



Forgeries of Desire: The Erotics of Authenticity in New Testament Historiography

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**Forgeries of Desire: The Erotics of Authenticity in
New Testament Historiography**

presented by

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Forgeries of Desire:
The Erotics of Authenticity in New Testament Historiography

A dissertation presented

by

Alexis Garland Waller

to

The Faculty of Harvard Divinity School

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

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Forgeries of Desire: The Erotics of Authenticity in New Testament Historiography

Abstract

Situated at the intersection of the study of the New Testament, the theorizing of Christian origins, and queer historiography, this dissertation examines the ways in which biblical scholarship's pursuit of historical authenticity normalizes some epistemic desires while stigmatizing others. I focus specifically on a set of New Testament and early Christian texts whose authenticity is disputed—texts characterized by some rubrics as pseudepigraphical and by others as forged—and the arguments that arose over the course of those texts' receptions. Rather than making a case for or against the authenticity of any of the texts read here, this project analyzes how discourses of authenticity and forgery, as two terms in a binary constructed to distinguish the normative from the deviant, inflected as both terms are by the forces of canon and orthodoxy, designate acceptable and unacceptable—*perverse*, even—forms of contact across texts and times. The deployment of forgery discourses in New Testament scholarship can be read, I propose, as enabling or curtailing certain kinds of readerly and writerly relations—relations that speak to a kind of *historical desire* and *disavowed eroticism* that structure biblical scholarship's historicizing truth claims generally, especially when its traditional historiographical commitments constrain certain desires and modes of identification by marking them as intelligible and properly historical, while rendering others as historically illegible.

Thus, this project also investigates how historical-critical biblical scholarship negotiates its unease regarding the relational nature of interpretation and the place of the historian's desire. I entertain the question of whether a paradox—that biblical studies is passionately attached to and

structured by its notions of objective history—is what undermines the recovery of the intimate politics and affective disavowals that discourses of authenticity perform in disputes on “falsely” authored texts. Ultimately, I suggest that biblical history poses its own forms of “queer” history, queer in the sense of disrupted, broken open, by diverse—and perverse, by many of its own dominant and regularly enforced standards—lines of desire and imagination. Engaging resources offered by queer theoretical and affective engagements with historiography that are particularly helpful for parsing relations between the erotic, relational, and theological negotiations in forgery scholarship in biblical studies specifically, I ultimately wonder if we might need to grapple with the epistemological implications of the fact that all our histories are forgeries of desire.

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Introduction

Situated at the intersection of the study of the New Testament, the theorizing of Christian origins, and queer historiography, this dissertation examines the ways in which biblical scholarship's pursuit of historical authenticity normalizes some epistemic desires while stigmatizing others. I focus specifically on a set of New Testament and early Christian texts whose authenticity is disputed—texts characterized by some rubrics as pseudepigraphical and by others as forged—and the arguments that arose over the course of those texts' receptions. Historical-critical biblical scholarship generally treats forgery disputes as epistemological problems that can be resolved by better formulating the criteria of authenticity, applying more precise historical or scientific methods, or, simply, finding more evidence. But it is not only concerns about criteria, methods, the absence of evidence—or of a forger's confession—that bring these disputes to a heated standstill. At the heart of the matter is a conflict about what authenticity is and what historians *desire* from it.

Rather than making a case for or against the authenticity of any of the (purportedly) ancient texts I read here, I am instead interested in the ways in which discourses of authenticity and forgery, as two terms in a binary constructed to distinguish the normative from the deviant, inflected as both terms are by the forces of canon and orthodoxy, designate acceptable and unacceptable—*perverse*, even—forms of contact across texts and times. Designating a work as authentic, forged, or otherwise pseudonymous is a taxonomic project whose terms are not, of course, ideologically neutral. Far from being merely descriptive, categories of attribution express and shape the varied relations that are conceived as being possible between texts and readings of them, and thus implicitly between authors and readers, between scholars and their ancient objects of study. Discourses of forgery and authenticity are deployed in New Testament scholarship in

order to enable or curtail certain kinds of readerly and writerly relations—relations that speak to a kind of *historical desire* and *disavowed eroticism* that, I will argue, structure biblical scholarship’s disputes over spurious and authentic attribution and historicizing truth claims more generally. The rhetoric of forgery, I propose, engages a false binary—a useful one, however, which is then deployed to mitigate the intensity of the historian’s own desires (to touch certain pasts in certain ways) by marking another’s desires (to touch those or other pasts, differently) as too great. Following this logic, I ask: if *forgery*, alongside other categories of attribution like *pseudepigraphy*, *orthonymity*, and their concomitant constructions of *authenticity*, enables us to map or enact certain relations and desires while nullifying others, what fears and longings do these categories variously scaffold, and to what different ends?¹ Can the impasses that emerge from these forgery disputes be addressed more productively by attending more closely, critically, and even sympathetically to the emotional, relational and erotic dimensions of history-making—especially the theologically-fraught terrain of biblical history-making?

This project was conceived in response to the reception history of a “minor” text in the archive of earliest Christian history, a fragment that was claimed to be related to the canonical Gospel of Mark, called *The Secret Gospel of Mark* or *The Longer Gospel of Mark* (which I refer to hereafter as *The Secret Gospel of Mark*, or *Secret Mark*).² This fragment, which was

¹ Bart Ehrman proposes “orthonymity” as a counterpoint to “pseudonymity” in his outline the terms of attribution and authorial claims relevant to biblical studies (*Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013], 1; 29-32). See also Kent D. Clarke, “The Problem of Pseudonymity in Biblical Literature and Its Implications for Canon Formation” in *The Canon Debate*, eds. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 440-468.

² The *Letter to Theodore*, purportedly by Clement of Alexandria, quotes from a text which it claims was composed by the author of the Gospel of Mark, which in turn came to be called *The Secret Gospel of Mark* (Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973] and *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark* [New York: Harper & Row, 1973]). Scott G. Brown argues for the title

interpreted by at least one purportedly ancient reader and one modern scholar as implicating Jesus in homoerotic relations with a disciple, opens up broad questions about authorship, desire, and the sexual politics of interpretation in biblical history.³ Reading this text and the scholarship that proliferated in response to it prompted my turn to a set of queer theoretical critiques of historiography that render more visible and historically valuable the affective intensity, homophobia (and other anxieties about “nonnormative” erotic life in scholarly community and the biblical past), and personal intimacies that structure New Testament scholarship’s weighing of evidence for the forgery or authenticity of this text. As I read it, the reception history of *Secret Mark* presents a portrait of a disciplinary struggle to live properly with an unruly past and of scholars (and their conflicting desires and fantasy lives) with one another. This dissertation makes the case that a close reading of the scholarship around *Secret Mark* and the professional and personal relations that underpin—that comprise—this scholarship provides a useful site for reading constructions of “desire” and “fantasy” in New Testament historiography.

Secret Mark’s reception—especially as it came to revolve around accusations of forgery—interests me for the ways in which it so boldly marks the complex relationships between historiography, (homo)sexuality and discourses of authenticity in New Testament scholarship. But I also want to name that I am working through the history of *Secret Mark*

Longer Gospel of Mark in “On the Composition History of the Longer (“Secret”) Gospel of Mark,” *JBL* 122, 1 (Spring 2003): 89-110.

³ The ancient reader is the letter’s “Theodore,” and the modern reader is, of course, Morton Smith, who proposes as one possible interpretation (among others) the possibility of homoerotic elements in the ritual Jesus conducts with this resurrected disciple described in the fragment (Smith, *The Secret Gospel*, 113-14.; and, suggested ever so briefly and indirectly, *Clement of Alexandria*, 185-6). In the *Letter to Theodore*, Clement responds to his interlocutor, whom he names Theodore, and so presumably Theodore has asked if the text does indeed mention a naked man with a naked man, and Clement seems to suggest that this is reference to the kinds of “carnal and bodily sins” (των σαρκικων και ενσωματων αμαρτιων), the “unspeakable teachings” (τας αορητους διδασκαλιας) that evidently prompted Theodore’s inquiry into the gospel’s meaning and imagery (I.1-5).

against the backdrop of unfolding controversies regarding *The Gospel of Jesus' Wife* (GJW), the limits and possibilities of scientific testing and narratives of provenance, and the vilification of a feminist historiography that has been construed as more ideologically-motivated than traditional historiographical approaches.⁴ Parallels are sometimes drawn between *Secret Mark* and *The Gospel of Jesus' Wife* in these exchanges, or, more often between Morton Smith and Karen King: these scholars, as champions of the texts under scrutiny, have been characterized respectively as a closeted gay man with a revisionist “gay agenda” (Smith) and as an embittered female scholar with a “hyperfeminist” agenda (King).⁵ An old caricature reemerges with force in these disputes: many responses set these scholars and their projects against proper agenda-free historical-critical approaches and scholars whose rationality and lack of desire for alternative

⁴ Karen L. King, “Jesus Said to Them, ‘My Wife ...’”: A New Coptic Papyrus Fragment,” *HTR* 107 (2014): 131-59; Tuross, “Accelerated Mass Spectrometry Radiocarbon Determination of Papyrus Samples,” *HTR* 107 (2014): 170-1; L. Dupuydt, “The Alleged Gospel of Jesus’s Wife: Assessment and Evaluation of Authenticity,” *HTR* 107 (2014): 172-89.

⁵ When this connection was broached at the 2015 York University symposium, Caroline T. Schroeder “noted that people do make jokes about Smith and homosexuality, and that Carlson's phrase ‘lifelong bachelor’ is a code for that, and that so too gender issues and sexism were there from the beginning in discussions of *The Gospel of Jesus' Wife*,” to quote James McGrath’s paraphrase of Schroeder’s comment in his notes on the panel on *Secret Mark* (September 25, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/exploringourmatrix/2015/09/ycas2015-fourth-panel.html>). Schroeder also offers her own analysis of the role of gender politics in responses to King’s scholarship across online and print forums (“Gender and the Academy Online: The Authentic Revelations of the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*,” in *Fakes, Forgeries and Fictions: Writing Ancient and Modern Christian Apocrypha* [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017], 304-25). Tony Burke also identifies similarities between the responses to Morton Smith and to Karen King in an interview for *Talk Gnosis After Dark*, Episode 49, Mar. 25, 2015, “Secret Gospels, Gay Jesus, Jesus’ Wife, & Pinocchio” (<http://gnosticwisdom.net/secret-gospels-gay-jesus-jesus-wife-pinocchio/>). See Tony Burke’s related blog post, “Some Reflections on Ariel Sabar’s *Veritas*,” on *Apocryphicity* (September 1, 2020), <http://www.apocryphicity.ca/category/gospel-of-jesus-wife/>. Burke also provides a timeline of events, reactions, and publications debating this issue in his introduction to *Fakes, Forgeries and Fictions: Writing Ancient and Modern Christian Apocrypha* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 28-31. Insinuations of Smith’s “gay agenda” have been put forward by Jacob Neusner, who articulates his “Gay Gospel Hypothesis” in *Are There Really Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels?* (27-31), Peter Jeffery in *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); and Donald Harman Akenson, *Saint Saul: A Skeleton Key to the Historical Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 87–88. Christopher B. Zeichmann tracks characterizations of King’s “hyperfeminism” in “Gender in Biblical Studies after the Forgery of *The Gospel of Jesus’s Wife*,” *Bib Int* 26 (2018): 391-412.

pasts (or perhaps, lack of need to read the past differently in order to feel themselves in relation to it) render their scholarship affectively and epistemologically neutral.

In his reading of the unfolding reactions to *The Gospel of Jesus' Wife*, Christopher Zeichmann describes how the responses to King, which in certain notable ways paralleled responses to Smith, “functioned rhetorically with regard to the disciplinary knowledge of New Testament studies”:

Positioning one’s self as a GJW-skeptic on the basis of an agenda-free method works to contrast with King as a feminist who saw what she wanted to see. These responses thus impute a distinction between the neutrality of historical-critical biblical scholarship and the revisionist feminism attributed to King. That is, King was unable to see the problems with GJW due to her professional and ideological investment in its contents, whereas those more detached – having no particular sympathy for theorizing early Christian gender norms, feminist biblical interpretation, or Coptic Christian apocrypha – were able to assess the matter more “rationally.” Because feminist approaches are placed in counter-position with ostensibly neutral methods, it is clear that gender plays a role in the framing of the debate. Why was feminist scholarship consistently denigrated in conversations about GJW’s forgery? And how does feminist scholarship come to be understood as antithetical to neutral historiography?⁶

These questions resonate deeply with those I ask in this dissertation. Zeichmann points to the ways that “knowledge production in New Testament studies is deeply gendered, as is implicit in this distinction between historiographic neutrality and feminist revisionism.”⁷ I, too, want to explore the gendered dimensions of knowledge production in this field as I tease out some of my own answers to Zeichmann’s questions, while also noticing the ways in which they play out differently across the stage of male-male homosocial relations in the case of Smith and his almost exclusively male colleagues and later interlocutors in biblical scholarship.⁸ Across my

⁶ Zeichmann, “Gender in Biblical Studies,” 398.

⁷ Zeichmann, “Gender in Biblical Studies,” 398.

⁸ Eve Sedgwick has defined male homosociality as a form of same sex bonding that is shored up by a fear or repudiation of homosexuality and that has the impact of maintaining male solidarity through

examinations of both the texts under scrutiny and the scholarship that seeks to adjudicate their status as authentic or falsely authored, I specifically seek out traces of the symptomatic workings of a disciplinary unconscious, one which renders feminist and queer approaches to the telling of what we call the past as the nonnormative, excessive, perverse other to traditional historical-critical approaches to biblical textual pasts.⁹ This will, I hope to show, set us up to face the kinds of impasses that emerge in scholarly attempts to distinguish theologically important, affectively-invested texts designated authentic from those deemed forged or otherwise falsely-authored.

Theories and Methods

What interests me is not the true nature of these texts' attributions so much as the desires that lie at the heart of the discourses around them—or, put another way, the epistemological, theological, and affective stakes of those discourses in early Christian historiography. Rather than debating for or against the authenticity or forgery of the specific Christian texts I examine in this dissertation, instead I attend to the ways that historical-critical scholarship on spurious attribution illuminates both what kinds of tools, evidence, and assumptions biblical scholarship

exclusion of and/or dominance over women (Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1985]). I am indebted to conversation with Jennifer Knust who, in reading this dissertation, pressed the question of how the vilification of feminist biblical historiography fits unevenly alongside the homophobic backlash against Smith. The ways in which Smith's defenders consistently seek to secure him within the fold of the male-dominated biblical scholarly homosocial order by minimizing his homosexuality or the place of homoeroticism in his readings of the biblical past attempt to align Smith with the rational epistemologies that (are claimed) to characterize this masculine lineage of (Harvard-trained) scholars. The vilification of King, on the other hand, might be read as an attempt to establish the impropriety of such emotionally motivated feminist scholarship issuing from the oldest endowed chair at Harvard in order to confirm her place *outside* of the male homosocial contract.

⁹ For one relevant articulation of the disciplinary unconscious, see Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 14-15. In my last chapter, I more fully address my use of and the implications for a disciplinary unconscious in biblical studies.

relies on to distinguish fantastical from realistic renderings of the past and what kinds of anxieties arise about how well one can secure such distinctions.

Queer historiography offers models for this kind of inquiry. It does so by engaging critically and constructively with the role of desire and affect in the production of history. The recent queer theoretical critiques of historicism I engage here emerged out of post-Foucauldian attempts to bridge theoretical divides in the history of sexuality. Calling for a reappraisal of the methods, epistemological assumptions, and affects (or presumed lack thereof) that have structured traditional historical interpretation, the diverse body of work gathered under the heading of queer historiography variously revises what it might mean to seek a “queer past,” what such a search might look like, and what it might be able to yield. While acknowledging that traditional historical methods are often intended to safeguard the past and prevent violence by willful denial of inconvenient facts or by uncritical, overly imaginative appropriation, queer historiography is generally concerned with what values traditional historicism’s approaches to “objectivity,” “authenticity” and “proof” encode and enforce, whose desires they subsume and authorize. Much of this work openly borrows from psychoanalysis’ formulations of desire, fantasy, melancholia, and the strange temporalities of dreams, memory, and mourning. In doing so, this literature, though heterogeneous, generally seeks to make sense of our various attachments to the past and of how certain modes of archiving and historicizing influence and are influenced by identity categories, traumas, and desires in the present.

The question of what counts as desire—and evidence of desire—in texts or history is, of course, crucial. What interests me in the recent queer historiographical work that has emerged in the wake of scholarship on sexual and queer pasts by Boswell, Foucault, and Halperin is a seemingly circular set of questions regarding the theorizing of desire in a given historical

context: how does one historicize desire, how does desire influence one's historicizing work?¹⁰

To approach these questions, I engage with queer theoretical interventions in medieval and Renaissance scholarship as well as in contemporary queer literature and art.¹¹ While the approaches differ, each of these queer historiographical projects models practices of interpretation that embody not only a form of intellectual inquiry but also enact an ethical procedure, insisting that the ethical must be articulated alongside the epistemological foundations at work in making meaning of texts and instantiating certain representations of the past as historical.

Ultimately, I follow Carla Freccero's prioritization of queer "historico-ethical practices" that can help us live with and honor traumatic pasts and their afterlives.¹² Her framework invites an implicitly psychosocial, ethical, even therapeutic, question: How do we live with the histories we tell and the histories that are handed to us (as told by others, sometimes authoritative others), and how do the ways we tell histories impact the lives of others we may or may not know? To put it simply, I want to pose this question to the study of earliest Christian history. I am not the first to want to ask this question by any means, but I do want to tie it explicitly to the erotics of disciplinary life and to an anxiety about whose expressions of desire for the past shape the

¹⁰ Key literature in this lineage includes John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, transl. Robert Hurley (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1978); and David M. Halperin, "Is There a History of Sexuality?" *History and Theory* 28, 3 (1989): 257-274, and *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: and Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

¹¹ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); and Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹² Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, 8.

boundaries and rules of “properly” historical work (in particular as these are complicated by the uses of history for theological ends).

To take seriously the instability of the binary of authenticity and forgery is to destabilize the means by which we secure origin stories as factual rather than fantasized. This holds certain dangers, dangers of which some of us may have recently become more aware in our contemporary political climate. And yet, I am interested in exploring that destabilization, exploring what might lie beneath our overconfidence in the ability of “facts” to liberate or protect. In acknowledging the force of fantasy—in its imaginative, sometimes erotic dimensions—as it feeds historical research and writing, I openly explore some of the ways we might be able to circumscribe the brute force of our historical claims as truth claims, upending the identification of “historical” with the real and of “imagined” with unreality. This project inquires into how we might then conduct our historical work and what values guide our methods and our measures of success or accuracy. This dissertation, then, both critiques and reimagines New Testament historiographical investments in evidence, origins, and affective neutrality. To do these critical, diagnostic readings this project *also*, therefore, performs constructive imaginative readings that explore “historical” possibilities that might stand to the side of historical-critical regulations of relations with the possible past.

Chapter Outline

In Chapter 1, I initiate a close reading of the reception history of *Secret Mark*, the kinds of arguments and evidence that are deployed throughout that reception, and the affective and relational clues contained therein. Long relegated to footnotes in Markan studies, this little text’s volatile reception bears the marks of the complex relationships between historiography, (homo)sexuality, discourses of authenticity and forgery, and theological and affective

investments in the historical study of Christian origins. I address the reasons scholarship on *Secret Mark* appears to be locked in “a stalemate,” examine the significance of this stalemate for methods and ethics in New Testament historiography, and reorient this reception as an affective history in order to make new meanings of the role of affect and imagination in the construction of evidence.¹³

In Chapter 2, I put *Secret Mark*’s reception in conversation with work on queer archives in order to explore other historiographical perspectives on the evidence for and against *Secret Mark*’s authenticity against the backdrop of GLBTQ history of the 1970s-90s. I track the crossover between methods in studies of the history of sexuality and the history of Christianity, in particular as they respond to the role of imagination and desire, and renderings of identification and alterity in both fields of history. I examine the role the constructs of authenticity and the “real” play in these historiographical approaches and consider how scholarship variously constructs its objects of analysis—the objects of its desire—and lays out the rules for determining when those objects have been realistically rendered or “really” encountered.

In Chapter 3, I engage with another set of scholarly investigations of authenticity and attribution, no less fraught for being more traditionally centrally located: the authorship and authenticity of Pauline pseudepigrapha, both canonical and apocryphal. I take historical-critical debates over constructions of authorship in canonical and non-canonical Pauline texts as a case study, mapping the dynamics of desire and anxiety that drive the use of “forgery” as a structuring historical category in this corner of New Testament scholarship. Taking seriously the relational

¹³ Charles Hedrick, “The Secret Gospel of Mark: Stalemate in the Academy,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11, 2 [Summer 2003]: 141.

dynamics constituted through terms of attribution, I analyze narratives that proliferate around the body of Paul in both ancient writings and modern scholarship on Pauline pseudepigraphy in order to analyze not only the epistemological but also the affective and erotic stakes of authenticity conveyed by attributions of “orhonymity” and, thus, its constitutive others—pseudonymity, forgery.¹⁴ Constructions of authorship loom large in this scholarship’s explicit and implicit formulations of authenticity and realness. Ultimately, in this chapter I set up the argument that authenticity and its opposites (sometimes designated by pseudepigraphy, sometimes by forgery) are deployed as analytical categories in New Testament scholarship in order to cast some ways of reviving and touching the dead as acceptable and others as perverse, depending on readers’ perspectives about the author, the tradition, how the text should be used. Imagery of contact, touch, proximity, and discussion of the influence of proper and improper desire for identification with the past proliferate in this scholarship, raising a series of vital questions. How do our own attractions and repulsions to various historical possibilities shape our modes of and motives for distinguishing truth from falsehood in our historiographical projects? How do these attractions and repulsions influence a discipline’s methods for adjudicating between good and bad evidence for one likely version of the “real” past instead of another? In what ways do the theological underpinnings of biblical historiography amplify the stakes of these distinctions?

Finally, I return to the question of the relationship between the methods we engage and the ethics of our modes of reconstructing the past—in particular, the early Christian past against the backdrop of the sexual politics and theological investments of any given present. I turn to the “fantasmatic historiography” that Carla Freccero’s historical work forwards and the concept of

¹⁴ Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 1.

“historical radiance” that C.M. Chin elaborates, wondering how our historical investigations and representations embody a particular ethics of relation with the past we seek and with one another as we argue for certain versions of the past over others.

Conclusion

This project investigates how historical-critical biblical scholarship negotiates its unease regarding the relational nature of interpretation and the place of the historian’s desire through methodological attempts to delimit the biblical scholar’s “unrestrained imagination” or to shape a more “disciplined intimacy” with the objects we study.¹⁵ I do not want to suggest that there is anything wrong in itself with restraining the imagination or with the boundaries that disciplined intimacy as a kind of method attempts to instantiate. I want to make clear that I do understand certain forms of historicism—with their recourse to discourses of realism and (occasionally) objectivity—as able *both* to shore up dominant paradigms and mainstream identities and to anchor vulnerable bodies, marginalized communities, and minoritarian identities in durable and presently necessary pasts. Nonetheless, biblical studies’ traditional historiographical commitments constrain certain desires and modes of identification by marking them as intelligible and properly historical, while rendering others as historically illegible; thus, I am interested in analyzing the ways in which these constraints structure what kinds of desires, intimacies and fantasies are then instantiated as licit and illicit within productions of the historical. I entertain the question of whether a paradox—that biblical studies is passionately attached to and structured by its notions of objective history—is what undermines the recovery

¹⁵ Clifton Black, *Mark: Images of An Apostolic Interpreter* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 12; Laura Nasrallah and Melanie Johnson-Debaufre, “Beyond the Heroic Paul: Toward a Feminist and Decolonizing Approach to the Letters of Paul,” in *The Colonized Apostle*, ed. Christopher D. Stanley (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 2011), 173.

of the intimate politics and affective disavowals that discourses of authenticity perform in disputes on “falsely” authored texts.

Ultimately, I argue that biblical history poses its own forms of “queer” history, queer in the sense of disrupted, broken open, by diverse—and perverse, by many of its own dominant and regularly enforced standards—lines of desire and imagination. If we could only register that, the impasses encountered in forgery disputes might look and feel very different, leading to different historical imaginaries and senses of possibility. If historical narratives are necessarily born out of our complicated desires in the present, rendered “historical” through various (conscious and unconscious) modes of representation, then how do we negotiate the ethical and moral dangers of such epistemological relativism? This question implicitly pervades each set of textual analyses the dissertation performs, as I consider how resources offered by queer theoretical and affective engagements with historiography might be particularly helpful for parsing relations between the erotic, relational, and theological negotiations in forgery scholarship in biblical studies specifically. In the end, I wonder if we might need to grapple with the epistemological implications of the fact that all our histories are forgeries of desire.

Chapter 1—Unspeakable Teachings; or, the Symptomatic History of the *Secret Gospel of*

Mark

A certain woman whose brother had died ... prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going near, Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And straightway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan.

