In order to anticipate some of the objections with which historians often meet the argument that follows, I wish to grant at the outset that historical events differ from fictional events in the ways that it has been conventional to characterize their differences since Aristotle. Historians are concerned with events which can be assigned to specific time-space locations, events which are (or were) in principle observable or perceivable, whereas imaginative writers—poets, novelists, playwrights—are concerned with both these kinds of events and imagined, hypothetical, or invented ones. The nature of the kinds of events with which historians and imaginative writers are concerned is not the issue. What should interest us in the discussion of "the literature of fact" or, as I have chosen to call it, "the fictions of factual representation" is the extent to which the discourse of the historian and that of the imaginative writer overlap, resemble, or correspond with each other. Although historians and writers of fiction may be interested in different kinds of events, both the forms of their respective discourses and their aims in writing are often the same. In addition, in my view, the techniques or strategies that they use in the composition of their discourses can be shown to be substantially the same, however different they may appear on a purely surface, or dictional, level of their texts.

Readers of histories and novels can hardly fail to be struck by their similarities. There are many histories that could pass for novels, and many novels that could pass for histories, considered in purely formal (or, I should
But the aim of the writer of a novel must be the same as that of the writer of say, formalist) terms. Viewed simply as verbal artifacts histories and novels are indistinguishable from one another. We cannot easily distinguish between them on formal grounds unless we approach them with specific preconceptions about the kinds of truths that each is supposed to deal in. But the aim of the writer of a novel must be the same as that of the writer of a history. Both wish to provide a verbal image of "reality." The novelist may present his notion of this reality indirectly, that is to say, by figurative techniques, rather than directly, which is to say, by registering a series of propositions which are supposed to correspond point by point to some extratextual domain of occurrence or happening, as the historian claims to do. But the image of reality which the novelist thus constructs is meant to correspond in its general outline to some domain of human experience which is no less "real" than that referred to by the historian. It is not, then, a matter of a conflict between two kinds of truth (which the Western prejudice for empiricism as the sole access to reality has foisted upon us), a conflict between the truth of correspondence, on the one side, and the truth of coherence, on the other. Every history must meet standards of coherence no less than those of correspondence if it is to pass as a plausible account of "the way things really were." For the empiricist prejudice is attended by a conviction that "reality" is not only perceivable but is also coherent in its structure. A mere list of confirmable singular existential statements does not add up to an account of reality if there is not some coherence, logical or aesthetic, connecting them one to another. So too every fiction must pass a test of correspondence (it must be "adequate" as an image of something beyond itself) if it is to lay claim to representing an insight into or illumination of the human experience of the world. Whether the events represented in a discourse are construed as atomic parts of a molar whole or as possible occurrences within a perceivable totality, the discourse taken in its totality as an image of some reality bears a relationship of correspondence to that of which it is an image. It is in these twin senses that all written discourse is cognitive in its aims and mimetic in its means. And this is true even of the most ludic and seemingly expressivist discourse, of poetry no less than of prose, and even of those forms of poetry which seem to wish to illuminate only "writing" itself. In this respect, history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation.

This characterization of historiography as a form of fiction-making is not likely to be received sympathetically by either historians or literary critics, who, if they agree on little else, conventionally agree that history and fiction deal with distinct orders of experience and therefore represent distinct, if not opposed, forms of discourse. For this reason it will be well to say a few words about how this notion of the opposition of history to fiction arose and why it has remained unchallenged in Western thought for so long.

Prior to the French Revolution, historiography was conventionally regarded as a literary art. More specifically, it was regarded as a branch of rhetoric and its "fictive" nature generally recognized. Although eighteenth-century theorists distinguished rather rigidly (and not always with adequate philosophical justification) between "fact" and "fancy," they did not on the whole view historiography as a representation of the facts unalloyed by elements of fancy. While granting the general desirability of historical accounts that dealt in real, rather than imagined events, theorists from Bayle to Voltaire and De Mably recognized the inevitability of a recourse to fictive techniques in the representation of real events in the historical discourse. The eighteenth century abounds in works which distinguish between the study of history on the one side and the writing of history on the other. The writing was a literary, specifically rhetorical exercise, and the product of this exercise was to be assessed as much on literary as on scientific principles.

