

A Study in Authenticity

Admissible Concealed Indicators of Authority and Other
Features of Forgeries—A Case Study on Clement of
Alexandria, *Letter to Theodore*, and the *Longer Gospel of
Mark*

Timo S. Paananen

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Supervisors

Docent Matti Myllykoski (University of Helsinki)

Professor Ismo Dunderberg (University of Helsinki)

Pre-Examiners

Professor Tony Burke (York University)

Professor Mark Goodacre (Duke University)

Opponent

Professor Tony Burke (York University)

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Abstract

A standard approach in historically minded disciplines to documents and other artefacts that have become suspect is to concentrate on their dissimilarities with known genuine artefacts. While such an approach works reasonably well with relatively poor forgeries, more skilfully done counterfeits have tended to divide expert opinions, demanding protracted scholarly attention. As there has not been a widespread scholarly consensus on a constrained set of criteria for detecting forgeries, a pragmatic maximum for such dissimilarities—as there are potentially an infinite numbers of differences that can be enumerated between any two artefacts—has been impossible to set. Thus, rather than relying on a philosophically robust critical framework, scholars have been accustomed to approaching the matter on a largely case-by-case basis, with a handful of loosely formulated rules for guidance. In response to these shortcomings, this dissertation argues that a key characteristic of inquiry in historically minded disciplines should be the ability to distinguish between knowledge-claims that are epistemically warranted—i.e., that can be asserted *post hoc* from the material reality they have become embedded in with reference to some sort of rigorous methodological framework—and knowledge-claims that are not.

An ancient letter by Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 CE) to Theodore, in which two passages from the *Longer Gospel of Mark* (also known as the *Secret Gospel of Mark*) are quoted, has long been suspected of having been forged by Morton Smith (1915–1991), its putative discoverer. The bulk of this dissertation consists of four different articles that each use different methodological approaches. The first, a discourse analysis on scholarly debate over the letter's authenticity, illuminates the reasons behind its odd character and troubled history. Second, archival research unearths how data points have become corrupted through unintended additions in digital-image processing (a phenomenon labelled *line screen distortion* here). Third, a quantitative study of the handwriting in *Clement's Letter to Theodore* shows the inadequacy of unwittingly applying palaeographic standards in cases of suspected deceptions compared to the standards adhered to in forensic studies. Additionally, Smith's conduct as an academic manuscript hunter is found to have been consistent with the standard practices of that profession. Finally, a study of the conceptual distinctions and framing of historical explanations in contemporary forgery discourse reveals the power of the methodologic approach of WWFD (What Would

a Forger Do?), which has recently been used in three varieties (unconcealed, concealed, and hyperactive) to construe suspected documents as potential forgeries—despite its disregard of justificatory grounding in favour of coming up with free-form, first-person narratives in which the conceivable functions as its own justification. Together, the four articles illustrate the pitfalls of scholarly discourse on forgeries, especially that surrounding *Clement's Letter to Theodore*.

The solution to the poor argumentation that has characterized the scholarly study of forgeries is suggested to be an exercise in demarcation: to decide (in the abstract) which features should be acceptable as evidence either for or against the ascription of the status of forgery to an historical artefact. Implied within this suggestion is the notion of constraint, i.e., such that a constrained criterion would be one that cannot be employed to back up both an argument and its counter-argument. A topical case study—a first step on the road to creating a rigorous standard for constrained criteria in determining counterfeits—is the alternative narrative of an imagined creation of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* by Smith around the time of its reported discovery (1958). *Concealed indicators of authority*, or the deliberate concealment of authorial details within the forged artefact by the forger, is established as a staple of the literary strategy of mystification, and their *post hoc* construction as acceptable evidence of authorship is argued to follow according to criteria: 1) that the beginning of the act of decipherment of a concealed indicator of authority has to have been preceded by a literary primer that is unambiguous to a high degree, 2) that, following the prompting of the literary primer, the act of deciphering a concealed indicator of authority has to have adhered to a technique or method that is unambiguous to a high degree, and 3) that, following the prompting of the literary primer and the act of decipherment, both of which must have been practiced in an unambiguous manner to a high degree, the plain-text solution to the concealed indicator of authority must likewise be unambiguous to a high degree.

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The idiosyncrasies of the English of this dissertation were professionally corrected by Kenneth W. Lai. All remaining mistakes and quirky syntactic structures are due to my own linguistic preferences and consciously made contrary to his better judgment.

Finally, I acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Maiju Paananen—my wife, my lover, and my friend.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviations used in this study (but not in the published articles, which follow the idiosyncrasies of their respective journals) follow the disciplinary standards as set in the most recent edition of *The SBL Handbook of Style*, except for the following:¹

Theod. Clement of Alexandria, *Letter to Theodore*.

This usage follows the standards set in Michael J. Kok, “Secret Gospel of Mark,” in *e-Clavis: Christian Apocrypha* (CANT 15; 2016); <https://www.nasscal.com/e-clavis-christian-apocrypha/secret-gospel-of-mark/>.²

WWFD What Would a Forger Do?

This acronym refers to the contemporary method of constructing physical artefacts as forgeries, as discussed in Timo S. Paananen, “WWFD or What Would a Forger Do: A Critical Inquiry of Poorly Argued Contemporary Cases for Forgery,” 1–24.

1 “Abbreviations,” in *The SBL Handbook of Style* (2nd edition; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014) 117–260.

2 Note that this departs from *The SBL Handbook of Style*, in which *Theod.* refers to Theodotus’s *On the Jews*; however, of the “Old Testament Pseudepigrapha” (label used in *SBL Handbook*) it is noted in “Abbreviations,” 125–126 that, “authors whose works survive only in a small number of fragments should not normally be abbreviated.”

1 Introduction

The least interesting question one might ask about Titus Flavius Clemens, also known as Κλήμης ὁ Ἀλεξανδρεὺς (Clement of Alexandria; ca. 150–215 CE), and his *Letter to Theodore* (*Theod.*) is whether the document was forged³ by Morton Smith (1915–1991).

This suspicion was raised only gradually over a lengthy research process into the letter in question, an interest that was kindled in late 2005 following the watershed publication of *The Gospel Hoax* by Stephen C. Carlson,⁴ then ignited in 2008, following an exceptional review of yet another book on the topic, Peter Jeffery's *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled* (2007).⁵ This review was penned by the foremost author on the textual contents of Clement's letter, Scott G. Brown,⁶ who did not waste time challenging the various claims of forgery, including those of Carlson and Jeffery, that exploded in the latter half of the 2000s.⁷ For close to a decade the question of whether *Theod.* was, in fact, forged by Smith, remained the inescapable, all-encompassing topic of discussion, wherever this remarkable document has been brought forth.

3 A decision in principle I had already made in Timo S. Paananen, "WWFD or What Would a Forger Do: A Critical Inquiry of Poorly Argued Contemporary Cases for Forgery," 1–24, at 2 n. 1, is to "Note that the terms 'fake,' 'faked,' 'forgery,' 'forged,' 'faux,' etc. are used ... interchangeably to refer in the most general manner to physical artefacts (including documents) that deceive their readers, whether intentionally or not."

4 Stephen C. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark* (Waco, Tx.: Baylor University Press, 2005).

5 Peter Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled: Imagined Rituals of Sex, Death, and Madness in a Biblical Forgery* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007).

6 Scott G. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's Controversial Discovery* (Studies in Christianity and Judaism / Études sur le christianisme et le judaïsme 15; Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005).

7 Scott G. Brown, "Review of *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled: Imagined Rituals of Sex, Death, and Madness in a Biblical Forgery*, by Peter Jeffery," *Review of Biblical Literature* (2007) 1–47; http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/5627_5944.pdf. Apart from Brown's response to Jeffery, his most important contributions to authenticity challenges include "The Question of Motive in the Case against Morton Smith," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (2006) 351–383; "Factualizing the Folklore: Stephen Carlson's Case against Morton Smith," *Harvard Theological Review* 99 (2006) 291–327; "The Letter to Theodore: Stephen Carlson's Case against Clement's Authorship," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008) 535–572; "Mar Saba 65: Twelve Enduring Misconceptions," in *Splendide Mendax: Rethinking Fakes and Forgeries in Classical, Late Antique, and Early Christian Literature* (ed. Edmund P. Cueva and Javier Martinez; Groningen: Barkhuis & Groningen, 2016) 303–330. Two further articles Brown co-authored with Allan J. Pantuck are to be added here: Allan J. Pantuck and Scott G. Brown, "Morton Smith as M. Madiotes: Stephen Carlson's Attribution of Secret Mark to a Bald Swindler," *Journal for the Study of Historical Jesus* 6 (2008) 106–125; Scott G. Brown and Allan J. Pantuck, "Craig Evans and the *Secret Gospel of Mark*: Exploring the Grounds for Doubt," in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013) 101–134.

However, after penning several popular articles on the topic,⁸ composing a master's thesis in the University of Helsinki on the topic,⁹ curating an academic research blog (largely) on the topic,¹⁰ editing and publishing original studies by other scholars on the topic,¹¹ conducting my own minor research on the topic,¹² cultivating professional connections and friendships with many people interested in the topic,¹³ and spending considerable time contemplating a Th.D. dissertation on the topic, I perceived how the grey-rain curtain (that was this topic) turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, revealing more twisted and complex, original and imaginative issues to be pursued beyond this topic. Such a realization took place, at least partly, due to the abundance of scholars who did and will, no doubt, continue to treat this topic as the most pertinent affair, even if I have personally ceased to do so. In fact, some recent developments in the academic community at large evidence the gravity scholars place on the matters of authenticity, as has been demonstrated by cases such as the Jacob ossuary,¹⁴ the Artemidorus papyrus,¹⁵ the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*,¹⁶ the Jordan lead codices,¹⁷ etc.¹⁸

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- 8 Timo S. Paananen, "Kuka kirjoitti Salaisen Markuksen evankeliumin? Osa 1: Morton Smith vs. Stephen C. Carlson," *Vartija* 121 (2008) 83–97; Timo S. Paananen, "Kuka kirjoitti Salaisen Markuksen evankeliumin? Osa 2: Morton Smith vs. Peter Jeffery," *Vartija* 121 (2008) 123–132.
- 9 Timo S. Paananen, "Salaisen evankelistan salaliitto: Uusin keskustelu Klemens Aleksandrialaisen kirjeestä Theodorokselle" (Master's Thesis, University of Helsinki, 2009).
- 10 Timo S. Paananen, *Salainen evankelista: On Clement's Letter to Theodore and the Longer Gospel of Mark* [blog]; <https://salainenevankelista.blogspot.fi/>.
- 11 Scott G. Brown and Allan J. Pantuck, "Stephen Carlson's Questionable Questioned Document Examination: A Guest Post," in Timo S. Paananen, *Salainen evankelista: On Clement's Letter to Theodore and the Longer Gospel of Mark* [blog] (2010); <https://salainenevankelista.blogspot.fi/2010/04/stephen-carlsons-questionable.html>.
- 12 Timo S. Paananen, "A Short Interview with Quentin Quesnell," in Timo S. Paananen, *Salainen evankelista: On Clement's Letter to Theodore and the Longer Gospel of Mark* [blog] (2011); <https://salainenevankelista.blogspot.fi/2011/06/short-interview-with-quentin-quesnell.html>.
- 13 For my everlasting delight, I was able to convince Roger Viklund to lend his considerable expertise on matters I knew nothing about, and his keen eye and demeanour supplemented my own outlook so well that two of the four articles that constitute the bulk of this dissertation were co-authored with him: Roger Viklund and Timo S. Paananen, "Distortion of the Scribal Hand in the Images of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 67 (2013) 235–247; Timo S. Paananen and Roger Viklund, "An Eighteenth-Century Manuscript: Control of the Scribal Hand in *Clement's Letter to Theodore*," *Apocrypha* 26 (2015) 261–297.
- 14 As noted in Paananen, "WWFD," 6 n. 25, "The forgery trial ... (482/04 State of Israel v. Oded Golan) was concluded on March 14, 2012 after more than seven years of court proceedings, when judge Aharon Farkash ruled that Golan was acquitted of all charges of forgery, though he was convicted of illegal trading of antiquities."
- 15 Jürgen Hammerstaedt, "Simonides ist nicht an allem schuld! Die Debatte um den Artemidor-Papyrus," in *Die getäuschte Wissenschaft: Ein Genie betrügt Europa—Konstantinos Simonides* (ed. Andreas E. Müller et al.; Göttingen: V&R Unipress / Vienna University Press, 2017) 257–78.
- 16 Gesine Schenke Robinson, "How a Papyrus Fragment Became a Sensation," *New Testament Studies* 61 (2015) 379–94.
- 17 Samuel Zinner, *Son of the Star: Bar Kokhba and the Jordanian Lead Books—Overview, Assessment, Interpretation* (A Free Online Educational Report; 2017); <http://www.leadbookcentre.com/downloads/son-of-the-star-bar-kokhba-and%20the-jordanian-lead-books.pdf>.
- 18 To offer a terse answer to this question: "It is my perspective that *Clement's Letter to Theodore* (including the so-called *Secret Gospel of Mark*) was not forged by Morton Smith—not at least according to the

The transformation of my own perspective is evident in the articles that constitute this study. The first of these, “Stalemate to Deadlock,” is already somewhat distanced from the physicality of the manuscript of *Theod.* itself, as it concentrates on the discourses performed on the manuscript, in its aim for a broader study of heavily contested scholarly topics, offering universally applicable remedies to these issues, as explicated in section 2.1 and chapter 3.¹⁹ In my subsequent plunge into investigations of the quality of the scribal line (called “scribal hand” in the abstract) in the two articles co-authored with Roger Viklund, “Distortion of the Scribal Hand” and “Control of the Scribal Hand,” the manuscript of *Theod.* faded further into the background towards the end of the latter. In “Control of the Scribal Hand” a crucial observation is made: the standard approach to suspected forgeries in historically minded areas of study²⁰ has been hindered by its fetishization of the notion of *dissimilarity*. Indeed, as Albert S. Osborn, one of the key figures in forensic studies, has noted, “A perfect forgery cannot be detected by anyone.”²¹ That is, an artefact that cannot be distinguished from a known genuine artefact cannot be declared a forgery.

This leads to one of the peculiar problems of the study of forgeries, that as a distinct genre the historical counterfeit is defined by its worst examples.²² In other words, a

admissible state of the present evidence.”

- 19 Timo S. Paananen, “From Stalemate to Deadlock: *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* in Recent Scholarship,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 11 (2012) 87–125.
- 20 As noted in Paananen, “WWFD,” 2 n. 1, “During the 20th cent. the extent ... has been documented in a number of important studies. For literary fakes, see especially James Anson Farrer, *Literary Forgeries* (New York: Longmans, 1907); Wolfgang Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum* (Munich: Beck, 1971); Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990); K. K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). In biblical studies, the recent standard has been set in Bart D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For non-literary faked artefacts, see A. Vayson de Pradenne, *Les fraudes en archéologie préhistorique* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1932); Karl E. Meyer, *The Plundered Past* (New York: Atheneum, 1973); Maxwell L. Anderson, *Antiquities: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).”
- 21 Albert S. Osborn, *Questioned Documents: A Study of Questioned Documents with an Outline of Methods by Which Facts May Be Discovered and Shown* (2nd edition; Toronto: Carswell, 1929) 367.
- 22 Cf. Robert W. Mitchell, “The Psychology of Human Deception,” *Social Research* 63 (1996) 819–861, at 851: “The only understanding we have of deception is from failed deceptions or those revealed by their perpetrators.” Cited in Javier Martínez, “Hippias of Elis: Lessons from One Master Forger,” in *Fakes and Forgers of Classical Literature: Ergo decipiatur!* (ed. Javier Martínez; Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity 2; Leiden: Brill, 2014) 163–178, at 163. Martínez’s inference, however, that “Studying successful historical forgers thus requires that there not be a scholarly consensus as to their status as forgers,” is difficult to sustain as such a study would be as likely to end up being about “successful historical not-forgers” (tentatively leaving aside its inherent nonsensicality), for how would we even tell the difference when, *qua definitione*, we could not? And were we to try and circumvent the problem by simply performing a close reading on the work of a suspected forger *as if they were a forger*, we would most likely just produce a hyperactive rendition of the (imagined) actions of the (suspected) forger, as documented in Paananen, “WWFD,” 14–16.

historical fake has first to be identified as such, and a positive identification follows only (*sans confession*) from the subsequent identification of serious enough mistakes on the part of the forger.²³ While a poor forgery can thus be quickly dismissed by the unanimous assessment of scholars, the more skilful ones tend to divide expert opinions and lead to prolonged debates that could potentially drag on for decades.²⁴ Thus the stated aims²⁵ of the two articles establish a pragmatic limit for scholarly suspicion that would otherwise devolve into an indefinite period of “exploring the grounds for doubt,”²⁶ essentially ignoring the evidence of similarity in favour of coming up with ever more contrived evidence of dissimilarity.

The transformation was brought to completion by the time of “WWFD”. In this article the manuscript of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* has been fully relegated to the background—only one example of its kind among others (though, it must be said, one of the most important of its kind). Here, the focus has shifted to the unwitting scholarly tendency to construct their respective exposures of forged artefacts as exercises in intentionalizing, framing, and justifying the acts of the (alleged) forger with the self-constructed internal coherence of their self-written narrative. The aim of the article in documenting WWFD, or *What Would a Forger Do?* as I colloquially labelled this phenomenon, became the first step in the larger effort to create constrained²⁷ criteria for fakes, a project that would

23 Similarly Sanna Nyqvist and Outi Oja, *Kirjalliset väärennökset: Huijauksia, plagiaatteja ja luovia lainauksia* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2018) 44, who observe literary fakes to be a “paradoksaalinen kirjallisuudenlaji” (paradoxical genre of literature). Cf. Thierry Lenain, *Art Forgery: The History of a Modern Obsession* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012) 271: “Only an exposed fake may be said to be ‘perfect’ ... a fake does not exist *as such* before having been discovered.” Emphasis original.

24 Succinctly put in Lenain, *Art Forgery*, 18: “in some instances ... questions of authenticity may remain dramatically open, and ... some fakes can indeed remain undetected over very long periods of time.” Cf. one of the “basic facts” enumerated in Christopher A. Rollston, “Forging History: From Antiquity to the Modern Period,” in *Archaeologies of Text: Archaeology, Technology, and Ethics* (ed. Matthew T. Rutz and Morag M. Kersel; Joutkowski Institute Publication 6; Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2014) 176–197, at 176: “Scholars are able to detect poor quality forgeries, but high quality forgeries have sometimes duped even the best of scholars.”

25 Namely, to note uniform similarities of the “scribal hand” between the most accurate archival data points (as opposed to using poorly reproduced copies and adhering to poorly understood principles of forensic document examination), and compared to other, non-contested eighteenth-century manuscripts (as opposed to using poorly understood principles of forensic document examination with a non-representative sample of details from other, non-contested eighteenth-century manuscripts).

26 It is hardly coincidental that one of the more recent examples of a contrived attempt to establish Smith as the forger of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* is literally subtitled “Exploring the Grounds for Doubt”; Craig A. Evans, “Morton Smith and the *Secret Gospel of Mark*: Exploring the Grounds for Doubt,” in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013) 75–100.

27 As observed in Paananen, “WWFD,” 3 n. 5, “I have chosen to use the word ‘constrained’ to refer to the qualitative aspect of such criteria, as the terms ‘formal’ or ‘standard’ do not capture the core weakness of contemporary usage of such methodological tools. A criterion can be considered constrained when it cannot be used equally well—after satisfying its condition(s)—to argue for both A and \neg A, i.e., both for an argument and its opposite. Examples of constrained criteria within the academic study of history

entail a paradigm shift in the way forgeries are studied—from considerations applied on a case-by-case basis that followed a loose set of rules of thumb to a set of more rigorous standards.²⁸ As documented in the article, no such criteria exist at the moment.²⁹ There are at least four significant reasons to contemplate the question of constrained criteria to the study of forgeries, regardless of whatever formulations scholars would wish to assert as adequate (if any).

First, there has been a renewed academic interest in counterfeits of all kinds.³⁰ Though individual fakes and forgeries have been historically debated at length,³¹ after the early twentieth century scholars have tended to exhibit a certain reluctance in tackling the subject. Thus, half a century ago, Joseph Naveh noted that “allegations of forgery are not the scholarly fashion of the moment,”³² while Richard D. Altick and John J. Fenstermaker reminded their students that, “Scholars encounter forgeries by no means as often as writers about the adventurous side of literary research, eager for a touch of melodrama,

(widely understood) include various notions of intertextuality, where, e.g., psychological experimentation has suggested that in the genre of ‘prose narrative material’ the common use of at least sixteen consecutive words between two documents strongly suggests one of the two documents has been used as the source for the other ... the notion of provenance (i.e., the discovery of an artefact as part of a controlled excavation and its unbroken chain of custody afterwards), which virtually guarantees authenticity of the artefact ... the use of Bayesian statistics to assess the available historical evidence ... In other words, such criteria have a built-in, inherent control on their conclusions to avoid a methodological free-form that would otherwise follow from their application.”

- 28 One promising attempt to produce such controlled criteria for the classification of literary forgeries has recently been made in Francesca Tomasi et al., “Towards a Taxonomy of Suspected Forgery in Authorship Attribution Field,” in *DH-CASE '13: Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Collaborative Annotations in Shared Environment: Metadata, Vocabularies and Techniques in the Digital Humanities* (New York: ACM, 2013) Article No.: 10. For an earlier, more broadly applicable system, see also Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 182–188.
- 29 Paananen, “WWFD,” 2–5. Cf. Eco, *Limits of Interpretation*, 197, 200: “It thus seems that our modern culture has outlined ‘satisfactory’ criteria for proving authenticity and for falsifying false identifications. All the aforementioned criteria, however, seem useful only when a Judge is faced with ‘imperfect’ forgeries ... semiotic approach to fakes shows how theoretically weak are our criteria for deciding about authenticity.” Interestingly, the question of criteria has also been brought up within art history regarding *aleamorphs* (unintentional features that are perceived as hidden images) and *cryptomorphs* (intentional features that are subsequently recognized as hidden images); e.g., Horst W. Janson, “The ‘Image Made by Chance’ in Renaissance Thought,” in *De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky* (vols. 2; ed. Millard Meiss; New York: New York University Press, 1961) 1:254–266, at 262 n. 39: “Clearly, there must be a line of demarcation somewhere between ‘unconscious symbols’ that may reveal the *stato dell’animo* of their creator and those betraying only the *stato dell’animo* of the beholder.” However, as James Elkins, *Why are Our Pictures Puzzles? On the Modern Origins of Pictorial Complexity* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 167 wryly notes, “after stating the problem in this way, Janson does not return to it.”
- 30 Nyqvist and Oja, *Kirjalliset väärennökset*, 110 note that the study of fakes has been recently found to be, e.g., a gateway to the study of the values and practices of the literary cultures that produced such fakes.
- 31 Consult esp. Grafton, *Forgers and Critics*.
- 32 Joseph Naveh, “Aramaica Dubiosa,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 27 (1968) 317–325, at 317, though Naveh later concludes, “Nevertheless, forgeries do occur. It is therefore legitimate to raise questions concerning forgeries, but, needless to say, with the necessary reservation and caution.”

may imply.”³³ Nowadays, on the contrary, scholars feel free to casually acknowledge that forgeries “flourish in *all* archaeological, cultural, and artistic spheres from all chronological periods of the world’s cultures.”³⁴

Second, scholarly attitudes are closely tied to larger shifts in cultural discourses. As many cultural critics have observed, the mainstream early twenty-first-century Western culture has become cognisant of the possible existence of “half-hidden clues, tell-tale signs, and secret messages,”³⁵ then “obsessed with connections and interpretation.”³⁶ David Aaronovitch has called ours a period of “fashionable conspiracism,” and as explored further in sub-subsection 2.5.3.2, some scholars have dedicated themselves to be in for a pound, rather than a penny.³⁷

Third, the forgers themselves have begun to receive personal vindication as creative artists in their own right, as post-structuralist literary notions have transformed the once universally condemned practice to an act of celebrated genius,³⁸ one perceived as a powerful form of criticism that challenges the spurious notion of the “authentic”.³⁹ Nowhere is this vindication more prominent than when the act of the discovery of fake artefacts is presented as a methodology akin to a puzzle, in which the fake artefacts provide the very means for their own detection. By this point, the act of writing history

33 Richard D. Altick and John J. Fenstermaker, *The Art of Literary Research* (4th edition; New York: W. W. Norton, 1993 [1st edition, 1963]) 60. On forgeries within the discipline of archaeology, Oscar White Muscarella, “The Antiquities Trade and the Destruction of Ancient Near Eastern Cultures,” in *A Companion to the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East* (ed. D.T. Pott; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 107–124, at 119–120 notes that, “Scholarly awareness of forgeries of ancient Near Eastern artifacts began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries but then declined ... At present, relatively few scholarly references to forgeries occur in archaeological literature.”

34 Oscar White Muscarella, “Forgeries of Ancient Near Eastern Artifacts and Cultures,” in *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art* (ed. Brian A. Brown and Marian H. Feldman; Berlin: Gruyter, 2013) 31–53, at 31. Emphasis original.

35 Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000) 16.

36 Jane Parish, “The Age of Anxiety,” in *The Age of Anxiety: Conspiracy Theory and the Human Sciences* (ed. Jane Parish and Martin Parker; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) 1–17, at 8.

37 David Aaronovitch, *Voodoo Histories: The Role of the Conspiracy Theory in Shaping Modern History* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008) 3.

38 Lenain, *Art Forgery* traces the attitudes towards art forgery from that of the positive appreciation of mimetic mastery (of early modern fakes) to that of universal condemnation (late modern fakes). For examples of the latest change, see, e.g., Nick Groom, *The Forger’s Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature* (London: Picador, 2002); Jonathon Keats, *Forged: Why Fakes are the Great Art of Our Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

39 See especially chapter 3 of Ruthven, *Faking Literature*. Thus also Julia Abramson, *Learning from Lying: Paradoxes of the Literary Mystification* (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 2005) 14: “The author of a mystifying text shapes a work to imitate a recognized form, with the aim of commenting critically on that form or on its current mode of production or reception. In this way mystification identifies a trend, and the critical project contains a didactic element.” Cf. Eckart Voigts-Virchow, “Shelley, Malley, Carey: A Performative Hermeneutics of Faking and Hoaxing,” *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 56 (2008) 175–191, at 176: “A fake is both a critique of the artistic field and a piece of art in its own right.”

“becomes a matter of revelation through signs, and signs the mechanism of history ... akin to cryptography.”⁴⁰ The faker-*auteur* is construed as sure of themselves, confident enough in their ability to manufacture fakes to employ a particular strategy of mystification—viz., leaving an autobiographical trail of clues pointing towards the true authorship of the artefact.⁴¹ Consequently, the thrill of the discovery of new historical artefacts has been expanded by the post-structuralist thrill of deconstructing existing ones, and the uncovering of fake historical artefacts has become a battle of wits against the ingenuity of the manufacturer of the fake. Such a challenge offers the tempting possibility of a demonstrably firm resolution of either / or (i.e., *either authentic or faked*) instead of the more usual open-ended discourse characteristic of the academic study of history.⁴²

Fourth, and most importantly, academic study, including the study of fakes and forgeries, should be an intellectual endeavour that, unlike other intellectual endeavours, is distinguished only by its strict adherence to scholarly methodologies.⁴³ In practice, without a clear understanding of the methodological practices scholars have chosen to employ—the precise thing we are currently lacking in the study of fakes and forgeries—the end result can remain nominally within scholarship (i.e., pass the initial peer review) yet produce results of the most surprising kind, as I will discuss in section 1.2.

40 Brian P. Bennett, “Hermetic Histories: Divine Providence and Conspiracy Theory,” *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* 54 (2007) 174–209, at 176.

41 On the notion of mystification as a strategy, see Jean-François Jeandillou, *Esthétique de la mystification: tactique et stratégie littéraires* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1994) 25, 27. Tom Keating, an English art forger, would sometimes write, inter alia, “this is a fake” on the canvas he would use for creating a forged painting (visible only using X-radiation); Tom Keating, Frank Norman and Geraldine Norman, *The Fake’s Progress* (London: Hutchinson, 1977) 85. Another English art forger, Eric Hebborn, once inserted his own initials on a faked drawing; Eric Hebborn, *The Art Forger’s Handbook* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook Press, 1997) 68.

42 A point made in Groom, *Shadow*, 66. For another plausible explanation (of the sociology of deviance) for the prevalent positivist attitude of scholars engaged in forgery-hunting, see Benjamin Kelly, “Deviant Ancient Histories: Dan Brown, Erich von Däniken and the Sociology of Historical Polemic,” *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 12 (2008) 361–382.

43 My emphasis on scholarly methodologies here and elsewhere is rooted in the pragmatic notion that historians—indeed, anyone working within a professional community of experts, especially within the humanities—cannot dictate the reception of their own academic history writing but are in this regard at the mercy of the community as a whole; peer-review *par excellence*. The talk of methodologies and criteria are, consequently, intended to facilitate the community with rational means for carrying out their duties of review and criticism. As I have noted in Paananen, “WWFD,” 16 n. 84, “This, I believe, is a broadly held consensus across all academic disciplines, as scholarly views diverge only on the specific *content* of this difference-making distinction.” Cf. Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., “The Challenge of Poetics to (Normal) Historical Practice,” *Poetics Today* 9 (1988) 435–452, at 445: “The only referent that can be found for ‘history’ ... is the intertextuality that results from the reading of sets of sources combined with (guided by?) the readings of other historians of these same or other sources synthesized in their expositions. ‘History’ refers in actual practice only to other ‘histories’.”

One example I use in “WWFD” for a constrained criterion is the notion of *provenience*, which is emphasised in archaeology and related fields—the notion that discoveries have to take place *in situ* (i.e., as part of controlled archaeological excavations), since no amount of expertise can guarantee the authenticity of non-provenienced artefacts.⁴⁴ While this criterion is useful for illustrating the concept of constraint, I am less sure of its cross-disciplinary applicability. While the consideration of *provenience* is, of course, occasionally beneficial in trying to differentiate authentic from inauthentic objects, it should only be yet another rough rule of thumb to begin with.⁴⁵ First, there are historical examples of fake artefacts being salted into archaeological excavations either by the labourers or by the directors themselves.⁴⁶ Second, even when an artefact has been unearthed *in situ*, its *provenance*, especially its chain of custody, has to remain intact as well, as an artefact that has emerged after a break in the chain of custody could well have been changed to a fake one.⁴⁷

44 Paananen, “WWFD,” 3 n. 5.

45 Cf. Aaron Demsky, “Reading Northwest Semitic Inscriptions,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 70 (2007) 68–74, at 68–69: “It is obvious that a document purchased on the antiquities market is suspect ... However, I would not dismiss a document from consideration if it was without a proper provenance.” Similarly Martin Heide, “The Moabite and Their Aftermath: How to Handle a Forgery Affair with an International Impact,” in *New Inscriptions and Seals Relating to the Biblical World* (ed. Meir Lubetski and Edith Lubetski; Issue 19 of Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 193–242, at 231: “Non-provenanced antiquities cannot be ignored; they must be published and assessed. They should be clearly indicated as ‘non-provenanced,’ but otherwise dealt with adequately.” This notion is sharply contested in Oscar White Muscarella, “Bazaar Archaeology,” in *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Vorderasiens: Festschrift für Rainer Michael Boehmer* (ed. Uwe Finkbeiner; Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1995) 449–453, at 452: “For, even if it is argued that it cannot be proven that the discs are forgeries, it equally cannot be proven that they are genuine. This is significant, and it manifests that the discs are lost to archaeology—even if in fact they are genuine.” Emphasis original. Note that both Demsky and Heide incorporate the concept of *provenience* within their use of the word *provenance*.

46 Thus Paul T. Craddock, *Scientific Investigation of Copies, Fakes and Forgeries* (London: Routledge, 2009) 471: “Archaeological sites can be salted by the digging labourer when the director is foolish enough to offer a reward for interesting finds, as exemplified by Boucher de Perthes ... Archaeological excavations can also be salted by the director and, where the material is unique, suspicions may be aroused. For example, the stone tools found on the excavations of ... Shinichi Fujimura.” Likewise, Oscar White Muscarella, “Antiquities Trade,” 118, 121–122: “Museum-employed curators and archaeologists exhibit and publish forgeries, sometimes knowingly, obeying museum orders for fear of offending rich collectors or their colleagues ... Archaeologists also, innocently or not, publish forgeries as ancient artifacts. A prominent example is the archaeologist Roman Ghirshman, whose many publications, both monographs and exhibition catalogues, are standard scholarly texts. He was the most prolific publisher of Iranian forgeries, baptizing them as ancient productions and providing them with forged (by him) *proveniencies* ... Forgeries implanted by archaeologists at their sites have also occurred in Japan ... and is alleged to have happened at a site in the United States.” For yet another example, see Christopher A. Rollston, “The Bullae of Baruch ben Neriah the Scribe and the Seal of Ma’adanah Daughter of the King: Epigraphic Forgeries of the 20th Century,” in *Joseph Naveh Volume* (ed. Hillel Geva and Alan Paris; Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies 32; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2016) 79–90, at 80.

47 For the difference between *provenience* and *provenance*, see Rosemary Joyce, “When Is Authentic? Situating Authenticity in the Itineraries of Objects,” in *Creating Authenticity: Authentication Processes in Ethnographic Museums* (ed. Alexander Geurds and Laura Van Broekhoven; Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2013) 39–57, at 44–45.

Scholars have nevertheless suggested provenience as an important factor for manuscript finds, a focus that could easily be more trouble than it is worth.⁴⁸ For starters, as noted by Harold Love, most manuscript discoveries are made “by simply looking in the catalogue of a library,”⁴⁹ while uncatalogued or poorly catalogued archives are traditionally combed through by solitary textual scholars, a practise ill-suited to securing a provenience for the manuscripts analogous to the condition in archaeology that discoveries be made *in situ*.⁵⁰ The most pressing issue by far, however, is the current state of many of the ancient treatises routinely used in contemporary historical study, as many of the universally recognised early Christian writings (to take a few specific examples) cannot be assigned a provenience apart from citing, for example, a particular dealer of antiquities—sometimes even that much is uncertain.⁵¹ Elevating this principle to a constrained criterion would thus remove large amounts of material from the hands of historians on the basis of their lack of suitable provenience—more so the farther back the discovery of the artefacts date.⁵²

48 E.g., Bruce Chilton, “Provenience: Reply to Charles Hedrick,” in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013) 67–74.

49 Harold Love, *Attributing Authorship: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 184. Cf. Richard D. Altick, *The Scholar Adventurers* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950) 88: “At the outset, the routine of the manuscript hunter is fairly well established. He goes to the most obvious places first. He consults a great array of scholarly reference books, such as the catalogues of manuscripts owned by the British Museum and the various libraries at Oxford and Cambridge. He writes to, or visits, all the large libraries that have manuscript collections.”

50 For a brief overview of manuscript hunting as an historical profession, see Paananen and Viklund, “Control of the Scribal Hand,” 263–265. Cf. Altick, *Scholar Adventurers*, 89–90: “He must comb every library, large and small, every archive, every institution where manuscripts may conceivably be kept; he must go through innumerable catalogues of book dealers and auctioneers to find out what manuscripts have turned up for sale in the last hundred years or so, and then try to trace them as they passed from collector to collector ... [under] a persistent suspicion that librarians and collectors, however systematic their cataloguing methods, often do not know what they actually possess.”

51 *The Gospel of the Savior* (Papyrus Berolinensis 22220) was sold by an antiquities dealer named Karl J. Möger to the Egyptian Museum of Berlin in 1967, while the *Egerton Gospel* (Papyrus Egerton 2) was sold by an unknown antiquities dealer to the British Museum in 1934; Charles W. Hedrick, “Secret Mark: Moving on from Stalemate,” in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013) 30–66, at 41. For the disturbing provenance of the *Gospel of Judas* (Codex Tchacos), see Herbert Krosney, *The Lost Gospel: The Quest for the Gospel of Judas Iscariot* (Washington: National Geographic Books, 2006). Even such landmark finds as The Chester Beatty Papyri, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi codices were not discovered *in situ* and are, strictly speaking, non-provenanced (though, as Christopher A. Rollston, “Non-Provenanced Epigraphs II: The Status of Non-Provenanced Epigraphs within the Broader Corpus of Northwest Semitic,” *MAARAV* 11 (2004) 57–79, at 77–78 notes, the particularities with the discovery of the whole collection of The Dead Sea Scrolls warrants a special consideration: six of the Qumran caves, e.g., were spotted by archaeologists after their arrival to study the initial five caves, located by non-archaeologists).

52 There is a tendency even for discoveries thought to have been made under reasonable conditions to be found out to include irregularities, especially manuscripts possessing contemporary religious significance. On the most recent case of papyrus fragments from Luke (Papyrus 4), the provenience of which were revealed to have been fabricated, see Brent Nongbri, *God’s Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018) 247–268.

I thus discuss the topic of developing constrained criteria for various aspects of forgeries in subsection 2.5.2, after introducing the necessary background information in section 1.3 and subsection 2.5.1. This is a necessary next step on the road away from simply documenting WWFD—or “poorly argued contemporary cases for forgery,” as it is labelled in the article title. One such approach is developed in section 3.1, the aim of which is no less audacious than to effect a fundamental shift in the study of fakes and forgeries, one rigorously critical framework at a time.

Notwithstanding, the manuscript of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*—the manuscript allegedly discovered by Smith then lost again by the staff of the library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem—remains at the heart of this study as a contemporary touchstone exemplifying all that can go wrong in a study in authenticity. Some key facts on the background and contents of the manuscript of *Theod.* have thus to be established before venturing further on.

1.1 The Manuscript of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*

The most commonly related story of discovery of the manuscript of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* is that of Smith himself.⁵³ Briefly recounted,⁵⁴ Smith was once again on an extended manuscript hunting trip in 1958, when he stumbled upon this previously unknown manuscript in the library of the monastery of Mar Saba, Israel. The text was copied on the blank end papers of a printed book, a collection of the authentic letters of Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 35–107 CE) by Isaac Voss (1646).⁵⁵ Smith photographed the manuscript pages for further study, and published two treatises in 1973, a popular account and interpretation of his trip and the contents of the manuscript, and a

53 Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) 1–25.

54 This story is narrated in much greater detail in “Stalemate to Deadlock,” 88–89; “Control of the Scribal Hand,” 263–269, for which only a few recent developments can be added. Most substantially, Stephan Hüller and Daniel N. Gullotta, “Quentin Quesnell’s *Secret Mark* Secret: A Report on Quentin Quesnell’s 1983 Trip to Jerusalem and His Inspection of the Mar Saba Document,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 71 (2017) 353–378 documents the last-known encounter with the manuscript of *Theod.* Based on his journal, notes, photographs, and letters concerning his 1983 trip to Jerusalem, Quentin Quesnell would have gained access, hours at a time, to the manuscript on multiple occasions for study; Hüller and Gullotta, “Quentin Quesnell,” 369–375. Other noteworthy details include the possibility that Smith’s original catalogue number (MS65) had been superseded by another (MS76), that the manuscript had been assessed by the library staff to have been written in 1672, and that Quesnell had seen numerous other Mar Saban manuscripts of a similar handwriting, photographs of which are currently located at Smith College Archives, part of their collection of Quentin Quesnell papers; Hüller and Gullotta, “Quentin Quesnell,” 371, 374, 374 n. 96.

55 Isaac Voss, *Epistulae genuinae S. Ignatii Martyris* (Amsterdam: Blaeu, 1646).

scholarly, critical edition of the text with an extensive commentary.⁵⁶ The original remained at the monastery until a party of four scholars transferred it to Jerusalem in 1976. Unfortunately, no scientific tests could be performed on the manuscript at that time.⁵⁷ Though entrusted to the care of the library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the manuscript went missing sometime during the 1980s, or perhaps early 1990s, and its whereabouts have remained unknown ever since despite numerous attempts to locate it.⁵⁸

The text of the letter⁵⁹ appears to be a response by Clement of Alexandria to a certain Theodore, concerning a variant of the Gospel of Mark that Theodore had encountered in the hands of the Carpocratians, one of the multitude of early Christian groups. Clement affirms that the Alexandrian church used an expanded version of the Gospel of Mark—Smith titled this the *Secret Gospel of Mark*⁶⁰—a copy of which the Carpocratians had obtained. In the words of Clement, however, of the various Carpocratian claims,

τὰ μὲν ψεύδεται παντελῶς, τὰ δέ, εἰ καὶ ἀληθῆ τινα περιέχει, οὐδ' οὕτως ἀληθῶς παραδίδοται. Συγκεκραμένα γὰρ τὰ ληθῆ τοῖς πλάσμασι παραχαράσσεται ὥστε, τοῦτο δὴ τὸ λεγόμενον, καὶ τὸ ἄλλας μωρανθῆναι

(some are altogether falsifications, and others, even if they do contain some true elements, nevertheless are not reported truly. For the true things being mixed with inventions, are falsified, so that, as the saying goes, even the salt loses its savor).
(*Theod.* I.12–15)

Theodore had especially inquired about the words γυμνὸς γυμνῶ (naked man with naked man; *Theod.* III.13), which, according to Clement, are not part of the extended Gospel of Mark. In response to the misinformation which Theodore had received, Clement cites two

56 The popular account contains the discovery story referred to above; Smith, *Secret Gospel*. The critical edition is Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973).

57 Guy G. Stroumsa, “Comments on Charles Hedrick’s Article: A Testimony,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003) 147–153.

58 For details, see Paananen and Viklund, “Control of the Scribal Hand,” 267–269.

59 For text of the letter in its original Greek I have used A. K. M. Adam, “Fragment of the Letter of Clement to Theodore, Containing the *Secret Gospel of Mark*: A Study Edition” (Oxford: Quadriga, 2018); <http://akma.disseminary.org/2018/04/clement-to-theodore-the-secret-gospel-of-mark/>. For the English translation I have used Morton Smith’s original translation as revised by Scott G. Brown in Brown, *Mark’s Other Gospel*, xii–xiii, xvii–xxii. Note that all translations from *Theod.* are by Smith (as revised by Brown), while all other translations from other sources, unless specifically noted, are mine.

