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ADJUDICATING BETWEEN COMPETING SOCIAL DESCRIPTIONS: THE
CRITICAL, EMPIRICAL AND NARRATIVE DIMENSIONS (WITH AN
APPLICATION TO MARXISM)

City University of New York

PH.D.

1980

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ADJUDICATING BETWEEN COMPETING SOCIAL DESCRIPTIONS:
THE CRITICAL, EMPIRICAL AND NARRATIVE DIMENSIONS
(WITH AN APPLICATION TO MARXISM)

by

NANCY FRASER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in Philosophy in partial fulfill-
ment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy, The City Univer-
sity of New York.

1980

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1980

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 26, 1960
date

Marshall Cole
Chairman of Examining Committee

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ABSTRACT

It is often presupposed that choices between competing theories, interpretations, actions or whatever qualify as rational just in case they result from the application of some decision-procedure. I take issue with this assumption when what is at stake is choosing between competing descriptions of social reality. I argue that there is not and cannot be a decision-procedure governing such choices, but that such choices may nonetheless be rational and intersubjectively defensible.

I counterpose to the decision-procedure model of social description adjudication a hermeneutical model. I show that good and convincing reasons for preferring one social description or historical interpretation to another need not be strictly derivable from or translatable into a set of universal rules capable of being formulated independently of and in advance of the consideration of the particular case. I show, rather, that rational adjudication between competing social descriptions consists in creative rule-transcending judgment akin to Aristotelian phronesis or Kantian reflective judgment.

My argument for a hermeneutical approach to social description adjudication is made largely via consideration of a series of examples. I look at a collection of rival accounts of the same portion of social reality and at the process of choosing between them. I consider the sorts of reasons and arguments that might be advanced for preferring one to another and I evaluate them. The descriptions I look at are accounts of the French Revolution of 1848 and they include Karl Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Bonaparte, Victor Hugo's Napoleon the Little, Gustave Flaubert's Sentimental Education and the works of two recent twentieth century social historians.

I show that these descriptions are complexes of at least three analytically distinct components: critical, empirical and narrative. I show, therefore, that the choice between them can be made from at least three corresponding standpoints. But I also argue that these three dimensions are not independent of one another; each, rather, presupposes the others and none is foundational with respect to the others. Adjudicating between competing social descriptions, then, turns out to be a complex non-canonical process of weighing the relative merits within each dimension.

An important consideration which runs through the adjudication process in each dimension is that of insight

vs. blindness. Whether it is a question of deciding if one description is a persuasive critique of another, or which of two rivals is more adequate empirically, or which is a more plausible and convincing narrative, one is always involved in assessing how far and how much each of the accounts permits us to see. The centrality of this notion certifies the inescapably hermeneutical character of social description adjudication. It precludes the possibility of a decision-procedure, but not of rationality. The alternative to a canonical method of description adjudication is not relativism but hermeneutics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation owes its existence, at least in part, to the generous financial support provided by two institutions. The Philosophy Department of Hunter College of the City University of New York in effect underwrote the research for the project by having me as a Graduate Teaching Fellow from 1975 to 1978. The writing of the work, on the other hand, was made possible by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation through its unusually liberal Dissertation Year Fellowship, which I held from 1978 to 1980. I am very grateful to both of these institutions and to the individuals associated with them. Especially helpful and supportive were Professors Peter Caws and Joseph J. Kockelmans of the American Thyssen Philosophy Group.

I wish also to acknowledge support of another kind, less material but no less crucial. A large number of persons gave of their time and intelligence in discussions with me and in reading and criticizing various drafts of portions of the manuscript. Among these were Professors Stefan Baumrin, Marshall Cohen, Robert S. Cohen, Arthur Collins, Henry LeRoy Finch, and Andrew McLaughlin. Two others, Professors Richard J. Bernstein and Peter Caws,

must be singled out for service above and beyond the call of duty. It is no exaggeration to say that their support--both intellectual and moral--was essential to the completion of the dissertation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The standard view of what a rational choice between two or more alternatives looks like can be called the "decision-procedure picture of rationality." This picture understands a choice as rational insofar as it results from the application of a rule or set of rules. These rules must be universal in form, capable of being formulated in advance of their application in any given case and independent of such applications. Indeed, it is precisely the universal, independent and pre-established character of the rules comprising a decision-procedure which, on this view, guarantees the rationality of the choices it determines. If the method could not be stated in advance and in terms independent of the particulars of the case, then the process of choosing would be ad hoc. There would be no common decision-making structure to insure that each case was not being handled dissimilarly. So inconsistency could not be definitively ruled out. And since it could therefore turn out that certain choices might be made in ways inconsistent with the ways in which other choices were made, then the choosing process could

not be considered rational.

Such is the way the decision-procedure picture of rationality understands rational choice. It is a model which has long dominated philosophical thinking. Whether the field is logic or ethics or philosophy of science or whatever, the presumption has usually been that to be rational is to be in possession of a canonical method of adjudication meeting certain formal requirements. It is required that such a method be universal, consistent and uniquely determining. In other words, to be rational is to apply a method which uniquely determines the next move or step at every point and which does so in the same way for anyone whomsoever and which yields a single answer.

In ethics, for example, both utilitarianism and Kantianism have aspired to be adjudication methods in the sense of decision-procedures. Each, that is, aspired to articulate a rule or set of rules to be applied in the same way by everyone in every case to determine the same answer to questions of the form: Ought one to do A or B? Each sought a rule or set of rules capable of being formulated in advance of and independently of its application in any given case.

Similarly, in the philosophy of science, Hempel and Popper each sought and proposed a decision-procedure

to guarantee the rationality of theory choice. The former proffered a positivist confirmation strategy, while the latter proffered a falsificationist strategy. But that difference was perhaps less significant than the agreement that without a method consisting of universal, pre-established rules to be applied in a fully specified way, the preference for one theory over another would be arbitrary and non-rational.

One could go on to cite other areas in which the decision-procedure model of rationality has been pre-eminent, so preeminent indeed as to have been shared by all or most major antagonists. Political theory, philosophy of social science, philosophy of law, even aesthetics, have each, at some time or another, been under the sway of this picture. In each, that is, the premise has been accepted that without a decision-procedure, choices could not be rationally justified. The alternative to having a decision-procedure, it was or is thought, is relativism. If we cannot justify our choices by appeal to a canonical method, then we cannot justify them at all. If option A cannot be certified as superior to option B via such a method, then it can only be that A is not superior to B. To put it more generally and alarmingly, without a decision-procedure any choice is as good as any other. Or, in more recent parlance, "anything goes."

This all or nothing view is, in my view, the source of a great deal of present day philosophical anxiety and confusion. There is widespread recognition, at least among many philosophers in many fields, that we simply do not, indeed more radically cannot, have decision-procedures to adjudicate our choices. One source of this recognition has been the realization that rules do not wear on their sleeves, as it were, their own mode of application. Wittgenstein was perhaps influential in emphasizing that a rule cannot logically determine its own mode of application. He showed that given any rule or set of rules, a multiplicity of application strategies is always logically possible. So it seems that something's having the form of a canonical method does not guarantee that everyone will always apply it in the same way. Deviant applications cannot be proven "wrong" since the only thing that justifies the more usual mode of application is the purely contingent fact of its widespread use in a given form of life. In other words, the necessity that seemed to attach to decision-procedure outcomes turns out to be irreducibly conventional.

There is another source of the recognition that we lack and are not likely to acquire decision-procedures to certify our choices as rational. This is the recent widespread acceptance of philosophical holism and the corres-

ponding rejection of atomism. The decision-procedure picture presumes the existence of and the possibility of access to arbiters which are external to and therefore neutral between the rival options. In the case of adjudicating between competing scientific theories, A and B, for example, both Hempel and Popper presuppose observations which were independent of, external to and neutral with respect to both. Otherwise how could such observations be expected to rationally arbitrate between them?

Nowadays, however, this atomism is under attack. It is widely argued that there can be no such neutral arbiters because observations are always made and described from the perspective of some holistic structure or another. Such observations are therefore in some sense internal to that structure and are not neutral in a contest between that structure and some rival structure. This in effect rules out the use of decision-procedures in scientific theory choice and elsewhere insofar as they depend upon the possibility of external neutral arbiters.

So it seems that if it should turn out, as is likely, that some version of conventionalism and/or holism is true, then the rationality of our choices cannot be certified via decision procedures. But we have seen that the standard view is that the rationality of a choice

consists precisely in its being dictated by a decision-procedure. It follows, then, that on the standard view, rationality is defeated and relativism reigns supreme. For on this view, in the absence of a decision-procedure, no option can be shown to be better than any other; "anything goes."

It is no surprise, then, that given the widespread currency of conventionalism and holism, and given also the at least implicit acceptance of the decision-procedure picture of rationality, relativism of the most nihilistic sort is currently enjoying a renaissance. But is it really the case that this is our only remaining alternative? Is the decision-procedure/relativism dilemma really exhaustive and unavoidable?

It is my view, and the view defended in this work, that having acknowledged the impossibility of decision-procedures, we need not embrace relativism of the "anything goes" variety. It is my view, rather, that we can still justify our choices as rational, provided we are willing to adopt a different picture of the nature of rational choice. This other picture I call the "hermeneutical picture of rationality."

Unlike relativism, on the hermeneutical picture choices are justified in terms of reasons which have intersubjective validity. But unlike the decision-procedure

picture, these reasons are neither translatable into nor derivable from a set of universal rules constituting a canonical method. The reasons advanced in hermeneutical choice justification are not strictly speaking separable from the particulars of the case. They are not, that is, instances of general rules. Or, when they implicitly refer to universal values (say simplicity or comprehensiveness or fairness or whatever), they do not at the same time presuppose a pre-established hierarchy determining the relative weighting of such values. In other words, the hermeneutical picture of rationality partakes of precisely the sort of ad hoc character which the decision-procedure picture sought to exclude. The precise form the reasoning will take cannot be spelled out in advance; it is not independent of the particulars of the case.

Still, I think, this does not mean that choices so justified are non-rational. On the contrary, I hope to show that such choices can have intersubjective validity as established by rational argument and discussion.

That being established as the general standpoint and aim of the present work, it remains to discuss the specifics. Rather than present here a full-scale defense of the hermeneutical picture of rationality in general, I concentrate upon its appropriateness in one domain: that

of adjudicating between competing social descriptions and/or historical interpretations. I begin by taking as a given the holistic critique of atomistic empiricism. I assume, that is, the inescapable interpretation-laden character of social description, the impossibility of appeal to "bare data," and hence the lack of neutral arbiters for deciding between interpretations across conflicting conceptual frameworks. I assume, therefore, that no decision-procedure or canonical method could decide such cases.

But while accepting the critique of atomistic empiricism as its starting point, the present work questions the relativistic conclusions many want to draw from it. It questions, that is, the assumption that the impossibility of a decision-procedure governing interpretation choice is tantamount to the impossibility of any and all rational standards and methods of adjudication. It seeks to show how it may nonetheless be possible to rationally adjudicate between conflicting historical interpretations or social descriptions, notwithstanding the soundness of the critique of atomistic empiricism. It seeks to show, then, that relativism and/or subjectivism are not the only remaining alternatives.

This means that the present work takes up such questions as the following: How, despite the inescapable

category-laden character of social description, can rational judgments concerning empirical adequacy be made? How can the relative adequacy or inadequacy, the relative strengths or weaknesses, of conflicting social descriptions be rationally adjudged, despite the impossibility of a decision-procedure? How can an account of description adjudication steer clear of both the Scylla of relativism and the Charybdis of, e.g., Hempelian positivism?

The thesis of this work is that we can make rational judgments about the adequacy and inadequacy, the weaknesses and strengths of conflicting social descriptions. We can, despite the lack of a decision-procedure, rationally adjudicate between conflicting interpretations. It does not follow from the impossibility of neutral external arbiters that there are or can be no means of arbitration whatsoever. It does not follow from the "underdetermination" of theory that any interpretation or description is as good as any other and that there are no rational grounds for deciding among alternatives. It is not the case that the only alternative to a Hempelian or Popperian decision-procedure is relativism or subjectivism.

The present work, then, explores how conflicting social descriptions or interpretations can be adjudicated. It seeks to sift out the component strands of social des-

criptions, to reveal what sorts of judgments are involved in comparative evaluation and to develop a picture of what a hermeneutical approach to adjudication might look like. It attempts this while doing justice, it is hoped, to the inherent multiplicity of alternative descriptions or interpretations of social reality, given the inherent multiplicity of alternative conceptual frameworks, narrative techniques, and critical interests which can be brought to bear upon the understanding of social reality. It seeks to carve out a space between atomistic empiricism and relativism in which conflicting social descriptions can be rationally but hermeneutically adjudicated. It seeks thus to show that commitments to rationality and pluralism need not be mutually exclusive.

Every stage of the argument developed in the following pages involves what is in effect a two-pronged attack. On the one hand, and contra the decision-procedure picture, the pluralist theme is sounded: the wideness of the variety of alternative descriptions is insisted upon and canonical adjudication procedures are therefore ruled out. On the other hand, and contra the relativists, the rationality theme recurs: the possibility of grasping, sorting out and rationally adjudicating between the great plurality of social descriptions is

demonstrated. These, then, are the two poles of the argument which underlies the present work. A few additional words about each are in order.

The first prong of the attack (that directed against the decision-procedure picture) involves showing that social description is rather more complex than has often been supposed. Critics of atomistic empiricism, of course, have emphasized an irreducible conceptual element. But this is by no means the only analyzable component of description. The present work shows that social description may also presuppose the operation of narrative techniques and conventions; and it shows that description may further involve a critical element such that it develops a picture of social reality at least in part via a critique of possible rival descriptions. Moreover, the possibility is left open of still further additional analyzable components of social description beyond the conceptual, narrative and critical components identified here.

The picture of social description as a complex with several analytically distinct components implies a far greater plurality of alternative descriptions than is usually admitted. Again, the critic of Hempelian positivism recognizes the possibility of a plurality of conflicting descriptions deriving from a plurality of incommensurable

conceptual frameworks. But the conceptual is not the only axis along which alternatives can be plotted. Each analytically distinct component of description constitutes a dimension which likewise admits of alternatives. Thus, there are pluralities of possible narrative frameworks and of possible critical interests which can inform social descriptions. Each of these dimensions--the conceptual, the narrative and the critical--is in effect a variable which can instantiate a plurality of values and hence generate a plurality of conflicting social descriptions.

If social description is more complex than has usually been supposed, and if the range of possible conflicting descriptions is therefore greater than has usually been supposed, then surely the process of adjudicating between conflicting descriptions is likewise more complex than has usually been supposed. The choice between, say, two conflicting descriptions will involve sorting out for comparison the analytically distinct components of each, adducing considerations appropriate to the comparative evaluation of each pair of components, and integrating the results of these sub-adjudications so as to produce an overall judgment of adequacy/inadequacy, relative strength/weakness or whatever. The second step, it will be apparent, may involve the comparative evaluation

of incommensurable conceptual, narrative and critical frameworks. In that case, it is clear that no decision-procedure can govern the adjudication process.

The foregoing concerns the first prong of our attack, that directed against the decision-procedure view. The second, which is directed against relativism, involves showing that the complexity and multi-dimensional pluralism of social description does not immunize it against any and every form of rational adjudication. For one thing, it can be shown that it is indeed possible to sort out and analyze the analytically distinct components of conflicting social descriptions, that the complexity is not such as to defy human reason. Then, too, it can be shown that there are cases in which alternative descriptions share enough to conflict but not enough to be amenable to a decision-procedure; and that in these epistemologically significant cases it is possible to rationally debate the relative merits of the conflicting descriptions, to give reasons and arguments in support of one's preferences, and to arrive at intersubjectively valid consensus.

Of course, it cannot be denied that what counts as a good reason or a good argument in description adjudication will vary with the dimension under consideration. Thus comparative evaluation across incommensurable concep-

tual frameworks will differ from that across incommensurable narrative frameworks and both of these in turn will differ from that across incommensurable critical interests. But this in itself does not make any of these modes of adjudication less rational.

Perhaps a more serious difficulty is the following: even within any single dimension (be it the conceptual, narrative or critical), what counts as a good reason or argument is not fixed once and for all. In some cases one may wish to give greater weight to, say, comprehensiveness and less to, say, simplicity, while under other circumstances it may seem more appropriate to weight these values differently. It is (in part) this flexibility which precludes the possibility of a decision-procedure here. The justification of judgments in description adjudication is not by appeal to universal, formalizable methodological rules which can be stated independently of the cases to which they putatively apply.

But it does not follow that "anything goes." The fact that what is a good reason or argument in one case may not be so good in another case neither makes it any less good in the first case nor any less bad in the second. Reasons and arguments in description adjudication can still be justified. Their justification is by appeal

to their appropriateness (or inappropriateness) to the particulars of the case or cases under consideration. One points to the features of the specific texts and their interrelations which conduce to the handling of adjudication better in one way than in another. Methodological discussion, then, is more concrete than it is usually thought to be; it tends to shade into substantive discussion. But this does not mean that it is irrational or otherwise defective. Only a too close and mistaken identification of reason with formal argumentation yields that unfortunate conclusion.

It follows that to be "against method" (in the sense of formal rules constituting a decision-procedure) is not necessarily to be an anarchist. The proper alternative to the decision-procedure picture is not an irrational subjectivism or relativism but rather hermeneutics. The picture of description adjudication presented here is entirely in the spirit of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Truth and Method. Gadamer argues that hermeneutics partakes of a distinctive kind of rationality which shares some features of Aristotle's phronesis and Kant's reflective judgment. Its modus operandi is not the subsumption of particulars as instances under universal rules, but rather the grasping of particulars in their individuality so that they in effect codetermine,

supplement and correct the universals.

The present work proposes an approach to description adjudication which partakes of the sort of rationality that Gadamer has in mind. Certainly, it will not satisfy those who take a decision-procedure as the sole manifestation of rationality. But that, it is presupposed here, is an inadequate view of reason. In many areas, including that which is the subject of the present work, to insist on mechanical rule-following is the height of irrationality. When it comes to adjudication between conflicting social descriptions or historical interpretations, it is precisely creative rule-transcending judgment appropriate to the case at hand which constitutes rationality.

The present work, then, opposes both atomistic empiricism, with its would-be canonical methods, and also radical incommensurability theory, with its relativism, anarchism, and ultimate nihilism. The thesis that rational adjudication between competing social descriptions is possible via a kind of hermeneutical sensitivity to the concrete is not argued, by and large, in the epistemological mode. Rather, it is argued in the main via extended treatment of concrete cases of description adjudication. In what follows, some conflicting social descriptions are considered in detail;

their various components (critical, conceptual and narrative) are sorted out and contrasted; and some interpretive arguments that might be given in support of preferences for one over the others are proposed and evaluated.

This concrete, exemplary mode of argument, however philosophically unorthodox, is appropriate for the task of working out the implications of the critique of the decision-procedure approach to description adjudication. It is becoming one of the preferred modes of argument in anti-atomistic philosophy of science as well. This is because in rejecting the possibility of a decision-procedure, we in effect assume that an acceptable picture of description adjudication will not and cannot take the form of a formal, abstract criterial statement. We no longer look for an atemporal standard that will solve the problem of description adjudication once and for all. Rather, we seek to show that the lack of such decision-procedures or formal solutions is no barrier to effective adjudication in concrete cases that arise and are of interest to us. This, of course, is more properly shown than said.

What follows can be read as a series of elaborate counter-examples against the view that without a decision-procedure, there can be no rational adjudication. The

mode of concrete, exemplary argument, as developed in the present work, is the appropriate and natural medium for developing a counter-thesis that maintains the rationality of adjudication while denying the possibility of codifying that rationality in a set of formal methodological rules.

It follows that the present project differs substantially from the effort to propose and defend a philosophical theory of truth. Important and legitimate as the latter project is, it is not taken up here. Here we are concerned less with the theory of truth than with the effective practice of description adjudication. Yet this effective, practical orientation is not unrelated to the theoretical enterprise. It could with some justice be said to get at the sorts of existential problems which underlie the latter. For surely it is at least in part our concern to justify our judgments about and interpretations of social reality against a felt proliferation of alternatives which leads us to seek a philosophical theory of truth in the first place. In addressing itself directly to the latter enterprise, the present work, then, is distinct from, yet at the same time related to, more standard philosophical work.

It remains to explain the nature of the concrete cases to be examined and to sketch the plan of attack. The

descriptions which comprise our exemplars all concern the rise and fall of the French Second Republic. That is, they treat the French Revolution of 1848 and the subsequent events leading up to the coup d'état of Louis-Bonaparte on December 2, 1851. Some are descriptions by contemporary observers and participants; others are by twentieth century scholars with far less apparent personal stake in the subject matter. One is an historical novel which describes the social reality of the Second Republic via a fictional narrative; the rest are putatively true, factual accounts. Some are outstanding classics; others are largely forgotten or obscure.

It is a collection of descriptions comprising a great variety of conceptual frameworks, critical interests and narrative strategies. Adjudication, therefore, turns out to be the very complex affair we have anticipated and prepared for.

By and large, we will treat the descriptions in pairs and will focus on one of the three identified dimensions for each pair. The divisions are as follows: we begin by trying to adjudicate between Karl Marx's The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Bonaparte and Victor Hugo's Napoleon the Little in terms of the critical dimension; we see how the critical component of social description can be analytically isolated and evaluated through a reading

of Marx's text as a critique of Hugo's. This is roughly the content of Chapter II. In the course of this adjudication attempt, we come up against the irreducible empirical component of description. That dimension is then taken up as the next stage of inquiry in Chapter III. Here there is an attempt to adjudicate in terms of empirical adequacy between Marx's description and those of some recent twentieth century social historians with incommensurable conceptual frameworks. This project naturally leads us to the recognition of an irreducible narrative component of social description. That, in turn, becomes the explicit theme of Chapters IV and V. The former isolates and analyzes the narrative component of The Eighteenth Brumaire. The latter does the same for Gustave Flaubert's Sentimental Education and then considers how the two descriptions can be adjudicated despite their incommensurable narrative structures. Finally, the results are summarized and integrated in Chapter VI.

We can anticipate the conclusions by pointing out here that although each dimension of description involves its own proper adjudication considerations, there is something which emerges as common to all three. In every case, an important value is how much each of the rival descriptions permits us to see, how far each goes in making accessible to us areas of social reality which were otherwise

closed off to us. Whether we are adjudicating from the critical, empirical-conceptual or narrative point of view, we find that we are always concerned with the way in which the more adequate description reveals what the less adequate conceals, with the question of blindness vs. insight. One cannot help but think of the Wittgensteinian notion of a perspicuous representation which rearranges the phenomena so as to permit the emergence of previously unnoticed connections, differences and similarities, thereby changing their shape and meaning. Such a notion, of course, defies the sort of formal criterial analysis we have already rejected for description adjudication. Its cash value will appear, if at all, only in the way it functions concretely in the course of the interpretive evaluation of actual cases. Let us turn, then, without further delay, to our cases and to the picture we wish to paint of a rational hermeneutical process of adjudicating between conflicting social descriptions.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL DESCRIPTION AS CRITIQUE:

MARX vs. VICTOR HUGO

One apparently straightforward approach to the problem of adjudicating between conflicting social descriptions involves the interpretation of one description as a critique of the other. Imagine two conflicting social descriptions, A and B, and then imagine that A is complex in the following way: It is on the one hand a description of social reality simpliciter, and on the other a description of the inadequacy of a rival description, B. Imagine further that the two aspects of A stand to one another not in a mere external relation, but rather in an internal one. Imagine, that is, that the rival description B, which is the object of A's critique, is in some way constitutive of the social reality which is (also) A's subject matter. Then, in describing B, A will be at the same time describing a portion of social reality.

The relation we have hypothesized between the two rival descriptions, A and B, can be referred to by the expression "A is a critique of B." In order to see what is involved in adjudicating between two descriptions

when one is a critique of the other, we need to look more closely at this relation.

First, we should get a picture of what we mean when we stipulate that B is a description of social reality and yet is also in some way constitutive of social reality. This can be understood as follows: B is some agent's (say C's) understanding of his or her situation and C's activity is a constitutive component of social reality. What C understands to be his or her situation is a constitutive component of C's activity. Since C's activity is a constitutive component of social reality, it follows that C's understanding of his or her situation is a constitutive component of social reality. And since B is the description of that understanding, it is likewise a constitutive component of social reality. This, then, is how it is possible for us to understand the stipulation that B be both a description of social reality and also a constitutive component of that same social reality.

Now we can give a more detailed analysis of what it means to say that A is a critique of B. We have already said that A is a description of the inadequacy of its rival B in addition to and as part of its being a description of social reality simpliciter. As a critique of B, A must describe the content of B, i.e.

it must describe how the agent C understands his or her situation and his or her activity. But A must also evaluate that understanding. It must show how B may be distorted. A may do this by juxtaposing B to some other putatively more reliable picture of the situation. It may thereby point up misinterpretations or misperceptions inherent in B. Alternatively or additionally, A may point up internal inconsistencies and lacunae in B. It may show how those misinterpretations, misperceptions, inconsistencies and lacunae affect C's activity and thus contribute to the making of social reality simpliciter.

To the extent that A is a persuasive critique of B, A may be said to "subsume" B in the sense of accounting for it. This is to say that A shows us both "what is really going on here" and also "how (C) could have been misled about what is really going on here."¹ Subsumption, it may be noted, is an asymmetrical relation. If A successfully subsumes B, then it cannot also be the case that B successfully subsumes A. This is because a successful subsumption entails the judgment that the subsumed description is less adequate

¹This formulation appears in Alasdair MacIntyre's "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," The Monist 60 (October 1977): 455.

than the subsuming one.

Of course it is possible that A has the form of a critique of B while B likewise has the form of a critique of A. Then each attempts to subsume the other. Where this is the case, adjudicating between A and B involves the delicate problem of weighing the misperceptions, inconsistencies and lacunae pointed up by A about B against those pointed up by B about A.

We can confine ourselves for the present to the more simple, yet still complex enough, problem of establishing that A subsumes B where the question of B's subsuming A does not arise. In other words we can assume that B does not as it were anticipate the possibility that there might be a rival description of the sort that A is and so does not take up the task of subsuming it. In this case, it may be said that the very fact of A's anticipating B, coupled with the fact of B's failing to anticipate A, counts as a prima facie reason for adjudging A to be superior to B as a social description. But of course whether or not such prima facie grounds are ultimately overridden depends upon whether or not A is taken to be a persuasive critique of B.

