Chapter Two

Varieties of Structure in Historical Accounts

Traditionally, the general form of historical accounts has been that known as "narrative history." Even though other forms have increasingly replaced narrative histories, a number of philosophers have recently taken the narrative to be the best model for understanding the logic of historical explanation. Among examples of this view one may cite W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding*, Arthur C. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, and Morton White, *Foundations of Historical Knowledge*; earlier forms of a similar tendency are to be found in W. H. Dray's continuous series model of explanation, in W. H. Walsh's account of history as "significant narrative," and in some aspects of the theories of Croce and Collingwood. I find this tendency unfortunate, as I have elsewhere attempted to make clear.\(^1\) What is of concern to me here, however, is not
criticism; instead, I wish to offer a positive analysis of alternative forms of structure to be found within historical works. I need merely make two preliminary remarks concerning the concept of a narrative as applied to historical studies.

In the first place, describing history as narrative suggests—and I assume is meant to suggest—that historiography is to be compared with telling a tale or story. This is misleading even when applied to the most traditional histories. A historian dealing with any subject matter must first attempt to discover what occurred in some segment of the past, and establish how these occurrences were related to one another. Once this research has been carried forward to a partial conclusion, he must, of course, think about how he will best present his findings, and this, and what follows upon it, may be regarded as "constructing a narrative." Such a narrative, however, is not independent of his antecedent research, nor is that research merely incidental to it; the historian's "story"—if one chooses to view it merely as a story—must emerge from his research and must be assumed to be at every point dependent on it. It is therefore misleading to describe what historians do as if this were comparable to what is most characteristic of the storyteller's art: The basic structure of a story or tale is of the storyteller's own choosing, and whatever may be preliminary to his telling that story does not serve to control the act of narration.² In the second place, as we shall see, the demands placed on a historian by his subject matter rarely permit him to follow any simple story line. To explicate the chain of occurrences with which he deals, he must, in most cases, provide a great deal of material concerning the antecedent background of these occurrences, and must also pay close attention to many contemporaneous events. The storyteller, on the other hand, is not under the same necessity: he starts in media res and he need merely introduce whatever earlier background or whatever references to ongoing events he regards as useful in highlighting his story. Therefore, narratives tend to have a simpler, more linear, and more self-contained structure than do historical accounts, even when the historian is sequentially tracing the changes that occurred over time with respect to the central subject with which his account is concerned. I shall therefore speak of the structure of the more traditional historical accounts as sequential in character, and avoid referring to such works as narratives.

As I have remarked, this traditional structure has been increasingly replaced by other ways of organizing historical works, but the sequential form remains one basic pattern of which we must take cog-
nizance. There are two other such forms with which I shall deal in the present chapter: the explanatory and the interpretive. What must be emphasized at the outset is that these are not "pure" forms: No historical work uses one to the exclusion of the others. As we shall see, there will be points at which each of the three modes comes into play in any historical work; however, the overall structure of any historical study is likely to conform more closely to one of these forms than to either of the others. The fact that I shall not attempt to isolate and deal with any other forms does not indicate that I believe my classification to be exhaustive. I do, however, regard these three types of structure as more pervasive than any others one might distinguish.

I

For purposes of exposition, I shall first briefly consider the explanatory structure, which dominates some historical accounts and which can be of importance at almost any point in any form of historical inquiry. What I shall term an explanatory structure is present only when a person—in this case a historian—already knows (or believes that he knows) what has in fact happened, and seeks an explanation of why it happened. In such a case he starts from a fact taken as present and seeks to trace back its causes—that is, to establish what was responsible for its having happened. How we are to conceive of the cause, or the causes, of an occurrence is a problem that will occupy us in the second part of this book. What is here of importance is what may be called the direction of inquiry in an explanatory account. Speaking generally, inquiry starts from a given outcome and proceeds in a direction that is the reverse of the direction in which the events responsible for that outcome actually occurred; in other words, an explanatory account involves a tracing back of events from the present toward the past.³ It is here that there emerges a first and fundamental point of difference between an explanatory structure and a sequential structure, for the latter—as we shall see—follows events in the order of their occurrence, and though the outcome of the series may in fact already be known by the historian, it need not have been known. On the other hand, in explanatory inquiries, the inquiry itself (although not the account that emerges from it) moves back from what is known to have occurred and seeks an explanation of it through tracing its antecedents.
Furthermore, in an explanatory account of a particular occurrence, the events with which the historian deals may be extremely diverse, not belonging together except insofar as each happened to contribute to the particular outcome the historian is investigating. For example, if he is to account for a sudden decline in a nation’s foreign trade, he is not necessarily confined to events that occurred within that nation: The eruption of a war involving one of the nation’s major trading partners and a blockade of that partner by its neighbors might well be important factors to be taken into account. In addition, a drought may have caused a decline in the nation’s agricultural exports to other nations; so, too, may have a strike of dock workers. All such factors are relevant for the historian who wishes to explain what occurred, but it is obvious that they are often wholly independent of one another. Thus, an explanatory account of a particular effect draws upon factors each of which has its own separate history: The historian will not be following any one continuous series of events. In this respect, such accounts differ from the characteristic structure of sequential histories.

