History: Text: Future

Michael Green

Summary

This article is an investigation into the historiographical concerns that inform any literary projection of the historical past and/or present into the future. Parts 1–3, then, survey the status of the future in the textualization of history, engaging with narrative versus nomological accounts of historiographical structures and moving towards the utopian element informing historical projection. Part 4 picks up the more specifically "literary" concerns to which a consideration of the utopian brings us, and prepares a critical strategy for dealing with the intersection of the historical and the literary in their use of the future. The project as it stands is meant to serve as a preparation for a later analysis of key South African literary works which operate within the "genre" (developed as a heuristic device) of "future histories".

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel ondersoek historiografiese aangeleenthede wat enige literêre projeksie van die historiese verlede en/of hede tot die toekoms belig. Deel 1–3 ondersoek die status van die toekoms in die tekstualisering van die geskiedenis – dit betrek verhalende versus nomologiese beskrywinge van historiografiese strukture en beweeg dan na die utopiese element wat historiese projeksie belig. Deel 4 ontwikkel die meer spesifieke "literêre" aangeleenthede waarna 'n oorweging van die utopiese ons lei, en berei 'n kritiese strategie voor om die raakpunte tussen die historiese en literêre gebruik van die toekoms te hanteer. Die huidige projek is bedoel om te dien as 'n voorbereiding vir 'n latere analise van sleutelwerke in die Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur, wat binne die "genre" (ontwikkel as 'n heuristiese middel) van "toekomstige geskiedenisse" opereer.

1

> . . . the future is a prologue to all history.
>
> (Bundy 1976: 2)

> We view the present trial as an interim affair. Somewhere in the future lies a date when black and white South Africans will take a second look at these moments of our history. They will evaluate afresh the events now in contention and our role in them. And since the privilege will belong to them, they will pass final judgement. We are convinced that theirs will be contrary to the present one. They will vindicate us.
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> Patrick "Terror" Lekota, Popo Molefe,
> Moss Chikane, joint statement in the
> "Delmas" treason trial.
> (*The Weekly Mail* 1988: 3)

In his study of the historical novel, Georg Lukács is adamant that the future has no serious place:

> What Marx said of legal institutions applies in wide measure to literary forms. They cannot stand higher than the society which brought them forth. Indeed, since they deal with the deepest human laws, problems and contradictions of an

> epoch they *should* not stand higher – in the sense, say of anticipating coming perspectives of development by romantic-Utopian projections of the future into the present. For the tendencies leading to the future are in fact more firmly and definitely contained in what really is than in the most beautiful Utopian dreams or projections.
>
> (Lukács 1981: 421)

Historiography proves just as unaccommodating when it comes to the future. Fredric Jameson joins a long line of those who deride "theories of history" on grounds, significantly enough, remarkably similar to those used by Lukács:

> The multiplication of theories of history strikes me . . . as the symptom of (a) . . . cultural illness: an attempt to outsmart the present, first of all, to think your way behind history to the point where even the present itself can be seen as a completed historical instant . . .; to name and label the moment you are standing in even before it reaches its ultimate consecration *sub specie aeternitatis* in the history books themselves.
>
> (Jameson 1971: 320)

And what inspires such manoeuvres? "Such a mode of thought", says Jameson, "springs from a profound horror of time and fear of change; it is a very different kind of mental operation from the Marxist sensitivity to the present as history, which welcomes and rejoices in an ever more intense existential awareness of the historicity of life".

"The present as history", of course, may well be taken as the theme of Lukács's *The Historical Novel*. Despite their vastly differing contexts[1], we may continue to shuttle between Lukács and Jameson on the conceptual lines that link them so firmly on this point. It is the nub of Lukács's denial of the historical novel's status as a special case within the genre of the novel: just as the past must be presented as the prehistory of the present (the task of the historical novel), so the present itself must be presented as history (the task of the novel form in general). The "social reason for creating the historical novel as a genre or sub-genre in its own right is . . . the separation of the present from the past, the abstract opposition of the one to the other" (Lukács 1981: 289). Although Jameson inverts the temporal terms of this equation, he makes much the same point when he writes: "the attempt to predict is but one of the symptoms of a failure to think in a situational way . . ." (Jameson 1971: 361).

Both literature and history, it seems then, address the future at some risk to their integrity. What then are we to make of the emergence of a group of texts intimately concerned with history which take the future seriously as their subject? That this bespeaks some kind of failure may well be true, but to the extent that this is so, it would seem to be a significant failure. For *future* histories stubbornly come forth, at significant points in particular literatures. These works seek to comment upon the past and present by projecting their implications forward in time. In this they reverse the standard techniques of historical fiction, but remain directly related to them. Attempts to give

meaning to the past involve, it seems, at crucial points, an implied or explicit appeal to the future. Hence the term "future histories"; it designates those fictional forms that invert past projection into future projection, whilst retaining a serious commitment to particular and specific historical conditions. The question is, as we have seen, whether this is a valid strategy, for literature or history. The answer turns on related issues for both. For the paradox of linking "future" and "history" in fictional terms unravels a little as the importance of the future for the logic of history writing in general, so implicit as to be all too often overlooked, is traced. In these traces, it is possible to plot the significance of the historiographical forms informing a variety of literary addresses to the future. This paper will concern itself largely with the first step of such an investigation (focusing on history and the future), but will also, towards its conclusion, begin to suggest the ways in which historiographical considerations are related and pertinent to literary ones.

