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WEAVING *LIVES* FOR VIRTUOUS READERS:
GREGORY OF NYSSA AS BIOGRAPHER

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BY
ALLISON LEIGH GRAY

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To Liz,

πατήρ, διδάσκαλος, παιδαγωγός, μήτηρ, ἀγαθοῦ παντὸς σύμβουλος

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Introduction. The woven garment

Now then, since the manner of life in accord with virtue is something neither uniform nor marked by a single style, but, as in the making of fabric, the art of weaving creates the garment by using many threads, some of which are stretched vertically and others are carried horizontally, so, too, in the case of the virtuous life many things must twine together, so that a noble life is shown forth. In the same way the divine apostle enumerates threads of this sort, by means of which pure works are woven together; he is talking about love and joy and peace, patience and kindness (Gal 5:22) and all the sorts of things that adorn the person who is putting on the garment of heavenly incorruptibility in place of a corruptible and earthly life (2 Cor 5:1-4).

Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Homily 9, 24.271.16-272.4.¹

For Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-395 CE), the virtuous life may be likened to a fabric made up of “many threads” (πολλὰ νήματα) held in tension, interlocking to form a coherent whole, united by “the art of weaving” (ἡ ὑφαντικὴ τέχνη). Even the “pure works” (καθαρὰ ἔργα) that adorn a virtuous person are themselves to be thought of as woven out of numerous strands, the fruits of the Spirit that Paul enumerates in Galatians. The “noble life” (ὁ ἀστεῖος βίος) displayed through the weaver’s craft is equated with “incorruptibility” (ἀφθαρσία), and it is a departure from the “earthly life” (γηῶνος βίος). With this image of a woven garment and the skill needed for its construction, Gregory captures the complexity involved both in living virtuously and in depicting the “virtuous way of life” (ἡ κατ’ ἀρετὴν πολιτεία). Gregory himself takes on the complicated task of weaving literary portraits in three laudatory biographical narratives, or encomiastic *bioi*.

¹ ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν οὐ μονοειδῆς τίς ἔστιν οὐδὲ μονότροπος ἡ κατ’ ἀρετὴν πολιτεία, ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τῆς τῶν ὑφασμάτων κατασκευῆς διὰ πολλῶν νημάτων, τῶν μὲν ἐπ’ εὐθείας ἀνατεταμένων τῶν δὲ κατὰ τὸ πλάγιον διηρμένων, ἡ ὑφαντικὴ τέχνη τὴν ἐσθῆτα ποιεῖ, οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ἐναρέτου ζωῆς πολλὰ χρὴ συνδραμεῖν, διὸ ὁ ἀστεῖος ἔξινφαίνεται βίος, καθὼς ἀπαριθμεῖται τὰ τοιαῦτα νήματα ὁ θεῖος ἀπόστολος, διὸ ἡ τῶν καθαρῶν ἔργων ιστουργία συνίσταται, ἀγάπην λέγων καὶ χαρὰν καὶ εἰρήνην, μακροθυμίαν τε καὶ χρηστότητα καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα, οἷς κατακοσμεῖται ὁ ἐκ τοῦ φθαρτοῦ τε καὶ γηῶνος βίου τὴν οὐράνιον ἀφθαρσίαν μετενδύμενος (GNO Online 24.271.16-272.4).

All translations of works of Gregory of Nyssa are my own, as are those of other Greek and Latin texts quoted in this dissertation, unless otherwise noted.

On the surface, the three *bioi* appear to deal with very different types of individuals with distinct life paths, from the biblical figure Moses (*The Life of Moses*, VM), to a third-century wonderworking bishop (*The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus*, VGT), to Gregory's older sister, Macrina, who directs a household of ascetic women on the family estate (*The Life of Macrina*, VSM). Yet these three narratives, despite their different subjects and varied sources, are united by a common emphasis on their intended educational impact for some audience. In all three, Gregory explicitly comments on the teaching function of the *bios*:

VSM 1: So since you approved that the record of her good deeds should bear some benefit (κέρδος), lest such a life should go unnoticed in subsequent times and lest she, having raised herself to the most lofty peak of human virtue through philosophy, should silently pass by in unprofitable (ἀνωφελής) obscurity...²

VGT 2: For it is clear that when his life of virtue, like a fiery beacon (πυρσός), shines out to our souls through recollection, it becomes a path (όδός) toward the good both for the one who describes it and for those listening.³

VM I.2, 15: Since the letter which you recently sent requested us to furnish you with some counsel concerning the perfect life (ό τέλειος βίος), I thought it fitting to provide [it]... So then let Moses be set before us in the composition, as an example (ὑπόδειγμα) for life.⁴

In each case, an audience or individual is addressed directly, and the text is depicted as a tool for communicating beneficial truths and desirable lessons about virtue to its recipient(s). What "benefit" (κέρδος) can the record of a life bear, for whom, and how? What does it mean for a life to be "unprofitable" (ἀνωφελής) or to become a "fiery beacon" (πυρσός) or "path" (όδός)? What

² Έπει τούν ἐδοκίμασας φέρειν τι κέρδος τὴν τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἱστορίαν, ώς ἂν μὴ λάθοι τὸν μετὰ ταῦτα χρόνον ὁ τοιοῦτος βίος μηδὲ ἀνωφελής παραδράμοι διὰ σιωπῆς συγκαλυφθεῖσα ή πρὸς τὸν ἀκρότατον τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἀρετῆς ὅρον ἔαυτὴν διὰ φιλοσοφίας ἐπάραστα.

³ Δῆλον γάρ, ὅτι πυρσοῦ δίκην διὰ τῆς μνήμης ἐκλάμψας ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν ὁ κατ' ἀρετὴν αὐτοῦ βίος, ὁδὸς πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν τῷ τε διεξιόντι καὶ τοῖς ἀκούοντι γίνεται.

⁴ Τῆς γάρ ἐπιστολῆς ἣν πρώην διεπέμψω ταύτην ἀπαγγελλούσης τὴν αἴτησιν τὸ γενέσθαι σοί τινα παρ' ἡμῶν ὑποθήκην εἰς τὸν τέλειον βίον, πρέπειν ὡήθην παρασχεῖν... Μωϋσῆς τοίνυν ἡμῖν εἰς ὑπόδειγμα βίου προτεθήτω τῷ λόγῳ.

does “the perfect life” (ο τέλειος βίος) have to do with the example (ύπόδειγμα) of any individual’s life?

Although the importance of exemplarity in Greco-Roman biographical narrative is widely recognized in contemporary scholarship,⁵ Gregory’s transparent focus and explicit statements on the topic makes these three *bioi* fascinating artifacts of the dynamic fourth-century world of Christian education.⁶ The *bioi* provide a rich and detailed collection of woven garments, composed across several decades during a significant period in the ongoing development of a Christian intellectual identity and its literary expression.

While past scholars have studied each of the texts at the center of my project, none has undertaken an in-depth study of the three together, nor explained how Gregory the biographer adopts and adapts existing rhetorical and literary techniques to imagine, construct, and train an ideal reading audience. Building upon insights from scholars who work on encomia (laudatory speeches), biography, philosophical and theological anthropology, and the history of Greco-Roman education, I argue that Gregory’s attention to audience is not only thoroughgoing in all

⁵ Herwig Görgemanns, “Biography,” in *Brill’s New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World: Antiquity Volume 2, Ark-Cas* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 651. Both Frederick E. Brenk and Tim Duff have described the importance of exemplarity and individual exempla in the *Lives* of Plutarch (Frederick E. Brenk, “Setting a Good *Exemplum*: Case Studies in the *Moralia*, the *Lives* as Case Studies,” in *The Unity of Plutarch’s Work: ‘Moralia’ Themes in the ‘Lives,’ Features of the ‘Lives’ in the ‘Moralia,’* edited by Anastasios G. Nikolaides, *Millenium Studies* [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008]: 237-253; Tim Duff, *Plutarch’s Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999]). Christopher Gill, discussed further in Chapter 2, studies the role of character-development in texts about exemplary lives (Christopher Gill, “The Question of Character-Development: Plutarch and Tacitus,” *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, volume 33, number 2 [1983]: 469-487).

⁶ As the public profile and the political and socio-economic status of Christian communities grew in a tolerant and even supportive post-Constantinian environment, the literary and material records of the lives of ascetic figures and martyrs also grew exponentially. This trend has been documented and analyzed most famously by Peter Brown (see especially Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* [Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992]). Other works taking a socio-literary perspective posit a correlation between historical circumstances and an increase in hagiographic devotional literature: Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) and Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997).

three *bioi*, but is also critical to understanding the texts' shared formal features and their function: Gregory's encomiastic *bioi* are educational tools that serve a propaedeutic function for Christian readers who, like one of his addressees, wish to "translate" (μεταφέρειν, VM I.3) the virtues described in the texts into their own lives.

I. A biographical snapshot of Gregory

Gregory is perhaps best known for his role in defending and cogently re-articulating the orthodox Trinitarian position established in the Nicene Creed (325 CE), but he contributed to a whole complex of debates that gripped fourth-century Christian theologians and bishops.⁷ Born in Cappadocia, Gregory was the third son in a wealthy, landed Christian family of nine children.⁸ He received an elite education in literature, rhetoric, philosophy, and theology, as well as training for public leadership and service.⁹ Gregory's own father, Basil the Elder, was a teacher of rhetoric in Cappadocia, and Gregory's older brother Basil received extensive education in rhetoric and philosophy at a series of urban schools (Caesarea, Constantinople), culminating in

⁷ His key contribution to Trinitarian theology was the robust defense of a single divine *ousia* and three *hypostases* in debates with the Neo-Arian Eunomius, in his *Contra Eunomium*, books 1-3. His treatise *Ad Ablabium* refutes the idea that the persons of the holy trinity are three gods. He comments on theological anthropology in *De hominis opificio*, and addresses the connection between Christian resurrection from the dead and human grief in his dialogue *De anima et resurrectione*. Homilies and commentaries treat a variety of biblical books, from the Song of Songs (*In Canticum canticorum*) to the Psalms (*In inscriptioes Psalmorum*) to the Acts of the Apostles (*In Sanctum Stephanum I and II*). Among his more distinctly pastoral works, we might count a discussion of infant mortality (*De infantibus premature abreptis*) and a treatise on virginity (*De virginitate*). He also composed funerary and commemorative orations for illustrious public figures, like the daughter of the Emperor Theodosius I (*In Pulcheriam*) and for his older brother Basil (*In Basilium fratrem*).

⁸ Specifically on the family's social standing, see Thomas A. Kopecek, "The Social Class of the Cappadocian Fathers," *Church History*, Volume 42, Number 4 (1973):453-466. He places them in the Roman curial class.

⁹ Gregory seems to have received his education locally within Cappadocia and his native Pontus, unlike his brother Basil who was trained at Athens (cf. Gregory's *Epistle* 13 to Libanius, GNO Online 33.44.14ff.). That Gregory was intimately familiar with classical Greek literature is beyond doubt. For the impact this knowledge had on his portrayal of Macrina in the VSM, see Georgia Frank, "Macrina's Scar: Homeric Allusion and Heroic Identity in Gregory of Nyssa's Life of Macrina," *JECS*, volume 8 number 4 (Winter 2000): 511-530; and Ellen Muehlberger, "Salvage: Macrina and the Christian Project of Cultural Reclamation" *Church History* (2012): 273-297.

some time spent at no less an intellectual center than Athens.¹⁰ It was during Basil's stay at Athens that he met and befriended Gregory Nazianzus; the latter notes how much their friendship was affected by their shared intellectual pursuits.¹¹ Gregory had the opportunity to apply his skills to diplomatic ecclesiastical governance in 372 when he was appointed to the episcopal See of Nyssa by his elder brother, Basil, who was already the bishop of Caesarea (329/330-379 CE). By the end of his life, Gregory had participated in the Council of Constantinople (381 CE), where his leadership in doctrinal matters so distinguished him he was later remembered as “a father of fathers.”¹² He also spent some time in 385 CE at the Constantinopolitan court, where he pronounced funeral orations for the Empress Flacilla (wife of Theodosius I) and her daughter Pulcheria.¹³ It is probably during this period that he met Olympias, a prominent Christian woman

¹⁰ Raymond Van Dam, *Families and Friends in Late Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), Chapter 1, esp. pp 18-22; Gregory Nazianzus' account of the time he spent with Basil is in his *Oration 43.13-14* (the funerary oration for Basil).

¹¹ See for example Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration 43.15* on their friendship.

¹² The note honoring Gregory from the Second Council of Nicaea, 787 CE, reads as follows: “Gregory Bishop of Nyssa, whom all call a father of fathers” (*Gregorius Nyssensis episcopus, quem omnes patrum patrem vocant*, *Acta VI.5*). The Latin text is from Joannes Dominicus Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, Volume 13 (Graz: Akademische Druck – u. Verlagsanstalt, 1902, repr. 1960), 692. A new Greek edition of the Acts of the Second Nicene Council is currently being published in the *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum*, Series Secunda from De Gruyter, but at the time of writing only volumes containing Acts I-III (vol. 3, part 1) and IV-V (vol. 3, part 2) were available. See English translation in John Mendham, transl., *The seventh general council, the second of Nicaea, held A.D. 787, in which the worship of images was established with copious notes from the "Caroline books", compiled by order of Charlemagne for its confutation*, (London: W.E. Painter, 1850), 382.

¹³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio funebris in Flacillam imperatricem* (GNO Online 48); *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam* (GNO Online 47). Anna Caimi Danelli outlines the rhetorical structure of each oration and argues that Gregory uses the typical form of a eulogy described by Menander but incorporates his own Christian teaching about death and mourning, modulating his emphasis on theological and doctrinal topics based on the make-up of his audience (Anna Caimi Danelli, “Sul Genere Letterario delle Orazioni Funebri di Gregorio di Nissa,” *Aevum* 53, Fasc. 1 [1979]: 140-161, esp. pp 146-152). In 1999, Ulrike Gantz published an edition of the oration for Pulcheria with commentary (Ulrike Gantz, *Gregor von Nyssa: Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam*, XPHΣΙΣ: Die Methode der Kirchenväter im Umgang mit der Antiken Kultur, Volume 6 [Basel: Schwabe and Company, 1999]). Similarities between the two texts imperial funerary orations and Basil's consolatory texts are described in Robert C. Gregg, *Consolation philosophy: Greek and Christian paideia in Basil and the two Gregories*, Patristic monograph series, no. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975), esp. Chapter 4.

who was also in correspondence with John Chrysostom.¹⁴

Not only did Gregory and his Cappadocian compatriots participate in the world of classical *paideia* and Christian leadership, but the family had wide-ranging connections within a subset of similarly educated and similarly influential Christians. Their most well-known historical connection was to Origen (ca. 184 - ca. 253 CE), for whom Christian engagement with classical education was a fraught matter.¹⁵ The Cappadocian link to Origen, as we learn in the VGT and from the Cappadocians' own letters, comes partly from Neocaesarean family connections: Macrina the Elder and her husband were trained in their faith by Thaumaturgus,

¹⁴ This timeline for their meeting is proposed by Daniélou in his "Introduction," *La Vie de Moïse, ou Traité de la Perfection en Matière de Vertu*, ed. and transl. by Jean Daniélou, S.J., 3rd ed., *Sources Chrétiennes* 1 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968): 6-42, 13. The timeline allows him to explain how Gregory dedicated the *In canticum canticorum* to Olympias ca. 389 CE (Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum canticorum* title, GNO Online 24.3.Tit).

¹⁵ See Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer: School, Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, Library of New Testament Studies 400 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), esp. Chapter 11 on Origen and his attitude toward classical *paideia*. Carl Vernon Harris claims that in the *De principiis*, "Origen's purpose, it seems, was less to augment the number of religious truths than to clarify the teachings of the Church by an exposition that would be at once coherent, true to Scripture, and scholarly enough to win the attention of the philosophers" (Carl Vernon Harris, *Origen of Alexandria's Interpretation of the Teacher's Function in the Early Christian Hierarchy and Community* [New York: The American Press, 1966], 54). Robert M. Grant argues that Origen "was not enthusiastic about a literary education," but does note that in his *Contra Celsum* (when he is "writing for an audience outside the church, at least ostensibly") Origen displays a familiarity with literature in the canon of secular *paideia* (Robert M. Grant, "Theological Education at Alexandria," in *The Roots of Egyptian Christianity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson and James E. Goehring, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986]: 178-189, 185-186). In particular, Origen's work of Scriptural interpretation is informed by philosophical interpretation of Homeric texts (see Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer*, 151-2 on *Contra Celsum* 1.42), and he sees the study of philosophy as propaideutic "for an adequate reading of biblical texts" (145). Peter Martens highlights the importance of training in philology for Origen, especially the role of philology in text criticism and exegesis (Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, Oxford Early Christian Studies [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012]). Origen's *Hexapla*, a massive undertaking, may be taken as evidence of his commitment to detailed exegetical work and his conception of its importance for Christian scholars (John Wright, "Origen in the Scholar's Den: A Rationale for the Hexapla," in *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, ed. Charles Kannengiesser and William L. Petersen [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988]: 48-62). Patricia Cox Miller gathers illustrative examples of Origen's comments on the necessity of interpreting Scripture allegorically, and she proposes that "... in the hands of such an interpreter as Origen, allegory is the name of interpretation as such, provided that one brings to interpretation the kind of poetic and abysmal recognitions that Origen expressed so well. Consciousness of the perceptual structures that one brings to words entails the recognition that all writing is allegory, a fall into a poetic abyss" (Patricia Cox Miller, "Poetic Words, Abysmal Words: Reflections on Origen's Hermeneutics," in Kannengiesser and Petersen, *Origen of Alexandria*: 165-178, 178).

who was trained by Origen.¹⁶ Origen himself was, according to Eusebius, a student of Clement of Alexandria (ca. 160 - ca. 215).¹⁷ Clement's text *Paedagogus* lays out a program of education and training for Christians.¹⁸ Even this brief overview demonstrates that a concern for a particularly Christian, highly philosophical and rhetorical form of education was part of Gregory's intellectual and theological heritage.

Scholars have pieced together various accounts of Gregory's upbringing, education, ministry, and personal life, drawing on his own letters and treatises to demonstrate that he served as Church lector before his appointment as bishop, to show that he participated (if at first reluctantly) in the veneration of local saints and martyrs, and to argue that he may have married and had a son.¹⁹ Raymond Van Dam's three volumes published in 2002-2003 richly recreate the

¹⁶ VGT 22. See Gregory of Nazianzus *Or. 43.5-6* on Macrina the Elder. Vasiliki Limberis, *Architects of Piety: the Cappadocian Fathers and the cult of the martyrs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) claims that the personal connection to Thaumaturgus through Macrina the Elder imbues the family with a heredity sanctity that they draw upon to enhance their local ecclesial authority (135). The major source for Thaumaturgus' education under Origen is Thaumaturgus' own text, *In Origenem oratio panegyrica*. The authenticity of its attribution to Thaumaturgus has been questioned, but Crouzel defends it in Henri Crouzel, "Faut-il voir trois personnages en Grégoire le Thaumaturge? A propos du 'Remerciement à Origene' et de la 'Lettre à Grégoire,'" *Gregorianum*, Volume 60, Number 2 (1979): 287-320, esp. 289-300. Thaumaturgus' text describes features of Origen's philosophical and theological teaching, and praises his ability to lead his students toward virtue. On the relationship between the *In Origenem* and the VGT, Maraval writes, "En fait, l'*Éloge de Thaumaturge* et le *Remerciement à Origène* présentent le même personnage, mais sous des aspects différents: le premier est un moine devenue évêque qui convertit les païens grâce à ses pouvoirs de thaumaturge, l'autre un membre actif d'une école philosophique qui fait devant celle-ci la preuve des compétences acquises auprès de son maître – un aspect qui présentait peu d'intérêt pour l'auditoire de Grégoire" (Maraval, "Introduction," in *Éloge de Grégoire le Thaumaturge, Éloge de Basile*, transl. Pierre Maraval, *Sources Chrétiennes* 573 [Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2014]: 7-64, 29). On Origen as Thaumaturgus' teacher in Caesarea, largely on the basis of accounts in Eusebius and Thaumaturgus' own writings, see Anders-Christian Jacobsen, "Conversion to Christian Philosophy – the case of Origen's School in Caesarea," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*, Volume 16, Number 1 (2012): 145-157.

¹⁷ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.2.2-6.

¹⁸ See also discussion in Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 48-52.

¹⁹ Gregory's vivid personal anecdote about a dream encounter with the martyrs associated with the cult of the 40 Martyrs at Sebaste is found in Gregory's *In XL Martyres*; see also Limberis' recent work on the Cappadocians and their engagement with martyr cult: Vasiliki Limberis, *Architects of Piety*, 21, 63-65.

Daniélou holds that Gregory was married, though he points out there is not much evidence to determine whether he kept his wife after being appointed bishop (Jean Daniélou, "Introduction," 9; Jean Daniélou, "Le mariage de Grégoire de Nysse et la chronologie de sa vie," *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes*, Volume 2, Number 1-2 [1956]:

social, economic, and political *milieux* of the Cappadocian Fathers and their congregations.²⁰

More general studies, like Andrea Sterk's 2004 book *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity*, examine the social and ecclesiastical conditions that shaped the episcopal experience of bishops like the Cappadocians.²¹ Some recent works like Susan R. Holman's 2001 *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* and Vasiliki Limberis' 2011 *Architects of Piety: The Cappadocian Fathers and the Cult of the Martyrs* explicitly draw on parts of Gregory's oeuvre (homilies and orations, respectively) as case studies for different aspects of fourth-century Christian life.²² These reconstructions evince an abiding scholarly interest in the connections or overlap between Gregory's personal experiences and his literary output.

This is an interest Gregory himself shares. He displays an active and earnestly pastoral and pedagogical approach to his social world through his letters and addresses to a broad range of interlocutors – young priests, fellow bishops, lay congregations, women, non-Christian rhetors, members of the imperial family, and devotees of famous saints and martyrs.²³ Whether

71-78). For a summary of the debate over Theosebeia and Cynegius, see Anna M. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters. Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*. Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 83 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp 15-18. Suffice it to say here that Gregory's *Epistles* 13, 14, and 197 and the treatise *De virginitate* have been pored over by numerous scholars who come to quite different conclusions.

²⁰ Raymond Van Dam, *Becoming Christian: the Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Raymond Van Dam, *Families and Friends*; Raymond Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow: Roman Rule and Greek Culture in Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

²¹ Andrea Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church: The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

²² Susan R. Holman, *The Hungry are Dying: Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Limberis, *Architects of Piety*.

²³ See collected letters in Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*. The pedagogical approach is summarized well in Morwenna Ludlow, "Texts, Teachers and Pupils in the Writings of Gregory of Nyssa" in *Literature and Society in the Fourth Century AD: Performing Paideia, Constructing the Present, Presenting the Self*, edited by Lieve Van Hoof and Peter Van Nuffelen, Mnemosyne Supplements, Monographs on Greek and Latin Language and Literature, volume 373 (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 83-102.

forging letters to Basil in the name of an uncle to mend a familial rift (see Basil, *Epistles* 58, 59, 60)²⁴ or recommending the student Cynegius to the Athenian rhetor Libanius (Gregory, *Epistles* 13 and 14), Gregory frequently shows his concern for using the word, spoken and written, to foster and preserve human connection.

His diverse corpus reflects the highly creative intellect of this pastor, theologian, and teacher. However, some have identified his less than systematic expressions of doctrine and, more troubling still, his apparent acceptance of Origen's teachings about *apokatastasis* (universal salvation) as problematic aspects of his literary production.²⁵ As Anthony Meredith points out, however, we should keep in view the occasional nature of most of Gregory's texts, since they were "written in response to particular challenges he and the Church felt themselves called on to

²⁴ Basil rebukes Gregory in Basil, *Epistle* 58. Basil, *Epistle* 59 is an appeal to the uncle, another Gregory, for reconciliation, and *Epistle* 60 to the uncle comments on Gregory of Nyssa's previously demonstrated unreliability in communicating the uncle's words to Basil.

²⁵ Gregory's thought is characterized as unsystematic in, for example, Rowan Williams, "Macrina's Deathbed Revisited: Gregory of Nyssa on Mind and Passion," in *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy in Late Antiquity: Essays in tribute to George Christopher Stead, Ely Professor of Divinity, University of Cambridge (1971-1980), in celebration of his eightieth birthday, 9th April 1993*, edited by Lionel R. Wickham and Caroline P. Bammell, assisted by Erica C.D. Hunter, *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1993): 227-246, 228.

For Gregory's reception of Origenic thought, see recent discussion in Ilaria Ramelli, "Christian Soteriology and Christian Platonism: Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Biblical and Philosophical Basis of the Doctrine of Apokatastasis," *Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (2007): 313-356; Ilaria Ramelli, "Harmony between *Arkhē* and *Telos* in Patristic Platonism and the Imagery of Astronomical Harmony Applied to Apokatastasis," *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 7 (2013): 1-49. Several scholars have pointed out that we must, of course, be cautious in claiming a through-line from Origen to Gregory. In his 2002 article on how Origen and Gregory treat the Lord's Prayer, Meredith writes, "The conclusion of this investigation is that neither in thought nor in vocabulary or use of Scripture is there very much in common between the two writers. Even if Gregory knew Origen's treatment of The Lord's Prayer, he made very little use of it; and the probability is that he was ignorant of it. If this is true, it is another indication of the doubtfulness of the facile suggestion that Gregory is to be thought of as a disciple of Origen (albeit at several removes, through his grandmother Macrina and Gregory the Wonder-worker). The evidence of these five sermons hardly supports such a claim" (Anthony Meredith, "Origen and Gregory of Nyssa on the Lord's Prayer," *Heythrop Journal*, Volume 43 (2002): 344-356, 355). A further complication arises when we consider that even the connection through Gregory Thaumaturgus is tenuous at best: on the basis of the VGT, it is unclear and even doubtful that Nyssen knew Thaumaturgus' theological writings. See Raymond Van Dam, "Hagiography and History: The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus," *Classical Antiquity* Volume 1 (1982): 272-308, and Jean Bernardi, *La Prédication des pères cappadociens, le prédicateur et son auditoire*. Publications de la Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de l'Université de Montpellier, 30, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1968), especially page 301.

face. This means in practice that we sometimes find him using quite inconsistent models in his desire to dispose of objections to his own particular understanding of the gospel.”²⁶ Since the three *bioi* are, in Gregory’s own formulation, written for a contextually grounded didactic purpose, the occasions for their composition require discussion.

II. Three biographical narratives

The extant form of *The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus* (VGT) is a narrative expansion of a commemorative oration Gregory delivered in 379 or 380 CE in Neocaesarea, the seat of the text’s eponymous “Wonderworker” bishop (ca. 210/215-ca. 270/275 CE).²⁷ The oration was originally delivered to a live audience of Neocaesarean citizens, most likely Christians gathered for Thaumaturgus’ feast day. Accordingly, it begins with an address that reflects its initial live delivery. Scholars believe the extant form of the text includes some additions to the original address; as Slusser puts it, “we may assume that Gregory of Nyssa added such improvements as he wished before letting the oration circulate more widely.”²⁸ This wider audience was probably a group of Christians interested in learning about a luminary of the Church. As Stephen Mitchell has shown, the majority of the information Gregory offered was “no more than pious fiction.”²⁹

²⁶ Anthony Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 15.

²⁷ A recent summary of the scholarly debate surrounding the dating of the original delivery and the location may be found in Pierre Maraval, “Introduction,” 14-23. Its delivery relative to the death of Basil in 379 CE and the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE is somewhat unclear, though Maraval suggests, on the basis of Gregory’s *Epistle* 19, that Gregory could indeed have delivered the speech in Neocaesarea in the autumn of 379 CE. Stephen Mitchell proposes the precise date of November 17, 379. November 17 would have been the anniversary of Thaumaturgus’ death, and the date is preserved independently in the Latin *Life* (Stephen Mitchell, “The Life and Lives of Gregory Thaumaturgus,” in *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium and the Christian Orient*, ed. Jan Willem Drijvers and John W. Watt, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World*, Volume 137 [Leiden: Brill, 1999]: 99-138, 115).

²⁸ Michael Slusser, “Introduction,” in *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus: Life and Works*. The Fathers of the Church, a new translation, Volume 98 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998): 1-37, 16. Basing his division on that proposed by Koetschau, Slusser takes Gregory’s remarks about “resuming” (ἐπαναλαβόν) the story of Thaumaturgus’ early priesthood as an indication that he is adding a new section (VGT 96.8).

²⁹ Stephen Mitchell, “The Life and Lives,” 99.

Thaumaturgus becomes, in Gregory's hands, an exemplar of Christian wisdom and a model for successful evangelization of the Pontic region, but the historical details of Thaumaturgus' life are inaccurate when considered against the evidence from the earlier bishop's own autobiographical writings.³⁰

Gregory describes his older sister's life, death, and burial in *The Life of Saint Macrina* (VSM), a text he writes in approximately 382 CE from the position of an eyewitness and admirer; this narrative presents Macrina (ca. 327-379 CE) as a model of virtues, with a special emphasis on her philosophical self-control. Vasiliki Limberis has argued that this *bios*, with its emphasis on asceticism, allows Gregory to claim a privileged connection to the “celestial family” of martyrs.³¹ The extended account of events that technically occurred immediately before and after Macrina's death is much longer than the summary of her life, and that dilation makes this a somewhat atypical *bios*. Gregory addresses an epistolary opening to a family friend who asked for an account of the virtuous woman's life and death. Internal comments about the effect Macrina's death had on a large community (VSM 33), and Gregory's *prooimion* suggest the text was intended for a more general readership.³²

Finally, the *Life of Moses* (VM) that Gregory wrote in approximately 390 CE recounts, with extensive exegetical reflections, the life and work of the biblical Moses, taking its raw material from the Scriptural record in Exodus through Deuteronomy, but purporting to offer a universally applicable account of “the life of perfect virtue.”³³ This text, unlike the other two, is

³⁰ Mitchell points out that Eusebius' information about Thaumaturgus' early life, including his name change from Theodore to Gregory, probably came from the *In Origenem* (Mitchell, “The Life and Lives,” 105).

³¹ Limberis, *Architects of Piety*, 109ff.

³² The *prooimion* will be discussed in Chapter 1.

³³ On the dating of the *Life of Moses*, a contentious subject, Ann Conway-Jones offers a clear summary of the stakes (Ann Conway-Jones, *Gregory of Nyssa's Tabernacle Imagery in its Jewish and Christian Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford

divided into two distinct sections. First a *historia* recounts the events of Moses' life, closely following the Scriptural narrative and giving a generally faithful summary. Then Gregory returns to the beginning and tells the full story again in what he calls a *theoria*. As he puts it near the beginning of his text, “then we will seek out the sense (διάνοια) that corresponds to the history (ιστορία), for counsel (ύποθήκη) about virtue.”³⁴ In this second, longer section of the text he provides more detailed interpretive comments linking Moses' experiences and activities to contemporary Christian life and practice. The two accounts nevertheless both proceed sequentially, relating Moses' life from birth to death. The text's addressee is one Caesarius, named in VM II.319. The K manuscript of the text adds “monk” or “solitary” (μοναχός) with the name, contributing to a traditional argument that the addressee was a young priest. Other scholars contend this Caesarius may be (a) Gregory's son, (b) Caesarius the brother of Gregory Nazianzen, or (c) a totally separate individual.³⁵ Because Gregory speaks of more readers than just this addressee in the body of the VM,³⁶ it seems a fair assumption that he imagined some form of communal reading or wider dissemination for the text.

University Press, 2014).). While Daniélou puts the work near the end of Gregory's life because he considers it a reflection of Gregory's mature theology, Heine insists on an earlier date to situate the composition within the context of debates with Eunomius (Ronald E. Heine, *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Oxford Early Christian Studies [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995], 63). Conway-Jones astutely notes that “The real disagreement is not about dating, but about the nature of the treatise. Is it mysticism or polemical theology? Agreeing with Daniélou's dating does not preclude seeing the treatise differently” (Conway-Jones, *Gregory of Nyssa's Tabernacle Imagery*, 26). I follow her lead in accepting the later date but positing ongoing polemical concerns about the nature of human knowledge and conceptions of the divine nature that had become central to Gregory's thought.

³⁴ ...ούτω τὴν πρόσφορον τῇ ιστορίᾳ διάνοιαν εἰς ἀρετῆς ύποθήκην ἀναζητήσωμεν (VM I.15).

³⁵ In the absence of further evidence, I am inclined to believe one of the latter two options. Evidence for Gregory's possible marriage and family is cogently discussed in Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 15-25. The brother of Gregory Nazianzen is known from Gregory Nazianzen's funeral oration for Caesarius, *Oration 7*, his *Epistles 7* and 20, and Basil's letter to him, *Epistle 26*.

³⁶ Examples will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

III. Genre: encomiastic *bios*

In 1987, Arnoldo Momigliano wrote that

Generally speaking, one can say that Gregory of Nyssa in the variety of his biographical experiments is at the center of the transformation of biography in the fourth century. No other gives us a sequence comparable with that provided by Gregory of Nyssa in the lives of Moses, of Gregory Thaumaturgus, of his brother Basilus, and of his sister Macrina, not to speak of minor but by no means insignificant pieces such as the sermon on Bishop Meletius of Antioch.³⁷

Notwithstanding this compelling assessment, the *bioi* of Moses, Thaumaturgus, and Macrina remain understudied as a collection. A 1984 volume of essays, originating from the Fifth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa held in Mainz in 1982, did classify the VM, VGT, and VSM as texts sharing a common genre.³⁸ The essays included cover subjects from martyrological motifs³⁹ to “the holy death-bed”⁴⁰ to a comparison between the VSM, Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus*, and Iamblichus’ *On the Pythagorean Life*.⁴¹ However, now more than thirty years later, works that treat the three texts together remain unusual in a scholarly field that, with surprising consistency, still deals with these works separately, as representatives of discrete theological projects and even different genres. The VM is studied among Gregory’s exegetical

³⁷ Arnoldo Momigliano, *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 176. He goes on to point out, in particular, the neglect of the VM as a biographical work: “Paradoxically, the life of Moses by Gregory of Nyssa has suffered perhaps from too much attention, for it has been studied in isolation from the rest of Gregory of Nyssa’s biographical work” (Momigliano, *On Pagans*, 216).

³⁸ Andreas Spira, ed. *The Biographical Works of Gregory of Nyssa*. Patristic Monograph Series 12 (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, Ltd., 1984).

³⁹ Monique Alexandre, “Les nouveaux martyrs. Motifs martyrologiques dans la vie des saints et thèmes hagiographiques dans l’elogie des martyrs chez Grégoire de Nysse,” in Spira, *The Biographical Works*, 33-70.

⁴⁰ John T. Cummings, “The Holy Death-Bed, Saint and Penitent, Variation of a Theme,” in Spira, *The Biographical Works*, 241-263.

⁴¹ Anthony Meredith, “A Comparison between the *Vita S. Macrinae* of Gregroy of Nyssa, the *Vita Plotini* of Porphyry and the *De Vita Pythagorica* of Iamblichus,” in Spira, *The Biographical Works*, 181-195.

works⁴² and as a treatise on Christian mysticism.⁴³ The VSM is identified as a hagiographical account especially useful for the insight it provides into the family of two Cappadocian Fathers;⁴⁴ fourth-century liturgical and devotional practices, including female monasticism,⁴⁵ and

⁴² See Frances M. Young on the VM as a model of paraenetic exegesis in a figural mode in Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 259-263. J. Warren Smith identifies the work as a “biographical allegory” in J. Warren Smith, “Macrina, Tamer of Horses and Healer of Souls: Grief and the Therapy of Hope in Gregory of Nyssa’s *De Anima et Resurrectione*,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, Volume 52, part 1 (October 2000): 37-60, 54. Ilaria Ramelli’s detailed explications of both Origen and Gregory study the classical philosophical roots of their allegorical exegesis. See Ilaria Ramelli, “Philosophical Allegoresis of Scripture in Philo and its Legacy in Gregory of Nyssa,” *The Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism* 20, edited by David T. Runia and Gregory E. Sterling (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008): 55-99.

⁴³ The identification of Gregory as a mystical theologian extends back to Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme et théologie mystique: essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1953). His position (and dissenting positions) are addressed in Chapter 3.

Another thread in recent scholarship, which is not strictly relevant for this dissertation, but which is compelling for its interest in audience, deals with Gregory’s potential impact on contemporary theological discussions. See for example the collected essays in Sarah Coakley, ed., *Re-Thinking Gregory of Nyssa* (Malden, MA; Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

⁴⁴ For example, the text is used alongside other references in Basil and Gregory Nazianzus to reconstruct a composite portrait of Macrina in Anna M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger, philosopher of God* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008). Kate Cooper suggests the text can be read as “the story of a Christian dynasty, and of how an ideal of Christian commitment was handed down through the women of a family across three generations” (Kate Cooper, “The Life of Angels,” *Band of Angels: The Forgotten World of Early Christian Women* [New York: The Overlook Press, 2013]: 163-90, 164). There has been a shift away from mining the VSM for traces of the historical Macrina among some scholars, including Elisabeth A. Clark, who argues that accounts of holy women like Macrina are “literature,” and not simply ‘documents’ (in case you wish to make that distinction) and hence are readily subject to literary analysis and critique” (Elisabeth A Clark, “Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the ‘Linguistic Turn’,” *JECS*, volume 6 [1998]: 413-430, 418.). See also J. Warren Smith, “A Just and Reasonable Grief: The Death and Function of a Holy Woman in Gregory of Nyssa’s Life of Macrina” *JECS*, volume 12, number 1 (Spring 2004): 57-84. Smith uses the VSM as a starting point to examine the function of the fourth-century “holy woman,” partially following Clark. Since he takes the position that “drawing an exact line between history and Nyssen’s literary license is impossible,” he concentrates on “how Nyssen uses the figure of his sister to represent the ideal of ascetic piety” and argues that she has a “function as a mediator of hope” (Smith, “A Just and Reasonable Grief,” 63-64; 59).

⁴⁵ Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450* (London: Routledge, 1995); Cloke points out that in the VSM, Macrina exemplifies not only a very Roman emphasis on the *univira* (woman married only once, pp. 31-32), but also the virgin life (pp.61-63) and spiritual motherhood (p. 144). Peter Brown incorporates Gregory’s portrait of Macrina into his account of women’s ascetic practices and new social roles in his *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). See also Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion*. On the VSM as a window into Gregory’s conception of eucharistic presence, see Derek Krueger, “Writing and the Liturgy of Memory in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina*,” *JECS* Volume 8, Number 4 (Winter 2000): 483-510. Stavroula Constantinou classifies the VSM under one of six categories of female roles in her study of women’s performance of sanctity in Byzantine *Passions and Lives*. The roles are as follows: the martyr, the penitent, the cross-dresser, the nun, the abbess (her classification of Macrina, p. 130), and the pious wife (Stavroula Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances: Reading the Body in Byzantine Passions and Lives of Holy Women*, *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia* 9 [Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2005], 17).

Gregory's views on asceticism.⁴⁶ The VGT is taken as a festal oration that may provide either reliable or legendary information about the historical Thaumaturgus and Cappadocian reception of his writings (or lack thereof).⁴⁷ Yet it remains the case that all these three texts are examples of encomiastic *bios*, even if their similarities and differences have not been extensively studied according to the rules for the genre.

A. Encomiastic compositions

Gregory makes clear in each text that he will praise the excellence of its subject. In the VGT, he twice refers to the oration he is about to deliver as a “speech in praise” (ο ἔπαινος),⁴⁸ the technical term for a speech of praise or panegyric used by rhetorical theorists including

⁴⁶ The scholarly focus on ascetic teaching in the VSM is reflected in how the text is grouped with other works by Gregory. For example, the *Fathers of the Church* series includes it in a volume of “Ascetical Works,” and the *Escriptors Cristians* edition groups it with two other “Obres Ascétiques.” Individual studies reflect similar approaches. See Julia Burman, “Death and gender in late Antiquity: A case study of the death of Saint Macrina” in *Gender, Cult, and Culture in the Ancient World from Mycenae to Byzantium: Proceedings of the Second Nordic Symposium on Gender and Women’s History in Antiquity (Helsinki 20-22 October 2000)*, ed. Lena Larsson Lovén and Agneta Strömberg (Sävedalen: Paul Åströms Förlag, 2003): 140-150; Fotis Vasileiou, “At a Still Point of a Turning World: Privacy and Asceticism in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of St. Macrina*” *Byzantium*, volume 82 (2012): 451-463.

⁴⁷ See especially Slusser’s introductory essay in the Fathers of the Church series volume on Thaumaturgus; William Teferi, “The Cultus of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus,” *Harvard Theological Review* vol. 29 no. 4 (1936): pp 225-344; Raymond Van Dam, “Hagiography and History.” A particularly balanced view of the historical reliability of the VGT may be found in Blossom Stefaniw, “Gregory Taught, Gregory Written: The effacement and definition of individualization in the Address to Origen and the Life of Gregory the Wonderworker” in *Reflections on Religious Individuality: Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian Texts and Practices*, ed. Jörg Rupke and Wolfgang Spickerman, *Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten* 62 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012): 119-143. Stefaniw also uses the text to study the history of ideas. She examines the VGT alongside Thaumaturgus’ own *Address to Origen*, in order “to trace shifts in the scope for and form of individualisation from the early third to the late fourth century, in terms of the religious representation of one person” (Stefaniw, “Gregory Taught,” 119). Arnaldo Momigliano seems to waver between genres, referring to the VGT as “this life or rather panegyric” in his “The Life of St. Macrina by Gregory of Nyssa,” 213. Michel van Esbroeck also provides the somewhat inappropriate generic classification as “panegyric” in his discussion in “The Syriac Versions of the Panegyric of Gregory of Nyssa on Gregory the Wonderworker and of the Life of the Same” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, Volume 56 (2004): 1-13. He seems to be basing this classification on the Syriac title. Also revealing is the publication of the “*Éloge de Grégoire le Thaumaturge*” with “*Éloge de Basile*” in a single 2014 volume (Pierre Maraval, transl. and ed., *Grégoire de Nysse, Éloge de Grégoire le Thaumaturge, Éloge de Basile*, Sources Chrétiennes 573 [Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2014]).

⁴⁸ VGT 1 and VGT 3.

Aristotle.⁴⁹ Gregory also describes what he is about to say as “laudatory speech” (εὐφημία, VGT 2)⁵⁰ and refers to its subject as “the one being praised in an encomium” (ἐγκωμιαζόμενος).⁵¹

In the VSM, he does not use this technical terminology, but calls his account a “lengthy narrative” (μακρηγορία), a probable play on his sister’s name.⁵² However, the intent to praise her is still clear. His first reference to Macrina in the text is as an “esteemed” (εὐδόκιμος) individual;⁵³ this word was typically used to describe someone or something as honored or glorious, and in Gregory’s own corpus it appears more often as a quality of persons or as a substantive adjective than as a quality of inanimate objects, suggesting its use here also has to do with the excellent quality of Macrina’s soul.⁵⁴ Throughout, he speaks positively of her qualities: her striking beauty is “worth marveling at” (θαυμάζειν ἄξιον, VSM 4), and he notes that “the virtue of the great Macrina showed through” at certain points in her life (διεφάνη τῆς μεγάλης Μακρίνης ἡ ἀρετή, VSM 10).

As in the VSM, in the VM Gregory does not employ technical terminology for praise but indicates in other ways that praise is a major part of his work. Gregory also refers to Moses as “esteemed” (εὐδόκιμος), even using the term within a statement reminding readers of the program of the whole work: “We said straightaway in the *prooimion* that the lives of honored

⁴⁹ Aristotle writes in *Rhetorica* 1367b.27, “Panegyric is a speech exhibiting greatness of virtue” (εἶστιν δ’ ἔπαινος λόγος ἐμφανίζων μέγεθος ἀρετῆς). Menander, on the other hand, makes no distinction between ἐγκώμιον and ἔπαινος (see Menander I.331.15).

⁵⁰ This designation is repeated at VGT 11. Gregory also uses εὐφημία apparently interchangeably with ἐγκώμιον and ἔπαινος in other parts of his corpus (*LGO*, s.v. “εὐφημία.”). See, for example, his classification of *De virginitate* as both εὐφημία and ἐγκώμιον for virginity in just a few lines (Gregory, *De virginitate* GNO Online 31.251.24-252.3).

⁵¹ Further discussion of how Gregory will go about praising Thaumaturgus may be found in Chapter 1, under the heading *prooimion*.

⁵² Derek Krueger, “Writing and the Liturgy of Memory,” 484.

⁵³ VSM 1.

⁵⁴ *LGO*, s.v. “εὐδόκιμος.”

men have been set forth as a pattern of virtue for those to follow” (εὐθὺς ἐν προοιμίοις ἐπειπόντες τῶν εὐδοκίμων ἀνδρῶν τοὺς βίους εἰς ἀρετῆς ὑπόδειγμα τοῖς ἐφεξῆς προκεῖσθαι, VM II.48).⁵⁵ The “example” (ὑπόδειγμα) must be shown to be praiseworthy if it is to be imitated.

The work of such praise belongs most properly to epideictic rhetoric, that branch of rhetoric concerned with “praise or blame.”⁵⁶ In the late fourth-century when Gregory was writing, a composition describing and lauding a person could take the form of an encomium (ἐγκώμιον), a eulogy, or a panegyric.⁵⁷ Handbooks of rhetorical exercises for students offer brief sample encomia for Thucydides and for wisdom, among other topics.⁵⁸ However, praise for an individual could be incorporated into other types of compositions. Aristotle notes that “praise (ἐπαινος) and counsels (συμβουλαί) have a common aspect... whenever you desire to praise (ἐπαινεῖν), look to what you would suggest; whenever you desire to suggest (ὑποθέσθαι), look to what you would praise.”⁵⁹ An orator delivering a deliberative speech might spend some time praising the course of action he is trying to persuade an audience to take. Given Gregory’s stated aim of offering readers a “benefit” (κέρδος) and exhorting them to “translate” (μεταφέρω) the exemplar’s virtue into their own lives, he seems to be combining the praise of an epideictic

⁵⁵ In the body of the text, Gregory refers to two of Moses’ deeds as “esteemed” or “glorious;” his education (τροφή, VM II.308) and his birth (τόκος, VM II.1).

⁵⁶ Definition from Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1.3 (1358b): ἐπιδεικτικοῦ δὲ τὸ μὲν ἐπαινος τὸ δὲ ψόγος.

⁵⁷ *LSJ*, s.v. “ἐγκώμιον.” In addition to praising illustrious figures from history and literature, rhetors composed eulogies for the dead and panegyrics for living figures. There was also a collection of encomia for obvious and even unlikely subjects, from human beings to abstract concepts. Perhaps the most famous example of the “paradoxical encomia” (παράδοξα ἐγκώμια) is a speech in praise of baldness (*Calvitii encomium*) by Synesius of Cyrene (ca. 370-413 CE); this seems to have been composed as a comical response to a speech in praise of hair (*Encomium comae*) by the famous Greek orator Dio Chrysostom (see additional references and examples in Theodore C. Burgess, *Epideictic Literature*, The University of Chicago Studies in Classical Philology [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1902], 160-166.).

⁵⁸ Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8, Rabe 22-27.

⁵⁹ Ἐχει δὲ κοινὸν εἶδος ὁ ἐπαινος καὶ αἱ συμβουλαί... ὅταν ἐπαινεῖν βούλῃ, ὅρα τί ἀν ὑπόθοιο, καὶ ὅταν ὑποθέσθαι, ὅρα τί ἀν ἐπαινέσειας (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1.9.36 [1368a].).

composition with the persuasion to action of deliberative rhetoric.

In these three texts, Gregory also treats the major subjects that were typically praised in encomia. The authors of rhetorical *téχναι* (handbooks) organize those topics that should be treated in an encomium under a fairly standard outline of “rhetorical heads,” or *kephalaia*. Such an outline is preserved by Aphthonius, a student of the great rhetor Libanius at Constantinople and a fourth-century CE contemporary of Gregory.⁶⁰ Aphthonius was a teacher of rhetoric who composed a handbook of rhetorical exercises (*progymnasmata*) which offers a description of encomium similar to what Gregory himself would have been taught in the fourth century:

This then is the division of the encomium. You should make it with the following headings (*kephalaia*). You will construct a *prooimion* appropriate to the *hypothesis*; then you will put the origin (*genos*), which you will divide into nation, homeland, ancestors, and parents; then upbringing (*anatrophe*), which you will divide into habits and trade and principles; then you will make the greatest heading of encomia, the deeds (*praxeis*), which you will divide into those of soul and body and chance; soul, as courage or prudence; body, as beauty or swiftness or strength; and chance, as power and wealth and friends; after these a comparison (*synkrisis*) by juxtaposition, attributing greatness to the thing being treated in the encomium; then an epilogue (*epilogos*) especially belonging to a prayer.⁶¹

This series of topics assumes a chronological model for narrating the subject’s life circumstances and emphasizing her admirable attributes and deeds, and it is a model that Gregory more or less follows in the *bioi*. Other authors, including Aelius Theon, propose arranging the text to cover

⁶⁰ This may also be the same Libanius who trained Basil. See Anna M. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, and Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 1-5.

⁶¹ Ή μὲν οὖν διαιρεσις αὗτη τοῦ ἐγκωμίου· ἐργάσαιο δ' αὐτὸ τοῖσδε τοῖς κεφαλαίοις· προοιμιάσῃ μὲν πρὸς τὴν οὖσαν ὑπόθεσιν· εἴτα θήσεις τὸ γένος, ὁ διαιρήσεις εἰς ἔθνος, πατρίδα, προγόνους καὶ πατέρας· εἴτα ἀνατροφήν, ἦν διαιρήσεις εἰς ἐπιτηδεύματα καὶ τέχνην καὶ νόμους· εἴτα τὸ μέγιστον τῶν ἐγκωμίων κεφάλαιον ἐποίσεις τὰς πράξεις, ἃς διαιρήσεις εἰς ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα καὶ τύχην, ψυχὴν μὲν ὡς ἀνδρείαν ἢ φρόνησιν, σῶμα δὲ ὡς κάλλος ἢ τάχος ἢ ρώμην, τύχην δὲ ὡς δυναστείαν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ φίλους· ἐπὶ τούτοις τὴν σύγκρισιν ἐκ παραθέσεως συνάγων τῷ ἐγκωμιαζομένῳ τὸ μεῖζον· εἴτα ἐπίλογον εὐχῇ μᾶλλον προσήκοντα (Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8, Rabe 22).

actions that pertain to virtues thematically, rather than chronologically.⁶² In choosing particular deeds and qualities to praise, Gregory is certainly influenced by his Christian theology, but the sequence of *kephalaia* remains constant.⁶³ Where Gregory departs from or comments on his use of encomiastic *kephalaia* that would have been familiar to his readers, he tends to explain these divergences as a matter of deliberate authorial choice.

The texts should be considered examples of encomiastic biography rather than encomia proper, because Gregory identifies them as accounts of his subjects' lives. The majority of encomia and panegyrics are also much more brief than any of the three texts; even Isocrates' *Evagoras*, a rather lengthy speech of praise, is only some 4600 words.⁶⁴ Theodore Burgess, in his 1902 University of Chicago dissertation *Epilectic Literature* provides a clear definition of what he calls encomiastic "method":

⁶² Aelius Theon draws a sharp distinction between encomium and narrative as literary forms: "After this we will take up actions and successes, not one after another as though we were giving a narrative..." Here Kennedy follows the Budé edition of Patillon and Bolognesi, which adds "for narrative is characteristic of historians" from the Armenian. Aelius Theon goes on describing the proper approach, "but while writing we arrange each according to one of the virtues, then describing the deeds, such as writing that he was temperate and then adding immediately what temperate deed was done by him, and similarly with the other virtues." μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τὰς πράξεις καὶ τὰ κατορθώματα παραληγόμεθα οὐκ ἐφεξῆς διηγούμενοι. [addition here] λέγοντες γὰρ ἄλλα προστίθεμεν κατὰ μίαν ἐκάστην ἀρετήν, ἔπειτα τὰ ἔργα διεξίοντες, οἷον ὅτι ἦν σώφρων, προλέγειν καὶ ἐπιφέρειν εὐθός, τί αὐτῷ σωφρονητικὸν ἔργον πέπρακται, ὄμοιώς ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρετῶν (Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 8, Spengel 112; George A. Kennedy, transl., *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 10 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003], 52). Contemporary scholars have shown that in fact this distinction between chronological and topical arrangements is rarely strictly observed in texts from Gregory's period or earlier. For a good brief discussion of the overlap and distinctions between historiography and biography (especially Christian biography/hagiography), see Simon Swain, "Biography and Biographic in the Literature of the Roman Empire," in *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, ed. M.J. Edwards and Simon Swain (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997): 1-37, esp. pp 23-21. Patricia Cox specifically states that "chronology does not provide the structural referent for the narration of the holy man's life" (Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983], 57).

⁶³ As Robert C. Gregg writes of the use of encomiastic topics in Cappadocian consolatory texts: "It is undeniable... that the things singled out for praise in Basil's epistles as well as in the orations of the Gregories often bear the stamp of their religion, and make the basis for commendation those attributes which cannot be understood apart from the values and practices of the Christian community in fourth-century Cappadocia" (Gregg, *Consolation philosophy*, 142).

⁶⁴ Similarly, Isocrates' *Heleneae encomium* is approximately 3700 words in length.

The word “encomium” is used sometimes in a loose way, with merely the general idea of laudatory style. It stands here for a point of view and a method of treatment. It is also used for a distinct division of literature, a laudatory composition on some assigned theme and following conventional rules. It is a presentation, with more or less extravagant praise, of the good qualities of a person or thing.⁶⁵

We might take the encomiastic method described by Burgess as the naming of a literary “mode,” using the term as defined by Alastair Fowler. In his *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*, Fowler explains that “when a modal term is linked with the name of a kind, it refers to a combined genre, in which the overall form is determined by the kind alone.”⁶⁶ That is, the encomiastic project of each *bios* and the familiar structural features of encomium that Gregory employs do not make the texts encomia. Their basic kind is biography or *bios*.

B. Bios

In arguing that these texts are *bioi*, I am aware that the term has a complex history and range of possible definitions. Modern scholars vary in their assessments of the mechanics and aims of biographical writing from the fifth century BCE through the fourth century CE and beyond. The broad outlines of the genre as it would have been known in Gregory’s time are generally agreed upon, and the concise but insightful lectures of Arnoldo Momigliano provide what is still a helpful basic definition based on content: a biography relates an “account of the life of a man from birth to death.”⁶⁷ Yet the specific contours of *bios* continue to be debated.

⁶⁵ Burgess, *Epideictic Literature*, 113.

⁶⁶ Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 107. For a more full definition of mode, see pages 106-11 of the book.

⁶⁷ Arnoldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 11.

Many maintain that biography was either an offshoot or subcategory of historiographical writing,⁶⁸ perhaps stemming from “the development of the concept of individualism” even before the Hellenistic period.⁶⁹ Others, including Burgess (1902) and more recently Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau (2000) have noted the connection between biography and panegyric, speeches honoring a living individual, usually a member of the imperial family.⁷⁰ Duane Reed

⁶⁸ See Christina Shuttleworth Kraus, “Historiography and Biography” in *A Companion to Latin Literature*, ed. Stephen Harrison (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 241-256. The contention that biography is history is not without basis. For example, the *Progymnasmata* of Aelius Theon classifies biography within historical writing, though as its own type: “There are several genres of historical writing...Biographical writing also belongs to this genre; for example, accounts of noble lives by Aristoxenus the musician and others by Satyrus” (Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata*, transl. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 68, from the French Patillon and Bolognesi edition, which he calls “an English translation of a French translation of a reconstruction of a Greek text from an Armenian translation of it,” Kennedy *Progymnasmata*, 64). See also the fine point made by Bruno Gentili and Giovanni Cerri, that classifying biography as or separate from history was a problem ancient historiographers also grappled with: “we must...recognize that the two notions are intimately connected to two different conceptions of history: on the one hand history understood as a series of political events alone, on the other history seen as an anthropology that embraces all aspects of human life: selective history or global history. This diversity of approach to history, as Momigliano points out...underlies the contemporary debate; but, we must add, it was also operative in the historiographic thought of the Greeks” (Bruno Gentili and Giovanni Cerri, *History and Biography in Ancient Thought*, London Studies in Classical Philology 20 [Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1988], 62).

I follow Burgess, who maintains a distinction between encomium and history “both in aim and method. History has for its purpose the narration of events, the presentation of facts, usually in chronological order, and an impartial interpretation of their relation to one another. It is not concerned with praise or blame, and is far from having a theory to maintain for which facts must be chosen, some emphasized and some ignored, or even the truth sacrificed. It lacks all personal bias.” Yet he notes, “The connection between the encomium and biography is still more intimate. Biography is an essential part of history, but when made a separate composition it partakes of the nature of both history and the encomium. A portrayal of character is the main aim in each, so events may be treated in summary fashion; but the encomium gives more room for choice, idealization, omission.” Burgess, *Epideictic Literature*, 116-117.

⁶⁹ Görgemanns, “Biography,” 647.

⁷⁰ Burgess, *Epideictic Literature*, 102-109. In their introductory essay for a volume specifically devoted to biography, panegyric, and “the transgression of the boundaries between them,” Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau argue against a strict and simple division between the two types of texts in late antiquity, but nevertheless acknowledge that “the beginnings of the two genres in the fourth century B.C. were distinct” (Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau, “Introduction: Biography and Panegyric” in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000] 1-2). Biographic elements, they point out, are to be found in both types of text, and both may “offer a vividness of portraiture analogous to the almost tangible and vibrant images on the mummy cases of Roman Egypt;” but they point out that “it is usual to regard panegyric as less reliable, because of its professed aim to praise, and to think of biography as (ideally) more historically based,” since it could analyze a subject no longer present (Hägg and Rousseau, “Introduction,” 13, 4). Ancient rhetorical theorists were similarly interested in the place of praise in life-writing. In the first century *Progymnasmata* of Aelius Theon, there is a warning in the section on encomium about the appropriate time to praise someone for good deeds: “Fine actions are those praised after death (for people tend to flatter the living) or inversely, actions praised while we are still living and overcoming the envy of many; for, according to Thucydides, envy is in rivalry with the living” (καλαὶ δέ εἰσι

Stuart (1928) suggested an expansion of "biography" to include a variety of texts interested in the "transmission of personality."⁷¹ Perhaps most broadly, Mark Edwards and Simon Swain (1997) have helpfully proposed a general category, "the biographic," which can appear within a variety of genres.⁷² In contrast to this broad definition of *bios*, some would introduce further distinctions within the category biography itself. As early as Friedrich Leo, writing in 1901, two types of biography were distinguished: peripatetic (enjoyable) and Alexandrian (informative).⁷³ Hägg points out that this division has largely been rejected in subsequent studies, but it has remained informative for some scholars.⁷⁴ For example, philosophical/literary and political biographies may sometimes still be treated as separate kinds of texts, named for their subjects' occupations. In 1985, Joseph Geiger presented the works of Cornelius Nepos as examples of political biography, a move largely unchallenged in the 2012 work of Rex Stem on Nepos.⁷⁵

There is also debate over whether or not hagiography is a separate genre or should be considered a sub-category of *bios*. Virginia Burrus, for example, proposes an expansive description of hagiography that draws attention to the highly creative and transformative potential of these texts:

Hagiography is a historical product, a queer, late version of the ancient novel, emerging at the intersections of romance with biography, historiography,

πράξεις καὶ αἱ μετὰ θάνατον ἐπαινούμεναι· τοὺς γὰρ ζῶντας εἰώθασι κολακεύειν, καὶ ἀνάπαλιν αἱ ζώντων ἔτι ήμδων ἐγκωμιαζόμεναι καὶ τὸν τῶν πολλῶν φθόνον ὑπερβαλλόμεναι· φθόνος γὰρ τοῖς ζῶσι κατὰ Θουκυδίδην πρὸς τὸ ἀντίπαλον, Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 9, Spengel 110). Although there is no sharp distinction here between praise for the living and for the dead, our rhetor seems to share Plutarch's concern for the dangers of κολακεία, and to bear out Hägg and Rousseau's contention that there was some historical separation of the two genres.

⁷¹ Duane Reed Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1928), 10.

⁷² M.J. Edwards and Simon Swain, editors, *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁷³ Friedrich Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer literarischen Form* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1901), esp. 133-135.

⁷⁴ Hägg, *The Art of Biography*, 67-68.

⁷⁵ Joseph Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos and Ancient Political Biography* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985); Rex Stem, *The Political Biographies of Cornelius Nepos* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012).

panegyric, martyrology – a statement that does not so much define its genre as announce its persistent subversions of genre, its promiscuous borrowings, its polyphorous multiplication of contesting (and thus always compromised) voices, its subtle and ever-shifting resistances within power, its layered remappings of place and replotting of time, its repeated traversals of the boundaries of history and fiction, truth and lies, the realms of the sacred and the profane.⁷⁶

Burrus is certainly correct that the authors of early Christian biographical narratives combine features of various genres, resulting in texts rich with literary allusion and echo. Nevertheless, I find the classification of hagiographical texts under the umbrella of *bios* a more tenable position;⁷⁷ as Hägg puts it, “...biography as a creative literary force in the ancient world continues seamlessly into the fourth century, invigorated by Christian writers and fertilized by Christian concerns.”⁷⁸ For the late fourth-century in which Gregory writes, it is not necessary to speak of the hagiographical as a fully separate category, but rather to treat it as a literary mode whose execution would have relied on a common set of rhetorical *topoi*, in line with Edwards

⁷⁶ Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography*, *Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 18.

⁷⁷ *pace* Michael Stuart Williams, who considers Christian biography its own category, distinct from martyrology (which narrates only one short piece of a life) and from hagiography (because it has more “secular” content); he recognizes a “fraternal” relationship between Christian and non-Christian biography of the late antique period (Michael Stuart Williams, *Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography: Between Eusebius and Augustine* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008], esp. the Introduction). Claudia Rapp writes, “more than mere descriptive biographies, hagiographical texts are intended as narratives of role models” (Claudia Rapp, “City and Citizenship as Christian Concepts of Community in Late Antiquity,” *The City in the Classical and Post-Classical World: Changing Contexts of Power and Identity*, ed. Claudia Rapp and H.A. Drake [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014]: 153-166, 163).

Of course there are some exceptions to the drawing of a sharp distinction between biography and hagiography as categories. See for example Turner, who uses the category “spiritual narratives” more broadly to include hagiography, philosophical biography, and spiritual autobiography: “written works, or parts of written works which purport to relate to real events but whose principal focus are religious or philosophical truths” (Peter Turner, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity: A Study in Late Antique Spiritual Literature* [Surrey: Ashgate, 2012], 4). For an overview of one branch of critique, see Felice Lifshitz, “Beyond Positivism and Genre: ‘Hagiographical’ Texts as Historical Narrative” In *Viator* 25 (1994): 95-113. Lifshitz problematizes the category’s use and proposes seeing “hagiography” as an ideological term for “fictional” or “legendary” texts defined in opposition to “historiography,” although “there can be no simple definition of ‘hagiography’ or of historiography that does not conscientiously take into account changing political contexts” (Lifshitz, “Beyond Positivism and Genre,” 97).

⁷⁸ Hägg, *The Art of Biography*, 380.

and Swain.⁷⁹ That is, *bioi* can have more or less overt agendas vis-à-vis the presentation of theological principles, but such an agenda is an aspect of the text that is not necessarily determinative for its genre.⁸⁰

Each of Gregory's texts focuses on an individual and offers a narrative account of his or her life and thus belongs to the generic category *bios*.⁸¹ In each text, he begins with the exemplar's birth and proceeds through the events of her life to narrate the circumstances of her death and its impact on the community she led. This is true within each part of the VM; both *historia* and *theoria* accounts proceed from birth to death chronologically. Across the three texts, certain events are dilated upon at greater length (e.g., Gregory's visit to Macrina's deathbed, in VSM 16-25), but forward movement through each narrative is determined primarily by the sequence of events in the exemplar's life.

This identification of the texts' genre has methodological implications for this study. First, I attend to both the ways Gregory confirms to and the ways he departs from conventions of

⁷⁹ Other genres may be folded in with such modes. For example, the funerary oration has both biographical and encomiastic components. Jan Willem Van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie point to the relatively early conflation of genres: "In the Hellenistic and Roman periods, the *epitaphios logos* [originally for soldiers who died in battle] became more or less identical to the *enkomion* ('eulogy'). It was usually composed for individuals who had died a natural death, or it functioned simply as an exercise in declamation" (Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, "Pagan Traditions of Noble Death," *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity* [London: Routledge, 2002]: 9-41, 18). Similarly, Gentili and Cerri assert, "We should avoid any excessive schematism which stiffens the differential 'generic' features, and keep our eye on their functional flexibility and the generative and dialectic processes which represent the historicity of the literary act" (Gentili and Cerri, *History and Biography*, 84).

⁸⁰ Hägg and Rousseau make this helpful point in the introduction to their volume *Greek Biography and Panegyric*, 1-2.

⁸¹ Here I differ specifically from Maraval, who identifies the VGT as eulogy, rather than *bios* (Maraval, "Introduction," 9-14). Similarly, I do not follow Leemans' denotation of the VSM and VGT, without the VM, as "hagiobiographical" texts, in his list of which he also includes the eulogy for Basil and the funeral orations for Pulcheria and Flacilla (Johan Leemans, "Style and Meaning in Gregory of Nyssa's Panegyrics on Martyrs," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, Volume 81, Number 1 [2005]: 109-129, 110). He recognizes that these texts belong to distinct genres (he lists encomium and funeral oration), but appears to be using "hagiobiographical" as a designation of literary mode (Leemans, "Style and Meaning," 110).

encomiastic *bios* as constitutive of the meaning of these texts. As Fowler points out, “literary meaning necessarily involves modulations or departures from generic codes, and therefore, eventually, alterations of them.”⁸² Second, in order to historically contextualize Gregory’s narrative choices, I concentrate on rhetorical and literary theory that could have been known and employed by Gregory and educated readers in his fourth-century Greco-Roman and Christian context. This is not to reject the many useful insights modern literary criticism offers for a reading of any of the three *bioi*, and I do adopt the idea of a text’s implied reader to talk about the “ideal readers” Gregory imagines in and for his texts. However, one of my key assumption should be named right away. In my discussion of interpretation and interpretive strategies, I assume, like Gregory would, that authorial intent matters for textual meaning.⁸³ The author does have control over the arrangement and stylistic features of his text, such that certain readings would, from his perspective, be misreadings, and (more significantly) he tries to recommend certain interpretations in the text itself.⁸⁴

IV. Weaving Lives and lives: Gregory’s stated purpose and the reader

Why does Gregory choose the genre of encomiastic *bios* as a medium for teaching about virtue? What advantages and challenges are associated with his choice? How does the author

⁸² Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, 23.

⁸³ Morwenna Ludlow has argued that Gregory frequently depicts “the relationship between teacher and pupil as being mediated in one way or another by texts” (Ludlow, “Teachers, Texts and Pupils,” 86). She writes, “Gregory’s concept of pedagogy, therefore, is bound up with this particular social function of texts: they have a vital role in the complex interplay between teacher and pupils, a role which he sees as both fruitful and problematic. What makes Gregory’s thought on this question so interesting is that this social role of literature is both described in, and exemplified by, Gregory’s own writings” (102). If Ludlow is correct, then for Gregory the didactic encomiastic *bioi* he writes could mediate some real and educational relationship between himself and his readers, and any analysis must take seriously his authorial intentions.

⁸⁴ This is opposed to approaches that assume a text’s indeterminacy and the governing role of readers in creating or determining the meaning of a text. Such an assumption is articulated clearly and briefly in Wolfgang Iser, “Indeterminacy and the Reader’s Response in Prose Fiction,” *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989): 3-30.

construct a script or identity and attendant expectations for his ideal readers, and what is the intended impact of an encomiastic *bios* on a member of the reading audience?

A. Virtue and text

In the course of praising Thaumaturgus' leadership and judgment, Gregory uses a striking image to describe the relationship between a few particulars of the exemplar's life and the virtue he possesses and displays on myriad occasions:

... his grace brought about lawfulness and communal peace, for all and for individuals alike, and great increase of good, privately and publicly, since no evils afflicted their concord. But it would also not be inopportune to recall one of his judgments so that, as the proverb goes, we should see the whole woven garment from the border.⁸⁵

The proverbial image⁸⁶ seems to combine the idea of careful selection with the assumption that Thaumaturgus' virtue is a unity, a thing which may be grasped and "seen."⁸⁷ The image itself is

⁸⁵ ... εὐνομία τε καὶ εἰρήνη κοινῇ τε καὶ πᾶσι καὶ τοῖς καθ' ἔκαστον διὰ τῆς ἐκείνου χαρίτος ἦν, καὶ πολλὴ τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἡ ἐπίδοσις, ιδίᾳ τε καὶ κοινῇ, μηδεμιᾶς κακίας τὴν πρὸς ἄλλήλους ὄμονοιαν ἐπικοπτούσης. Οὐκ ἄκαιρον δ' ἂν ἵσως εἴη, μιᾶς αὐτοῦ κρίσεως μνήμην ποιήσασθαι· ως ἂν, κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν, ὅλον ἡμῖν γένηται καταφανὲς ἐκ τοῦ κρασπέδου τὸ ὑφασμα. (VGT 49).

⁸⁶ The proverb about the border of a garment is also attested in *Sancti Pachomii vita quarta* 14, 418.13-14, appearing there together with a proverb about tasting wine from just one sip. I am grateful to Margaret M. Mitchell for the suggestion that Gregory may also have in mind the "fringe" or "border" (κράσπεδον) of Jesus' garment and the miraculous healings effected for those who touch it (Mt 9:20; 14:36).

⁸⁷ The virtues Gregory lauds in the three *bioi* are best thought of as complementary to one another. As he writes in *De instituto Christiano*, "Concerning the parts of virtue, what sort one needs to consider as being greater, which one we must pursue before the others, which second, and what the order of the rest is, it is not possible to say. For they have equal honor and, by means of each other, lead those exercising them to the heights. Simplicity gives way to obedience, obedience to faith, faith to hope, hope to justice, and that to service, and that to humility. From this comes gentleness which leads to grace, grace to love, and love to prayer. And so, attached and dependent on each other, they lead to the peak of what is desired..." (περὶ δὲ τῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς μερῶν, ποῖον δεῖ κρείττον ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιτηδεύειν, ποῖον δὲ τούτου δεύτερον καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἐφεξῆς καθ' ἔκαστον, οὐκ ἔστιν εἰπεῖν. ἀλλήλων γὰρ ὄμοτίμως ἔχονται καὶ δι' ἄλλήλων ἐπὶ τὴν κορυφὴν τοὺς χρωμένους ἀνάγουσιν. ή μὲν γὰρ ἀπλότης τῇ ὑπακοῇ παραδίδωσιν, ή δὲ ὑπακοὴ τῇ πίστει, αὕτη δὲ τῇ ἐλπίδι, καὶ ἡ ἐλπὶς τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ, κάκείνη τῇ διακονίᾳ, κάκείνη τῇ ταπεινότητι παρὰ δὲ ταύτης ἡ πραότης παραλαμβάνουσα τῇ χαρᾷ προσάγει, ή δὲ χαρὰ τῇ ἀγάπῃ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τῇ εὐχῇ καὶ οὕτως ἀλλήλων ἐξηρτημέναι καὶ ἐξαρτήσασαι τὸν ἔχομενον ἐπ' αὐτὴν ἀνάγουσι τοῦ ποθουμένου τὴν κορυφὴν, GNO Online 28.77.15-78.6.) On the precise interaction and mutual enrichment or reinforcement of the virtues, see Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, "Gregory of Nyssa on the Reciprocity of the Virtues," *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. Volume 58, Part 2 (October 2007): 537-552. Radde-Gallwitz effectively complicates a simplistic "reciprocity theory" of human virtue by demonstrating that Gregory uses identical language to talk about both divine and human virtues; at the same time, human expression of these virtues entails different preparation (control of the

an example of the figure of speech *synecdoche* (συνεκδοχή, Latin *intellectio*), in which a part signifies the whole or the whole stands for some part.⁸⁸ As such, it brings us to the heart of a challenge all biographers faced: how does the biographer combine and arrange the features of a necessarily limited portrait in such a way as to give readers access to the essence, nature, or character of his subject?⁸⁹ Or, how do virtuous qualities become embodied, and how can an interpreter reason from things observed to things unseen or even invisible?

For Gregory, the life of virtue is a way of participating in the true and perfect Good that is God.⁹⁰ Because human beings are created and changeable, they are not capable of achieving

passions) or expression (justice requires courage) than are necessary for a perfect God. For a discussion of “vice” (κακία) in Aristotle, where it may be taken as an opposite of virtue, see the very helpful essay by J.J. Mulhern, “KAKIA in Aristotle,” in *KAKOS: Badness and Anti-Value in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Ineke Sluiter and Ralph M. Rosen, Mnemosyne Supplements: Monographs on Greek and Roman Language and Literature, Volume 307 (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 233-254.

⁸⁸ *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.33.44 has one definition with examples: “It is *intellectio* when the whole thing is known from the part or the part from the whole. The whole is known from the part in this example: ‘Didn’t those nuptial flutes remind you of his wedding?’ For in this, the whole sanctity of the marriage is discerned from one sign of flutes. The part from the whole, as if someone should say to one who displays sumptuous garb or ornament: ‘You are showing me riches and throwing about abundant opulence’” (*Intellectio est cum res tota parva de parte cognoscitur aut de toto pars. De parte totum sic intellegitur: Non illae te nuptiales tibiae eius matrimonii commonebant?*” *Nam hic omnis sanctimonia nuptiarum uno signo tibiarum intellegitur. De toto pars, ut si quis ei qui vestitum aut ornatum sumptuosum ostentet dicat: Ostentas mihi divitias et locupletes copias iactas*”). Quintilian expresses a general caution against the use of synecdoche in prose texts, judging it a more appropriate figure for poetry (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 8.6.19-22).

⁸⁹ Plutarch famously comments on particular types of content that may reveal qualities of soul: “...often a minor action like a phrase or a jest makes a greater revelation of character than battles with thousands of casualties or the greatest armaments or sieges of cities” (πρᾶγμα βραχὺ πολλάκις καὶ ρῆμα καὶ παιδιά τις ἔμφασιν ἥθους ἐποίησε μᾶλλον ἡ μάχαι μυριόνεκροι καὶ παρατάξεις αἱ μέγισται καὶ πολιορκίαι πόλεων [Plutarch, *Alexander* I.2]). However, narrative arrangement and narrator commentary are just as crucial to characterization as the specifics of content. See further discussion in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3.

⁹⁰ Gregory’s Christian Neoplatonism has been the subject of much study. The older work of Cherniss offers a useful overview (Harold F. Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*, University of California Publications in Classical Philology [New York: Burt Franklin, 1930, repr. 1971]). Kevin Corrigan examines the role of Platonic thought in Gregory’s anthropology (Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul, and Body in the 4th Century* [Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009]; Kevin Corrigan, “Οὐσία and ὑπόστασις in the Trinitarian Theology of the Cappadocian Fathers: Basil and Gregory of Nyssa,” *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* Volume 12 [2008]: 114-134, DOI:10.1515/ZAC.2008.009); on this question, see also Gerard B. Ladner, “The Philosophical Anthropology of Saint Gregory of Nyssa,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, volume 12 (1958): 59-94. The particular combination of Scriptural and Platonic sources in Gregory’s work is addressed briefly in Catharine P. Roth, “Platonic and Pauline Elements in the Ascent of the Soul in Gregory of Nyssa’s Dialogue on the Soul and Resurrection,” *Vigiliae*

perfection; yet Christ commanded his followers to “be perfect” (εσεσθε τέλειοι, Mt 5:48).

Gregory’s solution to this paradox is to exhort Christians to imitate Paul, who continually “stretches out” (ἐπεκτείνω) toward what lies ahead.⁹¹ As he understands it, human perfection lies in perpetual progress toward the Good; this is the theological principle Daniélou famously termed *epektasis*, after the verb ἐπεκτείνω in Phil 3:13.⁹² It seems plausible that a chronological biographical narrative could capture a sort of “moving picture” of its subject’s progress. I suggest Gregory writes encomiastic *bioi* to portray exemplary *epektasis*. But how does he expect readers to move from such a portrait to their own manifestations of virtue?

Hans Boersma’s 2013 monograph, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach*, proposes that reading and interpretation are related to Gregory’s

Christiana, Volume 46 (1992): 20-30. Specifically on the soul, see Enrico Peroli, “Gregory of Nyssa and the Neoplatonic Doctrine of the Soul,” *Vigiliae Christianae*, Volume 51, Number 2 (May 1997): 117-139. Gregory’s reception of Christian Neoplatonism from earlier thinkers is treated in a number of topical studies as follows: Ramelli, “Christian Soteriology”; Ramelli, “Harmony between *Arkhē* and *Telos*; Ilaria Ramelli, “The Divine as Inaccessible Object of Knowledge in Ancient Platonism: A Common Philosophical Pattern across Religious Traditions,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, volume 75, number 2 (April 2014): 167-188. John M. Rist identifies problems with drawing facile parallels between Cappadocian theology and Neoplatonic thought in his “Basil’s ‘Neoplatonism’: Its Background and Nature,” in *Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic: A Sixteen-Hundredth Anniversary Symposium. Part 1*, edited by Paul Jonathan Fedwick (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1981): 137-220.

⁹¹ See further discussion of how this is explained in the *prooimion* of the VM in Chapter 1.

⁹² At the end of his treatise *De perfectione*, he proffers a definition of perfection in human life: “Changing continually for the better, and being transformed from ‘glory for glory’ (2 Cor 3:18), let him so change, always improving through daily growth and ever becoming perfect, and never arriving at the limit of perfection. For this is true perfection: never to stop growing towards what is better nor to proscribe some limit for perfection” (πρὸς τὸ κρείττον διὰ παντὸς ἀλλοιούμενος καὶ ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν μεταμορφούμενος οὕτω τρεπέσθω, διὰ τῆς καθ’ ἡμέραν αὐξῆσεως πάντοτε κρείττων γινόμενος καὶ ἀεὶ τελειούμενος καὶ μηδέποτε πρὸς τὸ πέρας φθάνων τῆς τελειότητος. αὕτη γάρ ἔστιν ἡ ὡς ἀληθῶς τελειότης τὸ μηδέποτε στῆναι πρὸς τὸ κρείττον αὐξανόμενον μηδέ τινι πέρατι περιορίσαι τὴν τελειότητα, Gregory of Nyssa, *De perfectione* GNO Online 30.213.26 -214.6). Gregory himself employs the term *epektasis* (ἐπέκτασις) only in *In Canticum cantorum*, GNO Online 24.174.15.

For Daniélou’s presentation of the concept, see Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme*, 291-307. Everett Ferguson gives particular attention to the imagery Gregory uses to talk about perpetual progress (especially the race, ascent, and flight) in Everett Ferguson, “God’s Infinity and Man’s Mutability: Perpetual Progress According to Gregory of Nyssa,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Volume 18, Numbers 1-2 (Spring-Fall 1973): 59-78. For an incisive introduction to *epektasis* in Gregory, see Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco, “Epektasis” in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, ed. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, transl. Seth Cherney (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

conception of the virtuous life. Boersma convincingly argues that Gregory sees both Scriptural interpretation and the pursuit of virtue as tasks that lead a person upward to God. As he puts it, “the ‘turn’ involved in interpretation and the ‘ascent’ into Paradise are one and the same thing, looked at from two different angles, the one exegetical and the other moral. Anagogy lies at the heart both of interpretation and of virtue.”⁹³ Based on a study of texts from across Gregory’s oeuvre, Boersma states his insight even more clearly, arguing that for Gregory reading and virtuous living share the same goal of closeness and likeness to divine perfection.⁹⁴ In one formulation, he explains that “by depicting this harmonious future as the purpose both of the Psalter and of the course of history, Nyssen makes clear that he believes the aim of interpretation and of human life to be one and the same.”⁹⁵ I agree with Boersma’s assessment of how Gregory envisions reading, and I seek to build on his insight by examining how Gregory describes and models interpretive tasks in the three *bioi*, which are, I argue, vital places in his oeuvre where this dynamic is worked out.

Boersma himself turns to the VM at the end of his book, where he seeks to demonstrate that the biography of Moses presents its subject as “a model of virtue that one is called to imitate.”⁹⁶ He points out that Gregory interprets Moses’ deeds as stages in a life of perpetual progress.⁹⁷ He ultimately claims that “The anagogical structure of *De Vita Moysis* is quite

⁹³ Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 70.

⁹⁴ Boersma deals primarily with treatises (*Contra Eunomium*, *De hominis opificio*, *De virginitate*, *De professione Christiana*, *De perfectione*) and homilies (*In inscriptiones Psalmorum*, *In Canticum canticorum*, *In ascensionem Christi oratio*).

⁹⁵ Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue*, 71.

⁹⁶ Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue*, 231. The full treatment is found on pages 231-245.

⁹⁷ For example, “Moses’ increasing ability to see God is at one and the same time growth in virtue” (Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue*, 237).

evident.”⁹⁸ What remains unanswered is how Gregory envisions readers actually accomplishing the work of “translating” that anagogical structure into their own lives, and what particular interpretive strategies he describes in his texts that he thinks can facilitate such translation.

The influence of the author’s interpretive work on the shape of a *bios* is outlined by Patricia Cox in her 1983 volume *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man*.⁹⁹ Her study considers Christian and non-Christian portraits of late antique holy men together, and she proposes a “two poles” model of looking at the exemplary figure in a *bios*. In her presentation, *ethos* and *praxeis* exist in tension as authorial lenses useful for gazing upon each other. She argues that biographers use anecdotal narrative to portray religious and philosophical ideals in the pattern of a historical life; the subject becomes a means for the author to alternately ground an ideal character in history and to use history as a means of accessing truths about character.¹⁰⁰ While this is a valuable and important insight, I would add that the way Gregory uses metaphors to talk about exemplary actions and about understanding or interpreting those actions vis-à-vis character traits actually suggests that a triangulation is going on: the reader is the necessary third pole in any consideration of the exemplar’s life.

Keeping the “third pole” of the Gregory’s ideal reading audience in view, we may pursue an additional line of inquiry about the interaction of literary form and authorial aims. How does Gregory create a script for interpretation for his ideal readers, to move them from hermeneutical tasks involved in reading to ethical tasks involved in living virtuously? How does balance the

⁹⁸ Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue*, 242.

⁹⁹ Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*.

¹⁰⁰ Her larger argument is about the mode of thinking that biographers adopted rather than about their methods of composition, so her project is not strictly literary (Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, xii).

saintly character of his subjects with his insistence on their imitability? When does he seek to recommend and/or model particular strategies for reading and interpretation? How is the ideal reader's work of weaving together a garment of virtues in her own life related to the work of a biographer weaving a portrait of an exemplar on the page?

B. The reader

The role of the reader is too often unexplored, even in studies of Gregory's *bioi*. In his 2008 volume, *Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography: Between Eusebius and Augustine*, Michael Stuart Williams includes a chapter focused on the VM and the commemorative eulogy *In Basilium fratrem*.¹⁰¹ The goal of his study is to examine the way biographers construct themselves as authoritative, mediating figures in and through the process of writing. Williams shows that for Gregory, as for other Christian biographers, gaps between the Scriptural past and the contemporary period can be “elided,” allowing the biographer to depict the present world as a re-enactment of Scripture.¹⁰² In a complementary move, Williams argues, Gregory reconstructs the biblical story of Moses in terms of fourth-century Christian history and practices.¹⁰³ While the observations here about the use of Scripture in the VM and eulogy for Basil are rich, more work must be done to determine if they hold true for Gregory's other *bioi*. Is the re-enactment of

¹⁰¹ I would demur from both Williams and Momigliano (in his 1987 remark quoted above) and their classification of the eulogy for Basil as a biographical narrative. This text does contain biographical elements; Danelli demonstrates in her analysis that the major encomiastic *kephalaia* do appear in the composition, embedded in lengthy *synkrisis* between Basil and biblical figures like Paul (*In Basilium fratrem* 11-12, GNO Online 53.116.18-119.15), John the Baptist (13-14, GNO Online 53.119.16-122.2), Elijah (15-18, GNO Online 53.122.3-125.6), Samuel (19, GNO Online 53.125.7-22), and Moses (20-23, GNO Online 53.125.23-130.10) (Danelli, “Sul Genere Letterari,” 154-155). However, the fact that Gregory treats topics like *praxeis* multiple times and before he treats *genos* dissuades me from calling this a narrative intended to offer an account of Basil's life from birth to death. The *synkrisis*, rather, provide the structure for the discussion of Basil's attributes and deeds, making this a panegyric rather than a bios (and Gregory himself refers to the composition as a *πανήγυρις* in 2, GNO Online 53.110.20).

¹⁰² Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 16-18, 64.

¹⁰³ Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 19.

Scripture the only or even primary function of Scriptural *synkrisis* in the other biographical narratives? If Gregory is constructing a mediating and authoritative role for himself, what does he say or assume about the audience for whom he mediates?

Additionally, though Williams has demonstrated convincingly that Gregory's exegetical skill fundamentally shaped the way he portrayed Basil, the issue of *how* Gregory thought a reader or readers might "translate" Moses' virtues into their own fourth-century lives remains an open question. The fact that an elite, highly educated figure like Basil can imitate biblical figures – or, more accurately, the fact that Gregory, his elite, highly educated brother, can identify opportunities for complex Scriptural *synkrisis* – does not mean any given member of Gregory's audiences could also imitate the figures. If we take seriously Gregory's stated goal of offering his readers some "benefit" and assistance in their quest to "translate" the virtues described in the text into their own lives, we must keep Gregory's conception of that reader in view. In the absence of an elite, highly educated exegete like Gregory, could textual interpretation take place? Just how imitable are the interpretive strategies the biographer models, and by whom could they actually be performed? When and how does he address his audience, and what advice does he offer them?

Thinking simultaneously about Gregory the biographer, his subjects, his texts, and his ideal reading audiences requires thinking about tensions that arise among these various relationships. If Gregory expresses uncertainty about the subject's virtue,¹⁰⁴ how does this affect

¹⁰⁴ In a few isolated episodes, Gregory seems aware his readers might have questions about whether or not his subject's actions were truly virtuous. For example, at VGT 75, Thaumaturgus actually strikes dead a con artist who was attempting to fleece him, and Gregory allows that this use of power might appear "severe" (σκυθρωπός, VGT 75). Similarly, when he describes Moses' order for the Israelites to despoil the Egyptians, he admits that a lawgiver commanding people to steal is nonsensical (VM II.113); his solution is to recommend a turn from the "obvious sense" (ή πρόχειρος διάνοια) to the "loftier meaning" (ό ύψηλότερος λόγος, VM II.115).

his authoritative stance vis-a-vis the readers? If Gregory relays the content of a subject's private, divinely revealed vision in vivid detail,¹⁰⁵ should his very narrative artistry bring his reliability into question? Peter Turner's 2012 monograph, *Truthfulness, Realism, Historicity: A Study in Late Antique Spiritual Literature*, raises additional questions in this vein.¹⁰⁶ Turner questions the dichotomy "truthful/realistic" or "intellectual/spiritual," a pairing which, he argues, contemporary scholars use to analyze ancient spiritual portraits. He claims that the dichotomy obscures a more complicated view of historicity held by the authors of such texts, and draws evidence especially from Augustine's autobiographical *Confessions* to argue that narrative realism is a literary feature that authors could use to bring out "the spiritual significance of even quite mundane categories of human experience."¹⁰⁷ For example, Turner cogently discusses how a saint's ways of occupying and traveling through physical space can hold "metaphorical potential," and he illustrates the point that historical accounts and descriptions can be imbued with spiritual meanings.¹⁰⁸ Such metaphorical or spiritual modes are incorporated into what might still be called an essentially historical view.

When Turner himself discusses hagiography, he explains that he attempts "to shift attention away from the relationship between the hagiographer and the information he relates, and onto the complex and mutual set of attitudes that connect him to his audience."¹⁰⁹ In my assessment, Turner is correct that identifying the attitudes and expectations an author shares with his audience is crucial for understanding both the literary structure and potential impact of a

¹⁰⁵ Revelations received by figures in the texts appear in Chapters 1 (Emmelia, VSM 2) and 2 (Thaumaturgus, VGT 29-33; Moses, VM I.20 and VM II.19-26).

¹⁰⁶ Turner, *Truthfulness*.

¹⁰⁷ Turner, *Truthfulness*, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Turner, *Truthfulness*, 48-55.

¹⁰⁹ Turner, *Truthfulness*, 26.

biographical text. For example, knowing that readers and author alike would have been familiar with the list of topics typically treated as a part of *genos* (birth) in an encomiastic composition helps us understand that most readers would have shared Gregory's positive assessment of the omens surrounding his sister's birth and helps us identify VSM 2 as a moment in which Gregory talks about Christian revelation in a familiar narrative form. However, I would challenge the idea that attending to such "complex and mutual" attitudes somehow comes at the expense of attending to the author's own relationship to his material. In fact, these two relationships would most fruitfully be considered together. It is precisely when a biographer reflects on his own relationship to his biographical subject and that subject's exemplary qualities that he reveals some of his assumptions about how other readers could or should relate to these same objects. In a close reading of the three *bioi*, what can we discover about the Gregory's expectations for his readers? When and how does he communicate his assumptions, and what interpretive tasks does he try to set for the ideal readers who share (or adopt) them? What do we stand to gain by reading these three texts together?

C. Reading and the woven garment

Conceptualizing the writing of a *bios* as a craft (τέχνη) invites us to consider Gregory's textual products as artistic works whose beauty reflects authorial expertise and the exercise of trained skill.¹¹⁰ Within his imagined narrative and artistic workshop, Gregory the biographer composes on a standing loom with a vertical warp and horizontal weft. Each of our three *bioi* is a single woven garment, planned and executed by Gregory. Like the divine apostle who

¹¹⁰ Plutarch uses a similar analogy for biographical portraiture, which also draws from the world of artisanal production and takes as its model painting (Plutarch, *Alexander* I.3).

