METAHISTORY:

THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE

Hayden White

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY PRESS
Baltimore & London

1973

INTRODUCTION:
THE POETICS OF HISTORY

This book is a *history* of historical consciousness in nineteenth-century Europe, but it is also meant to contribute to the current discussion of the *problem of historical knowledge*. As such, it represents both an account of the development of historical thinking during a specific period of its evolution and a general theory of the structure of that mode of thought which is called "historical."

What does it mean to *think historically*, and what are the unique characteristics of a specifically *historical method* of inquiry? These questions were debated throughout the nineteenth century by historians, philosophers, and social theorists, but usually within the context of the assumption that unambiguous answers could be provided for them. "History" was considered to be a specific mode of existence, "historical consciousness" a distinctive mode of thought, and "historical knowledge" an autonomous domain in the spectrum of the human and physical sciences.

In the twentieth century, however, considerations of these questions have been undertaken in a somewhat less self-confident mood and in the face of an apprehension that definitive answers to them may not be possible. Continental European thinkers—from Valéry and Heidegger to Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, and Michel Foucault—have cast serious doubts on the value of a specifically "historical" consciousness, stressed the fictive character of historical reconstructions, and challenged history's claims to a place among the sciences.[1] At the same time, Anglo-American philosophers have produced a massive body of literature on the epistemological status and cultural function of historical thinking, a literature which, taken as a whole, justifies serious doubts about history's status as either a rigorous science or a genuine art.[2] The effect of these two lines of inquiry has been to create the impression that the historical consciousness on which Western man has prided himself since the beginning of the nineteenth century may be little more than a theoretical basis for the ideological position from which Western civilization views its relationship not only to cultures and civilizations preceding it but also to those contemporary with it in time and contiguous with it in space.[3] In short, it is possible to view historical consciousness as a specifically Western prejudice by which the presumed superiority of modern, industrial society can be retroactively substantiated.

My own analysis of the deep structure of the historical imagination of nineteenth-century Europe is intended to provide a new perspective on the current debate over the nature and function of historical knowledge. It proceeds on two levels of inquiry. It seeks to analyze, first, the works of the recognized masters of nineteenth-century European historiography and, second, the works of the foremost philosophers of history of that same period. A general purpose is to determine the family characteristics of the different conceptions of the historical process which actually appear in the works of the classic narrators. Another aim is to determine the different possible theories by which historical thinking was justified by the philosophers of history of that time. In order to realize these aims, I will consider the historical work as what it most manifestly is—that is to say, a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing* them.[4]

---

[1] See my "The Burden of History," *History and Theory*, 5, no. 2 (1966): 111–34, for a discussion of the grounds of this revolt against historical consciousness. For the more recent manifestations, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London, 1966), pp. 257–62; and *idem*, "Overture to le Cru et le cuit," in *Structuralism*, ed. Jacques Ehrmann (New York, 1966), pp. 47–48. Two works by Michel Foucault also may be consulted: *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, 1971), pp. 259ff.; and *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris, 1969), pp. 264ff.

[2] The substance of this debate has been ably summarized by Louis O. Mink, "Philosophical Analysis and Historical Understanding," *Review of Metaphysics*, 21, no. 4 (June, 1968): 667–98. Most of the positions taken by the main participants in the debate are represented in William H. Dray, ed., *Philosophical Analysis and History* (New York, 1966).

[3] See Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 367–73.

[4] Here, of course, I verge upon consideration of the most vexed problem in modern (Western) literary criticism, the problem of "realistic" literary representation. For a discussion of this problem, see René Wellek, *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven and London,

My method, in short, is formalist. I will not try to decide whether a given historian's work is a better, or more correct, account of a specific set of events or segment of the historical process than some other historian's

