

WRITING THE PAST: LE ROY LADURIE AND THE VOICE OF THE NEW HISTORY

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Once he has selected, classified, and analyzed the documents deemed necessary to his undertaking, the historian is faced with the same task as the author of fiction: whether his text will consist of a story, a description, or a commentary, he still has to write it up. He must, among other things, order the material, assign a position to the various segments that will make up the work; determine to what extent his own discourse will share the text with other discourses, such as that of the archives; decide whether his perspective will frame the whole endeavor or give way to other perspectives, notably those of groups or individuals; and finally, make stylistic decisions, for instance in the area of vocabulary and sentence patterns. Even though, in Jakobsonian terms, historical discourse is referential and not poetic, focusing on the information and not on the message itself, these various operations are not trivial or ancillary: just as in fiction, they shape the material to be reported. In fact, it could be argued that they are all the more significant in that they tend to be taken for granted, since the writing process, in history as in most referential discourse, is usually regarded as the non-problematic step in which data are given linguistic form, made into a text.

My purpose here is to examine a specific aspect of this textualization, and to do so while reading a piece of what is known as the New History. The problem I shall investigate is among the most routinely considered in narratology: that of "voice." I shall, in other words, ask the question "who is speaking" and shall attempt to determine the nature, position, and function of this speaker.¹ As for the text, I have chosen a relatively recent work written by one of the major French historians of today: Le Roy Ladurie's *Carnival in Romans*, published in 1979. These choices are dictated by various

considerations. The few scholars who have concerned themselves with the strategies of historical discourse have mostly focused on the organization of the narrated, for example on the various types of story-line used by the historian to make sense of things. They have contended that "emplotment" is one of the essential aspects of the historical undertaking, and that story-telling constitutes a type of knowledge, a mode of comprehension as valid as (if distinct from) the deductive or statistical models of the exact sciences.² However, as evidenced in several collections of articles recently published in France, Germany and the United States, this kind of research has hardly touched questions relating to the very act of narrating.³ Furthermore, the same research has mainly centered on works written in the nineteenth century, or even earlier. Given the changes which have occurred in historiography during the last fifty years, it seemed worthwhile to examine a text which was more recent and which appeared to be representative of present historical writing. Indeed, *Carnival in Romans* can be regarded as combining the two types of inquiry currently prevailing in French historiography: the structural analysis advocated by the first and second generations of the *Annales* School (insofar as it contains a lengthy synchronic description of phenomena related to the *longue durée*), and narrative history, or at least that type of history characterized by what has been called "the revival of narrative" or "the return of (to) the event," since the central part of the work consists of the telling of a story: that of the carnival mentioned in the title.⁴ Of course, I do not claim that *Carnival in Romans* should be considered as the epitome of present historical writing, nor that questions related to the reporting of events are necessarily relevant when we examine how this research is conducted. After all, an enormous number of texts (books, articles, discussions, etc.) are bracketed under the label "history," and each of them presents its own problems. Structural history, for that matter, has a weak narrative component, and it would presumably not be as productive to ask questions bearing upon story-telling in Le Roy Ladurie's *Les Paysans du Languedoc* as I deem it to be in *Carnival in Romans*.

Reading a historical text as what White has called a "literary artifact" is highly restrictive indeed.⁵ Because of this narrow focus, I shall not deal with issues that might be labelled properly historical. Did Le Roy Ladurie have enough evidence in the first place? Does he make a legitimate use of this evidence, for example of the tax records?

Could one challenge his interpretation of the events that took place in Romans as being traceable to class-related conflicts? Numerous reviews have covered these problems, and it is not my purpose—nor is it within my area of competence—to take them up once again.⁶ Yet, my analysis will not be purely formal. I shall assume that the phenomena under consideration are not autonomous, and I shall attempt to assess what they mean in regard to the whole enterprise of “doing” history. The investigation will unfold in three steps. I shall first define the type of narration at work in *Carnival in Romans*; then, I shall examine the various functions of the narrative voice; and, finally, I shall try to articulate the relationship between these textual conventions and some of the characteristics displayed by the New History on other levels.⁷

I

Historical discourse has often been taken to be the prototype of objective representation. It is probably revealing that Benveniste, while elaborating his famous distinction between “*histoire*” and “*discours*,” should have taken an excerpt from Glotz’s *Histoire grecque* as an instance of the former: of the model of communication where events are reported “as they happened” and “seem to be telling themselves outside of the presence of a speaker,” as opposed to the “*discours*,” where the communication is organized around the “I” of the speaker and the “you” of a listener.⁸ Of course, like all dichotomies of this type, Benveniste’s is open to challenge. Against this brand of structural linguistics, the advocates of pragmatics have argued that all utterances are traceable to a subject, that all statements, even so-called scientific ones (“water boils at 212 degrees”), are ultimately made by someone and directed toward someone else (a summary profile of the speaker who utters “water boils at 212 degrees” would include the trait “knows the Fahrenheit system”). In the area of poetics, narratologists such as Gérard Genette have contended that all texts are conducted by an “I,” that the only difference between first and third person narratives lies in the position of this “I” (whether inside or outside the story), and that even in cases where this first person remains implicit, it is always possible

to find references to it in the form of commentaries, metaphors, or generalizations (*Figures III*, pp. 225-27). Yet, as Genette concedes, the "I" is not always present to the same extent (so Benveniste may have a point after all). For instance, the narrator situated outside the story does not have to remain silent. True, he may leave the text itself as the only sign of his involvement (canon: Hemingway's *The Killers*). But he may also take an active part in the reporting of the events (Tolstoy's *War and Peace*), and it is possible to conceive all kinds of intermediate stands between these two extremes. In this respect, on a scale going from maximum overtness to maximum covertness, the "I" that speaks in the historical text would probably be located on the side of maximum covertness.⁹ More precisely, it would have been located there since the late nineteenth century, since the conventions of positivist writing (of which Glotz's *Histoire grecque* constituted a good example, at least in the example quoted by Benveniste) equated scientific truth with an ideal of neutrality: in other words, since those conventions prevented the historian from taking sides in his story, as Voltaire or Michelet had been allowed to do, and instructed him to erase the signs of his presence.

