

Article

Co-authoring History: Montpellier, the Vendée, and the Co-authorship of the Sources

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Abstract: The discourses of literature and history are generally regarded as two distinct genres. This essay sets out to investigate the use of fictitious, that is, the *invented*, as well as *real* elements, in addition to narrative tools in some literary and historical texts to examine whether there is evidence for a fundamental difference between them in this respect. In the first half of the article, from the juxtaposition of Merle’s historical novel, *En nos vertes années*, to Le Roy Ladurie’s *The Beggar and the Professor*, we shall see that real and fictitious elements are also interwoven in Merle’s text, just as history uses fictitious elements, necessarily and tacitly, or, in some works, in a rather provocative way. In the second half of this essay, in examining literary and historical narratives of the counter-revolution in the Vendée, it will become evident that historians also use the same narrative techniques as writers to orientate readers. While these findings would confound the normative distinction between history and literature, we cannot, however, finally conclude that there is no fundamental difference between literary fiction and history. Arguing against Alun Munslow, who claims in *Authoring the Past* that “‘doing history’ is an authorial activity,” this present article tries to argue that, while in many aspects writing history is indistinguishable from writing fiction, the historian has co-authors: the sources themselves may enter the process of writing history. This is a conclusion that emerges from the analysis of Simon Schama’s *Citizens*. His text about the revolt in the Vendée points to a potential advantage of history when compared to literary fiction: historians may feel obliged to change their original point of view under the burden of the fact they themselves have enumerated—something we can call the latent but inherent co-authorship of the sources in historical narratives.

Keywords: history; literature; narrative; sources; authorship

1. Introduction

The famous Swiss surgeon, Felix Platter, writes in his memoirs that, when he was a child, Captain Georg Summermatter gave him an outdated, multicoloured doublet and a matching pair of trousers as a gift after his victory at Ceresole. Fought in 1544 between the French and the troops of the Holy Roman Empire, ending with the triumph of the French army with four thousand Swiss mercenaries in its ranks, this battle was memorable not only for Platter, one of the main characters of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *The Beggar and the Professor* [1], but it was also the battle after which, among others, Jean de Siorac was dubbed a knight. He was the father of the protagonist in Robert Merle's popular sequence of novels, *Fortune de France*, which is also about the history of the 16th century [2].

The discourse of literature (such as Merle's books) and that of history (such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's book) are generally regarded as two distinct genres, although the well-founded nature of this distinction has been subject to serious doubts from the 1960s and 1970s, especially based on the work of Roland Barthes and Hayden White's pathbreaking *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973) [3]. This essay sets out to investigate the use of fictitious and real elements, in addition to narrative tools in some literary and historical texts to examine whether there is evidence for a fundamental difference between them in this respect. From the juxtaposition of Merle's historical novel, *En nos vertes années*, the second volume in the series [4], to Le Roy Ladurie's *The Beggar and the Professor*, we shall see in the first half of the article that real and fictitious elements mingle in Merle's text, just as history uses fictitious elements, either necessarily or tacitly, or, in some works, in a rather provocative way. In the second half of this essay, in examining literary and historical narratives of the counter-revolution in the Vendée, it will become evident that historians also use the same narrative techniques as writers to orientate readers. While these findings would confound the normative distinction between history and literature, we cannot, however, finally conclude that there is no fundamental difference between literary fiction and history.

Alun Munslow has recently edited *Authoring the Past*, a volume comprised of fifteen essays, originally published in *Rethinking History* from 1998 to 2011. The authors of the essays intend to answer the question "why they think about and write history as they do." The basic idea of the volume is that "'doing history' is an authorial activity" [5]. This present article tries to argue that while from the aspect of narration writing history is indistinguishable from writing fiction, the historian has co-authors: the sources themselves may enter the process of writing history. This is a conclusion that emerges from the analysis of Simon Schama's *Citizens*. His text about the revolt in the Vendée points to a potential advantage of history when compared to literary fiction: historians might feel obliged to change their original point of view under the burden of the facts they themselves have enumerated—something we can call the latent but inherent co-authorship of the sources in historical narratives.