---

1963), pp. 221–55. In general, my own approach to the problem, as it appears within the context of historiography, follows the example of Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, 1968). The whole question of the "fictive" representation of "reality" has been handled profoundly, with special reference to the visual arts, in E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London and New York, 1960). Gombrich himself finds the origin of pictorial realism in Western art in the effort of Greek artists to translate into visual terms the narrative techniques of epic, tragic, and historical writers. Chapter 4 of *Art and Illusion*, on the differences between the conceptual overdetermination of mythically oriented Near Eastern art and the narrative, antimythical art of the Greeks, can be profitably compared with the famous opening chapter of Auerbach's *Mimesis*, which juxtaposes the styles of narrative to be found in the Pentateuch and Homer. Needless to say, the two analyses of the career of "realism" in Western art offered by Auerbach and Gombrich differ considerably. Auerbach's study is Hegelian throughout and Apocalyptic in tone, while Gombrich works within the Neo-Positivist (and anti-Hegelian) tradition represented most prominently by Karl Popper. But the two works address a common problem—that is, the nature of "realistic" representation, which is *the* problem for modern historiography. Neither, however, takes up analysis of the crucial concept of *historical* representation, even though both take what might be called "the historical sense" as a central aspect of "realism" in the arts. I have, in a sense, reversed their formulation. They ask: what are the "historical" components of a "realistic" art? I ask: what are the "artistic" elements of a "realistic" historiography? In seeking to answer the latter question, I have depended heavily on two literary theorists whose works represent virtual philosophical systems: Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, 1957); and Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969). I have also profited from a reading of the French Structuralist critics: Lucien Goldmann, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. I should like to stress, however, that I regard the latter as being, in general, captives of tropological strategies of interpretation in the same way that their nineteenth-century counterparts were. Foucault, for example, does not seem to be aware that the categories he uses for analyzing the history of the human sciences are little more than formalizations of the tropes. I have pointed this out in my essay, "Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground," *History and Theory*, 12 no. 1 (1973): 23–54.

In my view, the whole discussion of the nature of "realism" in literature flounders in the failure to assess critically what a genuinely "historical" conception of "reality" consists of. The usual tactic is to set the "historical" over against the "mythical," as if the former were genuinely *empirical* and the latter were nothing but *conceptual*, and then to locate the realm of the "fictive" between the two poles. Literature is then viewed as being more or less *realistic*, depending upon the ratio of empirical to conceptual elements contained within it. Such, for example, is the tactic of Frye, as well as of Auerbach and Gombrich, although it should be noted that Frye has at least conned the problem in a suggestive essay, "New Directions from Old," in *Fables of Identity* (New York, 1963), which deals with the relations among history, myth, and philosophy of history. Of the philosophers who have dealt with the "fictive" element in historical narrative, I have found the following most helpful: W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (New York, 1968); Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge, 1965); and Louis O. Mink, "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding," in *Philosophical Analysis and History*, ed. Dray, esp. pp. 179–86.

account of them; rather, I will seek to identify the structural components of those accounts.

In my view, this procedure justifies concentration on historians and philosophers of distinctively classic achievement, those who still serve as recognized models of possible ways of conceiving history: historians such as Michelet, Ranke, Tocqueville, and Burckhardt; and philosophers of history such as Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Croce. In the consideration of such thinkers, I will moot the issue of which represents the most correct approach to historical study. Their status as possible models of historical representation or conceptualization does not depend upon the nature of the "data" they used to support their generalizations or the theories they invoked to explain them; it depends rather upon the consistency, coherence, and illuminative power of their respective visions of the historical field. This is why they cannot be "refuted," or their generalizations "disconfirmed," either by appeal to new data that might be turned up in subsequent research or by the elaboration of a new theory for interpreting the sets of events that comprise their objects of representation and analysis. Their status as models of historical narration and conceptualization depends, ultimately, on the preconceptual and specifically poetic nature of their perspectives on history and its processes. All this I assume as a justification of a formalist approach to the study of historical thinking in the nineteenth century.

