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## Analysing the Discourse of History

Among the many different types of written material which have been subjected to 'structuralist' analysis, historiography holds a rather special place. This is in part for the simple reason that such an analysis of the historical text has only been made comparatively rarely. Judged beside the more traditional literary materials, which by now are suffering from the fatigue of 'deconstruction,' historiography still continues to be an open field for the analyst. But this very fact is a result of complexities in the project which continue to make historiographical analysis a field laid with mines, as well as an open one. In part, they are complexities arising from the institutional and professional basis of historical studies. Quite simply, who is to perform such an analysis? A literary critic? — but such a figure will not easily avoid the charge of misunderstanding and misinterpreting the historian's methodology. A historian? — but what historian would take the trouble to acquire the tools of structural research, or (which would be the necessary preliminary) the mental attitude which legitimates such research? An answer to this dilemma is perhaps to be found in the invocation of a specially tailored inter-disciplinary person — a *déclassé* historian or a historically-minded *littérateur*. But such a person will very soon come up against the deeper divisions which lie beneath the professional barriers. He will find not simply different practices, governed by the insistence of different types of material, but different paradigms determining the cognitive claims of the two types of specialist. As soon as he crosses the fence, he risks being arrested as a poacher.

The point is well illustrated by two quite different viewpoints, those of Gossman and Momigliano, which have emerged in the debate over historiography in the past few years. Lionel Gossman, a literary scholar and critic, is at pains to show that the historical writings of Augustin Thierry and Edward Gibbon became his concern through a perfectly natural process of development:

Finally, because of my interest in masks and codes, I have long been intrigued by forms of writing in which the literary imagination appears to disguise itself and to submit to significant constraints — literary criticism, historiography, scholarship and erudition, natural history. As long as literary studies were dominated by rhetoric, the literary character of Buffon, Michelet, Carlyle, or Macaulay was recognised, and these authors were regularly studied as models of style to be followed or avoided. When rhetoric ceased to be the focus of interest in literary studies, such writers were most often quietly dropped from the literary canon and abandoned to students of biography and cultural history. I believe we are now ready to reread, reconsider, and, where appropriate, reinstate them. We now know that there are no firm boundaries separating literary from other forms of writing.<sup>1</sup>

Gossman is making a double claim. First of all, he is expressing an entirely justifiable interest in ‘masked’ forms of writing, where the writer’s excellence is to some extent veiled by the fact that he has quite definite informative or scientific responsibilities. Secondly, he is suggesting that there has been a far-reaching change in the character of literary studies. Now that ‘rhetoric’ has ceased to be anathema in the critic’s vocabulary — now that literature is no longer valued specifically for the moral, or ‘life-enhancing’ qualities which the novel, preeminently, was held to display — it becomes logical to annex whole territories of written material which had been abandoned to the specialist: that is to say, to the historian or the natural scientist, who were certain to view Buffon or Michelet according to quite different criteria.

Having deliberately simplified Gossman’s point in the interests of clarity, I can present without any special pleading the sort of objections which would be made to it by the second critic, Arnaldo Momigliano. It must be borne in mind that Momigliano is himself a very distinguished *historian* of historiography. Not for him the luxury of all those dear little dissertations<sup>2</sup> on Gibbon which concern themselves with the historian’s literary style; he takes it as axiomatic that the only valid way of estimating the worth of a historian is through familiarity with the sources which that historian used, and the ability to judge the soundness of his historical method. Any other estimate or description of historiography is bound to be dangerously misleading, not least because it completely misrepresents the historian’s own conception of the task which he is engaged upon.

It would be possible to suspend the argument at this point, and declare an uneasy truce. On the one hand, no one can deny that historiography is a form of writing, and that the literary critics are perfectly entitled to deal with it in their own manner, if they wish. Even the most chauvinistic historian could not claim that his colleagues have been particularly assiduous in cultivating the illustrious forebears of the profession. On the other hand, no one can deny that there is

something distinctive about historiography. If a critic were to assert that we should judge George Eliot above all by the scrupulous care with which she selected her materials, and the professional integrity with which she assessed and conveyed their 'truth', we should say that such a point of view was bizarre, and in any case unverifiable. But it does, undoubtedly, make sense for Momigliano to claim attention for the historian's process of documentation, and his operation of distinguishing between the 'true' and 'false'. We might view George Eliot's painstaking 'research' into the Italian Renaissance during the writings of *Romola* as, on the whole, an aberration, since the book's defects in plot and characterisation are all too evident and in no way offset by the knowledge of historical detail. But we could scarcely take as irrelevant the fact that Gibbon or Macaulay used this source rather than that source; nor could we dismiss the claims of sheer accuracy in such a cavalier way.

Yet if a truce were acceptable, there would be little point in continuing with this article. My own contention is that the structuralist, or more generally 'rhetorical' analysis of historiography is not merely a pursuit which the critics can indulge in while the serious historians have their backs turned, since it is a method which leads us to ask fundamental questions about the status of historical enquiry, and to realise that the relation of the historical text to reality is itself a *historical* problem of the utmost interest. This is perhaps where the immense learning and consummate professional integrity of a Momigliano turn out to have their limitations. For the present-day professional historian is liable to search the past for the evidence of that same method of documentary criticism which he has received from Ranke and the German school. He knows that it cannot really be found before 1800, and yet he is all too willing to discover mere indications that the critical spirit of the modern period was not foreign to preceding ages. That is how Paul Veyne argues, at any rate, when he notes Momigliano's diagnosis of a 'new value attached to documents' in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius. For Veyne, who is himself a distinguished classical historian, the works of Eusebius leave 'a rather different impression'. Far from pioneering the techniques of documentary criticism, Eusebius is continuing the practice of compiling extracts from previous historians which had already been used by Porphyry. His usage is far from indicating that he attributes a 'new value' to documents, since he is really doing no more than amass a number of 'precious fragments' and sparing himself the trouble of re-writing this section of his history.<sup>3</sup>

This instance is a revealing one, since it demonstrates that the historian's 'good conscience' can itself lead him to be unhistorical. Criti-

cal analysis of earlier historiography is, for obvious reasons, the historian's blind spot, since he will not readily tolerate the proposition that historical writing has been all things to all men, and that this Protean genre is itself an aspect of cultural history. Since we began by contrasting Momigliano's position with that of Gossman, it is worth returning to the historical implications which lurk within Gossman's thesis, since they are by no means negligible. Literary studies were once dominated by rhetoric, he argues. This ceased to be the case, but now we are apparently returning to the *status quo ante*. 'We now know that there are no firm boundaries separating literary from other forms of writing.' Is it not relevant to mention that the stage when literary studies ceased to be 'dominated by rhetoric' was also the stage at which history adopted the programme of showing the past 'as it really happened' (Ranke's *wie es eigentlich gewesen*)? In other words, history adopted its 'scientific' paradigm, and furnished itself with new tools of critical analysis, at the very stage when rhetoric ceased to have imperial sway throughout the many modes of literary composition. A sign of this process was the tendency of literature itself to adopt the historical paradigm, as in the 'historical novel', and the 'realist' or 'naturalist' novel. Undisguisedly literary products passed themselves off *as if* they had that transparency to the real which the historian had programmatically asserted.