In a sequential history, the historian chooses a subject that has a degree of continuity in its history, and he seeks to trace the strand of events making up that history. Consequently, a sequential history seems to possess a single dominant story line—as narratives generally do—rather than being an analysis of independent factors that, together, bring about a particular result. However, the comparison between sequential historical accounts and nonhistorical narratives must not be overemphasized, not only because of the differences to which I have already alluded but because what we regard as a story usually leads to a specific conclusion, and it is with respect to that conclusion that the episodes were selected by the person telling that story. A historian, however, may write a history of some still incomplete series of events, as Thucydides did: He commenced his account of the war between the Athenians and the Peloponnesians when they first took up arms. In that case the historian follows occurrences as they occur, not knowing where they will eventuate, but keeping in mind that he is to include only those events that seem to have a direct bearing on the particular subject with which his history is concerned. His subject may be a person or a nation, a changing institution or a cultural movement; in any of these cases a sequential history has a unifying theme. When historians look back upon a completed life or the end of an era in a nation’s history, or upon an earlier cultural movement or a set of institutional changes, it is of course easier to see
what was relevant than when they are dealing with what is still an ongoing process; yet, even in these cases, the structure of a sequential account may be quite unlike the usual structure of a narrative—the reign of a king may have come to a close without coming to a climax, or an institution may have changed its forms and its functions without our viewing each of its earlier changes as preparatory to what it later became. In short, in much of history, if it be narrative, it is narrative sorely lacking in point. This fact, however, is apt to be concealed by cases in which the historian has chosen to depict some sequence of events in which we are fascinated by the manner in which—as in a story—the parts form themselves into a single unified whole.

We are now in a position to see the essential differences between an explanatory and a sequential approach to the materials with which historians are concerned. For the sequential historian there is a particular series of events he wishes to follow, seeing one grow out of another and observing how other events altered their progress, but how in the end they came to form a single history whose course he is able to render intelligible. In this, the direction of the flow of events and the direction of his explanation coincide. To be sure, at some points in this flow he may be puzzled, and he will then have to pause to give an explanatory account as to why, at this point, an event of a particular sort unexpectedly occurred; in general, however, a sequential account will follow the form of Dray's continuous series model of explanation—one event led to another, and it to the next, and so on to the end of the series. On the other hand, an explanatory account does not set out to give the reader a sequential view of what occurred, but seeks to answer a definite question: Granted that this event did occur, what factors were responsible for its occurrence? Sometimes tracing a continuous series of events provides an explanation with which we are satisfied, but historical analyses often take another form, tracing back a confluence of otherwise unrelated events and indicating how, at successive moments, they interacted. The difference between these approaches is sometimes as great as the difference between explaining the size of the population of the United States in 1976 by tracing a curve of growth and accounting for the rate of growth in any particular decade.

We must now turn to the third form of structure in historical works, the interpretive. Perhaps the simplest way of indicating how interpretive works differ from those whose structure is primarily sequential or primarily explanatory is to consider the task faced by
almost any historian as he introduces his reader to the subject with which he is to be concerned. In that introduction he must portray the state of affairs existing at the time and place at which his account begins, insofar as its aspects are relevant to that with which he is to deal. Other aspects of what then existed, even if known, are not of concern: What is needed is to present a background against which future developments can be understood. The portrayal of these materials cannot consist in simply listing them, since the relations existing among them will be important to relationships among the events that later emerged from them. Thus, at the outset of any historical work an attempt is made to depict a particular state of affairs, not in all detail but in terms of what was most significant in its structure with respect to the later events with which the historian intends to deal.

Now, it is possible for a historian to enter upon a similar task not simply for the sake of presenting background for understanding further events, but for the sake of depicting that state of affairs itself. This, I take it, is precisely what historical accounts that are primarily interpretive in structure are intended to do. To be sure, they are unlikely to be restricted to depicting the structure of a state of affairs merely at some moment in time; they will be inclined instead to treat of such structures as enduring in a continuing form over some definite span. For example, G. M. Young in his essay *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age* dealt with England from 1831 to 1865; Burckhardt's *Culture of the Renaissance in Italy* is, of course, an interpretive history of even greater sweep. Since historical structures to some extent change over time, the interpretive historian will generally also be concerned with understanding and depicting these changes. Thus, in portions of his work he will adopt sequential modes of treating his subject matter. Further, he will at various points attempt to explain such changes, and thus from time to time his account will proceed much as explanatory accounts proceed. Nonetheless, a historian may envision his main task as that of revealing the characteristic feature of some form of life, rather than sequentially tracing or explaining the various occurrences that enter into his account. This motivation is evident in the works of Young and of Burckhardt to which I have alluded.4