This being given, however, it is immediately apparent that the works produced by these thinkers represent alternative, and seemingly mutually exclusive, conceptions both of the same segments of the historical process and of the tasks of historical thinking. Considered purely as verbal structures, the works they produced appear to have radically different formal characteristics and to dispose the conceptual apparatus used to explain the same sets of data in fundamentally different ways. On the most superficial level, for example, the work of one historian may be diachronic or processionary in nature (stressing the fact of change and transformation in the historical process), while that of another may be synchronic and static in form (stressing the fact of structural continuity). Again, where one historian may take it as his task to reinvoke, in a lyrical or poetic manner, the "spirit" of a past age, another may take it as his task to penetrate behind the events in order to disclose the "laws" or "principles" of which a particular age's "spirit" is only a manifestation or phenomenal form. Or, to note one other fundamental difference, some historians conceive their work primarily as a contribution to the illumination of current social problems and conflicts, while others are inclined to suppress such presentist concerns and to try to determine the extent to which a given period of the past differs from their own, in what appears to be a predominantly "antiquarian" frame of mind.

In sum, considered purely as formal verbal structures, the histories produced by the master historians of the nineteenth century display radically different conceptions of what "the historical work" *should* consist of. In order, therefore, to identify the family characteristics of the different kinds of historical thinking produced by the nineteenth century, it is first necessary to make clear what the ideal-typical structure of the "historical work" *might* consist of. Once such an ideal-typical structure has been worked out, I will have a criterion for determining which aspects of any given historical work or philosophy of history must be considered in the effort to identify its *unique* structural elements. Then, by tracing transformations in the ways historical thinkers characterize those elements and dispose them in a specific narrative in order to gain an "explanatory affect," I should be able to chart the fundamental changes in the deep structure of the historical imagination for the period under study. This, in turn, will permit one to characterize the different historical thinkers of the period in terms of their shared status as participants in a distinctive universe of discourse within which different "styles" of historical thinking were possible.

The Theory of the Historical Work

I begin by distinguishing among the following levels of conceptualization in the historical work: (1) chronicle; (2) story; (3) mode of emplotment; (4) mode of argument; and (5) mode of ideological implication. I take "chronicle" and "story" to refer to "primitive elements" in the *historical account*, but both represent processes of selection and arrangement of data from the *unprocessed historical record* in the interest of rendering that record more comprehensible to an *audience* of a particular kind. As thus conceived, the historical work represents an attempt to mediate among what I will call the *historical field*, the unprocessed *historical record, other historical accounts*, and an *audience*.

First the elements in the historical field are organized into a chronicle by the arrangement of the events to be dealt with in the temporal order of their occurrence; then the chronicle is organized into a story by the further arrangement of the events into the components of a "spectacle" or process of happening, which is thought to possess a discernible beginning, middle, and end. This *transformation of chronicle into story* is effected by the characterization of some events in the chronicle in terms of inaugural motifs, of others in terms of terminating motifs, and of yet others in terms of transitional motifs. An event which is simply reported as having happened at a certain time and place is transformed into an inaugurating event by its characterization as such: "The king went to Westminster on June 3, 1321. There the fateful meeting occurred between the king and the man who was ultimately to challenge him for his throne, though at the time the two men appeared to be destined to become the best of friends. . . ." A transitional motif, on the other hand, signals to the reader to hold his expectations about the significance of the events contained in it in abeyance until some terminating motif has been provided: "While the king was journeying to Westminster, he was informed by his advisers that his enemies awaited him there, and that the prospects of a settlement advantageous to the crown were meager." A terminating motif indicates the apparent end or resolution of a process or situation of tension: "On April 6, 1333, the Battle of Balybourne was fought. The forces of the king were victorious, the rebels routed. The resulting Treaty of Howth Castle, June 7, 1333, brought peace to the realm—though it was to be an uneasy peace, consumed in the flames of religious strife seven years later." When a given set of events has been motifically encoded, the reader has been provided with a story; the chronicle of events has been transformed into a *completed* diachronic process, about which one can then ask questions as if he were dealing with a *synchronic structure* of relationships.[5]

Historical *stories* trace the sequences of events that lead from inaugurations to (provisional) terminations of social and cultural processes in a way that *chronicles* are not required to do. Chronicles are, strictly speaking, open-ended. In principle they have no *inaugurations*; they simply "begin" when the chronicler starts recording events. And they have no culminations or resolutions; they can go on indefinitely. Stories, however, have a discernible form (even when that form is an image of a state of chaos) which marks off the events contained in them from the other events that might appear in a comprehensive chronicle of the years covered in their unfoldings.