60 Clement uses two labels for this version of Mark: πνευματικώτερον εὐαγγέλιον (a more spiritual Gospel; *Theod.* I.21–22) and τὸ μυστικὸν εὐαγγέλιον (the mystic Gospel; *Theod.* II.6, II.12). Apart from Smith’s translation of the latter as the *Secret Gospel of Mark* that has become the standard in scholarship (e.g., Michael J. Kok, “Secret Gospel of Mark,” in *e-Clavis: Christian Apocrypha* (CANT 15; 2016); <https://www.nasscal.com/e-clavis-christian-apocrypha/secret-gospel-of-mark/>), these passages are variously referred to as the *Mystic Gospel of Mark* and the *Longer Gospel of Mark*. For a discussion on the merits of each, consult Brown, *Mark’s Other Gospel*, xi, 215–219.

passages from the extended gospel in full, locating the first between Mark 10:34 and 10:35, and the latter after the first sentence in Mark 10:46:⁶¹

καὶ ἔρχονται εἰς Βηθανίαν, καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖ μία γυνὴ ἧς ὁ ἀδελφὸς αὐτῆς ἀπέθανεν. Καὶ ἐλθοῦσα προσεκύνησε τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Υἱὲ Δαβὶδ ἐλέησόν με. Οἱ δὲ μαθηταὶ ἐπετίμησαν αὐτῇ. Καὶ ὀργισθεὶς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπῆλθεν μετ’ αὐτῆς εἰς τὸν κῆπον ὄπου ἦν τὸ μνημεῖον, καὶ εὐθύς ἠκούσθη ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου φωνὴ μεγάλη, καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπέκύλισε τὸν λίθον ἀπὸ τῆς θύρας τοῦ μνημείου, καὶ εἰσελθὼν εὐθύς ὄπου ἦν ὁ νεανίσκος ἐξέτεινεν τὴν χεῖρα καὶ ἤγειρεν αὐτὸν κρατήσας τῆς χειρός, ὁ δὲ νεανίσκος ἐμβλέψας αὐτῷ ἠγάπησεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἤρξατο παρακαλεῖν αὐτὸν ἵνα μετ’ αὐτοῦ ᾗ. Καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου ἦλθον εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ νεανίσκου, ἦν γὰρ πλούσιος. Καὶ μεθ’ ἡμέρας ἕξ ἐπέταξεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ ὀψίας γενομένης ἔρχεται ὁ νεανίσκος πρὸς αὐτὸν περιβεβλημένος σινδόνα ἐπὶ γυμνοῦ, καὶ ἔμεινε σὺν αὐτῷ τὴν νύκτα ἐκείνην. Ἐδίδασκε γὰρ αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὸ μυστήριον τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐκεῖθεν δὲ ἀναστὰς ἐπέστρεψεν εἰς τὸ πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου

(And they come to Bethany. And there was there a certain woman whose brother of hers had died. And coming, she prostrated before Jesus and says to him, “Son of David have mercy on me.” But the disciples rebuked her. And having become angry Jesus went away with her into the garden where the tomb was. And immediately was heard from the tomb a great cry. And approaching, Jesus rolled the stone from the door of the tomb, and going in immediately where the young man was, he stretched out the hand and raised him, having grasped the hand. But the young man, having looked upon him, loved him and began to beg him that he might be with him. And going out from the tomb they went into the house of the young man; for he was rich. And after six days Jesus gave charge to him; and when it was evening the young man comes to him donning a linen sheet upon his naked body, and he remained with him that night; for Jesus was teaching him the mystery of the kingdom of God. Now rising, he returned from there to the other side of the Jordan). (*Theod.* II.23–III.11)

καὶ ἦσαν ἐκεῖ ἡ ἀδελφὴ τοῦ νεανίσκου, ὃν ἠγάπα αὐτὸν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ Σαλώμη, καὶ οὐκ ἀπεδέξατο αὐτὰς ὁ Ἰησοῦς

(And there were there the sister of the young man whom Jesus loved him and his mother and Salome, and Jesus did not receive them). (*Theod.* III.14–16)

Against the conventional discovery story Smith reports, however, some scholars have implied the following alternative, a distinctly different narrative as part of their case that the manuscript of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* was forged by its putative discoverer, Smith himself.⁶²

61 Translation by Brown, “intended to preserve the idiosyncrasies of their Markan phraseology”; Brown, *Mark’s Other Gospel*, xiii, xxiii.

62 A similar counter-narrative was composed in Charles W. Hedrick, “Evaluating Morton Smith: Hoaxer Outed or Colleague Slandered,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 37 (2010) 283–294 of the contents of Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*. Hedrick judged the monograph to be a “slick presentation of what is clearly less than circumstantial evidence”; Hedrick, “Evaluating Morton Smith,” 285.

1.2 The Alternative Narrative: The Manuscript of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* as a Fake

According to this alternative narrative, Smith read James Hogg Hunter's novel *The Mystery of Mar Saba* at some point between its publication in 1940 and his own journey to the monastery of Mar Saba in the summer of 1958. Hunter's novel depicts, within a larger plotline of spy intrigue, a forgery of an early Christian text (*Shred of Nicodemus*) planted in Mar Saba by Nazis for the British archaeologist, Sir William Bracebridge, to find.⁶³ Smith thus became inspired by this novel to create a literary forgery of his own,⁶⁴ though he would also draw inspiration from a number of other literary works, as explicated below. Two notable facts should be included here.⁶⁵ First, Hunter's novel contained an illustration of the forged *Shred of Nicodemus*.⁶⁶ Second, Smith's given name, Morton, was similar to the name of one of the minor characters in Hunter's novel, that of Lord Moreton.⁶⁷

Smith began his work by acquiring a copy of Isaac Voss's 1646 edition of the letters of Ignatius of Antioch,⁶⁸ a book that suited his purposes for two reasons. First, it was originally published as part of the seventeenth-century debate on the authenticity of certain Ignatian letters, including interpolations made to the authentic ones; the resulting contrast between this notion of inserting inauthentic interpolations into authentic texts and the forged epistle of Clement (that could be said to contain interpolations to the Gospel of Mark) was, to quote one recent scholar, "brilliant irony".⁶⁹ Second, facing the first blank end paper Smith intended to use for the beginning of his

63 James H. Hunter, *The Mystery of Mar Saba* (New York: Evangelical Publishers, 1940).

64 Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 101–102; Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 19; Francis Watson, "Beyond Suspicion: On the Authorship of the Mar Saba Letter and the Secret Gospel of Mark," *Journal of Theological Studies* 61 (2010) 128–170, at 163; Evans, "Grounds for Doubt," 81.

65 The two facts listed here are intentionally obscure, the strangeness of which derives from their status as *non sequuntur*, as discussed in subsection 2.5.2.

66 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 19; Watson, "Beyond Suspicion," 167.

67 Evans, "Grounds for Doubt," 81. Anthony Le Donne refines this point by pointing out their indistinguishable phonetic character; Anthony Le Donne, *The Wife of Jesus: Ancient Texts and Modern Scandals* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2013) 88.

68 Voss, *Epistulae genuinae*. Omitted from the narrative is the preparatory period during which Smith acquired the skills necessary to produce a forgery of the magnitude of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*. That no such period could have existed is established in Allan J. Pantuck, "A Question of Ability: What Did He Know and When Did He Know It? Further Excavations from the Morton Smith Archives," in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013) 184–211.

69 Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 87. See also Bart D. Ehrman, "Response to Charles Hedrick's Stalemate," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003) 155–163, at 162. This point is also deemed remarkable by Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 20; Chilton, "Provenience," 73.

forged composition, Voss, in his closing remarks to his work, reprehended “impudentissimus iste nebulo” (that most shameless scamp) that had forged the fake Ignatian letters, another “humorous, almost poetic touch” from Smith’s part.⁷⁰

The composing of the Greek gospel extracts would also have been inspired by Hunter’s novel. The fictional account of *Shred of Nicodemus* provided the idea that a short early Christian excerpt could be constructed as a pastiche with the themes of death and burial and subsequently interpreted sensationally.⁷¹ Other points of contact include the removal of a stone from a tomb in a garden, and the characters of Nicodemus—who ἦλθεν πρὸς αὐτὸν νυκτὸς (came to him [Jesus] at night); Jh 3.2—and the resurrected young man—who, ὀψίας γενομένης ἔρχεται ... πρὸς αὐτὸν (when it was evening ... comes to him [Jesus]); *Theod.* III.7–8.⁷² The *Shred of Nicodemus* also explains the empty tomb incident in naturalistic terms (i.e., Nicodemus stole the body of Jesus), which is also one of the proposed interpretations for the resurrection of the young man in *Theod.* II.25–III.5.⁷³

Many other details of the gospel story were composed in a laughable manner: ἔμεινε σὺν αὐτῷ τὴν νύκτα ἐκείνην (*Theod.* III.9) rendered idiomatically as “spent the night with” implies a (homo)sexual encounter;⁷⁴ προσκυνέω (prostrate; *Theod.* II.24) implies a sensual advance rather than a worshipful attitude towards Jesus when translated as “bent down to kiss”;⁷⁵ ἔρχομαι (to come; *Theod.* II.24) could be understood in English as reaching sexual climax;⁷⁶ χεῖρ (hand; *Theod.* III.3–4) could be read either as a euphemism for the penis, as referring to the starting position in ancient wrestling (in the nude), or as a sign

70 Voss, *Epistulae genuinae*, 318; Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 97. This point is also deemed remarkable by Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 87; Ehrman, “Response,” 162; Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 20; Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 237; Pierluigi Piovanelli, “Halfway between Sabbatai Tzevi and Aleister Crowley: Morton Smith’s ‘Own Concept of What Jesus “Must” Have Been’ and, Once Again, the Questions of Evidence and Motive,” in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013) 157–183, at 161 n. 15, though he finds this detail only “troubling,” not a “clearly identifiable ‘joke’”; see also Piovanelli, “Halfway between,” 169.

71 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 91–92; Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 139–142, 166; Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 81, 91. On the methodological difficulties of interpreting *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* as a pastiche, see Brown, *Mark’s Other Gospel*, 92–97; Hedrick, “Moving on from Stalemate,” 45–51.

72 Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 167–169.

73 First suggested in Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (Revised and Updated edition; London: Arrow Books, 2006 [1982]) 348; Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 19, 83. A more plausible interpretation, however, is that the young man was dead, and the “great cry” demonstrates demonic disturbance upon Jesus’s arrival, as happens elsewhere in the Gospel of Mark (e.g., Mark 1:23–24; 5:6–7); Brown, *Mark’s Other Gospel*, 153.

74 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 65–69. For a more plausible interpretation of the Greek, see Brown, “Factualizing the Folklore,” 313–322; Brown, “Twelve Enduring Misconceptions,” 311–313.

75 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 92–93.

76 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 93.

of mutual love between Jesus and the young man.⁷⁷ In short, this first gospel passage could readily be a story of “Jesus rejecting a woman in order to help an anguished young man ‘come out of the closet’ for his first (homo)sexual experience.”⁷⁸ The gospel passage would thus make an alluding “coupling” of the themes of the mystery of the kingdom of God, the motive of secrecy, and the sexual acts forbidden in Jewish law into a “linkage” transmutating into Smith’s personal *sphragis*, a seal of (in)authenticity.⁷⁹

The composing of the Clementine letter began by borrowing the English equivalent (Theodore) of the recipient’s Greek name (Θεόδωρος) from Angus Wilson’s novel *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956); another novel Smith would have read prior to his journey to Mar Saba in 1958.⁸⁰ Hunter’s novel inspired other details of the letter: just as the discovery of the fictional *Shred of Nicodemus* amidst other early Christian texts lent credence to the forgery, so Smith wrote the Clementine letter to frame the gospel extracts for the same purpose.⁸¹ The eloquent Greek of the epistle, which indeed follows Clement’s style, was produced by favouring words that were “found in Clement but not in other Patristic writers,” while omitting those “not found in Clement but present in other Patristic writers.”⁸² Finally, along the lines of his literary *sphragis* described above, Smith inserted a number of “deliberately embedded clues” to the text.⁸³ *Theod.* I.13–15 (“For the true things being mixed with inventions, are falsified, so that, as the saying goes, even the salt loses its savor”) was a crucial piece of the puzzle, as its use of salt imagery could be construed as foreign to the real Clement of Alexandria, and its notion of the adulteration of salt an anachronism.⁸⁴ Smith would have composed the sentence in this way to draw attention to the fact that one of the well-known table salt producer in the twentieth century was the Morton Salt Company.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the word ἄλας (salt) in the letter is immediately followed by μωραίνω, in the context of salt losing its savour. Smith chose to use this

77 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 93–95.

78 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 92. For another perspective on such jokes, see Brown, “Review of *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*”.

79 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 69–72, 81; Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 81–89. For counterpoint, see Brown, “Factualizing the Folklore,” 322–326.

80 Philip Jenkins, “Alexandrian Attitudes: A New Source for the ‘Secret Gospel of Mark’,” *Books & Culture* 20 (2014) 8–9.

81 Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 167; Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 90–91.

82 Andrew H. Criddle, “On the Mar Saba Letter Attributed to Clement of Alexandria,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995) 215–220, at 218. Smith’s source of data would have been Otto Stählin’s four-volume critical edition of Clement; *Clemens Alexandrinus* (vols. 4; ed. Otto Stählin; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1905–1936). For critique, see Brown, *Mark’s Other Gospel*, 54–57; Brown, “Review of *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*,” 41–42.

83 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 61.

84 Both constructions have been persuasively challenged in Brown, “Factualizing the Folklore,” 306–311.

85 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 58–62.

word in its infinitive form (as opposed to the other forms used in the canonized gospels) because of the letter *nu*, which could then conceal his first name Morton as *μωρανθη̅ναι*.⁸⁶ That is, an ingenious reader would have been able to pick up on the author's first name⁸⁷ by making the connection between *ἄλας* and the Morton Salt Company and that three of the six letters of the name Morton were reproduced in the Greek word referring to salt losing its savour.⁸⁸

For his surname, Smith used the Greek word *παραχάρασσω* (here: falsify) to conceal it by the following chain of inferences: literally speaking *παραχάρασσω* refers to “re-stamping” (thus also of falsifying), which could be translated as “forging,” a word that originates from French *forger*, which in turn originates from Latin *fabricare*, a verb that describes actions that might result in a forged product, literary or metallurgical; in English, a forger (as in one who produces metalwork at a forge) could also be called a *smith*, and such derivation from *παραχάρασσω* to *smith* would have been plausible for a person whose name happened to be Smith.⁸⁹ Other features evidencing Smith's sense of humour include the sign of the cross placed at the beginning of the text, similar in appearance to the modern text critical sign for spurious text,⁹⁰ the ending of the manuscript in mid-sentence (or a “cliffhanger ending,” as one critic puts it),⁹¹ and perhaps even Smith's dedication of *The Secret Gospel* “For The One Who Knows”.⁹²

86 Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 154–155.

87 Note, however, that Morton was Smith's second name. Born as Rubert Morton, Smith changed his first name to Robert. Before settling for “Morton Smith” he had also used “R. Morton Smith” in his early scholarly publications. I wish to thank Allan J. Pantuck, the foremost expert on the Smith Archive, for this information.

88 Assuming, of course, a rough one-to-one correspondence between the English and the Greek alphabets.

89 Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 152–154. Here I am indebted to the manner Brown has broken down this argument in Brown, “Twelve Enduring Misconceptions,” 319.

90 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 33.

91 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 79. See also Ehrman, “Response,” 162; Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 86.

92 The significance of this dedication was first questioned by Quentin Quesnell, “The Mar Saba Clementine: A Question of Evidence,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (1975) 48–67, at 66; mentioned in passing by Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 17; considered still “ein ungelöstes Rätsel” by Eckhard Rau, “Weder gefälscht noch authentisch? Überlegungen zum Status des geheimen Markusevangeliums als Quelle des antiken Christentums,” in *Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferungen: Beiträge zu außerkanonischen Jesusüberlieferungen aus verschiedenen Sprach- und Kulturtraditionen* (ed. Jörg Frey and Jens Schröter; Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 254; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 139–186, at 151. Specifically, Quesnell contrasted this dedication to that in Smith's *Clement of Alexandria*, dedicated to Arthur Darby Nock, who himself suspected the authenticity of Theod. As noted in sub-subsection 2.5.1.2, such jokes lack the necessary pertinence to securely identify the supposed punch line as an authorial revelation. Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 242–243 notes the rather obvious Gnostic connection, but ends up wondering, “whether Smith's unnamed dedicatee was actually himself, congratulating his own creative brilliance in a narcissistic mental mirror, trumpeting through the fog: Behold the One Who Knows.” In itself, however, it is hardly surprising that Smith would have dedicated a popular book called *The Secret Gospel* to “One Who Knows,” i.e., a *Knower* (Gnostic). Smith was never sympathetic to conservative scholarship: he coined the term “pseudorthodox” (starting with Morton Smith, “The Present State of Old Testament Studies,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969) 19–

Smith's *intentio auctoris* for the epistle was always to have it read crooked. That is, it was not to be read straight(forwardly), as Clement simply condemning the Carpocratians for their heterodox beliefs but as an implied Carpocratian coming to the realization of the extent of Clement's hypocrisy—after all, Clement emphatically denies that the words γυμνός γυμνῶ belong to the gospel extracts, even though a crooked reading of the passage construes that it is about the young man's first (homo)sexual encounter.⁹³ Consequently, Smith composed *Clement's Letter to Theodore* as an *extended double entendre*. The Greek word ἀπόρρητος (here: ineffable; *Theod.* I.22) should thus be understood as referring to the tradition “among Christians [that homosexuality] is not to be named,”⁹⁴ while ἀπροφύλακτος (unforeseen) and ἀποθνήσκω (to die) in *Theod.* I.27–28 are to be interpreted, respectively, as “without a condom” (as in “unguarded”; similarly, in English “prophylactic” can be used as a synonym for “condom”) and “climaxing” (dying is a common euphemism for an orgasm in many languages, including Latin).⁹⁵

As an extended double entendre, *Clement's Letter to Theodore* is, furthermore, literarily dependent on Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* (1891). This inference derives from a number of details of similarities between the two literary works (including paratextual⁹⁶ material),

35), to describe, in the explanation of Stanley Isser, “Studies of Ancient Jewish Messianism: Scholarship and Apologetics,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 25 (1988) 56–73, at 67, “those academicians who claim to be critical scholars but whose conclusions, consciously or unconsciously, always appear to support the religious positions of groups to which they belong.” This scholarly bias has not necessarily changed much in the 21st century; cf. Tony Burke, “Heresy Hunting in the New Millennium,” *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 39 (2010) 405–420. The reverse of such an attitude would be to express support for those that conservative scholars most despised. Even so, Smith's dedication to “One Who Knows” does not in itself have to entail anything more than, e.g., Smith's quip about his advancing “along the left hand path,” a comment he makes in a letter to Gershom Scholem, dated August 1, 1955—a reference to a magical approach that within Western magical tradition, according to Kennet Granholm, *Embracing the Dark: The Magic Order of Dragon Rouge—Its Practice in Dark Magic and Meaning Making* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2005) 28, “is usually used for the occultists whose goal is self-deification with a maintained individuality, whereas the Right Hand Path is used for the occultists striving for a union with the divine with a resulting resolution of the magician's individuality”; *Morton Smith and Gershom Scholem, Correspondence 1945–1982* (ed. Guy G. Stroumsa; Leiden: Brill, 2008) 81. That Smith had a special interest in subversive religious and magical practices both ancient and modern is well-known in his biography; cf. Pierluigi Piovanelli, “Une certaine “Keckheit, Kühnheit und Grandiosität” ...’: La correspondance entre Morton Smith et Gershom Scholem (1945–1982). Notes critiques,” *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 228 (2011) 403–29; Piovanelli, “Halfway between”.

93 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 206–211, 238.

94 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 238; Peter Jeffery, “Clement's Mysteries and Morton Smith's Magic,” in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013) 212–246, at 242.

95 Jeffery, “Clement's Mysteries,” 242–243.

96 *Paratext*, as defined in Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (trans. Jane E. Lewin; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 1, refers to all the “accompanying productions” a text happens to be surrounded with—nowadays, in the case of a simple book, at least the author's name and the title of the work are always included. Furthermore, Genette, *Paratexts*, 344 notes that paratext can be further distinguished as *peritext* and *epitext*, so that epitext refers to “any paratextual element not

such as the crooked reading of the aforementioned Greek word ἀπόρρητος with Lord Alfred Douglas’s poem “Two Loves” (1894), passages from which—including “love that dare not speak its name”—were read aloud at Wilde’s indecency trial in 1895,⁹⁷ and τῆς ἐπτάκις κεκαλυμμένης ἀληθείας (of that truth hidden by seven veils; *Theod.* I.26), which seems to echo Wilde’s stage direction “Salome dances the dance of the seven veils” (in its 1894 English translation from Wilde’s original French).⁹⁸

Having thus prepared both the gospel extracts and the Clementine letter that frames them, Smith transferred these texts to the end papers of Voss’s book either in advance or during his 1958 stay at the monastery of Mar Saba⁹⁹—the site of discovery deliberately chosen because of Hunter’s novel.¹⁰⁰ While on site, Smith left behind yet another humorous clue of his deed on a separate Mar Saban manuscript, inserting a Greek name with his own hand that could be construed as a cryptonym,¹⁰¹ deriving from a Greek verb that can be translated both as “to swindle” and as “to lose one’s hair”—as one critic has observed, Smith “was substantially bald well before 1960.”¹⁰²

Following the successful planting of the forged manuscript, Smith prepared a scholarly commentary on the Clementine letter of 462 pages between 1958 and 1966, afterwards composing an elaborate account of his journey for his popular treatise on the manuscript,

materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely”—such as interviews of the author, reviews of the book, and so on. Here, the concept of paratext(ual material) is used to refer generally to all such instances of intertextuality.

97 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 238–239; Jeffery, “Clement’s Mysteries,” 242–243.

98 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 228–231; Jeffery, “Clement’s Mysteries,” 242. For a hefty criticism of this strategy of interpreting *Theod.* as an extended double entendre—namely, as a “hermeneutics of desperation”—see Brown, “Review of *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*,” 23–30.

99 Ehrman, “Response,” 159 n. 8 suggests the latter. Hüller and Gullotta, “Quentin Quesnell,” 376 report, however, that Quesnell thought it “‘impossible’ that Smith could have smuggled a book from outside of the monastery into the library owing to the tight scrutiny of his overseers.” Hüller and Gullotta, “Quentin Quesnell,” 376 n. 106 also refer to Agamemnon Tselikas, “Agamemnon Tselikas’ Handwriting Analysis Report,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 37 (2011) i–xv, at vi; <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-interpretation/agamemnon-tselikas-handwriting-analysis-report>: “I think [it] is impossible for someone to write this text inside the monastery since 1923. It was not allowed to anyone to have access to the books and, if he had, he was under the constant supervision (as now). No one could easily use an old book to write on white leaves such a text.”

100 Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels*, 102; Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 19; Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 163; Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 81.

101 Fictitious names that, according to Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 84–85, are “caractérisent par leur relation avec ce qu’ils cachent. ... On s’autorisera donc à tenir pour cryptonymes tous les noms dont le caractère supposé se laisse deviner, avec un plus ou moins haut degré d’évidence selon que le masque—en soi comme dans son rapport au texte qu’il accompagne—est totalement ou partiellement opaque.” Order reversed.

102 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 42–44. This argument is, however, based on flawed data, as established in Pantuck and Brown, “Morton Smith as M. Madiotes”.

publishing both were in 1973.¹⁰³ On one hand, the complexity of the commentary was meant to misdirect scholars into debating internal issues in the text rather than focusing on the manuscript itself.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, Smith’s intimidating level of detail ensured that few scholars would take the trouble to critically process all of his arguments.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, Smith was able to insert one final deliberate clue in his commentary on the passage about salt discussed above (*Theod.* I.13–15), in which his proposed allusion of Matt 5:13 to Jer 10:14 LXX could also be made on the basis of translating ἔξω βάλλω (cast out) in the former and χροονεύω (cast metal) in the latter with their English homonym “cast”. This Smith would have done to draw attention—following his preceding attempt to allude to Morton Salt—to the words omitted in his quote from Jeremiah, one of which happens to be χρυσοχόος (*goldsmith*).¹⁰⁶

The reminiscences of Smith’s journey were modeled on Hunter’s novel. Smith uses “reconcile” to describe his experience as a manuscript hunter—that of going into a monastery unsure of whether there is anything worthwhile to find, thus in need of “reconciling” himself to this fact—as the fictional Sir William does.¹⁰⁷ The word “cell” (referring to monastic lodging) is also used in both works.¹⁰⁸ One recent critic has described these similarities as “amazing, both in substance and in language.”¹⁰⁹

In addition, Smith likewise employs his literary strategy of extended double entendre in his commentary. In his discussion of the “mystery of the kingdom of God,” for instance, Smith referred to Col 2:18 as potentially “the first reference to practice of a technique for ascent to the heavens”—namely, that μηδεις υ̐μας καταβραβευέτω θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν ἀγγέλων, ἃ ἐόρακεν ἐμβατεύων (nobody is to give a judgment against you, who is willing to practice humility and worshipping of angels, whom he saw as he entered [into heavens?]).¹¹⁰ However, in his lengthy commentary

103 Smith, *The Secret Gospel*, 76 notes that first draft of *Clement of Alexandria* was completed in 1963, revised and accepted for publication by the Harvard University Press in 1964, then revised a second time in 1966, subsequently “going through the press” until its publication in 1973.

104 Quesnell, “Evidence,” 48, 60–61; Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 19, 81, 87–90; Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 13, 237, 247; Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 155 n. 74. On Smith’s role in controlling access to the manuscript—namely, that he did all and more than was characteristically expected of an academic manuscript hunter to ensure other scholars would have adequate access to the artefact—see Paananen and Viklund, “Control of the Scribal Hand,” 269–271.

105 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 13, 111.

106 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 62–64. For a second opinion, see Brown, “Factualizing the Folklore,” 311–313.

107 Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 165–166; Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 89–91.

108 Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 90.

109 Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 90.

110 Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*, 180–181.

Smith also refers to “the potential climax of the consequences of Christian baptism” (Col 3:1–17), “the spiritual union effected by physical intercourse in marriage” (Eph 5:32), and “Christ’s descent in disguise” (*Ascension of Isaiah* 10–11), which he contrasts with the description of Christ “stripping off” the powers and authorities in Col 2:15.¹¹¹ As such, all these instances are intended to “hint of sexual double meaning,” while at the same time preserving “faux deniability” allowing Smith to claim that such an implication does not exist, “an essential feature of Smith’s brand of humor” according to one recent critic.¹¹² A careful reading of Smith’s writings indicates, furthermore, that he was suffering from severe psychological issues.¹¹³ Based on Jeffery’s description of these issues and citations from Smith that Jeffery uses to validate them, Donald Capps proposed that Smith must have suffered from narcissistic personality disorder.¹¹⁴

What then was Smith’s motive for forging *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*? According to his critics, they were numerous, including challenging himself,¹¹⁵ challenging his peers,¹¹⁶ taking revenge on his peers,¹¹⁷ mocking his peers,¹¹⁸ proving himself,¹¹⁹ propagating his ideas about early Christianity,¹²⁰ opposing fundamentalist ideas about early Christianity,¹²¹ acting out on his alleged character as an archetypal trickster,¹²² providing a respectable history to homosexuality,¹²³ and general crankiness following alleged psychological issues.¹²⁴ Smith is also perceived too complex a character to establish one simple motive,¹²⁵ even to the extent that Smith himself did not know “clearly what he was

111 Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*, 178–181.

112 Jeffery, “Clement’s Mysteries,” 234–235.

113 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 5–13, 123–131, 242.

114 Donald Capps, “The Diagnostic Question,” a conference paper for “The Secret Gospel of Mark, Sex, Death, and Madness: The Psychodynamics of Morton Smith’s Proposal,” at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in New Orleans, November 21, 2009.

115 Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 88.

116 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 79.

117 Piovanelli, “Halfway between,” 166–169.

118 Jenkins, “Alexandrian Attitudes,” 8–9.

119 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 79–80.

120 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 80–86; Piovanelli, “Halfway between,” 181, citing Per Beskow, *Strange Tales about Jesus: A Survey of Unfamiliar Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 103. Although neither Evans nor Watson discuss Smith’s motives, their arguments on continuity between their interpretations of Smith’s scholarly ideas and their interpretations of the contents of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* seem to imply that Smith created the document for perpetuating his own agenda; Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 155–161; Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 81–89.

121 Jacob Neusner, *Are There Really Tannaic Parallels to the Gospels? A Refutation of Morton Smith* (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 80; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) 10.

122 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 84–86; Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 92, 121.

123 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 239.

124 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 242.

125 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 85–86; Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 242–243.

actually communicating” in his act of deception.¹²⁶

For the remainder of this dissertation, I will refer to this account of Morton Smith having constructed a highly sophisticated forgery of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* as the *alternative narrative*. As will be discussed in section 3.1, this narrative functions as the *fons et origo* for developing constrained criteria for the acceptability of alleged concealed indicators of authority, a literary technique within the tradition of mystification that has been inexplicably used to construe many of the individual claims enumerated above.

1.3 Some Preliminary (and Pre-emptive) Considerations

Scholars are likely to elicit divergent responses to the *alternative narrative* described in the previous section. To use the reception of Carlson’s *The Gospel Hoax* (2005) as our guide, these will range from whole-hearted acceptance to incredulity about the “bizarre” aspects of many of the claims.¹²⁷ Based on this, I can envision two general objections to emerge. Those opposed to the conclusion of the alternative narrative might claim that the whole narrative is *obviously* so weird that it is not worth the trouble to figure out the reasons behind its strange character. On the other hand, those in favour of (at least) the conclusion that Smith did forge the manuscript of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* might object to my *form of presentation* of the alternative narrative. In their eyes, this alternative narrative is weird only in appearance, because I have omitted a number of other arguments that would have lent credence to the narrative’s presentation of Smith’s intentional efforts in creating a forged Clementine letter. Thus, a holistic assessment of scholarship on *Theod.* would present the details within the alternative narrative in a better light. That is, as an artificial construct, the alternative narrative would not be acceptable (as a reasonable description of the actions that led to the alleged manufacturing of *Theod.*) to any scholar in favour of Smith’s culpability. I would thus have been better not to have attempted to craft the alternative narrative in the first place.

126 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 243. Following the list of possible motives described above, it might be safe to conclude that neither does anyone else. It is worth noting, at any rate, that the question of motive in the study of literary fakes is often a complicated one. Cf. Grafton, *Forgers and Critics*, 40–41. Similarly Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 4–5, 97. On more detailed considerations of the alleged motives behind *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*, see especially Brown, “Question of Motive,” 351–383; Paananen, “Stalemate to Deadlock,” 108–110.

127 Of the works cited in the alternative narrative, *The Gospel Hoax* is perhaps the most representative, as it was the first presentation of many of the more unique and imaginative details. For a more in-depth treatment of the reception of *The Gospel Hoax*, see Paananen, “Stalemate to Deadlock,” 95–96.

In response to the first objection I would argue that the alternative narrative has been so carefully constructed that the following sentence could not be challenged: *each statement in the alternative narrative has been made in a scholarly publication*. As such, there is no detail in the alternative narrative so obvious that it could be dismissed without first presenting precise, clearly articulated reasons. As Michael Barkun has noted,

the fact that the beliefs ... are bizarre ought not to imply that they are necessarily innocuous or unworthy of careful scrutiny. Bizarre beliefs have broken into the open before. Indeed, new orthodoxies can emerge out of just such ideological undergrowth, sometimes with devastating effects.¹²⁸

As noted in chapter 1, forgeries in the late twentieth century have become construed such that they are the keys to their own puzzles, and the lack of constrained criteria in the study of forgeries has led, in extreme cases, to the likes of the alternative narrative.¹²⁹ “Weird” claims are themselves worthy of scrutiny when they, as in Barkun’s case, occur in the margins of society—and all the more so when academics themselves are found propagating them.¹³⁰

On the other hand, the objection to the framing—in this case a “weirdness effect”—that my presentation of the alternative narrative has produced is entirely justified. It does, however, underline the point I intend to make. First of all, these arguments were taken very seriously at the time of their publication, and even though some of them—especially those about Smith having embedded a host of deliberate clues pointing to his own authorship—may have been the first to become suspect since the publication of *The Gospel Hoax* (2005), my thesis is that every statement made in the alternative narrative leans on the same basic framework.¹³¹ My framing of the alternative narrative—that is, my omission of other arguments scholars have made to justify their conclusion that *Theod.* is

128 Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (2nd edition; Comparative Studies in Religion and Society 15; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) 239.

129 For a less extreme example, consider some of the arguments used to construe the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* as inauthentic—arguments that are not, in practice, able to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic text passages, as established in Timo S. Paananen, “Another ‘Fake’ Or Just a Problem of Method: What Francis Watson’s Analysis Does to Papyrus Köln 255” (2012); <http://blue.butler.edu/~jfmgrat/GJW/Another%20Fake%20Or%20Just%20a%20Problem%20of%20Method%20by%20Timo%20S.%20Paananen.pdf>.

130 Cf. Massimo Pigliucci and Maarten Boudry, “Why the Demarcation Problem Matters,” in *Philosophy of Pseudoscience: Reconsidering the Demarcation Problem* (ed. Massimo Pigliucci and Maarten Boudry; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013) 1–6, at 3: “The lack of interest for pseudoscience in some philosophical quarters derives from the tacit assumption that some ideas and theories are so *obviously* wrong that they are not even worth arguing about. Pseudoscience is still too often considered a harmless pastime indulged in by a relatively small number of people with an unusual penchant for mystery worship. This is far from the truth.” Emphasis original.

131 As elaborated in sub-subsection 3.1.4.1, I have decided to treat the alternative narrative as a rational construct that is only inadmissible due to reasons of consistency in academic history writing.

a work of forgery—does not *create* so much as *accentuate* the nature of the arguments claiming that Smith deliberately chose a particular old book, and sprinkled amusing details in its pages. Whether or not these arguments are ultimately deemed acceptable has little to do with my decision to highlight them in this manner. It seems clear to me that the alternative narrative itself cannot sustain the weight of the whole case for forgery. This should not, however, lead us to shield these claims from criticism altogether, nor do they prevent us from using them for other, more constructive purposes than the simple assessment of the plausibility of the claims themselves. Narratives within the academic study of history are, in any case, “constructions,” as Stephen Turner observes, “which include only that which is relevant to the point of the narrative ... [which] is at least in part to make some historical outcome intelligible.”¹³² The alternative narrative serves a purpose, at the very least for the following: to provide a baseline to a comparative analysis in subsection 2.5.3; after an in-depth study in subsections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2.

That is to say, historians might be accidentally reading the alternative narrative as a standard, judicious academic history writing of *the production of the manuscript of Clement’s Letter to Theodore*, though it is not. In other words, the “historical outcome” I aim to make “intelligible” with the alternative narrative is not the production of the manuscript of *Theod.* but rather *the structure of the methodological free-form* (or lack of constrained criteria) in contemporary discourses on forgeries. The alternative narrative provides raw material for the study of the latter phenomenon. Here, the narrative form is construed merely as a *chronicle* of factual statements from scholarly literature, allowing, inter alia, a fruitful collation of information—such as observing “that most shameless scamp” to be the most widely cited detail among the scholars whose work comprises the alternative narrative. The alternative narrative is never studied as a holistic composition but only through its details, most often as a single factual statement corresponding to a single sentence of the narrative. The alternative narrative can thus be viewed simply as a series of claims that happen to be presented in the form of a historical narrative—or, as one might wish to ascertain, just a minor idiosyncrasy of its author.

¹³² Stephen Turner, “What Do Narratives Explain? Roth, Mink and Weber,” in *Towards a Revival of Analytical Philosophy of History: Around Paul A. Roth’s Vision of Historical Sciences* (ed. Krzysztof Brzechczyn; Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities 110; Leiden: Brill, 2018) 130–147, at 143.

2 Methods and Materials

The four articles that comprise the bulk of this dissertation were consciously constructed to apply different methodological approaches to the manuscript of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*. As such, each methodology needs to be discussed separately. The study of the alternative narrative is likewise divided into separate parts: the classification of the material (subsection 2.5.1), the analysis of the material (subsection 2.5.2), and the comparative study of the material (subsection 2.5.3).

2.1 “*Stalemate to Deadlock*”: A Discourse Analysis by Any Other Name

The first of the published articles, as explicated in the abstract, “reviews the literature pertaining to the recent debate over the question of authenticity of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* (including the so-called *Secret Gospel of Mark*) and argues that the academy has tied itself into a secure deadlock.”¹³³ Due to the limitations of article length, the theoretical basis of the article had to be excised from the article text; beneath the thin veneer of a literature review thus lies a straightforward discourse analysis,¹³⁴ one that nevertheless amount to double the length of a regular article within the discipline. Briefly stated, as “the odd demeanour of the discourse” was already obvious between the years 1973 and 2005,¹³⁵ the most recent development of the two streams of foul play accusations—the *hoax hypothesis*, and the *double entendre hypothesis*¹³⁶—and their counter-cases were analysed with the presupposition that it is most important to “work with what has actually been said or written, exploring patterns in and across the statements and *identifying the social consequences* of different discursive representations of reality.”¹³⁷ Thus my attention centred foremost on how participants engaged one another in the larger authenticity discourse,¹³⁸ enabling me to map out the figurative road “From Stalemate to

133 Paananen, “Stalemate to Deadlock,” 87. Title italicization added.

134 Although the analysis itself was perhaps straightforward, the concept of discourse analysis never is. This particular approach to language, as observed in Deborah Schiffrin, *Approaches to Discourse* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 5, is “widely recognized as one of the most vast, but also one of the least defined, areas in linguistics.” The sentiment is captured most cogently in the preface to Barbara Johnstone, *Discourse Analysis* (3rd edition; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018) xi, where the reader is urged “not to think of discourse analysis as a collection of facts or canonical studies or as a body of theory” but as “an open-ended heuristic” that is practiced “by paying close and systematic attention to particular situations and particular utterances or sets of utterances.”

135 That is, immediately after the publication of Smith’s *The Secret Gospel* (1973), and up until the publication of Carlson’s *The Gospel Hoax* (2005).

136 Paananen, “Stalemate to Deadlock,” 88.

137 Marianne W. Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage Publications, 2002) 21. Emphasis mine.

138 Cf. Norman Fairclough, *Media Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995) 125–128.

Deadlock,” as discussed in further detail in chapter 3.

2.2. “Distortion of the Scribal Hand”: A Rankean Trip to the Archive

The phenomenon my co-author, Roger Viklund, and I label *line screen distortion* in the first documented occurrence of an erroneous reading due to manuscript digitization process,¹³⁹ resulted from a return to the basics in the study of history. That is, a (mostly figurative) trip to (private) archives, in the footsteps of the nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke, whose appreciation of the private archival material was summarized by Lord Acton as follows: “By going from book to manuscript and from library to archives, we exchange doubt for certainty, and become our own masters.”¹⁴⁰ Invaluable in providing their assistance were Charles W. Hedrick and Allan J. Pantuck, the first of whom secured scholarly rights of access to high-quality scans of the colour photographs taken of the manuscript of *Theod.* in 1983,¹⁴¹ having, together with Nikolaos Olympiou, tracked down the retired librarian of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, who had the photographs in his possession at the turn of the millennium.¹⁴² Similarly, Pantuck assisted us in securing high-quality scans of Smith’s black-and-white photographs taken in 1958 from the Smith Archive, now housed in the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.¹⁴³ When all the logistics had been sorted out, a comparison of the high-quality material with the earlier textual descriptions of the quality of the scribal hand in the manuscript, informed by the standards of forensic studies, revealed a disparity that could not be explained by mere differences in scholarly perceptions.¹⁴⁴

139 See 3, below.

140 John Dalberg-Acton, “Notes on Archival Research, 1864–1868,” in *Lord Acton: The Decisive Decade 1864–1874: Essays and Documents* (ed. Damian McElrath; Bibliothèque de la Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique 51; Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1970) 121–140, at 140.

141 Hüller and Gullotta, “Quentin Quesnell,” 376–377.

142 Charles W. Hedrick and Nikolaos Olympiou, “Secret Mark: New Photographs, New Witnesses,” *The Fourth R* 13 (2000) 3–16.

143 Albert I. Baumgarten, who accessed the Smith Archive when conducting research for *Elias Bickerman as a Historian of the Jews* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 131; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), reports that “talking with the staff I got the impression that every crank and crackpot in creation wanted to see [the Smith Archive] in order to find something in the papers to support their view of [Clement’s Letter to Theodore]”; <https://salainenevankelista.blogspot.com/2010/08/how-many-books-published-in-last-five.html?showComment=1282769991117#c3496412440699494800>. I myself have never personally visited the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York.

144 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 28–31.

2.3. “Control of the Scribal Hand”: Palaeography and Forensic Studies in the Qualitative and Quantitative Abstract

On the one hand, “Control of the Scribal Hand” is another return to the basics in the study of history akin to “Distortion of the Scribal Hand” with another trip to an archive, augmented by a return to the fundamental approaches and research questions of two closely connected text-centred disciplines of palaeography and forensic document examination. As Tom Davis has observed, these are two disciplines that “do not communicate with each other”—yet they must, in this study, be reconciled.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, this article employs two layers of materials to justify its argument for similarity as the defining constrained criterion in the study of alleged forgeries. The first such layer involves the known biographical details of Smith, including his own accounts of his manuscript-hunting journeys and his related correspondences,¹⁴⁶ both of which can be contrasted with earlier manuscript-hunting accounts in the Mediterranean region.¹⁴⁷ The other layer of evidence comprises expert opinions of the two Greek-speaking professionals—one palaeographer, the other a forensic document examiner—that have disagreed with one another in their analyses of the handwriting in the manuscript of *Theod*.¹⁴⁸ This impasse is ultimately resolved by considering other eighteenth-century Greek manuscripts—specifically, two specimens from the manuscript collection of The British Library.¹⁴⁹ Thus a qualitative analysis of Smith’s biographical details is followed by a quantitative analysis of palaeographic details (ones that Colette Shirat has labelled “hints of control”) in the three Greek manuscripts.¹⁵⁰

145 Tom Davis, “The Practice of Handwriting Identification,” *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society* 8 (2007) 251–276, at 251.

146 The most up-to-date summary of these sources is still the lengthy footnote in Paananen and Viklund, “Control of the Scribal Hand,” 263–264 n. 10.

147 E.g., Henry Octavius Coxe, *Report to Her Majesty’s Government on the Greek Manuscripts Yet Remaining in Libraries of the Levant* (London, 1858). On contemporary scholarly accounts on the beginnings of manuscript hunting, see Jocelyn Hunt, *The Renaissance: Questions and Analysis in History* (London: Routledge, 1999); for a scholarly classic and entertainingly written history of manuscript hunting, see Leo Deuel, *Testaments of Time: The Search for Lost Manuscripts and Records* (New York: Knopf, 1965).