It follows that adjudicating between A and B where A is interpreted as a critique of B (but not the

reverse) involves assessing the persuasiveness of the critique. This will be in part a matter of assessing the coherence and comprehensiveness of A. We will want to consider whether or not A gives us a perspective for seeing more and more coherently than does B. Does A enable us to see both what B sees and how the latter is misleading or distorting and how C could have nonetheless been convinced of it?² Does A permit us to see the meaning of C's activity both as informed by C's intentions and self-understanding (as described in B) and as exceeding that self-understanding by virtue of the latter's inadequacy and therefore to see C's activity as contributing to social reality in ways unintended by C? In other words does A show us that B, far from being an adequate account of social reality is, by virtue of its misperceptions, inconsistencies and lacunae, in fact a datum itself in need of being adequately accounted for as (an initially baffling) component feature of social reality?

What a persuasive critique does, then, is to redescribe its rival in such a way as to make visible the inadequacies or limitations of the latter. If A is a persuasive critique of B, it will in effect

²Ibid., p. 455.

redescribe or reinterpret the latter so as to enable us to see beyond what B in and of itself enabled us to see. In this case, A can be said to broaden our perspective or vision, to let us see more than B did. On that basis, A can be said to be a persuasive critique of B and hence a superior social description.

At this level of abstraction it is difficult to say more about the nature of persuasiveness with respect to social critique. In order to do justice to the complexity and multiplicity of the sorts of judgments involved in this mode of interpretation adjudication, it is helpful to consider an example sufficiently complex to give rise to such judgments. Let us get a better handle on the assessment of critique by turning now to such as example.

Consider Karl Marx's description of the rise and fall of the French Second Republic. His Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Bonaparte can be construed as a description of social reality (that is, of the events leading up to Louis-Bonaparte's coup d'état of December 2, 1851), which is at the same time and by design a description of the inadequacy of other rival descriptions of that social reality. It can be seen as providing an answer not only to, "What is really going on here?", but also to, "How could others have been so misled about what

is really going on here?"

This way of reading The Eighteenth Brumaire fits the internal development of the text itself. One of its principal themes is the misunderstanding, the systematic blindness, the mis-self-description of all the actors in the drama. In this respect The Eighteenth Brumaire carries out the characteristic Marxian project of critique. Marxian critique involves not simply the analysis of social reality, but also that of the dominant conceptions of social reality. Capital, for example, bears the subtitle "A Critique of Political Economy," meaning the science. From Marx's point of view, the apparently distinct objectives of describing social reality and describing misdescriptions of social reality are mutually interdependent; one cannot get at either of them except via the other.

Indeed this interdependency is especially apparent in The Eighteenth Brumaire. The real subject matter of the text is the praxis of a number of distinct, historically specific social-personalities. I use this term to refer to a shared life-stance or practical orientation in the social world with its own peculiar moral, affective and aesthetic coloring--a totality within which are meshed dispositions toward specific modes of action; a sensibility with characteristic modes of judgment, percep-

tion, imagination and valuation; characterological traits; and congruent ideological propensities. In other words, a social-personality is to be understood as encompassing a whole mode of social being and is not to be reduced to a mere mode of cognition (which is something narrower), although it will include cognitive dimensions.

Now we have said that the social-personalities of the actors in the Second Republic form the real subject matter of Marx's text. In his account of social reality, the Bonapartist party, for example, constitutes one distinct social-personality, the party of the Mountain another, the various factions within the party of Order still others, and so on. Each of these social-personalities is described as misunderstanding its own activity and the social context into which that activity is inserted. And each does so in its own concrete, characteristic way which is distinct from the others. The interplay of these misinterpretations and of the misunderstood actions they generate produces the "unintended effect" of Louis-Bonaparte's coup d'état. Marx's narrative is constructed by means of continual juxtapositions of the praxis of each social-personality with its inadequate self-perception. Indeed, in his hands, the praxis and the self-interpretation appear as two sides of the same coin and the limitations of the one

turn out to be congruent with the limitations of the other. Marx incorporates into his description of each social-personality the limited perceptions of social reality specific to it.

When The Eighteenth Brumaire is looked at in this way, the distinction between social reality per se and agents' interpretations of social reality tends to collapse. It is not really that Marx describes two different things: "what really happened" and "how others could have been misled about what really happened." It is not that he shows how rival descriptions are inadequate in addition to himself giving his own description. Rather, in showing the inadequacies of the self-descriptions of various participating social-personalities, he is already describing social reality. This is so since what each social-personality thinks of itself and of its situation is constitutive of the significance or meaning of its activity, and the meaning of its activity is constitutive of its activity, and therefore of social reality.

Many of the most important contemporary social descriptions of the Second Republic which rival Marx's are by exponents of and spokesmen for the various social-personalities Marx describes. For example, Alexis de Tocqueville's famous account in his Souvenirs can be

seen as a paradigm description representing the social-personality of the united party of Order; Victor Hugo's account can likewise be read as an expression of the Montagnard social-personality; and so on. In a sense, then, since Marx's description is a description of the various Second Republic social-personalities, it is at the same time a critique of the descriptions of Tocqueville, Hugo, et al. And this means that one way in which we can assimilate Marx's effort is by looking at how well it enables us to see and understand the weaknesses of these other descriptions.

Let us attempt this with respect to Victor Hugo. Let us see whether or not Marx's account of Hugo's party, the Mountain,--of its situation and its activity, and also of its self-understanding of its situation and activity--is a persuasive critique of Hugo's rival description. Let us see whether or not Marx's description permits us to see more and more coherently than Hugo's, whether or not it lets us see not only what Hugo sees but also how that is misleading and distorting and how Hugo could nonetheless have been convinced of it. Let us see whether or not Marx's does indeed subsume Hugo's description, whether or not it is superior to the latter.

Hugo, as we shall shortly see, was closely associa-

ted during the period in question with the Mountain. His praxis as an active participant in the parliamentary world of the Second Republic constitutes a portion of the social reality of that short-lived polity. Hugo also wrote descriptions of the Republic's demise, and he wrote them, we shall see, in a way congruent with his political activity as a Montagnard. His descriptions, we shall see, are expressions of the Montagnard social-personality as described by Marx, just as his actions were. And given all of this, we shall also see that there is a sense in which Marx, in describing the role of the Mountain in the collapse of the Second Republic, and in thereby describing the Mountain's characteristic ways of understanding itself and its role, is in effect providing the sort of critique of Hugo's inadequate description which interests us here.

Hugo's Napoleon the Little was written in June and July of 1852 and appeared in August of that same year. Since Marx completed The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Bonaparte in March of 1852, he did not, at the time of writing, have access to Hugo's text. Yet he did know something of Hugo's involvement in the politics of the Second Republic. One of Marx's most important sources of information about the events he describes was the official parliamentary record, the Moniteur.

Herein were published all the proceedings of the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies, including the speeches and addresses of Representative Victor Hugo. It is reasonable to assume that in reading this record, Marx acquainted himself with Hugo's role. This supposition is borne out by the fact that at one point in The Eighteenth Brumaire he refers to Hugo by name in connection with his contribution to the parliamentary debate over the Government's Roman policy. (We shall discuss this later.) So here at least is a small portion of Marx's text which is, in the most literal sense, about Hugo.

Furthermore, by the time of the republication of The Eighteenth Brumaire in 1869, Hugo's text was well known. Marx had read it and referred to it directly in his preface to the new edition. He called Napoleon the Little and Proudhon's Coup d'Etat the only "writings dealing with the same subject approximately at the same time as mine (which) deserve notice."³ He then added the following critical comment:

Victor Hugo confines himself to bitter and witty invective against the responsible pub-

³Karl Marx, "Author's Preface to the Second Edition," The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 7. All subsequent references to The Eighteenth Brumaire are to this edition.

lisher of the coup d'état. The event itself appears in his work like a bolt from the blue. He sees in it only the violent act of a single individual. He does not notice that he makes this individual great instead of little by ascribing to him a personal initiative such as would be without parallel in world history. . . . I, on the contrary, demonstrate how the class struggle in France created circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero's part.⁴

This comment, whose substance we will ignore for the present, shows that Marx did, at least after the fact, conceive his account as making up what he took to be the deficiencies of Hugo's.

But the case for reading The Eighteenth Brumaire as in part a critique of Hugo's description does not rest primarily on such circumstances as these. On the contrary, it rests on the possibility of reading Hugo's text as a congruent expression of the social-personality of the Mountain as described by Marx. Here we need to show, therefore, that Hugo really does, by his activity, his values, his outlook, his character structure and self-identification, belong to this party.

A brief summary of Hugo's role in the revolutionary period will suffice to establish an initial connection. Having flirted with Bonapartism and social reformism, while basically supporting the July Monarchy of Louis-

⁴Ibid., p. 8.

Philippe, Hugo was not, at the outbreak of the February Revolution, the dedicated republican he was to become during the course of the evolution of the Second Republic. He initially hoped to maintain the constitutional monarchy with the Duchess of Orleans as regent, perhaps in anticipation of a ministerial portfolio. But when this proved impossible, he quickly rallied to the support of the newly proclaimed republic, congratulated the Provisional Government on its abolition of the death penalty and unsuccessfully negotiated with Lamartine for a ministry.

Hugo was elected to the Constituent Assembly in June 1848, after an earlier electoral defeat. At this time he was associated with the conservative circle known as the Rue de Poitiers group. Like the other members of this circle, he favored the dissolution of the National Workshops and sided against the June insurrectionists. Under Cavaignac's dictatorship he supported the state of seige and restrictions of assembly, though not the measures restricting the press. His journal L'Evenement endorsed the presidential candidacy of Louis-Bonaparte, playing up its social reformist aspects. The only indication of the turn his political career was about to take was his support for the inclusion of a "right to work" clause in the preamble of the

new Constitution. With this single exception, the author of Napoleon the Little was, until well into 1849, a supporter of the party of Order and of Bonaparte, whom he visited at the Elysée Palace.

But even before the convening of the Legislative Assembly to which he had been elected, Hugo had grown disenchanted with his conservative colleagues. He broke definitively with them over the question of the Roman expedition and over that of social reform. By 1850, he was allying consistently with the democratic republicans of the Mountain. He opposed the law increasing Church control over education and that of May 31 abolishing universal suffrage, delivering a speech on the latter in parliament. And as the struggle between the Assembly and the executive came to a head in 1851, Hugo took a characteristically Montagnard stand on every key issue: he voted to repeal the restrictive electoral law of May 31 and against the Quaestor's Bill which provided for the conservative-controlled Assembly to requisition troops for its defense. And of course, he opposed the Constitutional revision aimed at legally permitting the election of Bonaparte to a second presidential term, while seriously considering running for the office himself.

Although Hugo served as vice president of the democratic party's Committee of Surveillance of the

Assembly, he consistently claimed to have been surprised by Bonaparte's coup d'état. When it eventually occurred on December 2, 1851, the author of Napoleon the Little played a leading role in the formation and activity of the Comité de Résistance. He was not, however, among the many republican Representatives who were imprisoned and/or deported. Yet he left France disguised as a worker, vowing to remain in exile so long as Bonaparte remained in power. This he did. It was in these circumstances and with these allegiances that he wrote Napoleon the Little.⁵

This summary of Hugo's activity during the Second Republic shows that he is legitimately classified, at least from the Fall of 1849 through the composition of Napoleon the Little, as a member of the democratic party. But it sketches only the externals of his career; it does not reveal what his activity meant or how it expressed the social-personality of his party.

So consider now Marx's much "thicker" description of the behavior of the Mountain. Marx identifies the democratic party's most characteristic mode of self-

⁵John B. Halsted, "Victor Hugo's Indictment of Louis Napoleon's Crime," December 2, 1851: Contemporary Writings on the Coup d'Etat of Louis Napoleon. Edited by John B. Halsted. Garden City: Doubleday, 1972, pp. 311-329.

expression as follows: it delivers thundering moralistic denouncements of what it sees as the brutal suppression of "the people's eternal rights" by the party of Order. These tirades, however, are not accompanied by any serious, efficacious efforts at organizing resistance to these abuses. Rather, they function as self-consoling substitutes for such activity. In fact, from Marx's viewpoint, the party's diatribes simultaneously mask and express its fear of mass popular action. The Montagnards, in their heart of hearts, are mortally afraid of social conflict. Time and again throughout the period, they make what to the naive eye appear as tactical errors. They agitate at inopportune moments and around relatively trivial issues, insuring that they fail to get the mass response they apparently seek. Yet when the moment is propitious and the stakes are of enough moment to make the campaign serious, they invariably miss the opportunity.

Now Marx's description of these repeated "mistakes" suggests nothing so much as a "repetition compulsion," to use an anachronistic Freudian term. That is, as the story is told over and over again, a specific characterological syndrome emerges, one which paradoxically unites ostentatious moral outrage with what begins increasingly to look like some sort of desire to fail.

A few examples from Marx's text will make this more plain. In June of 1849, the Assembly learned that the expeditionary force sent to Rome, apparently in the service of liberty, had in fact attacked the republican forces. The Mountain, including Hugo (this is the incident in connection with which Marx refers to him by name), raised a great hue and cry. It unsuccessfully presented a bill of impeachment against Bonaparte and threatened to defend the Constitution by arms. It then proceeded to call a mass unarmed demonstration which was easily broken up by armed troops under the command of General Changarnier on behalf of the party of Order. The result was the solidification of that party's rule and the virtual destruction, at least for the time being, of the democratic party; many of its parliamentary representatives either were arrested or fled.

Here is Marx's comment:

Seldom had an action been announced with more noise than the impending campaign of the Montagne, seldom had an event been trumpeted with greater certainty or longer in advance than the inevitable victory of democracy. Most assuredly, the democrats believe in the trumpets before whose blasts the walls of Jericho fell down. And as often as they stand before the ramparts of despotism, they seek to imitate the miracle. If the Montagne wished to triumph in parliament, it should not have called to arms. If it called to arms in parliament, it should not have acted in par-

liamentary fashion in the streets. If the peaceful demonstration was meant seriously, then it was folly not to foresee that it would be given a war-like reception. If a real struggle was intended, then it was a queer idea to lay down the weapons with which it would have to be waged. But the revolutionary threats of the petty bourgeois are mere attempts to intimidate the antagonist. And when they have run into a blind alley, when they have sufficiently compromised themselves to make it necessary to give effect to their threats, then this is done in an ambiguous fashion that avoids nothing so much as the means to the end and tries to find excuses for succumbing. The blaring overture that announced the contest dies away in a pusillanimous snarl as soon as the struggle has to begin, the actors cease to take themselves au serieux, and the action collapses completely, like a pricked bubble.⁶

We can distinguish a number of features of this portrait of the Montagnard social-personality. Marx begins with the manifest discrepancy between the advance trumpeting of the impending action and its actual fizzling out, between the confident assurances of victory and the actual pusillanimous character of the defeat. Then he discerns the complex intentionality which connects these contradictory poles: the quasi-superstitious belief in the power of the word; the delusion that the enemy can be talked into submission; the consequent irresponsibility of the threats made; the half-hearted, reluctant attempt to carry them out. In this way, the Montagnard backs himself into a corner; he must do something that

⁶Marx, op. cit., p. 53.

he does not really want to do and never seriously meant to do: engage in serious struggle for his cause. No wonder, then, that all sorts of (self-positing) obstacles suddenly arise as he meanders towards defeat.

Marx sees this action of June 13, 1849 as the highpoint of the Mountain's energy and independence during the Second Republic. Yet he reports that the party enjoyed a brief resurgence in March of 1850 when its candidates did well, especially among Parisians and the army, in the by-elections held to fill the Assembly seats vacated after June 13. Here was an opportunity to renew more efficaciously the struggle against the counter-revolution. But in Marx's eyes, the opportunity was wasted as a result of the same characterological syndrome.

The social-democratic party. . . seemed only to try to find pretexts for putting its own victory once again in doubt and for blunting its point. . . instead of making its victory at the polls conclusive and thereby compelling the party of Order to at once contest it in parliament, instead of thus forcing the adversary to fight at the moment of popular enthusiasm and favorable mood in the army, the democratic party wearied Paris during the months of March and April with a new election campaign, let the aroused popular passions wear themselves out in this repeated provisional election game, let the revolutionary energy satiate itself with constitutional successes, dissipate itself in petty intrigues, hollow declamations and sham movements, let the bourgeoisie rally and make its preparations, and lastly weakened the significance of the

March elections by a sentimental commentary in the April by-election, the election of Eugene Sue. In a word, it made an April Fool of March 10.⁷

Here again, Marx sees Hugo's party avoiding a decisive struggle, preferring purely symbolic gestures. Its penchant for the sentimental, for the moralistic declamation is exercised at the cost of efficacy. Again the tactical "error" smacks of a deeper problem, a "failure syndrome," if you will.

Those deputies who had avoided arrest and exile after June 13, including Victor Hugo, had resolved that if the party of Order had been able to successfully subvert the Constitution on the Roman question, it would not do so on that of universal suffrage. That was where the line would be drawn and held. Yet when the Order-dominated Assembly unconstitutionally abolished universal suffrage on May 31, 1850, there was no serious agitation for resistance. In Marx's words,

Just as the democrats had, in revolutionary fashion, agitated the minds and raged during the constitutional election contest, so now, when it was requisite to prove the serious nature of that victory arms in hand, did they in constitutional fashion, preach order, majestic calm (calme majestueux), lawful action, that is to say, blind subjection to the will of the counter-revolution, which imposed itself as the law. During the debate the Mountain put the party of Order to shame

⁷ Ibid., pp. 69-70.

asserting, against the latter's revolutionary passionateness, the dispassionate attitude of the philistine who keeps within the law, and by felling that party to earth with the fearful reproach that it proceeded in a revolutionary manner. Even the newly elected deputies were at pains to prove by their decorous and discreet action what a misconception it was to decry them as anarchists and construe their election as a victory for revolution.⁸

Here Marx describes the social psychology of a political tendency which has lost its belief in itself and its possible victory. The Mountain's behavior, as depicted here, is that of a party with no clear-cut sense of its identity and mission; it can only see itself, as it were, through the eyes of its opponents. Hence, its compulsive need to demonstrate its respectability, as though it were some inferior species of humanity dealing with its "betters." Unable to generate any energy of its own to affect the course of events, it can only carp from the sidelines at the energetic motion of the enemy. In Marx's phrase, quoted earlier, it is a party which has "cease(d) to take itself au serieux."

Marx implies that the retention of universal suffrage was a cause, perhaps unlike the Roman expedition, which was potentially capable of attracting popular support and might have been made the focus of a drive to

⁸Ibid., p. 70.

halt the counter-revolution. But the democrats failed to mount a campaign. They rationalized their inactivity in an ingenious way: they convinced themselves that nothing need be done now, that resistance could wait until election day when the entire population need only show up, armed and en masse, at the polls and force their votes to be registered. The Mountain imagined, contrary to what Marx took to be the actual strength and state of mind of the various parties, that on the second Sunday of May, 1852, a full two years after the passage of the law of May 31, when Bonaparte's non-repeatable term expired and a new President was to be elected--it imagined that on that day it would be vindicated, that its candidate would win, that Bonaparte would respectfully retire in accordance with the Constitution, that the party of Order would not contest this scenario, and that the democratic Republic would be preserved.

Marx's description of this attitude develops his insight into the social-personality of Hugo's party.

It was enough to hear the self-complacent howl of victory with which Messieurs the Democrats congratulated each other on the expected gracious consequences of the second Sunday in May 1852. In their minds the second Sunday in May 1852 had become a fixed idea, a dogma, like the day on which Christ should reappear and the millenium begin in the minds of the Chiliasts. As ever, weakness had taken refuge

in a belief in miracles, fancied the enemy overcome when he was only conjured away in imagination, and it lost all understanding of the present in a passive glorification of the future that was in store for it and of the deeds it had in petto but which it merely did not want to carry out as yet.⁹

The same sort of discrepancy which Marx noted between the Mountain's fierce words and ambivalent actions during the crisis over the Roman expedition is manifest here. The party's previous threat to defend universal suffrage at all costs is at odds with its inaction in the face of the actual event. But in this case, its disorientation is further advanced. As Marx sees it, it retreats from reality into an elaborately constructed fictional universe and convinces itself that, at the moment of its actual defeat, it has won a great victory. It swells with self-importance in contemplation of future heroisms and of the rewards which must ultimately come to those who wait. Marx's description recalls Nietzsche's view of early Christian slave populations. Here the "millenarian" attitude serves to rationalize passivity and to insulate the Montagnard from social reality.

Absorbed in a self-consoling fantasy world, the democrats become oblivious to actual political develop-

⁹Ibid., p. 20.

ments and fail to register what to Marx are portents of the impending Bonapartist coup. Marx describes them in the following way:

Those heroes who seek to disprove their demonstrated incapacity by mutually offering each other their sympathy and getting together in a crowd had tied up their bundles, collected their laurel wreaths in advance and were just then engaged in discounting on the exchange market the republics in partibus for which they had already providentially organized the government personnel with all the calm of their unassuming disposition. December 2 struck them like a thunderbolt from a clear sky, and the peoples that in periods of pusillanimous depression gladly let their inward apprehensions be drowned by the loudest bawlers will perchance have convinced themselves that the times are past when the cackle of geese could save the Capitol.¹⁰

The Montagnards are shown building castles in the air with the most minute care for detail, dividing among themselves all the posts to be filled in their imaginary republic. Preoccupied with this exercise in wish-fulfillment, they are blind to even the grossest outlines of developments in the more mundane and unpleasant real world. Convinced that their superior moral virtue ensures their ultimate triumph, they do not deign to concern themselves with the mundane details of waging a successful political struggle. Their victory is to be of a higher kind; the nation, it is assumed, will respond directly to the aura

¹⁰ Ibid.

of pure right the party exudes, a goodness unsullied by participation in actual struggle. Hence, the "bawling," the "cackling," the mutual condolences, all of which have a preposterous air, when the nation fails to respond in the anticipated manner and by and large acquiesces in the fait accompli of December 2. The shock of the coup d'état, far from definitively deflating these Montagnard pretensions, apparently only aggravates them, plunging the party into frenzied protestations of its own innocence.

Here, then, are what Marx sees as the characterological peculiarities of the Mountain's social-personality: a penchant for moralistic declamation coupled with inaction or ambiguous action; a preference for the symbolic gesture over the efficacious campaign; a disposition to avoid careful attention to social reality and to escape into realms of imaginary glory; supreme self-confidence in its own higher virtue; and a propensity to absolve itself from all responsibility for "unexpected" abhorrent outcomes. But this is not all. Marx's description attempts to show that these character traits are congruent with and find expression in the party's ideology.

No party exaggerates its means more than the democratic, none deludes itself more lightly over the situation. . . the democrat, because he represents the petty bourgeoisie, that is, a transition class, in which the

interests of two classes are simultaneously mutually blunted, imagines himself above class antagonism generally. The democrats concede that a privileged class confronts them, but they, along with the rest of the nation, form the people. What they represent is the people's rights; what interests them is the people's interests. Accordingly, when a struggle is impending, they do not need to examine the interests and positions of the different classes. They do not need to weigh their resources too critically. They have merely to give the signal and the people, with all its inexhaustible resources, will fall upon the oppressors. Now, if in the performance their interests prove to be uninteresting and their potency impotence, then either the fault lies with pernicious sophists, who split the indivisible people into hostile camps, or the army was too brutalized and blinded to comprehend that the pure aims of democracy are the best thing for it, or the whole thing has been wrecked by a detail in its execution, or else an unforeseen accident has this time spoilt the game. In any case, the democrat comes out of the most disgraceful defeat just as immaculate as he was innocent when he went into it, with the newly won conviction that he is bound to win, not that he himself and his party have to give up the old standpoint, but, on the contrary, that conditions have to ripen to suit him.¹¹

In Marx's eyes the Mountain's ideology fits its characterological incapacity for serious politics. It simplistically divides into two homogeneous blocs the complex welter of interests, factions, classes and social-personalities which inhabit the political universe of the Second Republic. Where Marx discerns a myriad of distinct tendencies coalescing in the counter-revolutionary

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 53-55.

movement, the democrat sees only a monolithic "reaction." This is more of a moral category than a sociological one. It encompasses dark and nefarious forces, whose peculiar dynamics are unspecified, but who continually strive to suppress popular liberties. Marx calls this conception a "night in which all cats are grey and which permits (the Mountain) to reel off their night watchman's commonplaces."¹² It lumps together all the various strata which a party intent on effective intervention would need to distinguish and obscure "the peculiar physiognomy of this period"¹³ by assimilating this "reaction" to every other one that has plagued humanity since the dawn of history.

The second social force which the Mountain recognizes is "the people." This complementary abstraction includes everyone not encompassed by the "reaction" and is the undifferentiated locus of all virtue and justice. In the moralistic drama of history, its role is the continual warding off of the "reaction's" attacks and the defense of the "eternal rights of man." The Mountain itself is simply the latest in the long series of "people's parties," with essentially the same task, composition, and

¹²Ibid., p. 46.

¹³Ibid.

outlook of all its predecessors.

The "objective" deficiencies of this ideology are, to Marx, patently obvious. It could not have been better designed to shield its exponents from the complex specificity of social reality in the Second Republic. But Marx does not judge it merely as a species of intellectual or philosophical "error." Rather, he looks at the concrete way it functions within the Montagnard social-personality as a totality. In insulating the Montagnard from a realistic assessment of his situation, it obviates his need for responsible tactical considerations. It feeds his vanity by fostering the illusion that he stands at the head of a vast army of supporters who await his instructions. It thereby reinforces his disposition to evade present struggle while fantasizing about future victories. And it permits him to cling to his moral superiority in the face of defeat by furnishing him with a supply of ready-made excuses for shifting the blame elsewhere. In short, the characterological syndrome and the ideology, thus described, exhibit a striking complementarity. They mesh with one another in the Montagnard social-personality. The ideology relieves the Montagnard of responsibility for his actions, rationalizes his failures and justifies him. And his characterological penchant for doing just that in turn protects the

ideology from disconfirming confrontations with social reality.

Such, then, is Marx's description in The Eighteenth Brumaire of the Montagnard social-personality. Such is his description of this party's view of its situation and activity, of the inadequacy of that view, and of the ways in which that inadequacy contributed to the making of the social reality of the French Second Republic. This gives us what we need in order to interpret The Eighteenth Brumaire as (at least in part) a critique of Victor Hugo's rival description in Napoleon the Little. By bringing to bear Marx's picture of Montagnardism upon the interpretation of Hugo's text, we will be in a position to see whether or not Marx's description successfully subsumes Hugo's, that is whether or not it is a persuasive critique of the latter, and thus whether or not it can ultimately be adjudged superior to the latter. Let us look now at Napoleon the Little in order to see whether or not the perspective afforded us by The Eighteenth Brumaire permits a redescription of the former which reveals its limitations.