2. Montpellier Twice: The Writer as Historian

If we consider our two books about the 16th century, we can see that, in the first three volumes of the novel series, Merle's narration stays on the "micro level"; it is about everyday life. In the second volume, Pierre de Siorac's father sends him to study medicine at the University of Montpellier. Close to the city gate, in an olive grove, a terrible sight meets his eyes: next to the empty gallows, on an olive tree, swings the body of a young woman hanged for throttling her misbegotten infant:

I caught sight of parts of a female corpse hung from the largest of the olive trees. Her head was tied with her own hair onto one branch, her legs, arms and trunk onto other branches with a hempen rope. The hangman had laid her bare to disgrace her, so one could see that she was a young maid, and although she had been dead for more than a week, she was not eaten by the birds so much that her pretty bosom and stomach could still be seen. The poor girl, whose soft body was thus exposed to vile human curiosity and left as prey to ravens' beaks, was first gibbeted, then when she expired, was taken off the rope and made naked, and her body was cut into pieces by the hangman's big sword like a butcher cuts up an animal; then, to make an example, these were tied on this beautiful tree, which did not bend more under this terrible burden than under the weight of a dead bird ([4], p. 71).

This incident is also commented upon in the first volume of the novel series narrated by Pierre de Siorac [6]. According to the novel, Pierre arrives in the city on 22 June 1566. When he gains admittance to the city, a pleasant scene makes him forget the olive grove for a minute:

We slowly crossed this square, and I was surprised to see a procession of nice cavaliers, preceded by musicians playing on lutes and viols. These young men, evidently noble and with a concomitant ease written on their brows, were wearing snow-white ankle-length shirts on top of their hoses and doublets. And what really amused and fascinated me was that they held a silver shell in their left hands and a spoon of the same metal in their right hands, with which they were tapping the bottom of their shells to the rhythm of the music; this made a very pleasant but not at all continuous sound, since the moment they caught sight of a charming young lady in the Place de la Canourque—and it was miraculous how many young ladies were walking there, and how pretty they were, they were more and prettier than ever in any town of France—they all rushed to her, surrounded her and offered her in their spoons a few sugared almonds, which filled up their shells ([4], pp. 75–76).

Afterwards, Pierre arrives at the pharmacy, where he is going to stay. A servant, Fontanette, shows the guest his room and takes off his boots. This servant later becomes one of the protagonists of the novel, and is hanged at the age of eighteen for killing her illegitimate child ([4], pp. 77–80, 410–21).

Reading Merle's text about Pierre and Le Roy Ladurie's book about Felix Platter, we interestingly meet the description of very similar events and experiences. It is most probable that Felix Platter had no longer been wearing Captain Georg Summermatter's presents, the outdated pair of trousers and doublet, when he arrived in Montpellier on 31 October 1552 to study medicine at the university. In connection with the last day of his journey, he recalls the discomfort he felt when he saw hanged people near the inn of Castelnau. However, having ridden into the city, he brightened up—says Le Roy Ladurie, the author of the book based on his memoirs—when he met some distinguished gentlemen, supposedly noblemen dressed in white and equipped with flags and string instruments: "They held silver shells and spoons with which they made a loud racket. With these spoons they also distributed candies and sweets to the well-born young ladies as they passed along the way" ([1], pp. 182–83).

Then he went to find Laurent Catalan's pharmacy, where he was to board during his studies. Catalan's assistant showed Felix his room, but it was Beatrix, the apothecary's young servant, who finally assisted him in removing his boots. At this point, Le Roy Ladurie cites Felix Platter word by word:

On December 3, 1556, Catalan's former servant, Béatrix [Bietris], who removed my boots the night I arrived in Montpellier in 1552, was hanged on the square [in front of Montpellier's city hall and Notre-Dame cathedral] from a gallows with a single arm. She was hanged and choked to death. She had left the Catalan house a year earlier [in 1555] to go to work for a young priest [pfaff] who got her pregnant. When the child came to term, she threw it into the toilet in the priest's house, where its little body was found. The mother was sentenced to death and executed. Her body was given to the School of Medicine for dissection. Its uterus was still swollen and enlarged, because the birth had taken place only a week earlier. The executioner wrapped his victim's remains in a sheet and hung them from a gibbet outside the city ([1], p. 184).

Felix Platter also preserves a record of the execution of a young man on the square in front of Montpellier's city hall on 22 July 1553. First his head was cut off with a hunting knife, then his body was cut to pieces: all his limbs were cut off, and the next morning the hangman hung each piece of the body on an olive tree outside the city and left them to rot there ([1], pp. 210–11).

