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Historians approach the study of history from many different perspectives. Narrative historians and structural historians have opposing views of the treatment of history. This essay focusses on the debate between the two and discusses the revival of the narrative version of history, that is, the telling of events. The opposing view believes that history should focus on structures, and that the analysis of events is more important than just describing what occurred. The author proposes that a middle ground that includes both an analysis of structure as well as a description of events should be possible.

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History of Events and the Revival of Narrative

Peter Burke

Narrative versus Structure

Like history, historiography seems to repeat itself – with variations.¹ Long before our own time, in the age of the Enlightenment, the assumption that written history should be a narrative of events was under already attack. The attackers included Voltaire and the Scottish social theorist John Millar, who wrote of the ‘surface of events which engages the attention of the vulgar historian’. From this point of view, the so-called ‘Copernican Revolution’ in historiography led by Leopold von Ranke in the early nineteenth century looks rather more like a counter-revolution, in the sense that it brought events back to the centre of the stage.²

A second attack on the history of events was launched in the early twentieth century. In Britain, Lewis Namier and R. H. Tawney, who agreed on little else, suggested at much the same time that the historian should analyse structures rather than narrate events. In France, the rejection of what was pejoratively called ‘event history’ (*histoire événementielle*) in favour of the history of structures was a major plank in the platform of the so-called ‘*Annales* school’, from Lucien Febvre to Fernand Braudel, who regarded events, like Millar, as the surface of the ocean of history, significant only for what they might reveal of the deeper currents.³ If popular history remained faithful to the narrative tradition, academic history became increasingly concerned with problems and with structures. The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur is surely right to speak of the ‘eclipse’ of historical narrative in our time.⁴

Ricoeur goes on to argue that all written history, including the so-called ‘structural’ history associated with Braudel, necessarily takes some kind of narrative form. In a similar way, Jean-François Lyotard

has described certain interpretations of history, notably that of the Marxists, as 'grand narratives'.⁵ The problem with such characterizations, to my mind at least, is that they dilute the concept of narrative until it is in danger of becoming indistinguishable from description and analysis.

I shall not pursue this argument here, however, preferring to concentrate on the more concrete question of the differences in what one might call the degree of narrativity between some contemporary works of history and others. For some years now there have been signs that historical narrative in a fairly strict sense is making another comeback. Even some of the historians associated with *Annales* have been moving in this direction – Georges Duby, for example, who has published a study of the battle of Bouvines, and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, whose *Carnival* deals with the events which took place in the small town of Romans during 1579 and 1580.⁶ The explicit attitude of these two historians is not very far from Braudel's. Duby and Le Roy Ladurie focus on particular events not for their own sake but for what they reveal about the culture in which they took place. All the same, the fact that they devote whole books to particular events suggests a certain distance from Braudel's position, and in any case Le Roy Ladurie has discussed elsewhere the importance of what he calls the 'creative event' (*événement matrice*) which destroys traditional structures and replaces them with new ones.⁷

The new trend, which has begun to affect other disciplines, notably social anthropology, was discussed by the British historian Lawrence Stone in an article on 'The Revival of Narrative' which has attracted much attention.⁸ Stone claimed to be doing no more than 'trying to chart observed changes in historical fashion' rather than making value judgements. In this respect, some of the best-known historical works which appeared in the 1980s confirmed his observations. Simon Schama's *Citizens*, for example, a study of the French Revolution published in 1989 and describing itself as a return 'to the form of the nineteenth-century chronicles'.⁹

All the same it is difficult not to sense Stone's regret at what he calls 'the shift . . . from the analytical to the descriptive mode' of historical writing. The title of his article as well as its arguments has been influential. It has contributed to making historical narrative a matter for debate.¹⁰

More exactly, historical narrative has become a matter for at least two debates, which have been taking place independently, despite the relevance of each to the other. To link the two is a major aim of this chapter.¹¹ In the first place, there is the well-known and long-standing campaign opposing those who assert, like Braudel, that historians

should take structures more seriously than events, and those who continue to believe that the historian's job is to tell a story. In this campaign, both sides are now entrenched in their positions, but each has made some important points at the expense of the other.¹²

On one side, the structural historians have shown that traditional narrative passes over important aspects of the past which it is simply unable to accommodate, from the economic and social framework to the experience and modes of thought of ordinary people.¹³ In other words, narrative is no more innocent in historiography than it is in fiction. In the case of a narrative of political events, it is difficult to avoid emphasizing the deeds and decisions of the leaders, which furnish a clear story line, at the expense of the factors which escaped their control. As for collective entities – Germany, the Church, the Conservative Party, the People, and so on – the narrative historian is forced to choose between omitting them altogether or personifying them, and I would agree with Huizinga that personification is a figure of speech which historians should try to avoid.¹⁴ It blurs distinctions between leaders and followers, and encourages literal-minded readers to assume the consensus of groups who were often in conflict.

