

CRITICAL AND EDIFYING? A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that edifying dialogue is an appropriate and satisfying component of historically critical biography. It *has been* a part of biography. The edifying and critical intent is traced through pre-modern biography to demonstrate that this was the case in the Hebrew, Greek, Roman, Early Christian and Medieval eras. Key authors examined include the author(s) of the Pentateuch, the Gospel writers and the authors of the Biblical epistles, Herodotus, Polybius, Livy, Plutarch, Tacitus, Athanasius, Jerome, Sulpicius Severus, and John Capgrave. It *can be* a part of biography even given the challenges of contemporary theory posed by the extreme positions of positivism and postmodernism (or their chastened re-formulations). Important authors discussed in this section include Arthur Marwick, Keith Jenkins, David Harlan and Peter Novick. It *is* a part of some biographies meant for a particular audience (such as feminist works). And hopefully it *will be* increasingly looked upon as the preferred way of writing biography. My dissertation follows these stages. I begin with what biography has been and argue that the Greek and Roman historians believed that the intent of biography was critical and edifying. In fact, critical and edifying intent is notable also in Biblical and medieval biographies. The next section argues that edifying discourse is compatible with both traditional and postmodern theories of history-writing. The third section of the dissertation moves from theoretical considerations to the work of two notable Christian historians, George Marsden and Harry Stout. I note that these two scholars in particular are, in theory, open to my argument but that they can hesitate to engage in edifying discourse in biography. Finally, I briefly examine a few authors who write edifying and critical biography. Toril Moi, Carolyn Heilbrun, and the Bollandists are discussed in this section.

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DEDICATION

To Brian

And to my family

Chapter One: Critical and Edifying History—Something Has Been Lost

In the 1990s among the members of one particular sub-section of the American Historical Association, the Conference of Faith and History, there was an infamous exchange pertaining to a certain biography of George Whitefield.¹ The biography, renowned for its controversial content even among its supporters, was reviewed by some evangelicals with a degree of rancour its author, Harry Stout, had not anticipated. His detractors charged Stout with failing to portray Whitefield as a kind of emblematic hero. At best, Stout depicted Whitefield as pious and diligent. Furthermore, there was no sense of the work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, evident in Stout's account of Whitefield's life.² Iain Murray, Whitefield scholar and author of numerous biographies, including one on Whitefield's contemporary Jonathan Edwards, levelled similar charges against Stout's biography and added another. For Murray, Stout's text was paradigmatic of all that was wrong with what Murray called the new evangelical approach to history: it failed to engage history from a standpoint which included the supernatural.³

Although to many Murray's comments could seem bizarre (historians have situated their task in the realm of the mundane rather than the supernatural for quite some time now), from other perspectives Murray's views can be understood sympathetically. First, Murray knew he was reading a biography about a prominent religious figure that was written by a like-minded, confessing, practicing and prominent Christian historian. Murray expected to find

¹Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans 1991).

²For example see David White's review of *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*, by Harry Stout, *The Banner of Truth* (March 1994): 2.

³This exchange was summarized by D.G. Hart, "History in Search of Meaning: The Conference of Faith and History," in *History and the Christian Historian*, ed. Ronald Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 68-87. Hart suggests that the strong reactions which Stout's biography garnered point to much larger questions of historical method still unresolved by members of the Conference of Faith and History (CFH). See also Iain Murray's review of *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, The British Isles and Beyond, 1700-1990*, eds. Mark Noll, David Bebbington, and George Rawlyk, *The Banner of Truth* (July 1994): 8-14. See especially page nine of this review article where Murray takes aim at Stout's chapter, "George Whitefield in Three Counties."

evidence of that shared faith perspective within the biographical composition. It troubled Murray, as previously mentioned, that the Holy Spirit was not credited as prime mover in the conversions experienced by many in Whitefield's audiences. Instead, observes Murray, Stout suggests Whitefield's theatrical and marketing skills were the animus driving the Great Awakening. Murray had hoped for a different tone from a fellow Christian. Second, throughout most of the history of Christian biography, both readers and authors entered into the biographical task as a form of discourse that went beyond historical recitation. Although Murray does not explicitly discuss the history of biography, he seems to have hoped that more of the character of pre-modern biography would be a part of Stout's text. In the past it was expected that examining the life of a godly person would reveal something of the character, will or hand of God. Furthermore, biography before modernity was concerned with questions of morals and ethics. In terms of the history of the biographical genre, Murray's expectation of some form of direct discussion of Whitefield's spiritual importance was not unreasonable.

If Murray can be understood sympathetically, so too Stout's surprise at the reception his biography received from members of his own Reformed denomination is not unexpected. While the kind of biography Murray was calling for is consistent with previous modes of discourse, Stout assumed that overtly religious biography was a past form that should be abandoned in the present, or at least confined to a church context.⁴ Stout responded to Murray's articles with a critique of what Stout labelled "providentialist" historical methodology.⁵ At first it might seem that Stout's denunciation of providentialist history sidesteps the question of the supernatural within history-writing. Stout's definition of providentialist history is not much concerned with the reality of, or even the possibility of, the miraculous. However, the argument is not a dodge but an attack on the assumptions which gird

⁴This is an important qualification and will be discussed at greater length in chapters four and five.

⁵Harry Stout, "Biography as Battleground: The Competing Legacies of the Religious Historian," *Books and Culture* 2 (July/August 1996): 9-10.

Murray's own methods. Stout is more troubled by the way in which claims of knowledge of the supernatural are used as proofs of God's divine favour, or alternatively of God's condemnation, than whether miraculous anecdotes are to be included or not. More precisely, even if aberrations in natural causation could be proven, historians likely cannot and certainly should not determine the meaning of such occurrences for their readers. One cannot, for example, say that the Holy Spirit guided Whitefield's words and actions to bring about conversion experiences. Such a claim not only is inappropriate in the religious plurality of the present but also, quite simply, assumes to know what is ultimately unattainable. The most that could be claimed would be to observe that Whitefield believed in the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion. The Christian tradition maintains that humanity cannot know the fullness of God's interaction with the world and people; God's ways are comprehensible only in part. God alone possesses fullness of knowledge. Stout holds that the same epistemic strictures apply in the analysis of everyday events. In either the so-called miraculous or mundane events of the past, Stout remains sceptical that anybody can look back and discern what the will of God had been at those times; he is incredulous of those who presume such intimate knowledge. Stout can marshal both academic and Christian epistemology to support his arguments. Thus, Stout rejects two aspects which his detractors believed should be part of biography: inclusion of the miraculous and inclusion of evidences, whether mundane or miraculous, which demonstrate the hand of God in individual lives or past events. Whether supernatural or not, the events of the past cannot be given providential explanations.

The historiographical positions of Murray and Stout are representative of the two types of religious biography at the present time. Even though the arguments of both Murray and Stout can be understood sympathetically, both positions are insufficient. The terms of the debate have been set out as a discussion about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of providentialist claims. For many, following the strictures which Stout holds is the way that

historically critical biography is differentiated from biography appropriate to a confessional context. It is my observation, however, that in this debate there has been no mention of the function of biography as guide to ethics, morals and models of imitation or condemnation. Yet for most of the history of biography, the emphasis has been on these latter impulses. To be sure, past biographies contained statements that would fit Stout's providentialist label. In particular, reports of supernatural events were a part of biography, just as miraculous events were part of ancient history-writing. The Roman historian Livy, for example, began and ended many of his books with lists of the miracles that had occurred during that year. In Greco-Roman biography and early Christian biography of the late Classical era, however, providentialist claims were not prominent, even if supernatural events were part of the historical report. Greco-Roman biographers were more interested in edification than in making claims about the will and intent of a divinity. Such a comment is perhaps less characteristic of the biographies included in the Christian canon. In at least one formative, non-canonical text, *Life of Antony*, however, edification is not linked to overtly providentialistic claims. The notable point is that edification does not have to include providentialistic claims which assert that a particular event in history demonstrates God's blessing or punishment.

Definitions

For the purposes of my dissertation "edification" will indicate an author's intent to instruct the reader about how to live in response to historical knowledge. For the historians and biographers of much of the human past it was as important that a biography provided the reader with information about the subject as it was that the reader's actions should be influenced as a result of reading the text. An aspiring politician, for example, would engage the biography of a statesman as part of his contemplation of his own character, actions and career. Given the history of biography, I find Murray's and Stout's debate about the admissibility of providentialism to be slightly reductionistic. There continues to be little discussion on the

admissibility of edifying discourse in biography. Is that because it is agreed to be inappropriate? If so, it is the intention of my dissertation first to re-open discussion of the role of edification for the historical sub-genre of biography, and particularly in the kind of biography in which I deem this discussion the most contentious and most urgent: religious biography. Second, my project will argue that edifying discourse is indeed appropriate for a historical-critical biography, whether religious or not. Third, I will contend that biography, like history, cannot help but participate in the discussion of “how now shall we live.” Thus, eventually my project should move from questions of appropriateness to questions of method. The bulk of this dissertation will build a foundation for this third task by establishing the first and second of these points. Significant exploration of how to do ethically sensitive historical-critical biography will emerge briefly in this dissertation, and I intend subsequent work to follow this direction.

Doubt about the possibility of edifying dialogue has been part of modern consciousness. Interpretation takes place within a particular worldview—which is sometimes called speculative philosophy of history. All interpretation (including speculative philosophies of history and even mere chronicles) takes place within a worldview. In order to have an edifying dialogue as a result of reflection upon history there has to be significant overlap between the worldview of the author and the reader.

Many have given up on edifying discourse because the modern world is characterized by competing systems of meaning (as opposed to the supposed unity of the religiously grounded worldview of the Middle Ages or the Bible, for example). The potential difficulty of engaging in edifying discourse only increases when the text is meant for a larger audience in which many worldviews will be represented. Within the discipline of History, competing worldviews have sometimes led to fragmentation and frustration with regard to the kind of conversations that result from this fragmentation. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Elisabeth

Lasch-Quinn explain the beginning of a new historical society in America, The Historical Society, as a reaction to the “wave of postmodernist relativism and indeterminacy” that welcomes those who have not “capitulated to relativism and relevance.”⁶ The members of The Historical Society see themselves as a kind of remnant of historians who still do their historical work as it should be done.

Others have given up on edifying discourse because of the inescapability of a socially constructed worldview. In the 1960s Peter Berger published two texts that explored the relationship of an individual to his or her society as a social construction. In *The Social Construction of Reality* Berger and co-author Thomas Luckmann do not agree with radical relativism nor do they believe that sociology should abandon empirical methods.⁷ In *The Sacred Canopy* Berger examines the social construction of religion. Religion, according to Berger, is one of the forms of legitimation of social institutions and religious institutions in particular. What he says in the context of religion has come to apply to many sectors of life including the discipline of History: “All legitimation serves to maintain reality—reality, that is, as defined in a particular human collectivity.”⁸ History, therefore, is a social construct and History legitimates social institutions as well as collectively held understandings of the past. Within the discipline of History, understanding the implications of social construction has typically resulted in either the ghettoization of interpretation (everyone has their own interpretation) or severely limited any engagement in interpretation for the present. In chapter five I discuss the relationship of edifying discourse in the context of relativism and the consequences for interpretation in the writing of history.

It is important to note that interpretation, in the broadest sense of the term, does occur

⁶Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Reconstructing History: The Emergence of a New Historical Society* (New York: Routledge, 1999), xiv.

⁷Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 189.

⁸Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 35.

in all three of the historian's tasks. In rough terms, a historian provides description, explanation, and interpretation. A historian describes *who* said and did *what* as well as *when* and *where* it was said and done. A historian explains *how* particular events came about (as a result of previous events) and how a particular event effected the events that followed it. Evaluative judgements are part of these first two tasks. A historian judges certain descriptive details as unnecessary to include in his or her report. Some factors of causation are deemed more important than others. My dissertation does not discuss the kinds of judgements (perhaps these could also be called interpretations) at these first two levels of the historian's task. When I discuss the interpretive function of a historian I will be referring to the third level of the historian's task. A historian interprets the meaning of an event. The third task, interpretation, can be done in two different ways. Interpretation can, first, discuss the meaning of an event in terms of its consequences. *Why* was this event important for subsequent events? Someone could argue that the terms of the negotiations in Paris, 1919 set in motion all the factors that would cause the Second World War.⁹ But a historian could also interpret the meaning of the event for the present. Why are the negotiations which took place in Paris in 1919 meaningful today? Certainly the consequences of the Paris Peace Conference could be traced not only to World War II but also to the present. The meaning of the Paris Conference could also be interpreted for the present in terms of what might be learned by individuals or by a society. What can I as an individual learn from something that happened almost a century ago? Perhaps that if I as a voter in a democratic country demand that my political leaders exact a kind of vengeance on our nation's enemy, I may have the power (through the voice of my vote) to set in motion negative consequences not only for that enemy but also myself. What can a society

⁹This is not the argument which Margaret Macmillan puts forward in her monograph on the Paris Conference (she does not posit that the Paris Conference guaranteed the Second World War). MacMillan's text is notable, however, as a fascinating discussion of the meaning of the events in Paris for the subsequent two decades. See Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2003).

learn from the Paris Conference? Perhaps that the actions of a country (or group of countries) can have global ramifications. Whether or not my particular interpretations are correct is not the point here. The example is meant to illustrate the different kinds of interpretation that are possible. It is the last two of these kinds of interpretation that I am interested in. What are the potential meanings of an event for the individual or a society and how an individual's or a society's actions be directed as a consequence? I will typically use the word "interpretation" to mean the third of the historian's tasks.

Before continuing, a few more terms need to be given provisional definitions: moral adjudication, ethical dialogue, and exemplary models. These three forms of dialogue were part of the edifying intent of the ancient author. My definitions may seem to be crude but they have been helpful to me as I have attempted to sort through the various ways in which authors attempt to interpret the meaning of a life or of historical events. One way that authors entered into the interpretation of a life or event was by adjudicating what is good or what is less-than-good. At its most basic level, moral adjudication commends or censures the words, deeds or intentions of a subject. It is not merely a comment to the effect that a particular speech or deed was unfortunate for the subject's career or that a specific action helped an individual to win a military victory (and was therefore a good decision). Such comments would be better understood as an author's way of explaining cause and effect. Rather, moral adjudication would suggest that a subject's words or deeds were virtuous, ignoble, or so forth, in and of themselves. Such moral discourse could be applied to an individual or group. A person could be condemned for cowardice or praised for selflessness. Or the deeds of a corporate body such as the Roman Senate, a town, or a military regiment, could be evaluated as shameful, noble, or otherwise. Historians are rightly concerned about such evaluations as I label moral adjudication. They observe that all adjudication is contextually situated and therefore relative. They conclude that, it is inappropriate to judge the dead. Past people acted within their context

which is not the same as the present context. These concerns are discussed in fuller detail in later chapters where I question whether these concerns are sufficient to warrant censure of moral adjudication.

Ethical dialogue can be discussed in at least two ways. The goal of both forms of dialogue, however, is to convince the reader to adopt a certain attitude or act in a particular way. First, general truths of life, the universe, human nature, or divine entities can form part of an author's interpretive scheme. Comments like these can become providentialist. In such instances an author could assert, for example, that certain events occurred because the Gods strike down the proud and the self-exalted. The reader understands that his or her own failure to be humble risks the same divine judgement; the reader is exhorted to forsake pride. This observation of the Gods and the proud is an important theme in Herodotus, the Greek historian of the Persian Wars. Even if the divine is left out, however, observations of human nature can still function as providentialist statements. An author could, for example, structure a historical account in order to emphasize that human greed leads to war; society is exhorted to forsake greed and seek peace. This observation is a significant theme in Thucydides, the historian of the Peloponnesian War. While ethical dialogue of this kind explicates the nature of the divinities or the world, it is not this kind of ethical dialogue which will be the focus of my discussion.

A second form of ethical dialogue reflects on the meaning of the past. Whatever the adjudication of the past may be, there is something that can be learned in the present. An author could indicate that the actions of a person or society at a particular time were shameful or praiseworthy (a moral adjudication). The author would then go on to suggest that the appropriate response is grief for what is lost or pride in what has been accomplished, or perhaps exhort the reader to fix what has been destroyed in one way or another. The author might disclose his hope that readers will act in such a way as to reverse unworthy decisions or

to continue to build on the good that was done in the past. It is this second type of discussion that is of interest—the author’s intent to persuade the reader to move from his or her current actions or attitudes to new or modified actions or attitudes.

Especially in the Greek, Roman and Christian traditions (but not limited to them), biography included exemplary models. The words and deeds of a subject were taken as models. Authors presented their subjects as models to be imitated or as examples to be condemned. In fact, a single subject could be both a model of imitation and repudiation. Or the imitation of a subject could be qualified in one way or another. Often an author understood that exact replication of a particular deed might not be possible or even desirable. Rather, the author would endorse the imitation of the subject’s inner character. If a reader imitated the good character of the subject the result would be good deeds. The reader is not meant to imitate the deed but the character trait that produced that deed. Examples of both kinds of imitation are notable in ancient biographies. When the fourth-century Bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, discusses the eating and sleeping habits of his biographical subject, the eremitical Antony, he commends them as a template for monastic discipline. The details of Antony’s eating and sleeping habits were important because they were intended to be normative for other monks’ eating and sleeping habits. *Agricola*, by the Roman historian Tacitus, on the other hand, commended its subject not as someone to be imitated in a sort of one-to-one correlation. Agricola was the Governor of Roman Britain. No general reading the speeches Agricola had given to his troops, for example, would understand his task to be a repetition of Agricola’s sentiments, let alone the same speech, to his own troops. Tacitus does insist, however, that Agricola’s virtues are imitable: especially Agricola’s faithful service to the empire even though that empire was ruled by a tyrant.

The Task and Themes

The title of my dissertation is deliberately ambiguous and an intentional play on the

multiple meanings of the word “historiography” as used by historians. (It is the only place in my dissertation where I use the term ambiguously.) When some authors use the term “historiography” they mean the method and theory of writing history, which some also call the critical philosophy of history. When others use the term “historiography” they simply mean texts in which the past is discussed. Thus “historiography” has been used to indicate both method and theory as well as writing about the past. My dissertation is an examination of the history of Christian biography but with particular emphasis on a question of method. I examine the history of Christian biography in order to inquire about the critical and edifying intent of the authors. Furthermore, I examine the history of Christian biography to inquire about the methods that the authors used to convey that intent. I begin with an exploration of the Classical and Biblical foundations of Christian Biography and then discuss medieval biography and its critical and edifying impulses. I argue that historians and biographers of the Classical, Biblical and medieval eras understood that the edifying applications of biography were necessarily rooted in a real past even as they applied them to the present. Methods of communicating that critical and edifying content differed from author to author and from era to era. All understood, however, that biography must be both critical and edifying.

In this dissertation I examine biographies from various eras in order to think through what aspects of pre-modern biographies should be jettisoned or refined for the present context and what should be re-incorporated that has been abandoned. Not all the components of earlier biographies can be retained. Where methods of obtaining a greater degree of accuracy have been advanced, for example in archaeology and sociology, these methods rather than antiquated methods should be employed. In the past, various historians and biographers did claim to know the mind and judgement of God (or the Gods) on past events and lives. Although I will argue that this kind of claim was not the dominant form of edifying content of pre-modern biographies, it was present. I believe that making such claims in a confessional

setting today should be done only with great caution. Christians agree that omniscience is a quality of God and not of humans. Furthermore, Christians agree that humans can know the mind of God only in part. It may be that on many occasions making overt providentialist claims in a non-confessional setting is typically counter-productive. Providentialist history, such as that which Murray espouses, will likely continue to be unwelcome in a pluralistic, academic context. This lack of welcome does not bother me much as I believe the focus can helpfully and legitimately shift from aspirations of divine knowledge to inquiries in ethical discussions. Examining the life of another in order to answer “how now shall we live?” is both a legitimate historical and religious question. It is also a question that people of varying faiths or philosophies can engage even if different answers are given to it. Biography in this form acknowledges that something important to the historical and biographical processes has been lost in the contemporary era. Too much of the ancient forms of discourse has been abandoned if this question is to be answered. This dissertation is, in a sense, a recovery project: reclaiming elements of pre-modern assumptions of the functions of history. Furthermore, I will show that such biography endures within contemporary history-writing, albeit perhaps from examples not in the centre of the academic profession. The benefit of recovering this mode of biography will be two-fold: biography as ethical discourse constitutes a more satisfying religious engagement and a more honest and satisfying historical engagement. Convincing authors such as Murray and Stout, and other potential doubters, of a different approach to biography will constitute the principal purpose of my dissertation.

I am not primarily interested in how biography was written but rather in how biography can be written today. The primary question of my dissertation is an inquiry into the place and function of edifying discussion in historically critical biography of contemporary religious biography. I argue that a middle ground, so to speak, is possible. Between its exclusion and its abuse, a place for edification in history-writing can be opened. Indeed, certain basic elements

of edifying discourse are unavoidable. Many would agree that some degree of moral adjudication, however basic, is part of all history-writing. However much historians may strive to research and write about the past in a so-called objective way, most of these same historians would also agree that everyone inevitably interprets within the context of his or her worldview. Some brief comments about the history of the relationship of facts and values in history-writing may be helpful here.

Half a century ago, Karl Löwith traced a two thousand-year arc between modern and Greco-Roman Classical times during which discussion of meaning was slowly but increasingly extracted from the processes of history-writing. His minor classic, *Meaning in History*, is an account of the devolution of the interpretive function of history.¹⁰ While modern historians may continue to describe what happened in the past, explain why it happened, and perhaps even interpret what events might have meant to the original participants, the progression (perhaps the term regression would more accurately summarize his argument) of history from late antiquity to the modern era demonstrates the increasing reluctance of the contemporary historian to interpret the ongoing meaning of past events for the present-day reader. Thus, Löwith begins with the modern situation (as demonstrated through an examination of the writings of Burckhardt, Marx, and Hegel) and progresses, backwards through time, as he analyzes the philosophies of history of Comte, Voltaire, Vico, Bossuet, Joachim, Augustine and Orosius, ending with an analysis of the Bible and its Classical context. Early Christian writers did not separate the historical task from explication of its meaning.¹¹

¹⁰Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History, Traced Through the Works of Burckhardt, Marx, Hegel, Proudhon, Comte, Condorcet, Turgot, Voltaire, Vico, Bossuet, Joachim, Augustine, Orosius and the Bible* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).

¹¹See also Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949). The essays in this collection argue that modern history-writing has too easily (prematurely) cast aside the Christian and Classical methods of history-writing. Niebuhr asserts that the "goodness of Christ must be embodied in the stuff of history" (213) but at the same time he is exploring legitimate ways of doing so in a pluralistic world. The conclusions he comes to are outdated in the postmodern situation as he focuses primarily on the modern perception of history as progress – a concept which

Löwith wrote half a century ago yet his complaint continues. The issue has been discussed by a more recent author. In *The Degradation of American History* David Harlan notes that until the twentieth century historical writing had been one of the ways in which Americans engaged in moral reflection. He makes a case for the return of this function in historical writing and gives an account of the emergence of New Traditionalism in America. Harlan is attempting to “find the predecessors that we need—to think with their thoughts, to work through our own beliefs by working through their beliefs. Only thus does history become a mode of moral reflection.”¹² However, the predecessor which most dominates his own text is Hayden White, among other modern philosophers of history. This dissertation differs from Harlan’s work in two respects. First, I find that the predecessors we need, in Harlan’s terms, are historians and biographers as well as philosophers of history. Harlan is building the philosophical foundation for the possibility of constructing of a new style of history rather than designing blueprints or beginning construction itself. As such Harlan performs a necessary task but this dissertation intends to interact with historians and biographers proper in order to contemplate what history as moral reflection has and could look like. Furthermore, while Harlan looks to the late twentieth century for the predecessors who will guide I will take a much longer look back and suggest that the predecessors we need are found in many pre-modern authors.

My thesis insists that edification is integral to biography as a subset of history-writing.

has declined in recent decades. Yet, even if his conclusions need revision, he is at least raising the question of the relationship of Christian history-writing and secular history-writing. The notion that the two may be incompatible is not currently much entertained. See also George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto: CBC Learning Systems – CBC Massey Lectures, 1969). In these four lectures Grant argues that since the publication of Nietzsche’s writings, humanity’s conception of history has changed. He argues that until and including the time of Hegel and Marx, history (and I would argue by extension, history-writing) derived its meaning from the end towards which it aimed and gave particular events meaning in terms of that perceived end. Grant believed that Nietzsche had correctly exploded the weaknesses in both Hegel and Marx’s theories but that his own solution was problematic. Nietzsche “discovered” that time was history – and nothing more. If people, not God, are the creators and sustainers of history, then there is no inevitable outcome to time and history has no meaning. Grant countered that man cannot live by this axiom. Humans are called to make moral choices and these choices are difficult to make if all that man has to guide him is Nietzsche’s will to power.

¹²David Harlan, *The Degradation of American History*, 75.

There is, however, some work to be done in the performance of such kind of dialogue. Just as I insist that people can learn from the past, so too I will look to the textual exemplars within the history of biography to learn from their understanding of critical and edifying biography.

There is an important parallel between the Stout and Murray debate with discussions in current historiographical debates. Many practicing historians are cautious about, or even dismissive of, the place of ethical discourse in scholarly historical texts.

My dissertation requires intense interdisciplinary work. The sub-title of the scholarly journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* also indicates that to work on biography is to cross disciplines. Something of the nature of biography refuses to be captured by any one of the modern disciplines. It will not be made the exclusive domain of history or literature or any other branch of learning. I think it is fitting that my thinking and writing about biography has been done in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program, for to study biography requires historical, literary, and I will argue, philosophical and religious sensitivity. Specific streams within each of these four disciplines are more directly linked with my project. Historiographers discuss the methods of historical investigation as well as the limits of claims to historical certainty. Within the study of literature there are those who have thought about how biography, a non-fiction form, can be good literature (similar to those who think about this same question in autobiography). Morals and ethics are an important part of philosophical discussion, and also of religious dialogue. As I shall suggest later in the dissertation, it may be that writing biography requires the input of representatives from these varied fields. That these important branches from a number of the humanities should be brought together in biography seems commendable for the discussion of a single human. One can hope that the different perspectives of the various fields of inquiry will lead to a fuller and more helpful understanding of a person's life and the application of that understanding to the present. Such interdisciplinary work, furthermore, might help foster a context similar to that which prevailed

prior to the multiplication of disciplines in the modern university. It may even be that as the number of disciplines grew so did the difficulty in assessing a life. Interdisciplinary work may actually make interpretive comments more obvious, and especially so if similar interpretive insights are shared by practitioners from several fields.

If I want to argue that something has been lost or similarly that we can learn from the history of the genre itself, an examination of the nature of ancient history-writing and biography must be completed. In the last few decades much scholarly work has been produced on the character of ancient history-writing. I will rely on this work for this section to observe that the authorial intent of Greek, Roman, Biblical and medieval biography, as a sub-set of history-writing, was both critical and edifying. How did it seek to be critical? How did it edify? What of the methods of communicating edifying content can be instructive today?

Contemporary historiography (method and theory) tends to be divided into two important factions: traditional and postmodern. So-called traditional historiography tends to be nervous about combining edifying and historical writing. Since the professionalization of history-writing in the late nineteenth century historians have cultivated a reputation for accurate historical reporting based on evidence. The disciplining power of the academic guild was thought to ensure that fabrications, which had characterized the previous work of the gentleman or clerical historian, would be eliminated. Yet even such a commendable pursuit as that had its own pitfalls. Positivists had claimed too much epistemic certainty in their accounts of the past. Historians have come to accept that the Truth of the past (certainty) can only ever be “truth” (contingent upon the perspective of the author and the reader). This change in epistemology is based on the admission (shared by a great many in the humanities) that full knowledge and absolute objectivity are unattainable. This means that ultimate Truth is unknowable and truth from a particular perspective is the best that can be achieved. Furthermore, the mystique of the disinterested scholar has been revised. Objectivity has been

re-defined as the attempt to acknowledge and overcome biases rather than believing that historians can work unencumbered by any corrupting prejudice.

Finally, until about half a century ago much historical research tended to focus on the topics of politics and war and questions germane to other sectors of society such as women, minority groups, and domestic life received less attention. There seems to be a correlation between the increasing breadth of historical foci with the need to think carefully about both the meaning of history and the meaning of individuals. Many of those interested in the history of women, minority groups, and domestic life were not merely curious about these histories but also believed that the implications of such research affected actions (both of individuals and society as a whole) in the present. Biography was also important in the historical research of women, minority groups and other areas of inquiry. Biographies of key women, for example, could validate the importance of women's history as well as inspire women in the present by first making the life of a particular woman known and second by demonstrating how her actions were important. Such women of the past became exemplars for women of the present. Traditional historiography has welcomed the greater breadth of research topics and in that regard it is neither naïve nor narrow. But it continues to remain suspicious of edifying reflection. Greater *topoi* are accepted and especially so if such research is done without an overtly edifying intent. Those who are more cautious about edifying reflection in these newer areas of research rightly challenge those who are more enthusiastic about such discourse to avoid hagiography. Conversely, the latter challenge the former that the writing of history is not mere chronicle.