148 Venetia Anastasopoulou, “Experts Report Handwriting Examination,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 36 (2010) 1–39; <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/wp-content/uploads/secret-mark-analysis.pdf>; Tselikas, “Handwriting Analysis”.

149 Add MS 8240, fol. 92–109v Gregory of Nazianzus, *Contra Julianum imperatorem* 1; Add MS 8237, fol. 2–2v Letter by Konstantinos Dapontes to an anonymous correspondent dated Piperi, 10 February 1754. An excellent overview of these manuscripts is given in The British Library’s Digitised Manuscripts website at <http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Default.aspx>.

150 Colette Shirat, “Handwriting and the Writing Hand,” in *Writing Systems and Cognition: Perspectives from Psychology, Physiology, Linguistics and Semitics* (ed. William C. Watt; Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994) 375–446, at 439; Colette Shirat, *Writing as Handwork: A History of Handwriting in Mediterranean and Western Culture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006) 430.

2.4 “WWFD”: An Analytic Study of Method

The last of the articles, and the one most removed from the direct physicality of the manuscript of *Theod.*, follows the conventions of the analytic tradition in the philosophy of history. That is to say, the analysis most concerns clear conceptual distinctions and the correct framing of historical explanations—or, as Chris Lorenz has stated, “If historians explain in the form of narrative ... then they better make sure that they frame their questions carefully and that they get their facts under their description right.”¹⁵¹ There is no doubt that the phenomenon I have labeled WWFD (What Would a Forger Do?),¹⁵² and documented in its three varieties (unconcealed, concealed, and hyperactive) from contemporary debates on forgeries, indeed makes for great narratives, inas much as the alternative narrative does, along with all the other excellent examples cited in this article. As such, it is again the qualitative aspect of such scholarly writing that this article challenges.

2.5 Methods for Studying the Alternative Narrative

The claim in this section is that the alternative narrative of the origins of the manuscript of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*, as explicated in section 1.2, offers the building blocks—naturally, together with related paratextual material, including previous scholarly work on the topics—for the construction of a robust framework for the admissibility of alleged acts of deliberation from the part of the (alleged) forger. Although I have already addressed some objections to this mode of analysis in section 1.3 and although I nevertheless insist on the importance of such an approach for the task at hand, it is nonetheless impossible to deny that the techniques employed in subsections 2.5.2 and 2.5.3 are experimental. Specifically, while the analysis is, again, mostly informed by the conventions of the analytic tradition within the philosophy of history, and especially by insight made in recent developments following the so-called “ontological turn” in contemporary epistemology,¹⁵³ it is difficult to find analogous approaches elsewhere in

151 Chris Lorenz, “Philosophy of History and Analytical Philosophy in Germany: A Special Relationship,” in *Towards a Revival of Analytical Philosophy of History: Around Paul A. Roth’s Vision of Historical Sciences* (ed. Krzysztof Brzechczyn; Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities 110; Leiden: Brill, 2018) 55–72, at 56.

152 As I note in Paananen, “WWFD,” 7 n. 32, “Reviewers were unanimously against a technical term I had concocted in Latin to refer to this method (*imitatio imitatoris imaginandi*) as either too pretentious, or sounding too much like a Hogwarts spell, so”—no doubt to my eternal regret, I might add—“I have opted not to use it.”

153 E.g., Maurizio Ferraris, *Documentality: Why It Is Necessary to Leave Traces* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013). As Maiju Paananen, “Imaginariness of Early Childhood Education: Societal Roles of Early Childhood Education in a Transnational Era of Accountability” (*Kasvatustieteellisiä tutkimuksia /*

academic study. As such, much of the following argumentation may exhibit a somewhat novel character for the field. This is only fitting, as my overall aim is to call for a paradigm change in the study of forgeries. This approach of combining distinct academic disciplines to deal with complex questions has often been referred to as *transdisciplinary* in contemporary research. Maiju Paananen has argued at length that this approach is not about “arbitrarily combining information here and there” but that

there is a need to take the different ontological entities of reality seriously by using proper methodologies to examine these different aspects and by using a sufficient framework which includes these different ontological entities, to discuss the results rigorously.¹⁵⁴

Consequently, three distinct categorical approaches are used in this study: an attempt at a taxonomy of the alternative narrative (2.5.1), an attempt at a qualitative analysis of the alternative narrative (2.5.2), and an attempt at a comparative analysis of the alternative narrative (2.5.3).

2.5.1 Classifying the Arguments within the Alternative Narrative

The arguments that form the alternative narrative can be classified into three distinct groups.¹⁵⁵ First are the claims that posit a *literary, derivative relationship (hoax)* between *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* and some other distinct work (especially Hunter’s *The Mystery of Mar Saba*). Second are the claims that posit certain features of the text and related paratextual material as *concealed indicators of authority*; these provide evidence of firm deliberation from the author’s part to reveal their true identity to the careful reader (e.g., Morton in *μωρανθηναί*; Smith as the “baldy swindler”). Third are the claims that posit certain features of the text and related paratextual material as *jokes*; deliberately composed as jokes by the author that furthermore divulge the author as a twentieth-century individual (e.g., double meanings; amusing juxtaposition of material such as Voss’s scorn for “that most shameless scamp”).

Helsinki Studies in Education 3; Ph.D. dissertation, University of Helsinki; Helsinki: Yliopistopaino, 2017) 21 has noted, Ferraris’s “theory of ontology is a good surface for interdisciplinary discussion since it categorizes the entities in the world in a way that allows us to discuss both things that are socially constructed, being dependent of place and time, and things that are not dependent on place and time.”

¹⁵⁴ Paananen, *Imaginaires*, 30.

¹⁵⁵ As summarized by Rodion Ebbighausen and Dieter Korn, “Paleontology as a Circumstantial Evidence Lawsuit,” *Historical Biology* 25 (2013) 283–295, at 289, “The purpose of all taxonomy is classification, in short to bring order. To be able to do so, taxonomy relies on a taxonomic schema that is a logical construct or a set of rules, which guide the process of classification ... The concept of a taxonomic schema could be chosen freely, even though it is obvious that some schemas are more applicable than others. ... Hence, the taxonomic schema that is preferred is the one that expresses the theoretical point of view the best.”

2.5.1.1 The Literary, Derivative Relationship (hoax)

At the conceptual level, the first group, the notion of a *literary, derivative relationship (hoax)*, is widely used by scholars, especially in its more benign application—i.e., in suggesting ordinary literary relationships. Each academic discipline has its own set(s) of criteria for determining how a literary relationship can be legitimately established. As explicated below, all authors behind the alternative narrative have used the concept of the literary relationship in their other writings, as such judgment calls are often needed in the study of history.

More specifically, in the alternative narrative, *Clement's Letter to Theodore* is found to be literarily dependent on the following works:

- Gospels (canonized) of the Christian Bible
- Otto Stählin (ed.), *Clemens Alexandrinus* (1905–1936)
- Oscar Wilde, *Salomé* (1891)
- James H. Hunter, *The Mystery of Mar Saba* (1940)
- Angus Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956)

The relationship of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* to the New Testament gospels and Stählin's critical editions will not be discussed here, as this relates to the technical composition of the Greek text of the gospel extracts and the Clementine epistle and because the assessment of their relationship has already been found by other scholars in the field to flaunt standard procedures.¹⁵⁶ As for Hunter's novel, although Philip Jenkins's original observation of the connection to *Theod.* was more one of an intriguing oddity than a bona fide argument of derivation,¹⁵⁷ more sustained efforts have recently been made by Craig A. Evans and Francis Watson, the latter of whom establishes Smith's dependence on

¹⁵⁶ Specifically, Brown and Hedrick have noted that the manner with which scholars have assessed Clement's gospel extracts pastiches of the canonized gospels follows a reverse logic compared to usual scholarly practice. Thus Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 110: "The criterion scholars use to isolate Mark's handiwork in the canonical gospel ... is the same criterion used to isolate an imitator's handiwork in [*Clement's Letter to Theodore*];" Hedrick, "Moving on from Stalemate," 51: "In the case of [*Clement's Letter to Theodore*], however, the appeal to prove forgery is to excessive consistency, which is a methodological reversal of how we usually argue in the guild." On Criddle's study, apart from the critiques cited in n. 82, above, see Andrew R. Solow and Woollcott K. Smith, "A Statistical Problem Concerning the Mar Saba Letter," *American Statistical Association* 63 (2009) 254–257, especially on the mismatch of Criddle's source of Clementine data and his statistical model.

¹⁵⁷ Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels*, 102: "The fact that [*Clement's Letter to Theodore*] came from Mar Saba is either strong proof of the text's authenticity, in that nobody would have dared invent such a thing in the 1950s, or else it is a tribute to the unabashed *chutzpah* of a forger."

Hunter's novel in the following manner.¹⁵⁸

Table 1: Smith's Dependence on Hunter, According to Watson

Parallelism	Hunter's novel	Theod. & Smith's writings	Notes
Lexical parallel; similar sentiment	"I was prepared to leave Mar Saba, reconciled to the negative results of my search" (Hunter, <i>Mystery of Mar Saba</i> , 293.)	"I was gradually reconciling myself to my worst expectations" (Smith, <i>The Secret Gospel</i> , 12.)	"similar circumstances narrated in similar language" (Watson, "Beyond Suspicion," 166.)
Similar sentiment	"But I have always had the feeling that some might have been overlooked" (Hunter, <i>Mystery of Mar Saba</i> , 279.)	"But there was always the chance that something had been missed" (Smith, <i>The Secret Gospel</i> , 11.)	"strikingly similar terms" (Watson, "Beyond Suspicion," 165.)
Similar episode	Discovery in the monastery of Mar Saba of a short, sensational I CE text, together with second-century (CE) texts to give credence to its authenticity (according to their discoverer)	Discovery in the monastery of Mar Saba of a short, sensational (?) I CE (?) text, embedded in a second-century (CE) (?) text to give credence to its authenticity (according to their discoverer)	"similar in content" (Watson, "Beyond Suspicion," 166.)

¹⁵⁸ Watson, "Beyond Suspicion," 161–170.

Parallelism	Hunter's novel	<i>Theod.</i> & Smith's writings	Notes
Similarities between <i>Shred of Nicodemus</i> and the gospel extracts in <i>Clement's Letter to Theodore</i>	Greek text included as an illustration, composed in Greek as a pastiche of Mark, John, and the Hebrew Bible, totalling 71 words, "of which 28 occur in five phrases of three or more words," translated into English, containing themes of death and burial, and motifs of a stone removed from the tomb, a garden, and the character of Nicodemus who "came to him [Jesus] at night"	Greek text included as photographs, composed in Greek as a pastiche of Mark, John, and LXX (?), totalling 157 words, "of which 66 occur in thirteen phrases of three or more words," translated into English, containing themes of death and burial, and motifs of a stone removed from the tomb, a garden, and the character of young man who "when it was evening ... comes to him [Jesus]"	"parallelism between the two Mar Saba discoveries" (Watson, "Beyond Suspicion," 167.)

Evans, who acknowledges his dependence on Watson’s “stimulating contribution”¹⁵⁹ adds the following:¹⁶⁰

Table 2: Smith’s Dependence on Hunter, According to Evans

Parallelism	Hunter’s novel	Theod. & Smith’s writings	Notes
Lexical parallel; similar sentiment	“This monastery ... at one time housed many <i>manuscripts</i> . <i>Most of these were removed</i> , but I have always had the feeling that <i>some might have been overlooked and hidden away</i> ” (Hunter, <i>Mystery of Mar Saba</i> , 279.)	“I had not expected much from the Mar Saba <i>manuscripts</i> , since I knew that <i>almost all of them had been carried off</i> ... But there was always the chance that <i>something had been missed</i> ” (Smith, <i>The Secret Gospel</i> , 11.)	“The parallel is amazing, both in substance and in language” (Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 90.)
Lexical parallel; similar sentiment	“I was prepared to leave Mar Saba, <i>reconciled</i> to the negative results of my research, when a monk told me he had certain manuscripts in his <i>cell</i> ” (Hunter, <i>Mystery of Mar Saba</i> , 293.)	“I was gradually <i>reconciling</i> myself to my worst expectations and repeating every day that I should discover nothing of importance. Then ... I found myself in my <i>cell</i> , staring incredulously at a text” (Smith, <i>The Secret Gospel</i> , 12.)	This “lexical parallel; similar sentiment” adds to Watson’s comparison of the same passages the occurrence of “cell” in both accounts.
Similar episode	Discovery in a religious establishment of a Greek text amongst rare books, containing an embarrassing detail about Jesus not having been resurrected	Discovery in a religious establishment of a Greek text embedded in a rare book, amongst rare books, containing an embarrassing detail about Jesus’s homosexuality (?)	“interesting ... parallels” (Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 81.)

159 Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 89.

160 Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 81, 89–91.

Parallelism	Hunter's novel	<i>Theod.</i> & Smith's writings	Notes
Similar phonetic character	Lord Moreton	Morton Smith	See subsection 2.5.2, below.

The dependence of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* on Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* is justified on account of the following literary parallels. First, Wilson's novel contains a forged artefact that is planted on an early Christian site in England—specifically, a grave of a seventh-century bishop named Eorpwald, who is described as “One ... of the great disciples of Theodore.”¹⁶¹ Second, the forgery leads to the accusations that Eorpwald was a sorcerer whose heterodox practices included sexually explicit aspects. Jenkins juxtaposes these facts first with the allegedly forged manuscript of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*, alleged to have been planted on an early Christian site in Israel, addressed to Θεόδωρος (usually anglicised as “Theodore”), and, second, with Smith's depiction of Jesus as a “magician” in his 1977 monograph *Jesus the Magician*. According to Jenkins, together with the contents of the Clementine letter, Smith's monograph constituted a rewriting of early Christian history with “a strong sexual content”—just like the forged artefact in Wilson's novel, a parallelism that Jenkins finds “striking”.¹⁶²

Finally, the dependence of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* on Wilde's *Salomé* rests on one lexical parallel between Smith's translation of τῆς ἐπτάκις κεκαλυμμένης ἀληθείας in *Theod.* I.26 (“of that truth hidden by seven veils”) and one of Wilde's stage directions in the play, the English translation in 1894 of which reads “Salome dances the dance of the seven veils.”¹⁶³ Other links between the two are alleged to be more interpretative, including such associative connections between characters as the personified “Wisdom of God,” who speaks “through Solomon” in *Theod.* II.13, both of which are connected to Salome, the first by noting Smith's suggestion that “in the Manichaeon Psalm book ... Salome appears as the equivalent of ... [personified] Wisdom,”¹⁶⁴ the latter by noting that Salome is simply the feminine equivalent to Solomon—a “pun [that] is even more

161 Angus Wilson, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes: A Novel* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1956) 402.

162 Jenkins, “Alexandrian Attitudes,” 8–9. Jenkins's suggestion that “a strong sexual content” characterizes the religiosity described in *Jesus the Magician*—just as in Wilson's novel, following the discovery of the forged artefact—is a common misrepresentation of Smith's argument, on which see Brown, “Question of Motive,” 354–365.

163 Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 228–231. Jeffery, “Clement's Mysteries,” 242. For a concise history and critical interpretation of the dance of the seven veils, see Toni Bentley, *Sisters of Salome* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 2005) 27–32.

164 Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*, 191.

delightful in Hebrew.”¹⁶⁵ Many scholars would already consider these examples to be far-fetched, but this would be a premature conclusion, as even further links have been alleged between the Clementine letter and the various biographical details connected to Wilde’s *post-mortem* influence. These include “the ‘Clement’ figure in [*Theod.*],” who “represents ... a type of ‘holier-than-thou’ moralist” similar to Noel Pemberton Billing, who invoked Wilde’s name at his trial defending against libel charges in 1918, when Wilde’s *Salomé* had just had its first public performance in England.¹⁶⁶ These and similar details are argued by Jeffery to “demonstrate dependence”.¹⁶⁷

2.5.1.2 Concealed Indicators of Authority and Jokes

The second (*concealed indicators of authority*) and third group (deliberately composed *jokes*) of arguments made in the alternative narrative seem foreign compared to the more familiar arguments of literary dependence. In themselves, these are serious considerations to be made in the study of forgeries and fraud, and the reality of neither is open to questioning. For a contemporary, unambiguous example, we can cite the case of the English novelist Ian McEwan, who came up with one “shocking attempted fraud” (in his own words) surrounding his 1997 novel *Enduring Love*.¹⁶⁸ McEwan purported the novel to have been based on a real case study published in the *British Review of Psychiatry* by Robert Wenn and Antonio Camia. No such journal exists, however, and the surnames of the fictional scholars Wenn and Camia are simply an anagram of “Ian McEwan”.¹⁶⁹

As some scholars of the alternative narrative have observed, the roots of such practices stretch back to the ancient concept of *sphragis* (seal), intended to secure the authenticity of given document as having derived from the purported author.¹⁷⁰ For ancient epistles, the *sphragis* could be a physical, clay seal, a trusted individual able to supplement the delivery of the letter with an oral message, or a subtler reference in the text of the

165 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 228–231.

166 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 231–234.

167 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 225.

168 Ian McEwan, *Enduring Love* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997); Ian McEwan, “Shocking Attempted Fraud,” *Psychiatric Bulletin* 23 (1999) 508.

169 Noted as such by Robin G. McCreddie, [No Title], *Psychiatric Bulletin* 23 (1999) 243. For a discussion of McEwan’s attempt, see Ruthven, *Faking Literature*, 175–176.

170 Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 88; Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 16. Specifically, Dionysius the Renegade is cited as an ancient author who composed a play that his rival, Heraclides, was fooled into attributing to Sophocles, only to be put to shame when Dionysius pointed out various acrostics he had concealed within the play. One of these spelled out Ἡρακλείδης γράμματα οὐκ ἐπίσταται οὐδ’ ἠσχύνθη (Heraclides does not know his letters, nor is he ashamed); Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* V.93. The acrostic was translated from Greek as “Heraclides is ignorant of letters and is not ashamed of his ignorance” in Robert D. Hicks (trans.), *Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Volume I: Books 1-5* (Loeb Classical Library 184; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925) 547.

document common to both the sender and the receiver—for instance, to their previous correspondence.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, in ancient poetry, the author could embed his name within the poem as an acrostic.¹⁷² For example, such signature acrostic could, as in the case of *Ilias Latina*, spell out ITALICVS SCRIPSIT (Italicus wrote this), for a poem whose author would be otherwise unknown.¹⁷³ As Valentina Garulli explains, apart from ancient ideas about literary immortality,

an acrostic poem cannot be reused or plagiarized, since the acrostic functions as a strong connexion between that text and only one name, which cannot be replaced by any other name without modifying the whole text.¹⁷⁴

On the contrary, the practice of literary mystification has not been discussed in the scholarship on *Clement's Letter to Theodore*, apart from citing Love for his observation that “fakers rarely resist a concealed joke or two, just to rub home how supremely clever they are.”¹⁷⁵ The term “mystification” or “mystifier” is itself traced back by Julia Abramson to the mid-eighteenth century, used to describe practical jokes played out in literary form. Works of such a form would employ “ironic clues” to disclose the embedded joke to the readers, should they pay sufficient attention to the text.¹⁷⁶ Jean-François Jeandillou, who

171 John L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 214–217; Paola Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek Letter Writing: A Cultural History (600 BC–150 BC)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 33–34. For the many forms *sphragides* could take, see Loreto Nuñez, “Liminal Games: Fluidity of the *Sphragis* of a Novelist,” in *The Ancient Novel and Early Christian and Jewish Narrative: Fictional Intersections* (Ancient Narrative: Supplementum 16; Havertown, Penn.: Casemate, 2013) 143–168. For a contrary view—namely, that the literary *sphragis* was not used as a sign of authenticity but as a sign of the author’s literary erudition—see Lowell Edmunds, “The Seal of Theognis,” in *Poet, Public, and Performance in Ancient Greece* (ed. Lowell Edmunds and Robert W. Wallace; Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) 29–48, at 30–40.

172 Jacqueline Klooster, *Poetry as Window and Mirror: Positioning the Poet in Hellenistic Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 2011) 177 n. 8. For a recent monograph on these and related literary features, see Christine Luz, *Technopaignia: Formspiele in der griechischen Dichtung* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). A separate but related topic is the use of acrostics by early Christians, such as the letters ΙΧΘΥΣ and the symbol of fish. A classic study of this practice is Franz Joseph Dölger, *ICHTHYS: der heilige Fisch in den antiken Religionen und im Christentum* (vols. 5; Münster: Aschendorff, 1922–1943). The modern classic on this topic is undoubtedly Laurence Harold Kant, “The Interpretation of Religious Symbols in the Graeco-Roman World: A Case Study of Early Christian Fish Symbolism” (vols. 3; Ph.D. dissertation; Yale University, 1993).

173 Marco Scaffai, ed., *Baebii Italici Ilias Latina: introduzione, edizione critica, traduzione italiana e commento* (Edizioni e saggi universitari di filologia classica 28; Bologna: Pàtron, 1982) suggests that Publius Baebius Italicus, a first-century Roman senator, was the author of this work.

174 Valentina Garulli, “Greek Acrostic Verse Inscriptions,” in *The Muse at Play: Riddles and Wordplay in Greek and Latin Poetry* (ed. Jan Kwapisz, David Petrain, and Mikolaj Szymanski; Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 305; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012) 246–278, at 272.

175 Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 185. Cited in Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 79.

176 Abramson, *Learning from Lying*, 12–13. The phenomenon is particularly strong both among actors and scholars in the French language; from early authors such as Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740–1814), to the practiced insolence within Oulipo (post-1960), up to the recent republication and extensive study of the fake Arthur Rimbaud poem “La chasse spirituelle” in Jean-Jacques Lefrère, *Arthur Rimbaud: la chasse spirituelle* (Paris: Editions Leo Scheer, 2012). As observed in Nyqvist and Oja, *Kirjalliset väärennökset*, 102, “Lefrèren perusteellisen *La Chasse spirituelle*-tutkielman takakanteen oli painettu runo ensimmäistä kertaa Rimbaud’n käsialalla kirjoitettuna. Siitäkään ei

defines mystification as a “strategy” applicable in any literary genre, maintains the use of authorial “formes d’aveu tacite” (forms of hidden confessions) as an essential feature, as they offer for the victim “une chance de sauver la face” (an opportunity to save face).¹⁷⁷

Although we might be consequently tempted to ascribe the alternative narrative as an example of mystification, with Smith as the chief *mystificateur*, such an attribution would run to at least one overarching problem—namely, the lack of a willing disclosure of the narrative’s secrets by its putative author. As Anthony Grafton observes, mystification is “the production of literary works meant to deceive *for a short time only*, as practical jokes.”¹⁷⁸ That is, one of the defining features of mystification is missing: without “the author’s willing public revelation of [their] identity” none of the things an authentic mystification pretends to teach—commensurate with the Enlightenment values “to reveal hidden causes, communicate knowledge, and promote critical reasoning”—are transmitted.¹⁷⁹

At any rate, the following concealed indicators of authority are suggested to exist, according to the alternative narrative:

Table 3: *Concealed Authorial Indicators within the Alternative Narrative*

Primer	Technique of decipherment	Plain-text solution	Notes
Reference to “salt” (<i>Theod.</i> I.13–15) is allegedly a) unlike Clement, b) a technological anachronism	Association of an alleged technological anachronism to a twentieth-century provider of the technology	Morton Salt Company → Morton	“more likely a deliberately embedded clue” (Carlson, <i>Gospel Hoax</i> , 61.)

tietysti ole ollut saatavilla alkuperäistä paperikappaletta, vaan pelkästään autenttiselta näyttävä faksimilejäljennös ... Ranskalaisten mieltymys mystifikaatioon ulottuu toisinaan myös tutkimuksen puolelle” (The poem is printed on the back cover of Lefrère’s in-depth study of *La chasse spirituelle* in Rimbaud’s own handwriting. The original autograph, however, has not been made available, only an authentic-looking facsimile ... The French penchant for mystification is occasionally felt within the academy as well).

177 Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 23–25.

178 Grafton, *Forgers and Critics*, 5. Emphasis mine.

179 Abramson, *Learning from Lying*, 12, 16. Similarly, the chief difference between ancient *sphragides* and their alleged descendants within the alternative narrative lies in their respective manner and purpose. While the ancient practice used a specific literary technique (e.g., acrostic) to indicate the author of the work (at least, in the specific cases of signature-acrostics), that in the alternative narrative has been tied to a multitude of literary techniques—without any clear idea of the motive behind them.

Primer	Technique of decipherment	Plain-text solution	Notes
The reference to “salt” (<i>Theod.</i> I.13–15) is supposedly a technological anachronism, and the word ἅλας (salt) is followed by the word μωραίνω (pass, of salt, lose its savour)	Unkeyed transposition cipher (anagram) / cryptic crossword	μωρ[αν]θῆν[αι] → Morton	“In the nature of the case, it is impossible to be sure of this” (Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 154.)
The reference to “salt” (<i>Theod.</i> I.13–15) is supposedly a technological anachronism, and the word παραχαράσσω (falsify) used in the passage carries different layers of meaning, also in translation	Etymological explanation	παραχαράσσω → <i>to forge</i> → <i>to smith</i> → Smith	“In itself, its value as evidence for Smith’s forgery of the letter is minimal. Yet the forgery metaphor occurs not in isolation but in conjunction with [μωρανθῆναι]” (Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 153–154.)
Smith’s assertion in his commentary on <i>Theod.</i> I.13–15 that Matt 5:13 alludes to Jer 10:14 LXX (Smith, <i>Clement of Alexandria</i> , 18–19), is supposedly faulty	Reading the words omitted from a direct quotation (of Jer 10:14 LXX)	κατησχύνθη πᾶς χρυσοχόος ἀπὸ τῶν γλυπτῶν αὐτοῦ → goldsmith → Smith	“Either clue is clever by itself—but their combination is ingenious” (Carlson, <i>Gospel Hoax</i> , 63.)
Handwriting supposed being the same as in another Mar Saban manuscript, which contains a supposedly fictional personal name	Association of the spelling of a name and personal characteristics to an etymological explanation	Μ. Μαδιότης → M. “baldy swindler” → Morton Smith	“cleverly disguised confession” (Carlson, <i>Gospel Hoax</i> , 44.)

Primer	Technique of decipherment	Plain-text solution	Notes
Alleged anachronisms in <i>Theod.</i> portrayal of sexuality	Recognition of sexual innuendo	Sexual innuendo → Morton Smith's literary <i>sphragis</i>	“The uncanny resonance of [<i>Theod.</i>] with mid-twentieth-century notions of sexual identity and legal regimes is ... a telling anachronism” (Carlson, <i>Gospel Hoax</i> , 71); “there are amusing elements that make sense from the perspective of a twentieth-century reader” (Jeffery, <i>The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled</i> , 93.)

As should be evident from the above table, there is much overlap between concealed indicators of authority and the supposed jokes and other amusing details. That is, the decipherment of the alleged fictional personal name of M. Μαδιότης as M[orton] the “baldy swindler” seems to function as a humorous wink as well as a clue to the identity of the real author, and even many of the less authorial jokes seem nevertheless to belong to Smith’s literary *sphragis*. Consequently, concealed indicators of authority can only be distinguished from deliberately composed jokes based on their *pertinence*, such that clear concealed indicators of authority must be as highly accurate in their disclosing of the author as a specific individual—for example, using details that refer to a personal name (Morton, Smith) or to other identifiable characteristics (lack of hair, particular sense of humour)—while details such as the supposed cliffhanger ending of the text, though in themselves arguably humorous in nature, are nevertheless presented as less accurate inasmuch as specific authorial attribution is concerned.

For a specific example of the effect of pertinence, consider Smith’s supposedly deliberate choice to write the Clementine letter on the end pages of Voss’s book. Within the alternative narrative, this feature is the one of the most commented upon,¹⁸⁰ and comes down to two interrelated claims: that whoever wrote the text in Voss’s book made a deliberate choice to do so, first, to introduce (supposed) Markan *interpolations* to a book that called for the expunging of Ignatian *interpolations* is *ironic*, and, second, to insert

¹⁸⁰ See nn. 69 and 70, above, for a full list of references.

(allegedly) forged ancient text on the opposite of a clear condemnation of the forging of ancient texts is even more *ironic*. As I argue below, there are methodological reasons for restricting the ascription of such claims to deliberate actions. The use of irony in itself, or virtually any particular sense of humour, is hardly grounds for identifying a specific individual—that is, the ironists of the world, both ancient and modern, can hardly be distinguished from one another in their use of irony alone. In the case of Voss’s book, it would be just as viable to posit that someone else of comparable sense of irony, such as an eighteenth-century monk or humanist, could have been the author on the same grounds as it has been argued for Smith’s authorship—any of them could appreciate the irony of reading about and practicing in the same book interpolation and forgery. Furthermore, an eighteenth-century monk could as well have been copying an authentic ancient text to Voss’s end papers, perceiving the irony of his decision to copy this particular text into this particular book, because *he* (sc., the monk) could have been the one to think “that most shameless scamp” an apt descriptor for the gospel fragments he was copying onto the page.

In short, not only does the above ascription of irony in the case of Voss’s book fail to distinguish between Smith and a random eighteenth-century monk or humanist, it also fails to distinguish between the acts of forging and copying. That is not to say that the above discussion is a good example of academic history writing—it is, in fact a thought-experiment—but that the case of Voss’s book *in itself* has virtually no bearing on the question of composition of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* but only on the question of coming up with a useful classification for the statements made within the alternative narrative: that some of the features of the text and its related paratextual material are alleged to be highly pertinent to a specific individual (viz., concealed indicators of authority), while others are not (viz., deliberately composed jokes). For this reason, I argue that there is no need for an in-depth analysis of the latter.

2.5.2 Studying the Arguments within the Alternative Narrative

The arguments that form the alternative narrative were classified above into three distinct groups. Common to all three is the implied notion of *firm deliberation* at work.

Conceptually, a *literary, derivative relationship (hoax)*—i.e., the idea of deriving ideas, if not whole textual passages, from other works—is easy to comprehend. The act of the author, in the process of creating a citation of some other work, is often described as a deliberate

act,¹⁸¹ and, in the case of Smith of the alternative narrative, the deliberateness of his actions is both emphasised and required.¹⁸²

The production of *concealed indicators of authority* constitutes, likewise, a deliberate act by the author. As I argue in section 3.1, a concealed indicator of authority is marked off by a primer, such as an anachronism (e.g., supposedly non-Clementine use of salt imagery or the anachronistic presence of free-flowing salt), that arouses the reader's suspicions, causing them to search for (and discover) the concealed indicator of authority, such as an associative connection to a modern operator (e.g., Morton Salt Company) or an anagram or cryptogram of the real author's name (μωρωνθηβαι → Morton). The primer, the method of decipherment, and the plain-text result are necessarily construed as deliberate actions by the author.¹⁸³

For *jokes*, as well as concealed indicators of authority, to contain the explanatory power the alternative narrative gives them, they must be the result of deliberate action by the author. The need for such a criterion is evident when considering the bald *non sequitur* that scholars have resorted to in the alternative narrative: the similarity of the names Morton and Moreton.¹⁸⁴ Upon scrutiny, this detail cannot have any bearing on the topic it allegedly illuminates. Smith's given name was Rubert Morton, so the similarity between Morton and Moreton is entirely incidental to the logic of the alternative narrative—i.e., that Smith read Hunter's novel and was then inspired to create a literary forgery.¹⁸⁵ That is, if there is nothing deliberate about the similarity between Morton and Moreton (such as Smith changing his name to create the parallelism), Smith's lack of agency can only mean that the Morton-Moreton similarity is an innocent coincidence, irrespective of

181 In some classifications, such as Richard B. Hays's distinctions between quotations, allusions, and echoes, it would be possible to view the faintest of literary parallels ("echoes") as non-deliberate, though the authorial action itself would remain. Note that this is a different framing of the issue compared to how Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989) 23 constructs the difference between the three "as points along a spectrum of intertextual reference." Cf. Christopher A. Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians* (Biblical Interpretation Series 96; Leiden: Brill, 2008) 13: "Even if [the author] only unconsciously echoed a text ... we can still speak of [the author] 'doing' something as an author with and in the words he wrote." For the alternative narrative, however, no claims of non-deliberate actions are made nor would they make sense within the narrative itself, as explicated below.

182 E.g., Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 88–89: "Smith understood the psychology of his peers well and was able to conceal some important information even in the non-scholarly, 'popular' edition, *Secret Gospel*"; Jeffery, *Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 130: "Only when he began writing the second book, while looking for ways to construct his narrative of visiting Mar Saba, did Smith decide to shape his story so that it served the larger agenda."

183 Cf. Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 58–62; Watson, "Beyond Suspicion," 154–155.

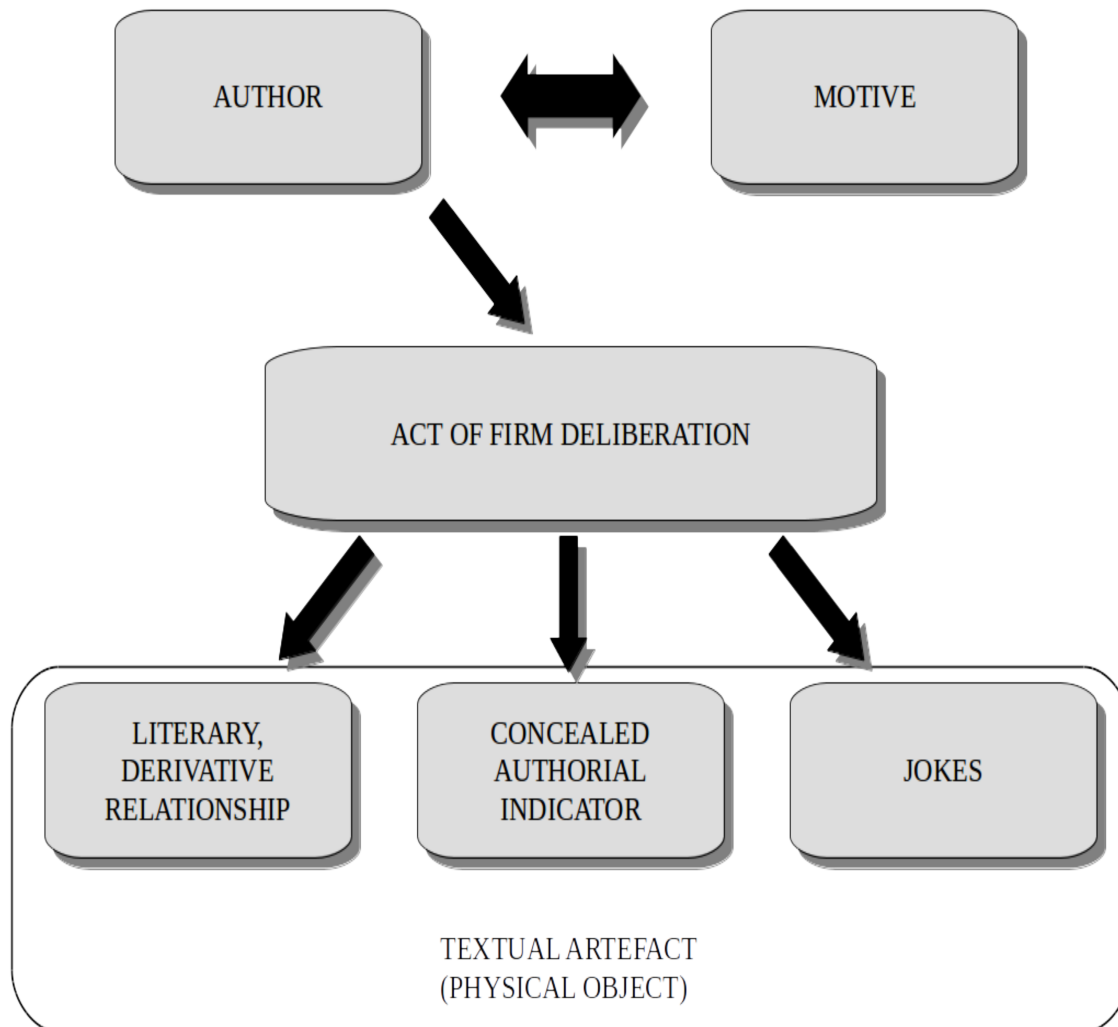
184 Evans, "Grounds for Doubt," 81.

185 Cf. Brown and Pantuck, "Craig Evans," 104–105.

Smith's supposed involvement in the composition of the Clementine letter and the role of Hunter's novel therein. In other words, even if Smith did read Hunter's novel and had crafted a fake manuscript and engineered the conditions of its discovery to follow this literary model, the similarity between his name and that of a fictional person in a novel—of which he did nothing to foster—played no role in his supposed plan for the simple reason that it played no role in his supposed plan.¹⁸⁶ Consequently, that the Morton-Moreton similarity cannot function in the role it is assigned in the alternative narrative given the lack of deliberation by Smith implies that, for any of the jokes to have bearing on the question of authenticity, they would not only have to contain the possibility of Smith's deliberate action but would have to require the performance of such an action as well.

¹⁸⁶ The second *non sequitur* noted in section 1.2—viz., the observation of a parallel between Hunter's inclusion of an illustration of the fictional forged document in his novel and Smith's inclusion of photographs of the manuscript in his critical edition of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*—was introduced by two different scholars, neither of whom suggested that any conclusion could be drawn from this connection. That is just as well, as *there is nothing that could possibly follow from this observation*, at least once the notion that Smith decided to include photographs of the manuscript *because* Hunter also had an illustration of his fictional forged document included is discarded. As such, what this argument becomes is a very rare form of *non sequitur*, a *nihil sequitur* (i.e., “nothing follows”); a sentence that merely masquerades as an argument to the casual reader.

Illustration 1: The Logic of the Alternative Narrative



Following these observations we can illustrate the logic of the alternative narrative with the above diagram. Consider the claim that Smith indicates his sense of humour (*motive*, as the *author*) by choosing to begin the Clementine letter with the sign of a cross (*act of firm deliberation*, as the *author*), because modern text critics use a similar device to indicate spurious text (*joke*, as per the above classification).¹⁸⁷ This small narrative functions well within the internal logic of the alternative narrative, but calls into question how scholars construed such a detail in the first place. As far as the evidence goes, there is, after all, only the manuscript of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* as a physical artefact. Inaccessible to us are the actions of the author, as well as the author themselves

¹⁸⁷ Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 33.

and whatever motive the author might have had in their choice to begin the composition with the sign of a cross.¹⁸⁸

Such questions are worth considering here, because they cut to the heart of the problem that pervades many works of academic history writing that, in the words of Simon Gunn, take “a form of documentary bric-à-brac held together by loose association ... without enquiring in detail as to [the] breadth and depth.”¹⁸⁹ In the case of the alternative narrative, the problem is evident in the narrative’s lack of interest in validating many of its claims concerning the act of firm deliberation, as the claims themselves are often left to stand on their own, as if they themselves provided the means for their own appraisal. Yet the question of criteria—of ensuring that enough “breadth and depth” exists—remains the only means to reach beyond the mere physicality of the textual artefact itself. It is for this very purpose that we have developed criteria for assessing, for instance, questions of literary, derivative relationships. As Michael Oakeshott observed already in 1933, “The question in history is never what must, or what might have taken place, but solely what the evidence obliges us to conclude did take place”;¹⁹⁰ a sentiment echoed by Roger Chartier in 1997 in his pursuit after “the criteria by which a historical discourse—always a knowledge based on traces and signs—can be held to be a valid and explicative reconstruction ... of the past reality it has defined as its object.”¹⁹¹ It is only

188 The emphasis I place upon the physicality of the document here and elsewhere is instructed by the so-called “ontological turn” within contemporary epistemology, termed “new materialism(s)” in Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, “Introducing the New Materialisms,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (ed. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost; Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010) 1–44. For the most prominent recent example of such material realism, see Ferraris, *Documentality*. Note that our access to the manuscript of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* is mediated by reproductions of photographs of the manuscript, but this use of such a medium has no bearing on the discussion that follows.

189 Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2006) 153.

190 Michael Joseph Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Moscow: РИПОЛ КЛАССИК, 1978) 139. Furthermore, as Oakeshott describes, “All that history has is ‘the evidence’; outside this lies nothing at all. And this is not a mere methodological scepticism; history is not merely obliged to *postulate* nothing beyond the evidence. What is beyond the evidence is actually unknowable, a nonentity”; Oakeshott, *Experience*, 107–108. Emphasis original. Cf. Hayden White, “Response to Arthur Marwick,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (1995) 233–246, at 239–240, who, defining how “events” (that “have to be taken as given”—i.e., “the past”) differ from “facts” (i.e., following Arthur Danto, “events under a description”), observes that “historiographical consensus ... is very difficult to achieve, is always open to revision from another perspective, and never lasts for ever. The relation between facts and events is always open to negotiation and reconceptualization, not because the events change with time, but because we change our ways of conceptualizing them. And if this is true of events, it is even more true of facts. We not only change our ideas of what the facts are of a given matter but our notions of what a fact might be, how facts are constructed, and what criteria should be used to assess the adequacy of a given array of facts to the events of which they purport to be descriptive.”

191 Roger Chartier, *On the Edge of the Cliff: History, Language, and Practices* (Parallax; Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) 9. Cf. Arthur Danto, “Narrative Sentences,” *History and Theory* 2 (1962) 146–179, at 167: “Not to have a criterion for picking out some happenings as relevant and others as irrelevant is simply not to be in a position to write history at all.”

through consideration by the criteria we have established that enables us to decide whether or not a particular action was taken by a particular author.¹⁹²

How do such considerations bear on the argument that the author of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* chose to begin with a sign of the cross to showcase his sense of humour? First, such a claim (implicitly) states that the author would have acted with firm deliberation, on the basis that the similarity between sign of the cross and *crux critica* is perceived as humorous in this manner only if it came about deliberately (i.e., not by accident). This, and any other claim we might wish to make regarding the author and his actions, is legitimized (in principle) by some set of criteria we have deemed robust enough to justify our claims. All such criteria would be necessarily grounded on the physicality of the textual artefact, the only instance of "evidence" (as Oakeshott understood it) in our possession.¹⁹³ That is not to say that the use of evidence according to some set of criteria would be a simple affair. On the contrary, there will always be room for debate concerning any set of criteria, from their constituent arguments to their application. Crucially, however, without some idea as to how to decide, in this instance, whether the similarities between the sign of a cross and a *crux critica* are indicative of the authorship of the text, there remain only vague notions that the potential for such coincidences or relationship indeed exist but without a means to sustain discussion about them.

