

From THE POETRY OF POPE Thomas DeQuincey 1848 LITERATURE OF KNOWLEDGE AND LITERATURE OF POWER

What is it that we mean by *literature*? Popularly, and amongst the thoughtless, it is held to include everything that is printed in a book. Little logic is required to disturb *that* definition. The most thoughtless person is easily made aware that in the idea of *literature* one essential element is,—some relation to a general and common interest of man, so that what applies only to a local or professional or merely personal interest even though presenting itself in the shape of a book, will not belong to literature. So far the definition is easily narrowed; and it is as easily expanded. For not only is much that takes a station in books not literature, but, inversely, much that really *is* literature never reaches a station in books. The weekly sermons of Christendom, that vast pulpit literature which acts so extensively upon the popular mind—to warn, to uphold, to renew, to comfort, to alarm--does not attain the sanctuary of libraries in the ten-thousandth part of its extent. The drama, again, as for instance the finest of Shakspeare's plays in England and all leading Athenian plays in the noontide of the Attic stage, operated as a literature on the public mind, and were (according to the strictest letter of that term) *published* through the audiences that witnessed their representation, some time before they were published as things to be read; and they were published in this scenical mode of publication with much more effect than they could have had as books during ages of costly copying or of costly printing.

Books, therefore, do not suggest an idea co-extensive and interchangeable with the idea of literature, since much literature, scenic, forensic, or didactic (as from lectures and public orators), may never come into books, and much that *does* come into books may connect itself with no literary interest. But a far more important correction, applicable to the common vague idea of literature, is to be sought, not so much in a better definition of literature, as in a sharper distinction of the two functions which it fulfils. In that great social organ which, collectively, we call literature, there may be distinguished two separate offices, that may blend and often *do* so, but capable, severally, of a severe insulation, and naturally fitted for reciprocal repulsion. There is, first, the literature of *knowledge*, and, secondly, the literature of *power*. The function of the first is to *teach*; the function of the second is to *move*: the first is a rudder; the second an oar or a sail. The first speaks to the *mere* discursive understanding; the second speaks ultimately, it may happen, to the higher understanding, or reason, but always *through* affections of pleasure and sympathy. Remotely it may travel towards an object seated in what Lord Bacon calls *dry* light; but proximately it does and must operate--else it ceases to be literature of *power*--on and through that *humid* light which clothes itself in the mists and glittering *iris* of human passions, desires, and

genial emotions. Men have so little reflected on the higher functions of literature as to find it a paradox if one should describe it as a mean or subordinate purpose of books to give information. But this is a paradox only in the sense which makes it honorable to be paradoxical. Whenever we talk in ordinary language of seeking knowledge, we understand the words as connected with something of absolute novelty. But it is the grandeur of all truth which *can* occupy a very high place in human interests that it is never absolutely novel to the meanest of minds: it exists eternally, by way of germ or latent principle, in the lowest as in the highest, needing to be developed but never to be planted. To be capable of transplantation is the immediate criterion of a truth ranges on a lower scale. Besides which, there is a rarer thing than truth, namely, *power*, or deep sympathy with truth. What is the effect, for instance, upon society, of children? By the pity, by the tenderness, and by the peculiar modes of admiration, which connect themselves with the helplessness, with the innocence, and with the simplicity of children, not only are the primal affections strengthened and continually renewed, but the qualities which are dearest in the sight of heaven—the frailty, for instance, which appeals to forbearance, the innocence which symbolizes the heavenly, and the simplicity which is most alien from the worldly—are kept up in perpetual remembrance, and their ideals are continually refreshed. A purpose of the same nature is answered by the higher literature, *viz.*, the literature of power. What do you learn from *Paradise Lost*? Nothing at all. What do you learn from a cookery book? Something new, something that you did not know before, in every paragraph. But would you therefore put the wretched cookery-book on a higher level of estimation than the divine poem? What you owe to Milton is not any knowledge, of which a million separate items are still but a million of advancing steps on the same earthly level; what you owe is *power*, that is, exercise and expansion to your own latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite, where every pulse and each separate influx is a step upwards, a step ascending as upon a Jacob's ladder from earth to mysterious altitudes above the earth. *All* the steps of knowledge, from first to last, carry you further on the same plane, but could never raise you one foot above your ancient level of earth; whereas the very *first* step in power is a flight, is an ascending movement into another element where earth is forgotten.

Were it not that human sensibilities are ventilated and continually called out into exercise by the great phenomena of infancy, or of real life as it moves through chance and change, or of literature as it recombines these elements in the mimicries of poetry, romance, etc., it is certain that, like any animal power or muscular energy falling into disuse, all such sensibilities would gradually droop and dwindle. It is in relation to these great *moral* capacities of man that the literature of power, as distinguished from that of knowledge, lives and has its field of action. It is concerned with what is highest in man; for the Scriptures themselves never condescended to deal by suggestion or co-operation with the mere discursive understanding: when speaking