In the case of military history in particular, John Keegan has pointed out that the traditional battle narrative is misleading in its 'high focus on leadership' and its 'reduction of soldiers to pawns', and needs to be abandoned.¹⁵ The difficulty of doing so may be illustrated by the case of Cornelius Ryan's well-known study of D-Day.¹⁶ Ryan set out to write about the soldier's war rather than that of the general's. His history is an extension of his work as a war correspondent: its sources are mainly oral. His book conveys very well the 'feel' of battle on both sides. It is vivid and dramatic – indeed, like a classical drama, it is organized around the three 'unities' of place (Normandy), time (6 June 1944) and action. On the other hand, the book is fragmented into discrete episodes. The experiences of the different participants do not cohere. The only way to make them cohere seems to be to impose a schema derived from 'above' and thus to return to the war of the generals from which the author was trying to escape. Ryan's book illustrates the problem more clearly than most, but the problem is not his alone. This kind of bias may be inherent in narrative organization.

The supporters of narrative, on the other hand, have pointed out that the analysis of structures is static and so in a sense unhistorical. To take the most famous example of structural history in our time, although Braudel's *Mediterranean* (1949) finds room for events as well as structures, it has often been noted that the author does little to suggest what links there might be between the three time-scales with which he is

concerned; the long, the medium and the short term. In any case, Braudel's *Mediterranean* is not an extreme example of structural history.¹⁷ Despite his remarks in the preface about the superficiality of events, he went on to devote several hundred pages to them in the third part of his study. Braudel's followers, however, have tended to shrink his project (and not only in the geographical sense) in the course of imitating it. The now classic format of a regional study in the *Annales* manner includes a division into two parts, *structure* and *conjoncture* (in other words, general trends), with little space for events in the strict sense.

Historians in these two camps, structural and narrative, differ not only in the choice of what they consider significant in the past, but also in their preferred modes of historical explanation. Traditional narrative historians tend – and this is not exactly contingent – to couch their explanations in terms of individual character and intention; explanations of the type 'orders arrived late from Madrid because Philip II could not make up his mind what to do,' in other words, as philosophers would say, 'the window broke because Brown threw a stone at it.' Structural historians, on the other hand, prefer explanations which take the form 'the window broke because the glass was brittle,' or (to quote Braudel's famous example) 'orders arrived late from Madrid because sixteenth-century ships took several weeks to cross the Mediterranean.' As Stone points out, the so-called revival of narrative has a great deal to do with an increasing distrust of the second mode of historical explanation, often criticised as reductionist and determinist. Once again, Schama's recent book makes a good example of the trend. The author explains that he has 'chosen to present these arguments in the form of a narrative' on the grounds that the French Revolution was 'much more the product of human agency than structural conditioning'.¹⁸

This protracted trench warfare between narrative and structural historians has gone on far too long. Some sense of the price of the conflict, the loss of potential historical understanding which it involves, may be felt by comparing two studies of nineteenth-century India which appeared in 1978 and focus on what used to be called the 'Indian Mutiny' of 1857, and is now known as the 'Great Rebellion'.¹⁹ Christopher Hibbert produced a traditional narrative, set-piece history in the grand manner, with chapters entitled 'Mutiny at Meerut', 'The Mutiny Spreads', 'The Siege of Lucknow', 'The Assault', and so on. His book is colourful, indeed gripping, but it is also superficial in the sense of failing to give the reader much idea of why the events took place (perhaps because it is written from the point of view of the British, who were themselves taken by surprise). On the other hand, Eric Stokes

offers a careful analysis of the geography and sociology of the revolt, its regional variations and its local contexts, but draws back from a final synthesis. If one reads the two books one immediately after each other, one may be haunted, as I was, by the ghost of a potential third book, which might integrate narrative and analysis and relate local events more closely to structural changes in society.