It is easy to identify such works as examples of interpretive histories, but the genre is far more inclusive than these illustrations suggest. For example, if one takes Richard Pares's well-known Ford Lectures, *King George III and the Politicians*, one finds an attempt to
portray "the ruling interests and motives of British politics in George III's reign; to explore the king's uncertain and undefined relations with the House of Commons; and to illustrate the conflicts which this uncertainty and want of definition produced from time to time." While Pares's description involved elements of explanatory analysis and also some tracing of sequential connections, his emphasis throughout his lectures lay on the interpretation of relationships among individuals and groups who held and shared power. Nor is this an isolated example: Almost any cross-sectional study of political or social life is bound to have a strong bias toward an interpretive structure, even if, later, explanations are offered as to how the relationships among the various segments of the community came to be as they were. Thus, interpretive studies cannot be confined to a study of the interplay of elements in the culture of a people; they often deal with institutional relationships as well. Of this we shall have more to say later.

II

It is now time to turn from this first general characterization of the three types of historical structure to a closer consideration of their interplay. I shall first address myself to the relations that are likely to exist between sequential and explanatory accounts, and in this connection we shall see in further detail why the current tendency to identify history with narrative is basically misleading, especially insofar as general history is concerned.

In general histories, the nature and changes of a social order are what serve as the focus of a historian's interest, and any such order involves a complex network of relationships even where a historian may wish to confine himself to only one facet of the society—say, to its political aspects. In order to depict the political life of a society one cannot follow any simple narrative sequence. This is evident if one considers even a sharply delimited segment of political life, such as a single presidential election campaign. It would be a gross distortion of the subject matter if the historian were to view the events constituting the campaign as a single linear series in which each step is causally related to a particular antecedent and itself leads to a specific consequent, as (for example) Morton White's analysis of the basic skeletal structure of historical narration would have us assume. Usually there is an overall strategy in a political campaign,
and that strategy originally depends upon an analysis of the established voting habits of different segments of the population, and upon a recognition of the current interests, disaffections, and needs of various geographic, economic, and ethnic groups. Thus, to understand the stratagems each political party employs, one must grasp their relationships to longer-enduring factors that are not themselves links in the sequential chain of events constituting the “story” of the campaign. Moreover, much that happens in a national election happens at different times and in different parts of the nation, and the ultimate outcome of a campaign, even in an age of rapid, widespread communication, may depend not upon what happens day by day, but upon where it happened, and by whom it is known to have happened, and how it relates to what the opposition had already claimed. In other words, an election, unlike a chess match, is not won or lost by a series of neatly arranged sequential moves and countermoves; any merely sequential narrative, or “campaign story,” is therefore not likely to give its readers much insight into why the elements in that story occurred or why they had the effects they did.

Rather than viewing an election as a linear sequence of events, it is more accurate to view it as a whole made up of parts, with an understanding of that whole depending upon an understanding of its various parts and of their relations to one another. Such a whole is, of course, temporal; it is not a whole that is present all at once. Some of its parts will precede others, but many may be present at the same time; some will depend upon others, but many may be independent of most of the others, nonetheless contributing something to the whole of which each is a part. What is true of a single process, such as an election campaign, or the enactment of a single measure by the Congress, is obviously true of any major ongoing changes in the political life of a nation. The interplay of centers of political power, and the decisions reached, the setbacks, the recouping of losses, and the final results achieved cannot be charted in a linear pattern in which each relevant event is to be viewed as a discrete link in a single continuous chain. The relations between the events with which political historians deal are always set against an institutional background, without which the relations between the various events cannot be understood. Furthermore, it is rarely the case that the political life of a nation exists in isolation from its economic and social changes or is unaffected by its relations to other nations. Under these circumstances, the model of historical accounts that narrativists propose is so oversimplified as to be radically misleading.
Nevertheless, there is one important aspect of the view of those who adopt this model that can be retained even after one drops all other analogies between writing history and telling a story: This aspect is the claim that, in describing what actually occurred and in tracing the relationships between these occurrences, one is in fact offering what a historian will take to be an explanation. In other words, contrary to what has been held by Hempel and others, there is what Fred D. Newman has termed "explanation by description": In order to explain actual events, one need not in all cases show that they followed from a set of antecedent conditions according to some general law. This is a consequence of what has already been said in the preceding paragraph: An understanding of a whole may come through understanding its parts and their relations; and while these relations among the parts may sometimes have to be explained with reference to general laws, as we shall see in chapter 5, this is not in all instances necessary.

