

**AGAINST DECLARATIVITY***CONTRA LA DECLARATIVIDAD**CONTRA DECLARATIVIDADE*

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**ABSTRACT**

Historical discourse is a period phenomenon shaped by the rhetorical and genre understanding of the moment in which it became formalized and professionalized - that is, the second half of the nineteenth century. In the figurative arts, realist painting and its rival, photography, was dominant, and the literary form this notion of consciousness took was the realist novel. Literary realism devices replaced romantic literature devices, just as those latter devices had succeeded, but never replaced the eighteenth-century devices. Historical discourse and the very notion of proper history followed realism devices, mostly the single-lens photographic perspective, one viewer's viewpoint. From a discourse perspective, this approach took the form of declarative, statement-making. Also, it is not to say that the declarative sentence which gives this term its name was rejected as the preferred way of making assertions about the world - far from it. Although a few self-conscious stylists (Derrida, for instance) work hard to avoid it, the declarative sentence is almost inevitable. Their readers work even harder. But just as narrativity encompasses a realm that extends far beyond narratives, so that narratives can proliferate in an environment that has, in a crucial sense, rejected grand narratives, so declarative statements will exist without entailing statement-making. The declarative act became the defining mark of professional history and remained its principal mode, just as it remains the predominant mode of literature and any number of other discourses. Indeed, this essay is written in the declarative rhetorical mode. However, literary modernism, philosophy, and a host of scientific developments have left this way of representing the world behind. Moreover, the same technological and intellectual changes that caused the modernist vision have, at the same time, created a different world to be depicted, a different sort of event to be represented historically. Not only the form but also the content have changed. The ethical and practical frustrations of representing such events have led to a theoretical challenge to the declarative form of knowing and to a challenge for the genre distinctions that constitute guild history: the idea of the past produced by academically professionalized individuals. For example, the difference between history and fiction - or rather, their respective relationship to truth and reality - has blurred. In contrast, history has adopted some of the modernist literature devices and the present's practical demands.

Keywords: declarative act. history . fiction . narrative.

## RESUMEN

El discurso histórico es un fenómeno de época, moldeado por la retórica y la comprensión de género del momento en que se formalizó y profesionalizó, es decir, la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. En las artes representativas, la pintura realista y su rival, la fotografía, eran dominantes, y la forma literaria que tomó esta noción de conciencia fue la novela realista. Los dispositivos del realismo literario reemplazaron a los dispositivos de la literatura romántica, al igual que esos últimos dispositivos habían tenido éxito, aunque nunca reemplazaron, a los dispositivos del siglo XVIII. El discurso histórico y la misma noción de historia propiamente dicha siguieron a los dispositivos del realismo, especialmente la perspectiva fotográfica de un solo objetivo: un punto de vista, un espectador. Desde la perspectiva del discurso, esto tomó la forma de declaratividad. Esto no quiere decir que la oración declarativa que da nombre a este término haya sido rechazada como la forma preferida de hacer afirmaciones sobre el mundo, ni mucho menos. La oración declarativa es casi inevitable, aunque algunos estilistas conscientes de sí mismos (Derrida, por ejemplo) se esfuerzan por evitarla. Sus lectores trabajan aún más duro. Pero, así como la narratividad abarca un ámbito que se extiende mucho más allá de las narrativas, de modo que las narrativas pueden proliferar en un entorno que, en un sentido crucial, ha rechazado las grandes narrativas, las declaraciones declarativas existirán sin implicar la declaratividad. La declaratividad se convirtió en la marca definitoria de la historia profesional y sigue siendo su modo principal, al igual que sigue siendo el modo principal de la literatura y de muchos otros discursos. De hecho, este ensayo está escrito en el modo retórico declarativo. Sin embargo, el modernismo literario, la filosofía y una serie de desarrollos científicos han dejado atrás esta forma de representar el mundo. Además, los mismos cambios tecnológicos e intelectuales que provocaron la visión modernista han creado al mismo tiempo un mundo diferente para ser representado, un tipo diferente de evento para ser representado históricamente. No solo ha cambiado la forma, sino también el contenido. Las frustraciones éticas y prácticas de representar tales eventos han llevado a la forma declarativa del conocimiento a un desafío teórico y a un desafío a las distinciones de género que constituyen el gremio de la historia: la idea del pasado producida por individuos académicamente profesionalizados. Por ejemplo, la distinción entre historia y ficción, o más bien, su respectiva relación con la verdad y la realidad, se ha desdibujado, mientras que la historia ha adoptado algunos de los dispositivos de la literatura modernista y las demandas prácticas del presente.

Palabras clave: declaratividad. historia. ficción. narrativa.

## RESUMO

O discurso histórico é um fenômeno de época, moldado pela retórica e compreensão de gênero da época em que foi formalizado e profissionalizado, ou seja, a segunda metade do século XIX. Nas artes representativas, a pintura realista e sua rival, a fotografia, eram dominantes, e a forma literária que assumiu essa noção de consciência foi o romance realista. Os dispositivos do realismo literário substituíram os dispositivos da literatura romântica, da mesma forma que esses dispositivos posteriores sucederam, embora nunca tenham substituído, os dispositivos do século XVIII. O discurso histórico e a própria noção de história seguiram os dispositivos do realismo, especialmente a perspectiva fotográfica de um único objetivo: um ponto de vista, um espectador. Do ponto de vista da fala, isso assumiu a forma de declaração. Isso não quer dizer que a sentença declarativa para esse termo tenha sido rejeitada como a forma preferida de fazer reivindicações sobre o mundo, longe disso. A frase declarativa é quase inevitável, embora alguns estilistas autoconscientes (Derrida, por exemplo) se esforcem para evitá-la. Seus leitores trabalham ainda mais nisso. Mas, assim