It is time to investigate the possibility of a way of escaping this confrontation between narrators and analysts. One might begin by criticizing both sides for a false assumption which they have in common, the assumption that distinguishing events from structures is a simple matter. We tend to use the term 'event' rather loosely to refer not only to happenings which take a few hours, like the battle of Waterloo, but also to occurrences like the French Revolution, a process spread over a number of years. It may be useful to employ the terms 'event' and 'structure' to refer to the two extremes of a whole spectrum of possibilities, but we should not forget the existence of the middle of the spectrum. The reasons for the late arrival of orders from Madrid need not be limited to the structure of communications in the Mediterranean or Philip II's failure to make up his mind on a particular occasion. The king may have been chronically indecisive, and the structure of government by council may have slowed down the decision-making process still further.

It follows from this vagueness of definition that we should do as Mark Phillips has suggested and 'think of the varieties of narrative and non-narrative modes as existing along a continuum'.²⁰ Nor should we forget to ask about the relation between events and structures. Working in this central area, it may be possible to go beyond the two opposing positions, to reach a synthesis.

Traditional Narrative versus Modern Narrative

To this synthesis, the opinions expressed in the second debate may well have a useful contribution to make. This second debate began in the United States in the 1960s, and it has not yet been taken as seriously as it deserves by historians in other parts of the world, perhaps because it seems 'merely' literary. It is not concerned with the question, whether or not to write narrative, but with the problem of what kind of narrative to write. The film historian Siegfried Kracauer seems to have been the first to suggest that modern fiction, more especially the 'decomposition of temporal continuity' in Joyce, Proust and Virginia Woolf, offers a challenge and an opportunity to historical narrators.²¹ A still more

clear-cut example of this decomposition, incidentally, is Aldous Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), a novel composed of short dated entries over the period 1902–34 in an order which, whatever its logic, is determinedly non-chronological.

Hayden White attracted more attention than Kracauer did when he accused the historical profession of neglecting the literary insights of its own age (including a sense of discontinuity between events in the outside world and their representation in narrative form) and of continuing to live in the nineteenth century, the great age of literary 'realism'.²² In similar vein, Lionel Gossman has complained that 'it is not easy for us today to see who is, as a writer, the Joyce or the Kafka of modern historiography.'²³ Perhaps. All the same, the historian Golo Mann seems to have learned something from the narrative practice of his novelist father. It is not entirely fanciful to compare Golo Mann's account of the thoughts of the ageing Wallenstein with the celebrated chapter in *Lotte in Weimar* evoking Goethe's stream of consciousness, apparently an attempt to go one better than Joyce. In his study, which he calls 'an all too true novel', Golo Mann follows the rules of historical evidence and makes it clear that he is presenting a hypothetical reconstruction. Unlike most novelists, he does not claim to read his hero's mind, only his letters.²⁴

In contrast to White and Gossman, I am not arguing that historians are obliged to engage in literary experiments simply because they live in the twentieth century, or to imitate particular writers because their techniques are revolutionary. The point of looking for new literary forms is surely the awareness that the old forms are inadequate for one's purposes.

Some innovations are probably best avoided by historians. In this group I would include the invention of someone's stream of consciousness, useful as it might be, for the same reasons that have led historians to reject the famous classical device of the invented speech. Other experiments, however, inspired by a wider range of modern writers than have yet been mentioned, may offer solutions to problems with which historians has long been wrestling, three problems in particular.

In the first place, it might be possible to make civil wars and other conflicts more intelligible by following the model of the novelists who tell their stories from more than one viewpoint. It is odd that this device, so effective in the hands of Huxley, William Faulkner, in *The Sound and the Fury* (1931), and Lawrence Durrell, in *The Alexandria Quartet* (1957–60) – not to mention the epistolary novels of the eighteenth century – has not been taken more seriously by historians, though it might be useful to modify it to deal with collective viewpoints as well as

individual ones. Such a device would allow an interpretation of conflict in terms of a conflict of interpretations. To allow the 'varied and opposing voices' of the dead to be heard again, the historian needs, like the novelist, to practice heteroglossia (see above, p. 6).²⁵

Curiously enough, just as this essay was going to press, a historical work of this kind made its appearance. Richard Price presents his study of eighteenth-century Surinam in the form of a narrative with four 'voices' (symbolized by four typefaces); that of the black slaves (as transmitted by their descendants, the Saramaka); that of the Dutch administrators; that of the Moravian missionaries; and finally that of the historian himself.²⁶ The object of the exercise is precisely to show as well as to state the differences in viewpoint between past and present, church and state, black and white, the misunderstandings and the struggle to impose particular definitions of the situation. It will be hard to imitate this *tour de force* of historical reconstruction, but Price deserves to inspire a whole shelf of studies.

