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Chapter 12: Imagining Action: Explanation in twentieth-century historiographical and fictional rewritings of the *Chronicle of Morea*¹

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The reception of Byzantine historiographical narratives in modernity offers an opportunity to unlearn disciplinary assumptions that have conditioned scholarly understandings of the Byzantine past and its textual traces. Historians of Byzantium, whether they frame their practice in terms of reception or not, are constantly engaged with the reception of medieval narratives, as well as in attempting to identify and explain the reception of other narratives (i.e., potential sources) within them. How modern historical fiction receives Byzantine historiography has yet to be seriously studied, however, it too (like modern historiography) receives, reworks, and redeploys earlier historiographical narratives, both medieval and modern. Historians typically claim closer relationships to past reality for their narrative products than historical novelists. However, the analysis of how histories and historical novels actually receive earlier narratives destabilizes and blurs rigid dichotomies separating fact from fiction, history from novel, and historian from novelist.

Byzantine historiography, like other historiographies, is not “motivated by the question of the *reality* of the past. The reality of the past is a given, it is an enabling supposition of historical enquiry.” (White 2005, 148) That stuff really happened in the past is not up for debate. The

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debate revolves instead around what can *truly* be asserted about that stuff “on the basis of the (professionally determined) admissible evidence” (White 2005, 148). In recent decades (especially since the 1990s), scholars have increasingly reassessed what they believe can be truly asserted about the Byzantine past on the basis of historiography. The complacent equation of historiographical narratives with past reality has given way to the more nuanced evaluations of the referential capacity of Byzantine historiography. The literary, rhetorical, and generic qualities of historiography have received increasing attention and primacy to the point where today, even the most theoretically conservative historians acknowledge that history is a form of literature. However, even questions of the literariness of historiography, where arguably the greatest transformation has occurred, have failed to do more than displace the dyad of history versus literature into the realm of practitioner approach. One can approach historiography as a literary critic (understood as “an end in itself”) or as a historian (instrumentalising literariness to gain true knowledge of the past), but not both (Macrides 2010, xi). Historians are still asking: “How much history is there in Byzantine historical texts?” (Kaldellis 2016, 293) The principal difference is that today scholars place Byzantine historiography, or more specifically certain elements of it, further towards the literary end of the scale than previous generations. The same is true for a host of other foundational binaries, such as the division between fact and fiction, real and imagined, content and form, true and false, primary and secondary, on which (Byzantine) history as a discipline depends. The project of Byzantine history requires that these binaries be identified, distinguished, separated, and the privileged element presented as the product of research in isolation. Scholars may now acknowledge that the literary and rhetorical form of Byzantine historiographical narrative affects its truth value, but there is still no place in modern scholarship for anything that is explicitly imagined, fictitious, or false, there is only space for the exclusively and verifiably real, factual, and true. In Byzantine studies, the sceptical and deconstructive critiques, seen in some other branches of historical enquiry, as well as the compromises made as a result, have either been ignored (e.g., Jeffreys, Haldon, and Cormack 2008, 14–15) or, less often, explicitly rejected (e.g., Haldon 1984; Kaldellis 2010).

Today, knowledge of the Byzantine past remains both the objective and product of *doing* Byzantine history. This requires a single past reality to be retained as accessible, albeit through

its reflection in the distorting mirror of historiography (Mango 1975). *Doing* Byzantine history remains a process whereby the careful analysis and decipherment of medieval historiographical narratives (and other 'sources') are used to produce modern historiographical and argumentative narratives. Historical fiction has yet to enter this conversation. However, by thinking about the construction of the thirteenth-century Byzantine past and the reception of medieval historiographical narratives in different types of modern texts, namely the realist novel and realist historiography, the rigid binaries and absolutism of traditional practice can be explicated and disrupted. In contrast to historiographical narrative, historical fiction locates its story-products in time-and-place-specific contexts, but steps beyond what historians would recognise as the truths we know about it and in the process reveals the slippage between historiographical and fictive modes of narration.

This chapter seeks to create openings in the generic and categorical walls constructed to maintain a proper distance between medieval source material, modern historiography, and historical fiction, by comparatively examining how action is explained in four narratives about thirteenth-century Byzantine and Frankish Greece. The first is the fourteenth-century *Chronicle of Morea*, the most detailed medieval 'source' for the period. The second is a modern historical novel, Alfred Duggan's *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* (1962), while the third and fourth are two early twentieth-century histories of the Latin crusader states in southern Greece and the eastern Mediterranean, Rennell Rodd's *The Princes of Achaia* (1907) and William Miller's *The Latins in the Levant* (1908). I begin by introducing these four narratives and their relationship to each other. I continue by offering three short case studies, each relating to structurally central battle scenes. My focus in these case studies is on how action is explained in each narrative and how explanations change or remain static between earlier and later narratives.

