TRUTHFUL FICTION: NEW QUESTIONS TO OLD ANSWERS ON PHILOSTRATUS' *LIFE OF APOLLONIUS*

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WITHIN THE PAST TWENTY YEARS four extensive works have appeared treating Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (*VA*) from various literary, historical, and cultural perspectives. These include E. L. Bowie's "Apollonius of Tyana: Tradition and Reality," Maria Dzielska's *Apollonius of Tyana in Legend and History,* Graham Anderson's *Philostratus: Biography and Belles Lettres in the Third Century A.D.,* and my own lengthy chapter in *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World.*[1] The popularity of what has often been considered an "offbeat" text is striking—and largely explicable given concurrent interest in such subjects as the Second Sophistic, the novel, holy men, and asceticism. At this juncture it is thus appropriate to ask: how far have these studies advanced our appreciation and understanding of this text? In answer to this question, I propose first to critique the assumptions and methods of this body of work on *VA* and, second, to suggest that new insights into the nature of ancient fiction would provide both a resolution to old scholarly impasses and a more fruitful agenda for research.

Little is known about the historical Apollonius. He must have been born early in the first century C.E. in Tyana in Cappadocia and died sometime during or after the reign of Nerva (96–98). So little remains of sources prior to *VA* that the most that can be said further both with certainty and without fear of "contamination" from posthumous representations is that Apollonius appears to have been a wandering ascetic/philosopher/wonderworker of a type common to the eastern part of the early empire.[2] Philostratus' work, which appeared a century after

[1] Bowie 1978, Dzielska 1986, Anderson 1986, Francis 1995.

[2] These prior sources include the first surviving (and highly uncomplimentary) reference, in Lucian (*Alex.* 5), a collection of purported letters, a so-called testament of Apollonius, a book by Maximus of Aegeae concerning Apollonius' activities in that city,

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the death of its hero, is usually thought to have been published sometime after the death of the empress Julia Domna in 217.[3] For a biography *VA* is extraordinarily long, eight books requiring two Loeb volumes. The work begins with a description of the birth of a "greater than Pythagoras" (1.2) and one who would "approach the gods" (1.5), then follows Apollonius' prodigious youth through his devotion to piety and learning, especially in regard to the god Asclepius. With his early training perfected, Apollonius sets out to discover the source of piety and wisdom among the Brahmans of India, which allows Philostratus to provide his reader with two and one-half books full of travel, adventure, and esoteric philosophy.[4] It is at the very beginning of this journey, while in Nineveh (1.19), that Apollonius first meets his lifelong companion and disciple Damis. Philostratus asserts that Damis kept a record of Apollonius' ideas, discourses, and prophecies and that a descendant of Damis' family presented these to Julia Domna (1.3). The empress, in turn, gave these "tablets" (*deltoi*) to Philostratus with the command that he recast them in more appropriate literary style.[5] It is these memoirs which, according to Philostratus, form the authoritative basis of his own work.

Upon his return from India, Apollonius is acclaimed by the Greek cultural world and becomes actively involved in the affairs of the cities of Asia Minor and Greece (4.2–33), even journeying to Rome to confront Nero (4.35–47), in an episode which presages Apollonius' climac-

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and a biography by one Moiragenes, which Philostratus explicitly warns his readers against in *VA* 1.3–4, 1.19. See Bowie 1978, 1663–85; Speyer 1974; and Francis 1995, 85–89.

[3]Since the work was commissioned by the empress (*VA* 1.3) but not dedicated to her—meager but plausible evidence, as is the case with so much concerning *VA*. That *VA* predates Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists* (*VS*) is established by a reference to the former work at *VS* 570.

[4]Though not immediately relevant to discussion here, a recent and intriguing argument against the historicity of Apollonius' Indian journey has been offered by Simon Swain (1995).

[5]In 1.3 Philostratus states that these memoirs were written on "tablets" (*deltoi*). As will be seen below, the translation of *deltoi* here is crucial to one argument regarding the novelistic character of *VA*. The passage is worth citing in the original: οὗτος τῷ Ἀπολλωνίῳ προσφιλοσοφήσας ἀποδημίας τε αὐτοῦ ἀναγέγραφεν, ὧν κοινωνῆσαι καὶ αὐτός φησι, καὶ γνώμας καὶ λόγους καὶ ὁπόσα ἐς πρόγνωσιν εἶπε. καὶ προσήκων τις τῷ Δάμιδι τὰς δέλτους τῶν ὑπομνημάτων τούτων οὔπω γιγνωσκωμένας ἐς γνῶσιν ἤγαγεν Ἰουλίᾳ τῇ βασιλίδι. It is important to note that this passage allows for a number of subtle but significant variants in interpretation and would benefit from a complete, dedicated philological study of Philostratus—a task that remains to be done.

tic confrontation with Domitian. He journeys throughout the Mediterranean world, discoursing on true philosophy and religion, preaching Greek cultural ideals, prophesying, and performing the occasional miracle. He visits the gymnosophists of Egypt, and reaches the height of his reputation when Vespasian summons him to Alexandria to solicit his advice and blessing upon accession to imperial dignity (5.27–41). In the final two books, Apollonius is arrested and imprisoned by the unworthy son of Vespasian. Brought before Domitian, he refutes the accusations made against him and, as proof of both his innocence and his superior philosophical nature, simply vanishes from sight and materializes at the coast, where the faithful Damis has booked passage back to Greece. The episode allows Philostratus to deliver a reprise of the entire work and a virtual *apologia* in the form of a formal defense speech which Apollonius prepared but never delivered to the emperor, and which occupies more than half of book 8 (8.7.1–16). *VA* concludes in short order with a description of various legends concerning Apollonius' death, none of which Philostratus considers definitive; the very last chapter relates a miraculous appearance made by Apollonius after his death, for the express purpose of teaching that the soul is immortal (8.31).