In other words, we can come up with historical scenarios at will: simply by imagining different motives, behind different authors that culminate in different actions, all of which results in different overall assessments. To wit, an eighteenth-century monk might have chosen to demonstrate his sense of piety (*motive*, as the *author*) by choosing to begin the Clementine letter with a sign of the cross (*act of firm deliberation*, as the *author*), following customary forms, before copying a letter from one of the fathers of the church.¹⁹⁴

192 Further on the role of criteria in historiographical study, see 3.1, below.

193 Cf. George Kane, *Piers Plowman: The Evidence for Authorship* (London: Athlone Press, 1965) 5: "The character of external evidence is that it exists absolutely, in some determinable way independent of the text which it concerns. It may be bad; its accuracy can be questioned, but its existence cannot. It is a kind of physical fact. Internal evidence, by contrast, is a critical postulate. It has a contingent character, depending for its existence on being identified as such by someone, and for its validity upon, first, the correctness of the identification, and second, the quality of the reasoning applied to it."

194 For the use of the sign of the cross in Late Antiquity and onwards, see Ildar Garipzanov, *Graphic Signs of Authority in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 300–900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) 81–105, 223–234, 292–302.

It should be noted here that to imagine various historical scenarios is not identical to practicing academic history writing. To qualify for the latter, one would need to *justify* one's conceivable possibilities to the satisfaction of one's peers, a process that would require us to begin with what we have (the textual artefact) and argue that some set of criteria allows the privileging of one authorial action over another.¹⁹⁵ This, then, would be to step outside the conception of *representation* within the study of history: to cease to argue whether a given historical description *corresponds* to an event in the past, since, as Leon J. Goldstein has noted, correspondence as a criterion "can have no application in the practice."¹⁹⁶ The key element in the historian's toolbox is the academic community and the practices that have become established within it (see further 3.1.4.1, below).

Which community-sanctioned criteria, then, have scholars in support of the alternative narrative applied to justify their claims of firm deliberate action by Smith? For the straightforward cases of scenarios of literary dependence, the implied justifications—occasionally explicated by assurances of the strength of the parallels—are best assessed in relation to existing criteria for literary dependencies (see 2.5.3.1, below).

¹⁹⁵ These ideas reflect mostly Richard Rorty's understanding of epistemic warrant as a matter of sociology; see especially Richard Rorty, "Putnam and the Relativist Menace," *The Journal of Philosophy* 90 (1993) 443–461. Two objections can be raised to my methodological considerations. First, philosophically inclined readers might object to this model's loose, pragmatic character, as it simplifies the process of writing history into an abstract loop between ideas of criteria and their applicability, discarding other possibilities such as the unconscious (regarding motives) and non-actions (regarding deliberateness), and I would concur with such an assessment. The purpose of this model, however, is not to become a universal yardstick for every conceivable historical question but to function as a pragmatic guideline for the issue at hand: the recognition of primers, elaboration on methods of decipherment, and assessment of the validity of plain-text solutions—not only for the manuscript of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* but for all instances of concealed indicators of authority taken into study. Furthermore, even this loose description suffices to expose the problems of the alternative narrative. Not only are many of the claims of deliberateness in the alternative narrative explicated as if the claims themselves would be able to provide the necessary criteria for their own assessment, but—as I will argue below—even in the cases in which some sort of criteria is present, they might yet remain an inadequate basis from which to draw conclusions about the authorship of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*. As Paul A. Roth, "Philosophy of History," in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Social Science* (ed. Lee McIntyre and Alex Rosenberg; London: Routledge, 2017) 397–407, at 398 observes, "what analytic philosophers desire" are, after all, "normative benchmarks for goodness of explanation." Second, this scheme can be criticized for the opposite reason—namely, that it is unnecessarily complicated for the simple task of assessing the scholarly merits of the alternative narrative. This challenge misses the point for two reasons. First, as already stated above, it is not my intention to discuss the alternative narrative *per se* but to use it as an exemplary instance of a contemporary debate on fakes and forgeries and their various shortcomings. Second, the importance of adhering to a relatively robust philosophical framework for the academic writing of history should become clear in this section. That is, some (relatively robust) philosophical understanding of the methodology of the academic writing of history is required to avoid the pitfalls that have led contemporary scholars to apply a hodgepodge of non-constrained criteria that offer little help for assessing the likes of the alternative narrative (2.5.3).

¹⁹⁶ Leon J. Goldstein, *The What and the Why of History: Philosophical Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 332.

As I establish in sub-subsection 2.5.3.2, concealed indicators of authority and jokes cannot be assessed in relation to existing criteria, as there are none. We can, however, try to assess the internal logic of a concealed indicator of authority or a joke within the alternative narrative by considering the alleged genre of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*.¹⁹⁷ If *Theod.* is classified as a *hoax* rather than a *forgery*, then the motivation for its production would be murkier and more playful than the more straightforward explanation of fame or money as a motivation behind the production of a forgery.¹⁹⁸ Different motive-dependent classifications have been developed in literary studies for such cases.¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, it is the decision itself—even the mere suspicion—by which a scholar happens to sit before a skilful object of concealment, one whose faker-*auteur* has construed a mystification that beckons the scholar to decode its mysteries and reveal its secrets, that becomes the driving force to embrace the post-structuralist thrill of deconstruction. Then and there, the battle arena is set for a personal battle of the wits, one based on the notion, following Love, that “fakers rarely resist a concealed joke or two, just to rub home how supremely clever they are.”²⁰⁰

Such considerations have allowed considerable leeway for scholars to hunt for instances of concealment. Yet, as Love explicates on the page following his above observation on concealed jokes, “the urge to deattribute [i.e., uncover a forgery] can easily get out of hand.”²⁰¹ Love provides two examples of this: Jean Hardouin and his conclusion that most

197 The following unravelling of the strategies that enable the construction of the alternative narrative represents only one of the possible approach to evaluating the issue. Due to the circular nature of the reasoning within the alternative narrative, any starting point could have been chosen.

198 Further on these differences regarding *Clement's Letter to Theodore*, see Paananen, “Stalemate Deadlock,” 92–99.

199 Cf., e.g., Groom, *Forger's Shadow*, 61: “Hoaxes are intellectual exercises designed to show the mastery of the hoaxer over the hoaxed; the forged work, however, maintains its integrity and is not designed to implode.” Cf. Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 21: “Contrairement au faussaire, le mystificateur fabrique de l'*authentique* pour en jouer, plus que pour le monnayer.” Emphasis original. In Brian McHale, “Archaeologies of Knowledge: Hill's *Middens*, Heaney's *Bogs*, Schwerner's *Tablets*,” *New Literary History* 30 (1999) 239–262, at 261 n. 35, in which three categories are posited: “genuine hoaxes” correspond to Groom's depiction of forged works and “entrapments” to Groom's depiction of hoaxes, both of which are distinguished from “mock-hoaxes,” which are *not* meant to deceive readers but are produced “to be recognized as hoaxes (almost) immediately,” examples of which include Armand Schwerner's *The Tablets*. Emphasis original. An alternative scheme is provided in Lenain, *Art Forgery*, 315: the mystification “offers clues to be deciphered ... allowing the clever ones to guess the true nature of the message,” the forgery is a “total and permanent concealment of the identity of its maker,” while the hoax aims to promote an idea or harm persons.

200 Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 185. Within the alternative narrative this statement of Love has been quoted by Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 79. Love's notion follows the established tactics of literary mystification, as discussed, e.g., by Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 22–23: “La mystification littéraire participe avant tout de la moquerie; si elle cherche à tourner en ridicule le mystifié, elle lui laisse en même temps une chance de sauver la face.” Similarly in Lenain, *Art Forgery*, 281: “Wit constitutes a basic ingredient of the stories of deceptive doubles.”

201 Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 186. Cf. Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 215–216: “Le mystificateur fait naître chez son

classical literature, including most of the early Christian writings, were, in fact, forged during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries,²⁰² and C. L. Stainer's conclusion²⁰³ that William Drummond's account of his conversations with Ben Jonson in 1618–1619²⁰⁴ is, in fact, forged.²⁰⁵ But how does Love decide on the point at which “the rhetoric of suspicion” has taken “over a mind to the extent of making it incapable of accepting any proposition unsupported by an impossible degree of verification.”²⁰⁶ The short answer is that he does not: it is as if the sheer monumentality of Hardouin's suggestion (called “the outstanding example”²⁰⁷) is enough to direct readers to the only sensible conclusion—discarding it. In Stainer's case, Love assures us that “these arguments have never been taken seriously by Jonson scholars and *must be assumed* to rest on a misapprehension.”²⁰⁸ I do not intend to suggest that either of these assessments is wrong—on the contrary, I do not think Hardouin's scenario contains any merit, nor do I believe the conversations between Jonson and Drummond were forged. I do, however, wish to draw attention to the fact that Love, even though he does acknowledge that it is possible to go too far in one's “urge to deattribute” nevertheless fails to specify how far is too far. In other words, it is well enough to point to the extreme ends of a spectrum and claim that there is a difference between them, but this tells us nothing about the more common examples.

By the same token, we might inquire by which criteria scholars of the alternative narrative reasoned about the deliberateness of Smith in crafting a number of concealed indicators of authority and jokes. As with Love, here, too, a short answer is in order: they had none—inasmuch as the qualitative contents of the supposed deliberate actions are concerned. In other words, it is never explicated for what possible reasons we should consider the creative concealments of Smith's name as serious instead of tortured interpretations. Just as Love's use of Hardouin, the mere existence of an implied story told of Smith's deliberate actions is left to stand on its own, seeming to provide its own

lecteur attentif une sorte de doute hyperbolique.” Similarly Speyer, *literarische Fälschung*, 102: “Im 19. Jahrhundert ... Dabei vermied man nicht immer die Gefahr, in Hyperkritik auch echte Schriften zu verwerfen.”

202 Esp. Jean Hardouin, *Ad censuram scriptorum veterum prolegomena* (London: P. Vaillant, 1766).

203 C. L. Stainer, *Jonson and Drummond: Their Conversations – A Few Remarks on an 18th Century Forgery* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1925).

204 William Drummond, “Heads of a Conversation betwixt the Famous Poet Ben Johnson, and William Drummond of Hawthornden, January, 1619,” in *The Works of William Drummond, of Hawthornden*, (ed. John Sage and Thomas Ruddiman; Edinburgh: James Watson, 1711) 224–227, which was the first published, summary account of the conversations.

205 Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 186–193.

206 Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 189.

207 Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 186.

208 Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 190. Emphasis mine.

justification. While some scholars do acknowledge that they might, as Love suggests, be going too far,²⁰⁹ such reflections are discarded in the end for two circumstantial reasons, *assertions regarding Smith's alleged motive*, especially regarding his (alleged) sense of humour, and the sheer *volume* of concealed indicators of authority and jokes (*voluminousness*).²¹⁰

First, upon identifying *Clement's Letter to Theodore* as a hoax wherein “the hoaxer [has planted] deliberate mistakes or jokes as clues to the fake's true nature,”²¹¹ most scholars have held Smith's sense of humour as the chief motive behind his alleged actions of mystification. That is, to assert that Smith planted the jests and quips scholars have claimed to find requires that Smith's faculty of witticisms was up to the task. Thus, Jeffery

209 Thus Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 93: “Or am I, a product of mid-twentieth-century American schoolyard culture, misreading an ancient text through prurient eyes.” Similar sentiments can also be found from Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 87: “Is this a craftily placed fingerprint or an intriguing coincidence”; Watson, “Beyond Suspicion” 154: “In the nature of the case, it is impossible to be sure of this”; Evans, “Grounds for Doubt” 96: “Let me assure readers that I do recognize that innocent coincidences sometimes occur.”

210 Although some concealed indicators of authority and jokes within the alternative narrative could be construed to stem from a different motive—e.g., that of Smith's (alleged) propagating of his ideas about early Christianity—the sense of humour remains the only explicitly argued motive for Smith's alleged constructions of concealed indicators of authority and jokes. Watson, for instance, never explicates the reason Smith would have wanted to leave behind a “forger's signature” in the form of a concealed indicator of authority but simply follows Carlson's cue in postulating that certain details of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* might indicate “a deliberately embedded clue”; Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 152. The core problem here is the difficulty of determining a clear motive for the forging of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*: although the alternative narrative is ripe with deliberate actions ascribed to Smith with a plethora of alleged motives recorded on pp. 28–29, above, many of its claims still return to Smith's sense of humour as the implied motive required by the narrative logic of the alternative narrative, even in cases where an explicit reference to Smith's sense of humour is lacking. Consider the most prominent example: the alleged link between Hunter's novel *The Mystery of Mar Saba* and Smith's story of the discovery of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*. Here, scholars of the alternative narrative are effectively claiming that, because Smith forged his alleged discovery at Mar Saba in 1958, he needed to copy the experience of manuscript hunting from the available literature. But why would Smith, who had hunted manuscripts for decades, have needed to resort to literature to describe something he could as well have drawn from real experience? In other words, what would have prevented him from using some of his earlier trips to monastic libraries to draw inspiration? And, crucially, what would have prompted him to borrow this experience from Hunter's novel of all places? To make sense of the logic of citing Hunter, we would have to view it as an act of mystification—that Smith, having made a deliberate choice to cite Hunter's novel in his own story of discovery, wanted to record the truth of his authorship, to be perhaps found out at some point, and thus communicated this to the observant reader. This would have to be the case, since neither the claim that Smith cited Hunter accidentally nor the claim that he echoed him unconsciously (both non-deliberate actions) could justify the claim that Smith forged *Clement's Letter to Theodore*, since such a claim would fit adequately with any scenario that imagined Smith to have created a composition of a discovery story, and would not be able to differentiate between Smith forging the manuscript of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* and him simply finding it at Mar Saba. In other words, for these claims to have any bearing on the question of authorship, Smith's decision to cite Hunter in this instance has to function as yet another example of a concealed indicator of authority, one that is dependent on his role as the mystifier, and requires him to possess that particular sense of humour suitable for the task. Cf. Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels*, 101, that an “unabashed *chutzpah* of a forger” would have been needed.

211 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 16.

posits “faux deniability” as “an essential feature of Smith’s brand of humor,”²¹² with other scholars having presented similar ideas.²¹³

Second, volume is seen as an important criterion as follows:²¹⁴

Table 4: *The Importance of Voluminousness within the Alternative Narrative*

Observation on volume	Source
“several others that are hard not to find amusing”	Ehrman, “Response,” 159.
“Either clue is clever by itself—but their combination is ingenious”	Carlson, <i>Gospel Hoax</i> , 63.
“All its perplexing details ... cohere into an intelligible message, all its characters have meaningful roles to play, every mystery is ultimately revealed”	Jeffery, <i>The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled</i> , 226.
“In itself, its value as evidence for Smith’s forgery of the letter is minimal. Yet the forgery metaphor occurs not in isolation but in conjunction with [μωρανθῆναι]”	Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 153–154.
“the cumulative amount of circumstantial evidence”	Piovanelli, “Halfway between,” 182.
“outrageous series of coincidences”	Jenkins, “Alexandrian Attitudes,” 9.

That is to say, none of the alleged concealed indicators of authority or jokes is assessed based on qualitative criteria. The first circumstantial justification refers to the alleged motive—sense of humour—of the alleged author that, following genre conventions of the

²¹² Jeffery, “Clement’s Mysteries,” 235.

²¹³ E.g., Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 88: “mystification for the sake of mystification”; Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, xviii: “I had read enough of Smith’s writings to suspect that ... his sense of humor was such that he could have salted [*Clement’s Letter to Theodore*] with clues, revealing its true nature”; Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 128 n. 4: “Murgia’s statement about Smith’s sense of humor ... betrays his unfamiliarity with Smith”; Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 155: “The author of this wordplay will have appreciated the fact that μωρανθῆναι usually means ‘to be made foolish,’ ‘to be made a fool of’—a concealed reference to those who are fooled (*Mortonized*, we might say) by this forged (*Smithed*) letter.” Emphasis original. Cf. Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 129–130: “If Smith can tell such a joke in church ... he can do it anywhere. The hints of sexual humor in [*Clement’s Letter to Theodore*], therefore, will also have to be taken seriously”; Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 243: “It quickly fell afoul of Smith’s nasty sense of humor, which in turn became the transparent mask of his considerable rage.”

²¹⁴ Other textual scholars have also emphasised the value of voluminousness in other contexts—e.g., Arthur Sherbo, “The Uses and Abuses of Internal Evidence,” in *Evidence of Authorship: Essays on Problems of Attribution* (ed. David V. Erdman and Ephim G. Fogel; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966) 6–24, at 11: “A series of commonplaces (to substitute a more specific term than minor agreements) when it arrives to a sufficiently great number becomes, in its totality, something other than the mere sum of those commonplaces. Or, what may make things clearer, substitute ‘coincidences’ for ‘commonplaces’ and it should be obvious that a series of coincidences results in something more startling and rare than any one coincidence, however extreme it may be and however weak the individual coincidences may be.”

hoax, allows the overriding interpretation of various literary details to be that of the expression of humour. The second is a reference to the voluminousness of these details, as if the mere number of instances where a scholar can construe a “joke” somehow helps us to decide whether to attribute a manuscript to one author or another.

Consequently, instead of providing clear justifications for their assertions, scholars have entered an insidious circle of question-begging, in which each turn of the wheel of motive, author, action, and result—that is, noting that Smith, as the alleged author, possessed a particular sense of humour, leading to the uncovering of a deliberately crafted joke or similar antic—produces yet another discovery of literary parallelism or amusing detail, which is in turn taken as further evidence that the initial judgment of the motive or ascription of authorship was correct. As such, it only takes a few turns of the wheel to accumulate sufficient evidence, though we would only have succeeded in begging the question. Besides the collective effort of scholars whose works have contributed to the alternative narrative,²¹⁵ we can observe this phenomenon in the writings of Jeffery: the more he keeps reading Smith’s scholarly works, the more instances of Smith’s alleged deceptiveness and alleged coarse sense of humour he keeps uncovering—to the point that he now sees such examples “in almost every *paragraph* of Smith’s writings.”²¹⁶

By way of summing up the above discussion, I return to the founding claim: that *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* is a forgery created by Smith.²¹⁷ This is a startling claim, even more surprising considering scholars have not shied away from implying *themselves* that their own arguments in support of this claim do, in fact, beg the question. The preface to *The Gospel Hoax* is quite clear in this. As I have observed elsewhere,

It is curious to note that the starting point of Carlson’s inquiry had less to do with the question of forgery—that is, whether [*Clement’s Letter to Theodore*] is a forgery *per se*—and more with the question of the identity of the forger. In other words, according to Carlson, the study of Criddle [in 1995] had already shown that the letter is not from the real Clement of Alexandria and, consequently, the real question pertains only to the identity of the forger. In his own words: ‘Was

215 Note especially that the one sentence in *Theod.* 1.13–15 contains (at least) *two different* instances of concealment of the name Morton.

216 Jeffery, “Clement’s Mysteries,” 232. Emphasis mine. Cf. Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 75: “Descriptions of the pathological characteristics of the conspirators often include references to illicit sexual behaviour, debauchery and hedonism ... one also finds regular accusations of homosexual practices.”

217 Cf. Hedrick, “Moving on from Stalemate,” 32–33: “They [two examples of concealed indicators of authority] are not actually ‘clues,’ however, unless one assumes *a priori* that Smith forged the text. What I mean is this: the prior assumption leads to seeing the datum as a ‘clue.’”

[*Clement's Letter to Theodore*] the eighteenth-century idle musings of a bored Greek Orthodox monk or a Dutch humanist ... Was Morton Smith a victim of a malicious forgery, or did he himself have something to do with it?'²¹⁸

The problem that follows is the poor conceptual separation between the notions of whether *Clement's Letter to Theodore* is a forgery and whether Smith forged it—even more so, while the claims within the alternative narrative are meant to prove the former, they (at best) pertain only to the latter. One might, of course, point out that, to establish Smith's deliberateness in creating the letter is to establish the question of forgery as well. This I do not deny, but such a conclusion would require that the arguments presented for Smith's deliberateness be robust enough to actually distinguish Smith's deliberateness from the deliberateness of the scholars themselves in construing instances of literary dependency, concealed indicators of authority, and jokes.²¹⁹

That having been said, I wish to reiterate here that my point in the above section is simply this: scholars have failed to adequately address the requirements for justifying their claims about concealed indicators of authority and deliberately crafted jokes in *Clement's Letter to Theodore*. In lieu of providing clear reasons for the many decisions of judgment they have had to make, scholars have foregone qualitative reasoning, referring only to the volume of amusing details they have construed, coupled with vague notions concerning Smith's motive(s) and his sense of humour. As I will argue later, there is nothing to differentiate these claims from any number of equally bizarre claims regularly encountered in pseudo-scholarly sources, tantamount to the claims of justification made by Ignatius Donnelly, the nineteenth-century champion of the notion that Francis Bacon was the true author of Shakespearean poems and plays: "The proofs are *cumulative*. I have shown a thousand of them."²²⁰

218 Paananen, "Stalemate to Deadlock," 93; citing Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, xv–xvi.

219 Cf. Paananen, "WWFD," 8: "In other words, there is a poor conceptual separation between the notions of whether a given artefact is forged and whether a given forger was responsible for its fabrication. Oftentimes WWFD is used to argue for the first, when it pertains (at best) only to the latter. One might, of course, point out that to establish the latter as deliberate is to establish the question of forgery at the same time. This I do not deny (to a degree), but such conclusion would require that the arguments presented for the 'means, motive, and opportunity' were robust enough to actually distinguish the deliberateness of the forger from the deliberateness of the scholars themselves in construing their instances of plausible 'means, motive, and opportunity' of the forger. If such methodological robustness has been established somewhere in scholarly debates on fakes and forgeries, I have yet to encounter it."

220 Ignatius Donnelly, *The Great Cryptogram: Francis Bacon's Cipher in the So-called Shakespeare Plays* (vols. 2; London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1888) 2:890. Emphasis original.

2.5.3 Contrasting the Arguments within the Alternative Narrative

In the previous sections (2.5.1–2.5.2), the arguments within the alternative narrative were classified into three distinct groups and their implied claims of firm deliberation on the part of Smith, the alleged author of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*, assessed. Furthermore, the claims of literary, derivative relationships (hoax) were noted to be standard arguments in the academic study of history and were thus considered viable to be tested against established criteria on such issues, while the claims of concealed indicators of authority and jokes were observed to be foreign to the usual standards for academic history writing.

2.5.3.1 Contrasting Literary, Derivative Relationships (Hoax)

As discussed in sub-subsection 2.5.1.1, in the alternative narrative *Clement's Letter to Theodore* is thought to be literarily dependent on a number of works. Three of these works are of interest here—Wilde's *Salomé* (1891), Hunter's *The Mystery of Mar Saba* (1940), and Wilson's *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* (1956). Of these three, the strongest (in relative terms) case has certainly been made regarding the second title on that list. As discussed above in further detail, Watson cites a single lexical parallel (*reconcile to*), two instances of similar sentiments (bracing for failure; expectations of a chance discovery), a similar episode of discovery (Mar Saba; the presence of other texts), and general parallels between the *Shred of Nicodemus* and the gospel extracts as support for his conclusion about literary dependence:

Had *The Mystery of Mar Saba* been first published c. 1975, the analysis presented here would show it to be heavily dependent on *The Secret Gospel* (1973) ... There is no alternative but to conclude that Smith is dependent on the novel.²²¹

Evans adds to Watson's list of parallelisms two further lexical parallels (*manuscripts; cell*), the alleged similarity of an embarrassing detail, and the *non sequitur* of Moreton/Morton, concluding that "Smith's dependence on Hunter appears to be the unavoidable

²²¹ Watson, "Beyond Suspicion," 170. Watson's point regarding the hypothetical chronology of Hunter's novel following the publication of Smith's discovery story has three issues. First, it equates the writing of a novel with the manufacturing of a manuscript forgery, the latter of which requires considerably more skills. Second, it fails to distinguish between the manuscript of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* and Smith's writings concerning the manuscript (*Clement of Alexandria; The Secret Gospel*), including the story of its discovery, opting to merge together all of these different physical products of writing. Third, it takes the hypothetical date of publishing of *The Mystery of Mar Saba* ("c. 1975") as a premise for its hypothetical literary dependence on *The Secret Gospel* (1973), a move that—especially concerning the writing of the manuscript of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*—would beg the question (i.e., the date of publication is itself the contested issue, and thus cannot be used as a premise).

conclusion.”²²²

What are the justifications for the notion that such parallelism constitutes a strong literary relationship between *The Mystery of Mar Saba* and *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*? Watson and Evans offer faint assertions about “strikingly similar terms,” whose parallels are “amazing, both in substance and in language” but no attempts to qualify these terms.²²³ It is as if, somehow, these parallels are expected to be so unquestionably clear that no further justification need be given. Since there are no explicated criteria within the alternative narrative and scholars have formulated questions of literary dependence within their respective fields of inquiry in various ways, the most instructive point of comparison for the present study exists between how scholars like Evans and Watson assess the question of literary dependence between *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* and *The Mystery of Mar Saba* and in how they assess literary dependencies in other contexts.

Evans, in his earlier writings, considered whether literary relationship could be established between Josephus’s *The Jewish War* (6.5.3) and the passion tradition preserved in the canonized gospels of the New Testament. He first lists the parallels:

There are several important parallels between the temple-related experiences of Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus son of Ananias. Both entered the precincts of the temple (το ιερόν: Mark 11:11, 15, 27; 12:35; 13:1; 14:49; J.W. 6.5.3 §301) at the time of a religious festival (εορτή: Mark 14:2; 15:6; John 2:23; J.W. 6.5.3 §300). Both spoke of the doom of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44; 21:20-24; J.W. 6.5.3 §301), the sanctuary (ναός: Mark 13:2; 14:58; J.W. 6.5.3 §301), and the people (λαός: Mark 13:17; Luke 19:44; 23:28-31; J.W. 6.5.3 §301). Both apparently alluded to Jeremiah 7, where the prophet condemned the temple establishment of his day (“cave of robbers”: Jer 7:11 in Mark 11:17; “the voice against the bridegroom and the bride”: Jer 7:34 in J.W. 6.5.3 §301). Both were “arrested” by the authority of Jewish—not Roman—leaders (συλλαμβάνειν: Mark 14:48; John 18:12; J.W. 6.5.3 §302). Both were beaten by the Jewish authorities (παίειν: Matt 26:68; Mark 14:65; J.W. 6.5.3 §302). Both were handed over to the Roman governor (ήγαγον αυτόν επί τον Πιλατον: Luke 23:1; ανάγουσιν ... επί τον ... επαρχον: J.W. 6.5.3 §303). Both were interrogated by the Roman governor (έρωταν: Mark 15:4; J.W. 6.5.3 §305). Both refused to answer to the governor (ουδέν άποκρίνεσθαι: Mark 15:5; J.W. 6.5.3 §305). Both were scourged by the governor (μαστιγοῦν/μάστιξι: John 19:1; J.W. 6.5.3 §304). Governor Pilate may have offered to release Jesus of Nazareth, but did not; Governor Albinus did release Jesus son of Ananias (άπολύειν: Mark 15:9; J.W. 6.5.3 §305).²²⁴

222 Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 91.

223 Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 165; Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 90.

224 Craig A. Evans, “Jesus and the ‘Cave of Robbers’: Toward a Jewish Context for the Temple Action,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 3 (1993) 93–110, at 106.

Should such a list—comparable episodes about two individuals named Jesus entering the same temple in a passage that contains with eleven lexical parallels—be considered “amazing, both in substance and in language.” Not at all, as Evans rightly observes,

Literary relationships are suspected when there is a *high concentration of common vocabulary, especially phrases and whole sentences*. In short, I think that the common vocabulary adduced above indicates common judicial and penal process, but not literary relationship. There is no indication that the story of one Jesus influenced the telling of the story of the other Jesus.²²⁵

Here, Evans exemplifies the standard cautious approach to establishing literary relationships in the study of ancient history, including his own field of biblical studies—a notable difference from the arguments he makes within the alternative narrative.

Watson, likewise, cites John S. Kloppenborg in arguing for the importance of “*strong verbal agreements*” and “*striking agreements in the sequence*” when providing literary explanations for early Christian texts.²²⁶ Jenkins is also worth adding to this discussion, citing his general assessment that parallels are “tenuous” when “*passages cited as parallels are describing broadly similar ideas which were commonplaces*”²²⁷ in comparison to his subsequent description of parallels between *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* and Wilson’s *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* as “striking”. In the latter case, there is only a single lexical parallel (Theodore / Θεόδωρος) propped up of Jenkins’s interpretation that Smith’s academic work amounted to a sexually-laden rewriting of the early Christian history.²²⁸

If Evans, Watson, and Jenkins reduced the rigor of their criteria for determining literary dependence in the above instance, neither do we return to the traditional standards for establishing alleged literary dependence²²⁹ when discussing Wilde’s *Salomé*.²³⁰ Jeffery’s case for the latter is a colourful rereading of the whole of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* as a Carpocratian anti-Gospel that builds itself upon earlier interpretative choices, one (debatable) step after another. To understand this argument, we must first accept Jeffery’s reading of the letter as one that “ridicules the Christian ideal of monogamous

225 Evans, “Cave of Robbers,” 106 n. 47. Emphasis mine.

226 Francis Watson, “Q as Hypothesis: A Study in Methodology,” *New Testament Studies* 55 (2009) 397–415, at 399 n. 8, citing John S. Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 18. Emphasis mine.

227 Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels*, 97–98. Emphasis mine.

228 It is interesting to note here Jenkins’s own condemnation of “the Jesus Seminar school” for its tendency “to exaggerate the apparent similarities between the canonical gospels and later texts”; Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels*, 99. On Jenkins’s misrepresentation of Smith’s scholarship, see n. 162, above.

229 “Dependence” is used in Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 225. Alternatively, Jeffery claims *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* to be “based on ... *Salomé*” in Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 239.

230 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 228–231; Jeffery, “Clement’s Mysteries,” 242.

heterosexuality and attempts to show that Jesus practiced a purer, homosexual love,”²³¹ and which depicts Clement as “a stereotypically bigoted heterosexual churchman, a hypocrite who advocates lying in the name of the church, who is shown trying unsuccessfully to hide and distort the embarrassing ‘truth’ that homosexuality was the religion of Jesus himself.”²³² If we accept this reading of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*, and note Jeffery’s suggestion that the Clementine corpus does not refer to “seven veils” in the exact manner as appears in *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*,²³³ we can then, perhaps, begin to appreciate the alleged literary connection to Wilde’s *Salomé*. It is on the basis of this supposed literary dependence that Jeffery reads Clement’s “the Wisdom of God, through Solomon” (*Theod.* II.13) in a subversive manner. That is, Jeffery first notes that Smith himself translated the Greek words τῆς ἐπτάκις κεκαλυμμένης ἀληθείας (*Theod.* I.26) as “of that truth hidden by seven veils” in *Clement of Alexandria*, a translation that “seems to point a little too boldly to Wilde’s *Salomé*,” leading Smith to bracket the word “veils” in *The Secret Gospel* in an attempt “to muffle this cue.”²³⁴ Subsequently, Jeffery feels justified to take the king’s name as “the masculine equivalent of Salome,” suggesting a play on words that is “even more delightful in Hebrew ... since Shlomo and Shulamit are the paradigmatically heterosexual couple in the Song of Songs.” It is worth concluding this discussion with Jeffery’s modified quote of Song 8:10: “I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers; so in his eyes I am as one who brings Shalom[e].”²³⁵ In all, the link between *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* and *Salomé* comes about after much of the former is read as a contrarian document, following a long chain of (unqualified) parallels and witticisms with no explicit interest in controlling them with some set of criteria—quite removed from how early Christian writings are typically interpreted in biblical studies.²³⁶

231 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 239.

232 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 235.

233 Note that the words τῆς ἐπτάκις κεκαλυμμένης ἀληθείας (*Theod.* I.26) could be translated as “of the sevenfold veiled truth” (i.e., without an overt allusion to Wilde’s “dance of the seven veils”) and that Clement does elsewhere use the words ἐν τῷ ἀδύτῳ τῆς ἀληθείας (in the innermost sanctuary of the truth; *Strom.* V.4.19.3) and ἅγια ἁγίων ... ἀποκαλύψαντος (unveiling the holy of holies; *Strom.* VI.8.68.1) and related interpretations of the number seven. For a convincing interpretation of the Clementine readings of these and other details in the contested manuscript, see Scott G. Brown, “Behind the Seven Veils, I: The Gnostic Life Setting of the Mystic Gospel of Mark,” in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013) 247–283. Translations from *Strom.* in this footnote are by Brown.

234 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 321 n. 20.

235 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 229.

236 For a different criticism on Jeffery’s literary method as “not rooted in exegesis but in his habit of associative reasoning,” see Brown, “Twelve Enduring Misconceptions,” 314.

The point of this section is not to belabour literary relationships as such, for which adequate discussions exist elsewhere,²³⁷ nor to consider the question of literary relationships in the particular case of *Clement's Letter to Theodore* in any further detail, as this has also been done elsewhere.²³⁸ Rather, the point is to draw attention to how scholars have opted to assert literary dependence in this case either without referring to any of the established criteria in the field, or (as in Evans, Watson, and Jenkins) ignoring those they have previously (and, I would argue, more persuasively) employed in assessing the question of literary dependency in other contexts. The standard attitude in biblical studies, as we saw in the citation of Evans above, is to study literary dependence “under the watchful eye of a strict methodology, rigorously and consistently carried out.”²³⁹ Contrary to this attitude, the criteria the alternative narrative implies are sufficiently loose to allow for establishment of literary dependence in almost any imaginable connection. Thus, as was the case for Hunter’s *The Mystery of Mar Saba*, if the observation of a *single* verbal parallel, *two* instances of similar sentiments, and *one* episode of rough similarity (as within Watson’s case)—even when increased to *three* verbal similarities of common words and *three* instances of roughly similar sentiments (as in Evans’s case—were enough to establish literary dependence, this would be enough to establish every extant early Christian text as dependent on every other early Christian text.²⁴⁰

The obvious counterpoint to these grievances is to point to the peculiar nature of the case at hand: if *Clement's Letter to Theodore* is indeed a forgery manufactured by Smith, it is hardly sustainable to refer to the usual procedures of argumentation within literary studies for the contrary. I would concur: existing models of literary dependence are usually geared towards cases that are quite unlike a complicated forgery we might have

237 For a generalist history of the practice, see Altick and Fenstermaker, *Literary Research*; on general terminology, see Ziva Ben-Porat, “The Poetics of Literary Allusion,” *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976) 105–128. In the context of biblical studies, see especially Terence L. Donaldson, “Parallels: Use, Misuse, and Limitations,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983) 193–210; Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*; Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006) 25–49; Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture*; Maarten J. J. Menken, “Allusions to the Minor Prophets in the Fourth Gospel,” *Neotestamentica* 44 (2010) 67–84. Hays, e.g., assembles no fewer than seven overlapping “tests” for controlling the extent of literary interpretation in Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 29–32. Another example of such criteria can be found in Donaldson, “Parallels”.

238 Such work has been done, e.g., by Scott G. Brown and Allan J. Pantuck, “Craig Evans”.

239 Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture*, 12. Similar notions are prominent esp. in doctoral theses that employ some form of literary criteria—e.g., Outi Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery in Luke's Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 123; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 51: “The claim of direct dependency, especially of literary dependency, requires careful and methodologically sound scrutiny.”

240 Even if the themes of death, burial, and references to the passion story (garden, stone in front of a tomb) were added to these criteria, there would hardly be any clarity about the nature of interconnections between any of the early Christian gospels.

in the case of the Clementine letter. Herein lies the problem that led in the first place to the insidious circle of question-begging discussed above in subsection 2.5.2, by which scholars have suddenly felt free to discard almost all standards they would otherwise normally employ in their field of inquiry, all to attend to the merest suspicions of forgery. If scholars are to decide that special cases require special methodologies (as they inevitably do), these special considerations can hardly become less strict and to be applied with less rigour than their more commonplace counterparts. The lack of constrained criteria for the study of forgeries is sorely felt around questions of literary dependency—let alone those of concealed indicators of authority and jokes.

2.5.3.2 Contrasting Concealed Authorial Indicators and Jokes

The trouble with having a scholarly toolbox with only two pieces of methodological assurances—one that volume is a measure of certainty, the other that positing one particular sense of humour of an imagined author allows for constructing literary details as humorous—is that these two have repeatedly been used to argue for many divergent claims, from mere curiosities to outrageous revisions of world history.²⁴¹

As described in chapter 1, the study of literary fakes is host to peculiar problems unique to the endeavour, of which I gave as the most persistent example the definition of historical fake according to its worst examples. Here, we have a somewhat lesser problem, albeit no less unique: how to take into consideration an example without accidentally validating it in the process. In other words, an attempt to compare the logic of any specific example to the logic of the alternative narrative always has the danger of backfiring: a reader might very well conclude that the comparison *strengthens* rather than diminishes the persuasiveness of the alternative narrative, given that its implied logic has been used successfully elsewhere. For this reason, the following two example texts used for comparison are chosen because they represent extremes in at least two manners, which necessarily renders them unfit to be used for support—first because of their general rejection by their (non-scholarly and pseudo-scholarly) peers and second because of their obscurity. Bluntly put, the logic of this exercise is the following: if even pseudo-scholars reject the conclusions of the example texts and if these texts are furthermore so obscure that no one has ever tried to construct an argument on their basis, then these texts are strongly insulated from becoming arguments in their own right to support the

²⁴¹ Nevertheless, such notions are still common in academic literary studies—e.g., Altick and Fenstermaker, *Literary Research*, 103–104: “The certainty of an ascription is proportional to the cumulative weight of evidence, both internal and external.”

claims within the alternative narrative.

The first of these extreme examples is *The Treasure Maps of Rennes-le-Chateau* [sic]²⁴² (1984) by Stanley James—a work of considerable ingenuity that offers concealed clues and deciphered anagrams over the span of 350 pages that James had uncovered over the course of his research into the nature and whereabouts of the treasure of Rennes-le-Château, allegedly discovered and subsequently hidden by Bérenger Saunière at the turn of the twentieth century.²⁴³

First, we might take note of the references to the alleged sense of humour of Saunière, a constant theme in James’s analysis that is necessitated by the humorous character of the subsequently uncovered clues:

Across the top is [written] “Domus mea domus orationis vocabitur” which is the first part of a saying ... spoken by Christ in indignation when he turned the money changers out of the temple. But that is only half of what Christ said. And here is the great humour of Saunière, for the rest of the sentence, which Saunière did not have engraved, is ... “but you have made it a den of thieves”. (!!!) [sic] Saunière is of course referring to himself, and also indirectly to anyone who comes to read his clues ... But Saunière’s humour is even wider than his own shrug and wry grin and embarrassed half shame of comfortable and expedient guilt. Under the latin [sic] legend ... are the heraldic devices of the Bishop of Carcassone [sic] ... and of Pope Leo the Thirteenth ... Saunière was naming his bishop and Pope both to be thieves.²⁴⁴

Second, we might consider an example of James’s etymological explanations, especially his emphasis on the placement of individual words and anagrams:

Across the top of the whole lintel in prominent capital letters are the words “TERRIBILIS EST” and directly underneath in smaller letters is “locus iste” ... But since the four words were explicitly separated into two sets of two and TERRIBILIS EST was the more prominent I thought that the french [sic] might be indicated, e.g. “Terriblement est”. Then I split that as follows “terre – blé – mont – est” meaning “land-corn-mountain-east” ... So “TERRIBILIS EST” means “land-gold-mountain-in the east”. And “locus iste” being underneath the previous phrase might thus mean located underneath that land, i.e. buried ... “Terribilis est locus iste” is a 22 letter anagram meaning: “blés lise ici – trésor Titus” which means:

242 Stanley James, *The Treasure Maps of Rennes-le-Chateau* (Bow, UK: Seven Lights Publishing, 1984). The publication lacks accent marks—e.g., Rennes-le-Château in the title—which I have corrected in the following citations.

243 For the purposes of my argument here, the exact details of the various claims related to Saunière and his alleged treasure are irrelevant, as the object of inquiry is James’s method. For a comprehensive (and critical) look on the matter in Anglophone scholarship, see Bill Putnam and John Edwin Wood, *The Treasure of Rennes-le-Château: A Mystery Solved* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003). For a fascinating article about the claims about the treasure in French, see Christiane Amiel, “L’abîme au trésor, ou l’or fantôme de Rennes-le-Château,” in *Imaginaires archéologiques* (ed. Claudie Voisenat; Ethnologie de la France 22; Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 2008) 61–86.

244 James, *Treasure Maps*, 33–34.

“gold might be read here – the treasure of Titus” ... The words are on a corbel – “corbeau” in French, which as we shall see means “au Berço”. “Terribilis est locus iste” contains its own clues. In latin [sic] “Terribilis” could be split “terri-bilis” – “Land of Gall”. There is no “est” in latin [sic], it is French for “is” or “east”. If “est” is French, then in French “Terri – bi – lis” would mean that “terri” could be read twice. But “locus” meaning “neighbourhood, region” also means “placed connected on with the other” i.e. two places connected by something joining them together. And “iste” means “that person or thing near to you” i.e. near to you as you stand here. “Terribilis” is Land of Gall – and “gall” in French is “bilaire” in the sense of bile, and “colère” in the sense of anger. Thus Terribilis is the land of bilaire and colère. And “locus iste” is a “place of two things connected near to you” i.e. near to the reader of the inscription over the church door. We can see “col” in “colère” – “col” meaning “a pass” between the two mountains, for example, that it thus connects by them being on either side of it. We also get “col” from “locus”. In “bilaire” and “colère” we get “Berço” ... There are two Berços, Berques, the Berque Grande and the Berque Petite [sic]. They are near to the church door at Rennes-le-Château, and they are connected by a ridge which dips between them to form the “col” – “the pass”. For each Berço “to join the wing of the Berço” means the join of their closest edge, i.e. where they connect under the col.²⁴⁵

Let me reiterate here that this is all nonsense: we need to establish a baseline for comparison, and given the danger of validation by reference explicated above, we could not do better than to choose James, whose musings are so reaching that even some of his fellow clue hunters for the Rennes treasure discredit his method of reasoning.²⁴⁶

Notwithstanding, James’s analysis is indistinguishable from the concealed indicators of authority asserted within the alternative narrative. Consider, for one example, how Watson construes one by referring to the etymologies of various words:

The underlying image in the statement about falsification is that of *forgery*, as the verb παραχαράσσεται indicates. This word means “to mark with a false stamp” (χάραγμα), and thus “to forge”. The παραχάραγμα is the counterfeit coin and the παραχαράκτης is the counterfeiter or forger. The mingling of truth and falsehood corresponds to the mixture of precious and base metal in the counterfeit coin. The Greek terminology can be used metaphorically to apply not only to coinage but to literary fabrications—as in the case of Clement’s letter, where the falsification or “forgery” in question is the Carpocratian version of the Secret Gospel. ... While παραχαράσσω focuses on the act of imprinting a false image, the English equivalent, “forge” ... derives from the French *forger*, which itself derives from the Latin *fabricare*, to “make” or “manufacture” ... Originally, the “forger” is simply one who works at a “forge” and so practices the art of “forgery” ... The forger is also a *smith*, the forge is also a *smithy*, and in forging a metal object one also *smiths* it. And so, when the forger becomes a counterfeiter, the worker in metal becomes a smith. Bearers of the family name “Smith” are perhaps

²⁴⁵ James, *Treasure Maps*, 34–36.