Gossman is therefore talking about a development in three stages. In the first, rhetoric dominates literary studies, and history among them. In the second, rhetoric abdicates, and the text is valued for its capacity to show a reality beyond itself. In the third, rhetoric returns. Are we, however, simply back where we started? It would surely be in the highest degree unhistorical to suppose that the intervening period could be blotted out, and history return to its comfortable placement within the hierarchy of genres. Instead, we must reckon with a three-stage process which is, in a certain measure, dialectical. That is at any rate the implication of Michel Charles's introduction to the recent number of *Poétique* on 'Le texte de l'histoire'. Charles justifies the opening of this collection with texts by the eighteenth-century historian, Mably, and the contemporary critic, Roland Barthes, in the following terms:

Mably is still inscribed in a space where historical discourse has a fundamental literary dimension; with Barthes, the new task is to interrogate it, if not as literary, at least as discourse. Obviously, between the two, people forgot that every scientific discourse could *also* be apprehended as a linguistic operation (of course, on the other side, it must be stated that Mably seems to have no notion of the ambition of historical discourse being not simply to elevate the soul and to gladden the heart). That people are rediscovering, and have been for some years, the



instance of rhetoric in scientific discourse is without doubt a factor of great importance, one which is capable of completely reorganising the 'literary' field and the analytic function which bears the same name.<sup>4</sup>

Charles's two opening texts bear out his contention. Here is the Abbé de Mably writing in 1783 about 'The historian, the novelist, the poet'. Though he is quite well aware that history is different from the novel, he sees every advantage in combining the qualities of the two genres. 'Take care,' he recommends, 'that you bring the novel into history.' Evidently for Mably it is 'artistry', with its pleasurable and morally elevating effects upon the reader, which is the prime criterion by which a history should be judged. Consequently he castigates 'those clumsy historians, who simply place at the bottom of the page, in the guise of notes, what they are not artistic enough to incorporate in their narration.'<sup>5</sup> The principle that the narration should be a seamless web entirely outweighs the convenience, for referencing and for annotation, of a second level of discourse in the text. But Mably seems quite unaware that this second level, in which the historian can specify and elaborate upon his sources, is already becoming an indispensable *scientific* adjunct to the narration. In the *Vindication* of Edward Gibbon, published in 1776 to answer the hostile critics of *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, the new departure is already apparent. Gibbon comments specifically on the disadvantages of 'the loose and general method of quoting', and claims to have 'carefully distinguished the *books*, the *chapters*, the *sections*, the *pages* of the authors to whom I referred, with a degree of accuracy and attention, which might claim some gratitude, as it has seldom been so regularly practised by any historical writers.'<sup>6</sup>

The antithesis is surely a clear one. Mably views the 'artistic' achievement of a seamless narration as the prime aim of the historian. Gibbon is already aware that the historian has a cognitive responsibility; that his text must present its *titres de noblesse* in fully specifying the sources upon which it relies; that the reader should not merely look to the text for pleasure and improvement, but should be given the tools for reconstructing and criticising the processes of inference and argument which the historian has used. Half a century after Gibbon's *Vindication*, this principle is taken for granted by a new generation of historians, who have improved upon Gibbon's scrupulousness by making a firm distinction between primary and secondary sources. Both Leopold von Ranke, in the well-known Preface to his *History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations* (1824), and Augustin Thierry, in the Preface to his *History of the Norman Conquest* (1825), announce with pride that their work is based on original documents. It is only to be ex-

pected that this return to the primary sources will be signalled by an abundance of informative and demonstrative annotations. Far from viewing the use of the annotation as an artistic blemish, a historian like Thierry in fact exploits this second level in order to stress the consistent message of his history, which is that narration simulates historical reality only to the extent that it absorbs, and even in a sense exhausts, the available source material. As Thierry writes in his Preface: 'I have consulted none but original texts and documents, either for the details of the various circumstances narrated, or for the characters of the persons and populations that figure in them. I have drawn so largely upon these texts, that, I flatter myself, little is left in them for other writers.'<sup>7</sup>

These illustrations allow us to define more exactly the three-stage, or dialectical process which both Lionel Gossman and Michel Charles take for granted. To analyse the eighteenth-century historical text as Mably would have analysed it is a traditional rhetorical assignment. History has its own territory and its own battery of effects, but it is not regarded as being qualitatively, or cognitively, different from other types of text. To look at a history by Ranke or Thierry in the terms which they themselves laid down in their Prefaces is quite a different matter. The historical text presents itself as a construct: that is to say, it is composed from the original sources specified in the notes and references, and to this extent its detail is open to scrutiny and challenge. But it also presents itself as a replica of the real. Ranke writes that, instead of 'judging the past, of instructing the present for the benefit of ages to come', he aspires 'to show only what actually happened.'<sup>8</sup> Thierry also stresses the point that his primary aim is to convince his audience not through argumentation, but through the achievement of a 'complete narration':

People have said that the aim of the historian was to recount and not to prove; I do not know, but I am certain that in history the best type of proof, the most capable of striking and convincing all minds, the one which allows the least mistrust and leaves the fewest doubts, is complete narration.<sup>9</sup>

Thierry's remarks imply, no less than those of Ranke, a crucial ambivalence in the objectives of the new history. From the scientific and cognitive point of view, these texts must establish themselves as drawn from elsewhere — from the abundant repertoire of original sources which such historians were indeed prominent in opening up. From the literary and rhetorical point of view, however, the histories of Ranke and Thierry must feign transparency. The test by which the 'complete narration' is reckoned to be a replica of the real is not a rhetorical test.

'Mistrust' and 'doubt' have been removed by a kind of sleight of hand, which is to make the very protocol of narration a self-validating proof of the events described. As Barthes puts it in the closing paragraph of his article on 'The discourse of history', with reference to Thierry:

History's refusal to assume the real as signified (or again, to detach the referent from its mere assertion) led it, as we understand, at the privileged point when it attempted to form itself into a genre in the nineteenth century, to see in the 'pure and simple' relation of the facts the best proof of those facts, and to institute narration as the privileged signifier of the real.... Narrative structure, which was originally developed within the cauldron of fiction (in myths and the first epics) becomes at once the sign and the proof of reality.<sup>10</sup>

Barthes' article therefore defines with exactitude the third stage — which is also the position adopted in this article. 'Structuralist' analysis of historiography is not simply the 'return of rhetoric', and rhetorical analysis. It is the return of rhetoric in a new guise, given greater precision and more comprehensive applicability by the modern development of linguistics and semiology. But it is more than that. In so far as it exposes the linguistic strategies of a historiography which defined itself by its privileged relation to the real, this analysis becomes inevitably a demystification of the 'mythic' form of nineteenth-century historiography. It also becomes, by implication, a critique of the historiography which has sought to maintain, even up to the present day, the privileged status assumed by the new history of the nineteenth century. Its role is to suggest (as if reversing the old tale of the Emperor's New Clothes) that Clio is indeed a Muse with draperies, and not a representation of the Naked Truth. But such a critique is not, of course, purely destructive. As Hayden White stressed, and as he demonstrated in his pioneering work of historiographical analysis, *Meta-history*, history has little to lose, and everything to gain, from being drawn 'back once more to an intimate connection with its literary basis.'<sup>11</sup> To analyse the texts of Ranke and Michelet, Tocqueville and Burckhardt, is not to expose an imposture, but to discover the powerful poetic talents that lie beneath, and guarantee, the historical achievement.