Lord Geoffrey's Fancy

Alfred Duggan's (1903-64) historical novel *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* (1962) tells the story of an English knight from Herefordshire, called William Briwerr. This landless knight sets out to seek his fortune in 'the East' and comes to the Frankish principality of Achaia, a polity created by Frankish crusaders in the Peloponnesian peninsular of southern Greece following the

conquest of Constantinople in 1204 by the fourth crusade. Once there William finds service under the baron of Karytaina, the eponymous Geoffrey de Bruyeres, one of the twelve chief lords of the principality. Geoffrey invents a kinship tie with William and claims him as a cousin, on account of their similar sounding names (Briwerr and Bruyeres). As part of Geoffrey's retinue, William observes and participates in military and political action that takes him not just all over the Peloponnese, but also to Nicaea and Constantinople by way of central Greece and Macedonia. *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* is framed by the life of William, its narrator, beginning with his departure from Herefordshire and ending with his return and quiet retirement there.² However, Geoffrey is central to the story. This is not because of the titular love affair, which actually occupies a rather marginal position in the narrative, but rather because his character enables the narration of the wider political and military fate of the principality of Achaia, which the novel tracks from acme through to heroic decline.

In a paratextual authorial note at the end of *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy*, Duggan reveals his understanding of the epistemological status of his narrative.³

This is in outline a true story, even to Sir Geoffrey's address to his tent-pole before the battle of Pelagonie. See Rennell Rodd, *The Princess of Achaia*, Edwin Arnold, 1907, and William Miller, *The Latins in the Levant*, John Murray, 1908. The only entirely imaginary characters are the narrator and his wife, though there was a genuine Briwerr family in England. Public events happened as I have described them, though I have used my imagination in supplying motives and explanations, especially for love affairs. (Duggan 1962, 254)⁴

² Note that Duggan himself retired to Ross-on-Wye in Herefordshire for the last eleven years of his life and it is there that he wrote *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* (Waugh 1964).

³ Authorial notes are important loci for the dissonances inherent in historical fiction and have even been suggested as a definitional element for the generic identification of historical fiction: "It might be a rule of thumb to define the historical novel as something which has an explanatory note from the writer describing their own engagement with the period in question, either through schooling or, more commonly, through their reading and research." (De Groot 2009, 6–8). See also Chapter 15.

⁴ Duggan finishes this note by stating that "The narrator's opinion of Greeks, Turks, and other foreigners is his own, and not necessarily that of the author." (Duggan 1962, 254) As this statement

Duggan claims the novel to be “in outline a true story” and specifically affirms the truth of one particular scene, Geoffrey's address to his tent-pole (see the second case study below). Implicitly, Duggan therefore accepts that some elements of the narrative are not true. Two characters are identified as imagined, in opposition to the rest of the cast, who are implicitly assumed to be not imagined (i.e., real). The narrator's plausibility (if not his historicity) is suggested by the “genuine” existence of a Briwerr family in thirteenth-century England. The claim that only the narrator and his wife are entirely imaginary ignores the host of minor and often unnamed characters in *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy*, most often soldiers, knights, and servants, who likewise do not survive in the historical record. “Public events” are claimed as having “happened as...described”, a statement that leaves the ontological status of private events ambiguous, but implicitly open to the possibility of having not happened. Duggan is thus revealed to conceive of his novel as possessing a story that is both true and false, characters that are both real and imagined, and events that both happened and did not.⁵ The dyadic dissonances revealed in this paratextual note are foundational for historical fiction and are precisely the points of rupture that make it so good to think with, since it blurs precisely the binaries on which the authority of modern historiography depends.

suggests, *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* views Byzantine/Frankish Greece through an English and Frankish lens. Place names are ‘Frankicised’ throughout and a glossary of place names is included (Duggan 1962, vii). Athens and Thebes, for example, are rendered as Satines and Estives. The Byzantines/Eastern Romans, including both Nicaeans and Epirots, are consistently called Grifons. The latter are produced as sly and effeminate, while Turkish characters are rendered as barbarous and violent. Both are opposed to the honest martial masculinity of the crusaders. For the gendered production of Byzantines in Western/crusader texts and modern historiography, see respectively Demacopoulos (2019, 13–48) and Neville (2019, 5–21).

⁵ The realness of events and characters are central to the early understanding of the historical novel: “We consider (say) the eighteenth century from the purely historical standpoint, and, while we do so, are under no delusion as to our limitations; we know that a few of the leading personages and events have been brought before us in a more or less disjointed fashion, and are perfectly aware that there is room for much discrepancy between the pictures so presented to us (be it with immense skill) and the actual facts as they took place in such and such a year.” (Nield 1902, 10)

Taking my lead from Duggan, this paper focuses on the *motives* and particularly the *explanations*, that this authorial note identifies as being supplied by his imagination. Duggan contrasts the descriptive *what* of his story, events, and characters with the explanatory *why*, without acknowledging that explanation and motive are baked into historiographical narratives, just as much as they are into realist novels. There is no description of the past, without explanation (Megill 1989).