²⁴⁶ E.g., Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe, *Rennes-le-Château: Its Mysteries and Secrets* (Ashford: Bellevue Books, 1991) 159–160.

more likely than others to have noted its antecedents.²⁴⁷

Furthermore, examples of concealment of other words and the importance of their relative placement are presented in the following manner:

Yet the forgery metaphor occurs not in isolation but in conjunction with a second metaphor, concerned with the corruption of salt. The Carpocratian Gospel is a forged production in which truth is mingled with falsehood—“so that, as the saying goes, even the salt loses its savour [ὥστε ... καὶ τὸ ἅλας μωρανθῆναι]” (I.14–15).

If παραχάρασσω evokes the figure of the forger or “Smith”, does μωρ[αν]θῆν[αι] suggest “Morton”? In this mixed metaphor, has the true author of Clement’s letter to Theodore concealed his own signature? In the nature of the case, it is impossible to be sure of this. Yet this hypothesis might explain several surprising features of the salt metaphor. ... Why then the infinitive μωρανθῆναι? The answer may lie in the ending, -ναι, and specifically in the ν. That ν is essential if μωρ[αν]θῆν[αι] is to mark the spot where the name “Morton” lies concealed. ... If all this is correct, the author of this wordplay will have appreciated the fact that μωρανθῆναι usually means “to be made foolish”, “to be made a fool of”—a concealed reference to those who are fooled (*Mortonized*, we might say) by this forged (*Smithed*) letter.²⁴⁸

Should we place these arguments next to each other, the following parallels can be found:

Table 5: Assertions of the Author’s Sense of Humour to Justify the Interpretation of Certain Literary Details

James	Watson
“‘Terribilis est locus iste’ contains its own clues”	“Perhaps this enigmatic text actually <i>solicits</i> its own exposure” ²⁴⁹
“here is the great humour of Saunière”	“the author of this wordplay will have appreciated the fact that μωρανθῆναι usually means ‘to be made foolish’, ‘to be made a fool of’”

247 Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 152–153. Emphasis original.

248 Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 153–155. Here, Watson again insists on the importance of the placement of words in a footnote: “Since μωρανθῆναι is immediately preceded by the word ‘salt’, the Morton Salt connection may also be in play here”; Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 155 n. 75. Watson’s remark is made in reference to Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 58–62, in which a different concealment of the word “Morton” within this same passage on salt is suggested.

249 Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 131. Emphasis original.

Table 6: Assertions of the Techniques of Concealment, Their Loci and Volume to Justify Their Genuineness

James	Watson	Notes
“But since the four words were explicitly separated into two sets of two ... the french [sic] might be indicated”	“The underlying image in the statement about falsification is that of <i>forgery</i> , as the verb παραχαράσσεται indicates”	The notion of concealment within the passage is drawn from the words themselves
“I split that as follows ‘terre – blé – mont – est’ meaning ‘land-corn-mountain-east’ ... So ‘TERRIBILIS EST’ means ‘land-gold-mountain-in the east’”	“While παραχαράσσω focuses on the act of imprinting a false image, the English equivalent, “forge” ... derives from the French <i>forger</i> , which itself derives from the Latin <i>fabricare</i> , to ‘make’ or ‘manufacture’”	The first technique of concealment within the passage; literal translation
“‘locus’ meaning ‘neighbourhood, region’ also means ‘placed connected on with the other’ i.e. two places connected by something joining them together ... ‘iste’ means ‘that person or thing near to you’ i.e. ‘near to you as you stand here’”	“The Greek terminology can be used metaphorically to apply not only to coinage but to literary fabrications”	The second technique of concealment within the passage; non-literal translation (i.e., metaphor)
“The [mass of] detail is seen and it is hard to believe it is all relevant and that some of it is not superfluous” (James, <i>Treasure Maps</i> , 33); “This might be thought contrived, were it not for the constant repetition of reference we find to the whole or parts” (James, <i>Treasure Maps</i> , 41.)	“the forgery metaphor occurs ... in conjunction with a second metaphor”	The notion of volume deduced to be significant
“‘locus iste’ being underneath the previous phrase might thus mean located underneath that land, i.e. buried”	“since μωρανθῆναι is immediately preceded by the word ‘salt’”	The notion of placement of words deduced to be significant

James	Watson	Notes
<p>“In latin [sic] ‘Terribilis’ could be split ‘terri-bilis’ – ‘Land of Gall’ ... and ‘gall’ in French is ‘bilaire’ in the sense of bile, and ‘colère’ in the sense of anger ... We can see ‘col’ in ‘colère’ – ‘col’ meaning ‘a pass’ between the two mountains, for example ... We also get ‘col’ from ‘locus’. In ‘bilaire’ and ‘colère’ we get ‘Berço’ ... They are near to the church door at Rennes-le-Château, and they are connected by a ridge which dips between them to form the ‘col’ – ‘the pass’”</p>	<p>“The forger is also a <i>smith</i>, the forge is also a <i>smithy</i>, and in forging a metal object one also <i>smiths</i> it ... If παραχαράσσω evokes the figure of the forger or ‘Smith’”</p>	<p>The first technique of decipherment within the passage; cryptic crossword / word associations</p>
<p>“‘Terribilis est locus iste’ is a 22 letter anagram meaning: ‘blés lise ici – trésor Titus’”</p>	<p>“does μωρ[αν]θῆν[αι] suggest ‘Morton’”</p>	<p>The second technique of decipherment within the passage; unkeyed transposition cipher (anagram) / cryptic crossword</p>

The second of the extreme examples presented here comes from an obscure 1921 monograph on Dante (1265–1321), in which the author Walter Arensberg claims to have found “acrostics, telestics, interior sequences, anagrams, irregular letter clusters, string ciphers, and cabalistic spelling devices” in the *Commedia*.²⁵⁰ As with James, Arensberg’s exercise offers an excellent baseline for comparison, as the argument itself has to my knowledge never been taken seriously by anybody, including Arensberg’s closest associates.²⁵¹ A summary by John F. Moffitt of Arensberg’s cryptographic reading is worth quoting in full, as Arensberg claims that the *Commedia*

symbolically re-enacts various aspects of birth, reincarnation and the primitive Mother-Goddess Cult. ... the three stages of Dante’s “Hell”, “Purgatory”, and “Paradise” were really representations of different physical aspects of the reproductive organs of the distinguished Tuscan poet’s mother, Bella—whom Arensberg also dramatically reveals to be Dante’s metaphorical lover, Beatrice. ...

²⁵⁰ Walter Arensberg, *The Cryptography of Dante* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1921) 4.

²⁵¹ In the assessment of Marcel Duchamp, the most well-known of Arensberg’s associates, “His system was to find in the text, in every three lines, allusions to all sort of things ... Arensberg twisted words to make them say what he wanted, like every one who does that kind of work”; Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971) 52.

Dante is first born through vaginal passage and then, by means of incestuous love-making, Dante is again destined to be re-born—as Christ.²⁵²

A rare exception to the general rule, Arensberg is thoroughly candid with his own method of decipherment. The act of firm deliberation on the part of the author to conceal information within cryptograms is deducted per five distinct criteria:

First, hints in the text that something is being concealed; second, a correspondence between the meaning of the cryptogram and the meaning of the text; third, the appearance of cryptograms in salient and symmetrical positions, such as the beginnings and the ends of the various parts, chapters, cantos, or other units of text; fourth, a repetition of cryptic readings identical or similar in meaning; and fifth, a repetition, in various cryptograms, of an identical cryptographic “frame” or structure.²⁵³

In reality, however, Arensberg’s formulation of his own criteria is highly ambiguous, and he fails even to follow his own methodology, to the detriment of his proposed readings.²⁵⁴ Additionally, he does not enumerate the necessary decisions he had to make to even begin to ascribe cryptographic readings to the *Commedia*—i.e., references to the author’s motive for hiding them in the first place. This is done by referring to Dante’s sense of humour in light of the occasionally amusing concealments. Arensberg, for example, holds that Dante’s use of the word “vele” “suggests a pun on the word ... *vel*,” translated by Arensberg as “veil” and claimed to indicate the presence of concealment; another such word is “ingegno,” “a reference to wit or cunning.”²⁵⁵ The clearest example is found in the “hidden signature of Dante ... one of a large number contained in the *Divina Commedia*”:²⁵⁶

252 John F. Moffitt, “Cryptography and Alchemy in the Work of Marcel Duchamp and Walter Arensberg,” *Aries* 1 (2001) 38–61, at 41.

253 Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 4. The actual use of these criteria is expanded on in Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 395–464. Interestingly, Arensberg does note on occasion that his method has problems of its own; Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 4: “A decipherer is necessarily to some extent at the mercy of the very ingenuity which the act of deciphering requires”; Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 401: “In view of the incomplete guidance afforded by the anagrammatic acrostic structure ... the probability of error in deciphering is great. ... the reading, however it may be confirmed, cannot be absolutely *proved* as intentional.” Emphasis original.

254 Arensberg’s troubled readings follow first from problems within his stated methodology, as criteria 4 and 5 are essentially about voluminousness. This is stated even more plainly in Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 91: “The strongest evidence ... will be the cumulative evidence.” On a methodological critique of this use of voluminousness, see 2.5.2, above; 2.5.3.3, below. Furthermore, criterion 2 raises the question of the purpose of enciphering information within cryptograms in the first place, as the plain meaning of the text is asserted to be the same as the concealed meaning within the text. Only criteria 1 and 3 are technically adequate, if only Arensberg would have tried to qualify his “hints in the text” to accompany the first criterion (and not to present himself with much too much leeway in describing all sorts of textual details as “hints”) and did not completely disregard the latter.

255 Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 35.

256 Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 56.

Now the duplicities of Dante's language are such that he repeats the mention of his name in the very words with which he excuses it. In his reference to his name, which, as he says, *di necessità qui si registra*, Dante may be understood to be saying that his name is "registered here" in the words: DI NECESSITA; that is, that the words: DI NECESSITA, are the form which he here uses for his signature.²⁵⁷

Arensberg's work furthermore showcases a fascinating multilingual explanation for yet another signature of Dante within the *Commedia*. Having first posited that both "five hundred, ten, and five" and its presentation in Roman numerals as "DXV" are used to represent the poet, Arensberg concludes the following:

The words IO VIDI, considered as a cryptogram, are the equivalent of the cryptic number [i.e., five hundred, ten, and five, or DVX in Roman numerals] ... The letters IO of IO VIDI are the equivalent, in the Arabic notation of numbers, of ten; the letters VI of VIDI are the Italian spelling of the letter V, which in the Roman notation of numbers is five; and the letters DI of VIDI are the Italian spelling for the letter D; which in the Roman notation is five hundred.

The IO, as a ten, of IO VIDI is transmutable ... to any ten-letter spelling of the name in so far as it designates the number of letters of the name.²⁵⁸

VI = V, or five, = first, the number of letters in DANTE; and second, the letter with which DANTE ends, or E, which, as the fifth letter of the alphabet, has the numerical value of five.

DI = D, the initial letter of DANTE.

IO VIDI is, therefore, "the universal form" which appears, by transmutation, in the name of Dante, and in his guise as a "five hundred, ten, and five" and in DVX.²⁵⁹

Arensberg continues his argument with yet another reference to Dante's supposed sense of humour deciphering "vel" as (yet another) guise of the poet:

It is not inconceivable, moreover, that in the identification which he makes in the poem of his own nature with the divine nature, Dante may have intended a punning: IO, VI DI, as "I, there God."

This VEL is another of the cryptographic guises of DANTE. It may be transmuted either into the "universal form" of his name or into his name itself by the method already described of transmuting the letters involved into numerical equivalents that have for their integers, the zeroes being disregarded, a five, a one, and a five.

257 Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 55. The details of the process by which Arensberg journeys from "DI NECESSITA" to "Dante" are not relevant to his notion that the hidden signature exhibits Dante's "duplicities". On the decipherment technique, see Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 55-56.

258 According to Arensberg the form of the poet's name being deciphered here is *Dante Aldighiero*, the latter of which contains ten letters when spelled with an extra "d".

259 Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 131-132.

The transmutation of VEL into these integers is made as follows:

V, in Roman notation	=	5
E, as fifth letter of the alphabet	=	5
L, as tenth letter of the alphabet	=	10

L is the tenth letter of the Italian alphabet, as the Italian alphabet has neither J nor K ... I conjecture, moreover, that Dante was not insensible to the punning value of the word VEL, which in Latin means *either* and *or*. In his identification of himself with the divine nature Dante is *either* God *or* man.²⁶⁰

I reiterate, once again, that the above argumentation is nonsense, used to provide a baseline for comparison. In the alternative narrative Smith is said to employ the same manner of guises not only to exhibit his alleged sense of humour but also to refer to the constituents of his personal name and to some of his personal characteristics, the decipherment of which requires translations from one language to another. Carlson presents his case for one of the hidden signatures of Smith he claims to have uncovered as follows:

Smith published photographs of two other manuscripts [of Mar Saba] in a 1960 article ... The same photograph of manuscript no. 22 was reproduced on page 37 of Smith's *Secret Gospel* ... Three different handwriting styles are found on the page facing the pasted end-papers ... whoever wrote [the manuscript of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*] was also the first hand of manuscript no. 22. ... For the first hand, even though it resembles an eighteenth-century style, Smith confidently dated it to the twentieth century and attributed it to a certain M. Madiotes (Μ. Μαδιότης). This person lacks a religious title and for that reason appears to be a visitor to Mar Saba. While the name superficially appears Greek with the -ότης suffix of many Greek surnames, such a surname cannot be found at all in the current Greek telephone directory available online. Rather, the name is a pseudonym built on the root μαδ-. Few modern Greek words begin with μαδ-, but one of them is the verb μαδῶ, which literally means "to lose hair" and has a figurative meaning of "to swindle".

Smith has thus preserved a lot more information about the person who penned [*Clement's Letter to Theodore*] than previously realized. This person belongs to the twentieth century, this person is not a Greek orthodox monk, this person had a given name beginning with the letter M, and this person bore a pseudonymous surname that means either "baldy" or "swindler" This person bears an uncanny resemblance to Morton Smith himself. After all, Smith belonged to the twentieth century, Smith was not a Greek orthodox monk, Smith's given name starts with the letter M, and Smith was substantially bald well before 1960.²⁶¹

260 Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 133, 160–161.

261 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 42–44.

Who would have employed such “a cleverly disguised confession”²⁶² but one who “must have had a good sense of humor.”²⁶³ For if *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* “abounds in jokes,”²⁶⁴ it necessitates that its author must have possessed humour and wit in equal measures—just like Smith, whose sense of humour, Carlson assures us, “was such that he could have salted [*Clement’s Letter to Theodore*] with clues, revealing its true nature.”²⁶⁵

Unfortunately for Carlson the above presentation on M. Madiotes (M. Μαδιότης) contains a number of errors that were explored in detail in an article by Pantuck and Brown.²⁶⁶ Let us suppose, however, for the sake of the argument, that Carlson’s reading holds true (even though it does not): namely, that there are three hands on manuscript no. 22 (there are, in fact, five), that the first hand is written by the author of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* (the amount of writing is categorically inadequate for such a conclusion), that Smith dated the first hand to the twentieth century (he dated it to the eighteenth century), that Smith attributed a personal name to the first hand (he attributed it to the second hand), that the personal name attributed was M. Μαδιότης (Smith had corrected this name in the offprint to Μαδεότας, though Pantuck and Brown read this name as Μοδέστος), that the personal name is not a real surname (Μοδέστος is a very common one), that the personal name is a pseudonym, that the personal name is formed from the modern Greek verb μωδῶ (“to lose one’s hair”; “to swindle”), and that the spelling of the name Morton beginning with the letter M and the association of Smith’s personal characteristics (i.e., lack of hair) to the etymological explanation of the alleged pseudonym, along with the notion of a particular sense of humour, forms a “cleverly disguised confession” on the part of Smith.

262 This descriptor is used of M. Madiotes (M. Μαδιότης) in Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 44.

263 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 20.

264 This characterization is used in Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 79.

265 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, xviii.

266 Pantuck and Brown, “Morton Smith as M. Madiotes”.

As such, Carlson’s argument follows the logic of Arensberg’s, which can be put together as follows:

Table 7: Assertions of the Author’s Sense of Humour to Justify the Interpretation of Certain Literary Details

Arensberg	Carlson
“Dante was not insensible to the punning value of the word”	“Smith’s] sense of humor was such that he could have salted [<i>Clement’s Letter to Theodore</i>] with clues, revealing its true nature”
“the duplicities of Dante’s language”	“[<i>Clement’s Letter to Theodore</i>] abounds in jokes”

Table 8: Assertions of the Techniques of Concealment, Their Punning Character, and Their Correspondence with Personal Characteristics and Spelling to Justify Their Genuineness

Arensberg	Carlson	Notes
“in the identification which he makes in the poem of his own nature with the divine nature, Dante may have intended a punning: IO, VI DI, as ‘I, there God’”	“a cleverly disguised confession ... Smith identified with a pseudonym that means ‘baldy’ or ‘swindler’”	The notion of concealment; hidden signature in the form of a pun
“The letters IO of IO VIDDI are the equivalent, in the Arabic notation of numbers, of ten; the letters VI of VIDDI are the Italian spelling of the letter V, which in the Roman notation of numbers is five; and the letters DI of VIDDI are the Italian spelling for the letter D; which in the Roman notation is five hundred”	“attributed ... to a certain M. Madiotes (M. Μαδιότης). ... the name is a pseudonym built on the root μαδ-. Few modern Greek words begin with μαδ-, but one of them is the verb μαδῶ, which literally means ‘to lose hair’ and has a figurative meaning of ‘to swindle’”	The technique of concealment of the personal name of the author; translation to another symbolic system

Arensberg	Carlson	Notes
<p>“The IO, as a ten, of IO VIDII is transmutable ... to any ten-letter spelling of the name in so far as it designates the number of letters of the name ... VI = V, or five, = first, the number of letters in DANTE; and second, the letter with which DANTE ends, or E, which, as the fifth letter of the alphabet, has the numerical value of five. DI = D, the initial letter of DANTE”</p>	<p>“Smith’s given name starts with the letter M, and Smith was substantially bald well before 1960”</p>	<p>The plain-text construction of correspondence between the literary detail and the letters that spell the author’s name / the personal characteristics of the alleged author</p>

Finally, Arensberg uses the notion of *double entendre* to construct a creative reimagining of Dante’s journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise as an incestuous journey through the genitalia of the poet’s own mother. First, Arensberg persuades his reader that the poet was not above the use of common ribaldry:

Those who regard Dante as too serious to descend to verbal tricks will note that *salse* in line 51 has long been recognized as a pun on the proper name of the ravine where the bodies of criminals were thrown and the word for “pickle”.²⁶⁷

This having been established, Arensberg’s reading of double meanings follows:

That Dante is indeed to be considered as in the womb of Beatrice in his ascent to Paradise is frequently implied by *double entente*. A striking instance of such a double meaning is to be seen in the words of Beatrice to Dante, *Par.* i. 88–89:

Tu stesso ti fai grosso

Col falso immaginar.

These words occur just a few lines before Beatrice ... is likened to a mother turning toward her delirious child Dante. The word *grosso* has, of course two meanings in Italian; it means, first, “dull” or “stupid” and, second, it means “pregnant”. The double meaning of the whole passage may be developed, therefore, as follows: Beatrice and Dante are ascending together to Paradise, and Dante, who imagines that he is still on earth, is confused by the novel experiences which the ascent produces. When Beatrice, therefore, says in effect to Dante that in his false conjecture he is making *himself* pregnant, she is virtually implying that what he is really doing is *making her pregnant*.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 279.

²⁶⁸ Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 352–353. Emphasis original.

Whatever doubts Arensberg's readings may arouse, they are to be consoled by the sheer number of such readings, for "All these possible double meanings, slight or farfetched as they may seem in themselves taken separately, have a cumulative value."²⁶⁹ Each *double entendre* is consequently said to be further proof of every other *double entendre*, and risqué readings of Dante are supplied with further reminders of the importance of volume—for example,

the seven P's which the angel cuts on the forehead of Dante and directs him to wash off. The letter P is generally supposed to stand for the Italian word for sin: *peccato*; and the seven P's to stand, thus, for the seven so-called mortal sins ... Considering the sex symbolism of the poem, I suggest that Dante intends the letter P as the phallic symbol which it was recognized to be.

The seven P's as phallus suggest the seven *acts* of creation, which are recorded in the seven days of creation and symbolized in the phallic seven branched candlestick. The words with which the angel directs Dante to wash the "wounds" of the seven P's have a double meaning. He says, *Purg.* ix. 113–114:

Fa che lavi,

Quando sei dentro, queste piaghe.

In the double meaning of these words, there is a reference to the sexual act which Dante is to perform when he is *dentro*, the sexual act, seven times repeated, as in the creation of the world, whereby he is to recreate himself.²⁷⁰

The same strategy is employed in the alternative narrative to portray *Clement's Letter to Theodore* as a contrarian text that contains vast multitudes of double meanings. First, the punning character of the alleged author is emphasized. Jeffery does this by highlighting Smith's choice of words—namely, that Smith had "felt increasingly disoriented by the hypnotic Byzantine hymns at Mar Saba," at which point "he could quip, 'I knew what was happening, but I relaxed and enjoyed it.'"²⁷¹

Now the phrase "relax and enjoy it" is the punch line of an obscene joke ... "If rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it."

Although that fact does not establish by itself that Smith had actually heard the joke, it does rule out more innocuous interpretations of "I knew what was happening, but I relaxed and enjoyed it," given the thesis of the book in which this statement appears [i.e., in one of Jeffery's interpretations, Smith intended to establish homosexuality as the original religious message of Jesus] ... if Smith can tell such a joke in church—in one of the most renowned Christian

269 Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 123.

270 Arensberg, *Cryptography*, 251–252.

271 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 128; citing from Smith, *Secret Gospel*, 6.

monasteries!—he can do it anywhere. The hints of sexual humor in [*Clement's Letter to Theodore*], therefore, will also have to be taken seriously.²⁷²

Moreover, in the words of Jeffery, when “the possibility” of such “amusing elements” is brought forth, “we begin to notice more of them.”²⁷³ A good example of the results achieved is the following reading of the gospel extracts, in which a *double entendre* is said not merely to be a collection of individual details but to function like a genre—a genre of *extended double entendre*—“in which double meanings are present at plot level.”²⁷⁴

We can read the entire story as an account of Jesus rejecting a woman in order to help an anguished young man “come out of the closet” for his first (homo)sexual experience.

In the mid-twentieth century it was thought that the word [προσκυνέω] was related etymologically to the notion of kissing, as one might kiss an idol. Retranslating this one word as “bent down to kiss” has the advantage of making a coherent narrative out of what had been a sequence of perplexing events: why did the disciples rebuke the woman, why and at whom was Jesus angry, and why was there a cry from the tomb before the youth had been restored to life? All these details make sense if they show Jesus rejecting a woman’s sexual advance in favor of freeing a young man ... In effect, my retranslation proposes that this word be read as a humorous double entendre ... the anger of Jesus and the rebukes of the disciples would be particularly understandable if the [alleged author] was an English-speaker who wanted to imply that, while “coming, she bent down to kiss Jesus,” the woman was “coming” in the slang English sense—that is, “experiencing sexual orgasm.” The quote “And after six days” ... could suggest a transfiguration of sorts: arriving in the dark of night, minimally clothed, the young man finds out who Jesus really is.²⁷⁵

Readers of the more sceptical persuasion are reassured that in many cases “the sexual aspect is only hinted at; its presence can therefore be denied and attributed to the reader’s own prurience,” a troubling characteristic from the perspective of the interpreter that is, nevertheless, “an essential feature of Smith’s brand of humor.”²⁷⁶ Support for this is drawn from their voluminousness and from such instances where the innuendo is assessed to be more frankly displayed:

[Smith] was always implying or asserting that unsophisticated people would mistakenly perceive a sexual reference in one text or another, while he himself knew better—even though it was Smith himself who kept coming up with these highly inventive misinterpretations. This element of faux deniability can be seen, for example, in every published mention of his most infamous joke, “Holy man

272 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 128–130.

273 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 93.

274 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 237.

275 Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 92–93.

276 Jeffery, “Clement’s Mysteries,” 235.

arrested ... naked youth escapes” as a newspaper headline for Jesus’ arrest at Gethsemane in Mark 14:46–52. But there are countless other examples. ... Smith was not always satisfied with hinting, however, and at times he frankly stated what he meant in passages that also illustrate his cavalier syncretism of disparate traditions, if not a penchant for outright fabrication.

In the very next sentence of the epistle: “Thus, in sum, [Mark] prepared matters, neither grudgingly nor incautiously, in my opinion, and, dying, he left his composition to the church in Alexandria” (I.26–II.1). What is communicated by the phrase “neither grudgingly (φθονερῶς) nor incautiously (ἀπροφυλάκτως)”? ... if the epistle were read as an extended double entendre by Smith, it would be saying that, immediately after the exegesis leading mystagogically to the seven-veiled truth, “he prepared in advance, neither jealously (φθονερῶς) nor without a condom (ἀπροφυλάκτως), as I suppose, and, climaxing, he left his written composition to the church in Alexandria.” Those who hope this is only an illusion on my part will find no reassurance in Smith’s commentary, where the only citation ... is Plato’s *Phaedrus*: “... lovers ... are jealously (φθονερῶς) disposed ...” (243c). There’s just no getting away from this topic [in Smith’s writings].²⁷⁷

Placed together the similarity between the strategies of Arensberg and Jeffery is obvious:

Table 9: Double Entendre Readings Supported by References to Their Alleged Author’s Sense of Humour and to their Voluminousness

Arensberg	Jeffery	Notes
“ <i>salse</i> in line 51 has long been recognized as a pun”	“Smith can tell such a joke ... anywhere”	The presupposition of the brand of humour of the alleged author
“possible double meanings ... have a cumulative value”	“Once we allow the possibility ... we begin to notice more of them”; “there are countless other examples”	The voluminousness of double meanings used as evidence of the presence of double meanings
“These words occur just a few lines before Beatrice ... is likened to a mother turning toward her delirious child Dante. The word <i>grosso</i> has, of course two meanings in Italian; it means, first, ‘dull’ or ‘stupid;’ and, second, it means ‘pregnant.’ The double meaning of the whole passage ... what he is really doing is <i>making her pregnant</i> ”	“we can read the entire story as an account of Jesus rejecting a woman in order to help an anguished young man ‘come out of the closet’ for his first (homo)sexual experience. ... an English-speaker who wanted to imply that, while ‘coming, she bent down to kiss Jesus,’ the woman was ‘coming’ in the slang English sense ... ‘And after six days’ ... the young man finds out who Jesus really is”	Individual words and whole passages read as risqué innuendo

²⁷⁷ Jeffery, “Clement’s Mysteries,” 235–236, 242–243.

Arensberg	Jeffery	Notes
“Considering the sex symbolism of the poem, I suggest that Dante intends the letter P as the phallic symbol which it was recognized to be. ... In the double meaning ... there is a reference to the sexual act which Dante is to perform”	“as an extended double entendre ... it would be saying that, immediately after ... ‘he prepared in advance, neither jealously (φθονερώς) nor without a condom (ἀπροφυλάκτως), as I suppose, and, climaxing, he left his written composition to the church’”	Individual signs / symbols / words read in a sexually explicit manner following the notion of the voluminousness of such “symbolism” either within the work itself or within a “genre” of its own (viz., extended double entendre)

2.5.3.3 Summary and Further Discussion

After this comparison of authors whose claims failed to become accepted even by their (non-academic) associates (left side of tables) with authors whose claims have passed at least some level of academic peer review and been published in university presses and respected academic journals (right side of tables), it is worth returning to the purpose of this section (2.5) as a whole.

First, in subsection 2.5.1 I argued that the arguments within the alternative narrative were most conveniently classified into three distinct groups: *literary, derivative relationships (hoax), concealed indicators of authority, and jokes*.

Second, in subsection 2.5.2 I argued that each of these three groups implied that a firm, deliberate authorial act had been performed, though the scholars who argued that such firm, deliberate acts had been performed provided no qualitative criteria for making this claim. Sufficient for these scholars was the voluminousness of these supposed actions, together with references to the supposed motive of the supposed author, in effect creating a self-sustaining strategy of question-begging, in which every further instance of such examples validated every other instance of such examples.

Third, in the present subsection (2.5.3) I have argued, about literary derivation, that the authors within the alternative narrative have refrained from applying all existing criteria to their case for establishing literary, derivative relationships in their arguments, even when they had applied stringent criteria in other contexts. Furthermore, I have argued, about concealed indicators of authority and jokes, that the strategies of relying on voluminousness and references to the supposed author’s supposed sense of humour have been used to sustain completely bizarre beliefs of a pseudo-historical variety, of which two examples were provided. Additionally, the chosen examples were so extreme that

even fellow pseudo-historians of these pseudo-historical authors rejected them.

This strongly implies that the supposed concealed indicators of authority and jokes within the alternative narrative cannot be qualitatively differentiated from similar claims made in the extreme pseudo-historical examples cited above. Consequently, the circumstantial assurances of voluminousness and motive (even if they were asserted as constrained criteria) cannot be accepted as robust enough or as admissible for arguments about authorship.

It is worth pondering just why these two assurances have been irresistible to both scholars and non-scholars alike, despite their inadequacy at the task of reliably uncovering concealed indicators of authority and jokes. I suggest two main reasons for their failure. First, neither of them contains a qualitative element and although assertions of motive could be constructed with one (though, within the alternative narrative, this is not done), the matter of volume in itself remains always deficient in this regard, for, in the words of Samuel Schoenbaum, *sans* qualitative controls “it is difficult to see why a great heap of rubbish should possess any more value than a small pile of the same rubbish.”²⁷⁸ Consequently, the likes of the old text critical adage of “weighing, not counting” manuscripts has bearing on deciding whether a concealed indicator of authority or a joke is simply a figment of one’s imagination. To take this matter to task, a robust set of constrained criteria that, at minimum, would allow us to discard the methodologies of James and Arensberg, is necessary.

I suspect that there is a certain allure to the act of placing oneself in the imagined shoes of a forger and of conjuring up a small narrative to justify a particular feature of the supposed forgery. Such an approach, however, rests on the asynchronous relationship between the conceivable and the justifiable. An argument that employs conceivability as its sole criterion must merely avoid logical impossibilities, but an argument that seeks to justify such a possibility requires that the criteria for its justification be met. In other words, without a clearly articulated methodology for controlling the creation of concealed indicators of authority and jokes, the likes of the notions of voluminousness and the references to the supposed author’s supposed sense of humour will be used as a

²⁷⁸ Samuel Schoenbaum, *Internal Evidence and Elizabethan Dramatic Authorship: An Essay in Literary History and Method* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1966) 197; for a more moderate assessment, consider Matthew Scott, *The Hermeneutics of Christological Psalmody in Paul: An Intertextual Enquiry* (Society for New Testament Studies 158; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 4, that “a cumulative approach to evidence runs the risk of circularity.”

basis for constructing anecdotal narratives that proceed from conclusion backwards to its premises—a methodological choice I have labelled WWFD in “WWFD” and further described as “fit to construct a forgery out of anything.”²⁷⁹ As this technique requires only a small first-person narrative in which the conceivable functions as its own justification, it is little wonder that it fails to distinguish between the real and the faked in an academically rigorous manner—as evidenced by its equally justified use by James, Arensberg, and the scholars within the alternative narrative.

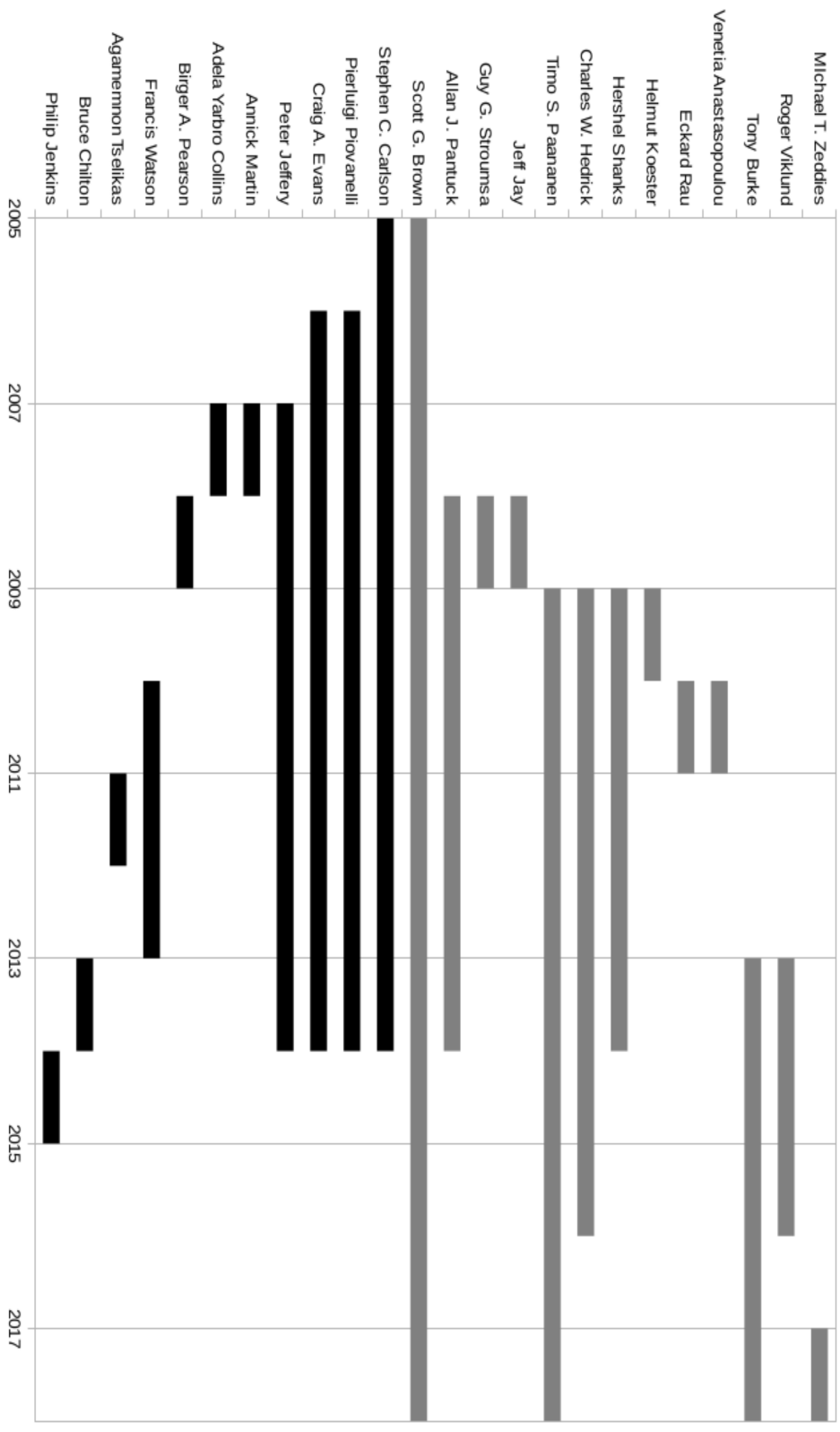
WWFD is the ideal technique for constructing a forgery out of details that in other circumstances—or, at least in less (hyper)sensitive times—might otherwise have been deemed indicative of authenticity. Thus unqualified, voluminousness and assertions about an author’s sense of humour—thinly veiled “guises” of WWFD—are such tools as can “transmutate” a stone lintel into a treasure map (like James), a narrative poem into a series of cryptograms (like Arensberg), or an eighteenth-century manuscript into a hoax manufactured for a purpose no scholar can agree on (like the scholars within the alternative narrative).

Yet we are far from done with the topic. Nothing in the material existence of a stone lintel categorically *prevents* one to be a treasure map, nor a narrative poem to be composed of a series of cryptograms, nor an eighteenth-century manuscript to be a hoax. As we had already established in sub-subsection 2.5.1.2, mystification remains an option that is as much available to our contemporaries as it was available to earlier generations—perhaps even more so at present, given the contemporary voices that have sought to transform forgery into a quasi-legitimate form of art in its own right, and the “fashionable conspiracism” of our post-truth political environment, as discussed in chapter 1.

Consequently, given that mystification is a genuine phenomenon engaged in by authors it becomes necessary to inquire according to what criteria should the *post hoc* construction of literary, derivative relationships (hoax), concealed indicators of authority, and jokes be made admissible as evidence of authorship.

279 Paananen, “WWFD,” 17.

Illustration 2: Scholars Who Have Made Substantive Contributions to the Debate, Pro Authenticity in Grey, Contra Authenticity in Black



3 Results and Discussion

The four articles that comprise the bulk of this dissertation each offer two types of results: ones generally applicable to the study of forgeries, and ones specifically applicable to the study of the authenticity of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*. On the latter point, it was concluded that, in the latter half of the 2000s, the academic discourse on the topic had moved from Hedrick's "stalemate"²⁸⁰ to a secure deadlock. This shift followed from various scholarly malpractices²⁸¹ that were codified in discourse analysis as *practices of non-engagement, vitriolic language, and mischaracterizations of opinions*.²⁸² For my own part, I expressed a wish that future scholarly engagement might address two of the lesser understood aspects of the forgery claims—namely, “the notion that *Clement's Letter to Theodore* is full of obscure ‘hidden clues,’ illuminating the path to the solution of an ingenious textual puzzle,” and the argument that “a queer reading of the text [of *Theod.*] discloses the modern origin of the composition ... [which] cannot but beg the question, supposing as it does the very thing it is trying to prove.”²⁸³ As no such engagement has been undertaken elsewhere, I suppose this dissertation has risen to the challenge.

The two articles I then co-authored with Roger Viklund illuminated the physicality of the manuscript of *Clement's Letter to Theodore*. We observed that the halftone reproduction of the images of the manuscript—one that had been used to point out myriad signs of forgery²⁸⁴ based on the handwriting—had introduced artefacts to the offset reproductions (plates) due to the phenomenon of *line screen distortion*. That is, a printing technique involving a line screen placed over a continuous tone image to convert it into a halftone image had created an illusion of simulated handwriting.²⁸⁵ As summarized in the article, “all the signs of forgery ... disappear once we replace the printed images ... with the original photographs.”²⁸⁶ Subsequent studies enshrined Smith's manuscript hunting practices as twentieth-century ideals, as Smith—unlike his nineteenth-century

280 Per the title of Charles W. Hedrick, “The Secret Gospel of Mark: Stalemate in the Academy,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003) 133–145.

281 One early commenter of this dissertation noted to me that this word represents one example of the general “intemperate language” of this thesis. I have, however, retained its usage here, as it was the term of choice already in Paananen, “Stalemate to Deadlock” to refer to wilful ignorance or misstatement of arguments, and vitriolic language within scholarly debates.

282 Per the title of Paananen, “Stalemate to Deadlock”; summarised in Paananen, “Stalemate to Deadlock,” 114–118.

283 Paananen, “Stalemate to Deadlock,” 119–120.

284 Scholars have cited, e.g., blunt ends at the beginnings and ends of the lines, pen lifts, retakes, retouching, and tremors; Viklund and Paananen, “Distortion of the Scribal Hand,” 8–12.

285 Viklund and Paananen, “Distortion of the Scribal Hand,” 5–7.

286 Viklund and Paananen, “Distortion of the Scribal Hand,” 12.

predecessors—did not remove the manuscripts from the institutions that housed them, being instead “content making catalogues and photographing the manuscripts for the purpose of further study.”²⁸⁷ The manuscript of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* was deemed “indistinguishable from an authentic eighteenth-century manuscript,” as palaeographic standards were found to be inadequate in cases of suspected deceptions compared to standards in forensic studies.²⁸⁸ Finally, the “poor argument” explicated in “WWFD” is that described in detail in sub-subsection 2.5.3.3; the final cautionary remarks of this article are applicable to any narratives similar to the alternative narrative:

The contemporary debate culture on fakes and forgeries has filled to the brim with suspiciousness and hypercriticality ... [culminating] in the all-powerful WWFD, an explanatory tool with a scope too broad to be used sensibly ... [as it is] fit to construct a forgery out of anything.²⁸⁹

Moving on to the results that are generally applicable, I begin by citing my concluding statement at the end of “Stalemate to Deadlock”:

It will be beneficial to everyone involved to recognize how this specific debate has never been an exemplary one, and how the sins of the fathers, so to speak, continue to haunt the most recent debate as strong as they have ever been. Such recognition of the extraordinary character of the debate could be one step for scholars to feel more at ease in changing their opinion on the subject, one way or the other. Ultimately, the difficulties in arguing over any scholarly topic are common all over the academy and cannot be solved here. A less oppressive atmosphere will be, however, one step towards a more ideal environment in which to have a discourse.²⁹⁰

Such sentiments might seem to exhibit youthful naïvety more than a pragmatic solution for making progress on a divisive issue; yet the simple, almost banal wisdom of avoiding an “oppressive atmosphere” constitutes a crucial aspect of structured discussions—e.g., the IDI (International Dialogue Initiative)—that aim to defuse complex societal issues.²⁹¹ While the above point was made towards the end of 2010, the following year saw the inaugural session of the *York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium Series*, which concentrated wholly on *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*, the proceedings of which were published in 2013 in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate*.²⁹² The organizer of the symposium and editor of the volume of its proceedings,

287 Paananen and Viklund, “Control of the Scribal Hand,” 265.

288 Paananen and Viklund, “Control of the Scribal Hand,” 295–296.

289 Paananen, “WWFD,” 17.

290 Paananen, “Stalemate to Deadlock,” 119.

291 See, e.g., the IDI website, <http://www.internationaldialogueinitiative.com/about-us/>.

292 *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013).