Consider what has been said of an election campaign: To explain its outcome we do not in fact relate that outcome to some antecedent set of conditions by means of a general law; we analyze the campaign as an ongoing process in which the tactics employed by each contending party proved to be successful or unsuccessful with particular groups of people in particular localities, and we take into account how events over which neither party may have had control also affected the outcome. Understanding what constitutes the electoral process in a particular nation (or its subdivisions) permits one to analyze that process into its components and to offer a description of these components and of how they affected one another; this is to offer what historians generally would take to be an explanation of the campaign's outcome. Some historians or political scientists or sociologists may wish to generalize from such analyses, formulating a general law concerning relationships between particular economic conditions or wars or psychological factors and what have been the results of presidential elections in the United States; however, as we shall see, it is doubtful whether there can be any satisfactory laws of sequence of that type, even in the physical sciences. While there are indeed generalizations that historians must often use, the point to be noted is that one is giving what a historian would count as an explanation when, within a sequential history, one is able to follow the train of events that make up the series as a whole. Unless the relations between the particular episodes remain opaque—which they often are not—tracing the components within a process does yield an
explanation of why, when the situation was as it was at a given time, it later became radically altered. In short, as our contemporary narrativists insist, to complete “the story” is to give the explanation; but my point is that in a historical account “the story” is by no means a simple narrative story.

Furthermore, I wish to insist that the relations between the particular episodes within a historical account may remain opaque: It may not be in the least clear how one well-authenticated part of a process was related to another, even when one suspects that there must be some relation between them. In such cases the sequential structure of a historical account must be supplemented by explanatory or interpretive analyses. Consider, for example, the case in which it is obvious that a historian must make mention of a deep economic recession in order to explain the outcome of a particular election. Campaign speeches, newspaper editorials, and voting patterns may yield abundant evidence that there was such a connection. Yet, it may not be at all clear from the documents available to the historian how such a recession was itself connected to any foregoing events. To establish such a connection, he may have to call upon economists who, by the use of well-established generalizations concerning economic processes, can explain the connection between the recession and earlier politically motivated policies. In order to apply such generalizations to the events with which he is concerned, the historian may also have to employ what I have termed the interpretive method, which forces him to look for institutional relationships of which he may not previously have been aware. Thus, an opaque relationship in what otherwise seems to be a straightforward sequential account may lead historians to seek new factors in the situation, and the background of earlier sequential accounts will thereby have become more complex. This, of course, is one way in which a discipline such as economics has led to fundamental changes in the traditional forms of historiography.9

Analogous relationships between sequential accounts and explanatory or interpretive inquiries are to be found when we turn from general histories to the field of special histories, such as histories of science or literature or architecture or philosophy. In these fields, however, the sequential structure raises problems not present in the case of general history. These problems arise because the subject matter of a special history—as we have noted in chapter 1—is some phase of culture, not a particular society or its institutions. Therefore, the special historian deals with a collection of activities and works,
rather than with any entity that has a continuous existence. Nevertheless, when one reads a history of French literature, of Gothic architecture, or of chemistry, the literary works, the buildings, or the discoveries that make up the history form a related series; they are not merely random collections, sequentially arranged. Obviously, this is because the historian has arranged them as he has; but why, one may ask, should that arrangement have been chosen?

The answer that may first come to mind is that one can see how each of these works may have influenced some of the succeeding ones; thus, the series is formed through the skeins of influence the historian follows. This, however, leaves out of consideration a more basic factor: the definition of his subject matter that led the historian to his selection of those materials to which primary attention was to be devoted. As we shall see, only after his subject matter has thus been delimited does the tracing of influences become important in establishing the continuity to be found in any special history. One can appreciate the importance of a definition of the nature of a cultural element when one notes, for example, that different literary historians define “literature” in different ways. For some, it includes only fiction, drama, poetry, essays, and journals, whereas others would also include sermons and correspondence, and perhaps historical, scientific, or philosophical writings viewed from the point of view of their relations to other literary forms. Furthermore, whether one uses a broad or a narrow definition of “literature,” some would wish to include only works considered to be of high literary merit during their author’s own time or subsequently, whereas others would include popular fiction, popular verse, widely distributed political tracts, and so forth, taking into account breadth of distribution and general interest, as well as literary merit. Similar considerations apply, mutatis mutandis, to histories of architecture, of science and technology, philosophy, or any other special history. Given this situation, it is not strands of influence, but the historian’s conception of his subject matter that, in the first instance, dictates the principles of inclusion of certain materials in his work and governs the exclusion of others.