The Princes of Achaia and The Latins in the Levant

Again taking my cue from Duggan's authorial note, I compare *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* primarily with the two modern historiographical narratives, Rennell Rodd's *The Princes of Achaia* (1907) and William Miller's *The Latins in the Levant* (1908), on which Duggan depends for his claim to a mostly truthful story, predominantly real characters, and public events that actually happened. Miller's text, which as the title suggests engages with the whole Frankish Levant, has both a wider scope and a slightly wider chronological focus. Neither devote much of their narratives to the events that were later received in *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy*.⁶ These are classic works of early twentieth-century historiography and today, they remain the foundational narrative accounts of the period, although they read as somewhat dated.⁷

Neither were exclusively historians. While Miller was primarily a journalist, Rodd was a diplomat and later a politician. Both narratives present an often-contradictory mixture of a positivistic conception of historiography with a philhellenic romanticism also seen in their other works. Throughout, both historians display a tendency to paraphrase their source material. This is especially the case with Rodd, who regularly inserts extended translations

⁶ Sixteen pages of Miller's 675-page text (c. 2.4%) narrate the period covered in *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy*, in contrast to approximately forty pages of Rodd's 635-page-long monograph (c. 6.3%).

⁷ For the importance of Miller's work see Paul Hetherington's appraisal: "It is pre-eminently *The Latins in the Levant* (1908), and *Essays on the Latin Orient* (1921 [1964]) that reveal Miller's capacity for reducing complex and detailed issues to a clear and coherent narrative unity. These masterly studies are his most lasting gifts to medieval scholarship, and of enduring value. When listing his works, he always put them before any others. They are books of their period; but it is still impossible to study these centuries of Levantine history without having digested them." (Hetherington 2009, 155)

from medieval texts (as we shall see below in the case studies), which are assumed to be factual and require no analysis. As the prefatory paratexts of both historians make clear, they understand their histories in narrative terms, despite their positivist orientation.

...**the brilliant story** of the Dukes of Athens and the Princes of Achaia, I was enabled to some extent to repeople my mountain castles with their proper tenants and to realise **a new world of dramatic personages on a stage** over which the curtain seemed hitherto to have descended with the Roman conquest of Greece. (Rodd 1907, vi, emphasis added)

We know now, year by year—yes, almost month by month—the vicissitudes of Hellas under her Frankish masters, and all that is required now is **to breathe life into the dry bones**, and bring upon **the stage** in flesh and blood that picturesque and motley crowd...the persons of the romantic **drama**...Throughout I have based **the narrative** upon first-hand authorities. I can conscientiously say that I have consulted all the printed books known to me in Greek, Italian, Spanish, French, German, English, and Latin, which deal in any way with the subject...The historian of Frankish Greece is confronted at the outset with the problem of **telling his tale** in the clearest possible manner. (Miller 1908, vii–viii, emphasis added)

Both Rodd and Miller explicitly conceive of their history writing as telling a story and use extended dramatic metaphors in describing their projects. Miller's claim to be breathing "life into the dry bones" of what "we know"—a claim he also makes in another of his historiographical works (1921 [1964], 57, 85)—is precisely what Alessandro Manzoni identified as the great opportunity of the historical novel. In his seminal study, Manzoni wrote that historical fiction could give "not just the bare bones of history, but something richer, more complete. In a way you want him [sic] to put the flesh back on the skeleton that is history." (1996, 67–68; De Groot 2009, 35) While both Miller and Manzoni deploy a well-worn trope that appears in various places including the book of Ezekiel (37:1-14), the close alignment in their visions of historiography and historical fiction signpost the potential of the comparative

analysis undertaken in this chapter to blur the boundaries between such generically demarcated narratives.

The *Chronicle of the Morea*

All three of the modern narratives introduced so far depend on a group of five medieval historiographical narratives traditionally grouped under the umbrella title of the *Chronicle of Morea*. These texts are understood by scholars to be five different 'versions' – two Greek (the HT and P 'versions'), one old French, one Italian, and one Aragonese – of a Greek (or possibly old French) 'original', probably composed in the fourteenth century (Shawcross 2009, 31–52; Jeffreys 1975). According to modern historians, the two versions of the *Chronicle of Morea* considered to be oldest, fullest, and closest to the original (namely the Greek HT and the Old French texts), constitute the principal surviving source for Frankish and Byzantine Morea during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The *Chronicle of Morea* has tended to be seen as less reliable than other historiographical narratives that narrate the same period, such as those of George Akropolites, Geoffrey de Villehardouin, George Pachymeres, Ibn Bībī, and Nikephoros Gregoras, particularly because of the HT version's low-brow Greek and verse form. Nevertheless, it is often the only (or only detailed) source for much of the history of the principality of Achaia. To dramatically simplify what is an extremely complex collection of narratives, the *Chronicle of Morea* can crudely be thought of as being split into two halves by the battle of Pelagonia (1259). The first half, which begins with the establishment of the principality, focuses on its apogee in the 1250s, while the second half is dominated by its sharp decline after 1259, in the face of Nicaean expansion and the polity's increasing dependence on the Angevin kingdom, formalised by the treaty of Viterbo in 1267.