Pierre de Siorac's and Felix Platter's ensuing careers as medical students in mid-16th-century Montpellier can be juxtaposed in great detail from their Marrano host through their university studies to incidents of an execution and a dissection. We have a good reason to compare the lives of Pierre de Siorac and Felix Platter, the protagonists of a novel and a historical work, respectively. The life of the latter was also connected at one point with that of Jean de Siorac, but the course of his son's, Pierre de Siorac's, life ran parallel to that of Felix during a longer period of time. It is, of course, no accident that they shared most of their experiences: what happened to Felix Platter was experienced by Pierre de Siorac, that is, Merle wrote his novel based on the memoirs which were also used also by the historian, Le Roy Ladurie [7]. While reading Merle, the readers—or at least Model Readers, as defined by Eco [8]—think that they meet a fictitious world, or assume that the world that is described there is real in its outlines in the sense that its descriptions are based on historical sources. However, the details of the novel, especially the protagonist's experiences and feelings, are invented. Le Roy Ladurie's monograph, however, makes the readers realize that this is not exactly true, and that some of Pierre de Siorac's experiences are, in fact, "real" in the sense that they correspond to those recorded by Felix Platter in his memoirs. Therefore, the case of the two medical students of Montpellier exposes the question of the differences and similarities of historical and literary texts, recently highlighted by the virtual conference *Novel Approaches: From Academic History to Historical Fiction* organized by the Institute of Historical Research of the University of London in November 2011.

It has been argued that literature and history can be regarded as two distinct genres, not because of a well-founded theoretical distinction, but because these texts are generally read in this way. Pierre Siorac and Felix Platter's case, however, does not seem to conform to the distinction between them made by Aristotle:

The difference between the historian and the poet is not that between using verse or prose [...] No, the difference is this: that the one relates actual events, the other the kinds of things that might occur. Consequently, poetry is more philosophical and more elevated than history, since poetry relates more of the universal, while history relates particulars [9].

A large part of Pierre Siorac's supposedly fictitious experiences are no less "actual" than those of the "real" or "historical" personality, Felix Platter. We should therefore also have a look at the other

side of the coin: how can fictional elements be built into historical works, and then, how do historians use narrative tools?

3. Fiction in History

Influenced by postmodern criticism of the practice of history, several historians experimented with building fictitious elements into their texts. The American historian John Demos published his book, *The Unredeemed Captive: A Family Story from Early America*, in 1994. In 1703, Native Americans descended on a village in Massachusetts, abducted more than a hundred Englishmen, and took them to Canada. Most of them were released after a couple of years, but the minister's seven-year-old daughter, who had been adopted by an Iroquois family, refused to return home. She claimed she had become an "Indian," and even married a Native American man. The climax of the book occurs when an English delegate (who recorded the story) and two Jesuit missionaries try in vain to persuade the girl to return home. She only utters one word: "No." After this, Demos writes: "we do not know what Eunice Williams could have thought [...] we can only speculate—only imagine—but that much, at least, we must try." On the next page, separated from the rest of the book by being written in italics, he elaborates on what he thinks Eunice may have thought [10].

Certain parts of Simon Schama's *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculations* (1991) are even more disturbing for those insisting on the conventional dividing line between history and literary fiction. The first part, *On the Many Deaths of General Wolfe*, is about the battle of Québec, and the highly successful, monumental painting of General Wolfe, who was killed in action, by Benjamin West. Furthermore, it makes mention of Francis Parkman, chronicler of the American battles of the Seven Years' War. The second part focuses on the murder of Doctor George Parkman, distant relative of Professor Parkman, and the trial of the murderer, Professor Webster, a chemist at Harvard, which was tremendously sensational at the time.

We are informed that General Wolfe was quite distressed before the battle; we can read about the police investigator's thoughts on the Boston élite and about how the governor, who rejected the plea for mercy, "glanced behind him at his blackthorn stick leaning against the wall of the Corner Office," and how "he took off his silver-mounted spectacles and set them on the green leather desk-top" as he was quietly thinking. If we take into consideration the general characteristics of historical sources, we can see that the inclusion of these pieces of information is quite unusual. Nevertheless, the readers might not even notice these details because they have already read, in the first and fourth chapters, a private soldier's first-person singular account about the battle on 13 September in 1759, near Québec City. Furthermore, they also had the chance to be present at the police interrogation of the janitor that had discovered the remains of the victim in Professor Webster's laboratory in the second chapter. In the book's epilogue, Schama admits that these episodes are fictitious in their entirety. Concerning his writing, he says that it is "a work of the imagination that chronicles historical events", and he also adds that "the narratives are based on primary sources" [11].

