The Synoptic Problem?
An Old Testament Perspective

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The synoptic phenomenon is neither a uniquely NT issue nor a new issue, because there are many parallel stories, laws, and poems in the Hebrew Bible/OT. This study examines the literary technique of imitatio or mimesis in the classical and ancient Near Eastern worlds to see what the employment of this technique may tell us about why ancient writers reused, retold, and expanded select older works and how their early audiences may have understood these parallel stories. After discussing the esteem with which ancient writers viewed the accomplishments of earlier ages and defining what the technique of literary imitation is and is not (e.g., epitomization, inner-biblical exegesis, rewritten Bible), this article proceeds to discuss various dangers and disputes in the application of mimesis in the context of the ancient Mediterranean world (e.g., parody, plagiarism). The article concludes that study of creative imitation holds much promise for elucidating the significance of parallel laws, poems, lists, and stories in the Old and New Testaments. Scholars can gain an added appreciation of the literary craft practiced by the authors of synoptic Scriptures through an acute awareness of the techniques by which writers reworked, rewrote, and supplemented their sources.

Key Words: antiquarianism, archaism, biblical interpretation, canon, epitome, hermeneutics, inner-biblical exegesis, mimesis, rewritten Bible, scribal education, Synoptic Problem

A common question put to me by students in introductory OT/Hebrew Bible classes is “Why does Deuteronomy start all over again and repeat so much of what is said in Exodus and Numbers?” When we get to the Chronicler’s work in our survey, a common question is “Why did the Chronicler decide to write another history in addition to that of Samuel–Kings?” Similarly, when I teach a course entitled “Jewish and Christian

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Foundations,” a very common question is “Why are there four gospels in the NT and not just one?”

The phenomenon of multiple, parallel stories is neither a uniquely NT issue nor a new issue. There are many cases of parallel stories, parallel poems, parallel laws, and parallel lists in the OT. The number of these parallels is, in fact, stunning. One thinks immediately of the extensive parallels between Samuel–Kings and Chronicles, but there are also long parallel sections between books such as Kings and Isaiah, dealing with Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah (2 Kgs 18–20 // Isa 37–38), Kings and Jeremiah, dealing with the fall of Judah (2 Kgs 25 // Jer 51–52), and Genesis and Chronicles, dealing with universal and Israelite genealogies. There are also parallels between some of the Judahite lineages in Chronicles and the genealogy that appears near the end of Ruth (e.g., 1 Chr 2:9 // Ruth 4:18; 1 Chr 2:10–15 // Ruth 4:19b–22). There is an instance in which the same poem appears both within the book of Psalms and within one of the historical books (Ps 18:1–51 // 2 Sam 22:1–51). A list of Levitical towns appears in both in Josh 21 and in slightly different form in 1 Chr 6. There are, of course, many parallels between laws found in Deuteronomy and those found in earlier law collections within the Pentateuch. There is a fascinating case in which a medley of psalms or psalm excerpts appears within a narrative context (e.g., 1 Chr 16:8–36; cf. Pss 105:1–15; 96:1b–13; 106:1, 47–48). There are also cases in which we find significant parallels within a single book (e.g., the tabernacle accounts of Exod 25:1–31:17 and 35:1–40:33). The edict of Cyrus appears both within Chronicles (2 Chr 36:22–23) and within Ezra (1:1–4). There are actually three versions of the Cyrus edict within the book of Ezra itself (1:1–4, 5:13–15, 6:3–5). Similar but by no means identical lists of Jerusalem’s residents can be found in Neh 11 and 1 Chr 9. This list of parallels could be extended with other examples, but the larger point seems clear. The Synoptic Problem is not simply an NT issue but also an OT issue.

My concern in this essay is not to attempt to trace the possible lines of dependence from one particular text to another but rather to explore the significance of the phenomenon of parallel stories in the ancient world. Parallels of this sort have been dealt with in a variety of different ways in

1. Discussion of other common questions, such as “Will this be on the exam?”; “Could you tell us what is important in your lectures and what is not?”; and “I wasn’t here for class last two weeks; did I miss anything?” would undoubtedly take us too far from the topic at hand.

2. A useful (albeit not altogether complete) set of comparisons may be found in Abba Bendavid, Parallels in the Bible (Jerusalem: Carta, 1972).

3. So the MT. The situation is more complicated in the LXX insofar as the LXX account of Exod 35:1–40:33 lacks certain elements found in the MT, sometimes follows a variant order from that of the MT, and is generally shorter than the MT. See J. W. Wever, Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus (SBLSCS 30; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990). W. H. C. Propp provides a helpful list of the divergencies between the two accounts: Exodus 19–40 (AB 2a; New York: Doubleday, 2006) 631–36.
the history of biblical exegesis. In my judgment, the fact that we have so many parallel stories, laws, poems, and lists within the Hebrew Scriptures cannot be accidental. To have one or two parallels between OT books or parts thereof would not be unusual. The existence of a parallel or two such as these could be explained in any number of different ways. For example, there is the possibility that two different writers were each employing a common source. A hypothesis such as this seems to hold true in some cases. But, the more parallels that exist, the less likely it is that the common source hypothesis could be valid in each and every instance. To have so many clear parallels, word by word, clause by clause, sentence by sentence, pericope by pericope, and so forth indicates that at least in some instances a conscious process of reuse by one or more authors of older literary works was in play. Moreover, given the different genres represented by the parallels in the Hebrew Bible, as well as the variety of dates typically assigned to the books containing these passages, it may be safe to say that the interest in redeploying, developing, and recontextualizing older works extended over a long period of time. To be sure, there seems to be more of an intensified interest in drawing on older writings in the later biblical books, the apocryphal (or deuterocanonical) writings, and the Dead Sea Scrolls than there is in some of the earlier biblical materials. But, in any case, the parallels are confined neither to one genre of literature nor to one particular period in the history of biblical composition.

