CHAPTER SEVEN
Historiographical Speculations

Causality and Historiographical Focus

At the time I began writing this book, the Gothic had begun to get quite popular as a topic of criticism, and at the early stages of writing I used to have twinges of terror at the thought that my ideas would be anticipated by other critics. Despite the burgeoning of the new historicism, despite the echoes of Fredric Jameson's watchword, "Always historicize," and despite the outpouring of interpretations of writers of romance from Walpole to Maturin and after, very few students of the Gothic seemed to be interested in literary history in any usual sense. Indeed, literary history is something people just aren't doing any more it seems, for a variety of reasons, some of them ideological. But one of them is clearly a distrust of the historiographic genre itself.

There are good and bad reasons for this distrust, but one of the good reasons is that none of the theoretically grounded modes of literary history is able to provide us with a story that is adequate at every level, and that, in turn, is because historical explanations have a preferred "depth of focus." As with a camera, when one focuses on objects near the lens, the background gets blurry, whereas when one focuses on "infinity," whatever is close to the lens loses detail. This is not just a rhetorical issue. It has to do with the fact that history is not merely a narrative but one that depends in the first instance on the topos of causality. And the historiographical equivalent of the problem with focal depth arises from the differing forms of causality that operate in our explanations of phenomena.

As a rhetorical topos, causality is not a simple one: we use the word cause all the time in entirely different ways, without one being identifiable as the normal case. In historical discourse, cause is usually a question of agency; it answers the question, Who brought a particular state of affairs about? and
corresponds to what Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* calls the efficient cause. But there Aristotle lists three other varieties of cause that we also regard as significant: the material cause, what unformed matter was there in the first place, the means that were at hand for the efficient cause to act upon; the formal cause or shaping principle needed to produce an artifact; and the final cause, the *telos* or purpose, the end at which all means are aimed. Any of these may enter into our general sense of what brought something about. We may question at times whether a *telos* or purpose is always necessary, since sometimes we do things without intending to, or intending the opposite of what we actually accomplish. Inanimate objects and geological processes accomplish great feats without anything describable as intent, although the language we use to describe phenomena is so laced with the teleological that we often attribute purpose to inanimate objects.¹

We also understand the differences between necessary and sufficient causes. Anoxia (for example) is sufficient to cause the death of a living organism, but it is not a necessary cause of death, in that death can surely occur in the presence of plenty of oxygen. And on the other hand streptococcus bacilli are necessary causes of rheumatic fever, but they aren’t sufficient causes, as many people harbor the bacilli without having that serious disease or, indeed, even feeling ill. And we also understand the differences between precipitating causes, which rapidly trigger some violent change, and predisposing causes, which provide the conditions or factors that induce a change to come about.²

We all recognize each of these forms of causality in different aspects of daily life, and depending on our purposes, we appeal to different forms, shifting between the various causal mechanisms in ways that seem completely natural. When I worry about my nine-year-old son watching too many violent programs on television, I am not afraid that he is going to pick up a steak knife and use it on his little sister, but I do fear that violent stimuli of a certain sort could desensitize his spirit to others’ pain: here what I care about is a predisposing cause. When I want to know how my aunt Harriet’s favorite lamp got broken, I don’t want to hear a lecture on the friable qualities of Meissen porcelain or the law of gravitation. I want to know about the precipitating cause: who pushed it off the table?

In daily life we are forced to have recourse to any and all of these in rapid succession, driven by our shifting concerns. In remoter matters, however, like the writing of a literary history, it is possible to have a marked preference for one form of causality over another. The controversy mentioned in chapter 2 between Michael McKeon and Ralph Rader on the origins of the
English novel is illustrative of this. It isn’t just that McKeon and Rader disagree over what caused the English novel, it’s that they don’t agree on what should count as an explanation. For McKeon any real explanation of the novel’s origins is to be found in the predisposing factors: his explanation ends when he has elucidated what made society change in such a way as to make meaningful the notion of a narrative that made significant the domestic struggles of individuals, and was at the same time “realistic,” like the truth but not historically veracious. The peculiar concerns and intents of the authors of these novels are less important: for McKeon, if Richardson had not written the first English novel, someone else would have, and the course of literary history would have developed almost precisely as it did.

But for Rader, it doesn’t count as an explanation of the novel to be able to say how society got to the state where it could support fictional narrative as a literary genre. For Rader the predisposing causes are less interesting, and he is willing to take them for granted. Instead the novel begins when a particular individual—Samuel Richardson—tells a story about a virtuous servant who marries a well-born landowner, and tells that story in a way that was unique at the time. What was original about *Pamela* was that the events recounted had to be understood in two different ways at once, on a narrative plane and on an authorial plane. That is, the reader is forced to take the story as autonomously “real,” in the sense that we understand Pamela’s world as operating by the laws that obtain in our own world and therefore independent of our desires about her; and as “constructed” in that we understand the novel in terms of Richardson’s creative intention, forming expectations and desires respecting the protagonist that shape our sense of the whole. For Rader the crucial moment is the construction of a form that operates on both levels—autonomous narrative and authorial construct—at once. Once that had been done, others could imitate the achievement, bring to it new sorts of meaning and structure.3

These preferences over what counts as an acceptable explanation of the origin of a genre have further consequences. Rader is not deeply concerned with the predecessors to Richardson’s formal achievement, as they belong to strands of literary history that did not initiate world-historical change;4 and in a similar way, Michael McKeon loses much of his interest in the history of the novel once the genre has gotten fully started, as though its embryology rather than its history were of primary concern.5

Well, which of them is right? Is the origin of the English novel to be found in its predisposing or its precipitating causes? Clearly both—and neither. Surely each answer is only one element of what would be a totally
satisfying solution, and rationally, we ought to reject the either/or quality of the question. But while we can reject the disjunction as undesirable, it is harder to come up with a method of historical research that does not enforce it. As Johnson's Imlac cautioned Rasselas, one cannot at the same time fill one's cup from the mouth and the source of the Nile. And the systematic study that provides us with a sense of all that was crucially necessary to produce an artifact will never tell us about the moment of invention that went beyond the necessary to the sufficient. When the focus is upon the individual genius engaged in constructing something new out of materials that are available to hand, we see the foreground with clarity, but the background—including how those materials came to be available to hand—recedes into a blur. Conversely, when it is the ground that occupies our attention, we must take the figure for granted. Indeed those who investigate the background may even assume that the foregrounded individual's contribution is ultimately not very important. In areas like technological invention parallel work is so common that most of us accept that, if Edison had not invented the lightbulb in October 1879, someone else would have done so a few months or years later, that we would be lighting our homes and offices in similar ways, though without paying our bills to Consolidated Edison. But in any case, as with the cognitive psychologists' pictures that require us to focus on either figure or ground and that show two different faces depending upon which we choose, we cannot focus upon both at once. Histories, including literary histories, are thus necessarily unsatisfying: the more satisfying the explanation with a particular range of focus, the more visible are the defects of its virtues.