Set against this model of objectivity, and notwithstanding the fact that the latter has never been (some would say: cannot be) fully realized, *Carnival* presents a striking singularity: from the first paragraph ("I have long dreamed of writing the story of a small town . . .," p. 9) to the last one ("The carnival in Romans makes me think of the Grand Canyon . . .," p. 408), the reader is constantly reminded that the story is being told by an "I." This first person has textual and epistemological features which, given its massive presence, have to be briefly qualified. Textually, as is generally the case in academic historiography, it is heterodiegetic, that is, located outside the story: it belongs neither to a witness nor to a participant (as opposed to the "I" of memoirs or autobiography), but to a scholar who did not take part in the events he is reporting. Furthermore, in accordance with the rule governing serious (vs. fictional) discourse,¹⁰ it refers directly to the author: it is Le Roy Ladurie who endorses "I have long dreamed . . .," whereas, for example, it is not Proust but the narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu* who is responsible for "I have long gone early to bed," whatever similarities may be found between the two Marcells. Finally, in accordance again with the rules of serious discourse, it is an "I" committed to making true statements, namely, statements that can be confirmed or disproved by way of

empirical verification. In *Eugenie Grandet*, for instance, Balzac does not claim to be telling the story of a real Eugénie; the existence of such a character can certainly be investigated, but the findings will neither disqualify Balzac's novel nor add to its merit. On the contrary, what Le Roy Ladurie asserts in *Carnival* is supposed to be based on evidence; the book is thus open to verification, and it would be relevant to inquire, among other things, if there is such a town as Romans, and if a carnival actually took place at this location in 1580. Reviewers, for that matter, have asked questions of this type, although obviously more sophisticated ones than these.

If the "I" that speaks in *Carnival* is located outside the story, it is also temporally remote from the facts it is recounting. Again, this position is not unusual: like fictional ones, most historical texts take the form of an ulterior narration, which means that they tell what happened, and not what is happening or what will happen.¹¹ Yet, in this respect, historical texts display one peculiarity at least. In fiction, even when we know at what point in time the author has written the story, the temporal distance between the narrator and the text cannot generally be specified; nor does it matter, in most cases at least. In history, however, the equation author-narrator, as well as the fact that events tend to be dated with precision, make it possible to measure this distance; and determining the exact length of the time lapse appears relevant, since it is not quite the same for an historian to write a few months or several hundred years after the facts. As far as *Carnival* is concerned, we know that the book was written in the 1970s and published in 1979, that is, almost 400 years after the events it is reporting. Historically, this remoteness poses specific problems (availability of documents, etc.) which lie outside the scope of this study. My analysis will thus be limited to considering the implications of the narrator's temporal position, more precisely to examining whether there are signs of this position within the text itself.

Although *Carnival* unfolds according to the principle of ulterior narration, it does not always adhere strictly to chronological order. This order, indeed, is probably impossible to maintain consistently, even in texts that do not problematize time and, unlike some types of fiction, do not systematically rearrange the events for the sake of dramatic schemes. In *Carnival*, the flow of the narrative is interrupted at various moments by diverse anachronies, of which three will be considered here.

First, there are numerous but relatively brief analepses, that is, textual units that take us back in time. Since the beginning of any story (and any history) is to some extent arbitrary, one of the basic tasks of the narrator—and one which involves possible temporal distortions—consists in providing information on what precedes this beginning. In *Carnival*, Le Roy Ladurie devotes the first four chapters and more than 100 pages to a lengthy description of Romans and the Dauphiné before dealing with the events proper. This description, however, cannot cover every detail, and the narrator has sometimes to break off the report of what happened in 1579-80 to provide some background information, notably when new characters are introduced. To take two examples, Paumier, the leader of the lower classes, is given a three-page biography (pp. 117-20) upon the mention of his election as captain of the drapers' militia on St. Blaise Day in 1579. As for Paumier's opponent and leader of the Romans establishment, Judge Guérin, he receives a half-page biography (p. 32), which is then completed by short flashbacks into his past, mainly into his former misdeeds (i.e., his participation in the St. Bartholemew massacre, p. 129). These flashbacks add a specific point to the description of the background given in the first chapters, and they do not involve any moving away from the mode of ulterior narration. Yet, even though they do not particularly obtrude, they fracture the continuity of the narrative. They thus point to the difficulty of telling things "as they happened" in time, as well as to the corresponding role of the narrator as a (re)organizer.