Yet, since all this is revealed only at the very end of the book, his readers are, more or less, left in uncertainty as to what it is that they are actually reading. Since the book contains admittedly fictitious descriptions (the house, for instance, on the islands of the Azores, where Webster met his wife, and the one from where he was taken) and details that, as it later transpires, can evidently not be based on

sources, the readers might also deem those parts fictitious that later claim to be based on primary sources. (Such texts are the letters written to the Governor of Massachusetts in Professor Webster's favour, or other letters written by his sister-in-law. However, it is only at the end of the book that we learn that they are not fictitious, but based on original sources.)

Schama deliberately subverts the conventions of traditional historiography in his narrative. The sections of his book are a kind of "historical novella," and some episodes are "pure inventions based, however, on what documents suggest." Schama insists that he does not want "to scorn the boundary between fact and fiction," but to point out that, in each and every historical writing, the historian necessarily creates: edits, comments, interprets and delivers judgements ([11], p. 322). For the readers, however, the strongest feature of the book will still be the deliberate juxtaposition of real and fictitious elements.

Robin Bisha's study, "Reconstructing the Voice of a Noblewoman of the Time of Peter the Great: Daria Mikhailovna Menshikova—An Exercise in (Pseudo) Autobiographical Writing," was published in *Rethinking History* in 1998. After two paragraphs of introduction, we can read the first-person singular narrative of Princess Menshikova, who is about to join her husband in exile in Siberia. She relates her life. This article is a result of a large amount of research by Bisha, in which the six pages of the diary are followed by four pages of commentary [12].

Robert A. Rosenstone's classical tale of three Americans' experiences in Meiji, Japan [13], for example, or the above-cited works put an old feature of historical writing into the spotlight [14]. Though open experimentation with building fiction into historical narratives as a central element is rare, there is no work of history that does not contain invented elements. Schama's technique is to openly do what other historians are also forced to do: he builds elements of fiction into historical narratives. Historians have always been forced to bridge certain logical gaps in their narratives with parallels, analogies and speculations—though they tend to mark these with "traffic signs" (expressions like "I think," "maybe" or "perhaps"). Historians cannot have sources behind each and every one of their sentences. Consequently, argues the eminent German historian Reinhart Koselleck, historical sources do not direct, but rather tie the hands of the historians: these must not be contradicted, but sources never prescribe for them what they should write or say [15].

Fictional building stones may thus make their way into historical texts as deliberate attempts at a crossover from literary fiction to history, and the same also happens as a result of a dire but carefully concealed necessity to bridge the gaps in the sources. However, there is clearly more to it than that. Since historians' texts are narratives, they necessarily use narrative tools. History is a textual representation of the past, so the importance of the process by which historians create their narratives becomes evident (see for example [3]). In Alun Munslow's formulation: the cognitive dimension of history and its ethical dimension are connected by the aesthetic [16]. In our second set of examples, therefore, we will examine the use of some narrative tools by writers of fiction and those of history. The main goal of this section is not to compare how the same subject matter is approached by different writers and historians, and even less so to make substantial statements about this subject matter itself, the counter-revolutionary conflict in the Vendée, but basically to observe how historians use the well-established narrative tools of literature. Interestingly enough, it will emerge that sources play a much more active part in forming the historian's text than Koselleck suggests.

4. Images of a Counter-Revolution: The Historian as Author

Victor Hugo takes up a position on the question of the counter-revolution in the Vendée without hiding his personal involvement. “In that war my Father fought, and I can speak advisedly thereof,” he writes. In fact, in the beginning of *Ninety-Three*, written in 1874, the setting of the first scene, which lays the foundations of the whole novel, makes it clear on which side Eco’s Model Reader is supposed to place him or herself. We meet some volunteers, brave Parisian soldiers of the Red Cap battalion, who take pity on and adopt three young orphans. These people embody humanity, while the author introduces the enemy, which has not yet appeared, as follows:

The forest of La Saudraie was tragic. It was in its copses that, from the month of November, 1792, civil war commenced its crimes. Mousqueton, the ferocious cripple, came out of its fatal shades. The list of the murders that had been committed there was enough to make one’s hair stand on end [17].