In the second place, more and more historians are coming to realize that their work does not reproduce 'what actually happened' so much as represent it from a particular point of view. To communicate this awareness to readers of history, traditional forms of narrative are inadequate. Historical narrators need to find a way of making themselves visible in their narrative, not out of self-indulgence but as a warning to the reader that they are not omniscient or impartial and that other interpretations besides theirs are possible.²⁷ In a remarkable piece of self-criticism, Golo Mann has argued that a historian needs 'to try to do two different things simultaneously', to 'swim with the stream of events' and to 'analyse these events from the position of a later, better-informed observer', combining the two methods 'so as to yield a semblance of homogeneity without the narrative falling apart'.²⁸

Here again Price's new book offers a possible solution to the problem by labelling his own contribution that of one 'voice' among others. Alternative solutions are also worth considering. Literary theorists have lately been discussing the fictional device of 'the unreliable first-person narrator'.²⁹ Such a device may be of some use to historians too, provided that the unreliability is made manifest. Again, Hayden White has suggested that historical narratives follow four basic plots: comedy, tragedy, satire and romance. Ranke, for example, chose (consciously or unconsciously) to write history 'emplotted as comedy', in other words, following a 'ternary movement . . . from a condition of apparent peace, through the revelation of conflict, to the resolution of the conflict in the establishment of a genuinely peaceful social order'.³⁰ If the way in which a narrative ends helps determine the reader's interpretation, then it

might be worth following the example of certain novelists, such as John Fowles, and providing alternative endings. A narrative history of the First World War, for example, will give one impression if the story ends at Versailles in 1919, another if the narrative is extended to 1933 or 1939. Alternative closures thus make the work more 'open', in the sense of encouraging readers to reach their own conclusions.³¹

In the third place – and this is the main theme of this chapter – a new kind of narrative might cope better than the old with the demands of the structural historians, while giving a better sense of the flow of time than their analyses generally do.

Thickening Narratives

A few years ago, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz coined the term 'thick description' for a technique which interprets an alien culture through the precise and concrete description of particular practices or events, in his case, the description of cock-fights in Bali (cf. chapter 5).³² Like description, narrative might be characterized as more or less 'thin' or 'thick'. At the thin end of the spectrum we have the bare remark in a volume of annals like the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that 'In this year Ceolwulf was deprived of his kingdom.' At the other end we find stories (all too rare so far), which have been deliberately constructed to bear a heavy weight of interpretation.

The problem I should like to discuss here is that of making a narrative thick enough to deal not only with the sequence of events and the conscious intentions of the actors in these events, but also with structures – institutions, modes of thought, and so on – whether these structures act as a brake on events or as an accelerator. What would such a narrative be like?

These questions, though concerned with rhetoric, are not themselves rhetorical. It is possible to discuss them on the basis of texts, narratives produced either by novelists or by historians. It is not difficult to find historical novels which grapple with these problems. One might start with *War and Peace*, since Tolstoy may be said to have shared Braudel's view of the futility of events, but in fact many famous novels are concerned with major structural changes in a particular society, viewing them in terms of their impact on the lives of a few individuals. A distinguished example from outside western culture is Shimazaki Toson's *Before the Dawn* (1932–6).³³ The 'dawn' of the title is the modernization (industrialization, westernization) of Japan, and the book deals with the years immediately before and after the imperial

restoration of 1868, when it was far from clear which path the country was going to follow. The novel shows in vivid detail how 'The effects of the opening of Japan to the world were making themselves felt in the lives of each individual'.³⁴ To do this the author chooses an individual, Aoyama Hanzo, who is the keeper of a post-house in a village on the main road between Kyoto and Tokyo. His job keeps Hanzo in touch with events, but he does not merely observe them. He is a member of the National Learning movement, committed to an authentically Japanese solution to Japan's problems. The plot of the novel is to a large extent the story of the impact of social change on an individual and his family, a point emphasized by Toson's interruption of his story from time to time to narrate the main events in Japanese history from 1853 to 1886.

It is likely that historians can learn something from the narrative techniques of such novelists as Tolstoy or Shimazaki Toson, but not enough to solve all their literary problems. Since historians are not free to invent their characters or even the words and thoughts of their characters, they are unlikely to be able to condense the problems of an epoch into a story about a family, as novelists have often done. One might have hoped that the so-called 'non-fiction novel', might have had something to offer historians, from Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965) to Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* (1982), which claims 'to use the texture and devices of a novel to tell a true story'. However, these authors do not grapple with the problem of structures. It looks as if historians have to develop their own 'fictional techniques' for their 'factual works'.³⁵

Fortunately, the authors of a few recent works of history have also reflected on problems like these and their studies sketch an answer, or more exactly several answers, of which it may be useful to distinguish four. One model is well on the way to becoming fashionable, while the other three are represented by little more than one book each.