Tony Burke, noted in his introduction that the symposium was designed to “break this impasse”—that is, because of “how poorly the principle voices in the debate were communicating with each other.”²⁹³ Practicing what I had only preached in the abstract, the result of this mission was still one of mixed success.²⁹⁴ Despite the open-hearted attitude with which all participants²⁹⁵ of the symposium no doubt entered, the tensions that remained afterwards are evident in the papers published in the conference proceedings. This is especially notable in remarks directed to Stephen C. Carlson and Agamemnon Tselikas, the two scholars who were the most prominently featured during the symposium but who did not attend.²⁹⁶ To clarify, I am not suggesting here that at least some of the antipathy, frustration, and disappointment were not justified, as both Carlson and Tselikas have—the first by his silence,²⁹⁷ the latter by the explicit signalling of his intention in writing²⁹⁸—indicated their disinclination for pursuing further scholarly inquiry into *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*.

The decision to disengage has proven to be a problem, for, as Hershel Shanks has noted, “no matter how many arguments for forgery ... you refute, you can never prove that the letter is authentic.”²⁹⁹ That is to say, there is a disproportionate, asynchronous relationship between arguing for and arguing against the fakeness of literary documents: sowing doubt has proven to be an epistemologically simple task in the case of *Theod.* (e.g.,

293 Tony Burke, “Introduction,” in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013) 1–29, at 16.

294 Note, however, that the illustration on p. 84, above, seems to suggest a bleaker conclusion: that Burke unwittingly *killed* communication between the two sides of the debate, as the only scholars emboldened by the conference to pursue new research on *Theod.* were those in support of its authenticity.

295 Scholars, whose papers were published in *Ancient Gospel*, were (in the order their papers were published): Charles W. Hedrick, Bruce Chilton, Craig A. Evans, Scott G. Brown, Allan J. Pantuck, Hershel Shanks, Marvin Meyer, Pierluigi Piovanelli, Peter Jeffery, and Stephen C. Carlson (whose 2008 SBL presentation was included as an appendix).

296 These are most pronounced in Burke’s and Hedrick’s contributions, the first of whom notes how Carlson “misrepresented the support of professional document examiner Julie C. Edison” and the latter of whom points out how “Carlson has never replied in any detail to these criticisms of his position—not even when given the opportunity in a paper”; Burke, “Introduction,” 17; Hedrick, “Moving on from Stalemate,” 32.

297 It is noteworthy that, effectively, the last word from Carlson, as reported by Burke, “Introduction,” 16, is that he “shrugged his shoulders” in response to a question posed to him after his 2008 SBL presentation on whether or not continue to participate in the ongoing scholarly discussion after he had completed his doctoral studies at Duke University.

298 Personal communication.

299 Hershel Shanks, “Was Morton Smith the Bernie Madoff of the Academy,” in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013) 135–144, at 138. Similarly in art history, as Elkins, *Pictorial Complexity*, 172, 178 observes, “simple claims, such as the sighting of a single hidden figure, can engender complex counterarguments, it can be very difficult to argue against even the simplest sighting of a cryptomorph. ... Most cryptomorphs, in short, are effectively impervious to falsification.” On the distinction between cryptomorphs and aleamorphs, see n. 29, above.

noting supposedly concealed jokes), while proving the negative involves all kinds of philosophical hardships, in much the same way that performing a handwriting analysis without addressing important theoretical considerations is easier to do than to come up with an adequate response that does address them. What all this suggests for the larger matter of effective interaction between scholars of differing views is that a delicate balance must be struck between challenging individual scholars to maintain robust methodological foundations and accusing them of personal failures in having neglected to do so. None of the categories of scholarly malpractices explicated in “Stalemate to Deadlock”—*non-engagement*, *vitriolic language*, and *mischaracterizations of opinions*—are as effective on their own, but function best (or worst, as the case may be) when they interact with each other, one feeding and leading to the other in a vicious circle. And, as with any illness, the first step towards a cure is to have a correct diagnosis of the malady ready at hand.

The more widely applicable results from the other articles that comprise the bulk of this dissertation were something completely different. First, in 2010, Melissa M. Terras theorised that,

Relying on computational systems ... can insert further uncertainty into the representation of the text created ... distortion caused by lens shape, difficulties in colour management and reproduction, and the unintentional introduction of ‘artefacts’ into images.³⁰⁰

“Distortion of the Scribal Hand” presents the first incidence of such an “unintentional introduction”—specifically, of a scholar having “published documentary material that has been read erroneously (and published, and refuted) due to faults in the digitization process,” though not quite in the manner Terras had envisioned.³⁰¹ At this point, it was foremost the professional understanding of my co-author, Viklund, on the techniques of image production and manipulation that brought us to accurately describe and explain the crucial distinction previous scholars had missed: that looking at a picture of a manuscript in a printed book—specifically, the black-and-white images in Smith’s *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*,³⁰² and the colour images in Hedrick and Olympiou’s

300 Melissa M. Terras, “Artefacts and Errors: Acknowledging Issues of Representation in the Digital Imaging of Ancient Texts,” in *Kodikologie und Paläographie im digitalen Zeitalter 2 / Codicology and Palaeography in the Digital Age 2* (ed. Franz Fischer, Christiane Fritze, and Georg Vogeler; Schriften des Instituts für Dokumentologie und Editorik 3; Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2010) 43–61, at 45.

301 Terras, “Artefacts and Errors,” 56.

302 Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*, 449, 451, 453.

“New Witnesses”³⁰³—is not the same as looking at the photographs themselves (or even high-quality scans made directly from the photographs themselves). That is to say, the original photograph *is never identical* even to its reproductions and whether this should be a cause for concern for scholars working with digital reproductions of images of manuscripts depends on the intended purpose of these digital reproductions. Even poor reproductions are probably sufficient, if one is only interested in making correct identifications of individual glyphs—i.e., of reading the text. The more minute details one aims to observe—including, I would presume, most of the commonly studied palaeographic details—the more accurate the reproductions must be. Ideally, perhaps, one should even access the original documents themselves.

“Control of the Scribal Hand,” for its part, noted the dangers of the unwitting adaptation of one disciplinary standards to another field of study. That is, an expert in one particular area is by default a non-expert in some other area of knowledge and whether an expertise in one particular area offers expertise in some other—even if related—area, can only be determined on a case-by-case basis. The worst situation in this context is arguably one in which an expert expects to be able to adapt their expertise to a (seemingly) related study area—but, in reality, they cannot.

As discussed further in the article,

Much of palaeographers’ work is dedicated to the decipherment of writing in manuscripts and where there is seldom reason to suspect forgery. Forensic document examiners often deal with cases in which deception of some sort is suspected. Palaeographers are keen to obtain as much external evidence about the writer, period, and origin of the manuscript as possible to augment their assessment of the (distant) past, about which there is often much to learn. Forensic document examiners do not shun such external evidence, but usually their purpose is to rely on the internal evidence of the manuscript in order to test others’ assertions about these matters. It is common for them to request known samples (standards) of the handwriting of the suspect and attempt to establish the idiographic characteristics of the internalized model hand of both writers (or one and the same writer, as the case may be). Palaeographers do not usually shy away from “generalizations about the characteristics of a hand,” nor would much history be written without a healthy amount of speculation and conjecture thrown in. Forensic document examiners would be laughed out of the court should they be caught making conjectures without firm evidence to back them up.³⁰⁴

303 Hedrick and Olympiou, “New Witnesses,” 3–16.

304 Paananen and Viklund, “Control of the Scribal Hand,” 285. As noted in Paananen and Viklund, “Control of the Scribal Hand,” 285 n. 107, these observations are based on Davis, “Handwriting Identification,” 251–252, 260, 267–273; Sirat, *Writing as Handwork*, 491–497.

A palaeographer might understandably be wont to try to draw “common-sense” inferences based on their knowledge in the field of palaeography, when discussing a manuscript of suspected provenance. As documented in “Control of the Scribal Hand,” however, such inferences often turn out to be wrong when assessed according to the standards employed in forensic studies. In fact, one of the key authors we relied on for much of our understanding of palaeographic practices, Shirat, draws the straightforward distinction between “style elements” and “execution elements,” ascribing the former to “the palaeographers’ tools for placing documents into time and space” and the latter to “the document examiners’ field.”³⁰⁵ One of the examples cited in “Control of the Scribal Hand” is illuminating in this respect, as the conclusions on line terminations by a palaeographer and a forensic document examiner were, in fact, found respectively to be descriptions of line connections (i.e., part of style elements) and line continuity (i.e., part of execution elements).³⁰⁶ That is, despite the similar language used in both analyses, the phenomenon studied, in fact, differed: the use of the language of palaeography for the study of forgeries resulted in conclusions that were *non sequuntur*—at least according to the standards in forensic studies. If anything, such unfortunate mistakes should encourage interdisciplinary research activity pertaining to complex, interdisciplinary topics to combine disciplinary expertise.

On this matter, “WWFD” offers an even more wide-ranging conclusion:

The contemporary debate culture on fakes and forgeries has filled to the brim with suspiciousness and hypercriticality. This has culminated in the all-powerful WWFD, an explanatory tool with a scope too broad to be used sensibly. The solution, consequently, is one of demarcation: to decide which features are acceptable as evidence either for or against ascribing the status of forgery to an historical artefact. Implied here is the notion of constraint—i.e., the control of method in the specific sense ... a constrained criterion is one that cannot be employed to back up both an argument and its counter-argument. A methodological free-form deriving from suspiciousness and hypercriticality lacks this quality.³⁰⁷

Many of the commentators at this point lamented that I do not here suggest some constrained criteria. This would be no simple task: in fact, the reason I have spent so much time in establishing the inadequacy of current endeavours in subsection 2.5.3 (after having laid down the necessary analyses in subsections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2 of the material

305 Shirat, *Writing as Handwork*, 495. This is the standard classification in Roy A. Huber and A. M. Headrick, *Handwriting Identification: Facts and Fundamentals* (Boca Raton, Flo.: CRC Press, 1999) 105–146.

306 Paananen and Viklund, “Control of the Scribal Hand,” 285–286.

307 Paananen, “WWFD,” 17.

presented in section 1.2) is to finally get to the point of suggesting examples of such criteria that are not only theoretically well justified but that can also be put to use. As I wrote in the last footnote in “WWFD,”

One stepping stone on this path is to reformulate the central question scholars are prone to ask of a suspected forgery: instead of investigating whether or not the artefact is genuine, scholars might rather consider whether the artefact can be distinguished from a genuine artefact, given that the material reality limits the historian’s ability to answer questions according to what can be justified by referring to the material reality (e.g., documents, artefacts), which necessarily forms the basis of the historian’s conclusions. In other words, it is trivially true that a forger could conceivably have done many things that are inaccessible for the purposes of constructing them *post hoc* from the material artefact(s) themselves. As I have argued elsewhere (in [“Control of the Scribal Hand”]), this change in attitudes would bring the standards in contemporary studies on forgeries closer to those used in forensic studies.³⁰⁸

Another stepping stone follows: the tripartite, constrained criteria for acceptable instances of concealed indicators of authority—criteria that do not accept quantitiveness according to some vague “preponderance of evidence” but rely on qualitative, hermeneutic interpretations of the supposed mystificatory tactics.

3.1 Suggested Criteria for the Control of Concealed Indicators of Authority and Deliberate Actions of the Author

If *literary, derivative relationships (hoax), concealed indicators of authority, and jokes* must be controlled with qualitative criteria, what could such criteria consist of?

Once again, we must begin with what we have—physical details—which we employ to establish other details we wish to assert, like authorial action(s). Consider an extreme example of a concealed indicator of authority: that the present sentence was composed by Pope Francis, who deliberately embedded his title (*papa*) into this very sentence (as the 22th, the 27th, the 64th, and the 80th letter). There might be good reasons to insist that Pope Francis did no such thing but none that could allow us to deny that the letters in question do spell out the word “papa”.

When dealing with such literary details, we can only argue about the reasons for which such assertions are made. Crucially, we must resist succumbing to the “realistic effect”³⁰⁹ and entertaining ideas about realist absoluteness and certainty with our historical

308 Paananen, “WWFD,” 18 n. 90.

309 As described by Roland Barthes, “The Discourse of History,” in *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook*, vol. 3 (ed. E. S. Shaffer; trans. Stephen Bann; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 7–20, at 17–18 as a confusion between the referent and the signified.

assertions. In other words, we can never establish with precise certainty that Pope Francis did not access my computer just now, just as we can never decree with unarguable clarity that Smith did (not) act as the alternative narrative claims any more than we can (never) establish (to quote Quentin Skinner) “that life is not a dream”.³¹⁰ Rather, we can ask whether we can *posit* that Smith would have concealed indicators of authority in the text of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*, much as we might find adequate reasons not to posit that the pope intervened in the process of my writing this dissertation or not to consider that we are living in a dream. Such reasons can be supported most straightforwardly by the use of a common set of criteria, which (in turn) allow one to assess whether or not a postulation is acceptable. Here, the notion of acceptability simply means that we would be content if such criteria were applied in other contexts according to the principle of consistency, as discussed in sub-subsection 3.1.4.1, below.

I have already discussed my understanding of the role of robust criteria in the academic study of history in subsection 2.5.2, above. It is perhaps necessary to clarify at this point that, when I speak of criteria that enable historians to move beyond the physicality of historical artefacts, I simply mean the *reasons* behind the arguments of historians. For the majority of academic historical writing, such criteria are only implicitly present, as arguments about complex matters regarding a historical author (based on textual artefacts) cannot be presented with as much precision as the arguments about simpler matters regarding an author’s actions that might have led to, for instance, derivative relationships between literary works. Consider the analogy of playing an instrument according to standard musical notation as opposed to playing “by ear”. For the most part, academic historians do their history writing “by ear” and only in some cases (such as with literary relationship) does there exist any sort of clearly defined notation system to ensure that everybody is playing the same tune.³¹¹

310 Quentin Skinner, *Vision of Politics, Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 122.

311 According to the scheme of “scientific reasoning” (abstracted to fit all academic disciplines) in Ebbighausen and Korn, “Circumstantial Evidence,” 288–292, academic history writing would fall mostly under the rubric of “interpretations,” though constrained criteria could be better placed under “rules”—i.e., constrained over the regulative idea of “acceptability” and mutable in principle should the notion of acceptability happen to change for some reason. On the latter point, see 3.1.4.1, below.

As I have observed previously, the matter of distinguishing an authentic artefact from a fake has remained without a generally accepted set of robust criteria since the times of Mabillon.³¹² Contemporary forgery discourse is, consequently, largely a process of carrying the tune “by ear” and, as I have documented elsewhere,³¹³ one of the worst of its recurring themes is performed out of tune to extreme dissonance, as the critical inquiry into fakes and forgeries has been pursued in a manner free of any justification by composing an internally coherent narrative from the imagined actions of the imagined forger.

Other historically minded disciplines have been plagued with problems of their own. In the literary study of mystification the requirement of common criteria has been repeatedly emphasized by scholars such as Jeandillou, whose *Esthétique de la mystification* (1994) remains the only presentation of the techniques of mystification with a robust theoretical basis. Jeandillou is confident that, even in the face of criticism as to its “lisibilité” (readability), mystification nevertheless “fournissent ... des indices dont le repérage permet” (supplies ... clues that allow for its identification).³¹⁴ For the same reason he speaks of the “nombreuses contraintes” (numerous constraints) the inception of such rules of mystification would entail, especially those of “cohérence” (consistency) and “vraisemblance” (plausibility).³¹⁵ Then, some two hundred pages later, he presents

312 Paananen, “WWFD,” 2–5. It should be noted here that, since Mabillon, a variety of methods of “scientific” character have become established, especially in the discipline of forensic studies, beginning from Osborn, *Questioned Documents* (in the US) and Wilson R. Harrison, *Suspect Documents: Their Scientific Examination* (London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1958) (in the UK). These are all generally well designed methods (cf. the discussion prompted by the 2009 report from the National Academy of Sciences in Paananen and Viklund, “Control of the Scribal Hand,” 276) when they work and allow the discernment of fake from non-fake artefacts. Oftentimes, however, they do not function well, as, e.g., the recent case of the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife* has exhibited, for which see Janet E. Spittler, “Responses to Mark Goodacre, James McGrath, and Caroline Schroeder on the *Gospel of Jesus’ Wife*,” in *Fakes, Forgeries, and Fictions: Writing Ancient and Modern Christian Apocrypha* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2015 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade, 2017) 349–374. Nevertheless, as Nyqvist and Oja, *Kirjalliset väärennökset*, 98–99 observe, “Kirjallisten väärennösten tutkimuskenttä ei ole lainkaan niin jäsentynyt ja ammattimainen kuin kuvataiteen puolella ... Väärennösten tutkimisen pitäisi siis oikeasti alkaa siitä, että ensin tutkitaan ja määritellään vertailumateriaalin aitous. Koska näin ei yleensä tehdä, tutkimukset ovat kaikkea muuta kuin aukottomia” (The study of literary fakes is far less organized and professional than the study of artistic fakes ... The study of fakes should be founded on the study of the authenticity of the material used for comparison. As this is seldom done, the results are far from certain).

313 Paananen, “WWFD,” 5–16; cf. 2.5.3.3, above.

314 Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 24. Such permission follows from the existence of a “système latent” (hidden structure) of mystifications; Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 214. Furthermore, Jeandillou refers to Josette Rey-Debove, *Le Métalangage: Étude linguistique du discours sur le langage* (Paris: Le Robert, 1978) 291: “L’essentiel, c’est que le jeu soit lui-même structuré et reconnaissable. C’est ce qui doit décider de l’acceptabilité du texte littéraire. Dans cette mesure, la littérarité est un code, mais chaque œuvre littéraire retient ce qu’elle veut des immenses possibilités qui lui sont offertes; c’est pour cette raison qu’on est autorisé à parler du code d’un texte.”

315 Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 9.

the prime exemplars of “doute hyperbolique” (excessive doubt) who “rechercher—et découvrir!—des supercheries où il n’y en avait pas” (search for—and find!—forgeries where there are none): Jean Hardouin and Pierre Louÿs. Both are passed over briefly as “incapable qu’elle est d’apporter une preuve dirimante à l’encontre de la thèse officielle” (unable to provide compelling evidence contrary to the official explanation).³¹⁶

Just as in my discussion of the “outstanding examples” of Love in subsection 2.5.2 Jeandillou does not offer a solution, only the remark that “il convenait de laisser aux experts le soin de démasquer les auteurs ‘déguisés’” (it was appropriate to leave to the experts the unmasking of ‘disguised’ authors). This is noteworthy because of his explicit argument on the previous page that, “Le fin mot d l’énigme ne se limite pas à un orthonyme que l’on substituerait à une ou plusieurs signatures fantaisistes; il implique la mise en évidence des règles qui régissent un jeu du secret” (The final word concerning mystification is not limited to providing a real name as a substitute for one or multiple fanciful signatures; it consists of focusing on the evidence of the rules that govern the game of mystification).³¹⁷ That is to say, just as Love noted the possibility that scholarly suspiciousness could “easily get out of hand,” Jeandillou recognizes a difference between admissible and “excessive” doubt—neither, however, suggests any criteria for the poor “scholars” and “experts,” whom they leave to deliberate over such matters on their own, presumably on a case-by-case basis.

The need for such rules has been discussed above in subsection 2.5.3.³¹⁸ In brief, no boundaries as such exist between serious academic study and pseudoacademic ponderings, because, in the abstract, there are no boundaries *unless boundaries have been drawn by us* and—to quote Ludwig Wittgenstein on the topic of language games (such as scholarly discussions on fakes and forgeries)—“we can draw a boundary—for a special purpose.”³¹⁹ That special purpose here is the demarcation between serious academic study and pseudoacademic ponderings, a distinction, as I have shown in subsection 2.5.3, has become blurred in the study of fakes and forgeries.

316 Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 214–216.

317 Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 213–214.

318 This possibility is also indirectly acknowledged by Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 214: “S’ils ne sont pas illégitimes dans certains cas, les critères axiologiques ne sauraient suffire à rendre un compte fidèle des artifices d’écriture”; cf. Brown, “Twelve Enduring Misconceptions,” 320: “Since this approach [concealed indicators of authority as they are constructed within the alternative narrative] could connect [*Clement’s Letter to Theodore*] to any number of persons, I submit that it does not so much detect clues as invent them.”

319 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (trans. G. E. M. Anscombe; New York: Macmillan, 1953) 33.

In the methodological discussion below, I have drawn from various academic disciplines, including cryptology, communication studies, and literary studies, as well as the long history of the so-called Shakespearean Authorship Question, a topic in which many of the issues raised here have already been discussed and the academic conclusions from which we could repurpose for a broader application—including to avoid missteps. The insights drawn from these fields culminate in the tripartite criteria I have suggested for evaluating *concealed indicators of authority*,³²⁰ according to which the primer (concealed), decipherment (authority), and plain-text solution (indicator) are to be separately assessed. That is, (literary) primer that indicates a concealed indicator of authority must first be identified, then its plain-text solution deciphered according to academic standards of decipherment.

3.1.1 Concealment of indicators of authority

Beginning with the *concealed* aspect of an indicator of authority and returning to the unambiguous example of McEwan’s “shocking attempted fraud” (see 2.5.1.2, above), it is worth noting that McEwan’s playful mystification went unnoticed by many readers. There was, after all, little reason to suspect that anything was amiss. As K. K. Ruthven observed, it was not even noticed by a specialist in psychiatry who reviewed³²¹ McEwan’s novel.³²² Such is the human condition that we are often blind to things outside our focus—what psychologists have termed “inattentional blindness”—most famously demonstrated in an experiment in which participants failed to notice a man dressed in a gorilla costume, as they were prompted to count the number of passes made between one team of basketball players.³²³

320 On the alternative narrative and literary, derivative relationships (hoax) and jokes, see 2.5.1, above. It should be noted here that all of the jokes and most of the literary relationships (hoax) outlined in the alternative narrative could be assessed according to the model presented here. That is, the jokes identified in the alternative narrative can be considered less pertinent forms of concealed indicators of authority (see 2.5.1.2, above; 3.1.4.1, below), while the supposed literary relationships (hoax), especially those concerning Hunter’s novel, function only as further disguised indicators of authority, as discussed in n. 210, above.

321 Ronan J. McIvor, “Enduring Love,” *Psychiatric Bulletin* 23 (1999) 61.

322 Ruthven, *Faking Literature*, 175–176.

323 Discussed in hindsight by the scholars of the original experiment in Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons, *The Invisible Gorilla: And Other Ways Our Intuitions Deceive Us* (New York: Crown, 2010). Such gorillas can also appear in expert material given to expert observers—and are missed in equal measures. This was at least the case in an experiment in which radiologists were given slightly doctored images for which they were instructed to perform a routine lung nodule detection, as reported in Trafton Drew, Melissa L. H. Võ, and Jeremy M. Wolfe, “The Invisible Gorilla Strikes Again: Sustained Inattentional Blindness in Expert Observers,” *Psychological Science* 24 (2013) 1848–1853.

There was, nevertheless, one deliberate clue included in McEwan’s anagram that could have raised the suspicions of the reviewer—as it did others’.³²⁴ The (fictional) names of the authors of the alleged medical case study could have come into focus once the alleged publication choice (*British Journal of Psychiatry*) was discovered to be completely fictional, while further research would have revealed that the authors were likewise non-existent. The importance of such a literary *primer* to, first, raise the awareness of the possibility of doubt, and second, to beckon—like a mystagogue—to take another step towards the mysteries, is implicit in many descriptions of concealed indicators of authority, including the various concealed signatures of Smith within the alternative narrative.³²⁵

Although this notion of the primer is straightforward, it raises the question as to its exact function in the process of deciphering a concealed indicator of authority. To my mind, the concept of the primer offers solutions to three distinct problems that must be resolved before any deciphering can begin: inattentional blindness, cryptanalytic hyperactivity, and question-begging. It should be noted that the primer is foremost a theoretical tool in all three of its solutions. However, although the primer usually is a distinct entity that can be used to expose the concealment and is separate from the indicator of authority proper (e.g., the non-existent journal in the case of McEwan’s anagram is distinct from the actual *steganogram*³²⁶ “Wenn (and) Camia”), there is no reason for the *mystificateur* not to construct their primers more organically—i.e., as inherent parts of the indicators of authority themselves—though I suspect this is not the norm.

3.1.1.1 Primer Solutions (1): Inattentional Blindness

That a concealment of indicators of authority *without* a primer becomes meaningless as an act of mystification is evident in the example of Pope Francis I made up above. That is, nobody could suggest a game of mystification to be played in such an arbitrary and *unfair* (for both the *mystificateur* and the implied audience) manner. How could the reader be expected to choose four letters out of a sentence with over 150 to choose from? Why concentrate on that sentence in the first place? Consider, for another example, the case of “that most shameless scamp” in the alternative narrative: that the opposing printed page to the first handwritten page of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* is deemed so important follows

324 E.g., McCreadie, [No Title].

325 E.g., the primer in the form of spatial proximity, for which see, e.g., Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 87: “But then, on the opposite side, begins the letter of Clement”; Watson, “Beyond Suspicion,” 154: “not in isolation but in conjunction with.”

326 For an explanation of steganograms, see 3.1.1.2, below.

directly from notions of fair play, as it would be largely meaningless for an indicator of authority to be concealed among the 360 printed pages that precedes “that most shameless scamp”—such as Ignatius’s words concerning Jesus in his *Letter to the Magnesians*, in which he notes that the result of our lack of voluntariness τὸ ἀποθανεῖν εἰς τὸ αὐτοῦ πάθος (to die into his misfortune) is that τὸ ζῆν αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ἡμῖν (his life we do not have; *Ign.Magn.* 5.2). That is, this notion in the *Letter to the Magnesians* can be contrasted with the first gospel extract in *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* as readily as the opposition between the (supposed) subversiveness of writing the supposedly invented Markan interpolations into the very book that explicitly condemns a similar practice, denounced as the work of “that most shameless scamp”. In other words, it would be absurd to expect a reader to make such a connection to the *Letter to the Magnesians* without an adequate primer to direct the reader’s attention to this passage. In this case, the primer in the last of the printed pages is its spatial relation (viz., proximity, as the opposite sheet) to the beginning of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*—perhaps together with the contrast between the printed block letters and the cursive handwriting, as well as the Latin-language epilogue of the editor and the Greek-language beginning of the Clementine epistle—which might, at the very least, help alert the reader to the possibility that there is more to uncover here.³²⁷ Thus, the requirement that identification and evaluation of a primer precede the decipherment process is necessitated first by inattentive blindness, or the general human inability to identify inconspicuous details that have not had attention called to them when one is occupied with other details.

3.1.1.2 Primer Solutions (2): Cryptanalytic Hyperactivity

On the second type of solutions offered by primers, one example worth exploring is the so-called Shakespearean Authorship Question, which usually manifests itself as the pseudohistorical proposition that the plays (and poems) of William Shakespeare were written by somebody other than the playwright William Shakespeare (1564–1616) of Stratford-upon-Avon. This claim was first made in the mid-nineteenth century and, from the beginning, widely sought to identify notions of concealed indicators of authority.³²⁸ A

327 Even then, this would be a difficult textual puzzle, despite the (supposed) spatial proximity as its primer.

328 For the most prominent nineteenth-century studies of this kind, see Delia Bacon, *The Philosophy of the Plays of Shakspere Unfolded* (London: Groombridge and Sons, 1857); Donnelly, *Great Cryptogram*. Note the various spellings of Shakespeare’s name around the time of Bacon’s publication, as explained by the editors in “Orthography of Shakespeare’s Name,” in *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art* 3 (1854) 295: “We now spell the poet’s name Shakespeare, though heretofore we have spelled it Shaksper,” citing various reasons for the orthographic change that “have convinced us

recent survey of the number of alternative candidates posited for the authorship of the Shakespearean corpus arrived at a formidable figure of eighty.³²⁹ Unfortunately, despite the lengthy pedigree of the idea, much of the scholarly response has been in the form of ridiculing such claims.³³⁰ This uniformity has been facilitated by the divide between the discussants in this debate, as academic Shakespearean scholars in general have never accepted the proposal of alternative candidates of authorship. Consequently, the debate has been framed as the academic versus the dilettante or the respectable versus the bizarre, and there has been no incentive for scholars to deal seriously with such challengers at an academic level of argumentation.³³¹ Only in the field of cryptology has the question of whether some of the Shakespearean candidates used legitimate cryptographic systems to construct concealed indicators of their authority been studied with a measure of seriousness. On the latter, William F. Friedman and Elizabeth S. Friedman, *The Shakespearean Ciphers Examined* (1957) remains the standard text.³³²

Drawing from the study of cryptology, a basic distinction should be made between the *code* (or *cipher*) and the *steganogram*, in that a code is visible, while the steganogram is not. In other words, the existence of the coded message is known (even if the solution is not), while the steganogram hides not only the solution but its own existence as well.³³³ The concealment of McEwan's name as an anagram—viz., “Wenn (and) Camia”—makes this concealment device a steganogram (as the names “Wenn” and “Camia” can be easily

almost against our will, that Shakespeare, not Shakspeare is the better mode of writing the name.”

329 Matt Kubus, “The Unusual Suspects,” in *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt: Evidence, Argument, Controversy* (ed. Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 49–60, at 51.

330 The last name of John Thomas Looney, who authored “*Shakespeare Identified in Edward De Vere, The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford*” (London: C. Palmer, 1920), e.g., has been unnecessarily ridiculed, as noted in James Shapiro, *Contested Will: Who Wrote Shakespeare?* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010) 169. In Kathleen E. McLuskie's assessment, the “persistent background in the authorship debate” consists, inter alia, of the “Mockery of mental illness ... together with the anger and name-calling that also accompany it”; Kathleen E. McLuskie, “‘This Palpable Device’: Authorship and Conspiracy in Shakespeare's Life,” in *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt: Evidence, Argument, Controversy* (ed. Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 163–177, at 163.

331 The one exception is perhaps *Shakespeare Beyond Doubt: Evidence, Argument, Controversy* (ed. Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

332 William F. Friedman and Elizabeth S. Friedman, *The Shakespearean Ciphers Examined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957). Note, however, that the importance placed here on the existence of a primer stands in direct contradiction with the stipulations in cryptanalysis—evidenced, e.g., by Friedman and Friedman, *Shakespearean Ciphers*, 26; namely, that for the existence of a cipher, “There must be no external clues.”

333 It should be noted that steganograms can technically work without coding their message in the first place, trusting only to their concealment for security. Additionally, it is possible to distinguish further within steganograms, as Friedrich L. Bauer does between the *open code* (in which the message is hidden in plain sight, with the expectation that the coded nature of the message would not be apparent to the outside observer) and the *semagram* (in which the message is encoded in, e.g., alterations in font, letters, or other minor changes such as pin pricks beneath certain letters); Friedrich L. Bauer, *Decrypted Secrets: Methods and Maxims of Cryptology* (Berlin: Springer, 2013) 9–24.

mistaken for the proper names of actual scholars), just as Watson’s suggestion within the alternative narrative that the word $\mu\omega\rho\alpha\nu\theta\eta\nu\alpha\iota$, apart from being a legitimate choice in the Greek sentence it occurs, also conceals the personal name “Morton” within it.

Despite the long history of secret writing, the use of steganograms has received much less scholarly attention than the use of other forms of cryptography.³³⁴ Klaus Schmeh’s *Versteckte Botschaften* (2009) is one of the few recent studies on this phenomenon,³³⁵ in addition to Schmeh’s 2012 survey of the “pathology of cryptology,”³³⁶ the latter term referring to a concept first introduced by David Kahn in 1967.³³⁷ Here, the pathology in question exhibits its symptoms as “cryptanalytic hyperactivity,” or, as in Schmeh, “Code-Fieber” (code fever), by which Kahn and Schmeh refer to a tendency to seek out hosts of “invalid solutions” to imaginary cryptographic puzzles—i.e., to discover coding devices where none exists.³³⁸ Regarding steganograms, such hyperactivity is exceptionally difficult to control, as any text in existence can theoretically function as a cover-text for some sort of hidden message.³³⁹ That is, in Schmeh’s words, “It is obvious that the *non-existence* of a para-code ... cannot be proven.”³⁴⁰ In general, “cryptanalytic hyperactivity” or “Code-Fieber” are the cryptanalysts’ terms of choice for the phenomenon that literary theorists such as Jeandillou have called “doute hyperbolique” (excessive doubt), an attitude that has enabled the likes of Hardouin to compose massive exposés on such

334 It should be noted that with the introduction of information and communication technology, steganography can be *linguistic* or *technical / digital*; only the former is of interest in the study of concealed indicators of authority, while the latter relates to techniques of hiding data within digital structures.

335 Klaus Schmeh, *Versteckte Botschaften: Die faszinierende Geschichte der Steganografie* (Hannover: Heise Zeitschriften Verlag, 2009).

336 Klaus Schmeh, “The Pathology of Cryptology: A Current Survey,” *Cryptologia* 36 (2012) 14–45.

337 David Kahn, “The Pathology of Cryptology,” chap. 24 in *The Codebreakers: The Story of Secret Writing* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

338 Schmeh’s recent survey in “Pathology” contains examples as varied as Equidistant Letter Sequences (most famously applied to the Bible; hence commonly known as “Bible code”), the WOW Signal detected in 1977 by a radio telescope, the various decipherments proposed for the Voynich manuscript, and the notion that “Paul is Dead”—i.e., the idea that Paul McCartney died in 1966 and a look-alike was clandestinely recruited to the Beatles.

339 Kahn, *Codebreakers*, 873.

340 Schmeh, “Pathology,” 16. Emphasis mine. Schmeh does, however, suggest one approach that he dubs “absurd comparative code”. In short, if anyone insists that, e.g., the pyramids exhibit the Ancients’ knowledge of advanced mathematical concepts, because the relationships between various measurements can be described with them, one could just as well take a bicycle or a pasta spoon (to stand for the absurd) and demonstrate a comparable code in them, given that any dimensional object can be used for such derivations; Schmeh, “Pathology,” 16–17. In Shakespearean studies, such an approach has been used to show that cryptographic solutions can be provided for the name of the Stratford-upon-Avon playwright or that of any other figure. For example, consider Joseph Gilpin Pyle’s response to Donnelly’s *The Great Cryptogram* in his *The Little Cryptogram: A Literal Application to the Play of Hamlet of the Cipher System of Mr. Ignatius Donnelly* (St. Paul, Minn.: Pioneer Press, 1888) 25: “Don nill he [Donnelly], the author, politician and mountebanke, will worke out the secret of this play. The Sage [of Nininger—i.e., Donnelly] is a daisy.”

conspiratorial deception.³⁴¹ Thus, the requirement that identification and evaluation of a primer precede the process of decipherment is necessitated second by the difficulties of controlling “cryptanalytic hyperactivity” regarding steganograms, a mindset that can potentially make all texts of any kind carriers of hidden messages.

3.1.1.3 Primer Solutions (3): Question-Begging

The third type of solution offered by primers is their potential to help with the most devious of the problems inherent to the study of concealed indicators of authority: that to posit one is to beg the question. Scholars in the field of literature studies have had to acknowledge time and again that all techniques of mystification, strictly speaking, have to be assumed to be such techniques to even begin dealing with them. In other words, even though the circumstances of scholarly argumentation would enable the eventual admissible status of their identification as acts of mystification, to being the process scholars must first, if only temporarily, beg the question. Thus, Jeandillou notes that a study of mystification “présupposer ... l’existence d’un tel objet” (presupposes ... the existence of such an object),³⁴² while Abramson, following the lead of Jeandillou, laments the “insurmountable hermeneutical difficulties,” when the mere undertaking of a debate on such techniques “not only presupposes their existence, but also assumes their successful identification as mystifications.”³⁴³ Consequently, the requirement that identification and evaluation of a primer precede the decipherment process is necessitated third by the circular logic involved in positing a concealed indicator of authority—i.e., the problem of begging the question. It should be noted that the logical fallacy is not effectively solved here, though it is somewhat mitigated by setting high standard for constructing such an argument. In the abstract, nevertheless, interpretation is as such inescapably circular and can never be so grounded as to be absolutely free of self-referencing, as much contemporary debate on the (anti)foundationalism of epistemology attests.³⁴⁴ This view has been most succinctly summarized by Andrew

341 Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 214–216. Cf. Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 185 (“the urge to deattribute [i.e., uncover a forgery] can easily get out of hand”), discussed in 2.5.2, above.

342 Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 9.

343 Abramson, *Learning from Lying*, 151 n. 16. Similarly, in art history, as explained by Elkins, *Pictorial Complexity*, 179–181, “It could be said that the very act of searching for cryptomorphs is suspect, and, in fact, few art historians actively look for hidden images. Since they are born without historical method or critical control, it is best to be told about them by someone else ... Even when forms have demonstrably been hidden, they *also* speak about the ‘stato dell’animo’ of the viewers—in this case, the historians—who choose to write about them.” Emphasis original.

344 On this topic, see Gary Brent Madison, *The Politics of Postmodernity: Essays in Applied Hermeneutics* (Contributions to Phenomenology; Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001) 69–91; cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (trans. Joan Stambaugh; rev. Dennis J. Schmidt; Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010) 148:

Bowie:

The attempt definitively to ground knowledge is either ... an infinite regress of reasons for reasons, or a circular argument that relies on reasons which themselves require grounding, or a breaking off of the attempt at grounding in the name of something which is taken as dogmatically self-evident.³⁴⁵

Following the above considerations on the importance of identifying and evaluating a literary primer, I suggest the following as the first criterion for the admittance of concealed indicators of authority as evidence of authorship.

Criterion #1: The beginning of the act of decipherment of a concealed indicator of authority must be preceded by a literary primer that is unambiguous to a high degree.

Rationale: A concealed indicator of authority is often signalled by a literary primer, even in cases of little theoretical sophistication, to combat inattentional blindness on the part of the implied reader, and must be treated as a distinct concept that is unambiguous to a high degree for two further reasons: to mitigate the problems of cryptanalytic hyperactivity and begging the question on the part of the scholar.

3.1.2 Authority of Concealed Indicators

Continuing with the *authorial* aspect of concealed indicators of authority, I turn to how a distinction can be made between valid and invalid solutions. In cryptology, the rules of decipherment, which must be unambiguous, are paramount from the perspective of the decipherer for two related reasons. First, it is only by following unambiguous rules of decipherment that the decipherer can ascertain the solution to be unique, or, as Friedman and Friedman write, “there is only one valid solution to a cryptogram of more than a very few letters which involves the use of a real key; to find two quite different but equally valid solutions would be an absurdity.”³⁴⁶ Second, it is only by following unambiguous rules of decipherment that the decipherer can ascertain the solution to be the one intended by the encipherer.³⁴⁷ Furthermore, the requirement to be able to

“What is decisive is not to get out of the circle, but to get in it in the right way ... A positive possibility of the most primordial knowledge is hidden in it which, however, is only grasped in a genuine way when interpretation has understood that its first, constant, and last task is not to let fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception be given to it by chance ideas and popular conceptions, but to guarantee the scientific theme by developing these in terms of the things themselves.”

345 Andrew Bowie, “Gadamer and Romanticism,” in *Gadamer’s Repercussions: Reconsidering Philosophical Hermeneutics* (ed. Bruce Krajewski; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 55–81, at 67–68. Bowie refers here to the philosophy of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819) who, in Bowie’s interpretation, had already established as much against the standard Cartesian position taken by his contemporaries.

346 Friedman and Friedman, *Shakespearean Ciphers*, 22.

347 Friedman and Friedman, *Shakespearean Ciphers*, 18; Kahn, *Codebreakers*, 881.

describe the decipherment process in an unambiguous manner sets a high standard to the practice of constructing concealed indicators of authority *post hoc*, or, as Jeandillou writes, “Le fin mot de l’énigme ... implique la mise en évidence des règles qui régissent un jeu du secret” (The final word concerning mystification ... consists of focusing on the evidence of the rules that govern the game of mystification).³⁴⁸ As such, the demand of unambiguousness for the act of decipherment serves, together with the demand of the identification and evaluation of a literary primer, as a second control on cryptanalytic hyperactivity.

Finally, it should be noted that the concept of decipherment as an act is foremost—just as much as the concept of literary primer—a theoretical tool to enable the admittance of authorial evidence from concealed indicators of authority into scholarly argumentation concerning authorship. As observed above, a steganogram can function without further encipherment, relying only on its concealment, in which case the act of decipherment is not necessitated. In other words, if a primer directs the reader’s attention to a message that is effectively not enciphered, there is no practical next step to be taken to obtaining the plain-text solution. Nevertheless, as a theoretical concept the act of deciphering is still inherent in the process. Consider the case of a simple acrostic: the act of decipherment is simply a process of isolating the first letter of each line of the text and rearranging them in consecutive sequence—an act that is practically never actually required with acrostics, as the plain-text solution can be read from the first letters of subsequent lines just as easily as each of the regular lines of text.

3.1.2.1 Decipherment of Anagrams: An Example

One of the most commonly observed devices for constructing concealed indicators of authority is the anagram (i.e., an unkeyed transposition cipher).³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 213–214.

³⁴⁹ Cf. Albert C. Leighton and Stephen M. Matyas, “The History of Book Ciphers,” in *Advances in Cryptology: Proceedings of CRYPTO ’84* (ed. George Robert Blakley and David Chaum; Lecture Notes in Computer Science 196; Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1985) 101–113, at 102: “Oddly, anagramming is often used as a last resort, especially by the unskilled, to unscramble impossible cryptograms even when there is no logical basis whatsoever for doing so.”

Consider the aforementioned anagram of “Ian McEwan” as “Wenn (and) Camia”.³⁵⁰ If one accounts *only for its cryptographic properties*, it is practically unsolvable. First, natural languages include *redundancy*, meaning that certain letters and their combinations are more probable than others.³⁵¹ The McEwan anagram is short, totalling nine letters, and happens to exhibit much less redundancy than a longer, random selection of prose in the English language might.³⁵² This characteristic becomes important when considering *unicity distance*, a concept introduced by Claude Shannon in 1949 to refer to the minimum amount of ciphertext required for a unique solution to be theoretically achievable.³⁵³ For the most often used example, the unicity distance of a simple monoalphabetic substitution cipher in the English language—think of William Legrand in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Gold-Bug” or Sherlock Holmes in Arthur Conan Doyle’s “The Adventure of the Dancing Men”—is about 28 characters.³⁵⁴ That is, the ciphertext message has to be at least 28 characters long for a decipherer with unlimited computation power to be able to ascertain a unique solution.³⁵⁵ Thus, the fact that McEwan’s anagram has a per-character redundancy that is much lower than the normal *implies a higher unicity distance compared to an average transposition cipher*. That is, a transposition cipher with low redundancy, akin to McEwan’s anagram, would have to have more than 28 characters for a unique solution to be theoretically achievable; however, McEwan’s anagram comprises only nine characters.