2

> The true genesis is not at the beginning but at the end.
>
> Ernst Bloch

> ... what strikes the random observer of the history of philosophy is the lack of attention given the future as such, as though there were something essentially frivolous in a consideration of that which does not yet exist, when so much exists already. In that the philosophers resemble M. Terentius Varro, "most learned of all the Romans", who "is supposed to have forgotten the future tense in the first version of his Latin grammar".
>
> (Quoted by Jameson 1971: 125)

It would certainly be taking things too far to suggest that, of the Germanic characteristics retained in the English language, the reduction of the numerous tense and aspect forms of Indo-European verbs (preserved and added to in Latin, despite Varro's lapse) could be related to the anomalous position of works concerned with the future in our general cultural text. English, solidly equipped with past and present tenses, may have no future tense, but non-tense systems within the language convey temporal meanings; future time is easily evoked by use of modal expressions, usually reinforced or clarified by adverbs. In any event, a concern with units of expression as complex as narrative tends to keep us in the past tense, regardless of deictics; narration, after all, usually represents all experience linguistically as *past* experience, if only as a reflex of the rupture between the moment of narration and the narrative invoked.

Yet a hint of suspicion remains regarding the slightly awkward conjuncture of tense and the future, prompting us at least to consider the ontological uncertainty surrounding the textual status of the future. For the accuracy of the passage from *Marxism and Form* given in the epigraph above is borne out by that work's extraordinary (in the senses of both unusual and extreme) stress upon the future. This may be illustrated by considering Jameson's

contribution of one of the more remarkable sentences to be found in contemporary criticism:

> Yet whatever the outcome, it pleases me for another moment still to consider the stubborn rebirth of the idea of freedom, in three such profoundly different shapes, at three such profoundly different moments in history: its reinvention by the historian-playwright, dreaming the heroic gestures of political eloquence in his tiny feudal city-state open to the fields, stimulated by the news of revolutionary victories there where in a few years the shock of Napoleonic armies will cause the earth to tremble; by the poet, stalking his magical fun-park for the neon omens of objective chance, behind the hallucinatiory rebus of the street scene never ceasing to hear the pop gun volleys of the vicious, never-ending military pacification of colonial empire; by the philosopher, in the exile of that immense housing development which is the state of California, remembering, reawakening, reinventing – from the rows of products in the supermarkets, from the roar of the freeways and the ominous shape of the helmets of the traffic policemen, from the incessant overhead traffic of the fleets of military transport planes, and as it were from beyond them, in the future – the almost extinct form of the Utopian idea.
>
> (Jameson 1971: 116)

The concluding paragraph of *Marxism and Form* contains this caveat: "even if ours is a critical age, it does not seem to me very becoming in critics to exalt their activity to the level of literary creation . . . ." (p. 415). The lyricism of the sentence quoted above from the same work stretches critical style to the point of belying this disclaimer, but its unashamed flight is generated and sustained by *Marxism and Form's* consistent preoccupation with the relationship between freedom and the Utopian impulse – "without which", says Jameson, "Marxism remains an objective theory and is deprived of its most vital resonances and of its essential psychic sustenance as well" (1971: 157).

We must ask how this position accords with Jameson's dismissal of "theories of history" noted above. The answer lies in a separation of a positive and creative *impulse* towards the future from narrow, one-dimensional attempts at *prediction*, or so it would seem from two separate but related qualifiers regarding Utopia invoked by Jameson:

(a) "first and foremost", Utopia is "nothing but a *logical* possibility", the "naive projection" of which "into the realm of historical chronology can only result in metaphysical nostalgia ... or in Utopianism. Yet", he continues, "in some more subtle fashion all so-called "theories of history" tend to organize themselves around the covert hypothesis of just such a moment of plenitude" (1971: 38).

(b) Equally, "when the literary work attempts to use this Utopian material directly, as content, in secular fashion, as in the various literary Utopias themselves, there results an impoverishment which is due to the reduction of the multiple levels of the Utopian idea to the single, relatively abstract field of social planning" (1971: 145–146).

History and literature appear equally capable of misappropriating the future; what we must investigate before moving on to such considerations is how *Marxism and Form* presents the positive possibilities in the formal deployment of the future.

The lengthy sentence on utopia quoted above serves as a summary of the sections on Schiller, Benjamin, and Marcuse, and as a prelude to "Ernst Bloch and the Future"; as such it is pivotally placed amongst these figures who are representative of, as the chapter heading embracing them specifies, "Versions of a Marxist Hermeneutic". Briefly, Jameson is concerned with hermeneutics as "a political discipline", one which "provides the means for maintaining contact with the very sources of revolutionary energy during a stagnant time, of preserving the concept of freedom itself, underground, during geological ages of repression. Indeed", he continues, "it is the concept of freedom which ... proves to be the privileged instrument of a political hermeneutic." In this sense, freedom is "best understood as an interpretive device rather than a philosophical essence or idea. For wherever the concept of freedom is once more understood, it always comes as the awakening of dissatisfaction in the midst of all..." (1971: 84). In Benjamin, Marcuse, and Schiller Jameson identifies freedom with the Utopian idea, which "keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of a stubborn negation of all that is" (Jameson 1971: 111).