Even from this brief synopsis, it is clear that elements of invention and reality are not only juxtaposed in *VA* but shaded one into the other so as to blur the distinctions between them. Modern scholars, however, have consistently approached *VA* with the view that fiction and history are mutually exclusive and antithetical categories. The first and fundamental task here is thus to expose the flaws of this overly schematic view and show how it has caused any element of *VA* deemed "novelistic" to be dismissed as mere sophistic invention, compounding misunderstanding of Philostratus and misinterpretation of his text. Next we must consider that this overly rigid conceptual distinction between fiction and history will have been quite alien to ancient readers who could, more readily than moderns, believe something to be truthful though not factual. Indeed, ensuing discussion will demonstrate that it was ancient historiography itself which first employed this complex dynamic of truthful fiction (as opposed to the merely plausible fiction of the modern historical novel), sharing modes of invention and presentation with other rhetorical and literary productions. There was, in fact, an entire repertoire of literary strategies shared by both fiction and history available to Philostratus in constructing his work. This, then, draws us to a reinterpretation of the "novelistic" elements of *VA* as means to facilitate belief and communicate truth.

Turning to the scholarship on *VA,* it appears at first glance to be steeped in controversy. Bowie and Anderson in particular stake out opposite and antithetical positions which link the literary form of *VA* to questions of its historical credibility—focusing on issues of anachronism, literary imitation, and whether the ever-devoted Damis really existed. Beneath these disagreements, however, lies a deeper and less articulated issue. Bowie presents *VA* as "novelistic" or "fictional" and thereby concludes that Philostratus intended this work to be merely an entertaining piece of sophistic literature, not meant to be taken seriously, and certainly not to be taken as history.[6] Dzielska largely follows Bowie on these points.[7] Anderson, in turn, goes to extremes to argue in favor of historicity—even to the point of identifying Damis from later Arabic sources—ultimately to show that *VA* should not be relegated purely to the realm of fantasy.[8] This rigid dichotomy between fiction and history, entertainment and seriousness, though called into question by B. P. Reardon seven years prior to Bowie's work,[9] has nevertheless dominated the discussion.[10]

In an earlier work on *VA* I sought to obviate this dichotomy first

[6]Reardon had reached similar conclusions, through different channels: "Il crée une oeuvre variée, dont l'élément commun est qu'elle est surtout le produit d'un artiste en littérature, et non d'un homme convaincu de quoi que ce soit" (1971, 190). And "En somme, il a 'remanié' Apollonios pour servir ses propres fins littéraires: il veut simplement captiver l'intérêt du lecteur, sans trop chercher la vérité. . . . Il cherche l'intéressant, au point éventuellement d'écarter le vrai" (1971, 266).

[7]The area of Dzielska's original contribution, the nature and dissemination of Apollonius' post- and non-Philostratean legends, lies outside the scope of this essay. Her work is cited here only as it is relevant to issues under discussion, but it is certainly a worthy piece of scholarship in its own right and valuable for its collection of diverse evidence and testimony on Apollonius. Dzielska's argument (1986, 27–35) that Apollonius was not born until ca. 40 C.E. must, however, be rejected; see Bowie 1989.

[8]Anderson 1986, 155–73. For refutation of the identification of Damis see Edwards 1991.

[9]Reardon 1971, 410–11.

[10]Both Bowie and Anderson inherit a wealth of scholarship with regard to their positions, as they themselves acknowledge. The highlights of the history of scholarship can be summarized as follows. E. Meyer (1917) first called the historicity of Damis and *VA* into question as a correction to R. Reitzenstein (1906). This view, with some exceptions, dominated until F. Grosso (1954) endeavored to rehabilitate *VA* as a historical source. Bowie (1978) refuted Grosso's arguments as having no formal validity and reasserted Meyer's position. This, in turn, prompted Anderson (1986) to argue against Bowie and assume a position generally similar to that of Grosso. More extensive histories can be found in Bowie 1978, 1652–55 (in fullest detail); Anderson 1986, 131 n. 2; and Francis 1995, 86–89.

by simply redefining the historicity of the text, arguing that its historical value pertains to Philostratus' own time of the early third century and urging that the "Quest of the Historical Apollonius" of the first century be abandoned.[11] The point concerning historical value remains important, but at the same time it entailed skirting any literary discussion of *VA,* lest such a discussion, per Bowie's arguments, discredit the social–historical value of the text. Though seeking to undermine the wall that had been constructed between fiction and history—or literary study and social history—I ultimately only reinforced its rigidity. Perhaps because *VA* is such a long and complex text, those who study it have consistently been pushing into prominence only parts and aspects of the text, and applying often erudite and exquisite methodologies to the wrong questions.

This contention can be further illustrated with some arguments taken from this body of scholarship that have specific reference to the issue of fiction and history. From the very beginning of his article, Bowie makes his assumptions clear:

> Investigators of Apollonius must try to determine how much belongs to the first-century character and how much is attributable to elaborations in the second century and to Philostratus himself, while a student of Philostratus will wish to concentrate on the latter part of the enquiry and add the question how far and with what intent Philostratus was perpetrating a work of fiction.[12]

A valid agenda this, but one which skews towards an anticipated result by viewing history and fiction as black and white, mutually exclusive and antithetical categories, and by asserting that an analysis which then sorts the text into either one or the other category will be the primary desideratum of the scholar. In this, Bowie claims to offer no more than a refinement and correction in detail of the position Eduard Meyer initially presented in 1917.[13] Following Meyer, Bowie moves within the space of one short paragraph to the essential thesis: "Damis is an invention of Philostratus, who will not have expected his readers to take him seriously."[14]

[11] Francis 1995, 85, 89, 128–29, 184–86.
[12] Bowie 1978, 1652–53.
[13] See above, note 10.
[14] Bowie 1978, 1653.