Here the crucial opposition was between "truth" and "error," rather than between fact and fancy, with it being understood that many kinds of truth, even in history, could be presented to the reader only by means of fictional techniques of representation. These techniques were conceived to consist of rhetorical devices, tropes, figures, and schemata of words and thoughts, which, as described by the Classical and Renaissance rhetoricians, were identical with the techniques of poetry in general. Truth was not equated with fact, but with a combination of fact and the conceptual matrix within which it was appropriately located in the discourse. The imagination no less than the reason had to be engaged in any adequate representation of the truth; and this meant that the techniques of fiction-making were as necessary to the composition of a historical discourse as erudition might be.

In the early nineteenth century, however, it became conventional, at least among historians, to identify truth with fact and to regard fiction as the opposite of truth, hence as a hindrance to the understanding of reality rather than as a way of apprehending it. History came to be set over against fiction, and especially the novel, as the representation of the "actual" to the representation of the "possible" or only "imaginable." And thus was born the dream of a historical discourse that would consist of nothing but factually accurate statements about a realm of events which were (or had been) observable in principle, the arrangement of which in the order of their original occurrence would permit them to figure forth their true meaning or significance. Typically, the nineteenth-century historian's aim was to expunge every hint of the fictive, or merely imaginable, from his discourse, to eschew the techniques of the poet and orator, and to forego what were regarded as the intuitive procedures of the maker of fictions in his apprehension of reality.

In order to understand this development in historical thinking, it must be recognized that historiography took shape as a distinct scholarly
discipline in the West in the nineteenth century against a background of a profound hostility to all forms of myth. Both the political Right and the political Left blamed mythic thinking for the excesses and failures of the Revolution. False readings of history, misconceptions of the nature of the historical process, unrealistic expectations about the ways that historical societies could be transformed—all these led to the outbreak of the Revolution in the first place, the strange course that Revolutionary developments followed, and the effects of Revolutionary activities over the long run. It became imperative to rise above any impulse to interpret the historical record in the light of party prejudices, Utopian expectations, or sentimental attachments to traditional institutions. In order to find one’s way among the conflicting claims of the parties which took shape during and after the Revolution, it was necessary to locate some standpoint of social perception that was truly "objective," truly "realistic." If social processes and structures seemed "demonic" in their capacity to resist direction, to take turns unforeseen, and to overturn the highest plans, frustrating the most heartfelt desires, then the study of history had to be demythified. But in the thought of the age, demythification of any domain of inquiry tended to be equated with the fictionalization of that domain as well.

The distinction between myth and fiction which is a commonplace in the thought of our own century was hardly grasped at all by many of the foremost ideologues of the early nineteenth century. Thus it came about that history, the realistic science par excellence, was set over against fiction as the study of the real versus the study of the merely imaginable. Although Ranke had in mind that form of the novel which we have since come to call Romantic when he castigated it as mere fancy, he manifested a prejudice shared by many of his contemporaries when he defined history as the study of the real and the novel as the representation of the imaginary. Only a few theorists, among whom J. G. Droysen was the most prominent, saw that it was impossible to write history without having recourse to the techniques of the orator and the poet. Most of the "scientific" historians of the age did not see that for every identifiable kind of novel, historians produced an equivalent kind of historical discourse. Romantic historiography produced its genius in Michelet, Realistic historiography its paradigm in Ranke himself, Symbolist historiography produced Burckhardt (who had more in common with Flaubert and Baudelaire than with Ranke), and Modernist historiography its prototype in Spengler. It was no accident that the Realistic novel and Rankean historicism entered their respective crises at roughly the same time.

There were, in short, as many "styles" of historical representation as there are discernible literary styles in the nineteenth century. This was not perceived by the historians of the nineteenth century because they were captives of the illusion that one could write history without employing any fictional techniques whatsoever. They continued to honor the conception of the opposition of history to fiction throughout the entire period, even while producing forms of historical discourse so different from one another that their grounding in aesthetic preconceptions of the nature of the historical process alone could explain those differences. Historians continued to believe that different interpretations of the same set of events were functions of ideological distortions or of inadequate factual data. They continued to believe that if one only eschewed ideology and remained true to the facts, history would produce a knowledge as certain as anything offered by the physical sciences and as objective as a mathematical exercise.