While this "revolutionary stimulus" (1971: 82) may draw its energy from a profound nostalgia, as it does in the case of Benjamin, although Jameson relates this too to the future (see Jameson's comments on the *Angelus Novus* (1971: 83)), it is most explicitly associated with the future in the work of Ernst Bloch. Bloch's dialogue with Freud is precisely one of finding room next to a model in which comprehension consists of working back to origins for "an ontological pull of the future" – "an unconscious of what is yet to come" (Jameson 1971: 129). To expand upon the first epigraph to this section of the paper: for Bloch, "the meaning of Being itself comes into being, if at all, only at the moment when the world passes over into Utopia, and when that final Utopian destination returns upon the past to confer direction upon it" (1971: 131). The teleological implications here are consciously related to their textual source and model: the "sense in which all plot may be seen as a movement toward Utopia, in its basic working through to some ultimate resolution of the basic tensions" (p. 146) is taken to the point where the very time of the work may itself stand as a figure of Utopian development: "Every great work of art, above and beyond its manifest content, is carried out according to a *latency of the page to come,* or in other words, in the light of the content of a future which has not yet come into being, and indeed of some ultimate resolution as yet unknown" (1971: 149). For Jameson, such a perspective

> may serve as an object lesson in some of the ways available to a Marxist hermeneutic to restore a genuine political dimension to the disparate texts preserved in the book of our culture: not by some facile symbolic or allegorical interpretation, but by reading the very content and the formal impulse of the

> texts themselves as figures – whether of psychic wholeness, of freedom, or of the drive towards Utopian transfiguration – of the irrepressible revolutionary wish.
> (1971: 159)

And of the duties falling to literary criticism at the conclusion of *Marxism and Form*, pride of (last) place is reserved for "keep(ing) alive the idea of a concrete future" (Jameson 1971: 416).

This is in keeping with Jameson's unification of theory and history in a narratological matrix, as is most clearly spelled out in *The Political Unconscious* ("the human adventure is one . . ., the unity of a single great collective story") (Jameson 1981: 19). Ignoring for the moment the Hegelian ghost behind this enterprise, we may use Jameson's use of Bloch as something of a route map, tracing the significance of the future through history, utopia, and criticism.

3

> The future is hidden from us. But does an astronomer think like this when he calculates an eclipse of the sun?
> (Wittgenstein 1976: 223e)

Alf Stadler says of the black consciousness movement's contribution to changing Africans' perceptions of themselves and of whites: "Undoubtedly in the long run, this will turn out to be no less important in the rehabilitation of the African's sense of self than the notion of négritude did elsewhere" (Stadler 1987: 172). In one way this paper may be seen as a sustained meditation on the phrase "in the long run". Its aim is to test the epistemological status of sentences of this sort (the example given is meant to be randomly representative), as a clue towards understanding the role of the future in history writing. In turn, the hope is that this will serve as a basis for understanding texts which make the historical future their subject.

History as organized knowledge of the past; history as continuous and connected process. This distinction, central to the topic in hand, is foregrounded by Raymond Williams in the section on history in *Keywords* (1983: 146–147). After noting that the first of these formulations is the "predominant" and "established general sense", he points out that

> . . . it is necessary to distinguish an important sense of history which is more than, although it includes, organized knowledge of the past. It is not easy to date or define this, but the source is probably the sense of history as human self development which is evident in (early) C18 in Vico and in the new kinds of Universal Histories. One way of expressing this new sense is to say that past events are seen not as specific histories but as continuous and connected process. Various systematizations and interpretations of this continuous and connected process then become history in a new general and eventually abstract sense. Moreover, given the stress on human *self-development, history in many of these uses loses its exclusive association with the past and becomes connected not only to the present but also to the future.*
> (Williams 1983: 146–147)

Moving through a summary of the kinds of intellectual systems upon which history in the latter sense draws, Williams then naturally tackles the different uses of "historicism", the hostile sense of which – "to attack all forms of interpretation or prediction by 'historical necessity' or the discovery of general laws of historical development" (1983: 147) – is most relevant for our purposes here. Karl Popper usually comes first to mind in this connection, *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957) providing us with not only a pervasive contemporary definition of "historicism", but also a title variations upon which, as we shall see, serve as something of a linking theme in related fields. An address on the same topic given by Popper in 1948, "Prediction and Prophecy in the Social Sciences"(Popper 1959: 275–285), will help us to organize our concerns on this subject.

The main focus of Popper's attack is what he sees as the confusion of the theoretical sciences with the social sciences; "all theoretical sciences are", he admits, "predicting sciences" (1959: 278). Crucially, however, the social sciences do not have to do with the "repetitive systems" (p. 279) that concern the theoretical sciences (even here only in "special cases") which allow for the formulation of predictive laws or theories. Interestingly, Popper situates this confusion within a "wider philosophical scheme which may be called historicism – the view that the story of mankind has a plot, and that if we can succeed in unravelling this plot, we shall hold the key to the future" (p. 278). This "wider scheme", traceable from Heraclitus to Marx, lies behind the modern "historicist doctrine which teaches that it is the task of the social sciences to predict historical developments" (Popper 1959: 278) by means of large-scale laws of historical development. Recent historiography has tended to separate these related elements of historicism in Popper's sense – narrative and general law – and entered into an extended debate regarding their relative merits for *explanation* in history.

"One notes how explanation is involved with prophecy", writes Phyllis Lewsen disapprovingly (1970: 357), and this can apply to explanation in both its narrative and nomological senses. As the concept of "narrative explanation" has been developed largely as a counter-model to nomological models of explanation, it is best to begin with the latter.

The nomological position has been most centrally put by C.G. Hempel in an evolving series of essays which culminate, for our purposes, in one entitled "Explanation in Science and History" (in Dray 1966: 95–126). Here his original thesis that all explanation in the sciences (which includes, for him, history) is basically the same in form has been modified considerably, but is still maintained.

Explanation in history, Hempel holds, as with explanation in any empirical discipline, must, to be an explanation at all, conform to either the deductive or probabalistic model of nomological explanation. In its strongest form (the deductive nomological), the explanation is expressed as an initial proposition followed by a law of universal regularity – this is the form of a causal explanation. An attenuated version allows for an initial premise followed by a high statistical probability – the explanans in this case does not invariably lead to the explanandum, as in the deductive-nomological case. It is never-

theless still nomological in that it presupposes general laws, even if they are statistical rather than universal in form, and is expressed in an inductive explanatory argument. Further reconsideration led Hempel to allow for elliptic and partial explanations, and, in the case of explanations not explicit or specific enough to qualify for even these categories, the "explanatory sketch" is proposed. Historical explanation falls for the most part into these last two categories as "generalizations underlying a proposed historical explanation are largely left unspecified; and most concrete explanatory accounts have to be qualified as partial explanations or as explanation sketches" (Hempel 1966: 109).