of man in his intellectual capacity, the Scriptures speak, not of the understanding, but of "*the understanding heart*," making the heart,—that is, the great intuitive (or non-discursive) organ, to be the interchangeable formula for man in his highest state of capacity for the infinite. Tragedy, romance, fairy tale, or epopee, all alike restore to man's mind the ideals of justice, of hope, of truth, of mercy, of retribution, which else (left to the support of daily life in its realities) would languish for want of sufficient illustration. What is meant, for instance, by *poetic justice*? It does not mean a justice that differs by its object from the ordinary justice of human jurisprudence, for then it must be confessedly a very bad kind of justice; but it means a justice that differs from common forensic justice by the degree in which it *attains* its object, a justice that is more omnipotent over its own ends, as dealing, not with the refractory elements of earthly life, but with the elements of its own creation and with materials flexible to its own purest preconceptions. It is certain that, were it not for the literature of power, these ideals would often remain amongst us as mere arid notional forms; whereas, by the creative forces of man put forth in literature, they gain a vernal life of restoration and germinate into vital activities. The commonest novel, by moving in alliance with human fears and hopes, with human instincts of wrong and right, sustains and quickens those affections. Calling them into action, it rescues them from torpor. And hence the pre-eminency, over all authors that merely *teach*, of the meanest that proves, or that teaches, if at all, indirectly by moving. The very highest work that has ever existed in the literature of knowledge is but a provisional work, a book upon trial and sufferance, and *quamdiu bene se gesserit* [while it behaved well]. Let its teaching be even partially revised, let it be but expanded, nay, even let its teaching be but placed in a better order, and instantly it is superseded. Whereas the feeblest works in the literature of power, surviving at all, survive as finished and unalterable among men. For instance, the *Principia* of Sir Isaac Newton was a book *militant* on earth from the first. In all stages of its progress it would have to fight for its existence: first, as regards absolute truth; secondly, when that combat was over, as regards its form, or mode of presenting the truth. And as soon as a La Place, or anybody else, builds higher upon the foundations laid by this book, effectually he throws it out of the sunshine into decay and darkness; by weapons won from this book he superannuates and destroys this book, so that soon the name of Newton remains as a mere *nominis umbra*, but his book, as a living power, has transmigrated into other forms. Now, on the contrary, the *Iliad*, the *Prometheus* of AEschylus, the *Othello* or *King Lear*, the *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, and the *Paradise Lost* are not militant but triumphant forever, as long as the languages exist in which they speak or can be taught to speak. They never can transmigrate into new incarnations. To reproduce these in new forms or variations, even if in some things they should be improved, would be to plagiarize. A good steam-engine is properly superseded by a better. But one lovely pastoral valley is not superseded by another, nor a statue of Praxiteles by a statue of Michael Angelo. These things are separated, not by imparity, but by disparity. They are not thought of

as unequal under the same standard, but as different in *kind*, and, if otherwise equal, as equal under a different standard. Human works of immortal beauty and works of nature in one respect stand on the same footing: they never absolutely repeat each other, never approach so near as not to differ; and they differ not as better and worse, or simply by more and less; they differ by undecipherable and incommunicable differences, that cannot be caught by mimicries, that cannot be reflected in the mirror of copies, that cannot become ponderable in the scales of vulgar comparison.

ROLAND BARTHES THE DISCOURSE OF HISTORY,

translated by Stephen Bann. *Comparative Criticism*, 3 (1981): 7-20. Pagination, superscripts, and accents are not preserved. Please see source for the final three notes.

The formal description of sets of words beyond the level of the sentence (what we call for convenience discourse) is not a modern development: from Gorgias to the nineteenth century, it was the special concern of traditional rhetoric. Recent developments in the science of language have nonetheless endowed it with a new timeliness and new methods of analysis: a linguistic description of discourse can perhaps already be envisaged at this stage; because of its bearings on literary analysis (whose importance in education is well known) it is one of the first assignments for semiology to undertake.

This second level of linguistics, which must look for the universals of discourse (if they exist) under the form of units and general rules of combination, must at the same time obviously give an answer to the question whether structural analysis is justified in retaining the traditional typology of discourses; whether it is fully legitimate to make a constant opposition between the discourses of poetry and the novel, the fictional narrative and the historical narrative. It is the last point which gives rise to the reflections set down here. Does the narration of past events, which, in our culture from the time of the Greeks onwards, has generally been subject to the sanction of historical 'science', bound to the unbending standard of the 'real', and justified by the principles of 'rational' exposition - does this form of narration really differ, in some specific trait, in some indubitably distinctive feature, from imaginary narration, as we find it in the epic, the novel, and the drama? And if this trait or feature exists, then in what level of the historical statement must it be placed?(1) In order to suggest a reply to this question, we shall here be looking, in a free and far from exhaustive fashion, at the discourse of a number of great classic historians: Herodotus, Machiavelli, Bossuet and Michelet.

I. THE ACT OF UTTERING

First of all, we may ask under what conditions the classic historian is enabled -or authorized - himself to designate, in his discourse, the act by which he promulgates it. In other words, what, on the level of discourse - and not of language, are the *shifters* (in Jakobson's sense of the term)(2) which assure the transition from the utterance to the act of uttering (or *vice versa*) ?

It would appear that historical discourse involves two regular types of shifters. The first type comprises what we might call the shifters of *listening*. This category has

been identified by Jakobson, on the level of language, with the term *testimonial*, according to the formula CeCa1/Caa2: in addition to the event reported (Ce), discourse mentions at the same time the act of the informer (Ca1), and the speech of the utterer which is related to it (Ca2). This form of shifter thus designates any reference to the historian's *listening*, collecting testimony from *elsewhere* and telling it in his own discourse. Listening made explicit represents a choice, for it is possible not to refer to it at all; it brings the historian closer to the anthropologist, in so far as he mentions the source of his information. Thus we find an abundant use of this shifter of listening among historian/anthropologists like Herodotus. The forms vary: they range from phrases of the type of *as I have heard*, or *to my knowledge*, to the historian's use of the present tense which testifies to the intervention of the utterer, and to any mention of the historian's personal experience. Such is the case with Michelet, who 'listens to' the History of France as a result of an overwhelming personal experience (of the Revolution of July 1830) and takes account of this in his discourse. The *listening* shifter is obviously not distinctive to historical discourse: it is found frequently in conversation, and in certain expository devices used in the novel (such as anecdotes which are taken from fictional sources of information mentioned in the text).