The Widening Circle

In the first place, texts are formed by the very forms they inhabit. The tyrannies of genre are obvious enough: a sonnet demands fourteen lines, not thirteen or fifteen, and a tragedy demands a sympathetic protagonist progressing toward a doom. But even if we think of texts as divorced from generic considerations, as completely sui generis, beginnings make demands upon endings. Raymond Chandler, who was certainly in sufficient resistance to the tyranny of the genteel generic conventions of the English mystery story, also found himself in a different sort of trouble of his own making in his own resplendent novels, a prisoner of story elements that, having been introduced, insisted upon being developed and complicated, completed before they
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could be closed off. As he put it to James Sandoe, "With me a plot, if you could call it that, is an organic thing. It grows and often it overgrows. I am continually finding myself with scenes that I won't discard and that don't want to fit in. So that my plot problem invariably winds up as a desperate attempt to justify a lot of material that, for me at least, has come alive and insists on staying alive" (129–30). With Chandler's desire to choke off a text that refuses to let itself be finished we get a strong sense of the text as having an intentionality that transcends the human intentions of the author.

At one remove from the text is the writer as the efficient cause of the texts she or he writes. Thus the popularity of literary biography, which, despite the proclamation of the "death of the author" from the devotees of Barthes and Foucault, continues to dominate literary criticism and to receive the lion's share of grants from major foundations. The historiographical implication of literary biography is the romantic supposition that writers express some inner substance into the text. But whatever is within was once outside.

At one remove beyond the writer is the literary scene: the other texts to which writers respond, which constitute a backdrop against which their originality plays. Today Anne Tyler writes (at least in part) in response to Joyce Carol Oates. It is well known that Thackeray situated himself against Dickens. And in the Gothic heyday Matthew G. Lewis wrote The Monk in response to Mrs. Radcliffe, and, to repay the compliment, Radcliffe wrote The Italian partly in response to The Monk (Conger, "Sensibility Restored"). But it would be making a mistake to assume that writers situate themselves exclusively against their contemporaries. A writer's literary scene is partly made up of the texts of that day, partly of the canon of "required reading" against which all texts are measured. Furthermore, within that literary scene are other vaguer outposts that combine to give a sense of the aesthetic ideology of the day: what novels and other imaginative texts were supposed to aim at or avoid. All these things are not "efficient" causes, but they predispose the writer to write one way rather than another, to make certain sorts of choices rather than others. And beyond the literary scene is the artist's society as a whole.

Society is an enabling cause of the text in several senses at once. (1) Any mimetic work reproduces in some sense the world outside, in the sense that it must be what that age would consider a possible world, and even works of fantastic fiction, containing impossibilities, must reproduce at least that age's vision of how agents of a certain age, class, gender, living at a certain time, behaved to others so specified. What ghosts do when they haunt you
depends on when they do it. There are norms in each age for what ghastly behavior entails, and while authors are always free to violate such norms, they do so at the risk of being misunderstood. Historical fictions are created by the notions of history current in a particular era, and they are notmistakable for those of some other age: Scott's medieval bumpkins are creatures of a Romantic imagination and not to be confused with the peasants that might be created by a late twentieth-century novelist. (2) More vaguely, any texts will incorporate some subset of beliefs and values possible for that age, including the question of which things were thought to be solvable and decidable, and which others were thought of as endlessly problematic.

These vaguely cultural norms are produced at least partly by the material conditions of the age. Again this is true in several senses: technological changes make certain artistic forms possible that had been impossible before, and the different forms of the circulation of texts (as well as their creation) are a function of the culture as well. Movies are circulated not merely in movie theaters and film societies but are shown on television and sold or rented for home viewing by videocassette stores. One of the appeals of the Gothic novel was its availability in the early nineteenth-century equivalent of the videocassette store: the circulating library. Rental libraries had come into being in the eighteenth century, but the vogue of the Gothic created a new wrinkle in circulation. William Lane, proprietor of the Minerva Press, pioneered the franchising of libraries circulating its own product—to which consumers early in the nineteenth century had become "addicted"—for tradesmen seeking comparable profits in the provinces.

Genre vs. Mode in Literary History

The various causes that operate upon a given literary text are thus at a variety of degrees of remove from the text itself, and selecting one level of causation as the focus of one's discourse tends to remove the others to a position in the background. The result is that Marxist, formalist, and reception theories are going to produce different sorts of histories, with somewhat different focal lengths. Marxist history tends to resemble the product of a camera's widest-angle lens; detail gets lost in the general sweep, and the factors tend to be long range and very general. Reception history tends to focus on the literary scene (while admitting larger-scale factors). It can get down to the individual-influence study (Radeliffe's reception of Lewis) but operates in its most characteristic way when considering the influence of audiences on
the circulation and therefore the production of texts. Formalist studies tend to focus on the individual texts and their attempts to solve general problems, to struggle with materials and techniques within the general zeitgeist. Focus is definitely on the individual author, although collective issues can be raised, and are definitely raised when the question of genre conventions is brought in.

But all three forms of historical explanation will tend to converge, as they have done in this essay. My third, fourth, and fifth chapters, written from three different theoretical perspectives, nevertheless all present histories that follow the story that precedes all histories, which has similar starting and ending points and focuses on similar historical tropes (particularly those of evasion and betrayal).

One question is whether this convergence continues indefinitely as one continues on in time, and here we can definitively say that it does not. For each of these ways of looking at the history of the genre, the Gothic expires as a literary movement around 1825. For the neo-Marxist, the explanation is complete with the gravamen of their explanations—with the response to the Old Regime in the novels of Walpole, Radcliffe, Lewis, and Maturin. For reception theory, the interesting issues in the Gothic conclude around the same time, with Frankenstein and Melmoth, or rather with the change in the attitude to Radcliffe that occurs around the time the Romantic sensibility, Jauss's aisthesis, becomes a typical response to these fictions. For the formalists, there are interesting issues concerning the Gothic aftermath, particularly the reasons why the Brontë sisters were able to solve aesthetic problems that the core texts of the Gothic had found insoluble. And as I have argued in chapter 6, the "gothic" works that follow the "gothic"—even what I have called the neo-Gothic of the 1890s—turn out to be very different in scope and find themselves solving very different problems. Furthermore, late Gothic works are often "gothic" in very different senses: Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! is not Gothic in the same way as Dinesen's Seven Gothic Tales, and neither of these is Gothic in ways similar to Stephen King's The Shining.

