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HISTORY AND FICTION

What Is History?

“History ... is all fictionalized, and yet history.”¹ It may come as a surprise to readers unfamiliar with recent debates in biblical studies to discover the frequency with which the term *fiction* has begun to appear in discussions of biblical narrative. Alter, for example, in a provocative essay entitled “Sacred History and the Beginnings of Prose Fiction,” emphasizes the vital role of fiction in biblical historiography. He even goes so far as to claim that “prose fiction is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative.”² It will be my aim in this chapter to argue that the concept of fiction, *if it can be properly defined and guarded against misunderstanding*, may be fruitfully employed in discussions of biblical historiography, but that it is in practice often applied in inappropriate and confusing ways, perhaps not least by Alter himself.³ I shall suggest further that the confusion over fictionality derives in part from ambiguities within the term *fiction* itself. To complicate matters further, the term *history* is also ambiguous, being understood even by nonspecialists in at least two distinct senses.

Confusion over the role played by fictionality in history is

¹Halpern, *First Historians*, p. 68.

²The essay constitutes chap. 2 of *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, and the quote is from p. 24.

³See Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 23-30.

apparent since some are proclaiming fictionality as lying at the heart of history-writing, while others are declaiming fiction as the very opposite of history. Blomberg insists, for example, that “a historical narrative recounts that which actually happened; it is the opposite of fiction.”⁴ Similarly, Colin Hemer observes that “it is no good raising the question of historicity if we are dealing with avowed fairy-tale or fiction.”⁵ But Alter seems to have in mind some other concept of fiction, for he insists that fictionality and historicity are not antithetical. He writes:

In giving such weight to fictionality, I do not mean to discount the historical impulse that informs the Hebrew Bible. The God of Israel, as so often has been observed, is above all the God of history: the working out of his purposes in history is a process that compels the attention of the Hebrew imagination, which is thus led to the most vital interest in the concrete and differential character of historical events. The point is that fiction was the principal means which the biblical authors had at their disposal for realizing history.”

A first step in coming to terms with the apparent disagreement is to clarify what the terms history and fiction can mean. History, for example, as the term is commonly employed, can refer either to the past or to the study of the past; or, to put it another way, history can denote both events in the past and verbal accounts of these events. Consider the following illustration provided by David Bebbington.

A visitor to the Tower of London may well buy a copy of its history. When ‘history’ is used in this way it means something different from ‘history’ in the claim that history repeats itself. A history of the Tower of London is its written history, a record of the past. The history that may or may not repeat itself, on the other hand, is the past itself, not a record but what really took place. In the English language the word history can mean either what people write about time gone by, that is historiography; or else it can mean what people have done and suffered, that is the historical process.⁷

⁴*Historical Reliability*, p. xviii n. 2.

⁵*Book of Acts*, p. 34.

⁶*Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 32.

⁷*Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought*, new ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), p. 1.

No doubt many disputes could be settled if the various terms of discussion were consistently defined and applied. If, for example, as Philip Davies suggests, the term history were reserved for “the events of the past as a continuum” and the term *historiography* for “the selective telling of those events,” much confusion could be avoided.⁸ But since such terminological consistency is frequently lacking in academic discussion,⁹ about all one can do is to recognize that *history* is used in two quite distinct senses—to refer to the past itself and to interpretive verbal accounts of the past—and to discern in each context which is intended.¹⁰ (It is perhaps also worth mentioning that much confusion and misunderstanding could be avoided if specialists would bear in mind that laypersons often have little understanding of the way *history* and *historical* are used as technical terms in professional discussions and, not surprisingly, are baffled when confronted by statements that both deny that some event is *historical* and at the same time insist that this does not mean it didn't happen.¹¹ To the layperson, history is what happened in the past.)

What about the term *fiction*? To the average person, who

⁸J. Rogerson and P. R. Davies, *The Old Testament World* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1989), p. 218.

⁹E.g., with respect to Old Testament studies, J. Van Seters (In *Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983], p. 209) comments: “the subject of Israelite historiography has become highly diversified and the terminology increasingly ambiguous and confusing, [so that] the same terms are used in quite different ways.”

¹⁰This discussion of *history* might easily be extended to cover such terms as *historie* and *historical*, *Historie* and *Geschichte*, and so forth, but what is important for our present purposes is the basic distinction between history-as-event and history-as-account. On the former pair, see Caird, *Language and Imagery*, p. 202; on the latter, see R. N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976). s.v. “Historie”; F. S. Leahy, “The Gospel and History,” *Reformed Theological Journal* (Nov. 1985): 52-54.

¹¹Cf. J. Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible*, Explorations in Theology 7 (London: SCM, 1980), p. 9: “Again, it may be argued that the view just expressed assumes that God does not act in history and does not affect it. It assumes nothing of the sort. It simply observes that we do not apply the term ‘history’ to a form of investigation which resorts to divine agency as a mode of explanation.”

tends to regard history and fiction as virtual opposites, a statement like the one by Alter quoted above—“fiction was the principal means which the biblical authors had at their disposal for realizing history”—will seem like nonsense. But Alter explains:

The essential and ineluctable fact is that most of the narrative portions of the Hebrew Bible are organized on literary principles, however intent the authors may have been in conveying an account of national origins and cosmic beginnings and a vision of what the Lord God requires of man. We are repeatedly confronted, that is, with shrewdly defined characters, artfully staged scenes, subtle arrangements of dialogue, artifices of significant analogy among episodes, recurrent images and motifs and other aspects of narrative that are formally identical with the means of prose fiction as a general mode of verbal art.¹²

What Alter seems to be saying, in essence, is that literary shaping and artistry play no less significant a role in biblical historiography than in fiction. Halpern puts it succinctly when he states that “history [by which he means history as account] is fictional and employs the devices of all narrative presentation.”¹³

The point in all this is that the word *fiction*, like the term *history*, may be used in two senses. Unfortunately, the two senses of fiction are not always clearly distinguished in discussions of narrative historiography. Alter, for example, sometimes speaks of “historicized fiction” and other times of “fictionalized history,” without ever offering a clear articulation of the rather fundamental difference between the two.¹⁴ The crucial term in each of these expressions, however, is the last one. In “historicized fiction,” the weight of emphasis falls on *fiction*, suggesting that whatever bits of

¹²“How Convention Helps,” p. 116.

¹³*First Historians*, p. 269.

