

The Literary Journeys of Gregory of Nazianzus and Synesius of Cyrene

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Abstract: *In this article, I will discuss the descriptions of sea storms in two late antique authors, Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 329–389 CE) and Synesius of Cyrene (ca. 370–413 CE). Focusing on a conventional trope, this article explores how interaction with literary tradition can become a site of innovation and self-fashioning. I address here two distinct but related queries: how the literary creation of identity is pursued through the repetition of previous identities, and what role space and mobility take up in this process. In doing so, I aim to underline that the intertextuality of late antique, ‘belated’, literature is not only self-aware and creative, but can also act as a form of self-assertion.*

Keywords: *Gregory of Nazianzus, Synesius of Cyrene, intertextuality, space, self-presentation*

The journey by sea, with its potential pitfalls and its metaphorical potential to represent life as a whole, is one of the most conventional themes in Greek literature.¹ Yet the literary tropes of ancient travelling have received only limited scholarly attention. In this article, I will discuss the conventional theme of a storm at sea in two late antique authors, Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 329–389 CE) and Synesius of Cyrene (ca. 370–413 CE). Both were highly educated writers well acquainted with the traditional tropes and *topoi* of Greek literature. By focusing on two late antique sea journeys, this article explores how interaction with literary tradition

¹ The paradigmatic example is the Odyssey. For interactions with the wider conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY in ancient literature, see, e.g., Horn *et al.*, “Spatial Metaphors of the Ancient World,” 456–457.

can become a site of innovation and self-fashioning. I address here two distinct but related queries: how the literary creation of identity is pursued through the repetition of previous identities,² and what role space and mobility take up in this process. In doing so, I aim to underline that the intertextuality of late antique, ‘belated’, literature is not only self-aware and creative, but can also act as a form of self-assertion.³

Throughout the fourth century, the spatial and intellectual ordering of the Roman world was increasingly thought of as governed by Christ and by the entanglements between church and state. Religion acted as a space for the exploration and negotiation of identity, arguably more so than ever before in the history of the Roman empire.⁴ Christian pilgrimage narratives started to be written in the second half of the fourth century.⁵ Importantly, the religious incentive to travel to holy sites is found alongside a language of universality in Christian authors, a rhetoric that inherently challenges the usefulness of physical mobility.⁶ As such, late antique travel ac-

² A repetition of the Other is perhaps crucial to the conception of identity; cf. the discussion of identity and identity (‘identité’ and ‘mêmeté’) in Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, especially 150–166.

³ The notion that many texts in Late Antiquity are deeply invested in the classical tradition and intertextuality is so well-acknowledged that it hardly needs stating. More recently, scholarship has been more interested in the limits of intertextuality as a framework of interpretation (e.g., Formisano, “Displacing Tradition,” 207–235) and in the staging of that intertextuality as a form of self-aware belatedness (e.g., Pollmann, *The Baptized Muse*, 8–9). It is to the latter strand of research that this article hopes to contribute.

⁴ Cf. Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, especially 5–6 for a discussion of the different scale of religious self-presentation in late antiquity. Pauline Allen compares the epistolary networks of Synesius and Augustine as bishops, and how they identified themselves ‘over and against the *imperium*’ (Allen, “Brushes with the Imperium,” 45).

⁵ The singularity of Christian pilgrimage as a specific form of travelling can be debated for its early stages, cf. e.g., Clark, “Pilgrims and foreigners,” 149–158.

⁶ An important expression of this tension is Gregory of Nyssa’s *Ep.* 2, where Gregory discourages travel to the holy lands (introduction and translation in Silvas, *Gregory of Nyssa*, 115–122). See Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred* for a more extensive account of the various intellectual reactions to the development of pilgrimage.

counts operate against a background of imperially structured space (roads, borders), a desire to see religious sites with one's own eyes, and a philosophical questioning of the value of physical mobility.

In Gregory, Synesius, and several of their contemporaries, these themes are explored through the prism of the self. As scholarship has established, late antique authors operated within a competitive environment where education served as the marker of the intellectual elite.⁷ The pinnacle of this education was the skill of interpretation (exegesis), which was considered a necessary requirement to claim the coveted authority of 'philosopher'.⁸ Despite their differences, Synesius and Gregory are prime examples of the self-promotion that is needed to build and maintain a reputation as a philosopher, both writing and interpreting texts with a remarkably autobiographical focus. Through a comparison of both authors, I hope to reveal similar strategies of what one could call spatial self-fashioning⁹, i.e., the act of putting oneself on the map, both literally and figuratively, both as a place on the map and as the key to reading that map. By comparing the rather different authors Synesius and Gregory, I also want to suggest that the use of these strategies is not a purely Christian phenomenon.¹⁰

Two storms at sea

I will compare the fifth *Epistle* by Synesius of Cyrene with a passage from the poem *De vita sua* by Gregory of Nazianzus. Synesius' *Ep.* 5

⁷ The scholarship on late antique *paideia* is far too extensive to summarise here. The work of Peter Brown remains an important introduction. See especially Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man," 80–101 and Brown, *Power and Persuasion*.

⁸ See now especially Niccolai, *Christianity, Philosophy, and Roman Power*.

⁹ A concept originating in renaissance studies, 'self-fashioning' is still a helpful term since it describes the use of literature as a form of Foucauldian engagement with power structures and networks. See Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*.

¹⁰ Joëlle Soler suggests that there is an important role for Christianity in the popularity and development of the late antique travel account. See especially Soler, "Religion et récit de voyage"; Soler, "La conversion du récit de voyage antique"; Soler, "Voyage réel et voyage spirituel". My analysis here hopes to nuance this claim.

is one of his 156 letters that have been preserved.¹¹ His brother Eupotius, the addressee of *Ep.* 5, is also the most popular addressee of the preserved corpus.¹² The topic of Synesius' letter is his journey by sea between Alexandria and Cyrene.¹³ The letter implies it was written in Azarion, on the Libyan shore, before Synesius arrived at his destination, Cyrene.¹⁴ It is usually dated after 400,¹⁵ with 28 May or 22 October 401 as likely options.¹⁶

Gregory tells the story of his journey by sea in a passage (vv. 121–210) of his longest autobiographical poem, *Carm.* II.1.11 (*De vita sua*).¹⁷ Composed in the iambic trimeters of a tragedy,¹⁸ the poem is thought to be written around 382 and is addressed to the elite of the capital Constantinople, which he had recently left. In his *De vita sua*, Gregory recounts episodes from his life, including how he ended up in a storm (or so he claims) while travelling to Athens as a young man to pursue further studies. The event is deemed to have taken place in November 348.¹⁹ The storm episode also features in two other autobiographical texts by Gregory, the earliest of which was presumably written around 371.²⁰ Whereas Gregory's travel story was therefore written only twenty or thirty years before Syne-

¹¹ These are the letters that can certainly be attributed to Synesius, cf. Maldonado Rivera, "The Letter Collection of Synesius of Cyrene," 208.

¹² Roques, *Études sur la correspondance*, 161–196.

¹³ Garzya, *Synésios* II, 93. I will use the edition by Garzya here, referring to the line numbers in this edition.

¹⁴ The name is mentioned in l. 225. For the notion that the letter is written in Azarion, see the repeated temporal markers, e.g., ζῶμεν ἡμέραν ἐβδόμην ἥδη (l. 243) or νυνί (l. 250). Cf. Garzya, *Synésios* II, 92 n.1.

¹⁵ See Long, "Dating an Ill-Fated Journey," 367.

¹⁶ I here follow the dating suggested by Long, "Dating an Ill-Fated Journey".

¹⁷ It is uncertain if Gregory added titles to his own poems, but the title is transmitted in the vast majority of manuscripts. Cf. Jungck, *Gregor von Nazianz*, 151.

¹⁸ Compare Blowers, *Visions and Faces of the Tragic*, 109 for the connection of the metre with the tragic content of the poem.

¹⁹ See McGuckin, *St Gregory of Nazianzus*, 47, relying on Jungck, *Gregor von Nazianz*, 157 for the dating in November of that year.