Most nineteenth-century historians did not realize that, when it is a matter of trying to deal with past facts, the crucial consideration for him who would represent them faithfully are the notions he brings to his representation of the ways parts relate to the whole which they comprise. They did not realize that the facts do not speak for themselves, but that the historian speaks for them, speaks on their behalf, and fashions the fragments of the past into a whole whose integrity is—in its representation—a purely discursive one. Novelistic might be dealing only with imaginary events whereas historians are dealing with real ones, but the process of fusing events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality capable of serving as the object of a representation is a poetic process. Here the historians must utilize precisely the same tropological strategies, the same modalities of representing relationships in the record, the facts exist only as a congeries of continguously related fragments. These fragments have to be put together to make a whole of a particular, not a general, kind. And they are put together in the same ways that novelists use to put together figments of their imaginations to display an ordered world, a cosmos, where only disorder or chaos might appear.

So much for manifestoes. On what grounds can such a reactionary position be justified? On what grounds can the assertion that historical discourse shares more than it divides with novelistic discourse be sustained? The first ground is to be found in recent developments in literary theory—especially in the insistence by modern Structuralist and text critics on the necessity of dissolving the distinction between prose and poetry in order to identify their shared attributes as forms of linguistic behavior that are as much constitutive of their objects of representation as they are reflective of external reality, on the one side, and projective of internal emotional states, on the other. It appears that Stalin was right when he opined that language belonged neither to the superstructure nor the base of cultural praxis, but was, in some unspecified way, prior to both. We do not know the origin of language and never shall, but it is certain today that lan-
guage is more adequately characterized as being neither a free creation of human consciousness nor merely a product of environmental forces acting on the psyche, but rather the instrument of medication between the consciousness and the world that consciousness inhabits.

This will not be news to literary theorists, but it has not yet reached the historians buried in the archives hoping, by what they call a "sifting of the facts" or "the manipulation of the data," to find the form of the reality that will serve as the object of representation in the account that they will write when "all the facts are known" and they have finally "got the story straight."

So, too, contemporary critical theory permits us to believe more confidently than ever before that "poetizing" is not an activity that hovers over, transcends, or otherwise remains alienated from life or reality, but represents a mode of praxis which serves as the immediate base of all cultural activity (this an insight of Vico, Hegel, and Nietzsche, no less than of Freud and Levi-Strauss), even of science itself. We are no longer compelled, therefore, to believe—as historians in the post-Romantic period had to believe—that fiction is the antithesis of fact (in the way that superstition or magic is the antithesis of science) or that we can relate facts to one another without the aid of some enabling and generically fictional matrix. This too would be news to many historians were they not so fetishistically enamored of the notion of "facts" and so congenitally hostile to "theory" in any form that the presence in a historical work of a formal theory used to explicate the representation in a historical narrative) and the remission of the conceptual apparatus by which the facts are ordered in the discourse to the interior of the narrative, where it serves as a hidden or implicit shaping device, in precisely the same way that Professor Frye conceives his archetypes to do in narrative fictions. History does not, therefore, stand over against myth as its cognitive antithesis, but represents merely another, and more extreme form of that "displacement" which Professor Frye has analyzed in his Anatomy. Every history has its myth; and if there are different fictional modes based on different identifiable mythical archetypes, so too there are different historiographical modes—different ways of hypotactically ordering the "facts" contained in the chronicle of events occurring in a specific time-space location, such that events in the same set are capable of functioning differently in order to figure forth different meanings—moral, cognitive, or aesthetic—within different fictional matrices.

In fact, I would argue that these mythic modes are more easily identifiable in historiographical than they are in literary texts. For historians usually work with much less linguistic (and therefore less poetic) self-consciousness than writers of fiction do. They tend to treat language as a transparent vehicle of representation that brings no cognitive baggage of its own into the discourse. Great works of fiction will usually—if Roman Jakobson is right—not only be about their putative subject matter, but also about language itself and the problematical relation between language, consciousness, and reality—including the writer's own language. Most historians' concern with language extends only to the effort to speak plainly, to avoid florid figures of speech, to assure that the persona of the author appears nowhere identifiable in the text, and to make clear what technical terms mean, when they dare to use any.