To prove Damis a fiction, and *VA* therefore fiction*al,* Bowie proceeds to reveal four crucial anachronisms in the text, arguing on the basis of a careful command of Neronian and Flavian chronology.[15] Having demonstrated that a contemporary, much less eyewitness, source would not have made such fundamental errors of time and fact, Bowie poses the question which serves to advance the distinction between fiction and history to an extreme: "If Damis was not what Philostratus asserts, what was he?"[16] The answer, paradoxically, is that he is a literary device meant to tell Philostratus' reader precisely that *VA* is *not* to be taken seriously! He concludes: "The foregoing arguments are offered to support the view that 'Damis' was most probably an invention of Philostratus himself, and, in that his readers would be expected to recognize the novelistic topos, the connection with Julia Domna cannot be used to warrant his authenticity."[17]

Calling attention to *VA* 1.3, where Philostratus speaks of "tablets" (*deltoi*) containing the so-called memoirs being brought to Julia Domna by a relative of Damis, Bowie draws an analogy to the wooden tablets of both Dictys of Crete and *The Wonders beyond Thule* and speaks of Philostratus' "conscious evocation of a novelistic tone and setting."[18] Drawing further parallels with the Philostratean *Heroicus,* the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyrii,* Iamblichus' *Babyloniaca,* the Historia Alexandri Magni, and other novelistic productions, Bowie quotes with approval Reardon's description of *VA* as "presque un roman."[19] Concluding his

[15]Bowie 1978, 1655–62. The anachronisms in question concern the regnal dates of the Parthian king Vardanes, Apollonius' relation to Musonius Rufus, the depiction of Demetrius the Cynic, and Apollonius' meeting with Vespasian at Alexandria. This, I would hold, is an excellent example of erudite knowledge and method applied to the wrong question. For the opposing response to these arguments see Anderson 1986, 175–97.

[16]Bowie 1978, 1662.

[17]Bowie 1978, 1665–66.

[18]Actually, as Bowie points out (1978, 1663 n. 34), questions about the "*deltoi*" have been with us since J. Göttsching (1889), and the connection to Dictys was made by Speyer (1974). Bowie was, however, the first to draw out the full implications and connections regarding this as a "novelistic" feature. On Dictys see Merkle 1994.

[19]Bowie 1978, 1663–67. It must be noted, however, that Reardon's original comment stresses the "presque." Directly after coining this *bon mot* (1971, 189), Reardon points out that many of the most crucial elements in his definition of the ancient novel are, in fact, missing from *VA*; see also Reardon 1971, 265. Bowie (1994) has given further consideration to these novelistic elements, but in that brief chapter offers no substantive revision or retraction of his earlier position in the *ANRW* article (1978).

argument, Bowie suggests that Philostratus' aim in *VA* was most plausibly that of any professional writer, "to produce a well–rounded and entertaining piece of literature."[20] In the end he must admit how little can actually be determined with certainty regarding the "Ur–Apollonius."[21] The problem is that along the way, he has left us with a text that, by the same token, is largely devoid of any serious meaning whatever.

The great paradox of *VA* scholarship, however, is that the defenders of a "serious" and "historical" text confront the document with the same predispositions regarding fiction and history as their opponents. Compare, for example, Anderson's stated approach to that of Bowie quoted above.

> The problem posed by the *Life* is where and how to draw the line between stylistic presentation, rhetorical exaggeration, and just plain falsehood. The solution may not always lie in detecting deception by Philostratus as often as possible, but rather in recognizing how often it is inseparable from artistic license, sophistic reflex and bona fide historical reconstruction from treacherous sources.[22]

Frankly, I do not think it advances the inquiry much to hold that if and when Philostratus is lying, he might not have been able to help it or, put differently, that Philostratus' intention was to write "real history," and that on those occasions where he is clearly in error, he merely lost control of his sources. Such an approach leaves the student of *VA* with the same task as that prescribed by Bowie: to sift and sort the text into lists of the true and the false. We are left to think of Philostratus' work as either a failed novel or a bad history.

The view of literal, factual history as opposite to and exclusive of novelistic fiction produces a further irony by focusing both positions on excruciatingly narrow questions on which conclusions regarding the entire work, and even Philostratus himself, are perilously built. Nowhere is this more obvious than on the issue of the historical reality of Damis. Bowie's position has been outlined above, and again Anderson follows the same premises, believing that the existence of Damis "must have important consequences for our view of the integrity of Philostratus in

[20]Bowie 1978, 1666.
[21]Bowie 1978, 1686.
[22]Anderson 1986, 123.

other fields."[23] Indeed, it is odd to hear a staunch defender of the historicity of *VA* and the reputation of Philostratus state that with proof of a historical Damis "the whole balance of evidence will have to change, and with it our notion of how bad Philostratus' excesses really are."[24]

What then can be said of this controversy, not only in reference to *VA* but also in terms of the relationship between fiction and history? Glen Bowersock is perhaps more assertive than necessary, but fundamentally correct, when he states:

> With works of imaginative literature there is nothing more ruinous for historical understanding than genre theory or a mindless search for antecedents, origins, and distant parallels.[25]

Or again, and more kindly:

> The invocation of sources and antecedents never provides an explanation of an innovation: they can only reveal, inadequately at best, some of the building blocks that were used to construct it.[26]

The old answers regarding *VA* equate "truth" with "historical reliability," as if the only truth were that of the demonstrable fact, and relegate the historical value of the work to a matter of arguing mere plausibility.

[23] Anderson 1986, 166.

[24] Anderson 1986, 285.