In this study, I would like to look at the literary technique of creative imitation (Latin: imitatio) or mimesis (Greek: mimesis) in the classical, biblical, and ancient Near Eastern worlds to see what the employment of this technique may tell us about why ancient writers reused, retold, recontextualized, and expanded select older works and how their ancient audiences may have understood parallel stories of this sort. The phenomenon of imitatio or mimesis was widespread in antiquity but has not received the kind of sustained attention it deserves in biblical studies. In recent years,


5. For instance, one of the few texts in Chronicles that explicitly deals with the Persian period (1 Chr 9:2–18) is partially paralleled by Neh 11:3–19. Both passages list various residents of Jerusalem, mention assorted genealogical connections of Judahites, Benjaminites, priests, and Levites, and follow a similar order. A common source seems to underlie both accounts, yet each work contains unique material contextualizing the list in its own way; Gary N. Knoppers, “Sources, Revisions, and Editions: The Lists of Jerusalem’s Residents in MT and LXX Nehemiah 11 and 1 Chronicles 9,” Text 20 (2000) 141–68. In Chronicles, the list appears as a catalogue of returnees to Jerusalem, whereas in Nehemiah the list is associated with the results of Nehemiah’s efforts to repopulate Jerusalem. The testimony of LXX Nehemiah is also important for comparative purposes, because this text is significantly shorter than MT Nehemiah 11.
John Van Seters has written an insightful treatment of literary imitation, and I would like to expand on his brief discussion while touching on a number of additional points. Some of the issues affecting the use and abuse of imitation, such as sycophancy, parody, and plagiarism, were discussed already in ancient times and are still valid today. These complications to our understanding of mimesis may be profitably discussed in this larger context.

I. OLD IS GOOD: AN OVERVIEW OF MIMESIS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

The terms mimesis and imitatio actually cover a broad range of related ways by which later writers made conscious reuse of older material. Mimesis basically designates a later writer's relation of acknowledged dependence on an earlier one. The models chosen by later writers to emulate were well-established poems, styles of writing, and prose works that enjoyed high standing in the writers' intellectual community.


7. These early discussions are abundantly attested, as we shall see, in sources stemming from the classical world. Even though the phenomenon of literary imitation is amply attested in ancient Egypt and in the city-states of ancient Mesopotamia, the surviving literary evidence from these great civilizations does not furnish us with nearly as much information relating to the intellectual reflections on and the debates about literary imitation as we can draw from classical and late antique sources.

8. There is a related but distinct use of mimesis in antiquity. Plato (Respublica 10.595–607) and Aristotle (Poetica) use mimesis to refer to the relation by which language and art represent their objects; Willem J. Verdenius, Mimesis: Plato's Doctrine of Artistic Imitation and Its Meaning to Us (Philosophia antiqua 3; Leiden: Brill, 1949). However interesting and philosophically important, this particular use of mimesis lies beyond the scope of my essay. In the context of biblical studies, see, for example, Eric Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953); Jacob Licht, “Mimesis in the Bible,” in לארשי יב.setDate:1134970962:Studies in the Bible Dedicated to the Memory of Israel and Zvi Broide (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv School for Jewish Studies, 1976) 133–42 (Hebrew).

9. The point about the self-conscious reuse of an established literary work (or works) is critical, because examples of imitation involving two parties may on some occasions be perceived by a third party (but not by the second party, the one responsible for the imitation itself). Some literary critics term the kind of imitation perceived by a third party as comparatio (rather than as imitatio). So, for instance, Peter Green, Classical Bearings: Interpreting Ancient History and Culture (London: Thames & Hudson, 1989) 194.

In mimesis, an earlier writer’s work (or works) served as the exemplar for one’s own. That is, although a given writer may have learned from a variety of earlier writings, the writer was normally expected to focus on one particular work, one particular style of writing, or one particular kind of genre to perpetuate and extend in his or her own work. It was rare, however, for the mimetic writer or poet to cite his or her main source overtly. The relationship between the two works was, in this respect, implicit not explicit. One objective in the process of imitatio was to understand and absorb the original model, while another was to develop it skillfully and imaginatively. One of the complaints lodged against the second-century B.C.E. Roman playwright Terence by his elder contemporary and competitor Luscius Lanuvinus was that Terence had added material from Menander’s Perinthia (“The Woman from Perinthos”) to his adaptation of Menander’s Andria (“The Woman from Andros”). For Luscius Lanuvinus, this was an act of contaminatio, an improper importation of alien elements from one literary work into another. To be sure, there are certain complex genres, such as historiography, that can themselves incorporate several genres or subgenres. Hence, the Chronicler’s work, which imitates the Deuteronomistic History, or more broadly the Primary History (the Enneateuch), incorporates a variety of literary subgenres—poems, lists, and genealogies—just like its exemplar does.

The larger point is, however, that mimesis normally operates not on a globally intertextual level but more with a view to extending and developing one particular established model. In one respect, mimesis is similar to the fashioning of a summary or “epitome” (epitome) of an older work, because both involve the studious reuse of an older, well-known literary writing. Beginning in the Hellenistic period, it was common for some
writers to compose convenient abridgements or potted histories of much longer works. Nevertheless, the literary technique of epitomizing long writings is substantially different from the literary technique of mimesis. The former simply involves the condensation of an older work but the latter involves the selective reuse, reworking, supplementation, and recontextualization of older material so that the borrowed material is recreated as the borrower’s “own property” (privi iuris) in a new work.

In some respects, mimesis resembles what scholars have called inner-biblical exegesis in that inner-biblical exegesis also involves the conscious reuse and reinterpretation of an older text. There is clear overlap between the two phenomena. But whereas inner-biblical interpretation can center on the citation and reuse of something as small as a phrase or a clause, imitation usually involves something as broad as the continuation and perpetuation of a genre, the reuse of an older style of writing poetry, a sustained use of archaizing language, or the extensive reuse of dramatic and narrative texts. Moreover, in the process of mimesis a writer is expected to go beyond interpreting and commenting on an inherited literary work, although an exercise such as this is certainly part of the larger picture. In mimesis, one also actively produces one’s own new and distinctive literary work. In literary imitation, the new work may even compete with or rival the established work. As Russell comments, in mimesis one should create one’s own distinctive work by selecting from and modifying the model and “at all costs” avoiding “treading precisely and timidly in the footsteps of the man in front.”

