

Knowing Herodotus: The Historian and his *Histories* in Post-War  
Anglophone Literature

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## Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
1. Herodotus in Classical Reception Studies	11
2. Challenging History with an Amiable Companion	15
Part I ‘My Herodotus’: The <i>Histories</i> and Travel Writing	21
Chapter 1: Introduction	
1.1 Herodotus: The First Travel Writer?	22
1.2 The <i>Histories</i> as Literary Resource for Travel Writers	25
1.3 Using the <i>Histories</i> as a Guide	30
1.4 Reading the Character of Herodotus	33
1.5 Conclusions	36
Chapter 2: The ‘Perfect Travel Companion’ of Freya Stark	38
2.1 Stark and her Sources	40
2.2 Why Ionia?	42
2.3 Why Herodotus?	44
2.4 Stark’s Herodotus	45
2.5 A Sensible Herodotus	49
2.6 Conclusion	55
Chapter 3: ‘Open, friendly, a hail-fellow well-met’: Herodotus and Ryszard Kapuściński	57
3.1 Herodotus the Guide	60
3.2 Kapuściński’s Companion	62
3.3 The Curiosity of Herodotus	68
3.4 Conclusion	72
Chapter 4: Justin Marozzi’s Herodotean Pleasure-Seeker	74
4.1 ‘Herodotus would have been delighted’	75
4.2 ‘I am not Herodotus’: Herodotean alter-egos in <i>The Man Who Invented History</i>	86
4.3 Conclusion	90
Part II Counter- <i>Histories</i> : Herodotus and the Novel	92
Chapter 1: Introduction	
1.1 Fiction and Herodotus’ <i>Histories</i>	93

1.2 Trends in Herodotean Novels	95
1.3 Concluding Thoughts	103
Chapter 2: Imitating a Grasshopper: ‘Answering’ Herodotus in Gore Vidal’s <i>Creation</i>	105
2.1 The Biographical Aspect of <i>Creation</i>	106
2.2 The Herodotean Narrator and Vidal	116
2.3 Writing and Memory in <i>Creation</i>	123
2.4 Conclusion	131
Chapter 3: Malleable <i>Histories</i> in Michael Ondaatje’s <i>The English Patient</i>	134
3.1 The Quest for the Falling Man	135
3.2 <i>The English Patient</i> and <i>Histories</i> 1.8-12	140
3.3 The Distortion of Almásy’s <i>Histories</i>	144
3.4 Conclusion	151
Chapter 4: The Tripartite Herodotus of <i>American Gods</i>	153
4.1 Crafting America	154
4.2 <i>American Gods</i> and the Pan ‘Incident’	158
4.3 The Deception of Low Key Lyesmith	161
4.4 Shadow’s Herodotean Road-Trip	166
4.5 The <i>Histories</i> of Mr. Ibis	168
4.6 Conclusion	172
Conclusion	173
1. The Herodotus of Part I	174
2. The Herodotus of Part II	178
3. Some Final Thoughts	182
Bibliography	183

## Abstract

The evolution of Classical reception studies in recent decades has encouraged a corresponding growth of interest in assessing instances of Herodotean reception from antiquity to the present era. This thesis joins the conversation by exploring how Herodotus' *Histories* has been utilized in post-war anglophone literature. Concentrating on examples of Herodotean reception in travel literature and the novel, I examine the ways in which Herodotus has inspired authors to engage with the *Histories*. The featured travel writers regard the text as a guide to travel, with Herodotus characterised as the perfect companion to escort a traveller on their journey. For the novelists Herodotus' account becomes a means through which to explore the malleability of historical texts, with the *Histories* symbolising the flaws of Western narrative history and its tendency to neglect marginalised voices. By identifying the contexts from which these case studies emerged this thesis seeks to extract what motivations lie behind the authors' interaction with the *Histories* and examine the ways in which Herodotus' work has been utilized to correspond with ideas and audiences of the modern era.

## Introduction

As an observer he [Herodotus] was accused of many faults, from inaccuracy and exaggeration to downright lying; it is pleasant that so likable a man has in quite recent times been so extensively vindicated. Above all he was, and has always been, good company; and although about 2400 years have elapsed since his death, many still find him so.

R. P. Lister *The Travels of Herodotus* (1979: 176)

When the novelist and poet Richard Percival Lister (1914-2014) concluded *The Travels of Herodotus: In Quest of Western Civilization* (1979) by characterising Herodotus as ‘likable’, he joined a tradition in which authors mould the content of the *Histories* to suit their individual agendas. The book comprises a biographical travelogue of Herodotus’ life,<sup>1</sup> beginning in the land of his birth in Halicarnassus and ending at the alleged site of his death in Thurii.<sup>2</sup> The narrative is centred on the assumption that Herodotus visited the regions that are described in the *Histories*, the core text around which Lister constructs his account.<sup>3</sup> Across seven chapters,<sup>4</sup> Lister presents Herodotus as a voyager travelling through Asia, Africa, and Europe, reworking Herodotus’ description of these regions to augment the described journey. So, for example, Lister relates the customs of the Egyptians in his chapter on Herodotus’ travels in Egypt:

Sons were under no obligation to help their parents, but daughters were obliged to support them, whether they wished to or not.

There were no priestesses, men acting as priests of both goddesses and gods. Priests in other countries grew their hair long, but in Egypt they shaved their heads. In other countries relatives of the dead cut their hair off as a sign of mourning, but in Egypt, where men normally shaved their chins, they showed their respect for the dead by growing their hair long and allowing their beards to sprout (1979: 112).

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier example of this approach to the *Histories* can be found in the previous century in J. Talboys Wheeler’s two-volume *The Life and Travels of Herodotus in the Fifth Century before Christ: An Imaginary Biography based on Fact* (1855). See, also, Hall (2020).

<sup>2</sup> For his association with the colony of Thurii in ancient sources see, for example, Aristotle *Rhetorics* 1409a26-28, *Suda* H536, and Priestley (2014: 28-34)

<sup>3</sup> Lister had already adopted a similar approach to Marco Polo’s *The Travels of Marco Polo* (ca. 1300) in his 1976 book *Marco Polo’s Travels in Xanadu with Kublai Khan*. Indeed, the first chapter of this book is also called ‘A Traveller is Born’.

<sup>4</sup> Chapter I, entitled ‘A Traveller is Born’, deals with Herodotus’ origins in Asia Minor and explores the region’s relationship with the Persian Empire. Following this the reader travels with Herodotus to Thrace and Scythia in Chapter II, back to Halicarnassus in Chapter III, across Mesopotamia to Babylon in Chapter IV, to the African Continent to explore the culture of the Egyptians in Chapter V, and then across the Mediterranean to Athens in Chapter VI. The book ends in the Greek colonies in Italy with Herodotus’ death and legacy.

In Aubrey de Sélincourt's translation of the *Histories* the original description is as follows:

No woman holds priestly office, either in the service of goddess or god; only men are priests in both cases. Elsewhere priests grow their hair long; in Egypt they shave their heads. In other nations the relatives of the deceased in time of mourning cut their hair, but the Egyptians, who shave at all other times, mark a death by letting the hair grow on the head and chin. (*Histories* 2.36).<sup>5</sup>

Lister's book is not a line-by-line retelling of the *Histories* but does at times paraphrase what is found in Herodotus' account, such as in this instance. Lister extends beyond Herodotus' narrative by supplementing his account with references to additional texts and archaeological research, especially where new evidence has come to light or references to later history are deemed worthy of mention.

Sources that are cited by Lister in the book include Apollonius' *Argonautica*, the *I Ching*, Euripides' *Medea*, T. S. Eliot's 'Whispers of Immortality' (1919), and Homer's *Odyssey*. Lister, however, does not reference the academic work that he uses in his description of the ancient peoples that Herodotus described. This contrasts with his earlier book on Marco Polo's travels, which does include a bibliography. His chapter on Scythia and Thrace, for example, intertwines Herodotus' description of royal Scythian burials with more contemporary data ascertained from the finds of the Pazyryk tombs of the Altai region,<sup>6</sup> along with asides that emphasize when the archaeology supports Herodotus' account of the ancient peoples. Hence, amidst a description of

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<sup>5</sup> This is the translation of the *Histories* that will be used from this point onwards in this thesis. Of my six case studies, Justin Marozzi is the only author to cite this edition of the *Histories* as being his main source: 'The Herodotus who kept me company during my journeys, and from whom I quote most often, can be found in the highly accessible—and portable—Penguin Classics edition' (2008: xi). Michael Ondaatje drew on G. C. Macaulay's 1890 translation, whilst Freya Stark used Enoch Powell's 1949 translation. Ryszard Kapuściński was gifted Seweryn Hammer's 1955 translation, with his translator Klara Glowczewska favouring Robin Waterfield's (1998) for her translation into English. Neither Gore Vidal nor Neil Gaiman revealed which edition they drew on for their novels.

<sup>6</sup> As Lister does not cite the research he is referring to on this subject, we can only speculate on the texts he was referencing. For example, earlier in the decade Sergei Ivanovich Rudenko's 1970 study *Frozen Tombs of Siberia: The Pazyryk Burials of Iron Age Horsemen* was published in English by University of California Press. Owing to its proximity to the date of *The Travels of Herodotus* and the wealth of material contained within the volume it seems reasonable to presume that this is a text used by Lister in his research.

the archaeologists' findings, he emphasizes Herodotus' veracity by stating that: 'The dead, wearing their finest clothes and jewellery, were arranged, *as Herodotus described*,<sup>7</sup> on mattresses' (1979: 72).<sup>8</sup>

The desire to prove the accuracy of Herodotus' account occupies a substantial portion of Lister's book and illustrates how the author interacts with the *Histories* within his work. Lister wants his reader to see 'how amazingly accurate, thorough, and professional were Herodotus's observations and research' (1979: 1), and so constructs a narrative with the aim of proving it. This results in a text that straddles notions of truth and fiction. The author may have based the narrative on historical sources, coupled with contemporary archaeology; nevertheless, the book's engagement with Herodotus and the *Histories* is subject to the whims of Lister's own imagination. Embellishments such as Lister characterising Herodotus as 'likable' and a 'good companion', as illustrated in the opening quotation, are an illuminating demonstration of the author imposing his own tastes upon his engagement with the *Histories*.

This impulse to mould the content of *Histories* to support an author's agenda is a mode of engagement that is not unique to Lister. Whilst it is no longer extant,<sup>9</sup> the fifth century BCE historian and physician Ctesias of Cnidus' twenty-three book *Persica* stands in contrast to Lister's approach because it sets itself in opposition to Herodotus' account.<sup>10</sup> Ctesias' account of the development of the Persian empire takes the *Histories* and 'corrects' the alleged errors of Herodotus' text. And so, for example, when Herodotus describes the Persian king Cyrus' capture of Lydia the defeated king Croesus is shown mercy by his conqueror after Croesus recalls the words of Solon regarding the instability of a man's fortune (*Histories* 1.86-87).<sup>11</sup> Ctesias' version

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<sup>7</sup> My italics.

<sup>8</sup> The corresponding passage to this is *Histories* 4.71, where Herodotus notes that once the corpse has reached its final resting place it is 'laid in the tomb on a mattress, with spears fixed in the ground on either side to support a roof of withies laid on wooden poles, while in other parts of the great square pit various members of the king's household are buried beside him: one of his concubines, his butler, his cook, his groom, his steward, and his chamberlain—all of them strangled. Horses are buried too, and gold cups (the Scythians do not use silver or bronze), and a selection of his other treasures.'

<sup>9</sup> See Alexander Meeus (2017: 172- 201) for the difficulty of categorizing Ctesias due to his work being in fragmentary form.

<sup>10</sup> According to Photius, Ctesias accused Herodotus 'of falsehood in many passages' and calls him 'an inventor of fables. Ctesias is later than Herodotus, and says that he was an eyewitness of most of what he describes, and that, where this was not the case, he obtained his information directly from Persians, and in this manner he composed his history. He not only disagrees with Herodotus, but also in some respects with Xenophon the son of Gryllus. Ctesias flourished in the time of Cyrus, son of Darius and Parysatis, brother of Artaxerxes who succeeded to the throne' (*Library* 72.1).

<sup>11</sup> *Histories* 1.32, which will be discussed further in Part II Chapter 4.

does not reference Croesus' acknowledgement of Solon's wisdom;<sup>12</sup> rather Croesus is pardoned by Cyrus after thrice being freed from his chains whilst imprisoned in the temple of Apollo (Photius,<sup>13</sup> *Library* 72.5).<sup>14</sup> Ctesias was a Greek doctor who worked in the Persian court for King Artaxerxes II; according to Diodorus' *Historical Library* 2.32.4, he came to court as a prisoner of war 'having been taken into service by the King because of his medical knowledge.' His close association with the Persian court and its members led to his exploring of the events surrounding the Greco-Persian wars from the 'Persian' perspective, setting it in opposition to the purported hellenocentrism of Herodotus' account.

From Plutarch to T. E. Lawrence and beyond,<sup>15</sup> authors have read in Herodotus varying traits which display the influence of their respective biases. The untrustworthy Herodotus of Ctesias sharply contrasts with the charming and accurate Herodotus of Lister, and yet both authors were working from the same source text. This diversity illustrates a trend in Herodotean reception that sees authors engage with Herodotus' writing through generous helpings of authorial invention. The focus of this thesis will be to explore this diversity in a Post-war anglophone context. Part I will examine three works of travel literature in particular: Freya Stark's *Ionia: A Quest* (1954); Ryszard Kapuściński's *Travels with Herodotus* (2004), and Justin Marozzi's *The Man Who Invented History* (2008), and Part II concentrates on the novels *Creation* (1981) by Gore Vidal, *The English Patient* (1992) by Michael Ondaatje, and *American Gods* (2001) by Neil Gaiman.

The fifty-four-year period in which these books were published and the cultural shifts that occurred over this historical period has its effect on the texts and their authors' respective focuses. It is during this era, for example, that Frank Miller's (b. 1957) Eisner award-winning comic series *300* (1998) would tap into the long history of depicting the Battle of Thermopylae (*Histories* 7.201-233) as the struggle of heroic Western warriors against a barbaric (and non-European) threat,<sup>16</sup> whilst simultaneously allowing the author to channel his anti-Muslim bigotry.<sup>17</sup> Other examples of the trope being applied to events of the modern era include the comparison between battle of the

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<sup>12</sup> Both accounts, however, do involve a degree of divine intervention in association with Apollo, as Herodotus describes the flames of Croesus' pyre being doused by the divinity (*Histories* 1.87).

<sup>13</sup> Photius was a 9th century CE Byzantine scholar and so was writing far later than Ctesias, but his epitome remains the main source for Ctesias.

<sup>14</sup> This particular section of Photius' work is a summary of Books 7-9 of Ctesias' *Persica*.

<sup>15</sup> Plutarch is in reference to *On the Malice of Herodotus*, whilst T.E. Lawrence refers to a letter he wrote to David Garnett dated 14th February 1930.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Subho Basu, Craig Champion, and Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn (2007).

<sup>17</sup> This bigotry would intensify following the events of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001, and is arguably at its most pronounced Miller's 2011 graphic novel *Holy Terror*.

Alamo to the fate of the Spartans at Thermopylae.<sup>18</sup> In Miller's *300* the Persians can be understood as analogues for how he saw the inhabitants of the contemporary Muslim world.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, in Jehanzeb Dar's analysis of the depiction of Muslims in popular American Comic books, Dar notes how Miller's Persians are coded in the same stereotypical manner as Muslims are depicted in the medium: 'violent, oppressive, and garbed in typical Oriental fashion, i.e., turban-clad, robed, and bearded' (2010: 104).<sup>20</sup> This assessment is borne out by Miller's own statements regarding the parallels between the ancient and modern conflict. When questioned if he thought the United States could be regarded as a modern-day Sparta, Miller responded, 'Certainly, but we've also got a lot more bombs. *I think there's no denying that the same ideas are at stake,*<sup>21</sup> just that the odds are very, very different.'<sup>22</sup> By engaging in such stereotypes and using the *Histories* to support them Miller demonstrates the potential for Herodotus' work to be weaponized in the service of racist and nationalist ideologies.

In contrast to Miller's engagement with *Histories* 7.201-233 is the application of *Histories* 2.104 within civil rights discourse in this period.<sup>23</sup> Prior to the twentieth century, this passage was applied by anti-slavery campaigners to counteract the argument that the history of civilization within the continent of Africa was lesser in comparison to that of the Europeans. For example, in a speech delivered in 1848 by the anti-slavery campaigner, historian, clergyman, and politician John Gorham Palfrey (1796-1881) would reference the passage when challenging the claim that people of African descent are 'naturally inferior':

The gentlemen speaks of the Egyptians. Undoubtedly he has attended to the curious hint in Herodotus, bearing that question ... He cannot have overlooked that singular passage in so common an author as Herodotus, in which the old chronicler has been thought to

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<sup>18</sup> Examples include the battle of the Alamo, which David Levene (2007:394) notes was 'immediately and repeatedly' compared to Thermopylae after it took place.

<sup>19</sup> In 2007 the *Los Angeles Times* interviewed U.S. Marines on the subject of the film adaptation of *300*. Ilario G. Pantano, a former Marine who returned to the military following the events of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 and had later been cleared of the premeditated murder of two Iraqi captives, stated that 'I barked and cheered my way through *300* with two fellow Marine infantry officers who have shed blood and tears in the back alleys of Iraq'.

<sup>20</sup> See, also, Frank Mehring (2020).

<sup>21</sup> My italics.

<sup>22</sup> David Itzkoff (2007).

<sup>23</sup> 'The Egyptians said that they considered the Colchians part of Sesostris' army. I myself guessed it, partly because they are black-skinned and woolly-haired; though that indeed counts for nothing, since other peoples are, too; but my better proof was that the Colchians and Egyptians and Ethiopians are the only nations that have from the first practised circumcision' (*Histories* 2.104).

say, that the ancient Egyptians, the remote source perhaps of Greek civilization, were woolly-headed negroes (1984: 8).

*Histories* 2.104 would later be adopted by writers concerned with civil rights and applied in a manner similar to its use in the previous centuries. The Jamaican American historian, author, and journalist Joel Augustus Rogers' (1880/83- 1966) self-published novel *From "Superman" to Man* (1917) depicts an encounter between an African American Pullman Porter called Dixon and an openly racist United States senator. It is their exchange that drives the narrative. Rogers' protagonist calls upon Herodotus early in their debate, after being confronted with the following statement:

"Tell me has the Negro race ever produced a Julius Caesar, a Shakespeare, a Montezuma, a Buddha, a Confucius? The Negro and all the Negroid races are inherently inferior. It is idiocy to say the Negro is the equal of the Caucasian. God Almighty made black to serve white. He placed an everlasting curse on the sons of Ham and the black man shall forever serve the white." And his face flushed with excitement. (1917: 19).

In response to this Dixon calls upon the *Histories* and states:

"The belief that the history of the Negro began with his slavery in the New World, while popular, is highly erroneous. The black man, like the Aztec, was civilized when the dominant branches of the Caucasian variety were savages. You will remember, sir, that Herodotus, the Father of History, and eyewitness, distinctly mentions the black skins and woolly hair of the Egyptians of his day. In Book II, Chapter 104, of his history he says,

'I believe the Colchians are a colony of Egyptians, because like them they have black skins and woolly hair.' (1917: 19).

The discourse at the centre of Rogers' narrative may be fictional but this passage serves as an effective summary for how *Histories* 2.104 had been, and, indeed, would be, applied in the face of anti-black racism. In such instances Herodotus' account becomes a tool through which the oppressed engages with the cultural objects of the oppressor. Thus, Herodotus' status as the father of History lends him an authority which in turn reflects favourably upon the later sources that cite material from the *Histories*.

Later examples from the era this thesis covers can be found in African American journalism where writers such as the journalist, educator, and civil rights leader Carl J. Murphy (1889-1967) show how bigotry can be challenged through education, with the *Histories* being an important element of this defence. In his 1959 article for the *Baltimore Afro-American* entitled 'Us Africans', Murphy was inspired by the following question raised by Dr. Charles Wesley the president of Central State College, Wilberforce, Ohio: 'What should be done with persons who announce in public and in print that colored people have never made positive contributions to any civilization?' Murphy first recommends his reader to obtain Rand McNally's Histomap of world

history due to its value in showing that ‘Egyptians, Africans ruled the world from the year 2000 to 1150 B.C.’ Murphy then advises the following to his reader:

Add to this map a tiny \$2.50 book worth its weight in gold: Its title is “Herodotus.” Written 2400 years ago by a man whom all scholars honor as the “father of history.” The golden words of Herodotus, written 450 years before Christ, when this first historian travelled and lived among the great nations of his day are these: “The Egyptians are black with wooly hair.” Then Herodotus added: “They are the wisest, the best looking and the longest-lived people in the world.” Egyptians were first to become civilized. All other nations learned and borrowed from Egypt. ... Egypt included Libya, Sudan, Ethiopia and part of what is now Palestine.

As with Rogers, for Murphy the reason why Herodotus’ description of the Egyptians is an important source to draw on in defence of African civilisation is because Herodotus is ‘a creditable historian’ who travelled in the country. The rhetorical value of using the *Histories* in such a way then lies in Herodotus’ status as the father of history and in the reliability of his account of the sites he saw during his travels.

With the six cases studies in my thesis, the emphasis of their respective authors is to take a stance that has more in common with the progressive approach of the authors who looked to *Histories* 2.104 for inspiration rather than the regressive engagement of Frank Miller. They process Herodotus’ work through their respective perspectives and by incorporating their contemporary experiences produce receptions that present new ways of understanding the *Histories*, which this thesis will explore. Whilst the case studies demonstrate individual responses to the *Histories* in light of the authors’ interests what is also notable is how many shared features are detectable across these works. The *Histories* is regarded as a foundational text that sits at the start of a tradition with which each author seeks to engage. For the authors of travel literature Herodotus is their forebear and, to varying degrees, a template by which to measure themselves. Herodotus occupies the status of companion, as was noted earlier in Lister’s conclusion. The novels, too, engage with the concept of origins, with Herodotus’ reputation as the ‘father of history’<sup>24</sup> highlighting the problematic nature of recorded history and the need to challenge the official narrative of events. The interaction of truth and fiction in these books suggests why this dichotomy may have drawn the authors to Herodotus’ work. The authors are drawn both to Herodotus’ status as the father of history and to the potential for fabrication that his parallel reputation as the father of lies implies.

What will also be explored is the depiction of Herodotus as a character, which relates to the role of fictionality within Herodotean reception. Readers of the *Histories* have no true idea as to who Herodotus was. Therefore, I will consider how much an author’s depiction is dependent

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<sup>24</sup> Cicero *Laws* (1.5).

on the content of *Histories* and what aspects are the product of their imagination. In conjunction with this will be an examination of how these authors use Herodotus and the *Histories* to respond to contemporary events, such as critiquing the present, by idealizing Herodotus and the world he described. Similarly, if Herodotus is not featured prominently then what role do characters that can be read as Herodotean alter-egos, in that they represent Herodotus or possess Herodotean traits, play in these works?

## **1. Herodotus in Classical Reception Studies**

The potential for a diversity of readings is a key facet of Classical Reception theory, which emphasises the important role the reader plays in how ancient material is understood. Classical Reception theory emerged from both the study of the Classical Tradition and development of Reception Theory. Prior to the development of Classical Reception, the study of the Classical Tradition was the dominant approach to understanding how the Classical world was used and understood in post-Classical interactions.<sup>25</sup> As the name implies, the emphasis here was on the idea of continuity. Classical Reception would evolve this approach by incorporating more recent literary models, in particular Reception theory, a literary concept that places particular emphasis on how the interpretation of a text is modified by each individual reader's experiences and knowledge.<sup>26</sup> As Charles Martindale described it in *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (1993):

our current interpretations of ancient texts, whether or not we are aware of it, are, in complex ways, constructed by the chain of receptions through which their continued readability has been effected (1993: 7).<sup>27</sup>

That an individual's understanding of any text, be it ancient or modern, is a subjective rather than fixed engagement is a concept of central importance for the purposes of this thesis. The chasm of time that lies between the case studies included in this thesis and the key text with which they interact results in receptions that reveal the peculiarities of each individual author and the unique

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the first chapter of Lorna Hardwick's *Reception Studies* (2003) for the shift from tradition to reception in the Classics and Felix Budelmann and Johannes Haubold (2008) on the role of tradition in the Classics prior to the development of Classical reception studies.

<sup>26</sup> See Hardwick (2003), Hardwick and Christopher Stray (2008), and Martindale (1993 and 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Martindale would later describe his work in *Redeeming the Text* as 'a manifesto for the adoption of reception theory within the discipline of classics' (Martindale 2006: 1).

way in which they have engaged with the *Histories*. As Hardwick and Stray are keen to emphasise in their introduction to *A Companion to Classical Reception*, receptions are ‘complex activities’ which are

part of wider processes. Interactions with a succession of contexts, both classically and non-classically orientated, combine to produce a map that is sometimes unexpectedly bumpy with its highs and lows, emergences and suppressions and, sometimes, metamorphoses (2008: 1).

This is very much the case with the following case studies. The texts both engage with a myriad of sources when crafting their respective engagements with the *Histories* and reflect each author’s individual background, as well as their wider conceptions of the world around them.

In their introduction to *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Herodotus in Antiquity and Beyond* (2016), Jessica Priestley and Vasiliki Zali recall Arnaldo Momigliano’s statement that ‘There was no Herodotus before Herodotus’<sup>28</sup> and add that ‘there have been and will be many Herodotuses after him’ (2016: 1). This they credit to the fact that the *Histories* continues to inspire artists, writers, filmmakers, and others to the present day. Owing to the theoretical framework emerging towards the end of the twentieth century and developing across the following decade, studies focussing on Herodotus within the context of Classical reception theory arise concurrently with these advances. Priestley and Zali’s Brill volume is the most extensive work on the reception of Herodotus thus far produced, as it covers a wide variety of receptions from antiquity to the present with the aim of uncovering new areas of exploration within the realm of Herodotean reception.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, topics range from Thucydides’ engagement with the *Histories*,<sup>30</sup> the re-emergence of the *Histories* in Europe of the early second millennium,<sup>31</sup> to the suggestion of Herodotean parallels in late twentieth-century developmental studies.<sup>32</sup>

The potential for greater study of Herodotean reception within the categories of travel literature and narrative fiction is addressed by Priestley and Zali who observe that ‘Almost every period since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC would benefit from more study’ (2016: 13). They further highlight

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<sup>28</sup> Momigliano (1966: 129).

<sup>29</sup> Prior to this, Priestley’s earlier monograph *Herodotus and Hellenistic Culture: Literary Studies in the Reception of the Histories* (2014) contributed to the subject by looking at the reception of Herodotus’ work in the Hellenistic era. Thomas Harrison and Joseph Skinner’s *Herodotus in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2020) is the most recent volume to examine Herodotean reception, but this time in the modern era.

<sup>30</sup> Marek Węcowski (2016) and Zali (2016).

<sup>31</sup> Félix Racine (2016), Adam Foley (2016), and Dennis Looney (2016).

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Eldon Stevens (2016).

‘the use of the *Histories* as inspiration for travel, travel writing and reportage’ and ‘the nature and purpose of fictional adaptations of subject materials’ as being worthy of future study (2016: 14). Of the six case studies featured in this thesis, the levels of prior analysis vary markedly, often due to the popularity of the work and its author. Amongst the travel literature examples, Ryszard Kapuściński’s *Travels with Herodotus* has garnered the most attention due to his status as an internationally acclaimed journalist and author. Magdalena Horodecka (2014) and Kinga Kosmala (2016), for example, have both examined the close relationship between Kapuściński and Herodotus that is described by the author in *Travels with Herodotus*, with both studies exploring the manner in which Kapuściński shapes Herodotus into his alter-ego.

By contrast, Freya Stark’s *Ionia: A Quest* and its engagement with the *Histories* has received very little analysis. Stark was a respected and popular travel writer during her lifetime and has been the focus of three biographies by Caroline Moorehead (1985), Molly Izzard (1993), and Jane Fletcher Geniesse (2010). Several articles have been written on her experiences and travels including Syrine C. Hout’s (2002) exploration of Stark’s work in a post-colonial context and the examination by Malise Ruthven (2006), Stark’s godson, of the anti-Imperialist element of Stark’s writing. However, secondary literature on *Ionia: A Quest* is largely limited to contemporary book reviews and references to the work in later biographies where Herodotus’ role is notably unexamined if mentioned at all.<sup>33</sup> One of the more recent responses to the book was in a 2011 article published in the *Guardian* in which popular travel writers described their favourite travel books. Within the article the travel writer Colin Thubron nominated *Ionia: A Quest*, describing it as both ‘enchanting’ and ‘disturbingly moralistic’, and crediting the book with inspiring his career path. But, again, the Herodotean element is unexplored. Out of the three travel writers Justin Marozzi fares least well with regards to examinations of his work, as the responses are currently restricted to book reviews and his own promotion for the book.<sup>34</sup> There exists, then, the space for further exploration of the authors’ engagement with the *Histories* within the context of the genre of travel literature.

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<sup>33</sup> G.G. Arnakis’ review, for example, notes that Stark ‘turns avidly to the sources, and discovers that Herodotus is still a valuable guide to the background of the present ruins’ (1955: 485), but the format of the piece does not allow for any deeper exploration.

<sup>34</sup> His 2008 article for the *Independent* entitled ‘Justin Marozzi’s Classical Grand Tour’ is discussed in Part I, Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Of my six case studies, the highly popular and acclaimed *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje has received by far the most analysis.<sup>35</sup> A substantial proportion of studies examine the novel in a non-Herodotean context.<sup>36</sup> Responses to the Herodotean influence on Ondaatje's work include studies exploring how Ondaatje's research led to Herodotus becoming attached to the project,<sup>37</sup> Ondaatje's application of *Histories* 1.8-2 in the narrative of *The English Patient*,<sup>38</sup> as well as examinations of the post-colonial aspects of the novel and how this theme connects to Herodotus' original text.<sup>39</sup> Like Ondaatje, Neil Gaiman's popularity as an author, as well as the many successful adaptations of his novels,<sup>40</sup> has seen an increasing amount of attention being paid to his work. *American Gods* has seen studies ranging from Irina Rata's (2015) examination of intertextuality in the novel, to Siobhan Carroll's (2012) exploration of how America as a nation is interrogated in Gaiman's narrative.<sup>41</sup> Less attention has been paid to the role of Herodotus' *Histories* in the novel thus far with Debbie Felton's (2015) investigation of the prominence of *Histories* 1.32 and Vanda Zajko's (2020) exploration of how the lack of Greek myth in the novel is substituted by the presence of Herodotus being notable exceptions.

Whilst Gore Vidal's prominence as a writer and political commentator garnered him much attention during his lifetime and beyond, the majority of responses to *Creation* are largely limited to contemporary book reviews and segments of books that survey Vidal's wider oeuvre.<sup>42</sup> Studies that focus on the novel have looked at its applicability to modern wars,<sup>43</sup> and at the place of cultural relativism within the novel,<sup>44</sup> but examining the role of Herodotus is a recent development and is

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<sup>35</sup> *The English Patient* was the recipient of several awards including Booker Prize in 1992 and the Golden Man Booker Prize in 2018, which was a special award to commemorate the prize's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The film adaptation was, likewise, the recipient of many prizes including nine Academy Awards, two Golden Globes, and five BAFTAs.

<sup>36</sup> For example, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (1994), Susan Ellis (1996), Madhumalati Adhikari (2003), and Stephanie Hilger (2004).

<sup>37</sup> Vernon Provencal (2003a)

<sup>38</sup> Provencal (2003b)

<sup>39</sup> Rachel Friedman (2008).

<sup>40</sup> Including Matthew Vaughan's *Stardust* (2007), Henry Selick's *Coraline* (2009), and Starz's television adaptation of *American Gods* (2017-2021).

<sup>41</sup> Additional examples of non-Herodotean engagement include Susan Gorman (2018) and Jesper Skyette Sodemann (2019).

<sup>42</sup> Including Chapter 4, 'The Ancient World: *Julian, Creation*', of Robert F. Kiernan's book *Gore Vidal* (1982) and Mary Renault's 1981 review of *Creation* for *The New York Review of Books*: 'The Wise Lord and the Lie'.

<sup>43</sup> Neilson (2004).

<sup>44</sup> Vassilaki Papanicolaou (2012).

largely limited to Heather Neilson's 2016 survey of the novel's Herodotean themes.<sup>45</sup> As was the case with the travel literature examples, there is the scope to explore the prominent position of the *Histories* in these novels and examine what choices lie behind each authors' motivation to highlight Herodotus' influence.

## **2. Challenging History with an Amiable Companion**

This study will look at six case studies and through close readings of each work will explore the processes through which these authors engage with Herodotus and the *Histories*. The case studies will be split into two parts. Part I, entitled "My Herodotus': The *Histories* and Travel Writing', will be dedicated to Herodotus' role in the genre of travel literature and Part II, 'Counter-*Histories*: Herodotus and the Novel', will examine three novels in the genres of historical fiction, historiographic metafiction, and fantasy. Part I will open with a chapter that establishes Herodotus' place within the genre of travel literature. The *Histories* is regarded as an early form of travel writing due to Herodotus declaring that he travelled in search of data.<sup>46</sup> Interpreting the work in this manner has resulted in travel writers drawing upon the text as a means of supplementing their own travels. This can take the form of engaging with the *Histories* as a reliable literary resource on the regions he described, but it has also resulted in travellers looking to the *Histories* as a guidebook. Authors in the latter category essentially filter the regions in which they travel through a two and a half millennia year old lens and they do this because Herodotus' account is deemed to be a trustworthy description of the world he depicted. The nature of the genre with its focus on the experiences of the individual traveller through their journeys has also resulted in the authors' use of the *Histories* to attribute personality traits to Herodotus. This latter feature is of particular interest as it forms a substantial aspect of the case studies within Part I. Freya Stark, Ryszard Kapuściński, and Justin Marozzi were each enthralled by the concept of Herodotus' personality and the following chapters of Part I will explore how this fascination with Herodotus and his *Histories* manifested.

Chapter 2 will be dedicated to Freya Stark's depiction of Herodotus and his work in her travelogue *Ionia: A Quest* (1954). The book emerged in the immediate post-war period and the

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<sup>45</sup> Neilson (2016). Neilson also discusses the novel in her 2014 book *Political Animal*, which examines the depiction of the concept of power in Vidal's writing.

<sup>46</sup> For example, *Histories* 2.143. Lionel Casson dedicated an entire chapter to Herodotus in his 1974 study *Travel in the Ancient World* entitled 'The First Travel Writer'. See, also, Blanton (2002: 6) and Thompson (2011: 36). The idea of Herodotus as a proto-travel writer is discussed further in the introduction of Part I of this thesis.

turmoil of the previous decades looms over the work, as she travels through the Western coastal region of Turkey in order to escape to an idealised Ionian past. A prolific researcher when preparing for her travels, Stark's work is interwoven with a myriad of references to her sources which she uses to aid her reconstruction of a lost world. Of these sources, three authors are the most prominent: Strabo, Pausanias, and Herodotus, with Herodotus being the second most important personality in the work after Stark herself. The authors writing on the region influences their status within the travelogue, but Herodotus' elevation to supporting character is unique in the book, as he becomes her 'perfect travel companion' (1954: 17). For Stark Herodotus was both a guide to the region and a companion to her travels, and when constructing her travel narrative, she gave him distinctive characteristics. The key aspects to her reading are her understanding of Herodotus as being 'sensible',<sup>47</sup> as well as his interest in cultures beyond his own. These are traits she draws from the text of the *Histories* and her own imagination. What will also be considered here is how her writing of Herodotus contrasts to her engagement with other aspects of the ancient world and what this in turn reveals about her own tastes. A central concern of Stark's that is evident across much of her writing was to encourage a deeper understanding in the West of the cultures and history of Western and Central Asia. How Stark's depiction of Herodotus connects with this theme will also be examined here.

The third chapter will focus on Ryszard Kapuściński's *Travels with Herodotus* (2004). Although written in Polish and later translated into English, Herodotus' dominant position justifies the work's inclusion here. Indeed, Kapuściński's travelogue-cum-memoir of his life and career as an international journalist is so tied to Herodotus that it has been questioned whether Kapuściński wanted his reader to see himself as a modern Herodotus.<sup>48</sup> This particular trope is testament to the power that Herodotus' authorial persona still exerts but also echoes the use of Herodotus-type figures that occur in the narrative of the *Histories*, such as Solon. And so, as the *Histories* featured Herodotus 'stand-ins', so these sources create new 'Herodotus-esque' figures. Like Lister, Stark, and Marozzi, Kapuściński sees Herodotus as someone he enjoys spending time with and shapes his characterisation accordingly. His Herodotus is fascinated by the world around him, much as the proto-journalist that Kapuściński characterises him as ought to be. In addition to this, Kapuściński is convinced that Herodotus would have been a supporter of causes for which he too was concerned, such as anti-slavery and anti-authoritarianism. Kapuściński uses segments of the text of the *Histories* to support these ideas whilst simultaneously letting his imagination fill in the

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<sup>47</sup> *Ionian: A Quest* (1954: 50 and 69).

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Horodecka (2014) and Kosmala (2016).

perceived gaps. This ‘merging’ of the Polish author with the ancient Greek will be the chief concern of this chapter.

The fourth and final chapter of Part I will look at the journalist and travel writer Justin Marozzi’s travelogue *The Man Who Invented History* (2008). Published fifty-four years after Stark’s *Ionia: A Quest*, it nevertheless shares Stark’s fascination with the figure of Herodotus. And, like Stark, Marozzi’s Herodotus is informed by the author’s own tastes, with Marozzi shaping his Herodotus as ‘an educated, enlightened, adventurous, endlessly curious man with a dazzling intellect and a felicitous turn of phrase’ (2008: 9). The book opens with an introduction that proclaims ‘Why We Should All Read Herodotus’ (2008: 1) and is followed by four parts with the journey beginning in Turkey, the country of the historian’s birth; Iraq, chosen both for the location of Babylon but also for the ongoing international war that was raging during his visit in 2004; Egypt, where he is inspired by Herodotus’ fascination with the country; and, finally, Greece. What will also be examined here is the book’s focus on the concept of pleasure and how Marozzi draws that notion from the *Histories*. Exploring these elements of Marozzi’s work illustrates the degree to which the author projects his own preferences on to his version of Herodotus. This is a theme that will be a major feature of Part I, because whilst the texts occupy the realm of non-fiction their interactions with the *Histories* employ imaginative elements in their construction.

Part II investigates engagements with Herodotus and the *Histories* within the format of the novel. Given the wide scope of the *Histories* there is a lot of material on which to draw and this allows novelists who interact with Herodotean content to focus solely on one segment of the account without the need to involve the wider narrative. The first chapter of this section will, therefore, begin by exploring the appearance of Herodotus and the *Histories* across genres, with particular focus on novels that both draw on Herodotean content and name Herodotus within the narrative or in the novel’s supplementary material. And so, the authors examined here must acknowledge their debt to Herodotus in order to be included. The purpose of highlighting Herodotus’ role is an important factor in understanding an author’s engagement. For those who seek to draw upon Herodotus’ standing as the father of history there are others who toy with the concept of Herodotus as the father of lies.

In the latter grouping can be found Gore Vidal’s *Creation* (1981), which will be the focus of Chapter 2. *Creation* is one of the few examples of a work of narrative fiction which attempts to tackle the *Histories* as a whole. Situated within the genre of historical fiction the novel takes the form of the memoir of a Persian diplomat called Cyrus Spitama who recounts his travels across the Persian Empire and beyond. At the centre of the narrative lies Herodotus’ *Histories*; it sets the memoir in motion and informs the progress of the narrative through the retelling, and in some

cases reworking, of several events that were originally described in the *Histories*. What holds the work together is the narrative voice of Cyrus who, like the travel writers introduced above, adopts a Herodotean persona in the work. Vidal's narrator, however, purports to have very little esteem for Herodotus with the narrative of the novel framed as a correction of the *Histories'* account of the Greco-Persian wars. However, a closer look at Vidal's engagement reveals an adherence to the *Histories* which contrasts to the protestations of his protagonist. Vidal's interaction with the *Histories* and whether it is reconfigured to correct Herodotus' account or to address the author's deeper concerns regarding Western narrative history will be explored within this chapter.

Michael Ondaatje's historiographic metafiction *The English Patient* (1992) will be examined in the second chapter of Part II. Like Vidal's novel, *The English Patient* is set in the past but unlike *Creation* it dates to a few decades prior to its composition. The novel takes the historical figure of László Ede Almásy de Zsadány et Törökszentmiklós and his exploration of the deserts of north-east Africa and crafts a fiction around his life that includes an affair with a married woman and a horrific plane crash from which he does not recover. Into this fiction is woven Herodotus and his *Histories*. In *The English Patient* Ondaatje uses the *Histories* to play with the concept of history and the potential for manipulation in historical accounts. He takes true life figures and events and imposes Herodotean material on to them. The application of the Gyges and Candaules' wife narrative of *Histories* 1.8-12 is the main example of this. Ondaatje projects Herodotus' *logos* onto a fictional story of the affair of Almásy and Katherine Clifton and thus uses the father of history to aid in the artifice of his narrative. The real Almásy and his fellow desert explorers used the *Histories* as an important resource in understanding the archaeology of the region. Ondaatje extends this fact by having Almásy carry a copy of the text to which he adds aspects of his own travels and ideas. Consequently, the text is warped, which becomes symbolic of the fragility of recorded history. And so, drawing on the figure that stands at the beginning of the tradition of Western narrative history allows Ondaatje to use Herodotus as a filter for these ideas.

The final chapter will examine Neil Gaiman's fantasy novel *American Gods* (2001). The chief means of approaching Gaiman's work will be through the inclusion of three Herodotean alter-egos in the novel, each of which tackles a different aspect of Herodotus' authorial persona. The first is a character called Low Key Lyesmith, who is revealed to be the Norse god Loki, a trickster deity who is often associated with deception in the sagas and poetry of the Norsemen. Low Key gifts a copy of the *Histories* to the novel's protagonist whilst in prison and introduces the theme of 'call no man happy until he is dead' that runs throughout the story.<sup>49</sup> The character of Low

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<sup>49</sup> *Histories* 1.32.

Key/Loki taps into the ‘father of lies’ aspect associated with Herodotus that has been attached to his persona by later readers, with the deceptive role the god plays in the narrative echoing the accusations of deception and invention levelled at Herodotus by Ctesias in his *Persica*,<sup>50</sup> Detlev Fehling,<sup>51</sup> and even Vidal’s protagonist, Cyrus.<sup>52</sup> The second is the novel’s protagonist, Shadow Moon, a traveller to new lands who encounters oral informants that enlighten him on the history and culture of the places he visits. Like, Low Key, Shadow is also connected to the physical copy of the *Histories* that is described at the opening of the novel and with *Histories* 1.32. The third figure who can be associated with Herodotus in the novel is Mr. Ibis, the incarnation of the Egyptian god of writing, Thoth. In this role he writes his own history of America and the interaction of its peoples with their gods; the theme which Gaiman claimed was the inspiration for the novel.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Gaiman cites Pheidippides’ encounter with Pan in *Histories* 6.106 as the chief inspiration for the novel’s depiction of the gods in America. Mr. Ibis’ ‘Coming to America’ stories could be considered ‘digressions’ away from the main narrative. However, their role in the novel is to demonstrate the varying international influences on American culture. And so, the stories, whilst initially seeming separate from the main narrative, become connected to it both through the revelation that they are being written by one of the novel’s Herodotean alter-egos and by drawing on the aspect of the *Histories* that challenged Greek ethnocentrism by highlighting the external influences on Greek culture.<sup>54</sup> Gaiman, then, like Vidal and Ondaatje, engages with the *Histories* as a means of challenging the ‘official’ historical narrative. For Vidal and Ondaatje, the target was Western narrative history, for Gaiman the focus was on American history in particular.

Whilst the case studies that will be examined here are some distance from the source with which they interact, each author finds great value in focussing their attention on Herodotus’ *Histories*. Across this chasm of time are centuries’ worth of engagements, with responses tackling Herodotean content in a myriad of ways. Indeed, it has been observed that ‘Through the *Histories* Herodotus has spoken meaningfully to generations of readers he would never know and could never have imagined.’<sup>55</sup> With this thesis I aim to examine the ways in which Herodotus is imagined, invented, and exploited by these authors. Distinctive ways of understanding Herodotus and his

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<sup>50</sup> Indeed, John Dillery (2018: 51) describes Herodotus as Ctesias’ ‘*bête noir*’.

<sup>51</sup> Fehling (1989).

<sup>52</sup> See Part II Chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>53</sup> Rudi Dornemann and Kelly Everding (2001).

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, *Histories* 2.43: ‘Nevertheless it was not the Egyptians who took the name of Heracles from the Greeks. The opposite is true: it was the Greeks who took it from the Egyptians’.

<sup>55</sup> Priestley (2014: 221).

work in a modern context can be drawn from identifying the patterns that occur in these works and investigating the purpose of deviations. How, for example, does the *philobarbaros* Herodotus of Plutarch compare to the humane wanderer of Ryszard Kapuściński's? Are the differences in envisioning Herodotus due to an author's focus on particular elements of the source text, or does the difference emerge from the authors' divergent cultural expectations and experiences? Examining the reception of Herodotus in mid-twentieth to early twenty-first-century literature provides a route to understanding the social, political, literary world in which these works were produced and consumed.

## Part I

### 'My Herodotus': The *Histories* and Travel Writing

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1: Herodotus: The First Travel Writer?

‘Travel writers and foreign correspondents know that Herodotus is their ancestor,’ observed the journalist Charlotte Higgins in an article published in the *Guardian* in 2009. What is the reasoning behind such a statement? When Herodotus opens his enquiry, the focus is on examining the origin and progress of the Persian Wars and not on any journey Herodotus may have taken in the process of his research.<sup>56</sup> Yet, at the close of the Proem he also states that he ‘will proceed with my history, telling the story as I go along of small cities of men no less than of great. For most of those which were great once are small today; and those which used to be small were great in my own time’ (*Histories* 1.5). Whilst the passage ties in with the theme of the transient nature of good fortune,<sup>57</sup> as well as linking the work back to Homeric epic,<sup>58</sup> it also highlights the fact that the narrative will cover a variety of locations. On this basis, imagining Herodotus to have visited the places he discussed, travel writers have claimed Herodotus as their own. These same regions also became destinations for later travellers who then looked to the *Histories* in order to learn about their history and included Herodotus in their written accounts. Such references can range from brief allusions to more detailed interrogations of Herodotean content. Part I of this thesis focusses on three examples in the latter category, namely, Freya Stark’s 1954 travelogue *Ionia: A Quest* (Chapter 2), Ryszard Kapuściński’s 2004 travelogue-cum-memoir, *Travels with Herodotus* (Chapter 3), and Justin Marozzi’s *The Man who Invented History* (2008) (Chapter 4).

In order to contextualise these case studies, it is necessary to survey Herodotus’ place within the genre of travel writing and observe patterns that occur both between texts and across centuries. Hence, this introduction will investigate the ways in which authors use the *Histories* as a literary resource by citing Herodotus to supplement their account and explore the use of the *Histories* as a reference guide. Finally, it will examine how travel writers imagine the character of Herodotus. In identifying what patterns exist within the genre we can see how our case studies

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<sup>56</sup> *Histories* 1.1: ‘Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvellous deeds—some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians—may not be without their glory; and especially to show why the two peoples fought with each other.’

<sup>57</sup> See my chapter on Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods* (Part II, chapter 4) for more on this topic.

<sup>58</sup> *Odyssey* 1.1: ‘Tell me, O Muse, of that many-sided hero who travelled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy. Many cities did he visit, and many were the people with whose customs and thinking he was acquainted.’

compare, where they follow trends, and what meaning we can derive from any variation from these tropes.

To begin it is worth considering here what constitutes an example of travel writing. Certainly, texts within the remit of travel literature tend to cover a vast array of categories. As Thompson (2011: 1-2, 11) states, ‘the term “travel writing” encompasses a bewildering diversity of forms, modes and itineraries’, and ‘is a very loose generic label’, especially ‘as one moves back in time, to consider travel writing in its earlier manifestations’. Such varying manifestations are described by Raban (1988: 253-54) as consisting of ‘the private diary, the essay, the short story, the prose poem, the rough note and polished table talk with indiscriminate hospitality.’ Consequently, the flexibility of the genre is not only reflected in the variety of examples of interaction with Herodotean material within this category, but it also means that the *Histories* may itself be regarded as an early example of a travel narrative, if we accept Herodotus’ assertion that he travelled to at least some of the places of which he writes. In *Histories* 2.143, for example, when writing of his time in the Egyptian city of Thebes, Herodotus speaks of a visit to a temple and his interaction with the priests there: ‘They took me into the great hall of the temple, and showed me the wooden statues there’. These claims to have travelled beyond the Greek world have not gone unchallenged. Armayor (1980), for example, examined whether Herodotus’ statements regarding his travels in Egypt could be supported with archaeological evidence, and concluded they could not.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, for the authors discussed in this opening chapter academic critiques of this type are of little concern. That Herodotus travelled where he claimed to have travelled is accepted as a fact and little attention is given to examining the veracity of this particular aspect of his work.

The importance of Herodotus within the genre of travel writing is further evident in Blanton’s (2002) timeline for her survey of British and American travel writing in the eighteenth century onwards. She states that the genre begins at ca. 484 BCE with the proposed date of Herodotus’ birth and further adds his travels, estimated as occurring between ca. 460-445, with his inclusion ending upon his death ca. 427-408 BCE. No other ancient author is included in the timeline and the next entry jumps to 400 CE and the travels of the pilgrim Egeria to the Holy Land.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, Casson’s *Travel in the Ancient World* (1974: 39-43) sets the earliest example of travel writing back even further than Herodotus to around 1130 BCE, with the report of an Egyptian priest named Wenamun, which he describes as being ‘the earliest detailed account of a voyage in existence’. However, subsequent studies have indicated that the work is an example of

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<sup>59</sup> See also Fehling (1989: 240-243) who cites examples such as 2.104.2 and 2.126 as evidence Herodotus had never visited Egypt.

<sup>60</sup> Her letter depicts the journey she took to the Holy Land in the 380s CE.

historical fiction.<sup>61</sup> Whilst Herodotus may be the first point of her chronology, Blanton goes on to argue that ‘despite the obvious importance of Herodotus as “the father of history,” he may not be, as some claim, the first travel writer’; rather this title instead belongs to Egeria (2002: 6). Why Blanton favours Egeria over Herodotus is that the nun is the first extant example of ‘a traveller going from place to place and interpreting (albeit as Stations of the Cross) events and sights’ (2002: 6). This, Blanton argues, is not so in the *Histories*. Whilst it is generally assumed that Herodotus did in fact travel, and his work is narrated in the first person, there is little sense of an organizing principle in his *Histories*, aside from his desire to explain the origins of the Greco-Persian Wars.

Thompson (2011: 36) is also of the opinion that whilst Herodotus can ‘be regarded as a travel writer, since his account ... draws significantly on his own travels around the Mediterranean and Black Sea, and includes lengthy ethnographical discussions on the cultures he discovered’, the *Histories*, along with Strabo’s *Geography* and Pausanias’ *Description of Greece*, do not ‘offer the reader any sort of re-creation in writing of the original travel experience’. This is the format, he argues, that is required for a text to conform to a reader’s expectation of the genre. Instead, focussing still on ancient authors, Thompson (2011: 36) views Horace’s *A Journey to Brundisium* (*Satire* 1.5) as having more in common with this idea of the travel narrative as it ‘offers a much more personal travel account, in which the narrator recounts some of the hardships and misfortunes which befell him along the way’,<sup>62</sup> thereby making it ‘an important model for travel writers in later eras.’<sup>63</sup> So, whilst it is possible to regard the *Histories* as an early form of travel writing, it is not written in the form of modern standard travel narratives, in which the reader follows a journey from point A to point B and is presented with the people, locations, and events that occurred along the way. Reproducing an account of the journeys he undertook prior to composing the *Histories* was not Herodotus’ concern. Nonetheless, because he states that he travelled to some of the areas he would later write about, he can be interpreted as a proto-travel writer who belongs at the start of a long and fruitful tradition. As such, it is unsurprising that later authors should wish to consult his writing as an aid to their travels.

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<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Helck (1986) and Baines (1999).

<sup>62</sup> Which include being harassed by gnats and disturbed by the croaking of frogs.

<sup>63</sup> See Gowers’ (1993) who argues that ‘whilst the journey may never have happened ... it is still a simulation of a real adventure’ (1993: 50) and Jensen (2013) who acknowledges how ‘Horace’s account of his journey furnishes us with many details about travel and life in the late Roman republic, particularly about the routes and modes of travel and the amenities that travelers [sic] could expect along the way’.

## 1.2: The *Histories* as Literary Resource for Travel Writers

Travellers across the centuries have drawn inspiration from Herodotus' account, and these examples often share common features regardless of the span of time between them. Most frequently, when travel writers credit Herodotus, the citation is in reference to a custom that is described in the *Histories* and still occurs at the time the traveller visited the region. An example of this can be found in the explorer, naturalist, photographer, and writer Isabella Bird's (1831-1904) description of coracles in *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan: Volume 1: Including a Summer in the Upper Karun Region and a Visit to the Nestorian Rayahs* (1891: 18), in which she notes how 'they were old even when Herodotus mentions them'.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, in *Turkestan Solo: A Journey through Central Asia* (1932) the travel writer and photographer Ella Maillart (1903-1997) draws her readers' attention to the long history of drinking of kumis by citing both Hippocrates and Herodotus:

Indeed, it would appear that the drinking of kumys has been around for as long as man has had an association with horses. Hippocrates is said to have declared it to be a drink 'of longevity, joy and mental agility' and Herodotus in his 5th-century BC chronicle, *Histories*, describes the Scythian processing of mare's milk.<sup>65</sup>

This method of an author signalling the antiquity of noteworthy customs or objects by establishing Herodotus as a benchmark is a feature that occurs frequently in examples of travel literature that reference the *Histories*.