The second type of shifter comprises all the explicit signs whereby the utterer - in this case, the historian - organizes his own discourse, taking up the thread or modifying his approach in some way in the course of narration: that is to say, where he provides explicit points of reference in the text. This is an important type of shifter, and there can be many different ways of 'organizing' discourse accordingly; but these different instances can all be subsumed under the principle that each shifter indicates a movement of the discourse in relation to its matter, or more precisely a movement in relation to the sequence of its matter, rather like the operation of the temporal and locational deictics 'here is/there is'. Thus we can cite as cases where the shifter affects the flow of utterances: the effect of immobility (*comme nous l'avons dit plus haut*), that of returning to an earlier stage (*altius repetere, replicare da piu alto luogo*), that of coming back again (*ma ritornando all'ordine nostro, dico come. . .*), that of stopping dead (*sur lui, nous n'en dirons pas plus*), and that of announcing (*voici les autres actions dignes de memoire qu'il fit pendant son regne*). The organizing shifter poses a problem which is worthy of attention, though it can only be lightly indicated here: this is the problem arising from the coexistence, or to be more exact the friction between two times - the time of uttering and the time of the matter of the utterance. This friction gives rise to a number of important factors in historical discourse, of which we shall mention three. The first relates to the many ways of producing the phenomenon of acceleration in a historical account: an equal number of pages (if such be the rough measure of the time of uttering) can cover very different lapses of time (the time of matter of the utterance). In Machiavelli's *History of Florence* the same

measure (a chapter) covers in one instance a number of centuries, and in another no more than two decades. The nearer we are to the historian's own time, the more strongly the pressure of the uttering makes itself felt, and the slower the history becomes. There is no such thing as isochrony - and to say this, is to attack implicitly the linearity of the discourse and open it up to a possible 'paragrammatical' reading of the historical message.(3) The second point also reminds us, in its way, that this type of discourse - though linear in its material form - when it is face to face with historical time, undertakes (so it would appear) the role of amplifying the depth of that time. We become aware of what we might call a zig-zag or saw-toothed history. A good example is Herodotus, who turns back to the ancestors of a newcomer, and then returns to his point of departure to proceed a little further - and then starts the whole process all over again with the next newcomer. Finally there is a third factor in historical discourse which is of the utmost importance, one which bears witness to the destructive effect organizing shifters as far as the chronological time of the history concerned. This is a question of the way historical discourse is inaugurated, of the place where we find in conjunction the beginning of the matter of the utterance and the *exordium* of the uttering.(4) Historical discourse is familiar with two general types of inauguration. In the first place, there is what we might call the performative opening for the words really perform a solemn act of foundation; the model for this is poetic, the *I sing* of the poets. So Joinville begins his history with a religious invocation (*Au nom de Dieu le tout-puissant, je, Jehan, sire, Joinville, fais écrire la vie de nostre Saint roi Louis*), and even the socialist Louis Blanc does not disdain the purificatory intonation, (5) so evident is it that the beginnings of speech always carry with them a kind of difficulty, perhaps even a sacred character. Then there is a much more commonly found element, the Preface, which is an act of uttering characterized such, whether prospectively in so far as it announces the discourse to come, or retrospectively in that it embodies a judgement on the discourse. (Such is the case with the Preface which Michelet wrote to crown his *History of France*, once it had been completely written and published.) Bearing in mind these different elements, we are likely to conclude that the entry of the act of uttering into the historical utterance, through these organizing shifters, is directed less towards offering the historian a chance of expressing his 'subjectivity', as is commonly held, than to 'complicating' the chronological time of history by bringing it up against another time, which is that of the discourse itself and could be termed for short the 'paper-time'. To sum up, the presence in historical narration of explicit signs of uttering would represent an attempt to 'dechronologize' the 'thread' of history and to restore, even though it may merely be a matter of reminiscence or nostalgia, a form of time that is complex, parametric and not in the least linear: a form of time whose spatial depths recall the mythic time of the ancient cosmogonies, which was also linked in its essence to the words of the poet and the soothsayer. Organizing shifters bear witness, in effect -- though they do so through indirect ploys which have the appearance of rationality - to the predictive

function of the historian. It is to the extent that he *knows* what has not yet been told that the historian, like the actor of myth, needs to double up the chronological unwinding of events with references to the time of his own speech.

The signs (or shifters) which have just been mentioned bear solely on the very process of uttering. There are other signs which refer no longer to the act of uttering, but to what Jakobson calls its protagonists (Ta): the receiver and the sender. It is a fact worthy of note, and somewhat mysterious at the same time, that literary discourse very rarely carries within it the signs of the 'reader'. Indeed we can say that its distinctive trait is precisely that it is - or so it would appear - a discourse without the pronoun 'you', even though in reality the entire structure of such a discourse implies a reading 'subject'. In historical discourse, the signs of the receiver are usually absent: they can be found only in cases where History is offered as a lesson, as with Bossuet's *Universal History*, a discourse which is explicitly addressed by the tutor to his pupil, the prince. Yet in a certain sense, this schema is only possible to the extent that Bossuet's discourse can be held to reproduce by homology the discourse which God himself holds with men - precisely in the form of the History which he grants to them. It is because the History of men is the Writing of God that Bossuet, as the mediator of this writing, can establish a relationship of sender and receiver between himself and the young prince.

Signs of the utterer (or sender) are obviously much more frequent. Here we should class all the discursive elements through which the historian - as the empty subject of the uttering - replenishes himself little by little with a variety of predicates which are destined to constitute him as a *person*, endowed with a psychological plenitude, or again (the word has a precious figurative sense) to give him *countenance*.⁽⁶⁾ We can mention at this point a particular form of this 'filling' process, which is more directly associated with literary criticism. This is the case where the utterer means to 'absent himself' from his discourse, and where there is in consequence a systematic deficiency of any form of sign referring to the sender of the historical message. The history seems to be telling itself all on its own. This feature has a career which is worthy of note, since it corresponds in effect to the type of historical discourse labelled as 'objective' (in which the historian never intervenes). Actually in this case, the utterer nullifies his emotional persona, but substitutes for it another persona, the 'objective' persona. The subject persists in its plenitude, but as an objective subject. This is what Fustel de Coulanges referred to significantly (and somewhat naively) as the 'chastity of History'. On the level of discourse, objectivity - or the deficiency of signs of the utterer - thus appears as a particular form of imaginary projection, the product of what might be called the referential illusion, since in this case the historian is claiming to allow the referent to speak all on its own. This type of illusion is not exclusive to historical discourse. 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! Today linguistics and psychoanalysis have made us much more lucid with regard to privative utterances: we know that absences of signs are also in themselves significant.