Although mimesis was one technique of literary composition found in a variety of ancient Mediterranean cultures, the best and most fully documented evidence for what ancient writers thought about the literary tech-

and importance that if anyone wishes to claim knowledge of the scriptures apart from it, he should laugh at himself” (Epistula 53.8). See further Gary N. Knoppers and Paul B. Harvey, “Omitted and Remaining Matters: On the Names Given to the Book of Chronicles in Antiquity,” JBL 121 (2002) 227–43.

nique stems from the classical world. In classical antiquity, ancient imitation is usually directed to an individual author or to authors grouped together by genre. In this manner, Herodotus incorporates and develops a series of epic conventions from Homer, even though the genre of Herodotus’s work differs markedly from that of Homer. Virgil also draws on Homer, while Ovid later draws on Virgil. In the first century B.C.E., Sallust develops a style based on preclassical writers and in particular on the style of the elder Cato (Censorius). In later centuries, Arruntius, among many others, imitates the style of Sallust. In the first century B.C.E., Lucretius freely adopts a style patterned after that of the third- to second-century B.C.E. poet Quintus Ennius. The third- to fourth-century C.E. teacher of rhetoric Arnobius, in turn, models his style after Lucretius. These few examples reveal that mimesis involves more than simply alluding to or borrowing from one isolated feature in an earlier work. Conte and Most write that *imitatio* is “the study and conspicuous deployment of features recognizably characteristic of a canonical author’s style or content, so as to define one’s own generic affiliation.” The use by these scholars working in classical studies of the term *canonical author* is deliberate. Mimesis works best when readers or listeners can readily recognize the model being imitated. To be eligible to serve as a model, a literary work needs to become well known and established in the writer’s broader intellectual community.

In his studies on literary criticism in the ancient classical world, Donald Russell provides a longer definition of *imitatio* involving a series of five principles.

1. One should choose an appropriate model to imitate (the object must be worth imitating).
2. The imitation should be tacitly acknowledged as an imitation and be recognizable as such.

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25. The *Annales* of the early Latin poet Ennius were closely studied by a variety of writers including Cicero, Catullus, Virgil, Ovid, and Lucan. Ennius himself was very much affected by past usage, having rendered Euripidean language in Latin for his (tragic) dramatic scripts. Awareness—and heightened appreciation—of what Ennius does depends, of course, on the reader’s knowledge of the Greek original.
27. Conte and Most, “Imitatio,” 749.
3. One should avoid slavish copying in content or style; the writer should make his mark on the material and so make the borrowing his own property. This should include providing a new literary setting and meaning to the borrowed material.

4. What should be imitated should not be simply one particular feature of the older work but a sign of the general excellence perceived in the model that could be achieved anew in a fresh setting.

5. One may aspire to compete with the established model and even offer a rival version of the borrowed work.28

At this point in the discussion, one might inquire as to what benefits a writer might gain from so closely studying and emulating a prestigious literary work. Would not it make more sense for a new writer simply to begin afresh and compose a work with no implicit or explicit ties to previous literary works? Would not a concentrated dedication to understanding, absorbing, and imitating the achievements of the past detract from one’s own artistic efforts? Questions such as these are perfectly understandable and, as we shall see later, were raised by some ancients themselves. Indeed, some ancient writers did not seem overly receptive to or cognizant of the tradition of mimesis. Yet, at least for some other scribes, the questions may assume too much. That is, the extent to which ancient authors, poets, and artists could begin from scratch (or would want to do so) with no ties to past traditions or styles may be avidly debated. It may also not have been an easy task for writers, poets, and artists to establish themselves without the support of patrons, teachers, and sponsors, who themselves had ties to or preferences for certain earlier works.29 In any case, the author employing literary imitation could benefit in different ways from exploiting this form of composition. The association with a well-established and much-admired composition could bring luster to one’s own creation. The idea, according to Seneca the Elder, was “not so much to pilfer, but to borrow openly in the hope of being noticed.”30 In a world that valued antiquity, a connection of this sort with a prestigious predecessor could go a long way to promote the success of one’s own work.

The widespread interest in literary imitation within the ancient world was itself intimately tied to the value the ancients placed on learning from the past as a necessary foundation for embarking on any successful endeavor in the present. “One learns (one’s) skill from another, both long ago and now.”31 In a traditional system of education such as this, poets are “lis-


29. The system of artistic patronage is defended, for example, by the playwright Terence in his prologue to Adelphoe (“Brothers”) 15–21.

30. Seneca the Elder, Suasoriae 3.7. The comment is made with reference to the use of Virgil’s work by Ovid.

31. Baccylides, Pien frg. 5. On the text, see Herwig Maehler, Bacchylidis carmina cum fragmentis (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana; Munich: Saur, 2003) 87.
teners or readers before they become singers or writers.\textsuperscript{32} In Hesiod's \textit{Theogony}, one reads that the Muses are the daughters of "Memory" (\textit{Mnemosyne}).\textsuperscript{33} Literary imitation is, therefore, something that was part and parcel of scribal educational systems in a variety of ancient cultures. As Niditch and Carr point out, in ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, scribal education of this sort would commonly take the form of copying, memorizing, and reciting older texts.\textsuperscript{34} Translation, paraphrase, and commentary were related skills taught to young scribes. Much of this educational training was primarily centered on school texts, letters, and administrative documents. But, at least some students progressed from studying and copying economic and administrative documents to studying longer literary texts that were taken to represent the classical or canonical texts of an earlier age (or ages).\textsuperscript{35} Texts such as this would be carefully studied, copied, committed to memory, and orally recited. The deployment of \textit{imitatio} thus connoted the high esteem of authors for older well-established literary works.\textsuperscript{36} In an age that prized the past and present continuity with the past, the careful use of \textit{imitatio} was a mark of erudition and distinction.

The importance of antiquity within the world of antiquity is a point that is often forgotten or neglected in some contemporary discussions of parallel texts and synoptic Scriptures. Our own contemporary culture places such an emphasis on originality, inventiveness, and creativity that it makes it difficult for us to fathom the extent to which many of the ancients were concerned with antiquity, continuity, and pedigree.\textsuperscript{37} In our cultural setting, the word \textit{imitation} can carry negative connotations of derivation, counterfeit status, and artificiality. But for many (albeit not all) in the ancient world, imitation was one way by which admired older works could be illumined, perpetuated, and improved.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{32} Conte and Most, "\textit{Imitatio}," 749.
\textsuperscript{33} Hesiod, \textit{Theogony} 54. Zeus was the father of the Muses: \textit{Theogony} 36. Further references and commentary may be found in Martin L. West, \textit{Theogony} (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966) 174–77.
\textsuperscript{36} Conte, \textit{Rhetoric of Imitation}, 23–46.
\textsuperscript{37} So, for example, when discussing the importance of learning from the past, Diodorus Siculus calls history the "prophetess of truth" and the "metropolis of philosophy," \textit{Bibliothek} 1.2.2. See also Isocrates, \textit{Contra sophistak} 12–13; Cicero, \textit{De inventione rhetorica} 1.2.1–2; Tacitus, \textit{Dialogus de oratoribus} 32.5–7; 33.1–34.4; Plutarch, \textit{De liberis educandis} 1–4; Eusebius, \textit{Historia ecclesiastica} 10.2.
\textsuperscript{38} Manifest in the different ways by which later writers reuse the works of earlier writers (extended quotation, simple quotation, modified citation, refutation, conflation, reformulation, amplification, supplementation, and so forth) is a range of literary dependency. This
Moreover, within the world of antiquity there were certain periods in which the interest in the past was especially acute. These have been described by some scholars in Egyptology and ancient Near Eastern studies as periods of deliberate archaism or antiquarianism and by some scholars in classical studies as periods of classicism. In any case, these were times in which scribes and artists consciously revived the art, architecture, language, styles, and tropes of literature in the past, usually some distant past, and reused these in their own time.