This approach can also be found in author and diplomat Gerald Russell's (1928-2018) *Heirs to Forgotten Kingdoms: Journeys into the Disappearing Religions of the Middle East* (2014) especially with regards to the chapters dedicated to Mandaeans, Copts, and Zoroastrians. Of course, Herodotus wrote of neither the Mandaeans, nor the Copts, as both of groups emerged in the early centuries of the first millennium CE. However, Russell's comparison of Mandaean ritual cleansing after intercourse to a similar Babylonian practice in Book 1 of the *Histories* serves to demonstrate the religion's origins in Mesopotamia even if the customs do not entirely match.<sup>66</sup> And with regards to the Egyptians in his chapter on the Copts, it is the Egyptians themselves who have suggested the continuity. Russell describes how Herodotus' observation that 'Egyptians are religious to excess,

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<sup>64</sup> *Histories* 1.194.

<sup>65</sup> *Histories* 4.2. For a detailed examination of the passage see West (1999).

<sup>66</sup> Russell (2014: 32): 'When a Mandaean couple are married, they may not have intercourse until the right time, determined in advance by the *ganziybra* through observation of the stars. Afterwards they are considered unclean—and, just as the fifth-century Greek historian Herodotus says Babylonian couples used to do, "at daybreak they both wash, before they have washed they will not touch any household utensils."'

more than any other country in the world',<sup>67</sup> was supported by a decade-worth of opinion polls where the population 'agreed with Herodotus: they believe themselves to be the most religious people in the world' (2014: 221).<sup>68</sup>

Like Herodotus' *Histories*, Strabo's *Geography* has been grouped into the tradition of travel literature thanks to its geographical description of the world and the extensive travels of its author.<sup>69</sup> The *Geography* contains references to the *Histories*, including 17.1.52, for example, where Strabo is critical of how 'Herodotus and other writers trifle very much when they introduce into their histories the marvellous, like (an interlude of) music and song, or some melody', or at 12.3.21 where he criticises Hellanicus, Herodotus, and Eudoxus regarding the varying names listed for the Amazons. Nevertheless, there is some overlap between his work and the *Histories*. In his book on India, for example, there are references to gold-digging ants, as well as flying serpents (15.1.37).<sup>70</sup> Gold-digging ants would feature in later travel accounts but of particular interest here is the latter example. Whereas Herodotus located his flying serpents in Arabia (2.75, 3.107-8), Strabo speaks of them as being in India. This relocation of the creatures is not unique to Strabo; indeed, both Cicero and Aristotle situate them in the continent of Africa.<sup>71</sup> The offering of an alternative location is a feature that is also detectable in pre-Modern travel narratives. The issue with these accounts, however, is determining whether the authors are drawing from Herodotus or deriving

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<sup>67</sup> *Histories* 2.11. Russell uses de Selincourt's translation of the *Histories*.

<sup>68</sup> These findings are taken from research conducted by Shibley Tehami over a ten-year period and presented in an article for the *Washington Post* entitled 'Egypt's Identity Crisis' (2013).

<sup>69</sup> Thompson (2011: 36).

<sup>70</sup> *Geography* 15.1.37: 'All the country on the other side of the Hypanis is allowed to be very fertile, but we have no accurate knowledge of it. Either through ignorance or from its remote situation, everything relative to it is exaggerated or partakes of the wonderful. As, for example, the stories of myrmeces (or ants), which dig up gold; ... In some places there are serpents of two cubits in length, with membranous wings like bats. They fly at night, and let fall drops of urine or sweat, which occasions the skin of persons who are not on their guard to putrefy.'

<sup>71</sup> Its inclusion in Aristotle's *The History of Animals* (Part 5) is as follows: 'Of animals that can fly some are furnished with feathered wings, as the eagle and the hawk; some are furnished with membranous wings, as the bee and the cockchafer; others are furnished with leathern wings, as the flying fox and the bat. All flying creatures possessed of blood have feathered wings or leathern wings; the bloodless creatures have membranous wings, as insects. The creatures that have feathered wings or leathern wings have either two feet or no feet at all: for there are said to be certain flying serpents in Ethiopia that are destitute of feet.' The description by Cicero is found in the following passage of *On the Nature of the Gods* (Chapter XXXVI): 'Even the much-ridiculed Egyptians never deified an animal except with reference to some benefit which they derived from it. For instance, the ibis, being a tall bird, with legs that do not bend, and a long beak of horn, destroys a vast number of serpents; in killing and eating the winged snakes that are brought in by the south-west wind from the Libyan desert, it preserves Egypt from plague, the snakes being thus prevented from causing harm by their bite when living, or by their smell when dead.'

material from a tradition that has developed across the centuries between the *Histories* and pre-Modern travel accounts.

An early example of this can be found in the work of the Arab geographer and historian Abu al-Hasan Alī ibn al-Husayn ibn Alī al-Mas'ūdī (ca. 890-956 CE). Known as the 'Herodotus of the Arabs',<sup>72</sup> Mas'ūdī was born in Baghdad during the Islamic Golden Age where literacy was high, and books, including works by ancient Greek authors, were far more accessible in comparison to contemporary Europe. He travelled extensively during his lifetime and wrote thirty-six books, of which only two are extant: *The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Precious Gems* and the *Book of Admonition and Revision*. In his depiction of the hippopotamus in *The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Precious Gems* he does not reference Herodotus in its description. However, the animal's appearance is nonetheless similar. At 2.71 of the *Histories* the hippopotamus is described as being: 'four-footed, with cloven hooves like cattle; blunt-nosed; with a horse's mane, visible tusks, a horse's tail and voice; big as the biggest bull'. As in the *Histories*, the appearance of a creature is constructed in Mas'ūdī's account via a literal translation of its name (*hippos*, horse). Hence, it is described as 'resembl[ing] a horse, but the hooves and tail are different, and the forehead is broader' (Lunde and Stone 2007: 49).

This trend appears to continue further into the Medieval period. The at times highly questionable writings of Marco Polo and John Mandeville again display Herodotean material but, in these cases, it is difficult to establish whether this is actually due to a familiarity with the *Histories* or rather with the fantastical content of bestiaries. Popular in the Middle Ages, compendia of fantastical creatures had originated in antiquity and drew on the work of authors including Herodotus to populate their pages with real and mythical beasts. This may have been the means through which these authors unknowingly accessed Herodotean content. This is due to the general lack of acquaintance with Herodotus' work in Western Europe during this time.<sup>73</sup> As Hajab (2016: 84) observes in his study on the re-emergence of Herodotus in the Renaissance, 'Herodotus' work disappeared for a time from the Medieval culture of the West, partly due to a decline in the knowledge of Greek language during the period of Late Antiquity.' Certainly, the accounts of Marco Polo and Mandeville are in keeping with the standard approach to Herodotean material in Medieval travel writing more generally: that is to say, the interest is in the more incredible content of Herodotus' narrative, as described by Thompson (2011: 38):

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<sup>72</sup> Sprenger (1841: ix) 'el-Masu'udi has a just claim to be called the Herodotus of the Arabs. Combining, like Herodotus, ethnography and geography with history, and learning with experience and oral information, he distinguishes between the various nations of the East, and gives us a picture of their innate character'. See, also, Knight (2001).

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, Racine (2016) and Carley and Juhász-Ormsby (2016).

The continents of Asia and Africa especially were a source of fascination to readers in Europe, and gave rise to a rich, if often highly speculative, literature ... Typically, they are a compendia of information, in which the observations of Classical authorities such as Herodotus and Pliny are combined with more recent reports that have filtered back, often via intermediaries, to the centres of intellectual activity in Europe. As a consequence, many medieval travel texts seem to modern readers a curious blend of the factual and the fabulous, as they combine plausible descriptions of foreign peoples and places with accounts of monstrous or miraculous beings that are clearly projections of European fears and fantasies, such as winged centaurs, dog-headed men and Amazons.

Looking, for example, at gold-digging ants in *The Travels of John Mandeville* from ca. 1356 (2005: 183), although Mandeville locates them in Sri Lanka rather than India, they nevertheless share features with the ants in the *Histories*. However, Mandeville's focus on the use of horses in besting the gold-digging ants, instead of the camels described by Herodotus at 3.102-105, suggests a potential non-Herodotean origin for the passage.<sup>74</sup> In Guillaume le Clerc's *Bestiaire* (ca. 13<sup>th</sup> century) from the preceding century, horses rather than camels are also described as assisting the local men, this time Ethiopians, in obtaining the ant's gold.<sup>75</sup> This potential for indirect Herodotean material

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<sup>74</sup> The passage from Chapter 13 is as follows: 'In the isle also of this Taprobane be great hills of gold, that pismires [ants] keep full diligently. And they fine the pured gold, and cast away the un-pured. And these pismires be great as hounds, so that no man dare come to those hills for the pismires would assail them and devour them anon. So that no man may get of that gold, but by great sleight. And therefore when it is great heat, the pismires rest them in the earth, from prime of the day into noon. And then the folk of the country take camels, dromedaries, and horses and other beasts, and go thither, and charge them in all haste that they may; and after that, they flee away in all haste that the beasts may go, or the pismires come out of the earth. And in other times, when it is not so hot, and that the pismires ne rest them not in the earth, then they get gold by this subtlety. They take mares that have young colts or foals, and lay upon the mares void vessels made there-for; and they be all open above, and hanging low to the earth. And then they send forth those mares for to pasture about those hills, and with-hold the foals with them at home. And when the pismires see those vessels, they leap in anon: and they have this kind that they let nothing be empty among them, but anon they fill it, be it what manner of thing that it be; and so they fill those vessels with gold. And when that the folk suppose that the vessels be full, they put forth anon the young foals, and make them to neigh after their dams. And then anon the mares return towards their foals with their charges of gold. And then men discharge them, and get gold enough by this subtlety. For the pismires will suffer beasts to go and pasture amongst them, but no man in no wise' (2005: 183).

<sup>75</sup> Guillaume le Clerc's *Bestiaire* describes the oddity thus: 'There is another kind of ant up in Ethiopia, which is of the shape and size of dogs. They have strange habits, for they scratch into the ground and extract there from great quantities of fine gold. If any one wishes to take this gold from them, he soon repents of his undertaking; for the ants run upon him, and if they catch him they devour him instantly. The people who live near them know that they are fierce and savage, and that they possess a great quantity of gold, and so they have invented a cunning trick. They take mares which have unweaned foals, and give them no food for three days. On the fourth the mares are saddled, and

may also offer an explanation of the reports of dog-headed men in *The Travels of Marco Polo* (ca. 1300) Chapter 13 Volume II, as, again, such fantastical creatures were well referenced in other works following their inclusion in *Histories* 4.191.<sup>76</sup> If the *Histories* were indeed the main source for these passages each author's interaction with Herodotus displays very few of the features that are found in later works such as citing Herodotus as a reliable resource or claiming to have followed in his footsteps. Moreover, Herodotus is not named, thereby making any connection even more difficult to ascertain.

Examples of this pattern continue into the Renaissance in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516).<sup>77</sup> Although a work of fiction, it is argued by Hulme and Youngs (2002: 3) to be 'a foundation for subsequent travel writing, influencing the form of both expectations and reports'. Of particular interest here is Book 2 pages 87-89 and the visit of the ambassadors to Utopia.<sup>78</sup> Clad in the finery of their own culture, the people of Utopia see the ambassadors' golden jewellery as chains and perceive them to be slaves. Hadas (1964: 113) compares this to *Histories* 3.22 where Cambyses' ambassadors, the Fish-Eaters, are questioned by the Ethiopian king about why they wear gold chains and bracelets. When 'the Fish-Eaters explained their use as ornaments he laughed and, supposing them to be fetters, remarked that they had stronger ones in their own country.' However, Hadas is nevertheless cautious in categorically identifying Herodotus as the influence. Because of the increased distribution of the *Histories* amongst the European elites, he states that:

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to the saddles are fastened boxes that shine like gold. Between these people and the ants flows a very swift river. The famished mares are driven across this river, while the foals are kept on the hither side. On the other side of the river the grass is rich and thick. Here the mares graze, and the ants seeing the shining boxes think they have found a good place to hide their gold, and so all day long they fill and load the boxes with their precious gold, till night comes on and the mares have eaten their fill. When they hear the neighing of their foals they hasten to return to the other side of the river. There their masters take the gold from the boxes and become rich and powerful, but the ants grieve over their loss.'

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, David Gordon White's 1991 study *Myths of the Dog-man*.

<sup>77</sup> For studies on Herodotus' reception in other parts of Renaissance Europe see Foley (2016) and Looney (2016).

<sup>78</sup> The description in More's *Utopia* (87-9) is as follows: 'Their caps were covered with bracelets, thickly set with pearls and other gems. In a word, they were decorated in those very things, which, among the Utopians, are either badges of slavery, marks of infamy, or play-things for children ... they looked upon them as slaves, and showed them no respect ... Others censured the fashion of their chains, and observed, they were of no use. For their slaves could easily break them; and they hung so loosely, that they thought it easy to throw them away. But when the ambassadors had been a day among them, and had seen the vast quantity of gold in their houses, as much despised by them as esteemed by others; when they beheld more gold and silver in the chains and fetters of one slave, than in all their ornaments; their crests fell, they were ashamed of their glory, and laid it aside; a resolution which they took, in consequence of engaging in free conversation with the Utopians, and discovering their sense of these things, and their other customs.'

It is altogether likely that More had the Herodotus passage in mind when he wrote of the Utopian attitude toward gold. But that need not be the case, for the evil of gold has been so obvious that many have wished to destroy its potency (1964: 113).

And so, whilst the *Histories* may have been a direct influence here, as with the Medieval examples, the potential for the passage being the product of secondary reception as opposed to a direct engagement with the *Histories* is also a possibility. Consequently, whilst there are cases where it seems that Herodotus' writing is being referenced by an author, caution should nevertheless be practiced when grouping these examples with texts that clearly state their Herodotean origin.

### **1.3: Using the *Histories* as a Guide**

The focus of the novelist and travel writer Paul Theroux's (b. 1941) *Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town* (2002) is largely on the author revisiting countries within Africa in which he had previously worked and the effect of external influences on the continent. He opens the book by situating Herodotus at the beginning of the tradition of sightseeing within the continent. As he puts it:

Tourists have been visiting Egypt for 2500 years—Herodotus (roughly 480-420 BC) was the first methodical sightseer. He was fascinated by Egyptian geography and ruins—and was also collecting information for his *History*, of which the whole of Volume Two is Egyptiana. Herodotus traveled [sic] as far as the First Cataract, that is Aswan ... ever since Herodotus they [the Egyptians] have been welcoming foreigners (2002: 6-7).

Whilst Theroux does not proceed to follow in the footsteps of the ancient tourist, he does highlight here a recurring trope within travel writing when he describes Herodotus as a 'sightseer'. Characterising Herodotus in this manner has resulted in later travellers regarding the *Histories* as a guide to the regions described within the narrative. Sightseeing the contemporary world through the ancient lens of the *Histories* is a characteristic that first emerges in the early-modern era. The historian, politician, philosopher, and abolitionist Constantin François de Chassebœuf, comte de Volney's (1757-1820) book *Travels through Syria and Egypt, in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785: containing the present natural and political state of those countries, their productions, arts, manufactures, and commerce: with observations on the manners, customs, and government of the Turks and Arabs*, for example, demonstrates the author consulting Herodotus' account during his voyages.

Volney was already familiar with Herodotus, having written *Mémoire sur la Chronologie d'Hérodote* during his studies. His knowledge of the work meant he would consult Herodotus'

account when visiting locations that were also featured in the *Histories*. Volney drew on other texts in his work, and this, too, will be a feature of later examples in this genre, but he states that Herodotus is the ‘Greek historian, to whom we are indebted for almost all our knowledge of ancient Egypt, and whose authority every day’s observation confirms’ (vol. i 20). Why does Volney feel the need to look to an ancient author to enrich his travel experience? Two millennia had passed between Herodotus and Volney’s visits to Egypt, after all. In the preface to *Travels through Syria and Egypt* he explains to the reader why it was he decided to visit Syria and Egypt:

I determined, therefore, on a plan of travelling; but to what part of the world I should direct my course remained still to be chosen: I wished the scene of my observations to be new, or at least brilliant. My own country, and the neighbouring nations, seemed to me either too well known, or too easy to access: the rising States of America, and the savages, were not without their temptations; but other considerations determined me in favour of Asia. Syria, especially, and Egypt, both with a view to what they once have been, and what they now are, appeared to me a field equally adapted to those political and moral observations with which I wished to occupy my mind.

‘Those are the countries,’ said I, ‘in which the greater part of the opinions that govern us at this day have had their origin. In them, those religious ideas took their rise, which have operated so powerfully on our private and public manners, on our social state. It will be interesting, therefore, to be acquainted with the countries where they originated, the customs and manners which gave them birth, and the spirit and character of the nations from whom they have received as sacred: to examine to what degree this spirit, these manners, and these customs, are altered or retained: to ascertain the influence of climate, the effects of the government, and the causes of the various habits and prejudices of these countries; in a word, to judge from their present state what was their situation in former times.’

What is clear here is the desire to compare the contemporary country to its past, and, as he views Herodotus as being the best source for ancient Egypt, the *Histories* becomes a key text on this subject. Certainly, the use of Herodotus to guide travellers in Egypt is an element of travel literature in the preceding centuries. When the journalist, novelist, and Egyptologist Amelia Edwards (1831-1892) wrote of her time in Egypt, she stated that ‘We have of course been dipping into Herodotus—everyone takes Herodotus up the Nile’ (1877: 64). Likewise, in the published letters of the author and translator Lucie Duff-Gordon (1812- 1869), it is clear that the *Histories* influences her experiences during her time in Egypt:

Nothing is more striking to me than the way in which one is constantly reminded of Herodotus. The Christianity and the Islam of this country are full of ancient worship, the sacred animals have all taken service with Muslim saints.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Duff-Gordon (1997: 57).

For her, the country was ‘a palimpsest in which the Bible is written over Herodotus and the Koran over that. In the towns the Koran is more visible, in the country Herodotus’. Looking to ancient sources was a common approach amongst English writers of the Victorian and Edwardian period, who called upon their education in the Classics to make sense of the new worlds they were encountering.<sup>80</sup> Toner (2013: 39) explains that this is because ‘Authors who were looking to analyze foreign peoples and customs found it natural to turn to ancient sources such as Herodotus and Tacitus for models of how to achieve this.’ Lewis’ (2015: 79) study on the influence of the *Histories* on nineteenth-century British travel accounts of Egypt concurs with this reading and argues,

Europeans had figuratively come to Egypt via the Greeks and Romans until they literally arrived there. Every educated young man and many women had perused Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus and Strabo ... [and] ... It was from this classical orientation that travelers [sic] viewed Egypt.<sup>81</sup>

And so, as with Volney in the previous century, when drawing on the *Histories* the emphasis in these examples is on using the work as an aid to experience the country the author is visiting.

Arguably, for the missionary and explorer David Livingstone (1813-1873) knowledge of the *Histories* not only shaped his journey but drove him to his death. The pursuit of the source of the Nile, which occupied Livingstone in his final years, drew inspiration from Book 2.28 of the *Histories*. Newspaper articles of the time such as ‘Livingstone and Herodotus’ emphasised the importance of the *Histories* in Livingstone’s quest,<sup>82</sup> and, its influence is certainly apparent in Livingstone’s own writing. In a journal entry from the year before his death, for example, he makes reference to Herodotus’ explanation of the Nile’s source. Dated to 18<sup>th</sup> April 1872, the entry demonstrates the faith he had in Herodotus’ account of the source, if not perhaps the faith he had in himself to find it:

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<sup>80</sup> See Toner (2013: 39).

<sup>81</sup> Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) seems to playfully poke fun at the convention of interpreting a modern country through the work of ancient authors in a letter written on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1850 describing her time in Greece. In it she writes, ‘You will suppose that, as we sailed from the Isthmus to Piraeus a few days since, we repeated the famous paragraph of Sulpicius’ letter to Cicero sighing over the ruined cities of Greece; that we opened our Herodotus as we opened the bay of Salamis and thundered out a speech from Thucydides when, entering the port, we caught sight of the Acropolis. Alas! No. Our classics are safe in our portmanteaus and studies have been confined to the line of the long walls, the scene of the triumph of Themistocles to a few rambles over the agora.’

<sup>82</sup> Bird (1872).

I pray the good Lord of all to favour me so as to allow me to discover the ancient fountains of Herodotus, and if there is anything in the underground excavations to confirm the precious old documents (τὰ βιβλία), the Scriptures of truth, may He permit me to bring it to light, and give me wisdom to make proper use of it.

Some seem to feel that their own importance in the community is enhanced by an imaginary connection with a discovery or discoverer of the Nile sources, and are only too happy to figure, if only in a minor part, as theoretical discoverers—a theoretical discovery being a contradiction in terms.<sup>83</sup>

For travellers such as Livingstone finding the source was important ‘because the Nile nourished Egypt, because one could speculate in whether the ancients had known the source, and because the traveller who found it would have everlasting fame’ (Bridges 2002: 65). That Livingstone refers to ‘the ancient fountains of Herodotus’ demonstrates that he perceived Herodotus’ account as a reliable means to locating the source, therefore, signalling that its veracity was unquestioned by the explorer.

Of course, engaging with foreign lands in this way is also a highly problematic endeavour. Examples of travel literature such as these where Herodotus’ *Histories* is regarded as an adequate means of accessing modern nations risk diminishing local populations by viewing them through ancient lenses. This is because they perpetuate the Orientalist notion, as outlined by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), that the cultures encountered are essentially static and incapable of change. The distance between Herodotus’ fifth century world and travellers of the modern era is vast and yet their use of the *Histories* as a guide indicates they perceived some continuity regardless of the changes that had occurred over the millennia.

#### **1.4: Reading the Character of Herodotus**

What is also evidenced in this era of travel writing is the emergence of Herodotus as a character that greatly appeals to travellers. Imagining the personality of Herodotus through his writing is not a new concept; Plutarch’s *On the Malice of Herodotus*, for example, had sought to label Herodotus as a *philobarbaros* through his depiction of non-Greek speakers in the *Histories*. Even the scholar and translator of the *Histories* Aubrey de Sélincourt (1894-1962) confessed to having been somewhat subject to this compulsion. Indeed, in the preface to his book *The World of Herodotus* (1962: 9), de Sélincourt writes of ‘The relationship which grows between a translator and the author whose work he is translating’, stating how it is

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<sup>83</sup> *Histories* 2.19-31.

a peculiarly intimate and personal one and is apt to turn either to irritation or to a firm and lasting affection. The two years I spent translating Herodotus were happy ones, and I soon came to feel that here, if anywhere in antiquity, was a man whose attitude to life was, in spite of basic differences, immediately intelligible to the modern world.

De Sélincourt's interaction with the text through the mode of translation led him to imagine a Herodotus whose thought processes would have been in keeping with the translator's era. Seeing Herodotus as being both the pinnacle of his time and ahead of it is an interpretation that emerges within travel accounts of the modern era. An early example within the genre is in the explorer and writer Mary Kingsley's (1862-1900) *West African Studies* (1899). At page 193 Kingsley includes a section in which she assesses the veracity of Herodotus' description of the circumnavigation of Africa and states:

we owe to Herodotus here, as in many other places in his works, a debt of gratitude for honestly putting down what he did not believe himself; he also has suffered from this habit of accuracy, becoming himself regarded by the superficial people of this world as a credulous old romancer, which he never was. *Good man, he only liked fair play.*<sup>84</sup>

What is demonstrated here is a characteristic that will become more prominent in the following centuries: namely, the idea that an author may determine the character of Herodotus the man via the content of his work. A similar understanding can be seen in a letter written by the officer, archaeologist, and diplomat T.E. Lawrence (1888-1935) to the writer and publisher David Garnett (1892-1981) on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1930, in which he describes Herodotus as 'one of the best men', 'a marvellous fellow', and 'pre-eminently human'.

There are usually exceptions to every rule, and this is certainly the case when it comes to holding Herodotus in esteemed reverence within the genre. The biographer and travel writer Sara Wheeler's 1992 book on the Greek island of Evia (Euboea) entitled *Evia: An Island Apart* follows the continuity pattern. In Book 8.19 of the *Histories*, 'Herodotus tells the story that Themistocles, leading the Greeks, held a meeting on the beach after their defeat' (1992: 218), and whilst they are on the beach 'the people of Euboea were ... driving their herds'.<sup>85</sup> This, comments Wheeler, is something the islanders still do today: 'The locals, quite naturally, were driving their sheep along the shore, as I had seen them do hundreds of times during the summer' (1992: 218). But it is Herodotus' reaction to Themistocles' next action that presents us with something different to what has been described so far in this introduction. Themistocles orders his men to slaughter the animals, 'as it was better that their own troops should have them than the enemy' (*Histories* 8.19).

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<sup>84</sup> My italics.

<sup>85</sup> *Histories* 8.19.

Herodotus concludes by adding that the Euboeans had been warned to remove their property from the island, but they had ignored it ‘and the result was great suffering’.<sup>86</sup> Wheeler’s reading of Herodotus’ assessment is negative in comparison to the previous examples. For Wheeler, ‘Herodotus sniffily concluded that it was the Evians’ own fault because they ignored an oblique oracle warning them to keep their animals away from the island’ (1992: 218). Problems deriving from inadequate responses to oracles are a feature of the *Histories* such as Book 1 and Croesus’ misinterpretation of the Delphic oracle,<sup>87</sup> and so if the oracle’s words are taken at face value, then the actions of the Euboeans is a continuation of this trend.<sup>88</sup> It is Wheeler’s characterisation of Herodotus that stands out here. Her Herodotus is far more judgemental than what is observable in previous examples and is in marked contrast to the man who valued ‘fair play’ in Kingsley’s writing. However, whilst Wheeler’s depiction of Herodotus’ is more negative than earlier examples, she still adheres to the compulsion within the genre of using the *Histories* to draw out personality traits.

Within the sphere of travel writing, one may attribute the need to focus on Herodotus’ ‘personality’ to the nature of the genre. As was noted earlier, whilst examples of travel writing can come from a myriad of texts, the prerequisite to define a work as travel literature is the recounting of a journey undertaken by the author. The subjectivity that arises from such an account has led Fussell (1980: 203) to suggest the genre is

a sub-species of memoir in which the autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker’s encounter with distant or unfamiliar data, and in which the narrative—unlike that in a novel or romance—claims literal validity by constant reference to actuality.

A sense of an autobiographical narrative is certainly a feature of Herodotus’ account of his travels. When writing of his visit to the Pyramids he reports ‘I remember distinctly that the interpreter who read me the inscription said the sum was 1600 talents of silver’ (2.125), whilst in his passage on the Labyrinth he states, ‘I went through the rooms in the upper storey, so what I shall say of them is from my own observation’ (2.148). He presents himself to the reader as a traveller and consequently this has encouraged fellow travellers to explore this aspect of the *Histories*. Indeed, as Casson (1974: 111) describes it,

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<sup>86</sup> *Histories* 8.20.

<sup>87</sup> *Histories* 1.53-56 and 1.91.

<sup>88</sup> See Luraghi (2001: 188) for an alternative interpretation of the oracle.

His role is to be the perfect companion: to be articulate, well-informed, a skilled raconteur; to include in what he tells a fair share of the unusual with a dash of the exotic; to tell it all with infinite zest. It was Herodotus who set not only the pattern but the standard

Casson may see this characteristic in the *Histories*, but there are problems in crafting a personality for Herodotus from the content of his writing. West (1991: 151) warns that in ‘interpreting [the] first-person references as straightforwardly autobiographical’ a reader runs the risk of taking ‘too literally a storyteller’s assumed narrative *persona* when we ought to distinguish the “real” from the “implied” narrator as we naturally would in reading a novel or poem written in the first person.’ As Dewald notes in her 2002 article “‘I Didn’t Give My Own Genealogy’: Herodotus and the Authorial Persona’, Herodotus’ ‘authorial, first-person voice plays a prominent part in the *Histories*’ (2012: 267). This may suggest why writers feel able to construct a persona from the content of the *Histories*. However, as ‘Herodotus does not tell us anything about his family or ethnic affiliations’ (Dewald 2012: 267), the figure who emerges from the text is determined by each individual’s interpretation of the *Histories*.

## **1.5: Conclusions**

The *Histories* is a text that can be considered as both a work of travel literature and a resource to prospective travel writers. Its place within the travel writing genre derives from Herodotus stating he travelled when obtaining data for his inquiry. This is a feature that is commonly accepted amongst travel writers who directly engage with the *Histories*. Regarding Herodotus as a proto-travel writer who recorded the marvels he saw results in authors accessing his material as a means of supplementing their own travel accounts. This is because his work is deemed to be a reliable resource and so his data is judged to be worthy of inclusion due to its antiquity and renown, often because he was the first to write about specific objects, places, or cultures. Seeing Herodotus as a fellow traveller has also led to travellers effectively following in his footsteps by using the *Histories* as a form of travel guide. The gap of time that exists between Herodotus’ account and the later travellers is of little concern to these examples, which in turn emphasises their confidence in Herodotus’ veracity.

What can also be detected within the genre is the inclination to attach character traits to Herodotus. If Herodotus is considered to be the forebear of a tradition that centres of the travel accounts of individual writers, then the practice of imagining the nature of this pioneer of the genre by looking to his writing is perhaps understandable. The attraction of Herodotus’ ‘voice’ is a feature that dominates the following case studies. And, like, many of the components surveyed

in this chapter, is pursued at length in the writing of Freya Stark, Ryszard Kapuściński, and Justin Marozzi, therefore, demonstrating that Herodotus' position within the genre exhibits commonalities that are evident across the centuries.

## Chapter 2

### The 'Perfect Travel Companion' of Freya Stark

The writer, historian, and professional traveller Freya Stark was born in England in 1892, and her 'earliest life was a blurred succession of houses and countries',<sup>89</sup> due to her parent's bohemian lifestyle. After serving as a nurse on the Italian front during the First World War she began to study Arabic in 1922, eventually travelling to Beirut in late 1927. Her first publication was an article for the British magazine *Cornhill Magazine* in 1928, with her first book, *Baghdad Sketches* (1933) arriving five years later. When Stark began her writing career the genre of travel writing was regarded as 'the most distinguished literary form',<sup>90</sup> particularly 'for writers restless with inherited beliefs, and eager to "explore" and "discover" new allegiances.'<sup>91</sup>

During her career, Stark was the first woman to receive the Burton Medal from the Royal Asiatic society. She also received the Royal Geographical Society's Back Grant in 1933 and their Founder's Gold Medal in 1942 for her written accounts depicting her travels in Western Asia. Other awards include the Triennial Burton Memorial Medal from Royal Asiatic Society (1934); the Mungo Park Medal from the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (1936); and the Percy Sykes Memorial Medal from Royal Central Asian Society (1951). As these awards suggest, Stark was highly lauded for her writing of her experiences in Asia, the region with which she is most associated. Stark was not the first British woman to travel alone there; indeed, she arrived in Iraq just two years after the death of the writer, archaeologist, and political officer Gertrude Bell.<sup>92</sup> But whilst Bell's time there involved establishing the modern state of Iraq, Stark's interactions with the Iraqi people were far less imperialistic and she wrote about them on a much more personal level.<sup>93</sup>

It was her own interest in Arab culture that stimulated her journeys and her writing. Learning Arabic was a route to travelling at ease and without the distance imposed by an interpreter. The desire to interact with the local people that defines her work would in turn often

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<sup>89</sup> Roth Pierpont (2011).

<sup>90</sup> Hout (2006: 58).

<sup>91</sup> Dodds (1982: 128).

<sup>92</sup> References to Herodotus can be found in the published diaries of Bell. In an entry from 29<sup>th</sup> December 1901, she writes of her good fortune of finding 'a secondhand [sic] copy of Herodotus in French' whilst in Greece, and of how she 'was delighted that I had Herodotus so fresh in my mind' when visiting Sardis. In an entry from 7<sup>th</sup> March 1902, she writes of the defeat of Croesus and 'the Tomb of Atyattes described by Herodotus'.

<sup>93</sup> She did, however, work as a propagandist for the British Government. See Karsh and Miller (2004) for a scathing analysis of her time spent in the United States.

set her at odds with the British community in Baghdad, and in particular with officials. In *Baghdad Sketches* she notes how she began to feel like a ‘Disturber of the Peace’ due to the fact that she had several Arab friends and would dress in the local attire.<sup>94</sup> Stark’s behaviour, it seems, stemmed from her desire to understand the culture better and why she wanted to do so derived from the wish to create ‘a picture of methods of meeting between East and West’.<sup>95</sup> As Hout (2002: 65) explains:

Of paramount significance is her relentless effort in her travel literature to underscore essential similarities despite obvious differences between European and non-European peoples ... she recognized the importance of devising a new rapport between the West and East in general, and the British and the Arabs in particular. Although most of her ideas were later dismissed as naïve and impractical, her systematic attempt to understand foreign cultures and find some kind of universal unity and peace across national and religious borders remains meaningful.

Hout’s description effectively conveys the over-arching theme of Stark’s presentation of the lands of her travels to her Western audience. Her efforts to communicate with and at times live alongside foreign peoples derived from her personal aim of fostering a sense of communion between those nations separated by the artificial binary of East and West. Understanding this key principle also sheds light on Stark’s relationship with Herodotus’ *Histories*, both in terms of what attracted her to the text and how she engaged with it within *Ionia: A Quest*. On a basic thematic level, Herodotus’ interest in those that were considered to be ‘barbarian’ and his exploration of ‘the two peoples [who] fought each other’ (*Histories* 1.1) finds its parallel in Stark’s concern with the interaction of Western and non-Western peoples. Stark identified in Herodotus a kindred spirit, and so I will explore how her engagement with the *Histories* and its author manifests in her 1954 travelogue *Ionia: A Quest*. Looking at how Stark defined the nature of Herodotus in her work reveals the construction of a hybrid-figure who understood and analysed his contemporary world and yet had much to teach the people of the Post-War era.

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<sup>94</sup> *Baghdad Sketches* (2011: 44).

<sup>95</sup> Stark *Coast of Incense* (1953: 216).

## 2.1: Stark and her Sources

*Ionia: A Quest* documents the journey the ‘poet of travel’ took in western Turkey in late 1952.<sup>96</sup> The journey took Stark to sites including Pergamum, Ephesus, and Miletus, where she encountered only one other tourist throughout the entirety of her trip.<sup>97</sup> Stark chose this specific region due to its legacy in Western culture. In a letter written on 11th November 1952 to her publisher John ‘Jock’ Murray, she declared that it was ‘absolutely necessary to travel to Asia Minor’ because ‘here is the source of all that has made us, all the ideas, all the patterns’. The book itself has twenty-four chapters in total with each describing a different stage in her journey, including the history of select locations which she based on a combination of literary sources and her observation of what archaeological traces remained.<sup>98</sup>

Before embarking upon the travelogue proper, Stark presents the reader with a ‘Synopsis of History’. This aims to provide a survey of Asia Minor’s history for those unfamiliar with its past. Stark herself began the journey from ‘a level of ignorance shared with the majority of those readers who may not have made a particular study of the ancient world’ (1954: xiii- xiv). This, she says, is why the references listed at the back of the book are so thorough: they allow anyone who is interested to investigate the subject further and ‘come perhaps to different conclusions’ (1954: xiv). This lacing of her travelogue with extensive referencing is a technique common to Stark’s writing. Stark liked to gather an impressive array of material in order to familiarise herself with the history and culture of a region she was visiting. For example, her later book documenting the campaigns of Alexander the Great in the East, *Alexander’s Path: From Caria to Cilicia* (1958a), would draw heavily on the writing of Arrian. And it is perhaps because of this rigorous preparation, as

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<sup>96</sup> Her friend the writer Lawrence Durrell’s description of her in as featured in *The Journey’s Echo: Selected Travel Writings* (1988).

<sup>97</sup> She encountered her sole fellow sightseer at Pergamum (1954: xiii).

<sup>98</sup> The chapters are as follows: Chapter 1: ‘Dawn in Ionia’; Chapter 2: ‘Smyrna: The Family in the Levant’; Chapter 3: ‘Clazomenae: The Philosophic Weather’; Chapter 4: ‘Teos: Anacreon and the Poetry of Living’; Chapter 5: ‘Erythrae: Exile and Slavery’; Chapter 6: ‘Chios: Ingredients of Empire’; Chapter 7: ‘Myrina: ‘New Harvests cover the land’; Chapter 8: ‘Gryneium: Solitude and Patriotism’; Chapter 9: ‘Pitane: Toleration and Truth’; Chapter 10: ‘Pergamum: The Raiders of the Border’; Chapter 11: ‘Cyme: The Phrygian Mood’; Chapter 12: ‘Phocaea: Decision’; Chapter 13: ‘Colophon: The Position of Women’; Chapter 14: ‘Clarus and Notium: Xenophanes and Reason’; Chapter 15: Sardis: The Commerce of Sardis’; Chapter 16: ‘Ephesus: Commerce and the Unexpected’; Chapter 17: ‘The Panionium: Symbols’; Chapter 18: ‘Priene: Greatness in Art’; Chapter 19: ‘The Oracle of Didyma: Ecclesiastical Tradition’; Chapter 20: ‘Miletus: The Aegean’; Chapter 21: ‘Heracleia: The Myth’; Chapter 22: ‘Magnesia on Maeander: The Persian Administration’; Chapter 23: ‘Aphrodisias: The Ease of Life’, and Chapter 24: ‘Hierapolis and Laodicea’

well as her adherence to ancient texts, that the *Geographical Journal* and the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* published three articles on her pursuit of Alexander.<sup>99</sup> *Ionia: A Quest* also found a life beyond the published book. In 1954 *History Today* magazine reproduced Chapter 11 of the book, entitled ‘Cyme: The Phrygian Mood’. The *Histories* is cited on three occasions in the extract,<sup>100</sup> but a reader unfamiliar with the relationship to Herodotus that Stark depicts in *Ionia: A Quest* would find no evidence of their ‘bond’ here.

Embedded within Stark’s account of her personal experiences of travelling in Turkey are a vast array of writers, ancient and modern. These include Sappho,<sup>101</sup> Omar Khayyam,<sup>102</sup> Homer,<sup>103</sup> John Myres,<sup>104</sup> Xenophon,<sup>105</sup> Theogonis,<sup>106</sup> Shakespeare,<sup>107</sup> David Magie,<sup>108</sup> Livy,<sup>109</sup> Pindar,<sup>110</sup> and Jane Austen.<sup>111</sup> In a letter sent to Stark on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1954, the traveller, soldier and author Patrick Leigh Fermor complimented the author’s use of ancient sources in *Ionia: A Quest*, stating that her ‘quotations from the Greek anthology are beautifully chosen, and seem to turn up so fortuitously and casually, as a delightfully uninsistent proof of all you are saying’.<sup>112</sup> Stark’s explanation for this high degree of referencing is addressed in the foreword of her travelogue; as she travelled through fifty-five ruined sites in western Turkey, ‘A great longing came to me to know more, and to bring a living image out of these dots and dashes of the past’ (1954: xiii). However, as she was ‘anxious to base [her] results on as solid a groundwork of historical fact as

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<sup>99</sup> ‘Alexander’s Minor Campaigns in Turkey’ (Stark 1956b); ‘Alexander’s March from Miletus to Phrygia’ (Stark 1958b) and ‘Landscapes in Caria I’ (Stark 1958c).

<sup>100</sup> *Histories* 8.130 opens the extract on page 598, *Histories* 5.49 features on page 602, and *Histories* 7.73 is referenced on page 603.

<sup>101</sup> Stark (1954: xix, xxiii, 9, 27, 87, 103, 114, 235, 244, 247).

<sup>102</sup> Stark (1954: 19).

<sup>103</sup> Stark (1954: 13, 51, 82, 104, 111, 114, 118, 122, 135, 176, 197).

<sup>104</sup> Stark (1954: 229, 234, 236, 246).

<sup>105</sup> Stark (1954: 72-4, 118, 125-6, 181, 207, 229, 234, 236, 238, 243, 246, 247).

<sup>106</sup> Stark (1954: xix, xxiii, 196, 236).

<sup>107</sup> Stark (1954: 217).

<sup>108</sup> Stark (1954: 145, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 236, 238, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246).

<sup>109</sup> Stark (1954: 231, 247).

<sup>110</sup> Stark (1954: xix, 27, 130, 143, 231, 246).

<sup>111</sup> Stark (1954: 141).

<sup>112</sup> He also compliments her use of photographs, particularly one he feels represents ‘the former Greek parts of Asia Minor: the one of your guide, a heavy, rather oafish, empty-handed lout planted as inertly as a sack of potatoes on the capsized capital of a broken Greek column. An agreeable bumpkin, I feel, with quite a nice smile; but he oughtn’t to be there ... The picture is almost heraldic in the simplicity and directness of its message, like the Red Heart of Douglas or the Bloody Hand of Ulster’ (Leigh Fermor 2016: 90).

my means allow', she looked to ancient writers to aid her 're-creation' of Ionia. She anticipates her reader

will see that the authorities are not chosen by an expert: many of them I fear are such as the historian might reject. Yet they build a picture that an average tourist in the days of Ionia might have felt at home with. However unhistorical, *it gave me pleasure to think of the things Pausanias saw*, the monuments of a doubtful past, as he went to and fro (1954: xiv).<sup>113</sup>

The diminished archaeological material meant Stark felt compelled to consult written sources. This approach was an at times dominant characteristic of her narrative style, which came especially to the fore when she felt first-hand experience needed to be supplemented with supporting evidence.

Here, Stark's method is to consult ancient authors to explore contemporary settings, regardless of the passage of time. As was observed in the introduction to Part I, Stark was part of a tradition in which travellers looked to the writing of ancient authors in order to enhance their experience of contemporary cultures. Likewise, her engagement with Herodotus and his *Histories* shares commonalities with examples of travel writing that would follow *Ionia: A Quest*. As the remainder of this chapter will show, in Stark can be found an author who constructs the ideal travel companion for herself combined with elements of her own literary persona. Her interests in the interactions between opposed cultures, as well as her concerns with ethnocentrism feed into her conception of Herodotus and inform the progress of the narrative. In addition to this, Herodotus' reliability as a recorder of data is evident in Stark's engagement, even during the instances where his veracity is called into question. In order to understand why Stark draws this level of engagement from Herodotus I will first look at what drew Stark to the region and then explore how she introduces Herodotus to her reader. From this I will then extend the examination to Herodotus' role in the text as a whole.

## **2.2: Why Ionia?**

For Stark, the purpose of looking to the past served to provide a means of escaping the sorrows of her contemporary world. Humanity had just emerged from the horrors of the Second World War and was now in the midst of the Cold War. For a British citizen such as Stark, added to this was the dismantling of the British Empire. It is possible to read her emphasis on cultural openness as being the ideal as a warning to the British in how to establish their new position in the world. Indeed, her depiction of the region that until relatively recently had been a part of the former

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<sup>113</sup> My italics.

Ottoman Empire emphasizes the changing fortune of a once powerful entity. Squire (1954) describes how in *Ionia: A Quest* the reader is ‘aware of two worlds; the immediate world before her eyes of Turks tilling their lands amidst the ruins of three thousand years and the old world which Herodotus knew in its prime and Pausanias in its decline’. It is the presence of current events in her writing that Patrick Leigh Fermor values when he commends her work in his Foreword to *Over the Rim of the World* (1988), noting how ‘moments of distress and contemporary tragedy cut clean across her tracing of ancient dramas’ (1988: viii). This is very much the case with *Ionia: A Quest*. Given she is writing about the presence of Greeks in Western Turkey, it should come as no surprise that the fallout from the mass expulsion of peoples that occurred in the region in the earlier part of the century following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire is addressed. However, for the Turks at least, ‘The wound is healing, and Turkey has her country to herself; there is optimism abroad there, a rising sap of life’ (1954: 34), although ‘Ionia today [remains] charred and scarred ... by the Greek departure and the Turkish arrival in 1922’.<sup>114</sup> Refugees, both ancient and modern, add to the sense of continuity and are featured by Stark in her text, as well as in her own photographs that are reproduced in the book, two of which include portraits of three Macedonian refugees in Erythrae. In her chapter on Teos, she writes of ‘Urla, a village where new houses are built for Balkan refugees’ (1954: 24), and her chapter on Pitane, too, mentions a ‘new village built for Balkan refugees’ (1954: 71), whilst chapter 14 features ‘Ahmet Beyli, a village of Balkan refugees who grow tobacco here in the shade of great fig trees’ (1954: 108).

Of her ancient examples, parallels are sometimes drawn to the plight of those living in the present. Stark’s chapter on Erythrae ends with the author lamenting of how ‘Thracian exiles are still torn from their homes and brought to Erythrae, as if nothing useful were ever learned at all’ (1954: 41). In the chapter on Chios a Herodotean parallel is drawn by Stark via the tale of Arion. Hüseyin, the skipper of the boat on which she is travelling, talks about the experiences of the local people during the Second World War and ‘the hunger of the islands’ (1954: 43). It is the actions of local boatmen that prompts a Herodotean comparison, more specifically, to *Histories* 1.23-24 and the tale of Arion of Methymna, the crew who plot ‘to throw him overboard and steal his money’, and his subsequent rescue by a dolphin. The contemporary examples have similar elements to the mythic story, particularly the actions of the crew and how it was that ‘a number of the boatmen saw to it that fugitives, who had paid large sums and were trying to escape with all they had left upon them, should never reach land.’ For these refugees, however, ‘usually it was the story of Arion, with the dolphins left out.’ And so, she states, ‘One can understand why the ancient

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<sup>114</sup> See, for example, Clark (2007) on the forced expulsions enacted by the Turks, and Milton (2009) and Robertson (2014) on the Armenian Genocide.

tellers of tales looked, for relief from human squalor, to the more decent animal world' and to stories such as these. Stark then proceeds to emphasise this point by including a retelling of the story of Coeranus of Miletus and his kindness to dolphins being reciprocated.<sup>115</sup> This reflects her own desire to seek relief from the present by escaping into a fantasy of the past, albeit one that is crafted using ancient sources.

### **2.3: Why Herodotus?**

The writers that are most frequently cited by Stark in *Ionia: A Quest* are Strabo, Pausanias, and Herodotus. All three authors were born in Western Turkey, wrote about the region, and were travellers. However, in the opening of the book it is Herodotus alone who receives Stark's thanks, and whom she describes as 'the constant companion of this journey' (1954: vi). Stark begins by displaying her familiarity with the rather sketchy account of his life that has been fashioned over the millennia, noting that: 'Of his life little but its work is known: except that he was the son of Lyxes, and ended his days in the South Italian colony of Thurii: and Sophocles at the age of fifty-five wrote for him a song' (1954: vi). What is, however, most significant in her thanks to Herodotus is that he was 'born in the Dorian city of Halicarnassus in Caria', that he was 'a traveller in the Levant', and that he was a 'maker of History' (1954: vi). These three aspects of Herodotus' character signal to the reader why Herodotus is the ideal companion for this travelogue before the narrative has even begun. The importance of his birthplace is of course due to its location on the Turkish coast. Herodotus' role as a traveller would have certainly appealed to Stark as well, who was by this time a well-respected travel writer.<sup>116</sup>

It is perhaps the final aspect of her thanks that suggests why it was that Herodotus, instead of Strabo and Pausanias, was singled out. True, all three were born in the region and were travellers, but Herodotus' status as the 'father of history' would have added credence to her work. As was noted in the introduction to Part I, Strabo references the *Histories* in his work and at times debates its validity. Pausanias, who has also been grouped into the genre of travel literature, has also been read as emulating Herodotus in his work the *Description of Greece*.<sup>117</sup> As Bowie (2001: 25) argues, 'it

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<sup>115</sup> The translation of the tale that Stark consulted for her research was the version found in the Loeb edition of *Elegy and Iambus* (Stark 1954: 246).

<sup>116</sup> Jane Fletcher Geniesse's 1999 biography of Stark is entitled *The Passionate Nomad*, and the latter part of the title is prompted by what can be described as the nomadic lifestyle that Stark led. Certainly, she travelled widely throughout her lifetime.

<sup>117</sup> See, for example, Gray (2016).

is in the tradition of Herodotus that Pausanias clearly wishes to place himself. Stark in a sense continues this tradition by doing the same; she embarks on a journey with Herodotus as a source of inspiration. Stark interweaves ancient sources and historical testimonies with her descriptions of the people she encountered and the sites she explored during her time in Western Turkey, which is comparable to Herodotus' approach of drawing on oral testimonies, literary texts, and his own investigation in crafting his account.

Setting out the Herodotean connection upfront introduces the importance Herodotus' *Histories* will have on what will follow. Beyond being a literary resource for the region, Stark also depicts Herodotus as the 'perfect travelling companion' (1954: 17) and dedicates a portion of her travel account to crafting a Herodotus that appeals to her sensibilities. This separates Stark from the majority of authors featured in the introduction to Part I who used the *Histories* as a guide. Like Mary Kingsley's earlier rendering of Herodotus as being interested in 'fair-play', Stark sees in Herodotus an appealing and thoughtful figure. In comparison to Kingsley's brief characterisation, however, Stark dedicates a significant proportion of her travel account to relaying the charm of Herodotus and his writing.

#### **2.4: Stark's Herodotus**

Central to Stark's appreciation of ancient material, be it in the form of text or landscape, is how it allows her to connect with the people of the past. As the mould of a bust from the ruins of Pompeii transports the protagonist of the author Pierre Jules Théophile Gautier's (1811-1872) short story *Arria Marcella: Souvenir de Pompéi* (1852) to a fantasy of the city in its heyday, Stark feels a connection to the people of ancient Ionia when she engages with the artefacts of their world. Whilst waiting to travel to Heracleia, for example, Stark observes the beauty of the rising moon:

I watched her with an incredulous, tremulous wonder, riding the eights with her silver reins, and shedding, as if into the darkness of moonlit chasms, the shackles of time. For what else did some shepherd see in his earlier day, but the goddess bending from rock to rock as I saw her, till in that high and barren chaos above the height of trees she looked down on a more fortunate shepherd, Endymion asleep? So the legend began. And whoever it was who first made articulate that loveliness and ecstasy of the night—he was my brother while I knew the thing he knew, whatever ages might lie between us. It was strange to share a secret with someone so long forgotten, who may have existed before even the art of writing was thought of, and saw what I saw and felt as I felt when he looked on the radiance stooping among the Latmian rocks (1954: 185-6).

The act of witnessing something that would have been on display to a person of the past prompts a sense of almost familial intimacy. The sense of wonder that the event inspires prompts her to

contemplate that the originator of the legend must have been inspired to compose the tale after experiencing such a magnificent sight. In this passage Stark can understand what led this unnamed ancient person to conceive the myth of Endymion and Selene. Indeed, this mutual understanding of the intoxicating atmosphere of the night, that Stark can comprehend now she is in this region, leads her to call the imagined originator 'my brother'. This sense of communion regardless of the separation of millennia is a key aspect to Stark's interaction with both Herodotus and her sources in general. This concept of sharing a connection with an ancient person across the chasm of time has much in common with her rendering of Herodotus. Both examples display, to differing degrees, the re-creation of a kindred spirit via the literary material she has encountered. What the above description also demonstrates is a characteristic that is intensified when she applies it to Herodotus' work. The idea of forming a connection across the chasm of time is a key aspect to Stark's interaction with both Herodotus and her sources in general. What makes Herodotus stand out both in comparison to the examples featured in the introduction to Part I and to Stark's treatment of other sources is how her communication with the ancient author is developed.

Stark's approach to Herodotus the man is not wholly dissimilar to that of Mary Kingsley and T. E. Lawrence, as discussed above. Like them, Stark imposes her own ideals onto the type of man she imagines Herodotus would have been and creates an amiable companion whose views are similar to her own; in her own words: 'a perfect travel companion' (1954: 17). Stark's interpretation of what she believes would be Herodotus' view of non-Greeks bears this out and recalls her own observations of cultural differences and the value of travel:

Out of the questions I should ask Herodotus, if I could have an hour's conversation with him, his real opinion about foreigners would be among the first: and I suspect that one might find it to be a very English opinion, that is to say that he would be interested in what is remote and pleased with its variety, and safe in the consciousness that his own was best. If one's own lot is not best, one ought to obviously to have altered it long ago: and as the Greeks spent so much time and energy in discovering the good life, it would be depressing for them to think that other people, with less mental effort, had succeeded in finding a better. One should therefore, I think, look upon this quiet confidence as a virtue, though dangerous, dangerous because it easily slips from rightness of self to wrongness of others, forgetting that every creature, including oneself, can have a different rightness of their own.' (1954: 141).

There is much to glean from this passage. If Stark's sees Herodotus as her perfect travel companion, then this paragraph contributes to understanding why. Herodotus is depicted here as a figure with whom she could converse with about topics that she finds interesting, if she were given the opportunity to do so. As she was in her third decade as a professional travel writer, it is perhaps unsurprising for Stark to seek Herodotus' view on non-Greeks. Both authors, after all,

had focused significant portions of their respective works on describing the people and cultures of foreign lands for their native audiences.

What is surprising is her comparison of Herodotus' opinions to the those of the English. The notion that the English are both 'interested' and 'pleased' with the range of cultures that exist in the world seems to jar with examples that are found in her earlier work and with Stark's criticism of the West in the rest of *Ionia: A Quest. Baghdad Sketches* for example, critiques British imperialists in Iraq. As noted above, in the book Stark presented her behaviour as being at odds with the British who lived there. Her insistence on living amongst the Iraqi people in Baghdad, instead of where the British community had settled was strictly against the advice of the British Civil Service: 'amongst the decorous wives of British civil servants, an independent, solitary traveller such as Stark was profoundly unsettling'.<sup>118</sup> Bird, for example, cites an incident in *Baghdad Sketches* as a demonstration of Stark identifying with the 'Other'. Whilst entertaining her friend and Arabic teacher Nasir Effendi at her house they are visited by a British woman, called simply 'Mrs. X.', who makes no secret of her wish for the Iraqi man to leave immediately. He does not do so, and Mrs. X. is eventually shown out by Stark. What is so compelling is Effendi's response to this woman's behaviour: "I knew she wanted me to go" he said. "I could see what she was thinking. They call us wogs." He put his cup down with a bang'.<sup>119</sup> The significance in this lies in the fact that Stark allows the 'Other' to speak because, as Bird (2012: 57) highlights, 'It is rare in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travel writing to see racism from the perspective of those on the receiving end'.