[25] Bowersock 1994, 14–15, in reference to the generation of critics coming after Rohde. In fairness, it should be noted that Anderson makes a similar observation: "It is futile in the end to try to 'explain' *Apollonius* in terms of any single genre. Sophistic encomia were much less rigid than the stereotyped textbook headings would have us believe; and sophists frequently exercised their talents in exploring new combinations of classical authors and classical genres. Here in effect we have the encomium in the form of a biography: the author's apparent expansions are in Platonic dialogue rather than set speeches; while the nature of the subject, and the indications in his undoubtedly extant sources, keep Philostratus on the borderline between novel and hagiography. The label 'sophistic biography' takes account of the compromises Philostratus has made" (1986, 235). As is clear, Anderson does not follow the implications of his first sentence here into the broader and more radical context of Bowersock, and ultimately remains confined in the same sort of genre arguments as Bowie—another example, along with the Damis question, of the narrow focus of *VA* scholarship. The various literary taxonomies suggested for *VA* have been thoroughly and conveniently summarized in Dzielska 1986, 12, and in less detail in Anderson 1986, 236 nn. 1–2; see also Talbert 1978.

[26] Bowersock 1994, 124–25.

The old answers equate the "fictional" with the "novelistic," as if the two were synonymous terms—which they are clearly not. The old answers set "fiction" and "history" as opposite poles, and one only has to consider how the Homeric poems were regarded in antiquity to realize what a false dichotomy this is to impose on the classical world.

Having assessed the shortcomings of previous scholarship regarding the schematized view of fiction and history, and the repercussions this has had on the estimation not only of *VA* itself but also of Philostratus' talent, we may now proceed to examine other, more flexible conceptions. Happily, recent studies in ancient fiction have taken their inspiration from both ancient theory, insofar as this was articulated, and even more so from a fresh, synoptic examination of ancient fictional and historical texts. Here we can integrate ancient practice and recent insights in a way that both obviates the old dichotomies and poses new questions that progress beyond the old answers offered regarding *VA*. For convenience, these new perspectives can be discussed under the broad rubrics of fiction and historiography and of fiction and the novel.[27]

J. R. Morgan has argued that the first condition of fiction is that both writer and reader recognize it for what it is, that there exists a "contract of fictional complicity" between author and audience and, of greater significance, that this contract was first extended to narrative prose precisely in historiography.[28] The first illustrative example that comes to mind is also the most potent and obvious: to what extent are Herodotus and Thucydides fictional? In answering this question, we would all eventually agree that both are fictional, but in different ways, and both are historical, but in different ways.[29] The link between fiction

[27]It is important to emphasize here that the present essay does not attempt to deliver an overview or specific treatment of the ancient novel itself, but only to discuss selected salient points of contact between the novel and *VA* and the broader topic of fiction and history. Work on the ancient novel is frighteningly voluminous; see, e.g., Bowie and Harrison 1993. A workable, recently revised bibliography may be found in Holzberg 1995, 109–26 (this English translation updates Holzberg's original German edition of 1986). Morgan and Stoneman 1994 also provides useful bibliographies at the end of each chapter. Tatum 1994 contains some of the more significant papers presented at the 1989 Dartmouth–NEH conference "The Ancient Novel: Classical Paradigms and Modern Perspectives"; now see also the review essay by Morgan (1996).

[28]Morgan 1993, 186–87, 193. See also Reardon 1991, 46–76, for another excellent discussion of fiction in antiquity.

[29]On this very question, in connection with the matter at hand, see Moles 1993.

and history is so obvious to us all that it is indeed puzzling that we forget it so easily when we begin to discuss Greek literature at the beginning of the Common Era. Bowersock remarks:

> For any coherent and persuasive interpretation of the Roman empire it becomes obvious that fiction must be viewed as part of its history. We have long grown accustomed to hearing of late that history itself is a fiction, or rhetoric, or whatever. The ancients would not have found that a particularly surprising doctrine, inasmuch as they drew only a faint line between myth and history and, as Cicero put it, considered the writing of history an *opus oratorium*—a rhetorical work.[30]

The phenomenon is already well-developed at the very beginnings of history. Are Thucydides' speeches "rhetorical" or "historical"? Does it even make sense to force a choice between the two?

Further examples can be easily elaborated. As Morgan again suggests, what would we have ended up with, had Lucceius provided Cicero with the literarily elaborated and emotionally charged history of his consulship he requested in *Ad Familiares* (5.12)?[31] Plutarch gives lessons on writing biography at the beginning of his life of Alexander which should give us all pause:

> I am not writing histories, but lives. Nor is there always in the most shining deeds a clear manifestation of virtue or wickedness, but rather a little thing or some word or quip often makes a greater revelation of character than great slaughtering battles, vast armies, or besieged cities. Therefore, just as painters get the likenesses of their portraits from the face and the expression of the eyes, in which character is revealed, but could care less about the other parts of their subjects, in the same way I must be permitted to concentrate rather on the marks of the soul and through them to portray the life of each, leaving the great feats to others. (*Alex.* 1.2–3)

Indeed, as Bowersock further notes, Sextus Empiricus placed history proper, fiction, and myth all in "the historical part" (τὸ ἱστορικὸν μέρος) of γραμματική. History proper is the presentation (ἔκθεσις) of truths and what actually happened, whereas πλάσμα is the representation of things that did not happen but resemble things that have hap-

[30]Bowersock 1994, 12.
[31]Morgan 1993, 191.

pened, and myth the representation of things that did not happen and are false (ψευδῆ).[32]

Surely, though, we are on firmer ground when it comes to chronology—the very stuff of history. Fiction and history must be distinguished here, and Bowie's arguments concerning *VA* which are based on anachronisms must hold. Here too Plutarch brings us up short in his comment on the meeting of Solon and Croesus:[33]

> As for his meeting with Croesus, some scholars think to refute it by chronology as made up. But for my part, when a story is so famous and has so many witnesses and—what is a greater consideration—is so appropriate to Solon's character and so worthy of his greatness of soul and wisdom, I do not think it right to sacrifice it to any so-called chronological canons, which so many scholars are to this day trying to correct, without being able to bring their contradictions to any agreed result. (*Solon* 27.1)

In light of these views, both ancient and modern, it is possible in fact to agree with Bowie that Damis is a pure fiction, invented by Philostratus, even that Philostratus intended his readers to recognize him as such, and argue nevertheless that, if anything, this is evidence that Philostratus intends to tell an important truth in *VA* and not simply contrive some artsy fabrication.

