

REVIEWS/RESENHAS

Sobchack, Vivian, ed. *The Persistence of History (Cinema, Television and the Modern Event)*. New York and London: Routledge, 1996. 265 pp.

Grindon, Leger. *Shadows on the Past (Studies in the Historical Fiction Film)*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. 1994, 250 pp.

by Fernando Simões Vugman

All those who are concerned with the current status of History should welcome *The Persistence of History* by Vivian Sobchack, be it for her excellent choice of essays, be it for the opportune moment for a book about such a subject. As she explains in the "Introduction", all the essays "deal with transformations in the sense and representation of history which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, correlative with the birth of cinema, modernity, and 'modernism'," especially in our current postmodern moment. All the essays in the book are concerned in some way with how film and television relate to those transformations history is experiencing.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part One, "The Historical Event," the essays relate —under various approaches— new media technologies and new modes and practices of narration to the problem of the adequacy of representation of historical matter. In

the first article, "The Modernist Event", Hayden White considers the debate surrounding Oliver Stone's *JFK*, arguing that the uniqueness of the traumatic historical events of the twentieth century—like the two World Wars and the Great Depression— "function as infantile traumas [that] are conceived to function in the psyche of neurotic individuals" for determinate social groups, i.e., events which cannot be just forgotten, but neither can be properly remembered. As a result, only through the modern media and modernist forms—with their characteristic collage and fragmentation—would those events be properly narrated. In the next essay, "Cinematic Shots: The Narration of Violence," Janet Staiger engages in the controversy surrounding *JFK* to question whether Stone actually did anything formally unusual which would render his film adequate to portray the historical traumatic events referred to by White. Part One includes two more essays: "Historical Consciousness and the Viewer: *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*," by Bill Nichols, and "'I'll See It When I Believe It': Rodney King and the Prison-house of Video," by Frank P. Tomasulo. The former, as noted by Sobchack in the Introduction, "both engages and goes beyond the dialogue between Staiger and White in his discussion of what he calls "the most important political documentary of the 1980's,"" while the latter takes a very different approach to the issue of the relation between historical matter and their representational forms.

In Part Two, "Historical Representation and National Identity," in addition to formal issues, the selected essays discuss the diverse representational strategies used not only to narrate historical events, but also to narrate "the nation." In that section the reader will find Sumiko Higashi's "Antimodernism as Historical Representation in a Consumer Culture: Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*, 1923, 1956, 1993," Robert Burgoyne's "Modernism and the Narrative of Nation in *JFK*," Denise J. Youngblood's "Andrei Rublev: The Medieval Epic as Post-utopian History," and Thomas Elsaesser's "Subject Positions, Speaking Positions: From *Holocaust*, *Our Hitler*, and *Heimat* to *Shoah* and *Shindler's List*." Linking these texts is their concern with and critique of the traditional conjunction of history and nation in something akin to "sermonization": the narration of past events and nation-building in coherent moral tales. Focusing on Stone's *JFK*, for instance, Burgoyne argues that in spite of its modernist form and fragmentary narrative the film "holds onto the very ideal of a coherent narrative of nation that its own formal structure seems to repudiate."

Finally, in Part Three, titled "The End(s) of History," four more essays are presented: "Historical *Ennui*, Feminist Boredom," by Patrice Pietro; "The Future of the Past: Film and the Beginnings of Postmodern History," by Robert A. Rosenstone; "Interrotroning History: Errol Morris and the

Documentary of the Future," by Shawn Roseheim; and "The Professors of History," by Dona Polan. In this last part, as Sobchack explains, all essays are "purposefully eccentric and emphasize on the one hand the 'dead end' of historiography as it has been traditionally conceived and practiced, and raise on the other the question of historiography's 'ends' or functions." Just to illustrate, Robert Rosenstone's essay combines humor and pastiche to question whether theorists like White and Linda Hutcheon, among other "postmodern theorists," have really been studying specific historiographical works; indeed, Rosenstone argues that few history texts have actually presented anything different from the traditional historiographical research, contrasting with what one finds in other fields and art forms.

But if traditional historians still have a place within this world in which architecture and the arts in general are showing a renewed interest in, quoting Sobchack, "History, history, herstory, histories," then another book propitious to our postmodern moment is Leger Grindon's *Shadows on the Past*. As its subtitle announces, the book presents the results of the author's studies in historical fiction film, and a taste for traditional historiography pervades the whole book.