*The Secret Gospel of Mark*¹⁶

The Secret Gospel of Mark—so the story goes—was found by Morton Smith, a Columbia professor of ancient history, while he was cataloguing manuscripts at the Mar Saba monastery library outside of Jerusalem in 1958. The gospel fragment is quoted in what appears to be a letter composed by the second-century church father, Clement of Alexandria, copied in an eighteenth-century hand onto the blank endpapers of a sixteenth-century printed volume of Ignatius of Antioch’s letters. This letter addresses a certain Theodore who, in turn, evidently has heard some

¹⁶ Translation of “The Secret Gospel of Mark” (II.23-III.11, folio 1 verso, line 23, through folio 2 recto, line 11) in Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*, 447: “και ην εκει μια γυνη ης ο αδελφος αυτης απεθανεν· και ελθουσα προσεκυνησε τον Ιησουν και λεγει αυτω· Υιε Δαβιδ, ελεησον με. οι δε μαθηται επιτιμησαν αυτη· και οργισθεις ο Ιησους απηλθεν μετ αυτης εις τον κηπον οπου ην το μνημειον· και ευθυσ ηκουσθη εκ του μνημειου φωνη μεγαλη, και προσελθων ο Ιησους απεκυλισε τον λιθον απο της θυρας του μνημειου· και εισελθων ευθυσ οπου ην ο νεανισκος εξετεινεν την χειρα και ηγειρεν αυτον, κρατησαστης χειρος· ο δε νεανισκος εμβλεψας αυτω ηγαπησεν αυτον και ηρξατο παρακαλειν αυτον ινα μετ αυτου η· και εξελθοντες εκ του μνημειου ηλθον εις την οικιαν του νεανισκου· ην γαρ πλουσιος· και μεθ ημερας εξ επεταξεν αυτω ο Ιησους· και οψιας γενομενης ερχεται ο νεανισκος προς αυτον, περιβεβλημενος σινδωνα επι γυμνου, και εμεινε συν αυτω την νυκτα εκεινην· εδιδασκε γαρ αυτον ο Ιησους το μυστηριον της βασιλειας του θεου· εκειθεν δε αναστασεπεστρεψεν εις το περαν του Ιορδανου.”

gossip about the gospel’s “unspeakable teachings” (τας αρρητους διδασκαλιας).¹⁷ Clement appears to have written the letter to assure Theodore that the gospel says nothing regarding what he seems to have asked about: absolutely not, there is no mention of a “naked man with a naked man” (το δε γυμνος γυμνω).¹⁸

From the gospel fragment’s first public presentation up until the time of this dissertation’s writing, the reception history of *The Secret Gospel of Mark* is—among those who know anything about it—famously controversial. Thick with mystery and rumor, rife with volatile accusations, betrayals, and defensiveness, it is an “affective history” *par excellence*.¹⁹ The short text at its center has been variously described as evidence of the earliest surviving version of the Gospel of Mark, a second-century forgery pieced together from other gospel narratives, a modern hoax, an “ironic gay joke,” and even “the most grandiose and reticulated ‘Fuck You’ ever perpetrated in the long and vituperative history of scholarship.”²⁰ As I will

¹⁷ Clement, *Letter to Theodore*, I.2.

¹⁸ Clement, *Letter to Theodore*, III.12.

¹⁹ I will explore the idea of affective history more thoroughly in Chapter 3, building on the interest in affect and historiography in Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003) and Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). Lauren Berlant theorizes affective history as the act of attending to how “affect, the body’s active presence to the intensities of the present, embeds the subject in an historical field, and that its scholarly pursuit can communicate the conditions of an historical moment’s production as a visceral moment” (“Intuitionists: History and the Affective Event,” *American Literary History* 20, 4 [2008]: 845.)

²⁰ Peter Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled: Imagined Rituals of Sex, Death and Madness in a Biblical Forgery* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 242. Jeffrey’s entire book amounts to an elaboration of what kind of “Fuck You” the Secret Mark “forgery” could have been for Smith. Characterizing it as a modern hoax, Philip Jenkins and Robert M. Price both imagined ways in which Smith could have been inspired to invent his discovery narrative and the text itself by reading pulp fiction, in particular an evangelical Christian mystery novel, *The Mystery of Mar Saba* by James Hogg Hunter (New York: Evangelical, 1940), which dramatizes the discovery of an ancient Christian textual fragment discovered in the Mar Saba monastery that scandalizes the Church but is then revealed to be a hoax. See Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 102; Robert M. Price, “Second Thoughts on the Secret Gospel,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 14, no. 1 (2004): 131. Donald Harman Akenson described Secret Mark and

explain in greater detail below, no clear consensus has been reached on the gospel's status (as, say, a second- or eighteenth- or twentieth-century composition), although impassioned arguments have been (and continue to be) mounted from many sides.

Feelings can be far more intractable than facts, and—as I will explore further in Chapter 2—feelings can be too intimately bound up with what gets construed as fact to distinguish between the two. I argue in this chapter that the controversy emerging in scholarship on *Secret Mark* pushes the desired or claimed objectivity, or affective neutrality, of historicism as the authorizing ground of New Testament scholarship to its limits—over its limits, even, spilling into the murky territory where desire and the writing of history intermingle in the messiest, most perverse ways. Those who condemn Smith for forging *Secret Mark* implicitly suggest that his desire (for a queer historical Jesus, they imply) was so inappropriately strong that he went so far as to manufacture an object “*from the past*” that he could put his hands on. Those who argue against modern forgery, however, nonetheless admit that Smith's desire for a particular (homoerotic, “libertine,” or magic-practicing) Christian past was so strong that it blinded him to more appropriate (heteronormatively comfortable) interpretations of the text, or to question the authenticity of the text he innocently found.

In the face of any new historical discovery, questions about evidence and criteria for making interpretive choices come to the fore, and Smith's work on *The Letter to Clement* and its transmission of what Smith would identify as *The Secret Gospel of Mark* fragment was at first controversial because Smith was arguing for the authenticity of a newly discovered “excerpt” from (a version of) the canonical Gospel of Mark. From the beginning, then, this text was

its “discovery” as an “ironic gay joke ... [and an] amusing bit of post-modern scholarly theatre” (*Saint Saul: A Skeleton Key to the Historical Jesus* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], 87–88).

situated at the intersections of debates over canon, orthodox Christianity and heretical Gnosticism, and the kind of historical Jesus a biblical scholar could glean from one's meager sources.

Whatever narrative is martialled to contextualize it, the gospel fragment emerges as a piece of history—whether ancient, modern, or somewhere in between—at the intersection of various lines of desire. As the situation stands today regarding the authenticity of the text, neither those scholars committed to salvaging *Secret Mark* as real historical evidence nor those who believe it to be a modern fake are comfortable dropping their claims. The stakes feel too high: for the one side, giving up *Secret Mark* as a modern forgery means the loss of potential evidence for the real Christian past, while for the other, using it constructively means inserting a homoerotically-inflected piece of fiction into the realm of proper history. If “authentic,” *Secret Mark* has important implications for the textual history of the canonical New Testament and the diversity of earliest Christian traditions. If “historical,” it would invite reimagining Christian origins (and, *perhaps*, for those who read a homoerotic innuendo into the text, the sex life of the historical Jesus, or, at least, the erotic fantasy life of later early Christians).

This chapter tracks the ways that the debate about *Secret Mark*'s authenticity makes explicit that the evidence on both sides is saturated with ambivalent but intense affective investments. Understanding both “authenticity” and “historicity,” then, to be rhetorical constructions with powerful effects, funded by and productive of powerful affects, I see *Secret Mark*'s reception as a kind of parable for making affective (and ideological) sense of the field's attachments to particular historiographical modes and not others. In other words, examining the problems brought forward by *Secret Mark* and its scholarly and popular reception are also a way

to bring forward what feels like a set of “unspeakable teachings” about the driving force of desire that much of this scholarship, like “Clement” writing to “Theodore,” is anxious for us to dismiss.

The Letter of Clement to Theodore

The purportedly Clementine letter bearing the fragment of this “secret” gospel, copied in eighteenth-century handwriting into the end pages of a printed volume of Ignatius, begins mid-conversation with its questioning interlocutor, Theodore: “You did well in silencing the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocratians,” he says, warning that this other sect of early Christians, who evidently made claims about the text in question, “wander from the narrow road of the commandments into a boundless abyss of carnal and bodily sins” (I.2-4). Theodore seems to have been wondering if the Carpocratians did in fact find something about a “naked man with a naked man” (III.13) in this “divinely inspired Gospel according to Mark” (I.12). Clement responds unequivocally: “I shall not hesitate to answer the questions you have asked, refuting the falsifications by the very words of the Gospel,” and he assures Theodore that no “naked man with naked man” is mentioned. To prove that Jesus and the young man who “loved him” kept their clothes on during their late-night rituals, Clement quotes the relevant passage, which is now our only extant text from the gospel (if, indeed, “extant” is the appropriate term here, since we now have only photographs of the text).²¹ But first, he gives some context: Clement explains that after writing down the public gospel, Mark came to Alexandria, bringing his own notes and Peter’s, and he added to “the former book” the Lord’s “secret” or “mystic” teachings, which were intended only for the spiritually advanced community (I.18-21). This version was meant to

²¹ As I recount below, sometime after several scholars visited the Mar Saba monastery library in 1975 and had color photographs of the manuscript taken, the pages on which Clement’s letter was inscribed were cut from the volume containing them and disappeared altogether. No one currently knows where the manuscript is held, if it (still) exists at all (Charles W. Hedrick with Nicolaos Olympiou, “Secret Mark: New Photographs, New Witnesses,” *The Fourth R* [September-October 2000]: 13-15.)

be kept secret because its advanced teachings would be misunderstood should it get into the wrong hands.

Evidently, it *had* gotten into the wrong hands: Clement's letter suggests that the Carpocratians had been reading it as evidence of a "libertine" gospel in which Jesus practiced some kind of homoerotic baptismal sex magic. Or so one might interpret the letter. In a later publication, Smith speculates on what other "unknown ceremonies" may have occurred during the night-time baptism described in the fragment, during which "the disciple was possessed by Jesus' spirit and so united with Jesus," situating its narrative in the context of more "libertine" forms of "gnostic Christianity": "Freedom from law may have resulted in completion of the spiritual union by physical union. This certainly occurred in many forms of gnostic Christianity; how early it began there is no telling."²²

As one might imagine, Smith's presentation of *Secret Mark* at the 1960 national meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature caused a big stir among biblical scholars. It also made the front page of *The New York Times*. Initially, debates about the text didn't center on the authenticity of the Clementine attribution or even the historicity of the gospel excerpt, but on whether Clement was correct in attributing this "secret" material to the author of canonical Mark. From the beginning, too, the conversation ranged beyond biblical scholarship and the academy, as evidenced by responses to Smith's publications appearing in venues for public audiences.²³ In

²² Smith, *The Secret Gospel*, 113-14.

²³ Sanka Knox, "A New Gospel Ascribed to Mark: Copy of Greek Letter Says Saint Kept 'Mysteries' Out," *The New York Times* (Dec. 30, 1960): 1. The next day Knox reported on the dispute, citing Pierson Parker's critique of Smith's SBL presentation), in "Expert Disputes 'Secret Gospel': Theologian Says Style of Excerpts Does Not Show They Were by Mark," *The New York Times* (Dec. 31, 1960): 7. Ten years later, after publication of Smith's books on *Secret Mark*, debate heated up again: See W. H. C. Frend, "A New Jesus?" *New York Review of Books* 20 (9 Aug. 1973): 34-35; Pierson Parker, "An Early Christian Cover-up?" *New York Times Book Review* (July 22, 1973): 5. The Jesuit New Testament scholar Joseph A. Fitzmyer flagrantly criticized Smith's *Secret Gospel* in an article published in a national Catholic weekly entitled, "How to Exploit a Secret Gospel," *America* 128 (June 23, 1973):

1973, Smith published two books on *Secret Mark*, one for scholarly and one for popular audiences; both, in different ways, instigated passionate disputes in Christian historiography that continue today.²⁴

The drama that surrounds the reception of this gospel has much to do with the ways in which the fragment's contents have been situated in intimate but precarious relation with the New Testament canon and the imagined authorship that brings us closest to the origins of Christianity. The earliest scholarly arguments about this text disputed whether it represented an earlier (i.e., situated closer to the "original") version of the Gospel of Mark than the canonical Mark found in our earliest or best manuscripts, or perhaps a later revision composed by Mark "himself" (thus, still "authentic" in the sense of stemming from the "original" gospel author, but not made canonical), or simply a later (but still ancient) pseudepigraphical creation (not a modern "forgery"). Each imagined *sitz im leben* mobilizes constructions of authorship and unexamined definitions of authenticity, which I will analyze in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Although he doesn't question the ways authenticity functions as a placeholder for a host of other values and agendas, Bart Ehrman frames the problem well:

If authentic, this letter would raise significant questions for the study of the New Testament and the history of early Christianity. It would make us rethink our interpretations of the earliest surviving accounts of Jesus. It would drive us to

570-572, and Smith shot back his response in "Mark's 'Secret Gospel'?" in the same magazine (*America* 129 [Aug. 4, 1973]: 64-65). Fitzmyer then suggested that Smith had delayed his academic treatment of the gospel until the popular version could also be released, to boost sales ("Reply to Morton Smith," *America* 129 [Aug. 4, 1973]: 65).

²⁴ Representative voices from those discussions that continue today can be found in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate: Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium*, ed. Tony Burke (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013). Conversation continued at the 2015 York University symposium. In 2015, yet another book on the controversy and the gospel was published, Robert Conner's *The "Secret" Gospel of Mark: Morton Smith, Clement of Alexandria and Four Decades of Academic Burlaque* (Oxford: Mandrake, 2015). *BAR* (November/December 2009) also featured *Secret Mark* in a series of articles discussing the forgery claims, and presenting the results of a new handwriting analysis, suggesting an authentic text, commissioned by the *BAR*.

reconsider our reconstruction of the historical Jesus. It would be one of the most significant discoveries of the twentieth century. If it were authentic.²⁵

Ehrman does not think Clement's letter and the gospel fragment are authentic, and so—we can rest assured—they do not have what it takes to push us to do this rethinking of early Christianity and of our reconstructions of the historical Jesus, or to engage the theological implications that these revisions could have. (But this dissertation asks: even without such secured distinctions, do they have what it takes?) In naming them, however, Ehrman puts his finger on the animating forces of the affective intensity that saturates this (primarily North American) New Testament scholarship generated by this proposed insertion of *Secret Mark* into canonical gospel literature and early Christian history.

Scholarly approaches to the historical origin and significance of the *Secret Mark* fragment have shifted over time. Initially, *Secret Mark* was employed in scholarly accounts of Christian origins that interpreted the fragment as evidence of an early stage of the Markan textual traditions which may have predated canonical Mark, perhaps drawn from a source shared by canonical Mark and John. Morton Smith asserted the possibility that this “secret gospel” material was “probably in the earliest form of Mark,” and, “if so, the canonical text of Mark would have been produced by abbreviation.”²⁶ Ten years after Smith's publication of *Secret Mark*, Helmut Koester advanced a theory of the priority of a longer form of proto-Markan material, out of which both the “secret gospel” would be constructed and canonical Mark would be abbreviated. John Dominic Crossan followed Koester, but argued that *Secret Mark* was itself the earliest version of the gospel (instead of Koester's proto-Mark), from which canonical Mark would stem

²⁵ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 70. Here, “authentic” means “authentically” *ancient*, but not necessarily Markan.

²⁶ Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 61.

(as a deliberate revision of the Carpocratian version). Raymond Brown and Robert Grant later argued that the canonical material existed first, however, and *Secret Mark* was formed out of a pastiche of gospel traditions. These early interpretations of the text's possible histories were rooted in various conjectures about authorship in relation to canon; within a couple of decades, these same aspects of the text's reception would come to be hotly debated through the lens of modern forgery.²⁷ The affective politics of canon and dating, alongside the under-theorization of authenticity, all of which are foundational to the logic of modern biblical historical-critical scholarship, were thus at play in *Secret Mark*'s reception well before the forgery debate took center stage and began to perform its particular policing work.²⁸ These elements help explain, however, the heightened affective stakes of forgery disputes that emerge later in the gospel's reception history.

Questions of Evidence

While dispute over *Secret Mark*'s authenticity was exacerbated by Morton Smith's interpretations of the text, the absence of the physical manuscript fueled the subsequent decades of forgery accusations. Smith had photographed the handwritten text in 1948, but he left the

²⁷ Helmut Koester, "History and Development of Mark's Gospel (From Mark to *Secret Mark* and 'Canonical' Mark)," in *Colloquy on New Testament Studies: A Time for Reappraisal and Fresh Approaches*, ed. Bruce Corley (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 35–57; John Dominic Crossan, *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 91–121; R. E. Brown, "The Relation of 'The Secret Gospel of Mark' to the Fourth Gospel," *CBQ* 36 (1974): 466–85; R. M. Grant, "Morton Smith's Two Books," *ATR* 56 (1974): 58–64.

²⁸ See Jennifer Knust's analysis the field's uneven theorization of authenticity and the "original text" in "In Pursuit of a Singular Text: New Testament Textual Criticism and the Desire for the True Original," *Religion Compass* 2/2 (2008): 180–194, and "On Textual Nostalgia: Herman C. Hoskier's Collation of Evangelism 604 (London, British Library Egerton 2610; GA 700) Revisited," in *The Future of New Testament Scholarship: From H. C. Hoskier to the Editio Critica Maior and Beyond*, ed. Garrick V. Allen (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 79–101. On the interconnectedness of canon, original text, and textual criticism broadly, see Eldon J. Epp, "The Multivalence of the Term 'Original Text' in New Testament Textual Criticism," in *Perspectives on New Testament textual criticism: collected essays, 1962–2004* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 551–93, and "It's All about Variants: A Variant-Conscious Approach to New Testament Textual Criticism," *HTR* 100, 3 (2007): 275–308.

physical copy at Mar Saba when he returned to New York. It wasn't until 1975, however, that the first proposal that the text was a modern forgery was published, with the article by biblical scholar Quentin Quesnell, "The Mar Saba Clementine: A Question of Evidence."²⁹ Quesnell's suggestion that the text may have been forged took hold of the scholarly imagination, and, with almost no one else besides Smith having laid eyes on the physical manuscript, Quesnell's suggestion took hold and the "folklore of forgery took on a life of its own."³⁰

A year after Quesnell's indictment, three scholars went in search of the manuscript. As one of them, Guy Stroumsa, remembered it, he "had been intrigued by Morton Smith's sensational description of his find, and we wanted to see the text with our own eyes."³¹ Fueled by desire to make contact with the real thing, Stroumsa, David Flusser, and Shlomo Pines drove down to the Mar Saba Monastery from Jerusalem, found the Voss edition of Ignatius in the tower library and saw the hand-copied letter of Clement. Concerned about its safekeeping, they had the volume transferred to the Jerusalem patriarchate's library. Color photographs were also taken around this time. Stroumsa explains that, although they had hoped to do an ink analysis, they were told at the National and University Library "that only at the police headquarters were people equipped with the necessary knowledge and tools for such an analysis."³² As Stroumsa concludes his account: "We gave up, I went back to Harvard, and when I came back to Jerusalem to teach, more than two years later, I had other commitments. It was only recently, more than a

²⁹ Quentin Quesnell, "The Mar Saba Clementine: A Question of Evidence," *CBQ* 37 (1975): 48-67.

³⁰ Scott G. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's Controversial Discovery* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism 15; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 12.

³¹ Guy Stroumsa, "Comments on Charles Hedrick's Article: A Testimony," *J ECS* 11, 2 (Summer 2003): 146.

³² Stroumsa, "Comments," 148.

quarter-century later, in talking to American colleagues, that I realized that I am the ‘last living Western scholar’ to have seen the Clement manuscript, and that I had a duty to testify in front of a skeptical scholarly world.”³³ Sometime after Stroumsa and fellow scholars made this visit and had the photographs taken, the end pages on which the text had been inscribed were removed from the book and have not been relocated since. Without a wider audience to confirm its continued existence or more thoroughly investigate its provenance, *Secret Mark*’s past has hovered somewhere between fantasy and history for decades.

And yet, despite (or because of?) its unstable status, a stream of monographs and articles on *Secret Mark* ensued in a sixty-year back and forth between supporters and detractors of Smith and his interpretations of the gospel. From the beginning, many were baldly uninterested in the question of forgery, focusing instead on what the gospel meant in relation to the canonical gospels or the historical Jesus.³⁴ Others stridently engaged in argument for the document’s “true” or “false” historical past, with various implicit definitions of what makes a “real past,” whether that be ancient, or an eighteenth century modern past, or a twentieth-century past.³⁵ As Charles

³³ Stroumsa, “Comments,” 148. Bruce Chilton interprets the subsequent events: “After Stroumsa’s intervention photographs in color were arranged by Kallistos Dourvas. The Greek Patriarchate has, since Stroumsa’s visit, cut the page from the volume, and keeps it separately. The inability to examine the manuscript and test its ink is a problem, since otherwise it is impossible to confirm Smith’s contention that the writing was done during the eighteenth century” (Chilton, “Provenience: A Reply to Charles Hedrick,” in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate [Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium]*, ed. Tony Burke [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012] 73. See also Charles W. Hedrick with Nicolaos Olympiou, “Secret Mark: New Photographs, New Witnesses,” *The Fourth R* (September-October 2000): 13-15.

³⁴ Crossan, *Four Other Gospels*, and “Thoughts on Two Extracanonial Gospels” *Semeia* 49 (January 1990): 155-68; James D. G. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making, Vol. 1: Jesus Remembered* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003], 169-70; “History and Development of Mark’s Gospel”; Helmut Koester, “History and Development of Mark’s Gospel (From Mark to Secret Mark and ‘Canonical’ Mark),” *Colloquy on New Testament Studies: A Time for Reappraisal and Fresh Approaches*, ed. by Bruce C. Corley (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983) 35-57, and *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990), 293-303.

³⁵ A selected list of titles after Neusner’s *Are There Really Tannaitic Parallels to The Gospels?* includes: Neusner, “Who Needs ‘the Historical Jesus’? Two Elegant Works Rehabilitate a Field Disgraced

Hedrick put it in 2003: “Unless the academy can reach a closer agreement on *Secret Mark*’s past, the secret gospel has no real future.”³⁶ In many ways, the sense of being mired in an impasse persists.

In the spring of 2011, Tony Burke organized the York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium (which in turn had grown out of conversations at the 2008 SBL Annual Meeting’s *Secret Mark* session) around these unresolved questions regarding the status of *Secret Mark*’s authenticity in hopes of bridging the divide and putting forward the best arguments about authenticity and forgery in, as some of the contributors hoped, *a more affectively neutral environment*. Paul Foster’s foreword to the volume of essays collected from the conference emphasizes the affective dimensions of this jostling over evidence and asserts that this book will provide reprieve from the emotional intensity of the debate: “Amid such strident assertions and counter-claims, one may turn to this collection of essays to find a relative sense of scholarly tranquility, as scholars wrestle robustly but respectfully with one another’s views.”³⁷ These conversations were picked up again at the York University symposium of 2015.³⁸ Rather than get mired in the “stalemate in the academy,” however, I want to make use of the impasse by

by Fraud," in *Ancient Judaism: Debates and Disputes: Third Series* (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 83; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993) 171–84; Raymond E. Brown, “The Gospel of Peter and Canonical Gospel Priority,” *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 321–43, in which Brown registers his theological objection to Secret Mark; Ehrman, "The Forgery of an Ancient Discovery? Morton Smith and the Secret Gospel of Mark," in *Lost Christianities*, 67–89; Craig Evans, *Jesus and His Contemporaries: Comparative Studies* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), 32–33; Hedrick, “The Secret Gospel of Mark”; Akenson, *Saint Saul* (84–91); Brown, *Mark’s Other Gospel*; and Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, while Jeff Jay renewed the argument for the authenticity of Clement’s letter specifically, “A New Look at the Epistolary Framework of *The Secret Gospel of Mark*,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 573–97.

³⁶ Charles Hedrick, “The Secret Gospel of Mark,” 141.

³⁷ Burke, *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery?*, xiii.

³⁸ See James McGrath’s account of the panel on forgery and *Secret Mark* at the symposium: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/exploringourmatrix/2015/09/ycas2015-fourth-panel.html> (accessed May 10, 2021).

wondering what in fact got us here. What is at stake is the very foundation of how these claims might be proven or not: it comes down to how we determine authenticity (by which is generally meant “authentically ancient”), our criteria, our definitions, what we hope determinations of authenticity might secure and why.

In his review of Smith’s work, Quentin Quesnell drew attention to Smith’s comment about looking “forward to the scholarly discussion that will follow the publication of the text. What will others see in it? And what evidence will they be able to find to support their insights?”³⁹ Quesnell proposed that, “[s]ince surely many others besides Smith must be equally fascinated with the question of how scholarly conclusions relate to evidence, is it impossible that one of them found himself moved to concoct some ‘evidence’ in order to set up a controlled experiment?”⁴⁰ This suggestion that a forger might be testing the discipline’s historicist standards by producing a forgery—that is, by constructing problematic evidence to see if it could pass for real history—lived on in various forms throughout the debates. Even though Quesnell was urging skepticism, and perhaps insinuating foul play, his fantasy of this evidence experiment, as well as Smith’s curiosity about what others would see in it, raise further questions: What personal desires or anxieties influence what scholars, or any readers, see in any given piece of evidence? According to what rules and definitions does any piece of evidence come to prove a particular past? For instance, some rendered Smith’s desire explicitly theological: “Make no mistake,” wrote New Testament scholar Walter Wink in his 1974 review:

Smith's is a theological and not just an historical program. He is engaged in a systematic effort to undermine the very ground on which Christian faith rests. His tools are the familiar ones: historical revision and psychological reduction. It is

³⁹ Smith, *Secret Gospel*, 25, quoted in Quesnell, “The Mar Saba Clementine,” 57.

⁴⁰ Quesnell, “The Mar Saba Clementine,” 58.

this project, and not his textual discovery, that gives his book the character of a challenge and confrontation.⁴¹

Wink was not distressed by questions of the document's authenticity, but by what Smith made of it.

