Ancient biography is now a well-established and popular field of study among classicists as well as many scholars of literature and history more generally. In particular biographies offer important insights into the dynamics underlying ancient performance of the self and social behaviour, issues currently of crucial importance in Classical Studies. They also raise complex issues of narrativity and fictionalization. This volume examines a range of ancient texts which are or purport to be biographical, and explores how formal narrative categories such as time, space and character are constructed and how they address (highlight, question, thematize, underscore or problematize) the borderline between historicity and fictionality. In doing so, it makes a major contribution not only to the study of ancient biographical writing but also to broader narratological approaches to ancient texts.

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This volume aims to contribute to two broad fields of classical scholarship: the study of biography and that of fictionality in narrative literature. As its title indicates, it combines both fields in that it approaches ancient biography as narrative, thereby following insightful work of other classicists (Pelling 2002a, Hägg 2012a) and at the same time departing from a number of traditional strands in scholarship on this genre, such as a long-standing concern with the vexing problem of its 'origins' and a tendency to accommodate the extant texts in different typologies (e.g. Leo 1901 on ‘Suetonian’ and ‘Plutarchan’ Lives). Most notably, for our purposes, scholarship on ancient biography has a long fascination with examining and assessing the individual Lives' historical reliability and authenticity. It has often been noted that the borderline between historicity and fictionality is profoundly blurred in many ancient biographies and that it is inadvisable to use these texts unproblematically as historical sources (e.g. Momigliano 1993, Lefkowitz 2012). Other scholars (e.g. Graziosi 2002) have drawn attention to the relevance of biographical traditions in their own right as creative reworkings of earlier traditions. And the consciousness with which some ancient authors inscribe themselves in the distinctive practice of writing bioi equally invites questions of a literary nature (see, for example, Papaconstantinou, Debié and Kennedy 2010).

The chapters of this volume explore questions of a literary nature as far as they relate to the main theme: interconnections between narrative technique and fictionalization. The first chapter acts as the introduction to this theme – and to the book as a whole. It offers a contextualization of the volume's overall approach, a state of the art and some theoretical background. It also draws together the themes of the volume and clarifies the various ways in which they unite the different chapters. The second chapter of the introductory Part I (Konstan and Walsh) sketches a broad survey of different biographical traditions.
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Parts II and III turn to specific biographies. The distinction between these parts corresponds to one of the major distinctions underlying the ancient biographical genre as a whole: whereas Part II deals with individual biographies, Part III deals with their collective counterparts. Part IV, finally, broadens the concept of biography by discussing a number of texts that are not traditionally regarded as part of the ancient biographical canon but unmistakably use biographical modes of discourse: letter-writing (Christy and Knöbl) and the novel (Pitcher). We are confident that the case studies offer a diverse and fairly representative sample of biographers and biographees: major highbrow authors (e.g. Philostratus by Robiano, Plutarch by Almagor and by De Pourcq and Roskam) pair with anonymous authors of popular literature (the Life of Aesop, by Karla); several categories of historical persons are dealt with as they are portrayed in important biographical sub-genres (emperors’ biographies in the chapters by Ash and Burgersdijk, philosophers in those by Beck, Kechagia, Christy and Knöbl; writers in those by Power, Karla and Pitcher; Christian saints in those by Gray and Praet).

This book is not, and cannot be, an exhaustive study of narrative technique and fictionalization in ancient biography. Rather, it comprises a number of case studies that share methodological premises. If only to keep the book’s number of pages within reasonable limits, the selection of texts discussed is ‘classical’ in the sense that there is little direct engagement with, for example, the traditions of Jewish biography, included in recent scholarship such as McGing and Mossman (2006), or with biography in ancient languages other than Latin and Greek. Similarly, a glance at the table of contents indicates that the volume’s emphasis is on biographical writing from the Roman imperial period (although, importantly, Konstan and Walsh take Xenophon as their starting point and many chapters make reference to earlier material). Not only do the first centuries CE constitute the genre’s best-documented period, but they also offer the richest material from our specific point of view. Since the literary tradition has important roles to play in how biographical accounts are fictionalized (see Chapter 1 on ‘literary modelling’), later texts, which inscribe themselves in a fully developed tradition, constitute both a safer and a more fertile ground for our approach than earlier, formative ones.

This volume is the result of the combined efforts of individually invited contributors. We want to thank them all for their work, their patience
Preface

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