The history of ancient Egypt is replete with examples involving the deliberate reuse of art, architecture, style, and language to link one’s own age with the venerated past. Artists, architects, and writers consciously imitated scenes, styles, or certain kinds of linguistic usage that they associated with a particular period (or periods) in the past. Although it may be rightly assumed that the ancient Egyptians constantly revisited the past with a view to restoring the glories of the monarchs they most ardently admired, there were also a number of other more practical factors at work in their reuse of older motifs and styles. Antiquarian tendencies were especially prominent in the architecture, sculpture, and painting of the New Kingdom, Third Intermediate, Kushite, and Saite periods.


The presentation of the Josianic period in the Deuteronomistic History is another example of archaism. Here, one reads an account of the (re)-discovery of a lost older document (Ur-Deuteronomium) leading to a temporary crisis in the affairs of the state. Having heard the “words of the scroll of the torah” read to him, the Judahite king tears his clothes, and, fearing divine wrath because “our ancestors did not heed the words of this scroll to practice all what is written concerning us,” he orders a prophetic consultation (2 Kgs 22:11–13). A deliberate and concerted royal attempt to reform Judahite society and the temple system of worship in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 23:4–14) follows, according to the demands for centralization as spelled out in the older prestigious writing. Given that the Torah scroll concerns Israel as a whole and not simply one part (Judah) of that greater multitrival entity, it is not too surprising that Josiah also makes an attempt to reform parts of the former Northern Kingdom (2 Kgs 23:15–20). To be sure, Josiah’s reforms in Bethel and in the “towns of Samaria” were prophesied centuries earlier (1 Kgs 13), but the reformer king is unaware of these old prophecies when he ventures north from Judah. He proceeds on the basis of the demands of the scroll that was recited to him and is only informed of the centuries-old prophecies during the course of his campaigns (2 Kgs 23:16–17). The larger point is that, in the story found in Kings, the Judahite king makes a concerted effort to reform his society according to the dictates of an older, venerable scripture.

A third example of archaism may be drawn from the history of Greek literature dating to Hellenistic times onward. Literature from this epoch became increasing archaistic and classicizing, neglecting earlier Hellenistic writers and the writers’ own contemporaries in favor of works in the archaic and classical periods. The literati in the later Hellenistic era were conscious of the present as being set off from but heir to a great past...
tradition. A distinction was made between the classical and the postclassical.\textsuperscript{47} For these writers, a sizeable gap separated their time from the time(s) of formative accomplishments in the past. Much of the Greek literature stemming from this period is mimetic, drawing its inspiration not so much from its immediate predecessors as from the works of older classical writers. In this case, the issue was not continuity but revival. Imitation, focusing on the greats of the past, was “an imitation of the ancients” \textit{\(mimēsis tōn archaiōn\)}.\textsuperscript{48} Authors, such as the first-century C.E. Greek critic and historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus, championed Thucydides as a model for historians and contended for the superiority of Attic over Asiatic rhetorical models.\textsuperscript{49}

A fourth example of a trend to return to the classics occurred in the world of Latin literature during a number of periods, especially during the so-called imperial age (from the time of Augustus to the reign of Constantine).\textsuperscript{50} One form classicism repeatedly took was reviving and deliberately employing obsolete diction in one’s own work.\textsuperscript{51} One goal in using such archaising diction, in line with the general Roman respect for the past, was to impart solemnity and a sense of importance to one’s own literary creation. This held true even when the usage had not been solemn in its original context.\textsuperscript{52} Another goal was to mark one’s own education and erudition. During the second century C.E., writers studied the works of earlier writers as important subjects in their own right and as sources for vocabulary and linguistic constructions to revive.\textsuperscript{53}

One implication of these case studies is to point to the larger importance ancients ascribed to works of quality, authority, and prestige within their own tradition(s). There were certain standard literary works that writers were expected to master and emulate in form, subject matter, language, or style. The rhetorical culture of the first four centuries of our era has been called a civilization of “the books.”\textsuperscript{54} In one instance, Dionysius of Halicarnassus even refers to this corpus of model compositions as \textit{ta ta...}
biblia, “the books,” a fascinating literary parallel to the term employed in early Jewish and Christian circles for the Scriptures.\(^55\)

This phenomenon has another point of relevance for biblical studies. The very existence of a plurality of gospels in the antique era, for instance, tells us that the gospel form was a powerful and popular genre of literature within the early churches. Before mimesis can occur, there has to be something approaching a consensus as to what important works, literary styles, or genres are worthy of imitation.\(^56\) That the gospel genre was repeatedly imitated, adapted, and transformed within the space of a few centuries is important. It seems evident that not only were the early gospels carefully read and studied but they also became the basis for the creation of new and different types of gospels in a variety of later cultural and religious settings.