It is sometimes said that the aim of the historian is to explain the past by "finding," "identifying," or "uncovering" the "stories" that lie buried in chronicles; and that the difference between "history" and "fiction" resides in the fact that the historian "finds" his stories, whereas the fiction writer "invents" his. This conception of the historian's task, however, obscures the extent to which "invention" also plays a part in the historian's operations. The same event can serve as a different kind of element of many different historical stories, depending on the role it is assigned in a specific motific characterization of the set to which it belongs. The death of the king may be a beginning, an ending, or simply a transitional event in three different stories. In the chronicle, this event is simply "there" as an element of a series; it does not "function" as a story element. The historian arranges the events in the chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning events different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process with a discernible beginning, middle, and end.

---

[5] The distinctions among chronicle, story, and plot which I have tried to develop in this section may have more value for the analysis of historical works than for the study of literary fictions. Unlike literary fictions, such as the novel, historical works are made up of events that exist outside the consciousness of the writer. The events reported in a novel can be invented in a way that they cannot be (or are not supposed to be) in a history. This makes it difficult to distinguish between the chronicle of events and the story being told in a literary fiction. In a sense, the "story" being told in a novel such as Mann's *Buddenbrooks* is indistinguishable from the "chronicle" of events reported in the work, even though we can distinguish between the "chronicle-story" and the "plot" (which is that of an Ironic Tragedy). Unlike the novelist, the historian confronts a veritable chaos of events *already constituted*, out of which he must choose the elements of the story he would tell. He makes his story by including some events and excluding others, by stressing some and subordinating others. This process of exclusion, stress, and subordination is carried out in the interest of constituting *a story of a particular kind*. That is to say, he "emplots" his story. On the distinction between story and plot, see the essays by Shklovsky, Eichenbaum, and Tomachevsky, representatives of the Russian School of Formalism, in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, Neb., 1965); and Frye, *Anatomy*, pp. 52–53, 78–84.

The arrangement of selected events of the chronicle into a story raises the kinds of questions the historian must anticipate and answer in the course of constructing his narrative. These questions are of the sort: "What happened next?" "How did that happen?" "Why did things happen this way rather than that?" "How did it all come out in the end?" These questions determine the narrative tactics the historian must use in the construction of his story. But such questions about the connections between events which make of them elements in a *followable* story should be distinguished from questions of another sort: "What does it all add up to?" "What is the point of it all?" These questions have to do with the structure of the *entire set of events* considered as a *completed* story and call for a synoptic judgment of the relationship between a given story and other stories that might be "found," "identified," or "uncovered" in the chronicle. They can be answered in a number of ways. I call these ways (1) explanation by emplotment, (2) explanation by argument, and (3) explanation by ideological implication.

◆ *Explanation by Emplotment*

Providing the "meaning" of a story by identifying the *kind of story* that has been told is called explanation by emplotment. If, in the course of narrating his story, the historian provides it with the plot structure of a Tragedy, he has "explained" it in one way; if he has structured it as a Comedy, he has "explained" it in another way. Emplotment is the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind.

Following the line indicated by Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, I identify at least four different modes of emplotment: Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, and Satire. There may be others, such as the Epic, and a given historical account is likely to contain stories cast in one mode as aspects or phases of the whole set of stories emplotted in another mode. But a given historian is forced to emplot the whole set of stories making up his narrative in one comprehensive or *archetypal* story form. For example, Michelet cast all of his histories in the Romantic mode, Ranke cast his in the Comic mode, Tocqueville used the Tragic mode, and Burckhardt used Satire. The Epic plot structure would appear to be the implicit form of chronicle itself. The important point is that every history, even the most "synchronic" or "structural" of them, will be emplotted in some way. The Satirical mode provided the formal principles by which the supposedly "non-narrative" historiography of Burckhardt can be identified as a "story" of a particular sort. For, as Frye has shown, stories cast in the Ironic mode, of which Satire is the fictional form, gain their effects precisely by frustrating normal expectations about the kinds of resolutions provided by stories cast in other modes (Romance, Comedy, or Tragedy, as the case may be).[6]