"Historical texts and fictional texts" says Andrew Laird, "have a great deal in common—both kinds of text seek to be believed. To achieve this end, they share many strategies."[34] It is in regard to these strategies shared by both history and fiction that discussion of the novel rightly enters into this inquiry.[35] Rather than remain in the realm of the theoretical, let us examine the application of this insight to some of the most contentious controversies surrounding *VA*.

Among the elements of the Damis controversy is that this source, or narrator, or character (and he is *all three,* an important point to be

[32] *Adversus Math.* 1.263–69, discussed in Bowersock 1994, 10–11 and n. 18. See also Morgan 1993, 187–93, for a similar discussion adducing other ancient sources.

[33] See discussions in Pelling 1990, 19–21; Moles 1993, 120–21.

[34] Laird 1993, 153.

[35] Bowersock 1994, 13: "The richness and importance of fiction for the historian of the Roman empire has been little investigated or appreciated. This neglect seems largely to have been the result of the way philologists and literary critics handled it. For one thing the novels have tended to be studied independently of other fictional forms."

discussed below), as he appears in *VA,* does not behave or report in a manner consistent with what we would expect from an actual first–century observer: he knows either too much or too little, and on the wrong occasions. The reaches of Persia and India are described in detail, whereas Apollonius presents Demetrius the Cynic to Titus as his adviser in the same year the emperor banished that philosopher from Rome.[36] Bowie states succinctly:

> "Damis" presents a historical background too sophisticated for his station while the palpable inexactitudes come precisely where he ought to be best informed, at Apollonius' entrances on stage.[37]

Anderson's rejoinder is, at this point, predictable:

> On present evidence he [Philostratus] may have been as much at the mercy of his sources as of his rhetorical talents. The briefer and more enigmatic such sources were, the more scope he had for error as well as rhetorical expansion (*auxesis*). In spite of the discrepancies, it is still perfectly possible that he did set out to harmonise a rather jejune main account with letters and local tradition. The slimmer such an account [i.e., the original "Damis source"] and the vaguer its geographical and historical frame of reference, the easier it would have been to make false connections in good faith. If Philostratus was really setting out to forge, could he not have done better than the *Life* as it stands?[38]

Once again, we are left to choose between failed literature or bad history, between Philostratus the deliberate liar and Philostratus the unintending purveyor of deceit.

Until now, comparisons to the novel have only been adduced to advance the former position, that the novelistic equals the fictional equals the unserious: but recent studies have introduced a new application. Morgan notes that the combination of geographic realism with temporal ambiguity is characteristic of the ancient novel:

> The entire geography of the novel's world—distances, directions, sailing–times—approximates so closely to reality that there seems nothing odd when the recent Budé Chariton includes a map tracing the fictitious

[36] *VA* 6.31–33; see Bowie 1978, 1659.
[37] Bowie 1978, 1662.
[38] Anderson 1986, 191.

> movements of fictitious characters. . . . Temporal settings are less precise than geographical, and more variably sustained. Chariton's novel takes over characters and historical background from Thucydides' history. . . . The reader is given the sense that the story is somehow located in the gaps in real history. Not everything is tied up; in the novel Hermocrates is alive later than he should be, so that his lifetime overlaps with the reign of the Persian king Artaxerxes. In the later stages of the novel, the hero Chaereas leads an Egyptian revolt from Persia, which looks rather like the actual revolt of 360 B.C., with Chaereas playing the part of Chabrias.[39]

This characteristic of the novel parallels the lavish detail of *VA*'s travelogues and its chronological ambiguities. I quote these arguments at length to bring the differences in approach into sharp relief and to focus on how a different view of the novelistic character of *VA* can advance our understanding of the text.

If, then, constructing this sort of parallel with the novel is valid, we can follow Morgan into consideration of the broader and more important issue at stake here. If the purpose of, for example, geographic realism is to facilitate acceptance of and/or belief in the story, the question becomes not *if* the story is to be believed but *how* it is to be believed.[40] This question has, for all intents and purposes, never been asked of *VA*. To prove *VA* fictional only, in effect, to dismiss fiction as mere entertainment is to ignore the contract of fictional complicity[41] and the implications and power of fictive belief, which "is obviously something quite different from believing a lie,"[42] and "has its own truth, which carrie[s]

[39]Morgan 1993, 198–201—though, for completeness, it should be mentioned that Philostratus apparently despised Chariton. See Philostr. *Ep.* 66, discussed briefly in Anderson 1989, 116–18.

[40]Morgan 1993, 103.

[41]See above, note 28.

[42]Morgan 1993, 225. He continues: "What do we mean when we talk of fiction being believable? I have argued that readers believe; but it is hardly sensible to ask whether something you believe is believable. Equally, I have argued that fiction also entails an awareness of its untruth; and again it seems inappropriate to ask if something you know for certain to be untrue is believable. The idea of 'believable fiction,' then, does not make sense from either of the reader's two perspectives in isolation. Rather, it is what mediates between and unites his two worlds. In monitoring a novel's believability, the reader is in a continual process of moving backwards and forwards between the world of fiction and the world of reality, checking that the correlation is sufficient to allow the game to go on. There is a chain of relativities: fictional pleasure requires belief, belief implies believability, but believability requires the evaluative distance of objective disbelief" (226).

conviction within its context."[43] In a somewhat different vein, but with the same import, Bowersock adduces the example of the Jewish interlocutor in Celsus' *True Doctrine* as an example of a novelistic fiction, clearly constructed and recognized as such, designed precisely to tell a truth.