Other critics who were concerned about its authenticity, however, alarmed by what they considered Smith's elision of fiction and fact, denounced his historical work as irresponsible fantasy or needy psychological compensation. Smith's former student Jacob Neusner accused Smith of disgracing the quest for the historical Jesus, arguing that the "'historical' results [that Smith arrived at]—Jesus was 'really' a homosexual magician—depended on selectively believing in whatever Smith thought was historical."⁴² After their public falling out at the 1984 Society of Biblical Literature meeting, Neusner would become one of his most vehement critics, declaring Smith "a charlatan and a fraud, and his discovery a hoax."⁴³ In 1993, two years after Smith's death, Neusner published a bitter, book-long refutation of Smith's scholarship, spanning from Smith's 1948 dissertation to his 1978 *Jesus the Magician*.⁴⁴ Neusner rendered Smith a

⁴¹ Walter Wink, "Jesus as Magician," *Union Theological Seminary Quarterly Review* 30 (1974): 11.

⁴² Jacob Neusner, *Are There Really Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels?*, 28. Scott Brown narrates some of the likely backstory to make sense of the intensity of Neusner's critique of his former teacher, especially since he had supported Smith's work up until the early 1980s. See Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 39-48. He relies in part on information recounted by Shaye J. D. Cohen, who was also a student of Smith's; see Cohen, Review of *Are There Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels?* *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1996): 86.

⁴³ Jacob Neusner and Noam M. M. Neusner, *The Price of Excellence: Universities in Conflict During the Cold War Era* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 78.

⁴⁴ Neusner, *Are There Really Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels?* Cohen's review of the latter refers to this book as "Neusner's obituary for Smith, bringing closure to an intense but troubled relationship" (Review of *Are There Really Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels?* 85). For an early account of the public confrontation that may have led to Neusner's attacks on Smith's work, see Hershel Shanks, "Annual Meetings Offer Intellectual Bazaar and Moments of High Drama," *BAR* 11, no. 2 (1985): 16. Shanks recounts how, at a session honoring Neusner, Smith stood up and announced: "Since I have often and deservedly recommended Professor Neusner's earlier historical works, so that his reputation reflects to some extent my sponsorship, I now find it my duty to warn you that his translation of the Palestinian Talmud contains many serious mistakes. It cannot be safely used, and had better not be used at all." He

dangerously imaginative historian with bad intentions: Smith, Neusner said, "chose to believe everything bad he could about Jesus, perhaps making up what he could not read into the sources."⁴⁵

It is notable that the hypothesis about Jesus's homoerotic contact with the young man is not a central feature of Smith's work on *Secret Mark*, certainly not as central as, say, the text's connections to ancient magical traditions are; one could certainly argue that Smith's critics made homoeroticism more central to the narrative than Smith did.⁴⁶ In his scholarly publication of and textual commentary on the *Letter* and *Secret Mark*, Smith barely mentions homoeroticism: it comes up briefly only as he debates the relation of the fragment to the "libertine" Carpocratians, a Christian sect with "a reputation for sexual license."⁴⁷ The gospel fragment would, however, play an important part in Smith's developing hypotheses about and ongoing research into the history of magical practices and the figure of the magician as a backdrop for his constructions of the history of early Christianity and the historical Jesus, work which would culminate in his 1978

went on to enumerate the errors, explaining he had brought copies of the review to prove it. Shanks continues: "Smith then descended from the dais, ripped open the cardboard boxes in his shopping bag and, with reviews in hand, began marching up the aisle like a staff sergeant, distributing the reviews to a stunned audience. Professor Davies asked Smith if he would wait until the end of the session to distribute the reviews. Smith replied that he would not and continued to pass out the reviews. Neusner made a brief, humorous reply, and "[t]he session was ended without further discussion. But the talk in the halls went on into the night" (Shanks, "Annual Meeting," 16).

⁴⁵ Jacob Neusner, *Rabbinic Literature and the New Testament: What We Cannot Show, We Do Not Know* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 5. Neusner elaborated the "Gay Gospel Hypothesis" in his *Are There Really Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels?* (27-31), which he also published as "Who Needs 'the Historical Jesus'?" in *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 4 (1994): 113-126.

⁴⁶ For a version of this argument, see Hedrick, "The Secret Gospel of Mark: Stalemate in the Academy."

⁴⁷ Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*, 185.

monograph, *Jesus the Magician*. Later arguments for Smith's forgery of *Secret Mark* arose, in part, from reactions to the trajectory of Smith's work as it bent towards this later monograph.⁴⁸

In many ways, then, Smith's work on *Secret Mark* was part of a larger set of historiographical questions that occupied his scholarship and his relations to the field: in his responses to criticisms of his reading of *Secret Mark*, for instance, Smith pressed consciously against the normative assumptions in the field about the kinds of interpretive moves canonical boundaries protect against, just as others would come to accuse Smith of inappropriately having his way with canonical Mark or the historical Jesus. He seemed to enjoy reminding his colleagues of the kind of fictions most New Testament scholars prefer to treat as facts. In a letter to Gershom Scholem on July 12, 1974, for instance, Smith provocatively pokes at the weak spots of historical criticism of the Bible:

For practical purposes the Gospels are our sole substantial evidence. And they are two generations later than the events and contradict both themselves and each other. Therefore, every school of criticism concerned about consistency begins by forming arbitrarily its own concept of what Jesus 'must' have been—a pious 'am ha'aretz,' a Hillelite rabbi, an eschatological preacher, a prophet like Elijah, etc. etc.—and then declares authentic the material that supports its predetermined conclusion, forces as much neutral material as possible into the picture, and brands the rest 'secondary.' The strength of my position, I think, is that, into this arbitrary guessing game, I have introduced the common-sense observations that ... it is more likely than not that a man's teachings are reflected by the practices of his disciples ... Now I have made my case, the next moves are up to my opponents. Let them explain: If Jesus did not practice magic, how does it happen that the central ritual of the earliest known Christianity is a rite of erotic magic (the eucharist)?⁴⁹

Clearly, critique of the rules that rendered some interpretations more realistically historical than others strikes are on Smith's mind. But many read this critique as defensive or as an expression

⁴⁸ Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician: Charlatan or Son of God?* New York: Harper and Row, 1978.

⁴⁹ Guy Stroumsa, *Morton Smith and Gershom Scholem: Correspondence 1945-1982* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), 160-61.

of his own excessive, perverse desire for a Jesus of his own making (homoerotically-inclined, or otherwise).

In another critical exchange about biblical historiography broadly, Smith displays his characteristic biting humor, frustration, and confidence in the relevance of his interpretations of the text. In 1975, the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture held a conference at the Graduate Theological Union and the University of California in Berkeley, prompted by Quesnell's proposal that *Secret Mark* might have been crafted by a modern forger. It was organized by Reginald H. Fuller, who presented a survey of possible readings of *Secret Mark* titled "Longer Mark: Forgery, Interpolation, or Old Tradition?"⁵⁰ Fuller accepts that Smith's find—the manuscript written in eighteenth-century handwriting—is likely a copy of a much older manuscript, possibly even attributable to Clement based on stylistic elements. But, he contends, "[i]t is at the point where Professor Smith begins to trace the history of the tradition back from Clement of Alexandria to the historical Jesus that my doubts begin seriously to arise."⁵¹ At this point, Fuller delves into biblical scholarship's methods of ascertaining the historical Jesus' behind the texts and how well Smith makes use of these approaches: "Professor Smith was correct in using form-critical methods to establish the antiquity of the resurrection story in the Letter to Theodore. But he failed to apply traditio-critical methods in order to establish the earliest discernible oral form of the narrative."⁵² He does not argue that the text—or the manuscript which carries it—was forged; rather, he implies that it cannot be used for to

⁵⁰ Reginald Fuller, "Longer Mark: Forgery, Interpolation, or Old Tradition?" in *Longer Mark: Forgery, Interpolation, or Old Tradition?*, ed. Wilhelm H. Wuellner (Protocol of the Eighteenth Colloquy: 7 December 1975; Berkeley, CA: Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1976), 1-11.

⁵¹ Fuller, "Longer Mark," 4.

⁵² Fuller, "Longer Mark," 6.

historically reconstruct Jesus as “a magician ... who practiced secret initiation rites with homosexual overtones.”⁵³

In his response to this argument, Smith criticizes Fuller’s position, but above all he asks probing questions about the applicability of the categories proposed by the title of Fuller’s talk and the assumptions that lie beneath them. While Fuller tries to parse the difference between this text’s possible identity as “forgery, interpolation, [or] old tradition,” Smith argues that each of these terms are simply “modern categories” that distort any ancient material to which we apply them, and he questions whether or not his interlocutors would comfortably apply such categories to canonical material.⁵⁴ For instance, he brings up John 21, generally regarded in New Testament scholarship as a “second ending” added to the Gospel of John, and Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, commonly read as the evangelist’s own composition creatively assembled from his sources. Responding to Fuller, Smith punches back: “Is John 21 a ‘forgery’? Or is the sermon on the mount in Matthew and Luke, an ‘interpolation’? Or is Matthew’s form of it ‘old tradition’? ... [W]e should waste no time trying to classify it in modern categories but should ask how these new pieces fit into and help us reconstruct our mostly missing mosaic of the first century of Christianity.”⁵⁵

These exchanges demonstrate some of the ways that *Secret Mark*, and by extension Smith as a historian of ancient Christianity, exist at this complicated nexus of Christian history and queer history. The issues get debated at the level of historiography but are in fact playing out on complicated affective interpersonal and theological playing fields. Here we might return to

⁵³ Fuller, “Longer Mark,” 3.

⁵⁴ Smith, “Response to Fuller,” in *Longer Mark: Forgery, Interpolation, or Old Tradition?* ed. Wilhelm H. Wuellner (Protocol of the Eighteenth Colloquy: 7 December 1975; Berkeley, CA: Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1976), 15.

⁵⁵ Smith, “Response to Fuller,” 15.

Ehrman’s unexamined affirmation of authenticity as the bulwark: if this document *in fact* had a “real past,” *then* we would be forced to let our interpretive imaginations run loose a little, *then* we would have to deal with perhaps uncomfortable revisions of certain social, theological, and political investments generated by or transformed into canonical version of the Christian past—but only “[i]f it were authentic.”⁵⁶ Evidence for authenticity performs social, political, and theological work—never simply scientific or historical work—and as such, authenticity itself becomes a potent object of desire.

In many ways, my own project aligns with some of the larger questions that occupied Smith’s imagination and critical inquiry as a historian of ancient Judaism and Christianity. Smith himself has asserted that “*all* accounts of [Jesus’] teaching and practice are conjectural, and I claim to my conjectures only that they fit the reports as well as any and better than most. Of course nothing can be *proved* about this subject.”⁵⁷ Many of his interlocutors would disagree with him on one or both points, and, as Ehrman puts it, Smith’s interpretations “left most scholars breathless and many incensed.”⁵⁸ But the fact that *Secret Mark* and Smith’s conjectures generated so much energy and became the object of so many scholarly—and for a time popular—cathexes, is exactly what I want to take up as evidence of how feelings fuel certain kinds of factualizing work.

Whether the *Secret Mark* manuscript was a modern forgery or not, then, it has become an object of longing and repulsion, a marker and maker of alternative narratives—be they ancient

⁵⁶ Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 70.

⁵⁷ Stroumsa, *Morton Smith and Gershom Scholem*, 160-61.

⁵⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, "The Forgery of an Ancient Discovery? Morton Smith and the Secret Gospel of Mark," in his *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 80.

and “authentically historical,” or modern fictions—of early Christian traditions, as well as an incitement to emotionally charged debates about methods and ethics in reconstructing the past. Unlike most of the scholarship that I survey in this dissertation, I am less interested in determining the truth of *Secret Mark*’s authenticity or forgery; rather, I take this scrap of text as a particularly dense site for reflecting on the felt investments that variously saturate the rhetoric of forgery and authenticity in New Testament scholarship. These felt investments and desires, I argue, importantly mark the boundaries of what counts as the evidence that circumscribes or fuels the fantasy life of Christian history.

Chapter 2—The Secret Gospel of Mark as Queer Archive; or, Psychic Needs in the History of Sexuality and the History of Christianity

“Smith had in mind a life of Jesus in the grand tradition of nineteenth-century narrative, only a Jesus in the image of Smith’s own fantasy of conspiracy and fraud: ... charlatan, magician, homosexual.”

— Jacob Neusner⁵⁹

“Homosexual acts by Jesus should be a non-issue for a historian... The historian’s questions are different: for example, did Jesus baptize or not?”

— Charles Hedrick⁶⁰

“Queer archives ... are composed of material practices that challenge traditional conceptions of history and understand the quest for history as a psychic need rather than a science.”

— Ann Cvetkovich⁶¹

As biblical scholar Anitra Bingham Kolenkow noticed early in the debates about the historicity of Smith’s find and his interpretations of it, Smith was not the only one to exert a strongly felt, theologically motivated agenda in contemporary biblical scholarly retellings of early Christian history. In her contribution to the 1975 Eighteenth Colloquy at Berkeley, Kolenkow addresses connections between scholars’ ideological or theological agendas and how they narrate trajectories between early and late sources. In doing so, she names the elephant in the room—anxiety on the part of biblical scholars about the proximity of homosexuality to any

⁵⁹ Jacob Neusner, *Are There Really Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels? A Refutation of Morton Smith*, SFSHJ 80 (Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1993), 21. Neusner manages to both gesture towards this long New Testament legacy of fantasy (that some would say saturates all historical Jesus enterprises, as they embody a search for a Jesus in “our” own image) and condemn Smith’s embeddedness in its traditions as especially egregious.

⁶⁰ Hedrick, “The Secret Gospel of Mark,” 142.

⁶¹ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 268.

historical or canonical Jesus: “[O]ne may also note the furor raised over Morton Smith’s charge that Jesus was a homosexual.... We know that the Gospel of John long has been known as possibly containing both gnostic and homosexual motifs.... What difference does it make to us if Jesus is not separated from a homosexual situation?”⁶² She leaves the question open, but many readers already had firm answers to that question.

In fact, a group of scholars embroiled in this debate suggest that the heightened emotional response to *Secret Mark*—and thus, the forceful nature of the “impasse”—is primarily rooted in the fear that Smith has slipped some queer fiction into the annals of “real history.” Since Smith’s interest, however marginal, in the sex life of the historical Jesus, was what seems to have hit such a nerve across the field, those who argue for *Secret Mark*’s authenticity have instead emphasized readings of the gospel that look past the homoerotic implications. Scott Brown, for one, has critiqued the propensity of scholars “to project onto Smith’s entire interpretive work an imaginary emphasis on Jesus being a homosexual” and Hedrick has portrayed Smith’s interest in Jesus’ homosexuality as very marginal.⁶³ Some of these scholars argue that Smith’s find was authentic but that he was wrong to read homoeroticism between the lines. Tony Burke and Charles Hedrick have suggested that if more of their conservative interlocutors could just separate Smith’s homosexual innuendos from the text itself, they wouldn’t need to argue for its inauthenticity.⁶⁴ In this line of thinking, which is prominent in defenses of *Secret Mark*, the text’s

⁶² Anitra Bingham Kolenkow, “Response to Fuller,” in *Longer Mark: Forgery, Interpolation, or Old Tradition?* ed. Wilhelm H. Wuellner (Protocol of the Eighteenth Colloquy: 7 December 1975; Berkeley, CA: Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1976), 33.

⁶³ Brown, “The Question of Motive in the Case Against Morton Smith,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 2 (2006): 355; Hedrick, “The Secret Gospel of Mark,” 135-36.

⁶⁴ Burke has explicitly said he thinks this is what’s going on with *Secret Mark*, and in a different but related way, with *The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife*. See Burke, “Secret Gospels, Gay Jesus, Jesus’ Wife, & Pinocchio.”

“queerness” is what makes it (necessary to call it) a forgery, either because its particular representation of homoeroticism makes it anachronistic (as some have tried to argue), or because of a more theologically pressing need to distance a text that could so easily be read as involving Jesus and homoeroticism from authentic Christian history or the canonical New Testament.⁶⁵ In either case, the role of (homo)sexuality in constructions of plausible historical evidence looms large.

Charles Hedrick has, for instance, fielded questions about Smith’s interest in Jesus’ sexuality and the response to it in biblical studies:

I have been asked in public gatherings, after presenting papers on *Secret Mark*, whether the negative reaction in the academy was due to homophobia. I cannot answer that question—I seriously doubt that anyone can. But the question is natural enough, in light of the strong response to Smith’s one line about homosexuality in both his books. On the other hand, homophobia may well have contributed to the disappearance of Clement’s letter. A homophobe who was also deeply religious would, not surprisingly, be greatly upset at the disrespect Smith’s suggestion accords Jesus. In addition, the ‘endorsement’ of homosexuality by Jesus, which Smith’s suggestion implies, creates a practical problem for religious institutions rejecting homosexuality as a sin, but promoting communal monasteries and convents. It is understandable that some people might feel it would be better had the document never been discovered.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Hershel Shanks, “‘Secret Mark’: A Modern Forgery? Restoring a Dead Scholar’s Reputation,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Nov./Dec. 2009): 59-61, 90-92; Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax*, xvii. Hershel Shanks critiques arguments for forgery based on the text’s anachronistic representations of homoeroticism. Responding to the arguments that Stephen Carlson and Peter Jeffery make about the role of homosexuality in discerning the forgery, Shanks argues: “The attitudes toward homosexuality reflected in the Clement letter are those of the 1950s, not the attitudes toward homosexuality in ancient times, they say. As Carlson puts it: ‘Secret Mark exude[s] the sexual mores of the 1950s.’ I am by no means an expert on homosexuality, but I do know that there is great disparity among scholars as to what ancient homosexuality was. I recently read a review of a new book titled *The Greeks and Greek Love*, which the reviewer describes as ‘a counterblast to Kenneth Dover’s classic *Greek Homosexuality* (1978).’ Clearly scholars vehemently disagree about the nature of ancient homosexuality, as I suspect they do about modern homosexuality. This is hardly enough to establish that the document has been forged.”

⁶⁶ Hedrick, “The Secret Gospel of Mark,” 136.

In strongly urging the field to see that the value of *Secret Mark*'s contribution to our reconstructions of the early Christian past or the history of the New Testament canon is too great to relegate it to the status of a forgery, Hedrick points out how often those who fight vehemently for its status as a forgery are also most bothered by Smith's interpretation of Jesus' potentially homoerotic relationships with disciples.⁶⁷ Hedrick argues, however, that without this homoerotically-oriented Jesus narrative getting in the way, we could use this document for what's *really important* (italicized ironically, of course): "Homosexual acts by Jesus should be a non-issue for a historian... The historian's questions are different: for example, did Jesus baptize or not?"⁶⁸ Hedrick's well-meaning attempt to pull *Secret Mark* out of the morass of hysterical scholarship has the disciplining effect of discrediting historians for whom "homosexual acts by Jesus" might be an object of interest or desire, implicitly policing both what can be a legitimate historical inquiry and who can participate in the making or authorizing of that history.

There are other difficulties, however, in naming the ways homophobia is entwined with claims for forgery in the effort to protect the early Christian past from any contact with (a potentially historically viable) homosexual Jesus. In an anecdote that gently reflects both the intimacy that is one of the pleasures of the small (predominantly homosocial) world of biblical scholarship, and the discomfort about homosexuality being named, much less authenticated through association with the early Christian historical imaginary, Helmut Koester recollects:

⁶⁷ Hedrick: "This initiation, Smith notes (but only in passing, I might add), may have included a physical union between Jesus and the initiate. At least, a physical encounter could not be excluded, Smith avers. Smith never develops this concept any further in the book, *but it is the one line in the book that most disturbed reviewers*. Smith argues that the Christian church in the second and third centuries covered up this baptismal founding rite of Christianity, a rite initiated by Jesus himself" ("The Secret Gospel of Mark," 135, my italics).

⁶⁸ Hedrick, "The Secret Gospel of Mark," 142.

I first met Morton Smith in 1960 at a conference at which he presented *Secret Mark* for the first time. After that meeting I sought him out, asked for a copy of the transcribed text and began discussing the matter with him. I especially criticized him for suggesting that the initiation rite in the Secret Gospel indicated some homosexual ritual. He was quite open to my criticism, and we became friends. In 1963, when I was a visiting professor at the University of Heidelberg, Morton had a sabbatical, which he spent searching for magical texts in European museums. He then asked me if he could bring me his manuscript, the first draft of what a decade later was to be published by Harvard University Press under the title *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*. We met several hours a day for a whole week, discussing details of the interpretation of *Secret Mark*.⁶⁹

I can't help but wonder, reading suggestively into the affective world of Koester's narrative, if Smith's openness to criticism of his interest in a homosexual Christian past—his willingness to set it aside—opened the way for his friendship with Koester and to Koester's desire to use *Secret Mark* in his reconstructions of canonical New Testament textual traditions. Of course, Bart Ehrman would critique my insinuations of a homophobic structuring of such academic relationships. Ehrman would call for hard evidence, and he would find it elusive:

As I have intimated, Hedrick suggests that the widespread vitriol found its root in a homophobia in the academy. I too do not know if this is true, but I certainly would like to see some evidence of it, if this in fact is what he wants to claim. For it is a rather serious charge—raised precisely by Hedrick's stated reluctance to raise it!—and not one that we should allow into general discourse without some supporting argument.⁷⁰

However, just as José Muñoz has reminded us how “[q]ueerness is rarely complemented by evidence, or at least by traditional understandings of the term,” securing proof of homophobia here would challenge conceptions of evidence, calling on a kind of suspect, affective knowledge.⁷¹ The exaggerated responses to Smith's so-called “homosexual” designs on the

⁶⁹ Koester, “Was Morton Smith a Great Thespian and I a Complete Fool?” *BAR* (Nov./Dec. 2009): 58. Again, we could read Koester's narrative of the collegial intimacy of biblical studies as a carefully cultivated homosocial world that is, as Jennifer Knust suggests, so often “epistemologically ‘between men’ and often materially between men, too” (Knust, private correspondence, April 2021).

⁷⁰ Ehrman, “Response to Charles Hedrick's Stalemate,” 156.

⁷¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York University Press, 2009), 65. “Queer evidence,” as Muñoz imagines it, would have to be “an evidence that

Christian past might be felt, however, as speaking *symptomatically* to a kind of panic reverberating across the field. They point not only to anxiety about some scholarship touching the historical Jesus in inappropriate ways but also to the anxiety New Testament scholars generally feel about their own desires to make contact with the past. People on both sides of the argument seem to hold out hope that stabilizing the reputation of *Secret Mark* as definitively forged or authentic will shut down uncomfortable uncertainties and, perhaps, alleviate anxiety about their own theological, imaginative, perverse, relations with the past—perhaps by shielding their own desires with the cover of seeming objectivity.

As squeamish or dismissive as much of the scholarship may be about this, and as much as the gospel's defenders might like to purge everything related to sexuality from the conversation, Smith's perhaps minor historical Jesus interpretation sheds light on exclusions and repressions in the study of the New Testament and Christian beginnings. As Hedrick has put it: "It is understandable that some people might feel it would be better had the document never been discovered."⁷²

While I agree with Hedrick, Brown, and others that Smith had different interests than writing gay Christian history, I do share Bart Ehrman's opinion (if not the conclusions he draws from this reading of Smith's interests) that the possibility of Jesus' homoerotic teaching was at some level very important to Smith and to his interpretation of *Secret Mark*:

One point that Hedrick does want to make explicit is that since the homoerotic interpretation of Clement's first citation of *Secret Mark* is not a central component of Smith's reconstruction it should not have played so large a role in the debate over the letter. In my opinion this is a misconstrual of the situation. For much of Smith's entire work on *The Secret Gospel* does indeed move towards the homoerotic aspects of the historical 'facts' he has uncovered about Jesus, his

has been queered in relation to the laws of what counts as proof." There's a built-in paradox here, an essential paradox that "queer evidence" must harbor to be both "queer" and "evident" (65).

⁷² Hedrick, "The Secret Gospel of Mark," 136.

explication of which, coming at the end of his long story of discovery, is the denouement of the entire argument. The letters to and from Scholem, so usefully cited for us now for the first time by Stroumsa, show that it was precisely the libertine character of the material that struck Smith at the outset. And reading the popular account, *The Secret Gospel*, leaves no doubt that the statements that raised the hackles of some of Smith's reviewers were not simply passing remarks open to some kind of homoerotic (or homophobic) misreading. Smith is much more explicit than that.⁷³

Ehrman also rather snidely plays up what he considers to be “possibly the most telling footnote of the book,” in which “Smith makes a suggestion about what these ‘unknown ceremonies’ may have entailed: ‘Manipulation too was probably involved; the stories of Jesus’ miracles give a very large place to the use of his hands.’ Indeed.”⁷⁴ Might unconscious homophobia be coming into play here as well, in particular in the implicit implication that any touch between men must be homoerotic?

Disputes over the text's authenticity and Smith's (pure or impure) desires continue to be intimately tied to certain readers' anxieties about the kind of historical Jesus that Smith saw behind it, and, relatedly, to the “personal” reasons that might have motivated Smith in particular to find that version of Jesus in history. Scott Brown, for instance, tries to come up with a “more plausible” motive than gay revenge, imagining that if Smith forged it, it might more reasonably have been his blind ambition, his hunger for the kind of fame that comes from finding foundational pieces of (Christian) history, “the fame and prestige that comes from being the discoverer of an important historical document.”⁷⁵ Further, Brown argues: “Hardly any other motive for forgery could account for the monumental effort Smith put into preparing his analysis

⁷³ Ehrman, “Response to Charles Hedrick's Stalemate,” *JECS* 11, 2 (Summer 2003): 156-7.

⁷⁴ Ehrman, “Response to Charles Hedrick's Stalemate,” 157.