Second, ulterior narration permits numerous occurrences of the narrative present. This present is extensively employed in French historiography, and it is no accident that it should also be called "historical." In *Carnival*, it occurs with the greatest frequency in the central chapters dealing with the events themselves, that is, the first incidents of 1579, the bloody confrontations of the 1580 carnival, and the establishment's ensuing repression of the lower classes. Of these five chapters, for instance, two begin immediately with the present (chapter 7: "In 1580, in Romans, it all starts up again like in 1579," p. 198; chapter 8: "This episode brings an end to the carnival properly speaking," p. 254), and the three others shift to this tense either after a few lines (chapter 6: "After Catherine's departure, things go from bad to worse," p. 175), or after a few pages (chapter 5: "In Romans, everything starts on February 3, 1579," p. 115). Furthermore, Le Roy Ladurie turns to the present when he refers not to the facts

themselves, but to the activities of his two main sources: Judge Guérin and the notary Piémont, who both left accounts of the events. Before or within literal quotations, he thus resorts to phrases such as "Guérin/Piémont reports" (p. 111), "adds" (p. 228), "continues" (p. 245), "tells" (p. 258), "says" (p. 111), or "notes" (p. 233), "writes" being of course the expression which is used most frequently.

Both presents are metaphorical indeed: they have the value of a *passé simple*, for Le Roy Ladurie, unlike some journalists reporting "live," cannot claim to be telling what he is witnessing. In other words, the occurrence of the historical present does not entail here a shift from ulterior to simultaneous narration: the account is still given retrospectively by a narrator who, for that matter, is not even pretending that he does not know the whole story—in particular, its outcome. Sentences like "In Romans, everything starts on February 3, 1579" are prototypes of what Danto calls "narrative sentences": statements that concern a specific moment, but describe this moment in terms which involve a knowledge of what will happen much later ("The Thirty Years War began in 1618").¹² Moreover, it should be noted that the same presents do not fulfill the function with which they are usually associated. Because they are too numerous and may occur at any moment in the story, they lose the faculty of designating this moment as "important" or "dramatic"; and, by the same token, they lose their alleged power of involving the reader "more intensely" in the object of his reading. Ultimately, they have to be regarded as signs of Le Roy Ladurie's position toward the narrative practices of French historiography, particularly toward the way these practices deal with what Weinrich has called "the crisis of the *passé simple*" in current French usage.¹³ Le Roy Ladurie treats the two tenses as if they were equivalent, and no apparent pattern governs the shift from one to the other. This position, let us remark, cannot be grasped in the American translation, where most presents, following Anglo-Saxon conventions of historical writing, have been rendered with preterits—a decision which does not alter the information, but obscures the role of the narrator, his active part in the temporal manipulation of the material.

Finally, and this phenomenon is probably the most obvious, Le Roy Ladurie turns repeatedly to the future: he tells not what happened, but what *will* happen. These futures have their "normal" predictive function. In other words, they must be distinguished from

the "historical" futures which sometimes occur at the end of a paragraph written in a past tense, and which can be understood either as involving a switch from narration to commentary or as having a metaphorical value, as "replacing" a *passé simple* ("Napoleon chose his ministers among conservatives. . . . Up to the end, Napoleon will be conservative in his foreign and liberal in his domestic policies or inversely, in order to please both tendencies of the French people").¹⁴ Whatever its exact value may be, this second future does not imply a radical break with chronological order: like the historical present, it is fully integrated into it. On the contrary, the futures that occur in *Carnival* generally disrupt this order. Yet, it would not be legitimate to speak in this instance of a shift from ulterior to anterior narration, for Le Roy Ladurie is not a prophet: he tells us about things that will happen *in his story*, not after the moment of writing. As there were analepses in *Carnival*, there are also prolepses, two types of them to be specific. Most are of the internal kind, which is to say that they foretell something which will be told again in the story, or at least which will take place within the temporal framework of the same story. So, from the first pages, the narrator indicates that the conflict will be class-related ("The carnival in Romans will not contradict this 'cleavage' between the orders," p. 19), and he forecasts the conclusion of the carnival as well as the fate of individual characters: namely, the failure of the popular movements ("These divergences between town and country . . . will weaken the third estate during the final crushing of the revolt in 1580," p. 80), and the upcoming bloodbath: a certain family "will count one dead" (p. 179), the butcher Geoffroy Fleur "will be hanged" (p. 186), in March of 1580 "1,500 to 1,800 villagers will be put to the sword" (p. 226), etc. Furthermore, there are a few external prolepses, that is, futures pointing to something that happened after 1580 and the end of the story proper. For instance, speaking about the behavior of juvenile delinquents in Romans, the narrator states that the "following centuries will reduce these brutal attitudes, without abolishing them" (p. 249); he announces that the "military pride of the commoners will some day claim war as not being the exclusive monopoly of the nobility," "will give breath and heart to Murat, Hoche, and Kléber," and "will take east thousands of French peasants," who "will follow an emperor to Moscow" (p. 384).

These prolepses fulfill various functions. In the first place, they generate dramatic interest. In a book which is long and not overly

easy, they provide the reader with what could be described as brief previews, and they establish for him that the promise implicitly involved in the title (the carnival has to be special since a book is devoted to it) will definitely be kept. Moreover, they contribute to maintaining the necessary coherence among facts and characters: they show that fact Z or character X have not been selected by accident, that they bear a precise relation to the point of the story. Last, and particularly significant in our view of the text, the use of a device as obvious as the prolepsis adds to the foregrounding of the narrator, points to his privileged retrospective position and his role as an organizer of time. True, this position is not peculiar to *Carnival* or to Le Roy Ladurie. The past, in history, is always recounted from the perspective of the present, and it is the knowledge of the outcome, even more the knowledge of what happened between this outcome and the moment of writing, that enables the historian to assign a meaning to the various parts of his story. What makes *Carnival* so unusual is that Le Roy Ladurie makes no attempt to conceal this knowledge, has no qualms about presenting his text as being situated in the *hic* and *nunc* of the narrator-author. In other words, to resort to a familiar metaphor which occurs in the book itself, the historian shows no uneasiness when he plays his part as stage director; he states explicitly his prerogative to determine when events will be presented on the historical "scene" (p. 60), as well as how they will be arranged in a "plot" which will "build up" and finally be "resolved" (p. 196).

