

History and Narration:
Looking Back from the Twentieth Century

Edited by

Marialuisa Bignami, Francesca Orestano
and Alessandro Vescovi

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

MARIALUISA BIGNAMI,
FRANCESCA ORESTANO
AND ALESSANDRO VESCOVI

The present volume on *History and Narration* is the outcome of a research conducted by members of the Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio e Letterature Straniere Comparate of the Università degli Studi di Milano. Editors and contributors, in the recent past, have worked together in the fields of modern English literature and linguistics. The group, coordinated by Marialuisa Bignami, has investigated the relationship between knowledge and narration. Two collections edited by Bignami have been published in recent years: the volume on “The Epistemologies of the Novel,” (*Textus 2 XVI*. 2003, coedited with the late John Skinner) and *Le trame della conoscenza. Percorsi epistemologici nella letteratura inglese dalla prima modernità al postmodernismo* (Milano: Unicopli 2006).

Our research has considered a wide range of narrative texts from the English-speaking world in their connection with historiography or, better said, with historical discourse. As with the previous volumes, each member of the research team chose the texts on which to work within the shared lines of the project. All participants took their lead from fields of research or from texts of which they were experts, but accepted the common outlook. Thus the very table of contents defines the cultural areas in which we have chosen to move and, at the same time, serves the purpose of a first statement of our critical attitude. The texts taken into consideration mostly belong to the realm of fiction, but also include dictionaries and encyclopaedias, as well as liminal productions in prose such as Christopher Hill’s history books or Jonathan Raban’s travelogue. In this light, the definition of the concepts of history and of narrativity has been a major issue right from the start, together with the attempt at defining historically the word “history,” an attempt which brings us back to the original semantic connection of history and narration.

As research coordinator Marialuisa Bignami fostered the critical outlook on the part of each contributor, no matter what methodological approach might have been chosen. Still, as our work proceeded, casting narrative and history in mutual perspective, we all became conscious of the fact that the cultural environment of the twentieth century was influencing our critical stance. In fact, we had been separately reaching the same conclusion, namely that the cultural attitude of the century we have just relinquished, and where our roots still lie, alerted us to a perception of the importance of language and linguistic strategies, to the point that we ended up reviewing and assessing one discourse by means of the expressive modes of another. Thus, during one of our periodical meetings, we realized that all issues would become more perspicuous if everyone could make clear the relation of the twentieth century to the several phases of the past with which we were separately dealing. A quote from David Caute may well describe our attitude: “When the committed artist speaks to the present through the past, he must always stay in touch with what is awkward and strange, with what remains elusive in terms of the modern” (“Looking back in Regret at Winstanley,” *The Guardian*, 17/10/2008).

This newly-reached cultural awareness engenders a richer and more complex procedure than simply adopting a historical perspective. It results in a double historicity: indeed historicity offers both a way of facing the past and a theoretical tool for discourse analysis.

On the one hand, what the nineteenth century would term “historical novel”—which consisted in a way of consciously setting the action of a narration in a well-defined moment of the past—defines the first approach in our critical practice, which is still valid today in so far as the historical novel/romance has recently had a new lease of life in the postmodern and postcolonial literary milieu. On the other hand, working on a broader canvas, we came to the conclusion that the attempt at defining the discursive relation of the twentieth century to its histories could provide an excellent critical tool, capable of supplying a more nuanced epistemological picture of the world.

This double historicity, as represented in the texts considered, opens up new critical insights, offering alternative ways of cataloguing, assessing, interpreting and even enjoying the past and its narrations. The results exceed by far the traditional practice of reading narrative by means of its own rules, that is to say by means of narratology. This complex cultural awareness dictated our title, where “history” comes before “narration.”

The essays cover a range of texts as diverse as the first encyclopaedias and dictionaries of English language and travelogues dealing with the myths of El Dorado and the American West; postcolonial fictional

accounts of key moments in the history of non-European countries, such as India, Pakistan and South Africa; narratives dramatizing history from either the perspective of gender or the personification of Puritan events. Thus the relationship between history and narration has been tackled from different angles highlighting the rhetorical strategies that are at work in the writing. While history becomes a way to read literary texts, literature provides a way of looking at history, often voicing the authors' disbelief in the reliability of the historical account, in the emplotment of events, in the prominence given to key figures or in the erasure of subaltern individuals or communities. Thus the contributions are not set within a strict chronological order, but rather obey the logic of our research, which has its origin in a linguistic survey of the field, stretches through a historian's account, follows the thread of historical novels and subsequently reaches fictions that question the discourse of history—gradually opening the canon of historicity to gendered, postmodern, postcolonial attitudes.

Elisabetta Lonati provides lexicographic evidence to our statement by reading seventeenth and eighteenth century dictionaries and encyclopaedias which define the concept of “history” across crucial transitions such as the one from “historiology” to “historiography” or the distinction between “natural history,” “poetical fictions” and history as “a narrative of matters of fact.” In Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755), the term history refers to events of the past “delivered with dignity,” with “narration” and “knowledge of facts and events.” This definition strengthens, with both conceptual and linguistic precision, the nature and scope of history as an expression of knowledge, and knowledge itself. As a man of his time, Johnson was trying to come to terms with the contiguous concepts of history and narration, convinced as he was that they could be separated both linguistically and indeed epistemologically.

The following essays more or less directly engage with the same issue. Each contributor points out and investigates the porous nature of these concepts—which becomes evident when the twentieth century awareness of the discursive nature of knowledge comes into play.

Marialuisa Bignami examines instances of narrativity in Christopher Hill's celebrated accounts of the English Revolution. In what Bignami considers as a trilogy—*Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (1965), *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972) and *The Experience of Defeat* (1984)—the representation of Puritan history amounts to the portrayal of a single character, possibly the main character from a picaresque novel. Bignami points out that the development of Puritan gradually unfolds from his hopeful youth to his troubled but fruitful

maturity, up to his withdrawal in his defeated old age. Thus Puritan stands at the centre of the picture of his life-story, narrated by Hill's lively pen, which redeems Puritanism from the scholarly dimension of historical facts, dates and plots. The final evidence is provided, Bignami argues, by the afterlife of Hill's character in recent fiction, drama and film.

The work of Naomi Mitchison, the "seismic" Scottish woman novelist who changed the genre of historical fiction, provides the subject for Alessia Oppizzi's investigation. She argues that Mitchison's commitment to historical narration over three decades turned into fiction Frazer's perspective as well as Jung's concept of myth and magic. With these tools, which academic historians were hardly inclined to adopt in their research for hard facts, Mitchison experimented with classical, modern and local history, not only questioning the authority of historians researching the past, but also working with a gendered point of view. Thus her early fiction stages male protagonists along with silenced women, but from the nineteenth thirties onward, women become central as their points of view multiply. This goal is achieved by means of two strategies: elements of fantasy and romance open up spaces for women's emotions; while women's bodies and their functions are focussed upon through scientific and technical language, especially when sexuality, pregnancy, childbirth and lactation are described.

The critical issue of history, not only as account of the past, but also as the present moment, is tackled by Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts*, as argued by Francesca Orestano. Starting from the oppressive 68 dark leather bound volumes of biography produced by her father, Woolf questioned the authority of the historian, and the kind of writing fashioned upon historical categories. Of these she offered an ironical account in *Night and Day* (1919); a sad account in *Jacob's Room* (1922) with the death of the young scholar who writes "Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?"; eventually *Between the Acts* (1941) provides Woolf's substantial critique of whatever authority aspires to wholeness and permanence. *Between the Acts* simultaneously builds its narration drawing from "herstory," from "history in the raw" (newspapers, the radio), from traditional accounts of British history—such as Carlyle's, Trevelyan's or Wells's—and from less optimistic plots such as Darwin's *Descent of Man* and Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*.

With the voice of V.S. Naipaul, Nicoletta Brazzelli posits the question of the eternal European obsession with Eldorado, which produced a history of conquest, exploitation, mass murder. Actually the history of Trinidad starts with a delusion and ends up in the indescribable horrors of slavery. Naipaul goes to the beginning of the colonial enterprise in order to

describe the nature and behaviour of the colonized individual. *The Loss of El Dorado* (1969) transforms historical reconstruction into a tangled fictional plot. The characters are historical figures such as Walter Raleigh, who appears alternately as a hero, a villain, a winner and a loser. Naipaul's texts are hybrids that mingle and juxtapose invented and historical characters, fiction and sound research, ideal settings and geographical contexts within a lyrical vision of history. By adopting the fictional device of "interplay," which consists in the extensive deployment of quotations and data, to the point of puzzling the reader, Naipaul denies history its objective absolute quality.

As it becomes increasingly evident here and in the following essays, postcolonial intellectuals and artists try to position themselves in a space of critical re-interpretation of history and to reinvent their national identity in terms of a rejection of an imposed European cultural mould.