The fact that, as Alan Donagan has pointed out, "few of the innumerable historical explanations found in the writings of historians even appear to accord with" the Hempel theory (Donagan 166: 142) has not enabled any theoretician to ignore it, although most disagree with it. The reason lies at least partially in the fact that the position one takes here bears on one's position with regard to the status of history as a discipline – precisely the point Popper demonstrates as being so open to confusion. Louis O. Mink may well note that when historians are asked to give an explanation in positivist terms (that is, explanation as necessity), they tend "to say something about history being an art rather than a science" (Mink 1944: 109), but a coexisting impluse is touched on by Hayden White when he writes: "historians, like most social scientists . . ., if they do not wish to claim for their discipline the status of a full-blown science, certainly wish to believe that their arguments or explanations have the force of logic behind them" (White 1978: 4). The degree to which history may be termed a science turns on its dependence on explanation in terms of general laws, and the key problem here remains that general laws are inextricably related to the issue of prediction. Thus R.G. Collingwood, in an argument roughly contemporary with Popper's, firmly states:

> The historian's business is to know the past, not to know the future; and whenever historians claim to be able to determine the future in advance of its happening, we may know with certainty that something has gone wrong with their fundamental conception of history. Further, we may know exactly what it is that has gone wrong. What has happened is that they have split up the single reality of the historical process into two separate things, one which determines and one which is determined; the abstract law and the mere fact, the universal and the particular. They have hypostatized the universal into a false particular supposed to exist by itself and for itself, and yet in that isolation they still conceive it as determining the course of particular events. The universal, being thus isolated from the temporal process, does not work in that process, it only works upon it. The temporal process is something passive, shaped by a timeless force working upon it from without. Hence, because the force works in exactly the same way at all times, the knowledge of how it works now is also a knowledge of how it will work in the future, and if we know how it has determined the flow of events at any one time, we thereby know how it would determine it at any other, and therefore can foretell the future.
>
> (Collingwood 1966: 54–55)

Here, obviously, are grounds for contention with a vast range of philosophies

and theories of history. Collingwood himself employs the above argument in his evaluation of "ideas" of history ranging from medieval eschatology (pp. 54–55) to contemporary "mental scientists" (p. 220). It is a position common to the defence of historiography as an empirical enterprise and related, though not identical by any means, attacks upon idealist concepts of history. Recent battles indicate that the point has by no means been settled.

E.P. Thompson's attack upon Althusserian Marxism in *The Poverty of Theory* (1978), for example, comes close to Popper's argument at several crucial points (as his title suggests), however much Thompson would not want to be aligned with Popper on other issues. Thompson's argument includes the rejection of a pervasive analogy within Marxism, that of "class structure as the motor of history", and the reason he gives for this is expressed in terms remarkably similar to those used by Collingwood:

> it supposes two distinct entities: "history", which is inert, an intricate composition of parts; and a "motor" (class struggle) which is brought to it, and which drives these parts, or sets them in motion.
>
> (Thompson 1978: 108)

An emphasis upon the latter is, for Thompson, the original sin of intellectual systems that place structure over process, theory over experience, forces over humanity, and the many other crimes of which Althusserianism is typical. Which is not to say, admits Thompson, that more traditional concepts of historical materialism have not been liable to a similar error:

> I don't mean to deny that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries engendered authentic and sometimes monstrous "historicisms" (evolutionary, teleological, and essentialist notions of "history's" self-motivation); nor to deny that this same historicism permeated some part of the Marxist tradition, in the notion of a *programmed* succession of historical "stages", motored towards a pre-determined end by class struggle.
>
> (Thompson 1978: 20 [his emphasis])

While this merits "severe correction", however, it is to be identified more in Marxist *theory* than its *practice*, holds Thompson. Thus, in his reading of *Capital,* for example, the emphasis is not upon the abstract economic laws set forth; as Paul Q. Hirst points out, these "laws" are reduced by Thompson to a "series of 'intuitions' about processes of capitalist development whose real features are to be uncovered by historians' research" (Hirst 1985: 68–69). Hirst's response to "The Poverty of Theory", "The Necessity of Theory", takes, as indicated by its title, exception to such an approach. It stresses the merely illustrative nature of the historical examples given in *Capital*, and takes Marx's "Preface to the First German Edition" seriously when it states:

> It is a question of these laws themselves, of these tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results. The country which is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future.
>
> (Quoted in Hirst 1985: 68)

The identification of laws, we note, moves us immediately to a predictive rather than historical emphasis. "*Capital*", Hirst insists, "is not a history, but that is because Marx claimed to be writing capitalism's *future*" (p. 68; Hirst's emphasis).