> It cannot escape the reader's notice that Celsus has launched his attack on Christianity by creating a fictional setting of his own. In other words, Celsus has created a fiction in order to expose other people's fiction. Of course he is not claiming that his Jewish interlocutor is a real person. His is the kind of fiction that we clearly know to be fiction. But he saw in the Gospel stories another order of fabrication in which there was a claim to historical truth. The truth of Celsus' discourse obviously does not lie in his scenario but in what is said in the scenario. The alleged truth is embedded in the fiction, and Origen understood this perfectly well.[44]

Fictive belief and this dynamic of a truth embedded in fiction for the purpose of telling a greater truth constitute fundamental examples of the strategies shared by historical and fictional texts. In terms of both strategy and function within the broader text, Celsus' interlocutor and the Thucydidean speech have much in common.

Other more sophisticated shared strategies that emerge from an examination of the novel can be applied to specific issues concerning *VA*. This brings us back to the issue of Damis' *deltoi.* Bowie's arguments regarding parallels to such works as Dictys of Crete and *The Wonders beyond Thule* have been noted above, and again more recent discussions of this "recovered record" motif pave the way to a new and better understanding.[45] Rather than seek some elaborate "in" joke, designed to flag literati that they were not to believe Philostratus' text, it is both more reasonable and more consistent to hold that Damis' *deltoi* perform the same function in *VA* that lost sources play in the novels. There they are grounds for fictive belief, "authorizing" the text by establishing its source and citing that source's provenance.[46] Once again, we can ac-

[43]Bowersock 1994, 118.

[44]Bowersock 1994, 3–4. On Celsus see also Francis 1995, 131–79.

[45]On this motif in general see Speyer 1970. It is no accident that Speyer has also produced a significant work on *VA* (1974), in which he holds the traditional fictional position regarding the controversial issues.

[46]Morgan 1993, 208–10. On these novels see also Bowersock 1994, 9–13, 23, 35–44.

cept Bowie's analysis, but draw from it the opposite conclusion: the motif of the *deltoi* is an invitation to a complex and highly literary form of belief, one worthy of the sophistic talent all critics ascribe to Philostratus.

In the same way, it is just as important to note that the traditional opposing argument for historicity is equally a misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the intricate construction of *VA*; attempts to identify Damis or reconstruct his memoirs[47] are misguided. Rather than remain in the coarse, unrefined dichotomies of true/false, fiction/history, Bowersock, Morgan, and, I would argue, Philostratus himself demand a subtler, more sophisticated approach which, ironically, has been described precisely in reference to *The Wonders beyond Thule*:

> Doubtless many of the marvels were fabricated, but their value as entertainment would be negated if the reader acknowledged it. So to proclaim incredibility was to claim truthfulness. By setting a romantic fiction within this paradoxographical framework, Antonius produced a novel whose plausibility as fiction rested directly on its implausibility as fact. This was reinforced by a convoluted apparatus of authorization, detailing how an autobiographical document had been buried in the protagonist's grave, later discovered, and was now being published for the first time.[48]

The facile comparison of *VA* with the novel is no longer facile, either on the side of *VA* or that of the ancient novel.

Damis is, however, not only the adduced author of a source; he is a narrator within the text itself. It is not only the alleged memoirs of Damis that lend *VA* the authority of an account contemporary with the life of Philostratus' hero,[49] it is also the voice of Damis himself as both a narrator and a character within the narrative. *VA* possesses a complicated double, perhaps even triple, narration.[50] Damis as narrator and as

[47] Anderson 1986, 165.

[48] Morgan 1993, 196.

[49] Knoles 1981, 42; Laird 1993, 154–55. Knoles's unfortunately unpublished and sadly often overlooked dissertation remains the only extensive study of the internal literary dynamics and structure of *VA*. A new published study incorporating both new insights into fiction and, just as important, a narratological analysis, is very much needed.

[50] Depending on who is construed as the subject of *phasi* at various points in the text; see Knoles 1981, 53–57; Anderson 1986, 157–61. Knoles, reflecting the traditional historical approach to *VA*, suggests that the cumbersome narration is the result of Philostratus dealing with a difficult and fragmentary source document.

character in the text serves to validate Damis as source. The *deltoi* come "alive" in the narration with the effect that any misapprehension, doubt, or disbelief the reader might have is deflected from the memoirs themselves and vested instead in Damis the character. In reading Philostratus' text, the reader might wonder: Did Damis really do this? In asking this question, however, the reader has already precluded doubting the source; that is, the reader will not ask the question "Did Damis really *say* he did this?" Damis the narrator and character validates Damis the source, and Damis the source lends credibility to both his narration and his character. Moving then to the level of the embracing narratological dynamic, Philostratus becomes more authoritative in having Damis as a source, while Damis becomes more authoritative by being accepted by Philostratus.[51] This raises the technique that John Winkler has termed "evidential accountability" to a new level of complexity.[52] We are now so far from Damis' flagging a patent and, therefore, unbelievable fiction[53] that, as T. G. Knoles has observed in his own quite different analy-

[51] See Knoles 1981, 45. It may even be possible to distinguish further between Damis the narrator and Damis the character. By the standards established by Morgan (1993, 224–29), the sort of fictive belief evoked by *VA* is different from that of the novel, which lies more in the reader's participation in the "plot" or identification with the characters. *VA* does not elicit either of these regarding Apollonius, even if the travelogues and drama serve to draw in the reader's emotional attention. Given this, it may be possible to view Damis the character as "sitting in" for the reader, providing a vicarious audience reaction to both his own situations and those of his beloved master. If this is so, this would constitute another level of interaction in which source, narrator, and character each serve to validate and reinforce the other, diffusing even farther the "evaluative distance of objective disbelief" (see above, note 42). This diminution of disbelief would then have important consequences. First is that the text would simply be taken as literal truth, which is discussed below. The second is that the contract of fictional complicity would not be recognized by the reader: that is, the reader believes the author is endeavoring to "pass off" his story as literal truth. Morgan notes (1993, 196–97) that Photius read *The Wonders beyond Thule* in exactly this way. He then goes on: "Perhaps this is an inevitable hazard of the game of fiction. There are plenty of modern instances of people forgetting the fictionality of fiction. Many people believe Sherlock Holmes to be a real person, partly through the sheer charisma of the character, but largely, I suspect, because of Dr. Watson's function as authenticating apparatus. Radio and television serials are notoriously taken as reality. There the medium authenticates itself" (197 n. 31). Does Damis then function as Watson to Apollonius' Holmes? Does *VA* itself serve as the self–authenticating medium of the *deltoi*?