It could be argued that Stark's opinion of the British in general and the English in particular had shifted in the years between the publication of these books. A lot had changed in the world between 1933 and 1954, as well as for Stark herself. At this stage in her career, she had received several plaudits, as mentioned at the start of this chapter. However, there is criticism of the British in *Ionia: A Quest*. On page 4, for example, she states that 'If we are to criticize the British for anything ... it would be for our lack of virtue'. In addition to this is the notion of Western arrogance. In Chapter 23 ('Aphrodisias: The Ease of Life'), Stark laments the failure of Western civilization in not embracing the good in cultures outside of their own. As she puts it, cultures fail

by not being tender enough with traditions other than our own, by not accepting all good where we find it, weaving it in with our own good, remembering that the mixture makes the vintage and that the Absolute is out of reach. (1954: 216)

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<sup>118</sup> Bird (2012: 56).

<sup>119</sup> Stark (2011: 65).

This is what she finds so appealing in the work of Herodotus and the region of Western Turkey from which he came. Both the historian and his hometown demonstrate the ideal of the East and the West coming together at their best. It is this that led to the great works of writing and philosophy that Stark features in her own work. And so, her prolific use of sources not only aims to provide a background to the place she explores, but it also proves to her reader why it is worth exploring. Hence, Herodotus' appeal lies in the fact that Halicarnassus was situated on the western coast of Asia Minor where East met West, meaning his work benefited from the influence of both.

At the end of the above passage in which Stark contemplates what she would ask Herodotus, she also meditates on cultural relativism and the differences in how groups perceive right and wrong. This is a topic that Stark had already addressed in a paper delivered in 1936 at the Book Exhibition, where she outlined her understanding of the value of travel:

Travel gives one, I think, a notion of what are and are not universal values ... The more one travels and discovers these universal values, the more one will also understand about one's own, the more one will discriminate the fundamental from the accidental. There are some things which make an appeal and are recognized everywhere, wherever there is a human being; and others which have only a limited currency. You would think that it is easy to distinguish them; but, as a matter of fact, we are constantly making mistakes' (1936: 108-9).

What can be classed as universal conventions include, according to Stark, 'the interest in clothes or children, the respect for old age, the love of learning' (1936: 109). In contrast to this, the concept of honour is, she suggests, subject to the mores of each respective culture. She states to her audience that 'Honour and truth are by no means the same all over the world; though every nation no doubt has them', and she cites examples from the region she had by that point become famous for travelling in, including the observation that whilst 'The Arab thinks it wrong to kill a sleeping enemy', nevertheless, 'he is forced by a sense of duty to execute his wife or sister if they are even gossiped about' (1936: 109). This is of course to be viewed in contrast to how the British audience of her paper would react to such an event and emphasises how two cultures can view honour so differently. Western Europeans do not come out of her comparison wholly unscathed, however, with the use of chemical weapons in the First World War described as being considered rather 'unsporting' by 'a number of savages' (1936: 109). The listing of such comparisons recalls *Histories* 3.38 and the assertion that 'Everyone without exception believes his own native customs, and the religion he was brought up in, to be the best'. When Darius presents both the Callatians and the Greeks with the funeral rites of the other group, each is disgusted by the other groups' treatment of the dead and prefer the custom of their own country. It is this idea of custom being 'king of all' that is echoed in Stark's examples of honour amongst the Arab peoples.

What seems to be occurring here then is the association of Stark's own values with content observable in the *Histories*, which would later manifest in her more direct engagement in *Ionia: A Quest*. In her 1956 work *The Lycian Shore: A Turkish Odyssey* she writes the following during the chapter covering her journey from Cos to Halicarnassus:

A mixed atmosphere is noticeable all down this Anatolian seaboard where none of the cities joined the Delian league in its early days. The *tolerance* of Herodotus was reared there, and, in Halicarnassus his native city, the Greek and barbarian fusion—the single world of Alexander's dream—was already in a small way accomplished.<sup>120</sup>

Herodotus and his homeland are exalted as examples of how a positive meeting of East and West can lead to a happy outcome, something she was keen to aid in her own era.<sup>121</sup> What is also evident with this passage is the effect that the journey depicted in *Ionia: A Quest* had had on her. This passage, however, goes beyond simple citation when Stark describes Herodotus as being tolerant. How is it that she can come to such a conclusion? Given that *The Lycian Shore* was her next published travelogue after *Ionia: A Quest* there is no doubt that the prominence of Herodotus in the earlier book influenced the later.

## **2.5: A Sensible Herodotus**

Stark's depiction of Herodotus remains never less than favourable throughout *Ionia: A Quest*. Similar to Kingsley's description of Herodotus being fair-minded, on more than one occasion Stark's construction describes Herodotus as being 'sensible'. Herodotus' rationalizing assessment of the Greek account of Heracles' visit to Egypt (*Histories* 2.45), for example, is described as 'one of his sensible conclusions' (1954: 69). Largely this derives from Herodotus dismissing the Greeks' version by stating 'such a tale is proof enough that the Greeks know nothing whatever about Egyptian character and custom.' As Moyer (2013: 316) notes, the passage allows Herodotus to establish 'the importance of understanding Egyptian customs, as well as his expert position in regard to other Greeks', a stance that no doubt would have appealed to Stark's interests.

In Chapter 6, 'Chios: Ingredients of Empire', Stark thinks of Herodotus during an encounter with three young Greek girls on a beach in Chios. As Stark had not obtained a visa to travel to Greece at this time, she could only view Chios from a boat. Nevertheless, she and her

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<sup>120</sup> My italics

<sup>121</sup> In the rest of the book Herodotus is named on eight occasions but his status largely remains that of a literary resource on the history of the region.

party do travel close enough to the island to find a spot to drop anchor and take a swim, whilst remaining ‘careful not to step out on the forbidden beach’ (1954: 50). While there

Three young girls, making their way to church perhaps, with coloured veils on their heads, came suddenly over the cliff, and cried out and made to turn back when they saw us, explaining in Greek that they were frightened, but yet coming on again, as it might have been Io on the shore of Argos or Europa in Tyre (1954: 50).

This leads Stark to recall Herodotus’ proem and the abductions that cause strife amongst the Greeks and the barbarians. However, it is not the clash between East and West that is on her mind. Rather it is Herodotus’ wisdom, particularly with regards to human behaviour, that has drawn her attention: ‘one could hear Herodotus, that sensible man, saying: “to be eager for revenge, they hold foolishness ... for it is plain that unless they had so desired themselves, they would not have been ravished”’.<sup>122</sup> This again demonstrates Stark looking to the text and the words of Herodotus to support her reading of his characterisation in *Ionia: A Quest*. Herodotus is seen as correct in his evaluation of human behaviour, as her encounter with the young women attests. Her understanding of this passage, however, is somewhat at odds with other readings of its meaning. Aristophanes may have parodied the events in his play *Acharnians*,<sup>123</sup> whilst Plutarch’s *On the Malice of Herodotus* (856 E-F) shows how scandalised the author was at the disrespect shown to Io. Such evaluations are irrelevant to Stark, for whom instead the passage demonstrates Herodotus’ accurate assessment of the human behaviour.

The emphasis on how Herodotus is correct in his assessments demonstrates the faith Stark had in the account contained within the *Histories*. The trust she expresses in her main source is also evident in Stark’s engagement with the other ancient texts to which she references. Accordingly, they are blended into the narrative with virtually no criticism. Her chapter on Colophon, for example, in which she considers the role of women in the history of the region, shows how her narrative interweaves the varying sources on which she drew:

Pausanias wonders when the Graces first shed their dress: he remarks that the older artists of Smyrna and Pergamum put clothes upon them.<sup>124</sup> And here is a purely oriental purdah

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<sup>122</sup> *Histories* 1.4: ““We think,” they say, “that it is unjust to carry women off. But to be anxious to avenge rape is foolish: wise men take no notice of such things. For plainly the women would never have been carried away, had they not wanted it themselves.””

<sup>123</sup> See Sansone (1985) for a survey of the arguments that have been raised both in favour and against this reading of Aristophanes’ play.

<sup>124</sup> *Description of Greece* IX.35.

touch from a timid well-brought up woman of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, who says: 'I hate a bad man, and veil my face as I pass him, keeping my heart light as a little bird's'.<sup>125</sup>

The Greeks in fact were late-comers to the coasts of Ionia, not mentioned there by Homer, to whom even Miletus is 'Carian, uncouth of speech',<sup>126</sup> and they brought no wives with them, 'but took Carian women whose menfolk they had murdered. ... For this murder,' says Herodotus, 'these women made them a law ... that they should never eat together with their husbands nor call them by their names. ...' it is a general oriental custom for men and women to eat separately, and Herodotus has given the gist of the matter a legendary twist.<sup>127</sup> (Stark 1954: 104).

Although, Stark did not want her reader to think of her as an expert in the ancient world, at this stage of her career she was considered to be an authority on West Asian culture, hence she can state with confidence that it 'is a general oriental custom for men and women to eat separately' without feeling the need to support this with a present-day example. By contrast, she names all the ancient texts she references here. Indeed, the footnotes I have included here (notes 124-127) are those featured in the book and demonstrate how important her references were in the construction of her narrative. However, the passage's conclusion is interesting in that Stark implies that Herodotus gives the story a mythical spin. This is somewhat at odds with, for example, Asheri's reading of the same passage in which he describes it, rather, as 'a rational aetiology for the widespread custom of sex-segregation at meals' (2007a: 177). And whilst How and Wells (1912) question the feasibility of such a tradition, stating it 'can hardly have been as absolute as Herodotus states', Stark's presentation of the material does not match with the contents.

What this passage also highlights is that Stark's engagement does not shy away from what she perceives as problematic elements in the *Histories*. Whilst Herodotus is uniformly admired by Stark throughout the entirety of *Ionia: A Quest*, questions relating to his veracity are also addressed in the book. Herodotus' description of the siege of Sardis by Cyrus and the eventual fate of Croesus, as described in *Histories* 1.84f, is featured in chapter 15 of *Ionia: A Quest*. Cyrus' burning of Croesus on a pyre (*Histories* 1.86) is challenged by Stark who instead favours Xenophon's account of Croesus' dialogue with Cyrus, as presented in the *Cyropaedia* (7.2), describing it as 'more probable than that of Herodotus' (1954: 126). This, she states, is because 'The Persians were fire-worshippers and therefore not likely to pollute their purest element with the flesh of their enemies.' Nevertheless, Stark refrains from overtly criticising this account and even suggests that it may have been the case that it was in fact Croesus who was attempting to kill himself 'and the fourteen noble

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<sup>125</sup> Theognis *Elegy and Iambus* I.299.

<sup>126</sup> *Iliad* 2.858

<sup>127</sup> *Histories* 1.146.

Lydian youths with him, in the Semitic tradition of Heracles,<sup>128</sup> and Sardanapalus,<sup>129</sup> or the later Dido' (1954: 126).<sup>130</sup> And so, Stark's account is not wholly devoid of instances where Herodotus' account contrasts with alternative narratives; nevertheless, the norm is to favour Herodotus' version.

Stark's attachment to Herodotus in the face of potentially inaccurate material is explained to her reader early in the book. In Chapter 4, 'Teos: Anacreon and the poetry of living', when discussing the famine in Lydia, which led to half the population resettling in Italy (*Histories* 1.94), Stark states that she believes the account to be 'unhistorical' (1954: 26). However, she confesses, 'I am far too devoted to Herodotus to doubt it' (1954: 26) and so does not question any further. A similar stance can be observed beyond her engagement with Herodotus. In her chapter on Colophon, she treats material encountered in Plutarch's *Life of Pericles* (24.6), in which he states that 'Twice a day, as they say, on going out and on coming in from the market-place, [Pericles] would salute [Aspasia] with a loving kiss', in an idealised way. Stark contemplates the relationship between men and women in ancient Greece by considering Xenophanes' poem to Archeanassa, 'the courtesan loved by Plato',<sup>131</sup> and Alcman having fallen 'immoderately in love with a poetess who was able to attract lovers to her by her conversation' (1954: 103).<sup>132</sup> Such examples, argues Stark, go against the standard idea that men thought little of women in ancient Greece:

One is always being told that love with the Greeks was entirely physical as far as women were concerned; I would never believe anything so unlikely, and prefer to remember Pericles, who never left the house without twice embracing his Aspasia.

Here Stark shows that whilst she is aware of the traditional interpretation of male and female interaction in the ancient world, she nevertheless prefers to look to texts that suit her own tastes. This method of filtering the past is a feature that informs Stark's engagement with her sources in *Ionia: A Quest* where the idealisation of ancient Greek texts and artefacts is supreme. This contrasts with how the legacy of Rome is handled within the work. Stark regarded the Romans with contempt. In a letter written in 1962 to Christopher Scaife she declared her distaste for their treatment of the Western Asia and of their writers:

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<sup>128</sup> Sophocles' *Trachiniae*.

<sup>129</sup> Diodorus Siculus *Historical Library* Chapter 2.

<sup>130</sup> *Aeneid* 4.666.

<sup>131</sup> 'Even upon her wrinkles there rests a bitter passion. Ah, ye wretches who encountered her youth in its first course, through what hot flame did ye pass?' (Atheneaus xiii. 600).

<sup>132</sup> Athenaeus (xiii. 600).

I have started chapter 1 of the Romans, the miserable tearing up of the Middle East by those brutal fascists. I must try to find a few nice ones to keep me going, Pliny is so boring, Cicero insufferable, Julian, I discover on reading his letters, an appalling prig. Even Catullus jeers at a man for being poor! What a relief to turn to Polybius who was Greek. I would have liked to have married him. What a decent person.

This sentiment of the Romans being fascists is certainly evident in *Ionian: A Quest* such as when she observes the ‘fascist blocks of the Roman masonry’ of the ruins in Laodicea (1954: 223). Her criticism of their architecture is extended further in her chapter on Hierapolis and Laodicea:

Here the huge solidity of the Roman ruins spreads itself along a ledge, with hollow arches, and piers of cement, and ceilings cut into curves, and rafters entirely of stone. The baths meet one first, and later churches are away to the north and theatre is held in the lap of the hill above: all look out across the plain to the lands of Maeander and with their blind eyes dominate the Ionian world. However impressive, one feels a deadness in the heart of this stone: the secret of life is not vivid inside it, as it is in the poorest remnant of an Hellenic wall (1954: 221-2).

The final sentence is very revealing. The vibrancy she finds in Greek architecture is lacking in the work of the Romans. Her description of Greek architecture on page 60 further emphasises her admiration:

Men have lived in the stones they put together from Avebury to Chartres and beyond; but no one, I believe, after the Greek, has put so much of himself into surfaces of walls, straightforward and entirely unadorned (1954: 60).

This aversion to the Romans could be simply due to personal taste, but it is possible that contemporary events are influencing Stark’s perception of Roman culture. Stark had lived a significant portion of her life in Italy and in her autobiography covering the period of 1939-1946, *Dust in the Lion’s Paw*, she is keen to differentiate between the regular Italian people and those who supported Mussolini:

The distinction between Fascists and Italians, so difficult for our people [the British] to grasp, was plain enough to us who lived among them: almost all the friends we had would have checkmated Mussolini if they could, nor did they want a victory which would turn their country into a German province in its wake ... And my feelings about the Fascists were (and are) expressed by Benedetto Croce, who said that they could never be intelligent or honest, for ‘if a Fascist is honest he is not intelligent; if he is intelligent then he is not honest; and if he is both intelligent and honest, he is not a Fascist.’ For this reason I use a word which has had some of its venom dusted over by time, but is more appropriate to the people I was to meet in the Yemen [propagandists for Mussolini’s regime] than the name of a country I love. (1988: 22).

Her use of the word ‘fascist’ in her description of Roman architecture would, therefore, imply a similar lack of sophistication in comparison with her beloved Greeks. Her book written in the following decade, *Rome on the Euphrates: The Story of a Frontier* (1966), for example, would lay the blame for the ‘eight centuries of unnecessary war’ (1966: 191) between Rome and the Eastern powers largely upon the Romans themselves. Moreover, in this later book Stark also equates the mistakes of the Romans with the actions of more contemporary powers. Indeed, she is quite open about how applicable the prolonged ancient conflict is to the modern world:

The great route of Asia is the oldest, the richest, the longest, the most persistent and most romantic of all the chequered streams of trade; and the benefits when it flows, and the catastrophes when it is interrupted, have been visible through all its vicissitudes, from the age of the Assyrians to our own. With China at one end and Europe at the other and Russia between them, the subject is topical today as ever before: and the question of this book—*Why did the Romans fight along their rich Euphrates frontier?*—can just as easily be asked today. (1966: xv-xvi).

These biases are important to acknowledge because they emphasize how her engagement with ancient material is subject to personal taste as much as what is contained within the text or object. This is certainly true when considering how Herodotus is presented in *Ionia: A Quest*. Stark’s Herodotus displays features that are found elsewhere in travel literature. She uses the *Histories* to enhance her experience of her journey as much as Duff-Gordon before her processed what she encountered in Egypt through her familiarity with the *Histories*. Likewise, holding Herodotus in such high esteem recalls Mary Kingley’s positive assessment of Herodotus as being both accurate and fair. What distinguishes Stark from these earlier examples is the extent to which she engages with Herodotus within her travelogue. As well as serving as a literary source and guide, Herodotus becomes a character alongside Stark who is as important to the narrative as the people she encounters on her journey. His presence, then, is informed as much by her preferences as from the data about him that can be gleaned from the content of the *Histories*.

Stark matches her Herodotus to her own preferences and so a degree of selectivity is, therefore, necessary in her construction. There are times when the material does not correspond to her conception of Herodotus the gentleman-traveller. She considers *Histories* 8.106, which depicts Hermotimus’ revenge on the man who turned him into a eunuch, to be ‘the most revolting of all the stories collected by Herodotus’ (1954: 75), but she does not agonise over its inclusion because Herodotus also shows revulsion to the content. And so, Stark briefly mentions the content of 8.106 before quickly moving on. Her description of Herodotus in this passage as a collector of tales also contributes to her idealisation of him more generally. In his article ‘Herodotus the

Tourist' (1985: 99) Redfield would later liken Herodotus' method of gathering data to a visitor who 'collects the emblems of various countries he visits'. Stark's own characterisation of Herodotus interprets his technique in a similar manner, which in this circumstance absolves Herodotus of any blame for what she found to be a repulsive passage. For Stark, Herodotus was simply recording for posterity what information he had gathered. And so, once again, potentially problematic material is rendered in such a way as to adhere to Stark's vision of Herodotus as the perfect travel companion.

## **2.6: Conclusion**

Stark's method of thoroughly researching a region when preparing for a journey led the author to declare Herodotus to be the ideal travel companion. Set amidst an array of ancient and modern sources, the *Histories* became her guide to experiencing the lost world of Ionia. For Stark being the product of a region where East met West meant Herodotus personified the best features of the world she wanted to experience in her travels. This in turn reflected on the *Histories*, which showed a fascination with non-European cultures to which Stark could relate. Her life's work was dedicated to understanding and writing about the peoples of Asia, especially Western Asia, in order to educate Westerners more generally, and the British in particular. In Herodotus, then, she found a kindred spirit, whose interests mirrored her own. However, whilst Stark is keen to remind her reader that the work as a whole was the product of a high degree of research, both through the use of literary sources and through her journey to Turkey, her characterisation of Herodotus does contain a fair degree of her own imaginings.

Stark saw in Herodotus a traveller whose knowledge and experiences shaped a work that appealed to her own sensibilities. One notable characteristic of Stark's Herodotus is what she sees as his good judgement, which she draws from the *Histories* by connecting the trait with passages where she thinks Herodotus has reached a sensible conclusion. Stark's conception of Herodotus in this manner inspires the faith that she has in his account. Indeed, even when she expresses doubt over certain aspects of the *Histories*, she remains fully devoted to her travel companion. As well as sharing commonalities with other examples of the genre (see Part I chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis), the affection that the author displays towards the ancient writer is a feature Stark has displayed elsewhere in her writing. When writing of ancient Greece, she shows a preference that is in marked contrast to her views on Rome. Her engagement with Herodotus and the *Histories* can also be seen as another expression of this fondness. And so, whilst *Ionia: A Quest* is the product of

Stark's engagement with ancient written material and archaeological sources, the text and its treatment of Herodotus' *Histories* is also shaped through her imagination.

## Chapter 3

### 'Open, friendly, a hail-fellow well-met': Herodotus and Ryszard

#### Kapuściński<sup>133</sup>

The two writers make a perfect pair, separated by two and a half thousand years yet equally fascinated by the beautiful terror of the human condition.

Sara Wheeler (2007)

Born in the city of Pinsk in 1932,<sup>134</sup> the internationally renowned Polish foreign correspondent and author Ryszard Kapuściński travelled the world as a foreign correspondent for various publications including *Polityka*, *Time* magazine, and *The New York Times*. His travels also gave him the material for a great number of later books, including *Another Day of Life* (*Jeszcze dzień życia*) (1976), *The Soccer War* (*Wojna futbolowa*) (1978), *The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat* (*Cesarz*) (1978), and *Shah of Shabs* (*Szachinszach*) (1982). Kapuściński explained that his later writing satisfied the need to convey more detail than was allowed by the succinct reportage of traditional journalism:

But once I had sent the cable, I was always left with a feeling of inadequacy. I had only covered the political event, and not really conveyed the deeper, and, I felt, truer nature of what was going on. And this sense dissatisfaction remained with me each time I returned to Poland. You can always find two versions of my work. The first version is what I do when I'm in the field—it's all in the cables, the stories filed. The second version is what I write later, and that expresses what I actually felt, what I lived through, the reflections surrounding the simple news story (Buford 2007: 241)

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<sup>133</sup> Kapuściński (2008: 47).

<sup>134</sup> In *Travels with Herodotus*, he described Pinsk as follows: 'It is a landscape of a flat, a very flat, country, a marshland, and there are two things that are important to me about Pinsk. First that here in this very provincial town, this town of dirt roads, cut off from everything, was in fact an extraordinarily cosmopolitan gathering. Many of the founders of the State of Israel came from my town. There were Jews, Poles, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Armenians, and every kind of religion, from Judaism to Catholicism to Islam, and we all lived together. The people were called Poleshuks, meaning merely 'people born in the district of Polsie', and they were a people without a nation and without, therefore, a national identity. And, second, while Pinsk was very international—or if you like, very 'nationless'—it was also very poor' (2008: 235). The variety, Kapuściński explained, was vital in assisting his engagement with those he encountered on his travels during his long career. 'You learned to feel, to sense how others lived. When I came to places like Nigeria, Angola, Iran, Brazil or Algeria, I found it easy to talk to ordinary people, to find out what was important in their lives. Everywhere was at least a little like Pinsk' (Boyd 1987).

Well-decorated during his lifetime, Kapuściński was the recipient of many awards, including the Hanseatic Goethe Prize (1999), the Feudo Di Maida Prize (2000), the Prix Tropiques (2001), and even served as the model for Jerzy Michalowski, the main protagonist in Andrzej Wajda's 1978 film *Bez znieczulenia* ('Without Anaesthesia'/'Rough Treatment'). It is assumed, too, that Kapuściński would have been a candidate for receiving a Nobel Prize had he lived long enough. As Timothy Garton Ash (2010) observes:

Had he lived a few years longer Ryszard Kapuściński might well have won the Nobel prize for literature. Although these things are shrouded in Vatican-like secrecy, I bet that he was on the Swedish Academy's rolling shortlist.

Such details, however, are largely absent from his last published work, the travelogue-cum-memoir *Travels with Herodotus*. Originally published in Polish in 2004, the book shows Kapuściński interlacing the details of his worldwide travels across his distinguished career with meditations on the nature of Herodotus and his *Histories*. Herodotus is such a prominent feature of the narrative that Kapuściński dedicates sizable portions of the book to either re-telling segments from *Histories* or quoting them wholesale. His focus on Herodotus serves to illustrate the connection he felt with the ancient writer and his work, a relationship that was forged over the decades. He carries the *Histories* with him when he leaves Poland for the first time and he describes how Herodotus remains with him throughout his many journeys across the world, even when the book is not physically in his possession. Herodotus is depicted as Kapuściński's perfect travel companion in *Travels with Herodotus* and the author goes to great lengths to prove the value of the ancient writer and his work.

Reading the text also proved to be an educational experience for Kapuściński, as he saw Herodotus to be not only the father of history but also a forefather of journalism. It also kept him entertained during times when he felt he needed to escape. Perhaps most interestingly, it provided him with comfort. The comfort he finds in Herodotus and his work is evident at many stages of the narrative. He carries the *Histories* with him when he leaves Poland for the first time and he describes how Herodotus remains with him throughout his many journeys across the world, even when the book is not physically in his possession. This chapter, then, will explore Kapuściński's engagement with Herodotus and the *Histories* in *Travels with Herodotus*. First, it examines Herodotus' role in Kapuściński's journeys. Secondly, it will identify and assess the traits that draw Kapuściński to Herodotus, chiefly his compassion and his curiosity. The depiction of Herodotus in *Travels with Herodotus* derives from a combination of admiration and imagination. Kapuściński devotes a great amount of the narrative to exploring his appreciation of Herodotus, often to the extent that his

own story becomes lost amongst Herodotean content. This, however, is intentional on the part of Kapuściński and is another means of signifying the importance of Herodotus to both his life and his work.

On one of the rare occasions that Kapuściński included personal information is his account of his student years Herodotus is also present within the passage. Whilst writing of his youth and his time spent at university, for example, Kapuściński's earliest encounter with the *Histories* is described as appearing 'for a moment in a lecture on ancient Greece' (2008: 3). His notes of the lectures that were delivered by Professor Biezuńska-Malowitz over fifty years earlier contain no trace of Herodotus:<sup>135</sup> 'I do not find his name. There are Aeschylus and Pericles, Sappho and Socrates, Heraclitus and Plato; but no Herodotus' (2008: 3). And yet he recalls he first heard Herodotus' name, but seemingly not the details of his work or life, in those same lecture halls (2008: 5). This is likely because a Polish publication of the text was unavailable until 1955, although it had been translated in the 1940s by Professor Seweryn Hammer (2008: 5).<sup>136</sup> No connection to Herodotus is established at this early stage but that soon changes when Kapuściński is given a translated copy by his editor-in-chief, Irena Tarłowska, before he departs for India on an assignment for the newspaper *Sztandar Młodych* ('The Banner of Youth').<sup>137</sup> From this point on the *Histories* served as an almost constant companion during his travels across the world. *Travels with Herodotus* follows these journeys whilst simultaneously exploring Kapuściński's relationship with Herodotus and the *Histories*. Accordingly, the account of his experiences in foreign lands is interspersed with contemplations on the ancient Greek and his work. This is immediately apparent when glancing at the 'Contents' of the book where the twelfth chapter entitled 'Armstrong's Concert' is followed by the thirteenth entitled 'The Face of Zephyrus', which refers to the Persian nobleman's act of self-mutilation that led to Darius' conquest of Babylon (*Histories* 3.154-160). And so, before the narrative begins, Kapuściński introduces to his reader how the world that Herodotus depicts will be discussed in conjunction with Kapuściński's account of his travels in the modern world.

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<sup>135</sup> Professor Iza Biezuńska-Malowitz (1917-1995) taught ancient history at the University of Warsaw.

<sup>136</sup> As well as a distinguished career as a Professor, Seweryn Hammer (1883-1955) also survived being detained at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp from 1940-41.

<sup>137</sup> In a 2007 review of the book published in the *Guardian* this is described by fellow travel writer Sara Wheeler as being 'a wonderful literary device'.

### 3.1: Herodotus the Guide

The compulsion to look to Herodotus' account when writing about a region that was described in the *Histories*, such as when travellers would boast of carrying Herodotus through Egypt, is a trait that occurs in Kapuściński's work. Thus, when he describes his time in Egypt in Chapter 11: 'The View from the Minaret', he prefaces this by first establishing Herodotus' own travels in the region, as recounted in Book 2 of the *Histories*. As is customary throughout *Travels with Herodotus*, Kapuściński includes large portions of the *Histories*' account of Egypt interspersed with retellings and musings on what Herodotus meant by focussing on specific elements of Egyptian history and culture. This is a characteristic of his engagement with the *Histories* in *Travels with Herodotus* where entire chapters can be dedicated solely to ancient material. Chapter 14, for example, entitled 'The Hare', is focussed on the Scythians with a significant proportion of the chapter consisting of passages where they are described in the *Histories*. This technique of devoting substantial portions of the travelogue-cum-memoir to sharing detailed material from Herodotus' account is explained by Horodecker as being partially 'motivated by a need to make the reader interested in what fascinated the author himself' (2015: 122). The degree to which the *Histories* features in the narrative stems from a place of fascination, with Kapuściński including as much detail as possible in order to convey the richness of Herodotus' text.

However, Kapuściński's use of Herodotean content in *Travels with Herodotus* does not always conform to the standard pattern found within travel literature. There are instances where the passage of the *Histories* that is featured does not match the location the author visited. Whilst other texts within the genre would draw on directly corresponding examples to enrich their understanding of a region, Kapuściński will sometimes look to passages describing the cultures and events of lands that are different to the place he is visiting. In the account of his time covering the Congolese fight for independence from Belgian imperialism, Kapuściński admits to being so absorbed by Herodotus' description of the Greco-Persian wars that he 'experienced the dread of the approaching war between the Greeks and the Persians more vividly than I did the events of the current Congolese conflict, which I was assigned to cover' (2008: 164).<sup>138</sup> The chapter depicting his journey there reflects this by consisting mainly of Herodotus' account of the Ionian Revolt.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> The sentiment also appears at page 126: 'I am too infected with the contagion of war—not the local one, but another, distant in place and time, which the king of the Persians, Darius, is waging war against the rebellious Babylon, and which Herodotus describes. I am sitting in the shade on the verandah [sic], swiping at flies and mosquitoes and reading his book.'

<sup>139</sup> Kapuściński (2008: 155-163).

It is possible to see parallels to the events of both conflicts, which suggest why Kapuściński was compelled to link the two. On a basic level both feature rebellions against the forces of colonialism that are headed by a leader who is subsequently executed at the behest of the imperialists. The ideologies behind such actions are, however, wildly different. Certainly, the Milesian tyrant Histiaeus was no freedom fighter like the Congolese politician and anti-imperialist Patrice Lumumba,<sup>140</sup> but the inclusion of this segment of Herodotus' account within Kapuściński's modern travels, as well as the concept of a revolt, nevertheless prompts a parallel to be considered even as the locations differ.

When he writes of his visit to Iran in 1979 Kapuściński's unique way of engaging with the *Histories* during his travels is further in evidence. The chapter begins by considering Darius I and his time as a ruler. He considers the Persian king to be a compelling figure, whose cruel deeds are juxtaposed with his good management of the empire. And so, Darius' treatment of Oeobazus and his sons in *Histories* 9.115-121 is contrasted with examples of him being a 'good administrator' who, as Kapuściński puts it,

took care of the roads and the mail, minted money, and supported trade. And first and foremost, almost from the moment when he donned to royal diadem, he began to erect a magnificent city, Persepolis, whose importance and lustre we would compare to Jerusalem and Mecca (2008: 145-146)

When describing Darius' penchant for organisation Kapuściński looks to the acts carried out by Darius once he obtains the throne, as depicted in *Histories* 3.89f, whilst his reference to Persian mail refers to the feats of the Persian couriers, as illustrated in *Histories* 8.98. As Kapuściński enters Iran at the time of its revolution, it seems appropriate that he should discuss issues surrounding the rulers of the region both in the past and the present. But no further passages relating to Herodotus' description of ancient Persia are featured in the chapter beyond this initial discussion. Instead, he includes a passage describing the Scythians that he claims to have read whilst riding the bus to Shiraz when his view of the landscape became too monotonous (2008: 147-148). The passage Kapuściński read is Herodotus' depiction of the Scythian custom relating to how the corpses of slain enemies are handled.<sup>141</sup> Here the text serves as a mode of keeping the author occupied during the journey rather than enlightening him on the ancient peoples of Iran. In instances such as these, the emphasis of Kapuściński's description is very much on the

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<sup>140</sup> Indeed, at a rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity given on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1964 Malcolm X described Lumumba as 'the greatest black man who ever walked the African continent'.

<sup>141</sup> *Histories* 4.64-65.

‘companion’ aspect of the travel companion descriptor and less on his role as an ancient guide. This is a key component to the ancient author’s characterisation in the memoir. Indeed, Herodotus remains a constant presence by Kapuściński’s side, serving as a source of inspiration and comfort, whether or not he carries the *Histories*. In the concluding chapter of *Travels with Herodotus* Kapuściński acknowledges:

Herodotus did not always accompany me. Frequently, my departures happened so suddenly that I had neither the time nor the presence of mind to think about the Greek. Even when I brought the book along, I often had so much work that I lacked the strength and the will to reread yet again the momentous conversation between Otanes, Megabyzus, and Darius, or to remind myself what the Ethiopians with whom Xerxes set out on his conquest of Greece looked like ... But even without reaching for the book, I could easily recall the epilogue to the war between the Greeks and the Amazons, which I had read on several previous occasions ... Even when I had not opened *The Histories* for years, I never forgot about Herodotus (2008: 265-267)

Possessing a physical copy of the *Histories*, then, is not an essential requirement for Kapuściński to engage with Herodotean material. Carrying Herodotus with him in his thoughts was enough and reinforces the deep affection Kapuściński has for the author and his work, which is emphasised throughout *Travels with Herodotus*.

### **3.2 Kapuściński’s Companion**

When Kapuściński describes his visit to Iran in *Travels with Herodotus* he recalls how it was only possible to travel to Persepolis via taxi. He, therefore, enlists the help of a driver called Jafar who takes him to his destination. The men share no common language and so communicate ‘solely via sign language’ (2008: 148). During the journey Jafar covers Kapuściński with a blanket when he shivers in the freezing desert night and signals to him not to dry his face after washing it with water. ‘The sun must dry off the moisture’ assumes Kapuściński; ‘I understood this to be a ritual and stood patiently waiting’ (2008: 148). In a text that prominently features Herodotus’ *Histories*, the communication through signs recalls Book 4.133, for example, where an Amazon communicates with a Scythian man via signs because ‘neither understood the other’s language’.<sup>142</sup> Beyond the situational comparison, Kapuściński’s interaction with Jafar offers a parallel to Kapuściński’s depiction of Herodotus in *Travels with Herodotus*. All Kapuściński knows of Jafar is his name and his occupation and yet in the short time they spend together Kapuściński describes

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<sup>142</sup> Kapuściński was certainly aware of this passage as it is featured at page 266.

the formation of a relationship. Jafar and Kapuściński cannot speak to each other and yet the author is guided, comforted, and educated by this companion. Through Jafar, Kapuściński is able to experience the wonder of Persepolis. Herodotus would provide a historical context for the site through his description of the expansion and development of the Persian Empire in the *Histories* and Jafar would physically take him there. There is the barrier of time between Herodotus and Kapuściński, just as there is the barrier of language between the taxi driver and his passenger. Nevertheless, he describes forging relationships with both men.

In *Travels with Herodotus* Kapuściński writes of how he slowly became drawn to Herodotus. As he puts it: ‘Herodotus had started to interest me—I took a downright fancy to him’ (2008: 44). As the narrative progresses, so, too, does the relationship with Kapuściński describing it as developing into ‘something akin to warmth, even friendship’ (2008: 177). Reading Herodotus in this manner is comparable to Stark’s representation of a sensible Herodotus and the fair-minded figure of Mary Kingsley.<sup>143</sup> Each depiction of Herodotus derives from a place of admiration on the part of the author and emerges from the authors’ reading of the *Histories*. But an element of imagination is also involved in the authors’ construction of Herodotus. As was described in the previous chapter, Stark’s Herodotus displayed interests in common with the twentieth-century travel writer, which suggested the influence of her own tastes on her rendering of Herodotus. This is also the case in *Travels with Herodotus*, as Kapuściński attaches qualities to his Herodotus that share commonalities with the Polish author.

The relationship of Kapuściński’s Herodotus to slaves and slavery, for example, is difficult to connect with the depiction of slavery in the *Histories* but corresponds with Kapuściński’s opinions on the subject of the oppressed. Within *Travels with Herodotus* Kapuściński does not imagine Herodotus to have behaved cruelly towards his slaves:

And what of Herodotus himself, what sort of slaves did he have? How many? How did he treat them? I think that he was a kind-hearted man, and gave them little reason to complain overly much. They visited a huge expanse of the world with him, and later perhaps, when he settled in Thurii to write his *Histories*, they served as living memories, as walking encyclopaedias, reminding him of names, places, and details of stories which he needed help remembering as he began writing them down, and in this way they contributed to the astonishing richness of his book.

What happened to them after Herodotus’ death? Were they put up for sale in the marketplace? Or were they maybe as aged as their master and likely to have followed him shortly after into the next world? (2008: 246)

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<sup>143</sup> Kapuściński states that he read Kingsley’s *West African Studies* during his time in Congo and commends her for being ‘penetrating in her observations and courageous in her compass’ (2008: 177). There is, however, no mention of her assessment of Herodotus.

Kapuściński is clearly aware of the speculative nature of his presentation, which is emphasised in his use of ‘I think’ and ‘perhaps’. Nevertheless, the author is right to highlight the presence of slavery in the narrative of the *Histories*. There are over one hundred references to slavery in the *Histories*. These passages range from slaves being used to convey hidden messages to Ionian conspirators (*Histories* 5.35) to slavery being perceived as an inherited characteristic (*Histories* 4.1-4).<sup>144</sup> On a conceptual level, the desire not to be subjects within the ever-expanding Persian Empire provides motivation for Greek resistance. This can be seen, for example, in Demaratus’ description of what Xerxes should expect from seeking conflict with the Spartans (*Histories* 7.102-3). Compassion towards the plight of slaves, however, is harder to locate within the narrative of the *Histories*. When Herodotus does acknowledge brutality towards slaves at 8.105 his revulsion derives more from the custom than concern for the victims. The Chian Panionius’ practice of castrating slaves is deemed ‘unholy’ by the author but, as Braund (2008: 15) notes, this is because the practice was not the cultural norm for the Greeks. The revulsion, then, lies not in the cruelty but in the societal variation. It is highly likely then that Kapuściński’s own experiences of slavery play a significant part in his depiction of Herodotus the slave-owner.

As Kapuściński is happy to express his admiration of Herodotus throughout his memoir it would be odd for him to present his idol as cruel when Kapuściński’s personal views of slavery are made quite clear in *Travels with Herodotus*. When writing of his time spent in Goree, Kapuściński notes of how the island had been:

A prison, a concentration camp, and the port of embarkation for African slaves being sent to the other hemisphere—to North and South America and the Caribbean. According to various estimates, several million, twelve million, perhaps as many as twenty million young men and women were deported from Goree. Those were staggering numbers in those days. The mass abductions and deportations depopulated the continent. (2008: 244-45)

The horrors of the transatlantic slave trade lead Kapuściński to wonder about how our ancestors profited from the exploitation of stolen people: ‘How often do we consider the fact that the treasures and riches of the world were created from time immemorial by slaves?’ (2008: 245), which then leads into the subject of Herodotus and his reliance on his slaves. Kapuściński simply cannot group his idol with those responsible for such abuses. Even so, his Herodotus is not critical of the people who accommodate slavery but rather blames the society for these conditions:

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<sup>144</sup> See Strong (2010) for the links between slavery and ethnicity in the *Histories*. See, also, Hunt (1998) and Harrison (2019).

He [Herodotus] tries to understand everything, find out why someone behaves in one way or another. He does not blame the human being, but blames the system; it is not the individual who is by nature evil, depraved, villainous—it is the social arrangement in which he happens to live that is evil. (2008: 260)

Kapuściński's compassion towards the marginalized and oppressed may also indicate why his Herodotus is depicted as behaving kindly towards those his society had oppressed. Kapuściński encounters an example of modern servitude during his stay in India. Upon leaving his hotel following his first night in New Delhi he is confronted by a group of rickshaw drivers (2008: 19). However, rather than allowing himself 'to be manipulated into assuming the role of a leech' he 'walked on without turning my head, impassive, resolute,' and 'a little smugly proud' at not taking on the role of 'an exploiter' and 'a bloodsucker'. He views this as deriving from his own cultural background where he 'had been brought up in a precisely opposite spirit, taught that even living skeletons such as these were my brothers, kindred souls, near ones, flesh of my flesh.' Consequently 'the very idea of sprawling comfortably in a rickshaw pulled by a hungry, weak waif of a man with one foot already in the grave filled me with the utmost revulsion, outrage, horror.' Recalling *Histories* 3.38 and its emphasis on cultural relativism, the author has imposed his own standards upon those who process the world differently. Though he thinks he is doing right by the rickshaw drivers they, on the other hand, 'were astounded—what was I saying, what was I doing? They had been counting on me, after all. I was their only chance, their only hope—if only for a bowl of rice.' Like his Herodotus, who he sees as being trapped within a system that is built on exploitation, Kapuściński is here subjected to the societal arrangement that forces men to subject other men.

Soon after this, when visiting a rajah's palace in Hyderabad, Kapuściński describes the multitude of servants who work there: 'You see no one else, really, and it's as if the entire estate had been given over to their absolute rule' (2008: 33). In this passage Kapuściński connects himself to the servants of the palace, as opposed to the rajah, through one particular observation: 'all are barefoot. Even if they are adorned with embroideries and tassels, brocades and cashmeres, they have nothing on their feet' (2008: 33-34). This is a detail he noticed immediately due to his own childhood experiences during the Second World War. As a child living under German occupation, poverty led to him sell bars of soap in order to afford to pay for a new pair of shoes:

I remember that the winter of 1942 was approaching and I had no shoes. My old ones had fallen apart, and my mother had no money for a new pair. The shoes available to Poles cost 400 zloty, ... where could one get 400 zloty? ... I was ten years old, and I cried half the tears of a lifetime then, because in fact no one wanted to buy the little soaps ... I was

actually engaged in a form of begging, trying to arouse pity. I would enter an apartment and say: Please, madam, buy a soap from me. It costs only one zloty, winter is coming and I have no shoes. This worked sometimes, but not always, because there were many other children also trying to get over somehow—by stealing something, swindling someone, trafficking in this or that. (2008: 34)

This rare description of his personal history illustrates Kapuściński's tendency for compassion in his descriptions of the people he encounters. Whilst compassion is a trait he associates with Herodotus; it is more likely one that emerges from his own writing style. Indeed, when glancing through obituaries honouring the author's life the celebration of his trademark empathy is noteworthy.<sup>145</sup> Kapuściński described empathy as being the characteristic of most value to a writer such as himself: 'Empathy is perhaps the most important quality for a foreign correspondent. If you have it, other deficiencies are forgivable; if you don't, nothing much can help'.<sup>146</sup> Consequently, when characterising his Herodotus, this too becomes an aspect of his personality. Herodotus treats his slaves kindly because this is what appeals to Kapuściński's sensibilities. And, like Stark, Kapuściński's affection for Herodotus leads to him 'excusing' sections of the *Histories* that he, as a journalist, finds difficult to process.

The slaughter of the women of Babylon, for example, is a passage from the *Histories* that Kapuściński deeply struggles with in *Travels with Herodotus*.<sup>147</sup> What little is said about the mass-murder in the *Histories* seems almost callous in its sparsity to the journalist. Kapuściński's technique of employing multiple questions when examining the nature of Herodotus is here applied in an attempt to process the carnage. He wonders why his dear Herodotus did not interrogate such a horror and if the men were all of one mind in supporting the action. What did the victims think and were the men of Babylon haunted by what they had done? Herodotus keeps it simple:

When the moment finally came to declare their purpose, the Babylonians, in order to reduce the consumption of food, herded together and strangled all the women in the city—each man exempting only his mother, and one other woman whom he chose out of his household to break bread for him (*Histories* 3.150)

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<sup>145</sup> Victoria Brittain's 2007 obituary in the *Guardian* describes how, 'All his writing about developing countries came out of his lived experience there. It was the ring of authenticity that made him as popular among African and Latin American intellectuals as at home in Poland. They all recognised his portraits of the mechanism of dictatorial rule, as well as appreciating his ease and empathy with ordinary people's lives.' Alex Duval Smith's 2007 obituary for the *Independent* ends by noting how 'Kapusinski showed us another world, incredibly poor, which, for many, comes down to one shirt, one pan, a spoon and a mouthful of water. Nearly two-thirds of humanity lives in this empty and silent world. He reminded us - we who are always dissatisfied and insatiable - of what is superfluous and secondary.'

<sup>146</sup> Boyd (1987).

<sup>147</sup> Kapuściński (2008: 127-129).

Dewald (2013: 160 n. 10) reads some nuance in the passage, seeing Herodotus' account as implying that the Babylonians 'effectively destroy their own culture by killing most of their women.' All Kapuściński can suggest is that Herodotus perhaps did not understand the enormity of what had taken place during the siege.<sup>148</sup> Certainly the lack of care towards the victims that Herodotus displays here contrasts with Kapuściński's general presentation of Herodotus. The comforting companion offers no solace to his Polish admirer with this account. What this passage illustrates is the difficulty in matching all aspects of Kapuściński's Herodotus to what is contained in the *Histories*. Compassion for others is demonstrated when Xerxes weeps for his army.<sup>149</sup> It might also be detected in the pity the victorious Persian king Cyrus feels for the defeated Lydian king Croesus.<sup>150</sup> Given these scenes are connected to the overarching concept of the instability of fortune and the fragility of human life that runs through the work, and that they involve a degree of imaginative construction on Herodotus' part, they might be linked to Herodotus own feelings on the events.<sup>151</sup>

This, however, is a rather implied reading of these passages, and suggests that Kapuściński's confidence in attaching compassionate traits on to his Herodotus stems from his desire to shape Herodotus to his own tastes. Indeed, towards the close of the book he imagines the ancient historian approaching him whilst he stands at the edge of the sea. This then becomes an appreciation of the rarity of a man such as Herodotus, 'a vivacious, fascinated, unflagging nomad, full of plans, ideas, theories' (2008: 269). As Kapuściński describes it:

He [Herodotus] had been a living, breathing man once, then was forgotten for two millennia, and now, after many centuries, lived anew—at least for me. *I endowed him with the appearance and traits I wished him to have. He was now my Herodotus*, near and dear to me, someone with whom I shared a common language and with whom I could communicate, or at least commune, without speaking (2008: 269).<sup>152</sup>

Here Kapuściński is open about the degree to which he has created a Herodotus all his own, one in possession of characteristics that were appealing to a writer whose work has been described as

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<sup>148</sup> Kapuściński (2008: 128) states: 'I don't know if Herodotus realized what he was writing.'

<sup>149</sup> *Histories* 7.45-46.

<sup>150</sup> *Histories* 1.86.

<sup>151</sup> See, for example, Sancisi-Weerdenburg (2002) on Herodotus' depiction of Xerxes, Christ (2013) for the Herodotean trope of the questioning king, a trope that Fehling (1988: 198-202) felt signified the role of invention in the *Histories*, and Said (2002) for the role tragedy plays in Herodotus' construction of Cyrus.

<sup>152</sup> My italics.

being ‘the truest, least partial, most comprehensive and vivid account of what life is like on our planet’.<sup>153</sup> And, as with his encounter with Jafar that opened this section, their relationship even transcends the need for speech.

### **3.3: The Curiosity of Herodotus**

When Kapuściński describes the first time he left his homeland, he confesses that Herodotus was a comfort to him. In the midst of the account of his trip to India he expressed what the text and its author came to mean to him:

I was grateful for his being by my side in India during moments of uncertainty and confusion, for helping me with his book. Judging by how he wrote, he seemed a man kindly disposed toward others and curious about the world. Someone who always had many questions and was ready to wander thousands of kilometres to find an answer to any one of them. (2008: 44)

There are two interesting components to Herodotus’ characterisation here. The first is his curiosity and the second is his compassion, which was discussed in the previous section. Ascertaining an accurate account of Herodotus’ personality traits from the narrative of the *Histories* is difficult. Likewise, Kapuściński did not draw upon testimonies, such as the *Suda*, in developing his characterisation. As he acknowledges, sources relating to Herodotus’ background are few and unreliable.<sup>154</sup> However, rather than leave the matter at that, this instead prompts Kapuściński to contemplate the unknown. Often in *Travels with Herodotus* Kapuściński will list a series of questions when answers are elusive to say the least. And although these answers are lacking, his questions still offer rich material for his reader. During the account of Kapuściński’s voyage to India, for example, he pauses to consider how little is known about Herodotus’ childhood and how this seemed to be customary amongst prominent men of his era. This prompts him to raise a series of questions in an attempt to counter the vacuum that exists. Amongst this lengthy succession of questions Kapuściński wonders ‘What sort of child is Herodotus? ...What did his father do? ... Might Herodotus’ father have been a merchant himself? Perhaps it was he who kindled in his son a curiosity about the world’ (2008: 45-46). Here curiosity is the key element to draw from Kapuściński’s construction of Herodotus’ character. A young Herodotus is associated with the potential for a questioning nature, with its origin possibly deriving from his father, whose suggested

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<sup>153</sup> Dyer (2001).

<sup>154</sup> Kapuściński (2008: 44).

occupation may have inspired both Herodotus' nature and future. There are questions that cannot be answered because the *Histories* does not include such details. The true Herodotus, he laments, was concealed behind a 'verbal fabric' (2008: 16).

On the theme of curiosity, elements of Herodotus' persona signal where Kapuściński derived his reading. Curiosity is defined as a desire to know or to learn. Herodotus displays this process from the outset by informing his audience that what will follow is the product of his inquiries, and so he has sought out knowledge in order to discover the reasons behind the animosity between Eastern and Western peoples.<sup>155</sup> Later in *Histories* 2.99 he draws attention to his method of inquiry by stating that 'Up to this point I have confined what I have written to the results of my own direct observation and research, and the views I have formed of them'. Again, the point to draw out here is the process of discovery he embarked on to obtain his data. It is this aspect of the *Histories* that informs Kapuściński's characterisation of Herodotus as a seeker of knowledge who is fascinated by the world.

Another feature of the *Histories* that Kapuściński sees as signifying Herodotus' curiosity is the variety of data that are covered within the *Histories*. The immense scope of the work and the diversity of subjects revealed to Kapuściński a mind that was in awe of the wonder he encountered on his travels. He credits this trait in Herodotus as being responsible for the *Histories*' existence. For Kapuściński, had Herodotus not been so fascinated by the world around him and so keen to preserve it for posterity he would not have created the work at all. In this, Herodotus was exceptional: 'the average person is not especially curious about the world'.<sup>156</sup> Combined with this was an insatiable appetite to learn more. Kapuściński's description of how Herodotus absorbed his material whilst on his travels seems to deliberately reflect the structure of the *Histories* in its scope and multiplicity. This is demonstrated in Kapuściński's depiction of Herodotus' thought-processes:

He carries in his mind a map of the world—actually, he is creating it as he goes along, amending it, filling it in. It is a living image, a turning kaleidoscope, a flickering screen. A thousand things take place on it. The Egyptians are building pyramids, the Scythians are hunting big game, the Phoenicians are kidnapping young women, and the Queen of the Cyreneans, Pheretima, is dying a dreadful death: *She became infested with a mass of worms while still alive ...* (2008: 269).<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> *Histories* 1.1.

<sup>156</sup> Kapuściński (2008: 267).

<sup>157</sup> The use of italics here signifies where the author is directly quoting from the *Histories*.

The immensity of the world depicted in the *Histories* with its multifaceted dimensions derives from the volume of material he consumed. The accumulation of knowledge he absorbed through his encounters during his travels resulted in a mind that was almost bursting at the seams with the material he had gathered.

The value of this characterisation also lies in how it enhanced Kapuściński's construction of his relationship with Herodotus as a companion in his travels. Seeing Herodotus as a figure whose curiosity led him to travel as a means of seeking further knowledge of the world provided Kapuściński with a model to emulate. His technique, according to Kapuściński (2008: 102), makes him the 'consummate reporter: he wanders, looks, talks, listens, in order that he can later note down what he learned and saw, or simply to remember better'. This is comparable to how the author described his own technique. Seeking to define the type of prose he produced Kapuściński settled on the description of 'literature by foot', a technique that required the insertion of his personal experiences within the text to signify that what he writes of is correct by virtue of the fact that 'I was there, that I witnessed the event'.<sup>158</sup> Seeing such value in the *Histories* led Kapuściński to claim that he used Herodotus' technique as a model for his own style of journalism. As he puts it: 'I was quite consciously trying to learn the art of reportage and Herodotus struck me as a valuable teacher' (2008: 177). Kapuściński emphasized the value of seeing the historian in such a manner in a 2004 article in which he wrote of how Herodotus was 'the father, master and forerunner of a genre—reportage' (2004: 50). In the article Kapuściński described Herodotus' willingness to travel as a means of understanding the world to be one of three aspects that cement his position as the genre's progenitor. He describes the second as Herodotus' readiness to learn from those he encountered on his travels, i.e., his oral informants, and the third is Herodotus' eagerness to engage with what has already been written. This interpretation of Herodotus' method is not unique to Kapuściński. The quotation by Charlotte Higgins in the Introduction to Part I of this thesis highlighted the debt foreign correspondents, as well as travel writers, owe to Herodotus. In the article 'Herodotus as an Ancient Journalist: Reimagining Antiquity's Historians as Journalists' (2010) Joe Saltzman argues in favour of 'labelling Herodotus as a journalist' because, although it 'may not change what he wrote' (2010: 153), it does change our perception of what he wrote and may even diminish criticism of him.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Taken from Buford (1987).

