

## Herodotus Strikes Back: The Return of Storytelling, or Premodernity in a New Guise?\*

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‘There are many facts in school histories, that seem to children to belong to lessons only. Some of these you will not find here. But you will find some stories that are not to be found in your school books, – stories which wise people say are only fairy tales and not history. But it seems to me that they are part of Our Island Story, and ought not to be forgotten, any more than those stories about which there is no doubt... Remember, too, that I was not trying to teach you, but only to tell a story.’

H. E. Marshall, *Our Island Story*, Preface.

The Herodotus-Thucydides dichotomy, like our own Lady Murasaki-Lady Sei Shōnagon dichotomy, is as old as the authors themselves.<sup>1</sup> No less a person than Thucydides set himself against his immediate predecessor, albeit implicitly;<sup>2</sup> and the subsequent generations of ancient critics were given to pairing them either in neutral juxtaposition or, more often, as foils – ‘glorious’ versus ‘horrid’ in subject, ‘smooth’ versus ‘severe’ in style, ‘trustworthy’ versus ‘unreliable’ in content.<sup>3</sup> The moderns also joined in the battle: during the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and thereafter the two old rivals suffered varying ups and downs in turn according to the circumstances and tastes of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Morris (1967), vol. 1, pp. xiii-xxiii, for a brief English-language introduction to the contrasting styles, and the bitter rivalry, of the two tenth-century court ladies that have been seen as together constituting Japan’s greatest medieval classics.

<sup>2</sup> Thuc. 1.21-23; cf. 1.97; Dion. Hal. *Thuc.* 6; 24; *Ep. ad Pomp.* 3; Lucian. *De hist. conscr.* 42.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Cic. *De or.* 2.55f.; *Orat.* 39; 219; Diod. 1.37.4; Dion. Hal. *Thuc.* 23f.; *Ep. ad Pomp.* 3; Quintil. 9.4.16; 10.1.73; 10.1.101; Plut. *Mor.* 855C, *De Herod. malign.* 3; Gell. *NA* 15.23; Joseph. *Ap.* 1.66; Lucian. *De hist. conscr.* 2; 18; 42; 54; Liban. *Ep.* 1036.5. For Herodotus’ own *Nachleben* in antiquity (both attested and inferential), see the authoritative exposition by Jacoby (1913), §32, and the most up-to-date one by Hornblower (2006).

times, and as recently as a few months ago Professor Sakurai again reminded us lucidly of this eternal rivalry<sup>4</sup> – a rivalry in awkward tandem for ever enshrined at the National Museum of Naples, in the famous Janus-like double bust of the two great historians looking in opposite directions (no. 1129). Yet for all the vicissitudes of fortune, one may safely say that by the end of the nineteenth century, with German scholarship taking the lead, the balance of the scale had on the whole been tipped in favour of Thucydides, who was apparently the more credible as a historian, and clearly the more useful as a political commentator.<sup>5</sup>

With the advent of the twentieth century, however, the balance tipped the other way again. Thucydides suddenly found himself under the onslaught of iconoclastic zeal directed against him by the modern descendants of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, represented by Cornford at the turn of the century and A. J. Woodman towards its end.<sup>6</sup> At the same time a concomitant tide, shored up by new archaeological discoveries and moral support from some prominent names (Jacoby and Momigliano for a start), reversed the fortunes of Herodotus, who saw his credibility relatively restored.<sup>7</sup> These iconoclasts, in their different ways, were mostly seeking to show that Thucydides was not as 'objective' (I avoid using the term 'scientific' as it is now too loaded) as he struggled to make his authorial persona appear. On the other hand Herodotus, it was claimed, was not so much a Father of Lies after all as had been deemed by many of his critics from Ctesias of Cnidus on down to Detlev Fehling, as the latter is often understood.<sup>8</sup> What emerges from all this apparent heresy, however, is that the

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<sup>4</sup> Sakurai (2006); this just-appeared introductory book, although it starts from a very different range of interest in Herodotean historiography from that of mine inside and outside this essay, nevertheless seems to show (to my pleasant surprise) several potential points of contact. If there is anything in which I might possibly disagree with her, it will revolve around the question of 'the birth of history' (*ibid.*, pp. 153ff.). It may simply be a matter of semantics or formulation rather than substance, but it is my long-held belief that history was born at the precise moment when someone, Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristotle, or whoever, asked the question: 'What is history? What is it for?'

<sup>5</sup> The modern reception of Herodotus and Thucydides at its various junctures has been eloquently recounted by Momigliano ([1958] 1966), pp. 135-141; and *id.* (1990), pp. 48-53.

<sup>6</sup> Cornford (1907); Woodman (1988), pp. 1-69.

<sup>7</sup> Jacoby (1913), esp. §28-30; Momigliano, *ibid.*; the most recent book to my knowledge that belongs to the school of 'Herodotus as an honest man' is Pritchett (1993); cf. also Cartledge and Greenwood (2002), pp. 353-363, for late twentieth-century modifications to the truth-debate.

<sup>8</sup> Ctesias T8; F1b; F9 *FGH* 3C.688; Fehling (1971, 1989<sup>2</sup>); on the latter see further below, n. 65.

criteria on which these twentieth-century scholars operated were essentially no different from those of their pre-twentieth century predecessors. Many of them may have pronounced the very opposite verdict on the two Greek historians. Yet, for all that, they were measuring them by the same yardstick: the degree of *veritas*, evidence-based 'truthfulness' in its modernist sense, or the lack of it. No matter: these studies certainly shook the confident assumptions of all the previous scholarship, so much so that at the close of the century Simon Hornblower felt constrained to observe somewhat *sotto voce* that 'enough documentary evidence exists to ... reassure us that there was indeed a Peloponnesian War.'<sup>9</sup>

But single-minded obsession with *veritas*, it must be noted, has rarely been typical of many past Herodoteans who have championed their hero. In antiquity it was predominantly the historian's charm of style that sold. During the Enlightenment his work was often preferred as a history of civilisation (or, in our contemporary usage, culture) over the narrowly political history of Thucydides.<sup>10</sup> And in the middle of the last century Collingwood favourably contrasted Herodotus' humanistic historicism, so to speak, with the ahistorical bent of his arch-rival towards timeless generalities<sup>11</sup> – although it was the very lack of such timelessness that had earlier made Aristotle consider history (viz. Herodotean *historia*) to be inferior to poetry.<sup>12</sup> On top of that, in the latter half of the same century, yet another favourable wind began to blow for Herodotus, and from a rather unexpected quarter: literary criticism, and a renewed interest it has inspired among historians in one of the most ancient arts of persuasion, storytelling. The title of this essay contains two keywords, 'Herodotus' and 'storytelling', but the first keyword, it must be admitted, has been meant more

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<sup>9</sup> See his addendum s. v. 'Thucydides' in the 1996 edition of the *OCD*, p. 1520 col. 2; cf. also Connor (1984), p. 6: 'Some felt cheated of the old Thucydides, the objective reporter, the scientist, the convenient source for historical facts.'

<sup>10</sup> This age-old characterisation of Herodotus and Thucydides as Cultural versus Political History, as the dual traditions of European historiography, was reiterated only a few years ago by Kelly (1998).

<sup>11</sup> Collingwood (1946), pp. 17-31. Here and throughout this essay the term 'historicism' is used in its classic, Meineckean-Crocean sense of *Historismus/istorismo*, of an understanding of the past as a sequence of unrepeatable experiences of humankind, and not in that of Popper's coinage ([1957], pp. 143ff.), a kind of teleological determinism; for the problem of the term, see Iggers, G. G., 'Historicism', in Wiener, P. W., ed., *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, New York, 1973, vol. 2, pp. 457-464.