There is yet a further point of importance brought out by Barthes in his closing paragraph, which helps to bind the structuralist or rhetorical analysis of historiography to the complex development of historical method at the present day. For Barthes, historiography is not to be thought of as clinging nostalgically to a nineteenth-century paradigm. New methods of historical research, and new techniques of presentation, have already toppled 'narration' from its pre-eminence, and produced a form of historiography which achieves its effects through

more explicit means. As Barthes puts it: 'Historical narration is dying because the sign of History from now on is no longer the real, but the intelligible' (p. 18). We should bear in mind that Barthes' article was published just two years after Fernand Braudel composed the 'Conclusion' to his great work on the Mediterranean World. No one who had read Braudel's *Mediterranean*, and studied the complex structure of temporal levels which the 'Conclusion' made explicit, could doubt that this was the result of a deliberate strategy of preferring 'intelligibility' to the 'reality' principle. Braudel dispenses with the conventional forms of narrative in order to stress more clearly the different rates of change throughout the Mediterranean World; the life of Phillip II of Spain, around which a more traditional historian might have built his animated narration, is seen as having no greater significance than the unvarying life of the Mediterranean sea-farer — the Greek fisherman in the café who recalls the legendary Odysseus.<sup>12</sup>

Our response to the original problem of boundaries with which this article began, is therefore largely provided. Whether or not the analysis of historiography is done by a historian or a literary specialist is an institutional question, with little ultimate significance. What is important is the fact that historiography itself, as typified by Braudel and the *Annales* School, is caught up in the same process of analysis and revision. Historians are aware that there is not one single, privileged way of signifying the reality of the past. Indeed, Barthes seems to imply that this very concern with 'reality' is a thing of the past, as if historians had uniformly adopted the methodological commitment of Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*. I am myself not so sure of this as Barthes appeared to be in 1967. Indeed I suspect that Barthes himself might have modified his view, if he had had the opportunity to re-write his essay ten or fifteen years later. But this is an issue which need not detain us at present, and can be left to the closing passages of this article.

Having indicated the historical and practical context in which the analysis of historiography takes place, I must obviously now proceed to a specific analysis. This is not as easy as might at first appear. It is a telling fact that the issue of *Poétique* ('Le texte de l'histoire'), to which reference has been made, turns out to be distinctly poor in examples of precise analysis. Besides the general prescriptions of Mably and Barthes, there are four contributions. Two of them, however, turn out to be on historical aspects of the texts of Sade and Valéry, one is a short and unexciting discussion of the intellectual context of Thucydides' *History*, and only the fourth article, an analysis of Tocqueville by the American scholar, Linda Orr, comes anywhere near being an exercise of the type which Barthes prescribes. Here there is a simple problem of

defining the unit of analysis. For historians do not, like poets or writers of short stories, specialise in self-contained texts of a moderate length. Indeed the very 'self-contained' character of the literary text is played down, for significant reasons, by the particular type of writer who is a historian. As the French historian Prosper de Barante remarked with reference to the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott: 'The beauty of history is to be the link in an uninterrupted chain. The literary composition closes its conclusions upon itself.'<sup>13</sup> Little profit would be gained from studying, as Frank Kermode has done for the novel, the 'Sense of an Ending' in a range of characteristic histories. For the historian, even though he will be ready to define his subject in accordance with the pre-existent temporal boundaries of a century, a reign or an individual life, must indeed remember that the 'chain' is 'uninterrupted', and any 'ending' can have sense only in its relation to the continuing process of historical change.

Hayden White's *Metahistory* tackles this problem in a highly original way. Wishing to concern himself not simply with one historian, but with the whole canvas of the nineteenth century, he brings in Northrop Frye's notion of 'emplotment' to explain, not the 'self-contained' character of the historical work, but its relation to a limited number of archetypal 'plots', such as tragedy and comedy. If Ranke emplots his histories in the 'comic' mode, this is not because he ends each of them with a 'comic' resolution, but because his historical world-view is shaped by his participation in the rise of the Prussian State, and he can look forward to a god-given resolution of the historical process in the imperial mission of the German nation (as opposed to Michelet, for whom the climactic event of modern times, the French Revolution, lies ineluctably in the past, and can only be evoked, or, from the literary point of view, repeated). If this concept of emplotment allows White to draw very suggestive comparisons between the attitudes of historians, in the strict sense, and philosophers of history like Hegel, Marx and Croce, it must be combined with a more exact instrument of analysis to demonstrate the detailed rhetorical patterning of the various texts. Here White doubles his modes of emplotment with the four rhetorical effects, or tropes, of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony. Overall emplotment is seen as consistent with the decision to employ these particular figures, with one or other predominating, in the construction of the history on a detailed, textual level.

However White's *Metahistory* is not a very useful model for the kind of analysis which can be carried out here. Its cogency depends precisely upon the range and variety of materials which it covers, and the uniquely comprehensive view of the nineteenth-century historical imagination which it supplies.<sup>14</sup> A more relevant precedent is the

article entitled 'Historicism, History and the Imagination', which White published in 1975. At the core of this study is a highly detailed analysis of a short passage of historical narrative written by A. J. P. Taylor. White answers the possible objection that this is an extract without any particular significance, which Taylor wrote 'quite fluently and naturally', with a clear statement of method which is worth quoting *in extenso*:

The point is this: even in the simplest prose discourse, and even in one in which the object of representation is intended to be nothing but fact, the use of language itself projects a level of secondary meaning below or behind the phenomena being "described". This secondary meaning exists quite apart from both the "facts" themselves and any explicit argument that might be offered in the extradescription, more purely analytical or interpretative, level of the text....

As thus envisaged, the historical discourse can be broken down into two levels of meaning. The facts and their formal explanation or interpretation appear as the manifest or literal "surface" of the discourse, while the figurative language used to characterize the facts points to a deep-structural meaning....