To bring this section which deals with the act of uttering to a close, we should mention the special case - foreseen by Jakobson and placed within his lattice of shifters, on the linguistic level - when the utterer of the discourse is also at the same time a participant in the process described in the utterance, when the protagonist of the utterance is the same as the protagonist of the act of uttering (Te/Ta): that is, when the historian, who is an actor with regard to the event, becomes its narrator, as with Xenophon, who takes part in the retreat of the Ten Thousand and subsequently becomes its historian. The most famous example of this conjunction of the *I* in the utterance and the *I* in the act of uttering is doubtless the *he* of Caesar's Gallic War. This celebrated *he* belongs to the utterance; when Caesar explicitly undertakes the act of uttering he passes to the use of *we* (*ut supra demonstravimus*). Caesar's *he* appears at first sight to be submerged amid the other participants in the process described, and on this count has been viewed as the supreme sign of objectivity. And yet it would appear that we can make a formal distinction which impugns this objectivity. How? By making the observation that the predicates of Caesar's *he* are constantly pre-selected: this *he* can only tolerate a certain class of syntagmas, which we could call the syntagmas of command (*giving orders, holding court, visiting, having things done, congratulating, explaining, thinking*). The examples are, in effect, very close to certain cases of the performative, in which speech is inextricably associated with action. Other instances can be found for this *he* who is both a past actor and a present narrator (particularly in Clausewitz). They show that the choice of an apersonal pronoun is no more than a rhetorical alibi, and that the true situation of the utterer is clear from the choice of syntagmas with which he surrounds his past actions.

II. THE UTTERANCE

It should be possible to break down the historical utterance into units of content, which can then be classified. These units of content represent what is spoken of in the history; in so far as they are *signifieds*, they are neither the pure referent nor the discourse as a whole: their wholeness is constituted by the referent inasmuch as it has been broken down, named and rendered intelligible, but not yet made subject to a syntax. We shall not attempt to go deeply into the investigation of these classes of units in this article. Such an effort would be premature. We shall confine the discussion to a few preliminary remarks.

The historical utterance, just like the utterance in sentence form, involves both 'existents' and 'occurrents', that is beings or entities, and their predicates. Now an

initial examination enables us to foresee that both of these categories, in their different ways, can form lists that are to a certain extent closed, and therefore accessible to comprehension: in a word, they can form *collections*, whose units end up by repeating themselves, in combinations that are obviously subject to variation. Thus, in Herodotus, the existents can be reduced to dynasties, princes, generals, soldiers, peoples, and places, and the occurments to actions like laying waste, putting into slavery, making alliances, organizing expeditions, reigning, using stratagems, consulting oracles etc. These collections, in so far as they are (to a certain extent) closed, should observe certain rules of substitution and transformation and it ought to be possible to structure them - a task which is obviously more or less easy according to the historian. The units found in Herodotus, for example, depend largely on a single lexicon, which is that of war. It would be an interesting question to investigate whether, for more modern historians, we should expect to find more complex associations of different lexicons, and whether, even in this case, historical discourse would not turn out to be based, in the last resort, on strong collections (it is preferable to talk of *collections*, rather than of *lexicons*, since here we are discussing only the level of the content). Machiavelli seems to have had an intuitive understanding of this type of structure: at the beginning of the *History of Florence*, he presents his 'collection', that is to say the list of juridical, political and ethnic objects which will subsequently be mobilized and set in combination in his narrative.

In the case of less well defined collections (in historians who are less archaic than Herodotus), the units of content may nonetheless receive a strong structuring which derives not from the lexicon, but from the personal thematic of the author. These (recurrent) thematic objects are numerous in the case of a Romantic author like Michelet, but we can also find them without any difficulty in authors who are reputedly more intellectual. In Tacitus, *fama* is such a personal unit, and Machiavelli establishes his history on the thematic opposition between *mantenere* (a verb which refers to the basic energy of the statesman) and *ruinare* (which, by contrast, implies the logic of affairs in a state of decline).(7) It goes without saying that, by means of these thematic units, which are most often imprisoned within a single word, we can find units of the discourse (and not of the content alone). So we come to the problem of the naming of historical objects. The word can convey with economy a situation or a sequence of actions; it aids structuring to the extent that, when it is projected on to the level of content, it forms in itself a small-scale structure. So it is with Machiavelli's use of the *conspiracy* to save having to make fully explicit a complex datum, which designates the sole possibility of struggle remaining when a government has vanquished every form of opposition that can be displayed in the open. The very act of naming, which enables the discourse to be strongly articulated, is a reinforcement of its structure. Strongly structured histories are histories which give an important

place to the substantive: Bossuet, for whom the history of men is structured by God, makes abundant use of substantives in sequence as a short-cut.(8)

These remarks are just as applicable to the occurrents as to the existents. The processes of history in themselves (however they happen to be developed through the use of terminology) pose an interesting question- among so many others, that of their status. The status of a process may be affirmative, negative or interrogative. But the status of historical discourse is uniformly assertive, affirmative. The historical fact is linguistically associated with a privileged ontological status: we recount what has been, not what has not been, or what has been uncertain. To sum up, historical discourse is not acquainted with negation (or only very rarely, in exceptional cases). Strangely enough, but significantly, this fact can be compared with the tendency which we find in a type of utterer who is very different from the historian: that is, the psychotic, who is incapable of submitting an utterance to a negative transformation.(9) We can conclude that, in a certain sense, 'objective' discourse (as in the case of positivist history) shares the situation of schizophrenic discourse. In both cases, there is a radical censorship of the act of uttering (which has to be experienced for a negative transformation to take place), a massive flowing back of discourse in the direction of the utterance and even (in the historian's case) in the direction of the referent: no one is there to take responsibility for the utterance.