My point is that, after 1825 or so, one begins to use the term gothic modally, which is to say, metaphorically. But metaphor means "change of place," and precisely which aspect of the Gothic it is that gets transferred—the original Gothic of 1764–1825—cannot be predicted in advance of the critical observation. It may be character or plot, it may be the formal affect (terror or horror), it may be scene and atmosphere, it may be merely an operatic use of language and dialogue—or some unpredictable combination of
these. Histories like David Punter's *Literature of Terror* ultimately find themselves grasping at desperate resemblances between the texts they want to discuss and the themes and structures they find in the core texts of the Gothic. This is not to deny that the resemblances will not always be there, because even postmoderns are still post-Romantics, and the Gothic—as the chief fictional form Romanticism took—became pervasive in fiction. The fact is that, by the middle of the twentieth century, just as there were few modes of popular or genre fiction that did not originate, one way or another, in the Gothic of the pre-1825 period, there are few important or rich texts that aspire to canonical status that might not be thought of as embodying one or another aspects of the Gothic. Once we think of the Gothic as a mode rather than a genre, the history of the Gothic becomes nearly coterminous with the history of literature as a whole.

The other question I raised in my introductory chapter was whether these three explanations constitute a braided strand that defines the single master narrative providing something like the whole truth. I think I have created a master narrative of a sort, but surely not the master narrative. While the historical narratives using Chicago formalism, phenomenological reception theory, and Marx via Williams and Macherey seem to fit together well—each taking up the story where the other leaves off—any number of critical systems (including those not yet invented) could surely generate historical narratives that could be set into a mutually reinforcing dialogue with one another. To do this properly, they would need to focus on complementary loci of causality: on predisposing as well as precipitating causes, on the necessary as well as the sufficient, on ends as well as middles and beginnings. The explanation I have created used the tools I had at hand, made available by my personal history, but other explorers will have different toolboxes. I cannot help imagining other master narratives crafted by different minds, though I cannot know yet what they will tell me, what other questions they will surprise me with, or how they will answer them.

**Problematics of Period and Genre, or Lumpers vs. Splitters**

Another issue that leads us to an impasse in any consideration of literary history has to do with the status of universals—in this case the universals of period terms and isms (the Renaissance, the Augustan Age, Romanticism, modernism, and so forth) and genres (the novel, the Gothic). The debate between those who essentially accept (with reservations, however serious)
and those who essentially reject (however reluctantly) the use of period and
genre universals goes back to the medieval scholastic debate between the real­
alists and the nominalists, and even further, to the disagreements between
the Platonists and Aristotelians in antiquity.

In a topic so old, most of the essential maneuvers have already been made
many times. As far back as 1924, A. O. Lovejoy was preaching that Ro­
manticism was not one but many, that one can speak usefully only of
Romanticisms, "heterogeneous, logically independent, and sometimes es­
centially antithetical to one another" (232). To this René Wellek had re­
plied that, in splitting Romanticism into sets of warring elements, Lovejoy
had deprived it of its historical utility. Wellek did not have the same sense
Lovejoy had of the internal contradictions within Romanticism, of course.
He claimed "a profound coherence and mutual implication between the ro­
mantic views of nature, imagination and symbol” and a “view of the world”
that was “all-pervasive in Europe” (Concepts of Criticism 197). But his dis­
agreement with Lovejoy went deeper than facts to principles of explanation.
Wellek rejected out of hand the nominalist assumption that history is “a dis­
continuous, meaningless flux,” arguing that without universal norms of
some sort to which individual texts of a period can be compared, there will
not only be no historical knowledge worth having but an impoverished lit­
erary criticism as well:

One meets . . . with the objection that there is no history of literature, but only of
men writing. According to the same argument we should have to give up writing a
history of language, as there are only men uttering words, and a history of philoso­
phy, since there are only men thinking. Such extreme “personalism” must lead to
anarchy, to a complete isolation of every individual work of art which in practice
would mean that it would be both incommunicable and incomprehensible. (“Pe­
riods and Movements” 84)

At the moment, one of the most interesting proponents of Lovejoy’s ver­
sion of nominalism is Eric Rothstein, whose article “Diversity and Change
in Literary Histories” argues forcefully against the utility of historical uni­
versals. For Rothstein people are dependably real (readers as well as authors)
and texts too are real enough, despite postmodern problematizing of the self
and the word. He also conceives it possible for an author to read text A and
have this register on text B, which he produces. But universals—periods and
genres—have real existence only in the sense that, as chimeras believed in
by authors, they may have an influence on the way writers write. For the
historian to place any credence in them is not merely futile but intellectually cowardly, a way of suppressing "differences, using entities whose raison d'être is to normalize and reduce multiplicity."9

I happen to share Rothstein's resistance to what he calls the "platonic" notion of genre—an entity that is definitive, in a sense more real than the individual texts of which it is composed. I too am a little frightened by critics who think they are privy to essences and occult substances like the Spirit of the Age—the Renaissance World-Picture, and things of that sort. Our own age, after all, has no such univocal spirit, is made up of multiple voices in dialogue and debate with one another, without any hegemonic vision of the sort that Ira Wade or E. M. W. Tillyard found, respectively, in the worlds of Voltaire and Shakespeare. It isn't easy to see why those ages should have possessed what ours surely has not, and it is easier to presume that the fit has been forced by the old procrustean method of ignoring or distorting whatever isn't conformable.

Rothstein envisions the primary practitioners of essentialism as the sauropodean segment of the professoriat, despondent, fearful of new developments in literary studies. He characterizes them as being in desperate search for a comfortable place to rest their cerebral cortices, for an illusory sense of firm control over the complicated past. If the Enlightenment is the "age of reason," we can assimilate all texts to that unitary idea, ignoring and distorting the passion and the madness that don't fit in. As Rothstein argues, historians who "like history only when they can lump it" are motivated by a species of bad faith: "Such simple tales appeal to a wish that, deep down, order exists, and that the discomfiting confusion of the past need not permanently disturb us, overburdened and unsure of rapport with that which we study" (133).