The role of the narrator is also foregrounded in operations related to the unfolding of the argument. For Le Roy Ladurie, if he knows the whole story, knows the whole text too. Thus he occasionally assumes the role of a planner, who charts his text with those "organization shifters" in which Barthes saw one of the traces left by the allegedly absent narrator of historical discourse:¹⁵ signs which do not pertain to an external referent but to the process of writing, to the text itself. These shifters, in *Carnival*, can point in different directions. They can refer back to an earlier moment ("I have explained in a previous paragraph," p. 34), forward to a later moment ("We shall see later the strategic importance of this door," p. 263), or announce briefly what the historian will or will not be doing ("Let us return to the question of power," p. 375; "I do not plan to tell here about the trial of the *tailles*," p. 369). Whereas the function of the analepses or prolepses was to establish some connection between two events, that of the organization shifters consists of linking two parts of the text that are

physically remote, or of easing the transition from one part to the other. Organization shifters are thus comparable to textual landmarks: they add an element of redundancy, and this element contributes to the readability of a work that is long and complex. But they are also signs of the "I," in this instance of the planning "I." As the narrator had moved back and forth in his story, as he, for example, had freely used his knowledge of the future, he now shows, at time quite informally ("Here we are" ["Nous y voilà"], p. 36), how the pieces are fitted together. Whereas the positivist text had tended to conceal its strategies, history writing now unfolds in the open, or at least *more* in the open; it is presented not as a natural product but as the result of various operations originating in the historian, two of them being the selection ("I do not plan to tell") and the ordering ("We shall see later") of the material, a material for which the claim is no longer made that it is "telling itself."

II

If the narrator of *Carnival* makes no secret of his temporal position, he is also quite explicit when he performs the various functions that go with the writing of the text. The most basic task of any narrator is undoubtedly to tell the story, to report the facts. In this capacity, of course, Le Roy Ladurie often remains silent: it would be cumbersome to refer all data to the subject who has selected and is enunciating them, and several passages of *Carnival* could be taken as examples of a text where events are recounted without apparent mediation. Yet, already at this most elementary level of "presenting the facts," Le Roy Ladurie does not hesitate to introduce an "I": in this instance the "I" of the *histor*, of the researcher going about his job of uncovering and gathering the evidence.¹⁶ He may state, for example, that some list of tenants is complete, "as I have checked in comparing the two pertinent registers" (p. 28); that from the records of the legal proceedings, "I extract a global study on the leaders and participants in the popular carnival" (p. 295); or that the third estate, in the Dauphiné, did not really take on tax collectors, "as I find only a single attack of this type . . . in the mouth of its lawyers" (p. 375).

Similarly, the graphs, tables, and statistics that come with the

description of the setting (chapters 1-2) as well as with the interpretation of the events (chapters 10-14) are not presented as having generated themselves. Le Roy Ladurie speaks of averages "calculated by me" (p. 29, p. 48), of statistics "made up by me" (p. 43, p. 44), and he observes that in order to define the threshold of affluence in Romans, he is the one who has "isolated the upper bracket of farmers, above 6 *écus*" (p. 311). These references to activities ("check," "calculate," "make up," etc.) are important epistemologically. They display an awareness that data were not "out there" ready to be picked up, and that the same data have not simply jumped out of the archives: they have been, as de Certeau puts it, "produced" by the historian,¹⁷ a process that does not imply that they have been invented or falsified. The treatment of numbers is in this respect particularly revealing, for numbers, especially when machine-generated, are frequently regarded as constituting the neutral, objective basis of all inquiry, and as such they play the role of an authoritative citation. In specifying that the computation is traceable to a researcher, Le Roy Ladurie challenges this alleged neutrality. He shows that the uncovering of the facts depends on a choice, an intention, a set of hypotheses concerning the nature of his undertaking just as he showed that the meaning assigned to these facts depended on his retrospective position.

Although *Carnival* is characterized, among other things, by a return to narrative history, it is not devoted exclusively to the telling of events. It also contains a good deal of commentary, a phenomenon which appears typical of present historical discourse. In effect, the task of the historian is seemingly no longer—as German text linguists have it—to propose a new version of an old story (*umerzählen*): it is to discuss (*besprechen*) the same story, to offer a new interpretation of it.¹⁸ In *Carnival*, the commentary may take on various forms. It occupies almost entirely the last four chapters, where it constitutes what some anthropologists would call a "thick description": an account that does not claim to be methodologically pure and draws on several disciplines, in this instance, beyond historical scholarship proper, semiotics and social anthropology.¹⁹ Yet, the commentary is not limited to the last section of the book. It is also interspersed with the initial synchronic description as well as with the six central chapters, which deal with the carnival itself. Obviously, this aspect of the book cannot be examined exhaustively. I shall, for this reason, focus on the interspersed commentary, more precisely on three of its

facets which constitute highly visible signs of the narrator as a commenting "I": historical parallels, a certain type of historical explanation, and partisanship.