It is not made explicit in Duggan's paratextual authorial note whether he had read the *Chronicle of Morea* himself. The dependence of both Rodd and Miller's histories on the text may have been enough, although he was capable of reading Greek and the critical edition of John Schmitt (1904) was accessible at the time of composition. Nonetheless, in his review of the 1964 translation of the HT 'version' of the *Chronicle of Morea* by Harold Lurier (1964), which appeared just after Duggan's death, Peter Topping assumed that *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* was

directly influenced by the *Chronicle of Morea*.⁸ Regardless of the directness of the relationship between the *Chronicle of Morea* and *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy*, these narratives are related to both each other and *The Princes of Achaia* and *The Latins in the Levant*. Their comparative analysis, in this chapter, seeks to blur the categorical and generic distinction between modern historiography and historical fiction that Topping re-inscribed in his review, carefully dividing, as he does, the reception of the *Chronicle of Morea* into historical significance (noted first) and its influence on literature (cited last).

The Battles of Karydi, Pelagonia, and Prinitsa

Three battles structure *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy*, dividing the novel into roughly equal parts. These battles illustrate and explain the fate of the principality. This begins with the battle of Karydi (1258), which saw intra-Frankish rivalry play out as chivalric war-as-sport between the principality of Achaia and the duchy of Athens; moves to the battle of Pelagonia (1259), which saw all the Franks defeated by the Byzantines; and culminates in the battle of Prinitsa (1263), in which a heroic fight sees the Franks temporarily halt the Byzantine occupation of the Morea, whilst signposting inexorable Frankish defeat. These battles describe and explain the political history of both the thirteenth-century Morea and the wider eastern Mediterranean world in more than just Duggan's novel (generally on the use of battles, see Kinloch 2018, 101–120). The battle of Pelagonia in particular is one of the central events in the narratives offered by both the *Chronicle of Morea* and modern scholars of late Byzantium.

The explanatory function of battles in historiographical narrative, combined with the use of battles as canonical examples of indisputable facts of the past (e.g., Carr 1962, 10–11; Marwick 2001, 152), make these three events especially illustrative places to test and blur the binaries offered by Duggan in his authorial note. This exploration will take the form of three case studies, in which I will examine the explanations given for some action that took place during each battle mentioned in these four narratives. In my first example, I will demonstrate the

⁸ "Beyond its historical significance the Greek Chronicle has had an influence on literature, ranging from the Helena episode in the third act of *Faust II* to various dramas and novels in Modern Greek and the admirable historical novel, *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* (1962), by the late Alfred Duggan." (Topping 1965, 737)

disjuncture between all three modern texts and their 'source material' (i.e., the *Chronicle of Morea*), with a particular focus on the manner in which modern historiographical theory and style sometimes require that historians contradict their sources and imagine action. In the second, I show how the rhetorical form of the *Chronicle of Morea* forces its way into all three modern texts, whether it is naively paraphrased or logically historicised. The third case study extends the argument of the second by tracking the survival of a cliché from a speech in all three modern texts in a way that suggests the potential of the historical novel to playfully subvert historiographical positivism.

1. The Battle of Karydi: Inventing Geoffrey's Defection

Much of the early part of *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* (chapters two-four) relates to the rivalry between the principality of Achaia and the duchy of Athens. In chapter two, Geoffrey de Bruyeres (nephew of the prince of Achaia) marries Isabel (daughter of the duke of Athens) in order to maintain the fragile balance of power between these two Frankish polities. Despite this, conflict breaks out between them in chapter three, over the suzerainty of knightly fees in Euboea. This conflict climaxes in a set-piece battle in chapter four, between armies aligned with the prince of Achaia (Geoffrey's uncle and suzerain) and the duke of Athens (Geoffrey's father-in-law). The military confrontation presented in chapter four, known as the battle of Karydi (1258) in modern historiography, has been located in a pass in the hills between Megara and Thebes (Rodd 1907, 194, Miller 1908, 106–108; Ilieva 1991, 150). In this battle, Geoffrey sides with his father-in-law. In so doing he breaks the laws of suzerainty, according to which Geoffrey should have fought for his suzerain (his uncle the prince). Consequently, his defection requires explanation.

Lord Geoffrey's Fancy explains Geoffrey's decision to abandon his uncle and join the Athenians in misogynistic terms. Geoffrey is presented as being nagged into submission by his wife Isabel, who persuades him to side with her father, because she preferred gay Athens, where all her blood relatives were living, to isolation in Geoffrey's more modest and rural castle in Karytaina. Geoffrey's defection is explained in a dialogue between the narrator William and his wife Melisande, after Geoffrey announced to his men his decision to desert his uncle the prince.

So the lady Isabel has won. I thought she would. Let that be a lesson to you, William. In politics husbands are guided by their wives, and that is true even of the best knight in all Romanie. Poor Isabel, she has been miserable here all summer, with her baby dead and her husband away on campaign. (Duggan 1962, 57)

Geoffrey's motivation is wholly explained by his relationship with Isabel. His relationship with the duke himself is entirely absent from Duggan's narrative. This pivotal event in the early narrative is thus explained through one of the "love affairs", which Duggan's authorial note identifies as being supplied by his imagination (1962, 254). *The Princes of Achaia* and *The Latins in the Levant*, in their briefer treatments of Geoffrey's defection, both allocate less agency to Isabel.