“enumerates threads” that make up “pure works,” Gregory the biographer selects materials from history, Scripture, theology, and the classical literary tradition when he describes the exemplar’s deeds and character. He weaves together engaging vignettes with figurative language and narrative commentary to craft each exemplary portrait. As part of this pastiche he includes Scriptural and philosophical allusions, from Plato’s chariot of the soul (*Phaedrus* 25, 246A-B and 34-35, 253D-254E; VM II.95) to the crucified Christ that John’s gospel sees prefigured in Numbers 13 (Jn 3; VM II.268).

His various historical and literary sources, and his diverse rhetorical techniques – the threads he uses to compose each text – can generally be distinguished, and our analytical task lies partly in teasing apart the interlocking elements of each narrative, inspecting the overlapping conjunctions of warp and weft, and untwisting the plies Gregory has twined together. At the same time, Gregory himself encourages us to take a holistic view of each literary *Life*. He claims that a reading of one of his *bioi* has the potential to offer guidance to the reader who wishes to live virtuously. By performing a synoptic reading of the VGT, VSM, and VM we may identify patterns in how Gregory uses discrete rhetorical and literary techniques to shape both exemplary portraits and scripts for interpretation, developing a more full understanding of his approach to biographical writing.

V. Plan of the dissertation

In the chapters that follow, I perform close readings of the three *bioi* (VGT, VSM, VM) in tandem with one another, with attention to their rhetorical composition, including the *skopos* and structure of each text, *topoi* and figures of thought or speech Gregory employs, and narrative

features like the construction of internal audiences and the use of narrator commentary.¹¹¹

Throughout, I give particular attention to his development of rich conceptual metaphors and the relation of metaphors to the texts' didactic function. How does Gregory seek to construct imitable exemplars, teach interpretive strategies, and encourage or facilitate mimesis?

The three *bioi* are analyzed in detail through close readings of numerous illustrative passages, selected on the basis of distinctive thematic and/or structural features. I draw supplementary material from Gregory's broader corpus when these other works help us better understand statements in the *bioi* about anthropology, fourth-century Christian *paideia*, Scriptural interpretation, and ways of encountering the divine, but my main focus is on these three works. Finally, I occasionally offer comparanda from other biographical narratives by authors Christian, Jewish, and pagan, when these can illuminate aspects of Gregory's technique.¹¹²

Despite their three different subjects, the *Life of Moses*, *Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus*, and *Life of Macrina*, as encomiastic *bioi*, are built around the encomiastic *kephalaia* as set out in Aphthonius' definition and taught to generations of school boys. Comparing the three *bioi* in terms of how each treats the headings of *prooimion*, *genos*, *anatrophe*, *praxeis*, and *euthanasia* allows us to identify and assess moments in which Gregory uses both typical and unexpected narrative structures and rhetorical *topoi* to depict each exemplar. This synoptic view also throws

¹¹¹ I find helpful Johan Leemans' statement regarding his approach to studying stylistic features in Gregory's panegyrics on martyrs: "...we will move beyond a purely diagnostic approach which limits itself to pointing out *that* these stylistic features occur. Our aim is to demonstrate how these stylistic features are used and what they contribute to the meaning of these sermons. For the application of these stylistic features does not only add to the beauty of the homiletical performance, but they also support the message the homilist wants to convey to his audience" (Leemans, "Style and Meaning," 112).

¹¹² The texts most frequently mentioned include Athanasius' *Life of Antony*, Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, and Philo's *Life of Moses*.

into relief patterns in the ways Gregory seeks to link individual episodes or images to his stated didactic aims; it also renders divergences among the three texts more striking so that they may be analyzed and their possible effects discussed. The encomiastic *kephalaia* were the loom on which Gregory wove his compositions; in turn, I use them as the organizing principle for the synoptic comparisons that follow. Encomiastic *bios* is a genre that is both mimetic and that tries to invite readers' mimesis, and so the structure of each chapter is also necessarily two-fold. I examine the literary portraits of virtuous exemplars that Gregory constructs. At the same time, I study the kinds of impressions, actions, and reactions these portraits of the biographical subjects seem designed to evoke from ideal readers of the *bioi*.

Chapter 1 focuses on *prooimion* and *genos* in the three biographical narratives. I examine the ways Gregory adopts and adapts regular features of these introductory *kephalaia* to define a complex hermeneutical relationship between his ideal readers, the biographical texts, and the portraits of the exemplars within those texts. Gregory describes his own compositional choices as determined by a desire to offer readers some benefit. In his depiction of the *genos* of each subject, Gregory does not just craft portraits of the exemplars, but invites the audience of ideal readers to step into the role of interpreters, a role that will allow them to extract some significant educational benefit from the reading of a *bios*.

The next two chapters study the major events of each exemplary life, their narrative depictions, and the potential impact of these depictions on the ideal reader. In Chapter 2, a discussion of *anatrophe* (upbringing), I argue that Gregory portrays each exemplar's *anatrophe* as the beginning of a lifelong engagement with education; this education takes the form of a reproducible *paideia*. By depicting training within the texts in the form of "Three Rs" that reflect actual fourth-century educational practices – learning through reading, revelation, and

relationships – Gregory seeks to render the exemplars imitable for fourth-century Christian readers. This chapter considers how Gregory’s *bioi* participate in the construction of a pedagogical community and how we might situate the texts within a developing Christian *paideia*. Chapter 3 examines Gregory’s approach to depicting and interpreting his subjects’ *praxeis*. I show that he uses the complicated conceptual metaphor of vision, sight, and seeing to problematize the relationship between physical sense perception and intellectual understanding. He employs vivid description, which draws upon readers’ sense perceptions, as a narrative tool, and opens a participatory window onto the events of the texts, casting ideal readers as eyewitnesses of the subjects’ *praxeis*. By modeling, evaluating, and recommending interpretive strategies, Gregory seeks to render textual interpretation desirable and imitable, identifying the ideal reader’s interpretive activity as itself a virtuous *praxis*.

Approaching the depiction of *praxeis* from a slightly different angle, Chapter 4 brings textuality and narration center stage. Starting from a study of how Gregory portrays each exemplar’s noble death and its aftermath in the *bioi*, I argue that he uses embedded narrators, allusion, and episodic storytelling in additional, retrospective episodes after the *thanatos* (death) to demonstrate that the virtue each exemplar displays while dying corresponds to the virtues he or she displayed in life. He uses the specific paradox of bodily corruption and the soul’s incorruptibility to highlight the presence of physical signs that point to the exemplar’s incorruptible virtue and the human capacity for reflecting the divine image.

The Conclusion considers the closing elements of the three *bioi* (*synkrisis* and *epilogos*) and returns to some basic questions: how can we characterize Gregory as a biographer, and why are these compositions he has woven effective, but also limited, teaching tools? What are his preferred threads and woven textures: structures, models, *topoi*, metaphors, themes, methods,

and foci? How can our view of his literary and rhetorical skill enrich our understanding of these encomiastic and biographical narratives? By analyzing the narrative and rhetorical artistry of these three *bioi*, we can see how Gregory sought to develop a Christian educational program, with *bioi* at its heart.

Chapter 1. Beginnings: the *genos* of an interpreter

No one who has been trained in divine wisdom should seek to praise someone who is spiritually renowned using the encomiastic techniques that are customary in the outside world.

The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus 4.¹

Our story did not get its reliability from hearsay knowledge of other accounts, but experience was the teacher of these things, and our reason went through the details accurately, not depending on anyone else's hearsay testimony. Nor was the maiden being remembered a stranger to our family, so that we had to learn the wondrous facts about her from others.

The Life of Saint Macrina 1.²

We must take up the task that lies before us, making God the guide of our reason. You requested, dear friend, that we trace in outline for you what the perfect life is. Your intention clearly was, if you should find in my treatise what you were seeking, to translate the grace disclosed by the composition into your own life.

The Life of Moses I.3.³

As he begins each of his three *bioi*, Gregory comments on apparently practical issues like literary form, the sources he used for composition, and the wishes of his readers. His remarks reveal that he is entirely aware of what readers would expect to find in an encomiastic biographical narrative, the crucial components of the genre: praise for some renowned figure, the testimony of various historical sources, and some lesson applicable to the reader's own life. Yet as Gregory states in the selection from the VGT above, his encomiastic biographical project is not at all straightforward. The customary literary form, he maintains, is an unworthy tool for describing exemplary spiritual figures. Similarly, he suggests in the VSM, not all sources are created equal, with eyewitness testimony preferred over "hearsay" (ἀκοή). And the connection

¹ Μηδεὶς δὲ τῶν τῇ θείᾳ σοφίᾳ πεπαιδευμένων κατὰ τὴν τῶν ἔξω συνήθειαν ταῖς τεχνικαῖς τῶν ἐγκωμίων ἐφόδοις ἐπαινεῖσθαι ζητείτω τὸν πνευματικῶς ἐπαινούμενον (VGT 4).

² Τὸ δὲ διήγημα ἡμῖν οὐκ ἐξ ἀκοῆς ἐτέρων διηγημάτων τὸ πιστὸν εἶχεν, ἀλλ' ὃν ἡ πεῖτρα διδάσκαλος ἦν, ταῦτα δι' ἀκριβείας ἐπεξήγει ὁ λόγος, εἰς οὐδὲν ἀκοὴν ἀλλοτρίαν ἐπιμαρτυρόμενος· οὐδὲ γὰρ ξένη τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν ἡ μνημονευθεῖσα παρθένος, ὡς ἀνάγκην εἶναι δι' ἐτέρων γινώσκειν τὰ κατ' ἐκείνην θαύματα... (VSM 1).

³ ἐγχειρητέον δὲ ἥδη τῷ προκειμένῳ, Θεὸν καθηγεμόνα ποιησαμένοις τοῦ λόγου. Ἐπεζήτησας, δὲ φίλη κεφαλή, τύπῳ ὑπογραφῆναι σοι παρ' ἡμῶν τίς ὁ τέλειός ἐστι βίος, δηλαδὴ πρὸς τοῦτο βλέπων ὡς, εἰπερ εὑρεθείη τῷ λόγῳ τὸ σπουδαζόμενον, μετενεγκεῖν εἰς τὸν ἴδιον βίον τὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου μηνυθεῖσαν χάριν (VM I.3).

between the wishes of a particular audience and the circumstances of an historical individual’s life might not be immediately apparent; what does “perfection” have to do with the stories preserved about Moses in the Pentateuch, and what does Moses have to do with a fourth-century reader?

In each *bios*, Gregory grapples with the biographer’s complicated task of working within the conventions of a highly formulaic genre that would have been familiar to the majority of his readers, while accurately portraying his three subjects (guided by his source material), and nevertheless introducing innovations appropriate for his own particular, Christian didactic goals. Taking a start from the beginnings of the *bioi* themselves, the *prooimia* and discussions of each exemplar’s *genos*, I examine how Gregory introduces his subjects, his texts, and his own authorial aims.

I. *Prooimia* and Gregory’s craft

To use our weaving metaphor of composition, the biographer must select the warp and weft threads he wishes to use in crafting a literary portrait. Warping the loom and laying out threads for the weft is equivalent to the rhetor’s task of *heuresis* (εὕρεσις or *inventio*), a term that means “discovery” or “invention.”⁴ In Gregory’s contemporary context, the rhetorical project of *heuresis* consists in “the devising of matter, true or plausible, that would make the case convincing.”⁵ Gregory constructs the vertical warp of his three *bioi* partly before his readers’ eyes, commenting in the preface of each *bios* on the substance and form of the text that follows.

⁴ LSJ, s.v. “εὕρεσις.”

⁵ Inventio est excogitatio rerum verarum aut veri similium quae causam probabilem reddant. Anonymous, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* I.3 (text later attributed to Cicero). Cf. Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever” Ἐστω δὴ ἡ ῥητορικὴ δύναμις περὶ ἔκαστον τοῦ θεωρῆσαι τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον πιθανόν (Aristotle, *Rhetorica*. I.2.1, transl. by John Henry Freese, LCL edition).

In each text, he also reveals some aspects of the design that has shaped the interplay of warp and weft for the *bios* as a whole, that is, the way particular elements of an exemplar’s life (weft) can help to highlight and/or obscure the expected literary features of the text (parts of the warp).

A. Beginnings

Each of the three texts opens with material that lays out the topic and import of the text to follow. This material comprises the *prooimion* (προοίμιον): the opening, introduction, preface, or preamble.⁶ The *progymnasmata* provide minimal guidance for how the *prooimion* of an encomiastic composition should relate to the text that follows. Aphthonius simply advises authors to “construct a *prooimion* appropriate to the subject” (προοιμιάσῃ μὲν πρὸς τὴν οὖσαν ὑπόθεσιν).⁷ His laconic instruction makes sense in the context of rhetorical education more broadly, since nearly every composition was thought to need a *prooimion* of some sort. It is one of the four parts of a speech that Aristotle outlines in his *Rhetoric*.⁸ Hermogenes devotes the entire first book of his *De inventione* to discussing various types of *prooimia*, including those designed on the basis of ὑπολήψεις (judgments) about the subject at hand, which is likely similar to what Aphthonius recommends for the encomium.⁹ From the fifth century BCE onward, some rhetoricians even compiled collections of stock *prooimia* that could be used in various circumstances; the prevalence of rhetorical τόποι (commonplaces) in such introductory material

⁶ LSJ, s.v. “προοίμιον.” I consistently use the transliterated term in italics.

⁷ Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8, Rabe 22.

⁸ The four parts are *prooimion* (προοίμιον), statement (πρόθεσις), proof (πίστις), and epilogue (ἐπίλογος) (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 3.13.4, Bekker 1414b). Aristotle notes that only two of these – the πρόθεσις and πίστις – are strictly necessary for every composition, with a *prooimion* only required in certain deliberative speeches, “when there is a conflict of opinion” (ὅταν ἀντιλογία ἥ, 3.13.3, Bekker 1414b).

⁹ The term may also encompass “suppositions” or “prejudices” (LSJ, s.v. “ὑπόληψις”). Hermogenes also describes *prooimia* from ὑποδιαιρέσις (subdivisions of a subject), from περιουσία (superfluous or additional subjects), and from καιρός (the occasion of the speech) (Hermogenes, *De inventione* 1.1-4).

made such collections feasible.¹⁰

The major goals for any *prooimion* are to gain the attention and goodwill of the intended audience, while naming the subject of the composition that follows. Quintilian tells us, “Among authors, the majority agree that there are three main ways of doing this: if we make him [the hearer] well disposed (*benevolus*), attentive (*attentus*), and ready to learn (*docilis*).”¹¹ Goodwill can be garnered for the subject of the composition, or the speaker can try to make the audience inclined to favor the speaker himself, most likely by downplaying his skill and eloquence, for Quintilian points out that “there is a natural preference for those who struggle.”¹² Aristotle’s advice for gaining the attention of the hearer also takes natural inclinations into account: “[People] are attentive to things that are important ($\tauο̄ς μεγάλοις$), that concern their interests ($\tauο̄ς ιδίοις$), that are wondrous ($\tauο̄ς θαυμαστοῖς$), that are pleasurable ($\tauο̄ς ἡδέσιν$), wherefore it

¹⁰ For a very summary introduction to the concept of such collections and some primary sources, see *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd rev. ed., s.v. “Prooimion,” by Christopher Carey. One of the interesting sources he points to is Cicero’s letter to Atticus explaining how he used a commonplace (Latin *locus*) to exhort the men of the senate not to be discouraged (*Cicero, Epistulae ad Atticum* 16.9.1-4); such a *locus* or *tόπος* would not be out of place in the *prooimion* of an encomium.

¹¹ *Id fieri tribus maxime rebus inter auctores plurimos constat, si benivolum attentum docilem fecerimus* (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 4.1.5).

¹² *Est enim naturalis favor pro laborantibus* (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 4.1.9). Quintilian highlights the importance of this inclination for forensic orators who need to garner the sympathy of a judge, though it could apply just as well for one composing an epideictic *exordium*. The orator and philosopher Dio Chrysostom (ca.40 – ca.120 CE), for example, inserts a self-deprecating “mere wanderers and self-taught philosophers that we are” ($\alphaνδρες \ \alphaληται \ \kai \ \alphaντουργοι \ \tauης \ \sigmaοφιας$) in the opening of his *De regno* (Or. 1) even as he describes the oration to follow as superior to a virtuoso musical performance (Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 1.9 (transl. J.W. Cohoon, LCL edition)). The late third or early fourth century CE text attributed to Menander Rhetor discusses the “being at a loss” in II.369, 13-17 (on Menander and the attribution of the texts, see briefly D.A. Russell and N.G. Wilson, “Introduction: Epideictic Practice and Theory,” *Menander Rhetor* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981]: xi-xlv, esp. xi and xxxiv-xl). Ulrike Gantz, writing on the use of *διαπόρησις* in Gregory’s funeral oration for Pulcheria, notes astutely that Christian authors can take advantage of their “being at a loss” to direct attention to the role of the audience as partners in the project of the oration, creating a “dialogue”: “Die traditionellen Proöminentopoi erhalten durch die christliche Nutzung eine neue, weiterreichende Funktion: Die Diaporesis sowie der wiederholte Bezug auf den Hörer ermöglichen dem Redner, gewissermaßen in einen «Dialog» mit den versammelten Menschen zu treten, die so in ganz anderer Weise zum Zuhören aufgefordert werden als bei einer herkömmlichen epideiktischen Rede” (Gantz, *Gregor von Nyssa*, 68-69).

is necessary to imply that the speech is about such things.”¹³ Even if the *prooimion* makes no overt appeals to its hearers, it must nevertheless “state the subject in a summary fashion” (*τὸ πρᾶγμα εἰπεῖν κεφαλαιωδῶς*).¹⁴

Gregory composes *prooimia* for all three *bioi*, with attention not only to his subject and audience, but also to his particular didactic aims. As I analyze the *taxis*, or rhetorical arrangement, of the three works, these portions of the texts are found at VGT 1-3, VM I.1-15, and VSM 1. His explicit reflections on purpose and method not only introduce the texts, but they provide a starting point for answering key questions about his biographical technique. What does Gregory say about the relationship between literary form and content? How does he describe his own role, with respect to each exemplar and with respect to his reading audiences? How does he seek to make the reader attentive and receptive, and what obstacles does he face in each case? What does he say about the relationship between the reading audience and each exemplar at the outset of each *bios*?

B. Introductions

*1. Thaumaturgus, VGT 1-3*¹⁵

In his *prooimion* for the VGT, Gregory addresses what his audience might gain from

¹³ προσεκτικοὶ δὲ τοῖς μεγάλοις, τοῖς ιδίοις, τοῖς θαυμαστοῖς, τοῖς ἡδέσιν· διὸ δεῖ ἐμποιεῖν ὡς περὶ τοιούτων ὁ λόγος· (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 3.14.7, Bekker 1415b).

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 3.14.9, Bekker 1415b. Aristotle is mostly concerned with a forensic context when he advises the orator to seek the goodwill of a hearer. However, he notes that a *prooimion* for epideictic compositions also involve appeals to the hearer, in addition to first comments about praise (*ἐπαίνος*) and blame (*ψόγος*) (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 3.14.4, Bekker 1415a).

¹⁵ Slusser's translation of the text has outlined the introductory material differently. He includes all of sections 1-10 under a prefatory heading. However, Gregory's material in 4-10 is clearly his version of a *genos*, even though he spends 4-6 critiquing the typical way of discussing a *genos* and offering his own alternative before getting to the real meat of Thaumaturgus' story in 7. As I read the text, 4-10 are part of the body of the *bios* rather than its introduction. See further discussion below.

attending to the biographical account. Right away, he offers a brief statement about the goal of his composition: “The object (*σκοπός*) for our speech is one and the same as that for our present gathering, for the great Gregory furnishes to you an occasion (*ὑπόθεσις*) for an assembly, and me with an occasion for a discourse (*διάλεξις*).”¹⁶ These opening lines name the exemplar to be studied, but they also serve as a *captatio benevolentiae*. By recognizing the worthy purpose of their gathering, Gregory creates a sense of commonality with his Neocaesarean audience, to highlight that he and his listeners share the goal of honoring Thaumaturgus. Presumably later readers who encountered only the written version of this text could likewise consider their reading an occasion to study the great Gregory.

Gregory next invokes the grace of the Holy Spirit to an “alliance” (*συμμαχία*) for the composition, a Christian addition to the project of constructing his authorial *ethos*. First, the Spirit serves as a sort of historical source who had direct experience of the exemplar, whose “brilliant and widely admired life was achieved by the power of the Spirit” (*ό λαμπρὸς ἐκεῖνος καὶ περιβλεπτος βίος τῇ δυνάμει κατωρθώθη τοῦ Πνεύματος*, VGT 1). With such assistance, Gregory suggests, he is likely to present an accurate account. He also insists it is the Spirit who provides him with the requisite power (*δύναμις*) to describe Thaumaturgus’ virtuous achievements: the Spirit’s grace “strengthens both for life and for discourse those who, with its help, endeavor at each of them” (*καὶ πρὸς τὸν βίον καὶ πρὸς τὸν λόγον τοὺς περὶ ἐκάτερον τούτων ἐσπουδακότας δι’ ἑαυτῆς ἐνισχύουσα*, VGT 1). Gregory models humility by attributing his success largely to spiritual aid rather than his own human abilities. Yet, as Quintilian

¹⁶ Ό μὲν σκοπὸς εῖς ἔστι τοῦ τε ἡμετέρου λόγου, καὶ τοῦ παρόντος ἡμῶν συλλόγου. Γρηγόριος γὰρ ὁ Μέγας, ὑμῖν τε τῆς συνόδου, κάμοὶ τῆς διαλέξεως ὑπόθεσις πρόκειται (VGT 1).

suggests, this expression of humility is in fact intended to make audiences all the more aware of the author's aptitude. Gregory downplays his role precisely by saying that he will be inspired by the same Spirit who helped Thaumaturgus reach great heights of virtue, equating himself, to some extent, with the exemplar; both subject and author, he claims, are inspired.

Gregory next explains the task before him. He aims to compose a speech in praise (here he uses the general term *ἔπαινος*¹⁷) that “might display (ἐπιδειχθῆναι), by means of recollection, so noble a man to those who are here, as he himself was seen to be by those who were there at that time, on account of his deeds.”¹⁸ That is, he seeks to bring a vivid portrait of the exemplar to life, using recollection as a tool. The promise of a vibrant portrait is something Gregory shares in common with other biographical *prooimia*. Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* famously begins with a similar emphasis on memorable details: “...often a minor action like a phrase or a jest makes a greater revelation of character than battles with thousands of casualties or the greatest armaments or sieges of cities.”¹⁹ Gregory's goal of “displaying” (from *ἐπιδείκνυμι*) Thaumaturgus suggests the kind of immediate encounter he would like to facilitate between his audience and the exemplar. Plutarch represents this kind of immediacy by using a simile that equates the biographer's task with that of a painter.²⁰ He explains,

¹⁷ The term is sometimes translated “panegyric” (LSJ, s.v. “ἔπαινος.”). Aristotle distinguishes between “praise” (*ἔπαινος*) broadly speaking and encomium in particular: while praise deals with “greatness of virtue” (*μέγεθος ἀρετῆς*), encomium is specifically concerned with “achievements” (*ἔργα*) that function as “signs” (*σημεῖα*) of the moral habits that mark such greatness (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1.9.33, Bekker 1367b).

¹⁸ ...τοιοῦτον ἐπιδειχθῆναι τοῖς παροῦσι διὰ τῆς μνήμης τὸν ἄνδρα, οἷος ἦν τοῖς κατ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν χρόνον αὐτὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων ὄρώμενος (VGT 1).

¹⁹ πρᾶγμα βραχὺ πολλάκις καὶ ὥριμα καὶ παιδιά τις ἔμφασιν ἥθους ἐποίησε μᾶλλον ἢ μάχαι μυριόνεκροι καὶ παρατάξεις οἱ μέγισται καὶ πολιορκίαι πόλεων (Plutarch, *Alexander* I.2).

²⁰ Gregory includes a similar image in his *De perfectione* (GNO Online 30.195.14-196.15), where he in fact equates living virtuously on the model of Christ with copying a portrait using paints that are virtues. Daniele Iozzia proposes that Basil and Gregory bring out more than their predecessors the immediacy of communication that painting is able to accomplish (Daniele Iozzia, *Aesthetic Themes in Pagan and Christian Neoplatonism: From Plotinus to Gregory of Nyssa* [London: Bloomsbury, 2015], 47-52). On the use of “portraiture” as a metaphor for literary representation

So then, just as painters get the likeness in their portraits from the face and the expression of the eyes, through which the character is shown, but make very little account of the remaining parts of the body, so also it must be allowed that I devote myself more to the signs of the soul and, by means of these, to portray the life of each man [Alexander and Caesar], leaving aside for others the matter of their great contests.²¹

Both authors begin their *bioi* by explaining that what the narrative can offer is a portrait of character or nobility in the soul.

Without real nobility of soul to display, however, the project could not proceed. To make this point, Gregory attributes the excellence of the VGT to its subject, whose “glory would shine forth” even if the discourse was faulty, “for it is the highest tribute to a man to demonstrate that he exceeds our power to praise him adequately.”²² The life and works of Gregory Thaumaturgus ought to be preserved because he lived virtuously. Embodying virtue is, in Gregory’s estimation and for any encomiastic biographer, a necessary condition for becoming the subject of a *bios*.²³

Finally, Gregory expands on why he has undertaken his encomiastic task, explaining his motivation as a concern for his audience:

Now if it were not beneficial (ἀκερδής) to remember those who were outstanding in virtue, and no incentive toward excellence to those who listen, then likewise it would be superfluous, unprofitable, and no use to anyone for someone to furnish a laudatory discourse (εὐφημίαν τὸν λόγον), since he would deliver it in vain and fatigue the ears to no purpose. But there is such grace (χάρις) attaching to the

among early Christian authors, especially John Chrysostom, see Margaret M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), Chapter 2.

²¹ ὅσπερ οὖν οἱ ζωγράφοι τὰς ὄμοιότητας ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου καὶ τῶν περὶ τὴν ὄψιν εἰδῶν οἵς ἐμφαίνεται τὸ ἥθος ἀναλαμβάνουσιν, ἐλάχιστα τῶν λοιπῶν μερῶν φροντίζοντες, οὕτως ἡμῖν δοτέον εἰς τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς σημεῖα μᾶλλον ἐνδύεσθαι, καὶ διὰ τούτων εἰδοποιεῖν τὸν ἐκάστου βίον, εάσαντας ἐτέροις τὰ μεγέθη καὶ τοὺς ἀγῶνας (Plutarch, *Alexander* I.3).

²² Αρίστη γὰρ ἀνδρὸς εὐφημία, τὸ ἐπιδειχθῆναι τῆς δυνάμεως τῶν εὐφημούντων ἀμείνονα. (VGT 3).

²³ The primary exception in our literary record are the so-called “paradoxical encomia” (παράδοξα ἐγκώμια), which Menander Rhetor defines as compositions of an epideictic character that treat paradoxical themes (see Menander I.346.9-23; his examples are encomia of death, poverty, and countries with poor in natural resources) but which he does not treat at any great length since these compositions were thought of as “a mere display of ingenuity” or an attempt “to startle, to win admiration and applause by a mere exhibition of smartness” (Theodore C. Burgess, *Epideictic Literature*, 157-8).

discourse, if it be done right, that the benefit (τὸ κέρδος) to the hearers will be much like that which the fiery beacon furnishes to those who are sailing on the sea, directing toward itself those wandering aimlessly on the deep in the darkness.²⁴

His promise that the discourse will not be unprofitable appeals, as Aristotle recommended, to the audience's desire for something that is to their benefit. Gregory associates members of the audience with those who "wander aimlessly" (πλανάω) and "in the darkness" (ἐν τῷ ζόφῳ), and promises that this *bios* could provide them with the assistance they need to reach the shore. The rich figurative language of a fiery beacon (ό πυρσός)²⁵ in the darkness also captures Gregory's own catechetical aspirations. Each *bios* has the potential to be far more than a well-executed discourse praising some subject's virtuous life. If properly shaped, that discourse can orient, direct, and galvanize those who engage with the text seeking a guide for their own lives. The focus on the possible "benefit" (κέρδος) associated with hearing about Thaumaturgus reveals both Gregory's concern for the audience and the central pedagogical purpose of the *bios*. For him, this instructive aim only makes sense if the *bios* praises a worthy subject, with the help of the Spirit. Only when the author, subject, and sources are appropriately matched could the beneficial "grace" (χάρις) attend a reader's encounter with the text.

²⁴ Εἰ μὲν οὖν ἀκερδῆς ἦν ἡ μνήμη τῶν κατ' ἀρετὴν προεχόντων, καὶ μηδεμίᾳ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν ἐγένετο συνεισφορὰ τοῖς ἀκούοντιν, περιττὸν ἵσως ἀν ἦν καὶ ἀνόνητον ἐπὶ μηδενὶ χρησίμῳ προσάγειν εἰς εὐφημίαν τὸν λόγον, αὐτὸν τε διεξιόντα μάτην, καὶ τὴν ἀκοὴν ἀργῶς ἀποκναίοντα: ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἡ τοιαύτη τοῦ λόγου χάρις, εἰ προσηκόντως γένοιτο, κοινὸν ἔσται τῶν ἀκούοντων τὸ κέρδος, καθάπερ ὁ πυρσὸς τοῖς ἐκ θαλάσσης προσπλέουσιν ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν εὐθύνων τοὺς ἐν τῷ ζόφῳ πλανωμένους κατὰ τὸ πέλαγος (VGT 2).

²⁵ Gregory uses the word in a variety of ways throughout his oeuvre (LGO, s.v. "πυρσός"). The fiery beacon may be a torch used in a procession (into a church in *Epistle 6 To Ablabius, bishop*, GNO Online 33.36.6; for a wedding in *In Canticum canticorum* GNO Online 24.388.11) or, as in the VGT and VM, a sign for seafarers (interestingly, Gregory applies the image to the life of another exemplary figure, his brother Basil in *In Basilium fratrem* GNO Online 53.115.23) or other travelers (in *De virginitate* GNO Online 31.340.21).

2. Moses, VM I.1-15

Despite offering a doubled account of Moses' life in two books in the VM, Gregory includes just one *prooimion* that serves for both the *historia* and *theoria* portions of the text.²⁶ Gregory begins with striking figurative language, capturing the urban scene of a horse race. The shouting (ἐπιβοάω) of the spectators, the eagerness (προθυμία) of the horses, and the keen effort (όξὺς όρμή) of the charioteer are all invoked. By comparing the young priest to a competitor in a horse race and himself to an enthusiastic spectator, Gregory sets up a literary dynamic in which the reader bears much of the responsibility for ethical achievement, with some assistance from the text. Gregory “participates” (συμπεριάγοντες) in the horse race as a spectator (one among “those fond of watching the horse races,” οἱ τῶν ἵππικῶν ἀγώνων φιλοθεάμονες), expressing his “goodwill” (εὔνοια) while the charioteer actually competes in the contest.²⁷

While laying out this division of labor at the beginning of the *prooimion*, Gregory praises his addressee's industry and status with a complimentary *captatio benevolentiae*. He calls him “dear one” (ὦ φίλη κεφαλή),²⁸ “my most honored friend and brother” (φίλων μοι καὶ ἀδελφῶν τιμώτατε), and even compares him to a “beloved child” (ώς ἀγαπητῷ τέκνῳ) in VM I.1-2. Simultaneously, he reveals the imagined role of the biographer as compared to that of the reader:

²⁶ His concluding remarks at the end of the *historia*, VM I.77, are phrased as a reminder of what is set out in the *prooimion* proper: “It would be a good time for us to harmonize the remembered life with the proposed object of our composition, so that we might have some contribution to the life of virtue from the things already mentioned. So let us begin the narrative of his life” (Καὶρὸς δὲ ἀν εἴη πρὸς τὸν προκείμενον ἡμῖν τοῦ λόγου σκοπὸν ἐφαρμόσαι τὸν μνημονευθέντα βίον, ὡς ἂν τις γένοιτο ἡμῖν ἐκ τῶν προειρημένων πρὸς τὸν κατ' ἀρετὴν βίον συνεισφορά. Άναλάβωμεν τοίνυν τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ περὶ αὐτοῦ διηγήματος, VM I.77). I do not take this as a second *prooimion*, but rather as a note restating the program of the work.

²⁷ VM I.1. Virginia Burrus points out another possible valence of the ekphrastic description: as Gregory “gently mocks those who rivet their gaze on the charioteers and mime their gestures... the joke is perhaps on his own initially misplaced Platonic identification with the charioteer of the soul rather than the horse of passion” (Virginia Burrus, “Queer Father: Gregory of Nyssa and the Subversion of Identity,” in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerard Loughlin [Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007]: 147-162, 153).

²⁸ On this usage of *κεφαλή* (lit. “head”) to refer to the person, especially in salutations, see LSJ, s.v. “κεφαλή”.

with his text, he can “exhort, urge, and encourage” (ύποφωνῶ τε καὶ ἐπισπεύδω καὶ … διακελεύομαι) the reader, who is “competing well in the divine race along the course of virtue” (τὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς στάδιον καλῶς ἐναγωνιζομένου τῷ θείῳ δρόμῳ).²⁹ Gregory somewhat messily mixes his metaphors here, shifting away from the horse race to talk about a “divine race” (θεῖος δρόμος), an image from the New Testament epistles.³⁰ Nevertheless, the message is clear: the task of working out what it means to live virtuously is shared by author and reader, but the biographer and his composition are in the service of the reader’s actual work of living.

Gregory's addressee for the VM is a young man, most likely a priest, who has requested a guide to "the perfect life" ($\tauὸν τέλειον βίον$). While Gregory commends the young man's interest in the topic, he claims it is beyond him as an author either "to encompass perfection" in the text or "show in [his] life the insights of the treatise."³¹ Instead, he proposes, the text will make a study of Moses. By shifting focus away from himself and onto the Scriptural exemplar, Gregory paradoxically enhances his own *ethos*, imbuing his narrative persona with an admirable humility. Gregory adds another bid for authority, citing his "old age" ($\tauῇ πολιᾳ ταύτῃ$, literally "gray hair") and associated life experience as beneficial attributes.³² And in the end, he does not totally eschew identification as a model of virtue; Gregory claims that "although there may be nothing useful for you in my words, perhaps this example of ready obedience will not be wholly

29 VM I.1.

³⁰ The closest parallel is 1 Cor 9:24, which includes both the word for the race-course (*στάδιον*) and the verb for running (*τρέχω*), but the image of an athlete competing in a race appears also in Phil 2:6; Gal 2:2 and 5:7; 2 Tim 2:5 and 4:7; and Heb 12:1. For more on the idea of the Christian as athlete, see Chapter 2.

³¹ τὸ τε γὰρ περιτιλαβεῖν τῷ λόγῳ τὴν τελειότητα καὶ τὸ ἐπὶ τοῦ βίου δεῖξαι ὅπερ ἀνὸ λόγος κατανοήσῃ ὑπὲρ τὴν ἐμὴν δύναμιν ἐκάτερον τούτων εἶναι φημι (VM 1.2, 3).

³² VM I.2. See Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 99 n.12 on the unreliability of this identification as a means of dating the VM late in Gregory's life.

unprofitable to you.”³³ Going even further, Gregory compares himself favorably to “many of those who are great and even those who have the advantage in virtue” (*πολλοὶ καὶ τῶν μεγάλων τε καὶ κατ’ ἀρετὴν προεχόντων*), who would also have trouble encompassing perfection. If he cannot be perfect, he is in good company, and proposes they “make God our guide for the composition” (*Θεὸν καθηγεμόνα ποιησαμένοις τοῦ λόγου*, VM I.3). Divine assistance can make up for human deficiency.

After invoking this divine aid, Gregory launches immediately into a definition of perfection, which extends from VM I.4-10. The focus throughout is on the idea that virtue has no limit, making it impossible for anyone to attain perfection in it. Gregory supports this proposition using Scriptural proofs and conceptions of the divine nature. It is Paul who taught that virtue’s “one limit of perfection is the fact that it has no limit” (GK, VM I.5) when he announced in Phil 3:13 that he never stopped “stretching out toward those things that lie ahead” (*τοῖς δὲ ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινόμενος*). God’s infinite nature confirms virtue’s limitlessness:

But certainly the one striving after true virtue participates in nothing other than God, because He is absolute virtue. Therefore since the desire for participation in that which is good by nature (*τὸ τῇ φύσει καλὸν*) belongs to those who know it, and since this good has no limit (*ὅρος*), of necessity the desire of the one participating does not come to a standstill (*στάσις*), being stretched out along with the limitless (*τῷ ἀορίστῳ*).³⁴

Nevertheless, Gregory points out, Jesus in Mt 5:48 commands his followers to be perfect. The benefit associated with the pursuit of virtue, as he presents it, lies in the fact that “not missing

³³ ὅλο μὲν σοὶ τι χρήσιμον ἴσως ἐκ τῶν λεγομένων οὐδέν, αὐτὸ δὲ τοῦτο πάντως οὐκ ἄχρηστον τὸ γενέσθαι σοὶ τῆς εὐπειθείας ὑπόδειγμα (VM I.2).

³⁴ ὅλλα μὴν ὁ τὴν ἀληθῆ μετιὼν ἀρετὴν οὐδὲν ἔτερον ἡ Θεοῦ μετέχει, διότι αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ παντελῆς ἀρετῆ· ἐπεὶ οὖν τὸ τῇ φύσει καλὸν εἰς μετουσίαν ἐπιθυμητὸν πάντως ἐστὶ τοῖς γινώσκουσι, τοῦτο δὲ ὅρον οὐκ ἔχει, ἀναγκαίως καὶ ἡ τοῦ μετέχοντος ἐπιθυμία τῷ ἀορίστῳ συμπαρατείνουσα στάσιν οὐκ ἔχει (VM I.7).

even a part would be a great benefit” (τὸ καὶ μὴ τοῦ μέρους ἀποτυχεῖν κέρδος ἀν εἴη μέγα, VM I.9). In fact, he proposes that “the perfection of human nature is always to be willing to increase in goodness” (...ἀεὶ ἐθέλειν ἐν τῷ καλῷ τὸ πλέον ἔχειν, ἡ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως τελειότης ἐστί, VM I.10). This *prooimion* is just one of many places Gregory expresses his view that *epektasis*, continual striving for progress, is a form of human perfection.

At this point, Gregory himself turns to a question I posed at the start of this chapter: what does a biblical figure like Moses have to do with *epektasis* or with the fourth-century reader? Strikingly, Gregory employs the same metaphor of a fiery beacon he used in the VGT to explain the importance of Scriptural exemplars:

It seems good to me to make use of Scripture as a counselor (σύμβουλος) in such things. For the divine voice says somewhere in the prophecy of Isaiah, “Look to Abraham your father, and Sarah who gave you birth” (Isaiah 51:2). With these words The Word admonishes those who wander outside virtue so that, just as at sea those who are carried away from the direction of the harbor bring themselves back on course by a clear sign (σημεῖον), upon seeing either a fiery beacon (πυρσός) raised up high or some mountain peak coming into view, in the same way Scripture by the examples of Sarah and Abraham may guide those drifting on the sea of life (κατὰ τὴν τοῦ βίου θάλασσαν πλανωμένους) with an unpiloted mind again to the harbor of the divine will...So perhaps the memory of anyone distinguished in life would suffice to fill our need for a fiery beacon and to show us how we can bring our soul to the sheltered harbor of virtue, where it no longer has to pass the winter amid the storms of life or be shipwrecked in the deep water of evil by the tripled waves of the passions. It may be for this very reason that the daily life of those sublime individuals is recorded in detail, that by means of the imitation (μίμησις) of those earlier examples of right action, those who follow them may conduct their lives to the good (πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθόν).³⁵

³⁵ Δοκεῖ δέ μοι καλῶς ἔχειν τῇ Γραφῇ περὶ τούτου συμβούλῳ χρήσασθαι· φησὶ γάρ που διὰ τῆς Ἡσαΐου προφητείας ἡ θεία φωνή· ἐμβλέψατε εἰς Ἀβραὰμ τὸν πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ εἰς Σάρραν τὴν ὀδίνουσαν ύμᾶς. Ταῦτα γὰρ πάντως ὁ λόγος τοῖς ἔξω τῆς ἀρετῆς πλανωμένοις διακελεύεται, ἵνα, καθάπερ οἱ ἐν πελάγει τῆς εὐθείας τοῦ λιμένος παρενεχθέντες κατὰ τὸ φανέν σημεῖον τῆς πλάνης ἐαυτὸν ἐπανάγουσιν ἡ πυρσὸν ἰδόντες ἀπὸ ὑψους αἰρόμενον ἡ κορυφήν τίνος ἀκρωρείας ἀναφανεῖσαν, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον τοὺς ἀκυβερνήτῳ τῇ διανοίᾳ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ βίου θάλασσαν πλανωμένους τῷ κατὰ τὴν Σάρραν καὶ Ἀβραὰμ ὑποδείγματι πάλιν κατευθύνῃ πρὸς τὸν λιμένα τοῦ θείου θελήματος... “Ισως δ’ ὃν τοίνυν ἔξαρκέσειε καὶ ἡμῖν ἐνός τίνος τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον εὐδοκίμων ἡ μνήμη τὴν τοῦ πυρσοῦ χρείαν πληρῶσαι καὶ ὑποδεῖξαι πᾶς ἐστι δυνατὸν τῷ ἀκλύστῳ τῆς ἀρετῆς λιμένι τὴν ψυχὴν καθορμίσαι, μηδαμοῦ ταῖς τοῦ βίου ζάλαις ἐγχειμασθεῖσαν μηδὲ κατὰ τὰς ἐπαλλήλους τῶν παθῶν τρικυμίας τῷ βυθῷ τῆς κακίας

In the VGT, Gregory suggested the biographical account itself could serve as a beacon. In the VM, the fiery beacon is also a detailed narrative portrait, preserved in Scripture as a sign (*σημεῖον*) and as a model for imitation (*μίμησις*).

The entire passage VM I.11-15 uses a combination of light and nautical imagery to show that biographical narrative in Scripture, because it is a genre of text that records the deeds of exemplary individuals, could be an important guiding force in an ideal reader's contemporary life. Gregory explains that Scripture provides the tools that can enable reader-sailors to navigate their vessels safely past treacherous shores. With the ocean navigation metaphor, Gregory introduces at least two key ideas that might help us understand his views of Scripture's place in the fourth-century Christian's pursuit of perfect virtue. First, the sailor who sees a far-off beacon is already envisioned as equipped to sail and navigate, using a particular set of skills acquired through training. The light itself does no more than point the way toward that which the reader may gain. That is, Scripture serves as an additional form of assistance, a helpful "counselor" and "advisor" (*σύμβουλος*) that enables humans to utilize their interpretive skills to the best advantage. At the same time, the counter-image of a sailor adrift in a hostile sea also suggests the essential stabilizing, orienting role of Scripture and its exemplars within the sailor's skill set. This rich image is deliberately complex, and Gregory sets Scripture as a fiery beacon that a) can only be useful to those who have the requisite skills to sail otherwise and b) is necessary for guiding and protecting the proper use of those other skills. Perhaps most interesting of all is the fact that the fiery beacon is itself simply a light in the darkness, a symbol subject to interpretation

ἐνναυαγήσασαν. Τάχα γάρ καὶ τούτου χάριν ἡ τῶν ὑψηλῶν ἐκείνων πολιτεία δι' ἀκριβείας ιστόρηται, ώς ἂν διὰ τῆς τῶν προκατορθωκότων μιμήσεως ὁ ἐφεξῆς βίος πρὸς τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἀπευθύνοιτο (VM I.11, 13).

or misinterpretation by sailors, who must have some idea of what it means and how it operates before they can follow its guidance. Gregory appears to advocate for cooperation between the reader's human intellect and divinely revealed Scripture. This complements the cooperation he described between the biographer who enthusiastically cheers on the reader and the reader who runs the race of virtue. Both may succeed by relying on the aid of the Holy Spirit.

Gregory closes the *prooimion* in VM I.14-15 by explaining more precisely how he and his readers must use a combination of the Scriptural account and their own discerning vision to extract "instruction" in virtue from the biblical story of Moses' life. In order to facilitate "translation" from the exemplar's life into the reader's life context, Gregory needs to mitigate the problem of the exemplar's historical specificity. He directly addresses his reader's hypothetical concern about being unable to imitate a figure from a different setting or historical period in any precise way. The reader might face problems because a myriad of circumstances - the details of his birth, gender, nationality, or upbringing, for example - do not directly map onto the corresponding circumstances in the life of his chosen exemplar:

What then? Someone will say, 'How shall I imitate them, since I am not a Chaldean as I remember Abraham was, nor was I nourished by the daughter of the Egyptian as Scripture teaches about Moses, and in general I do not have in these matters anything in my life corresponding to any of the ancients? How shall I place myself in the same rank with one of them, when I do not know how to imitate anyone so far removed from me by the circumstances of his life?'³⁶

Using personification in a dialogical mode of hypothetical question and answer,³⁷ Gregory poses

³⁶ Τί οὖν, ἐρεῖ τις, εἰ μήτε Χαλδαῖος ἐγώ, ὥσπερ ὁ Αἴβραὰμ μνημονεύεται, μήτε τῆς θυγατρὸς τοῦ Αἰγυπτίου τρόφιμος, ὡς περὶ τοῦ Μωϋσέως ὁ λόγος κατέχει, μηδ' ὅλως ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις πρός τινα τῶν ἀρχαίων ἔχω τι κατὰ τὸν βίον κατάλληλον, πῶς εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν τάξιν ἐνὶ τούτων ἐμαυτὸν καταστήσω, μὴ ἔχων ὅπως τὸν τοσοῦτον ἀφεστῶ τα διὰ τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων μιμήσομαι; (VM I.14).

³⁷ The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* defines this figure of thought as follows: "Personification consists in representing an absent person as present or in making a mute thing or one lacking form articulate, and attributing to it a definite form and a language or a certain behaviour appropriate to its character" (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.53, transl. Harry

a major question about the exemplary figure in a *bios* and imitation (μίμησις): how closely must someone copy the particulars of an exemplar's experience to imitate his virtue? The solution Gregory employs involves leaving behind common conceptions of what defines a person's identity and seeking out "the useful sense in the history (ἡ πρόσφορος τῇ ιστορίᾳ διάνοια) in order to obtain instruction in virtue (εἰς ἀρετῆς ὑποθήκην)." ³⁸ He explains,

To him we reply that we do not consider being a Chaldean a virtue or a vice, nor is anyone exiled from the life of virtue by living in Egypt or spending his life in Babylon, nor again has God been known to the esteemed individuals in Judea only, nor is Zion, as people commonly think, the divine habitation. We need some subtlety of understanding and keenness of vision (τίνος λεπτοτέρας ἡμῖν χρεία τῆς διανοίας καὶ ὀξυτέρας τῆς ὄψεως) to discern from the history how, by removing ourselves from such Chaldeans and Egyptians and by escaping from such a Babylonian captivity, we shall embark on the blessed life.³⁹

The solution relies on interpretation. Imitation depends, in part, upon consideration of sources and the correct identification of content that pertains to virtue, a task for the biographer composing the *bios* from the sources about his exemplar's complete life. It depends, too, on the author's and readers' shared "vision" (ὄψις) or way of looking at the exemplar in order to gain an understanding of the text's "useful sense" (ἡ πρόσφορος διάνοια). For Gregory, cooperation between readers and the biographer could enable the sort of interpretation that would eventually allow for translation.

Caplan, LCL edition). The "someone" (τις) who would pose the questions Gregory outlines functions here as an absent or hypothetical interlocutor.

³⁸ VM I.15.

³⁹ Πρὸς ὃν ἐροῦμεν, ὅτι οὔτε τὸ Χαλδαῖον εἶναι κακίαν ἡ ἀρετὴν κρίνομεν, οὔτε τῇ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ζωῇ οὔτε τῇ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι διατριβῇ τοῦ βίου τις τοῦ κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐξοικίζεται, οὐδ' αὖ πάλιν ἐν τῇ Ιουδαίᾳ μόνον γνωστὸς ὁ Θεὸς τοῖς ἀξίοις γίνεται, οὐδὲ Σιών κατὰ τὴν πρόχειρον ἔννοιαν τὸ θεῖόν ἐστιν οἰκητήριον, ἀλλά τίνος λεπτοτέρας ἡμῖν χρεία τῆς διανοίας καὶ ὀξυτέρας τῆς ὄψεως, ὡς διῆδεν ἐκ τῆς ιστορίας ποίων Χαλδαίων ἡ Αἰγυπτίων πόρρω γενόμενοι καὶ ποίας Βαβυλωνίων αἰχμαλωσίας ἀπολυθέντες τοῦ μακαρίου βίου ἐπιβησόμεθα (VM I.14).

3. *Macrina, VSM 1*

In the *prooimion* for the VSM, Gregory outlines the subject and significance of the *bios* in a somewhat roundabout way. He does not indicate right away that the subject is his sister but instead begins by recounting an encounter he had with an acquaintance, one Olympius, describing how the “flow of conversation turned to the memory of the life of some esteemed person” (εἰς μνήμην βίου τινὸς εὐδοκίμου προηλθε ῥέων ὁ λόγος, VSM 1). He explains that he had special knowledge about this person “for the remembered maiden was not a stranger to [his] family” (οὐδὲ γὰρ ξένη τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν ἡ μνημονευθεῖσα παρθένος, VSM 1). It is only at this point that he finally discloses she was “born from our same parents” (ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν ἡμῖν γονέων, VSM 1). This understated introduction of Macrina is one way for Gregory to navigate the hazardous straits of praising a family member.

He undertakes a twofold apologetic project. First he must defend his choice of subject as interesting and beneficial for a broad audience, and then he must refute the potential charge of familial bias or self-promotion in his presentation of Macrina’s exemplary qualities. Striking the balance between authority and humility is a tricky task in this situation. David Konstan points out specific risks biographers and eulogists face when praising an acquaintance:

For, on the one hand, by a profession of friendship the orator or writer runs the risk of invading the privileged space dedicated to the subject of praise, blurring the lines between the speaker and the world that is constructed by his text. Biography threatens to dissolve into autobiography - always a suspect genre - and eulogy into boasting. And, on the other hand, the self-proclaimed friend immodestly asserts his own virtue in the mere suggestion that so worthy a fellow as the hero of his text entirely reciprocates his affection.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ David Konstan, "How to Praise a Friend: St. Gregory of Nazianzus's Funeral Oration for St. Basil the Great" in Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau, eds. *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 161-2.

Gregory here must walk a fine line between praising his sister sufficiently and elevating himself too much. The issue of authorial self-praise tends to be more problematic in ancient autobiography.⁴¹ Plutarch devotes an entire treatise to the technique and occasions for praising oneself without provoking envy (Plutarch *Moralia* 539a-547f).⁴² Paul's careful maneuvering in 2 Cor 11-12, where he takes great care to justify his boasting, provides an example of the lengths to which authors might go to avoid the charge of self-praise.⁴³

In the third and fourth centuries CE, there is also a special concern for offering praise while avoiding flattery (κολακεία) in panegyric, orations directed toward living individuals, usually prominent political figures.⁴⁴ Such flattery would be inappropriate for an encomiastic composition in general, but especially for one in which the subject is a relation of the author. A philosophical critique of flattery appears as early as the Platonic dialogues.⁴⁵ Paul defends

⁴¹ Glenn Most asserts that self-praise is acceptable when used from a stance of self-defense (Glenn W. Most, 'The Stranger's Stratagem: Self-Disclosure and Self-Sufficiency in Greek Culture,' *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Volume 109 [1989]: 114 -133). Vivien J. Gray writes "The successful autobiographer disarms the audience's natural aversion to the self-praise that was a feature of self-presentation by casting himself as a victim of misfortune and misunderstanding" (Vivien J. Gray, "Classical Greece," in Gabriele Marasco, ed. *Political Autobiographies and Memoirs in Antiquity, A Brill Companion* [Boston: Brill, 2011]: 1-36, 34).

⁴² Plutarch also excoriates Cicero for his tendency to self-praise: "Cicero's immoderate self-boasting (περιαντολογία) in his speeches proves that he had an intemperate desire for fame" (ή δὲ Κικέρωνος ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἀμετρία τῆς περιαντολογίας ἀκρασίαν τινὰ κατηγόρει πρὸς δόξαν, Plutarch, *Comparatio Demosthenis et Ciceronis* 2). Classical thinkers' disdain for self-praise can be seen already in Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* I.86, where the ephor Sthenalaidas points out to his fellow Lacedaemonians that the Athenians indulge in distasteful praise of themselves.

⁴³ Margaret M. Mitchell demonstrates that John Chrysostom uses the standards for acceptable self-praise in Plutarch's treatise to defend Paul's self-presentation in these chapters of 2 Cor in his own *de laudibus sancti Pauli* 5: Margaret M. Mitchell, "A Patristic Perspective on Pauline περιαντολογία," *New Testament Studies*, Volume 47, Issue 3 (July 2001): 354-371.

⁴⁴ See Hägg and Rousseau, *Greek Biography and Panegyric*, especially 4-5.

⁴⁵ In Plato, *Respublica* IX, 590b, Socrates engages Glaucon in conversation about how shameful things enslave the best element in the self to the most wicked. Flattery is one of his exempla: "And aren't flattery (κολακεία) and illiberality (ἀνελευθερία) condemned because they subject this same spirited element (τὸ θυμοειδές) to the moblike beast, allow it to be showered with abuse for the sake of money and the latter's insatiability, and habituate it (ἐθίζω) from youth to be an ape instead of a lion?" (translation from C.D.C. Reeve, ed. *A Plato Reader: Eight Essential Dialogues* [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2012], 543.)

himself against accusations that he used “words of flattery” (λόγος κολακείας, 1 Thess 2:5).

Gregory himself includes flattery in a catalog of passions (*πάθη*), alongside such vices as hatred (*μῖσος*), strife (*ερις*), and envy (*φθόνος*).⁴⁶

Gregory’s strategy for avoiding all these pitfalls in the VSM is to adopt what is most likely an epistolary conceit to open the work.⁴⁷ The “letter,” addressed to Olympius, reminds the addressee of his own earlier request for information about the life and good deeds of Macrina. In just a few lines, Gregory effectively transfers the motivation for writing the *bios* away from himself or his own desire to praise his family and onto the friend, whose personal stake in the composition is perhaps less suspect than Gregory’s own. Having established the existence of at least one interested reader from outside the family, Gregory can more confidently assert that the ensuing text (much longer than any conventional letter, as he himself notes!⁴⁸) may be of interest to a wider audience. The same move that admirably distances Gregory from his subject thus also manages to reflect well on the exemplar. Gregory’s apparently self-effacing opening salvo suggests that Macrina is worthy of study in her own right, not just because of her close association with her better-known biographer.

As he seeks to make his readers (both the original addressee and any who later read the text) attentive, Gregory implies that his text offers privileged access to what Aristotle might call “things that are wondrous.”⁴⁹ Macrina herself is a wonder. Gregory explains that typical

⁴⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *De Beatitudinibus* GNO Online 27.106.14 (LGO, s.v. “κολακεία”).

⁴⁷ I am inclined to read the epistolary opening as a clever rhetorical fabrication that allows Gregory to “get away with” writing about an unusual subject.

⁴⁸ He excuses the excessive length of the documents by reminding his addressee that he asked Gregory to write on “a subject that goes beyond the scope of a letter” (ή ὑπόθεσις πλείων οὖσα ἢ κατ’ ἐπιστολῆς συμμετρίαν, VSM 1).

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 3.14.7, Bekker 1415b. Macrina’s renown is an open question. The text itself includes stories about high attendance at the exemplar’s funeral and her reputation for miracles (VSM 31, 36-39). On Macrina, see

designations are insufficient for describing his text's subject: "A woman was the starting-point of the narrative, if indeed she is a woman. For I do not know if it is appropriate (*πρέπον*) to name her using a term from nature (*ἐκ τῆς φύσεως αὐτὴν ὄνομάζειν*), since she went beyond nature."⁵⁰ He does not explain until later in the body of the text what he means by this, but it is almost certainly intended to make readers interested in finding out more (*docilis*, as Quintilian put it).⁵¹ Gregory portrays himself as uniquely qualified to provide an account of this wondrous woman's life. His account will be built on a uniquely authoritative set of sources.⁵² As discussed above, he does not need to rely on "hearsay" (*ἀκοή*), but instead observed Macrina himself; she was "as it were, an offering of first fruits, the blooming of her mother's womb" (*ὡσπερ τις ἀπαρχὴ καρπῶν*

especially Anna M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger* and chapter 6 (on Emmelia and Macrina) of Van Dam, *Families and Friends*.

⁵⁰ Γυνὴ δὲ ἦν ἡ τοῦ διηγήματος ἀφορμή, εἴπερ γυνή: οὐκ οἶδα γάρ εἰ πρέπον ἐστίν ἐκ τῆς φύσεως αὐτὴν ὄνομάζειν τὴν ἄνω γενομένην τῆς φύσεως (VSM 1). In line with Verna E. F. Harrison, Michael Nausner argues that "by confusing gender differentiations in relation to his sister Macrina, he not only prepares his readers for paradise, but actually lets aspects of divinely restored humanity become enacted" (Michael Nausner, "Toward Community Beyond Gender Binaries: Gregory of Nyssa's Transgendering as Part of his Transformative Eschatology," *Theology and Sexuality*, Volume 16 [2002]: 55-65, 59. Harrison's work, which tracks how all three Cappadocian fathers argue that gender becomes irrelevant in the eschaton because it is not an original part of the created "image of God," may be found in Verna E. F. Harrison, "Male and Female in Cappadocian Theology," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, Volume 41, Number 2 [October 1990]: 441-471). In contrast to Gillian Cloke, who classes Thecla among those early Christian women who go beyond femininity and are described more as men (Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God*, 220), Nausner suggests that her going beyond nature refers to her role foreshadowing the eschatological human condition, in which, for Gregory, gender is no longer an issue (Nausner, "Toward Community," 61); I agree with this assessment, since Gregory focuses specifically on Macrina's approximation of or participation in the "angelic life" in VSM 11. This has less to do with surpassing gender than surpassing the limits of human life, more broadly speaking.

More broadly on gender in Gregory's portrayal of both himself and Macrina in the VSM, see Virginia Burrus, "Begotten, Not Made: "Conceiving Manhood in Late Antiquity (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), esp. Chapter 2 and pp. 119-122. On the role of self-generation or self-determination among both men and women, see Verna E. F. Harrison, "Gender, Generation, and Virginity in Cappadocian Theology," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, Volume 47, Part 1 (April 1996): 38-68, esp. 62-68.

⁵¹ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 4.1.5.

⁵² Gregory hints at the fact-collecting role of a biographer in his *prooimion*, where he remarks that he did not have to consult other sources to find out about her life (VSM 1). Compare here Eusebius, who seeks to position his biography of Constantine as history and does so partly by deflected attention from his compositional choices: "It certainly seems to have been unusually important for Eusebius to establish his *bona fides* - and to minimise his own role in constructing his story" (Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 56).

πρώτη τῆς μητρώας νηδύος ἀναβλαστήσασα, VSM 1). The language of first fruits suggests right away that Macrina's life is an offering dedicated to God.⁵³

The *prooimion* promises a record of Macrina's virtuous achievements, though Gregory continues to attribute the original idea to Olympius. The addressee, he reports, thought that an account ought to be made "lest such a life should go unnoticed in subsequent times and lest she should silently pass by in unprofitable (ἀνωφελής) obscurity" (ἄν μὴ λάθοι τὸν μετὰ ταῦτα χρόνον ὁ τοιοῦτος βίος μηδὲ ἀνωφελής παραδράμοι διὰ σιωπῆς συγκαλυφθεῖσα, VSM 1). It would be a loss, from Gregory's perspective, if Macrina's life were made "unprofitable" (ἀνωφελής). Gregory and Olympius share a belief that an account of the exemplary life could carry some "benefit" (κέρδος), like the lives of Thaumaturgus and Moses.

C. Authorial invention

In the opening of the VGT, Gregory asserts that an encomiastic biographical account can provide incentive to excellence. The VM, he says, will offer requested "counsel concerning the perfect life" by "seeking out the spiritual understanding that corresponds to the history in order to obtain suggestions of virtue" and "come to know the perfect life for men."⁵⁴ He begins the VSM with a promise to preserve an account of Macrina's excellence so that it will not be "passed over" (λανθάνω) by those who could learn from it. These aims, all focused on offering

⁵³ Regulations for offering the first fruits of any birth or harvest to God are found in Exod 23:16-19; Lev 23:9-10; Deut 26:1-11. In the New Testament, the term ἀπαρχή is used primarily in a figurative way to refer to people, including Christ (1 Cor 15:20), but especially converts, e.g. at Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Thess 2:13; Jas 1:18. More broadly, it refers to God's chosen in Rev 14:4 (BDAG, s.v. "ἀπαρχή"). Gregory does not employ the term in any other distinctive fashion (LGO, s.v. "ἀπαρχή").

⁵⁴ ὑποθήκην εἰς τὸν τέλειον βίον (VM I.2); τὴν πρόσφορον τῇ ιστορίᾳ διάνοιαν εἰς ἀρετῆς ὑποθήκην ἀναζητήσομεν, δι' ἣς τὸν τέλειον ώς ἐν ἀνθρώποις βίον ἐπιγνωσόμεθα (VM I.15). Gregory points back to his compositional goals in VM II.48-50: If someone finds a problem in harmonizing the history and the interpretation, "Let him always remember the aim of our composition" (ἀεὶ μεμνήσθω τοῦ σκοποῦ τῶν ἡμετέρων λόγων).

something of value to those who read, are both to be expected in *prooimia*, but nevertheless these conventional elements are fundamental to Gregory's personal understanding of his didactic task.

These *prooimia* also offer a glimpse of Gregory's thoughts on ideal reading practices: to understand the significance of a life, one must engage in interpretation. If Gregory's portraits are not just mimetic records but are intended to enable mimesis among readers, then while his *bioi* preserve a realistic account of the subject, they must also take into account that a biographical narrative may partially depict or refer to reality, but cannot capture it thoroughly or with complete accuracy. *Bios*, which seeks to engineer a mediated encounter between readers and the very virtues that a subject displays, is a genre that may make visible – to those with the right kind of vision, understanding, and guidance – otherwise hidden or invisible realities. Gregory's attentiveness to this referential function of a biographical narrative is evident in his prominent application of the figurative language of light in two *prooimia*, particularly the metaphor of a guiding beacon for seafaring.⁵⁵ The figurative language of light and navigation provides an image for the readers' hermeneutical work while simultaneously capturing the essentially referential nature of the encomiastic *bios*. The text is not itself a blueprint or straightforward path to virtue; rather, like a beacon, it simply marks out the path. Extracting the orienting benefit from a beacon requires some work of the sailor who would navigate by it; the same is true for the ideal reading audience of a *bios*, who need to perform interpretive work to derive the promised benefit from a text that refers.

Gregory depicts this work as a shared task, using all three *prooimia* to outline the ideal

⁵⁵ Gregory also applies this metaphor in his *De virginitate* GNO Online 31.297.15-17: "And many of the saints shine forth their lives, like some sort of light, for those following toward God (πολλοί δὲ τῶν ἀγίων καθάπερ τινὰ λύχνον τὸν ἔαντῶν βίον τοῖς κατὰ θεὸν πορευομένοις προφαίνουσιν).

roles of author, subject, and audience. As Patricia Cox has argued, authorial intent shapes biographical portraiture, and the author – complete with his social, political, religio-philosophical, and personal convictions – becomes a sort of prism, such that “the biographers’ idea of the holy man can be seen as ways of understanding and organizing the cultural situations in which they were embroiled.”⁵⁶ Her compelling model situates the biographer and his subject as two mutually-reflecting points that generate a “mythic world” entered through considerations of deeds (*praxeis*) or character (*ethos*). However, Gregory’s *prooimia* insist on additional partners for the interpretation of a life. Cox’s model of two poles does not yet capture the active role of readers, or the literary and hermeneutical mechanisms by which *bios* readers may enter into and return from the mythic world of the text.⁵⁷ Cox addresses what we might call compositional mimesis, the production of rich, realistic portraits in text, and portraits that personify “certain revered philosophical and theological precepts.”⁵⁸ But what about readers’ mimesis, the consumption, digestion, and reproduction of lessons in a *bios*?

Seen as a tool for training readers to engage in interpretive activity, the text becomes a referential object that serves as a point of access to meaningful truths about virtue, both virtue already realized by the subject and virtue that might be practiced in the future by readers. The subject originally displayed virtue in a series of actions that can be preserved in text through authorial art, and from text into the ideal readers’ lives through subsequent interpretation and imitation. The biographical narrator, because of his privileged, near-omniscient view of the

⁵⁶ Cox, *Biography*, 134-136.

⁵⁷ Cox, *Biography*, xv.

⁵⁸ Cox, *Biography*, 70.

subject's life,⁵⁹ invites readers into the ongoing process of interpretation that he initiates.⁶⁰

Author and readers are both responsible for interpretation, though to different degrees; he is ultimately in charge of guiding and modeling interpretive strategies. What is more, in Gregory's view, they do not perform interpretation alone. His explicit appeals for the help of God, the Spirit, and his friend Olympius highlight the importance of Christian community for the composition and reading of *bioi*.

II. **Genos and innovation**

Following immediately on the *prooimion* of each text is Gregory's discussion of the exemplar's *genos*, her birth or origin (γένος).⁶¹ All three of the *prooimia* testify to Gregory's conception of his *bioi* as texts that teach and provide some benefit to the reader. This didactic function introduces a tension that Gregory must continue to grapple with when it comes time to describe each exemplar's birth: each figure comes from a particular setting and background, but

⁵⁹ The biographer typically presents himself as writing with an omniscient, external narrative point of view; his knowledge of the subject is the result of his own eyewitness experience or of study. See Plutarch, who self-consciously relies on sources (e.g. *Nic* 1.5). For additional examples and discussion of Plutarch's historical accuracy, see C.B.R. Pelling, "How far would they go? Plutarch on Nicias and Alcibiades" in *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (London: Routledge, 2000): 44-60. Biographers who reject this conventional narrative point of view tend to do so in similarly self-conscious and even playful ways. Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (see, e.g. I.3) claims to rely on, among other sources, memoirs taken down by one Damis, a traveling companion and disciple of Apollonius. For a helpful introduction to some major issues of narratology in this text, see T. J.G. Whitmarsh, "Philostratus," *Narrators, Narratees, and Narratives in Ancient Greek Literature*, Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative, volume 1, ed. Irene J.F. DeJong, René Nünlist, and Angus Bowie (Leiden: Brill, 2004): 423-439. Gregory's own manipulation of the narrator's point of view, especially in the VSM, will be discussed in Chapter 3; for now, suffice it to say that his departure from the typical omniscient, external point of view introduces new interpretive possibilities or strategies for readers.

⁶⁰ Claudia Rapp provides what I see as a helpful corrective to Cox, and a reminder about how ancient authors conceived of audience, in Claudia Rapp, "Storytelling as Spiritual Communication in Early Greek Hagiography: The Use of *Diegesis*," *JECS*, Volume 6, Number 3 (Fall 1998): 431-448, DOI: 10.1353/earl.1998.0048. Rapp argues that authors of hagiography demonstrates a concern for the audience and an expectation that the audience can and should imitate the exemplary figures described, especially in the opening sections of their narratives. Rapp's additional point, that "The roles of narrator of a *diegesis*, eyewitness, and disciple of the holy man thus intersect in a profound way that calls for further elucidation," is also relevant here (Rapp, "Storytelling as Spiritual Communication," 439).

⁶¹ *LSJ*, s.v. "γένος."

she is nevertheless meant to be a model for readers who may not share her homeland and social status, let alone her family and ancestors. Furthermore, because the circumstances of the exemplar's birth are matters determined by chance, the role of choice or will in cultivating virtues is, at best, unclear. How much either an exemplar or a reader imitating that exemplar can really "choose" virtue is an open question. In examining how Gregory depicts his exemplars' births, we may see how chance, choice, the particular, and the universal are woven together, and what Gregory has to say about the link between interpretation and imitation.

A. The origin of an exemplar

As detailed in ancient texts on encomium and epideictic literature, the praise of a person's *genos* is intended to situate the subject in his familial, political, military, and socio-economic context, in order to highlight the excellent qualities of his soul that can be linked to his origins. Aphthonius identifies a series of topics that should be covered under the heading of *genos*: "...then you will state the person's origin (τὸ γένος), which you will divide into nation (ἔθνος), homeland (πατρίς), ancestors (πρόγονοι), and parents (πατέρες).⁶² Aelius Theon introduces "good birth" (εὐγένεια ἀγαθή) under the larger heading of "external goods" (τὰ ἔξωθεν ἀγαθά), that should be attributed to fortune; he elaborates, saying that εὐγένεια comes "either from the greatness of a city and nation and constitution, or from ancestors and other relatives" (ἢ μὲν πόλεως καὶ ἔθνους καὶ πολιτείας ἀγαθῆς, ἢ δὲ γονέων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων οἰκείων).⁶³ All of these are attributes of the subject's life that cannot be attributed to her own

⁶² Ή μὲν οὖν διαιρεσις αὕτη τοῦ ἐγκωμίου· ἐργάσαιο δ' αὐτὸ τοῖσδε τοῖς κεφαλαίοις· προοιμιάσῃ μὲν πρὸς τὴν οὖσαν ὑπόθεσιν· εἴτα θήσεις τὸ γένος, ὃ διαιρήσεις εἰς ἔθνος, πατρίδα, προγόνους καὶ πατέρας (Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8, Rabe 22).

⁶³ Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 9, Spengel 110.

choice, but they are nevertheless thought to be determinative for the qualities of her soul.

The issue of nature and nurture, or chance and choice, is built into the encomiastic form. The rhetorical theorists and teachers recognize its importance, advising their students to emphasize one pole or the other, as the rhetorical situation demands. In Quintilian, we find one explanation for why parents and ancestors reflect on a person's virtue; when he discusses how arguments can be derived from the attributes of a person, he says “origin” (*genus*) is relevant because “persons are generally believed to be similar to their parents and ancestors, and sometimes the reasons for their living honorably or disgracefully proceed from this.”⁶⁴ Likewise, the place of origin was thought to instill certain qualities in the soul of a person. Menander instructs rhetors to “inquire about his nation as a whole, whether it is considered courageous and brave, if it is devoted to literature or the possession of virtues, like the Greek nation, or is observant of law, like the Italian nation, or is courageous, like the nation of the Gauls or of the Paeonians,”⁶⁵ explaining that “it is inevitable that a man from a nation of such a sort should be of that sort.”⁶⁶

Gregory is demonstrably aware of a similar list of standard topics. In the VGT, he enumerates the topics he knows most encomiasts address: “wealth (*πλοῦτος*), origin (*γένος*), glory (*δόξα*), worldly powers (*κοσμικαὶ δυναστεῖαι*), the founding stories of their homelands (*μῆθοι τὰς πατρίδας οἰκίζοντες*), and narratives (*διηγήματα*) intelligent people would shun:

⁶⁴ ...nam similes parentibus ac maioribus suis plerumque creduntur, et nonnumquam ad honeste turpiterque vivendum inde causae fluunt (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 5.10.25-27).

⁶⁵ ζητήσεις τὸ ἔθνος ἄποιν, εἰ ἀνδρεῖον ὑπειληπταὶ καὶ ἀλκιμον, εἰ περὶ λόγους ἔχει ἡ κτῆσιν ἀρετῶν, ὡς τὸ Ἐλληνικόν, εἴτε νόμιμον, ὡς τὸ Ἰταλικόν, ἢ ἀνδρεῖον, ὡς τὸ τῶν Γαλατῶν καὶ Παιόνων (Menander II.369.28-31).

⁶⁶ ὅτι ἀναγκαῖον τὸν ἐκ τοῦ τοιούτου ἔθνους τοιοῦτον εἶναι (Menander II.370.2-3).

victories (τρόπαια), battlefields (μάχαι), and the horrors of war (τὰ ἐκ πολέμων κακά).⁶⁷ Yet as seen in the chapter epigraph from this same text, Gregory wants to distinguish his composition from those others, to prove it is has been composed by someone trained “in divine wisdom” (τῇ θείᾳ σοφίᾳ, VGT 4). In the three *bioi*, how does Gregory adhere to and depart from generic conventions for depicting *genos*? Does a comparison of the three texts reveal any patterns in his modification of these conventions that might be connected to his stated didactic aims?

B. Universalizing *genos*

1. Thaumaturgus, VGT 4-10, Migne 896A-900A

It is in describing the *genos* of Thaumaturgus that Gregory most directly engages with how generic commonplaces and reader expectations pose potential obstacles to his Christian didactic goal. As Gregory puts it, “No one who has been trained in divine wisdom should seek to praise someone who is spiritually renowned by using the encomiastic techniques that are customary in the outside world.”⁶⁸ A work praising a spiritual exemplar, as Gregory puts it, ought to reflect the spiritual quality of its human subject. The author must be prepared to craft a portrait appropriate for the exemplar, even if that means changing the form of the text. Shifting reader focus onto questions of form (the “encomiastic techniques that are customary in the outside world”⁶⁹), he encourages them to pay attention to the artful construction of the text rather

⁶⁷ VGT 4. We might compare this list of qualities the world considers excellent to the list Basil provides (and rejects) in his *Ad Adulescentes* 2.2. See a comparable claim about John Chrysostom’s familiarity with and purposeful adaptation of encomiastic *topoi* in Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 95-100.

⁶⁸ Μηδεὶς δὲ τῶν τῇ θείᾳ σοφίᾳ πεπαιδευμένον κατὰ τὴν τῶν ἔξω συνήθειαν ταῖς τεχνικαῖς τῶν ἐγκωμίων ἐφόδοις ἐπαινεῖσθαι ζητείτω τὸν πνευματικῶς ἐπαινούμενον (VGT 4).

⁶⁹ VGT 4.

than simply to the artful author who constructs.⁷⁰ He pulls apart the strands of his tapestry, revealing some of the interlocking crosses of warp and weft, the underlying structure of Thaumaturgus' portrait.

Gregory says he wishes to reject not only typical, earthly sources of fame as deceptive but also to modify the very literary components that readers might expect to encounter in a text that lauds these sources of fame. Yet in order to make such distinctions between his work and other *bioi*, Gregory must rely on his audience's knowledge of the conventions of biography. Only by assuming that they are familiar with basic literary elements of the *bios* form can he highlight the purported divergences that make his text different. He insists, "By means of these elements of the spiritual praise of those being treated in encomia, the divine praise of encomia responds to the futile trumperies of the world below, judging it shameful that those being made known for such things are exalted for earthly honors."⁷¹ It is not simply that the form of the text must change to accurately describe its subject. Even more than that, there is a form of "divine praise" to which a biographer ought to attend, Gregory maintains. In a neat sleight of hand move, Gregory seems to be eliding his own authorial role: his hand has been forced, and he must

⁷⁰ This is not to deny the lingering presence of Gregory before readers' eyes and the way attention to literary choices reflects on the *ethos* of the author. Michael Stuart Williams' monograph works through one possible portrait of Gregory that takes shape over the course of his *Praise of Basil* and the *VM* (Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 58-100), and Chapters 2 and 3 explore techniques Gregory uses when portraying himself as a character in the *VSM*.

⁷¹ Διὰ ταῦτα τῆς πνευματικῆς τῶν ἐγκωμιαζομένων ἀποκρίνει τοὺς κάτω λήρους ὁ θεῖος τῶν ἐγκωμίων ἔπαινος, αἰσχρὸν εἶναι κρίνον τοὺς ἀπὸ τῶν τοιούτων ἐγνωσμένους διὰ τῶν κατὰ τὴν γῆν τιμίων σεμνύνεσθαι. (VGT 6). We might compare this to a similar dynamic in the treatise *De virginitate*, in which Gregory critiques a typical understanding of marriage before introducing his own teachings on the topic; this compelling reading comes from Mark D. Hunt, "Reconciliation of Body and Soul: Gregory of Nyssa's Deeper Theology of Marriage," *Theological Studies*, Volume 51 (1990): 450-478. Hunt asserts that "in chapter 4 he [Gregory] tells us that the standards according to which he constructs the 'ideal' marriage are not the true standard for determining what is good or bad in human experience" and "reveals rather subtly that the true object of his rhetorical venom is not marriage per se but the desire for pleasure and misguided expectations of happiness which are the basis of most marriages" (454-455).

compose an atypical text, because his subject is atypical.⁷²

Gregory is by no means the first to express rhetorically his hesitation about the conventional values of the encomiastic form. That itself is a longstanding *topos*, and critiques that comment on the limits of the standard encomiastic form are fairly common within encomia. Isocrates, for example, bemoans the difficulty involved in being truly original while praising anything good or noble:

Of those who have chosen to praise bumblebees or salt and the like, no one has ever been at a loss for words (οὐδεὶς πώποτε λόγων ἡπόρησεν), but those who try their hand at talking about those things that are confessed to be good (ἀγαθός) or beautiful (καλός) or distinguished for virtue (διαφέροντος ἐπ' ἀρετῇ) have all said things quite lacking (καταδεέστερον) about their topics...and while about those topics having glory it is rare to discover something that no one has said before, about those things that are cheap (φαῦλος) and low (ταπεινός), whatever someone speaking should chance upon is entirely original (ἄπαντας ἴδιον ἐστιν).⁷³

John Chrysostom, in a homily on Rom 16:3, praises Paul for recommending the humble tentmakers Prisca and Aquila to the Roman Christians, for “not accepting the customary worldly evaluations and estimations on which praise was conferred in late antiquity.”⁷⁴ Nevertheless, because Gregory insists he is composing a unique text, it is worth examining just how unique it really is. The *genos* Gregory constructs for Thaumaturgus does provide specific information about the subject, but simultaneously proposes a universal human origin and inheritance:

⁷² Note the similarity to his claim that terms from nature might not be appropriate for describing Macrina, who went beyond nature (VSM 1).

⁷³ τῶν μὲν γὰρ τοὺς βομβυλιοὺς καὶ τοὺς ἄλας καὶ τοιαῦτα βουληθέντων ἐπαινεῖν οὐδεὶς πώποτε λόγων ἡπόρησεν, οἱ δὲ περὶ τῶν ὁμολογουμένων ἀγαθῶν ἡ καλῶν ἡ τῶν διαφερόντων ἐπ' ἀρετῇ λέγειν ἐπιχειρήσαντες πολὺ καταδεέστερον τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ἄπαντες εἰρήκασιν... καὶ περὶ μὲν τῶν δόξαν ἔχόντων σπάνιον εὑρεῖν ἀ μηδεὶς πρότερον εἴρηκεν, περὶ δὲ τῶν φαῦλων καὶ ταπεινῶν ὅ τι ἄν τις τύχῃ φθεγξάμενος, ἄπαν ἴδιον ἐστιν (Isocrates, *Helenaen encomium* 12-13).

⁷⁴ Margaret M. Mitchell, “The Continuing Problem of Particularity and Universality within the *corpus Paulinum*,” *Studia Theologica*, Volume 64 (2010): 121-137, 128. Pages 126-129 of the article illustrate several approaches Chrysostom takes to critique the uncritical acceptance of categories of worldly praise (especially those things attributed to fortune, e.g. wealth, ancestors, family nobility).

In our judgment, on the other hand, just one native land deserves honor, paradise, the first home of the human race; just one city, the heavenly one, fashioned of living stones (1 Pet 2:5), with God for its creator and builder (Heb 3:4; 11:10); just one excellence of lineage, kinship to God - which no one gets automatically (like a good pedigree [εὐγένεια] in the world's view, which often flows even to the wicked through this automatic succession) but which one acquires in no other way than by free choice (προαίρεσις). "For as many as received him," says the voice of God, "to them he gave the power to become children of God (Jn 1:12)." ⁷⁵

Even as he criticizes them, Gregory cites the major components of a typical *genos*, enumerating narrowing concentric circles of homeland, city, and lineage.

Though only one land may deserve honor, Gregory nevertheless talks about Neocaesarea and its excellent geographical features. He says, "Let no one think that I have nothing honorable to say about the native land or ancestors of the man" (Καί με μηδεὶς οἰέσθω τῷ μηδὲν ἔχειν

σεμνὸν περὶ τῆς πατρίδος, ἢ τῶν προγόνων τοῦ ἀνδρὸς διηγήσασθαι, VGT 8). The land is rich, in that it "is all-producing of everything necessary for life" (ώς πάντων τῶν πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν ἀναγκαίων πάμφορος εἶναι); it is regarded by foreigners with "friendliness" (φιλοφροσύνη). ⁷⁶

But if mentioning such natural felicities would suggest that such things make the exemplar "nobler" (σεμνότερος, VGT 9), they are better ignored. As for family, Gregory writes, "Neither shall I recall in the composition his ancestors, those who set the stage for his birth according to the flesh, nor talk about their wealth or ambition or worldly renown." ⁷⁷ He employs here the rhetorical figure of thought *paraleipsis* (Latin *praeteritio*: providing details about a person or

⁷⁵ τῷ δὲ καθ' ἡμᾶς λόγῳ μία τετίμηται πατρίς, ὁ παράδεισος, ἡ πρώτη τοῦ γένους τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐστία: μία πόλις, ἡ ἐπουράνιος, ἡ διὰ τῶν ζώντων λίθων συνῳκισμένη, ἡς τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργὸς ὁ Θεός: μία γένους σεμνότης, ἡ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν ἀγχιστεία: οὐ κατὰ τὸ αὐτόματόν τινι γινομένη, κατὰ τὴν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ εὐγένειαν, ἡ καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς φαύλους πολλάκις διὰ τῆς αὐτομάτου ταύτης ἀκολουθίας ύστοις φέρεται, ἀλλ' ἦν οὐκ ἐστιν ἄλλως, ἡ ἐκ προαιρέσεως κτήσασθαι. Ὅσοι γὰρ ἔλαβον αὐτὸν, φησὶν ἡ θεία φωνὴ, ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ἔξουσίαν τέκνα Θεοῦ γενέσθαι (VGT 4).

⁷⁶ VGT 8.

⁷⁷ Αλλ' οὐδὲ τῶν προγόνων αὐτοῦ, τῶν προκαθηγησαμένων τῆς κατὰ σάρκα γενέσεως, μηνήμην ἐπὶ τοῦ λόγου ποιήσομαι, πλοῦτον καὶ φιλοτιμίας καὶ τὰς κοσμικὰς περιφανείας αὐτῶν διηγούμενος (VGT 10).

situation in phrasing that suggests you are passing over the topic because it is not worth speaking about).⁷⁸ It is in fact because he can assume that his Neocaesarean audience – who have, after all, gathered to commemorate Thaumaturgus – already knows about Thaumaturgus’ family and homeland that Gregory is able to pass over them so quickly.

Throughout this treatment of the *genos* of Thaumaturgus, however, Gregory takes care to refer back to the role of God, the creator and source of all human life. This addition, which he introduces using Scriptural passages like Heb 3:4 and Jn 1:12, could play an important role for the readers who learn about Thaumaturgus. If they share a common, divine lineage with such an exemplar, there is no excuse based on accidents of family background or access to natural resources that can prevent their own striving for or attaining virtue. Gregory seeks to encourage imitation with remarks on the universality of Thaumaturgus’ origins and lineage, hinting that readers should think of themselves as able to share with the exemplar in “the kinship to God” (ἢ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἀγχιστεία, VGT 4) or “the kinship from on high” (ἢ ἀνω συγγένεια, VGT 10). He adapts the traditional topics of family, nation, and race to propose more expansive definitions of kinship, ways to become “children of God.” There is precedent in the rhetorical tradition for this sort of reformulation. For example, Isocrates’ *Ad Demonicum* praises Demonicus’ father for

⁷⁸ Hermogenes demonstrates how *paraleipsis* can be used in an accusatory fashion, to impugn the character of a defendant: “And if the problem is about an individual, disparaging him by *paraleipsis*, let’s say, ‘I pass over telling how impious and polluted and abominable in all ways the rest of his life has been, so that I may not seem to trouble you in vain if you hear about such things, about which you are not now making judgment...’” (ἄν δὲ ιδιωτικὸν ἢ τὸ πρόβλημα, κατὰ παράλειψιν διασύροντες φήσομεν ἐγώ τὸν μὲν ἄλλον βίον παραλιμπάνω λέγειν ως ἀσεβῆς καὶ ἐνογῆς καὶ κατὰ πάντα ἀποτρόπαιος, ως ἀν μὴ δοκοίην ἐνοχλεῖν ύμᾶς μάτην, περὶ ὧν νῦν οὐ δικάζετε, περὶ τούτων ἀκούοντας, Hermogenes, *De inventione* 2.5.5-10). The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.27, 37 adds that “this figure is useful if employed in a matter which it is not pertinent to call specifically to the attention of others... or because the direct reference would be tedious or undignified, or cannot be made clear, or can be easily refuted” (*Haec utilis est exornatio si aut ad rem quam non pertineat aliis ostendere... aut longum est aut ignobile, aut planum non potest fieri, aut facile potest reprehendi*).

choosing a kinship based on character: “for he considered that in the matter of companionship nature (φύσις) is a much better guide than convention (νόμος), character (τρόπος) than birth (γένος), and freedom of choice (προαίρεσις) than necessity (ἀνάγκη).”⁷⁹ Gregory adapts his presentation of Thaumaturgus’ origins quite self-consciously away from the typical form of a text praising a subject’s *genos* in order to craft instead a universalizing account of origins that allows readers to think of themselves as sharing the exemplar’s *genos*. In this way, Gregory highlights one specific facet of the text’s didactic project: that he intends to mark Thaumaturgus as relevant for audiences beyond his native Pontus. Gregory positions this text in such a way as to set Thaumaturgus as a model for audiences far afield from Neocaesarea in 380 CE, both in time and space.⁸⁰

Not all the points Gregory tries to make in this section of the VGT are so straightforward. Praising the universalizing *genos* he has just crafted for Thaumaturgus, Gregory proclaims, “What could be more excellent than such a pedigree? All that the others have for their lineage are myths and fabrications (μῦθοι καὶ πλάσματα), and deceits of demons mixed up with mythical tales, but our lineage has no need of stories (τῶν διηγουμένων).”⁸¹ All three Greek terms –

⁷⁹ ἡγεῖτο γὰρ εἶναι πρὸς ἔταιρείαν πολλῷ κρείττω φύσιν νόμου καὶ τρόπον γένους καὶ προαίρεσιν ἀνάγκης (Isocrates, *Ad Demonicum* 10).

⁸⁰ He relates Thaumaturgus to his own family and their success in Pontus and Cappadocia; see Van Dam, *Becoming Christian*, 72-81 on Gregory and Basil’s reconstruction of a Christian landscape for Cappadocia, largely informed by their knowledge of Gregory Thaumaturgus and other figures, including those of legend (e.g. Longinus, centurion from the crucifixion, being of Cappadocian extraction). See also Basil’s *Letter 28* and *Letter 204*. In a text that may or may not have been known to Nyssen, Eusebius names Thaumaturgus as a student of Origen (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.30). In an episode I treat in the next chapter, Gregory describes Thaumaturgus’ apparently key role in introducing the church practice of intercessory prayer by bishops on behalf of their congregants (VGT 93).

⁸¹ Τῆς δὲ τοιαύτης εὐγενείας τί ἀν σεμνότερον γένοιτο; Πάτρια δὲ τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις ἄπασι, μῦθοι καὶ πλάσματα, καὶ δαιμόνων ἀπάται συναναμεμιγμέναι τοῖς μυθικοῖς διηγήμασιν· τὰ δὲ ἡμέτερα πάτρια, τῶν διηγουμένων οὐκ ἐπιδέεται (VGT 4-5). Gregory seems to use the substantive adjective δαιμόνιος, α, ον and the noun δαιμών, ονος, ὁ interchangeably, with perhaps a slight preference for the former in VGT (though this passage demonstrates his flexibility); see *LGO*, s.v. “δαιμόνιος” and “δαιμών.”

μῦθος, πλάσμα, and διήγημα – are potentially neutral when used to distinguish types of narrative.⁸² However, they can easily bear negative connotations of fabrication or falsehood, as it appears Gregory intends here.⁸³ In his *Progymnasmata*, Aphthonius insists on a distinction between various types of narrative (διήγημα), not all of which must be truthful, only plausible: “Some narrative is dramatic (δραματικόν), some historical (ιστορικόν), some political (πολιτικόν). Imagined narrative is dramatic; that giving an account of ancient events is historical; what orators make use of for their contests is political.”⁸⁴ But given that Scripture and biblical narrative are so crucial for the “kinship with God” that Gregory recommends to readers, it seems hazardous for him to reject stories altogether. Christians have inherited a legacy that is comprised almost entirely of stories; Gregory himself hopes to contribute stories to the collection by writing his *bioi* of exemplary figures. Is his thinking here unsystematic or inconsistent?