<sup>159</sup> As Saltzman puts it, 'Fehling concludes that Herodotus is a pseudo-historian. Others have called him "a rhapsodist in prose." So why not call him a journalist, who while not living up to the high standards of being a historian, certainly deserves credit as a workmanship journalist who did a credible job of reporting on the war between Greek city states

By comparing his own writing to that of Herodotus, Kapuściński is able to achieve two things. First, the parallel defends the author from criticisms launched against his method regarding his use, or lack thereof, of exact facts and dates:

There are so many complaints—Kapuściński never mentions dates, Kapuściński never gives the names of the minister, he has forgotten the order of events. All of that, of course, is exactly what I avoid. If those are the questions you want answered, you can visit your local library where you will find everything you need—newspapers of the time, the reference books, a dictionary. (Buford 1987: 241)

This criticism would later intensify soon after the author's death following the publication of Artur Domoslawski's biography of Kapuściński that was first published in Poland in 2010. The biographer describes how Kapuściński manipulated reality in order to suit the purposes of his writing, whilst also claiming to have witnessed events at which he was not present. One cannot help but see the parallels to Herodotus here and the accusations levelled against him regarding his use of sources and questions surrounding the truth of whether he visited the places he claims to have seen. Indeed, Kapuściński seems to have been playing with this. As Kosmala (2016: 357) notes, 'Kapuściński often reminds the reader that Herodotus does not practise a fact-laden type of writing either, and that Herodotus should not be reproached for the often questionable verifiability of his stories.' By encouraging this understanding of Herodotus and his work, Kapuściński in turn encourages his reader to be sympathetic to his own method of recording history.

Kapuściński also saw aspects of himself in the ancient Greek, which brings us to the second point: namely that it forces the reader to draw parallels between both men beyond technique. As has already been noted, the *Histories* and its author occupy a significant proportion of *Travels with Herodotus*. In addition to this is the fact that the only map included in the book, a work that hops around the world across several decades, is 'The World according to Herodotus' taken from E. H. Bunbury's *A History of Ancient Geography among Greeks and Romans* (1879). By contrast, Kapuściński's own travels cover several continents across many decades, and yet no map of his contemporary world is included. The inclusion of the map becomes symbolic of how prominent the world of the *Histories* is within Kapuściński's account of his own travels during his long career. Indeed, it rather illustrates the point made earlier of the times when Kapuściński would

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and the gigantic invading army of the Persian Empire, and how, against all odds, the Greeks claimed victory' (2010: 171-2).

become distracted by the Greco-Persian wars when he was in the midst of modern conflicts. Kapuściński's experiences, then, become subsumed within Herodotus' account.

Rice (2008) sees the nature of this relationship as stemming from the author's wish to present Herodotus as 'a stand-in for Kapuściński himself'. The impetus for this assessment derives from the fact that Kapuściński the man is elusive in his work:

Elements missing from the narratives—though not from his actual existence, one presumes—include genuine friendship, familial love, sexual desire and explicit violence. Killing in a book by Kapuściński is like sex in a Billy Wilder movie: The genius is in the suggestion (2008: 26).

Although Kapuściński offers more of his private history than Herodotus did, much of his persona conceals the personal. As Horodecka argues, 'Kapuściński hides his face behind Herodotus'. In this way Herodotus becomes

Kapuściński's double, a shade and mirror that had been accompanying him in his farthest travels. In some sense, he cannot dispose of him, but the ghost brings him genuine pleasure. Herodotus is not a romantic double—a phantasm indicating a neurotic chasm, or fears, or emotions of its original 'I.' He is kind to and friendly with his twin brother (2015: 129)

This identification with Herodotus is considered by Kosmala (2016: 366) to be a means for Kapuściński to be perceived as 'the Herodotus of our times'. In doing this Kapuściński encourages his reader to view both himself and his work through the prism of Herodotus. The aspects he celebrates, including his marvelling at the richness of the world, are qualities he wants his reader to see in his own writing. Likewise, the criticisms levelled at the modern author are to be deemed more permissible when understood through the methodology of his ancient mentor.

### **3.4: Conclusion**

In *Travels with Herodotus* the figure of Herodotus serves Kapuściński in many ways. The ancient historian is a surrogate, a companion, a mentor, a model, and a defence. Kapuściński builds this characterisation using both the text of the *Histories* as inspiration and his own imagination. On the degree of invention involved in his construction of Herodotus, Horodecka (2015: 122) describes how 'In *Travels with Herodotus*, the Greek historian's image is filtered through the personality and interests of the author'. The crafting of the ancient writer through the incorporation of the modern author results in a version of Herodotus that possesses traits which appealed to Kapuściński's

sensibilities. And so, Kapuściński's Herodotus, much like Stark's before him, was the perfect companion for the distinguished writer as he travelled across the world during his long career as a journalist and author.

Full of both awe at the wonders of the world and sympathy towards the people within it, Kapuściński's Herodotus illustrates what he thought an ideal journalist should be. Here I have focused specifically on his compassion, which made Herodotus both an ideal journalist and an ideal travel companion, and his curiosity. These are also traits Kapuściński wanted the reader to see in himself. Indeed, since the book's publication, it has been well-recognized that Kapuściński wanted to be understood through the prism of Herodotus, but his version of Herodotus also incorporates elements of Kapuściński. This results in a hybrid figure, who like Stark's Herodotus takes on elements of the modern author. Taking such an approach to a work that also falls within the category of memoir risks losing sight of Kapuściński's own life amidst the description of Herodotus. This, however, is the point. Kapuściński wants Herodotus to be a prominent factor within his depiction of his life's work because he wants his reader to draw a parallel between the two men.

## Chapter 4

### Justin Marozzi's Herodotean Pleasure-Seeker

I suppose no idea about Herodotus' taste in anecdotes is more widely and uncritically held than the idea that he likes stories that are spicy, erotic, or dirty  
Stewart Flory (1969: 103).

When discussing how he came to read *History* at the University of Cambridge in the early nineteen-nineties the journalist and travel writer Justin Marozzi laments that 'although I never came across Herodotus at University, I wish I had' (2008: 1). The father of history, however, 'was nowhere to be seen' (2008: 2). He attributes this to the snobbish attitude that is held by historians towards the *Histories*:

History, grown-up, self-confident and professional, has committed patricide, rubbing out the man who gave birth to it. With few exceptions, historians have become, in their own minds at least, far too sophisticated for simple old Herodotus, who is but an entertaining amateur. Nowadays he belongs to the classicists. (2008: 3).

This state of affairs he perceives to be unfair. As the title of his book is keen to highlight, Herodotus was *The Man Who Invented History*. Ergo, he ought to feature prominently if one is to understand the history of History. According to Marozzi, this is not the case amongst academic circles because his gifts as a storyteller are not valued.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, his hostility towards the general notion of historians with their alleged views on Herodotus' work is a key thread in the narrative of *The Man Who Invented History*. Marozzi's determination to explore Herodotus' work and follow in his footsteps is calculated to challenge the people that have diminished Herodotus' standing and present to his reader a 'true' portrait of Herodotus and the *Histories*. His alternative Herodotus is an

Educated, enlightened, adventurous, endlessly curious man with a dancing intellect and a felicitous turn of phrase, someone with a powerful sense of wonder and an all-encompassing humanity, brimming with relentless wanderlust and an irrepressible storytelling zeal, revelling in his fizzing sexual curiosity and fierce tolerance of other cultures, buoyed along on the currents of historical inquiry by his continent-spanning humour, ranging wit and questing wisdom. (2008: 9).

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<sup>160</sup> Marozzi (2008: 22).

The purpose of *The Man Who Invented History* is to prove this. Each reference to the *Histories*, every discussion on the nature of the text, and all the journeys that are undertaken by Marozzi reinforce the notion that the *Histories* is a text that is to be enjoyed by its reader. To examine this reading of Herodotus and his work, I will focus on three elements within this chapter. The first will explore what aspects of the *Histories* encourage such an interpretation from Marozzi; the second requires the consideration of how such a presentation compares to Marozzi's own style; and the third will look at how Marozzi encourages comparison between himself and Herodotus.

#### **4.1: 'Herodotus would have been delighted'<sup>161</sup>**

After graduating, Marozzi worked for two years in the Philippines as the local correspondent for the *Financial Times*, and he has since contributed to *The Times*, *The Economist*, *The Spectator*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, BBC World Service, and BBC Radio 4, as well as becoming a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. It is through his historical travelogues that Marozzi has explored the interest in history that he identifies in *The Man Who Invented History*. Herodotus' *Histories* is featured in his earlier books, but in these works Marozzi's engagement is more in line with examples of travel writing that use the *Histories* as a historical source. For *South From Barbary: Along the Slave Routes of the Libyan Sahara* (2001), his first book, he travelled 1,200 miles across the Libyan Sahara in order to trace the former slave routes in the region. Herodotus' *Histories* is cited on six occasions within this account,<sup>162</sup> and all inclusions conform to the convention of referencing the *Histories* in order to present the history of the region that is visited. The reference on page 125 where Marozzi describes how 'Herodotus contradicted himself' when writing of the Garamantes is somewhat different, as it questions the reliability of Herodotus' account. However, Marozzi does not analyse the passage any further than this brief statement.

The research for his second book *Tamerlane: Sword of Islam, Conqueror of the World* (2004) took him to central Asia. Whilst the focus of this book is on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Herodotus appears briefly when Marozzi writes of the Scythians and is contained within a quotation from the 1971 book *The History of the Mongol Conquests*:

As John Joseph Saunders wrote in his classic account of the period, *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (1971), 'Nomadic empires rose and fell with astonishing swiftness, but the essential features of the steppes remained unchanged for ages, and the description by Herodotus of the Scythians of the fifth century before Christ will apply, with trifling

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<sup>161</sup> Marozzi (2008: 45).

<sup>162</sup> Marozzi (2001: 14, 124, 125, 132, 207, and 209).

variations, to the Mongols of the thirteenth century after Christ, 1,700 years later' (2004: 16).

The inclusion of Herodotus here, confined as it is within a passage from another historical narrative, does not demonstrate any of the admiration that Marozzi would later proclaim in his following book. Again, the entry treats the *Histories* as a premier resource on the history of the Scythian peoples. As Marozzi does not challenge Saunders' description or offer any further details on Herodotus' account, this implies that he agrees with Saunders' assessment. The references to the *Histories* in *South From Barbary: Along the Slave Routes of the Libyan Sahara* and *Tamerlane: Sword of Islam, Conqueror of the World*, then, do not reveal the level of adoration that Marozzi would later profess throughout his celebration of the Halicarnassian in *The Man Who Invented History*.

Instead, Marozzi's description of Herodotus in *The Man Who Invented History* shares more in common with Stark's and Kapuściński's engagements with the *Histories*. Certainly, both authors are featured within Marozzi's travel account. When Marozzi meets the writer and traveller Patrick Leigh Fermor he is described as owning 'a circular inlaid marble table made by Freya Stark's *marmorista* in Venice' (2008: 266).<sup>163</sup> No mention, however, is made of *Ionia: A Quest*. Kapuściński's *Travels with Herodotus* on the other hand is referenced within Marozzi's book. In the introduction of *The Man Who Invented History* Marozzi describes Herodotus' *Histories* as 'a wonderful companion' (2008: 22) and recounts how both Kapuściński and the fictional desert explorer Count László de Almásy kept a copy of the *Histories* with them on their travels.<sup>164</sup> Marozzi would also describe the relationship he developed with Herodotus during his journeys in preparation for writing the book as being like 'Travelling with a dead man' (2008: 24). It seems unlikely that the shift in Marozzi's rendering of Herodotus between his earlier books and *The Man Who Invented History* was influenced by Kapuściński's recent work. Although *Travels with Herodotus* was initially published in Polish in 2004 the English translation arrived three years later in 2007. Nevertheless, because Marozzi's construction of Herodotus dominates the narrative of *The Man Who Invented History*, he includes a brief reference to Kapuściński's work to acknowledge the connection the books share.

The chief characteristics of Marozzi's engagement with the *Histories* are described by the author in a 2008 promotional article for *The Man Who Invented History* entitled: 'Justin Marozzi's Classical Grand Tour'. The article itself is one in a sequence by three different travel writers that offer 'alternative Grand Tours for the 21st century', which call upon the tradition of the indulgent

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<sup>163</sup> Marozzi would later describe Stark as being one of the greatest travel writers of the twentieth century in an article published in *Newsweek* (Marozzi 2011).

<sup>164</sup> See Part II Chapter 3 of this thesis for more on Almásy.

trips through Europe taken by elite young men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Marozzi's contribution proposes that long before the eighteenth century the Greeks were participating in similar voyages around the Mediterranean and beyond. Moreover, of these ancient travellers, 'you'd struggle to find a better, more dashing Grand Tourer than Herodotus, the fifth-century father of History, whose gallivanting expeditions across North Africa, the Aegean and the Middle East form the perfect itinerary for the traveller of today.' This matches with Marozzi's stated motivation in *The Man Who Invented History*, namely, to look to the *Histories* and seek out the regions described in Herodotus' account. The article, therefore, very briefly summarises the structure of his book, save for Iraq, which is not included in this article because the situation there does not lend itself to luxurious travel. Although Marozzi neglects to specify this and simply tells the reader: 'much as we'd love to visit Babylon, we'll leave Iraq to one side now and concentrate on Turkey, Egypt and Greece', his description of the damage caused by the invasion of the United States and its allies in *The Man Who Invented History* illustrates why this should be. As he describes it:

After a few weeks in Baghdad, I was growing used to the daily reports—and sounds—of car bombs, suicide bombings, attacks on American soldiers and civilians, kidnappings and beheadings of contractors and so on (2008: 91).

In spite of the awe he experienced when visiting sites such as Babylon, the ever-present threat of violence is not compatible with the concept of a pleasurable trip for a would-be Grand Tourer. In all, then, a single paragraph of this article is dedicated to Bodrum, three to Egypt, three to Greece, and half a sentence to Iraq.

The article concludes with Marozzi encouraging his reader to 'Enjoy the luxury. Herodotus would have approved' (2008a). This statement alone gives a revealing glimpse into the mind of the author and tells us a great deal about his reading of the *Histories*. When the statement is split in two, each half addresses a key aspect in Marozzi's presentation of the *Histories* to his audience. The first part and its emphasis on *luxus* and pleasure is a theme that manifests in *The Man Who Invented History* on several occasions. In fact, the desire for a certain kind of luxury prompts the journey Marozzi undertakes. The second part derives from Marozzi's conviction that Herodotus the man can be 'recognised' within the *Histories* through his writing.

That Herodotus would have supported the pursuit of pleasure is a central tenet of Marozzi's thesis. The project of travelling with Herodotus adopts the form of a pleasure-seeking exercise for Marozzi when he realizes it will remove him from the chill of a British winter:

I remember reading him one afternoon beneath a slate-grey Norfolk sky unravelling across a wilderness of sand. Skeins of pink-footed geese arrowed across the sky gloaming in their thousands, honking away like pigs possessed as they dropped out of the cloud, gently spiralling down to form a tufty grey carpet across the reclaimed saltmarshes. The wintering birds were a reminder of the dark months ahead and I found myself longing for Herodotus' turquoise world, a light so piercing you had to squint to see anything, the warmth of a topaz sun that wasn't a wan white disc besieged by cloud, a limpid sea you wanted to swim in rather than one so gaspingly cold it was a childish dare just to plunge in for a few seconds. I wanted olives and oranges, feta cheese and falafel, bobbing fishing boats and battlefields, pyramids, tombs and temples, marble columns hurled across sylvan groves in Ozymandian disarray. I wanted grand civilisation and the birth of history, not darkness at three o' clock and cold wet patches on my moleskins.

Idly, I started wondering where the two of us – because we were a team now – could go. Willed into life as the Norfolk chill took hold, a Herodotean expedition started to emerge from the frost-wrapped fields. It made more sense the longer I considered it, as anything sun-kissed and exotic will in the draughty ooze of a British winter. Rather than just returning to Herodotus and the *Histories*, I would go one better and take Herodotus with me and together we would return to his (much warmer) world. I would travel with the world's first travel writer. A journey into history with the Father of History. (2008: 23)

The purpose of this passage is to contrast the bleakness of Marozzi's home country with the rich and vibrant fantasy he conjures to describe Herodotus' world. I use the word fantasy here because there is a significant degree of romanticization emanating from this passage with regards to his depiction of the eastern Mediterranean. Certainly, his references to sites including battlefields and temples are in keeping with Herodotus' desire to record marvels within the *Histories*. However, his use of words such as 'sun-kissed' and 'exotic', coupled with edible delights of falafel and feta cheese are difficult to match to the content of Herodotus' account of the expansion of the Persian Empire and its eventual conflict with the peoples of Greece. As was the case in his promotional article for the book, the aim is to emphasise the connection between the concept of pleasure and Herodotus' *Histories*. Pleasure, as opposed to conducting a rigorous journey in search of all Herodotean locations, is what really motivates Marozzi to undertake the quest. This, then, explains why the more northerly regions of the Scythians are not visited by the author during his travels: he thought it would be too cold. Consequently, Marozzi will take Herodotus 'wherever I could (as long as it was warm)' (2008: 25). This results in journeys to Turkey (Part I), Iraq (Part II), Egypt (Part III), and Greece (Part IV), with each account interspersed with passages from the *Histories* combined with Marozzi's own musings on Herodotus and his work. He includes references to other texts but,<sup>165</sup> as in the work of Stark and Kapuściński, Herodotus is the most dominant source.

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<sup>165</sup> For example: "The thing is, wherever I go, perfect strangers press another volume into my hands. There's my friend Paul Cartledge's celebrated study *The Greeks*, former Prime Minister Tzannis Tzannetakis' travelogue on India, a guide to Samos, a book about the founder of modern Egypt Mohammed Ali Pasha's house in Kavala, several volumes of

In describing Herodotus, Marozzi reveals where he identifies the true workings of the mind of this ‘travel writer and indefatigable raconteur’ (2008: 275). His chapter on Cairo features a discussion of Herodotus’ account of the pyramids and their construction. He references Cheops’ role in the building of the great pyramid and the effort and manpower that was required on the part of slaves (2008: 181). It is the involvement of Cheops’ daughter in the story that reveals most to Marozzi in the account. Herodotus describes how Cheops sent his daughter to a brothel to raise money for the pyramid when his finances were struggling (*Histories* 2.126). In response to this element of Herodotus’ account, Marozzi conjures a scene in which Herodotus is told the story by his tour guide. He listens ‘clutching his traveller’s papyrus jotter with sweat-sticky hands’ as his Egyptian guide, ‘a breed of one of the world’s greatest storytelling hustlers, spins a sensational tale’ (2008: 181). For Marozzi it is ‘Entertaining nonsense’ (2008: 181), but for his Herodotus it is ‘just the sort of story he is dying to hear’ (2008: 181). Tales in this mould do occur on more than one occasion in the *Histories*. The pharaoh Rhampsinitus sends his daughter to a brothel in order to catch a thief at 2.121, whilst the largest contribution paid towards the tomb of Lydian king Alyattes that is made by the people of Lydia came from those working as prostitutes (1.93).<sup>166</sup> And so, Marozzi here is using material found in the *Histories* to shape his characterisation of Herodotus in this particular passage of *The Man Who Invented History*. This depiction becomes a prominent, albeit exaggerated, feature of Marozzi’s presentation of Herodotus, as the following analysis will explore.

An example of where this amplified characteristic is especially pronounced is when Marozzi describes his visit to Babylon. The site has long been the subject of exotic fantasies for Westerners adopting an orientalising gaze, and responses to Herodotus’ description of the city are no exception.<sup>167</sup> Before the extensive excavations of the site in the modern era, literary texts were the chief means through which Western audiences gained knowledge of the city, with the Bible and the *Histories* being the most dominant sources on the city. Responses to Herodotus’ depiction follow a similar approach. *Histories* 1.196, for example, recurred as a popular subject due to the depiction of ‘oriental’ women being sold to the highest bidder. Nineteenth and twentieth century renderings of the scene conform to the Western obsession of displaying oriental women for the

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new history textbooks, an elegant coffee-table book illustrating the religious monuments of Xanthi, Henry Miller’s *The Colossus of Maroussi*. The latest additions to the literary empire squeeze in alongside various Herodotus editions, Patrick Leigh Fermor’s *Mani and Roumeli*, Richard Evans’ broadside *In Defense of History* (a bust of Herodotus on the cover but, scandalously, not a single reference to him in the text), *Thermopylae* (another Cartledge) and Tom Holland’s *Persian Fire?* (2008: 224).

<sup>166</sup> Indeed, Strabo (XIII 4,7) notes of how the tomb was known to some as the ‘monument of prostitution’.

<sup>167</sup> See Bohrer (1998).

pleasure of the Western observer. The British painter Edwin Long's painting *The Babylonian Marriage Market* (1875),<sup>168</sup> for instance, which depicted a group of young women waiting to be purchased, had been such a popular work that American director D. W. Griffith would later reproduce the image on film in the Babylonian segment of his 1916 epic *Intolerance*.<sup>169</sup>

Marozzi acknowledges this history of reception, noting how 'Babylon, in the thousands of years since he [Herodotus] wrote about it, has become a one-word code for luxury, extravagance, decadence, confusion, sexual licentiousness and abandon' (2008: 131). Nevertheless, Marozzi is just as subject to focussing on Babylon in such a manner.<sup>170</sup> It should also be noted that amidst this focus on pleasure the greater context of the Western coalition's second invasion of Iraq is not neglected by the author. Indeed, he opens Part II: Iraq with a quotation from *Histories* 1.87: 'No one is fool enough to choose war instead of peace—in peace sons bury fathers, but in war fathers bury sons.' However, Marozzi's solemn reflections on the damage done to Iraq and its people are often diminished by his at times jarring flights of fancy. Whilst the threat of car bombs,<sup>171</sup> the corporate exploitation of the second gulf war,<sup>172</sup> and evangelical anti-Islamic propaganda are present within his account,<sup>173</sup> such issues are undermined, though I suspect not purposefully so, by Marozzi's personal account of his visit to Babylon.

In Book 2 chapter 5 of *The Man who Invented History* Marozzi announces: 'I have sex on my mind when I arrive at Babylon' (2008: 115). He blames this on Herodotus for during his description of Babylon he includes a brief mention of the purification rite from *Histories* 1. 198. This then prompts more than a paragraph's worth of invention where Marozzi becomes transfixed on the notion of genital purification and all that it may entail:

And then suddenly, completely out of the blue (to the extent that sex is ever a surprise in Herodotus), he comes out with the following ejaculatory – or perhaps post-coital – aside: 'When a Babylonian has had intercourse with his wife, he sits over incense to fumigate

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<sup>168</sup> See Bohrer (1998: 351f) and especially Hart (2011) who reads the painting as being a critique of Herodotus' account.

<sup>169</sup> See Rogin (1988) who explores the role of the Babylon portion of the film in conjunction with the other three narratives of the film.

<sup>170</sup> Indeed, Marozzi states that he took the first opportunity to travel to Babylon that arose because he was 'attracted by Babylon's desert-bound exoticism, by the chance to travel to a once cosmopolitan city whose links to the outside world had recently been severed. A veil had been drawn across Babylon, and what could be more tempting than the opportunity to draw that veil aside and stare upon her naked form?' (2008: 88).

<sup>171</sup> See Marozzi (2008: 80, 83, 84-84, and 98).

<sup>172</sup> See Marozzi (2008: 88).

<sup>173</sup> See Marozzi (2008: 89-92).

himself, with his wife opposite doing the same, and at daybreak they both wash. Before they have washed they will not touch any household utensils'.<sup>174</sup>

What a picture! No high-pressure rainforest shower to blast away the dirt, no moisturising shampoo for dry or damaged hair, no exfoliating soap to peel away the dead skin. No deep bath in which to luxuriate and relax those aching muscles after such a strenuous sexual encounter. Husband and wife have to hunch over a pathetic little fire to perfume their exposed genitals in clouds of sweet incense, wafting the smoke over their nether regions while making sure they don't crouch too low and singe them. What on earth would their children have made of it if they caught a glimpse of their parents behaving so oddly? 'Mummy, why are you burning your bottom?' their baffled little daughter might have asked. And the last sentence, that snippet of domesticity, utterly brilliant. A little extra detail from a virtuoso storyteller. No chopping up garlic and onions or sweeping out the kitchen until both of them have scrubbed up nicely. (2008: 116- 117).

Marozzi's observation here of Herodotus' 'extra detail' tallies well with that of Stewart Flory in his 1969 article 'The Personality of Herodotus'. When writing of Herodotus' account at 1.61 in which Peisistratus attempts to avoid impregnating his wife, Megacles' daughter, by refusing 'normal intercourse', Flory observes a similar 'Herodotean' touch. First, he notes that the true insult was not 'the act itself but the fact that Peisistratus did not want blood ties with the family of Megacles' (1969: 104) and so, Herodotus focuses, incorrectly, on the sexual aspect of the tale and somewhat misses the point. What also chimes with Marozzi's reading is Flory's description of how Herodotus concludes the passage:

But the peculiarly Herodotean touch and interest come in the following sentence: "She kept it a secret at first but then she told her mother and her mother told her father ... whether her mother had questioned her about it or not, I do not know." How typically Herodotean is the intimate nature of this final aside! Herodotus *is* interested in the act itself *and* in the pathetic, soap-opera tableau of the poor girl overcoming her shame to tell her mother (1969: 104-5)

Though Marozzi is familiar with Flory's work, including *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (1987) and 'Who Read Herodotus' *Histories?* (1980), this particular article is absent from his bibliography. And yet several aspects of Marozzi's conception of Herodotus correspond with Flory's reading in this article. For Flory Herodotus' interest in sex seems 'personal' and, in a statement that could easily have featured in Marozzi's book, the academic relates how Herodotus

cannot resist telling us that prostitutes donated the largest contribution for the tomb of Alyattes, nor can he resist giving us the prodigious dimensions of that tomb (1.93) he also delights in the pyramid that is built by an Egyptian princess, block by block, out of tips she

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<sup>174</sup> This, moreover, is not the only instance of connecting sex to Babylon in *The Man Who Invented History*; the city has much more to offer in this respect. See also pages 88, 129, and 133.

receives after she is forced into prostitution by her father to raise money for his own pyramid (1969: 105)

This matches well with Marozzi's own description of how *Histories* 2.216 became a part of Herodotus' narrative, as both writers detect a sense of glee on the part of Herodotus in including such details.

For Marozzi, such an example is key to the composition of the *Histories*. First, because Herodotus includes sex in order to entertain his audience. 'Herodotus understands his audiences' desire for titillation', explains Marozzi, and in order to keep their attention during lengthy live readings to a seated audience 'sex figures prominently' (2008: 7).<sup>175</sup> Secondly, because sometimes Herodotus can get rather carried away with himself:

Closing my eyes, I retreat down the cool corridor of history and see Herodotus on stage again, working his wide-eyed audience like an old-pro. Once he's started on sex, there's no stopping him. It's too good to pass up. And sex and foreigners: a deliciously titillating combination (2008: 117).

However, this assertion is equally applicable to Marozzi's own authorial voice. Indeed, it seems Marozzi is distorting his characterisation of Herodotus to suit his own taste, rather than simply illustrating to a modern reader 'traits of interest'. This is at its most pronounced when women feature in Marozzi's narrative. Remaining with his visit to Babylon, Marozzi is compelled to include Book 1.199 of the *Histories* and the 'sexual supermarket for Babylonian men' (2008: 118), as Marozzi calls it. This leads to the extended 'Marozzian' fantasy 'in the spirit of some of Herodotus' infinitely taller tales and digressions', of a slave in Herodotus' audience 'fantasising about his master's sumptuously soft-skinned wife. If only he was Babylonian, he thinks!' A paragraph of equal length on the following page explores the validity of Herodotus' account of Babylon by drawing upon the work of John MacGinnis in his 1986 article 'Herodotus' Description of Babylon'. However, like the Herodotus of Marozzi's imagination, Marozzi too cannot pass up the opportunity to interrupt the flow of the narrative by bringing sex into the equation. And so, prior to this exploration, the reader is introduced to 'one of the three Polish archaeologists attached to the Multinational Division headquarters in Camp Babylon'. According to the author, if she had been sent to the temple to serve Mylitta,

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<sup>175</sup> This recalls another text that is featured in Marozzi's bibliography. In his study, *Herodotus*, Romm (1998: 120) states 'he [Herodotus] often commences a long episode of the *Histories* with a particularly gripping anecdote, much as a public speaker today might warm up his audience with a joke'.

Agnieszka Dolatowska would not have had to hang around so long ... she is an attractive woman with wavy blonde hair, a light sprinkling of freckles and an air of windswept dreaminess. She is neither tall nor slender – the French would call her *costaude* rather than *svelte* – but she would have been considered handsome enough to avoid having to languish in the Temple of Aphrodite for three or four years. (2008: 119).<sup>176</sup>

This is neither the first nor the last instance of Marozzi drawing attention to the attractiveness of the women he encounters. And whilst it occurs with men also,<sup>177</sup> it is a predominant feature of the women in this text.<sup>178</sup>

The impetus behind such an association may be drawn from Herodotus' interjections within his own account. In the aforementioned *Histories* 1.196, for example, Herodotus does demonstrate his support of a custom that involves rating the value of women on their attractiveness. In keeping with his trait of categorizing the value of the foreign *nomoi* he encounters,<sup>179</sup> here he approves of a custom in which the sale of the more attractive women in the city supports the sale of less attractive women. As he sees it, the tradition is 'the most ingenious in my opinion' and he is sad to see that it is no longer practiced. The passage is also problematic in that there is no Babylonian record to suggest the practice took place and so its inclusion in the Babylonian account betrays a degree of distortion on Herodotus' part. As McNeal (1988: 55) stresses, 'The custom as Herodotus describes it has never been verified by any source and what we know of marriage rites in ancient Mesopotamia tends to indicate that no such custom could ever have existed there.' Regardless of its historicity, its inclusion in the text and Herodotus' assessment of its worth is of greatest value to Marozzi's depiction of the author.

What makes Marozzi's assessment of Agnieszka Dolatowska especially interesting is how it blends Marozzi's own observations with Herodotean material. By situating her within this Babylonian custom the archaeologist becomes simultaneously a character in the *Histories* and *The Man Who Invented History*. Marozzi also connects female attractiveness to Herodotus during his encounter with Professor Salima Ikram,<sup>180</sup> whom he describes as 'a Herodotean coquette' thanks to her vivaciousness and animated enthusiasm for Herodotus. According to Marozzi, 'This is no fusty academic' (2008: 192-3). The delight Marozzi derives from engaging with these attractive

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<sup>176</sup> Here he is, of course, referring to *Histories* 1.199.

<sup>177</sup> See, for example, his description of Patrick Leigh Fermor at page 265.

<sup>178</sup> For examples of Marozzi rating the attractiveness of those he encounters see also pages 37, 40, 46, 102, 103, 115, 150, 186, 191, 200, 203, 207, 228, 238, 247, 267, 310.

<sup>179</sup> See, for example, Corcella (2013: 70f).

<sup>180</sup> Who is Professor of Egyptology at the American University in Cairo.

women is linked to Herodotus, which enhances the overriding theme of enjoyment that characterises the work.

The evaluation of women's bodies, their attractiveness, and its related worth is a consistent theme within Marozzi's oeuvre. In *South from Barbary*, the presence of contemporary women is fleeting, and this lack of interaction results in them being defined largely by their appearance:

Throngs of prodigiously built matrons haggled ferociously with softly spoken gold- and silversmiths for jewellery they could not afford. Some were still dressed in the same white, sheet-like *farrasiyas* their forebears had worn hundreds of years before. Others hid behind their gaudy *hijabs* (Islamic veils) as they sailed through the narrow alleys hunting for perfume. (2001: 1-2)

Such 'prodigiously built matrons' are also the subject of the longest passage dedicated to describing women in the entire book (2001: 106-107), which centres on the Libyan penchant for large women. It begins with their guide Salek, 'extolling the many merits of fat women' (2001: 106). We learn that he

was not married yet but had a generously proportioned girlfriend of twenty whom he intended to marry later in the year, *inshallah*. Slim women he would not entertain for a moment as potential brides. 'My girlfriend is very, very fat, *alhamdulillah*,' he rejoiced. 'Thin women no good.' This predilection for well-covered women, by Touareg and Arab alike, goes back a long way in Libya (2001: 106).

One contrast to this is when Marozzi refers to the English travel writer, explorer, and novelist Rosita Forbes (1890-1967), who represents the most dominant female presence in the book. Her work is cited on several occasions and owing to the fact that Marozzi can only rely on Forbes' account of her experiences in North Africa, she, uniquely, is not characterised by how she looked but what she thought.

Similar trends occur in Marozzi's next book, *Tamerlane*, in which, he again describes 'heavily-built matron[s]' (2004: 229), as well as 'dancing girls' (2004: 7) and harems (2004: 44).<sup>181</sup> In his description of these women he admits that efforts to understand them better are hindered by his sources: 'Although little is known about how many he had, and when he married them, from time to time they surface in the chronicles and then just as abruptly sink back into the depths of obscurity' (2004: 44). What these examples show is that the preoccupations which Marozzi attributes to Herodotus in *The Man Who Invented History* in fact mirror his own obsessions. The focus on the attractiveness of women and their association with sex in *The Man Who Invented History*,

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<sup>181</sup> According to Marozzi, 'Temur was as avid a collector of wives as he was of treasures' (2004: 44).

is 'blamed' on Herodotus, but it is just as typical of Marozzi's own writing style as to what can be found in the *Histories*.

Marozzi's description of *Histories* 3.84-89 and the account of how Darius became king following the death of Smerdis is an interesting passage when considering what has been discussed above. Whilst it displays the author's trait of focussing on the lurid to the detriment of a more nuanced reading, it nevertheless corresponds to the idea of Herodotus deliberately including the sensational within his account. When Marozzi writes of the Persian Constitutional Debate in Book 3 and how Darius became the Persian king, he concludes the description of how Oebares helped Darius' horse to neigh first by stating 'Only Herodotus could combine high political theory with tales of horse sex' (2008: 214). This characteristic is in keeping with Herodotus' presentation elsewhere in *The Man Who Invented History*. However, what makes it supportable here is how Herodotus' account of how Darius attained kingship contrasts with the official Persian version.

In the *Histories* there are two accounts of how Darius' groom is able to prompt an excited response from Darius' horse. The first involved allowing the horse to mount a mare at the site the confederates would meet the following morning (3.85). The second, which Herodotus specifies as deriving from the Persians, required Oebares to rub the scent of the mare on his hand (3.87). Neither version, however, appears in Darius' own account of the event that features on the Behistun monument, which represents the only extant Persian historiographic text of this period. In the inscription he cites his Achaemenid heritage as proving his right to rule.<sup>182</sup> As Asheri (2007b: 477) notes 'there is no mention of chance or portents' here, but he sees in the tale allusions to Persian religious symbolism through the prominence of the horse and the sun.<sup>183</sup> Rollinger (2018: 146) reads in Herodotus' version an ironic narrative that uses said imagery to challenge the legitimacy of Darius' kingship. Immerwahr (2013: 176) on the other hand reads the entirety of the Accession *Logos* as establishing Darius in a favourable light, which is contrasted to his characterisation as a despot in the Campaign *Logoi*. The event, therefore, has been interpreted within a political context regardless of the seemingly trivial nature of the equine contribution.

True to his characterisation of Herodotus, however, Marozzi credits the inclusion as resulting from Herodotus' inability to 'discuss something serious without throwing in the fantastical'.<sup>184</sup> Marozzi is not concerned with the potential for a deeper meaning to its inclusion, such as the passage providing a means of delegitimizing Darius' position as leader of the Persians.

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<sup>182</sup> This can be seen, for example, at 1.9 where Darius states 'Auramazda gave me this kingdom; Auramazda bore me aid until I obtained this kingdom; by the grace of Auramazda I hold this kingdom'.

<sup>183</sup> See also Tuplin (2010: 44).

<sup>184</sup> Marozzi (2008: 213).

What is important is that it was deliberately included in the text by Herodotus and it fulfils Marozzi's remit of highlighting the unusual in the *Histories* in order to illustrate what it is that makes Herodotus's account enjoyable to read, much as Herodotus sought to write of 'great and marvellous deeds'.<sup>185</sup> And so, whilst Marozzi's Herodotus is just as subject to his personal whims as Stark's and Kapuściński's were, there are instances where his interpretation of the *Histories* has some support, even if the emphasis on the *Histories* being a 'vigorous testimony to his boundless fascination with sex'<sup>186</sup> neglects the wider context of Herodotus' depiction of foreign *nomoi*.

#### **4.2: 'I am not Herodotus'<sup>187</sup>: Herodotean alter-egos in *The Man Who Invented History***

During his visit to Samos Marozzi experiences a personal disaster: he loses his Moleskin notebook. As it contained a month's-worth of writing, he falls into a panic. He concurs with the travel writer Bruce Chatwin's admission that 'Losing my passport was the least of my worries; losing a notebook was a catastrophe' (2008: 293).<sup>188</sup> He frantically searches for it until he eventually spies it amongst the ruins of the Polycrates wall. The notebook's importance is immeasurable to him and without it his book will suffer, as he would be unable to recall the details from memory. As he puts it: 'I am not Herodotus, or Paddy Leigh Fermor. I need those notes' (2008: 293). Marozzi may not describe himself as being like Herodotus but his frequent musings on what Herodotus would have thought implies an access to the inner workings of the ancient author's mind.

Throughout *The Man Who Invented History* Marozzi claims to be able to determine the content of Herodotus' thoughts. This was evident when he wrote of how 'Herodotus would have approved' in his article for the *Independent* (mentioned above), and his book is also rife with such assertions. For example:

Had Herodotus been working as President Bush's speechwriter or spokesman, quite possibly *he would* have thrown his hands up in despair at the president's announcement of a crusade. As an observer of the war in Iraq *he would* have been deeply saddened by the conflict, disturbed by American and British arrogance and equally horrified by the slaughter of 'infidels' at Muslim hands. We suspect *he would* have been struck by the tragedy of a vicious civil conflict pitting one group of people with one set of customs (the Sunni) against another group with slightly different ones (the Shia). *The historian in him would* certainly have deplored the looting of the National Museum of Baghdad. *He would* have been troubled, above all, by the poisonous effect the war has had on relations between the Muslim world

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<sup>185</sup> *Histories* 1.1.

<sup>186</sup> Marozzi (2008: 33).

<sup>187</sup> Marozzi (2008: 293).

<sup>188</sup> Taken from Chatwin's *The Songlines* (1987).

and the West, a toxic blast that has corroded common ground, helped entrench prejudices on both sides of the civilisational divide and made future confrontation, conflict and terrorism more likely. And, had he lived to see it, *he would* have been utterly devastated by the destruction of Babylon (2008: 100-101).<sup>189</sup>

Within one paragraph Marozzi includes six instances where he states how he thinks Herodotus would have reacted to George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq were he alive today. This trait has been noted in reviews of the book where the author is criticised for 'too often ... [concluding] an anecdote by exclaiming breathlessly: "Herodotus would have been thrilled" or "saddened" or "delighted"'.<sup>190</sup> Marozzi's reason for being able to reach such conclusions derives from Herodotus' narrative voice. To Marozzi's credit, his reading of Herodotus and the *Histories* does not go unchallenged in *The Man Who Invented History*. Antigoni, an academic who drives Marozzi to Delphi, plainly dismisses his interpretation of Herodotus:

What you've got to understand about Herodotus, Justin, is that he's not a man he's a text ... The most important thing about Herodotus is not that he's a cosmopolitan or the things you're talking about. It's his message, know the limits of the human condition. It's nothing to do with don't exploit other people, be nice to them, that's Kapuściński's humanist nonsense. (2008: 229-230).

However, for Marozzi, such a notion is outrageous:

It makes me see red. Okay, so all we really have to go on is the *Histories*, but what a treasure trove it is. Herodotus the man shines forth on almost every page. Wry, amusing, intelligent, deft, humane, chatty, ingenious, cosmopolitan, teasing, moral – the many facets of his personality are laid bare in his prose. (2008: 229)

Antigoni remains unconvinced by his view. Indeed, when she criticises Marozzi for being distracted whilst she is talking to him, she tells him 'My God, you're just like Herodotus' (2008: 231). This, he observes, was not meant as a compliment. She dismisses his notetaking as being 'like a tourist, only half understanding what's going on around you' (2008: 231). Whilst it is delivered as criticism one assumes Marozzi would have been delighted by such a comparison. Indeed, whilst he describes himself as being unlike Herodotus in the chapter on Samos, he nevertheless includes instances in the narrative where others compare him to the Halicarnassian. Another example occurs during his trip to Egypt where his guide Refaat tells him 'You're just like Herodotus ... He

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<sup>189</sup> My italics.

<sup>190</sup> Porteous (2008).

was always complaining, too' (2008: 155). As with Antigoni, the resemblance is contained within an insult, but the comparison is nevertheless planted in the reader's mind.

Parallels to Herodotus are also present in Marozzi's description of his encounter with Patrick Leigh Fermor. When Marozzi lost his notebook on Samos, Leigh Fermor was coupled with Herodotus due to his ability to write of his adventures without the need for extensive notetaking. Certainly, Marozzi has a great admiration for the man that is comparable to his affection for Herodotus, and he includes his encounter with his living hero in *The Man Who Invented History*. Marozzi confesses to having pestered Leigh Fermor prior to their meeting in the hope of being able to discuss Herodotus (2008: 263). Leigh Fermor had initially declined as Herodotus was not his area of expertise. Nevertheless, regardless of Leigh Fermor's unfamiliarity with Herodotus, Marozzi sees his hero as a Herodotus-type figure in two ways. First, the thought crosses his mind to describe his hero as the 'Herodotus of our times' (2008: 263). Secondly, his wartime exploits are described as being worthy of inclusion in the *Histories*: 'If Herodotus had witnessed the Second World War, he might well have commented on the 'marvel' of the kidnapping of General Kreipe' (2008: 269).

In this chapter of *The Man Who Invented History* Herodotus is connected to both Leigh Fermor and to Marozzi himself. Marozzi contemplates whether to arrange a meeting with his 'Herodotean hero' (2008: 262), and so he connects Leigh Fermor to the *Histories* from the very start of this section. Marozzi also compares himself to Herodotus by describing his attempts to obtain an audience with Leigh Fermor as being like Herodotus obtaining eyewitness testimonies of the Greco-Persian wars: 'I can claim to be pursuing him as a war veteran just as Herodotus interviewed veterans of the Persian Wars' (2008: 263). He decides the best option would be to travel to Leigh Fermor in Kardamyli, just as when Herodotus, investigating the worship of Heracles, travelled to Tyre 'To satisfy my wish to get the best information I possibly could on this subject' (*Histories* 2.44; Marozzi 2008: 264). Even Leigh Fermor is presented as connecting his visitor to the Halicarnassian when he tells Marozzi that '*Your chap* Herodotus might be just the encouragement I need' (2008: 273).<sup>191</sup>

The overlap between Herodotus, Leigh Fermor, and Marozzi arguably reaches its zenith at the end of the chapter. As they part, Marozzi thanks Leigh Fermor and wishes him luck with the rest of the *Histories*. Marozzi hopes to inspire Leigh Fermor to continue reading Herodotus' account by highlighting what he thinks will appeal to his living hero:

'There's lots of sex in it, you know,' I say by way of encouragement.

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<sup>191</sup> My italics.

‘Really?’ he says, suddenly galvanized. He chuckles. ‘Could you point out the best bits?’ (2008: 273).

The sensational trait that Marozzi attaches to his ancient hero is also appreciated by Leigh Fermor who is indeed encouraged to continue reading. And so, in Marozzi’s account both Herodotus and Leigh Fermor are both depicted as being interested in the salacious parts of history.

This is a rather fitting conclusion to a chapter that essentially vindicates Marozzi’s reading of the *Histories*. Indeed, during the course of their meeting Marozzi depicts his modern idol as defending his ancient hero by presenting him with Antigoni’s reading of Herodotus and the *Histories* that is featured above. Upon hearing that Marozzi has been advised to ‘regard him not as a person but as a text’, Leigh Fermor ‘frowns sympathetically. “What a terrible way of looking at him. He seems frightfully engaging. I’m enjoying discovering him enormously”’ (2008: 271). The first point to consider here is what Leigh Fermor means by the word ‘discovering’. If he is implying that he had never encountered Herodotus before then this clashes with the fact that he was not only friends with Stark but had read and provided feedback on *Ionia: A Quest*, suggesting he would have at least been familiar with Stark’s rendering of Herodotus (See Part I, Chapter 2 of this thesis). Marozzi’s account of the meeting implies the ninety-one-year-old had never encountered the *Histories* prior to Marozzi’s insistence.

The second point to be gleaned from this exchange is how Marozzi and Leigh Fermor’s reading of the *Histories* is set in opposition to the academic Antigoni. As was noted earlier, Marozzi is at pains to liberate Herodotus and the *Histories* from the historians he feels do not understand how joyous the work is. Conversely, those who appreciate the *Histories* on Marozzi’s terms are celebrated. For example, when he meets the archaeologist Professor Vassos Karageorghis at a conference in Athens he describes him favourably:

You can tell if someone is a Herodotean. There is a sparkle in the eyes and a flash of fun. Perhaps even a dash of mischief (you don’t get that with Thucydides). Professor Vassos Karageorghis is one ... Unlike most of his more po-faced colleagues here, he exudes bonhomie and is constantly smiling. I could be wrong, but I have him down as an irrepressible Herodotean (2008: 200).

Academics that take an opposite view to Marozzi are held in less esteem. They are the opposite of Herodotus: ‘His inquiries and investigations did not consist of analysing, synthesising and criticising other people’s research from the comfort of an office and library’ (2008: 38). The problem for Marozzi is that Herodotus, as he puts it, ‘doesn’t really belong in academic circles. He’s much too fun for that. And in most cases, for them’ (2008: 38).

This rather gets us to the heart of Marozzi's depiction of Herodotus and the *Histories* in *The Man Who Invented History*. He wants to save Herodotus from those that would dampen the sense of enjoyment a reader should derive from the *Histories*. Professional historians he feels have been too influenced by both Plutarch's *On the Malice of Herodotus*, a tome that he laments did lasting damage to Herodotus' reputation,<sup>192</sup> and 'that earnest windbag'<sup>193</sup> Thucydides' 'uniquely political model' for writing history.<sup>194</sup> In writing *The Man Who Invented History* Marozzi aimed to correct this state of affairs and illustrate to the reader the joys of reading the *Histories*. This is why he places great emphasis on what he thinks the reader will enjoy discovering about Herodotus and his work. Like Marozzi's Herodotus with his ancient audience, the text is crafted to appeal as well as to inform. And like his Herodotus, Marozzi includes these things because he, too, can get rather carried away with himself.

### **4.3: Conclusion**

In *The Man Who Invented History*, Marozzi is at pains to deliver a portrait of Herodotus that he feels will appeal to a wider audience who may otherwise be daunted by the author's status and the antiquity of the work. His presentation emphasises what he perceives to be the most entertaining and pleasurable aspects of the text in order to illustrate its appeal to a potential reader. Employing the format of the travelogue accentuates this theme, as Marozzi can not only use the text as a guide but also demonstrate how it provided him with a great deal of enjoyment throughout his journeys. The motif of Herodotus as an ideal travel companion then plays into the overall aim of deriving pleasure from reading the *Histories*. Coupled with this is Marozzi's presentation of Herodotus as a character, as he aims to prove how Herodotus' narrative voice is one of the chief sources of enjoyment one can derive from reading the *Histories*. Marozzi, like Stark and Kapuściński before him, is adamant that an accurate sense of who Herodotus was as a man can be gathered from his interjections within the text. For Marozzi, these reveal a larger-than-life figure who was fascinated by all aspects of the world around him. As he puts it 'He is part learned scholar, part tabloid hack, but always broad-minded, humorous and generous-hearted, which is why he's so much fun' (2008: 5).

This sense of 'fun' that Marozzi finds so appealing in the *Histories* is set in opposition to academic renderings of Herodotus. For Marozzi, they do not understand its value because 'fun'

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<sup>192</sup> Marozzi (2008: 4).

<sup>193</sup> Marozzi (2008: 3).

<sup>194</sup> Marozzi (2008: 21).

has no place within their academic sphere. The characterisation of Herodotus and his work in this manner does have issues. Marozzi's focus on passages from the *Histories* that feature sexual content as a means of entertainment largely disregard the likely purpose of their original inclusions. Marozzi's reading of *Histories* 3.84f for example, emphasises the sensational to the detriment of a more nuanced reading in which the event depicted may be a thinly veiled attempt at delegitimising Darius' kingship. Likewise, is a sexual practice of a foreign culture included by Herodotus to provide new data to his audience, to highlight the difference between Greek and foreign customs, or simply to entertain both Herodotus and his audience? Is it perhaps a combination of all of these factors? The emphasis in such cases within *The Man who Invented History* is to highlight that Herodotus is drawn to such stories because they are titillating, a characteristic that appeals to both ancient and modern audiences. But Marozzi is imposing his own judgement here and this in turn betrays the influence of his own persona on his depiction of Herodotus.

## Part II

### Counter-*Histories*: Herodotus and the Novel

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Historians have always told stories. From Thucydides and Tacitus to Gibbon and Macaulay the composition of narrative in lively and elegant prose has always accounted their highest ambition.

Lawrence Stone (1979: 3)

Herodotus' *Histories* represent a fusion of prose and poetry.

Charles Fornara (1983: 32)

### 1.1: Fiction and Herodotus' *Histories*

While defending the historical novel in a 1797 manuscript entitled 'Of History and Romance', the novelist, political philosopher, and journalist William Godwin (1756-1836) argued against the writing of history that is 'the mere chronicle of facts, places and dates', for whilst it 'comes nearest to the truth' it 'is in reality no history.'<sup>195</sup> This he explains is because it is too abstracted from the humanity that has shaped the events depicted and so offers little to the reader:

He that knows only what day the Bastille was taken and on what spot Louis XVI perished, knows nothing. He professes the mere skeleton of history. The muscles, the articulations, every thing in which the life emphatically resides, is absent.<sup>196</sup>

Whilst Herodotus' *Histories* chronicles the events of the Greco-Persian Wars and establishes the context from which it emerges, the work is not the mere amalgamation of data that, as Godwin describes it, is 'abstracted from individuals whose passions and peculiarities are interesting to our minds' thus making it 'a dry and frigid science'. Rather, Herodotus incorporates a degree of *mimesis* that enlivens the narrative in a manner that would have pleased Godwin. *Histories* 3.134, for example, shows how Atossa successfully persuaded Darius to invade Greece at the behest of the man who successfully treated her abscess. The conversation between the Persian Great King and

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<sup>195</sup> Godwin (1797).

<sup>196</sup> In a letter to Percy Shelley dated 10<sup>th</sup> December 1812, Godwin would reinforce the value of the study of History as it exposes the reader to what is 'noble, useful, generous and admirable' in human nature (1992: 80). As well as the histories of one's own country he declares that a reader should also acquaint themselves with the histories of Greece and Rome, 'Because in them the achievements of the human species have been most admirable, in Rome, in high moral and social qualities, in Greece both in them, and also in literature and art' (1992: 80). Interestingly, he couples Homer amongst the histories of Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Plutarch (1992: 81).

his queen has been described as ‘part patently fictitious’,<sup>197</sup> with the motivation behind the conflict deemed ‘absurd’.<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, its presence aids in the progress of the narrative by providing a cause for Darius’ expansionism.

What it also does is point to the *Histories*’ use of elements that derive from fiction to enhance the historical narrative. The work of Homer is a key literary predecessor to consider in this respect. In his examination of the concept of history prior to and including Herodotus’ *Histories*, François Hartog (2000: 388) observes that ‘In Greece all begins with the epic’.<sup>199</sup> Certainly, the preservation of knowledge that is signalled by Herodotus as being one of the aims of his enterprise is also found in Homer. Within the story of the *Iliad*, Helen’s tapestry in which she weaves ‘battles of the horse-taming Trojans and the brazen-coated Achaeans, that for her sake they had endured at the hands of Ares’ has been read as displaying how the craft of weaving becomes ‘a vehicle for recording information, such as history or mythology’.<sup>200</sup> It can also be evidenced in the songs of Demodocus in the *Odyssey*, who sings of ‘the famous deeds of fighting heroes- the song whose fame reached the skies those days: The strife between Odysseus and Achilles’,<sup>201</sup> and whose words, Odysseus declares, to be ‘true to life, all too true’ (8.549). Indeed, the bard’s retelling of the Trojan War is described by the political theorist Hannah Arendt (1958: 574) as being the beginning of history. As she puts it: ‘the moment when Ulysses ... listened to the story of his own deeds and sufferings, to the story of his life, now a thing outside himself, an ‘object’ for all to see and hear’ is when these events ‘became *history*’.<sup>202</sup>

When examining the wider influence of Homer on Herodotus’ writing, Boedeker (2012: 97) observed:

Readers of Herodotus both ancient and modern have found the imprint of Homeric epic on all levels of his text, from the occasional use of special poetic words, to literary tropes such as set speeches and dialogues, to overall range and purpose.

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<sup>197</sup> Snodgrass (1980: 168).

<sup>198</sup> Immerwahr (2013: 168).

<sup>199</sup> See also Marincola (2013: 110), who opens his exploration of the influence of Homer on the *Histories* by emphasizing that ‘Like so many other genres of literature in antiquity, historiography was much indebted to Homeric epic’.

<sup>200</sup> Barber (1995: 153).

<sup>201</sup> *Odyssey* 8.74-75.

<sup>202</sup> In the article Arendt describes Herodotus as ‘a storyteller’ (1958: 576) who echoes Homer’s ‘impartiality’ in his aim to preserve the deeds of the Greeks and Barbarians, just as Homer sought to praise the glory of Hector as equally as Achilles in the *Iliad*. As she puts it, ‘this is still the highest type of objectivity we know’ (1958: 579).