This is not, of course, the case with the great philosophers of history—from Augustine, Machiavelli, and Vico to Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Croce, and Spengler. The problematical status of language (including their own linguistic protocols) constitutes a crucial element in their own dispositos. And it is not the case with the great classic writers of historiography—from Thucydides and Tacitus to Michelet, Carlyle, Ranke, Droysen, Tocqueville, and Burckhardt. These historians at least had a rhetorical self-consciousness that permitted them to recognize that any set of facts was variously, and equally legitimately, describable, that there is no such thing as a single correct original description of anything, on the basis of which an interpretation of that thing can subsequently be brought to bear. They recognized, in short, that all original descriptions of any field of phenomena
are already interpretations of its structure, and that the linguistic mode in which the original description (or taxonomy) of the field is cast will implicitly rule out certain modes of representation and modes of explanation regarding the field's structure and tacitly sanction others. In other words, the favored mode of original description of a field of historical phenomena (and this includes the field of literary texts) already contains implicitly a limited range of modes of emplotment and modes of argument by which to disclose the meaning of the field in a discursive prose representation. If, that is, the description is anything more than a random registering of impressions. The plot structure of a historical narrative (how things turned out as they did) and the formal argument or explanation of why things happened or turned out as they did are/wfigured by the original description (of the "facts" to be explained) in a given dominant modality of language use: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, or irony.

Now, I want to make clear that I am myself using these terms as metaphors for the different ways we construe fields or sets of phenomena in order to "work them up" into possible objects of narrative representation and discursive analysis. Anyone who originally encodes the world in the mode of metaphor will be inclined to decode it—that is, narratively "explicate" and discursively analyze it—as a congeries of individualities. To those for whom there is no real resemblance in the world, decodation must take the form of a disclosure, either of the simple contiguity of things (the mode of metonymy) or of the contrast that lies hidden within every apparent resemblance or unity (the mode of irony). In the first case, the narrative representation of the field, construed as a diachronic process, will favor as a privileged mode of emplotment the archetype of Romance and a mode of explanation that identifies knowledge with the appreciation and delineation of the particularity and individuality of things. In the second case, an original description of the field in the mode of metonymy will favor a tragic plot structure as a privileged mode of emplotment and mechanistic causal connection as the favored mode of explanation, to account for changes topographically outlined in the emplotment. So too an ironic original description of the field will generate a tendency to favor emplotment in the mode of satire and pragmatic or contextual explanation of the structures thus illuminated. Finally, to round out the list, fields originally described in the synecdochic mode will tend to generate comic emplotments and organicist explanations of why these fields change as they do.¹

Note, for example, that both those great narrative hulks produced by such classic historians as Michelet, Tocqueville, Burckhardt, and Ranke, on the one side, and the elegant synopses produced by philosophers of history such as Herder, Marx, Nietzsche, and Hegel, on the other, become more easily relatable one to the other if we see them as both victims and exploiters of the linguistic mode in which they originally describe a field of historical events before they apply their characteristic modalities of narrative representation and explanation, that is, their "interpretations" of the field’s "meaning." In addition, each of the linguistic modes, modes of emplotment, and modes of explanation has affinities with a specific ideological position: anarchist, radical, liberal, and conservative, respectively. The issue of ideology points to the fact that there is no value-neutral mode of emplotment, explanation, or even description of any field of events, whether imaginary or real, and suggests that the very use of language itself implies or entails a specific posture before the world which is ethical, ideological, or more generally political: not only all interpretation, but also all language is politically contaminated.

Now, in my view, any historian who simply described a set of facts in, let us say, metonymic terms and then went on to emplot its processes in the mode of tragedy and proceeded to explain those processes mechanistically, and finally drew explicit ideological implications from it—as most vulgar Marxists and materialistic determinists do—would not only not be very interesting but could legitimately be labelled a doctrinaire thinker who had "bent the facts" to fit a preconceived theory. The peculiar dialectic of historical discourse—and of other forms of discursive prose as well, perhaps even the novel—comes from the effort of the author to mediate between alternative modes of emplotment and explanation, which means, finally, mediating between alternative modes of language use or tropological strategies for originally describing a given field of phenomena and constituting it as a possible object of representation.

