Giving evidence to the Leveson Inquiry into press standards in the UK, Daily Express owner, Richard Desmond, was asked about his interest in the ethical standards of those writing in his newspapers. ‘Ethical, I don’t quite know what the word means’ he responded. He had previously commented, ‘We don’t talk about ethics or morals because it is a very fine line and everybody’s ethics are different’.

*Integrity and Historical Research* is a book which confronts the dilemma Desmond faced, though whether he would acknowledge its message is another matter. In assembling this collection of chapters Gibbons and Sutherland have drawn on a number of researchers from a variety of academic backgrounds and the messages they convey are as different as the authors, but with a linking focus on how they have dealt with what could be considered difficult situations.

The book begins with a discussion on the meanings of integrity and the difficulty of defining the term. Tony Gibbons reviews the way in which historians have presented the events of the past and the difficulties of achieving balance. He concludes that integrity ‘is a matter of negotiation between the virtues and in coming to a decision as to how best to balance the weight accorded to each applicable virtue in a given instance, it is a matter of practical reason – a matter of wisdom’.

From this introduction, and outline of the role and difficulty of establishing integrity within each author’s approach, the subsequent chapters offer a series of case studies into how historical events have been interpreted in various genre of literature. Jerome De Groot discusses the role of historical fiction and ethics, taking as his example the way writers of historical novels deal with perceived authenticity: do they need to be accurate about all events within the period in which they are writing, can they be ‘trusted’ to give an accurate account of what occurred, or is it necessary to soften or bend the ‘truth’ in order to make the fiction more palatable or acceptable? De Groot identifies a number of interesting examples where authors were criticised for their approach to aspects of language or race.

Patricia Duncker’s chapter on Fictions and Histories extends this theme noting that ‘some writers use historical fiction for a very serious purpose; to avoid the consequences of speaking openly on taboo subjects’. Thus she claims discussions of homosexuality in ancient times can be deemed more acceptable to some readers who might find this difficult if a novel was set in a more contemporary period. Further she argues that it is possible to write more persuasively about modern problems by giving them an historical context. The first half of this chapter draws on a range of examples from Tolstoy to Hasse, and was originally written as a separate paper. The second half, Tudor Afterword, is an analysis of how different authors have presented the events surrounding Henry VII, Thomas Cromwell and Anne Boleyn. The reader is left asking is there a truth, and if so which truth is it?

Defamation is linked with truth, and Sutherland’s chapter explores this concept. She also considers the truth of Thomas Cromwell as portrayed by Hilary Mantel in *Wolf Hall*, but uses Mantel’s portrayal of More to illustrate the point that no author should defame the

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*Integrity and Historical Research* edited by Tony Gibbons and Emily Sutherland (Routledge, 2012)

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subject of their discussion. ‘To defame the dead is no less heinous than to defame the living’ (84).

It is clear that all the authors of historical fiction have to confront this dilemma. Hosking identifies Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* as a recent novel which dealt with the impact of historical events on current political dilemmas. Hosking returns to the overarching theme of the book, integrity in presentation. He returns to Newland’s nineteenth-century work on interactions between indigenous and white settlers, again asking the question about the truth of the matters under discussion and questioning the effects of colonialism and suggests that such literature needs to be read more widely by those who wish to understand ‘such difficult history’.

Nicholas Brown uses three authors’ work to focus on the ethical issues which confront writers using life stories in their work. He writes clearly and concisely about each of these authors’ work (Reed, Somerville and Peel) explaining the reason for their selection and the way each approached the task of interpretation. This chapter is very readable for historian and non-historian alike. Brown approaches his topic with great clarity and thoughtfulness, and the result is a chapter which stimulates the reader, and certainly in this reviewer achieved the effect he hoped for in his final paragraph (you will have to read the book yourself to find out what it was!).

A discussion of the interpretation of oral histories follows directly after Brown’s analysis. Angela Franks to some extent builds on Brown, but in her case it is at a personal level as the two books she discusses are her own. The chapter outlines her methodology and approach to ensuring that the personal histories of the people of Nottinghamshire were recorded using information from those who had lived through a number of traumatic events, particularly the Second World War and closure of the local coalmines. Like Brown’s piece, this chapter is very readable. It is interesting that in itself it is a history of how a particular approach was adopted and worked for the author. On the downside it did not conform with the editors’ mandate. Where does integrity fit in? This should have been made more explicit rather than tacitly assumed by the reader.

Chapters 9, 10 and 11 look to other interpretations of people’s lives, moving from literature to stage and screen. Like the chapters which preceded them, these are interesting essays. The adoption of the Abelard-Eloise story to illustrate how nudity, castration and sexuality can be portrayed is vivid and leaves many questions in the reader’s mind. Juanita Feros Ruys returns to the notion of integrity in how these issues are dealt with and posits the protagonists within the medieval setting, comparing the success of the various interpretations of the tale. María Reimóndez’s chapter goes further, exploring where the intersection between fact and fiction occurs. She asks, and successfully answers, a number of complex questions mostly based on her own work not just as author but translator, a task which involves even greater integrity than direct interpretation. Her conclusion challenges the reader to think further about this dilemma:

Paths and roads continue. Nobody knows yet what the image will finally suggest, but integrity is maybe more relevant to the process than the product. Integrity means we
try our best to show that there is a different way of telling stories, reading the past and therefore living. (185)

The final chapter of the book draws together the role of historians in fiction and film. David Mosler and Jessica Murrell consider how the discipline of history has evolved and how novelists have treated historians, particularly Kingsley Amis in *Lucky Jim*. But other ‘historians’ also have a role in novels, and the authors briefly identify many other fictional academics who have achieved a degree of fame, and one is left to ponder if these fictions were based on truth. Having dealt with the academic in text the authors then consider the academic historian in film, and there are a surprising number of films where historians play a variety of roles. This very readable chapter refocuses the reader on the importance of integrity in the cultural and social portrayal of such people.

Not all the chapters in this book fit the theme of interpretation of integrity set out in the first chapter. Cătălina Botez takes a single book approach to discuss the concept of Techné in Levi’s book *The Periodic Table*. The entire chapter is built around this analysis, and whilst it is interesting and well written, its placement as the third chapter of the book seems at odds with the chapters that abut it. It certainly concerns interpretation, but lacks the focus on integrity the book title suggests.

At a time when oral history, historical fiction and film are increasingly popular, the concept of integrity is increasing in importance. Modern technology has meant that all of life is recorded somewhere. The interpretation of an individual’s actions by another is constantly under scrutiny, as the Leveson Inquiry shows us. This volume presents a useful collection of essays which illustrate to the reader how others have used their research material. It is not just a book for historians or those studying historical subjects. It is not a ‘how to’ book, but more a book of examples. It leaves the reader with a whole series of suggestions that need to be explored, and a need to return to individual chapters and follow up many of the references cited.

Cecile Cutler