Perhaps. On a generous reading, though, it is not story as such he disdains, but rather

⁸² For example, in the *Progymnasmata* attributed to Hermogenes, μῦθος and διήγημα each receive a short discussion, including information about when an orator might choose to use one or the other to some advantage (Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* 1-2, Rabe 1-6). Consider, as a possible parallel, the positive use of the Latin *fabula* by Cicero in a letter to Lucceius (Cicero, *Ad Familiares* 5.12.6). Bruno Gentili and Giovanni Cerri explain “he introduces the term *fabula* to indicate a historical narrative which would involve the reader, awakening admiration, a sense of expectation, joy, sorrow, hope and fear, in other words a narrative of the monographic type, centred on the achievements and the changing fortunes of a highly significant historical personage rich in emotional tension... In this case, the word characterizes a type of narrative which is very different from that of the ‘annals’ because of the larger amount of emotionality inherent in its unitary and monographic dimension” (Gentili and Cerri, *History and Biography*, 57). For a more thorough picture of how this letter “is carefully designed in many places to celebrate” the “intellectual kinship and camaraderie” of its author and addressee, and the role of literary compliments in that design, see Jon Hall, “Cicero to Lucceius (*Fam.* 5.12) in Its Social Context: *Valde Bella?*” *Classical Philology*, volume 93, number 4 (October 1998): 308-321, esp. 315-316.

⁸³ For a striking example of the negative connotations of μῦθος, see its use by Origen and Eustathius on 1 Kings 28, in Margaret M. Mitchell, “Patristic Rhetoric on Allegory: Origen and Eustathius Put 1 Kings 28 on Trial,” *The “Belly-Myther” of Endor: Interpretations of 1 Kings 28 in the Early Church*, Rowan A. Greer and Margaret M. Mitchell, Writings from the Greco-Roman World, Number 16 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007): lxxv-cxxiii, cxiv-cxvii.

⁸⁴ Τοῦ δὲ διηγήματος τὸ μέν εστι δραματικόν, τὸ δὲ ιστορικόν, τὸ δὲ πολιτικόν· καὶ δραματικὸν μὲν τὸ πεπλασμένον, ιστορικὸν δὲ τὸ παλαιὰν ἔχον ἀφήγησιν, πολιτικὸν δὲ φαρὰ τὸν ἀγῶνας οἱ ῥήτορες κέχρηνται (Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 2, Rabe 2).

story that is invented with the intent to deceive. We might compare this with Plato's objection to mimesis in books III and X of *The Republic*.⁸⁵ Among the Cappadocians, Basil advises young readers to exercise extreme caution when they encounter writers who "fabricate tales for the gratification of their hearers" (ψυχαγωγίας ἐνεκα τῶν ἀκουόντων λογοποιῶσι).⁸⁶ Mimetic art that aims to deceive is to be considered potentially harmful, because it distracts from the more worthwhile pursuit of truth or true understanding. It is the human activity of creating stories and the potentially misguided human intention behind that creation that seem to be the issue. Gregory rejects "story" inasmuch as it is a human fabrication and introduces one alternative source of knowledge that relies on divine activity and intention: the natural world.

The process of interpretation may be performed using the natural world as raw material, as a text that can be read and translated. Immediately Gregory shifts focus from the problematic fabrication of deceptive stories to the positive attributes of divinely-influenced stories. It is here that we catch a glimpse of Gregory's expansive view of "text." These divine tales may refer interpreters back to a deeper reality:

For whoever looks up to heaven and takes in its beauties and all creation with the eye of the soul, all the wonders it can comprehend of such things, will find there the stories (τὰ διηγήματα) of where we come from; or rather not of that native land itself but of the colony which we had colonized from the life above (cf. Phil

⁸⁵ The question of whether or not Plato truly rejects artistic and poetic mimesis is complex. Stephen Halliwell argues "that many passages in Plato do in fact ascribe to visual art a scope which goes beyond the simulation of appearances and has a claim on the attention of more than 'children and stupid adults'... Outside *Republic* x we have encountered three major ideas which can give substance to a view of paintings as something other than mere pseudo-objects, insubstantial simulacra. Those ideas, in summary, are ethical expression, idealisation, and beauty" (Stephen Halliwell, "Plato and Painting," in *Word and Image in Ancient Greece*, edited by N. K. Rutter and Brian A. Sparkes, Edinburgh Leventis Studies [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000]: 99-116. 113). On the compatibility of the definitions of mimesis in books III and X, see Gabriel Richardson Lear, "Mimesis and Psychological Change in *Republic* III," in Herrmann, Fritz-Gregor, and Pierre Destree, eds. *Plato and the Poets* (Leiden: Brill, 2011): 195-216.

⁸⁶ Basil, *Ad adulescentes* 4.6. His pointed use of the term ψυχαγωγία here hints at the possible damage to readers' souls involved in "entertainment" or "gratification" (LSJ, s.v. "ψυχαγωγία").

3:20) before we were given this present world.⁸⁷

The heavenly origin story plays a unifying role for those who know how to interpret the world around them.

Speaking of the created world and its status as an outpost, a mere copy of a heavenly paradise, he applies another metaphor, this one tailored to city dwellers like the Neocaesareans:

But if such is the colony (ἀποικία), think what the metropolis (μητρόπολις) on which it depends must be, what beauty that has, what its palaces are like, what happiness belongs to those who dwell there. For if created phenomena are such as to be beyond praise, what must we think of that which is above them, which the eye cannot see nor the ear perceive nor the mind guess at? (1 Cor 2:9)⁸⁸

He uses the image of a city and its colony to lay out a concept of simultaneous human separation from and connection to the divine source.⁸⁹ That separation, in the wider context of his theology, is an inevitable result of the process of creation and humanity's fall.⁹⁰ However, it is the lesser reality (the colony) that enables created human beings to gain some sense, however imperfect, of what the higher metropolis must be like.

⁸⁷ Εἰς γὰρ τὸν οὐρανὸν τις ιδὼν, καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ κάλλη, καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν κτίσιν τῷ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄφθαλμῷ κατανοήσας, ὅσαπερ ἀν ἐν τούτοις θαύματα καταλαβεῖν ἔξισχύσῃ, ταῦτα τῆς ἡμετέρας πατρίδος εύρήσει τὰ διηγήματα· μᾶλλον δὲ οὐκ αὐτῆς τῆς πατρίδος, ἀλλὰ τῆς ἀποικίας, ἢν ἀπὸ τῆς ὑψηλοτέρας ζωῆς ἀποικισθέντες τὸν παρόντα κατειλήφαμεν κόσμον (VGT 5).

⁸⁸ Εἰ δὲ ἡ ἀποικία τοιαύτη, λογίσασθαι χρὴ τίς ἡ τῆς ἀποικίας μητρόπολις, τί τὸ ἐν ἐκείνῃ κάλλος, οἷα ἐν αὐτῇ τὰ βασίλεια, τίς ἡ μακαριότης τῶν ἐκείνην εὐληχτών τὴν σίκησιν. Εἰ γὰρ τὰ φαινόμενα κατὰ τὴν κτίσιν τοιαῦτα, ώς ὑπὲρ ἔπαινον εἶναι· τί χρὴ τὸ ὑπὲρ τοῦτο λογίσασθαι, ὅ μήτε ὄφθαλμῷ λαβεῖν δυνατόν ἐστι, μήτε χωρῆσαι τῇ ἀκοῇ, μήτε διανοίᾳ στοχάσασθαι; (VGT 5).

⁸⁹ Claudia Rapp argues that many elite Christians in the post-Constantinian period used the model of “the *polis* in all its facets” as a “frame of reference... in order to explain such concepts as ‘belonging’ or ‘community’” (Rapp, “City and Citizenship,” 154). On pp 156-159 of the same essay, she notes earlier uses of the city metaphor in Paul’s letters and other NT texts (e.g., Rev), to the *Epistle to Diognetus* and *Shepherd of Hermas*. On Paul’s use of *politeuma* (πολίτευμα, “citizenship”) in Phil 3:20 as a way to set Christian conduct apart from other forms of conduct displayed by civic groups in Philippi, see Wendy Cotter, CSJ, “Our *Politeuma* is in Heaven: The Meaning of Philippians 3.17-20,” in *Origins and Method: Towards a New Understanding of Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Honour of John C. Hurd*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, Volume 86 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993): 92-104.

⁹⁰ Gregory outlines this theological anthropology elsewhere in his corpus. For a helpful overview of major points in *De hominis opificio*, see Ladner, “The Philosophical Anthropology.”

In Gregory's Christian Neoplatonic ontological and epistemological conception, those *realia* observed in the world can provide mediated access to the heavenly realm of the unseen. By adding the citation of 1 Cor 2:9, Gregory suggests that it should not be surprising within a Christian anthropology that in their current state, human beings cannot directly perceive that which is divine.⁹¹ People must engage with and interpret their natural world through the faculties of the physical senses – with eyes, ears, and mind – to gain some access to unseen truth, always relying on divine help. Human sense perception is implicated in the problematic phenomenon of experiencing distance between the observable and the imperceptible (i.e. *aistheta* and *noeta*).⁹² By bringing before the reader's eyes the whole life of an exemplar who is no longer present and by explaining that the exemplar's activities reveal her deeper motivations, Gregory the biographer renders his narrative composition another piece of the *realia* that refer. Learning to read a *bios* is a task akin to “reading” the natural world and discerning divine truths. Gregory's portrait of Thaumaturgus is closely connected to the accounts of other, biblical exemplars and to the real experiences of readers themselves. Gregory frames this biographical narrative as a potentially familiar story, while nevertheless offering a challenge to the typical way of thinking about story.

2. *Macrina, VSM 2*

Gregory opens the *genos* portion of the VSM with a discussion that weaves together

⁹¹ The fuller context of the quotation within 1 Cor 2, however, suggests that with the help of the Holy Spirit people are able to perceive what is otherwise unseen and incomprehensible.

⁹² The physical senses are extremely complex themselves, sometimes giving access to what is truly present but at other times not, as evidenced in episodes like Gregory Thaumaturgus shielding himself from the sight of pursuing enemies (VGT 85-86) or Macrina's deathbed prayer, during which she looks beyond what is before her eyes to what Gregory presumes is some heavenly scene (VSM 22-25). The role of the senses in both correctly and incorrectly perceiving earthly and heavenly realities is discussed in Chapter 3.

stories about three generations of women: Macrina the Elder, Emmelia, and Macrina herself. The explanation for the exemplar's name is provided first: "There was a certain esteemed Macrina earlier in the family, who was our father's mother, who had borne up bravely for the confession of Christ in the time of the persecutions, for whom the girl was named by her parents."⁹³ Gregory immediately establishes a lineage of devoted Christian belief, extending back through the paternal family line. But he also emphasizes the maternal, describing Emmelia's faith, in part to bolster the legitimacy of what comes next: the report of a divine revelation she received. He assures readers that Macrina's "mother was so great in virtue that in all things she was guided by the will of God, especially embracing the pure and spotless way of life."⁹⁴ It seems likely Gregory presented this information so that it does not come as a surprise that before Emmelia gave birth to Macrina, she experienced a divine dream vision. The vision equates the infant Macrina with yet another virtuous woman: "She [Emmelia] fell asleep and seemed to be holding in her hands the child still in her womb, and a person of greater than human shape and form appeared to be addressing the infant by the name of Thecla (There was a Thecla of much fame among virgins)."⁹⁵

Miraculous portents were considered a regular feature of biographical narration and encomia. Both Hermogenes and Menander advise writers to include information about any signs

⁹³ εὐδόκιμος δέ τις πάλαι κατὰ τὸ γένος ἦν ἡ Μακρίνα, μήτηρ τοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν γεγενημένη, ταῖς ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ ὄμιλογίαις τῷ καιρῷ τῶν διωγμῶν ἐναθλήσασα, ἥ ἐπωνομάσθη παρὰ τῶν γονέων ἡ παῖς (VSM 2).

⁹⁴ τοιαύτη κατ' ἀρετὴν καὶ ἡ μήτηρ ὡς πανταχοῦ τῷ θείῳ βουλήματι χειραγωγεῖσθαι, διαφερόντως δὲ τὴν καθαράν τε καὶ ἀκηλίδωτον τοῦ βίου διαγωγὴν ἀσπασμένη (VSM 2).

⁹⁵ εἰς ὑπνον καταπεσοῦσα φέρειν ἐδόκει διὰ χειρὸς τὸ ἔτι ὑπὸ τῶν σπλάγχνων περιεχόμενον καὶ τίνα ἐν εἴδει καὶ σχήματι μεγαλοπρεπεστέρῳ ἥ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον ἐπιφανέντα προσειπεῖν τὴν βασταζομένην ἐκ τοῦ ὄνόματος Θέκλης, ἐκείνης Θέκλης, ἡς πολὺν ἐν ταῖς παρθένοις ὁ λόγος (VSM 2).

that accompanied the subject's birth, under the topic γένεσις.⁹⁶ Menander includes a few famous examples in his treatise:

If any divine sign occurred at the time of his birth, either on land or in the heavens or on the sea, compare the circumstances with those of Romulus, Cyrus, and similar stories, since in these cases also there were miraculous happenings connected with their birth – the dream of Cyrus' mother, the suckling of Romulus by the she-wolf." (371.5-14)

The most important literary precedent for Gregory must nevertheless be Christ, whose birth was not only marked by an astronomical phenomenon (Mt 2:2, 9) and a dream vision for his foster father Joseph (Mt 1:20-25), but was proclaimed ahead of time to his mother (Lk 1:26-38).

The reference to Thecla's fame trades on readers' probable familiarity with this figure, but does not necessarily rely on a set of texts instead of some oral or liturgical tradition.⁹⁷ Having identified Thecla as a figure prominent within a specific Christian community, Gregory sets Macrina in a continuous line of familiar, imitable exemplars: Christian virgins. Because the similarity cited is at the level of a "way of life" (βίος), Gregory implies that the subsequent narrative will catalogue similarities, but he allows some space for individualization and the resulting differences. Macrina's story is being preserved for readers who can learn from her, and

⁹⁶ Hermogenes writes, "And you will also talk about any worthy wonders that happened at the time of the birth, such as from dreams or signs or such things" (ἐρεῖς δέ τινα καὶ ἀ περὶ τὴν γένεσιν συνέπεσεν ἄξια θαύματος, οἷον ἐξ ὄντεράτων ἡ συμβόλων ἡ τινῶν τοιούτων, Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* 7.23-26). Menander II.371.3-14 similarly advises that the encomiast include "if any divine sign occurred at the time of his birth" (εἴ τι σύμβολον γέγονε περὶ τὸν τόκον, 5). He even suggests that "if it is possible to invent, and to do this convincingly, do not hesitate; for the subject permits this, because the hearers need to accept the encomium without examination" (ἐὰν δὲ οἷόν τε ἡ καὶ πλάσαι καὶ ποιεῖν τοῦτο πιθανῶς, μὴ κατόκνει· δίδωσι γὰρ ἡ ὑπόθεσις διὰ τὸ τοὺς ἀκούοντας ἀνάγκην ἔχειν ἀβασανίστως δέχεσθαι τὰ ἐγκώμια, 11-14).

⁹⁷ See Stephen J. Davis on the cult of Thecla in Asia Minor and especially record of a shrine to "Hagia Thekla" in Seleucia that became a popular pilgrimage site, including for Gregory Nazianzus (Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: a tradition of women's piety in late antiquity* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2001]), esp. 36ff. Though she offers mistaken information about Gregory's reference to Thecla here in the VSM (on page 213 of her article she states that Thecla appeared to Emmelia and that Gregory mentions Thecla's martyrdom and not her virginity), Léonie Hayne traces references to Thecla in authors like Tertullian, Jerome, Gregory, and Evagrius (Léonie Hayne, "Thecla and the Church Fathers," *Vigiliae Christianae*, Volume 48 [1994]: 209-218).

intriguingly, Gregory sets the stage for her deeds by placing her in a pre-existent line of women whose excellence she imitates; the exemplar is herself already a model of mimesis.⁹⁸

What of the reader who would imitate Macrina? While in the VGT Gregory highlighted the role of Thaumaturgus' choice as determinative of his way of life, in the VSM he emphasizes more a complex set of influences that seem to direct Macrina, even before her birth. The family is one influence, direct divine intervention is another, and a regional religious heroine takes third place. Macrina's Christian identity is not left up to fortune or chance; she was born into a religiously distinguished family, yes, but the divine revelation at her birth connects her to a wider Christian tradition that other readers could potentially imitate. Macrina's connection to Thecla may have been divinely sanctioned by a vision, but the "way of life" ($\betaίος$) that they share remains a part of her ethical lineage that readers, too, could grasp.

3. Moses, VM I.16 and II.1-5

The details Gregory provides about Moses' *genos* are spare, a fact that can probably be attributed mostly to the brevity of the biblical account on which he draws.⁹⁹ That is, to a certain extent, the structure and content of Gregory's Scriptural source material is determinative for his authorial *heuresis*. In the *historia*, Gregory devotes just a few lines to noting the occasion of the birth and the reaction of Moses' parents to their child. I quote the entire passage here:

It is said that Moses was born when the law of the tyrant prevented male infants from being kept alive, but that by grace ($\tauῇ χάρτῃ$) he anticipated ($προλαμβάνω$) the whole contribution he would make in time. And because right away he appeared accomplished ($ἀστεῖος$), from the time he was in swaddling clothes, he

⁹⁸ Gregory Nazianzus, in his *In laudem sororis Gorgoniae* 9, compares his sister to a biblical figure, the good woman of Proverbs 31.

⁹⁹ Only Exod 2:1-3 describes Moses' birth, though Exod 1:8-22 details, with some drama, the historical circumstances and Pharaoh's law.

inspired in his parents a hesitation (*όκνος*) to destroy such a child.¹⁰⁰

This presentation makes much of the contrast between Moses and the world into which he is born. His very appearance is striking, and he is attended by grace, so much so that he “inspires” (*ἐμποιέω*) his parents to defy Pharaoh’s orders. As an infant, he anticipates or shows ahead of time (*προλαμβάνω*) that he is destined to make a great contribution to his people, leading them also to defy Pharaoh’s tyranny. What Gregory describes here is a body that reflects not just characteristics of the soul, but capacities or potential within the soul.¹⁰¹

Gregory offers somewhat more detail in the *theoria* account of Moses’ birth, but primarily about how Moses’ *genos* matters for the reader. The opening lines in VM II.1 are a near echo of the *historia* text: “When the tyrannical law had ordered that the males be destroyed, then Moses was born” (“Οτε καταφθείρεσθαι τὸ ἄρρεν ὁ τυραννικὸς διεκελεύετο νόμος, τότε γεννᾶται ὁ Μωϋσῆς, VM II.1). By talking about the tyrannical law rather than the tyrant, Gregory can generalize about customs over time instead of being tied to the specific location of

¹⁰⁰ Λέγεται τοίνυν ὁ Μωϋσῆς τεχθῆναι μέν, ὅτε ζωογονεῖσθαι τὸ ἄρρεν ἐν τοῖς τικτομένοις ὁ τοῦ τυράννου νόμος διεκάλυε, προλαβεῖν δὲ τῇ χάριτι πᾶσαν τὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ χρόνου γινομένην συνεισφοράν· καὶ εὐθὺς ἀπὸ σπαργάνων ἀστεῖος ὄφθεις ὄκνον ἐμποιῆσαι τοῖς γεννησαμένοις θανάτῳ τὸν τοιοῦτον ἔξαφανίσαι (VM I.16).

¹⁰¹ Rhetorical texts are not fully clear on how the body reveals and/or conceals aspects of the soul, how the body can affect the qualities of the soul it holds, and whether or how the attributes of a body are constitutive of virtue. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.6.10 lists “agility, strength, beauty, health, and their contraries” (*velocitas, vires, dignitas, valetudo, et quae contraria sunt*) as “merits or defects bestowed upon the body by nature” (*natura corpori adtribuit commoda aut incommoda*); in an epideictic composition, these attributes can be deployed for praise or blame, since a person being blamed can be censured for misusing natural advantages just as easily as a person being praised can be complimented for conquering physical shortcomings (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.6.14). That is, physical qualities are themselves neutral but can be portrayed as indicating aspects of character, depending on the orator’s needs.

In a similar fashion, Aristotle enumerates physical attributes that contribute to “bodily excellence” (*σώματος ἀρετῆ*): health (*ὑγίεια*); beauty (*κάλλος*), which consists in different qualities for men of different ages and occupations (e.g., young men are beautiful if they are adapted for bodily exertion and speed [*πρὸς βίαν καὶ πρὸς τάχος ἄμα πεφύκασιν*] while adult men are beautiful if they are adapted for the toils of war [*ἄκμαζοντος δὲ πρὸς μὲν πόνους τοὺς πολεμικούς*]); strength (*ἰσχύς*); and excellence of stature (*μεγέθους ἀρετή*) (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1.5.10-13, Bekker 1361b). The assessment of beauty and bodily excellence is hear clearly connected to one’s suitability for necessary tasks, which seems similar to what Gregory talks about in the case of Moses, whose appearance anticipates the good deeds he will perform.

Moses' birth. Indeed, from that point on, Gregory shifts to figurative interpretation, requesting, "Let it [the narrative] be apprehended according to its intention" (Νοείσθω δὲ καθ' ύπόθεσιν, VM II.2). Just what this intention entails becomes clear gradually over the course of VM II.1-5. He claims that "if someone, taking a starting-point from the history (ιστορία), should completely lay bare the riddling text (αἴνιγμα), Scripture teaches (διδάσκει ὁ λόγος) that this birth, which saddens the enemy, is the beginning of the life of doing virtue."¹⁰²

Linking Moses' birth in Egypt to "the beginning of the life of doing virtue" (ἀρχὴν τοῦ κατ' ἀρετὴν ποιεῖσθαι βίον) is no easy feat. He is aware of the difficulties involved and explicitly asks "How shall we, as a matter of choice (ἐκ προαιρέσεως), imitate (μιμησόμεθα) the fortuitous (συντυχικός) birth of the man?"¹⁰³ Gregory attempts to make the connection by explaining the roles of change and choice in human life. First, Gregory associates change with birth, for "it is necessary that what is subject to change is somehow always being born" (Δεῖ οὖν τὸ ἀλλοιούμενον πάντως που ἀεὶ γεννᾶσθαι, VM II.3). On this reading, any transformation is a remaking, a rebirth of sorts. But that remaking does not need to be the result of chance (τὸ συμβάν) like bodily (σωματικῶς) birth. Rather, Gregory asserts, "such a birth occurs by choice" (ἐκ προαιρέσεως ὁ τοιοῦτος γίνεται τόκος, VM II.3). If this is true, then it does indeed paradoxically follow, he says, that "we are in some manner our own parents (έαυτῶν πατέρες), giving birth to ourselves by our own free choice (ἀπὸ τῆς ιδίας προαιρέσεως) in accordance with whatever we wish to be, whether male or female, molding ourselves (διαπλασσόμενοι) to the

¹⁰² ὡς ἂν τις ἐκ τῆς ιστορίας τὰς ἀφορμὰς λαβὸν ἐπὶ τὸ γυμνότερον διακαλύπτοι τὸ αἴνιγμα, τοῦτο διδάσκει ὁ λόγος ἀρχὴν τοῦ κατ' ἀρετὴν ποιεῖσθαι βίον τὸ ἐπὶ λύπῃ τοῦ ἐχθροῦ γεννηθῆναι (VM II.5).

¹⁰³ Πᾶς οὖν τὴν συντυχικὴν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς γέννησιν ἐκ προαιρέσεως ἡμεῖς μιμησόμεθα; (VM II.1).

word of virtue or vice.”¹⁰⁴ Setting up a dichotomy between choice and chance, Gregory strongly emphasizes the role of choice and the will in the pursuit of virtue. As important as the exemplar’s striking bodily appearance was in the *historia*, in the *theoria* things bodily (σωματικῶς) recede to make way for a more focused discussion about qualities of the soul, the attributes of Moses that could be imitated if the readers will it.

Gregory’s assimilation of Moses’ birth to the average person repeatedly choosing a virtuous or vicious way of life is a reflection on *genos* that seeks to render Moses universally imitable. It also helps to justify a non-literal reading of the primary Scriptural text; once again Gregory’s didactic aim affects multiple aspects of his authorial technique. In contrast to the VGT, it is not just the form of the text that is affected, though he does devote a whole portion of the VM text – the *theoria* – to this kind of reading. Rather, Gregory reflects here on the very reading strategies and the hermeneutical principles that shaped his approach to the initial arrangement of the text.

III. Conclusion

In describing the exemplars’ births, Gregory must deal with two tensions. The first is between the particular and the universal characteristics of each exemplar’s life, and the second is between the roles of chance and choice in the beginning of a life of virtue. Gregory proceeds by mapping these two tensions onto one another. It is by singling out the “way of life” that is a matter of choice that one discerns what is universal underneath, behind, or within the

¹⁰⁴ Καὶ ἔσμεν ἔαυτῶν τρόπον τινὰ πατέρες, ἔαυτοὺς οἷους ἀν ἐθέλωμεν τίκτοντες καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ιδίας προαιρέσεως εἰς ὅπερ ἀν ἐθέλωμεν εἶδος, ἡ ἄρρεν ἡ θῆλυ, τῷ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἡ κακίας λόγῳ διαπλασσόμενοι (VM II.3). Verna E. F. Harrison comments on this passage that Gregory has to use a rather unusual meaning of “birth” here for the logic to work: “Unlike a mother’s ordinary childbearing, this is not an event that occurs at one moment but rather an ongoing condition of the soul” (Harrison, “Gender, Generation, and Virginity,” 63.).

particularities of an exemplar’s life, which have been determined by chance.

Gregory frames the project of discovering that which is universally imitable in terms of introducing innovations into the familiar. In the VGT, he juxtaposes familiar generic features with his own claims to narrative creativity; he appeals to a different, godly rule for writing to explain his move away from a more typical discussion of *genos*. In the VM, Gregory comments on the work of textual interpretation, a task that is shared by the author who interprets and the readers who are invited to join him in his task, at least by reading along. Familiar texts, in the hands of an informed interpreter, reveal their true meaning to new readers. In the VSM, Gregory does not express any discontent with the regular form of a *genos*, and he makes Macrina’s religious devotion familiar by attaching it to familial and regional precedents. Yet the divine erupts into Macrina’s young life and pronounces her secret name.

Gregory artfully varies between following, challenging, and even defying generic conventions to craft portraits that he hopes can offer the readers some “benefit.” He builds into the opening of each *bios* reflections about how the sort of innovation and interpretation he models pays off: it can lead to the identification of aspects of the exemplar’s way of life ($\beta\acute{\iota}\circ\zeta$), especially virtues, that a reader could “translate” into her own life, through choosing to perform virtuous deeds. Making the virtues of the exemplar recognizable for readers is work that takes place at the tightly woven junction between readers’ expectations about standard generic features of a *bios*, the particular events and circumstances in the exemplar’s life, and the biographer’s own aims.

In his *prooimia*, Gregory describes his own compositional work in terms that prioritize cooperation between the author and his addressees. Particularly through the use of striking figurative language, Gregory asserts that each *bios* mediates an encounter with some singular

subject; the text is a beacon that points to an exemplary figure, who is herself pointing toward a more broadly imitable “way of life.” The reader is competing in a race for virtue, sailing towards the harbor of virtue, or simply looking to preserve a record of a truly excellent person. Second, Gregory has shaped the *genos* portion of each *bios* to facilitate that reader imitation which he calls “translation” of the subject’s example into the reader’s life (VM I.3), by presenting ethical imitation as dependent upon textual interpretation, on a process of discerning the universal in the particular. Gregory shapes the openings of his *bioi* in ways that suggest he wishes his readers to identify themselves as interpreters. The ideal reader will engage with the virtuous subject Gregory has depicted. The subjects’ very origins point beyond particular life circumstances toward broader forms of kinship – with Scriptural exemplars and with members of contemporary Christian communities – in which ideal readers may participate.

With the help of the God who is true, perfect goodness (VM) and the Spirit who empowers humans to live virtuously (VGT), with proof of divine intervention (VSM), Gregory composes *bioi* that could point toward divine perfection. Gregory seeks to guide and direct readers’ interpretation of these exemplary lives, beginning by stating his didactic goals in the *prooimion* of each *bios* and by adapting the encomiastic *kephalaion* of *genos* to cast the readers as interpreters who may learn to become “translators.” Gregory directs the reader toward proper (or at least beneficial) modes of interpreting the textual record. One way the biographer can use his texts to inspire exemplary behavior is through seeking to direct his readers to practice exemplary reading.

Chapter 2. Raising an exemplar: *anatrophe* and exemplary *paideia*

Her mother was eager to educate the child, but not in that outside and secular paideia, which meant, for the most part, teaching the youngsters through poetry... Instead of this, whatever of divinely inspired Scripture was adaptable to the early years, this was the child's subject matter, especially the Wisdom of Solomon and, beyond this, whatever leads to a moral life.

The Life of Saint Macrina 3.¹

...just as Scripture says about Moses, “He was schooled in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,” so also the Great One, coming through all the schooling of the Greeks and knowing by experience the weakness and incoherence of their doctrines, came to be a student of the gospel.

The Life of Gregory Thaumaturgus 14.²

This teaches, it seems to me, that if we should be involved with profane teachings during our education, we should not separate ourselves from the nourishment of the Church's milk. This is the Church's laws and customs, by which the soul is nourished and matured, thus being given the means of ascending the height.

The Life of Moses II.12.³

Gregory depicts his exemplars-in-training as students who participate in a process of education that entails reading, especially the divinely revealed Scriptures, and life in a community centered around gospel values. Macrina reads the divinely inspired (θεόπνευστος) Scriptural texts that lead to virtue, under the guidance of a mother intent on cultivating wisdom and virtue. Thaumaturgus leaves behind the “incoherence” (ἀσύντατος) of Greek learning in favor of gospel teaching. Moses, too, once subjected to Gregory's allegorical eye, models the importance of supplementing secular education with training in the gospels, within the Church.

¹ Ὡν δὲ τῇ μητρὶ σπουδὴ παιδεῦσαι μὲν τὴν παιδα, μὴ μέντοι τὴν ἔξωθεν ταύτην καὶ ἐγκύκλιον παιδευσιν, ἦν ὡς τὰ πολλὰ διὰ τῶν ποιημάτων αἱ πρῶται τῶν παιδευομένων ἡλικίαι διδάσκονται.... Άλλ' ὅσα τῆς θεοπνεύστου γραφῆς εὐληπτότερα ταῖς πρώταις ἡλικίαις δοκεῖ, ταῦτα ἦν τῇ παιδὶ τὰ μαθήματα καὶ μάλιστα ἡ τοῦ Σολομῶντος Σοφία καὶ ταῦτης πλέον ὅσα πρὸς τὸν ἡθικὸν ἔφερε βίον.

² καθὼς περὶ τοῦ Μωϋσέως φησὶν ἡ Γραφὴ, διτὶ ἐπαιδεύθη πάσῃ σοφίᾳ τῶν Αἰγυπτίων· οὔτως καὶ ὁ Μέγας οὗτος, διὰ πάσης ἐλθόν τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων παιδεύσεως, καὶ γνοὺς τῇ πείρᾳ τῶν παρ' αὐτοῖς δογμάτων τὸ ἀσθενὲς καὶ ἀσύντατον, μαθητής τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καθίσταται.

³ τιθηνούμενος, ὅπερ μοι δοκεῖ διδάσκειν, εἰ τοῖς ἔξωθεν λόγοις καθομιλοίημεν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς παιδεύσεως, μὴ χωρίζεσθαι τοῦ ὑποτρέφοντος ἡμᾶς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας γάλακτος. Τούτο δ' ἂν εἴη τὰ νόμιμά τε καὶ τὰ ἔθη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, οἵς τρέφεται ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ ἀδρύνεται, ἐντεῦθεν τῆς εἰς ὑψος ἀναδρομῆς τὰς ἀφορμὰς ποιουμένη.

Examining the portrayal of each exemplar's training, I address several questions about our three texts. How and when does Gregory depict education in the *bioi*? How does he seek to connect training to the virtuous traits of each exemplar's soul? What images does he use to describe training, and why might these images be consistent or vary within and across the three texts? Next, can we reconstruct the contours of an idealized, exemplary *paideia* by attending to depictions of educational practices in the three *bioi*? Finally, how is the literary portrayal of each biographical subject's educational program related to actual fourth-century educational practices, and how do similarities and differences affect the potential imitability of the program described, for members of Gregory's real and ideal audiences?

I. *Anatrophe*: transformation and constancy

A. Raising an exemplar

Gregory first describes the education of each exemplar alongside the other events of her upbringing, events typically classified under the *kephalaion* of *anatrophe* (ἀνατροφή).⁴ This term bears a range of meanings, from basic alimental “nurture” to the more general “rearing” and even quite precisely “education.”⁵ Authors of the *progymnasmata* outline major categories of qualities and events related to upbringing that should be treated in an encomium.⁶ Aphthonius’ taxonomy delineates three subjects that should be treated under the heading *anatrophe*: “habits” (ἐπιτηδεύματα), “trade” (τέχνη), and “principles” (νόμοι, probably best taken to refer to the subject’s self-regulation rather than external laws).⁷ Hermogenes calls for the discussion of

⁴ Throughout, I transliterate in italics or translate this term as “upbringing.”

⁵ LSJ, s.v. “ἀνατροφή,” “ἀνατρέφω.”

⁶ Among Latin authors, see especially Cicero in *de Inventione* I.25, where he enumerates, among other items, who the exemplar has as friends (*In virtu considerare oportet... quibus amicis utatur*).

⁷ Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8, Rabe 22.

“nurture” (ἡ τροφή) and “upbringing” (ἡ ἀγωγή), the latter of which he further divides into “how [the subject] was guided, or how educated” (πῶς ἦχθη ἢ πῶς ἐπαιδεύθη).⁸ Menander Rhetor gives a more full guide, explaining what sorts of information might fall under a given category. For example, under “education” Menander advises, “You must speak of his love of learning, his cleverness, his zeal for study, his easy grasp of what is taught him. If [he excels] in literature, philosophy, and knowledge of letters, you must praise this...”⁹ The events traditionally associated with *anatrophe* are treated by Gregory in the three *bioi*, and they can be found in VSM 3-4,¹⁰ VM I.17-19 and II.6-18,¹¹ and VGT 11-22.

Particularly through its description of the young exemplar’s childhood and upbringing, an encomiastic biography participates in a wider ancient conversation about what it means to be educated, specifically to be trained in virtue.¹² As Margaret M. Mitchell points out in her study

⁸ Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* 7, Rabe 16.

⁹ ἔρεις τὴν φιλομάθειαν, τὴν ὁξύτητα, τὴν περὶ τὰ μαθήματα σπουδήν, τὴν ράδίαν κατάληψιν τῶν διδασκομένων. κανὸν μὲν ἐν λόγοις ἡ καὶ φιλοσοφίᾳ καὶ λόγων γνώσει, τοῦτο ἐπαινέσεις... (Menander II.371.27-30).

¹⁰ As will be seen below, the events that shape Macrina’s soul continue through her adolescence and adulthood, up through VSM 14, where Gregory shifts to his encounter with her at the end of her life. The description of her youthful pursuits ends in VSM 4, but in the broadest sense of *anatrophe* as training, an argument could be made for viewing all of VSM 3-14 together.

¹¹ The division of material between descriptions of *genos* and *anatrophe* in VM I is particularly thorny. The account of events from Exodus 2 is in such epitomized form that it is possible to read the description of both as extending over just two paragraphs: VM I.16-17. VM I.18 also begins with what looks like a transition away from the discussion of upbringing: “After he had already left the age of childhood and had been educated in outside *paideia* during his royal upbringing...” (Ἐκβάς δὲ ἥδη τὴν ἡλικίαν τῶν πατίδων, ἐν βασιλικῇ τῇ τροφῇ καὶ παιδευθεὶς τὴν ἔξωθεν παίδευσιν...). However, here a comparison of the two accounts in the text is helpful. VM II.6 is more clearly marked as the transition from a discussion of birth to nourishment; in the first sentence, Gregory in fact uses the noun *τροφή* to explain what parents are obligated to provide for their child. Therefore I have taken the material about Moses’ dual parentage in VM I.17 as the beginning of his upbringing. The end of the section is also more easily distinguishable in the *theoria*. Gregory still subsumes Moses’ move to live with “the foreigner” (ἀλλόφυλος, that is, his father-in-law) under the umbrella of education and instruction, exegeting the foreigner as ἔξω σοφία (VM II.17). He starts II.18 with “in the same way” (οὕτως), suggesting it is a summarizing paragraph. All discussion in I.18-19, of events up through Moses’ move to live in Midian, then, I am reading as pertinent to *anatrophe*.

¹² These are points made cogently by Averil Cameron and Paul Magdalino (he writes about a 10th century context). See Averil Cameron, “On defining the holy man,” in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. James Howard-Johnston and Paul Anthony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 27-43 and Paul Magdalino, “What we heard in the Lives of the saints we have seen

of John Chrysostom's portraits of Paul, a key assumption in this conversation is “the ancient ethical and pedagogical theory which held that learning takes place by imitations of exemplary figures.”¹³ Yet Gregory's description of imitation as “translating” (μεταφέρειν) in VM I.3 suggests just how complicated this imitation must be, practically speaking. What is it about the exemplars' upbringing and training that could be imitated, and what needs to be translated first?

One complication for creating an imitable portrait arises from the limitations of a narrative for depicting the process of education. In the portrayal of an exemplar's *anatrophe*, there is an essential tension between what we might today call nature and nurture.¹⁴ On the one hand, the text can offer evidence that the exemplar being described possesses virtues throughout his life and can display them to others in any circumstance.¹⁵ On the other hand, the text can also

with our own eyes’: the holy man as literary text in tenth-century Constantinople,” in Howard-Johnston and Hayward, eds., *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, 83-112.

¹³ Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 49. See further pages 49-55 on this topic.

¹⁴ This is similar to the pairing “chance vs. choice” discussed in Chapter 1. I use these terms to refer to what the text depicts, not to the way most ancients thought of actual anthropological development, for most philosophy held that virtuous qualities had to be instilled and cultivated. Aristotle, in *Ethica Nicomachea* 2.1-3, for example, states quite clearly that the capacity for virtue belongs to humans by nature, but that the virtues themselves must be added to a person, through education (for the intellectual virtues) or through habit (for the moral virtues): “Since there are two kinds of virtue, the intellectual and the moral, the intellectual has its origin and increase largely from teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time). But the moral is the result of habit” (Διττῆς δὲ τῆς ἀρετῆς οὐσης, τῆς μὲν διανοητικῆς τῆς δὲ ἡθικῆς, ἡ μὲν διανοητικὴ τὸ πλεῖον ἐκ διδασκαλίας ἔχει καὶ τὴν γένεσιν καὶ τὴν αὔξησιν, διόπερ ἐμπειρίας δεῖται καὶ χρόνου, ἡ δὲ ἡθικὴ ἐξ ἔθους περιγίνεται, Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* 1103a.14-17). See also Françoise Frazier, *Histoire et Morale dans les Vies Parallèles de Plutarque*, Collection d'Études Anciennes, Série grecque 124 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1996), 78-80 on *physis* and *paideia* in Plutarch: “Rubrique obligée, la *paideia* forme aussi avec la *physis* un couple de notions complémentaires susceptible de rendre compte du caractère. La nature et l'éducation contribuent à faire du héros ce qui il est: cela n'est guère original, mais il est plus intéressant de noter combien Plutarque néglige le faire au profit de l'être” (Frazier, *Histoire et Morale*, 78, emphasis hers).

¹⁵ We might think especially of the early childhood leadership of Cyrus in Xenophon's biography (e.g., his early knowledge and application of justice in Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* I.3.16-17), Plutarch's portrayal of a precocious Alexander entertaining envoys to his father's court (Plutarch, *Alexander* 5.1-3), and Luke's presentation of Jesus teaching Jewish elders in the Temple (Lk 2:46-50). Additional examples of children displaying hints of their mature qualities early on may be found in Greek art, especially in depictions of mythological heroes like Herakles, who is shown throttling snakes in his cradle (to demonstrate his strength of body) or murdering his tutor Linos (to illustrate his hot temper). For these and other illustrations, see John H. Oakley, “Child Heroes in Greek Art,” *Heroes: Mortals and Myths in Ancient Greece*, ed. Sabine Albersmeier (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009): 66-87.

describe the specific contours of an education that might not be reproducible but which changed the exemplar's qualities of soul, mind, and body in significant ways.¹⁶

One approach to dealing with this tension is to create stereotypical portraits that privilege specific virtuous qualities that could be possessed by subjects and readers alike. A long-standing assumption in the study of ancient biography, that *bioi* depict a static or innate human character, is articulated by David Aune in an essay on Greco-Roman biography. He writes that

individual personalities were assumed to be as fixed and unchanging as the kinship groups and the social and political units within which they were enmeshed. Greco-Roman biographies, therefore, are more idealistic than realistic. Consequently, the subjects of most ancient biographies are depicted as static personalities presented as paradigms of either traditional virtues or vices, rarely as a mixture of both.¹⁷

Ancient ethical theory, from Aristotle through our period, indeed focuses around a remarkably standard catalog of virtues, the four cardinal ones being wisdom (φρόνησις), temperance (σωφροσύνη), justice (δικαιοσύνη), and courage (ἀνδρεία). Gregory himself develops an ideal portrait of a Christian in his treatise *De perfectione*; the true Christian is one whose life is able “to display all the interpreted terms of the designations for Christ, some through imitation, others through worship” (πάντα τὰ ἐρμηνευτικὰ τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ σημασίας ὄνόματα ἐπιλάμπειν... τὰ

¹⁶ This tripartite breakdown among *praxeis* is featured in Aristotle, Aelius Theon, Hermogenes, and Aphthonius, and will be addressed in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4, which deal specifically with *praxeis*.

¹⁷ David E. Aune, “Greco-Roman Biography,” *Greco-Roman Literature and the New Testament: selected forms and genres*, ed. David E. Aune, SBL Sources for Biblical Study 21 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988): 107-126, 110. See also D.A. Russell on biographies of the poets: “It is in general true that the Greeks and Romans thought of a man's *bios* more statically and less dynamically than we do, and inclined always to view his actions and his words as revelations of an underlying, comparatively unchanging nature” (D.A. Russell, *Criticism in Antiquity* [London: Bristol Classical Press, 1995], 163).

μὲν διὰ μιμήσεως, τὰ δὲ διὰ προσκυνήσεως).¹⁸ However, biographical writing and portraiture, in contrast to ethical treatises, is demonstrably concerned with the fine-grained, the particulars of a figure’s life. As Plutarch famously writes in his introduction to the *Life of Alexander*, “a slight thing like a phrase or jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall.”¹⁹ It is the particularities that reveal the subject’s soul. Even if the geography in which Moses lived is extraneous and need not be imitated by a reader of the VM in order for that reader to mimic Moses’ virtue, nevertheless the details of his upbringing with the daughter of Pharaoh must be described.²⁰

Christopher Pelling’s description of an “integrated” depiction of the human person in Greco-Roman biography helpfully explains the tension between generality and specificity as one that leads not so much to “stereotype” as to “type:”

The differing elements of a character are regularly brought into some sort of relationship with one another, reconciled: not exactly unified, for a character cannot be described with a single word or category, and is not a stereotype; but one element at least goes closely with another, and each element predicts the next.²¹

Using examples mainly from Plutarch’s *Lives*, Pelling contrasts this integrated view of the person with a modern interest in individuation and complexity of character. He notes that the

¹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *De perfectione* GNO 30.178.15-17. These designations include kingship, peace, true light, and redemption, terms which Gregory defines with reference to Scripture, especially the Pauline corpus. On the Christology of this treatise, see Elizabeth Agnew Cochran, “The *Imago Dei* and Human Perfection: the Significance of Christology for Gregory of Nyssa’s Understanding of the Human Person,” *The Heythrop Journal*, Volume 50 (2009): 402-415. A more general discussion of the idea that, for Gregory, the Christian life follows a consistent path modeled on the life of Christ, may be found in Rowan A. Greer, assisted by J. Warren Smith, *One Path for All: Gregory of Nyssa on the Christian Life and Human Destiny* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015).

¹⁹ Plutarch, *Alexander* 1.1-2.

²⁰ See the discussion of VM I.14 in Chapter 1.

²¹ Christopher Pelling, “Childhood and Personality in Biography” in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. Christopher Pelling (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990): 213-244, 235.

ancient biographical concern for exemplarity is one factor that helps explains the emphasis on character and character types.²² As a caveat, Pelling articulates the crucial point that “the integrating assumptions clearly went very deep, and it would be facile to derive them from a straightforward interest in the exemplary.”²³ That is, the biographer’s choices and the resulting portraits do not undermine an understanding of virtues as true constants that could be grasped.

On the specific topic of *anatrophe*, Pelling (among others) notes that the integrated view of personality led ancient biographers to portray the childhood education of eminent cultural figures²⁴ as explanatory; upbringing explains the presence or absence of virtuous traits in an adult person.²⁵ While encomiastic *bios* as chronological narrative is demonstrably structured in a way that makes it natural to present any development of the virtues as a “flowering” of existing natural qualities and does not often explicitly describe the moment they are learned or implanted, this is a literary framing rather than an attempt to accurately present the anthropological phenomenon of human development.²⁶ Given Gregory’s didactic aims, the sub-category of

²² Pelling, “Childhood and Personality,” 237.

²³ Pelling, “Childhood and Personality,” 240. He also notes instances when Plutarch seems invested in a sort of individuation of his subjects, which may correspond more closely to Gill’s definition of “personality” than character. Nevertheless, Pelling remarks that Plutarch’s “analysis does not go very deep” for our modern sensibilities, because the biographical subjects do conform to and represent character types (228-230).

²⁴ Pelling maintains Leo’s distinction between political and cultural/literary biography types, though he recognizes the overlapping or blurring of these categories in some particular biographical instances. See also Joseph Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos*, 1-15 for some of the problems with Leo’s taxonomy; he lays out his objections to the “Peripatetic-Alexandrian” divide and suggests his own division along “political-intellectual” and “chronological-thematic” lines instead. See pp 217-221 of “Childhood and Personality in Biography” for Pelling’s discussion.

²⁵ Pelling, “Childhood and Personality,” 240.

²⁶ An example of how natural aptitudes for excellence can in fact flower in unexpected and inimical directions appears in Lucian’s *Alexander the False Prophet*. Lucian writes about Alexander’s positive qualities that in fact lead to evil and vicious actions: “In understanding, quick-wittedness, and penetration, he was far beyond everyone else; and activity of mind, readiness to learn, retentiveness, natural aptitude for studies ($\pi\tau\circ\varsigma\tau\alpha\mu\alpha\theta\mu\alpha\tau\alpha\epsilon\circ\varphi\mu\nu\epsilon\varsigma$) – all these qualities were his, in every case to the full. But he made the worst possible use of them ($\dot{\epsilon}\chi\rho\eta\tau\delta\epsilon\alpha\mu\tau\alpha\epsilon\varsigma\tau\alpha\chi\epsilon\mu\tau\sigma\tau\alpha\tau\alpha\tau\alpha$), and with these noble instruments ($\ddot{\sigma}\rho\gamma\alpha\tau\alpha\tau\alpha\gamma\epsilon\mu\alpha\tau\alpha\alpha\tau\alpha\alpha\tau\alpha$) at his service soon became the most perfect rascal of all those who have been notorious far and wide for villainy ($\dot{\epsilon}\pi\tau\alpha\kappa\alpha\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha$)” (Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* 4, transl. A.M. Harmon, LCL edition). Even in the case of Alexander, however, education had some role to

paideia within the depiction of an exemplar's upbringing and subsequent life offers compelling material for studying how Gregory envisions the influence early training might have on the development of virtuous character and how it undergirds each exemplar's display of virtues. Our study must also consider the practical *realia* of elite fourth-century Christian education and catechesis, and their probable influence on Gregory's portrayal of each exemplar-in-training.

Finally, it must be noted that the unavoidable narrative tension, for Gregory, is even less straightforward than the much-discussed tension between nature and nurture, because both of these are subsumed under the larger category of a Christian and Neoplatonic anthropology of human beings who are divinely created, fleshly, ensouled, sinful, and saved. Not only must he navigate the question of innate and implanted virtues, but he must do so in light of a theology that features *epektasis*, ongoing (indeed, never-ending) progress toward perfection. In the *bioi*, how does Gregory grapple with the tension between nature and nurture, between the soul that is evidently virtuous and the soul that must always be striving toward new and greater virtue?

B. Macrina: gold and the athlete

Macrina is portrayed as a student whose learning arises from and responds to her life circumstances, especially the experience of loss. Gregory describes his sister's reaction to Basil's death in 379 CE²⁷ with a combination of similes that emphasize the significance of this and other traumatic life experiences for her training and for her ability to demonstrate her status as an

play, for Lucian makes sure to point out that he was a student of a follower of Apollonius of Tyana, adding the editorial comment, "You see what sort of school the man that I am describing comes from!" (5).

²⁷ Maraval proposes a date of 377 for the death of Basil (followed by Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion*), Anna Silvas proposes September 378 (Anna M. Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, 39), but most scholars retain the traditional date of early 379, just prior to the ecumenical council at Constantinople in 381, at which Gregory seems to have distinguished himself (e.g., Daniélou, "Introduction," 11). For Basil's dates see Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, especially chapter 3.

exemplar of virtue:

When Macrina, from afar, heard the news [of his death] in a report, her soul was greatly disturbed by so great a loss (How could this suffering fail to touch her? Even the enemies of truth were affected by it.).²⁸ But, just as they say that the examination of gold happens in different furnaces, that if something gets through the first firing and is separated in the second and, in the last is finally cleansed of all impurity - this is the most accurate proof of true gold if, after all this firing, no impurity remains - something similar also happened for her. When her exalted intelligence had been put to the test by the different attacks of grief, the unadulterated and undebased quality of her soul was revealed in every way; first in the departure of her other brother, after this in the separation from her mother, and, in the third instance, when Basil, the shared honor of the family, departed from human life. She remained like an unconquerable athlete, in no way overcome by the onslaught of events.²⁹

Like gold, Macrina is purified and refined over the course of her life, until the simplicity of her soul's goodness becomes apparent. The image of stripping away excess to reach a pure inner core highlights the cumulative effects of her training. It is only after a series of trials that her virtue can be confirmed by outside observers. Through the metalworking image, Gregory shows that life experiences refine the raw matter (ἡ ὕλις) of an exemplar's character. There is some pure gold, some essential goodness present all along in Macrina's character, and it can be fired,

²⁸ Probably a reference to Eunomius, Basil's target in the *Contra Eunomium*. Gregory himself picked up Basil's task of refuting Eunomius after Basil's death, completing two volumes in the mid-380s. This situation is confirmed in what appears to be a letter to his brother Peter: "When the holy Basil fell asleep and I inherited the controversy of Eunomius..." (ἐπειδὴ κατ' αὐτὴν τοῦ ἀγίου Βασιλείου τὴν κοίμησιν τὸν τοῦ Εὐνομίου λόγον ὑπεδεξάμην, *Epistle* 29.4, GNO Online 33.87.22-24.).

²⁹ Ή δὲ πόρρωθεν ἐκ φήμης ἀκούσασα τὴν συμφορὰν ἔπαθε μὲν τὴν ψυχὴν ἐπὶ τῇ τοσαύτῃ ζημίᾳ (πῶς γὰρ οὐκ ἥμελλεν ἀπτεσθαι κάκείνης τὸ πάθος, οὐ καὶ οἱ ἐχθροὶ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐπήσθοντο;). Καθάπερ δὲ τὴν τοῦ χρυσοῦ φασι δοκιμασίαν ἐν διαφόροις γίνεσθαι χωνευτηρίοις, ὡς εἴ τι τὴν πρώτην διαφύγοι χωνείαν, ἐν τῇ δευτέρᾳ διακριθῆναι, καὶ πάλιν ἐν τῇ τελευταίᾳ πάντα τὸν ἐμμεμιγμένον ρύπον τῇ ὕλῃ ἀποκαθαίρεσθαι, τὴν δὲ ἀκριβεστάτην εἶναι βάσανον τοῦ δοκίμου χρυσοῦ, εἰ διὰ πάσης διεξελθόν χοάνης μηδένα ρύπον ἀποποιήσειε· τοιοῦτόν τι καὶ ἐπ' ἔκείνης συνέβη, ταῖς διαφόροις τῶν λυπηρῶν προσβολαῖς τῆς ὑψηλῆς διανοίας βασανισθείσης πανταχόθεν ἀναδειχθῆναι τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀκινδήλευτόν τε καὶ ἀταπείνωτον, πρότερον μὲν ἐν τῇ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τοῦ ἄλλου μεταστάσει, μετὰ ταῦτα δὲ ἐν τῷ χωρισμῷ τῆς μητρός, ἐκ τρίτου δὲ ὅτε τὸ κοινὸν τῆς γενεᾶς καλόν, Βασίλειος, τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ζωῆς ἐχωρίζετο. Έμεινε τοίνυν καθάπερ τις ἀθλητὴς ἀκαταγώνιστος, οὐδαμοῦ τῇ προσβολῇ τῶν συμφορῶν ἐποκλάσασα (VSM 14).

cleansed, and subjected to tests that uncover its purity.³⁰

As a result of the passage's major focus on the purified essence, it may appear that Gregory thinks of his sister's qualities as innate, situating himself firmly on the "nature" side of a nature-nurture dichotomy, perhaps disregarding the importance of education and practice. The virtue Macrina displays has been part of her soul all along. However, the combination of the refinement simile with subsequent reference to an athlete proves that matters are more complicated in Gregory's conception of *how* virtues inhere in the soul.

While outside circumstances reveal Macrina's inner state and serve as proof of her virtue, this metaphor works by creating an external perspective – a view from outside – that readers may adopt; Gregory casts himself in the role of a near-omniscient narrator who explains narrative events to a group of observers. From such a vantage point, the circumstances of Macrina's life can be seen as revealing constant, underlying, or innate qualities; events do not change her but only strip away anything that was obscuring a clear view of her qualities. The image of repeated firings to reveal a pure core, therefore, privileges a synchronic view of Macrina's life. Over time,

³⁰ As early as the fifth century BCE, the Greek rhetorician Isocrates drew on the language of purity to talk about virtues in the soul. In his *Ad Demonicum*, Isocrates claims "But the posession of virtue, when it grows up with us in our understanding without alloy (ἀκιβδήλως, typically used of gold), is the one thing that grows old together with us; it is better than riches and more useful than high birth" (Ἡ δὲ τῆς ἀρετῆς κτῆσις οἷς ἀν ἀκιβδήλως ταῖς διανοίαις συνανξηθῇ, μόνη μὲν συγγηράσκει, πλούτου δὲ κρείττων, χρησιμωτέρα δ' εὐγενείας ἔστιν). Gregory's contemporary, the preacher John Chrysostom (347-407 CE), employs a similar image of refined gold to talk about Christian perfection and purification: "For as fire purges away impurity from gold, thus affliction purges souls, making them pure, fashioning them as shining and bright" ("Οπέρ γὰρ τῷ χρυσίῳ τὸ πῦρ, τοῦτο, ἡ θλῖψις ταῖς ψυχαῖς, τὸν ρύπον ἀποσμήχουσα, καθαροὺς ἐργαζομένη, λαμπτροὺς κατασκευάζουσα καὶ φαιδρούς, John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians* 26 [PG 580]). In this homily on 2 Corinthians, Chrysostom bemoans the loss of days when Christian faith was honed by persecution, as opposed to the present age of peace that has allowed believers to become complacent; he laments that contemporary believers' lives are not characterized by the furnace-like affliction that could refine a soul. He goes on to claim that Christians who undergo suffering from illness without turning to "demonic" aids like amulets and Jewish cures are somehow participating in a martyr-like endurance, allowing the affliction to refine their souls. Gregory, too, suggests that really quite ordinary forms of suffering - in this case, loss of loved ones - could perform the necessary refining function for Christian souls.

her virtuous soul has been revealed “in every way” (*πανταχόθεν*). Nevertheless, the image hints at an alternative, diachronic perspective of Macrina as a person whose soul undergoes actual development, who must endure each test.

Gregory’s simile comparing Macrina to an unconquerable athlete draws attention to how Gregory thinks Macrina experiences the process of testing and purification. Transformative exercise (*ἀσκησις*) facilitates the constancy external observers see. Asceticism as “a way of life that requires daily discipline and intentionality in bodily behaviors” for Christians of late antiquity indeed takes its roots from the more broadly athletic application of *ἀσκησις*, meaning athletic training, exercise, practice, or discipline, mainly for the purpose of self-improvement.³¹ The athletic simile, while it still situates Macrina as an object of scrutiny, reframes that scrutiny using a narrative vantage point more internal to the exemplar’s experience; the passage indicates that she attained a virtuous state through intentional discipline and that she must have done work over time to be ready for this contest with the foe, grief.

Athletic similes and metaphors appear frequently in both classical and biblical texts, where they are most often used to describe persistent self-discipline. The link between athletic discipline and moral excellence was deeply embedded in classical and Hellenistic Greek culture. One representative example from Lucian of Samosata’s (c. 125-180 CE) *Anacharsis* articulates

³¹The definition quoted here is from Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 6. Associated terminology for Christian abstinence and temperance, such as *ἐγκράτεια* and *σωφροσύνη*, do not as strongly indicate an athletic background, although they certainly do appear in texts on *ἀσκησις* as virtues proper for someone in training (*LSJ*, s.v. “*ἐγκράτεια*,” “*σωφροσύνη*”). *γυμνάσιον* (along with the feminine *γυμνασία*) is used to describe the bodily exercises that are part of athletic training, as well as the school itself where these exercises take place (*PGL*, s.v. “*γυμνασία*,” “*γυμνάσιον*”). Gregory uses *γυμνάσιον* figuratively as a means of preparing for virtuous life (*De professione Christiana* GNO Online 29.129.16) and for death (*De mortuis* GNO Online 34.53.4) (*LGO*, “*γυμνάσιον*”). It is significant here that Gregory emphasizes not an attitude or orientation (however dynamic) but the persona of an athlete acquired through active and complex training, since he is focusing on creating the portrait of his biographical subject.

this link. The text features the legendary Greek lawgiver Solon defending Greek devotion to gymnastic athletic training against the ridicule of the foreign sage Anacharsis.³² Anacharsis, portrayed here as a stereotypical barbarian obsessed with war, cannot understand how athletic contests prepare the Greeks for military victory. Solon replies with a long account of the exercises and concludes, “And when I told you of a common good and of the high happiness of the *polis*, it is that at any time, both in peace and in war, the youth might appear exceptionally fitted out, eager for our highest goods.”³³ Solon asserts the importance of athletic discipline for virtuous achievement in military and other arenas.³⁴

Athletic ἀσκησις and victory in the athletic contest (ἀγών) is a frequent metaphor for philosophical self-mastery. Facing one’s own death and dealing with grief are considered ideal scenarios for practicing the philosophical discipline of self-control (ἐγκράτεια). Beginning with the pre-Socratic tradition³⁵ and extending into subsequent strains of Platonic,³⁶ Cynic, and Stoic teaching, there is a basic concept of preparing oneself to face suffering and death without being overcome (the *ars moriendi*).³⁷ Indeed Cynic moral philosophy insists that “purely physical

³² Anacharsis, a Scythian royal and philosophical visitor to Greece in the 6th century BCE, is encountered elsewhere in Herodotus *Histories* 4.76 and as one of the seven sages in Diogenes Laertius *Bioi* 1.101ff. On this text and athleticism, see Jason König, “Lucian and Anacharsis: *gymnasion* education in the Greek city,” *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 45-96.

³³ καὶ ὅπερ ἔφη τὸ κοινὸν ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὴν ἄκραν πόλεως εὐδαιμονίαν, τοῦτ’ ἔστιν, ὅπότε εἰς τε εἰρήνην καὶ εἰς πόλεμον τὰ ἄριστα παρεσκευασμένη φαίνοιτο ἡ νεότης περὶ τὰ κάλλιστα ήμιν σπουδάζοντες (Lucian, *Anacharsis* 30).

³⁴ Gregory’s brother Basil is clearly aware of this connection. In *Ad Adulescentes* 2.6, he likens the introductory stages of training a young man to interpret Scripture to “imitating those who perform their drills in military tactics, who, after they have gained experience by means of gymnastic exercises for the arms and dance-steps for the feet, enjoy, when it comes to combat, the profit derived from what was done in sport” (transl. Roy J. Deferrari, LCL edition).

³⁵ See Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif: Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 16 (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 25.

³⁶ For accounts of Socrates on self-discipline, see especially the *Phaedo*; the image of the charioteer and team from *Phaedrus* (echoed by Gregory in *De Anima*) reflects equestrian contests.

³⁷ See Uta Poplitz, *Athlet des Evangeliums: Eine motivsgeschichtliche Studie zur Wettkampfmetaphorik bei Paulus*, Herders Biblische Studien 43 (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 167-171, for a comparison between the portrayal of the

exercise must first be transferred to the spiritual plane, or mental plane, before it has any moral value.”³⁸ The Stoic ideal of impassibility (*ἀπάθεια*) is described as the result of self-discipline and practice; Marcus Aurelius calls the sage an “athlete in the greatest athletic contest” (*ἀθλητὴς ἀθλού τοῦ μεγίστου*) in his second-century CE *Meditations*.³⁹

The philosophical valence of self-discipline also appears in Christian texts about martyrdom. Martyrologies like those of the North Africans Perpetua and Felicitas (early third century CE) or the Roman Agnes (late third to early fourth century CE) reinforce the Christian conviction that resurrection awaits believers who follow Christ into sacrificial death.⁴⁰ Gillian Clark rightly points out that

The martyr may be shown declaring that what is done to his or her body does not affect the soul, but the suffering of the body is of central importance: it is not a temporary and finally irrelevant anguish, left behind as the triumphant soul ascends to God, but a glorious demonstration of God’s power manifested in what seems most vulnerable, human flesh and blood.⁴¹

Christian theologians delivering eulogies or writing consolatory letters advise believers to

athlete and the Cynic philosopher Diogenes in the writings of Dio Chrysostom; the two share essential forms of self-discipline, but the philosopher excels by extending his *ἀσκησις* throughout his lifetime (ein ganzes Leben lang), while the athlete trains only for the duration of the games (die Zeit der Spiele; Poplutz, *Athlet des Evangeliums*, 167.).

³⁸ Pfitzner, *Paul and Agon Motif*, 28. Diogenes Laertius references two types of *ἀσκησις*, the *ψυχική* and the *σωματική*, in his *Vitae Philosophorum* 6.70. Dio Chrysostom’s two orations on the boxer Melancomas praise both his physical beauty and the beauty of his soul, characterized by self-control (*σωφροσύνη*) and “courage” (*ἀνδρεία*, Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 28.12 and *Oration* 29.8-9). Cf. also the passage from Lucian’s *Anacharsis* discussed above. On Dio Chrysostom and the relationship between athletics and virtue, see König, *Athletics and Literature*, especially Chapter 3, “Models for virtue: Dio’s ‘Melankomas’ orations and the athletic body,” pp 97-157.

³⁹ Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 3.4.3. For more on Marcus Aurelius and Roman Stoicism, see Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). On Epictetus, *ἀπετήτη*, and athletics, see A. A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁰ For Perpetua and Felicitas, see text and translation in Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). For Agnes, see Ambrose, *Concerning Virginity* 2-5 (composed 377 CE) and Prudentius, *Liber Peristephanon* 14 (composed late fourth-century CE).

⁴¹ Gillian Clark, “Bodies and Blood: Late Antique debate on martyrdom, virginity and resurrection” in *Body and Gender, Soul and Reason in Late Antiquity*, Variorum Collected Studies Series 978 (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2011), 106. See also Lucy Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2004).

respond to loss and grief with a self-control empowered by firm belief in the resurrection.⁴²

The passage also echoes biblical instantiations of the athletic metaphor, which similarly link training and achievement. Gregory seems to draw upon Paul's analogy between athletic self-control and moral continence in 1 Cor 9:24-27 and his self-portrait as a runner in Gal 2:2.⁴³ The Pastoral Epistles' image of an athlete adhering to rules and receiving a crown (2 Tim 2:5) captures the need for discipline and emphasizes the goal of such discipline.⁴⁴ Of particular importance for Gregory is the striving for perfection described in Phil 3:12-14, verses he connects to the human desire to see God and to *epektasis*, the creature's eternal progress toward perfection.⁴⁵ These examples from the New Testament epistles represent a range of ways athletic discipline was applied to signify spiritual development and liturgical conduct.⁴⁶ This dual application likewise appears in Philo of Alexandria's works, where he frequently portrays the biblical patriarchs (including Moses) as victorious athletes of virtue.⁴⁷ Like an athlete who

⁴²See, for example, two letters of Basil to a couple who had lost their son: *Epistle 5 To Nectarius* 2 (including allusion to 1 Thess) and *Epistle 6 To the Wife of Nectarius* 2 (including reference to Mt 10:29 and an exhortation to the mother to bear up like a martyr, on the model of the Maccabean mother). Gregg, *Consolation philosophy* is a study of Cappadocian thought about mastering and overcoming grief that addresses the overlap of classical and Christian strains directly: Greek and Christian paideia both functioned "as complementary resources, both indispensable for a full articulation of their [Cappadocian] φιλοσοφία" (219).

⁴³Cf. also the runner in Gal 5:7, Rom 9:16, and Phil 2:16. For a thorough study of Paul's usage of the athletic metaphor and its background in Greco-Roman and Hellenistic Jewish texts, see Poplutz, *Athlet des Evangeliums*.

⁴⁴ See the Christ-believing community as crown in Phil 4:1 and 1 Thess 2:19. Interestingly, Gregory employs the image of discipline (*paideia*) generating a reward of peaceful fruit from Hebrews 12:11 at VM II.193, commenting on the significance of the pomegranates that adorn the priestly garments. When he explains why the priests do not wear sandals, he insists it is so they are not "weighed down for the race" (ώς ἀν μὴ βάροιτο πρὸς τὸν δρόμον) toward virtue (VM II.201). This complex of interlocked scriptural examples reflects the prominence of the link between *paideia* and *askesis* in Gregory's thought.

⁴⁵ See further Chapter 3.

⁴⁶ On athletic metaphors and the ὄγών motif in Pauline epistles, see Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*; Robert L. Seesengood, *Competing Identities: The Athlete and the Gladiator in Early Christianity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006). For the athletic and gladiatorial motif in the Corinthian correspondence specifically, see Cavan W. Concannon, "Not for an Olive Wreath, but Our Lives": Gladiators, Athletes, and Early Christian Bodies," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, number 1 (2014): 193-214.

⁴⁷ For Philo's uses and a comparison with Stoic uses, see Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*. Moses is an athlete in VM I.48.

disciplines the physical body, Macrina practices taming grief with reason, exercising her rational faculties so that she can face challenges of increasing difficulty without being overcome.⁴⁸ This athletic simile of VSM 14, in its historical and literary context, thus certainly evokes an ongoing educational process that involves effort and facilitates internal development. Gregory attempts to stage an encounter for the audience with Macrina as “personality” transformed.

As Gregory depicts it, life experience is responsible for shaping Macrina’s virtuous soul, and the traumatic losses described in the VSM can be understood as specific external circumstances that reveal a quality she possessed because of training. This portrayal of Macrina shows us that, although history is described such that an external event reveals a subject’s inherent quality, events are so described as the result of compositional choices, and not necessarily in a way that reflects deep-seated conceptions of human character as static. When a *bios* is arranged thematically (as in Philo’s *Vita Mosis*), the systematic literary framework overrides a holistic portrayal of the subject’s slow development or learning process.⁴⁹ An encomiastic biography with a chronological narrative structure, like the VSM, is demonstrably arranged in a way that presents development of the virtues as a flowering of recognizable qualities; though such a work might not often explicitly describe the exact moment virtues are

⁴⁸ The particular attribute Gregory applies to Macrina’s athleticism, “unconquerable” (ἀκαταγόνιστος), should be viewed alongside an intriguing parallel in Eusebius’ report about the martyrs of Lyons and Vienne. The martyr Blandina, though she is “small and weak and contemptible,” is described as having put on “Christ the great and unconquerable athlete” (ἡ μικρὰ καὶ ἀσθενῆς καὶ εὐκαταφρόνητος μέγαν καὶ ἀκαταγόνιστον ἀθλητὴν Χριστὸν ἐνδεδυμένη) in the midst of her trials; by imitating Christ’s death, she shares in his victory over death (Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.1.42). Blandina’s Christlike endurance and repeated victories over the Adversary are praised as a potential source of inspiration for the other believers, just as Macrina’s excellence is meant to inspire. On the athletic metaphor in Blandina’s story, see Robert Paul Seesengood, “Apelythēsan: Perpetua, Blandina, and the literary description of martyrdom as athletic triumph in early Christian proto-hagiography” in Seesengood, *Competing Identities*, 85-109.

⁴⁹ This may help to account for the differences Pelling sees between “political” lives and “literary” or “cultural” lives in terms of the emphasis biographers place on early childhood exploits and education (more common in “literary” than “political” *bioi*).

learned or implanted, this can be understood, in part, as a result of narrative choices aimed at capturing complexity.

This practice of marking both constancy and transformation in the exemplar's portrait can also be related to Gregory's concern for offering readers an imitable exemplar. Christopher Gill, in his work on portraits in Greek epic and tragedy, proposes making a distinction between depictions of "character" and of "personality" in these literary texts, in an attempt to account for the experience of texts' imagined audiences.⁵⁰ Gill associates "character" with "the process of making moral judgments," which involves "(i) placing people in a determinate ethical framework and (ii) treating them as psychological and moral 'agents', that is, as the originators of intentional actions for which they are normally held responsible and which are treated as indexes of goodness or badness of character."⁵¹ The complement in our *bioi* is Gregory holding his exemplars up as models, whose virtuous decisions and activities he identifies as intentional and indicates are admirable. "Personality," on Gill's definition, is "connected... with a response to people that is empathetic rather than moral"; the subject described is treated as a unique individual who may be appraised from a subjective point of view and who may be seen (though not necessarily) "as someone whose nature and behaviour are determined by forces which fall

⁵⁰ "Principally I have in view the related topics of the audience's assumptions (deployed in the reading of 'character-markers'), and the audience's responses to the figures thus characterized. To be more exact, I am concerned with trying to define the kinds of assumptions and responses which the works themselves seem to expect, rather than with the assumptions and responses which we, as contemporary readers, tend to provide, or with the history of such responses in classical scholarship" (Christopher Gill, "The Character-Personality Distinction" in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. Christopher Pelling [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990]: 1-31, 8). For an earlier formulation of the argument, see Christopher Gill, "The Question of Character-Development: Plutarch and Tacitus." *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, volume 33, number 2 (1983): 469-487. A more recent expanded version (with more specific textual evidence) is found in Christopher Gill, *Personality in Greek Epic, Tragedy, and Philosophy: The Self in Dialogue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

⁵¹ Gill, "The Character-Personality Distinction," 2.

outside her control as an agent and perhaps outside her consciousness as well.”⁵² When Gregory portrays the exemplars as students, he presents them subjectively and at the same time extolls them as models: external forces have the power to change their traits. Gill argues that portrayals which invite readers to consider both character and personality are present in other Greek literature and may both appear in a single text (he refers especially to Greek tragedy⁵³). If this is the case, the type of exemplar Gregory depicts – one who models universally imitable virtue while simultaneously embodying individual and contextualized forms of that virtue – is at home in this wider *milieu* of Greco-Roman literature.

This point is important first because it helps us situate the *bioi* and their subjects quite comfortably within a longer literary tradition, including the tragic tradition, which (theorists like Aristotle held) has the potential to inspire audience reflection and transformation.⁵⁴ Second, if we acknowledge that an ancient author may present subjects in varying ways to achieve different effects for his imagined audience, we can better explain the way Gregory combines apparently contradictory metaphors when he portrays our three exemplars as students whose souls are transformed by training. The simultaneous emphasis on constancy and transformation in the description of Macrina’s *anatrophe* is best viewed as a deliberate choice by Gregory, likely

⁵² Gill, “The Character-Personality Distinction,” 2.

⁵³ See especially Gill, “The Character-Personality Distinction,” 17-29.

⁵⁴ Aristotle provides his basic definition of tragedy, with attention to its cathartic effects, at *Poetics* 1449b. On a related, interesting note, in the same work Aristotle identifies the entire impetus for poetry (including drama) as the mimetic impulse natural to human beings, who, he says, learn by imitating (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448b). Bruno Gentili and Giovanni Cerri comment particularly on the emotional component of mimesis: “But this relation of emotionalism, which established itself in the performance of a poetic text, would not be understandable without the idea of mimesis, which was at the base of Greek conception of poetic creation: mimesis as bringing back to life through words, music, gesture and dancing, or a mythical or human action or a natural phenomenon. A mimetic process which transmits itself to the listener under the form of emotional participation” (Gentili and Cerri, *History and Biography*, 19).

designed to render her experience familiar to Gregory's ideal readers and make her a sympathetic figure who continually works to make progress. By incorporating metaphors that emphasize both "character" and "personality" into his portrayal of this encomiastic *kephalaion*, Gregory attempts to manage the tension between nature and nurture as influences on virtue while showing an exemplar whose continual progress (*epektasis*) is also to be imitated.

C. Moses: fighting for virtue

In VM I.17-19, Moses is described in ways that focus on constancy: he is raised and educated by Egyptians, but his true identity is as a Hebrew. Gregory suggests that even the infant Moses behaves in ways that reflect his nature: he "naturally refused the foreign nipple" (ἀποστραφεὶς δὲ φυσικῶς τὴν ἀλλόφυλον θηλήν, VM I.17) and had to be nursed by his biological mother instead. This variation on the events of Exod 2:7-9, which do not say anything about Moses rejecting Pharaoh's daughter, reveals that Gregory manipulates the biblical text, choosing to narrate particular details in order to make statements about Moses' innate qualities.

Similarly, when Moses fights the shepherds who threaten Jethro's daughters at the well in Midian (Exod 2:17), Gregory privileges the synchronic view of Moses' virtue. Gregory's narrative commentary on Moses' encounter with his future father-in-law, the priest of Midian who serves as an external witness, seems to assume that one may discern the exemplar's developed traits in a single moment from an external vantage point. After leaving Egypt, Moses became the son-in-law of one of the foreigners, a man with insight into what is noble and perceptive in judging the habits and lives of men. This man from one act - I mean, of course, his wrath against the shepherds – gained insight into the virtue of the young man, how he fought on behalf of the right without looking for

personal gain.⁵⁵

Moses' father-in-law is able to identify Moses' motivations and traits on the basis of a single incident. Drawing attention again to training that affected Moses' virtue, Gregory maintains that Moses acted as he did because he "considered the right valuable by its own nature."⁵⁶ The action is the product of previous training and the capstone of Moses' upbringing. In the arc of the narrative, it also sets the stage for further deeds Moses will undertake on behalf of the people.

When he discusses Moses' upbringing in the *theoria* portion of the VM, Gregory incorporates language and images that tend to emphasize transformation and Moses as personality. Moses rejects the nourishment Pharaoh's daughter can offer him because he is setting an example for Christians among Gregory's contemporaries: it is by the teachings of the Church that "the soul is nourished and matured, making from this the starting point of the upward ascent" (τρέφεται ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ ἀδρύνεται, ἐντεῦθεν τῆς εἰς ὕψος ἀναδρομῆς τὰς ἀφορμὰς ποιουμένη, VM II.12). Without such training, the soul is undernourished, perhaps even malnourished, and immature; the way Gregory formulates this passage assumes that development can and must take place.

In the *theoria*, the tension between constancy and transformation, which audiences might experience as a toggling between Moses' character and personality (respectively, using Gill's terminology), comes to a head in a series of three battles. Moses is both a warrior and the one who is fought over, which means he must train for battle and that the outcome with respect to his

⁵⁵ κηδεύσας τινὶ τῶν ἀλλοφύλων, ἀνδρὶ διορατικῷ τοῦ βελτίονος καὶ κρίνειν ἥθη τε καὶ βίον ἀνθρώπων ἐπεσκεμμένῳ, ὃς διὰ μιᾶς πράξεως, λέγω δὴ τῆς κατὰ τῶν ποιμένων ὄρμῆς, ἐνιδῶν τοῦ νέου τὴν ὄρετήν, ὅπως οὐ πρὸς οἰκεῖον βλέπων κέρδος τοῦ δικαίου ὑπερεμάχησεν (VM I.19).

⁵⁶ αὐτὸ τὸ δίκαιον τίμιον τῇ ιδίᾳ φύσει κρίνων (VM I.19).

soul's virtue is not decided ahead of time.

The first battle, described in VM II.13-15 is between ancestral religion, which Gregory also calls the “doctrines of the fathers” ($\tauὰ πάτρια δόγματα$) and those “outside doctrines” ($\tauὰ ἔξωθεν δόγματα$) that belong to “the one who is a foreigner when it comes to worship” ($ὁ κατὰ τὴν θρησκείαν ἀλλόφυλος$).⁵⁷ As Moses kills the Egyptian who threatens to harm a Hebrew slave, his nature battles with his nurture, and nature wins out when he defends the Hebrew. Gregory also connects Moses’ deeds directly to a display of virtue. On Gregory’s reading, this first battle is also one between virtue and “the one attacking virtue from the other side” ($τὸν ἐκ τοῦ ἐναντίου τῇ ἀρετῇ ἐπεμβαίνοντα$), and it is a fight over who or what gains control of the human soul (VM II.15).

The second battle is one that takes place internally, within the soul of each person. Moses intervenes between two Hebrews to prevent their fighting (Exod 2:13). In the *historia*, Gregory explained that Moses encouraged them to exercise reason rather than passion, illustrating that Moses already possessed superior reasoning faculties (VM I.18). Yet in the *theoria*, at VM II.16, Gregory admits the possibility that “deluded calculations” ($πεπλανημένοι λογισμοί$) and the vauntings of “the inferior” adversary ($ὁ χείρων$) might threaten to overwhelm even someone who wants “to give the victory to what is righteous” ($δοῦναι τῷ δικαίῳ τὸ κράτος$). The one who is not strong enough to withstand the battle on his own is advised, like Moses, to flee “to the greater and higher teaching of the mysteries” ($πρὸς μείζονά τε καὶ ὑψηλοτέραν τῶν μυστηρίων διδασκαλίαν$). By admitting human weakness into the discussion, Gregory appears to be remarking on the role of ongoing training, aided by divine support, in the life of someone who

⁵⁷ VM II.13.

pursues virtue. He presents Moses' struggle in terms that allow for *epektasis*.

The final battle is one in which Moses the warrior distinguishes between alternative applications of learning and wisdom. In this reading of the events at the well, Gregory no longer talks about how an observer recognized Moses' virtue. Instead, he offers an exhortation to guide "our" conduct in an encounter with "outside wisdom" (ἔξω σοφία). Like Moses, "in this way let us convict the wicked shepherds for their unjust use of the wells and scatter them – which means reproving the teachers of evil for their wicked use of education."⁵⁸ Gregory has depicted an exemplar who has progressed from the early days of his upbringing. At first he made a right choice for himself alone, preferring the nourishment of his mother (a figure of the Church) to that of a foreign woman. In his early battles, the exemplar had to flee from inimical forces and seek the support of divine teachings. Now, Moses has matured to the point where he can fight against those wicked teachers who would mislead others. Like an athlete, he has been shaped by the discipline of successive contests.

D. Thaumaturgus: plants and husbandry

Describing Thaumaturgus' upbringing, Gregory weaves together images from the natural world and two arenas of human endeavor to depict the exemplar's virtuous traits. Gregory writes that

... he showed from the very first what he would be like at full maturity. And just as the best seedlings, when they rise quickly from first growth to straight young saplings, already give their growers promise of their later beauty, so too he, at an age when for others the soul is in great danger on account of ignorance, since youth more often than not slides easily down toward frivolous and stupid things - at that point, by the first choice of his own life, he made visible in his own person that David speaks truly: 'The just will flourish like the palm tree.' For this tree

⁵⁸ καὶ τοῦτο ἐλώμεθα τοὺς πονηροὺς ποιμένας τῆς ἀδίκου τῶν φρεάτων χρήσεως ἀποσκεδάσαντες, ὅπερ ἐστὶ τοὺς τῶν κακῶν διδασκάλους ἐπὶ τῇ πονηρᾷ χρήσει τῆς παιδεύσεως διελέγξαντες (VM II.17).

alone grows up from the earth with its crown full-sized, and as it grows in height receives no increment to its breadth with the passage of time. So he too flourished from his first appearance, emerging perfect and mature immediately in the choice of his life. For, forsaking all that youth goes wild over - riding, hunting to hounds, jewelry, clothes, gambling, luxurious living - he was from the first complete in the possession of the virtues, consistently choosing what was best for his age.⁵⁹

In a certain sense, in this passage the whole of the exemplar's life is laid out before readers; the promise of virtue we see in this textual introduction comes, Gregory says, to fulfillment over the course of the subsequent narrative. "The just will flourish like the palm tree," a citation of Psalm 92:12, identifies one of the generally recognized human virtues (justice, δικαιοσύνη)⁶⁰ and explains one way witnesses may recognize that a subject possesses this virtue: the just will flourish. The image of plant growth suggests that Thaumaturgus' virtue increases in its recognizability and scope of influence but remains unchanged in its fundamental qualities. It is always the same virtue, even in its earliest lived incarnation. The figure suggests that the exemplar possesses some inborn virtue, and Thaumaturgus is a consistently virtuous figure whose praiseworthy qualities can be easily identified.

But the figurative language, which emphasizes character over personality, comes at a cost

⁵⁹ ἔδειξεν εὐθὺς παρὰ τὴν πρώτην, οὗτος ἐν τῷ τελείῳ τῆς ἡλικίας γενήσεται. Καὶ καθάπερ τὰ εὐγενῆ τῶν βλαστημάτων, ὅταν ἐκ πρώτης αὐξήσεως εἰς εὐθυγενεῖς ἀναδράμῃ τοὺς ὄρπηκας, προδείκνυσι τοῖς γηπόνοις διὰ τῆς παρούσης ὥρας τὸ εἰς ὕστερον κάλλος· τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον κάκεῖνος, ὅτε τοῖς ἄλλοις ὑπὸ ἀγνοίας περισφαλής ἐστιν ἡ ψυχὴ, πρὸς τὰ μάταιά τε καὶ ἀνόνητα κατολισθαινούσης προχείρως ὡς τὰ πολλὰ τῆς νεότητος· τότε διὰ τῆς πρώτης τοῦ βίου αἰρέσεως, ἔδειξεν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ τὸν Δαβὶδ ἀληθεύοντα, ὅτι Δίκαιος ὁς φοῖνιξ ἔξανθήσει. Μόνον γὰρ δὴ τούτο τῶν δένδρων τελείῳ τῷ πάχει τῆς κορυφῆς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἀναφύεται· καὶ τῆς κατὰ τὸ μῆκος ἐπιδιδούσης αὐξήσεως, οὐδεμίαν ἐπὶ τὸ πλάτος προσθήκην ἀπὸ τοῦ χρόνου δέχεται. Οὕτω κάκεῖνος ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης ἥνθησε βλάστηση, εὐθὺς τῇ αἰρέσει τοῦ βίου τέλειος ἀνασχὼν καὶ ὑψίκομος. Πάντων γὰρ ἀποστάτας, περὶ ἀ τὸ νέον τῆς ἡλικίας ἐπτόηται, ἵππικῆς, κυνηγεσίων, καλλωπισμάτων, ἐνδυμάτων, κυβείας, τρυφῆς· εὐθὺς ὅλος τῆς τῶν ἀρετῶν κτησεως ἦν, τὸ πρόσφορον ἀεὶ τῆς παρούσης αὐτῷ ἡλικίας καθεξῆς προαιρούμενος (VGT 11).

⁶⁰ Gregory is not particularly creative in his catalog of human virtues; the standard list from any number of Aristotelian and Platonic philosophical texts would have been well-known to his reading audience. This fact will help us draw another line of continuity between Gregory and other biographers: he is not the only author of *bioi* who takes advantage of his readers' existing conceptions of virtue to craft portraits of subjects that model interpretation. That Gregory's catalog of virtues is also rooted in (or at least finds confirmation in) Scripture marks him as an author concerned to show that biblical texts should be part of the reader's interpretive apparatus.

when we remember Gregory's thoughts on *epektasis*. Thaumaturgus' virtue becomes visible through his choices, but those choices are themselves presented as having been dictated by pre-existing virtues. When he avoided all the pitfalls of youthful indulgence, Gregory asserts that Thaumaturgus was "consistently choosing" the best options for himself because he was "from the first complete in the possession of the virtues." In this case the exemplar is shown to be recognizably excellent, if only stereotypically described: even as a young man, he is the very model of complete, mature virtue. Therefore it is difficult to see how Thaumaturgus could be an imitable figure. Does he not advance or progress? Gregory's text may point out a virtue for readers, but how should readers acquire mature virtue for themselves?

Reinforcing the impression that Thaumaturgus does not experience transformation, Gregory only very briefly describes Thaumaturgus engaging with teachers. Attaching himself to Origen, "in this way he showed not only his love of learning and love of hard work but also the serenity and moderation in his character; for while he was full of such great wisdom he did not disdain to use another teacher for the divine topics of learning."⁶¹ That Thaumaturgus submitted to any formal education at all, the passage suggests, just demonstrates he already possessed virtuous traits, which prove he does not truly need further education in virtue. And yet the horticultural image of a palm tree that emerges from the ground and continues to grow suggests that if readers were to adopt a vantage point that attends to Thaumaturgus' subjective experience (i.e. to consider him from the perspective of Gill's "personality"), the gradual growth of the palm tree or the real-time course of *paideia* might reflect discipline and transformation.

⁶¹ δεικνὺς καὶ διὰ τούτου, οὐ μόνον τὸ φιλομαθὲς καὶ φιλόπονον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ κατεσταλμένον ἐν τῷ ἥθει καὶ μέτριον· τοσαύτης γὰρ σοφίας ἀνάπλεος ὃν ἐτέρῳ χρήσασθαι διδασκάλῳ πρὸς τὰ θεῖα τῶν μαθημάτων, οὐκ ἀπηξίωσεν (VGT 22).

Thaumaturgus' portrait becomes still more complicated when we consider that just before this comment about teachers, Gregory lauds Thaumaturgus for his self-control: "Did he not wrestle down his nature by reason, and harness youth to thought like some domesticated animal, and become superior to all the natural passions which are awakened, and set in motion against himself the envy which grows up against all good people?"⁶² The reference to harnessing recalls the tasks of animal husbandry. Pairing pastoral imagery with the more urban athletic simile of a wrestler, Gregory crafts a portrait of personality, complementary to the natural growth of the palm tree. The repeated juxtaposition of nature (noun: φύσις) or the natural (adjective: φυσικός) with Thaumaturgus' conditioning highlights effort and discipline. In fact, virtue is so much a product of self-discipline that the vice of envy can be depicted as something that "grows up" (ἐπιφύω) in response as a matter of course! It is not only the end result of virtuous behavior that matters; the ongoing process which enables such a result is just as praiseworthy.

E. Conclusion

In all three *bioi*, Gregory uses the apparent opposites of constancy and transformation together to present education and training as fundamental aspects of the exemplar's young life. Thinking of the *bios* as a woven garment, we might think of constancy and transformation as raised or recessed stitches woven with a single strand. Depending on the position of the viewer's gaze, different stitches are more prominent in different narrative moments, and a given episode may be seen as an opportunity to highlight recognizable virtue or, alternatively, as a space for recreating subjective experience. Presenting a sequence of episodes, like Moses' battles, or

⁶² Ὡς τῷ λόγῳ καταπαλαίσας τὴν φύσιν καὶ καθάπερ τι τῶν ὑποχειρίων ζώων ὑποζεύξας τῷ λογισμῷ τὴν νεότητα, καὶ πάντων τῶν φυσικῶν ἐπεγειρομένων παθημάτων κρείττων γενόμενος, καὶ τὸν πᾶσι τοῖς καλοῖς ἐπιφυόμενον φθόνον καθ' ἑαυτοῦ κινήσας... (VGT 19).

images, like Thaumaturgus as wrestler and palm tree, may be a way for Gregory to depict a subject's diachronic transformation, even if individual passages do not all reflect the subject changing. The weaving model of composition allows us the freedom to see beyond simple opposition to complementarity and multivocality within the *bios*, to better appreciate Gregory's creative handling of biographical tensions.

In these three texts, training – whether formal training or a reasoned response to some combination of revealed truths and life circumstances – does have a transformative effect on the character and virtues of the student-subject. The images of refined gold and growing plants invite readers to focus on demonstrated virtuous qualities, while at the same time Gregory incorporates the athletic simile and husbandry metaphor in an effort to reveal that these virtues have been honed through the subjects' efforts, with the result that the virtues are equal to examination and scrutiny (the δοκιμασία of VSM 14). Gregory appears to take for granted that readers might wish to perform this sort of scrutiny. Accordingly, in the description of each exemplar's upbringing he shifts between narrative vantage points so the exemplar could be viewed as both personality and character, as a figure who participates in the *epektasis* that is part of the Christian's pursuit of virtue.

II. Developmental stages and modes of learning: an analytic

Gregory's seriousness about the theme of *paideia* is shown in the fact that he does not merely relegate it to the conventionally expected section on *anatrophe* early in the respective works. In a whole range of episodes in Gregory's descriptions of their *praxeis*, the exemplars learn and teach. What does education look like in these texts? The “when” and “how” of education within and across the *bioi* can be studied by attending to narrative structure and by considering broad categories of educational techniques.