To introduce another aspect, an essential aspect, of the historical utterance, we must turn to the classing of units of content, and the way in which they fall into succession. As far as a preliminary sample seems to indicate, classes of this kind are the very same as we have claimed to discover in the fictional narrative.(10) The first class comprises all the segments of the discourse which lead back to an implicit signified, through the process of metaphor; so we have Michelet describing the motley clothing, the garbling of coats of arms and the mixture of architectural styles, at the outset of the fifteenth century, as so many signifiers of a single signified, which is the disintegration of morality at the close of the Middle Ages. This particular class is therefore one of indices, or more exactly of signs (and it is a class very frequently found in the classic novel). The second class of units is formed by the fragments of discourse which are rational, or syllogistic by nature: it would perhaps be more accurate to call them enthymematic, since it is almost always a case of syllogisms which are approximate, or incomplete. (11) Enthymemes are not exclusive to historical discourse; they occur frequently in the novel, where bifurcations in the anecdote are generally justified in the eyes of the reader by pseudo-reasonings of a syllogistic type. The enthymeme confers upon historical discourse a non-symbolic intelligibility, and for this reason it deserves attention. Does it still exist in historical studies, where the discourse attempts to break with the class Aristotelian model? Lastly, there is a third class of units - which is no means the least important -

comprising what we have tended to call, after Propp, the 'functions' of the narrative, or the cardinal points whence the anecdote may adopt a different course. These functions grouped together: they may be syntagmatically grouped in a closed succession, with a high degree of logical entailment or sequential order. Thus, in Herodotus, we can find on more than one occasion an *Oracle* sequence, composed of three terms, each of which presents an alternative (to consult or not, to answer or not, to follow or not); these may be separated one from the other by other units which are foreign to the sequence. The foreign units are either the terms of another sequence, in which case the schema is one of imbrication; or they are minor expansions (items of information, indices), in which case the schema acts as a catalyst which fills the interstices between the core elements.

To generalize - perhaps unwarrantably - from these few remarks the structure of the utterance, we may offer the suggestion that historical discourse oscillates between two poles, according to whether it is indices or functions that predominate. When the indexical units predominate in a historian (testifying at every moment to an implicit signified), his is drawn towards a metaphorical form and borders upon the lyrical and symbolic. This is the case, for example, with Michelet. When, by contrast, it is the functional units which predominate, History takes on a metonymic form and becomes a close relation of the epic. An example of this tendency can be found in the narrative history of Augustin Thierry. There exists, it is true, yet another form of History: the History which tries to reproduce in the structure of the discourse the structure of the choices lived through by the protagonists of the process described. Here reasoning is dominant; the history is a reflexive one, which we might also call strategic history, and Machiavelli would be its best demonstration.

III. SIGNIFICATION

For History not to signify, discourse must be confined to a pure, unstructured series of notations. This is the case with chronologies and annals (in the pure sense of the term). In the fully formed (or, as we say, 'clothed') historical discourse, the facts related function inevitably either as indices, or as core elements whose very succession has in itself an indexical value. Even if the facts happen to be presented in an anarchic fashion, they still signify anarchy and to that extent conjure up a certain negative idea of human history.

The signifieds of historical discourse can occupy at least two different levels. First of all, there is the level which is inherent to the matter of the historical statement. Here we would cite all the meanings which the historian, of his own accord, gives to the facts which he relates (the motley costumes of the fifteenth century for Michelet, the importance of certain conflicts for Thucydides). Into this category also fall the moral or political 'lessons' which the narrator extracts from certain episodes (in Machiavelli,

or Bossuet). If the lesson is being drawn all the time, then we reach a second level, which is that of the signified transcending the whole historical discourse, and transmitted through the thematic of the historian - which we can thus justifiably identify as the form of the signified. So we might say that the very imperfection of the narrative structure in Herodotus (the product of a number of *series* of facts without conclusion) refers in the last instance to a certain philosophy of history, which is the submission of the world of men to the workings of the divine law. In the same way in Michelet, we can find that particular signifieds have been structured very strongly, and articulated in the form of oppositions (antitheses on the level of the signifier), in order to establish the ultimate meaning of a Manichean philosophy of life and death. In the historical discourse of our civilization, the process of signification is always aimed at 'filling out' the meaning of History. The historian is not so much a collector of facts as a collector and relater of signifiers; that is to say, he organizes them with the purpose of establishing positive meaning and filling the vacuum of pure, meaningless series.

As we can see, simply from looking at its structure and without having to invoke the substance of its content, historical discourse is in its essence a form of ideological elaboration, or to put it more precisely, an *imaginary* elaboration, if we can take the imaginary to be the language through which the utterer of a discourse (a purely linguistic entity) 'fills out' the place of subject of the utterance (a psychological or ideological entity). We can appreciate as a result why it is that the notion of a historical 'fact' has often aroused a certain degree of suspicion in various quarters. Nietzsche said in his time: 'There are no facts in themselves. It is always necessary to begin by introducing a meaning in order that there can be a fact.' From the moment that language is involved (and when is it not involved?), the fact can only be defined in a tautological fashion: what is noted derives from the notable, but the notable is only - from Herodotus onwards, when the word lost its accepted mythic meaning what is worthy of recollection, that is to say, worthy of being noted. thus arrive at the paradox which governs the entire question of the distinctiveness of historical discourse (in relation to other types discourse). 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 the discourse, without it ever being possible to attain it outside the discourse. We should therefore ask ourselves in a more searching way what place the 'real' plays in the structure of the discourse.