This conception of the historical discourse permits us to consider the specific *story* as an *image* of the events *about which* the story is told, while the generic story-type serves as a *conceptual model* to which the events are to be likened in order to permit their encodation as elements of a recognizable structure.<sup>15</sup>

In the analysis which follows, I intend to use Hayden White's working method (as summarised in the preceding passage) in conjunction with some of the important distinctions which Barthes employs in his 'Discourse of History'. I shall argue that the two approaches are consistent, though they spring ultimately from rather different conceptions of 'structuralist' or semiological method. Instead of concentrating upon one extract, as in White's article, or ranging widely among historiographical examples, as Barthes does, I shall use three short passages from twentieth-century history books which deal with the same 'event'.

i) *Tuesday, March 26.* We must estimate that the enemy has 25 Divisions still in reserve. I attended a Conference at Doullens at 11 a.m. with Plumer (Second Army), Horne (First), Byng (Third). I explained that my object is to gain time to enable the French to come and support us. To this end we must hold our ground, especially on the right of our Third Army (near Bray) on Somme, where *we must not give up any ground*. The covering of Amiens is of first importance to the success of our cause; on the other hand, I must not so extend our line through enemy pressing our centre making it bulge, and thus extending our front as to risk its breaking.

About 12 noon I had a meeting (also at Doullens) between Poincaré (President of France), Clemenceau (Premier), Foch, Pétain and Lord Milner, General H. Wilson (C.I.G.S.), my C.G.S. (Lawrence) and

myself. We discussed the situation and it was decided that AMIENS MUST BE COVERED AT ALL COSTS. French troops, we are told, are being hurried up as rapidly as possible. I have ordered Gough to hold on with his left at Bray. It was proposed by Clemenceau that Foch should be appointed to coordinate the operations of an Allied force to cover Amiens and ensure that the French and the British flanks remain united. This proposal seemed to me quite worthless as Foch would be in a subordinate position to Pétain and myself. In my opinion, it was essential to success that Foch should control Pétain; so I at once recommended that Foch should *co-ordinate the action of all the Allied Armies on the Western Front*. Both Governments agreed to this. Foch has chosen Dury for his H.Q. (3 miles S. of Amiens). Foch seemed sound and sensible but Pétain had a terrible look. He had the appearance of a Commander who was in a funk and has lost his nerve.

I lunched from lunch-box at Doullens, then motored back to Beaufort.

(Robert Blake, ed. *Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914-1919*, [London, 1952], p. 298)

ii) At noon Poincaré took the chair. Present were Clemenceau, Locheur (French minister of Armaments), Foch, Pétain, Haig, Wilson, Milner and Generals Lawrence (Haig's C.G.S.) and Montgomery (for General Rawlinson, British Military Representative at Versailles).

Pétain was in a state of very great emotional tension. Haig noted that he 'had a terrible look. He had the appearance of a Commander who was in a funk and had lost his nerve.' Certainly in the course of the meeting Pétain's pessimistic views were expressed with a startling emotional warmth.

Haig spoke first. North of the Somme he was confident of holding his ground. South of it he could do nothing. Pétain followed, defending his measures since March 22. 'It is evident,' he added, 'that everything possible must be done to defend Amiens.'

At the mention of Amiens the restless Foch could no longer contain himself. He burst out in sharp, spitting sentences: 'We must fight in front of Amiens, we must fight where we are now. As we have not been able to stop the Germans on the Somme, we must not now retire a single inch!'

This was the moment; Haig took it. 'If General Foch will consent to give me his advice, I will gladly follow it.'

The general meeting temporarily broke up into private discussion groups, after which Clemenceau read out a draft agreement charging Foch 'with the coordination of the action of the British and French Armies in front of Amiens'.

This was not what Haig wanted: 'This proposal seemed to me quite worthless,' he wrote in his diary, 'as Foch would be in a subordinate position to Pétain and myself. In my opinion, it was essential to success that Foch should control Pétain'.

He proposed therefore that Foch's coordinating authority should extend to the entire western front and all nationalities. This was agreed. At last after three and a half years of war the allies had a supreme commander, at least in embryo. This was the great achievement of the Doullens conference. However, the conference did not lead to the results most urgently hoped for by Haig. For Foch, despite his ostenta-



tious energy and fire-eating, was not to concentrate 20 divisions astride Amiens as soon as possible (only 8 by early April), did not — and could not — significantly speed up the movement of French reserves already ordered by Pétain. Whatever the moral importance of the new supreme command, in hard facts of divisions and dispositions it made little difference to the battle.

(Correlli Barnett, *The Swordbearers — Studies in Supreme Command in the First World War*, [London, 1966], pp. 358-59)

iii) On 26 March, while the British Fifth Army was still reeling back, British and French leaders met at Doullens. As Pétain came into the room, he pointed to Haig and whispered to Clemenceau: 'There is a general who will have to surrender in the open field, and I after him.' A few minutes later, Foch bounced in full of confidence. He said: 'Why aren't you fighting? I would fight without a break. I would fight in front of Amiens . . . I would fight all the time.' Milner took Clemenceau out of the room and said: 'The British generals accept the command of General Foch.' Haig eagerly agreed. The decision was made without consulting the War Cabinet. Foch was entrusted with 'the coordination of the Allied armies'. His powers soon grew. On 3 April he was given 'the strategic direction of military operations'. This time the Americans accepted Foch's authority also. On 14 April he received the title of 'Commander-in-Chief of the Allied armies in France'. Theoretically he stood above all the Allied authorities. In practice Clemenceau tried to order him about, and sometimes succeeded. Moreover Foch could only persuade; he could not compel. He was, in his own words, 'conductor of an opera who beats time well'. Actually he was a bit more: a conductor who had his own instrument. Though he could not command the fighting armies, he controlled their reserves and could decide when these should be used. Previously each Allied commander had flung in his reserves at once when menaced by a German attack. Now Foch held the reserves back, despite agonized cries for help from first Haig and then Pétain. When he used them it was for a counter-attack, not simply to stop up a hole. Foch's control of the reserves goes far to explain the apparent paradox in the campaign of 1918. The Germans made far greater advances than ever before and far greater gains in terms of territory; they were beaten decisively nevertheless. By allowing the Germans to advance, Foch actually restored the war of movement, which was the only way in which the war could be won.

(A.J.P. Taylor, *The First World War — An illustrated history*, [Harmondsworth, 1966], pp. 218-20)

From the purely conventional point of view, we can start to discriminate between these three historical extracts. The first, from Haig's war diaries, would be termed an original, or primary source. The second and the third would be secondary sources, based on such documentary accounts as the Haig diaries. Obviously the way in which the historiography of a particular subject evolves is through successive modification not only of the meanings which can be drawn out of the primary sources, but also of the interpretations which intervening historians may have given. But in this particular set of examples, we can disre-

gard the possibility of a reciprocal influence between Barnett and Taylor, since both their works were originally published in the same year (1963). Both therefore stand roughly in the same relation to Haig's text, and both have had available to them roughly the same set of primary and secondary materials on the history of the First World War. Much of the detail in these passages is, for example, taken from the Official British History. At the same time, there is a clear difference between the two secondary sources which could be called *generic*. Correlli Barnett's work falls into the genre of 'military history': its title, and even more precisely its sub-title ('Studies in Supreme Command in the First World War'), prepare us for an exercise that is deliberately limited in scope. By contrast, Taylor is attempting a general history of the War, which is defined specifically as an 'illustrated history'. In the Preface to his work, he describes his aim succinctly: 'In the First World War, the camera could record the life of Everyman. It shows the statesmen and generals, on parade and off it. It shows the instruments of destruction. Photographs take us into the trenches and the munitions factories' (p. 11). It seems to point out that the quoted extract about the conference at Doullens is broken up, in Taylor's text, by the insertion of a striking photograph of trench warfare. The caption reads: 'The offensive which lost Germany the war'.