<sup>12</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 1451b; but see also the recent reinstatement of the presence of theological fatalism in Herodotus by Harrison (2000); id. (2003); Mikalson (2002).

as a metaphor for the second. For all that has been said so far about Herodotus, what follows mostly involves a story about storytelling, and what its return to history entails.

Now this story begins with a little piece of historical narrative written for British children at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Once upon a time there was a giant called Neptune... When he grew old and had no more strength to rule, he gave his sceptre to the islands called Britannia, for we know –

“Britannia rules the waves.”

This is from the opening chapter of *Our Island Story*, an early post-Victorian account that retrieves Britain's (England's, really) national memory from the mythical periods down to the death of Queen Victoria. This once popular title, after having been out of print for more than half a century, was reprinted last year. I personally have found this book, which is of no small size, beautifully written and its stories quite absorbing. However, when it comes to reissuing it *today*, one cannot help but be tempted to draw a rather unsavoury analogy with, say, a sudden re-emergence on the bookselling market of wartime Japan's national myth-history, which instead of Neptune would have the Great Sun-Goddess Amaterasu augustly ordaining her grandson Ninigi, the reputed ancestor of the imperial family, to descend upon the divine heights of ancient Japan, and thence to proceed into a cheering crowd of right-wing fanatics to the great horror of everyone else. Take another passage, from Caesar's first expedition to Britain in 55 BC: 'Thus Caesar first landed upon the shores of Britain. But so many of his soldiers were killed and wounded that he was glad to make peace with these brave islanders... Indeed, when he went away, it seemed rather as if he were fleeing from a foe than leaving a conquered land.' This is again a very widespread stock motif of national folklore, where one might easily swap e.g. Caesar with Lars Porsenna and the Britons with the Romans in a 'revised' version of early Republican history. Now all this may sound like no new trend at all, but simply a zombie, once declared moribund by Walter Benjamin, returning to life in its worst form.<sup>13</sup> Rightly so, because that

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<sup>13</sup> Benjamin ([1936] 1961), IV: 'Die Kunst des Erzählens neigt ihrem Ende zu, weil die epische Seite der Wahrheit, die Weisheit, ausstirbt.' It turns out, however, to have been a

is what this antique narrative is all about: it is a classic piece of the *erzählende Geschichte*, recreation of the past memory in the form of a continuous story (to follow Bernheim's textbook definition), complete with origins, etymologies plus a little practical wisdom; and the publisher of its paperback edition is quite aptly called 'Yesterday's Classics'.<sup>14</sup>

It would certainly be naïve to look on a charming children's book written more than a century ago from the lofty heights of the present, were it not for the fact that *Our Island Story* already belonged to yesterday when it was originally published in 1905. As the book's very title and the preface quoted at the beginning of this essay suggest, its author, H. E. Marshall, then modestly conceived her book as 'not a history lesson, but a story-book'. Yet in 2005, exactly a century after, the think-tank that reissued the book, and nearly all the reviewers, contradicted her by boldly and unanimously calling it a 'history'. What had happened in the space of a hundred years? To this the most pertinent answer, in my view, came from one of those reviewers who correctly identified an intellectual trend that had resurrected *Our Island Story* from the morgue: the historian's re-discovery of storytelling.<sup>15</sup> But how can that be: a historian married to 'storytelling', with its frequent connotation of 'lying'? Surely that would be a less than respectable helpmate for a person in his profession? Anyhow, the same reviewer wittily went on to characterise the book as 'cutting-edge' because, as he or she saw it, its 'brave mix of truth and myth' is a paradoxical rebuttal of modernity and, hence, 'impeccably postmodern' (again with a pinch of sarcasm I suppose – though this last comment was deftly excerpted by the publisher for a blurb!).

Here we have that magic word, postmodernism. While it is a rather debatable point whether it can still claim to be 'cutting-edge', the word has certainly been around for some time. It has commonly been associated with an assortment of intellectual movements in the latter half of the twentieth century that can be seen in one way or another as rejection of modernity.<sup>16</sup> To that

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very long end indeed, as one finds Roland Barthes ([1967] 1984), p. 166, still giving the same diagnosis in the late 60s: 'La narration historique meurt...'

<sup>14</sup> A free copy of the full text of *Our Island Story* is available online, generously provided by the Baldwin Project at: <http://www.mainlesson.com/>

<sup>15</sup> *The Economist*, 'Notes on a small island', Aug. 20, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> 'Incredulity towards meta-narratives (l'incrédulité à l'égard des métarécits)' in Lyotard's ([1979], p. 7) classic formulation.

extent it may be a unitary, coherent strand of thought. But this blanket term, more often used pejoratively by its detractors than by its proponents, conceals greatly differing ideological convictions, as well as theoretical, not to mention terminological, disagreements within itself – as might be expected from any polarising generalisations like the Optimate-Popular opposition in Republican Rome. The principal source of this disarray, I think, is that no one has ever been quite sure what exactly constitutes postmodernism's imagined enemy, 'modernity', apart from a vaguely defined Enlightenment syndrome. So it has come about that some of the ideological strains in one school of postmodernism turn out to be closer to those of the anti-postmodernist camp than another school of postmodernism. Or it may be talking about architecture (it originally was). Or may be about some impenetrable French films. Or about Anglo-American multiculturalism. Or about sex. In order to facilitate comprehension – not least for myself – I take up here just one particular variety of postmodernism, to which the historical discipline has reduced the term as being more or less synonymous: discourse theory applied to the most obvious form of historical representation, historiography.<sup>17</sup>

To give a brief illustration of what this school of postmodernism has to say about history and historiography, I first quote one passage which, as I see it, betrays one of the intellectual origins of its core tenets:

Left to themselves, the facts do not speak. Left to themselves they do not exist... To select and affirm even the simplest complex of facts is to give them a certain place in a certain pattern of ideas, and this alone is sufficient to give them a special meaning... To set forth historical facts is not comparable to dumping a barrow of bricks. A brick retains its form and pressure wherever placed; but the form and substance of historical facts, having a negotiable existence only in literary discourse, vary with the words employed to convey them.

What strikes us most in this startling statement, I suspect, is that it sounds depressingly familiar. But patience is called for. These words in fact do not

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<sup>17</sup> Throughout this essay I have made no conscious attempt to distinguish between 'history' and 'historiography', as neither term has any clear-cut definition in contemporary usage (for the problem see Cartledge [1997], p. 3) and, under postmodernist theorisation, all such distinctions are supposed to collapse.

emanate from a Michel Foucault or a Paul Veyne or even a Hayden White writing in the 70s or the 80s. They come from Carl Becker, the liberal historian of the Enlightenment, in his famous or notorious Presidential Address to the American Historical Association in 1931.<sup>18</sup> Becker's sentiments here are typical of the so-called 'crisis of historicism' that had simmered on since the *Methodenstreit* at the end of the nineteenth century but only reached its apogee in the period between the two world wars. At the same time, his views no doubt echo in part the American tradition of pragmatism and in part, too, the contemporary sense of disorientation aired by Weimar Germany's cultural critics;<sup>19</sup> and although Becker himself duly retracted them after the war, others, notably Meinecke, Croce, Collingwood, and later E. H. Carr, variously sought to address the same questions as were raised in the first part of the quotation.<sup>20</sup> However, in more than one way Becker's pessimism as a whole, vented perhaps in some fit of tragic irony, looked forward to that of the postmodernists, who were to complete this cycle of scepticism by adding their own twist of extreme historicism.<sup>21</sup>

For this last group of post-war intellectuals, by deploying a combined force of structuralist narratology and post-structuralist deconstruction, came out onto the stage to declare that history, as long as it is a social and linguistic construct forever trapped in the infinite play of meanings at any given moment, cannot recount the past 'as it really was', but only 'as if it really was'. At worst it is a rhetorical exercise in converting arbitrary concepts into concrete 'facts' and then legitimising them by suppressing all the rest as non-facts. (Is Thucydides being denounced?) Or at best it may be a creation of some unconscious mindset infused with poetic plots and tropes. (That epic poet and tragedian Herodotus?) And at all events it is, at the other end of the production line, bound to throw up a hopelessly deficient vehicle to convey what the author intends to convey to his

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<sup>18</sup> Becker (1932), p. 233.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Spengler's two contemporaries (one critic, the other admirer), Lessing (1927<sup>4</sup>), and Friedell (1927), Bd. 1, 'Einleitung', who were both to fall victim to Nazism later. For an earlier expression of the dilemmas, see among others, Nietzsche (1901), ss. 556; 604.