But of course this brand of essentialization is rife in many other segments of academe as well. As Nina Baym has rightly complained, the idealized characterization of the Great Tradition of the American novel as Man against Nature on the Frontier, which came in after World War II, reshaped American literary history so as to exclude all the many talented American women who wrote through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.10 Baym sees this distortion charitably, as stemming from a patriotic motive and only incidentally misogynistic: an attempt to define American literature in terms of what was most characteristically American instead of which literary texts written by Americans were the best.

Today much of the essentializing is done with precisely the same motive, mutatis mutandis, by rather than against marginalized groups. About The
Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, edited by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Gail Godwin complained that the selection was biased by political motives in an effort to make the texts by the best and most “representative” women authors as explicitly feminist as possible. Henry Louis Gates, editor of the Norton Anthology of Afro-American Literature, argues that what is most characteristically African American about African American literature involves oral motifs (songs, blues, riffs, signifying, doing the dozens) going back to African roots. Whatever value there is in this argument, it surely implicitly lowers the value of texts by African Americans whose literary style was more assimilationist. Houston Baker’s “Generational Shifts and the Recent Criticism of Afro-American Literature” argues that anthologists of African American literature from the 1920s on have premised their collections on different, but equally exclusive, essentialistic criteria. Similarly, Louis Owens has attempted—fortunately without much success—to define normatively what the Native American novel should be about in terms of necessary themes, mode of narrative technique, and values (see Weidman). In general, wherever identity politics has become a significant motive in literary study we find similar versions of Platonic essentialism in the definition, not of periods or genres but of national or minority traditions.

But Rothstein claims to be equally frightened of what he calls the “Aristotelian brand” of universals, which he equates roughly with René Wellek’s notion of a period as “a time-section dominated by a set of [empirically discovered] literary norms... whose introduction, spread, diversification, integration, decay, and disappearance can be traced” (Wellek, “Periodization,” qtd. in Rothstein 134). Rothstein is worried that this sort of universal “relies on the shaky hunch that one set of norms need dominate or that dominant norms need form a set or, in fact, that norms retain a traceable identity” (134).

Parts of this indictment are more worrisome than others. It is indeed fatally easy, as Rothstein suggests, to overstate the dominance of any set of norms, particularly those that are used to define a period rather than a genre. Wellek’s insistence that Romanticism constituted a “view of the world” that was “all-pervasive in Europe” seems more Platonic than Aristotelian. (One thinks of Woody Allen’s line—playing a medieval jester—that “soon it will be the Renaissance and we’ll all be painting.”) What we have agreed to call the Romantic era had more than its share of anti-Romantics: for every Wordsworth there was a Crabbe, for every Shelley a Peacock. The naming is a shorthand, indicating a prominent feature of the landscape, like calling the latter half of the seventeenth century the “era of Louis XIV.” It
could as easily be called the era of successful opposition to Louis XIV—or, bypassing politics altogether, the era of Newton.

Statistically, no set of norms ever takes over to the point of dominance that would allow it to form a government in Great Britain or pass legislation in America. That there was a vogue of the Gothic novel seems hardly in doubt, but even at its height, perhaps 40 percent of the novels published in England were centrally or marginally assimilable to one or another of the various forms of the Gothic novel—which means that at least 60 percent were not.

Similarly, as Brian Corman has amply documented, no single model can account for the variety of comic drama created in the fifty years following the Restoration. Any univocal sense we may think we possess of Restoration comedy has been produced by ruthless oversimplification. But as Corman also shows, the variety of mixed forms that dominates comedy after the Restoration also shifts its mix markedly over the half-century, leaving English comedy under Anne a very different institution from what grew up under Charles. To prove this requires a conceptual Same against which the Different can appear, and Corman needed to begin with a crude sense of both comedy and of the Restoration in order to bring out those complications that are needed to make the best sense of both the genre and the period. Unlike the Platonistic notion of genre, the Aristotelian notion is one of institutional forms that change over time.

In arguing that norms don't necessarily "form a set" (whatever that might mean), Rothstein is probably rejecting the sort of claim Wellek makes that there was "a profound coherence and mutual implication between the romantic views of nature, imagination and symbol" ("Concepts of Criticism" 197), or, in terms of genre, against Eve Sedgwick's notion that the various Gothic conventions are all versions of one vague superconvention. But these ways of thinking are profoundly Platonistic rather than Aristotelian: they presume a dialectic in which each of the lower levels of being reflects and reduplicates the higher levels, as body does spirit or matter idea. An Aristotelian would argue that norms always do form a set, but as an aggregate rather than a totality. We need all the rules of the game to play that game, but if the rules were different (if kings in chess could jump three squares in any direction, say), we would be playing a different game (not chess any more but something else).

I have been defending an Aristotelian view of genre and period, but to do so one has to examine the anti-Platonic alternative: what an extreme nominalism would entail not just in theoretical but in operational terms.
Rothstein seems, at least at the outset, to argue in that way: he opens by suggesting that we might substitute for genre and period universals a sort of intertextual network. Each individual author and text is seen in terms of its multiple intertextual affiliations, which branch out something like the neuronal net of the brain, in which each of our billions of neurons forms hundreds or thousands of synapses (connections) with others. The attraction of this is to avoid privileging one bit of data over another, making some world-historical texts into primary subjects for history while demeaning others into mere background. It is clean and tidy—and utterly futile.

The problem is that (as Wellek pointed out in one of his less Platonistic moods) without universals of some sort we have no historical knowledge worth having. History may not be true in the "lump" but it may not be meaningful when split into microscopic particles either. Rejecting everything save a concatenated network of individual influences would provide a large set of tiny knowledge–fragments—so large a set, in fact, that it would be unknowable save by the mind of God. Any group of $n$ texts generates $n!$ permutations of influences of the earlier on the later. Thus the interactions and mutual influences of (say) the 200 Gothic novels Ann Tracy located—a small fraction of what was published in the 1760-1825 period—would generate 200! such interactions. This is a number somewhat larger than a one with four hundred zeros after it, or considerably more than the number of subatomic particles in the universe.

Thus any atomism of this sort would be thoroughly hopeless at providing meaningful historical information. The only thing that could save it are the universals that Rothstein had wanted to reject in the first instance, universals that take an overwhelmingly numerous set of possible relationships (n-factorial connections for $n$ terms) and group things together tentatively, at least, as a way of cutting through the statistical jungle.