⁷⁵ Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 49.

of the gospel fragments and the letter. So there is at least one plausible motive, which has often been passed over in favour of less plausible ones (such as that Smith wanted to discredit Christianity by showing that Jesus was gay).⁷⁶ Again, I am not arguing that Smith did indeed forge the text or interpret it the way that he did out of some desire for the “gay revenge,” but I do want to question the assumption that the desire to undermine hegemonic Christian homophobia is a *less plausible* desire than the desire for professional success and academic prestige—it might be a less *conscious* desire, but that makes it no less plausible. I also want to question whether the desire to undermine hegemonic Christian homophobia is any less potent than a desire on the part of certain Christian biblical scholars or theologians to instantiate such homophobic readings as more properly historical readings.

Queer Evidence, Queer Archives

One way to make sense of the evidence marshalled for and against queer readings of the gospel and the value of the various kinds of evidence marshaled both for and against *Secret Mark*'s authenticity, is to read it all as part of a kind of queer archive. In an issue of the *Radical History Review* devoted to the subject, queer archives are described as “a space where queer subjects put themselves together as historical subjects, even if done in the context of archival lack”—and thus, here in these archives, “one collects or cobbles together historical understandings of sexuality and gender through an appraisal of presences and absences.”⁷⁷ Work that has been situated within what has been dubbed the “queer archival turn” takes an explicit interest in the role of desire in finding or making histories (including desire on the part of historians for particular versions of the past, and instantiations of desire from the past as they

⁷⁶ Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 49.

⁷⁷ Daniel Marshall, Kevin P. Murphy, and Zeb Tortorici, “Queering Archives: Historical Unravelings,” *Radical History Review* 120 (2014): 2.

were recorded, retrieved or lost, left unmarked or written over). Ann Cvetkovich considers the way queer archives are so often archives of feelings. She explains that “the model for the archive of feelings is quite often that of the fetish,” by which she means, taking up Freud and Marx, “that objects derive their significance from the feelings attached to them; not because of their intrinsic meaning or referentiality.”⁷⁸ After all, for Freud “there is always ‘some pleasurable motive’ for the recall of the remote past—a potential theory of remembrance as wish fulfillment parallel to the theory of dreams.”⁷⁹

Surfacing desires and getting in touch with fantasies is at the heart of many queer archival endeavors and related creative uses of the past. Following a psychoanalytic logic, Cvetkovich proposes the archive of feelings as a way to approach “cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception.”⁸⁰ To address and reimagine the kinds of objects, however substantial or ephemeral, that speak our various histories as an archive of feelings is to consider not simply the documentation but also the affective life that went into the making, collecting, and preserving of those “documents,” and to account for one’s own and others desires in entering a relationship with those archives. Examining physical and metaphorical archives, she also organizes her own work as a response to the challenge of historicizing queer and lesbian public cultures, and other trauma cultures, *as* an archive of

⁷⁸ Cvetkovich, "Photographing Objects: Art as Queer Archival Practice" in *Lost and Found: Querying the Archive*, eds. Mathias Danbolt, Jane Rowley and Louise Wolthers (Nikolaj, Copenhagen Contemporary Art Center, 2009), 54.

⁷⁹ John Fletcher, *Freud and the Scene of Trauma* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013), 115, quoting from Sigmund Freud, “Screen Memories,” in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 3, transl. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1899), 317.

⁸⁰ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 7.

feelings.⁸¹ For Cvetkovich, the “archive of feelings” specifically describe unconventional assemblages and the ways they often intimately associate things that in “properly historical” contexts might not be allowed or expected to touch; how they value and convey histories of what might have been but can’t now be easily told; or how they contain histories that could never have been but which their creators long to have known.⁸² Homing in on the erotic dimensions of queer historiography’s work in the archives, Cvetkovich proposes the fetish as one model of the archive of feelings, in which “objects derive their significance from the feelings attached to them; not because of their intrinsic meaning or referentiality.”⁸³ Such “archives,” be they physical or metaphorical, act as a repository or expression of the kinds of “queer histories ... made of affective relations” that, for instance, Carolyn Dinshaw has mapped.⁸⁴

Queer archival projects, on the one hand, construct or collect evidence that might be foundational for alternative narratives of desire, expressions of gender, or queer community, and, on the other, are positioned to question what kinds of erotic trajectories and normative identities

⁸¹ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 7.

⁸² The “archive of feelings” becomes one way of accounting for histories of trauma, particularly intimate traumas, histories marked paradoxically by disassociation and forgetting (Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 7). Maia Kotrosits reads Christian history, like other historical endeavors defined by contemporary identity politics, as one vast, messy, traumatic archive of feelings, in *Rethinking Early Christian Identity* and in her application of Cvetkovich’s queer approach to trauma in readings of early Christian texts in particular (*Rethinking Early Christian Identity: Affect, Violence and Belonging* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015], esp. 141-44, 178-84).

⁸³ Ann Cvetkovich, “Photographing Objects: Art as Queer Archival Practice,” 54.

⁸⁴ Dinshaw aims to render such histories “by making entities past and present touch,” to touch across time through calculated juxtapositions (*Getting Medieval*, 12). For examples of queer archives engaged in such affective historiographical experiments apart from those described in Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings*, see Danbolt et al., eds., *Lost and Found*, an exhibition catalogue and collection of essays. Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006) serves as such an archive, confirming for Cvetkovich the (historical, social, political, affective) importance of “queer perspectives” on traumatic experience that is hard to speak, hard to archive, particularly trauma that challenges “the relation between the catastrophic and the everyday and that make public space for lives whose very ordinariness makes them historically meaningful” (“Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*,” *WSQ* 36, 1-2 [2008]: 111).

traditional historical archives are invested in constructing or protecting.⁸⁵ Focusing specifically on the role of personal desire in archival research and historical reconstruction, Antoinette Burton asks how much is desire “a crucial constituent of the archive experience?” After all, “history is not merely a project of fact-retrieval ... but also a set of complex processes of selection, interpretation, and even creative invention—processes set in motion by, among other things, one’s personal encounter with the archive, the history of the archive itself, and the pressure of the contemporary moment on one’s reading of what is to be found there.”⁸⁶

While acknowledging that traditional historical methods often intend to safeguard the past, to prevent violence that can be done by willful denial of inconvenient or offensive facts or by uncritical, too-imaginative identification and appropriation, however, queer historiography specifically questions what values “objectivity,” “authenticity,” and “proof” code and enforce and whose desires they subsume and authorize. The queer archival turn takes an explicit interest in the role of desire in finding or making histories—desire registered by historians and institutions for particular versions of the past, as well as instantiations of desire “from the past” as they were recorded and retrieved.

⁸⁵ Of course, it is not only the *queer* archival turn that attends to questions of desire in the archives: Antoinette Burton, for instance, sets this as a central motivating question in *Archive Stories*, an edited collection of personal accounts that purport to offer “self-conscious ethnographies” of archival research. (“Introduction,” *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History*, ed. Burton [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005], 11). *Archive Stories* brings together narratives of the impact of researchers’ experiences of race, gender, and personal histories on their access to and relationship with collections of historical materials. Burton uses the concept of “archive” to refer to “traces of the past collected intentionally or haphazardly as ‘evidence’” (6). Such archives include but are not limited to “official spaces or state repositories”: “From the Rosetta stone to medieval tapestry to Victorian house museums to African body tattoos, scholars have been ‘reading’ historical evidence off of any number of different archival incarnations for centuries” (3).

⁸⁶ Burton, “Introduction,” 8.

Queer archival projects do the double work of constructing or reconstituting evidence that might be foundational for alternative narratives of sexual desires, expressions of gender, traumatic experience, or queer community, and, by contrast, of questioning what kinds of erotic trajectories and normative identities traditional historical archives are invested in constructing or protecting. In this sense, queer archives invite us to pause and consider the affective (messier, more fractured and contradictory than ideological) stakes of “evidence.” These include questioning the affective as well as social and political stakes of what kinds of objects are privileged as evidence under what conditions and for whom, and what kinds of objects get forgotten, written off, suppressed under different circumstances, and taking seriously the felt dimensions of the preservation or loss of such objects. Queers often know that there is rarely a “historical” place to which one can (re)turn or which one can authoritatively cite, and yet, the longing persists, and so we resort to making creative inferences from hints, suggestions, and strange absences—to inventing things that can attest to a *felt reality*.

In her work on queer archives, Ann Cvetkovich argues explicitly for “the importance of fantasy as a way of creating history from absences,” homing in on the kinds of archives that can instantiate (histories of) queer lives and desires from the most ephemeral traces that so often are all that are left to mark the presence and erasures of queer pasts.⁸⁷ Kathryn Bond Stockton captures this in her description of how “certain queer comedians, who grew up in the sixties before there were any gays on TV, wryly explain that they ‘found themselves’ as children in TV

⁸⁷Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 271. Writing within literary and cultural studies, Cvetkovich developed her notion of the “archive of feelings” to capture the hard-to-speak, hard-to-historicize evidence of trauma that so often plays a formative role in the construction of queer communities (7-12). For an examination of notions of the archive across queer studies and the field of history, as well as an analysis of the perceived differences between “the queer archive of feelings and most actual public research archives,” see Sara Edenheim, “Lost and Never Found: The Queer Archive of Feelings and Its Historical Propriety,” *differences* 24, 3 (2013): 36–62.

personas...: Ernie, the odd boy on *My Three Sons*; Robin of *Batman*; *The Beverly Hillbillies*' Miss Jane Hathaway; or Josephine the Plumber (in ads for bathroom cleaners)."⁸⁸ Writing about the challenge of historicizing queerness in childhood, Stockton says: "Even if we meet [these queer, strange children] in our lives and reading (inside an Anglo-American context), they are not in History, as we are going to see. They are not a matter of historians' writings or of the general public's belief. The silences surrounding the queerness of children happen to be broken—loquaciously broken and broken almost only—by fictional forms. Fictions literally offer the forms that certain broodings on children might take."⁸⁹ It's in these sites of fictional or fantasized queerness that queers might feel we have good reason to stake our own varied sorts of "historical" claims, Stockton and Cvetkovich suggest.

Such archives, then, "are composed of material practices that challenge traditional conceptions of history and understand the quest for history as a psychic need rather than a science."⁹⁰ Cvetkovich cites as one example Cheryl Dunye's 1996 film *The Watermelon Woman*, about a queer black woman (named Cheryl and played by Dunye herself) who is obsessed with finding evidence of a 1930s African American lesbian actress named Fae Richards. Dunye marshals forms of documentary and oral history to tell her story. The film features a fake archive—doctored photographs, antique film clips, and forged letters created for the film by artist Zoe Leonard, but it speaks to "real" history (the real dyke heroines of early Hollywood, the Josephine Bakers, Clara Bows, Marlene Dietrichs, Dorothy Arzners) and to the role of contemporary longings to find queer lost things. *The Watermelon Woman*'s overlapping

⁸⁸ Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 1.

⁸⁹ Stockton, *The Queer Child*, 2.

⁹⁰ Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 268.

personal and “historical” narratives provide spaces of meditation on what drives someone to seek intimacy or kinship with figures from the past, how historical obsessions and personal relationships spill over into each other, and how the past, through fantasy and historical fact, obliquely informs and is informed by felt relations in and across the present.

When looking of the evidence of an “actually” ancient past, how do we disentangle our own fantasies and desires from our encounters with the “evidence”? Why is the “evidence” we’re dealing with available to us *as evidence* in the first place? When does the past end? When does an origin begin? What are the boundaries of any given archive? The “queer archival turn” is very much about unexpected libidinal attachments, and about honoring those attachments as the very stuff of history, as valuable historical evidence albeit ephemeral and maybe the stuff of fantasy entirely—where fantasy is itself understood to be part of the historical record. I’m interested in examining the queer archives of New Testament history and scholarship for more traces of these queer investments, affect in the archives, or feelings as evidence. How might the ancient production of that “evidence” itself be entangled in the work of fantasy (gospel narratives as ancient fantasies, or Clement’s argument against one reader’s fantasies about Jesus’s relationship with the naked young man, or the letter attributed to Clement itself as a product of fourth-century or even eighteenth-century fantasies)?

Putting *Secret Mark*’s volatile and varied reception history alongside queer historiographical projects, we can better analyze the affective dimensions at work in notions of the “historical” as they are mobilized around *Secret Mark*, positing *Secret Mark*’s reception as a queer archive. Doing so, I argue, has implications for how we make sense of discourses of authenticity and forgery in early Christian historiography. In its queer archival dimensions, *Secret Mark*’s reception speaks to the ways historical evidence acts as a cover—and a medium—

for the transmission of affective and theological investments and anxieties regarding what we can actually know about “what really happened” in the past, as well as to the constitutive role (homo)sexuality plays in the fraught debate about forgery. After all, as those who work with queer archives know well, and as I argue *Secret Mark*’s reception demonstrates, gender and sexuality are intimately entangled with constructions of objectivity and investments in the authority of (certain versions of) the historical past.⁹¹

Secret Mark exists at the nexus of queer history and Christian history, uncomfortable as that has made the biblical scholars who engaged this text in reconstructions of the canon or earliest Christian history. As such, its reception forms a rich archive of feelings and of desires that speaks to both Christian history and queer history. *Secret Mark* provokes a set of imaginative possibilities that might seem dangerous perhaps because it makes explicit the ways in which “psychic needs” do shape history.⁹² The collection of scholarly, popular and personal material that accumulated over the course of *Secret Mark*’s twentieth century reception functions, I argue, as a queer affective archive at the very heart of New Testament historiography. It is an “archive” bound together in great part by its obsession with—or by its being unwillingly haunted by—the pressing “question of evidence,” as Quesnell emphasized, but the range of “evidence” that makes up in this “archive” of *Secret Mark*’s reception history is inconsistent with the dispassionate standards of traditional historicism that most of Smith’s interlocutors lay claim to or strain to defend. Their use of this rather queer evidence (queer in the sense of perversely imaginative or nonnormative by historicist standards) underscores the

⁹¹ Compare, for instance, the explosive dispute and invective around the role of sexual orientation and gender, respectively, in discussions of *Secret Mark* and *The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife*, mentioned in my introduction.

⁹² Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 268.

affective—even erotic—dimensions that drive historicist approaches to the past. As such, this particular queer Christian archive points to a set of methodological and ethics issues at the nexus of both the history of sexuality and the history of Christianity.

Queer archives invite us to consider the affective stakes of what kinds of objects are privileged as “evidence,” under what conditions, and for whom. José Esteban Muñoz, for instance, probes the conflicted relationship between “queerness” and “evidence”: “evidence of queerness has been used to penalize and discipline queer desires, connections, and acts,” to shape when, where and how one might express or discover queer sexualities, performances, lineages in the past, and how one might engage them in the present. “When the historian of queer experience attempts to document a queer past, there is often a gatekeeper, representing a straight present, who will labor to invalidate the historical fact of queer lives—present, past, and future.”⁹³ Queering the hierarchical relationship between, on the one hand, institutional archives, what they collect, how they preserve it, and, on the other, repeated gestures and performances, spreading rumors, the shoebox or scrapbook in the closet containing zines, pornography, love letters, and so on, is partly an act of redefining what a historical document is, but it is also a mode of being curious about the structures that determine what history is most reliably preserved and to what ends.

The strangeness of what I am calling the archive of *Secret Mark*'s reception history presses for acknowledgment of the role of imagination and feeling, of hints and gestures, and unconventional forms of evidence not as the dross that must be clear to access real history but as the building blocks of that history itself—of the history of early Christianity in particular. For instance, the agenda for the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture

⁹³ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 65.

conference at Berkeley, organized by Fuller shortly after the publication of Quesnell's pivotal article which proposed the possibility of *Secret Mark's* modern forgery, was inspired by a dream Fuller had. Fuller is quoted in the conference minutes: "I'd like to begin by sharing a dream. In the dream, Professor Smith met the man responsible for the Piltdown skull. Then Professor Smith broke down and admitted that he himself had written the supposed letter from Clement. As a result of that dream, I naturally seized upon the whole question of criteria for detecting a forgery, as Professor Murgia did. That is points 1 and 2 on the list."⁹⁴ Yes, naturally. Fuller's dream, ephemeral though it may have been, had the rather real and (thanks to publication of the papers) lasting effect of adding evidence to the critique of Smith's discovery and interpretations.

Elsewhere in this archive, Robert Price tells a freely associative personal anecdote of his own which he offers as proof to refute Smith's narrative of discovery, taking fiction as a kind of reliable evidence:

If *Secret Mark* is Morton Smith's own creation, where might he have derived the idea for it? This question brings me at last to a chance discovery of my own, the event that caused me to reassess the whole question after I thought Professor Hedrick had laid it to rest. Two years ago, I was in Detroit on a speaking tour and chanced to be poring over the shelves of a large but lackluster second-hand bookstore. My eye fell upon the title of one worn-looking volume, *The Mystery of Mar Saba*. Thinking instantly of Morton Smith's fateful visit there, I picked up the book with mild curiosity, thinking, "What if it turns out to be one of those 'lost Gospel' novels?" Son of a gun, *it did!*⁹⁵

From this chance encounter with a work of evangelical spy fiction in a Detroit bookstore, Price wonders if "Morton Smith might easily have become familiar with this popular novel, and I

⁹⁴ Minutes of the Colloquy, in *Longer Mark: Forgery, Interpolation, or Old Tradition?* ed. Wilhelm H. Wuellner (Protocol of the Eighteenth Colloquy: 7 December 1975; Berkeley, CA: Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1976), 56.

⁹⁵ Robert M. Price, "Second Thoughts on the Secret Gospel," *BBR* 14, 1 (2004): 131. Price opens this essay by drawing a rather freely associative parallel to Irving Wallace's novel, *The Word*, which tells the story of scholar who pulls off a hoax, and this narrative seems to remind Price of Smith (127).

cannot help wondering if it gave him the idea for a hoax of his own, meant to undermine the Christian faith that he found to be oppressive.”⁹⁶ Elsewhere, Price indicts Smith for giving too much authority to the imaginative dimensions of religious history:

In 1985 I asked Morton Smith how he responded to charges of forgery, recently renewed in Per Beskow's excellent book *Strange Tales about Jesus: A Survey of Unfamiliar Gospels*. He told me the now-familiar story of the custodians of the manuscript secreting it away out of embarrassment at the notoriety that Smith's book *Secret Gospel* had brought them, henceforth wanting to suppress the evidence. He asked, furthermore, what business Beskow had in condemning all the more-recent New Age Gospels as spurious: if they embodied someone's faith, weren't they authentic Gospels, no matter who wrote them or when? Later I wondered if his words did not apply equally, even especially, to his own *Secret Mark*!⁹⁷

Of course, he concludes, “[s]hort of yet another manuscript discovery, this time perhaps a confession among Smith's own papers, we will never know.”⁹⁸

Guy Stroumsa attempted to marshal more evidence from Smith's personal records, in great part in order to prove Smith's innocence. In publishing the private correspondence of Smith and Gershom Scholem, Stroumsa hoped to offer access to Smith's “state of mind” as he worked through the early stages of interpreting the text and communicated with his admired mentor:

While no definitive proof will ever satisfy Smith's debunkers, his correspondence with Scholem sheds some new light on Smith's Mar Saba discovery and on his state of mind afterwards, while he was working on the presentation of his discovery to the scholarly world. The correspondence should provide sufficient evidence of his intellectual honesty to anyone armed with common sense and lacking malice.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Price, “Second Thoughts on the Secret Gospel,” 132. Cf. Scott Brown on how unlikely he thinks it is that Smith would have picked up a work of evangelical pulp fiction, as well on how different Smith's and The Mystery of Mar Saba's stories actually are (*Mark's Other Gospel*, 57-59).

⁹⁷ Price, “Second Thoughts on the Secret Gospel,” 130.

⁹⁸ Price, “Second Thoughts on the Secret Gospel,” 132.

⁹⁹ Stroumsa, *Morton Smith and Gershom Scholem*, xv.

Despite Stroumsa's intentions, some of Smith's critics instead turned to those letters for evidence of Smith's burgeoning dislike and eventual break with the church, his youthful fascination with Alistair Crowley, and other seeds of dissent that would lead him to write Jesus into history as a magician conducting (erotic?) baptismal initiations. These came to be read as further clues to why Smith might have wanted to find a piece of evidence exactly like *The Secret Gospel of Mark* fragment. For instance, in one of his early letters to Scholem, Smith writes with enthusiasm about having read *White Stains* and a biography of Alistair Crowley:

Reacting to his upbringing he developed hatred towards Christianity and already at the age of twenty he published his first book: *White Stains*, based on Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. *White Stains* was published in 1896, and from then until 1906 Crowley lived as a litterateur, off his parents' money. Then he became interested in magic.... Why am I interested in a fool like him? I cannot say. I just am. He has a certain 'Keckheit, Kuhnheit und Grandiositat' (as Goethe said about Byron) which I find lacking in your usual research student and your average Anglican minister.¹⁰⁰

Smith writes this letter from Philadelphia, where he was at the time living at home with his father, having just begun serving as Vicar at St. Ambrose's Mission in Philadelphia (a position that would not last long for him). Why was Smith so captivated with Crowley's un-Anglican "cheekiness, boldness and grandiosity," his detractors wondered suspiciously?¹⁰¹ Interpreting from Smith's biography and these statements that Smith was an angry gay man, a lapsed Christian who was looking for a way to undermine Christianity, or whose desire to make a place for homosexuality at the heart of Christianity was so strong that it pushed him to fabricate the evidence. Peter Jeffery especially harps on this:

I believe[s] we have to conclude that he had a larger goal than simply authenticating and interpreting an interesting text he had found. In time I think it will be clear that the historic Christian opposition to homosexuality was a subject of great personal importance to Smith, well beyond the investment that any

¹⁰⁰ Stroumsa, *Morton Smith and Gershom Scholem*, 10-11.

¹⁰¹ Stroumsa, *Morton Smith and Gershom Scholem*, 9.

scholar would have in seeing his research findings widely accepted. The shape of Smith's obsession will gradually emerge as we consider what else he had to say on the subject of sex.¹⁰²

Jeffery rails against Smith's work, his emotionalism, his representation of events. Jeffery particularly faults Smith for being angry with the church, with "Christianity," for conflating Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, even for feeling hurt and overpowered by "the church"—suggesting Smith was wrong about (what Jeffery understands to be) his sense of woundedness at the hands of Christianity and that Smith misrepresented the church's teachings on homosexuality, making them worse than they actually doctrinally were.¹⁰³

Another piece of "evidence" that simultaneously acknowledges and eludes the contested question of authenticity is a 1984 Channel 4 (UK) television special beautifully titled *Jesus: The Evidence*. It features Morton Smith in his late 60s, performing an encounter with *Secret Mark*, visually suggesting the presence of the manuscript in the monastery library.¹⁰⁴ Smith is seated at a desk in a library, or a film studio set up to look like a library. He's holding a facsimile copy of the Voss volume of Ignatius' letters opened to the pages inscribed with the (by then) lost manuscript. "The evidence turned out to show that the evidence was, pretty certainly, authentic. I had to be so careful because the text implied that Jesus himself practiced some sort of secret

¹⁰² Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 121.

¹⁰³ Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 154-6.

¹⁰⁴ I was first alerted to this TV special by Mark Goodacre, who writes about it in a 2009 blog entry, "Morton Smith, Mar Saba and Jesus: The Evidence." The description of the show is filtered through Goodacre's memory: "I am pretty sure that I am able to provide the date and the occasion. I am lucky to have a good memory, and I can recall seeing Morton Smith on the Channel 4 (UK) documentary *Jesus: The Evidence*, talking about *Secret Mark*, in 1984. According to the BFI, the three-part series was broadcast in April 1984. My memory is enhanced not only by the fact that at the time my parents had recently purchased a Betamax video recorder, which I used to tape the series, but also by the fact that I had my first appearance on TV criticizing the series that same month, on the show *Right to Reply* (I was a precocious teenager, I am afraid!)." <http://ntweblog.blogspot.com/2009/11/morton-smith-mar-saba-and-jesus.html> (accessed September 2015).

nocturnal initiation. This what Clement quotes of the secret gospel.” The screen freezes, with the facsimile of the text in the center of the frame and the words of the gospel fragment are heard in voiceover: “But the youth, looking upon him, loved him, and began to beseech him that he might be with him... The youth comes to him wearing a linen cloth over his naked body, and he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of God.” The camera cuts back to Smith, who explains that Clement follows the gospel excerpt with a “reassurance that there is nothing in this text ... to justify the rumors Theodore has obviously heard to the effect that during the ritual Jesus and the initiate were naked together.” The episode attempts to visualize evidence that may or may not have ever actually existed to render alternative versions of early Christianity to a popular audience—constructing a historical fantasy (and perhaps an erotic fantasy) for an audience in the act of reimagining Christian origins.

Writing in condemnation of Smith’s imaginative historiography (perfectly embodied by this imaginative television sequence with its facsimile edition of the letter), Patrick Skehan connects Smith’s scholarship on the letter of Clement and the Gospel to the libertine Christian sect that has supposedly been lewdly interpreting this version of Mark: “The whole morbid concatenation of fancies does credit to Smith’s ability to enter into the spirit of the Carpocratians[.]”¹⁰⁵ But this episode might also be rendered as a beautiful example of what Carla Freccero calls “fantasmatic historiography,” where fantasy is treated as an epistemologically valuable means of accessing or making sense of the past.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Patrick Skehan, “Review of Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark,” *CHR* 60, 3 (1 October 1974): 452.