A number of basic differences between Barnett and Taylor have begun to come to the surface. It would be inexact to say that *The Swordbearers* is designed for a 'serious' audience, and Taylor's *First World War* for a 'popular' audience. Nevertheless, Taylor's work is concerned to present the war as essentially a 'People's War', and his dedication of the book to Joan Littlewood, producer of the successful musical, *Oh! What a lovely war*, is therefore, very much in character. 'Everyman' will be given a central role, and the necessarily anonymous protagonists of the campaign photographs will be granted a prominence which the 'statesmen and generals' cannot usurp. The cover of Taylor's book is enlivened by a much reproduced, and deeply shocking photograph of a dead soldier lying in the mud of the trenches, with one skeletal hand bent back as if to ward off a blast or blow from the agonised skull. Barnett, whose text contains relatively little photographic illustration, uses a cover design for the Penguin edition in which a clenched fist in a leather glove clutches three suitably armed toy soldiers to a barely visible uniformed chest. The 'message' is there, even before we open the two books. Taylor gestures towards the dumb 'reality' of the photograph, which has its own, self-evident message and does not need to be mediated by the historian. Barnett uses a specially composed, professionally 'designed' photographic cover which stresses, in an eye-catching and ironic way, the fact that the ordinary soldier is

for his purposes a mere pawn: these are 'Studies in Supreme Command'.

Up to now, we have been describing the general characteristics of the two histories from which our second and third extracts are taken. Objections might be made to the analysis on a number of grounds. Why should we suppose that these two books are 'all of a piece', and that the type of cover design or illustration chosen has anything to do with the 'generic' character of the history? Is not a series of binary distinctions, such as those that we have drawn between Taylor and Barnett, liable to set up a spacious division of categories? Could we not equally well have demonstrated similarities between the approaches of the two historians? The answers to these questions can only depend on the cogency of the analysis which has been given, and will be continued. Certainly the foregoing remarks could be adjudged, if they were curtailed at this point, as telling us nothing essential about the two texts, while drawing attention to relatively superficial matters of presentation. The previously quoted passage from Hayden White makes a much more substantial claim for historiographical analysis: namely that 'the facts and their formal explanation or interpretation appear as the manifest or literal "surface" of the discourse, while the figurative language used to characterize the facts points to a deep-structural meaning'. It is this assumption, which postulates a 'generic story-type' as a 'conceptual model' for the history, which we must now try to test in a more detailed analysis of the respective texts.

First of all, it has to be acknowledged that there is a striking difference in what might be described as the 'staging' of the Doullens conference by Barnett and Taylor. The 'facts'—for which Haig's diary serves as an example—are not only 'explained' and 'interpreted'. They are presented in a vivid and effective way, with the use of quotation marks to indicate direct speech. And yet it is not easy to retain in our minds, as we read the two descriptions, that we are in fact following the passage of the same event. Barnett, who is concerned particularly with Haig's exercise of 'supreme command', gives a privileged position both to Haig as a protagonist of the narrative (or *diegesis*), and to Haig's diary as a source. He begins, as Haig did, by listing the participants at the conference, though he completes Haig's account with the mention of additional figures—such as the French Minister of Armaments, Locheur (himself a crucial source for what took place on this occasion). He gives prominence in the account to Haig's striking comments on Pétain, using quotation marks and the neutral phrase 'Haig noted' to give a sense of immediacy and documentary precision to the observation which it hardly has in Haig's original diary entry. In the diary, Haig's comment comes at the end of the paragraph, and its effect is

somewhat muted by the fact that Pétain's 'terrible look' is in contrast to Foch being 'sound and sensible'.

Barnett has therefore worked to keep Haig in the forefront. Pétain and Foch are also involved in the outcome of the debate. But the narrative is unified by a device comparable to the rhetorical *anaphora*: 'Haig spoke first.... This was the moment; Haig took it.... This was not what Haig wanted.... He proposed therefore....' As the debate goes back and forth, our point of reference is the reiterated appearance of Haig as subject, acting and reflecting. By contrast, Taylor makes the conduct of the debate seem very different. Haig is initially presented as *object*, not subject — as the object of Pétain's whispered confidences to Clemenceau. Instead of bursting out 'in sharp, spitting sentences', Foch is described as having 'bounced in full of confidence' (a curious, and no doubt unintentional effect of this phrase, not contradicted by Taylor's unspecific introduction to the meeting, is that Foch actually seems to have entered the room with this rousing speech, rather than simply entering the debate!). Of course, the content of Foch's speech, in the two cases, coheres with the different adjectival qualifications given by the two historians. What is conventionally presented as the *ipissima verba* of the historical actor is, of course, always a reconstruction. The indirect speech of the original source must be converted into direct speech, in most cases, and the translation of the content from one language to another is bound (as in this case) to create a range of alternative possibilities which the historian can utilise for his 'deep-structural' purposes. Barnett presents Foch's intervention as an opportunity for Haig to intervene ('This was the moment') and clinch the debate; the fact that Foch has used the plural 'we must fight' is a useful connector, since Haig is thus shown as subscribing to a common purpose. Taylor has the confident Foch using the singular pronoun, 'I', and displaces Haig's 'eager agreement' to a point after the temporary break-up of the meeting into discussion groups. The sense communicated is not that the resourceful and percipient Haig understood just when to take the chance of subordinating his individual authority to an overall authority, but that a confused and difficult situation was resolved by an interim solution which Haig and his colleagues grasped with relief (but over-hastily, as the War Cabinet had not been consulted).

I would not for a moment deny that the issues raised here are a subject for legitimate historical debate. It is open to a historian to argue that Barnett gets it wrong, and Taylor gets it right, or *vice versa*. Such argument can quite reasonably turn on issues like the weighing of one source against another, such as Loucheur against Haig, and the overall interpretation which a particular event or series of events

receives. But where a debate of this kind has its limitations, surely, is where it assumes the possibility of a single, ideal account, in which all the areas of difference would be removed. For a historian to maintain this attitude as a kind of working hypothesis, or epistemological stance, is all very well — no one can be reproached for trying to discover a unitary truth. But it is surely foolish to assume that such a standard can be used for assessing and understanding the histories that we actually have in our possession. In this world, which is so much less than the best of all possible worlds, we have texts like Barnett and Taylor (and admittedly a great many more which would be less striking in their contrast). When we examine them in detail, it does indeed appear that they have what White calls (in deference to modern linguistics) a 'deep-structural' coherence. The 'generic story-type' does not necessarily conflict with the 'purely analytical or interpretative' level of the text. But, equally, it is virtually impossible to disentangle one from the other, without reducing the historical text to a kind of bloodless algebra.