¹⁴He does show awareness of the distinction on occasion; see, e.g., *Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 25, 33-34, 41. But his lack of clarity on this important point still leaves him open to criticism; e.g., D. Patrick and A. Scult (Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation, JSOTS 82 [Sheffield: Almond, 1990], p. 50) write: “Alter has done much to open the Bible to serious reading by a wider audience, but by limiting himself to aesthetic judgments, he still does not integrate the Bible’s truth-claims, as they are spoken, into his interpretative approach. He essentially reads the text as realistic fiction.”

factual information may be included the story itself is nonfactual (as, for example, in a historical novel). In “fictionalized history,” on the other hand, the weight falls on history, the claim being that the story is a representation of a real event in the past, whatever fictionalizing may be involved in the crafting of the narrative.¹⁵ Only when this double sense of the term fiction is understood—fiction as genre and fiction as *artistry* or *craft*—does it become possible to agree with Blomberg that history “is the opposite of fiction” and at the same time to agree with Halpern that “all history ... is fictionalized, and yet history.”¹⁶ Blomberg’s focus is on history and fiction as distinct literary genres, whereas Halpern’s point seems to be that any representation of the past, inasmuch as it is not (literally) the past, involves a “fictionalizing” aspect.¹⁷ Halpern has in mind *form* (i.e., the way the story is told), while Blomberg is apparently thinking of *function* (i.e., for what purpose the story is told).

So long as we bear in mind this important distinction between form and function we may speak of a certain fictionality involved in all narrative discourse while still maintaining the common-sense differentiation between historical narratives, which “claim to tell us what really happened,” and *fictional* narratives, which “portray events that of course by definition never happened, [though] they are often said to be true-to-life.”¹⁸ The point is simply that fictionality of a certain sort is as likely to be found in the historian’s toolbox as in the fiction writer’s.¹⁹

¹⁵For a similar distinction, cf. F. F. Bruce (“Myth and History,” in *History, Criticism and Faith*, ed. Colin Brown [Leicester: IVP, 1979], p. 84), where he favors “mythologization of history” to “historicization of myth,” but prefers “theological interpretation of history” to both.

¹⁶Both quotations occur at the beginning of this chapter.

¹⁷Cf. Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* p. 100: “The real world is never identical with the world of a story, even if that story is regarded as portraying life in the real world quite accurately.”

¹⁸D. Carr, “Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity,” *HTh* 25 (1986): 117.

¹⁹Sternberg (*Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 28) illustrates this point well by citing an evaluation of historian Garret Mattingly’s *The Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (1959) by a low professional historian and observing “how many of [Robert] Alter’s *measures of fictionality* are invoked to define Mattingly’s professional excellence as a *historian*” (insertion and italics mine).

Still, given the potential for (and indeed the presence of) much confusion resulting from the use of an ambiguous (bivalent) term like *fiction*, it would be far better, at least with respect to the perceptions of the average person, to substitute a term like *artistry* to describe the historian’s literary technique, and reserve the term *fiction* for the nonfactual genre of that name. Since this is not likely to happen, however, it will be necessary when reading this or that scholar to discover how the term *fiction* is being used.

The issues raised so far can be elucidated by comparing historiography, which might be fairly described as a kind of a verbal representational art, with a visual type of representational art such as painting.²⁰

HISTORY-WRITING AS REPRESENTATIONAL ART

In his oil painting classes in Chicago, my former teacher Karl Steele would occasionally reflect on a criticism that he, as an impressionist painter, sometimes received from those more at-

²⁰The analogy between historiography and art has a venerable history and continues to evoke interest today; see, e.g., F. R. Ankersmit, “Historical Representation,” *HTh* 27 (1988): 205-28. No analogy is perfect, of course, and a criticism that could be made of this one is that a text should not be treated “as a static spatial form, like a painting, a sculpture, or a piece of architecture” (so R. M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], p. 42), since reading is a “dynamic, concrete, temporal experience, instead of the abstract perception of a spatial form” (ibid., p. 25). I would argue, however, that the distinction between reading texts and viewing paintings should not be overpressed. While countless tourists may spend a few hours in the Louvre casting a glance this way and that to see the paintings, it can hardly be said that many of them have properly *viewed* the paintings. Time and dynamic interplay are as involved in giving a painting a “close viewing” as they are in giving a text a “close reading.” If anything, the distinction between viewing a painting and reading a text is in the sequence of perception: with a painting, one generally begins with an impression of the whole, then proceeds to study individual *passages* of the painting, and finally returns to a greater appreciation of the whole in the light of its parts; with an unfamiliar narrative, one must generally begin by reading the individual passages in sequence, which leads eventually to an impression of the whole, and then finally to a greater appreciation of the parts in the light of the whole.

tracted by what is commonly called abstract or expressionist art. The basic criticism was that since his paintings were *representational*, or at least *realistic*²¹ (primarily landscapes and seascapes), there was less *artfulness* in his craft—he simply *copied* nature. Steele's response was to challenge his critics to inspect at very close range any two-inch square of one of his canvases. Should the critics agree to the challenge, what they would find would not be nature, or even an exact copy of the appearance of nature, but a tiny abstract painting! In other words, each of Steele's *realistic* paintings consisted of a series of abstractions, which taken together and viewed from the proper vantage point gave a convincing and indeed realistic impression of the scene depicted. In one sense, then, Steele's paintings were *fictions* and not *literal* renderings of reality. There could be no question of counting blades of grass or leaves on trees; each brush stroke was an abstraction, just paint on canvas. In another sense, however, his paintings were very much representations of reality, imparting to receptive viewers a truer sense and appreciation of the scene, as Steele perceived it, than even the best color photography could have done.

The above illustration relates to the issue of historiography in the following manner. Common sense suggests that it would be a *reductio ad absurdum* to argue that since Steele's paintings at one level make use of techniques indistinguishable from those employed by abstract or expressionist painters, they therefore cannot be representational, or make reference to a reality outside themselves. One can find, however, among the writings of those who challenge the representational capacity of narrative discourse, statements that seem similarly reductionistic. Roland Barthes, for example, in drawing attention to what he calls "the fallacy of referentiality," writes:

²¹I am using the term in a general, not a technical sense, as a virtual synonym for naturalistic—i.e., concerned with depicting the world more or less as it appears. For a more technical description of these two terms, see, e.g., K. Reynolds with R. Seddon, *Illustrated Dictionary of Art Terms: A Handbook for the Artist and Art Lover* (London: Ebury Press, 1981), ad loc.