The Romance is fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it—the sort of drama associated with the Grail

[6] I am aware that, by using Frye's terminology and classification of plot structures, I throw myself open to criticism by those literary theorists who either oppose his taxonomic efforts or have their own taxonomies to offer in place of his. I do not wish to suggest that Frye's categories are the sole possible ones for classifying genres, modes, *mythoi*, and the like, in literature; but I have found them especially useful for the analysis of historical works. The principal criticism of Frye's literary theory seems to be that, while his method of analysis works well enough on second-order literary genres, such as the fairy tale or the detective story, it is too rigid and abstract to do justice to such richly textured and multi-leveled works as *King Lear*, *The Remembrance of Things Past*, or even *Paradise Lost*. This may be true; it probably is. But Frye's analysis of the principal forms of mythic and fabulous literature serves very well for the explication of the simple forms of emplotment met with in such "restricted" art forms as historiography. Historical "stories" tend to fall into the categories elaborated by Frye precisely because the historian is inclined to resist construction of the complex peripeteias which are the novelist's and dramatist's stock in trade. Precisely because the historian is not (or claims not to be) telling the story "for its own sake," he is inclined to emplot his stories in the most conventional forms—as fairy tale or detective story on the one hand, as Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, or Satire on the other.

It may be recalled that the normally educated historian of the nineteenth century would have been raised on a staple of classical and Christian literature. The *mythoi* contained in this literature would have provided him with a fund of story forms on which he could have drawn for narrative purposes. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that even as subtle a historian as Tocqueville would be able to shape these story forms to the kinds of purposes that a great poet, such as Racine or Shakespeare, would conceive. When historians like Burckhardt, Marx, Michelet, and Ranke spoke of "Tragedy" or "Comedy," they usually had a very simple notion of what these terms signify. It was different with Hegel, Nietzsche, and (to a lesser extent) Croce. As aestheticians, these three philosophers had a much more complex conception of genre, and wrote much more complex histories as a result. Historians in general, however critical they are of their sources, tend to be naive storytellers. For Frye's characterization of the basic plot structures, see *Anatomy*, pp. 158–238. On Frye, see Geoffrey Hartman, "Ghostlier Demarcations: The Sweet Science of Northrop Frye," in *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays, 1958–1970* (New Haven and London, 1971), pp. 24–41.

legend or the story of the resurrection of Christ in Christian mythology. It is a drama of the triumph of good over evil, of virtue over vice, of light over darkness, and of the ultimate transcendence of man over the world in which he was imprisoned by the Fall. The archetypal theme of Satire is the precise opposite of this Romantic drama of redemption; it is, in fact, a drama of diremption, a drama dominated by the apprehension that man is ultimately a captive of the world rather than its master, and by the recognition that, in the final analysis, human consciousness and will are always inadequate to the task of overcoming definitively the dark force of death, which is man's unremitting enemy.

Comedy and Tragedy, however, suggest the possibility of at least partial liberation from the condition of the Fall and provisional release from the divided state in which men find themselves in this world. But these provisional victories are conceived differently in the mythic archetypes of which the plot structures of Comedy and Tragedy are sublimated forms. In Comedy, hope is held out for the temporary triumph of man over his world by the prospect of occasional *reconciliations* of the forces at play in the social and natural worlds. Such reconciliations are symbolized in the festive occasions which the Comic writer traditionally uses to terminate his dramatic accounts of change and transformation. In Tragedy, there are no festive occasions, except false or illusory ones; rather, there are intimations of states of division among men more terrible than that which incited the tragic agon at the beginning of the drama. Still, the fall of the protagonist and the shaking of the world he inhabits which occur at the end of the Tragic play are not regarded as totally threatening to those who survive the agonic test. There has been a gain in consciousness for the spectators of the contest. And this gain is thought to consist in the epiphany of the law governing human existence which the protagonist's exertions against the world have brought to pass.