Indeed, Grindon's claim that the historical fiction film deserves to be considered a genre in its own right is foregrounded with a good deal of

historical data. The book begins with the identification of the generic conventions and motives characteristic of the historical fiction film, and with the assertion that historical films “interpret and comment on significant past events, as do historians, [and that] by looking at the motives behind the displacement of the present to the past,” one can find their political implications to the present. Next, a framework is provided for the analysis and discussion of the historical fiction film as a genre.

Following the introductory section, the author examines extensively a number of films, with special attention to *Gone With the Wind*, *The Birth of a Nation*, *La Marseillaise*, *Reign of Terror* (or *The Black Book*), *Senso*, *The Rise to Power of Louis XIV*, and *Reds*. All these films are extensively investigated in their historical sources and all the information about the history and the making of each film is explored, as Robert Rosenstone points, to show “how the films can appropriate historical events, insinuating an intention, providing an escape into nostalgia, or directing a search for knowledge and origins.” It is a book that fully meets the author’s intention to “provide a framework for a continuing discussion by illuminating the vital concerns and defining relationships of the historical fiction film.”

Xavier, Ismail (org.). *O Cinema no Século*. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1996, 384p.

by Arlindo Castro and José Gatti

In his elegantly written introduction to *O Cinema no Século*, Ismail Xavier comments on the crossroads at which the area of film studies finds itself at the turn of the century. For those who are not familiar with the most important trends of film theory, Xavier’s text comes in handy. After all, few areas of knowledge have been as influential in the human sciences in our century as the study of cinema.

The bulk of film studies in the first half of the century focused on the specificities of cinema as opposed to other forms of expression such as theater and painting. As Xavier puts it, “it is typical of the sciences to be rigorous in the construction of their object”, and the field of film studies was no exception. In Brazil, the hegemonic tendency in film studies was even more specific: it privileged Brazilian cinema over other national cinemas, as a reaction to the pervasive presence of foreign films in our market. But things changed radically since the seventies and eighties, when film studies in the whole world were reshaped by its association with a number of disciplines such as aesthetics, psychoanalysis, narratology, history and cultural studies. At the same time, scholars and critics in Brazil

began to dedicate themselves to the study of audiovisual texts from other countries within a globalized perspective. *O Cinema do Século* gathers nineteen lectures that were given by scholars, researchers and filmmakers at the Museu da Imagem e do Som, in São Paulo, between April 1994 and November 1995. Not surprisingly, these lectures relate cinema to other disciplines and deal with cinema as a global phenomenon.

The book is organized in two parts: the first, *Relações Prismáticas*, debates, in the words of Xavier, “the insertion of cinema in culture and society”; the second, *Afinidades Eletivas*, analyzes the relations between cinema and the other arts, or else cinema as a “factor in the recomposition of the sphere of the arts”. According to Xavier, the question at the hub of the book is not “what is cinema?”, but rather “what is cinema in dialogue with?” Hence the formula for the title of each lecture, *Cinema and...*, which guides the thematic organization of the book. In the first part the authors discuss the relationship between *Cinema and* History, Industry, Politics, Journalism, the Imaginary, Sexuality, Reality, Virtuality, Religion, Multiculturalism, the Spectator. The second part examines the common grounds of cinema and other artistic endeavors: Theater, Music, Painting, the Avant-garde, Pop Art, Performance, Poetry and Magic (even though one hardly thinks of the latter as an art). The book features, among the lecturers, Brazilian scholars from

different fields, such as Jean-Claude Bernardet, Maria Rita Kehl, Nelson Brissac Peixoto and others; from the United States, Annette Michelson, Tom Gunning and Robert Stam; from Britain, Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey.

As in all collections, the texts do not follow the same standards. The ones presented by the foreigners represent the forefront of film studies in the Anglophone world. They all delve into their own theoretical specialties—except perhaps for UCLA professor P. Wollen, who, in autobiographical fashion, reflects on his own experiences as a filmmaker and screenwriter of Michelangelo Antonioni’s *The Passenger*.