Historical discourse takes for granted, so to speak, a double operation which is very crafty. At one point (this break-down is of course only metaphorical) the referent is detached from the discourse, becomes external to it, its founding and governing

principle: this is the point of the *res gestae*, when the discourse offers itself quite simply as *historia rerum gestarum*. But at a second point, it is the signified itself which forced out and becomes confused with the referent; the referent enters into a direct relation with the signifier, and the discourse, solely charged with *expressing* the real, believes itself authorized to dispense with the fundamental term in imaginary structures, which is the signified. As with any discourse which lays claim to 'realism', historical discourse on admits to knowing a semantic schema with two terms, the referent and the signifier; the (illusory) confusion of referent and signified is, as know, the hallmark of auto-referential discourses like the performative. We could say that historical discourse is a fudged up performative, which what appears as statement (and description) is in fact no more than the signifier of the speech act as an act of authority.(12)

In other words, in 'objective' history, the 'real' is never more than an unformulated signified, sheltering behind the apparently all-powerful referent. This situation characterizes what we might call the *realistic effect*. The signified is eliminated from the 'objective' discourse, and ostensibly allows the 'real' and its expression to come together, and this succeeds in establishing a new meaning, on the infallible principle already stated that any deficiency of elements in a system is in its' significant. This new meaning - which extends to the whole of historical discourse and is its ultimately distinctive property - is the real in itself surreptitiously transformed into a sheepish signified. Historical discourse does not follow the real, 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.

The prestige attached to *it happened* has important ramifications which are themselves worthy of historical investigation. Our civilization has a taste for the realistic effect, as can be seen in the development of specific genres like the realist novel, the private diary, documentary literature, news items, historical museums, exhibitions of old objects and especially in the massive development of photography, whose sole distinctive trait (by comparison with drawing) is precisely that it signifies that the event represented has *really* taken place.(13) When the relic is secularized, it loses its sacred character, all except for that very sacredness which is attached to the enigma of what has been, is no longer, and yet offers itself for reading as the present sign of a dead thing. By contrast, the profanation of relics is in fact a destruction of the real itself, which derives from the intuition that the real is never any more than a meaning, which can be revoked when history requires it and demands a thorough subversion of the very foundations of civilized society.(14)

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. Augustin Thierry became the theoretician of this narrative style of history, which draws its 'truth' from the careful attention to narration, the architecture of articulations and the abundance of expanded elements (known, in this case, as 'concrete details').(15) So the circle of paradox is complete. 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. In this connection, we can also understand how the relative lack of prominence (if not complete disappearance) of narration in the historical science of the present day, which seeks to talk of structures and not of chronologies, implies much more than a mere change in schools of thought. Historical narration is dying because the sign of History from now on is no longer the real, but the intelligible.

NOTES

'Le discours de l'histoire' was first published in *Social Science Information* (1967). See also the translation by Peter Wexler in Michael Lane, ed., *Structuralism: A Reader*(London, 1970), pp. 145-55.

1. Translator's note: Barthes makes frequent use in this essay of the linguistic terms: *enonciation/enonce*. While the latter denotes a statement or proposition, the former is used to designate the act of making the statement or proposition, in speech or writing. Since this distinction is central to Barthes' purpose, and cannot easily be conveyed in any other way, I have used the two terms: act of uttering/utterance.

2. R. Jakobson, *Essais de linguistique generale* (Paris, 1963), Ch. 9.

3. Following Julia Kristeva, we designate by the term 'paragrammatism' (which is derived from the anagrams of Saussure) forms of double writing, which involve a dialogue of the text with other texts, and call for a new logic (Julia Kristeva 'Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman', *Critique*, 239 (April 1967), 438-65).

4. The exordium (in any form of discourse) poses one of the most interesting problem in rhetoric, to the extent that it is a codification of ways of breaking silence and combats aphasia.

5. 'Avant de prendre la plume, je me suis interroge severement, et comme je ne trouvais en moi ni affections interessees, ni haines implacables, j'ai pense que je pourrais juger les hommes et les choses sans manquer a la justice et sans trahir la verite' (L. Blanc, *Histoire de dix ans* (Paris, 1842)).

6 Translator's note: Barthes uses the term *contenance*, which combines the two sees' of 'content' and 'countenance'.

7 Cf. E. Raimondi, *Opere di Niccolo Macchiavelli* (Milan, 1966).

8 An example: 'On y voit avant toutes choses l'innocence et la sagesse du jeune Joseph; ses songes mysterieux; ses freres jaloux; la vente de ce grand homme; la fidelite qu garde a son maitre; sa chastete admirable; les persecutions qu'elle lui attire; sa prison et sa constance' (Bossuet, *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, in *Oeuvres* (Bibliotheque de la Pleiade) (Paris, 1961), p. 674).

9 L. Irigaray, 'Negation et transformation negative dans le langage des schizophrene', *Langages*, 5 (March 1967), 84-98.

10 Cf. 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (London, 1977), pp. 79-124.

11 Here is the syllogistic schema in a particular passage of Michelet (*Histoire du moyen age*, vol. iii, book vi, chapter I): (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) the princes chose old Aubriot, etc. (Translator's note: the term 'enthymema' 'enthymeme' has been used, from Aristotle onwards, to denote an argument based on merely probable grounds: i.e. a rhetorical as opposed to a demonstrative argument.)

12 Thiers expressed with great purity and naivety this referential illusion, or this confusion of referent and signified, thus fixing the ideal of the historian: 'Etre simplement vrai, etre ce que sont les choses elles-memes, n'etre rien de plus qu'elles, n'etre rien que par elles, comme elles, autant qu'elles' (quoted by C. Julian, *Historiens francais du XIX siecle* (Paris, n.d.), p. lxiii).