como a narratividade abrange um reino que se estende muito além das narrativas, de modo que as narrativas podem proliferar em um ambiente que, em um sentido crucial, rejeitou as grandes narrativas, as frases declarativas existirão sem implicar em declaração. O ato declarativo tornou-se a marca definidora da história profissional e continua sendo seu modo primário, assim como continua sendo o modo primário de literatura e de muitos outros discursos. Na verdade, este ensaio foi escrito no modo retórico declarativo. No entanto, o modernismo literário, a filosofia e uma série de desenvolvimentos científicos deixaram essa forma de representar o mundo para trás. Além disso, as mesmas mudanças tecnológicas e intelectuais que deram origem à visão modernista criaram, ao mesmo tempo, um mundo diferente a ser descrito, um tipo diferente de evento a ser representado historicamente. Não apenas a forma mudou, mas também o conteúdo. As frustrações éticas e práticas de retratar tais eventos levaram a forma declarativa do conhecimento a um desafio teórico e um desafio às distinções de gênero que constituem a guilda da história: a ideia de passado produzida por indivíduos academicamente profissionalizados. Por exemplo, a distinção entre história e ficção, ou melhor, sua relação respectiva com a verdade e a realidade, foi borrada, enquanto a história adotou alguns dos artifícios da literatura modernista e as demandas práticas do presente.

Palavras-chave: ato declarativo. história. ficção. narrativa.

Historical discourse is a period phenomenon, shaped by the rhetorical and genre understanding of the moment when it became formalized and professionalized –that is, the second half of the nineteenth century. In the representative arts, realist painting and its rival, photography, was dominant, and the literary form this notion of consciousness took was the realist novel. The devices of literary realism replaced the devices of romantic literature, just as those latter devices had succeeded, but never replaced, the devices of the eighteenth century. Historical discourse and the very notion of proper history followed the devices of realism, especially the single-lense photographic perspective –one viewpoint, one viewer. From a discourse perspective, this took the form of *declarativity*. This is not to say that the declarative sentence which gives this term its name was rejected as the preferred way of making assertions about the world –far from it. The declarative sentence is almost inevitable, although a few self-conscious stylists (Derrida, for instance) work hard to avoid it. Their readers work even harder. But just as narrativity encompasses a realm that extends far beyond narratives, so that narratives can proliferate in an environment that has, in a crucial sense, rejected grand narratives, so declarative statements will exist without entailing declarativity.

Declarativity became the defining mark of professional history, and remains its principal mode, just as it remains the principal mode of literature and any number of other discourses. Indeed, this essay is written in the declarative rhetorical mode. However, literary modernism, philosophy, and a host of scientific developments have left this way of representing the world behind. Moreover, the same technological and intellectual changes that caused the modernist vision have at the same time created a *different world* to be represented, a different sort of event to be represented historically. Not only the form, but also the content, have changed. The ethical and practical frustrations of representing such events have led to a theoretical challenge to the declarative form of knowing, and to a challenge to the genre distinctions that constitute guild history –the idea of the past produced by academically professionalized individuals. For example, the distinction of history and fiction –or rather, their respective relationship to truth and reality– has blurred, while history has adopted some of the devices of modernist literature and the practical demands of the present.

I must repeat at the outset that the word "declarativity" is to be understood as one understands the word "narrativity." That is, *declarativity* is defined as "the condition of being declarative", but, just as *narrativity* is used to designate the narrative features of non-narratives, so "declarativity" need not require all, or even a preponderance of declarative statements. There are many paths to declarativity, which is also the case with narrativity, which may be found in many forms of discourse that are not

proper narratives. Just as narrativity signifies a textual condition that leads to a final meaning through the process of emplotment, so declarativity is the mark of confidence, of speaking with the authority that comes from enunciation itself.

Declarativity, the stylistic mode that is figured forth by declarative sentences and which represents a world that is knowable and known, and therefore ripe for capture in narrative discourse, is certainly the basic approach of history and of the human sciences in general. Even the occasional venture into counterfactual situations is expressed in declarative mode, although framed by a clear proviso that "this is a positive assertion of what did not happen, as though it had happened".

Ezra Pound once wrote:

And even I can remember  
A day when historians left blanks in their writings,  
I mean for things they didn't know.

As I noted in an essay written long ago, this is what normal historical practice cannot do. Yes, one must point out missing evidence, difficulties in the argument. To note the essential discontinuities, fragmentation, arbitrary and contradictory nature of historical sources, is a different matter. The ideology of narrative will, to use the term I am suggesting here, enforce declarativity by emplotting the sources into a coherence that simply is not there (Kellner, 1989: 54). As the philosopher Louis Mink noted, one does not find stories in the archives (Mink, 1987: 60). They must be made.

Hayden White has noted several times the dominance of the declarative in historical discourse. It is the natural form of historical expression. "Something happened," which should be interpreted to mean "I, the historian, declare that something happened," is the model. From this model follows "I, the historian, declare that this happening caused other happenings," and "I, the historian, declare that this sequence of happenings has a meaning (to be understood in a cultural and professional context that has also been established by declarative statements.)" As I see it, Ranke's dictum that he intends to write history "as it actually happened," (*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*) is a defense of the declarative. Not of the modal possibilities of expressions –what *might* have happened, not what *would* have happened if..., what *should* have happened –nor of the citational possibilities offered by large archives– what so-and-so *claimed* happened, what the tradition has *maintained* to have happened. And, above all, not how the statements to be made about the past *came to exist*. Instead, simply what did happen, declaratively.