The Brazilian contributors make up a more heterogeneous team. In a certain sense, this fits the proposal of the series of lectures, which emphasizes interdisciplinarity. One feels that themes such as television and video would deserve specific texts—but of course it would be impossible to cover the wide range of possibilities suggested by cinema and all of its interfaces.

Ismail Xavier warns us that certain lectures were not featured as originally planned, like *Cinema and Architecture* and *Cinema and Opera*. The first one for its role in stage setting, in the organization of filmic space as a whole, and in the transition from reality’s apparent tridimensional space onto the bidimensional space of the screen; the second one for its multiple relations with music, poetry, theater and performance.

(An important absence is the subject of Cinema and Literature, which, in the series at the Museu da Imagem e do Som was addressed by Davi Arrigucci Jr. and will be published in a separate book by the author).

Despite all of its qualities, the book lacks a bibliography and a filmography. It is about time that Brazilian publishing houses (especially one with Imago's prestige, which was responsible for the publication of Freud's complete works in Brazil) paid more attention to such important details.

O Cinema no Século stands, anyway, as an excellent survey of the debates that animate film studies nowadays — and this is surely more than welcome.

Soares, Jô. *O Xangô de Baker Street*. Companhia das Letras, 1995.

by Salma Ferraz

Sherlock Holmes no Brasil

Você sabia que Sherlock Holmes namorou uma fogosa mulata brasileira? Que foi preso por atentado ao pudor por ter tentado fazer sexo sob os ramos de um jequitibá em pleno Passeio Público? Que Sherlock estava “elementarmente” errado na maioria de suas brilhantes deduções e era um acidentado por natureza? Que o único criminoso que Sherlock não conseguiu

prender foi um brasileiro? Que o criminoso brasileiro ria e zombava da insuficiência dedutiva de Holmes? E que, pasmem, Jack, o estripador, não era inglês e sim brasileiro e cometeu seus primeiros crimes não nas ruas neblinentas de Londres, mas sim nas calorentas vielas do tropical Rio de Janeiro?

Isso mesmo, o *serial killer* mais conhecido da História e que praticamente virou lenda é brasileiro e é mais inteligente do que Sherlock Holmes, cuja inteligência foi capaz de impressionar os melhores cérebros da Scotland Yard. Se você não consegue responder às perguntas acima, **é elementar meu caro leitor**, você ainda não leu *O Xangô de Baker Street*, romance de estréia do humorista e apresentador Jô Soares.

O livro poderia ser enquadrado em diversas classificações: um intrigante livro de suspense policial; um romance histórico, uma vez que nele encontramos D. Pedro II, José do Patrocínio, Machado de Assis, Aluizio de Azevedo e a atriz Sarah Bernhardt; uma escritura carnalizada seguindo os apontamentos de Mikhail Bakhtin², pois se trata de um livro que parodia a obra de Conan Doyle dessacralizando personagens consagrados da literatura; um romance intertextual; uma crítica deslavada ao processo de afrancesamento da sociedade brasileira do século passado; e por último, predomina, soberano, aquilo que seu autor mais sabe fazer: **RIR**.

Estes seis tópicos se entrelaçam no decorrer da obra. O suspense perpassa toda a obra, num fôlego extraordinário, ao longo de suas 352 páginas, o que já é um prodígio. O enredo detetivesco é o seguinte: um violino desaparece misteriosamente. Em seguida, surge um criminoso que atua nas trevas da noite, mata, retalha suas vítimas anatômica e cirurgicamente, com detalhes de requintada crueldade. Após os crimes, toca uma música ao violino e deixa um fio do mesmo enrolado nos órgãos genitais das vítimas, todas moças. Seguindo as regras básicas de toda novela de detetive, o assassino é um cidadão acima de qualquer suspeita que só será revelado nas últimas páginas do livro e, contrariando todas as regras do gênero, o detetive não descobre nem desmascara o assassino.

Sutilmente, nessa trama ficcional, os personagens históricos são enredados. Ou melhor; na trama histórica é que os personagens ficcionais são enredados. D. Pedro, numa visita a sua amiga, a atriz francesa Sarah, que esteve no Brasil no ano de 1886, comenta o desaparecimento do violino, dado por ele à Baronesa de Avaré, uma de suas muitas amantes. A atriz sugere ao imperador que convide Sherlock Holmes para fazer uma visita ao Brasil e assim desvendar o sumiço do instrumento. É desta forma que, no romance, estão misturados personagens ficcionais, como Sherlock e Dr. Watson, com personagens históricos — D. Pedro e Sarah. Os limites entre história e ficção são muito tênues, uma vez que personagens ficcionais transitam em

meio a toda uma sociedade do século passado, que é histórica: a sociedade do Rio de Janeiro, com suas ruas, estabelecimentos, escritores, políticos, jornalistas, etc.