It is this sensitivity to alternative linguistic protocols, cast in the modes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony, that distinguishes the great historians and philosophers of history from their less interesting counterparts among the technicians of these two crafts. This is what makes Tocqueville so much more interesting (and a source of so many different later thinkers) than either his contemporary, the doctrinaire Guizot, or most of his modern liberal or conservative followers, whose knowledge is greater than his and whose retrospective vision is more extensive but whose dialectical capacity is so much more weakly developed. Tocqueville writes about the French Revolution, but he writes even more meaningfully about the difficulty of ever attaining to a definitive objective characterization of the complex web of facts that comprise the Revolution as a graspable totality or structured whole. The contradiction, the aporia, at the heart of Tocqueville's discourse is born of his awareness that alternative, mutually exclusive, original descriptions of what the Revolution is are possible. He recognizes that both metonymical and synecdochic linguistic protocols can be used, equally legitimately, to describe the field of facts that comprise the "Revolutio" and to constitute it as a possible object of historical discourse. He moves feversishly between the two modes of original description, testing
both, trying to assign them to different mental sets or cultural types (what he means by a "democratic" consciousness is a metonymic transcription of phenomena; "aristocratic" consciousness is synecdochic). He himself is satisfied with neither mode, although he recognizes that each gives access to a specific aspect of reality and represents a possible way of apprehending it. His aim, ultimately, is to contrive a language capable of mediating between the two modes of consciousness which these linguistic modes represent. This aim of mediation, in turn, drives him progressively toward the ironic recognition that any given linguistic protocol will obscure as much as it reveals about the reality it seeks to capture in an order of words. This *aporia* or sense of contradiction residing at the heart of language itself is present in *all* of the classic historians. It is this linguistic self-consciousness which distinguishes them from their mundane counterparts and followers, who think that language can serve as a perfectly transparent medium of representation and who think that if one can only find the right language for describing events, the meaning of the events will display itself to consciousness.

This movement between alternative linguistic modes conceived as alternative descriptive protocols is, I would argue, a distinguishing feature of all of the great classics of the "literature of fact." Consider, for example, Darwin's *Origin of Species*, a work which must rank as a classic in any list of the great monuments of this kind of literature. This work which, more than any other, desires to remain within the ambit of plain fact, is just as much about the problem of classification as it is about its ostensible subject matter, the data of natural history. This means that it deals with two problems: how are events to be described as possible elements of an argument; and what kind of argument do they add up to once they are so described?

Darwin claims to be concerned with a single, crucial question: "Why are not all organic things linked together in inextricable chaos?" (p. 453). But he wishes to answer this question in particular terms. He does not wish to suggest, as many of his contemporaries held, that all systems of classification are arbitrary, that is, mere products of the minds of the classifiers; he insists that there is a *real* order in nature. On the other hand, he does not wish to regard this order as a product of some spiritual or teleological power. The order which he seeks in the data, then, must be manifest in the facts themselves but not manifested in such a way as to display the operations of any transcendental power. In order to establish this notion of nature's plan, he purports, first, simply to entertain "objectively" all of the "facts" of natural history provided by field naturalists, domestic breeders, and students of the geological record—in much the same way that the historian entertains the data provided by the archives. But this entertainment of the record is no simple reception of the facts; it is an entertainment of the facts with a view toward the discrediting of all previous taxonomic systems in which they have previously been encoded.

Like Kant before him, Darwin insists that the source of all error is semblance. Analogy, he says again and again, is always a "deceitful guide" (see pp. 61, 66, 473). As against analogy, or as I would say merely metaphorical characterizations of the facts, Darwin wishes to make a case for the existence of real "affinities" genealogically construed. The establishment of these affinities will permit him to postulate the linkage of all living things to all others by the "laws" or "principles" of genealogical descent, variation, and natural selection. These laws and principles are the formal elements in his mechanistic explanation of why creatures are arranged in families in a time series. But this explanation could not be offered as long as the data remained encoded in the linguistic modes of either metaphor or synecdoche, the modes of qualitative connection. As long as creatures are classified in terms of either semblance or essential unity, the realm of organic things must remain either a chaos of arbitrarily affirmed connectedness or a hierarchy of higher and lower forms. Science as Darwin understood it, however, cannot deal in the categories of the "higher" and "lower" any more than it can deal in the categories of the "normal" and "monstrous." Everything must be entertained as what it manifestly seems to be. Nothing can be regarded as "surprising," any more than anything can be regarded as "miraculous."