Claims concerning the "realism" of narrative are therefore to be discounted. . . . The function of narrative is not to "represent," it is to constitute a spectacle. . . . Narrative does not show, does not imitate. . . . "What takes place" in a narrative is from the referential (reality) point of view literally nothing; "what happens" is language alone, the adventure of language, the unceasing celebration of its coming.²²

This sounds very much like saying that "what happens" in one of Steele's paintings is *paint alone*. Barthes's statement may be true of some narratives, but surely not all. If paintings can be broadly divided into representational and nonrepresentational varieties, into those that attempt to depict some aspect of the world outside and those that simply celebrate the potentialities of paint as a medium, then is it possible that narratives can be similarly classified? Of course, even representational (referential) painters enjoy considerable freedom in terms of how they choose to depict their **subject**—compositional and **stylistic** decisions have to be **made**.²³ But this does not mean that a generic distinction cannot and should not be made between paintings that are representational and those that are not. By the same token, I would contend that a distinction can and should be made between narratives that are essentially representational (historiographical) and those that are not.

On what basis then are narratives to be classified? Form alone is not a sufficient criterion: "there are simply no universals of historical vs. fictive form. Nothing on the surface, that is,

²²"Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" (1966), p. 124; quoted by Hayden White ("The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory" *HTH* 23 [1984]:14), which see for an extended critique of Barthes's position (pp. 12-15).

²³E. H. Gombrich ("The Mask and the Face: Perception of Physiognomic Likeness in Life and in Art," in *Art, Perception, and Reality*, ed. Maurice Mandelbaum [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972], pp. 1-46) offers an extreme example of this in his description of a portrait painted by Picasso in which the subject's head is given a perfectly oblong shape, but then, in "a balancing of compensatory moves . . . to compensate for her face not being really oblong but narrow, Picasso paints it blue—maybe the pallor is here felt to be an equivalent to the impression of slimness" (p. 30). The interesting point is that despite the abstractions, the painting retains a referential function.

infallibly marks off the two genres. As modes of discourse, history and fiction make *functional* categories that may remain constant under the most assorted formal variations and are distinguishable only by their overall sense of **purpose**.²⁴ In other words, "there are no formal features, no textual properties **that** identify a given text as a work of fiction,"²⁵ yet history and fiction can still be distinguished on the basis of their overall purpose. Aristotle, writing more than two thousand years ago, came close to saying the same thing: "The difference between a historian and a poet is not that one writes in prose and the other in verse. . . . The real difference is this, that one tells what happened and the other what might happen."²⁶ This general point can be illustrated by observing the chiasmic structure of the last four chapters of 2 Samuel.

21:1-14	A	Famine resulting from Saul's sin is stopped
21:15-22	B	Short list of Davidic champions
22:1-51	C	Long poetic composition: David's song of praise
23:1-7	C'	Short poetic composition: David's last words
23:8-39	B'	Long list of Davidic champions
24:1-25	A'	Plague resulting from David's sin is stopped

As Sternberg points out, **chiasm** is now widely recognized as "one of the indisputable literary devices" found in the Old Testament, and yet the chief goal of the epilogue to 2 Samuel "remains informational and memorial." The conclusion to be drawn from this is that while "form can produce or imply an artistic function, it still cannot enthrone one regardless of context."²⁷

If, then, historical literature and fictional literature are "distinguishable only by their overall sense of purpose," context becomes one of the primary means of discovering this purpose.

²⁴Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 30.

²⁵Vanhoozer ("Semantics of Biblical Literature," p. 68), summarizing the view of J. R. Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History* 6 (1975): 319-32.

²⁶*Poetics*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), chap. 9 (1451b).

²⁷*Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 40-41.

We are reminded of one of the fundamental principles of discourse introduced in the preceding chapter-viz., that "each successively higher level of textual organization influences all of the lower levels of which it is composed." The question to be asked then is this: What is the apparent function of a particular narrative within its broader context? A sense of the purpose of a narrative is, as Sternberg puts it, "a matter of inference from clues planted in and around the **writing**."²⁸ Again let me illustrate with an example from the visual arts.

Imagine that we are viewing a painting of an old railroad depot. Imagine also that for the moment we are not allowed to look around to gain our bearings and to discover where the painting is hung. Without some knowledge of the painting's setting, we may be unable to decide whether the painting's primary function is a historical one-to be a lasting reminder of the appearance of an old landmark-or an aesthetic one-simply to be a pleasing work of art. Imagine that we are now allowed to look around. If we find that the painting is prominently displayed (with a bronze plaque beneath it) in the foyer of a brand new railroad terminal, we shall likely conclude that some historical function is being served (perhaps this was the old terminal that was demolished to make room for the new one). If, on the other hand, we find that the painting is displayed in an art gallery along with other paintings depicting various subjects, we shall be more inclined to assume that the aesthetic function is primary. Now, of course, the historical (or referential) purpose implicit in the first scenario does not exclude a concern with artistic quality. It is the greater aesthetic appeal of a painting over a photograph that will have prompted the railroad company to choose the more expensive option. The first scenario does imply, however, that the artist will have worked under some referential constraints. He will have been constrained by the actualities of the subject, at least to the point of making the subject recognizable. In the second scenario, though the artist may in fact fairly represent the appearance of the old depot, he will have been under no obligation to do so.²⁹

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁹Illustrations of the continuum between referential and aesthetic interests might easily be multiplied: an architectural blueprint is referential, while an architectural

What is true of visual art (paintings) is true also of verbal art (narratives). The difference between a narrative whose primary purpose is representational (or referential) and one whose primary purpose is aesthetic is the degree to which the artist is constrained by the actualities of the subject matter. As Matt Oja puts it, "historians are constrained by the need to discover and work with a set of facts which already exist and which they look upon from without. Writers of fiction are not so constrained. ... A fictional narrative does not have objective reality until the author creates it."³⁰ In some instances external evidence-material remains, eyewitness reports- may offer clues as to a narrative's purpose and its degree of adherence to the "facts,"³¹ but in all instances our quest to discover a narrative's overall sense of purpose should begin with attention to clues in and around the narrative. If both the subject matter of the narrative itself and the nature of the surrounding context suggest a representational purpose, then we may assume that the writer has been in some measure constrained by the facts. I say "in some measure," because neither representational artists nor historians simply reproduce their subjects.

HISTORY-WRITING AS A CREATIVE ENTERPRISE

I have argued that the chief difference between writers of history and writers of fiction is that the former are constrained by the facts of the past, while the latter are not. Does this disallow any creative input from the historian in the writing of history? Not at all, for as we have just noted, historians do not simply reproduce the past. Rather, they must contribute to the work they produce in at least a couple of ways. First, they must study all available

rendering of the planned construction combines representational and aesthetic interests in almost equal measure; a "mug shot" is referential, while a portrait combines representational and aesthetic interests, etc.