¹⁰⁶ Championing the use of psychoanalysis alongside queer theory to intervene in productions of empirical history and attend to the play of affect in constructions of the past, Freccero argues that allowing “fantasy and ideology an acknowledged place in the production of ‘fantasmatic’ historiography [functions] as a way to get at how subjects live, not only their histories, but history itself, to the extent that history is lived through fantasy in the form of ideology” (“Queer Times,” in *After Sex? On Writing Since*

Queer Histories of New Testament Historiography

Queer archives speak to similar impulses in New Testament historiography, in which disavowed or repudiated desires and aversions and their theological implications or motivations get displaced onto historical narratives or interpretations of ancient texts in New Testament historiography. Our inheritance from nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical-critical biblical scholarship is a historicism that claims to be able to distinguish faith from reason, wishful thinking about an early Christian past from objective analysis of archaeological or textual evidence. Wishful thinking (including desire for or identification with an idealized Christian past, certainly shaped by the sentiments of faith or reactions against them) is thus aligned with the theological and the confessional over and against the historical in a certain kind of biblical-scholarly self-definition, even as that same biblical scholarship produces “objective” or “accurate” or “realistic” history in the image of a sublimated faith or in support of unconscious theological commitments.

I’m interested in surfacing the desire, the affective or erotic charge, in “secular,” scientific historiography, where the historical itself comes to function as a kind of fetish. In this fetishistic portrayal of the historical in biblical studies, the affective charge is generated by the disavowal of the theological (as it has been aligned with the confessional, the moralistic, the subjective, and the emotional in the self-conscious splitting of academic biblical studies from what happens in the pulpit) and its sublimation through the historical, the philological, the textual, the methodological in general.¹⁰⁷ These contribute to the “methodone addictions” that

Queer Theory, eds. Janet Halley and Andrew Parker [Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011], 20).

¹⁰⁷ Stephen Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011). See also Irene Peirano Garrison, “Classical Philology and Theology: Entanglement, Disavowal, and the Godlike Scholar,” in *Source, Original, and Authenticity between Philology and*

Moore and Sherwood diagnose biblical scholarship as suffering from.¹⁰⁸ Moore and Sherwood track both the ways the historical functions as a foundational, constitutive dimension of secularizing approaches to the Bible (e.g., in the salvaging of the cultural Bible in Jonathan Sheehan’s Enlightenment account), and how the historical performs (sublimated) theological and moral work (importing “religious” modes into, or exemplifying the “religious” dimensions inadvertently funding, the “secular”).¹⁰⁹

The affective dimensions of contests over history speak to the ways the historical is used to neutralize moral dilemmas in relation to the Bible, or to distinguish the professional from the confessional, the academic from the clerical, or to anchor an identity category in the present by means of a “real history” in the past (e.g., scholarship on Christian origins, Christian identity; or histories of gay experiences, sexual identities as universal, with a locatable past), or to protect certain kinds of experience from certain kinds of meddling, simplification, or identification (protecting history’s alterity, privileging rupture over identification). For example, Moore and Sherwood put Wellhausen’s “historical” claims about the composition of the Pentateuch in the context of anxieties about the moral content of the Bible: Wellhausen’s separation of the Pentateuch into individual earlier and later sources with different histories becomes a kind of technical way to parse the “spirit” from the “letter.” Theologically or ethically problematic areas in the text could be attributed to “later” sources that were farther from the morally pure originary parts of the Bible. God’s demand for the sacrifice of Isaac, for instance, which was beginning to

Theology, edited by Catherine Conybeare and Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 86-109.

¹⁰⁸ In describing “the biblical-scholarly susceptibility to methodolatry and methodone addiction,” Moore and Sherwood confess: “Method is our madness” (*The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 31).

¹⁰⁹ Moore and Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*; Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

smack of an immoral or morally compromised deity, was a cause of discomfort in the early modern period; it could be explained away by attributing its particular formulation to a hiccup in the text's historical transmission. Because a textual or historical problem was easier to handle than the attribution of immorality to God, Moore and Sherwood suggest, moral issues could be dealt with more easily and surreptitiously through the lens of historical issues; scholars used the historical to *protect and to salvage the theological*.

Moore and Sherwood recognize biblical studies as a particularly juicy site for tracing the role of the unfolding of history as a “secular” other (figured in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in particular as a kind of scientific or distinctively modern discourse) to “religious” ways of knowing (figured in terms of private feeling, experience, faith, belief, and/or the premodern). In their analysis of the “invention” of modern biblical scholarship, Moore and Sherwood point to its self-conscious split from the theological and the moral:

[Q]uestions of historical possibility were easier to deal with than questions of moral possibility. Even the ‘Deists’ seemed to recoil from the audacity of charging the biblical god of immorality and declaring Holy Writ antecedently unfit, impossible, or incredible on moral grounds. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the more orthodox form of emergent biblical criticism entailed taking up the programmatic question ‘Could it have happened?’ in its historical sense while closing the question down in its moral or philosophical sense... Thus the category of the historical in biblical scholarship became a surrogate not only for the ethical but also for the theological, and did not disturb either category directly... The historical now served as a place marker for the theological, but also, paradoxically, as a license to do biblical scholarship in a thoroughly de-theologized mode ... one that shattered every biblical-scholarly mold that has been handed down since antiquity.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Moore and Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 58-59. Maia Kotrosits also analyzes the affective dimensions of this sublimation of the theological and the ethical through the historical in New Testament studies, theorizing some of the effects of New Testament studies’ investment in “a kind of apparently un-affected practice and self-presentation,” even as the stakes for contemporary Christian identities and relations with nation and empire press forcefully on such historical endeavors (*Rethinking Early Christian Identity*, 6).

When the theological is sublimated through the historical, as it so often is in biblical studies, the affective stakes of historicity are heightened, as the reception of *Secret Mark* hotly displays. It is not just within the realm of biblical scholarship, however, that the historical functions with such theological and affective potency: the theological fetishization of the historical, of a kind of historicism, plays an important role in queer history and the history of sexuality more broadly.

A foundational text in the debates over how to do queer history, John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* operates in ways that resonate with nineteenth-century biblical scholars who, as Moore and Sherwood describe them, used the historical to protect certain theological orientations. Boswell, in revising the mainstream narrative of the place of gay people in Christianity, engages in such affectively intense contests over history, using representations of the historical in order to neutralize moral dilemmas in relation to the Bible. One of Boswell's goals is to anchor an identity category in the present by means of a "real history" in the past: he provides a history of gay experiences, thus relying on sexual identities as universal with a locatable past, not unlike scholarship on Christian origins that posits a Christian identity across time (and that allows one to chart, to compare and contrast, "Christian" experiences from *then to now*).

In a way then, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* is thus surfacing a desire for a particular, "real" past in within the modes of secular historiography. Boswell's stated project is to show that the rejection of homosexuality is not inherent to Christianity, that intolerance of homosexuality is not a theologically necessary within Christian identification and practice. In order to make this claim effectively, Boswell inhabits the position of the value-neutral historian; but in doing so, his work makes profound social, political, affective, and theological interventions as he attempts to peel popular perceptions of beliefs about

homosexuality away from the historical “reality” of how homosexuality came to be condemned by some Christians (or those people who were using Christianity to further their own prejudices). Boswell’s work points both to and away from the role Christianity has played in fueling homophobic histories, as well as the role it has played in fueling some queer-identified folks’ needs to recover or imagine historical narratives of gay lives sustained, or at least not condemned, by Christianity.

Boswell’s project and its enthusiastic reception suggest a popular contemporary desire to bring Christianity and homosexuality into alignment and to uphold the potential integrity of both. History as such, then, holds implicit theological potential for Boswell. This project is also a testament to both Boswell’s and his readers’ interests in finding themselves in, or in finding community with, figures from the early Christian past. It is a history that makes it possible for queers to re-establish intimacy with a (religious) historical past otherwise seemingly cut off from them by Christian intolerance. Boswell argues for a picture of Christianity and scripture as not monolithic or uniformly authoritative. Boswell faults scholarship on the Bible, as well as the biblical translations available, for leading religious readers to believe that their scriptures condemn something they know as “homosexuality.” He takes aim at the lexicographical tools that do not properly translate sexual terms in classical works or in biblical texts. By charting the history of a few key terms that have been taken to condemn homosexuality from 1 Corinthians through Greek and Patristic sources, Boswell is in a sense clearing the name of earliest Christianity and the original intentions of Paul and his earliest audiences, and perhaps, seeking to shield contemporary believers and readers from authorized homophobic readings of those texts. Historicizing the shift from Greek to Latin readings of scripture in the West as the place in which the original complexity and variety of meanings of certain Greek terms are lost, and their Latin

translations and concomitant shifting social values become codified in the biblical texts *as biblical values and investments*, is a way of performing sublimated theological work.

Boswell's project embodies the kind of affective work that, in the hands of later historians of queer life, would come to be called queer historiography. Even though he makes philological arguments rooted in traditional historicism and implicitly uses the language of objectivity and neutrality in ways that contradict the later queer historiographical approaches that consciously articulate the ways that the historical *cannot be protected from subjective desire*, Boswell enacts some of the moves and certainly meets some of psychic needs that will be identified with later movements in "queer history." Despite his essentialist rendering of "gay people," people with a sexual identity that can be found in any time or place—or maybe *because* of it—*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* restores his readers' capacity to make erotic, affective contact with a ("gay") past cut off from them by narratives of dangerous, repressive Christianity. Illustrating her vision of the queer touch across time, Carolyn Dinshaw points to Boswell's success and the subsequent fan mail he received after the book's publication as suggesting the ways in which *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* both provides the playing field for (and is itself saturated with) desire to be in contact with figures of the past, to be intimate with them, or to find oneself in them.¹¹¹

This is a different approach to the historical than, those who follow in the footsteps of a historian like David Halperin. Halperin is among those who argue for contextually specific cultural constructions of sexuality, those for whom the differentiation of—not continuity between—identities past and present are most crucial to depathologizing homosexuality by articulating it as just one social construct among many, not the only or right one. Here the

¹¹¹ Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 22-34.

historical functions as a needed marker of difference, particularity, and otherness. However, I would argue that even the effort to preserve the past's difference, to disidentify, to claim, for instance, that we not assume "their" experience of desire maps onto "our" sexuality, is as much funded by present desires to make space for certain identities as the effort to trace a queer continuum from ancient times to today. And, in fact, the move in recent queer historiographical projects to honor desire, continuity and identification over or in equal measure to difference, rupture or ultimate alterity, reclaims aspects of earlier approaches in the history of sexuality like those fundamentally expressed in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* while nonetheless attempting to articulate the otherness of a past that can never be fully accessed, of a realness that can never quite be touched.

Recent queer historiographical approaches push their readers to notice the ways that the historical "real" cannot be protected from the subjective orientations and desires of the historian (including the desire to be in contact with figures of the past, to be intimate with or to find oneself in and identified with them, whether that be the desire to find queers "like us" in the past, or the strong fantasy life of faithful later Christians who travel the Mediterranean to walk "in the footsteps of Paul"). Boswell and his eager readers' interest in finding themselves in, or in finding community with, figures from the early Christian past illustrate this, as do any number of movements in biblical historiography: take, for example, Halvor Moxnes' analysis of British identification with the Holy Land of ancient times as it shaped biblical scholarship and the British national imagination, or the complicated identifications expressed in the various quests for the historical Jesus.¹¹² Buell's analysis of the ways in which 19th-century European and American spiritualist movements home in on the traces of a past that can assert itself in the

¹¹² Halvor Moxnes, *Jesus and the Rise of Nationalism: A New Quest for the Nineteenth-Century Historical Jesus* (London; New York: I.B. Taurus, 2012).

present and interact with the future pose another example.¹¹³ Each of these historical accounts suggest that the present haunts the past as much as the past leaves its mark on any given present.

At the same time, Boswell is operating within the kind of secularizing discourse that, as Ann Pellegrini puts it, functions as a structure of feeling that invisibilizes (by universalizing) its own affective attachments so that they look like detachments while making religion hold secular modernity's affective excess.¹¹⁴ Boswell's work might be used to illustrate Pellegrini's articulation of the ways in which the affective turn corresponds to the liberal academy's anxiety about the return of religion, in particular so-called fundamentalist religion. In Pellegrini analysis, religion is conceptualized in "secular" thinking as a repository of affect (over and against secular reason) and as that which gets relegated to the private sphere. Boswell's project perhaps unconsciously works to recover affect and affective modes of doing history as a kind of reclamation of the excesses secularism has implicitly asked religion to hold (a reclamation of the religious excesses of queer studies, implicitly—which Boswell is also surfacing).

Like Carolyn Dinshaw's reading of Boswell's "fan mail" after the publication of *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, the reception of *Secret Mark* beyond the academy speaks to the kind of hunger felt by readers of Boswell's history to find a place of origin, including at the (imagined) origins of Christianity: "For some the very existence of *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, a chunky university press history book—read or unread—whose author taught at Yale, was enough to strengthen claims to cultural legitimacy. (The footnotes became something of a 'fetish,' as one correspondent put it, standing

¹¹³ Denise K. Buell, "Cyborg Memories: An Impure History of Jesus," *Biblical Interpretation* 88, 4-5 (2010): 313-34.

¹¹⁴ Ann Pellegrini, "Feeling Secular," *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 19, 2 (2009): 205-218.

in for or at least signifying such legitimacy).”¹¹⁵ Boswell’s historical study, for instance, made its way into a cartoon from the gay magazine *Christopher Street*, making “a point about the way this gay history book fostered a separate gay culture: it featured two guys at a bar, one saying to the other: ‘How about coming back to my place for a little *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality?*’”¹¹⁶

Similarly, *The Advocate* published an article in 1973 about Smith’s recently published *Secret Gospel of Mark*, pointing to another queer life this secret gospel leads. A cartoon illustration of the young man presenting himself to Jesus, scantily draped with a cloth, graces the cover of the issue. The article itself begins: “Was Jesus gay? ... Few have been convinced, though some serious scholars have conceded that some of the reported incidents in Christ’s life could be interpreted as supporting the notion that He occasionally showed homosexual feelings.”¹¹⁷ The two-page article on *Secret Mark* is, for example, just one element of a multifaceted archive of feelings held together in this issue of *The Advocate*: on the front page, a long section of the fragment of *Secret Mark* is reprinted, telling the story to a readership who would be inclined to get the sexual innuendo of the narrative about the young man who loved Jesus and stayed the night with him. The article continues on most of page 10, accompanied by two advertisements that are particularly poignant. One ad, for New York City’s Church of the Beloved Disciple has as its tagline: “Gay People of New York, This is YOUR Church.” Directly below, another ad for an insurance company features a black and white photograph of a beautiful nearly nude man sprawled with abandon on a sandy beach, reminiscent of a gracefully muscular

¹¹⁵ Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 25.

¹¹⁶ Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 28.

¹¹⁷ Rob Cole, “Jesus Christ ... Super Gay?” *The Advocate* 115 (July 4, 1973): 1.

Michelangelo pietà. The caption below the photograph reads: "RELAX ... take the risk out of your life. Insure with us. Call for auto, health, fire, disability, life and retirement incomes to fit your needs. We have it all. Let us help you avoid discrimination."¹¹⁸ Taken together, this queer collection of materials seems to promise safety in material, social and spiritual spheres, speaking to the kinds of psychic needs that queer Christian history might meet for some: such fantasies might in fact be foundational for a psychic experience of realness.

Perhaps, at a certain level, readers of *The Advocate* would not disagree with Peter Jeffery's assessment, however disparaging its intent: "Like the pseudonymous authors of so much of the New Testament, he might tell himself, he would only be bringing new clarity to the true teaching that had always been there."¹¹⁹ And if so, what might it change? Whose fantasies would be honored, and whose would be crushed? What valuable function might those queer fantasies play? One could point to a long history of fantasy that saturates early Christian history-writing, filling in gaps in imaginative ways: the hunt for the ever-receding original text, the highly imaginative, and contested, principles for determining earlier and later textual variants, and the kinds of stories spun to explain the logic of the canons of textual criticism (e.g., shorter or harder readings are more likely to be original because we imagine the ancient scribe wouldn't have added to the original, or would have simplified a prior difficult reading); or when biblical scholars posit—and even reconstruct and produce critical editions of—something like the Q source, a hypothetical sayings gospel constructed to explain the connections between the gospels of Matthew and Luke, or even the nineteenth-century construction of Gnosticism as a historical

¹¹⁸ Cole, "Jesus Christ ... Super Gay?" 10.

¹¹⁹ Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, p. 224.

entity and an elaborate syncretistic religion to make sense of certain bodies of texts across landscapes of orthodoxy and canon.¹²⁰

While *Secret Mark*'s "archive" includes traditional forms of evidence like handwriting analysis and ancient comparanda, as well as the kinds of biblical scholarly fictions that read as "historical," like form and source critical analyses, this "archive" also includes presentations and personal interactions at academic conferences recorded in published volumes, scholarly articles, and popular media, and, more recently, filtered through the blogosphere, leaving traces along the way of the institutional, theological, and emotional stakes of this historical conundrum. These various sources provide the records of vicious public spats, dreams, rumors and other and other realia and phenomena that (strangely, for a field as seemingly historically-critically invested as New Testament studies) were used as evidence, like pulp fiction, private correspondence, and personal anecdotes about Smith's character. Meaningful silences, unspoken knowledge, code words and rumors are vividly marshalled as evidence against the authenticity of the ancient text by proving Smith's inappropriate desire for a certain kind of past.

This collection of materials is not some sort of *Secret Mark* sideshow, I argue, but, like so many compelling queer archives, it underscores the contingency of any history and the difference various kinds of desires can make in determining how the past must have been and what kind of future it can have. As such, we can value the text and its reception for the ways in which they are so vividly entangled in sexual politics and the (mostly disavowed but potent) affective relations of academic life. In rendering this visible, I argue that historicist practices at work in this scholarship are as affective and imaginative as the queer archival endeavors I charted in this

¹²⁰ See Michael Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), and Karen King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

chapter. Morton Smith's work on *Secret Mark* invites a queering of biblical historiography, not only through the suggestion of a historical "gay Jesus" that some saw Smith's reading of *Secret Mark* as forwarding, but as evidence for the ways all biblical scholarship is saturated with "excessive desires."

Finally, the gospel fragment itself—with its narrative of the young man emerging from the tomb and longing to be with the one who resurrected him—might also offer us an image for working through attachments to disciplinary history and depictions of the early Christian past: *Secret Mark's* Jesus is, after all, suggestive of the (queer) historiographer who desires intimacy with the past, and who resurrects the dead so that they might touch and be touched by the one who has long been gone. This reception history, then, opens up a larger set of methodological, historiographical, and ethical questions about the nature of the evidence with which we long to make contact and the discourses of authenticity that render that evidence usable in the doing of early Christian history.

Chapter 3—Authenticity and Desire: Authorship and Queer Touch in Pauline

Pseudepigraphy

“And while I lived, ... I wrote it (down) and deposited it under the wall of a house ... And when I was released from this temporal life (and stood) before my Lord, he spoke to me thus: Paul, ... send and reveal it for its sake so that men may read it and turn to the way of the truth that they may not come into these bitter torments.” – Apocalypse of Paul¹²¹

“If I were a writer, and dead, how I would love it if my life ... could come to touch ... some future body ...” – Roland Barthes¹²²

Pauline pseudepigraphy provides another arena for identifying how what is deemed (by some scholars and some ancient readers) “deceptive,” manipulative, or otherwise threatening about false attribution or fictionalized textual origins can nonetheless promise pleasures and historical usefulness (for other readers). In this chapter, I analyze the kinds of historical constructions that different categories of attribution make possible, and I pay particular attention to how metaphors and imagery of touch and contact that emerge in these attribution narratives convey the historical “real.” Because the “real Paul” is an object of potent (historical, theological) desire, the field of New Testament and Early Christian studies is shaped by powerful social, political and theological pressures to deal carefully with distinctions between “real” and “unreal” Pauls, intensifying the affective and ideological stakes of textual and historical

¹²¹ The ending to the Syriac *Apocalypse of Paul*, transl. J. Perkins, “The Revelation of the Blessed Apostle Paul. Translated from an Ancient Syriac Manuscript,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 8 (1864? 66?): 183–212 (English trans. of a Nestorian MS from Urûmiah) (repr. *Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record* 6 [1865], 372–401). See also Armin Baum, “Authorship and Pseudepigraphy in Early Christian Literature: A Translation of the Most Important Source Texts and an Annotated Bibliography” in *Paul and Pseudepigraphy*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and Gregory P. Fewster (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 12–13; and J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 616–645.

¹²² Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1971), 12.

interpretation of evidence for authorship and the context of composition. Our various interests in historical and literary authenticity—in parsing a coherent “real” Paul from this (original) Paul’s afterlives—are shaped by the great value we place on the concept of origin and its inextricability from a particular idea of the historical “real.”

Ultimately, this chapter engages with writings attributed to Paul to argue that authenticity and its opposites (sometimes designated by pseudepigraphy, sometimes by forgery) are deployed as analytical categories in New Testament scholarship in order to cast some ways of reviving and touching the dead as acceptable and others as perverse, depending on readers’ perspectives (of the author, of the tradition, of how the text should be used). Take, for instance, the ending of the *Apocalypse of Paul*: this non-canonical text gives a first-person account of the death of its attributed author and the events that led to the burial and later exhumation of his written words.¹²³ In this framing narrative, the (ghost of the) author returns to reanimate his words and redirect his textual afterlife. The returning author hopes his text will touch future readers and turn them “to the way of the truth.” As the *Apocalypse* tells it, Paul is compelled by God to return from death and instigate the reading of his own text—a “friendly” return, one might say.¹²⁴ In some versions, the narrative that frames the apocalypse proper gives an account of the marble box in which the manuscript is held, alongside either Paul’s sandals or his robe. Both function as traces of contact with the body of Paul in order to authorize one another. Images of contact like these surface in both the ancient texts and modern scholarship and they provide clues to the way “realness” is constructed and negotiated.

¹²³ I refer to the *Apocalypse of Paul* (*Visio Pauli*) in its Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions, not the Coptic *Apocalypse of Paul* found at Nag Hammadi. For the translation: Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 616-645.

¹²⁴ “The pleasure of the Text also includes a friendly return of the author” (Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* [Paris: Le Seuil, 1971], 12; trans. Richard Miller [New York: Hill and Wang, 1976], 8).

The *Apocalypse*'s ending marks its own attribution and thus, according to some readers, makes a "historical claim" about its own origin: "And while I lived, ... I wrote it (down) and deposited it under the wall of a house." In other words, it claims to have been scrupulously hidden by Paul himself until its discovery in the fourth century. Other readers argue, however, that this ending provides a "deceitful explanation" for why no one had heard of this particular vision of Paul's until this text's late appearance:¹²⁵ the "real Paul" could never have composed this text since, among other things, the text inscribes a post-mortem account of its own fate ("when I was released from this temporal life (and stood) before my Lord, he spoke to me thus: Paul, ... send and reveal it..."). If Paul had already written this vision down and was by then long dead, how could his first-person account of what had happened three-hundred years later also be inscribed in that same document? By all modern scholarly accounts, then, *The Apocalypse of Paul* is an obvious example of pseudepigraphy—literally, falsely-ascribed writing.¹²⁶ Some would go further, calling it an explicit forgery: a work written in the name of another with the intention to deceive its readers.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Baum, "Authorship and Pseudepigraphy in Early Christian Literature," 12.

¹²⁶ I use pseudepigraphy here as a literary category, referring equally to works of both canonical and noncanonical biblical literature as well as Greco-Roman literature more broadly. In New Testament scholarship.

¹²⁷ Definitions of forgery, however, are no more fraught around the issue of deception and intention than designations of pseudepigraphy and pseudonymity: "Where possible to determine, authorial ascriptions that are deemed to have been intentionally or deliberately made for the producer of the literature in question are to be preferred for designation as pseudonymous. Thus for a work to be considered pseudonymous, its authorial ascription should ideally be regarded as original to the said text or literary 'autograph' (primary pseudonymity), as opposed to a later scribal alteration, interpolation, or mistaken attribution (secondary pseudonymity)" (Clarke, "The Problem of Pseudonymity in Biblical Literature and Its Implication for Canon Formation," p. 447). But some scholars (e.g., Metzger, Ehrman) want to distinguish between pseudepigraphy and forgery based on the criteria of deception: Metzger defines forgery as an attribution "made with the calculated attempt to deceive" and thus "not all pseudepigrapha (that is, works wrongly attributed to authors) are to be regarded as forgeries" (Bruce M. Metzger, "Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha," *JBL* 91 [1972], 4). Ehrman refines this definition, clarifying that "pseudepigrapha come in two varieties: falsely attributed writings and writings

A text widely assumed to have been composed much later than the time of the “real” Paul, then, *The Apocalypse* can be read as evocatively taking up what it deems a compelling absence in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, where Paul mentions but does not give a full description of being “caught up to the third heaven.” In the text of 2 Corinthians as we have it, Paul (the implied author) wishes not to boast and so refuses to elaborate on this vision or even directly claim it as his own. He conveys the experience in the third person, describing a “man in Christ” to whom this ascent to the third heaven happened. Like most readers, however, the reader who we might imagine became the author of the *Apocalypse of Paul* understood 2 Corinthians’ implied author Paul to be referring to himself as the one who was “caught up.” Scholarship generally agrees that a later reader-author (i.e., the pseudepigrapher inhabiting the voice of Paul in the *Apocalypse*) fleshed out the 2 Corinthians narrative with an elaboration of the vision of the third heaven and beyond. This is a Paul who, in fact, makes more than one return in order to write: first, from beyond the third heaven, and later, from the afterlife to make sure his text is found and read (in the 4th century and beyond). Even this account of the texts’ relations and of the implied authors deemed responsible for them, though, is too simple: 2 Corinthians is hardly a single letter written at a singular point in time by (the hand of) the apostle Paul. Further, the attempt to pinpoint “the author” (the pseudepigrapher) of the *Apocalypse* is complicated by a muddy textual-critical history: a quintessentially “living text,” the *Apocalypse of Paul* registers a complex, shifting textual life through its variations across extant copies and multiple versions.¹²⁸

that make a false authorial claim. It is this latter kind of pseudepigraphon that I am calling forgery” (*Forgery and Counter-Forgery*, 44).