When members of the counter-revolutionary peasant army of the Vendée turn up in person, their description makes one feel repugnance for them in the very first moment: there were “some with a ferocious look, all with an open one.” The leader of the enemy is the Marquis de Lantenac, who gives evidence of his mercilessness already on the Corvette Claymore: first, he awards the artillery-sergeant who stopped the runaway cannon, then he executes the same man as the person responsible for the accident. As head of the peasant troops, he raises the cry: “Kill! burn! no quarter!” Subsequently, in order to make this crystal clear and have this made common practice (and not to leave the readers in doubt), he immediately has the red-capped captives killed:

“What is to be done with the wounded?”

“Put an end to them.”

“What shall we do with the prisoners?”

“Shoot them.”

“There are about eighty.”

“Shoot the whole.”

“There are two women.”

“Them also.”

“There are three children.”

“Carry them off. We will see what shall be done with them” ([17], pp. 81, 84, 89).

The central conflict of *Ninety-Three* stretches therefore between humanity and inhumanity. Humanity is represented by the Republican soldiers, although it would be more logical if this were *vice versa*, since it was the Republicans that arrived with weapons to the villages and woods of the Vendée and Brittany. Lantenac, however, commits a tragic error (*hamartia*) by shooting the injured, the captives and the women, which turns the sympathy of the Model Reader against the Whites.

Honoré de Balzac’s political position is different from that of Hugo. For Hugo, 1793 is the moral zenith that can only be compared to Thermopylae. Having reached this, the fall of the Jacobins is followed by Gomorrah, and Paris, formerly the city of free and benevolent residents, has become the city of tarts and cutpurses ([17], pp. 95–96). On the contrary, Balzac is a Thermidorian (he claims that after Robespierre’s fall, Thermidor 9, the Revolution became more gentle), even a Bonapartist: with

respect to the events of Brumaire 18, he announces that “the national energy revived” [18]. Nevertheless, in the battle fought between the Revolution and the counter-revolution, Balzac also takes sides with the Revolution. In his view, the Revolution represents France, as well as the universal principle of freedom in this fight.

Thus in his novel, *The Chouans* (1829), the Republicans are morally superior to the Royalists’ Breton peasant army. We are already in 1799. The Chouans find every excuse for looting. The sympathy readers could start feeling for them when reading about their holy mass celebrated in the woods is immediately destroyed by effects of the Jesuit monk’s sermon. Royalist leaders want rank and promotion. One of them wants to hang each and every revolutionary. From a romantic aspect, their only merit is that they fight for a lost cause. Still, they lack “the magnificent simplicity,” which is characteristic of “the successful men of the Republic.” This is also the opinion of the Republican secret agent, Marie: “For God’s sake, leave cruelty to the aristocrats; Republics should be generous.” In the end, her lover, the Marquis de Montauran, leader of the Royalists, also gets branded with this infamy, this being the moral cause behind his fall. Even though he earlier pledged his word for their safety, Montauran gives his subsequent assent to the slaughtering of the Republican soldiers. Moreover, writes Balzac, “the savagery, and even the treachery of this military execution [...] corresponded with the secret wishes of his heart” ([18], pp. 177, 199, 276).

Just as in Hugo’s novel, embodied by Gauvain and Cimourdain, a duality appears in the Republican camp in the person of Hulot, the generous officer, and the detective Corentin, a representative of Fouché’s scheming. Yet here, unlike in *Ninety-Three*, it is clear that Hulot gets the upper hand, expels Corentin, and negotiates a compromise with the Royalists who give up on their anti-national position. Montauran is dying, and his last will is that his younger brother shall not fight against France. Thus, at the end of *The Chouans*, some kind of a Bonapartist compromise seems to come to life, which would have been completely unacceptable for Hugo.

From the overview of the two novels, it seems that the authors assert their political preferences in the plot by creating figures and relating events, which influence the Model Reader’s sympathies on a moral basis. The Royalists, who slaughter prisoners of war and threaten children with a death by fire, are contrasted with noble characters of generous behaviour. The moral standing of the parties is evident from the first moment on, and, in both novels, the Royalists commit a tragic error, which justifies their final failure. Hugo’s novel is not only more monumental but it also offers deeper insights than Balzac’s. Hugo does not paint us a Revolution that is snow-white, but applying clever and effective narrative tools, he absolves it from its crimes at least in part—and in a large part, at that.