The postmodern critique of traditional historiography has convinced many that power and interests are an inescapable part of writing history, and that this is true whether or not the author is aware of the way in which power influences his or her work. Postmodern theory is open to an ethical discussion of power in the writing of history but less open to an ethical

discussion of the interpretation of the past. Furthermore, radical relativism tends to discourage the corporate process of learning from the past. David Harlan has argued that the writing of history is a moral discipline and relies on the seminal work of Peter Novick to support his rejection of traditional claims of objective knowledge.¹³ At the same time that Harlan welcomes edifying dialogue in the writing of history, he also claims there are no models or methods that help an author write what Harlan describes as the history which we need—history as moral discourse.¹⁴ Harlan allows that individuals are free to make their own meaning but has little hope that a society can engage history as moral dialogue. It seems to me that relativism allows edifying dialogue only for the individual, or perhaps a group. If this is true, then an author's ethical discourse could be viewed as akin to narcissism and the justification for its inclusion in a text would be extremely weak. Thus while postmodern historiography welcomes edification, its fear of acting tyrannically inhibits authors from the performance of such discussions.

Biography as edifying dialogue is compatible with the traditional historiography that endorses a chastened Enlightenment—the rejection of the positivism of the early twentieth century but the continuing insistence that truthful knowledge of the past is attainable and some ability to minimize the distortions of bias exists.¹⁵ The goal of biography is to describe how it essentially was. Yet biography as edifying conversation also agrees with postmodern critics that ethics is inescapable. The new religious biography must be both critical (including self-critical) and edifying discourse. It insists that that edification is not only legitimate but also a

¹³David Harlan, *The Degradation of American History* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997), 210-211. Peter Novick's history of the American historical profession provides a history of the idea of objectivity. The positivism of the early twentieth century has been largely rejected or at least modified so as to make claims of less epistemic certainty. See *That Noble Dream: The 'Objectivity Question' and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988).

¹⁴Harlan, *The Degradation of American History*, 205.

¹⁵I first encountered the term "chastened Enlightenment" in the conclusion to Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University, 1997), 147.

beneficial corporate endeavour.

Three renowned historians and three well received biographies will receive close attention: Martin Marty's *Martin Luther*, George Marsden's *Jonathan Edwards*, and, Harry Stout's *The Divine Dramatist*.¹⁶ In his introduction, Marty states that it is important that an author present his subject in such a fashion as to be comprehensible to a reader far removed in time, space and cultural situation. But Marty does not indicate to what end any particular subject is to be made accessible nor why Luther in particular should be of interest in the early twenty-first century. If thoughtful consideration of Martin Luther's life can aid a Lutheran pastor of today, for example, would an interested historian not want to explicate this insight clearly? Marsden, perhaps the most sympathetic to the task of learning from biography, begins and ends his biography with a discussion of the importance of learning from our predecessors. The biography proper, however, never pauses to consider what can be learned from Edwards. Both Marty and Marsden are convinced that the reader can be edified, to use my term, by their subjects but hesitate to engage in edifying discourse. Stout raised controversial suspicions regarding his subject's sexuality. As he couldn't prove that his intuition was correct, his allegations are embedded in the text with a kind of wink-and-a-nod to those able to perceive it, but never directly discussed. He has acted as a responsible historian but could he have also opened up a timely and important discussion as well? Is there not more to learning from a life than merely learning about a person? Historians of religious history could be at the forefront of such discussions and practices, not lagging behind. With their historical credentials well developed they could be the avant-garde of practitioners who broaden the historical task in this direction. I will demonstrate that engaging ethical discussions can be a more satisfying historical analysis than omitting them.

¹⁶George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2003). Martin Marty, *Martin Luther* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

Much exists in the texts of Marty, Marsden and Stout that is good. Indeed, these texts were chosen over others because the direction of these historians holds more potential than that of the providentialists. It is not my intention to enter into a thorough critique of providentialist history-writing. There may be appropriate venues for asserting the judgement of God on specific events of history or on specific individuals. I believe that there is greater potential for common ground if the dialogue avoids such assertions and instead discusses the moral and ethical implications of historical research. I am under the impression that people of relatively diverse belief systems can and have agreed on many points of ethics. I believe that following the lead of scholars such as Marty, Marsden and Stout will lead to a more inclusive dialogue that remains appropriate to an audience of various beliefs. Extensive engagement with providentialist historians will be for later research endeavours. However, it is the task of my project to cast a vision of what I think could be and how it can be achieved. The best examples, therefore, are chosen in order to encourage good history-writing to become better yet.

It is not an entirely new task that I advocate. Should historians of religious history look for allies they can be found not only in the past but also in the present. Feminist authors may be instructive in this matter. Take for example the biography of Simone de Beauvoir by Toril Moi. What is the meaning of Simone's life? Moi addresses this directly for her audience. Her discussion has not gone without controversy but the goal of biography is not necessarily to avoid controversy. Moi is unafraid to discuss the significance of Simone's life, for herself and for the reader. The reader now has the ability to engage the facts of Simone's life as well as her meaning. Moi has begun the conversation which needs to arise anytime the contemplation of a life is begun.¹⁷ In the history of biography, severing the facts of a life from a discussion of the implications of that life constitutes an aberration. By re-evaluating the functions of biography as both history and ethical discourse, the "unusual" format holds the potential to become the

¹⁷Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

standard practice. What has been lost can be re-incorporated. A truncated form of history-writing can regain its proper breadth.

There are, therefore, unexpected allies for Christian authors. At least one scholar has chided Christian historians for not seeking out these allies. Bruce Kuklick has urged Christian historians to explore alternative historical methods that engage the meaning of their history and that are transparent about the philosophical and theological principles which guide them. Kuklick is a non-Christian historian who has spied the latent hypocrisy, or at least potential inconsistency, in the methodological assumptions held by Christian historians. In a review of recent works on American religious history by Mark Noll and George Marsden, Kuklick concludes with sustained scepticism regarding the integration of secular history and the Christian historian:

The principles of Christian, and more specifically, Protestant scholarship, especially in the field of history, fit uncomfortably with the premises of the academy today . . . [yet] it is by no means clear that the axioms of secular “critical” history are coherent. With the rise of committed history over the last generation, the response of Protestant thinkers has been awkwardly and nervously to adopt many of the secular conventions on offer. Yet the kind of history they have written – they must know in their heart of hearts – avoids confronting the deepest issues of their faith, indeed denies that these issues are relevant to history.¹⁸

Kuklick faults Christian historians on several counts. First, they accept current historical methods as unproblematic when they are not. Second, they fail to see the contradictions between Christianity and modern historical theory (perhaps Kuklick might point to differing opinions on the plausibility of the so-called miraculous and note that a Christian would have difficulty denying miracles without denying his or her faith but have difficulty including accounts of miracles as having really happened and be considered

¹⁸Bruce Kuklick, “Evasive Manoeuvres: Can Protestant Historians Play by the Rules of the Secular Academy without Giving the Game Away?” *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* (March/April 2004): 21. Note that it is Marsden’s recent biography of Jonathan Edwards which functions as one of Kuklick’s primary examples.

credible). It is the goal of this dissertation to present an alternative position that does engage “the deepest issues of their faith” while arguing that such discussion can fit plausibly in the academy today (even if still uncomfortably).

The debate between Murray and Stout is notable not only for the emotional fireworks it ignited but also because it represents an unresolved tension amongst Christian historians in particular and within the epistemology of history-writing more generally. Historians have long conceded that objectivity, as an ultimate goal, is impossible. Yet, to their credit, historians generally refuse to veer into the opposite ditch of radical scepticism. The past can be known, even if imperfectly, and it can be discussed and written about. Thus, historians exist in precarious epistemological middle ground in history-writing. They reject providentialist history on the one hand and on the other hand they know that pure objectivity and truth are unattainable. Although difficult to maintain, it is a compromise that tends to work, in a practical sense, for most historians as they go about their everyday tasks of writing history. When these same historians turn their hand to the historical sub-genre of biography, however, the difficulties and tensions tend to increase.

The same epistemological assumptions by which historians garner praise when discussing historical events can sometimes incur harsh criticism when writing biography. Or, at least, those assumptions can fail to be sufficient to many readers. Stout discovered this for himself. He notes that he used the same research methods and historiographical principles when he wrote his history of Puritanism in America as when he wrote his Whitefield biography, but was criticized for his methods only in his biography. Stout states, “My biography of George Whitefield embodied the same objective perspective as *The New England Soul*, but it aroused quite different and far more hostile response on the part of many Christian

readers and reviewers.”¹⁹ The same methods and tone which he used in his history, which was well received by his current detractors, failed in his biography. People expected something more when the author chose to write biography. For the historian, biography represents a challenge. A biographer often feels that he or she must choose between either an only slightly chastened hagiography or an only slightly chastened objectivity. It need not be like this. For the historian, biography represents an opportunity. If a theorist can substantiate the combined quest of the highest critical methods with the ethically didactic discourse which has been part of biography for most of its history, an epistemologically rich position may be possible.

I believe that the challenge of writing biography is particularly pertinent for religious historians. On the one hand, religious historians will want to avoid hagiography and on the other hand they will also want to avoid the charge of having written a mere chronicle. I believe that a critical and edifying biography constitutes a satisfying balance between hagiography and chronicle. Although I will not return to the writing of authors such as Stout and Marsden until the last chapters of the dissertation, I will demonstrate that religious historians are well-poised to be at the forefront of this interdisciplinary and epistemologically rich historical engagement: biography.

Summary of Thesis

In sum, edifying dialogue is an appropriate and satisfying component of historically critical biography. It *has been* a part of biography. The edifying and critical intent is traced through pre-modern biography to demonstrate that this was the case over a considerable span of time and in a variety of cultural contexts (from the Hebrew, Greek, Roman and Medieval eras). It *can be* a part of biography even given the challenges of contemporary theory posed by the extreme positions of positivism and postmodernism (or their chastened re-formulations). It *is* a part of some biographies meant for a particular audience (such as feminist works). And I

¹⁹Stout, “Biography as Battleground,” 9.

hope that it *will be* increasingly looked upon as the preferred way of writing biography. My dissertation follows these stages. I begin with what biography has been and argue that the Greek and Roman historians believed that the intent of biography was critical and edifying. In fact that critical and edifying intent is notable in Biblical and medieval biographies. The next section argues that edifying discourse is compatible with both traditional and postmodern theories of history-writing. The third section of the dissertation moves from theoretical considerations to the work of notable Christian historians. I note that two scholars in particular are, in theory, open to my argument but that they hesitate to engage in edifying discourse in biography. Finally, I briefly examine a few authors who write edifying and critical biography.

Chapter Two: The Critical and Edifying Impulse of Classical History and Biography¹

For most of the last two hundred years of professional, academic history-writing, the historical texts produced by the ancients have been regarded as sub-standard history-writing. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scholars scoured the ancient texts for factual errors, methodological naïveté and rhetorical artifice; all were found and systematically documented. Through the processes of this modern “unmasking,” it was concluded that ancient authors were unreliable and uncritical. Yet, with respect to the last two centuries, there has never been a better time than now to be an admirer of some of these ancient authors, particularly, the Greco-Roman history-writers. Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, the dismissive evaluations of the Classical authors have been adjusted.

Greek and Roman historians have been increasingly portrayed as intentionally critical authors. The point, however, is not without debate. Did the Greek and Roman historians intend to write about the past? In the first part of the chapter I will discuss Cicero’s succinct summary of the historical task. Recently, scholars have debated how seriously to take Cicero’s words and so I will summarize the debate but agree with those who argue that influential Greek and Roman historians typically intended to narrate a real past. Did the intention to write about what really did happen result in an account that reflects this historical intent? By modern standards Greek and Roman methods were crude. Yet recently archaeological discoveries have shown agreement with some of the oral reports recorded by Herodotus and Livy. Although such finds do not verify the text as a whole, the apparent agreement between written record and material remains

¹The term “ancient” will be used throughout this text as a collective reference to Greek, Roman and Early Christian authors. It is acknowledged that these three categories do not encompass the entirety of ancient writings. Egyptian or Babylonian history-writings, for example, could also be included under the rubric “ancient” even though they will not be discussed here. The Hebrews also were significant in the ancient world for their history-writing and this topic will be covered at length in the chapter on the Bible. “Classical” will refer to Greek and Roman texts only (excludes Christian texts). Also, in an attempt to make clear the multiple meanings of the word history, this dissertation will attempt, wherever grammatically possible, to use the term “history-writing” to indicate the act and products of recording events of the past. “Historiography” will be used to indicate the methods and theories of history-writing. “History” will refer either to the past or to the academic discipline as a department of the University.

is suggestive of an impulse to remember the past. The second section of this chapter will discuss a few Greek and Roman historians in depth in order to elucidate the relationship of the critical and edifying character in the writing of history. Although the points I make could be made by examining additional primary sources, my discussion will focus on Herodotus with some attention given to Polybius and Livy. The final section of this chapter will explore the critical and edifying character of Classical biographies, especially as found in selected biographies by Plutarch and *Agricola* by Tacitus.

Did the Greek and Roman historians intend to report on a real past or were they writing something else? Two contemporary authors are notable in the discussion of the rhetoric as used by the ancient history-writers and the topic of intention. T.P. Wiseman explores the rhetorical and oratorical nature of Roman history-writing in *Clio's Cosmetics*. Since a modern reader has not been trained in the same way as the ancients were, argues Wiseman, it can be difficult to discern the intent of the author. Roman education, for example, was primarily directed towards the training of rhetoricians and orators. Patricians needed to be persuasive advocates in the lawcourts and political assemblies. They were not trained to be historians. Typically, writing history was something you did if your political or military career had ended. Thus these retired or failed politicians would use the tools of rhetoric as the foundation of their history-writing. Wiseman argues that a deeper appreciation for ancient rhetorical techniques illuminates certain passages which were not intended to be taken at face value but which have been taken as such by modern readers. In the first third of his work, Wiseman argues that sensitivity to rhetoric helps clear up much of the misinformation taken, for example, from Valerius Antias' text. In the last third of his book, Wiseman situates Roman historians within their literary context. In particular, historians were indebted to the poets. Wiseman compares Cornelius Nepos with Catullus to argue that both historians and poets shared a common canon of myth, geography, ethnography and history. His central point in this section: the boundary between myth, poem

and history was fluid rather than firm and that it is hard to say whether the history-writers intended to write about the past.²

A.J. Woodman takes some of Wiseman's research even further. Wiseman had noted that the earliest Roman historical records were *annales*: specifically, lists of military victories and triumphs. He suggested that Roman historians filled in the tempting gaps between the annual entries with oratorical *narratio*. This narration was that of the orator rather than what we would recognize as historical narrative. Oratorical narrative was intended to persuade and to that end the author of a speech was allowed to invent what he needed.³ Using Wiseman's work as a platform for his own research, Woodman's analysis of rhetoric in history-writing leads him to conclude that those ancient texts typically described as history-writing should rather be classified as literature.⁴ His argument rests on the assumption that ancients and moderns perceive historical truth differently. Oratorical permission to invent rather than report was employed to create dramatic effect in history-writing. Woodman believes that there are good reasons for believing that Tacitus, for example, simply made up much of his history. Although this dissertation disagrees with Woodman's conclusion (that ancient history-writers often knowingly fabricated the past), the analysis of rhetoric by both Wiseman and Woodman has advanced our ability to discern the character of ancient history-writing. In particular, ancient history-writing was a literary endeavour as well as historical. As such, it embraced one of the functions of literature: the contemplation of meaning. Nevertheless, if they are correct that the Greek and Roman historians intended to entertain and persuade then that discussion of meaning remains rooted in fiction.

To further examine the question of intention I will discuss Cicero's comments on the

²T.P. Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics: Three Studies in Greco-Roman Literature* (Rowman and Littlefield: Leicester University), 1979.

³*Ibid.*, 34-37.

⁴A.J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography: Four Studies* (London and Sydney: Croom and Helm, 1988), 197.

writing of history and secondary scholarship on Cicero's description of the historical task. There is little historiographical discussion by the Greeks or Romans and so Cicero's comments on the principles which should guide this genre are important. Cicero's work has been interpreted in a number of ways. In the middle of the twentieth century T.A. Dorey accepted Cicero's discussion as indicative of the Greek and Roman attempts to be accurate historians. Later T.P. Wiseman and A.J. Woodman suggested that careful analysis of Cicero indicated that Cicero would not have been troubled by historians who made up parts of their historical narratives. In this debate I think that the recent work of John Marincola is most convincing. Marincola demonstrates that fictional invention was not the norm. Cicero's brief historiographical discussion is interesting both as study of what it meant to be truthful in antiquity and the relationship of truth with edification.

Cicero outlined three fundamental rules for history-writing. First, an author must never say what is false. Second, a historian must never suppress the truth. Third, the documents must demonstrate no hint of partiality nor is the venting of hatred permitted.⁵ In the mid-twentieth century T.A. Dorey understood Cicero in a fairly straightforward manner. Furthermore, Dorey noted that the application of these rules calls for the use of moral skills.⁶ Dorey's observation emphasizes the point that ancient history-writers took their task to be both a critical and a moral one.

T.P. Wiseman's *Clio's Cosmetics* first raised scepticism regarding Cicero's ruminations on history-writing.⁷ The difficulty in reading Cicero in straightforward manner, Wiseman argues, is that it does not take into consideration the evolution of language. Over time a particular word might remain the same but its meaning may not. The word "truth" may not have

⁵Cicero, *De Oratore*, II, 15, 62, as translated and explained by T. A. Dorey, "Caesar: The 'Gallic War'" in *Latin Historians* ed. T. A. Dorey (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 15, 62.

⁶T.A. Dorey, "Caesar: The Gallic War," in *Latin Historians*, ed. T.A. Dorey (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 67.

⁷Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics*, 37-38.

meant the same thing to Cicero as it does to a person shaped by the scientific, critical mindset of the Enlightenment. When twentieth-century scholars have read Cicero they have assumed that when Cicero says historians must tell the truth, Cicero means basically what moderns mean by truth. Without appreciation for the evolution of a word, Cicero's advocated methodology can seem to bear a great likeness to modern sensibilities. Wiseman compares the early historians with the poetry of that era and suggests that early historians invented their narratives and these inventions became the sources which later historians used.

A.J. Woodman aligns his analysis of Roman history-writing with Wiseman's.⁸ In *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* Woodman argues that when the Roman historians are claiming that they are telling the truth they are saying 'I'm not biased,' rather than 'I'm not making this up.' Impartiality, or the impression of impartiality, was an important part of both oral rhetorical performance in the law courts and in history-writing. Thus, Wiseman and Woodman believe that Cicero is not setting out a historiographical method. Rather, Cicero is simply recommending that history-writing be as good a literary form as rhetoric. In order to do so, a historian can and should use all the techniques of a rhetorician. Invention was one of the techniques of rhetoric.

Wiseman and Woodman seem to have a point. Various Greek and Roman authors did indeed set truth and bias as opposites rather than the modern instinct to understand 'false' as the opposite of 'truth'. Consider the following passage from Polybius and note that he does not discuss the important historiographical principle of 'not making something up' when discussing truth and bias:

Now in other spheres of human life we should perhaps not rule out such partiality. A good man ought to love his friends and his country, and should share both their hatreds and their loyalties. But once a man takes up the role of the historian he must discard all considerations of this kind. He will often have to speak well of his enemies and even

⁸See C.S. Kraus and A.J. Woodman, *Latin Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1997), 5. See also Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography*.

award them the highest praise should their actions demand this, and on the other hand criticize and find fault with his friends, however close they may be, if their errors of conduct show that this is his duty. For just as a living creature, if it is deprived of its eyesight, is rendered completely helpless, so if history is deprived of the truth, we are left with nothing but an idle, unprofitable tale. We must therefore not shrink from accusing our friends or praising our enemies, nor need we be afraid of praising or blaming the same people at different times, since it is impossible that men who are engaged in public affairs should always be in the right, and unlikely that they should always be in the wrong. We must therefore detach ourselves from the actors in our story, and apply to them only such statements and judgements as their conduct deserves.⁹

There is no direct command to avoid fabrication of the past but rather the emphasis is on impartiality. Polybius had many reasons to defend his history with regard to its impartiality. Polybius was, after all, in an amicable relationship with a key figure of much of his history; Scipio Aemilianus. As his readers would know of this relationship, Polybius needed to convince his audience that he knew his task required him to set aside his partiality and bias. Polybius had to demonstrate that truth and partiality are opposites in order that his history-writing be taken seriously. Otherwise he risked being received as Scipio's propagandist. Truth and impartiality are critical for the ancient historian because he must assign praise and blame irrespective of his personal friends and enemies. Further, note the importance given to the ethically interpretive task of the historian in this passage. Nevertheless, Woodman seems to be correct. Truth and bias, truth and partiality are set as opposites rather than truth and fiction or truth and lying.

Another scholar disagrees with Woodman. John Marincola examines the various authors who make claims of impartiality in their history-writing in order to discuss their understanding of truth and falsity. Did the Greek or Roman historian feel free to invent the past? Marincola observes that of all the claims made by ancient history-writers (such as claims of effort, upstanding personal character, political and military experience and so forth) "the promise to be impartial is far and away the most common."¹⁰ Furthermore, unlike other claims, the ancient

⁹Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, 55. From I.14.

¹⁰John Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997), 158.

historians conducted genuine discussions about impartiality. Impartiality was necessary because it was the historian's task to evaluate. Failure to pass judgement on deeds and actions would have been unthinkable

because that would be alien to history's nature and purpose as imagined by many of the ancients: since history's utility lay partly in displaying proper and improper models of conduct, it was the historian's task to evaluate men and deeds. Although the valuation did not need to be overt, it became common for the historian to speak in his own person, words of praise or blame about the characters and events of his history.¹¹

Marincola agrees with Woodman: truth and bias are opposites rather than the modern dichotomy of true and false. However, Marincola asks further questions that clarify aspects which Woodman leaves unexplored. *Why* is it that bias and partiality so dominate the historians' claims to the reader? What about bias makes it the opposite of truth? According to Marincola, partiality is the opposite of truth because the person who is biased will think nothing of inventing deeds. That is, if you want to make someone a hero who was not a hero, you must make up some deeds that prove he merits such an evaluation. Proper adjudication can only be done when the facts are judged rather than invention. The ancients did not perceive the decision to assign praise or blame as a problematic historiographical practice. Such actions were troubling only when done by a biased person who falsified deeds in order to validate his adjudication.¹² If Marincola is right, then the dichotomy of truth and bias approximates the modern truth-falsity dichotomy. More importantly, Greek and Roman historians understood that if narrative was to be edifying it needed to be rooted in an actual past.

Cicero also promoted four secondary rules for history-writing. First, the author should express his own opinion on the topics discussed in his text. Also, the author should describe not only what was said or done but how it was said or done. Third, when describing the outcome of an event the author should explain whether the cause was praiseworthy, blameworthy or neutral.

¹¹Ibid., 158-59.

¹²Ibid., 160, 162

Finally, an author must not tell only what men did but also the careers and character of the men who gained a notable reputation.¹³ What does one make of these further rules? Cicero's first rule suggests that ancient history-writing was very much intended to be an interpretive task. The ancient reader learned not only what happened but also the author's estimation of deeds and events. For Cicero, it is not enough to describe or explain; the author must adjudicate.

Description and explanation are only part of the job. You can't simply list the events of a war, season by season, without indicating whether the decision to participate was justly or unjustly made. Further, Cicero's fourth point expresses interest in the biographical aspect of history-writing. Men don't simply appear or disappear in the events of history. The Roman fascination with individuals and great men in particular is betrayed here. Character was of great importance to the ancients. Assigning praise and blame to the causes of events was intimately linked to knowing the character and deeds of the people of those events. In another document, *Pro Archia* 14, Cicero states, "All literature, all philosophy, all history, abounds with incentives to noble action, incentives which would be buried in black darkness were the light of the written word not flashed upon them. How many pictures of high endeavor the great authors of Greece and Rome have drawn for our use, and bequeathed to us, not only for our contemplation, but for our emulation."¹⁴ Here Cicero also acknowledges and commends the exemplary function of history-writing. Although Cicero did not write history, he believed that historians should be both accurate and edifying.

A final point on the intention of the Greek and Romans historians can be made by discussion of what the ancient historian said when he wrote autobiographically. Marincola examines what the ancient history-writer said about himself. The ancient author had to convince

¹³Cicero, *De Oratore*, II, 15, 62, as translated and explained by T. A. Dorey, "Caesar: The 'Gallic War,'" 66-68.

¹⁴As translated by Ronald Mellor, *The Roman Historians* (London: Routledge, 1999), 3. Note that here are listed the three forms of discourse (literature, philosophy and history) which the ancients considered proper for the discussion of right action.

the reader that he had an upstanding character before he could hope to convince the reader that he had reported the content of history accurately. The historian, therefore, wrote autobiographically, if briefly so, in order to let the reader know that he possessed sufficient moral goodness to be worthy of writing the historical account. An author had to prove he merited a reader's trust in the performance of this task.¹⁵ Ancients saw a much stronger connection between the value of the history-writing produced and the character of the author than we do today. If a person lacked a virtuous character, ancients wondered how a person's interpretation of history could be trustworthy. In their concern for the moral character of the author, the ancients demonstrated a high respect for and awareness of the interpretive nature of history-writing.

The intent of Greek and Roman history-writing seems to have been both critical and edifying. Let us return briefly to Livy for a concrete example:

What chiefly makes the study of history wholesome and profitable is this, that you behold the lessons of every kind of experience set forth as on a conspicuous monument; from these you may choose for yourself and for your own state what to imitate, from these mark for avoidance what is shameful in the conception and shameful in the result.¹⁶

Why the ancients wrote history or what they considered the function and use of history to be, differs from the modern perspective. Many would consider exorcising such practices from modern discourse as a critical advancement. Those who think that the critical and edifying tasks need to be kept apart will need also to read the following chapters, for this chapter is not primarily intended to convince the reader that the joint agenda *should* be done. Rather, the attention of this section will be on the ancient performance of history-writing; that it *can* be

¹⁵ John Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, 260; 128-133.

¹⁶Livy, *Livy in Fourteen Volumes*, trans. B.O. Foster, vol.1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University), 7. See also Aubrey de Séincourt's translation of Livy in *The Early History of Rome* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1960), 34. This same section reads: "The study of history is the best medicine for a sick mind; for in history you have a record of the infinite variety of human experience plainly set out for all to see; and in that record you can find for yourself and your country both examples and warnings; fine things to take as models, base things, rotten through and through, to avoid."

done or, better, that it has been done and was largely successful.

There has also been a growing appreciation for the critical methods of the Classical history-writers. I will briefly mention recent scholarship of Herodotus and Livy in that regard. A careful reading of Herodotus reveals that he seldom fails to evaluate the reliability of the source. Indeed, multiple explanations for various events are not uncommon and the veracity of each one is judged by Herodotus.¹⁷ Virginia Hunter describes Herodotus as an early source critic:

To leave aside the significance the word critical has acquired since the nineteenth century, when the discipline of history was born, we have seen that Herodotus was as critical as any thinker could be about the past and in particular about his Greek sources for the past, given the absence of a whole series of ancillary disciplines and a critical method, which are the contributions of the nineteenth century to that discipline.¹⁸

Herodotus' method was as critical as anyone's until the nineteenth century. He worked with a rudimentary yet, according to Hunter, not unworthy source criticism methodology. Hunter explains that Herodotus attempts to distinguish between true *logos* and false *mythos*. He seeks resolution for chronological contradictions in the various sources he consults. He will often critique all the sources he consulted in order to construct a new version which is a

¹⁷See for example *Histories* III.9 where Herodotus provides the reader with two stories of how water was brought to troops in the desert. He states that the first account is more likely because the second is hard to believe. Herodotus names his source in IX.16 and lets the reader know how reliable the source is. Here Herodotus begins and concludes a story about a mixed Theban and Persian banquet by explaining to the reader that a certain Thersander, who had been at that dinner, had told him about the event—a reliable eyewitness source. There is an interesting exception in another story where Herodotus cannot decide which account is more likely to be true. He uses this point of indecision to dole out words of wisdom. In VII.148-152 Herodotus gives both the Argive and Greek accounts of the Argive decision-making processes: would the Argives become allies with Sparta or would they avoid war with Persia altogether? The two accounts differ and Herodotus ends the section by saying that he cannot positively say which account is correct. He does, however, say that he is sure of one thing. Interestingly, the “one thing” that he is sure of is a philosophical maxim. “For my own part I cannot positively state that Xerxes either did, or did not, send the messenger to Argos; nor can I guarantee the story of the Argives going to Susa and asking Artaxerxes about their relationship with Persia. I express no opinion on this matter other than that of the Argives themselves. One thing, however, I am very sure of: and that is, that if all mankind agreed to meet, and everyone brought his own sufferings along with him for the purpose of exchanging them for somebody else's, there is not a man who, after taking a good look at his neighbour's sufferings, would not be only too happy to return home with his own. So the Argives were not the worst offenders. My business is to record what people say, but I am by no means bound to believe it—and that may be taken to apply to this book as a whole.” Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (New York: Penguin, 1996), 421.

¹⁸Virginia Hunter, *Past and Process in Herodotus and Thucydides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1982), 91. See also page 86.

demythologized combination of the credible parts of the sources.¹⁹ Hunter's work on Herodotus exemplifies the increased appreciation for the critical acumen of ancient historians.