Similarly, the recognition that mimesis was a widespread practice in the ancient world sheds some light on the phenomenon of the so-called rewritten Bible texts that appear as a prominent type of literature within the Dead Sea Scrolls. Works belonging to the broad category of “rewritten Bible” include the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen\(^n\)), the Temple Scroll (4Q524; 11QT\(^a–c\)), and the Reworked Pentateuch (4Q158; 4Q364–67; 4QRP).\(^57\) To these

\(^{55}\) Ars rhetorica, 298.1. See also his Epistula ad Pompeium 3, in which he describes the work of Herodotus as the best “canon” (kanon) of historical writing in Ionic Greek and the work of Thucydides as the best in Attic Greek. Lists of works comprising the Greek and Roman literary canons may be found in Quintilian, Institutio oratoria 10.1.46–84 and 10.1.85–131, respectively. See George A. Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Traditions from Ancient to Modern Times (2nd rev. ed.; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) 132–33; Elaine Fantham, “Latin Criticism of the Early Empire,” in The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, vol. 1: Classical Criticism (ed. George A. Kennedy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 286–91. To be sure, the make-up of the canon in the first centuries of our era is not entirely a clear matter. The composition of the canon may have not been so much a fixed constant as a constant flux. For example, the literary canon embraced by a circle of rhetoricians might differ from the canon embraced by a circle of historians living at the same time. McDonald, The Biblical Canon, 39–44. Moreover, canon did experience some change in accordance with new settings, the rising popularity of certain works (and the waning popularity of others), and new social and historical circumstances; Flashar, “Die klassizistische Theorie der Mimesis,” 79–97; Peter Parsons, “Identities in Diversity,” in Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World (ed. Anthony Bulloch et al.; Hellenistic Culture and Society 12; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 157–62. For the history of antique and medieval Christianity, see the extensive treatment of McDonald, The Biblical Canon, 190–429 (and the references cited there).

\(^{56}\) My concern in this context is not to trace the individual directions of dependence but rather to point to the relevance of the general phenomenon itself. Derrenbacker provides a convenient overview of recent scholarly theories of the relationships among the Synoptic Gospels; Ancient Compositional Practices, 120–258.

\(^{57}\) Works such as these take as a point of departure an earlier biblical book or collection of books. They select from, interpret, comment on, and expand portions of a particular biblical book (or group of books), addressing obscurities, important points, puzzling features, and other issues with the source text. It should be acknowledged, however, that there is no widespread consensus as to precisely what a rewritten scripture is; Knoppers, I Chronicles 1–9, 129–34.
works could be added other well-known writings, such as the book of *Jubilees*, Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities*, and Pseudo-Philos *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (“Book of Biblical Antiquities”). In short, the creation and preservation of these texts may tell us something about the popularity and prestige of the originals on which they were based.

II. Out with the Old, In with the New: Disputes and Dangers in the Use of Mimesis

The phenomenon of mimesis was widespread in the ancient world and was itself a topic of study and discussion within classical antiquity.58 Indeed, by the first century C.E., a number of rhetorical schools had developed in the classical world. The *Controversiae* by Seneca the Elder and a similar type of collection ascribed to Quintilian, *Declamations minores* (“The Minor Declamations”), consist of model speeches of various genres—forensic, deliberative, epideictic, panegyric—that students were supposed to imitate, when assigned a certain topic.59 In other words, the rhetorical schools, as they emerged in the (Greek) Hellenistic world after Alexander and in Rome, were living examples of how mimetic art was explicitly and consciously practiced.60

Given the practice of literary imitation in a number of different periods, it is not surprising that one comes across a range of comments about the nature of and standards governing the practice. Certainly, training students in the art of mimesis was not without its critics. For instance, the practice of reviving and employing archaic diction and classical style was eschewed by some. Quintilian (ca. 35–95 C.E.) decries the use of antique


60. In this context, the comments of Quintilian are relevant; *Institutio oratoria* 2.10; 12.1, 10.
language as unsuitable in many circumstances. Similarly, Seneca the Younger (ca. 4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) complains about those in his own time who employ obsolete, unknown, and old-fashioned words as unbecoming to achieving good style. He pronounces that archaizing usage of this sort by contemporary orators is “corrupt” (corruptum) and “mistaken” (peccare). These sorts of comments are important because they give us a better sense of the ancient debates about the proper goals, methods, and limitations of mimesis. One may ask, for example, what is the boundary, if there is such a thing, between mimesis and plagiarism? Where does copying stop and thievery begin? Are there any cases of plagiarism within biblical literature? Moreover, what is the relationship between mimesis and parody, if any? Does parody, which presumes close study of a literary work, a particular set of works, or an entire genre, constitute a form of mimesis? It will be useful to engage these questions briefly, because they inevitably affect how scholars may understand the relationships among synoptic Scriptures.

**Parody**

At first glance, parody would seem to be an obvious form of mimesis. Parody seems to be a kind of imitation that is designed to amuse and intended to be recognized this way. The success of a parody depends in large measure on readers (or listeners) knowing a good deal about the original that the new work parodies. In fact, some audience recognition is essential for allusions to have good effect. An example is the play *Ranae* (“Frogs”; 405 B.C.E.) by the Greek playwright Aristophanes, in which Aeschylus and Euripides deliver bombastic speeches. The humor in these orations depends, in no small part, on auditors having seen and heard plays by the respective poets. Other examples may be found in Ovid’s work *Fasti* (“Calendar”). For instance, Ovid’s highly allusive and disjointed relation of the fall of the Tarquins and, for that matter, the tradition of Lucretia and Brutus, are practically incomprehensible unless one knows the received tradition as set out in the Roman history of Livy. In short, the concise and witty tales that Ovid offers in this work often evoke standard texts and are sensible only if one knows the standard tradition(s) on which they are based.

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61. Yet, he also criticizes the practice of coining many new words and speaking in metaphorical language. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 11.6–7.
65. Similarly, irony and satire also depend heavily on allusion for their effectiveness.
66. Livy, *Ab urbe condita libri* (“Books from the Foundation of the City”) 1.39–54; 2.2–19; Ovid, *Fasti* 2.685–852. I wish to thank Paul B. Harvey (personal communication) for calling my attention to this text.
The primary form parody takes is comedy, but parody also plays a role in other forms of literature. A striking example is the collection of “biographies” of the Roman emperors from the second–third centuries (C.E.) known as the *Scriptores historiae Augustae*. Purportedly a continuation of the biographies of Roman emperors (*De vita Caesarum*) written by Suetonius (ca. 70–130 C.E.), the individual biographies are cast in a Suetonian format and are said to be written by no fewer than six different authors. In fact, a wealth of clues suggests that the biographies were written by one author, writing (probably) in the late fourth century (ca. 395 C.E.). It is relevant to observe both that this author has created some fictitious emperors within his larger work and that his mimesis does not involve any acknowledged dependence on an older work. The success of the parody depends on a circle of well-educated readers (*cognoscenti*) who will recognize and appreciate the author’s sober, echt-biographical mask. The target of parody thus may be an individual author, a particular writing, a set of works, or an entire genre. In line with Russell’s definition of *imitatio*, parody can involve the principle of competition or rivalry (*zēlos*) with an established model. In parody, the model imitated may be even turned into its mirror image.