As I noted before, it is not easy to test the full implications of White's notion of the 'generic story-type' without reference to a complete historical narrative. Nevertheless, these two extracts from Barnett and Taylor — whose opening is determined by the mention of the Doullens conference, but whose closing can only be decided arbitrarily — contain their own distinctive types of resolution. In both cases, the historian is concerned to show, by a chronological leap which the literary critic calls *prolepsis*, the long-term effect of the decision taken at Doullens. Barnett, indeed, begins by *analepsis*, or looking back into the past ('At last after three and a half years of war the allies had a supreme commander.') This, he suggests, was the 'great achievement' of the Doullens conference, and it is certainly hard to see how anyone writing 'Studies in Supreme Command' could treat the appointment of a 'supreme commander' as anything but an achievement. But having made this assertion, Barnett introduces a qualification which comes near to contradicting his claim. The personal qualities which made Foch so much more convincing a commander than Pétain ('his ostentatious energy and fire-eating') did not in fact enable him to alter the course of the war; he 'did not — and could not' accelerate the movement of reserves which the defeatist Pétain had already set in motion. Barnett puts us in mind of Tolstoy's famous analysis of the limitations on Napoleon's action in *War and Peace*; without going so far as to imply that the military commander is powerless to influence events, he suggests that Foch could not possibly, at least in these circumstances, alter a course of events which had already been put beyond the control of any one man.

This individual element, or *syntagma*, within the overall chain of Barnett's narrative thus has its own ending. But it is also, we might reasonably expect, an ending which inscribes in microcosm the ending of the work as a whole. Although Haig is the main focus of this part of Barnett's study, and although his forceful role at the Doullens conference has been carefully underlined, we must not suppose that Haig is to have his wishes granted and his intentions carried out. Note that at this point we are referring, strictly speaking, only to the 'Haig' who 'urgently hoped for' positive results from the conference, according to Barnett's text. The Haig who is the subject of the original diary entry does not expatiate on what results he expected to flow from the appointment of Foch as supreme commander. It is significant that immediately subsequent entries in the diary do not return to the question. Barnett's 'Haig' is part of a conscious rhetorical construction: that of the 'hero of the story' who secures the 'great achievement' but finds that fate is against him, at least in the short term. Against 'Haig's human intentions', there must be pitted the ineluctable circumstances of modern warfare, those 'hard facts of divisions and dispositions'. Relating this individual instance to the overall thematic of Barnett's study, we begin to see the irony which is inherent in the choice of his title: 'Swordbearers' they may be, in the traditional, ceremonial sense, but these hapless commanders have to deal with a complex modern weaponry which cannot be deployed so swiftly and decisively as a drawn sword. Perhaps the fully-kitted soldiers gripped by the leather glove in the cover design are not the troops which they control, but the commanders themselves, held in the vice-like grip of circumstances.

For Taylor, the implications of the Doullens conference are very different. And here again, though there is a blatant divergence in critical interpretation, there is also a clear structuring of the *syntagma* in accordance with an overall thematic. Taylor is concerned to stress the connections, and the conflicts, between commanders in the field and politicians on the home front, and he also wants to suggest that their struggle for power took place largely without influencing the dire events of the war. (The back cover of his book puts the matter in a nutshell: 'For four years, while statesmen and generals blundered, the massed armies of Europe writhed in a festival of mud and blood.') He therefore uses the opportunity of the Doullens conference to point out two separate and, in fact, rather inadequately related aspects of the command structure towards the end of the war. In the first place, though Foch was 'above all Allied authorities' by virtue of his position as Commander-in-Chief, Clemenceau tried 'to order him about, and sometimes succeeded.' Whether these instances were important or

unimportant, Taylor does not say. In default of any such illustration, we are simply left with the *signified* — ‘unproductive rivalry between statesmen and generals’. In the second place, however, Taylor makes a positive claim for the instrumentality of Foch in ending the war. In terms that specifically conflict with those of Barnett, he credits Foch with the ability to control his reserves, a ‘conductor who has his own instrument’, and furthermore acknowledges that he ‘restored the war of movement’. In a sense, Taylor’s message is clear: Foch was responsible for bringing about a new military situation even though he had no such strategic intention. As Taylor would have it he ‘actually restored the war of movement’ when he resisted the ‘agonized cries’ of Haig and Pétain, and engineered a counter-attack. But Taylor is careful not to attribute any excessive credit to Foch for this achievement: the fact that the ‘war of movement’ was ‘the only way in which the war could be won’ is explained, arguably, by the historian’s hindsight, and not credited to Foch’s percipience.

Up to this point we have been concerned with what Hayden White calls the ‘secondary meanings’ in the historical text, and with the way in which these meanings (projected through all the literary and rhetorical resources of the historian) add up cumulatively to a ‘generic story-type’ or ‘conceptual model’. For Barnett, this might be expressed in the theme: ‘impotence of supreme commanders in the conditions of modern warfare’. For Taylor, it would be ‘unproductive rivalry of statesmen and generals, while the “massed armies” are slaughtering one another’. Both imply what White would term ‘ironic’ modes of ‘emplotment’: the text is constructed in such a way that we are continually being made aware of the disconnection between purpose and fulfilment, action and reaction. To this extent we could claim that both Barnett and Taylor recall us to the very prototype of military history, Thucydides’s *Peloponnesian War*, which (according to Adam Parry’s lucid and convincing analysis) is similarly structured according to a series of oppositions between recurring terms, summed up in the antithesis between *logos* and *ergon* (rational purpose and effective action).<sup>16</sup> But there is a sharp difference between the ironic modes of Taylor and Barnett, which is perceptible even in these brief extracts. Taylor’s is the purer irony, since none of the military and political protagonists are given sufficient dignity for us to feel that they are unfortunate victims of circumstance. Barnett, by contrast, retains a standard of purposefulness and even heroism: the ‘moral importance’ of supreme command is still worth stressing over against the ‘hard facts’ of divisional manoeuvres. If Barnett had had a little more conviction, we might feel, he would have attempted a full-bloodedly



*tragic* plotment, with the moral dignity of his protagonists standing in poignant contrast to the iron laws of Fate.