²⁰ Apart from the passage in *De vita sua* (discussed here), see Gregory's *Carm.* II.1.1, vv. 307–326; *Or.* 18.31. For the dating of *Carm.* II.1.1, see Tuilier, Bady, and Bernardi, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze*, LI.

sus' *Ep.* 5, the journeys they recount are about half a century apart from one another.

Gregory's and Synesius' storm descriptions operate within different genres. Whereas Gregory's journey is part of a longer autobiographical poem, Synesius' journey is narrated in a prose letter. Both texts also originate from different contexts. Gregory was a leading bishop within the Nicene faction of the church, and used his autobiographical poetry to reflect on a long career, which included a stint as the bishop of Constantinople. Synesius was a Neoplatonic philosopher who would become a bishop some years after writing the letter considered here,²¹ yet would never fully conform to mainstream Christianity. Synesius' religious identity, especially after his appointment as bishop, has been extensively discussed in scholarship.²² What matters here is that Synesius chooses to present himself in this letter as a Neoplatonic philosopher rather than a Christian thinker.

The differences between both texts matter. I am interested here in potential variations on the use of the 'storm at sea' trope in a Christian and in a Neoplatonic form of self-presentation. Two authors can of course hardly suffice to paint a general picture of late antique forms of reading. Nevertheless, I hope that a comparison of Gregory and Synesius can show that despite their differences in religious self-presentation, they display a similar reliance on intertextuality as a form of authorial self-affirmation. In doing so, I aim to show that Gregory and Synesius are part of a broader set of late antique interests in the connections between travelling, interpretation, and self-fashioning.

What connects these two accounts is the *topos* of a storm wrecking a sea journey. Even though travel narratives, and especially storm descriptions, are of central importance in Greek and Latin literature, there have been relatively few studies of (late) antique travel stories and their structural features.²³ A small number of studies

²¹ All suggestions for dating the letter antecede Synesius' appointment as bishop in 410. Cf. Schmitt, "Φλεγμαίνοντα ὀνόματα," 55.

²² See most recently Niccolai, "Synesius of Cyrene," 209–233 with references to earlier scholarship in n.8 (pp. 211–212).

²³ A similar point is made in the review essay by Elsner, "Greco-Roman

compare different storm descriptions and highlight their rhetorical conventionality.²⁴ A number of general studies further discuss actual travelling in antiquity and/or late antiquity,²⁵ ancient migration,²⁶ and religious journeys - especially Christian pilgrimages.²⁷ Yet apart from references to (late) antiquity in more general studies,²⁸ and from studies of individual travel authors,²⁹ so far only Joëlle Soler's 2005 study *Écritures du voyage* attempts to offer a comprehensive literary study of Greek and Latin travel narratives.³⁰ In her mono-

travel writing”.

²⁴ Storm descriptions are highly conventional pieces of rhetoric. See Biggs and Blum, “Sea-storms in ancient epic” (discussing Greek and Latin descriptions); Huxley, “Storm and Shipwreck”, and Dunsch, ““Describe Nunc Tempestatem”” (both focusing on Latin texts), and Hilton, “The Theme of Shipwreck” (discussing Greek and Latin prose).

²⁵ The standard study is still Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*. See further e.g., André and Baslez, *Voyager dans l'Antiquité*; Adams and Laurance, *Travel and Geography*; Ellis Kidner, *Travel, Communication, and Geography*; Adams and Roy, *Travel, Geography, and Culture*; Le Bohec, *Les voyageurs dans l'Antiquité*. For late antiquity, there is Cantino-Wataghin and Caillet, *Le voyage dans l'Antiquité tardive*.

²⁶ See e.g., Moatti, “Mobility and identity”. The large-scale migrations (the so-called ‘Barbarian invasions’) of late antiquity are a separate area of scholarship. See Heather, “Migration and Identity” for a succinct overview.

²⁷ Elsner and Rutherford, *Pilgrimage* and Harland, *Travel and Religion* discuss both Christian and non-Christian pilgrimages. Christian pilgrimages have received extensive scholarly attention. For this article, I found Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*; Dietz, *Wandering Monks*, and Leyerle, “Landscape as Cartography” particularly helpful.

²⁸ Von Martels, *Travel Fact and Travel Fiction*; Das and Youngs, *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing*; Kuuliala and Rentala, *Travel, Pilgrimage and Social Interaction*. The work of Scott F. Johnson focuses on late antique ‘cartographical thinking’ more broadly. Especially relevant are Johnson, “Travel, Cartography, and Cosmology”; Johnson, “Real and Imagined Geography”, and Johnson, *Literary Territories*.

²⁹ To mention but a few examples: Pretzler, *Pausanias: Travel Writing* on Pausanias; Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet*, Rapske “Acts, Travel and Shipwreck”, Alexander, *Acts in its Ancient Literary Context*, especially 69–96, Börstinghaus, *Sturmfahrt und Schiffbruch*, and Đỗ Thị Yến, *The Lucan Journey on the Acts of the Apostles*; Rougé, “Romans grecs et navigation” and Paschalis and Frangoulidis, *Space in the Ancient Novel* on the novel.

³⁰ Soler, *Écritures du voyage*. Biggs and Blum, *The Epic Journey* explores the theme of epic journeys more broadly.

graph, Soler aims to show that ancient travel narratives functioned as a genre or at least had generic similarities.³¹ There is, I believe, particular significance in focusing on two late antique authors here. As emerges from Soler's study and some of her other work,³² late antiquity and especially the end of the fourth century were a time in which literature intensely engaged with travel narratives.

Gregory and Synesius are acutely aware of the rhetorical conventionality of storm descriptions. Both authors claim that they were caught up in a storm while in the open sea, both having set sail in the same city, namely Alexandria. Synesius' and Gregory's narratives, I suggest, achieve a collapse of the physical into the metaphorical. Both writers explore the trope of the storm to thematise their simultaneous wandering of body and mind. In doing so, they obfuscate the boundary between real and imagined in their texts.³³ Both Synesius and Gregory claim they truly made the journeys they describe, yet they present them in an intensely literary way, raising suspicions as to whether their journey ever took place. Both authors also reinterpret their travel narratives as holding a key to their identities. In other words, the journey in both texts is simultaneously experienced, turned into literature, and interpreted. Synesius and Gregory act as travel guides and exegetes of their own physical journeys, which they fictionalise and metaphorise in the process. This operation is enabled by the complementary collapse in their travel narratives of the roles of literary character, author, and allegorical interpreter.³⁴ In both the letter and the poem, the character

³¹ These generic family resemblances between ancient text should especially be read in comparison to the (early) modern genre of the *récit de voyage* (see especially Soler, *Écritures du voyage*, 9–11; 20–22; 34–42; 409–416).

³² See especially Soler, *Écritures du voyage*, 251–253; “La conversion du récit de voyage”; “Voyage réel et voyage spirituel”.

³³ The questioning of reliability could also be seen as a more general feature of travel narratives, see Carey, “Truth, Lies and Travel Writing” for a discussion of modern travel narratives and Soler, “Itinera facta, itinera ficta” for ancient narratives. Soler, “Voyage réel et voyage spirituel” describes a similar obfuscation of real and imagined writings in the *Passio Mariani et Iacobi*, a development she traces back to Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.

³⁴ Compare the reference to ‘autofiction’ in Horáček, “Homer at Heart,” 17.

who experiences the journey assumes, via a first-person narrative, the same voice as the narrator who interprets the journey. The traveller, the author, and the narrator thus combine in a first voice which performs an exercise of simultaneous coding and decoding.

Underlying this collapse of roles is a desire, driving both authors, to authorise themselves by embodying identities from the past. Both Synesius and Gregory use their descriptions to restage several journeys from the literary past. This act of re-performance is not necessarily innovative in itself,³⁵ yet their highly autobiographical focus does make Synesius and Gregory apt case studies for the interest of late antique authors in reading and becoming earlier literature. In recovering past identities, both authors attempt to embed their texts (and selves) in a timeless tradition of literature. As such, their texts look both towards the past and towards the future: Synesius and Gregory themselves become models to be imitated by later readers.