We find, of course, that literary historians (for example) do not deal with the whole of past literature, but set themselves more specific tasks: They may deal with the works of a single author or of a school, with a style or a genre, with the literature of a period or of a nation. Yet, what is included within their more specific topic depends upon what they are willing to regard as literature, and also upon how, for example, they delimit the period or the genre they wish to inves-
tigate. This primary delimitation of the materials with which a literary historian deals is analogous to the fact that the materials that fall within the scope of a general historian's interest are, in the first instance, determined by the subject he has chosen, by the aspect or aspects of it with which he is concerned, and by the scale on which he wishes to pursue his inquiry. There is, however, a point at which this analogy breaks down. As we have noted, the general historian deals with some continuing societal structure, analyzing its parts and following its changes, whereas a literary historian, or the historian of any other branch of culture, deals with a series of works that, although they are seen as belonging together, are not parts of any actual single whole. It then becomes necessary to raise the question of how a literary historian can justify the fact that he includes certain works and excludes others when he comes to write his sequential account of, say, a nation's literature, or of a genre such as the novel. While his definition of literature or of the novel provides an initial delimitation of his material, there will undoubtedly be many examples that fit his definition with which he will not deal. Unlike a general historian, he cannot then say, "These do not belong to the subject with which I am dealing," for that with which he is dealing is a class of objects, not a continuing whole and its parts.

At this point the literary historian, or any other special historian, is likely to invoke the concept of "importance": He will attempt to include all important examples of the class of works with which he is dealing, but will be willing to exclude those he believes lacking in importance. The term "importance," however, conceals within itself a number of meanings. In the present context, for example, an important work may be one of outstanding literary value; or it may be one that had a significant influence on other literary works by virtue of its theme or its technique; or it may be regarded as important because it influenced social and political thought, or moral and religious belief, and would therefore be included by those literary historians who adopt one of the broader definitions of literature. Of these alternatives—for each of which many examples can readily be cited—it is only the first meaning of "importance" that does not include an obvious and explicit reference to the factor of influence. Even in that case, the way in which the concept of "outstanding literary value" is frequently used may suggest a tacit reference to the factor of influence, for works so designated are usually those that are considered classics—that is, works whose readership and influence have persisted. Should this be challenged, and were there to be no
reference to a work's influence contained in value judgments regarding literary merit, the role of influence would nevertheless be deeply ingrained in any literary history, since the history of a literature, or of a genre, does not confine itself to criticism and to the comparison of individual masterworks. Therefore, in a literary history, or in any other form of special history, the question of influence and the spread of influence stands at the heart of the problem of continuity.

In tracing influences in literature—to remain with it as an example—the historian sometimes has explicit evidence to guide him: Letters, diaries, the author's conversations with others, and the like provide the historian with suggestions as to the works and events that may have most influenced an author. Such materials are, of course, of great biographical value, but one cannot take an author's explicit comments on other authors or events (nor can one take any absence of such comment) as an accurate reflection of the degree to which he was in fact influenced by them. In literary history, as in anthropological investigations of the spread of culture traits and of culture complexes, one must be guided by resemblances that are found, as well as by the probability that there has been an opportunity for the dissemination of influence. Letters, diaries, and the like can directly attest to the existence of contact, and thus to the opportunity for influence; however, the literary historian has other, less direct evidence he can use concerning opportunities for influence: the availability of the relevant works in their original form or in translation, discussion of these works in periodicals known to have been read by the author in question, and the like. Yet, it is through resemblances that most clues as to influence are originally discovered; and after the possibility of contact has been established, it is on the strength of these resemblances, and the unlikelihood of their having been accidental, that the historian’s argument for influence must finally rest.

In noting resemblances and tracing influences among literary works, the historian of literature is led to weave a complicated pattern of relationships: Even in the simplest cases, there will not be any single line of influence to follow, in which a influenced b, and b influenced c, but in which c was influenced by nothing but b. Any work, c, will have been written by some person, and the influence of b on his work—no matter how strong—will not explain c, since the author's own experience and style, as well as the need not merely to repeat what has already been done, will have affected his work. Nor is it likely that the work of an author will be affected by one model
only: Whatever the influences from the past or from his contemporaries that affect him, they are not likely to remain discrete, but will blend and affect his various works in different ways. Therefore, even if one were to write the history of some limited literary form, in moving from one author to another the literary historian must take much into account beyond the specific form he is to trace. He must be prepared to treat the most important works written in this form in their own contexts, and not merely as illustrations of that form; furthermore, in some cases he may also be expected to account for the fact that the form with which he is concerned arose and flourished when it did. For example, it would be a poor history of the epistolary novel in the eighteenth century if one were led by similarities in their form to treat Pamela, La Nouvelle Héloïse, and The Sorrows of Werther without consideration of Richardson, Rousseau, and Goethe, as if these novels were related only to each other and not to the lives and other works of those who wrote them. It would also be an impoverished history of the epistolary novel if no attempt were made to show what these works had in common beyond their epistolary form, and how such common elements were related to other aspects of the literature and thought of the time. It is for this reason that I have characterized the task of a literary historian as one of weaving a complicated pattern of resemblances (and, of course, also contrasts) among the works with which his definition of literature and his chosen aspect of that literature has led him to deal. And since he is a historian, and is not merely classifying works according to resemblances in abstraction from questions as to when they were written, or by whom, he will seek to account for these resemblances in terms of influences: In other words, he will seek not merely to analyze the resemblances and differences he finds, but to explain them.13