350 Alfred J. Menezes, Paul C. van Oorschot, and Scott A. Vanstone, *Handbook of Applied Cryptography* (Boca Raton, Flo.: CRC Press, 1996) 238: a transposition cipher produces a ciphertext c which corresponds to plain-text $m = m_1 \dots m_t$ as $c = E_e(m) = m_{e(1)} \dots m_{e(t)}$, where E is the encryption function, e is the encryption key, and t is the fixed period of characters encrypted. Following this notation, $t = 9$ and $e = (7\ 6\ 9\ 3\ 5\ 8\ 4\ 1\ 2)$, if $m = \text{IanMcEwan}$, meaning that $c = \text{wEnncamIa}$, a code further concealed by spacing and capitalization of the ciphertext as “Wenn (and) Camia”.

351 Menezes, van Oorschot, and Vanstone, *Applied Cryptography*, 245–246.

352 For standard frequencies, see Menezes, van Oorschot, and Vanstone, *Applied Cryptography*, 247–248; compared to the normal frequency of single characters in the English language, the letter N in McEwan’s anagram occurs more than three times, as does the letter C, and the letter W occurs more than five times more frequently; of the 15 most common bigrams in the English language, McEwan’s anagram contains only one (AN), a frequency of more than six times more than normal.

353 Claude E. Shannon, “Communication Theory of Secrecy Systems,” *Bell Systems Technical Journal* 28 (1949) 656–715.

354 Martin E. Hellman, “An Extension of the Shannon Theory Approach to Cryptography,” *IEEE Transactions on Information Theory* 23 (1977) 289–294, at 291; Menezes, van Oorschot, and Vanstone, *Applied Cryptography*, 247.

355 Though as noted in Cipher A. Deavours, “Unicity Points in Cryptanalysis,” *Cryptologia* 1 (1977) 46–68, at 55, given limited resources, an effective unicity distance is calculated to be around 38 characters. Then again, other variables, such as the decipherer’s ability to employ higher-order relations once parts of the plain-text are revealed means that the *practical* unicity distance is only around 25 characters, as noted in Deavours, “Unicity Points in Cryptanalysis,” 55. Thus, William F. Friedman, “Cryptology,” in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (14th edition; vols. 24; Chicago, Ill.: William Benton, 1973) 6:844–851, at 848: “Practically every example of 25 or more characters representing the monoalphabetic encipherment of a ‘sensible’ message in English can be readily solved.”

The second reason for the technical insolvability of McEwan’s anagram is, alternatively, that it fulfills Shannon’s requirements for “perfect secrecy,” or because of its high message equivocation. As with all traditional anagrams, McEwan’s anagram can be considered an example of an unkeyed transposition cipher—i.e., unlike many other variants of transposition ciphers, such an anagram is not keyed in its encipherment process in any specific manner.³⁵⁶ On the other hand, the encipherment of anagrams can also be described as keyed, albeit with an encryption key of equal length to the anagram itself.³⁵⁷ The latter option becomes crucial following Shannon’s further work on the theoretical concept of “perfect secrecy,” which requires that two conditions are met: that the keyspace (i.e., the theoretical maximum number of different keys in a given encryption scheme) is at least equal to the message space (i.e., the theoretical maximum number of different messages) and that the encryption key is of at least equal length to the message.³⁵⁸ Both of Shannon’s conditions are true of anagrams when they are described as keyed transposition ciphers, such that, as Craig P. Bauer has commented,

If the length of the transposition key equals the length of the message, the cryptanalyst is essentially playing Scrabble with a large number of tiles and may be able to form several meaningful solutions with no statistical reason for favoring one over another.³⁵⁹

356 This description is used, e.g., in Leighton and Matyas, “Book Ciphers,” 102. In contrast, other forms of transposition ciphers, which divide the plain-text into blocks of glyphs, are individually rearranged according to an encryption key. One example of a category of such keyed transposition ciphers is the route cipher, in which, e.g., a specific keyword can be used to indicate the “route” (i.e., the agreed order) the decipherer should take to produce the cleartext from the ciphertext.

357 Cf. n. 350, above, where McEwan’s anagram is described using the notation in Menezes, van Oorschot, and Vanstone, *Applied Cryptography*, 238. Such an example represents one instance where the encryption key is of equal length to the plain-text.

358 Shannon, “Secrecy Systems,” 679–683. The most often cited example of “perfect secrecy” is the Vernam system, or the “one-time pad” cipher, presented in its original 1917 form as a variant of the Vigenère (i.e., a polyalphabetic substitution) cipher. For a technical, yet concise explanation of the Vernam cipher, see John B. Anderson and Rolf Johannesson, *Understanding Information Transmission* (IEEE Press Understanding Science & Technology Series 18; Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2006) 219–220.

359 Craig P. Bauer, *Secret History: The Story of Cryptology* (Discrete Mathematics and Its Applications; Boca Raton, Flo.: CRC Press, 2016) 131. Regarding Bauer’s notion, it is sometimes necessary to consider the differences between key and message equivocation—roughly corresponding to the difference between “playing Scrabble” with five versus fifty tiles. Simply put, key equivocation decreases as message length increases (i.e., the longer the ciphertext, the less ambiguity there is about the correct encryption key, until at some point beyond the unicity distance of that particular cipher only one valid key remains possible), but the case is more complex in the case of message equivocation. When the message enciphered contains only a handful of characters, there is likewise only a handful of ways—due to the redundancy of natural languages—to put together a sensible message. Yet, as Jan C. A. van der Lubbe, *Basic Methods of Cryptography* (trans. Steve Gee; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 44 has observed, “As soon as [message length] increases, the number of possible messages increases dramatically and, consequently, the message equivocation rises,” only to plateau as the message equivocation curve approaches the key equivocation curve.

Consider the anagrammatic challenge William F. Friedman issued in 1959, following the historical practice of such figures as Galileo Galilei (1564–1642),³⁶⁰ in which he enciphered his opinion on the meaning of the Voynich manuscript, a fifteenth-century manuscript written in a script that was never deciphered:

I PUT NO TRUST IN ANAGRAMMATIC ACROSTIC CIPHERS, FOR THEY
ARE OF LITTLE REAL VALUE—A WASTE—AND MAY PROVE NOTHING.
—FINIS.³⁶¹

After a number of incorrect anagrammatic readings were produced in the ensuing years, the intended plain-text message was revealed in 1970.³⁶² Below, I have reproduced Friedman’s own decipherment, together with my own variant:

THE VOYNICH MS WAS AN EARLY ATTEMPT TO CONSTRUCT A CIPHER
FOR A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF AN IRRATIONALIST, IF MIRED,
TYPE.

THE VOYNICH MSS WAS AN EARLY ATTEMPT TO CONSTRUCT AN
ARTIFICIAL OR UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF THE A PRIORI TYPE.—
FRIEDMAN.

The meanings of these two solutions are mutually incompatible, and there is no intrinsic reason to favour one solution over the other. Furthermore, given the number of letters this anagram contains, many more equally plausible readings could still be devised, apart from my own and those suggested prior to 1970. Consequently, the Friedman anagram presents a clear example of an anagram with high message equivocation,³⁶³ as the high number of characters allows this purported opinion on the Voynich manuscript to be practically of any kind.³⁶⁴

360 In one famous example, Galileo enciphered a discovery of his—that “Cynthiae figuras aemulatur mater amorum,” i.e., (in Galilei’s own explanation) “Venere imita le figure della Luna” (Venus mimics lunar phases)—as “Haec immatura a me jam frustra leguntur, o.y.” See, e.g., Galileo’s letters dated 11 December, 1610 and 1 January, 1611, in Edward Stafford Carlos (trans.), *The Sidereal Messenger of Galileo Galilei and a Part of the Preface to Kepler’s Dioptrics Containing the Original Account of Galileo’s Astronomical Discoveries* (London: Rivingtons, 1880) 93–94, 96–99.

361 William F. Friedman and Elizabeth S. Friedman, “Acrostics, Anagrams, and Chaucer,” *Philological Quarterly* 38 (1959) 1–20, at 19 n. 28.

362 Curt A. Zimansky, “Editor’s Note: William F. Friedman and the Voynich Manuscript,” *Philological Quarterly* 49 (1970) 433–443, at 438.

363 See n. 359, above, for a brief explanation of message equivocation.

364 Incidentally, the message Friedman intended is the second one, where the abbreviation MSS (usually indicating the pl. of manuscript) is used, though historians would generally refer instead to the Voynich MS (manuscript, sg.). Should the provenience of the two solutions become muddled somehow, some might argue that the erroneous (or, at least, less widely used) reference to the Voynich manuscript in plural could not possibly be the “correct” decipherment.

McEwan's anagram, on the other hand, with a length of only nine characters, has much lower message equivocation than the Friedman anagram—yet an anagram generator³⁶⁵ was able to find 161 unique anagrams constructed of words that occur in English dictionaries for the input “IanMcEwan,” none of which includes “Wenn” or “Camia”. Expanded to include a list of all known surnames in the English language, the possibilities would be greater still. Given that the English language has an average word-length (in normal, running text) of 4.79 letters and that 80% of such words are between 2 and 7 letters in length, there is reason to be suspicious of almost all anagrams of at least five letters in length,³⁶⁶ since already at this point the level of message equivocation becomes too high, given an unknown amount of redundancy (i.e., a short extract might deviate from expected levels of redundancy to a remarkable degree). Consequently, given purely mathematical considerations, a transposition cipher that uses a key equal to the length of its message of *more than four characters* can almost never be ascertained to have a unique solution.³⁶⁷

Why, then, do I claim that McEwan's anagram has been solved in a way that is unambiguous to a high degree? As explicated above, there is no mathematical basis for this claim. Rather, other factors contribute to this evaluation. First, there is the author's own words that “Wenn (and) Camia” was intended to be an anagram of “Ian McEwan”.³⁶⁸ Second, a long tradition of mystification has been brought about by the unambiguous literary primer—namely, a non-existent (fictional) article having been “published” in a non-existent journal by non-existent authors (see 3.1.1.2, above). Third, this tradition exists within a larger tradition of mystification, where the personal names of fictitious authors and characters are used as concealed indicators of authority (see 2.5.1.2, above).³⁶⁹ Fourth, the plain-text solution “Ian McEwan” is unambiguous that it happens to fit the general circumstances that a fictional article has been described in a novel authored by a person with the same name as the plain-text solution (see 3.1.3, below).

365 *Internet Anagram Server / I, Rearrangement Servant*, at wordsmith.org.

366 Peter Norvig, “English Letter Frequency Counts: Mayzner Revisited or ETAOIN SRHLDCU”; <http://norvig.com/mayzner.html>. Note that this study updates the standard work (Mark S. Mayzner and Margaret Elizabeth Tresselt, “Tables of Single-letter and Digram Frequency Counts for Various Word-length and Letter-position Combinations,” *Psychonomic Monograph Supplements* 1 (1965) 13–32) with data retrieved from Google books Ngrams, at <http://storage.googleapis.com/books/ngrams/books/datasetsv2.html>.

367 Cf. Friedman and Friedman, “Acrostics, Anagrams,” 6: “The anagrammatic method is as flexible as the ingenuity of the anagrammatist who employs it.”

368 McEwan, “Shocking,” 508.

369 Thus Lenain, *Art Forgery*, 293: “In the long tradition of literary mystifications, the clues (which only the cleverest and best-informed persons will notice) usually lie in the names of fictitious authors or characters, so endowed with the status of encrypted signs.”

Consequently, it is the higher-order relations of these four points that allow us to be certain about the correct solution of McEwan's anagram—in a way that would not be possible by applying mathematical considerations alone.

Finally, the above considerations concerning the properties of anagrams help explain why anagrams have been commonly used in pseudohistorical works. A high message equivocation (i.e., multiple solutions) results in a high degree of plasticity that can then be used to construct outrageous solutions to historical questions. Thus, contrary to Albert C. Leighton and Stephen M. Matyas, I find that there is nothing “odd” in the tendency for enthusiasts of pseudohistory to make use of anagrams as their means of decipherment: they have an outsized potential to supply a desired answer.³⁷⁰ For the same reason, it is up to the professional historian to discourage their usage in historical inquiries, as the anagram itself should never be taken as authoritative; only in connection with other, higher-order relations between the anagram and its environment can a historical argument be made on the basis of an anagram.

Following these considerations on the importance of describing the method of decipherment, using the decipherment of anagrams as our example, I suggest the following as the second criterion for the admittance of concealed indicators of authority as evidence of authorship.

Criterion #2: Following the prompting of the literary primer, the act of deciphering a concealed indicator of authority must follow a technique or method that is unambiguous to a high degree.

Rationale: A plausible technique of decipherment must be identifiable to guarantee the uniqueness of the solution—i.e., the decipherer should be able to arrive from a literary primer to the supposed plain-text solution via a defined technique. Consequently, the requirement that the method of decipherment be unambiguous to a high degree further mitigates the problems of cryptanalytic hyperactivity and question-begging.

3.1.3 Indication of Concealed Authority

How does a concealed indicator of authority indicate its concealed authority? Following the identification of literary primer and of the process of decipherment, we arrive at the identification of the plain-text solution, which I propose must be as unambiguous as the steps that precede it. Formally, then, the third criterion for the admittance of concealed indicators of authority as evidence of authorship is as follows:

³⁷⁰ Leighton and Matyas, “Book Ciphers,” 102.

Criterion #3: Following the prompting of the literary primer and the process of decipherment, both of which must have been unambiguous to a high degree, the plain-text solution to the concealed indicator of authority must likewise be unambiguous to a high degree.

Before explicating the rationale for criterion #3, I first briefly explain the recurring phrase “unambiguous to a high degree,” specifically as it pertains to the plain-text solution—though the following considerations are equally applicable in the first two criteria.

To ask whether the plain-text solution is *unambiguous* to a high degree is to ask whether the plain-text solution contains a *meaning* that is of sufficient *clarity*. The question of meaning (of whatever degree of clarity) is a complex topic in contemporary philosophy of language, yet there are two guiding notions that help in developing criteria for concealed indicators of authority. First, there is the communicative intent of the *mystificateur* themselves. From the perspective of literary studies of mystification, as Jeandillou has observed, “on interprète du même coup les intentions de qui le prend en charge et l'action exercée par ce biais sur les destinataires pressentis” (we interpret, at the same time, the intentions of the one in charge [i.e., the perpetrator] and the action that is taken in this way upon the intended recipients).³⁷¹ Or, as Lenain formulates this point, a mystification has to be “conceived as active and intentional”—i.e., “defined as an expression in the proper sense, since it derives from a more or less conscious will to reveal, to communicate.”³⁷² From the viewpoint of the cryptanalyst, this formulation can be constructed in an even more straightforward manner: “Ciphers are meant to be deciphered, or no one would use them.”³⁷³

Second, there is the subversiveness inherent in the study of the fake, as explicated in chapter 1 of this dissertation, which suggests that we approach the question of communicating meaning from the perspective of its opposite—i.e., failure to communicate. Such a failure might be described as an “unhappy” occurrence, as John L. Austin does in his speech-act theory:

Unless a certain effect is achieved, the illocutionary act [i.e., the speech act from the perspective of what the speaker intended their speech act to mean] will not have been happily, successfully performed.³⁷⁴

371 Jeandillou, *Esthétique*, 27.

372 Lenain, *Leaning from Lying*, 240.

373 Friedman and Friedman, *Shakespearean Ciphers*, 281.

374 John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa; 2nd edition; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) 116. Austin's use of the word “happily” in the citation follows from his

More forcefully, in his criticism of Austin, Jacques Derrida emphasizes that communication as a “signature event” takes place within a particular context—in other words, that a communicative act of any kind is radically interwoven with socially co-accepted significations that compel the critic to distinguish meaning from intention to mean.³⁷⁵ Thus, failure becomes a realistic possibility because of the iterability³⁷⁶ of language itself. In Derrida’s words,

Iterability alters, contaminating parasitically what it identifies and enables to repeat “itself”; it leaves us no choice but to mean (to say) something that is (already, always, also) other than what we mean (to say), to say something other than what we say *and* would have wanted to say, to understand something other than... etc. ... And the *mis* of those misunderstandings to which we have succumbed, or which each of us here accuses the other of having succumbed to, must have its essential condition of possibility in the structure of marks, of remarkable marks or ... of oral or written utterances.³⁷⁷

How do these considerations allow us to understand the applicability of the plain-text solution? If mystification pretends to be a communicative genre, in which, *inter alia*, the *mystificateur* must at some point divulge their own authorship and in every manner of communication contains an “essential condition of possibility” of failure, then, regardless of the intention of the *mystificateur* to reveal, there must also exist instances of failed communication in the tradition of mystification. That is to say, instead of the peculiar “normal” of studying the historical fake according to instances where the fake has been poor enough to fail, the study of the failure to communicate in this context not only requires that the fake itself has failed but also that, whatever communication might have been intended, that communication and the hoax as whole are themselves failures—a thoroughly fail-u-r(e) of epic proportions.

observation that a failure of the speech act does not make it “false but in general *unhappy* ... for this reason we call the doctrine of *the things that can be and go wrong* on the occasion of such utterances, the doctrine of the *Infelicities*”; Austin, *Things with Words*, 14. Emphasis original.

375 Cf. Todd May, *Reconsidering Difference: Nancy, Derrida, Levinas, and Deleuze* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) 96: “Writing, if it is more than mere scratches on a page, must convey a meaning that is a product of the code—the social system of signification—from which that writing draws its significative resources. That meaning is independent of the communicative intention of the person doing the writing in this specific sense: the writing has a meaning, a socially accepted signification, regardless of what the person who did the writing wants that writing to mean.”

376 Mark Alfino, “Another Look at the Derrida-Searle Debate,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 24 (1991) 143–152, at 146 defines iterability as “the necessary possibility that any meaningful item of language will remain meaningful (though not necessarily possess the same meaning) through its repetition across contexts.”

377 Jacques Derrida, “Limited Inc a b c...,” in *Limited Inc* (trans. Samuel Weber; Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988) 29–110, at 62.

Taking into consideration both the (implied) author's intention and their action as it pertains to their (implied) *audience*, as noted by Jeandillou above, does, however, offer a practical solution to this problem. Consider textual critics as an audience for mystification (not necessarily an audience the *mystificateur* might have had in mind). Different audiences differ in their ideas of unambiguousness and degrees of clarity, such that an illegible plain-text solution to one audience could well be considered legible for another.³⁷⁸ An analogous example might be the allusion, a communicative textual device for which admissibility as evidence for the purposes of scholarly debate has been considered extensively. Christopher A. Beetham, for instance, observes that,

An author has failed in his use of allusion as a literary device if the audience does not catch the reference. ... The allusion may be there, embedded in the text, even though the audience missed it.³⁷⁹

The crucial point here concerns the *duty* inherent in communicative attempts, including the mystifier's own authoring of concealed indicators of authority. Suppose I place a large potato into my mouth before beginning to speak. My listeners might insist that the message I would have intended to deliver *and* did deliver *per potato* might "be there," to quote Beetham, and perhaps they would be right. From their point of view, however, I might as well have intended to speak in nonsensical verse, as the communicative result would be the same. Likewise, a *mystificateur* who has failed to follow certain precautions will have voluntarily (if unwittingly) made their game of mystification unwinnable. That is, their message of authorship will consequently become irretrievable *post hoc* just as my speech in the above example will have become inscrutable *post potato*.

Two examples of such epic failure to communicate can be cited here. First, there are the cases where one of the constituents of concealed indicators of authority has become wholly inaccessible to the intended audience. One such example is the case of Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *Marbot: Eine Biographie* (1981), which resembled the author's earlier *Mozart: Biographie* (1977) in all but one detail: neither Andrew Marbot (1801–1830) nor any of his family relatives were real people.³⁸⁰ Apart from this single unexpected detail, all the

378 Consider how Poe explicated this notion through the character of Mr. William Legrand in his short story "The Gold Bug": "This [cipher] was of a simple species—such, however, as would appear, to the crude intellect of the sailor, absolutely insoluble without the key"; Edgar Allan Poe, "The Gold Bug," in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (Mineola, N.Y.: Calla Editions, 2008) 291–325, at 317. Cf. Edmunds, "Theognis," 34 on the author's mystificatory tactics: "The strategy consists in composing poetry for the *agathoi*, in a manner that only they can understand and only if they possess a *sophia* corresponding to the poet's."

379 Beetham, *Echoes*, 12.

380 Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Marbot: Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981); Wolfgang Hildesheimer,

features of a proper historical biography were present: among other details, reproductions of paintings allegedly portraying the Marbot family members and an index of historical characters. Given that the Marbot family is fictional, Hildesheimer in fact omits them from this index, and simply uses artworks as if they depicted family portraits—for example, Sir Henry Raeburn’s *Lieut-Colonel Bryce McMurdo* (ca. 1800–1810) is labelled in the book “*Sir Francis Marbot*”.³⁸¹ These details function as wonderful clues signalling for the reader to demystify and uncover the fictional nature of *Marbot*, prompting the reader to snap out of their inattention by recognizing the mislabelled paintings and identifying the fictional status of Andrew Marbot by noting, among other things, the absence of the Marbot family from the index of historical characters. This is at least the case in Hildesheimer’s German original, but the French translation of *Marbot* inexplicably adds the Marbot family members to the index.³⁸² As Abramson notes, “Since the index of names is an authenticating device for the novel, and the omission of the false names a clue as to the mystification, this appears to be an error on the part of the translator.”³⁸³ This error—i.e., removing an unambiguous authorial detail—leads to a rather catastrophic failure in Hildesheimer’s communicative attempts, for the inferences drawn solely from the mislabelled portraits are necessarily less unique without the enciphered message itself—that Andrew Marbot (as marked by his absence from the index of historical characters) is a fictional character.³⁸⁴

Second, some concealed indicators of authority are so vague and ambiguous in all three constituent parts that it is impossible for the decipherer to succeed in demystifying them. A prime example of such a failure to communicate is the curious case of Ern Malley, a fictitious poet invented as a vehicle for mocking the Australian modernist movement in the 1940s, concocted by James McAuley and Harold Stewart.³⁸⁵ One of their deliberate

Mozart: Biographie (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977).

381 Ulrich Weisstein, “Wolfgang Hildesheimer’s *Marbot*: Fictional Biography and Treatise on Comparative Literature,” *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 32 (1983) 23–38, at 36–37 n. 11.

382 Wolfgang Hildesheimer, *Sir Andrew Marbot* (trans. Martin Kaltenecker; Paris: J.-C. Lattès, 1984).

383 Abramson, *Learning from Lying*, 174 n. 9. Abramson credits Jean-Marie Schaeffer, “Loup, si on jouait au loup? (Feinte, simulacre et art),” *Autrement dire* 6 (1989) 111–123, at 118 n. 10.

384 The primer, decipherment, and plain-text solution are presented here in a simplified manner; there is more to the portrayal of Andrew Marbot in *Marbot* that could legitimately be described equally as belonging to the various primers, ways of deciphering, and resulting plain-text solutions. My presentation here is only the most unambiguous manner of arriving at the conclusion that Hildesheimer, as Dorrit Cohn noted, “evidently intended [*Marbot*] to be recognized and admired for what it is: a masterful disguise”; Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) 79. Emphasis original.

385 For a comprehensive analysis, see the standard study of the so-called Ern Malley Affair by Michael Heyward, *The Ern Malley Affair* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), which also reprints the complete poems of Ern Malley.

“clues” to the non-existence of Ern Malley was concealed in a letter of (the equally fictitious) Ethel Malley, the sister of the recently deceased fictional poet, who wrote “that his death was due to Graves’ disease. If he had only taken better care of himself it need not have been fatal.”³⁸⁶

According to Stewart, “nobody dies of [that] disease. Wouldn’t you have thought that would have alerted them?”³⁸⁷ The problem with this primer, however, lies in the ambiguity of the original formulation of Ethel Malley, which does not claim that his brother died of Graves’ disease, but *due* to it, the latter having been attested in at least since the seventeenth century to mean “attributable to a particular cause or origin; derived or arising from; caused by, consequent on; as a result of.”³⁸⁸ Such consideration might appear to be splitting hairs, but a more direct causal link implied by the construction “die of” would have been preferable, because the death of Ern Malley now follows from his rejection to take “better care of himself”. That is, there is no disagreement between Stewart’s statement that “nobody dies of [Graves’] disease” and Ethel Malley’s words that his brother would still be alive, “If he had only taken better care of himself.” Furthermore, the ambiguity of this phrase must be read in the context of the letter itself—namely, that Ethel Malley is not a medical expert, nor does the letter purport to be an epicrisis chronicling the exact cause of death of the patient. Thus, there are several good reasons why dying “due to Graves’ disease” might not alert the critic as McAuley and Stewart had intended, since, in its context, Ethel Malley’s statement cannot be construed as unambiguous to a degree that would effectively snap the reader out of their inattention and thus to actively pursue other clues embedded within the poems themselves. This once again exhibits the unavoidable circular nature of deciphering a mystification and the importance of constructing them in the proper manner—i.e., not to design them so that they are unwinnable by design.

While many critics have claimed that the poems of Ern Malley are “full of clues to the status of its alleged author ... as an imposter,”³⁸⁹ each one of these is nevertheless ambiguous to a degree that stymies the reader from deciphering the intended message.

386 This citation from Ethel Malley’s letter was first published in Max Harris, “Introduction,” *Angry Penguins* 7 (1944) 2–6, at 2, a literary journal edited by Harris and to which the poems of Ern Malley were initially submitted for publication.

387 Quoted by Heyward, *Ern Malley*, 107.

388 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. “due, *adj.* and *adv.*”

389 Judith Ryan, “After the ‘Death of the Author’: The Fabrication of Helen Demidenko,” in *Cultures of Forgery: Making Nations, Making Selves* (ed. Judith Ryan and Alfred Thomas; New York: Routledge, 2003) 169–198, at 178.

As Ruthven observes,

You need either to know or at least suspect that “Ern Malley” never existed before you can recover “evidence” of that fact from the texts of his poems. Only then will they appear to bristle with clues ... “Our serious frolic” will suddenly seem as revelatory a phrase as Ireland’s “solemn mock’ry,” and what looked like a mere Dylan Thomas-ism (“this No-Man’s-language”) will be read as a blindingly obvious clue when linked to the statement elsewhere in these poems “that a poet may not exist”. Not until you know that two people fabricated them will you experience “confirmation” of that fact in the phrase, “we are as the double almond concealed in one shell”.³⁹⁰

That is, more succinctly, “in matters of interpretation, no ‘fact’ pre-exists the hypothesis that constructs it as such, and no ‘clue’ precedes a suspicion.”³⁹¹ The onus is again on the perpetrator of mystification to ensure that the message they intend to communicate remains, at least in principle, retrievable *post hoc*. In other words, given that at least 25 characters are needed for a message in a monoalphabetic substitution cipher in English language to be decipherable in practice, composing any message with fewer characters than this bare minimum would be a fool’s work. Likewise, and given that anagrams of more than four characters almost never contain unique solutions, this particular literary device is always a poor choice for such a manner of communication.

To be unambiguous to a high degree is far from being an insurmountable obstacle for the *mystificateur*.³⁹² That is, there are limits to the medium (of physical manuscripts and artefacts) to mediate between whatever events there were in the past and whatever academic historians end up writing about them. Without actively challenging the inattentive blindness of the intended audience, on one hand, and controlling for cryptanalytic hyperactivity and question-begging, on the other, while also ensuring that decipherment leads to a unique solution *pertinent* to the intended revelation, there will be difficulties in persuading the audience of the relevance of such a revelation, especially a skeptical audience, as academic historians are ideally meant to be.

To return to the topic of unambiguity of plain-text solutions, a concealed indicator of authority must not falter at the end but maintain a high degree of accuracy in its identification of a particular individual as its author. That is, even if its (literary) primer and technique of decipherment are unambiguous to a high degree, the plain-text solution

390 Ruthven, *Faking Literature*, 176.

391 Ruthven, *Faking Literature*, 176.

392 As noted in Paananen, *WWFD*,” 4 n. 13, referring to Ruthven, *Faking Literature*, 177, there is a “complete lack, as Ruthven notes, of ‘interest in identifying criteria for evaluating spurious texts’ for their literary qualities, even when ‘it is widely acknowledged that some are better than others.’”

itself must also be pertinent to whatever it was designed to indicate. Suppose, for instance, that Pope Francis really did embed his title (*papa*) to a sentence in section 3.1 of this dissertation: how would scholars establish that identity, since the title itself is common not only to Pope Francis, but also to his predecessors and successors? Scholars might, perhaps, begin by trying to locate the origin of this document, cross-referencing its production with other details known about its author, studying the file metadata of its various versions, etc. Should they fail, the plain-text solution itself would not offer the kind of unambiguity that would enable them to pick Francis over Benedict XVI.³⁹³ Whatever decisions we might make on philosophical grounds over the notions of meaning or clarity, the message of the will to communicate is delivered “happily” only when both the sender and the receiver are able to agree that the same message was communicated.

Given these considerations, I present the rationale for the third criterion:

Rationale: From the perspective of fakes (mystification) as a communicative genre, it is crucial that the plain-text solution of a concealed indicator of authority is unambiguous to a high degree to ascribe the authorship confidently to a specific party.

3.1.4 Tripartite Criteria for Concealed Indicators of Authority in Action

Mystification is a delicate game. Genuine mystifications might fail to attract the attention they were designed for, while “hyperactivity” might transform a genuine work into a fantastic mystification. The tripartite criteria outlined in subsections 3.1.1–3.1.3 aim to provide a coherent framework for to analyse and evaluate concealed indicators of authority, a key convention in the genre of mystification.³⁹⁴ One question that remains, however, is the applicability of these criteria.

393 They would, however, argue the matter on numerous other counts; Pope Benedict XVI would be considered a less likely candidate by pointing, e.g., to the words of Greg Burke, senior communications adviser of the Vatican in 2012–2015, that “The pope [Benedict XVI] is not the kind of person like the rest of us who in a meeting or a lunch is looking at their BlackBerrys to see if any messages have come in,” as reported by *The New York Times* on December 4, 2012.

394 For the opposite exercise—to apply these criteria as a roadmap for creating one’s own concealed indicators of authority—I would suggest Jeandillou, *Esthétique* as an indispensable companion for such pursuits.

Table 10: Criteria for the Admissibility of Concealed Indicators of Authority

Criterion #1: for admissible concealment of indicators of authority
The beginning of the act of decipherment of a concealed indicator of authority must be preceded by a literary primer that is unambiguous to a high degree.
Rationale: A concealed indicator of authority is often signalled by a literary primer, even in cases of little theoretical sophistication, to combat inattentive blindness on the part of the implied reader, and must be treated as a distinct concept that is unambiguous to a high degree for two further reasons: to mitigate the problems of cryptanalytic hyperactivity and begging the question on the part of the scholar.
Criterion #2: for admissible authority of concealed indicators
Following the prompting of the literary primer, the act of deciphering a concealed indicator of authority must follow a technique or method that is unambiguous to a high degree.
Rationale: A plausible technique of decipherment must be identifiable to guarantee the uniqueness of the solution—i.e., the decipherer should be able to arrive from a literary primer to the supposed plain-text solution via a defined technique. Consequently, the requirement that the method of decipherment be unambiguous to a high degree further mitigates the problems of cryptanalytic hyperactivity and question-begging.
Criterion #3: for admissible indication of concealed authority
Following the prompting of the literary primer and the process of decipherment, both of which must have been unambiguous to a high degree, the plain-text solution to the concealed indicator of authority must likewise be unambiguous to a high degree.
Rationale: From the perspective of fakes (mystification) as a communicative genre, it is crucial that the plain-text solution of a concealed indicator of authority is unambiguous to a high degree to ascribe the authorship confidently to a specific party.

3.1.4.1 General Application:

The question here concerns the elements of concealed indicators of authority themselves: how is one to recognize (i.e., make a valid interpretation of) primers or techniques of decipherment—or any other detail—about texts in the first place? This last question reiterates the perennial question of hermeneutics—about understanding and interpreting texts, whether textual, visual, or otherwise accessible to the senses. As discussed in subsection 2.5.2, above, I maintain that a demarcation should be made between what we have and what we justify to our peers (based on what we have). Especially the justificatory criteria scholars apply to reach their conclusions are of prime importance, as they are often used implicitly, though they should be laid out explicitly. As David B. Resnik has observed, demarcations—even the grand demarcation between science and pseudoscience, but until recently thought of as an unanswerable conundrum³⁹⁵—are

³⁹⁵ Esp. Larry Laudan, “The Demise of the Demarcation Problem,” in *Psychics, Philosophy and Psychoanalysis: Essays in Honor of Adolf Grünbaum* (ed. R. S. Cohen and L. Laudan; Boston Studies in the Philosophy of

admissible so long as such decisions are “made with an eye toward promoting our practical goals and concerns.”³⁹⁶ To make a distinction, then, between textual details such as concealed indicators of authority and jokes, a pragmatic division (as discussed in 2.5.1.2, above) can be made according to pertinence. That is to say, pertinence is a *virtue* of a clever, amusing concealed indicator of authority, the lack of which makes such an example merely a clever, amusing joke.³⁹⁷ The virtue of pertinence is a useful demarcation marker to distinguish textual devices that are admissible as evidence of authorship (since they pertain to a particular individual) from textual devices that are not.

If pertinence is a necessary virtue of a concealed indicator of authority, how should one then account pragmatically for the recognition of primers or of techniques of decipherment from a text—or, indeed, for the recognition of any kind of textual feature? As the scope of such a consideration is much wider than simply distinguishing between individual textual features such as concealed indicators of authority and jokes, the answer to this question might end up being too broad—i.e., unable to demarcate between the acceptability of one notion or another due to being too abstract. Nevertheless, I suggest here the notion of *consistency* as a useful line of demarcation, especially in matters related to suspected features of forgery.

Of all the scholarly virtues one would have classically assigned to academic history writing—for instance, impartiality (objectivity), evaluation of the quality of sources (source criticism), coherence of the emerging historical narrative (consistency), intellectual honesty according to the principle of charity when interpreting historical sources (historicism / contextualism)—the only one to survive decades of well-justified criticism in the philosophy of history is the notion of consistency. Here, consistency refers less to the classical sense of the virtue as it relates to historiography (wherein the coherence of the narrative itself is a trivial necessity) but to the practices ingrained in

Science 76; Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1983) 111–127, at 125: “What makes a belief well founded (or heuristically fertile)? And what makes a belief scientific? The first set of questions is philosophically interesting and possibly even tractable; the second question is both *uninteresting* and, judging by its checkered past, *intractable*.” Emphasis mine.

396 David B. Resnik, “A Pragmatic Approach to the Demarcation Problem,” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 31 (2000) 249–267, at 264.

397 The framing of the desired epistemic qualities as virtues can be traced back to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. My use of the word virtue here should not, however, be confused with the contemporary “virtue epistemology,” for which see Ernest Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980) 3–25. The pragmatic approach to virtue as a quality of demarcations *themselves* and not of the individual intellects making these demarcations is more attuned to the philosophies of history of Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991).

historiography, including the application of criteria to justify one's historical arguments.

The importance of the virtue of consistency is easiest to explain through a historical example. Towards the end of the twentieth century, Religious Studies was still often practiced “under pressure from a hidden (although invariably unconscious) theological agenda.”³⁹⁸ This agenda manifested itself, e.g., in the study of Christian Origins in the tendency to read the Christian New Testament as a coherent whole, even up to the point of manufacturing various coherent syntheses of its contents under the label “New Testament theology”.³⁹⁹ The problems with this approach are manifold—for instance, the arbitrary decision to adopt a particular historical framework like that of the canons of the Christian New Testament as a limiting factor *after* one has described (and thus put a limit to) the diversity of early Christianity following the same arbitrary framework—a methodological move that could be justified, e.g., if writing to an audience of a faith community that accepts this same framework, but one that is harder to justify in the practice of academic history writing as a whole. One solution I borrow here from Heikki Räisänen for the control of such a “hidden ... theological agenda” is the study of early Christianity from a conscious “history-of-religions point of view”. Such an approach would be descriptive rather than confessional (i.e., early Christian ideas would have to be studied “as human constructs” using “methods similar to those that [we] would apply to any other texts”)—in short, an exercise in “fair play”.⁴⁰⁰

Such “fair play” would require, among other things, the control of one's application of methodology according to *consistency*—refusing to allow double standards to operate in the discipline. *The virtue of consistency as a regulative force is to control the arbitrariness of criteria.* That is, between the physical artefact itself and whatever conclusions happen to be drawn, remaining consistent ensures that the criteria facilitates scholarly discussion about both the conclusions and the criteria themselves. Such an outcome is ensured by requiring that only those criteria are applied that we are willing to live with. That is, the criteria themselves are acknowledged to be necessarily arbitrary choices that aim to fulfil practical goals—in the case of academic historians, this most often means persuading

398 Donald Wiebe, “The Failure of Nerve in the Academic Study of Religion,” *Studies in Religion / Sciences Religieuses* 13 (1984) 401–422, at 402.

399 Heikki Räisänen, *Beyond New Testament Theology: A Story and a Programme* (2nd edition; London: SCM Press, 2000) 126–133. In the words of Frank Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007) 423, “The unity of the New Testament is a presupposition of faith.” Matera's treatise is an excellent, sympathetic take on the history and future of writing such “New Testament theologies”.

400 Heikki Räisänen, *The Rise of Christian Beliefs: The Thought World of Early Christians* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2010) xvii, 3.

their colleagues, since the community of academic historians is the ultimate arbiter of the end results.⁴⁰¹ This communal dimension of academic study is beautifully described by Maarten Boudry, Stefaan Blancke, and Massimo Pigliucci in their evolutionary description of science:

The scientific worldview is a product of collective, cultural design. In some cases, single individuals take great leaps forward, but even their achievements would not have been possible without the collective work of their predecessors. Even geniuses need the shoulders of other giants to stand on. Moreover, brilliant ideas need skillful defenders and promoters to win over the scientific community. As much as many scientists work in relative isolation, sooner or later they need to face the severe “selection” routines of their fellow experts.⁴⁰²

The requirement for consistency in the application of the criteria ensures (together with the guild as arbiter) that academic history writing is not an “anything goes” affair. In practical terms, such demands about textual features such as concealed indicators of authority serve effectively as controls on the questions academic historians choose to debate. Criteria that are too loose in their admission of alleged concealed indicators of authority into the conversations about authorship could result, for example, in most of the 80 candidates for the authorship of the Shakespearean corpus in becoming admissible into serious academic consideration. If this is an end result we are not willing to live with, the criteria of admissible evidence for authorship must be made stricter. Whatever the criteria themselves, the one regulatory test that must always be performed is that of consistency—no special pleading should be allowed, and no historical source excused from the common application of the criteria, notwithstanding their arbitrariness.

401 Cf. Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Philosophical Papers 1; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 42: “When we suggest that one of the few things we know (or need to know) about truth is that it is what wins in a free and open encounter, we are told that we have defined ‘truth’ as ‘satisfies the standards of our community.’ But we pragmatists do not hold this relativist view. We do not infer from ‘there is no way to step outside communities to a neutral standpoint’ that ‘there is no rational way to justify liberal communities over totalitarian communities.’ For that inference involves just the notion of ‘rationality’ as a set of ahistorical principles which pragmatists abjure. What we in fact infer is that there is no way to beat totalitarians in argument by appealing to shared common premises, and no point in pretending that a common human nature makes the totalitarians unconsciously hold such premises.”

402 Maarten Boudry, Stefaan Blancke, and Massimo Pigliucci, “What Makes Weird Beliefs Thrive? The Epidemiology of Pseudoscience,” *Philosophical Psychology* 28 (2015) 1177–1198, at 1180.

3.1.4.2 Specific Application:

McEwan's Anagram

McEwan's anagram has been used extensively above, as it functions as an unambiguous contemporary example of a concealed indicator of authority. A breakdown according to the tripartite criteria outlined above might look like this:

Table 11: *McEwan's Anagram*

Primer	Technique of decipherment	Plain-text solution
Non-existence of the alleged journal of publication / non-existence of the alleged authors	Anagram: "Wenn (and) Camia"	"Ian McEwan"

McEwan's anagram passes at least two of the suggested three criteria of unambiguity with ease: there is an unambiguous primer and an unambiguous technique of decipherment. The fact that its plain-text solution is not unique is unfortunate, being a function inherent in the cryptographic properties of anagrams, but, as discussed at length in sub-subsection 3.1.2.1, there are at least four reasons nevertheless to accept "Ian McEwan" as the correct solution and treat the case of authorship as settled.

Morton's Anagram

On the other hand, the one alleged anagram (almost a cryptic crossword) in the alternative narrative breaks down as follows:

Table 12: *Morton's Anagram*

Primer	Technique of decipherment	Plain-text solution
The reference to "salt" (<i>Theod.</i> I.13–15) is supposedly a technological anachronism, and the word ἄλας (salt) is followed by the word μωραίνω (pass, of salt, lose its savour)	Anagram (cryptic crossword): μωρανθῆναι → μωρ[αν]θῆν[αι] (transliteration: m ō r [a n] th ē n [a i])	"Morton"

The primer in McEwan's anagram is straightforward to verify, unlike the above primer that, first of all, requires extensive knowledge of foodstuff in the ancient world to assess. This convolution does not in itself disqualify the primer, however, as the intended audience of this particular concealed indicator of authority would have been Smith's

colleagues, who would have been cognizant of such matters (or might otherwise have known how to investigate further on this detail). More difficult for the supposed technological anachronism is that, as argued cogently by Brown, it requires a *misreading* of the Greek sentence in *Theod.* as an analogy that its syntax does not allow. Among other problems, the conclusion—i.e., that mixing salt with a substance that would result in it losing its savour *requires* an anti-caking agent that was invented by Morton Salt Company—is simply wrong, as salt in the ancient world could not only lose its savour due to impurities⁴⁰³ but could also be mixed with other substances with the help of ancient technology: mortar and pestle.⁴⁰⁴ The additional step of the primer (i.e., that of noting another word that follows the (alleged) keyword) would then otherwise be more acceptable, given that the meaning of the second word would then be reasonably connected to the first—but the first word does not imply an anachronism as presented within the alternative narrative.⁴⁰⁵

Another take on the primer is to imagine that Smith simply made a poor job when composing it. Yet entertaining such possibility is to summon the historicist notion discussed in subsection 2.5.2 and section 3.1: no matter the historical scenarios we are able to conceive, the key difference between the scholarly and the pseudoscholarly lies in one's ability to distinguish those that can be asserted *post hoc* from the material reality they have been embedded in with reference to some sort of rigorous methodological framework from those that cannot be. In other words, to borrow the historical realist perspective of Ephim G. Fogel, sometimes such things “must be rejected as unreal mockeries even, paradoxically, when they are genuine.”⁴⁰⁶

If the primer above is problematic, the decipherment is worse still. The Greek word that is suggested to divulge the name “Morton” contains ten letters, while the plain-text solution proposed contains only six. Discarding four of the letters is peculiar enough but inexplicable decisions must further be made in transliterating the Greek. In Classical

403 See, e.g., Brown, “Factualizing the Folklore,” 310: “The imagery in [*Theod.*] presupposes an impure form of salt that can lose its sodium chloride without the compound disappearing altogether. Many of the salts used in antiquity were of this sort. As Pliny noted, the salt in these impure compounds was occasionally dissolved away by water, leaving ‘salt’ that lacked its distinctive savor.”