And now in the moment of his need, **Guy sought, through the influence of his daughter Isabella, to detach her husband**, Geoffroi de Bruyères, the foremost soldier of the Morea, from allegiance to the Prince his uncle. **Overcome by the pleading of his wife**, the lord of Carytena, after long searches of the heart and with much misgiving, broke his oath of allegiance. (Rodd 1907, 194)

...Geoffroy de Bruyères, baron of Karytaina, "the best soldier in all the realm of Romania," who had fought for his prince in Negroponte, **after a struggle between conflicting ties of kinship**, deserted his liege lord and uncle, William, for the side of his father-in-law, Guy. (Miller 1908, 105)

In Rodd's explanation, Isabel is transformed into an agent of the duke of Athens (Guy). However, she remains a prominent participant in the action and Geoffrey's defection is explained through feminizing language (Isabel's "pleading"). In Miller's explanation, Isabel drops out of the narrative completely, leaving only an implicit trace in the relationship between Geoffrey and his father-in-law. Both explanations deploy emotive language (i.e., "searches of the heart", "pleading", "struggle", and "conflicting ties") to explain Geoffrey's

motivation and decision and both, to different extents, decentre Isabel, without displacing the importance of her marriage ties.

In the narratives depicting Geoffrey's defection in *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy*, *The Princes of Achaia*, and *The Latins in the Levant* Isabel is understood to be the daughter of the duke of Athens. However, in the *Chronicle of Morea* she is understood to be Guy's sister, rather than his daughter. She is also, it is worth bearing in mind, never identified by name.⁹ Modern historians have argued from texts other than the *Chronicle of Morea* (*Lignages d'outremer* 2003, 90, nn. 144-145 (§333), Sanudo II.125-127) that Isabel was Guy's daughter and not his sister. Consequently, they have identified this as an error in the narrative. Indeed, it is almost impossible to read the *Chronicle of Morea* today in any language without this error being signposted, since most editions and translations of the text include explanatory footnotes (e.g., Buchon 1845, 107, n. 1; Lurier 1964, 167, n. 32; Van Arsdall and Moody 2015, 77, 254). However, the fact that Geoffrey was the prince's brother-in-law is essential to explaining Geoffrey's defection in the *Chronicle of Morea*. In the *Chronicle of Morea*, unlike the three modern texts, it is the duke of Athens himself who pleads with Geoffrey (Lurier 1964, 167). The interaction of these two characters is framed in completely different terms. In the *Chronicle of Morea*, honour, friendship, and brotherhood between two brothers-in-law is offered as the principal explanation for Geoffrey's defection, rather than the relationship between son-in-law and father-in-law. In the long passage in which this explanation unfolds in the HT 'version' of the *Chronicle of Morea*, Geoffrey is described no less than five different times as friend, brother, or brother-in-law.

Ὁ κάλλιος φίλος...παρακαλῶντα ὡς ἀδελφὸν καὶ γνήσιον του...ὁ ἀδελφός του...τοῦ γυναικαδελφοῦ του...Εἶπεν ὅτι καλλίον ἔχει νὰ ἀχάση τὴν τιμὴν του, / παρὰ νὰ λείψη ἐκείνου τοῦ γυναικαδελφοῦ του. [...the very honourable friend...pleading as his brother and relative...his brother...his brother-in-law...He said that it is more honourable to lose his honour / than to leave his brother-in-law.]
(*Chronicle of Morea*, 3218-36; Lurier 1964, 167)

⁹ Concerning the naming (or not) of female characters in Byzantine historiography, see Kinloch (2020).

This focus on the filial bonds between Geoffrey and the duke of Athens offers a different explanation for Geoffrey's defection, one in which Isabel plays only a marginal role.¹⁰ Since the *Chronicle of Morea* is the only medieval text that narrates the defection of Geoffrey, although other texts mention the battle, all three modern explanations depend either directly or indirectly on the *Chronicle of Morea* at this point. However, since the filial explanation of the *Chronicle of Morea* cannot be used in the modern narratives, all three must imagine an alternative, independent of their 'source material'. Duggan, Rodd, and Miller's explanations of Geoffrey's defection offer different emphases on the personal and political. However, despite some formal and stylistic differences between Duggan's novel and the two modern historians (e.g., the use of direct speech), all three explanations are inventions, supplied by these authors in the twentieth century. Since all three modern narratives are equally divorced from the medieval text through which they claim access to the thirteenth-century past, and thus authority, the difference between historiography and historical fiction is revealed to be only at the formal and stylistic level. Comparison of how this novelist and these historians respond to the incompleteness of the historical record highlights the role of imagination and invention in historiography, thus blurring the distinction between the two.

2. The Battle of Pelagonia: Explaining Frankish Defeat

The battle of Pelagonia (1259) is a central turning point in *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy*, the two modern histories, and the *Chronicle of Morea*. In all these narratives, defeat at Pelagonia, the capture of the prince and most of the knights of the principality (including the narrator in *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy*), and the ransom paid for the prince in the form of three key castles are understood to simultaneously precipitate the decline of the principality.¹¹ Central to the explanation of why this battle occurred in all four narratives is a speech given by Geoffrey de Bruyeres. The reception of Geoffrey's speech from the *Chronicle of Morea*, in the two modern histories and *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy*, blurs the distinction between historical fiction and historiography,

¹⁰ This is consistent across all versions of the *Chronicle of Morea*.