There are many kinds of facts invoked in *The Origin of Species*: Darwin speaks of "astonishing" facts (p. 301), "remarkable" facts (p. 384), "leading" facts (pp. 444, 447), "unimportant" facts (p. 58), "well-established" facts, even "strange" facts (p. 105); but there are no "surprising" facts. Everything, for Darwin no less than for Nietzsche, is just what it appears to be—but what things appear to be are data inscribed under the aspect of *mere contiguity in space* (all the facts gathered by naturalists all over the world) and *time* (the records of domestic breeders and the geological record). As the elements of a problem (or rather, of a puzzle, for Darwin is confident that there is a solution to his problem), the facts of natural history are conceived to exist in that mode of relationship which is presupposed in the operation of the linguistic trope of metonymy, which is the favored trope of all modern scientific discourse (this is one of the crucial distinctions between modern and premodern sciences). The substitution of the name of a part of a thing for the name of the whole is prelinguistically sanctioned by the importance which the scientific consciousness grants to mere contiguity. Considerations of semblance are tacitly retired in the employment of this trope, and so are considerations of difference and contrast. This is what gives to metonymic consciousness what Kenneth Burke calls its "reductive" aspect. Things exist in contiguous relationships that are only spatially and temporally definable. This metonymizing of the world, this preliminary encoding of the facts in terms of merely contiguous relationships, is necessary to the removal of metaphor and teleology from phenomena.
which every modern science seeks to effect. And Darwin spends the greater part of his book on the justification of this encodation, or original description, of reality, in order to discharge the errors and confusion which a merely metaphorical profile of it has produced.

But this is only a preliminary operation. Darwin then proceeds to restructure the facts—but only along one axis of the time-space grid on which he has originally deployed them. Instead of stressing the mere contiguity of the phenomena, he shifts gears, or rather tropological modes, and begins to concentrate on differences—but two kinds of differences: variations within species, on the one side, and contrasts between the species, on the other. "Systematists," he writes, "...have only to decide...whether any form be sufficiently constant and distinct from other forms, to be capable of definition; and if definable, whether the differences be sufficiently important to deserve a specific name." But the distinction between a species and a variety is only a matter of degree.

Hereafter we shall be compelled to acknowledge that the only distinction between species and well-marked varieties is, that the latter are known, or believed, to be connected at the present day by intermediate gradation, whereas species were formerly thus connected. Hence, without rejecting the consideration of the present existence of intermediate gradations between any two forms, we shall be led to weigh more carefully and to value higher the actual amount of difference between them. It is quite possible that forms now generally acknowledged to be merely varieties may hereafter be thought worthy of specific names; and in this case scientific and common language will come into accordance. In short, we shall have to treat species in the same manner as those naturalists treat genera, who admit that genera are merely artificial combinations made for convenience. This may not be a cheering prospect; but we shall at least be free from the vain search for the undiscovered and undiscoverable essence of the term species. (Pp. 474-75; italics added)

And yet Darwin has smuggled in his own conception of the "essence" of the term species. And he has done it by falling back on the geological record, which, following Lyell, he calls "a history of the world imperfectly kept...written in a changing dialect" and of which "we possess the last volume alone" (p. 331). Using this record, he postulates the descent of all species and varieties from some four or five prototypes governed by what he calls the "rule" of "gradual transition" (pp. 180ff.) or "the great principle of gradation" (p. 251). Difference has been dissolved in the mystery of transition, such that continuity-in-variation is seen as the "rule" and radical discontinuity or variation as an "anomaly" (p. 33). But this "mystery" of transition (see his highly tentative, confused, and truncated discussion of the possible "modes of transition," pp. 179-82, 310) is nothing but the facts laid out on a time-line, rather than spatially disposed, and treated as a "series" which is permitted to "impress...the mind with the idea of an actual passage." (p. 66). All organic beings are then (gratuitously on the basis of both the facts and the theories available to Darwin) treated metaphorically on the literal level of the text but synecdochically on the allegorical level) as belonging to families linked by genealogical descent (through the operation of variation and natural selection) from the postulated four or five prototypes. It is only his distaste for "analogy," he tells us, that keeps him from going "one step further, namely, to the belief that all plants and animals are descended from some one prototype" (p. 473). But he has approached as close to a doctrine of organic unity as his respect for the "facts," in their original encodation in the mode of contiguity, will permit him to go. He has transformed "the facts" from a structure of merely contiguously related particulars into a sublimated synecdoche. And this in order to put a new and more comforting (as well as, in his view, a more interesting and comprehensible) vision of nature in place of that of his vitalistic opponents.