With this in mind, a passage like 3.134 draws comparisons to Homer's Helen, as Atossa, like her fictional counterpart, becomes the 'cause' of a war between the Greeks and an Asian civilisation. This flexibility with the truth may undermine the reliability of the work for some readers. Fehling (1989: 155), for example, would prefer to view Herodotus as a poet who shapes the information he obtained with the help of his imagination, rather than as a 'scientific historian'. There are others, like Godwin, who see the value in expanding beyond the straightforward regurgitation of data.

It may be an exaggeration to say that the authors of fiction who engage with Herodotean content have taken on Herodotus' mantle. However, the fact remains that when a writer takes a fragment of the *Histories* and shapes it for their own purposes, they enter a tradition that blends the boundaries between history and fiction. I will explore examples of narrative fiction that examine history through their engagement with the *Histories* in this portion of my thesis. Gore Vidal's *Creation* (1981), Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* (1992), and Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* (2001) display a keen interest in ideas surrounding the nature of history and its status within their contemporary culture. With these case studies I aim to demonstrate how the authors engage with the *Histories* and why they are drawn to Herodotus' status as the father of Western narrative history. As their novels question the concept of Western narrative of history, I will explore what made the *Histories* an ideal text to use. Within this exploration I consider how these authors draw this reading from the *Histories* as well as how the relationship between history and fiction assists in this enterprise. In this first chapter I will begin by surveying examples of Herodotean reception within the format of the post-war novel. Exploring a wide body of novels will highlight the recurring modes of reception that are detectable across these works and allow me to identify whether such features arise a consequence of engaging with the *Histories*.

## **1.2: Trends in Herodotean Novels**

Whilst the ancient Greeks did not have a name for the novel,<sup>203</sup> of the examples that fall within the category, references to Herodotus' work can be detected. Lucian's *A True Story* (second century C.E.), for example, contains several allusions to the *Histories*, including a parody of *Histories* 4.74, where the Scythians becoming intoxicated through the inhalation of hemp seeds, when the inhabitants of the moon inhale their food through smoke (Lucian 1.23). Chariton's *Callirhoe* (first century C.E.) also features Herodotean allusions, with Anderson (2014: 17) describing Chareas being saved from execution after Callirhoe's name is uttered (4.2-3) as 'an amusing distortion' of

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<sup>203</sup> See Reardon (1976: 120).

Croesus being spared from the flames after speaking Solon's name in *Histories* 1.85-89.<sup>204</sup> When looking to later examples in the genre in the post-war era, Herodotus' presence also emerges in a variety of forms. The Pulitzer and Nobel Prize-winning author John Steinbeck (1902-1968) opens Part 4 of his family saga *East of Eden* (1952) with a brief retelling of *Histories* 1.30. Through the meeting of Solon and Croesus, Herodotus provided Steinbeck with a means of processing how society is to judge whether a person has lived a good life, namely that it can only be determined once that life has expired. When Croesus asks the Athenian 'Do you consider me lucky', Solon replies 'How can I tell? ... You aren't dead yet' (Steinbeck 1963: 391). The passage is featured to highlight the supposition that a man's time on this planet can only be assessed after he 'has brushed off the dust and chips of his life' (Steinbeck 1963: 391), with the emphasis being less on the concept of the instability of fortune and more as a means of contributing to the exploration of morality that runs as a thematic thread throughout the novel.<sup>205</sup>

Herodotus' work is not spoken of elsewhere in the novel, but its inclusion here demonstrates a key feature of the *Histories*' relationship with narrative fiction. Namely, that the breadth of material contained within Herodotus' account is a boon to prospective authors. Whether an author is interested in the over-arching narrative of the East versus West conflict or, as here, an encounter between two historical figures, the *Histories* offers authors a wealth of material to draw on.<sup>206</sup> And, as with travel literature, the scale of Herodotus' influence on each novel can vary. Whilst some examples will choose to situate their entire narratives in the world of fifth-century Greece, there are others that will reference the era within a more modern setting. References to Herodotus' work can be found in genres as varied as the family saga, adventure thrillers, and biographical fiction, with historical fiction being the genre where his content most frequently occurs. With the latter this is largely due to the respective authors regarding his work as a reliable resource on the period of which he wrote.<sup>207</sup>

The novels I will feature here are those that engage with Herodotean material and acknowledge their debt to the ancient author to their prospective reader. This is because not all

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<sup>204</sup> Other examples from the novel include the opening lines where the author presents himself as 'Chariton of Aphrodisias', which Hunter (1994) sees as echoing the opening lines of the *Histories*, as well as the work of Hecataeus and Thucydides, and the novel's setting in Achaemenid Persia, which de Temmerman (2017: 486) finds notable as this was 'the same realm adopted by Herodotus'.

<sup>205</sup> On the subject of morality in *East of Eden* see, for example, Heavilin (2016) and Appleton Aguiar (2005).

<sup>206</sup> The encounter between Solon and Croesus is also a feature of Tolstoy's short story *Croesus and Fate* (1886), as well as the subject of the fourth chapter in Part II of this thesis, *American Gods*.

<sup>207</sup> Bridges (2007: 411) also credits Herodotus' descriptions, dramatizations, and the use of 'diverse individual voices' as an inspiration to fiction writers, especially in comparison to the account of Thucydides.

works are forthcoming in signalling their application of the *Histories*. Frederic Raphael's (b. 1931) novella *The Hidden I: A Myth Revisited* (1990) is a retelling of the interaction of Gyges, Candaules, and Candaules' wife, who is here named Lydia, as described in *Histories* 1.8-12. Whether Herodotus was a direct influence is not acknowledged by Raphael at any point in the book, with the novel's subtitle being the only indication of an original folk-source.<sup>208</sup> Raphael does, however, potentially allude to other passages in Book 1 of the *Histories*, when Gyges and Candaules visit a 'precinct of the temple [where] women waited for men' (1990: 24). For a reader familiar with Herodotus' work this calls to mind *Histories* 1.199 and suggests the author may well be engaging with the content of the *Histories* in the novella.<sup>209</sup> The reader who is familiar with the origins of the story then can engage with *The Hidden I: A Myth Revisited* as an adaptation, whilst at the same time the lack of any foreknowledge does not render the work unreadable. In the examples I include here, however, the authors are happy to acknowledge the influence of Herodotus on their writing. One approach is to use Herodotean material in the novel's narrative and acknowledge the debt in the paratexts. The second type sees an author adapt Herodotean material and feature Herodotus as a presence within the narrative.

Herodotus' absence as a character within narratives of the first type tends to stem from the fact that Herodotus' content largely pre-dates his proposed birth. And so, if a novel about the Battle of Salamis featured Herodotus as participating in or observing the event then this would undermine any sense of historicity that an author may be seeking to achieve in their work. An example of this first type is Steven Pressfield's (b.1943) historical fiction *Gates of Fire* (1998). As with Raphael's *The Hidden I: A Myth Revisited*, a reader unfamiliar with the *Histories* would be unlikely to see its influence on Pressfield's novel by looking at the narrative alone. Whilst the story is influenced by Herodotean content, Herodotus remains unnamed within the narrative due to the time period on which the novel is focussed. If the reader looks at the surrounding material,

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<sup>208</sup> Raphael has written of Herodotus elsewhere. In *Antiquity Matters* (2017), when writing of the Gyges tale in Plato's *Republic*, he also discusses Croesus, the last member of Gyges' royal line, and his encounter with Cyrus, as depicted in *Histories* 1.86-88, Raphael notes that whilst 'Their ages make it unlikely that, in fact, Solon and Croesus exchanged two words together ... Herodotus, however, cannot resist the story that when Croesus had been defeated by Cyrus the Great and was about to be burned alive, he remembered Solon's modest notion of happiness and conceded the point, in a loud voice. Moved by Croesus's heartfelt cry, Cyrus is said to have reprieved his captive and made him his friend' (2017: 108). And so, Raphael believes that, irrespective of accuracy, Herodotus was compelled to include the passage.

<sup>209</sup> *Histories* 1.199.1: 'The foulest Babylonian custom is that which compels every woman of the land to sit in the temple of Aphrodite and have intercourse with some stranger once in her life. Many women who are rich and proud and disdain to mingle with the rest, drive to the temple in covered carriages drawn by teams, and stand there with a great retinue of attendants.' This passage is also retold in Vidal's *Creation* (2002: 85-87).

however, Herodotus' role is more prominent. He is included by Pressfield in the Historical Note (1998: 13-14), a passage from the *Histories* is featured before the narrative begins (1998: 15), and he is listed amongst the ancient sources on which the author drew when researching the novel (1998: 524), the others being Homer, Plutarch, Pausanias, Diodorus, Plato, Thucydides, and Xenophon.

As the novel is a retelling of what occurred at the Battle of Thermopylae, Pressfield selects a passage from Herodotus' account of the battle to open the work:

Although extraordinary valour was displayed by the entire corps of Spartans and Thespians, yet bravest of all was declared the Spartan Dienekes. It is said that on the eve of battle, he was told by a native of Trachis that the Persian archers were so numerous that, when they fired their volleys, the mass of arrows blocked out the sun. Dienekes, however, quite undaunted by this prospect remarked with a laugh, 'Good. Then we'll have our battle in the shade.' (1998: 15)

This passage serves Pressfield's narrative in that it introduces one of the novel's key characters, Dienekes. It also introduces the longstanding tradition of idealising the Greeks in general and the Spartans in particular. Dienekes' defiant response when confronted with the might of the Persian army is emblematic of a trope that is evident in literature on both the Greco-Persian wars and the Battle of Thermopylae. As Bridges puts it,

The Greek fighters in novels such as this are invariably presented as fighting for a greater good;<sup>210</sup> their courage, excellence and patriotism in fighting to protect the world from the threat of eastern barbarism is repeatedly stressed. (2007: 408).

By using this passage Pressfield calls to mind this convention, but he also goes some way to subvert it within the narrative itself. The Spartans of *Gates of Fire* are not wholly idealised by Pressfield as his story does not shy away from the brutality of their culture. Likewise, the author makes a concerted effort to depict the Persians as being more than simply an 'Eastern threat'. Towards the novel's conclusion, when questioned by Leonidas about whether he hates the Persians 'Dienekes answered at once that he did not. "I see faces of gentle and noble bearing. More than a few, I think, whom one would welcome with a clap and a laugh to any table of friends." Leonidas clearly approved my master's answer.' (1998: 493).<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> The novels to which she is referring include Edward Bulwer Lytton's unfinished *Pausanias, the Spartan* (1873) and Jon Burke's *The Lion of Sparta* (1961).

<sup>211</sup> Challenging the notion of the Greeks being the heroes of the West and the Persians being the oppressor from the East is dealt with at greater length in Vidal's *Creation* (see below).

Pressfield's novel engages with issues of reliability and accuracy, which are recurring themes in the novels that acknowledge their debt to Herodotus. When Pressfield writes about Herodotus and the *Histories* in the Historical Note and the Acknowledgements of *Gates of Fire* the veracity of the ancient text is not questioned by the author. Rather, it is considered a reliable resource to draw on. This in turn lends credibility to the narrative itself. Although a work of fiction, the novel re-imagines a true event and uses Herodotus, along with 'Homer, ... Plutarch, Pausanias, Diodorus, Plato, Thucydides, Xenophon' (1998: 524), to create an epic retelling of what took place. And Pressfield certainly aimed for authenticity in his approach to the subject; consulting academics and experts in the field.<sup>212</sup> Highlighting Herodotus' contribution then is another way for the author to convey his pursuit of historical accuracy to the reader.

The method of using content from the *Histories* in a story and directly addressing his influence outside of the narrative can also be found in Tim Leach's historical novels on the life of Croesus following Cyrus' conquest of Lydia: *The Last King of Lydia* (2013) and *The King and the Slave* (2015). Leach's novels draw on content from the first three books of the *Histories*, which he uses to aid his depiction of the latter stages of Croesus' life and travels in service of the Persian kings. As Leach's focus is on the sixth century, he does not include Herodotus as a named presence in the narrative. Herodotus is, however, named in the acknowledgements of both novels. In *The Last King of Lydia* Leach characterises Herodotus as a storyteller (2013: 326), whilst in *The King and the Slave* he is described as 'the wandering historian who couldn't resist a good story' (2015: 279). This expansion in the Acknowledgment of the second novel is interesting. The description is in keeping with the characterisation of Herodotus as both a traveller and a storyteller, that is a key component of the engagement with Herodotus in this thesis. Leach's engagement with this aspect of Herodotus may have also influenced the inclusion of a nameless figure who appears toward the novel's end. In the final pages of the second novel 'a quick-witted boy from Halicarnassus' is purchased by Isocrates, Croesus' personal slave and companion throughout both novels, who promises to teach the boy all that he knows. The pair then wander:

from one court to another, as Solon had half a century before, telling stories to kings, princes, satraps, and archons. He told only stories he knew, the stories he had lived and witnessed for himself. His reputation spread, travelled faster than he did, and soon kings

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<sup>212</sup> According to Pressfield, 'almost as indispensable ... have been the extraordinary scholars and historians of our own time, whose wisdom I have looted shamelessly' and he lists academics and historical writers including Paul Cartledge, G. L. Cawkwell, Victor Davis Hansen, Donald Kagan, John Keegan, H. D. F. Kitto, J. F. Lazenby, Peter Green, W. K. Pritchett, Mary Renault, Hunter B. Armstrong, and Ippokratis Kabtzios as being particularly worthy of mention (1998: 524-5).

were vying for his favour, sending generous gifts to tempt him to their courts. They asked for stories of Cyrus and Cambyses, of Persia and Lydia, of battles and intrigue at court. He spoke of the wonders of Babylon, the fall of Sardis, the wild plains of the Massagetae, the ancient tombs of Egypt. But above all, again and again, he told stories of Croesus.

He told them of Croesus the king, and Croesus the slave. Of the man who lost an empire but saved his people from slavery, who had hoarded wealth but craved only happiness. He embellished the stories for those who wanted myths, told them truthfully to those who respected the truth, made them more plausible for those who would never believe the things he had seen with his own eyes. He taught them all to the boy, to earn a living when Isocrates was gone, to spread amongst his own people in Halicarnassus when he could finally return home. (2015: 277-78).

Although the facts surrounding Herodotus' life are difficult to ascertain, comparing the period in which the novels take place to Herodotus' suggested lifespan means it is unlikely that the unnamed boy is Herodotus. However, this is perhaps the means by which Herodotus will later obtain the information that Isocrates relates to the various courts around which he travels. Although the boy may not be Herodotus, the transmission of knowledge in this manner conveys the role that the oral tradition had in Herodotus' research. Indeed, Leach emphasises this point in the final sentence of the novel when he writes of the boy's future audience in Halicarnassus. And so, whilst Herodotus is not present as a named character within this story, his presence is signalled through the unnamed boy and what he symbolises.

Another example of this type of Herodotus-influenced storytelling is Gene Wolfe's (1921-2019) fantasy novel *Soldier of the Mist* (1986). Again, Herodotus does not appear in the narrative, but Wolfe draws upon the world of the *Histories* by setting the novel during the events of Xerxes' campaign in Greece. The novelist does, however, dedicate the book 'with the greatest respect and affection to Herodotus of Halicarnassos' (1986: vi).<sup>213</sup> As with Pressfield's *Gates of Fire*, Wolfe, too, includes a passage from the *Histories* at the start of the book. The passage in this instance is taken from the account of the Battle of Plataea at *Histories* 9.62. The inclusion of this quotation from the *Histories* can be understood to serve the narrative in two ways. First, because it introduces the subject of war; secondly, because it hints at the presence the gods will have in the narrative. Wolfe's protagonist, known only as Latro, is a soldier who has survived a brain injury that has altered his perception in two ways. First, he is unable to recall his past and to retain new memories, which has led to him write his day-to-day experiences on a scroll. According to Wolfe's Foreword, this scroll has subsequently been 'adapted' by Wolfe into *Soldier of the Mist*. Secondly, Latro's injury has also resulted in his being able to see and communicate with divinities and other supernatural

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<sup>213</sup> The novel's sequel, *Soldier of Arete* (1989), 'is dedicated to the old colonel, the most underrated of ancient authors and the least heeded: Xenophon the Athenian.'

beings.<sup>214</sup> With this in mind, the context of the passage Wolfe has chosen here is interesting. The text included does not feature any divine activity but what follows does. At 9.65 Herodotus notes:

It is indeed a marvel that although the battle was right by the grove of Demeter, there was no sign that any Persian had been killed in the precinct or entered into it; most of them fell near the temple in unconsecrated ground. I think—if it is necessary to judge the ways of the gods—that the goddess herself denied them entry, since they had burnt her temple, the shrine at Eleusis.

Whilst the presence of the goddess as indicated connects the narrative of the novel, arguably the manifestation of Pan at 6.105 has an even greater influence on the depiction of the gods. This is because the divinities of *Soldier of the Mist* are shown to appear and speak directly to Latro, as Pan does to Pheidippides. At page 146, for example, Latro encounters Persephone. The gods are not named in the novel because Latro's injury has meant he is unable to recall them. Their attributes are how a reader deduces their identity. And so, in this passage the goddess is described as 'young ... and lovely, wreathed in leaves and flowers' (1986: 146), who says she is the daughter of the Great Mother (1986: 146) and is Queen of the Dead (1986: 147). From these features it is clear to a reader familiar with Greek mythology that she is Persephone, the daughter of Demeter and wife of Hades.

One key aspect of this novel that links it to the *Histories* is the theme of memory. The *Histories'* purpose in memorializing the deeds of the past so that they would 'not become forgotten in time' (1.1) is echoed in Latro's drive to write a daily account of his own deeds, so that they may not be lost due to his amnesia:

My name is Latro. I must not forget. The healer said I forget very quickly, and that is because of a wound I suffered in battle. He named it as though it were a man, but I do not remember the name. He said I must write down as much as I can, so I can read it when I have forgotten. Thus he has given me this scroll and this stylus of heavy slingstone metal (1986: 3)

As a means of emphasizing the importance of recording these details, Wolfe's protagonist has completely lost his memories of his past and, consequently, he does not know who he is. With this Wolfe seems to have scaled the notion of preserving knowledge from oblivion down to a more personal level. However, that Latro's travels in this first novel occur during Xerxes' expansion into

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<sup>214</sup> Latro's 'gift', which follows his injury, is comparable to Demodocus being gifted with song after losing his sight: 'the faithful bard the Muse adored/ above all others, true, but her gifts were mixed/ with good and evil both; she stripped him of sight/ but gave the man the power of stirring, rapturous song' (*Odyssey* 8.62-65).

Greece also means Wolfe can introduce elements, including historical figures, in order to illustrate the events of the Greco-Persian wars. Thus, Latro visits Pausanias' camp in Chapter XXVII, whilst the death of Leonidas is discussed during a visit to the Hot Gates in Chapter XXXVII.

The recurring themes that occur within these examples suggest that when drawing upon Herodotean material authors will often engage in shared modes of reception. The element of the Herodotus-substitute character that is displayed in *The King and the Slave* and *Soldier of the Mist* draws on Herodotus' reputation as a traveller who obtains and conveys data as an aid to preventing it from being lost to time. At play, too, in these novels is the reliance on Herodotus as a source of historical data. Herodotus' account is valued enough to be highlighted by these authors as a trustworthy means of accessing the past. However, *Soldier of the Mist* also emphasises the tension between fact and fiction that will be a feature of my case studies. The fictional narrative that Wolfe presents as real demonstrates the issues surrounding the reliability of written accounts, especially as Herodotus' work is cited by the author as being a primary source for his fictional construction.

Questions surrounding the problematic nature of written accounts is particularly to the fore in Paul Sussman's (1966-2012) thriller *The Lost Army of Cambyses* (2002). As the title of Sussman's book implies, the alleged discovery of the lost army of Cambyses drives the narrative. The book opens by quoting *Histories* 3.26 and, as in the novels above, it serves as a means of introducing the reader to the legend that the characters will pursue. Sussman also includes Herodotus in a glossary within which he is depicted as being a 'Greek historian, known as 'the father of history'. Famous for his *Histories* outlining the causes and events of the wars between the Greeks and Persians' (2002: 582). Herodotus' role as a reliable source is questioned in the novel with a discussion on whether his account was merely a fabrication (2002: 390). The issue of veracity in fact serves Sussman's narrative well. The novel's prologue depicts the army as it marches through the desert to face the Ammonians. It focuses on a Greek mercenary called Dymmachus who becomes the sole survivor of the sandstorm that engulfs the soldiers. It is only towards the narrative's conclusion that both the reader and the novel's protagonist discover that the Greek mercenary and the clues he left behind are an elaborate fiction concocted to trap an international terrorist who raises money for his cause through the selling of rare artefacts on the black market. Questions surrounding the accuracy of Herodotus' account then serve as a microcosm of the larger narrative.

When an author does include Herodotus as a character or narrative presence the themes discussed above are retained. As well as the forthcoming case studies that will be discussed in the following chapters, an example of this can also be found in Jon Edward Martin's (b. 1947) historical novel *In Kithairon's Shadow: A Novel of Ancient Greece and the Persian War* (2003). Once again,

the majority of Martin's novel is focused on material from Herodotus' narrative that dates before the assumed birth of the man himself, as the novel is concerned with Xerxes' campaigns in Greece. However, references to Herodotus occur in the novel's glossary, where he is included in the descriptions of 'Lothagos' and 'Polemarch'. Martin makes reference to the potential of Herodotus misinterpreting military numbers in his description of 'Polemarch', but he is careful to use the word 'misinterpreted', as opposed to 'misrepresented' or even 'lied'. In this context the intent seems to imply that the error was a mistake rather than a deliberate attempt to distort facts.

Martin, however, subverts the trend I have noted thus far in novels that recreate the events of the Greco-Persian wars by including Herodotus as a named character. Indeed, the reader learns that the majority of the narrative was a story being told to a slave boy called Kleandros by his master, Herodotus. Herodotus is described by Martin as having a 'silver-flecked beard' (2003: 220) and as a man who acts kindly towards his slave. As a continuation of the latter theme, Martin ends the novel with the short sentence, 'Herodotus smiled' (2003: 222). Envisaging Herodotus as a cheerful man who was kind to his slaves was a component of the travel literature examples that I have previously observed, particularly in the case of Kapuściński. The author also conforms to the travelling storyteller trope as the character of Herodotus is due to depart 'for Thurii, to settle on the estate of a friend. And to finish my work' (2003: 221). In this short segment of the novel Herodotus is also visited by an old friend who is revealed to be one of the heroes of the story he has been telling. This seems to be the novelist's way of demonstrating the idea that Herodotus obtained his information of the Greco-Persian Wars from those who had experienced them first-hand. This in turn adds to the perception that Herodotus' account is to be trusted, even if the idea is conveyed within an invented exchange. But this surely links us back to the element of invention that Herodotus employed within the *Histories* and signals one of the factors for why authors may be drawn to his work.

### **1.3: Concluding Thoughts**

What this overview has demonstrated is that whilst the authors discussed above display varying degrees of invention when tackling the *Histories*, there are nevertheless detectable recurring modes of adaptation when dealing with Herodotean content within the format of the novel. By and large authors choose to signal Herodotus' role in the narrative to their reader and if this cannot be done within the main story itself then his presence is highlighted within the paratextual material. His influence can be novel-wide, or it can be confined within a single paragraph. What is found in these examples are varied readings of Herodotus and his *Histories*. At times it is a helpful historical

source of the period on which the author is writing, whilst at other times it can provide a fascinating folktale-like story from which the author can develop an extended narrative. Sometimes Herodotus is named within the narrative or featured as a character, whilst other examples include Herodotean analogues that fulfil the role he plays in other works. Often these features overlap with the concept of historicity. Perceptions of how information was preserved and relayed in the past, along with the reliance of the authors on Herodotus' account, play into this notion.

The sources I will focus on next will be shown to be in possession of several of these tropes. However, their integration of Herodotus and the *Histories* within their respective narratives will surpass what has been illustrated thus far, with the novels' examination of the nature of Herodotus and his work being more pronounced than in the examples featured within this introduction. In Gore Vidal's *Creation*, Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, and Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* the authors tackle the varied aspects of Herodotus' work within the framework of their respective novels. Components such as Herodotus' narrative voice, the reliability of his content, the stories featured within, and the structure and technique of the account are explored by these authors. What I will examine is how and why. How is Herodotean material engaged with and what can be considered different to the novels that were surveyed in this chapter? And perhaps most importantly, why is the emphasis on Herodotus? What do these authors see in the *Histories* that led to the elevation of its role in their work?

## Chapter 2

### Imitating a Grasshopper: 'Answering' Herodotus in Gore Vidal's *Creation*

I don't like the phrase 'historical novel' because it seems to cancel itself out even as one says it. I usually refer to them as reflections on American history or narratives

Gore Vidal (1988: 102)<sup>215</sup>

In Book Five of Gore Vidal's *Creation* the narrator, a Persian ambassador called Cyrus, critiques the Greek explanation for the Trojan War, as described by Homer. The thought of Greeks waging war 'because the wife of a Greek chieftain had run off with a Trojan youth' is ridiculous, he declares (2002: 218). To Cyrus it is clear that the Greeks wanted to control the entrance of the Black Sea and to do this 'they must first conquer Troy or Sigeum' (2002: 218). The passage serves to puncture the Greeks' inflated sense of themselves when speaking of the glorious deeds of their ancient heroes. The Greeks in this instance were not righting a wrong done to one of their own, they had ulterior motives. This passage is characteristic of the narrator's reactions to the Greeks and their culture. Throughout the novel he frowns upon this 'very unusual society' (2002: 567), and how it processes the world around it. The chief focus of his ire is Herodotus, more specifically his depiction of the Persians in the *Histories*. The novel is framed as being in opposition to Herodotus and the account of the Greco-Persian wars as described in the *Histories*. *Creation* then is a 'reply' to Herodotus' version of history. Vidal tells the reader as much in his Author's Note. When addressing how his reader is to understand the timeline of the novel Vidal states that, 'As for dates, the narrator is usually careful to relate events to the time when he began to dictate his *answer* to Herodotus (not yet known as "the father of history")—the evening of what we would call December 20, 445 B.C.'<sup>216</sup> This idea is emphasized within the novel itself. Following a recitation of the *Histories* at the beginning of the first book, for example, Vidal's narrator says he would have answered Herodotus in front of the audience of Athenians were he a younger man, whilst later he is encouraged to 'prepare an answer to Herodotus' (2002: 16). This initially seems at odds with the genre of historical fiction in which the novel is located, as the majority of examples that featured in the introduction were keen to highlight their debt to Herodotus and the general trustworthiness

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<sup>215</sup> Weiner (1988).

<sup>216</sup> My italics.

of his account. Vidal's novel rejects such an uncritical reading from the start of the book in his Author's Note and carries this notion through into the narrative.

However, Cyrus' version of the Trojan conflict betrays an adherence to the *Histories* that suggests a greater nuance in the novel's engagement with Herodotus. Like Cyrus, Herodotus, too, presents a contrary reading of the abduction of Helen, as depicted in the *Iliad*, in *Histories* 1.3-5 and 2.113-120. Cyrus' focus and reading of the story is different to Herodotus', but the variation from the Homeric account is a revealing parallel to the *Histories*. This passage then encompasses two strands of Vidal's interaction with the *Histories*. The first sees it linked to Cyrus' criticism of the Greeks. As Herodotus was a Greek who wrote his history for his fellow Greeks, this sees him worthy of scorn in Cyrus' eyes. However, is this the true intention behind Vidal's use of the *Histories*? In this chapter I will argue that *Creation* is less an attack on Herodotus and more a condemnation of Western arrogance and its neglect of the non-Western account of history, with Herodotus serving as the representation of the West thanks to his status as the father of Western narrative history. This then connects to the second strand of Vidal's reception of Herodotus, namely, is Vidal wedded to the other side of the Herodotean coin—that is as the father of lies—or does the novel adhere to the account of the *Histories* more than the narrator will care to admit? I will tackle these ideas by first examining the biographical elements of the novel. This will establish what decisions may lie behind Vidal's narrative choices. This will be enhanced by looking at the role of the 'Vidalian' narrator in conjunction with what is found in the *Histories*. Finally, I will examine the role of writing and memory in *Creation* and how official accounts of history are shown to be subject to manipulation.

## **2.1: The Biographical Aspect of *Creation***

Born Eugene Luther Vidal at West Point, New York on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1925 into 'the upper class [sic] world of power and money',<sup>217</sup> Vidal was linked with prominent political figures from an early age. His grandfather was Oklahoma's first Democratic senator, Thomas Pryor Gore (1870-1949), the man to whom *Creation* is dedicated.<sup>218</sup> Vidal credited his grandfather as perhaps his greatest influence. Blind as the result of two separate accidents, T. P. Gore would have his grandson read to him from an early age. In a 1960 interview with Eugene Walter, Vidal said the following about their relationship:

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<sup>217</sup> Peabody and Ebersole (2005: xi).

<sup>218</sup> See Lahood (1990) who describes Senator Gore as 'Vidal's hero and role model'.

I wasn't named after him, although he had a great influence in my life. He was blind from the age of ten; I read to him on and off for seventeen years ... What did we read? Well, I read him Constitutional History and British common law mostly; for pleasure we had Brann's *The Iconoclast* and Victorian poets. In his attic in Rock Creek Park D.C. (I describe that house in a short story, "A Moment in Green Laurel") there were seven or eight thousand books. The first that I could read by myself was called *The Duck and the Kangaroo*. My favorites were Lane's *Arabian Nights* and a 19<sup>th</sup> century *Stories from Livy*. (2005: 4).

Vidal himself ran for congress in 1960 and was endorsed by his friend Eleanor Roosevelt, whilst another friend of his, John F. Kennedy, concurrently ran for president. Vidal confessed to having been 'brought up with the idea of going into politics; all the family were in politics. Even my father, an aviation man, was in Roosevelt's Little Cabinet as Director of Air Commerce', whilst his mother's side of the family were 'forever running for office all around the South' (Walter 2005: 5). Regardless of his political connections Vidal is arguably most known for his writing, and was prolific during his lifetime; producing novels, screenplays, essays, reviews, short stories, plays, and memoirs.

Vidal's privileged background, which exposed him to leading political figures in America of the twentieth century, combined with his relationship to his grandfather are points to bear in mind when looking at his seventeenth novel *Creation*. In the travel literature case studies that were examined in Part I it was observable that the authors had the tendency to make their depiction of Herodotus reflect aspects of their own narrative voice. Hence, their versions of Herodotus at times held more in common with each respective author than the voice Herodotus adopted in the *Histories*. As was identified in the introduction to Part II of this thesis, the concept of Herodotus-type figures is a trope that can be found in examples of fictional engagements with the *Histories*. Vidal's novel also focuses on a Herodotean protagonist and his Herodotean protagonist incorporates elements of Vidal's own biography.

The novel is styled as the testimony of Cyrus Spitama,<sup>219</sup> the fictional half-Greek half-Persian grandson of the historical Persian religious leader Zoroaster and ambassador who, after hearing Herodotus give a reading from the *Histories*, is prompted to give the 'true' version of events.<sup>220</sup> Owing to his blindness, Cyrus dictates his testimony to his nephew Democritus and this forms the narrative of the novel.<sup>221</sup> *Creation* was not Vidal's first foray into the ancient world. He

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<sup>219</sup> Cyrus' surname links him to Zoroaster, who is also known as Zarathustra Spitama.

<sup>220</sup> The Persians of the fourth century CE had featured in his earlier novel *Julian* (1964) but they corresponded far more with the concept of the 'Other' than the characters depicted in *Creation*, as *Julian* is written from a Roman perspective.

<sup>221</sup> The Democritus of the novel is based on the pre-Socratic philosopher and atomist. Apart from his philosophical background which links to the novel's interest in the intellectual ideas of the period, the tradition in which Democritus

had served as a script doctor on the 1959 historical epic *Ben-Hur* (1959), whilst in 1964 his novel *Julian* was published, which focused on the fourth century CE Roman emperor Julian and the rise of Christianity in the Empire. Between 1954 and 1963 he also worked on an unpublished screenplay called *The Golden Age of Pericles*, the title of which would be echoed in the final books of *Creation*: ‘The Golden Age of Xerxes the Great King’ and ‘The Peace of Pericles’.<sup>222</sup> This play included many of the same characters that are depicted in the Athens-based segments of *Creation*. Vidal also wrote the original screenplay for the 1979 film *Caligula*,<sup>223</sup> but would request to have his name removed from the credits, as he felt the studio had significantly altered his work. In addition to this, he wrote *Kalki* (1978), a novel that was centred around an American G.I.’s claims of being the tenth incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu and required Vidal to write about one of the ancient religions whose origins would later be discussed in his next novel, *Creation*.

The current edition of the novel is divided into ten ‘books’, as Vidal chose to call them. The first book is ‘Herodotus Gives a Reading at the Odeon in Athens’ and establishes the reasons behind Cyrus’ counter-history. The following books look back to Cyrus’ life and travels across Asia and Europe in the sixth and fifth centuries.<sup>224</sup> The original 1981 edition contained nine books in total, much as Herodotus’ *Histories* were eventually divided into nine books. Whilst this would draw comparison to the division of the *Histories*, Vidal would later express his displeasure at the structure of the first edition. In the Author’s Note to the restored 2002 edition, he stated that the chapter, ‘The Burning of Sardis’, had been removed from the first edition by an overzealous editor:

I have regretted that the original book had been seriously damaged by an overtly busy editor who mistakenly thought that he understood the public taste ... he managed to cut a number of key scenes because he felt that readers would not be interested in how the grandson of Zoroaster grew up in the court of Persia’s Great King, Darius, where he was befriended by Darius’ son and heir, Xerxes—the spine to the narrative. (2002: xi).

Vidal’s interest in emphasising the importance of Cyrus’ youth and his life in the Persian court ties into the novel’s over-arching intention of presenting an account of the Greco-Persian Wars from

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blinds himself may have also inspired Vidal to insert him into the narrative. See, for example, Cicero *de Finibus* V.29 and Aulus Gellius *Attic Nights* X.17. For more on Democritus’ depiction in the ancient world see Diogenes Laërtius’ *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.34- 49.

<sup>222</sup> See, also, Neilson (2014: 64).

<sup>223</sup> Directed by Tinto Brass, Giancarlo Lui, and Bob Guccione.

<sup>224</sup> They are as follows: Book 2: ‘In the Days of Darius the Great King’, Book 3: ‘The Greek Wars Begin’, Book 4: ‘The Burning of Sardis’, Book 5: ‘India’, Book 6: ‘The Passing of the Awesome Royal Glory’, Book 7: ‘Cathay’, Book 8: ‘Why the Ganges River Turned Red with Blood’, Book 9: ‘The Golden Age of Xerxes the Great King’, and Book 10: ‘The Peace of Pericles’

a non-Greek perspective. Indeed, when the novel begins with the immediate aftermath of Herodotus' reading, Cyrus' response is to give his own version of events. When Cyrus begins to dictate his own personal history at the start of Book 2, he opens with the death of his grandfather at the hands of the Turanians.<sup>225</sup> He then proceeds to describe his childhood in the Persian court, and this allows Vidal to insert prominent figures from the *Histories* including Darius, Atossa, Hippias, Democedes, Xerxes, and Mardonius. Cyrus' interactions with historical figures extend beyond the Persian court when he comes of age. Instead of taking his grandfather's role as head of the Zoroastrian faith, he is given the position of trade envoy by Darius. This allows him to travel across the empire and beyond and is a role he continues to perform when Xerxes becomes king. In comparison to Herodotus' account, the 'Greek Wars', as Cyrus calls them, are given very little attention with Xerxes' forays into Greece being relayed to him when he returns from his trade missions in India and Cathay. And it is during his time in India, Cathay, and later in Athens, that Cyrus encounters important philosophical figures of the era.

Cyrus' interactions with these leading philosophical thinkers of the fifth century BC form a vital component of the novel. Their inclusion allowed Vidal to explore examples of how the world was understood in the pre-Christian era through the wanderings of one man. In Athens Cyrus's home is poorly repaired by Socrates, he attends a party with Anaxagoras, and his nephew is Democritus. In India he is exposed to the teachings of the Jains and has an audience with Gautama Buddha. In Cathay he encounters Lao Tzu and befriends Confucius, the depiction of whom Kiernan (1982: 64) describes as being the 'centrepiece' of the novel's historical portraits.<sup>226</sup> What Karl Jaspers described as the 'Axial Age' in *The Origin and Goal of History* (1949) and the idea of the flowering of human thought during this period in human history is a prominent feature in *Creation*. Regardless of the validity of Jasper's hypothesis, the novel certainly hinges on the premise that if someone was long-lived and well-travelled, they could have potentially encountered many of the key figures of that time, as Cyrus does.<sup>227</sup> When he meets these founding figures Cyrus questions them on the nature of life and of the origin of good and evil. For Cyrus 'there is only

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<sup>225</sup> Vidal is here using the account of Zoroaster's death found in the Classical Persian Epic poem the *Shahnameh* (c.977-1010 CE) by Ferdowsi.

<sup>226</sup> Certainly, Vidal admired Confucius' teachings. When asked if the Buddha was his philosopher of choice he replied, 'No, I prefer Confucius. Confucianism isn't a religion at all; it's a system of education, of administration. It's the sanest approach to life that I know about' (Parini 2005: 135).

<sup>227</sup> Of course, there is the issues here regarding the dates of some of the key figures Cyrus encounters during his life, especially Zoroaster who has been dated to as early as the mid to late Bronze age.

one subject worth pondering—creation’ (2002: 10). This is why, as the first book ends, Cyrus adds an extra dimension to his testimony, beyond correcting Herodotus’ supposed inaccuracies:

So make yourself comfortable, Democritus. I have a long memory, and I shall indulge it. As we wait in this drafty house for the Spartan army to come—not a moment too soon as far as I’m concerned—I shall begin at the beginning and tell you what I know of the creation of this world, and of all the other worlds too. I shall also explain why evil is—and is not. (2002: 23)

In *Cyrus* there are two interacting autobiographical strands that link back to Vidal. Just as *Cyrus* mixed with the noted historical figures of his time, so, too, did Vidal during his own lifetime. The relationship of the novel’s narrator to his nephew is also possible to compare to the author, especially when taking into account elements of his own family history. Just as *Cyrus* was expected to take over his grandfather’s mantle as head of the Zoroastrian faith, Vidal was ‘expected to be a politician.’ As he noted, ‘My grandfather at one point thought he might have been president, and once you get that in the family, the family never gets over it.’<sup>228</sup> To this observation he would also add: ‘I was the oldest grandchild, and I lived with him. I would be his political heir.’<sup>229</sup> The relationship between a blind older man and a younger male relative and the strong bond that is forged between them can also be compared to the depiction of *Cyrus* and Democritus and may perhaps suggest the reason why Vidal dedicated the novel to T. P. Gore. When Parini noted this similarity in a 1990 interview with Vidal the author rejected any autobiographical connection, stating ‘No, it’s an objective book—if there can be such a thing’ (2005: 135). Vidal did, however, write about his grandfather elsewhere. In the lost television play *The Indestructible Mr. Gore*, which aired on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1959, the youthful T. P. Gore was played by William Shatner. The play depicted his grandparents’ courtship, with Vidal himself serving as ‘the grandson-narrator from the future’ (1992: 76).<sup>230</sup> Here then Vidal takes on a role that is rather similar to that of Democritus’ in *Creation* and, although the teleplay predates the novel by twenty-two years, it nevertheless parallels the later work. Likewise, his novel *Empire* (2000), which was set in the lead-up to World War II and America’s eventual entry into the conflict, again featured T. P. Gore, as well as Eleanor Roosevelt and a younger version of Gore Vidal himself. Therefore, whilst familial parallels were denied by Vidal, it is not an alien concept within his canon.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Ruas (1984: 88).

<sup>229</sup> Ruas (1984: 88).

<sup>230</sup> See Vidal (1992: 76f).

<sup>231</sup> *Empire* belongs to the series of historical novels depicting the development of the United States of America that Vidal called *Narratives of Empire*. Published between 1967 and 2000 they consisted of *Washington D.C.* (1967); *Burr*

Another parallel between Vidal's narrator and both Herodotus and Vidal can be observed when Cyrus describes his literary predecessors and contemporaries. Cyrus is shown to be hostile to Herodotus through the central conceit of the novel, as well as through the frequent references to the man and his work that Cyrus inserts throughout his account. Also depicted in the novel is Cyrus' intense dislike of Aeschylus who, like Herodotus, is subject to the vitriol of the ambassador. Towards the conclusion of the novel, he delights in recalling the playwright's death:

Old Aeschylus was so furious at being second to this young upstart that he moved to Sicily, where that sharp-eyed eagle put an end to their rivalry with a well-aimed turtle [sic]. I always enjoy thinking about the death of Aeschylus. (2002: 567)<sup>232</sup>

Although Vidal denied any autobiographical influence on the narrative, Cyrus' dislike for Aeschylus does seem reminiscent of Vidal's own infamous spats with some of his contemporaries. A showdown with Norman Mailer in a recording of *The Dick Cavett Show* from 15<sup>th</sup> December 1971, during which both men insulted the work and character of the other, allegedly resulted in Mailer head-butting Vidal backstage.<sup>233</sup> He held a long rivalry with the author Truman Capote, whom he filed a lawsuit against in 1979, whilst Ayn Rand's detestable philosophy of Objectivism was critiqued by Vidal in a 1961 article for *Esquire*:

Though Miss Rand's grasp of logic is uncertain, she does realize that to make even a modicum of sense she must change all the terms. Both Marx and Christ agree that in this life a right action is consideration for the welfare of others. In the one case, through a state which was to wither away, in the other through the private exercise of the moral sense. Miss Rand now tells us that what we have thought was right is really wrong. The lesson should have read: One for one and none for all.

Therefore, once again the potential for autobiographical content in the character of Cyrus is detectable. Cyrus' interaction with some of the ancient Greek authors he was in contact with does bear comparison to Vidal's own behaviour even if the author denied such a reading.

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(1973); *1876* (1976); *Lincoln* (1984); *Empire* (1987); *Hollywood* (1990), with *The Golden Age* (2000) being the final book in the sequence.

<sup>232</sup> Vidal based this on the legend surrounding Aeschylus' death as recorded by Valerius Maximus and Pliny.

<sup>233</sup> At one point their exchange went as follows:

Mailer: Are you ready to apologize?

Vidal: I will apologize if it hurts your feelings, of course I will.

Mailer: No, it hurts my sense of intellectual pollution [sic].

Vidal: Well, as an expert, you should know about that.

This sense of opposition to fellow writers that Vidal displayed throughout his life is also comparable to what can be found in the *Histories*, where Herodotus demonstrates a critical stance when speaking of his predecessors, although not to the extent of Vidal's Cyrus'.<sup>234</sup> At *Histories* 2.20-22 for example, Herodotus critiques the ideas that have been put forth when discussing the various theories surrounding the nature of the Nile. Here he features the hypotheses of Thales of Miletus,<sup>235</sup> Hecataeus,<sup>236</sup> and Anaxagoras,<sup>237</sup> although he does not name his sources, and examines the flaws with each. Indeed, *Histories* 2.20 begins with Herodotus referring to 'Certain Greeks, hoping to advertise how clever they are, have tried to account for the flooding of the Nile in three different ways', and further states that 'Two of the explanations are not worth dwelling upon'.<sup>238</sup> Herodotus also differentiates himself from the Homeric tradition in the proem of the *Histories*. The opening sentence of the *Histories* is distinct from the first lines of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, with both authors acknowledging different sources of information. For Homer it is the Muse, for Herodotus it was his own investigations. Therefore, both *Creation* and the *Histories* begin by contrasting themselves to an earlier work, a text which will nevertheless have a huge influence on the rest of the narrative.

With such parallels on display in *Creation*, should the conclusion be drawn that Vidal wanted to enrich his narrator by incorporating aspects of his own autobiography? I would argue that with *Creation* Vidal is attempting to provide a commentary on the issues of accepted historical narratives and the dangers of uncritically accepting an account as true without taking into account alternative narratives. Indeed, the premise of the novel is formulated on the idea that Herodotus' account of the Greco-Persian Wars is flawed in that it is told from the winning side. Regardless of Herodotus' use of oral testimonies and written accounts, for Cyrus the narrative of the *Histories* is from a Greek perspective and for Vidal it is problematic because it was written by a single man. Vidal contemplates on the issue throughout the novel, suggesting that his concern over accepted historical accounts is to be considered a primary theme in the novel. Indeed, this concern can be detected in other elements of the narrative. The character of Thucydides as depicted in the novel

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<sup>234</sup> See, for example, Fowler (1996) for the influence of Herodotus' predecessors and contemporaries on his work, and Thomas (2002) for an exploration of the cultural climate from which he emerged.

<sup>235</sup> *Histories* 2.20

<sup>236</sup> *Histories* 2.21

<sup>237</sup> *Histories* 2.22

<sup>238</sup> Herodotus strikes a similar tone in *Histories* 4.36 when criticising 'the absurdity of all the map-makers—there are plenty of them—who show Ocean running like a river round a perfectly circular earth, with Asia and Europe of the same size.' As was the case in 2.21, Hecataeus' description of the world is believed to be the target here, although once again he is unnamed.

displays such issues during the narrator's encounter with the Athenian historian in Book 1 of *Creation*.

Vidal greatly admired Thucydides and his work. In a 1974 interview from the *Paris Review* Vidal stated that 'By and large history tends to be a rather poor fiction—except at its best. *The Peloponnesian War* is a great novel about people who actually lived'.<sup>239</sup> His description of the work as being a novel that includes historical figures points to why Vidal should have been drawn to the Thucydides' account. Vidal had by that time already ventured into the genre of historical fiction and dealt with real-world figures and would soon go on to write *Creation* over the years following the interview. Vidal would again discuss these ideas in a 1984 interview in which he describes Thucydides as being 'a proto-novelist' by virtue of the fact that he shaped history into a narrative (Ruas 2005: 89). In the same interview Vidal also compares himself to Thucydides stating, 'I had the sort of background that made it possible—inevitable—for me to write about men of power from first-hand knowledge, as Henry Adams could, and as the great Thucydides could.' (Ruas 2005: 87).

In comparison to Thucydides, Vidal had very little to say about Herodotus, and when he did, it was within the limits of his fiction. As well as his inclusion in *Creation*, Herodotus is also cited in *Julian*.<sup>240</sup> In comparison to his comments regarding Thucydides, Vidal would not enthuse about the importance of Herodotus' opus on his life. Indeed, in 2006 Vidal selected *The History of the Peloponnesian War* for an article in *Best Life* magazine entitled 'The Book that Changed My Life'.<sup>241</sup> Did Vidal's obvious admiration for Thucydides influence how he approached Herodotus in *Creation*? Thucydides is certainly read as being critical of Herodotus' approach to history,<sup>242</sup> instead favouring to write about contemporary events rather than going deeper into the past, and Cyrus is

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<sup>239</sup> Clarke (1974).

<sup>240</sup> The passage from the novel is very brief: 'he has deliberately put himself in the line of Livy and Tacitus rather than that of Herodotus and Thucydides, showing that there is no accounting for taste' (*Julian* 1964: 453-4).

<sup>241</sup> See, also, Neilson (2014: 62).

<sup>242</sup> Evans (1968: 12), for example, describes how in *The History of the Peloponnesian War* Thucydides 'turns his back on the type of history which Herodotus wrote. For Thucydides saw no future in Herodotus' attempt to describe events he had not witnessed or to tell the story of men whose language he could not speak. The historian had another and more serious purpose. He was to put down an accurate record of human experience, in Thucydides' case the Peloponnesian War, and since human experience was a manifestation of human nature which was constant, then the historian's account would be of educational value to men of discernment. Thucydides' actual words (1.22.4) sound like a massive reproof of the Herodotean product'. See, also, Foster and Latenier's 2012 volume *Herodotus and Thucydides* for a comprehensive collection of papers examining the relationship between both ancient historians, as well as the later reception of their work and what affect this has had on how each has been perceived in relation to their contribution to the genre.

shown to take a similar stance against Herodotus. Following the reading by Herodotus at the Odeon at the start of the novel, Cyrus has an encounter with Thucydides and is questioned by the Athenian about what they have just heard. He queries whether a copy will be sent to Artaxerxes at Susa, to which Cyrus replies ‘Why not? ... The Great King enjoys wondrous tales. He has a taste for the fabulous’ (2002: 7). His answer startles Thucydides who asks if Cyrus is insinuating ‘that the account we have just heard is untrue?’ (2002: 7). Cyrus responds by stating that what they have just heard ‘is only a version of events that took place before you were born and, I suspect, before the birth of the historian’ (2002: 7). This idea is more in keeping with *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, particularly 1.21.1, a passage that Swain (1993: 33) describes as being ‘one of the most discussed passages in ancient literature’.<sup>243</sup> Vidal’s Thucydides on the other hand has more in common with his depiction in the *Suda* where he weeps following a reading of the *Histories*, which this scene seems to be a playful reworking of. When Cyrus points to the inaccuracy of Herodotus’ account, such as the incorrect age given to Xerxes when he becomes king, Thucydides defends Herodotus by describing this inaccuracy as ‘A small detail’ (2002: 8). Cyrus retorts that this is nevertheless ‘typical of a work that will give as much delight at Susa as that play of Aeschylus called *The Persians*, which I myself translated for the Great King, who found delightful the author’s Attic wit’. In an aside, Cyrus tells the reader that this is actually a lie, as the play was in fact an insult to the Persian royal family, which would have angered Xerxes had he known the ‘extent to which he and his mother had been travestied for the amusement of the Athenian mob’ (2002: 8).

As Vidal was familiar with Thucydides’ work, why then does he have Cyrus take a more Thucydidean stance regarding the reproduction of historical data for an audience? Likewise, why does Thucydides adopt the role of Herodotus’ defender? For readers familiar with the work of both ancient authors this would surely stand out and, perhaps, that was intentional. To have the scene occur at the start of the novel introduces questions of historical accuracy both in what the characters are discussing as well as in the characters themselves. If *Creation*’s Thucydides seems at odds with the historical Thucydides’ stance regarding Herodotus’ method of historical writing, then it raises the question of whether Cyrus’ version of events can be entirely trusted, given that the majority of the novel comprises his testimony.

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<sup>243</sup> This passage is as follows: ‘On the whole, however, the conclusions I have drawn from the proofs quoted may, I believe, safely be relied on. Assuredly they will not be disturbed either by the lays of a poet displaying the exaggeration of his craft, or by the compositions of the chroniclers that are attractive at truth’s expense; the subjects they treat of being out of the reach of evidence, and time having robbed most of them of historical value by enthroning them in the region of legend. Turning from these, we can rest satisfied with having proceeded upon the clearest data, and having arrived at conclusions as exact as can be expected in matters of such antiquity.’ (Thucydides 1.21.1)

This entire section seems calculated to introduce the reader to questions of fact versus fiction in historical writing. Even a reader unfamiliar with Thucydides, Herodotus, and the supposed opposition of their writing styles can still glimpse this topic through Cyrus' reaction to Herodotus. In the opening paragraph of the novel Cyrus' immediate response to Herodotus' account is depicted. 'I am blind' he begins,

But I am not deaf. Because of the incompleteness of my misfortune, I was obliged yesterday to listen for nearly six hours to a self-styled historian whose account of what the Athenians like to call "the Persian Wars" was nonsense of the sort that were I less old and more privileged, I would have risen in my seat at the Odeon and scandalized all Athens by answering him. (2002: 3).

What angers Cyrus here is that Herodotus' account of the origins of the Persian and Greek conflict is incorrect. He reasons that a Greek cannot know the intricacies of the Persian court and the rationale of its kings. But, as Cyrus spent most of his life in service to three of its kings, he does. Just as an old Greek man reminds Cyrus that 'There are still many of us left who remember well the day the Persians came to Marathon' (2002: 7), Cyrus remembers events from the opposite side, or so he likes to emphasize. However, owing to his trade missions in India and Cathay he did not participate in Darius' and Xerxes' Greek campaigns. Rather he heard about them after the fact, at one point from a eunuch, at another from Xerxes himself, who regards the invasion a success (2002: 541).<sup>244</sup> But receiving the information in this way this makes Cyrus experience of the wars similar to that of Herodotus'. Whilst his eyewitnesses delivered their accounts to him chronologically nearer to the time the events took place, the information in Cyrus' testimony is nevertheless second-hand. Therefore, the reader is left to wonder if his account is truly any more reliable when speaking of the wars than what we find in the *Histories*. Vidal was certainly aware of the unreliability of Cyrus as a narrator and declared him to be 'full of biases of one kind or another' (Parini 2005: 135). Moreover, Vidal draws the audience's attention to this by having the character admit to lying about Aeschylus' *Persians* to Thucydides on page 8 of the novel. Although Cyrus explains why he does this, it nevertheless plants a seed of doubt in the mind of the reader.

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<sup>244</sup> As Cyrus recounts: 'Practically speaking, not only did Xerxes not ruin his native land but he thought that he had done quite well by his patrimony. He had wanted to teach the Greeks a lesson, and he had. He had only one complaint: the cost of the war. "Every bit of gold that I got from Babylon was spent in Greece." So the lesson is plain: Never go to war against a poor country, because no matter how it turns out you lose. I doubt that this sentiment would have appealed to Aeschylus because it is hard for a Greek to realize that Greece is small and poor; that Persia is large, and rich. That life is short. Short.' (*Creation* 2002: 541).

It is also tempting to venture a reason behind having Thucydides appear in the novel at all. Vidal has the novel begin in 445 BC and, therefore, several years before Thucydides began to write *The History of the Peloponnesian War* in 431 BC. The gap of time between the encounter at the opening of the novel and when Thucydides began to write implies that Cyrus' criticism had such an effect on Thucydides that he would take a different stance in his approach to history when composing his own work.<sup>245</sup> This becomes significant when considering the potential autobiographical element of the novel and the concept of alter-egos. Although Vidal denied its presence in *Creation*, it is possible to see aspects of the author in his narrator. With this in mind, it is interesting to see a Vidal-surrogate offering advice on how to process history to the author whose work he would later deem as having changed his life. With the case studies I examined in the first part of this thesis, the authors used the *Histories* to form a relationship with an idealised version of Herodotus, in which the ancient author exists for them as a companion. In *Creation* Vidal's engagement with the *Histories* allows the character who contains elements of his own autobiography to not only speak to his beloved Thucydides within the realm of the narrative, but also to inspire him to write Vidal's favourite book.