<sup>20</sup> Meinecke ([1928] 1972<sup>2</sup>), pp. 270ff.; Croce (1917), esp. pp. 3ff.; 99ff.; id. (1938), pp. 1-161 passim; Collingwood (1946), esp. pp. 202ff.; 282ff.; Carr (1961).

<sup>21</sup> On Becker's precocity and its inter-war historical context, see Wright (1999). His understanding of 'facts' as unstable discursive constructs closely parallels the more concrete definition of 'facts', as opposed to 'le réel' or 'events', later delineated by Barthes ([1967] 1984), pp. 163ff., and White (1995), pp. 238ff.; see also Veyne (1971), pp. 48ff.; Berkhofer (1995), pp. 53ff.; Munz (1997), pp. 854ff., with varying appellations for the same distinction.

prospective readers. (For confirmation one only has to read the first few paragraphs of this essay on the subsequent fate of the two Greeks!) All these add up to show, according to this view, that history is generally no more than a species of realistic literature, and specifically a class of self-referential storytelling that passes for truth-telling, just as much as myth once did. Indeed, as Claude Lévi-Strauss once remarked and the Venus mural in California's Venice Beach concurred, history is our myth.<sup>22</sup> By arguing thus these intelligent folks, in their own peculiar ways but to a devastating effect by some fatalists' estimate, ditched once and for all that classic Aristotelian distinction between history and poetry,<sup>23</sup> resurrecting instead the equally ancient thesis of Quintilian, that history is, after all, a kind of prose-poem.<sup>24</sup> No more, no less. And the more radical pundits, in a natural extension of the death of the Author in literature announced by French post-structuralism and the American New Criticism, went so far as to proclaim the death of the Historian. To study history is not to study the past – nor even the historian. What really matters is 'wie es eigentlich *gelesen*' by the Reader. So, the logical upshot of this line of argument would be that, at one extreme, it is perfectly possible, irrespective of external documents, to argue that there was indeed no Peloponnesian War – in much the same way as Jean Baudrillard argued that the Gulf War had never taken place ('La guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu').<sup>25</sup>

This blatantly nihilist assault on the received notion of history, which horrified even the venerable Momigliano, naturally led to fierce controversies, cries of foul play, feigned what's-new apathy, and more thoughtful counter-offensives.<sup>26</sup> At stake was more than just the narrowly professional credibility of historians; the idea of historical truth as nothing more than a mirage, *pseudea etymoisin homoia*, conjured up by 'the lays of a poet' clearly carried far wider, potentially sinister implications. Those engaged in ancient history, it is true, often innocently accept, or even welcome, the notion that

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<sup>22</sup> Lévi-Strauss (1979), pp. 42f.; Rip Cronk, *Venice Reconstituted*, 1989, Venice Beach Hotel, Exterior (a postmodern adaptation of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*).

<sup>23</sup> Arist. *Poet.* 1451b; cf. Cic. *Leg.* 1.5; Lucian. *De hist. conscr.* 8.

<sup>24</sup> Quintil. 10.1.31.

<sup>25</sup> Baudrillard (1991).

<sup>26</sup> Most famously Momigliano (1981); see also Murray (1991), p. 63, observing the Italian polymath in his late years: 'The signs of impatience with theoreticians became more prominent ... he admired Foucault and Marshall Sahlins perhaps, but was visibly distressed by the view of his American colleague Hayden White, that history was a form of rhetoric.'



there may be as many stories as there are historians and as many readings as there are readers as a premise for innovative thinking. With the more recent past, however, such Pyrrhonian relativism, or 'narrativism' as it is fancily called, all too easily lends itself to innovation of a perverse kind. One only need look at David Irving in the dock to see the point: the postmodernist poetics of history, largely born out of the left-wing radicalism of the 60s and the early 70s by way of recouping traditionally marginalised voices, threatens to play into the sticky hands of all sorts of other happily buried demons, the ugliest among them the right-wing revisionism from the 80s on.<sup>27</sup> This last danger first became widely publicised with the Paul de Man affair in the late 80s, which deconstructed, as it were, the late leading deconstructionist as a one-time Nazi collaborationist.<sup>28</sup>

Yet more pertinent to my story is probably a similar warning raised against postmodernism at about the same time, though in an altogether separate context. Curiously it emerged from de Man's intellectual defender Christopher Norris, during the UK's so-called 'history debate' that involved a proposed national curriculum in English and Welsh schools.<sup>29</sup> This debate gained, and continues to gain, far wider resonance beyond a single policy issue. It may therefore be no coincidence, in this context, that Civitas, the think-tank that reissued *Our Island Story*, had backed (on its 'blog' site) a plea made earlier last year by Tim Collins, the then Conservative shadow education secretary, to

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<sup>27</sup> This question is variously addressed by Friedländer et al. (1992); and most recently by Moses (2005); cf. the postmodernist apologia by Eagleston (2004); Jenkins and Munslow (2004), p. 14. I am here also alluding, one may easily understand, to the embarrassing publication in the last decade of a number of crackpot Japanese histories with unabashedly revisionist agenda, some of them selectively adopting useful bits of postmodernist and postcolonial language for their own ends, while some others cloaking their meta-narrative of shabby nationalism in strings of 'little stories'; for an English-language review of this neo-nationalist abuse, see Nozaki (2005): 'The Nationalist Appropriation of Postmodern Vocabulary'. We might recall too, that their forefathers were after all already arguing 'how to overcome modernity (kindai-no-chōkoku)' in the early 1940s. For the general problem of the synthesis of old bigotry and new ideology, see Buruma and Margalit (2004), pp. 142ff.

<sup>28</sup> For an engaging story of this startling revelation in 1987 and its aftermath, see Lehman (1991), 'Part 2: the Fall of Paul de Man'; cf. also Ginzburg (1999), pp. 16ff., which identifies a common strand of thought running from Nietzsche to Jacques Derrida and de Man that 'fascinate[s] at the same time both the heirs of the colonizers and the heirs of the colonized.'