For my analysis, I will start with Synesius' *Epistle* 5. Although written later than Gregory's poem, Synesius' letter provides us with a more traditional example of a travel narrative - his journey is the main focus of the text. Synesius will then serve as the background for Gregory's attempts to incorporate traditional motives within a Christian framework.

Synesius

In her study of late antique travel narratives, Soler briefly discusses Synesius' letter, but not Gregory's autobiographical poem. Soler's rhetorical analysis of Synesius marks an important shift in the scholarship on Synesius' letter. Earlier scholarship has almost exclusively been interested in the *realia* that can be deduced from this text as a source on ancient seafaring.³⁶ Soler, however, discusses how Syne-

³⁵ See e.g., Soler, *Écritures du voyage*, 88 on the repeatability of many travel narratives, with Aeneas and Odysseus as particularly paradigmatic examples.

³⁶ I focus here on studies specifically devoted to *Ep.* 5. See further references in Zwingmann, "Beim Sturm mit den Weibern," 47 n.58. The most relevant discussion for this article can be found in the unpublished doctoral thesis of Alexander Petkas, who focuses on the theme of 'travelling philosophy' in this letter: Petkas, "Synesius of Cyrene," 170–179. The third chapter of Pizzone, *Sinesio e la «sacra ancora»* offers an important account of intertextual parallels

sus uses his letter to promote his philosophical credentials.³⁷ In her reading, the author mainly aims to use his journey description to return to the literature of the classical past.³⁸ There is an unmistakable literary nostalgia in the letter, yet Synesius' self-embedding in the past is also creative and innovative.³⁹

Tradition is the necessary vehicle for Synesius' self-assertive presentation as an apt interpreter of literature, religion, and culture. Letters are a genre inherently conducive for this type of self-presentation,⁴⁰ but the travel narrative provides Synesius with a unique opportunity to indicate his interpretational skills. Travelling, as demonstrated in Second Sophistic models such as Philostratus' *Apollonius of Tyana*, is not only a way of acquiring knowledge, but also a way of asserting intellectual authority.⁴¹ It is on the road that a philosopher can use their interpretative skills to read the landscape and its people, and it is by travelling that the philosopher enacts the geographical growth of his fame. In Synesius' philosophical self-presentation, religion plays a major role. He stresses that the majority of the crew of his ship was Jewish and he emphasises that the captain's religion stands in the way of seafaring during Shabbat

in *Ep.* 5. Filip Horáček has studied the Homeric undertones of this letter as indicative of 'internalised' knowledge in Synesius. See Horáček, "A threefold cultural encounter"; "Homer at Heart". Roques, "La lettre 4"; Lacombrade, "Encore la lettre 4"; and Long, "Dating an Ill-Fated Journey" discuss the dating of the letter. Krischer, "Ein Zeugnis" and Schmitt, "Φλεγμαίνοντα ὄνομα-τα" debate the presence of Aristotelian concepts. Casson, "Bishop Synesius' Voyage"; Kahanov, "The Voyage of Synesius" and Leyerle, "Communication and Travel," 456 analyse the skill of the ship's captain. Meijer, "The ship of bishop Synesius" criticises Casson's identification of the ship type as a lateen rig. Janni, "Synesius from Alexandria to Cyrene" uses Synesius to discuss a confrontational relationship between the 'ancient man' and nature. Zwingmann, "Beim Sturm mit den Weibern" offers a discussion of the women on board Synesius' ship.

³⁷ Soler *Écritures du voyage* 320–321.

³⁸ Especially Soler *Écritures du voyage* 327–328.

³⁹ As hinted at by Soler *Écritures du voyage* 329.

⁴⁰ Cf. Luchner, "Gott und Selbstrepräsentation".

⁴¹ As discussed in Elsner, "Hagiographic geography". Cf. Synesius' *De insomniis* 11.2, where he suggests that interpretations of dreams can offer the same knowledge as a 'long journey' (ὁδὸν μακράν) to oracles.

(ll. 23–26 and ll. 86–93). That the impact of religion on someone's actions is questioned specifically with respect to seamanship is not irrelevant considering the traditional philosophical metaphor of the ship of state.⁴²

Although Synesius describes his experiences as unexpected (παθόντες ἃ μηδὲ ὄναρ ἠλπίσαμεν, *Ep.* 5, ll. 17–18), he opens his description with the statement that it would have been wise (σοφόν) to leave the ship straight after departure, because he immediately (εὐθύς) realised that the ship getting stuck thrice in the surface of the port was a negative sign (ll. 4–6). To an almost comical degree,⁴³ Synesius then includes a string of further negative signs in his description of the ship he boarded. The crew consisted of a shipowner with a death wish (ll. 20–21), and seamen with physical impairments (ll. 27–34). Synesius' demeaning description of the physical limitations of the sailors strengthens the sense of impending calamity. Through his first-person description, Synesius suggests himself as an apt reader of signs who could predict the difficulties he was about to face at sea. As readers, we are asked to join his interpretative praxis. In a development that resembles dramatic irony, the audience – both his brother and the wider audience of this letter – is encouraged to pick up on the foreboding signs in their reading of the text.

Synesius not only presents himself as an apt interpreter of signs, he also acts on those signs. If we were to interpret his sea journey philosophically, his self-presentation resembles that of a philosopher-king who combines contemplation with intervention. Synesius gives unsolicited advice to Amaranthus, the captain of the ship (see e.g., πλέωμεν in l. 65). He presents himself as the mouthpiece of the passengers, the voice of reason trying to encourage the captain and crew to act in the right manner.⁴⁴ Amaranthus' Jewish iden-

⁴² This metaphor was used in late antique philosophical self-fashioning, see e.g., the discussion of Greenwood, "Plato's pilot" of its use in Julian and Libanius. Compare Synesius' *De insomnia* 16.2 for an example in Synesius of a direct link between a ship's captain (κυβερνήτης) and the skills of interpretation.

⁴³ Synesius hints at the entertainment value of his story; cf. l. 10 (γέλῳ); l. 21 (χαίρειν σχολάζεις), and l. 34 (οὐ μετρίαν διατριβήν).

⁴⁴ Cf. ll. 57–74.

tity is relevant here. As scholarship attempting to defend his skill against Synesius' criticism implicitly acknowledges,⁴⁵ there is an agonistic aspect to Synesius' mockery of a Jewish captain who feels compelled to observe the Sabbath at the height of the storm (ll. 86–123). The subtext here seems to be that Synesius' advice is more valuable because it originates from someone with better philosophical credentials. Importantly, Amaranthus is described as reading 'the book' (τὸ βιβλίον, presumably the Pentateuch)⁴⁶ instead of helping his passengers (ll. 109–110). Competition in navigation is suggestively presented as competition in reading and interpreting.

Synesius combines the leisurely contemplation of the highly educated philosopher immersed in ancient literature with the experiential traveller putting his life at risk. This is exemplified by Synesius' reference to the Scylla of the *Odyssey*. Synesius suggests that the captain was so reckless that it looked as if he considered putting Scylla to the test, a monster - Synesius says - 'we try to avert with prayers in school' (τῆς Σκύλλης ἣν ἐν τοῖς γραμματείοις ἀποτροπιάζομεθα, ll. 46–47). The natural landscape in which Synesius situates his journey coalesces with the textual landscape of the literary tradition within which he is writing. Importantly, Synesius does not just engage with the rhetorical exercises of his school time, he becomes a character in a rhetorical world made real. Synesius stages and embodies the tradition he wants to write himself in.

In his work on Synesius' letters, Alexander Petkas already suggests that Synesius is consciously presenting himself as a new philosopher in the mould of Dio Chrysostom, a Second Sophistic orator whom Synesius explicitly used as the model for his eponymous philosophical manifesto *Dio*.⁴⁷ Importantly for his use of Dio as a paradigm, Synesius in fact underlines the importance of conventionality and predictability in literature in his *Dio*. Synesius mentions that he trained himself as a reader to be able to predict what comes next in a text (*Dio*, 16.2–3). It is relevant in the context of Synesius' *Ep.* 5, that Dio Chrysostom suffered shipwreck himself, an experience which he narrates in his *Or.* 7 (the *Euboean Oration*).