Granted Hirst fights for this point only to make clear "that both Marx's conception of capitalism and of the method by which it should be studied are untenable" (1985: 68), as (along with his co-author, Hindess) his rejection of teleological causality in *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* would lead us to expect. While Thompson's concern is to defend Marxism from any interpretation which would deny the primacy of human agency (as an emphasis upon general laws or structures would), Hirst is in fact even more thorough-going in his rejection of history as shaped or determined by large-scale abstractions. He demonstrates in "The Necessity of Theory" that Thompson's humanist perspective is dependent upon a definition of history as a single, continuous whole, and that this status may be conferred only by a philosophy of history – which, for Hirst, is an illegitimate manoeuvre in that it gives precedence to an idealist category, the "discipline of history", say, rather than the political and ideological context in which such categories are formed. Hirst illustrates this by separating Hegel's dialectic from philosophies of history:

> Hegel's dialectic explains a *process* but not its end (history is not the development of something, realization of a given end) – it is to use Althusser's phrase, "a process without a subject", a process conceivable as itself only by taking the place of the Absolute. It differs from teleological realizations of a given end (Comte, Spencer, etc.) in this rigorous openness, or opaqueness of all but the *form* of its process to knowlege. A philosophy of history is the one rigorous mode of unification or formulation of the object "history" as a continuous (if not uniform) space of knowledge. It *unifies* the space as possible to be comprehended by a single form of knowledge . . . If philosophical or antiquarian grounds for the unity of this object are rejected then historical investigations need to base their pertinence on some other claim, for example, current political or ideological relevance.
>
> (Hirst 1985: 89)

It is on these grounds that Hirst has shocked many Marxist theorists with his rejection of historical writing as having "a primary and special relevance to Marxist social analysis" (1985: 88). What is of specific interest to us in his argument, however, is the way in which it underlines the fact that any concept of history as a homogeneous field is dependent upon structuring tropes. Even more to the point, the terms upon which prediction is possible within any monolithic figuration of history are particularly revealing of its structural modes, which is why any deconstruction of history makes a primary victim of the future.

This is not to say that the future does not feature in deconstructionist texts; if anything, it sometimes governs their challenge to historiographical totalization all the more strongly for its invisibility. Literally unthinkable in terms of the rationality it will replace, it exists in, as David Simpson says of the early

Derrida, the "apocalyptic excitement" it generates. "*Of Grammatology*", Simpson writes:

> . . . contains an apocalyptic rhetoric that forsees the "end of linear writing" and of the "vulgar and mundane concept of temporality" that is its analogue in the familial understanding of history (*Of Grammatology*, p. 87), Derrida finds himself searching for clues to a future that he cannot by his own logic . . . conceive of as open to rational prediction. Thus he argues not for a describable future configuration but for signs and glimpses of a breakdown in the present culture of "linear writing".[2]
>
> (Simpson 1988: 728)

The Foucault of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Order of Things* is similarly reluctant to "sketch out in advance the face we will have in the future" (Foucault 1972: 131), but nevetheless makes it clear that he looks forward to the smoothing out of the wrinkle in our knowledge that is "man". What has often been objected to about Foucault's account of the displacement of one "epistemic field" by another, however, is the lack of a transformational system.[3] Its absence is an indication of contemporary concern with the totalization that is implicit in concepts of process.

To illustrate with a more limited and manageable example: even E.P. Thompson's theoretically self-effacing arguments show an increased sensitivity to the unguarded use of tropological organization. He has edited out of later (Pelican) editions of *The Making of the English Working Class* a sentence from the Preface to the original 1963 edition (published by Gollancz) – a sentence which returns us to our consideration of the place of the future in history writing. Thompson had written: "This book can be seen as a biography of the English working class from its adolescence until its early manhood" (p. 11). While the metaphor emphasizes the organic over the mechanistic, it does not escape the idea of regular, roughly predictable stages of development – even laws of a sort – and it is likely that this led to its later exclusion. Thompson is prepared to admit logic, but not law: "(w)e can see a *logic* in the responses of similar occupational groups undergoing similar experiences, but we cannot predicate any *law*" (Thompson 1984: 9). This logic, however, still entails appeals to the future even when avoiding the excessively retroactive evaluation of past events:

> Our only criterion of judgement should not be whether or not a man's actions are justified in the light of subsequent evolution. After all, we are not at the end of social evolution ourselves. In some of the lost causes of the people of the Industrial Revolution we may discover insights into the social evils we have yet to cure.
>
> (Thompson 1984: 12)

The notion of "evolution" fails to escape a sense of structure and predictability, and the notion of significance remains firmly tied to a future, even if only in a potential sense. We may ask, following on our arguments concerning the future and forms of historicism, whether Thompson has managed to avoid entirely historicist implications in his practice.

Thompson's precautions against a lapse into historicism involve more than a denial of nomological factors in the writing of history; they include a dismissal of narrative as a structuring device. Although, as his commitment to plain style would lead us to expect, he does not specifically align himself with any of the strong theoretical arguments against the narrative status of history, he does claim that *The Making of the English Working Class*, "is a group of studies, on related themes, rather than a consecutive narrative" (1984: 11). Hayden White, however, has demonstrated that *The Making of the English Working Class* is essentially narrative in form, as indeed is the work of Foucault and Derrida (and by implication, Hirst) (White 1985). White's claim is based upon his standard manoeuvre (developed in *Metahistory* (1973)), of identifying four fundamental tropological stages informing consciousness. These tropes are, for him, the essence of narrative, and it is his identification of them in a vast range of works that makes him perhaps the key figure in the argument concerning the essentially narrative nature of history writing. I am not interested in recounting White's methods here (which, for all their interest, are dangerously ahistorical), but will take advantage of his aims to shift from the problems of law and predictability to the issue of the place of the future in narrative explanation.

The clearest point at which to pick up on arguments concerning the narrative nature of history is the debate within analytical philosophy in the 1960s and 70s which, as White has noted, "sought to establish the epistemic status of narrativity, considered as a *kind of explanation* especially appropriate to the explanation of historical, as against natural events and processes" (White 1984: 7). It will not be necessary to rehearse all the positions taken around this question. One of the most important texts to emerge from the debate, A.C. Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History* (1965), will give us enough purchase, primarily because the future plays such a central yet tellingly ambiguous role in it.