In terms of reliability, the Classical historians are again considered to be repositories of trustworthy information. Sometimes the accuracy would have surprised the author himself. Livy is but one example. As we shall see, new archaeological discoveries have confirmed Livian anecdotes which had before been considered primarily fictive. The first ten books of Livy were considered unreliable history except as a record of late Republican myths. Livy informs the reader that he is only repeating what his scanty and weak sources had described.²⁰ Even the author doubted the possibility that his account was accurate. Recent excavations of the Roman Forum, however, have unearthed the earliest burial places of the people of Rome and found convincing evidence for the existence of an early population of mixed Latin and Sabine ethnicity. This discovery allowed historians to put the myth of the Rape of the Sabine women in an historical context. Even if the evidence was not enough to confirm the details of the story, the intermingling of the Latin and Sabine peoples who would found Roman culture was now verifiable. Further, it was discovered that the Roman Forum had been paved over about the time which Livy places the urbanizing program of King Tarquin, attesting to the accuracy of the date and event. Third, inscriptions have been discovered which include names of Etruscan kings that parallel the names of the kings as given by Livy.²¹

One could continue along the same lines when discussing Herodotus. J.A.S. Evans became aware of archaeological work in Russia and realized that the archaeologists there were

¹⁹Ibid., 97.

²⁰See Livy, trans. B.O. Foster, vol. 1, 5. Here Livy states: "Such traditions as belong to the time before the city was founded, or rather was presently to be founded, and are rather adorned with poetic legends than based upon trustworthy historical proofs, I purpose neither to affirm nor to refute . . . But to such legends as these, however they shall be regarded and judged, I shall, for my own part, attach no great importance."

²¹Ronald Mellor, *The Roman Historians*, 74. Mellor quickly lists these three archaeological proofs of Livy's mythical description of early Rome. Mellor is not suggesting that Livy's first books be taken as straightforward and accurate description of the past. He is reporting a certain degree of modern surprise with regard to apparent correlations between archaeological evidence and Livy's mythology.

unearthing evidence of a civilization remarkably like the Scythian culture Herodotus describes.²² Evans examines the topographical research and archaeological evidence of the second half of the twentieth century which validates some of Herodotus' reports. Evans relates twentieth-century archaeological discoveries which seem to verify some of the more fantastical aspects of Herodotus. The Scythians described in Book Four seemed as mythical to Herodotus' first audience as they did to the generations of readers afterwards. These people of the north were so quintessentially barbarian that they *had* to have been fictional. Yet archaeology seems to corroborate Herodotus' stories. The ostentatious and, frankly, gruesome practices of royal Scythian burials, for example, fascinated Herodotus. Excavations of these sites confirm the main points of Herodotus' description.²³ Also, the burial rites of ordinary Scythians are mentioned, including a practice which we today might call a wake. This wake was fuelled not by alcohol but rather by throwing hemp onto a communal fire, allowing the participants to breathe in the vapours. Herodotus reports that the Scythians enjoyed the vapours so much that they howled with pleasure. In the 1950s, excavations in Siberia unearthed hemp and hemp-burning tools.²⁴

Archaeology has also unearthed supporting evidence for another Herodotean anecdote. Amidst the ambitious military endeavours of Cambyses, described in Book Three, Herodotus includes a small but curious story about a lost detachment of soldiers, swallowed by sand in Egypt. A Persian detachment was sent against Siwa, explains Herodotus; the men stopped briefly at the El Khargeh oasis, left the oasis and were never seen again. The soldiers didn't return to the oasis and did not reach their destination. Herodotus then reports the story that the locals told about that detachment. They claimed that as the soldiers sat down to eat their mid-day meal a wind arose, heaping waves of sand upon their heads until they were completely

²²J.A.S. Evans, *Herodotus* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1984). Evans's examples will be described in more detail in the section on Herodotus.

²³On the archaeological finds of Scythian burial practices see E.D. Phillips, *Royal Hordes: Nomad People of the Steppes* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965).

²⁴J.A.S. Evans, *Herodotus*, 65.

covered. The story of these soldiers was merely a story until 1977 when an Egyptian archaeological team unearthed thousands of bones together with Persian spears and swords near Siwa. Interestingly enough, the area is called “The Sea of Sand.” The soldiers who had ‘drowned’ there were finally found.²⁵

If there is a caveat it is that in some ways Herodotus was not so much a great historian as he was lucky. By that I mean that much of what Herodotus reports was what he was told by the locals rather than things he investigated and saw for himself. This, possibly, speaks of a certain mindset of truth-telling by a variety of oral cultures of the time. The oral reports which Herodotus repeats have been shown to be true because many people told generally reliable stories.²⁶ Herodotus would have been a better historian if he had checked on these stories, although such actions may not have been possible for Herodotus, given limitations in travel and so forth. If oral report often does reflect actual events then, in retrospect, it might be that we are better served by Herodotus’ over-supply of information than if he had edited out anything he could not personally verify. Herodotus himself tells us that his sources are oral. His honesty about sources at least puts readers on guard as to how much to trust them. Furthermore, Herodotus is generally circumspect with regard to the credibility of his sources. If he thinks the

²⁵ J.A.S. Evans, *Herodotus*, 50. The story of the soldiers buried by sand can be found in Herodotus III.26.

²⁶ Since its first publication readers have not known how to appropriate the wealth of oral tradition recorded in *Histories*. See François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Berkeley, CA: University of California), xv-xx. Hartog observes that Herodotus’ work has been on trial for the last twenty-five centuries but no final judgment has been reached because successive generations of interpreters swing one way then the other in their judgement of Herodotus, and his oral reports in particular. So how does one distinguish between what can be trusted in these oral stories and what cannot? Various critics of Herodotus, including Thucydides and Voltaire, decided that everything Herodotus saw himself was trustworthy but that the oral traditions which Herodotus includes may or may not be true. One simply had no way of knowing. It seems that unless archaeological finds confirm a story, the practice of Thucydides and Voltaire will continue. Also, on the basis of trusting what Herodotus saw or what was a part of his times, the early book of Herodotus have been regarded as untrustworthy but for most of the past his description of the Greek-Persian war has been taken as reliable. For more on the problem of evaluating oral tradition in Greek history-writing see John Davies, “The Tradition about the First Sacred War,” in *Greek Historiography*, ed. Simon Hornblower (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 193-212. Davies examines the contention that the First Sacred War was fictional—oral tradition ‘reports’ events that never happened. His point is less to prove that the war did happen (Davies believes that there is no conclusive proof, only a plausible hypothesis) than to examine modern evaluation of ancient oral tradition. Two books by Rosalind Thomas are also of note. *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989) and *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992).

story is untrue, he says so. If he has more than one version of a story he gives both. He sometimes lets the reader decide which version is more likely to be true and at other times lets the reader know which one he thinks is more likely to be correct.

Herodotus

Herodotus is often cast as the transitional figure in the development of history writing; not quite historian, not quite fiction writer. This is epitomized in the most famous question asked about Herodotus—“father of lies or father of history?” The answer has never enjoyed long periods of general consensus, regardless of which label has been favoured. Some epochs, including the Greeks of the generation after Herodotus, dismissed him as liar.²⁷ In the last half of the twentieth century, the barometer has again moved in the direction of historical patriarch.²⁸ Given this growing appreciation of Herodotus and his *Histories*, this formative work is now a good text in which to examine the ancient Greek understanding of the relationship of critical historical method and intentional didacticism. The Greek concept of critical and edifying will be adopted by the Roman writers.

First, what can be said about Herodotus’ reliability and methods? The question of Herodotus’ veracity is not an insignificant matter. If Herodotus was a deliberate deceiver then his work needs to be appreciated in much the same way as the Homeric epics—in a primarily literary manner. Second, the degree to which Herodotus can be taken as historically accurate is not the only reason why he is important for the purposes of this dissertation. Herodotus stands as a pivotal figure in the development of Western history-writing because he was generally a

²⁷Herodotus fared better in the estimation of Roman writers than Greek. Cicero was the first to call Herodotus the “Father of History.” See T.J. Luce, *The Greek Historians* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 36-37.

²⁸For a summary of the history of the interpretation of Herodotus consult Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus*. Also see the Norton critical edition of Herodotus, *The Histories*, edited by William Blanco and Jennifer Tolbert Roberts (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1992). Although the first part of this book is merely selections from Herodotus, the volume includes nearly two hundred pages of both ancient and contemporary commentary on Herodotus and his text. The assembled collection of excerpts provides the reader with the broad range of reactions and interpretations of Herodotus that have been put forward over the centuries.

reliable reporter *and* he took seriously his task as ethical instructor, critic of current political situations and preceptor of the general laws which govern the universe, especially the law of Fate.

Various contemporary authors have credited Herodotus with the more generous paternity of history rather than lies. Arnaldo Momigliano holds that “Herodotus is better than any mediaeval historian I know of with the possible exception of Ibn Khaldun.”²⁹ Granted, this comment was intended as a barb against those who argue that the Christian tradition should get the credit for influencing history-writing in a direction of factuality and regard the Greco-Roman authors as less reliable than Christian. Momigliano is convinced the “truth trajectory” can be traced much further back than Christianity and is not afraid to name Herodotus as father of history rather than of lies. More importantly, Herodotus was one of the earliest Greek writers to develop a critical attitude in the recording of events. Momigliano grants that critical theory has developed in necessary ways since then but affirms that Herodotus should be applauded for making significant advances—from the mere historical consciousness of the Homeric poems before him to genuine history-writing.³⁰ Indeed, Momigliano suggests that the reason Herodotus was considered untrustworthy by his ancient critics was because he was not patriotic enough.³¹

²⁹Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1990), 30.

³⁰Ibid., 35. Momigliano believes the “old” theory of Herodotus’ evolution. That is; *The Histories* demonstrate evidence of the author’s progress from geographer and ethnographer (Books 1-6) into a historian (the second half (Books 7-9). While I appreciate that Momigliano vouches for Herodotus’ eventual transformation into a historian, I disagree that Herodotus only becomes a historian at the end of the text. If you adhere to a more narrow definition of a historian’s philosophy and methods then perhaps Herodotus is not a historian in the beginning of the text. The point, however, is that Herodotus had a rather broader vision of what history-writing was. For another theory amenable to my argument see Hartog’s *The Mirror of Herodotus*. One of Hartog’s goals is to demonstrate that such a division, between geographer and historian, is arbitrary. Herodotus discusses a broad range of topics in the first half of his text and then narrows his focus to the narration of the Persian War in the second half. However, this is not evidence of an evolving historical method or consciousness. Rather, the earlier Books are the grounds by which Herodotus establishes his moral and political critiques of the persons involved in the Persian War.

³¹Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*, 40. Although Momigliano does not supply any examples from Herodotus’ text, they are not in short supply once you begin reading Herodotus. One of Herodotus’ habits was to give examples of Greek customs which had really originated in foreign lands. His comments were in contrast to the popular belief, within Greece, that these practices were indigenous. In IV.187-190 Herodotus claims that Greek clothing, harnesses for horses, and the practice of women crying at religious ceremonies all originated in Libya. In V.58 he observes that the Greek alphabet is taken from the Phoenicians.

Herodotus' obvious interest in and appreciation for barbarians and barbarian culture would have been distasteful to many Athenians. Overall, Momigliano portrays Herodotus as a methodological pioneer, who made mistakes and whose methods were crude, certainly, but who launched history-writing as a form of writing that attempted to find out about the past and report what happened.

K.H. Waters suggests yet another reason why Herodotus might have been dismissed as a trustworthy historian. Waters describes Herodotus as having one foot in the epic tradition, owing to his obvious imitation of Homeric forms.³² Because of this similarity to Homer, Herodotus' accounts have been discredited for much of the past twenty-five centuries.³³ The question of the fictive quality that the use of narrative brings to a historical account is part of lively historiographical debate today. While some have suggested that the use of narrative, in itself, fictionalizes the account to greater or less extent, others are less convinced. As this particular topic intersects with Herodotus I note that Simon Hornblower has said that although the narrative structure of Herodotus is similar to the Homeric epics, does not in itself indicate that Herodotus is inventing what he is writing. Indeed, Hornblower suggests that Thucydides follows the narrative structure of Homer more closely than Herodotus and yet Thucydides,

Perhaps most unsettling to a Greek, in II.50-51 Herodotus claims that the names of nearly all the gods were borrowed by the Greeks from the Egyptians. Remember also that Herodotus was from Halicarnassus, a Greek colony in Asia Minor and that Herodotus' father was likely Carian rather than Greek. Because his father was non-Greek, Herodotus was unable to ever attain Athenian citizenship. Halicarnassus was unwelcome in both the Dorian Pentapolis and the Ionian League. See J.A.S. Evans, *Herodotus*, 3. Such factors could explain why Herodotus failed to possess the xenophobia that characterized many other Greeks.

³²K.H. Waters, *Herodotus the Historian: His Problems, Methods and Originality* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), 136. Waters notes that Herodotus has been regarded as incapable of historical analysis because of the influence of epic poetry in his work. As evidence Waters directs the reader to Herodotus' introductory statements. Here Herodotus informs the reader that he aspires to keep alive the deeds of the Greeks and non-Greeks. This is very much like the goal of epic poetry; to keep alive the deeds of Greek and Trojan heroes.

³³For an ancient example in which Herodotus was described as a 'liar' see the Plutarch, *On the Marginality of Herodotus*, enumerating the lapses in Herodotus' history. Interestingly, this pamphlet was written by Plutarch whose own historical details have been received with a degree of scepticism. Evans mentions this pamphlet and suggests that Plutarch's claims of inaccuracy were generally ill-founded or based on Plutarch's dislike for Herodotus' pro-barbarian tenor. See Evans, *Herodotus*, 164-65.

everyone agrees, is not writing fiction.³⁴

Besides verifying a number of oral stories in Herodotus J.A.S. Evans helped restore the reputation of Herodotus' reliability in his comments about historical method. Evans allows that Herodotus was not entirely free from bias or naïveté, but affirms that he did possess a true historian's mind. Herodotus was not a mere chronicler or geographer. He demonstrates curiosity and an inquiring disposition. He didn't just describe; he wanted to know why things happened as they did. Cause and effect were aspects of his research. How was it that the Persians came to make war on the Greeks? How were the numerically inferior numbers of Greeks able to defeat the great host of Persians?³⁵ To these authors' comments I add that Herodotus was interested in the meaning of all of history. Herodotus is famous for digressions, and digressions within digressions. But these digressions were not simply for entertainment nor do they owe their existence exclusively to Herodotus' famous inability to edit out gossip or a good yarn. Herodotus knew that to answer one 'how' or 'why' was not dissimilar to a three-year-old's infinitely regressing questions of 'why.' The digressions answer a chain of repeated "whys" and shape the discussion of the big questions of history.

It would be misguided to think of Herodotus as a modern historian. He was sloppy with chronology, numbers and other such points that a historian takes pains to make sure are correct. For example, at the end of the account of the rivalry for the Spartan throne between the brothers Cleomenes and Dorieus, Herodotus describes Cleomenes' reign with the adjective "short." In actuality, however, Cleomenes ruled for thirty years. Herodotus' choice of the adjective would seem to be inappropriate. Marincola notes, however, that the question remains open as to whether Herodotus knew the time span was longer than he indicated and he purposefully misrepresented the information to make a point, whether he simply didn't bother to do the

³⁴Simon Hornblower, "Narratology and Narrative Technique in Thucydides," in *Greek Historiography*, ed. Simon Hornblower (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 140.

³⁵J.A.S. Evans, *Herodotus*; i-ii.

necessary research and calculations, or whether he really did understand Cleomenes' reign to have been a short, or relatively short, one. The answer is unknown. Numbers are likewise problematic as when, for example, Herodotus reports the number of deaths in the battles with the Persians. John Marincola notes that Herodotus' claims about the number of Persians killed should be approached with caution as the numbers seem inflated. For example, if Herodotus is taken seriously, the number of Greek dead in comparison to Persian dead would be at the unlikely ratio of 3:100.³⁶

In terms of intent, Herodotus was a critical historian. In terms of performance Herodotus was not a modern, critical historian. Thus far we have discussed the critical character of Herodotus. What was the edifying intent of his history-writing? Herodotus intended his *Histories* as a political critique of his current times. His history functioned as a preceptor of right behaviour and attitudes. He was interested in the manner in which human character functions in the causation of world affairs. And it explored the character of the universe, in particular, the role of Fate in the events of human history.

Some of his digressions are intended to challenge the sense of superiority which Greeks held, especially in relation to non-Greeks. The Athenian political ideal was the democracy of the city-states. Democracy was considered superior to both monarchy and oligarchy. Herodotus includes an interesting section on a debate about the ideal form of government which the Persians conducted. In the aftermath of a bloody internal power-grab within the upper echelons of Persian power-brokers, the Persian noblemen gather to discuss the direction that government should take in light of recent events. A certain Otanes delivers a speech to the congregated Persians in which he outlines the evil inherent in monarchy, as demonstrated by the reign of Cambyses. Otanes urges his listeners to create a government of the people in which the people and the government will be equals. Immediately following Otanes, a certain Megabyzus

³⁶ Herodotus, *Histories*, 587.

recommends the principle of oligarchy. Monarchy is evil, agrees Megabyzus, but the people tend to be irresponsible and violent. Thus, a small number of representatives from the highest class are to be given power to rule. When Megabyzus concludes, Darius speaks in favour of monarchy. (At this point in the narrative Darius has yet to win the throne of Persia.) Darius offers his opinions on the weaknesses of oligarchy and democracy, but in the end wins the debate with his observation that monarchy has been the tradition of the Persians and that changing the tradition would not profit their society.³⁷ Herodotus suggests, through narrative, the rather controversial notion that different forms of government might be best for different kinds of societies. Democracy is best for the Greeks because it is the Greek tradition, not necessarily because it is the best form of government. Furthermore, his audience would have been reluctant to consider the possibility that enlightened conversation took place in the Persian court, or that monarchy might be as valid as democracy.

Herodotus challenges notions of superiority not only in politics but in matters of religion as well. After describing the various religions of the world, Herodotus concludes that each people group develops for itself the religion which suits their needs the best. Every person, should he or she survey all the world's religious options, would in the end choose his or her own native religious system.³⁸ Herodotus also believes that all the religions are essentially derivatives of a common religion. What varies is not ultimate reality but rather the idiosyncratic ways in which the rituals are performed and the stories told. He is very keen, for example, to demonstrate that the gods of Egypt, Greece, Persia, and the major civilizations, are the same

³⁷Ibid., 187-189.

³⁸Ibid., 169. In II.3 Herodotus states that no nation knows more about religion than any other nation. See John Gould, "Herodotus and Religion," in *Greek Historiography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 91-93. According to Gould, Herodotus generally looks for human explanations in human affairs—he doesn't look for divine causation. But there is an important distinction to be made between Herodotus' treatment of the gods as causal and his perception of the role of Fate. He does not look to the gods for explanation of events. In fact, Gould argues, he demonstrates real hesitation in doing so which is expressed in various ways. First, Herodotus does not attribute causation to the gods unless he has been given extra evidence—which he does not require in discussing human causation. Second, he does not name which god is responsible. Finally, Herodotus doesn't use his own voice to attribute an event to divine intervention but rather uses the indirect speech of one of the characters to talk about Fate.

gods but called by different names in the different tongues. Contrary to conventional Greek thought, Herodotus asserts that it was the Greeks who borrowed their knowledge of the gods from the Egyptians, rather than arising *sui generis* amongst Greek peoples.³⁹ John Gould believes that Herodotus thought that all people had equal access, if equally limited access, to knowledge of the divine. Gould does not suggest that Herodotus did not believe in the gods or supernatural causation: “Herodotus took the possibility of supernatural causation in human experience quite as seriously as he took the involvement of human causation.”⁴⁰ But Herodotus was highly hesitant to claim knowledge of divine causation. He will only suggest *possible* motives for divine intervention or action; he does not pronounce on such matters. Herodotus believes in the gods but refrains from making providentialist claims.

Herodotus can also be critical of particular actions and policies. The story of Dorieus and Cleomenes is again instructive. Here Herodotus digresses in order to comment on the inappropriate behaviour of an individual and on the unreasonable social and political practices which caused the individual to act as he did. Herodotus recalls an episode of Spartan history in which two sons of the Spartan king desired to inherit the throne. The younger, Dorieus, is one of the finest and ablest men of his generation while the elder, Cleomenes, was mad and tyrannical. Unable to tolerate being ruled by Cleomenes, Dorieus embarked on a number of ill-advised journeys and conquests in foreign lands, in one of which he was killed. Herodotus concludes the story of Dorieus and Cleomenes by informing the reader that had Dorieus only been patient and endured a while in Sparta, he would be king, since Cleomenes’ reign was short and he left no son as heir. Herodotus’ comments could almost be taken as a statement of fact rather than an admonition to be patient. A closer reading of the entire account reveals that impatience was but one of the character flaws that propelled Dorieus to his end. When Cleomenes took the throne,

³⁹Herodotus, *Histories*, 104-105.

⁴⁰Gould, “Herodotus and Religion,” 93.

Dorieus left Sparta “in a fit of temper” without consulting the Delphic oracle for advice on a suitable site on which to settle or observing the usual formalities.⁴¹ His initial attempt to settle elsewhere ended in failure and he was driven from the area. Upon his return to the Peloponnese he was advised to found a new city in Sicily. This time he went first to the Delphic Oracle and was promised that the land would be his. While traveling along the Italian coastline he was asked by the Crotoniates to join in a campaign against the Sybarites, which he did. The end result of these skirmishes was the death of Dorieus. Later, there arose some doubt as to whether Dorieus had really helped the Crotoniates in their war. The Sybarites claimed that the proof of Dorieus’ involvement in battle against them lies in his death. For if Dorieus had not “transgressed the instructions of the oracle” but rather “done only what he was sent to do, and not allowed himself to be led into incidental adventure, he would have taken and held the country of Erys, and neither he nor his army would have perished.”⁴² Dorieus was impatient, impulsive and foolish. Although one feels pity for Dorieus at the beginning of the episode, by the end Herodotus has condemned him for his lack of virtue.

The story of Dorieus is one of Herodotus’ many digressions. It is a brief life: the manner of his birth is recorded in great detail, albeit perhaps because there was a gossipy story to be told. (There was some doubt amongst the male Spartan aristocracy that Dorieus’ mother was indeed pregnant. In order to assure themselves that she wasn’t lying, these aristocrats sat on the bed with the woman while she delivered Dorieus.) The account of Dorieus ends with his ignoble death. Yet the story of Dorieus is a small digression within a larger digression: one that sets the story of Dorieus and Cleomenes within the larger question of the Spartan practice of making king not the ablest son of the king but the eldest. If the Spartans would have rejected their inflexible adherence to the tradition of eldest son, they would have had a better king than

⁴¹Herodotus, *Histories*, 294.

⁴²Ibid.

Cleonmenes. Instead, they wasted the life and potential of Dorieus. The foolishness of favouring tradition over good practice harmed the Spartans and, most particularly, Dorieus.

His first audience would have understood Herodotus as a political critic of past and present government.⁴³ Consider an anecdote that at first glance may seem to be a mere recitation of a truism. In book seven, Herodotus reports the maxims which Artabanaus, advisor to King Xerxes, offered as Xerxes was planning his invasion of Greece. The advisor tells his King:

You know, my lord, that amongst living creatures it is the great ones that God smites with his thunder, out of envy of their pride. The little ones do not vex him. It is always the great buildings and the tall trees which are struck by lightning. It is God's way to bring the lofty low. Often a great army is destroyed by a little one, when God in his envy puts fear into the men's hearts, or sends a thunder-storm, and they are cut to pieces in a way they do not deserve. For God tolerates pride in none but Himself.⁴⁴

Here Herodotus is setting up his themes for the last three books of *Histories*. The great Xerxes will be conquered by the comparatively insignificant Greeks. More importantly, it is a repetition of truth about the nature of the universe which Herodotus is keen to communicate at various points throughout the text: defeat is not the unexpected consequence of pride.⁴⁵ The humbling of the great, the foolishness of those who desire more but in their pursuit of gain lose it all—these lessons are the climax of the life of Croesus in the early books and set the pattern for the greed and fall of Xerxes.

The story of Croesus, a great king whose desire for conquest led to defeat at the hands of those he invaded and his execution on a pyre, is perhaps the most vivid of all of Herodotus'

⁴³Ernst Badian, "Herodotus on Alexander I of Macedon: A Study in Some Subtle Silences," in *Greek Historiography* ed. Simon Hornblower (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), 107-130.

⁴⁴Herodotus, *Histories*, 378. Compare this statement with Hebrew wisdom and prophetic literature. For example Job 40: 11-12: "Pour out the overflowings of your anger, and look on all who are proud, and abase them. Look on all who are proud, and bring them low; tread down the wicked where they stand" and Isaiah 2:12: "For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up and high."

⁴⁵Perhaps this is a narrative, rather than proverbial, illustration of Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." Herodotus' central lesson may have been cliché even in his day. Or he may have borrowed it from Hebrew Wisdom literature. Yet cliché or borrowed, Herodotus is quite serious about the truth of this maxim. The gods *will* strike down the proud, the ambitious, the self-exalting. Thus, when considering the shape of his work, the fall of Croesus and then the fall of Xerxes at the end of *The Histories*, the text could be viewed as a narrative, historical form of Wisdom Literature. If this were true, Herodotus, the Father of History, is exemplary for perceiving the task of the historian as being intertwined with the task of discerning wisdom.

accounts.⁴⁶ Croesus is the archetypical foreshadowing of Xerxes. Croesus' ambition is Xerxes' ambition. What Croesus came to understand about Fate is what Xerxes should have also learned. Think for example of the climax of the first four books of the *Histories*. The last stronghold in which King Croesus had evaded defeat by the forces of Cyrus has just fallen. Croesus realizes with horror that the prophecy which he had interpreted as a guarantee of his own victory, had actually promised no such thing. Croesus had been told that if he attacked Persia he would destroy a great nation. He failed to appreciate the ambiguity of such a pronouncement. Croesus attacked Persia and did indeed destroy a great nation—his own. The greedy, unconscious impulse to interpret an ambiguous prophecy as a harbinger of success was symptomatic of Croesus' blindness and folly. His greed and ambition caused him to misinterpret the prophecy. As the flames licked his feet on the executioner's pyre, he realized his greed and ambition had brought him there.

Herodotus wrote his text during the Peloponnesian War. As Herodotus sat down to compose his *researches*, the literal translation of the word history in Herodotus' text, he seems to have come to the conclusion that those at the height of their glory are unwise to revel in their accomplishments and foolish to reach for more. The gods will strike down such persons. Throughout the *Histories* the men who in the height of their success grasp after still more are brought low. Xerxes is warned just as Croesus had been warned. Xerxes was brought low just as Croesus had been brought low. Herodotus warns the Athenians that if they continue in their current ambitions Fate will bring them low. Evans sums up Herodotus as follows:

His charm is undeniable, and it tends to obscure the serious purpose behind the *History*. Herodotus was searching for the *aitia* of the war, and the *aitia* was the moral cause: who or what was to blame? He sought his answer in the attack and counterattack of Greek and barbarian, and he centered on the rise of Persian imperialism and made it his leitmotiv. The *History* ends at the turning point of Persian imperialism, when the Persian

⁴⁶As the story goes, although Croesus was put on the pyre and the fire lit and his lower body burned by the flames, Croesus' execution was stayed at the last possible moment. The king, upon hearing Croesus' prophetic utterances, ordered that the fire be put out and made Croesus an advisor.

custom of expanding reached its watershed and could not continue longer. There Herodotus stops. But his *History* was published just as Athenian imperialism reached its crisis point.⁴⁷

The lesson, the gods will humble the proud and foil the ambitions of the mighty, is communicated through reporting past events. The message was directed at the ambitions of the Athenians who, in their growing desire for Empire, were not dissimilar to the Persians. Both the story of Croesus and Xerxes teach this lesson. The Athenians would do well to learn from the past. The shape of Herodotus' *Histories* when viewed as a whole (beginning with Croesus and ending with Xerxes) takes the form of a political and ethical warning. The warning is not directed at a future audience but the present political situation. Great men before have grasped after world domination and been defeated. With his history, Herodotus warns the Athenians to desist from their desire for empire.

Robert Kaplan recently described Herodotus as a historian for our time.⁴⁸ The first section of his article explains why Herodotus is chosen over against Thucydides, even though Thucydides “may have been more trustworthy.”⁴⁹ According to Kaplan Thucydides was a brilliant editor and for that moderns tend to prefer him. But Herodotus understood that facts as moderns understand them are often unable to explain causation. Herodotus appreciated that the religious dimension of his world as well as the goodness, evil, or irrationality in human nature were not only real but often the most important part of accurate description and insightful explanation. Knowledge of perceptions, emotions and beliefs are integral to understanding the past. Kaplan recalls Herodotus' story of the founding of the temple dedicated to Pan in Athens. A professional runner named Phidippides had seen Pan when on a run and Pan had asked him why the Athenians ignored him. When Phidippides told this story to the Athenians, it was decided that a temple to Pan would be constructed. Kaplan suggests that if Western people today

⁴⁷J.A.S. Evans, *Herodotus*, 166.