Yet, literary imitation normally assumes some admiration on the part of a writer for an older, well-established work, whereas parody may assume the opposite scenario. Mimesis may involve the veneration of a canonical work, whereas parody may lampoon the older work and undermine it. To take one example, Aristophanes claimed that Eupolis’ comedy *Maricas* (ca. 421 B.C.E.) was his own *Equites* (“Knights”; 424 B.C.E.) “worn inside out” and that other comic writers were “imitating” (*mimoumenoi*) his comparisons. The use of the term *imitation* by Aristophanes is clearly negative. Parody is rejected as an illegitimate form of mimesis. In this instance, mimesis, if this is what we may call it, may have worked too well. The relationship between an older work and a new work was readily


70. To complicate matters further, there are several works surviving in the Homeric tradition that are both parodies and advertisements of the (often anonymous) author’s Homeric skills. The *Batrachomyomachia* (“Battle of Frogs and Mice”), a (probably) 4th-century B.C.E. work, is a brief “Homeric”-epic parody that does not make fun of the master work as much as it imitates its depictions of warfare in an amusing fashion. Described by modern scholars as an epyllion (a kind of miniature epic), the *Batrachomyomachia* contains many entertaining epithets, comical terms for armor, and so forth; Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homerica* (new rev. ed.; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936) 541–63.
acknowledged by the original author himself.71 The deliberate reuse of the content, form, or style of an older literary work by a younger playwright brought some unwelcome recognition to the new work. In sum, parody may be regarded as a legitimate form of literary imitation, but it may not have been universally accepted, much less appreciated, as such in the ancient world.

**Plagiarism**

Within classical antiquity, a more fiercely-debated and complicated issue than parody was plagiarism. But, given that mimesis by definition involves the reuse of an older work in a new work, how should one define plagiarism? What constituted the "theft" (Greek klope; Latin furtum) of another's writing? The more nuanced and sophisticated of the ancient literary critics distinguished between the *imitatio* of earlier writers' works and the plagiarism of those works.72 For these literati, theft constituted slavish and derivative copying and was to be condemned.73 Plagiarism was despised as thievery.74 By contrast, creative imitation was an acceptable and normal re-use of older material that resulted in the borrowed material becoming the borrower's own property in the new setting within which it was framed. Because the original was presumably well known and informed the new context, the relationship between the old and the new was implicitly acknowledged, rather than concealed. When Seneca the Elder suggests that Ovid imitated Virgil "not as a pilferer, but as an open appropriator" (*non subripiendi causa sed palam mutuandi*), the difference between mimesis and plagiarism seems clear.75 The same distinction seems evident when Longinus praises a whole tradition of writers from Stesichorus and Archilochus to Plato for their clever and informed reuse of Homer.76 Nevertheless, the boundary between the proper reappropriation of an older work and outright plagiarism is not always clear. Indeed, a boundary

71. It could be argued, in this case, that Eupolis's mistake was to parody the work of a living playwright. Perhaps it was a sign of disrespect for a younger playwright to mimic the work of an older competitor. But, as my colleague Paul B. Harvey points out (personal communication), Aristophanes himself parodies two works of an elder playwright, Euripides' *Andromache* (ca. 426 B.C.E.) and *Helena* (412 B.C.E.), in Aristophanes' own work *Thesmophoriazusae* (411 B.C.E.). 72. The following discussion is indebted to Michael S. Silk, "Plagiarism," in *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth; 3rd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 1188. More broadly, see Eduard Stemplinger, *Das Plagiat in der griechischen Literatur* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1912). 73. So, for instance, Horace, *Ars poetica* 132–34. 74. In the opinion of Van Seters, the Chronicler employed a form of imitation in writing his history, but a form of imitation that amounts to plagiarism. Van Seters comes to this conclusion because he thinks that the Chronicler's imitation was obvious but not acknowledged as such; "Creative Imitation," 399–400. The issues are admittedly complex, but I disagree with Van Seters's claim and will deal with the matter in a future study. 75. Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Suasoriae* 3.7. Cf. Cicero, *Brutus* *(De Claris Oratoribus)* 76. 76. Longinus, *Peri hypsous*, 13.
of this sort seems to have been unknown to many in the ancient world. The question is very much connected to a related issue, namely, the link between tradition and innovation. Is the ultimate goal of mimesis to learn from the excellent minds of the past, to study, absorb, and master much-admired classics, or is it to innovate beyond, compete with, and even surpass the originals? Is the highest goal of mimesis the melding of a student’s personality with his model’s or the production of a new and better work than that produced by the model? When many modern critics speak of *imitatio*, they emphasize emulation and competition (*zélōs*), rather than servile dependence. They speak of the need for critical study and the use of a plurality of models, rather than the uncritical reworking of a single older work. It has to be admitted, however, that when many ancient writers speak of “*imitātiō*,” they usually mean (1) the “action of imitating an example”; (2) the “action of producing a copy or an imitation, mimicking”; or (3) the “result of imitating, a copy, counterfeit, imitation.”

To be sure, it is important to point out that some ancient commentators speak of the need to go beyond imitating an older model. As Quintilian points out, if one sets out to reproduce an older literary work, no matter how highly esteemed and worthy that excellent model may be, one will end up reproducing both its strengths and its weaknesses. Moreover, an older literary work, no matter how highly esteemed that work may be, will inevitably exhibit certain oddities and peculiarities that would be unsuitable to reproduce in one’s own writing. According to Quintilian, a student needs to go beyond imitation and aspire to produce a better product. Better, then, to learn from more than one past master in preparing one’s own literary work. Similarly, in the view of Horace, it is important to learn from the best of tradition but not to imitate it slavishly. It is clear that some of the antique writers were themselves aspiring to produce better works than those written by their ancestors and peers. For example, in composing his *Life of Paul, the First Hermit*, Jerome seems to have been determined to upstage the work of Athanasius, *Life of Anthony*, by creating a

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77. In this context, the very definition and meaning of mimesis are at stake. Parsons (“Identities in Diversity,” 162–63) distinguishes among three kinds of mimesis: (1) an external variety (a point of debate in philosophical circles) in which the relation between a representation and reality is at issue (see n. 8); (2) an internal variety (a point of debate in rhetorical circles) in which the relation between stylist and stylistic model is at issue; (3) another variety in which the relation between inspiration and technique is at issue. The third intersects with the second.


forerunner to Anthony. In so doing, Jerome advertises that he (Jerome) is more knowledgeable than the master Athanasius.