The image which he finally offers—of an unbroken succession of generations—may have had a disquieting effect on his readers, inasmuch as it dissolved the distinction between both the "higher" and "lower" in nature (and by implication, therefore, in society) and the "normal" and the "monstrous" in life (and therefore in culture). But in Darwin's view, the new image of organic nature as an essential continuity of beings gave assurance that no "cataclysm" had ever "desolated the world" and permitted him to look forward to a "secure future and progress toward perfection" (p. 477). For "cataclysm" we can of course read "revolution" and for "secure future," "social status quo." But all of this is presented, not as image, but as plain fact. Darwin is ironic only with respect to those systems of classification that would ground "reality" in fictions of which he does not approve. Darwin distinguishes between tropological codes that are "responsive" to the data and those that are not. But the criterion of responsibility to the data is not extrinsic to the operation by which the "facts" are ordered in his initial description of them; this criterion is intrinsic to that operation.

As thus envisaged, even the Origin of Species, that summa of "the literature of fact" of the nineteenth century, must be read as a kind of allegory—a history of nature meant to be understood literally but appealing ultimately to an image of coherency and orderliness which it constructs by linguistic "turns" alone. And if this is true of the Origin, how much more true must it be of any history of human societies? In point of fact, historians have not agreed upon a terminological system for the description of the events which they wish to treat as facts and embed in their discourses as self-revealing data. Most historiographical disputes—among scholars of roughly equal erudition and intelligence—turn precisely on the matter of which among several linguistic protocols is to be used to describe the events under contention, not what explanatory system is to be applied to the events in
order to reveal their meaning. Historians remain under the same illusion that had seized Darwin, the illusion that a value-neutral description of the facts, prior to their interpretation or analysis, is possible. It was not the doctrine of natural selection advanced by Darwin that commended him to other students of natural history as the Copernicus of natural history. That doctrine had been known and elaborated long before Darwin advanced it in the *Origin*. What had been required was a redescriptions of the facts to be explained in a language which would sanction the application to them of the doctrine as the most adequate way of explaining them.

And so too for historians seeking to "explain" the "facts" of the French Revolution, the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, the effects of slavery on American society, or the meaning of the Russian Revolution. What is at issue here is not, What are the facts? but rather, How are the facts to be described in order to sanction one mode of explaining them rather than another? Some historians will insist that history cannot become a science until it finds the technical terminology adequate to the correct characterization of its objects of study, in the way that physics did in the calculus and chemistry did in the periodic tables. Such is the recommendation of Marxists, Positivists, Cliometricians, and so on. Others will continue to insist that the integrity of historiography depends on its use of ordinary language, its avoidance of jargon. These latter suppose that ordinary language is a safeguard against ideological deformations of the "facts." What they fail to recognize is that ordinary language itself has its own forms of terminological determinism, represented by the figures of speech without which discourse itself is impossible.

NOTES

1. I have tried to exemplify at length each of these webs of relationships in given historians in my book *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1973).

2. References in the text to Darwin’s *Origin of Species* are to the Dolphin Edition (New York: n.d.).

6 THE IRRATIONAL AND THE PROBLEM OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT

It is conventional nowadays in any discussion of eighteenth-century historical thought to make at least a small gesture in the direction of rebalancing the nineteenth-century charge that the Enlightenment was deficient in historical sensibility. And it would seem obligatory to make such a gesture in a discussion of the concept of the irrational in eighteenth-century historical thinking, for the nineteenth century’s indictment of the historical sensibility of the age turns in large part on allegations regarding the Enlightener’s incapacity to entertain sympathetically any manifestation of the irrational in past ages or cultures whose devotion to reason did not equal its own. But it seems to me that any analysis of eighteenth-century historical thinking which begins with the assumption that the nineteenth century was justified in making the kind of criticism it did of the eighteenth century grants too much to the nineteenth-century historians’ conception of what a proper historical sensibility ought to be. It was Nietzsche who reminded his age that there are different kinds of historical sensibility, and that sympathy and tolerance are not necessarily the most desirable attributes for all historians in all situations. There are times, he said, in the lives of cultures no less than in the lives of individuals, when the "proper" historical sensibility is marked...