[52] Winkler 1985, 66–67; also discussed by Laird (1993, 173), in the context of his own conclusions regarding fictional and historical narratives.

[53] Bowie 1978, 1663.

sis, Damis the source would operate in the same way and produce the same effects regardless of whether the *deltoi* were a legitimate document, forged, or simply a literary device.[54] Philostratus has so constructed *VA* that the contract of fictional complicity operates on several levels simultaneously; there can be no question that he intends his reader to take his work "seriously."

It must also be remembered just how seriously readers took not only *VA,* but also the novels themselves. Laird points to the distressing fact that Dictys and similarly Dares the Phrygian, translated into Latin, were regarded in some circles for some time as authentic.[55] Likewise *VA,* read as a factual biography, was used as a bulwark of pagan religion and culture by Sossianus Hierocles, who in his *Philalethes* set up Apollonius as a rival and superior to Jesus.[56] In one of his most trenchant observations, Bowersock states: "Rewriting the past—the intrusion of fiction into what was taken to be history—becomes from this period of Lucillius and Martial an increasingly conspicuous feature of the Graeco–Roman world."[57] To confuse still further our tidy modern categories and distinctions between fiction and history, the credible and the incredible, Bowersock pointedly quotes Origen's reaction to all this "fictional revisionism":

> We are embarrassed by the fictitious stories which for some unknown reasons are bound up with the opinion, which everyone believes, that there really was a war in Troy between the Greeks and the Trojans.[58]
>
> (*C. Cels.* 1.42)

We may, indeed, take comfort that there was someone in antiquity who was able to distinguish—as clearly as we can today—Second Sophistic fictions and fabrications from the historical truth uttered by Homer!

Having begun with a critique of the too rigid distinction between fiction and history, we have returned to yet another example of this

[54]Knoles 1981, 44.

[55]Laird 1993, 155, citing Clarke 1981.

[56]Parts of Hierocles' work are preserved in Eusebius' *Contra Hieroclem*; see the important article by T. Hägg (1992). A succinct discussion with bibliographical references can be found in Francis 1995, 83 n. 1.

[57]Bowersock 1994, 9.

[58]Translation by H. Chadwick (1965, 39), quoted and discussed by Bowersock (1994, 9). This entire section in Origen's work is worth reading for the further complications Christianity added to the issue of fiction and history.

nebulous boundary as it exists in both ancient literature and in our own understanding. Ultimately this investigation resolves itself into an exploration of the various historical and fictional modes and strategies of telling a truth. The issue becomes even more complex when it concerns a retelling through historical revisionism. It is thus appropriate to conclude this discussion of *VA* by suggesting what sort of truth Philostratus sought to convey by representing (or perhaps re-presenting) Apollonius in the way he did.

VA is itself part of a much larger phenomenon of the "rewriting of the past" Bowersock describes.[59] The obsession with historicity and the existence of Damis has overshadowed the fact that, leaving Damis aside, a number of various well-developed traditions about Apollonius clearly existed before *VA,* and that scholars of all opinions have always agreed that Philostratus reworked these source materials.[60] Thus *VA* is a work of fictional revisionism; what Bowersock says of fiction writing in the empire is seen to apply, as has so much of current thinking about ancient fiction, with particular force to *VA.*

> The overt creation of fiction as a means of rewriting or even inventing the past was a serious business for many of the ancients, and for us the enormous increase in fictional production of all kinds during the Roman empire poses major questions of historical interpretation. There was as much truth or falsehood in fiction as in history itself. Fiction must necessarily include not only overt works of the imagination, such as the novels and Lucian's *True Stories,* but also the rewriting of the mythic and legendary past as part of the creation of a new and miraculous present.[61]

Herein lies "the truth about Apollonius" which Philostratus sought to convey. It is something far more than mere biography; it is

[59] Bowersock 1994, 124: "It is, furthermore, a plain fact of chronology that the distinctive fictional forms of the Roman empire begin, on the present evidence, no earlier than the reign of Nero and proliferate conspicuously soon thereafter. To be sure, antecedents of this fiction, such as the Homeric tales, Ctesias's Persian fantasies, Xenophon's *Cyropaideia,* Hellenistic travel literature, and the lost lubricities of the short Milesian tales, serve to identify some of the scattered elements that the imperial writers assimilated, brought together, and transformed in order to create what, on any accounting, was a wholly new phenomenon in Graeco-Roman literature." See also 21–27.

[60] See above, note 2. On the ultimate aim and significance of this rehabilitation of Apollonius see Francis 1995, esp. 125–29, 182–89.