Consider, first, the existential stance Hugo adopts in Napoleon the Little. He sees himself as France's proscribed conscience, bearing witness to her degradation from his outpost in exile. He is a kind of keeper of

moral accounts, methodically compiling a record for the edification of humanity. He writes in order to fulfill what he sees as the duty of all republicans to:

accept proscription with all its miseries; to remain eternally erect before the traitor, with his oath (to preserve the Republic) in their hands; to forget their inward sufferings, their private sorrows, their families dispersed and mutilated, the ruin of their fortunes, the wounds of their affections and their bleeding hearts; to forget themselves, and henceforth feel but one wound,--the wound of France; to cry aloud for justice; to scorn the thought of submission or resignation; to be implacable; to seize the odious crowned perjurer, if not by the hand of the law, at least with the pincers of truth, and redden the fires of history with the letters of his oath and brand them on his face!¹⁴

Hugo exhorts his fallen comrades to follow his example of implacable hostility to the Bonapartist regime. They are to maintain a selfless dignity in defeat. If they cannot in reality dethrone the usurper, they must do so symbolically, bringing him before the bar of history, if not the French high court. They must deport themselves as noble heroes who have suffered a setback, but are not broken. The adoption of this stance, the striking of this pose, preserves their honor, instructs their countrymen and world opinion, and is a thorn in the side

¹⁴Victor Hugo, Napoleon the Little. In The Works of Victor Hugo. Vol. VIII. Philadelphia: John Wanamaker, n.d., p. 8. This volume also contains The History of a Crime. All subsequent references to both works are to this edition.

of the Emperor-to-be.

Here Hugo exhibits the disposition towards the symbolic gesture which Marx ascribed to the Montagnard social-personality. His stance of outraged but dignified virtue, denouncing Bonaparte's villainy from abroad, is an almost theatrical posture. It is as if he seeks to promote his cause by turning himself into a living symbol.

But how seriously does Hugo count on the efficacy of his symbolic gesture? His attitude vacillates between extremes of fatalistic defeatism and unbounded optimism. At his most optimistic, he expresses something akin to that quasi-superstitious faith in the power of the word, that belief in the miracle of Jericho, which Marx discerned in the democratic party. He assumes that his erect posture and thunderous prose will unmask Bonaparte for the traitor he is and rouse the now sleeping conscience of the French to revolt.

There will be an awakening. The single aim of this book is to do away with this sleep. France must not adhere to this Government even with the acquiescence of lethargy. . . .

Moreover, at the present moment. . . France knows nothing of what took place on the 2nd of December and on the ensuing days, and this is her excuse. . . . In the eyes of France, in the eyes of Europe, the 2nd of December still wears a mask. This book is a hand issuing from the darkness and tearing off that mask. . . .

Yes, there will be an awakening!

Yes, there will be an escape from that torpor which, for such a people, is shame; and when France shall have awakened, she opens her eyes and begins to distinguish what is before her and beside her, she will recoil with a terrible shudder in presence of the monstrous felony that dared to espouse her in the darkness and make her the sharer of its bed.¹⁵

Armed with his pen, Hugo will be the bearer of enlightenment, the galvanizer of the national pride, and the liberator of his country.

This optimism appears to rest on the very sorts of assumptions which Marx found so attractive to and compatible with the Mountain's social-personality. Hugo imagines that only the nation's ignorance stands in the way of Bonaparte's deposition. Once apprised of the regime's true character, its gross immorality, its felonious and blood-stained origins, the French will find it insupportable. If they have so far acquiesced in the "crime," this can only be because they do not yet see the Government's true colors. They are laboring under a misconception, one which Hugo's pen and the efforts of his co-thinkers will right.

The country should be traversed through and through, the villages entered, the barracks entered; the soldier spoken to who no longer knows what he is doing; the laborer spoken to, who has an engraving of the Emperor in his cottage, and because of that engraving votes

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 12-13.

whatever he is asked. We must remove the radiant phantom they have before their eyes. The whole situation is an immense delusion. We must dispel this delusion; sound its every depth; disabuse the people, and, above all, the people of the country districts; stir up their consciences and their emotions; show them the empty houses, the open graves, and make them lay their fingers on the horrors of this regime. They are good and honest; they will understand.¹⁶

This is a more prosaic and practical seeming version of the earlier passage. But in both, the French are seen essentially as being under the spell of an evil sorcerer. Their faculty of judgment has been mesmerized. Hugo envisions himself in the role of the handsome prince whose kiss of fire will rouse the slumbering princess. The coup d'état is a mere "card-sharper's trick." The people are naturally virtuous; they are naturally disposed to support Hugo and his party. Only trickery of the most diabolical and monstrous scope could have temporarily robbed Hugo of this reservoir of natural support.

This is, of course, precisely the attitude that Marx attributes to the democratic party of the Second Republic. When Hugo and his party fail to attract popular support, they characteristically blame sophists who must have divided and tricked the people, confused them as to their true aims and loyalties. Only such

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 63-64.

trickery, not any manifest inadequacy of the Mountain, can explain such an "unnatural" result. This is one of those strategems for evading responsibility and shifting blame which Marx foresaw. It coheres with the party's tendency, also here evinced in Hugo's description, to imagine that it commands immense support, even in its hour of defeat; that it can do great deeds, even when it is most passive; that it would surely have triumphed, but for some unforeseen detail which wrecked its otherwise correct calculations; that it will still win in the end, once this interfering detail is removed.

Hugo's optimistic expectation that his book will dramatically alter the political situation is thus part and parcel of the democratic character structure as dissected by Marx. The extent of Marx's understanding of this syndrome is revealed in an almost clairvoyant passage in The Eighteenth Brumaire in which he foresees in great detail Hugo's rationalizations, down even to the very metaphor of the woman violated in the darkness.

It is not enough to say, as the French do, that their nation was taken unawares. A nation and a woman are not forgiven the unguarded hour in which the first adventurer that came along could violate them. The riddle is not solved by such turns of speech, but merely formulated differently. It remains to be explained how a nation of thirty-six millions can be surprised and delivered unresisting into captivity by three

chevaliers d'industrie.¹⁷

From Marx's point of view, Hugo's account is so manifestly inadequate to explain Bonaparte's success, that it is not enough to discredit its face value. In addition, it is necessary to understand how Hugo could credit it. Thus Marx would want to treat Hugo's description as itself a component portion of social reality to be accounted for in an adequate description of the makings of the coup d'état.

Marx's portrait of the Mountain's social-personality, as we have seen, carves out a place in which to position Hugo's insistence that he and his countrymen were "taken by surprise." This insistence belongs in that complex of dispositions and attitudes Marx describes: the Mountain's self-centered fascination with its own spotless virtue and its consequent blindness to social reality; its absorption in dreams of a glorious future awaiting it and its forfeiture of all understanding of the present; its imagining the enemy overcome and its victory assured, while it avoids action or acts ambiguously so as to insure its failure; its reversion to a stock of ready-to-hand alibis to excuse that failure; in short, its unwavering belief in its

¹⁷Marx, op. cit., p. 21.

ultimate victory in the abstract, coupled with that curious avoidance of it in the concrete.

This is a context in which one can set Hugo's view that the naturally virtuous, republican "people" were defrauded by Bonaparte and caught unawares by his coup. It begins to seem possible that such a view could have been plausible to Hugo when we see its congruence with the syndrome as a whole. We can see that this view preserves his sense of virtue and self-esteem; it relieves him and his party of any contributory responsibility for the success of the coup; it shields him from the recognition that some sizable and important sections of the population may have actually preferred the Bonapartist regime to one headed by Hugo and his party, and that others, even without such a preference, may not have considered the Second Republic worth defending; it leads him to imagine that he need only declaim from abroad to correct the situation, and that such declamation must necessarily be efficacious; and failing that, it enables him to play the comfortable role of outraged virtue. That is, it consolidates an entire social identity that might otherwise be imperiled by the shock of defeat. In all of these ways, Hugo's view is reconstructed as a coherent expression of the democratic social-personality as described by Marx.

But was Hugo really surprised by the coup d'état? As always, when confronted with his prose, one wonders how much is rhetoric included merely to produce an effect and how much expresses Hugo's actual beliefs. How can we square his repeated claims that he was taken by surprise with his membership on the Mountain's Committee of Surveillance, formed to guard against precisely that eventuality and with what Marx (and other observers) identified as the many advance indications of the coup? We can only conclude that Hugo did not want to see it coming. A curious passage in Napoleon the Little sheds light on his state of mind.

Hugo raises the question: Supposing the coup d'état had not occurred, what then would have happened in 1852? To answer it he uses a metaphor which likens the development of the Republic to the progress of a train on a railway track. All goes smoothly unless a beam is thrown across the track to derail the train. The beam is the electoral law of May 31, 1850, passed unconstitutionally by the party of Order's parliamentary majority to abolish universal suffrage. This law, in a mixing of the metaphor, is then likened to a dike damming a current and thereby causing torrential floods which sweep away everything, including the dike itself.

"But for the 2nd of December, what would have taken place in 1852?" Suppress the law of the 31st of May; take from the people its dike; take from Bonaparte his lever, his arm, his pretext; let universal suffrage alone; take the beam from the rails,--do you know what would have happened in 1852?

Nothing. Some elections. A few calm Sundays on which the people would have come to vote; yesterday toilers, to-day electors, tomorrow toilers, always sovereign.¹⁸

1852 did not, then, contain in itself any real danger. The law of the 31st of May, killed morally, was dead before the 2nd of December. A new Assembly, a new President, the Constitution purely and simply put into practice, and some elections,--nothing more. Take away Monsieur Bonaparte, and you had 1852. But it was necessary for Monsieur Bonaparte to go; that was the difficulty, and from that came the catastrophe.¹⁹

From Marx's perspective it again looks as if Hugo is escaping from the harsh unpleasantness of social reality into a fantasy world of future greener pastures. He drastically simplifies the political situation obtaining shortly before the coup d'état so that it appears as a violent interruption of an otherwise sound state of affairs, rather than as an organic consequence of a diseased one. If universal suffrage had been left to stand, there would simply have been a vote and Bonaparte would have been defeated. Or, given the passage of the

¹⁸ Hugo, op. cit., p. 120.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 124.

new electoral law, a law which had been killed morally and was already dead, if it had not been for Bonaparte's cunning criminality, the people would have voted anyway and ousted him. Without the law, no Bonaparte. Without Bonaparte, no law!

But from Marx's perspective, Hugo is deluded on both counts, and in precisely the ways he attributes to the Mountain. Marx has the democrats, in The Eighteenth Brumaire, simply conjuring away the law of May 31, expecting mass turnouts on the second Sunday of May to put them in power and, lost in these chimeras, avoiding organized resistance to the law. Marx believes that the law was not widely considered "dead." And furthermore, that with or without the law of May 31, it was, as everyone except the democrats was aware, virtually certain that Bonaparte would be re-elected, despite the Constitutional provision forbidding it. Hence, the effort to revise the Constitution at the last minute, opposed by Hugo and his party, so as to legitimize what was already regarded as a fait accompli.

So from Marx's perspective, Hugo's description looks drastically off-base. It seems to suffer from the characteristic limitations of the Montagnard social-personality. Hugo cannot come to grips with the fact of Bonaparte's popularity nor with the discredit into which

his own party has fallen through its repeated "failures." Purging his account of any stray details which might suggest his own responsibility for events paving the way for the coup d'état, he shares out the blame between the "criminal" and the architects of the law of May 31, his opponents in the party of Order. He retreats into what Marx called the "millenarian" faith that the Republic rested on a solid footing, that the elections would have vindicated him and laid low his enemies, that vast armies of Frenchmen had been with him and ready to obey his signal, in short, that everything would have been fine, if only. . . .

All of these indications of a deluded optimism in Hugo's text link up with Marx's view that the Montagnard is a victim of his own rhetorical excesses. He is taken in by the phalanx of fierce words and burning sentiments he confidently and sometimes recklessly marshals to crush his opponents. He expects to shame or intimidate the enemy into submission, and convinces himself that he has already won, even as he aids in laying the groundwork for his own defeat.

Another expression of this disposition is found in Hugo's handling of the resistance to the coup d'état and of his own role in that resistance. Contrary to Marx and to most other contemporaries, Hugo suggests

that there were massive risings against Bonaparte throughout the countryside and a veritable civil war in Paris. From his point of view, the republicans were on the verge of winning and were stopped only at the last possible moment by a bloody and vicious massacre, the likes of which had never before been seen. (Marx would say that Hugo conveniently forgets June 1848 and his own role then as a guardian of "order.") He vacillates between two conflicting claims: that the Bonapartist troops ruthlessly and cold-bloodedly murdered innocent, unarmed passersby, and that they defeated heroic and valiant soldiers of the republic, intent upon resisting tyranny with every means at their disposal.

Some of the exaggeration can be attributed to Hugo's interest in making Bonaparte appear the worst of "criminals." But Marx's perspective enables us to see a deeper significance in these "misstatements of fact." It is, as we have seen, part of the total Montagnard characterological make-up to believe that Bonaparte's regime was intensely unpopular, that the Republic was greatly loved, and that Hugo's own personal efforts at resistance were reflective of the passions, commitments and interests of the "people." This is another case of the democrat imagining himself at the

head of a great popular army, about to triumph, foiled only by the most nefarious and unconscionable means.

It will be remembered that Marx portrayed this delusion as going hand in hand with the Montagnard's proclivity for exaggerating his resources, and so making wildly irresponsible threats which he cannot in reality carry out, thereby compromising himself and becoming embroiled in foredoomed adventures, such as that of June 13, 1849. Hugo's description of his own role in the resistance of December 4 confirms Marx's insight. He recalls his efforts to persuade the other republican representatives still at large to don the tri-colored scarves symbolizing their office and march in a body through Paris challenging the army and rousing the people to revolt. Only reluctantly was he convinced by his colleagues that such a course was suicidal and that a more cautious strategy was called for. Even then, though, he never squarely faced what Marx's account takes to be the fact that those sections of Paris which had traditionally provided the revolutionary shocktroops were demoralized by the butchery of June 1848 and by the subsequent half-heartedness of the Mountain, and were unwilling to endanger themselves again on behalf of this uninspiring Republic.

Now there is no denying that Hugo's instinctive

reaction was a courageous one, and that he was indeed prepared to risk his life for his cause. Yet it could nonetheless be said that his instinct is consistent with Marx's view of the social-personality of the Mountain. Hugo prefers a course of action more symbolic than effective. He is entranced with the vision, in his mind's eye, of a procession of representatives provocatively decked out in their republican finery, a quasi-religious processional. He imagines himself and his colleagues as a troop of pied pipers, attracting an ever-growing following by the pomp and symbolism of their attire and fine words. Even the Bonapartist troops will be charmed by this spectacle. In other words, Hugo's deepest drive is not so much to accomplish his end as to make a dramatic gesture "for the record," and thereby to certify for the world and himself the virtuous heroism and purity of his person. That is to say, even his actions are conceived as non-verbal equivalents of his words: sentimental, rhetorical, symbolic. And, of course, this is precisely what Marx's description of the Montagnard social-personality leads us to expect.

So far we have concentrated on the deluded optimism Hugo expresses in Napoleon the Little. But from Marx's point of view, this appeared as organically linked with a darker undertone running through the

Montagnard social-personality, a "failure-compulsion." The other side of Hugo's optimism, then, is a streak of defeatism for which the former compensates and consoles him. After the coup d'état, the optimism becomes hollower and harder to sustain, while the pessimistic underside comes to the fore. We can see a number of expressions of the democratic "failure syndrome" in Napoleon the Little.

Just as Hugo insists that his prose will and must arouse the nation from its slumbering acquiescence in the Bonapartist "felony," he senses the hollowness of the words. A sigh of despair escapes.

It is time, we repeat, for this monstrous sleep of the human conscience to come to an end. After the horrible scandal of the triumph of the crime, mankind must not be confronted with a still more horrible scandal, --the indifference of the civilized world.

If this could be, history would some day appear as an avenger. But till then, just as wounded lions hide themselves in solitude, the righteous man, veiling his face in presence of this universal abasement would take refuge in the immensity of disdain.²⁰

In this passage Hugo no longer adopts the stance of the hero certain of his triumph; nor of the prince who will rescue the spellbound princess. Now he is the prophet scorned, hiding his face so as not to be contaminated by

²⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

the corruption surrounding him, retreating into a private enclave of righteousness. He is a wounded lion, licking his wounds and bellowing with magnificent impotence from a distance. The same absolute conviction of moral superiority is here, but it is admixed with a martyr-like fatalism.

This curious mixture of self-confident rhetoric and feelings of impotence is revealed most clearly in another passage. Hugo here indulges in an elaborate fantasy, this time not of glorious future successes, but of tragic past failures. He supposes the existence, at some time prior to the coup, of a prescient representative in the Assembly who, unlike Hugo himself, foresees the ultimate denouement of the revolutionary drama, and warns his colleagues of the dangers they face. The imaginary representative is a great orator; his vision, sincerity and eloquence ought, if there were a God in heaven, to prevail and save the day. But see how Hugo sets up the scene. The orator intones:

"I warn you of four great public perils. Your political system bears within itself that which will slay it. It is necessary to transform, root and branch, the administration, the army, the clergy, and the magistracy; to suppress here, to retrench there, renew everything, or perish through these four institutions which you take for elements of duration, but which are elements of dissolution."

Murmurs. He exclaims: "Do you know what your centralized power can become in the hands of a perjured executive power? An immense treason carried into effect at the same time over the whole surface of France by all functionaries without exception."

The murmurs break out again, and with more violence: The audience cries, "Order!" the orator continues: "Do you know what your permanent army may one day become? An instrument of crime. . . an hour may strike when. . . our glorious regiments will be transformed, to the profit of a man and the shame of a people, into gilded hordes and pretorian bands. . . ."

The murmurs become a clamour. Cries of "Order!" are heard on all sides. The speaker is apostrophized by everyone, "You have just insulted the administration; now you outrage the army!" The speaker resumes: "And if haply the day should come when a man. . . would tear the Constitution to pieces. . . , do you know what your irremovable magistracy would do? . . . It would hold its peace!"

The last words of the speaker are lost in the clamour. The tumult becomes a tempest. "This man respects nothing! . . ." The speaker is censured. . . . (He) continues: "And your paid clergy, and your salaried bishops. . . do you know what your bishops will do? They will fall prostrate, not before God, but before this man!"

Is it possible to form any idea of the fury, the hooting, the jeers, the imprecations, with which such words would be received? Is it possible to imagine the cries, the apostrophies, the menaces, the entire body rising as one man, and the tribune scarcely protected from violence. . . . The speaker would be again called to order, censured, compelled to apologize, excluded from the chamber. . . . And on the next day the indignant bourgeoisie would say, "Well done!" and from all quarters the journals would shake their fists at the "calumniator;" and even his own party, on his own bench in the Assembly, his best friends would abandon him. . . . And after this generous and heroic effort, it would be

discovered that the four institutions attacked had become more venerable and impeccable than ever. . . .²¹

We will deal later with the substance of the speaker's warning. For now we need note only that it contradicts Hugo's earlier estimation of the situation when he asked what would have happened in 1852. Here it appears that the possibility of the coup d'état was, as it were, built into the Constitution, whereas before this same Constitution was touted as the bulwark which, had it been respected, would have prevented the coup.

But more important for our present purposes is the form that Hugo's imaginary scenario takes. It tends to undermine an entire section of his text devoted to a glorification of "The Tribune" or the French parliamentary tradition. In that section, Hugo treats this institution as the most potent force on earth capable of dethroning tyrants, enlightening mankind, and setting humanity free throughout the entire world. From Marx's point of view, this looks like the characteristic Montagnard belief in the miracle of Jericho. Apparently, however, it is a belief that Hugo has difficulty sustaining. In the present passage, the word has suddenly lost its miraculous powers. The orator's valiant attempt is an

²¹Ibid., pp. 187-189.

unmitigated failure. He is reviled on all sides; even his best friends desert him. (Hugo cannot forebear to add his characteristic touch of melodramatic sentimentality.) In sum, this is a rather different and much darker sort of brooding about "what might have been" than the earlier deluded optimism.

One gets a sense from this passage that Hugo would himself have liked to have been this unheeded prophet. Perhaps this is the highest sober aspiration that he can permit himself from the vantage point of his defeat and exile. To be a wounded lion, a prophet scorned, is this a desire we can understand in terms of Marx's description of the Montagnard social-personality? Perhaps it is the most comfortable available role for the democrat disposed to self-righteous declamation and symbolic gesture. Certainly it permits him to come "out of the most disgraceful defeat just as immaculate as he was innocent when he went into it."²² It permits him to thunder with self-assured dignity without the responsibility of realizing his words in action. Perhaps the "failure-wish" that Marx discerned buried deep down in the Montagnard social-personality has, under the

²²Marx, op. cit., p. 54.

pressure of events and the shock of defeat, risen nearer to surface, and become semi-conscious.

At any rate, this martyred defeatism is one of the two opposing poles of Hugo's reaction to the Bonapartist coup d'état. It coexists in an uneasy tension with the surviving deluded optimism. Of course, these are the same apparently contradictory impulses which Marx showed to be fused in the Mountain's social personality. Their mediation and resolution in Napoleon the Little is attempted by means of an ideological schema. Hugo tries to convince himself that his defeat is itself a necessary contributing step which paves the way for his eventual providentially ordained victory. In order to properly understand his attempt to salvage from failure a basis for belief in future triumph, we must look more closely at Hugo's account of the processes leading up to December 2nd.

It will be remembered that Marx described Montagnard populism as "a night in which all cats are grey,"²³ an abstract Manichean division of social reality into two opposing camps: the "reactionaries" and the "people." Marx maintained that this schema collapsed a

²³Ibid., p. 46.

multitude of important distinctions and thereby blinded the party to social reality, to all those considerations concerning the strength and size of various parties to which a serious movement of any kind would have to be sensitive.

Indeed, this appears to fit the ideology which shapes Hugo's attempts at a sociological account of the coup d'état. At his most moralistic and ideological, Hugo dispenses with sociology altogether. He sees only "on one side a nation, the first of nations, and on the other, a man, the last of men."²⁴ From this point of view he tells a tale of woe about how this least of men "tramples," "flouts," "mocks," "insults," "defiles," and otherwise violates this first of nations.²⁵ Bonaparte, it is clear, is the only actor in this drama. Everyone else simply suffers passively. This is why Marx remarked that Hugo, in attempting to make Bonaparte small, had actually made him great.²⁶ The continual hammering away at his crimes, his deceptions, his malevolent schemes and calculated subterfuges,--all this serves

²⁴Hugo, op. cit., p. 31.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Marx, op. cit., p. 8.

only to make the man the most diabolical genius the world has ever known, one whose every word and deed going back twenty-five years was cunningly plotted to achieve the precise premeditated effect of December 2nd.²⁷ This is indeed a great Napoleon, one whom Hugo and his "people" cannot possibly be blamed for not having foiled.

Hugo is aware of the tension in his text between Bonaparte's "greatness" and his "littleness." He poses the question explicitly:

When the man is measured and found so little, and his success is measured and found so enormous, it is impossible for the mind not to experience some surprise. We ask ourselves: How has he done it? We analyze the adventurer, and laying aside the advantage he derives from his name, and certain facts which aided him in scaling the ramparts, we can discover nothing at the bottom of the man and of his action but these,--craft and money.²⁸

The line of thinking opened up at the beginning of the passage by the question has already been closed off again by the "answer" at the end. From Marx's standpoint, an adequate answer would require Hugo to focus on the empirical complexities of the social-personalities of the various strata making up the Second Republic, including his own. But it looks as if Hugo's ideology

²⁷ See Hugo, op. cit., pp. 17-18, 20-22, 125, 150-151, for examples.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

and social identity make this impossible. Incapable of confronting his own inadequacies and of giving up his idealized abstraction of the "people," he can only fall back on a conspiracy, one now enlarged to include Bonaparte's co-plotters.

Hugo pursues this line in his description of the adherents of the Bonapartist regime. He identifies these people in general as the morally depraved. They include former notables in the republican Assemblies and ministries who opportunistically hitch their wagons to whichever star shines most brightly for the moment in the firmament. Alongside these thoroughly corrupt ones are their dupes, "the fools" who are the "one class of men unanimous in rallying to the new order."²⁹ Having been taken in by the former's diatribes against "demagogism," "anarchists," and "communists," . . . "it was for them especially that the saying was invented, 'Louis Napoleon has saved society.'"³⁰ Then, there are the Jesuits and corporals, whom Hugo identifies as having really voted "yes" in the plebiscite held shortly after the coup to legitimate it. (Hugo maintains that the bulk of the vote in favor of Bonaparte was obtained by

²⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

fraud and coercion.) Others who support the regime are the government functionaries and aspiring functionaries, whose sole motive is salaries, promotions, etc. And then there are the "religious-voltairian-proprietor-manufacturers. . . who pray in these terms: 'O my God! send up my Lyons railway shares!'"³¹

Marx's standpoint permits us to concede that Hugo has correctly identified some of the bases of Bonaparte's support. Yet it also enables us to maintain that he fails to penetrate the concrete sociological and psychological processes of counter-revolution. We can say that Hugo fails to give us insight into such matters as how the groups he identifies come to prefer the Bonapartist option to other possibilities, including a government headed by Hugo's party. And, of course, he neglects to give any serious consideration to Bonaparte's popularity among the lower social orders. He simply concludes that Bonaparte

seeks elsewhere than among the true people a sort of ravenous popularity, speculating on the savage instincts that still remain in the peasant and the soldier, trying to succeed by the agency of the coarsest selfishness and of the basest passions, by inflaming the appetites of the sensual and stimulating the envy of the covetous.³²

³¹Ibid., p. 153.

³²Ibid., p. 46.

Here we see most plainly that the "people" is for Hugo a moral category; those who lack the requisite virtue, i.e., those whose allegiances are not Victor Hugo's, are excluded from its ranks. They are not "the true people," but subhuman impostors.

All those who support Bonaparte and oppose Hugo's political aspirations constitute the "party of the past." They are engaged in a perverse and ultimately futile attempt to resist progress. The Republic is the form of the future; its triumph is inevitable, providentially foreordained. In resisting it, the men of the past are "wrestl(ing) with God."³³ Opposing them are the "true people," the party of the future. They see that the institutions and authorities of the past are now a desiccated corpse, which they propose to bury in a ditch.

In 1848, all who clung to the past, all who lived on the corpse, saw that ditch close by them. That yawning ditch into which all their fictions, their treasury, were so near falling--fictions that weighed over men for so many centuries,--they resolved to fill up. . . . They resolved to have done once and for all with the spirit of enfranchisement and emancipation, and to tread down and crush forever the ascending forces of humanity.

. . . To undo the labours of twenty generations, . . . to slay. . . religious inquiry, philosophical inquiry, universal inquiry; to crush through-

³³ Ibid., p. 118.

out Europe that immense vegetation of free thought. . . ; to marry the knout and the holy water sprinkler; . . . to resuscitate all that could be resuscitated of the Inquisition, and stifle all that could be stifled of intelligence; to stupify youth, --in other words, to brutalize the future; to overturn the tribunes, to suppress the journal, the public poster, books, utterances of every sort. . . to preach to man material interest as his faith, his law, his aim, his God; . . . in a word, to close up that abyss which is named "progress"--such was the vast, enormous plan, extending over Europe, . . . of those men of the old world.