A. Three developmental stages

In each of his *bioi*, Gregory shows the subjects progressing through an educational *cursus* plotted in relation to three stages of education, corresponding roughly to major divisions within the relatively standard Greco-Roman hebdomadal system of seven life stages (childhood, maturity, and old age are the primary three).⁶³ In his youth (stage 1), the subject displays an early aptitude for virtuous action. This stage, for our *bioi*, is synonymous with the period of *anatrophe* or upbringing. As noted above, stage 1 for Macrina is described in VSM 3-4, for Moses in VM I.17-19 and VM II.6-18, and for Thaumaturgus in VGT 11-22. Next the subject takes a period of retreat (stage 2); upon reaching adulthood, each of the subjects withdraws from the wider world to better focus on divine realities. Gregory describes this second stage in VSM 5-11, VM I.20-22 and VM II.19-53, and VGT 23-27. After this retreat, the older and now mature subject emerges to engage with his community in a new role as a teacher, educating others (stage 3).⁶⁴ Stage 3 for

⁶³The seven stages, in their Greek terminology, are *παιδίον*, *παιδίς*, *μειράκιον*, *νεανίσκος*, *ἀνήρ*, *πρεσβύτης*, *γέρων*. For a helpful overview of the hebdomadal system including the major Greek sources and their echoes in New Testament literature, see R. Larry Overstreet, “The Greek Concept of ‘Seven Stages of Life’ and Its New Testament Significance,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19.4 (2009) 537-563. For a more detailed treatment, see Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Life: From Conception to Old Age* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990). According to Diogenes Laertius, Pythagoras held an atypical four-part division: “He divides man’s life into four quarters thus: ‘Twenty years a boy, twenty years a youth, twenty years a young man, twenty years an old man; and these four periods correspond to the four seasons, the boy to spring, the youth to summer, the young man to autumn, and the old man to winter,’ meaning by youth one not yet grown up and by a young man a man of mature age” (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* VIII.10, transl. R.D. Hicks, LCL edition). The tripartite division of youth, adulthood, and old age seems to correspond well to the organization of society using a “two-generational principle” especially for military service and public office-holding; “Age,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*, ed. John Roberts (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), accessed January 11, 2016, DOI:10.1093/acref/9780192801463.001.0001. Scholars have also recognized that Gregory uses the three stage model in his eulogy for Basil, as well as the VGT. See Andrea Sterk, “On Basil, Moses, and the Model Bishop: The Cappadocian Legacy of Leadership,” *Church History*, Volume 67, Number 2 (June 1998): 227-253, esp. 233-234.

⁶⁴ Returning briefly to VSM 14 and VGT 19, I would note that the Macrina whose soul is recognizably refined gold has reached the third stage and adopted her role as teacher and model for members of her community and of the text’s audience. Gregory’s descriptive remark that “the genuine and undebased quality of her soul was revealed in every way” (*πανταχόθεν ἀναδειχθῆναι τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀκιβδήλευτόν τε καὶ ἀταπείνωτον*) indicates that because of what she has experienced, her virtue is now available for public consumption in a way it might not have been previously. Thaumaturgus, on the other hand, is depicted in stage 1 of his educational process, showing already in

our exemplars is found after VSM 12, VM I.23 and VM II.54, and VGT 28.

Samuel Rubenson, in his essay “Philosophy and Simplicity: The Problem of Classical Education in Early Christian Biography,” identifies a variant on the three stage model in eight Christian texts: Gregory’s three *bioi*,⁶⁵ the *Life of Antony*, Jerome’s biographies, and the *Life of Pachomius*. Rubenson tracks the stages of the exemplar’s training – education, retreat, leadership – and presents these as a particularly Christian pattern that reflects “the emergence of a specifically Christian culture with a Christian educational system of its own.”⁶⁶ While this observation is compelling, Rubenson does not ever effectively complicate his early assertion that

the lack of any concept of progress in traditional biography naturally led to the idea that the superior gifts of perception and understanding of the wise philosopher were present from the beginning. The role of education seems, in the words of Patricia Cox, to have been primarily that of “a kind of discipline, the fine tuning of an already overpowering intelligence.” Education in the myths and in philosophical tradition, in Homer and Plato, as well as rhetorical skill, did not actually add anything, it simply confirmed inherent and divine wisdom and established the language of the holy man.⁶⁷

Having shown above that Gregory does depict his three exemplars as figures who experience transformation, I find Rubenson’s claim problematic. The essay demonstrates briefly that Gregory, in our three biographical works, depicts training and ongoing development in divine knowledge and wisdom as essential for Christian exemplars, but there is no discussion of how

rough form the promise of his future refinement, but ready to subject himself to further stages of training. Having begun his ascent to study “the philosophy of the Christians” (τῆς τῶν Χριστιανῶν φιλοσοφίας) under Origen at the end of his engagement with earthly education, readers even glimpse him in a moment of transition between the first and second stage (VGT 21).

⁶⁵ Though he claims the VM “is not really a biography at all” (Samuel Rubenson, “Philosophy and Simplicity: The Problem of Classical Education in Christian Biography,” in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau, eds. [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000]: 110-139, 124).

⁶⁶ Rubenson, “Philosophy and Simplicity,” 135.

⁶⁷ Rubenson, “Philosophy and Simplicity,” 114.

Gregory's portraits of education might problematize an insistence on inherent virtue.⁶⁸ The *bioi* do outline relatively consistent stages of education, and I take these to be a feature of the literary structure of each text. But Gregory's descriptions of educational practices allow for complex varieties of experience within each stage, and these deserve greater study for what they might reveal about Gregory's ideas about *paideia*.

B. Modes of learning: the Three Rs

As the chapter epigraphs exhibit, the ideal Christian education that may lead to a life of virtue depends upon the student engaging with texts and revealed wisdom in the context of communal life. I argue that in the *bioi* Gregory features three modes of learning, individually and in combination. These interwoven modes – the Three Rs of reading, revelation, and relationship – outline educational practices that are the practical components of teaching and learning in virtue. Reading, revelation, and relationships lend particularity and imitability to the general paideutic development Gregory describes.⁶⁹ The act of reading (and rereading) takes pride of place. Gregory emphasizes engagement with texts that serve as a basic curriculum. Divine revelation, mediated through text or by direct perception,⁷⁰ directs the student's pedagogical endeavors, for it is divine revelation that discloses the proper aims and methods for the student who would develop and practice virtues. Most broadly, the exemplar is trained by participating in a series of relationships. Relationships take the form of encounters with figures who model appropriate behavior or of interpersonal crises that call for the exercise of virtue. On our weaving

⁶⁸ Rubenson, "Philosophy and Simplicity," 124-129.

⁶⁹ He does not use a consistent set of terms to identify these three modes; the "Three Rs" is my own analytic.

⁷⁰ The particular types of perception that are appropriate or inappropriate for divine revelation are discussed and problematized in Chapter 3.

model of composition, the three modes of learning might be thought of as three different colored plies twisted into a single thread. As the thread is woven through a series of vignettes, different plies catch the viewer's eye. The overall effect is that the narrative depiction of *paideia* manifests in multiple places but with a constant overall color scheme. The Three Rs appear in various permutations and combinations as Gregory depicts students in the *bioi*.

In what follows, I trace the learning modes through each of the developmental stages, to answer two questions: What are the consistent features of an idealized *paideia* as it is portrayed in the three texts? What differences among the three texts emerge from a study of education?

III. Exemplary *paideia*

A. Early aptitude and the turn from worldly concerns

In all three *bioi*, some event causes the subject to turn away from worldly wisdom and worldly concerns. The accounts allow for a variety of influences that might prepare the young subject to engage seriously with divine teaching. On the level of the narrative, early education orients the exemplar to cement her devotion to a Christian “philosophy” (φιλοσοφία) and to virtuous living.⁷¹ Gregory combines figurative language and narrative commentary to bring out the contrasts or continuities between upbringing and philosophical study.

1. Macrina, VSM 3-4

In the case of Macrina, it is a reading program that primes her to advance to the higher

⁷¹ In the VSM, Macrina is several times described as pursuing φιλοσοφία herself and directing others (Basil, Peter, Emmelia) to do the same; she first turns to the pursuit VSM 6, where she is already an example for Emmelia. In the VGT, Gregory sets up an opposition between “outside philosophy” (ἔξω φιλοσοφία) and “the philosophy of the Christians” (ἡ τῶν Χριστιανῶν φιλοσοφία, VGT 22). Thaumaturgus also seeks to protect “the true philosophy” (ἡ ἀληθὴ φιλοσοφία, VGT 24) he has studied from the dangers of the marketplace. In VM I.19, Gregory calls Moses’ goal the “greater philosophy” (ἡ μείζων φιλοσοφία, VM II.19) when he presents it as an alternative to Egyptian learning.

philosophy. She reads in the context of household relationships, and her reading affects other relationships she chooses (or does not choose) to pursue. Reading and relationships are complementary learning modes in her *anatrophe*. Gregory depicts his sister's early childhood education as an intimate engagement with a collection of selected biblical works, a program overseen by Emmelia:

Her mother was eager to have the child given instruction, but not in the outside and secular *paideia* (τὴν ἔξωθεν ταύτην καὶ ἐγκύκλιον παίδευσιν), which meant, for the most part, teaching the youngsters through poetry. For she thought that it was shameful and altogether unfitting to teach the soft and pliable nature either the passionate themes of tragedy (which are based on the stories of women and give the poets their ideas and plots), or the unseemly antics of comedy, or the shameful activities of the immoral characters in the *Iliad*, defiling the child's nature with the undignified tales about women. Instead of this, whatever of divinely inspired Scripture was adaptable to the early years, this was the child's subject matter, especially the Wisdom of Solomon and, beyond this, whatever leads to a moral life. She was especially well versed in the Psalms, going through each part of the Psalter at the proper time; when she got up or did her daily tasks or rested, when she sat down to eat or rose from the table, when she went to bed or rose from it for prayer, she had the Psalter with her at all times, like some good traveling companion.⁷²

The passage gives more attention to the texts than to the human beings involved. Emmelia takes a back seat to the literature itself, even though she is the engineer of this curriculum and a nurturing figure whose eagerness signifies her concern for Macrina's moral formation. Macrina is described in terms of her daily routine, itself the product of reading the Psalms; the systematic

⁷² Ἡν δὲ τῇ μητρὶ σπουδὴ παιδεῦσαι μὲν τὴν παιδα, μὴ μέντοι τὴν ἔξωθεν ταύτην καὶ ἐγκύκλιον παίδευσιν, ἦν ως τὰ πολλὰ διὰ τῶν ποιημάτων αἱ πρῶται τῶν παιδευομένων ἡλικίαι διδάσκονται. Αἰσχρὸν γάρ φετο καὶ παντάπαισιν ἀπρεπές ἡ τὰ τραγικὰ πάθη, ὅσα ἐκ γυναικῶν τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰς ὑποθέσεις τοῖς ποιηταῖς ἔδωκεν, ἡ τὰς κωμικὰς ἀσχημοσύνας ἡ τῶν κατὰ τὸ Ἰλιον κακῶν τὰς αἰτίας ἀπαλήν καὶ εὐπλαστὸν φύσιν διδάσκεσθαι, καταμολυνομένην τρόπον τινὰ τοῖς ἀσεμνοτέροις περὶ τῶν γυναικῶν διηγήμασιν. Άλλ’ ὅσα τῆς θεοπνεύστου γραφῆς εὐληπτότερα ταῖς πρώταις ἡλικίαις δοκεῖ, ταῦτα ἦν τῇ παιδὶ τὰ μαθήματα καὶ μάλιστα ἡ τοῦ Σολομῶντος Σοφία καὶ ταύτης πλέον ὅσα πρὸς τὸν ἡθικὸν ἔφερε βίον. Άλλὰ καὶ τῆς ψαλμῳδουμένης γραφῆς οὐδ’ ὄτιον ἡγνόει καιροῖς ιδίοις ἔκαστον μέρος τῆς ψαλμῳδίας διεξιούσα τῆς τε κοίτης διανισταμένη καὶ τῶν σπουδαίων ἀπτομένη τε καὶ ἀναπαυομένη καὶ προσιεμένη τροφὴν καὶ ἀναχωροῦσα τραπέζης καὶ ἐπὶ κοίτην ιούσα καὶ εἰς προσευχὰς διανισταμένη, πανταχοῦ τὴν ψαλμῳδίαν εἶχεν οἷόν τινα σύνοδον ἀγαθὴν μηδενὸς ἀπολιμπανομένην χρόνου (VSM 3).

nature of her reading practices serves as a filter through which readers first see the subject of the *bios*. That is, she is defined right away as a reader and a student of the Scriptures. The text itself, the Psalter, becomes a third character accompanying Macrina on her educational path. The other texts are also active agents in the girl's life. Various types of literature usually associated with *paideia* are named here, an indication that Gregory probably expects his ideal audience to be aware of the more typical educational curriculum: Homeric epic, Attic drama, lyric poetry.⁷³ These more traditional texts are then dismissed because of their potential to "defile," especially women and children. Even when dealing with the texts from "outside," (ἔξωθεν) Gregory attributes to reading the power to influence character.⁷⁴

Yet the passage also defines a number of relationships between characters. One metaphor

⁷³ This literary canon was fixed by convention and tradition; see Martin Lowther Clarke, *Higher Education in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1971), especially Chapter 2; on the key role of Homeric texts, see Ronald F. Hock, "Homer in Greco-Roman Education" in *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity*, ed. Dennis R. MacDonald (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001): 56-77. Indeed, it was on the basis of a shared literary canon that elite men in Greco-Roman society came to participate in, challenge, and reproduce their society's values and ideals, such that this canon became a source of cultural capital. See four case studies in Graham Anderson, *The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1993), chapter 11. Men in prominent civic and imperial positions could dependably relate to one another using a common fund of texts and ideas they first encountered in elementary and secondary education. For example, we know that shared social and individual qualities were lauded and reinforced through the use of literary *exempla* in symposiastic settings: "Lines and metaphors from Homer were often used to adorn their speeches and to express their self-presentation" (Hock, "Homer in Greco-Roman Education," 77). On the continued relevance of *paideia* for social maneuvering in the fourth century, see Lieve Van Hoof, "Performing *Paideia*: Greek Culture as an Instrument for Social Promotion in the Fourth Century A.D." *The Classical Quarterly*, Volume 63, Issue 1 (May 2013): 387-406. Masculinity was constructed in public through oratorical performance, for rhetorical self-presentation, education, and composition were elite activities intimately tied to gender and ideas about masculinity, power, and self-actualization. On the construction of elite masculinity and education, see Maud W. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists & Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Thomas Habinek, *Ancient Rhetoric and Oratory*, Blackwell Introductions to the Classical World (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005); Lin Foxhall and John Salmon, eds., *Thinking Men: Masculinity and its Self-Representation in the Classical Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1998). Numerous other aspects of male elite existence - everything from the execution of public duties, to the enjoyment of leisure time, to the writing of personal letters - were shot through with references to the literary works that formed the canon of the ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία. On the role of letters in forging Cappadocian social networks, see Nathan D. Howard, "Gifts Bearing Greekness: Epistles as Cultural Capital in Fourth-Century Cappadocia," *Journal of Late Antiquity*, Volume 6, Number 1 (Spring 2013): 37-59.

⁷⁴The idea that texts could corrupt or lead to malformed character is present already in Plato's advice to keep poetry out of the educational program in the ideal republic (Plato, *Republic* X).

draws on such relationships to present an ideal attitude toward texts and reading: the Psalms are for Macrina a “faithful companion” (σύνοδος). By emphasizing the formative relationship between Macrina and her educational materials, Gregory positions the exemplar as a model interpreter. Having taken the Wisdom of Solomon and other biblical books as guides to the moral life, she adopts the text as a blueprint for her behavior.⁷⁵ The scene describes an ordered, disciplined daily routine, brought to fulfillment later in the *bios* when Macrina and the community of women she leads may be praised for their near-angelic way of life, in which “there was constant prayer and an unceasing hymnody distributed at all times equally throughout the whole day and night, so that these were for them both their work and their rest from work.”⁷⁶ The early structure of Macrina’s reading program prefigures this later monastic devotion and confirms she is a suitable leader for the community of women.

Macrina’s Scriptural reading bears fruit already in her twelfth year, when she applies reason to overcome an adolescent grief and commit herself to “the higher philosophy.” When Macrina’s beauty had become apparent,⁷⁷ the girl’s father selected a worthy young man for her to marry; unfortunately the betrothed died before the wedding could take place. Undaunted,

⁷⁵ David Martinez points out that the Psalms were among the most frequently used texts in Egyptian Christian circles, based on the number of papyrus copies extant; he argues it probably had a similar status among Christians as Homer among pagans on the basis of its “antiquity, poetic power, and didactic value” (David Martinez, “The Papyri and Early Christianity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 3).

⁷⁶ τὸ τῆς προσευχῆς ἀδιάλειπτον καὶ ἡ ἄπαυστος ὑμνῳδία, κατὰ τὸ ἵσον παντὶ συμπαρατεινομένη τῷ χρόνῳ διὰ νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας πάσῃς, ὥστε αὐταῖς καὶ ἔργον εἶναι τοῦτο καὶ ἔργου ἀνάπταυσιν (VSM 11).

⁷⁷ The flowering of youthful beauty seems to be a common way of talking about women arriving at a marriageable age. See also Gregory’s description of Emmelia in this same text at VSM 2, and the characterization of Pulcheria as a flower in his *Oratio consolatoria in Pulcheriam* GNO Online 47.462.15-19: εἴτε περιστεράν χρὴ λέγειν ταύτην, εἴτε νεοθαλές ἄνθος, ὃ οὐπω μὲν ὅλον τῶν καλύκων ἐξέλαμψεν, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν ἔλαμπεν ἥδη, τὸ δὲ λάμψειν ἡλπίζετο καὶ ὅμως ἐν τῷ μικρῷ τε καὶ ἀτελεῖ ὑπερέλαμπεν.

Macrina chose for herself a future life of virginity that she describes as widowhood,⁷⁸ “and her judgment was more firm than her age warranted” (καὶ ἦν τῆς ἡλικίας ἡ κρίσις παγιωτέρα).⁷⁹

Macrina is precocious enough to render her commitment to this way of life secure by attaching herself to her mother and remaining in the family household.⁸⁰ She chooses a complementary set of relationships - daughter to her mother, bride to an absent bridegroom, and virgin devoted to God - over the possibility of finding another fiancé from among the many suitors seeking her hand.

Gregory identifies Macrina as a dedicated virgin participating in a way of life treated at length in both literary and social histories of the fourth century, but we also see a clear undercurrent of references to the sort of intellectual and practical training that motivate and sustain her vocation.⁸¹ Though young, Macrina shows her aptitude for applying doctrinal principles to daily pursuits – a result of reading and relational modes of learning – advancing two

⁷⁸ The commitment to virginity is equated with the lifestyle of a widow in numerous ancient texts; for examples, see especially Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God* and Susanna Elm, ‘*Virgins of God*’: *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). Arnoldo Momigliano describes Macrina’s conviction in relation to contemporaneous Roman practices: “Here the identification of engagement with marriage is patent: and the mystical interpretation of the Roman quality of *univira* is equally precise” (Momigliano, *On Pagans*, 209).

⁷⁹ VSM 5.

⁸⁰ There are numerous examples of young people, even children, dedicating themselves to the ascetic life in early Christian texts. Ville Vuolanto’s article catalogs examples and discusses models in which children must oppose their parents’ wishes and those in which parents are supportive, sometimes even joining their children in ascetic pursuits: Ville Vuolanto, “Choosing Asceticism: Children and Parents, Vows and Conflicts,” in *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R. Phenix, *Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum* 58 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009): 255-291.

⁸¹ On virgins in the fourth century, see Brown, *Body and Society*; Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395-600* (London: Routledge, 1993), esp. 139-144; Elisabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Cloke, *This Female Man*; Elm, ‘*Virgins of God*’; Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*. J. Warren Smith summarizes Gregory’s position on virginity as a path to virtue, drawing on passages from the *De virginitate* and VSM. He writes, “Thus the life of the virgin is a figurative form of putting on eschatological incorruptibility in this life in two ways. First, through withdrawal from normative social intercourse and ascetic mastery over the body the soul is purged of the social and carnal habits, thus achieving the purity necessary for contemplative participation in the Divine. Second, the purified soul of the virgin gains greater purity through its contemplative, prayerful union with God who illuminates the soul filling it with the pure light of the divine nature” (J. Warren Smith, “A Just and Reasonable Grief,” 67).

arguments in favor of her chosen way of life. First, “she used to say that it was out of place and unlawful not to accept once and for all a marriage determined for her by her father and to be forced to look to another, since marriage is by nature unique, as are birth and death.”⁸² The admirable quality of obedience is supplemented by mental acuity and biblical precedent.⁸³ Second, she drew upon Christian teaching about the afterlife to insist that “the young man joined to her by her parent’s decision was not dead, but living in God because of the hope of the resurrection.”⁸⁴ This early decision to prioritize heavenly over earthly commitments prepares the way for Macrina’s later activities.

2. *Thaumaturgus*, VGT 11-22

In the VGT, Gregory demonstrates that, despite Emmelia’s principled objections, the reading of classical texts is not necessarily harmful for the young Christian. He depicts Thaumaturgus’ move from classical to Christian philosophy as a rational progression. In terms of the preparatory stages he undertakes on his way to that higher philosophy, Thaumaturgus is both a more and less typical student than Macrina, a difference that may be attributed to his gender and his public life. Inasmuch as the *bios* indicates that he did not need much training to act with temperance, Thaumaturgus is distinguished from the average young student.⁸⁵ On the other hand,

⁸² ὅτοπον ἔλεγε καὶ παράνομον εἶναι μὴ στέργειν τὸν ἄπαξ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῇ κυρωθέντα γάμον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς ἔτερον ἀναγκάζεσθαι βλέπειν, ἐνὸς ὄντος ἐν τῇ φύσει τοῦ γάμου ως μία γένεσις καὶ θάνατος εἰς (VSM 5).

⁸³ See the Pastoral Epistles, e.g. 1 Tim 5:3-16 (on ideal conduct for widows) and Titus 2:3-5 (on conduct appropriate for both older and younger women). On Macrina’s obedience, see Fotis Vasileiou, “*At a Still Point of a Turning World*,” 455: since Macrina’s obedience to her father’s wishes led to suffering because of social norms instead of suffering because of defying social norms (as did Thecla), she presents an appropriate model for the fourth-century urban setting.

⁸⁴ τὸν δὲ συναρμοσθέντα κατὰ τὴν τῶν γονέων κρίσιν μὴ τεθνάναι δισχυρίζετο, ἀλλὰ τὸν «τῷ θεῷ ζῶντα» διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς ἀναστάσεως (VSM 5).

⁸⁵ I think that in this instance, Rubenson’s assessment of education as refining but not inculcating virtue is somewhat justified. However, a passage like VGT 19 (in which Thaumaturgus “harnesses” his impulses) still complicates the picture, as discussed above.

his program of study itself contains no Christian elements; he could be any elite youth of the third or fourth centuries CE who pursued studies in an urban center. Like these other young men, he probably attached himself to an individual instructor whose expertise would have included rhetoric.⁸⁶ The *bios* passes over most of the specifics of Thaumaturgus' education, on the assumption that the text's audience would have been familiar with the typical course of elite male ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία. Instead, the biographer concentrates on bringing the contrast between Christian teaching and alternative philosophies into high relief. Gregory portrays Thaumaturgus' dawning realization that Christian philosophy is superior as a by-product of relationships with and among students. Education takes place in the context of relationship.

The contrast between the truly valuable “traits of spiritual renown” (πνευματικῆς εὐφημίας) and the “trifles of the world below” (τοὺς κάτω λήρους) introduced in the *prooimion* of the VGT reemerge at this stage of the narrative, as Gregory works to show what is unique about Christian doctrine by focusing on its fruits.⁸⁷ The practice of judging a teaching or a person based on its fruits is recommended by both Jesus and Paul in the Scriptures, even though

⁸⁶ Texts and their interpretation formed the core of elementary and secondary education in the classical world. Typically beginning at the age of 7, students learned their letters and reading from a *grammatistes* and/or *grammatikos* before advancing to literary and linguistic studies under *rhetores* around age 14. This period, between ages 14 and 19, usually involved the study of standard subjects (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, music, geometry, astronomy), before older students peeled off to work with philosophers, orators, or in one of the professional fields (medicine, architecture, law, teaching). For the standard course of education in the classical, Hellenistic, and imperial worlds, see Clarke, *Higher Education*; Raffaela Cribiore, *Writing, teachers, and students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, American Studies in Papryology, no. 36 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) and *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: the Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Henri-Irénée Marrou, *L'Église de l'Antiquité tardive* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985); Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Kevin Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁸⁷ VGT 6.

Gregory does not directly point out this correlation.⁸⁸ Just as Macrina's educational bibliography pointed to positive moral formation as the criterion for adjudicating between appropriate and inappropriate texts, so here the moral dimension becomes Gregory's lens for talking about the philosophies one might choose to pursue. Macrina selected a text to be her companion, but Thaumaturgus selects his texts on the basis of what he sees among his companions. The pursuit of worldly philosophy does not cultivate peace, a desirable quality for Christian life (e.g., 1 Tim 2:2). On the contrary, Thaumaturgus "saw Greek and barbarian philosophy alike divided into different conceptions in their opinions on the divine, and the leading exponents of the positions not converging toward one another but competing to consolidate each position separately by subtlety of speech."⁸⁹ Therefore he "left them to refute each other as if in a civil war."⁹⁰ Gregory highlights the negative social outcomes associated with Greek and barbarian philosophies and thereby indicates how relationships might inform learning: the animosity between philosophers of various schools reflects some deeper problem with those schools.

Given this emphasis on relationship as a source of helpful information, Thaumaturgus' turn to Christianity is depicted as a reasoned response to the interpersonal incoherence engendered by Greek education and philosophy. As Harold F. Cherniss puts it, "In his life of Gregory the Thaumaturge" Gregory shows "that even the worst of pagan learning may be good training, may lead a man up to the true faith."⁹¹ Gregory also takes a jab at intellectual

⁸⁸ Cf. Mt 7:16 (with divine judgment in 3:10); 12:33 and interpretation in 12:35, with parallels in Lk 6:43, 45. See Gal 5:22-23 for "fruits of the Spirit," along with 6:8-9 on reaping a good harvest from good planting (cf. Rom 8:23, where believers have the first fruits of the Spirit).

⁸⁹ Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ εἶδεν πρὸς διαφόρους ὑπολήψεις ἐν ταῖς περὶ τοῦ Θείου δόξαις σχιζομένην τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν καὶ τὴν βάρβαρον ὄμοιώς φιλοσοφίαν, καὶ τοὺς τῶν δογμάτων προεστηκότας, οὕτε πρὸς ἀλλήλους συμβαίνοντας, καὶ τὸ καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἔκαστον κρατούντειν τῇ περινοίᾳ τῶν λόγων φιλονεικοῦντας (VGT 13).

⁹⁰ τούτους μὲν ὥσπερ ἐν ἐμφυλίῳ πολέμῳ, ὑπ' ἀλλήλων ἀνατρεπομένους κατέλιπεν (VGT 13).

⁹¹ Cherniss, *The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa*, 10.

incoherence when he remarks on the “emptiness” of public oratorical performance, claiming Thaumaturgus recognized its shaky foundation on “fancy logical footwork” and “artificial reasonings.”⁹² Similarities to classical Greek dismissals of sophistry are not accidental. The long tradition of philosophers bemoaning rhetoric's deceptive nature had, by the time Gregory writes, become a standard part of Mediterranean intellectual consciousness.⁹³ Reading may be an especially complicated task when texts, words, and arguments may conceal a rhetorician's true intent. But Gregory explains that Thaumaturgus navigates the difficult straits by combining reading with another mode of learning, his awareness of relationships. The two modes are twined together.

3. Moses, VM I.17-19 and VM II.6-18

In Gregory's hands, Moses' turn from worldly pursuits to a single-minded pursuit of the truth is explained in terms of his relationships with his biological and adoptive mothers. In both the *historia* and *theoria* segments of the *bios*, Gregory explains the rejection of Pharaoh's daughter as an advance toward true wisdom. The women are equated with antagonistic forms of philosophy, embodying their respective cultures.⁹⁴ As for Thaumaturgus, so for Moses: the move to higher philosophy is partly inspired by a recognition that the alternative leads to bad ends, in this case a striving against the teachings of the fathers. Gregory insists “Scripture concedes that his relationship with her who was falsely called his mother should not be rejected until he had

⁹² καταλαμβάνει δὲ τὸν ἐστῶτα λόγον τῆς πίστεως, τὸν οὐδεμιᾷ λογικῇ τινι περιεργίᾳ καὶ τεχνικαῖς πλοκαῖς κρατονόμενον (VGT 13).

⁹³ Cf. works as early as Plato's *Meno* and Aristophanes' *Clouds*. Gregory expresses a similarly negative view of ἡ διαλεκτική and the philosophical (and rhetorical) incoherence that undermines access to truth in *De anima* GNO Online 15.34.11ff. See a brief discussion of this passage in Susan Wessel, “Memory and Individuality in Gregory of Nyssa's *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*,” *JECS*, Volume 18, Number 3 (Fall 2010): 369-392, esp. 376-378.

⁹⁴ This conceptual metaphor has a rich cultural context: the female figure σοφία (Wisdom, Proverbs); the allegory of Sarah and Hagar in Gal 4; Roman imperial visual culture (coins, sculpture) depicting cities and countries as women.

seen his own maturity was imperfect. But he who has already run up to the heights, as we have learned about Moses, will be ashamed to be called the son of one who is barren by nature.”⁹⁵ By emphasizing the role of maturity in Moses’ decision-making process, Gregory depicts education and developmental progress in tandem. To linger in a relationship with a philosophy that is unable to bear fruit would be a mistake for the mature student who has been made aware of the alternative way.

But rather than totally denying the usefulness of worldly education, as he did for Macrina, Gregory suggests it must be subjected to examination in light of the heavenly wisdom and the subject’s intellectual and moral needs. A moment of crisis becomes the catalyst for this examination. Like Macrina and Thaumaturgus, Moses faces a decision that functions in the *bios* as a test of his virtue, and he reveals an early aptitude for enacting justice. By killing the Egyptian who was oppressing the Hebrew slave, Moses aligns himself with his native people and with the side of the divine. Moses is, according to Scripture, out of place, unlike Macrina or Thaumaturgus. Gregory depicts his turn as a form of return, emphasizing the constancy of Moses’ identity:

Indeed, he was not separated from her [his natural mother] while he was being brought up by the princess, but was nursed by his mother’s milk, as the history states. This teaches, it seems to me, that if we should be involved with outside teachings (*τοῖς ἔξωθεν λόγοις*) during our education, we should not separate ourselves from the nourishment of the Church’s milk, which would be her laws and customs. By these the soul is nourished and matured, making from this the starting point of the upward ascent.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ …ἔως τότε συγχωρεῖ ὁ λόγος μὴ ἀπωθεῖσθαι τὴν τῆς ψευδωνύμου μητρὸς οἰκειότητα, ἔως ἂν τις τὸ ἀτελὲς τῆς ἡλικίας ἐν ἑαυτῷ βλέπῃ. Ὁ δὲ πρὸς ὑψος ἥδη ἀναδραμών, ὡς περὶ τοῦ Μωϋσέως ἐμάθομεν, αἰσχύνην ἡγήσεται τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἀγόνου παῖς ὄνομάζεσθαι (VM II.10).

⁹⁶ ἡς οὐδὲ παρὰ τῇ βασιλίδι τρεφόμενος ἀπεσχίσθη, τῷ μητρῷ γάλακτι, καθὼς ἡ ἱστορία φησί, τιθηνούμενος, ὅπερ μοι δοκεῖ διδάσκειν, εἰ τοῖς ἔξωθεν λόγοις καθομιλούμεν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς παιδεύσεως, μὴ χωρίζεσθαι τοῦ ὑποτρέφοντος ἡμᾶς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας γάλακτος. Τοῦτο δ’ ἂν εἴη τὰ νόμιμά τε καὶ τὰ ἔθη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, οἵς τρέφεται ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ ἀδρύνεται, ἐντεῦθεν τῆς εἰς ὑψος ἀναδρομῆς τὰς ἀφορμὰς ποιούμενη (VM II.12).

Once he has made the decision to ascend to the height of divine philosophy, he immediately falls into open antagonism with an Egyptian and departs to the wilderness of Midian.⁹⁷

B. Advancing by way of retreat

Moving from the first to the second of the three developmental stages, we find in each *bios* a further distillation of the subject's sense of purpose. Yet the modes of learning continue to operate simultaneously. Each exemplar's training involves a retreat from the world and its cares that facilitates more complete devotion to the divine. Although the peaceful period is inevitably interrupted and the exemplar is called back to public life, the retreat is portrayed as a crucial element of the subject's virtuous formation.

1. Moses, VM I.20-22 and VM II.19-53

In the VM, Gregory describes retreat from everyday life as an opportunity for the retreatant to prepare himself for public engagement. Philo, in his *Life of Moses*, also highlights the importance of this period; although both Philo and Gregory rely on Scripture for the outline of events in Moses' retreat, their interpretations differ in revealing ways. While Philo frames events as preparation for Moses' kingly leadership and his role as lawgiver,⁹⁸ Gregory describes

John David Penniman's recent article discussing how Gregory uses the image of mother's milk in the VM, the eulogy for Basil, and the commentary on the Song of Songs highlights the Roman conception of a mother's milk as nourishment that can transmit "cultural or familial identity" to the child, an additional aspect of the portrait of Moses receiving nourishment from two mothers (John David Penniman, "Fed to Perfection: Mother's Milk, Roman Family Values, and the Transformation of the Soul in Gregory of Nyssa," *Church History*, Volume 84, Issue 3 [September 2015]: 495-530, 497).

⁹⁷ Gregory, however, depicts the murder positively by unpacking what he considers its higher (or alternatively deeper) meaning: it is admirable to slay the one who rises up in opposition to true religion (VM II.13).

⁹⁸ Clement of Alexandria discusses Moses' role in terms more akin to Philo. In his *Stromateis* 1.23-28, he offers a short commentary on the life of Moses that highlights Moses' excellent leadership and philosophy. The beginning at 1.24.158(1) sums up his Mosaic portrait: "So Moses is for us a prophet, legislator, organizer, general, statesman, philosopher" ("Εστιν οὖν ὁ Μωυσῆς ἡμῖν προφητικός, νομοθετικός, τακτικός, στρατηγικός, πολιτικός, φιλόσοφος"). He goes on to explain that all of Moses' attributes are those which properly belong to a king. On the upbringing of

the discipline that makes Moses ready to encounter God, an activity he says is the goal of the human pursuit of virtue. In VM II.19, explaining Moses' transition to a period of retreat, is a general comment that “the truth will shine, illuminating the eyes of our soul with its own rays” (ἐπιλάμψει τότε ἡ ἀλήθεια, ταῖς ιδίαις μαρμαρυγαῖς τὰς τῆς ψυχῆς ὄψεις περιανγάζουσα) on one who takes the “peaceful and tranquil course of life” (ἡ εἰρηνικὴ καὶ ἀπόλεμος διαγωγή). Philo says Moses learns how to be a shepherd in Midian, “being instructed for leadership, for the task of a shepherd is also a preparation for the task of a king, to have charge of that most gentle flock of human beings.”⁹⁹ In a variation on the theme, Gregory explains that in solitude “all the movements of the soul in us, in the manner of sheep, are shepherded by the will of the presiding reason” (πάντων τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν τῆς ψυχῆς κινημάτων, προβάτων δίκην, τῷ βουλήματι τοῦ ἐπιστατοῦντος λόγου ποιμανομένων, VM II.18). Both interpreters highlight Moses' development, but Gregory attends more closely to the experience of Moses as a “personality,” a figure whose training is explicitly taking place within the soul.¹⁰⁰ This internal preparation also appears in Gregory's *historia* account: the exemplar pauses after God commands him to free the Israelites, and Gregory says this was to initiate a period of testing, “especially so that he might learn the strength sprung up in him from God” (ώς ἀν μάλιστα μάθοι τὴν ἐγγινομένην αὐτῷ θεόθεν ισχύν, VM I.21).¹⁰¹

Moses in Philo (mainly his education in Egypt), see Louis H. Feldman, “Philo's View of Moses' Birth and Upbringing,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Volume 64, Number 2 (April 2002): 258-281.

⁹⁹ Philo, *De Vita Mosis* I.60: προδιδασκόμενος εἰς ἡγεμονίαν· ποιμενικὴ γὰρ μελέτη καὶ προγυμνασία βασιλείας τῷ μέλλοντι τῆς ἡμερωτάτης τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιστατεῖν ἀγέλης.

¹⁰⁰ This is not to say that Philo is unconcerned with the attributes of Moses' soul; the ability to lead with justice is certainly a reflection on qualities of soul. Nevertheless, Gregory's account places more overt emphasis on this aspect of the exemplar's training.

¹⁰¹ ἐγγίγνομαι can mean both to be “born in” or “bred in” and “spring up, appear in.” This latter meaning is more common when the verb is used of qualities (LSJ, s.v. “ἐγγίγνομαι”). I have here chosen to translate as though the strength has newly sprung up in Moses, since that helps make sense of his need for a period to learn about it.

The second stage of Moses' educational program takes place in the wilderness, which Gregory characterizes as a space apart from a community, yet one that enriches Moses' ability to engage in meaningful relationships.¹⁰² Eschewing human contact, Moses receives divine revelation and forms a closer relationship with God. While in the wilderness, Moses receives his revelation at the burning bush. VM I.20 describes it as an “awe-inspiring theophany” (φοβερὰ θεοφάνεια) that is revealed to Moses' eyes and ears. In the *theoria*, Gregory explains that the divine flame in an “earthly” (γηῖνης) bush foreshadows the mystery of Christ's Incarnation.¹⁰³ Being apart from the distractions of everyday life is a crucial part of Moses' encounter with this awesome mystery. Gregory writes that in the presence of the divine light and the divine voice, Moses learns that none of those things which are grasped by the senses or which are understood with thought truly exists, but “only the transcendent essence and cause of everything, on which everything depends” (πλὴν τῆς ὑπερανεστώσης οὐσίας καὶ αἰτίας τοῦ παντὸς ἀφ' ἣς ἐξῆπται τὸ πᾶν, VM II.24). What is the point of better understanding this God? Gregory comments on the possible benefit of the retreat period, again in broad terms that encompass his own day: the person who encounters the divine light “becomes able to assist others to salvation, to destroy the tyranny which holds power wickedly, and to lead out to freedom everyone held in punishing

However, it is entirely possible Gregory means instead to suggest that Moses has possessed this strength for some time and is just now going to explore it more fully.

¹⁰² This is in contrast to the portrayal by Philo, who needs to show Moses leading flocks and a family in Midian to demonstrate his preparedness for leadership. In the VGT, as we will see below, Gregory recognizes that Moses was not alone during his time in Midian, but he still emphasizes solitude when it suits his argument about Moses' development.

¹⁰³ On this theophany and the role of the light-darkness dichotomy in Gregory's language about God's self-revelation to human beings, especially in the VM, see Philip Kariatlis, “Dazzling Darkness”: The Mystical or Theophanic Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa,” *Phronema*, Volume 27, Number 2 (2012): 99-123.

slavery.”¹⁰⁴

In a number of other ways, too, the departure from everyday concerns and Egyptian power facilitates a transformation in Moses. On the basis of the leprous hand and staff-to-snake miracles (Exod 4:1-9), Gregory describes a contrastive relationship between Moses and Pharaoh.¹⁰⁵ Pharaoh’s obsession with earthly appearances makes him subject to trickery through magic and its illusions, while Moses has been “strengthened by the illumination of the light,” and this quality accompanies him from the wilderness back into Egypt.¹⁰⁶ “Just as an athlete who has sufficiently trained his athletic strength with his physical trainer, he would now boldly and confidently strip for the contest with his opponents.”¹⁰⁷ The miracles he witnessed and performed in the wilderness sustain him upon his return. Gregory depicts Moses’ retreat in the desert of Midian as what Alison Goddard Elliott calls “a third pole” between the seeming opposites of nature and culture, superior to both because it is a space where the holy person may experience or recreate a paradisiacal state.¹⁰⁸

We might, in fact, argue that Moses never leaves the state he enters in the wilderness, even when he goes on to lead the Israelites. In the VM, any strict delineation of developmental stages, convenient for constructing an exemplary portrait, seems to dissolve in the face of Gregory’s interpretation of the biblical narrative. In a recursive pattern of behavior, Moses

¹⁰⁴ τότε τοιοῦτος γίνεται οὗς καὶ ἑτέροις εἰς σωτηρίαν ἀρκέσαι καὶ καθελεῖν μὲν τὴν ἐπικρατοῦσαν κακῶς τυραννίδα, ἐξελέσθαι δὲ πρὸς ἐλευθερίαν πᾶν τὸ τῇ πονηρῇ δουλείᾳ κατακρατούμενον (VM II.26).

¹⁰⁵ His primary focus in the passage is on how these transformations prefigure the incarnation of Christ (VM II.27-33); however, he does subsequently describe the effects on Moses in terms of his training.

¹⁰⁶ διὰ τῆς τοῦ φωτὸς ἐκλάμψεως δυναμωθείη (VM II.36).

¹⁰⁷ καθάπερ τις ἀθλητὴς ικανῶς ἐν παιδοτρίβου τὴν ἀθλητικὴν ἀνδρείαν ἐκμελετήσας, θαρσῶν ἥδη καὶ πεποιθώς, πρὸς τὸν ἀγῶνα τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἀποδύεται (VM II.36).

¹⁰⁸ Alison Goddard Elliott, *Roads to Paradise: Reading the Lives of Early Saints* (Hanover: University Press of New England for Brown University Press, 1987), esp. 132.

undertakes multiple periods of retreat in order to engage with God and then to mediate between God and the people. The presentation of relationships and pedagogical communities takes precedence over a strictly linear progression in the exemplar's literary portrait.¹⁰⁹ From his solitary trip to the top of Mount Sinai to retrieve the commandments to his vision of the heavenly tabernacle, much of Moses' time in the wilderness with the Israelites involves vacillating between retreat and return, contemplation and activity. Each moment of retreat leads him back again to engagement with the people.

Adding to the impression that Moses' training is cumulative and is effective for a wider community, Gregory explains the fact that Moses brings his wife and son along with him to Egypt in terms of education. Not only was the retreat a period that allowed him to build a family unit, but it is a sort of capstone for his earlier training. Moses' wife accompanies him because he needs to hold onto certain beneficial elements from his worldly education. The interpretation insists that discernment leads to fruitfulness:

The foreign wife will follow him, for there are some things derived from outside education which should not be rejected as comrades in our giving birth to virtue. For both moral and natural philosophy may some time become for the higher way of life a comrade, friend, and companion of life (σύζυγός τε καὶ φίλη καὶ κοινωνὸς τῆς ζωῆς), as long as the offspring of this union introduce no sort of foreign defilement.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Rowan A. Greer, in discussing the ways Gregory depicts progression through and reciprocity of moral, natural, and contemplative stages in the Christian life as in fact two collapsed categories of vision and virtue interacting, expresses quite clearly that for Gregory "moral virtue is from one perspective the prerequisite for vision, but it is equally true that vision is what enables moral progress" (Greer, *One Path for All*, 159). That is, rather than adhering strictly to a more Platonic or Origenic conception that perfect virtue must precede access to divine truths, Gregory seems to say that virtue and vision are mutually reinforcing. On this issue of whether purification/virtue precedes or follows revealed visions of the divine see also Philip Kariatlis, "'Dazzling Darkness': The Mystical or Theophanic Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa," *Phronema*, Volume 27, Number 2 (2012): 99-123, esp. 107-108.

¹¹⁰ Ἀκολουθήσει δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ ή ἐξ ἀλλοφύλων ὁμόζυγος: ἔστι γάρ τι καὶ τῆς ἔξω παιδεύσεως πρὸς συζυγίαν ἡμῶν εἰς τεκνογονίαν ἀρετῆς οὐκ ἀπόβλητον. Καὶ γάρ ή ἡθική τε καὶ φυσικὴ φιλοσοφία γένοιτο ἂν ποτε τῷ ὑψηλοτέρῳ φιλοσοφῷ σύζυγός τε καὶ φίλη καὶ κοινωνὸς τῆς ζωῆς, μόνον εἰ τὰ ἐκ ταύτης κυήματα μηδὲν ἐπάγοιτο τοῦ ἀλλοφύλου μιάσματος (VM II.37).

To unpack the limitations and explicate how one should remove foreign defilement, Gregory interprets the troubling episode when the Lord attacks Moses on the road and the circumcision of Moses' son (Exod 4:24-26) as the removal of extraneous philosophical training on the way to fully developed virtue.¹¹¹ The learning modes of revelation and relationship twine together for Moses; it is his relationships with the divine and with his companions that ratify the virtue he displays.

2. *Thaumaturgus*, VGT 23-27

Gregory depicts Thaumaturgus' wilderness retreat as a retreat from the moral depravity of public life, with its attendant temptations to vanity, arrogance, and wickedness. Because he wrote for a Neocaesarean audience, the public role of their bishop cannot be denied, but Gregory seems to propose an alternative to worldly models of leadership. Thaumaturgus leaves the site of his education and takes himself off to his native land. Yet, because his people seek to turn his learning to public use, which might have meant he would "acquire a good repute among them as a sort of fruit of his great labors," he retreats further in order to avoid arrogance and pride.¹¹² It is in this way that Thaumaturgus "became in our times another Moses, rivaling him absolutely in his wondrous deeds."¹¹³

Gregory collapses the distinction between Scriptural virtue and contemporary virtue, making Moses an imitable model by showing Thaumaturgus, whom readers should imitate, as

¹¹¹ VM II.38. For patristic exegesis of this passage, see A.S. Jacobs, "Blood Will Out: Jesus' Circumcision and Early Christian Readings of Exodus 4:24-26," *Henoch* Voulme 30, Number 2 (2008): 311-332.

¹¹² ὡς ἂν τινα καρπὸν σχοίη τῶν μακρῶν πόνων τὴν ἐπ' αὐτοῖς εὐδοκίμησιν (VGT 24).

¹¹³ ἄλλος τις οὗτος ἐν τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς χρόνοις Μωϋσῆς ἀτεχνῶς πρὸς τὰ ἐκείνου θαύματα τὴν ἄμιλλαν ἔχων (VGT 24).

one link in a mimetic chain stretching from the distant past to the readers' present.¹¹⁴ The Scriptural *synkrisis*, as one might expect, comes out in Thaumaturgus' favor, for he was alone, unlike Moses who had a wife.¹¹⁵ Thus "it is possible for someone who knows well how to perceive virtue to judge which of them was marked more by the passionless life."¹¹⁶ Gregory leaves the outcome unstated, but seems to be trying to script a judicial role for his audience.

For Thaumaturgus the remote place serves as an antidote to culture, a space for being close only to God.¹¹⁷ Gregory makes the exemplar's encounter with God, an example of relational and revelatory learning modes, the central focus of the retreat period. First, Thaumaturgus engages with the truth by drowning out the call of personal ambition and focusing instead on the self as a conduit to relationship with the divine: "Separating himself from the commotions of the marketplace and from town life altogether, he lived in a remote place alone and with himself, and through himself with God."¹¹⁸ This idea of recognizing the divine image within oneself pervades Gregory's corpus, appearing most prominently in the soul's need to cleanse itself of "rust" (ιός), "mud" (πηλός), or "mire" (βόρβορος) to uncover and restore its created beauty in *De Virginitate*.¹¹⁹ The concept also depends on his interpretation of Genesis 1:27; he holds that human beings were created in God's image and likeness but lose sight of that

¹¹⁴ See especially Williams, *Authorised Lives*, Chapter 2. Williams traces a similar dynamic in Gregory's eulogy of Basil. That Gregory uses Moses and Moses' story similarly in the eulogy and in the VGT shows a consistency of thought about one role of Scripture in shaping Christian conceptions of self and community. This will be explored further in Chapter 3.

¹¹⁵ Although remember that in the VM, Gregory remarked more about Moses' solitude than on his wife as a companion. The "historical facts" become malleable in service of interpretive goals.

¹¹⁶ κρίνειν ἔξεστι τῷ πρὸς ἀρετὴν καλῶς βλέπειν ἐπισταμένῳ, ὅποτέρῳ τούτων μᾶλλον ὁ βίος δι' ἀπαθείας γέγονε (VGT 25).

¹¹⁷ In this instance, Gregory does focus on desert as "not-culture" rather than on the desert as a mediating space between nature and culture (Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*). See earlier note.

¹¹⁸ καὶ καθόλου τῆς ἐν ἀστει διαγωγῆς ἐαυτὸν χωρίσας, ἐν ἐσχατιῷ τινι ἐαυτῷ μόνῳ συνῆν, καὶ δι' ἐαυτοῦ τῷ Θεῷ (VGT 24).

¹¹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginitate* GNO Online 31.299.21, 26.

likeness due to the accumulated dirt of sin.¹²⁰ Solitude provides both a chance to purify the self and an associated opportunity to encounter the divine.

Second, revelation offers a form of training that validates and empowers the exemplar. Through a powerful vision and audition, the evangelist John and Mary the mother of Christ convey to Thaumaturgus a creed encapsulating the “truth of pious faith.”¹²¹ The full text of the creed may not be original to Gregory Thaumaturgus, though some kernel may have been inscribed on a wall at Neocaesarea.¹²² More likely, it was composed by Gregory for the original oral presentation of the encomiastic biography or later for the written *bios*. In either case, its importance for the fourth-century audience cannot be overstated.¹²³ Gregory intervenes with a

¹²⁰ See further in *De virginitate* GNO Online 31.297.24-298.21. For an in-depth study of Gregory’s anthropology, see Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa*. Zachhuber traces in Gregory’s oeuvre the creation of man, as a species, in the image of God, sharing a common human nature (φύσις) (154-160); on the basis of this he argues, convincingly, that *De Virginitate* shows “the item created in the image of God [nature] has not been substantially altered, but damaged and its beauty obscured by the existence of evil” (178). Specifically on the image of God within the human person, see J.T. Muckle, “The Doctrine of St. Gregory of Nyssa on Man as the Image of God,” *Mediaeval Studies* 7 (1945): 55-84.

¹²¹ τῆς εὐσεβοῦς πίστεως ἡ ἀλήθεια (VGT 29). In his translation, Michael Slusser translates εὐσεβοῦς with “orthodox,” but I see no reason to make this interpretive leap. Maraval translates with “pieuse,” and I have followed him here (Maraval, *Éloge de Gregoire le Thaumaturge*, 133).

¹²² Slusser, *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus*, 8. Mitchell, with Abramowski, rejects the authenticity, adding that the text was not known to Basil when he wrote his *De Spiritu Sancto* circa 375 CE (Mitchell, “The Life and Lives,” 109). Telfer, however, holds the Creed to be one of Thaumaturgus’ authentic compositions (William Telfer, “The Cultus of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus,” *Harvard Theological Review*, Volume 29, Number 4 [1936]: 225-344). If the Creed does have an historical kernel that was inscribed on the church in Neocaesarea, it was most likely a basic tripartite statement about the divine persons that Nyssen has significantly expanded. I am inclined to agree with Slusser, who suggests the simple form “One God, One Lord, One Holy Spirit, Perfect Trinity” (Slusser, *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus*, 55 n. 28); Lane Fox also argues for the historicity of such a formula (Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* [London: Penguin Books, 1986], 521).

¹²³ The inclusion of the Creed material also helps scholars date the text to sometime post-381 CE, after Gregory had attended the Council of Constantinople, where the Nicene Creed and trinitarian theology were confirmed. In Thaumaturgus’ own writings, Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not often mentioned and the Incarnation is generally treated instrumentally. Possible explanations for the texts’ apparent lack of theological sophistication are proposed by Slusser, including that the theological works are 1) exoteric and intended for uncatechized Christians, 2) composed early in Thaumaturgus’ life and therefore unsophisticated, or 3) simply reflective of Gregory’s own “rudimentary” grasp of Christian dogma (Slusser, *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus*, 8-10). Lane Fox provides a brief but useful discussion of Gregory’s apparent relation to Origen’s works and known teaching methods in *Pagans and Christians*, 519-525. Luise Abramowski (“Das Bekenntnis des Gregor Thaumaturgus bei Gregor von Nyssa und das Problem seiner Echtheit,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* vol. 87 no. 2 [1976]: 145-166.) and Slusser both point out that the sophisticated Creed is more likely to have been composed by Nyssen.

moment of narrative commentary to explicate the relevance of this creed for faith in his own day. Thaumaturgus “left that God-given teaching to his successors as a kind of inheritance, by which the people there [Neocaesarea] are initiated to this day, thus remaining unaffected by every heretical wickedness.”¹²⁴ Gregory’s comment proclaims that divine words mediated by a holy and virtuous teacher have an enduring power. His revelation is not just his, but it is an inheritance for the Christian community to come. Similarly, Gregory’s text, which records these formative moments from the exemplar’s life, can continue to transmit that inheritance.

In this portion of the *bios*, revelation works as a type of training that draws upon the student’s physical senses and his rational faculties, and it galvanizes Thaumaturgus’ development as a virtuous actor who may use reason and action in service of the divine, even within the world.¹²⁵ Once again employing the metaphor of a trained athlete, Gregory describes the effect of the revelation on Thaumaturgus’ resolve:

He was filled with a certain boldness and confidence through that vision, like an athlete who, since he has enough experience from competition and strength from training, strips confidently for the race and prepares for the contest against his competitors; now he likewise, suitably anointed in soul by his care for himself and by the allied help of the grace which was revealed to him, thus undertook his contests.¹²⁶

The emphasis on accumulated experience highlights the transformative nature of Thaumaturgus’ training. Training is certainly not instantaneous, but in the Christian context it may be catalyzed

¹²⁴ καὶ τοῖς ἐφεξῆς, ὥσπερ τινὰ κλῆρον τὴν θεόσδοτον ἐκείνην διδασκαλίαν καταλιπεῖν· δι’ ἣς μυσταγωγεῖται μέχρι τοῦ νῦν ὁ ἐκείνης λαὸς, πάσης αἱρετικῆς κακίας διαμείνας ἀπείρατος (VGT 31).

¹²⁵ He is prepared to fight against the power of “the Adversary” (τοῦ ἀντικειμένου, VGT 34).

¹²⁶ Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν παρρήσιας τινὸς καὶ θάρσους διὰ τῆς ὄψεως ἐκείνης πλήρης ἐγένετο, καθάπερ τις ἀθλητὴς ἀρκοῦσαν πρὸς τοὺς ἄθλους ἐμπειρίαν τε καὶ δύναμιν ἐκ παιδοτρίβου κτησάμενος, θαρσῶν ἀποδύεται πρὸς τὸ στάδιον, καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἀντιπάλους ἀγωνίζεται, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον κάκεῖνος, τῇ τε καθ’ ἑαυτὸν μελέτῃ καὶ τῇ συμμαχίᾳ τῆς ἐπιφανείσης αὐτῷ χάριτος, ίκανὸς τὴν ψυχὴν ἀλειψάμενος, οὕτως ἀντιλαμβάνεται τῶν ἀγώνων (VGT 34).

by isolated moments of revelatory experience. That is, self-discipline and external gift twine together for the shaping of the exemplar and then again in the literary presentation of this process.

The relational learning mode also plays a role in Thaumaturgus' story, when a Christian teacher helps Thaumaturgus advance to the second stage of his educational program. Despite his wisdom, he "did not disdain to use another teacher for divine things" when Origen took him on as a pupil.¹²⁷ Gregory notes that "this is the Origen mentioned in books."¹²⁸ The reference to Thaumaturgus' humility makes this moment of ecclesiastical name-dropping, an opportunity to praise the exemplar's academic pedigree without suggesting that it made him puffed up. After he completes his education, Thaumaturgus tries to retire to an obscure place.

Gregory continues to address the fact that the very occasion for which he composed this *bios* is a public celebration commemorating Thaumaturgus' Neocaesarean leadership. Given the ongoing tension between worldliness and spiritual development, Gregory depicts Thaumaturgus' re-integration into public life as a spiritually fruitful event; indeed, the vision serves as incentive for Thaumaturgus to begin his fruitful preaching. But Gregory emphasizes the exemplar's reluctance. Thaumaturgus' attempts to flee the world entirely are foiled by the machinations of a well-meaning Phaidimos, the second person with whom Thaumaturgus has a formative relationship. This bishop of Amasea contrives to ordain the exemplar remotely. This ordination at a distance depends on the efficacy of the spoken word: the most important element of the

¹²⁷ ἐτέρῳ χρήσασθαι διδασκάλῳ πρὸς τὰ θεῖα τῶν μαθημάτων, οὐκ ἀπηξίωσεν (VGT 22).

¹²⁸ Ὡριγένης δὲ οὗτος ἦν, οὐ πολὺς ἐπὶ τοῖς συγγράμμασι λόγος (VGT 22). Raymond Van Dam illustrates convincingly that there is no real evidence Gregory of Nyssa knew the writings of Gregory Thaumaturgus (Raymond Van Dam, "Hagiography and History," 280-281). Among the compositions attributed to Thaumaturgus is an *Address of Thanksgiving to Origen*, which describes Origen's teaching methods, but Gregory of Nyssa does not mention anything about the details of Thaumaturgus' time under the theologian in the VGT, merely that it happened.

investiture is the word of ordination, and the laying on of hands can apparently take place at a later time.¹²⁹ Although Thaumaturgus could not escape the call to service, his eventual return to public life and a leadership role is presented as a positive development, especially for the inhabitants of Neocaesarea who make up Gregory's audience.

3. *Macrina, VSM 5-11*

Macrina enters domestic retreat when she rejects marriage and devotes herself to her mother. It is only later in the text, however, that Gregory describes her choice as a retreat. Macrina and Emmelia gather a larger community of Christian women in their household at Annesi, and these women, from a range of socio-economic backgrounds,¹³⁰ model a form of contemplative retreat without needing to be in the wilderness. These women become not disciplined athletes, but angelic figures: "Just as by death souls are freed from the body and released from the cares of this life, so their life was separated from these things, divorced from all mortal vanity and attuned to an imitation of the existence of the angels."¹³¹ Their monasticism is partly responsible for this formation, but the two learning modes of revelation and relationship are cited. Gregory makes two points about Macrina's role: she is first a guide for her mother, and then together the two of them shape the community of women who all live in common. It is her

¹²⁹ In contrast, by the early second century, New Testament books show that both baptism and laying on of hands to impart the Holy Spirit seem to be necessary for full incorporation into the Church (Acts 19:1-7; more specifically for ordination/investiture at 2 Timothy 1:6). I agree with Slusser's assessment of the relationship between this ordination and typical ordination practices in the period. He remarks that "I doubt if Gregory of Nyssa was so concerned to save canonical precision" (Slusser, *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus*, 52 n. 21).

¹³⁰ In VSM 11, Gregory remarks that some of the women originally incorporated were household slaves; VSM 28 mentions one community member "outstanding for her wealth and birth and the youthful bloom of her body" (Ἐν ταύταις ἦν γυνή τις τῶν εὐσχημόνων πλούτῳ καὶ γένει καὶ τῇ τοῦ σώματος ὥρᾳ). This Vetiana is the daughter of a senator and had been married to a prominent man. In VSM 29, he names Lampodium, identified as having a leadership role for the group of virgins.

¹³¹ Καθάπερ γάρ αἱ διὰ θανάτου τῶν σωμάτων ἐκλυθεῖσαι ψυχαὶ καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον τοῦτον μεριμνῶν συνεκλύονται, οὕτως κεχώριστο αὐτῶν ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ἀπώκιστο πάσης βιωτικῆς ματαιότητος καὶ πρὸς μίμησιν τῆς τῶν ἀγγέλων διαγωγῆς ἐρρυθμίζετο (VSM 11).

relationship with these many women that helps transform the domestic space into an educational space.

These relationships also make Macrina's own retreat from married life and from an urban setting a period that brings her Scriptural learning to fruition; her earlier reading shapes her devotional practices, which in turn give her life an angelic component. Throughout VSM 5-11, Gregory emphasizes gradual transformation. It is revelation, however, that ultimately guides the entire structure and progress of the women's way of life. Gregory attributes the ongoing development of these women and their virtue to their philosophy, which "gave them additional aids for discovering goods leading them to greater purity."¹³² Through a combination of self-discipline and attentiveness to revealed goods, they receive encouragement in their way of life, a way apart from that which is worldly.

The VSM describes not just Macrina's retreat, but also their brother Naucratius' retirement to private life in the local woods. His decision to "despise all the opportunities at hand" in favor of "a life of monasticism and poverty" enables him to engage in virtuous behaviors.¹³³ He cares for a group of poor and infirm elderly people and puts his talent for hunting to work procuring their food while simultaneously using those labors as a means of "subduing his youthfulness" and transforming his soul.¹³⁴ The family's youngest brother, Peter, apparently did not leave home for his education or to pursue an illustrious public role; this latter he achieves anyway, for

scorning the hindrances of external matters, and having nature as an adequate teacher of all good learning, and always looking to his sister and making her the

¹³² ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ καθαρότερον ταῖς τῶν ἐφευρισκομένων ἀγαθῶν προσθήκαις τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἐπιδιδούσης (VSM 11).

¹³³ τῶν ἐν χερσὶν ἀπάντων ὑπεριδῶν ... τὸν μονῆρη καὶ ἀκτήμονα βίον (VSM 8).

¹³⁴ τὴν νεότητα τοῖς τοιούτοις ἄμα κατεδάμαζε πόνοις (VSM 8).

mark of every good, he devoted himself to such virtue that he did not seem to be inferior to great Basil in virtuous qualities.¹³⁵

Gregory links a Christian form of training to the cultivation of virtue, and even asserts that such training can take place in the home that has become a monastic setting. Like Macrina's reading program, her brothers' paths present alternatives or supplements to the typical elite, male course of *paideia*.

C. Reproducing exemplary learning

The retreat from worldly things prepares the exemplar for teaching and leadership roles. The majority of each *bios* focuses on the exemplar's mature *praxeis*, which include ongoing moments of training and education, this time with the exemplar as a leader. Yet the educational process begun during the exemplar's upbringing never disappears from view. A brief discussion of representative examples will demonstrate the continued relevance of the Three Rs for other figures beyond the three exemplars. Gregory depicts pedagogical communities as dynamic and evolving entities.

1. Moses, VM I.29 and VM II.112-116

Moses returns from his period of retreat to take up the mantle of teacher and guide. According to Gregory's *theoria* account, the Exodus is not just liberation from slavery, but a means of guiding the Israelites along the same path Moses himself trod when he rejected "the outside doctrines" (τὰ ἔξωθεν δόγματα, VM II.13). Just as Moses grappled with an adversary in a series of battles, so those who choose to follow him are "threatened by the adversary with

¹³⁵ Οὗτος τοίνυν τῆς περὶ τοὺς ἔξωθεν τῶν λόγων ἀσχολίας ὑπεριδών, ίκανὴν δὲ διδάσκαλον παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ μαθήματος τὴν φύσιν ἔχων ἀεί τε πρὸς τὴν ἀδελφὴν βλέπων καὶ σκοπὸν ἀγαθοῦ παντὸς ἐκείνην ποιούμενος εἰς τοσοῦτον ἐπέδωκεν ἀρετῆς, ὡς μηδὲν ἔλαττον τοῦ μεγάλου Βασιλείου δοκεῖν ἔχειν ἐν τοῖς κατ' ἀρετὴν προτερήμασιν (VSM 12).

onslaughts of temptations” (ταῖς τῶν πειρασμῶν προσβολαῖς ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀντικειμένου ἐπηρεάζονται, VM II.56).

Though they proceed toward freedom, neither Moses nor the Israelites fully leave Egyptian culture and its trappings behind. Gregory’s commentary permeates the sections of the VM where he relates the events of Exod 12:36, for the excellence of Moses’ command to despoil the Egyptians is not readily apparent. He claims “the loftier meaning is more fitting than the obvious one” (ό ύψηλότερος λόγος τῆς προχείρου διανοίας ἀρμοδιώτερος, VM II.115). Gregory steps in to direct his reader’s attention to moral principles that are hidden behind apparently contradictory actions. In this difficult interpretive case, readers are told that precise imitation of the exemplar would be ill-advised. By despoiling the Egyptians, Moses and the Israelites instead transform their dark past into a form of devotion.¹³⁶ Gregory explains the way out from Egypt as a passage from earthly learning for its own sake to learning in the service of divine truth. Gregory here confirms that earthly learning can be beneficial for people of faith when it is applied to “adorn” (καλλωπίζω) the Church.¹³⁷

Gregory describes the attributes of a leader in terms of relationships, bringing the relational mode of learning forward when he describes Moses as teacher. The people need a leader who can “counsel them against fear and will strengthen their downcast minds with the hope of divine help.”¹³⁸ This function, however, is dependent upon the exemplar’s own relationship with God:

¹³⁶ He writes that Basil, who also used his learning to beautify the Church, did so by “dedicating” (ἀναθεῖς, from ἀνατίθημι) that learning to God (VM II.116). Dedication to God is a frequent translation for this verb, especially among Christian authors (*PGL*, s.v. “ἀνατίθημι”).

¹³⁷ VM II.115.

¹³⁸ ἀντιστήσει τῷ φόβῳ τὴν συμβουλήν, τῇ τῆς θείας συμμαχίας ἐλπίδι τὸ κατεπτηχός τῆς διανοίας παραθαρσύνων (VM II.117).

This help would not come unless the heart of the leader spoke with God. Many of those placed in such a position are concerned only with outward appearance; of those hidden things which are observed only by God they have little thought. But for Moses it was not so. On the contrary, when he commanded the Israelites to be of good courage, he did cry out to God, although making no apparent sound, as God himself bears witness.¹³⁹

Gregory claims the communication in secret is proof of Moses' spiritual excellence. His lack of concern for "outward appearance" (*τὸ φαινόμενον*), read in light of Matthew 6, illustrates his proper humility with respect to both God and human beings. The interlocking relationships between God, exemplar, and people pictured here mark Moses' actions as reflections of and ways to reproduce his training. In his virtue, the exemplar points referentially beyond himself and toward an ideal relationship with God.

2. *Thaumaturgus*, VGT 28ff.

Thaumaturgus, too, teaches members of his local community, mainly through the performance of wonders and symbolic actions, the *thaumata* that constitute his epithet.¹⁴⁰ Relationships, rather than being formative for the exemplar himself, allow him to shape the experiences and character of others. Thaumaturgus may initiate or cultivate a relationship as a means of passing on learning he himself has perfected. Not surprisingly, most of these benefactor-beneficiary relationships are focused on drawing the other party closer to God, either

¹³⁹ Ὁπερ οὐκ ἀν γένοιτο, μὴ τῆς καρδίας τοῦ προεστηκότος τῷ Θεῷ λαλούσης. Τοῖς γὰρ πολλοῖς τῶν ἐν προστασίᾳ τουάντη προτεταγμένων τὸ φαινόμενον μόνον ὅπως ἀν εὗ διατεθείη σπουδάζεται· τῶν δὲ κεκρυμμένων, ἀ μόνῳ τῷ Θεῷ καθορᾶται, ὀλίγος γίνεται λόγος. Ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ Μωϋσέως οὐχ οὔτως ἦν· ἀλλ' ἐν ᾧ θαρσεῖν τοῖς Ἰσραηλίταις διακελεύεται, μηδεμίαν κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον φωνὴν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν ποιησάμενος, βοῶν παρ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ μαρτυρεῖται (VM II.118).

¹⁴⁰ On the model of prophets in the Hebrew Bible and Jesus in the gospels, Thaumaturgus engages in activites that bear symbolic import to teach his observers and compatriots (versus actions that just reveal virtues). Gregory tends to unpack these events with interjected commentary or even dialogue on the level of the narrative. One such action is described in this section, but others appear at VGT 75 (killing the "sham" dead man, cf. Acts 3:8 and 5:1-15) and VGT 77 (heals a man with his breath on a cloth).

by converting him to Christianity or by revealing some divine truth. Thaumaturgus appears to teach primarily through the mode of revelation, but always in the context of some relationship.

One pagan temple custodian is converted and even becomes a deacon when he learns about the power Thaumaturgus wields.¹⁴¹ Gregory records a pattern in Thaumaturgus' teaching: he uses the content of revelation in relationships, much like prophets in the Hebrew Bible. Commanding demons and relocating a massive boulder are tangible signs of Thaumaturgus' link to the divine.¹⁴² The meanings of his wonders are widely available in a visual or experiential form. Some of his miracles even left marks on the natural world that were still available for people in Gregory's day to visit and admire, as he notes.¹⁴³ With the story of the custodian's conversion fresh in readers' minds, Gregory refers to a series of other conversions, though without enumerating their individual circumstances. Instead, he focuses on the methods and the outcome. Thaumaturgus converts the people in Neocaesarea by a number of activities, most importantly, Gregory says, "by proclamation" (τῷ κηρύγματι).¹⁴⁴ Thus he imitates the model of the first disciples and their inspired preaching in Acts, effecting mass conversions.¹⁴⁵

By combining preaching and works of power, Thaumaturgus directs the Neocaesareans toward proper belief and worship. As a result of their education in the faith, the city's inhabitants band together to carry out a liturgical project:

By distributing to women what was beneficial, to children what was appropriate, to fathers what was properly dignified, and by being all things to all,¹⁴⁶ by the

¹⁴¹ VGT 39-40 and VGT 85.

¹⁴² The passage in VGT 34-41 relies heavily on the language of "sight" and "seeing" to explain how the custodian experiences Thaumaturgus' power. See further in Chapter 3.

¹⁴³ Cf. VGT 48, 53, 55, 60. For brief discussion of the nature miracles, see Van Dam, *Becoming Christian*, 91ff.

¹⁴⁴ VGT 47.

¹⁴⁵ A clear parallel may be found in Acts 2, where Peter's speech at Pentecost results in a high number of conversions.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. 1 Cor 9:22.

collaboration of the Spirit he at once constituted for himself so great a people that they wanted to build a temple, everyone assisting to this goal with their goods and their bodies. This is the temple which is pointed out to this day, which that Great One, halting as soon as he arrived, laid as a kind of foundation and groundwork for his priesthood, completing the work by some sort of divine impulse and higher aid.¹⁴⁷

It cannot be mere coincidence that this passage echoes the activities of Moses and the Israelites using their Egyptian wealth to adorn the tabernacle, or the accompanying VM example of Basil using his pagan education to benefit the Church. In both *bioi*, training is best evinced when it becomes embodied, especially when it is embodied within or for the Church. This episode that describes the move from edification to edifice gives tangible form to Thaumaturgus' progress and transformation. The temple turns worldly items to spiritual purposes, reinforcing the idea that Thaumaturgus embodies a type of leadership that is in, but not of, the world (Jn 15:19; 17:15-16).

3. *Macrina, VSM 12ff.*

Macrina also trains a number of individuals in the narrative of the VSM. Gregory attributes the thorough conversion of their illustrious brother Basil to Macrina, and then he elaborates on the training she provided for another of their siblings, the youngest son of the family, Peter.¹⁴⁸ Gregory employs a whole catalog of terms to describe Macrina's role with

¹⁴⁷ Γυναιξὶ τὰ πρόσφορα, παισὶ τὰ σύμμετρα, πατράσι τὰ πρέποντα νέμων, καὶ πάντα πᾶσι γενόμενος, τοσοῦτον ἔαυτῷ λαὸν ἀθρόως τῇ συνεργίᾳ τοῦ Πλεύματος παρεστήσατο, ὥστε πρὸς ναοῦ κατασκευὴν ὄρμῆσαι, πάντων χρήμασι τε καὶ σώμασι πρὸς τὴν σπουδὴν ὑπουργούντων. Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ναὸς, οὗ τὰς ἀρχὰς ἐκεῖνος τῆς κατασκευῆς κατεβάλετο· ἐπεκαλλώπισε δέ τις τῶν μετ' ἐκεῖνον, ἐκείνου ἀξίως· ὁ μέχρι τοῦ παρόντος δεικνύμενος, ὃν ὁ μέγας ἐκεῖνος εὐθὺς ἐπιστάς, οὗρὸν τινα θεμέλιον καὶ κρηπίδα τῆς ιδίας ιερωσύνης τῷ περιφανεστάτῳ τῆς πόλεως ἐνοπέθετο, θείᾳ τινὶ δυνάμει τελειώσας τὸ ἔργον (VGT 47-48).

¹⁴⁸ The powerful passage on Basil from VSM 6 deserves quotation, for it emphasizes the gentleness and simplicity Gregory attributes to his sister as a teacher: "After the mother had skilfully arranged what seemed best for each of Macrina's sisters, her brother, the distinguished Basil, came home from school where he had had practice in rhetoric for a long time. He was excessively puffed up by his rhetorical abilities and disdainful of all great reputations, and considered himself better than the leading men in the district, but Macrina took him over and lured him so quickly to

respect to Peter's *anatrophe*. She is not only pedagogue - the expected title for one who oversees early childhood and adolescent education - she is in fact called "father, teacher, pedagogue, mother, the counselor of every good."¹⁴⁹ Gregory describes Macrina's care for Peter as an educational process that parallels her own. As she shapes herself, she also brings Peter along on the same path: "he was above all a co-worker with his sister and mother in every phase of their angelic existence."¹⁵⁰ Given that the angelic life, as we have seen, is predicated on structuring the day with the singing of Psalms (VSM 11), it appears that Macrina directs her students using the mode of reading to supplement formative relationships.

Macrina takes on this role of nurturing educator for her entire semi-monastic domestic community, but instead of parallel development, we see Macrina preceding and showing the way. Figurative language dominates in the community's response to her death, a narrative moment when Gregory describes the exemplar's effects on her companions. Privileged within the household are the women "she had nursed and reared after finding them prostrate along the highway at the moment of starvation and she had led them to the pure and uncorrupted life."¹⁵¹

the goal of philosophy that he withdrew from the worldly show and began to look down upon acclaim through oratory and went over to this life full of labors for one's own hand to perform, providing for himself, through his complete poverty, a mode of living that would, without impediment, lead to virtue" (ἐπάνεισιν ἐν τούτῳ τῶν παιδευτηρίων πολλῷ χρόνῳ προασκηθεὶς τοῖς λόγοις ὁ πολὺς Βασίλειος ὁ ἀδελφὸς τῆς προειρημένης. Λαβοῦσα τοίνυν αὐτὸν ὑπερφυῆς ἐπηρμένον τῷ περὶ τοὺς λόγους φρονήματι καὶ πάντα περιφρονοῦντα τὰ ὀξιώματα καὶ ὑπὲρ τοὺς ἐν τῇ δυναστείᾳ λαμπροὺς ἐπηρμένον τῷ ὅγκῳ, τοσούτῳ τάχει κάκεινον πρὸς τὸν τῆς φιλοσοφίας σκοπὸν ἐπεσπάσατο, ὥστε ἀποστάντα τῆς κοσμικῆς περιφανείας καὶ ὑπεριδόντα τοῦ διὰ τῶν λόγων θαυμάξεσθαι πρὸς τὸν ἐργατικὸν τοῦτον καὶ αὐτόχειρα βίον αὐτομολῆσαι, διὰ τῆς τελείας ἀκτημοσύνης ἀνεμπόδιστον ἔσωντὸν τὸν εἰς ἀρετὴν βίον παρασκευάζοντα). Note especially that on Gregory's recounting, Basil only leaves behind the worldly education and turns his prodigious gifts toward divine purposes under the direction of Macrina! Her advancement enables Basil's own transition into the part of the educational process that focuses on engagement with Christian ethical and theological teaching.

¹⁴⁹ πατήρ, διδάσκαλος, παιδαγωγός, μήτηρ, ἀγαθοῦ παντὸς σύμβουλος (VSM 12).

¹⁵⁰ τότε δὲ ἀντὶ πάντων ἦν τῇ ἀδελφῇ καὶ τῇ μητρὶ συνεργῶν αὐταῖς πρὸς τὴν ἀγγελικὴν ἐκείνην ζωήν (VSM 12).

¹⁵¹ Ἡσαν δὲ αὗται, ἃς ἐν τῷ τῆς σιτοδείας καιρῷ κατὰ τὰς ὁδοὺς ἐρριμένας ἀνελομένη ἐτιθηνήσατό τε καὶ ἀνεθρέψατο καὶ πρὸς τὸν καθαρόν τε καὶ ἀφθορὸν βίον ἐχειραγώγησεν (VSM 26).

Gregory is certainly playing on both literal and metaphorical forms of nursing and rearing, given his focus on Macrina as teacher. After Macrina's death, the community of virgins lament that "the light that directed the path of our souls has been taken away."¹⁵² That the women of her community recognize her as such is one way Gregory tries to mark the effectiveness of her example. The Scripturally resonant images of "light" and "path" bring out the possibility that Macrina simply moves sooner or more quickly along the way of *epektasis*, while her friends and family follow. That is, her training is more advanced, but it is not necessarily inaccessible; she may be imitated.

Gregory also describes the teacher-student relationship between Macrina and himself.¹⁵³ Throughout the narrative, he depicts himself deferring to Macrina, the superior teaching partner in the relationship. For example, in VSM 19, Gregory explains that he let himself be guided by her wishes "because it was pleasing and desirable to her, in order to seem obedient to her as teacher in all things" (ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῦτο κεχαρισμένον ἦν καὶ φίλον αὐτῇ, ὡς ἂν διὰ πάντων πείθεσθαι τῇ διδασκάλῳ δοκοίην). Macrina admonishes Gregory and directs him to right thinking about himself and the sources of his authority.¹⁵⁴ Her physical endurance through illness affects him so profoundly he crafts a *synkrisis* between Macrina and Job.¹⁵⁵ Most importantly, their philosophical dialogue on her deathbed consoles him in his grief. It is this rich and multi-faceted relationship between Gregory and Macrina that, he says, gave him special insight to compose the *bios* itself. Further compounding the importance of reading, Gregory notes that the

¹⁵² Ἐσβέσθη, λέγουσαι, τῶν ὄφθαλμῶν ἡμῶν ὁ λύχνος· ἀπήρθη τὸ φῶς τῆς τῶν ψυχῶν ὁδηγίας (VSM 26).

¹⁵³ Chapters 3 and 4 develop further what is, here, only a preliminary discussion of their relationship.

¹⁵⁴ VSM 21.

¹⁵⁵ VSM 18.

text is intended to extend the exemplar's pedagogical influence far beyond the bounds of her original domestic setting.¹⁵⁶ The *bios* becomes a form of testimony, preserving Macrina's most important deeds and attitudes for wider study. It suggests that Gregory views his imagined readers as students of Macrina, virtually members of a pedagogical community that includes the exemplar.

IV. The fourth-century audience and *paideia*

Gregory shows the exemplary *paideia* portrayed here being reproduced and perpetuated by the exemplars for a range of individuals and groups. The three texts themselves are a means of preserving lessons that willing readers might themselves wish to reproduce. But are the Three Rs depicted actually reproducible in the fourth-century world of Gregory's reading audiences?

A. Reading

As notes throughout this chapter indicate, the reading programs undertaken by Macrina or Thaumaturgus represent existing and widely available literary canons. It is not difficult to imagine that, depending on gender and access to a teacher, an elite Christian man or woman of the fourth century could imitate one or both exemplars. Additional resources were available as well. One rich literary resource likely available to Gregory's contemporaries was Athanasius' biographical portrait of Antony the desert ascetic.¹⁵⁷ The *Life of Antony* was composed ca. 356-362 CE, during Gregory's lifetime. The account records Antony's miraculous deeds and his encounters with contemporaries, both believers and opponents; right away in the text, Athanasius claims that Antony was unlettered, a fact that not only does not undermine his spiritual authority

¹⁵⁶ See the discussion of the *prooimion* in Chapter 1.

¹⁵⁷ Gregory Nazianzus, for example, calls it "a rule for the monastic life in the form of a narration" in his *Oration* 21.5.

but is even meant to bolster it.¹⁵⁸ However, in one striking scene that has been the subject of much discussion, Antony engages in sophisticated debate with a series of philosophers.¹⁵⁹ Many students of the text seem to have reached a consensus that the historical Antony was probably well-educated, a judgment that reinforces the impression that Athanasius' claims about Antony's lack of education were part of an attempt to propose alternative, Christian sources of cultural capital apart from classical *paideia* and oratorical training.¹⁶⁰

B. Relationships

In addition to the literary models of ascetic living available for Christian consumption, real-life encounters with ascetics and their more extreme counterparts, the martyrs, also seem to have played a formative role for Gregory and his siblings.¹⁶¹ Relationships with such living models could provide individuals among Gregory's audiences, perhaps especially those like Caesarius who were involved in the Church hierarchy, with additional guidance.

References in Basil's correspondence indicate that during their younger years Gregory and Basil knew and had regular contact with Eustathius of Sebaste, whose extreme ascetic

¹⁵⁸ Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 1.2; mentioned again at 72.1 and 73. Cf. Acts 4:13.

¹⁵⁹ Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 72-80.

¹⁶⁰ Rubenson, "Philosophy and Simplicity," 110-111 (and 111 n. 3). On Chrysostom's purposeful downplaying of Paul's "rhetorical competence," and the irony involved in praising the unlettered using advanced rhetorical training in the fourth century, see Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 241-245. For the continuing impact of classical *paideia* for Christian elites through late antiquity, see Cameron, *The Mediterranean World*, 130-134. During this period ascetic communities of various kinds were also becoming more common. On the rise of asceticism, see Clark, *Christianity and Roman Society*; Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and narrative representation in the early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1994). On the body as focal point for religious identity and display, see Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

¹⁶¹ Among numerous studies on the relationship between martyrdom and asceticism in the first five centuries of the Common Era, see especially Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Grig, *Making Martyrs*, and the introductory essay, Jakob Engberg and Anders Klostergaard Petersen, "Finding Relevant Contexts for Early Christian Martyrdom," *Contextualising Early Christian Martyrdom*, edited by Jakob Engberg, Uffe Holmsgaard Eriksen, and Anders Klostergaard Petersen. *Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity*, volume 8 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011): 1-14. On the common identity of martyrs and ascetics as suffering figures, see Perkins, *The Suffering Self*.

teachings were condemned at the Synod of Gangra in the mid-fourth century.¹⁶² While martyrdom itself was less common during the later decades of the fourth century, the veneration of martyrs and their relics was on the rise. Gregory's narrative account of his dream encounter with the forty martyrs of Sebasteia and their personal (if disciplinary) attention to his liturgical practices reveals yet another layer of Cappadocian participation in the lives of holy people.¹⁶³

Relationships could also take the form of individual mentorship. In the VGT, Thaumaturgus chooses successors who can carry on his work and imitate him. Like Paul with Timothy or Moses with Joshua, Thaumaturgus and his deacon instantiate a model of succession for the Christian community. Similarly, Gregory adopts a personal and supportive advisory role toward Caesarius, the addressee of the VM.¹⁶⁴

C. Revelation

Given the singular nature of theophanies like the burning bush, revelation is the most potentially problematic learning mode for fourth-century audiences of the *bioi* to imitate. However, as shown above Gregory emphasized a sort of dispositional preparation that made the exemplars ready to encounter the divine, and it is this preparation that could reasonably be

¹⁶² See Basil's *Epistle* 223 to Eustathius and positive mention of Eustathius in Basil's *Epistle* 237 to Eusebius of Samosata in Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*. See also Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, especially chapter 3 on Basil; Van Dam, *Becoming Christian*, 19-21; Van Dam, *Families and Friends*, 25, and the note on "Basil's obsession for privileging his notions of doctrinal purity or ecclesiastical harmony at the expense of a personal relationship" partly to explain his later refutation of Eustathius' positions in the 375 CE composition *On the Holy Spirit* (Van Dam, *Families and Friends*, 31). Extremes of ascetic practice were a controversial subject in fourth-century Christian circles - See for example Shaw, *The Burden of the Flesh*, 230-235. As Shaw points out, debates over appropriate or "heretical" ascetic practices frequently "centered on questions of fasting and the behavior of women, with wider issues of individual authority and ecclesiastical control" (231).

¹⁶³ Limberis, *Architects of Piety* argues that the disciplinary action suggests a more personal or exclusive relationship that Gregory enjoys with these figures over and against the laity as a group (137-139). It is also worth noting that it was Emmelia who was responsible for funding the building of the martyr shrine just one mile from the family's estate at Annesi, another mark of personal devotion to the martyr cult.

¹⁶⁴ VM II.319. See the Introduction for a discussion of Caesarius' identity.

imitated by his contemporaries.

The exemplar's preparatory retreat from society was not merely a Scriptural touchstone for Gregory, nor was it a life choice available only to men. Macrina's *bios* provides numerous examples of retreat that could be practiced by fourth-century Christians of different social classes and genders. Several members of Gregory's family and community left the world and its concerns behind to devote their lives to contemplation, service, and virtue. Confirming the impact retreat could have on religious formation and virtuous development in a fourth-century Christian context, the other Cappadocian fathers reflect on domestic retreat and other retreat forms undertaken in their social circles. Gregory Nazianzus described his experience in Basil's monastic community as a welcome period of relaxation apart from the world.¹⁶⁵ Like Thaumaturgus, Gregory Nazianzus is drawn back into public life and a Church leadership role at the insistence of another bishop; Basil himself plays the role of Phaidimos for his friend. Basil himself started and sustained a monastic community.

Through Basil's letters, sermons and other works, we may trace the development of his ideas about ascetic communities, their tasks, and their usefulness.¹⁶⁶ The *Small Asketikon*, penned by Basil and preserved in a Latin translation of Rufinus known as the *Regula Basili* and in a Syriac translation known as *Quaestiones Fratrum*, describes the importance of living in

¹⁶⁵ Gregory's correspondence with Basil (Gregory Nazianzus, *Ep.* 4-5) and the apologetic speeches he made to his congregation in Nazianzus upon his return from unauthorized time away in Pontus (Gregory Nazianzus, *Or.* 1-3) seem to capture mixed feelings about his own pursuit of monastic life. See John A. McGuckin's nuanced discussion of Gregory of Nazianzus' attitudes toward askesis, monasticism, and Basil's monastic community in John A. McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), esp. 88-100.

¹⁶⁶ Several authors address the development of Basil's views on asceticism, especially as they are related to preaching and governance within his bishopric. See Elm, 'Virgins of God', especially chapters 2-3; Augustine Holmes, OSB, *A Life Pleasing to God: The Spirituality of the Rules of St. Basil*, Cistercian Series 189 (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 2000); Sterk, *Renouncing the World*.

community and reinforcing one another's ability to serve: "That we may not therefore admit inducements to sin through the eyes or the ears and so, little by little, through long habit, become settled in a most wretched way of life, and again that we might be able to give time to prayer, we ought first of all seek a retired dwelling."¹⁶⁷ The later expanded rule, the *Great Asketikon*, develops a collection of practical examples to supplement the rules of the *Small Asketikon*. It should come as no surprise that the VSM, embedded in this family background and social environment, is concerned with the practicalities of retreat and its execution in communal space.

Against the backdrop of Gregory's lived experience, we see that the specific features of retreat that appear in the three texts – location (urban, domestic, or in the wilderness), duration (brief and singular, repeated, or ongoing), social configuration (in company or solitude) – are of secondary importance to its formative function. Whether they undertake one among the whole range of monastic options available to fourth-century Christians or adapt their own households and communities to contemplative purposes, the readers who would imitate the exemplars have available many practical tools for developing themselves apart from the cares of the world.

V. Conclusion

The portraits of the exemplars in the *bioi* depict both constancy and transformation, offering audiences views of both "character" and "personality" for Macrina, Moses, and

¹⁶⁷ Basil of Caesarea, *Regula Basillii* 97. The Latin runs as follows: *Igitur ut neque per oculos neque per aures recipiamus illecebras ad peccandum, et paulatim longo usu inhaeramus consuetudini pessimae, et rursum ut possimus oration vacare, oportet primo secretius habitare.* Anna Silvas comments, "The divine summons of the human person to communion was reflected in the very constitution of humanity, made in God's image as a social being. This call to communion was realized and refracted in the church at large and in each local community, and in a very concrete fashion in the Christian ascetic community. Thus Basil's ascetic and moral teaching was based on a well-thought-through anthropology and pedagogy, an understanding of what human beings were created to be and how they might be best helped to achieve their ultimate calling" (Anna M. Silvas, *The Rule of St. Basil in Latin and English, a Revised Critical Edition* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013], 7.).

Thaumaturgus, and a chance to see each virtuous soul. Gregory seeks to guide readers to particular vantage points using metaphor and narrative commentary. Training and education are woven into every part of each exemplar's life, from the subject's own *anatrophe* to her participation in the formation of others. Reading, revelation, and relationships work in combination and individually as modes of learning in the texts. Where revelation is involved, whether the exemplar is a Scriptural figure or receives divine wisdom, the revealed content is more highly valued than other knowledge; even Moses' apparently immoral actions deserve a closer look to discern the loftier sense (VM II.115), and a divinely formulated credal statement can shape a community for generations (VGT 33). A frequently used book or passage of Scripture may become so embedded in the student's consciousness that it can dictate a daily schedule (VSM 3), and quotations and allusions pepper educated discourse in any number of social contexts.¹⁶⁸ We have seen that these contexts, too, are variable but influential elements of the educational program Gregory describes in his *bioi*. The narrative account of each exemplar's life captures a whole series of relationships between the exemplar and other individuals or groups, encountered live or through texts, in a variety of settings. These are communities united by the pursuit of education in the virtues, and the familiar nature of the educational practices described may be a way Gregory tries to make the pedagogical communities in the *bioi* accessible to a fourth-century audience; many specifics could reasonably be reproduced in a range of settings and by readers with a variety of intellectual abilities.

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, Macrina's deathbed prayer in VSM 24 and its numerous echoes and quotations of Scripture passages. For enumeration of Scriptural references, see Kevin Corrigan, transl. *The Life of Saint Macrina by Gregory Bishop of Nyssa* (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing, 1997), 67-68. Further comments on the pastiche may be found in Maraval's Sources Chrétiennes edition, 74-75.