<sup>29</sup> Norris (1988). On the Thatcherite programme to introduce a fixed national curriculum into history education in the late 80s, and the broader debates that had preceded and followed it, see the contributions by respected historians in Gardiner et al. (1990); cf. also Elton ([1984] 1991); Evans (1997), pp. 179f.; for another follow-up to the debate, I refer to the two articles 'History lessons' and 'Achtung! Too many Nazis' in *The Economist*, Nov. 3, 2001.

revive a national narrative for 'the survival of the British nation';<sup>30</sup> and although I doubt if the book would serve the purpose for any other nation than the *English*, similar calls are now increasingly heard from the Labour government itself.<sup>31</sup> True, given the current socio-political atmosphere in the UK, the need for a modest corrective to the excessive multiculturalism of the postmodernist left, with its perceived dissolution of all communal values, might be cited as a rationale for reissuing the book. It is also true that Caesar, a clever but greedy continental, in full flight from the wild but brave 'Britons' is only harmlessly funny. But this kind of move, whatever its intent, always risks striking an unfortunate chord with another sort of postmodernism at the other end of the political spectrum. Thucydides was true indeed to his reputation as a historian of synchronic truth when he spoke against writing history for 'the applause of the moment': not only literary or theatrical applause but, we might read here, revisionist applause.<sup>32</sup> Although we may not escape in the end from the dictum that every history is contemporary history, this is not the kind of history we would want, for the postmodern age or otherwise.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Tim Collins quoted as saying in *The Guardian*, 'Conscription of the Past', June 11, 2005, by the popularising historian Tristram Hunt, who concludes his criticism of the Tory proposal with a raw rant against an odd axis of evil of the USA, Japan and India, and a panegyric of 'our' liberal, pluralist, reflexive tradition of history teaching – thereby inadvertently succumbing to the same pervasive mythology of national exceptionalism (Britain in his version being uniquely tolerant and open to diversity), around which quasi-intellectual discourses of every political shade in every country tend to revolve; we see the same chimera at work, on the Conservative front, in Elton ([1984] 1991), pp. 113ff. Another figure that might be of some interest in this story is Arthur Bryant, who as educational adviser to the Conservative government in the 30s was responsible for the inter-war organisation of historical pageants based on the episodes of *Our Island Story*: cf. Roberts (1994), ch. 6 (a polemic that depicts the late Tory historian as an opportunistic weak ideologue, one-time Nazi sympathiser and naïve upholder of mystic 'Englishry').

<sup>31</sup> *The Economist*, Aug. 20, 2005, *ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> As every scholar since Niebuhr would agree, revisionism – all manner of it – was a notoriously ancient pastime, feeding a well-established source of polemics to Thucydides (e.g. the founding 'mythistory' of Athenian democracy) and for that matter nearly every other ancient author; Thucydides' work itself, needless to say, was a 'revisionist history, albeit of an exceptionally powerful variety' (Connor [1984], p. 11); so was Herodotus' (Lateiner [1989], p. 42); and so was, after all, Hecataeus' (F1 FGH 1A.1). It may be noted, too, that Japan's oldest extant narrative history, *The Records of Ancient Matters (Kojiki)*, was composed already in the spirit of 'correcting' the past: 'Hereupon, regretting the errors in the old words, and wishing to correct the misstatements in the former chronicles, She [Empress Genmyō] ... commanded me Yasumaro to select and record the old words...' (1. Pref. 11, following B. H. Chamberlain's classic translation).

<sup>33</sup> That is, the kind of pseudo-history commonly referred to as 'romantic history' (cf. Meinecke [1951], pp. 15f.), and specifically as *la storia poetica* and *praticistica*, so named, and strongly

Even today the dust of the postmodern battles has barely settled, at least in humanities and social sciences. It is a measure of the lingering enmity that sporadic mortars are still being launched against the whole idea of deconstructing history by traditionalists of wildly diverse ideological persuasions, from the British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm to the American neo-conservative classicist Donald Kagan.<sup>34</sup> However, the last couple of decades of the twentieth century also witnessed the more accommodating scholars start parallel diplomacy with postmodernism. These negotiatory tactics, for all practical purposes, can be divided into three categories or so, with large overlaps between them.<sup>35</sup> On the theoretical front, the first group of sceptical and cautious historians seems on the whole to have shifted their ground to a more measured 'containment' policy by the end of the 90s.<sup>36</sup> The second, which seems to me the most predominant, is an active engagement strategy, or the historian's equivalent of the Third Way.<sup>37</sup> This has translated into an eclectic, and often tacit, takeover of the very theoretical weaponry developed since the late 60s under the broader rubric of the so-called linguistic turn, of which postmodernism was the last and ultimate weapon of mass deconstruction; yet it has now been deployed not to 'disable' the fundamentals of 'our own history', but to 'empower' them,<sup>38</sup> scientifically as it were. In classical studies, for example, the study of storytelling, or narratology, of all theoretical hues has most cogently and profitably been casting newly critical lights on literary works, er, texts, including those of Herodotus and Thucydides (often without invoking the older 'Homeric' question of their compositional processes, or even the modernist question of their *veritas*);<sup>39</sup> the underlying assumption, presumably, being that

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repudiated, by none other than Croce (1917), pp. 26-36; yet id. (1938), pp. 181-190, more bluntly calls it *la storia di tendenza* and *di partito*.

<sup>34</sup> Hobsbawm (2005); Kagan (2005); for an earlier voice of conservative conscience, see Elton (1991), pp. 27-73.

<sup>35</sup> For a different classification, see Jenkins (1997), which instead divides the debate into five camps (for and against postmodernist histories, for and against the collapse of the 'lower case' history, and the ambiguous).

<sup>36</sup> E.g. Eley (1996); Evans (1997); Ginzburg (1999).

<sup>37</sup> Rosenau (1991); Berkhofer (1995); Burke et al. (2001<sup>2</sup>) are among the more sympathetic towards various postmodernist theories.

<sup>38</sup> To paraphrase Eley (1996), p. 214.

<sup>39</sup> The last few decades have seen a profusion of narratological as well as broadly cultural studies on Herodotus: Fornara (1971); Hartog (1980); Lang (1984); Gould (1989); Lateiner (1989); Evans (1991); Harrison (2000); Thomas (2000); Munson (2001); of these the narrative analyses are almost invariably Unitarian (save Fornara, *ibid.*), and many of the cultural

whatever one is to make of modern historiography, the pre-modern variety can safely be treated just the same as any other branches of literature like poetry and oratory.<sup>40</sup> But more broadly, before the linguistic turn started to encroach on the historical profession itself, practitioners of cultural history, many of them anxious to supplant or supplement the old socio-economic determinism with the new cultural determinism,<sup>41</sup> had already extended this linguistic model to explore the whole range of human discourse at all social levels, from visual representations to oral traditions, from Greek cultic practices to actions of a Roman emperor, discovering in them codes, plots, tropes, allusions, structures, symmetries, binary oppositions, paradigms, meta-narratives, mentalité, self-constructions, dominations, oppressions, subversions, or whatever they

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enquiries tend to start from mildly New Historicist contextualism while leaving a large scope for authorial agency; the intellectual concerns that permeate these works also inform the two recent compendia of the latest Herodotean scholarship by Bakker, de Jong and van Wees (2002), and Dewald and Marincola (2006); and these in addition to numerous individual articles for which one is advised to refer to those compendia; see also below, nn. 66-71, for more bibliog. On the other hand interest in Thucydides in terms of the linguistic and cultural turns has understandably been centred on his narrative techniques: see the general narratological studies by Dewald (2005), a published version of her 1975 dissertation; Hornblower (1994); Rood (1998); for an application of postmodernist theory (intertextuality, reader-response criticism etc.), see Connor (1984); the late twentieth-century reception of Thucydides in these directions is broadly explored and exploited in the latest monograph by Greenwood (2006). Yet the second half of the classic work of Cornford (1907), who, as it happens, was another earlier example to cave in to the discursive nature of both ancient and modern historiography (pp. viiiif.), was in several respects 'narratological' long before the term was coined; in particular, he identified a set of tragic modes operating in Thucydidean narrative; for the literature after Cornford on the subject, see Greenwood, *ibid.*, pp. 21f.; 83-108. More recent scholarship has further enlarged its scope to look for the historian's affinity, set in a wider literary and cultural milieu or 'intertextuality', with other types of poetry, above all with the epic (see the latest bibliog. in Howie [2005], p. 208 n. 4) but also the epinician: Howie (1998), a revised translation of his 1984 German article; most recently Hornblower (2004). Short narratological studies (with convenient bibliographies) on various Greek authors are collected in a recent anthology by de Jong, Nünlist and Bowie (2004).