Cinzia Schiavini encompasses biography, time and space, geographical accounts (and erasures) within the American construction of a "usable past." Her survey starts with Lewis and Clark's notorious expedition to the West and follows it up studying the re-writing and re-travelling of the same tracks by two modern authors: Duncan and Raban. She argues that the tropes that concurred to create a national epic reveal the gap between the real and presumed knowledge of the past. In *Out West. An American Journey* (1987) Duncan exposes the contradictions and the ambivalent use of Lewis and Clark's expedition by the hegemonic culture. Travelling is for him a quest for "authenticity," a concept that extends from relics of the past to modern replicas. In Raban's *Bad Land* (1997), history fails to provide roots, just like the Bad Lands failed to offer shelter and prosperity to early settlers. The Bad Lands also defied attempts at depiction by artists and photographers engaged by investors and politicians. Thus the recovery of the history of those regions interweaves with the author's own quest for identity and inevitably reveals the ambiguous readings of the hybrid nature of the past.

Vishnupriya Sengupta looks at the way three novelists have committed themselves to the account of the India-Pakistan partition occurred in 1947. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (1988), Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), each in its own style, employ different modes of knowledge to draw out the "microhistory" embedded within the historical event. Bapsi Sidhwa is here considered as a social historian, who represents the events of Lahore through the eyes of a young Parsi girl; Amitav Ghosh takes the stance of a modern historian, focussing on the illusory territorial divisions perceived by the emotionally involved character of Thamma; Rushdie, as a

postmodern, detached historian, draws attention to the ambiguity and opacity of both historical and fictional knowledge. Sengupta argues that the three novels share a common way of engaging memory. Despite differences in subject and narrative technique, all three writers deal with a diachronic version of history but at the same time the linear succession of events is re-written in terms of some deeper underlying narrative, which she equals with the master narrative marking the end of the British rule.

In truly postmodern fashion, Coetzee deals with personal history by meeting the manifold challenges of autobiography. Giuliana Iannaccaro reads Coetzee's *Summertime* (2009) in the light of his previous experiments with the role of authority in fiction, diaries, notebooks, interviews, personal accounts. By playing with his own biographical experiences to the point of aligning himself with a fictional character, Coetzee delegitimizes authorial and authoritative perspectives, undermining the reliability of any text. The novelist plays with narratological panache and stylistic self-assuredness in texts which, while pretending to realism, in fact constantly defy the reader's suspension of disbelief. *Summertime* partakes of the author's life-long project of opposing the authority of historical discourse by rendering provisional, collective and uncertain whatever pronouncement a writer attempts to make—even when he is narrating the story of his own life.

The first book of Ghosh's projected trilogy about the Opium Wars—waged between the British crown and China to open the Chinese markets to western opium—provides Alessandro Vescovi with the material for assessing the writer's poetics of historical novel writing. Thorough research, comprehensiveness and precise imagination are the keywords of his poetical and political stance. *Sea of Poppies* (2008) is first and foremost a research novel, based upon historical documents of diverse origin and authority. These range from official accounts and reports about an opium factory in Patna, to documents found in remote archives, such as the British Library, the Mauritius National Archives, Canton's Library. Vescovi reads some of these sources against the actual fictional rendition of the plight of opium workers in nineteenth-century Bihar. The imperial sources depicted the factory as a clean and well lighted place, where efficiency was the governing principle. On the contrary, the same factory is described by Ghosh as a scene from Dante's *Inferno*. The colonizers' discourse is thus counteracted by the novelist's comprehensive research and imaginative microhistories which expose the lies embedded in the macrohistory of the imperial project.

On the whole, the essays reveal a continuous thread in the readings of history produced during the twentieth century. Early twentieth century

writers tried to counteract the illuministic and positivist notion that history can be truly and reliably written. Mostly they were concerned with the different implications of new sciences such as anthropology, cultural history, mythical and social patterns elaborated within the Western tradition. Postmodern and especially postcolonial novelists opened up the horizon to new paradigms and distant realities of colonial and postcolonial histories. Still all the authors considered here seem to share the notion that history and narration are deeply imbricated, together with an aspiration to write an inclusive historical narration, which may take into account not only the hard facts, but also the “wretched of the Earth,” the unheroic, and ultimately every human act, including thoughts, feelings and emotions. To put it differently, they all seem to perceive that the writer’s task is fraught with unavoidable ethical responsibilities—once behoving the historian’s dignity, and since the twentieth century, increasingly entwined with the poetics of narration.

Milano, August 2011

CHAPTER ONE

“HISTORY” AND “HISTORIES” IN 17TH- AND 18TH-CENTURY ENGLISH LEXICOGRAPHY

ELISABETTA LONATI

Dictionaries represent a new and developing genre and a fundamental source of information for linguistic and encyclopaedic contents throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. The present study is based on a corpus of primary texts belonging to (early) Modern English monolingual lexicography:¹ in particular, the research was carried out on hard-word dictionaries, general and universal dictionaries and dictionaries of arts and sciences to ascertain the occurrence of the term *history*, its primary meaning, its polysemic value and its contexts of use. Cognate words—such as *historian*, *historical*, *historiographer*, *historiography*, *story*, etc.—and those semantically related to *history*—such as *chronicle* and *fiction*—have also been added to the list. The most relevant definitions, explanations, interpretations and cross-references of all these terms are discussed in the following paragraphs. This analysis has highlighted the ways in which the concept of Modern History has originated and developed through time, as well as the way the term has been exploited in other fields of knowledge.²

17th-century Dictionaries: the Hard-word Tradition

Title pages and prefaces. The hard-word dictionary tradition, starting with Cawdrey’s *A Table Alphabeticall* in 1604,³ aims at collecting and explaining all those difficult English terms—often coming from the classical or romance languages—used in specific fields of knowledge. Indeed, the title pages and the prefaces of such works offer detailed information as far as their domain-specific language is concerned. Some

examples are clearly given in their prefaces. In Cockeram’s *The English Dictionarie* (1623), the compiler declares that “The last Booke is a recitall of seuerall persons, Gods and Goddesses, Giants and Deuils, Monsters and Serpents, Birds and Beasts, Riuers, Fishes, Herbs, Stones, Trees, and the like” (A Premonition from the Author to the Reader, A4 ff.). In the preface of Blount’s *Glossographia* (1656), instead, when the compiler points out the domain-specific vocabulary included in his work, the term *history* is systematically preceded by adjectives and is commonly used to represent particular realities such as “English Histories ... Turkish History ... French History ... Roman Histories” (Blount 1656, To the Reader, A2). In Cockeram (1623) nothing explicit is said about history even though “recitall” can be easily associated with the concept and, hence, to the personal history of human beings and anthropomorphic figures, as well as to the history of the earth and beasts. Blount’s preface is far more explicit: “History” and “Histories” can be easily associated with facts and factuality, and thus interpreted as an account, a record of something really happened. The association with facticity is further highlighted when the terms are compared to the expression “poeticall stories,” whose terminology is not included in Blount’s lemmata: “I have avoided poeticall stories, as much as I could since they are not necessary to be understood by the Generality” (ibidem), namely the general—but educated—readers. The “poeticall stories” clearly refer to something else than “historical stories”; actually, *history/-ies* ~ *stories* suggest the lexicalization of a conceptual difference already present in the mind of the speaker-compiler.

In Phillips’s *The New World of English Words* (1658) the expressions “Historical Relations” and “Poetical Fictions” lexicalize the same difference. As stated in the title page of his dictionary,

[to] Natural History ... are added the Significations of Proper Names, Mythology, and Poetical Fictions, Historical Relations, Geographical Descriptions of most Countries and Cities of the World; especially of these three Nations wherein their chiefest Antiquities, Battles, and other most Memorable Passages are mentioned. (Phillips 1658, title page)

Thus, Blount’s *history/-ies* ~ *stories* is here paralleled with Phillips’s *relations* ~ *fictions*: *histories* and *relations* point to the historical dimension, *stories* and *fictions* to the poetical one.⁴ However, neither Blount in 1656, nor Phillips two years later list and define the terms *history/-ies* and/or *stories* in their dictionaries. None of 17th-century compilers includes *history* and only Cockeram, in his *The English Dictionarie* (1623), ventures into the definition of *stories* and *story*:

“Stories of olde histories. *Legendaries*” and “a Story of things past. *Cronologie*.”

This approach would confirm both the semantic-discursive variation in usage and the conceptual pairs represented by *history/-ies* ~ *stories*, *relations* ~ *fictions* and strengthened by a new one: *chronology* ~ *legendary*. The term “*Cronologie*” is to be associated to the historical dimension, whereas “*Legendaries*” to the poetical element. Here, the morphological opposition of the headwords, singular vs. plural, carries the semantic load and distinguishes two independent lexemes: “story” overlaps with “*Cronologie*” and, as a consequence, with the history-account-record of past events and earthly affairs (Phillips’s “historical relations”), whereas “stories” is the equivalent of “*Legendaries*”—though the term “(olde) histories” is also used—and represents the fictional level of Blount’s “poeticall stories.”⁵

***Histor-* derivatives in 17th-century lemmata.** The term *history* is not included in 17th-century lemmata whereas the title pages and the prefaces already testify to the early stages of variation in meaning, form and usage. The specialization of the term *history*—as primarily expressing a non-fictional reality—emerges as well.