⁴⁵ See especially Casson, "Bishop Synesius' Voyage".

⁴⁶ Garzya, *Synésios* II, 11 n.36.

⁴⁷ Petkas, "Synesius of Cyrene," 174–175.

As already indicated by Petkas, this speech by Dio served as one of the central literary models for Synesius' *Ep.* 5.⁴⁸

This self-styling of Synesius as a new Dio is part of a broader network of intertexts in this letter. The theme of someone with superior intelligence who is not believed (see οὐκ οὐκ ἐπειθον λέγων in *Ep.* 5, l.69) by a ship's crew, but is vindicated through the course of the story is a well-established trope in Greek literature. One of the most prominent examples is the second *Hymn to Dionysus* (*Homeric Hymns* 7), but examples abound, including from New Testament sources, especially the journey of Paul in *Acts* 27 (see e.g., *Acts* 27.10). Apart from epic storm descriptions, further parallels could be drawn with the story of Jonah in the Septuagint (*Jonah* 1–3) or the short description of a storm in Josephus' autobiographical *Life of Flavius Josephus* (*Vita* 3).⁴⁹ Soler already notices that Synesius' description of the storm can be fruitfully read against storm descriptions in Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon* and Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*.⁵⁰

This network of intertexts is so strong that simple allusions suffice. There is a relevant parallel, for example, with the famous storm passage in *Od.* 5 where Odysseus deplores the fact that he did not die in Troy (vv. 306–312). Synesius does not explicitly refer to this passage, but when he describes Achilles' fear of a watery death by the river Scamander, he stresses the use of the word λευγαλέος in *Il.* 21.281.⁵¹ As Roque's commentary on letter 5 already suggests,⁵² Synesius probably expects his readers to realise that Odysseus uses the exact same word in the *Odyssey*: the only other occurrence of λευγαλέος in Homer is in *Od.* 5.312. Synesius thus stages a repetition of repetition; he thinks about Achilles fearing death in a passage which itself subtly repeats the language of Odysseus' storm.

Synesius' indirect reference to Odysseus' famous shipwreck also links the letter to Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*. In both the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Storm descriptions also abound in Latin literature. Parallels could be added to the depiction of the storm in *Aeneid* 1, or Caesar's encounter with pirates in Lucan's *De Bello Civili* (5.476–721).

⁵⁰ Soler "Religion et récit de voyage," 323.

⁵¹ Compare the commentary of Roques in Garzya, *Synésios* II, 100.

⁵² See Garzya, *Synésios* II, 120 n.47.

letter and the novel, the captain abandons his rudder when he can no longer control the ship, expressed in similar language.⁵³ In Achilles Tatius: Τέλος ὁ κυβερνήτης ἀπειπὼν ῥίπτει μὲν τὰ πηδάλια ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν ('Finally, the captain renounced [his task] and dropped the rudder out of his hands') (*Leucippe and Clitophon*, 3.3.1), in Synesius: μεθῆκεν οὖν ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν ὁ κυβερνήτης τὸ πηδάλιον, l. 90 (the captain then let go of the rudder from his hands). Both seem influenced by Odysseus' storm description, where the epic hero has to let go of his raft's rudder: πηδάλιον δὲ / ἐκ χειρῶν προέηκε (he let the rudder slip out of his hands) (*Od.* 5.315–316).⁵⁴

It is valuable to explore the novelistic connections in more depth, since Synesius' tragicomic letter takes a rather different approach to themes which feature in *Leucippe and Clitophon*. In Achilles Tatius' novel, the ship heads towards Alexandria, 'the great city on the Nile' (*Leucippe and Clitophon*, 2.31.6), whereas Alexandria is the point of departure for both Synesius and Gregory. In Achilles Tatius' novel, the storm scene is part of an internal narration by Clitophon in the first person. During the storm, a skirmish breaks out among the passengers who fight to board the life rafts (εἶχον δὲ καὶ πελέκεις καὶ μαχαίρας, *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 3.3.3). In Synesius, however, soldiers draw their swords because they prefer to commit suicide then to die in the sea (ὁρῶ τοὺς στρατιώτας ἅπαντας ἐσπασμένους τὰς μαχαίρας, ll. 137–138). They do this, Synesius asserts, as proper 're-enactors of Homer' (αὐτοφνεῖς Ὀμηρίδας, l. 141). As we will see below, Synesius refers here to a particular anxiety about the interpretation of sea deaths in Homer. In Achilles Tatius, gold and silver are thrown overboard without any distinction (διάκρισις δὲ οὐκ ἦν ἀργύρου καὶ χρυσοῦ [...] ἀλλὰ πάνθ' ὁμοίως ἠκοντίζομεν ἕξω τῆς νηός, 3.2.9). Synesius takes care to stress that people keep their gold displayed on their person - a 'long-standing custom' (πάλαι καταδεδειγμένον τοῦτο ποιεῖν, l. 146), which can serve as recompensation for the arrangement of a funeral if their bodies are found (ll.

⁵³ According to the TLG the construction πηδάλιον/πηδάλια ἐκ (τῶν) χειρῶν only occurs in Homer, Synesius, and Achilles Tatius (and in scholia on Homer and Synesius).

⁵⁴ See Lehmann, "De Achillis Tatii aetate," 25–27 for further parallels between Synesius and Achilles Tatius.

147–148).

The abundance of earlier sea descriptions in Greek literature offers plenty of potential for intertextual engagement. It is precisely this web of intertexts and the importance of the theme of (divine) insight, leadership (with the ship-state metaphor), and supernatural experience that makes the site of the storm a particularly good place for one's self-presentation as late antique interpreter of textual evidence. Synesius draws attention to his engagement with this network and to his interpretational practices at the climactic point of his storm description. What occupies Synesius more than the acute threat to his life in the storm is a line from Homer. In a reference to *Od.* 4.511, Synesius asserts that 'Ajax totally perished, when he drank the briny water' (Αἶας δ' ἐξάπόλωλεν, ἐπεὶ πῖεν ἄλμυρὸν ὕδωρ, *Ep.* 5, l. 127).

The strong word for dying in this quote, ἐξάπόλωλε, makes Synesius worry that a death at sea causes not just the body, but also the soul to perish. He indicates that he was disturbed by the possibility that 'it might be true that a death at sea would also be a destruction of the very soul' (ἀληθὲς εἶη τὸν καθ' ὕδατος θάνατον ὄλεθρον εἶναι καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς ψυχῆς, ll. 125–126). This remark must be ironical, as Petkas already notices. The idea of a death at sea as robbing the deceased of the proper burial rites may be traditional,⁵⁵ Synesius could have hardly believed that his soul would literally perish. This would be irreconcilable with the central idea of an immortal soul in Neoplatonism.⁵⁶ There is further irony in Synesius' quote and interpretation. As already noticed in the commentary of Garzya, the central verb ἐξάπόλωλε does not actually feature in *Od.* 4.511, which reads ὥς ὁ μὲν ἔνθ' ἀπόλωλεν.⁵⁷ It is unlikely, but not im-

⁵⁵ Cf. Huxley, "Storm and Shipwreck," 122.

⁵⁶ Petkas, "Synesius of Cyrene," 174. Synesius seems to hint at the traditional Platonic view on the immortality of the soul in his *Ep.* 105, ll. 85–87 in the edition by Garzya, *Synésios* III. See for this interpretation e.g., Dimitrov, "Synesius of Cyrene," 150–151.