Chapter I, Historical Understanding, by Louis O. Mink, ed. Brian Fay, Eugene O. Golob, and Richard T. Vann. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987, pp. 35-41. From *Proceedings of the XIIIth International Congress of Philosophy* (Firenze: Sansoni Editore, 1960) V, 41 1-17 .

Modes of Comprehension and the Unity of Knowledge

Attempts to construct a general theory of knowledge--in fact, every attempt at a philosophical synthesis since Democritus--have taken as a model of knowledge some area of positive science and extended its procedures, presuppositions, and purposes to a definition of knowledge as such. For philosophical rationalism before the nineteenth century, the model was always mathematics. For Hegel and for Croce, the model was historical knowledge. Modern empiricism has tended to take theoretical physics as its model, and most recently some English-speaking philosophers have been moving in the direction of regarding legal argument as exemplifying the normal type of thinking. There have of course also been irenic attempts to settle the strife of models by distributing the field of knowledge among several sovereign sciences, for example by distinguishing between the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften* or by Windelband's distinction between "idiographic" (i.e., particularizing) and "nomothetic" (i.e., theoretical) sciences. Such distinctions in effect abandon the great historic ideal of the unity of knowledge either by recognizing an irreconcilable plurality of methods or by a division of the world into independent subject matters. But it could not be said that any such proposal has been enduringly successful, or could be. The irresistible tendency of any general method is imperialistic; it inescapably prescribes its own subject matter and rejects as irrelevant and unreal whatever cannot be brought under its hegemony.[35]

But the great debate between proposals of method turns on differences of analysis of the sufficient conditions of knowledge, and in the radical disagreements about *sufficient* conditions it has been easy to overlook the remarkable consensus which exists about some of the *necessary* conditions of knowledge. It is the purpose of this essay to call attention to one such neglected condition and to show that a consideration of it suggests a new question about the unity of knowledge. It appears that the separate sovereignties on the map of knowledge must be distinguished not by methods nor by subject matters but by unique and irreducible modes of comprehending the world as a totality.

The fact to which any theory of knowledge must return is the simple fact that experiences come to us seriatim in time and yet must be capable of being held

together in an image of the manifold of events. The steps of a proof, the actions of a narrative, the notes of a melody, and even the words of a sentence are experienced one after the other, but must be considered in a single mental act before they even constitute data for significant discourse. Such an act, which may be called "comprehension," differs from both judgment and inference and is in fact presupposed by both. The assertion or denial of a relation between concepts, which is the characteristic of judgment, presupposes the act of considering the concepts together; and the scope of comprehension is wider in any case than the domain of concepts. It is represented in the act by which one thinks of a sonnet as a whole, distinguished from the line-by-line reading of a sonnet for the first time, or in the act by which one thinks of a historical event in a context of other events. Moreover, where inference refers to the drawing of a conclusion from premises, comprehension refers to the capacity to think of the conclusion together with the premises, as in mathematical demonstrations it is not uncommon to grasp a proof as a whole rather than as a series of manipulations according to rule.

As a phenomenon, comprehension is indeed so ubiquitous that, like other constant features of experience, it has been overlooked in favor of more variable and vivid data. But it has also been frequently recognized even when not named and described. Descartes seems to have had it in mind in stating his fourth rule of method in the Discourse: "to make enumerations so complete and reviews so general that I should be certain of having omitted nothing." If this rule is merely a reminder to check one's work as one would proofread a manuscript or check the addition of a column of figures, it is no doubt [36] salutary advice but unworthy of inclusion in the four rules which Descartes proposed to substitute for the "great number of precepts of which Logic is composed." But the rule deserves its place if it is interpreted as indicating the synthesis toward which analysis is directed, that is, as a practical precept for arriving at that state of comprehension in which the great number of elements into which Cartesian analysis has divided a problem are grasped together in a single mental act. Descartes says as much when he explains the process by which he discovered analytic geometry (Discourse, Part II): "In order to keep them [geometrical relationships and proportions] in my memory or to embrace several at once, it would be essential that I should explain them by means of certain formulae, the shorter the better."

Plato himself regarded comprehension as characterizing the final wisdom resulting from inquiry; it is the point in the education of the Guardians in the *Republic* at which, following their mastery of the individual mathematical sciences, "reflection can take a comprehensive view of the mutual relations and affinities which bind all these sciences together" (531 D). Now of course the method by which Plato proposed to attain a "comprehensive view" differs from Descartes's method, and the elements and relations comprised by comprehension differ as well in the two cases, but it is at least

notable that they agree in regarding comprehension as a kind of *totum simul*, the grasping in a single act as a totality of what the discursive intellect otherwise can review only *seriatim*. Nor have rationalists alone implicitly or explicitly recognized comprehension. Empiricists, in their emphasis on inductions from particular cases, require it too as the condition of considering together the multiple cases on which any particular induction rests. Bergson, almost alone in recent philosophy, has made comprehension the cardinal principle of a philosophical theory, rather than its presupposition and ideal aim, but his error lay just in this, that he regarded as a unique method--which he called "intuition"—what is in fact the aim of *every* method. Hence he regarded intuition and analysis as opposed and incompatible methods, whereas comprehension, which phenomenologically *seems* like intuition, is not a method but the grasp of totality without which any method would disappear into the stream of unreflective consciousness.

Independent as such of particular method, comprehension operates at all levels of reflection and inquiry. At the lowest level, it is a [37] grasping of the data of experience and issues in the perception and recognition of objects. At an intermediate level, it is the classification together of a set of objects and issues in the formation of concepts. At the highest level, it is the attempt to order our knowledge of the world into a single object of understanding. Of course this is an unattainable goal, but significant nonetheless as delineating the teal by which partial comprehension is measured. Naturally enough, one finds the goal described in theological or quasi-theological terms. Laplace's omniscient scientist, for example, knowing the laws of nature and the position and velocity of every particle in the universe at an instant, could predict and retrodict the detailed character of the world at any moment of time. Boethius, in a different image of totality, described God's knowledge as a *totum simul* in which all moments of time would be seen as simultaneously present in a single divine perception--history spread out in a single panorama as a landscape is for us. And Plato called divine the knowledge which would consist in the contemplative vision of a set of essences apprehended as a single intelligible system. As much as these three may differ as theories of knowledge, they agree in characterizing the *state* of knowledge as a complex but unitary act of mind.