The power of declarativity is plain to see; it is taken to be the default style, almost not a style at all but simply a statement of how things are. It presents existence in a form that seem natural. In *Metahistory*, writing about the work of Jacob Burckhardt, White associates the declarative with a rejection of metaphor and goes on to link this stance to irony.

And this anti-Metaphorical attitude is the quintessence of Burckhardt's Irony, as it is the quintessence of every Ironist's attitude. Hence we see the apparent "purity" of Burckhardt's style. It abounds in simple declarative sentences, and the verb form most often chosen, almost to the point of expunging the active voice from Burckhardt's characterizations of events and process, is the simple copulative. His paragraphs represent virtuoso variations on the simple notion of *being* (White, 1973: 260).

Do we need to be reminded of the authority of *being*, and its place in the so-called metaphysics of presence, as Derrida might have said? The American rhetorician Richard Weaver has written of an argument from definition as a presentation of reality; his description asserts the force of declarativity.

Now we see that in all these cases the listener is being asked not simply to follow a valid reasoning form but to respond to some presentation of reality. He is being asked to agree with the speaker's interpretation of the world that is. If the definition being offered is a true one, he is expected to recognize this and say, at least inwardly, 'Yes, that is the way the thing is' (Weaver, 2001: 1354).

White describes this approach –simply presenting reality– as leading to a series of paratactic observations that add up to, in Burckhardt's own words, "a series of pictures, clear, concise, and most effective in their brevity" (White, 1973: 261). Unlike the Romantic historian, who depicted great metaphorically-constituted organic visions, Burckhardt's particularistic assertions claimed the "real." White writes: "This "realism," in turn, was conceived to have two components: the apprehension of the historical field as a set of discrete events, no two of which are precisely alike; and the comprehension of it as a fabric of relationships" (White, 1973: 261).

Agreeing with Croce that Burckhardt's style represents a moral failure to confront the historical forces that were changing his world (for the worse, from Burckhardt's perspective), White speaks of a lack of will to change the world on Burckhardt's part (White, 1973: 264). Yet Croce, too, will also come under fire for his presentation of historical knowledge as quintessentially declarative. White summarizes Croce's view as follows:

Historical accounts were *nothing but* sets of existential statements, of the form "something happened," linked together to constitute a narrative. As such, they were, first, *identifications* (of *what* happened) and, second, *representations* (of *how* things happened). This meant that, finally, history was a *special* form of art, which differed from "pure" art by virtue of the fact that the historian disposed of the categories of the "real-unreal" in addition to the normal artistic categories of possible-impossible." The historian as a dispenser of knowledge could take thought only as far as the assertion that such and such had happened or had not happened. He could never dilate upon *what might have happened* in the past *if* so-and-so had *not* happened, and, more important, on what *might yet happen* in the future *if* one did so-and-so in the present. The historian never spoke in the present tense or the subjunctive mood, but only in the simple past (more precisely, the Greek aorist) tense and the declarative mood (White, 1973: 400).

I have quoted at some length White's characterization of Croce's view of historical knowledge because it seems remarkably similar to Michael Oakshott's notion of the historical past, a notion that White has recently brought back into discussion and which will appear again here.

What I shall note at this point is simply that White's reference to declaratives in his writings on historians is closely tied to criticism of the traditional historical enterprise on moral grounds. The declarative, by presenting what *is*, is an abandonment of inquiry into what *might be* and the possibilities of that becoming. From White's perspective what is lost is any utopian vision, a sense that things ought to *be* radically different.

In his work on narrative after *Metahistory*, White goes beyond his identification of the historical mood as declarative. There, the reference is not only to historical discourse itself, but rather also to historiographical analysis, which White claims misses the point of narrative form precisely because of its attachment to declarativity.

Thus, in their summaries of explanations contained in historical narratives, these analysts of the form tended to reduce the narrative in question to sets of discrete propositions, for which the simple declarative sentence served as a model. When an element of figurative language turned up in such sentences, it was treated only as a figure of speech the content of which was either its literal meaning or a literalist paraphrase of what appeared to be its grammatically correct formulation (White, 1987: 48).

So declarativity is seen by historical practice and theory as the antidote to the banished figural language and as the solvent of narrativity, turning attention away in both cases –figuration and narrative– from the form to the content. Looking back at Hayden White's work through the 1980s, this developing accusation of *declarativity* as the source of problems for professional history (or guild history, as I shall call it) faces a problem of its own. Isn't declarativity, the positive statement about what happened, the natural way of representing reality? Could it be that historical declarativity, at least, is itself historical? And therefore not natural at all?

It can be argued that the declarativity that one notes in historical discourse after the middle of the nineteenth century, was established by the great institutions of historical practice. These were the German seminar system, the historical journal and historical associations, the marginalization of amateur



antiquarians and archivists, and the university-mandated separation of the practice of "proper" history (that is, declarative history) from what came to be called philosophy of history and from literature. The effect and intent of these institutional developments was to downplay the great popular appeal of the historical writing that had preceded the professionalization of guild history. And what I am calling declarativity became the necessary form of a necessary discourse, professional history.

The romantic historians, earlier in the nineteenth century, did not feel bound by a declarativity that had not yet become the standard mode of discourse. Augustin Thierry, of example, and Prosper de Barante, wrote in a very different way from later historians; they will display their sources at length in their footnotes, which can hardly be called such because they do not perform the function of the proper historical footnote (Bann, 1995: 20-21). The sources cited in the notes form a second voice, a narrative of their own. The greatest of the romantics, Jules Michelet, might seem an exception, writing volume after volume of declarative narrative, but the meaning of his assertions is shaped everywhere by a powerful metaphoric consciousness that calls upon the spirit and symbol to kill the evil of the literal. We should recall that he framed his great work on the French Revolution with a *Preface* in which he depicts himself descending into the archive as into a grave; upon his emergence, he speaks with the voice of the dead multitudes. His voice, in other words, may seem declarative, but it is not his own.