¹²⁸ David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997). A. Hillhorst, “The Apocalypse of Paul: Previous History and Afterlife” in *The Visio Pauli and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul*, edited by Jan N. Bremmer and Istvan Czachesz (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 1-22. J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of*

There are so many circulating, displaced Pauls here: how could we possibly construct an authoritative narrative about the *Apocalypse*'s relations to any singular author, much less this author's intentions? And yet, biblical scholarship generally agrees that we can attribute a motive, an intention—deceitful or pious as the case may be—to “this author.” In fact, in order to historically contextualize such a text we *must* attribute intentionality to an author or to the redactor who supplies the attribution to Paul: is this an author who knew his readers would treat this vision as an enjoyable Christian fiction or a useful midrashic supplement to Christian tradition, or did he hope to trick his readers into believing Paul “really” wrote this text in order to flesh out what he could not share in 2 Corinthians? Historians' desires to contact the *real*—the real past of both the “authentic” and the “pseudepigraphical” Pauline letters and the unique circumstances of their composition and circulation—*requires* us to ascribe ancient authors' and readers' intentions in redeploying the figure of Paul. In spite of increasingly self-reflective methodological discussions in New Testament historical and textual criticism, this turn to motive or intention is—unavoidably—a theological and historical crux of any discussion of pseudepigraphy or forgery in New Testament scholarship.

How then do we adjudicate the value of these different constructions and modes of historicizing, if the historically “plausible” is deconstructed so as to be no longer self-evident? What kind of author is being constructed with historical defenses of these Pauline texts? What modes of historiography open up if scholarly interpretations of authorial intention (and, implicitly, constructions of authorship) used to parse different kinds of pseudepigrapha, particularly to distinguish “forgeries” from “innocent” pseudepigrapha, are themselves taken as

Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1993) 616-645.

fantasies or fictitious histories of our own making, our own ways of touching the past and of imagining the past touching its past and, perhaps, us?¹²⁹ What if these constructs are better understood as fantasies of contact, of intimacy?

False Binaries

While recognizing that ancient authorship did not connote the kinds of textual ownership associated with modern means of publication and distribution, Bart Ehrman forwards arguments for the usefulness of the category of forgery to describe works like the *Apocalypse of Paul*, as well as canonical biblical texts. All but eight works from the New Testament go under the name of their “actual author,” Ehrman states provocatively: “All other Christian writings are either anonymous, falsely ascribed ... or forged.”¹³⁰ He argues for both the prevalence of the phenomenon of forgery across the ancient Greco-Roman and early Christian world and for its condemnation by early Christian readers and their contemporaries. Ehrman takes on a body of scholarship in biblical studies, as well as a lay readership of biblical literature, and that, for explicit or implicit theological reasons, “want to see literary forgery as an innocent undertaking in antiquity, or at least in Christian antiquity.”¹³¹ Historicizing forgery as an ancient Christian phenomenon, Ehrman pushes to maintain its negative connotations in order to attend to the possibility of biblical authors’ deceptive intentions. In doing so, he effectively redescribes the shape of the canon, unseating its moral authority by peeling apart the authority of apostolic authorship from the power conveyed by canon itself: for example, he argues, the “books falsely

¹²⁹ For a fuller recent critique of pseudepigraphical author function and on pseudepigraphy as an interpretative reading practice, see Hindy Najman and Irene Peirano, “Pseudepigraphy as an Interpretive Construct,” *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Fifty Years of the Pseudepigrapha Section at the SBL*, eds. Matthias Henze and Liv Ingeborg Lied (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 331-58.

¹³⁰ Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 1.

¹³¹ Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 42.

claiming to be written by Peter (e.g.) inside the New Testament are no different, in extending that false claim, from books that falsely claim to be written by Peter outside the New Testament.”¹³² I am sympathetic to this project’s attempt to undermine the canonical-noncanonical binary, but I question the ways in which it is built on another binary that is no more historically pure and no less theologically fraught: the binary of forgery and authenticity itself.

In calling a set of canonical New Testament texts forgeries, Ehrman wants to make clear, however, that his is a *historical* study not a *theological* polemic, and that he is not “advancing some kind of positivist agenda in promoting one kind of Christian thought ... over another”:

When I call a text forged, I am making a literary-historical claim about its author... not a judgment about its merit as a literary text (religious, theological, ethical, personal, or any other kind of merit). In particular I am not claiming it is inferior in these ways to a work that is orthonymous. I am not, that is, contrasting later forged texts with texts that are somehow pristine, ‘original,’ and therefore better or more worthy of our attention.¹³³

I would argue, however, that he does not have to make that contrast himself. The category of forgery, with its normative moral and theological valences of deceptive versus innocent intentions, does that work for him. The “historical” does his theological work for him.

In this chapter, I explore how constructions of authorship in Pauline scholarship are used to instantiate this binary as a historical description rather than a polemical construction. Definitions of some writing as forged (*i.e., we can pinpoint the nature of an individual inscriber’s intention to deceive*), and some writing as genuine (*i.e., we know an individual personally inscribed a text innocently, with good intentions, an individual who can be tied to a particular, original moment in which the act of inscription singularly occurred*) that are based on assumptions—projections, intuitions, fantasies—about the inner psychological states of authors

¹³² Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 17, n.19.

¹³³ Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 4.

as intention-bearing individuals assume that we can know something about the “authenticity” of a text if we can name the person who “authored” it, assuming that authorship is a transparent and available category for such uses.

Approaching the Real and Constructing Authorial Intention

Historians’ desires to contact the *real*—the real past of both the “authentic” and the “pseudepigraphical” Pauline letters and the unique circumstances of their composition and circulation—requires us to ascribe ancient authors’ and readers’ intentions in redeploing the figure of Paul. To locate intention, one must find (or imagine) the originary moment of creation of a text, which in turn requires isolating the body of an author in time and space. This move—constructing authorship as the act of a singular person composing, holding a writing implement in her hand, inscribing a composition at a particular moment in time registered as a beginning—has drawn critiques for its basis in anachronistic notions of authorship in the ancient world.¹³⁴ This quest for the body of the author of the text in biblical studies is a kind of “archive fever,” an attempt to locate the moment before the foot and the footprint could be distinguished. Built out of this (impossible) quest, this archive fever, comes the task of ascribing intention to that creator. In my reading of biblical scholarship’s constructions of these moments of origination from which the “plausible intentions” of a writer might be construed, however, I focus on what discourses are in operation that make some reconstructions more *plausibly historical* than others.

¹³⁴ Armin D. Baum, “Content and Form: Authorship Attribution and Pseudonymity in Ancient Speeches, Letters, Lectures, and Translations—A Rejoinder to Bart Ehrman,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136, 2 (2017): 381-403; Najman and Peirano, “Pseudepigraphy as an Interpretive Construct”; Matthew Larsen, “Accidental Publication, Unfinished Texts and the Traditional Goals of New Testament Textual Criticism” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 39, 4 (2017): 362–387; Karen King, “‘What Is An Author?’: Ancient Author-Function in the Apocryphon of John and the Apocalypse of John.” Pp. 15-42 in *Scribal Practices and Social Structures among Jesus’s Adherents: Essays in Honor of John S. Kloppenborg*. Eds. William E. Arnal, Richard S. Ascough, R.A. Derrenbacker, and Phillip A. Harland. BETL. Leuven: Peeters, 2016.

Armin Baum, for instance, characterizes the *Apocalypse*'s description of "its own rediscovery in Tarsus in 388 CE" as a "deceitful explanation" by means of which the author of the text "wanted to deflect critical questions about the authenticity of his work."¹³⁵ Interpreting the vision's narrative frame depicting Paul's return from death to unearth the manuscript, Baum argues that, "[h]ad the author of the *Apocalypse of Paul* wanted his readers to infer that his book did not claim to have originated with the apostle Paul (but was, for instance, a mere interpretation of Pauline thoughts), he would, in all probability, have abstained from such a historical claim."¹³⁶ By arguing for the pseudepigrapher's deceitful intentions, Baum is working against a strain in biblical scholarship that would rehabilitate certain pseudepigraphical Pauls for theological use. Biblical scholars wanting to claim apocryphal texts like this one as theologically usable within a Christian tradition that extends beyond the canon have generally felt the need to emphasize the "innocence" of pseudepigraphical practices—their innocence, or lack of deceptive intention, makes them morally innocuous. By arguing against the innocence of the pseudepigrapher's intentions, Baum pushes readers to take seriously the potential impiety of those who write in the name of Paul—urging us towards a reading of the text as a kind of "forgery." We can see from this analysis, however, how much the distinction between innocent or deceitful writing-in-the-name-of-another requires the construction of authorial intentions—intentions to deceive or not. This distinction also requires the isolation of a moment of originary creation when such innocent or deceitful intentions were set to work.

Arguing for the validity of application of "forgery" to ancient textual phenomena, Ehrman claims that his own "use of the term *forgery* is no more derogatory than the ancient

¹³⁵ Baum, "Authorship and Pseudepigraphy in Early Christian Literature," 12.

¹³⁶ Baum, "Authorship and Pseudepigraphy in Early Christian Literature," 13.

terms used to describe the same phenomenon”: “bastard,” “counterfeit,” or “lie.”¹³⁷ Going back to “the proto-orthodox heresiological tradition,” Ehrman cites Irenaeus’s critiques of Gnostics and other heretical movements. In claiming the longevity of derogatory terms for texts of disputed authorship, however, Ehrman rehabilitates polemical categories of analysis to describe a historical phenomenon. These examples from early Christian history clearly make the point that “forgery” as he is using it, and as he claims ancient readers would have used its equivalent, marks the boundaries of authoritatively proper readings from improper ones. The use of “forgery,” like any of the polemical terms deployed by ancient Christians and their contemporaries to debate the authority of texts, then does the work of marking insiders and outsiders for various rhetorical gains. Ancient people certainly cared about authenticity, truth and falsehood in attribution, source of origin, but their motivations and evidence for seeing false attributions were “theological” (or affective, social, cultural, ideological, and so on) as much as they were “historical,” in Ehrman’s sense of the term.

Speyer makes the case for a category of what he calls “genuine religious pseudepigraphy”: this is pseudepigraphical writing which was divinely inspired and therefore cannot be considered deceptive since it was genuinely perceived by its author as the inscription of the revealed words of a deity.¹³⁸ In this case-specific critique of authorial intention, Speyer suggests that one can determine whether religious pseudepigraphy is genuine or not by determining whether or not the inscriber was aware of “Greek rationalistic modes of thought and conversant with the ideas of authorship,” and thus was only pretending to be inspired by a divine being. But, in an imaginative response to Speyer, Ehrman wonders: If inspired by the spirit, why

¹³⁷ Ehrman, *Forgery and Counter-Forgery*, 31.

¹³⁸ Wolfgang Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum* (Munich: Beck, 1971).

write in someone else's name? After all, continues Ehrman, the "real" Paul certainly felt inspired by God and wrote in his own name.¹³⁹ But Ehrman imagines a scenario in which there are only two options, embodied by a genuine authorial intention to write an individual's own ideas down, or by an individual bent on deceiving readers by composing a particular kind of lie. He continues to press against Speyer by leaning into imagining various authorial intentions: "If it was the Spirit talking, why claim specifically to be Peter? Or James? Or Jude? Why not simply say 'Thus says the Lord,' or 'Thus says the Spirit of God'? Or write anonymously together?"¹⁴⁰ All of these were certainly options that were employed in various ancient texts. What kind of space, then, do pseudepigrapha specifically provide for teasing out how ancient and contemporary readers put the figure of the author discursively to work?¹⁴¹

Ehrman also critiques Speyer's distinction between genuine religious pseudepigraphy and deceitful, nonreligious pseudepigraphy for attempting "to render a historical judgment (what kind of pseudepigraphon is this work?) on the basis of a nonhistorical criterion (what is the state of mind of the author? Does he genuinely feel inspired by the divine?). Inner psychological states are never accessible to the historian, and so surely they are not the best basis for forming historical conclusions."¹⁴² The specter of authorial intention, however, haunts all historical reconstructions of scriptural legacies. For instance, in the case of the intentions implied by

¹³⁹ Ehrman, *Forgery and Counter-Forgery*, 38-39.

¹⁴⁰ Ehrman, *Forgery and Counter-Forgery*, 39.

¹⁴¹ For other approaches to answering this question, see Najman and Peirano, "Pseudepigraphy as an Interpretive Construct" and King, "What is an Author?" David Brakke, too, reviewing Ehrman's reliance on a conflict model in *Forgery and Counter-Forgery*, hopes we might wonder more not only about the wider literary contexts in which pseudepigraphical or forged texts were produced but that, in dialogue with the like of Karen King and Charles Stang, we might also ask "more religious questions about the performances of self and other that forgery facilitated—that is, about the spirituality of literary deceit and Christian authenticity" ("Early Christian Lies and the Lying Liars Who Wrote Them: Bart Ehrman's *Forgery and Counterforgery*" *Journal of Religion* 96, 3 [2016]: 390).

¹⁴² Ehrman, *Forgery and Counter-Forgery*, 37.

attributions, Ehrman himself suggests that historians can identify whether or not the person “who first thought of assigning the five books of the Torah to Moses” was not “innocent” of impure motivations.¹⁴³ Or that there might be a meaningful distinction between forgery and “literary fiction,” thereby assuming the historian can identify when an author intended to deceive readers (pseudepigraphy, forgery) or intended to write transparently in another’s name as a creative rhetorical exercise: “in many instances it is difficult to tell whether deception was part of the intent,” says Ehrman, but “in other instances the matter is clear.”¹⁴⁴ How is authorial intent not also as opaque—or historically inaccessible—as any other inner state of an intending author whom we imagine as a single historical individual with desires and motivations? He seems to argue that one can’t trust a reading of an author *not having* an intent to deceive, but you can know when an author *does* intend to deceive.

Ehrman’s taxonomy of false attribution practices makes explicit the ways in which these operative categories rely on constructions of desire and affective orientations within sometimes implicit and sometimes overt moralizing schemata. I want to draw attention not only to the problematic binary into which these affective orientations are forced, but also to the functions authorial intention is put to as a form of reliable historical evidence. On the one hand, I’m happy to acknowledge that we project intention onto authors as an interpretive measure, but if we are to rely on this interpretive move, we would also have to acknowledge that we are working within an assumed range of feelings and desires, a range related in some way to our own or to those who are accessible to us in any given time and context. And yet Ehrman claims that forgery (with its built-in *intention* to deceive) is a neutral, historically descriptive category. Biblical

¹⁴³ Ehrman, *Forgery and Counter-Forgery*, 51.

¹⁴⁴ Ehrman, *Forgery and Counter-Forgery*, 43.

scholars have tended to disagree with his application of the term to canonical texts or religious texts, but not with the explanatory usefulness of the category itself for historiography. How would problematizing the coherence and stability of the categories of “authorship” and “authenticity” unravel Ehrman’s claim that forgery is an appropriate term for describing these ancient texts?

To answer this question, I turn to some further examples of Pauline pseudepigrapha and scholarship on Pauline authorship and attribution. If we read the practice of pseudepigraphy as a mode of writing through desire, it reveals how much New Testament scholarship on pseudepigrapha must itself negotiate the kinds of desires for touch and contact with which pseudepigraphal texts are also grappling. Taken to the extreme, this scholarship skirts the question: what if all of our histories built on such a desire for touch? Further, constructions of authenticity fuel our erotic engagement with the past and forge the objects of our desires.

“As a historian, I do not value the authentically Pauline writings any more or less than later ‘Pauline’ writings that were forged,” writes Ehrman.¹⁴⁵ But what does he—and what might we—value about knowing the difference between them? Constructions of authenticity, after all, give us something real we can (almost) touch, or perhaps something we can, at least, keep desiring to touch. And yet, towards the end of his study of early Christian forgery, Ehrman does admit that his use of forgery is polemical in its own way: engaging the possibility that New Testament texts are “forged” requires scholars and readers of the Bible to acknowledge that the Bible is composed of fallible, all too human texts, mixed with human emotion, desire and scheming. These very attempts to undermine canonical moral authority unwittingly reify the techniques of canon-formation (and thus the polemics of orthodoxy and heresy). Ehrman’s

¹⁴⁵ Ehrman, *Forgery and Counter-Forgery*, 7.

commitment to the category of forgery might, however, prompt biblical scholars to engage with some of the messier dimensions of our relations with the past and of ancient readers' messy relations with one another.

Categories of Attribution and The Disciplined Imagination

We can imagine how, *for a variety of reasons*, ancient readers felt compelled to claim that texts were falsely attributed, just as ancient authors may have been variously motivated to engage in pseudonymous writing.¹⁴⁶ Ehrman's deployment of forgery as a category of analysis tends to flatten the affective playing field, but it isn't hard to imagine an act of so-called intentional literary deception as much more complicatedly imbued with creative aggression, devastated necessity, or affectionate reaching out for intimacy—as well as religious engagement. The fact that many ancient readers did get upset about deception and “false” writings has as much to do with marking boundaries and with discrediting opponents and ideas that were either too close to or too different from their own. Accusing another author or group of deceit was (and is) part and parcel of boundary-formation in general. Whether we are talking about ancient deployments of true/false categories or contemporary desires to use the language of forgery for dealing with ancient materials, forgery and authenticity are analytic categories that work through a dichotomy that conceals the variety of options that lie in between.

Laura Nasrallah's “Out of Love For Paul” acts as an important corrective to the affective flattening of ancient pseudepigraphical dynamics implied by Ehrman's discussions of early Christian forgery and turns the discussion squarely towards the role of desire in pseudepigraphy and gestures towards its role in modern scholarship. Nasrallah's reconfiguration of pseudepigraphical writings and the proliferation of scriptural tradition (in art and architecture as

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Clarke's list of motivations in “The Problem of Pseudonymity,” 449.

well as in texts) as “improvisations of history” provides the arena for pushing back against much of biblical scholarship’s narrow taxonomy of “innocent” and “deceptive” literary practices, in great part by shifting how one might imaginatively respond to such practices. Rather than treating pseudepigraphical practices as deceptive forgeries, Nasrallah argues, one might read them as creative responses motivated by love and a diversity of theological and social needs, thus implying a wider range of plausible intentions—and a *kind of innocence* to this phenomenon we label pseudepigraphy or ancient forgery.

Nasrallah situates pseudepigraphical practices in the richly complex context of ancient appreciation for (and pushback against) imaginative histories and polemics about truth, fiction, and lies in general. She then directs our attention to distinctions between ancient and modern responses to these various practices of writing in the name of another: “Early Christians worked out of multiple historical possibilities (*some of which may be more or less ethically attractive to us*) clustered around this important apostle then saint.”¹⁴⁷ She invites her fellow historians to hold their ethical compulsions at bay for a time in order to feel some sympathy for those compelled by love compelled to create Paul anew. This functions as an invitation, too, to consider the various kinds of work these historical possibilities might be doing for the ancients. Her intervention involves shifting the valence of pseudepigraphical and imaginative historical practices from negative to positive, yet it does not fundamentally alter the terms we use to evaluate evidence for true or false histories. Rather, it invites us to be more generous towards those accounts that add up to being “false”: “Ancient writing tells us that sometimes truth must be exceeded in the practices of history. Cicero insists upon the ‘groundwork’ of impartiality and

¹⁴⁷ Laura Nasrallah, “‘Out of Love for Paul’: History and Fiction and the Afterlife of the Apostle Paul,” *Early Christian and Jewish Narrative: The Role of Religion in Shaping Narrative Forms*, eds. Judith Perkins and Ilaria Ramelli (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 93, emphasis added.

truth, but then points to the ‘completed structure’ or *exaedificatio* of ‘the story and the diction’ or the events and the words (*De orat.* 2.62).”¹⁴⁸ She invites historians to acknowledge that “love sometimes compels and exceeds truth in the writing of (a possible) history”—even Cicero thought this was okay sometimes (at least if it benefited him, in the writing of his biography).¹⁴⁹ But this implies that *some people* are *sometimes* driven by feeling to color outside the lines of truth—thus also implying that there is, however difficult to ascertain, a singular essential germ of a truth that other people, less motivated by affection or love or some other passion, might be better able to distinguish and transmit. Truth is the foundation beneath the edifice of emotion or desire which can be excavated—at least conceptually, if not practically speaking.

This ultimately lands us again in the territory of a disciplined historiography in which, though we can appreciate the various historical, social, and theological values of pseudepigraphical “Pauls,” we can ultimately parse them from an authentic and thus coherent Paul (not in scare quotes) who wrote seven “real” letters. We can appreciate affective histories, but we can (and thus to a certain degree *must*) also distinguish them from (more) objective histories: “This ‘Paul’ reveals creations and contestations of possible histories in antiquity. Not all of these histories were good histories—good in the sense of supported by adequate data, good in the sense of moving toward a more ethical world.”¹⁵⁰ While this emphasis on treating ancient Christian pseudepigraphical literary practices as instantiations of possible histories beautifully expands our imaginaries for attributing possible authorial intentions and thus interpreting texts contextually, it does not, as Nasrallah claims, “[relieve] us of the impossible problem of asking

¹⁴⁸ Nasrallah, “‘Out of Love for Paul,’” 93.

¹⁴⁹ Nasrallah, “‘Out of Love for Paul,’” 94.

¹⁵⁰ Nasrallah, “‘Out of Love for Paul,’” 93.

about authorial intention.”¹⁵¹ When we more generously reinterpret a pseudepigraphical text as entertaining a possible history, we are in part imparting a different intention to the text’s author(s): an intention to expand the scope of an earlier Paul, to act on a desire (perhaps a loving rather than deceptively manipulative desire) to re-encounter that Paul or to make that Paul accessible to new readers. Imparting intention—and thus articulating an origin story of a text—is one of the “functions” of authorship. All Pauls exhibit/enact (various) author-functions, whether designated (by us or by ancient readers as) “real” Pauls or “fake” Pauls. The question I want to press even more forcefully here is: how do our own attractions or repulsions to these various “historical possibilities” shape our tools, methods, and capacities for distinguishing *truth from falsehood*, to adjudicate between good and bad evidence for one likely “real” version of the past over another?

There are moments when Nasrallah comes close to acknowledging the relativism inherent in all (historical) interpretative enterprises and suggests the attitude that this acknowledgment necessitates on the part of the historian: “We are weakly sketching imperfect maps, ... [and] we need to be humble in our enterprise of writing history not because we work with scripture but because our conclusions will always be provisional.”¹⁵² And, further: “Those who read such texts [as Ephesians or 1 Timothy] may wish to evaluate the ethics displayed within a given text; we may wish for example that early Christians did *not* write that slaves should obey their masters and that 1 Timothy did not insist on women’s subordination. But earliest Christian history is not rendered pure of such injustices by claiming that text like the Pastorals is mere forgery; Paul as

¹⁵¹ Nasrallah, ““Out of Love for Paul,”” 93.

¹⁵² Nasrallah, ““Out of Love for Paul,”” 93.

author function must be taken as seriously as Paul. The ethics of interpretation of this ‘Paul’ lie with us.”¹⁵³ But upon what commitments do we base our own ethics of interpretation?

In parsing a coherent “real” Paul from this “original” Paul’s afterlives, our historical interpretations are shaped by the great value we place on—and the inextricability of—origins and a particular idea of the “real.” Historians’ desires to contact the *real*—the real past of the authentic and the pseudepigraphical Pauline letters, in this case, and the unique circumstances of their composition and circulation, say—requires us to ascribe authorial intention and to imagine readers’ intentions in redeploying the figure of Paul and Paul’s words. Because the “real Paul” is a potent theological construct and an object of intense desire, his figure amps up the affective and ideological stakes of this historical enterprise. The field of New Testament and Early Christian studies is even more powerfully pressed to deal carefully with distinctions between and interpretations of “real” and “unreal” Pauls. But this question of making contact with the authentic author and parsing real from unreal Pauls is as old as the texts themselves.

Anxiety and Desire in Colossians and 2 Corinthians

Across canonical and noncanonical Pauline texts, authorial voices of different “Pauls” express a wide range of feeling about different kinds of contact, including different feelings about and rhetorical uses of the presences and absences letter-writing makes possible.¹⁵⁴ Writing in the name of Paul marks *mixed desires to both* use the figure of the author to stabilize or limit meaning and authorize certain orientations within the rubric of apostolic sanction or association

¹⁵³ Nasrallah, ““Out of Love for Paul,”” 93.

¹⁵⁴ Writing is what allows alienation to happen: when the letter takes on its own authority, the author is in a sense unresponsive now, or “dead” to it. Cf. Steve Friesen, “Second Thessalonians, the Ideology of Epistles, and the Construction of Authority: Our Debt to the Forger,” *From Roman to Early Christian Thessaloniki: Studies in Religion and Archaeology*, eds. Laura Nasrallah, Charalambos Bakirtzis, and Steven J. Friesen. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Theological Studies, 2010), 191.

but also to bring new meanings and uses out of received traditions. Whether the texts are deemed “genuine” or “pseudepigraphical,” an “author” is presenting a “Paul” to an imagined body of people, knowing that in some ways the textual presence will have a life of its own that both ensures the life of the author’s continuation and threatens it.