. . . At certain times of human history, when certain things are being plotted, when certain things are being done, it seems as if the old demons of humanity--Louis XI, Philip II, Catherine de Medicis, The Duke of Alba, Torquemada--are somewhere there in a corner, seated around a table and holding council.³⁴

For Hugo, then, the February Revolution and subsequent events culminating in the coup d'état of Louis Bonaparte are a struggle between the party of the past and that of the future, between reaction and progress. This is simply the latest in a long line of such struggles which everywhere dot human history. The Bonapartists do not differ fundamentally from the architects of the Inquisition, the tyrants of antiquity, and the despots of the East. Indeed, throughout Napoleon the Little, they are referred to as Neros, Caligulas, Tamurlaines, Borgias, pashas, sultans, and so forth. By

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 208-211.

the same token, the mass "people's party" which Hugo sees himself leading in this period is essentially of a piece with every force which has ever resisted oppression in the course of history.

Here one recalls Marx's comment that this ideology "obscures the peculiar physiognomy of this period."³⁵ It seems that Hugo's facile assimilation of the contemporary situation in France to this pre-fabricated, abstract, metaphysical, ahistorical schema, robs him of the ability to discern its distinctive features and specific textures. And Marx has shown us how this ideology exercised a pull on Hugo, given its links with his party's and his own characterological peculiarities.

This is the ideological underpinning of Hugo's attempt to find in the coup itself some ray of hope, some basis for sustaining the long-range optimism of his outlook. We saw that he insisted on the providential inevitability of the ultimate triumph of republicanism and we saw how his faith in the necessary victory of virtue over vice shaped and consolidated his stance as an exiled prophet in Napoleon the Little. In order to maintain the delicate balance between hope and despair,

³⁵Marx, op. cit., p. 46.

confidence and depression, optimism and pessimism, Hugo tries to make out that the coup d'état itself is an instrument of progress.

He argues that the execrable Bonaparte is actually unwittingly a servant of Hugo's cause. The success of his coup serves to break down two crucial associations in the minds of the French which temporarily stand in the way of republicanism. First, it severs the connection between the Republic and the Terror. The very refusal of the Mountain to defend the Republic against the counter-revolution is thus transformed into a virtue. The party's disposition to cave in before the onslaughts of the "party of the past" testifies to the essential mildness and virtue of republicanism. People need no longer fear that the Republic means the excesses of 1793; indeed Hugo and his colleagues have, as it were, bent over backwards to correct that misimpression. Second, the coup destroys the association between the Empire and national pride and glory. The connection established by Napoleon the Great is now dissolved by Napoleon the Little. Those who had naively assumed that the ascendancy of the nephew would inaugurate the glory known under that of the uncle are even now being disabused of that notion. The new regime, which makes France the shame of the

civilized world, provides the effective cure.³⁶

Furthermore, Hugo claims that the Bonapartist regime promotes the republican cause by discrediting, more thoroughly than the Republic itself could have done, those four institutions his unheeded oracular orator identified as the main obstacles to progress. These were: the centralized administration, the permanent army, the paid clergy, and the irremovable magistracy. Of course, it was precisely the people associated with these institutions, government functionaries, army officers and soldiers, the clergy and the judges, whom Hugo pointed to as the pillars of Bonaparte's support. But now the manifest corruption they exhibit in this capacity is, in his eyes, their conviction before the bar of history. The middle class had thought them to be the necessary bulwarks of society. But through Bonaparte's coup this error is exposed. It is a lesson that could not have been taught so effectively and quickly by other means. Even Hugo's beloved "tribune" is now found too slow for the dissolution of such prejudices. Drastic measures were called for, and so Providence hit upon Louis-Bonaparte as its

³⁶Hugo, op. cit., pp. 183-184.

unwitting instrument.³⁷

Thus, Hugo tries to extract a glimmer of hope from the apparent triumph of the reaction. From the perspective of The Eighteenth Brumaire, the problem with his effort is not so much that he is wrong as that coming from him the description is contradictory and self-serving.

In order to describe the coup as an instrument of progress, Hugo must dispense, at least temporarily, with some of the cardinal tenets of his democratic faith. Without ever rejecting them outright, and thereby calling into question his entire outlook, he must quietly put aside for a time his belief in the unswerving virtue of the "people," his commitment to the parliamentary system as the agent of world progress, and his faith in the power of the word to change the world. That such enormous concessions are made for the sake of a "happy ending" seems, from Marx's point of view, to indicate that what we are witnessing here are the last desperate flailings of the Montagnard in extremis.

From Marx's perspective, Hugo's description of the benefits of the Bonapartist coup enables him to con-

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 184-191.

tinue to avoid confronting his party's failure; it justifies and consoles him by transmuting his defeat into a victory; it bolsters his assurance of his own virtue and relieves him of the responsibility for his actions. Altogether, it shores up the Montagnard social-personality which is threatened by the success of Bonaparte's coup d'état and the destruction of the Second Republic.

The foregoing shows, I believe, that Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire can, with some success, be interpreted as a critique of Victor Hugo's rival description. Let us consider exactly how this was shown. First, it was assumed that the two descriptions were indeed conflicting accounts of the French Second Republic. Then it was shown that Hugo's way of interpreting that social reality was tantamount to a self-description of the outlook, situation and activity of one (collective) agent operating within that same social reality, the party of the Mountain. It followed that insofar as Marx's description was about that party (in addition, of course, to being about other component parts of the social reality of the Second Republic), then Marx's description was at the same time a description of Hugo's description. And furthermore, since Marx's description was, in effect, a redescription of Hugo's description which made visible

inadequacies and limitations of the latter, it followed that Marx's description was a critique of Hugo's

Now we need to raise again the question of assessing the persuasiveness of the critique. It seems undeniable that in making possible the sort of redescription of Hugo's Napoleon the Little which we have just given, Marx's account has permitted us to see a great deal more of Hugo's and his party's outlook, situation and activity than did Hugo's own description. We were able to see beyond the latter and to discern a great many contradictions, lacunae, misperceptions, and so on. It seems, then, that we were given a more coherent, comprehensive and perspicuous picture of at least this one portion of social reality. We ought, therefore, to conclude that Marx's description successfully subsumes Hugo's. At the same time, it is clear that the question of Hugo's subsuming Marx's never arises, that it is beyond Hugo to even conceive the possibility of such a description as Marx's. It seems, then, that we can conclude that The Eighteenth Brumaire is a persuasive critique of Napoleon the Little and therefore superior to the latter as a social description of the French Second Republic.

And yet the matter is perhaps not so simple. We have, in effect, thus far proceeded as if the persua-

siveness of the critique were the basis for validating the relative correctness of Marx's description of social reality. But clearly one could argue that this is precisely to put things backwards. It ought rather to be the case that the correctness of the description provide the basis for the acceptability of the critique.

The objection can be restated as follows: Marx's critique of Hugo rests upon a number of empirical assumptions about "what was really happening" in the Second Republic. It was because Hugo's description departed from these putatively correct empirical assumptions that it was described as inadequate and limited, as involving misperceptions, contradiction, lacunae and so forth. Surely, then, if we are to assess the adequacy of Marx's critique, we must inquire into the correctness of the empirical assumptions underlying it. For, if it should turn out that Marx were wrong about "what was really happening," then his critique, no matter how perspicuous, coherent, comprehensive, and persuasive, would be fatally undermined.

The force of this objection can be seen if we look once more at the nature of social description and critique. We saw that critique was a complex type of social description. Its distinctive way of describing agents' self-descriptions involves a comparative moment

and therefore a duality between the two terms of the comparison. On the one hand, there is the agent's self-description simpliciter; on the other hand, there is the putative actual character of what the subject's description describes. The critic's description of his subject's self-description is a juxtaposition of these two in such a way as to reveal a discrepancy between them. Thus, in critiquing Hugo and the Mountain, Marx juxtaposes (often only implicitly) their view of what is happening against his own putatively more adequate view.

This comparative moment or duality is the very heart of critique as a form of social description. It is what distinguishes critique from simple hermeneutical description. The latter, at least as it is often understood and practiced, describes the self-descriptions of agents in such a way as to avoid raising the question of the adequacy of those self-descriptions. Proponents of critique argue, therefore, that hermeneutics, thus conceived, is a deficient mode of social description in that it is incapable of discerning agents' systematic ideological misunderstandings of their own activity. Critics warn, therefore, that hermeneutical descriptions of this type may merely reproduce that misunderstanding instead of coming to an adequate understanding of their

subject matter.

In seeking to avoid that danger, critique structures its social descriptions dualistically as we have seen. Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire is clearly so structured. A proponent of hermeneutics might hold that the dualistic character of Marx's description is arrived at via the superaddition of a distorting foreign element (Marx's own view of "what really happened") upon social description proper (the agents' self-descriptions). But for Marx or for any practitioner of critical description, the more complex form, which requires the holding together in a single act of synthesizing judgment two, so to speak, subdescriptions, is precisely social description itself in its most adequate manifestation.

At any rate, no complete assessment of the sort of critical social description we find in The Eighteenth Brumaire can fail to consider the empirical adequacy of that term in the comparative structure which reflects the critic's own putatively correct view of "what really happened." When we try to adjudicate between two conflicting social descriptions by interpreting one as a critique of the other, we find that we are driven to consider the question of what is involved in assessing the empirical adequacy of description. This, of course,

is a question that cannot itself be answered from within the framework of the question about the persuasiveness of critique. It requires rather the establishment of a new problematic, which we take up in the next chapter.

In order to set the stage for that effort, we may close the present chapter by citing some of the empirical assumptions underpinning Marx's critique which need to be assessed. First, there is the assumption that mass popular agitation in June 1850 against the abolition of universal suffrage might have been effective. Then there is the assumed falsity of the Montagnard view that all would be well without such a campaign and the related assumption that this falsity could easily have been known at the time. Also, that there were numerous advance indications of the impending coup d'état and that these were easily discernible at the time. Further, that the demise of the Republic was not caused by a conspiracy, and that the acquiescence of the masses in the coup was not due to their having been tricked.

The above (and others we could have cited) all devolve upon the most central of Marx's empirical assumptions, which are these: It was not the case that the coup d'état was a violent external interruption of an otherwise sound polity. Rather, the Republic was deeply

and fatally rent by class divisions which doomed it. Bonaparte's success was the culmination of a counter-revolutionary process traceable ultimately to the fear on the part of the bourgeoisie of a socialist revolution carried out by the French proletariat under the direction of its Parisian center. The bourgeoisie's fear had some basis in social reality given that the bloody civil war of June 1848 was an abortive proletarian revolution. That event (which was omitted altogether from Hugo's description) was crucial in that it both drove the bourgeoisie into the arms of Bonaparte and also disabused the workers of the illusion that the Republic was in their interests and worth defending.

These are the assumptions which we need to validate in some way or another if we are to resolve the question of the persuasiveness of Marx's critique. Let us turn now to the task of seeing what such validation involves, and hence what is involved in adjudicating between conflicting social descriptions in terms of empirical adequacy.

CHAPTER III

TOWARD A POST-EMPIRICIST ACCOUNT OF EMPIRICAL ADEQUACY: MARX vs. RECENT SOCIAL HISTORIANS

We have imagined that an empiricist¹ might object to our judgment about the superiority of Marx's social description to Hugo's in the following way: Marx's critique, however coherent and perspicuous, rests upon certain empirical assumptions about the Second Republic. But these assumptions may be false. And if indeed they should turn out to be false, then his critique of Hugo, however coherent and perspicuous it appears, will be falsified.

Now we must take up this challenge. There is a

¹Throughout this chapter, the terms "empiricist" and "empiricism" are used somewhat loosely to cover persons and views holding that a distinction between observation and theory can be drawn in a straightforward manner, that observations can be conceived atomistically and correlated with corresponding bits of reality, that such observations and the bits of reality corresponding to them can be brought to bear in a straightforward manner to decide between competing theories, and that, therefore, theory choice is governed by a decision-procedure. This usage is meant to include, for example, both Hempelian positivism and Popperian falsificationism, but to exclude, for example, the holism of Quine and Kuhn and the anarchism of Feysabend.

certain sense in which we ought to sympathize with the spirit of the empiricist's objection. This is the sense in which he or she is insisting upon the idea that any social description, whether structured as critique or in some other way, is making a validity claim to the effect that it is adequate to its subject matter. Put more simply, the empiricist is in part reminding us that Marx in writing The Eighteenth Brumaire is surely trying to say something about how things were with the Second Republic. And this is certainly correct. There is no doubt that Marx is making claims about what is the case and furthermore he believes that it is the correctness of these claims which makes possible the perspicacity of his critique of Hugo.

The empiricist deserves an additional measure of our sympathy for his or her insistence that the sorts of validity claims embedded in Marx's critique and in social description in general are arguable. He or she is right to insist, contra radical incommensurability theorists, for example, that some way of assessing the empirical adequacy of competing social descriptions is both possible and necessary. It is not the case that "anything goes" and this is in part because social reality is constraining with respect to what is an empirically adequate description of it.

Yet this is about as far as our sympathy with the empiricist ought to extend. To insist upon the importance of the problem of assessing the empirical adequacy of social description is not necessarily to see all its implications. The empiricist, it must be said, has far too simple a picture of what is involved in assessing empirical adequacy.

The empiricist typically makes the assessment of empirical adequacy a matter of falsification. He or she imagines firstly that there can be framework-neutral observations characterized in framework-neutral language, and secondly that when one or more of these is inconsistent with some description, law or theory, the latter is falsified. But recent work in the philosophy of science has challenged both of these empiricist "dogmas." The inescapable implication of "frameworks," "paradigms" or "research-programmes" in directing and characterizing observation is now widely admitted. And so is the notion that inconsistencies don't tell one what to do with them; hence, that falsification, as the empiricist conceives it, does not constitute a decision-procedure for the determination of empirical adequacy.²

²The literature concerning the challenge to what is here being called the empiricist philosophy of science is enormous. A good starting point is Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

The critique of empiricism in the natural sciences surely applies as well in the domain of social description. Indeed, it has often been claimed, though perhaps without justification, that due to its special subject matter, social description would be exempt from the empiricist falsification model even were natural science not.³ We need not take up this question here. The argument from the special nature of the subject matter of social description is not required for the case against empiricism. That the falsification model is not adequate on its own home ground is enough to discredit it in the outlying region where it was always applied more or less as an afterthought.

Where, then, does this leave us? On the one hand, we have rejected the empiricist view of what is involved in assessing the empirical adequacy of social description. On the other hand, we have accepted the relevance of the general notion of empirical adequacy for

³The notion of an ontologically based difference in method between the natural and social sciences has a long history. Two important recent defenses of the idea are Charles Taylor, "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," Review of Metaphysics 25 (1971), and Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959). An extremely penetrating and original critique of this view is found in Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

the evaluation of social descriptions such as Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire. This means that we are committed to finding some more sophisticated account of empirical adequacy.

We can perhaps begin to get a picture of what an alternative account of empirical adequacy might look like if we examine more closely precisely how the empiricist model breaks down in the case we have selected. It so happens that a well-known social historian who specializes in the French Revolution of 1848 has recently published a study of the Second Republic which is explicitly conceived as just the sort of empiricist falsification of The Eighteenth Brumaire which we hypothesized. His name is Roger Price, and his book is The French Second Republic: A Social History.⁴ Price attempts to marshal observational evidence which is putatively untainted by interpretive or conceptual bias and couched in neutral language in order to falsify Marx's validity claims about the proletariat and its role in the revolution and Republic. By seeing how this attempt at falsification fails (in its own terms) we will learn more about the nature of social description and therefore about what

⁴Roger Price, The French Second Republic: A Social History (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1972).

is involved in assessing its empirical adequacy.

Price's argument, stripped down to its essentials, is that Marx's account is vitiated by a factual error. The author of The Eighteenth Brumaire was mistaken in describing the June insurrection of 1848 as a "proletarian revolution" and in describing the participants as a "proletariat." Price adduces what he takes to be evidence that falsifies the Marxian description. He draws on analyses of arrest records to show that the majority of the insurgents were artisans from the traditional Parisian trades, while the bulk of the remainder were small workshop patrons, retail shopkeepers, unemployed workers and day laborers. Smaller numbers of clerks, liberal professionals and some rather atypical highly skilled factory workers also participated:

In terms of the actual participation in the insurrection, this was (not) a movement of factory proletarians. . . , but was a far more heterogeneous movement of the Parisian lower classes, including. . . many members of the social groups Marx refers to as petty bourgeois and lumpenproletariat.⁵

Despite this heterogeneity, Price claims that the preponderance of artisans is the crucial sociological feature of the insurrection,⁶ and that Marx's description

⁵Ibid., pp. 187-188.

⁶Ibid., p. 170.

is falsified. He notes that the few factory workers who did participate were nearly exclusively metal workers. Highly skilled, well-paid and well-organized, they were in important respects indistinguishable from artisans.⁷ So were the insurgent small property owners, according to Price. The latter were typically patrons of small workshops employing artisans in the traditional artisan trades, indeed working alongside them. Even the insurgent retailers were part of the artisan subculture; their clientele were artisans and they themselves lived and worked in artisan neighborhoods.⁸ Similarly, the unemployed and day laborers who fought in June were often declassed artisans or provincials hoping to learn a trade. They lived within the same geographical and cultural space as their more fortunate fellow insurgents.⁹

In order to refute Marx's description of the June insurrection as a proletarian revolution, Price cites data to the effect that the artisan insurgents were skilled craftsmen employed in small workshops who maintained close relations with their employers. Thus

⁷Ibid., p. 164.

⁸Ibid., p. 8.

⁹Ibid., pp. 166-167, 170.

they did not work as unskilled labor in large impersonal factories. Their work was non-mechanized and often involved the manufacture of luxury consumer goods, unlike genuine proletarians.¹⁰

Furthermore, Price claims that Marx's description is falsified by the sheer geography of the insurrection. He adduces evidence to show that the main centers were the Faubourgs Saint-Antoine, Saint-Michel and Saint-Jacques, the areas housing the traditional Parisian trades and their personnel; it was here where the artisans lived and worked that the insurgents erected their barricades and made their stand. On the other hand, those areas of the city where factories were located and true proletarians lived (mostly suburbs in outlying regions) were quiet.¹¹ This clearly points to the conclusion, contra Marx, that proletarians were not insurgents and insurgents not proletarians.

Price cites some additional geographical evidence in support of his refutation of Marx. The insurrection was largely a Parisian affair; only in Lyon was there a sympathetic, coordinated, large-scale uprising in June 1848. This is significant because these two cities were

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 7, 17, 79.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 6-7, 170, 175, 180.

both centers of small-scale craft manufacturing, rather than industrial centers with significant concentrations of factories. They were decidedly artisan cities, not proletarian centers. And the genuine proletarian cities of mid-nineteenth century France, places like Lille and Mulhouse, experienced no uprisings in June 1848.¹²

Price goes on to contrast the mores of artisans and proletarians so as to show that the latter were in effect not capable of insurrectionary praxis, while the former were. He cites evidence of the higher educational levels and more stable domestic habits of the craftsmen. The factory workers were much more prone to drunkenness, anomie, and non-programmatic expressions of frustration than were the artisans. Whereas the latter had organizational and political experience, the former were essentially pre-political peasants, and tended to resort to traditional rural forms of protest such as food riots rather than to strikes or programmatic political forms of action.¹³ It is no wonder, then, according to Price, that the genuine proletarians of the Second Republic were not involved in the June insurrection, nor that those who were insurgents were not

¹²Ibid., pp. 12, 115, 189-192.

¹³Ibid., pp. 56-64, 72-74, 77-78, 80, 89, 137.

proletarians.

Now this is all very interesting material which Price has introduced into the discussion. Yet it seems clear that it does not serve to accomplish what he thinks it does. That is, this material does not, contrary to Price's intention, constitute a falsification of Marx's description of the June insurrection as "the proletarian revolution" or of the insurgents as "the Paris proletariat." The reason for this is that Price's data are conceived in terms of a concept of the proletariat which differs significantly from Marx's concept.

Price assumes that Marx means by "proletariat" something like "class of existing individuals who earn wages for unskilled factory labor." His data are directed at showing that the June insurgents were not proletarians in this sense, hence that Marx was mistaken. But is this really how Marx uses the term "proletariat" in The Eighteenth Brumaire? Does he really claim that the insurgents were factory workers? Is it really the case that he makes the rather straightforward sort of factual error Price attributes to him? Is it really a simple matter of mistaken identity?

I think we will see that this is not the case and therefore that Price's attempted falsification does

not work if we look at how Marx uses the term "proletariat" in The Eighteenth Brumaire. Consider first the following passage in which Marx describes the situation of this class in the period preceding the June insurrection:

Having secured (the victory of February 1848, i.e. the overthrow of the July Monarchy) arms in hand, the proletariat impressed its stamp upon (the new republic) and proclaimed it to be a social republic. There was thus indicated the general content of the modern revolution, a content which was in most singular contradiction to everything that, with the material available, with the degree of education of the masses, under the given circumstances and relations, could be immediately realized in practice.¹⁴

This description is of interest because it passes quickly over the contemporary activity of those whom Marx calls "the proletariat." It focuses instead upon what it depicts as the gap between what they proclaim and what they are capable of realizing. Their inability to achieve the "social republic" they desire is not, in Marx's view, like the Mountain's inability to achieve its goals. In this case, so we are told, failure is a matter of historical unripeness. "The material available" is inadequate; those who are called "the proletariat" are neither sufficiently educated (presumably politically, at least mainly), nor sufficiently numerous, nor sufficiently powerful in their relations with other

¹⁴Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Bonaparte (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 22.

sections of the population. In short, they are in Marx's eyes historically immature.

It will be immediately clear that we have a rather different sort of description here than the sort Price wanted to refute. Here we have a description which juxtaposes the present state of a group of historical agents against the describer's projection of their future development. The present character of those called "the proletariat" is described from the vantage point of what they are not yet but can be expected to become, given the extrapolation of certain historical tendencies. It is a projection of an as yet unrealized future development which is the standard in terms of which the present state is assessed. That projected future or goal of development is what for Marx confers meaning upon the present empirical facticity of these people. In this sense, we can say that Marx's description of the proletariat in this passage is projective.

Another passage from the text brings out this projective element of Marxian social description still more clearly.

On the threshold of the February Revolution, the social republic appeared as a phrase, as a prophecy. In the June days of 1848, it was drowned in the blood of the Paris proletariat, but it

haunts the subsequent acts of the drama like a ghost.¹⁵

Once again the passage asks us to look beyond the immediate facticity of the empirical agents. Or rather we are to look at that facticity only through the prism, as it were, of the projected future development of the class and of its aims.

Thus, the importance of the notion of a "social republic" is its status as a forerunner of the socialism Marx envisions. And the significance of the June 1848 uprising is its status as a portent or foreshadowing of projected future communist proletarian revolution. This, then, is the sense in which the June insurrection is "proletarian": it announces this project and in so doing puts it on the historical agenda. Similarly, the June insurgents are called "proletarians" in the sense of anticipating or prefiguring the formation of the modern working class Marx envisions.

One further passage may be cited to flesh out the picture:

With (its June 1848) defeat the proletariat passes into the background of the revolutionary stage. It attempts to press forward again on every occasion, as soon as the movement appears to make a fresh start, but with ever decreased expenditure of strength and always slighter results. As soon as one of the social

¹⁵ibid., p. 118.

strata situated above it gets into revolution-ary ferment, the proletariat enters into an alliance with it and so shares all the defeats that the different parties suffer, one after another. But these subsequent blows become the weaker the greater the surface of society over which they are distributed. The more important leaders of the proletariat in the Assembly and in the press successively fall victims to the courts, and ever more equivocal figures come to head it. In part it throws itself into doctrinaire experiments, exchange banks and workers' associations, hence into a movement in which it renounces the revolutionizing of the old world by means of the latter's own great, combined resources, and seeks, rather, to achieve its salvation behind society's back, in private fashion, within its limited conditions of existence, and hence necessarily suffers shipwreck.¹⁶

Here we see that Marx once again describes the activity of those he calls the "proletariat" in terms of a contrast between their limited or immature present facticity, on the one hand, and the projected mature character of the class he expects them to become. Once again, it is the projection about the shape of a future which is not yet which confers meaning upon the present and provides the categories for the latter's description.

This reading of Marx's text squares with his treatment of the proletariat elsewhere, especially in Capital. There the proletariat is presented not so much as a given historical fact, but rather both as the product of a long historical development and also as the process

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

of that development. It is a process involving the transformation of a multiplicity of pre-industrial social groups into a modern self-conscious class. Marx sees this transformation as the historical coalescing of the experience of dispossessed peasants, declassed artisans, failed petty proprietors and others. Persons from all of these backgrounds participate in and contribute to the formation of the modern working class or proletariat. Indeed, the class itself can be viewed as this process of contribution and self-transformation. In view of their history of political radicalism and their organizational experience, Marx recognizes skilled artisans as an especially influential tributary of this proletarian stream in formation.¹⁷

Given that this is Marx's general approach to the proletariat, it is not surprising that we find him using the term essentially projectively in The Eighteenth Brumaire. What is perhaps surprising, though, is the fact that in a history whose entire significance devolves ultimately upon the possibilities for and projected future development of the proletariat, Marx has so little to say

¹⁷ Karl Marx, Capital (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954). See especially Vol. 1. The approach to the proletariat as historical process has been further developed by E. P. Thompson in The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963).

about that class. The last passage we quoted suggests why. It tells us that the proletariat retired from an active political role in the revolution after its June defeat. Qua historical agent, then, it retires too from Marx's description. But for Marx, the proletariat continues nonetheless as an historical presence, albeit a negative one. It constitutes a great void at the heart of the Second Republic, both conferring meaning upon the drama and indeed influencing its unfolding at a distance by the fear its failed prophecy generates; "it haunts the subsequent acts of the drama like a ghost." This shows that Marx conceives the general importance of those whom he calls the "proletariat" in the history of the Second Republic to be precisely their projective role, as opposed to more standard forms of agency.

Having seen how the term "proletariat" operates in The Eighteenth Brumaire, we are now in a position to return to Roger Price's attempt to falsify Marx's description. It should be clear that this attempted falsification does not work. The purportedly neutral, interpretation-free evidence which Price adduces is not at all independent of his own categorical framework. (Of course, this does not make this evidence any less factual.) Price takes "proletariat" to mean roughly class of modern un-

skilled factory workers. Therefore, he seeks out and characterizes data structured in terms of that categorical assumption. His data, thus understood and reported, are inconsistent with the hypothesis, attributed to Marx, that the June insurgents were proletarians in the sense of unskilled factory workers.