<sup>40</sup> It is a curious matter of fact that *OCD*'s rather long review by D. P. Fowler and P. G. Fowler of the twentieth-century history of 'literary criticism and classical studies' (pp. 871ff.) dodges the question of historiography, bar a single passing note: '[narratology] is often seen as the least "threatening" approach ... except perhaps in relation to historiography.' This perceived threat, however, has conversely elicited calls for drawing a line between fictional and historical narratives from narratological theorists themselves: see Genette (1993), pp. 54ff.; Cohn (1999); on which more below, n. 54.

<sup>41</sup> On this Herodotean Custom-is-the-King-of-all fixation, see Jones (1996); what Hobsbawm had hailed as 'continuation' ([1980], p. 8), he laments instead as a liability, as 'the determinist fix', 'the undead residue of historical materialism' in the tradition, esp. in the Foucauldian tradition, of cultural history.

chose to discover.<sup>42</sup> The third response, and this is what matters to this essay, is, well, a conditional surrender, so to speak. That is, frankly to accept the acceptable part of the postmodernist challenge, and to (re)create history as such: a story.

Before going further, some clarification will be required of words like 'story' and 'narrative', for much confusion has been brought in by the loose terminology of literary theories, by common usage and not least by pseudo-academic obfuscation. First, 'story' in this case should not, as every so often it does, imply 'fiction'. I said 'conditional' because no historian with a conscience would be prepared to demolish the fundamental borderline between history and fiction. On the other hand story does not, as it does in formalist narratology, refer to the hypothetical sequence of actual events themselves either. By story I simply mean what narratologists variously call 'narrative' 'story' '*sjuzhet*' – the form rather than the content.<sup>43</sup> And the kind of narrative I have in mind does not include every form of narrative discourse in its broadest possible sense, like meta-narratives or pictures or maps or statistics or perhaps DNA history, but one particular mode of linguistic representation, word-based narrative. Nor does it deal with what is happening, as a live report does, what will happen, as prophecy or fortune-telling does, or what generally happens, as a gnomic saying does. It is all and only about what happened, and the way it is arranged in some coherent string (often chronological and nearly always causal, with the added variety of occasional leaps in time or anachrony) and reworked into a realistic story – that is, 'narrative history' in its most conventional sense.

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<sup>42</sup> In this context the younger generations of the French *Annales* school or the cultural theorists of the New History may come to mind as being representative; but for my own preferences I refer to the more 'humanistic' approaches adopted for Roman historical traditions by people like Peter Wiseman and Jürgen von Ungern-Sternberg, and the contributors to the anthology in the former's honour edited by Braund and Gill (2003); see also Coudry and Späth (2001), a more pan-European project in the same vein.

<sup>43</sup> It may certainly be contested, quite rightly, that the form as signifier – the emplotment (linking of items through a postulated chain of cause and effect), the order (arrangement of items or plots), the duration (narrative rhythms, or emphases given to particular items or plots), the mood (focalisation, or viewpoints), the voice ('what I think really happened' versus 'what is thought to have really happened' etc.) – decides the content as signified; so that the form is itself an interpretative and/or propositional discourse. But I excuse myself for leaving aside this thorny question by simply noting that it is immaterial to my current argument whether the content thus generated presents itself as such, a story, a probable truth, or pretends to be the Story, the nonnegotiable Truth.

Time was when history indeed stood for story or history *ad narrandum*. Only a century ago G. M. Trevelyan was still able to defend it as the 'bedrock' of history.<sup>44</sup> But within less than fifty years, professional scholarship had pushed this once most familiar or even self-evident means of history-telling dramatically out of fashion, replacing it with history *ad probandum* or analytical history structured in horizontal, thematic alignment; so much so that Arthur Keaveney, in the late 80s, had to open his narrative history of the course of the Italian Social War with an apologetic excuse that 'this is an unashamedly old-fashioned book';<sup>45</sup> and Peter Munz, in the late 90s, quipped that nowadays historians were the only people around who refused to see the past as a time structure.<sup>46</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, that the renewed call for narrative history should have come not only from those postmodernist critics who preferred its apparently unassuming mode of representation to the social scientific, argumentative, often mystifying variety,<sup>47</sup> but also from respectable historians who deplored the scholarly condemnation of traditional narrative to such opprobrium. In fact the talk as well as practice of narrative is nearly as old as postmodern narrativism itself: it originated from an incipient offshoot of the social history of the late 70s that was to evolve into what is today cultural history.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Trevelyan (1913), pp. 1-55; cf. also Friedell (1927), Bd. 1, pp. 16f.

<sup>45</sup> Keaveney (1987), 'Introduction'.

<sup>46</sup> Munz (1997), pp. 851ff. Munz's criticism was directed at structuralist historiography in general, but it may also have been a more specific rebuke to Paul Veyne's oxymoronic precept that 'le temps n'est pas essentiel à l'histoire' ([1971], pp. 83f.); yet incidentally this too has a curiously ancient ring, as for example when Eunapius (F1 Müller = F1 Blockley) proclaims: '...whereas the highest aim and function of history is to record events with a minimum of subjectivity and in the light of the truth, the details of chronology (*hoi akribeis logismoi tôn chronôn*), intruding irrelevantly like uncalled witnesses, are of no help in this. For what do dates contribute to the wisdom of Socrates or the acuity of Themistocles? Were they great men only during the summer? Did one see them growing and shedding their virtues like leaves according to the time of the year?' (tr. by Blockley).

<sup>47</sup> Leading narrativists such as Hayden White ([1978], pp. 83ff.; 117f. and passim) and Dominick LaCapra (1985) are natural advocates of the historian's self-reflexive use of literary, rather than technical, devices (many of them, however, opt for colourless, often arcane prose styles in their own work); for the storytelling school of postmodernism, see Rosenau (1991), pp. 66; 84.

<sup>48</sup> The 'revival of narrative' was first publicly recognised by the late anti-postmodernist social historian Lawrence Stone (1979); yet as Hobsbawm (1980) was quick to point out, the kind of narrative Stone was then speaking of was by and large confined to the 'little-story' or micro-narrative type of social and cultural history (other specimens are only cursorily discussed at *ibid.*, pp. 19ff.).

It was these convergent trends of the linguistic, cultural and postmodern turns that staged the triumphant return of storytelling. 'History as a story', once thus restored, has since then disseminated far beyond the narrow confines of social and cultural history, breathing new life even into the 'old-fashioned' great stories of war, politics and revolution.<sup>49</sup> Its success has been such that in the late 90s even the epitome of the source-bound, common-sense empiricism in the mould of Richard Evans approvingly noted that postmodernism had helped restore legitimacy to literary narrative in history writing,<sup>50</sup> a sentiment which certainly represents one strand of British historical tradition that Trevelyan had so strenuously and somewhat parochially vindicated. Probably this unexpected revival of traditional storytelling can also be linked to the similar phenomenon detectable in those areas that had earlier been taken on by literary deconstruction, such as novels, films and theatrical performances. Ancient history, with its long tradition of communicating itself through storytelling, might naturally be expected to be in the vanguard of this enterprise. Yet curious as it may seem, it has so far been less successful than the later periods in translating this new current into 'serious' academic writings. The majority of today's titles that do practise the art of storytelling on ancient history are either elementary books stocked on the shelves of local schools, or the so-called 'popularising histories' to be found in corner bookstores. To be sure, these books are of great worth in their own right, often informative and sometimes ingenious. The point is that these types of history have always been there anyway, with or without postmodernism. *Our Island Story* was just one such.