Working backward, as I am, in a way hardly approved by declarative chronologism, we find in the eighteenth century (and before) an unwavering sense of history as part of rhetoric, with its own position in the rhetorical manuals, distinguished from the "mere" scholar or antiquarian on the grounds that the historian was a writer, unlike the other diggers into the past. Until the end of the eighteenth-century, history was seen as a literary genre, charged with bringing to life past ages that faded as they became more distant (Gossman, 1990: 228). The rhetorical outcome of this was precisely an equality of writer and reader, an absence of the declarative stance of superiority. As Lionel Gossman put it:

What was important was not so much the truth of the narrative so much as the activity of reflecting about the narrative, including that of reflecting about its truth. History, in the eighteenth century, raised questions and created conditions in which the individual subject, the critical reason, could exercise and assert its freedom. It did not present itself as an objectively true and therefore compelling discovery of reality itself. On the contrary, its truth and validity were always problematic, provoking the reader's reflection and thus renewing his freedom. In an important sense, therefore, historical narrative and fictional narrative were constructed in fundamentally similar ways in the eighteenth century. (Gossman, 1990: 244).

However, we wish to characterize the historical rhetoric of the romantic and enlightenment era, we ought not call it purely declarative. The rules were too fluid to enforce declarativity and empower the historical voice. To display one's sources at the bottom of the page like Barante is to produce a second voice in the text, to write in a grandly symbolic way like Michelet is to forfeit the direct assertiveness of realism, to conduct a conversation about cultural meaning with a reader on one's own level as Voltaire would do is to insist that the past is at the service of human reflection by a select, but decidedly non-professional, few (Stephen Bann, Linda Orr, Lionel Gossman, Hayden White). The form finally chosen by the European guild, with references to sources merely indicated in a footnote, with a sober and decidedly nonfigural language employed, and with a one-sided discourse in which the reader is purely receptive, is declarativity itself. Declarativity, and the narrative form it presumed, is the result of exclusions. What was excluded was the reader, who lost his freedom to interpret documents for himself, to engage or refuse the emotions of the historian, and to find a meaning for himself in the words of another. Declarativity repressed all that by means of the "historical method." To be sure, many questioned or even mocked the smug certainty of the professional historians, and none more so than Friedrich Nietzsche, but however burdensome it seems, this sense of the past remains the norm, the natural, ethical, and professional way of understanding human events.

Since I am avoiding the declarative requirement of chronological presentation, I will note here that Hayden White's first major foray into historical theory was "The Burden of History" in 1966; there he called upon the profession to reconsider its assumptions. In that essay, he noted that the challenges to contemporary historical thought was a result of its complacent and misled assertion that history was special because it embodied *both art and science*, presumed to be in opposition. Actually, White

maintained, the science imagined by history was nineteenth-century physics, and the art of nineteenth-century realism. "They certainly do not mean to identify themselves with action painters, kinetic sculptors, existentialist novelists, or *nouvelle vague* cinematographers" (White, 1978: 42). It is *positivistic* science that is the model. We may infer that the common theme in nineteenth-century art (realism) and nineteenth-century science (positivism) to which history, in White's view, had indentured itself, was an allegiance to the declarative mode as the natural way in which responsible observers of human life expressed themselves. Ultimately, White rejected both the positivist search for the meaning of things, based as it was on a "stable conception of the world" that was passing away in both science and art, and the existentialist notion that life has no meaning for humanity. Instead, White suggested: "We might amend the statement to read: it will be lived all the better if it has no single meaning but many different ones" (White, 1978: 50). As in art and life, so in historical discourse –progress, he would claim, will result not from an ever-improving single view of the past, but rather from the accumulation and invention of differing views. So White was against declarativity from the start. But he had not yet theorized the historical moment that gave rise to this opposition.

The style of declarativity was the style of nineteenth-century realism, reflecting an art that aimed at rendering physical reality precisely as it was experienced by the senses of an individual who had highly developed sensory abilities. Although impressionism seemed a revolutionary break with the prevailing painterly possibilities because it used the materials of the art-form –that is, paint– in a different way, it was nevertheless declarative in its confidence that the artist was the authoritative source of the vision. (As Cezanne said, "Monet is only an eye, but, my God, what an eye."). Physical science of the nineteenth century followed the same pattern: the world was out there, and can be observed and known, and described in a declarative, mathematical, way. History, as it developed in the nineteenth-century, was simply a reflection of the prevailing rhetorical stance, as opposed, for example, to a reflective stance of the eighteenth century, in which historian and reader are mutually engaged in a consideration of the possible significance and ethical meaning of past events. And this rhetorical stance was strongly anti-rhetorical. History no longer figured as a genre of rhetoric because it was aspiring to the status of a science. A rhetoric of anti-rhetoric prevailed, to use the phrase of Paolo Valesio, despite the flourishing by the early twentieth century of grand philosophies of history and culture (Comte, Spengler, Toynbee, Marx, Freud), carefully defined out of "proper" history. Indeed, White maintains that rhetoric was particularly suppressed in the nineteenth century in order to reinforce the authority of the dominant (male) voices; rhetoric was insincere, inauthentic, untruthful, "the very principle of immoral speech" (White, 2010: 297). And this because it led to paths beyond the declarative.