³⁰"Fictional History and Historical Fiction: Solzhenitsyn and Kiš as Exemplars," *HTh* 27 (1988): 120; similarly, Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, p. 29.

³¹For nuanced discussions of the slippery concept of "facts," see Stanford, *Nature*, pp. 71-74; II. H. Nash, *Christian Faith and Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), pp. 93-109.

evidence pertinent to their subject and develop their own vision of the past. Second, this vision must be encoded in a verbal medium in such a way that it can be shared with others. The first task, "the historian's construction of the past," is described by Stanford as "the pivot of historical knowledge" that stands between "history-as-event and history-as-record." The second task, the transposition of this construction into "written or spoken form," is equally important, since it "stands between the historian's mental construction and those of the audience."³²

Few historians or philosophers would dispute the notion that writers of history make significant contributions in the ways mentioned above. What is hotly disputed, however, is the nature and extent of the historian's contribution. One of the major points of debate is whether narrative *form* as such is an aspect of reality itself or is a product solely of the historian's imagination. A narrative is characterized by having a plot, for example, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Are such features aspects of reality itself or constructions created solely in the mind of the historian? Does the past present itself in narrative form, as a meaningful sequence, or is it a meaningless chaos, upon which the historian must impose a narrative structure?

Some historians and literary theorists today assume that "real events simply do not hang together in a narrative way, and if we treat them as if they did we -are being untrue to life."³³ Others, however, disagree. David Carr, for example, strongly challenges the view that meaningful sequence is merely an invention of historians.³⁴ He sets the stage by quoting such notables as Louis Mink ("Life has no beginnings, middles and ends. ... Narrative qualities are transferred from art to life") and Hayden White ("Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of

³²*Nature*, pp. 143-44. Similarly, Axtell ("History as Imagination," p. 458) writes: "Since history at its best is shared discovery, the historian's final and most important task is to *translate* his vision, his 'achieved awareness' and understanding, of the past for the modern reader."

³³Carr ("Narrative and the Real World," p. 117), who goes on to contest this view.

³⁴Both in the article mentioned in the preceding note and in a book entitled *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

well-made stories? Or does it present itself more in the way that the annals and chronicles suggest, either as a mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude?"³⁵ Carr himself maintains that "narrative is not merely a possibly successful way of describing events; its structure inheres in the events themselves."³⁶

If Carr is correct, does this mean that the historian simply finds historical narratives rather than constructs them? I would contend that the answer lies somewhere in the middle, and that two extremes should be avoided: (1) that which denies the importance of the historian's vision and creative imagination and (2) that which denies to the past any inherent/coherent structure whatsoever. Historians, as verbal representational artists, find themselves in a position analogous to that of visual representational artists. The latter can paint a number of different pictures of a single subject, no two of which are alike, but this does not mean that the subject itself lacks inherent structure or that the artists are unconstrained by the facts. The production of a representational painting involves a coordination of creativity and constraint, the creativity of the artist under the constraint of the subject. The subject matter does not simply present itself to the artist as a painting waiting to be painted. The artist must make various kinds of choices. First, a subject must be chosen from among the multitude of possible subjects in the world around. Second, a vantage point must be chosen from which to view the subject. Third, compositional decisions must be made: what are to be the boundaries or limits of the painting? Do these boundaries result in an overall sense of balance? Depending on the purpose of the painting, the artist may have some freedom to arrange or rearrange elements of his subject. The portrait artist, for example, enjoys considerable freedom to rearrange objects in the setting but is rather constrained when it comes to rearranging the subject's face! Fourth, a paint medium must be chosen (oil, acrylic, watercolor, etc.), the palette of colors selected (will it include a limited or a full range of colors?), the style decided (will the painting be rendered

³⁵"Narrative and the Real World," p. 118.

³⁶Ibid., p. 117.

in intricate detail with small brushes or will it be executed boldly and rapidly with a palette knife?), and so forth.

Just as the physical world does not present itself in such a way that no creative choices are required of artists who would depict some aspect of it, so the past does not present itself in such a way that historians need make no creative choices in the construction of a historical account of some aspect of it. But if the past does have some inherent structure (as I believe it does), then the first task of historians is to seek to discern that structure. Beyond this, they must also choose a point of view—the most appropriate perspective from which to depict the subject and the "best light" in which to see it. And they must make aesthetic choices—how shall the work be composed, what degree of detail shall be included, what shall be the boundaries of their "picture" of the past, and so forth.

Constraint by the subject matter, point of view, aesthetic choices—our painting analogy can help us begin to understand how the three impulses mentioned in the preceding chapter might be coordinated in the biblical literature, not only its narratives but also in other genres (such as poetry) that may include historical reference. The historiographical impulse implies constraint by the subject, the *theological* implies point of view, and the *literary* implies aesthetic choices. But the fruitfulness of the painting analogy does not end here. So far, the creative choices required of painter and historian alike are but preliminaries to the actual execution of the work. When it comes to the latter, there are again a number of helpful parallels between the requirements of visual and of verbal representation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL REPRESENTATION

Of the numerous points of advice that Karl Steele would customarily offer his painting classes, several stand out as particularly important. First, he would often instruct students at work on their paintings to blur their vision occasionally by half-closing their eyes; the effect of this was to eliminate the distraction of too much detail and to facilitate perception of the major

contours and tonal relationships of the subject. Second, and as a corollary to this first point of advice, he would stress the importance of standing back from the canvas, or even walking backward, in order to view the subject and the canvas from a distance. Close proximity to the canvas, he would say, does not guarantee more accurate results but quite often the opposite, since the painter sometimes gets lost among the trees and loses sight of the overall shape of the forest. Third, he would contend that the most effective paintings are those that exploit the suggestiveness of visual ambiguities-lost edges, mysterious shadows, etc. He would point out that a common mistake of beginners is to attempt to record the great mass of detail exhibited by the subject, whereas the best way to achieve a realistic representation is to be very selective, limiting the depiction of details to a suggestive few so as to allow the mind of the viewers to fill in the rest.

These procedures of the visual artist-what we might call creative *means* to representational ends-find ready analogues in the work of the verbal artists we call historians. Since the "Ideal Chronicler"-viz., one who records everything that happens as it happens-does not exist, it is obvious that all historians must, to some extent at least, simplify their presentations of their subjects.³⁷ As Peter Ackroyd rightly observes, "the recounting of what happened, even a few moments later, inevitably introduces simplifications, selections, interpretations."³⁸ Indeed, one of the main tasks of historians, **Axtell** reminds us, is to discern and represent "the larger patterns, structures and meanings behind particular events and facts which contemporaries were not able to see."³⁹

How do historians accomplish this? Where data are plentiful,

³⁷For a critical evaluation of the concept of the "Ideal Chronicler," see P. A. Roth, "Narrative Explanations: The Case of History," *HTh* 27 (1988): 1-13; also L. O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. R. H. Canary and H. Kozicki (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 140. Even if an exhaustive "Ideal Chronicler" existed, the resulting history would be so massive as to be useless.