On the one hand, *history* is probably not perceived as a hard word; on the other hand, its derivatives, already identifying and representing specific concepts, deserve lexicographic treatment. *Historiologie*/(-gy), *historiography*, *historiographer*, *historical*, *historian* are usually included in dictionaries, their definitions are short and essential—more often than not equivalents—recurring from one dictionary to the following ones. Among the most interesting definitions are the ones for *historian* and *historiographer* (-phy); the first is essentially a teller; the latter a writer, but their roles are often mixed up, sometimes overlapping:

Historian. A writer or teller of a History. (Bullockar, 1616)

Historiographer. A writer of Histories. (Bullockar, 1616)

Historian. A teller of Histories. (Cockeram, 1623)

Historiographer. A writer of Histories. (Cockeram, 1623)

Historiography. (*historiographia*) the writing an History. (Blount, 1656)

Historiographer. (*historiographus*) an historian, a writer of Histories. (Blount, 1656)

Historiographer, (Greek) a Writer of Histories, a Historian. (Phillips, 1658)

Historian and *historiographer* will merge with time, but the alternation in the use of “History” and “Histories” (see above) in their definitions suggest a certain ambiguity of usage between *history/-ies* referring either to the historical dimension or to the poetical one—or, rather, to both of them considered together, as if they had fused.⁶

Historiologie/(-gy), generally identified as “The Knowledge and telling of old Histories” (Bullokar, 1616), the “Knowledge of Histories” (Cockeram, 1623), “a historical discourse” (Phillips, 1658), “a discourse of History” (Coles, 1676) gives room to *historiography* and gradually disappears from 18th-century lexicography, apart from Cocker’s dictionary (1704), where *historiologie/(-gy)* is said to be the “relating of old History,” and Bailey’s (1721; 1730; 1755), where the definition highlights the knowledge of history. The semantic turning point seems to be Phillips’s definition—almost identical in Coles—whereas semantic ambiguity comes out of Bullokar’s and Cockeram’s “old Histories” and “Histories,” which seem to refer to a poetical level rather than a historical one.

Historiography, instead, appears for the first time in Blount (1656; see above), is left out in Phillips and then, from Coles (1676) onward is usually included with definitions focussing on the writing and practice of history: “HISTORIOGRAPHER, one practising/HISTORIOGRAPHY, *g.* a writing of Histories” (Coles, 1676).

18th-century Dictionaries: General Inclusion and Encyclopaedic Principles

At the dawn of the 18th century, two important principles are established in lexicography: the general inclusion and the encyclopaedic principles. Strictly bound to the previous tradition, both of them may be considered as an expansion—from a quantitative point of view—as well as a specialization—from a qualitative point of view—of 17th-century lemmata. General vocabulary is regularly included in dictionaries and treated in detail at different linguistic levels: great(er) attention is paid to pronunciation, morphology, etymology and semantics; definitions and explanations tend to be more and more precise and information is structurally organized. Encyclopaedic treatment—namely, further information pertaining to a given topic, or term, beyond the general definition—is sometimes included, but this kind of semantic-discursive discussion will constitute the basis of another important 18th-century (para)-lexicographic genre, that is to say those dictionaries of arts and sciences marking the origins of modern encyclopaedias (see sections 3. and 4.).

The first general—“compleat”—English dictionary was published in 1702 as *A New English Dictionary: or, A compleat collection of the most proper and significant words*, later attributed to John Kersey and revised by the author in 1713. The preface to the 1702 edition highlights that

The most useful terms in all Faculties are briefly explain'd; more especially those that relate to Divinity, Ecclesiastical Affairs, the Statute-Laws of this Nation, History, Geography, Maritime Affairs, Plants, ..., Handicrafts, ..., &c. (Kersey 1702, The Preface, A2)

whereas the preface to the 1713 edition is slightly different, but not in its core principles:

However, many particular useful Terms in every FACULTY, are here set in a true Light, and briefly explained with all possible clearness, viz. Those that relate to Grammar, Logick, Rhetorick, Divinity, Law, Philosophy, Arithmetick, Geometry, Geography, Astronomy, Architecture, Fortification, ... Poetry, Physick, Surgery, ... Affairs of Sea and War, Heraldry, ... Handicrafts, Manufactures, ... Merchandizing, ... &c. To These is added, a succinct account of the Functions of the Principal Officers, Magistrates, &c. of GREAT BRITAIN; ... (Kersey 1713, The Preface ii-iii)

History—as a branch of knowledge—is generically quoted in the first excerpt among other topics whose vocabulary is said to be included in the work; in the latter excerpt, history disappears as a general reference, to be scattered into many domains mainly belonging to both human activities—either theoretical, or practical—and the natural world. All of them to be “briefly explained with all possible clearness ... [in] a succinct account” (Kersey, The Preface 1713, ii-iii): *history* represents a slippery concept to be necessarily disclosed in its multifarious aspects.

In Cocker’s *English Dictionary* (1704), the compiler claims that to the interpretation of

The most refined and difficult words in Divinity, Philosophy, Law ... is Added a Historico-Poetical Dictionary, containing the Proper Names of Men, Women, Rivers, Countries, Cities, Castles, Towns, Mountains, ... And the feigned Stories of Heathen Gods, with other Poetical Inventions. (Cocker 1704, title page)

The expressions “feigned Stories” and “Poetical Inventions” are used as equivalents and belong to fiction, whereas the preceding list of topics belongs to history, that is to say human activities and natural description. The linguistic choices expressing the fictional side of the matter can be traced back to the conceptual differentiation already arising in 17th-century

lexical variation and usage. Blount’s (1656) “poeticall stories” vs. “English Histories ... French History...” and Phillips’s (1658) “Poetical Fictions” vs. “Historical Relations” are confirmed (see section 1.).

Some years later, in the title page of his *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1721), Bailey lists a series of sub-disciplines which relate to history, such as “Ancient Statutes, Charters, Writs, Old Records, and Processes at Law; ... Remarkable Places in *Great Britain*” (1721). The same series of sub-disciplines comes up again in his *Dictionarium Britannicum* (1730) and in the Scott-Bailey’s *A New Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1755). Two more lexicographers playing a crucial role in English dictionary methodology and practice and their important works must be introduced. They are Martin’s *Lingua Britannica Reformata* (1749) and Johnson’s *A Dictionary of the English Language*. Theirs are strictly lexical dictionaries of the English language and, in their prefaces, the historical discourse refers only to linguistic description and change.

In 18th-century universal dictionaries *history* is a recurrent headword: the general concept expressed by this term requires both lexicographic treatment and lexicological analysis. The compilers feel the need to organize and record its polysemic usage into appropriate definitions, according to the occurrence of the linguistic forms *history* ~ *story* in different contexts of use. From a lexicographic point of view, they try to transform the variation in meaning and usage of the previous century into clear entries and sub-entries. There are at least two macroareas: the first generically relating to *civil history*—as recital, account, record of facts and events; the second concerning *natural history*—as description of animals, plants, the celestial and mineral worlds, but also the nature and constitution of living creatures, etc.⁷ *History* referring to “poeticall stories” (Blount 1656) or “Poetical Fictions” (Phillips 1658) is now rare.

The first thorough definition of *history* is documented in the revision of Phillips’s *The New World of English Words* (1658) carried out by John Kersey and issued in 1706 (known as Kersey-Phillips). Under *history* we read:

properly a Narrative of Matters of Fact, of which the Relater was an Eye-witness; a particular Account of Actions and Things worthy of Note; a Description of the Nature and Qualities of Living-creatures, Plants, Minerals, &c. (Kersey-Phillips 1706, under HISTORY)

The first two senses are the most frequent at the beginning of the century, sometimes recorded in a far less detailed way as in the *Glossographia Anglicana Nova* (GAN 1707), in which *history* is said to be

“a Narration or Relation of things as they are, or of actions as they did pass.” Those derivatives such as the terms *historiographer* (-phy) and *historian* help delineate the semantic complexity of *history*: in Kersey-Phillips (1706) itself, a historiographer is “an Historian, a Writer of Histories, especially such a one as is appointed for that purpose, by a Prince or State.” This highlights that *civil history*—or, the civil account/description of events—is the leading idea,⁸ and suggests that history is—or is becoming—a professional concern. In Kersey’s *Dictionarium Anglo-Britannicum* (1708), *history* is defined as an “Account of Actions and Things worthy of Note,” that is to say the second sense recorded in Kersey-Phillips (1706). The peculiarity of being “worthy of Note” can be traced back to the definition (the only one) provided by Kersey himself in his 1713 revision of his 1702 dictionary: “An History, a particular account of Actions & Things worthy of remark” and it may be regarded as the outcome of a good relater, of “An Historian, one that writes or is skilled in History”⁹ (see section 1).

Things do not change in Bailey’s dictionary (1721), here *history* is “a Narration or Relation of Things as they are, or of Actions as they did pass,” as in the *GAN* (1707). The same definition is found in B. N. Defoe’s *A Compleat English Dictionary* (1735), in the anonymous *A New English Dictionary* (1737), attributed to Defoe himself, and with some variations in Martin (1749). In this case, *history* is defined as “a narrative, or an account of actions and things past” coming from two Greek roots meaning “to enquire” and “knowing.”