Up to this point I have been at pains to demonstrate that declarativity has been the dominant mode of rhetorical (or anti-rhetorical) presentation since the nineteenth-century –in art, science, and historical discourse. I have also noted that this dominance was not the case earlier, and that it has come under scrutiny from a number of thinkers, including Hayden White. So now I turn to the results of this scrutiny, its meaning for theory of history and for the position of history and the other human sciences in the realm of rhetoric. The impact of the modern, in short, will necessitate the recognition of a new kind of event to historicize and a different kind of voice to accomplish that.

Between 1880 and the First World War, a crucial change occurred, as described brilliantly in Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space*. In area after area, the impact of technology, particularly the railroad and the telegraph, altered the human experience of the basic elements of consciousness. Time becomes a multi-layered complexity, and space hardly exists as it once had, as telegraph messages bring an event vast distances instantaneously. All of this leads to what Kern calls "the Cubist War," in which the multiple perspectives and temporalities of artistic developments provide a model for the unsettling novelty of World War I. The speed and chaos of rail travel and, especially, telegraphic communication made any sense of certainty moot.

This insight had been developed earlier by Erich Auerbach, in *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature* of 1946. Of Proust, for example, Auerbach writes that the "writer as narrator of objective facts has almost completely disappeared; almost everything stated appears by way of reflection

in the consciousness of the dramatis personae" (Auerbach, 1953: 534). For Virginia Woolf, he notes, exterior events have lost their force, and may serve to unlock any number of reflections from the past. The "randomness and contingency of the exterior occasion" gives way to inner process (Auerbach, 1953: 538).

The players were all acting in the dark. *Reality itself had become resistant to declaration*. In other words, the arts and historical reality itself (WWI, the "cubist war", so named by Gertrude Stein) have turned "against declarativity." This is not to equate anti-declarativity with modernism *per se* –such an assertion would be quite declarative– but the relationship is close.

Kant once wrote a famous essay in which he tried to find the right balance between the claims of theory, claims we might see as absolute (at least in theory), and practice, which has the advantage of being actual and real. In the essay, Kant discusses three arenas for this theory/practice debate: personal morality, the constitutions of states, and the cosmopolitan relationships of states among themselves. Hegel continued to seek a middle path between these two paths, resolving the matter as ever in a deep historicization that would turn theory into practice at an abstract level, which in Marx's hands becomes non-abstract. "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it."

This opposition between theory and practice seems to be a mirror image of the currently revived distinction between the historical past and the practical past. One might argue that the historical/practical past duality, as presented to us by Michael Oakeshott and brought back to the conversation by Hayden White, is a likeness of Kant's twosome. Just as theory is allegedly pure, without use or *parti pris*, the historical past, constituted continually by professionals, has no non-academic use and seems to exist as a sort of aesthetic object, one might say. Its purpose is purposelessness, as Kant might have put it; to give it a purpose is to denature it by making it practical, the practical basket into which we put all of our "uses" of the past.

I mentioned earlier that Oakeshott's distinction between a historical past, constituted by the professional standards and practices set forth by the discipline, and a practical past, the one with which people live and accomplish a culture, is failing. In a discursive sense historical discourse has already taken a literary form by its indenture to narrative. As White commented: "All stories are fictions." Because he identifies the literary with writing in which the form becomes part of the content, White insists that history and its related representations of the real be viewed as modes of literary writing, because the narrative form itself imposes a content that is very powerful –the ideology of meaning produced by the inevitable emplotment. There is no innocent narrative, no straightforward story, because the act of representing events in the form of a story creates meanings that are added to the events.

Let us pause here and consider objections to the direction of my argument. Blurring the margins of declarative history and literature or rhetoric –two realms that at one time each claimed history as a component part– raises the question of whether one can make things up, invent, fantasize. What happens to truth when you walk down the anti-declarative road? Where to stop? The historical past, as Oakeshott conceives it, is a place where no one ever lived because it never existed. It is an artificial construct created by a certain method that authorizes trained individuals to make declarative statements about certain artifacts, in the context of a large declarative discourse, the conversations of historians, ultimately ruled by narrative. And yet, it is a force regularly appealed to by living souls who want authoritative opinion about matters that concern them.

Opposed to the historical past is the practical past, which covers all of our public and private uses of the vast assortment of stories and collective memory. Any sense of the past as real is found in the practical pasts, as numerous as human purposes. And all of them are clearly open to the pressures and needs of the moment. There is no point in claiming that falsifying historical events is legitimate. It is not, although every historical work, I would maintain, includes and excludes material in ways that from some perspectives seem to be falsifying. That is why there are historical debates. Self-consciously literary writing, however, may, by using methods not yet available to the guild, offer reality better than



declarative history which suppresses its literary underpinning. But if we grant that fiction, rather than history, can afford the sense of *what it was like to live* at a certain time and place, is it not nevertheless the case that historical fictions are parasitical on the information of the historians? That is, isn't the practical past in its many forms dependent on the historical past? The answer, in my opinion, is just the opposite. At every turn, the historical past is guided and shaped by the very practical demands of the present. Indeed, I have recently argued that there never was a historical past, and White's assertion that historical discourse must perforce depend on the available narrative forms of its place and time buttresses this reversal. It is fictionality, figurative and narrative, that is the foundation for historical knowledge of even the most scientific kind.

According to the philosopher Berel Lang, whose extensive writings on the ethics of writing about the Holocaust have influenced this debate, all writing requires ethical justification because it requires an artificial mask for the author and an artificial mediation of language. He argues: "The logical implication of this view is that *no* imaginative representation of the Nazi genocide escapes these risks or the likelihood of failure, no matter how original or compelling it otherwise is" (Lang, 1990:149).

Lang presents both sides of the representational dilemma: on the one side, the position that asserts that memoir and documentary are adequate to the event; on the other, the notion that the event surpasses the powers of factual assertion, and invites the imaginative possibilities of the literary-figurative. "In this sense, imaginative writing, 'knows itself' –testifying to this by the impossible ideal it adopts of a form of writing that attempts at one time to be both literary and historical (Lang, 1990: 141).