The first answer might be described as 'micronarrative' (along the lines of the new term 'microhistory'). It is the telling of a story about ordinary people in their local setting. There is a sense in which this technique is commonplace among historical novelists, and has been since the age of Scott and Manzoni, whose *Betrothed* (1827) was attacked at the time (in the way that history from below and microhistory have been attacked more recently), for choosing as his subject 'the miserable chronicle of an obscure village'.³⁶

It was only quite recently, however, that historians adopted the micronarrative. Well-known recent examples include Carlo Cipolla's story of the impact of the plague of 1630 on the city of Prato in Tuscany,

and Natalie Davis's tale of Martin Guerre, a sixteenth-century prodigal son who returned to his home in the south of France to find that his place at the farm – and in his wife's bed as well – had been taken by an intruder claiming to be Martin himself.³⁷

The reduction in scale does not thicken a narrative by itself. The point is that social historians have turned to narrative as a means of illuminating structures – attitudes to the plague and institutions for fighting it in the case of Carlo Cipolla, the structure of the southern French peasant family in the case of Natalie Davis, and so on. More exactly, what Natalie Davis wanted to do was to describe not so much the structures themselves as 'the peasants' hopes and feelings; the ways in which they experienced the relation between husband and wife, parent and child; the ways in which they experienced the constraints and possibilities in their lives'.³⁸ The book can be read simply as a good story, and a vivid evocation of a few individuals from the past, but the author does make deliberate and repeated references to the values of the society. Discussing, for example, why Martin's wife Bertrande recognized the intruder as her husband, Davis comments on the status of women in French rural society and on their sense of honour, reconstructing the constraints within which they manoeuvred.

On the other hand, the comments are deliberately unobtrusive. As the author explains, 'I . . . chose to advance my arguments . . . as much by the ordering of narrative, choice of detail, literary voice and metaphor as by topical analysis.' The goal was that of 'embedding this story in the values and habits of sixteenth-century French village life and law, to use them to help understand central elements in the story and to use the story to comment back on them'.³⁹ The story of Martin may be regarded as a 'social drama' in the sense in which anthropologists use the term; an event which reveals latent conflicts and thus illuminates social structures.⁴⁰

Micronarrative seems to be here to stay; more and more historians are turning to this form. All the same, it would be a mistake to regard it as a panacea. It does not provide a solution to all the problems outlined earlier, and it generates problems of its own, notably that of linking microhistory to macrohistory, local details to general trends. It is because it tackles this major problem directly that I regard Spence's *Gate of Heavenly Peace* as an exemplary book.

Jonathan Spence is a historian of China who has long been interested in experiments in literary form. One of his first books was a biography of the emperor K'ang-Hsi, or rather a portrait of the emperor – indeed, a kind of self-portrait, an attempt to explore K'ang-Hsi's mind by making a sort of mosaic or montage out of the personal remarks to be found

scattered among official documents, arranging them under headings such as 'sons', 'ruling', or 'growing old'. The effect is not unlike a Chinese *Memoirs of Hadrian*. It is difficult to think of a study which better deserves the description 'history from above' than the self-portrait of an emperor, but Spence followed it with a moving essay in history from below. *The Death of Woman Wang* is a piece of microhistory in the manner of Cipolla or Davis, with four stories told, or images depicted, to reveal conditions in Shantung province in the troubled years of the later seventeenth century. More recently, in *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, Spence organised his account of the famous Jesuit missionary to China around a number of visual images, at the expense of chronological sequence, producing an effect reminiscent of Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza*.

The Gate of Heavenly Peace, on the other hand, looks more like a piece of conventional history, an account of the origins and development of the Chinese Revolution from 1895 to 1980.⁴¹ Once more, however, the author's interest in biography and in historical snapshots asserts itself and his book is built round a small number of individuals, notably the scholar Kang Youwei, the soldier-academic Shen Congwen and the writers Lu Xun and Ding Ling. These individuals did not play a leading part in the events of the revolution. From this point of view they may be compared with what the Hungarian critic Georg Lukács has called the 'mediocre hero' in the novels of Sir Walter Scott; a hero whose ordinariness allows the reader to see the life and the social conflicts of the time more clearly.⁴² In Spence's case the protagonists were selected because, as the author suggests, they 'described their hopes and sorrows with particular sensitivity' and also because their personal experiences 'help to define the nature of the times through which they lived'. They are viewed as passive rather than active. Indeed, the author speaks of 'the intrusions of outside events' on his characters.⁴³ His concern with different individuals implies an interest in multiple viewpoints or multivocality, but – in contrast to Price's book, discussed above – this multivocality remains below the surface of the story.