⁵⁷ Garzya, *Synésios* II, 99–100. The reading ἐξάπόλωλε can be found in Byzantine quotations, but this is presumably only because of Synesius' influence. See Christides, "Ποικίλα ελληνικά" for a discussion of the textual evidence. To add to the irony, in *Od.* 12.350–351 Eurylochus compares a quick death in sea favourably with a slow death on land (cf. Pizzone, *Sinesio e la «sacra ancorà»*,

possible that Synesius misremembered the line or quoted a textual variant that has not been preserved.⁵⁸ More likely, however, is that Synesius is self-ironising his practices of reading and interpreting.

It is relevant in this context, that Synesius is not the first author to draw connections between the verb ἐξάπολλυμι, death at sea, and the corruption of the soul.⁵⁹ In his *Apologia ad Autolyicum*, the second-century author Theophilus of Antioch draws a comparison between the earth and the sea, whereby he presents islands as a metaphor for churches that offer salvation, and the risk of drowning as a metaphor for corruption by heresies. In the span of two sentences, Theophilus uses the verb ἐξάπολλυμι four times to underline the connection between the spiritual death of heresies and the physical deaths caused by shipwrecks (*Apologia*, 2.14). This earlier reference makes it at least plausible that Synesius' misquotation was quite carefully considered. While displaying his skills as Homeric reader and allegorical interpreter, Synesius may simultaneously be ironising the very tradition of reading physical journeys as allegories for spiritual ones.⁶⁰ Yet the ironies of Synesius' adapted quote from Homer would only have been noticeable for readers with knowledge of Homer and Neoplatonism. As such, the subtle irony in fact only reinforces Synesius' use of his shipwreck as a display of his interpretive skills as a reader.

In the final part of this section, I want to focus more on the spatial context in which Synesius purports to have written his letter. Synesius tells his brother that he writes his account on 'deserted

101).

⁵⁸ Compare the discussion in Horáček, "Homer at Heart", 23–26.

⁵⁹ Importantly, in another account of the storm episode than the one I focus on here, Gregory refers to his fear of dying without baptism as a fear of a 'death of the soul' (ὁ [i.e. θάνατος] τῆς ψυχῆς, *Or.* 18.31). Elsewhere, Gregory also uses the verb ἐξάπολλυμι in the context of his soul. In an allusion to *Il.* 18.290 in his first autobiographical poem (*Carm.* II.1.1, vv. 294–295), Gregory indicates that the joy of his soul had perished. Importantly, Gregory's exasperation comes just before this poem's version of his sea journey (vv. 307–326).

⁶⁰ From the third century onwards, it had become commonplace to read the *Odyssey* as a spiritual journey in Neoplatonic circles, cf. Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 132–133.

shores' (ἐρήμοις ἄκταις, ll. 13–14), positioning himself seemingly at the edges of the world. In his port of refuge, the otherwise unattested town of Azarion, Synesius describes an improbable encounter with women whose breasts are so large that they reach up to their shoulders (ll. 274–276). Synesius may have reached land and civilisation again, his almost otherworldly description fits in the tradition of *periploi* and fantastical geographical accounts, casting doubt on the veracity of his letter as a whole. How would Synesius have sent a letter to his brother from this isolated port town? Who would have carried Synesius' letter to his brother?⁶¹ The letter, for all its insistence on its 'real' story, seems to operate in a vacuum of realism.

Although scholarship has recognised this letter's combination of the fantastical and the autobiographical,⁶² there is an underappreciated spatial side to Synesius' blending of levels of credibility. The ethnographic description may be seemingly situated at the margins of the world, the women Synesius describes are in fact Libyan (Λιβύσσαι, l. 252). Synesius, being born in the Libyan Cyrene, thus indicates that he has stranded in his native region. Even though the term Λιβύη could be used quite loosely in Greek,⁶³ Synesius' reference to the 'land of Ammon' (ll. 277–278), further suggests that we should imagine Azarion to be located in the Cyrenaica (the province of Libya Superior) or Marmarica region (the province of Libya Inferior).⁶⁴

Synesius' characterisation of the Libyans in the remote Azarion

⁶¹ This is especially meaningful considering the importance regularly bestowed on letter carriers. See e.g., Synesius' *Ep.* 55, ll. 1–2 and *Ep.* 85, ll. 1–2 for two references to letter carriers in letters addressed to Synesius' brother. Synesius' *Ep.* 129 is a particularly relevant point of comparison for the difficulty of sending letters across the Libyan Sea.

⁶² Cf. e.g., Johnson, "Real and Imagined Geography," 395, describing Synesius as 'highlighting his literary self-awareness (and causing us to question whether any of it really happened)'. It should be noted that the sharp distinction between fiction and non-fiction as literary categories is arguably much more of a modern preoccupation. Cf. e.g., Ligota, "This Story Is Not True."

⁶³ See e.g., Reynolds, "Libya".

⁶⁴ In his commentary, Denis Roque (Garzya, *Synésios* II, 104 n.69) indicates that Azarion must be in Marmarica, seemingly based on the fact that it must be in a more remote part of Libya than in Cyrenaica.

can be connected to his more general ‘othering’ of Libyan populations. He regularly pitches the Cyrenian population against the ‘barbarian’ native populations of Libya.⁶⁵ Yet there may also be a more intertextual explanation. So-called ‘Libyan stories’ (Λιβυκοὶ λόγοι/μῦθοι) were known as a category of Greek fables.⁶⁶ Dio Chrysostom, Synesius’ model rhetorician-philosopher, provides a relevant example. Dio recounts a Libyan myth in his fifth oration.⁶⁷ It concerns a story about women with the upper body of a beautiful woman and the lower body of a dangerous snake (*Or.* 5.12). These women would attack any shipwrecked men who arrived on the Libyan shore (τούς τε ναυαγούς ἀπὸ τῆς θαλάττης ἐπανιόντας, *Or.* 5.11). In Dio, this Libyan myth is interpreted as an allegory of the soul (killing beasts is equated with purifying one’s soul), an interpretation, Dio indicates, that should be clear to anyone with too much time on their hands (πλείω σχεδὸν ἢ ἔδει σχολὴν ἄγοντι, *Or.* 5.18).

It is not implausible to presume that Synesius, an avid reader of Dio, would have incorporated the ethnographic passage in his letter as a playful response to Dio’s *Or.* 5. Writing his letter at leisure in Azarion (τῆς νῦν ἡμῖν παρούσης σχολῆς, *Ep.* 5, l. 272), Synesius blurs the boundaries between narration and interpretation. He has the time to interpret his own story, precisely because he is trapped in a (fantastically) remote town. Instead of Dio’s inhospitable women killing the Libyan population in a distant past (cf. *πάλαι* in Dio’s *Or.* 5.5), Synesius’ Azarion is populated by hospitable, yet ethnographically othered women in the present. The transition into ethnography would thus serve as a self-positioning for Synesius in the wake of a long tradition of othering depictions of people in Libya, a ‘land of the imagination’.⁶⁸ Synesius’ own Libyan myth would then allow him to continue a tradition which he is satirically subvert-

⁶⁵ See Marshall, “The Representation of Libyans” and Hazawi, “The Barbarians” for Synesius’ broader relationship with the ‘Libyans’.

⁶⁶ Cf. Leigh, “Lucan and the Libyan Tale,” 104 and West, “The ascription of fables,” 114–116 for references.

⁶⁷ Dio also refers to a Libyan myth, presumably the same one, in his *Or.* 4.73.

⁶⁸ A quote taken from Hunter, “Serpents in the Soul,” 287. See Leigh, “Lucan and the Libyan Tale,” 105 n.88 for further references to stories about fearsome women in Libya.

ing. As such, the fact that this eye-witness account was purportedly written in Azarion underlines that Synesius' self-positioning in the space of the empire simultaneously constitutes a self-incorporation in the history of literature (and vice versa).

There is a more fundamental question at stake here. In one's manifestation of identity, there is always a need to look at the self with a certain degree of othering. If an author wants to reveal her identity, she needs to present herself in a public way, and reflect on the way in which other people will perceive her.⁶⁹ Every act of self-fashioning is a form of representation, and perhaps, necessarily, of misrepresentation.⁷⁰ This ambivalence is reflected in the way I read Synesius' self-incorporation in the literary tradition. In writing himself into earlier literature and in enacting the position of past literary travellers, Synesius simultaneously embodies the roles of a 'reliable' narrator and of a fictional character. This mode of bookish self-manifestation and necessary self-misrepresentation, I will now argue, can also be found in Gregory.