Para entender esse terreno movediço, esse campo particular das relações entre história e ficção, que é o campo no qual está situado *O Xangô de Baker Street*, citamos Saramago: “História e Romance seriam tão somente expressões da mesma inquietação dos Homens³.”

A obra é parodística e, por isto, exige que o leitor tenha algum conhecimento de quem foi Sherlock Holmes e Dr. Watson, saiba alguma coisa das aventuras do detetive inglês e algo sobre Conan Doyle, caso contrário, muito dos episódios, humor e ironia presentes na obra não terão sentido e graça. Este conhecimento deverá também abranger personagens da Literatura (Edgar Allan Poe), Psicanálise (Freud), Ciência, História Geral e do Brasil.

Sobre a paródia cabe citarmos Linda Hutcheon, pois “o papel da paródia é desnudar e desconstruir⁴⁷”. Realizando uma paródia da obra de Conan Doyle, o livro de Jô Soares carnaliza seus personagens: o tímido D. Holmes quer fazer amor com a mulata Ana Candelária em lugares públicos, chegando a ser preso por atentado ao pudor. Dr. Watson, sempre sisudo em Doyle, no romance, vai encarnar num centro de umbanda a entidade da pomba gira, gritando feito uma fêmea histórica, tentando dizer o nome do

assassino, o que por si só já dessacraliza o gênero da novela de detetive, uma vez que o criminoso não pode ser descoberto por meios sobrenaturais. O dedutivo Holmes é passado para trás por uma mente assassina bem brasileira, que lhe escreve uma carta, chamando-o, literalmente, de burro, tão evidentes eram as pistas deixadas por ele, as quais, Holmes, a despeito de todas as suas elocubrações, não consegue desvendar.

Dois consagrados personagens da literatura inglesa são retratados no *Xangô* "às avessas", pelo lado esquerdo e demoníaco, e é justamente isso que causa muito riso. Ainda segundo Hutcheon (op. cit., p 18), "a inversão irônica é uma característica de toda paródia."

Intertexto, o debruçar do texto sobre outros textos, é o que não falta em *Xangô*, um verdadeiro mosaico de citações: Conan Doyle — *As Aventuras de Sherlock Holmes*, Umberto Eco *O nome da Rosa* e com o cinema — *O Silêncio dos Inocentes*. É a homenagem do autor a três clássicos do suspense e seus protagonistas: Sherlock Holmes, Guilherme de Baskerville e Dr. Hannibal Lecter.

No romance o autor implícito, aquele segundo "eu" do autor real, realiza toda uma crítica à sociedade do século passado, que se queria francesa, mas não era. Se os brasileiros do século dezenove se vestiam e comiam como na França, se as roupas eram sobrecasacas pretas, o suor de suas

axilas era bem tropical. O francês precário dos estudantes de direito da faculdade do largo de São Francisco que pediam para a atriz francesa pisar em "seus capotes", pensando que "capotes" em francês fosse o equivalente a "casacos" e jamais "preservativos", é um típico exemplo da sociedade brasileira que se expressava num francês precário e era capaz de um verdadeiro delírio ao ouvir *A Marselhesa*.

O Brasil se queria francês e Sherlock, o mais inglês dos ingleses, pelo contrário, se queria bem brasileiro: troca suas roupas pretas por ternos de linho claro, seu peculiar cachimbo por água de coco e sua habitual cocaína pela *cannabis*. O processo é inverso: os brasileiros queriam ser europeus - franceses, e o europeu Sherlock queria ser brasileiro.

Tudo isto, história, ficção, intertextualidade, paródia, carnavalização, costumes franceses é permeado por muito riso, muita ironia e humor.