Presenting the history of China in this way does raise problems. The cross-cutting from one individual to another risks confusing the reader, and so does the shift back and forth between what might be called 'public' time, the time of events like the Long March or the 1949 Revolution, and the 'private' time of the main characters. On the other hand, Spence does communicate in a vivid and moving way the experience of living (or indeed of failing to live) through these turbulent years. Among his most memorable passages are his account of a child's-eye view of the 1911 revolution, as remembered by Shen Congwen; Lu

Xun's reaction to the massacre of student demonstrators in Beijing in 1926; and the official attacks on Ding Ling in 1957, following the suppression of the 'Hundred Flowers' Movement.

There may be other ways of relating structure to events more closely than historians generally do. A possible method is to write history backwards, as B. H. Sumner did in his *Survey of Russian History* (organized by topics) or Norman Davies in his recent history of Poland, *Heart of Europe* (1984), a narrative which focuses on what the author calls 'the past in Poland's present'.⁴⁴ It begins with 'The Legacy of Humiliation: Poland since the Second World War' and moves back through 'The Legacy of Defeat', 'The Legacy of Disenchantment' (1914–39), 'The Legacy of Spiritual Mastery' (1795–1918), and so on. On each occasion the author implies that it is impossible to make sense of the events narrated in one chapter without knowing what preceded them.

This form of organization has its difficulties, most obviously the problem that even though the chapters are arranged in reverse order, each chapter has to be read forwards. The great advantage of the experiment, on the other hand, is to allow, or even force the reader to feel the pressure of the past on individuals and groups (the pressure of structures, or of events which have congealed, or as Ricoeur would say, 'sedimented' into structures). Davies does not exploit this advantage as much as he might. He does not make any serious effort to relate each chapter to the one which comes 'after' it. It is difficult to imagine his backward-walking approach becoming fashionable in the manner of microhistory. All the same, this is a form of narrative well worth taking seriously:

A fourth kind of analysis of the relation between structures and events can be found in the work of an American social anthropologist, yet it will complete the circle by bringing us back to *Annales*. The anthropologist is Marshall Sahlins, who works on Hawaii and Fiji, is extremely interested in modern French thought (from Saussure to Braudel, from Bourdieu to Lévi-Strauss), but takes the event more seriously than any of these thinkers do.⁴⁵ In his studies of encounters between cultures in the Pacific, Sahlins makes two different but complementary points.

In the first place, he suggests that events (notably Cook's arrival in Hawaii in 1778) 'bear distinctive cultural signatures', that they are 'ordered by culture', in the sense that the concepts and categories of a particular culture shape the ways in which its members perceive and interpret whatever happens in their time. The Hawaiians, for example, perceived Captain Cook as a manifestation of their god Lono because

he was obviously powerful and because he arrived at the time of year associated with appearances of the god. The event can therefore be studied (as Braudel suggested) as a kind of litmus paper which reveals the structures of the culture.

However, Sahlins also argues (contrary to Braudel) that there is a dialectical relationship between events and structures. Categories are put at risk every time they are used to interpret the changing world. In the process of incorporating events, 'the culture is reordered.' The end of the *tabu* system, for example, was one of the structural consequences of contact with the British. So was the rise of intercontinental trade. It is true in more than one sense that Cook did not leave Hawaii as he had found it. Sahlins has told a story with a moral, or perhaps with two morals. The moral for 'structuralists' is that they should recognize the power of events, their place in the process of 'structuration'. Supporters of narrative, on the other hand, are encouraged to examine the relation between events and the culture in which they occur. Sahlins has gone beyond Braudel's famous juxtaposition of events and structures. Indeed, he has virtually resolved, or dissolved, the binary opposition between these two categories.

To sum up. I have tried to argue that historians such as Tawney and Namier, Febvre and Braudel were justified in their rebellion against a traditional form of historical narrative which was ill-suited to the structural history which they considered important. Historical writing was enormously enriched by the expansion of its subject-matter, and by the ideal of 'total history'. However, many scholars now think that historical writing has also been impoverished by the abandonment of narrative, and a search is under way for new forms of narrative which will be appropriate to the new stories historians would like to tell. These new forms include micro-narrative, backward narrative, and stories which move back and forth between public and private worlds or present the same events from multiple points of view.