The writing that 'knows itself' is not declarative.

In dealing with the Holocaust, White tells us, we face a special situation because the question is not "is this statement true," but rather "what is the historical object we are considering?"

The theoretical question, 'What is it I see before me?' belongs to the same discourse as the answer cast in the mode of a set of facts which add up to the statement: "What you see before you is a Holocaust, genocide, extermination, and other such crimes." And because the theoretical question, 'What is it?' belongs to the same discourse is the answer, 'It is X,' we cannot legitimately (i.e., with a logic that is not tautological) point to any given history of the Holocaust written by any given historian as an *example* of a 'proper' treatment of it (White, 2010: 30).

In other words, to arrive at a proper (or authentic) sense of any action or event, there must be a pre-existing notion of what its proper substance, time, place, and purpose might be, as well as knowledge of the proper means for its accomplishment. When, however, the nature of the event itself is problematic, questions arise that go beyond the historical, because the issue is other than factual. There is no proper answer to the question of whether one ought to write a history of the Holocaust in the mode of Christopher Browning, which I have characterized as sublime or of Daniel Goldhagen, which strikes me as a beautification –in both cases using the terminology of Kant. That is, do we see this event as an inexplicable thing beyond our ability to comprehend or as an event that can be understood and described quite clearly (Kellner, 2003). To put it simply, the declarative is not appropriate for events the nature of which is in question, as White indicates...

The difficulty in which much of Holocaust discourse has become mired is that the telling of the truth about anything can come modalized in ways other than an answer to the simple declarative sentence which is usually taken by philosophers to be the model of statements claiming to be true (White, 2014. 31).

Again we come to the normative nature of declarativity, which would be called entitlement if it were found in a person. Because, however, the declarative is not the only mode (to use White's word) in which the Holocaust –or *anything*– can be represented, the propriety of the representation, and its claim to authenticity, accuracy, professionalism, reality –all of them substitutes for truth– depends on excluding or marginalizing the non-declarative. What is not declarative is not history.

Limiting my remarks now to my own area of interest and the hypothesis that there is more than one way to "tell the truth about the past," I wish to suggest that both the historical novel and the novelesque history are

instances of nondeclarative discourses, that their truth may consist less in what they *assert* in the mode of factual truth telling than in what they connote in the other moods and voices identified in the study of grammar: which is to say, the *modes* of interrogation, conation or coaction, and subjunction and the *voices* of action, passion, and transumption (White, 2014. 32).

What leads White to embrace the novel (and the novelesque) as potentially more realistic than proper guild history is the turn away from the declarative. Practical realism needs a narrative world one can live in, a full world where connotations not recorded in documents fill out the picture. When nondeclarative connotation enters the scene and challenges the denotation of secure language and declarativity, the reader returns and the isolated voice of the writer joins the conversation.

Although declarativity is not dependent on any particular syntactic form because it is rather an approach to representation that can be achieved in many ways, countering it in historical discourse is a challenge. White suggested that the "middle voice" of ancient Greek grammar might offer a theoretical model for a certain non-declarative voice. In this, he follows Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, both of whom had anti-declarative agendas and both of whom explicitly extolled the middle voice. Barthes's essay "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" laments that Indo-European languages have only active and passive modes (both declarative in intent), while another possibility exists in ancient Greek, a middle voice that places the subject of the verb in the action described –one might say that the space of declarativity is gone. Barthes notes that it is the modern writing that calls the middle voicing to mind; the Proustian narrator, for example, has no existence prior to having written, his memories having been pseudo-memories (Barthes, quoted in White, 1999: 38). The romantic novelist's relation to the process of writing, one might say, is not interior, but anterior. This is a declarative stance. Not so, the modern. Derrida also cites the middle voice in his discussion of *différance*, the discovery of which is a clear form of anti-declarativity. What I am calling declarativity here, Derrida sometimes calls the metaphysics of presence, which he follows Heidegger in lamenting.

And philosophy has perhaps commenced by distributing the middle voice, expressing a certain intransitiveness, into the active and the passive voice, and has itself been constituted by this repression (Derrida, quoted in White, 1999: 39).

Note the "perhaps" in this quoted sentence; it is one of Derrida's many reflexive gestures against the declarative.

A crucial matter in this discussion is whether it is about rhetoric or poetics. That is, do the implications of the reaction against the declarative affect primarily the representation of past events or the study of representations of past events. If the former, if the discussion is taken to be rhetorical, then what is at issue is the natural persuasiveness of declarativity, and the costs of other modes of presentation. Indeed, the notion of presentation itself, reflecting as it does the "metaphysics of presence" that the long tradition of continental philosophy (notably, Heidegger and Derrida) have decried. But if it is rather the latter, poetics, that we are concerned with, then our aim becomes a precise study of style, and especially the devices that evade or counteract the declarative. When White noted the anti-metaphoric style in Jacob Burckhardt, he was noting a *poetic* characteristic; when he agrees with Croce that Burckhardt demonstrates a moral failure to confront his age, while disapproving of it, he is in the realm of *rhetoric*, although it should be clear that the hyper-declarative (and anti-metaphoric style) of Burckhardt is a device that produces the aesthetic world-view that Croce and White both resist. Poetics is a branch of rhetoric. All of which is to say that stylistic choices have effects in the world and express political and cultural points of view. Burckhardt's declarativity, it seems, expressed a resistance to change.

Change, however, has its own history. As opposed to nature, in which there are no tragic, or catastrophic, or unimaginable events, history is often portrayed using exactly these terms, which depend upon a basically mythic order of things.