The reconciliations which occur at the end of Comedy are reconciliations of men with men, of men with their world and their society; the condition of society is represented as being purer, saner, and healthier as a result of the conflict among seemingly inalterably opposed elements in the world; these elements are revealed to be, in the long run, harmonizable with one another, unified, at one with themselves and the others. The reconciliations that occur at the end of Tragedy are much more somber; they are more in the nature of resignations of men to the conditions under which they must labor in the world. These conditions, in turn, are asserted to be inalterable and eternal, and the implication is that man cannot change them but must work within them. They set the limits on what may be aspired to and what may be legitimately aimed at in the quest for security and sanity in the world.

Romance and Satire would appear to be *mutually exclusive* ways of emplotting the processes of reality. The very notion of a Romantic Satire represents a contradiction in terms. I can legitimately imagine a Satirical

Romance, but what I would mean by that term would be a form of representation intended to expose, from an Ironic standpoint, the fatuity of a Romantic conception of the world. On the other hand, however, I *can* speak of a Comic Satire and a Satirical Comedy, or of a Satirical Tragedy and a Tragic Satire. But here it should be noted that the relation between the genre (Tragedy or Comedy) and the mode in which it is cast (Satirical) is different from that which obtains between the genre of Romance and the modes (Comic and Tragic) in which it may be cast. Comedy and Tragedy represent *qualifications* of the Romantic apprehension of the world, considered as a process, in the interest of taking seriously the forces which *oppose* the effort at human redemption naively held up as a possibility for mankind in Romance. Comedy and Tragedy take conflict seriously, even if the former eventuates in a vision of the ultimate *reconciliation* of opposed forces and the latter in a *revelation* of the nature of the forces opposing man on the other. And it is possible for the Romantic writer to assimilate the truths of human existence revealed in Comedy and Tragedy respectively within the structure of the drama of redemption which he figures in his vision of the ultimate victory of man over the world of experience.

But Satire represents a different kind of qualification of the hopes, possibilities, and truths of human existence revealed in Romance, Comedy, and Tragedy respectively. It views these hopes, possibilities, and truths Ironically, in the atmosphere generated by the apprehension of the ultimate inadequacy of consciousness to live in the world happily or to comprehend it fully. Satire presupposes the *ultimate inadequacy* of the visions of the world dramatically represented in the genres of Romance, Comedy, and Tragedy alike. As a phase in the evolution of an artistic style or literary tradition, the advent of the Satirical mode of representation signals a conviction that the world has grown old. Like philosophy itself, Satire "paints its gray on gray" in the awareness of its *own* inadequacy as an image of reality. It therefore prepares consciousness for its repudiation of all sophisticated conceptualizations of the world and anticipates a return to a mythic apprehension of the world and its processes.

These four archetypal story forms provide us with a means of characterizing the different kinds of explanatory affects a historian can strive for on the level of narrative emplotment. And it allows us to distinguish between *diachronic*, or processionary, narratives of the sort produced by Michelet and Ranke and the *synchronic*, or static, narratives written by Tocqueville and Burckhardt. In the former, the sense of structural transformation is uppermost as the principal guiding representation. In the latter, the sense of structural continuity (especially in Tocqueville) or stasis (in Burckhardt) predominates. But the distinction between a synchronic and diachronic representation of historical reality should not be taken as indicating mutually exclusive ways of emplotting the historical field. This distinction points merely to a difference of emphasis in treating the relationship between continuity and change in a given representation of the historical process as a whole.

Tragedy and Satire are modes of emplotment which are consonant with the interest of those historians who perceive behind or within the welter of events contained in the chronicle an ongoing structure of relationships or an eternal return of the Same in the Different. Romance and Comedy stress the emergence of new forces or conditions out of processes that appear at first glance either to be changeless in their essence or to be changing only in their phenomenal forms. But each of these archetypal plot structures has its implication for the cognitive operations by which the historian seeks to "explain" what was "really happening" during the process of which it provides an image of its true form.