If they are looking for models of narratives which juxtapose the structures of ordinary life to extraordinary events, and the view from below to the view from above, historians might be well advised to turn to twentieth-century fiction, including the cinema (the films of Kurosawa, for example, or Pontecorvo, or Jancsó). It may be significant that one of the most interesting discussions of historical narrative is the work of a historian of the cinema (the piece by Kracauer, already cited). The device of multiple viewpoints is central to Kurosawa's *Rashomon*.⁴⁶ It is implicit in Jancsó's *The Red and the White*, a narrative of the Russian civil war in which the two sides take turns to capture the same village.

As for Pontecorvo, it might be said that he has made the historical process itself the subject of his films, rather than merely telling a story about individuals in historical costume.⁴⁷ It is interesting to see that Jonathan Spence uses the language of 'montage', and that *The Return of Martin Guerre* appeared more or less simultaneously as history and as film, after Natalie Davis and Daniel Vigne worked together on the subject.⁴⁸ Flashbacks, cross-cutting, and the alternation of scene and story; these are cinematic (or indeed literary) techniques which may be used in a superficial way, to dazzle rather than to illuminate, but they may also help historians in their difficult task of revealing the relationship between events and structures and presenting multiple viewpoints. Developments of this kind, if they continue, may have a claim to be regarded as no mere 'revival' of narrative, as Stone called it, but as a form of regeneration.

NOTES

- 1 This paper originated as a lecture and the present version owes a great deal to the comments of various listeners, from Cambridge to Campinas and from Tel Aviv to Tokyo. My particular thanks to Carlo Ginzburg, Michael Holly, Ian Kershaw, Dominick LaCapra and Mark Phillips.
- 2 I try to support this argument in 'Ranke the Reactionary', *Syracuse Scholar* 9 (1988), pp. 25-30.
- 3 F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 2nd ed. rev., tr. S. Reynolds (London, 1972-3), preface.
- 4 P. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, tr. K. McLaughlin and D. Dellauer (3 vols, Chicago, 1984-8) 1, pp. 138ff.
- 5 J.-F. Lyotard, *La condition post-moderne* (Paris, 1979); *The Post-Modern Condition*, tr. C. Bennington and B. Macrumi (Manchester, 1984).
- 6 G. Duby, *The Legend of Bouvines*, tr. C. Tihanyi (Cambridge, 1990); E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival*, tr. M. Fenney (London, 1980).
- 7 E. Le Roy Ladurie, 'Event and Long-Term in Social History' tr. B. and S. Reynolds in his *Territory of the Historian* (Hassocks, 1979), pp. 111-32.
- 8 L. Stone, 'The Revival of Narrative', *Past and Present* 85 (1979), pp. 3-24; cf. E. J. Hobsbawm, 'Some Comments', *Past and Present* 86 (1980), pp. 3-8. Cf. J. Boon, *The Anthropological Romance of Bali* (Cambridge, 1977) and E. M. Bruner, 'Ethnography as Narrative' in *The Anthropology of Experience*, ed. V. Turner and E. Bruner (Urbana and Chicago 1986), chapter 6.
- 9 S. Schama, *Citizens* (New York, 1989), p. xv.
- 10 Cf. B. Bailyn, 'The Challenge of Modern Historiography', *American Historical Review* 87 (1982), pp. 1-24.
- 11 Cf. Ricoeur; M. Phillips, 'On Historiography and Narrative', *University of*