This relative failure to produce narrative history on any grand scale is fairly understandable. For it simply takes time to change an intellectual habit, or paradigm, framed in terms of analytical, 'deadly serious' history resplendent with big footnotes (like the ones you see on these pages). And, as intellectual trends go, ancient historians in the last fifty years or so have tended to catch, and drop off, the train last. Perhaps such conservatism is not in itself a bad thing, since postmodernist literary theory, as noted, has always run the risk of being hijacked by 'cultural guerrillas' for politically pernicious ends. The risk of making history cater solely to the present is no less real for ancient history; in a

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<sup>49</sup> For the literature on the development of narrative history since the late 70s, see Berkhofer (1995), chs. 2-3; Evans (1997), pp. 142ff.; 244ff.; Burke (2001<sup>2</sup>), pp. 283-300.

<sup>50</sup> Evans (1997), pp. 244ff.

way all the more so, given what E. H. Carr once called the 'built-in ignorance' of ancient historians.<sup>51</sup> Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, after all, are only the most egregious cases of modern exploitation of the grand narrative that was Classical Antiquity.<sup>52</sup> Although it may be a bit of a stretch to draw another example from a children's book, it is also interesting to observe how the earlier chapters of *Our Island Story* seamlessly weave the Graeco-Roman past into the story of England, largely through a generous reading of Roman historiography and medieval English chronicles (Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth etc. – via John Milton?). Even we in East Asia may not be immune from erecting modern myths upon the same Graeco-Roman past for our own sake – by drawing false analogies, for example, or toying with some 'Occidentalist' generalisations.<sup>53</sup> And there are of course practical difficulties involved in writing a narrative that is both readable, even entertaining, and yet acceptable to the current academic norms and standards. At best it may end up as just another popular history, and at worst as a populist history.

It is surely beyond the scope of this modest essay to come up with a handy answer to such old questions as how to achieve the two goals of turning out a piece of historical writing capable of filling one's soul with *iucundissima lectionis voluptate*, and at the same time keeping Neptune, Amaterasu and suchlike at bay; or how to prevent the historical Alexander or Caesar from descending into the Alexanders or Caesars of novels and Hollywood films.<sup>54</sup> But

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<sup>51</sup> Carr (1961), p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> To take a less frightening example, it has been fashionable for some time to argue that the modern narrative of the ancient *Völkerwanderung* was a nationalist myth created to legitimatise the nation states of Europe: on this debate see Geary (2002); for the history of this 'Germanist paradigm' in the European historiography since the Reformation, Kelly (1998), pp. 174-187; 204f.; 221f. But the younger Ward-Perkins ([2005], pp. 172ff.), meanwhile, has lately added a new twist by suggesting that the now prevalent alternative model, a peaceful assimilation of the Germanic tribes into the Roman world (see Cameron [2002], pp. 169ff.), bears just as many political overtones within the context of the European integration. One might easily dismiss this as just another peculiarly British paranoia, and the charge of partisanship is in any case the historian's rhetorical stock in trade to marginalise the proverbial Other. Still, I feel there is something more than that in Ward-Perkins' view. And I feel, too, that the whole debate now stands every chance of being further affected by the question of European Islam.

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. the nineteenth-century Slavophile rejection of classical traditions as illustrated by Buruma and Margalit (2004), pp. 90ff.

<sup>54</sup> Postmodernism is all too willing to collapse this distinction between history and historical fiction: e.g. Adhikari (2002) unhesitatingly restyles the class of literature conventionally (but not unreasonably) designated 'historical novels' – *A Farewell to Arms*, *The Bridge on the River Quai*, *Laurence of Arabia*, *War and Peace* and so on – as 'literary' 'fictionalised' or



even in our hazy world of ancient history, storytelling, of a sort, seems to be making a cautious comeback. Since the late 90s in particular, major review journals attest a small but gradual growth in the number of publications in history that self-consciously tell stories or at least contain large chunks of narrative, if such crude quantification is anything to go by.<sup>55</sup> True, not all the narrators in these books may be qualified storytellers. But even in the heydays of narrative history, I should not suppose everyone was a Gibbon or a Macaulay. It is also true that some of these studies are of the new-old, counter-reformation streak, as much in content as in form, reviving older views and concentrating almost exclusively on the political, institutional and individual. But again, that is in the end what a 'return' is all about.<sup>56</sup> It may well be legitimate, therefore,

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'unconventional history'. In practical terms, however, such a distinction is more easily stated than implemented: see the general survey of the problem by Berkhofer (1995), pp. 45-75. On the purely formal level, such narratological 'signposts' as observed by Genette (1993), pp. 54-84, and Cohn (1999), pp. 109-131, may serve as some kind of rough measures to demarcate fictional from non-fictional narratives – granted, of course, that the author of the narrative is conscious, indeed conscientious, about what he or she is doing, i.e. writing a historical fiction and not, like Lucian's *True Stories*, a fictional history (cf. Genette, *ibid.*, p. 78 n. 33; pp. 82ff.); that the reader is clever enough (both sore points postmodernist theory would call into question); and that one is not deterred by these narratologists' characteristic but unhelpful penchant for heterodiegetic jargon and artificial neologism in formulating their observations. On the level of content, the solutions proposed all tend to settle on either implausible eclecticism (Munz [1997]; Burke [2001<sup>2</sup>]; Bevir [2002]) or otherwise a somewhat bland reassertion of the 'referential' constraints imposed on historiography, i.e. empirically solid evidence outside interpretation, or Carr's metaphorical shape of a mountain (Momigliano [1981], pp. 260ff.; Evans [1997], chs. 3-4; 8; Cohn [1999], *ibid.*; Ginzburg [1999], pp. 101ff.). But such external referentiality, if attainable at all (which, again, postmodernism denies as it denies the possibility of access to the extratextual or ontological reality of the past), is heavily limited in the case of ancient history by the opposite kind of constraints, that is, the very narrow scope for material corroboration. Few periods of ancient history would ultimately be recoverable without recourse to that proverbial 'reasoned conjecture'. Yet where exactly does reasoned conjecture end and imaginative fiction begin? The Peloponnesian War, we may concede, was a construct 'real' enough; the Persian War, probably. But what about, say, the Trojan War, an epic war that is 'situated at the edge of history' (Hartog [2000], p. 388)?

<sup>55</sup> This (admittedly impressionistic) observation is based on *The Classical Review* and the online *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*.

<sup>56</sup> For one thing, the micro-narrative approach commonly practised in the historiography of the more recent past is considerably harder to apply to the remote past: the passage of time has robbed historical nobodies of enough documentation to turn their experiences into sustained *petites histoires* or little stories. Yet two recent biographical studies, one on Alexander (Mossé [2001]) and the other on Nero (Champlin [2003]), seem to show how much light can still be shed even on such irredeemable 'great men' with a fusion of traditional *Quellenkritik*, late twentieth-century representation theory and postmodern exercises in storytelling. No doubt this fusion may not always be successful, and its 'newness' more a

to ask: where does this 'return' get us? Can we really say it is signalling one genuine trend in a healthy direction for the years to come? Or is it not just a temporary retreat from the present mess supposedly created by an array of intellectual trends that have been lumped together as postmodernism? Or worse, is it not a deplorable regression to pre-modernity, the postmodernists' other favourite, disguised as postmodernism or post-postmodernism? To these I can only say, in the best empiricist tradition, *nec satis scio, nec, si sciam, discere ausim* – for every future prediction is bound to fail. However, I may observe the following points, and in spite of all the possible pitfalls so far indicated, register a humble appeal of my own for storytelling.