A few years later, the lexicographic climax of 18th-century non-encyclopaedic tradition is achieved with the publication of Johnson’s dictionary (1755) preceded by his *Plan of a Dictionary of the English Language* (1747), in which the lemmata to be included and the way they would be treated are plainly discussed. Linguistic matter (meant as necessary morpho-semantic qualities of the terms under scrutiny) is emphasized at the expense of encyclopaedic matter (meant as further explanatory information added to the essential definition), though they are not completely separable. These last considerations also explain those lexicographic-lexicological choices in Martin’s dictionary (1749), namely his concise and general definition of the term *history*, an attitude which was also typical of pre-*Cyclopaedia* (1728) and pre-Bailey (1730) 18th-century compilers.

Johnson’s entry is brief and well-structured, including three senses followed by exemplificatory quotations from eminent writers:

HI'STORY, *n. s.* [*ἱστορία; historia*, Latin; *histoire*, French.]

I. A narration of events and facts delivered with dignity.

Justly Caesar scorns the poet's lays;

It is to *history* he trusts for praise.

Pope.

2. Narration; relation.

The *history* part lay within a little room.

Wiseman.

What *histories* of toil could I declare?

But still long-weary'd nature wants repair.

Pope.

3. The knowledge of facts and events.

History, so far as it relates to the affairs of the Bible, is necessary to divines.

Watts.

(Johnson 1755)

History is primarily “a narration of events and facts delivered with dignity,” and such “dignity” is an essential feature belonging to style, together with the dignity of those events *worthy of Note/remark* (see Kersey 1706, 1708; 1713). The third sense can be found under *historiologie(-gy)*, an entry omitted by Johnson but almost always included in the previous tradition, meaning either knowledge and relation *of* history or discourse *on* history. Thus, Johnson strengthens and defines, with both conceptual and linguistic precision, the nature and scope of history as an expression of knowledge, and knowledge itself, precisely of facts and events.

More and more frequently, and definitely with Johnson, 17th- and 18th-century dictionaries record the received usage of *history*: the term primarily refers to those facts pertaining to the human action and behaviour, that is *human(-civil) history*. The lexicalization of *history* mainly as civil account or description is also confirmed by the corresponding semantic (re)definition—in meaning and usage—of the term *story*. This aphetic form is always attested in 18th-century general dictionaries and mainly defined as generic relation or narration:

A Story, History, *relation*, or *merry tale*.

(Kersey 1702)

A Story, A *Relation*, a *merry Tale*; ...

(Kersey 1713)

A STORY, [contract of *History*] a Relation, A Tale, a lye.

(Bailey 1721)

STO'RY [... a Contraction of *History*] a Narration.

(Bailey 1730)

A STORY, a Relation, A Tale, a Lie; ...

(Defoe 1735)

Apart from the definition issued by Bailey 1730, the other ones are followed by equivalents—or synonymic expressions—which explicitly connote the apparently generic meaning suggested by both *relation* and *narration*. If *tale* may be primarily interpreted as those “Stories of olde Histories. *Legendaries*” (Cockeram 1623), “poeticall stories” (Blount 1656), “Poetical Fictions” (Phillips 1658), or paired with Cocker’s “feigned Stories” and “Poetical Inventions” (1704), all of them referring to the poetical domain, *lie* seems to be even stronger in its connotation and possibly interpreted as false and deceitful statement, not necessarily to be ascribed to poetical writings (for further details, see note 4).

That in the first half of the 18th century *story* is still uncertain in its usage—or, rather, in the record of its usage—is also confirmed by Dyche-Pardon’s *A New General English Dictionary* (1735). Here, not only the term is associated with *tale* and *lie* but also with *history*: “STO’RY (S.) Sometimes means a Narration or History of some Matter of Fact; and sometimes a Lye or Invention, a false or idle Tale, &.” In the dictionaries of the following decades, the term *history* serves as an equivalent to define one possible semantic nuance of *story* and, in this case, such equivalence comes first in the list of alternative senses:

STO’RY, I history	(Martin 1749)
STO’RY. n.s.... I. History; account of things past.	(Johnson 1755)
STO’RY ... 2. a narration, account of things past.	(Scott-Bailey 1755)

However, the meaning remains general and generic. Furthermore, “account of things past” (Johnson and Scott-Bailey) does not necessarily mean account of things past actually occurred or, in other words, *story-matter of fact*. On the contrary, the strong association of the term *story* with the fictional dimension is highlighted by the compilers’ attempt to make up, circumscribe and arrange the fuzzy concept conveyed by *story-fiction* into many sub-senses:

STO’RY,	
2 recital of any particular adventure.	
3 a tale.	
4 a fable, or flam.	
5 a lye.	(Martin 1749)
STO’RY. n.s. ...	
2. Small tale; petty narrative; account of a single incident...	
3. An idle or trifling tale; a petty fiction.	(Johnson 1755)
Sto’ry ...	
3. A small tale, account of a single action.	
4. A petty fiction.	(Scott-Bailey 1755)

A clear tendency emerges from these examples: notwithstanding the apparent order of the definitions, the semantic-discursive area of fiction is both widely attested and treated in detail, especially when compared with the *story*-matter of fact¹⁰ coming first in the sequence.

From the analysis carried out up to this point, it can be argued that *story* covers a wider semantic area than *history* does, pointing to a wider reality difficult to be determined both from a lexicological and from a lexicographic point of view. The following sections will help to disentangle such a complex matter.

Chambers’s *Cyclopaedia* and Bailey’s “Mixed Method”

This section will discuss the term history in Chambers’s *Cyclopaedia: or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (Cy, 1728), Bailey’s *Dictionarium Britannicum* (1730) and Scott-Bailey’s *A New Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1755), though the three works belong to different kinds of dictionary. As mentioned above, the encyclopaedic principle and the general inclusion principle give birth to specific genres which refine in time and find their climax in Chambers (1728) and in Johnson (1755) respectively. In between, Bailey places his lexicographic experience, a mixed method summarizing the technical effort of the first half of the 18th century. Johnson’s lexicographic effort—and outcome as well—has already been discussed. Here, Chambers’s historical thought and his entry, history, will be analyzed in order to have a clear frame of reference before approaching Bailey’s dictionaries.

In the title page of his work, Chambers declares to include “the several Sciences Human and Divine.... The Rise, Progress, and State of Things Ecclesiastical, Civil, Military, and Commercial...” whereas, in his preface, even though history is not included as an independent discipline, the concept seems to be implied in the division of knowledge into the parcelling out of wordly affairs, such as “POLICY, or the Consideration of Society and Commonwealth; ... LAW, or the Rules and Measures of Society; ... TRADES and MANUFACTURES, ... MILITARY Art, including the Consideration of Armies ..., CHRONOLOGY, or the Doctrine of Time, ...” but also “METEOROLOGY, or the History of Air and Atmosphere, ... MINEROLOGY, or the History of Earth, ... ZOOLOGY, or the History of Animals, ...” (Chambers 1728, Preface, pp. iii ff.).

As in other previous and coeval works, history may be perceived through the lens of both human actions and the description of the natural world, as the compiler will make explicit under *history*.

History is first and foremost “a Recital, or Description of Things as they are, or have been; in a continued, orderly Narration of the principal Facts and Circumstances thereof” (Chambers 1728, under HISTORY). However, *history*—etymologically denoting the “*Search of curious Things*” as well as the “*Desire of knowing*” or, rather, the “*Rehearsal of Things we have seen*”—has extended its meaning in time “and we apply it to a *Narration of divers memorable Things*” (Chambers 1728, under HISTORY). Thus, if the term *history* is originally applied to both the research and relation of facts and things witnessed at firsthand, then it shifts towards narration/relation of facts and things reported by others.

History represents two distinct disciplinary areas: on the one hand, the description of the natural world; on the other hand, the history of the actions, peoples, individuals, either *Sacred* “which lays before us the Mysteries and Ceremonies of Religion, Visions, or Appearances of the Deity, ...” or *Civil* “that of People, States, Republicks, Communities, Cities, &c. ...,” *Personal* “which gives the Portrait, or Life of some single Person... See BIOGRAPHY”¹¹ and *Singular* “which describes a single Action ...” (Chambers 1728, under HISTORY).

The historical narration needs to be expressed with its own style, generically defined by Chambers as *Historical Style*: that is, a middle style, characterized by “Perspicuity and Brevity. See STYLE”¹² (Chambers 1728, under HISTORICAL) or, in other words, an “expression considered in regard to clearness, effectiveness, beauty, and the like.”¹³ However, the method of the narration may vary according to both the aims and interests of the narrator-*historiographer*¹⁴ and the stylistic ornaments:

Simple History, is that deliver’d without any Art or foreign Ornament; being only a naked, and faithful Recital of Things, just in the Manner, and Order wherein they pass’d. – Such are the Chronicles ... the Fasti; Chronological Tables, Journals, &c. See FASTI. (Chambers 1728, under HISTORY)

The historical relation is therefore both the recording of what happened and the narration of facts apparently without any comment by the relater-narrator. Far more complex is the case of the narrative techniques following *Simple History*, namely *Figurate History* and *Mix’d History*:

Figurate History, is that which is further enrich’d with Ornaments, by the Wit, Ingenuity, and Address of the Historian. ...