⁴⁸Robert Kaplan, “A Historian For Our Time,” *The Atlantic* 299 January/February 2007, 78-84.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 80.

cannot comprehend that Phidippides really did see and talk with Pan they will have little ability to understand much of the non-Western world. Kaplan is not professing any belief in the ancient gods. Whether Phidippides saw Pan because the Olympic gods do exist or because Phidippides was dehydrated does not matter. The temple to Pan was built because Pan appeared one day and demanded that the Athenians build him a temple. Kaplan believes those who dismiss the story as fiction demonstrate a kind of narrowness typical of Enlightenment. Our judgement is surely clouded, states Kaplan, if we do not understand that our world is just as “fantastic” as the one described by Herodotus.⁵⁰

Although Kaplan’s article began by granting preference to Herodotus, the final sentence places the two ancient historians on an equal platform. In the present, Kaplan states, “Herodotus will be as valuable as Thucydides.”⁵¹ Why? In a previous paragraph Kaplan wrote: “If rationalism and secularism have taken us so far that we can no longer imagine what Phidippides saw, then we are incapable of understanding—and consequently defending ourselves against—many of the religious movements that reverse the Enlightenment and affect today’s geopolitics.” Dismissing Herodotus in favour of Thucydides has led Western people to forget that Herodotus is describing a reality too—the true world of perceptions upon which many people base their decisions and actions. And the West cannot forget this if they want to combat those undeniably real religious perceptions. In the end, Kaplan has not really preferred Herodotus over Thucydides—except for the forgotten insight he brings to the understanding of, *and defence against*, non-Enlightened cultures. Herodotus is a partner to Thucydides for he includes what Thucydides omitted. I agree with Kaplan on several important points. Herodotus “allows us to see the world whole.”⁵² Admiring the editing tendency of Thucydides has narrowed the discussion of the past. Furthermore, Herodotus *is* a historian for our time—but not as a kind of

⁵⁰Ibid., 84.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., 81.

defensive strategy against other cultures but as a text in which we reconsider the relationship of critical and edifying in the writing of history and particularly the relationship of critical and edifying in a text which assumes a different world view than Western, atheistic Enlightenment.

Polybius

Polybius bridges the worlds of Greek and Roman history-writing. Born in circa 200 B.C. in Megalopolis, a city with membership in the Achaean League, Polybius likely expected to spend his life as an influential politician, officer and gentleman. His father was a politician who also had large landholdings. Polybius was groomed to follow his father's pattern and was trained in practical matters such as hunting and the management of the family's extensive property. Although no direct evidence exists for the kind of education he had, it was probably a typical Hellenistic schooling. F.W. Walbank notes that Polybius' writing itself indicates that his training in literature and philosophy were superficial as compared to the Golden era of the fourth and fifth centuries but nevertheless Polybius was conversant with recent Hellenistic authors.⁵³ As a young man, Polybius became a politician and military commander. However, following Roman victories in Greece in 168 B.C., a thousand leading Greeks, from cities whose loyalty to Rome was doubted by the Senate, were sent to Italy as detainees. Polybius spent sixteen years in Italy during which time neither he nor the other Greek captives were granted a trial. While in Italy, Polybius became friends with Scipio Aemilianus. Scipio was the son of the commander of the Roman forces who had been victorious in Greece in 168 B.C. and was well set to become a significant member of the Roman military himself. After Polybius was released from Roman detention, he returned to Greece briefly. In 150 B.C. Scipio Aemilianus invited Polybius to join him in Carthage, about the time of the beginning of the third Punic War, where Scipio was in command of the Roman legions. Polybius would watch as Scipio's forces lay siege to and utterly destroyed the city of Rome's greatest enemy. Like Thucydides before him,

⁵³F.W. Walbank, *Polybius* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1972), 32-33.

one of the great strengths of his history is the fact that he was an eye-witness to much of what he describes. Alternatively, he had access to individuals who had themselves been eye-witnesses. Like Thucydides, Polybius is regarded as an accurate and reliable reporter.

Like Herodotus, Polybius frequently digresses. But whereas Herodotus uses the digression to include ethnographical, geographical or mythical material, Polybius' digressions also explore methodological aspects of history-writing or moral commentary. Polybius also includes geographical digressions, yet even these sections serve didactic purposes.⁵⁴ More frequently, narrative is interrupted in order to assign praise or blame. At other times, as much as an entire book is devoted to historiographical questions. Book twelve, for example, is perhaps the longest and best known of these digressions. In this section, sometimes titled "Criticisms of Timaeus and His Approach to History," Polybius outlines the failures of Timaeus and other Hellenistic historians and the manner in which he is different from them. Herodotean and Polybian digressions have fallen out of vogue in contemporary history-writing. Extended interruption of narrative, for the most part, is viewed as inappropriate. Yet, for the ancients, the digression was expected. Polybius supplies the following reason for inclusion of the digression. True to his style, the reason runs along highly utilitarian logic.

The human senses...are incapable of lengthy concentration on a single object. This is true of taste and sight, and it is true of the prolonged effort involved in reading a history; hence there arose the practice of the most learned authors of the past who were in the habit of providing myths and stories to serve as digressions...and so give their readers a rest.⁵⁵

Digressions in the text of Thucydides are extremely rare and in this aspect his history does not act as a model for Polybius. Thucydides rarely addresses his audience directly or

⁵⁴These didactic purposes vary. In 3.59 Polybius' geographical digression is a call to be sympathetic to former historians who either omitted inclusion of geography or gave inaccurate accounts. Reliable geographical information is difficult to acquire and describe, pleads Polybius, and we should be grateful that previous authors at least added something to our knowledge of the world. He, on the other hand, had travelled widely and his geographical inclusions, he claims, will provide accurate knowledge of areas which were previously unknown. It is also a subtle argument for his own authority as a historian.

⁵⁵Walbank, 46. This is Walbank's summary of Polybius 38.5-6 where Polybius justifies the use of digression by appealing to history and utility.

deviates from his narrative. Elsewhere, however, Polybius is not unlike Thucydides in his sharp and precise analysis. Polybius always strives to report what actually happened in as clear a manner as possible.⁵⁶ Accuracy is of great importance to Polybius. For him it follows that if history is to be of use to the reader, it must be accurate. Occasionally, Polybius makes claims which stress a higher standard of reliability than found in Thucydides. When reporting speeches, for example, Thucydides tells the reader that he will re-create the general gist of what was said even if the exact words are his invention. Polybius states that such a policy is insufficient. “Now the special function of history, particularly in relation to speeches, is first of all to discover the words actually used, whatever they were, and next to establish the reason why a particular action or argument failed or succeeded.”⁵⁷ In another passage, Polybius notes that it is the politician who chooses what should be said on any particular occasion. It is not the duty of the historian to invent the content of the speech retroactively. The historian reports the speech as it was said so that current politicians can learn what is appropriate speech-making for different occasions.⁵⁸ The need for accuracy is supported by utilitarian and didactic reasoning. It is Polybius’ recurrent emphasis on the usefulness of history for the present reader which differentiates him from Thucydides’ famous claim that history be useful for the future. Polybius has embraced his present-day readership; both the digressions and the need for accuracy are necessary in order that the history be useful and profitable for the reader.

Polybius discusses the relationship of truth-telling and falsity within the context of history-writing. In this section Polybius agrees with others who say that even if a history text is lacking in style, if it retains a sense of the truth, it can still be called a history. For history is like

⁵⁶John Derow is one scholar who argues that in historical acumen Polybius outstrips Thucydides. While Thucydides successfully masters the ‘who, what, where and when’ of history-writing, it is Polybius who first really gets at ‘how and why.’ Herodotus, according to Derow, relied too heavily on Fate to really answer questions of ‘how.’ Thucydides focused too heavily on detailed descriptions of events and on the human motivation of fear and therefore he did not get at serious analysis. See “Historical Explanation: Polybius and his Predecessors” in *Greek Historiography*, ed. Simon Hornblower (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 75-76; 80-81; 86-89.

⁵⁷Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert (New York: Penguin, 1979), 400.

⁵⁸This is Walbank’s interpretation of Polybius’ comments in XII.25.i. See Walbank, 45.

an animal. If it loses its eyesight it is helpless. So, too, “if history is deprived of its truth, we are left with nothing but an idle, unprofitable tale.”⁵⁹ There are different kinds of falsehoods, continues Polybius: unintentional and intentional. The former are the result of ignorance and those who include unintentional falsehoods should be kindly corrected. Intentional falsehood, however, should be condemned.⁶⁰ Note that although the emotional response to unintentional and intentional falsity differs, the action taken is not. Whatever the intention, falsity is to be identified and corrected. Thus far we have noted the critical impulse in Polybius. How did he combine critical with edifying?

Polybius’ most important theme was the rise of Rome. Polybius wanted to help Greek readers understand how the city of Rome was able to elevate itself from a relatively unimportant power to be the master of the world in such a short time. To explain this topic Polybius examines a fifty-three-year period during which, in Polybius’ estimation, the formative events which effectively propelled Rome to power were concentrated. For the most part, Polybius is writing for a Greek audience. His principal goal is to explain to the Greeks the history and nature of their new masters. Yet, Polybius wasn’t just teaching the Greeks about the Romans. His interest in larger issues, such as Fate or personal conduct, is more general in application than simply acquiring political savvy.

Polybius treats the topic of Fate in a manner similar to Herodotus. Compare Polybius’ account of a certain Regulus with that of Croesus in Herodotus. Whereas Herodotus relies on the characters to discuss the lesson or on analogy to communicate his warning to the audience, Polybius addresses the reader directly. Regulus was a Roman consul during the First Punic War. He was in joint command of Roman forces which achieved key victories both in naval combat and in land battle. He was confident that he would be able to lay siege to and conquer the city of

⁵⁹Polybius, *Rise of the Roman Empire*, 432.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

Carthage itself. However, he knew that this would take more time than was left in his year as consul. Therefore, in order to obtain the victory for himself and rather than allowing the new consul to claim it for his own glory, Regulus initiated negotiations with the Carthaginians. His terms, however, were no different than if he had indeed already overrun the city. The Carthaginians, when they heard Regulus' terms, were insulted by them and determined that they would be no worse off in the eventuality of loss. Thus, they opted to make the Romans earn their victory rather than give it to them without a fight. Shortly after the Carthaginians rejected Regulus' terms, a large number of Spartan mercenary soldiers arrived in Carthage under the leadership of Xanthippus of Lacedaemon. Xanthippus possessed a brilliant tactical mind and the Carthaginians gave him considerable empowerment to organize and lead the combined Greek and Carthaginian forces. The end result was a spectacular victory for the Carthaginians. The losses for Carthage were minimal while the numbers of Roman survivors were few. Regulus was amongst the prisoners who were marched into Carthage. Polybius concludes the section on Regulus thus:

These events carry in them many lessons for those who can read them aright and wish to be guided in the conduct of their lives. The disaster which befell Regulus offers us the clearest possible illustration of the principle that we should not rely upon the favours of Fortune, above all when we are enjoying success. Here we see the very man, who only a little while before had refused any pity or mercy to the vanquished, himself led captive and pleading before his victims for his own life. And that saying of Euripides, which has long been acknowledged as just, *One wise head can outmatch a score of hands* is once more confirmed by the facts in this instance. One man and one brain overcame that host which until then had seemed invincible and capable of accomplishing anything, restored the fortunes of a state which had seemed irretrievably ruined, and raised up the spirits of its soldiers which had sunk to the depths of despair. I have recorded these events in the hope that the readers of this history may profit from them, for there are two ways by which all men may reform themselves, either by learning from their own errors or from those of others; the former makes a more striking demonstration, the latter a less painful one. For this reason we should never, if we can avoid it, choose the first, since it involves great dangers as well as great pain, but always the second, since it reveals the best course without causing us harm. From this I conclude that the best education for the situations of actual life consists of the experience we acquire from the study of serious history. For it is history alone which without causing us harm enables us to judge what is the best

course in any situation or circumstance. Enough, then, on this subject.⁶¹

Throughout his text Polybius returns to the topic of the utility of history and the study of history as guide to present conduct numerous times. His promise of “enough” typically means “enough for now.” Nevertheless, the account of Regulus is one example by which Polybius substantiates his claim for the purpose of history. In the preface, Polybius writes:

But in truth all historians without exception, one may say, have made this claim the be-all and end-all of their work: namely that the study of history is at once an education in the truest sense and a training for a political career, and that the most infallible, indeed the only method of learning how to bear with dignity the vicissitudes of Fortune is to be reminded of the disasters suffered by others.⁶²

His history, like other histories, educates the reader regarding the events of the past. What happened in the Punic wars? Read Polybius and you will find out. Furthermore, the text in general and stories about men such as Regulus in particular function as advice for those thinking of a political career.⁶³ Regulus’ unwillingness to share his anticipated glory with anyone was his undoing. The reader is also reminded of the fickle nature of Fate. Like Croesus, Regulus had been confident of victory. And like Croesus, Regulus was led as a prisoner into the courts of those he thought he would conquer. Finally, the study of the lives of people, not just events, is integral to the task of history. Learning about the fortune and misfortune of others is the means by which the reader himself learns how to conduct himself. The wise person does not gloat or become greedy when Fortune smiles on him or despair when Fate turns against him. A biographical sketch is the prism through which the elements of event, Fate, character and moral action are refracted and can be analyzed for the present reader to apply to his own life.

F.W. Walbank, perhaps *the* Polybian scholar, emphasizes the pragmatic and utilitarian

⁶¹Ibid., 79-80. The story of Regulus is told in 1.25-34

⁶²Ibid., 21.

⁶³Polybius’ text comes close to rivalling Livy’s in length and yet, unlike Livy, is often considered to be a rather dry text to read. Its length and aridity were factors which contributed to its failure to influence history-writing past the Classical era. Polybius’ work was virtually unknown in the medieval period and re-discovered during the Renaissance. Interestingly, one of the first popularizations of Polybius’ text came about when Machiavelli and other sixteenth-century theorists began to appreciate Polybius’ pragmatic and utilitarian approach to politics.

nature of Polybius' historiography. It is difficult to deny that Polybius can give this impression. The utility of Polybius, however, is not only to learn what happened. Shortly after beginning his discussion of the Second Punic War, Polybius inserts another historiographical digression. On this occasion he is defending his inclusion of the fine print, so to speak, of the three treaties between Rome and Carthage.

Now some uncritical readers might think that it is unnecessary for me to discuss considerations of this kind [that is; including the entire content of the treaties] in such minute detail. My answer is that if there were any man who believed himself so self sufficient as to be able to deal with any eventuality, I should accept that knowledge of the past might benefit him but would not be indispensable. However, if there is no one to be found who could claim such omniscience in conducting either his private life or his country's affairs—since no man of sense, even if all is well with him now, will ever reckon with certainty on the future—I shall insist that a knowledge of past events such as I have described is not merely an asset but is absolutely essential.⁶⁴

Polybius' utility is not intended to gain knowledge for knowledge's sake. The person of sense equips himself for the present and the future with the knowledge of the past. The chill hand of ill Fate lingers round the comment that even the person of current happiness ought to learn since the future holds no guarantees. Polybius transcribed the treaties as they were preserved on bronze tablets in the treasury of the Aediles beside the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.⁶⁵

(Remember that Polybius was kept in Rome for over a decade and had the opportunity to record these documents.) He does so because he believes that knowing the details of the various clauses included in the treaty will increase the reader's capacity to better understand the nature of the universe and make better decisions regarding the conduct of his own life. Whether right or wrong, for Polybius, even the minutiae of history have pragmatic, utilitarian value for private and public life.⁶⁶ Like Herodotus, Polybius exemplifies the Greek logic of edifying discourse as

⁶⁴Ibid., 206-7.

⁶⁵Ibid., 203.

⁶⁶See also Arthur Eckstein, *Moral Visions in The Histories of Polybius* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1995). Eckstein argues that despite the semi-regular digression on utility, the primary vision of Polybius' *Histories* embodies a code of conduct. Arthur Eckstein compares Polybius to a warrior. A soldier conducts his life according to a code. Polybius was an aristocrat. The nobleman, as well as the soldier, manages his life in particular ways. The honourable deed of an individual who chooses the good, knowing both that Fortune is

necessarily rooted in actual events.

Livy

Livy is notable in the development of historical writing for two important reasons. First, he was interested in what can be learned by understanding the *longue durée* of history. His history begins with the very earliest Romans and continues until his present day.⁶⁷ Livy believed it was necessary to write about the whole of history if you really wanted to understand a part of it. If you wanted to know the meaning of present events, you needed to know the relationship of the present to what preceded the current state. He saw patterns in history, a kind of cyclical recurrence. Thus, learning about the distant past helped a reader to understand the present because of recurring patterns or themes. The myths of the founding of Rome were worth telling not because Livy necessarily believed them to be true but because the character of the early Roman was conveyed through them. These Roman characteristics continued through the centuries until the present. The similar patterns of behaviour in the earliest days, the Punic Wars, and his present day are part of the resulting cycle set in motion by Roman characteristics.

Second, Livy was concerned about human actions. As Walsh notes, Livy's goal was not scientific history but rather an analysis of the moral choices which allowed the Carthaginians to succeed.⁶⁸ Indeed, depicting the psychology of the military leaders and the combatants was a higher priority for Livy than precise military description. It must be noted in Livy's defence that he was no worse at military description than Sallust or Tacitus. Livy is interested in probing motives and elucidating character, especially national character. Thus, Livy uses speeches to demonstrate the character of individuals. For example, Hanno's speech about Hannibal creates a

not only fickle but capricious and that the world of goodness is dissolving, becomes the model of the code which the reader also aspires to enact.

⁶⁷Livy, *The War With Hannibal*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (New York: Penguin, 1965). This text would take Livy's entire life to complete. The sheer size of his work was its own undoing. Because the 142 books of *ab Urbe condita* took up so much space, not to mention the time and expense involved in creating even a single copy, very few copies of the entire work were made. Most libraries would not have had the space to house that many scrolls. Of the 142 books, only 35 are extant in their entirety.

⁶⁸Ibid., 136.

portrait of Hannibal as selfishly ambitious to the point where Hannibal will put his own interests before the interests of Carthage.⁶⁹ In another example the actions undertaken by the Roman Assembly, representing the Roman spirit, depict the Roman national character.⁷⁰

Jane Chaplin explores the function of *exempla* in *Livy's Exemplary History*. She argues that the tool which stitches together the disparate parts of Livy's history is the *exemplum*. She makes the following observations in support of the importance of exemplars in Livy's text. Roman youth were trained to learn and point out the actions of others as worthy of avoidance or imitation. Speech-makers were expected to use *exempla* effectively. The Roman funeral practices or the display of ancestral busts in the atriums of personal homes kept the examples of predecessors fresh in Roman memory. *Exempla* pervade Livy's text as they did Roman culture. There are two aspects to Livy's *exempla*. First, Livy perceives history as a storehouse of beneficial lessons. Second, Livy believes that people can tailor their own actions according to what they have learned from the past. These actions can be practical (military or political decisions) or they can be moral. So how does Livy indicate to the reader who or what is an *exemplum*? Sometimes he uses the first person voice to explain the lesson. More commonly he uses narrative. For example, historical characters recollect what happened in the past and then decide to imitate or avoid similar actions. Another common tool is the use of direct or indirect speech. The speaker states what the meaning of some aspect of history is and then attempts to persuade his audience of his interpretation. Of course, Livy uses these speeches in various ways. Sometimes, Livy agrees with the interpretation of the speech-maker and intends that the external audience agree with the speaker. At other times Livy intends that the external audience reject the speaker's argument.⁷¹

⁶⁹Livy, *Livy in Fourteen Volumes*, trans. B. O. Foster, vol 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1929), 9.

⁷⁰Livy, *The War With Hannibal*, 127, 132.

⁷¹Jane Chaplin, *Livy's Exemplary History* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), 2-4, 13-14.

Livy's history is peopled, literally, with biographical history since it is a primary way in which one learns from history. Sallust influenced the later Christian authors with his moralistic tones and use of *exempla*.⁷² Livy is notable because he combines the intent to provide moral instruction with the annalistic format of the early Roman historians and Roman interest in exemplars. Livy provides paragons to be imitated and specimens of reproach to be avoided. Livy, like later Christian authors, participates in his culture's ethical discourse through the use of exemplars in the writing of history.

Summary of Ancient History-writing

Robert Sullivan's opening paragraph in the Erasmus Institute News about Donald Kagan's 2005 Thomas Jefferson Lecture to the National Endowment for the Humanities intrigued me.⁷³ Sullivan quotes Kagan's claim that even though religious traditions are no longer relevant, "the need for a sound base for moral judgments" persists. According to Kagan, history-writing can replace religion as "a necessary supplement" and the "most useful key we have to open the mysteries of the human predicament."⁷⁴ In retrospect I should not have been surprised at his comments, for Kagan is a historian, yes, but more specifically, a historian of Greco-Roman history-writing. Kagan argues for the primacy of history-writing in moral discourse. I took encouragement from Kagan's point that the ancients wrote history for moral instruction and it is this same function which should make contemporary history-writing the greatest of the Humanity's disciplines.

⁷²Ibid., 26-27.

⁷³Donald Kagan, "In Defense of History," <http://www.neh.gov/whoweare/kagan/lecture.html> (accessed July 29, 2008).

⁷⁴Happily, the relevance or irrelevance of religion is not my particular fight. Sullivan took issue with the assumption that religion is fading which was certainly appropriate. Yet, as the director of a religious program whose headquarters are on a Catholic campus, I wonder if his interaction with Kagan's lecture could have been more expansive. Christian authors of the first few centuries shared with their Greek and Roman countrymen the assumption that history-writing was more than an account of the past. Classical people wrote and read history to remain alert to the public and personal moral implications of narrated events. Christian members who wrote history were similarly mindful of the purposes of history-writing. In addition to questioning whether or not religion is fading, a contemporary Christian might consider what could be gained by re-examining the historiography of early Christianity in a manner similar to the way Kagan explores what could be gained by re-examining Greek and Roman history-writing.

In important ways, Kagan remains a traditional historian. He is contemptuous of those who would say that humans can never know the truth about the past or who abandon the quest to discern what really happened. Further, he rejects the notion that history is an infinitely malleable body of literature which can be shaped to suit whatever personal or political goal is currently desired. He is troubled by the “many teachers of the humanities today, who deny the possibility of knowing anything with confidence, of the reality of such concepts as truth and virtue, who seek only gain and pleasure in the modern guise of political power and self-gratification as the ends of education.”⁷⁵ In these remarks, Kagan seems to be an unrepentant positivist. The second half of the lecture, however, dispels such notions. Kagan thinks like an ancient. He is not advocating a chastened Enlightenment view whereby one admits that ultimate truth and pure objectivity are unattainable—and then continues on more or less precisely as before. Like the ancients and, as it happens, traditional historians, too, Kagan believes that the past is both knowable and describable. Unlike moderns he believes that the study, writing and reading of history can and should function as moral preceptor. His final paragraph is worth quoting at length:

Two millennia ago the Roman historian Livy’s introduction to his great narrative account of his nation’s history included this observation: *What chiefly makes the study of history wholesome and profitable is this, that you behold the lessons of every kind of experience set forth as on a conspicuous monument; from these you may choose for yourself and for your own state what to imitate, from these mark for avoidance what is shameful in the conception and shameful in the result.* (1.10) That is a view of the purpose of historical study that went out of favor with professionals in the nineteenth century and is not thought respectable in our time. As a result it has been increasingly harder to persuade people that they have anything to learn from history... This has not, however deterred millions of people hungry for historical writing from reading those historians who will interpret the past by narrating a story and are alert to the moral implications, personal and political, of the story they tell. And why should it be otherwise? The fact is that we all need to take our moral bearings all the time, as individuals and as citizens. Religion and the traditions based on it were once the chief sources for moral confidence and strength. Their influence has faded in the modern world, but the need for a sound base for moral judgements has not. If we can not look simply to moral guidance firmly founded on religious precepts it is natural and

⁷⁵As found in the second paragraph of the speech.

reasonable to turn to history, the record of human experience, as a necessary supplement if not a substitute. History, it seems to me, is the most useful key we have to open the mysteries of the human predicament. Is it too much to hope that one day we may see Clio ascend her throne again and resume her noble business at the same old stand?⁷⁶

Kagan calls for a return to the thinking of the ancients. The tenor of his introduction suggests to me that it is a call to adhere to a chastened Classicalism. While the response to the postmodern critique of positivism has been, typically, a call for a chastened Enlightenment, Kagan seems to be on a better track. He is calling for a chastened Classicism.

Greek and Roman Biography

If the reliability of historical texts of the classical era has been regarded as dubious, the sentiment is only stronger when applied to biography. Patricia Cox suggests that whatever else late antique biography was, it was not history: not in the modern sense, not even in the sense of classical history-writing. “The fact is, however, that in antiquity biography was not simply a subgenre of history. It had its own unique characteristics, and sustained historical veracity was not one of them.” Her comments about biography in antiquity apply with only slight modification to late antiquity. Biographies of this period she describes as “imaginal histories or as historicized mythic ideals.”⁷⁷ An important question of my dissertation is the relationship of critical and edifying in biography. A number of Plutarch’s biographies will be examined in order to see how he combined these two elements. In some instances Plutarch seems to have been concerned about both reliable presentation of his subject and edification. A biography by Tacitus, *Agricola*, will also be discussed. The intent of influential biographies from this era was both critical and edifying.

In ancient and modern times there is a kind of singularity about the use of the word biography. In modern English, it is hard to think of another noun used to designate a sub-genre

⁷⁶ Ibid., the final paragraph.

⁷⁷ Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1983), 5, xvi.

of history-writing.⁷⁸ For specialized forms of history-writing—whether in terms of approach or of subject matter—the more common grammatical structure is adjectival. Thus, there is Marxist history, feminist history, political history and so forth. There is no stand-alone noun by which such history-writing is designated. There is not, for example, Marxistory, femistory, or politistory. Rather, biography is distinct from other sub-genres of history-writing by its designation as a noun. What then is the significance of such an observation? What is the difference between history and biography?

Although the ancients may not have cast the discussion of the difference between history and biography in grammatical terms, Greek and Roman authors noted that differences between the two genres existed. The difficulty with the ancient claims about the differences between the two genres is that the very same authors who delineate the differences between history and biography break their own “rules.” Plutarch claims the difference between biography and history is the emphasis on words and jests in the former rather than on deeds of war or politics in the latter. Yet his *Julius Caesar* omits anecdotes of words and jests in order to concentrate on war and political consolidation. Cornelius Nepos summarized the difference between history and biography thus: biography includes meditation on virtue while history does not.⁷⁹ Yet, such an observation cannot be sustained in any systematic way when analyzing ancient history-writers. Polybius moves frequently from narrative to directly addressing the reader for various reasons and often for the purpose of explicating a lesson in character. Sallust interrupts his narrative to comment on the virtues and moral failings of society and individuals.

Greco-Roman authors claimed that the difference between history and biography was the

⁷⁸Except perhaps autobiography. But autobiography has become so linked with biography that many use the terms interchangeably.

⁷⁹Cornelius Nepos says this: “the recitation of deeds is history; the recitation of deeds with analysis of virtue is biography” (as translated by Richard Burrige, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison of Greeco-Roman Biography* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992], 121, 144). For a critical yet positive evaluation of the style of Nepos see Edna Jenkinson, “Nepos—An Introduction to Latin Biography,” in *Latin Biography*, ed. T.A. Dorey (London: Routledge, 1967), 1-15.

discussion of virtue in the biography and the lack of this discussion in history. Despite this claim it seems that the difference was actually the difference between a focus on a person rather than an event, such as a war. Biography focused on a person while history-writing took larger contexts for its subject matter. The difference was not, in fact, discussion of virtue versus lack of discussion of virtue. To be sure, the change in focus from event to a single person was not without important consequences. For ancient authors the writing of a life would naturally lend itself to the probing of individual character while a history would tend towards observations about human character *in general* or the nature of the world. The change in focus, however, was not accompanied by a change in method. Authors of biography needed to establish the same claims of veracity as the history-writers. They had to convince their readers that they were telling the truth. The close relationship of biography and history-writing is especially noticeable in the age of the Roman Empire. This chapter examines biographies from Greco-Roman authors of the Principate in order to make some observations about the relationship of biography to history-writing. Did biographies attempt to be as accurate as their general history counterparts? Was biography, like history-writing, presented as a preceptor? Through various examples, it will be shown that biography attempted to be critical, it gives moral evaluation (it praises virtue and abhors vice), it commends or condemns specific actions, and it constructs exemplary models. These are patterns of writing that were found also in other history texts. It will be argued that it is best to consider ancient biography as simply a form of ancient-history writing.