Not all such explanations will be of the same type, since many sorts of influences can affect any literary work. For our present purposes it will be sufficient to classify them under four general heads, which may be roughly described as follows: (1) influences coming from other literary works; (2) influences coming from the other arts, or from religion, the sciences, or philosophy; (3) factors in an author's own personality and in his experiences that can be related to individual works or to his creative work as a whole; and (4) political and social factors in the life of his time by which his work can be shown to have been directly influenced. This classification of the sorts of influences one may expect to find in literature is not intended to
apply to all kinds of special histories, but it does have applicability in fields other than in literature—for example, to the history of the pictorial arts or of philosophy.

I shall not attempt to deal with these different forms of influence individually, but shall merely use them to illustrate how, in the sequential structure of a literary history, or in other forms of special history, explanatory elements are introduced. For example, when there is a sudden break in the literary traditions of a nation, the literary historian will attempt to explain that change. In some cases he can appeal to influences coming from sources other than literature, whether these arose in other arts or were to be found in intellectual or social changes; in other cases he may find testimony that the old forms have worn thin and no longer attract, and a major innovator has appeared. In such cases the innovations may have been directly related to the life experiences of one or a few major innovators; in other cases they may have resulted from a rebellion against current fashions and a search for renewal in earlier indigenous traditions or in exotic forms. The power of novelty is not to be underestimated, and when it is found in a major creative figure, his work may set a pattern for his generation and, for a time, for others who come after him.

In other cases, where one is not dealing with swift, revolutionary changes, but with new emphases and a new tone, the influence of individuals may also be strong, but the literary historian will be more apt to look for the explanation of such changes in the intellectual and social life of the period with which he is concerned. This point need not be labored: The literary historian does not merely depict the changes he finds, but seeks to account for them in terms of the different influences that have effectively shaped the works and have channeled the influences of the authors with whom he has chosen to deal.

It is at this point that one can most clearly see the importance of interpretive accounts for the literary historian, or for any other type of special historian. Unless a background has already been presented in which the relationships between social, political, religious, philosophical, scientific, and other important factors in the life of the period have been depicted, there will be virtually no materials upon which to draw when the literary historian wishes to explain the changes he finds and the effects these changes have carried in their train. Therefore, he must, at various points, present a cross-sectional depiction of the condition of the society with which he deals and of
the various elements entering into its culture, or he must presuppose that his readers will have knowledge at hand regarding these factors when he introduces them in explaining the persistence or the changes of the forms and themes with which he deals. In presenting such interpretive portraits, a historian need not confine himself to discussing works of major importance. In fact, he is unlikely to do so. Many works that are not of outstanding merit nor of significant influence may find their way into a literary history, or into any other form of special history. These are works taken to be more or less "typical," that is, works that to a marked degree are paradigmatic of a style or a form of sensibility, or of reactions to the political, social, or intellectual aspects of the times. For example, while it is unlikely that any examples of the eighteenth-century Gothic novel would be included in histories of English literature if the literary historian were to be concerned only with outstanding literary value or with subsequent influence, such novels do represent a facet of English sensibility, and are usually included in histories of English literature in that guise, being taken as harbingers of some of the attitudes associated with "Romanticism."

Since the literary historian will, as we have seen, introduce explanatory elements into his sequential account of almost any aspect of literary history, and since such explanatory interpretations presuppose interpretive analyses of the society and its culture, it is obvious that in the field of special histories, no less than in general histories, a sequential account will not take the form of a simple narrative exposition; it will involve crisscrossing relationships, in which the historian picks up first one thread and then another and weaves them into an intricate pattern that follows the complex of relationships with which he is concerned.

III

A similar intricate pattern of relationships is to be found in historical accounts that are interpretive in their basic aim and structure. In them, however, the sequential patterning that arises through tracing influences is less in evidence. While an interpretive account is not usually confined to a single cross section of time but spans a period, as I have noted in the case of Young's *Victorian England* and Burckhardt's *Culture of the Renaissance in Italy*, the emphasis in such works is on the manner in which aspects of society or of the culture
of the period, or both, fit together in a pattern, defining a form of life
different from that which one finds at other times or in other places.
It is of interest to consider what lends structure to interpretive ac-
counts as thus conceived.