[61] Bowersock 1994, 13.

the invention of tradition.[62] As such, it clothes its truth with the fictional realism of Apollonius' life. I contend that Philostratus even gives some hint of this at the beginning of *VA*:

> δοκεῖ οὖν μοι μὴ περιδεῖν τὴν τῶν πολλῶν ἄγνοιαν, ἀλλ' ἐξακριβῶσαι τὸν ἄνδρα τοῖς τε χρόνοις, καθ' οὕς εἶπέ τι ἢ ἔπραξε, τοῖς τε τῆς σοφίας τρόποις, ὑπ' ὧν ἔψαυσε τοῦ δαιμόνιός τε καὶ θεῖος νομισθῆναι.[63]
>
> (*VA* 1.2)

This is a claim to truth, indeed a truth superior to the ignorance of the many (τὴν τῶν πολλῶν ἄγνοιαν) and based on precision regarding the details of Apollonius' life (ἐξακριβῶσαι τὸν ἄνδρα). Philostratus has in this way already cleverly constructed and offered his contract to the reader, for it is precisely in the biographical precision that the fiction lies. Yet this is not deception. Rather, it is a strategy for telling the greater and ultimate truth about Apollonius: how he came to be *considered* a divine man (δαιμόνιός τε καὶ θεῖος νομισθῆναι).

This interpretation is further substantiated as Philostratus ends 1.2 about to tell his reader how he acquired his most precise or detailed information (ἀκριβέστερα). He then begins 1.3 with what by now should be seen as the awesome statement "There was a man Damis . . . ," and proceeds to relate the story of the *deltoi.* Directly thereafter, Philostratus warns his reader against Moiragenes' work, describing the author as ignorant about many things concerning (details about the life of) Apollonius (πολλὰ δὲ τῶν περὶ τὸν ἄνδρα ἀγνοήσαντι). By the very words he chooses, Philostratus allies himself and Damis in the cause of truth and exactitude (ἀκρίβεια); likewise he equates common opinion (and Moiragenes, apparently his major literary competitor) with ignorance (ἄγνοια). Philostratus claims to recover a lost truth. Is he, in the words of Origen quoted above, creating a new batch of "fictitious stories" contravening accepted truth or, as Philostratus himself announces, dis-

[62]Though it concerns the historiography of a much later period, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983 has offered valuable new methodological contributions which parallel the developments regarding fiction discussed here.

[63]The Loeb translation by F. C. Conybeare (1912) reads: "It seems to be that I ought not to condone or acquiesce in the general ignorance, but write a true account of the man, detailing the exact times at which he said or did this or that, as also the habits and temper of wisdom by means of which he succeeded in being considered a supernatural and divine being."

pelling old ignorance? In antiquity as in our own day, that answer lies with the individual reader, for it depends on the perception of the sort of truth Philostratus intends to communicate by means of his fiction. "Men do not find the truth; they create it, as they create their history."[64]

So where does this leave the scholarship on *VA,* the ostensible question posed at the beginning of this inquiry? Largely in a state of paradoxical agreement. Bowie's erudite researches into first–century C.E. chronology and into literary form and history remain valuable: *VA* is "fictional," indeed it is "novelistic." But the meaning of these terms has changed since Bowie's treatment and their significance has become larger. Good methods led to wrong conclusions, fostered by incorrect assumptions. To call *VA* "fictional" or "novelistic" is not to deny the work serious meaning, but to invite the new questions: How was this work to be believed? What is the truth that is being told in it? To answer these questions we need not, indeed we must not, insist on literal "historicity" and fabricate ever more elaborate theories as to how *VA* can represent first–century fact. Anderson, in turn, has the right conclusions but the wrong methods. The "truth" of *VA* lies in the area of "fictional representation," an area only now being explored.[65] The old answers have proved both right and wrong, and have led to an impasse based on their mutual assumption that fiction and history are opposite and exclusive.

"Whereas all novels are fiction, not all fictions are novels."[66] This distinction is vital and can account for many of the peculiar difficulties of *VA.* If the first condition of fiction is that both sides recognize it for what it is,[67] we can ask whether by the complexities of his narration, representation, and fictional revisionism, Philostratus has actually vio-

[64]Veyne 1988, xii; quoted with approval in Bowersock 1994, 11. On one level at least, the choice concerning Apollonius was that described by Jerome (*Ep.* 53 Hilberg): *sive ille magus ut vulgus loquitur, sive philosophus ut Pythagorici tradunt.* Though Philostratus explicitly wrote *VA* to combat the former reputation, it nevertheless persisted, despite Hierocles' further lionization of Apollonius, in forms encompassing both "white" and "black" magic; on this particular topic see Dzielska 1986.

[65]Compare this to the conclusions reached by the traditional historical approach to *VA* when, for example, it has to deal with Philostratus' description of Apollonius' Indian and Ethiopian travels: "But in the end truth, error, and falsehood look remarkably alike; one of the functions of a sophist was to impose a facile consistency on all three" (Anderson 1986, 220).

[66]Morgan 1993, 176; endorsed and quoted in Bowersock 1994, 9 n. 17.

[67]See above, note 28.

lated his side of the contract of complicity.[68] Has *VA* ultimately "in trying to make the reader believe, succeeded only too well and ended up forfeiting its status as fiction"?[69] For modern scholars, it may sound very odd indeed to say that the problem with *VA* is that it is too believable, but there is every reason to see that readers in antiquity found it so, especially in an age verging on "the new and miraculous present" that was to characterize late antiquity.[70]

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[68]"Strategies of realism (make believe) extend to the textual act of representation. Manner of narration, as well as content, is engineered to produce belief" (Morgan 1993, 205).

[69]As Morgan (1993, 197) says of *The Wonders beyond Thule.*

[70]"But this is merely to say that the implied view of the verisimilar differs from generally held modern ones. This is worth stressing, because it is here, rather than on the fundamental questions of what fiction is and what it is for, that the Greek novels are foreign to us" (Morgan 1993, 227). Yet the phenomenon itself is not foreign to us. Some seven hundred people a year write to Sherlock Holmes at Baker Street, as if he were not only real but actually still alive (Morgan 1993, 225). Less gullible tourists in London merely inquire as to the whereabouts of Holmes's grave (Knoles 1981, 153–64).

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