Similarly to literary representations, the configuration of the dramatic space (or story space), the presentation of the characters and the situation for the readers is of pivotal importance in historical works, too. This is well demonstrated by the book, *Reflections on the Civil War*, written in 1969 by the Polish historian Pawel Jasienica [19]. Its first episode is the description of the massacre in Machecoul, committed by the Whites: for several days, thirty executions took place daily, some of which were realized with a particular brutality, and altogether five hundred people fell victim to them. However, the Polish historian immediately remarks that the man in charge of these cruelties learned these methods in revolutionary Paris during the massacres of September 1792; then he also adds that the Blues were no better either, rather even worse, for they executed their enemies in the same way right after the Machecoul case in Pornic, and, at the end of the rebellion, in Nantes. Here, thirteen thousand

people out of the hundred thousand residents fell victim to the terror: five thousand of them, among them four hundred children, were simply drowned. Since Jasienica's sympathy is with the Vendée side, he cannot let the horrors of Machecoul be imprinted into his readers' minds. On the one hand, he compensates for these with the description of an even more brutal massacre with a greater number of victims, although that happened much later, thus tilting the moral balance. On the other hand, concerning the methods of the terror, he puts the blame on the *sans-culottes* of Paris and claims that the Whites only copied their cruel and brutal example. Afterwards, he makes it clear that the principal culprit is the one who had invented these methods. He recalls Barnave's sentence uttered in the Convention in the summer of 1789, with which he legitimated two lynch cases: "Was the blood which has been shed then so pure" ([19], pp. 20–30, quotation: 30)?

The Polish author stands on the Vendée's side not only because it was the uprising of the people, but because he, in fact, also refers to the Bolsheviks when speaking about the French revolutionaries. This is why he claims that "the main reason behind the uprising in the Vendée was the general practice that life was cruelly squeezed within the limits of a doctrinarian approach." This was demonstrated by the conscriptions when earlier freedoms were overridden, by the reorganization of the Church, by the intolerably drastic action taken against royalty, which had been considered holy. This is the reason why Jasienica's book could not be published even in Polish before 1985. It is as if he was talking about the Communists, or existing Socialism in general, when he presents his final conclusion:

A society that has lost decency shall not hold up for long. That is, a society in which everyone must be overseen by a supervisor, who does not keep his hands in the pockets at all. A society in which you cannot believe anyone's word and cannot count on anyone. The long-term dominance of fear, denunciations, theft and lies necessarily leads to the dismantling of the society ([19], pp. 42–65, 143, quotations: pp. 42, 143).

The Polish historian was not, and perhaps could not be in 1969, entirely in favour of the counter-revolution. He favours partly the French Revolution that supplied the "foundations" on which "the whole comfortable 19th century [...] lies," but writes that "those foundations were washed with a needless amount of blood" ([19], pp. 10–11, 80–81, quotations: pp. 80–81). Yet, is it possible to separate these from each other? Can Gauvain exist without Cimourdain? Hardly. John Haycraft's narrative is not completely devoid of this ambivalence either. His book, *In Search of the French Revolution* (1989), can be considered as the Baedeker of the French Revolution [20]. He visits its sites and reflects on the events that took place there. His work is emphatically personal due particularly to the parts in which he describes his journey. This immediately removes the text from the register of historical writings and brings it closer to the less respected journalistic narratives, thus making it possible that it should not to be taken seriously, and that its historical statements can be dismissed.

Concerning the chapters about the Vendée, it is again essential to know how the initial situation is described for the Model Reader. The spiral of violence was started by the Blues, claims Haycraft, when they started conscription and shot into the crowd demonstrating against this. The Whites were more merciful than the Blues, as, for example, to their prisoners of war. The single exception was Souchu's massacre in Machecoul, where the number of victims totalled five hundred. (The inhumane sins of the two sides compare therefore in the form of rule and exception: as a rule, the Whites are merciful, and it is only exceptional when Blues become victims.) The journey of the peasant army of the Vendée is transcendentalised into a sort of Way of Sorrows from the point on when they turn back

from the bank of the English Channel. There they should have waited only four more days until the English arrived. However, they marched back hungry in the freezing cold with their wives and children, and suffered one defeat after another. Haycraft describes the reprisals following the collapse of the revolt as a genocide, and compares it to the Holocaust. The detailed description of these inhumane brutalities is sure to have an effect on the readers: at Le Petit Luc, 107 out of 563 victims were under the age of seven; at Chanzeau, women fell victim to the terror; at Vezin, 1,500 died, among them the wounded; at Angers, the number of victims is 1,200; while at Nantes, the butchers of the Blues drown their victims in the Loire using industrialized methods ([20], pp. 166–74, 180–7).