³⁸"Historians and Prophets," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 33 (1968): 21.

³⁹"History as Imagination," p. 457.

historians must seek to discern the major contours of the subject by, as it were, half-closing their eyes so as to perceive the big picture. Alternatively, or additionally, they may enjoy the advantage of being able to view the subject from a distance, from across the room of time. As important as empirical evidence and eye-witness testimony are, historians standing at some remove from the subject are often in a favorable position to discern the major shapes and relations of the past. We often say of prominent contemporaries (presidents or prime ministers) that "it will be interesting to see how history treats them." Again, Ackroyd makes the point well: "the historian who writes at some distance from the events may be in a better position to give a true appraisal than one who is so involved as to see only a part of what makes up the whole."⁴⁰ One reason that the historian writing some time after the event may be at an advantage is that "the significance of a historical phenomenon is often recognized by its sequences or consequences, i.e., its **posthistory**."⁴¹ Finally, historians, like painters, must avoid the temptation to include too much detail in their depiction. There must be an economy to their craft; if carefully selected, only a few suggestive details may be necessary to capture their subject (Esau's hairiness, Ehud's left-handedness, Eli's heaviness, etc.). "What matters most in history ... is 'the great outline and the significant detail; what must be avoided is [a] deadly morass of irrelevant narrative' in between."⁴²

THE ADEQUACY AND AUTHORITY OF REPRESENTATION

Simplification, selectivity, suggestive detail- these hallmarks of effective historiography are reminiscent of the kinds of features often highlighted in discussions of the literary artistry of

⁴⁰"Historians and Prophets," p. 21.

⁴¹M. Tsevat, "Israelite History and the Historical Books of the Old Testament," in *The Meaning of the Book of Job and Other Biblical Essays* (New York: Ktav, 1980), p. 181; note also Tsevat's important qualification that "the significance is not bestowed by the latter upon the former; the consequences are indicators and not generators" (ibid.).

⁴²Axtell, "History as Imagination," p. 459; quoting Lewis Namier.

biblical narrative. I hope that by now enough has been said to make the point that literary artistry and reliable historiography should not be set in opposition. But still the challenge might be raised: "In making a case that the Bible presents us with 'representational paintings,' have you not reduced our confidence in what the Bible can tell us about the past? Wouldn't photographs serve us better?" The answer to this question is that it very much depends on the artist! Admittedly, painting often involves a greater interpretive component than does photography (though even the latter requires that creative choices be made), but this is not necessarily a bad thing. As Carl F. H. Henry asserts, "Christian faith requires not simply the redemptive historical act but its meaning or significance as well; historical research alone is impotent either to guarantee any past event or to adduce its meaning or theological import."⁴³

"But I'm just interested in the bare facts," the challenge might continue. Such a statement is both wrong-headed and a bit naive. Since the past is past and unrepeatable, it will never be possible to recover the "bare facts" pure and simple, at least not all of them; we are inevitably dependent on witnesses and evidences. As Caird explains, "History has a factual content, but it comes to the historian not as fact but as evidence, emanating from persons with whom he must engage in **conversation**."⁴⁴ Even if we could return to the past and record it on videotape, this would still not guarantee us an adequate understanding of the past. In the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, I remember hearing a commentator on National Public Radio express a frustration he had felt while the war was in progress. It went something like this: "They kept sending us videotapes, but they didn't tell us what they meant. We had the video images, but no interpretation."

It is the greater interpretive capacity of painting over photography that makes it the generally preferred medium for portraiture (visual historiography). And it is the greater interpretive (explanatory) capacity of literary narrative over bare chronicle that makes it the preferred medium of biblical historiography.

⁴³God, Revelation and Authority (Waco: Word, 1976), 2: 330.

⁴⁴Language and Imagery, p. 202.

These preferences are only justified, of course, to the extent that the narrators or painters are skillful and competent in their craft, and they have adequate access to their subject. No one would dispute that a portrait by an artist who is incompetent or who has no clear notion of the character and appearance of the subject will be inferior (on either artistic or referential grounds, or both) to even a simple photograph of the subject. But recent studies are increasingly demonstrating that the biblical narrators were consummate literary artists. And for those willing to accept it, their claim to have written under divine inspiration more than adequately guarantees their access to their subject.⁴⁵

There are, of course, many in today's world who dismiss any notion of divine inspiration. In so doing, however, they find themselves in a rather perplexing position. As Mink explains in "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," many moderns continue to embrace (consciously or unconsciously) a concept of Universal History—the notion that "the ensemble of human events belongs to a single story"—but they have no notion as to "who devises or tells this story. In its original theological form, as with Augustine, Universal History was the work of divine Providence; but as the idea became secularized by the eighteenth century, God the Author retreated, leaving the idea of a story which is simply there, devised by no one ... but waiting to be told by someone" (pp. 136–137). Mink's proposed solution to this rather unstable state of affairs brought about by modernism's elimination of the Author but retention of the Story is, in the end, to abandon altogether the residual belief that the past contains an "untold story to which narrative histories approximate" and to assert that only "individual statements of fact" are "determinate." But since "the significance of past occurrences" cannot be grasped except insofar as they find a place within a narrative, Mink concludes that a story must yet be told, and it is we who must tell

⁴⁵As Henry aptly puts it (*God, Revelation and Authority*, 2: 330): "Empirical probability can indeed be combined with inner certainty when the meaning of specific happenings is transcendently vouchsafed, that is, when that meaning is objectively given by divine revelation." Cf. also Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 32-35.

the story; we must "make the past determinate in that respect" (p. 148). Having shown "God the Author" the door, modernism is left to tell the story itself. And though Mink does not address the issue, it would seem that since "we" denotes a plurality of persons, none of whom possesses more than a relative authority, the inevitable result of Mink's "solution" will be a thoroughgoing historical relativism.

The alternative to modernism's dilemma is to embrace a concept of biblical inspiration such that the authority of the Bible's pictures of the past (whatever may be the differences between them, and however incorrectly we may at times view them) is as secure as the authority of the One who inspired them.