Gregory

Like Synesius, Gregory uses literature as the vehicle for his project of self-promotion. When Gregory presents himself as a man incapable of lying in his poem *De vita sua* (ἀνδρὸς ἀψεудεστάτου, v. 17), he thematises similar questions of reality and reliability. In calling himself incapable of lying, Gregory in fact draws attention to the subjective nature of his poem, which serves an apology for his time in Constantinople (cf. vv. 12–16). The poem accounts his life from birth, but mainly focuses on his time in the capital, where he only stayed for a brief but eventful two years. Gregory's poem highlights his rhetorical education by describing the extensive training he received in several cities. In his description of his student days, Gregory decides to focus on his stay in Athens, perhaps still *the* centre of (classical) culture in the Greek-speaking world of the fourth centu-

⁶⁹ Cf. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 5: 'self-fashioning occurs at the point of encounter between an authority and an alien'.

⁷⁰ Cf. Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, an important study in the establishment of self-fashioning as a concept that focuses on false identities and the difficulties of and agency in recognising identities.

ry.⁷¹ The storm narrative I will focus on is part of this description of his studies. After studying in Alexandria, Gregory travelled to Athens for further studies, but ended up in a tempest.

It is during this storm, Gregory writes (vv. 194–201), that he vowed to dedicate his life to God. As such, the storm narrative conveniently links two fundamental aspects of Gregory's self-presentation. The journey's trajectory connects two mythical centres of learning - Alexandria and Athens,⁷² which underlines Gregory's authority in the field of classical *paideia*. At the same time, the stormy encounter with the power of nature provides Gregory with a dramatic moment to stage his religious authority. Gregory's storm description has so far only received scholarly attention in the form of commentary-style discussions and comparisons of Gregory's different versions of the episode.⁷³ I will limit my analysis here to the version in *De vita sua*, with the hope that a sustained literary reading of this passage might help explain why Gregory saw this as such an important anecdote for his self-fashioning.

Like Synesius, Gregory opens his travel account with an indication of the time in which he embarked on his journey. He indicates that this took place outside of the sailing season and to underline the point, he opens his description with both a temporal marker and an astrological reference⁷⁴ (vv. 124–128): 'It was wholly outside of the [sailing] season (ὥρας) – the sea had not calmed down yet / [and] as they say, the [star sign of] the tail of Taurus is not without danger, / those who dare to sail then act out of boldness, not intelligence – / then it was (τότ' οὖν) that I left Alexandria.' There was only a limited time window for safe sea journeys in (late) antiquity,

⁷¹ See E.J. Watts, "Athens between East and West".

⁷² It is telling that these two cities are the focus of Edward Watts' study of late antique learning: Watts, *City and School*.

⁷³ Couli, "Les trois récits" provides a short analysis of the three main references to the storm episode in Gregory's work and discusses the broader literary tradition of sea narratives in which these references fit. The episode is also discussed in John McGuckin's biography (McGuckin, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus*, 48–54) and Carl Jungck's commentary (Jungck, *Gregor von Nazianz*, 156–161). I use the edition by Jungck for Gregory's *De vita sua*.

⁷⁴ Suggestions for interpretation are summarised in Jungck, *Gregor von Nazianz*, 157.

which may seem to make Gregory's strong concern about the time of travelling not very remarkable.⁷⁵ Yet the inclusion of a temporal setting at the start of a travel or storm narrative is also used as a literary device here. The bad timing of the journey sets the scene for the story. In hinting at upcoming trouble, Gregory (like Synesius) suggests his ability to interpret the signs of his own narrative.

Similarly to Synesius and in line with the traditional depiction of the main character in this intertextual network, the way in which Gregory interacts with the rest of the crew seems to indicate his philosophical authority. With a stress on the unlikelihood of the event and a play on disbelief and faith, Gregory narrates how the entire crew joined in his prayers (*De vita sua*, vv. 170–74):

ὁ δ' ἐστὶν οὐ πιστὸν μὲν, ἄψευδές δ' ἄγαν,
πάντες παρέντες τὴν ἑαυτῶν συμφορὰν
ἐμοὶ συνῆγον ἐκβοᾷς εὐκτηρίους
πλωτῆρες εὐσεβοῦντες ἐν κοινοῖς κακοῖς·
οὕτω συνήλγουν τοῖς ἐμοῖς παθήμασιν.

It is hard to believe, yet truly true:
everyone who suffered their own misfortune
joined me in my shouts of prayer.
In common hardship, the sailors acted piously,
so strongly they suffered with me in my misfortunes.

This promotion of Gregory's own authority is, as in Synesius' case, at least partly realised by means of intertextuality. Gregory draws a direct comparison between his own storm episode and the account of Jesus calming the seas in the Synoptic Gospels (*Matt.* 14:22–33; *Mark* 4:35–41; *Luk.* 8:22–25).⁷⁶ At the climax of his storm narrative, he prays to Jesus while directly invoking his apostolic predecessors (vv. 200–201): καὶ νῦν μαθητῆς ἐν σάλῳ· τίνασσέ μοι / τὸν ὕπνον ἢ πέξυε, καὶ στήτω φόβος ('Now too, a disciple in the seas! Shake off / my slumber or walk [to me] and let my fear come to an end').

Just like he did for the Apostles, Gregory asks Jesus to wake up and take his fear away. Gregory presents himself as a new μαθητῆς

⁷⁵ Cf. e.g., Tammuz, "Mare clausum?"

⁷⁶ See also Jungck, *Gregor von Nazianz*, 161 and the commentary by Bernardi in Tuilier, Bady, and Bernardi, *Saint Grégoire de Nazianze*, 149 for the references.

(v.200), and with the version of Matthew in mind, we as readers can infer that Gregory is a new Peter. καὶ νῦν is an important literary insertion. It encapsulates a tendency that is present in Gregory's work from his earliest preserved writings; a desire for imitation (and specifically, *imitatio Christi*).⁷⁷ Yet καὶ νῦν is also a bold, interventionist claim that is relevant to my broader argument here: Gregory is not just an imitator of Peter, he asks in his poem to be treated as another *actual* μαθητής. 'And now' stresses not just the parallels between past and present, but typologically reconfigures the present as an actualisation of the past. Gregory's vivified imitation might even suggest that he is a better disciple than Peter. Jesus walks on the water but bids his friends not to fear: θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε (Matt. 14.27). Peter first walks on the water towards Jesus as a demonstration of his faith, but he is scared (ἐφοβήθη, Matt. 14.30) by the wind. When Gregory asks Jesus to relieve him from his φόβος, he is therefore not just imitating Peter but also staging an act of interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew. If it were not for this interpretational move, it would be much more logical in the narrative that Gregory would ask to be saved from death rather than to be freed of fear. Gregory the disciple has internalised and realised the advice given to Peter. As such, Gregory's self-styling is markedly literary; the story of his own life simultaneously becomes an *aemulatio* of the Gospels and a reader response to the lesson given to Peter in Matthew's Gospel.

In his storm description, Gregory suggests that he was not baptised (cf. vv. 164–165). This not only makes the storm scene a metaphor for his baptism, but it also helps to explain the focus on his anxiety and his self-dedication to God. Nevertheless, Gregory's rhetorical presentation is one which combines a moment of great personal transition with a focus on religious consistency. Gregory promises to live for God in the future (σοὶ ζήσομ', v.198) but simultaneously suggests the danger that God will lose a servant - indicating that he was already predestined to serve God in the first place (σὺν ζημιώσει λάτριν, v. 199). He is, was, and will be of God - 'σός',

⁷⁷ See e.g., his first oration, Or. 1.3: Χθὲς συνεσταυρούμην Χριστῷ, σήμερον συνδοξάζομαι. Hofer, *Christ in the Life* offers an excellent analysis of *imitatio Dei* in Gregory.