Recent philosophy of science tells us that even in the simplest possible case, i.e., the case in which Marx's categorical framework coincided or nearly coincided with Price's, this inconsistency is not in and of itself a falsification. Or rather, it is only insofar as one decides to take it as such instead of as necessitating some other sort of adjustment in the system. In other words, the inconsistency can be resolved in other ways and there is no canonical decision-procedure capable of uniquely determining which way one must go here. One is not compelled to consider the hypothesis falsified, although one might do so (and, it might be added, do so with good reasons).

However, Price's situation is not even as good as this. For clearly our present case is not nearly as simple as the one we have just considered. Ours is a case in which two incommensurable categorical frameworks are involved. For we have seen that Marx's category of "the proletariat" is not equivalent to Price's

notion of a class of modern unskilled factory workers. So Price's data in effect glance off the categorical surface of Marx's description instead of directly meeting it. Or put slightly differently, Price's data do not bear directly upon the truth or falsity of Marx's description (though as we shall see, it is possible that they may have some sort of indirect bearing).

This will be seen immediately if we consider how Marx might reply to Price's purported falsification. He might say that Price's data are all well and good but that they don't take away from the fact that a proletarian class is in formation and that the radical Paris tradesmen and their insurrectionary praxis in June 1848 are part of the process of formation of that class. In other words, Marx might very well deny that he meant by "proletariat" what Price means, and elaborate his own category in terms of a historical development whereby dispossessed peasants, declassed artisans, ruined petty proprietors, and so on are transformed into a modern class conscious industrial proletariat.

It appears, then, that Price's data fail to falsify Marx's description for the reason that they don't touch on it. That is to say they are conceived and couched in terms of a categorical framework different from and indeed alien to Marx's. Hence these data are

not so much inconsistent with Marx's description as categorically out of phase with it. After all, it is highly likely that Marx was himself aware that the June insurgents did not work in factories by and large and that the unskilled industrial workers of Lille and Mulhouse, say, were not involved in the uprising. Yet this did not or need not have stopped him from describing the insurrection and its personnel as proletarian in the sense we have just explicated. There is clearly no inconsistency here, hence no question of falsification.

The problem here is precisely that problem which has been the subject of so much recent controversy in the philosophy of natural science. We have two incommensurable categorical frameworks with two incommensurable categories of "the proletariat." The observations made from the standpoint of and in the language of one are therefore out of phase with descriptions made from the standpoint of and in the language of the other. The former therefore are not such as to confirm or infirm the latter. And furthermore, there is no third set of neutral external observations to which one could appeal to adjudicate between the two competing frameworks. Any additional set of observations we might introduce for this purpose would itself necessarily be made from the standpoint of and in the language of some third cate-

gorical framework which would itself stand in need of justification. This additional complication would get us no closer to the possibility of a definitive empiricist falsification. Indeed, the impossibility of category-independent observation entails the impossibility of such falsifications across categorical frameworks. And as we have seen, even within a single framework, an inconsistency need not require the jettisoning of any given hypothesis.

But what if someone should object that a projective description such as Marx's is illegitimate, that its unfalsifiability stems from its unwarranted way of "going beyond" present facticity and importing extraneous assumptions about the future into description? This is certainly a misleading way of looking at the matter. To speak of "going beyond" the facts and importing extraneous material into their description is to succumb again to the "myth of the given." The difficulty with this is not that all description necessarily involves such a "going beyond the facts." It is rather that there are no facts in the sense implied here to go beyond. That is, there are no facts in the sense of facts lying wholly outside any categorical framework. There are no facts in the sense of facts wholly unconstituted as relevant to some given mode of

description.

Once the myth of the such pure "Ur-facts" is given up, it becomes clear that Marx's facts about the historical unripeness of the Paris proletariat are no less facts than those of Price about their artisan form of employment. In each case, the categories of description constitute a distinct set of phenomena as relevant facts. Since the descriptive categories are different, the constituted facts differ in each case.

The reason that it is tempting to regard Price's facts as more "factual" than Marx's, is that Price's descriptive categories are more widely in use than Marx's. They are perhaps so widely in use as to be taken for granted and hence are virtually invisible. Facts constituted in their terms thus appear to be facts simpliciter, that is, facts independent of the categorical framework which constitutes them as such. The greater visibility of Marx's categorical framework may simply be a function of its more restricted currency, at least in many circles.¹⁸

We must give up the idea that Price, as opposed

¹⁸Nelson Goodman makes a similar argument for the conventional character of realism in art. Cf. Languages of Art (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 34-39.

to Marx, simply sees what is really there and sees with, as it were, virgin eyes, eyes unencumbered with categorical spectacles. That this is patently not the case can be seen in the following way. Price's peculiar way of looking at the phenomena is a response to Marx's. The former did not simply stare blankly at his material. Rather, he started with a question and with a question invited, as it were, by Marx. It is not an exaggeration to say that Price's description could not have been made but for Marx's. It was the asking of certain kinds of questions, made possible by Marx's description, that lay behind the adoption of his own categorical framework. Clearly, then, his description is in this respect no different from Marx's. It is every bit as category-laden.

So the role of descriptive categories in constituting realms of relevant facts is much the same in such apparently "innocent" descriptions as Price's as it is in more exotic ones like Marx's. The same difficulties that pertain to the falsifiability of the latter pertain to the falsifiability of the former. It is equally true of both descriptions that they resist falsification by evidence conceived from the standpoint of and couched in the language of some alien categorical framework.

This goes to show that it will not do to make the sort of Popperian move that outlaws projective social description on the grounds that it is not in principle falsifiable. The difficulties that stand in the way of falsifiability are not peculiar to descriptions of this type. The problem is not with projective social description but rather with the falsifiability criterion itself.

In rejecting falsifiability and in thereby not (at least on these grounds) ruling out projective social description, we are not to be understood as rejecting any empirical adequacy requirement whatsoever. On the contrary, Popper is right in spirit if not in letter. Projective social description is not of interest unless it is susceptible to some sort of judgment of empirical adequacy. To repeat once more, Marx is surely in The Eighteenth Brumaire trying to give a description that is adequate to the social reality of the Second Republic, and we need to have some way of assessing the extent to which he does just that.

But recognition of the importance of categorical frameworks with respect to description and observation leads us to recast the question of empirical adequacy. The empiricist took assessment of empirical adequacy to be a matter of testing individual descriptive

statements or laws by reference to what were thought to be corresponding external observations or classes of observations. Now, however, with the role of categorical frameworks in view, we see a need to conceive the question in a less atomistic fashion. We need to make it a matter of assessing the empirical adequacy of the categorical framework itself. In order to judge a description, we ask not whether it fits the relevant facts conceived as external, neutral arbiters. Rather, we ask whether the categories it uses to constitute the facts proper and relevant to it as such are adequate. But what does it mean to ask about the empirical adequacy of categories in this way without presupposing a sphere of neutral, external facts?

We have been arguing that the choice of a set of descriptive categories, whatever their type, carries in its train the pointing up of a corresponding domain of phenomena and the constitution of that domain as a sphere of relevant facts. Indeed, it is this way that categories have of, as it were, bringing along their own domains of relevant facts with them (and vice versa) that precluded the possibility of cross-categorical falsifications. This seems to be a dangerous situation since it appears to make descriptions criticizable only internally, that is, in terms internal to their own

categorical structure. How, then, is it possible to assess the adequacy of the categories as such? And how adjudicate between competing descriptions across categorical frameworks?

Since we have abandoned the empiricist chimera of a realm of external, neutral facts capable of arbitrating such questions, it follows that any facts we appeal to will be facts constituted as relevant to some categorical framework. And we have seen that facts constituted as such by one categorical framework need not bear directly upon descriptions made within the terms of some other such framework. But this does not mean that such facts have no bearing whatsoever on such descriptions. That they can neither falsify nor confirm in empiricist terms does not make them altogether without relevance for assessments of empirical adequacy. But what sort of relevance might they have?

It seems to me that it is entirely reasonable to argue for the empirical inadequacy of a given social description in terms like these: This description is inadequate because its categorical structure is such that it fails to constitute as relevant some domain of phenomena. It in effect closes this domain off to us, blocks our view of it, and in so doing makes us blind to some set of possible facts or at least to their possible

relevance.

Of course, this type of argument presupposes that we have already come to a position of being able to see the blocked off realm and its relevance. That is to say, we can only make this sort of judgment of the inadequacy of a given description after we have access to some other categorically different description (or at least a glimpse of the possibility of such a description). Suppose, for example, that we judge some description to be empirically inadequate on the grounds that it blinds us to a domain which we can see from the vantage point of some second competing description. This second description will be cast in categorical terms involving the constitution of a realm of facts not constituted as relevant by the first description. So the second description (or its categorical framework) can be thought of as letting us see what the first did not. It in effect opens up what the first blocked off.

It might very well be the case that in moving from the first to the second description we experience a kind of enlightenment. We have a sense, that is, that it is as if we had been blind before and now can see. And this notion need not be dismissed as mystical since it can be given a precise content. The move from the first to the second description involves our coming into

possession of a new domain of facts and of a sense of their relevance. And once having done so, we see that we are now the richer for it, that our previous way of seeing was impoverished.

Once opened to us, domains of facts and their relevance tend to stay that way. They tend, that is, not to close off again. They become incorporated into a standpoint from which we can look back on our first description and judge it to be inadequate or at least too limited. Indeed, if we try to think ourselves back into the standpoint of the original description, we find we cannot do so. The change in the conceptual geography is such that we can't convincingly pretend to be blind again.

Now we need to see whether or not this post-empiricist account of empirical adequacy for social description accounts for what goes on in an actual historiographical dispute. So let us return once more to Marx's description of the proletariat in The Eighteenth Brumaire. But this time, let us look at it from the perspective of an alternative account by another recent social historian with a rather more sophisticated methodological outlook than that of Roger Price.

The historian whose work I propose to discuss now

is William H. Sewell, Jr.¹⁹ Sewell's work on the proletariat of the Second Republic and the June insurrection is, like Price's, conceived as an alternative to Marx's account and as a critique thereof. And indeed, some of the material Sewell introduces into the discussion is related to the sort of material Price introduced. But Sewell's approach is nonetheless quite different from that of Price. He does not envision the introduction of this material as a falsification of The Eighteenth Brumaire. Rather, he sees it as highlighting the inadequacies of that work by making visible and treating as relevant what Marx missed.

Put most generally, Sewell's argument is the following: The Eighteenth Brumaire gives us no notion of the corporatist cultural and organizational heritage of the June insurgents, a heritage which goes all the way back to the ancien régime. The Eighteenth Brumaire therefore does not permit us to see how this heritage mediated these workers' response to the immediate politi-

¹⁹William H. Sewell, Jr., "From Revolution to Revolution: Property and Labor in France, 1789-1848," and "Corporations Républicaines: The Revolutionary Idiom of Parisian Workers in 1848." These are chapters from a book to be published by Cambridge University Press. Hereafter the first will be cited simply as "From Revolution to Revolution," and the second as "Corporations Républicaines."

cal and economic situation of 1848. It does not permit us to adequately understand that response because it blinds us to the corporatist idiom in which their response was expressed, and hence to its ultimate meaning. In closing off to us the corporatist ideas, values, language and customs which mediated the insurgents' response to the June crisis, Marx's account in effect portrays the workers' movement as being generated, unmediated, out of the exploitative dynamics of the new capitalist system. But this is not adequate. It fails to conceptualize as relevant an important domain of material and thereby distorts the meaning of the insurrection.

Sewell's argument treats as relevant to the understanding of June, and hence to the demise of the Second Republic, an area which Marx does not: the cultural heritage of the insurgents. He looks at the recent history of the French artisans' forms of organization and praxis, as well as at the political and moral assumptions underlying them, in order to master the idiom in which they characteristically express their aspirations. The knowledge of this idiom, of its syntax, vocabulary and grammar, and therefore of the relative value of each of the possible utterances within it, forms the basis for Sewell's interpretation of the praxis of

the insurgent skilled trades workers in 1848.

He identifies their idiom as that of corporatism, noting "the ubiquity of the corporate theme in workers' ideology in 1848. . . (when) corporatist terminology abounded in workers' revolutionary discourse-- in speeches, petitions, statutes of organizations, newspaper articles, manifestoes and the like."²⁰ Sewell finds the use of the corporate idiom not only in workers' discourse, but also in their non-verbal praxis. This praxis, including the June insurrection, made use of corporatist organizational forms and corporatist ideology. It embodied, for example, the quintessentially corporatist assumptions that the trade was a moral community which ought to be organized so as to promote the good of all its practitioners and to guarantee the high standards of its practice; that the trade was the natural form of organization of production, etc.

These assumptions and the corresponding organizational forms which played a role in the revolution of 1848, according to Sewell, have a history of several hundred years during which they shaped and were shaped by the developing social-personality of the French artisan. The corporations of the ancien régime had been simultaneously

²⁰ Sewell, "Corporations Républicaines," op. cit.

economic, moral, religious and legal bodies. Qua economic organizations, their traditional functions included the working out and enforcing of uniform wage schedules and production standards, as well as controlling access to the practice of the trade via apprenticeship regulation and the sale of masterships.²¹ But these economic functions were linked with a set of broader moral assumptions and practices.

The trade was presumed to be a solidary moral community and the corporation's overarching purpose was to keep it in good order for the benefit of the entire trade community and the public at large. The corporate ethic was collective. Members were required to contribute to mutual aid funds for the support of the unemployed within the trade. Masters were in theory prevented from introducing innovations harmful to journeymen and from otherwise subverting traditional practices for the sake of private gain. Workers in turn were disciplined for such deleterious practices as drunkenness, begging, incompetence and insubordination.²²

Of course, in practice masters often had the power to disregard the collective ethic with impunity when it

²¹Sewell, "From Revolution to Revolution," op. cit.

²²Ibid.

suited them, while journeymen and apprentices could not. In some trades, as a result, there grew up journeymen's organizations, sometimes secret, sometimes open. But these were informed by similar corporate assumptions and aims: uniform wage and production schedules, mutual aid, apprenticeship regulation, and overseeing of member's alcohol consumption, etc.²³

The trade corporation of the ancien régime was also a legal entity. It, and not the individual master, held from the crown the legal right to organize and practice the trade. It sold this right to the master without thereby alienating to him the right of absolute disposal over his newly acquired property in the mastership. Theoretically, he could not resell the mastership or even bequeath it at will, but only with the permission of the corporation.²⁴

The Great French Revolution changed all of this, however. The trades corporations, like all other corporate bodies, were abolished. Only individual proprietorship was recognized as legal. "The corporate spirit" was branded as counter-revolutionary; no intermediary bodies could stand between "the people" and their government;

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

no combinations of partial interests could thwart and obscure the indivisibility of the General Will. This change altered the balance of power between patrons and artisans to the latter's disadvantage. Now employers would be unhindered in their pursuit of private gain, and workers would be without recourse and protection. During the Empire, Restoration and July Monarchy, trade-based mutual aid societies emerged. They tried to mitigate the harshest effects of the new order and took up some of the slack left by the abolition of the trades corporations. While officially they were to be charitable and religious fraternities, some traditional corporate economic functions (especially the setting of wage tariffs) were covertly reassumed.²⁵

Such, then, was the history in outline of the trades corporations up to the outbreak of the 1848 revolution. Such, then, was the traditional "idiom" of corporate organization, practice and thinking. Having conceptualized this history and tradition as relevant to the June insurrection, Sewell is now in a position to see in that event features which Marx could not see. He finds in the insurrection traces of the corporate idiom, especially of the notion of the trade as the

²⁵Ibid.

natural economic and moral unit. He argues that this notion was taken up by the skilled trades workers in the new revolutionary circumstances of 1848 and transformed into the basis for an effort to reorganize the political, social, and economic life of the nation.

Sewell makes his case by noting some empirical characteristics of the trades workers' praxis in the months leading up to June--characteristics which Marx either fails to notice or does not construe as relevant. Immediately following the February Revolution, there was a flurry of corporate organization and reorganization in Paris. The skilled trades workers believed that the overthrow of the July Monarchy and the establishment of the Second Republic, for which they had fought, meant the recognition of a previously unacknowledged natural right: "the right of association." Much reform and socialist propaganda had argued for such a right both as the moral antidote to competitive individualism and as the economic cure for poverty and unemployment. At any rate, the trades workers took their victory to mean that their corporations, suppressed by the hated loi Chapellier as illegal combinations against the economic freedom of the individual entrepreneur, would now be legitimized. They began to organize. Existing underground corporations, which had been disguised as mutual aid societies, were brought out

into the open and transformed along republican lines. Defunct corporations were revived, and trades which had never previously been organized constituted themselves as corporate entities.²⁶

But this was not, according to Sewell, a simple resurrection of the past. Unlike the trades organizations of the ancien régime, the new revolutionary corporations of 1848 were explicitly dedicated to the solidarity of all artisans across trade lines and to the solidarity of all trades with one another. In addition, they were, for the first time, radical-democratic in structure; membership was automatically accorded to everyone practicing the trade, and all officers and delegates were elected by universal suffrage. Sewell sees these revolutionary corporations as miniature republics which the trades workers eventually came to view as the proper constituent units, social, political and economic, of the larger Republic.²⁷

Sewell finds other ways in which the corporate idiom colored artisan political praxis in the Spring of 1848, ways overlooked by Marx. In all the political processions and demonstrations of this period, including the

²⁶ Sewell, "Corporations Républicaines," op. cit.

²⁷ Ibid.

marches around the Hôtel de Ville on February 25 and 28, the journées of March 17, April 16, and May 15, the corporations participated as such, each marching beneath its own banner. These seizures of public space announcing popular sovereignty were not, as in the Year II, carried out by an undifferentiated sans culotterie; rather, they were effected by an organized phalanx of corporations ouvrières, and thus marked an important shift in the skilled trades workers' sense of their identity.²⁸

Sewell also remarks, as Marx does not, that during the electoral campaign of April 1848, each corporation constituted itself as an electoral committee. Like a political club, it auditioned and endorsed candidates. It was a revealing feature of this new corporatism, that corporations nearly always endorsed candidates from their own trades. The campaign to elect workers to the National Assembly was a failure, in Sewell's view, due largely to each corporation's desire to have its own deputy in Parliament and to act as an autonomous political unit during the campaign. The efforts of Louis Blanc and the Luxembourg Commission to mobilize the support of all the Paris corporations behind a single unified slate

²⁸Ibid.

were unsuccessful. The trades workers' sense of corporate identity was too strong and indeed Blanc's own position was ambiguous since he and the Commission had encouraged the idea that the corporations should become political units.²⁹

As Sewell sees it, the work of the Luxembourg Commission bore traces of the corporatist idiom. The Commission, under Blanc's leadership, had been set up by the Provisional Government in March of 1848 to seek solutions to the "problème du travail" (i.e., unemployment and poverty). Technically, its role was strictly advisory; it had no power to effect any reforms. Furthermore, its sphere of concern was limited to the economic issue; it had no mandate to tackle constitutional questions. But the corporatist sentiments of its personnel and of its constituency-at-large encouraged a significant multiplication of its pretensions. The key to this, according to Sewell, was the widely held notion that the workers' corporations were the most natural and satisfactory form of social organization and ought therefore to become the constituent political units of the state. He notes that Blanc habitually referred to the Commission as "the Estates General of the people" and treated it as a

²⁹Ibid.

parliament of labor; and also that Blanc arranged for the election of two deputies from each of the Paris workers' corporations and set them to work on the task of elaborating the "constitution du travail."³⁰

Although the National Assembly abolished the Luxembourg Commission in May of 1848 before its work was completed, Sewell discerns the main outlines of this "constitution." Labor was to be recognized as the sole foundation of the socio-political order. A Manifesto of the Delegates of the Corporations proclaimed, "L'état . . . c'est le fabricant. N'est-ce pas souverain, le fabricant de toutes richesses?"³¹ The sovereignty of the producers was to be organized along trade lines; the National Assembly was to seat two democratically elected representatives of each workers' corporation. In other words, the workers' corporations were to become the basic political units of the new république démocratique et sociale.³²

This corporatist constitutional programme was, according to Sewell, admixed with a kind of corporatist

³⁰ Ibid. Also Sewell, "From Revolution to Revolution," op. cit.

³¹ Sewell, "From Revolution to Revolution," op. cit.

³² Sewell, "Corporations Républicaines," op. cit.

skilled trades socialism. Gradually, with the aid of state credit, the workers' corporations were to be transformed into democratic cooperatives or "associations" of production. Former workers and former masters would become "equal associates," jointly owning and controlling the means of production. As more and more of the trade became corporately owned and managed, the reign of egoism and competition would be replaced by that of cooperation and harmony.³³

This idea of associative production, i.e., of replacing private petty craft manufacturing with cooperative artisan-producers' associations, had been a central tenet of French socialist thought in the thirties and forties. Sewell believes that in the Spring of 1848, when the trades workers seemed the victors of the new revolution, it became the ubiquitous goal of the corporate labor movement.³⁴ He notes the linguistic connection between the notions of the "right of association" and "associated production."

In Sewell's view, the corporatist character of the pre-June activity and thinking of the Parisian trades

³³ op. cit. Sewell, "From Revolution to Revolution,"

³⁴ Ibid.

workers is an important clue to the meaning of the insurrection itself. When the insurgents raised the banner of the république démocratique et sociale, they were fighting for a vision of a democratic, anti-capitalist social order based upon the corporate organization of labor. Granted, most of them could not put it so programmatically or coherently. Still their meaning is revealed through their creative contemporary use of the idiom of their cultural heritage.

Here, then, is Sewell's description of the June insurgents and their insurrection. As we have seen, it draws upon a body of facts which Marx's description did not draw upon: facts concerning the corporatist character of the praxis of the radical working class movement in Paris in 1848. For example, we saw that Sewell gives a place to such facts as the following: that there was a renaissance of corporate organization after February; that the unsuccessful electoral efforts of those who would soon man the barricades were largely corporate-based; that likewise their demonstrations and public marches were corporate-based; that the programme of the "vanguard" of these workers at the Luxembourg Commission was for a kind of democratic, anti-capitalist corporate state. And so on. None of these facts finds a place in Marx's description.

In the terms of the argument we have been developing, what permits such facts to find their way into Sewell's horizon of vision is a categorical framework which conceptualizes as relevant material concerning the cultural history of the insurgents. Sewell begins with the assumption that agents' social activity is expressed via an "idiom" and that such "idioms" are culturally transmitted from the past even as they are creatively transformed in response to new problems. In order to understand what agents such as the June insurgents are really up to, it is necessary to learn the idiom through which their praxis is expressed. This will involve familiarizing oneself with their history-- in the case of the June insurgents with corporatist traditions and organizations of previous artisan culture. Only in terms of this inherited background can the quality of what they are doing in the present emerge. Only against this inherited background can the (relative) novelty of what they do be apparent.

It is not our present task to analyze and assess Sewell's action theory as such. Rather, it is our purpose to point out that because he takes the cultural heritage of the insurgents to be relevant to an understanding of their praxis, Sewell has access to a body of facts about the insurrection to which Marx does not. Because he takes

the history of corporatist ideology and organization to be relevant, Sewell is able to see features of the June events to which Marx is blind.

When we are able to appreciate this, we can make a case for the empirical inadequacy of Marx's description of the proletariat without presupposing discredited empiricist notions of framework-free facts, falsification, and the like. We can criticize Marx's description as follows: Marx does not bring to bear upon the understanding of June any material concerning the traditions of the insurgents. Instead, he seems to presuppose that their aspirations and sensibilities were created ex nihilo, as it were, by the contemporary economic and political crisis. We are given no sense of how these most recent experiences were filtered through the trades workers' existing, previously constructed social-personalities.

We can see that in this respect, Marx's treatment of the proletariat differs greatly from the way he describes the Mountain or the party of Order. With these groups, he takes great pains to show how the memories and traditions of 1789 constituted an idiom (to use Sewell's term) which constituted the options available to them and shaped their praxes.

But when it comes to the lower orders in the Second

Republic, Marx's description lacks concreteness. The insurgents in his account have no real identifiable social-personality, no historically specific idiom concretizing their praxis. In place of such historical specificity, we are left to supply some sort of highly abstract, rationalistic schema. For example, that the Government and Assembly, in abolishing the Luxembourg Commission and the National Workshops, threatened the workers' objective, material interests, and the latter therefore rebelled.

As plausible as this might seem when we have nothing else to go on, it begins to seem very empirically thin and inadequate as soon as we see the possibility of another sort of description. Once, that is, Sewell has given us access to a domain of facts making possible a much richer or thicker description, the limitations of Marx's description become apparent. When we turn from his account to Sewell's and then back again, we feel as if Marx had in effect misled us insofar as his description blinded us to dimensions of social reality which now seem important. He did not permit us to see who the insurgents were and what they wanted. And on this basis we make the judgment that Marx's account is empirically inadequate, and that Sewell's is superior.

But suppose that someone objects that our judgment of the empirical inadequacy of Marx's description is not grounded in a set of formal criteria or rules. Or, to put the objection more generally, that our account of empirical adequacy is itself inadequate since it does not outline a decision-procedure for adjudicating between competing descriptions. It does not provide a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for empirical adequacy. It does not establish formal criteria which when fulfilled distinguish empirically adequate social descriptions from empirically inadequate ones. Rather, it is only a loose notion whose application in any specific case is not uniquely determined. Indeed, its application might vary from case to case and from person to person.

Our answer to this objection must be as follows: It is certainly true that no decision-procedure, no necessary or sufficient conditions, no formal criteria are given here. But it is a mistake to expect that sort of thing. The process of adjudicating between competing social descriptions across categorical frameworks is not susceptible to codification in universal form. This is not because of anything special about the subject matter; indeed we have recently come to appreciate that theory choice in the natural sciences is similar in

not being governed by the sort of canonical decision-procedure our objector has in mind. Whatever set of rules or criteria we might try to introduce in either domain would be susceptible of varying applications in any concrete case.

But it does not follow that the process of adjudication or assessment of empirical adequacy is non-rational, as radical incommensurability theorists have sometimes assumed. Rather, there is a different sort of rationality at work here. Some philosophers have likened this sort of rationality to Aristotelian phronesis, which differs from the episteme our objector wants. Whereas the latter involves the subsumption of particular cases as instances under universal rules, the former involves a kind of non-codifiable sensitivity to the unique particularity of the individual case. In episteme, rationality consists in rule-following. Phronesis, on the other hand, can be thought of as a kind of creative rule-transcending rationality which enables one to make the right judgment at the right time in the right circumstances, etc. Its judgments are justified not by appeal to general rules but in terms of their appropriateness given the particulars. This does not make these judgments either subjective or arbitrary or irrational. It is possible to discuss the merits of

the case and to give reasons in support of one's views. What is not possible, however, is to divorce those reasons from the particulars which embody them and to inflate them into a universal Method.³⁵

This is why our comparative analysis of Marx and Sewell remained at the level of particulars. It was necessary to present in detail Sewell's alternative description of the proletariat in order for the inadequacies of Marx's to become apparent. It was only the total picture emerging in its concrete articulation that was persuasive. There were no short-cuts in the form of universal methodological rules whose application could have obviated this. But once again, it must be stressed that this phronesis-like character of our view of empirical adequacy is not a weakness. It only

³⁵The Aristotelian roots of this conception of rationality are discussed in Hans-Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975). Gadamer also finds support for his critique of "methodism" in the Kantian notion of judgment as formulated in the third Critique. I was fortunate in hearing papers and discussions of these questions at the symposium on Rationality in the Natural and Social Sciences at the Inter-University Centre for Post-Graduate Studies, Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia in the Spring of 1978. Contributions by Richard Rorty and Richard J. Bernstein were especially helpful. In addition to this, I wish to acknowledge Prof. Bernstein's help in clarification and development of these ideas, both in discussions and through his paper, "Practical Discourse and Truth: Arendt and Habermas," read at the New School for Social Research on October 25, 1979.

appears as such to a philosophical and cultural tradition which has lost sight of the distinctive rationality of practical reason or judgment.