Danto firmly rejects all strong forms of prediction or prophecy in history writing of the type set out by Collingwood above; indeed, his analysis of the philosophy of history is primarily concerned with establishing the distinction between "history" (which is concerned "only with the past, and with the future only when it becomes past") and "substantive philosophy of history" (which is concerned with "the *whole* of history: the whole past and the whole future: the whole of time") (Danto 1965: 4).

Like many of the theorists involved in this debate, Danto is tentatively prepared to admit the possibility of historical laws, but any predictions based upon them would remain conditional and general, while

> the task of history itself would still be to tell the story of what precisely happened, even if the story should fall under a general historical law as an instance, and even if the law should be known. History alone would be able to exhibit the amazing variety of temporal wholes which none the less fall under a single historical law. (Danto 1965: 255)

A common enough compromise. Here, the particularity and specificity of the

"story" elements are contrasted with the generalities available to us through laws; the former being identified with history as such, the latter are marginalized to a degree comfortable enough to allow for some limited role – and these limitations include any element of prediction.

Danto recognizes that historians "describe some past events with reference to other events which are future to them"; crucially, however, the latter events are still "past to the historian". "Philosophers of history" on the other hand, "describe certain past events with reference to other events which are future both to these events and to the historian himself. And I wish to maintain", he continues,

> that we cannot enjoy a cognitive standpoint which makes such an activity feasible. The mode of organizing events which is essential to history does not . . . admit of projection into the future, and in this sense the structures in accordance with which these organizations are affected are not like scientific theories.
>
> (Danto 1965: 15)

Yet what is of particular interest to us in Danto's writing is that his dismissal of the predictive power of historical laws does not serve to lay the ghost of the future as an integral part of history. In fact, a peculiar sense of loss pervades even his most convincing rejections of an historian's use of evidence future to himself. In, for example, the final paragraph of *Analytical Philosophy of History*, Danto writes:

> Not knowing how our actions will be seen from the vantage point of history, we to that degree lack control over the present. If there is such a thing as inevitability in history, it is not so much due to social processes moving forward under their own steam and in accordance with their own natures, as it is to the fact that by the time it is clear what we have done, it is too late to do anything about it. "The owl of Minerva takes flight only with the falling of the dusk" . . . . We capture the future only when it is too late to do anything about the relevant present, for *it* is then past and beyond our control.
>
> (Danto 1965: 284 [his emphasis])

But this is more than a simple fact of temporality. Having expelled the significance of the future as an effect of necessary historical laws, Danto finds it returning as an effect of the *linguistic* basis of history writing. The past/future relationship emerges as structurally necessary to meaning-giving in history.

Danto's analysis of this linguistic feature is centred on what he designates as "narrative sentences" (as his emphasis above on history's "telling the story" might lead us to expect). These

> . . . occur most typically in history writings, although they appear in narratives of all sorts . . . . Their most general characteristic is that they refer to at least two time-separated events though they only *describe* (are only *about*) the earliest event to which they refer.
>
> (Danto 1965: 143)

An example (suitably, considering the long-term aims of this paper, a literary

one) provided by Danto by way of illustration is Yeats's, "A shudder in the loins engenders there/ The broken wall, the burning roof and tower/ And Agamemnon dead." Both the rape of Leda and the destruction of Troy are referred to, but only the rape is described, and its significance established by its future reference. Crucially, as we have seen above, this "future reference" must be *past* in relation to the writer for the significance given to the earlier event to be valid. The problem is that the same structure governs meaning-giving in history as a whole. Therefore not even a complete knowledge of all that has happened in the past, Danto establishes at some length, would characterize an Ideal Chronicler, "(f)or it is only in the light of the future that the events he witnesses will take on a measure of significance" (1965: 159). Danto quotes Whitehead's "cut away the future and the present collapses, emptied of its proper content" (1965: 152), and does not avoid, for all his rejection of substantive philosophies of history, the conclusion that "if the future cannot be known, the past cannot be known completely" (p. 197).

Danto's passing reference to Hegel's "Owl of Minerva" needs, for our purposes, to be teased out a little more, for Hegel's notion of the Absolute Idea, as Fredric Jameson points out, is ultimately the working out of just such a deadlock. Danto quotes from the Preface to the *Philosophy of Law*. The famous passage more fully reads:

> A word on preaching about how the world should be. For that, philosophy always arrives too late. As the *thought* of the world, it only makes its appearance after the actuality has finished its process of development and is over. What the conception teaches, history also shows to be necessary. Only in the maturation of actuality does the ideal appear to confront the real. Then the ideal reconstructs this world for itself in the form of an intellectual realm comprehending it in its substance. When philosophy paints its grey in grey then the form of life has grown old, and this grey in grey is not capable of rejuvenating it, merely of understanding it. The owl of Minerva only begins its flight when the twilight falls.
> (Quoted in Jameson 1971: 364)

For Hegel, as Jameson comments, "one . . . has to posit an end to history in order for historical thought to take place", and Hegel's controversial doctrine that it ends in the present is not unrelated to the problem in hand. Indeed, Collingwood finds Hegel's position the only defensible one, even if he chooses to reject the specific philosophical and political significance Hegel attached to it:

> History *must* end with the present, because nothing else has happened. But this does not mean glorifying the present or thinking that future progress is impossible. It only means recognizing the present as a fact and realizing that we do not know what future progress will be. As Hegel put it, the future is an object not of knowledge but of hopes and fears; and hopes and fears are not history.
> (Collingwood 1966: 3)

"Hopes and fears" may not *be* history, but is it in fact possible to divorce them from history? Agnes Heller, in *A Theory of History*, demonstrates how not. Her "theory of history" is opposed, in a distinction now familiar to us, to