Plutarch

Plutarch could combine critical and edifying. His portraits are reasonable historical representations. By deliberate arrangement of material Plutarch engages moral adjudication and ethical dialogue. Alternately, Plutarch can also enter into edifying discussion by inserting a digression. These elements were part of the historical task. How did the ancient authors understand the relationship of biography and history-writing? Plutarch's preface to *Alexander*

may make the best-known distinction between history-writing and biography in ancient texts.⁸⁰ It was Plutarch's habit to pair one biography with another in his writing. In this instance Plutarch pairs the young, conquering Macedonian king with Julius Caesar. These men, explains Plutarch, had careers that included celebrated events of such number and magnitude that to recount them would overwhelm his task. Plutarch will merely summarize their achievements. The justification for such brevity can be found in the difference in the task of the historian and the biographer. A history that focuses on an individual's exploits usually tells us nothing of the virtues or vices of the subject, claims Plutarch. In biography "on the other hand a chance remark or a joke may reveal far more of a man's character than the mere feat of winning battles in which thousands fall, or of marshalling great armies, or laying siege to cities."⁸¹ Plutarch follows this assessment with an analogy. Just as a painter must take greater pains to depict the subject's eyes than any other part of the body, so too Plutarch claims his task is to dwell with greater length on these remarks and jests in order to illuminate the inner workings of the subject. By these means, rather than by recounting the struggles and achievements of his career, is the portrait of a man created.

If read in isolation, Plutarch's introductory chapter on Alexander could suggest that a well-defined boundary between history-writing and biography was already in place by the second century. There was the "discipline," if you will, of history-writing, its subject matter confined to the matters of military and political success or failure. Whereas the "discipline" of biography existed separately, with its subject matter confined to anecdotal words and jests

⁸⁰Plutarch was certainly not the first ancient biographer nor even the first Greek biographer. For a history of Greek biography from Homer until the end of the first century B.C., consult Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography: Four Lectures* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1971). See pages 37-41 where he notes that at the time Herodotus and Thucydides wrote their histories, the Greek cultural milieu was ill-disposed towards the biographical task. In the fifth century there was faith in the collective organization and democracy and distrust of tyranny. As biography focused too much on the individual rather than the collective, biography really only develops after general history-writing. The distinction between history and biography occurs later, at the time of Polybius and onwards.

⁸¹Plutarch, "Alexander" in *The Age of Alexander*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert (New York: Penguin, 1973), 252.

intending to reveal the inner man. The modern mind is predisposed towards such generic distinctions and if unfamiliar with Plutarch's work might assume that he could be counted on to follow his own classifications. In fact, at times Plutarch does write a biography that emphasizes not the word or jest but the military accomplishments. Such is the case in *Caesar*, the biography he chooses to pair with *Alexander*. A sharp distinction between history and biography would seem to be more of a guideline than a rule or, better, perhaps a way of justifying the shift in focus to a readership that valued massive historical tomes and world history. In practice, Plutarch writes biographies in a variety of ways, whatever best suits either the subject or his approach to the subject. If focusing on words and jests satisfies his purposes best, he does so. But if focusing on so-called important historic events works better, he switches to this kind of discourse.

So why did Plutarch even bother to include a brief discussion on the difference between history and biography only to fail to follow his own words in the very next text? It is unlikely he simply forgot what he wrote. Perhaps ancient biography was far more subversive than we think. Perhaps biography was a challenge to the hegemony of military and political events as the stuff of history. The change in focus in biography was an opportunity to include the other things which a history-writer would leave out. Such an observation seems to make more sense of the claims made by various authors regarding the differences between history and biography. The ancients agreed that history-writing was part of the moral discourse of their society. To justify biography on the grounds that in this format you will include discussion of virtue, as Nepos did, seems repetitive. It seems more likely that when Plutarch stakes his claim for the words and jests of life, he is actually validating the everyday matter of life as worthy historical subject matter. Should the author wish it, biography allowed for the inclusion of non-political and non-military aspects of history-writing. Not only are the so-called lofty events of the past part of historical and ethical discourse, the mundane ones are as well.

The first point which demands demonstration is whether ancient biography can be considered a form of history-writing, particularly in regard to its primary goal—to say what essentially happened. Christopher Pelling examines eight of Plutarch’s biographies in order to make some generalizations about his historical methods: *Lucullus, Pompey, Crassus, Cicero, Caesar, Cato Minor, Brutus* and *Antony*. Pelling chooses these particular lives because these subjects would not have been as much a part of Plutarch’s education and cultural background as the Greek lives but were yet well enough known that Plutarch would have to get these men “right” if these eight biographies were to be respected.⁸² So what kind of critical methodology did Plutarch employ when he had to do serious historical research? Plutarch consulted a number of sources, both history-writing and biographical texts. Livy and Polybius were among his historical sources, as were lesser-known authors Appian and Pollio. Pelling notes that Plutarch tended to follow one source, Pollio, somewhat slavishly for various sections of his text. Such practices, however, were common to both history-writing and biography. Pelling further notes that, unfortunately, at times Plutarch could be less interested in primary research than we would like him to be. *Caesar*, for example, does not demonstrate knowledge of the *Commentarii*; that is, Plutarch was aware the document existed but does not seem to have read it. Plutarch does not make use of letters by Caesar and Antony even though he knew about them and they would have been available to him had he wanted to consult them. On the other hand, in *Cicero* Plutarch seems to have been familiar with many of Cicero’s letters, speeches and treatises; in this case he did read the primary sources. In *Antony* Plutarch makes extensive use of the *Second Philippic*, a primary source. Plutarch’s lives of Pericles and Thucydides indicate that he had extensive

⁸²Christopher Pelling, *Plutarch and History: Eighteen Studies* (London: Gerald Duckworth and The Classical Press of Wales, 2002), 1; 12-13. See also Ronald Mellor, *The Roman Historians* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 136-37. Mellor observes that the Roman practice of funeral speeches was a formative influence upon the development of Roman biography. Mellor suggests that the Roman funeral speeches tended to be more accurate about the facts of a person’s life than Greek encomia. It is likely that Mellor would agree that certain facts might be glossed or creatively explained but that you simply couldn’t make something up when everyone would know the general outlines of the subject’s life. Plutarch would have to be at least as accurate as the funeral speeches when he writes about these Roman subjects.

knowledge of Thucydides' history.⁸³ Plutarch's consultation of sources was at times less than vigorous but commendable at other times.

How faithful was Plutarch to his historical sources? To what extent did Plutarch commit sins of omission to construct his portraits? Pelling states that the principle which guided Plutarch's selection of sources and selection of details was illumination of the subject's character. This generalization needs to be further qualified by noting that Plutarch generally chose the historical items that were most favourable to the subject. In *Cimon* (a Greek life) Plutarch tells the reader that a biographer shouldn't stress the subject's faults and weaknesses. An author shouldn't omit them either, but not emphasize the flaws.⁸⁴ Plutarch can be true to the spirit of his own advice. Thus, in *Caesar* Plutarch does not mention Caesar's adulterous affair with Servilla, the sister of Cato. He does include it, however, in *Cato* and again in *Brutus*. Caesar's affair actually illuminates an aspect of Caesar's character yet Plutarch represses it in *Caesar* so as to not dwell on the subject's failings. Caesar's deed is dealt with in another person's biography which, from a modern perspective, seems backwards.⁸⁵ Although unconventional, Plutarch's method allows the reader to glimpse the person of Caesar from a variety of perspectives: a commendable practice in the analysis of the events of the past and the character of an individual.

If illumination of character is Plutarch's objective, how does he arrange historical details to accomplish this goal? Is it done responsibly? Pelling lists the ways in which Plutarch abridges material. Plutarch occasionally conflates similar items. In *Caesar*, for example, Plutarch avoids

⁸³Pelling, *Plutarch*, 16-17; 20; 117.

⁸⁴Plutarch includes a digression on method at the end of chapter two of *Cimon*. Plutarch compares an author's responsibility to the subject to the task of a portrait painter. The artist must include both the handsome and less than handsome features of a face but does not dwell on the defects for to do so would be to create a caricature. Interestingly, even though the author is not to dwell upon defects, Plutarch insists upon including them. To not include them would be to misrepresent the subject and reality. For to avoid inclusion of faults would create the false impression that human nature was capable of producing a character that was absolutely good and unswervingly dedicated to virtue. Plutarch seems to indicate that the creation of a plaster saint is of little value in the contemplation of human nature and virtue. A plaster saint is a kind of caricature. A painter and a biographer represent what is really there, even if done generously.

⁸⁵*Ibid.* 53-54.

the tedium of reporting all three of the senatorial debates (dealing with the Catiline conspirators) and writes up the proceedings as if there was only one debate. In *Cato Minor* Plutarch compresses chronology so as to make it seem like events that were actually quite far apart in time, happened close together. Plutarch's arrangement conceals a five-year time lag between Cato's proposal to surrender Caesar to the Germanic people and the start of the civil war. Other times, Plutarch is guilty of chronological displacements. He likes to organize his material thematically and to do so can put the events in the wrong chronological order. Finally, Plutarch can transfer a deed from one person to another. Plutarch has Antony and Crassus give a speech to the troops before crossing the Rubicon in *Antony* but in *Caesar*, Julius delivers the speech. In truth Julius Caesar really did give the speech to the troops but in *Antony* Plutarch transfers the speech to others.⁸⁶

Pelling notes that Plutarch sometimes fabricates circumstantial detail in other of his biographies but Pelling also observes that in these eight Roman lives Plutarch allows himself very little of this. Further, what fabricated details can be found are peripheral. In *Antony*, for example, Plutarch has a conversation take place between Antony and Trebonius while the two of them are travelling together. He has the two characters discussing important topics in their tent. Yet the details of travel and tent appear only in Plutarch. The conversation itself took place as attested in the *Second Philippic* but the details of the travelling situation seem to be entirely from Plutarch's imagination. In another example, Plutarch fabricates a context in order to fit in material from different or contradictory sources. In *Caesar* Plutarch portrays Caesar in dire straits, getting the worst of it at the beginning of a battle with Vercingetorix. But such a detail is not found in Caesar's *Commentarii*. Rather, according to Pelling, Plutarch must fabricate this context in order to include an anecdote from oral history. This anecdote makes sense only if Caesar was indeed in danger of losing near the beginning of the battle. On the whole, however,

⁸⁶Ibid., 91-94.

Pelling generalizes, Plutarch renders a circumspect portrait of each of the eight Romans. In other lives, such as in *Coriolanus*, Plutarch is guilty of greater and more important fabrications.⁸⁷ The point of the eight Roman lives is that Plutarch can be a reasonably reliable historian if he wants to be one.⁸⁸ From a modern perspective Plutarch's transgressions are unacceptable but, as noted in the section on historians, ancient history-writing texts generally fail by modern standards. Many ancient biographies warrant no censure stronger than that which is applied to ancient history-writing.

Furthermore, in these eight Roman lives Plutarch can also discuss the meaning of the life of the subject. The exception to this observation occurs in *Caesar*. In this life Plutarch is not interested in character, in ethical discourse, or in insightful comments into the general truths of the human condition. Plutarch stays focused on the historical context. How is it that Caesar was able to become the tyrant he always wanted to become? The life makes no comment on whether the desire to become a tyrant was good or imitable. Rather, Plutarch examines the historical factors which came together or were manipulated by Caesar and facilitated his ascendancy as sole ruler. On the other hand, Pelling describes *Pompey* as a moralistic life. Pompey's virtues are praised and his failings censured. Also, the text demonstrates insight about the truths of human existence. At the moment when the troops of Pompey and Caesar begin battle, effectively civil war, several Roman noblemen reflect on the causes of the strife: greed and personal rivalry. Brothers and kinsmen using identical standards were locked in combat: "a clear enough lesson of how blind and how mad a thing human nature is when under the sway of passion. Had they only been content quietly to govern and enjoy their conquests, the greatest

⁸⁷ Ibid., 94-96.

⁸⁸ Granted, reliability and insightful analysis are not necessarily synonymous. Robin Seager complains about Plutarch's lack of political insight in Seager's introductory comments about *Cicero*. Plutarch either ignores or misrepresents the political implications of Cicero's actions late in life. See Plutarch, *Fall of the Roman Republic* (New York: Penguin, 1972), 311. Perhaps this was deliberately done or perhaps Plutarch did not understand late republican Rome well enough to provide political analysis. As noted below, Plutarch could be a subtle political analyst when discussing Greek politicians who, although more distant in time, were more culturally familiar to Plutarch.

and best part of earth and sea was theirs to control.’⁸⁹

Plutarch’s *Cato Minor* showcases an imitable character. He was an upright man who conducted himself virtuously. He did have flaws, and these are noted. Pelling observes that Plutarch censures Cato’s treatment of women and does not hide Cato’s unseemly fondness for wine. The circumstances surrounding his divorce and remarriage do not suggest the highest aspirations of virtue.⁹⁰ On the whole, however, Cato as portrayed in the text exemplifies a life conducted with integrity and virtue. Also notable in *Cato* is Plutarch’s decision to censure Caesar. In 22.5 Plutarch describes Caesar’s policies as disgraceful and selfish.⁹¹ It is an interesting decision—to publish a compendium of lives in which you assess unsavoury aspects of one life but in the text of another life. If Plutarch’s evaluation of Caesar really was disgracefulness and selfishness, perhaps the strictly historical analysis of Caesar makes sense. If there is not goodness or beauty to dwell upon, you need to choose between learning from a negative example or simply recount the subject’s deeds and explain contexts without recourse to contemplative analysis. But as the former option would involve dwelling on an individual’s faults, Plutarch would be, at least theoretically, disinclined to do this. Pelling concludes that for Plutarch the biographical genre is malleable; he writes biography in a variety of ways. Some texts are historically focused and others exemplary or moralistic. He assigns praise and blame but in unexpected places. Perhaps the best way to understand the texture of this text is by appreciating it as a whole. Plutarch’s biographies are a mixture of historical narrative and moral and ethical precepts.

Plutarch relied on reputable Greek historians in various Greek lives. Plutarch was intimately familiar with Thucydides, as his readers would also have been. Plutarch counted on

⁸⁹Plutarch, “Pompey” in *Fall of the Roman Republic*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin, 1972), 232. From *Pompey* 70.

⁹⁰Pelling, 103.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 58; 102-105

his audience's familiarity with Thucydides in order to guide their reading and indicate to them where his interpretation of Nicias, Alcibiades and Pericles differs from Thucydides'. This is Christopher Pelling's argument in "Plutarch and Thucydides" which can be summarized as follows. Plutarch makes a claim in the first chapter of *Nicias* which might surprise the modern reader. Plutarch admires Thucydides' artistic merits—his ability to create drama and emotional responses. Plutarch states that he won't try to compete with Thucydides on this plane. Rather, Plutarch will compose serious historical texts which will get at the truth of what happened. Yet for much of his account he follows Thucydides quite closely. At notable junctures, however, Plutarch revises Thucydides in subtle ways in order to make, in Pelling's estimation, better political insights than are found in parts of Thucydides. For example, Thucydides and Plutarch both emphasize the clash of individualism and public duty in the events of Athens and in the character of the leaders, but in different measure. For Thucydides, Athens is doomed when individuals forget their public duty and chase personal ambition. In both Thucydides and Plutarch the Athenian populace, the *demos*, is fickle. In Thucydides the leaders are responsible for directing and leading the *demos*. When the leaders abandon this task for reasons of personal benefit, Athens is doomed. Plutarch is not so sure; he suggests that the *demos* acted in fickle and violent ways in order to further the ambitions of the individuals who made up the *demos*. Thucydides believed that leaders who failed to act for the good of the people, regardless of whether the *demos* knew what was good or not, precipitated Athens' disaster. Plutarch is less sure that it is as simple as that. In Plutarch the *demos* is as responsible for the actions of the leaders as the leaders themselves. Pelling ends by saying that Plutarch's re-interpretation of Thucydides

is an interesting one, and well worth serious consideration even in modern terms. That is not necessarily because his views rest on contemporary authority, or at least not in a straight-forward way. It is because they rest on his human insight, a profound and impressive insight that, at least on some occasions, is likely to have got it pretty well

right.⁹²

Plutarch began *Nicias* by claiming to best Thucydides with a straightforward historical account rather than dramatic portrayal. Analysis of the purported no-nonsense history-writing reveals a concerted interest in adjudicating the behaviour of the Athenian populace, who were found wanting.

Philip Stadter explores Plutarch's choice of parallel lives. What guided his decision to put the "couples" together as he did? Stadter's test case examines what he calls Plutarch's most bizarre pair of them all: Lysander and Sulla. Both the men and their historical situations were notably dissimilar. Stadter argues that both Plutarch's choice of these subjects and where he places them within the Parallel Lives demonstrates that the reason they are paired together is to make a moral comment as well as create a negative exemplary model. For example, negative characteristics exhibited by Lysander (harshness, vengeance and military prowess) are also part of Sulla's character. In fact these negative traits dominate Sulla's portrait to such an extent that would make Sulla "seem a caricature, if the historical record did not confirm its accuracy."⁹³ Plutarch's negative exemplar was a historical person. Recall that elsewhere Plutarch claims to present his subjects in the best light possible and de-emphasize their flaws. Thus, Plutarch is careful to include the many successes of Sulla's life. Yet at the same time that Plutarch praises Sulla's extraordinary military skill, far from omitting anecdotes which blacken his character, as was the case in *Caesar*, Plutarch includes multiple criticisms of Sulla's character and behaviour. Lysander is paired with Sulla, not because he became the tyrant which Sulla did, but because he

⁹²Christopher Pelling, "Plutarch and Thucydides" in *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition*, ed. Philip Stadter (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 31. Pelling also states: "[Plutarch] is thus using Thucydides to 'correct', or at least refine, Thucydides' own portrait; and the reinterpretation is surely not unintelligent. As with his judgements of people, so even in political analysis, he is capable of applying his human insight thoughtfully, and on such occasions he is confident enough to pit his own judgements even against Thucydides'; and those interpretations are sometimes not at all bad. . . . And, great though the respect is that we rightly have for Thucydides, it is hard to be confident that Plutarch was wrong. In *Alcibiades*, then, 'literary' and 'historical' aspects go hand in hand. Plutarch traces the popular reaction to Alcibiades with more subtlety than Thucydides, and this renders his analysis both more historically interesting and more artistically arresting." *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹³Philip Stadter, "Paradoxical Paradigms: Lysander and Sulla," in *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition*, ed. Philip Stadter (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 8.

shared a similar background and, in milder form, similar vices. Both men came from impoverished beginnings, became successful generals and introduced political reform. More importantly, both were ambitious, harsh and merciless to those whom they considered their enemies. The two subjects shared similar character flaws: the difference was the degree to which they gave expression to them. Lysander was freely elected to positions of power while Sulla had to take such positions by force. Lysander attempted to bring about constitutional reform through conventional procedures whereas Sulla imposed reform. Lysander harmed his enemies and massacred his friends' opponents but Sulla even murdered his best friends if they crossed him. Both were successful military generals, but Lysander warred against foreigners while Sulla made war on his own countrymen. Through this pairing, argues Stadter, Plutarch expresses a moral truth. The weaknesses of Sulla are common to many; Sulla was not a monster. All humans have the potential to degenerate and consequently digress from the common weaknesses of Lysander to become a Sulla if they do not control themselves.⁹⁴

Stadter is persuasive in demonstrating the way in which these lives are meant to be exemplary. The Lysander-Sulla pair is part of three pairs, all of which explore the vice of ambition. Themistocles and Camillus are prey to their ambition and do not master this weakness. However, their ambition led them to re-build cities and save their countrymen when invaded by foreigners. Both were able to set aside political strife in order to accomplish such tasks. Although they never really mastered their ambition, at least their ambition led them to feats of greatness, not meanness. The third pair, Pericles and Fabius, were also ambitious men. But Pericles and Fabius were men of self-control who would not let themselves be ruled by their ambition. Examples of such mastery are suggested by the accounts in which Pericles recalled an enemy, Cimon, back to Athens and Fabius refused to use violence against Scipio, a rival. By arranging these pairs in this order Plutarch creates examples of both imitation and

⁹⁴Ibid., 48, 7-8.

condemnation. Compare the statement attributed to Pericles as he died: “No Athenian has put on mourning because of me” with the epitaph assigned to Sulla: “No friend ever surpassed him in kindness, no enemy in viciousness.”⁹⁵ Pericles and Fabius mastered themselves to become excellent statesmen. Their exemplary role is made sharper when set alongside the violence of Lysander and Sulla. To fail to master your ambition is to be but at the beginning of a process that could lead to Sullan deeds. To control yourself is to aspire to Periclean heights.

If Stadter’s analysis is correct, it comes as no surprise to note that the first two chapters of *Pericles* are a digression on the emulation of exemplary models. We ought to blame those who chose to emulate unworthy models, Plutarch suggests, for a person is able to choose what to contemplate. Since we are responsible for our conscious intellect, we ought to choose to apply our intellect to models that inspire the reader to attain proper virtue. Plutarch states that we find these models in the examples of good men. Towards the end of chapter two Plutarch further refines the role of exemplary models. While it is good that the observation of moral good in another rouses the reader to imitation, it is not, in the final analysis, the point. It is the author’s responsibility to promote understanding of virtuous deeds. Plutarch seems to be indicating that there is no simple one-to-one correlation. Just because a subject did a particular deed does not mean the reader should undertake the exact same deed. A reader properly emulates virtues, not specific deeds. Thus, Pericles and Fabius Maximus are models of moderation and uprightness. Plutarch’s exemplars illuminate the nature of virtue and it is the understanding of virtue, in addition to proper deeds, that makes them imitable. The reception of these exemplars requires sophisticated contemplation.

Previously it was observed that Herodotus and Polybius used digressions to engage edifying dialogue. Plutarch sometimes used digressions in order to discuss virtue. Alan Wardman makes this comment about the patterns of history-writing found in Plutarch’s

⁹⁵Ibid., 50-51.

biographies: “Plutarch’s use of digressions tends to conform to the historian’s pattern, even when he is writing on subjects that are concerned with character and have moral implications.”⁹⁶ Wardman wonders why Plutarch would need to use digressions if a primary purpose of the lives is character study and why Plutarch sometimes apologizes for the use of digressions. Wardman notes, for example, that the description of These in *Dionysis* is a digression which Plutarch justifies on the basis that it is relevant to the study of character. Wardman observes that Plutarch presents his story in the same manner in which a historian unfolds his account and as such he feels bound by the rules of history-writing. Plutarch’s digressions and his explanations for them lead Wardman to conclude that Plutarch’s biographies

have not entirely freed themselves from the modes of historical writing. Thus the form of Plutarchan biography is closer to historiography than his utterance in *Alexander* would, at first, have us believe. It is easy to forget his closeness to historical writing because he naturally speaks of his method with a view to making us aware of the differences between history and biography. Yet we soon become aware that the *effect* of ‘minor events, sayings and jests,’ so far as they are used is to achieve a shortened form of history.⁹⁷

Digression is one way of including edifying dialogue as part of history-writing and biography. Like Polybius, however, direct discussion of the meaning of events or a person’s life was a part of biography. For an example of this kind of edifying technique, I will look to Tacitus.

Tacitus

In terms of generic classification, Tacitus’ *Agricola* is, by turns, part eulogy, history, geography and ethnography. The focus, however, seldom wavers from discussion of Agricola, Tacitus’ father-in-law, and as such it is best described as a biography. The text begins with Agricola’s birth and ends with his death. The geographical and ethnographical digressions are related to the military movements of his career. Other characters enter the narrative only as Agricola himself encounters them. Tacitus composed *Agricola* prior to writing either of his

⁹⁶Alan Wardman, *Plutarch’s Lives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1974), 9.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 9-10.

extended historical treatises, *Annals* and *Histories*. *Agricola* (and *Germanica*) were his trial run for history-writing.

Agricola is a notable example of indirect characterization. Direct analysis of Agricola's character comes only in the concluding chapters; until then his character is developed by describing events, motives and thoughts. Thus, anecdote after anecdote demonstrates Agricola's virtue so that by the time the reader comes to the end of the biography, she thinks, "Agricola was a virtuous man!" As generalizations, such observations are certainly correct. Some further comments, however, may help refine the ways in which Tacitus intended the reader to contemplate virtue.

At various points Tacitus will include some pointed social critique; but not always in relation to Agricola's actions. Such comments have the feel of maxims. For example, in the midst of describing the seasons of warfare, Tacitus inserts this truth of life: "This is the unfairest aspect of warfare: all claim for themselves the credit for success, failure is blamed on a single man."⁹⁸ This comment is not meant as a slight against Agricola's men. Rather, once the reader comes to the concluding chapters and learns of Domitian's envy of Agricola's successes, he realizes that the comment is directed at the former Emperor. Tacitus believed that Domitian sought to claim the victories in Briton for his own and thereby strip Agricola of the honour that was due him. Critique of Domitian affords another opportunity to observe truths of humankind. Agricola, well aware of Domitian's jealousy, wisely refuses a proconsular position. Even though he refused the position, Tacitus believes that Agricola was still entitled to a proconsular salary, which Domitian refused to give to Agricola, thus demonstrating that Domitian was either a cheapskate or greedy (or both). Further, in his comments pertaining to Domitian's decision to withhold the salary, Tacitus suggests that Domitian exemplifies the human tendency to hate

⁹⁸Tacitus, *Agricola and Germany*, trans A.R. Birley (Oxford: Oxford University, 1999), 20.

someone you have hurt.⁹⁹

At other times Tacitus' observations about human nature feel surprisingly critical of Roman culture. Perhaps the most notable instance of such criticism occurs in the speeches delivered before the biggest battle of Agricola's seven years in Britain. These speeches communicate not only the character of the speakers but also a highly selective history of Rome and Britain. Calgacus, leader of the Briton forces, tells his troops that, given the history of Roman behaviour, it would be no good to submit to the Romans, for they

have pillaged the world: when the land has nothing left for men who ravage everything they scour the sea. If an enemy is rich they are greedy, if he is poor, they crave glory. Neither East nor West can sate their appetite. They are the only people on earth to covet wealth and poverty with equal craving. They plunder, they butcher, they ravish, and call it by the lying name of "empire." They make a desert and call it "peace."¹⁰⁰

Even though spoken by Calgacus, the comment on imperial behaviour seems pointed and certainly surprising in the context of a biography that purports to praise Calgacus' opponent, the subject of the biography and the person responsible for imposing empire upon the Britons.

Unexpected observations appear at other places as well. In one digression Tacitus outlines the behaviour of the Britons in response to the Roman presence in their land. Agricola, unlike his predecessors, attempted to acculturate the Britons through peaceful means; he ended economic abuses and bureaucratic ineptitude. By these means Agricola moved the Britons from open hostility towards the Romans to a point where they desired to take on Roman ways. Not only did they learn Latin and don togas but they acquired a taste for colonnades, warm baths and extravagant banquets. Tacitus describes these changes as a kind of fall for the Britons. Earlier, they had been noble savages who were unpolluted by the laziness induced by Roman luxury. The Britons, explains Tacitus, who before had no experience with baths or banquets, took on Roman ways and called them civilization, "although they were in fact part of their

⁹⁹Ibid. 30.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 22.

enslavement.”¹⁰¹ Tacitus’ observation is somewhat ambiguous (although temptingly suggestive in the contemporary context of post-colonial theory). Enslavement to what or whom? To baths or to Romans? Is it a commendation of Agricola’s pacification techniques—not only was he an able general but he could also subdue the area through non-violent acculturation? These examples demonstrate an interesting critique of imperial conquest, in a biography of a subject who was the face of the Emperor in Britain.

In addition to moral comments on various topics, the text also portrays Agricola as an exemplary model. Tacitus tells his readers that as a young man, Agricola chose models to follow; he wanted to learn from experienced men.¹⁰² Just as the reader is to learn from the experience of Agricola, Agricola had also learned from men who had lived before him. Indirect characterization continues in anecdotal modes until the time of Agricola’s recall and largely involuntary retirement. These last chapters are dominated by the antagonistic relationship between the successful general and envious emperor. It is here that we get to the lesson of Agricola’s life—how to be a great man even in an era of a tyrant. Agricola was ruled by self-restraint and good sense. He did not desire the kind of renown that comes to a man when he uselessly protests against tyranny and demands freedom. All that is gained by such actions is a ruined career or even a violent death. Furthermore, and here Tacitus obliquely addresses his reader, “those whose habit is to admire what is forbidden [demanding freedom under a tyrant] ought to know that there can be great men even under bad emperors, and that duty and discretion, if coupled with energy and a career of action, will bring a man to no less glorious summits than are attained by perilous paths and ostentatious deaths that do not benefit the Commonwealth.”¹⁰³ It is part apology, yes. Tacitus is defending Agricola’s choice to submit to Domitian rather than publicly denounce his increasing infringements upon the traditional rights

¹⁰¹Ibid., 17.

¹⁰²Ibid., 5.

¹⁰³Ibid., 31.

and roles of Senators. But Agricola is also an example of someone who put service to his empire ahead of futile protests against tyranny. He chose dutiful service to the commonwealth and by his actions attained greatness, even though ruled by a tyrant. Using rhetorical flourish in the epilogue Tacitus calls upon the spirit of Agricola himself to remind his family to contemplate his character and to continually ponder his words and deeds. This command is given ostensibly to Agricola's wife and daughter. For the family and indeed for the audience, Agricola was an exemplar.¹⁰⁴ While Tacitus' critique of empire was communicated through indirect means, critique of Domitian's actions and the Agricola's exemplary aspects are presented directly.