Readers who would become students of the *bioi* are offered not just portraits of exemplary students and teachers, but the contours of an imitable educational program. The subjects of the *bioi* grapple with some issues similar to those facing fourth-century reading audiences. Complementary and adversarial relationships between classical and Christian philosophies come to the fore, and Gregory takes a position advocating for the usefulness of secular education if it can be put in the service of the Christian community, and if it does not lead to vices like pride and arrogance, which threaten to break down that community. The consistent attention to imitable learning modes and specific educational practices, outlined in this chapter, is one of Gregory's contributions to the development of a *paideia* appropriate for late ancient Christians. Specifically Christian educational practices, from singing Psalms in a private home (VSM 3, 11) to participating in the erection of a sanctuary (VGT 47), are shown to be supplements or even replacements for the tasks of a typical classical *paideia*. The exemplary *paideia* Gregory describes, even if it is realized only in the *bioi*, can inform readers of the behaviors and attitudes that together constitute a virtuous way of life, especially the crucial role of training for the soul's progress toward perfect virtue.

Chapter 3. Seeing *praxeis*, practicing virtue

Thus the zealous lover of goodness, while always receiving the thing appearing to the senses as an image of that which is desired, longs to be filled with the very imprint of the archetype.
The Life of Moses, II.231.¹

In the midst of enumerating Moses' virtuous *praxeis*, Gregory pauses to reflect on Moses' desire to encounter the divine. He comments on the events of Exod 33:18ff:

And although he [Moses] was lifted up through these exalted experiences, still he has an unsatiated and unmet desire for more, and he still thirsts for that with which he is continually filling himself as much as possible, and he asks to receive it as if he has never yet had a share, beseeching God to appear to him not as he is able to receive, but as God exists. It seems to me that experiencing such a thing is fitting for the soul well-disposed towards that which is good in its nature (τὸ τῇ φύσει καλόν), which soul hope always draws onward from the good that has been seen (τοῦ ὄφθέντος καλοῦ) to what lies above (τὸ ὑπερκείμενον) because that which is consistently comprehended with the mind always kindles the desire (ἐπιθυμία) for that which is hidden (τὸ κεκρυμμένον). Thus the zealous lover of goodness, while always receiving the thing appearing to the senses as an image (εἰκόν) of that which is desired, longs to be filled with the very imprint of the archetype (αὐτοῦ τοῦ χαρακτῆρος τοῦ ἀρχετύπου).²

Gregory narrates Moses' theophany in terms that highlight the complicated interplay between physical sight and knowing, between seeing, desire, and growth in virtue. Moses' desire to see God, for Gregory, mirrors the soul's desire to see not just an image, but the imprint of the archetype, the very thing that, in his Christian Neoplatonic conception, precedes the image. But the embodied human person has a limited capacity to receive (μετέχειν) the divine; the senses

¹ ὅθεν ὁ σφοδρὸς ἐραστὴς τοῦ κάλλους, τὸ ἀεὶ φαινόμενον ὡς εἰκόνα τοῦ ποθουμένου δεχόμενος, αὐτοῦ τοῦ χαρακτῆρος τοῦ ἀρχετύπου ἐμφορηθῆναι ἐπιποθεῖ.

² Καὶ διὰ τοσούτων ἐπαρθεὶς ὑψωμάτων, ἔτι σφριγῷ τῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ καὶ ἀκορέστως ἔχει τοῦ πλείονος καὶ οὗ διὰ παντὸς κατ' ἔξουσίαν ἐνεφορεῖτο ἔτι διψᾷ καὶ ὡς μήπω μετεσχηκώς τυχεῖν δέεται, ἐμφανῆναι αὐτῷ τὸν Θεὸν ἰκετεύων, οὐχ ὡς μετέχειν δύναται, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐκεῖνός ἐστι. Δοκεῖ δέ μοι τὸ τοιοῦτο παθεῖν ἐρωτικῇ τινι διαθέσει πρὸς τὸ τῇ φύσει καλὸν τῆς ψυχῆς διατεθείσης, ἦν ἀεὶ ἡ ἐλπὶς ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄφθέντος καλοῦ πρὸς τὸ ὑπερκείμενον ἐπεσπάσατο, διὰ τοῦ πάντοτε καταλαμβανομένου πρὸς τὸ κεκρυμμένον ἀεὶ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἐκκαίσυσα, ὅθεν ὁ σφοδρὸς ἐραστὴς τοῦ κάλλους, τὸ ἀεὶ φαινόμενον ὡς εἰκόνα τοῦ ποθουμένου δεχόμενος, αὐτοῦ τοῦ χαρακτῆρος τοῦ ἀρχετύπου ἐμφορηθῆναι ἐπιποθεῖ (VM II.230-231).

cannot grasp God “as God exists” (ώς ἐκεῖνός ἐστι). This passage, with its emphasis on the fact that the senses allow only a limited grasp of the divine, points to an intriguing puzzle that Gregory grapples with in all three *bioi*: just what does it mean to look at something hidden? For biographical writing, this question crystallizes around the narration of deeds or *praxeis* (πράξεις). How do narrated *praxeis* make the exemplar’s invisible soul visible? What are the roles of the biographer and the readers in the project of “seeing” exemplary virtue through an examination of *praxeis*?

In the passage, Gregory appeals to a referential relationship³ between what is seen and what is hidden, here identified as “the good that has been seen” and “what lies above.” He calls that which is apprehended by sense perception (τὸ φανόμενον) an “image” (εἰκόν) pointing beyond itself. Drawing on Neoplatonic ontology, according to which earthly beauty refers to the superior forms, the Cappadocian confirms Scriptural assertions that created things point toward the Creator God (cf. especially Romans 1:20 and Psalm 19:1).⁴ But Gregory incorporates the

³ As we saw in Chapter 1, referentiality is a fundamentally important concept for Gregory’s contextualization of the exemplars in the *prooimion* and *genos* portions of the *bioi*; with *praxeis*, too, Gregory’s aim of pointing beyond the exemplar’s specific actions to virtue that “lies above” and which readers may imitate in their own particular circumstances shapes the literary presentation of events.

⁴ For a helpfully brief differentiation of “image” in Gregory from a more classically Platonic conception, see Giulio Maspero, “Image” in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*. Because of Gregory’s commitment to a Nicene definition of the Trinity and the reality of Christ’s Incarnation, “image” (as applied to humans in the image of God) implies participation and divine immanence and does not bear the full Platonic sense of inferiority. Gregory addresses the immanence of the divine in creation elsewhere in his oeuvre. See for example *De professione Christiana*: “It does not seem to me that the Gospel is speaking of the firmament of heaven as some remote habitation of God when it advises us to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, because the divine is equally present in all things, and, in like manner, it pervades all creation and it does not exist separated from being, but the divine nature touches each element of being with equal honor, encompassing all things within itself” (Οὐ γάρ μοι δοκεῖ τὸ στοιχεῖον τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καθάπερ τι κεχωρισμένον ἐνδιαιτημα θεοῦ λέγειν τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, ἐν οἷς προστάσσει τελειοῦσθαι ἡμᾶς κατὰ τὸν ἐπουράνιον πατέρα, διότι τὸ θεῖον κατὰ τὸ ισον ἐν πᾶσιν ἐστι καὶ διὰ πάσης ὡσαύτως διήκει τῆς κτίσεως καὶ οὐδὲν ἀν χωρισθὲν τοῦ ὄντος ἐν τῷ εἶναι μένοι, ἀλλ’ ὁμοτίμως ἐκάστου τῶν ὄντων ἡ θεία φύσις ἐφάπτεται, πάντα τῇ περιεκτικῇ δυνάμει ἐντὸς ἑαυτῆς περιείργουσα, Gregory of Nyssa, *De perfectione* GNO Online 29.138.24-139.4). He continues with a proof-text from Psalm 138:8-11.

I take seriously the cautions offered by John M. Rist in his 1981 essay on the detection (and spurious detection) of Neoplatonism in fourth-century Christianity (John M. Rist, “Basil’s ‘Neoplatonism’: Its Background and Nature,” in

Christian Platonic echo into his *bios* for a purpose beyond abstract theological reflection, for the Moses of the *Life* is a practical model for readers who also struggle to learn from images, the literary portraits of subjects in the *bioi*.

The passage describes a Moses who is always drawn toward the divine, no matter how much he has accomplished. The language of desire and satiety reflects a history of Cappadocian debates with their forebear Origen about anthropology and the nature of the human soul's eschatological encounter with God.⁵ But what is the function within Gregory's project of encomiastic *bios*? Gregory identifies Moses' very seeking and desire as the prime marker of his perfect virtue. Positing a connection between "seeing" the divine and continually progressing toward perfection, Gregory adapts the Scriptural narrative of Exod 33:18ff (Moses seeing God's backside) to comment on virtue.⁶ It also renders perfect virtue imitable for a wider range of readers, since to seek continually is an activity that may be undertaken in a variety of contexts and ways of life; it may be translated into new settings outside the text. If we consider the biographical context of this identification between seeking and virtue, the readers who approach the *bioi* to find models to imitate also engage in a form of "seeking" guided by the narrator's descriptions of subjects and *praxeis* that are "good in [their] nature." The idea of vision, when it is connected to seeking, links interpretation and the pursuit of virtue.

Basil of Caesarea: Christian, Humanist, Ascetic: A Sixteen-Hundredth Anniversary Symposium. Part 1, edited by Paul Jonathan Fedwick [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1981]: 137-220). His call for "no less than a rewriting of the intellectual history of the fourth century" has been taken up by some of the authors I cite here, perhaps especially by Ilaria Ramelli, whose work on Origen and Gregory of Nyssa has been extremely helpful for my own understanding (Rist, "Basil's 'Neoplatonism,'" 138).

⁵ On Origen's ideas about human origins and afterlife and similar topics in Gregory, see recently Ilaria Ramelli, "Harmony between *Arkhē* and *Telos*."

⁶ For an example of some early Christian exegesis of Hebrew Bible theophanies, see Bogdan G. Bucur, "Clement of Alexandria's Exegesis of Old Testament Theophanies," *Phronema*, Volume 29, Number 1 (January 2014): 61-79.

Elaborating on the Exodus account, Gregory acknowledges a disconnect between what the human senses can “receive” and the richer reality of God’s essence. A second metaphor, the “imprint of the archetype,” adapts the language of clay- and metalworking to reinforce readers’ sense of the distance between what appears (*τὸ φανόμενον*) and what is hidden beyond it (*τὸ κεκρυμμένον*).⁷ Although he evokes this distance in the current passage, earlier in the *bios* Gregory did describe Moses’ experience on the mountain, allowing readers to experience at second-hand the exemplar’s divine revelation (VM II.162-169). Yet if the senses are limited receptors, how can such a theophany or the exemplar’s experience of it be preserved meaningfully in literary form? Gregory uses the language and concept of vision to grapple with the inevitable gaps between the narrative evocation of sense experience and real or live experiences of the ineffable.⁸ The vision language in the *bioi* works both with and against real sense perception to draw readers on toward that which is “beyond the senses.”

This brings us to the subject of an ideal reader’s participation in interpreting the primary “text” of narrated Mosaic *praxeis*. Although Gregory works from the actual Scriptural text of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, he synthesizes these sources into a new account of *praxeis*, and each deed recounted becomes itself a newly interpretable text. In the passage above, Gregory interjects his own commentary in the form of a gnomic saying to explain the broader significance of Moses’ behavior, making it applicable for the reading audience. In his assessment, hope draws souls well-disposed toward the beautiful closer to the divine. In fact, it is by reading about Moses’ *praxeis* that readers gain their understanding of principles like this one.

⁷ Though it cannot be explored at great length here, the metaphor of the “imprint” (*χαρακτήρ*) echoes Scriptural and philosophical material. See, e.g., Hebrews 1:3; Plato, *Timaeus* 50d-51e.

⁸ However incomplete these live experiences may themselves be.

Throughout the *bioi*, reading is figuratively tethered to seeing; Gregory applies the concept ‘vision’ to reading and interpretive practices. He invites ideal readers to see the exemplars’ *praxeis* as eyewitnesses, students, and participants.

In this chapter, I examine how Gregory portrays the *praxeis* of each mature exemplar, in order to understand how he constructs each encomiastic account to support his didactic aims. Gregory strategically deploys a specific conceptual metaphor – vision – to describe and explain both the exemplars’ actions and readers’ access to those actions. I argue that Gregory describes the exemplars’ *praxeis* utilizing a chronological narrative structure while attending to standard divisions like those Aphonius outlines in his *Progymnasmata*. Within this rhetorical framework, Gregory treats the narration of *praxeis* as a dynamic field to explore the roles of sense perception, interpreting communities, and hermeneutical principles, to model within each narrative an interpretive process ideal readers might themselves carry out and which will aid in their pursuit of the virtuous life.

My argument proceeds in four stages, each centered around the analysis of some specific application of vision terminology.⁹ To lay the groundwork, I briefly show that across all three *bioi* Gregory explicitly reflects on the nature of perception, including the knowledge and comprehension of realities beyond mere sense perception, in both rhetorical and philosophical terms.¹⁰ In order to deal with the difficulties involved in portraying a soul by describing actions,

⁹ Each use discussed is prominent across all three *bioi*, suggesting a consistent authorial preoccupation with the metaphor; its ubiquity further suggests that studying it is a way to assess a major component of Gregory’s biographical voice and technique, contributing to our developing portrait of Gregory as biographer.

¹⁰ Gregory does, of course, use the language of vision to refer to straightforward physical seeing. For example, Macrina sees Gregory enter her room in VSM 17; the possessed prostitute of VGT 17 presents an “awful and fearful sight” (θέαμα φρικτόν τε καὶ φοβερὸν) to those present; and the Israelites saw Pharaoh’s armies approaching in VM I.29. In Part II of the chapter, we shall see how sometimes straightforwardly physical vision is combined with the conceptual metaphor with interesting results.

Gregory focuses on the role of vision and the work of seeing he asks his readers to do.

After establishing that Gregory uses this language in ways grounded in his Christian Neoplatonic and literary *milieux*, I argue that three complementary applications of vision terminology facilitate the Cappadocian's particular goal of training Christian interpreters. First, Gregory uses the conceptual metaphor of vision to problematize, challenge, and rehabilitate (in a limited way) the role of physical sense perception for the tasks of engaging with and communicating about the divine. He explicitly comments on the interdependence of physical sight and intellectual or rational comprehension, justifying the biographical project by theorizing about how and why it is useful to record an exemplar's ineffable experiences in narrative form. The second application is comparative; he refers to sight and blindness to mark out a spectrum along which he situates better and worse interpretive strategies. Finally, Gregory applies the language of vision in interjected commentary to open a participatory window onto the biographical narrative, creating an expectation that readers can and should, through the act of reading, imagine themselves as eyewitnesses of the exemplars' virtuous deeds.

I contend that Gregory identifies the act of interpreting a biographical narrative as itself a virtuous *praxis*; readers who engage in “better” forms of seeing and interpreting are advancing along the path of virtue trod by the texts’ subjects and internal audiences. That is, Gregory portrays learning to discern what is hidden behind, beyond, or within that which is seen as necessary on two counts. First, this discernment can enable readers to “see” into the exemplars’ souls, recognize the virtues that motivate the exemplar’s *praxeis*, and imitate those virtues. Second, ideal readers who undertake the work of discernment can experience biographical reading itself as a practice with desirable “benefits” for cultivating virtue in their own souls (VGT 2).

I. Virtuous *praxeis*: soul made visible

Though the author and readers of an encomiastic *bios* share the basic assumption that the exemplar's behavior is virtuous, some of the subject's actions may appear questionable at first blush. Moses kills the Egyptian (Exod 2:11-12, VM I.18 and II.15), and yet Gregory insists this action is consistent with Moses' perfect virtue; Thaumaturgus gives money to a deceitful prostitute, an act Gregory attributes to his deep wisdom (VGT 15-17); Macrina admonishes her mother not to mourn for a deceased child, and Gregory praises her self-control (VSM 10-11). If a given action appears to redound to blame rather than praise, how and when can the author intervene to ensure readers do not misunderstand? How is it possible to tell which actions reflect which virtues?

A. Narrating *praxeis*

The tension between what is observed and what is inferred from observation is already inherent in the biographical presentation of the major encomiastic *kephalaion* of exemplary *praxeis*. Consider the advice of Aelius Theon, whose instructions for choosing material to praise in an encomium run, in part, as follows: “The ethical virtues are goods of the soul *and the actions which follow from these*; for example, that a person is prudent (φρόνιμος), temperate (σώφρων), courageous (ἀνδρεῖος), just (δίκαιος), pious (օστιος), generous (ἐλευθέριος), magnanimous (μεγαλόφρων), and such things.”¹¹ That is, actions are thought to result from internal aspects of character which are themselves in the soul and are invisible except through behavior.

¹¹ ψυχικὰ δὲ ἀγαθὰ τὰ σπουδαῖα ἡθικὰ καὶ αἱ τούτοις ἀκολουθοῦσαι πράξεις, οἵον ὅτι φρόνιμος, ὅτι σώφρων, ὅτι ἀνδρεῖος, ὅτι δίκαιος, ὅτι ὄστιος, ὅτι ἐλευθέριος, καὶ ὅτι μεγαλόφρων, καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα (Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 8, Spengel 110, emphasis added).

In the *progymnasmata*, most authors divide the deeds themselves into a number of sub-categories that are related to the qualities and virtues they display. For example, Aphthonius advises the treatment of “deeds, which you will divide into soul (ψυχή) and body (σῶμα) and fortune (τύχη): soul, such as courage or prudence; body, such as beauty or swiftness or strength; and fortune, such as power and wealth and friends.”¹² Hermogenes suggests a slightly different division, calling for a treatment of the “nature of the soul and body” (φύσις ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος) and then a discussion of “pursuits” (ἐπιτηδεύματα), “deeds” (πράξεις), and “external things” (ἐκτός); he also gives an example of how to bring out the relation between deeds and pursuits: “having chosen a general’s life, [tell] what he accomplished in it.”¹³ In Aelius Theon, we find further information about which sorts of deeds are most worthy of mention, a description that places a heavy emphasis on context. He asserts that

deeds (πράξεις) are praised on the basis of the occasion and whether someone did them alone, or was the first, or when no one else did them, or did more than

¹² τὰς πράξεις, ἀς διαιρήσεις εἰς ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα καὶ τύχην, ψυχὴν μὲν ὡς ἀνδρείαν ἢ φρόνησιν, σῶμα δὲ ὡς κάλλος ἢ τάχος ἢ ρώμην, τύχην δὲ ὡς δυναστείαν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ φίλους (Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8, Rabe 22). Cicero also lists the three categories of soul (*animus*), of body (*corpus*), and of external circumstances (*externae*) in his *De inventione* 2.59 177, describing the latter two more fully: “The virtues of the body are health, beauty, strength, speed; of external circumstance are public office, money, connections, birth, friends, fatherland, power, and other things which are considered to be similar in kind” (*corporis valetudo, dignitas, vires, velocitas; extraneae honos, pecunia, affinitas, genus, amici, patria, potentia, cetera quae simili esse in genere intellegentur*). He had listed the virtues of soul somewhat earlier, at *De inventione* 2.52 159: “Virtue is a habit of soul in accord with the order of nature and with reason... It has four parts: prudence, justice, courage, temperance” (*Nam virtus est animi habitus naturae modo atque rationi consentaneus... Habet igitur partes quattuor: prudentiam, iustitiam, fortitudinem, temperantiam*).

¹³ The full passage runs as follows: “And of course the nature of the soul and body will be examined, each of these according to its divisions; for you will say about the body that it is beautiful, that it is large, that it is fast, that it is strong, and about the soul that it is just, that it is temperate, that it is wise, that it is courageous. After these speak about pursuits, what sort of life he pursued – a philosopher, a rhetor, a general. The deeds are the most important, for the deeds are among pursuits, for example, having chosen a general’s life, what he accomplished in it. And the external things, such as relatives, friends, possessions, servants, luck and such things (καὶ μὴν καὶ φύσις ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος ἐξετασθήσεται καὶ τούτων ἐκάτερον κατὰ διαίρεσιν· ἐρεῖς γὰρ περὶ μὲν σώματος, ὅτι καλός, ὅτι μέγας, ὅτι ταχύς, ὅτι ἰσχυρός, περὶ δὲ ψυχῆς, ὅτι δίκαιος, ὅτι σώφρων, ὅτι σοφός, ὅτι ἀνδρεῖος. ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐκ τῶν ἐπιτηδεύμάτων, οἷον ποιὸν ἐπετήδευσε βίον, φιλόσοφον ἢ ἥρτορικὸν ἢ στρατιωτικόν. τὸ δὲ κυριώτατον αἱ πράξεις· ἐν γὰρ τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασιν αἱ πράξεις· οἷον στρατιωτικὸν βίον ἐλόμενος τί ἐν τούτῳ κατέπραξε. τὰ δὲ ἐκτός, οἷον συγγενεῖς, φίλοι, κτήματα, οἰκέται, τύχη καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα, Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* 7, Rabe 16).

others, or did them with few others, or beyond what was characteristic of his age, or surpassing what was hoped for, or with difficulties, or because they were done very easily or quickly.¹⁴

But the uniqueness of an action is not the only feature that ought to be noted. Aristotle proclaims, “Since praise comes from deeds, and action in accordance with free will (τὸ κατὰ προαίρεσιν) is characteristic of the morally good person (σπουδαῖος), one should try to show him acting in accordance with free will, and it is useful that he is shown to have acted so many times.”¹⁵

Each of our three texts presents a narrative that is arranged chronologically and that privileges the sequential narration of deeds, with an eye toward providing multiple examples of each exemplar’s major virtues. The deeds of the exemplars are treated in VSM 5-38, VGT 23-99, and VM I.20-76 and II.19-318; they make up the central and longest portions of the three works. Another viable option for encomiastic composition organizes deeds according to the virtues they display, removing the need for a certain kind of interpretive work.¹⁶ However, Gregory takes advantage of the chronological arrangement of a *bios* to exercise his readers’ hermeneutical faculties. Gregory also uses the philosophically grounded conceptual metaphor of vision for

¹⁴ ἔπαινεται δέ εἰσιν αἱ πράξεις καὶ αἱ διὰ τὸν καιρόν, καὶ εἰ μόνος ἔπραξέ τις ἢ πρῶτος, ἢ ὅτε οὐδείς, ἢ μᾶλλον τῶν ἄλλων, ἢ μετ’ ὀλίγων, ἢ ὑπὲρ τὴν ἡλικίαν, ἢ παρὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα, ἢ μετὰ πόνων, ἢ ὅσα ῥάστα ἢ τάχιστα ἐπράχθησαν (Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 8, Spengel 110).

¹⁵ ἐπεὶ δ’ ἐκ τῶν πράξεων ὁ ἔπαινος, ἵδιον δὲ τοῦ σπουδαίου τὸ κατὰ προαίρεσιν, πειρατέον δεικνύαι πράττοντα κατὰ προαίρεσιν, χρήσιμον δὲ τὸ πολλάκις φαίνεσθαι πεπραχότα (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1.9.32, Bekker 1367b).

¹⁶ Quintilian mentions both arrangements in his *Institutio oratoria* 3.7.15: “In some cases, it has been better to follow the stages of a man’s age and the order of his actions; so that natural qualities would be praised in the early years, then his education, after that the succession of his works (that is of deeds and sayings); in other cases, it has been better to divide praise by the kinds of virtues – of courage, justice, self-control, and the rest – and assign to each whichever of his deeds were performed in accordance with them” (*Namque alias aetatis gradus gestarumque rerum ordinem sequi speciosius fuit, ut in primis annis laudaretur indoles, tum disciplinae, post hoc operum (id est factorum dictorumque) contextus, alias in species virtutum dividere laudem, fortitudinis iustitiae continentiae ceterarumque, ac singulis adsignare quae secundum quamque earum gesta erunt*). Menander, on the other hand, expresses a preference for the thematic arrangement: “For you will everywhere divide the deeds which you are about to praise with an encomium by the virtues (there are four virtues, courage, justice, temperance, wisdom), and see if the deeds are related to certain virtues” (διαιρεῖ γὰρ ἀπανταχοῦ τὰς πράξεις ὃν ἀν μέλλης ἐγκωμιάζειν εἰς τὰς ἀρετάς [ἀρεταὶ δὲ τέσσαρές εἰσιν, ἀνδρεία, δικαιοσύνη, σωφροσύνη, φρόνησις] καὶ ὅρα τίνων ἀρετῶν εἰσιν αἱ πράξεις, Menander II.373.5-9).

specifically biographical purposes: (1) to convey that *praxeis* reflect or embody an exemplar's virtuous character, because they arise from it, and (2) to portray interpreters as capable of discerning the virtuous character that motivates observable actions.¹⁷ He relies on his Christian Neoplatonic anthropology and epistemology in order to apply the metaphor, incorporating his own significant philosophical *paideia* into the literary-rhetorical form of *bioi* and their portrayals of exemplary deeds.¹⁸

B. Christian Platonic anthropology in the *bioi*

In the dialogue *De anima et resurrectione*, hailed as the “Christian *Phaedo*,”¹⁹ Macrina takes on an obviously Socratic role. Her philosophical expertise is also reflected in VSM 18,

¹⁷ For example, these functions are paired in the discussion Gregory has with Lampadia about dressing Macrina's corpse for burial. Lampadia, in her role as interpreter, reasons backward from Macrina's simple wardrobe to the exemplar's virtuous rationale for living with few possessions: “What stores?” she said. “You have in your hand everything she stored up. See the cloak, see the veil for her head, the worn sandals for her feet. This is her wealth, this her surplus. There is nothing beyond what appears put up in some hidden chest or secured in a treasury. She knew one storage place for her own wealth: the treasury of heaven; having stored everything there, she left nothing behind on the earth” (“Ποίοις, εἶπεν, ἀποκειμένοις; ἐν χερσὶν ἔχεις πᾶν τὸ ἀπόθετον· ιδοὺ τὸ ἱμάτιον, ιδοὺ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἡ καλύπτρα, τὰ τετριμένα τῶν ποδῶν ὑποδήματα· οὗτος ὁ πλοῦτος, αὕτη ἡ περιουσία. Οὐδὲν παρὰ τὸ φαινόμενον ἐν ἀποκρύφοις ἀπόκειται κιβωτοῖς τισιν ἡ θαλάμοις ἡ σφαλισμένον. Μίαν ἀποθήκην ἔδει τοῦ ιδίου πλούτου, τὸν θησαυρὸν τὸν οὐράνιον· ἐκεῖ πάντα ἀποθεμένη οὐδὲν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὑπελείπετο,” VSM 29).

¹⁸ Significant work has been done on philosophical echoes and innovation in Gregory's corpus more broadly speaking. On Platonism in the *bioi* specifically see focused studies like Gerhart B. Ladner, “The Philosophical Anthropology”; and Pierre Maraval's brief piece “La Vie de sainte Macrine de Grégoire de Nysse: continuité et nouveauté d'un genre littéraire,” *Du Héros Païen au Saint Chrétien: actes du colloque*, Strasbourg, 1er-2 décembre 1995 / organisé par le Centre d'Analyse des Rhétoriques religieuses de l'Antiquité (C.A.R.R.A.) (Paris : Institut d'Etudes augustiniennes, 1997): 133-138.

Some specific points on the connection between philosophy and education are worth noting in light of Chapter 2. Ellen Muehlberger argues convincingly that Macrina's Socratic portrait allows Gregory to rehabilitate and reclaim some elements of the classical tradition as useful for Christians (Ellen Muehlberger, “Salvage.”). Samuel Rubenson argues that the VSM and other hagiographies reveal tensions and propose solutions as early Christians grappled with developing a Christian *paideia* (Samuel Rubenson, “Philosophy and Simplicity.”).

¹⁹ A reasonable *terminus post quem* for this text is 379 CE, since the dialogue is depicted as taking place after the death of Basil in that year (Giorgio Maturi, “An et Res,” *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*.

For discussion of the similarities between the *De anima*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium*, see particularly the following: Charalambos Apostolopoulos, *Phaedo Christianus: Studien zur Verbindung und Abwägung des Verhältnisses zwischen dem platonischen “Phaidon” und dem Dialog Gregors von Nyssa “Über die Seele und die Auferstehung*, Europäische Hochschulschriften 188 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1986); Catharine P. Roth, “Platonic and Pauline Elements”; Susan Wessel, “Memory and Individuality in Gregory of Nyssa's *Dialogus de anima et resurrectione*,” *JECS*, Volume 18, Number 3 (Fall 2010): 369-392 (especially pages 373-380 on genre); Rowan Williams, “Macrina's Deathbed Revisited.”

during a conversation with Gregory in which she relies on the rational faculty of her soul to prepare for death. Macrina is a teacher who challenges incorrect perceptions of the good; she directs Basil (VSM 6), Emmelia (VSM 11), Peter (VSM 12), and Gregory himself (VSM 18, 21) toward the proper goal of Christian virtue. In VSM 18, Gregory explicitly compares his sister not to Socrates but to the biblical hero Job, whose ability to discuss theology cogently even while afflicted by painful sores represents an ideal. He specifically juxtaposes Macrina's physical suffering and her unbowed intellect, stating that her ability to reflect and teach is “not impeded by the sickness” that is attacking her body.²⁰ The subject matter of their conversation, however, connects Macrina to Socrates. Her discussion topics range from “discourse on the soul” to “the reason for life in the flesh” to “what release there is from death back again into life,” a collection of subjects quite like those under consideration in Plato’s *Phaedo*.²¹ The sophisticated “contemplation of higher things” ($\tauῇ περὶ τῶν ὑψηλῶν θεωρίᾳ$) she provides depends on her mental clarity, her posession of a mind ($νοῦς$) that is able to train and control the body ($σῶμα$) and its suffering. Her discussion topics reflect a concern for living well and virtuously, connecting rationality – part of the soul’s very nature – to willed acts of virtue. Gregory insists that body and soul cooperate in carrying out both virtuous and vicious actions in various places throughout his corpus.²²

²⁰ οὐδὲν ὑπὸ τῆς τοσαύτης ἀρρωστίας παραβλαπτόμενον (VSM 18).

²¹ ὅπως ἐπήρθῃ τῷ λόγῳ περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ἡμῖν φιλοσοφοῦσα καὶ τῆς διὰ σαρκὸς ζωῆς τὴν αἰτίαν διεξιοῦσα, καὶ ὅπου χάριν ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὅπως θνητὸς καὶ ὅθεν ὁ θάνατος καὶ τίς ἡ ἀπὸ τούτου πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν πάλιν ἀνάλυσις (VSM 18).

²² In his *In sanctum Pascha*, Gregory writes of the body and soul that “in every deed, both assist one another and accomplish together the deeds done” ($ἐπὶ πάσης πράξεως ἀλλήλοις ἀμφότερα συνεφάπτεται καὶ συναποτελεῖ τὰ γινόμενα$, GNO Online 40.267.5-7). In *De instituto Christiano*, he emphasizes the cooperation of body and soul in preparation to encounter God: “So it is necessary for the one about to bring *body and soul*, according to the law of piety, to God and offer him a bloodless and pure sacrifice...” ($Δεῖ τοίνυν τὸν μέλλοντα ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα κατὰ τὸν$

In the VM, Gregory Christianizes and Scripturalizes the Platonic tripartite division of the soul while recognizing its counterpart in non-Christian teaching:

It is safety and security to mark the upper doorpost and the side posts of the entrance with the blood of the lamb. These things about the physiology of the soul (Ταῦτα περὶ ψυχῆς φυσιολογοῦντος) the Word shows us through figures (δι’ αἰνιγμάτων), and outside learning (ἡ ἔξωθεν παίδευσις) also shows them, dividing the soul into the rational (τὸ λογιστικὸν), the desiring (ἐπιθυμητικὸν), and the passionate (θυμοειδές). Of these parts we are told that the passion and the desire are placed below, supporting on each side the intellectual part of the soul, while the rational aspect (ὁ λογισμός) is joined to both so as to keep them together and to be held up by them, being trained for courage by the spirit and elevated to the participation in the Good by desire.²³

Although he acknowledges that the division is known in “outside learning,” Gregory comments on the spatial aspect of Scripture’s image for teaching anthropological principles. The spirit and desire are below the intellectual and rational part of the soul. In this specific quotation, it appears that the image, if understood properly, not only shows the division of the soul, but the proper hierarchy among its parts. Scripture teaches through enigmas, inviting and requiring interpretation, and Gregory serves as a guide for interpretation.

Neoplatonism provides Gregory with a conception of the soul’s capacity to desire that

τῆς εὐσεβείας νόμον προσάγειν θεῷ καὶ τὴν ἀναίμακτον αὐτῷ καὶ καθαρὰν ἀποδιδόναι λατρείαν..., GNO Online 28.43.8-10). Later in the same sermon, he includes an extended section on the necessity of keeping body and soul united, and both aimed at virtuous ends (GNO Online 28.54.20 – 55.18). In the VM itself, Gregory explains that Moses purifies his garments before going up on the holy mountain: “This is because it is necessary for the one who is about to embark on the contemplation of Being to be thoroughly pure, so that he might be pure in both body and soul and spotless, the dirt on each part rightly washed off” (Τοῦτο δέ ἐστι τὸ διὰ πάντων καθαρεῦσαι δεῖν τὸν μέλλοντα προσβαίνειν τῇ τῶν ὄντων θεωρίᾳ, ὡς καὶ ψυχῇ καὶ σώματι καθαρὸν εἶναι καὶ ἀκηλίδωτον τὸν ἐν ἐκατέρῳ ρύπον καταλλήλως ἀποκλυσάμενον, VM II.154).

²³ Φυλακὴ δέ ἐστι καὶ ἀσφάλεια τὸ τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ἀμνοῦ τὴν τε φλιάν καὶ τοὺς σταθμοὺς τῆς εἰσόδου κατασημήνεσθαι. Ταῦτα περὶ ψυχῆς ἡμῖν φυσιολογοῦντος δι’ αἰνιγμάτων τοῦ λόγου, καὶ ἡ ἔξωθεν παίδευσις ἐφαντάσθη, διαιροῦσα τὴν ψυχὴν εἰς τὸ λογιστικὸν καὶ ἐπιθυμητικὸν καὶ θυμοειδές. Ἐκ τούτων δὲ τὸν θυμὸν μὲν καὶ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ὑποβεβηκέναι φασίν, ἐκατέρωθεν τὸ διαινοητικὸν τῆς ψυχῆς ὑπερείδοντας, τὸν δὲ λογισμὸν ἀμφοτέροις ἐπεζευγμένον συνέχειν τε αὐτοὺς καὶ ὑπ’ ἐκείνων ἀνέχεσθαι, πρὸς μὲν ἀνδρείαν τῷ θυμῷ στομούμενον, πρὸς δὲ τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ μετουσίαν δι’ ἐπιθυμίας ὑψούμενον (VM II.95-96).

becomes key for the Christian pursuit of a virtuous life.²⁴ The desiring faculty is, in Gregory's formulation, an accretion, but one which was providentially ordained for fallen humans.²⁵ This appetitive faculty takes center stage in several places where he discusses desire.²⁶ Gregory asserts that desire for finite, material things is insatiable, "for if he who fulfills his desire for one of the things which he pursues should then incline his desire to something else, he is found empty again of that thing. And even if he should become full of this, he is found once more an empty and roomy container for something else."²⁷ Compare this to the positive portrayal of desire in a virtuous figure like the Moses of our opening passage (VM II.230-231), who is drawn on by finite, material things, which appeal to his desires, to a new and insatiable desire for the

²⁴ Following here John Behr on *De hominis opificio*, as opposed to Christopher Stead; John Behr, "The Rational Animal: A Rereading of Gregory of Nyssa's *De hominis opificio*," *JECS*, volume 7, number 2 (Summer 1999): 219-247; Christopher Stead, "The Concept of the Mind and the Concept of God in the Christian Fathers," *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology*, ed. B. Hebblethwaite and S. Sunderland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982): 39-54.

²⁵ See *De anima*: "For the desiring element, although it is not by nature directed toward the good (for the sake of which it is sown in us), grows up and increases..." (τὸ γὰρ ἐπιθυμητικὸν οὐ πρὸς τὸ φύσει καλὸν οὐ χάριν κατεσπάρη ἡμῖν ἐφύν τε καὶ ἀνέδραμεν..., GNO Online 15.45.4-6). For a clear explication of Gregory's position and its relation to Plotinus, see especially Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory*, 133-156. Rowan Williams, "Macrina's Deathbed Revisited," points out that Gregory's anthropology is difficult to pin down, but provides this helpful summary: "Whatever Gregory believed, it was *not* that the human subject consisted of a rational core with some embarrassing additions" (236).

²⁶ Desire is also the focus, but of negative attention, in Gregory's characterization of the Egyptian armies in his exegesis of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea (VM II.122-123): "For who does not know that the Egyptian army are the various passions of the soul by which the person is enslaved? ... For who would be able to name some distinction between those intellectual urges and the impulses to pleasure and sorrow and covetousness from the aforementioned army? ... In the chariot there are three drivers whom the history calls 'viziers.' You will understand these three, completely carried along by the chariot, (since you were previously instructed in the mystery of the side posts and upper doorpost [VM II.95]) as the tripartite division of the soul, counting that which is perceived as the rational, the appetitive, and the spirited" (Τίς γὰρ οὐκ οἶδεν ὅτι στρατὸς Αἴγυπτιός ἐστι τὰ ποικίλα τῆς ψυχῆς πάθη, οἵς καταδουλοῦται ὁ ἄνθρωπος;... Τί γὰρ ἂν τις διαφέρειν εἴποι τοὺς θυμώδεις τῶν λογισμῶν ἢ τὰς πρὸς ἡδονήν τε καὶ λύτην καὶ πλεονεξίαν ὄρμας τῆς μνημονευθείσης στρατιᾶς... ἐν ᾧ οἱ τρεῖς ἐπιβάται, οὓς τριστάτας ὄνομάζει ἡ ιστορία: νοήσεις δὲ τοὺς τρεῖς τούτους πάντως τοὺς φερομένους ὑπὸ τοῦ ἄρματος, προδιδαχθείς ἐν τῷ κατὰ τοὺς σταθμοὺς καὶ τὴν φλιὰν μυστηρίῳ τὴν τριμερῆ τῆς ψυχῆς διαίρεσιν, εἰς τὸ λογιστικὸν καὶ ἐπιθυμητικὸν καὶ θυμοειδὲς ἀναπέμπων τὸ νόημα). Allowing rationality to be overwhelmed by the passions and impulses, then, leads to destruction.

²⁷ Ο γὰρ πληρώσας ἔαντοῦ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἐν τινι ὕπερ ἐσπούδασεν, εἰ πρὸς ἔτερόν τι τῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ ρέψειε, κενὸς πρὸς ἐκεῖνο πάλιν εὑρίσκεται· καν γένηται τούτῳ πλήρης, τῷ ἔτερῳ πάλιν κενός τε καὶ εὐρύχωρος γίνεται (VM II.61).

ultimate good. As in the chariot image from *Phaedrus* or its counterpart in Exod 12, so here the appetitive part of the soul, under the guidance of the rational faculty that has been properly trained, directs the exemplar ever closer to God.²⁸ That is, the embodied human soul has the capacity to choose and execute virtuous action.²⁹

C. Vision and epistemology in reading *bioi*

Even though he has a relatively high degree of control over which praxeis to depict,³⁰ a biographer praising his subject must address the hermeneutical gap between how a given action appears and what positive thing(s) it signifies about the actor, thus providing readers with the interpretive tools for navigating that gap. For Gregory the Christian Platonist, this gap implicates human epistemic limits:

“You have suffered nothing new,” the teacher said to them [the Christians of Comana], “misled by your eyes and entrusting the judgment of the beautiful to sense alone. For sense perception is a faulty criterion of the truth of real essences, itself blocking the way into the depth of understanding.”³¹

As Thaumaturgus articulates it to the Christians at Comana, sense perception without

²⁸ In Gregory’s Christian system, the naturally compelling nature of God eventually removes the need for the soul’s desiring faculty. Moses is used as the prime example of the being who, as he becomes more perfect, eventually abandons desire but nevertheless continues to advance toward God.

²⁹ Gregory affirms the possibility of choice throughout the VM. See Andrew P. Klager, “Free Will and Vicinal Culpability in St. Gregory of Nyssa’s *De vita Moysis*,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, volume 55, numbers 1-4 (2010): 149-179; Hans Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue*, 231-240. See *De professione Christiana*: “Therefore, the One who orders us to imitate our Father orders us to cleanse ourselves from earthly passions, and this is a separation which does not come about through a change of place, but it is achieved only through choice” (οὐκοῦν ὁ τὸν οὐράνιον μιμεῖσθαι κελεύων πατέρα τῶν γηῶν παθῶν καθαρεύειν κελεύει, ὃν ἡ ἀπόστασις οὐ διὰ τοπικῆς μεταβάσεως, ἀλλὰ διὰ προαιρέσεως ἐνεργεῖται μόνης, GNO Online 29.140.2-5).

³⁰ Certain factors may limit Gregory’s freedom, such as the audience’s knowledge about the exemplar’s life and activities (as in the case of Moses, a well-known Scriptural figure).

³¹ Οὐδὲν καὶ νὸν πεπόνθατε, φησὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ διδάσκαλος, δόφθαλμοῖς ἀπατηθέντες, καὶ τῇ αἰσθήσει μόνῃ τὴν κρίσιν τοῦ κάλλους ἐπιτρέψαντες. Σφαλερὸν γάρ κριτήριον τῆς τῶν ὄντων ἀληθείας ἡ αἴσθησις, τὴν πρὸς τὸ βάθος τῆς διανοίας εἰσόδον δι’ ἔαυτῆς ἀποκλείουσα (VGT 69).

supplementary knowledge does not allow and can even hinder access to truth.³² At times, Gregory appears to allow the events to speak for themselves, while at others he intervenes with overt didactic commentary. In this case, Thaumaturgus the subject provides interpretive guidance, not only for the community to whom he speaks, but, potentially, for readers as well.

Gregory draws on Neoplatonic principles to craft portraits of the three exemplars who choose virtuous action; he also draws on these principles to explain the task of ideal readers. In each text he recommends and models interpretive strategies on the assumption that the intellectual faculty, the *νοῦς*, can access realities the body itself cannot directly perceive. He applies the vocabulary of “conceptions” to the things one may know about the infinite, and ultimately incomprehensible, divine nature.³³ Becoming like Moses and “seeing God” is not the only benefit associated with moving beyond physical sight to right conceptions of the divine, though this is a key aspect of Gregory’s theology.³⁴

Gregory marks biographical narrative as a genre that records not only the *praxeis* observed but, by extension, aspects of an exemplar’s soul that are the “real” things driving the *praxeis*. Reading *bioi*, then, can offer practical experience in moving from physical perceptions – a starting point – to intellectual understanding – the ending point that becomes a new starting

³² The role of sense perception in knowledge of God is a hotly contested topic among Gregory’s Christian predecessors. Origen’s insistence in *Contra Celsum* that Christians can partly rely on sense perception (which itself relies on the Stoic concept of *cataleptic* impressions and intellectual assent) is an important element of Gregory’s own training. For more on both external and internal challenges to Christian epistemological claims about the apostles’ knowledge and sense perception, see the helpful article by Robert J. Hauck, “They Saw What They Said They Saw”: Sense Knowledge in Early Christian Polemic,” *Harvard Theological Review*, Volume 81, Number 3, (1988): 239-49.

³³ See Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³⁴ For an excellent introduction to the contrast between knowledge and conceptions, see again Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea*, Chapter 6, esp. 153-55. Heine addresses in detail the agonistic context in which Gregory frames his understanding of “right conception” (Heine, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life*, 127-158).

point. Gregory applies the metaphor of vision to this process of discerning. In the VSM, Peter sees Macrina's virtuous example and adopts it, "always looking (βλέπων) to his sister and making her the mark (σκοπός) of every good."³⁵ In a complementary fashion, the VGT praises Thaumaturgus' decision to avoid public speaking, writing that he "made silence his example, displaying (δεικνύς) the internal (έγκειμενον) treasure not by words but in deed," that is, making his virtue visible.³⁶

In summary, both rhetorical conventions and Christian Platonic anthropology provide concepts for describing the link between the human soul and actions that reveal virtues in the soul. Gregory draws on both to narrate the exemplars' *praxeis* in his *bioi*. Because of humans' physical and psychic make-up, humans may purposefully perform virtuous actions, and due to the nature of observation and knowledge, outside observers can gain some conception of the virtues that motivate *praxeis*. The language of vision draws attention to and mediates the tension between the limited perceptions that accompany embodiment and the rational capacity for interpretation and insight. Gregory uses sight as an epistemological metaphor to grapple with a major assumption of the biographical genre: that actions reveal or expose the soul (especially its ἀρετή) to external observers.

The link between vision, rationality, and interpretation had also appeared in Philo of Alexandria's (c. 25 BCE - 50 CE) exegetical treatments of the life of Moses.³⁷ Scholars of both Gregory and Philo have noted similarities between Gregory's treatment of Moses in the VM and

³⁵ πρὸς τὴν ἀδελφὴν βλέπων καὶ σκοπὸν ἀγαθοῦ παντὸς ἐκείνην ποιούμενος (VSM 12).

³⁶ ἐπίδειξιν ποιεῖται τὴν σιωπὴν, ἔργῳ δεικνὺς τὸν ἐγκειμένον θησαυρὸν, οὐχὶ ρήμασι (VGT 24).

³⁷ For an excellent overview of Philo's portrait of the lawgiver, which gives attention to allegorical interpretation and the various roles and virtues of Moses that allow Philo to depict him in terms that would have been familiar for Greeks, see Louis H. Feldman, *Philo's Portrayal of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

Philonic exegesis of the Mosaic material.³⁸ Apart from the numerous comparanda in Philo's own *Life of Moses*, one application of vision language elsewhere in his oeuvre seems particularly relevant for our study of Gregory's VM: the assessment of idolatry as a failure of vision. In *On the Decalogue* 66-69, Philo summarizes the errors involved in fashioning idols, using a variety of metaphors including sight. Paragraphs 67 and 68 should be quoted in full:

For they [idolaters] cut away the most excellent support of the soul, the rightful conception of the ever-living God, and like skiffs without ballast they are tossed here and there, always borne about, never able to come into a harbor nor to be placed securely in truth, blinded as to the thing worthy of vision, that alone for which it is necessary to be keen-sighted. They seem to me to live a more wretched life than those who have lost the sight of the body, for the latter have been disabled unwillingly, either enduring some grievous disease of the eyes or being set upon by their enemies, but the former, by a decision, not only dimmed the eye of the soul but have even consented to cast it away entirely.³⁹

The hierarchical ranking of physical sight below the Platonic “eye of the soul”⁴⁰ reinforces the

³⁸Albert C. Geljon, *Philonic Exegesis in Gregory of Nyssa's De vita Moysis*, Brown Judaic Studies, number 333 (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002); Geljon points especially to four ways Gregory's VM relates to Philo's text: through selection, adaptation, transposition, and Christianization, Gregory “mainly makes use of Philo as an exegete of Scripture” on whose work Gregory could expand in creative ways (Geljon, *Philonic Exegesis*, 167-174). See in addition Claudia Rapp, “Comparison, Paradigm and the Case of Moses in Panegyric and Hagiography,” in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, edited by Mary Whitby (Boston: Brill, 1998): 277-298; and David T. Runia, *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (Brookfield, VT: Gower Publishing Company, 1990).

³⁹τὸ γὰρ κάλλιστον ἔρεισμα τῆς ψυχῆς ἐξέκοψαν, τὴν περὶ τοῦ ζῶντος ἀεὶ θεοῦ προσήκουσαν ὑπόληψιν, ὥσπερ τε ἀνερμάτιστα σκάφη σαλεύουσιν ὡδὲ κάκεῖσε διαφερόμενοι τὸν αἰῶνα, μηδέποτ' εἰς λιμένα κατάραι μηδ' ἐνορμίσασθαι βεβαίως ὀληθείᾳ δυνάμενοι, τυφλώττοντες περὶ τὸ θέας ἄξιον, πρὸς ὃ μόνον ὀξυδορκεῖν ἀναγκαῖον ἦν. καὶ μοι δοκοῦσι τῶν τὰς τοῦ σώματος ὅψεις πεπηρωμένων ἀθλιώτερον ζῆν· ἐκεῖνοι μὲν γάρ ἀκουσίως ἐβλάβησαν ἡ νόσον ὀφθαλμῶν χαλεπήν ὑποστάντες ἡ πρὸς ἐχθρῶν ἐπιβουλευθέντες, οἱ δὲ κουσίῳ γνώμῃ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὅμμα οὐκ ἡμαρτώσαν μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ παντελῶς ἀποβαλεῖν ἡξίωσαν.

⁴⁰Hans Boersma argues that for Gregory seeing God with the eye of the soul is an activity that people can engage in even while they are alive, before they participate in the eschatological beatific vision: “...for Gregory everyday spirituality – seeing what God is like by looking at the world around us [for God's activity] and observing with the ‘eye of the soul’ ‘the luminous outpoured rays of the divine nature’ in our hearts – is intrinsically linked to the beatific vision” (Hans Boersma, “Becoming Human in the Eyes of God: Gregory of Nyssa's Unending Search for the Beatific Vision,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Volume 17, Number 2 (April 2015): 131-151, 138, citing *De beatitudinibus* 6.144.8–9; 6.144.12). On the eye of the soul more generally as a means of perception in Gregory's writings, see Boersma, *Embodied Virtue*, 93-100. Sarah Coakley rejects Daniélou's idea of a “doctrine” of spiritual senses in Gregory's work, and she shows instead a development of thought about the spiritual senses, beginning from *De anima* and culminating in *In canticum canticorum* (Sarah Coakley, “Gregory of Nyssa,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley [Cambridge:

superiority of contemplation over mere perception; only the former can result in a “rightful conception” of God.⁴¹ Philo further highlights the imbalance between physicality and the soul when he frames a strong dichotomy within the vision metaphor. Without “keen-sighted vision” aimed at the divine, the idolaters are not just suffering from low vision, they are completely blind. In the wider context of discussing Egyptian religion, Philo links this failure of sight and the resulting sin with a lack of “right education” (*παιδεία ὁρθή*).⁴² The Jewish philosopher, like Gregory his later reader, marks out training as a key component undergirding virtuous behavior and a possible corrective for poor vision. By implicating training, both biographers call attention to their texts’ implied audiences, who ought to strive to situate themselves among the seeing, leaving behind forms of blindness.

II. Beyond the senses: vision and communication

Gregory shows how the exemplars respond to divine revelations – theophanies, visions, auditions – as an integral part of their virtuous activity. The revelations themselves are explained

Cambridge University Press, 2013]: 36-55. As my argument shows, Gregory is quite flexible in his references to vision (physical and noetic) in these three texts.

⁴¹ We know from a broad consideration of Philo’s corpus that the “right conception” of God demands apophaticism. For a discussion of Philo and Gregory on this topic, and of the Platonic roots of their thought, see Ilaria Ramelli, “The Divine as Inaccessible Object of Knowledge in Ancient Platonism: A Common Philosophical Pattern across Religious Traditions” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 75, number 2 (April 2014): 167-188. Gregory’s conception is likely also rooted in the thought of Clement of Alexandria, his forebear. In his *Stromateis* 2.2.6 (1), Clement interprets Exod 33 (Moses entering the darkness) as follows: “As a result, Moses, convinced that God will never be known to human wisdom, says, ‘Reveal yourself to me,’ and was forced to enter into the darkness, where the voice of God was present; that is, into the innermost, invisible intellectual conceptions of being” (οὕτεν ὁ Μωσῆς οὐποτε ἀνθρωπίνη σοφίᾳ γνωσθήσεσθαι τὸν θεὸν πεπεισμένος, ἐμφάνισόν μοι σεαυτὸν φησὶ καὶ εἰς τὸν γνόφον, οὐ δῆν ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰσελθεῖν βιάζεται, τουτέστιν εἰς τὰς ἀδύτους καὶ ἀειδεῖς περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἐννοίας.)

⁴² He specifically refers to the probable reactions of well-trained observers who see Egyptian idolatrous practices: “Indeed strangers on their first arrival in Egypt, before the local delusion enters into their minds, die laughing, while whoever has tasted right education, bewails the plastering of a pious veneer on impious things and considers those doing it, with good reason, more wretched than the things being honored...” (καὶ δὴ τῶν ξένων οἱ πρῶτον εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἀφικόμενοι, πρὶν τὸν ἐγχώριον τύφον εἰσοικίσασθαι ταῖς διανοίαις, ἐκθνήσκουσι χλευάζοντες· ὅσοι δὲ παιδείας ὁρθῆς ἐγεύσαντο, τὴν ἐπ’ ἀσέμνιοις πράγμασι σεμνοποιίαν καταπλαγέντες οἰκτίζονται τοὺς χρωμένους, ἀθλιωτέρους, ὅπερ εἰκός, ὑπολαμβάνοντες εἶναι τῶν τιμωμένων, *De Decalogo* 80).

as gifts from God, but the subsequent activities of the exemplars reflect on their qualities of soul. Overwhelmingly in these three texts, he constructs a sort of complementarity between the understanding that comes to the eye of the soul in a revelatory experience, the physical effects of that revelation, and concrete communication about its content. Revelation as narrated in the three *bioi* begins in and returns to the senses, even if it departs from them for a time. I argue that Gregory emphasizes vision to insist that physical sense perception is indispensable for communicative, especially literary and catechetical, purposes: it makes exemplary *praxeis* visible and could allow ideal readers to participate in the work of interpretation.

In the VM and VGT, Gregory includes a number of episodes in which faulty sense perception suggests the senses can be deceived by demonic and magical powers. In VM I.24, the eyes of those watching in the Egyptian court are deceived by “the magic trick of the sorcerers” (ἢ τῶν γοήτων μαγγανεία, Exod 7:11-12). VGT 77 tells the story of a young boy whose demonic possession causes him to see a second figure standing beside Thaumaturgus while the bishop gives a speech.⁴³ It is perhaps because such misperceptions are, for Gregory, tied up with the nature of the senses that he narrates divine revelations with special attention to the role of the senses. In the *bioi*, the revelations become challenging interpretive puzzles that engage the actual physical senses of both exemplars and readers.

Gregory attempts to make the reader a real-life spectator of the events he describes through the use of vivid description, a literary technique which taps into readers’ faculties of

⁴³ Thaumaturgus breathes on linen cloth and throws it over the possessed boy. At that point, “the boy began to be shaken and to cry out, and to fall down and be flung about, and to suffer all the passions that come from demons” (ταράσσεσθαι ἥρξατο καὶ ἀναβοῆν τὸ μειράκιον, καὶ καταπίπτειν καὶ διαρρίπτεῖσθαι, καὶ πάντα πάσχειν τὰ ἐκ δαιμόνων πάθη, VGT 77).

sense perception, to narrate the ineffable. Aphthonius defines vivid description, or *ekphrasis*, as follows:

Ekphrasis is descriptive language, bringing manifestly before the eyes the thing shown. One ought to describe both persons and things, both times and places, irrational animals and, in addition to these, plants... In composing an *ekphrasis*, it is necessary to employ a relaxed style and adorn it with diverse figures and, on the whole, to create an imitation of the things being described with the *ekphrasis*.⁴⁴

The figurative language of vision operates in tandem with the evocation of readers' senses to show that physical sense perception, though limited in its ability to perceive the divine, is crucial for interpreting and responding to experiences of divine revelation in a virtuous fashion, and especially for communicating the content of a revelation to the wider community.

A. Readings of revelation

Many scholars who study Gregory's oeuvre address divine revelations portrayed in the *bioi* primarily in relation to Gregory's mystical theology rather than their genre or poetics.⁴⁵ A

⁴⁴ Ἐκφρασίς ἔστι λόγος περιηγηματικὸς ὑπ' ὅψιν ἄγων ἐναργῶς τὸ δηλούμενον. Ἐκφραστέον δὲ πρόσωπά τε καὶ πράγματα, καιρούς τε καὶ τόπους, ἀλογα ζῷα καὶ πρὸς τούτοις φυτά·... Ἐκφράζοντας δὲ δεῖ τὸν τε χαρακτῆρα ἀνειμένον ἐκφέρειν καὶ διαφόροις ποικίλλειν τοῖς σχήμασι καὶ ὅλως ἀπομιμεῖσθαι τὰ ἐκφραζόμενα πράγματα (Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 12, Rabe 36-38). The various uses of *ekphrasis* among classical and early Christian authors have been the subject of extensive study in recent decades. See, for example, Shadi Bartsch, *Decoding the Ancient Novel: The Reader and the Role of Description in Heliodorus and Achilles Tatius* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Jás Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Robert S. Nelson, "To say and to see: Ekphrasis and vision in Byzantium," *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. Robert S. Nelson, Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 143-168; Michael Paschalis, "Reading Space: A Re-examination of Apuleian *ekphrasis*," *Space in the Ancient Novel*, ed. Michael Paschalis and Stavros Frangoulidis Ancient Narrative, supplementum 1 (Gröningen: Barkhuis Publishing, 2002): 132-142; Ruth Webb, "Accomplishing the picture: ekphrasis, mimesis and martyrdom in Asterios of Amaseia," *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Liz James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 13-32; and Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Farnham: Routledge, 2009).

⁴⁵ For example, Hans Urs von Balthasar collects quotations from the VM alongside passages from *Contra Eunomium* as evidence for Gregory's thought about the limits of human knowledge of God's nature: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*, transl. Mark Sebanc, A Communio Book (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 89-95. Michael Stuart Williams (discussed further below) represents a partial exception, recognizing that "the foundation of the work in the life of Moses is not merely a sustaining metaphor; it is not merely a device to help collect together Gregory's conclusions concerning abstract

specific passage from the VM frequently appears at the heart of this debate, VM II.162-169. The episode retells the events of Exod 24:18, when Moses encounters God in the cloud on Sinai. From Daniélou forward, one strand of scholarship emphasizes Gregory's claims about the inadequacy of the senses and the body as a means of encountering the divine, insisting that they must be abandoned. Daniélou takes his lead from *In canticum canticorum* 11, where Gregory outlines God's theophanic appearances to Moses as in light, in a cloud, and then in darkness. Daniélou claims that Moses also proceeds through three stages in the VM, increasingly moving beyond sense experience, ascending to union with God.⁴⁶ He identifies Gregory's term *epektasis* (based on Phil 3:12-14) as a "synthesis of Gregory's spirituality in its central theme" of perpetual progress.⁴⁷ But Daniélou does not attend to how Gregory's readers are meant to imitate that *epektasis* in their own lives, or how the text of the VM might help them do so.

Ronald E. Heine's 1975 monograph, *Perfection in the Virtuous Life*, proposed an alternative reading of the critical passage and the sequence of theophanic episodes in the VM. Rather than isolating three distinct stages of mystical progression, Heine notes that the summary of Moses' accomplishments at the end of VM lists a whole series of events that characterize Moses' advancement toward perfection.⁴⁸ On Heine's assessment, Gregory focuses on continual

virtue. His *theoria* is grounded in history, and the *historia* set out in the first book is to be understood as 'absolutely reliable and trustworthy'" (Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 88). His citation is from G.S. Bebis, "Gregory of Nyssa's *De Vita Moysis*: a philosophical and theological analysis" from *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 12 (1967): 369-93. However, on the very next page he turns to a discussion of how similar Moses' history is to a late antique form of spirituality, suggesting his interests are more broadly historical than strictly literary.

⁴⁶ Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme*, 21.

⁴⁷ For *epektasis* in Gregory, see the primary example of *In Canticum Canticorum* 8 and Daniélou *Platonisme*, 291.

⁴⁸ See especially pages 99-114 in Heine, *Perfection*. Ann Conway-Jones, in her recent volume on the tabernacle in VM II.170-201, offers a critique of Daniélou and agreement with Heine's emphasis similar to my own: Ann Conway-Jones, *Gregory of Nyssa's Tabernacle Imagery in its Jewish and Christian Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9-11. Consider also Colin W. Macleod's statement about mysticism in Gregory's writing: "In short, Gregory's prime concern is with Christian perfection; and mystical language expresses not some immediate apprehension of God ... but that there is no perfection without God" (Colin W. Macleod, "Allegory and

advancement, in large part as a response to his and Basil's debates with Eunomius over the ability of language to describe God's nature accurately. An appeal to continual progress is a means of modifying Origen's contentions about human satiety (*κόρος*) in the divine presence, not necessarily a focused reflection on the nature of all human encounters with the divine. This interpretation in the context of a theological *agon* allows that the VM does indeed focus on progress or advancement, without insisting that Gregory's presentation of that progress is overly systematized or too similar to the medieval development of mystical union. Brian E. Daley expresses this point clearly: "... the *ἐκστασίς* to which Gregory occasionally refers is less the love-wounded swoon of Bernini's St. Teresa than the recognition of the limits of language by a great rhetorician who is also a man of deeply perceptive faith."⁴⁹

Neither Daniélou's nor Heine's approach aims to provide an analysis, as this chapter does, of the literary techniques Gregory uses to articulate his apophatic theological convictions in biographical narrative. When we treat the three texts together as examples of encomiastic *bios*, however, we can appreciate how Gregory attempts to accomplish his goal of training readers to be interpreters. In fact, by studying the methods he uses to communicate non-sensible experiences to a reading audience, we find that Gregory consistently focuses on how the exemplars generated records of their revelatory experiences for groups or audiences within the *bioi* (what I refer to as internal audiences).

Martin Laird's 2002 article "Under Solomon's Tutelage: the Education of Desire in the

Mysticism in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa" *The Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, Volume 22, Number 2 [October 1971]: 362-379, 367-368).

⁴⁹ Brian E. Daley, S.J., "'Bright Darkness' and Christian Transformation: Gregory of Nyssa on the Dynamics of Mystical Union," *Finding God in all things: essays in honor of Michael J. Buckley, S.J.*, edited by Michael J. Himes and Stephen J. Pope (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996): 215-230, 225.

Homilies on the Song of Songs ” introduces the useful concept of *logophasis* as one aspect of Gregory’s response to the challenge of teaching about the content of divine revelation without compromising his fundamentally apophatic theology.⁵⁰ By Laird’s definition, “Logophasis...pertains to the transformed and transforming deeds and discourse that result from apophatic union.”⁵¹ In this essay and his 2004 monograph (*Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith: Union, Knowledge, and Divine Presence*) Laird considers the aftermath of an ineffable revelatory experience that does not engage the senses, and he rightly points out that in Gregory’s depiction the revelation has discursive effects: “Although the mind does not grasp in comprehension what it seeks in darkness (i.e. God), God yet acts upon the mind, or as Gregory says, moistens or bedews the mind with insight. This moisture is distilled by the mind, and this distillation can be reflected upon, understood, and expressed.”⁵² Ultimately, he argues, “as a fruit of apophatic union with the Word (*logos*), the Word expresses (*phasis*) itself through the deeds and discourse of the one whom the Word indwells.”⁵³

Gregory enlists the conceptual metaphor of vision to mitigate the problem of limited and unreliable physical senses, especially in the context of divine revelation, by maintaining a simultaneous emphasis on physical sight (which has access to the κοσμὸς αἰσθητός) and intellectual comprehension (which gives access to the κοσμὸς νοητός). Even as physical sense perception is depicted within the narrative as a problematic means of obtaining information, at

⁵⁰ Martin Laird, “Under Solomon’s Tutelage: The Education of Desire in the *Homilies on the Song of Songs*.” *Modern Theology*, Volume 18, Number 4 (October 2002): 507-526. He first introduced the term in Martin Laird, “Apophasis and *logophasis* in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Commentarium in canticum cantorum*,” *Studia Patristica* 37. (Louvain: Peeters, 2001): 126-132.

⁵¹ Laird “Under Solomon’s Tutelage,” 525 n.102.

⁵² Martin S. Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa and the grasp of faith: union, knowledge, and divine presence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 154.

⁵³ Laird, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 155.

the level of communication or *logophasis* it becomes a crucial tool for multiple layers of literary mediation, first to explain to readers how the exemplars move from revelatory experience to virtuous action, and second to preserve accounts of ineffable experiences for readers to consume and comprehend.

B. Problematizing physical sense perception in revelation

Revelation pushes at and exposes the boundaries of the human body as a reliable source of information. In the *bioi*, Gregory explicitly names the challenge of divine revelation as a problem with sense experience. As he writes in the VM, when Moses encounters God in the cloud,

Leaving behind everything that is observed, not only whatever sense perception comprehends but also whatever the mind seems to see, it [the intellect (οὐ νοῦς)] always goes on to the inner part until by the mind's craftiness it slips through to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. For in this is the true knowledge of what is sought, and in this is the seeing by not seeing, since that which is sought surpasses all knowledge, being marked off on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness.⁵⁴

Reflecting on the use of metaphor in Scripture, Gregory explains that it is this exact failure of the senses and of knowledge that makes “darkness” an apt description for the place of the intellect’s encounter with the divine.⁵⁵ Nevertheless the best language Gregory can use to describe the perceptive activity of the intellect is a non-physical sight.

In the narrative frame of Thaumaturgus’ desert vision (VGT 28), Gregory emphasizes the exemplar’s recognition that sensible realities are an insufficient source of information about

⁵⁴ Καταλιπόν γὰρ πᾶν τὸ φαινόμενον, οὐ μόνον ὅσα καταλαμβάνει ἡ αἴσθησις, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσα ἡ διάνοια δοκεῖ βλέπειν, ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ ἐνδότερον ἔται, ἔως ἂν διαδύῃ τῇ πολυπραγμοσύνῃ τῆς διανοίας πρὸς τὸ ἀθέατόν τε καὶ ἀκατάληπτὸν κάκεῖ τὸν Θεὸν ἴδῃ. Ἐν τούτῳ γὰρ ἡ ἀληθής ἐστιν εἰδησις τοῦ ζητούμενου καὶ ἐν τούτῳ τὸ ἰδεῖν ἐν τῷ μὴ ἰδεῖν, ὅτι ὑπέρκειται πάσης εἰδήσεως τὸ ζητούμενον, οἷόν τινι γνόφῳ τῇ ἀκαταληψίᾳ πανταχόθεν διειλημμένον (VM II.163).

⁵⁵ We see here his recourse to apophatic theological formulations.

divine truth. The exemplar seeks divine guidance because he does not want “to rely on flesh and blood” (*σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι προσανέχειν ὥετο δεῖν*):⁵⁶ he wants a “manifestation of what is hidden” (*ἡ τῶν κρυφίων φανέρωσις*) so that “the truth” (*ἡ ἀληθεία*) could be revealed to him “through some appearance” (*διά τινος ἐμφανείας*).⁵⁷ Revelation is depicted in stark contrast to physicality and what the exemplar could expect to perceive in the normal sensible world around him. Revelation alone can provide satisfactory access to that which is hidden, even if it can only do so through appearances.

Gregory depicts the exemplars struggling with the limits of their senses while desiring access to truths that lie beyond the power of the senses. Yet for readers, the senses are indispensable as a means of engaging with Gregory’s narratives and gaining knowledge about the exemplars. For the purposes of biographical writing, Gregory partially rehabilitates the physical senses in their capacity as a means of mediating between readers and narrated *praxeis*, and he enlists the figurative language of vision as one paradoxical means of doing so.

C. Rehabilitating sense perception for narrative

In all three narratives, revelations leave tangible effects that can be perceived with the senses, even if the content of the revelatory experience cannot.⁵⁸ Gregory explains the

⁵⁶ This is probably an allusion to Gal 1:16.

⁵⁷ VGT 28.

⁵⁸ This is similar to the work of *phantasia*, according to Quintilian. As D.A. Russell describes, “Quintilian promulgates the conventional opinion that we must ourselves feel the emotions we wish to promote in others. How are we to do this, given that emotions are not in our control? By forming in our minds clear *phantasiai* – ‘visions’ – of absent things; this means putting to practical use the faculty of day-dreaming and fantasy which we often employ in an idle moment. From vividness of vision will come vividness of expression, both in poetry... and in oratory” (D.A. Russell, *Criticism in Antiquity*, 109). Gregory’s task as biographical narrator is doubly difficult: the original content and emotional impact of a revelation have already been filtered through expression by the subject, and he uses the resulting data to “recreate” (approximately) the original experience in a way that can communicate to his own readers.

significance of these sensible effects through direct commentary, asserting that physical senses can contribute to intellectual comprehension, and, conversely, that the understanding that comes from noetic “seeing” may help in discerning the meaning of other physical perceptions.

1. *Vision in the desert, VGT 28-34*

Gregory portrays Thaumaturgus’ wilderness vision as an isolated event that has ongoing repercussions for the exemplar, for his contemporary community, and for Gregory’s audience. Thaumaturgus’ visionary encounter with the evangelist John and the Virgin Mary initially empowers him to take up his work as a newly ordained bishop.⁵⁹ The experience also inspired him to create a visual record of their conversation in the form of a creed, publicly placarded in Neocaesarea.⁶⁰ Gregory’s own text preserves another vivid record of the event for later audiences. He crafts a *synkrisis* linking Thaumaturgus to Moses and the divine vision of Exodus 24:12-15 to highlight the importance of relaying the vision’s content to a wider audience:

For just as the Word says that Moses, having gone outside the world of appearances and calmed his soul within the invisible shrines (for this is what ‘the darkness’ figuratively means), learned the divine mysteries, and himself instructed the whole people in the knowledge of God, the same dispensation can be seen in the case of this Great One. On the one hand, he did not have a sensible or earthly mountain, but the pinnacle of desire for the true teachings. On the other hand, for darkness, he had the vision which others could not comprehend; for a writing-tablet, the soul; for the letters engraved on the stone tablets, the voice of the one he saw; through all of these things, both he and those initiated by him enjoyed a manifestation of the mysteries.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Not surprisingly, the divine vision increases the exemplar’s confidence and makes him an “athlete” prepared for struggle against the Adversary (see Chapter 2 on the athletic metaphor).

⁶⁰ VGT 31.

⁶¹ Ως γὰρ τὸν Μωϋσέα φησιν ὁ λόγος, ἔξω τοῦ φαινομένου γενόμενον, καὶ ἐντὸς τῶν ἀοράτων ἀδύτων τῇ ψυχῇ καταστάντα (τοῦτο γὰρ ὁ γνόφος αἰνίττεται), μαθεῖν τε τὰ θεῖα μυστήρια, καὶ δι’έαντοῦ τῆς θεογνωσίας παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ καθηγήσασθαι· τὴν αὐτὴν ἔστι καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ μεγάλου τούτου κατιδεῖν οἰκονομίαν· φῶσος μὲν ἦν, οὐκ αἰσθητόν τι ἡ γεώλοφον, ἀλλὰ τὸ ὑψος τῆς τῶν ἀληθινῶν δογμάτων ἐπιθυμίας· γνόφος δὲ τὸ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀχώρητον θέαμα· δέλτος δὲ ἡ ψυχή· τὰ δὲ ἐν ταῖς πλαξὶ γράμματα, ἡ τοῦ ὀφθέντος φωνή· δι’ ὧν ἀπάντων αὐτῷ τε καὶ τοῖς παρ’ ἐκείνου μυσταγωγούμενοις ἐγένετο ἡ τῶν μυστηρίων φανέρωσις (VGT 33).

The revelation to Thaumaturgus, a revelation which Gregory describes as more personal and physical than that which came to Moses in the darkness,⁶² is rendered effective when it is conveyed to the wider audience of those he initiates into the Christian mysteries. The manifestation of the mysteries, which must function referentially and noetically, nevertheless has real effects on the sense perceptions of the Christian community, who can view the posted creed even in Gregory's day.

A similar effect can accompany the actions of the miracle-working exemplar, whose miracles function as a secondary theophany, revealing divine power. When Thaumaturgus performs healing miracles, the reactions of the internal audience are described in terms that position physical sense perception and intellectual comprehension as complementary faculties. Thaumaturgus “most of all won the multitude over by proclamation, because vision coincided with hearing and the tokens of divine power illumined it through both. For his word astounded the hearing as the wonders on behalf of the sick astounded the eyes.”⁶³ Actual physical effects on ears and eyes are depicted as conduits for edification, an intellectual capacity. What witnesses see allows them to comprehend divine power in their minds. By presenting these two types of perception in tandem, Gregory cautiously rehabilitates the potential of physical sense perception, under particular conditions, to provide meaningful access to a real understanding of the miraculous.

⁶² The *synkrisis* with Moses addresses a number of points, from the location of the revelation (for Moses, a mountain, but for Thaumaturgus, the “pinnacle of desire) to the medium for preserving the revelation (for Moses, letters on stone tablets, but for Thaumturgus, the divine voice in his soul). Thaumaturgus’ revelation is simultaneously bodily and disembodied; he bears the marks of the revelation in himself, not on stone tablets.

⁶³ Τούτῳ γάρ δὴ μάλιστα προσήγετο τοὺς πολλοὺς τῷ ιηρύγματι, ὅτι συνέβαινεν ἡ ὄψις τῇ ἀκοῇ, καὶ δι’ ἀμφοτέρων τῆς θείας δυνάμεως ἐπέλαμπεν αὐτῷ τὰ γνωρίσματα. Τὴν μὲν γάρ ἀκοὴν ὁ λόγος, τὰς δὲ ὄψεις τὰ περὶ τοὺς ἀσθενοῦντας ἐξέπληττε θαύματα (VGT 47).

2. The tabernacle, VM II.169

In the VM, Gregory portrays Moses translating private revelation for public edification; as Gregory depicts it, this translation is a process wherein the knowledge revealed becomes increasingly tangible and thereby visible. The tabernacle is revealed to Moses in its heavenly and earthly iterations, and Gregory explains this multiplicity of forms as the result of translating God's teaching, in stages, for those who did not have the divine vision themselves. Although the vision's content is described by Gregory as a revelation of Christ, it is nevertheless important that when Moses considers the content of his vision "he sees that tabernacle not made with hands, *which he shows to those below by means of a material likeness.*"⁶⁴ Divine condescension means that this Moses, who encounters the Incarnate Christ in highly Platonic terms,⁶⁵ has been given a vision of the heavenly tabernacle that may be handed on to his community in physical form.

The blast of the heavenly trumpet in Exodus also affects both physical and intellectual perception:

When he who has been purified and is sharp of hearing in his heart hears this sound (I am speaking of the knowledge of the divine power which comes from the contemplation of reality), he is led by it to the place where his mind lets him slip in where God is. This is called "darkness" by Scripture, which signifies, as I said,

⁶⁴ τὴν ἀχειροποίητον ἐκείνην σκηνὴν βλέπει, ἵν διὰ τῆς ὑλικῆς μιμήσεως τοῖς κάτω δείκνυσι (VM II.169); cf. 2 Cor 5:1. For a thorough treatment of the "tabernacle not made with hands" in this portion of the VM, see Conway-Jones *Gregory of Nyssa's Tabernacle Imagery*. Of particular interest is her survey of allegorical interpretations of the tabernacle by Gregory's Alexandrian predecessors: Philo, Clement, and Origen on pages 36-46.

⁶⁵ See the argument of Nathan Eubank, "Ineffably Effable: The Pinnacle of Mystical Ascent in Gregory of Nyssa's *De vita Moysis*," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, Volume 16, Number 1 (January 2014): 25-41. Eubank argues that "in the *De vita Moysis*, Gregory of Nyssa makes the culminating moment, not the apophatic experience of the darkness, but the encounter with the celestial tabernacle, Christ, thereby suggesting that the mystical ascent to God does not end in the darkness of God's ineffability, but in the encounter of God as both unknowable and known, utterly transcendent but also incarnate" (27). I find this interpretation compelling for its emphasis on Moses returning to his community with something "known" to share.

the unknown and unseen.⁶⁶

The internal perception and reception of divine revelation is described as analogous to physical sense perception, specifically the sense of hearing. In Gregory's woven composition, physical hearing is pushed to the back of the fabric, devalued so that a non-physical, noetic hearing may be emphasized. At the same time, some kinship between the physical sense and the noetic one may be assumed. The one who is "sharp of hearing in his heart" thereby becomes a relatable figure for readers who are familiar with the way physical hearing works. While a given reader may not have the experience of hearing "in his heart," he might nevertheless imagine such an experience.

Close links between physical sense perception and the conceptual metaphor of vision serve two functions simultaneously. On the one hand, Gregory subordinates physical sense perception to intellectual comprehension, acknowledging that physical senses are insufficient for grasping divine truth. On the other hand, for readers, words or images communicated in a revelatory experience provide some limited access to the content of the revelation. After he has explained that "darkness" is an eminently suitable metaphor for Moses' experience of contact with the divine, Gregory adds that "When Moses arrived there, he was taught by word what he had formerly learned from darkness, so that, I think, the doctrine on this matter might be made firmer for us as a result of being testified to by the divine voice."⁶⁷ Ann Conway-Jones offers an

⁶⁶ Ο δὲ κεκαθαρμένος τε καὶ ὀξὺς τὴν ἀκοὴν τῆς καρδίας, τὴν ἡχὴν ταύτην δεξάμενος, λέγω δὴ τὴν ἐκ τῆς θεωρίας τῶν ὄντων γινομένην πρὸς τὴν τῆς θείας δυνάμεως γνῶσιν, ὁδηγεῖται δι' αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸ ἐκεῖ διαδύναι τῇ διανοίᾳ ὅπου ἔστιν ὁ Θεός. Τοῦτο δὲ γνόφος ὑπὸ τῆς Γραφῆς ὄνομάζεται, φῶ διερμηνεύεται, καθὼς εἴρηται, τὸ ἄγνωστόν τε καὶ ἀθεώρητον (VM II.169).

⁶⁷ Ο δὲ ἐκεῖ γεγονώς, ἀ προεπαιδεύθη διὰ τοῦ γνόφου, πάλιν διὰ τοῦ λόγου διδάσκεται, ὡς ἄν, οἷμαι, παγιώτερον ἡμῖν τὸ περὶ τούτου γένηται δόγμα, τῇ θείᾳ φωνῇ μαρτυρούμενον (VM II.165).

In this regard, I find the 1989 article by Sara J. Denning-Bolle particularly problematic: Sara J. Denning-Bolle, "Gregory of Nyssa: The Soul in Mystical Flight," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Volume 34, Number 2

excellent insight about this passage and the fact that Gregory says “tabernacle” is a name of Christ. She takes Gregory’s Christological interpretation of the vision and the list of additional Christological titles in the following passage (VM II.176-177) to be his unique contribution to early Christian exegesis of the passage: “the revelation vouchsafed to him [Moses] was a new name for God, a name overlooked by previous biblical commentators... Gregory puts it on a par with the well-known Johannine Christological titles.”⁶⁸

3. *Dream vision, VSM 2*

The VSM stands somewhat apart from the other two *bioi* with respect to revelations. In it Gregory introduces a separate set of concerns about the role of the senses, because divine revelation in this text is consistently mediated through dreams. Gregory does not describe Macrina herself receiving any revelations; his account seems to be circumscribed by the historical facts of his sister’s life, or at least by what she reported to him. However, both Emmelia and Gregory receive prophetic dreams that reveal some truth about Macrina’s way of life and her soul.⁶⁹ Emmelia’s dream in VSM 2 conforms somewhat to the pattern discussed for visions in the VGT and VM. The result of the dream is Macrina’s “secret name” ($\tauὸν ὄνομα τὸ κεκρυμμένον$), a word that serves “to foretell the child’s way of life” ($\tauὸν βίον προειπεῖν τῆς$

(1989): 97-116. In discussing the parallels between Gregory’s concept of mystical ascent (in the *De Anima* and VM) and Platonic portrayals of the soul’s ascent, she equates Moses’ abandonment of “sensual and irrational emotion” (VM II.157) with the Platonic insistence in Phaedo that purification requires “separating, so far as possible, the soul from the body” and being “freed from the body as from fetters” (*Phaedo* 67c-d; Denning-Bolle, “Gregory of Nyssa,” 107). While for Gregory the emotions are indeed connected with physical sense perception in the body, he does not actually insist at this point in the VM that the soul must separate from the body, but rather claims the rational part of the soul must discipline its irrational elements. I think this difference is in fact significant given that Gregory subsequently has his exemplars take advantage of the body to communicate the intellectual content of their revelations to audiences.

⁶⁸ Conway-Jones, *Gregory of Nyssa’s Tabernacle Imagery*, 117.

⁶⁹ Gregory’s dream about Macrina’s glowing bones (VSM 15) will be discussed in Chapter 4, in the context of the scenes that, Gregory says, fulfill its prophetic message.

νέας, VSM 2). That is, the vision's content leaves both a word and a life that can be seen by others.

But the angelic figure of the dream does not actually prophesy so clearly. Gregory offers his interpretation in a narrative comment: "It seems to me that the one appearing was directing her toward such a name, not so that the child being born should be called this, but to foretell the child's way of life and to indicate the likeness of their choices through the likeness of name."⁷⁰ The dream is another form of divine communication that requires interpretation, problematic even with its Scriptural pedigree (e.g., Joseph in Gen 37-50, and many others) and even in light of Emmelia's own devotion and status as a reliable witness.⁷¹

The dream's physical effects are discussed only briefly. Patricia Cox Miller, in a study of literature about dreams in late antiquity, shows that during this period dreams could be considered an "image produced by interconnecting physiological and psychic processes."⁷² That seems to be the case here. Gregory reports that the dream eased Emmelia's labor pains, since immediately upon waking she delivered the child; her labor is a tangible physical reality that might have brought on the dream about birth. Within the dream itself, the means of Emmelia's perception is less clear. The divine figure is eventually removed from Emmelia's sight (μεταστῆναι τῶν ὄψεων), suggesting she was watching something. But Gregory states only that

⁷⁰ Δοκεῖ δέ μοι μὴ τοσοῦτον πρὸς τὴν ὄνοματικὴν κλῆσιν ὁδηγῶν τὴν γειναμένην ὁ ἐπιφανεὶς τοῦτο προσφέγξασθαι, ἀλλὰ τὸν βίον προειπεῖν τῆς νέας καὶ τὴν τῆς προαιρέσεως ὄμοιότητα διὰ τῆς ὄμωνυμίας ἐνδείξασθαι (VSM 2).

⁷¹ Ladner correctly points out that elsewhere in his corpus "Gregory admits that the senses affect the mind through the brain, that the mind can become deranged through physical illness and dulled by somatic conditions, that dreams are often caused by physical circumstances" (Ladner "The Philosophical Anthropology," 76). Gregory himself addresses the complicated nature of dreams in *De hominis opificio* 13 (Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity: Studies in the Imagination of a Culture* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994], 47-51). On the role of dreams in adding color to Roman histories, see Gentili and Cerri, *History and Biography*, 48.

⁷² Miller, *Dreams*, 43. She bases this on Aristotle's psychobiological explanation for dreams.

the figure “appeared” (ἐπιφανέντα), suggesting that Emmelia did not fully apprehend his true form. In Gregory’s retelling, the dream retains its mysterious nature, even as the biographer interprets it as a reflection on Macrina’s soul.

By showing exemplars engaged in the process of translation from ineffable to visible, Gregory uses the literary portraits to validate his own practice of narrating the revelations with vivid description and language laden with appeals to sense perception. Ideal readers, then, are challenged to apply their own powers of perception, both physical and intellectual, to studying these narrated scenes that reveal hidden truths; Gregory provides them with model interpreters (both good and bad) in the form of internal audiences.

III. Training the eyes: vision as a metric of success

In his narrative art one of the means by which Gregory seeks to mediate the *logophasis* of the ineffable experiences and subsequent *praxeis* of his exemplars is through his characterizations of internal audiences and their own *praxeis*. Gregory uses the language of vision in a comparative capacity, to assess the relative interpretive prowess of internal audiences in the *bioi*. An internal audience is comprised of subjects in the text who are depicted as observers or witnesses of the exemplar’s or another subject’s actions.⁷³ These groups are variously constituted – Christians and non-Christians; friends, admirers, or enemies of the

⁷³ Stavroula Constantinou explains the term as follows: “In their literary representations, saints re-enact specific religious roles which they perform before God, the devil and/or a human audience. The human audience is situated both internally and externally in relation to the texts. The internal human audience consists of the saints’ disciples and the laypeople who encounter them. The external audience is the intended one consisting of Christians of Late Antiquity and the Byzantine era; it experiences the saints’ performances through a reading of or listening to the texts” (Stavroula Constantinou, *Female Corporeal Performances*, 13).

exemplar; longtime companions or new acquaintances.⁷⁴ Internal audience members may have a range of reactions to narrative events.⁷⁵ When other figures in the biographical narrative observe the subject's *praxeis* and respond, Gregory not only records but comments on their reactions. Gregory ranks those reactions along a spectrum that identifies seeing well with superior or correct interpretation, and seeing poorly with inferior or incorrect interpretation. By arranging internal audiences along a spectrum with this metric, Gregory simultaneously accomplishes two things: first, he models, rejects, and recommends various interpretive strategies; second, he renders superior interpretation desirable while advocating for its attainability. He invites readers to see these internal audiences seeing and hence to place themselves on the spectrum as interpreters. In this regard Gregory has much in common with the authors of other ancient *bioi*, including others with a Platonic epistemology.

A. Internal audiences and readers' mimesis

Contemporary scholarship on biography has considered the complex role of internal audiences in *bioi* from a variety of angles, and one particularly fruitful area of study has been the relation between internal audiences and readers' mimesis. As scholars of Greco-Roman biography, especially of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, have pointed out, internal audiences can

⁷⁴In the VSM, Gregory himself constitutes one internal audience for the events of Macrina's life and her death. Later in the chapter we will examine several narrative effects of his complicated position as a narrator who combines recollection and later reflection within his account.

⁷⁵ That is, I take some issue with the position Blossom Stefaniw expresses in her essay on Gregory Thaumaturgus: "Also, there is only one interpretation of his (Thaumaturgus') actions and his person which Gregory of Nyssa accepts, and it is always the same: Gregory's miracles manifest divine power and are therefore a compelling reason to follow Gregory's God. This way of parsing the Thaumaturg's religious power has a sort of mechanic causality which neutralizes any individual scope for religious practice on the part of those who witness Gregory's miracles" (Stefaniw, "Gregory Taught," 132-133). She is correct that Gregory of Nyssa recommends or validates only one "best" interpretation of his subject's *praxeis*, but the depiction of audiences with a range of reactions in fact reinforces the idea that witnesses (and readers *cum* witnesses) may freely choose to exercise, or not, their interpretative faculties.

function as intermediate models for readers who would imitate exemplary virtue. Alexei V. Zadorojnyi's 2012 essay "Mimesis and the (plu)past in Plutarch's *Lives*" is a brief but incisive study of mimesis as a fundamental component of Plutarch's biographical project.⁷⁶ In addition to pointing out close connections between mimesis and Plutarch's paideutic goals,⁷⁷ Zadorojnyi highlights that "wearing his Platonist hat, Plutarch asserts that mimetic relationships lie at the heart of all ontology: 'For creation is an image (*εἰκόν*) of reality in matter, and the Coming-to-Be is a likeness (*μίμημα*) of Being' (*De Is. et Os.* 372F)."⁷⁸ Building on this base, he identifies Plutarch's readers as interpreters who must actively interrogate the historical examples provided to make them relevant for what Zadorojnyi calls the "dateless 'now' of ethical reckoning."⁷⁹ This process certainly seems akin to the "translation" Gregory endorses in the VM. Plutarch models this type of interpretation and imitation through narration about figures within the texts who imitate earlier exemplars: "Mimesis is thus both an ingredient of the exemplary past and the purpose of studying it under Plutarch's tutelage."⁸⁰ Through their presentation in narrative form, interpretation and imitation provide another set of examples for readers' consideration, and these examples may assist readers in moving from reading to translating.

Zadorojnyi's insight offers a valuable lens for analyzing the paedetic and mimetic potential in the internal audiences portrayed in Gregory's three *bioi*. One fundamental assumption at work in the existing discussion is that readers will and do identify with members

⁷⁶ Alexei V. Zadorojnyi, "Mimesis and the (plu)past in Plutarch's *Lives*" in *Time and Narrative in Ancient Historiography: The 'Plupast' from Herodotus to Appian*, ed. Jonas Grethlein and Christopher B. Krebs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁷⁷"It is, I believe, safe to accept that Plutarch endorses mimesis which is not merely functionally but paideutically rational - that is, legitimate vis-a-vis the framework of normative values" (Zadorojnyi, "Mimesis," 180).

⁷⁸ Zadorojnyi, "Mimesis," 178.

⁷⁹ Zadorojnyi, "Mimesis," 191.

⁸⁰ Zadorojnyi, "Mimesis," 176.

of the internal audience. But what literary techniques does Gregory employ to facilitate that identification? As demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 2, the application of a single conceptual metaphor to any two groups - to the author (Ch 1) or exemplar (Ch 2) and to the reader(s) - may create a script for ideal readers who are modeled on the biographer performing hermeneutical tasks or the exemplar transforming his character through training, respectively. When the metaphor of “seeing,” an eminently relatable activity, is applied to internal audiences and to readers, what are the potential effects for readers?

B. Internal audiences on a spectrum

Gregory uses internal audiences to mark out the spectrum along which interpreters may fall: from blindness to sight, from incorrect to correct interpretation. On the one hand, he assesses perceptions and understanding of *praxeis* among figures in the narrative. At the same time, he specifically addresses the interpretation of that which is perceptible. He thus recommends reproducible interpretive strategies by associating them with superior vision and by having subjects in the text, including the exemplars, demonstrate that the strategies are effective.

1. Thaumaturgus at Comana, VGT 62-72

In one episode from the VGT, Thaumaturgus appoints the charcoal-burner Alexander as bishop of Comana in a move that shocks and “leads to amazement” the growing Christian community of that city (θαυμαστικῶς... διακειμένων).⁸¹ Gregory combines reflection on the fraught relationship between perception and reality with praise of Thaumaturgus’ wisdom, building a contrast between Thaumaturgus and the people of Comana on the basis of the exemplar’s ability to see beyond surface appearances to what lies within; he finds fault with the

⁸¹ VGT 69.

untrained Comanans who see poorly. The exemplar uses his senses well but “waits for some guidance from God” and so has “true” (ἀψευστος) judgment.⁸² The episode establishes a basic interpretive principle that is similarly double in form: do not rely only on appearances, but be directed by Scriptural precedent and revelation.