- Toronto Quarterly* 53 (1983–4), pp. 149–65; and H. Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation* (Madison, 1989), esp. chapter 12.
- 12 For a discussion from different points of view see *Theorie und Erzählung in der Geschichte*, ed. J. Kocka and T. Nipperdey (Munich, 1979).
 - 13 The last point is well made in E. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, tr. W. R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), chapters 2 and 3 (discussing Tacitus and Ammianus Marcellinus).
 - 14 J. Huizinga, 'Two Wrestlers with the Angel' in his *Men and Ideas*, tr. J. S. Holmes and H. van Marle (London, 1960). Contrast the defence of personification in Kellner (esp. chapter 5 on Michelet).
 - 15 J. Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (1976: Harmondsworth, 1978 ed.) pp. 61ff.
 - 16 C. Ryan, *The Longest Day* (London, 1959).
 - 17 Ricoeur (1983) goes so far as to claim that it is a historical narrative with a 'quasi-plot' (pp. 298ff).
 - 18 Schama (1989), p. xv.
 - 19 C. Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny* (London, 1978); E. Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj* (Cambridge, 1978).
 - 20 Phillips, 'On Historiography' (1983–4), p. 157.
 - 21 S. Kracauer, *History: the Last Things before the Last* (New York, 1969), pp. 178ff.
 - 22 H. V. White, 'The Burden of History', *History and Theory* 5 (1966), reprinted in his *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore, 1983), pp. 27–50. For a philosophical defence of the continuity between narratives and the events they relate, see D. Carr, 'Narrative and the Real World: an Argument for Continuity' *History and Theory* 25 (1986), pp. 117–31.
 - 23 L. Gossman, 'History and Literature' in *The Writing of History*, ed. R. H. Canary and H. Kozicki (Madison, 1978), pp. 3–39.
 - 24 G. Mann, *Wallenstein* (Frankfurt, 1971), pp. 984ff.; 993ff.; T. Mann, *Lotte in Weimar* (1939), chapter 7. Cf. G. Mann, 'Plädoyer für die historische Erzählung' in Kocka and Nipperdey (1979), pp. 40–56, especially his claim that historical narrative does not exclude awareness of theory.
 - 25 Cf. G. Wilson, 'Plots and Motives in Japan's Meiji Restoration', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25 (1983), pp. 407–27 which makes use of the terminology of Hayden White but is essentially concerned with the multiplicity of actors' viewpoints. N. Hampson, *The Life and Opinions of Maximilian Robespierre* (London, 1976) offers a dialogue between diverse modern interpretations of the French Revolution.
 - 26 R. Price, *Alabi's World* (Baltimore, 1990).
 - 27 The problem was already discussed by Thierry and Michelet. See G. Pomata, 'Overt and Covert Narrators in Nineteenth-Century Historiography', *History Workshop* 27 (1989), pp. 1–17.
 - 28 Foreword to the English translation of his *Wallenstein* by C. Kessler (London, 1976). Mann confesses that 'the first approach preponderates' in his own book. Another good example of what Mann advocates can be found in T. H. Breen, *Imagining the Past: East Hampton Histories* (Reading, Mass., 1989).

- 29 W. Riggan, *Picaros, Madmen, Naifs and Clowns: the Unreliable First-Person Narrator* (Norman, 1981).
- 30 H. White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore, 1973), pp. 176ff.
- 31 Cf. M. Torgovnick, *Closure in the Novel* (Princeton, 1981), and U. Eco, 'The Poetics of the Open Work' in his *The Role of the Reader* (London, 1981), chapter 1. A move in the direction of a more open historical narrative is predicted by Phillips, 'On Historiography' (p. 153).
- 32 C. Geertz, 'Thick Description: Towards an Interpretative Theory of Culture', and 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight' in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).
- 33 Shimazaki Toson, *Before the Dawn* (Honolulu, 1987).
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 621.
- 35 W. R. Siebenschuh, *Fictional Techniques and Factional Works* (1983) discusses how this was done in the past, with special reference to Boswell's life of Johnson. Cf. R. W. Rader, 'Literary Form in Factual Narrative: the Example of Boswell's Johnson' in *Essays in Eighteenth-Century Biography*, ed. P. B. Daghlian (Bloomington, 1968), pp. 3-42.
- 36 Quoted in *Letteratura Italiana*, ed. A. Asor Rosa 5 (Turin, 1986); p. 224.
- 37 C. Cipolla, *Cristofano and the Plague* (London, 1973); N. Z. Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973).
- 38 Davis, *Martin Guerre* p. 1.
- 39 N. Z. Davis, 'On the Lame', *American Historical Review* 93 (1988), pp. 575, 573.
- 40 On this concept, V. Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (Ithaca, 1974), chapter 1.
- 41 J. Spence, *Emperor of China* (London, 1974); *The Death of Woman Wang* (London, 1978); *The Gate of Heavenly Peace* (London, 1982); *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (London, 1985).
- 42 G. Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, tr. H. and S. Mitchell (London, 1962), pp. 30ff.
- 43 Spence (1982), p. xiii.
- 44 N. Davies, *Heart of Europe: a Short History of Poland* (Oxford, 1984).
- 45 M. Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* (Ann Arbor, 1981) and *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985). Cf. P. Burke, 'Les îles anthropologiques et le territoire de l'historien', in *Philosophie et histoire*, ed. C. Descamps (Paris, 1987), pp. 49-66.
- 46 The original story, by Akutagawa, did not adopt this device.
- 47 G. Pontecorvo, *La battaglia di Algeri* (1966); *Queimada* (1969).
- 48 N. Z. Davis, J.-C. Carrière, D. Vigne, *Le retour de Martin Guerre* (Paris, 1982).