Jorge de Burgos, personagem de Umberto Eco em *O Nome da Rosa*, que tentava desruir o suposto segundo livro de Aristóteles que versava sobre o riso, pois o riso "era a fraqueza, a corrupção, a insipidez de nossa carne..." não deixava, porém, de admitir que no livro do filósofo grego, pelo contrário, "a função do riso é invertida, elevada à arte, abrem-se-lhe as portas do mundo dos doutos. Faz-se dele objeto de filosofia..."⁵.

É isto que Jô Soares faz com seu livro: eleva o riso à categoria de arte e faz dele

objeto de filosofia. A nossa sorte é que esse livro não foi comido por um fanático como Jorge de Burgos e podemos ainda rir à vontade.

Notas

- 2 Mikhail Bakhtin. *Problemas da Poética de Dostoiévski*. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 1981.
- 3 José Saramago. História e ficção. In: *Jornal de Letras*. Lisboa, 1990, p. 20.
- 4 Linda Hutcheon. *Uma teoria da paródia*. Lisboa: Edições 70, 1989, p. 14.
- 5 Umberto Eco. *O nome da rosa*. Trad. Aurora F. Bernardini Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1986, p. 532.

White, Hayden. *The Content of the Form: narrative discourse and historical representation*. The John Hopkins University Press, 1992.

by Antonio João Teixeira

Although the chapters that appear in this book have been previously published separately in different places at different times, they have been revised by the author for their publication as a book and are all related to the problem of historical representation. By putting together essays on Droysen, Foucault, Jameson and Ricoeur, Hayden White has

managed to give an encompassing account of a problematic issue that has been one of the major concerns of historical studies as well as of many other areas of the human sciences: that of the importance of narrative representation in the description or explanation of the “object” of study of the human sciences. Although the authors mentioned deal with this subject in different ways, White finds in them common characteristics which confirm the point made by him that historical narratives are, from a semiological perspective, concerned with the production of meanings. Notions such as political power, wars, economic activity and the establishment of alliances interest him to the extent that these discourses involve intentional creation and destruction being, thus, meaningful.

In order to discuss the importance of narrativity in the representation of reality, White reviews the three basic types of historical representation—annals, chronicles and historical narratives, all of them related to the impulse to moralize reality, for they deal with a system of social relationships governed by law. Differently from annals and chronicles, historical narratives have a greater comprehensiveness, a central subject and an organization of materials and also depend on narrativity, an important value due to our need of coherence and fulness in the representation of real events. Since they have a plot and a narrative closure, White

suggests that they are also endowed with moral meaning. And as the sequence of events has an “ending”, when the narrative “concludes”, what we have, in fact, is not an end in itself but simply a shift from one moral order to another.

In traditional historical theory, historical discourse followed the dissertative mode of address in the form of the logical demonstration. The dissertation was an interpretation of the historian’s thoughts about what he supposed were the true events, and his narrative a representation of what he imagined was the true story. This distinction proved to be ambiguous, for what theorists viewed as merely the form of discourse—the narrative—was actually content, because this form manifested itself in elements of stories, in plot: the form of the story performed by human agents determined the form of the narrative, so that the plot would exist prior to the event. The ambiguity of the term “history” rests then in the fact that it refers not only to the facts that actually happened but also to the narration of these very facts. Consequently, White argues that because ideology is the treatment of the form of a thing as a content, historiography in the nineteenth-century must be considered ideological. Or, as Barthes proposes, it can be seen as an imaginary elaboration that allows us to apprehend the structure of the world. The set of real events the historian wants to represent must then be encoded as story elements in an imaginary discourse. By changing the form of the

narrative, we might not change the information it conveys but we would surely change the meaning produced by it. Therefore, historical narrative can be characterized as “symbolic discourse” which reveals its form in “plot” and its content in “meaning”. Since historical actions are lived narrativizations, they can only be represented by narratives. Hence, form equals content, in the sense that the first is the narrative and the second what has been narrated. Quoting Ricoeur, White states that any discussion of the proper form of a historical narrative becomes a theory of the content of history.