Jasienica estimates the number of the victims of the civil war as two hundred thousand ([19], p. 160). Simon Schama writes (based on Jean-Clement Martin's findings) a quarter of a million [21], while according to the *Dictionnaire historique*, it totalled five hundred and fifty thousand [22]. However, it is not the numbers that decide the case—it is too difficult to grasp their weight anyway. It is evident that it is not those authors whose final estimation of the victims is lower who will find an excuse for the Blues, and it is not the author who gives credit to a higher figure who will end up on the side of the Whites. It is the author's *a priori* standpoint that is decisive. According to this, the author's text may orientate the Model Reader to one particular political position. It depends on the narration how the readers will position themselves.

5. A Small, but Significant Difference: The Co-authorship of the Sources

Schama's monumental *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, published in 1989 relates the story of the French Revolution from its antecedents to Robespierre's fall. In fact, he accepts Tocqueville's argument that in the long run the Revolution was nothing more than a bloody and unnecessary *détour*: the foundations of nineteenth-century France had already been laid by 1789, there was no need for the Revolution in order to accomplish modernization. In Schama's book, the events in the Vendée also receive a complete chapter and some more pages in the chapter on reprisals. The discussion (similarly to Jasienica's presentation) starts with a detailed description of the massacre in Machecoul, which we see through the eyes of a child who witnessed the whole event. The Model Reader's sympathy, therefore, is turned towards the patriotic citizens of this small town:

The constitutional priest [23] Le Tort was pulled from his church and stabbed in the face with a bayonet for ten minutes before he was finished off. [...] Chains of prisoners were formed by passing ropes under their arms in the infamous 'rosaries' by which they were dragged to fields outside the town, made to dig ditches and then shot so that they fell neatly into their graves ([21], pp. 691–92).

In what follows, Schama provides a lengthy analysis why it was in the Vendée that the revolt erupted: the factors he takes into consideration are the conscription, the question of religion and special local conditions. Although he has already pointed out in the first part of his text, thus putting both parties on an equal footing, "how similar the gruesome events at Machecoul were to comparable acts of violent retribution committed by the Republican side," the weight of this single sentence (which still blames the Whites for starting the terror) cannot equal the effect of the detailed description of the massacre in Machecoul. The text that discusses the second phase of the revolt is significantly shorter than the previous one. This comes in the book right after the story of the retribution for the revolt in

Lyon. At that point, the Model Reader of Schama's book is already in a very different state of mind, since Schama has already confronted him with the brutalities of revolutionary terror. And the retribution that comes after the revolt in the Vendée is worse than anything previously experienced:

Every atrocity that time could imagine was meted out to the defenseless population. Women were routinely raped, children killed, both mutilated. To save the powder General Cordellier ordered his men to do their work with the saber rather than the gun. At Gonnord on January 23rd, General Crouzat's column forced two hundred old people, along with mothers and children, to kneel in front of a large pit they had dug; they were then shot so as to tumble into their own grave. Some who attempted to flee were struck down by the hammer of a local Patriot mason. Thirty children and two women were buried alive when earth was shoveled onto the pit ([21], pp. 693–700, 791, quotations: 693, 791).

Having written all this, it is as if the author felt that something had completely turned round, felt the need to take a step back, and consciously retreat from his own narrative, in order to draw the conclusions:

It is not necessary, though, to accept Reynald Sécher's characterization of the massacres as 'genocide' to see that a human catastrophe of colossal proportions occurred in the Vendée in the year II that demands a substantial upward revision of the fatalities.

Confronted with evidence of an apocalypse, it does historians no credit to look aside in the name of scholarly objectivity. True, events in the Vendée were in the nature of a war (though the butchery was at its worst after the battles were over); true, the Vendéean rebels themselves committed their share of massacres in the early stages of the rising. But whatever claims on political virtue the French Revolution may make on the historian's sympathy, none can be so strong as to justify, to any degree, the unconscionable slaughters of the winter of the year II. Still less does it seem right to shunt off the history of the Vendée into a special category of works set aside from the rest of the history of the Revolution, as though it were some sort of aberration. The exterminations practised there were, in fact, the logical outcome of an ideology that progressively dehumanized its adversaries and that had become incapable of seeing any middle ground between total triumph and utter eclipse ([21], pp. 791–92).