So in addition to the "individuals" (texts and authors) Rothstein envisions "strands," each representing "at least one hypothetical population to which a given individual might belong." Meanwhile "strands" and "populations" are "defined in terms of a core of acknowledged members, often with more dubious members around these" (136). And indeed, once Rothstein gets beyond the reality of "people and texts" as objects of historical knowledge and has progressed to acknowledge the reality of "populations . . . with some assured members and some dubious ones" (137–38), he has reached out to objects of knowledge delimited by normative universals, whether he likes that or not, and his "ideal model" of historical scholarship goes a great deal deeper into the realm of "the Aristotelian brand" of universal:
One might codify a number of actual works into a set to achieve a sensitive enough instrument to calibrate a conceptual space. . . . When, for example, two novels of the 1840s, two of the 1860s, and two of the 1880s are used to chart changes over those years, the novels chosen must be convertible into types (or tokens of hypothetical types), and what then happens to their inconvenient, idiosyncratic parts? A safer course would be to make the hypothetical types, the ideal models, explicit, and to show how the two novels of each decade resemble and differ from the rationalized form exhibited in these models. Procrustes and his cutter would weep, but that is quite all right. (139)

Using individual texts to calibrate a conceptual space is the right idea, but one has to be skeptical about the notion that literary history is always going to move by decades, or any other grouping of years dividing evenly into five or ten, and somewhat more skeptical about the idea that two novels of the 1860s can represent the period. Are we going to choose Mrs. Oliphant's Miss Marjoribanks or Mrs. Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret, Trollope's Can You Forgive Her? or Le Fanu's Uncle Silas? And what sort of "model" can be assimilated to all four of these novels? Rothstein does not go into details, but if he were to produce them, Procrustes and his cutter might instead have Mona Lisa smiles on their faces. Two novels chosen as a sample of a decade may sound more objective than a genre delimited by norms, but without a prior theory ordering it, any such procedure must be a stab in the dark. What the literary historian needs more than a model or a procedure of any sort is a set of intuitions already trained by experience in recognizing what is and what is not typical, and two ideational faculties, one for generalizing and one for throwing generalizations out the window when they aren't ratified by experiences broader than those that produced them.

One can sympathize with Rothstein's sense that the worst thing a literary historian can do is to force texts into the procrustean bed of genre and period categories. But despite the opposing ways in which they are presented, there may not be much in the way of operational difference between what Rothstein rejects as "the Aristotelian brand" of procrusteanism and the brand he winds up advocating. Tragedy, in Aristotle's Poetics, is a genre that functions precisely like what Rothstein calls a core population, a set of texts with a family resemblance generated by different authors within a time frame, and what Aristotle thinks he knows about them is not deduced from foreknown general principles of aesthetics but is rather inferred from common features in the texts and their reception. Whenever such "norms" of the population are "empirically discovered," that is, not defined into exist-
ence but inferred from (for example) features of earlier works that were most persistently imitated by later ones, those norms constitute a hypothesis about the population, a hypothesis that can be interrogated in terms of earlier, later, and non-core works, a hypothesis that could be rejected, modified, or (tentatively, until a better one came along) accepted. This is all Aristotle's method really entails, rightly understood, though it is not easy to understand him rightly, and more tempting to read him in calcified form as he has been throughout the last five centuries through the distorting lens of Platonic dialectic.

Foucault, New Historicism, Historical Futilitarianism

But what makes Rothstein's version of nominalism a cause worth pursuing—in however strange a manner—is the resurgence of a different form of nominalism bearing a postmodern battle dress in the form of the new historicism. The principal spokesperson for the new historicism, Stephen Greenblatt, continually insists that new historicism is not a theory or a set of doctrines but a practice (“Toward a Poetics of Culture” 1), but of course it is a practice based on a theory or a set of theories. H. Aram Veeser identifies the following “key assumptions” that “continually reappear and bind together the avowed practitioners” of new historicism:

1. That every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices;
2. that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
3. that literary and non-literary “texts” circulate inseparably;
4. that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses unalterable human nature;
5. . . . that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe. (xi)

The fascinating thing about this list is that it engages the past without any actual appeal to the methods of history. Perhaps this will be less surprising when we recall that the principal philosophical doctrine of this program is that of Michel Foucault. There is a sense in which Ian Hacking is right to call Foucault a proponent of “an extreme nominalism” (39), referring to Foucault's sense that there are not only no ideas governing reality, but we
cannot know the reality of the past as such, only representations purporting to map the real, nor is there a unitary self doing this mapping, only a subject constituted by society as an effect of its repressive social and economic structures. Foucault views history not only as a mode of knowledge that is obsolescent, tied to the modern épistême that he feels is on its way out, but as itself as one of those methods of repression. For Foucault, history embodies the various . . . aspects of the will to knowledge [vouloir-savoir]: instinct, passion, the inquisitor's devotion, cruel subtlety, and malice. It discovers the violence of a position that sides with those who are happy in their ignorance, against the effective illusions by which humanity protects itself, a position that encourages the dangers of research and delights in disturbing discoveries. The historical analysis of the rancorous will to knowledge reveals that all knowledge rests upon injustice (that there is no right, not even in the act of knowing, to truth or a foundation for truth) and that the instinct for knowledge is malicious. ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 162-63)

For obsolescent history, Foucault wishes to substitute "genealogy" in Nietzsche's sense of a study of "emergences" that "rejects the metaphistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies," that "opposes itself to the search for 'origins'" (140).

Yet although Hacking calls Foucault a nominalist, no Platonist could be more rigidly totalizing in his periodization than Foucault is in Les mots et les choses. As Clifford Geertz has put it, Foucault sees European history crosscut by three great fault lines . . . traversed by mere chronology . . . . In the first period, that of Paracelsus and Campanella, things are related to one another by intrinsic sympathies and antipathies . . . that God has stamped onto their faces for all to read. In the second, that of Linnaeus and Condillac, things are related to one another through the use of types and taxonomies—species and genera, speech parts and grammars—directly given in the presented arrangement of nature. [After the second coupure, in the third period] things are related to one another narratively—seen as foreshadowings and outcomes, causes and consequences. "History" rather than "similitude" or "order" becomes the master category of experience, understanding and representation. [And the gap between the third period and the fourth] which we are right now trying to find some way to live through, marks the beginning of the end of this temporized consciousness and its replacement by some new strange form of existence not yet completely in view. (4)
The four epochs into which Foucault divides Western history, normally called the Renaissance, the Age of Reason, the modern age, and the postmodern future, are each separated by a *coupure*, or rupture, forcing a complete break with the mode of thought of the past. These epochs are viewed as entirely discontinuous, each integrated by an *épistème*, a mode of power/knowledge with its own discursive practices, methods of expression that are also methods of oppression.