One of Le Roy Ladurie's major theses, crudely summarized, is that the rituals of carnival exposed social conflicts, and that the struggle for fiscal justice of the members of the third estate made them into forerunners of egalitarian tendencies which were to develop later. This thesis is expounded at length in the last chapter, programmatically entitled "The Primitives of Equality." But it also underlies several shorter passages, mostly single sentences where the "I" intervenes to draw a connection between what happened in Romans and some further revolutionary event. For example, the unhappy drapers are compared with "the silk workers who revolted in Lyon in 1832" (p. 24); the low involvement of women in Romans with the activities of the "*tricoteuses* and *pétroleuses* of 1793 and 1871" (p. 314); the fact that the population in Romans had kept two cannons with the significant urban trouble caused much later by the same problem of "who will retain the arms" ("I think of the Paris Commune in 1871," p. 148); and the different ways of acting out carnival according to one's social class with the various types of demonstrations in May, 1968, demonstrations which were different in character depending on whether they were staged by students or workers (p. 333). At times, the parallels may also apply to individual characters. The story of Colas, who went from being a delegate of the third estate to a leader of the nobility, is linked with that of other men whose political path was similarly erratic ("I think of Jacques Doriot, Gustave Hervé, Marcel Déat," p. 108). Textually similar to the prolepses analyzed earlier, these associations are signs of the retrospective standpoint of the narrator: a narrator who knows the whole history as he knew the whole story, and fully assumes ("I think of . . .") his privileged position. In addition to pointing to the "I," the parallels also contribute to the intelligibility of the work. For the lesser-known (Romans) is given meaning by connection with the better-known, in this instance with the French revolutionary tradition, or some would say, because of the mandatory references (Commune, May 68), with the French revolutionary mythology.²⁰

Another trace of the commenting "I" lies in a grammatical phenomenon: the shift from the *passé simple* or the historical present of the narrative to the present of generalizations, of eternal truths. The question of the existence (or nonexistence) of historical laws has been

widely debated. It opposes, on the one hand, the advocates of the unity of science, who aim to bring history under the deductive or statistical model of the exact sciences, a model said to be of the "covering law"; and, on the other hand, those who think that such a model cannot be applied to history (or more generally to the social sciences), and has to be replaced by alternative modes of explanation, narrative being one of them.²¹ Le Roy Ladurie, to my knowledge at least, has not taken sides in a discussion which has been more of a concern for Anglo-Saxon than for French historiography,²² and his way of making sense of things is indebted to various strategies in addition to narrative, such as the synchronic analysis and the thick description mentioned earlier. There are, however, numerous law-like statements in *Carnival*. But they are expressed in forms that are low in "scientific" explanatory value, forms like the proverb ("When the cat's away, the mice will play," p. 92; "He who can do more, can do less," p. 106; "He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind," p. 116; "If you leave your place, you lose it," p. 146; "The first step is the hardest," p. 252; "Once burned, twice shy," p. 316), or the commonplaces of social and political analysis ("People fight well only against what they have renounced," p. 165; "Revolution, in a small town, occurs among people who know each other," p. 122; "Mulattos are sometimes more racist than whites," p. 159; "Troops of peasant guerillas offer little resistance to a regular army in pitched battles," p. 286).

It is not always easy to define the narrator's attitude toward these generalizing propositions. On the one hand, he is not entirely committed to their validity. He cannot seriously present them as major premises in a deductive argument, and he would probably not claim that he who sows the wind will *always* reap the whirlwind or that people can *only* fight well against what they have renounced. These bits of popular wisdom and common knowledge are offered tongue-in-cheek, and their presence in scholarly discourse constitutes an aspect of the humor of *Carnival*. The same statements, however, are not made so ironically as to be ludicrous; they mean what they say, and their use implies the belief that they convey some truth. They could be subsumed under the category of the "guarded generalization," that is, of the proposition that includes, implicitly or explicitly ("Mulattos are *sometimes* . . ."), a modifier such as "often," "usually," or "typically." For that matter, as Scriven has suggested, many historical explanations are grounded in similar truisms.²³ To write, for

example, that Louis XIV became unpopular because taxes were too high involves an underlying generalization such as “people do not like taxes” or “people do not like high taxes”: an assertion which tells nothing new but presumably something true, and which is based on a reasonable knowledge of human behavior. These truisms usually remain implicit in scholarly discourse, insofar as they are regarded as too trivial, or too dull, to be worth mentioning. One of the arresting aspects of *Carnival* is that it expressly offers explanations of this kind, yet does so playfully, from a slight distance: a move that enables Le Roy Ladurie to pay homage to popular imagination, while proposing—indirectly and somewhat mischievously—a reflection on the nature of historical explanations.