This latter is a Kind of rational *History*; which without stopping at the Shell or Outside, the Appearances of Things, discovers the Springs and Movements of the several events; enters into the Thoughts, the Breasts of the Persons concern’d therein; discovers their Intentions and Views; and by

the Result of entreprizing Undertakings, discovers the Prudence or Weakness, wherewith they were laid, conducted, &c.

These are much the most useful, and entertaining Histories. – To this Class, may be peculiarly referr’d the Histories and Annals of *Tacitus*, among the Antients; and those of *Guicciardin*, *Petavins*, and Bishop *Burnet* among the *Moderns*. (Chambers 1728, under HISTORY)

The aim “to write the History of his Time” (Chambers 1728, under HISTORIOGRAPHER) is not only the recording of the events but also the search for their causes, along with their interpretation and discussion. History is an investigation which goes beyond the appearance of things happening or already happened, and thus entertains and arouses curiosity: here, the historiographer seems to be a teller, besides being a relater-narrator, and *history* seems to overlap with some of the meanings expressed by *story*. In this regard, an interesting example of variation in history is the third one:

Mix’d History, is that which, beside the Ornaments of figured *History*, calls in the Proofs and Authorities of simple *History*; furnishing authentic Memoirs, or original Letters, Manifesto’s, Declarations, &c. to vouch the Truth of what is said. (Chambers 1728, under HISTORY)

However, the term *history* does not simply deal with events really happened or presumed to have happened. It may also refer to either likely or even fabulous events. This is the case of *romance*: a series of events, actions, situations almost totally invented by the writer. In the sub-headword HISTORY, Chambers specifies that the term

is also used for a Romance; or a fabulous, but probable Relation, of a Series of Actions or Adventures feign’d or invented by the Writer. —Such is the *History* of The Civil Wars of *Granada*; the *History* of *Don Quixote*; the Ethiopic *History* of *Heliodorus*, &c. See ROMANCE. (Chambers 1728, under sub-headword HISTORY)

This kind of history is distant from the plain relation of facts and events, from “the Truth of what is said” (*Mix’d History*, under HISTORY): the imagination of the author-relater-writer-narrator is emphasized, just taking the cue from the external world to build up his own imaginary history or, rather, *story*-invention pertaining to the poetical dimension.¹⁵ The actions and events overlap with “a fabulous Relation of certain Intrigues and Adventures.... See FABLE ... &c” (Chambers 1728, under ROMANCE), that is to say “a *Tale*, or feign’d Narration, design’d either to instruct or divert: Or, *Fable*, as Mons. *de la Motte* defines it, is an

Instruction disguis'd under the Allegory of an Action"¹⁶ (Chambers 1728, under FABLE).

The general structure of the entry HISTORY is summarized below (for the full text of the entry, see Appendix A):

HISTORY		
Definition, etymology and historical change		
History of Nature	Subjects: < Nature and Actions >	History of Actions: Ancient vs. Modern Universal vs. Particular Sacred vs. Profane
	Matter: < Natural; Sacred, Civil, Personal, Singular >	
	Form: 1.Simple 2.Figurate 3.Mixed	
	History > Romance	

An important change in the lexicographic—or, rather, lexicological and lexicographic—working-out of the term *history* is already clear before the middle of the century and the publication of Martin's and Johnson's dictionaries, in 1749 and 1755 respectively. On the one hand, universal dictionaries also include specific vocabulary but limit themselves to general definitions; on the other hand, the new encyclopaedic tradition offers the opportunity to further discuss those contents just surveyed in the hard-word dictionaries of the previous century. The turning point is Bailey 1730: with him the general inclusion principle expands its scope beyond the inclusion of both common and specialized vocabulary with the addition of encyclopaedic material. In 1730, for the first time in a universal dictionary, a series of different senses and conceptual sub-categories are structurally organized under *history*, thus emphasizing the domain-specific usage of the term. Bailey places himself halfway between the universal dictionary tradition—based on the general inclusion

principle, both for the number of terms included and for the way they are treated—and the dictionary of arts and sciences tradition. The latter adds, and then almost completely replaces, to the general inclusion the encyclopaedic principle.

In Bailey 1730, to the general definition of *history* as “a Recital, Narration or Relation of things as they have been in a continued Series of the principal Facts and Circumstances of it,” particular histories are added as sub-headwords:

Natural HISTORY, a description of natural Bodies; either *Terrestrial*, as Animals, Vegetables, Fossils, Fire, Water, Air, Meteors; or *Celestial*, as Planets, Stars, Comets, &c.

Civil HISTORY, is that of People, States, Republicks, Cities, Communities, &c.

Singular HISTORY, is one which describes a single Action, as an Expedition, Battle, Siege, &c.

Simple HISTORY, one delivered without any Art or foreign Ornament; being only a just and bare relation of Matters just in the manner and order wherein they were transacted.

Personal HISTORY, is one that gives the Life of some single Person.

Figurate HISTORY, is one that is inrich'd with the Ornaments of Wit, Ingenuity and Address of the Historian. (Bailey 1730, under HISTORY)

It can be argued that “*Civil ... Singular... Personal HISTORY*” refer to the type of narration or description, whereas “*Figurate*” and “*Simple*” refer to the way the narration or description are carried out. Chambers’s general definition of *history* has definitely influenced Bailey 1730 and, despite the reorganization of the original encyclopaedic entry, the sub-headwords as well derive from Chambers’s subdivision and elaboration of contents under HISTORY.

Another work exploiting Bailey’s mixed method deserves to be mentioned, that is to say Dyche-Pardon’s dictionary (1735): a work which is dedicated to all those people “unacquainted with the Learned Languages” and which aims at giving information about those “difficult Words, and Technical Terms made use of in” different specific domains (history included) listed in the title page. This is remarkable for at least two reasons: on the one hand, under *history*, Dyche-Pardon puts forward an accurate synthesis of what was available in the two lexicographic traditions, either past or present; on the other hand, such a synthesis suggests a sort of conceptual priority for *civil history*—as attested in later dictionaries. To the general definition of *history*—that is the one primarily defining the semantic field of the term, which almost completely overlaps

with the civil life—an explicit sub-classification, that is *natural history* and *civil history*, follows:

History (S.) A regular Account of the several Transactions and Conditions of a *State*, *King*, private *Person*, or other Thing, as they arise, or are dependent upon one another, and as it may be applied goes by several Names or Distinctions; as *Natural History* is a Description of the Productions of Nature, whether *Celestial*, as the Planets, Stars, Comets, Affections of the Air, Climate, &c. or *Terrestrial*, as Animals, Vegetables, Rivers, Mines, &c. and *Civil History*, is that of the People, Governments, &c. (Dyche-Pardon 1735, under HISTORY)

According to the situation and the context of use, the term *history* specializes its meaning(s) “and as it may be applied goes by several Names or Distinctions” (see above, under HISTORY). Clear examples are “*Natural History*” and “*Civil History*,” the only two kinds classified by Dyche-Pardon 1735.

The Scott-Bailey’s dictionary (1755) lists the same headwords as Johnson’s does:¹⁷ the macro-inclusion of cognate words such as *historian*, *historic*, *historical*, *historically*, *to historify*, *historiographer*, *historiography*, *historiology* highlights both the numerical extension of the lemmata if compared to the previous tradition and the qualitative extension of the concept represented by the term *history*, now systematically complemented by derivatives. However, what is remarkable in Scott-Bailey (1755) is the encyclopaedic overflow, which stands out in the contents. The entry *history* is far more detailed if compared with Johnson’s: as regards the first section it reflects the same structure, but in a less definite way. The three senses put forward by Johnson are also documented in Scott-Bailey: the keywords for *history* are 1. narration/relation of events (with dignity), 2. narration/relation, 3. knowledge of facts/events, with a further specification of *history* as a “continued series of principal facts and circumstances thereof,” as in Chambers 1728. The analogies with Chambers’s dictionary increase, as in the sub-headwords “*Natural HISTORY... Civil HISTORY ... Singular HISTORY ... Simple HISTORY ... Personal HISTORY... Figurate HISTORY ... Mixt HISTORY*” (this last not included in 1730 wordlist) which are clearly derived from the *Cyclopaedia* (see the present section and Appendix A):

HI’S TORY, [*histoire*, Fr. *istoria*, It. *historia*, Sp. Port. and Lat. *ἱστορία* (*sic*), Gr.] **1.** A recital, narration, or relation of facts and events with dignity, as they have happened in a continued series of the principal facts and circumstances thereof. **2.** Narration, relation in general. The *history*

part lay within a little room. *Wiseman*. **3.** The Knowledge of facts and events. *History*, so far as it relates to the affairs of the bible, is necessary to divines. Watts.