From this level of analysis, we can move directly to the more detailed and systematic treatment of Barthes' 'Discourse of History'. Designed as it is to cover the general field of 'classic' historiography, from Herodotus to Michelet, this article does not lend itself directly to our comparative treatment of three twentieth-century sources. But there are useful parallels to be made. Barthes bases the first two sections of his analysis on the structural distinction between *énonciation* and *énoncé* — the act of making a statement or utterance, and the statement or utterance itself. First of all, he addresses himself to the *énonciation* of the historical text, asking 'under what conditions the classic historian is enabled — or authorized — himself to designate, in his discourse, the act by which he promulgates it' (p. 7). His attention is focused on the 'shifters' (Jakobson's term) whereby the historian marks the transition from his statement to the conditions under which it was made: telling phrases like 'as I have heard' or 'to my knowledge' which reinforce our sense of the historian 'listening' to testimony; and devices which complicate the chronology of the text, signalling the historian's ability to move backwards and forwards in time — 'as we have said before', 'returning to an earlier stage', etc. As Barthes rightly emphasises, the classic historian typically makes use of an *exordium*, or opening formula, comparable to the 'I sing' of the poet: for a medieval chronicler like Joinville, it is a religious invocation — 'In the name of God Almighty, I, Jean, Sire de Joinville, write the life of our Holy King Louis' (p. 9). Of course, the obvious point to be made from our point of view is that twentieth-century historiography, as typified by our two secondary examples, very largely eschews any such 'shifting' mechanisms. Haig's diary, the primary source, narrows the gap between the 'I' of the *énoncé* and the 'I' of the *énonciation*, since the diarist of the evening is recapitulating what has happened to the general of the morning and afternoon. Barnett and Taylor, though they do not reject *analeptic* and *proleptic* references, feel no need for a more formal organisation of the narrative, let alone for an opening *exordium*, or a 'listening' shifter. In a sense, at least for Barnett, who liberally cites his sources, the role of the 'listening' shifter has been taken over by the apparatus of the notes and references at the bottom of each page.

The point of this comparison thus appears to be a negative one. One might say that the professional status of the historian in the present century dispenses him from the need to make an *exordium*, or the necessity of 'listening' shifters. Why do I begin this history? The answer is, quite simply, 'because I am a historian'. No doubt the description of

Barnett as 'one of the outstanding military historians of the rising generation' on the back cover of his book is one device for rendering an *exordium* unnecessary. From whom have I received my testimony? The modern professional historian scorns to mention this in the text, because it is conventionally assumed that he has covered all available 'primary' sources and there is no need to insist on the point, apart from the discrete provision of references. While conceding these major points, we might at the same time hazard the suggestion that the conventional devices of classic historiography are more likely to mutate into an almost unrecognisable form, than to vanish entirely. If Correlli Barnett's *titres de noblesse* render an *exordium* unnecessary — and the same could be said for A. J. P. Taylor's qualification as 'an uncompromising historian' on *his* back cover — the 'listening' shifter is undeniably present whenever the text makes us aware of a further dimension of historical reality, which guarantees the 'life-like' quality of the narrative. Against Barnett's terse references, the ample photographic illustrations of Taylor's book undoubtedly perform this function in a much more positive way: irrespective of whether they are precisely bound into the narrative, they serve as a successful authenticating device. Here is a historian, they seem to say, who has *looked at*, and not simply listened to, the testimony of history.

Barthes himself makes a similar point when he stresses that the 'deficiency of signs of the utterer', and in particular the exclusion of the 'I' from the text, ensures no more than the illusion of objectivity. 'It would be hard to count the novelists who imagined — in the epoch of Realism — that they were objective because they suppressed the signs of the 'I' in their discourse!' (p. 11). The contemporary historian could perhaps be accused of sustaining the illusion which novelists have, on the whole, abandoned. By choosing to exclude the 'I' from the historical narrative, he is doing no more than adopting an 'objective persona', which will certainly not guarantee him against a personal inflection of the text which he is writing. Barthes's second section in the 'Discourse of History', which concentrates upon the text as *énoncé* or statement, suggests some ways of analysing what takes place behind the mask of objectivity, and provides a different method of ordering the material from that adopted by Hayden White. Any statement, as Barthes points out, can be reduced to a list of 'existents' and 'occurrents' — of 'beings or entities' and their predicates. If we compile such a list, we have a *collection* of terms, 'whose units end up by repeating themselves.... Thus, in Herodotus, the existents can be reduced to dynasties, princes, soldiers, peoples, and places, and the occurrents to actions like laying waste, putting into slavery, making alliances, organizing expeditions, reigning, using stratagems, consulting oracles etc.' (p. 12). Whether

such 'collections', and discernible rules of 'substitution and transformation' underlying the disposition of collections in the text, could be found in Barnett and Taylor, is an issue which would require detailed textual analysis. Both historians evidently rely on what Barthes terms the 'lexicon' of war, and yet Taylor exploits a more figurative, colloquial vein: we would probably not find in Barnett the whimsical metaphor of 'stop up a hole', nor would we expect the serio-comic extension of Foch's figure of the 'conductor' into a 'conductor who has his own instrument'. Although such a conclusion is bound to be provisional within the terms of this article, it seems likely that Barnett is a historian who rarely strays outside the 'lexicon of war', while Taylor is drawing on what Barthes calls 'a personal thematic', characterised by the choice of key figures and metaphors to structure the overall 'collection'. One of Taylor's obvious devices, for example, is the consistent exploitation of figures of rapid movement: 'reeling back', 'bounced in', 'flung in'. This heightening of the figurative level, so to speak, prepares us for the judgment about the 'war of movement' with which our extract closes.

A further interesting issue which Barthes explores in his review of the historical text as *énoncé* is the rational or logical status of the narrative. Historiography is clearly not just a matter of 'collections' of terms in combination: it is a matter of 'argument'. Yet Barthes is surely right when he asserts that historical discourse does not have the strictly rational character of the syllogism. Instead, it relies on 'enthymematic' reasoning, on rhetorical rather than demonstrative argument. Barthes chooses his example from Michelet, and sums up the logical structure of the passage in the following way: '(1) To distract the people from revolt, it is necessary to occupy them; (2) now, the best way to do that, is to throw them a man; (3) so, the princes chose old Aubriot....' (p. 19). Though there is not so pure an example of enthymematic reasoning in our two secondary sources, it is clear that the argument of both historians does rely, at certain points, on rhetorical cogency rather than on logic. Barnett's second paragraph could be summarised as follows: Pétain was in a state of very great tension: Pétain looked as if he had lost his nerve; 'certainly' he expressed his pessimistic views with startling warmth. The second statement (from Haig's diary) reads as a confirmation of Pétain's interior state of mind, when it is also one of the pieces of evidence (perhaps the primary evidence) for positing that state of mind in the first place. The third statement is a conflation of two notions: he expressed pessimistic views (extension and confirmation of the first two statements) *and* he expressed them 'with startling warmth'. But the form of this third statement, and particularly the force of the word 'certainly', contribute to a clear non-sequitur: he was,

and appeared, pessimistic — certainly he expressed his pessimism with startling warmth. Surely we might have expected a contrast here (*and yet* he expressed his pessimism...) rather than a reinforcing connective?