At stake in Comana is not just the identification of a worthy leader, but also the accurate discernment of personal character based on actions and appearance. Gregory frames the problem of judging internal traits from *praxeis* as one of interpretation, in part by building dramatic irony into the setting for the election. Thaumaturgus’ truly exemplary qualities are overshadowed in the eyes of the Comanans by his apparently praiseworthy qualities. Although the members of the internal audience seem to recognize Thaumaturgus’ excellence and send an embassy to request his presence at their council, they err when they begin to nominate candidates for the bishopric, revealing that they are in fact unable to see what matters:

the recommendations of all those in office then were concentrated on those who seemed to stand out in eloquence and family and other superficialities. For they supposed, since those things also were qualities of the Great Gregory, they should also not be lacking in the one who entered upon this grace.⁸³

While the people of Comana recognize Thaumaturgus’ attributes as positive, without additional guidance they cannot distinguish superficialities from the truly valuable.⁸⁴ Gregory presents the causal explanation for their decision in terms that connote unreliability and hint at incorrect standards; they “supposed” (οἴομαι) candidates were worthy based on how they “seemed”

⁸² VGT 70.

⁸³ τότε τῶν μὲν ἐν τέλει πάντων αἱ γνῶμαι τοὺς προέχειν δοκοῦντας λόγῳ τε καὶ γένει, καὶ τῇ λοιπῇ περιφανείᾳ περιειργάζοντο. Ὡοντο γὰρ, ἐπειδὴ καὶ ταῦτα περὶ τὸν μέγαν Γρηγόριον ἦν, μηδὲ τούτων δεῖν ἄμοιρον εἶναι, τὸν ἐπὶ τὴν χάριν ταύτην ἐρχόμενον (VGT 63).

⁸⁴ At the same time, Gregory reminds readers of Thaumaturgus’ more typical (non-spiritual) praiseworthy qualities – his noble birth, his family connections – precisely by listing them to reject them.

(δοκέω). The internal audience that gives attention to appearances is ranked at the inferior end of the spectrum, over and against Thaumaturgus. This presentation echoes the explicit discussion of value which appeared in the *prooimion* and *genos* of the VGT (see Chapter 1). We should note that if the people of Comana had read the introduction to this very *bios* (VGT 4-6), they would have been aware that sources of worldly renown and sources of spiritual honor seldom align!

The narrative echo connects this instance of deficient seeing to a problem Gregory faces as an encomiastic biographer: correct interpretation requires an accurate definition of virtue. In the words of the *prooimion*, “By means of these elements of spiritual praise for those being treated in encomia, the divine praise of encomia responds to the futile trumperies of the world below.”⁸⁵ In the setup of the passage, then, Gregory indicates that Thaumaturgus will model for the internal audience *and for readers* a way of looking that corresponds to genuine virtue.⁸⁶

Gregory confirms this low ranking of the internal audience by naming the problems judges in Comana face, outlining two interpretive pitfalls. First, in a brief speech treated as direct quotation, Thaumaturgus indicates that over-reliance on the senses is a major obstacle: “For sense perception is a faulty criterion of the truth of real things, itself blocking the way into the depth of understanding.”⁸⁷ Although sense perception is a conduit for information, it lingers on the surface instead of advancing into the depths. This metaphor of surface and depth resonates

⁸⁵ Διὰ ταῦτα τῆς πνευματικῆς εὐφημίας τῶν ἐγκωμιαζομένων ἀποκρίνει τοὺς κάτω λήρους ὁ θεῖος τῶν ἐγκωμίων ἔπαινος (VGT 6); see Chapter 1.

⁸⁶ The summary of virtue provided in the VGT is as follows: “But we call ‘proper’ that which lasts so long that it cannot be taken away. Therefore prescinding from everything such as wealth, fame, glory, honor, luxury, pleasure, relatives, and friends, we remain concerned only with the disposition toward vice or virtue: we consider only the virtuous to be blessed” (“Ἴδιον δέ φαμεν, ὃ διαμένει πάντως εἰς τὸ διηνεκὲς ἀναφαίρετον. Ἐπεὶ οὖν πάντων χωριζόμενοι, πλούτου, περιφανείας, δόξης, τιμῆς, τρυφῆς, ἀπολαύσεως, συγγενῶν, φύλων, μόνης τῆς κατὰ κακίαν ἡ ἀρετὴν διαθέσεως ἀχώριστοι μένομεν· μόνον κρίνομεν μακαριστὸν τὸν ἐνάρετον, VGT 7).

⁸⁷ φαλερὸν γὰρ κριτήριον τῆς τῶν ὄντων ἀληθείας ἡ αἱσθησις, τὴν πρὸς τὸ βάθος τῆς διανοίας εἴσοδον δι’ ἑαυτῆς ἀποκλείουσα (VGT 69).

with principles of good Scriptural interpretation articulated elsewhere in Gregory's corpus.⁸⁸ The overarching conceptual metaphor for interpretation at work, however, is vision; Gregory metonymically identifies all the viewers, including Thaumaturgus, as "eyes." The exemplar's eye is penetrating or clear-sighted (διορατικός), while theirs is untrained (ἀπαίδευτος).⁸⁹ This identification links the problem of interpretation to the physical senses.

But it is not just literal sight that creates a barrier to insight. The episode also marks as a second pitfall the Comanans' default criteria for assigning value. Casting the exemplar over against other leadership figures and calling it amazing that Thaumaturgus "was not swept along with the testimonies of leadership," Gregory cues the instability of "the opinion of the worthies" that would typically guide decision-making.⁹⁰ And the passage claims more than instability; Thaumaturgus' own words go so far as to align ignorance of Alexander's value with "the demon who is the enemy of true religion."⁹¹ Thaumaturgus' insight, addressed authoritatively to the

⁸⁸ Of course, the images Gregory uses to talk about layers or levels of textual meaning are more complex than just surface and depth. However, a vertical axis for interpretation does appear often in his texts; Gregory frequently talks about anagogical interpretation, which requires an elevated view of the text (i.e., getting to the spiritual meaning of the text by considering it from a more lofty perspective). Manlio Simonetti summarizes the position Gregory takes in *In canticum canticorum* as follows: "A little earlier Gregory had spoken of *theoria* obtained by means of *anagogē*. By *theoria*, he understands the contemplation of the profound, spiritual sense of Sacred Scripture, while *anagogē* (action of elevating) means the exegetical procedure which elevates the letter from the first level of literalness to the higher one of the spiritual signification" (Manlio Simonetti, "Exegesis," In *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*). Hans Boersma expresses particularly well the way in which Gregory's approach to Scripture and exegesis pertains to ascent: "...the 'turn' involved in interpretation and the 'ascent' into Paradise are one and the same thing, looked at from two different angles, the one exegetical and the other moral. Anagogy lies at the heart both of interpretation and of virtue" (Boersma, *Embodiment and Virtue*, 70). Basil also utilizes the idea of depth when he talks about the mysteries through which Scripture teaches. He tells his young students, "Yes so long as, by reason of your age, it is impossible for you to understand the depth of the meaning of these, in the meantime, by means of other analogies which are not entirely different, we give, as it were in shadows and reflections, a preliminary training to the eye of the soul..." (Basil of Caesarea, *Ad Adulescentes* 2.6, transl. Roy J. Deferrari, LCL edition).

⁸⁹ VGT 65.

⁹⁰ Τί τούτων ἀν τις πρὸ τοῦ ἐτέρου θαυμάσειε; τὸ μὴ δυσωπηθῆναι τὸν ἄνδρα τῶν ἀξιωμάτων τὴν ψῆφον, καὶ μὴ συναρπασθῆναι πρὸς τὰς μαρτυρίας τῶν προεχόντων (VGT 71).

⁹¹ τῷ τῆς εὐσεβείας ἔχθρῷ δαίμονι (VGT 69).

internal audience, highlights a divide between an inappropriate, misguided value system and one informed by religious sensibilities. Those who interpret in an inferior manner are ranked with the demonic, an example of hyperbole,⁹² while the exemplar and his superior vision gain the narrator's endorsement.

Yet the comparative application of vision terminology allows that there is room for improvement, and a Comanan who sees poorly is not a lost cause. The key to discernment and better interpretation is to use an evaluative framework that is not worldly to see behind or beyond appearances; the *bios* gives readers access to this key in the *prooimion*, and the internal audience in Comana also eventually learns it. Taking advantage of narrative sequencing, Gregory shows the internal audience changing, learning how to “see” better. This internal audience appears to engage in progress that might be an example of *epektasis*. Further instruction and divine revelation convince the people of Comana that Alexander is an appropriate leader for their community.

Gregory commends himself to the reading audience as an authoritative interpreter while the internal audience, in parallel, relies on the exemplar. While Alexander is being cleaned up, Thaumaturgus describes the doctrines of the priesthood, “thereby sketching out the life according to virtue.”⁹³ The exemplar intervenes to detail meaningful pursuits, values, and personal qualities. Though the *bios* does not provide a transcript of Thaumaturgus’ speech, Gregory narrates that as a result Thaumaturgus “prevented the error they were committing out of

⁹² Hyperbole is presented as either a figure of thought or a rhetorical trope. Aristotle claims hyperboles are metaphors (μεταφοραί), adding that “hyperboles are characteristic of youth; for they show vehemence... the Attic rhetors especially make use of hyperbole” (εἰσὶ δὲ ὑπερβολαὶ μειρακιώδεις· σφοδρότητα γὰρ δηλοῦσιν...χρῶνται δὲ μάλιστα τούτων οἱ Ἀττικοὶ ῥήτορες, Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 3.11.15-16, Bekker 1413a).

⁹³ διὰ τούτων τὸν κατ’ ἀρετὴν ὑπογράφων βίον (VGT 68).

ignorance and revealed through himself the good that had been hidden from them (τὸ κεκρυμμένον παρ' αὐτοῖς ἀγαθὸν).”⁹⁴ The narrative commentary not only praises Thaumaturgus’ wisdom, which gives him the ability to recognize true value behind false appearances, but it neatly equates Thaumaturgus’ insight with Alexander’s humility, for both are attributes that enable their possessors to properly direct believers. While internal audiences learn how to interpret, readers are offered helpful definitions of virtue that will aid their own future interpretation.

Divine revelation reinforces Gregory’s narrative point about the disconnect between valuable qualities and an appearance that is not aesthetically pleasing. An individual member of the internal audience, one Attic youth, was unimpressed by Alexander’s lack of oratorical skill. This young man was chastened by a vision in which doves of great beauty were identified as belonging to Alexander: the speech’s form may be uninspiring, but the content is not to be dismissed.⁹⁵ By framing the episode’s essential opposition in terms familiar to contemporary students of rhetoric and philosophy (not least those educated Christians familiar with a defense of the New Testament’s simple style⁹⁶), Gregory provides yet another touchstone for readers

⁹⁴ τό τε κατὰ ἄγνοιαν παρ' αὐτῶν πλημμελούμενον ἐπιστρέψαντος, καὶ τὸ κεκρυμμένον παρ' αὐτοῖς ἀγαθὸν δι' ἔαντοῦ φανερώσαντος (VGT 72).

⁹⁵ VGT 70. Andrea Sterk astutely notes that “whatever the Nyssan’s reservations about pagan learning, he seemed unable to dismiss the value of education for leaders in the church, even if best abandoned in pursuit of a higher goal” (Andrea Sterk, “On Basil, Moses, and the Model Bishop: The Cappadocian Legacy of Leadership,” *Church History*, Volume 67, Number 2 [June 1998]: 227-253, 238).

⁹⁶ See, for example, Origen, *Peri Archon*, 4.1.7: “The divine aspect of Scripture, extending through all of it, is not abolished because our weakness is unable, for every saying to bring to mind the brilliance of the teaching hidden in it, concealed in simple and humble speech. For we have a treasure in earthen vessels, so that the exceeding greatness of the power of God might shine forth (2 Cor 4:7), and it might not be thought of as being from us humans” (χρεοκοπεῖται...οὐδὲ ἡ τῆς γραφῆς θειότης διατείνουσα εἰς πᾶσαν αὐτήν, διὸ τὸ μὴ καθ' ἐκάστην λέξιν δύνασθαι τὴν ἀσθένειαν ἡμῶν παρίστασθαι τῇ κεκρυμμένῃ λαμπρότητι τῶν δογμάτων ἐν εὐτελεῖ καὶ εὐκαταφρονήτῳ λέξει ἀποκειμένῃ. ἔχομεν γάρ θησαυρὸν ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν, ἵνα λάμψῃ ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ μὴ νομισθῇ εἶναι ἐξ ἡμῶν τῶν ἀνθρώπων).

who would situate this narrative vignette in the wider context of their experience.

Gregory's own summary comments at the end of the episode reinforce the contrast between untrained and trained viewers, for the readers are now aware that the “distinctions of this world” are not included as part of what “the divine Word has enumerated in the lists of good things.”⁹⁷ The body which is seen may mislead one's assessment of the soul inside, and the categories of physical beauty and ugliness are rejected; these do not reliably denote qualities of character. Gregory hints at the solution when he distinguishes between the “clear-sighted eye” (οὐδὲ διορατικὸς ἐκείνος ὀφθαλμός) of Thaumaturgus, attuned to what is astonishing (ἐκπληξίν), and the “uneducated eyes” (οἱ ἀπαίδευτοι ὀφθαλμοί) of those who see only something “laughable” (ἐπιγέλαστον) when they look at a virtuous man.⁹⁸ Thaumaturgus “saw as nothing all those things which, according to this life, are judged worthy of pursuit or contempt.”⁹⁹ He correctly identifies Alexander's virtuous character because “to him, all the appearances of the world (πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὸν κόσμον φαινόμενα) were looked down upon alike.”¹⁰⁰ Superior vision belongs to those who have been properly trained. Samuel, the subject of a *synkrisis* here,¹⁰¹ received the necessary education from God, Thaumaturgus from his own practice of virtue and attentiveness to divine revelation, and now the narrative outlines how the Comanans and the

⁹⁷ Full translation: “For when he was seeking to find the one most pleasing to God and seeking someone worthy, he did not think that he should take wealth and rank to be trustworthy as testimony, nor the distinctions of this world, none of which the divine word enumerates in the lists of good things” (Ζητῶν γάρ τὸν τῷ Θεῷ κεχαρισμένον καὶ ἄξιον εύρειν, οὐκ ἀξιόπιστον εἰς μαρτυρίαν φήθη πλοῦτον παραλαβεῖν καὶ ἄξιωμα, καὶ τὰς κατὰ τὸν κόσμον τοῦτον περιφανεῖας, ὃν οὐδὲν ἐν τοῖς τῶν ἀγαθῶν καταλόγοις ὁ θεῖος λόγος ἀπηριθμήσατο, VGT 71).

⁹⁸ VGT 65.

⁹⁹ ἀντ' οὐδενὸς ἐώρα τὰ πάντα, ὅσα κατὰ τὸν βίον ἡ σπουδῆς τίνος, ἡ ἀτιμίας ἄξια κρίνεται (VGT 71).

¹⁰⁰ ὃ πάντα τὰ κατὰ τὸν κόσμον φαινόμενα ἐν τῷ ὄμοιῷ καθεωρᾶτο (VGT 71).

¹⁰¹ Early on, Gregory fashions a correspondence between the exemplar's actions and the story of Samuel electing David (1 Sam 16:7). Thaumaturgus seeks someone with a priestly soul who has demonstrated his excellence “through concern for his way of life and for virtue” (δι' ἐπιμελείας βίου καὶ ἀρετῆς, VGT 63).

readers may begin their own education. This passage thus creates a vision/interpretation spectrum and outlines the hermeneutical principles that allow individuals inside and outside the narrative to move toward the superior end of that spectrum.

C. Internal audience as model

In one intriguing case, Gregory records, interprets, and assesses the *praxeis* of an internal audience of which he himself was a member. In VSM 26-27, he uses the language of vision in an attempt to create a way for readers and the internal audience to share an experience of seeing but to respond differently. Gregory applies the vision metaphor to internal audiences and readers to facilitate readers' mimesis of virtuous exemplars.

1. Responding to Macrina's death, VSM 26-27

Although the circumstances surrounding Macrina's funeral are recorded from a later vantage point, the description of her death and her community's reaction is presented as though capturing Gregory's immediate experience of the events. One approach to analyzing such an instance of narrative self-presentation is to dissect and examine individually the intervening layers of recollection, interpretation, and reinterpretation in order to understand the historical and emotional dimensions of Gregory's relationship with Macrina. This approach is one Raymond Van Dam and Anthony Meredith both take to good effect, providing rich accounts of Cappadocian family history reconstructed from the theologians' writings.¹⁰² However, shifting our attention from the way Gregory's account is mimetic to the way it enables the ideal reader's mimesis prods us to consider the role Gregory plays as a member of one internal audience. Analyzing his narrative portrayal allows us to note how Gregory the biographer adjudicates

¹⁰² See especially Meredith, *Gregory of Nyssa* and Van Dam, *Families and Friends*.

interpretive strategies and objects of vision.

When Gregory sees Macrina's body in the peaceful repose of death, he is troubled, even undone. He and the community of women in Macrina's semi-monastic household grieve together. The primary narrator depicts his remembered grief in a form readers can analyze, situating them at a critical distance that the immediate experience itself precluded for him as a participant. Gregory's own deeds are described and explained, with the advantage that the narrator is fully aware of the internal motivations that led to behaviors observed. All of Gregory's reactions are described as an interplay between invisible emotions and their physical or sensible externalization:

My soul became weak for two reasons, both because of the things I saw and because of the sound of the virgins' weeping. For until that point, they had controlled themselves in silence, shutting up the grief in their souls, and they had choked down the impulse to cry out because of awe for her, as if they were afraid of the reproach of her visage already silenced; lest, contrary to her order, some sound should break forth from them and should cause their teacher grief. And like some fire burning their souls from within, when their emotion could no longer be controlled in silence, some bitter, ungovernable wail broke forth, and it was no longer possible for my reason to remain orderly, but, like some mountain stream overflowing below the surface, I was swept away by my emotion and, heedless the things at hand, I was entirely in grief.¹⁰³

Grief manifests in a series of observable *praxeis*. But even while Gregory's suffering is still hidden from view, he describes its effects in physical terms. This self-portrait, with its personal narrative voice, thus depicts the *praxeis* of one member of an internal audience in distress.

¹⁰³ Ἐμοὶ δὲ διχόθεν ἐγίνετο πάρετος ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ οἵς τὸ φαινόμενον ἔβλεπον καὶ οἵς τὴν ἀκοὴν διὰ τῆς γοερᾶς τῶν παρθένων οἰμωγῆς περιηχούμην. Τέως μὲν γάρ ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ διεκαρτέρουν ἐκεῖναι, τῇ ψυχῇ τὴν ὄδύνην ἐγκατακλείουσαι, καὶ τὴν οἰμωγῆς ὄρμὴν τῷ πρὸς αὐτὴν φόβῳ κατέπνιγον, ὥσπερ δεδοικυῖαι καὶ σιωπῶντος ἥδη τοῦ προσώπου τὴν ἐπιτίμησιν, μή που παρὰ τὸ διατεταγμένον αὐταῖς φωνῆς τινος παρ' αὐτῶν ἐκραγείσης λυπηθείη πρὸς τὸ γινόμενον ἡ διδάσκαλος. Καὶ οἰονεὶ πυρός τινος ἔνδοθεν αὐτῶν τὰς ψυχὰς διασμύχοντος, ἐπεὶ οὐκέτι κατακρατεῖσθαι δι' ἡσυχίας τὸ πάθος ἥδυνατο, ἀθρόως πικρός τις καὶ ἄσχετος ἀναρρήγνυνται ἥχος, ὥστε μοι μηκέτι μένειν ἐν τῷ καθεστηκότι τὸν λογισμόν, ἀλλὰ καθάπερ χειμάρρουν τινὸς ἐπικλύσαντος ὑποβρύχιον παρενεχθῆναι τῷ πάθει καὶ τῶν ἐν χερσὶν ἀμελήσαντα ὅλον τῶν θρήνων εἶναι (VSM 26).

Although the text appears to contain an immediate account of Gregory's experience, a closer look reveals he manipulates the narrative point of view. The relative temporal locations of Gregory as he appears in the timeline of the text (subject-Gregory), of Gregory the retrospective storyteller (narrator-Gregory), and of readers affect the legibility of the text's emotional landscape. Temporal distance enables what might otherwise be impossible: narrator-Gregory understands and explains the meaning of his actions, even though his original experience was of being out of control. By virtue of its narrative presentation, subject-Gregory's confusion is eclipsed by narrator-Gregory's present correct understanding. Confusion recedes into the past to be replaced by order, and he reconstructs for readers the hermeneutical processes that led to both early inferior and later superior reactions to Macrina's death, allowing readers the chance to respond virtuously to the sight of Macrina's corpse even though he himself did not in the historical moment.

As in the VGT, contextualization aids in the superior interpretation that can lead to virtuous action. In this passage, paradoxical constructions provide a set of limits within which the reader may contextualize subject-Gregory's response. For example, concentrating on a task is opposed to "being swept away" ($\pi\alpha\rho\varepsilon\nu\chi\theta\eta\nu\alpha\iota$) by distracting grief: Gregory names two reactions and by a bookending synecdoche represents the full range of possible responses.¹⁰⁴ With the help of temporal distance, subject-Gregory's immediate reaction may now be situated on the vision/interpretation spectrum, and narrator-Gregory describes his reaction as an inferior interpretation that led to less than ideal behavior. The *bios* reinforces this negative judgment of

¹⁰⁴ On the practice of referring to a whole by its two opposing poles, with examples in Greek literature, see G.E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

uncontrolled grieving and provides interpretive guidance by identifying self-control as ideally virtuous. Earlier, the text praised Macrina's ability to focus her thoughts on the higher philosophy even as her body was suffering (VSM 18), and Macrina herself is here portrayed as a figure at peace, her very peacefulness imposing a check on the virgins' grief.

The wider framing of the *bios* also establishes that the internal audience's *praxeis* either display or renounce the virtue of self-control. The whole of Gregory's dialogue *De anima et resurrectione* deals with the proper Christian reaction to death. That *De anima* is presented as a dialogue with Macrina, presumed to record the conversation referred to in VSM 17, reinforces the impression that Gregory holds his sister up as a model of the virtue of self-control. As Robert Gregg demonstrates in his monograph on consolation philosophy in the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory and his cohorts adopt and adapt the Greek philosophical tradition from the classical period through late antiquity, which maintains that the cultivation of self-control is an ideal response to death and grief.¹⁰⁵ Throughout the VSM, deaths of family members and other intimates - from Macrina's fiancé to Naucratius, from Basil to Emmelia - have been portrayed as key moments in Macrina's ongoing *paideia*. The narrative transforms each loss into an occasion for her development as a spiritual exemplar who controls her initial emotional and passionate reactions by taking recourse to philosophical rationality, using revealed spiritual knowledge about resurrection to turn her sorrow to gratitude.¹⁰⁶ In this text, the battle between Scripturally-

¹⁰⁵ Robert C. Gregg, *Consolation philosophy*.

¹⁰⁶ The importance of gratitude as a counterbalance for grief and distress is well described (with numerous convincing examples from the VSM) in Derek Krueger, "Writing and the Liturgy of Memory." While I disagree with some conclusions of this article (see Chapter 4 for my argument that the text crafts mediated (textualized) rather than direct encounters with the exemplar's physical presence), Krueger outlines well the movement from overwhelming grief, through rational self-control, to another attitude or orientation that the exemplar may choose for herself. Specifically on the ways Gregory depicts Macrina using reason and argumentation to "train" Emmelia to

informed reason and natural, bodily passion acts as a structuring opposition for the Christian's encounter with grief.¹⁰⁷

When the opposition reappears in VSM 26-27, Gregory and the virgins fail in their attempts to imitate Macrina. In light of their reaction to grief, her previously described self-control and its Christian rationalization appear even more praiseworthy. Partly by means of this marked contrast, Gregory lauds his sister's *praxeis* as indicative of virtuous self-control. This depiction of overwhelming grief and its causes reflects on the quality of interpretation the figures in the narrative model. Readers ought to imitate the biography's exemplar but can also learn from the internal audience's struggle and failure.

Gregory uses paradoxical images to echo and develop these textual themes. Earlier in the text, paradox illustrated the exemplar's self-control, for Macrina's words flowed like an unobstructed stream, even though she was burning with fever.¹⁰⁸ Here, the image of a powerful mountain stream bowling over Gregory's rational faculties finds its complement (also paradoxical) in the blazing fire that afflicts the virgins, drawing a sharper contrast between Macrina's control and the internal audience's passion, between her exemplary *praxis* and their almost complete failure to imitate it. Metaphor gives sense-perceptible form to emotional and religious experience. For the reader the divided grieving selves in the narrative are readily

overcome her grief in the face of Naucratius' death, see the excellent discussion of VSM 10 in Smith, "A Just and Reasonable Grief," 68-72.

¹⁰⁷ On reason and emotions as possible reactions to grief, see the death of the fiancé in VSM 5; the juxtaposition between Macrina and Emmelia responding to Naucratius' death in VSM 9-10 and Macrina's positive influence in VSM 11; the aftermath of Basil's death in VSM 14 (treated in chapter 2 of this dissertation); and Macrina's expounding on the hope of the resurrection as a counterbalance to misfortune in VSM 17.

¹⁰⁸ Georgia Frank points out the notable contrast between Macrina's dry eyes throughout the text and the copious weeping indulged in by other characters, including Gregory both before and after his sister's death (Frank, "Macrina's Scar," 526).

comprehensible, because they are presented in terms of self-control or its absence and by familiar paradoxes related to self-control. The double reference to that virtue helps readers identify the lesson of the biographical vignette. That is, because this narrative instance alludes to a concept present throughout the *bios*, Gregory directs attention through this singular experience of grief toward consideration of the potentially imitable virtue of self-control.¹⁰⁹

Finally, Gregory uses Macrina's corpse as a focal point in the episode to which viewers, both the internal audience and ideal readers, respond. The passage juxtaposes vivid images that stimulate readers' senses with descriptions of the virgins' actions, a narrative move that grants readers access to the women's emotional experience.¹¹⁰ The rapid toggling between (reader) perception and (internal audiences') action is a complicated compositional move that creates an implied narrative relationship between what the virgins perceived and how they acted; action is framed as reaction, and furthermore as relatable reaction. This interposed narrative of imagined causality facilitates the ideal reader's identification with members of the internal audience, because they view an interpretable object together. At the same time, the text presents the internal audience as another interpretable object.

From the outset, Gregory blames his and the virgins' discomfiture on sensations.

¹⁰⁹ I say "potentially imitable" because even Gregory allows that one may initially be overcome by grief, and that such grief may seem reasonable if the person who has died was an exemplar and guide. Yet his own progress toward an eventual rational response (and the ability of narrator-Gregory to correctly assess subject-Gregory's error) strongly suggests that the development of self-control is possible.

¹¹⁰ The idea that Macrina is a light in the darkness also appears here. J. Warren Smith points to this metaphor in his 2004 article on Macrina and grief: the virgins' lament that they have lost the lamp of their eyes "may be an allusion to Psalm 118.105 (LXX): 'Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.' Here, however, the virgins have modified the words of the psalm. The lamp and the light are not equated with the word of the Lord but with Macrina. Indeed, Macrina has functioned for this community as the lamp and light which enables them to see not only an example of how a Christian should face death but also the joy of one who lives in proleptic anticipation of heavenly communion with Christ" (Smith, "A Just and Reasonable Grief," 81-82). The point I take from this is that Macrina functionally embodies Scripture as the lamp, confirming the referential role of an exemplar.

Weeping assaults his ears just as the sight of Macrina's body, closely described in the previous paragraph (VSM 25), struck his eyes. In response to these sensations, Gregory's emotions career out of control. The sequence of events recreated in the passage, which moves from an analysis of the virgins' reactions to a description of Gregory's own confusion, enhances the impression that the text straightforwardly recounts a simple cause and effect sequence: the visible and then audible distress of Macrina's community builds until it strongly affects Gregory, who is initially a witness and then a participant.¹¹¹

The arrangement of the episode reinforces the impression that the internal audience's experience hinges on Macrina's bodily presence. Silence and cries alternate, the silence first, associated with Macrina's "sleeplike" repose,¹¹² the cries later, bursting forth and described as unwanted because they contradict the exemplar's orders and her manifest peacefulness. By constantly bringing the focus back to Macrina's body, a visible object, Gregory narrates on a timeline what he saw the virgins do as though it is a reaction to their sense perception; however internal their struggle with grief, it was set off by some physical perception. At the same time, the constant reference to Macrina's corpse as the object of perception indirectly invites readers' participation in the scenario. Gregory's description outlines two possible outcomes for a reader's participation: she may respond as subject-Gregory and the virgins do, or she may, with the benefit of narrator-Gregory's hindsight, likewise try to apply self-control when responding to Macrina's corpse.

¹¹¹As Virginia Burrus puts it, "in this remarkable line of prose, Gregory makes the virgins' voice his own." Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography*. Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 73.

¹¹² οἱ ὄφθαλμοὶ προσεδέοντο, καθάπερ ἐπὶ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν γίνεται ὑπνου (VSM 25).

Subject-Gregory and the virgins all respond to Macrina's presence in an improved fashion by the end of the episode, and narrator-Gregory again describes the positive end of the spectrum of interpretation in terms of vision:

Then somehow I recalled my soul as though from some deep, and *looking intently* (ἀτενίσας) at that holy head, as if I were reprimanded for the disorder of those making noise with their wailing, “Look at her! (Πρὸς ταύτην βλέψατε)” I said in a loud voice to the crying virgins, “And remember her advice, by which you were taught by her about order and decent behavior in everything.”¹¹³

He instructs the virgins to see Macrina's body as an incentive to self-control rather than disorder. It is the sight of Macrina's body and attention to what it signifies about her teaching that can lead to improved interpretation and virtuous action.

In this passage that describes mainly the negative end of the spectrum of vision and interpretation, Gregory nevertheless maintains that superior interpretation is possible. In keeping with Stoic ethical principles and Scriptural teaching, Gregory depicts succumbing to grief as a choice.¹¹⁴ In the moment when subject-Gregory is “overwhelmed,” the text deploys an image of “being swept away” in the throes of grief. Yet according to the passage, this surrender of rational

¹¹³ Ἐπεὶ δέ πως καθάπερ ἐκ βυθοῦ τινος τὴν ἔμαυτοῦ ψυχὴν ἀνελεξάμην πρὸς τὴν ἀγίαν ἐκείνην κεφαλὴν ἀτενίσας, ὥσπερ ἐπιτιμηθεὶς ἐπὶ τῇ ἀταξίᾳ τῶν ἐπιθορυβούντων διὰ τοῦ θρήνου· Πρὸς ταύτην βλέψατε, εἴπον μεγάλῃ τῇ φωνῇ πρὸς τὰς παρθένους βοήσας, καὶ τῶν παραγγελμάτων αὐτῆς ἀναμνήσθητε, δι’ ὃν τὸ ἐν παντὶ τεταγμένον καὶ εὔσχημον παρ’ αὐτῆς ἐπαιδεύθητε (VSM 27).

¹¹⁴ Cf. his comment in VM II.74 on hardening Pharaoh's heart: “But even if what has been said before is so stated by the divine Word, and God does in this way entirely hand over to dishonorable passions the one who gives himself up to them (Rom 1:28), neither is Pharaoh hardened by the divine will nor is the froglike life fashioned by virtue. For if this were to be willed by the divine nature, then certainly that human choice would fall into line in every case, such that no distinction between virtue and vice in life could be observed. Different people conduct their lives differently - some ordering themselves with virtue, others falling down into vice. One would not easily attribute these differences in their lives to some necessities in accordance with the divine will which lies outside themselves. It lies within each person's power to make this choice” (Αλλ’ εἰ καὶ οὕτω λέγεται παρὰ τῆς θείας Γραφῆς τὰ εἰρημένα οὕτω τε τῷ πάθει τῆς ἀτιμίας ὁ Θεὸς ἔκδοτον δίδωσι τὸν πρὸς τοῦτο φερόμενον, οὔτε ὁ Φαραὼ θείᾳ βουλήσει σκληρύνεται, οὔτε ὁ βατραχώδης βίος ὑπὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς πλάσσεται. Εἰ γὰρ βουλητὸν ἦν τοῦτο τῇ θείᾳ φύσει, πάντως ὃν ἐπὶ πάντων κατὰ τὸ ίσον ἡ τοιαύτη προαίρεσις ἵσχυσεν, ὡς μηδεμιᾶς ἀρετῆς καὶ κακίας παρὰ τὸν βίον διαφορὰν θεωρεῖσθαι, ἄλλων δὲ ἄλλως μετεχόντων τοῦ βίου καὶ τῶν μὲν δι’ ἀρετῆς κατορθουμένων, τῶν δὲ εἰς κακίαν ἀπορρεόντων. Οὐκ ἄν τις εὐλόγως ὑπερκειμέναις τισὶν ἀνάγκαις ταῖς κατὰ τὸ θείον βούλημα συνισταμέναις τὰς διαφορὰς τῶν βίων λογίσαιτο, ὃν ἡ προαίρεσις ἐφ’ ἔκαστου τὸ κράτος ἔχει).

control is the result of poor assessment of sense perceptions. In retrospect he remarks, “It somehow seemed to me that the impulse of the virgins’ grief was just and reasonable.”¹¹⁵ From narrator-Gregory’s later perspective, and from the perspective of an ideal reader, the surrender to lamentation was (and still is) a poor – even if sympathetic – choice. Considering Macrina’s corpse in the context of her teachings and consistently virtuous way of life should inspire “order” and “decent behavior.” The hope of the resurrection should have assuaged grief. Subject-Gregory’s struggle and failure to trust in the real things instead of in his perceptions is manifested in his body and in the composition of the *bios*. But even such a failure, properly narrated, can educate readers who will encounter similar struggles.

D. Seeing with a community

In the *bioi*, Gregory most frequently recommends and models a single strategy for discerning virtue behind and within exemplars’ narrated *praxeis*: turning to a shared tradition, overwhelmingly to the Scriptures, for guidance.¹¹⁶ Gregory often advises readers to “look to” Scripture and incorporates direct *synkrisis*. Gregory compares the exemplars of VGT and VSM

¹¹⁵Καὶ μοι δικαία πως ἔδόκει καὶ εὖλογος ἡ τοῦ πάθους ἀφορμὴ ταῖς παρθένοις εἶναι (VSM 26, italics mine).

¹¹⁶ One of the most intriguing examples of this phenomenon is when Gregory describes Moses, his priestly assistants, and the Law, personified, working in concert to interpret the teachings of the Law properly. Gregory describes the significance of the events in the Israelites’ battle with Amalek (Exod 17:8-16) as follows: “That Moses has his hands elevated signifies the contemplation of the Law with lofty perception, and that he lets them hang to earth signifies the mean and low literal exegesis (κατὰ τὸ γράμμα τοῦ νόμου ἐξήγησίν) of the law and its observance” (Σημαίνει δὲ τὸ μὲν ἐν ὅψει τὰς χεῖρας ἔχειν τὸν Μωϋσέα τὴν διὰ τῶν ὑψηλοτέρων νοημάτων θεωρίαν τοῦ νόμου, τὸ δὲ εἰς τὴν γῆν ἐπικλίνειν τὴν ταπεινήν τε καὶ χαμαίζηλον κατὰ τὸ γράμμα τοῦ νόμου ἐξήγησίν τε καὶ παρατήρησιν, VM II.149). He elaborates on this interpretation by explaining how the priesthood “supports the falling Law at its base with a stone so that the Law, with a figure of outstretched hands, shows forth its purpose (σκοπός) to those who behold it” (Ἡ γάρ ἀληθῆς ιερωσύνη … πίπτοντα τὸν νόμον εἰς ἔδαφος ὑπερειδει τῷ λίθῳ, ὥστε αὐτὸν ἀνεστῶτα τῷ σχήματι τῆς τῶν χειρῶν ἐκτάσεως τὸν ἔαντοῦ σκοπὸν ὑποδεικνύειν τοῖς βλέπουσιν, VM II.150). The complex image here depicts the cooperative functions of Scripture and its interpreters. The priesthood, perhaps like Gregory’s ideal readers, are shown engaging in key interpretive tasks that help their interlocutor – Scripture – express the σκοπός that is apparently its own (τὸν ἔαντοῦ σκοπὸν). Between the exemplar and the community, correct apprehension of Scripture’s meaning is possible, with some acknowledged limitations.

to Patriarchs,¹¹⁷ Moses,¹¹⁸ prophets,¹¹⁹ kings,¹²⁰ Job,¹²¹ Peter,¹²² Paul,¹²³ and even Christ.¹²⁴

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Gregory sometimes takes a different approach with the already Scriptural figure of Moses. In the VM, he appeals to Scriptural comparanda,¹²⁵ but also to tradition of another sort: the writers and thinkers of the early Church.¹²⁶

Gregory draws on the context of a community of Christian thinkers and interpreters to discern instructions for virtue in the episode from Exod 4:27ff of Moses meeting Aaron and acquiring his brother's cooperation before the two face off against Pharaoh. The key he provides for understanding this event is a teaching not strictly biblical. Nevertheless he insists on its authoritative status for his readers. He writes,

There is a saying (which derives its trustworthiness [τὸ πιστόν] from the tradition of the fathers [ἐκ πατρικῆς παραδόσεως]) which says that when our nature had fallen into sin God did not overlook our fall as not providentially ordered. But he appointed an angel with an incorporeal nature to join forces with each person's life, and, on the other hand, he also appointed the corruptor to contrive against nature in a similar way, through a punishing and evil-working demon afflicting

¹¹⁷ Abraham: VGT 12; Joseph: VGT 20.

¹¹⁸ VGT 25, 33.

¹¹⁹ Samuel: VGT 64.

¹²⁰ VGT 50.

¹²¹ VSM 18.

¹²² VGT 75-76.

¹²³ VSM 19.

¹²⁴ VSM 37.

¹²⁵ E.g. at VM II.26, when the transformation of Moses' hand (Exod 4:6-7) is compared to the incarnation, with textual support from the Psalms (Psalm 77:10). VM II.134 compares the oasis refreshing the Israelites to the gospel, its springs to the Apostles. The grapes Joshua and the spies bring back to the Israelite camp (VM II.268) are equated with Christ on the cross.

¹²⁶ Similar appeals to Patristic tradition appear in a sixth-century author (who appeals to the Cappadocians); see Averil Cameron, "Models of the Past in the late Sixth Century: The Life of Patriarch Eutychius" in Graeme Clarke, ed., with Brian Croke, Alanna Emmett Nobbs, and Raoul Mortley, *Reading the Past in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1990): 205-223. Her study deals with "the formation of the idea of the authority of the past as resting in a canon of the correct Fathers, whose thinking, if correctly rehearsed again, will guarantee credibility in a world in which not much else is certain" (206). Such an appeal to Patristic tradition appears in the VSM and VGT as well, in addition to Scriptural *synkrisis*. Comparing Macrina to Thecla in VSM 2, Gregory points to non-canonical tradition. The VGT records Thaumaturgus' performance and sanction of martyr festivals and credits him with the founding of priestly intercessory prayer in VGT 94.

the life of the person.¹²⁷

Gregory cites the tradition of the fathers as a source of legitimacy for teachings about guardian angels. He most likely points back to Origen's *De Principiis* II.10.7, in which Origen claims, based on Matt 18:10, that an angel has been assigned to each believer.¹²⁸ This teaching is sufficient for interpreting Scripture as well as for establishing general principles of Christian life. Once the authority of the doctrine is thus established, Gregory links right interpretation and subsequent right *praxis* with seeing.

Gregory invokes ongoing, lived Christian experience as a secondary context for understanding Moses' *praxeis*. The imagined audience of the VM, readers and interpreters of Scripture, aims to advance toward virtue and receive divine assistance:

So if someone should estrange himself from those enticing him to evil, turning to the better using reason, and should put evil, as it were, behind him, placing his own soul, like a mirror, face-to-face with the hope of good things, so that the images and appearances of virtue shown to him by God are imprinted on the purity of his soul, then the brotherly alliance meets and unites with him. For the angel, who is in some way a brother to the rational and intellectual part of the human soul, appears, just as it is said, and also assists whenever we approach the Pharaoh.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Λόγος τίς ἔστιν, ἐκ πατρικῆς παραδόσεως τὸ πιστὸν ἔχων, ὃς φησι, πεσούσης ἡμῶν εἰς ἀμαρτίαν τῆς φύσεως, μὴ περιιδεῖν τὸν θεὸν τὴν πτῶσιν ἡμῶν ἀπρονότητον, ἀλλ’ ἄγγελόν τινα τῶν τὴν ἀσώματον εὐληχότων φύσιν παρακαθιστᾶν εἰς συμμαχίαν τῇ ἐκάστου ζωῇ, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ἐναντίου τὸν φθορέα τῆς φύσεως ἀντιμηχανᾶσθαι τὸ ἵσον, διὰ πονηροῦ τίνος καὶ κακοποιοῦ δαίμονος τῇ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ζωῇ λυμανόμενον (VM II.45).

¹²⁸ On the reception of Matt 18:10 in early Christian texts (including writings from Irenaeus, the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies, and Clement of Alexandria), see Bogdan G. Bucur, "Matt. 18:10 in Early Christology and Pneumatology: A Contribution to the Study of Matthean *Wirkungsgeschichte*," *Novum Testamentum* 49 (2007): 209-231. Gregory himself refers to the gospel passage and angels in *Ad Eustathium, de sancta trinitate* 13. The tradition of guardian angels can also be traced back to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision V.1-4, another possible source used by Origen and Gregory after him.

¹²⁹ Εἴπερ οὖν ἀλλοτριωθείη τις τῶν ἐπὶ κακῷ δελεαζόντων, πρὸς τὸ κρείττον τοῖς λογισμοῖς ἐπιτρέψας, καὶ οίονεὶ κατὰ νότου τὴν κακίαν ποιήσειν, ἀντιπρόσωπον τὴν ἔαυτοῦ ψυχῆν, οἴον τι κάτοπτρον, πρὸς τὴν ἐλπίδα τῶν ἀγαθῶν στήσας, ὡς τῆς προδεικνυμένης αὐτῷ θεόθεν ἀρετῆς τὰς εἰκόνας τε καὶ τὰς ἐμφάσεις τῷ καθαρῷ τῆς ιδίας ψυχῆς ἐντυπώσασθαι, τότε αὐτῷ ἡ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ συμμαχία συναντᾶ καὶ συνίσταται. Ἀδελφὸς γάρ τρόπον τινὰ κατὰ τὸ λογικόν τε καὶ νοερὸν τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁ ἄγγελος, ὁ τότε, καθὼς εἱρηται, φαινόμενός τε καὶ παριστάμενος, ὅταν τῷ Φαραὼ προσεγγίζωμεν (VM II.47).

Images of virtue are revealed by God, and “seeing” them is clearly a function of the soul’s rational and noetic faculties ($\tauὸ\lambdaογικὸν\tauε\kαὶ\νοερόν$). This sort of seeing leads to a more virtuous way of life, with divine assistance. Moving along the spectrum toward superior vision and interpretation is made even more attainable, since it is a divinely assisted activity.

When the vision metaphor is applied to internal audiences as a metric of interpretive success, readers watch as interpretive strategies are put to the test, to succeed or fail. Gregory’s *bioi* present seeing well as a teachable, reproducible process that takes place in the context of a Scripturally-focused and divinely guided Christian community that is imagined as a community with shared traditions and shared teachers (including angelic ones!). Gregory presents the most successful strategy for interpreting *praxeis* as a process of contextualization that draws on the authority of shared tradition and the divine assistance that is available. Superior interpretation does not happen in a vacuum, but instead must be an informed and holistic way of “seeing” the world.

In the episodes discussed above, Gregory recommends a trained vision that engages the eye of the soul over against mere physical sight. Even for skilled interpreters, there is an intellectual understanding that supersedes what can be gained through the senses. But the “images and appearances of virtue” that God reveals indicate that the trained seer, too, has only indirect or imperfect access to divine realities. This idea is intimately related to Gregory’s insistence on *epektasis*; beyond the senses, there is intellectual understanding, and each instance of noetic perception will lead to a desire for further such instances. Readers with varying levels of perceptiveness, therefore, could all find a starting point on the road of perpetual progress.

IV. The invitation to see: vision and imaginative participation

The comparative and communicative purposes for which Gregory has enlisted the

concept of vision represent an effort to render his narrative presentation of each exemplar's *praxeis* both affecting and effective. Gregory also combines explicit appeals to the readers' (selectively reliable) real physical senses with the figurative language of vision to open a participatory window onto the events depicted in the text. Using direct commentary and invitations for the reader to look or "see," Gregory insists on the relevance of the events he narrates for the lives of contemporary readers and invites the ideal reader to step decisively into her role as an eyewitness and interpreter of the exemplar's *praxeis*.

A. Eyewitnesses across time

Gregory uses numerous strategies in his attempts to create a bridge between the events of the narrative and the world of his reading audience. In his chapter-length study of the VM and Gregory's eulogy for Basil, Michael Stuart Williams argues that Gregory effectively collapses historical distinctions between Scriptural time and the contemporary period by depicting Basil's daily life in relation to Moses and other Scriptural models, and further, that "into that everyday life, however, he imported the whole world of the Bible. Scripture was accordingly 'de-mystified'. In effect, it was brought up to date."¹³⁰ Williams focuses on the idea that Gregory writes within and thereby creates a context of ongoing Scriptural history, arguing that Gregory appeals to a Scriptural past that becomes a Scriptural present.

To support his claim Williams points to examples of *synkrisis*, a staple of encomium and encomiastic *bios*, but not as such.¹³¹ He addresses rather Gregory's theoretical methodology, the

¹³⁰ Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 81.

¹³¹ The same is largely true for the collected essays of Clarke, et al, *Reading the Past*. Averil Cameron's contribution (Cameron, "Models of the Past") deals with the specific technique of patristic citation, but the remaining essays address general approaches to the past and the construction of history/histories.

typological mode of reading Scripture and contemporary history that lies behind and motivates such specific *synkrisis* as the comparison of Moses to Basil and vice-versa.¹³² In his introduction, Williams specifically identifies typology (here in contrast to allegory) as an interpretive mode concerned with “repetition in history of previous historical events.”¹³³ This approach is suggestive for the analysis of vision as a conceptual metaphor in Gregory’s *bioi*. He draws attention to a pattern in Gregory’s references to Scripture and convincingly argues that intertextuality creates a common context shared by exemplars and readers. Most importantly for our purposes, he identifies this “sense of congruity”¹³⁴ and “alignment”¹³⁵ of Scriptural and contemporary periods as a key point of study for those who seek to understand the didactic aspects of Gregory’s biographical project: “Gregory’s *Life of Moses* originated precisely in the desire to relate the exemplary figures of Scripture to the practical matter of living in the contemporary world.”¹³⁶

One fruitful way to move forward with Williams’ approach is to consider history as just one among several possible frameworks for understanding that readers may have in common with exemplars. We have already seen above that a Christian Platonic philosophical

¹³² For example, Williams reads the application of an identical narrative figure (the darkness in which revelation is received) to both Moses and Basil as a function of historical alignment, but does not comment on the choice of figure or its narrative effects: “Basil’s ‘dark cloud’ was a metaphorical one, a poor imitation perhaps of Moses’ theophany. But it might be best in this case to understand the relationship in reverse. Moses, for Gregory, was a thinker who had penetrated to the darkness at the heart of Christianity and had reached the same conclusions as the Cappadocians. It is in this company that this ‘theologised’ and theologising Moses belongs: he was perhaps to be considered less as a model for Basil, and more as a projection of Basil and his concerns into the distant biblical past” (Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 94).

¹³³ Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 12. He here contradicts the position articulated by Henri de Lubac that, for most of the Christian interpretive tradition up through Thomas Aquinas, “allegory” and “typology” could be used almost interchangeably, and “En fait, ils pouvaient passer pour synonymes” (Henri de Lubac, “Typologie et allégorisme,” *Recherches de de science religieuse*, volume 34 [1947]: 180-226, 203).

¹³⁴ Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 80.

¹³⁵ Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 20.

¹³⁶ Williams, *Authorised Lives*, 60.

anthropology is another such framework that may connect exemplars and readers as human beings who, Gregory assumes, share a common human experience. We have also seen how the narrative evocation of sense experience can facilitate reader identification with internal audiences. Below I offer a more detailed picture of how narrative commentary, direct address, and the conceptual metaphor of vision operate with respect to readers' experience of engaging with texts to open a participatory window into Gregory's authorial interpretive project.

B. The author's voice

The language of vision plays a crucial role in turning the imagined reader's gaze toward relevant aspects of the exemplar's *praxeis*. In cases where *synkrisis* of persons or deeds is not operating but the realities of the narrative nevertheless bleed into the present time of the reader, Gregory uses direct address to form a link between text and reader. In the example of Thaumaturgus converting the people of Neocaesarea (VGT 42-48); Gregory twice interrupts the short description with comments addressed to the contemporary audience. He anticipates their reception of the *bios* they are reading by remarking on its narrative style:

If the history of the stories about him is something narrative and artless, and our discourse voluntarily leaves aside the profitable things that could be discovered in the events with some thoughtfulness, let it be (for those judging events rightly) no small testimony to the fact that the wonders of the one being remembered have not been augmented through any design, but that the memory of his deeds suffices for the most perfect speech of praise.¹³⁷

This comment seems to invite readers to indulge in the sort of subtle thinking that would reveal hidden gems in the narrative. Yet in the very act of pointing readers toward such gems, Gregory

¹³⁷ Εἰ δὲ διηγηματική τίς ἔστι καὶ ἀκατάσκευος τῶν περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγων ἡ ἱστορία, τὰς ἐκ περινοίας τινὸς ἐφευρισκομένας τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐπανξήσεις ἔκουσίως τοῦ ἡμετέρου παραλιπόντος λόγου· γένοιτο ἀν καὶ αὐτὴ τοῖς ὁρθῶς τὰ πράγματα κρίνουσιν οὐ μικρὰ μαρτυρία, τοῦ μηδὲν δι' ἐπινοίας ἐπανξεσθαι τῷ μνημονευομένῳ τὰ θαύματα, ἀλλ' ἀρκεῖν τὴν μνήμην τῶν κατ' αὐτὸν πραγμάτων πρὸς τελειότατον ἐπαινον· (VGT 46).

shows his hand; the biographer comments on his own narrative craft and the texture of the account he is weaving, his artful supposed artlessness. He also points to tangible objects his imagined audience might be able to see, like the local temple Thaumaturgus established that still stands: “This is the temple that is pointed out to this day, which that Great One, halting as soon as he arrived, laid as a kind of foundation and groundwork for his priesthood.”¹³⁸ What the readers themselves can observe about the text and their world effectively invites them to engage the account of Thaumaturgus’ *praxeis* as eyewitnesses who analyze and interpret with Gregory.

Similar first and second person commentary by the narrator frames interpretive moments in the other *bioi*. In the VM, Gregory exegetes the events of Exod 31:19, in which Moses destroys the first tablets recording God’s commandments, grinds down the golden calf, and makes the people consume the evidence of their idol worship. His commentary identifies the connection between Scripture and the present day as an object of vision; it is something readers may see:

The history prophetically proclaimed especially these things also about the events which have come to pass now in our own time. For the whole deceptive act of idolatry vanished entirely from life, being swallowed down by pious mouths effecting the annihilation of impious matter in themselves through the good confession. And the ancient mysteries instituted by the idolaters simply became water, fleeting and immaterial, water swallowed down by those previously idol-crazed. *When you see* those who formerly submitted to such emptiness now abolishing and destroying those things in which they had trusted, doesn’t the narrative seem to cry out to you clearly that every idol will then be swallowed up by the mouths of those who have drawn back from falsehood to piety?¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ναὸς, οὗ τὰς ἀρχὰς ἐκεῖνος τῆς κατασκευῆς κατεβάλετο· … οἵον τινα θεμέλιον καὶ κρηπῖδα τῆς ιδίας ιερωσύνης (VGT 48).

¹³⁹ Ταῦτα μάλιστα καὶ περὶ τῶν νῦν ἐν τῷ καθ’ ἡμᾶς χρόνῳ γεγενημένων τότε ἡ ἱστορία προφητικῶς ἀνεφώνησε. Πᾶσα γάρ ἡ περὶ τὰ εἰδωλα πλάνη τέλεον ἐξηφανίσθη τοῦ βίου καταποθεῖσα παρὰ τῶν εὐσεβῶν στομάτων τῶν διὰ τῆς καλῆς ὄμοιολογίας τὸν ἀφανισμὸν τῆς ἀσεβοῦς ὕλης ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ποιησαμένων. Καὶ ὕδωρ γέγονεν ἀτεχνῶς παροδικόν τε καὶ ἀνυπόστατον τὰ πάλαι πεπηγότα παρὰ τοῖς εἰδωλολάτραις μυστήρια, ὕδωρ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν τῶν ποτε εἰδωλομανούντων στομάτων καταπινόμενον. Ὄταν γάρ ἵδης τοὺς πρότερον τῇ τοιαύτῃ ὑποκύπτοντας ματαιότητι νῦν ἀναιροῦντας ἐκεῖνα καὶ ἀφανίζοντας, ἐν οἷς αὐτῶν ἦν ἡ πεποίθησις, ἀρ’ οὐχὶ βοῶν σοι δοκεῖ φανερῶς ἡ ἱστορία

The participatory language here takes the form of a call to adhere to a particular understanding of Scripture as a text that is speaking to the present day even as it is describing past events. What Williams calls the process of Scriptural updating is at work, because seeing the events is an ongoing, present tense activity. At the same time, Gregory's text focuses on the sensory,¹⁴⁰ and it is sense experience that creates real-world resonance for the interpreter. He invokes sight and hearing, transforming the Scriptural account into an active agent calling for attention.

C. Shared sense

Gregory makes it clear that readers, exemplars, and internal audiences all share similar sense experiences. Sense experience, then, can function to unite readers and the exemplar in text, their object of study. By appealing to the senses, Gregory can combine explicit addresses to readers with more subtle or implicit appeals that nevertheless invite readers to be participants and eyewitnesses.

1. “*To live with the senses*,” VSM 11

In the VSM, Gregory draws attention to Macrina's community and their mode of conduct, presenting *praxeis* that, he contends, facilitate continual advancement in virtue. He follows this bird's-eye view of a way of life with an interpretive comment. Gregory represents what an observer might see alongside narrator speculations about the sense experiences of the practitioners themselves. By combining these two levels when considering the role of the body in

ὅτι· καταποθήσεται ποτε πᾶν εἴδωλον τοῖς στόμασι τῶν πρὸς τὴν εὐσέβειαν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀπάτης μετατεθέντων; (VM II.203).

¹⁴⁰ The image of idolaters swallowing down the water may also be an invocation of the sense of taste, though Gregory seem to keep the focus on observation and does not comment explicitly on how the Israelites experienced their ordeal.

performing and seeing virtue, Gregory creates space for readers as embodied beings to imitate the virtue that subjects in the *bios* practice, even though their virtue makes them appear to be living beyond the body.

Describing Macrina's way of life and its imitation among members of her domestic community, Gregory expresses admiration for their departure from worldly concerns. He begins with a litany of their positive qualities, then suddenly interjects a comment about his narrative task, opening an invitation for readers to observe the way of life and conceptualize its significance:

Yet what human word could bring this sort of way of life before the eyes, the life, as it were, bordering on both the human and the incorporeal nature? For nature to have been freed from human passions is better than that which exists in a human fashion, whereas to appear in the body and to be encompassed by a form and to live with the sense organs is to have a nature less than angelic and incorporeal. Perhaps someone might bravely say the difference was negligible because, although living with the flesh because of their affinity to the bodiless powers, they were not weighed down by the attractions of the body, but, borne upwards in midair, they took a share in the heavenly faculties. Not a little time was spent in this way of life and, in time, their successes increased and always their philosophy gave them additional aids for discovering goods leading them to that which is more pure.¹⁴¹

Gregory remarks on the inadequacy of language and then of narrative, drawing attention to the fact that he is writing for an audience who are not, technically, eyewitnesses. Nevertheless he seeks a way to "bring before [readers'] eyes" some portrait of the exemplary lifestyle.

¹⁴¹ Τὴν τοίνυν τοιαύτην διαγωγὴν τίς ἂν ὑπ' ὄψιν ἀγάγοι λόγος ἀνθρώπινος, παρ' οἷς μεθόριος ἦν ἡ ζωὴ τῆς τε ἀνθρωπίνης καὶ τῆς ἀσωμάτου φύσεως; Τὸ μὲν γάρ ἐλευθερωθῆναι τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων παθημάτων τὴν φύσιν κρείττον ἦ κατὰ ἀνθρωπὸν ἦν, τὸ δὲ ἐν σώματι φαίνεσθαι καὶ σχήματι περιειλῆφθαι καὶ τοῖς αἰσθητικοῖς ὄργανοις συζῆν ἐν τούτῳ τῆς ἀγγελικῆς τε καὶ ἀσωμάτου φύσεως τὸ ἔλαττον εἶχον. Τάχα δ' ἂν τις τολμήσας εἴποι μηδὲ πρὸς τὸ καταδεέστερον τὴν παραλλαγὴν εἶναι, ὅτι σαρκὶ συζῶσαι καθ' ὄμοιότητα τῶν ἀσωμάτων δυνάμεων οὐκ ἐβαροῦντο τῷ ἐφοιλκίῳ τοῦ σώματος, ἀλλ' ἀνωφερῆς τε καὶ μετέωρος ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ ζωὴ ταῖς οὐρανίαις συμμετεωροποροῦσα δυνάμεσι. Χρόνος ἦν τῆς τοιαύτης διαγωγῆς οὐκ ὀλίγος καὶ συνηγένετο τῷ χρόνῳ τὰ κατορθώματα, ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ καθαρώτερον ταῖς τῶν ἐφευρισκομένων ἀγαθῶν προσθήκαις τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἐπιδιούσης (VSM 11).

Following Williams' lead, we may first note the collapse of the exemplar's time and the ideal readers' historical setting. Narrator-Gregory presents his past observations as though they apply to an ongoing situation.¹⁴² A nature freed from human cares is described in general terms, though the specific models are the women in Macrina's household. The way of life Macrina and her companions pursue is presented as a viable option for readers outside that household in Gregory's contemporary period.¹⁴³ But the discussion of history and time periods alone only takes us so far, since it cannot fully account for how the text grapples with portraying the way of life: Gregory expresses frustration with "human speech" (*λόγος ἀνθρώπινος*) and the difficult task of communication. The literary choices he makes as he goes about describing the way of life that "bordered on both the human and the incorporeal nature" appeal to an experience that also transcends historical periods: human physical sense perception.¹⁴⁴

Other valences of 'vision' are still operative. Gregory's description focuses on the role of bodies, passions, and desire, and we note again echoes of the Platonic anthropology that undergirds the portrayal of *praxeis*. Privileging the rational and not being "weighed down by the

¹⁴² And it is likely that the community of women established in Macrina and Emmelia's family home continued there even after the exemplar's passing. The end of the VSM describes Gregory's departure from the estate and his encounter with a pilgrim also leaving, who goes out to report his experiences to others.

¹⁴³ Nathan D. Howard explains the connections between Gregory's portrayal of Macrina and his wider pastoral goals in the following way: "But Gregory also understood multiple functions that this text could accomplish. These included bolstering the status of his family as an example of Basil's Nicene orthodoxy, underscoring his own episcopal authority and that of his brother Peter, and posing an effective model of participatory Christianity for the lay audience. In this portrayal, it was critical for Basil, Gregory, and their brother Peter to have access to Macrina's holiness as a way of infusing their office with the aura of the sacrosanct. Thus Gregory extended their individual identities to a numinous kinship, embodied by Macrina's *πρᾶξεις* [sic.] – her acts of spiritual discipline" (Nathan D. Howard "Familial *Askēsis* in the *Vita Macrinae*," *Studia Patristica*, Volume 47 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010): 33-38, 34). He is certainly correct that Macrina's ascetic devotions "augmented" the family's spiritual authority (Howard, "Familial *Askēsis*," 34), but for the present study, his final observation about Macrina's role as a model for lay Christians seems most important. Howard asserts that "Macrina was the ascetic Christian that Gregory and Basil envisioned for all saints who did not face the stumbling block of municipal challenges" that bishops had to manage (38).

¹⁴⁴ μεθόριος ἦν ἡ ζωὴ τῆς τε ἀνθρωπίνης καὶ τῆς ἀσωμάτου φύσεως, (VSM 11).

allurements of the body” (οὐκ ἐβαροῦντο τῷ ἐφολκίῳ τοῦ σώματος), the women on the level of the narrative advance toward “that which is more pure” (τὸ καθαρότερον). On the level of narration, and thus for readers, physical sense perception is both the object of scrutiny and the means of scrutinizing what lies beyond the sensible. Gregory draws explicit attention to the communicative role of vivid description discussed in part III of this chapter.

Because it evokes physical senses and refers to that which lies beyond sense experience, this passage valorizes the philosophy that these women used to undergird their advancement toward a pure way of life. Even as readers consider the bodies of the women in community, their observation is pushed away from the sort that could be said to “be weighed down” by the bodily and toward recognition of a past ideal. Gregory directs attention to the incorporeal aspects of the women’s way of life. Readers who observe and contemplate this shift are already participating in it through the guided interpretation; with the narrator’s help, their participation as eyewitnesses takes the form of “seeing” with the intellect what lies beyond the surface level of sense perceptible realities.

2. *Imagining frogs, VM II.68-72*

In the VM, Gregory also poses direct questions to readers as a way of engaging their immediate attention,¹⁴⁵ but he uses more subtle methods to open participatory space as well. Gregory casts readers as eyewitnesses when he uses vivid description to directly engage their interpretive faculties through their imaginative participation. While interpreting the Egyptian plagues, Gregory spends a surprising amount of time discussing the presence and significance of the frogs. In examining this passage, we find that Gregory’s imaginative invocation of quotidian

¹⁴⁵ E.g. commentary on the war with Amalek: Όρας δι’ οἵας πρόεισιν ἀκολουθίας ὁ λόγος; (VM II.148).

objects creates a vivid account that is intended to resonate with his readers' experience.

A clear summary of Gregory's allegorical interpretation grounds the discussion: "The species of frogs are truly the destructive offspring of the evil generated from the unpurged heart of men as though propagated from some mire."¹⁴⁶ The amphibians are an appropriate plague for the Egyptians, who engage in evil actions against their Hebrew slaves. It is when Gregory elaborates on this general point, however, that readers are called upon to validate his interpretation using corroborating evidence from their own experience. The frog-like person,¹⁴⁷ who succumbs to the passions, leaves signs of his beast-like state everywhere in his home, and it is this general home that Gregory conjures before readers' eyes:

For such a man shows his wastefulness in everything, so that everyone easily recognizes the life of the undisciplined man and of the pure man based on the things valued in the household. In the former's house there are seen, through some images made by artists' skill on the plaster on the wall, the flammable matter of sensual passion. Through such images the nature of the disease is brought to mind: the passions pour in upon the soul through the eyes, from the dishonorable aspect of the things seen. But in the house of the self-controlled man there is every precaution and forethought to preserve the eye, pure from sensual spectacles. The table of the self-controlled man is likewise found to be pure, but that of the one wallowing in filth in the miry way of life is froglike and fleshy. And if you search the storerooms, that is, the secret and unmentionable parts of

¹⁴⁶ Ἀληθῶς γὰρ βατράχων ἄντικρυς γένη ἔστι τὰ φθοροποιὰ τῆς κακίας γεννήματα ἐκ τῆς ρυπαρᾶς καρδίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἷον ἐκ τίνος βορβόρου ζωογονούμενα (VM II.69).

¹⁴⁷ In his *Physiognomica*, Aristotle indicates that those who practiced the science of physiognomics sometimes proceeded from a comparison of human and animal physical features to presumptions about human character, especially virtues and vices. He in fact excoriates those who construct a physiognomic system that is based on the physical characteristics of animals. He points out that not only is it difficult to say that a man resembles an animal in any real particulars, but also that animals have more features in common with each other than they have distinguishing features, and that with animals it is nearly impossible to tell what physical features correspond to any aspects of moral character (Aristotle, *Physiognomica* 1, 805b-806a). For a brief overview of physiognomic practice among Greeks, see A. MacC. Armstrong, "The Methods of the Greek Physiognomists," *Greece & Rome*, Volume 5, Number 1 (March 1958): 52-56 (esp. on the idea that "a resemblance in body implies a resemblance in character, and whereas human beings study to shroud their defects, animals unconcernedly expose their whole character in its nakedness," see p. 54). On the comparison between humans and animals as indicative of base physicality and low moral character in early Christian literature on asceticism, see Janet Spittler, *Animals in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: The Wild Kingdom of Early Christian Literature*, WUNT 2, Volume 247 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 43-49.

his life, you will discover among the licentiousnesses much more than frogs in their stockpile.¹⁴⁸

Gregory combines appeals to physical sight and intellectual perception here, both identified as forms of ‘vision.’ Intellectual recognition, which operates through signification (ἐπισημαίνεται), is subsequent to actual observation of the home environment. Secret and unspoken aspects of the profligate person’s lifestyle are imaginatively uncovered, and things seen with and in the body are described as affecting the soul.

As Williams’ model of Scriptural re-enactment might suggest, the description does effectively imbue everyday items from the readers’ contemporary time (the murals, bed, and storeroom) with Scriptural significance, but the mechanism by which it does so makes an appeal to the readers to imagine looking into the house of a profligate or prudent man. Gregory traces out the physiological experience of viewing a suggestive fresco, not only calling to mind typical domestic decorative arts, but comparing the viewing to the experience of disease. Ironically, he must invoke such an image in the minds of his readers in order to condemn it. The passions that rise from viewing such artwork are a destructive force afflicting the soul *through the eyes*.

Gregory uses the table as a metonymy for eating habits, again marking the close connection between bodily practice and the presence or absence of a virtue like self-control. The virtual walk-through of the dichotomous households creates a spatial frame within which readers can

¹⁴⁸ Ἐπισημαίνεται γὰρ διὰ πάντων ὁ τοιοῦτος τὴν ἀσωτίαν, ὥστε πάντας ῥαδίως ἐπιγνῶναι διὰ τῶν κατὰ τὸν οἶκον σπουδαζομένων τὸν βίον τοῦ τε ἀκολάστου καὶ τοῦ καθαρεύοντος, ὅταν ἐν τούτῳ μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν τοῦ τοίχου κονιαμάτων δείκνυται παρὰ τῆς τέχνης διὰ εἰδώλων τινῶν τὰ τῆς ἐμπαθοῦς ἡδονῆς ὑπεκκαύματα, δι’ ὃν ὑπομιμνήσκεται τῆς νόσου ἡ φύσις, διὰ τῆς ὅψεως ἐκ τῆς ἀτιμίας τῶν θεαμάτων ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐπεισχεομένου τοῦ πάθους, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ σωφρονοῦντος φυλακὴν πᾶσαν καὶ προμήθειαν τοῦ καὶ τὸν ὄφθαλμὸν καθαρεύειν τῶν ἐμπαθῶν θεαμάτων. Καὶ ἡ τράπεζα δὲ ὡσαύτως καθαρὰ μὲν τοῦ σωφρονοῦντος εὐρίσκεται, βατραχώδης δὲ καὶ πολύσαρκος τοῦ πρὸς τὸν βορβορώδη βίον ἴλυσπωμένου. Κάν τὰ ταμιεῖα διερευνήσῃς, τουτέστι τὰ κρυπτὰ τοῦ βίου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπόρρητα, πολὺ μᾶλλον ἐν ἐκείνοις σωρείαν βατράχων ἐν τοῖς ἀκολάστοις κατανοήσεις (VM II.71-72).

situate themselves to become observers of the fruits that come from virtuous or vicious character.

In summary, Gregory appeals to his readers' interpretive capacity not only by evoking physical sense perception with vivid description but also by including gnomic sayings and narrative commentary (often in the first and second person) to invite readers to become eyewitnesses of the exemplars' *praxeis*. By encouraging readers to participate actively and even imaginatively in the reading process as though they, like the narrator, are watching the subjects performing virtuous actions, Gregory marks certain narrative episodes as appropriate sites at which readers themselves may, usually with his guidance, apply the general strategic approach to literary interpretation modeled throughout the *bioi*.

This strategic approach, as I have been piecing it together over the course of this chapter, works as follows. In order to "see" a given *praxis* well, readers can consider the reactions of internal audiences to adjudicate between better or worse interpretations, note their own reactions to vivid description, and attend to those aspects of the narration the author exhorts them to "see." Though they rely on the narrator's modeling and guidance while reading the *bioi*, readers employing this strategy use their physical senses in conjunction with the "eye of the soul" to bridge the hermeneutical gap from perceptible, visible *praxeis* to an understanding of hidden (but no longer truly invisible) motivations and character traits.

D. Thaumaturgus as a test case, VGT 79-88

In VGT 79-88, Gregory depicts events in a form that seems designed to provide readers with an opportunity to test the major interpretive principles outlined in the *bios* by applying approved strategies to a study of Thaumaturgus himself. He employs the figurative language of vision in the context of a strategic narrative arrangement: this episode comes at the end of an interconnected sequence of *praxeis*. Gregory inserts frequent appeals to Christian community,

drawing on this interpretive context to attempt to shape the ideal reader's conclusions about Thaumaturgus. Throughout, he identifies readers' interpretive activity as virtuous.

Gregory established in VGT 62-77¹⁴⁹ that senses, subject to various forms of deception and manipulation, can deliver false information to the rational faculty, and that the perceptions of sensible body are a necessary but insufficient source of information for readers trying to discern aspects of character from *praxeis*. In this longer episode, Thaumaturgus performs two surprising actions that the *bios* classifies as virtuous. When persecution of Christians begins, he retreats from the city (VGT 84). When danger is imminent, he engages in deception (VGT 85-86). Gregory challenges ideal readers to question their initial estimation of these narrated *praxeis*. The narrative indicates there is a positive outcome for those who have learned how to re-evaluate their initial perceptions in a context informed by Scripture and community: a chance to imitate the exemplar's way of seeing.

Gregory describes members of two internal audiences in this episode. These groups become the misinterpreters and beneficiaries, respectively, of Thaumaturgus' actions. While standing and praying on a hillside, Thaumaturgus and his companion are overlooked by pursuers who would capture and persecute them; these villainous members of a discrete internal audience see only two trees, even though an informant "kept indicating with signs" where Thaumaturgus was.¹⁵⁰ Gregory attributes the pursuers' misperception to divine protective power, putting this attribution in the mouth of Thaumaturgus encouraging his deacon to pray confidently¹⁵¹ and

¹⁴⁹ The narrator's interjection in VGT 78, though not analyzed here, is an important marker for questions about the text's unity and the structure of the original oration: it appears to signal the intended final section of the work. For our purposes, as stated in the introduction, the *bios* is being treated as a literary unity.

¹⁵⁰ οἱ ζητηταὶ μηδένα ἐωρακέναι... σημείοις ὑπέγραφεν (VGT 86).

¹⁵¹ Literally, Thaumaturgus told his deacon "to stand with firm and unwavering confidence in God" (στερρῷ τε καὶ ἀδιστάκτῳ τῇ πεποιθῆσει στῆναι πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, VGT 85).

returning to it in the resolution of the failed search. As in the Comana vignette (VGT 62-72) and the analysis of the froglike life (VM II.68-72), correct interpretation requires adopting a historical perspective that gives attention to fruits or outcomes. Though Gregory describes Thaumaturgus relying on the faulty nature of perception to protect himself, the deception inspires select onlookers - members of a second internal audience - to convert: the informant, “recognizing the divine protection by which they were thought to be trees by their pursuers, fell down before him and believed in the word.”¹⁵² Manipulation of the physical senses thus becomes a means of foiling evildoers and enabling proper discernment of where divine power rests. Thaumaturgus’ deceit was not negative, but corrective and advantageous for the Christian community.¹⁵³ That is, what the internal audiences cannot see with their physical eyes helps them learn to “see” (figuratively) the truth.

Once again, Scripture serves as one contextual framework for recognizing virtue. A comparison with Moses helps justify Thaumaturgus’ actions and explain their import. The exemplar is like Moses, in that he sees “with the eye of his soul” ($\tauῷ ὄφθαλμῷ τῆς ψυχῆς$) and thereby embodies Scripturally-approved modes of leadership, guidance, and assistance for his community.¹⁵⁴ Scripture becomes a hermeneutical guide for the present day as well – readers who are not facing a situation of persecution may nevertheless always call upon divine assistance when their own newly trained “eyes of the soul” deem it necessary.

¹⁵² καὶ γνοὺς τὴν θείαν φρουρὰν, δι’ ἣς ἐκεῖνοι δένδρα τοῖς διώκουσιν ἐνομίσθησαν, προσπίπτει τε αὐτῷ, καὶ πιστεύει τῷ λόγῳ (VGT 86).

¹⁵³ This positive potential of deceit is also a theme in Cappadocian theology of the Passion. See especially Gregory Nazianzus’ *Or. 39*, on the deception of the Devil operative in Christ’s Passion, and Gregory of Nyssa’s *Cat Or 21*. For a brief overview, see Donald F. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge, Mass: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), 107-108.

¹⁵⁴ VGT 88.

The context of the Christian community, with its traditions and needs, informs interpretation as well. In this episode, Gregory attributes Thaumaturgus' exemplary behavior to his ability to look beyond the surface and see what his congregants need, but his discernment also relies on his awareness of customary Christian behavior. When the threat of persecution reaches the community, people succumb to fear, abandoning the sentiments and duties that Gregory classifies as natural:

There was total confusion among the people and much helplessness, as they all looked on each other with suspicion, since the loyalty of children to their parents did not endure in the terrors, nor did nature guarantee to children the faithfulness of parental care. Families split over religion were divided against each other, and a child with Greek ideas became the betrayer of his believing parents, and the father still in unbelief turned accuser against his believing child, and a brother, for the same cause, would war against nature, judging it holy that his own kinsman should be punished if he should cling to the true piety.¹⁵⁵

Violent division is linked to misperception: the Christians “look on one another with suspicion” (*δι’ύποψίας*). This type of looking is described as unnatural, destructive, and contrary to the usual order of things. What is worse, in the context of Christ’s New Testament apocalyptic sayings, it is a sign of the end times (e.g., Mk 13:12; Mt 24:10; Lk 21:16).¹⁵⁶ Gregory identifies a key danger: vicious behavior may result from untrained or improper ways of seeing and interpreting circumstances. In a series of episodes so focused on Thaumaturgus’ insight and ways of seeing well, the horror of unnatural seeing and its fallout might serve as an extra incentive for viewers to imitate the exemplar’s way of seeing.

¹⁵⁵ Σύγχυσις δὲ ἦν πᾶσα κατὰ τὸ ἔθνος καὶ ἀμηχανία πολλὴ, πάντων ἀλλήλοις δι’ύποψίας ὅντων, οὐ πατράσι τῆς παρὰ τῶν τέκνων εύνοίας ἐν τοῖς φοβεροῖς παραμενούσης, οὐ παισὶ τὸ πιστὸν τῆς πατρικῆς κηδεμονίας ἐγγυωμένης τῆς φύσεως. Ἐμερίζετο δὲ κατ’ ἀλλήλων τὰ γένη πρὸς τὰς θρησκείας σχιζόμενα. Καὶ παῖς Ἐλληνίζων πιστῶν γονέων προδότης ἐγίνετο· καὶ κατὰ παιδὸς πεπιστευκότος ἐν ἀπιστίᾳ μένων ὁ πατὴρ κατήγορος ἦν. Καὶ ἀδελφὸς ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς αἰτίας ἐπολέμει τῇ φύσει, ὅσιον κρίνων τὸν ὄμογενη τιμωρήσασθαι, εἰ τῆς εὐσεβείας ἀντέχοιτο (VGT 82).

¹⁵⁶ See also Jn 9:18-23; Mic 7:5-6.

But Thaumaturgus “saw” (εἶδον) and reacted to the “weakness of human nature” (τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως τὴν ἀσθένειαν). His apparently cowardly choice to flee the city is, in this setting of social upheaval, a strategic move. The faith leader the rulers sought to capture “like a general” so “they might shatter the whole battle line of the faith” provides an example for those whose devotion to Christianity cannot withstand the threat of imminent death. Gregory extends the military metaphor, common to many contemporary martyrologies,¹⁵⁷ as he explains that

Thaumaturgus

... advised the church to pull back a little from the fearful attack, thinking it better that they should save their lives by flight than that, by standing in the battle line of the contest, they should become deserters from the faith. And so that people might be as strongly persuaded as possible that saving their faith through flight conferred no danger on their soul, by his own example he became a symbol of the advice to withdraw, since he himself withdrew from the approach of danger before the others.¹⁵⁸

While those around him abandon their natural responsibilities, betraying their social obligations, Thaumaturgus adopts an even greater responsibility for his fellow Christians as their *strategos*. By modeling a course of action for the whole community, he displays not cowardice, but strategic wisdom, enacted as merciful condescension.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Grig, *Making Martyrs*.

¹⁵⁸ Σύμβουλος γίνεται τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ μικρὸν ὑποχωρῆσαι τῇ φοβερᾷ προσβολῇ, κρείττον εἶναι ἡγούμενος διὰ φυγῆς τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν περισώσασθαι, ἢ ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τῆς τῶν ἀγώνων παρατάξεως, λιποτάκτους γενέσθαι τῆς πίστεως· καὶ ὡς ἂν μάλιστα πεισθεῖεν οἱ ἀνθρωποι, μηδένα κίνδυνον φέρειν τῇ ψυχῇ, τὸ τὴν πίστιν διὰ φυγῆς περισώσασθαι, τῷ καθ' ἔαυτὸν ὑποδείγματι, σύμβουλος τῆς ἀναχωρήσεως γίνεται· αὐτὸς πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἀναχωρήσας τῇ τοῦ κινδύνου φορῷ (VGT 84).

¹⁵⁹ This, too, like the judicious use of deceit for good purposes, aligns Thaumaturgus with the figures of Christ and God. We might contrast Thaumaturgus’ choice to flee with the behavior of Gregory of Nazianzus, who faced violence and the threat of violence from Arian clergy in 380 CE, during a controversy over baptismal practices but who chose to remain with his congregation, defying his opponents. A summary of events with references to Gregory of Nazianzus’ several accounts in *De vita sua* and selected letters can be found in John A. McGuckin, *St. Gregory of Nazianzus: An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 256-261.

From Thaumaturgus’ own educational pedigree, we might consider also the example of Clement of Alexandria, who apparently left the city during the persecution of Christians in 202/203 CE; Arthur Droege makes the interesting and plausible connection between Clement’s personal experience and his distinction between necessary and unnecessary

Coming as it does at the end of an extended narrative sequence, this episode is uniquely situated to invite the ideal reader to apply lessons about interpretation and virtue encoded in previous episodes. The shift from evaluations by the internal audience to an evaluation in the narrator's own voice opens the episode for interpretation by the reader. Then Gregory uses vivid description to capture the terrifying historical circumstances that have disordered nature, references a well-known component of military hierarchy, and echoes Scriptural prophecy about family divisions, invoking contextual frameworks that facilitate the readers' participation.

Gregory's *bios*, surrounding the subject's deeds with *synkrisis* and orienting information, serves as a guide inducting readers into proper interpretive practices. Good interpretation within the narratives is consistently described using the language of vision, a choice that preserves the rich potential of sense perception even as Gregory incontrovertibly shows that the senses alone are unreliable. Our reading revealed that the narrative arc of the episodic *bios* is meant to instantiate the gradual development of a highly trained interpretive facility in readers; not only does the *bios* describe how internal audiences come to recognize the truth or meaning of a situation, but through the act of sequential reading, readers are challenged to apply the interpretive principles introduced in earlier passages to later vignettes.

V. Conclusion

I have demonstrated that the conceptual metaphor of vision is ubiquitous in the *bioi*, where Gregory applies it to grapple with the exemplars' *praxeis* precisely as visible (perceptible)

Christian martyrdoms in *Stromateis* 4 (Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 141-144). Clement's example stands in contrast to that of Origen, Thaumaturgus' immediate teacher, who (Eusebius reports) had to be restrained from rushing to a martyr's death even as a child, when the Severan persecution reached him and his family in 202/203 CE (Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.2.2-6). For more on Eusebius' developing thought on persecution and martyrdom, see Robert M. Grant, "The Fifth Theme: Persecution and Martyrdom," *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980): 114-125.

expressions – that is, embodied manifestations – of virtue and to demonstrate how they can reveal the character and virtues of their soul. The figurative language is embedded in a sophisticated Christian Platonic anthropology that Gregory as a biographer seeks to dramatize in accessible narrative form; like other roughly contemporary biographers, he adapts such teaching to account for and take advantage of generic conventions of reporting *praxeis*. The epistemological valence of vision helps the biographer give readers the interpretive tools to deal with a world where that which is seen refers to that which is hidden. By studying three specific applications of vision in Gregory's *bioi* – communicative, comparative, and participatory – I have shown that he employs vision as a flexible, multivocal term, to model, assess, and recommend an interpretive approach while also opening space within the narrative where readers might themselves participate, through the practice of interpretation.

The findings of this chapter help to flesh out our developing portrait of Gregory the biographer. The writer who draws on tenets of Christian Platonic anthropology and epistemology demonstrates the extent of his classical education. He is manifestly invested in exploring the pragmatic and didactic functions of the *bios* genre for a Christian reading community, and he does not shy away from subjects which are difficult to portray in text, using narrative commentary to draw attention to interpretive and narrative challenges. The transparent modeling of interpretive strategies supports the hypothesis proposed in the Introduction, that Gregory adapts the encomiastic convention of enumerating and organizing his subject's *praxeis* to portray ongoing development, a pattern we also observed in his descriptions of *anatrophe* and *paideia* and which appears to reflect to his theological conception of perpetual progress (*epektasis*).

Gregory encodes directions for literary interpretation in the *bioi*. From the characterization of internal audiences to direct commentary, to calculated appeals to readers'

physical senses, the tactics of biographical narration seem to show us a mediated engagement with the world and the necessity of accessible contexts for understanding experience, whether physical or divinely revealed. Yet Gregory's stated goal in VM I.3, to enable a reader to translate the exemplar's virtues into his own life, requires further independent hermeneutical work on the part of that reader. Resonances of meaning-making frameworks, like shared history of common human experience, which allow links between the reader's time and Gregory's interpretation of the exemplar's time, are not fully sufficient, since events and *praxeis* in the reader's own time that may resonate are themselves subject to interpretation. In the final chapter, I demonstrate that Gregory seeks to facilitate such real life interpretation by depicting various figures and events in the *bioi* as "texts" that are subject to the interpretive gaze. Gregory layers narratives and storytellers in a process of textualization, rendering human bodies sites subject to and in need of interpretation.

Chapter 4. *Thanatos: narrating a death, reading a life*

There was a need of intimacy with a holy man. The biographer mediated the intimacy between saint and reader by asserting the intimacy between saint and biographer.

Arnoldo Momigliano, “Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion,” 1987.¹

She said, “But I have kept a gray garment of your mother’s which I think we should put over her, so that this holy beauty should not be made splendid with extraneous adornment because of the dress.” Her opinion won out, and the garment was placed on Macrina. But even in the gray, she shone, the divine power, I think, adding such grace to her body that, as in the vision of my dream, rays seemed to be shining forth from her loveliness.

Life of Saint Macrina, 32.²

Near these were multicolored veils made out of skillfully woven material, the different colors intertwined with each other to make the elegance of the woven web, by which veils were separated that part of the tabernacle which was visible and accessible to some of those performing sacred rites from that which was secret and inaccessible.

Life of Moses, II.172.³

Arnoldo Momigliano’s insight that the biographer creates a sense of intimacy between saints and ordinary readers by “asserting intimacy between saint and biographer” is borne out in Gregory’s three texts, in a deceptively straightforward fashion. To train for “the life in accordance with virtue” (ο κατ’ ἀρετὴν … βίος, VGT 2), interpreters from the ideal audience must encounter the exemplary subjects whose histories they read; Gregory mediates a variety of encounters, through his thoughtful εὑρησις and artful narrative arrangement (τάξις). As the preceding chapters have shown, Gregory can be quite transparent about how and why he makes

¹ Arnoldo Momigliano, “Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion,” in *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987): 159-177, 177.

² “Αλλ’ ἔστι μοι, φησί, τῆς μητρὸς τῆς ὑμετέρας τῶν φαιῶν πεφυλαγμένον ἴμάτιον, ὃ ἄνωθεν ἐπιβληθῆναι καλῶς ἔχειν φημί, ὃς ἀν μὴ τῷ ἐπεισάκτῳ διὰ τῆς ἐσθῆτος κόσμῳ τὸ ἱερὸν τοῦτο κάλλος λαμπρύνοιτο.” Ἐκράτει τὰ δεδογμένα καὶ τὸ ἴμάτιον ἐπεβλήθη· ἡ δὲ ἔλαμπε καὶ ἐν τῷ φαιῷ, τῆς θεῖας, οἴμαι, δυνάμεως καὶ ταύτην προσθείσης τὴν χάριν τῷ σώματι, ὥστε κατὰ τὴν τοῦ ἐνυπνίου ὄψιν ἀκριβῶς αὐγάς τινας ἐκ τοῦ κάλλους ἐκλάμπειν δοκεῖν.

³ Ποικίλα τε πρὸς τούτοις ἐξ ὑφαντικῆς φιλοτεχνίας καταπετάσματα, διαφόρων ἄνθων ἐπαλλήλοις πρὸς τὴν τοῦ ὑφάσματος ὥραν συμπλεκομένων, οἵς διεκρίνετο τῆς σκηνῆς ὅσον ὄρατόν τε καὶ βάσιμόν τισι τῶν ἱερουργούντων ἦν καὶ ὅσον ἄδυτόν τε καὶ ἀνεπίβατον.

certain literary and narrative choices. Reading about the exemplar's virtuous deeds is a mode of learning that may become a virtuous practice when properly performed within a reading community, applying both the physical senses and the “eye of the soul” to an examination of the exemplars' *praxeis*, which Gregory brings vividly before readers' eyes. Intimacy with text, biographical subject, author, and other readers seems fundamental for the audience Gregory imagines.

Yet as Momigliano also points out, the apparently intimate encounters between biographical subjects and the readers of a *bios* are carefully and craftily mediated by the biographer. The author asserts his intimacy with the exemplar using a range of rhetorical techniques and narrative structures. It is nowhere more clear that the biographer is a mediator than when he describes each exemplar's death. He seeks to bring the dead to life, to make the absent present, to transform an experience of reading a text into an interpersonal encounter. Like the woven veils that separate the holy of holies from the tabernacle or the gray garment that covers but cannot conceal Macrina's glowing body, the narratives themselves obscure access to the noetic, invisible, and hidden world that lies behind, beyond, and within the lives of the exemplars. It is perhaps a testament to Gregory's narrative craft and his commitment to training his readers to “see” that the very literary mechanisms of obscuring and mediating intimate access to the exemplars and their virtues can themselves be difficult to detect.

In this chapter, I examine how Gregory depicts each exemplar's noble death or *euthanasia* (εὐθανασία) as a final virtuous *praxis*.⁴ With attention to last words, the moment of

⁴ Throughout, I use the transliterated term *euthanasia* or the English “noble death.”

death, and the events that follow in all three *bioi*, I analyze Gregory's engagement with this component of the *kephalaion* related to deeds. What makes a death noble, and how does the narration of a death scene relate to what has come before? What can a dead or dying body reveal about virtue? How does Gregory adopt and adapt typical features used in depicting some subject's noble death, incorporating them into his own didactic accounts? What kind of role does he script for the readers of these death scenes?

I argue that Gregory constructs his accounts of exemplary noble death in a way that seeks to emphasize continuity between the exemplar's earthly life and the divine image all Christians aim to reflect. This specific focus on continuity is a key way Gregory deals with the tension between the desired immediacy of an encounter with the exemplar and the undeniable – even apparently insurmountable – distance between the deceased exemplar and the ideal reading audience.

I. Narrating the final *praxis*: *thanatos* and *euthanasia*

What turns a death (*thanatos*) into a noble death (*euthanasia*), and what makes a narrative description of death into an account of virtue? Gregory himself never uses the term *euthanasia*, referring to each exemplar's death with a variety of euphemistic phrases focused on departing from human life.⁵ Yet in the episodes that describe each exemplar's final moments,

⁵ There is no entry for “εὐθανασία” in the *LGO*. In the VSM, Lampadia uses θάνατος to describe Macrina's death (VSM 29). Euphemistic expressions abound in the three texts. Gregory refers to Macrina's death as her “departure from life” (ό χωρισμὸς τῆς ζωῆς, VSM 22) and as her “being set free from the chains of the body” (τῶν δεσμῶν ἐκλυθεῖσα τοῦ σώματος, VSM 22). Gregory once refers to Moses' death as an “end of living” (τελευτὴν ζῶσαν) at VM II.314. This seems to be a usage that depends on the LXX text of Deuteronomy 34:5 and 7 (5: ἐτελεύτησεν Μωυσῆς; 7: Μωυσῆς δὲ ἦν ἐκατὸν καὶ εἴκοσι ἑταῖρον ἐν τῷ τελευτᾶν αὐτόν). He also describes Moses' death as the point when he “changed over from the human life” (μεθίσταται τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου βίου, VM II.75). In the VGT, death is referred to as “departure from life” (ἡ ἐκ τοῦ βίου μετάστασις, VGT 95) and as when Thaumaturgus “migrated from the human life to God” (τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου βίου πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν μετανίσταται, VGT 95).

Gregory presents their sayings and their actions as evidence of virtue in their souls, interpreting this final deed as an entirely positive capstone on a life of admirable deeds, as a death that is indeed noble.