The rapidity with which Foucault’s notion of historical change was accepted in great parts of the academic community is symptomatic of the way in which our ideas of change, historical and otherwise, themselves change historically. It is interesting to note a parallel shift in the scientific community. As recently as the 1960s there was general acceptance of a version of Charles Darwin’s original idea of evolution: slow but continuous and progressive change in organic life forms arising out of natural selection and the struggle for existence and reproduction. Today there has been a growing shift toward the notion (argued by, among others, Stephen Jay Gould) of biological *coupures*: times of rapid catastrophic change, with worldwide replacement of one set of dominant species by another set, events precipitated by a random, climate-altering occurrence, punctuating long periods of relative stasis. The scale of the catastrophe would be rather different—biological *coupures* would go on for hundreds and thousands of years—but the shape of change, stasis, and catastrophe, is strikingly similar.

In any event, Foucault’s version of the genealogy of ideas involves linking up discursive practices with one another—often through similitudes and *catachreses*—“in order to establish those diverse converging, and sometimes divergent, but never autonomous series that enable us to circumscribe the ‘locus’ of an event, the limits to its fluidity and the conditions of its emergence.”

Within each of Foucault’s genealogies—his stories of the emergence of new methods of punishment, new modes of treatment for mental illness, new attitudes toward the body and sexuality—his treatment of change is more or less coherent. The self-contradiction only appears when one places the various genealogies against one another. Then it becomes evident that changes in each of the discursive formations occur within a *coupure*, a fissure between *épistèmes*, but that all the changes do not occur at or even around the same time, the posited moment of the rupture between separate *épistèmes*.

The beginning of the regulation of the lives of imprisoned criminals by
timetables and rules, for example, starts about a century after you would expect it should, given Foucault’s general vision of the Enlightenment with its fascination with types and taxonomies. Geertz complains that “the strata of the various ‘sites’ he has so far ‘excavated’—insanity, medical perception, linguistics, biology, economics, punishment, and . . . sex—are, like those of ‘real’ archaeology . . . only approximately coordinated with one another in time” (4). Foucault does not attempt to disguise this fact. As he says in The Archaeology of Knowledge, “We must not imagine that rupture is a sort of great drift that carries with it all discursive formations at once. . . . The idea of a single break suddenly, at a given moment, dividing all discursive formations, interrupting them in a single moment and reconstituting them in accordance with the same rules—such an idea cannot be sustained. The contemporaneity of several transformations does not mean their exact chronological coincidence: each transformation may have its own particular index of temporal ‘viscosity’” (175). But if discursive formations may linger for more than a century because of their “temporal viscosity,” the notion of an épistémé as a coherent historical formation begins to seem empty.

The other issue that needs to be made clear is the basic break Foucault has made on causality: the aim of both his archaeologies and his genealogies is not to lay bare the nexus of conditionality and contingency, of what was necessary and what sufficient for one state of affairs to transmute itself into another. As he says,

The old question of the traditional analysis (What link should be made between disparate events? How can a causal succession be established between them? What continuity or overall significance do they possess? Is it possible to define a totality, or must one be content with reconstitution of connexions?) are now being replaced by questions of another type: which strata should be isolated from others? What types of series should be established? What system of relations . . . may be established between them? What series of series may be established? And in what large-scale chronological table may distinct series of events be determined? (Archaeology of Knowledge 3–4)

Like Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt explicitly rejects the notion of causality as the principal focus of his genealogical investigations. In the course of relating Shakespeare’s theatrical representations of women who dress up as boys (like Viola in Twelfth Night) to a story of cross-dressing by Marin le Marcis in Montaigne’s Travel Journal, to Jacques Duval’s story of a woman
married to a hermaphrodite (De Hermaphroditis [1603]), and to Galen’s and Paré’s various misconceptions about the male and female sexual organs, Greenblatt hastens to assure us that he realizes that it was unlikely that Shakespeare had studied Galen and Paré, and almost inconceivable that he had heard about the cases of cross-dressing and hermaphroditism mentioned by Montaigne and Duval. These are not sources or even intertexts. “The relation I wish to establish between medical and theatrical practice is not one of cause and effect or source and literary realization. We are dealing rather with a shared code, a set of interlocking tropes and similitudes that function not only as the objects but as the conditions of the representation” (“Shakespearean Negotiations” 86).

There is nothing intellectually dishonest at all about what Greenblatt is doing in this chapter—though I have to say that he appears to be more comfortable or less defensive when the cultural text against which he reads Shakespeare is, like Samuel Harsnett’s Declaration of Egregious Popish Impositions, a book Shakespeare is likely to have read, or like William Strachey’s account of storm and shipwreck near Bermuda, a text Shakespeare probably saw in manuscript. In a sense, there is in many ways nothing very new about it either. Since the beginnings of modern philological studies a century ago, literary scholars have been pursuing analogues of important literary texts to supplement whatever direct sources and influences might be found. What may be confusing may reside primarily in the fact that the name that has stuck to this sort of research—the new historicism—is a grotesque misnomer, given that it is neither new nor a historicism but is based instead on an explicit repudiation of the basic foundations of historical knowledge.29

The new historicism has made the strongest showing in Renaissance studies and in approaches to what we still call the Romantic period. Part of this may stem from the influence of two of its most prestigious practitioners, Stephen Greenblatt and Jerome McGann, who have each organized what amounts to a cottage industry in their respective fields. But a more important reason may be that so many of the masterworks of literature of these periods, such as the plays of Shakespeare and the odes of Keats, have been considered sub specie aeteminitatis. It has come late to eighteenth–century studies for the converse reason: the major works of the 1660–1800 period, from “Mac Flecknoe” through “The Rape of the Lock” to “The Deserted Village,” have always needed to be read as social, indeed topical, texts and have never been abstracted from history.