For example, in 2 Corinthians, Paul’s seeks to overcome insecurities shaped by absence by pitching a threat that speaks to an anxiety about how his letters may be rhetorically powerful while making him, the real Paul, look weak in comparison: “For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.’ Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we will also do when present” (2 Corinthians 10-11). The need to emphasize that his authorial power extends his presence is a way of competing with a version of himself already out there on its own terms.¹⁵⁵ Is it really *his*, then? Is it really *him*? 2 Corinthians plays an ambivalent and contradictory role, then, as “both a substitute for Paul’s presence and an ersatz Pauline presence.”¹⁵⁶ The “original Paul” exists as an authorial construct, even in the “original Paul’s” own awareness; or, you could say, all we have are a variety of authorial constructs and fantasies about the body of the man and the body of the original text, the autograph, and the latter’s relation to that bodily presence.

In the historical imaginary, certain texts are read as more proximate to Paul himself than others. Both Colossians and 2 Thessalonians, although generally taken to be pseudepigraphical, have been imagined as texts composed in “closer” spatial and/or temporal proximity to (the living body of) Paul. Do some scholars desire to get close to the body of the author, in part by

¹⁵⁵ 2 Cor 10:7-11, cf. Friesen, “Second Thessalonians, The Ideology of Epistles, and the Construction of Authority,” 195.

¹⁵⁶ Friesen, “Second Thessalonians, The Ideology of Epistles, and the Construction of Authority,” 191.

imagining the author's physical presence as informing the composition of the letter? Is imagining the original author's proximity to the text more satisfying to some than imagining a text transmitting merely a distant memory of the author, or a far-removed stranger's citation? (In such a fantasy, Timothy is imagined as writing on Paul's behalf, in both his "own" voice and Paul's voice, either in prison with Paul or very shortly after Paul's death.)¹⁵⁷

A canonical Pauline letter widely deemed pseudepigraphical, 2 Thessalonians begs its recipients "not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us" (2 Thess 2:1-2). In doing so, the letter expresses a worry about how far "Paul" can be expanded. 2 Thessalonians seems to hope that "Paul" can expand just far enough for this letter to register as "Pauline," but not so far as to allow for the legitimacy of *other* letters that *seem* to be Pauline, that *seem* to come "from us," from this "Paul" and his close associates. Pseudepigraphy lives in that space between the possibility of creativity and anxiety about proliferation beyond the control of that particular text.

Scholarly fantasies of nearness of the author to his text run parallel to fears of the textual tradition set too free, at too great a distance from the controlling touch of the author. James Dunn, for instance, imagines Colossians as a "bridge" that extends the essence of Pauline theology from the undisputed to the disputed bodies of Paul('s writing): composed either "in the late phase of [Paul's] career or (presumably) among his close disciples after his death," Colossians "helps authenticate that [post-Pauline] theology as, in a quite proper sense, 'Pauline.'"¹⁵⁸ In fantasies like Dunn's, invoking something like ghost-writing, Paul is nearby,

¹⁵⁷ James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996), 19.

¹⁵⁸ Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, 19.

authorizing by proximity, the intimacy of nearness being invoked (unless Paul has already given up the ghost and Timothy now composes a letter alone in prison).

Of course, such “ghost-writing” might be a better analogy for ancient writing practices: whoever composed a text was not necessarily the same person(s) who inscribed it, nor would the text necessarily have matched “word for word” what issued from the speaker’s lips, further breaking down the concept of author as we would reconstitute or reanimate it “behind” the ancient text, regardless of its “true” or “false” status in the literary or scriptural canon. The text of Colossians dwells on something like this, too, worrying about nearness and distance, presence and absence. Colossians imagines the kinds of affections Paul has for his readers, constructing an authorial presence that can reach across space and (implicitly in adopting his name and turns of phrase perhaps at a much later time) across time beyond death. The author, dead but revived, absent but present, loves and touches and is loved and touched. These encounters are also enacted in the first person, which might be perceived in so many more ways than any flatly conceived rhetorical take-over of another’s voice. Pseudepigraphical writing can function as imagined re-encounter with the author, encounter ambivalently mixed with imitation, inhabitation, desire, differentiation.

Notions of authorship in Colossians encompass or gather affects that stick to Paul and even cohere in the “we” that includes Timothy and the “we” that also includes “you,” including felt responses to oscillations between the power and the danger of physical presence in the text and what it means for authority and collective participation. Paul the apostle individually acts as intercessor and authorizer of the spiritual message about Jesus; *he* can speak authoritatively about and for God’s son, because his individual “I” has a special connection with divine sources

in this letter. But Paul in conjunction with Timothy becomes a “we” that can enact a sense of collective ownership of the gospel and makes space for a collectivity to which “you” can belong.

The function of attribution here performs Paul’s presence in spirit through the letter. The letter acknowledges it cannot make present a body, but it can make present a spirit—a spirit that senses and conveys feelings. Paul’s spiritual presence conveys the presence of his pride in them and love for them, his “rejoicing ... for those at Laodicea and for all those who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love” (2:1-2). It suggests how authorship, or a specific attribution to Paul, functions to anchor a community in the presence of a particular feeling body. But the presence of that body is ambivalently desirable: it seems like having the live body of the speaker (figured as Paul) before them would make more real the authority of the speaker—and the letter seems to suggest or imagine a readership that is pining for that presence a little bit, desiring the body of the author.

Such embodiment would also undermine the authority of Paul because, clearly, he cannot always be there physically to authorize a message (and perhaps was never the individual human being who wrote down any version of this letter); in which case, bodily presence must also be denigrated in the face of the power of the spiritual presence. And yet, too, Paul being with “you” in spirit must be more powerful than the presence of those who try to take “you captive by philosophy or empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (2:8). The speaker goes on: “I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ” (2:4). Here Paul, figured as author of this letter (or this author figured as Paul) functions to authorize this reading of spiritual traditions as authentically ancient and spiritual, not having been made

“according to human tradition.” This presents a case of anxiety over contested version of the gospel message and the strategy of leaning on apostolic authority to set things straight, and thus the desire to attribute such a letter to Paul and his team. And Paul as author can authorize another “minister and fellow servant in the Lord” — Tychicus. “I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.” (4:7) He is sending eyewitnesses, one of whom is “one of you.” By the end, Paul is mentioning all kinds of people, a list of perhaps well-known names, including Luke the gospel-writer, making connections (imagined or historically real). The last line draws on the trope (or marks the genuine hand) of the person who might be dictating a letter to a secretary signing a letter, marking the physical presence of the author reaching out to his recipients: “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you” (4:18).

Pseudepigraphical Fear and Desire

The language of “forgery,” although intended to designate qualities of deception and lateness, actually brings up much more complex desiring positions than intent to deceive and more varied temporality than that which aligns what is “earliest” with most “authentic.” Regardless of whether they are considered to be genuine or disputed, earlier texts have passed through many hands (they are literally bodies of texts touched by many later corporeal and textual bodies over time, through copying, retelling, redacting, excerpting, translating, and so on). Whether or not the author intended to deceive his or her audience is one kind of question we might ask when we want the “author” to stabilize the meaning of a text or tradition. Ancient texts (like modern scholars) might put “Paul” to work to stabilize a tradition, weeding out the false

teaching from the true, just as Ehrman would use the figure of the author to weed out Christian moral superiority from another truth, the truth that incipient orthodoxy encouraged the manipulation of earlier materials to suit their own desires and needs, “corrupting” the original texts in the process.¹⁵⁹

When we identify false attribution, we necessarily invoke its authentic others: the “true” author of the falsely attributed work on the one hand (the pseudepigrapher, the forger), and, on the other, the “original” text(s) that mark the true, bounded body of work of the (falsely) attributed author. The temporal and physical boundaries of a body (of a work, of an author) are assumed and put quietly to work.¹⁶⁰ Ancient pseudepigraphy functions as a potent site, then, for exploring the uneasy alliances between (fantasies about) the body of the author and the authority of a text. In disputes over true and false authors, disputes that seek the ancient author’s body in order to put particular kinds of limits around the text, we draw very near to Foucault’s notion of the author as an “ideological figure” who marks “the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.”¹⁶¹ Writing in the “I” of another, after all, allows for the expansion of what that “I” can mean and hold, even as that “I” is chosen in light of the known or assumed boundaries of that other’s existing works.

In these disputes, then, the author is a figure who can be brought to life through certain kinds of writing and reading; this resurrection and its interpretive implications instigate fear and anxiety, as Foucault notices—but it can inspire other feelings, too: hope, longing, pleasure. The author marks the manner in which we *desire* the proliferation of meaning alongside the manner in which we fear that same proliferation. Roland Barthes theorizes authorship in relation to the pleasure of imagining the author as a “body” for

¹⁵⁹ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁶⁰ Foucault “What is an Author?” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, 118-19.

¹⁶¹ Foucault, “What is an Author?” 118-119.

whom readers “conceive a desire” to develop a cross-temporal intimacy.¹⁶² Ancient pseudepigrapha might be read as fantasies of readers-become-writers who inhabit or breathe life into the body of a past author so that that author can “later” (now) touch them and, soon perhaps, “some new future” readers’ bodies.¹⁶³ Pseudepigraphical texts especially embody an ambivalence about the possibility of continually proliferating meaning: they are bound up in the pressing question of how to bring old wisdom to bear on new situations and yet maintain a modicum of control over how far that goes. We see this, for instance, in pseudepigraphical writings that express blatant anxiety about *others* writing “falsely” in the name of that same co-opted author.¹⁶⁴ Both ancient texts deemed pseudepigraphical and modern New Testament scholarship are shaped in relation to this irresolvable ambivalence towards the creative but also perverse relationships that such polysemy invites.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Barthes also connects this desire for the body of the author to his own anxieties about mortality and finitude: “If I were a writer, and dead, how I would love it if my life ... could come to touch ... some future body” (Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 12; quoted in and closely read by Jane Gallop, *The Deaths of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time* [Duke University Press, 2011], 10).

¹⁶³ Cf. Barthes: “The author who comes from his text and goes into our life has no unity: he is a mere plural of ‘charms,’ the site of a few tenuous details, yet a source of vivid novelistic glimmerings ... this is not a (civil, moral) person, this is a body” (Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 8). As Gallop reads Barthes: “The ‘author who returns’ is the ‘author who comes from his text and goes into our life.’ The author returns from the world of the text to life, but if the return is a return from the dead, the life returned to is not the author’s but our life. The author returns to us” (Gallop, *Deaths of the Author*, 39).

¹⁶⁴ Ehrman gives the example of warning “against the forgeries of ‘false’ teachers” in the Apostolic Constitutions: “If anyone publicly reads in the Church the spurious books of the ungodly, as if they were holy, ... let him be deprived” (8.47.60). Of course, what the Apostolic Constitutions means by “spurious” versus authentic is perhaps still an open question (*Forgery and Counterforgery*, 126). See also Dunn on Colossians, as he parses Epaphras’ role in the spreading of Paul’s authority in 1:7: “It is not too fanciful to imagine Epaphra, anxious to share the good news with his own townsfolk, volunteering to evangelize...” However, Dunn finds it interesting that Epaphras was not included as part of the “we” of Paul and Timothy, and thinks this might imply that “the letter writer (Timothy?) did not wish to diffuse Paul’s apostolic authority too far. This is reinforced by the reading ‘on our behalf’ ... which again clearly implies that Epaphras’s evangelization in Colossae was at Paul’s behest” (*Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 63). The “forgeries” that warn against other “forgeries” (e.g. the Apostolic Constitutions) might not be hypocritical, but are rather fighting about something other than the merely “historically accurate” (in the contemporary scholarly sense) facts of who sits down with a stylus to write. The problem is not so much who writes but rather what is written, complicated by the tautological relation between the two.

¹⁶⁵ Gallop reads Barthes as “a perverse, even queer desiring subject,” connecting his “perverse desire for the author he nonetheless knows to be dead” to “the celebration of non-normative sexuality that is central to *The Pleasure of the Text*.” Gallop points to—and performs—the work of mourning that reading can perform, too, tying it to the erotic when she emphasizes the creative potential in the “stubborn unreasonableness of desiring despite the knowledge that someone is dead” (*Deaths of the Author*, 5).

The capacity—real or imagined, desired or denied—of being able to enter or touch the body of the authentic author, expresses and negotiates an erotic dimension of our historical scholarship, too. I argue that New Testament scholarship on pseudepigraphy specifically expresses desire for the body of the author, desire to touch and be touched by that body. This desire for the Pauline corpus, for example, is complexly tied to the desire to ground historical or theological interpretations in the truth that the body is assumed to confer. But, I contend, this touching, this contact, is inextricable from the ambivalence—that irresolvable state between fear and longing articulated by Foucault and Barthes—that saturates both ancient and modern projects of authorial (re)construction, an ambivalence generated by the very fact that the letter is precisely *not* the present body of the author. This ambivalence fundamentally structures our historiographical theories, methods, and practices for finding or producing the author, the original text. Accepting this ambivalence, I argue, is crucial to inquiry into the ideological, affective, and erotic dimensions of New Testament scholarship’s discourses of forgery and authenticity.

Conclusion: Historiography, Radiant and Fantasmatic

Secret Mark's plight constitutes a warning to all scholars as to the dangers of allowing sentiments of faith to cloud or prevent critical examination of evidence. ... After twenty years of confusion, it must be time to set aside emotionalism and approach both this fragment and Morton Smith's assessment of the role of magic in early Christianity with objective and critical eyes.

— Shawn Eyer¹⁶⁶

[R]eading historically may mean reading against what is conventionally referred to as history.

— Carla Freccero¹⁶⁷

What weird and beautiful works could emerge if historians approached their craft as a dreaming art? Rather than make the strange past like us, we can hope to make ourselves more strange.

— C.M. Chin¹⁶⁸

In his analysis of the anxious and theologically driven backlash to Morton Smith's publications on *The Secret Gospel of Mark*, Shawn Eyer concludes with a plea for a more "objective" approach, one which can ultimately better reveal the historical truths to which the evidence points. But the thrust of the argument I am making here is different. Attachments, anxieties, rumors, and fantasies circulate around the almost inseparable assemblage of the text of *Secret Mark*, the person who found (or forged) the text and presented it to his colleagues and the public, *and* the histories generated to explain where the text comes from. The text cannot be peeled apart from this affectively saturated reception, much to the chagrin of those who would like to restore it to a clean historical slate. I have shown how the various emotional responses—

¹⁶⁶ Shawn Eyer, "The Strange Case of the Secret Gospel According to Mark: How Morton Smith's Discovery of a Lost Letter of Clement of Alexandria Scandalized Biblical Scholarship," *Alexandria: The Journal of the Western Cosmological Traditions* 3 (1995):103-29.

¹⁶⁷ Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 4.

¹⁶⁸ Chin, "Marvelous Things Heard," *The Massachusetts Review* 58, 3 (Fall 2017): 488.

to *Secret Mark*, to Smith and his interpretations of the gospel, to the fact of the controversy itself—function *as sites of evidence*, rather than as barriers or blinders that blur and overwrite more concrete, verifiable evidence or otherwise block the possibility of objective interpretation. Further, I want to press, none of us is immune from such investments (driven by “sentiments of faith,” or any other sentiment). Histories constructed from any early Christian text will always be emotionally fraught, although they may appear less histrionic in some contexts. Rather, I have argued, it is *the disavowal* of theologically and emotionally inflected claims that obscures important historiographical questions about the slippery, unpredictable nature of evidence itself and about narratives that would try to shore up the foundational place of evidence in traditional historicism.

This disavowal has political and cultural roots and consequences, some of which result in the hegemony of a kind of knowledge created by and for what Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has dubbed “malestream” scholarship, the product of our field’s entanglements with colonialism, imperialism, orientalism and the politics of Enlightenment constructions of reason and subjectivity.¹⁶⁹ (Another way I might put it: historical objectivity has come to function as a kind of fetish in the field of early Christianity and New Testament studies.) The condemnation of “emotionalism” in this context shores up a gendered and racialized subjectivity and mode of “rational” authoritative knowing that has long been aligned in Western scholarship with cisgender white male subjectivity over and against the knowing of Black/brown,

¹⁶⁹ See Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, “Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 90:4 (1997) and *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Toward an Emancipatory Educational Space* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), and for relevant links between the colonial encounter and the writing of history Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2007) and Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York, 1988 [1975]).

feminine/feminized, and/or queer subjects. Because constructions of the historical have been so potently invested with the forces of universalizing secular scientism and objective rationalism in modern New Testament studies, as it has developed out of theological educational contexts into the secularized university's religious studies departments, the boundaries of the "properly historical" require constant maintenance—a defense system that is, ironically, heavily freighted with the very affective forces that are split off from that "properly historical" domain. These forces—the imaginative, emotional, relational, and confessional forces—that the "historical" has so often been deployed to contain, undermine or dispel in modern biblical scholarship, are then constantly guarded against because they always seem to be threatening a return, to erupt in and through the very procedures martialled to keep them at bay. From another point of view, of course, these forces are also always already quite present—never successfully dispelled.

In order to examine the ethics and epistemologies of the historical and disciplinary projects I have taken up in this dissertation, I want to lean into intimacy with what we might describe as that which remains unspoken or perhaps entirely unconscious—in ourselves and our interlocutors, in the field imaginaries which we inhabit, and in the rules and languages through which we render ourselves and our knowledges legible to those others with whom we are in relationship (our readers, our colleagues, our students). To speak of the disavowal of emotional and theological commitments, the fetishization of the historical as an affectively charged substitute for what cannot be consciously thought or desired, and the haunting return or resurrection of that which is repressed in the symptomatic impasses of disputes over forgery and authenticity, is to venture into the conceptual domain of psychoanalysis. In posing this conclusion, I martial concepts from a set of critical historiographical projects that take seriously unconscious life: they formulate ethical stances for relating to one's objects of study, one's

interlocutors, and the visible and invisible parameters of one's field, that take into account both what cannot be known about others/the Other and what cannot be known about oneself.¹⁷⁰ These projects forward psychoanalytic models of the subject that recognize the many ways we are made of and driven by more than we can know of ourselves and that appreciate the capacities of fantasy, dream, and desire to deliver some of this broader picture back to our conscious, thinking, and theorizing selves.

Putting my own readings of New Testament historiography in dialogue with these psychoanalytically oriented projects, I reflect on these questions: What might it look like to attend to the symptomatic workings of biblical studies' disciplinary unconscious at the edges of the impasses around forgery disputes? How might we read not only for what has been repressed but for that which returns in disguised but probing terms in order to find ways to (re)assimilate that which has been repressed, to access and redirect those stunted energies? In order to engage New Testament historiography's sublimation of the affective and the theological, symptomatically read through its fetishization of the historical, this chapter delineates some ways of working with the disciplinary unconscious as it has underpinned this dissertation's engagement with forgery and authenticity in the earliest Christian past.

Encountering the Disciplinary Unconscious: Wiegman and Freccero

In order to make sense of the psychic life—the unconscious investments, the driving affective forces—of academic fields based in identity knowledges (e.g., American studies, women's studies, whiteness studies), Robyn Wiegman has articulated the psychoanalytic dimensions of the “field imaginary.” Wiegman specifically investigates “the operation of the

¹⁷⁰ This project is clearly indebted to psychoanalytic formulations, and the theorists I'm reading here explicitly engage psychoanalysis but with varying degrees of specificity or commitment to specific lineages of psychoanalytic theory and practice.

political as it generates the affective force that constitutes the psychic life of a field,” focusing in particular on how idealizations of (leftist) political efficacy fuel identity-based fields specifically.¹⁷¹ Treating the field imaginary as synonymous with the “disciplinary unconscious,” Wiegman describes it as the “domain of critical interpellation through which practitioners learn to pursue particular objects, protocols, methods of study, and interpretive vocabularies as the means for expressing and inhabiting their belonging to the field.”¹⁷² Borrowing from psychoanalytic models that underpin theories of the field imaginary, Wiegman argues that one cannot take up a critical position on the field imaginary *outside* of the discourse one is analyzing: there can be no outside perspective “unencumbered by disciplinary obligations and field-forming injunctions of its own.”¹⁷³ However much one has been immersed in academic cultures based on a belief in the possibility of “rhetorical methods that allow scholars to claim an uncontaminated authority, it is hardly the case that anyone can travel very far without dragging more of herself along than she can possibly know.”¹⁷⁴

In her pursuit of unconscious disciplinary attachments in American studies (as registered by the affects, wishes, and impulses of a field’s practitioners), Wiegman nonetheless disavows the need to root herself in any specific psychoanalytic lineage.¹⁷⁵ She forges ahead in simpler terms:

¹⁷¹ Wiegman, 14-15. We could, of course, say that New Testament studies, rooted as it in the history of Christian traditions, is itself an identity-based field, subject to similar attachments and constraints as the identity fields Wiegman analyzes. For readings along this line of argument, see Maia Kotrosits’ *Rethinking Christian Identity* and *The Lives of Objects: Material Culture, Experience, and the Real in the History of Early Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

¹⁷² Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 14-15.

¹⁷³ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 14-15.

¹⁷⁴ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 14-15.

¹⁷⁵ “How, then, does a book emerge to claim no primary theoretical investment in psychoanalysis that nonetheless cultivates whatever self-identity might be said to describe it by focusing on the antimaterial ephemera that psychoanalysis so lovingly engages: affects, impulses, and wishes, along with

My use of *object relations* is not ... a theoretical commitment to a distinct body of psychoanalytic thought, but a reflection of my interest in the simplest idea the phrase helps to deliver: namely, that objects of study are as fully enmeshed in fantasy, projection and desire as those that inhabit the more familiar itinerary of intimate life, such as sex, lover, parent, sibling, friend. By object, I mean to designate targets of study that reflect a seemingly material existence in the world (as in people, goods, law, books, or films) and those that do not reveal such materiality in any immediately graspable way (as in discourse, ideology, history, personhood, the unconscious, and desire itself). By relation, I mean the constitutive dependence of one thing on another, such that no critical practice can be considered the consequence of its own singular agencies. In this loose conceptual framework, I view the very attempt *to know* as an intimate relation, crafted within and from the sociality and materiality of a world we inherit; and I take the proposition that *knowing is a means to do justice* as an attempt to transform that intimacy into reinventing the world.¹⁷⁶

As academics with political (and, for some of us, consciously theological) commitments, it is hard not to want to instrumentalize our acts of knowing in service of those values and commitments. It can be easy to fall into the belief that “knowing is a means to justice,” and therefore that our own intimacy with our objects of knowledge expand with our fantasized capacity to “reinvent the world” through these academic acts. Our acts of knowing come to feel powerful, laden with affect, charged with libido. Wiegman’s project, embedded in its title, *Object Lessons*, presses the “pedagogical point ... that identity knowledges are bound to much more than what we use them to know—in order to license attention to the impulses that keep us enthralled to them.”¹⁷⁷ Wiegman makes the case that it is therefore worthwhile to examine the impulses that keep us so libidinally attached to our objects of knowledge—they do much more

the critical force of desire? How can I return, repeatedly, to the language of objects, identifications, and attachments without imagining myself in debt or duty to psychoanalysis...?” (Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 19). And: “I offer no overarching theory of desire from which I have derived my use of the phrase *political desire*, nor do I delineate a specific theoretical understanding of what psychic processes are engaged and performed by attachment and investment” (Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 20).

¹⁷⁶ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 20.

¹⁷⁷ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 21. Wiegman refers to and builds on Antonio Viego, *Dead Subjects: Toward a Politics of Loss in Latino Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); see also Viego’s “The Unconscious of Latino/a Studies,” *Latino Studies* 1.2 (July 2003): 333-36.

than we are conscious of using them to do (or we may try to do much more with them than we are conscious of).

The stakes are not merely academic—for Wiegman, or for me. Wiegman insists that our ability to grapple with the disciplinary unconscious has further reaching ethical implications for our dealings with those registered to us as “other.” Engaging Antonio Viego’s Lacanian reading in *Dead Subjects*, Wiegman summarizes the thrust of Viego’s argument: “it is the disavowal of the workings of the unconscious and of language that continues today to condemn racialized subjects to the not-yet or almost human.”¹⁷⁸ Viego’s work, she says, “asks practitioners to forgo the pleasure of desiring a subject who can fully know, not just herself but the conditions of her own and the world’s making.”¹⁷⁹ When we can release the desire to fully know the other, of ourselves, of the past, of the world—or when we release the assumption that such full knowing is possible—we may emerge with a commitment to another kind of ethics of relation: one that recognizes the limits of our own interpretive capacities and categories, one that invites the open question and allows for the tussle and intimacy of encounter. For Wiegman, psychoanalysis offers both theory and practice for this kind of relational work:

Perhaps this is why I am drawn to psychoanalysis as an idiom for considering the relational practices of knowledge production, because in the very form of its practice lies a commitment I share not to the analyst’s expert ability to discover the ‘truth’ of the subject or to shore up the subject’s ‘own’ truth but to the relational encounter itself, without which there is little that interests me. . . . Indeed, what compels me toward psychoanalysis is the relational practice that generates it.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 23.

¹⁷⁹ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 23.

¹⁸⁰ Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 23-24.

As I conclude this project, I want to highlight the ways that historiography functions as a set of relational practices within the kind of field imaginary that Wiegman maps. I suggest here that the “working through” of impasses around forgery and authenticity—especially at the boundaries of the biblical canon—must be dealt with not in terms of formulating a more epistemologically impervious stance but in terms of an ethics of relation, in particular one that takes seriously the unconscious of the field (of practitioners) in which it operates.