¹¹ Generally on the importance of the battle of Pelagonia in historiography of the thirteenth century, see Kinloch (2018, 155–169).

because there is no qualitative difference in the reception of this speech's explanatory role in the works of the novelist Duggan and the historians Rodd and Miller, despite the canonically suspicious status of speeches in historiography.

A scepticism towards the reliability of speeches, identified as fictive, literary, and rhetorical, has been ingrained in the practice of history, since its emergence as a formal and increasingly professionalised discipline in early modernity. Voltaire, for example, identified speeches as one of three ways in which historians draw false characters, in a section of his preface to *The History of the Russian Empire under Peter the Great* alongside a critique of how historians also give false facts.¹²

Harangues, or set speeches, are another species of oratorical lying, which was anciently allowed to the historians. They made their heroes say what it was possible for them to have said. This liberty indeed might be taken with a person of some antiquity; but now these fictions are no longer tolerated: nay, we go still further; for if a speech were to be put into the mouth of a prince that never pronounced it, we should consider the historian a rhetorician. (Voltaire 1763, xxii)

The principal locus of this debate, as alluded to by Voltaire, has been antique historiography and especially the speeches of Thucydides (Jebb 1907, 359–445). The legacy of this scepticism is now solidly embedded in modern Byzantine historiography, as has recently been illustrated by a stock-taking article by Ralph-Johannes Lilie (2014, 208).¹³ It is therefore noteworthy that narrative elements, such as speeches, traditionally identified as fictive, literary, and rhetorical, are presented as true in both *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* and *The Princes of Achaia*. It is also significant that the explanatory role of speeches persists even when they are excised from 'scientific' modern scholarship, as in *The Latins in the Levant*.

¹² Concerning Voltaire and historiography see Pierse (2013) and Stern (2015, 14).

¹³ "The consequence of this is, however, the realization that speeches of this kind, if they were ever delivered, which is quite doubtful, had nothing at all to do with reality." (Lilie 2014, 208)

According to the *Chronicle of Morea*, the Frankish army came to the field with an allied force of Epirot Romans to fight the Nicaean Romans. However, the bastard son of the Epirot ruler defected to the Nicaeans before the battle. Upon hearing this, the council of leaders (both Frankish and Epirot) determined to flee and leave their army behind while they made their escape. To this effect they bound all the leaders present with an oath. Geoffrey de Bruyeres, however, wishing to warn his men without breaking his oath and to enable them to pressure the prince to stay and fight, gave a loud (direct) speech to his tent-post, intending to be overheard (*Chronicle of Morea*, 3864-3872; Lurier 1964, 185-6). His ruse is successful and although the Epirots flee the Franks stay, fight nobly, and consequently are defeated by Turkish and Roman trickery.

In Rodd's *The Princes of Achaia*, the speech of Geoffrey from the HT version of the *Chronicle of Morea* is translated and reproduced in full, alongside a paraphrase of the passage preceding it.

But the lord of Carytena was troubled and perplexed, and pondered how he might save his people, to whom he was devotedly attached, without breaking the oath of secrecy to which he had subscribed. A broken lance was lying in his tent, and with the shaft he loudly struck the tent-pole and addressed it in the epic vein, "Oh, pole of my tent, a loyal servant hast thou been to me until this day, and were I to fail thee and desert thee now, recreant should I be and lose thy faithful service. Therefore fain would I excuse myself to thee, and have thee to know that the Prince and the Despot and we, the other high barons of the army, have bound ourselves together by oath to fly this night and abandon our people. This may I not discover to any man, because of my oath, but to thee I tell it, that art not a man, affirming that the truth is even so." (Rodd 1907, 204)

This relatively loose translation of the *Chronicle of Morea* is presented by Rodd, without caveat, as a true account of what was actually said.¹⁴ In *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy*, Geoffrey also gives a

¹⁴ It is worth noting the hypocrisy of Rodd here, since in the preface to his history he patronisingly critiques the history of "the talented authoress" Diane de Gobineau for having "followed too closely the narrative of the chronicle [of Morea] for historical accuracy." (Rodd 1907, viii)

speech to his tent-pole. The speech follows the rough shape of that of the *Chronicle of Morea* and *The Princes of Achaia*, although it differs in tone and length.

“Good old tent-pole,” he said loudly, “on all my campaigns you have been with me, against Grifons and Esclavons and against my dear uncle William. Now I must leave you to fall into the hands of my enemies. And not only you, old tent-pole. I must also abandon my servants and my muleteers and indeed all my dismounted followers. For that matter some of the knights of my mesnie may be left behind. The leaders of the host have agreed to flee secretly in the middle of the night, from shameful fear and for no other reason. But the camp must be left standing, to deceive the Sebastocrator so that we get a good start. Therefore we may not warn our faithful followers, to whom we are bound by oaths of mutual fealty. The leaders will escape while their followers perish. O my tent-pole, what baseness, what ingratitude, what felony! A good knight should warn his followers of impending danger. But a good knight cannot break his pledged word. Before he revealed the hideous project the Despot bound me with an oath of secrecy. I swore by my hope of salvation never to reveal the decisions of the council to a living soul. But you, my dear tent-pole, have no soul; though you are more worthy of Heaven than the Despot or even my uncle William, who has consented to this foul treachery. Therefore to you I may open my heart, lamenting the shame to which I am bound by the oath I swore before the council.” (Duggan 1962, 115–116)

This speech is significantly longer and more detailed. Further, it transforms elements of the action narrated, most notably, by shifting blame for this perceived treachery and cowardice to the Epirot despot and away from the prince of Achaia.¹⁵ The speech scenario is also different, since it is delivered not for the multitude of men around Geoffrey’s tent, as in the *Chronicle of Morea*, but rather just for the narrator William.