The last sign of the commenting “I” to be examined here is also the most conspicuous. It consists of the utterances traceable to what Barthes calls the “emotional person” of the historian (“Discours de l’histoire,” p. 69), that is, of an aspect of the person that most researchers in the social and exact sciences have been trying to conceal or suppress. The narrator, in these passages, no longer accounts for the facts he has just reported: he evaluates them in terms of good or bad, renounces all pretense to objectivity (or, in Flaubertian terms, impassibility), and freely communicates his likes and dislikes. Before considering the many facets of this involvement, it must be briefly noted that the very choice of Romans is justified by a personal preference: as he states in the first paragraph, Le Roy Ladurie is fond of the town, the province, and their inhabitants. Of course, it helps that archives should be “overabundant” (p. 10). But the initial decision to write about Romans is ascribed to a certain “pleasure” in being there (p. 10), that is, to a factor (the researcher’s enjoyment) which usually remains unstated and is not automatically associated with scholarship. Le Roy Ladurie’s affection is immediately perceptible in a grammatical device common in a certain type of fiction: the casual use of the possessive adjective “our” to specify places and people (“Our hero . . .”), so as to involve the reader in an assumed shared familiarity with them. The narrator speaks frequently of “our town” (pp. 10, 13, 124, 229, etc.), “our province” (p. 62), or “our Dauphiné” (p. 104), but also of “our peasants” (p. 18), “our revolt” (p. 17), and “our carnival” (p. 37). He even uses the expression “chez nous” (literally: at home) to designate the area, a phrase which can be understood in two ways, both idiosyncratic: either as a reference to “the place where I and you reader will live for

some time," or to "the place where I and they (the townspeople) are living right now." The second interpretation is more in accord with idiomatic tradition, but it implies, since Le Roy Ladurie cannot claim to be from Romans, some transfer from emotional to physical closeness—a transfer that locates the historian at the very place that will be the object of the investigation, and makes the site of research, ideally, into the home of the researcher.

Although Le Roy Ladurie appreciates Romans, he does not care equally for all its groups and inhabitants. Providing a black and white picture of what happened in the town, he praises the third estate, whose performance leaves him "astounded and admiring" (p. 367); and he condemns the Romans establishment, in particular its leader, Judge Guérin. The latter is immediately presented as "inescapable" and "irremovable" (p. 32), an assessment which becomes harsher and harsher as the book proceeds: he is "the evil genius of the ruling class" (p. 129), a character "from a detective novel" ("un personnage de série noire" p. 129), a "specialist of low blows" (p. 274), a "Tartuffe" (pp. 153, 241) and finally, a "Machiavelli" (p. 277), who has plotted from the start to use the carnival to crush the lower classes. Furthermore, the narrator comments negatively on Guérin's account of the events: he speaks of "malicious exaggeration" (p. 126), of "laughable" or "ridiculous" expressions (p. 248), charges the judge with "inventing" certain statements attributed to people (p. 251), and intersperses literal quotations from Guérin's text with brackets displaying a disapproving "sic" (p. 247). Le Roy Ladurie thus goes much beyond the usual criticism of the document. Guérin's testimonial is discredited, and it is compared very unfavorably with the other main report on the events related to the carnival: the narrative written by the notary Piémont, a narrative which is deemed to be both "intimate" and "disinterested" (p. 251).

Indirectly, authorial judgments are also expressed by means of punctuation. For the narrator makes extensive use of two signs which, in serious discourse, are ordinarily reserved to the editorial: suspension points and exclamation marks. Both signs function rhetorically like the explicit evaluations which have just been mentioned insofar as they provide a negative comment on the behavior of the ruling class both during and after the 1580 carnival. Suspension points, in this regard, refer to a latent appraisal: the narrator could add something to the report of the facts, but he elects not to do so because conclusions are obvious and could be drawn by the reader himself. For instance, a

general taxation of the nobility did not take place earlier than 1639 "and even 1789..." (=very late, p. 72); a member of the establishment who was sentenced to death after carnival "did not do too badly... he was amnestied" (=thanks to his rank, p. 298); and the blood of many old bourgeois families in Romans "turned blue slowly, surreptitiously..." (=these families, because of their financial means, were ennobled, obtaining in the process both prestige and the much wanted tax-exempt status of the nobility, p. 365). As for exclamation marks, they are signs of the emotional "I," of its reactions to the report of some deed. They indicate that there is something peculiar (usually something to be indignant about) in the statement they close, and they amount to a "how + adjective" that would briefly comment on what has just been reported. For example, a tax perceptor who was appointed for one year is still in charge "six years later!" (how unlawful! p. 33); during the meetings of the three estates, the nobility has "the absolute majority!" (how unfair! p. 60); and the egalitarian tendencies of some lawyer did not keep him from being "ennobled ten years later, in 1605!" (how hypocritical! p. 364). Suspension points and exclamation marks noticeably alter the nature of the utterance, inasmuch as they turn it from an "assertion of" into a "reaction to." One can, as a test, substitute periods in the preceding examples and then measure the difference. True, the change does not totally erase the presence of the emotional subject, but it unquestionably tones it down and brings these utterances closer to statements of what merely "is."²⁴

No historical text, of course, comes without a partisan dimension. As the most impersonal piece of history is traceable to an "I," the most balanced can be shown to originate in some ideological position—the ideal of objectivity being one of them. In this respect, what appears so uncommon in *Carnival* is the explicitness and the intensity of the partisanship. Most historians would have most likely been satisfied with letting the facts "speak for themselves," that is, they would have presented these facts in such a way as to program their reception. To use an old dichotomy from literary criticism, they would have "shown" Guérin's villainy and the third estate's merits without feeling compelled to "tell" them. Le Roy Ladurie, however, seems eager to settle his accounts in a way that cannot lend itself to any kind of ambiguity; and he makes no effort to dampen the fervor of his enthusiasms or to lessen the violence of his condemnations. Although the reception of the book has been generally favorable, this