First, it has certainly been easy to mock postmodernism for the inherent absurdities of many of its propositions when turned on their head (or to put it another way: its theory against all theories, the myth of ending all the myth of modernity, the universal challenge against the universal, the call for 'historicising' everything while denying history, the very grand narrative of postmodernism, and so on). It has also been easy to criticise the more extreme school of postmodernism for its Foucauldian reduction of the consensual model of historical knowledge, however flawed and problematic in its very nature, to a mere set of crass ideologies and tools of power; and for its utter failure to take account of the referential or corroboratory side of historical enquiry, not to mention its public and ethical dimensions.<sup>57</sup> But rather than accusing postmodernism of what it fails to do, one ought rather to grapple with it in terms of what it does – to take issue with the historian's exposition, which had largely been passed over by modern 'Philosophy of History'. And what postmodernist experiments have taught him, or better reminded him, is that it is decent stories, rather than cold analyses, that make people listen, understand and – may I dare use the tricky word – empathise. We should all know this, to our pain, from our daily struggle with those long-faced undergrads ever determined to cling to the back of lecture rooms.

Secondly, for all the talk of postmodernism having had its day (let us leave aside the obvious paradox of there ever being an end to the 'after-modern'), it

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matter of terminology than methodology, but we are, after all, still at the end of a long beginning, from which something in some way innovative might arise in a Viconian spiral.

<sup>57</sup> On this last point, see Moses (2005), a timely criticism of White's redemptive poetics of history.

continues to haunt history. That is precisely because its argument has disturbed those notoriously ancient hotspots of historiography, all of which, ultimately, bear on the epistemological question of objective truth: the boundary between history and literature, between history and rhetoric, between history and myth. These questions, needless to say, have a long pedigree, reaching back in modern times to the sixteenth-century humanists through Vico, 'that eccentric arationalist' of the Enlightenment,<sup>58</sup> and ultimately descending from antiquity, from Thucydides, Aristotle, Polybius, Cicero, Quintilian, Lucian to name but a few. In the ranks of those who did question them, we could also count a few respectable names in modern *Geschichtswissenschaft*: von Ranke, indeed, together with his critic Droysen, who both had the temerity to argue that history is somehow a mixture of science and art;<sup>59</sup> or, to put it in more recent parlance, a synthesis of referentiality and representation. 'Just as Marx was not a Marxist, Ranke was not a Rankean,' to borrow the phrase of Peter Burke.<sup>60</sup> So, as the postmodernists themselves gladly acknowledge, there is nothing particularly postmodern about them. These are issues that have arrested the minds of all generations of humanity, ancients and moderns alike. Some have taken these ambiguities as embarrassing shortcomings, to be stamped out at all costs. Others have turned them to their own advantage, to promote collective amnesia or to create narratives of redemption for this resentment or that trauma, and thereby to deform the whole shape of history. Still others have discovered in them the very merits and promises of history, sources of its imaginative power to restore flesh and blood to a world that is no longer with us. For this last school, such a venerable master of literary history as Gibbon may be too ancient a modern case to cite, but even in our twentieth century we have

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<sup>58</sup> White (1973), p. 51.

<sup>59</sup> Ranke ([1830s] 1954), pp. 290f.: 'Die Historie unterscheidet sich dadurch von allen anderen Wissenschaften, daß sie zugleich Kunst ist... Als Wissenschaft ist sie der Philosophie, als Kunst der Poesie verwandt.'; Droysen (1868), p. 78: 'auch bei uns ist die Einsicht gewonnen oder das Zugeständniss gemacht, dass „die Historie Kunst und Wissenschaft zugleich sei“.'

<sup>60</sup> Burke (2001<sup>2</sup>), p. 3. See the process of Rankeanism, faced with mounting historical scepticism, hardening into an unyielding yet not necessarily consistent dogma by the end of the nineteenth century: e.g. the notorious decree pronounced by J. B. Bury ([1903] 1972<sup>2</sup>), pp. 210; 223, 'history is a science, no less and no more,' which has since been subjected to much ridicule for its naturalistic understanding of science, but which was in fact more of an expression of 'a mind torn between two conceptions'(so Collingwood [1946], p. 148); see also Adams (1909), pp. 231f., around the same period: 'Is history a science or an art?... [The question] attempts to make a distinction which does not exist.'

the formidable example of Ronald Syme, who practised the art of combining research with literary narrative to intimidating effect.<sup>61</sup>

Thus it was not for nothing that Cicero opined that the best orator is the best historian; and not for nothing that Lucian, while vehemently eschewing poetic partisan history, nevertheless prescribed 'a touch and share of poetry' for history writing.<sup>62</sup> Since the rise of positivist science if not ever since the time of Hecataeus of Miletus, historical practice has more often than not followed fashionable abstract theories, and first-rate research thrives on what some cynics have termed conceptual plagiarism: historical materialism, Weberian sociology, econometrics, cultural anthropology, semiotic linguistics, psychoanalysis, physiology, neo- and post-Marxism, ethnic studies, gender theory, and what not of any other disparate offshoot of social sciences and cultural studies. The inventory goes on and on. In this dazzling hypermarket of after-modern theories, storytelling is one of the very few items still left for sale, only waiting for a serious customer to grab. It is also one of the more marketable of postmodernist novelties to the historian. For I see no intrinsic harm, with good inspiration and due adjustment, in applying a prudent degree of 'Clio's cosmetics' to the complexion of history, any more than processing it through the heavy surgery of tyrannical theories that tend to snip off uncomfortable warts of empirical details.

Some historians of postmodernist stripe, on the other hand, have viewed the revival of narrative, especially political narrative of the traditional order, as reactionary; and instead argued that the thematic, theoretical and multiculturalist approach is more 'sympathetic and accessible'.<sup>63</sup> A very un-postmodern value judgement I fear to say, in that it equates the validity of one mode of representation with its perceived superiority over others – or should I say the Other? Anyhow that complacent belief in its supposed 'accessibility' seems to sit somewhat uneasily with the grim fact that popular narrative histories with an overtly élitist outlook continue to draw a large audience, far larger than merely the dominant, conservative male folks, and with a reach that professional scholarship could only dream of matching. (Like it or not, in Japan

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<sup>61</sup> See Wiseman ([1997] 1998), which at various points raises the question of history and fiction in Syme's major works.

<sup>62</sup> Cic. *De or.* 2.36; 2.62; *Leg.* 1.5ff.; Lucian. *De hist. conscr.* 8; 45 (but compare his *Ver. hist.* 1.2-4); see also Diod. 20.1-2; Plut. *Mor.* 347A-E, *Bell. an Pac. praest. Ath.* 3.

<sup>63</sup> Cameron (2002), pp. 176ff.

we have Ms Nanami Shiono's vast literary output on Roman history.) I am in no position to weigh the relative merits and demerits in either approaches, but why assume, in the first place, that narrative history is only good for throwing up linear, periodised, event-bound, great-men stories simply because it used to do so in the past? Such an assumption, in my view, does scant justice to its full potential.<sup>64</sup>

But is it possible, then, to achieve the kind of synthesis implied here? How can we produce, for example, a historical narrative that combines high politics, grand ideas and universalising models with less spectacular aspects of human experience, such as local stories, individual memory and personal beliefs (Geertz' 'thick-description' type of narrative), setting them in a non-linear, non-periodised, polycentric arrangement? That question now conveniently brings us all the way back to Herodotus, the beginning of the story, and of History. By all odds he is a paragon of postmodern historiography. His mastery of storytelling has never been called into question even by his fiercest critics, not excluding Plutarch.<sup>65</sup> He is often more willing to emerge as an intimate first-person narrator than stealthily stay behind a faceless third-person narrative.<sup>66</sup> His narrative flow is notoriously of the kind that Roland Barthes called 'zigzag history (l'histoire en zigzags)' and more sombre structuralists 'ring composition';<sup>67</sup> and ending as it is with a chronologically and conceptually

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<sup>64</sup> This seems however to be the common assumption even among those favourably disposed to narrative: so also Stone (1979), pp. 3f.; for a criticism of this oversimplification, Berkhofer (1995), pp. 26f.; 35f.