AN EXAMPLE: SAMUEL-KINGS AND CHRONICLES

In the preceding paragraph, mention was made of differences that sometimes exist among the Bible's pictures of the past. Indeed, even biblical accounts of the same events often differ in various ways. Some might wish that these differences did not exist, but the fact of the matter is that our having different presentations of the same subject often puts us at an advantage! Multiple presentations enable us to view the subject from different angles and under various lights, and to benefit from the narrative artists' own interpretive contributions. However brilliantly a biography may be written, or however masterfully a portrait may be painted, our knowledge of the life and visage of a given individual is surely enhanced if we have access to more than one biography or portrait. When approaching the New Testament's four gospels, for example, or the Old Testament's two histories of the monarchy (Samuel-Kings and Chronicles), we do well to keep this perspective in mind.⁴

⁴The real question, of course, for those who are perplexed by differences among accounts of the same event(s) is whether or not these constitute irreconcilable differences—that is, contradictions—that would force us to call in question the narrative artists' competence, motives, control of the subject matter, or the like. While it would be obscurantist to deny that the Bible presents vexing difficulties for which solutions are not readily forthcoming, I would maintain (1) that a properly

To investigate how we might go about negotiating differences among biblical accounts purporting to cover similar historical terrain, let us look more closely at the synoptic histories of the Old Testament. As Roddy Braun has observed, a comparative reading of Israel's synoptic histories affords an opportunity "to learn much about both the nature of historical writing in Israel and the manner in which God used His inspired writers to speak a message to their own day."⁴⁷ Even a quick reading discovers that Samuel-Kings and Chronicles paint rather different pictures, not only in points of detail but even in terms of their overall shape. The Chronicler's history, for instance, has little or nothing to say on matters that were of great concern in the earlier history of Samuel-Kings: reference to King Saul (whose election, rejection, and decline occupy much of 1 Samuel) is limited to a brief summary of his death and its cause in 1 Chronicles 10;⁴⁸ nothing is said of the Saulide opposition to David's rise to power (though this opposition is a focus of interest in the second half of 1 Samuel and the early chapters of 2 Samuel); no mention is made of David's adultery with Bathsheba and his arranged murder of Uriah, nor of the disastrous political and domestic consequences of these actions (though 2 Samuel 1 1-20 are largely taken up with these matters); no mention is made of Adonijah's threat to Solomon, or of Solomon's palace, or of his apostasy (though these figure prominently in 1 Kings 1-1 1); no mention is made of the prophetic ministries of Elijah and Elisha that occupy center stage in 1 Kings 17-2 Kings 8, save the report of a letter of judgment from Elijah to Jehoram of Judah in 2 Chronicles 21:1 1-17 (which letter,

nuanced understanding of the nature and purpose of the biblical literature greatly lessens the number of perceived difficulties and (2) that the remainder of stubborn cases should be held in abeyance or, preferably, made the object of special study by those whose technical training and theological orientation might place them in a position to find, not strained harmonizations, but true solutions.

⁴⁷"The Message of Chronicles: Rally 'Round the Temple," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 42 (1971): 502.

⁴⁸For a recent discussion of the significance of the brief treatment of Saul in Chronicles, see Saul Zalewski. "The purpose of the story of the death of Saul in 1 Chronicles X," *VT* 39 (1989): 449-67; cf. also Achroyd, "The Chronicler as Exegete," *JSOT* 2 (1977): 2-32.

curiously, is not mentioned in **Kings**);⁴⁹ no mention is made of the fall of the Northern Kingdom (an event of signal importance recounted in 2 Kings 17). The list could continue and be presented in much greater detail, but enough has been indicated to show that by virtue of its omissions the Chronicler's presentation of Israel's past is given a quite different shape than that of Samuel-Kings.

Not only does the Chronicler's picture omit much that is found in Samuel-Kings, it also includes much that is not found in the earlier corpus: extensive genealogical lists stretching back to Adam (1 Chron. 1-9); additional lists of David's mighty men (chap. 12); reports of David's Levitical appointments (chaps. 15-16); descriptions of his preparations for temple building and temple worship (chaps. 22-29); much additional material relating to the Kingdom of Judah (various additions in the stretch of text from 2 Chron. 11-32); and Cyrus's decree marking the end of the exile (36:22-23).

From this very general overview, we can see that the Old Testament's two histories of the monarchy present different pictures in terms of overall shape and composition. But the differences between them are not limited to such large-scale matters. The two histories often differ significantly even in the way they render the same event or in the way they portray the same person. As an example, we might compare the two accounts of God's dynastic promise to David as presented in 2 Samuel 7 and 1 Chronicles 17.⁵⁰ That "there is a clear literary relationship

⁴⁹For discussion, see R. Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1988), pp. 167-69.

⁵⁰Other instructive examples would include, e.g., the Chronicler's depiction of King Abijah, which is comparatively more positive than that found in Kings (cf. 2 Chron. 13 and 1 Kings 15; for discussion see D. G. DeBoys, "History and Theology in the Chronicler's Portrayal of Abijah," *Biblica* 71 [1990]: 48-62); the Chronicler's presentation of David's census as compared to the Samuel account of the same episode (1 Chron. 21 and 2 Sam. 24; see Dillard, "David's Census: Perspectives on 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21," in *Through Christ's Word: A Festschrift for Dr. Philip E. Hughes*, ed. W. R. Godfrey and J. L. Boyd [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985], pp. 94-107; J. H. Sailhamer, "1 Chronicles 21:1—A Study in Inter-Biblical Interpretation," *TrinJ* 10 [1989]: 33-48); the depiction of Josiah and his reforms in Chronicles as compared to the presentation in Kings (see, on 2 Chron. 34:4-7 and 2 Kings 23:4-14; D. L. Washburn,

between the two" is beyond dispute.⁵¹ But when we compare the two passages, we discover a number of differences between them. The chart on the next two pages basically follows the NIV, but with some adjustments to reflect more closely the Hebrew texts. In the chart, some (though not all) differences have been highlighted: material peculiar to one passage only is placed in italics and the location of this material is indicated by a dotted line in both texts; solid underlining identifies noticeable differences in phraseology; alternation of the divine names God and LORD (Yahweh) are in bold type. (See chart now.)

A side-by-side reading of these parallel texts discovers numerous **divergences**—some minor, others more major. What are we to make of them? In the present context we must limit ourselves to a few brief comments on some of the apparently more significant differences. But first a word of caution: it should not be assumed that all differences represent motivated changes by the Chronicler.⁵² Some may simply reflect the Chronicler's freedom to paraphrase or generalize, as he does often in his composition.⁵³ Other differences seem to result from stylistic or lexical preferences.⁵⁴ In still other instances, the Chronicler may simply be repeating what he finds in his *Vorlage* (the text of Samuel with which he was familiar).⁵⁵

"Perspective and Purpose: Understanding the Josiah Story," *TrinJ* 12 [1991]: 59-78); and many more.