Having given this post-empiricist account of what is involved in assessing the empirical adequacy of social description, we are in a position to return to the question of the legitimacy of Marx's projective use of the term "proletariat" and indeed of projective description more generally. It will be remembered that Marx's category of the proletariat had what we called a projective character. That is, it was not the sort of descriptive category which characterized the sheer present facticity of the working class without regard to what that class could be expected to become in the future. Rather, it operated via an assumption about the future which conferred meaning upon the present. It thereby enabled the present to be described in terms of its relation to a set of posited future possibilities or goals.

We can now raise the question as to whether or not our assessment of the empirical inadequacy of Marx's description of the June insurgents entails, after all, the illegitimacy of projective description. In arguing that Marx's description of the insurgents was too thin, were we in effect saying that the technique of describing

their present activity and thinking in terms of how far it had come along the path to what Marx anticipates as its ultimate historical fruition, obscured some rather important present characteristics? That the projective or future-oriented aspect of the description swallowed up, as it were, the present facticity of what was being described? That the latter was thus closed off and prevented from emerging in its concrete specificity?

Another way of putting this is the following: Did not our assessment imply that Marx's projective use of the term "proletariat" lent his description of these people a largely negative quality? We saw that they were described as immature, not yet formed, uneducated, lacking in certain resources, in short not yet what they will someday be. The emphasis is on their falling short of the mark, hence, on what they are not. And from the point of view of the material opened up to us by Sewell's alternative description, does it not appear that this negative thrust of Marx's account blocked the emergence of the positive characteristic of the June insurgents?

This way of looking at the matter seems to square with our account. And yet it is misleading to the extent that it presupposes an epistemologically significant distinction between the present and positive on the one

hand and the future and negative on the other hand. We have already seen that it is impossible to maintain any notion of the sheer givenness of social facts untainted by any categorical framework. So in an important sense, "positive, present" descriptions are no more basic than "negative, projective" ones. Both are category-laden. And I think we can now go on to see that both are temporally-oriented as well, and that neither temporal orientation is more basic or "given" than the other.

To see this, consider once more our example. It simply is not the case that unlike Marx's, Sewell's description is devoid of temporal orientation. It is not the case that Sewell simply describes the "pure present" of the insurgents' praxis. On the contrary, a major point of our discussion of his work was that it approached the constitution of a realm of facts about the present praxis of the insurgents only through categories drawn from an understanding of their past.

The contrast between Marx's description and Sewell's, then, is not that between a pure present-oriented description and a non-present-oriented one. Nor is it a contrast between a non-temporal description and a temporal one. Rather, it is a contrast between two different temporal structures. Whereas Marx views the

present as prologue to the future, Sewell views it as culmination of the past. Whereas Marx describes the present in terms of how it leads to or anticipates or sets the stage for projected future developments, Sewell describes it in terms of what it makes use of and how it follows from the past.

We can see now that in each case the way the present is described is in part determined by its place in a temporal sequence. Thus, the description of the present as the beginning of a development extending into the future will differ from the description of the present as the end point of a development which began in the past. Which aspects of the present are made available for description and which appear relevant will vary with the way in which the present is conceived to fit into a broader temporal sequence. We have already seen how Sewell points up different features of the insurgents' praxis than Marx does. And it should now be clear that the principle of selection has a good deal to do with these considerations of temporal sequence. In taking the insurrection as more or less the end point of a development, Sewell sees in it traces of the corporatist heritage from the past. On the other hand, Marx, in taking the insurrection as the beginning of a projected future working class history, sees in it immature approxi-

mations, first stabs and "prophecies."

It appears, then, that our consideration of the problem of empirical adequacy has brought us to the brink of a new problematic. This new problematic concerns the question of temporality in social description, the problem of narrative structure or plot. We want to ask is it indeed unavoidable that, in describing what is or was happening, one presuppose some notion of what happened before and/or after? That is, is all social description covert narrative? And if so, how do we decide where the story ought properly to begin and end? How do such decisions concerning beginning and ending points in part determine the overall meaning and value ascribed to the story? Finally, how do these sorts of considerations concerning narrative structure figure into the process of adjudication between competing social descriptions?

These sorts of questions seem to take us away from what might be thought of as the strictly cognitive dimensions of social description. It looks like we are entering the realm of aesthetic valuation. But in fact the very distinction between the cognitive, on the one hand, and the aesthetic, on the other, may turn out to be unable to withstand scrutiny. For our new "aesthetic problematic" has arisen directly out of our cognitively-

oriented inquiry into empirical adequacy. It has turned out that our investigation into the problem of empirical adequacy has uncovered the importance of temporal orientation in social description. We are now, therefore, in a position to reflect on this newly uncovered dimension, to take it up as an explicit theme of our inquiry. Let us turn without further delay to this task.

CHAPTER IV

ALTERNATIVE EMPLOTMENTS IN SOCIAL

DESCRIPTION: MARX

Our investigation into what is involved in assessing the empirical adequacy of competing social descriptions uncovered a dimension we had not previously considered: the temporal orientation or narrative structure of description. We saw that just as descriptions rest upon categorical frameworks, so they may also depend upon temporal orientations or underlying plot structures. In other words, how one describes what is or was happening may depend in part on (overt or covert) assumptions about what happened before or after.

We saw, for example, that Marx's description of those whom he called "the proletariat" in The Eighteenth Brumaire depended on his expectations about what would happen to them in the future. And also that William Sewell's rather different description of these people depended upon his assumptions about what had happened to them before June 1848. Thus, the choice (which need not be understood as a conscious voluntary decision) of a given temporal orientation or narrative form makes a

great deal of difference as to what sorts of facts find their way into descriptions.

These observations suggest that a full understanding of social description requires an appreciation of how narrative techniques and structures operate therein. One lesson of our comparative analysis of the Sewell and Marx descriptions in the previous chapter is that a multiplicity of alternative narrative forms or temporal orientations are possible with respect to some given portion of social reality. Another is that this multiplicity is in part what makes possible the production of a multiplicity of alternative social descriptions. It is clear, then, that the process of adjudicating between competing social descriptions must at some point involve adjudicating between the temporal orientations or narrative structures which underlie them. Our present task is to investigate precisely what this might involve.

This much is clear. Just as we saw that the choice of some categorical framework for description could not be justified by appeal to putatively neutral framework-free facts, so we can rule out the view that the justification of any given temporal orientation or plot structure can be in terms of "time-or-plot-free" elements of any kind. The arguments in the two cases are

parallel and need not be redrawn here. Suffice it to say that it will not do to argue that, for example, Sewell's choice of beginning and end points for his narration of the June insurrection of 1848 is superior to Marx's alternative choice on the grounds that Sewell's better fits the facts as to when the story really does begin and end.

But the impossibility of justifying the choice of one mode of emplotment over possible alternatives in such "objectivist" terms need not land us in a relativist predicament. We need not assume that there are no rational grounds for such choices. Our task here will be parallel to that of the previous chapter. There we sought an account of empirical adequacy which permitted rational adjudication while doing full justice to the multiplicity of possible categorical frameworks. So here we seek a means of rational adjudication of narrative modes which gives due weight to their inherent multiplicity.

We can begin by getting an overview of how vast the multiplicity of possible emplotments for any portion of social reality actually are. We have already seen that precisely what a description includes and how it is shaped will vary with the choice of beginning and end points. It was in these terms that we contrasted the

alternative descriptions of Sewell and Marx: whereas the former described the June insurrection as the end point of a narrative temporal sequence, the latter described it as the beginning of a sequence extending beyond it in time. Of course, these are not the only two possibilities. The story could in principle begin or end just about anywhere. As we have said, there is nothing in social reality itself which determines that a description of it must start or end at some given point in time. And since the beginning and end points of narrative descriptions in part determine what is omitted and what is included in them, it follows that in principle what is omitted and what is included is itself immensely variable.

One can also look at the matter in terms of the location of a single event within competing descriptions. It is entirely possible that an event which appears as the beginning point in one narrative appear as the end point of some alternative account. This difference in position will make for a difference in the way the event is presented. In the first narrative, it will be characterized in terms of an inaugural motif; in the second, in terms of a terminating motif. Needless to say, there is no reason why this event could not be emplotted as a point anywhere in the middle of any number of alterna-

tive narrative accounts. Nor is there any reason why it might not be omitted altogether from other possible competing narratives.¹

But we are only beginning to scratch the surface of the multiplicity of alternative emplotments in social description. The possibilities abound even among those descriptions in which the beginning and end points coincide or nearly coincide, even among those descriptions which include and omit nearly the same material. For the way in which the transition from beginning to end point is made is subject to great variation. One description might emplot this transition in the Tragic mode, another in the Comic, yet another as Romance, and so on. By thus lending the narrative an overall shape or structure, the choice of emplotment in this gross sense determines what kind of story is being told and what its meaning is.²

This in part determines the manner of presentation

¹Hayden White, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), pp. 5-7.

²The classic and still very useful discussion of the major, standard modes of emplotment is Northrop Frye's "Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes," in his Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 33-67. For an application of Frye's plot classification to historiography, see Hayden White, Ibid., pp. 7-11.

of any single event within the description. It may determine that an event assume the role of a climax, for example, as opposed to that of a foreshadowing, contributing cause, coincidence, background detail, consequence, or whatever. This in turn will determine the emotional load borne by the event; for example, that it involve a release as opposed to a building of tension. Once again, it is clear that there is no reason in principle why some event might not assume any one of such a multiplicity of alternative roles in competing narrative descriptions.³ Thus, a range of alternative ways of describing the significance of any given event is given with the availability of alternative overall plot structures.

We have spoken thus far as though a describer's choice of overall plot type for his or her narrative were limited to the standard conventional dramatic forms which critics have identified (*i.e.*, Tragedy, Comedy, Romance, Satire, etc.). But we need not assume a pre-given set of standard types fixed for all time. Clearly there is a great deal of room for original idiosyncratic plot types. Consider for example the whole gamut of possible ironic variations on the standard types.

³White, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

When we turn in the next chapter to consider Gustave Flaubert's Sentimental Education as a narrative description of the French Second Republic, we will see one such variation--an anti-Bildungsroman which depends upon the conventional structure at the same time it overturns it.

Indeed, the recent history of narrative forms shows an enormous expansion of possibilities. We have seen, for example, the construction of anti-narratives premised upon the explicit and deliberate denial of some of the most standard narrative conventions. Thus, a structuralist description can be understood as an anti-narrative which eschews even the emplotting of events in a temporal sequence. From this point of view, its atemporality may be only apparent in two senses: first in that it may very well depend upon covert assumptions about what happened before or after the "time-slice" described, thereby in effect locating the latter as a moment in some assumed broader temporal sequence; and second, in that insofar as it is an ironic anti-narrative, it depends for its sense upon the more standard narrative modes of temporality which it eschews. Again, we shall come across a description which begins to approach this sort of anti-narrative in the next chapter when we analyze Flaubert's Sentimental Education.

But variations in plot structure are not the only source of possible variations in social description. It is also possible to vary the way the narrator functions in a narrative so as to significantly alter the content and meaning of a description. That is to say there are a number of possible alternative strategies as to who tells the story and from what standpoint. Options range from the use of the omniscient narrator which is standard in much nineteenth century narrative to that of the limited point of view technique perfected by Henry James to stream of consciousness techniques of our century to the refusal, sometimes found in anti-narratives, to be pinned down to the use of any identifiable strategy of narration.

Such choices have a great deal to do with how we interpret any given description and therefore with its meaning. This is because one cannot answer the question: What does this description mean?, until one can answer: Who is doing the describing here and from what standpoint? That is, the reader of a narrative social description needs to discover where the author of the text stands with respect to his or her subject matter. What are his or her beliefs and attitudes about the contending parties? With which, if any, does he or she identify; which, if any, does he or she champion?

It is through the use of some one of a multipli-

city of possible strategies for constructing a narrator's persona that the describer is able to guide (sometimes unwittingly and despite conscious intentions) the reader to interpret the description. He or she may shape the persona of the narrator so as to inspire or undermine confidence and thus vary the valuation the reader will put on the description.

Related to the options concerning narrators is another dimension of narrative construction which also provides for great variation in social description. This concerns the multiplicity of possible techniques of characterization available to describers. Our discussion of narrators' personae could have gone on to include the somewhat odd case in which the latter blossoms into a full-fledged character. For example, in the limited point of view and stream of consciousness techniques, what the narrator tells functions as much to reveal his or her sensibility as to convey the plot. There may even be an implied distinction between "what is really happening" and what the narrator tells us is happening.

The possibilities are multiplied when we consider that such techniques are not limited to the delineation of the narrator's persona, but may also be applied to the characterization of any agent who appears in the narrative.

The describer of social reality, as we saw in our discussion of Marx and Hugo, has the delicate dual task of accurately depicting agents' world-views, on the one hand, and indicating their limitations, on the other. For example, the describer may juxtapose the agent's actual situation with his or her view of that situation. There may be a juxtaposition of an agent's view of other agents in the narrative with the actuality of these other agents, and so on. Characters may even be constructed so as to mutually define each other by the juxtaposition of their more or less incompatible views of each other and of the shared situation. By varying the way this is done, a great variety of competing social descriptions can be generated.

Other aspects of characterization techniques may also be varied for differing results. The describer has a choice as to the extent to which he or she portrays any given character "from the inside." This is related to the choice as to the degree to which the reader is permitted to identify with any given character and to the pattern of sympathies and antipathies developed throughout the narrative. Furthermore, the describer has considerable latitude in determining the proportion between description and action in delineating character, in fixing upon the degree to which various characters are

presented as agents versus patients, and so on.

These, then, are only some of the most obvious of the many variables involved in the construction of narrative social descriptions. And, of course, each of them permits a very finely graded continuum of possible choices. So the sheer multiplicity of possible alternative narrative accounts of any portion of social reality is positively enormous.

It is a multiplicity that is different from and in addition to that which we previously considered when we explored the question of empirical adequacy in terms of alternative categorical frameworks. And it is a multiplicity which raises a similar, albeit more complex, problem: how are we to allow for the possibility of some sort of rational adjudication process while at the same time doing full justice to the multiplicity of alternative narratives? How ensure rational standards of preference for one emplotment of, for example, the story of the Second Republic over alternative emplotments without falling back on such discredited empiricist notions as that the first really fits the facts of the matter as given independently of any narrative structure whatsoever?

Having laid out some of the dimensions of the problem of narrative structure as it bears upon description

adjudication, we are now in a position to return to the illustrative material we have been discussing. We can now read Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire in a different way--as dramatic narrative. In so doing, we will be paying attention to its use of narrative techniques. We will identify exactly what sorts of narrative techniques Marx is using, how they operate and how they influence the shape and content of his description. Then we will be set in the next chapter to contrast The Eighteenth Brumaire in these respects with an alternative narration, Sentimental Education. Finally, we will see how it is possible to adjudicate between them.

Marx calls his own emplotment of the story of the rise and fall of the Second French Republic in The Eighteenth Brumaire "farce."⁴ And certainly it contains a strong farcical element, especially surrounding the characterization of Louis-Bonaparte as a buffoonish picaro and the emplotment of his struggle with the party of Order as unabashed knavery outwitting hypocritical pedantry. But just as certainly, this is not the whole story. For the contest between these two forces takes

⁴Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Bonaparte (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 15.

place against a larger backdrop--the absence of the true hero of the drama, the proletariat.

We saw in the last chapter how in Marx's account the proletariat was taken out of the action as a result of its defeat in June 1848. But we also saw how it nonetheless continued in Marx's view to exercise its pull on events, to "haunt the subsequent acts of the drama like a ghost."⁵ Although the proletariat ceases to function as an agent after June, Marx continues to invoke its presence as a moral idea which hovers above the agents and in effect accuses them. This ghost of the proletariat stalks the scene, crying out for revenge and for justice. Although it gets no satisfaction, it strikes fear into the hearts of its enemies in the party of Order and drives them to self-destruction as they frenziedly attempt to prevent its return.

Here, then, we have a number of elements of classical tragedy. Indeed, this tragic aspect of The Eighteenth Brumaire is in effect an envelope surrounding the more mundane farce. It seems, then, that the text is emplotted as a farce inscribed within a larger tragedy. But even this more complex notion is inadequate.

⁵Ibid., p. 118.

As Hayden White has pointed out,⁶ the Marxian emplotment of modern history does not stop at the tragic failure of bourgeois society to do justice to the proletariat. Rather, this tragedy is circumscribed within a larger projected comedy which looks to a resolution in which the pariah is reintegrated into a transformed society. It is from the standpoint of this as yet unfinished comedy that Marx writes the history of present tragic failures. The latter thus assume the status of mere tragic subplots within the overall comedic whole. The envisioned comic resolution simultaneously sharpens and softens the contemporary tragedy of the proletariat; on the one hand, it serves to condemn all compromise solutions and to undercut all partial solace; on the other hand, however, it holds out the promise of a total apocalyptic transformation which justifies contemporary suffering. The short-term tragedies serve to educate the proletarian protagonist, to expose blind alleys, half-way pseudo-solutions and traps, and thus to prepare it morally as well as militarily, to make it worthy of its projected triumph in the anticipated comedic resolution. In this respect, the inscription of the tragedy within the comedy involves

⁶White, *op. cit.*, pp. 286-287, 310, 313.

the use of narrative conventions governing the construction of the classical Bildungsroman.

At any rate, it is clear that in terms of plot structure, there is a great deal more going on in The Eighteenth Brumaire than Marx lets on when he contrasts the history of the Second Republic as simple farce with that of the First as tragedy. We have provisionally and in the most general terms identified the text as a farce inscribed within a larger tragedy in turn inscribed within a still larger comedy incorporating Bildungsroman elements. This is an extremely original and ingenious weaving together of conventionally defined plot elements.

If we look more closely, we can see how Marx constructs his narrative. The Eighteenth Brumaire begins with the immediate aftermath of the February Revolution and ends with Bonaparte's coup d'état of December 2, 1851. The opening, which follows the expulsion of the hated Orleanist monarchy, is a time of apparent social harmony and high expectations. But these are soon revealed to be illusory. The whole of the remaining story is taken up with the relentless working out of the social divisions masked by the early post-February euphoria.

The three plot schemata of farce, tragedy and comedy are represented in this process and in its outcome:

the farce in the triumph of Louis-Bonaparte, "a grotesque mediocrity. . . play(ing) a hero's part"⁷ who bungles and connives his way into power while the rest of the contending parties destroy one another and themselves; the tragedy in the early defeat of the proletariat in June (which is the closest thing to a genuine climax in the story, although it comes virtually at the beginning); and the comedy in the educative process going on beneath the surface of the action preparing the proletariat for future victory and exhausting all the bankrupt pseudo-options which had confused it in its earlier naiveté.

The overall shape of the plot which permits the merging of these three strands is that of the revolution in reverse. Unlike the first Great French Revolution of 1789, this revolution does not progressively widen its aims and its social composition. It does not become increasingly bold and outgrow its early leaders. Rather, its scope decreases and its bases of support shrink. It turns against its own early manifestations not because they don't go far enough, but because they go too far. The most progressive and popular parties are eliminated first, leaving the struggle to increasingly

⁷Marx, op. cit., p. 8.

counter-revolutionary forces. Here is Marx's summary of the shape of this reverse revolution:

In the first French Revolution the rule of the Constitutionalists is followed by the rule of the Girondists and the rule of the Girondists by the rule of the Jacobins. Each of these parties relies on the more progressive party for support. As soon as it has brought the revolution far enough to be unable to follow it further, still less to go ahead of it, it is thrust aside by the bolder ally that stands behind it and sent to the guillotine. The revolution thus moves along an ascending line.

It is the reverse with the Revolution of 1848. The proletarian party appears as an appendage of the petty-bourgeois-democratic party. It is betrayed and dropped by the latter on April 16, May 15, and in the June days. The democratic party, in its turn, leans on the shoulders of the bourgeois-republican party. The bourgeois-republicans no sooner believe themselves well established than they shake off the troublesome comrade and support themselves on the shoulders of the party of Order. The party of Order hunches its shoulders, lets the bourgeois republicans tumble and throws itself on the shoulders of armed force. It fancies it is still sitting on its shoulders when, one fine morning, it perceives that the shoulders have transformed themselves into bayonets. Each party kicks from behind at that driving forward and in front leans over towards the party which presses backwards. No wonder that in this ridiculous posture it loses its balance and, having made the inevitable grimaces, collapses with curious capers. The revolution thus moves in a descending line.⁸

This colorful passage is an accurate summary of the plot of The Eighteenth Brumaire. It conveys the overall mean-

⁸ Ibid., pp. 42-43.

ing of the story, the backwardness of the revolution, as it were. It sets the general affective tone with which the story is to be handled: a bitter, satirical humor. It lays down a principle of selection in terms of which various events are either included or excluded: the former will be those concerning the successive transfers of power from one party to another. It lays down a principle for the ordering of these events: the revolution in reverse. It determines the range of character types: from the diabolical to the incompetent. It determines, therefore, that this will be a narrative without active heroes since every agent is morally suspect. It determines, therefore, that the reader will not be permitted to identify with any of these agents, but will stand aloof and ridicule and judge them. This is because the revolution in reverse structure involves the use of an aloof yet highly judgmental omniscient narrator.

It follows, too, that the plot of The Eighteenth Brumaire has a certain repetitive structure. First we are told how the proletariat is eliminated in part via the treachery of its supposed ally, the petty-bourgeois democrats. Then we see the latter suffer the same fate at the hands of the "pure" bourgeois republicans. This party, having thus done the dirty work of the party of

Order is in turn sent packing by it. And the latter, finally, having cleared the field of all possible opposition (and hence of all possible support), is a sitting duck for Louis-Bonaparte. Several features of this plot structure are skillfully developed by Marx.

First, there is the imputation of a poetic or retributive justice at work. The repetitive cycles of perfidy produce in us the feeling that each successive victim gets no more than it deserves. We get a sort of satisfaction in the fittingness of the punishment for the crime: how right that betrayers of allies should perish by their own allies' betrayal! "He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword." This symmetry is both aesthetically pleasing and partially consoling as a substitute for a more profound sort of justice denied us in the outcome of the revolution.

Marx develops this theme of poetic justice with great wit and precision:

During the June days all classes and parties had united in the party of Order against the proletarian class as the party of Anarchy, of Socialism, of Communism. They had "saved" society from "the enemies of society." They had given out the watchwords of the old society, "property, family, religion, order," to their army as passwords and had proclaimed to the counter-revolutionary crusaders: "In this sign thou shalt conquer!" From that moment, as soon as one of the numerous parties which had gathered under this sign against the June insurgents seeks to hold the revolutionary

battlefield in its own class interest, it goes down before the cry: "Property, family, religion, order." Society is saved just as often as the circle of its rulers contracts, as a more exclusive interest is maintained against a wider one. Every demand of the simplest bourgeois financial reform, of the most ordinary liberalism, of the most formal republicanism, of the most shallow democracy, is simultaneously castigated as an "attempt on society" and stigmatized as "Socialism." And, finally, the high priests of "the religion and order" (sic) themselves are driven with kicks from their Pythian tripods, hauled out of their beds in the darkness of night, put in prison-vans, thrown into dungeons or sent into exile; their temple is razed to the ground, their mouths are sealed, their pens broken, their law torn to pieces in the name of religion, of property, of the family, of order. Bourgeois fanatics for order are shot down on their balconies by mobs of drunken soldiers, their domestic sanctuaries profaned, their houses bombarded for amusement--in the name of property, of the family, of religion and of order. Finally, the scum of bourgeois society forms the holy phalanx of order and the hero Crapulinski installs himself in the Tuileries as the "saviour of society."⁹

The symmetry is perfect, the deserts just. And the effect is a short-circuiting of any indignation the reader might otherwise feel at the coup d'état. What a different affective response this way of emplotting the story engenders from that of Victor Hugo! Here we cannot possibly identify with the party of Order. We can only feel that they got what they deserved. And we are left with an aloof,

⁹ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

ironic sense of the vicissitudes of political life (though, as we shall see shortly, Marx will not let us rest with that response).

Throughout The Eighteenth Brumaire, Marx misses no opportunity to point out the sorts of ironic symmetries which comprise the "just deserts" motif. For example, he tells us that it is fitting that a constitution that was brought into existence by bayonets turned against "the people" during the state of siege of Paris following the June insurrection should be put out of existence by bayonets with Bonaparte's coup d'état.¹⁰ Or again, that if the pathetically timid and incompetent campaign the party of Order mounted against Bonaparte in the period leading up to the coup wasn't worth much, then even it was more than the bourgeois party at large outside of parliament deserved, since the latter rushed to sacrifice its public political interests for the sake of its private business interests.¹¹ Many other examples could be cited.

Marx varies the "just deserts" theme by making the enemies of the proletariat not only morally deserving of, but also causally responsible for their own defeat

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 104.

at the hands of Bonaparte. One way in which he exploits this additional symmetry is through what we can call the "nursery" theme, a term taken from the following passage:

. . . with the state of siege in Paris (after the June days), the respectable, the pure republicans planted the nursery in which the praetorians of December 2, 1851 were to grow up. . .¹²

The idea is that the victims of Bonaparte's treachery (especially the party of Order) were also his instructors in crime. He did no more than copy the extra-parliamentary and unconstitutional tactics they used against others. It was from them that he learned the very strategems he used to destroy them: red-baiting; demagogic appeals to public opinion against Parliament; invoking the threat of the red spectre to frighten opponents; conspiring with the Ministry against the Assembly; disbanding the Assembly by force; having generals disobey summonses for the protection of the Assembly, etc. These were all tactics the party of Order had used against others. Marx's "nursery" motif turns on the irony that in so doing, Order was digging its own grave; it gave Bonaparte the means he needed to inter them on December 2.

Marx uses the "nursery" theme not only to undercut any possible sympathy for the party of Order, but also

¹²Ibid., p. 35.

to deny any special originality or cleverness to Bonaparte. The imitativeness of the latter is stressed¹³ and this in a way which reflects back upon the party of Order: its having been outfoxed by such a mediocrity does not say much for it. All of this only enhances the strength of the implication that Order brought its troubles upon itself and ought not to be mourned.