A. Encomiastic *bios* and *thanatos* as *praxis*

The *bioi* record each exemplar's death and the events that follow, in VGT 95-99, VM I.75-76 and II.305-318, and VSM 19-38.⁶ This portion of each encomiastic *bios* is included not only out of historical necessity – though, of course, Gregory's sources say and his audiences know each exemplar is dead⁷ – but because of the genre in which Gregory writes. A complete *bios* offers an account of the subject's life from birth to death.⁸ Furthermore, in order to assess the quality of the exemplar's life one must know about the circumstances of her death. This is a point articulated perhaps most clearly in earlier Greek tradition by the sage Solon in Herodotus' *Histories*. In response to Croesus' request to know who is the happiest man, Solon responds with this bit of wisdom: possessions and good fortune are all well and good, but these are not

For a brief discussion of the history of our English “euthanasia” and its relation to the Greek term, see John M. Cooper, “Greek Philosophers on Euthanasia and Suicide,” *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 515-541, esp. 515-516.

⁶ In each of these accounts, some part of the passage I am classifying as *euthanasia* actually narrates events after the death or in some other way tangential to the death scene itself. For example, VGT 96-99 are, more precisely, a retrospective narrative recounting a miracle from an earlier period in the exemplar's life, and Maraval and others identify this as a later addition to the published version of the text of Gregory's speech. However, since Gregory has chosen to insert it at this point in the biographical account, and because its thematic content does relate to the virtues described in the death scene, I treat it as an extension of the account of Thaumaturgus' *euthanasia*. Further discussion and explanation are found below.

⁷ The biblical account of Moses' life describes his death in Deuteronomy 34:1-8. Gregory's audience in Neocaesarea, gathered together (as he says in VGT 1) to commemorate Thaumaturgus, know the bishop has been dead for many years. Gregory begins his account of Macrina's life referring to her in the past tense, and the fact that the epistolary interlocutor has apparently requested an account of her life so that it will not be forgotten (“in the time to come, such a life should not be passed over” ἀν μὴ λάθοι τὸν μετὰ ταῦτα χρόνον, VSM 1) suggests he knows that life is over.

⁸ The standard reference is still Arnoldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

permanent, and so are not sufficient for happiness. He concludes that if a man has these “and if, still in possession of these things, he should end his life well ($\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\nu\tau\eta\sigma\epsiloni\tau\theta\beta\epsilon\iota\sigma\epsilon\epsilon\tilde{\nu}$), he is the one you seek, who is worthy to be called happy. But before he dies, be careful not to call him happy, but fortunate ($\epsilon\tilde{\nu}\tau\eta\chi\epsilon\alpha$).”⁹ A complete view of the life and its ending are required for accurate assessment.¹⁰

It seems appropriate, then, that within the encomiastic *kephalaion* of *praxeis* rhetors are generally encouraged to cover and extol the circumstances of the subject’s death. The death is included among *praxeis* because it, too, can reveal aspects of the subject’s soul that should be used in assessing the happiness of the subject and the quality of his or her life. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* lists the manner of death under external circumstances (*extraneae res*) that could redound to praise or blame, depending on how the person conducted himself: “If he is dead, [tell] what sort of death he had, and what sort of things followed after his death.”¹¹ Aphthonius does not mention this topic as a part of encomium, but the *Progymnasmata* attributed to Hermogenes offer examples of the type of material an encomiast might include when describing the subject’s death:

And then from the manner of his death ($\grave{\alpha}\pi\grave{\tau}\grave{\theta}\tau\theta\beta\epsilon\iota\sigma\epsilon\tau\theta\eta\sigma\epsilon\epsilon\tilde{\nu}$), how he died fighting for his country; and if there was anything incredible about it, as in the case of Callimachus, because his corpse remained standing. And you will praise him on account of who killed him; such as for the fact that Achilles died at the hand of the god Apollo. You will also examine the events after the death: if

⁹ εἰ δὲ πρὸς τούτοισι ἔτι τελευτήσει τὸν βίον εὖ, οὗτος ἐκεῖνος τὸν σὺ ζητέεις, ὁ ὄλβιος κεκλήσθαι ἄξιός ἐστι· πρὶν δ’ ἀν τελευτήσῃ, ἐπισχεῖν μηδὲ καλέειν κω ὄλβιον, ἀλλ’ εὐτυχέα (Herodotus, *Hist.* I.32).

¹⁰ Aristotle’s discussion of what it means to be truly happy not only references Solon’s pronouncement, but modifies the definition of happiness somewhat to account for the fact that a virtuous man can be happy even in adverse circumstances. To pronounce someone happy requires that the person “realizes complete goodness in action, and is adequately furnished with external goods” and that “he must also be destined to go on living not for any casual period but throughout a complete lifetime in the same manner, and to die accordingly” (Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* 1.10, transl. H. Rackham, LCL edition).

¹¹ *Si interierit, cuiusmodi mors eius fuerit, cuiusmodi res mortem eius sit consecuta* (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 3.7.3).

they held games for him, as for Patroclus (*Iliad* 23); if there was some oracle about his bones, as with Orestes; if his children are famous, as for Neoptolemus.¹²

The rhetor advises encomiasts to emphasize primarily the circumstances of the death itself, including manner and cause, if these can be used to praise the subject.¹³ Hermogenes also recommends that the encomiast narrate events that are chronologically posterior to the death, e.g. the lives of the subject's children or the reactions of his community. These are further items that are typically classified under "deeds of fortune" or "external things" in the literature on encomium.¹⁴ But when and how is virtue shown through the components of a typical narrative about *euthanasia*? On the basis of a comparative study of narrative scenes depicting noble deaths, I argue that three typical features – last words, the reactions of witnesses, and events after death – are frequently used to portray virtuous qualities of the dying subject's soul.¹⁵

¹² ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ τρόπου τῆς τελευτῆς, ὅπως ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος μαχόμενος· καὶ εἴ τι παράδοξον ἔνταῦθα, ὡς ἐπὶ τοῦ Καλλιμάχου, ὅτι καὶ νεκρὸς εἰστίκει· καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀποκτείναντος αὐτὸν ἐπαινέσεις, οἷον ὅτι Ἀχιλλεὺς ὑπὸ θεοῦ ἀπέθανε τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος. ἔξετάσεις δὲ καὶ τὰ μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν, εἰ ἀγῶνες ἐτέλησαν ἐπ' αὐτῷ, ὡς ἐπὶ Πατρόκλῳ, εἰ γηραιός τις περὶ τῶν δοτέων, ὡς ἐπὶ Ὁρέστου, εἰ οἱ παῖδες ἔνδοξοι, ὡς ὁ Νεοπτόλεμος (Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* 7, Rabe 16).

¹³ One example of praiseworthy circumstances is the ideal of a Spartan death, in which the man falls while fighting bravely on the front lines, illustrating his courage and his dedication to civic duty. For a brief history of the development of this theme and its appearance in Plutarch, see Andrew G. Scott, "The Spartan Heroic Death in Plutarch's *Laconian Apophthegms*," *Hermes*, Volume 143, Number 1 (January 2015): 72-82.

¹⁴ See Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8, Rabe 22; Cicero, *De inventione* 2.59 177; Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* 7, Rabe 16; Chapter 3.

¹⁵ Christopher Pelling analyzes in a similar way the material that follows the narration of deaths in Plutarch's *Lives*, in his "Is Death the End? Closure in Plutarch's Lives," *Plutarch and History: Eighteen Studies* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2002): 365-386. Pelling argues that Plutarch uses a number of techniques to provide closure at the end of each *Life*, and argues that the synkritic conclusions of each pair re-open ethical and thematic questions that the conclusions of the *Lives* themselves attempt to close. His list of techniques includes authorial intrusion, summarizing or modifying vignette, and tracing down family fortunes, all of which operate using a "pattern of thematic recall" (375). The components I consider here are both drawn from Hermogenes' recommendations and built up from a survey of Greek, Jewish, and early Christian texts that describe some subject's death. Not all of these texts are strictly biographical, since death scenes appear in a number of genres.

1. Last words

Biographers frequently preserve their subjects' last words. This appears to arise from a natural interest; as early as Plato's *Phaedo*,¹⁶ Phaedo's interlocutor Echecrates requests specific information about both the words and conduct of the dying Socrates: "What are the things the man said before his death? And how did he die?" (Τί οὖν δή ἐστιν ἄττα εἰπεν οἱ ἀνὴρ πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου; καὶ πῶς ἐτελεύτα; *Phaedo* 57a) He repeats an almost identical request at 58c.¹⁷ A vignette relating last words tends to take the form of a *chreia* (χρεία), a brief anecdote about a character.¹⁸ Like a maxim or gnomic saying (γνώμη), the *chreia* may include a pithy saying, but it is expanded to include the identity of the particular character who speaks and sometimes the circumstances in which the saying is delivered, such as to whom the words are spoken.¹⁹

Aphthonius makes the following distinction between the two literary forms: "The *chreia* differs from a maxim inasmuch as a *chreia* is sometimes concerned with action, but a maxim is always a saying, and inasmuch as it is necessary for the *chreia* to indicate a person, whereas a maxim is

¹⁶ This text was composed shortly after Socrates' death in 399 BCE.

¹⁷ Τί δὲ δὴ τὰ περὶ αὐτὸν τὸν θάνατον, ὃ Φοίδων; τί ἦν τὰ λεγθέντα καὶ πραχθέντα (Plato, *Phaedo* 58c). The wording here is slightly different, of course, but Echecrates questions Phaedo on the same topics as before: "What were the circumstances around his death, Phaedo? What were his words and his deeds?"

¹⁸ On the widely recognized prevalence of *chreiai* in Mark's gospel, see the brief overview and introduction in Ben Witherington, III, *New Testament Rhetoric: An Introductory Guide to the Art of Persuasion in and of the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 24-31.

¹⁹ On the varied uses of the *chreia* in school exercises at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, see the 2002 volume of collected examples, edited and translated by Hock and O'Neil. They note that at the primary and secondary levels, *chreiai* were primarily used to teach reading and grammar, but at the tertiary level students were required to expand a given *chreia* into a longer narrative. For example, in the exercises Hermogenes outlines, students were practicing praising the πρόσωπον of the speaker before relating the saying; expanding on, defending, or refuting the content of the saying; and then exhorting some audience to act based on (or contrary to) the saying. This Hermogenic exercise seems particularly relevant to the use of *chreiai* in biographical *thanatos* scenes (Ronald Hock and Edward N. O'Neil, editors, *The Chreia and Ancient Rhetoric: Classroom Exercises*. Writings from the Greco-Roman World Series [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002], esp. ix, 83-84, and 88ff. on Hermogenes).

brought forth impersonally.”²⁰ The “last words” component of most *bioi* takes the form of a *chreia*, and this form allows the biographer to perform the work of characterization that connects words to virtues in the soul.

An author might use the last words to point to the subject’s consistency in his chosen way of life. Socrates’ final public pronouncements are recorded in Xenophon’s *Apology* in a way that demonstrates the philosopher continues to use probing questions to provoke self-examination. Xenophon reports that Socrates admonished those weeping for him by questioning their actions (“What is this?” he said, “And why are you crying?” *Tí τοῦτο; εἰπεῖν αὐτόν, ἢ ἄρτι δακρύετε; Apology* 1.27).²¹ The final speech of the ascetic monk Antony (251-356 CE) in Athanasius’ Christian *bios*, consists largely of exhortation to his followers to persevere in their ascetic practices, the very practices that Antony has been modeling throughout his ascetic life in the desert (*Vita Antonii*, 91.6).²²

²⁰ Διενήνοχε δὲ ἡ χρεία τῆς γνώμης τῷ τὴν μὲν χρείαν εἶναι ποτε πρακτικήν, τὴν δὲ γνώμην ἀεὶ λογικήν, καὶ τῷ τὴν μὲν χρείαν δεῖσθαι προσώπου, τὴν δὲ γνώμην ἀπροσώπως ἐκφέρεσθαι (Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 4, Rabe 8).

²¹ The last words of Socrates that Diogenes Laertius records in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* II.42 are a paean to Apollo and Artemis and a “fable of Aesop” that Diogenes says he composed “not very skillfully” (οὐ πάνυ ἐπιτετευγμένος) (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, transl. R.D. Hicks, LCL edition). The *Phaedo*, 60b-61c, also records that Socrates was composing poetic versions of Aesop’s fables before his death. On Socrates’ choice of Aesop, see Mark L. McPherran, “Socrates and Aesop in Plato’s *Phaedo*,” *Apeiron*, Volume 45, Issue 1 (February 2012): 50-60. McPherran argues that Socrates chose Aesop because of similarities in their fates (51).

²² Paul van Geest argues that Athanasius uses the account of Antony’s developing asceticism to model a movement from instruction to *praxis* to self-discipline inspired by love, a movement that was intended to be instructive for readers of the *Life* (Paul van Geest, “...seeing that for monks the life of Antony is a sufficient pattern of discipline”: Athanasius as mystagogue in his *Vita Antonii*,” *Church History and Religious Culture*, Volume 90, Number 2-3 [2010]: 199-221). Antony’s engagement with and instruction of a Christian community are treated as a paradoxical component of his retreat; Sophie Cartwright argues that in the *Vita Antonii* Athanasius constructs a political theology designed to encourage the establishment of a heavenly kingdom on earth (Sophie Cartwright, “Athanasius’ ‘Vita Antonii’ as Political Theology: The Call of Heavenly Citizenship.” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Volume 67, Number 2 [April 2016]: 241-264, 259). For more on the political implications of Antony’s asceticism, see David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), esp. Chapter 3.

Sometimes authors depict their dying subjects using their last words in an attempt to color others' perceptions of their character. Flavius Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, an early third-century CE account of the life and deeds of a wonderworking Neopythagorean philosopher, records the last words of Apollonius to Damis, the "eyewitness" source for many of the narrative's events. Apollonius directs, "Even when you philosophize on your own, Damis, look to me" (ὦ Δάμι, καν ἐπὶ σεαυτοῦ φιλοσοφῆς, ἐμὲ ὅρα, 8.28), proclaiming himself to be a model of intellectual and philosophical virtue.²³ In Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, there are two accounts of the death of Pythagoras. In one, the fleeing philosopher was stopped short when he came upon a field of beans, "where he stopped, saying he would be captured rather than cross it, and be killed rather than prate about his doctrines; and so his pursuers cut his throat."²⁴ To whom he spoke, and who recorded the words is unclear, but this *chreia* demonstrates Pythagoras' own apparent interest in reminding posterity that he was consistent in his commitment to his principles.

Plutarch preserves his subjects' last words with some frequency. Even when he uses the death scene to draw the subject's virtue into question, the final words play a key role. In his *Life of Cato the Younger*, the statesman, orator, and Stoic philosopher, he records that before he took his own life Cato was reading Plato's *Phaedo* (*Cato Minor* 68.2), and that he had conversations with several family members and close friends who were determined to keep his sword away

²³ See Christopher Jones, "Apollonius of Tyana, Hero and Holy Man," in Ellen Bradshaw Aitken and Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean, eds., *Philostratus' Heroikos: Religion and Cultural Identity in the Third Century C.E.*, SBL WGRW, Number 6 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004): 75-84, on the historical and literary reputations of Apollonius. With respect to Apollonius' pronouncement to Damis (above), Jones points out that "Philostratus consistently represents Apollonius as 'divine' (θεῖος), though he does so with caution, usually making characters in the work use the adjective rather than expressing his own opinion" (Jones, "Apollonius of Tyana," 78); it seems, therefore, less surprising that Apollonius recommends himself at the end of his life.

²⁴ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* VIII.39, transl. R.D. Hicks, LCL edition.

from him; in these exchanges he insisted on his sanity and the fact that his plans for suicide were governed by philosophical principles.²⁵ Indeed, the final utterance Plutarch records was “Now I am my own!” (νῦν ἐμός εἰμι, *Cato Minor* 70.1), a proclamation redolent of Stoic dedication to self-control.²⁶ In this presentation, the subject proclaims his own commitment to virtue and philosophical excellence, a position consistent with his earlier actions. Plutarch’s narrative undermines the idea that Cato has really achieved Stoic *apatheia* in other ways: he punches a servant (*Cato Minor* 68.3), “groans with pity” for those caught in a storm at sea (70.3), and, after a botched suicide attempt, pushes away the physician trying to save him, whose name is Cleanthes, like one of the founders of Stoicism (70.6). Alexei V. Zadorojnyi identifies Plutarch’s project here as a Platonic critique of Stoic philosophical principles and practices.²⁷ This

²⁵ The principles in view are generally associated with Stoicism, though they can be traced back to Socrates in the *Phaedo*. There the philosopher leaves a loophole, as it were, allowing suicide in the case of some necessity. In Stoic tradition, that necessity (ἀνάγκη) takes the form of a signal from the god or the impossibility of continuing to live in accordance with nature, and it is only the sage who can correctly identify these conditions. Among crucial primary textual records for the philosophical justification for voluntary death, see Seneca’s *Epistle* 24, which collects examples of admirable men and their noble deaths from the historical tradition. As David Seeley points out, Seneca highlights the imitability and exemplary quality of these deaths in *Ep. 24* and other texts; see David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul’s Concept of Salvation*. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 113-124. On the public nature of Cato’s suicide as part of its admirable nature, see Catharine Edwards, “Modelling Roman Suicide? The afterlife of Cato,” *Economy and Society*, Volume 34, Number 2 (2005): 200-222.

²⁶ On the Stoic conception of self-possession and autonomy, see A.A. Long, “Stoic Philosophers on Persons, Property-Ownership, and Community,” in *From Epicurus to Epictetus: Studies in Hellenistic and Roman Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 335-359. For the role of the “self” as aristocratic persona, see the argument of Timothy Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and Self in Roman Thought and Literature*, Studies in Classics, Volume 10 (New York: Routledge, 2004). Hill writes that “the Roman equation of the self with the capacity to act as a moral witness within the community...underlies the basic dichotomy visible in Roman discourse between honorable and dishonorable deaths. Good deaths are those which display an exemplary awareness of those social norms that ideally regulate the conduct of an aristocrat, and thus successfully demonstrate to a social audience the individual’s right to act as a moral witness within it. Bad deaths, on the other hand, indicate that the individual’s awareness of these norms is deficient or misguided, due to, e.g., the influence of the appetites” (19). It seems to be this problem of “misguided” action that Zadorojnyi comments on (see below). On the features of an admirable Roman suicide more broadly speaking, see Miriam Griffin, “Philosophy, Cato, and Roman Suicide: I.” *Greece & Rome*, Volume 33, Number 1 (April 1986): 64-77, esp. 67-68; and Miriam Griffin, “Philosophy, Cato, and Roman Suicide: II,” *Greece & Rome*, Volume 33, Number 2 (October 1986): 192-202.

²⁷ Alexei V. Zadorojnyi, “Cato’s Suicide in Plutarch,” *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Volume 57, Number 1 (May 2007): 216-230, 222-223.

complicated account, which preserves philosophically sound last words in the context of incongruous actions, reveals Plutarch's characterization of Cato as a figure whose qualities of soul are perhaps not as admirable as they should be. The last words and the manner of death are working in conjunction to offer evidence that may be used to assess Cato's virtues.

2. *Reactions of witnesses*

Those who witness or hear about a noble death are frequently depicted as offering some interpretive comment, either immediately or upon further reflection. Such reactions can be a way for the author to record public judgments about the virtue of the deceased. The biographer, too, can serve as a "witness" to the events of the death, the details of which he finds in his sources; that is, authorial comments about how to interpret the events in the death scene may also function as signposts meant to direct readers toward or away from particular assessments of the subject's virtue. The accounts of Socrates' death by Plato and Xenophon include reactions from both kinds of witnesses.

In the *Phaedo*, Plato emphasizes the complementarity of Socrates' words and manner; the eyewitness who observed his death maintains that Socrates "appeared [to me] happy, Echecrates, in both manner and words, as he died fearlessly and nobly" (εὐδαίμων γάρ μοι ἀνὴρ ἐφαίνετο, ὦ Ἐχέκρατες, καὶ τοῦ τρόπου καὶ τῶν λόγων, ὡς ἀδεῶς καὶ γενναίως ἐτελεύτα, *Phaedo* 58e). The witness points directly to virtues that, in his assessment, Socrates displayed.²⁸ *Phaedo* reports that

²⁸ The biographical narrative pattern in scenes describing noble death appears here, and is tied to the fact that Socrates' death was voluntary (I prefer the terminology of Droege and Tabor, who use "voluntary death" instead of "suicide" to avoid the almost wholly negative connotations of self-inflicted death in the modern world). Much of Socrates' deathbed discussion is concerned with the various factors that make voluntary death acceptable or even desirable, such that his action may be construed as a noble and virtuous one. For an overview of the influence of the *Phaedo* in subsequent Greco-Roman philosophical discussions of voluntary death, see Arthur J. Droege and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco:

Crito closed the eyes of the deceased, and he offers a final note: “Such was the end, Echecrates, of our companion, a man, we could say, who was the best of all those in our experience, and also the most sensible and the most righteous” (“Ηδε ἡ τελευτή, ὡς Ἐχέκρατες, τοῦ ἐταίρου ἡμῖν ἐγένετο, ἀνδρός, ως ἡμεῖς φαῖμεν ἄν, τῶν τότε ὅν ἐπειράθημεν ἀρίστου καὶ ἄλλως φρονιμωτάτου καὶ δικαιοτάτου, *Phaedo* 118a). This superlative praise assumes a *synkrisis* between Socrates and other figures known to both the witness and his interlocutor. Though the readers are unlikely to have known Socrates, this presentation of the witness’s judgment as one that is considered and informed seems designed to create a reliable, trustworthy testimony.

Xenophon, in his *Apology*, concludes with a double pronouncement in his own narrative voice. First, Xenophon declares that through his conduct in facing death Socrates “exhibited strength of soul” (ἐπεδείξατο δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν ῥώμην, *Apology* 1.33) and “wisdom and nobility” (τὴν τε σοφίαν καὶ τὴν γενναιότητα, *Apology* 1.34); he transparently interprets the events that took place. Second, he tries to direct any later interpretation, claiming that Socrates should be remembered as an exemplary guide to virtue; indeed, “if anyone should meet a person among those who aim at virtue who is more helpful than Socrates, I think that man is most worthy of

HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), especially Chapter 2 (“The Death of Socrates and Its Legacy”). In summary they write, “With the exception of the Pythagoreans (and their intellectual heirs, the Neoplatonists), no philosophical school in antiquity condemned the practice of voluntary death. What concerned the philosophers more than the act itself were the reasons for which an individual might justifiably choose death” (Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 43). They specifically attribute the authoritative condemnation of suicide as a sin to Augustine, just after our period (Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 3-4). On Socrates’ arguments about suicide, see James Warren, “Socratic Suicide,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Volume 121 (2001): 91-106. For treatments of suicide in the Roman literary tradition, see Timothy Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors*; for a detailed taxonomy of modes and causes for self-killing, see Anton J.L. Van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide: Self-killing in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1990), esp. Chapters 2-3, pages 40-132.

being deemed fortunate” (εἰ δέ τις τῶν ἀρετῆς ἐφιεμένων ὥφελιμωτέρῳ τινὶ Σωκράτους συνεγένετο, ἐκεῖνον ἐγὼ τὸν ἄνδρα ἀξιομακαριστότατον νομίζω, *Apology* 1.34).²⁹

A narrator’s commentary about the death might express an authoritative opinion or invite readers to develop their own assessment of events.³⁰ Philostratus, in his *Lives of the Sophists*, describes the end of Critias the Sophist and tyrant by juxtaposing his own reaction with that of others; while some “think that he played an honourable part at the last” (δοκεῖ δ’ ἐνίοις ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς γενέσθαι παρὰ τὴν τελευτήν), Philostratus says he himself believes “that no human being can be said to have died nobly (καλῶς ἀποθανεῖν) for a cause that he took up in defiance of the right (ὑπὲρ ὃν οὐκ ὄρθως εἴλετο).”³¹ He combines the record of historical opinion with an authorial interjection, presenting interpretive options for readers. The narrator of the Christian *Martyrdom of Polycarp* interjects his own narrative commentary as a way of interpreting the martyr’s death. He authoritatively states that Polycarp “gained the crown of incorruptibility” (τὸν

²⁹ Xenophon’s version of the same events in the *Memorabilia* similarly upholds Socrates’ death as the most noble imaginable. Apparently conflating the philosopher’s apology with his last words, Xenophon proclaims he “gained glory, showing forth the strength of his soul and its justice, speaking most truthfully and frankly and justly, and receiving the sentence of death most meekly and manfully. For it is confessed that there is no record in human memory of death more nobly borne” (… τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν ὥμην ἐπιδειξάμενος εὐκλειαν προσεκτήσατο, τὴν τε δίκην πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἀληθέστατα καὶ ἐλευθεριώτατα καὶ δικαιότατα εἰπὼν καὶ τὴν κατάγνωσιν τοῦ θανάτου πραότατα καὶ ἀνδρωδέστατα ἐνέγκας, ὁμολογεῖται γὰρ οὐδένα πω τῶν μνημονευομένων ἀνθρώπων κάλλιον θάνατον ἐνεγκεῖν, Xenophon, *Memorabilia* IV.8.1-2). Furthermore, his cheerful and serene manner between conviction and the actual time of death lead Xenophon to a series of rhetorical questions about Socrates’ superlative conduct: “And how could someone die more nobly than this? Or what sort of death could be more noble than that in which someone dies most nobly? What sort of death could be more blessed than the noblest? Or what more dear to the gods than the most blessed?” (καὶ πῶς ἂν τις κάλλιον ἢ οὐτως ἀποθάνοι; ἢ ποῖος ἂν εἴη θάνατος καλλίων ἢ ὃν κάλλιστά τις ἀποθάνοι; ποῖος δ’ ἂν γένοιτο θάνατος εὐδαιμονέστερος τοῦ καλλίστου; ἢ ποῖος θεοφιλέστερος τοῦ εὐδαιμονεστάτου; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* IV.8.3.) The *synkrisis* readers are invited to perform elevates Socrates above all other exemplars in perpetuity.

³⁰ A particularly striking example of authorial reaction to the events of a death is found in Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet*, 59. In his account of what is decidedly an *ignoble* life and death, Lucian opines that the circumstances of Alexander’s “most wretched end” (οἰκτιστος τέλος) were fitting for “a son of Podaleirius; for his leg (πούς, ποδός) became mortified quite to the groin and was infested with maggots.” With this proclamation, even in a text aimed at blame rather than praise, Lucian shows how the circumstances of a death are linked to the deceased’s virtue and vice.

³¹ Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 16, 502, transl. Wilmer Cave Wright (London: William Heinemann, 1922).

τῆς ἀφθαρσίας στέφανον ἀπολαβόν, *Mart. Polycarp* 19), a result that affirms the noble nature of Polycarp's sacrifice. After the death and burial scenes in the *Life of Antony*, Athanasius proceeds to directly address his readers, inviting them to “consider for yourselves what kind of person was this Antony, the man of God” (λογίζεσθε καὶ ὑμεῖς, ὅποῖς ἦν ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος Ἀντώνιος, *Vita Antonii* 93.1). In order to assist readers in their assessment, he follows this invitation with remarks that praise Antony's ascetic discipline and an assertion that his fame corroborates his great virtue, ending with an exhortation to readers and a closing doxology (94); the narrator depicts himself as a figure who performs interpretive work that readers may also perform.³²

3. Events after death

Among events after death, Hermogenes includes items such as whether or not people “held games” (ἀγῶνες ἐτέθησαν) in honor of the deceased, whether there was an “oracle” (χρησμός) about him, and “if his children are famous” (εἰ οἱ παῖδες ἔνδοξοι).³³ In part, the rationale for including this information must be to indicate how the subject's community judged him and whether they considered his memory worthy of honor.

At the same time, like other “external circumstances” or “deeds of Fortune,” the events after a person's death might have been thought of as affecting him directly. In his *Ethica*

³² Averil Cameron, in an essay on the *Lives* of Antony and Constantine, points out that the exemplarity of Antony's death is already mentioned at the start of this narrative section: “...the deaths of Constantine and of Antony are recounted with solemnity and emphasis on their exemplary and edifying nature; of Antony it is said that ‘even his death has become something imitable’ (VA 89)” (Averil Cameron, “Form and Meaning: the *Vita Constantini* and the *Vita Antonii*,” in *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000]: 72-88, 82).

This appears to be a paraphrase rather than a direct quote, though she is correct that Athanasius calls particular attention to the recollection or recounting of Antony's death. At *Vita Antonii* 89, he writes, “And how the end of his life happened is a worthy thing for me to commemorate and for you to desire to hear” (Οἶον δὲ καὶ τὸ τέλος αὐτῷ τοῦ βίου γέγονεν, ἄξιον κάμε μνημονεῦσαι, καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀκοῦσαι ποθοῦντας). Athanasius seems to be creating a miniature narrative frame to focus his readers' attention on aspects of Antony's comportment at his *thanatos*.

³³ Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* 7, Rabe 16.

Nicomachea, Aristotle speculates about whether things that happen to a deceased person's children and later descendants could affect his happiness:

Now it would be a strange thing if the dead man were also to change (συμμεταβάλλοι) with the fortunes of his family, and were to become a happy man at one time and then miserable at another; yet on the other hand it would also be strange if ancestors were not affected (συνικνεῖσθαι) at all, even over a limited period, by the fortunes of their descendants.³⁴

Aristotle eventually concludes that the dead are affected to a certain extent, but not so much as to make the happy unhappy (or *vice versa*).³⁵ The information about descendants is generally presented as a bald statement of facts. In his biography of Cato the Elder, Plutarch moves immediately from the last words to a list of the subject's prominent descendants, which takes up just a few lines (*Cato Major* 27.5). The life of Cato the Younger concludes with brief accounts about the fates of his son and daughter (*Cato Minor* 73). That a man's offspring are themselves virtuous reflects positively upon those same family, homeland, and ancestors that were already praised in an account of the man's *genos*. The author is able to show that the early promise of a virtuous life is fulfilled and passed on, even after death.

Similarly, the author can offer a reflection on the earlier *praxeis* and their potential impact for later generations. The late gamma-text of the *Alexander Romance* adds a comprehensive list of all those nations and peoples Alexander conquered (III.35). This list seems intended to serve as a reminder of Alexander's military prowess and his impressive legacy. The text ends with some iambic lines praising the Macedonian king, a final narrative comment on his excellence. Part of this poetic addition remarks directly on virtue: "Virtue alone remains,

³⁴ Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* 1.10.4-5, transl. H. Rackham, LCL edition.

³⁵ Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea* 1.11.6, transl. H. Rackham, LCL edition.

imperishable/ In fame, and even Time that conquers all/ Cannot destroy a noble reputation.”³⁶

Not all events that take place after a death are positive, but they may nevertheless be presented in such a way as to provide the narrator with occasions to comment on the qualities of the deceased. Plutarch’s *Life of Caesar* 67-69 narrates the aftermath of Caesar’s assassination. The murder throws the senate into disarray, which “filled the people with confusion and helpless fear” (κατέπλησε ταραχῆς καὶ δέους ἀπόρου τὸν δῆμον, 67.1). The people’s confusion continues into the next day, when Plutarch explains that the people “showed by their deep silence that although they pitied Caesar they respected Brutus” (έπεδήλου τῇ πολλῇ σιωπῇ Καίσαρα μὲν οἰκτείρων, αἰδούμενος δὲ Βροῦτον, 67.4). These narrative comments aim to reveal the mixed public attitude toward Caesar’s rule. Plutarch also describes how the people respond after they find that Caesar, with the same public generosity he showed during his life,³⁷ has left them all gifts in his will (68.1). They become enraged at the sight of his “mutilated” (διαλελωβημένον) body and form a vengeful mob to attack his murderers (68.1). The impassioned public response is a form of outrage over the ignominious circumstances of the generous man’s end, an end that does not seem appropriate for someone with Caesar’s qualities.

³⁶ *Alexander Romance*, III.35, transl. Richard Stoneman, Penguin edition.

³⁷ For example, after the civil wars, he celebrated three triumphs, gave gifts to his soldiers, scheduled gladiatorial and naval combats for the public, and even furnished public banquets in the city (Plutarch, *Life of Caesar*, 55). Whether this beneficence is itself virtuous, or appropriate for an imperial ruler, may be questioned. See, for example, Christopher Pelling, “Plutarch’s *Caesar*: A Caesar for the Caesars?” in *Plutarch and History*, 253-265; Pelling argues that Plutarch intends to address timeless themes and qualities, not just those that would be appropriate for his own day. Among these themes is the success or failure of law and democracy, and the role of propaganda (258). Nevertheless, the events after Caesar’s death do indicate his consistency of action, which relies on qualities in his soul.

Accounts that provide information about the subject's burial also reflect public assessment of the deceased. Philostratus describes the great displays of devotion around Achilles' tomb in his *Heroikos* (written ca. 218 CE³⁸):

His burial was the most notable (ἐκδηλότατα) among men for all the offerings with which the Greeks presented him: they decided it would never be right again to wear long hair after his death, and their gold, or whatever they had either brought with them to Troy or received from the booty there, they heaped up onto the pyre... Then he received glorious honors (λαμπρῶν) again both from his son and, in an effort to repay thanks to him (ἀντιχαρίζεσθαι αὐτῷ πειρωμένων), from the Greeks who also, as they prepared to sail away from Troy, fell on his tomb and imagined they were embracing Achilles (τὸν Αχιλλέα φοντο περιβάλλειν).³⁹

The *Heroikos*, a dialogue that refers to various types of evidence that could support the practices of hero cult, also describes later veneration at Achilles' tomb (52.3, 16), proof of ongoing honors for the warrior.⁴⁰ The protracted death scene in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* concludes with Christian followers gathering the bones of the martyr; the narrator points out this will enable them to celebrate the “day of his martyrdom” in appropriate fashion going forward (τὴν τοῦ

³⁸ For dating and other circumstances of composition, see Jeffrey Rusten and Jason König, ed. and transl., “Introduction,” *Philostratus: Heroicus; Gymnasticus; Discourses 1 and 2*, Loeb Classical Library 521 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014): 5-69, 5-11.

³⁹ Philostratus, *Heroikos* 51.13, transl. Jeffrey Rusten and Jason König, LCL edition.

⁴⁰ Maclean and Aitken, in the introduction to their 2001 WGRW translation of the *Heroikos*, lay out differing scholarly opinions about the aim of the text vis-à-vis hero cult. Their conclusion is as follows: “We are... inclined to take the *Heroikos* with some seriousness as seeking to persuade its audience of the value of hero cults... The categories of conversion, belief, and disbelief are, however not the most precise for understanding the *Heroikos*. Rather, we find in the *Heroikos* a contrast in sources of authority” (Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean and Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, transl. “Introduction,” *Flavius Philostratus: Heroikos*, SBL WGRW, Volume 1 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001]: xxxvii-xcii, lxxxi). See also Hans Dieter Betz, “Hero Worship and Christian Beliefs: Observations from the History of Religion on Philostratus’ *Heroikos*,” in Aitken and Maclean, *Philostratus’ Heroikos*, 25-47, on the implications of hero cult described in *Heroikos* for understanding Christology in the gospels.

Cf. also the satirical account of the self-immolation of Peregrinus. Lucian describes the fabrication of false omens in the aftermath of Peregrinus’ death (he himself admits he is responsible for a story about a speaking vulture rising from Peregrinus’ pyre, Lucian, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, 39-41, transl. A.M. Harmon, LCL edition). On art representing heroic death and its role in hero cult, see the brief essay by Corinne Ondine Pache, “The Hero beyond Himself: Heroic Death in Ancient Greek Poetry and Art,” *Heroes: Mortals and Myths in Ancient Greece*, ed. Sabine Albersmeier (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009): 88-107.

μαρτυρίου αὐτοῦ ἡμέραν, *Mart. Polycarp* 18).⁴¹ By connecting the martyr's resurrection life to devotional practices and commemoration among living Christians, the text actually points to future events; this devotion is dependent upon the recollection of Polycarp's exemplary *praxeis*, including his death.⁴² In his *Life of Antony*, the account of burial provides the author with a way of connecting Antony to the past, specifically to biblical tradition. Athanasius writes that no one except the two people responsible for interring the body knows Antony's burial place, thus assimilating the exemplar to Moses (92.2; Deut 34:5-6). Another allusion to the death of Moses follows in 93.2, where Athanasius reports that despite Antony's advanced age, the monk's eyes were undimmed at the time of death and he had kept all his teeth (Deut 34:7).

In some texts, the author may use an account of events that follow the subject's noble death to affirm the wisdom of the subject. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, a collection of texts that were probably initially composed by Hellenistic Jews, possibly as early as the second century BCE, purport to preserve the final words of biblical patriarchs, the twelve sons of Jacob.⁴³ This testamentary literature draws its framework from Hebrew Bible scenes like Gen 49,

⁴¹ As Virginia Burrus points out when comparing Polycarp's death scene with Ignatius of Antioch's epistolary anticipation of death, "Unlike Ignatius, Polycarp has not, however, been rendered entirely invisible through his witnessing death. Instead, his frail body, like his shame, has been converted through the testing of fire into an enduring treasure: what remains are his bones, 'more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold' (18.2)" (Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008], 23).

⁴² It is the contention of Droege and Tabor that the devaluation of earthly life (in the face of a promised, better afterlife) we see in Christian martyrologies is fully continuous with a similar reversal of values in Hellenistic Judaism, which saw martyrdom as a noble choice. They write that in authors like Philo and Josephus, and in rabbinic texts, "it is simply assumed throughout that obtaining 'eternal life' beyond this world is the human goal. Such an orientation will of necessity involve a devaluation of this present life and a revaluation of death as the way to Paradise. Given this perspective, the issues of when one can properly choose to depart become unavoidable" (Droege and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, 105).

⁴³ These texts probably did not reach their completed form, at Christian hands, until the second century CE. For an overview of scholarship on the dating and composition of the *Testaments*, see Robert A. Kugler, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha* (Sheffield: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2001).

where a dying patriarch delivers instructions, blessings, and curses for his descendants. These extended “last words” accounts conclude with brief descriptions of burial or lamentation, consisting of only a few lines in each case. One of the longer accounts, the death of Dan, records the following:

After saying these things he kissed them and slept an eternal sleep. And his sons buried him and later they brought up his bones near Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. However, Dan prophesied to them that they would forget the law of their God, that they would be estranged from their apportioned land and from the people of Israel, and from their lineage and their seed; and so it happened.⁴⁴

Here the author records the fulfillment of prophecy to show that the patriarch’s wisdom was reliable, perhaps a means of suggesting that the exhortations recorded earlier in the text should be followed.

The narration of miraculous or supernatural events that occurred in the aftermath of a subject’s death can also work to confirm the excellent qualities of the subject. In Xenophon’s account, Socrates delivered a “prophecy” about the son of Anytus, the truth of which Xenophon confirms (1.29-31) as proof of Socrates’ wisdom and insight. At Alexander’s deathbed in the *Alexander Romance*, even Bucephalus the faithful horse wept piteously and expired at his master’s bedside (III.33 in the gamma-text), an indication that the king was so great he even impressed irrational animals.⁴⁵ Several biographical narratives include among events after death

⁴⁴ Καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν κατεφίλησεν αὐτούς, καὶ ὑπνωσεν ὑπνον αἰώνιον. καὶ ἔθαψαν αὐτὸν οἱ νιοὶ αὐτοῦ. καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἀνήνεγκαν τὰ ὄστα αὐτοῦ σύνεγγυς Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ. Πλὴν ὡς ἐπροφήτευσεν αὐτοῖς Δάν, ὅτι ἐπιλάθωνται νόμον θεοῦ αὐτῶν, καὶ ἀλλοτριωθήσονται γῆς κλήρου αὐτῶν καὶ γένους Ἰσραὴλ καὶ πατριᾶς αὐτῶν καὶ σπέρματος αὐτῶν, οὗτος καὶ γέγονεν (*Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, The Testament of Dan* 7.1-3).

⁴⁵ The *Alexander Romance* is a highly literary source about the Macedonian king, probably initially composed in the third century BCE, but preserved in three quite different recensions, at least one of which includes supplements from as recently as the seventh or eighth century CE (the gamma-text). The earliest transmitted version of the Alexander Romance is the *alpha*-recension (the Greek manuscript of which is identified as ‘A’). As Corinne Jouanno points out in her argument that the *Romance* is essentially biographical, though fictional, in this earliest recension “the biographical element is put to the fore in the very title, which in the Greek manuscript (A) reads as Βίος

the return of the deceased. In *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 8.31, Philostratus tells readers about a youth who did not believe Apollonius' teachings about the immortality of the soul until the man himself appeared in a dream vision and convinced him. The account seems to be a way for Philostratus to confirm that the deceased exemplar does not significantly change his teachings or teaching methods just because he has died: his virtuous soul remains unaltered.

Jesus' resurrection appearances in the four canonical gospels may be taken as further examples of this insistence on continuity between virtues displayed in life and virtues that belong to the soul even after death. On the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35), Jesus reiterates Scriptural teaching about the necessity of the Messiah's death (Lk 24:25-27), a topic covered throughout the preceding narrative. François Bovon, in his *Hermeneia* series commentary, describes verses 25-27 of the episode this way:

What follows is a condensation of Lukan theology: the articulation of a prophetic statement and a kerygmatic summary. What the prophets have proclaimed and predicted (*λαλέω* in the sense of pronouncing solemn words, here the oracles) is what they have just witnessed, the necessary (*ἔδει*) passion (*παθεῖν*) of the Messiah, as well as what they must still realize – Christ's entry into his glory.⁴⁶

The words Jesus utters after his death are consistent with what he taught while still living, and he

Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μακεδόνος" (Corinne Jouanno, "Novelistic Lives and Historical Biographies: The *Life of Aesop* and the *Alexander Romance* as Fringe Novels," *Fiction on the Fringe: Novelistic Writing in the Post-classical Age*, edited by Grammatiki A. Karla, Monographs on Greek and Roman Language and Literature [Leiden: Brill, 2009]: 33-48, 36). Jouanno goes on to highlight the nevertheless literary and fictional nature of the *Romance* as follows: "What differentiates our novelistic biographies from historical ones (for instance, Plutarch's *Lives*) is of course the place given to the fictional element (the *plasma*), which turns them into διηγήματα *πλασματικά* or "pseudo-history". But there is another important feature that makes a difference, namely the intention to entertain in Aesop's and Alexander's novelistic lives: historical biographies, relying on the moralizing effect of *exemplum*, aim primarily at the reader's edification" (Jouanno, "Novelistic Lives," 36). On additional versions of Alexander's death by poisoning in Eastern reception of the *Romance*, see Faustina Doufikar-Aerts, "'The Last Days of Alexander' in an Arabic Popular Romance of Al-Iskandar," in *The Ancient Novel and Beyond*, ed. Stelios Panayotakis, Maaika Zimmerman, Wytse Keulen, Mnemosyne Bibliotheca Classica Batava Supplementum, Volume 241 (Leiden: Brill, 2003): 23-35.

⁴⁶ François Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28-24:53*, transl. James Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 374.

also serves as a witness reacting to his own death, analyzing its significance for an audience.

Similarly, the Jesus who appears to his disciples on the beach in John's gospel (Jn 21:1-23) behaves much as he did in life. He miraculously multiplies food (the huge catch of Jn 21:6 // Jn 6:1-13), shares a meal with his followers around a charcoal fire where he deals with Peter's triple denial (the threefold proclamation of love in Jn 21:15-17 balances the prediction of Jn 13:38 and the charcoal fire heightens the parallel between the settings of Peter's denial in Jn 18 and of this new reversal),⁴⁷ and predicts his followers' suffering (Jn 21:18-19 // Jn 15:18-21). Both evangelists craft literary parallels to earlier gospel episodes in order to demonstrate that the Jesus who is raised carries the essential traits and concerns he bore in his earthly life.⁴⁸

A final consideration is how the events that happen after death might be narrated in a way that invites readers to question and assess the virtue and excellence of an individual. Paul Murgatroyd, for example, argues that Plutarch's decision to portray Cleopatra's noble death in the final books of the *Life of Antony* serves to highlight the way that deficiencies of Antony's character, especially his lack of conviction and courage, are revealed in his ignoble and clumsy suicide.⁴⁹ Such a presentation confirms that the manner of death and its aftermath can indeed shed new light on the qualities of a subject's soul.

⁴⁷ Haenchen points out this significance of the charcoal fire ($\alpha\gamma\theta\rho\alpha\kappa\alpha$) and writes of the exchange between Peter and Jesus that "it is not merely a private scene, but a public, ritual scene, the threefold character of which is conceived as a counterpart to the threefold denial of Peter" (Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John Chapters 7-21*, transl. Robert W. Funk, *Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], 223-224, 226).

⁴⁸ The primary point, of course, is that the resurrected Jesus the disciples encounter is truly the Jesus they knew before (see esp. Lk 24:36-43).

⁴⁹ Paul Murgatroyd, "Plutarch's Death of Antony," *Symbolae Osloenses*, Volume 86, Issue 1 (2012): 178-181, esp. 180.

B. Summary

This wealth of examples, many of which were well-known and which were likely to have been familiar to Gregory himself, demonstrates that authors describing a death often adopt the *chreia* form to prove that a person's *thanatos* is actually *euthanasia*, that the death is a final *praxis* that can reveal qualities of the person's soul.⁵⁰ The reactions of various witnesses, including the biographer himself, add to the portrayal of virtue or vice in each death scene. Finally, events that take place after the death, from omens and apparitions to public commemoration to later events in the history of the deceased's descendants – offer great authorial latitude for commenting on the subject's soul and its qualities. In Gregory's encomiastic *bioi*, we should expect to find typical features of the *euthanasia*, tailored to account for the historical sources the biographer used and to extol each figure's virtues.

II. *Euthanasia*: the exemplar's life in death

Each of Gregory's three *bioi* draws upon this collection of narrative techniques to portray and assess the virtues the exemplar displays as he or she dies. As we shall see below, however, Gregory also consistently provides a review of his exemplars' living deeds, either narrating one or two individual episodes or offering an epitomizing summary; this is, I will demonstrate, a revealing choice that seems inextricably tied to his own didactic project. I argue that Gregory uses each exemplar's *euthanasia* as a lens through which to re-view the life, and his retrospective

⁵⁰ As Maarit Kivilo points out in a 2010 study of the *Lives* of early Greek poets, the circumstances of a biographical subject's death can evince great individual variation while nevertheless conforming to a rather formulaic pattern; for example, she demonstrates that "according to biographical traditions, to die a terrible or unusual death is almost inevitable for famous people whether they are poets, law-givers, soothsayers or heroes" (Maarit Kivilo, *Early Greek Poets' Lives: The Shaping of the Tradition*, Mnemosyne Supplements, Monographs on Greek and Roman Language and Literature, Volume 322 [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 217-218). See also her chart of recurring formulaic themes in lives of seers, wise men, tyrants, and heroes on page 221 of the same volume.

retelling of the exemplar’s history emphasizes not just the continuity between the virtues displayed in earlier *kephalaia*, but also continuity between each noble death and the life of Christian *epektasis* that can allow a person to reflect the divine image more perfectly. Gregory crafts accounts of exemplary *euthanasia* that could facilitate readers’ interpretive activities, in particular through the strategic use of narrative sequencing, embedded narrators, and literary allusions.

A. Thaumaturgus: the exemplar’s sojourn

Gregory includes two “last words” *chreiai* in the account of Thaumaturgus’ death, as is typical of an account of *euthanasia*. First, Thaumaturgus himself shows his commitment to the church he founded, the ancestors of the addressees of Gregory’s original oration (VGT 1, 8). The exemplar foresaw his end and concentrated primarily on what he was leaving behind for the Christian community he had fostered:

Having directed the church in this way, and being zealous to see that everyone migrated from idols to the saving faith before his departure from this life (πρὸ τῆς ἐκ τοῦ βίου μεταστάσεως), since he foreknew his own departure, he zealously searched the whole place and the surrounding area, wishing to learn if there were any people left behind outside the faith. So since he knew that the number of those who persevered in the former deception was no more than seventeen, “This is very sad,” he said, looking off toward God, “that there should be something lacking from the full number of the saved.”⁵¹

The framing of this first saying confirms Thaumaturgus’ continued concern for the faithful and his dedication to the mission to convert pagans, admirable qualities that Gregory emphasized in

⁵¹ Τοῦτον δὲ τὸν τρόπον ἐμπολιτευόμενος τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ, καὶ σπουδὴν ἔχων πρὸ τῆς ἐκ τοῦ βίου μεταστάσεως πάντας ἰδεῖν πρὸς τὴν σωτήριον πίστιν ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων μεταθέντας· ἐπειδὴ προέγνω ἐαυτοῦ τὴν μετάστασιν, σπουδὴν πᾶσάν τε τὴν περιοικίδα διηρευνήσατο, μαθεῖν θέλων εἴ τινες εἰνοί περιλειφθέντες ἔξω τῆς πίστεως. Ἐπεὶ οὖν ἔγνω τοὺς παραμεμνηκότας τῇ ἀρχαίᾳ πλάνῃ μὴ πλείους εῖναι τῶν ἐπτακαίδεκα, Σκυθρωπὸν μὲν καὶ τοῦτο, φησὶ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν ἀποβλέψας, τὸ λιπεῖν τι τῷ τῶν σωζομένων πληρώματι (VGT 95).

depictions of the bishop's earlier *praxeis*.⁵² Thaumaturgus' own expression of discontent may also point to the exemplar's humility. Gregory supplements the exemplar's statements with allusive narrative commentary that connects this final saying to earlier portions of the *bios*, taking on the role of an interpreting witness. He puts Thaumaturgus' disappointment with the number of those who persevere in "deception" (*πλάνη*) and "idols" (*εἰδωλα*) in context by objecting, in his own narrative voice, "But on the contrary it is worthy of great thanksgiving (*μεγάλης εὐχαριστίας ἄξιον*), that he leaves behind the same number of idolaters for the one who will take over the church after him as the number of Christians he found."⁵³ The bishop's final reflection about a supposed failure thus becomes a chance for Gregory to point out his success in converting the region's pagans to Christianity.

By looking back to the events of Thaumaturgus' early episcopate in Neocaesarea (VGT 27) to bookend the death scene, Gregory makes the bishopric the central feature of Thaumaturgus' life and the context for interpreting his final words. Earlier events like his training with Origen and even the demonstrations of miraculous power against demons recede in the face of allusions to pastoral activity and the all-important conversions that have led to the existing community, Gregory's real audience. Perhaps functioning as a final *captatio benevolentiae* to match VGT 8, this praise for Neocaesarea's Christian population might have sharpened that audience's attention to the episode. Whether or not it flatters the audience, the

⁵² See his rightful rejection of familial pagan traditions (VGT 10); his first convert, the custodian of a pagan temple (VGT 35-41); and the reason for the persecution of Christians during Thaumaturgus' lifetime – "to lead them by fear and the coercion of tortures back again to their ancestral worship of demons" (*προσαγάγοιεν πάλιν αὐτοὺς φόβῳ τε καὶ τῇ τῶν αἰκισμῶν ἀνάγκῃ τῇ πατρῷᾳ τῶν δαιμόνων λατρείᾳ*, VGT 79).

⁵³ Πλὴν ἀλλὰ μεγάλης εὐχαριστίας ἄξιον, ὅτι τοσούτους καταλείπει τοὺς εἰδωλολάτρας τῷ μετ' αὐτὸν ἐκδεχομένῳ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, ὅσους αὐτὸς Χριστιανοὺς ὑπεδέξατο (VGT 95).

mention reminds Neocaesarean Christians of the benefit attached to remembering Thaumaturgus' life. By referring to Thaumaturgus' contemporary legacy, Gregory begins to evoke the exemplar's ongoing influence, which clearly was not halted by death.

The exemplar's final wish then places him firmly in a Scriptural context. Not only does Thaumaturgus provide instructions for burial like the Hebrew Bible patriarchs, but Gregory marks an important parallel between Thaumaturgus and Christ:

After praying both for the growth toward perfection for those who already believed and for the conversion of the unbelieving, so he migrated from human life to God (τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου βίου πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν μετανίσταται), having commanded his companions not to use the place assigned to him for burial. For if while living the Lord did not have any place to lie down, but spent his life sojourning among strangers (ἀλλὰ παροικῶν ἐν ἀλλοτρίοις τὸν βίον διῆγαγεν), neither would he [Thaumaturgus] be ashamed by a sojourn after death.⁵⁴

Lack of a burial space allows Gregory to link Thaumaturgus to Moses, whose burial place was unknown (Deut 34:6) as well as to both the life and death of Christ, with allusions to Matt 8:20 (and the parallel in Lk 9:58) and gospel accounts of Christ's burial.⁵⁵ While according to this account Thaumaturgus' attention is focused on Christ and the *imitatio Christi*, the statement is also mindful of some imagined audience. Thaumaturgus is attentive to his reputation and status in the eyes of others; he claims he "will not be ashamed" (οὐ ἐπαισχυνθήσεται) by the circumstances of his burial. In this presentation of the exemplar, Gregory gives Thaumaturgus

⁵⁴ Ἐπευξάμενος δὲ τοῖς τε πεπιστευκόσιν ἥδη τὴν εἰς τὸ τέλειον αὔξησιν, καὶ τὴν ἐπιστροφὴν τοῖς ἀπίστοις, οὕτω τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου βίου πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν μετανίσταται, ἐπισκηψάς τοῖς ἐπιτηδείοις, μὴ κτήσασθαι τόπον αὐτῷ πρὸς ταφὴν ἰδιάζοντα. Εἰ γὰρ ζῶν, κύριος κληθῆναι τόπου τινὸς οὐκ ἐδέξατο, ἀλλὰ παροικῶν ἐν ἀλλοτρίοις τὸν βίον διῆγαγεν, οὐδὲ μετὰ θάνατον τῇ παροικίᾳ πάντως ἐπαισχυνθήσεται (VGT 95).

⁵⁵ Luke 23:53-55 records that Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus in "a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid"; Matthew identifies this tomb as Joseph's own (Mt 27:59-60); Mark's spare account simply calls the tomb "rock-hewn" (Mk 15:46). The Johannine account elaborates on the tomb's location (writing that it was in a garden near the place of crucifixion), but similarly claims it was a new tomb (Jn 19:41).

Given Gregory's comparisons between Thaumaturgus and Moses throughout the text, it is highly likely he intends to echo the circumstances of Moses' burial in an unknown location (Deut 34:6).

some authority to dictate his own reception history. Thaumaturgus is one mediator of his *bios* to an audience, and he is shown by Gregory to be complying with a Scriptural pattern.

Gregory's artful εύρεσις is apparent in the way the portrait of the dying Thaumaturgus coheres to the portrait of Thaumaturgus as possessing a divine lineage and *genos*, which Gregory constructed in the text's *prooimion* (VGT 5). The final *chreia* preserved in this scene emphasizes two of Thaumaturgus' potentially imitable qualities, selected from among a catalog of virtues. His selflessness and otherworldliness are the focus:

“But afterwards let it be said of my life,” he said, “that neither was Gregory named for someplace while he lived, and after death was a sojourner in strangers' graves, guarding himself from every possession on earth, nor did he even allow himself to be buried in his own place. For he judged his only possession to be that honor which does not have within itself any vestige of selfishness.”⁵⁶

The lack of a home and resting place confirms Thaumaturgus' similarity to Moses. Gregory shifts from the exemplar's last words to his own narrative comment about bodily *askesis*, reacting as a witness of the events in his sources and drawing readers' attention to how Thaumaturgus displayed the virtues in his soul.⁵⁷ As we saw in Chapter 3, providing a richly detailed and Scripturally informed context to aid in the interpretation of isolated events is one

⁵⁶ Άλλ' ἔστω, φησὶ, τῷ μετὰ ταῦτα βίῳ διήγημα, ὅτι Γρηγόριος οὔτε ζῶν ἐπωνομάσθη τόπῳ τινὶ, καὶ μετὰ θάνατον ἄλλοτρίων τάφων ἐγένετο πάροικος, πάσης τῆς ἐν τῇ γῇ κτήσεως ἑαυτὸν ἀποστήσας, ὃς μηδὲ ἐνταφῆναι ιδίᾳ καταδέξασθαι τόπῳ· μόνην γάρ αὐτῷ κτῆσιν τιμίαν εἶναι ἔκρινεν ἐκείνην, ἡ πλεονεξίας ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς ἔχνος οὐ δέχεται (VGT 95).

⁵⁷ There is also an echo here of earlier events in the narrative. When Thaumaturgus entered Neocaesarea, Gregory relates that he was free: “But since he had freed himself all at once of everything, as if of some kind of burden, when he took up philosophy, and he no longer had any of life's necessities, neither field, nor land, nor house, but was himself everything to himself (or rather virtue and faith were fatherland and hearth and wealth to him) so therefore he was in the midst of the city but had no house or anywhere to rest, neither belonging to the church nor of his own...” (Ἐπεὶ δὲ πάντων ὁμοῦ εὐθὺς, ὅτε τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἥπτετο, καθάπερ τινὸς ἄχθους ἑαυτὸν ἡλευθέρωσε, καίπερ ἦν αὐτῷ τῶν πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν ἀναγκαίων οὐδὲν, οὐκ ἀγρὸς, οὐ τόπος, οὐκ οἰκία, ὀλλὰ πάντα ἦν αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ [μᾶλλον δὲ ἡ ἀρετὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις, πατρὶς αὐτῷ ἦν, καὶ ἔστια, καὶ πλοῦτος]. ὡς οὖν τῆς μὲν πόλεως ἐντὸς ἦν, οἴκος δὲ αὐτῷ πρὸς ἀνάπτωσιν οὐδαμοῦ, οὐ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, οὐκ ἴδιος... VGT 44). Thaumaturgus justifies this lack of possessions with a short speech, which Gregory records in full, and which should reverberate in the readers' mind during a reading of the death scene.

interpretive strategy Gregory models when describing *praxeis*. His approach to interpreting the *euthanasia* appears to be consistent with his interpretations of other *praxeis*, but with the benefit of being able to allude to the entire narrated life; the death serves as a capstone.⁵⁸ By insisting he will not be tied to a particular place, Thaumaturgus is again portrayed as his own interpreter and renders *himself* a universal exemplar. Readers who would imitate Thaumaturgus' possession of honor without any trace of selfishness, the kind of honor he identifies as a worthy possession, can do so in a wide range of historical circumstances. The exemplar has ongoing significance for Gregory's contemporary readers and the *bios* itself can serve as a point of access for encountering him. In his role as biographer, it appears that Gregory fulfills Thaumaturgus' dying wish by reporting the exact content of what he wants to have said about him. The biographer is also the one who preserves the account of Thaumaturgus' honor and can offer proofs that it is his most important possession; as early as the *prooimion* of the VGT, Gregory had tried to direct readers to pay attention to such spiritual qualities rather than earthly possessions.

Finally, this *chreia* throws into relief the fact that without a grave or commemorative site, access to Thaumaturgus is, in some ways, obscured and limited. Yet the *bios* facilitates and mediates a different sort of access through retrospective narrative. While the exemplar's last words and the reactions of narrator-Gregory, the witness to Thaumaturgus' death, contribute to a

⁵⁸ I would mark here a similarity between Gregory's literary technique and a technique used in the *Alexander Romance*. The author of the *Romance* describes a host of premonitions, prophecies, and other interruptions that point forward and foreshadow or predict the subsequent events of the text. Jouanno points out that these interjections are a means of connecting what otherwise might read as isolated episodes strung together (Jouanno, "Novelistic Lives," 37; for a complete list, see Claire Muckensturm-Poule, "Les signes du pouvoir dans la *recensio vetusta* du *Roman d'Alexandre*," in *Pouvoir des hommes, signes des dieux dans le monde antique*, ed. Michel Fartzoff, Élisabeth Smadja, and Évelyne Geny (Paris: Presses Universitaires Franc-Comtoises, 2002): 157-171, especially the chart on pages 169-171. I am indebted to Jouanno for this source). I will make a similar case about the connecting function of allusion in Gregory's *bioi*.

portrait of the bishop as a virtuous figure, additional work of interpreting the *euthanasia* and its significance takes place after the narration of the death scene proper. Given the advice of the Hermogenic *progymnasmata* and the examples from other *bioi* cited above, we might expect Gregory to describe the subsequent activities of the community Thaumaturgus left behind. Unexpectedly, however, Gregory narrates an episode from early in the exemplar's life and attempts to direct attention to a new theme: incorruptibility.

Gregory describes how Thaumaturgus converted such large numbers to Christianity during a plague (VGT 96-99). He explains the role disease and health played in conversion, drawing reader attention to Thaumaturgus' role as a figure who mediates divine power and protects believers. Physical disease reflects an otherwise invisible spiritual ailment, for Gregory sums up that "those who were healthy were too weak in their reasoning for the reception of the mystery, but by bodily illness they were made healthy enough for faith" (Οἱ γὰρ ἐν τῇ ὑγιείᾳ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ μυστηρίου παραδοχὴν τοῖς λογισμοῖς ἀσθενοῦντες τῇ σωματικῇ νόσῳ πρὸς τὴν πίστιν ἐρρώσθησαν, VGT 99). In this formulation, Thaumaturgus combats bodily corruption and death through the teaching of the Christian faith. When the signs of plague first appeared in a household,

...then they came as suppliants to the Great One, begging that the burden of the evil might stop because of the God he preached and made known. They confessed He is the only true God and has power over everything...There was one means of salvation for those in danger: that the great Gregory should come into that house and, by prayer, push back the suffering which was pressing on it.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ ικέται γίνονται τοῦ μεγάλου, στῆμαι δεόμενοι τοῦ κακοῦ τὴν φορὰν διὰ τοῦ παρ' αὐτοῦ γινωσκομένου τε καὶ κηρυσσομένου Θεοῦ ὃν μόνον ὡμολόγουν ἀληθῶς εἶναι Θεὸν καὶ κατὰ πάντων τὸ κράτος ἔχειν... εἰς ἐγίνετο τοῖς κινδυνεύοντι σωτήριας τρόπος τὸ ἐντὸς ἐκείνου γενέσθαι τοῦ οἴκου τὸν μέγαν Γρηγόριον καὶ δι' εὐχῆς τὸ ἐνσκῆψαν τῷ οἴκῳ πάθος ἀπώσασθαι (VGT 99).

Thaumaturgus is a mediator who, empowered by a confession of faith, can effect some sort of protection. We should detect here an allusion not only to Scripture (e.g., Mk 5:34 and 10:52), but to Thaumaturgus' own lived *praxeis*. In VGT 91-93, Thaumaturgus protected his deacon from demonic assault through intercessory prayer. At VGT 93, Gregory insisted that intercessory prayer is a practice Thaumaturgus bequeathed to the current Neocaesarean community, a still-effective sign of his legacy that the ideal reader could see or even practice.

But Gregory does not strictly need an additional episode to illustrate Thaumaturgus' ability to convert pagans; his prowess has already been illustrated in numerous vignettes and the bishop referred to his *praxeis* in his last words. So what is the purpose of this story? What does the account about disease and healing contribute to readers' understanding of Thaumaturgus' legacy? And why does this episode appear after the narration of the exemplar's death, even though it took place earlier in his life?

Gregory's stated purpose in including this retrospective account is to cause readers to "marvel" (θαυμάζω) about the "transformation" (μετάστασις) of the converted (VGT 96) and to guard against failure to believe (he writes, "let no one be unbelieving..." μηδεὶς δὲ ἀπιστείτω, VGT 96). As a whole, the episode could be seen as a rough parallel to the Acts 19 account of Paul in Ephesus: the whole city crowds into an arena (Acts 19:28, VGT 97) where great confusion and uproar ensues (Acts 19:32, VGT 97); the people together cry aloud to a pagan deity (Artemis in Acts 19, Zeus in VGT 97). The focus in the VGT account is on Thaumaturgus combating idolatry, which he has done throughout his career, but the echoes of Paul's ministry reinforce the exemplar's connection to a Scriptural past. In sum, the retrospective narration of Thaumaturgus' plague healings creates a sense of continuity with his earlier mediating and protecting *praxeis* and, at the same time, with his ongoing legacy for Gregory's real

Neocaesarean audience.

1. A narrative pattern

Even in this brief vignette, several narrative features reveal Gregory's consistent attention to the hermeneutic responsibilities of his ideal audience: (1) the exemplar's physical presence is dismissed or elided, leaving readers to focus on other types of presence or legacy, especially the narrative of the *bios* itself; (2) Gregory describes the last words as subject to, even requiring, interpretation in light of the exemplar's earlier *praxeis*; and (3) after the exemplar's *euthanasia*, additional retrospective narrative (διήγησις) is used to create continuity between the now-dead exemplar and his earlier life, and to make the life as a whole "speak" for readers in the present day. In addition to identifying coherence and continuity in the life of the exemplar, Gregory intimates that the *praxeis* of the living exemplar point toward the Christian *telos* of overcoming or transcending death and corruption through a life of faith. Even within the changeability of the created world that removes the physical presence of a biographical subject, there is room for the exemplar's story to reflect the divine image, especially the image of the Incarnate Christ. The retrospective study of Thaumaturgus' healing miracle, viewed in light of his death, illustrates not only the exemplar's stretching out toward incorruptibility and his ability to extend protection from corruption to others, but also the importance of interpretation and contextualization for enabling readers to encounter the divine image through the exemplar and understand it was already present (though perhaps obscured) within the exemplar's virtuous earthly life.

B. Moses and the next life

The story of Moses' *euthanasia* is told twice in the VM, once in the *historia* section of the work and again in the *theoria* section. In both accounts, which stick closely to the Scriptural

details of Deuteronomy 34, Gregory nevertheless represents the biblical events using the typical features for narrating a noble death outlined above. By elaborating on minor details of the biblical text, especially notes about Moses' physical appearance at the time of his death, Gregory depicts Moses' *euthanasia* as a distinct *praxis*, emphasizing the way his dead and dying body reflects his possession of virtues and his consistent commitment to following God's will.

1. Euthanasia in the *historia*, VM I.75-76

In the *historia*, Gregory provides a tantalizingly brief comment on Moses' death, drawing readers' attention to observable signs and appearances rather than to Moses' preparedness or mental state. Although we might expect last words as part of this account, there is no final Mosaic pronouncement in the biblical account, so Gregory leaves *chreiai* out of his narrative.⁶⁰ Instead, he records Moses' manner of death and adds an assessment in his own narrative voice,

...he departed from this human life, leaving behind neither any sign on the earth nor any memorial of his departure in the tomb; nor had time marred his beauty, had not dimmed his brightness of eye (Deut 34:7) nor diminished the grace shining from his face. But he was always in the same way keeping, and in the very same way preserving, in the changeableness of nature, something unchanging in his beauty.⁶¹

The events that took place after Moses' death leave no mark, no physical memorial to which readers can look. Similarly, Gregory reports that death left no mark on Moses' body. Moses is

⁶⁰ Alternative sources of information about Moses' perimortem activities and words were available in Gregory's time. Jude 1:9 and the *Assumption of Moses* assert that Michael the archangel fought with the devil over the burial of Moses. Gregory does not refer to these sources in the VM, though it is likely he knew of the Epistle of Jude. For information on Gregory's quotations of the New Testament (which does not, however, include Jude), see James A. Brooks, *The New Testament Text of Gregory of Nyssa*, The New Testament in the Greek Fathers, Number 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991).

⁶¹ μεθίσταται τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου βίου, οὐδὲν ἐν τῇ γῇ σημεῖον οὐδὲ μνημόσυνον τῆς ἑαυτοῦ μεταστάσεως ἐν τάφοις ὑπολειπόμενος, οὐ τῷ κάλλει χρόνος οὐκ ἐλυμήνατο, οὔτε τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τὴν λαμπτηδόνα ἡμαύρωσεν, οὔτε τὴν ἀπολάμπουσαν τοῦ προσώπου χάριν ἀπίμβλυσεν. Ἀλλ' ἦν ἀεὶ ὥσαύτως ἔχων καὶ κατὰ ταῦτὸν ἐν τῷ τρεπτῷ τῆς φύσεως διασώσας τὸ ἐν τῷ καλῷ ἀμετάπτωτον (VM I.75-76).

described as transcending the defining characteristic of created life – τρεπτός or changeability.

For Gregory and his Alexandrian forebears, Clement and Origen, such mutability or being liable to change applies to creatures, but not to God the father or to the Logos.⁶² That changeability can in fact be harnessed for the perpetual progress and growth in the virtues that Gregory calls *epektasis*. What does it mean for an assessment of the exemplar's virtue that Moses has overcome changeability?

Gregory specifies that “time” (χρόνος) is the force Moses overcomes, as evidenced by his undimmed eye; this is consistent with his Platonic sensibilities, given the Platonic conception of time as a feature of the created world that does not touch the transcendent creator.⁶³ However, there is almost certainly a moral component to Moses' unchanging beauty, as well; indeed, the καλός here might be Moses' virtue or excellence. In his wider oeuvre, Gregory repeatedly refers to moral mutability using the same term, τρεπτός.⁶⁴ The signs in Moses' physical body that indicate his resistance to changeability almost certainly also represent his consistent moral virtue. The continuity that could be observed in his bodily form is indicative of the continuity of virtuous qualities in his soul, and so his manner of death confirms that which was revealed in his earlier *praxeis*.

⁶² *PGL*, s.v. “τρεπτός” – Gregory uses it as a mark of creatures that distinguishes them from God in *Oratio catechetica*, GNO Online 16.55.4ff. Rejecting divine changeability was central to Christian debates of the post-Nicene period; Athanasius used the term τρεπτός in a key argument against the Arians at *Oratio I contra Arianos* 28 and *Oratio quarta contra Arianos* 12, where he refutes the idea of Christ's changeability.

⁶³ See especially Plato, *Timaeus* 37c-38e. In the Alexandrian biblical exegesis that lies in the background of Gregory's education, Philo's *On the Creation* 26 also takes existence within time to be a quality of created things and not of the creator.

⁶⁴ In the *Antirrheticus adversus Apolinarium*, Gregory attributes changeability to the human mind (τρεπτὸς ὁ νοῦς ὁ ἀνθρώπινος, GNO Online 10.194.29), and insists this distinguishes human from divine (τρεπτὸν μὲν τὸ ἀνθρώπινον, ἀτρεπτὸν δὲ τὸ θεῖον, GNO Online 10.223.2). Fortunately, changeability can be put to good use, if humans rightly orient themselves to “growth towards that which is better” (τῆς ἀεὶ πρὸς τὸ κρείττον γινομένης αὐξήσεως); see Homily 8 from *In canticum cantichorum* (GNO Online 24.252.9-13).

That Moses does not leave behind any material sign or memorial “on the earth” (ἐν τῇ γῇ, VM I.75) stands in contrast to the preservation of his earthly body. Using vivid description to point to bodily signs – “the brightness of his eyes” (τῶν ὄφθαλμῶν ἡ λαμπηδών, VM I.76), “the grace shining from his face” (ἡ ἀπολάμπουσα τοῦ προσώπου χάρις), VM I.76) – Gregory privileges that body as a significant interpretive site. The image of Moses’ body becomes a sort of memorial when it is preserved in textual form. The textualized earthly body that may be apprehended with the senses might offer those reading the *bios* a glimpse of the intangible and eternal, of that divine nature that does not change. The *theoria* account makes even clearer how Gregory’s attention to the exemplar’s dead body provides a glimpse of the divine image.

2. *Incorruptibility in the theoria, VM II.305-318*⁶⁵

The structure of the narrative about Moses’ noble death in the *theoria* is somewhat unusual. Gregory constructs a short preface to the *euthanasia* in VM II.305-307. He asserts that “there is no need to prolong the account, I think” (οὐδέν, οἴμαι, χρὴ μηκύνειν τὸν λόγον, VM II.305), and pauses to remind readers of the definition of perfection laid out in the *prooimion*. He proposes, “we would do well, by bringing the account up to the end of Moses’ life (πρὸς τὸ πέρας τοῦ βίου Μωϋσέως), to show that the definition of perfection which we have proposed is

⁶⁵ It is worth noting up front that retrospective retelling may be at work on the macro-level in this particular *bios*. Although I am unconvinced that Gregory strictly separates a purely literal account from figurative interpretation in the two books of his work, it is nevertheless clear that he preserved the detailed contemplation of Moses’ life, where he consistently draws out lessons for living virtuously, until after readers encountered the interpretive hinge of Moses’ death, for the first time, in Book I. That is, unpacking and interpreting the signs in Moses’ life and deeds – as he puts it, “now is the time for us to harmonize the life which we have called to mind to the proposed aim (σκοπός) of our account” (Καιρὸς δ’ ἂν εἴη πρὸς τὸν προκείμενον ἡμῖν τοῦ λόγου σκοπὸν ἐφαρμόσαι τὸν μνημονευθέντα βίον, VM I.77) – is an exercise that is best performed after readers know something about the circumstances of his death. Even without insisting on this macro-level narrative structuring, we can see that the account in VM II.305-318 has a more sustained reflection on incorruptibility.

secure.”⁶⁶ That is, the *euthanasia* about to be described will serve as proof that perfection is “the advancement of life always toward what is better” (ἡ πρὸς τὸ κρεῖττον ἀεὶ γενομένη τοῦ βίου ἀπαύξησις, VM II.306).⁶⁷

What follows is constructed in such a way that the description of Moses’ death in VM II.314 is positioned between two distinct summaries of the exemplar’s virtuous *praxeis*. The first, in VM II.308-313, lists events from Moses’ birth up through the “wrath that Phineas showed against the passions” (ἡ τοῦ Φίνεας γενομένη κατὰ τοῦ πάθους ὄργὴ, VM II.313). These are all the events related in both the *historia* and *theoria* portions of the text.⁶⁸ The purpose of such a summary seems to be quite simply to “bring” (ἄγω) the account up to the time of Moses’ death, as proposed in VM II.306. The review of earlier *praxeis* may also be a way Gregory prepares readers to interpret the *euthanasia* as a capstone *praxis*. An additional metaphor at the end of VM II.313 confirms that Gregory intends the death to be taken in this way. He writes, “but having come to the very top of the mountain, like some skillful sculptor (ἀνδριαντοποιὸς ἐπιστήμων) who has fashioned precisely the whole statue of his own life (ὁ ἀνδριὰς τοῦ βίου),

⁶⁶ καλῶς ἂν ἔχοι, πρὸς τὸ πέρας τοῦ βίου Μωϋσέως ἀγαγόντας τὸν λόγον, ἀσφαλῆ δεῖξαι τὸν ἀποδεοθέντα ἡμῖν ὅρον τῆς τελειότητος (VM II.306).

⁶⁷ In VM II.307, Gregory uses the metaphor of an eagle above the ether to explain what the life of someone who constantly ascends toward perfection looks like.

⁶⁸ And here again I would assert, *contra* Daniélou, that there is not a discernible scheme of three distinct stages in Moses’ ascent toward closer and closer contact with God. Instead, Gregory shows that Moses made steady progress throughout his life, beginning from the circumstances of his birth. In effect, Moses used each experience of encounter with the divine and with human communities to become more virtuous and a better servant to God. This summary of Moses’ deeds makes it obvious that human communities did play an important role in Moses’ development of virtue: among the seminal life events recounted are that he “made haste to share with his kinsmen the good things that came to him from God” (σπουδὴν ποιεῖται κοινωνῆσαι τοῖς ὁμοφύλοις τῶν θεόθεν αὐτῷ γεγενημένων καλῶν, VM II.310) and that he led the Israelites through the Red Sea, “ordered the priesthood” (τὴν ἱερωσύνην ἐκόσμησε), and “tempered intemperance through the priesthood” (τὴν ἀκολασίαν διὰ τῆς ἱερωσύνης ἐκόλασε) in the story of Phinehas. Gregory portrays each of these events as part of Moses’ progression, not limiting his list to contemplative activity.

did not simply bring his creation to an end, but he placed the crown (κορυφή) on his work.”⁶⁹

The peaceful death that Gregory describes as a “crown” or “crest” is meant to serve as further evidence that Moses lived well.⁷⁰

In VM II.314, the account of the death proper, Gregory offers a two-part claim about what Moses gains by pursuing the life of perfect virtue: the exemplar is worthy of the title “servant of God” (οἰκέτης Θεοῦ),⁷¹ and he is not subject to death, as death is conventionally understood. That is, Gregory proclaims that Moses’ end (τέλος) is what “the history calls death, a living death (τελευτὴ ζῶσαν), which is not succeeded by a funeral, over which a tomb is not erected, and which does not bring dimness to the eyes or corruption (διαφθορά) to the face.”⁷² This account of the noble death is presented as thought it is not an account of a typical *euthanasia* at all, but of something different.

By characterizing Moses as οἰκέτης Θεοῦ, Gregory seems to be re-evaluating Moses’ history in the light of this paradoxical death that is not death. On the one hand, an οἰκέτης is a humble member of the household; on the other hand, to be a servant in the household of God is an incredible honor. Therefore Gregory is able to say, “when one has accomplished such right actions, then he becomes worthy of this lofty name (ἀξιοῦται τοῦ ὑψηλού τούτου ὀνόματος), to

⁶⁹ ἀλλ’ ἄνω γενόμενος κατ’ αὐτὴν τοῦ ὅρους τὴν ἀκρώρειαν, ὥσπερ τις ἀνδριαντοποιὸς ἐπιστήμων, ὅλον ἔαυτοῦ τὸν ἀνδριάντα τοῦ βίου ἐξεργασάμενος ἀκριβῶς, ἐπὶ τῷ ἀκρῷ τῆς κατασκευῆς οὐχὶ τελευτὴν, ἀλλὰ κορυφὴν τῷ ἔργῳ ἐπέθηκε (VM II.313).

⁷⁰ See Daniele Iozzia on the connection between this image of sculpting and Plotinus’ *Enneads* I.6 (Iozzia, *Aesthetic Themes*, 39-44).

⁷¹ In the VSM, Macrina identifies Gregory as an οἰκέτης Θεοῦ and herself as a handmaid (παιδίσκη, cf. δούλη in Lk 1:38), when he first arrives home in VSM 17! The text records, “She said, ‘You have fulfilled this grace for me, O God, and you have not deprived me of my desire, since you moved your servant into the sight of your handmaid’ (Καὶ ταύτην ἐπλήρωσάς μοι, φησί, τὴν χάριν ὁ θεός, καὶ οὐκ ἐστέρησάς με ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας μου, ὅτι ἐκίνησας τὸν οἰκέτην εἰς ἐπίσκεψιν τῆς παιδίσκης σου, VSM 17).

⁷² ὃ δὴ τελευτὴν ἡ ιστορία λέγει, τελευτὴν ζῶσαν, ἦν οὐδὲ διαδέχεται τάφος, ἢ οὐκ ἐπιχώννυται τύμβος, ἡ τοῖς ὄφθαλμοῖς ἀμαυρότητα καὶ τῷ προσώπῳ διαφθορὰν οὐκ ἐπάγουσα (VM II.314).

be called servant of God, which is the same as saying that he is better than all others. For one would not serve God unless he became better than everyone in the world.”⁷³ In Chapter 14 of John’s gospel, which Gregory almost certainly has in mind, the house of God (“my Father’s house” [ἡ οἰκία τοῦ πατρός μου, Jn 14:2]) is the heavenly kingdom, where Jesus promises to bring his disciples. The use of this honorific suggests that Moses, too, participates in the heavenly life that Jesus promises to his followers.

Gregory expands on the events after Moses’ death more than he did in the *historia*, conforming the account of the *euthanasia* somewhat more closely to the typical form described above. He discusses in more detail the events that happened after Moses’ death and includes a rather enigmatic interpretation of the biblical note that Moses lacks a known burial place: “Along with this [title “servant of God”] is contemplated not being covered by a tomb; this is the life that is bare (γυμνός) and simple (ἀπέριττος) without evil appendages (ἐφόλκιον).”⁷⁴ As a witness to the events described in Deuteronomy, Gregory the biographer reacts, explaining that Moses lacks a tomb because his burial reflects his simplicity of soul and his rejection of evil.

What we find in VM II.315-317 is a newly significant history of Moses’ whole life, presented in language directed toward readers, describing what will happen when they imitate Moses’ deeds and virtues. Gregory invites the reader into the act of exegesis with a well-ordered series of simple interpretive questions:

What does the history say about this? (Τί γάρ φησι περὶ αὐτοῦ ἡ ἱστορία; VM II.314)

⁷³ Διὰ τοσούτων κατορθωμάτων γενόμενος τότε ἀξιοῦται τοῦ ὑψηλοῦ τούτου ὀνόματος, ὥστε οἰκέτης κληθῆναι Θεοῦ, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἵσον εἰπεῖν ὅτι παντὸς κρείττων ἐγένετο. Οὐ γὰρ ἂν τις Θεῷ δουλεύσειε μὴ τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ πάντων κρείττων γενόμενος (VM II.314).

⁷⁴ ... ὃ συνθεωρεῖται τὸ μὴ ὑποχωσθῆναι τῷ τύμβῳ, τοῦτο δέ ἐστι τὸ γυμνήν τε καὶ ἀπέριττον τῶν πονηρῶν ἐφολκίων τὴν ζωὴν γενέσθαι. VM II.317.

What then are we taught through what has been said? (Τί οὖν παιδευόμεθα διὰ τῶν εἰρημένων; VM II.315)

The Scriptural account is presented as a story that teaches as it speaks, even though that teaching requires explication. By using direct address and including himself in the “we,” the community taught by Scripture’s account, Gregory depicts the interpretive maneuvering that follows as a shared task. What is more, interpretation is shown to be the handmaid of mimesis; readers are addressed as those who will “through both purity and purification, make your own upward journey to the mountain” (καὶ διὰ τῆς καθαρότητός τε καὶ ἀγνείας ὁδοποιήσῃς σεαυτῷ τὴν ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος ἄνοδον, VM II.315). Like Moses, they will make an ascent toward a greater understanding of divine mysteries. Gregory extends the artistic sculpting metaphor he applied in VM II.313 to explain how Moses perfected himself into VM II.316 to make the point that a reader, like Moses, can mold his own character.⁷⁵

Gregory speaks directly to the interaction of corruption and incorruptibility within Moses’ exemplary body. At the close of his *theoria* section, Gregory returns to the idea of the undimmed eye and unchanged appearance (Deut 34:7) that are concrete physical signs reflecting the virtuous nature of Moses’ soul. This time, he offers more extended commentary on Moses’ body as a site that signifies his closeness to God and that can reveal the progress his soul has made toward more perfectly reflecting the divine nature. He writes,

Scripture tells of another mark (γνώρισμα) of such service: the eye is not dimmed nor the face corrupted (διαφθείρω). For how can an eye which is always in the light be dimmed by the darkness from which it is always separated? And the person who achieves incorruption (ἀφθαρσία) in his whole life admits no

⁷⁵ He writes, “...when you become a sculptor (λαοξόος) of your own hearts, so as to carve in them the divine oracles from God...” (ὅταν γένη τῶν σῶν καρδιῶν λαοξόος, ὥστε ἐν ταύταις παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰ θεῖα λόγια ἐγχαράξαι, VM II.316). More on this below.

corruption (οὐδεμία φθορά) at all in himself. For he who has truly come to be in the image of God and who has in no way turned aside from the divine character (χαρακτήρ) bears in himself its distinguishing marks (γνώρισμα) and shows in all things his conformity to the archetype (πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον); he beautifies his own soul with what is incorruptible (ἀφθαρτος), unchangeable, and what shares in no evil at all.⁷⁶

Even in death the exemplar's external appearance signifies his internal state, offering tangible signs that may be recorded in vivid description and interpreted by later generations. Signs on the body mark Moses' continued importance for Gregory's contemporary Christian community. A review of the biblical history is a way of showing that exemplary *euthanasia* is continuous with virtuous earthly life and that the deceased exemplar clearly reflects the image of God. The example of Moses proves that a virtuous person becomes what is incorruptible, overcoming the negative potentialities of changeability.⁷⁷

The incorruptibility Gregory describes is, paradoxically, both a transformation of the human body (which is naturally subject to corruption) and the simultaneous preservation of the divine image all human beings bear within the soul. That same complex interplay of constancy and transformation that characterizes Gregory's treatment of *anatrophe* and *paideia* is at work even at the end of the exemplar's life. The *epektasis* to which readers are exhorted in accounts of

⁷⁶ Τῆς δὲ δουλείας ταύτης καὶ ἔτερον γνώρισμά φησιν ὁ λόγος τὸ μήτε ὄφθαλμὸν ἀμαυρωθῆναι, μήτε πρόσωπον διαφθαρῆναι. Ο γὰρ ἐν φωτὶ διὰ παντὸς ὧν ὄφθαλμὸς πᾶς ἀμαυρωθῆσεται διὰ σκότους οὐ ἡλλοτρίωται; Καὶ ὁ τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν ἐν πάσῃ τῇ ζωῇ κατορθώσας οὐδεμίαν πάντως φθορὰν ἐφ' ἔαυτον παραδέχεται. Ο γὰρ ἀληθῶς κατ' εἰκόνα Θεοῦ γεγονὼς καὶ μηδαμοῦ παρατραπεῖς τοῦ θείου χαρακτῆρος ἐφ' ἔαυτοῦ τὰ γνωρίσματα φέρει καὶ συμβαίνει διὰ πάντων τῇ ὁμοιώσει πρὸς τὸ ἀρχέτυπον, τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ τε καὶ ἀναλλοιώτῳ καὶ πάσης ἀμιγεῖ κακίας τὴν ιδίαν ψυχὴν καλλωπίζων (VM II.318).

⁷⁷ Gregory echoes this teaching in his *De virginitate*, where he explains that humans can encounter divine beauty in their own souls: "...and it has been shown that it is not possible for the soul to be attached to the incorruptible God unless it makes itself as pure as it is able through incorruptibility, so that by means of likeness it may lay hold of likeness, like a mirror, having pledged itself to the purity of God, so that it has shaped what is in itself in accordance with participation in and manifestation of the prototypal beauty" (καὶ ἐδείχθη μὴ δυνατὸν ἐτέρως εἶναι συναφθῆναι τὴν ψυχὴν τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ θεῷ, μὴ καὶ αὐτὴν ὡς οἰόν τε καθαρὰν γενομένην διὰ τῆς ἀφθαρσίας, ὡς ἀν διὰ τοῦ ὁμοίου καταλάβοι τὸ ὄμοιον, οἵονει κάτοπτρον τῇ καθαρότητι τοῦ θεοῦ ἔαυτὴν ὑποθεῖσα, ὥστε κατὰ μετοχὴν καὶ ἐμφάνειαν τοῦ πρωτοτύπου κάλλους καὶ τὸ ἐν αὐτῇ μορφωθῆναι, *De virginitate*, GNO Online 31.296).

an exemplar's education is shown here to be a process of pursuing a *τέλος* that is at last fulfilled in the *euthanasia*: Moses' excellence transforms his body into a living sign of a human ability to be conformed to the divine image, a transformation other "friends of God" may happily anticipate.

3. *Imitating incorruptibility*

I propose that Gregory uses the final summary of Moses' deeds as a modification of the "events after death" component found in accounts of *euthanasia*. With direct address to the readers, Gregory lays out the plan of a life that would reproduce the virtues in Moses' *praxeis*. For example, he claims that

...when you come through all these things, and you bring forth the staff of the priesthood in yourself, which draws no moisture at all from the earth to the blossom but has within its fruit its own power for producing fruit (the first taste of which is bitter and tough but then is sweet and edible); when you hand over to destruction everything which opposes your worth, like Dathan going under the earth and like Kore consumed by fire, then you will draw near to the goal (*τέλος*).⁷⁸

That goal is a target the readers of the *bios* and Moses share. Gregory lays out here an outline for his reader's life, such that the reader could become a sort of descendant of Moses, the imitator who shares in his *genos*, as the *theoria* account of *genos* proclaims.⁷⁹ The anticipated actions of the ideal reader, who pursues future perfection by imitating the exemplar's past, are "events after death" written as a plan for the descendants. The account seems specifically concerned with

⁷⁸ ὅταν διὰ πάντων γένη τούτων καὶ βλαστήσῃ ἐν σοὶ τῆς ιερωσύνης ἡ ράβδος, ἡ μηδεμίαν τινὰ γῆς ἰκμάδα πρὸς τὴν βλάστην ἐφελκομένη, ἀλλ' οἴκοθεν τοῦ καρποῦ τὴν δύναμιν ἔχουσα καὶ καρποῦ καρυῦνον, οὗ ἡ μὲν πρώτη ἔντευξις πικρά τε καὶ κατεστυμμένη, τὸ δὲ ἐγκείμενον ἡδὺ καὶ ἐδώδιμον, ὅταν πᾶν τὸ ἐπανιστάμενον κατὰ τοῦ σοῦ ἀξιώματος εἰς ἀφανισμὸν χωρήσῃ, κατὰ τὸν Δαθὰν ὑπόγειον γενόμενον ἡ ἐκδαπανηθὲν τῷ πυρὶ κατὰ τὸν Κορέ, τότε προσεγγίσεις τῷ τέλει. (VM II.316).

⁷⁹ See Chapter 1.

readers who are part of the priesthood, mentioning the staff of Aaron (in this passage), “the mysteries of the tabernacle” (τὰ τῆς σκηνῆς μυστηρία), and “the office of the priesthood” (τὸ τῆς ἱερωσύνης ἀξίωμα).