strong presence of the historian together with his value system has often been felt as an unnecessary component of the text, as something which could (and should) have been eliminated in the name of scholarly neutrality. Le Roy Ladurie has been blamed for being excessively garrulous (Knecht), for siding indiscriminately with the underdog (Stone), or for overusing exclamation marks to advocate his own beliefs (McFarlane). Likewise, as mentioned earlier, the American translation has to a certain extent weakened the devices which have just been analyzed, notably in the area of punctuation. Whether in the reviews or in the translation, these forms of censure are revealing insofar as they point to a resistance: Le Roy Ladurie is perceived of as going too far, in this instance beyond the conventions of writing that rule historical discourse. In our perspective, which is less prescriptive than descriptive, the very fact that some aspects of the text should be considered as deviant, or at least unusual, is in itself significant. It shows that writing is not the last, non-problematic step in the research, but involves (and inscribes) an attitude toward the material. Furthermore, it shows that within a specific discipline, namely scholarly history, practitioners can be identified not only by their objects and methods, but also by their attitude towards accepted procedures of writing and their management of the very strategies of the text.

III

In his essay "The Burden of History," White charges current historiography with being a combination of "late nineteenth-century social science" and "mid-nineteenth-century art." To correct this unfortunate state of affairs, he calls for an experimental type of history writing that would be based on "contemporary scientific *and* artistic insights," and would give historians the possibility of using "impressionistic, expressionistic, surrealistic, and (perhaps) even actionistic modes of representation" (*Tropics of Discourse*, pp. 45, 47). Judged by these standards, namely, the standards of contemporary fiction, *Carnival* obviously does not fit the bill; nor do, for that matter, most historical works of the twentieth century (White comes up with one example only: Norman O. Brown's *Life against Death*). Yet, it

could be argued that *Carnival* is innovative within its own "series": within the set of texts that our culture regards as belonging to scholarly history and classifies as such in bookstores or libraries. In this respect, the locus of interest of the book is not different from that of a book of fiction: it resides in the intertextual relationship which is established with other texts in the same series. The use of a highly visible and wide-ranging "I" can thus be regarded as instituting a dialogue with other historical practices. In the first place, it contrasts with the erasure of the signs of enunciation in the positivist historiography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for instance in this positivist monument which is the *Histoire de France* written by Lavissee and his team. It also differs, although less sharply, from the procedures employed by historians who are much closer to the author of *Carnival*: let us say, to take two examples among many others, from Duby's cautious resort to the "I" in *Le Dimanche de Bouvines* (1973), or from Ozouf's stubborn utilization of the impersonal "on" in *La Fête révolutionnaire* (1976). Finally, it diverges from Le Roy Ladurie's own former usage: *Les Paysans du Languedoc* (1966) and *Histoire du climat depuis l'an 1000* (1967) were written according to different conventions, the "I" there being that of the *histor* and interpreter, never that of the emotional person. Le Roy Ladurie's "new manner" did not start before the mid-1970s, more precisely not until *Montaillou* (1975). As for the nature of this dialogue, it is, in Bakhtinian terms, "polemically colored."²⁵ Indeed, Le Roy Ladurie does not challenge some of the most ingrained habits of historical writing quietly: he loudly claims that he is doing so, and he flaunts his transgressions in the obvious, provocative manner which has caused the unhappiness of some reviewers and brought about changes in the American translation.

If the narrative characteristics that have been described distinguish Le Roy Ladurie from other historians, their significance is certainly not restricted to the textual level. Indeed, they enter into a new epistemological paradigm. They inscribe the shift from positivism to the New History, that is, from a view of history where the ideal had been to report the facts "as they happened" (it was, before Benveniste's, Ranke's famous formula: "*Wie es eigentlich gewesen*"),²⁶ to a different view where this way of putting things is meaningless, since facts do not have an existence of their own, since their selection, ordering, and presentation depend on decisions which can only be made by the historian. In this respect, the extensive use of

the "I" in *Carnival* can be regarded as an aspect of a new rhetoric of truth, a rhetoric that is common to most texts of the New History, even though it is doubtless more prominent in Le Roy Ladurie's second manner than in any other work. In positivist writing, the disappearance of the speaker was like a guarantee of the purported objectivity of truth. In Le Roy Ladurie, the overt presence of the same speaker functions as a sign of an epistemological change: it refers to a radical relativism, to the belief that research is an activity which is always directed and grounded in a researcher. In other words, what Le Roy Ladurie seems to be saying is that he does not want to go on pretending: pretending that documents are objective givens and that the historical text constitutes their mere projection or continuation; that the same text can unfold itself, "naturally," without someone doing the unfolding; and that the scholarly endeavor can be devoid of personal involvement. The strategies displayed in *Carnival* are thus the textual equivalents of what linguists (Austin) or poeticsians (Genette) have been saying about the nature of any utterance, sociologists (Habermas) about the nature of any research, and philosophers (Danto) about the nature of historical research specifically.²⁷ In Le Roy Ladurie's practice, the historical text is no longer the mode of reporting "reality" in a way that would be transparent and non-problematic. It is thought of as a construct, and presented as such.

Finally, beyond methodological and epistemological concerns, one should while examining *Carnival* allow for a certain pleasure which would be provided by the very act of writing: pleasure in moving away from the discursive constraints which were imposed on historians by positivism, and later by structuralism; pleasure in making comments, in drawing parallels, and in quoting from popular wisdom; pleasure in taking sides, in telling stories with heroes and villains; pleasure, in a word, in answering decisively and forcefully the question I asked at the beginning—a question every writer has to answer, the one with which Butor, recalling what might have been the point of the story, concludes his novel *Degrès*: "Who is speaking?"