In the first place it is to be noted that since the historian is seeking
to depict the nature and relationships of various aspects of life at one
particular place and time, his account will have to fit into a chrono-
logical, sequential framework of greater duration than that of the
continuing state of affairs with which he is directly concerned. As we
see in Young and in Burckhardt, he will initially need to provide a
background for the specific period he is to interpret. In providing
such a background, his position is the converse of that of sequential
historians: They must inform their readers of the state of affairs
obtaining at the outset of their sequential accounts, whereas the
background the interpretive historian must supply is a sequential
background that sets the stage for the patterns of life with which he is
to be concerned. Thus, the ongoing processes in which a particular
state of affairs is embedded contribute one element of structure to
interpretive historical accounts, and the chronology of events within
the period cannot be neglected. To be sure, the interpretive historian
need not be concerned with all of the known facts leading up to an
initial state of affairs, nor with all the events that later occurred
because of them; not every change that may have occurred in the
preceding period will be relevant to the later state of affairs with
which the interpretive historian is concerned. Nor will every event
that has a legitimate place within a sequential account of a period
also be relevant to an interpretive history, although many events will
have a place in both.

While the presence within any interpretive history of elements de-
derived from various sequential histories—such as those concerned with
political, economic, literary, or religious life—provides a structural
framework or principle of organization that cannot be wholly ne-
eglected, a second and even more significant factor in structuring any
interpretive historical account is the historian's view of what aspects
in the times were most characteristic, pervasive, and fundamental for
the pattern of life he is attempting to portray. Sometimes such convic-
tions are derived from general sociological theories, or from some
particular philosophic or historical bias, but they need not be: Many
historians in fact deny that the same aspects of life are always, and in
all societies, equally fundamental. Whatever the source of his inter-
pretation may be, the interpretive historian will attempt to show how
the period with which he is concerned may be viewed—or may best be viewed—in terms of some basic theme or themes. This type of selective organization differs at least in degree (and, as I shall later argue, also in kind) from the structure to be found in other forms of historical account. While it is true that the work of any historian presupposes that certain events or aspects of life are taken to be more important than others, in historical works that aim to be primarily interpretive it is the interpretive theme itself, and not a particular series of intrinsically related occurrences, that serves to explain why the elements the historian discusses have been brought together.

Under these conditions, it may seem that I acknowledge that an interpretive historian has free rein, and can in effect offer almost any interpretation of a period that fits the theme he has chosen. This, however, is not the case. Different historians may, of course, adopt different positions as to which basic themes provide the greatest insight into a period, and thus in what light the period may best be viewed, but there is a standard against which such claims are measured. That standard is how well a given interpretive theme is supported by a wide range of evidence. Thus, regardless of what may have led a historian to offer one rather than another interpretation of a period, it is on the basis of evidence that interpretive histories—no less than other histories—are to be judged.

To understand the limits that evidence places on the historian's interpretation of a period, one must first note that interpretive history is not an independent enterprise that can proceed without using the results of other historical inquiries not primarily interpretive in their aims and their structure. This is merely to say that in order for an interpretive historian to get to know the form of life in a given period he must draw upon other studies, embracing the political, economic, literary, religious, artistic, and other developments that occurred within that period; otherwise he will not have materials to interpret. To be sure, the interpretive historian should be more than a synthesizer of already familiar materials; there may be a great deal of research he himself must do after he has found the framework that for him best characterizes the form of life in the period with which he is concerned. Yet, even this further research must cohere with what has already been known concerning the period, and it is usually his own prior knowledge of many aspects of the period—rather than prior sociological or philosophical commitments—that suggest to the interpretive historian in what light those phases of the period in which he is interested can best be viewed. At this point his interpretation
must be able to withstand criticism: Others who are knowledgeable in the same fields will judge whether the interpretation is supported by the evidence adduced, and will also want to consider whether important contradictory evidence exists. Furthermore, interpretive accounts are praised or condemned on the basis of whether the fit between the interpretation and its evidence leads one to see other points at which the interpretation is applicable to the period in question, or whether the interpretation is plausible only because its author arbitrarily restricted his attention to those aspects of the period that illustrated the theme he had chosen to push. Historians—no less than scientists—apply general principles such as these in estimating the fit between an interpretation and the evidence needed to support it, and they apply such principles concretely and in detail with respect both to what has been said and to what has been left unsaid and should have been said in any particular work.