## **2.2: The Herodotean Narrator and Vidal**

A common feature in the work of Vidal is his use of a narrator. This can be found, for example, in the novels *Kalki* (1978) and *Myra Brekinridge* (1968) in which Vidal crafts invented narrators whose testimonies of their experiences form the basis of the narrative. When discussing this trend in his novels Vidal explained that

I try out different voices which is why I do all those first-person narratives. I like impersonation. I like going into another character. I really believe *mimesis* is one of the highest aspects of art. So the "I" is mimetic. (Ruas 2005: 98)

Regarding its application in his historical novels Vidal's mode of dealing with the fictional aspects of a historical novel is to 'invent characters—fictional persons—who will then observe the "real" people' (Parini 2005: 133). Its use in *Creation* then is not a deviation from Vidal's canon and may be one of the reasons why Herodotus' work attracted the novelist. When I earlier explored the genre of travel writing, the authorial persona proved to be an important component of an author's

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<sup>245</sup> In addition to this, Thucydides is described as being 'a sombre middle-aged man' (2002: 6), which does not match with the estimated year of his birth being 460 BC and thus making him approximately fifteen years old at the time the confrontation takes place.

engagement with the text. A similar process is detectable in the realm of fiction. In *Creation* Herodotus exists in the narrative but it is Cyrus who adopts the Herodotean role in the story. Cyrus is motivated by his dissatisfaction with Herodotus, but Vidal draws on Herodotus' authorial persona in his construction of the character of his narrator. He does this by having his narrator recall his 'nemesis' at various points throughout the narrative. At page 452, for example, Vidal has Cyrus note how Herodotus misunderstands Persian custom when describing drunkenness at court:

Herodotus now tells us that it is only while drunk that the Great King devises policy. Actually, the reverse is true. Every word that is said at a royal drinking party is recorded by a scribe, and any order that the sovereign gives while drunk is carefully scrutinized in the neutral light of the next day. Should the decision be less than coherent, it is quietly forgotten.

In doing this Vidal reminds his audience of Herodotus' influence on the narrator, even when it is presented to the reader in a negative fashion. The influence is even more overt at page 7 where Cyrus admits to emulating Herodotus' style in a passage that recalls Herodotus' statement at 4.30 of the *Histories*:<sup>246</sup>

Democritus reminds me, courteously, that I am again off the subject. I remind *him* that after listening all those hours to Herodotus, I can no longer move with any logic from one point to the next. He writes the way a grasshopper hops. I imitate him. (2002: 7)

The use of the word 'imitate' here is intriguing, particularly as it is applied so early in the novel. Within the sentence it refers to Herodotus' style of alternating from one time period to another as a means of providing context for the greater narrative arc. The tone is supposed to imply a level of mockery, but Cyrus' narrative voice does contain a degree of imitation when compared to Herodotus and may perhaps be the reason why Vidal here draws attention to the concept.

Looking, for example, to how de Jong (2013: 263) summarises the ways in which Herodotus' narrative voice is demonstrated in the *Histories*, it is possible to find parallels to what is featured in *Creation*:

The narrator reveals himself in three ways: first, as a person who travels and talks with informants; second, as a *hístōr* who compares and weighs stories; and third, as an organizer of the narrative.

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<sup>246</sup> 'A remarkable fact occurs to me (I need not apologize for the digression—it has been my habit throughout this work)' (*Histories* 4.30)

Of these it is the first and second features that are most applicable to Vidal's Cyrus. Although he controls the narrative in the sense that it is his testimony and ideas that are presented, the reader learns at the novel's conclusion that it is Cyrus' nephew Democritus who has 'organized these recollections of Cyrus Spitama into ten books' (2002: 573). One could assume that Democritus is unlikely to misrepresent the words of his uncle, but Vidal's narrative does highlight the issues that can surround committing knowledge into written form (see below), which suggests to the reader that they should be cautious about what they have read.

De Jong's first and second descriptions of Herodotus being a traveller who seeks knowledge and a *hístōr* are more easily applied to the novel's narrator. First, because he travels and obtains knowledge through his observations; secondly, because he assesses the data he acquires. Unlike Cyrus, Herodotus does not play a role in the majority of the events he recounts, with exceptions such as *Histories* 2.143 and 2.150. Cyrus on the other hand does, as he is shown to have lived a long enough life to have participated in most of the history he recounts. And because his lifespan is so long, he is able to speak with a vast number of oral informants through his travels. Although the character is engaged in a trade mission, Cyrus is shown to seek out knowledge when he travels beyond the borders of the Persian Empire. His time in India and Cathay results in interactions with figures including Lao Tzu and Gautama Buddha. Owing to their reputation at the time of these encounters, Cyrus questions them on their understanding of the purpose of creation and why evil exists.<sup>247</sup> In doing this Vidal can use the characteristic of the knowledge-seeking traveller to engage with the overarching purpose of the book; to explore the origins of the dominant philosophies of the modern era. And whilst Vidal does not have his narrator travel with the specific purpose of gaining knowledge, he nevertheless is shown to engage with new ideas during his time abroad.

The *hístōr* component is demonstrated in *Creation*, where Cyrus is depicted as critiquing his chief Greek source, the *Histories*, throughout the novel. The story of what befell Croesus once king Cyrus conquered Lydia at page 153 illustrates the narrator measuring multiple sources and finding them to be inaccurate. The Lydian account of Croesus being burned alive by king Cyrus is described as false, whilst Herodotus' account of king Cyrus taking pity on the king and allowing him to live is also deemed to be incorrect. Cyrus' source, an old man who was a ten-year boy when king Cyrus attacked Sardis, told him directly that 'After a siege of two weeks, Cyrus' troops captured the citadel. Croesus died in the melee' (2002: 153). Here he demonstrates the element of

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<sup>247</sup> For example: 'I am a believer, of course. But I am not a zealot. Also, I was never satisfied by Zoroaster's explanation—or nonexplanation—of how the Wise Lord was created. What existed before the Wise Lord? I have travelled the whole world in search of an answer to that all-important question' (Vidal 2002: 33).

‘preselection’<sup>248</sup> that can be found in Herodotus’ treatment of his sources. Although Cyrus includes various versions of the event, he nevertheless selects one as providing the accurate account of Croesus’ fate.

Although Cyrus dismisses Herodotus’ account of Croesus’ fate, the critical stance the narrator adopts when discussing Herodotean material within the novel as a whole is not always supported by the content of the narrative. The description of Cyrus’ visit to Babylon in Book 2 Chapter 9 of *Creation* features no direct references to Herodotus, and by this, I mean he is not named by the narrator at any point. Nevertheless, the chapter is loaded with details from *Histories* 1.178-200 and 3.150-160. During a visit taken in Cyrus’ youth with a young Xerxes and Mardonius, the three encounter the satrap Zopyrus and hear of how he butchered himself to win success for Darius (*Creation* 2002: 83, *Histories* 3.154-160), see the tomb of Nitocris (*Creation* 2002: 84, *Histories* 1.187) and visit the temple of Ishtar (*Creation* 2002: 85-87, *Histories* 1.199). Herodotus’ approval of the Babylonian custom whereby the sick seek advice by waiting in the street for a knowledgeable passer-by to offer assistance (1.197) is here conveyed to the young men by their guide:

One broad highway was lined with every sort of diseased person. As we came into view, they shouted out their symptoms. According to our guide “Babylonians don’t trust physicians. So the sick people come here. Whenever they see someone who looks knowledgeable, they tell him their particular illness. If he knows of a cure, he’ll discuss it with them.”

As we watched, quite a number of passers-by did indeed stop to talk to the sick, and tell them which herb or root might prove to be effective. (2002: 87).

Vidal modifies his account here by adding the element of Babylonian distrust (Herodotus simply says that they have no doctors) but the modern retelling is consistent with the ancient account, which calls into question the idea that *Creation* is a critical response to Herodotus’ *Histories*. As the testimony of Cyrus draws on the account of Herodotus in an uncritical manner, Cyrus’ description of Herodotus as ‘a self-styled historian whose account of what the Athenians call “the Persian Wars” was nonsense’ (2002: 3) is somewhat undermined by the similarity of the content. What this illustrates is that for Vidal the *Histories* is not an unreliable text. It provides him with a means of accessing the non-Greek world of the time and Vidal employs it as such. Regardless of Cyrus’ protestations, Herodotus’ account is retold at various points across the novel. Vidal may amend details or embellish the narrative for dramatic affect but there is a faithfulness to the original that contrasts with the stated thesis of the novel’s narrator.

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<sup>248</sup> Ligota (1982: 10).

If Vidal as a writer is open to using the text to enrich *Creation's* narrative, why then is Herodotus singled out in the narrative for being worthy of such a prolonged correction? The centrality of the *Histories* in *Creation* may lie with its author's reputation as the father of history. This sets Herodotus at the beginning of Western narrative history, but what is of interest here is how the *Histories* extends its attention to the non-Greek peoples of the world, albeit through Greek eyes. From the outset Herodotus states that the achievements of non-Greeks will be included along with those of the Greeks (*Histories* 1.1) and the narrative bears this out. The attraction of the *Histories* then would be that the work at the start of the Western historical tradition has a place for non-Western peoples. Why this would be of interest to Vidal can be found in the didactic aspect of the novel. Vidal found that for himself his research for the novel was 'a crash-course in comparative religion'.<sup>249</sup> The author Mary Renault concurred, stating that 'readers will learn with something of a start how worldwide was the flowering of spiritual and intellectual leaders in that amazing century' in her review of the novel for *The New York Review of Books* (1981).<sup>250</sup> The description of Asian philosophical traditions that emerge when Cyrus meets the progenitor of a philosophy or religion are featured to educate the reader in non-Western methods of understanding the world.

Along with *Julian*, *Creation* stands out from Vidal's other novels which tend to focus on American history and society. Nevertheless, the novel can be understood as presenting a critique of Vidal's contemporary America. Papanicolaou, for example, sees *Creation* as being Vidal's attempt 'to address the deficiencies in the American educational system' (2012: 88). Cyrus' critique of the sophist on page 10 of *Creation* is read by Papanicolaou (2012) as being a denunciation of the shift in America's own education system towards a more business-orientated model:

in recent years traditional methods of education have been abandoned ... In theory, a sophist is supposed to be skilled in one or another of the arts. In practice, many local sophists have no single subject or competence. They are simply sly with words and it is hard to determine what specifically, they mean to teach, since they question all things, except money. They see to it that they are well paid by the young men of the town (Vidal 2002: 10).

To a certain degree this reflects Vidal's own general disdain for the state of the contemporary education system within the United States. In his 1992 book *Screening History*, for example, he laments that,

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<sup>249</sup> Parini (2005: 135).

<sup>250</sup> A review which so delighted Vidal that he included a quote from it in the Author's Note to the 2002 edition of the novel.

Discussions of education in America always center [sic] on money. How to get money from the defense [sic] department to the schools? This *is* a problem, of course, but there is a greater problem that no one seems willing to address. What should a school teach? It is plain that what we teach now is of no great use to anyone even if what was taught was well taught (1992: 93)

For Vidal an alternative approach to study would be far more beneficial to the student than the one they currently experience:

I would teach world civilization—East and West—from the beginning to the present. This would occupy the college years—would be the spine to my educational system. Then literature, economics, art, science, philosophy, religion would be dealt with naturally, sequentially, as they occurred. After four years, the student would have at least a glimmering of what our race is all about. (Clarke 2005: 51).<sup>251</sup>

One cannot help but see a parallel to *Creation* with this. Whilst the novel covers the lifetime of a single man, it aims to embrace as many aspects of his contemporary world as it can and gives as much value to Asian culture as to European. As Papanicolaou puts it:

*Creation* can be seen as an exploratory experiment in the Vidalian vision of an accelerated multidisciplinary education, engaging readers in a massive learning project in which didacticism plays an active role (2012: 89).

Beyond the educational value that results from engaging with alternatives traditions, *Creation* also targets the United States on a societal level. In his study on the influence of Roman history and literature in Vidal's work, Tatum (1992: 102) observes that 'When Vidal writes about ancient Rome, he makes you think about modern America; when he writes about modern America he makes you think about ancient Rome.' In this context he is referring to *Julian*, a novel that depicts the establishment of Christianity in fourth century Rome. However, in spite of the scale of time between the novel's setting and its composition, Tatum adds that 'the subject was chosen for its connections to the present.' As Altman (2005: 166) notes, 'The influence of religion in contemporary American society is rarely absent from Vidal's fiction or essays', and so it seems clear that Vidal wished to explore how it was that Christianity became a dominant world religion. Indeed, as Neilson (2014: 50) observes, 'For Vidal, the significance of Julian as a historical figure lies in his having been one of the first to offer a sustained resistance to Christianity.' Why this angle should have been of interest to Vidal is his disdain for the three Abrahamic religions. This can be

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<sup>251</sup> See, also, Vidal's 1988 interview with Weiner (2005: 123) and Vidal (1992: 94f).

evidenced, for example in his address ‘Monotheism and its Discontents’, which was delivered at Harvard University on 20<sup>th</sup> April 1992:

Now to the root of the matter. The great unmentionable evil at the center [sic] of our culture is monotheism. From a barbaric Bronze Age text known as the Old Testament, three anti-human religions have evolved — Judaism, Christianity, Islam. These are sky-god religions. They are, literally, patriarchal — God is the omnipotent father — hence the loathing of women for 2,000 years in those countries afflicted by the sky-god and his earthly male delegates. The sky-god is a jealous god, of course. He requires total obedience from everyone on earth, as he is in place not for just one tribe but for all creation. Those who would reject him must be converted or killed for their own good. Ultimately, totalitarianism is the only sort of politics that can truly serve the sky-god's purpose. Any movement of a liberal nature endangers his authority and that of his delegates on earth. One God, one King, one Pope, one master in the factory, one father-leader in the family home.

To read such a passage offers some degree of explanation as to why Vidal would have chosen to explore how Christianity became such a dominant force in the world. But can his other ancient novel be read as possessing the same applicability to modern America? According to Altman (2005: 165) the answer is no. In his study of the ways in which Vidal's writings can help us to understand the United States, he states that, ‘Of all Vidal's major works [*Creation*] is least relevant to the theme of this book.’ Its focus on pre-Christian history and literature is deemed to offer little to his overall thesis. This assessment does have its opponents. To continue with the anti-Christian theme of *Julian*, Neilson (2014: 65) argues that ‘*Creation* continues the demystification which was at the heart of *Messiah* and *Julian*, by outlining the philosophical systems which preceded Christianity within the contexts of the political systems in which they developed.’ If one is to read *Creation* in this way, then, it presents an interesting parallel to Herodotus' description of the gods at *Histories* 2.50. There he claims that ‘The names of nearly all the gods came to Greece from Egypt.’ Adding, ‘I know from all the inquiries I have made that they came from abroad, and it seems most likely that it was Egypt, for the names of all the gods have been known in Egypt from the beginning of time’. Regardless of the accuracy of this statement,<sup>252</sup> what is comparable to *Creation* is what Herodotus is conveying in this statement. To tell the Greeks that their religion derives from an external civilization challenges any notion of the type of cultural superiority that is often entwined with a society's religious traditions. In a similar vein, by focussing on the religions and philosophical debates of the pre-Christian era, Vidal can present the predominantly Christian country of the United States of America with ideas that are far older than those presented in the Gospels.

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<sup>252</sup> Fehling (1989: 243) described the statement as ‘an astounding failure’, whilst Burkett (2013: 198) notes how the passage has often been regarded (and dismissed) as an example of ‘deviant Egyptomania’.

Moreover, to include Confucius, from whom the ‘Golden Rule’ seems to have originated,<sup>253</sup> reminds the reader that the concept had a history that long predated Jesus.

### **2.3: Writing and Memory in *Creation***

Vidal has stated he was inspired to write *Julian* after reading Edward Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789) and that after a decade’s worth of reading about the period:

I became more at home in the fourth century, and to do a man’s life it is necessary to know the time perhaps better than the man, because the character you finally create will be a work of your own imagination, and that is why paradoxically, one must be free with facts. By remaining absolutely accurate in detail, one can invent a good deal in spirit.<sup>254</sup>

*Creation* would, likewise, be the culmination of a vast amount of research on Vidal’s part. As he would describe it in a 1990 interview:

I’ve simply got to do all the research myself in order to *discover* what I want to know. The process occurs like this: I order boxes full of books from American booksellers. I may buy two or three hundred books for each novel. I read the books here, in Ravello, taking notes. After I’ve written the novel, I always get a professional historian to check the novels to see that I’ve not made any great gaffs. Writing these books has been my education. *Creation* was, for me, a crash course in comparative religion. (Parini 2005: 135).

Whilst Vidal did not reveal what secondary literature he drew on in order to craft his version of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, he did include primary sources within the narrative.<sup>255</sup> As well as aiding in the recreation of Cyrus’ world by including the literary treasures that were available at the time, their inclusion also contributes to the exploration of the value of the oral tradition versus the merits of written history that is interwoven into the narrative. The novel includes several examples of writing being considered by Vidal’s characters to be an effective way of conveying information. At page 483, for example, Confucius is shown to be interested in writing a history of Lu by stating that he thinks ‘it might be useful ... to show how and why ten generations of dukes

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<sup>253</sup> *Creation* (2002: 466).

<sup>254</sup> Vidal (1981: 96).

<sup>255</sup> As well as the novel’s main target, the *Histories*, Aeschylus’ *Persians* (2002: 8, 540); the *Ramayana* (2002: 231); Homer’s *Iliad* (2002: 218, 353-4, 531) and *Odyssey* (2002: 231, 353-4, 469, 508); the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (2002: 74); the *I Ching/The Book of Changes* (2002: 432, 445, 464), and Anaxagoras’ *Physics* (2002: 10) are all featured within the narrative.

have been powerless.’ Another instance is at page 16 where Anaxagoras encourages Cyrus to write down the teachings of his grandfather Zoroaster. Anaxagoras explains that he has ‘heard of Zoroaster all my life but no one has ever made clear to me who he was or what he actually believed to be the nature of the universe.’ To add to this, Cyrus is shown to write accounts of his trips to India and Cathay that are subsequently submitted to the Persian archives (2002: 506).

The potential for recorded information to be manipulated is an issue that is also explored in the novel. When Cyrus returns to Magadha after his travels in Cathay, his wife, Ambalika, presents him with an official document describing the ‘account of the lamentable death of Cyrus Spitama at Susa’ (2002: 525). She requests he forge the signature of the first clerk of the chancellery of Susa with her plan being to officially present the document in six months’ time and thus freeing her to marry again. Although, the document is false, its words will become the official Indian account of Cyrus’ fate. The novel, then, displays concern both with the presentation of data through the written word and also with the potential for its corruption.

Book 6, Chapter 6 of *Creation* features a passage illustrating the process of writing a document. Xerxes, who at this point in the story has recently become king, decides he must write his autobiography and enlists Cyrus’ help in composing it. They use the palace’s only copy of Cyrus the Great’s autobiography as a template and work for three days and nights:

We worked like this. Xerxes would tell me what he wanted to say. I would then make notes for myself. When I was ready to dictate, the secretaries were summoned. While I declaimed in Persian, my words were translated simultaneously into Elamite, Akkadian and Aramaic, the three written languages of the chancellery. (2002: 369).

Once completed, copies are sent to every city in the empire, with translations being made for the Greeks, Egyptians, and Indians at a later stage. The power that such a text can possess in the world of the narrative is emphasized by Vidal with the acknowledgement that the king’s ‘personal testament can be used in any court of law as a supplement of the official law code’ (2002: 369). By imitating the autobiography of his predecessor, attention is also drawn to the fact that texts are subject to degrees of manipulation. Here it is as a means of investing Xerxes’ words with authority. Cyrus questions why he would want his autobiography to be written in a language that is considered ‘very old-fashioned’, but for Xerxes this is ideal. It calls to mind the words of his ancestors and, therefore, situates this new king in the imperial tradition. The *mimesis* at play here also serves as a commentary on Vidal’s own enterprise in reworking an earlier text. Although established as an answer to Herodotus, when rewriting passages originally featured in the *Histories*,

the novel's general adherence to the Herodotean account suggests that the author sought to benefit from the authority of his predecessor much as Xerxes does with his grandfather's autobiography.<sup>256</sup>

Vidal has Cyrus lament that knowledge preserved through the oral tradition can be altered deliberately and accidentally. Deliberate alterations occur in order to make the message more suitable for a new generation, and accidental omissions derive from the reciter simply forgetting the original (2002: 377). It is because of this that Cyrus admits to having 'finally come around, reluctantly, to the view that it is important that these things be recorded now while errors are relatively few' (2002: 377), and so, in turn, it becomes 'a possession for all time' (cf. Thucydides 1.22). In wishing to preserve knowledge from oblivion, Vidal's narrator comes to an agreement with his supposed nemesis who displayed 'his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time' (*Histories* 1.1). Indeed, for all the criticisms levelled against his account by Cyrus, Vidal is careful to situate Herodotus in the written, as opposed to the oral, tradition. His words may be delivered orally but they are presented as being read rather than recited from memory. Moreover, the first book of the novel is entitled 'Herodotus gives a *Reading* at the Odeon in Athens'.<sup>257</sup> And, like Cyrus, Herodotus is aware of the issues surrounding the oral transmission of knowledge. As he states in Book 7 of the *Histories*, for example, 'I am duty-bound to tell what is said, but I am not at all bound to believe it—and let this sentence apply to the whole of my account' (7.152).<sup>258</sup> As Ligota (1982: 10) observes, this stance on the part of Herodotus regarding his treatment of his sources shows an awareness that 'there are only versions and no ultimate truth'. Whether Herodotus' recognition of the problems that can potentially arise from recording multiple testimonies was a key component to how Vidal structured both his protagonist and his narrative cannot be stated for certain. However, the novel's depiction of how Darius became king of Persia seems constructed in order to highlight this theme, composed as it is from multiple testimonies.

Vidal's depiction of Darius' accession illustrates at length the tensions that can occur when drawing on multiple sources. Indeed, in the midst of the narrative Cyrus declares to have 'heard

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<sup>256</sup> The alternative to this can be found at pages 353-54, with the reworking of Homer by Artemisia's brother, Prince Pigres, whose additions are described as being both hideous and to the detriment of the actual Homeric verse he sings: 'First he would sing us a verse from the *Iliad*, crudely emphasizing the six stresses to the line. Then he would sing an entirely new verse whose seven stresses to the line often contradicted entirely the meaning of what had gone before. I had the sensation that I was dreaming the sort of dream that one sometimes has after too large a Lydian dinner' (2002: 353). For Neilson (2016: 386), this inclusion serves as a metafictional joke on the part of the author, with Pigres' modification of Homer being presented 'as irrefutable evidence of his insanity.'

<sup>257</sup> My italics.

<sup>258</sup> See also *Histories* 2.123, 2.130-131, 4.195, and 6.137 for further examples of Herodotus stating he is 'simply' reporting what his multiple sources say.

so many versions of what happened ... that I suspect that no one now alive knows exactly how it was that Darius convinced the others that he—the youngest conspirator—should be Great King’ (*Creation* 2002: 126). In constructing the account Cyrus relies on oral informants including Atossa (Darius’ wife), Hystaspes (Darius’ father), and Xerxes (Darius’ son). Added to this is what is termed the ‘Greek’ version of events, with Herodotus being the only named source.<sup>259</sup> The narrative is divided into two parts by Vidal.<sup>260</sup> The first part appears in Book 3 (‘The Greek Wars Begin’) and the second part in Book 6 (‘The Passing of the Awesome Royal Glory’). The first version follows Herodotus but with minor deviations and expansions. The deviations serve to illustrate the subjective nature of oral testimonies and the problems that can arise when constructing a historical account from biased informants. The expansions derive from the nature of the format which allows for Vidal to expand on the historical account as described by Herodotus.

Cyrus begins the account by describing the downfall of Cambyses, including his slaughter of the Apis bull and the murder of his sister-wife, as recounted to him by Atossa. The progress and content of her testimony largely follows that which is described in the *Histories*. References to Cambyses’ alcoholism in *Creation*, for example, correspond to *Histories* 3.34 in which Prexaspes tells Cambyses that the Persians think he is ‘too fond of wine’.<sup>261</sup> Vidal’s narrative maintains the alcoholism hypothesis and applies it other the cruelties that were enacted by Cambyses. His murder of his sister-wife, for example, is attributed to alcohol by Atossa:

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<sup>259</sup> Vidal draws on Greek and Persian sources in shaping this portion of his novel. The *Histories* was prime amongst his source texts but his use of the name ‘Mardos’, as opposed ‘Smerdis’ when describing Cambyses’ younger brother suggests Aeschylus’ *Persians* (774) may have been an influence here. Darius’ version of events as recounted in the Behistun monument is also a key text in the passage.

<sup>260</sup> A move which parallels its appearance in Herodotus’ account. Although the division is not as wide in the *Histories*, and remains within the same book, the narrative of the accession is also divided into two sections: the first part ending at 3.38 and the second part beginning at 3.61.

<sup>261</sup> On the concept of Cambyses’ relationship to alcoholism in the *Histories*, Asheri (2007b: 432) argues that what is being referred to is not necessarily alcoholism but rather ‘love or devotion to wine’ and points to *Histories* 1.133 as this being a vice that is ‘typical of the Persians’. The trait is not exclusive to the Persians, however. Greeks are also shown to be subject to madness brought on by wine elsewhere in the *Histories*. Book 6.84 for example discusses the theories behind Cleomenes’ madness in a manner that is similar to how Herodotus approaches Cambyses’ in Book 3. Herodotus states that the Spartans suppose that ‘he lost his wits because, in his association with the Scythians, he had acquired the habit of drinking his wine neat.’ Herodotus, on the other hand, offers a more supernatural reason and tells the reader he thinks that Cleomenes ‘came to grief as retribution for what he did to Demaratus’ (*Histories* 6.65-66).

I embraced my sister for the last time. She was only ten or eleven but Cambyses could not do without her. So off she went to Egypt, where, they say, he killed her when he was drunk (2002: 116)

In contrast to this brief mention in *Creation*, Herodotus discusses the subject at greater length and includes the murder itself (*Histories* 3.31-32). That Herodotus gives a fuller account of the sister's murder in comparison to the version included in Vidal's narrative seems to be related to the nature in which the information is presented in *Creation*. The details are being recounted by a family member who is unlikely to dwell on the violence of the event. The highly abbreviated version of the incident is also emblematic of Atossa's general treatment of the sequence of events which lead to Darius becoming king. As well as holding back information relating to her sister's death, Atossa withholds and distorts the details surrounding the death of Cambyses and Mardos, as well. As Cyrus describes it:

Like a true statesman, Atossa could admire the efficiency of her enemies; could applaud the efficacy of a murder whose fact she deplored; could tell me lies, which she was doing. But the lies of Atossa are as interesting as anyone else's truths. I later came to know the truth of this business, and I may be tempted, presently, to go behind the agreed-upon story, simply to set matters straight and—confute Herodotus! (*Creation* 2002: 117).

Atossa may be one of Cyrus' primary informants on this matter, but her untrustworthiness is brought to the fore here. Even in this early stage of the account of Darius' accession the emphasis is on how the officially recognized version of these events is not the true account of what happened. Cyrus' reference to Herodotus's account at the end of this passage also signals that both his Persian and the Greek sources are inaccurate in their description of the deaths of Cambyses and Mardos.

Whilst Cyrus sows the seeds of doubt regarding the trustworthiness of his sources, he nevertheless recounts what Atossa has told him is the accurate version of what took place regarding the murder of Mardos. Cyrus replicates Herodotus' stance of recording the information he was given even when it is of a questionable nature. On the death of Mardos, Atossa feigns ignorance of when he was killed, speculating it probably took place before Cambyses left Babylon for Egypt and is confident that all actions taken after this were carried out by the false Mardos, including his rallying of the Persian clans. Cyrus wonders how any of them could have been fooled by the deception, but Atossa assures him that 'no one suspected he was imposter, including me' (2002: 119). The assumption that Mardos' death took place before the Egyptian campaign matches

the written Persian account featured in the Behistun Inscription (i.10),<sup>262</sup> whilst Herodotus has it occurring during Cambyses' time in Egypt (*Histories* 3.30). This divergence amongst the ancient sources of when Smerdis was murdered was described by Olmstead (1938: 396) as 'ominous' and perhaps the disagreement between the ancient sources contributed to Vidal's eventual rendering of the usurpation.

The Greek version, as recounted by Cyrus, follows Herodotus' description of the events. Herodotus is not named here by Cyrus. However, the passage's correspondence to the *Histories* coupled with the reference to confuting Herodotus that was featured in the above passage from page 117 of *Creation* and, of course, the general theme of the book, implies that when Cyrus here says 'Greek' he means 'Herodotus'. The dialogue of Gorbryas and Darius, for example, is very similar to what is found in the *Histories*. In *Histories* 3.78 it goes as follows:

But Gorbryas, aware of his hesitation, cried out: "What's your hand for—if you don't use it?"

'I dare not strike,' said Darius, 'for fear of killing you.'

'Fear nothing,' answered Gorbryas, 'spit both of us at once—if need be.'

Darius then drove his dagger—by luck into the body of the Magus.

Compare this to page 125 of *Creation* and the similarities are quite apparent:

'Strike!' shouted Gorbryas.

'I can't see,' said Darius. 'I might strike you.'

'Then kill us both. But strike!'

Darius stabbed the figure nearest to him. As Grecian fate would have it, Darius killed Gaumata.

As with the Babylon account that was earlier discussed, Vidal makes few changes to this part of Herodotus' account. This is reasonable in a diegetic sense, as Cyrus here is specifically drawing upon the Greek account in order to supplement his description of Darius' accession. In contrast, Cyrus' Babylonian account was framed as his own experiences of the city and its people, which results in a clash between Cyrus' criticism of the unreliability of Herodotus' account and Vidal's replication of details from the description found in the *Histories*.

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<sup>262</sup> 'King Darius says: The following is what was done by me after I became king. A son of Cyrus, named Cambyses, one of our dynasty, was king here before me. That Cambyses had a brother, Smerdis by name, of the same mother and the same father as Cambyses. Afterwards, Cambyses slew this Smerdis. When Cambyses slew Smerdis, it was not known unto the people that Smerdis was slain. Thereupon Cambyses went to Egypt. When Cambyses had departed into Egypt, the people became hostile, and the lie multiplied in the land, even in Persia and Media, and in the other provinces' (Cushing Tolman 1908).

Part one of the tale's appearance in the novel is brought to an end by once again emphasising the multiple sources upon which Cyrus has drawn. The Persian oral informants are presented first, followed by the Greek version of events, and culminating in Darius' official description of what took place, as presented in the Behistun inscription. When describing how it was decided who would be king, Xerxes believes that the conspirators voted, and Darius received most votes because he was the one who killed the false Mardos. Next, is Atossa' version, which disagrees with Xerxes' suggestion of there being a vote at all: 'There was no vote', she says, 'How could there be? Darius was the Achaemenid. When he put himself forward, the others obeyed him. People always did. He was like that' (2002: 126). Atossa here agrees with the Behistun Inscription's account of Darius' accession, in which Darius' Achaemenid ancestry is the basis of his right to the throne (1-5). When Cyrus questions Darius' ancestral ties by stating that Gobryas was more closely related to the Achaemenids, Atossa disagrees, leading Cyrus to note that 'For her, the past was always what she said it was. She was not unlike the Greeks, who have concocted a most complicated story involving—what else?—treachery', (2002: 126). Again, the testimonies of his Persian informants regarding these details emphasise the overarching theme of this part of the account. Cyrus may be providing the 'Persian version' but he is just as concerned at signalling the problematic nature of his sources as Herodotus was when describing his own.

Cyrus' inclusion of the written accounts of the Greeks and Persians add to this melange of contrasting testimonies. Herodotus' version, as described in *Histories* 3.84-87 and Darius' official declaration, as featured in the Behistun inscription bring this segment to a close. The latter parallels its inclusion in the *Histories*, as both works describe inscriptions commissioned by Darius to document his kingship. Herodotus states that Darius' 'first act was to erect a stone monument with a carving of a man on horseback, and the following inscription: *Darius, son of Hystaspes, by the virtue of his horse and of his groom Oebares, won the throne of Persia.* The horse's name was included.' Vidal's adaptation does not include the horse memorial because Cyrus asserts that this was a Greek fabrication. Instead, it is stated that

Once Darius was king, Hystaspes persuaded him to acknowledge the Wise Lord in all pronouncements and inscriptions. Today, in every city of the empire, there is at least one well-displayed inscription describing how the kingdom was given to Darius the Achaemenid by the Wise Lord' (Vidal 2002: 127).

The chapter ends with Democritus interjecting that he 'would like to know the *true* story of how Darius became king' (2002: 128). Cyrus responds by saying he will tell it in due course because, though it has much in common with what we have seen above, there is 'one significant, tragic difference' (2002: 128). This part of the tale finishes then with a reminder that this patchwork

retelling of what can be found in the *Histories* and in the official Persian rendition, with additions by Vidal, is somewhat incomplete. Whilst Cyrus includes multiple accounts surrounding the fates of Cambyses and Mardos, each of these is flawed. Atossa's account is problematic because the reader is told she is lying. Xerxes' version is regarded as false by his mother. Hystaspes' information comes directly from his son Darius, as does the written Persian account. The Greek version is told by someone who was not a witness and is confirmed by the narrator to be presenting a rather fanciful if entertaining version of events.<sup>263</sup> And so, Vidal addresses the fallibility of these testimonies by ending this collection of accounts with Cyrus' pronouncement on the problematic nature of their veracity.

Considering the issues that are raised in the part one of this retelling, when Cyrus' account arrives at the 'true' version of Darius' accession a fair degree of caution on the part of the reader is to be expected. Xerxes tells the story to Cyrus, which he had first heard from gossiping eunuchs when he was a child and was later confirmed to him by Atossa. The truth, according to the narrator, is that Darius had murdered both Cambyses, whose spear he had poisoned, and the true Mardos. Darius was in fact the source of the false Mardos rumours, according to this version and Atossa 'was the only person left on earth who knew the truth' (2002: 373). The lies of Atossa that were referred to in Book 3 of *Creation* are then explained via the account of how Atossa saved herself from being put to death by Darius and how she secured Xerxes' place as heir to the throne. Again, the narrative derives from multiple oral testimonies given to Cyrus by Atossa, Xerxes and Cyrus' Greek mother Lais.

In contrast to what she had claimed earlier in the novel, Atossa was fully aware that Darius had murdered both of her husband-brothers but proposes to conceal the truth if he married her and made their first son, Xerxes, the royal heir. Although no such episode is featured in the *Histories*, Herodotus does suggest that Atossa certainly had the power to secure Xerxes' position as heir. At *Histories* 7.2-3, upon the intervention of Demaratus, Xerxes is named successor. Nevertheless, Herodotus adds that 'Personally, I believe that even without this advice from Demaratus, Xerxes would have become king, because of the immense power of Atossa.' Vidal's invention also recalls the interaction between Atossa and Darius in the *Histories*, which illustrates her influence over the Great King. When she persuades Darius to invade Greece rather than Scythia at 3.134 the reader is presented with a scene that is arguably just as fictitious as Vidal's.

Although Darius' double regicide is a departure from Herodotus' narrative, it does have thematic links with the *Histories*. The idea of Darius as a threat to Cyrus' dynasty is displayed at

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<sup>263</sup> During his description of the Greek version Cyrus declares that, whilst incorrect, 'the Greek stories are a good deal more entertaining than ours' (2002: 127).

*Histories* 1.209-210. Indeed, prompted by a dream, Cyrus tells Hystaspes that ‘I have discovered that your son is plotting against me and my throne ...one cannot possibly get away from the fact that this dream means that he is plotting against me’ (1.209). Whilst Herodotus disagrees with the king’s interpretation, it could easily have been this scene that inspired Vidal to make Darius actively pursue the throne by murdering King Cyrus’ sons. To add to this, of the conspirators who oust the usurper in Book 3 of the *Histories*, it is Darius who speaks in favour of retaining the monarchy.<sup>264</sup> Moreover, it is he who uses trickery to obtain power thanks to the interference of his groom Oebares. As Rollinger (2018: 133) observes, obtaining his kingship through trickery contributes to ‘the portrait of Darius that Herodotus presents ... of a king whose legitimacy is questionable’.<sup>265</sup> And so, although Vidal takes these ideas to the extreme, they do seem to have their roots in Herodotus’ narrative. The account of Darius’ ‘true’ accession then allows Vidal to illustrate the overarching theme of the novel’s examination of historical accounts. Interestingly, he also demonstrates the idea of the manipulation of truth in his description of Cyrus’ Persian sources. The novel is predicated on the fact that the *Histories* are seen as being pro-Greek by Cyrus and ergo subject to pro-Greek bias. And yet here Persians are shown doing the same in order to attain and retain power. Darius conceals the truth to maintain his position as ruler, whilst Atossa does so to preserve her life and to secure her son’s position as successor. *Creation* may be the Persian version, but it is presented as being just as flawed as that of the Greeks.

## **2.4: Conclusion**

In her exploration of *Creation*’s interaction with the *Histories*, Neilson (2016: 384) draws attention to the comparison that can be made between Cyrus’ account of the Greco-Persian wars and that which is described in Ctesias’ *Persica*. Looking to Llewellyn-Jones’ introduction to his translation of the fragments of Ctesias she notes of how his description of Ctesias’ work is ‘suggestive of Cyrus Spitama’ (2016: 384).<sup>266</sup> Ctesias’ engagement with Herodotus and the *Histories*, which I discussed earlier in the introduction of this thesis, does appear to have some parallel to the

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<sup>264</sup> *Histories* 3.82.

<sup>265</sup> Rollinger (2018) also discusses the passage in its wider Near Eastern context.

<sup>266</sup> The passage that was drawn to her attention by fellow researchers was his description of Ctesias viewing the Persian world differently to Herodotus due to their differing perspectives: ‘Sitting at the heart of the Empire, at the court of the Great king, Ctesias marginalizes the Greco-Persian Wars ... he was the first Greek author to look at Persian history from the *inside*, a place where the ‘Great Event’ of Greek history, as narrated by Herodotus, was only one of many wars experienced by the Achaemenid kings, their nobles, and their subjects (and an event, moreover, which the Persians had emerged from relatively unscathed)’ (Llewellyn-Jones 2010: 52-3).

depiction of Cyrus and the testimony he delivers in *Creation*. Both works question Herodotus' accuracy and attempt to present a Persian perspective of the events surrounding and including the Greco-Persian Wars. The diminishment of the Greco-Persian wars results in both works preferring to focus on Asian cultures and history, with Vidal's narrative extending far further than Ctesias by including an entire book dedicated to China (Book Seven: 'Cathay'). Veracity is claimed by Cyrus and Ctesias through the testimony of eyewitnesses to the events described and through personal experiences.

With few details of Ctesias' text remaining, one might feel compelled to view Vidal's novel as a reimagining of the lost work, which adopts the anti-Herodotus mantle of Ctesias and enhances the counter-narrative through his access to a wealth of modern research and archaeology. A closer reading of *Creation*, however, reveals a more complicated reception of the *Histories*. Whilst the desire to look to non-European traditions and history is certainly a factor in *Creation* it is not wholly to the detriment of Herodotus' account. Cyrus feigns disagreement with Herodotus' version of events, but Vidal freely adapts the ancient Greek's work throughout the narrative, including instances where non-Greek cultures are described. And so, when the *Histories* is Vidal's primary source, details are expanded, reshaped, or altered to suit the purposes of the narrative, as was evidenced in *Creation*'s account of Babylon. On the surface this may be read as undermining the core principle of the novel, i.e., that it is to be understood as an 'answer' to Herodotus. However, Herodotus and his work are not strictly the targets to which Vidal aims his critique. When criticism is directed at the 'father of history' it is his status as such that is focus for Vidal rather than the content of the work itself.

The work is concerned with drawing attention to the problematic nature of recorded history and the difficulty in obtaining a truly objective version of events. Herodotus' presence in the narrative serves to support this. The inclusion of a wide range of sources which Cyrus cites when constructing his account imitates Herodotus' own techniques within his historical narrative, with the *Histories* standing out as one of Cyrus' key sources. Moreover, being situated at the start of Western narrative history also results in Herodotus' association with narratives that elevate predominantly European voices and histories which in turn leads to the delusion of Western superiority. Whilst texts such as Frank Miller's 1998 comic *300* would engage with Herodotean material to construct a tale of western *übermensch*en standing together against the 'barbarian hordes', *Creation* can be viewed as a counter-narrative to this use of the *Histories*, as it purposefully elevates Asian history and philosophy in its rendering of the past. Vidal dedicated significant proportions of the novel to depictions of the cultures of fifth century Iran, India, and China in order to display the achievements of these civilisations, much as Herodotus depicted 'the great and marvellous

deeds—some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians’ so that they would ‘not become forgotten in time’ (*Histories* 1.1).

## Chapter 3

### Malleable *Histories* in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*

The titular character of Michael Ondaatje's Booker Prize-winning novel *The English Patient* (1992) 'fell burning into the desert' (1992: 5) in a plane that carried both him and the corpse of his dead lover (1993: 174-175). He lives but is severely injured and unable to recall his identity. His beloved copy of Herodotus' *Histories* also survives the fire and is carried with him to a villa in Italy where he eventually dies. Ondaatje based the central figure of his novel on a real man, the Hungarian aristocrat, desert explorer, aviator, and archaeologist László Ede Almásy de Zsadány et Törökszentmiklő. The real Almásy, however, did not die in 1945 after suffering from injuries sustained from a plane crash in North Africa. Rather, he died on 22nd March 1951 'from severe hepatitis complicated by an attack of amoebic dysentery'.<sup>267</sup> Although Almásy did not endure the fate of his fictional counterpart, he did crash his plane in Syria whilst he was attempting to fly from Hungary to Egypt in 1931.<sup>268</sup> This playful engagement with the concept of truth is indicative of the genre of novel in which *The English Patient* has been situated: historiographic metafiction.<sup>269</sup>

The term historiographic metafiction was first coined by Linda Hutcheon in her 1988 analysis *A Poetics of Postmodern: History, Theory, Fiction* and is concerned with emphasising how unobtainable objective truth is. For Hutcheon (1988: 50) historiographic metafiction 'asks both epistemological and ontological questions. How do we know the past (or the present)? What is the ontological status of the past? Of its documents? Of our narratives?' These ideas lead to works within the genre exploring narratives beyond the traditionally accepted version of events because, as she adds 'there are only truths in plural, and never one truth' (1988: 110). Authors within this genre are, therefore, likely to draw readers' attention to marginalized voices. The concept of history being of human manufacture is a persistent theme within novels of this type with authors drawing attention to the artifice in order to remind the audience that 'history is a construction, not something natural that equates to the past. History is not the past, but a narrative based on documents and other material created in the past.'<sup>270</sup>

*The English Patient* is seen as being an example of this genre because it uses real-life historical figures within the narrative but crafts fictitious personages and events around them. In doing this, it highlights the fictionality that is a play in the work. On the one hand, Ondaatje maintains true

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<sup>267</sup> Bierman (2005: 25).

<sup>268</sup> Tötösy de Zepetnek (1999: 5) described this as a "coincidence" between history and fiction'.

<sup>269</sup> See, for example, Bolton (2008).

<sup>270</sup> Nicol (2002: 99).

elements he uncovered during research in preparation for the novel. On the other hand, he has true historical figures interact with characters from his own fiction. The characters of Caravaggio and Hana had appeared in his previous novel *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987), a story whose main protagonist was Hana's stepfather Patrick Lewis. Amongst this blend of fact and fiction sits Herodotus' *Histories*. A work of historiography that has faced accusations of deception is, perhaps, an appropriate text to be featured so prominently in a story such as that featured in Ondaatje's novel. And indeed, the *Histories* is used by Ondaatje to contribute to the sense of artifice he constructs in the novel. This is achieved through his use of *Histories* 1.8-12. Its application in the novel sees the author filter his historical figures through the Herodotean characters of Gyges, Candaules, and Candaules' wife and in doing so deliberately undermining the historicity of the narrative. Ondaatje also highlights the problematic nature of written history through Almásy's interaction with the *Histories* both as a physical text and the manner in which the character's interests determine what parts of the text he chooses to highlight and those he purposefully neglects. Rather than existing as a fixed and unalterable object, within the narrative of *The English Patient* the *Histories* is subject to Almásy's tastes. He alters it in a physical manner by amending its content with additions that arise through research and he adjusts the content by focussing on certain elements of Herodotus' account and rejecting other parts that do not match his vision of the world. Doing this demonstrates that a work of history is a fragile text which can be subjected to the biases of a receiver. Before I explore these ideas, however, I will begin by looking at how Almásy and Herodotus became attached to the story, as told by Ondaatje.

### **3.1: The Quest for the Falling Man**

The starting point for the novel was the image of a crashed plane. In a 2000 interview with Gary Kamiya Ondaatje says, 'it began with this plane crash and it went from there'. It is from this original vision that *The English Patient* was formed.<sup>271</sup> From its occurrence, which Ondaatje claims took place during a trip to Cairo in 1978,<sup>272</sup> to the novel's publication in 1992, one wonders how the author managed to attach Herodotus' *Histories* on to such a vague vision. He has admitted that 'I already read some of him [Herodotus] before', but the connection seems to have emerged mainly

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<sup>271</sup> According to Scobie (1994: 92), 'it is typical of Ondaatje that he would begin his book with an image, rather than a character or a plot; his sensibility as a writer is grounded in poetry, and all his 'novels' may be described as poetic novels'.

<sup>272</sup> Dafoc (1997).

through his investigation of the identity of this ‘guy who crashed in the desert’.<sup>273</sup> Indeed, the desert is the key in this respect. It seems that once Ondaatje had located the setting of the plane crash, the pieces began to fall into place. His own fascination with the deserts of North Africa led to the realization ‘that this guy had crashed in the desert, and had been involved with the Bedouin. So where in the desert was he? Which desert? Libyan? Egyptian?’.<sup>274</sup> The location emerged once Ondaatje grasped the period in which his man had fallen.<sup>275</sup> In a 1997 interview with the actor Willem Dafoe who played Caravaggio in Anthony Minghella’s 1996 film adaptation he describes how simply writing the word ‘aerodrome’ instead of ‘airport’ helped him to realize that his mystery man belonged to a different era from his own: specifically, the period between the two world wars.<sup>276</sup>

Possessing both an era and a location, Ondaatje could now ‘begin the historian’s job of “research,” of Herodotean *historia*’,<sup>277</sup> research which was largely carried out in the Royal Geographical Society. Ondaatje’s account of his initial experience there is either neutral or off-putting, depending on which version you look at. In his interview with Eleanor Wachtel (1994: 254) he describes the Royal Geographical Society as ‘a wonderful place’ and that on his

first day there, a Mr. Trout came down the stairs. He said, “What can I do for you?” I said “I want the desert in 1935,” and he took me to a room, which was covered in newspapers, just scattered on the floor from about the last hundred years. I started to read about explorers from that period.

However, in his later interview with Dafoe the story becomes tinged with negativity:

With *The English Patient*, I did go to the Royal Geographical Society but I didn’t spend that long there, a couple of afternoons actually. They weren’t very friendly. “What specifically do you want?” they asked, and I didn’t know what I specifically wanted. I went away and came back and said I want to find out about something or other in the desert in 1935, and then they let me in. And once I was in, then I could look around in a more random way. It is a defensive kind of research, I don’t want to know everything about the desert in 1935. I needed space to invent, choreograph (Dafoe 1997).

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<sup>273</sup> Dafoe (1997).

<sup>274</sup> Wachtel (1994: 254).

<sup>275</sup> ‘Originally’, Ondaatje has explained, ‘I thought the book was going to be a contemporary book, set in that one period of the Second World War. But once I got into the desert stuff, and through that Herodotus, I began picking up a sense of the layers of history’, (Wachtel 1994: 251).

<sup>276</sup> Ondaatje stated that ‘At one point, the patient talks about an aerodrome, as opposed to an airport, and, bang I realized I was in another era, writing alongside him.’

<sup>277</sup> Provencal (2003a: 144).

Defensive it may have been, but it led Ondaatje to identify not only his anonymous falling man but also his connection to the *Histories*. Ondaatje described how his initial introduction to Almásy came from an acquaintance, as he told Dafoe: 'I originally found out about Almásy through a friend of mine's parents who were in Cairo during the war'.<sup>278</sup> But Almásy's membership of the Royal Geographical Society, and their possession of some of his papers, must have contributed to the conflation of fictional character and real man. Indeed, it is through his research that Provencal (2003a: 159) believes that Ondaatje 'marked Almásy as his man' and 'for several reasons: he was an aviator, a desert explorer, and, most importantly, he brought Herodotus into the picture.' How so? Because it is through his research that Ondaatje must surely have encountered Almásy's monograph: *Récents explorations dans le Desert Libyque* (1936), the final chapter of which Provencal (2003: 150) believes cemented in Ondaatje's mind the English Patient's identity.<sup>279</sup> The title of the monograph is included in the novel and can be found at page 235, but it is not featured in Ondaatje's list of acknowledgements. Instead, R. A. Bagnold's review of Almásy's monograph is included and listed alongside this is a paper by Dr. Richard Bermann entitled 'Historical Problems of the Libyan Desert' (1934).<sup>280</sup>

In both the novel and in reality Bermann was Almásy's friend, and a fellow explorer of the region and this paper is drawn upon by the author, particularly in chapter four: 'South Cairo 1930-1938'. In the paper is a statement, which Ondaatje has stated served his narrative for as he read it, he began to pick up

a sense of the layers of history. I was going back deeper and deeper in time. That sense of history, of building overlaid with building, was central to my mind- unconsciously, I think. Looking back now, it seems to have to do with unearthing, baring history (Wachtel 1994: 251).

What struck him in particular about the paper was Bermann's declaration that,

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<sup>278</sup> Dafoe (1997).

<sup>279</sup> The chapter being called 'Herodote et les récentes explorations dans le Désert', which as Tötösy de Zepetnek (1994: 145) observes, is 'an important element of Ondaatje's novel itself'. In the novel it is described by Almásy as 'stern with accuracy' (1993: 241).

<sup>280</sup> The minutes of the meeting that followed Bermann's paper contain contributions from 'the Austrian Minister' and the British archaeologist and academic John L. Myres who expresses delight 'that Herodotus, who provided that best of guidebooks, has once more deserved his reputation- has once more been proved to have known what he was talking about when he described the Libyan hinterland' (1934: 465).

As the expedition's official chronicler, I was in charge of our travelling library, which, I am sorry to state, mainly consisted of one book: the *Histories* of old Herodotus, the best Baedeker of the Libyan Desert still existing (1934: 458).

For Ondaatje this was 'great, because [Herodotus] was an historian writing about a place where these guys are many hundreds of years later.' 'The idea of a contemporary history and an ancient history that links up' greatly appealed to him.<sup>281</sup> And so, in a manner similar to Stark's process when preparing for *Ionia: A Quest*, the *Histories* became attached to the project through Ondaatje's research. This research in turn partially shaped how Herodotus' presence in the novel is depicted. The fictional Almásy values his copy of the *Histories* because the real desert explorers held the text in such high esteem. This adds a degree of historical authenticity to the work, which is signalled both in the novel's paratextual content and in the variety of interviews in which Ondaatje participated. However, the *Histories* also fulfils a counter purpose in the narrative, one which is also evident in ways in which Ondaatje plays with historical details in his interviews when describing the process by which he constructed *The English Patient*.

At play in Ondaatje's account of the novel's composition are themes that recur within the novel's narrative. One key idea is how far we can trust a person's memory of an event. As was noted earlier, Ondaatje provided two versions of his visit to the Royal Geographical Society. The discrepancy could be down to the author having remembered incorrectly the details of his time there. However, it is worth bearing in mind studies such as Matthew Bolton's 'Michael Ondaatje's "Well-Told Lie"' (2008) which examines how Ondaatje plays with the truth of his family history in his 'memoir' *Running in the Family* (1982).<sup>282</sup> Bolton argues in favour of viewing the memoir as a work in which the facts are less important than the ways in which Ondaatje explores his own identity. Indeed, the memoir's account of his father's death, for example, contrasts with his brother's version in his biography: *The Man-Eater of Pananai: A Journey of Discovery to the Jungles of Old Ceylon* (1992). Christopher Ondaatje writes that their father died as the result of alcohol poisoning, Michael Ondaatje describes him drowning during a monsoon. Here then is displayed a liberal relationship to documented history, which allows the author to manipulate data in order to examine his own interests. In the case of *The English Patient*, he takes true historical figures from

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<sup>281</sup> Dafoe (1997). Provencal (2002a: 144) believes that Bermann's paper must have been an important find for Ondaatje, since it 'reflects the status of Herodotus within the Geographical Society, as well as the European establishment, four years before the outbreak of World War II.'

<sup>282</sup> The word 'memoir' is here used in its loosest definition. Whilst Huggan (1995: 118) has described the book as a 'travel memoir', Davis (1996: 267) found 'fictionalised memoir' to be a more accurate definition.

the desert explorations in 1930s North Africa and adapts their experiences to suit the purposes of the narrative he sought to construct.