<sup>65</sup> Indeed for Fehling himself Herodotus' virtues in this respect were manifest, and his censure was not directed at Herodotus but at apologists who attempted to explain away what he himself appreciated as *fictions*, and not as lies; see e.g. Fehling (1989<sup>2</sup>), pp. 8f.; 245-254.

<sup>66</sup> For a narratological definition of the 'narrator', as opposed to the 'author' (though in practice they are mostly identical in modern historiography: cf. Genette [1993], pp. 68-79), and the ways it features in Herodotean narrative, see de Jong (2004), pp. 1-10; 101-110; for Herodotus' tactical use of first-person narration, Thomas (2000), pp. 235-247; Dewald (2002); Brock (2003), pp. 8-16. On the recent call for making the historical narrator 'overt' in his narrative, Burke (2001<sup>2</sup>), p. 290.

<sup>67</sup> Barthes ([1967] 1984), p. 155. For the organising principles of Herodotean narrative in general, see Lang (1984), pp. 1-17; Gould (1989), pp. 42-62; Lateiner (1989), pp. 39f.; 114-125; 212ff.; de Jong (2002); id. (2004), pp. 111ff. A number of postmodernists have curiously decided that the concept of 'time', together with its implied 'causality', is an oppressive, white male construct, to be abandoned altogether in a multicultural world; for a convenient summary, see Rosenau (1991), pp. 62ff.; 85; 171; typical expressions of this view can be found in Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, 1992, and Ermarth, *Sequel to History*, 1992 (both extracted in Jenkins [1997], pp. 39ff.). This has resulted in some experimental historical prose that breaks down not only chronological sequences but any semblance of coherence as is

misplaced recollection of Cyrus' counsel, it has no immediately recognisable exit, at any rate to our modern, or rather modernist eyes.<sup>68</sup>

These formal points may appear rather frivolous to some. But there is a further trait in Herodotus that should recommend him as an ideal historian in the postmodern age and beyond: his celebrated *poikilia*, multi-facetedness, or elusiveness if you will. Herodotus is a universalist and a particularist at the same time. He is not only ethnocentric but also 'culturally aware', so much so as to be dubbed *philobarbaros*.<sup>69</sup> He believes (like most other classical historians) in individual agency as much as in unconscious or collective or environmental or metaphysical compulsions. He is a detached antiquarian and a passionate ideologue in one.<sup>70</sup> His morals contain a lot of practical wisdom that however impose no ultimate solutions. He offers both grand narratives as a historian and

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conventionally understood; see a few exotic but amusing specimens collected by Jenkins and Munslow (2004), 'Part 3: Deconstructionism'.

<sup>68</sup> Of all the problems of 'closure' in classical historiography (a topic of much interest to me: cf. my as yet unpublished papers 'How Did Posidonius Close his *Histories*?', read at Edinburgh, May 1997, and 'When Did the Social War End? The Structure of Diodorus Bks. 37-38', read at Tokyo University, Nov. 2001), the concluding passages of Herodotus would constitute the most famous and most enigmatic, causing scholarly uneasiness since Wilamowitz and prompting suspicions of incompleteness, interpolation etc.; Dewald (1997) offers a useful up-to-date summary of the past literature on the question and a postmodernist interpretation of her own.

<sup>69</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 857A, *De Herod. malign.* 12. Interest in the way Herodotus represents the ethnic, sexual and geographical (in addition, of course, to the chronological) 'others' in his digressions naturally features prominently in many recent publications, esp. those of Hartog (1980); Gould (1989), pp. 86-109; 129ff.; Lateiner (1989), pp. 135-162; Thomas (2000), chs. 2-4; Munson (2001), pp. 73-172; several contributors to Bakker, de Jong and van Wees (2002); and Derow and Parker (2003); see Rood (2006) for the most recent summary and bibliog. to date of this issue – an issue that can again easily be overshadowed if not overwhelmed by contemporary preoccupations: e.g. Munson, *ibid.*, speaks of Herodotus' 'polemic against cultural chauvinism, cultural imperialism, and racism', Rood, *ibid.*, of his 'message of tolerance' for cultural diversity, Thomas, *ibid.*, pp. 113-134, and Geary (2002), pp. 44ff., of his sensitivity towards the fluid nature of ethnic identity; whether this Herodotus the liberal, enlightened multiculturalist (*pace* Hartog) will survive the current backlash against liberal, enlightened multiculturalism in real life remains to be seen. The treatment of Herodotus in broader postcolonial discourses (esp. in Bernal, Hartog and, by natural extension, Said) is summarised and critiqued by Thompson (1996), pp. 112-141; for a general review, and the historian's criticism, of 'Saidism' as variously set and revised in postmodern contexts, see MacKenzie (1995), pp. 3-39.

<sup>70</sup> Fornara (1971), Evans (1991), Moles (2002) and with less hyperbole Lateiner (1989), pp. 132ff., and Munson (2001), esp. pp. 172-131, reject the traditional charge against Herodotus of blind partisanship towards Athens (cf. Jacoby [1913], cols. 357-360), instead seeing in the text a warning against contemporary Athenian imperialism; for the general trend to view him as something of a political scientist (on a par with or even better than Thucydides – maybe), see Raaflaub (2002), pp. 164-186; Fowler (2004); Forsdyke (2006).

'little stories' as a storyteller. In other words, he stands for everything that postmodernism likes, and dislikes. In a mysterious way I still cannot gauge, he transcends all these supposed dichotomies without being too eclectic or stiflingly politically correct.<sup>71</sup> This quality in his work, together with its sheer sweep of space, time and themes, has always made the Father of History the guiding light, as a cliché goes, whenever a new widening of men's intellectual horizons has demanded a new understanding of the world.<sup>72</sup> So today's postmodernist and anti-postmodernist camps could do worse than consult him, should they ever wish to settle their futile disputes. And tomorrow's storyteller-historian might as well take his cue from him. Perhaps this is more than a matter of literary emulation. Herodotus composed in an age of scientific rationalism, so that no sooner had his *historiê* appeared, with all the *thômata* it paraded, than it invited predictable accusations of mendacity, of being the Lying Other, from his contemporaries. For all that, and whatever Thucydides made of it, the story he told has turned out 'a possession for all time' in the end. We might as well draw a lesson or two from this truly postmodern reversal.

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<sup>71</sup> These views are variously voiced by Hartog (1980), pp. 378ff.; Gould (1989); Lateiner (1989); Momigliano (1990), pp. 39f.; 50ff.; Munson (2001); Bakker, de Jong and van Wees (2002); Dewald and Marincola (2006); above all Thomas (2000), who, for all her insistence on the 'context' (New Historicist-speak for 'intertextuality') that generated the *Histories*, appears very much given to projecting our contemporary 'postmodern conditions' onto the fifth-century world of Herodotus; her overall thesis is also closely paralleled by Raaflaub (2002).

<sup>72</sup> See Momigliano ([1958] 1966), pp. 135-141.

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