NOTES

1. In the area of narratology, my terminology is generally drawn from Gérard Genette, "Discours du récit," in *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), pp. 67-273, and Gerald Prince, *Narratology: The Form and Function of Narrative* (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton, 1982).

2. On the concept of "emplotment," see Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). On story-telling as a type of knowledge, see Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), particularly chapter 11: "Historical Explanations: The Role of Narrative," pp. 233-56; W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), particularly chapters 4 and 5: "The Historical Understanding" and "Explanations in History," pp. 72-125; and Louis O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki, eds., *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 129-49.

3. Among these collections, let us mention Canary and Kozicki, eds., *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*; Jacques Guilhaumou, ed., *La Rhétorique du discours: Objets d'histoire (XVIII^e-XX^e siècles)* (Lille: Presse Universitaire de Lille, 1981); Reinhardt Kosseleck and Wolf-Dieter Stempel, eds., *Geschichte: Ereignis und Erzählung* (München: Fink, 1973); Siegfried Quandt and Hans Süssmuth, eds., *Historisches Erzählen: Formen und Funktionen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1982; and Leonard Schulze and Walter Wetzels, eds., *Literature and History* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1983).

4. Lawrence Stone, "The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History," *Past and Present*, 85 (1979), 3-24; Pierre Nora, "Le retour de l'événement," in Jacques Le Goff, ed., *Faire de l'histoire I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), pp. 210-28. In *Temps et récit* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), Paul Ricoeur argues that narrative has actually never completely disappeared from history, even from the writings of the *Annales* School (see for instance the analysis devoted to Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, pp. 293-313). In *Le Territoire de l'historien*, Le Roy Ladurie himself comments favorably on the emergence of a type of history which he calls "structuralo-événementialo-structurelle" (p. 173).

5. Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 81-100.

6. Among the many reviews devoted to *Carnival*, let us mention those by William Beik, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1980), 307-09; Jean Duvignaud, *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 315 (1979), 128-30; R. J. Knecht, *History*, 217 (1981), 297-98; Alan McFarlane, *Journal of Modern History*, 52 (1980), 520-23; Lawrence Stone, *New York Review of Books*, 17 (1979), 20-24; and Llevan Scott Van Doren, *American Historical Review*, 85 (1980), 136.

7. The edition used is the one published by Gallimard in 1978. I have consulted the American translation by Mary Feeney (New York: George Braziller, 1979), but it tends to erase several of the very textual phenomena that will be closely investigated (resort to the first person, to the future tense, to suspension points and exclamation marks, etc.). All translations are thus my own and possible errors my responsibility. For the sake of simplification, *Carnival in Romans* has been shortened to *Carnival*.

8. Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 241.

9. On the notions of "overtness" and "covertness," see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), p. 173.

10. On the distinction between "serious" and "fictional" discourse, see John R. Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," *New Literary History*, 6 (1975-76), 319-32. The dichotomy is based on a pragmatics of enunciation whose premises can of course be challenged. See Jacques Derrida, "Signature événement contexte," in *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1971), pp. 365-93.

11. On the concept of "ulterior narration," see Genette, p. 229.

12. Arthur C. Danto, "Narrative Sentences," in *Analytical Philosophy of History*, pp. 143-81.

13. Harald Weinrich, "La crise du passé simple," in *Le Temps: Le Recit et le commentaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), pp. 291-316.

14. The example is drawn from Weinrich, p. 228.

15. Roland Barthes, "Le discours de l'histoire," *Informations sur les Sciences Sociales*, 4 (1967), 66.

16. On the concept of *histor*, see Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 242.

17. Michel de Certeau, *L'Ecriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 84.

18. Harald Weinrich, "Narrative Strukturen in der Geschichtsschreibung," in Kosselleck and Stempel, 519-22.

19. On this concept, see Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), in particular pp. 3-10.

20. In keeping with the American tradition of "editing," the reference to Déat et al. has been dropped in the translation. The translator thought, perhaps, that the parallel

was irrelevant, or that this reference system would be accessible to a French reader only.

21. For the canonic presentation of the first position, see Carl G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," *Journal of Philosophy*, 39 (1942), 35-48, and "Explanations in Science and in History," in R. G. Colodny, ed., *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1962), pp. 9-33. For a defense of the second position, see William Dray, *Laws and Explanations in History* (New York: New York University Press, 1957), and Louis O. Mink, "Philosophical Analysis and Historical Analysis," *Review of Metaphysics*, 21 (1968), 667-98.

22. For French contributions to the debate, see Paul Ricoeur "L'éclipse du récit," in *Temps et récit*, pp. 137-72, and Paul Veyne, "Comprendre l'intrigue," in *Comment on écrit l'histoire: Essai d'épistémologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1971), pp. 111-44.

23. Michael Scriven, "Truisms as Grounds for Historical Explanations," in Patrick Gardiner, ed., *Theories of History* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 443-75.

24. The test can easily be performed by confronting the French text and the American translation, where most suspension points and exclamation marks have been replaced with periods.

25. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (n.p.: Ardis, 1973), p. 164.

26. Quoted in Schulze and Wetzels, *Literature and History*, p. 5.

27. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1962); Gérard Genette, "Frontières du récit," *Communications*, 8 (1966), 152-63; Jürgen Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als Ideologie* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1968); Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*.