As was addressed at the start of this chapter, Ondaatje invented a demise for his Almásy that did not occur. Likewise, the real-life analogues for Katherine and Geoffrey Clifton did not perish as depicted in the novel. Sir Robert Clayton-East-Clayton died of acute anterior poliomyelitis in 1932 and his wife, Lady Dorothy Clayton-East-Clayton, did not die in a cave in North Africa in 1939. Though she was an experienced aviator, she succumbed to serious head injuries after falling, although there is some speculation that she jumped,<sup>283</sup> from the cockpit of her plane and on to the runway of the Brooklands Aero Club in Surrey in 1933. There is also no indication that she and Almásy were engaged in an affair. She has been reported as having ‘publicly declined to shake Almásy’s hand on more than one occasion’.<sup>284</sup> This was reputedly down to her being aware of Almásy’s homosexuality and disapproving of it,<sup>285</sup> however, disagreements exist on the nature of Almásy’s sexuality.<sup>286</sup>

With these details, Ondaatje once again plays with the truth in his writing. He included true-to-life details, such as the fictional Geoffrey Clifton having a plane called Rupert as Robert Clayton did (Ondaatje 1993: 143).<sup>287</sup> Bierman (2005: 90) further observes that if you disregard the hyphenates, the surnames Clayton and Clifton are very similar. In doing this Ondaatje transcends the historical account by embellishing the truth with his invented version of Almásy’s life as a desert explorer. Like a historian he undertook research to flesh out his original vision, but the execution moves away from the historical. Unlike Herodotus who ‘turns away from the poetic world of myth at the beginning of *The Histories* to deal only with the truth he can verify by way of *historia*’,<sup>288</sup> Ondaatje obtains his data and then constructs a fiction around them. In the *Histories* the mythic tale of Helen and Paris’ love affair, which led to the Trojan War and has inspired artists and poets from Homer’s *Iliad* to Jacques-Louis David’s *The Love of Helen and Paris* (1788), becomes one in a series of tit-for-tat abductions across the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>289</sup> In *The English Patient*,

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<sup>283</sup> Bierman (2005: 93f).

<sup>284</sup> Bierman (2005: 89). See also Meredith (2011: 95f).

<sup>285</sup> Bierman (2005: 89).

<sup>286</sup> See Kubassek (1999), Kelly (2002: 116), and Meredith (2011: 95f).

<sup>287</sup> In the year following his death the Royal Geographical Society published Clayton’s description of the Gilf Kebir, which is drawn from his notes and diary entries. The article begins by lamenting the loss of ‘yet another young adventurer whose spirit and capacity would have won him many laurels’ before describing his purchase of ‘a second-hand Gipsy I Moth ... ‘known to his friends, and ... referred to in his diaries, as *Rupert*’ (1933: 249).

<sup>288</sup> Provencal (2003a: 145).

<sup>289</sup> *Histories* 1.3.

a Hungarian aristocrat's collaboration with the Nazis is described by Ondaatje as being driven by a tragic affair with a married woman. The methods then are inverse with Herodotus moving away from the mythic archetype of the tragic love affair and Ondaatje embracing it. If Ondaatje's approach to history in the novel is free in its application, is there anything in the approach that may have compelled him to include Herodotus's work beyond the aforementioned prominence of the *Histories* in the writings of the desert explorers? Although not adhering to the notion of Herodotus as the 'father of lies', Ondaatje may nevertheless have been drawn to the degree of creative licence that many have detected in the *Histories*. Passages where embellishments serve to enhance the progress of the narrative and depict the details behind major events may have appealed to Ondaatje who was open to this approach to history. One such passage is *Histories* 1.8-12.

### **3.2: The English Patient and Histories 1.8-12**

The tale of Gyges, Candaules and Candaules' wife plays a significant role in the narrative of *The English Patient*. It is a passage that has proved a popular subject over the centuries. Indeed, as Hazewindus (2004: 43) observes, 'the story of Candaules, his wife and his right-hand man Gyges is one of those famous stories that have always stirred the imagination of writers and painters.'<sup>290</sup> It served as an inspiration for Fredrich Raphael's *The Hidden I: A Myth Revisited* (see introduction to Part II) and it is the most prominent passage from the *Histories* to be featured in *The English Patient*. Ondaatje not only chooses to narrate the tale, but he also incorporates the triangle into the narrative. The characters of Almásy, Katherine Clifton, and her husband Geoffrey are compared to Gyges, Candaules' nameless wife,<sup>291</sup> and Candaules via the romantic entanglement that will eventually lead to the deaths of the married couple and to Almásy becoming the titular 'English' Patient. *Histories* 1.8-12, then, serves as an archetype upon which Ondaatje crafts the adulterous affair between Almásy and Katherine.<sup>292</sup> As has already been noted, Almásy and the Cliftons were based on historical figures, and yet Ondaatje creates a fictional affair for them by incorporating

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<sup>290</sup> Hazewindus goes on to add: 'It occurs in various forms from Herodotus to Mario Vargas Llosa and in art from Jordaens to Degas. The motif is not uncommon: a man thinks his wife so beautiful that he wants to show her to another man. We find it in the Bible in the prelude to the Book of Esther, 1. 10-13, where king Ahasverus wants to show his wife Vashti to the people. In Livy and Ovid there is the story of Lucretia, according to her husband's boasting to fellow soldiers the most beautiful and industrious wife of all women.' See also Provençal (2003b: 56f) for an exploration of how Iris Murdoch's novel *The Severed Head* (1961) and Robertson Davies' novel *Fifth Business* (1970) parallel *The English Patient* in their engagement with the tale of Gyges and may have in turn influenced Ondaatje's story.

<sup>291</sup> Later works inspired by the tale have called her Nyssia, including Gautier in his novella *Le roi Candaule* (1844).

<sup>292</sup> See Provençal (2003b: 59).

one of the most famous stories from the *Histories*. What I will explore here is how the comparisons are made within the narrative and why Ondaatje chose to draw this parallel.

The tale of Gyges, Candaules, and Candaules' wife is narrated in *The English Patient* by Katherine Clifton as a means of entertaining the desert explorers. The passage is quoted at times and paraphrased at others. An example of how this is done is as follows:

The next day the wife calls in Gyges and gives him two choices.

*"There are now two ways open to you, and I will give you the choice which of the two you will prefer to take. Either you must slay Candaules and possess both me and the Kingdom of Lydia, or you must yourself here on the spot be slain, so that you mayest not in future, by obeying Candaules in all things, see that which you should not. Either he must die who formed this design, or you who have looked upon me naked"*

So the king is killed. A New Age begins. (1993: 234).<sup>293</sup>

Ondaatje introduces the story at a late stage in the narrative.<sup>294</sup> Katherine's narration occurs in the second half of the novel where the pieces of Almásy's life prior to the plane crash, which had hitherto been a mystery, begin to be revealed.<sup>295</sup> As the questions surrounding the identity of 'English' patient start to be answered within the narrative, Ondaatje incorporates elements of Herodotus' *Histories* into the construction. This is especially apparent when the characters comment on the story as it is being read. Interjections from Katherine and Geoffrey combined with Almásy's own thoughts regarding the tale connects the narrative of the novel to Herodotus' historical account. After describing Candaules' passionate love for his wife and her beauty Katherine jokingly asks her husband 'Are you listening, Geoffrey?', to which he replies 'Yes, my darling' (1993: 232). This exchange fixes the roles of Katherine and Geoffrey within this Herodotean parallel. As Scobie (1994: 98) observes, when 'Katherine reads the story, she allows the clear implication that she is the queen, [and] her husband, Geoffrey, is Candaules.' As Almásy recalls the event to Caravaggio he connects himself to Gyges. Soon after Katherine's playful interaction with her husband Almásy states 'that eventually I will become her lover, just as Gyges will be the queen's lover and murderer of Candaules' (1993: 233). That Ondaatje wants the reader to see the connection between the ancient characters and the modern parallels is clear. Certainly, Almásy does, as it forms a key part of this memory.

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<sup>293</sup> Italics here signify Ondaatje's use of italics when quoting from the *Histories* in the novel.

<sup>294</sup> This passage from the *Histories* is narrated by Katherine in the penultimate chapter of the novel, Chapter IX: 'The Cave of the Swimmers.'

<sup>295</sup> The reader first 'meets' Almásy the desert explorer in Chapter IV: 'South Cairo 1930-1938.'

However, not all concur with such a reading. Scobie (1994: 98) asserts that whilst the characters of Almásy, Katherine, and Geoffrey can be connected to the figures depicted in *Histories* 1.8-12, 'the novel allows for other parallels too'. For example, the outcome of Ondaatje's romantic triangle is not quite the same as Herodotus'.<sup>296</sup> When Geoffrey discovers the affair, he takes Katherine in his plane and attempts to crash it into Almásy, thereby killing all three of them. He only manages to kill himself in this instance. Almásy safely avoids being hit, but Katherine is seriously wounded. So, although it is Geoffrey who takes on the murderous role of Gyges here, as the husband, and therefore possessing the Candaules role, he dies first. Moreover, Ondaatje has Almásy admit that the character of Candaules 'was in no way a portrait of Clifton', simply, 'he became part of the story' by virtue of the fact that he is Katherine's husband (1993: 234). Similarly, in relation to the observing of the 'unaware' in hidden spaces, Scobie (1994: 99) associates this particular stance with Caravaggio, for it is 'Caravaggio who most often plays the role of the spy, watching women from secret places.' It is because of this then that he concludes 'the characters of the ancient story shift around, according to the character's desires.' Ellis (1996: 33), further distances her reading of the novel's use of *Histories* 1.8-12 from the accepted parallel by associating the tale with Hana and Kip. Indeed, she notes that 'Almásy's telling of the Gyges *logos* is prompted by his awareness of the affair between Hana and Kip, and acts as a cautionary tale about the possible consequences of male traffic of women.' And so, here it serves more as a warning than as a direct comparison. Whilst these are reasonable comparisons to be made, the way in which Almásy, Katherine, and Geoffrey interact with the *Histories* seems calculated on the part of Ondaatje. The interjections invite the reader to draw direct comparisons between the ancient and modern love triangles, even if the events of the *Histories* do not wholly translate onto the story of *The English Patient*.

Ondaatje has not stated why this specific tale of all the events depicted in the *Histories* was singled out for expansion in his novel. Before Katherine begins her narration the character of Almásy admits to Caravaggio to having previously skimmed past the story 'as it had little to do with the places and period I am interested in' (1992: 232). This statement of course links to the real Almásy's interest in Herodotus' descriptions of the desert regions of North Africa, and so points to the historical element of the novel and the research Ondaatje had undertaken. But the sense of historicity that Almásy's admission evokes is deliberately undercut by what follows. *Histories* 1.8-12 is narrated and comparisons between the Herodotean characters and the twentieth-century figures are drawn. Ondaatje may, perhaps, have been drawn to the suggestion of fictional

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<sup>296</sup> See also Meyers (2011).

components that have been detected in this particular passage. As was addressed in the introduction to Part II of this thesis, the *Histories* contains elements that derive from epic poetry, with his account displaying features that can be compared to Homer's work. Such features can be found in the Gyges narrative also. Whilst Herodotus' version of the tale does not contain the fantastical elements that occurred in alternative versions in antiquity, such as the magic ring that is described by Plato,<sup>297</sup> imaginative licence on the part of Herodotus has been observed in the composition of the passage.

There are some who disagree with this idea. Griffin (2006: 46), for example, argues that whilst Herodotus' version is transformed by the author beyond its folktale origins, 'everything here is real-world and rational.' De Jong (2013: 259), however, points to instances where Gyges' thoughts are revealed as demonstrating the passage's debt to epic. When Gyges is described as initially declining Candaules' invitation to spy on his wife 'because he was afraid of what might happen if he accepted' (*Histories* 1.9), Herodotus assumes here the role of the omnipresent narrator. Thus, he 'follows in the footsteps of the Homeric narrator' (de Jong 2013: 260) by being privy to his character's inner thoughts. Asheri (2007a: 81) also detects the element of fiction within the passage. He notes that whilst the story does show some degree of rationalization in its composition, the dramatic and poetic origins of the tale are detectable in its mixture of dialogue and dramatic scenes. The passage also displays thematic commonalities with other aspects of the *Histories*, which indicate a degree of narrative stylization. Indeed, its position at the start of the work creates a parallel to the marital discord found towards the end of the *Histories* (9.108-113) with the account of Xerxes, Amestris, Artayante, and Masistes' wife.<sup>298</sup>

This combination of factors indicates that the tale 'undoubtedly has been restructured by Herodotus' imagination',<sup>299</sup> at least to some degree, a reading that chimes with Ondaatje's own depiction of historical data in *The English Patient*. His portrayal of Almásy, Katherine, and Geoffrey draws on the features of their historical counterparts but reworks them in an imaginative way.<sup>300</sup> Ondaatje fictionalizes the twentieth century figures through his skills as a storyteller and with his application of *Histories* 1.8-12. The *Histories*, then, becomes a means through which Ondaatje develops the artifice that lies at the heart of the novel's depiction of its historical figures. As was addressed earlier, the affair between Almásy and Katherine is an invention of Ondaatje's in the

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<sup>297</sup> *Republic* II, 360B-C. See also Flower Smith (1920).

<sup>298</sup> See Flory (1987: 29-89), Blok (2012: 230-2), and Dewald (2013: 166f).

<sup>299</sup> Adhikari (2002: 45).

<sup>300</sup> As Couter (2009: 4) describes it, Ondaatje 'uses characters to tell the story he wants to tell for diverse and particular effects'.

same way that their eventual demises do not match their real-life counterparts. By adding the tale of Gyges, Candaules and Candaules' wife to their characterisation, Ondaatje adds an extra layer of fiction to their portrayal, and in turn distances the novel from being perceived as a straightforward retelling of history. The author rather ironically, then, uses the text that is situated at the beginning of Western narrative history to create a sense of unreliability within the narrative of *The English Patient*.

### **3.3: The Distortion of Almásy's *Histories***

The most prominent object in *The English Patient* is Almásy's 1890 translation of the *Histories* by G. C. Macaulay. Almásy's text is not merely a translation of the *Histories* and nothing more. Ondaatje describes it as 'the Herodotus journal' (1993: 156), and earlier in the narrative Hana is shown to pick up a

Notebook that lies on the small table beside his bed. It is the book which he brought with him through the fire—a copy of *The Histories* by Herodotus that he had added to, cutting and gluing in the pages from other books or writing in his own observations—so they all are cradled within the text of Herodotus (1993: 16).

Later, on page 96 of the novel, Ondaatje observes that

In his commonplace book, his 1890 edition of Herodotus' *Histories*, are other fragments—maps, diary entries, writings in many languages, paragraphs cut out of other books. All that is missing is his own name. There is still no clue to who he actually is, nameless, without rank or battalion or squadron. The references in his book are all pre-war, the deserts of Egypt and Libya in the 1930s, interspersed with references to cave art or gallery art or journal notes in his own small handwriting.

These additions make the book swell to twice its original size with some being added to address alleged mistakes on Herodotus' part.<sup>301</sup> At page 246 it is shown that when Almásy 'Discovered the supposed truth to what had seemed a lie,' he amends the text accordingly. And so, he would take 'his glue pot and pasted in a map or news clipping or used a blank space to sketch men in skirts with faded unknown animals alongside them'. Such additions to the text of Herodotus are reflected in Ondaatje's own narrative in which is found italicised passages that quote from, amongst others,

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<sup>301</sup> At page 96 the book described as 'the patient's notebook, the book which he had somehow managed to carry with him out of the fire. The book splayed open, almost twice its original thickness.'

Major A. B. Hartley's *Unexploded Bomb* (1993: 182 and 184) and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1993: 144).<sup>302</sup>

McVey (2014: 146) describes the *Histories* as one of the main symbolic objects in the narrative of *The English Patient*. This is certainly the case when observing how Almásy engages with it both as an object and with its content. He alters it physically and emphasizes elements that appeal to him, to the detriment of others. If the reader is to consider the *Histories* as symbolising 'the font of Western Historiography' as Provencal (2003a: 149) argues, then the altered state of the *Histories* within the narrative serves to illustrate how easily an account of history can be warped to suit the preferences of the receiver. And so, as well as his physical additions, Almásy is also shown to erase passages that have no appeal for him: 'He bought pale brown cigarette papers and glued them into sections of *The Histories* that recorded wars that were of no interest to him' (1993: 172).<sup>303</sup>

The physical treatment of the text demonstrates how easily a historical record can be tampered with, even by someone who regards it with the degree of reverence that Almásy does. This image of editing the *Histories* finds its parallel in how Almásy engages with the Proem of the *Histories*, where he is shown to be selective in choosing which elements he elevates.<sup>304</sup> Just as he amends the physical text, in the narrative he is shown to wilfully neglect passages in favour of others. *Histories* 1.1 is quoted in the penultimate part of the novel (Part IX: 'The Cave of the Swimmers') and its insertion within the account of Maddox's death emphasises Almásy's detachment from the concept of commemoration:

And Maddox returned to the village of Marston Magna, Somerset, where he had been born, and a month later sat in the congregation of a church, heard the sermon in honour of war, pulled out his desert revolver and shot himself.

*I, Herodotus of Halicarnassus, set forth my history, that time may not draw the colour from what Man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds manifested by both Greeks and Barbarians ... together with the reason they fought one another.* (1993: 241)

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<sup>302</sup> Ondaatje's list of acknowledgements (1992: 305-6) states that 'Other important books were Mary McCarthy's *The Stones of Florence*; Leonard Mosley's *The Cat and the Mice*; G. W. L. Nicholson's *The Canadian's in Italy 1943-5* and *Canada's Nursing Sister's*; *The Marshall Cavendish Encyclopaedia of World War II*; F. Yeats-Brown's *Martial India*; and three other books on the Indian military: *The Tiger Strikes* and *The Tiger Kills*, published in 1942 by the Directorate of Public Relations, New Delhi, and *A Roll of Honour*.'

<sup>303</sup> Friedman (2008: 57) observes that by inserting additions into his copy of the *Histories* Almásy becomes a 'posthumous editor' of the original text.

<sup>304</sup> See, also, Provencal (2002: 149-150).

The passage displays Almásy's alienation from *Histories* 1.1 via the loss of Peter Madox a man to whom he felt great affection: 'I loved his calmness in all things. I would argue furiously about locations on a map, and his reports would somehow speak of our "debate" in reasonable sentences' (1993: 242). In keeping with the topic of this chapter on *The English Patient*, the character of Madox was based on the historical figure Patrick Andrew Clayton (1896-1962) a surveyor and soldier who participated in some of the desert explorations as Almásy.<sup>305</sup> As was the case with Almásy and the Clayton-East-Claytons, Patrick Clayton did not meet the same fate as his fictional counterpart, dying instead twenty-three years after the character of Madox killed himself. The character maintains elements of the historical figure in order to serve the illusion of historicity, but his invented name along with his fictional death contributes to Ondaatje's approach to the idea of history. And so, whilst the fictitious elements lend to the sense of artifice that characterizes Ondaatje's engagement with the era, the death itself also interacts with the novel's depiction of how easily Almásy warps the text of the *Histories*. This aspect of Herodotus' proem, then, becomes 'tainted' through being situated within the memory of Madox's death.

Almásy's interaction with *Histories* 1.1 contrasts sharply with the context in which *Histories* 1.5 is featured within the narrative. The passage which consists of the closing programmatic statement of Herodotus' proem is inserted within the description of Almásy's desert expeditions in Chapter IV: 'South Cairo 1930-1938'. As Ondaatje discovered through his research, Herodotus' *Histories* was an important text to Almásy and his companions. And so it is in the novel, too:

We were young. We knew power and great finance were temporary things. We all slept with Herodotus. "For those cities that were great in earlier times must now become small, and those that were great in my time were small in the time before.... Man's good fortune never abides in the same place" (1993: 142).

As with the previous passage, Ondaatje alludes to the historical in this portion of the narrative. The author retains the respect the desert explorers held for the *Histories*, as was described by Bermann in his 1934 paper. As an enhancement of this, Ondaatje does not include the part of the passage that has been linked to the *Histories*' debt to epic poetry. In the sentence prior to the quoted passage, Herodotus' description of the 'cities of men' alludes to *Odyssey* 1.3 where Odysseus is described as having seen 'many cities of men'.<sup>306</sup> It is difficult to ascertain whether this choice to not include this aspect of *Histories* 1.5 was deliberate on Ondaatje's part. Certainly, whilst he

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<sup>305</sup> See Clayton (1933) for his report on the 1932 expedition to Gilf Kebir which was undertaken with Almásy.

<sup>306</sup> See Hartog (2000) and Marincola (2013) for the character of Odysseus serving as an inspiration for ancient historians.

undertook research in preparation for writing the novel, he never claimed to have explored academic debates on the nature of Herodotus and his text. Nevertheless, the absence does connect with the attempt at historical authenticity, as demonstrated by highlighting the importance of the *Histories* to the historical desert explorers, by removing the link to Homer's work of fiction from the quotation.

The passage, however, also lends itself to the theme of the manipulation of historical texts that can be detected in Ondaatje's narrative through the context in which this reference to the poem emerges. When compared to Almásy's recall of *Histories* 1.1, the text that surrounds *Histories* 1.5 is far more in tune with Almásy's interests. Indeed, its theme of impermanence spills into the narrative both through Almásy's philosophy and on a thematic level. The instability of the systems to which humans attach great value is what attracts the character to the shifting landscape of the desert and the sense of impermanence that it fosters. As Provencal (2003a) puts it, 'what one acquires in the desert is an existential sense of history as an endless *process*, which opposes itself to an imperial sense of history as an endless *progress*.' This is plainly demonstrated in Almásy's description of the desert as a place where the makers of 'civilization' are obliterated:

The desert could not be claimed or owned—it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names long before Canterbury existed, long before battles and treaties quilted Europe and the East. Its caravans, those strange rambling feats and cultures left nothing behind, not an ember. All of us, even those with European homes and children in the distance, wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into the landscape. Fire and sand. We left the harbours of oasis. The places water came to and touched ... *Ain, Bir, Wadi, Fogarra, Khottara, Shaduf*. I didn't want my name against such beautiful names. Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert.

Still, some wanted their mark there. On that dry water-course, on this shingled knoll. Small vanities in this plot of land northwest of the Sudan, south of Cyrenaica. Fenelon-Barnes wanted the fossil trees he discovered to bear his name. He even wanted a tribe to take his name and spent a year on the negotiations. Bauchan outdid him, having a type of dune named after him. But I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from (1993: 138-139).

The overarching theme here is the sense of elimination that the desert evokes in Almásy. The impermanence that comes from a landscape that can be altered with each gust of wind chimes well with the theme of instability that attracts Almásy to *Histories* 1.5, as opposed to the concept of preservation that is displayed in *Histories* 1.1. And so, whilst *Histories* 1.1 is embedded within a negatively framed passage for the character, *Histories* 1.5 corresponds to Almásy's conception of the world and his yearning for obliteration. This is why Almásy is shown to reject the vanity of imposing one's identity on the desert by naming its features as Fenelon-Barnes and Bauchan do.

As Ellis (1996: 27) puts it, ‘His rejection of names links problematic ownership to the issues of nationalism and colonialism in the text.’ The importance of the concept spills over into the narrative with several instances of namelessness and name erasure, which in turn links to similar instances of name suppression within the *Histories*.

The protagonist’s desire to erase his identity can be connected to the ambiguity surrounding the real-life Almásy, a characteristic which seems to have drawn Ondaatje to this man. Indeed, O’Dea (2006) is certain that ‘what Ondaatje seems to have borrowed most significantly from the historical Almásy is his ambiguity.’ Moreover, as Bierman (2005: 9) acknowledges: ‘whenever the researching biographer imagines he has pinned the man’s character down, some perplexing new fact emerges to raise new uncertainties and – to mix the metaphor – the focus blurs again.’<sup>307</sup> And, hence, the inability to pin-point the true nature of Laszlo Almásy is perfectly illustrated in Caravaggio’s struggle to reveal the real identity of Hana’s patient. It is certainly clear that such ambiguity is translated in the novel via the questions surrounding the ‘anonymous’ patient’s identity. Indeed, even the title suggests its centrality. Caravaggio’s attempts to discover the burned man’s identity and name feed the narrative and form a ‘structure’ of sorts to the plot. And so, once again the element of historical truth is woven into the narrative by Ondaatje, but the author plays with such details in order to subvert the standard conventions of the historical novel.

Namelessness does not remain attached to Almásy’s identity alone, it is connected to various figures throughout the novel with its meaning shifting in relation to the character and

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<sup>307</sup> Bierman (2005: 9) lists the questions surrounding the real Almásy thus: ‘was he, as the British suspected, a pre-war spy for the Italians or, as the Italians suspected, a pre-war spy for the British? Perhaps he was both; perhaps he was neither. Was he a genuine Nazi sympathizer or no more than a romantic royalist and traditionalist? Perhaps it was his insatiable love of the desert which swept all other considerations aside. Did he become a double agent serving British intelligence towards the end of the war and during the Cold War that followed? And if so, did he do so out of conviction or self-preservation? And if not a British intelligence ‘asset’ why else would MI6 have gone to considerable expense and trouble to help him escape from Hungary and return to Egypt? Crucially, by what means was he able to beat a war crimes charge levelled against him by a Hungarian communist People’s Court which might anyway have been expected to jail or even execute him simply for the crime of being ‘a class enemy?’ O’Dea (2006) would also raise additional questions on the nature of the historical Almásy: ‘Did he really discover the legendary Zerzura, as he once claimed to have done? Or, as some historians and scholars believe, was he using the name of Zerzura only as a metaphor for the endless quest of exploration? Was he an enemy agent only for the Germans during the war, or did he spy for the British too? In either case, what would have been his motivations? These are some of the questions surrounding the historical Almásy, and Ondaatje doesn’t really attempt to answer them. Instead, he borrows the ambiguity itself in creating his English Patient as a complex text—a text that Caravaggio, in particular, feels he must read and interpret.’

context.<sup>308</sup> When Katherine first appears in the novel, for example, she, like Candaules' wife, has no name. And like her Herodotean 'counterpart' she is simply referred to as 'Clifton's wife' (1993: 97). She is referred to a second time at page 142, but again she remains nameless, she is merely identified as the wife of Geoffrey Clifton. When she is named at page 143, she is reading a passage from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, just as she was reading aloud when the reader first encounters her.<sup>309</sup> That it takes Ondaatje some time to name her is not unique to this character. Indeed, the status of names in *The English Patient* is an important narrative device used by Ondaatje and parallels examples of name suppression in the *Histories*. Certainly, even if he read only one tale from the *Histories*, that of Gyges, Candaules and Candaules' wife, this alone would have given suitable insight into the name-play that exists in Herodotus' *Histories*. Candaules' wife remains nameless throughout her inclusion in *Histories* 1.8-12 being identified only through her relationship to her first husband.<sup>310</sup> It has been argued that the absence of a name within this passage could result from the lack of relevant material in Herodotus' sources,<sup>311</sup> but her namelessness may also be the result of a deliberate narrative strategy on the part of Herodotus. Larson (2006), for example, sees the suppression of female names in the *Histories* as potentially connected to cultural norms associated with honour. As she puts it, Herodotus 'observes a general tendency to suppress names

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<sup>308</sup> Hana, for example, is initially nameless until the arrival of Caravaggio at the villa in 'Part II: In Ruins' when, after being reminded of how she once told Caravaggio of her love for Verdi, Ondaatje names her finally and writes: 'Hana bows her head, embarrassed' (1993: 32). Her name is revealed simultaneously with a fragment of her past. Prior to this she is simply known as 'she'. Her nameless is connected to the trauma of her experiences during World War II. As Ellis (1996: 28) observes, in a state of horror from her wartime experiences, Hana 'abandoned the intimacy of names as she begins to call everyone "Buddy" acknowledging the relational imperative created by names.' A similar mode of name suppression as the result of past sufferings can be found at *Histories* 2.128 in which the Egyptians purposefully suppress the names of two pharaohs whose reigns they associate with misery: 'Chephren reigned for fifty-six years – so the Egyptians reckon a period of a hundred and six years, all told, during which the temples were never opened for worship and the country was reduced in every way to the greatest misery. The Egyptians can hardly bring themselves to mention the names Cheops and Chephren, so great is their hatred of them; they even call the pyramids after Philitis, a shepherd who at that time fed his flocks in the neighbourhood.' In doing this they undermine the central idea of the pyramids, that they immortalise those who commissioned them, by refusing to indulge the pharaohs' desires. Indeed, as Hollmann (2011: 156) notes, 'they actively insult them by attaching to their magnificent monuments the name of one on the opposite end of the social scale, a mere herdsman.'

<sup>309</sup> Here she reads a suitably appropriate poem by Stephen Crane: 'I walked in a desert/ And I cried:/ "Ah, God, take me from this place!"/ A voice said: "It is no desert."/ I cried: "Well, but---/ The sand, the heat, the vacant horizon."/ A voice said: "It is no desert."'

<sup>310</sup> She is named elsewhere in antiquity, as Asheri (2007a: 81) notes, 'in other sources she is called Nysia, Clytia, Habro, Toudo'.

<sup>311</sup> See, for example, Sancisi-Weerdenburg (1983: 20-31) and Waters (1985: 128-9).

for women who observe proper female behaviour, and he often conspicuously names women of less repute or of questionable activity.<sup>312</sup> Hence, preceding the tale of Candaules' wife in the proem, the mythical heroines of *Histories* 1.1-3 are named as if to contrast with the nameless Lydian queen, for their behaviour may be read as 'questionable'.<sup>313</sup>

Name suppression within this context, however, is not always the case throughout Herodotus' narrative. Artemisia for example is named as she displays deeds that Herodotus deems worthy of inclusion.<sup>314</sup> It is also difficult to parallel Katherine Clifton's initial name suppression with patriarchal concepts surrounding 'ideal' female behaviour that have been extracted from Herodotus' text. Ondaatje's narrative does display instances where oppressed female characters remain nameless,<sup>315</sup> but the theme of deliberate name erasure is connected more with Almásy's yearning for obliteration. This is the desire which attracts him to the notion of the impermanence as found in *Histories* 1.5. And so, in Almásy's description of the desert's appeal, as was featured above, the notion of name erasure is repeated by the character. This is set up in opposition to his colleagues Fenelon-Barnes and Bauchan who follow the commemorative theme of *Histories* 1.1 by attempting to preserve a record of their deeds upon the desert through the act of naming parts of the landscape after themselves.<sup>316</sup>

Whilst there are comparable elements to this name suppression between *The English Patient* and the *Histories*, Almásy's emphasis comes to the detriment of the opening of Herodotus' proem where the desire to preserve the great deeds of humanity from the obliteration that is warned of

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<sup>312</sup> Larson (2006: 230).

<sup>312</sup> A stance that was described in Pericles' funeral oration: 'If it is necessary to recount something on the subject of female excellence to those of you who will now be in widowhood, I will indicate it with this brief advice. Your glory will be great in not becoming worse than your natural character, and the greatest *kleos* will be hers who is least talked of among men in terms of either excellence or blame' (Thucydides 2.45.2).

<sup>313</sup> Although Larson (2006: 230) does concede that name suppression in this respect would have been pointless, as their names and their fortunes were far too well known and, therefore, rendering anonymity 'ridiculous'.

<sup>314</sup> At *Histories* 7.99 Herodotus declares, 'There is one name which I cannot omit – that of Artemisia. It seems to me a marvel that she – a woman – should have taken part in the campaign against Greece. On the death of her husband the tyranny had passed into her hands, and she sailed with the fleet in spite of the fact that she had a grown-up son and that there was consequently no necessity for her to do so. Her own spirit of adventure and manly courage were her only incentives.'

<sup>315</sup> Whilst searching Fenelon-Barnes' tent during an expedition, for example, Almásy recalls finding what 'seemed to be a small lump, a dog possibly, under the covers. I pulled back the djellaba and there was a small Arab girl tied up, sleeping there' (1993: 138). The imprisoned girl remains unnamed. See York (1994) for an exploration of the depiction of women in Ondaatje's fiction.

<sup>316</sup> Ondaatje (1993: 139).

at 1.5 is set out. As Asheri (2007a: 73) puts it, ‘Herodotus wants to save from oblivion or from all devouring time what deserves to be remembered.’ Almásy, on the other hand, frowns upon this notion and the behaviour of his colleagues who attach their names to parts of the desert. Even when the commemorative aspect of the *Histories* is featured within the narrative, it is situated within the death of Madox. This positioning emphasizes Almásy’s detachment from the concept, particularly when compared to the entry of *Histories* 1.5 in the narrative. What all of this signifies is that whilst Almásy respects the *Histories* he is not above altering its contents to fit his preferences. This is demonstrated by the character’s additions and amendments to his personal copy of the *Histories* and through what Almásy chooses to emphasise when citing Herodotus’ proem. By manipulating the text in this manner, Ondaatje demonstrates the susceptibility of historical accounts to external interference. The *Histories* may have been composed by the father of history, and thus is afforded a high degree of status by titular character of Ondaatje’s novel, but even this does not save it from being tampered with by Almásy.

### **3.4: Conclusion**

In a 2012 interview broadcast on BBC Radio 4 Ondaatje stated that he included the character of the Indian sapper Kirpal (Kip) Singh in *The English Patient* in order to highlight the role that Indians played in the Second World War.<sup>317</sup> As he put it, he ‘wanted to see Asia represented in the story’, as the sacrifices of its people in defeating Nazism are so often neglected in favour of the European and North American contribution. In doing this he takes on the Herodotean mantle of commemorating the achievements of the past so that they may not be forgotten. What this also demonstrates is how the Western historical narrative is prone to overlooking the role of alternative histories within the official account of events and suggests another reason as to why the *Histories* was elevated by the author within the narrative. Ondaatje’s application of the *Histories* takes a similar stance to Vidal’s in its reading of Herodotus’ position at the start of Western narrative history and through the novel’s interest in challenging the idea that a ‘true’ and objective account of history can be obtained. Ondaatje uses the *Histories* as an aid to illustrate the problematic nature of historical accounts, first, by attaching artificial elements to historical figures and, secondly, through the demonstration of the potential for interference in historical texts.

The former is partially achieved through Ondaatje’s application of *Histories* 1.8-12. The author weaves the story of Gyges, Candaules, and Candaules’ wife into his narrative, and thus uses

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<sup>317</sup> *Book Club: The English Patient*, BBC (5<sup>th</sup> August 2012).

an ancient historical text to fictionalize the lives of modern historical figures. This use of Herodotus' text contrasts with the majority of modern novels featured in the introduction. In those examples the authors generally preferred to use the *Histories* in order to foster a sense of historicity in their stories. Ondaatje also interacts with the concept of historical authenticity, indeed the inclusion of the *Histories* in the work stems from the research he undertook when formulating the novel. Herodotus' work was an important source for the desert explorers of the 1930s and they used it to guide their expeditions though the desert regions of North Africa. This in turn became the impetus for the *Histories* inclusion in *The English Patient*. However, Ondaatje subverts any sense of historical accuracy by inserting the Gyges narrative into his depiction of Almásy's interwar desert explorations. The narrative of *The English Patient* may contain components of truth but features including the incorporation of Herodotus' account into the novel's narrative deliberately undercut them.

The *Histories* further adds to this sense of unreliability through Almásy's treatment of the Herodotus' work both physically and thematically. Although the character reveres the *Histories*, he nevertheless tampers with its content. His treasured physical copy swells from the inclusions Almásy inserts into the book, and often these consist of 'corrections', which suggest that even a champion of the *Histories* such as the novel's protagonist finds 'flaws' in Herodotus' account. Tampering with the text of the *Histories* expands beyond the literal sense if one looks at how Almásy engages with the proem. *Histories* 1.1 and 1.5 are quoted within the narrative as a means of representing Almásy's attraction to the notion of transience in comparison to his colleagues' desire to impose their presence upon the desert as a form of personal commemoration. Whilst *Histories* 1.5 is framed in a positive light, which extends into the wider narrative through, for example, name erasure, *Histories* 1.1 is situated in a more negative context to signify the character's alienation from the content of this aspect of the proem. What this accomplishes is to illustrate the fragility of historical texts. Almásy may respect Herodotus' account but even he is shown to warp its content to suit his own purposes.

## Chapter 4

### The Tripartite Herodotus of *American Gods*

Lyesmith had loaned Shadow a battered paperback copy of Herodotus' *Histories* several months earlier. 'It's not boring. It's cool,' he said. *American Gods* (2004: 6).

When Herodotus' *Histories* is first introduced in Neil Gaiman's fourth novel, the Hugo and Nebula award-winning *American Gods* (2001), the protagonist, a convict called Shadow Moon, has to be encouraged to read it. The book's champion, Low Key Lyesmith, is convinced that his cellmate will enjoy it and he is correct in this assumption. Upon accepting the 'battered paperback copy' of the *Histories* Shadow 'had made a face, but he had started to read, and had found himself hooked against his will' (2004: 6). Its effect on Shadow is profound. He abandons the book when leaving prison, but he does not forget it. During his travels across the United States of America Gaiman has his protagonist refer to the *Histories* and Herodotus on more than one occasion. The *Histories* is more than a prop within the narrative. Its influence can be found in the novel's depiction of gods walking amongst humanity, which Gaiman has credited to the story of Pheidippides' encounter with Pan in Book 6 of the *Histories*. As the novel is classified within the category of modern fantasy, Herodotus' description of the human and divine interaction of *Histories* 6.105 is in keeping with a genre that often draws upon real-world mythology and folklore as a source of inspiration. This is certainly the case in *American Gods*, with its list of characters that references a diverse range of world mythologies. Notably absent, however, are the Greek representatives in Gaiman's pantheon.<sup>318</sup>

Greece is, however, represented through Herodotus. Gaiman does not produce the standard recreation of scenes from the *Histories*, as has been the case in several of the novels covered previously, but he does weave the work into his complex network of references. The *Histories* exists on several levels within the novel. It features as a physical object, as a topic of conversation between characters, and as a source of inspiration for the narrative. In this latter form it varies from the bulk of *Histories*-inspired novels, which use the text to aid an author's depiction of the ancient world. Gaiman's novel has more in common with the type of engagement found in *The English Patient*. As well as the *Histories* featuring as a tangible object within both narratives, each

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<sup>318</sup> The same is true for their Roman counterparts in the novel. This, however, is not the case in the television adaptation where Vulcan is featured. See Zajko (2020) for how classical myth figures in the story of the novel as well as within its television adaptation.

author supplements non-Herodotean characters with Herodotean components. Specifically, both novels contain no characters from the *Histories*. However, the novels feature characters that are crafted with the aid of content from the *Histories*. In *The English Patient* it was evident in each corner of the modern love triangle. With *American Gods* this form of engagement with the *Histories* is seen in the characterisation of Shadow Moon, Low Key Lyesmith, and Mr Ibis, with each character representing both shared and individual connections to Herodotus and his work. There may be no Greek deities in *American Gods*, but in separating Herodotus across these three characters he becomes a symbol of the theme of Gaiman's novel: that there is no monolithic American identity.<sup>319</sup>

#### **4.1: Crafting America**

The narrative of *American Gods* follows Shadow Moon, who is both a recently released convict and a recently bereaved widower, and his travels across the United States in the service of the mysterious Mr Wednesday. Shadow comes to discover that Mr Wednesday is in fact an incarnation of the Norse god Odin, whose worship was brought to North America with the first Viking explorers. Moreover, Odin is not the only deity Shadow encounters. Thanks to several millennia-worth of migrations from across the world, American versions of gods including the West-African Anansi (Mr Nancy), the Indian Kali (Mama-Ji), the Germanic Ēostre (Easter), the Egyptian Bastet and the Slavic Czernobog, live amongst the unsuspecting population of the United States. However, disaster is looming for the deities and Mr Wednesday plans to counteract the emerging threat of the 'New' gods, including Media and Technical Boy. He has, therefore, enlisted Shadow's services in order to unite the 'Old' gods in preparation for the impending Ragnarok-style battle against the 'New' gods.

Like Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, this all began with an image. In the article 'All Books Have Genders' Gaiman recounts the novel's mercurial genesis beginning in May 1997.<sup>320</sup> The author states that he initially did not know what form the story would take, adding that at this stage it could easily have become the script for a movie or a TV series, or the basis of a short story. He describes the situation as follows:

It began ... with an idea that I couldn't get out of my head. I'd find myself thinking about it at night in bed before I'd go to sleep, as if I were watching a movie clip in my head. Each night I'd see another couple of minutes of the story.

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<sup>319</sup> See Caroll (2012) and Gorman (2018) for more on how *American Gods* tackles the notion of an American identity.

<sup>320</sup> Gaiman (2001a).

In June 1997, I wrote the following on my battered Atari palmtop:

A guy winds up as a bodyguard for a magician. The magician is an over-the-top type. He offers the guy the job meeting him on a plane - sitting next to him.

Chain of events to get there involving missed flights, cancellations, unexpected bounce up to first class, and the guy sitting next to him introduces himself and offers him a job.

His life has just fallen apart anyway. He says yes. (Gaiman 2001a)

This is effectively a summarized version of how Shadow comes to meet Mr Wednesday in Chapter 1 of *American Gods*, with Mr Wednesday's occupation being the only significant difference. For just over a year Gaiman struggled to pin down the story, the characters and the setting. However, on a trip to Reykjavik his ideas started to take form: 'Not the story of it - I still had nothing more than the meeting on the plane and a fragment of plot in a town by a lake - but for the first time I knew what it was about. I had a direction.'<sup>321</sup>

He claims the next struggle was naming his protagonist. For Gaiman, finding the name was important: 'There's a magic to names, afterall'.<sup>322</sup> And indeed, in the novel names are used to signal to the reader the true nature of the characters Shadow encounters on his travels. Wednesday was Woden's day, and as Woden and Odin are different names for the same god, Mr Wednesday is, therefore, the American version of Odin in the novel.<sup>323</sup> Likewise, Loki is a trickster god and hence his American incarnation goes by the name Low Key Lyesmith, and so on. For his protagonist, Gaiman wanted his name to be descriptive and finally settled on Shadow, which was taken from an unreleased song written by Elvis Costello and David Was called *Shadow and Jimmy*. And so, with his protagonist named, Gaiman says he felt he could finally begin to write.<sup>324</sup>

When composing the novel Gaiman incorporated a wide variety of references into the framework of the story, a trait that is a common feature within the author's writing. For Rata (2015:

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<sup>321</sup> Gaiman (2001a).

<sup>322</sup> Gaiman (2001a).

<sup>323</sup> The Odin of Norse mythology went by at least two hundred names, including Hanged One, Raven God, Allfather, and Slain God. This aspect of the god is also found in *American Gods*, see for example, page 159: 'He calls himself Wednesday. Grimm. Olfather. Old guy.'

<sup>324</sup> Gaiman began the novel in December 1998 and completed it in January 2001. He described its completion as follows: 'I was sitting in an ancient and empty house in Ireland with a peat fire making no impression at all on the stark cold of the room. I saved the document on the computer, and I realised I'd finished writing a book' (Gaiman 2001a).

103) ‘Gaiman is an author-*bricoleur* as defined by Lévi-Strauss (1966: 16-33), who creates improvised structures by appropriating pre-existing materials’.<sup>325</sup> This tendency within Gaiman’s writing to draw heavily upon a wide range of source material is a widely recognised characteristic of his style. As Prosser (2015: 9) observes, ‘Gaiman is a prolific adapter’. The trait is certainly applicable to *American Gods* and its myriad of references. Gaiman is very much the literary magpie. *American Gods*’ use of the *Histories* is not the only instance of the author drawing on the work of another. His 2004 short story entitled *The Problem of Susan*, for example, features content derived from C. S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia* and examines the character of Susan Pevensie, the only Pevensie child to be exiled, potentially for eternity, from Narnia. The story is a response to Lewis’ narrative, in particular Gaiman’s dismay at the treatment of the eldest sister, who is dismissed as being ‘interested in nothing now-a-days except nylons and lipstick and invitations’, which consequently makes her ‘no longer a friend of Narnia’.<sup>326</sup> Gaiman’s distaste for this aspect of Lewis’ depiction of Susan is what led him to write a story in which what seems to be an adult version of Susan called Professor Hastings recounts her youth and the loss of her family. Elsewhere he has engaged with the cosmic horror of H.P. Lovecraft,<sup>327</sup> adapted the Old English epic poem *Beowulf* for the screen,<sup>328</sup> and placed Marvel Comic’s most recognizable characters within an early seventeenth-century setting.<sup>329</sup> And so, as Prosser (2015: 9) observes,

His novels, short stories, and comics frequently reimagine the stories that are often considered ‘literary classics.’ From Ancient Greek and Roman myths to the stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and H.P. Lovecraft, Gaiman has transformed a wealth of familiar tales into a series of modern and compelling fictions.

Certainly, the incorporation of fictional characters and landscapes from the work of other authors into his own varied canon is familiar territory for Gaiman.

Within *American Gods* this trait is just as pronounced. The scope of the novel is varied with references ranging from the Transatlantic Slave Trade to Slavic mythology to American popular culture. The *Histories* exists as part of the complex network of references that Gaiman draws on

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<sup>325</sup> She adds, ‘According to Lévi-Strauss, the author-bricoleur works with signs, constructing new arrangements by adopting existing signifieds as signifiers and conveying his message “through the medium of things”–by the choices made from “pre-constrained possibilities”.’

<sup>326</sup> *The Last Battle* (1956), Chapter Twelve.

<sup>327</sup> His short story *A Study in Emerald* (2003) also serves as a pastiche of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories.

<sup>328</sup> Along with Roger Avery, Gaiman co-wrote the script for Robert Zemekis’ 2007 film *Beowulf*.

<sup>329</sup> *Marvel 1602* (2003-2004).

throughout the narrative. Television programmes including *Cheers*, *The Tonight Show*, *I Love Lucy*, and films such as *The Wizard of Oz* feature alongside West African folk heroes and malicious Germanic house spirits. Chapters open with quotations that usually share a thematic link with the text that follows. As Rata (2015: 109) describes it, they ‘anchor’ the meaning of what is to follow in the chapter. Chapter Two, for example, includes the day of Laura Moon’s funeral and so begins with the quote of an ‘Old Song’: ‘They took her to the cemet’ry/ In a big ol’ Cadillac/ They took her to the cemet’ry/ But they did not bring her back’ (2004: 35).<sup>330</sup> Even Gaiman’s initial attempts to name the novel drew upon contemporary music. He described his being torn between ‘calling it *Magic America* (after the Blur song)’ and ‘*King of America* (after the Elvis Costello album) and that didn’t seem right either’ (Gaiman 2005b: 654). He eventually settled on *American Gods*, for lack of any better ideas: ‘So I wrote *American Gods* (not after anything) at the top of the page of the outline, and figured I’d come up with a better title sooner or later’ (2005b: 654).

As well as being in keeping with Gaiman’s tendency to reference various media within his writing, such inclusions contribute to the cultural collage of the United States that Gaiman attempts to illustrate in the novel. The author’s depiction of the United States is shaped through a vast array of influences in order to highlight the multi-faceted nature of the society. The nation is the product of a wide variety of influences and Gaiman’s method of incorporating elements derived from the work of other artists and writers compliments this concept. Indeed, as Gorman (2018: 165) describes it, the version of the United States that Gaiman depicts in *American Gods* is ‘messy, multi-vocal and destabilized’. By enriching the narrative with a vast number of cultural influences including religion, literature, music, and cinema, Gaiman demonstrates that the notion of a coherent and singular national identity cannot be achieved. Mr Wednesday highlight this theme when he tells Shadow the following:

San Francisco isn’t in the same country as Lakeside any more than New Orleans is in the same country as New York or Miami is in the same country as Minneapolis ... it’s the same *land*, obviously—but the only things that give it the illusion of being one country are the greenback, *The Tonight Show*, and McDonald’s (2004: 270).

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<sup>330</sup> See Gorman (2018: 171-173) for a discussion on these epigrammatic quotations and how they connect to their chapters.

Gaiman's rendering of the nation as the product of a vast system of influences stands in opposition to what Carroll (2012: 322) describes as 'the grand illusion of national commonality' and the false concept of a singular American identity, which can easily slip into nationalism.<sup>331</sup>

The *Histories* serves as an aid to this theme of challenging the idea of a monolithic American identity which runs through the narrative of *American Gods* in several ways. First, as has already been stated above, Herodotus' work is one of the many international sources upon which Gaiman drew when crafting his story. Secondly, the *Histories* also influences how the gods appear in the book. *Histories* 6.105, which depicts Pheidippides' encounter with Pan serves as an inspiration for Gaiman's depiction of the gods who, within the narrative, represent the vast number of journeys taken by immigrants in order to reach the United States. Thirdly, the characters of Shadow Moon, Low Key Lyesmith/Loki, and Mr. Ibis contribute to the theme of multiplicity in that each represents different aspects of Herodotus and his work. Shadow and Low Key are both associated with Solon's advice to Croesus from *Histories* 1.32 and engage with the passage's content on several occasions. They can also be viewed as representing differing readings of Herodotus and his account. Low Key, through his association with the trickster god Loki and his actions in the novel, can be read as signifying the accusations of deception that have been directed against Herodotus since antiquity. Through his journey across the United States and his witnessing of marvels and encounters with oral informants, Shadow can be read as paralleling Herodotus' method of data gathering. And, finally, there is Mr. Ibis who is shown to record his alternative history of the United States of America, one that is composed entirely of the stories of immigrants across the millennia, from pre-history to the present. This trio of characters, then, represent three aspects of Herodotus; the father of lies, the traveller in search of knowledge, and the organizer of data, and thus conform to the novel's core theme of highlighting the multifaceted nature of US society by engaging with a wide variety of cultural influences. And so, just as there is no singular US identity, there, too, is no singular means of accessing Herodotus and his *Histories* in *American Gods*.

#### **4.2: American Gods and the Pan 'Incident'**

As was noted at the start of this chapter, there are no Greek gods in *American Gods*, but an encounter with a Greek deity did inspire how gods and mortals interact in the novel. Gaiman first read the *Histories* on a trip to America. In an interview with Dornemann and Everding in 2001 he

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<sup>331</sup> See Schildkraut (2007) on how research has shown that when questioned American citizens, regardless of their ethnic background, can be sympathetic to the characterisation of 'American identity' as a complex entity. See, also, Smith (1997) for the 'multiple traditions' theory of describing American identity.

discussed what it was that attracted him to Herodotus' work and how he came to be the inspiration for the novel's central concept:

In the case of *American Gods*, one of the things that really made it concrete for me—which I tip my hat to in the text—was reading Herodotus, which I did when I first came to America ... In the case of Herodotus, and there are a few moments in Suetonius as well, you're reading about a world view in which you're being told who won this battle and the strategy and the tactics. There are people here who are obviously the grandchildren of the people in this battle, and you're getting all the information. Then, we sent a runner from here to there to tell the people in Marathon that we had won. On the way, the runner met Pan in a clearing, and Pan said to him "Why don't you build me a temple? I want a temple and I want it built on this spot." The runner said okay and he kept running and he was almost dead when he arrived, and they revived him, and he told them that the Greeks had taken the battle and also that Pan wanted a temple. These days we would tell the event as: Greeks won the battle. That's the real thing that happened. The runner seeing Pan we treat as either apocryphal or as imagination or as an over-stressed mind ... The point being that you had a world in which the gods were written about and treated as simply part of the world. And I thought wouldn't it be a really cool thing to try and put that into the here and now. If people did come over with their gods, what are their gods doing, how are their gods doing? That's really where the whole thing sprang from.<sup>332</sup>

Gaiman's protagonist is also attracted to *Histories* 6.105, and he uses it as a means of illustrating to Sam Black Crow why the *Histories* is so appealing to read:

And there's battles in there, all sorts of normal things. And then there are the gods. Some guy running back to report on the outcome of a battle and he's running and running, and he sees Pan in a glade. And Pan says "Tell them to build me a temple here". So he says okay, and runs the rest of the way back. And he reports the battle news, and then says, "Oh, and by the way, Pan wants you to build him a temple." It's really matter-of-fact, you know? (2004: 184)

Outside of Pan's interaction with Pheidippides, the gods of the *Histories* tend to play less of a tangible role, but their presence is nevertheless a feature. Indeed, as Harrison (2000: 32) states, the *Histories* is saturated with instances of divine intervention. Owing to the nature of each source, how this plays out in both the novel and the work of history is different but there are some shared characteristics. In the *Histories*, as in *American Gods*, the gods play their part in the wars depicted. Gaiman's gods are physically present amidst the fray, both in the lead up to the conflagration as well as on the battlefield. This is not the case in the *Histories*, in which it is only humans who appear amongst the fighting.<sup>333</sup> In the *Histories* 'Greek gods do not in Homeric fashion make an epiphany

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<sup>332</sup> Dornemann and Everding (2001).

<sup>333</sup> See for example *Histories* 8.38-9.

in battle' (Mikalson 2012: 189) but they are described as participating to a certain degree. There is the suggestion, for example, that at Plataea Demeter prevented Persian soldiers from entering her sanctuary. Why this was done, proposes Herodotus, is 'that the Goddess herself would not let them in, because they had burnt her sanctuary at Eleusis' (9.65). But Demeter is not shown performing this action and this separates the divine action that can be found in Gaiman's fantasy novel from that which is evident in Herodotus' *Histories*.

The requirements of each genre go some way to explaining why Gaiman's gods are more defined as characters. This may account for why Gaiman latched on to the Pan episode in Book 6 when he described to Everding and Dornemann what attracted him to the *Histories*. Pan's appearance to Pheidippides is the only example in the *Histories* of an encounter with a divinity in which the god speaks directly to a mortal and not through an intermediary, such as an oracle. And so, whereas Gaiman's gods are fully rounded characters with back stories, motives, and so on, Herodotus' 'characterization of the divine is made up only of the broadest brush strokes'.<sup>334</sup> In this respect then it could be argued that *American Gods* has more in common with Homer's depiction of the gods than what is found in the *Histories*, as the Homeric gods are active participants in the events of the narrative, including on the battlefield. Prosser (2015) certainly finds the comparison between Homer's gods and Gaiman's narrative to be apt and describes Shadow's wife Laura as representing the 'flawed Athena' (2015: 10) of a novel she describes as being a modern interpretation of Homer's *Odyssey*. The elements of Athena she sees in Laura include being the mentor, guide, and protector of Shadow who through her un-dead status 'has an element of preternatural awareness of impending events, often alluding to or warning Shadow of what is to come' (2015: 14). And so, whilst the Greek gods do not feature as characters in the narrative, their presence exists on a thematic level at the very least, both in Laura's characterisation and Pan's influence on how the gods are presented.