This discussion of *Agricola* has focused on the modes of moral discourse found in this biography rather than whether it is history-writing or accurate. A comparison of this text with Tacitus' history-writings or a comparison of the content of *Agricola* with what can be known from other sources would be informative. However, it is here assumed that since many of the first readers would know whether or not Agricola was faithfully rendered, Tacitus would have had to get most of the details of Agricola's life correct. Furthermore, Tacitus follows the Thucydidean pattern of recounting speeches: get at the general gist of the speech, if not the exact words. The speeches in Thucydides are presented as polished rhetoric that are more like what would have been found in literature than would have actually been said at the time—even though it is presented as direct speech in the biography. Thus, Calgacus' speech (in perfect, rhetorically sophisticated Latin) is no less history-writing than Thucydides.

The foregoing examination of Herodotus, Polybius, Plutarch and Tacitus is offered to demonstrate the significant continuity between ancient history-writing and biography. People both past and present sometimes instinctively understand history and biography to be separate forms rather than intimately related. The use of distinct words helps create such an impression. If in both modes of writing, however, an author attempts to provide a reasonably accurate

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 33.

account and guide the reader in ethical dialogue what is the important difference? Although ancient authors claimed there was a difference between history and biography, it was a difference of focus rather than method. The biographer Plutarch, for example, both fails and succeeds as a historian (by modern evaluation) in ways similar to history-writing proper. I will sustain this theme in the section on Christian biography. It is reasonable to consider early Christian biography also as a category of ancient history-writing. Like their Greco-Roman predecessors, Christian biographers reflected on the events of the past and found instruction for the present. And they did so using the forms of history-writing of their Greco-Roman contexts and the Biblical logic of critical and edifying. The discussion of the Greek and Roman contribution to the understanding of the relationship of critical and edifying is thus concluded. I turn now to the Biblical logic of critical and edifying as the second formative foundation in the history of Christian biography.

Chapter Three: The Critical and Edifying Impulse of Biblical History and Biography

Although Ernst Breisach's survey of the development of historiography in the West is impressive indeed, the discussion of the influence of Hebrew tradition in the history of history-writing was brief.¹ This brevity of treatment is not in keeping with the importance that the Hebrew tradition has had in the development of history-writing. What follows will demonstrate that the fundamental logic of the Hebrew Scriptures holds that the historical writings (of which biography is one) must be critical and edifying.² Even though this section will not be a survey of Hebrew historical writings of the Breisach-type, it will be, in part, an argument for the inclusion of Hebrew Scriptures in such a survey. Like its Greek counterparts the Hebrew Scriptures were formative in the understanding of the nature of history-writing. The Hebrew Scriptures in turn were influential in Christian understandings of the nature of history. Thus both the Old and New Testament portions of the Bible are important texts in the history of historiography and biography.

This chapter is divided into two basic sections—the Old and New Testament—and each of the two sections explores two fundamental questions. The first section on the Old Testament asks whether the OT is historical. A great deal of scholarship has been produced in answer to this question and I will simply sketch a basic outline of it. I agree with those who understand that the intent of the OT authors was to write about what actually happened. The second question the OT section asks is whether the OT is biographical. On this matter little secondary scholarship from the last fifty years or so has been written. In fact it is difficult to find the word biography listed in the index of texts that deal with the history of the OT. Here I discuss my observations of the character of the biographical sketches of the OT. The second section, on the New Testament, asks the same two questions. Is the NT historical? Is the NT biographical?

¹Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994).

²From this point on I will refer to the Hebrew Scriptures as the Old Testament and use the abbreviation OT to indicate the Old Testament. I will abbreviate the New Testament as NT.

What is the importance of it being so? These observations are important in my argument particularly in comparison with texts of the ancient, medieval and modern world. The primary importance of this section is to establish the critical and edifying intent of the Biblical authors—which later Christian biographers will also have. The secondary importance of this section is to establish that the Biblical authors understood that edification had to be rooted in an actual past in order to be edifying.

Is the Old Testament historical? To enter into a discussion about the historicity of the Old Testament is to enter into a scholarly field with more than the usual polarization and lack of consensus. There are a number of positions on the question of historicity. At one end of the spectrum there are scholars who argue that the Old Testament presents very little historically reliable information. In what follows I will discuss the work of Niels Peter Lemche, Philip Davies and Thomas Thompson. These scholars contend that the Old Testament texts contain a *minimum* of historical information. Moving towards the other end of the spectrum are scholars who, to varying degrees, contend that the OT is a reasonable portrait of what happened. I will discuss the work of Iain Provan, V. Philips Long and Tremper Longman III.

Although the debate about the historical value of the OT may be contentious, I note that the debate itself is similar to that in the analysis of Classical texts. I have discussed some scholars of Greek and Roman historical texts who are highly sceptical of the historical reliability of these texts. Others are more confident that when the Greek and Roman authors set out to write history their attempt, at least, was to the best of their ability. The historicity question is not just a confessional issue and you do not have to be a religious believer to think that the ancient texts are in some way reliable histories. I comment, secondly, that the question of the reliability of ancient texts, be they Hebrew or Greek, is not the same as questions about the validity or non-validity of a religious tradition. While this comment seems patently obvious regarding ancient Greek and Roman texts, it can become blurred in the discussion of Biblical

texts—by both those who hold that the Bible has a low degree of reliability and those who hold that the Bible has a high degree of reliability. Indeed, the importance that the OT places on knowledge of the events of the past, and the relationship of these past events to faith, contributes to the difficulty.

With these words of caution I return to further discussion of the nature of OT history. Within the question of the historicity of the OT are two related questions which can be conflated but if teased apart can illuminate the discussion. The first question is whether the authors of the OT intended to write history. The second question pertains to the performance of a historian. Is the author able to follow through on the intention to write history? Biblical books like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon, for example, are not intended to be historical narratives. In other texts the intention is less clear. Many scholars have come to regard the book of Jonah as a parable that was always intended to be read as a parable. Similarly, many scholars (although not all) understand that the first three chapters of Genesis (or possibly the first eleven chapters) are myth and were intended as myth. It is not my intention to engage that particular question but rather to simply note that there is an important shift between Genesis 11 and 12 and thus there is justification for beginning my discussion with Abraham.³ For my purposes, I am taking Genesis 12 – II Chronicles as the historical section of the OT.⁴ In that section, however, I omit the book

³Early in the nineteenth century Hermann Gunkel identified a shift between the P source in Genesis 2:4 – 11:32 and the J and E sources in Genesis 11:30 and following. *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1997), 1. Later in the century Gerhard von Rad divided Genesis into what he called primeval history and patriarchal history and made Genesis 12:10 the dividing point. Although he agreed with Gunkel's assessment of the switch between P and J as being located at Genesis 11:30. *Genesis* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972), 5. Tremper Longman III calls Genesis 1-11 the preamble to chapters 12-36. *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 126. Three other scholars also divide their analysis of Genesis at this point. See John Rogerson, R.W.L. Moberly and William Johnstone, *Genesis and Exodus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001).

⁴There are different opinions as to which OT books constitute the historical narrative. F.F. Bruce categorized the books from Joshua to Esther as the Historical Books. *The Books and the Parchments: Some Chapters on the Transmission of the Bible*, revised edition (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 89. A. Abela assumes that the historical narrative extends from Exodus to 2 Kings. She wonders whether the author of Genesis intended Genesis to be an introduction to the primary history of the subsequent section. "Is Genesis the Introduction of the Primary History?" in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History*, ed. A. Wénin (Leuven: Leuven University, 2001), 400. Victor Hamilton states that it is common to refer to "the corpus of biblical books from Joshua through Esther as the Historical Books." *Handbook to the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 13.

of Ruth as it is currently the subject of debate as to its historical intent. Ruth may be a parable or didactic *novella* not intended as a historical text.⁵

A number of scholars are sceptical of both the intent and performance of history-writing in the OT historical books. Here we will briefly consider the work of Niels Lemche, Philip R. Davies and Tom Thompson. Niels Lemche comments on the discovery of the Merneptah stele and the inclusion of the name of the state of Israel on that archaeological find by saying that there is no proof of political or ethnic continuity between the state of Israel as it existed in the distant past and the state of Israel as it is represented in the Old Testament. “The only thing the two entities [the real political Israel of the past and the literary Israel of the OT] may have had in common is the *name*.”⁶ Later in the same article Lemche refines this position by stating that it is possible that the OT writers may have included something that eventually turns out to be historically accurate. The writers themselves, however, had no “concrete idea” of what might have happened or when.⁷ Rather, all that the writers of the OT did was put popular, oral tradition into a literary format. In short, Lemche believes that the authors of the OT lacked the methodological tools necessary to write a historical document even if they did intend to write history. The historical accounts in the OT might have some accurate information but this will be the exception rather than the rule.

As has already been discussed with Herodotus, however, it is sometimes uncanny how much oral report can turn out to be correct. Herodotus claimed to have travelled about the world (as he knew it) collecting and repeating the stories of the various areas he went to. If the OT authors and editors collected the oral reports of the Hebrew people, then historical sections of the OT would seem to be at least history of the same level as Herodotus. The status of

⁵André LaCocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary*, trans. K.C. Hanson (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004), 2. Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 262-262. Victor Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004).

⁶Niels Peter Lemche, “Is It Still Possible to Write a History of Ancient Israel?” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 8 (1994): 170.

⁷*Ibid.*, 183.

Herodotus as historian has greatly increased in the last two decades. Perhaps the same might happen for the authors of the OT.

A second scholar is sceptical about the historical nature of the OT. Like Lemche, Philip Davies believes that the Old Testament is at best a sketchy picture of what really happened in ancient Palestine. Davies explains that the word “Israel” represents three different and not necessarily overlapping ideas. The first Israel is a literary, more precisely Biblical, representation. The second Israel is a historical entity, or, to put it another way, the second Israel is what actually happened to those people who lived in Palestine during the Iron Age irrespective of what was written or not written about them. The third Israel is what scholars have reconstructed about the past based on information from the first and second Israel.⁸ Davies believes that the first Israel, the Biblical record, has prevented the second Israel from being represented. Davies sees his task as giving a voice to the real characters and real societies of this era that have been “obliterated by a literary construct.”⁹ He understands that his task is in conflict with the first Israel, in fact that “biblical scholarship is guilty of a retrojective imperialism, which displaces an otherwise unknown and uncared-for population in the interests of an ideological construct.”¹⁰ While Lemche sees the authors of the OT as lacking the critical tools necessary to write a reasonably accurate account of the past Davies views that matter with greater scepticism, believing that the authors of the texts and the later canonization of the text have prevented the second Israel from emerging in a responsible form of third Israel. From the perspective of the second Israel the effect of the Biblical history has been malevolent, whether it was intended that way or not.

Thomas Thompson, a third scholar who doubts the historical nature of the OT, takes the sceptical discussion in another direction that is nevertheless complementary to the ideas of

⁸Philip R. Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'* (Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament), 11.

⁹*Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

Lemche and Davies. For Thompson the stories of the patriarchs, for example,

are not historical, nor do they intend to be historical: they are rather historically determined expressions about Israel and Israel's relationship to its God, given in forms legitimate to their time, and their truth lies not in their facticity, nor in their historicity, but in their ability to express the reality that Israel experienced.¹¹

The reality that the Israelites experienced which Thompson is referring to is the Babylonian exile of the Hebrews. Thus for Thompson the OT is the text that the Jewish people needed in order to come to terms with their exile. While Lemche allowed that it might be possible for the OT texts to accidentally reveal something historically accurate, Thompson is less willing to make such a concession. Thompson views the OT texts as intentional fictions that communicate a mostly imagined past to alleviate the difficulties of a present reality. Thompson's position, if re-framed in the context of my thesis question, would hold that edification does not have to be rooted in what really happened in the past. The OT provides a history that justifies the attitudes and actions of the Hebrews not with an account of what did happen but with what the authors wanted to have happened. If there is historical value, it is that it reveals the concerns of the authors or editors of the post-exilic period. This kind of argument is similar to what is currently the *modus operandi* of scholars of medieval biography. These scholars state that while medieval biographies reveal very little of the subject, their historical value is in the unintentional historical illumination of the author and the author's original audience. This point shall be taken up at length in the chapter on medieval biography.

Again, Davies's and Thompson's discussion of the OT has its counterpart in the Classical field. T.P. Wiseman believes that despite claims to the contrary ancient Roman historians let present needs outweigh critical historical enquiry. Tacitus is Wiseman's primary example. Tacitus made up large sections of his histories in part because he was attempting to ingratiate himself to the Emperor Trajan. Tacitus's bias—the desire to show how good Trajan

¹¹Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974), 330.

was as an Emperor in comparison to previous Emperors—was motive for a highly skewed literary construct. But Tacitus is not the only ancient who can be characterized thus but rather bias so coloured the history-writing of the Roman authors, at least, that today's reader shouldn't put too much trust in the texts they produced. Wiseman was countered by John Marincola as previously discussed. Marincola is not convinced that the Greek and Roman historians let present day concerns cloud their histories to the point where they should be regarded as fictive literary constructs.

The work of Lemche, Davies, Thompson and others has provided many important and insightful critiques. First, all three of these scholars rightly critique those who look to the OT only to support their theology and especially those Christians who look to the history of the OT to support their theology of the New Testament.¹² The history of the OT is an important topic in itself. Second, all three scholars encourage a greater appreciation for the literary character of the OT. Whether it is Lemche's position that the Biblical authors just could not write good history despite what might have been their best efforts or Davies's assertion that the OT texts have a repressive and silencing effect, or whether Thompson's understanding that the authors did not intend to write history, their scholarship encourages today's reader to pay greater attention to the literary quality of the text. It does not, however, bode well for discussion of the OT as a model of critical history. These authors are willing to concede that the intent of the OT was edifying in one way or another but do not think that the authors or editors were able or possibly did not even desire to write accurately about the past.

Lemche, Davies and Thompson are representative of one side of the debate. Other scholars disagree. The work of these other scholars seems most persuasive to me. As I am inclined to see a reasonable attempt to get things right in the Greek authors, I see no reason not to grant the Hebrew authors equal treatment. Thomas Jefferson once, reportedly, told his

¹²Ibid., 329.

nephew to read the Bible as he would Livy or Herodotus.¹³ And so I shall do—with my critical faculties functioning but with some wonderment as to why I should be expected to maintain a high degree of doubt when plausible explanations exist.

I will return to the same question posited above. Did the authors or editors of the OT texts intend to write history? The question of intentionality was discussed by Baruch Halpern in *The First Historians*. Halpern's thesis is that some of the OT authors, "those who wrote works recognizably historical—had authentic antiquarian intentions. They meant to furnish fair and accurate representations of Israelite antiquity."¹⁴ Halpern is arguing against those who say that the Israelites were either incapable of distinguishing between history and myth or chose not to distinguish between the two. The Israelites both could and did.¹⁵ Halpern focuses on the brief story of Ehud and his murder of the Moabite king, Eglon, (as reported in Judges 3:12-30) to demonstrate that the intent of the author was historical rather than imaginative. Halpern states that analysis of the text itself cannot, of course, prove that the event happened. Rather Halpern is countering Robert Alter who suggests that because the story of Ehud is written with exceptional skill, narrative economy and "whodunit" suspense, it must be historical fiction rather than historical.¹⁶ Halpern compares the Ehud text to another text of obvious historical intent and suggests how the author of the Ehud narrative worked with oral sources. Far from inventing the story, the author is instead attempting to find the true historical account of the events which had likely become exaggerated in the oral reports. The end result, argues Halpern, is that the "Ehud account is not 'fictionalized history,' in the sense of historical romance. It is history defictionalized."¹⁷

The next question would be how successful were they? In *The Art of Biblical History V*.

¹³ Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 268-269.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

Philips Long has set out a number of criteria by which any history could be evaluated but is in particular meant for the evaluation of the OT.¹⁸ A reliable historical document must have internal consistency and external consistency. An evaluation of internal consistency is completed primarily through literary analysis. Robert Alter has done much work on the literary analysis of the OT and in particular in narrative analysis of the historical sections of the OT.¹⁹ The title of Long's text is a deliberate play on Alter's title. Long agrees with Alter's assertion that if a reader wants to understand the historical claims of the OT writers it is imperative that readers undertake careful narrative analysis to check for internal consistency as well as to understand what claims the authors are actually making about the past. External consistency can be checked by comparing a historical section of the OT with other Biblical texts, with other non-Biblical texts of the same period, and by comparing the historical section with material remains such as those discovered by archaeologists.²⁰ Long's text sets out the criteria for evaluation.

A later work by Iain Provan, V. Philips Long and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, is an extended interaction with the historical passages of the OT in which these three authors examine the text for internal and external consistency. Provan, Long and Longman conclude instead that you cannot just know that the OT does not provide a reasonably accurate account of the past.²¹ Provan, Long and Longman argue that careful narrative analysis does not allow for the conclusion that the historical sections of the OT cannot have happened. In fact, careful textual work may reveal that the historical sections of the OT actually present what may be at least a logical and coherent presentation which does not obviously conflict with archaeological discoveries. Perhaps the Old Testament does not describe what actually happened but at the very least it cannot be stated with certainty that it did not happen as the OT

¹⁸V. Philips Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994).

¹⁹Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

²⁰Long, 186-195.

²¹Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2003).

describes it.

Other scholars agree with Provan, Long and Longman at some level. One archaeologist, William Dever, has similarly rejected the minimalist position. He sees a symbiotic relationship between the interpretation of the material remains and the reading of the Biblical account.²² Dever does not think that every historical claim made by the authors of the OT is accurate. Dever is particularly sceptical about the books of Exodus and Numbers because he says that the archaeological record does not bear out the claims of massive conquest.²³ Nevertheless, Dever does not think that the Biblical record fails as a historical record. He believes that various Biblical authors had some reliable sources which they used well. Certainly the authors felt free to manipulate their sources but this does not make the authors outright liars. Rather it simply demonstrates a naïve view of history not unlike other ancient histories. What Dever argues for is the search for what he calls convergences. Convergences are those places where archaeology and literary text enhance each other. The book of Judges, according to Dever, is one of those places where the Biblical record and archaeological record indicate a great deal of convergence. In such cases the Bible and the archaeological record help to interpret one another.²⁴

As I find the arguments of Provan, Long and Longman persuasive, I will simply defer to their work on the matter of historical accuracy. I do, however, want to comment on some comparisons between the OT and the ancient Greek authors that seem pertinent to my discussion. The first is on the role of the author or editor in the texts of the OT as compared to the Greek authors, especially Herodotus and Polybius. The Biblical author is about as hidden as

²²William Dever, *Who Were the Ancient Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003). John Bright would be another example of an archaeologist who would understand the biblical text and archaeological record as congruent for the most part. *A History of Israel* 4th ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000).

²³Provan, Long and Longman have countered Dever's arguments in *A Biblical History of Israel* by saying that a close textual analysis of Exodus and Numbers does not really make a claim for a rapid and massive conquest. Rather, sections that do so should be viewed as rhetorical posturing which evidence from within the same book counters. See *A Biblical History of Israel*, 148-156.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 226-228.

can be in a narrative. As has been discussed previously, Herodotus was constantly telling his audience about his sources and providing his reader with two or three versions of the same story. Herodotus will sometimes indicate which version of the story he finds persuasive and at other times he says that he will let the reader decide which version is the most likely to be true. Polybius sees no reason why his text shouldn't be interrupted for sometimes lengthy stretches if he feels there is a need to discuss either methods or morals.

This kind of overt, authorial or editorial interaction with sources and material simply does not occur in the Bible. The Biblical authors would approve of modern historians who claim that they will not interrupt their narratives with such kinds of discussions. Close literary analysis of the Bible is necessary because both the historical intent and the edifying content is implicit in the uninterrupted narrative. The Bible allows the reader to appropriate the lessons of the text without authorial moralizing and it expects the reader to understand that what is given is a historical account. In fact, historians who would otherwise distrust the historical accuracy of the Bible might consider the implications of the way in which modern history follows the form of the Bible. Thomas Cahill has argued that the Hebrew Scriptures radically altered the way in which the Western world understood time, history and the writing of history.²⁵ By extension, I observe that this influence has gone even further than Cahill suggested. The Hebrews not only influenced conceptions of time but how history was written. What is especially noticeable in the Hebrew Scriptures is the rejection of the obvious authorial presence in a text. Christian historians today, at least those who do not claim to be writing authoritative scripture in their accounts, might wonder if the Bible is the norm they want to follow or if the Greek models might be more useful for a narrative that attempts to be both critical and edifying. Although for a purely critical text perhaps the Biblical model of absent author or editor might be the best

²⁵Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 1998).

choice.

A further question about the historicity of the OT is why history was important to the Hebrew people? Like the early Greek historians the writers or editors of the OT insist that the past is knowable, explainable and can be recorded in a written text. The Old Testament, however, raises the stakes much higher than the Greek historians would have ever considered. Should a Greek historian write up an historical account that would prove to be false the worst consequence of this would be an embarrassed author. It would be unlikely that Greek identity would be regarded as suspect and certainly Greek religion would not need to be re-evaluated.

The historical claims of the Old Testament are much weightier than the Greek historians. Should the historical accounts of the Old Testament prove to be historically untrue, the identity of the Israelite people would be in question. Worse, if the historical claims of the Old Testament are indeed wrong, then the faith of those who believe in that text would be similarly fictitious. A number of passages in the OT demonstrate this point. The book of Deuteronomy begins with Moses speaking—but this time not as a law-giver, not as a judge, and not as a miracle-worker. The Israelites have come to the end of their journey in the wilderness and are about to enter the Promised Land. Moses speaks to the people of Israel primarily as a historian. The text states that “Moses undertook to expound this law as follows.”²⁶ What follows this verse is not a repetition of the Decalogue or of the instructions for the various rituals and festivals, as you might expect after being told that you were about to hear a speech about the law, but rather Moses recalls the history of the Israelite people.

The history that Moses gives begins autobiographically. More specifically, Moses begins the story of the history of Israel by recalling that at one point Moses had found the task of leading the Israelites to be unbearable and so Moses had delegated his leadership task by appointing leaders for each of the tribes. The personal appropriation of the meaning of the past,

²⁶Deuteronomy 1:5

that all who are listening are supposed to implement, is first undertaken by Moses. Moses then recalls the wandering in the wilderness after leaving Mount Horeb and the Israelites' refusal to enter into the Promised Land when they first came there because of the many and fearsome people who already lived there. The hardships of the desert years are recounted as well as the defeat of King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan. Moses's history has many lessons that the people are to appreciate. One such lesson is the reminder that the people of Israel had been here at this place before but that their lack of faith at that point in time had had serious consequences: forty years of nomadic life in the desert. Recalling the past functions as an exhortation to choose differently this time. The repetition of history also reassures the people that God was and continues to be with them. Remember the defeat of Sihon and Og? It was God who gave you the victory over these kings who were much stronger than you. God will surely give you the same support once you go into the Promised Land.

Finally and most importantly, the historical record is the reason for obeying God. Israel obeys God because they have seen God's hand in history. With their own eyes they have seen the works of God and with their own ears they have heard God speak. Because the Israelites have seen and known what God did in the past, they know what they are to do in the present.²⁷ Perhaps the most important passage of this section is found in chapter six.

When your children ask you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you?" then you shall say to your children, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. Then the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case."²⁸

The same logic is evident in many other passages of which I will mention only two. The first passage is Leviticus 22:33: "I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I

²⁷Deuteronomy 4:1-20.

²⁸Deuteronomy 6:20-24.

am the Lord.”²⁹ The historical logic of this passage seems to be fairly straightforward and yet audacious. God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt—a real event in history. Should this event prove not to be true, something just made up, then any possibility that the Israelites are serving the right God evaporates. But the author is so confident that it did happen and that this event was known to be true that the author does not blanch in the face of such a bold claim.

The second passage is found in Psalms 135-136. Psalm 135 begins with a command to praise and an acknowledgement of his power in creation. In verse eight the Psalm makes a significant shift from creation to an account of the works of history.

He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants. He struck down many nations and killed mighty kings—Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan—and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to his people Israel.³⁰

Psalm 136 is an extended version with the same theme. The first nine verses are a command to praise God for his creation. The remaining sixteen verses are a command to praise God for his works in history. This history begins with the story of the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt.

Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. . . .who struck Egypt through their firstborn, . . . and brought Israel out from among them, . . . who divided the Red Sea in two, . . . and made Israel pass through the midst of it, . . . but overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, . . . who led his people through the wilderness, . . . who struck down great kings, . . . and killed famous kings, . . . Sihon, King of the Amorites, . . . and Og, king of Bashan, . . . and gave their land as a heritage, . . . a heritage to his servant Israel.³¹

To those familiar with the tenets of Hebrew and Christian faith, that familiarity has likely softened the shock of these claims. The past is knowable and the past is where God has revealed himself. Each of the events that are recalled in that Psalm is followed by the phrase, “His steadfast love endures forever.” To know the past is to know who God is. Therefore, if the past

²⁹This refrain is repeated frequently in the OT. See Numbers 15:41, Judges 6:8-10, I Samuel 2:27-28, and I Samuel 12:6-15 as a few examples.

³⁰Psalm 125:8-12.

³¹Psalm 136: 10-22.

is unknowable, God is unknowable. If the exodus from Egypt is unknowable, God's goodness and love are unknowable. Few other peoples of that time, or perhaps since, have made such claims about the past. People of this faith tradition, be they Jews, Christians or Muslims, have a powerful reason to ask, "did it really happen?"

The second of the large questions of this section is whether the OT is biographical. Unlike the question of historicity, the topic of biography in the Old Testament has received little scholarly attention. One of the few texts on the subject is Ilana Pardes's *The Biography of Ancient Israel*. This text, however, seeks to understand the first five books of the OT as a biographical unit but not as biographies of individuals. Pardes discusses how to read Genesis to Deuteronomy as the biography of the nation of Israel. As such, in Genesis we see the infancy of the nation of Israel and we are able to progress through the adolescence and finally on to the adulthood of the nation of Israel as the reader moves through the five books.³² Biographical dictionaries of the OT exist.³³ The sole entry under the subject heading "Old Testament—Biography—History and Criticism in the University of British Columbia library data base is *Moses in America: The Cultural Uses of Biblical Narrative*.³⁴ To the best of my knowledge, there is little monograph length work available on the biography of the OT. Given how much biographical information there is in the OT, I would expect texts with titles like, *How to Read Genesis*, to provide some discussion on how to read biographically. While such texts provide excellent discussions on how to read the OT as literature, as theology and as history, there is little on how to read the Bible as biography.³⁵

Thus, we turn to the text of the Old Testament to examine its biographical character. At

³²Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 2000).

³³Joan Comay, *Who's Who in the Old Testament, Together with the Apocrypha* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971).

³⁴Melanie Wright, *Moses in America: The Cultural Uses of Biblical Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003).

³⁵Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005). Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

first glance it may seem the height of obvious to state that much of the OT is a succession of biographies. In fact some might say that a succession of biographies is what makes up the writing of history. However, when you compare the OT with Herodotus, it is notable that contemporaneous historical documents could be written differently. The OT is different from Herodotus in two important ways. The first way is the degree to which biography dominates the text and the second way is the different message each text gives about how to live in relationship to the Gods, or God, as the case may be.

In the first comparison I note that there are certainly many places where Herodotus focuses on a particular individual but he also has large sections devoted to discussions of a society. The customs, religious rites, and social institutions of the Egyptians and Scythians, for example, fascinated Herodotus, and he devoted entire books to this kind of information. The authors and editors of the OT shared this interest too, albeit expressed in a different form and with a focus on one people rather than many peoples. In the books of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, for example, there is much information about the religious practices of the Israelites. Information about what the priests wore, the kinds of utensils that were used, the dimensions of the tabernacle (the place of worship), what was said and done at a religious ritual, and when the rituals were to be performed, is given in a degree of detail that would have made Herodotus envious. However, the OT remains focused on biography in a way that Herodotus does not. Eventually the event of the Persian wars takes over the narrative. In the OT historical writings, events do not overshadow people. The exodus from Egypt or the creation of the monarchy are events that are told through biographical portraits. The reason for this becomes clearer when considering the second way that biographies differ between Herodotus and the OT.

This second difference is a result of the different conceptions about ultimate reality that each text takes to be true. Herodotus is fascinated by Fate and the way in which a person's life demonstrates the favour and disfavour of Fate. But Fate is a highly impersonal God. The hand of

Fate is as observable in the events of the time as in the events of a person's life. As a result, Herodotus is free to follow or abandon biographical narrative as he pleases. Later the Romans will allow event to include the non-human world and lightning strikes and the flights of birds will be understood as events that reveal what Fate has determined. These kinds of reports are included at the beginning and end of Livy's books of history. The biographies of the OT want to demonstrate how to live as a person of God. This OT God, however, is a highly personal God who speaks directly to individuals. There is very little of the kind of divination of animal entrails that was common elsewhere in the ancient world.³⁶ That this God is a personal God who speaks is revealed in the biographical character of the history-writing of the OT. It is not surprising that a text that believes in a personal God who speaks to individuals directly and a text that is at the same time attempting to teach its readers to live as a person of God (of *this* God) would chose to write its history as a kind of portrait gallery of people who chose (or did not choose) to live as a person of God. What is surprising is the lack of discussion in the scholarship of the last several decades on the biographical character of the OT.