¹⁵ On the ambiguity of the *Chronicle of Morea* on points of Frankish valour see Demacopoulos (2019, 103–121).

Suddenly he stopped in his tracks, staring at me. His eyes wrinkled as though with a smile, though his mouth remained set. "Don't go right away, cousin William," he said thoughtfully. "I have a secret I may not tell to a living soul. But I'm not a leper, you know, there's no need to keep away from my tent. In fact you might take a look at the tent-pegs. These Grifons have fastened the guy-ropes with a cunning knot I should like to see copied in Escorta. No, don't keep away from my tent, though at present I can't invite you inside." (Duggan 1962, 113–114)

Despite these transformations, Duggan explicitly states in his paratextual note that this speech was, at least in outline, true (Duggan 1962, 254). In other words, both Duggan and Rodd offer paraphrases of the speech as true or essentially true accounts of *what actually happened*. It is perhaps unsurprising that this vivid vignette was taken up so enthusiastically by Duggan, but it is more remarkable that Rodd integrates the text in exactly the same way.

Miller's rendition of this episode is, like his narrative of the battle of Karydi, stylistically simpler. He offers no direct speech, does not explicitly mention the story of the tent-pole, and is generally much more concise.

For an instant even William's courage seems to have failed him; but the reproaches of that stalwart baron, Geoffroy de Bruyeres, prevailed on him to lead his diminished but now homogeneous army against the heterogeneous host of Greeks, Hungarians, Germans, Slavs, and Turks. (Miller 1908, 111)

Although Miller's narrative ostensibly excises the speech, its explanatory function remains the same. His description of Geoffrey prevailing on the prince (William) to fight depends on the same speech in the *Chronicle of Morea* that Duggan and Rodd reproduced.¹⁶ Miller transforms the speech to Geoffrey's tent-pole into a direct confrontation/conversation between Geoffrey and the prince, but the speech's explanatory logic remains. Miller's narrative doubtless

¹⁶ It is not, for example, mentioned in the principal source used by Byzantinists, the *Chronike syngraphe* of George Akropolites (Macrides 2007, 361).

appears more plausible to modern historians with the sensibilities of Voltaire and Lillie, but if anything this direct confrontation/conversation between Geoffrey and the prince rests on no textual evidence from the *Chronicle of Morea*. It is, in other words, imagined by Miller as the most plausible *historical* explanation of *what actually happened*.

Duggan and Rodd reproduce and adapt the speech of the *Chronicle of Morea*. Miller attempts to excise this problematic textual element from his story and yet despite this is unable to escape the explanatory framework that the speech sets up. His narrative ends up relying on the speech and even being forced to imagine action that is not explicitly presented in the *Chronicle of the Morea*, on which the truth claimed by all three modern narratives ultimately depend. The main discernible difference between historiography and historical fiction turns out to be the style in which they paraphrase and reproduce the *Chronicle of the Morea*. In the end the most formally historiographical narrative (i.e., Miller's) is the least faithful to the medieval *source material*.

3. The Battle of Prinitsa: Explaining Frankish Victory

The final structuring battle of *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* is the so-called battle of Prinitsa, in which 312 Frankish knights vanquished a vast army of Nicaeans. According to the *Chronicle of Morea*, before the battle the Frankish leader, Jean de Catabas, the cuckolded husband of Jeanne de Catabas – the eponymous lady with whom Geoffrey de Bruyeres had eloped to Italy – gave a long speech to his men. Examination of the reception of this speech in the three modern texts, like the previous case study, demonstrates that there is no qualitative difference in the reception of this speech in the historiography and historical fiction. For all three, the speech is converted into historical fact. If anything, the formal freedom of historical fiction allows Duggan to potentially become a more critical reader of the *Chronicle of Morea* than Rodd and Miller. This reading thus demonstrates the potential of non-historiographical discourse to challenge positivist readings of medieval narratives.

In the *Chronicle of Morea*, Jean mentions a number of topics in a set piece speech, similar to that constructed in numerous other important passages of the text.¹⁷ After pointing out the

¹⁷ On speech acts in the *Chronicle of Morea*, see Shawcross (2009, 131–149).

disparate and ill-equipped nature of the enemy, he states that their victory would be praised as long as Noah's ark remains on Mount Ararat.