The first new historical attempt to approach the Gothic via Foucault’s
genealogical principles appears in Robert Miles's very recent *Gothic Writing, 1750–1820: A Genealogy*. For Miles the Gothic is not "romance" but "writing"; it names not a genre but a "discursive site . . . for representations of the fragmented subject" where competing ways of talking about the self and the other, nature and culture, sexuality and parenthood, contend for mastery (4). Thanks to this vast but vague thematics, Gothic writing—as opposed to the mere Gothic novel—embraces a large set of the discursive practices that bridge the age of sensibility and that of Romanticism. Drawing a line about the Gothic would be an arbitrary procedure. Miles reads various texts of the period—primarily fiction, criticism, and philosophy—to search out connecting threads of intertextuality, except that in Miles's thematics the art is not one of finding similarities but of demonstrating equivalent confusions and evasions within parallel texts, mediating a semantic breakdown, a rhetoric of difference, during a period in which Foucault had located a major coupure.

In the process Miles reads both canonical and dimly remembered texts in ways that enhance our sense of the "gaps" and incoherences that made for tension within the popular writing of the late eighteenth century. But afterward, one feels unmoored, as far as ever from a sense of the Gothic's place within history. The difficulty may in part stem from the structure of the book, which moves from cloudy theoretical overview into the dense thickets of intertextual reading. But it must also derive from the genealogical method of Foucault itself, which rejects teleology outright and the sense of shape, order, and hierarchy that comes only with causality. Indeed, there is something deeply unsatisfying, willfully blind, in Foucault's very notion of historical change, a vision of epistemic ruptures that drive our discursive practices from one sitting of power/knowledge to another, but that come whenever they come, ineffable and uncaused, apparently random movements, as earthquakes might seem had we no science of tectonics to explicate the slow inexorable convections of brute matter churning beneath the almost instantaneous disasters on the surface.

To say this is by no means to deny that what Robert Miles, Stephen Greenblatt, and the legion of other new historicists have been producing—namely, cultural studies of literature in its synchronic relationship to other discursive and nondiscursive cultural practices—have genuine value. Even if one's interest is exclusively in literary texts as aesthetic objects, cultural studies provide deep background, background one can only derive from immersing oneself in the distant period, absorbing from matters relevant and
apparently irrelevant an intuitive sense of its texture of life. Unless one believes, with Foucault, that history—and indeed all narrative generally—embodies an obsolescent mode of thought doomed to disappear with the modern épistème, there is no reason cultural studies should not coexist in a large world of scholarly practices with literary histories in all their various sorts. But they shouldn’t be confused with literary history either.30

Historical Pluralism

My final answer to the question posed by David Perkins, “Is literary history possible?” is that it is possible, necessary, but that any particular history is always going to draw complaints, no matter how complete it may attempt to be, because there is no way for any single coherent history to operate on the various focal lengths needed to answer the very different sorts of questions readers are going to raise. Chicago critics think primarily in terms of the development of institutional forms, Marxists in terms of the influence of material conditions upon texts as productions of ideology, while reception theorists think in terms of the phenomenological act of reading and changes in the horizon of expectations. Every history, no matter how complete in its own terms, will inevitably seem part of the story; none will be the whole story. I deduce the need for histories written from different theoretical perspectives to complement one another and provide the vision otherwise lacking.

To some extent, as I have suggested in chapter 2, there is a sort of syncretic approach implicit in historical writing generally, a move within a critical school to find a way of accounting for causal forces more centrally in view from a different perspective. (Terry Eagleton’s differentiation of “aesthetic ideology” and “literary modes of production” as semiautonomous features of textual production might be seen as ways of enlarging his post-Althusserian Marxist perspective to cover issues more central to formalists and reception theorists.) Such syncretic moves co-opting the “opposition” make better sense in historical writing—where one is expected to tell the “whole story”—than in the critical interpretation of particular literary texts, where there is no presumption that the writer will be giving anything but a single partial view.

These moves would be less necessary and less uncomfortable, however, if we could agree on the necessity for a historical pluralism, something a bit
more structured than the relativistic notion that “I will tell my version of the story while you tell yours.” As I suggested in chapter 6, the three versions of literary historical narrative, though convergent, were not identical. The Althusserian Marxist version of the Gothic was in effect a story about origins, of how the ground was laid for a literary form by a perversely accurate vision of authority. The formalist version was essentially a story of how the Gothic novel continued; how and why it had become effectively entrapped within a literary form that spun ever more baroque and outlandish variations on a standard plot line, but perversely kept it from the full artistic achievement that (perversely) became possible in a later era. And the Jaussian analysis of the Gothic was by and large an explanation of the Gothic’s decline, of how it began by creating a series of appetites for visionary escape that it ultimately could not maintain. As a first hypothesis, it might be worth investigating whether Marxist explanations tend in fact to be better at dealing with origins than continuations and ends, given the systematic emphasis on predisposing causes, on the tidal forces of technology and political economy that underlie shifts in more dependent ideological formations like literature. Formalist explanations tend to begin their narratives later in time, with precipitating causes, with those necessary provocations, innovations that make possible (or choke off) further developments. The point is that each mode of historical narrative has a unique role to play, a role it can play well or badly, but can only with awkwardness extend beyond its means. To find different narrative systems appropriate for different tasks is not a mere relativism or syncretism but a genuine pluralism of sorts. I don’t know if what I suggest would qualify by James Battersby’s rather exclusive definition, but it might by Hayden White’s definition of historical pluralism as presupposing “either a number of equally plausible accounts of the historical past or, alternatively, a number of different but equally meaningful constructions of that indeterminate field of past occurrences which by definition we call ‘history’” (“Historical Pluralism” 484). It does not presume that history is some solid essence on which literary interpretation should be based, but rather that the choice of worldview one makes in choosing a poetics is inevitably implicated in the sort of historical narrative one is going to write.

Pluralism currently has been getting a pretty terrible press. An issue of Critical Inquiry incorporating the proceedings of a March 1984 conference titled “The Foundations of Critical Pluralism” was retitled “Pluralism and Its Discontents” by the editor, Tom Mitchell, when it became clear that
panelists were treating pluralism “as an object of critical scrutiny from the standpoint of assumptions which are hostile to pluralism” (“Introduction”). The arguments were not primarily epistemological—as in Stanley Fish’s suggestion that it is incoherent to claim to be able to stand outside one’s own system of beliefs, to find a neutral corner at which one can dispassionately evaluate ideas written from a different perspective than one’s own. The arguments were primarily political.