I borrow, too, from Carla Freccero explicit formulations of the historiographical implications of psychoanalytic theories, as she makes sense of the exclusions and commitments that shaped her work early modern studies. For Freccero “[p]sychoanalysis, as an analytic, is also a historical method, albeit one denigrated by disciplinarily historicist practices. On the one hand, it argues for an eccentric relation between events and their effects; on the other it often challenges the empiricism of what qualifies as an event itself.”¹⁸¹ Building on Michel de Certeau, Freccero understands that psychoanalytic approaches lead to “inserting subjectivity into historiography,” which in turn “enables Certeau to analyze historical discourse as an institutional practice infused with subjective investments and caught up within networks of power that are themselves available for historical analysis.”¹⁸² Thus, Freccero argues: “By bringing elements of psychoanalysis into historiography in order to write the history of discourses on the other (heterologies)—by tracking, in part, the unconscious of the discourse of scientific knowledge—Certeau’s writing practice seeks to enable” recognition of the irrational and the affective at work in the production of history.¹⁸³ Out of this formulation, Freccero asserts: “Psychoanalysis affords

¹⁸¹ Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, 4.

¹⁸² Freccero, “Toward a Psychoanalytics of Historiography,” 366.

¹⁸³ Freccero, “Toward a Psychoanalytics of Historiography: Michel de Certeau’s Early Modern Encounters,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 100, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 366; Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3-16.

the possibility of producing a fantasmatic historiography.”¹⁸⁴ For Freccero, a fantasmatic historiography makes room (and provides methods for) “examining how desires and identifications—queer theory’s psychoanalytically inflected terminological legacies—are at work in historical scholars’ investments in the differences and similarities between the past and the present,” and it offers “a way of noting historiography’s own (self-)disciplining force, its ‘repudiations of pleasure and fantasy’ in spite—or because—of its queer wishes.”¹⁸⁵ Freccero, therefore, continues to call for “a queer historiography that would devote itself to a critical revalorization of the places and possibilities of pleasure within the serious and ‘ascetic’ work of history.”¹⁸⁶ For her, this queer historiography is embedded in commitments unabashedly inflected by psychoanalytic formulations of the unconscious and its impact on the discourses scholars feel compelled to deploy and inhabit in their productions of history and ways of relating to the past.

Freccero’s and Wiegman’s approaches to historiography and the unconscious life of the fields out of which histories are produced deeply inform my own project. Insisting that the *Secret Mark* controversy’s “archive” of evidence lends itself more to “fantasmatic historiography” than to traditional historicist reading practices, this dissertation speaks to the queer and unpredictable effects of the biblical past’s ongoing affective life, as well as the longings that lie at the heart of

Freccero argues: “...as with psychoanalysis, that which is ‘forgotten,’ ‘silenced,’ or ‘repressed’—the past, for both psychoanalysis and history—returns. Thus, although historiography perceives itself as founded on a ‘clean break’ between the past and the present, Certeau demonstrates instead the extent to which the Freudian mechanism of the return of the repressed operates within historiography’s exclusions” (“Toward a Psychoanalytics of Historiography,” 367).

¹⁸⁴ Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, 4.

¹⁸⁵ Here Freccero refers to her work with Fradenburg in *Premodern Sexualities* (*Queer/Early/Modern*, 79).

¹⁸⁶ Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*, 79, and Freccero and Fradenburg in *Premodern Sexualities*, xvii.

any reconstruction of the past. Putting New Testament forgery disputes in cultural and historical context (of mid-twentieth-century to twenty-first century North American politics and academia, as these emerged from nineteenth century academic and cultural formations), I read this scholarship's interpretations of ancient texts as a window into that scholarship's world. In doing so, I attempt to tell a story that makes sense of what I find there, a story surely as much about me and my own disciplinary context, struggles, and desires. In telling this "story," this "history" of *Secret Mark's* reception or of the debates about authorship in Pauline literature, I am making the claim that this particular moment in biblical scholarship illustrates a larger methodological, historiographical, and ethical impasse in the doing of Christian history. In doing so, I examine how forgery disputes open up sites for methodological critique and how they might provide the ground for a kind of portrait of a field, a portrait that tries to hold its contradictions clearly without too neatly resolving them and that understands the impasse to be symptomatic and therefore calls for more sympathetic attention. In a way, I am articulating a kind of psychosocial "diagnosis" of biblical studies' persistent if uneven attachment to certain kinds of historicism—a stubborn attachment that I have read as a symptom of disciplinary anxiety and repressed desire.

The disciplinary unconscious that interests me in this project, and whose edges and unruly energies I attempt to meet in the arena of the putative binary between forgery and authenticity, is in part registered through the history of the field's idealizations of, and defensiveness about, rationalism and scientific objectivity as these were being hashed out in 19th- and 20th-century biblical scholarship. This disciplinary unconscious might be formulated as holding the repressed *theological* and its incessant return through (at the edges of, in the shadows of) the modern *historical*—perhaps especially in these debates that work hard to maintain a split between the authentically historical and the forged. Another way to describe the return of this

repressed might be through haunting, in which we understand the theological to be haunting secular academic reason. Denise Buell, for example, takes up the question of what haunts historical Jesus studies, and in doing so illuminates some of the invisible but felt forces that have shaped the field, including those that have shaped (and have been shaped by) its scientism and historicism.¹⁸⁷ Regarding the studies of the historical Jesus, Buell reminds us that treating Jesus as “historically real” has (and has always had) its own present meanings and uses, its own particular histories and intended effects on futures yet to come—and is, of course, itself always already a theological move. Buell cites spiritualist movements as one of the now-forgotten conversation partners of historical Jesus studies who, like modern New Testament scholarship, sought relationship with historical figures from the Christian past, and in doing so, actually unsettle perceived stable boundaries between past present and future. In this sense, she uses notions of haunting as a way of understanding memory working across time, building on Schüssler Fiorenza’s understanding of history as memory work, and as a way of making the futures we want, but made through the terms that are legible in our present(s).¹⁸⁸ These projects constitute a warning to remember that any historiographical endeavor is always a constructive, creative project. They highlight how and why certain things could come into view *as history* and what epistemological work that “history” could perform as such.¹⁸⁹ What both Buell and

¹⁸⁷ Denise K. Buell, “Cyborg Memories: An Impure History of Jesus.” *Biblical Interpretation* 88, 4-5 (2010): 313-34.

¹⁸⁸ Buell, “Cyborg Memories”; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983; Tenth Anniversary Edition, 2nd ed., London: SCM Press, 1995).

¹⁸⁹ Or, as Jennifer Knust puts it, “[h]istorians – and perhaps textual critics can be included here as well – reconstruct the past in order to delineate future possibilities and necessities, and they do so for reasons that often lie beyond the scope of the arguments they explicitly present” (“On Textual Nostalgia,” 79-81). In *Displacing Christian Origins*, Ward Blanton analyzes historians’ desires for particular representations of Christian origins apart from their accuracy as representations of the past as it was or

Schüssler Fiorenza make explicit, and what is most important to my own project, is that the act of historicizing Christian origins is a relational move, one that unsettles strictly teleological temporalities and places the historian or reader in a complex, desiring relation with the past that leaves neither the past nor the historian or reader untouched, unchanged by that contact.

Reading the Impasse Reparatively

In seeking a conclusion to the forgery debates I have analyzed here, I found myself returning to the tenderness and generosity of Eve Sedgwick and to her queer psychoanalytic formulation of theorizing, of reading, of writing as reparative practices—as relational practices, practices capable of conferring love. Sedgwick’s psychoanalytic reading of why we turn to a particular theory when we do homes in on the ways in which theory can “act as an ego defense, warding off uncertainty and surprise, splitting good and bad objects, and managing to put its anxiety into knowledge while protecting its illusion of omnipotence.”¹⁹⁰ Sedgwick’s response to defensive uses of theory builds on Klein’s articulation of paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions and of “phantasy.” Kleinian phantasy bridges the aggressive and reparative impulses that make up both infantile object relations and adult relating and thinking—including the kind of thinking we might call academic theorizing. (Take, for instance, the theories that sustain a

could have been as an aspect of historical competition for authority to define distinctions between philosophical/secular reason and religion, and thus between modernity and premodernity. Maia Kotrosits attends to the performativity and affectivity of New Testament disciplinary representations of Christian origins and investments in notions of Christian identity; among these, she identifies a driving sense of loss and longing for belonging saturating constructions of early Christian histories (*Rethinking Christian Identity*.)

¹⁹⁰ Deborah P. Britzman, “Theory Kindergarten,” *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory*, eds. Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 122. Britzman reads Melanie Klein in dialogue with Eve Sedgwick, whose explication of paranoid and schizoid positions. See Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works, 1921-45* (London: Hogarth Press, 1975) and *Envy Gratitude and Other Works, 1946-1963* (Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, 1975).

particular set of historiographic methods.) Those theoretical orientations that Sedgwick categorizes as paranoid are characterized by anxiety and “a terrible alertness,” that cannot overcome what Klein calls the paranoid/schizoid position.¹⁹¹ Shaped by paranoid and aggressive phantasies, these theories (like the infant’s process in the paranoid/schizoid position) attack the split off bad object before it can retaliate and destroy the good objects (the good perceived both inside and outside of us). (Here I think of forgery disputes, and the fear of letting improperly historical content into the space of proper history or canonical scripture.) The only way to overcome this impasse, this constant splitting and pitting the good against the bad, is through a reparative move that, for Sedgwick especially, aligns with a queer theoretical reclamation of that which is considered “bad,” of that perverse or unacceptable content that has been discarded in the effort to isolate and preserve the “good,” proper, acceptable content.¹⁹² The good and the bad must be held together in relationship, and the anxiety of their proximity must be endured, until

¹⁹¹ Eve Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading: Or, You’re So Paranoid You Probably Think This Introduction Is About You,” *Novel Gazing: Queer Reading in Fiction*, ed. E.K. Sedgwick (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 8.

¹⁹² On working through how to bring queer theory and psychoanalytic theorizing together, Sedgwick turns to the divergent strategies of many streams of psychoanalytic thought: “the history of psychoanalytic thought offers richly divergent, heterogeneous tools for thinking about aspects of personhood, consciousness, affect, filiation, social dynamics, and sexuality that, while relevant to the experience of gender and queerness are not centrally organized around ‘sexual difference’ at all” (Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” 11). Britzman on Sedgwick’s comfort combining historically homophobic psychoanalytic theory with queer theorizing: “Sedgwick goes on to observe that while psychoanalytic categories are certainly not immune from the history of psychoanalysis, the desire for a purely (innocent) theory that can somehow ‘guarantee non-prejudicial ... beginning’ (Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You’re So Paranoid You Probably Think This Introduction Is About You,” 12) may well be a symptom of paranoid defense against the capacity to be surprised. From another vantage, this wish for a pure theory may also be a symptom of the desire for omnipotence” (Britzman, “Theory Kindergarten,” 138, n. 4). This in turn makes me think about a field’s desire to protect its historiographical theories and most reliable methods. A Kleinian reading on this might help us find a middle ground that can side-step our yearnings for perfect theory and accompanying desires for omnipotence.

one can see that one's fantasy of the bad destroying the good isn't as dangerous as one thought, and one can take in more of what one fears than one thinks.

In Sedgwick's re-articulation of Klein, the "desire of a reparative impulse ... is additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer an inchoate self."¹⁹³ Morton Smith's scholarship on *Secret Mark*, the creation of the fragment of the gospel (whether it occurred in the third century, the fifth, the eighteenth, or the twentieth), ancient Pauline pseudepigrapha, and modern scholarly reconstructions of Pauline authorship all attempt to "to assemble and confer plenitude on an object" (the figure of the author, the fragment of authentic text) that can then in turn offer up its resources to shore up an inchoate sense of "self" (the sense of a personal self or identity but perhaps also the sense of a disciplinary identity). This reading would make so much of our imaginative, creative work (including our scholarship) a reparative act, one intended to shore up the coming-into-being of an as yet still inchoate self.

In any reparative act of scholarly creation, I implicitly ask throughout this dissertation, whose inchoate selves are being repaired or shored up? What kinds of selves are granted space or legitimacy for this reparative work in any given field imaginary, that is, within the disciplinary boundaries established and policed by that imaginary? Whose reparative practices are not granted legitimacy and which selves cannot come into being as knowing, theorizing selves?¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Britzman, "Theory Kindergarten," 135, quoting Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," 27-28.

¹⁹⁴ Which objects in turn are repaired and given a place of status within the body of material we call evidence? Which objects must be split, which splits must be maintained? Whose anxieties dominate the field and keep these splits intact?

In asking these questions, I return to Shawn Eyer's concern about the destabilizing prevalence of emotionalism in the *Secret Mark's* reception and the need to evacuate sentiment from evaluations of the fragment's historicity. I contend, with readings of Sedgwick and Klein, that "[i]f theory cannot face its own psychic reality, its own phantasies of love and hate, then the anxiety that inaugurates what Klein calls the depressive position—itsself the grounds for reparation—cannot be worked through."¹⁹⁵ The way through an impasse must involve relinquishing omnipotence and the desire for our own theories and methods to be irrefutable. Can we do good work with imperfect theory or method? Can we be present to the profound and even dangerous flaws of our imperfect theories longing for omnipotent perfection long enough to see what surprising new formations emerge?

The impasses that arise in disputes over authenticity and forgery in New Testament scholarship can be read as products of these unworked through conflicts and an inability for the participants to face this psychic reality. As Deborah Britzman has extrapolated from Sedgwick and Klein, "[r]eparative readings offer us a very different sense of reality testing, not so much that of Freudian ego, where what is tested is the veracity of the object in terms of its re-finding. Rather, a reparative position tests the ethicality of one's own theory, one's own phantasy of encountering the world."¹⁹⁶ Klein's work on "the aggressive and sadistic defenses that collapse knowing with possessing"¹⁹⁷ informs the way I have read the forgery debates' splitting of the good from the bad and the inability of the very discourse of forgery and authenticity to hold the whole with ambivalence, a reparative move which would lay the groundwork for the reparative

¹⁹⁵ Britzman, "Theory Kindergarten," 124.

¹⁹⁶ Britzman, "Theory Kindergarten," 131-2.

¹⁹⁷ Britzman, "Theory Kindergarten," 133.

work of overcoming one's anxiety born of sadism and guilt. Committing to the binary opposition of forgery and authenticity is one form that the longing for mastery takes. Britzman brings this home to academic endeavors at large:

In our academia, can we ready ourselves to observe how the urge to expel ignorance produces rigid knowledge and more of an unthought known? Shall we admit our adeptness at dismissing theories that run contrary, not just to prevailing conventions but, more significantly, to who we think and wish we and others might be in and for our theory? Certainly affect threatens the omnipotence to which theory in silence aspires. And these affective tensions can exaggerate the space between what we know and what we want, between what we find and what we create, and between what we hold and what we destroy. Another sort of unthought known can also be observed here: Our internal conflicts structure what can be noticed in the world and held in theory.¹⁹⁸

To return to Shawn Eyer's concerns about emotionalism in the scholarship on *Secret Mark*, I would argue with Britzman, Sedgwick and implicitly Klein that we *must* attend to the affective tensions that structure the impasse and that exaggerate the space between the past we long to instantiate and the capacity of our historiographical methods and theories to do that work. And yet, theories that trouble our ability to be sure of what we know provoke their own kind of psychological resistance. Britzman explains that "part of what is refused when theories of affect are refused is the startling and irrational reach of psychic reality" in addition to the refusal to grapple with "the possibility that, however one tries to pin down its meanings by way of such stabilizing concepts as ideology, experience, identity or culture, for instance, one is still not in control of intentions, of the symbolic reach of representation, and of course, the unconscious."¹⁹⁹ She argues, however, that it "takes a theory of affect to understand something deep about the subtleties of not choosing to notice psychic reality."²⁰⁰ In turning to queer historiography and

¹⁹⁸ Britzman, "Theory Kindergarten," 127.

¹⁹⁹ Britzman, "Theory Kindergarten," 122.

²⁰⁰ Britzman, "Theory Kindergarten," 131.

theorizing on archives of feeling, this dissertation has sought to understand the resistance to noticing psychic reality alongside other sought-after realities. In attempting to chart the affective life of some corners of New Testament studies, I try to make sense of the psychic reality that I read as fueling forgery debates and as provoking the very anxiety that prevents biblical scholarship from grappling with that very psychic reality.

The “real” that interests me in all of this is, then, psychic, psychological: Can we grapple with the ways we use knowledge as “deflection and substitution, as condensation, idealization, and as wish fulfillment, as the means to ward off and create new anxieties, and as the basis of what must be worked through”—and that these psychological uses of knowledge are the very foundations of “theory’s work”?²⁰¹ From psychoanalysis, says Britzman, “we learn that theory may well be a retrospective reconstruction of what is felt before it can be known,” which in turn means that theory, “is always vulnerable to its own flawed dream work.”²⁰² Finally, I wonder: what if we approached our theories (of history, say) as impacted by such “flawed dream work”?

Rethinking the historiography of the ancient world, C.M. Chin asks, “What weird and beautiful works could emerge if historians approached their craft as a dreaming art?” and then gives one answer: “Rather than make the strange past like us, we can hope to make ourselves more strange.”²⁰³ Chin suggests that “we” can make “ourselves” more strange by recognizing that we cannot fully fathom ourselves—that we contain more than we can know, including desires and modes of relationship and of creation that we cannot fully own or enact. If we

²⁰¹ Britzman, “Theory Kindergarten,” 128.

²⁰² Britzman, “Theory Kindergarten,” 128.

²⁰³ Chin, “Marvelous Things Heard,” 488. This essay proclaims itself to be “a meditation, and an exhortation, on the aesthetic and moral importance of writing histories that include weirdness in their narratives, and that do not explain it away. It is also a plea to create history that is itself weird, as a way of refusing to ignore the weirdness of the world we live in” (480).

approached history-making as a *dreaming art*, would that mean we could approach evidence for various kinds of pasts as mode of contact with the (personal, cultural, disciplinary) unconscious? This would make history-writing a relational mode of exchange and a creative practice with an ethical foundation rooted in respect for and curiosity about a never fully knowable other.

One way of understanding ethics within a psychoanalytic framework is to argue that while we cannot be responsible *for* all of our unconscious content, we can be responsible *to the fact* that we know we do not entirely know ourselves. We can walk through the world with curiosity about our projections, especially our most potently felt projections—both the idealizing and the extremely negative ones. For Chin, approaching history as a *dreaming art* is not amoral or unethical. In fact, Chin explicitly names the “moral dimension to the act of dedicating oneself to the weirdness of history”:²⁰⁴ such dedication does not allow us to collapse past into present too easily, it asks us to question what we are doing when we draw analogies from the past to make sense of the present and not assume the past can serve our purposes so easily—an argument against instrumentalizing the past. Chin also argues that this approach to historiography prevents complacency and a disavowal of our own agency to work for freedom and liberation in the present.

However, the “project of learning to see and write weird history is a harder empathetic task than writing normalizing history. It is harder because it takes away the safety of normalcy and replaces it with the moral immediacy of encounter with what is not like us. In strange worlds, we are weightless and strange ourselves. That is our moral beginning.”²⁰⁵ This moral beginning is aligned with the call to own our own desires, to acknowledge our particular quests

²⁰⁴ Chin, “Marvelous Things Heard,” 488.

²⁰⁵ Chin, “Marvelous Things Heard,” 490.

for pleasure (for “finding delight”²⁰⁶)—and perhaps to become more aware of them as we notice those whose quests differ from our own. We have much to teach one another about “weirdness” and what we have come to absorb as normality: “The radiant strangeness of the premodern past can allow us to imagine worlds very different from our own, and that freedom of imagination should spur us to moral action.” Chin argues that “seeking historical radiance” becomes “a mental habit of making room for others in the world.”²⁰⁷ From this stems the “moral task of radiant historiography”: “a decentering of the self, a formal practice of recognizing one’s very limited presence in the world.”²⁰⁸ This in turn recognizes each historian as an “idiosyncratic, and inevitably flawed, medium of experiential translation.”²⁰⁹ These are lessons for those of us learning to decenter ourselves, for those of us invested (socially, personally, theologically, politically) in patriarchal and white supremacist structures of knowledge and power and in heteronormative desires and relationships (with other people, with modes of narrating history and grounding identities in the present).

Chin argues this practice of historiography an explicitly “moral advantage,” one that “works precisely by insisting on the alterity of the past from our own world.”²¹⁰ This dissertation attempts to map some of the challenges (psychological, methodological, ethical) to this epistemological project. This call to decenter the self is not new, but it’s worth continuing to call for it because it is so hard to achieve. It’s worth interrogating the ways in which it is hard to achieve—personally, pedagogically, professionally. A related question is: how do we accept *loss*

²⁰⁶ Chin, “Marvelous Things Heard,” 490.

²⁰⁷ Chin, “Marvelous Things Heard,” 485.

²⁰⁸ Chin, “Marvelous Things Heard,” 489.

²⁰⁹ Chin, “Marvelous Things Heard,” 487.

²¹⁰ Chin, “Marvelous Things Heard,” 489.

and the decentering of our ego? How do we cope with that discomfort? Some scholars, for instance, live with that decentered sense of self, a kind of alienation born of oppression.

While Chin makes the case for a radically altericist historiography—with its refusal to domesticate the bizarre, a privileging of the unsettling force of encounter rather than the reassuring recognition of explanation—my dissertation stands at an angle to this altericism. On the one hand, scholars condemn *Secret Mark* as the product of a too-empathetic reader, a reader-scholar who so overidentified with a version of the past (a kind of inability to treat the past as properly different, an inadequate recognition of alterity). On the other hand, those who condemn Smith's work on *Secret Mark* fail to recognize that Smith's needs for the past might be reasonably different from that of other scholars, and they might fail to recognize a queer Jesus because that Jesus didn't look like their own Jesus. Alterity goes both ways. I want to suggest, that when *some of us* (interpreters of nondominant identities) make the past *like themselves*, even momentarily, it makes it more possible for *others of us* to encounter a strange past.

In advocating for attention to “the responsibility historians share to put the world's strangeness to good use,” Chin argues that “we” must be open to being made more strange through our encounters with the radiant past in all its alterity.²¹¹ In a sense, Morton Smith was accused by his colleagues of making a past that *he* could identify with (by, literally, forging a fragment of a gospel that could be read as presenting a homoerotic episode featuring Jesus). Whether or not he made the fragment (or merely an interpretation of that fragment) so that he might have a past with which to identify, in doing so he made visible a kind of alterity with which *his colleagues could not—or would not—identify*. In part, my dissertation addresses the ways that this “us” of biblical scholarship (or historical scholarship more generally) is so

²¹¹ Chin, “Marvelous Things Heard,” 478.

multifaceted that when *some of "us"* make histories in our own images, that very act of that imagining makes visible histories that *others of "us"* find radiantly different. And yet, responding to Chin, I would argue that the issue is not simply one of identification versus alterity—if, that is, we take into account the diversity of “we” who make histories. Our various acts of imagining offer varieties of possibilities to one another, if we can root ourselves in the kind of ethics of relation that Chin is advocating—an ethics of relation that values "decentering and ceding ground"—which most of "us" struggle to allow to happen and which certainly is not happening in the forgery debates I have analyzed here.²¹²

Across this dissertations’ readings of desire and fantasy in New Testament scholarship, I have teased out an embarrassed eroticism that I argue structures New Testament historical discourse. In doing so, I not only engage the logic of psychoanalysis, but I also propose a queering of New Testament historiography by amplifying the (ironically) “perverse” intensity of desire threaded through that seemingly composed, properly directed “straight” historicism. In surfacing the erotic dimensions threaded through deployments of the categories of forgery and authenticity, I have argued for this division’s attempt to impose boundaries on the fantasy life of Christian history. In deconstructing the analytic category of forgery, I demonstrated the ways in which that category is used to distinguish the normative from the deviant (under the guise of the true from the false, the real from the fake), a false binary that functions to police “proper” and “improper” relations with the past. These categories register some desires for the past as appropriate, while rendering other desires, other fantasies of contact with the past, as inappropriate—perverse, nonnormative, queer.

²¹² Chin, “Marvelous Things Heard,” 485.

Without questioning what's at stake in any given notion of historicity or authenticity, we cannot pretend to look "objectively" at the evidence with which we make arguments for any version of the early Christian past. Not that I hope to disenchant our historical investments, our various assumptions about how, quite magically, sometimes quite erotically, the past touches and transforms our various presents: our reasons for loving, hating, and remembering various versions of the past can never be completely transparent to us—nor are they ever completely "ours" alone (a fact which powerfully contributes to the eros and the magic of historical imagination). Because of this lack of transparency, I have argued for the importance of exploring the affects and desires that have been sublimated through the powerful category of authenticity, as this category emerges in relation to the construction of its constitutive others (forgery, pseudepigraphy), and the methods used to firmly delineate these categories.

The ethical project that animates this work, then, is one that makes room for reckoning with the unconscious—the cultural unconscious, the disciplinary unconscious, as well as what we might call each scholar and reader's personal unconscious. It is an ethics of relation and a historiographical proposal that shares in the therapeutic orientation of some strands of psychoanalysis: healing for the individual and the collective requires a turn towards the contours of the unconscious, by means of fantasy, dream, the unearthing of desire and our earliest modes of object relating, our most primal loves and hates, either to make conscious what we have disallowed from view (freeing up psychic energy for the renewed flow of energy and creativity), to hold our loves and hates in ambivalent balance, or to take responsibility for the fact that we are driven by more than we can know and are not conscious masters of ourselves or our knowing.

Ultimately, this dissertation has emerged out of my own relentless desire for biblical scholarship to grapple more robustly—ethically and affectively—with the possibility and value of radical difference, and, more specifically, with the complexities of speaking of a "we/us" in charting desire in New Testament and early Christian historical reconstructions. I locate the problems surrounding the impasses in debates over forgery, authenticity, and pseudepigraphy in the domain of the *relational*, with its attendant ethical demands and questions. The relational domain that interests me is one that takes seriously unconscious and as well as conscious modes of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationship. This is intimately connected to how, for whom, and to what ends we narrate our identifications and disidentifications with the past and articulate the bounds of history.

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