Ἴδέτε πάλιν δεύτερον, ἀφέντες καὶ συντρόφοι, / ὅτι, ἂν μᾶς δώσῃ ὁ Θεὸς κ' ἡ τύχη
μας ἐτοῦτο, / τὸν ἀδελφὸν τοῦ βασιλέως κ' ἐτοῦτα τὰ φουσσᾶτα / μὲ πόλεμον καὶ
μὲ σπαθὶ νὰ τοὺς νικήσωμε ὧδε, / ἕως ὅτου στήκει ἡ κιβωτὸς στὸ Ἄραράτ τὸ
ὄρος, / μέλλει στήκει τὸ ἔπαινος τῆς σημερινῆς ἡμέρας, / ὅπου μᾶς θέλουν ἐπαινεῖ
ὅσοι τὸ θέλουν ἀκούσει. [And in second place, lords and comrades, consider that
should God and our fortune grant that we here defeat the brother of the basileus and
these armies with battle and with sword **as long as the ark remains on Mount Ararat**,
so long will remain the praise of this day, with which all those who will hear of it will
praise us.] (*Chronicle of Morea*, 4740-6; Lurier 1964, 210.)

This allusion to Noah's ark is repeated by both Miller and Rodd as fact.

Then Messire Jean de Catavas addressed his men. "[...] **so long as the ark of God shall rest on the mountain of Ararat**, shall live the praise of this day on the lips of men."
(Rodd 1907: 223)

Despite the smallness of his forces and his own physical infirmity, which prevented him from holding sword or lance, he ordered the prince's standard—the anchored cross of the Villehardouins—to be tied fast to his hand, and, reminding his men that they were Franks and their enemies men of many nations, bade them win fame which would endure "**so long as the ark remains on Ararat.**" (Miller 1908: 122)

Rodd again translates the whole speech, describing it as how Jean addressed his men, while Miller only quotes this allusion in isolation, but nevertheless as fact. So both include this colourful vignette, adopting it uncritically as fact and with it the explanatory power of a speech which produces a battle in which western knights won a great victory, motivated by heroic, epic, and religious goals. Duggan includes this same vignette, but in a manner that foregrounds the allusive quality of the reference and thus undermines its significance.

“We speak one language, we fight in the same way, we know one another, we serve the same lord. The Prince left us at home, thinking us unfit for war. Let's show him his mistake. Let's do a famous deed of arms, something that will be remembered for as long – as long – as long as Noah's Ark rests on Ararat.” / **Evidently Sir John had been trying to think of some famous battle of the past, and could not name one.** (Duggan 1962, 210)

Just as in the previous case study this speech, and its explanatory logic of a textual element of which modern historians claim to be particularly suspicious, persists in all the modern narratives. The chivalric call of the old knight Jean, as illustrated by this quotation, explains (at least in part) the victory of this tiny Frankish force in all the narratives. Miller and Rodd offer their quotations as straightforward fact, conforming (at least stylistically) to the expectations of modern ‘scientific’ historical discourse. Duggan, in contrast, places a question mark next to his citation, by quipping that Jean had not been able to think of a sufficiently august battle and thus somewhat undermines the explanatory power of the religio-chivalric speech. Although all three narratives reproduce the quotation, the novel appears to offer a more sceptical reception of the speech than the modern historians. Outside the disciplinarily accepted framework of historiography in which a statement can be either true or false, Duggan is able to highlight and thus question the invented, literary, rhetorical, and downright odd quality of this statement, without excising it from his narrative. This moment in the narrative thus hints, albeit somewhat intangibly, at the possibilities of historical fiction providing a framework capable of a less rigid critique than traditional historiography allows.

Preliminary Conclusions

Historical fiction represents the threshold between a disciplinary historiography, that refuses to abandon its failed attempt to become a science, and fiction, the repressed other that historiography refuses to become (Certeau 1988, 308–354; White 2005, 147–148; Wake 2016). Historical fiction’s attempt to distinguish itself from other realist novels and from historiography proper offers a crack through which to re-examine the assumed categorical and generic distinction that modern disciplinary historiography assumes for itself. Duggan’s

authorial note highlights several of the dissonances produced by historical fiction's attempt to face in two directions simultaneously, when it claims that *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* possesses a story that is both true and false, characters that are both real and imagined, and events that both happened and did not. The comparative examination of these dissonances in *Lord Geoffrey's Fancy* highlights similar phenomena in historiography.

Each of the three case studies, in different ways, seek to blur the boundary set up by disciplinary history. The first two case studies illustrate how modern historiographical explanations are both too divergent from their source material to fulfil their claims to an exclusively true story (as in the first case study) and retain too much of their narrative and rhetorical structure (as in the second and third). The first focuses on how historiography ends up being an inventive and imaginative process, while the second and third both demonstrate that there is often no qualitative difference between the ways in which historiography and historical fiction receive medieval texts. In these examples the principal difference in the reception of the *Chronicle of Morea's* narrative is its formal style of its retelling. Finally, the third case study tentatively suggests that the opportunity to look sideways at historical narration is a potential of historical fiction that has yet to be exploited. Taken as a whole, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that thinking about historiography in terms of reception and engaging with the logics that organise both historiography and historical fiction has the potential to empower alternative and (at least potentially) less disciplinarily straight-jacketed readings, because it starts by acknowledging that that historians are also in the business of imagining their stories and that meaning is neither fixed nor singular.

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