White goes on to Droysen’s “Historik”, where the same idea of the “content of the form” of a historical discourse can be found. Droysen considers the subject matter as the referent, not the content, which is instead the understanding of the facts and their moral implications. Thus, the same referent, say, the French Revolution, may have different contents. Besides, White argues, if all historical narratives are ideological, and if historical studies presuppose interpretation, a politics of interpretation must also be presupposed, for there is no such thing as “pure” interpretation. Therefore, the wedding of narration and interpretation makes historical studies a discipline rather than a science. Because historical narratives deal in the probable rather than the true, it is not possible to expect historical studies to be impartial. So, instead of being an absolutely objective process, history is foremost a

discourse, because it is not a mimetic representation of events but a study of “remains” or “sublimation” of past events.

According to Foucault, in White’s account, the basis of all cultural praxis is also discourse, and historical representation, by favoring language, is nothing but discourse, which has as its basis “desire and power”, often disguised as “the will to truth”. Foucault argues that this discourse is an instrument used to control the body and ultimately society itself. Contrary to the current idea that modern society is not repressive, he affirms when he deals with the discourse of sexuality, for example, that sexual practices have never been so much talked about, studied, and classified, but merely as a means of exerting absolute control over citizens in an attempt to discipline them and punish the ones who deviate from the norm. From his point of view it is the modality of discourse that establishes the distinctions between, say, “natural” and “unnatural” sexual practices, sanity and insanity, truth and error, and so on, so that the individual is conformed to the social laws. Then, to our consciousness, discourse would be reality itself and not simply a representation of it.

White then focuses his analysis on Jameson’s view of historical narrative as a “socially symbolic act” that gives meaning to events, with Marx’s critical insights being the semantic preconditions for the understanding of cultural texts.

The absent cause of present social events, that is, the actions of past human agents, cannot be understood by appeal to reason alone, but, as Jameson states, to the narrative capacities of the imagination, because he believes in the narrativity of the historical process itself. Thus the consciousness of the past would define the present and this process would be exactly the same process of a narrativized sequence of events; in this narratological causation, we can see past human agents as characters in a novel. The notion of contradiction, which is cultural, and therefore absent in nature, is present in a narrative in the dialectical relationship between the plot and story elements. Political problems as well as technical writing problems would be solved in the form of the narrative which, following Hjelmslev’s model, has an expression and a substance just as the content has an expression and a substance.

In discussing Ricoeur’s metaphysics of narrativity, White goes against the transformation of historiography into a science, as the Annalists wished, and favors the defense of narrative historiography. Ricoeur’s strongest point is his assigning narrativity a capacity to express human experience of temporality, the enigma of being-in-time. Also important is the distinction he makes between historical events and natural events. To him, historical events possess the same structure as narrative discourse. Therefore, historians can make use of stories to represent them.

Ricoeur, like White, is interested in narrative histories that present a plot and also experiences of temporality with meaning (real events as the referent), "invented" by a past agent, and related by the "productive imagination" of the historian. Thus, literary fiction and historiography would both be symbolic discourses sharing a common referent: the human experience of temporality. White goes on to discuss Ricoeur's notion of "deep temporality", which involves the mysteries of death and eternity, which are always present whenever human consciousness manifests itself.

Finally, White brings to the fore the question of the context in the text. Because their boundaries and their relationships are not precise, text and context have become an interesting aspect for historians to ponder on, mainly because they raise another problem, the question of transparent and ideologically distorted texts. White surprisingly states that if the historian is equipped with the proper tools, say, linguistic tools, all texts will reveal their praxis and time of production and thus become transparent. The four possible ways language and the world of things are related (causal, mimetic, analogical or semiological) give historians these proper tools and allow different approaches to cultural history. Instead of a linguistic theory of texts that would account for the first three of them, White seems to favor a semiological approach, which would then take into consideration the facts that are external

to the events themselves, that is, to contextual facts, that are present as reflections in the text and whose study consists in the process of meaning production. So, the real events are condensed into the form of the historical narrative as a symbol of the sociocultural processes of the time during which it is produced.

In short, what makes Hayden White's reasoning meaningful is the fact that he makes his point - the one that the form of historical narratives is in fact their content - by taking into account the work of different authors who view the issue from different angles. What is amazing in White's account is the similarity he finds in novels and historical narratives. In fact, they only differ in the material, or referent, they make use of - real or imaginary events. But they both must take into consideration the imagination of the novelist and the historian, and here White sides with Ricoeur in the argument that both types of narrative deal with the structures of human time. Whether real or imaginary, events depicted in novels or historical narratives are of a human nature, which gives these narratives a deep philosophical insight.