Recognizing that Gregory uses retrospective narration after the *thanatos* scene to create continuity between the exemplar’s *praxeis* and the perfection, through *epektasis*, that is the goal of all Christian life helps us address a question about the VM and mimesis: can the average reader actually be expected to imitate Moses? Perhaps the exemplar is a paragon whose excellence cannot be repeated. It is true that Gregory said Moses would not have received the title ὁ οἰκέτης Θεοῦ “unless he became better than everyone in the world.”⁸⁰ With Ann Conway-Jones, I would emphasize the possibility of corporate or communal, rather than individualistic, imitation. When she describes Moses’ tabernacle vision, she writes: “The benefits of the vision that Moses received – an understanding of the heavenly and earthly Christ – are available to all through the earthly body of Christ, the church.”⁸¹ Gregory’s Moses is the subject of this didactic text precisely because he is potentially imitable, in a particular context, with the appropriate guidance from teachers. It is possible that priests are most suited, among Christians, to imitate Moses. The *prooimion* grapples with the apparent disconnect between Moses’ historical circumstances and those of the reader. The retrospective historical account of the exemplar’s life, offered after the *euthanasia*, not only universalizes Moses’ major accomplishments through allegorical interpretation. Far from making Moses inimitable, this expanded timeline or playing field for imitation aligns imitation of the exemplar with a shared Christian *telos*. That is, the

⁸⁰ μὴ τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ πάντων κρείττων γενόμενος (VM II.314).

⁸¹ Ann Conway-Jones, *Gregory of Nyssa’s Tabernacle Imagery in its Jewish and Christian Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 166.

thanatos makes *epektasis* itself, that embodiment of virtue that is always incomplete, the target for human striving.

The artistic metaphor of VM II.313 and 316, which compares fashioning a life to sculpting a statue, seems intended to remind readers that this ongoing task of virtuous living is a reproducible, if variable, one. With this encomiastic *topos*,⁸² Gregory applies a single conceptual metaphor to the exemplar and to readers, reinforcing the hypothesis that the text is aiming to facilitate mimesis. Again, his didactic aim deeply influences the metaphors he chooses to use when constructing a biographical portrait. Additionally, through the text itself Gregory has shown that searching Scripture for a *telos* is a task the Christian reader can realistically complete. While it is possible that those who may most successfully imitate Moses are the priests, the combined effects of the *prooimion* and final address indicate Gregory intended for his narrative of Moses' life to work as a rough roadmap toward a common Christian life of virtue and a shared pursuit of perfection.

C. Macrina's holy body⁸³

When depicting his sister's death and funeral, Gregory appears to treat the typical features of *euthanasia* outlined above. He proceeds using forward chronological narration,

⁸² The *topos* appears also in Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.8.17-18. Origen uses the image of a statue to talk about imitating Christ: "In everyone who builds up for himself, in accordance with the divine Word, self-control (σωφροσύνη) and righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) and courage (ἀνδρεία) and wisdom (σοφία) and piety (εὐσέβεια) and the furnishings of the rest of the virtues, are votary statues (ἀγάλματα); we are convinced that is it fitting that the prototype of all statues (τὸ πρωτότυπον πάντων ἀγαλμάτων) – 'the image of the unseen God' (Col 1:15), 'the only-begotten God' (Jn 1:18) – is honored by these" (Ἐν πᾶσιν οὖν ἐστι, τοῖς κατὰ τὸν θεῖον λόγον σωφροσύνην ἔαντοις κατασκευάσασι καὶ δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἀνδρείαν καὶ σοφίαν καὶ εὐσέβειαν καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀρετῶν τὰ κατασκευάσματα, ἀγάλματα· οἵς πρέπον εἶναι πεπεισμέθα τιμᾶσθαι τὸ πρωτότυπον πάντων ἀγαλμάτων, «τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου», «τὸν μονογενῆ θεόν», Origen, *Contra Celsum* 8.8.17).

⁸³ The account of Macrina's death and the events that follow make up a surprising proportion of the *bios*, all of sections 19-38. Because there is such a wealth of material here, my analysis of this text may appear disproportionately long in comparison to my analyses of the VGT and VM, above.

moving sequentially through a funeral scene and finally describing his own departure from the family estate. Gregory does not use his own narrative voice to relate an earlier episode in the post-*thanatos* section of the text. Rather, he describes how he interacted with a series of embedded narrators, and it is these figures who narrate several events from earlier in Macrina's life. On her deathbed and after her burial, Macrina's body becomes a new "text" that holds signs to be interpreted, and these signs can only be explained in the context of retrospective narratives that draw on facts about her earlier *praxeis*. With the use of embedded narrators and frequent allusions to earlier episodes, Gregory recreates before readers' eyes the process of contextualization by which an exemplar's life is transformed into a coherent, retrospective narrative. That is, he takes on the role of an internal audience member who listens to the contextualizing stories. In so doing, he makes transparent for readers the importance of narrative and models the formation of an ideal and authoritative interpreting community.

1. Last words: the deathbed prayer, VSM 22-25

In the account of Macrina's deathbed prayer, Gregory uses both final words and comportment to blur the dividing line between the exemplar's earthly and resurrection lives. In this episode, Gregory comments on the invisible presence of Christ and the tangible presence of those in the room. Because Macrina acts as a mediator between the two types of presence, the reading audience is able to watch an internal audience (primarily subject-Gregory) encounter the divine through the medium of Macrina's created body.

Gregory offers a lengthy description of Macrina's manner of death, which includes a series of reactions in his own narrative voice. Even before death, Macrina participates in the heavenly or angelic life. Like Socrates, Macrina "philosophized...with high intelligence" although her body began to fail (ὑψηλῇ τῇ διανοίᾳ...ἐμφιλοσοφεῖν, VSM 22). Narrator-Gregory,

an eyewitness and an author who has reflected on this historical events before writing, compares her comportment to that of some angel “who has no kinship with the life of the flesh” (ὦ μηδεμιᾶς οὕσης πρὸς τὸν ἐν σαρκὶ βίον συγγενείας). We should detect an allusion to the “angelic” preoccupations of the whole community, described in VSM 11;⁸⁴ here, though, physicality is the focus.

In what seems like a paradox, while Macrina still inhabits her body, she uses signals and gestures to express *in a visible way* that she is already starting to stretch out beyond the body toward her invisible heavenly bridegroom. Gregory appears to be adapting the typical feature of last words in an account of noble death to include non-verbal modes of communication. Gregory describes the communicative function of Macrina’s gestures as follows:

Because of this, it seemed to me at that point that she made obvious (ἔκδηλον ποιεῖν) to those present that divine and pure love for the unseen bridegroom which she possessed concealed, having grown it in the depths of her soul (ψυχή), and that she publicized (δημοσιεύειν) the disposition in her heart (ἐν καρδίᾳ) to go to the one she was longing for, as if she would be with him swiftly if she were loosed from the chains of the body (γένοιτο τῶν δεσμῶν ἐκλυθεῖσα τοῦ σώματος). For it was as though her race was towards the beloved, and nothing else among the pleasures of life turned her eye (όφθαλμός) to itself.”⁸⁵

Gregory’s narration draws attention to his own role in the story alongside Macrina; as Momigliano puts it, he is creating a sense of intimacy for himself and, by extension, for readers.

⁸⁴ On the “angelic life” as a *topos* for describing ascetic practices among early Christians, see Karl Suso Frank, *ΑΓΓΕΛΙΚΟΣ ΒΙΟΣ: Begriffsanalytische und Begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zum “engelgleichen Leben” im frühen Mönchtum*, Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinerordens, Heft 26 (Münster Westf.: Aschendorff, 1964), esp. Chapter 1 “Der negative Weg zur vita angelica,” 18-39. Frank groups Macrina with others who practice chastity (Keuschheit, 34), but he also marks fasting (Fasten), night vigils (Wachen), and clothing (Kleiden) among physical ascetic practices (23-34).

⁸⁵ Διὰ τοῦτο μοι ἐδόκει τὸν θεῖον ἐκεῖνον καὶ καθαρὸν ἔρωτα τοῦ ἀοράτου νυμφίου, ὃν ἐγκεκρυμμένον εἶχεν ἐν τοῖς τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπορρήτοις τρεφόμενον, ἔκδηλον ποιεῖν τότε τοῖς παροῦσι καὶ δημοσιεύειν τὴν ἐν καρδίᾳ διάθεσιν τῷ ἐπειγεσθαι πρὸς τὸν ποθούμενον, ὡς ἂν διὰ τάχους σὺν αὐτῷ γένοιτο τῶν δεσμῶν ἐκλυθεῖσα τοῦ σώματος. Τῷ ὅντι γάρ ὡς πρὸς ἐραστὴν ὁ δρόμος ἐγίνετο, οὐδενὸς ἀλλού τῶν κατὰ τὸν βίον ἡδέων πρὸς ἔαυτὸν τὸν ὄφθαλμὸν ἐπιστρέφοντος (VM 22).

His perception of her intentions - “she seemed to me” (μοι ἐδόκει) - complements her activity of “publicizing” (δημοσιεύειν) and “making obvious” (ἐκδηλον ποιεῖν) those intentions. He is an ideally attentive internal audience. At the same time, Gregory’s account illustrates how he and others (those present, τοῖς παροῦσι) become authorized to interpret what the exemplar’s history means. These witnesses pass on what the exemplar showed them, gaining their authority directly from the virtuous woman.

Scriptural quotation and allusion abound in the actual last words Gregory reports in VSM 24, providing a specific literary context for understanding Macrina’s death. Having totally turned her attention toward the invisible bridegroom who stands at the finish line of her life’s race,⁸⁶ Macrina prays aloud, and these last words summarize her lived experience. Her prayer brings together Scriptural quotations from the gospels, epistles, psalms, and the Song of Songs, creating a pastiche of the very texts that, according to Gregory, formed the basis of Macrina’s education.⁸⁷ She describes the whole trajectory and history of her life as a forward path aimed at heavenly union with Christ. As we saw with Thaumaturgus’ last words, the exemplar offers an interpretation of her own life that harmonizes it to Scriptural history. Macrina, too, expresses a lack of concern for earthly realities; pleasures that might tempt another are completely irrelevant to her when she can focus on her beloved (cf. Philippians 3:7-11). As with the VGT, Gregory alludes to specific elements of the exemplar’s *praxeis*, creating an interpretive context that

⁸⁶ Gregory most likely adopts the image of a race toward some eschatological goal from 2 Tim 4:7. See the discussion of athletic imagery in Chapter 2.

⁸⁷ Most VSM translators catalog the Scriptural references. See, for example, citations in footnotes in Virginia Woods Callahan, transl., *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Ascetical Works*, The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation, Volume 58 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 180-181; see also Pierre Maraval, transl. and ed., *Vie de Sainte Macrine*, Sources Chrétiennes, Volume 178 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1971), 218-225.

allows him to say that early on the exemplar was already beyond the life of the body, participating in something greater that would not be fulfilled until the time of her death. For VGT it was the mention of the 17 pagans/Christians, for Macrina it is the reference to Christ as bridegroom, an allusion to Macrina's early decision to remain a virgin devoted to Christ, first described in VSM 5.⁸⁸

In VSM 25, Gregory describes in detail Macrina's gradual departure, and the vivid description in his account heightens the potential for reading audiences to engage imaginatively with the unfolding events. Her voice "dries up" (καταφρύγω) in VSM 25, but she indicates with the movements of her body that she is still praying. Gregory recounts,

And as she said these things, she placed the seal [the sign of the cross] upon her eyes and mouth and heart. Little by little, as her tongue was dried up by the fever, she was no longer able to articulate her speech (λόγος) and her voice (φωνή) gave out, and only from the trembling of her lips and the motion of her hands did we know that she was in prayer. And in the midst of these things, when evening came on and the lamp was brought in, Macrina distinguished the beam with the corner of her eye and, looking toward the light, made it clear that she was eager to say the nocturnal thanksgiving; although her voice failed, with her heart (διὰ τῆς καρδίας) and the movement of her hands, she fulfilled her desire and moved her lips in keeping with the indwelling impulse (πρὸς τὴν ἐνδοθεν ὄρμην). When she had completed the thanksgiving and signaled the end of the prayer by putting the sign of the cross on her forehead, she breathed a deep breath and brought her life to an end along with the prayer (τῇ προσευχῇ τὴν ζωὴν συγκατέληξεν).⁸⁹

⁸⁸ The image of Christ as bridegroom is biblical (e.g., 2 Cor 11:2; Mk 2:18-20 // Mt 9:14-15 // Lk 5:33-35; Eph 5:21-33; Rev 21:9 and 22:17 use the image of a "bride of the Lamb", and Christ is earlier signified by the lamb of Rev 5), and so certainly not unique to Gregory.

When Macrina announced to her family that she intended to remain a virgin, she said it was because "it is inappropriate not to keep faith with an absent bridegroom" (ἄτοπον δὲ εἶναι τῷ ἐκδημοῦντι νυμφίῳ μὴ φυλάσσειν τὴν πίστιν, VSM 5. She refers to her deceased fiancé here, though this is certainly a double entendre pointing to her union with Christ.), it seems reasonable to take Gregory's words at VSM 25 as an echo of the VSM itself, not just of the New Testament. Momigliano makes this connection to the earlier portion of the text, though he sees it as part of an overarching parallel between Macrina and Socrates: "The transformation of the love for the earthly fiancé into love for the celestial bridegroom is inseparable from Macrina's Socratic role in leading Gregory toward the contemplation of the world of immortality and resurrection" (Momigliano, *On Pagans*, 217).

⁸⁹ Καὶ ταῦτα ἄμα λέγοντα ἐπετίθει τὴν σφραγίδα τοῖς ὄφθαλμοῖς καὶ τῷ στόματι καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ. Καὶ κατ' ὅλιγον ἦ τε γλῶσσα τῷ πυρετῷ καταφρυγεῖσα οὐκέτι διήρθρου τὸν λόγον καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ὑπενεδίδουν, καὶ ἐν μονῇ τῇ τῶν γειτέων διαστολῇ καὶ τῇ τῶν χειρῶν κινήσει τὸ ἐν προσευχῇ εἶναι αὐτὴν ἐγινώσκομεν. Καὶ ἐν τούτοις τῆς ἐσπέρας

The “publicizing” Macrina did earlier must now be mediated. As a member of the internal audience, subject-Gregory now offers authoritative explanations, taking over the work of interpretation as Macrina’s earthly life ends and she can no longer speak for herself. In his description, Macrina still made “clear” (εκδηλος) what she was trying to do, and Gregory claims that she “signaled the end of the prayer” (τὸ πέρας τῆς εὐχῆς διεσήμανε), but it is his interpretation that mediates readers’ access to the scene and to the exemplar’s motivations. The gestures, as he interprets them, reflect a liturgical context, the daily schedule of Psalms and prayers that structure life in Macrina’s community (VSM 11) and would likely have been familiar to the Christian readers of the *bios*. Gregory’s choice to describe her “desire” (and its fulfillment bring her into line with his idea of *epektasis*. In her final living *praxis*, as Gregory explains it, Macrina becomes an embodiment of the prayer itself as she stretches out toward the divine with (and then beyond) her whole physical being.

1a. Memory and Liturgy

Derek Krueger has made the most significant recent strides in explaining how the liturgical contextualization of Macrina’s body – in life, in death, and in text – might matter for our understanding of Gregory’s biographical technique. In 2000, Krueger published a seminal article in *JECS*, “Writing and the Liturgy of Memory in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina*.” This study of Macrina’s deathbed and funeral in the VSM argues for the central role of memory

ἐπιλαβούσης καὶ φωτὸς εἰσκομισθέντος ἀθρόον τὸν τῶν ὄμμάτων διαστείλασα κύκλον καὶ πρὸς τὴν αὐγὴν ἀπιδοῦσα ἔκδηλος μὲν ἦν καὶ φθέγξασθαι τὴν ἐπιλύχνιον εὐχαριστίαν προθυμουμένη· τῆς δὲ φωνῆς ἐπιλειπούσης διὰ τῆς καρδίας καὶ διὰ τῆς τῶν χειρῶν κινήσεως ἐπλήρου τὴν πρόθεσιν καὶ τὰ χεῖλη πρὸς τὴν ἔνδοθεν ὄρμὴν συνεκινεῖτο· ὡς δὲ ἐπλήρωσε τὴν εὐχαριστίαν καὶ ἡ χεὶρ ἐπαγχεῖσα διὰ τῆς σφραγῖδος τῷ προσώπῳ τὸ πέρας τῆς εὐχῆς διεσήμανε, μέγα τι καὶ βύθιον ἀναπνεύσασα τῇ προσευχῇ τὴν ζωὴν συγκατέληξεν (VSM 25).

in making Macrina's life present and meaningful for audiences, emphasizing the parallels between "pious" acts of recollection in hagiographical writing⁹⁰ and the Christian liturgy, which incorporates both word and sacrament – especially the Eucharist – as memorials that make the divine present.⁹¹ This liturgical context of fourth-century Christian piety, central to Krueger's analysis, means that Macrina can inspire readers to mimetic action: "Her story represents a model for aristocratic renunciation of wealth in the quest for Christian ideals."⁹² Memory and recollection, enacted by the *bios*, offer members of the Christian elite a way to follow Macrina's lead in ascetic living, even after her death.⁹³ Adding his own metaphor, Krueger points to the idea that *bios* also preserves a mimetic portrait of the exemplar; he states that the text is like a "monument placed at the saint's tomb, marking a point of access to the saint's power," such that "hagiography sought to make present in narrative a holy essence that might otherwise be irretrievably absent."⁹⁴

In Krueger's presentation, both Gregory and Macrina are authors who recount Macrina's life in the form of a μακρηγορία, a term for a "lengthy narrative" that (as pointed out earlier) also

⁹⁰ Krueger, "Writing and the Liturgy of Memory," 497.

⁹¹ Alongside the liturgical import of a textual reproduction of a departed exemplar (and the associated *eucharistia* in the remembering community) are two more related devotional practices: pilgrimage and relic cult. Vasiliki Limberis' work especially marks important parallels between Gregory's dream vision and developing relic cult. See Vasiliki Limberis, *Architects of Piety*, 150-155. I see a similarity between this interpretation and Krueger's liturgical reading of the VSM because both point to some form of participation, an encounter between the deceased exemplar and a living community. Both studies of memorializing practices, however, can be built upon by considering questions of precisely how different narrative structures and rhetorical techniques are used to guide reading audiences and how the narratives themselves model acts of interpretation.

⁹² Krueger, "Writing and the Liturgy of Memory," 487.

⁹³ We might note a contrast here between the role of liturgy as commemorative act in the VSM and liturgy as a key element for the biographical composition as a whole and the portrayal of its subject; Lucy Parker argues that liturgy and liturgical piety provide a key to understanding the *Life of Martha* in Lucy Parker, "Paradigmatic Piety: Liturgy in the Life of of Martha, Mother of Symeon Stylites the Younger," *JECS*, Volume 24, Number 1 (Spring 2016): 99-125.

⁹⁴ Krueger, "Writing and the Liturgy of Memory," 484.

works as a play on Macrina's name; the narrative is truly her story.⁹⁵ Krueger insists that "paying attention to narration as an activity represented within this narratologically complex text offers clues to Gregory's self-conception as narrator, or more precisely as rememberer, since each of the narrators within the narrative are engaged foremost in the act of remembrance."⁹⁶ According to Krueger, Gregory's act of literary remembrance finds its liturgical counterpart in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Gregory writes in a genre typically used for ethical instruction, and explicitly presents himself as engaged primarily in an act of *pedagogy* oriented toward readers (Chapter 1). Even Gregory's recollection of how he mourns Macrina's passing (VSM 26-27), which Krueger classifies as an intimate, remembered report that authorizes Gregory's authorship,⁹⁷ is better framed as a dialogic account depicting the evolution of a subject-Gregory without self-control to a more self-controlled narrator-Gregory who has (eventually) modeled himself after the virtuous example of his sister. Macrina is not the only figure in the text who can be imitated; multiple internal audiences are shown learning, especially learning about interpretive strategies ideal readers could reproduce.

Krueger claims that "Christian biography, then, has as its object detecting, declaring, and giving thanks for the work of God in a Christian life."⁹⁸ Yet the mechanics of "detecting" the work of God in a life are unexplored in his study. He asserts that "recollection itself, a process

⁹⁵ Krueger, "Writing and the Liturgy of Memory," 484.

⁹⁶ Krueger, "Writing and the Liturgy of Memory," 491. He expands on this conception of hagiographical writing as a tool for self-formation and "for the cultivation of virtue" (the author's virtue) in his 2004 monograph: Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1.

⁹⁷ Krueger, "Writing and the Liturgy of Memory," 504.

⁹⁸ Krueger, "Writing and the Liturgy of Memory," 498.

that will prove ultimately and inevitably narrative, leads seamlessly to prayer.”⁹⁹ Yet Gregory himself indicates the movement from text to action is not seamless, but involves a series of interpretive acts, for the biographer and for readers. He must interpret the motions of Macrina’s body, supplying an explanatory narrative to show that she is at prayer. Pressing Krueger’s reading further, we can ask how *bioi* teach readers in a Christian community to be skilled interpreters of what they see, a prerequisite for engaged participation in the liturgy or for ethical activity. In this capacity, allusion plays a key role in the VSM.

2. *Macrina’s corpse*

After Macrina’s death, the work of interpretation continues, this time with a series of embedded narrators recounting events from Macrina’s past. Gregory weaves together a complicated mesh of allusions in his account of the events after death to contextualize signs in the body and explain how these signs should be read. The VSM and its detailed descriptions of Macrina’s corpse have been the subject of several studies that highlight symbolic and allusive elements of the episode. Many scholars have remarked on the connection between the glowing corpse of VSM 32 and Gregory’s dream-vision in VSM 15; Gregory himself highlights the link (“as in the vision of my dream...” κατὰ τὴν τοῦ ἐνυπνίου ὄψιν, VSM 32).

Multiple valences of the glowing body are significant for understanding how Macrina’s corpse becomes a symbolizing object that requires interpretation. The dream of the glowing bones, in the narrative arc of the VSM, happens during Gregory’s pilgrimage to see his holy sister, and so it portends Macrina’s significance as a potential focus of relic cult and pilgrimage

⁹⁹ Krueger, “Writing and the Liturgy of Memory,” 489.

by future generations who would seek miraculous intervention. Patricia Cox Miller discusses the way Macrina's corpse is an object that embodies the same truth revealed to Gregory in his prophetic dream, turning our attention to the fact that the divine may communicate in both physical and noetic ways:

As a shimmering object that mediated the gap between the paradigmatic worlds of Adam and the resurrection, Macrina's body provided a glimpse of the transformation that all might hope for. Her body was thus a formal analogue to Gregory's dream, itself a mediatorial vehicle that initiated Gregory, briefly, into a form of consciousness in which fleshly eyesight is "blinded" by beatific vision. Indeed, Macrina's body and Gregory's dream can hardly be separated, because it was the dream that had given him "eyes to see" the truth of his sister's body.¹⁰⁰

Morwenna Ludlow, like Krueger, remarks on how the exemplar's body and Gregory's text together preserve Macrina's memory: "In the *Life of Macrina*, the text itself seems to become a relic of his sister, a holy and almost sacramental object which brings the believer into contact with the saint."¹⁰¹ So far, these observations recognize the importance of Gregory the eyewitness biographer, apparently supporting Momigliano's assessment of how biographers create intimacy through commemoration.

Although Gregory's dream is important, Macrina's own actions and choices, to which the account alludes, are equally revealing (though less often noted). The way Macrina's corpse is concealed by the gray garment actually contains a secondary allusion that reinforces the connections between Macrina's corpse and her lived *praxeis*:

When our work was finished and the body was adorned with what we had, the deaconess spoke again and said that it was not fitting that Macrina should be seen by the maidens dressed as a bride (νυμφικῶς). She said, "But I have kept a gray garment of your mother's which I think we should put over her, so that this holy beauty should not be made splendid with extraneous adornment because of the

¹⁰⁰ Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, 238.

¹⁰¹ Ludlow, "Texts, Teachers and Pupils," 98.

dress.” Her opinion won out, and the garment was placed on Macrina. But even in the gray, she shone, the divine power, I think, adding such grace to her body that, as in the vision of my dream, rays seemed to be shining forth from her loveliness.¹⁰²

While it clearly refers to Gregory’s dream-vision, the passage gives narrator-Gregory a way to point out the high value Macrina’s domestic community places on humility.¹⁰³ At the same time, the fact that the garment belonged to Emmelia also alludes to an earlier comment Gregory made about the closeness between Macrina and her mother. Emmelia’s cloak covering Macrina’s body echoes the enfolding in view when “her mother often used to say to her that the rest of her children she had carried in her womb for a fixed time, but this daughter she always bore, embracing (περιέχουσα) her in her womb at all times and under all circumstances.”¹⁰⁴ This allusion invites the audience to reflect back on Macrina’s selection of a way of life. Her dedication to virginity and her semi-monastic asceticism, which led her to adhere to her mother, began as part of her decision to keep faith with her absent (deceased) “bridegroom” (νυμφίος, VSM 5); it perhaps began even earlier, with the pronouncement of her secret name, Thecla (VSM 2). It is not just God who revealed the “truth” about Macrina to Gregory, for Macrina herself consistently made choices that, in retrospect, foreshadowed the appearance of her corpse.

¹⁰² Ἐπεὶ δὲ πέρας εἶχεν ἡμῖν ἡ σπουδὴ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐνόντων περιεκοσμήθη τὸ σῶμα, πάλιν φησὶν ἡ διάκονος μὴ πρέπει νυμφικῶς ἐσταλμένην αὐτὴν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς τῶν παρθένων ὄρασθαι. Άλλ’ ἔστι μοι, φησί, τῆς μητρὸς τῆς ὑμετέρας τῶν φαιῶν πεφυλαγμένον ἰμάτιον, ὃ ἀνωθεν ἐπιβληθῆναι καλῶς ἔχειν φημί, ὡς ἂν μὴ τῷ ἐπεισάκτῳ διὰ τῆς ἐσθῆτος κόσμῳ τὸ ἱερὸν τοῦτο κάλλος λαμπρύνοιτο. Ἐκράτει τὰ δεδογμένα καὶ τὸ ἰμάτιον ἐπεβλήθη· ἡ δὲ ἔλαμπε καὶ ἐν τῷ φαιῷ, τῆς θεῖας, οἷμαι, δυνάμεως καὶ ταύτην προσθείσης τὴν χάριν τῷ σώματι, ὥστε κατὰ τὴν τοῦ ἐνυπνίου ὅψιν ἀκριβῶς αὐγάς τινας ἐκ τοῦ κάλλους ἐκλάμπειν δοκεῖν (VSM 32).

¹⁰³ As Julia Burman points out, the double funeral dress is “a statement for the humbleness of the state and against earthly, pompous funeral practices” (Julia Burman, “Death and Gender in Late Antiquity: A Case Study of the Death of Saint Macrina,” *Gender, Cult, and Culture in the Ancient World from Mycenae to Byzantium: Proceedings of the Second Nordic Symposium on Gender and Women’s History in Antiquity* (Helsinki 20-22 October 2000), ed. Lena Larsson Lovén and Agneta Strömberg [Sävedalen: Paul Åströms Förlag, 2003]: 140-150, 146).

¹⁰⁴ …ώς πολλάκις τὴν μητέρα πρὸς αὐτὴν εἰπεῖν, ὅτι τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν τέκνων τεταγμένῳ τινὶ χρόνῳ ἐκυοφόρησεν, ἐκείνην δὲ διὰ παντὸς ἐν ἑαυτῇ φέρειν πάντοτε τρόπον τινὰ τοῖς σπλάγχνοις ἑαυτῆς περιέχουσα (VSM 5).

Gregory's description of events after Macrina's death reframes the events of her life in light of her death. Caroline Walker Bynum articulates most clearly how the allusion to the dream, re-reviewed through the lens of Gregory's encounter with the corpse, creates a narrative continuity between Macrina's earthly life and the resurrection: "The resurrected body is both the ascetic who becomes a relic while still alive and the relic that continues after death the changelessness acquired through asceticism."¹⁰⁵ But how can we be sure that Gregory is reflecting on changelessness or continuity? Vetiana, one of the women from Macrina's domestic community, takes on the task of narration and testifies to the fact that the exemplar overcame bodily corruption even during her lifetime. That is, retrospective narration, performed by an embedded narrator, provides a context for correctly interpreting signs in Macrina's body.

2a. Signs and Fragments

Vetiana directs Gregory's attention to Macrina's scar: "She said, 'Do you see this small and nearly invisible sign (*σημεῖον*) on the skin?' It was like a mark (*στίγμα*) produced by a fine needle."¹⁰⁶ This small mark commemorates the absence of disease, marking the location of a healing act that took place in the past. Georgia Frank has convincingly identified the tale of Macrina's scar as a literary echo of the nurse describing Odysseus' scar in *Odyssey* 19.¹⁰⁷ Virginia Burrus approaches the sign from a different angle in her 2003 article, "Macrina's

¹⁰⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 86.

¹⁰⁶ Ὁρᾶς, ἔφη, τὸ λεπτὸν τοῦτο καὶ ἀφανὲς ὑπὸ τὴν δέρριν σημεῖον; στίγματι προσέοικε διὰ λεπτῆς ὁσφίδος ἐγγενομένῳ (VSM 31).

¹⁰⁷ Georgia Frank, "Macrina's Scar: Homeric Allusion and Heroic Identity in Gregory of Nyssa's Life of Macrina," *JECS* volume 8, number 4 (Winter 2000): 511-530. Virginia Burrus, however, notes that the οὐλή of Odysseus is not quite the same as the *σημεῖον* or *στίγμα* on Macrina's body, and argues that this "slippage" of terminology on Gregory's part is likely intentional (Virginia Burrus, "Macrina's Tattoo," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Volume 33, Number 3 [Fall 2003]: 402-417, 404).

Tattoo.” Interpreting the στίγμα on Macrina’s breast as a divinely-inscribed tattoo commemorating a miraculous healing, Burrus focuses precisely on its status as a sign to be interpreted. She pushes against Elizabeth Clark’s work on the impossibility of finding real female subjectivity in early Christian literature by suggesting that “the *Life of Macrina* inscribes feminine subjectivity as a stigma (marks the subject with and as difference) and, further, that ‘women’s history’ may be understood as a practice of reading and writing that continually marks (and therein makes) a difference.”¹⁰⁸ In part responding to Krueger’s interpretation of the text, she simultaneously offers an alternative to the liturgy of memory: Gregory records information about the “part of a part” of a woman’s body that becomes symbol and text, such that writing a biographical account “does not merely designate but continuously creates Macrina’s sanctity.”¹⁰⁹

Burrus’ article highlights the idea that Gregory’s text instantiates Macrina’s body as a symbol, focusing on the text’s creation of Macrina as an interpretable subject, not on the formation of the author’s identity. The body reflects the generative potential of a symbol rather than its potential to create stable connections to existing structures (like, for Krueger, the Eucharist). Burrus comments on the importance of reading, the appropriate activity for one who encounters such an interpretable sign. As she puts it, the mark may be unfolded: “the miracle that the brother, Gregory, is instructed to read in this revealed sign lies as much in the presence of the mark itself as in the divine healing that it commemorates.”¹¹⁰ On her reading, Gregory seems to be the ideal interpreter, an exemplary internal audience of one, whose “reading” is also preserved for the audience of the VSM. Like the tattoo on Macrina’s body, the “literary *vita*” can “lay

¹⁰⁸ Burrus, “Macrina’s Tattoo,” 413.

¹⁰⁹ Burrus, “Macrina’s Tattoo,” 410.

¹¹⁰ Burrus, “Macrina’s Tattoo,” 403.

claim to an irreducible materiality that is also the trace of divinity – more than that, of divine *desire* – in a woman’s body.”¹¹¹

But Burrus also points out that the “reading” of that material trace of the divine is necessarily unstable. Where Krueger claims that Gregory’s text purposefully incorporates Macrina into a recognizable context of *askesis* and piety, Burrus argues that a “memorializing fragmentation” takes place as Gregory narrates Macrina’s body and its parts.¹¹² Even Gregory’s potentially transgressive act of examining his sister’s naked breast must be “underwritten – prescribed – by a divine author/ity,” the miracle his gaze allows him to learn about.¹¹³ Burrus situates Gregory the author as one reader of the text that is Macrina’s body; though he produces another text recording Macrina’s life, the written *Vita* is not and cannot be the same as his sister’s lived *vita*. Readings and re-readings, Burrus seems to suggest, are themselves fragmentary, because a “true witness” has, like Gregory, a view that is “partial, fragmentary, and indirect.”¹¹⁴

Burrus’ reading emphasizes the fragment and its ambiguous potential. The multivocality of such textual symbols as the sign on Macrina’s body is undeniable. To insist on an associated multiplicity (even unlimited variety) of possible interpretations for signs in Gregory’s *bioi* is tempting, but I suggest such an insistence would miss the point Gregory himself tries to make: that the biographical account of Macrina’s life is a beacon that points to the pinnacle of human virtue (VSM 1). The didactic goal of the encomiastic *bios* as a whole must be kept in view here:

¹¹¹ Burrus, “Macrina’s Tattoo,” 409.

¹¹² Burrus, “Macrina’s Tattoo,” 411.

¹¹³ Burrus, “Macrina’s Tattoo,” 408.

¹¹⁴ Burrus, “Macrina’s Tattoo,” 411.

as Macrina's life should not be "passed over" (*παρατρέχω*, VSM 1) and rendered ineffective, so Gregory is exhorted not to "pass over" (*παρατρέχω*, VSM 31) the scar that signifies her greatest miracle.

It is also important to note that while Gregory narrates the text, it is the embedded narrator who tells the story and teaches Gregory how to interpret the mark. Burrus points to the "divine author/ity" that authorizes Gregory's interpretations, but it is in fact a member of the Christian community who does this authorizing work. Vetiana, who is helping Gregory prepare the body, first draws his attention to Macrina's necklace. They divide the ring and cross it bears between them, and she announces that "the ring is hollow inside and in it is concealed (*κατακέκρυπται*) a piece of the wood of life. And thus the seal of the cross on the surface (*ἄνωθεν*) reveals (*μηνύει*) by its form what is inside."¹¹⁵ Her pronouncement, which reveals knowledge about the fact that the external can simultaneously conceal and reveal the internal, seems designed to work not only as a comment on the ring and its content, but also on Macrina's physical form and her soul. The astute eyewitness then directs Gregory to look at the scar on Macrina's body, offering subject-Gregory what is essentially an opportunity to test her statement about how a surface testifies to what is inside. While Gregory's view may very well be "partial," the embedded perspective of a woman who witnessed Macrina's daily life up close can provide a reliable context for interpreting the scar; the story of this isolated fragment is in fact fully consistent with Macrina's life of virtuous deeds, and neither the story nor the life should be passed over.

¹¹⁵ Κοῦλος γὰρ κατὰ τὴν σφενδόνην ἔστιν ὁ δακτύλιος καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐν τοῦ ἔνθλου τῆς ζωῆς κατακέκρυπται· καὶ οὕτως ἄνωθεν ἡ σφραγὶς τῷ ιδίῳ τύπῳ μηνύει τὸ ὑποκείμενον (VSM 30).

3. Healing blindness, VSM 36-39

What follows is an interlude in VSM 35 that pointedly describes Gregory's discomfort with bodily corruption, the very type of corruption that Macrina resisted, as her scar signifies. At the gravesite, Gregory is afraid of violating "the divine command which forbids uncovering the shame (ἀσχημοσύνην) of father and mother" (φόβος μέ τις τῆς θείας ἐντολῆς εἰσέρχεται τῆς κωλυούσης πατρὸς ἢ μητρὸς ἀνακαλύπτειν ἀσχημοσύνην, VSM 35) by opening their tomb to deposit Macrina's corpse. Taking the ethical sense of "shame" that is sexual in nature, he describes his distaste as a pious desire to avoid the sin of Ham (Gen 9:20-27).¹¹⁶ But the ἀσχημοσύνη may be more complex. In a material rather than ethical sense, it can mean "formlessness" (akin to ἀμορφία), and it may carry a sense of bodily dissolution.¹¹⁷ For Gregory the Christian Neoplatonist, it is not unreasonable to suggest that it is partly the corruption of his parents' corpses that Gregory fears. Such a usage would bring into high relief the fact that Macrina performed multiple miracles to stave off or reverse bodily corruption. This interpretation becomes more plausible when we read the rest of Gregory's explanation for his fear: "How will I be free of such condemnation if I see the common shame of human nature (βλέπων τὴν κοινὴν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως ἀσχημοσύνην) in the bodies of our parents, how they have surely fallen apart (διαπεπτωκότων) and dissolved (λελυμένων) and been changed (μεταβληθέντων) into a disgusting and disagreeable formlessness (ἀμορφία)?"¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ There is also an injunction against looking on the shame of father and mother in Lev 18:7. The term ἀσχημοσύνη also appears in VSM 3, where it is one of the features of immoral characters in the *Iliad*, one of the texts Emmelia eliminates from Macrina's reading program.

¹¹⁷ *LSJ*, s.v. "ἀσχημοσύνη"

¹¹⁸ Καὶ πῶς...ἔξω τοῦ τοιούτου γενήσομαι κατακρίματος, ἐν τοῖς τῶν γονέων σώμασι βλέπων τὴν κοινὴν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως ἀσχημοσύνην, διαπεπτωκότων ὡς εἰκὸς καὶ λελυμένων καὶ εἰς εἰδεχθῆ καὶ δυσάντητον ἀμορφίαν μεταβληθέντων; (VSM 35).

On the heels of this reflection about the horrors of shame and decay, the closing episode of the VSM draws together sign, interpretation, and textuality into a complex narrative about healing; the narrative is both a portrait of Macrina's living access to incorruptibility and a model of interpretive activity for ideal readers. When Gregory leaves the family estate, he encounters a soldier on the road. This soldier offers an embedded, retrospective narrative about how Macrina healed his daughter, who had "an eye ailment resulting from an infectious sickness" (*τις ἐκ λοιμώδους ἀρρωστίας ... περὶ τὸν ὄφθαλμὸν συμφορά*, VSM 37). Macrina offered the family a "medicine" (*φάρμακον*, VSM 37), which turned out to be prayer (VSM 38). Her life of faith and unchanging devotion to prayer have borne fruit in the form of a miracle that combats bodily decay.

Through the soldier's closing comments, Gregory summarizes the dynamic that exists between Macrina's intervention and the Scriptures. The exemplar and her *praxeis*, recalled after her death, become a key that unlock the teachings of Scripture. The soldier's wife announced to him that Macrina's prayer effected a cure for their daughter's eye disease. Then, the soldier relates,

As she recounted these things, she also embraced our child and put her in my arms. And then, grasping with my understanding the incredible miracles in the gospel, I said: "Why is it so great that the eyes are restored to the blind by the hand of God, when now His handmaiden, having worked such cures through faith in Him, does deeds that do not fall short of those wonders?"¹¹⁹

The circumstances of Macrina's fourth-century life reanimate the Scriptures, bringing the

¹¹⁹ Καὶ ἄμα ταῦτα διεξιῦσα αὐτῇ τε τὸ παιδίον ἐνηγκαλίζετο καὶ ταῖς ἐμαῖς ἐνετίθει χερσί. Κάγῳ τότε τὰ ἀπιστούμενα κατὰ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον θαύματα τῇ διανοίᾳ λάβων "Τί μέγα, εἶπον, διὰ χειρὸς θεοῦ τυφλοῖς τὰς ὄψεις ἀποκαθίστασθαι, ὁπότε νῦν ἡ δούλη αὐτοῦ τὰς ἴάσεις ἐκείνας κατορθοῦσα τῇ εἰς αὐτὸν πίστει πρᾶγμα κατείργασται οὐ πολὺ τῶν θαυμάτων ἐκείνων ἀπολειπόμενον;" (VSM 38).

biblical world before the soldier who is standing in for Gregory's ideal audience.¹²⁰ But we should also recognize that the reanimation happens by way of an embedded *synkrisis*. When he compares Macrina's miracle and gospel accounts of healings, the soldier-as-narrator is doing the interpretive work usually performed by a biographer. Not only this, but the second part of the soldier's proclamation alludes to the gospel dynamic of miracles effected through faith.

Gregory's careful attention to τάξις and the narrative frame he constructs around the soldier's embedded narrative adds to the impact of the story as a lesson in hermeneutics and as an appeal to the *pathos* of the ideal reader. The soldier introduces his narrative in order to illustrate, as he says, "what a great kind of good has been removed from human life" with Macrina's death.¹²¹ Yet the account is included in the *bios*, which will be circulated and widely read, and so the good that is Macrina has not been fully removed from human life. In fact, the soldier's very act of storytelling preserves her *praxeis*, which are (as we have shown) fully consistent with her resurrection life and the relics of her body. Even on the level of the narrative itself, the soldier and his family are pilgrims who will continue to travel.¹²² The audience for Macrina's sanctity and virtue now includes people far beyond the monastic community, opening the way for Gregory's readers to participate in the events that take place after her death.

Gregory validates the soldier's interpretation of the healing miracle by framing the story with explicit commentary about the *bios* and its anticipated effects. At the start, he proclaims,

¹²⁰ See discussion of Williams, *Authorised Lives* in Chapter 3, on this dynamic of eliding the Scriptural past and the readers' present.

¹²¹ ...οῖον καὶ ὄσον ἀγαθὸν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης μετέστη ζωῆς (VSM 36).

¹²² Momigliano suggests it is also significant that the soldier and the other embedded narrator who helps prepare Macrina's corpse for burial (Vetiana or the deacon Lampodium) are elites; that is, these figures are likely have access to networks they can use to share Macrina's story. See Momigliano, *On Pagans*, 219.

“writing only this [the soldier’s account] into my history, I shall put an end to my composition” (ο δὴ καὶ μόνον ἐγγράψας τῇ ιστορίᾳ, καταπαύσω τὴν συγγραφήν, VSM 36), and after the soldier’s story ends he resumes with “I do not think it safe to add to my story” (οὐκ ἀσφαλὲς οἶμαι προσθεῖναι τῷ διηγήματι VSM 39) any additional details.¹²³ The tale that proves Macrina could counteract physical corruption in others as well as herself is a sufficient ending for the *bios*. Narrator-Gregory also describes the emotional character of this account. Subject-Gregory’s grief and weeping incited the soldier to tell the story, and the soldier himself concludes by crying. Gregory reports, “In the midst of saying these things, he checked his voice with hiccups, his tears flowing along with the narrative” (Ταῦτα λέγων μεταξὺ λυγμῷ τὴν φωνὴν ἐνεκόπτετο, τῶν δακρύων ἐπιρρυέντων τῷ διηγήματι, VSM 38). The story is a response to and an occasion for grief, a descriptive account that evokes reader emotions, drawing them into the community of those who grieve for Macrina. At the close of the VSM, we have a member of the internal audience once again taking up the double mantle of embedded narrator and interpreter. I suggest it is significant that the embedded narrator only does this at the end of the *bios*, after Macrina’s death. Viewed as a whole, in light of all her *praxeis*, including *euthanasia*, Macrina’s life reveals her closeness to the divine; like Christ, she not only resists but heals corruption.

III. Conclusion

In all three texts, Gregory describes the exemplar’s *thanatos* as a *euthanasia*, a noble death that serves as a capstone on the earlier *praxeis* and which can offer further proof that the exemplar’s soul is virtuous. He incorporates the typical features used to narrate a *euthanasia*,

¹²³ Gregory’s explanation for this reticence is discussed in detail in the Conclusion.

modifying them to suit his sources and his aims. In the VGT and VSM, Gregory preserves his subjects' last words, formulating *chreiai* that provide an interpretive context within which to discern each subject's virtues. Thaumaturgus, who has converted the region of Pontus, expresses his humble desire to do better. Macrina, who has structured her daily life with the prayers of the Psalms, prays aloud using a pastiche of biblical references and "publicizes" her desire to pray with her physical actions, confirming her single-minded devotion. Moses spoke no last words (or at least no words marked as such) in Deuteronomy, and so Gregory omits this feature from the two accounts in the VM.

Gregory also records the reactions of witnesses to each noble death; in his *bioi*, this feature of an account of noble death takes the shape of offering assessments of events in his own narrative voice, casting himself as an eyewitness (VSM) or a witness of the events as recorded in literary or otherwise historical sources (VM, VGT). By preserving his own reactions in the *bioi*, Gregory appears to be seeking to guide readers' interpretations of events; as the biographer, he has crafted each portrait and he also tries to direct the reading of the portraits.

When it comes to the events after death, each encomiastic *bios* has its own distinct emphasis. In the context of our weaving metaphor for composition, we might visualize the weaver using a distinctive color scheme for each garment, but weaving with the same design. In the VGT, Gregory focuses on the legacy Thaumaturgus has left for his now-Christian community. The VM explicitly describes the readers' own potential imitation of Moses, possibly depicting the reader who seeks to live virtuously as a descendant of the exemplar; this "kinship" has been explained as a spiritual kinship in the *genos* of VM II.1-5. In the VSM, Gregory focused primarily on Macrina's body, and his depictions of the corpse provided an opportunity to show internal audiences (including himself) practicing or modeling the interpretation of signs in

the human body. The woven design that each composition shares, however, is connected to Gregory's stated didactic aim. While each exemplar's physical presence is no longer accessible (Moses and Thaumaturgus' burial places are unknown, and Macrina is in a known location but nevertheless in a tomb), the *bioi* can serve as portable, reproducible literary memorials, making the image of each exemplar present for a far-flung, expansive reading audience.

Gregory's literary artistry adds to the instructive quality of each *bios*. In each instance of retrospective narration that follows the depiction of the death itself, Gregory uses literary allusion; with this device, he turns the text into an echo-chamber, providing a rich context for understanding isolated physical signs in the exemplar's body: Thaumaturgus' "sojourn," Moses' undimmed eyes, and Macrina's scar. In the VSM especially, Gregory portrays a number of figures practicing the interpretation of signs. Building readers' conscious awareness of and comfort with this allusive, contextualizing function of narrative is perhaps a way of preparing them to read and understand other signifying texts.

The *euthanasia* in each *bios* is a final *praxis* that confirms and even heightens the continuity between the exemplar's earlier virtuous deeds and his or her role as a model of *epektasis*. All three *bioi*, to different degrees, move from a narrative about the exemplar's death to some reflection on the larger issue of physical corruptibility and the incorruptibility of the soul, an issue central to the concept of the Christian afterlife that follows a life of virtue and of perfection.¹²⁴ For Gregory, incorruptibility is a key attribute of God and belongs properly to the divine nature, as he confirms in his *Antirrheticus adversus Apolinarium*: "God is wholly

¹²⁴ A helpful overview of Gregory's thought on incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία), with additional references to his wider corpus, may be found in Juan Ignacio Ruiz Aldaz, "Incorruptibility," in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*.

incorruptibility” (θεὸς δὲ πάντως ἐστὶν ἡ ἀφθαρσία, GNO Online 225.4). But ἀφθαρσία is also a quality in which human beings like the exemplars may participate, as a result of divine grace. Incorruptibility was, in fact, an attribute human beings had at the beginning of creation, but it was lost on account of sin.¹²⁵ However, humans who live virtuously, in light of Christ’s Incarnation and sacrificial death, may participate in divine incorruptibility and reflect the image of God.¹²⁶ The *euthanasia*, in Gregory’s hands, becomes a place to show how the virtuous soul may shine through and even transform the corruptible body of one who engages in *epektasis*. This is most obvious in the VSM, where Macrina’s scarred, glowing body and her healing miracles are discussed by a number of characters, who all remark on how she reflects divine power. In the VM, Moses is described as a general model for the way of life that draws one closer to God, toward the goal (τέλος) of being a perfect οἰκέτης Θεοῦ. In the VGT, the earliest of the three works, it is only the exemplar himself who remarks on his perpetual journey and desire to be more perfect.

For Gregory the author of encomiastic *bioi*, it appears that readers can only understand and appreciate the (in)significance of death in the light of a virtuous Christian way of life; the newly visible evidence of the virtuous exemplar’s conformity to the divine image and its incorruptibility is shown to be fully continuous with and even foreshadowed in the virtuous *praxeis* of her earthly life. In the very form of the text, which returns to re-examine lived

¹²⁵ See, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, GNO Online 27.105.16ff for ἀφθαρσία among a list of attributes belonging to humans as they were first created in the image of God.

¹²⁶ The Holy Spirit assists in this virtuous way of life: “For who does not know that the work of bodily union is the creation of mortal bodies, but that for those uniting with the spirit in fellowship, life and incorruptibility are born instead of children?” (τίς γάρ οὐκ οἶδεν, ὅτι τῆς μὲν σωματικῆς συναφείας τὸ ἔργον σωμάτων θνητῶν ἐστι κατασκευή, τῆς δὲ πρὸς τὸ πνεῦμα κοινωνίας ζωὴ καὶ ἀφθαρσία τοῖς συναφθεῖσιν ἀντὶ τέκνων προσγίνεται; GNO Online 31.305.11-15).

episodes even after the exemplar's death, Gregory indicates that the Christian practice of reading a *bios* ought to be a recursive process, and it is one that can both demonstrate and model skilled interpretation.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ We might compare this recursive process to one of the ways Richard B. Hays talks about participation in Christ. Discussing Paul's letters and presentation of history, he writes, "one more model for understanding real participation in Christ is the model of *narrative participation*. By that I mean that Paul's imaginative retelling of the story of Israel and of Jesus summons his hearers (and readers) into a symbolic world in which cross, resurrection, and Parousia are the events that define the shape and meaning of history...They are drawn into *participation* in a new narrative world, and their former ways of life are subjected to critical scrutiny in light of the gospel" (Richard B. Hays, "What is 'Real Participation in Christ'? A Dialogue with E.P. Sanders on Pauline Soteriology," in *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities, Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders*, edited by Fabian E. Udo, with Susannah Heschel, Mark Chancey, and Gregory Tatum [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008]: 336-351, 345-346). Similarly for Gregory, an ideal reader might recognize that realizations gained while reading could affect both a re-reading and that reader's interpretation of events in her contemporary world.

Conclusion. The garment of virtue and the weaver's craft

There are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I do not think that the world itself could contain the books that would be written.

John 21:25.¹

There are other wonders of the great Gregory preserved in memory from this time which we have not set down in writing to spare unbelieving ears, so as not to mislead those who think the truth in the loftiness of the accounts is a lie.

VGT 100.²

So, in order not to do harm to those unbelievers who do not believe in the gifts of God, on behalf of those ones I have refrained from narrating the greater miracles, judging it sufficient to end the narrative about her with what I have already said.

VSM 39.³

But there is no need to prolong the account, I think, by presenting to those who come upon it the whole life of Moses as an example of virtue. For anyone stretching himself up to the higher life, the things that have been said would be no small provision for the true philosophy. But for the one showing cowardice in the face of exertions on behalf of virtue, even if many more things than those that have been said should be written, there would be no benefit from the wealth of them.

VM II.305.⁴

As he comes to the end of each *bios*, Gregory announces that what he has recounted of the exemplar's life is sufficient. He returns to the explicit consideration of a concern that he first introduced in the *prooimia* of his texts: the readers' benefit. In the final paragraph of the VGT, he explains that he does not wish to further strain the credulity of those who are put off by the "loftiness" (μέγεθος) of the stories about Thaumaturgus, lest he push them to think his account of

¹ Ἐστιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἂ ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἄτινα ἐὰν γράφηται καθ' ἔν, οὐδ' αὐτὸν οἴμαι τὸν κόσμον γωρῆσαι τὰ γραφόμενα βιβλία.

² Ἐστι δὲ καὶ ἄλλα τῇ μνήμῃ μέχρι τοῦ δεῦρο διασωζόμενα τοῦ μεγάλου Γρηγορίου θαύματα, ἀπερ φειδόμενοι τῆς ἀπιστούσης ἀκοῆς, ὡς ἀν μὴ βλαβεῖεν οἱ τὸ ἀληθὲς ἐν τῷ μεγέθει τῶν λεγομένων ψεῦδος οἰόμενοι, τοῖς γεγραμμένοις οὐ προσεθήκαμεν.

³ Ως ἀν οὖν μὴ βλαβεῖεν οἱ ἀπιστότεροι ταῖς τοῦ θεοῦ δωρεαῖς ἀπιστοῦντες, τούτου ἔνεκεν καθεξῆς ίστορεῖν περὶ τῶν ὑψηλοτέρων θαυμάτων παρητησάμην, ἀρκεῖν ἡγούμενος τοῖς εἰρημένοις περιγράψαι τὴν περὶ αὐτῆς ίστορίαν.

⁴ Άλλ' οὐδέν, οἴμαι, χρὴ μηκύνειν τὸν λόγον, πάντα τοῦ Μωϋσέως τὸν βίον εἰς ἀρετῆς ὑπόδειγμα προτιθέντα τοῖς ἐντυγχάνοντι. Τῷ γάρ πρὸς τὴν ὑψηλοτέραν ζωὴν ἐαυτὸν ἀνατείναντι, οὐ μικρὰ γένοιτ' ἀν πρὸς τὴν ἀληθῆ φιλοσοφίαν ἐφόδια τὰ εἰρημένα. Τῷ δὲ μαλακιζομένῳ πρὸς τοὺς ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀρετῆς ιδρῶτας, καὶ πολλαπλάσια γραφῆ τῶν εἰρημένων, οὐδὲν ἀν ἐκ τοῦ πλήθους γένοιτο κέρδος.

the wonderworker's life has been fabricated. In the last lines of the VSM, he explains his decision to end the account of Macrina's life and deeds similarly; to go on might "harm" (βλάπτω) some of his readers. But does he really assume that anyone listening to or reading these *bioi* is unbelieving and could be so harmed? It is more likely this sort of closing formula is intended to congratulate those readers who have been convinced of the truth within the account. When he distinguishes between two groups of readers in VM II.305,⁵ Gregory explains that the account has already put forward enough material to serve as a "provision" (έφόδιον) for the reader making an upward journey toward virtue, even if it is not provision enough for the one who is too weak or cowardly (τῷ μαλακιζομένῳ) to face the "exertions" (literally "sweat," ιδρώς) the journey would require. It is abundantly clear which course of action Gregory hopes his reader will take. In the conclusions of all three texts, Gregory points back toward the "benefit" (κέρδος, VM II.305) his readers may or may not find in each *bios*, depending on the belief or effort they expend.

In examining the three *bioi* side by side and working systematically through the *kephalaia* of encomium that Gregory has used as the building blocks for his encomiastic *bioi*, I have examined a broad range of literary and rhetorical techniques and their potential narrative effects. Throughout, I have been concerned to show, across the three texts, patterns and divergences in Gregory's approach to the standard structures and thematic elements of encomiastic biographical narrative and to explore how his adoption and adaptations of rhetorical features are linked to his didactic aims. Keeping sight of the fact that he and his texts are firmly

⁵ This passage comes at the start of the *euthanasia*, as Gregory transitions from his description of earlier praxeis to the description of Moses' death. The epilogue of the text is in VM II.319-21, discussed below.

embedded in a fourth-century Christian literary and cultural context, I have argued that it is in considering the particulars of his literary and stylistic presentation of each exemplar's life that we see most clearly how he methodically attempts to construct and instruct his ideal reading audience as a community of interpreters.

In Chapter 1, I demonstrated that Gregory crafts a *prooimion* for each text that introduces his didactic project, which is to preserve accounts of exemplary figures and offer some benefit to readers. He also crafts an argument on each exemplar's *genos* and offers, with some degree of variation, reflections on a spiritual kinship that may supplement or replace the subject's historical family, nation, or homeland. I argued that in these opening portions of his *bioi*, Gregory seeks to invite readers to become interpreters, sharing the biographer's hermeneutic tasks: the ideal readers may learn from Gregory how to reason from the particulars of the exemplar's life and circumstances (matters of chance) to general principles about imitable virtues they might cultivate in their own souls (matters of choice).

In Chapter 2, I examined how Gregory portrays each exemplar's upbringing or *anatrophe* as a field in which constancy and transformation are interwoven such that one or both may be emphasized in a given episode. I demonstrated that across all three *bioi* he describes training as an ongoing *paideia* that is begun during the anatrophe but extends beyond it into the exemplars' mature lives and their communities. I argued that he consistently highlights three learning modes – the Three Rs of reading, revelation, and relationship – that correspond to educational practices that could be reproduced in the late fourth-century world of his readers; in so doing, I suggested, he sought to describe a learning community that could encompass both the exemplars and his ideal readers.

In Chapter 3, I showed how Gregory depicts the highly varied exemplary *praxeis* of

Moses, Thaumaturgus, and Macrina. I demonstrated that in each *bios* he grapples with the tension between observable actions and the hidden qualities of the virtuous soul that lie behind and motivate those actions. I argued that Gregory uses the figurative language of vision, sight, and seeing to model the “reading” of *praxeis*, in an attempt to situate his readers as eyewitnesses of the biographical subjects’ actions and to recommend interpretation as a virtuous *praxis* those readers may perform in their own lives.

In Chapter 4, I studied the portrayal of each exemplar’s *thanatos* as a noble death or *euthanasia*, demonstrating that Gregory uses typical features like last words, the reactions of witnesses, and the events after death to depict each *euthanasia* as a final virtuous *praxis*, a capstone on a whole life of virtuous deeds. Through a close reading of the *euthanasia* in the *bioi*, I argued that Gregory may also be seen, through each narrative about death, reflecting on the tension between bodily corruption and the incorruptibility of the human, immortal soul. He shows that the soul engaged in *epektasis* reflects the divine image, which may be glimpsed by readers who interpret signs in the exemplars’ dead or dying bodies.

In this Conclusion, I briefly examine the closing formulae of Gregory’s three texts and then return to the broader implications of his decision to write encomiastic *bioi* for such diverse figures. Why did he select this genre to describe and praise Moses, a well-known figure from biblical history; Thaumaturgus, an ecclesiastically recognized saint from a previous generation; and Macrina, a woman who is both Gregory’s contemporary and his sister? How did he adapt the form to depict each exemplar and to carry out his own didactic aims? Who is Gregory of Nyssa as biographer?

I. Concluding a *bios*

According to the *progymnasmata*, the final *kephalaia* of an encomiastic composition are

a *synkrisis* and the epilogue, the latter of which Aphthonius states should be “rather fitting a prayer” (εὐχῇ μᾶλλον προσήκοντα).⁶ How does Gregory end his three *bioi*?

A. Final *synkrisis* and epilogue

Gregory actually seems to neglect the formal final *synkrisis* called for in Aphthonius’ outline of encomium. In the formulation in his collection of rhetorical exercises, Aphthonius writes:

Synkrisis is a comparative account, bringing together, through juxtaposition, that which is greater with what is compared to it. When comparing it is necessary either to set fine things beside useful things or poor things beside poor things or good beside bad or small beside larger. As a whole, *synkrisis* is a double encomium or a double invective, composed from encomium and invective. Every topic of *synkrisis* is quite forceful, set down once for all, but especially that comparing small things to greater ones. Such things are appropriate for a *synkrisis*: whatever we blame and praise, both persons and things, both occasions and places, dumb animals, and, in addition, plants. It is not necessary when comparing to contrast a whole with a whole, for that is tedious and not argumentative, but to contrast a heading to a heading (κεφάλαιος); this is certainly argumentative. Then elaborate in the manner of encomium, except for comparison. There is no comparison in it, since the whole exercise is a comparison.⁷

None of Gregory’s three texts ends with a formal comparison between the exemplar and another figure, such as is found in Aphthonius’ sample encomium of Thucydides: “Then does anyone compare Herodotus to him? No, for he tells a story for pleasure, while Thucydides utters everything for its truth. Inasmuch as pleasure is something less than truth, so Herodotus falls

⁶ Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8, Rabe 22.

⁷ Σύγκρισίς ἔστι λόγος ἀντεξεταστικός ἐκ παραθέσεως συνάγων τῷ παραβαλλομένῳ τὸ μεῖζον. Δεῖ δὲ συγκρίνοντας ἥ καλὰ παραθεῖναι χρηστοῖς ἥ φαῦλα φαύλοις ἥ χρηστὰ πονηροῖς ἥ μικρὰ παραθεῖναι τοῖς μείζοις. καὶ ὅλως ἥ σύγκρισις διπλοῦν ἐγκώμιον ἔστιν ἥ ψόγος ἐξ ἐγκώμιου καὶ ψόγου συγκείμενος. καὶ πᾶς μὲν τόπος συγκρίσεως δεινὸς καθάπαξ καθέστηκε, μάλιστα δὲ ὁ τὰ μικρὰ παραβάλλων τοῖς μείζοις. Τοσαῦτα δὲ συγκρίνειν προσήκει, ὅσαπερ καὶ ψέγειν καὶ ἐγκωμιάζειν, πρόσωπά τε καὶ πράγματα, καιρούς τε καὶ τόπους, ἀλογα ζῷα καὶ πρὸς τούτοις φυτά. Οὐ δεῖ δὲ συγκρίνοντας ὅλων ὅλῳ παραβάλλειν, ὑπτιον γάρ καὶ οὐκ ἀγωνιστικόν, ἀλλὰ κεφαλαίῳ κεφάλαιον· ἀγωνιστικὸν γάρ τοῦτό γε· ἐπεὶ τὸ διαιρεῖν ἐγκώμιον τρόπος, οὐ συγκρίσεως. Σύγκρισις δὲ ἐν αὐτῷ οὐκ ἔστιν, ἐπείπερ ὅλον ἔστι τὸ προγύμνασμα σύγκρισις (Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 10, Rabe 31-32).

short of the beauties of Thucydides.”⁸ The omission of such formal statements in Gregory’s writing is perhaps best explained by the presence of incidental *synkrisis* strategically located throughout the *bioi*. Macrina endures pain like Job, a comparison that highlights her ability to overcome suffering with rational self-control (VSM 18). Thaumaturgus ends a land dispute between two brothers with a water miracle better than Moses’ parting of the Red Sea: the biblical figure parted the Sea for a short time, but Thaumaturgus permanently dried up the whole lake (VGT 51-53). In the VM, Moses as an individual is not the subject of any *synkrisis* with other Scriptural figures,⁹ but Gregory does compare events in his life with events from the New Testament, arguing that Moses’ actions signify those of Christ; for example, the transformation of Moses’ right hand in his bosom (Exod 4:6-7) is compared to the transformation of Christ in the Father’s bosom (VM II.26).

The choice to incorporate multiple comparative passages is well acknowledged in rhetorical theory. The preliminary exercises of Nicolaus the Sophist, for example, recommend that comparison be used to enliven the narrative:

Here [in the treatment of *praxeis*], or rather in all parts, so the language may not become tedious, even if flatness seems somehow to fit (ἀρμόζειν) panegyric; nevertheless, so that it not be entirely unserviceable, while we are making only a bare and unelaborated list, we shall try to refer the action to virtues and to introduce *synkrisis* by turns. For in this way the flatness is broken up and the discourse is made to seem energetic (ἐναγώνιος) ... As I said, it is necessary to insert *synkrisis* everywhere, escaping excessive flatness and going for an examination of the virtues, in order that the discourse may be lively.¹⁰

⁸ Εἴτα τις αὐτῷ παραβαλεῖ τὸν Ἡρόδοτον; ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνος μὲν διηγεῖται πρὸς ἡδονήν, ὁ δὲ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἀπαντα φθέγγεται· ὅσῳ δὴ τὸ πρὸς χάριν τοῦ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἔλαττον, τοσοῦτον Ἡρόδοτος τῶν Θουκυδίδου καλῶν ἀπολείπεται (Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8, Rabe 24).

⁹ See more on this in Chapter 3.

¹⁰ κάνταῦθα, μᾶλλον δὲ ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς μέρεσιν, ἵνα μὴ ὑπτιος ὁ λόγος γίγνηται, εἰ καὶ ἀρμόζειν πως τοῖς πανηγυρικοῖς ἡ ὑπιότης δοκεῖ, ὅμως, ἵνα μὴ πάντη ἐκλύηται μόνην μνήμην ποιουμένων ἡμῶν ψιλὴν καὶ ἀνεξέργαστον, πειρασόμεθα εἰς ἀρετὰς ἀναφέρειν τὰς πράξεις καὶ ἐπάγειν κατὰ μέρος τὰς συγκρίσεις· οὕτω γάρ η τε ὑπιότης διαλύεται καὶ ἐναγώνιος ὁ λόγος κατασκευάζεται... ὅπερ δὲ εἴπον, πανταχοῦ δεῖ τὰς συγκρίσεις ἐπάγειν, τὴν ὑπὲρ

In its discussion of encomium, the *Progymnasmata* attributed to Hermogenes suggest: “The best starting-point in *encomia* is that from comparisons, which you will use as the occasion guides you.”¹¹ In Chapter 4, I have shown that the accounts of *euthanasia* in a number of texts make a call for comparison; for example, Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* ends by suggesting readers could perform a *synkrisis* between Socrates and other admirable men: “So he seems to be all that a truly good and happy man ought to be. But if there is any doubter, let him set the character of others beside these things [in the account], and so let him judge.”¹² The reader is encouraged to propose other individuals for comparison, while the author maintains Socrates exceeds all others.

Gregory uses *synkrisis* throughout the *bioi* to draw direct comparisons between each exemplar and biblical figures, rather than reserving *synkrisis* for the conclusion; in part, this is because the treatment of a life calls out for chronological arrangement. But at the end of the VSM and VGT, Gregory inserts another type of subtle comparison that functions as a comment on literary form and authorship, and which may also be intended to invite readers to perform their own work. The short passages quoted at the start of this chapter make it obvious that Gregory closes these two *bioi* with a self-conscious echo of Scripture, particularly of the epilogue of the fourth gospel.¹³ In part, the reference to additional material not covered in the

τὸ μέτρον ὑπιότητα διαφεύγοντας, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς τῶν ἀρετῶν ἐξετάσεις ιέναι, ἵνα ἔμψυχος ὁ λόγος γένηται (Nicolaus, *Progymnasmata* 8, Felten 52-53).

¹¹ μεγίστη δὲ ἐν τοῖς ἐγκωμίοις ἀφορμὴ ἡ ἀπὸ τῶν συγκρίσεων, ἃς τάξεις, ὡς ἂν ὁ καιρὸς ὑφηγήται (Hermogenes, *Progymnasmata* 7, Rabe 16).

¹² ἐδόκει τοιοῦτος εἶναι οἷος ἂν εἴη ἄριστός τε ἀνὴρ καὶ εὐδαιμονέστατος. εἰ δέ τῳ μὴ ἀρέσκει ταῦτα, παραβάλλων τὸ ἄλλων ἥθος πρὸς ταῦτα οὕτω κρινέτω (Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, IV.8.11).

¹³ Perhaps more accurately the “double epilogue” of the gospel, if we consider also Jn 20:30-31, which reads, “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (Πολλὰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλα σημεῖα ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ, ἀ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ· ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεύσητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἔστιν ὁ χριστὸς ὁ νιὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ

narrative is a *topos* recommended in the *progymnasmata* on encomium. Compare two closing statements from sample encomia in Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata*. Of Thucydides, he writes, "Many other things could be said about Thucydides, if the great number of his praises would not fall short of telling everything."¹⁴ Similarly, he says of wisdom, "Many other things could be said about wisdom, but it is impracticable to go through them all."¹⁵ In both of these formulations, the encomiast emphasizes limits of time and rhetorical skill; in the epilogue for Thucydides, especially, we find an echo of the sort of authorial modesty Gregory, too, exhibits in elsewhere in the *bioi* (e.g., in VM I.2-3).

Like Aphthonius, Gregory the biographer asserts that his narratives about Thaumaturgus and Macrina must be partial, ending before he can relate all the illustrious deeds his exemplars performed. However, he gives an additional reason for concluding where he does: he is concerned about certain readers' abilities to believe and draw a benefit from the *bioi*. This focus echoes more closely the justification of the fourth evangelist than the simple concern for practicality recorded in the *progymnasmata*. Gregory here combines one of the primary virtues of narrative - plausibility (*πιθανότης*)¹⁶ – with Christian Scriptural concerns for faith and

ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὄνόματι αὐτοῦ). As Francis J. Moloney puts it in his commentary on 20:30-31, "The author has shared his belief in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, by means of the story from which the reader now rises. The journey of Jesus and the journey of the reader have been completed, but the storytelling is successful only if the one rising from the story has become part of it, led more deeply into belief in Jesus and all he has made known about God, and comes to life as a result of the reading experience (Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4 [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998], 544).

¹⁴ Πολλὰ ἦν ἔτερα περὶ Θουκυδίδου διεξελθεῖν, εἰ μὴ τὸ πάντα ἐρεῖν τὸ τῶν ἐπαίνων παρείλετο πλῆθος (Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8, Rabe 24).

¹⁵ Πολλὰ ἦν ἄλλα περὶ τῆς σοφίας διεξελθεῖν, ἀλλ' εἰς ἄπαν ἐρεῖν τοῖς διεξιοῦσιν ἀμήχανον (Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 8, Rabe 27).

¹⁶ Aphthonius identifies four virtues of narrative: "clarity, brevity, plausibility, and the Hellenism of the expressions" (σαφήνεια, συντομία, πιθανότης καὶ ὁ τῶν ὄνομάτων ἔλληνισμός, Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata* 2, Rabe 3). The Exercises of Aelius Theon leave out Hellenism ("The virtues of narrative are three in number: clarity, brevity, plausibility," Αρεταὶ δὲ διηγήσεως τρεῖς, σαφήνεια, συντομία, πιθανότης, Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata*, 79). But the rhetor does expand on the definitions of each narrative virtue: "For it is necessary always to keep to

unbelief.¹⁷ Gregory links his choice to end the account without telling all the miracles to a concern for readers' belief. In so doing, he enhances the apparent virtuosity of the exemplars while he simultaneously hints at his own literary virtuosity and the success of his *heuresis*. This narrator purports to have created an account that follows through on the promises of the *prooimion*.

The ending of the *theoria* in the VM is distinct in a number of ways. At VM II.305, we find a comparable passage to the conclusions of the VGT and VSM, in that here, too, Gregory declares his narrative sufficient. But he does not suggest prolonging the account would harm any reader, merely saying that for some readers, no amount of information would be enough to induce them to enter the struggle for virtue. Because his account of Moses' life is based on Scripture, perhaps Gregory was reluctant to suggest that the recorded events might strain credibility. Or perhaps he wished to avoid implying that he was working from an incomplete source, that the Scriptural account itself might have left out important episodes from Moses' life.¹⁸ He admits, in fact, that he is not providing the "whole life of Moses" (πάντα τοῦ Μωϋσέως

what is plausible in the narrative, for this is its most especial feature. And if plausibility is not present in it, the more clear and concise it is, all the more unbelievable it seems to the hearers" (δεῖ γὰρ ἔχεσθαι ἀεὶ τοῦ πιθανοῦ ἐν τῇ διηγήσει· τοῦτο γὰρ αὐτῆς μάλιστα ἴδιον ὑπάρχει· καὶ τούτου μὴ προσόντος αὐτῇ, ὅσῳ ἂν μᾶλλον σαφῆς καὶ σύντομος ἡ τοσούτῳ ἀπιστοτέρα τοῖς ἀκούοντις καταφαίνεται, Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 5, Spengel 79). Even if the other two virtues are present, without credibility the narrative will be a failure.

17 See ἀπιστέω and cognates in VSM and VGT conclusions quoted at the start of this Conclusion.

18 In her article on commentators in antiquity, Ineke Sluiter points out a tension much like what Gregory navigates here, the tension between authority and unclarity of the source. Sluiter argues, "The legitimization of writing commentaries is based on two presuppositions, which are in partial conflict. The first presupposition is that the source-text is valuable and should be made widely available and accessible. The second is that whatever is contained in the source-text is not optimally effective unless it is supplemented by the explanations of the commentator" (Ineke Sluiter, "The Dialectics of Genre: Some Aspects of Secondary Literature and Genre in Antiquity," in *Matrices of Genre: Authors, Canons, and Society*, ed. Mary Depew and Dirk Obbink [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000]: 183-203, 188). Though Gregory's allegorical interpretation of Moses' life appears in the context of an encomiastic *bios* and not a commentary, Sluiter's point is a useful one for understanding why Gregory takes care in this passage not to undermine Scripture's authority even as he highlights the clarity associated with his own interpretive work.

τὸν βίον) that is preserved in his biblical source. In any event, in the passage he appears to be concerned more with readers' motivations and actions – will they undertake the upward ascent? – than with their beliefs.

In VM II.319-321, the final paragraphs of the *bios* and the epilogue proper, we see an explicit reprise of the theme of “translation” (μεταφέρω) that Gregory introduced in the *prooimion* of the text. That “translation” is now presented as a process that involves making an ascent like Moses'.¹⁹ Gregory begins with an additional statement declaring the sufficiency of the account of Moses' life that appears in the *bios*, this time looking back to the original program of the work: “This our brief composition sets down for you, O man of God, these things about the perfection (τελειότης) of the life in accordance with virtue, Caesarius, writing down for you the life of the great Moses as a sort of prototype (προτότυπος) in the form of beauty.”²⁰ The original addressee of the text, the young Caesarius, is once again addressed directly. But in the very next line, Gregory offers a hint that the account is not intended for this reader only. He claims that the “form of beauty” he has traced is available “so that each one of us, through the imitation (μίμησις) of the ways of living (ἐπιτηδεύματα), might transcribe (μεταγράφω) in himself the type (χαρακτήρ) of beauty which has been shown to us.”²¹ Moses' life, according to Gregory, can function like a stamp that can leave an imprint on the willing imitator, transforming that imitator into its own shape.

¹⁹ At the end of VM II.319, Gregory uses God's address to Moses in Exod 33:17 and Moses' identification as friend of God in Exod 33:11 to confirm that “the life of Moses ascended the highest mountain of perfection” (πρὸς τὸν ἀκρότατον τῆς τελειότητος ὄρον ἀναβεβηκέναι τοῦ Μωϋσέως τὸν βίον, VM II.319).

²⁰ Ταῦτα σοι, ὃ ἄνθρωπε τοῦ Θεοῦ, περὶ τῆς τοῦ βίου τοῦ κατ' ἀρετὴν τελειότητος, Καισάριε, ὁ βραχὺς ἡμῶν οὗτος ὑποτίθεται λόγος, οὗτον τι πρωτότυπον ἐν μορφῇ κάλλους τὸν τοῦ μεγάλου Μωϋσέως ὑπογράφας σοι βίον (VM II.319).

²¹ ἐφ' ὃ τοὺς καθ' ἔκαστον ἡμῶν διὰ τῆς τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων μιμήσεως ἐν ἑαυτοῖς μεταγράφειν τοῦ προδειχθέντος ἡμῖν κάλλους τὸν χαρακτῆρα (VM II.319).

Having shown that he achieved his authorial goal, Gregory lays out a plan for his interlocutor:

Since the goal (τὸ τέλειον) of the virtuous way of life is the very thing sought by us, and the goal has been found in what we have said, it is time for you, noble friend, to look to that example (πρὸς τὸ ὑπόδειγμα) and, by translating into your own life (ἐπὶ τὸν ἴδιον μεταφέροντα βίον) the observations (made through higher allegorical interpretation [δι' ὑψηλοτέρας ἀναγωγῆς]) about what has been said narratively, to be known by God and to become his friend (φίλος).²²

The original addressee is invited to embody the lessons of the *bios* in his own life, re-writing the literary account with his own virtuous *praxeis*. Gregory refers to a process of “higher allegorical interpretation” (δι' ὑψηλοτέρας ἀναγωγῆς) that this reader – or any ideal reader – should apply to the account of Moses’ life in order to discern the goal toward which he should aim; the *bios*, with its paired *historia* and *theoria*, has modeled just such allegorical interpretation of the biblical text. Gregory here points to his own role as interpretive guide.

In the concluding sentence of the VM, Gregory also reprises his role as a spectator, cheering on the young man who is competing in a race toward the divine. He writes as though assured of his reader’s victory: “Whatever should be found by you, as your understanding is lifted up to what is most magnificent and divine (and I know well that many things will be found) will be entirely for the common benefit (κέρδος) in Christ Jesus. Amen.”²³ In this epilogue that is truly a prayer, as recommended by Aphthonius, Gregory expresses confidence that his reader’s further contemplation will result in greater understanding, which will lead, in

²² Ἐπεὶ οὖν τοῦτο παρ’ ἡμῶν τὸ ζητούμενον ἦν τί τὸ τέλειον τῆς ἐναρέτου πολιτείας ἐστίν, εὐρέθη δὲ διὰ τῶν εἰρημένων τὸ τέλειον, ὡρα σοι, ὃ γενναῖε, πρὸς τὸ ὑπόδειγμα βλέπειν καὶ τὰ δι’ ὑψηλοτέρας ἀναγωγῆς θεωρηθέντα περὶ τῶν ἱστορικῶν εἰρημένων· ἐπὶ τὸν ἴδιον μεταφέροντα βίον γνωσθῆναι τε ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ φίλον γενέσθαι αὐτοῦ (VM II.320).

²³ ὅ τι δ’ ἂν παρὰ σοῦ πρὸς τὸ μεγαλοπρεπέστερόν τε καὶ θειότερον ἐπαρθείσης σοι τῆς διανοίας εὐρεθῇ (πολλὰ δέ, εῦ οἶδα, εὐρεθῆσεται), κοινὸν πάντως ἔσται τὸ κέρδος ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἀμήν (VM II.321).

turn, to him being able to offer an additional benefit to the Christian community. Through the consideration of Moses' life, using the techniques modeled in the *bios*, the reader may imitate the exemplar's ability to bring some benefit to others; this is no small incentive to engage in the reading practices that Gregory has modeled in his composition.

In his three epilogues, Gregory continues to assert that encountering the lives of his three exemplars brings a multiplying and expanding good to the reader and his companions. He has designed each text's account of *praxeis* to reinforce this point. The narrative portrait of Macrina ends, as discussed in Chapter 4, with two embedded narrators who describe Macrina's miracle working and whose resulting deeper faith seems to serve as a model for the ideal readers. The internal audience, including subject-Gregory, is brought toward deeper belief, and through repeated acts of story-telling, Macrina's achievement in the higher philosophy was not "passed over in silence and her life rendered ineffective" (βίος μηδὲ ἀνωφελὴς παραδράμοι διὰ σιωπῆς συγκαλυφθεῖσα, VSM 1). The fact that Macrina is a rough contemporary of those earliest readers of Gregory's *bios* makes her story a kind of proof that exemplary virtue is achievable in the late fourth-century world.

When Gregory described Thaumaturgus appointing Alexander bishop at Comana, he depicted and assessed internal audiences as a way to recommend interpretive strategies, keeping the potential benefit for readers in mind. Again in the epilogue of the VGT, he highlights the importance of a benefit for the text's audience. Though the wonderworking bishop lived in a previous generation, Gregory emphasizes the signs and remnants of his *praxeis* that remain in the fourth century, the marks that have the potential to allow readers to approach the holiness they wish to imitate.

Although Moses' story took place in the distant past, repeated references to the way the

lessons of his life apply to the contemporary world are designed to elide the distance between Scriptural history and Gregory's fourth-century context. As shown in Chapter 3, the plague of frogs can serve as a reminder for readers to be careful about what kind of household art they view, lest it rouse their passions and lead to sinful action. Gregory's epilogue reveals his thoroughgoing effort to depict the exemplar's way of life as a prototype or "type" (χαρακτήρ) that is intended for mimesis.

Gregory writes a conclusion for each *bios* that is an ending but not a final one. Following on the instances of retrospective narration in each account of *euthanasia*, which seem designed to encourage readers to reconsider each exemplar's life as a whole, these three claims of sufficiency may also be understood as invitations to re-read the *bioi*, to seek out all their points of guidance for virtuous living. By claiming that what has been said is sufficient, Gregory attempts to encourage his readers to look back from the closing of each *bios* to earlier portions of the texts. The *bioi* are highly textured weavings, layered and rich, subject to repeated readings and new interpretations. In all three *bioi*, in the scenes of each exemplar's birth (*genos*), upbringing (*anatrophe*), education (*paideia*), deeds (*praxeis*), and noble death (*euthanasia*), Gregory has sought to praise his exemplars for their demonstrable progress on the path of virtue but simultaneously to render them imitable figures. Here in the epilogues of his three texts, Gregory calls his ideal readers not just to acts of imitation but to acts of virtuous reading and interpretation.

II. Weaving *Lives* for virtuous readers

The weaving metaphor for composition and the concepts of interlocked warp and weft have allowed us to trace the effects of Gregory's literary and rhetorical choices, to identify and explain patterns that appear across the three *bioi*, and to analyze in detail the different ways he

deals with essential tensions or problems in biographical writing. These tensions include nature and nurture, chance and choice, constancy and transformation, sensible and ineffable realities, particular and universal qualities, and exemplarity and imitability. Now that we have examined the construction of each woven garment up close, we should take a step back to consider how Gregory means for such a garment to be worn, that is, how he imagines encomiastic *bioi* might be used in the context of late fourth-century Christian life and *paideia*.

A telling depiction of the garment that is virtue appears in the *theoria* of the VM. In Gregory's allegorical interpretation of the priestly vestments in VM II.195-196, he describes the ephod and explains its significance:

Then on top of the foot-length tunic were worn two pieces of cloth, hanging down from the shoulders to the chest, and coming down the back they were joined to one another by two clasps, one on each shoulder. The clasps are stones, each with the names of six patriarchs engraved on them. The weaving of the cloths is multicolored. Hyacinth is twined together with purple, and bright red is mixed with flax. Gold thread is interspersed throughout all this, so that a single blended image (μίαν συγκεκραμμένην ὥραν) is constituted from the weaving, with the various dyes.

From these facts we learn the following: that the upper part of the outer garment, which is in a particular way an adornment for the heart, is a mixture of many and varied virtues. So the hyacinth is interwoven with purple, for cleanness of life is joined to kingliness. Bright red is mixed with linen, because the brightness and purity of life has in some way grown together with the redness of modesty. The gold, which illuminates these colors, alludes to the treasure reserved for such a way of life (τῷ τοιούτῳ βίῳ). The patriarchs engraved on the shoulders contribute in no small way to our adornment, for people's lives are adorned by the preceding examples of good men.²⁴

²⁴ Εἶτα δύο πέπλοι ἄνωθεν ἐπιβάλλονται τῷ ποδήρει, ἐκ τῶν ὥμων μέχρι τοῦ στήθους καὶ τῶν μεταφρένων καθήκοντες, δύο πόρπαις καθ' ἑκάτερον ὥμον ἀλλήλοις ἐνούμενοι. Αἱ δὲ πόρπαι λίθοι εἰσὶ τὰ τῶν πατριαρχῶν ὄνόματα ἐξ καθ' ἑκάτερον ἐν τοῖς χαράγμασι φέρουσαι. Ποικίλη δὲ τῶν πέπλων ἡ ἴστουργία. Υάκινθος μὲν πορφύρα συμπλέκεται, τὸ δὲ τοῦ κόκκου ἐρύθημα τῇ βύσσῳ μίγνυται. Πᾶσι δὲ τούτοις τὸ ἐκ χρυσίου νῆμα συγκατασπείρεται, ὡστε τῆς πολυειδοῦς ταύτης βαφῆς μίαν τινὰ συγκεκραμμένην ὥραν ἐκ τοῦ ὑφάσματος ἀπανγάζεσθαι. Αἱ δὲ διὰ τούτων μανθάνομεν ταῦτά ἔστιν, ὅτι τὰ ἄνω τῆς περιβολῆς, ὅσα τῆς καρδίας ιδίως γίνεται κόσμος, ἐκ πολλῶν καὶ διαφόρων ἀρετῶν κατακίρναται. Η οὖν ύάκινθος τῇ πορφύρᾳ συμπλέκεται. Τῇ γάρ καθαρότητι τῆς ζωῆς ἡ βασιλεία συνέζευκται. Κόκκος δὲ τῇ βύσσῳ συναναμίγνυται, ὅτι πέφυκέ πως τῷ τῆς αἰδοῦς ἐρυθήματι τὸ λαμπρόν τε καὶ καθαρὸν τοῦ βίου συμφύεσθαι. Οἱ δὲ χρυσὸς τοῖς ἄνθεσι τούτοις συμπεριλάμπων τὸν

He explains that it is the combination of virtues in an exemplary life that creates beauty. The colors used in the weaving represent both virtues in the soul and the rewards of virtue, the heavenly treasure that awaits the virtuous individual. Through the mingling and juxtaposition of varied threads that are virtuous acts, the ideal way of life not only becomes visible, but presents a “single blended image” (μία συγκεκραμμένη ὥρα). As shown, each of Gregory’s encomiastic *bioi* mimics the skillfully woven priestly garment, which combines instances of particular virtuous activity to present a “single blended image” of its subject, adorned “by the preceding examples of good men” (τοῖς προλαβοῦσι τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὑποδείγμασι).

The ephod is not just an object to be admired, but an item to be worn in the fulfillment of *leitourgia* for God and the worshipping community. Gregory’s encomiastic *bioi* are also utilitarian, part of the *accoutrement* of a Christian life of service. What purpose does Gregory intend them to serve? Gregory’s three texts all begin with a statement of his didactic aims and end with his assertion that the account gives readers what they need to learn about virtue. In all three *bioi*, he portrays the exemplary figures engaged in an ongoing and imitable process of *epektasis*. He emphasizes, in particular, the transformative potential of education, the impact of reading, revelation, and relationships on exemplars and members of their communities. We have also seen that throughout all three texts, Gregory models reproducible interpretive practices. Given all these shared, prominent textual features, it is apparent Gregory envisions a role for his encomiastic *bioi* in the Christian *paideia* of his late fourth-century world, as resources for

ἀποκείμενον τῷ τοιούτῳ βίῳ θησαυρὸν ὑπαινίσσεται. Πατρίαρχαι δὲ ταῖς ἐπωμίσιν ἐγγεγραμμένοι οὐ μικρὰ πρὸς τὸν τοιοῦτον καλλωπισμὸν ἡμῖν συνεισφέρουσι. Τοῖς γάρ προλαβοῦσι τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὑποδείγμασι κατακοσμεῖται μᾶλλον ἡ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ζωή (VM II.195-196).

describing and teaching ways to be virtuous readers who may become virtuous actors.

However, the texts are limited pedagogical tools. Virtuous Christian *praxis* and closeness to the divine, the objects of the ethical mimesis Gregory recommends in his *bioi*, are, as he presents them, dependent upon the readers' *paideia*. Imitation relies upon proper interpretation, which in turn relies upon training in proper practices of "seeing" and reading. Although the texts may be designed to equip the ideal readers with tools to approach earlier exemplary figures, whose deeds are preserved in Scripture and other texts, the limitations of readers, teachers, and their medium of communication cannot be ignored. Throughout Gregory's texts, the depictions of author, internal audiences, and exemplars interpreting texts and *praxeis* record examples of both success and failure. Members of internal audiences fall variously along the spectrum of blindness to correct vision. In the VSM, subject-Gregory was shown struggling to put into practice the virtue of self-control, even when he knew he should. Even the exemplars have their limits. Thaumaturgus was not prepared to begin the duties of his bishopric until he had received a divine revelation. Most significantly, as the example of Moses at Sinai shows, created human beings cannot overcome their epistemic limits, even if God reveals God's self to them "beyond the senses," in allegorical texts, or through the liturgy.

The corrective Gregory suggests in the *bioi* is the religious community. From young shepherds encountering their brothers in the wilderness, to elite young men attaching themselves to prominent Christian teachers, to mothers designing a reading curriculum, to older sisters educating younger brothers, to biographers drawing on the tradition passed down by the Fathers (VM II.45) or cheering on young people in their race to virtue, the presence of a community to guide interpretation seems fundamental to his conception of how both Scripture and exemplary lives should be read. Gregory's direct narrative commentary in all three texts may be intended as

a means to make himself available to his readers as a teacher, but, as he frequently notes, language is limited. It is only with the help of the Holy Spirit that the composition might let the light of the exemplar's virtue shine through, after all (VGT 1). But within the context of a Christian reading and worshipping community, the *bioi* are woven to function as propaedeutic texts, to prepare readers to practice and understand Christian Scriptural exegesis, which is itself a fundamental component of liturgy and *leitourgia* more broadly defined, including the ongoing education of other members of the community.

Gregory's three encomiastic *bioi*, though they describe diverse figures and *praxeis*, are all propaedeutic texts that construct a holistic profile of an ideal Christian reader, who is taught to be an active interpreter of texts and “texts,” especially of the narrative depictions of human action. This training takes place in the very process of reading each biographical account, because Gregory has adapted the rhetorical *topoi* typically employed in encomiastic compositions to portray his exemplars' ongoing development. This focus on the inductive development of an ideal reader corresponds to Gregory's conception of perpetual progress toward the divine, the *epektasis* that can be pursued by each Christian.

So who is Gregory of Nyssa as biographer? He is an artist skilled in “the art of weaving” (ἡ ψφαντικὴ τέχνη, *In canticum canticorum* GNO Online 24.271.20). Just as the virtuous person carefully constructs a unique woven garment from diverse strands – the virtuous qualities – of her life, so Gregory the biographer draws on a variety of sources and techniques to create each literary life and present the interlocking attributes of the virtuous exemplar for readers to consider. He is an athlete trained through discipline (ἀσκησις). In the VSM, subject-Gregory is trained by his close encounter with Macrina's holiness, a reflection of the divine image, in the work of interpreting signs; he depicts and models this work in his three texts. He is a skillful

sailor who knows how to navigate by the “fiery beacons” (*πύρσοι*, VGT 2; VM I.11, 13) that are the lives of earlier exemplary figures. Gregory himself is a reader who engages in interpretive heuristic tasks involving a range of sources – bodies seen or depicted, *praxeis* observed or described, and Scripture – looking beyond what is visible to what is hidden. He is an enthusiastic spectator, expressing “goodwill” (*εὔνοια*, VM I.1) as he urges his ideal readers to brave the “exertions” (*ἰδρώς*, VM II.305) required to ascend the mountain of virtue. Gregory the biographer writes to invite his reading audiences to embark on the path of *epektasis*, following after exemplars like Moses, Thaumaturgus, and Macrina who lead the way toward the goal of perfection, which is “to be known by God and become his friend” (*γνωσθῆναι τε ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ φίλον γενέσθαι αὐτοῦ*, VM II.320).

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