"philosophies of history", in which a chief characterization of the latter is the structural necessity of their having to account for the past, present, and future (a burden from which the former is free). A "philosophy of history"

> has to construct a "unit" which cannot be cut out of human structures or events because it encompasses all human structures and events. The "unit" so chosen is not a "closed" but an open one, and its logic cannot be reconstructed from its *end result* since this result is not yet given. As a consequence, the logic inherent in the "unit" cannot be reconstructed at all, it is (and remains) *unkown*. And this is why philosophies of history, in order to be consistent, have to include the *future* in the logic of their unit as well, as if it were (or could be) known. The developmental logic has to be established from the assumed knowledge of the future.
>
> (Heller 1982: 224–225 [her emphasis])

Unlike Collingwood and Danto, Heller does not simply reject this logic out of hand. While she does reject the philosopher of history's claim to be able to make *true* statements about future history, she nevertheless allows such statements a legitimate role. They may not be true simply because they are neither true nor untrue; they are rather "value-commitments".

> The image of future history is meant as a promise or a warning ... Whilst depicting the future, the philosopher of history intends to induce others to commit themselves to the same values; to the same lifestyle and activities as contained in his or her philosophy. The philosopher wants the addressee to *create* the future designed in the philosopher's imagination.
>
> (Heller 1982: 239)

Thus Heller can quote Herder: "a philosophy of history, too, is needed for the education of mankind" (1982: 223), and entitle her penultimate chapter, "The Need for Utopia".

4

> In 1720, thirty-seven years before the magically Swedenborgian year of Blake's birth, Charles Daubuz distinguished history from prophecy, arguing that "an Historian sets out the matters he relates in proper Words, such as we express our Conceptions by, and therefore shews the full Extent of the Things acted, because his words are adequate to our Notions: But a Prophecy is a Picture or Representation of the Events in Symbols; which being fetched from Objects visible to one view, or Cast of the Eye, rather represents the events in Miniature, than full Proportion; giving us more to understand than what we see".
>
> (Daubuz 1720: 56; quoted in Friedman 1988: 38)

Just as narrative tense is not a sufficient indicator of the temporal situation being treated, so grammatical mood in narrative does not necessarily reflect the actual manner of the statement made. The utopian mode is that of the implied subjunctive; despite its surface grammatical tense (past) and mood (indicative), the utopian form is ruled by the future tense and the subjunctive mood. We are involved here then with the grammar of desire.

This involves a definite rhetorical shift from the past tense and indicative

mood associated with history writing. As such, it suggests a deliberate strategy of noncongruence with any extratextual reality. Yet the one case does not necessarily follow upon the other, as Raymond Williams makes clear in his distinction between the categories of science fiction and utopian fiction. "It is tempting", he writes,

> to extend both categories until they are loosely identical, and it is true that the presentation of *otherness* appears to link them, as modes of desire or warning in which the crucial emphasis is attained by the elements of discontinuity from ordinary "realism". But this element of discontinuity is itself fundamentally variable. Indeed what has most to be looked at, in properly utopian or dystopian fiction, is that form of continuity, of implied connection, which the form is intended to embody.
>
> (Williams 1979: 54)

A similar observation is found in Dominic Baker-Smith's essay, "The Escape From the Cave: Thomas More and the Vision of Utopia":

> At the centre of all utopian writing is a concern with the mediating process between ideal forms and the inadequate provisions of experience . . . Whether it is utopia or dystopia that we are considering, the separation from fantasy is absolute: both imply a reference back to the world of concrete acts and familiar experience which fantasy excludes. The central feature of utopian writing is the effort to reconcile ideal possibilities with the recalcitrance of the known. Even in the case of dystopian writing it is that emphasis on the obstinate features of a known world which suggests desirable alternatives . . ..
>
> (Baker-Smith 1987: 8)

It is from this perspective that the utopian mode makes positively available to us the very negative logical grounds Danto presents for his ultimate rejection of any place for the future in history. "Philosophies of history attempt to capture the future without realizing that if we knew the future, we could control the present, and so falsify statements about the future, and so such discoveries would be useless", writes Danto (1965: 284). Far from being useless, this is precisely the logic of the utopian mode – and the *formally* identical dystopian mode. It is not so much predictive as pre-emptive. Whether inspirational or admonitory, utopias are explicitly interventionist. Thus we move from the overt indicative of the utopian text, by way of an implicit subjunctive, to a new, or at least different, form of the indicative.

Clearly the deep grammatical shift we are concerned with involves a change of mode, something along the lines set out in Daubuz's distinction between the historical and the prophetic in the epigraph above. But what we have hopefully signalled here is that the distinction is nowhere near as precise as Daubuz's, or critical creeds based upon a distinction similar to his, would have it. Daubuz's formulation is close to what, certainly since the beginning of the nineteenth century, has become a corner-stone in the distinction between "ordinary" and "poetic" language, that is, "an accentuation of meaning, to the detriment of reference" (Ducrot & Todorov 1981: 259). We may use this distinction to mark our shift in subject from the historiographical

to the literary (where, at the risk of conflating the utopian and the prophetic, Daubuz's observation leads us), but it seems we will constantly be betrayed into blurring the distinction. The implication of the utopian in the historical and the historical in the utopian is simply another example confounding the excesses bred of too clear a division between meaning and reference. It is one amongst other indicators of the figurative or tropological nature of history writing and the referential impulse within utopian forms. The realism Daubuz attributes to history and the symbolism he attributes to prophecy feed into each other. Utopian projections declare their reference to the present just as historical meaning attaches itself in important ways to events beyond the present. Desire writes the future into the past, the past into the future.