Yet at the same time these three instances suggest that there are fundamentally different modes of comprehension. A number of objects may be comprehended, as for Laplace and for Descartes, as instances of the same generalization or formula or law. This is a very powerful but very thin sort of comprehension: it is powerful because the generalization refers to its objects as members of a class and is a way of comprising them all, experienced and unexperienced, actual and possible. But it is thin because it refers to these objects only in virtue of their possession of certain common characteristics and omits everything else in the individuality of each. In general, one

may, through such hypothetico-deductive or *theoretical* comprehension, understand all the instances which are consequences of a hypothesis. A physical Law orders all the phenomena which exemplify it, as Boyle's law explains both volcanoes and steam engines; similarly, a formal logical or mathematical system is entirely understood when the postulate set, the definitions, and the rules of inference are known. No doubt the requirement of economy, which is Occam's razor applied to formal systems, reflects the fact that a simpler postulate set is easier to *comprehend* as a whole than a more cumbersome one which might be equally useful from the standpoint of technical application. [38]

But there is another way in which a number of things may be comprehended, as elements in a single complex of concrete relationships. It is in this way that we see together the multiple images and allusions of a poem, or the combination of influences, motives, beliefs, and purposes which explain a concrete historical action. It is not as instances of a theory but as centers of concrete relationships that we understand ourselves and others, and one may say that there is also a kind of *configurational* comprehension. As the theoretical mode of comprehension corresponds to what Pascal called *l'esprit de geometrie*, so the configurational mode corresponds to what he called *l'esprit de finesse*, the ability to hold together a number of elements in nice balance.

This is the mode of comprehension adumbrated by Boethius. Yet there is a third way, envisioned by Plato: to hold together a number of things as examples of the same category, and in fact of a system of categories incapable of abstraction from each other. If this were identical with theoretical comprehension, philosophy would indeed be a rigorous science, but indeed only one among many. But there are many reasons why subsumption under categories is not identical with deduction from hypotheses. One difference is that hypotheses can be given meaning independently of each other (even though the truth of a hypothesis may be logically connected with the truth of other hypotheses), whereas the meaning of categories is essentially dependent on their systematic interconnection. Thus *categorical* comprehension is neither so powerful nor so thin as theoretical comprehension. Moreover, categorical connections, unlike theoretical hypotheses, are not falsifiable by particular experiences, because they give form to experience itself (in this Kant was clearly right). Speaking roughly, one might say that theoretical comprehension emphasizes the relations that may hold between universals and particulars, configurational comprehension the relations that may hold between particulars and particulars, and categorical comprehension the relations that may hold between universals and universals. Subject as this formulation is to correction and expansion, it serves to indicate that these three modes exhaust the possibilities.

It should by now be apparent that theoretical, configurational, and categoreal comprehension are respectively appropriate to the natural sciences, to history, and to philosophy. But not entirely. Despite loose affinities, it would be vain to argue that these modes are coextensive with disciplines whose limits have been set by accidents of [39] history. Moreover, there have been and will no doubt continue to be attempts and proposals to reorganize, for example, historical inquiry with theoretical comprehension as its aim, or philosophy with configurational comprehension as its aim. But one cannot argue for the primacy of any of the modes except by reference to criteria which themselves are derivative from that mode's aim of comprehension. Hence each mode is self-justifying; critical analysis and intellectual advance are possible within but only within each mode. In each case the aim of ultimate comprehension leaves open the question of which theories, configurations, or category-systems will prove satisfactory by the standards relevant to the aim. Thus while each from its own standpoint envisions a unity of knowledge, and regards the others as errors or as subordinate stages in its own development, one must conclude that they constitute irreducible perspectives.

Each mode, in fact, has the totality of human experience as its subject matter. A mountain range is one sort of fact for the geologist, another for the historian, and yet another for the aesthician, although this difference to their cognitive aims may be obscured because the mountain range has the same relation to their practical interest as, for example, travelers. It would, of course, be a mistake to try to understand subatomic particles in any mode other than the theoretical; but this is because such particles are not data of experience and very possibly not facts of the world, but hypothetical constructs whose very meaning is given within the mode of theoretical comprehension. For similar reasons, one should not expect a configurational understanding of the relation of substance and quality, since these are categories which may or may not (depending on the categoreal scheme adopted) inform the experience of concrete particulars but are not themselves objects of experience.

Each mode of comprehension tends to generate its own form of discourse, including concepts which take their proper meaning from the way in which they function within the mode. And since these concepts often have the same name as concepts peculiar to a different mode, there occurs a transformation of meaning from mode to mode and hence a systematic ambiguity of these concepts which makes misunderstanding inevitable at the same time that it conceals its existence and reason. This occurs both in the case of first-order concepts, such as "man" or "force," and of second-order concepts, such as "fact" or "theory." It is with respect to the latter that the most serious misunderstandings occur, with natural scientists regarding the "theories"[40] of historians as unscientific, or philosophers regarding the "theories" of science as incomplete. By recognizing fundamental and irreducible modes of comprehension, it

is possible to explain why such misunderstandings occur but not to eliminate the cause.

Is unity of science possible? No, because the several modes of comprehension generate and justify several methods. Is unity of knowledge possible? Yes, as knowledge of a world for a mind whose mode of comprehension gives structure to that world. The limits of the world are the limits of the discipline we adopt to inquire into it. The disciplines of inquiry are distinguished by the modes of comprehension at which they aim.[41]