εἶπον, ‘εἰμί, καὶ τὸ πρὶν καὶ νῦν ἔτι’ (v. 194). The last quote is especially relevant because it might serve as a further interaction with the Peter model established in the Gospel of Matthew. In Matthew, Jesus asserts his identity with the statement ἐγὼ εἰμι. The statement can be interpreted as a continuation of God’s expression in *Ex.* 3.14 (‘Εγὼ εἰμι ὁ ὢν). Importantly, in Matthew the statement is embedded in a passage about faith and doubt, which is concluded by the Apostles’ assertion that Jesus truly is God’s son (ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ, *Matt.* 14.33). Gregory’s strong statement is in a way a direct response to Jesus’ self-assertion in the face of doubt. Jesus’ first-person εἰμί is reused here by Gregory to indicate his unerring faith in Jesus, who Gregory (the first person) addresses in the second person (σός).

Whereas Gregory openly positions himself within the tradition of the Gospel storm, he also interacts with the wider intertextual network of storm passages. Gregory not only presents himself as a second Peter, but more subtly also as a second Odysseus. Gregory’s reference to πολλαῖς στροφαῖς in verse 160 is a reference to the opening of his poem, where he addresses his audience: ἀκούσατ’, ἄνδρες, ἀνδρὸς ἀψευδεστάτου / καὶ πολλὰ μοχθήσαντος ἐν πολλαῖς στροφαῖς (‘Listen, you men, to a man incapable of lies, / who suffered many toils with many turns’) (vv. 17–18). When Gregory asks his audience to listen to the life of a man who has suffered a lot, it is hard not to be reminded of the opening of the *Odyssey*.⁷⁸ By interlinking his storm description with the opening of his poem, Gregory not only connects his physical journey to the metaphorical journey of his life more broadly, he also underlines the Odyssean undertones of his storm depiction. The textual network is, however, more complex than this. Like Synesius, Gregory also seems to weave the storm description from Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Clitophon* into his description.⁷⁹

Parallels between the two storm descriptions in Gregory and

⁷⁸ πολλαῖς στροφαῖς not only serves as a parallel to πολλὰ / πλάγχθη *Od.* 1.1–2, but potentially also to πολύτροπον.

⁷⁹ Thanks are due to Tim Whitmarsh for pointing me to this parallel. Lehmann, *De Achilles Tatii aetate*, 28–30 lists parallels between Achilles Tatius and Gregory’s *Or.* 4 and *Or.* 28.

Achilles Tatius can already be found on the level of structure, especially in the description of the prayer of Clitophon and the immediate calming of the seas in *Leucippe and Clitophon*, 3.5.4–6 and Gregory's prayer in *De vita sua*, vv. 194–203. Both prayers moreover focus on the theme of fear and the notion of dying several times. For Clitophon, it is a question of deaths through fear (πολλοὺς ἤδη τῷ φόβῳ θανάτους ὑπεμείναμεν, 3.5.4). Not unlike Synesius' (exaggerated) fear of his soul perishing if he were to drown, Gregory fears a 'double danger' (v. 198), namely harm to both his body and his soul.⁸⁰ There are also parallels in the language used to describe both storms. Whereas Clitophon refers to a κυμάτων ἢ στάσις (3.2.3), for example, Gregory describes his storm as a στάσις τῶν πνευμάτων (both in v. 131 and v. 202). Achilles Tatius describes the shouting on the ship as follows: συμμιγῆς δὲ πάντων ἐγένετο βοή· ἐρρόχθει τὸ κύμα, ἐπάφλαξε τὸ πνεῦμα, ὀλολυγμὸς γυναικῶν, ἀλαλαγμὸς ἀνδρῶν, κελευσμὸς ναυτῶν, πάντα θρήνων καὶ κωκυτῶν ἀνάμεστα ('a cry rang out simultaneously from everyone; the wave dashed with roaring sound, the wind blustered. The shrieking of women, the screeching of men, the orders of sailors; all was filled with wailing and howling', 3.2.8). Gregory uses remarkably similar vocabulary to describe shouting on his ship: βοή δὲ συμμιγῆς τε καὶ θρήνων πλέως / ναυτῶν, κελευστῶν, δεσποτῶν, †ἐπηβόλων† / Χριστὸν καλούντων ἐκ μιᾶς συμφωνίας ('all was crying, and everything was full of wailing / of sailors, of boatswains, of masters, of †partakers†, of people calling out to Christ with a single voice', vv. 139–141).

Gregory, Achilles Tatius and Homer are connected even more intricately than already suggested. Clearly inspired by rhetorical models of storm descriptions,⁸¹ Gregory and Achilles Tatius narrate how the storm hid the ship under its waves. In Achilles Tatius, we read (3.2.7): 'The rising sea now came onto the ship (Ἀναβαίνουσα μὲν γὰρ ἐπὶ τὴν ναῦν ἡ θάλασσα), it rolled through the bulwarks

⁸⁰ Cf. Jungck, *Gregor von Nazianz*, 161.

⁸¹ They seem mainly inspired by the *Odyssey* (see below), the conventional Greek model for storm descriptions, as indicated by e.g., MacDonald, "The shipwrecks of Odysseus and Paul," 93–94. Hilton, *A Commentary on Books 3 and 4*, 53–55 indicates further models for Achilles Tatius' storm depiction, especially *Acts of the Apostles* 27 and Petronius' *Satyricon*.

(διὰ τῶν γέρρων ἐκυλίετο) and covered the entire ship (ἐκάλυπτε πᾶν τὸ σκάφος). The wave swelled to a great height (κῦμα αἰρόμενον ὑψοῦ), touching the very clouds, and coming from afar against the ship, with its size resembling that of a [*lacuna*].⁸² In Gregory, vv. 132–137, we read: ‘[The storm winds] frothed up against the ship (ἔβραζε τὴν ναῦν) and all became a single night (καὶ τὰ πάντ’ ἦν νύξ μία): / earth, sea, air, the sky was darkened: / the ship was filled with water flowing over its sides (πλήρες δ’ ὑπερτοιχοῦντος ὕδατος σκάφος)’. Both descriptions seem at least connected to the divinely stirred storm Odysseus encounters in *Od.* 5: ‘[Poseidon] stirred up every gale / of every type of wind, and with clouds he covered (σὺν δὲ νεφέεσσι κάλυψε) / both land and ship (γαῖαν ὁμοῦ καὶ πόντον); a night arose out of the skies (ὁρώρει δ’ οὐρανόθεν νύξ)’ (*Od.* 5.291–294).

It is in a moment of presentness (καὶ νῦν) that Gregory simultaneously imitates previous models such as Peter and Odysseus, and draws attention to the act of reading and interpreting these models by declaring himself a *new* pupil. The journey within the natural landscape becomes a locus for imitation, interpretation, and identity. Storms are, however, not just rhetorical set pieces, they are also natural phenomena whose descriptions can draw on the force and forcefulness of nature. The untamed space of the sea is a fruitful locus for the exploration of religious identity.⁸² Importantly, the connection between divine power and desolate nature is a central theme of contemporary ascetic literature.⁸³ In Gregory’s staging of a storm as an epiphanic moment of dedication, he is thus able to harness both the literary tradition of storm descriptions, but also the ascetic authority of the natural world evoked in his description.

⁸² There is a long tradition of seeing the sea as a liminal space between the human and the divine. See e.g. Beaulieu, *The Sea in the Greek Imagination*, 62.

⁸³ The desert is the emblematic space for this overlap between natural force and ascetic exploration. Cf. the overview article Rapp, “Desert, City, and Countryside”. Gregory represents a tendency to internalise – and dislocate – asceticism, as discussed by Gautier, *La retraite et le sacerdoce*. Nevertheless, references to the space of nature are often associated with asceticism in his writings; cf. e.g., *Ep.* 1–2, 4–6. The imagery is touched upon in Otis, “The Throne and the Mountain”. See now also Lefteratou and Hadjitoffi, “Nature in the Poetry of Gregory”.