Interpretive historical accounts are not only judged as wholes, in which case the primary basis of judgment would seem to be a question of what evidence was adduced, or what should have been taken into account; they are also judged in a more piecemeal fashion. As is the case with respect to other types of historical works, one expects them not only to be enlightening when taken as a whole, but also to be sound in their parts. Therefore, an interpretive account of a period that is not also sound in its interpretation of the specific elements with which it deals within that period will be liable to criticism. At this point it is well to recall that interpretive accounts always presuppose, and at various points include within themselves, materials drawn from a vast number of relevant sequential histories. Similarly, as we have noted, within any interpretive account there will be suggestions as to how one is to explain particular changes that took place within the period under consideration. Where one part of an interpretive account comes into conflict with specific facts or relationships that may have been generally agreed upon by competent historians, it will presumably be the interpretive account, not the sequential or explanatory ones, that will be damaged. Such damage may not be irreparable to the interpretation as a whole. The conflict may simply lead one to substitute some element other than the one in question as evidence for the interpretation offered. In other words, when ample evidence exists, emendation and not reinterpretation may be all that is called for. However, in cases of basic conflict it will be the interpretive account, not the sequential or explanatory accounts, that will call for alteration.
This fact does not signify that interpretive accounts are inferior to other forms of historiography; it follows from the fact that we are here speaking of the elements within interpretive accounts, and not of the interpretation as a whole. Such elements serve as evidence for the interpretation, and whatever account is given of these elements must hold up against the same sort of critical scrutiny one uses in testing the continuities depicted in sequential accounts or the linkages among events that are taken as explanations of any particular outcome. In other words, the overall interpretation of a period that is offered by a historian will not serve as a justifying ground for his view of the various elements that are of concern to him in that period. It is these elements that serve as evidence for his interpretation, since the interpretation as a whole cannot serve as evidence for the accuracy of the elements upon which it is supposedly based. Thus, with respect to whatever is included within any interpretive historical account, the standards of criticism to be used are the same as those employed in examining the reliability of the elements present in any other type of historical account.

IV

In concluding this discussion of the types of historical accounts that I have differentiated, I wish to emphasize once again that although the structure of any particular historical work will be predominantly of one of these types, in every such work there will be passages—and frequently long passages—in which the other forms are present. Thus, as we have noted, explanatory accounts will be introduced into works that are primarily sequential or interpretive in nature, and a sequential framework makes its appearance in both explanatory and interpretive accounts. As we have also noted, at least a rudimentary form of interpretive historiography is also to be found in sequential and explanatory histories because of the necessity for depicting the initial state of affairs that any sequential or explanatory account takes as its point of departure.

There are, however, even tighter sets of bonds that tie these forms of historiography together. The chief of these is that the same events are susceptible of treatment in all three types of accounts: Whenever these accounts deal with the same society or societies over roughly the same span of time (if they use roughly similar scales), each will include discussions of many of the same events. The elements that
thus make their appearance in different types of historical accounts must be described and interpreted in noncontradictory ways if the accounts containing them are to be considered reliable with respect to them. Thus, so long as two or more historians are concerned with the same events, their works will not be irrelevant to each other, no matter how different their basic approaches may be. It therefore follows that historians who work in the same fields, or in fields that commit them to being concerned with the same events, are not to be regarded as working at crosspurposes, even if differences in their assumptions and their methods might otherwise lead one to regard them as opponents rather than as co-workers.

I do not wish to suggest that all disputes between historians will be resolved and that all historians will ultimately reach consensus in their views regarding the events with which they are mutually concerned. I merely wish to insist that insofar as the antagonisms one finds are based on radical differences in methods—as distinct from antagonisms based on personal hostilities, pride of place, or the like—one should not assume that it is in principle impossible to reach a substantial measure of agreement as to what occurred in given societies and how it happened that these events did occur. Should this contention appear to be hopelessly out of touch with the realities of the disagreements that exist among historians, there are several points to be noted, only two of which I shall mention here. First, it is to be noted that I have not claimed, and would not claim, that different interpretive histories, *when taken as wholes*, are mutually compatible; I have argued only that the adequacy of their treatments of the elements they introduce can be assessed, and that their adequacy with respect to the evidence they adduce, or fail to adduce, can also be assessed. It remains possible that after this has been done the weighting of the elements in the interpretation as a whole may differ from historian to historian, and there may not be any way in which such differences can be decided independently of more general sociological or philosophical commitments, or independently of purely personal preferences.14 Second, I wish to stress once again that different historians work on different scales and are concerned with different aspects of the life of a specific society at a given time. Therefore, the proliferation of works on what superficially appears to be "the same subject" need not be taken as indicative of a need for continual attempts to start afresh and to rewrite all that has been written concerning our human past. If, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, it is normal to find that works written on different scales and concerned
with different aspects of a society prove to be interlocking, the proliferation of historical accounts, each of which makes a point of its own, does not entail that we should commit ourselves to any form of historical relativism.

In the final chapters I shall once again take up this question, which was the issue with which philosophers who wrote about the problems of historiography were at one time most concerned. In general, however, this interest subsequently shifted, and problems concerning the nature of historical explanation came to dominate the field. Such problems are, of course, relevant to questions concerning the objectivity of historical knowledge, but they deserve discussion in their own right. In the following chapters I shall be concerned with some of them; only in chapter 5, however, will I deal specifically with history. This is because I believe that questions concerning historical explanation cannot be adequately discussed without raising issues that involve a general theory of what constitutes causal explanations. That topic, in turn, involves a careful consideration of the relation between causes and laws. Since the views I hold on these matters are undoubtedly heterodox, I shall develop them in the next two chapters at considerable length. Then, in chapter 5, I shall suggest some of the ways in which these analyses are applicable to the various types of historical study I have already delineated. I can then address the question of objectivity once again.