Marx goes on to develop in yet another way the idea that Order is causally responsible for its own demise. His emplotment has none other than that party itself destroying, in its struggles with other parties, the very weapons, indeed every weapon, it might have used later against Bonaparte. Thus, in its haste to get rid of the "pure" republicans, Order disbanded the Constituent Assembly before it could complete the drafting of a statute limiting the Presidential power.¹⁴ In its zeal to destroy the Mountain, it broke the back of the National Guard. In expelling the petty-bourgeois democrats from the Assembly and handing them over to the courts, it abolished its own parliamentary immunity.¹⁵

¹³Cf. Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 39-40.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 56.

To compound the irony, Marx's emplotment has Order itself handing over to Bonaparte one by one every lever of state power: the Ministry, its independent parliamentary majority, the army, its support in the commercial and financial classes, and so forth.

In all of these ways, Marx emplots Order's demise as a process of self-destruction. This has the effect of making incompetence a salient feature of its character. And that means that this party's defeat is no dire tragedy. It is simply unfit to rule--both morally and otherwise.

But Marx does not let the matter rest here. His narration of the bourgeoisie's responsibility, both moral and causal, for the Bonapartist coup does not stop with the plotting of such ironic symmetries. That would be to stay within the bounds of the conventions governing the construction of "the farce." But we have seen that the farce is inscribed within a larger tragic emplotment. Marx accomplishes this by linking up the "just deserts" and "nursery" themes directly with the fate of the story's hero in absentia, the proletariat.

The thread connecting the farcical self-destruction of the bourgeoisie with the tragedy of the proletariat in The Eighteenth Brumaire is the former's fear of the latter. Order did not contribute to its own destruc-

tion out of sheer stupidity. Rather, it did so under the perceived threat of proletarian revolution. Thus, if it had been merely a question of outmaneuvering Bonaparte, the party of Order might, for example, have advantageously sought to curb the executive power by partially dismantling and reducing the highly centralized national administrative machinery controlled by the President. But Order's fear of another June insurrection precluded this. It felt it needed the bloated bureaucracy in order to control the potentially revolutionary proletariat.

Thus the French bourgeoisie was compelled by its class position to annihilate, on the one hand, the vital conditions of all parliamentary power, and therefore, likewise, of its own, and to render irresistible, on the other hand, the executive power hostile to it.¹⁶

Marx thus exploits the bourgeoisie's self-betrayal as motivated by fear of proletarian revolution. He posits an inherent contradiction in the bourgeoisie's position: the safeguarding of the economic and social privileges the members of the class enjoy as private individuals is at odds with the maintenance of their overt public ascendancy as a political ruling class. The latter is actually a danger to the former. The party of Order is

¹⁶Ibid., p. 62.

driven to betray and destroy its own republic because this form of political life--when fully developed with such institutions as universal suffrage, a plurality of political clubs and mass parties, a free press, and so on--tends to induce a state of ferment in society, to politicize the lower orders, and to start them down a path towards socialist revolution along which there may be no stopping them. This is what the party of Order fears above all else, more even than a Second Empire. And it is this fear which ultimately throws many bourgeois into the arms of their "savior" Bonaparte.

The parliamentary regime leaves everything to the decision of majorities: how shall the great majorities outside parliament not want to decide? When you play the fiddle at the top of the state, what else is to be expected but that those down below dance?

Thus, by now stigmatizing as "socialistic" what it had previously extolled as "liberal", the bourgeoisie confesses that its own interests dictate that it should be delivered from the dangers of its own rule; that, in order to restore tranquility in the country, its bourgeois parliament must, first of all, be given its quietus; that in order to preserve its social power intact, its political power must be broken; that the individual bourgeois can continue to exploit the other classes and to enjoy undisturbed property, family, religion and order only on condition that their class be condemned along with the other classes to like political nullity; and that in order to save its purse, it must forfeit the crown, and the

sword that is to safeguard it must at the same time be hung over its own head as a sword of Damocles.¹⁷

Thus, the self-destructive, self-betraying behavior of the party of Order which constitutes (along with Bonaparte's use of it) the farce, turns out to have its roots and raison d'être in the bourgeoisie's need to suppress the proletariat, which constitutes the tragedy of The Eighteenth Brumaire.

Marx thus neatly ties up the farcical and tragic threads of his plot. At the same time, he provides for the possibility of a future comic resolution. The contradictory position of the bourgeoisie, the logic driving it to self-destruction, is emplotted as the death-agony of a social class which has outlived its historic destiny and ceased to be a viable and progressive force. The self-destructiveness and self-betrayal are symptoms of an irreversible process of degeneration. Thus, Marx makes repeated cross-comparisons between the role of the bourgeoisie as a political class in the First Republic and in the Second. The boldness, heroism and innovativeness of the revolutionaries of 1789 put the party of Order to shame, and the latter's exhaustion as a historical force is certified.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 66-67.

But the dying of one class coincides with the birth of another. As the Second Republic and its political ruling class self-destruct, the proletariat, the drama's hero in absentia, hovers embryonically in the wings. It is depicted by Marx as a regenerative force in formation, with something like the redemptive potential associated in classical tragedy with a new generation not mired in the bloodlusts and squabbles of the old.

Marx thus builds in the possibility of a future comic reversal. The tragedy of the proletariat's June defeat is softened by the projection of a future comic resolution. And at the same time, the victory of Bonaparte over Order is kept squarely on the place of farce, devoid of tragic overtones; the tone of the account of the latter is more ironic than condemnatory.

So the farcical, tragic and comic themes of The Eighteenth Brumaire are interwoven in a ballet of rising and falling classes. And along with this contrapuntal movement, there is a dialectic of forward and backward motion. Marx tells us that in overthrowing the monarchy and setting up the Second Republic in February 1848, the French believe they are involved in a forward historical thrust advancing toward a more modern, progressive form of life. What a surprise and disappointment, then, to

discover only a few years later that in actuality they have regressed to a more backward stage of history.

An entire people, which had imagined that by means of a revolution it had imparted to itself an accelerated power of motion, suddenly finds itself set back into a defunct epoch. . . . On December 2 the February Revolution is conjured away by a cardsharp's trick, and what seems overthrown is no longer the monarchy but the liberal concessions that were wrung from it by centuries of struggle. Instead of society having conquered a new content for itself, it seems that the state only returned to its oldest form, to the shamelessly simple domination of the sabre and cowl.¹⁸

The revolution which began with a republic based on universal manhood suffrage ends with the absorption of all political power into the person of a single Emperor. So the apparent thrust forward has ironically and tragically resulted in a slide backward.

But since the irony and the tragedy are, in Marx's narrative, only strands of a larger comedic plot, the development is not a simple backward movement. Beneath the surface backsliding, there has been subterranean forward progress. This covert forward motion, which is the basis for Marx's projected comedic resolution, is emplotted via the conventions governing the Bildungsroman:

During the years 1848 to 1851 French society has made up, and that by an abbreviated be-

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

cause revolutionary method, for the studies and experiences which, in a regular, so to speak, textbook course of development would have had to precede the February Revolution, if it was to be more than a ruffling of the surface. Society seems to have fallen back behind its point of departure; it has in truth first to create for itself the revolutionary point of departure, the situation, the relations, the conditions under which alone modern revolution becomes serious.¹⁹

Here Marx draws upon the narrative conventions governing the Bildungsroman form in order to tease out a covert forward movement underlying the apparent surface failure. The initial naiveté and underdevelopment of French society doomed the 1848 revolution to failure. But that failure has not been without its compensatory benefits. It has supplied the "education" which is the sine qua non for a future comedic triumph.

Indeed the Bildungsroman motif runs through The Eighteenth Brumaire. The hero who gains wisdom and experience, whose character is matured through the history of the rise and fall of the Second Republic is the proletariat. What looks like its tragic defeat turns out actually to be a phase of a development toward its projected future triumph.

In order to insist upon the educative value of

¹⁹Ibid., p. 19.

the proletariat's failure in the Second Republic, Marx draws an explicit contrast between the plot structures of bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. He depicts the latter as incorporating Bildungsroman motives which transmute earlier defeats into ingredients of later victories.

Bourgeois revolutions, like those of the eighteenth century, storm swiftly from success to success; their dramatic effects outdo each other; men and things seem set in sparkling brilliants; ecstasy is the everyday spirit; but they are short-lived; soon they have attained their zenith, and a long crapulent depression lays hold of society before it learns soberly to assimilate the results of its storm-and-stress period. On the other hand, proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltrinesses of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them, recoil ever and anon from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out:

Hic Rhodus, hic salta!
Here is the rose, here dance!²⁰

Here Marx is at his most self-conscious with respect to the operation of narrative techniques and conven-

²⁰ Ibid.

tions in his description. He is attempting explicitly to superimpose a comedic emplotment upon events which are at the same time being emplotted in his narrative as farce nested within tragedy. By positing that the tempo of proletarian revolution is inherently halting, doubling back upon itself, and above all needful of defeat in order to strengthen itself for eventual victory, Marx lays the basis for the conclusion that the proletariat's tragic defeats during the Second Republic are not tragic defeats pure and simple. For they can also be emplotted as prologue events in a comedic narrative whose time frame extends beyond December 2, 1851, to some projected future revolutionary proletarian triumph.

Thus, the link between the tragic and comic plot strands of The Eighteenth Brumaire is forged by Marx's use of the Bildungsroman convention with the proletariat cast in the role of pupil. Seen from this vantage point, the story of successive betrayals and self-destructions which culminate in the Bonapartist coup is a veritable school for revolutionaries. The June defeat serves to reveal the contradictions and conflicts of capitalist society. It makes manifest to the proletariat what had heretofore been masked beneath the deceptively harmonious surface in the period of the immediate aftermath of February when the Provisional Government had been all

things to all men. The sheep's clothing has been torn from the wolves. The workers are taught not to rely on their "betters" for support. They will not vote for General Cavaignac, "the butcher of June" and a Republican in the Presidential elections of December 10, 1848. Nor will they answer appeals from those parties who crushed them in June to defend the republic against the designs of monarchists and Bonapartists. In Marx's Bildungsroman, this wary, negative, even apathetic stance of the proletariat constitutes an advance over the original naively trusting consciousness which was duped in the early stages of the revolution (as in previous revolutions) into bearing the brunt of the fighting while others reaped the fruits.

In the Bildungsroman, then, the proletariat's defeat is actually a form of progress toward possible future victory. The protagonist is educated and toughened by his failure. The making of certain mistakes during the Second Republic is presumed to guarantee that they will not be made again in the next round. So the apparent backward movement of the tragedy which ends with the Bonapartist coup is actually (or at least can be) the early forward movement of the as yet incomplete comedy which extends further in time and ends with a projected proletarian socialist victory. As Marx

succinctly put it in his *Class Struggles in France*:

"The revolution is dead!--Long live the revolution!"²¹

As Bildungsroman, the Second Republic experience can be boiled down into a single lesson: the bourgeois parliamentary republic is not the answer to the problem of modern society. The proletariat apparently learned this much when it chose not to fight to defend that republic but rather to acquiesce in the Bonapartist alternative. The next phase of the educational curriculum, according to this emplotment, covers the lesson that the Bonapartist option is likewise no solution. The assimilation of that lesson will set the stage for the realization of what Marx presumes to be the only other possibility: socialist revolution.

. . . the revolution is thoroughgoing. It is still journeying through purgatory. It does its work methodically. By December 2, 1851, it had completed one half of its preparatory work; it is now completing the other half. First it perfected the parliamentary power, in order to be able to overthrow it. Now that it has attained this, it perfects the executive power, reduces it to its purest expression, isolates it, sets it up against itself as the sole target, in order to concentrate all its forces of destruction against it. And when it has done this second half of its preliminary work, Europe will leap from its seat and exultantly exclaim: Well grubbed, old mole!²²

²¹Karl Marx, The Class Struggles in France (1848-1850) (New York: International Publishers, 1935), p. 59.

²²Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Bonaparte, op. cit., p. 121.

In the next chapter we shall see that there are great difficulties here; but for now we may note that the passage has the attraction of a powerful symmetry. It lends the narrative an intelligible and satisfying shape by setting up a parallel between the parliamentary and executive powers: just as the former had to be "perfected" before it could be destroyed, so must the latter. The apparent triumph and strengthening of the executive power is therefore actually the preparation for its overthrow.

We can now summarize Marx's use of narrative techniques and conventions in The Eighteenth Brumaire. The plot structure is very complex and original. It involves the narration of a farce concerning the out-manuevering of the party of Order by Louis-Bonaparte. This farce is then enveloped in a larger tragedy concerning the defeat of the proletariat in June which leaves Order fearful of the class' revolutionary potential. The tragedy is in turn inscribed within a still larger emplotment of the story as a comedy in which a future triumph of the proletariat is projected. The possibility of this comic resolution is suggested by the use of Bildungsroman conventions which replot the proletariat's defeat as preparatory experience conducing to the projected future victory.

This mix of plot types involves the self-conscious shifting of the narrative's beginning and especially its end points. Marx has the farce end at December 2, 1851. And the tragedy in effect ends even earlier in June 1848. But the Bildungsroman is projected as continuing beyond the end of the Second Republic, beyond, that is, the time of Marx's own writing of The Eighteenth Brumaire. The lessons learned during the Second Republic comprise only half of the revolutionary curriculum; the proletariat is projected as continuing its education under the Second Empire, learning of the executive power what it previously learned of the parliamentary. The extension of the end point of the Bildungsroman plot thus makes possible a correlated extension of the narrative even further in the future to encompass a possible comic resolution. Marx imagines, in other words, the story continuing until the proletariat successfully revolutionizes society at some point even further in the future. At the same time, there is a lengthening of the narrative from the other side. By pushing the beginning point further back into the past to at least the revolution of 1789 when the bourgeoisie was at the height of its powers, Marx was able to play off the story of that class' decline against the story of the proletariat's projected rise.

It appears then that in superimposing this plural-

ity of plots upon one another in his narrative, Marx is at the same time progressively extending or shifting its beginning and ending points. Put very simply, he varies the two termini so as to take an increasingly longer view, as it were, of the history of the Second Republic. He emplots the latter proper as a section of a longer narrative which began earlier and goes on later. And it is out of this lengthening of view that he extracts the more optimistic elements of his description. Thus, it is only when the projected future proletarian revolution becomes the covert end point of the story that the comedic elements predominate.

We can also see how Marx uses some of the other narrative techniques we mentioned at the outset of this chapter. His narrator is the standard omniscient narrator of realistic narrative. The persona created is that of an aloof, albeit highly judgmental witness. The taking of the longer view which we analyzed permits the narrator a measure of ironic detachment from the fate of the Second Republic at the same time that it affords him a longer term engagé stance.

Much as he champions the interest of the proletariat, he is never in danger of becoming closely identified with that party as a character in the narrative. He himself displays none of the uncertainty and vulnerability which

would mark a description of that party's experience "from the inside." And this is even more obviously true of Marx's characterization of the other dramatis personae. They are described externally as in varying degrees diabolical and incompetent. In the longest view, they become puppets and playthings of much larger historical forces and tendencies, forces and tendencies which they can neither understand nor control.

Marx's narrator, on the other hand, has the persona of one who most emphatically does understand. This is what enshrines him in a position apart from and essentially superior to those whose story he emplots. The effect of this is to prevent the reader from identifying with any of the characters and to transport the reader to a space outside the characters' lived experience, a space from which he or she is afforded the longer view. By the end of The Eighteenth Brumaire, both narrator and reader stand anchored at the narrative's furthest end point; they stand at the point of the projected future comic resolution, at the projected future proletarian socialist revolution. And from that high ground, they look back at and survey the long road travelled. With something like the benefit of hindsight, then, they understand and weave together into a coherent whole all the disparate incoherent threads of the story

which escape the understanding of the characters.

What is perhaps the most striking thing about Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire is its capacity to neatly tie up all the apparently unruly strands of the Second Republic experience and weave them into a complex, highly coherent, aesthetically, emotionally and intellectually satisfying story. With its symmetrical repetitive cycles of betrayal and self-destruction, with its neat poetic justice, with its ingenious nesting of farce within tragedy within Bildungsroman within comedy, the text is a masterpiece of narrative construction. It manages to take a series of events which culminates in an outcome which virtually no one intended, which seems a classic case of the opacity and brute facticity of history--that is, of its resistance to human control and purpose, even to human understanding--it manages to take this and transform it into a saga with an inherent meaningfulness, design and rationality. It shapes the material, gives it a beginning, middle and end, and thereby domesticates its brute facticity. By an ingenious narrative structure, it recuperates meaning and salvages an historical destiny from material which threatened to deny them.²³

²³The notion of the recuperation of meaning from potentially degenerative material through the use of standard narrative techniques, as it is used here and in

Marx's favorite contemporary novelist was Honoré de Balzac, and I think it is not difficult to discern a certain affinity between the latter's fiction and Marx's historiography. In both cases, there is an aesthetic of total recuperation or salvage. No thread is left hanging, no question is left unanswered in the narrative. Everything is resolved, accounted for, worked out. Agents' motivations are always perfectly clear, if seldom neither admirable nor successfully translated into efficacious action. There is no detail even of scene-setting or physical description which does not somehow in the end turn out to be of significance in the narrative resolution. In short, absolutely everything which finds its way into the narrative is grist for the recuperator's mill.²⁴

There is a kind of total narrator's control over his story. He writes from the perspective of one who has lived through something and has figured it out; now

what follows, is one for which I am indebted to Jonathan Culler, Cf. his Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

²⁴For the Balzacian aesthetic, Cf. Culler, Ibid., p. 150., and Eric Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, Willard R. Trask, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 485-486, 489-491.

he will look back upon that no longer opaque and unsettling experience from a position of calm understanding and relate it to his readers. He is never in danger of becoming too closely identified with any of his characters, much as he may sympathize with or champion one or another of them.

This aesthetic of total narrative control, total recuperation of significant detail, and total resolution of ambiguity goes along with a penchant for fast-paced action. Both Marx and Balzac fill up their whole narratives with action scenes; something is always happening, and rest assured that it advances the plot. There are no dreamy moments of meditation or ennui, no tableaux in which time seems to stand still, such as we find in more recent narratives. Instead we have a history chock full of events.

All of these characteristics shared by Marxian and Balzacian narrative have the effect of ruling out, as it were, a tragedy of boredom and inaction, of time hanging heavy, of unrecuperated ambiguity. They rule out the more modern tragedy of the recalcitrance of experience, of its intractable refusal to compose itself into a meaningful story. They rule out the tragedy of a history which is really a non-history, that is, an essentially meaningless succession of events. They rule

out the tragedy of the absence of destiny.²⁵

This sort of narrative simply cannot be told from within the framework of the Marxian or Balzacian aesthetic. It requires the explicit, self-conscious negation of the narrative techniques operative therein. It requires the rejection of the traditional plot modes of tragedy, comedy, farce and Bildungsroman. It requires the absence of resolution of dramatic tensions. It requires the foregoing of even the resolution provided by some gain in the realm of understanding which might compensate for failure in the realm of action.

It is, if one stops to think, rather remarkable that the story of the Second Republic should be told without a trace of such tragedy of ambiguity. For it is, after all, the story of profound failure on every level. If one wanted an illustration of the finitude of human existence, one could find none better. Yet there is only one place in The Eighteenth Brumaire where something like this sort of tragedy comes through: it is Marx's very general summary evocation of the character of the period from May 1849, when the Legislative National Assembly was first convened, to December 2, 1851:

²⁵The absence of destiny as the modern form of tragedy is discussed by Culler, op. cit., p. 145.

The period that we have before us comprises the most motley mixture of crying contradictions: . . . passions without truth, truths without passions; heroes without heroic deeds, history without events; development, whose sole driving force seems to be the calendar, wearying with constant repetition of the same tensions and relaxations; antagonisms that periodically seem to work themselves up into a climax only to lose their sharpness and fall away without being able to resolve themselves. . . If any section of history has been painted grey on grey, it is this. Men and events appear as inverted Schlemihls, as shadows that have lost their bodies. The revolution itself paralyzes its own bearers and endows only its adversaries with passionate forcefulness.²⁶

Here we get an inkling--indeed the only such inkling in The Eighteenth Brumaire--of a more modern and bleak sort of tragedy. In the spectre of history without events and development, we sense the possibility of a narrative which does not obey any of the classical conventions--it lacks pace, climax, resolution, meaning. Instead of working themselves out in a satisfying solution of some kind, contradiction and tension simply exhaust themselves. But it would take an aesthetic not available to either Marx or to the Balzac he so admired to tell such a tale.

The possibility of emplotting the history of the 1848 revolution as unrelenting, unsalvagable frustration of human purposes, as an essentially meaningless winding

²⁶ Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Bonaparte, op. cit., pp. 43-44.

down of human energies is one Marx will not realize. Rather, he will strive to recuperate meaning via the use of traditional narrative techniques. So the revolution as winding down becomes the farce of the revolution in reverse with all its ingenious symmetries, and the revolution in reverse eventually becomes the educative experience of the Bildungsroman hero. It is as if Marx were using all the considerable dramatic powers at his command to salvage the emplotment of a meaningful destiny from material that threatens to decompose itself into absurdity.

And what a heroic and ingenious effort it is. What an imaginative reworking of the standard narrative forms and conventions, what originality in inserting the farce within the tragedy and the tragedy within the projected comedy all tied together with the Bildungsroman motif. Surely, this is a salvage operation of great power, energy and aesthetic intelligence. It qualifies Marx as truly one of the great conservatives of modern narrative literature.

CHAPTER V

ALTERNATIVE EMPLOTMENTS IN SOCIAL

DESCRIPTION: FLAUBERT

We ended the last chapter with the statement that Marx is to be ranked as one of the great conservatives in narrative literature. If that is so, then Gustave Flaubert, apolitical cynic, misanthrope and aesthete, must count as one of the great revolutionaries. His Sentimental Education, a realistic historical novel set in Paris in the 1840's, is an alternative way of emplotting the history of the Second Republic,¹ one which bursts the bounds of

¹In what follows I make no effort to sort out definitively the fictional from the factual in Flaubert's novel. I assume, but do not argue, that Sentimental Education has cognitive content as an account of the rise and fall of the French Second Republic, despite the fact that it describes fictional characters and events. I base this assumption on a view of discourse which does not ground truth and meaningfulness primarily upon reference (à la Russell, Searle, Donnellan, et. al.), but rather upon the shared practices, conventions and interests of a human community (à la Wittgenstein, Dewey and Rorty). But even where the priority of reference is insisted upon, it seems unobjectionable to assume that Flaubert's novel has cognitive content. One can simply treat its characters and events as ideal-typical of classes of actual persons and events. This may in part be what Nelson Goodman has in mind in Languages of Art (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976) in treating "exemplification" as a species of reference in art. In any case, my aim is not to reduce the novel to a set of empirical propositions. On the contrary, if I insist on the cognitive content of literature, I do so in part because I insist on the aesthetic form of historiography. This will become clear in the course of the present chapter.

the Marxian-Balzacian aesthetic. There is no neat tying up of causal, moral and thematic strands. The social world of the novel is much more random and less transparent than that of The Eighteenth Brumaire, and the human struggle to wrest meaning from experience much more problematic. Instead of the classical tragedy of recognition and reversal which was implicit in Marx's narrative, Flaubert gives us a more modern form of tragedy, a tragedy of entropy in which life simply winds down with increasing randomness and decreasing energy, without any climactic resolutions or gains in understanding to compensate for failed action. He gives us something approaching an anti-narrative whose effect is to call into question the intelligibility and meaningfulness of history.

Sentimental Education is in part the story of the progressive disillusionment and disintegration of an apparently talented and promising young man, Frédéric Moreau, who comes to Paris from the provinces to make his fortune in the 1840's. Emplotted in counterpoint to this personal "micro-history" is the larger "macro-history" of the period encompassing the sequence of political events from the revolution of 1848 (and before) to the Bonapartist coup d'état of December 2, 1851. A number of important "macro-events" are made directly

into scenes in the overall plot of the novel; others function as background events for the foreground scenes of the micro-history; and still others are simply mentioned in various characters' conversations or in the narrator's descriptions, and thus function as a temporal political axis along which to locate or "plot" the micro-story.

But the macro-history is not a mere backdrop for the narration of the micro-story, as is the case in most historical fiction. Rather, in Sentimental Education, the macro-history is itself being interpreted via its juxtaposition to the apparently "personal" story of Frédéric Moreau and his circle of acquaintance. At the same time, the meaning of Frédéric's story emerges only in terms of its juxtaposition against the emplotment of the macro-history. There is, then, a kind of mutual cross-fertilization of meanings among these two levels of the narrative. They end up being locked in an internal symbiosis much tighter than that established, for example, in Balzac's fiction. In Sentimental Education, the very dichotomy between "setting" and "plot" tends to break down.

Consider briefly, by way of illustration, the relationship between some of the most important peaks and valleys of Frédéric's love life, on the one hand,

and those of the political history of the Second Republic, on the other. Frédéric has for many years faithfully and respectfully worshipped from afar one Mme. Arnoux, the wife of a friend. His devotion to this unconsummated, ideal love has thus far kept him from pursuing other, more available women; it has left him frustrated and subject to bouts of severe lassitude and depression punctuated by occasional delusions of grandeur. In this state, he finds congenial the general radicalism in the air in 1847 and early 1848.

Then, at last, he succeeds in arranging an assignation with Mme. Arnoux, whom he now determines to possess. He lovingly prepares a rented room which will be the scene of their bliss. The date is February 22nd 1848, the day of the demonstration against the cancellation of the Reform banquet which set off the Revolution. Frédéric waits for Mme. Arnoux at the appointed spot, failing to join his friends in the protest and all the while observing the activity of crowds and police. When it becomes apparent that she is not going to keep the date, the sickening feeling of Frédéric's inner dissolution is juxtaposed to the perceived but unfelt and uncomprehended dispersal of demonstrators by police which occurs before his eyes. Finally, his misery turns to bitterness and he resolves to make himself foolish no

more over this woman. The next day, February 23rd, he is out observing the progress of the revolution, and with determined high spirits still informed underneath with the humiliation of the previous day, he seduces Arnoux's mistress, Rosanette, telling her that he is no longer preserving his chastity but has "reformed." He takes her to the room prepared for Mme. Arnoux and while the city celebrates the fall of the Guizot Government, the two continually laugh over the pun, shouting "Long live Reform!" Frédéric explains away some crackling noises as celebratory firecrackers; it is actually the firing of shots in the Blvd. des Capucines which turns the Reform into Revolution. Alongside the sleeping Rosanette, Frédéric cries in his pillow. When she awakes and asks him what is wrong, he tells her he is crying out of happiness over their love.