Of those writers, the most directly hostile is Ellen Rooney, who objects not to pluralism’s means but its goal: a dialogue of mutual understanding between adherents of rival theories. For Rooney what is wrong with pluralism is precisely that it excludes “the possibility of exclusion”; she instead “would explicitly and theoretically exclude some group, class, or school from her audience, in the sense that she would not seek to persuade them to the ‘truth’ of her view. The anti-pluralist marks exclusions and only thus escapes the problematic of general persuasion.” Rooney’s approach bears comparison with that of Stanley Fish. Fish presumes that “you will agree with me (that is, understand) only if you already agree with me”: those who already belong to the same interpretive community will automatically agree, and others who do not will automatically find that the interpretation fails to explain (“Interpreting the Variorum” 485). Rooney feels it important to exclude outsiders and explicitly limit her audience to the already convinced. The sociology of discourse she seems to value is that of the party meeting, to which only card-carrying members are invited, ones who never ask awkward questions or demand good reasons for what they are asked to believe.

Mitchell himself, in “Pluralism as Dogmatism,” argued that we need to recognize that “pluralism is an ideology as well as a dogmatism,” one that adopts a rhetorical strategy of “pure, unconscious appropriation of power,” taking “the moral high ground by designating itself as the philosophy uniquely devoted to liberal generosity and tolerance,” thus deluding us “into thinking that we occupy a position from which critical decisions can be made on the basis of pure, disinterested standards of value” (500). Bruce Erlich takes a related but more explicitly political view, more interesting in its implications, that pluralism not only is capitalist in ideology (using “the model of [Adam Smith’s] invisible hand using the self-advantage of each producer for the common good” but requires for its operation a “liberal” world of generosity and tolerance. Arguments among rival positions take place, Erlich insists, not merely in an abstract world of ideas, like Richard McKeon’s multidimensional vector space of methods, operations, principles,
and modes of thought, but in a world of social power. Erlich concludes that "pluralism lacks means to confront the influence of social power upon the encounter of voices. . . . Pluralism limits its own ability to define and to work for a utopia of free inquiry because [it] mistakes what society is and evades the authoritarianism denied in words but practiced in deeds by market societies and their apologists. . . . Rhetoricians only interpret the world, and that to control it; the point is to change it" (541, 543, 545).

What my ear detects in Rooney, Mitchell, and Erlich is a common sense, differently put with different degrees of intensity, that pluralism is the epistemology of political liberalism. Pluralism's instrumentalist view of discourse is one way of recuperating the pragmatic vision underlying liberalism and capitalism, particularly John Stuart Mill's notion that a free marketplace for ideas gives mankind the best chance of finding truth and avoiding error. But political liberalism was tainted in the 1980s by its association with neoconservatism, with Milton Friedman's monetarist economics and with William F. Buckley's brand of exclusionist politics. It is little wonder that Mitchell found pluralism under attack. It is hard to believe he found as many defenders—Wayne Booth, Nelson Goodman, Hayden White—as he did.

It would be naive to argue that methodological pluralism is ideologically neutral: we know that nothing is. But history moves on, and today, having moved past the infuriating dishonesty of the Reagan-Bush years at home and the doctrinaire obfuscations of the cold war abroad, it may be easier to view political liberalism and its discursive formations with less rancor. After the rejection by plebiscite, all over Eastern Europe, of socialist economic and social systems, it has become a little harder to think reflexively of Marxism as inevitably providing utopian solutions and easier to imagine liberalism as something people of goodwill would choose if it were available. In this sense the political attacks upon pluralism seem caught in the backwash of history.

My own personal commitments to the elements of the pluralistic historiography I have been defending could be equally seen as ideological, reflections of the odyssey of this subject through history. My attraction, unsteady and flickering though it is, to the Marxist literary historiography of chapter 3 is probably a peculiar expression of solidarity with the working class from which I sprang and for which I continue—despite long immersion in the academy—to retain some feeling. The formalism of chapter 4 reflects my long hermetic training at the University of Chicago under Elder Olson and Norman Maclean of the first generation of neo-Aristotelians and Sheldon Sacks and Wayne Booth of the second generation—even though ultimately
its view of history owes most to the ideas of Ralph Rader, who never studied there at all.\textsuperscript{35}

But as James Battersby has put it, the fact that everything is ideological shouldn't privilege ideological explanations any more than the fact that everything is geometrical should privilege geometrical explanations: "Every ideology permits—because it cannot exclude or preclude—many diverse, even conflicting formulations, expressions, and practices" (251). As a formalist by training, I could have made formalist literary history the master discourse, to be complemented as necessary by Marxist and reception histories. One can indeed write history this way, and as I pointed out in chapter 2, each mode of literary history has been making accommodations that would allow it to incorporate some of the insights of alternative modes without marking any break, or even any dangerous declaration that one's chosen mode of discourse is in need of a supplement. But as Walter Davis suggests, it is arbitrary to designate one mode of explanation as the "master" and the others as the "servants." (Another theorist of literary history could then choose another master.)\textsuperscript{36} To me it seemed that, looked at in practice, the three modes of historical explanation whose contribution to a history of the Gothic I have examined reinforce one another (overlap) in places and contradict one another (compete) in others. In addition there are topics on which one speaks and the rest are silent—issues that lie in the blind spots of the others' assumptions. They are differently focused but essentially complementary explanations, different stories trying to tell the same story. This dialogue between partially competing explanations is more interesting than any single explanation could be.\textsuperscript{37}

Nor does my own creation of a dialogue exhaust the possibilities, even for the limited event under scrutiny. I have to agree with Hayden White that "narrative accounts of real historical events . . . admit of as many equally plausible versions in their representation as there are plot structures available in the given culture for endowing stories . . . with meanings" ("Historical Pluralism" 489).

In the end, beyond or beneath ideology, pluralism is a pragmatic response to the limitations of the human mind that, understanding its limitations, builds different tools to accomplish different tasks. Man has no microscopic eye—but can build a microscope to view the smallest elements of matter. No telescopic eye—but can build telescopes to view the most distant luminaries of the universe. What we cannot build is a micro-telescope, a single instrument that can accomplish both tasks at once. The intellectual tools we build, including our critical theories and historical methods, can do what
they are constructed for, have their own ways of mapping the world, idiosyncratic areas of blindness and insight. We can see most clearly through a single lens, but it is at the cost of the wholeness of vision. To see more or from other angles we must be content to relinquish a monocular vision, to use different tools ourselves, or, what may be easier, to help each other see.