All this suggests that the principles that make historical change possible in the first place may themselves undergo change. Or, to put it another way: change itself changes, at least in history if not in nature. If it does, then so too can the nature of events change as well (White, 2014. 47).

White identifies a new sort of event, the "modernist" event, that makes special demands on representation. It is an event for which the declarative is inadequate.

Whatever the value of the middle voice in Barthes's poetics or Derrida's philosophy, for Hayden White it is a key to certain presumably special kind of experiences. The experiences which White calls "modernist events," form an important part of his later work. White does not believe that these or any events are unrepresentable, but rather that they require a form of representation appropriate to "the kind of experiences which social modernism made possible" (White, 1999: 42).

White notes the explosion of the Challenger space craft in 1986 as an example of an event, captured on video, that could be run over and over without producing any definitive interpretation. The technology has made certainty impossible, and replaced it with contestation and possibilities. "It appeared impossible to tell any single authoritative story about what really happened –which meant that one could tell any number of possible stories about it (White, 1999: 73). Because of its enormity and the large number of people involved, the Holocaust is such an event, one that surpasses the possibilities of narration by emplotting the event and creating a declarative object. Other events, however, seem to fit this type, and we should recall that White calls it not the modern event, but the *modernist* event. And that is quite a different matter.

Just as the forms which declarativity may take are many –White certainly describes a number of them in *Metahistory*, so the forms of anti-declarativity may be found in a variety of genres and devices. White points to Auerbach's final chapter in *Mimesis*, where he discussed a final –to him, Erich Auerbach– step in the representation of reality via Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf. Auerbach notes the absence of a central, single point of view in the modern novel, and relates this to the world of urban masses and the facelessness of it all. Multiple points of view –like the angles and surfaces of cubism– are more realistic, more suggestive of how life is actually lived, than the declarative narrative center of even the Flaubertian narrator. And histories do exist which employ this device. Saul Friedlander's magisterial history of the Holocaust proceeds by voicing many stories, many viewpoints and experiences in the enormity of the event. White has written: "It appeared impossible to tell any single authoritative story about what really happened –which meant that one could tell any number of possible stories about it (White, 1999: 73). It is not hard to see what he means; this is a comment on what one might call social technology, the way live their life in society. Indeed, it corresponds to the famous discussion of the post-modern condition by Jean-François Lyotard, in which the French philosopher speaks of the decline of grand narratives. The end of grand narratives, which he took to be a critical trait of the "postmodern condition" was actually the proliferation of smaller narratives, which is one type of anti-declarativity.

One of the principal devices of declarativity is the suppression of any signs of enunciation. These are references of many sorts in a text of the situation in which the text was produced. Obviously, they point away from the topic at hand and toward the author of the text. For example, I am writing these words on an iPad, in an afternoon in October 2016, in my study at home, with a pile of books to my left. They are being written with an eye to a lecture situation in South America. Any number of angles may come into play here –insecurities about the lecture, concern about the response to the argument I am making, worry about missing a number of classes at my university. *Declarativity has declared that these aspects of the work are not in fact aspects of the work at all, because of the strict distinction between the text and its subject and the circumstances surrounding the production of the text.* Philippe Carrard has studied textual matters in French historiography and describes what I would call the triumph of declarativity.

Since the 1930s and even more since the 1960s, French historiography has been a domain where exciting things are supposed to be happening: where new documents are uncovered, new territories chartered, new problems raised, and where young scholars can give free rein to their imagination. Yet the image of the discipline that emerges from the reference works I have surveyed is amazingly dull, especially in the area of writing. According to these manuals, historical texts should conform to a model that has hardly changed since the late nineteenth century: they should be written as blandly as is practically feasible, devoid of rhetorical "effects," and purged of all signs of their enunciation (Carrard 1992: 25-26).

Unlike the witness, who says "I was there" so "believe me or ask someone else," the historian, who was not "there" must say "I researched, so believe me or go check my sources" (Carrard, 2017. 104).

In reality, however, the historian *was somewhere* –in an office, a library, an archive, or at a computer screen. These essential realities must be suppressed, along with the signs of the personal. "*Le 'moi' est haïssible*". And so are "expressive traces" and "ironic utterances," and, of course, figural language. At the edges of the text, in prefaces or appendices or acknowledgements, the personal may intrude in formalized statements of gratitude or affection to spouses, colleagues, or in the case of Fernand Braudel, to the Mediterranean itself. ("I have loved the Mediterranean with passion, not doubt because I am a northerner like so many others in whose footsteps I have followed.") (Braudel, 1972 [1949]). By placing the personal in a separate area, which may be easily skipped over, the declarative purity of the work is maintained; the personal act of *coming to know*, which historians call research, is hidden behind a screen, as it were, in that the liminal position is within the book, but outside the proper text. To write a history as the story of an individual's complex process of learning, writing, delaying, revising, and all of the utterly non-declarative indirections of real historical experience –to do this is to write a novel. The process of coming to know is basically novelesque, whether the tale being researched and written is real or not. Such novels remind us that there is a path beyond declarativity.

The historical novel of "coming to know" is especially apt for modernist events and may represent the principal direction in Holocaust fiction. Three examples come to mind, all novels that bridge the gap between the historical and the literary. The first of these is the celebrated *MAUS* by Art Spiegelman, the cartoon account of a son's efforts to get a tellable story from his father, a survivor of Auschwitz. Half of the work is a sort of declarative depiction of the father's story. Interspersed with this are moments of enunciation; when, for instance Artie, the son, listens to a taped interview with his father after the latter's death. The paternal source is difficult, a problem for his son. So much has been written about *MAUS*, (including by me), that I shall say only that it concerns historical fact –the survivor's story– while the cartoon form provides a universe of connotation that places the reader in the text. Like a romantic history, *MAUS* shows a divided effort at reality.