The gallery of biographical portraits begins with Abram, who is later called Abraham, in chapter twelve of Genesis. Before that are the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Able, and Noah and his sons but these people are vague, shadowy figures. With Abraham we feel like we move get to meet our first knowable person of history. There are four important observations to be made about the biographical character of the history-writing of the OT. These four points are: (1) the realistically human nature of the subjects; (2) the distinctiveness of each subject; (3) the balanced portrayal of a subject's character; (4) the inclusion of female subjects in the text. I will demonstrate the first point about the character of Biblical biography by referring to the life of

³⁶This is not to say that there was no divination-style practices discussed in the OT. I am suggesting, however, that God's preferred way of communicating with people was to talk to them directly. God would, however, "speak" to people using these kinds of devices if necessary. Consider the story of Gideon as told in Judges 6:11-40. God sent an angel to Gideon to tell him God's message directly. But Gideon did not believe the angel and demanded a sign. Only after the sign was performed did he believe.

Abraham.

When Hesiod looked back to the time before his own, he saw heroes and demigods. But even in the earliest persons the OT rejects the idea of gods and heroes and instead demonstrates a respect for the humanness of the subjects. Throughout the Biblical text the subjects are ordinary people rather than superheroes and certainly not gods. And so with the story of Abraham, the first of the patriarchs, a real human character emerges. Chapter eleven of Genesis recounts the genealogy of Abraham beginning with Shem, the son of Noah, and ending with Terah the father of Abraham. Abraham feels like someone that can be known, at least in part, because he is so ordinary. He had an ordinary family, life events, and location. He had a father, Terah, and brothers, Nahor and Haran. One of his brothers, Haran, died leaving his son Lot, Abraham's nephew, to be raised by Terah. Abraham had a wife, Sarai (later called Sarah), and a sister-in-law, Milcah, who was married to Nahor. The family of Terah came from Ur but Terah and all that remained of his family moved to the city of Haran in Canaan where Terah died. Nevertheless a succession of extraordinary events occurred in the life of this very human person. Even so, Abraham remains a rather plain human being as these events occur to him and are not of his own genesis—this is the genesis of God's people but a genesis not directed by sometimes painfully human individuals. Extraordinary events do not originate with the subject, as in the stories of Hercules, for example, but are initiated and enacted by God.

Someone or something that Abraham recognizes as the LORD told him to leave Haran for a place which the LORD says he will show him. And so Abraham began a process of wandering which continued for the rest of his life. First to the wilderness of Canaan, then to Egypt and then into the Negeb region, Abraham increased in wealth and social status. If it were not for the fact that his journey had been commanded by the LORD it would have been an altogether ordinary affair, albeit with interesting aspects, as for example the Egyptian Pharaoh's marital interest in Sarah and Lot's capture by the kings of Canaan. Then, however, Abraham had

a vision in which the LORD promised to make Abraham into a great nation. His descendants, promised the LORD, would be like the stars in the sky. If Abraham had been like some of the pioneering families of the American new world, with children numbering in the teens, this might not have been a particularly impressive promise but Abraham and Sarah were old and past the years when children were a possibility. To such an extraordinary promise Abraham and Sarah reacted in ordinary human ways that are almost predictable. They doubted the promise. Sarah even laughed out loud at the absurdity. Sarah and Abraham attempted to rationalize the promise by interpreting the promise to mean that the young and still fertile maid of Sarah, Hagar, should act as a surrogate mother for the child which Abraham would then take for his own. And again everyone acted in all too predictably human ways. Hagar gets pregnant by Abraham and lashed it over Sarah. Sarah retaliated by treating Hagar badly. Abraham failed to act like the head of the household to institute peace and good relationships and allowed Sarah to do whatever she wanted to Hagar. Hagar, like many other abused young women, decided to run away.

It is to these highly ordinary human people that extraordinary events continue to occur. Hagar too encountered the extraordinary. When Hagar ran away she was met and comforted by an angel who told her to return to Sarah for the son that will be born to her, Ishmael, would also be the father of a great nation. Finally, Sarah had the most extraordinary event of them all. She became pregnant at a very old age and had a son named Isaac. Yet, despite all these extraordinary experiences, these people continue to act in all too human ways. As Isaac grew Sarah became jealous for Isaac's rightful inheritance and wanted to be rid of the now superfluous heir, Ishmael. A jealous Sarah told Abraham to send Hagar away. Rather than attempting the difficult task of mediating the relationship between the two women that have borne his sons, Abraham again took the easy way out and choose to end the problem by sending Hagar and Ishmael into the desert, essentially to die. This time Hagar did not run away but rather she and her son were cast out of the family. The extraordinary again occurs. An angel

appeared to Hagar to comfort her. A well was revealed to Hagar and it was enough to sustain her and Ishmael. Against all odds mother and son survived, the son grew, and Hagar found a wife for her son. Ishmael became a great nation. Abraham's actions against Hagar and Ishmael came close to destroying the possibility that Ishmael would be the father of a nation. The LORD had to intervene with the extraordinary in order to prevent the expected from occurring.

Abraham's actions, however, pale in comparison to the threat of the LORD himself. All of Abraham's hopes to be made into a great nation now rested on Isaac. As Isaac grew Abraham again heard a command from the LORD—to kill his son, his only son, the son whom Abraham loved, his son Isaac. This Abraham did, or at least intends to do until the very last moment when the LORD intervened to stop Abraham. Isaac was to be spared, the LORD said, because it was now clear that Abraham would not withhold anything from the LORD. Instead of Isaac a ram was placed on the sacrificial alter. After this final extraordinary event in Abraham's life, the predictable again becomes the norm. Sarah died in old age and Abraham engaged in lengthy negotiations with his neighbours in order to purchase land for Sarah's burial place. Isaac grew and Abraham found a wife for his son. Abraham put his servant a charge of finding an appropriate wife from amongst Abraham's kin and bringing her back for Isaac. A woman named Rebekah returned with the servant and married Isaac. Abraham, the elderly widower, remarried. He died and was buried next to Sarah.

The second point about the biographical character of the OT pertains to the respect shown for the distinctive individuality of each of the people discussed. Subjects are uniquely themselves. This is not to say that the various individuals do not experience similar life events or emotions. Many of the people whose life stories are recorded in the OT are described as having been favoured by God, protected by God and even talked with God. God made similar promises to different people. God promised both Abraham and Hagar that each of their respective sons would be a father of a great nation. Later, God made the same promise and

proposal to Moses which, shockingly, Moses declined.³⁷ Yet these people were all distinctly different from one another. The OT has respect for the individual characteristics of people.

Abraham is not like the other patriarchs, not even his own son. Isaac, the one for whom there was much expectation and anticipation, has a bit of an anti-climatic persona as the next character in the OT narrative. Whereas Abraham was constantly on the move and initiating events as he saw fit, Isaac is portrayed as sedentary and passive at every turn. It was Abraham who arranged for one of his servants to fetch a bride for Isaac while Isaac waited at home for Rebekah to arrive. All the intrigue of winning a wife that should have been Isaac's, (and which you would expect in the protagonist of a story), was acted out instead by the servant.³⁸ That Isaac is the only patriarch to have only one wife is more likely due to the fact that Abraham died before he could arrange for any more wives and that Rebekah did not suggest taking one of her maids for a wife rather than due to any deliberate decision on Isaac's part.³⁹ When Isaac built a well and others claimed that the well was theirs, Isaac did not fight with them but rather built another well elsewhere. And when those who lived around that well claimed that it was their well, Isaac moved on and built another well in a place where no one would want to claim it was, actually, their well.⁴⁰

Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Of Esau we know only a little. He was hairy, liked hunting, married a Canaanite woman who "made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah" and was the favourite son of Isaac.⁴¹ Jacob, by contrast, we know much of and furthermore the portrait that is painted of Jacob is quite different than that of his father. Jacob was Rebekah's favourite son and when Isaac was old and it was time for the blessing to be given from the father to the eldest son, Rebekah conspired with Jacob to steal the blessing from Esau.

³⁷Exodus 32:10.

³⁸Genesis 24: 1-66

³⁹It is possible that Joseph also had only one wife.

⁴⁰Genesis 26: 17-25.

⁴¹Genesis 26:35.

Although Jacob will become a deceitful character in the episodes that follow, it must be noted that in the stealing of the blessing Rebekah was the real “brains of the operation.” Isaac instructed Esau to hunt for some game and prepare a stew for Isaac after which Isaac would bless Esau. Overhearing Isaac’s instructions Rebekah instructed Jacob to kill a goat and give her the meat to make into Isaac’s favourite dish. Furthermore, Jacob should put the skin of the goat on his arms in order to imitate the hairy arms of his elder brother. Jacob took the stew his mother made and went to his nearly blind father to receive the blessing. Although Isaac was initially suspicious (he said that the voice sounded like Jacob’s but the hair was Esau’s), Isaac remained a passive figure to the very end and blessed Jacob rather than investigate the matter further.⁴² Rebekah and Jacob were deceitful in a way that Isaac, seemingly, can only vaguely comprehend any person as being capable of.

How different Jacob is from Isaac is made clear in the difference between the story of how Jacob found a wife as compared to Isaac’s story. Isaac, unlike Abraham, did not arrange for Jacob’s marriage (as he had not for Esau’s either). Rather it was Rebekah who initiated Jacob’s journey to find a wife. Rebekah told Isaac that her life was weary because of the Canaanite women that Esau had married and if Jacob were to do the same her life would not be worth living. Therefore Rebekah sent Jacob to her brother’s house to find a wife there.⁴³ There will be no servant stand-in for this courtship.

Jacob is unlike either his father or his grandfather in other ways as well. Jacob was an opportunist who had the ability to act cleverly and deceitfully, and chose to exercise that ability on several occasions. But at the same time Jacob desired to be godly. Long before Isaac sensed that death was near and sought to bestow his blessing, Jacob took advantage of people to get what he wanted. In one example Esau returned home after a long hunting trip and was extremely

⁴²Genesis 27:1-29.

⁴³Genesis 27: 41-46.

hungry. Jacob saw his brother's condition and used that moment of physical weakness to convince Esau to trade his birthright for the food that Jacob had made (Jacob, like his mother, seems to have been an excellent cook). After deceiving Isaac and stealing his brother's blessing, Jacob had to flee from his brother who was so angry that he vowed to kill Jacob. Jacob was on the run but even he had to sleep at night. Out in the open Jacob fell asleep and received a divine vision of a great ladder between heaven and earth and angels ascending and descending the ladder. Then the voice of God promised Jacob that he would make Jacob into a great nation. When Jacob woke up he marvelled at the vision he had received saying: "Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!" and "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."⁴⁴ But Jacob quickly got over his awe and returned to his opportunistic character and told God: "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you."⁴⁵ It is practically a legal contract in which it is unclear who benefits more, God or Jacob. Nevertheless, it boded well for Jacob that his first reaction was one of praise to God and only after giving due glory to God did his less noble character emerge.

If it is true that those who live by the sword die by the sword it might also be true that those who deal out deceit will be dealt deceit. At least this was the case for Jacob. Jacob met his match in his uncle Laban, Rebekah's brother. When Jacob saw Laban's daughter, Rachel, he asked Laban for permission to marry her. Laban said that Jacob had to work as Laban's hired hand for seven years before Rachel could be his. So Jacob worked for seven years. On the wedding night, however, Laban gave his elder daughter, Leah, instead of Rachel to be Jacob's

⁴⁴Genesis 28:16-17.

⁴⁵Genesis 28:20-22.

wife. For some reason (possibly there was a lot of wine at the wedding feast) Jacob did not notice he had been given the wrong girl and slept with Leah. In the morning a startled Jacob quickly headed over to Laban to find out why Laban had done this to him. Laban explained that it is not the custom to marry the younger daughter before the elder and if Jacob wanted Rachel too, he would have to take them both, and furthermore, that he would have to work as a hired hand for another seven years to pay for Rachel. It is difficult, at this point, to feel overly sorry for Jacob given how he has treated his family members and even his God.

A sub-point in the respect shown for the individual distinctness of the subjects in the OT is that the respect is accorded not only to the differing personalities that each person has but also to the distinctive nature of the individual's relationship with God. All three men had a distinctly different relationship with The Lord. Time and again when Abraham heard the LORD's voice commanding him to do something he obeyed. In response to God's instructions he left his country and moved to a new land, circumcised himself and all the men in his household, and, the most difficult command of all, agreed to sacrifice Isaac. Abraham is such a pro-active obey-er that he actually strays into disobedience. When God tarried, in Abraham's opinion too long, in providing him with a son, Abraham took the initiative for God and impregnated Hagar. This kind of relationship with God is in stark contrast to Isaac's relationship. Unlike his father who heard God speak frequently, Isaac did not hear God's voice. Even in what must have been the defining moment of his life, when he was bound and placed as a sacrificial victim on top of an altar, the text does not indicate that Isaac heard the voice of God. Abraham heard God speaking at that great and terrible moment, but did Isaac? There is no indication that he did. Unlike Abraham, Isaac never heard God promise him that he will be the father of a great nation. But neither does Isaac commit the great errors of either his father or his son. Isaac simply did what he knew to be right and peaceable all his life.

Jacob's relationship with God was different again from either his father or grandfather.

Jacob's relationship was not characterized by aggressive obedience or steady pacifism. Jacob literally wrestled with God. After long years of service to Laban Jacob decided to return to his homeland. Such a decision meant that he had to attempt to reconcile with Esau, who had vowed to kill Jacob. Jacob was, understandably, afraid. On the eve of that fateful reunion Jacob spent the night alone and met a strange man. The two wrestled through the night. The stranger struck Jacob in the hip and put the joint out of its socket. Still Jacob would not concede the fight but realizing that he was wrestling with God Jacob begged for a blessing. The blessing that he received was very different from what Jacob had asked for after his vision of the ladder. He was not given a promise of protection or wealth. The blessing that Jacob received was only this: a new name. He was no longer Jacob but Israel, the one who had striven with God and with humans and had prevailed.⁴⁶ The OT portrays Jacob's relationship with God as almost shockingly personal, intense, and quite different from his father's.

At the same time that the kind of relationship that these three men have with God is distinctly their own, all three were loved by God. Centuries later when God revealed himself to Moses God called himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. No distinctions were made between the three men. All three men were favoured by God and the patriarchs of God's people. Surely the mark of a good biography is concern to portray the distinctive character of the subject. The OT does this in both the personality of the subjects and the character of their relationship with God. The interest in biography is perhaps not surprising given what is said in the earliest chapters of Genesis. There the reader is told that God created Adam and Eve in his image. Human beings, who are descended from Adam and Eve, share this quality of being in God's image. It follows then that, first, human beings are interesting and significant and, second, human beings can learn from the behaviour of others. There is a kind of *humanism* in the Bible that is expressed in the interest in individuals.

⁴⁶Genesis 32: 22-32.

The previous retelling of Genesis 12-36 will be familiar to all that grew up attending synagogue or church. And perhaps the ability of a ten-year-old to recount all that has been presented on the flannel-graph board is better testimony of the biographical character of the OT than the opinion of scholarly secondary sources. For in those Sunday School lessons the individual characteristics of each of the subjects is typically plainly presented as part of a faithful retelling of the Biblical text. The respect for the individual character could be demonstrated by giving more examples as the stories of the patriarchs continues. Joseph, the son of Jacob, for example, is different again from his father. Jacob was a deceiver but Joseph was such a holier-than-thou do-gooder that Joseph's ten older brothers could not stand him (the elder ten brothers were far from saintly—apparently having inherited a bit more of Jacob's characteristics). Moses was a distinct person as well, as were Joshua, Gideon, Samson, and so forth. The portrait of the first three patriarchs, however, will have to suffice to make the point that the OT respects the individual characteristics of each person.

The third observation about biography in the OT has already been hinted at but further examination will demonstrate the point more fully. The OT respects the subject enough to present both the commendable and the reprehensible deeds of the subject. The OT does not gloss over or justify the ugly and evil deeds of the subject. Rather all that is unflattering is laid bare. Similarly, the deeds of faith and obedience are presented in a straight-forward manner. Interestingly, the OT is reticent to either overtly condemn particular actions or overly praise the good in a person. Often the text lets the telling of the actions themselves suffice for condemnation or praise. Those twenty-first century biographers, secular or Christian, who do the same share this methodological choice with the Biblical authors. The result of presenting both the triumph and failure of the Biblical subjects means that most of the subjects discussed are fairly balanced individuals. This helps create the impression that they are real people (and therefore helps to solidify the first observation I made about the characteristics of OT

biographical portraits). A balanced depiction of character is generally true for all subjects who receive more than merely cursory treatment. Joseph is perhaps an exception as in his adult life he is presented as nearly entirely praiseworthy. For the most part, the subjects of the OT are not plaster saints. Some examples will illustrate the point.

As already discussed, Abraham was capable of noble and praiseworthy actions but he could act with cunning and worse with a callousness that would bring about criminal charges in today's world. Abraham obeyed the call of God when he left Ur and moved to Canaan. However, the text has barely finished telling us of his move to Canaan, where God seems to be telling Abraham to go, when the text then informs us that Abraham has moved to Egypt. It is not entirely clear whether or not God wanted Abraham to go to Egypt. Whether this action was in obedience to God or demonstrated a lack of trust in God is not made explicit. Whatever the case, Abraham acted less than honestly while in Egypt. Sarah was a woman of apparent beauty. Abraham told Sarah that she should tell everyone that she was his sister lest anyone, in desiring Sarah, should kill Abraham thus freeing Sarah of the nuisance of a husband. Sarah caught the eye of none other than the Pharaoh of Egypt. Whether or not Pharaoh got around to sexual congress with Sarah is unclear but it is definitely clear that if it did not happen it was not Abraham who stopped the act. Rather God himself had to intervene by inflicting a plague on Pharaoh and his household. The plague ended when Pharaoh sent Sarah back to Abraham and gave Abraham great riches to boot. If Abraham was sorry for treating Sarah thus, it is not recorded. Furthermore, Abraham did the same thing again when he met King Abimelech of Gerar in the Negeb region. Again, it is a close thing that Sarah did not have sex with this man for Abraham was not going to intervene when Abimelech made it clear that this was his intention. God had to intervene again by sending a dream to Abimelech telling him of the truth

of the matter.⁴⁷ Again Abraham did not seem sorry for his actions—deceiving other men and treating Sarah like trade goods. He just welcomed the money he made in these near-affairs. The text implicitly criticizes Abraham. Both Pharaoh and Abimilech knew how wrong it would be to sleep with Abraham's wife and said so once they learned the truth. By everyone's standards but Abraham, Abraham has committed a terrible deed. And everyone but Abraham repented of the deed. In fact, these unwitting cuckolded men did the repenting for Abraham.

Both the good and bad of Abraham are evident when comparing two further stories about him. In the first story Abraham demonstrated his piety by his actions towards three people he thought were strangers. Abraham treated them with the hospitality that his culture commended. He welcomed them to his tent, he washed their feet, he served them cakes that Sarah had made, and prepared a feast of choice meats and cheese.⁴⁸ Contrast this account with Abraham's treatment of Hagar and Ishmael. Hagar was dependant on Abraham for her very life. To be cast out of his household was to be given a sentence of slow death by yourself in the wilderness. Far worse, Hagar was a slave who had been his sexual partner and was the mother of his child, whom Abraham also sent away. Abraham intended to be complicit in the death of his own son. That this horrible act was not realized is due to the intervention of God, not Abraham. Abraham exhibited what was best and worst in a head of a household. Abraham might be an example of how to be a person of God but that does not mean that everything he did was commendable.

Other characters are similarly presented as having both redeeming and unholy characteristics as manifested in their words and actions. Moses, for example, obeyed and disobeyed God. When God revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush Moses obeyed God's command to worship him. When God commanded Moses to return to Egypt and command

⁴⁷Genesis 20: 1-18.

⁴⁸Genesis 18: 1-15.

Pharaoh to free the Israelite slaves, Moses was less eager to comply. Moses gave a string of excuses to explain to God why he was unable to do this task. God became frustrated with Moses, not for the last time either, and it was an angry and exasperated God who responded that he would allow Aaron, the brother of Moses, to speak for Moses.⁴⁹ Much later in the text Moses asked to see God. It was a mark of how much Moses had faithfully served God that God agreed. Moses hid in a cave and God passed by the cave so that Moses saw God—not God’s face but God’s hinder parts.⁵⁰ Another time, the Israelites came to a place called Meribah where there was no water. Moses used the staff God had given him to strike the rock to make water flow for the Israelites to drink. He did not, however, give God the glory or invoke his name in this action. Moses acted as an independent miracle worker and God responded with judgement. As a consequence of his actions God told Moses that he would not be able to enter into the Promised Land.⁵¹ Moses was a great leader and a man of great faith but he too made serious mistakes.

Gideon is a figure in the book of Judges who similarly obeys God but also commits great sins. Although Gideon demanded God prove himself with a series of tests before Gideon would agree to obey God, Gideon did eventually agree to do as God commanded. As a result, Gideon defeated the Midianites of the area with only a small army of men. Furthermore, Gideon destroyed the altar of Baal. Although Gideon was faithful in these events, he ended his life in idolatry. Gideon made a gold idol and put it up in his hometown.⁵²

The fourth observation about the biography of the OT is with regard to the information given about women’s lives. Women are not represented to the degree that men are, as could be demonstrated by simply adding up the number of lines about men and comparing this number to those given to women. The balance would fall decidedly on the side of men. Furthermore, the

⁴⁹Exodus 3:1-4:17.

⁵⁰Exodus 33:12-23.

⁵¹Numbers 20:1-13.

⁵²Judges 8:22-35.

stories given about women are often troubling. Phyllis Trible's *Texts of Terror* is a literary analysis of four women discussed in the history-writings of the OT: Hagar, Tamar, an unnamed concubine of a Levite, and an unnamed daughter of Jephthah.⁵³ The stories of the two unnamed women, both of which are found in the book of Judges, are particularly troubling as both die violent deaths as the result of horrific decisions made by the men in their lives who should have protected them. In the case of Jephthah there is no direct condemnation of his actions. Even given these two significant points, the OT is notable for its inclusion of women's lives.

Sarah and Rebekah are not as prominent as their husbands Abraham and Isaac but they are nonetheless depicted as women who have particular personalities and who have at least some ability to control their own lives. In fact, Rebekah is nearly as fully developed a character as her husband Isaac which is remarkable considering that Isaac was the beloved son of Abraham and the person on whom rested all the promise for the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Sarah is not as prominent in the story as Abraham but we are told about her laughter when she overheard the promise of a son being given to Abraham. Furthermore, it was Sarah's wish that Abraham take Hagar as his concubine and later it was Sarah's wish that Hagar be sent out to the desert.

Jacob's wives, Leah and Rachel, receive much less attention than Jacob. Small details, however, are suggestive of their personalities. Rachel was both lovely and loved by Jacob. Leah, despite her beautiful eyes, was not loved by Jacob. It was Leah, however, who gave Jacob sons while Rachel was barren. The agony of both women is palpable. After the birth of each son Leah professed a hope that now Jacob will love her. That she made this statement after the birth of every son is an indication of how fully Jacob failed to do so. Rachel may have been Jacob's favourite in part because she seems to have shared similar characteristics with Jacob. When

⁵³Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984). See also Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

Jacob decided to leave Laban's household Rachel stole the statues of Laban's household Gods and then hid them when Laban came to look for them. She even lied to her father in order to prevent Laban from finding them. Rachel also experienced acute agony about her barrenness. She approached Jacob demanding a child through her servant and then another child by the same means. Finally Rachel had a son, Joseph, but died in childbirth when a second son, Benjamin, was born. Despite being loved by Jacob, Rachel's life is filled with pain and bitterness.

In the early chapters of I Samuel the reader learns of a woman named Hannah, a barren woman. Although Hannah experienced great anguish because of her barren state she took control of her spiritual state and presented herself at the house of the Lord to pray for a son. Hannah's petition was answered and her son Samuel was born. The Biblical author ascribes a great hymn of praise to Hannah which she sang after bringing Samuel to Eli, the priest.⁵⁴ Although the portrait of Hannah is brief it is a compelling one. She experienced great anguish but also the answer of God to her prayers. She is depicted as a woman of great spiritual strength.⁵⁵

Later in the chapter I will make some comments about the differences between the biographies of the OT and NT. Here I will make a few comments about the differences between OT biographies and those examined in the previous chapter. Most importantly, the OT functions differently than Herodotus or Polybius, for example, because it is intended to be read as a sacred text rather than merely an account of the causes and events in the Persian War or Punic Wars. The authors of the OT are claiming that they are revealing holy history. The intended goal of the OT is to bring people to a right understanding of who they are as a people of God and what actions are required of them as a result. Moses gives the Israelites a moral code, as given in the

⁵⁴I Samuel 2:1-10. Deborah is also credited with the composition of great hymn. See Judges 5.

⁵⁵I have by no means exhausted the list of women's life stories found in the OT. Tamar, Miriam, Rehab, and Deborah, to name a few, are all memorable women.

Pentateuch. Those who are descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and who follow the moral code are the people of God. The OT, therefore, sets out the collective identity of the people of God. Greco-Roman authors did not claim to be writing sacred text and the creation, at least, of a collective identity is not a prominent theme. Herodotus, in fact, disturbed the notion, collectively held by Greeks, that Greek ways were better than non-Greek ways. Polybius was explaining the Roman people to a Greek audience.

The claim of divine revelation and the function of the OT as sacred text have important implications for the present as well. I do not think that the OT can function as a methodological model for history-writing today in one important respect—the implicit nature of interpretation. The OT is, of course, a text that provides its reader with normative ethical teaching. It is in the laws and prophets that this normative teaching is given—the reader is told what right and wrong action is. As already noted, Moses told the people of Israel how to understand their history. The prophets explain, repeatedly, that the evil that the Israelites have done will bring about their political destruction. The biographical and historical accounts have little of this kind of direct discussion. As the history and biography are part of the larger text, however, these other portions of text (direct discussion of normative ethical actions) are vital for interpreting the history and biography. Neither the Greco-Roman texts nor the history-writing of today is embedded in such a larger context. In order to engage in ethical dialogue the Greco-Roman authors often had to directly address their reader in order to make their point clear.

This then concludes the discussion on the Old Testament as history and biography. I have not discussed all of the biographical portraits in the OT. Many similar observations could be made about the biographical portraits of Moses, David or Joseph. I note further that there are two books named after women—Ruth and Esther. The book of Ruth is the story of two women, Ruth and Naomi, who are both equally important in the story. In fact, there is no male, not even Boaz who eventually marries Ruth, who receives as much attention as these two women in this

text.

The same questions as were put to the Old Testament will be put to the New Testament. Is the New Testament History? Like the question of history in the OT, the issue of the historicity of the NT is a matter of considerable debate and scholarly production.⁵⁶ I will give only a small sketch. Also like the scholarly debates about the OT, the question of the historicity of the NT is focused on the performance of history in these texts. There is less concern to analyze the intention of the authors than on the matter of ascertaining what Jesus and Paul really said and did. My impression of the debate is rather that scholars today usually assume that the intention of the NT was to write history or at least to use the form of history-writing to convince the reader that what was being reported was actually true to past events.

Early in the twentieth century Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* was the beginning of the so-called Quest for the Historical Jesus.⁵⁷ In the middle of the century Rudolf Bultmann argued that there was a distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.⁵⁸ In other words, there was very little of the historical Jesus to be found in the New Testament.

In the 1980s the Jesus Seminar began under the influence of Robert Funk.⁵⁹ This seminar focused on the sayings of Jesus and evaluated the probable historical authenticity of the words ascribed to Jesus.⁶⁰ Like Bultmann the Jesus Seminar has concluded that very little of the Gospels records something Jesus said or did. John Dominic Crossan, for example, has argued

⁵⁶For an annotated bibliography of NT literature see Scott McKnight and Matthew Williams, *The Synoptic Gospels: An Annotated Bibliography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000).

⁵⁷Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (London: A. and C. Black, 1926).

⁵⁸Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith and Ermine Huntress Lantero (New York: Scribner's, 1958).

⁵⁹Robert Funk, Bernard Brandon Scott, and J.R. Butts, eds., *The Parables of Jesus* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1988).

⁶⁰For a brief evaluative discussion of Jesus Seminar in general and a book review of a text published by the seminar, *The Five Gospels*, see Richard Hays, "The Corrected Jesus," *First Things* 43 (May 1994): 43-48. For a longer evaluation see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

that Jesus is misrepresented in the Gospels. Although Jesus was a Jewish man of his time, he was a subversive and revolutionary figure in a way that the Gospels do not present him.⁶¹ Crossan, like others in the Jesus Seminar, perceive an older source of Jesus' words and deeds than the Gospels. This source is often referred to as *Q* and is the shorthand way of referring to a now lost *quelle* (German for "source") that existed before the canonical Gospels were written. Crossan and other Jesus Seminar authors also give attention to extra Biblical material such as *The Gospel of Thomas* in their work. Thus using these other sources has led Crossan to conclude that Jesus a figure who teaches about radical equality of people and the ability of all to have direct access to God without the need for religious institutions or mediators. Crossan understands Jesus to have actually been something like a Cynic philosopher rather than the portrait that the Gospels paint.⁶²

The historicity of the Apostle Paul has also been the subject of debate.⁶³ Much of the New Testament is typically regarded as having been written by Paul. The letters from Romans to Ephesians have all been thought to be of Pauline authorship at one point in Christian history. The Pauline authorship of some of these letters is now typically thought to be dubious. It is doubted, for example that Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians. But letters such as Romans and Corinthians are generally thought to be of Pauline origin. The question of the historicity of Paul must further take into account the book of Acts. This book is a history of the early church beginning with the missionary work of Peter, the disciple of Jesus, quite shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus. While Peter is a central figure in the first twelve chapters or so, the

⁶¹John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: Harper Sanfrancisco, 1995).