Natural HISTORY, a description of natural bodies; either terrestrial, as animal, vegetables, fossils, fire, water, air, meteors; or celestial, as planets, stars, comets, &c.

Civil HISTORY, is that of people, states, republics, cities, communities, &c.

Singular HISTORY, is one which describes a single action, as an expedition, battle, siege, &c.

Simple HISTORY, one delivered without any art or foreign ornament; being only a just and bare relation of matters, in the exact manner and order wherein they were transacted.

Personal HISTORY, is one that gives the life of some single person. See Biography.

Figurate HISTORY, is one that is enriched with the ornaments of wit, ingenuity, and address of the historian.

Mixt HISTORY, is that, which besides the ornaments of figured history, calls in the proofs and authorities of simple history, furnishing authentic memoirs, letters, &c. (Scott-Bailey 1755, under HISTORY)

Bailey 1730 and Scott-Bailey 1755—and, at a different level, Dyche-Pardon 1735—do not add anything new to what was documented under Chambers’s HISTORY. However, their effort may be considered a fundamental bridge between two lexicographic traditions: in the entries of their universal dictionaries, history stands out as a complex, all-embracing topic as never before recorded in a general inclusion dictionary. The term *history* represents a multifaceted reality—both conceptual and linguistic—manifesting itself in a continuum where certain aspects rather than others are highlighted in turn, according to the context and the aim of the narration. A kind of pan-history in which many histories—overlapping with one another—find their form of expression: in Dyche-Pardon’s words, “the several Transactions and Conditions of a *State*, *King*, private *Person*, or other Thing, as they arise, or are dependent upon one another” (Dyche-Pardon 1735, under HISTORY).

18th-century Dictionaries of Arts and Sciences

The encyclopaedic tradition does not begin with the *Cyclopaedia* (1728) and does not finish with it either, even though Chambers’s work may be considered a stepping stone towards the following publications. The following paragraphs are a survey of those dictionaries of arts and

sciences, issued in Great Britain between 1704 and 1788 and forming the basis of modern encyclopaedias.

The first work known as a dictionary of arts and sciences is Harris's *Lexicon Technicum* (*LT*, 1704). Basically dealing with the technical vocabulary belonging to the new scientific discoveries and experiments, the inclusion of humanities and related terminology is extremely limited in it and, where present, the discussion is concise and essential. The entry *history* is omitted in the first edition of Harris's work; however, in his preface, the contents of history are briefly outlined and associated to both the computation and passing of time:

In History and Chronology, you have what properly belongs to them as Arts; as an Account of the Civil Computation of Time; the Original and the Reduction, one to another, of the several Aera's, Epocha's, Periods, &c.¹⁸ (Harris 1704, § 35)

Thus, History is likened to Chronology whose entry is already present in the 1704-edition of the *LT* because of its arithmetical implications, particularly appealing to Harris's mathematical interests. Actually, *chronology*

in the common sense of the Word now, is the Arithmetical computing of Time for Historical Uses; so as thereby truly to date the Beginnings and Ends of Princes Reigns, the Revolutions of Empires and Kingdoms, Battles, Sieges, or any other Memorable Actions. (Harris 1704, under CHRONOLOGY)

Thus, on the one hand *chronology* represents a time-structuring principle for civil usage,¹⁹ providing the arithmetical continuum where human "Memorable Actions" (Harris 1704, under CHRONOLOGY) may be neatly placed; on the other hand *history* is "a recital or description of things, as they are or have been in a continued orderly Narration of the principal Facts and Circumstances thereof," as recorded under *history* in the 1736 5th edition of the same work, published a few years after the *Cyclopaedia* (1728). The fact that the general definition first, and then further specifications (or sub-headwords) completely overlap with Chambers's entry, demonstrates the strong relationship between these two works (for a comparison between them, see Appendix A).

Between 1751 and 1764 three more encyclopaedias were published: Barrow's *A New and Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1751), Owen's *A New and Complete Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1754-55), and Croker's *The Complete Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1764-66). All of them include the headword *history* but they do not make any breaking

innovation in contents, retracing the general definition—as well as the many subdivisions into natural history, civil history, personal history, etc.—which was clearly established by the previous tradition, that is to say

an account, properly speaking, of past transactions, narrated with such important circumstances as are proper to be transmitted to posterity, and that in a regular continued series of facts. (Barrow 1751, under HISTORY; Croker 1764, under HISTORY, except for the expression “of facts”)

and

a description or recital of things as they are, or have been, in a continued, orderly narration of the principal facts and circumstances thereof. (Owen 1754, under HISTORY)

Noticeably, these works expand the discussion about the method and style to be used in history, emphasizing both the fundamental role of truth by contrast with imagination and the difficult task of the historiographer in dealing with contents and readership. Actually, history is

the most difficult province. In other subjects there is a greater latitude for the writer’s imagination; but, in History, he is confined to the occurrences he relates: And these, as they are not alike entertaining, require force and judgment in the narration to make them all agreeable. ...

History will not admit those decorations other subjects are capable of.

The passions are not to be moved with any thing but the truth of the narration. All the force and beauty must lie in the order and expression. To relate every event with perspicuity, in such words as best express the nature of the subject, is the chief commendation of an historian’s style. (Barrow 1751, under HISTORY; Croker 1764, under HISTORY, with some differences in punctuation)

As a consequence a historiographer (who is “a professed historian, or writer of history,” Owen 1754)

must endeavour at a noble simplicity of thought, language, design, and ordinance, and carefully avoid all profuseness of false conceit, strained expression, and affected pompousness so inconsistent with the gravity, dignity and noble character of history. In a word he must write so as to be intelligible to the ignorant, and yet charm the wise; form and express such ideas as are great and yet shall appear very common, and intermix no other ornament with his narration than what the modesty of truth can bear.

... that he may always dare to speak the truth, and write of all without prejudice.... (Owen 1754, under HISTORIOGRAPHER)

The historiographer's stylistic effort only aims at communicating facts and events as they happened: the element of imagination pertains to other provinces and characterizes "a fabulous but probable relation of a series of adventures feigned by the writer. Such is the History of the civil wars of Granada, the History of Don Quixote, the Ethiopic History of Heliodorus, &c." (Barrow 1751, sub-headword HISTORY), as in Chambers's sub-headword HISTORY-Romance.

The present encyclopaedic survey culminates with the publication of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (EB, 1768-71) and with Abraham Rees's revision of Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* (1778-1788). The EB puts forward a very sober and bare definition, shorter than most of those recorded in 18th-century universal dictionaries:

HISTORY, a description or recital of things as they are, or have been, in a continued orderly narration of the principal facts and circumstances thereof. History, with regard to its subject, is divided into the history of Nature, (See Nat. Hist.) and the history of Actions. The history of Actions is a continued relation of a series of memorable events. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1768-71, under HISTORY)

Abraham Rees's revision simply transcribes Chambers's entry *history*. The actual refashioning of the whole work will be published with many additions, and in many volumes, as the *New Cyclopaedia* in the first half of the 19th century.

As far as the term *story* is concerned, it is never included in 18th-century dictionaries of arts and sciences.

“Lexicographic History” between Past and Present

The lexicographic survey carried out in the present study has basically highlighted the ways in which the term *history* was recorded in 17th- and 18th-century dictionaries, as well as the continuous adaptation in time undergone by its semantic load, along with the adaptation and consequent definition of other cognate words such as *story*.

Since the opening of the 17th century hard-word dictionary compilers have included the terms *history* and *histories* in their prefaces, title pages and definitions, but not in their lemmata. Notwithstanding the elusive concepts these terms may express, variation in usage becomes gradually evident: *history* mainly focuses on the historical dimension and when it points to the fictional realm, the plural form is preferred. This is also confirmed both by the aphetic forms *story/stories*, whose semantic-conceptual difference is governed by their morphological variation, and by

derivatives such as *historiologie/(-gy)*, *historiography*, *historiographer*, *historical*, *historian*, analyzed above. The definition of the semantic area of *history*, the lexicological-lexicographic structuring of the concept, as well as the fields of knowledge primarily belonging to it, will be the hard work of 18th-century lexicographers who systematically include the term as a head-word in their dictionaries.

History and *story* built up their lexical distinctiveness, that is to say their formal and their semantic identity, from the common ground of *narration*, which is generically defined in 17th-century hard-word dictionaries as “A declaration of the matter whereof one purposeth to speake. A report, a discourse” (Bullock 1616), “a report of a thing, a discourse, declaration, or relation” (Blount 1656), “a report or relation” (Coles 1676), and in 18th-century dictionaries and encyclopaedias as “a Relation, Report, or Recital of any particular Circumstances, or Actions:...” (Kersey-Phillips 1706), “a Relation of any particular Actions or Circumstances” (Bailey 1730), “Account; relation; history” (Johnson 1755), “in oratory and history, a recital, or rehearsal of a fact as it happened, or as it is supposed to have happened” (Chambers 1728).