This is also why it is relevant that Gregory presents the storm episode as the memory of an actual experience; his authority as philosopher is literarily embedded and literally experienced.

In doing so, Gregory, like Synesius, consciously obfuscates the boundary between real and imagined travelling, and between real place and imagined space more broadly. Gregory combines a reflection on the actual storm of his youth with one on the metaphorical storms tormenting him later in life. In a statement that seems to foreshadow his cry σός εἰμί, Gregory claims: ‘You were then (Σὺ καὶ τότε ᾗσθε) my Great Saviour, my Christ (Χριστέ μου), / freeing me even now (καὶ νῦν) from the waves of my life (κυμάτων βίου)’.⁸⁴ In the first verses of *De vita sua*, Gregory uses a hodological metaphor to introduce the aim of his poem; he sets out to describe the course (ὁδός) of his life: the aim of this work (λόγου) is ‘to narrate the path (ἐξιστορήσαι τὴν ὁδόν) of my misfortunes / or perhaps my fortunes’ (vv. 1–2). The placement of the storm episode within Gregory’s narrated ‘way of life’ is meaningful. The spatial reference to Alexandria, Gregory’s point of departure, is the first location mentioned by name in his autobiographical poem. This differs from the traditional way of writing an (auto)biography, whereby the city of birth (in Gregory’s case Nazianzus) would normally be mentioned as one of the first elements. Libanius, in his autobiographical *Or.* 1, for example opens with a reference to his native city Antioch (πόλεως πολίτην εἶναι μεγάλης τε καὶ ὀνομαστής, *Or.* 1.2). Considering Gregory’s extensive rhetorical training and the possibility that he may have consulted Libanius’ *Or.* 1,⁸⁵ it is highly likely that the absence of Nazianzus at the start of this poem is a purposeful departure from the traditional model of life writing. Alexandria itself is mentioned

⁸⁴ In this sense, I would nuance Couli’s statement that Gregory’s use of the sea metaphor is identical to its predecessors (‘les forms littéraires sont identiques’, Couli, “Les trois récits,” 167). It is precisely by self-consciously writing himself in a literary tradition and by obfuscating the boundaries between his own life and earlier literature, that Gregory differs from the models he interacts with. The sea-journey of life is a more common metaphor in Gregory, as demonstrated by Lorenz, “Zur Seefahrt des Lebens”.

⁸⁵ Hofer, *Christ in the Life*, 163–164 discusses the parallels between Libanius’ and Gregory’s autobiographies. Cf. Liebeschuetz, “Libanius and Late Antique Autobiography,” 273 for a suggestion of direct influence.

extremely briefly, it is only presented as a place of departure, a city worth only mentioning from a posterior perspective. The message of the narrative seems clear: it is the storm, its nondescript spatial location in open sea, and Gregory's pronounced life-long devotion to God during the storm itself that define his identity.

Importantly, the name of Gregory's destination is postponed until after the storm. In the case of Athens, the physical place and the sociocultural space are difficult to disentangle: 'Next came Athens and literature' ('Ἐπειτ' Ἀθῆναι καὶ λόγοι, v. 211) is how Gregory finally introduces the name of his destination. The physical location of Athens still matters, otherwise there would have been no journey to it, no safe distance from it. But in the same way as Gregory's life story travels down physical and mental paths, the spatial markers of the poem are equally real and elusive. Gregory mentions his love for literature (the λόγοι) earlier in his poem (τῶν λόγων δ' ἔρω, v. 111), yet the fact that Athens follows his stormy self-dedication does seem to convey a sense of hierarchy: Gregory's universal love for Christ always came before his Athenian education. Gregory's space of self-fashioning is thus built on (the impression of) physical mobility, linking different places in the empire as markers of his far-reaching education. Yet in the end, this space is also produced and controlled by the poem itself.

Spatial self-fashioning, therefore, is an exercise in circular logic; the author produces a space that, interpreted by this same author, reveals their identity. The conventionality of the tropes used in this construct is not why we should resist deeper interpretation. Rather, the literary tradition is the interpretive key with which these texts envision themselves as being read, written, and re-read. In this carefully constructed circularity, we as readers should also feel invited to participate in the acts of reading and becoming. As the sailors suffering with Gregory in the storm, we are tasked with deciphering, identifying and re-enacting the network of intertexts and literary journeys that are staged as dramatic performances for us to experience.

Conclusions

Synesius' *Ep.* 5 and Gregory's *De vita sua* have different aims and rely on slightly different forms of religious self-presentation. In Gregory's imitation of the Gospel, the past is typologically constructed as a model for the future. Literary tradition is a crucial part of his wider project to underline both the heritage and the future of a Christian empire that incorporates classical culture. For Synesius, intertextuality offers more room for simultaneous self-assertion and self-satirising. Intertextuality allows him to present himself as a philosopher who is at leisure to reinterpret, destabilise, and rewrite the tradition within which he operates.

Yet underlying these differences is a fundamental similarity in the self-positioning of Gregory and Synesius. Both authors construct themselves as ἐξηγηταί in the two senses of this Greek word: as interpreters and as guides. They interpret earlier literature and use their interpretative skills to claim authority, but they also present themselves as men of the world who write about their personally experienced journeys and thus act as guides into the landscape of the empire. Gregory and Synesius have been analysed here as two authors who engage in an act of self-mapping. As is well established in geographical thinking, every act of mapping is one of power manifestation and knowledge accumulation.⁸⁶

Relevantly for our discussion of spatial self-fashioning, every map is also a re-creation of the world it attempts to depict.⁸⁷ Considering the close connections between cartography, knowledge, power, and (re)creation it is perhaps only logical that Synesius and Gregory turn to a physical and metaphorical mapping of their selves in their search for intellectual and political authority. I do not aim to argue here that Synesius or Gregory stand at the birth of an unprecedented innovation. If anything, their forms of self-fashioning show the limits of the appeal of (and perhaps also of our scholarly desire for)

⁸⁶ Cf. Harley, "Maps, Knowledge, and Power". Whitmarsh and König, *Ordering Knowledge*, 35–36 discuss mapping as a metaphor for the (imperial) ordering of knowledge. For the connections between 'actual' maps and literary forms of mapping in late antiquity, see Johnson, *Literary Territories*.

⁸⁷ See Corner, "The Agency of Mapping".

novelty. Their modes of self-fashioning have precursors in earlier literature. Yet it is precisely the conventionality of tradition that served as a fertile seedbed for the manifestation of their identities. Gregory and Synesius, in other words, are not simply interested in continuing a longstanding tradition, the traditionality of their texts becomes a fundamental marker of their authorial identity.

There is scope for further study to analyse in more detail how Gregory and Synesius are only two representatives of a wider late antique phenomenon of self-narrativisation. In cloaking their embodied journeys in the garb of traditional travel narratives, Gregory and Synesius project their (literary) knowledge through the prism of personal identity,⁸⁸ potentially interacting with contemporary attempts to structure the world in a coherent, totalising model of knowledge.⁸⁹ The parallels between the travel accounts under discussion here and pilgrimage narratives may also invite further study. In their spatial self-fashioning, Gregory and Synesius namely resemble contemporary writers of pilgrims who are (presented as) both actual travellers to the Holy Lands and readers of (the space of) Scripture.⁹⁰

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⁸⁸ A useful model to think about this presentation of innovation as tradition is the notion of ‘anchoring innovation’, which is currently applied to the field of classics as part of a long-term research project funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO), cf. Sluiter, “Anchoring Innovation”.

⁸⁹ Letteney, *The Christianization of Knowledge* describes a shift in the production and aggregation of knowledge in late antiquity.

⁹⁰ Egeria is the emblematic example here, see e.g., the discussions in Limor, “Reading Sacred Space” and Hunt, “The Itinerary of Egeria”. Compare the parallels V. della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred*, 42 draws between Egeria and the Cappadocian fathers in their use of topography as ‘a persuasive mnemonic device’. See also the study of virtual pilgrimages in Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes*, especially 79–101.

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