It seems that Schama started discussing the counter-revolutionary revolt in the Vendée in a 'traditional' way which necessarily turns the Model Reader's sympathy towards the Blues. Either as a result of a spontaneous process or a premeditated turn, which would not surprise taking Schama's sympathies into consideration, he seems to have changed his mind, as though under the weight of all the facts he was obliged to enumerate. Doing so, he did not accept the slaughters the rebels committed, since they are as unacceptable and unforgivable as the ones committed by the Republican troops, but he changed his overall judgment on the whole issue. He did not make the history of the Vendée an epopee as a counter-revolutionary author would do, but in the end both Schama's and his Model Reader's sympathy were turned towards the counter-revolutionaries.

As we have seen in the first sections of this essay, neither their subject matter nor their methods offer readers a clear guidance if they wish to distinguish texts produced by history and those by literature. Mixing real and fictitious elements on the one hand (the way Rosenstone, Schama, Demos or Bisha do) and the use of narrative techniques to enforce their ideas when writing the history of a specific subject on the other (as the historians of the revolt in the Vendée do), suggests the basic

similarity of historical and literary texts. However, Schama's text on the counter-revolution in the Vendée points to a significant difference.

It is not only, as Koselleck argued, that historians are not allowed to contradict their primary sources (those accepted as reliable by the scholarly community), but more than that, they may force historians to change their original outlook: they can essentially act as co-authors. Though texts usually distinguished as literary and historical narratives may be seen as different colours of the same spectrum, historians as authors have an actual advantage over writers of fiction, as is manifested by Schama's narrative on the Vendée: the weight of their sources may persuade them to change their initial positions. In this way history, but only *good* history, can be distinguished from literature, despite the fact that both mix real and fictitious elements and use the same narrative techniques.

Arguing against Dorrit Cohn, Alun Munslow insists on the historian's authorship ([3], p. 7). This essay suggests that, although historians are authors and the past or its traces will never guide their pen to form their narrative, on certain occasions these sources could make their presence felt in such a way that they are entitled to a co-authorship of the historical narrative. To build on this latent specificity of writing history, historians should approach their sources with an open mind, let themselves be influenced, even be directed by them, and let themselves be dissuaded from their preconceptions—as they, in fact, have always been advised [24].

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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2. Robert Merle. *Fortune de France*. Paris: Plon, 1977, p. 16.
3. See, for example, Alun Munslow. *Narrative and History*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 5–6.
4. Robert Merle. *En nos vertes années*. Paris: Plon, 1979.
5. Alun Munslow. "Introduction." In *Authoring the Past: Writing and Rethinking History*. Edited by Alun Munslow. Abingdon: Routledge, 2013, p. 1.
6. In the first volume of the series, Pierre first talks about his father then recalls his own later memories from Montpellier, relates the story in the following way: "He was forced to flee from the city two days before the defence of his thesis, since he was afraid that he would have his last look at the sky through the hangman's halter, then having then his body quartered and, as was the local custom, hung on the olive trees where the road enters the outskirts of the city; this made a

particular impression on me when on a sunny morning in June I entered myself this lovely city, and I caught sight of the rotting remains of female corpses, hanged on branches to make an example; and the trees were not ashamed to yield their fruits.” ([2], p. 13.)

7. Merle might have used either of the editions of the source publication that treats the Montpellier memories of both Platters, e.g., *Felix et Thomas Platter à Montpellier (1552–1557 et 1595–1599)*. Edited by C. Coulet. Montpellier: Publications de la société des bibliophiles de Montpellier, 1982, or the complete text of the son’s memoirs: *Mémoires de Felix Platter*. Geneva: J.-G. Fick, 1866. It is also a possibility that he used one of the various German editions.
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22. Dominique Vallaud. *Dictionnaire historique*. Paris: Fayard, 1995, p. 958.
23. A priest who had taken an oath on the Constitution.
24. As Hans-Georg Gadamer wrote in 1960: “The important thing is to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings.” (Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004, p. 271.)