History emerges as a technical term essentially representing

that branch of knowledge which deals with past events, as recorded in writings or otherwise ascertained; the formal record of the past, especially of human affairs or actions; the study of the formation and growth of communities and nations. (*OED*, under *history*, n. 3.)

and also

a written narrative constituting a continuous methodical record, in order of time, of important or public events, especially those connected with a particular country, people, individual, etc. (*OED*, under *history*, n. 2.)

Both concepts are already present in 18th-century lexicographic works, both universal dictionaries and dictionaries of arts and sciences. *History* has basically lexicalized as *civil history*, that is to say that branch of knowledge dealing with the narration of those facts and events which belong to the human action and presumably aim at historical accuracy, the historiographer being committed to “speak the truth, and write of all without prejudice” (Owen 1754, under HISTORIOGRAPHER).

However, *history* also denotes *romance*, namely “a *Tale*, or feign’d Narration, design’d either to instruct or divert” (Chambers 1728, under FABLE), but the association *history-romance*—in the sense of *unhistorical history*—is seldom represented in 18th-century dictionaries and already outdated at that time.²⁰

As far as *story* is concerned, it is almost always excluded from hard-word dictionaries, besides being completely absent in 18th-century encyclopaedias. On the contrary, this term is always included in 18th-century universal dictionary lemmata and commonly defined as “narration-relation” with the meaning of “a narrative of real or, more usually, fictitious events, designed for the entertainment of the hearer or reader; a series of traditional or imaginary incidents forming the matter of such a narrative; a tale” (*OED*, under *story* n. 5.a.), thus corroborating the semantic-functional²¹ divergence of *history* ~ *story* attested since the first half of the 17th century (see Cockeram 1623, Blount 1656, Phillips 1658, section 1.). In a broad sense, *story* also meant “Historical writing or records; history as a branch of knowledge, or as opposed to fiction. ... *Obs.*” (*OED*, under *story* n. †3.), but such a generalized usage died out in the course of the 18th century. All of this suggests that the lexeme *story* was probably never perceived as a technical word expressing a domain-specific reality but as a general vocabulary item covering a wider semantic field than *history* did, and also suggests that contemporary usage echoes early Modern “*in nuce*-usage.”

Appendix A

Chambers’s HISTORY (1728)

HISTORY, a Recital, or Description of Things as they are, or have been; in a continued, orderly Narration of the principal facts and Circumstances thereof. See ANNALS.

The Word is *Greek*, ... and literally denotes a *Search of curious Things*, or a *Desire of knowing*, or even a *Rehearsal of Things we have seen*; being form’d of the Verb ... *to know a Thing by having seen it*. Tho’ the Idea affected to the Term *History*, is now much more extensive; and we apply it to a *Narration of divers memorable Things*, even tho’ the Relator only takes them from the Report of others.

The Origin of the Word is from the Verb ... *I know*; and hence it is, that among the Antients several of their great Men were call’d *Polyhistorēs*, q.d. Persons of various, and general Knowledge. See POLYHISTORES.

History is divided, with Regard to its Subject, into the *History of Nature*, and the *History of Actions*.

HISTORY of *Nature*, or *Natural HISTORY*, is a Description of natural Bodies; whether terrestrial, as Animals, Vegetables, Fossils, Fire, Water, Air, Meteors, &c. or Celestial, as the Stars, Planets, Comets, &c. See NATURE, &c. ...

Natural History is the same with what we otherwise call *Physiology*. See PHYSIOLOGY.

HISTORY, with Regard to Actions, is a continued Relation of a Series of memorable events, in the Affairs, either of a single Person, a Nation, or several Persons and Nations; and whether included in a great, or a little Space of Time.

Thus, *Thucydides* ...

History is divided into *Antient* and *Modern*, *Universal* and *Particular*, *Sacred* and *Profane*.

Fa. *Menestrier* gives us the proper Characters of the divers Kinds of *History*, with great Accuracy. – He distinguishes *History*, with regard both to its Matter, and its Form; and gives curious Instances of each particular.

History, with Regard to its Matter, is either *Sacred*, or *Natural*, or *Civil*, or *Personal*, or *Singular*.

Sacred HISTORY, is that which lays before us the Mysteries and Ceremonies of Religion, Visions or Appearances of the Deity, &c. Miracles, and other supernatural Things, whereof God alone is the Author. – Such are the Book of *Genesis*, the Gospels, *Apocalypse*, &c. See MIRACLE, GOSPEL, REVELATION.

Natural HISTORY, is a Description of the Singularities of Nature; its Irregularities and Prodigies; and the Alterations it undergoes in the Birth, Progress, End, and Use of Things. – Such is *Aristotle’s History* of Animals; *Theophrastus’s History* of Plants; and the entire Body of *Natural History*, by *Pliny*: Such also are *Acosta’s Natural History* of the *Indies*; *Plott’s History* of

Staffordshire, &c.

Civil HISTORY, is that of People, States, Republicks, Communities, Cities, &c. – Such are those of *Thucydides, Halicarnassaeus, Livy, Polybius, Mezeray, Fa. Daniel, Milton, Buchanan.*

Personal HISTORY, is that which gives the Portrait, or Life of some single Person. – Such are the Lives of *Plutarch, Corn. Nepos, Suetonius, &c.* The Lives of the Painters, Poets, Philosophers, Saints, &c.

Personal History, is the same with what we otherwise call *Biography*. See BIOGRAPHY.

Singular HISTORY, is that which describes a single Action, Siege, Battel, or even War, Expedition, &c.

History, with regard to its Form, is either *simple*, or *figurate*, or *mix'd*.

Simple History, is that deliver'd without any Art or foreign Ornament; being only a naked, and faithful Recital of Things, just in the Manner, and Order wherein they pass'd. – Such are the Chronicles of the *Eastern Empire*; the *Fasti*; Chronological Tables, Journals, &c. See FASTI.

Figurate History, is that which is further enrich'd with Ornaments, by the Wit, Ingenuity, and Address of the Historian. – Such are the Political, and Moral *Histories* of the *Greeks, Romans*, and most of the *Moderns*.

This latter is a Kind of rational *History*; which without stopping at the Shell or Outside, the Appearances of Things, discovers the Springs and Movements of the several events; enters into the Thoughts, the Breasts of the Persons concern'd therein; discovers their Intentions and Views; and by the Result of entreprizing Undertakings, discovers the Prudence or Weakness, wherewith they were laid, conducted, &c.

These are much the most useful, and entertaining Histories. – To this Class, may be peculiarly refer'd the Histories and Annals of *Tacitus*, among the *Antients*; and those of *Guicciardin, Petavins*, and Bishop *Burnet* among the *Moderns*.

Mix'd History, is that which, beside the Ornaments of figured *History*, calls in the Proofs and Authorities of simple *History*; furnishing authentic Memoirs, or original Letters, Manifesto's, Declarations, &c. to vouch the Truth of what is said. – Such are the *Histories*, or Collections of *Rushworth*; Mons. *Rapin Thoyras's History of England*; the Genealogical *Histories* of *Duchesne*; Mons. *de Marca's History of Bearn, &c.*

HISTORY, is also used for a Romance; or a fabulous, but probable Relation, of a Series of Actions or Adventures feign'd or invented by the Writer. – Such is the *History* of The Civil Wars of *Granada*; the *History* of *Don Quixote*; the Ethiopic *History* of *Heliodorus, &c.* See ROMANCE.

HISTORY, in Painting, is a Picture composed of divers Figures, or Persons, representing some Transaction, or Piece of *History*, either real or feign'd. See PAINTING. ...

Harris’s HISTORY (1736, 5th ed)

HISTORY, [... properly signifies, to know a thing by having seen it] a recital or description of things, as they are or have been in a continued orderly Narration of the principal Facts and Circumstances thereof.

Natural HISTORY, a description of Natural Bodies, whether they be *Terrestrial*, as Animals, Vegetables, Fossils, Fire, Water, Air, Meteors, &c. or *Celestial*, as the Stars, Planets, Comets, &c. It describes the Singularities of Nature, the Irregularities and Prodigies of it, and the Alterations it undergoes in the Birth, Progress, End, and Use of Things.

HISTORY, [in respect to *Actions*] is a continued Relation of a series of memorable Events in the Affairs or Concerns, either of a Nation, of several Persons and Nations, or of a single Person, either during the space of a longer or shorter Time.

Personal HISTORY, gives the Portrait of some single Person, the same that is otherwise called *Biography*.

Sacred HISTORY is that which relates the Mysteries and Ceremonies of Religion, Appearances of the Deity, his Messengers, Visions, &c. Miracles and other supernatural Things, whereof God only is Author.

Civil HISTORY is that which gives an account of People, States, Republicks, Cities, Communities, &c.

Singular HISTORY is that which describes one single Action, Siege, Battle, or even of a War or Expedition.

Simple HISTORY is one which is delivered without any Art or foreign Ornament; being only a faithful and naked recital of Things, just in the same Manner and Order as they were transacted or past.

Figurate HISTORY is one which is enrich’d with Ornaments, by the Wit, Ingenuity, and Address of the Historian.

HISTORY [in *Painting*] is used of a Picture, compos’d of divers Figures or Persons, representing some Piece of History, either real or feigned.