It is one thing of course to establish that this is the situation; it is another to make a claim for its legitimacy. Have we not, from an historiographical point of view, isolated a factor in history writing which is simply an error to be eradicated. And even if we can make a case for the occasional usefulness of historical projection, is this not a limited and at best marginal trope of history writing? Certainly it is not a legitimate formulation adequate to all historical accounts; neither is it the basis for a successful individual historical approach, as the failure of Ossip K. Flechtheim's efforts to establish a "new science" of prognosis in his *History and Futurology* (1965) illustrates. We therefore need a flexible sense of the utopian form to answer the questions posed here, and at least two are close to hand. The first, that of Paul Ricoeur, is the more comprehensive, but it grows out of an attempt to deal with a set of problems connected with the concept of ideology that is firmly, if not specifically, linked with the second, that of Fredric Jameson.

The fullest account of Ricoeur's position on this topic is set out in his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1986), which is based on a series of lectures given at the University of Chicago in 1975. Briefly, Ricoeur's concern is to break with the bind of the ideology/science distinction as proposed by Althusser and others, especially with the sense it conveys of distortion versus the "real". Drawing upon his concept of the symbolic nature of all action (established in *The Rule of Metaphor*), which he equates with all perspectives being ideological, Ricoeur then seeks a concept of ideology which is thoroughly pervasive and yet not necessarily prejorative. He achieves this by recourse to the idea of the utopian. Ricoeur identifies three levels upon which ideology works. The first two accord with more conventional concepts of ideology: distortion (in the sense that all perspectives are of a symbolic order, and thus noncongruent with the "real"), and legitimation (ideology fills the gap between the claims of the rulers and the beliefs of the ruled). Ideology at its third and deepest level, however, also plays an integrative social role. "All social action is already socially mediated, and it is ideology that plays this mediating role in the social realm. Ideology is integrative at this stage; it preserves social identity" (Ricoeur 1986: xix; See Editor's Introduction). Given the ideological nature of all perspectives, how then can one validly challenge a particular ideological position?

It is at this point that Ricoeur introduces the ideology/utopia relationship to escape any false appeals to a non-ideological "scientific" perspective. Utopia,

like ideology, is not necessarily a pejorative term. Like ideology, it too operates on three levels: at its weakest, it is a mode of fantasy and escape. But it also functions by challenging present authority (questioning the legitimation of power) and, at its best, exploring the possible (putting in question what presently exists). In fact,

> what we must assume is that the judgment on ideology is always the judgment from a utopia. This is my conviction: the only way to get out of the circularity in which ideologies engulf us is to assume a utopia, declare it, and judge an ideology on this basis. Because the absolute onlooker is impossible, then it is someone within the process itself who takes the responsibility for judgment .... It is to the extent finally that the correlation ideology-utopia replaces the impossible correlation ideology-science that a certain solution to the problem of judgment may be found, a solution ... itself congruent with the claim that no point of view exists outside the game. If there can be no transparent onlooker, then a *practical* concept is what must be assumed.
>
> (Ricoeur 1986: 172–173)

We may recognize in the above several of Jameson's concerns as expressed in *Marxism and Form* (as discussed in Part 1 of this paper), but it is in his "Conclusion" to *The Political Unconscious* that they come closest to those of Ricoeur. Jameson's approach (and here I compress to the point of caricature; it is necessary to follow all his qualifications with some care in order to treat his argument fairly) (Jameson 1982: 281–299), is "to argue the proposition that the effectively ideological is also, at the same time, necessarily Utopian" (p. 286). This he does by claiming

> that *all* class consciousness – or in other words, all ideology in the strongest sense, including the most exclusive forms of ruling-class consciousness just as much as that of oppositional or oppressed classes – is in its very nature Utopian.
>
> (Jameson 1982: 289)

This claim is based upon a dynamic sense of class in which "the prior moment of class consciousness is that of the oppressed classes" (1982: 289) which generates in turn "the mirror image of class solidarity among the ruling groups" (p. 290). Therefore "... all class consciousness of whatever type is Utopian insofar as it expresses the unity of a collectivity; yet it must be added," Jameson continues, "that this proposition is an allegorical one. The achieved collectivity or organic group of whatever kind – oppressors fully as much as oppressed – is Utopian not in itself, but only insofar as all such collectivities are themselves *figures* for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian or classless society" (p. 291).

What is achieved by this insight? Using Ricoeur's distinction between negative and positive hermeneutics, Jameson wishes to move Marxist criticism away from its concentration on the former – "to unmask and to demonstrate the ways in which a cultural artifact fulfils a specific ideological mission" (1982: 291) – in order to include the latter: "its simultaneously Utopian power as the symbolic affirmation of a specific historical and class form of collective unity" (p. 291).

Without reading this formulation out of its social context, it is useful to translate its terms into cultural ones. A cultural object, then, may be explained in terms of its limits and horizons; at the same time, however, these limits and horizons can be recognized as the lineaments of its achieved form. Form now can be read as positive and negative, or better still, a constant switching between the two; as shape, and as boundary; as a frontier between achievement and circumscription. This is the usefulness of playing the utopian back against the historical, the historical forward into the utopian. Desire shapes the limits around which the central issues here play; thus it is that in reading the problematic of the utopian back into itself, we are able to generate a strategy of reading appropriate for "future histories" (not, as warned, given here), but one also capable of expressing itself in general terms as a critical model.

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Notes

1. Several critics demonstrate how we may see in Lukács Jameson's "exemplary precursor". (See Simpson 1988: 739–740). Simpson refers to similar points made by Terry Eagleton in this regard (1986: 58).
2. Simpson refers to Spivak's translation of *Of Grammatology* (Derrida 1976).
3. See for example Hayden White's account of Jean Piaget's criticism of Foucault (White, 1985: 251).

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