There are other intertextual comparisons that can be drawn from the depiction of the gods in *American Gods*. Gaiman is adamant that *Histories* 6.105 was the deciding factor in their manifestation within the narrative, but the approach is comparable to other novels within the genre, too. Gene Wolfe's *Soldier of the Mist*, which was discussed in the introduction to Part II of this thesis, has a protagonist who communicates with the Greek gods and the novel, like *American Gods*, is split into four parts. Gaiman has not stated that the depiction of the gods in Wolfe's novel was a direct influence. However, he was an admirer of the author and his work. His fantasy novel

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<sup>334</sup> Harrison (2000: 32).

*Stardust* was dedicated to Wolfe and his wife Rosemary, and in a 2011 article in the *Guardian* series called 'My Hero' Gaiman chose to write of Wolfe, stating:

He's my hero because he keeps trying new ways of writing and because he remains as kind and as patient with me as he was when I was almost a boy. He's the finest living male American writer of SF and fantasy – possibly the finest living American writer. Most people haven't heard of him. And that doesn't bother Gene in the slightest. He just gets on with writing the next book.<sup>335</sup>

The Hugo award-winning science fantasy novel *Lord of Light* (1967) in which versions of Hindu and Buddhist deities live as gods amongst humans on a colonised planet has more of a tangible link to *American Gods*, as Gaiman dedicated the novel to its author Roger Zelazny (1937-1955). Finally, Diana Wynne Jones' children's fantasy novel *Eight Days of Luke* (1975) also shares a commonality in its rendering of the Norse gods in a modern setting. The events of the novel are set in motion by the involvement of a boy called Luke, who is in fact Loki. A version of Odin also features in the novel under the name Mr. Wedding, as opposed to Gaiman's Mr Wednesday. When questioned about this similarity, Gaiman stated that whilst he developed the idea independently the novels do 'bear an odd relationship, like second cousins once removed or something.'<sup>336</sup> And, as with the previous authors, Gaiman was a friend and admirer of Wynne Jones.<sup>337</sup> What this illustrates is that whilst the author does highlight the *Histories* as his source of inspiration on this particular matter, it is also set within a network of references that is characteristic of Gaiman's writing in general, and *American Gods* in particular.

#### **4.3: The Deception of Low Key Lyesmith**

The *Histories* is introduced into Gaiman's narrative by a character who is already manipulating the actions of the hero. As well as encouraging the protagonist to read the *Histories*, he also gifts the book to Shadow upon Low Key's transfer to another prison, and conceals several coins within the pages, as coins 'were contraband: you can sharpen the edges against a stone, slice open someone's face in a fight.' However, 'Shadow didn't want a weapon; [he] just wanted something to do with his hands' (2004: 7). The book is abandoned by Shadow upon his own release from prison, but whilst he 'left behind Low Key's Herodotus' (2004: 14) its influence remains with him. Low Key

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<sup>335</sup> Gaiman (2013).

<sup>336</sup> Gaiman (2001b).

<sup>337</sup> Gaiman (2011).

introduces the *Histories* as a physical object into the narrative and is one of two characters, the other being Shadow, that interacts with the physical copy of the *Histories* within the narrative. His association with the work is to the fore from the beginning of the novel. He is its champion and is responsible for Shadow's connection to the text.

Low Key is also linked to the *Histories* via one particular passage: Solon's declaration that you can call no man happy until he is dead (*Histories* 1.32).<sup>338</sup> This passage is featured early in the narrative of *American Gods* and occurs whilst Shadow is still incarcerated:

‘And then you’ll be happy?’ asked Low Key Lyesmith. That day they were working in the prison shop, assembling bird-feeders, which was barely more interesting than stamping out license plates.

‘Call no man happy, said Shadow, ‘until he is dead.’

‘Herodotus,’ said Low Key. ‘Hey. You’re learning.’

‘Who the fuck’s Herodotus?’ asked the Iceman, slotting together the sides of a birdfeeder, and passing it to Shadow, who bolted and screwed it tight.

‘Dead Greek,’ said Shadow. (2004: 6)

Felton (2015) regards the positioning of the reference so early in the narrative as appropriate because in ‘*American Gods*, as in the *Histories* itself, the sentiment is programmatic, introducing a theme crucial to both novels: reversal of fortune’. Moreover, it is notable that the frequency of the passage's occurrence in the novel is reminiscent of its application in the *Histories*. Cartledge and Greenwood (2012: 357), for example, note of how ‘Solon’s insight into the changeability of human fortunes echoes Herodotus’ statement in the proem (1.5)’.<sup>339</sup> But its recurrence is not restricted to proem alone, Harrison (2000: 51) describes how ‘Solonian’ ideas appear at times to be embedded in Herodotus’ narrative, such as in his account of Egypt (2000: 59f). Indeed, he goes on to argue that the *Histories* seem to be ‘founded on the principle of the instability of human fortune’ (Harrison 2000: 62),<sup>340</sup> and, similarly, the importance of this theme can be found in *American Gods*.

With this particular reading in mind, the effect Solon’s statement has on Herodotus’ narrative is similar to what occurs in *American Gods*. When the passage is first introduced by Gaiman the protagonist may be in jail, but he still has a wife and a home to go to once he is released. However, soon the character loses Laura; is released from prison early; attends his wife’s funeral;

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<sup>338</sup> See, for example, Chiasson (1986) and Hollman (2015).

<sup>339</sup> Shapiro (1996: 348), for example, states ‘the position of Solon’s speech indicates that Herodotus meant it to be programmatic, setting forth basic assumptions about the nature of human life and its relation to the gods which could then provide a philosophical framework for the *Histories* as a whole.’

<sup>340</sup> See also Harrison (2018: 345f).

discovers she was unfaithful and that her infidelity led to her own and his best friend's death; and begins to work for the mysterious Mr Wednesday. Moreover, when the passage is alluded to once again later in the novel the fortunes of the central characters have altered so drastically it seems Gaiman had deliberately included this reference as means of emphasising the dramatic turn of events, as Felton suggests. Prior to the novel's second explicit reference to 1.32, which is again linked to Low Key Lyesmith, Laura has risen from the dead, thanks to a magic coin that was tossed into her grave, and is following her husband on his travels, albeit in a helpful manner in that she helps him escape from the supporters of the New Gods. At this stage in the novel, Mr Wednesday's murder has also been carried out by the New Gods, whilst he was attempting to appease them. This is the action that rallies the Old Gods and prompts Shadow to collect Mr. Wednesday's corpse from them. In addition to this and unbeknownst to Shadow, Low Key, has been leading the New Gods whilst assuming the name 'Mr World'.<sup>341</sup>

Whilst retrieving Mr Wednesday's corpse, it is Low Key/Loki in the guise of Mr World who reminds Shadow of *Histories* 1.32: 'He smiled at Shadow. "Call no man happy, huh, kid?" he said. And then he too walked away' (2004: 483). The reversal of fortune on display here was orchestrated by Mr Wednesday and Low Key, as part of their scheme to fool the other gods, and perhaps Low Key is the one to introduce the *Histories* to Shadow as means of signalling his deception to both Shadow and the reader. For Swanstrom (2012: 12), the story of Croesus and Solon can be read as a 'very subtly deployed' example of misdirection by the author. By having Low Key introduce Shadow to the story Swanstrom suggests Low Key is 'looking out for Shadow by tuning him in to the vagaries of fate' (2012: 13). And so it is that by the third reference to *Histories* 1.32 Shadow is completely 'in tune' with the 'moral' of the passage, although the interlocutor in this instance is not Low Key and, hence, he misinterprets his meaning.<sup>342</sup>

'Are you happy?' asked Mr Nancy, suddenly. He had been staring at Shadow for several hours. Whenever Shadow glanced over to his right, Mr Nancy was looking at him with his earth-brown eyes.

'Not really,' said Shadow. 'But I'm not dead yet.'  
'Huh?'

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<sup>341</sup> This is not the only example of Loki adopting disguises within Gaiman's work. In Gaiman's acclaimed comic book series, *The Sandman*, the deity can change his appearance. Moreover, one of his nicknames in the series is 'Lie-Smith'. There is even further divine overlap between the world depicted in *American Gods* and *The Sandman* universe with Bast, Odin, Huginn, and Muninn appearing in both works.

<sup>342</sup> Although, rather interestingly, Anna Birgitta Rooth's monograph *Loki in Scandinavian Mythology* (1961) concluded that Loki's original form was that of a spider, which is the form associated with Anansi in African folklore. Moreover, both deities are classified as trickster figures in their respective mythos.

‘Call no man happy until he is dead. Herodotus.’

Mr Nancy raised a white eyebrow, and he said, ‘I’m not dead yet, and, mostly because I’m not dead yet, I’m happy as a clamboy.’

‘The Herodotus thing. It doesn’t mean that the dead are happy,’ said Shadow. ‘It means that you can’t judge the shape of someone’s life until it’s over and done.’

I don’t even judge then,’ said Mr Nancy. ‘And as for happiness, there’s a lot of different kinds of happiness, just as there’s a hell of a lot of different kinds of dead. Me, I’ll just take what I can get when I can get it.’

Shadow changed the subject. (2004: 549-50)

Gaiman’s use of *Histories* 1.32 in *American Gods*, then, occurs at varying stages throughout the span of the novel’s narrative. The interaction between Solon and Croesus is considered to be ‘one of the most important sources for Herodotus’ ethical, religious, historical, and philosophical views’ (Asheri 2007: 97). Whether Gaiman, too, wanted to apply a similar didactic purpose to his novel is debatable. Certainly, the instability of fortune contributes to Gaiman’s depiction of the United States of America and the position of the gods within it. Where formerly they were worshipped and valued, now they are confined to surviving as best they can in an increasingly hostile and, arguably, shallow world that worships money, technology, and celebrity.

Beyond these Herodotean connections, *Low Key* also returns us to a concept that has been a feature across the novels discussed thus far and that is of the Herodotean parallel. The inclusion of a Herodotean ‘alter-ego’ echoes what can be found in the *Histories*. Friedman (2008: 167) notes that ‘in representing himself in the *Histories* as a traveller who is able to see the big picture, Herodotus ... creates some interesting analogies between himself and some of the figures who populate his work.’ As well as figures including Democedes (3.125, 3.131-137) and Arion (1.24), Solon has also been compared to Herodotus. Indeed, Pelling (2006: 104) has observed that the Athenian ‘has much in common with the wise traveller Herodotus himself’, whilst Shapiro (1996) has argued that Herodotus supported the ideas that Solon’s expresses in the *Histories*.<sup>343</sup> *Low Key*’s connections to Herodotus and Solon prompts the suggestion that he may, too, serve a similar role in *American Gods* through his promotion of the theme of the instability of fortune to the protagonist.

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<sup>343</sup> Whilst not all concur with such a reading, see, for example, Lang (1984) and Waters (1985), Shapiro examines passages in the *Histories* that correspond with Solon’s statements including the mutability of fortune that Solon speaks of in *Histories* 1.32. As well as being a key feature of Gaiman’s application of Herodotus’ work, the theme can be seen reflected in the Herodotus’ Proem (1.5), as well as passages such as 3.33 where the source of Cambyses’ madness is queried: ‘whether or not his madness was due to his treatment of Apis. It may, indeed, have been the result of any one of the many maladies which afflict mankind.’

Low Key's association with Herodotus and the *Histories* is extended further when the nature of the deity he represents is taken into consideration. His alter-ego's surname of 'Lyesmith', his true identity being the incarnation of the Norse trickster deity, and his role as the co-conspirator behind the false conflict of *American Gods* connects the character to issues surrounding deception and lies. The Loki of myth is notorious for stoking trouble amongst his fellow supernatural beings, often with malicious intent.<sup>344</sup> How Low Key's true nature connects to Herodotus is through the historian's status as the father of lies. This is a reception of the *Histories* that dates back to antiquity. As was observed earlier in this thesis, attacks on the credibility of Herodotus' work range from Plutarch's *On the Malice of Herodotus* where the work is described as being full of 'fictions and fabrications' (854f) to Ctesias of Cnidus' *Persica* in which he accuses Herodotus 'of falsehood in many passages and calls him an inventor of fables' (Photius *Library* 72.1 ).<sup>345</sup>

The label that emerged in antiquity continues to the present and is addressed in *American Gods*. Sam Black Crow, a hitchhiker who travels with Shadow, states that whilst she has not read the *Histories*, she has heard of Herodotus. She asks the protagonist, 'Isn't he the one they call the father of lies?' (2004: 183). Shadow responds to her by saying he 'thought that was the Devil', to which Sam replies 'Yeah, him too' (2004: 183).<sup>346</sup> Sam justifies her assumption by referring to 'giant ants and gryphons guarding gold mines', which she states is evidence enough to support the fact that 'he made this stuff up' (2004: 183). Shadow, however, disagrees by noting that Herodotus 'wrote what he's been told' (2004: 183). Shadow's stance here corresponds with Herodotus' own assertions at 2.123, where he states that he will 'record the traditions of the various nations just as I heard them', and 7.152, where he reiterates that 'My business is to record what people say, but I am by no means bound to believe it'. What their exchange illustrates is that whilst Shadow dismisses complaints regarding inaccuracy within the *Histories* by using Herodotus' own argument to support the ancient author, Gaiman does show some awareness of issues surrounding Herodotus' reliability. The level of engagement with this academic debate in *American Gods* is not on the scale of Vidal's in *Creation*, for example, but its inclusion in this section of the narrative suggests that Gaiman may have been purposefully alluding to this topic when linking the character of Low Key to Herodotus.

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<sup>344</sup> See Kvilhaug (2018).

<sup>345</sup> See, also, Priestley (2014: 209-219).

<sup>346</sup> Rata (2015: 101) calls this part of their exchange an example of metatextuality, as the connection between Herodotus and the devil here allows for a dialogue to be read between the *Histories* and the *Bible*.

#### **4.4: Shadow's Herodotean Road-Trip**

*American Gods* opens with a 'Caveat, and Warning for Travelers [sic]' in which Gaiman advises his reader that 'This is a work of fiction, not a guidebook' (2004: xv). What may prompt a reader to think of it as being such is the journey which Shadow undertakes through the narrative. Bay (2001: 153), for example, lists travel writing as one of the genres that the novel embraces. The concept of journeying is a common motif in Gaiman's work and is readily apparent in *American Gods*.<sup>347</sup> As Bealer and Luria observe,

Because Gaiman typically introduces his fantastic worlds through the eyes of a character who is, like the reader, seeing them for the first time, part of the pleasure of these stories is the joy of exploration ... the reader embarks on a richly described encounter with an unfamiliar place, making these stories fictive travel literature—topographies of the imaginary where maps are philosophical rather than geographic (2012: vii).

Gaiman links the development of *American Gods* to several journeys he undertook towards the turn of the millennium. The Herodotus connection, he claims, emerged upon his first visit to the United States and consequently is an influence on the shaping of his depiction of America. Within the novel it is Shadow who undertakes a journey of discovery encountering wonders and acquiring knowledge on the places he visits from the people he meets. Marincola (1996: xiii-xiv) defines Herodotus' descriptions of the varying cultures he writes of as follows: 'When treating a people, it is Herodotus' habit to comment on their monuments, religious beliefs, customs, livelihoods and the natural wonders of their countries'. When describing encounters with new communities *American Gods* ticks all the boxes of this checklist. From the moment he is released from prison, Shadow spends the majority of the novel travelling across the United States. This gives Gaiman the chance not only to adopt this Herodotean approach to ethnography but also to add to his cultural collage by offering local histories and geographical descriptions of the places Shadow visits.

Receiving information from oral informants is a frequent means of attaining knowledge that Shadow experiences during his travels and is reminiscent of Herodotus' references to his own sources.<sup>348</sup> In *American Gods* this can be seen in the often rather fanciful yarns of Hinzemann. 'Shadow enjoyed Hinzemann's company – the reminiscences, the tall tales, the goblin grin of the old man' (2004: 314) the reader is told, and, indeed, such stories add to the multi-layered narrative

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<sup>347</sup> See, for example, his 1999 fantasy novel *Stardust*.

<sup>348</sup> See, for example, Hornblower (2012).

that Gaiman weaves into his plot. It is through Hinzemann that Shadow learns of the history, culture, and, indeed, wonders associated with the fictional town of Lakeside. When he takes Shadow on a ‘Grand Tour’ of the town the reader learns of its topography, climate, architecture, some of the customs practised by its townsfolk, including hunting and knitting, and the history of its library (2004: 271f). He even concludes with the bizarre tale of a skinless stag and proclaims to Shadow: ‘if you think there’s a word of a lie in that, I can prove it to you. I’ve got the antlers up on my rec room wall to this day’ (2004: 273). Such a scene is compatible to Herodotus obtaining knowledge from the Egyptian priest he speaks of in Book 2 of the *Histories*, which features repeated statements highlighting their interactions such as ‘The priests told me that’ (2.99), ‘Next the priests read to me’ (2.100), and ‘the Priests went on to tell me’ (2.107). And whilst Lloyd (2007: 237), for example, warns that ‘we cannot simply assume that he visited every place he mentions’ the description is certainly meant to convey that Herodotus visited the region. *American Gods* replicates this aspect of Herodotus’ account with Shadow’s visit to the American version of Egypt,<sup>349</sup> complete with its own Egyptian gods who have settled in Illinois in a city rather appropriately called Cairo.

Why this region is called Egypt is explained to Shadow on his journey there. Mr. Wednesdays’ ravens, Huginn (‘thought’) and Muninn (‘memory’ or ‘mind’), advise Shadow to visit ‘Kay-ro ... in Egypt’, but this, quite understandably, confuses him. He asks them to elaborate: ‘How am I going to go to Egypt?’ (2004: 172), but they are not prepared to explain and simply tell him to ‘Follow Mississippi. Go south. Find Jackal.’ When he asks for help at a gas station, a woman there shows him a map and goes into more detail regarding the name:

‘Cairo?’

‘That’s how they pronounce the one in Egypt. The one in Little Egypt, they call Kayro. They got a Thebes down there, all sorts. My sister-in-law comes from Thebes. I asked her about the one in Egypt, she looked at me as if I had a screw loose.’ The woman chuckled like a drain.

‘Any pyramids?’ The city was five hundred miles away, almost directly south.

‘Not that they ever told me. They call it Little Egypt because back, oh, mebbe a hundred, hundred and fifty years back, there was a famine all over. Crops failed. But they didn’t fail down there. So everybody went there to buy food. Like

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<sup>349</sup> Shadow’s voyage to Egypt also connects him to the Herodotean alter-ego Solon. As was noted in the previous section, Solon has been read as speaking for Herodotus in the *Histories*. Solon is also depicted as having travelled to Egypt during his decade away from Athens, as recounted in *Histories* 1.30, where he visits the court of Amasis. This, then, adds another layer of connection between the Athenian lawmaker and Shadow beyond the bond he and Low Key share with *Histories* 1.32.

in the Bible. Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat. Off we go to Egypt, bad-a-boom.’ (2004: 174)

Later, there is another explanation as to why it is called Egypt: ‘It’s in the delta of the Ohio and Mississippi. Like Cairo in Egypt, in the Nile Delta’ (2004: 182). That Shadow should be told two reasons for the nickname once again parallels Herodotus own informants, whose accounts can sometimes contradict each other. The occurrence reinforces the connection of Shadow to the characteristic of Herodotus as the traveller who gathers data from sources, and thus he conforms to the second aspect of Herodotus on display in *American Gods*.

#### **4.5: The *Histories* of Mr. Ibis**

Whilst the central narrative of *American Gods* revolves around Shadow and his attempt to navigate this new reality he has discovered, Gaiman’s scope extends beyond temporal limits of the main story. The chronology within this story remains linear and follows Shadow from his release from prison to the aftermath of the final battle. Around this, however, Gaiman inserts several analepses. These consist of vignettes describing characters who do not feature in the main narrative and depicts their journeys to, and experiences of the New World. Each segment is entitled ‘Coming to America’, with the exception of one called ‘Somewhere in America’ at page 195, and each illustrates the varying international influences that have shaped American culture over the millennia.

The first example is found on pages 75-78 and is set in 813 CE. It depicts the arrival of Vikings in North America and adapts material found in the *Grænlandinga Saga* and *Eirik’s Saga*. Both accounts record there being violence between the visitors and the locals. Gaiman’s reworking of this encounter picks up on this particular aspect by including a scene in which the Vikings sacrifice a *scraeling* ‘as tribute to the all-father, the gallows lord’ (2004: 77). The second ‘Coming to America’ story depicts the life of an eighteenth-century Cornish woman from her youth in England to her new life in America (2004: 103f). What follows this is the tale of Salim (2004: 195f). The date of his story is not specified but is presumably late twentieth century. He is an unhappy salesman from Oman who has a one-night stand with a taxi-driver in New York. The taxi driver is in fact an Islamic supernatural being called an Ifrit, and the story ends with the characters swapping lives. The story that follows this is the tale of a brother and sister called Wututu and Agasu and their journey on a slave ship from Africa to the Caribbean in 1778 (2004: 345f), the inclusion of which allows the narrative to acknowledge the role of the Americas in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. The final analepsis is the most ancient, taking place in 14,000 B.C.E., and depicts the crossing of the

Bering Straits by a tribe who worship a god represented by a mammoth skull called Nunyunnini (2004: 445f).

The emphasis in these stories on the migration of the people and their gods to a new land links to similar instances of the movement of peoples in the *Histories*. Gaiman has not discussed this particular aspect of the *Histories*, but his own migration stories are compatible with passages such as 1.94, in which famine results in the resettlement of half the population of Lydia to North Italy. In Gaiman's novel the 'Coming to America' stories often involve a combination of human suffering, such as slavery and the transportation of English criminals to the colonies, coupled with the fantastical element of the presence of supernatural beings. This is a pattern that echoes both the severe famine found at *Histories* 1.94 and the unusual manner in which the Lydians at first attempt to alleviate their hunger. The games they play may not be supernatural but there is an element of the fantastic in such an approach to starvation.

Whilst the 'Coming to America' stories initially seem detached from the sweep of the main narrative of the novel, Dalglish (2001) is correct to argue that these stories 'are not mere filler: they support and elaborate the themes of the novel and are an exemplary model of concise story telling.'<sup>350</sup> Certainly, they exist outside the main narrative with a date range from pre-history to the twentieth century and in this respect they can be compared to the 'digressions' away from the main narrative that Herodotus speaks of at 4.30 and 7.171. However, as Van Wees (2012: 321) observes, those who dismiss the sections of the *Histories* that extend beyond the main narrative as 'mere digressions' badly underestimate 'the scope of Herodotus' ambitions, as set out in his preface'. The same can be argued with regards to the 'Coming to America' stories, as they, too, contribute much to Gaiman's thesis. Whilst the author was not attempting to record 'human achievements' so that they 'may not become forgotten by time',<sup>351</sup> their inclusion emphasises the role migration has played in shaping the culture of the United States of America.<sup>352</sup> From pre-history to the present, the 'Coming to America' stories illustrate the types of journeys undertaken by those who would go on to shape the diverse culture that Gaiman sought to depict in his novel. As Gorman (2018: 170) describes it, these stories 'demonstrate that in this work, there is no unified, singular American History, but rather there are many histories.'

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<sup>350</sup> Dalglish (2001).

<sup>351</sup> *Histories* 1.1.

<sup>352</sup> See, also, Dunbar-Ortiz (2014: 13), who argues that incorporating indigenous communities within the 'nation of immigrants' narrative is harmful because it 'obscures the US practice of colonization' by likening the varied histories of native peoples to those of later colonists.

The focus of these stories on the roots of American culture is comparable to what can be found in the *Histories*. When Herodotus writes of the origins of the Greeks, the migration of people and customs plays a part in his discussion.<sup>353</sup> It has been argued that Herodotus has deliberately done this as a means of challenging ‘the sort of ideas about the Greeks’ common identity expressed in the *Histories* by an Athenian who defines ‘Greekness’ as ‘having the same blood and the same language and common shrines and sacrifices, as well as similar customs’ (van Wees 2012: 324).<sup>354</sup> With this interpretation in mind, when Herodotus states that ‘the names of nearly all the gods came to Greece from Egypt’ at *Histories* 2.50, what he is doing here is not so different to what Gaiman would later attempt to highlight in his novel. The ‘Coming to America’ stories demonstrate how the New World came to be populated by so many divine beings, but they also show how American culture has been subject to countless influences dating back to the first immigrants ever to reach the continent. Hence, when Mr Ibis states that the simplified version of American history is but ‘a fine fiction’ (2004: 103) and proceeds to present the true origins, one cannot help but draw comparisons to what Herodotus wrote about the foundations of Greek culture 2,500 years ago.

Mr Ibis is the key figure regarding this aspect of Gaiman’s narrative, as he is the author of the novel’s alternative account of American history. It is in the second ‘Coming to America’ story where Gaiman reveals that these accounts are being written by the character of Mr Ibis:

The important thing to understand about American history,’ wrote Mr Ibis, in his leather-bound journal, is that it is fictional, a charcoal-sketched simplicity for the children, or the easily bored. For the most part it is uninspected, unimagined, unthought, a representation of the thing and not the thing itself. It is a fine fiction, *he continued, pausing to dip his pen in the inkwell, collect his thoughts, and to continue,* that America was founded by pilgrims, seeking the freedom to believe as they wished, that they came to the America, spread and bred and filled the empty land (2004: 103).

This character has not yet appeared in the main narrative and so the implication of this reveal is not apparent. Nevertheless, with regards to Gaiman’s reception of the *Histories*, it is a significant moment. First, it is worth noting that, as well as the tattered paperback copy of the *Histories* which Shadow reads in prison, the *Histories* also appears later in the novel ‘bound in peeling brown leather’ at Lakeside (2004: 319). And so, on a superficial level, the second appearance of the *Histories* as a book can be connected to Mr Ibis’ leather-bound journal. It is also appropriate that Mr Ibis should

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<sup>353</sup> See, for example, *Histories* 1.56-58, 1.153, 1.171, 2.171, 4.180, 5.88, 6.60, 6.136-138.

<sup>354</sup> *Histories* 8.144.2.

be compiling his own history of the continent given that he is the incarnation of the Egyptian god Thoth, the god of knowledge and writing. In Gaiman's story he, along with Mr Jacquel (Anubis), runs a funeral parlour in Cairo, Illinois and they have a cat that is the incarnation of the goddess Bastet.<sup>355</sup>

The journey of the divine trio dates back three thousand five hundred and thirty years, 'Give or take' (2004: 211), thus linking the character to the tales of migration he carefully records. As Mr Ibis recounts the tale of their arrival in America to Shadow, he reveals how they came with Egyptian traders travelling across the Atlantic with 'Animal skins. Some food. Copper from the mines in the upper peninsula.' However, 'The whole thing was rather a disappointment. Not worth the effort. They stayed here long enough to believe in us, to sacrifice to us, and for a handful of traders to die of fever and be buried here, leaving us behind' (2004: 211). In this passage he takes on a double role. First, he occupies the position of oral informant to Shadow's knowledge-seeking traveller. Secondly, the passage displays his characterisation as the figure within the novel who shares historical knowledge with others. Mr Ibis conveys the long history of migration to America to Shadow (2004: 212-3) and offers to read his stories, likely the 'Coming to America' stories, to the protagonist.<sup>356</sup> The information he delivers, both through his writing and orally, emphasizes the notion that people have been travelling to America from across the world for a long time, certainly much longer than the traditional story of the Pilgrim fathers and, hence, why Mr Ibis calls it 'a fine fiction'. These connections also suggests that he is the character to be paralleled to the

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<sup>355</sup> Rata (2015: 110) describes their occupation as an example of hypertextuality in the form of parody, which Gaiman employs for his gods as a means of signifying their identity. And so, their connections to death in Egyptian beliefs has resulted in them being morticians. As Rata (2015: 110) puts it, they have become 'caricatures of their old selves'.

<sup>356</sup> Mr Ibis later mentions this to Shadow: "There's nothing special about coming to America. I've been writing stories about it, from time to time." They began to walk again. "True stories?" "Up to a point, yes. I'll let you read one or two if you like." (2004: 211-12). Later, he continues, "Did the Irish come to America in the dark ages you ask me? Of course they did, and the Welsh, and the Vikings, while the Africans from the West Coast,—what in later days they called the slave coast or the ivory coast—they were trading with South America, and the Chinese visited Oregon a couple of times—they called it Fu Sang. The Basque established their secret sacred fishing grounds off the coast of Newfoundland twelve hundred years back. Now, I suppose you're going to say, but Mister Ibis, these people were primitives, they didn't have radio controls and vitamin pills and jet airplanes ... The misconception is that men didn't travel long distances in boats before the days of Columbus. Yet New Zealand and Tahiti and countless Pacific Islands were settled by people in boats whose navigation skills would have put Columbus to shame; and the wealth of Africa was from trading, although that was mostly to the East, to India and China. My people, the Nile folk, we discovered early on that a reed boat will take you around the world, if you have the patience and enough jars of sweet water. You see, the biggest problem with coming to America in the old days was that there wasn't a lot here that anyone wanted to trade, and it was much too far away" (2004: 12-3).

aspect of Herodotus that records history for the education of others. And so, whilst Shadow fulfilled his Herodotean role through obtaining ethnographical information from oral informants during his travels, Mr Ibis occupies the Herodotean position of gathering stories in order to preserve them for posterity.

#### **4.6: Conclusion**

When speaking of the Herodotean influence on the *American Gods*, Gaiman has been more inclined to concentrate on the role of the divine. Given the narrative's emphasis on the existence of gods in America that he should focus on this particular feature is understandable. This is because *Histories* 6.105 was important in shaping how the gods appear within the story. The appearance of Pan to Pheidippides correlates with Shadow's discovery that the gods of all nations live amongst the citizens of the United States. In the narrative, the role of the divine characters is to signify the multiplicity of influences on the culture of America. From the mammoth-headed god of the first migrants to the Slavic deity Czernobog, each represents the fact that the history of America is composed of multiple narratives. As Gorman (2018: 180) puts it, 'There is no History, but there are histories. There is no America, but there are Americas. There is no God, but there are gods.'

This is a theme that can also be connected to Herodotus beyond his influence on the depiction of the gods in *American Gods*. There are three characters in the narrative that possess features which can be paralleled to Herodotus. Low Key Lyemsmith and Shadow Moon are linked to Herodotus and his work through their possession of a copy of the *Histories* and their dialogues on Herodotean themes, including Solon's advice to Croesus in *Histories* 1.32. Individually they also connect to traits that have been attached to Herodotus as a writer. Low Key's characterisation as an untrustworthy trickster shows some connection to the accusation of Herodotus being father of lies, a criticism that is featured within the narrative. As a traveller who obtains knowledge through observation and from oral testimony, Shadow serves as an analogue for Herodotus' description of his travels within the *Histories*. Shadow's role is complimented by the character of Mr Ibis who records the novel's alternative version of American history. Having multiple characters represent different aspects of Herodotus and the *Histories* plays into the theme of multiplicity that runs throughout the narrative. There is no monolithic identity of America just as there is no monolithic approach to understanding Herodotus and his *Histories*, and *American Gods* illustrates this by presenting the reader with several ways of accessing the man and his work.

## Conclusion

This thesis opened with an example of Herodotean reception that inhabited the realms of both fiction and travel writing. Using a variety of sources, Richard Lister reimagined the *Histories* as a biographical travelogue of Herodotus, with the content employed to reflect a lifetime's worth of journeys. Chief amongst his tools in this were the *Histories* and Lister's own imagination. For whilst *The Travels of Herodotus* may have drawn on contemporary research to underline Herodotus' veracity to the reader, the work relies on Lister's imaginative processes in its construction. Employing an older text in such a manner was a method Lister had employed before, and so revealed a trait that was peculiar to the author. What the work also possessed was two modes of reception that can often be observed in books which engage with Herodotus and his *Histories*: the concept of the Herodotean personality and the tension between fact and fiction in *Histories*-inspired texts.

My purpose in this thesis was to explore how my chosen texts engaged with the *Histories* and what can be determined from the choices of their authors. Why, for instance, does Gore Vidal adopt a hostile stance to Herodotus' account in *Creation*? What reasoning lay behind Freya Stark's decision to promote Herodotus to the role of travel companion in *Ionia: A Quest*? My chief concern here was to establish the aspects of the *Histories* that inspire such readings in conjunction with the role an author's understanding of the text reveals about their individual renderings. What did each author aim to achieve by adding the *Histories* to their writing? I sought to explore how authors draw on both the details of Herodotus' account and his reputation within the realms of the novel and travel literature. This is because Herodotus' status plays an important role in these six case studies since he is regarded as both the father of history and a proto-travel writer.

Through my six case studies I examined the authorial choices and wider contexts that informed these engagements with Herodotus and found that there was a degree of consistency that could be detected amongst the varied texts. Central to the three examples of travel literature was the belief on the part of their authors that the nature of Herodotus the man can be easily drawn from the text of the *Histories*. It was a common reading within the genre to regard Herodotus as a predecessor, a stance that was largely inspired by Herodotus' own descriptions of his travels in the *Histories*. Where these case studies stood out was in how they expanded upon the notion of Herodotus as a 'fellow traveller' with their acknowledgement of this status leading to deeper explorations of Herodotus' character. Each rendering of 'Herodotus' in these examples was also shaped by the authors' predilections. Consequently, whilst the authors were unified in identifying traits they saw in Herodotus, such as amiability and curiosity, each book creates what is essentially a hybrid figure who displays elements that can be attributed to the interests of his respective

creator. If the travel literature examples can be characterised by their emphasis on the role of Herodotus as a proto-travel writer, the three novels I examined in the second part of my thesis were more concerned with Herodotus' status as the 'father of history'. Although occupying different genres, these novels were concerned with challenging the notion that there can only be one official version of history. Rather, the need to look to alternative accounts is crucial in gaining a true understanding of our collective history. With Herodotus' *Histories* situated at the beginning of Western narrative history, it can be read as representing the flaws within this tradition, but the authors also utilize the *Histories* as a means of critiquing such conventions. And so it is that whilst the novelists see historical accounts as being subject to biases and a fair degree of manipulation, the travel writers inadvertently prove this in their imaginative renderings of Herodotus.

### **1. The Herodotus of Part I**

Part I of the thesis concentrated on Herodotus' *Histories* place within the genre of travel writing. Herodotus' descriptions of obtaining data through travel has led to the account being regarded as a work of proto-travel literature. Although his work does not conform to many of the common tropes, the category of travel literature encompasses a variety of forms, thus leading Herodotus to be regarded as a forefather. His presence within the genre also stems from his value as a literary resource, and so I also surveyed instances where he is cited in such works. This highlighted a significant mode of reception within the genre whilst offering some differentiation from my main case studies. This is largely because in the majority of these instances, Herodotus is included to supplement an author's account of their travels, as he is perceived to be an authority on the region in which an author is travelling. I then explored examples where the *Histories* is used as a guide. Beyond seeing Herodotus as an authoritative source of data, these authors enhance their travels by experiencing regions via Herodotus' account, regardless of the chasm of time that exists between the modern traveller and their ancient counterpart. I finished this by drawing attention to texts that demonstrate an engagement with Herodotus as a personality. This is a substantial feature of the case studies discussed in Part I where authors partake in lengthy interactions with Herodotus as a character. Here the interactions are briefer, but they provide some access into how travel writers can be compelled to draw out a character for Herodotus in their work regardless of the difficulties in determining the nature of Herodotus from his writing.

With Chapter Two I focussed on the oldest case study in this thesis: Freya Stark's *Ionia: A Quest*. By the time Stark undertook the journey that was the basis of her book she was already an acclaimed figure within the genre. Her method of preparing for a journey involved exhaustively

reading material related to the region she was visiting. As her aim for this voyage was to visit what had formerly been the Ionian region of Asia Minor, Herodotus' inclusion resulted from the location of his birthplace on the Western coast of modern-day Turkey. Her interaction with Herodotus, however, is different in comparison to the other sources Stark cites in the book. She had referenced the *Histories* in her writing previously, and would again in later work, but here Herodotus is elevated by the author to the position of travel companion and is described as being a near-constant presence during her journey through Western Turkey. Stark's aim was to access a vision of the past that she yearned for, and the *Histories* was one of the texts that permitted her to do this. Of the many sources she drew on, I wanted to explore why it was that the *Histories* was the most prominent in her travelogue. First Herodotus' status provided a degree of legitimisation to her recreation of the past. She addresses her desire at the start of the work to provide knowledge of the history of the region to her reader, hence the extensive use of sources throughout the book. Highlighting Herodotus' description as the father of history and emphasising his importance in the travelogue's construction plays into this desire for the impression of accuracy.

Stark's engagement also demonstrates a trait that is evident in later case studies. Namely, she displays an appreciation for Herodotus' narrative voice, whilst simultaneously attaching her own tastes upon it. Stark's Herodotus can be summarised in one word: 'sensible'. How this manifests is through the presentation of a figure who understood the foibles of the human condition and saw the value of cross-cultural exchange. The latter was of particular concern to Stark who saw herself as a mediator between the English-speaking world and the Arab world; hence her work prior to *Ionia: A Quest* showed a desire to present to her Western audience the rich and complex societies of this region. The notion of Herodotus arriving at sensible conclusions in his account is also connected to Stark's concerns over presenting correct historical data to her reader. She is content with the accuracy of her ancient sources, even when issues surrounding veracity are addressed. This is certainly the case with Herodotus, where she acknowledges the potential for inaccuracy in his account. Nevertheless, Stark's fondness for Herodotus overrides her pursuit for accuracy and points to a key determinant in the depiction of Herodotus in *Ionia: A Quest*; namely that the author's engagement with Herodotus and his work is as much influenced by her preferences as it is by the content of the *Histories*. Consequently, Stark is prone to highlighting what she finds desirable and neglecting what is considered less so.

This introduces a feature that comes to the fore in the work of Ryszard Kapuściński and Justin Marozzi in the twenty-first century where the authors are keen to merge Herodotus' persona with their own. Ryszard Kapuściński's *Travels with Herodotus* describes the author's life-long relationship with Herodotus as he travelled across the world during his career as a journalist. As

with Stark, Herodotus assumes the role of travel companion for Kapuściński, but he takes on a far more prominent role within the narrative, with Kapuściński devoting substantial portions of the book to exploring the historical account of the *Histories*. He describes himself as carrying the *Histories* with him and, as in previously discussed examples, will at times match a passage from the *Histories* to the modern region he is describing. However, Kapuściński also breaks from this tradition by featuring passages that link thematically to the historical circumstances in which Kapuściński is caught, as opposed to describing the history of the region he has visited. At other times, the passage is more of an entertainment that kept the author's mind occupied during lulls in his journey. Kapuściński's interaction with the text also extends beyond the notion of the *Histories* serving as a guide to travel. For Kapuściński, Herodotus is instead a mentor and thus his exploration on the nature of Herodotus sits alongside the description of his travels. He examines characteristics he believes led Herodotus to write the *Histories*. Chief amongst these is what can be defined as Herodotus' curiosity. Kapuściński supposes that the content of the *Histories* coupled with Herodotus' stated method of gathering data suggested a mind that was fascinated with the world around him. This he credited as inspiring his own approach to reportage, as he saw in Herodotus a forefather whose technique had much to teach him.

Another virtue he attaches to Herodotus is 'compassion'. This trait is far more difficult to determine in comparison to Kapuściński's exploration of curiosity. Kapuściński's description of Herodotus acting kindly towards his slaves, for example, is difficult to connect to the content of the *Histories* and illustrates the degree to which the author's rendering of Herodotus is shaped through his preferences. What Kapuściński achieves in tackling the *Histories* in this manner is to craft a wholly positive portrait of his idol. And, as with Stark's version of Herodotus, any unfavourable elements are set aside in favour of an idealised depiction of the ancient writer. Kapuściński clearly wished for his reader to draw parallels between himself and his Herodotus. The fact that Herodotus should occupy such a dominant position within a text that described the journeys undertaken by Kapuściński throughout his career signals a desire for a comparison to be made. Consequently, in *Travels with Herodotus* the author filters Herodotus through his own image whilst simultaneously wishing for the reader to see him in the mould of the ancient writer.

Justin Marozzi's approach to Herodotus and the *Histories* is to emphasize the appeal of both the ancient author and his account to a potential reader. In *The Man Who Invented History* Marozzi presented himself as a passionate defender of Herodotus and his work, and constructed a book dedicated to signalling its value. One way he does this is through associating the work with the concept of pleasure. This he derives from the content of the *Histories*, particularly Herodotus' narrative voice, and generous helpings of his own imagination. As in the previous case studies,

Marozzi has an agenda, and he shapes his version of Herodotus to support it. The Herodotus of *The Man who Invented History* is a traveller in search of the pleasures of life. Indeed, Marozzi likens him to the Grand Tourists of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. This leads Marozzi to highlight passages he believes merit this characterisation. Whilst he is not the first author to have taken this stance regarding Herodotus' work, such a reading can—as with our other texts—be linked to the author's own narrative self-styling. In addition to this, the book is laced with statements in which Marozzi confidently expresses that he knows how Herodotus would have reacted to a situation. He credits this to what he sees as the accessibility of Herodotus' narrative voice. But, again, it is just as likely that Marozzi is imposing his own persona on to the ancient author.

*The Man Who Invented History* also displays the aforementioned tendency in certain travel writers to invite comparisons to Herodotus within the narrative. Marozzi denies such a connection within his account, but some of the individuals he encounters on his travels are recorded as making the parallel for him. Kapuściński's reason for employing this comparison was to justify his approach to reportage, but for Marozzi it is more to emphasise that he is an authority in understanding Herodotus and the *Histories*. One of the book's themes is the author's wish to liberate Herodotus from the clutches of academics who do not appreciate the pleasure that is to be found in reading the *Histories*. And so, by likening himself to Herodotus within his account Marozzi encourages the notion that his interpretation of Herodotus is the correct one because he and Herodotus are of the same mind-set.

The authors featured in Part I are keen to foster a sense of expertise in relation to Herodotus and his *Histories*. This desire is displayed in Stark's copious use of sources throughout *Ionia: A Quest* to highlight the accuracy of her recreation of the past, in Kapuściński's examination of Herodotus and his text throughout the narrative of *Travels with Herodotus*, and in Marozzi's following in the footsteps of Herodotus in *The Man who Invented History*. And yet each author also imposes an element of the imaginary in their rendering of Herodotus as a character. In doing this they enter a tradition that extends beyond the genre of travel literature where traits and motivations are extracted from Herodotus' writing, whether characteristics are detectable or not. From Plutarch to Kingsley to de Sélincourt, the compulsion to draw out the 'real' Herodotus and respond accordingly in a written format is a mode of reception that has continued across the centuries. Stark, Kapuściński, and Marozzi each have their separate means through which they shape their ideal travel companion but in doing so they enter a long-standing tradition both within their genre and beyond.

## **2. The Herodotus of Part II**

As in Part I, my approach to Part II was to open by establishing Herodotus' wider role within the format of the novel. Whilst the majority of examples I included fell within the realm of historical fiction, there was no set genre within this analysis. Herodotus and his *Histories* can be detected in genres as varied as urban fantasy and thriller, and yet it was striking to find that shared modes of reception could be found across these examples. The motif of the travelling storyteller, for example, could be found in various forms across these texts and seems to be drawn from the characteristic of Herodotus travelling in search of knowledge, a feature which had also attracted travel writers to the *Histories*. Similarly, the narratives commonly include characters that take on Herodotean characteristics which encourages comparisons to Herodotus, even when the ancient author is not present within the narrative. This can take the form of a figure who gathers knowledge and either records it through writing or preserves it orally, and usually occurs because the narratives cannot feature a depiction of Herodotus due to the time in which the story takes place. Recreations of Herodotean material were also apparent in these texts where authors would tackle passages of varying length in order to form their narrative. Outside of the main narrative authors could also be found to highlight Herodotus' veracity in their paratextual material. This was especially the case in novels that sought to create a sense of historical accuracy and so would draw on Herodotus' status as the father of history to lend legitimacy to the fiction.

Within these examples, too, could be found reflections on the nature of fact versus fiction and the ambiguity of Herodotus' account within the *Histories*. Indeed, within the *Histories* Herodotus employs the methods of fiction in order to expand his content. The tension that arises from the degree to which fiction is employed within the composition of historical narratives is a unifying thread that runs through the three case studies that dominate Part II. Each example possesses tropes that were evident in the novels surveyed in the introduction and each seeks to reflect on the potential for the corruption of historical accounts, using Herodotus' *Histories* as a tool in this interrogation. This is partially connected to Herodotus' position at the beginnings of Western narrative history. But Herodotus' inclusion of non-Greek peoples in his depiction of the world likely also played a part in the modern authors' attraction to the text. In his proem Herodotus emphasised that the deeds of all peoples would be included in his narrative, a gesture which on the surface level suggests a desire to disengage from the potential for nationalist self-aggrandizing that could potentially stem from a historical account focussed on the Greeks twice defeating the Persians.

Gore Vidal's novel *Creation* presents itself as a contrary account of the Greco-Persian Wars, with the emphasis being on how little the Persian defeat meant to the Persians. Herodotus' *Histories* is central to this thanks to the wars being a major feature of his work. Consequently, the novel's narrator frequently cites Herodotus' account when describing the inaccuracy of the Greek version of events. In this thesis I explored how the character of Cyrus can be paralleled to aspects of Vidal's biography, regardless of how Vidal denied such equivalences. The value in exploring this autobiographical connection is that it interacts with the novel's concerns over the potential for inaccuracy in historical accounts. The central premise of the novel demonstrates this with Cyrus 'correcting' what is characterised as the accepted Greek version of the Greco-Persian Wars. And yet Vidal acknowledged that the narrator's account is also flawed, thus creating a sense of caution in accepting as fact the events of the narrative. Vidal's denial of a personal connection adds another layer to this theme. The parallels that are apparent between the fictional characters and aspects of Vidal's life suggest that the author's version cannot be taken at face value, which is in keeping with this thematic strand.

Another significant feature in the narrative is the Herodotean parallel-figure, with *Creation* featuring both Herodotus as a character and a Herodotus-type figure in the form of Cyrus who adopts features of Herodotus' persona. Cyrus takes on the role of the traveller in search of knowledge who becomes a travelling storyteller. Moreover, there are passages within Cyrus' account that draw substantially from the *Histories* and signal that Vidal found Herodotus' account more reliable than his narrator does. This led me to question the reason why Herodotus' *Histories* plays such a central role in the novel. If Vidal considered the text to be reliable then why is the narrator's response to the work so hostile? Vidal acknowledges Herodotus' reputation as the father of history at the start of the book and this offers some clue as to why he is the chief recipient of Cyrus' ire. It is Herodotus' position at the origins of Western narrative history that justifies his inclusion in the novel. The didactic element of Vidal's story centres on highlighting the value of non-Western traditions, in particular philosophical conceptions of the world. Presenting *Creation* as a parallel text to the *Histories* allows Vidal to include a survey of pre-Christian Asian and European philosophy by working from the Axial Age hypothesis that these concepts emerged within roughly the same time frame. By concentrating on this, Vidal sought to enlighten his American audience in particular, as he felt the dominance of Christianity within the culture was at odds with intellectual growth. The prominence of the *Histories* within the novel also results in the author meditating on the emergence of the written word from the oral tradition and the flaws to be found within both formats. The repeated references to Herodotus' inaccuracy by the narrator signal the issues the author perceives with writing, but the novel considers all forms of historical

accounts to be vulnerable to manipulation, be it intentional or accidental. *Creation's* alternative depiction of Darius' ascent to the throne, for example, illustrates how the official account of an event can differ from what 'actually' took place.

With Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* questions on the nature of history are also explored, with Herodotus' *Histories* providing a means through which the author demonstrates the plasticity of 'accepted' history. Taking the novel's genre as a starting point, I interrogated the means through which Herodotus' *Histories* is applied by the author to illustrate this idea. I focussed specifically on two elements of his engagement. First, I considered Ondaatje's use of *Histories* 1.8-12 and, secondly, I explored how Almásy is shown to manipulate the *Histories* through both his physical copy of the work and his interaction with the narrative of the text, in particular the Proem. Ondaatje's application of the Gyges narrative serves to add to the layers of artifice that are already in operation within the story, as demonstrated through Ondaatje's use of real historical figures and events and interspersing characters from his earlier fiction within the story. By associating his characters with the triangle depicted in *Histories* 1.8-12 Ondaatje adds yet another layer of fiction to his narrative. Through his additions and erasure of passages, Almásy's treatment of his copy of the *Histories* offers a symbolic demonstration of how fragile a historical account can be. This translates in a thematic sense when Almásy processes the Proem within the narrative. As with the physical copy, he highlights what appeals to him and diminishes elements that are abhorrent to his nature, which is in turn emphasised within the narrative through Ondaatje's characterisation of Almásy. It becomes ironic, then, that the work of the father of history is the text which aids in the novel's manipulation of the past.

Neil Gaiman's use of the *Histories* is different from earlier examples, as he does not use the format of the novel to produce the standard recreation of Herodotean content. *Histories* 6.105 drives the plot by virtue of the fact that the device of having deities existing amongst the human population was a significant source of inspiration for Gaiman, but the novel is not a retelling of the event depicted by Herodotus. Rather Gaiman's approach is to take elements of the *Histories* and weave them into the fabric of his narrative. One avenue I chose to explore was the potential for characters to take on Herodotean elements and thus become Herodotean parallels. Low Key Lyesmith is a character that Gaiman associates with Herodotus through his possession of a copy of the *Histories* and his championing of its content, particularly *Histories* 1.32. These connections allow Low Key to be regarded as a Herodotean figure, particularly in association with the 'father of lies' label. The novel's protagonist Shadow Moon, like Low Key, is connected to the novel's copy of the *Histories* and with *Histories* 1.32. He also takes up the mantle of champion for the work, proclaiming what he perceives to be its virtues and explaining why a reader should not blame

Herodotus for any inaccuracies. He also fulfils the role of the traveller who gains knowledge by engaging with oral informants. Shadow is the means through which the audience learns both about the world of the gods and cultures of the communities through which he travels, thus making him the representative of the researcher-aspect of Herodotus' authorial persona. The third character who occupies a Herodotean role is Mr Ibis. Being the incarnation of the Egyptian god of writing, his purpose in the narrative centres on his writing of an alternative version of the history of the United States in which the stories of the marginalised that are usually neglected in favour of focusing on the privileged few are brought to the fore. His version of history illustrates the need for multiple narratives of migration to be acknowledged in the history of the United States. Splitting these varying aspects of Herodotus and his work across three characters, then, serves the narrative's theme of signalling the multifaceted nature of the culture of the United States.

For the books featured in Part II the key to understanding Herodotus lies in his status as the father of Western narrative history. When Vidal's protagonist criticises Herodotus' account of the Greco-Persian wars in *Creation*, the emphasis is less on any potential inaccuracy in the *Histories* and more on the flaws of the Western historical tradition. Herodotus effectively represents the tradition in a symbolic manner and thus allows the author to explore the ways through which those who control historical accounts can exploit them. Ondaatje is also concerned with the conflict between truth and fiction in historical accounts and uses the father of history to support the artifice of his fictional rendering of a historical figure. Indeed, even the prop of the *Histories* within *The English Patient* becomes warped through the title character's interventions. Gaiman engages with similar ideas when he shapes the complex web of influences that is his version of the United States. An abiding narrative thread that runs throughout the novel is the desire to illustrate the role of immigrants from a diverse range of nations in shaping the history of America that is often sidelined in favour of a more Euro-centric version of history. Herodotus can be seen to add to this sense of variety. Herodotean traits are attached to multiple characters, thus reflecting the theme of multiplicity that runs throughout the novel. One such character creates his own history of America by compiling stories of migration that would otherwise have been lost to time. The authors in Part II, then, use the *Histories* as means of exploring the potential for corruption in historical accounts. These are ideas that have been explored in Herodotean scholarship for some time and the authors display some awareness of the tension between truth and fiction in Herodotus' account. But the purpose behind Herodotus' role in each novel is more to indulge in a critique of the concept of history in general as opposed to Herodotus' historical account in particular.

### 3. Some Final Thoughts

The case studies in this thesis display intriguing engagements with the Herodotus and his work. Stark's ideal travel companion may differ somewhat from the grasshopper whose account of history torments Vidal's protagonist, but both authors were drawing from the same source text. The differing genres, as well as contrasting narrative intentions, resulted in works that encourage readers to appreciate the *Histories* in compelling ways. Whilst homage is paid to Herodotus' status within the genre of narrative history, the authors are not restrained by academic conventions in dealing with the *Histories*. And so, whilst sharing features within and across genres, each of the books considered within this thesis contain unique elements that distinguish it from the rest and reveal the complex series of contexts from which each text emerges.

One avenue that deserves further exploration, but one that I was unable to include in greater detail within the final version of my thesis, due to it largely falling outside of the parameters of my research, was the use of the *Histories* in African American reception. In my research I encountered the varying ways in which the *Histories* was applied by African American writers as a means of counteracting racist narratives of history. *Histories* 2.104.2 was the chief passage for this type of reception with authors seeing Herodotus' account as proving that a Black civilization was in existence in the continent of Africa long before any white civilisation emerged in Europe.

Initially this passage was used by anti-slavery campaigners,<sup>357</sup> but later would be adopted by writers who were concerned with civil rights. In recent years there has been an increase in research which explores the ways in which Classical culture is reinvented by marginalised groups. Studies such as Margaret Malamud's *African Americans and the Classics* (2016) and Emily Greenwood's *Afro-Greeks: Dialogues Between Anglophone Caribbean Literature and Classics in the Twentieth Century* (2010) highlight the value of exploring how the oppressed engaged with the culture of the oppressor. Seeing how campaigners weaponised Herodotus' *Histories* proves that his role in the fight for justice and equality is worth exploring and illustrates the rich seam of research that Herodotean reception can unearth.

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<sup>357</sup> See, for example, Volney (1787) and Frederick Douglass' *The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered: An Address, Before the Literary Societies* (1854).

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