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Notes

¹ While the focus of this paper is not the history of English lexicography, some key principles in logical-chronological order are introduced to contextualize the discussion. On this subject, two relevant works deserve quotation: De Witt T. Starnes & Gertrude E. Noyes, *The English Dictionary from Cawdrey to Johnson 1604-1755*, and Henri Béjoint, *The Lexicography of English*, for both see References.

² The present study discusses only those data collected in 17th- and 18th-century lexicographic works, which represent the source texts at the core of the debate. The term *history* and its derivatives, their semantic-pragmatic load, their polysemic value in diachronic perspective are thoroughly treated in Christian Kay et al., *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary (HTOED)*, see References. In particular, an accurate lexicological analysis may be found under *history* (and cognate words), *story*, *fiction*, *narration*, etc. The terms included in the *HTOED* wordlist are cross-referenced according to both their semantic load/polysemic value and their different contexts of usage.

³ After their first occurrence in this paper, dictionaries will be usually referred to as author-compiler and issue date, i.e. Cawdrey 1604, etc.

⁴ In the corpus of texts under scrutiny here, the term *poetical* is always associated with imagination, fiction, invention. In particular, fiction(s) is generically defined as “a lie, or tale fained” (Cawdrey 1604), “a feined deuce, a lye” (Bullockar 1616), “a fained deuce” (Cockeram 1623), “a feigning, or inventing” (Phillips 1758), “a

feigned thing” (Cocker 1704), “an Invention or Device, a Lie or feigned Story” (Kersey-Phillips 1706; Kersey 1708; Bailey 1730), “(of *factio*, L. of *fin*go to invent) an invention, or feigned thing” (Martin 1749). The association *fiction-poetry* is explicit in Johnson’s entry (1755): to support the first sense listed under FICTION, that is to say “The act of feigning or inventing,” the compiler quotes Dryden who declares that “*Fiction* is of the essence of poetry, as well as of painting: there is a resemblance in one of human bodies, things and actions, which are not real; and in the other of a true story by a *fiction*. *Dryden*.” In the *HTOED* fiction is variously defined as—or associated with—“The action of “feigning” or inventing imaginary incidents, existences, states of things, etc., whether for the purpose of deception or otherwise” (1605); “The action of inventing or making with thought and skill; invention” (1699). For more results see *HTOED* <http://www.oed.com/thesaurus>, under *fiction*.

⁵ For an in-depth analysis and discussion of the relationship between history and fiction a relevant work deserves mentioning, that is E. Zimmerman, *The Boundaries of Fiction*, see References. In particular, the following passage seems relevant to contextualize the present study, pp. 27 and 29: “During the seventeenth century, truth claims based on various degrees of probability were gradually accepted as a supplement to certainty. Much empirical research was recognized as incapable of producing the kind of certainty claimed by a logic based on, or analogous to, mathematics.... History was influenced by the new probabilistic view of knowledge, which offered the possibility of deriving truth claims equivalent to those of the burgeoning empirical sciences.... The mild scepticism that motivated natural science to scrutinize its epistemological foundations also motivated history to examine its evidentiary foundations in testimony and documentation, linking history to probabilistic knowledge of the kind that empirical science was seeking. The quarantining of poetry from history in this developing epistemological paradigm gave the novel the opportunity to exploit its ambiguous position between the two.... / The attacks on the foundation of historical knowledge that are implicitly advanced by the novel were already explicit in eighteenth-century thought. Questions about the reliability of witnesses, who are often, if not inevitably, biased and also about the textualization of accounts of the past, with all the problems posed by the transmission of texts through time, were important to the thinking of philosophers, clergymen, and historical scholars. History, biblical scholarship, and fiction in the eighteenth century share the recognition that textuality undermines assumptions about presence.”

⁶ The *HTOED* partially reflects this situation, under *historian* we read: “One who relates a narrative or tale; a story-teller” (1586). Under *historiographer* the writing activity is highlighted, even though associated with natural history: “One who describes or gives a systematic account of some natural object or objects (see HISTORY n. 5); a writer of natural history” (1579-80). See *historian* n. 3, and *historiographer* n. 1 and 2 (in this case associated with *historian* and *memorialist*), <http://www.oed.com/thesaurus>.

⁷ In the *HTOED*, under *history* n. 2, we can read: “A systematic account (without reference to time) of a set of natural phenomena, as those connected with a country, some division of nature...” (1567) and “A work dealing with the properties of natural objects, plants, or animals; a systematic account based on observation rather than...” (1567). Under *history* n. 12, the knowledge and recording of present events, as well as the association with modern history, is instead emphasized: “Of or relating to the present and recent times, as opposed to the remote past; of, relating to, or originating in the current age or period” (1585), <http://www.oed.com/thesaurus>. This differentiation, attested in the second half of the 16th century, will be systematically and accurately defined in 18th-century lexicography.

⁸ Neither facticity—as “matter of factness” declared by eye-witnesses—nor *history* as natural history are mentioned here.

⁹ In Kersey 1702, definitions are less articulated and less detailed: “*An Historian. / Historical. / An Historiographer, or writer of histories. / An History, or relation of matters of fact.*” In Kersey 1713, the headword *historiographer* was deleted and its meaning attributed to *historian*.

¹⁰ This would be confirmed by the following meaning recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, <http://www.oed.com>, and already outdated at the middle of the 18th century: “Story ... †3. In generalized sense: Historical writing or records; as a branch of knowledge, or as opposed to fiction. Also, the events recorded or proper to be recorded by historians: ... *Obs.*” (see also *HTOED*, under *story* 1. c1449, 5., 7., 13., and 14., <http://www.oed.com/thesaurus>).

¹¹ Notwithstanding the cross-reference, the headword BIOGRAPHY is not included in Chambers’s lemmata, whereas *biographer* is defined as “an Author who writes the History, or Life of any Person, or Persons ...” (Chambers 1728, under BIOGRAPHER).

¹² “STYLE, ... Again, the *simple* or *low Style* is fit for Comedy, the *Sublime* for Tragedy, and the *Middle* for History...” (Chambers 1728, under STYLE).

¹³ In the *OED*, *style* n. 13a is defined as: “The manner of expression characteristic of a particular writer (hence of an orator), or of a literary group or period; a writer’s mode of expression considered in regard to clearness, effectiveness, beauty, and the like” (<http://www.oed.com>.)

¹⁴ “HISTORIOGRAPHER, a profess’d Historian, or Writer of History; or a Person who applies himself peculiarly thereto. See HISTORY. The Term is chiefly used for a Person who has a peculiar Charge and Commission to write the History of his Time...” (Chambers 1728, under HISTORIOGRAPHER).

¹⁵ According to what has been exposed so far, a passage from Zimmerman (1996) seems particularly relevant, pp. 20, 28 and 51-53: “The new fiction of the eighteenth century was regarded by some contemporary social critics as a threat to genuine history because it substituted a more stimulating though less accurate representation of reality... / Not only, then, did the new eighteenth-century fiction opportunistically fill the gaps created in history by the demand for verifiability, but it also simulated (and sometimes parodied) the documentary concerns of history. /

... Eighteenth-century fiction is not commonly *historical* fiction, but very often it is *historicized* fiction.... / Eighteenth-century fiction takes the process of stimulating a documentary foundation well beyond mere gestures toward potential external verification. There are of course analogues in prior works of fiction—in many romances, for example, and in extended fashion in *Don Quixote*.... / But eighteenth-century British fiction sometimes extends its representation of its own documentation to the point at which it appears to be representing not so much the history of the past as the traces of the past, in a sense taking verisimilitude to a disintegrating point at which it is not an account but an artifact, striving to be the past, not only to tell it.”

¹⁶ Later on under FABLE, Chambers points out that “The Fiction may be so disguised with the Truth of History, that there shall not appear any Fiction at all. To effect this, the Poet looks back into History, for the Names of some Persons to whom the feign’d Action either really or probably did happen; and relates it under those known Names, with Circumstances which do not change any thing of the Ground of the *Fable*. ... Thus may Fiction be made to consist with Truth” (Chambers 1728, under FABLE).

¹⁷ Apart from *historiology*—omitted in Johnson—and the graphic variant *historic* vs. *historick*, the “*histor-lemmata*” is exactly the same.

¹⁸ Pages are not numbered in Harris’s Preface, whereas the symbol § plus numeral identifies the paragraph from which the quotation was derived (numbering of paragraphs is mine).

¹⁹ The semantic drift of *history-chronology* as essentially “Civil Computation of Time” (Harris 1704, § 35), as well as the interpretation of “Historical Uses” (Harris 1704, under CHRONOLOGY) as *civil uses*, is already attested at the start of the century and clearly confirmed in later dictionaries.

²⁰ The date chart in the *OED*, under *history* n. †1., confirms the uncommon and irregular usage of *history* with the meaning of “A narration of incidents (in early use, either true or imaginary; later only of those professedly true); a narrative, tale, story. *Obs.* ...” Such infrequent usage is attested between 1390 and 1834, <http://www.oed.com>.

²¹ The term *functional* is here used with the general meaning of “contextually related to some function or purpose.”