⁵¹So H. G. M. Williamson, "Eschatology in Chronicles," *TynB* 28 (1977): 134.

⁵²See Dillard, "David's Census," pp. 94-96; Williamson, "History," in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars*, ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 31-32.

⁵³This may be all that is involved in the Chronicler's "You are not the one . . ." (v. 4) instead of 2 Samuel's "Are you the one . . ." (v. 5).

⁵⁴An example would be the Chronicler's preference for the shorter form of the first person singular pronoun (*'ani*) over the longer form (*'anōkī*) that is prevalent in Samuel-Kings. Whereas in Samuel-Kings the ratio of shorter to longer is something like 3 to 2, in Chronicles it is more like 25 to 1.

⁵⁵For example, 2 Sam. 7:7 has "tribes" (*šibtē*), while 1 Chron. 17:6 has "leaders" (*šōptē*). Since the latter is contextually more appropriate and is attested also in 2 Sam. 7:11, it appears that the Chronicler's *Vorlage* may preserve the better reading. On this and other matters discussed in this paragraph, see R. L. Braun,

2 Samuel 7:1—17

After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ² the king said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent." ³ Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you." ⁴ That night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying: ⁵ "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: 'Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? ⁶ I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. ⁷ Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their tribes whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'" ⁸ Now then, tell my servant David, "This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. ⁹ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. ¹⁰ And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not wipe them out anymore, as they did at the beginning ¹¹ and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD declares to you that the LORD will establish a house for you: ¹² When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. ¹⁵ But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.'" ¹⁷ Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

1 Chronicles 17:1—15

After David was settled in his palace, David said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under a tent." ² Nathan replied to David, "Whatever you have in mind, do it, for God is with you." ³ That night the word of God came to Nathan, saying: ⁴ "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in. ⁵ I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought Israel up to this day. I have moved from one site to another, from one dwelling place to another. ⁶ Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their leaders whom I commanded to shepherd my people , 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'" ⁷ Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. ⁸ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name like the names of the greatest men of the earth. ⁹ And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning ¹⁰ and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also subdue all your enemies. I declare to you that the LORD will build a house for you: ¹¹ When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹² He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. ¹³ I will be his father, and he will be my son.

I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. ¹⁴ I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever , his throne will be established forever.'" ¹⁵ Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

(Return to p. 79, second paragraph.)

There are, however, some differences between the two renditions that may require explanation on other grounds. Particularly striking are the Chronicler's omission in verse 13 of any reference to the chastisement of David's royal descendant, should he sin (contrast 2 Sam. 7:14), and his alteration of pronouns in the succeeding verse from "your house and your kingdom" to "my house and my kingdom." What are we to make of changes such as these?

Perhaps the way to begin is to recognize that the Chronicler presents a second painting of Israel's monarchical history, not an *overpainting* of Samuel-Kings. It is now widely acknowledged that both the Chronicler and his audience were well familiar with the Samuel-Kings material, and that the Chronicler's aim was to recast and supplement, not repress or supplant, the earlier history.⁵⁶ Thus, the Chronicler could feel free, for example, without pang of historical conscience, to omit the warning of 2 Samuel 7:14 as of little interest to his particular purpose for writing. After all, those who had experienced the Babylonian captivity and could look back on the checkered history of the divided monarchy did not need reminding that wrongdoing leads to "floggings inflicted by men." Moreover, in keeping with his overall purpose, the Chronicler wished to highlight Solomon's obedience, not his disobedience.

What then was the Chronicler's overall purpose for writing? To answer this question adequately would require not only a thorough study of the entirety of the Chronicler's work but also a

¹*Chronicles*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1986), p. 198. For speculation on the character of the Chronicler's Hebrew *Vorlage*, see Dillard, "David's Census," pp. 94-95.

⁵⁶B. S. Childs insists that "it is a basic error of interpretation to infer . . . that the Chr's purpose lies in suppressing or replacing the earlier tradition with his own account" (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress], p. 646, which see for Childs's reasoning). Similarly, Dillard points out that "the numerous points at which he [the Chronicler] assumes the reader's familiarity with the account in Samuel/Kings shows that he is using the Deuteronomistic history as a 'control' to an audience well familiar with that account" ("The Reign of Asa [2 Chronicles 14-16]: An Example of the Chronicler's Theological Method," *JETS* 23 [1980]: 214). On the Chronicler's many allusions to the earlier history, see also Ackroyd, "The Chronicler as Exegete."

consideration of the Chronicler's intended audience. The former is, of course, out of the question here.⁵⁷ As regards the Chronicler's audience, 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 (along with the evidence of the genealogies in 1 Chron. 3) makes it clear that the Chronicler is addressing the postexilic, restoration community in Jerusalem. We must ask, then, in assessing the Chronicler's rendition of the dynastic promise, "What must have been the pressing theological concerns of those who had returned out of exile in Babylon, or their descendants?" The unthinkable had happened—Judah had fallen and God's elect people had been swept away into exile. The question as to why this calamity had befallen God's people had been answered already for the exiles by Samuel-Kings. But for those now back in the land of Israel the pressing questions must surely be not "Why the exile?" but, rather, "Is God still interested in us? Are the covenants still in force?"⁵⁸ The Chronicler's answer to these questions is affirmative: God still cares for his people and is bound to them in covenant.

In his rendering of the promise to David, the Chronicler seeks to underscore these truths by bringing into the light what could only be dimly perceived in the shadows of the earlier rendering. That is to say, the Chronicler draws forth and makes explicit what was only implicit in 2 Samuel 7.⁵⁹ Perhaps it is this

⁵⁷If we were to attempt such an investigation, we might take our initial cues from the overall structure of Chronicles. It appears, for instance, that the Chronicler wishes to stress the continuity of Yahweh's dealings with (and interest in) his chosen people, as this is most strikingly expressed in the covenant with David. The Davidic kingdom is at a fundamental level the kingdom of Yahweh. And since this is so, events pertaining to the kingdom of Judah, where Davidic descendants once reigned, take on significance for "all Israel." Moreover, since in the Chronicler's day there is no Davidic king on an earthly throne, greater emphasis falls on the temple as the locus of Yahweh's continued rule. For more adequate appraisals, see the literature; e.g., Ackroyd, "Chronicler as Exegete"; Braun, "Message of Chronicles"; J. Goldingay, "The Chronicler as Theologian," *BTB* 5 (1975): 99-126; M. A. Throntveit, *When Kings Speak: Royal Speech and Royal Prayer in Chronicles*, SBLDS 93 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 77-88; Williamson, *Israel in the Book of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

⁵⁸Cf. Dillard, "David's Census," pp. 99-101.