Whether an attempt of this sort “to aspire to compete with the model and even offer a rival version of the borrowed work” is better termed _aemulatio_ rather than _imitatio_, as Green has argued, is unclear. The process of _aemulatio_ can be not only competitive but also hostile. The argument is important, but the shortcoming of this view resides in the fact that _aemulatio_ normally refers to the effort to rival another person (usually a contemporary) in terms of personal character and above all in public persona. This contrasts with the attempt to rival or to suppress another literary work. In any case, the larger point is that many of those praising literary imitation were also aware of its inherent dangers. These critics stress the need to equal or better the accomplishments of one’s predecessors. In the view of Longinus, the contest with the greats of the past is itself a noble one, and in the company of such illustrious figures, “it is no disgrace to be worsted by one’s elders.”

But the nuanced distinction between mimesis and plagiarism advanced by some literary critics seems to have been lost on many others in the ancient world. Not a few of the literate in classical antiquity seem to have deemed any substantial reuse of older compositions as improper. Hence, what might be viewed by one ancient critic as a brilliant _imitatio_ might be condemned by another critic as derivative copying or the “theft” (_klepē_) of another author’s creation. For some writers, the reappropriation of their work by other writers was a delicate issue. The sixth-century

83. Green, _Classical Bearings_, 194. From Green’s perspective, the literary technique of _aemulatio_ can include _imitatio_ as one of its methods but it is not necessary for _aemulatio_ to do so (with reference to Livy, _Ab urbe condita_ 28.21.4; Velleius, _Paterculus_ 1.17.5–7; Cicero, _Tusculanae disputationes_ 4.3.7, 18.7, 26.1–2; Pliny (the Elder), _Naturalis historiae_ 13.21.70, and other works).
84. Livy, _Ab urbe condita_ 26.38.10, 44.25.2; Pliny (the Elder), _Naturalis historiae_ 13.70; Cicero, _Tusculanae disputationes_ 4.26.56. Conte stresses, however, that _traditio_ and _aemulatio_ need not be seen as diametrically opposed to one another; _Rhetoric of Imitation_, 37–39.
85. See the _Oxford Latin Dictionary_ (ed. P. G. W. Glare; Oxford: Clarendon, 1988) 64, which defines _aemulatio_ as (1) “Desire to equal or excel others, ambition, emulation”; (2) “Unfriendly rivalry, emulation, envy”; (3) “An attempt to imitate (a person) or reproduce (a thing), imitation.” Cf. _aemulatus_ (ibid., 64), “Rivalry, emulation.”
86. Hence, Russell argues that _imitatio_ and _aemulatio_ can be (and should be) complementary literary processes; “De imitazione,” 9–10.
(B.C.E.) Greek poet Theognis purportedly placed a seal (sphragis) on his verses in an attempt to avert their misappropriation.\(^8^8\) The fourth-century B.C.E. Greek orator Isocrates intimates that, because other orators had (mis)used his work, he was free to reuse it himself.\(^8^9\) The first-century C.E. poet Horace dismissed those poets who imitated him as a “servile herd” (servum pecus).\(^9^0\) The Roman historian Polybius wrote that one should engage only in the writing of recent history, lest one repeat or simply plagiarize the works of earlier historians, as he accused many others of having done.\(^9^1\)

Some applied the damaging label plagiarism fairly mechanically to imitation in general. In this context, a number of Greek writers produced dissertations entitled “On Plagiarism” (Peri klopēs). The earliest known list stems from the third- to second-century B.C.E. scholar Aristophanes of Byzantium.\(^9^2\) The title of his work is revealing: Parallēloi Menandrou te kai aph’ hōn eklepšen eklogai (“Parallels between Menander and Those from Whom He Stole”). A later and much more extensive list is provided by the third-century C.E. scholar and philosopher Porphyry.\(^9^3\) In both cases, one comes across numerous charges of plagiarism. In fact, in the case of Porphyry, one finds the astonishing claim that the major Greek thinkers and writers were all plagiarists.\(^9^4\) As serious as allegations such as these may be, they are rarely complicated by any recognition of the nuanced relationships that existed among some similar texts. Philosophers as eminent as Anaxagoras, Plato, and Epicurus were accused in the third-century C.E. writing of Diogenes Laertius of stealing other thinkers’ ideas.\(^9^5\) In any case, it is revealing that such serious charges were leveled, even at a relatively late date, against a variety of highly esteemed thinkers from much earlier times.

In Rome, Terence was accused of theft for reworking older Greek material already translated or adapted by his predecessors, especially the Greek playwright Menander (ca. 392–344 B.C.E.).\(^9^6\) It may be helpful to discuss his case in some depth, because the actual situation was certainly

\(^8^8\) Some would date him earlier to the seventh century; Martin L. West, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) xiv, 64–73.
\(^8^9\) Isocrates, *ad Philippum* 5.94 (ca. 346 B.C.E.).
\(^9^0\) Horace, *Epistula* 1.19.20.
\(^9^1\) Polybius, *Histories* 9.2. Yet, as Van Seters observes (“Creative Imitation,” 399), the fashioning of narratives such as these about past events left a lot of scope for imitating the form, style, and content of the works of previous historical writers. In other words, ancient historians did not employ the works of their predecessors merely as historical sources.
\(^9^3\) Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 10.3.12.
\(^9^4\) A charge with which Eusebius and some of the Church Fathers very much agreed; Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 10.1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 14.
\(^9^5\) Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 3.37 (Plato); 9.34 (Democritus); 10.7, 14 (Epicurus). It is very difficult to assess the validity of the accusations registered in the work of Diogenes Laertius because the nature and reliability of many of his sources are uncertain.
more complex than his chief critic made it out to be. In the prefaces to his plays, Terence openly acknowledged his indebtedness to the works of past poets and playwrights. He made no attempt to hide the fact that he borrowed from past literary works and retained many of their original titles. Nevertheless, such open declarations about sources did not stop his elder contemporary and rival Luscius Lanuvinus from repeatedly accusing him of contaminating and spoiling well-admired older plays.