404 Brown, “Factualizing the Folklore,” 306–311.

405 Alternatively, the primer for this cryptic crossword (viz., Morton) has been argued to be its spatial proximity to another concealed indicator of authority—one that uses etymological explanation as its method of decipherment—which would require that the acceptability of the latter for authorial evidence would be established first.

406 Ephim G. Fogel, “Salmons in Both, or Some Caveats for Canonical Scholars,” in *Evidence of Authorship: Essays on Problems of Attribution* (ed. David V. Erdman and Ephim G. Vogel; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966) 69–101, at 101.

Greek, *omega* <ω> should stand for a long /ɔ/ (as opposed to *omicron* <ο>, which stands for a short /o/), but this is perhaps an acceptable variation given that the Latin alphabet does not make such a distinction, so that both *omega* and *omicron* can be transliterated as <ο>. On the other hand, *theta* <θ> is more usually transliterated <th>, given that unaspirated /t/ sound corresponds rather with *tau* <τ>, which likewise more closely corresponds with the pronunciation of the letter *t* in “Morton”. Nevertheless, the decision to transliterate *eta* <η> with <ο> cannot be justified in any manner I can imagine, as in none of the archaic Greek alphabets nor in any of the Greek dialects does this letter—which is sometimes used to represent a vowel, sometimes a consonant, and in some occasions *both* a vowel and a consonant—stand for a sound that would correspond to the second syllable of “Morton”.⁴⁰⁷ This is a long way to say what should be obvious by looking at the transformation from μωρανθη̅ναι to “Morton”—i.e., that it plays loosely with the idea of deciphering the former and arriving upon the plain-text solution represented in the latter that it is indistinguishable from nonsense (as established in 2.5.3.2, above). Due to its ambiguity, this concealed indicator of authority is inadmissible as evidence of authorship.

Other candidates within the alternative narrative fare equally poorly. I will present each of the five remaining cases with a brief commentary on their ambiguities.

Morton Salt Association

Table 13: *Morton Salt Association*

Primer	Technique of decipherment	Plain-text solution
Reference to “salt” (<i>Theod.</i> I.13–15) is allegedly a) unlike Clement, b) a technological anachronism	Association of a supposed technological anachronism to the twentieth-century provider of the technology: “Morton Salt Company”	“Morton”

Apart from the supposed technological anachronism discussed above, this candidate includes an adjacent primer—viz., the metaphoric use of salt found in *Theod.* being at odds with undisputed works of Clement of Alexandria. Unfortunately, this argument derives from an erroneous translation of the Greek text, from Clement’s *Stromateis* (1.8.41.3–4), which was used as a standard of comparison for the metaphoric use of salt. Namely, a

⁴⁰⁷ Roger D. Woodard, *The Textualization of the Greek Alphabet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 36–46.

crucial omission of the Greek negation οὐ transforms the meaning of Clement’s sentence to its opposite, as Brown has explained.⁴⁰⁸ Thus, without an acceptable primer, given the non-existence of the supposed technological anachronism used to construct the associative link between the American food company Morton Salt and the text of *Theod.*, there is little to commend this particular attempt: only the final step from “Morton Salt Company” to “Morton” could be considered unambiguous to an acceptable degree.

Smith’s Etymology

Table 14: *Smith’s Etymology*

Primer	Technique of decipherment	Plain-text solution
The reference to “salt” (<i>Theod.</i> I.13–15) is supposedly a technological anachronism, and the word παραχάρασσω (falsify) used in the passage carries different layers of meaning, also in translation	Etymological explanation: παραχάρασσω → <i>to forge</i> → <i>to smith</i>	“Smith”

Once again, this candidate is built upon the alleged technological anachronism discussed above. Compared to the ambiguous Morton’s anagram (or cryptic crossword), that the Greek word for falsifying occurs in the same passage is much weaker than the observed connection between “salt” and the notion of “salt losing its savour”. Furthermore, etymological explanation as a technique of decipherment can be easily abused, as discussed in sub-subsection 2.5.3.2, above. There, James reasons from French “corbeau” (referring to a corbel above the entrance to the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene in Rennes-le-Château, France) through its Latin inscription “Terribilis,” via a number of etymological explanations and translations between French and Latin, that “corbeau,” in reality, “means” (to borrow James’s own terminology) something completely different (viz., “au Berço”). Curiously, such argumentative practices using loosely associated inferences were standard in pre-modern etymological studies, which aimed at uncovering the true nature or meaning of words. As Robert A. Hall, Jr. explains:

The idea of a natural association of word and meaning dominated most etymological speculation in ancient times, so that philosophers hoped thereby to obtain an insight into the true (*etymos*) origin of things ... This type of etymology (often called Platonic from Plato’s use of the procedure in his *Cratylus*) led to

⁴⁰⁸ Brown, “*Letter to Theodore*,” 568–569. Note that the above mistranslation is only the most straightforward of the many problems with this supposed anachronism.

fanciful results, being based upon a wholly non-comparative, non-historical, and subjective view of one's own language alone, with no guiding concept of historical development, especially in phonetics.⁴⁰⁹

To start with the Greek word παραχαράσσω and infer—following Latin *fabricare*, then French *forger*—that the English word “forge” is worked by the “forger” as well as the “smith” which also happens to be the surname of Morton Smith, is a rather extreme example of such a tendency, and, given the non-existent primer for the Greek word in question, a prime example of the “cryptanalytic hyperactivity” discussed in subsection 3.1.1.2, above. That the technique of etymological explanations through loose association between words and concepts, along with the anagrammatic readings, is prominent among pseudoscholarly treatises is again explained by their potential to supply desired answers to questions that are, themselves, legitimate. That is, it is perfectly within reason to question whether Smith concealed an indicator of authority somewhere in the text of *Theod.* or its paratextual material. It is not, however, within reason to assert a concealed indicator of authority without a valid primer, especially when decipherment must be made through a loosely constructed chain of inferences between a matrix of meanings involving various words of various languages.

This following of associative whims to a self-fulfilling conclusion is wonderfully captured in the literary exemplar of Poe's *ur*-detective C. Auguste Dupin, who is portrayed to be able to observe his companion's train of thought with inhuman precision: from his street encounter with a fruiterer, he then considers the street's cobblestones, which leads him to think about Stereotomy, then Epicurus, then Dr. Nichols, then the Orion constellation, finally to land on the actor Chantilly—at which point Dupin comments on the diminutive stature of the actor, echoing his companion's opinion that Chantilly would be unsuitable to play Crebillon's Xerxes.⁴¹⁰ This notion is further encapsulated as a proverb of sorts—uttered by Casaubon in Umberto Eco's novel *Il Pendolo di Foucault* (1988)—that “Le connessioni ci sono sempre, basta volerle trovare” (there are always connections, one only has to will to find them).⁴¹¹ Such attitudes are nevertheless equally frequent in non-

409 Robert A. Hall, Jr., “Etymology,” in *Dictionary of World Literature: Criticism, Forms, Technique* (ed. Joseph T. Shipley; New York: Philosophical Library, 1943) 221–222, at 221.

410 Edgar Allan Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” in *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (Mineola, N.Y.: Calla Editions, 2008) 177–209, at 181–184.

411 Umberto Eco, *Il Pendolo di Foucault* (Milan: Bompiani, 1988) 180. Neither Poe nor Eco intended to encourage such attitudes. As Gary Richard Thompson observes, Poe's detective exemplifies irony in “the discrepancy between appearance and actuality; and the ease of Dupin's solutions contrasts with our mystification, as in the extravagant train of association in ‘Murders in The Rue Morgue’ whereby Dupin guesses what his friend is thinking, or as in the absurdly simple irony in ‘The Purloined Letter’ of hiding an object in plain sight where no one would think of looking for it”; Gary R. Thompson, *Poe's*

fictional (though not necessarily scholarly) literature. Through association, one leaps from Jesus of Nazareth, through his early Christian symbol of the fish, to another mystical sea beast of Neptune (*bestea Neptuni Quinotauri similis*), one of the legendary procreators of the Merovingian dynasty, to conclude that the Frankish monarchs were descendants of the Jewish house of David (through Jesus himself!).⁴¹² Likewise, one could travel from the blood-covered head on a platter in the (probably) thirteenth-century *Peredur fab Efwrawg*, through the severed heads of Celtic traditions, to the severed heads of Greek myths, including the prophesying head of Orpheus, forwards to the Jean Cocteau film *Orphée* (1950), to the figure depicted in the Shroud of Turin, in which the fold line across the figure's neck is argued to be due to decapitation, and conclude that Leonardo da Vinci was the manufacturer of the shroud, as he was depicted in a nineteenth-century poster as *Keeper of the Grail* (before jumping back to the grail quest of *Peredur*).⁴¹³ Similarly, from Gabriel Harvey's 1578 address to Edward de Vere—in its original Latin, *vultus tela vibrat* (your countenance shakes spears)—to then assert that an Elizabethan pun on the word *vultus* (face, countenance) was intended to be read *vultis* (second person plural present indicative active of *volo*, “wish, mean”), translating this verb as “you will” meaning “You, Will[iam],” then coupling “Will[iam]” together with “Shakes” and “Spear(s),” to then pick up another reference from a late sixteenth-century play *Arden of Faversham* of uncertain authorship, whence the evil murderers *Black Will* and *Shakebag* are connected through the former having once committed robbery at Gads Hill, a location which also features a robbery in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and in *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, another Elizabethan play of uncertain authorship, to finally conclude that “Will[iam] Shakespeare” was in fact a pseudonym of Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl of Oxford.⁴¹⁴

Associative arguments are fascinating to read, but they lack in persuasiveness due to lack of control, leading too often to implausible and fanciful conclusions.

Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales (Madison, Wis.; University of Wisconsin Press, 1973) 174–175. For their part, Eco's main characters are done for by the end precisely because they adopt such a “will to connect” to a tragicomic degree.

412 Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (New York: Dell, 1983) 235, 314, 387.

413 Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ* (New York: Touchstone, 1998) 358.

414 Richard Malim, *The Earl of Oxford and the Making of “Shakespeare”: The Literary Life of Edward de Vere in Context* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2012) 34, 77–78, 87.

Table 15: Goldsmith's Ellipsis

Primer	Technique of decipherment	Plain-text solution
Smith's assertion in his commentary on <i>Theod.</i> I.13–15 that Matt 5:13 alludes to Jer 10:14 LXX (Smith, <i>Clement of Alexandria</i> , 18–19), is supposedly faulty	Reading the words omitted from a direct quotation (of Jer 10:14 LXX): κατησχύνθη πᾶς χρυσοχόος ἀπὸ τῶν γλυπτῶν αὐτοῦ	“goldsmith” → Smith

In previous section, I may have been overly generous in accrediting the proposed plain-text solutions of the concealed indicators of authority in the alternative narrative. Regarding the example here, however, I can ascertain with ease that even the simple translation of the Greek word χρυσοχόος as “goldsmith” does not function as an unambiguous *post hoc* establishment of authorship to Morton Smith.

In the primer, there is a theoretically exemplar candidate for cutting through the reader's “inattentional blindness,” since Smith is argued to have proposed an indirect literary connection (allusion) on the basis of the *English translation* of the original Greek. This would have been a cardinal mistake for a historian and one that would be reasonably obvious upon closer examination by his peers. However, Smith does not anywhere establish this allusion on the basis of the English translation—such an inference was solely due to a critic's failure to comprehend Smith's argument—but on the basis of a verbal parallel (sc., μωραίνω) and the general notion in both passages of worthless things perishing.⁴¹⁵

Thus, regardless of the validity of the proposed allusion, as a primer it is not unambiguous to a high degree, nor is the consideration of words omitted from the passage in Jeremiah unambiguous, as this assertion is based on loose associative reasoning. Specifically, one would have to proceed from Smith's comment on how, “In III.183.23ff Clement identifies as ‘the salt of the earth’ those ‘more elect than the elect,’ ‘who hide away ... mysteries not to be uttered’,”⁴¹⁶ link this to the previously discussed Morton Salt association that “signifies that this comment applies to himself—that [Smith] has hidden away a mystery not to be uttered” and end up with the conclusion that *an*

415 Brown, “Factualizing the Folklore,” 311–313.

416 Smith, *Clement of Alexandria*, 18–19. Smith refers here to *Quis dives salvetur?* 36 according to its placement in the third volume of Stählin's four-volume critical edition of Clement; *Clemens Alexandrinus*.

ellipsis in the citation must indicate a clue about authorship—based on the English translation “every goldsmith is confounded because of his graven images.”⁴¹⁷ Compared to this chain of thought, where the previous assertion of concealed indicator of authority is argued to “signify” that another sentence should be interpreted as pertaining to the supposed author of the previous concealed indicator—specifically, that a word that is “not uttered” but is a “hidden ... mystery” is to be discovered from an ellipsis—the final move from “goldsmith” to the plain-text solution of “Smith” seems comparatively feasible. I would argue, however, that this final step is the more problematic one in light of the criteria that the plain-text solution be unambiguous in its association with authorship.

Consider the logic of this concealed indicator of authority: a historian constructs an unambiguous primer by suggesting a literary connection based on his own language rather than the language of the historical documents themselves, enciphering the message (or, as in the case of steganography, merely hiding it) in an unambiguous manner in an ellipsis within a quotation and pointing towards the ellipsis in an unambiguous manner, only for the plain-text solution to suddenly introduce ambiguity by making the keyword translate to “goldsmith” instead of “smith”. In other words, if Smith wanted to prime his readers with an obvious, critical error—with his technique of encipherment remaining the same—why would he choose “goldsmith” rather than “smith” as the message enciphered? In the *Septuagint* (whence the quotation from Jeremiah is drawn), there are a number of words more suitable for such a use than χρυσοχόος, which exclusively means “goldsmith”.⁴¹⁸ Since the supposed primer has no inherent reason to cite Jeremiah instead of, say, Isaiah (where two instances of “smith” occur), the choice to refer to “goldsmith” introduces unnecessary ambiguity. Perhaps this ambiguity does not render this particular concealed indicator of authority irretrievable *post hoc*. However, combined with the non-existent primer and the highly ambiguous, associative journey needed to draw out the intended word from the ellipsis, this instance of supposed communication about authorship can hardly be argued to be unambiguous and is, consequently, inadmissible as evidence of authorship according to the criteria outlined above.

417 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 62–63.

418 Such words include χαλκεύς, “coppersmith” also used as a more general term for the “worker in metal” (Gen 4:2 LXX; Isa 41:7 LXX; Isa 54:16 LXX; Sir 38:29 LXX); τέκτων, sometimes (albeit rarely) used to refer to metal-workers (e.g., 1 Kgdms 13:19 LXX); συγκλείων, meaning precisely “smith” in 4 Kgdms 24:14 LXX.

Table 16: Baldy Swindler's Cryptonym

Primer	Technique of decipherment	Plain-text solution
Handwriting supposed being the same as in another Mar Saban manuscript, which contains a supposedly fictional personal name	Association of the spelling of a name and personal characteristics to an etymological explanation: M. Μαδιότης → M. "baldy swindler"	M. "baldy swindler" → Morton Smith

The above primer is invalid, given its construction from flawed data (as discussed in 2.5.3.2, above); furthermore, a rigorous, scholarly methodology to connect a sample of only a handful of letters to another sample of handwriting does not exist.⁴¹⁹ The non-existence of the primer is thus a crucial omission, as without one there is nothing to control the critic's "cryptanalytic hyperactivity" and, consequently, no basis for deliberating on the particular name of M. Μαδιότης (alternatively spelled Μαδεότας and Μοδέστος) instead of all the other handwritten personal names in the same manuscript, including (in their Anglicised forms) "Joseph," "Dionysus," "Anobos" (or "Jacob"), and others.⁴²⁰ Had the decision to concentrate on the name of "Madiotes" been justified, we would still be left with a highly ambiguous chain of inferences from "Madiotes" through the Greek verb μαδῶ that arguably underlies the personal name, to the translation of M. the "baldy swindler," and finally to adopt this pseudonym to Morton Smith. While a clever wordplay such as this could be acceptable, should it be framed by a strong primer and an equally strong plain-text solution, neither exists here. As Brown has noted, "The verb *swindle* implies defrauding people of their money, which ... is not the objective of a hoax."⁴²¹ In other words, given the logic of the proposed concealed indicator of authority, to compose a pseudonym from a verb that does not even describe what the author is doing is to introduce further ambiguity to one's act of mystification. Whether this discrepancy is due to sloppiness on the part of the author or is the result of a deliberate act or, for that matter, to there being no concealed indicator of authority here, ambiguity

419 Brown, "Factualizing the Folklore," 293–298. Note the two corrections recorded in Pantuck and Brown, "Morton Smith as M. Madiotes," 119–120 n. 32.

420 Pantuck and Brown, "Morton Smith as M. Madiotes," 110–115, 122–123.

421 Brown, "Factualizing the Folklore," 295 n. 15. Emphasis original. As described in section 1.2, above, there is considerable uncertainty regarding Smith's motive for constructing a fake manuscript akin to the alternative narrative. That Smith did not try to benefit financially from the publications of *Theod.* means that *swindle* would have nothing to do with his actions even within the alternative narrative. Cf. Brown, "Question of Motive".

diminishes the admissibility of these concealed indicators. Here, since the non-existence of the primer already disqualifies this concealed indicator of authority as acceptable, such considerations about its decipherment and plain-text solution are intended only to be instructive.

Innuendo Sphragis

Table 17: *Innuendo Sphragis*

Primer	Technique of decipherment	Plain-text solution
Alleged anachronisms in <i>Theod.</i> portrayal of sexuality	Recognition of sexual innuendo	Sexual innuendo → Morton Smith's literary <i>sphragis</i>

The final concealed indicator of authority from the alternative narrative to be considered is somewhat removed from the other examples discussed above. The line of reasoning is presented in at least three distinct forms, with some overlap, the crux of which is the recurring use of sexual innuendo as a literary technique that either is sufficient in itself for the purposes of identifying the author or constitutes a distinct literary *sphragis* that is pertinent to Smith in particular.⁴²² It is argued first that the alleged sexual innuendo *alludes* to previous (pre-1958) works of Smith;⁴²³ second, that the *thickness* of the alleged sexual innuendo corresponds to the *thickness* of alleged sexual innuendo in both pre- and post-1958 works by Smith;⁴²⁴ third, that in *alluding* to Smith's previous (pre-1958) works a "coupling" of these allusions forms a "linkage" creating Smith's personal "seal of authenticity".⁴²⁵

The problem here is manifest in its lack of consistency. The homoerotic renderings of the gospel extracts within *Theod.* are not the only interpretative options, scholars having described these passages, to quote Brown, "as benign" so "the fact that interpreters disagree on whether there are sexual overtones ... shows that the evidence can be construed either way."⁴²⁶ This ambiguity regarding the method of decipherment would

422 For discussion of the use of *sphragides* in antiquity, see 2.5.1.2, above.

423 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 71–72; Evans, "Grounds for Doubt," 81–89; Piovaneli, "Halfway between," 164–165.

424 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 65–72; Jeffery, *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled*, 93, 127–131, 209–211, 242.

425 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 71–72, 81. Evans, "Grounds for Doubt," 81–89 duplicates Carlson's argument as a less robust, more general reference to Smith's pre-1958 writings.

426 Brown, "Question of Motive," 366–367; cf. Tony Burke, "Apocrypha and Forgeries: Lessons from the 'Lost Gospels' of the Nineteenth Century," in *Fakes, Forgeries, and Fictions: Writing Ancient and Modern Christian Apocrypha* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2015 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade, 2017) 231–264, at 260: "To those who see homoeroticism in the text, [*Theod.*] betrays its twentieth-century composition; but perhaps in a few decades it will be more clear

not itself disqualify the proposed concealed indicator of authority, but similar problems plague the primer and the plain-text solution. The claim of historical anachronism—an observation that cannot be described adequately by historical *explanantia*—is highly ambiguous, since the community arbiter of academic historians is likewise divided here, as in the case of the alleged “telling anachronism” in “the uncanny resonance of [*Theod.*] with mid-twentieth-century notions of sexual identity and legal regimes” that follows the interpretation of a passage from the Gospel of Mark (14.51–52) *in light of* the gospel extracts within *Theod.*⁴²⁷ According to the same interpretative schema, other scholars have suggested that ancient notions of “sacred mysteries” are what underly these passages.⁴²⁸ That is not to say that scholarly consensus is a prerequisite for the criterion of consistency to be met, though (reasonable) unanimity would certainly be beneficial for the argument. On the contrary, the notion of “fair play” pertains foremost to the criteria themselves, such that the lack of scholarly consensus here is best understood as a *consequence* of the misapplication of these particular criteria rather than itself a reason for their dismissal. That is, if only *Theod.* merited the extensive readings of innuendo—if χεῖρ (hand) is a euphemism for penis only in *Theod.*, when Jesus grasps (with his hand) a youngster by the hand, but not when Jesus and Judas dip their hands into a bowl in Matthew 26.23—such an argument is likely just an example of begging the question, as the reading of such innuendo would then presume a modern provenance for the text, in addition to a failure of the test of consistency.⁴²⁹

that it is the perception of homoeroticism that is contemporary.”

427 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 71.

428 Marvin Meyer, “The Young Streaker in Secret and Canonical Mark,” in *Ancient Gospel or Modern Forgery? The Secret Gospel of Mark in Debate* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2011 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2013) 145–156, at 151. For further endeavours to locate a plausible ancient context for *Theod.*, see Brown, *Mark’s Other Gospel*; Brown, “Letter to Theodore”; Jeff Jay, “A New Look at the Epistolary Framework of the Secret Gospel of Mark,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008) 573–597; Eckhard Rau, “Das Geheimnis des Reiches Gottes: Die esoterische Rezeption der Lehre Jesu im geheimen Markusevangelium,” in *Jesus in apokryphen Evangelienüberlieferungen: Beiträge zu außerkanonischen Jesusüberlieferungen aus verschiedenen Sprach- und Kulturtraditionen* (ed. Jörg Frey and Jens Schröter; Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 254; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 187–221; Brown, “Behind the Seven Veils, I”; Scott G. Brown, “Behind the Seven Veils, II: Assessing Clement of Alexandria’s Knowledge of the Mystic Gospel of Mark,” in *Fakes, Forgeries, and Fictions: Writing Ancient and Modern Christian Apocrypha* (ed. Tony Burke; Proceedings from the 2015 York University Christian Apocrypha Symposium; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2017) 95–128; Michael T. Zeddies, “Did Origen Write the Letter to Theodore,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 25 (2017) 55–87.

429 Others might contend that *not* failing this test would be the more dramatic option here. For another example, see Brown, “Twelve Enduring Misconceptions,” 309, who observed of the youth in Gethsemane in Mark 14:51–52 that “very few people find anything sexually suggestive ... when Jesus is arrested, even though in this instance the sheet actually comes off as the young man evades capture.”

All the same problems pertain to the thickness of innuendo, even more so as the argument holds that the thickness of this literary feature pertains to a particular individual—viz., Smith. As a plain-text solution the criterion of consistency is misapplied to the other extreme: for the alleged thickness of innuendo in *Theod.* to function in a pertinent manner, *all other writings of Smith* are argued to be equally thick with innuendo to the degree that the critic ends up finding objectionable content “in almost every paragraph.”⁴³⁰ Such an excess is akin to a Hardouin level of *explanans*, and given that no other scholar has agreed with this assessment, “cryptanalytic hyperactivity” is most likely responsible for the critic’s perception of an abundance of sexual innuendos in Smith’s corpus, especially given that no perceivable control for this notion is suggested. The notion of *sphragis* as the alternate, more pertinent form of the suggested plain-text solution is, in the abstract, a more robust manner to conclude the argument about perceived sexual innuendos. As discussed in sub-subsection 3.1.4.1, above, there is a limit to the pertinence of jokes and witticisms, regardless of the deliberateness with which they have been composed. For this reason, the mere innuendo is hardly sufficient, and the alleged anachronistic portrayal of sexuality in *Theod.* would have to contain a component that would have to be more accurate in its association with a specific individual, a problem that would be solved by the notion of *sphragis*. The argument here is that the secrecy motive in *Theod.* is brought together with the notions of forbidden sexual relations and the mystery of the kingdom of God, a “coupling” that constructs a “linkage” that thus forms a *sphragis*, the authorial seal.⁴³¹

The trouble with this notion is that the presence of all things supposedly sexual in *Theod.* is contested by other scholars. Even if we were to grant that *Theod.* has “coupled” the “linkage” described above,⁴³² we might still ask what primer would have drawn our attention specifically to the notions of secrecy and the mystery of the kingdom of God. That is, an anachronistic portrayal of sexuality is insufficient in its capacity to direct the reader towards such specific themes without further signposting.

Such a primer is implied to exist in the notion that Smith’s “linkage” is “quite unusual” to the degree that the strangeness might render it recognizable to a fellow scholar of ancient religions.⁴³³ If this were the case, the primer could, arguably, be accepted into

430 Jeffery, “Clement’s Mysteries,” 232. Emphasis mine.

431 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 71–72, 81; Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 81–89.

432 Note that the notions of “coupling” and “linkage” are never defined by the critics.

433 Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 82.

further discussion. In this particular case, nevertheless, the claim that Smith “linked” together the “mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11) with “forbidden sexual relations” (Tosefta, tractate *Hagigah* 2.1), is mistaken, as has been extensively discussed by Brown and Pantuck.⁴³⁴ The error lies the critics misreading of Smith’s 1951 treatise *Tannaitic Parallels to the Gospels*, which, in fact, explicitly connects the “mystery of the kingdom of God” to the notion that for those who possess this “mystery,” “God helps [them] to become better”—i.e., that “mystery” leads one to develop more virtuous morals.⁴³⁵ Rather, the only connection between this “mystery” and “forbidden sexual relations” is their spatial proximity, being within 65 words of each other.⁴³⁶

There is yet another problem with this argumentation on a more general level—namely, with the idea that a “coupling” of themes could create a “linkage” that would establish a personal *sphragis*, an authorial seal. Within the alternative narrative, two types of methodologic considerations are employed to justify this approach. First, there is the more austere justification that “elements” that are “connected” together in scholarly prose can function as a person’s “own *sphragis*”.⁴³⁷ This notion is extremely ambiguous. Over the course of one’s scholarly career, “elements” are “connected” together in the thousands. As a technique of encipherment, the practice makes no sense: how would the decipherer be able to discern which of the many elements, or even how many such elements, are intended to be part of the author’s personal *sphragis*? Such a technique would require a highly unambiguous primer to sift through the texts it would be embedded in and, furthermore, would have to be repeated enough times so as to create an unambiguous link to a single individual to be recognizable as its author. In this case, however, Smith’s *sphragis* is established without a primer of any kind, after such elements are allegedly used twice—once in a scholarly monograph and once in a scholarly article.⁴³⁸

Another line of argument is that “themes of interest”—present in anterior publications that are, furthermore, “quite unusual” such that they have been “advanced by no one else”—can be construed as a “linkage” by the fact that they have “perhaps hinted” at, or even “echoed” such themes.⁴³⁹ Compared to mere “elements” the requirement of “themes of interest” does constitute a step towards unambiguity—albeit a small one—but the

434 Brown and Pantuck, “Craig Evans,” 104–119.

435 Smith, *Tannaitic Parallels*, 136. This observation was originally made in Brown, “Factualizing the Folklore,” 324.

436 Smith, *Tannaitic Parallels*, 155–156.

437 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 71.

438 Carlson, *Gospel Hoax*, 71–72.

439 Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 81–84.

literary techniques of “perhaps hinting” and “echoing” are hardly distinct from simple “connecting”.⁴⁴⁰ The one clear improvement to the previous line of argumentation is the explicit requirement for the uniqueness of such a “linkage”. As such, the argument has the potential to extend beyond the requirement for a primer, given that a substantially unique “linkage” is proposed.⁴⁴¹ However, to accept mere “hinting” and “echoing” as sufficient is to betray the tactic of decipherment involved. There is no confusion as to how these readings came about within the alternative narrative: a particular interpretation of *Theod.* as sexually suggestive text was followed by a search through Smith’s previous publications for matches that could then be described as “linkages” and used evidence. As such, they once again exemplify the dangers of “cryptanalytic hyperactivity” and question-begging, and the importance of their control by the requirements that not only primers but also techniques of decipherment and plain-text solutions be unambiguous to a high degree.⁴⁴²

Following these examples of the use of the criterion of ambiguity for assessing proposed concealed indicators of authority, it has been made clear that the adoption of this relatively simple criteria allows the drawing of useful distinctions between the various allegations presented above. One of the cases for the requirement of strict unambiguity is that it changes little in how the discipline of history is currently practiced, whereas a looser criteria would—as the related regulative criterion of consistency might demand—entail the introduction of such techniques for interpretation as loose association and etymological explanation in the study of historical sources, as well as having to contend with most, if not all, of the 80 candidates for the authorship of the Shakespearean corpus. In other words, the proposed criteria would limit the admissibility of claims about concealed indicators of authority. For the alternative narrative, this proposition is an unfortunate conclusion, as no arguments in the alternative narrative seems to pass the bar of unambiguity established in this section.

440 Though Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 89 uses “elements” as a substitute for “themes”.

441 In this case the problem, as noted above, is not the uniqueness of the themes but that the proposed “linkage” is based on a misreading of Smith’s *Tannaitic Parallels*. Even if this were not misread, there seems still to be confusion between *Theod.* as a textual artefact and Smith’s own interpretation of *Theod.* That is, to argue that *Theod.* connects themes of secrecy, mystery, and forbidden sexual relations because that was the interpretation of Smith of *Theod.* (misrepresented) and is further linked in Smith’s previous writings (misrepresented), is to collapse together *Theod.* as a textual artefact and Smith’s interpretation of it (misrepresented)—i.e., the argument begs the question in assuming that Smith’s interpretation (misrepresented) of the text follows from his supposed authorship of the document.

442 Evans, “Grounds for Doubt,” 83–85 introduces a second article in which Smith uses “themes of interest,” bringing the tally of Smith’s allegedly unique “linkage” to one scholarly monograph and two scholarly articles—still hardly sufficient for establishing a recognizable authorial indicator, thus also failing to establish an unambiguous connection between the supposed author and the plain-text solution.

4 Conclusions

In the introduction I explicated four reasons for revisiting the question of constrained criteria for the study of fakes and forgeries: 1) renewed academic interest in the subject, 2) the absence of such criteria, which has resulted in methodological confusion in academic history writing, 3) changing cultural discourses regarding the validity of argumentation, and 4) changes in the status of perpetrators of fakes and forgeries.

Considering 1) and 2), the scholarly discourse on fakes and forgeries should be performed at a higher degree of robustness. As described at the end of “WWDF,”

It is a widely accepted notion that academic scholarship cannot be distinguished from other knowledge-generating endeavors except by its dedication to a particular, rigorous methodology, one that demands constant debate about its applicability. The limits of scholarly means are often at the heart of these debates. Samuel Sandmel, for example, warned biblical scholars in 1961/1962 of the dangers of *parallelomania*, or the tendency to ascribe literary relationships between ancient texts ... [for] ever since Mabillon ventured on the quest for (constrained) criteria to distinguish the real from the faux, only loose rules of thumb have become somewhat established in academia. These were perhaps adequate in earlier times but not anymore. For we are working at times of suspiciousness and hypercriticality, and the repeated epistemic highs offered by the application of WWFD to the task of constructing (yet another) non-provenanced literary document as a forgery.⁴⁴³

As for 3) and 4), a description by Kathleen Stewart about the scholar’s tendency to pursue “a skeptical, paranoid, obsessive practice of scanning for signs and sifting through bits of evidence for the missing link” reads like an eloquent attempt to summarize my previous analysis of *suspiciousness* and *hypercriticality*.⁴⁴⁴ This attitude is perhaps most pronounced in contemporary inferences in which “an overreliance on intentionality and personal attribution” is practiced as an “attributional style,” to cite Jovan Byford, where the author comes “back, over and over again, to the same cause ... for every event in terms of the same [explanation].”⁴⁴⁵ Such studies take each detail under scrutiny as positive evidence for the case of forgery—contrary to normal practices within literary criticism,

443 Paananen, “WWFD,” 16–18, referring to is Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962) 1–13, at 1. A brief, historical overview of such (failed) attempts to formulate constrained criteria is provided in Speyer, *literarische Fälschung*, 99–102.

444 Kathleen Stewart, “Conspiracy Theory’s Worlds,” in *Paranoia Within Reason: A Casebook on Conspiracy as Explanation* (ed. George E. Marcus; Cultural Studies for the End of the Century 6; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) 13–20, at 14.

445 Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 136. Cf. Stephan Lewandowsky, Klaus Oberauer, and Gilles E. Gignac, “NASA Faked the Moon Landing—Therefore, (Climate) Science Is a Hoax: An Anatomy of the Motivated Rejection of Science,” *Psychological Science* 24 (2013) 622–633, at 630, who refer to a specific “personality factor or cognitive style” common to conspiracy theorists.

where such monomania is viewed as a *warning sign* of overreach in one's theory. The most egregious examples of such an overreach is presented in the two *non sequuntur* discussed in subsection 2.5.2, where details are forced into the narrative, despite that their inclusion does not mean anything.⁴⁴⁶

That such a pliable, ambiguous literary technique as the concealed indicator of authority can be made acceptable so long as it conforms to the three criteria outlined in section 3.1 is both an accomplishment and a triviality. It is trivial in that the malleability of concealed indicators of authority should come as a given, since every other literary technique can be (and some have traditionally been) described with the help of various criteria for their *post hoc* identification from literary texts. The development of such criteria also constitutes an achievement for having that much done in a (reasonably) rigorous manner, though this comes with a caveat: the acceptance of such arbitrary criteria would necessitate embracing certain arbitrariness of the whole endeavour of studying history. In other words, the historian's demands for explanation are arbitrarily "fulfilled" insofar as *the historian's curiosity is satisfied*, to borrow Mary Fulbrook's formulation—or, as I have stated throughout chapter 3, insofar as we are willing to live with the results of our criteria, given the demands of the regulative virtue of consistency.⁴⁴⁷ Lastly, as Derek Turner has written, one must acknowledge that the study of history perennially suffers from "local underdetermination problems," as almost all examples of academic history writing tend to be empirically equivalent (i.e., all scholars generally have access to the same physical artefacts, such as documentary sources)—yet in the absence of such artefacts, "there is nothing anyone can do about it."⁴⁴⁸

That is, should we move towards a rigorous framework of the study of fakes and adopt constrained criteria to alleviate the feverish thrill of "discovering" more and more "forgeries," we would also have to acknowledge that *some artefacts would end up being deemed genuine even if they were fake and vice versa*. This would merely follow from the general principles of *justification in historical studies* and the perceptibility of *fakes and forgeries*—in other words, only artefacts that can be distinguished from authentic ones can

446 Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 136 quotes favourably Michael Billig, "Extreme Right: Continuities in Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theory in Post-War Europe," in *The Nature of the Right: European and American Politics and Political Thought since 1789* (ed. Roger Eatwell and Noël O'Sullivan; London: Pinter, 1989) 161, who notes the tendency to insist on "personal attributions to the point of absurdity," as one of the "emotional aspects" of "this style of belief."

447 Mary Fulbrook, *Historical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002) 122–140.

448 Derek Turner, "Local Underdetermination in Historical Science," *Philosophy of Science* 72 (2005) 209–230, at 227.

be deemed fake, while only features that can be warranted by referring to their physical grounding in the artefacts themselves can be deemed distinguished. On this point, there is an almost prophetic quality to Christopher A. Rollston's observation:

I am confident that forgers read academic articles and books about epigraphy, sometimes attend academic meetings and symposia, they use the best lexica of the ancient languages, they have ready access to pottery, papyrus, and stone of the right kind, they purchase or gain access to ancient carbonized remains (e.g., the remains of an old beam or carbonized seeds from an excavation) to assist in the fabrication of inks and patinas, and they know the sorts of laboratory tests that are being performed on inscriptions from excavations and on inscriptions from the antiquities market. ... In fact, I believe that the time will come in the near future when there are some modern forgeries that will be quite perfect.⁴⁴⁹

The link between the past and history would remain severed, and that severance would only be emphasized; as a trade-off, we would gain, to cite Hayden White, "a practical past"⁴⁵⁰ on in which we would be able to add robust agreement about forged artefacts to "all those memories, illusions, bits of vagrant information, attitudes and values ... to justify, dignify, excuse, alibi, or make a case for actions to be taken in the prosecution of a life project."⁴⁵¹

As a rationalising species, we will always be able to come up with new rationalisations. As scholars, ours is only to decide which of these myriad rationalisations we are willing to live with—whether or not they might concern a study in authenticity.

449 Rollston, "Epigraphic Forgeries," 81.

450 Hayden White, "The Practical Past," *Historiein* 10 (2010) 10–19, at 16–17 distinguishes "historical past" — "an end itself and for its own sake" — from "practical past," the latter always "in the service of the present."

451 Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (FlashPoints 17; Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2014). Cited in Robert Doran, *The Ethics of Theory: Philosophy, History, Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) 105; Doran, *Ethics of Theory*, 203 n. 37 notes that this quote is drawn from the manuscript version of White's *The Practical Past*, and that "this passage does not appear in the published version."

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Appendices

Timo S. Paananen, “From Stalemate to Deadlock: *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* in Recent Scholarship,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 11 (2012) 87–125.

Abstract

This article reviews the literature pertaining to the recent debate over the question of authenticity of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* (including the so-called *Secret Gospel of Mark*) and argues that the academy has tied itself into a secure deadlock. The current ‘trench warfare’ situation is due to various scholarly malpractices, which include the practice of non-engagement with other scholars, abusive language towards them and mischaracterization of their position. In order to remedy the situation and move the discussion forwards a number of correcting acts are suggested.

Keywords

Clement of Alexandria, forgeries (modern), Letter to Theodore, Secret Gospel of Mark

Roger Viklund and Timo S. Paananen, “Distortion of the Scribal Hand in the Images of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 67 (2013) 235–247.

Abstract

This article discusses Morton Smith’s famous manuscript find, *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* (including the so-called *Secret Gospel of Mark*), and critically assesses Stephen C. Carlson’s study of its handwriting (2005). Carlson’s analysis is found to be wanting due to line screen distortion introduced by the halftone reproduction process in the images he used. We conclude that the script in the manuscript of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore* lacks all and any kind of “signs of forgery”.

Keywords

Clement of Alexandria, forgeries (modern), handwriting analysis, Letter to Theodore, Secret Gospel of Mark

Timo S. Paananen and Roger Viklund, “An Eighteenth-Century Manuscript: Control of the Scribal Hand in *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*,” *Apocrypha* 26 (2015) 261–297.

Abstract

This article discusses Morton Smith’s role as a self-professed manuscript hunter in uncovering the only known copy of Clement’s Letter to Theodore, and critically assesses the existing studies on its handwriting. We argue that Stephen C. Carlson’s analysis is flawed due to its dependence on distorted images, that Agamemnon Tselikas’s study has a number of problems due to the unsuitability of applying standard palaeographic practices to a case of suspected deception, and that Venetia Anastasopoulou has made a sustainable case by arguing that Smith could not have imitated the difficult eighteenth-century script—a qualitative verdict strengthened by our quantitative study of the lack of signs of control. We conclude that the handwriting is indistinguishable from authentic eighteenth-century handwriting.

Cet article discute le rôle de Morton Smith comme dénicheur de manuscrits en raison de sa découverte de la seule copie de la Lettre de Clément à Théodore, et évalue critiquement les études paléographiques menées sur cette copie. Nous estimons que l’analyse de Stephen C. Carlson est hypothéquée par la confiance excessive que ce paléographe accorde à des photographies médiocres, que l’étude d’Agamemnon Tselikas présente l’inconvénient de ne pas appliquer les critères paléographiques usuels dans le cas de faux, et que Venetia Anastasopoulou a produit une étude solide, à nos yeux, en argumentant que Smith ne pouvait pas avoir imité l’écriture difficile du *xviii*^e siècle—un verdict qualitatif renforcé par notre étude quantitative sur l’absence de signes de contrôle. Nous parvenons à la conclusion que l’écriture du manuscrit ne peut être distinguée d’une écriture authentique du *xviii*^e siècle.

Timo S. Paananen, “WWFD or What Would a Forger Do: A Critical Inquiry of Poorly Argued Contemporary Cases for Forgery,” 1–24. (forthcoming)

Abstract

This article discusses the contemporary debates on fakes and forgeries, and notes the lack of constrained criteria in the evaluation of suspected manuscripts. Instead of controlled criteria, scholars have opted for an informal and inexplicated method—here labeled *WWFD* (What Would a Forger Do?)—in which an internally consistent story from the first-person perspective of the alleged forger functions as its own justification. Lacking any kind of qualitative control apart from the low bar of internal coherence, *WWFD* has the potential to make forgeries out of all non-provenanced literary documents. The use of *WWFD* in practice is documented in three varieties: unconcealed, concealed, and hyperactive. In each of these instances *WWFD* is used as a framing device to construct material details as suspicious, with little consideration on the warrant of such framing.

Keywords

Dead Sea Scrolls, forgeries (ancient), forgeries (modern), Hippias of Elis, manuscript forgery

Statement on the distribution of labour with Roger Viklund

Accepted by both parties on May 23, 2018.

Concerning:

- Roger Viklund and Timo S. Paananen, “Distortion of the Scribal Hand in the Images of *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 67 (2013) 235–247.
- Timo S. Paananen and Roger Viklund, “An Eighteenth-Century Manuscript: Control of the Scribal Hand in *Clement’s Letter to Theodore*,” *Apocrypha* 26 (2015) 261–297.

Both articles are co-authored works of Timo S. Paananen and Roger Viklund, the choice of first author for each of which was based on the innovation of the core idea(s) discussed in the articles.

The first version of “Distortion of the Scribal Hand,” pp. 238–246 was composed by Viklund, and subsequent revisions were made equally by both co-authors using cloud-based word processing over multiple iterations between 2011 and 2013.

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