A second work of coming to know is W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, hardly a novel at all, but rather a piece of writing on chance and time and loss. The narrator, a clear substitute for the author, meets and reencounters at random a strange man –a Jew sent to Britain by the *Kindertransport* program– who is in search of an identity by researching his mother's fate in Teresienstadt. Although the character of Jacques Austerlitz may be invented (or may not), the uncertainty surrounding all the events depicted demolishes declarativity. Reality is radically uncertain. In the third novel I shall mention, *Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer, the author –or a character of the same name– is the seeker, trying to find a woman who saved his grandfather from a Nazi massacre in Ukraine, guided by an apparently comic family of Ukrainians. Interspersed with this quest is the magical story of the Jewish *stetl* of Trachimbrod from 1791 until its extermination in 1941. Mystery, magic, and humor reveal a tradition and a historical slaughter that the historical, declarative past could hardly bring into moral focus.

I will quote from an essay of mine on these three authors.

It is no secret that the period of cultural discourse called postmodernism –an era that seems as fixed and distant now as the baroque– brought to the foreground once again certain devices that became trademarks: not the situation of enunciation, or the writing of the book; nor the living the life that becomes the book (Proust) –there is no immediacy of experience. It is rather the experience of research that is thematized in these books, thematized and personalized because in each case the research is focused on a person and on that person's situation. (Kellner, 2008: 179).

In these works, the signs of enunciation that express how the work itself, as an historical event, came to be, becomes part of the work; what had been a contribution to the "historical past" becomes "practical," a past that has actually been lived. And, although the historical experience is collective, coming to know the past is individual. Research teams do not write narratives.



If the novel of coming-to-know involves a factuality (what actually happened in the production of a certain history) it is a factuality that will, paradoxically, relegate the work to literature, "fictional" literature. Spiegelman's cartoons add altogether too much visual information to the tapes that Vladek Spiegelman recorded about his experiences. So much information is there that the reader becomes involved in interpreting the images and their connotations, and the *declarative weakens*. That excess takes the work out of the category of proper history. It belongs to the practical, anti-declarative, past.

The declarativity of guild history requires the dominance of one voice, the one who knows. Multiple voices disrupt. When Lyotard bade farewell to grand narrative in his famous definition of post-modernism, he was greeting the proliferation of narratives, multiple voices in the culture, making the univocal declarative assertion problematic. Histories like Simon Schama's *Citizens* and Saul Friedlander's volumes on the Holocaust make a point of featuring many stories, brought together in a collage, rather than forced into a mold. White has described Friedlander's work as a *sortes*, a heap of items "that have no essence," depicting an event of a sort that also has no essence. And as I once wrote about Schama's *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*:

Whatever the value of *Citizens* as a work of history, and I think it is considerable, it is worth our attention because, in restoring individuals to a pre-totalized narrative condition, a 'quotidian' mess, it steps back from the civilized Terror of totalized meta-narratives to the primitive terror of the historical sublime, a version of the non-sense which lies behind all sense (Kellner, 1991: 310).

Friedlander and Schama are emblems of the anti-declarativity that adapt to a form of reality that cannot be realistically narrated by the declarative modes that emplot and provide meaning. The multiple voices are radically diverse and add up to just that, a sublime and terrifying reality.

The pull of the declarative, however, remains strong. To assert what is a comfort when many alternative realities co-exist, in a "cubist" world, so to speak. In this world, declarativity, like narrative, always wins. We want to get the story straight. But the challenge of modernist anti-declarativity offers a crucial perspective on our perhaps too deep respect for reality.

At this point I will stray finally into dangerous territory, extending my argument as a challenge. My point up to now has been that the genre system of a certain moment (broadly, the later nineteenth-century when the institutions of the historical professions were established and wedded to the university) has marked and continues to some degree to mark the ways we think about history. Historians like Friedlander, Schama, and others within the historical guild have challenged the reign of declarativity, especially to deal with a special kind of event. This, in turn, brings our attention to the genre that has dramatized anti-declarativity, the novel of historical research, or "coming-to-know." The characteristic genre of the late 20th century, however, was a different sort of narrative, namely "historical meta-fiction." As described by Linda Hutcheon and Amy Elias, historical metafiction goes well beyond the boundaries of the classical historical novel, which brings the past to life within the documented understanding of their moment. An example of the historical metafiction that pushes farther is Laurence Norfolk's *Lempriere's Dictionary* (1991), where the fantasy that Foer placed in a separate narrative of the story of the stiel that the Nazis would murder becomes the story itself, leading up to the fall of the Bastille. Automaton, the Siege of La Rochelle, a Hindu assassin, the East India Company, and a young scholar who tries to forget the gruesome death of his father by researching and writing a classical dictionary, each mythological part of which becomes a nightmarish event in his own life—all of this mountain of classical erudition aims at the great conspiracy of global capitalism to ignite a Revolution in France, which as we know, happened.

This "historical meta-fiction" deserves a lengthy consideration as an example of the practical past, and there is no time for that here. But it raises the question of limits. Where does a serious pondering of the value of a piece of literary writing reach a limit? Certainly, it will take an earnest interpreter to tease out the connections of past and present, writing and scholarship, convention and originality that make this work of Norfolk's a useful example of the characteristic post-modern genre, as described by Hutcheon or Amy Elias. The historical meta-fiction offers a particular form of pleasure for the reader who can



navigate the literary real and the historical real, sensitive to the perspective of their interplay. So, my final question is this: where do we stop on the anti-declarative path? And what have we gained by taking it?

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