Taylor's explanation of the seeming 'paradox' of the 1918 campaign has similar inconsistencies, if we examine it on this detailed level. But we might well conclude that such examination is over-ingenious, and tells us only what we knew already: namely, that the historian is not using formal logic. Barthes' third and final section is much more suggestive in its implications, since it approaches the crucial issue of 'signification'. Here the historical text has a distinctive property, which it shares with no other area of discourse. As Barthes puts it:

The fact can only have a linguistic existence, as a term in a discourse, and yet it is exactly as if this existence were merely the 'copy', purely and simply, of another existence situated in the extra-structural domain of the 'real'. This type of discourse is doubtless the only type in which the referent is aimed for as something external to the discourse, without it ever being possible to attain it outside this discourse. We should therefore ask ourselves in a more searching way what place the 'real' plays in the structure of the discourse. (p. 17)

Barthes proceeds to characterise historical discourse in terms which are borrowed directly from Saussurean linguistics. The three components of the sign are the *signifier*, or material representation in speech or writing; the *signified*, or mental representation, and the *referent* in the external world. Yet historiography, like 'any discourse which lays claim to "realism"', feigns to know only the *signifier* and the *referent*; the historical text purports to be transparent to the action which it describes, and yet such a notion of transparency by-passes the necessary stage of mental representation—which is, of course, the stage at which Hayden White's 'conceptual models' play their part in processing and ordering the stuff of historical narrative. Barthes goes on to conclude that historical discourse tries to insert the 'real' as its 'unformulated signified', but that in effect 'it can do no more than signify the real, constantly repeating that *it happened*, without this assertion amounting to anything but the signified 'other side' of the whole process of historical narration' (p. 18). In other words, the distinctiveness of historiography resides in the special value which it attaches to the protocol of narration: to the question 'in what respect does this discourse represent the real?', the traditional historian must, and can only give the answer — 'it represents the real in so far as it is a narration'.

Of course, Barthes is not unaware in this argument that narration is used for fictional purposes. The difference between the 'realistic' claims of the novelist and the historian would reside precisely in the

fact that the novelist admits the level of signification: he knows that his text depends upon such mental constructs as genre and plot, while the historian is reluctant to assume any such thing. If we try to read our texts by Taylor and Barnett *as if* they were fiction, we must surely recognise that the inappropriateness of doing so does not spring from any observable linguistic features of the text as such. It is simply that, as Louis Mink put it, we have learnt 'how to distinguish between fiction and history as making different truth-claims for their individual descriptions'.<sup>17</sup> And the evidence that we have learnt this capacity can be found in our disposition to insert the signified "it happened" behind each and every instance of the past tense in a historiographic context.

Yet Barthes does not remain with the rather bland assumption that narration, in the general sense, offers the *open sesame* to historical realism. He writes more specifically of the 'effet du réel', or 'reality effect', and his subsequent article under that title gives a fullness to that concept which the 'Discourse of History' does not provide. In illustrating the 'reality effect', Barthes singles out instances of historical statements which strike us precisely because of their irrelevance to the main narrative. In exhibiting a striking detail, or a supplementary incident, for our attention these statements appear to illustrate the historical 'it happened' in all its purity — precisely because there is no other ascertainable reason for them being there. Neither Taylor nor Barnett includes in his brief extract (according to my judgment) a 'reality effect', though Taylor comes close to it in the slightly incongruous precision of 'Milner took Clemenceau out of the room'. Yet the extract from Haig's diary offers a fine example: 'I lunched from lunch-box at Doullens.' No doubt it would be absurd to claim that Haig is trying to enhance the effect of his narrative with a piquant detail (such information could be shown to be strictly functional — did not a carbon of each entry find its way rapidly to Lady Haig?). At the same time, we are simply concerned here with the textual *effect*, and can dismiss any queries about Haig's self-appointed status as a historian. If such a vivid detail succeeds in reinforcing for us the sense that 'it happened', it must also be seen in relation to the other conventions which have been used in presenting this 'original source' as a historical document: for example, the faithful retention of contractions and ellipses used in the original manuscript ('from lunch-box', 'I must not so extend our line through enemy pressing our centre making it bulge'), and the photographic illustration of the manuscript which assures us, by its propinquity to the transcribed text, that nothing has been lost. By comparison with the texts of Barnett and Taylor, which merely signify the real through the protocol of narration, Haig's diary *is* the real. No self-respecting historian of the period would forego the opportunity of

consulting, beyond Robert Blake's transcription, the 'ordinary field service notebook' in which it is contained. Yet behind this methodological insistence, from secondary source to published primary source, from published primary source to manuscript, there is a mythic as well as an epistemological requirement. Excessive public interest one was claiming that these diaries offered much new historical material. The galvanising effect of the discovery—in this period when Hitler's return and rediscovery have already mythic status for writers of drama and fiction—lay in sense that Hitler's diary was *almost* the real Hitler.

Here we must return, in conclusion, to Barthes' confident assertion, in 1967, that 'the sign of History from now on is no longer the real, but the intelligible' (p. 18). Despite the precedent of Braudel, this prediction must have seemed hazardous at the time, and in the English context it would no doubt have been unintelligible. Both of our historical examples, from Correlli Barnett and A. J. P. Taylor, date from the period just before Barthes was writing. Both of them show no sign that the traditional strategies of narration are in any way exhausted. Even among Braudel's colleagues in the French *Annales* school, it would appear that the most stringent 'structural' emphasis on intelligibility does not necessarily exclude the 'real'. Even the historian who has expelled the real in the guise of a seamless narration can recognise its return in the very singularity and synthetic unity of his objects of study. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, author of the immensely successful *Montaillou*, articulates this 'return of the real' in the closing section of his study of sixteenth-century France, *Carnival*:

These diachronic paradigms and contrasts nevertheless leave the deep unity of the protest process intact in synchronic terms (its own particular structure at a particular time). Though full of cracks, chips, and disjointed pieces. Dauphine's third estate remained a solid block. Even as internal dissent began to plague it in August 1580, a character like Camot, the Grenoble attorney, could appear as a living and unifying synthesis.<sup>18</sup>

If Le Roy Ladurie did not register the 'solidity' of past phenomena in this way, he would doubtless not be so popular a historian. Perhaps he would not be a historian at all. A similar point can be made, *mutatis mutandis*, about the structural analysis of historiography. If writers like Barthes, Gossman and White had not been fascinated by what remains after the historical text has been analysed, they would probably not have felt that the game was worth the candle.

## NOTES

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4. Michel Charles, introduction to *Poétique*, 49, (Feb. 1982), 4 (my translation).
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6. Edward Gibbon, *Vindication*, (Oxford, 1970), p. 10.
7. Augustin Thierry, *History of the Norman Conquest*, English translation by William Hazlitt, (London, 1856), p. xxx.
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12. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, English translation by Sian Reynolds, (London, 1973), ii, pp. 1239ff.
13. Prosper de Barante, *Souvenirs* (Paris, 1890-1901), iii, p. 358.
14. A similar, though more modest claim could be made for the analysis of my own study, *The Clothing of Clío — On historical representation in nineteenth-century Britain and France* (London, 1984), which traces common rhetorical procedures in a series of products of 'historical-mindedness': the historical painting, the historical museum and the historical novel being foremost among them.
15. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse*, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
16. Adam Parry, article on Thucydides in *Yale Classical Studies*, 22 (1972), 52.
17. Louis Mink, 'Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument', in Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (eds), *The Writings of History* (Madison, 1978), p. 149.
18. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival — A People's Uprising at Romans, 1579-1580*, English translation by Mary Feeney (London, 1980), p. 369.