⁶²Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity, 1997), 72. Marcus Borg puts it this way: "What picture of Jesus emerges in Crossan's book? I will put it in a sentence and then unpack it: Jesus was a Jewish Cynic peasant with an alternative social vision." *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1994), 34.

⁶³Some have suggested that Paul is in fact the founder of the Christian faith rather than Jesus. For discussion on this matter see A.N. Wilson *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997) and N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Chirstianity?* (Oxford: Lion Books, 1997).

story of the early Church quickly becomes dominated by the deeds of Paul.⁶⁴

The scholars listed above have taken seriously the question of what can be known about what Jesus and Paul actually said and did. They have applied modern methods of historical inquiry to the internal and external evidence of veracity. This kind of activity is something which Christians applaud (or at least should applaud) even if they do not agree with the conclusions of these scholars. As with the scholars of the OT, I note two points. First, important work is being done by those who have concluded that the Biblical canon has very little historical accuracy. Second, while I appreciate this work I find the work of other scholars to be more persuasive. I will briefly mention a few scholars who have also brought modern historical methods to bear on the canonical texts but have found reason for less scepticism. In particular I will briefly focus on scholarship of Luke and Acts as these texts are often categorized as biography and history.

N.T. Wright is an example of someone who has argued that the NT has greater veracity than other authors have claimed.⁶⁵ He is noted for having engaged the work of Marcus Borg, who is sceptical about the historical accuracy of the Gospels, both in print and in public debate.⁶⁶ Wright is, therefore, conversant with both NT scholarship and with the arguments of those who think the real Jesus was much different than the portrait in the NT. Even though Wright has refuted a more radical scepticism about what can be known about Jesus he has also said that it will not do

to suggest that because we have the Gospels in our New Testaments, we know all we need to about Jesus. . . . Christian traditions have often radically misunderstood the picture of Jesus in those Gospels, and only by hard, historical work can we move toward

⁶⁴For a survey of the scholarship on the historicity of Paul see Ben Witherington III, *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998).

⁶⁵Other scholars who hold a similar position would include Richard B. Hayes, Gordon Fee, and Luke Timothy Johnson. These scholars do not hold identical positions on the historical veracity of the NT but share a sense that the history is more trustworthy than not.

⁶⁶Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).

a fuller comprehension of what the Gospels themselves were trying to say.⁶⁷

Wright is not arguing for a simplistic reading of the portrait of Jesus but rather that even if a less sceptical attitude towards the historicity of the NT is adopted, much hard work needs to be done in order to appreciate what the authors intended to communicate.

David Aune classifies Luke-Acts as history and in fact it is a two-volume example of a general history.⁶⁸ Aune defines a general history as something that narrates “the important historical experiences of a single national group from their origin to recent past.”⁶⁹ He classifies Polybius as the earliest general historian whose work survives, at least in part. Aune may be correct but an observation is required here. Aune understands that the intent of the author of Luke-Acts was to present what happened. Even if it is true that Luke-Acts cannot be forced into the biographical mode it seems that there is much in Acts that is biographical.⁷⁰ The text focuses on individuals in a sequential way. Peter, Stephen, and Philip take up the lion’s share of the first chapters of Acts. The journeys of Paul dominate the latter sections.⁷¹

The author of Luke-Acts writes that it is his intent to tell you the truth of what really happened. One of the most interesting features of Luke-Acts is the prefatory material at the beginning of Luke. As far as Greek and Roman prefaces go, this section is comparatively short. By comparison with the rest of the Bible, this preface is far more of an authorial presence than is

⁶⁷ N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 10-11.

⁶⁸ Although the following observation may make a mountain out of a molehill, the decision to compose Luke and Acts as two volumes is of interest. In a previous chapter it was noted that the Greek literary tradition looked back to Iliad and Odyssey (history and biography) as its formative texts. In the two-volume Luke-Acts, we again note a similar pairing at the beginning of a religious tradition. Of all the Gospel authors Luke-Acts was the most interested in addressing a literate Greco-Roman audience.

⁶⁹ David Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1987), 88.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷¹ Charles Talbert has argued, interestingly, that Acts should be regarded as biography rather than historical monograph. He says that the difference in classifying it as one genre rather than another makes a difference in the interpretation of the focus of the two books. “The issue is whether or not the theological dimensions of the divine plan being worked out in Luke and Acts are the background or the foreground of the narrative. If Luke-Acts or Luke and Acts are biographical, then the divine plan is the backdrop for the Christological ecclesiological focus of the two volumes.” Charles Talbert, “The Acts of the Apostles: Monograph or ‘bios’” in Ben Witherington III, ed. *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), 71.

in much of the history-writing in the OT and in the other Gospels. Here we see an author setting out his intention.

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.⁷²

As has been discussed in the material by John Marincola on Greek and Roman historiography, historians held the primacy of eyewitness as the most authoritative sources. Luke claims that he has eyewitness sources. Historians made claims of effort and competence. Luke states that he is writing an orderly account. This preface and its parallel to Greek and Roman historical styles is an indicator of authorial intent to write about the past.⁷³

Like Aune, I.H. Marshall describes Luke as a historian. The historical and theological tasks are blended in Luke to form a text that expresses both historical and theological forms. Marshall is less concerned with questions of genre than he is with Luke's reliability. Luke purports to give the historical account of Jesus yet he is also attempting to convey a highly subjective message—human salvation as he understands it. In such circumstances can Luke be trusted as a history-writer? Marshall quotes M. Hengel as his answer: "Luke is no less trustworthy than other historians of antiquity."⁷⁴

C.J. Hemer compares Acts to other texts of the time and argues for a high degree of historical accuracy that is at least comparable to its Greek and Roman counterparts.⁷⁵ Hemer's work is like that of Provan, Long and Longman on the OT in the sense that Hemer is attempting

⁷²Luke 1:1-4.

⁷³See Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment*, 120-121.

⁷⁴I.H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970), 225. As has been noted by Charles Talbert it would have been nice if Hengel would have said *which* ancient historians were comparable to the author of Acts. Talbert, "The Acts of the Apostles," 71. Is the author like the good ancient historians or the bad ones?

⁷⁵C.J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

to assess the internal and external evidence of Luke-Acts in order to evaluate its historicity.⁷⁶

There exists solid research on both sides of the debate about the historical reliability of the NT. Since I am persuaded by one side rather than another I will simply note its existence and the arguments that seem the most likely to me and move on to the text of the NT in order to discuss the historical logic that the authors assumed and the character of biographical portraits there.

The historical logic of the NT is similar to the OT. The Book of Matthew has been placed as the first of the texts in the NT. This book begins with a genealogy of Jesus. For those who have studied the OT this genealogy is far from boring. Saying the names of these people brings to mind their stories. “Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar.”⁷⁷ Instantly the reader recalls how Tamar was denied her rights by Judah and how she decided to trick Judah in response. In fact, if a student were to be forced to write an exam on the history of the OT, this page from Matthew would be a rather handy cheat-sheet to be smuggled into the examination room. The genealogy begins with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the sons of Jacob and continues to David. After David are listed Solomon and the kings of Judah. These names are familiar to those who have read the books of Kings or Chronicles. There are names that are new to Matthew such as the names after the last king of Judah until the name of Jesus.⁷⁸ The author does not say where he obtained these names.

This genealogy is important for a number of reasons. The person of Jesus is linked with the faith of the people in this list. As the author of Matthew will later reveal, Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises made to many of the people in this list. The faith of the people in the OT will be shared by Jesus and those who come after him. Part of that faith is a particular understanding of history. The Christians who will follow Jesus adopt the OT understanding of

⁷⁶See also a collection of essays on Acts by Ben Witherington III, ed., *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996).

⁷⁷Matthew 1:3.

⁷⁸As has been observed by careful Bible readers for many centuries, there is another genealogical list given in Luke 3: 23-38. This list is significantly different from the one in Matthew. For example the list in Luke traces the genealogy of Jesus from Nathan, the son of David rather than from Solomon, son of David.

the importance of knowing about the past as part of knowing about God.

This assertion is borne out in other passages from the NT. Recall that when Moses spoke to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land he reminded them of events in which they had participated. With their own eyes and ears, hands and feet they had watched or even been part of the battles against the King Sihon and King Og. This logic is very similar to what is stated in the epistle of I John.

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you⁷⁹

Like the Israelites, the person who composed this letter had seen and heard with his or her own eyes and ears. The author shared with the Greek and Roman historians the primacy of eyes and ears. Like the OT as well, the edifying import is inherent in the author's view of God's presence in history. Since we know what has really happened we have joyful fellowship with God.

So what, more precisely, have these people seen and heard? The answer to this question is recorded in the Gospels. The first four books of the NT report the words and deeds of Jesus. The logic of the Gospels is that what is reported there will have significant implications for the reader. Towards the end of the Gospel of John the author makes a rare authorial appearance to tell the reader the following:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.⁸⁰

The disciples had seen and heard what Jesus did and are now testifying to those events. And now that you, the reader, know what happened, you have the possibility of true life. In these two

⁷⁹I John 1:1-5a.

⁸⁰John 20:30-31.

texts the authors agree with the OT writers that God reveals himself in history. If you cannot know what happened in the past, you have little hope of knowing God. But through these texts you can know what happened and therefore you can know God.

Paul was a significant contributor to the New Testament canon. He too agreed with the OT understanding of the nature of history and the importance of knowing what really happened as a way of knowing God. The Acts of the Apostles records an event that occurred in the life of Paul the Apostle while he was in Athens. Paul addressed a number of Athenians whom he was attempting to convert. Paul observed that the great number of temples in that city had given him the impression that the people there really believed that the Gods lived in the temples. Paul stated that this was untrue. There was a God who the Athenians did not know. This unknown God, however, need not remain unknowable. There are two ways, stated Paul, to know the true God. One is creation, of which the world and human beings are evidence. The other is history. God is knowable because from one ancestor he made all the nations of the world.⁸¹ Paul could have added that if the Athenians wanted to find out more about this history they should certainly consult the collected works of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Paul derived his personal spiritual authority on his ability to say, “I really know what happened!” In a letter which he wrote to the Christians in Galatia, Paul tells the recipients that he has the authority to rebuke and chastise them because he really did meet God one day on the road to Damascus. Paul had been zealous to defend the faith of Judaism against Christians but then God revealed himself to Paul and furthermore revealed the truth of the Christian claims about Jesus. After this event Paul converted to Christianity and later became a Christian missionary. Paul conferred with James the brother of Jesus—presumably learning much about Jesus through this excellent source.⁸² It is because God revealed himself to Paul in a particular

⁸¹Acts 17:22-31.

⁸²Galatians 1:11-24.

time and place and because at that time he was given a particular task that he can say what he does about God. It is almost expected, therefore, that Paul used the example of Abraham later on in the text to make his point even stronger.⁸³ Abraham too was a man in a particular time and place and God revealed his will to Abraham as well. The implicit logic of this section seems to be that if the audience believes that God met Abraham in a particular time and space and that this real experience gave Abraham authority, the same is true of Paul.

The link between the historical narrative of the OT and the continuation of the historical logic of the OT into the early Church is made more explicit in a passage from Hebrews. “What is faith?” asks the author of Hebrews. What follows, interestingly, is not a discussion of systematic theology or a philosophical dialogue. The chapter that follows this question is primarily a list of names from the OT. If you want to know what faith is, take a good look at the people of God in the past. It is distinctly similar to the genealogical list in Matthew (and would also constitute a good cheat-sheet for that OT history exam). The author of Hebrews says:

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”⁸⁴

Abraham is not the last person in that list. Moses and many others are listed as well. The culmination of that list, however, comes with the example of Jesus. If you want to know what faith is, the author is telling the reader, look to the example of all of these people of the past. Above all, however, look to the example of Jesus.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race

⁸³Galatians 3: 15-18.

⁸⁴Hebrews 11:8-12.

that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.⁸⁵

Jesus really did endure crucifixion. He is the ultimate example of one who ran with perseverance and the culmination to the list of others who ran with endurance. Jesus is the author and perfecter of the faith of the people on the list before him. The passage in Hebrews still has one remarkable aspect left to discuss. Although Jesus was the greatest fulfillment of God's self-revelation in history, Jesus' life, death and resurrection did not bring about the end of history. Others, after Jesus, will run the race with perseverance. Indeed the reader is meant to participate in that very race. The Christian, however, moves forward empowered by the cloud of witnesses and the knowledge of the life and death of Jesus. Note also that this passage in Hebrews imitates the biographical character of the OT. It is history as a biographical list. The intent of the biographical list is edification. The faith of the reader is to be built up as he or she is reminded of the many people of the past to whom God was revealed in the events of their lives.

The examples from the New Testament are internal evidence that the early Christians took history seriously. They, like the authors of the OT, agree that it is important to know what really happened if you are to know God. There is external evidence, also, of this same logic. The primary example of this is in the canon debates. As the early Church began to see the need to designate particular texts as more authoritative than others, they had to set criteria for inclusion or exclusion from the canon. One of the criteria was apostolic authority. In short, the criterion of apostolicity was evidence that a particular text had been written by an apostle—in other words, an eye-witness to the events that a particular text described. Apostolicity was not the only criterion—the other two were the rule of faith and the consensus of the church. Nonetheless,

⁸⁵Hebrews 12:1-3..

apostolicity was perhaps the most important of the criteria. “As primary sources the apostles and their followers were seen as the trustworthy exponents of the original revelation given in Jesus’ Church.”⁸⁶ Bruce Metzger makes the point even more clear. He states that it was important to early Christians that claims of apostolic authority were validated by meeting standards of historical veracity.⁸⁷ It was important that Christians be able to make claims of historical accuracy because of challenges to the tradition as exemplified by that of Marcion. Marcion claimed that Christians had badly misrepresented Jesus in the Gospels and he suggested that Jesus had in fact said and done something quite different.⁸⁸ The historical logic of the NT is a direct heir to the historical logic of the OT and in various passages deliberately links itself to the OT. Furthermore, the NT, as the OT, understands that edifying content and religious instruction cannot be removed from knowledge of a true past.

The final question of this chapter examines the biographical character of the New Testament. Are the Gospels, for example, biographies? David Aune argues that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John are a type of ancient biography. Aune states that although the “Gospels have no *exact* literary analogues in antiquity” the same could be true of many Classical texts. *Agricola*, for instance, is without an exact parallel. Nevertheless, these Gospels do fit within the parameters of Greco-Roman biographical forms.⁸⁹ The best treatment of the genre of the Gospels is by Richard Burridge. His text, *What are the Gospels?* is persuasive. Early in the twentieth century, Rudolf Bultmann had described the Gospels as an original and a unique phenomenon; they were *sui generis*.⁹⁰ Although not the first to question Bultmann’s

⁸⁶Andrie B. Du Toit, “Canon” *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce Metzger and Michael Coogan New York: Oxford University, 1993), 104.

⁸⁷Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 253.

⁸⁸R. M. Grant, “The New Testament Canon” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome*, vol. 1, eds., P.R. Ackroyd and C.R. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1970), 294.

⁸⁹David Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, 46.

⁹⁰Denys Hay, *Annalists and Historians: Western Historiography from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1977). Hay observes that the unique contribution of the Gospels not genre but subject

conclusion, BurrIDGE has more recently suggested a different perspective. He argues that the Classical genre which the Gospels most closely resembles is biography.⁹¹ BurrIDGE compares the Gospels with ten biographies from the Greco-Roman world.⁹² Categories of comparison include the way in which biographies begin and end, the subject of the text, characterizing external features (such as metre, size, structure, scale, literary units, sources, and methods of characterization) and characterizing internal features (such as style, tone, mood, attitude, values, and social setting). BurrIDGE even conducts statistical analysis on the kinds of verbs used in the biographies of the Greeks and Romans as compared to the kinds of verbs used in the Gospels. The NT, then, has four important biographical portraits.

What can be said about the character of these biographies? First, that there are a number of important differences between the character of biography in the NT as compared to the OT. There are a number of reasons for this. The first difference is that the four Gospels are all about the same person. No character in the OT received that kind of repetitive attention. The story of King David, to be sure, is repeated in Chronicles in shortened form after its extended version in Samuel but even a figure as important as David does not receive the amount of repeated treatment as Jesus does. I hasten to add that even though much of the four Gospels is the same, the four Gospels are four distinct portraits of Jesus. The early Church, however, placed so much authority on the life of Christ that they decided to include four accounts of the life of Jesus in their authoritative canon.⁹³

matter. For the first time in history-writing, the focus is on ordinary people rather than gods, heroes, political and military elites or the upper classes. Perhaps Hay's observation can be taken even further. If it is true that biography allowed for the inclusion of the ordinary (non-political, non-military) aspects of life, it may be that the Gospel authors gravitated towards the genre of biography in order to discuss their non-political, non-military yet historical events.

⁹¹BurrIDGE, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison With Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), 9-11.

⁹²These ten biographies are: Isocrates's *Evagoras*, Xenophon's *Agesilaus*, Satyrus's *Euripides*, Nepos's *Atticus*, Philo's *Moses*, Tacitus's *Agricola*, Plutarch's *Cato Minor*, Suetonius's *Julius Caesar* and *Augustus*, and Philostratus's *Apollonius of Tyana*.

⁹³For a discussion of the four distinct portraits of the Gospels see Richard A. BurrIDGE, *Four Gospels One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994).

The second difference is that the authors claim that the person who is the focus of the Gospels, Jesus, is not only human but also divine. It is difficult to argue, for example, that Jesus is an ordinary man to whom extraordinary events occur. The authors did not believe that Jesus was an ordinary person but rather quite the opposite. The Gospel authors claimed that Jesus was the Son of God. Furthermore, Jesus performed many extraordinary deeds. He cast out demons, healed the sick, turned water into wine, and had an uncanny talent for knowing where to fish at a particular moment. That Jesus initiated and performed these extraordinary deeds was meant to communicate to the reader that he was not an ordinary person.

A second point about the character of NT biography is the idea of *imitatio*, or imitation. For Christians it is helpful to have four biographies of Christ included in the New Testament since there is the expectation that the apostles, and all followers of Christ, will imitate Christ. The descriptions of the life of Christ and the apostles are, therefore, necessary for Christian faith and practice. A direct discussion of imitation is found in Paul but is linked to the importance of the biographies of Jesus. Paul himself urged his reader both to have the mind of Christ and to imitate his own example. Paul instructed us to imitate Christ's attitude in all things.

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. . . . Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.⁹⁴

The most important imitation is of Christ but Paul's readers were also supposed to imitate himself. In another letter Paul says:

Therefore I urge you to imitate me. For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.⁹⁵

There is, therefore a two-fold *imitatio* within the NT: *imitatio Christi* and *imitatio Pauli*. First a believer imitates Jesus but also Paul. If we are to be imitators of Paul, it seems logical that there

⁹⁴Philippians 2:1-5.

⁹⁵I Corinthians 4:16-17.

would be other leaders that are worthy of imitation. This kind of theology, was carried out by the early Christians and was part of the beginning of the medieval interest in the saints. For Paul was an example of how to live as a person of God, as were other leaders. This passage could also be indicative of an *imitatio Timothi*. Paul wants Christians to imitate Christ just as they had been taught by Paul (therefore imitating Paul's example of faith). But since Paul could not be there Timothy would represent Paul's teaching for him and Christians could therefore trust the teaching of Timothy and imitate his example of faith. As time passes this sense of imitation will pass on to the martyrs of the Christian faith. I do want to qualify this statement somewhat, however. It is not that the OT lacks any sense of *imitatio*. As the passage from Hebrews reveals, the people of the OT were models of faith. The impetus and even the imperative of imitation are heightened, however, in the NT in part because of Paul's direct discussion of it. With regard to Jesus, furthermore, the imitation is largely unqualified.⁹⁶ Whereas the patriarchs and kings of Jewish history were both models of faith and examples of those who disobeyed and sometimes even committed evil deeds, Jesus was the perfecter of faith.

These are two important ways in which the character of biography in the NT is different from the OT. There are, however, similarities as well. While Jesus might not be an ordinary person, the rest of the people in these accounts are. Before continuing with that point I must first make a rather large caveat. Some of these ordinary people, however, do initiate and perform miraculous deeds. The Book of Acts, for example, reports that Peter healed a crippled beggar.⁹⁷ An Old Testament parallel might be the miracles reported in the books of 1 and 2 Kings. Here two prophets named Elijah and Elisha were empowered by God to perform such deeds as miraculously keeping a food supply from diminishing during a drought, curing a woman's son

⁹⁶ This largely unqualified imperative to imitate Christ has been an important discussion in the history of Christianity. Even though Christians are called to imitate Jesus they have to think about how they will imitate Christ given that they are not first-century Jewish men living in Palestine, let alone that Jesus is thought to be God. Then again, the imitation of Paul is also complicated even though there is no claim of his divinity. The imitation of the saints, it seems, is a task which requires thoughtful engagement.

⁹⁷ Acts 3:1-10.

of sickness, raising a boy from the dead and healing a man named Naaman of leprosy.⁹⁸ These were, then, ordinary people empowered to perform miracles. These miracles, however, have a very important point. When Elijah healed the sick son of a widow, she responded, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD is in your mouth.”⁹⁹ When Peter healed the crippled beggar Peter said: “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.”¹⁰⁰ The beggar’s response was to praise God—not Peter. The miracles of the Old Testament prophets and Peter were the opposite of the miracle of Moses performed when he brought water from a stone. Here Moses did not announce that the power behind this miracle belonged to God before causing water to appear and God was angry about this crucial omission.

Again, the people of the New Testament were ordinary people. The disciples were fishermen, tax collectors, and zealots. The women who follow him included wives and one woman who was formerly possessed by demons. Ordinary men, women and even children are the people of these accounts. These ordinary people were distinct from one another. Peter and Paul, for example, perhaps the two most important apostles, were quite different from one another and in fact had distinctly different experiences of Jesus and had distinctly different careers as leaders of the early Church. Peter was a disciple of Christ who spent a number of years with Jesus. When Jesus called Peter to be a fisher of men, Peter left his fishing career and followed Jesus. He witnessed the miracles of Jesus. When he saw Jesus walking on the water, Peter went out of the boat to walk on the water towards Jesus (and when he began to sink, it was Jesus who had to save him from drowning). Paul, on the other hand, persecuted Christians after the death of Jesus. As he was travelling on the road to Damascus, he was blinded by a bright light and heard the voice of God. There are, of course, similarities between Peter and Paul. When Paul finally encountered Jesus he too left his former career and became a Christian. The

⁹⁸ 1 Kings 17: 8-24 and 2 Kings 4-5.

⁹⁹ 1 Kings 17:24.

¹⁰⁰ Acts 3:6.

two were distinct in their approach to mission work. Paul seemed to have embraced the mission to Gentile and Jewish people whereas Peter struggled to accept the work of missions among the Gentiles. Whereas Paul had needed a vision in order to come to faith, Peter needed a vision to understand the mission to the Gentiles. Peter, who had no problem preaching to fellow Jews in the temple, or to the Jewish crowds who gathered for the Jewish festival of Pentecost, received a divine dream. In this dream he saw something like a sheet being lowered from heaven and on it were all kinds of animals which Jewish law had declared as unclean for eating. A voice commanded Peter to eat those animals. This command was repeated three times. Peter came to realize that he must not hesitate to associate with Gentiles. He then went to the house of Gentile named Cornelius and there Peter explained what he has learned:

I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. . . . We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.¹⁰¹

This passage demonstrates that Peter had to come to an awareness of the mission to the Gentiles and in this sense differed from Paul who seemed to have no difficulty with this concept even though Paul's Jewish credentials were in no way inferior to Peter's. I could have shortened the quotation from Peter to make this point. I simply observe that in this passage again we see that Peter, like Paul and the Gospel authors, understood that he was an eyewitness to the historical event of Jesus and that knowledge of this truth was the impetus for his present actions.

Some of the people of the New Testament are not plaster saints. The portrait of Peter, one of the most important of the twelve disciples, is of an ordinary fisherman who at times is an

¹⁰¹ Acts 10 34-43.

example of faith and at other times, the opposite. When Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was, it was Peter who answered: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

To this Jesus replied:

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.¹⁰²

These are powerful words indeed! For his proclamation of faith Peter received a new name and the keys of heaven and earth. Later Peter would be one of only three disciples who witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus and the presence of Moses and Elijah with Jesus.¹⁰³

This same Peter, the rock on whom the Church will be built, denied Jesus. Jesus warned Peter that he would deny him when Jesus was about to face death. Since the disciples failed to understand or believe Jesus when he told them that he must die, Peter did not believe that he would ever deny Jesus. Yet after Jesus is arrested Peter follows Jesus to Caiaphas’ house (the place where the scribes and elders had gathered to try Jesus). When Peter was recognized while waiting outside he denied that he ever knew Jesus.¹⁰⁴ Peter exemplified what was best and worst in the disciples.

The final point to observe about the character of NT biography is that like the OT there are a lot of women. Like the OT, there are fewer women than men presented and there are fewer lines of text given to women than to men. Nevertheless, when reading the Gospel of Luke, for example, you will learn about a number of women. In fact, the first people discussed are a married couple named Zachariah and Elizabeth. Both these characters are equally developed. Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist and she was the first person in the text to recognize

¹⁰² Matthew 16:16-20.

¹⁰³ Matthew 17:1-13.

¹⁰⁴ Matthew 26:57-75.

that Jesus was the Son of God—no small part to play. Elizabeth was pregnant when the also pregnant Mary visited her. The baby leaped in Elizabeth’s womb when Mary greeted her and Elizabeth, filled with the Spirit, declared that in Mary’s womb was the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Lord.¹⁰⁵

Of course the second woman in the narrative of Luke is Mary, the mother of Jesus. We learn that an angel visited Mary to tell her of the coming birth of Jesus. After Mary heard Elizabeth’s words, Mary sang a song of praise.¹⁰⁶ Mary continues to be important in the narrative and especially in the stories of Jesus birth and early childhood. When Jesus was a youth and was left behind in the Temple Jesus’ parents came looking for him. It was Mary whose words to Jesus were recorded, not Joseph’s. “Child why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.”¹⁰⁷

Women are also prominent in the stories of Jesus’ miracles. Jesus visited the town of Nain and saw a funeral procession of the only son of a widow. Jesus saw this and understood the great sorrow that was hers and had compassion on her. He raised her son from the dead.¹⁰⁸ In other examples it is women themselves who are healed or raised from the dead. Luke tells how a man named Jairus had an only daughter who was so sick that she was on the point of death. Jairus came to Jesus to beg him to heal her but while he was speaking with Jesus he was told that his daughter had died while he was gone. Jesus went to Jairus’s house and raised the girl from the dead.¹⁰⁹ The story of Jairus’s daughter is interwoven with another story of a woman. This woman had been haemorrhaging for twelve years and comes to Jesus believing that if she could just touch him she would be healed. When she touched Jesus she was healed. Jesus wanted to know who touched him and would not go to Jairus’ house until he could speak to the

¹⁰⁵ Luke 1:39-45.

¹⁰⁶ Luke 1: 46-56.

¹⁰⁷ Luke 1:48

¹⁰⁸ Luke 7:11-17.

¹⁰⁹ Luke 8:40-42, 49-56.

woman face to face. When he spoke to her he gave her words of reassurance.¹¹⁰ Another time Jesus healed a crippled woman.¹¹¹

Women were important friends to Jesus even if no women were listed among his disciples. Luke gave the names of the women who followed Jesus around during his ministry:

The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.¹¹²

As the end of this passage reveals, these women were not only friends but also financial backers. The latter is not attributed to the male disciples. Other friends of Jesus were Mary, Martha and their brother, Lazarus. Jesus visited these siblings at their home. Jesus' verbal interaction with Lazarus is not recorded. What is recorded is Jesus' discussions with Mary and Martha.¹¹³ Some of Jesus' highest words of praise were given to a woman who he observed in the temple. She was a destitute widow and yet she put her last copper coins into the treasury. Jesus commended her offering as better than anyone else's because she had given all of her wealth.¹¹⁴ Women are important in the death and resurrection accounts of Jesus. It was the women followers of Jesus who took care of Jesus' body after he died.¹¹⁵ These same women were the first to go to the tomb of Jesus and it is the women who were met by an angel at the tomb. The angel's message of the resurrection of Jesus was given to the women. These women were the ones who told the male disciples of Jesus' resurrection.¹¹⁶

The historical intent and logic of the Bible are consistent between the Old and New Testament. There are also many similarities in the biographical character of the Old and New Testament. But like the passage in Hebrews indicates, history and biography did not come to an

¹¹⁰ Luke 8:43-48.

¹¹¹ Luke 13: 10-17.

¹¹² Luke 8:1-3.

¹¹³ Luke 10:38-42.

¹¹⁴ Luke 21:1-4.

¹¹⁵ Luke 23:55-56.

¹¹⁶ Luke 24:1-10.

end when the last page of the canon had been written. It should be expected, therefore, that anyone shaped by the Biblical tradition would write critical and edifying biography.