⁵⁹This is fully in keeping with the Chronicler's general practice; so, e.g., Childs: "Often the Chronicler spelled out in detail what was already partially implied in his source" (*Introduction*, p. 652; cf. p. 648). Cf. also Dillard, "Reward and Punish-

practice of making the implicit explicit that best explains the Chronicler's alteration of the pronouns in verse 14. At the time of the Chronicler's writing, there is no longer a Davidic kingdom, literally speaking, but the kingdom of God, of course, remains. Thus "your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me" of 2 Samuel 7:16 becomes "I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever." In underscoring the theocratic character of the Davidic throne, the Chronicler is simply making explicit what is already implicit in the promise of 2 Samuel 7:14: "I will be his father, and he will be my son."

In other ways as well, the Chronicler renders the dynastic promise so as to drive home its pertinence to his audience. Perhaps his replacement of "the king" with the more personal "David" in verses 1 and 2 is meant to evoke the thought that, though Israel no longer has a human king on the throne, the Davidic line has not vanished and neither has God's promise, which after all was made personally to David. His addition of a reference to the "covenant" in verse 1 may serve to remind his hearers that they are still bound to God in covenant. His omission of "out of Egypt" in verse 5 tends to generalize the statement and make it perhaps more immediately relevant to those who themselves have been delivered out of bondage, though in a different land. A similar dynamic may be involved in the Chronicler's replacement of "Saul" with "your predecessor" in verse 13. Even his rephrasing of the reference to God's dwelling in a tent may serve to take the focus away from the tabernacle per se and to suggest the more general point that God's presence is not confined to any particular locale or structure. Could it also be that the change in terminology from "who will come from your own body" (which recalls the promise to Abraham in Gen. 15:4 and seems to suggest an immediate descendant) to "one of your sons" (which allows reference to future descendants; compare 2 Kings 20:18) is meant to hearten the Chronicler's hearers with the thought that the Lord may yet raise up a Davidic scion? In context, of course, the literal referent remains Solomon (v. 12: "He is the one who will build a house for

ment in Chronicles: the Theology of Immediate Retribution," *WTJ* 46 (1984): 164-72.

me"). But a future son of David is not thereby excluded, at least not if the significance of the "house for me" is allowed to extend beyond the physical temple of Solomon.

To the above considerations, more could be added,⁶⁰ but perhaps we had better stop and hear Williamson's caution that the Chronicler's "handling of the dynastic oracle in 1 Chronicles 17 is but one element of this larger whole [i.e., the 'larger narrative structure' of Chronicles], and rash conclusions concerning his Tendenz should thus not be drawn hastily from a single text without further ado."⁶¹ For our immediate purpose, however, it does not so much matter that we discover the precise nature of the Chronicler's Tendenz as that we recognize that he had a Tendenz—a desire to present Israel's history in a certain light and for a certain purpose—and that this has influenced his depiction of the dynastic promise.

What then have we learned from this brief comparison of Israel's synoptic histories? Does the fact that 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles present the dynastic promise to David in distinctive ways present a problem for those who wish to take seriously the historiographical character of each? If both texts are given a flat reading, as if they were verbatim transcripts of the event, then the answer would have to be yes. But as we have tried to show in this chapter, historical reportage is often more akin to painting than photography. That the Chronicler should explicitly present what is implicitly present in his source is entirely acceptable. After all, we do this sort of thing everyday. Imagine that in response to an invitation, we are told, "I'm afraid that we shall be busy that evening." If we then bring home the report, "They said they couldn't come," we will not be accused of fabrication—we have only made explicit what is implicit in the literal reply. The Chronicler's more interpretive presentation, focusing as it does on the inner significance of the promise, is all the more justified inasmuch as he seems to assume knowledge of the Samuel version

⁶⁰We have not discussed, e.g., the Chronicler's avoidance of the term rest in his parallels to 2 Sam. 7:1, 11-12; see Dillard, "The Chronicler's Solomon," *WTJ* 43 (1980): 294.

⁶¹"Eschatology in Chronicles," p. 136.

on the part of his audience. In short, what the comparison of the two renderings of the dynastic promise illustrates is the extent to which historians may be creative in their presentations, while at the same time remaining constrained by the facts.

CONCLUSION

We began this chapter by asking the question What is history? In the opening paragraphs, we noted that the term history is used in at least two different senses: history-as-event and history-as-account. While never losing sight of the former, we focused primarily on the latter, which might better be termed historiography. Because there is so much talk nowadays of *fictionality* in narrative, it was necessary also to investigate whether and in what sense this term might legitimately be applied to *historiography*. The conclusion reached was that since an account of something (just like a painting of something) is not literally that something, one may legitimately describe the account or the painting as in one sense *fictional*. We noted, however, that because the term *fiction* is also used to designate a genre of literature that is not constrained by any "something" external to it (i.e., by any *referential* constraint), the term is not ideally suited to discussions of historiography and could profitably be replaced by less ambiguous terms such as *artistry* or *crafting*.

Having noted the analogy between historiography and representational painting, we went on to explore the place of *creativity* even in depictions whose essential purpose is referential. The analogy alerted us to some of the characteristics of successful representation such as selectivity, slant, simplification, suggestive detail, and so forth. As to the adequacy and authority of representation, we saw that these issues very much depend on the competence and credentials of the (visual or narrative) artists, as well as on their access to their subject.

Finally, we looked briefly at the synoptic histories of the Old Testament: Samuel-Kings and Chronicles. We saw that, though these cover much the same territory historically speaking, they are anything but identical. While a flat reading of the two might lead to the conclusion that they are mutually contradictory, we noted

that many of the differences between them can be better explained on the basis of their distinct purposes and audiences. We noted also that the Chronicler is not only himself acquainted with Samuel-Kings but apparently assumes a similar acquaintance on the part of his audience. This frees him to present his didactic history in creative ways, sometimes making explicit what may have been only implicit in his *sources*.

We **conclude then that historiography involves a creative, though constrained, attempt to depict and interpret significant events or sequences of events from the past.** In this chapter we have considered some of what might be said in answer to the question *What is history?* In the next we shall take up the question *Is historicity important?*