When evaluating the charges of the little-known Luscius Lanuvinus, it is difficult to make an independent assessment of the degree to which Terence and another Roman playwright, Plautus, adapted Menander's comedies for the Roman stage, because only a few of Menander's plays survive. Moreover, one would have to examine each instance of borrowing on a case-by-case basis because the extent of reuse may have varied in each instance. Study of the fragments of Menander's *Dis exapaton* ("The Double Deceiver") suggests that Plautus' adaptation of this work took more liberties with this comedy than previous scholarship had imagined.

In the case of Terence, he seems to have retained most of the names of the plays he took over from earlier Greek and Roman playwrights. Terence seems to have been generally more conservative in modifying the plots of his borrowed plays than Plautus was, yet he also seems to have innovated in a number of ways, including adding material from other plays into some of his plays, adding his own material to plays, converting monologues to dialogues, changing the endings of plays, avoiding the use of direct address, increasing the number of lines with musical accompaniment, and using prologues to combat his critics (as opposed to employing prologues to inform his audience about the structure of the plays). In sum,
even though Terence presented himself as an honest and open appropriator of earlier well-established literary works and evidently left his own distinctive stamp on the materials he borrowed and developed, this compliance with the traditional conventions of literary imitation did not prevent his work from being assailed as derivative and counterfeit.

As Silk comments, “The preoccupation with plagiarism over many centuries serves as a reminder that, contrary to some modern misstatements, ancient literature, especially poetry, was expected to be ‘new.’ Certainly many writers, Greek and Roman, are anxious to assert the originality of their own claim to it.”100 Much of the modern discussion about imitation and plagiarism assumes clearly available and agreed-on rules across the spectrum of ancient scholarship during a variety of times, but no central, universally recognized arbiter of definitions and standards existed in antiquity. There was, of course, no such thing as copyright, and, there was no widespread notion of the sanctity of intellectual property.101 Working within diverse traditions, diverse times, and diverse settings, ancient critics were sure to disagree. One problem was that ancient authors were employing different, if not competing and contradictory, esthetic principles of what constituted a great work of literary art. For some, clever appropriations of the styles, genres, or motifs of earlier, formative works were highly prized. In this view, the cultured reuse of older literary tradition was itself a contribution to the continuation and livelihood of that tradition. Imitation was the sincerest form of flattery.

To a greater or lesser degree, all literary works employing mimesis are, however, by definition derivative. Each borrows from past authors and each stands in a clear line of dependence on one or more previous literary works. It is precisely the derivative property inherent in imitation that was acceptable to some ancient commentators but objectionable to others. For the latter, originality was an essential key to establishing the value of a new work. A clear relation of dependence on an older work was deemed to be a liability, not an asset. The reuse and incorporation of the style, content, or genres inherent in received materials threw into question whether works of this sort were actually new works. A demonstrable connection to and reliance on older writings, no matter how well established or famous, could be viewed as plagiarism and theft.

100. Silk, “Plagiarism,” 1188. Among those asserting the originality of their works are Pindar, Olympian Odes 9.48–49; Aristophanes, Nubes 547; Callimachus, Aetia, frg. 1.25–28; Lucretius, De rerum natura 1.921–30; Virgil, Georgics 3.291–93; Horace, Epistula 1.19.21–34; Propertius, Elegiorum 3.1.1–6; Diodorus Siculus, Bibliothekê 40.7.8; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Antiquitates Romanae 1.2.1, 3.1–3, 4.1–5. Whether, in fact, each of these works was completely original is another matter.

101. Derrenbacker provides a good overview of the stages in the production and “publication” of books in the Greco-Roman world: Ancient Compositional Practices, 39–44.
These two views (and others) of what constituted excellence in literature coexisted within antiquity, and the inherent contradiction between them was never resolved. Indeed, the two views (and others) still exist today.102 Nevertheless, it is surely relevant that some of those practicing mimesis continued to do so despite the criticism they received from others. This suggests at least two things. First, it indicates that there were those within the broader intellectual community who could distinguish between derivative copying and creative borrowing and appreciate the difference between the two. Second, it demonstrates that there was a receptive audience for mimesis in the ancient world during a variety of times and in a number of different places. In spite of the literary appetite of some for completely new and original writings, there were obviously others who very much appreciated clever and creative appropriations of classic writings.

**Conclusions**

Study of the ancient practice of mimesis holds much promise for elucidating the significance of parallel laws, poems, lists, and stories in the Hebrew Bible and in the NT.103 Given that many biblical writings were anonymous, undated, and untitled, it would seem that they readily lent themselves to imitation. Van Seters comments, “What is remarkable in biblical studies is that scholars can treat intertextuality, source criticism, form-criticism and tradition history and completely avoid any discussion of the presence and significance of literary imitation in the text.”104 Indeed, the recognition of mimesis within the larger context of a variety of writings stemming from the ancient world leads one to expect to see mimesis at work in the history of the composition of literary writings in ancient Israel and Judah. That the authors of Deuteronomy, for example, rework the Covenant Code should occasion no great surprise.105 Similarly, that the Chronicler incorporates and rewrites selections of a variety of earlier writings within his own work is readily understandable when his

102. In a recent article (“Her Life, His Art, Your Call”) on ever-expanding notions of plagiarism and the plethora of public lawsuits pertaining to alleged instances of plagiarism, Charles Isherwood asks, “If, in today’s climate, a mere few words corresponding too closely to a few others in a previously published work can bring you newspaper headlines, will all written records of contemporary experience eventually become off-limits to other writers?” *New York Times*, December 3, 2006.


104. “Creative Imitation,” 397.

compositional technique is understood against the larger backdrop of the age within which he lived.

To be sure, Deuteronomy can be read without recourse to the Covenant Code as a work of literature in its own right, and Chronicles can be read without recourse to a variety of older, established compositions as a work of literature in its own right. Nevertheless, the authors of Deuteronomy and Chronicles would likely have assumed that their educated readers would know something of their sources and thus would appreciate their careful reuse of older literary works. For this reason, a strong case can be made for the study of mimesis. Scholars can gain an added appreciation of the literary craft practiced by the authors of synoptic Scriptures through an acute awareness of their sources.\textsuperscript{106} After all, what one of the ancient writers said still rings true: “One learns (one’s) skill from another, both long ago and now.”

\textsuperscript{106} In addition, the process of rereading the primary sources may be different after one has read a later writer’s \textit{imitatio} of those writings; Christine Mitchell, “The Dialogism of Chronicles,” in \textit{The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture} (ed. Matthew P. Graham and Steven L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 263; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 311–26.