Flaubert thus has the February Revolution coincide with his hero's loss of innocence and with the degradation of his ideal. This sets up, by a kind of metaphorical transfer, an association of revolutionary politics with prostitution, an association which Flaubert continues to exploit to the bitter end of his narrative. Thus, Frédéric's disillusionment with politics and with the Republic coincides with and is intertwined with his

progressive disillusionment with Rosanette, his ersatz substitute love. By June of 1849, he is deceiving her and frequenting the salon of an Orleanist notable and opportunist, M. Dambreuse. There he joins members of the party of Order in ridiculing his once dear Republic. His political and amorous opportunism develop space. In 1850, he seduces Mme. Dambreuse, whom he soon comes to regard strictly in terms of her usefulness in furthering his social, economic and political ambitions. All the while he maintains the increasingly degraded liaison with Rosanette. But his feeling for Mme. Arnoux has not died; indeed the ideality of that love only grows in the light of the debased actuality of the other two.

Frédéric is shaken out of his debilitating routine by a catastrophe that befalls his true love. Mme. Arnoux's husband has been sued for bad debts. The responsible creditor, unbeknownst to Frédéric, is Mme. Dambreuse; she is motivated by jealousy. Frédéric blames Rosanette and will not listen to her protestations of innocence. The three of them end up at an auction of Mme. Arnoux's personal things. It is December 1, 1851, and Frédéric watches with a feeling of sinking horror as the life of his beloved is obscenely dismantled and sold before his eyes. Far too late, he makes a principled

stand and breaks off relations with the other two women.

The next day, December 2, he feels only an infinite weariness and sense of disintegration. He hears the news of the coup d'état with indifference and yearns to return to his mother's provincial home and to the somnolent living-death there which first drove him to Paris. Thus, in Sentimental Education the disintegration of the Republic coincides with that of the life of the hero. The novel ends with a merging of the two levels of failure, corruption and weariness.

Flaubert set out to write "the moral history, or rather the sentimental history, of the men of my generation."² His characters, then, are treated as representatives of larger groups within the Parisian society of the time. They come from a wide variety of political, professional and social backgrounds. They espouse a wide variety of political, economic, and artistic beliefs. They are seen making and reflecting the actual culture of the period in what Flaubert took to be all its inanity and mediocrity. They parrot received opinion and change their allegiances with great

²Gustave Flaubert, Letter to Mlle. Leroyer de Chantepie, dated October 1864. Quoted by Robert Baldick, "Introduction" in Gustave Flaubert, Sentimental Education, Robert Baldick, trans. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1964).

rapidity, reflecting the evolution of attitudes during the course of the Republic's demise. They evince a weakness, corruptibility, and lassitude which Flaubert takes to be the hallmarks of the age.

Thus, Frédéric, the offspring of impoverished provincial nobility, is beginning law school when first we meet him. A rather desultory student, he dreams alternately of an administrative or diplomatic career; of a splendidly brilliant and productive life as a painter, poet, or literary scholar; of business successes of various kinds; of high political office in the current regime, whatever it be; but mostly, of love and romance. With the characteristic fickleness and vacillation we have already observed, he accomplishes little in any of these spheres, and instead dissipates the rather mediocre resources and energies at his disposal.

But with this breadth of interests and pretensions, Frédéric comes into contact with a variety of social types. This permits Flaubert to present the widest possible canvas of Parisian life, as seen in the following thumbnail sketches of some of his characters.

Frédéric's closest friend is an old boyhood chum, Charles Deslauriers. He is the son of an embittered and impoverished Napoleonic infantry officer who, in a characteristically Flaubertian irony, had been forced during

unfavorable political times to earn his living as a "dealer in men" (i.e., as a provider of army substitutes for the wealthy, a practice which the Great Revolution and Napoleonic era had abolished). Deslauriers files takes up the law in Paris and maintains a long-standing love-hate relationship with Frédéric. He envies the latter his wealth and breeding at the same time that he is dependent upon him. Deslauriers is resentful, ambitious for power and position (which he conceives rather crudely from lack of experience), impatient of Frédéric's romantic streak, and unlike the latter determined to succeed. Indeed, he is capable of betraying his friend many times over in pursuit of his goals.

He is also bitter and tends to blame his amorous and professional failures on society at large and especially on reigning political institutions. He longs for the days of '89 "when lawyers gave orders to generals"³ and uses every occasion to denounce Privilege, Monopoly, Control, Hierarchy, and Authority. When the revolution he dreams of finally arrives, he treats it as an opportunity to take his revenge upon those who have slighted him and hindered his success. He treats the Republic as an arena for personal advancement and obtains an appointment

³Flaubert, Sentimental Education, op. cit., p. 119.

as a provincial commissioner in a coal producing area. But Deslauriers loses his taste for democracy when the workers in "every pit (appoint) a provisional government of (their) own to give him orders."⁴ In the ensuing political turmoil, he runs afoul of both conservatives and socialists and is dismissed. As a result of this fresh humiliation, the once ardent republican is disillusioned. He becomes a cynic and at last an opportunist of some consistency.

More briefly, others in Frédéric's circle of friends include Cisy, the scion of a noble family and a Legitimist (gentle, girlish, so innocent and naive as to be foolish; an Anglophile and a dandy; devout, nervous and cowardly); Martinon, son of a prosperous farmer and protégé of an important Orleanist business figure (prematurely middle-aged and settled; a model of respectability designed not to offend; a retailer of conservative clichés; a young man who plays life safe and carefully cultivates those in authority); Sénécal, a church-poor mathematician, socialist and would-be St.-Just (dogmatic, humorless, puritanical, austere; ostentatious in the poverty and simplicity of his life; a hater in the name of equality of any sort of dis-

⁴Ibid., p. 364.

tion or superiority; "a man of theory, (who) respected only the masses and was merciless towards individuals"⁵); Dussardier, an uneducated shop assistant of illegitimate birth and an ardent democrat (slow-witted, courageous, instinctively altruistic and angered by injustice; sentimental, with more enthusiasm than judgment; the only character with a genuine moral sense, albeit an unrefined one); Regimbart, grumbler, crank and ideologue of the official "pure" Republican opposition party of the National (nationalistic, melancholy, increasingly taciturn; an inveterate cafe habitué and literal-minded prophet of doom--"Oh no dreams, no utopias, please!"⁶); and Hussonet, critic, journalist, would-be playwright, but above all wag and cynic (perverse in his rejection of all positive opinions; producer of startling paradoxes for originality's sake and irrespective of truth; sarcastic, scurrilous gossip and sophist; purveyor of sophisticated wit motivated by the basest commercial interests; an aesthete and utterly without principle).

In addition, there is Jacques Arnoux, the husband of Frédéric's beloved. When we first meet him, Arnoux is

⁵Ibid., p. 199.

⁶Ibid., pp. 68-69.

the proprietor of the hybrid l'Art Industriel--magazine, gallery, gathering place of the artistic demi-monde, and above all commercial enterprise. Arnoux has a "mind. . . not lofty enough to attain to art, nor pedestrian enough to aim exclusively at profit."⁷

He is a believer in progress, a republican and voltairean who aims to "emancipate" art by producing the sublime at popular prices; in other words, he has a passion for pandering to the public.⁸ He is a dilettante and a man of action--good-humored, crude, gregarious, ingenuously wicked, generous, manipulative, utterly dishonest, a compulsive liar, witty, cosmopolitan, opportunistic, courageous under fire as a respected middle class National Guard, expansive, egocentric, an inveterate womanizer; also an inventor of ruinous crack-pot schemes which he carries out with an "innate combination of sincerity and commercial guile."⁹

Then there is M. Dambreuse, the husband of Frédéric's aristocratic mistress. An industrialist and Orleanist notable, Dambreuse is the quintessential

⁷ Ibid., p. 198.

⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

⁹ Ibid., p. 389.

successful political opportunist, by turns a Bonapartist, Legitimist, Orleanist, republican, and finally a Bonapartist once again, "truckling to every government, worshipping Authority so fervently he'd have paid for the privilege of selling himself."¹⁰ He epitomizes, in his character, in his opinions, and in his shifting allegiances, the party of Order of the Second Republic. He is wily, hard working, pitiless, and devoted to securing a political climate favorable to business. His house is one of two places where Order conducts its unofficial business; the other is the salon of the courtesan Rosanette. Like the latter, the former is a center of "abysmal conversation, pettiness, spite, bad faith."¹¹

There are many other minor characters in Sentimental Education whose inclusion extends even further the breadth of the text's coverage of Second Republic social and political life. But we can stop with these brief descriptions of the more important characters. They should suffice to convey something of the novel's scope (and perhaps something of the merciless precision with which it dissects the phenomena it depicts).

¹⁰Ibid., p. 373.

¹¹Ibid., p. 359.

But now we need to see what Flaubert does with this extraordinary range of characters.

For one thing, Flaubert uses his characters as representatives of the contending parties in the Second Republic. And at the same time, by painting them unflatteringly he uses them as ad hominem arguments against these parties and the ideologies they espouse. For example, M. Dambreuse, who personifies the party of Order, is, as we have seen, painted as a despicable opportunist. His ideology and that of the members of his circle is represented as a contradictory amalgam of sanctimonious platitudes, well-worn cliches, and self-serving gossip held together by arrogance, gall, and greed. Altogether, it is a portrait guaranteed to make short shrift of any sympathy the reader might feel for the party of Order. Similarly, the party of the National is made ridiculous in the person of Regim-bart, who is seen bullying a waiter in one of his haunts: "Don't we get enough insults from abroad!"¹² The Legitimists are disposed of in the person of Cisy, the Mountain via Deslauriers, the socialists via Sénécal.

In addition to organized parties, less defined ideological networks are made to seem foolish and corrupt

¹²Ibid., p. 175.

by the foolishness and corruption of those who represent them in the novel. Thus the feminism of the Second Republic is convicted by its association with one Mlle. Vatnaz, a spinster who fancies herself a poet but seems mainly to be a procuress and whose politics are rooted in a soil of envy and resentment fertilized by a lifetime of romantic disappointments. Similarly, the broad contemporary currents of democratic egalitarianism are undermined by the judgment-impairing sentimentality with which they are incarnated in Dussardier. Progressive middle class cosmopolitanism is belittled through the person of Arnoux. The populism of the day is ridiculed via Flaubert's characterization of a vain and corrupt actor who becomes a popular hero and saint by virtue of playing over and over again the role of a humble character who insults the monarchs of Europe. This actor, who is constantly changing the spelling of his name and has phony biographies of himself published, runs for an Assembly seat claiming that he has allowed himself to be "crucified by Art" for the sake of providing the people with an incarnation of their ideal, that he can single-handedly quell riots by simply showing his profile, and that he will reform the theatre by doing away with managers and privileges.

All in all, then, Flaubert's techniques of charac-

terization serve to delimit rather narrowly the range of readers' responses to the Second Republic history. No identification is permitted with any established party or ideology. No sympathy may emerge for any character representing such forces. Instead of achieving a stance of empathetic identification with the agents throughout the unfolding of events, the reader is guided into a stance of aloof, critical observation, into a negativity of judgment which is itself anchored upon no identifiable positive outlook. This makes Sentimental Education unlike The Eighteenth Brumaire. The effect of the latter was, as we saw, to ground the readers' distance from and superiority to the characters in the narrative upon a positive projection about the future course of development and thus upon an outlook which could be stated positively and systematically. But in Sentimental Education the reader's critical, negative judgments of the characters rest upon no such positive grounds, but rather only upon the activity of negation itself. This gives Flaubert's narrative a very different meaning from Marx's, as we shall soon see in detail.

Flaubert's main technique for accomplishing this involves a break with standard narrative characterization methods. In most narratives, characters function as

centers of coherence and meaning.¹³ Usually, that is, narratives are constructed on the basis of the presumption that everything about a character flows from a determinate personality comprising a unified set of character traits. Thus, all the actions, beliefs, values, etc. of a character are such that they can be seen as issuing from a single personality as expressions of a coherent identity. It is this presumption which makes it possible for the character to have an intelligible and meaningful life-story.¹⁴

Flaubert's narrative, however, does not obey the standard conventions governing characterization. He rather gives us something like anti-characters, that is, characters whose actions, opinions, values, etc. resist efforts to compose them into meaningful wholes.¹⁵

¹³My discussion of standard characterization techniques and the use of characters as centers of coherence in narratives is drawn from Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, third edition (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1970), pp. 219-220 and from Jonathan Culler, Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 89-90.

¹⁴Here and in what follows, my understanding of the concept of a "life-story" has benefited from reading an unpublished manuscript by Charlotte Linde: "Creation of Coherence in Life-Stories." I am indebted to Andrew McLaughlin for calling this manuscript to my attention.

¹⁵Cf. Culler, op. cit., pp. 123-124.

The people in his narrative undergo frequent abrupt shifts in their political allegiances, in their professional and business careers, and in their ideologies. These shifts are rarely explained in the novel. Or, where an explanation is proffered, it is so manifestly inadequate as to be ridiculous. Characters simply drop out of sight for awhile and then reappear sporting new careers, new ideologies, new loyalties. These new features of their lives flatly contradict those of the previous stage or stages. But they rarely attempt to justify the change. There is, in other words, no attempt at or prospect for composing the different stages of a life into a coherent whole which would be capable of becoming the subject of a traditional narrative. Rather, the contradictory stages are simply allowed to subsist side by side in all their bizarre difference.

A few examples will make this more clear. Arnoux, as we have said, first appears in Sentimental Education as an art dealer and publisher. In this incarnation he is known to Frédéric until the latter leaves Paris for three years. Frédéric returns in 1846 to find Arnoux manufacturing pottery. The erstwhile champion of serious art now tells Frédéric that great painting is out of fashion and that he is involved in introducing

art into all spheres of life. He is making dishes, soup tureens, plates, basins, bathroom tiles with mythological designs in the Renaissance style, ice buckets, flower pots, candelabras, and "large coloured statuettes representing Negroes or Pompadour shepherdesses."¹⁶ Somewhat later he confides with excitement that he is hot on the trail of the secret copper-red of the Chinese potters. Soon his factory showroom is littered with the shards of his "successive efforts and infatuations"¹⁷: there are not only Chinese, but also Etruscan, Oriental, and Arabic reproductions which he has been pawning off as the real thing on country bumpkins. Next, Arnoux is found making signboards and wine labels. In May of 1848, while on National Guard duty, he is seen dreaming of leasing the North railroad embankments for planting potatoes and of organizing a giant procession of celebrities along the boulevards and renting out window views on the route.¹⁸ After the June insurrection he abandons an earlier scheme for a music hall where only patriotic songs would be sung. Instead he considers opening a

¹⁶Flaubert, op. cit., p. 116.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 315.

military hat shop.¹⁹ In 1850, he is involved in a gas lighting company.²⁰ And we see Arnoux for the last time in 1851, as the proprietor of the "Gothic Art Shop. Church Restoration - Ecclesiastical Ornaments - Polychrome Sculpture - Incense of the Magi."²¹ Hoping to secure both salvation and a fortune, the erstwhile voltairean is now a dealer in rosaries.

This is only one of the most spectacular examples of the general pattern of characterization in Sentimental Education. Arnoux's life is presented as a series of discrete moments, unconnected and unintegrated. It is not a meaningful whole which can be the subject of a life-story; it is relatable only as a bare temporal series: first this, then that, etc. In suppressing all integrating connections, Flaubert depicts a life which is characterized by randomness, meaninglessness and a lack of destiny.

This same mode of characterization can be seen in the career of another character whom we have not yet met: the artist Pellerin. In the early 1840's, he is shown revering the old masters, castigating contemporary realism

¹⁹Ibid., p. 358.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 389.

for its pettiness and lack of grandeur and ideals, and defending the autonomy of art vis-à-vis politics. In 1843, however, he is preparing to paint "The Genius of the Revolution." By 1846, he has rejected both classical and historical ideals and seeks variety, not unity and beauty, in art; "Because everything exists in nature . . . everything is a legitimate subject for painting."²² In 1847, at the height of the Reform movement, Pellerin is seen arguing for legislation by the Chamber of Deputies "in the interests of Art." In March of 1848, he is marching to the Hôtel de Ville with a deputation of "Pictorial Artists" to petition the Provisional Government for a "forum of Art, a sort of Stock Exchange handling aesthetic interests."²³ He is talking about artists pooling their genius to produce sublime art collectively, about covering Paris with gigantic monuments, and about his own pending picture of the Republic. This picture, which Flaubert has turned up later in the home of the opportunistic Dambreuse during his republican phase, shows "the Republic, or Progress, or Civilization, in the form of Christ driving a locomotive through a

²²Ibid., p. 124.

²³Ibid., p. 294.

virgin forest."²⁴ After June 1848, however, the doctrine and aesthetic expressed in this painting have been modified. Pellerin regrets the passing of the age of Louis XIV, considers a well-ordered monarchy best for art, and cannot forgive the Revolution the destruction of the Spanish Museum. By 1851, he has finished with Realism and is out to paint "the spirit."²⁵ Finally, we learn in the epilogue that in the interval from 1851 to 1867 he has "dabbl(ed) in Fourierism, homeopathy, table-turning, Gothic art and humanitarian painting (and) become a photographer."²⁶

Once again, we are shown a life that is discontinuous, incoherent and therefore without meaning. It is not that Pellerin (or Arnoux, for that matter) is a straightforward opportunist, calculatedly changing his aesthetic for personal gain. That is a Balzacian mode of characterization which Flaubert by and large eschews (M. Dambreuse is the sole genuine opportunist in Sentimental Education). Pellerin, Arnoux, and most of the others are characters of a far more disturbing stripe. They are confused, disintegrating personalities

²⁴ Ibid., p. 298.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 396.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 416.

whose lives are dispersions rather than accretions of meaning. Utterly without bearings, they are swept along by the prevailing current, prey to the vagaries of fashion, at the mercy of the received opinions of the moment. So much so that they are people without life-stories. They are the "weak vessels"²⁷ through which the chaos of life in the Second Republic flows.

Indeed, in Flaubert's hands, the macro-history of the Second Republic is nothing more than the resultant of the interaction of these representative personal and party disintegrations. Random as the lives of the individual characters are, they nonetheless are coordinated with one another. The careers of Pellerin and Arnoux run roughly parallel to one another and to the macro-history. The two men's respective artistic and business enterprises reflect the various phases of reform and republican sentiment from at least the mid-forties until the June insurrection and then drift progressively right-ward; both wind up in the period immediately preceding the Bonapartist coup d'état reflecting the religious revival of that time which signalled the general longing for an end to political turmoil

²⁷This is Henry James' phrase. James intended it derogatorily to criticize Flaubert's choice of inferior, abject human specimens to write about. Cf. Culler, op. cit., pp. 123-124.

and a return of authority and order.

We could have cited a great many other examples of the dispersed and chaotic careers of Flaubert's individual characters. Had we done so, we would have seen that each followed this general course of development in line with the political history of the Second Republic. The most striking thing about Sentimental Education is that despite the widely divergent initial circumstances and political allegiances of the characters and despite the extremely erratic nature of their respective careers, they all nonetheless end up by the end of the narrative converging around a single point. By December of 1851, everyone has disintegrated to such an extent that he or she is ready to invite or at least acquiesce in Bonapartism and its promise of order and peace. We saw how Frédéric's personal disintegration followed the course of politics and culminated in utter demoralization at the precise time of the coup d'état. We saw how an erstwhile young firebrand like Deslauriers could have gone down a path ending at cynicism and opportunism. That Dambreuse and his protégé Martinon should easily make their peace with the Empire is no surprise at all. And the same goes for nearly every other character in the novel. The disintegration of their personal lives accelerates with the course of events

until it finally comes to rest in the bosom of Louis-Bonaparte. Flaubert thus shows us how the enormous diversity of opinion and sensibility which he depicts comes to cancel itself out, to expend and exhaust itself without resolving itself and thereby to devolve upon the single Bonapartist option as a result of the impasse. It is only in terms of this net macro-historical resultant that any sense at all accrues to his characters' lives. But of course it is a sense which necessarily escapes them.

The most spectacular example of the way in which Flaubert manages to make the personal disintegrations of his characters feed into the disintegration of the Republic itself is found in the final convergence of the destinies of Sénécal and Dussardier in the last scene before the epilogue. Sénécal, it will be remembered, was first introduced to us as the incorruptible, dogmatic socialist, the uncompromising apostle of absolute equality and collectivism. Dussardier, on the other hand, was the sentimental working class democrat with an instinctive hatred of injustice and sympathy for the underdog. Throughout Sentimental Education, there is an implicit contrast between the two as their respective careers unfold contrapuntally.

In 1847, Sénécal is arrested for his role in an

incendiary bomb conspiracy; he had become impatient and despairing of more gradual means and sought to spark a revolution that would establish the Republic and "change the world in a fortnight."²⁸ Dussardier, despite Sénécal's guilt and the violent nature of the plot, feels it his duty to help the socialist now that he has fallen victim to Authority. Imagining the brutality with which the prisoner is being treated, he works for Sénécal's release.

Later in the same year, Sénécal is freed for lack of evidence, and Dussardier throws a party to celebrate. There the socialist praises universal suffrage, democracy and the principles of the Gospel, while his host expresses sympathy for an old soldier disgraced in a bribery scandal.

During the February Revolution, each is active in his own way. Sénécal had called for the immediate reorganization of labor and for the attack on the Hôtel de Ville to force the proclamation of the Republic. Dussardier, on the other hand, had fought with great courage on the barricades and had protected some enemy dragoons from the fury of his own comrades after the victory; he is seen waxing effusively over the outcome: "Workers and bourgeois are embracing! . . . What wonderful

²⁸Flaubert, op. cit., p. 233.

people! How splendid everything is!"²⁹

We next meet Sénécal as the Chairman of the "Club de l'Intelligence" during the electoral campaign in the Spring of 1848. Frédéric has come to present himself as a candidate for the Assembly. Sénécal, after calling for state seizure of banks and insurance companies and for the abolition of inheritance, opposes Frédéric's candidacy on the grounds that the latter failed to keep his promises to fund a republican newspaper and to rendezvous with his comrades for the February 23rd demonstration. Only one friend in the audience defends Frédéric: Dussardier. The latter's support, however, is proffered solely for the sake of friendship and despite the merits of the case.

Soon after the June insurrection of 1848, we again meet these two characters. Sénécal is imprisoned in the Tuileries after having fought on the side of the insurgents. Dussardier had fought on the other side, but is tormented by doubts about this. "After all, (the insurgents) had been promised a great many things which had not been given to them. Their conquerors hated the Republic; and then, they had been savagely treated!"³⁰

²⁹ Ibid., p. 291.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 333.

We hear little of Sénécal and Dussardier again until around January of 1851. Then we see the socialist expressing his happiness with the current state of the country which he claims is inadvertently moving toward Communism as progressively more things are being brought under state control. He favors Authority, and lambasts the inadequacy of the masses arguing that the end justifies the means and that dictatorship is sometimes indispensable. Around this same time, Dussardier, on the other hand, is despairing of the state of affairs. He laments the killing of the Republic: the limiting of the suffrage, the closing of the clubs, the restoration of censorship and of church control of education.

"Yet if only people tried! With a little good faith, they could reach an understanding. But it's no use. You see, the workers are no better than the middle classes. . . . I shall go mad if it goes on! I feel like committing suicide."³¹

Shortly thereafter comes the final shattering scene of the novel (except for the epilogue). The date is the Wednesday after December 2, 1851. Frédéric, whose own life has become an absolute shambles, stumbles numbly along the boulevards in a drizzling rain. Near the Opera he comes upon a crowd which is being broken up by cavalry

³¹Ibid., pp. 392-393.

and police. One demonstrator alone stands his ground. He is threatened by a policeman in a three-cornered hat. The demonstrator steps forward and shouts, "Long live the Republic!" He is stabbed and falls. Open-mouthed, Frédéric recognizes Dussardier on the ground and Sénécal above him.

The path traveled by Sénécal from socialist to Bonapartist and the final convergence of his destiny with that of Dussardier stands as a concentrated symbolic expression of the stupidity and brutality Flaubert took to be the hallmarks of the Second Republic experience. It epitomizes his way of using characters as nodes of disintegration and dispersal of meaning in opposition to standard techniques of narrative characterization.

Flaubert's ironic reversal of conventional narrative characterization affects the nature of the overall emplotment of his narrative. It rules out the standard narrative modes. His story cannot be classical tragedy because the discontinuity and randomness of his characters' lives preclude the possibility of the recognition and reversal which are essential to that mode. Without the capacity for changes in characters through gains in self-awareness, comedy likewise is ruled out; there is no basis for the sorts of transformations which would permit the healing of divisions.

The same goes for the Bildungsroman mode. The education of a hero depends upon the ability to construe and reconstrue past experience in the light of continuing developments. The character must be able to grasp the meaning of experience as a whole and to understand individual episodes in terms of their place in a larger life-story. Without this ability to unify what would otherwise be discrete and disparate episodes, there is no possibility of learning. The Bildungsroman mode depends, then, on a continuity and coherence in the characters' lives and self-awareness. They must be subjects who remain relatively self-identical throughout change and who are capable of reflecting upon their experience and unifying it into a coherent, meaningful whole from which they can learn something.

These, of course, are precisely the capacities Flaubert's characters lack. Indeed, he has deliberately set out in Sentimental Education to emplot the story of his generation and of the Second Republic as an anti-Bildungsroman. This is apparent both in his choice of title (which is an ironic reference to the standard mode he is rejecting) and in the novel's epilogue. The latter consists (in part) of a reunion scene between Frédéric and Deslauriers after a sixteen year interval since the ending of the narrative proper following the Bonapartist

coup d'état. The two friends catch one another up on their intervening experiences. Deslauriers' account is especially striking: he has been in succession a Government prefect, a director of colonization in Algeria, secretary to a pasha, manager of a newspaper, advertising agent and solicitor to an industrial company. It is another image of dispersion and disintegration, of a life about which an intelligible story cannot be told.

He and Frédéric exchange news about the subsequent careers of old friends and acquaintances. They reminisce and try to come to grips with the experiences recounted in the main body of the text. It is a conversation permeated with bad faith and utter lack of self-understanding, but also with enormous pathos. They admit that they have failed to realize their respective dreams and they try to identify the reasons.

"Perhaps it's because we didn't steer a straight course," said Frédéric.

"That may be true in your case. But I, on the contrary, was far too rigid in my line of conduct, and I failed to take into account a thousand-and-one minor factors which were really all-important. I was too logical, while you were too sentimental."

They blamed chance, circumstances, the times into which they were born.³²

³²Ibid., p. 418.

Here is the famous Flaubertian "impassivity." With no overt authorial comment whatsoever, the two characters are condemned by their own utterances. In the banality and superficiality of their words, they are made to engage in a kind of unintentional self-mockery. They proffer gratuitous, ersatz interpretation-schemata, and thereby succeed only in parodying the effort to wrest meaning from experience. Frédéric and Dussardier have too many answers and too facile answers. They create a superabundance of free-floating meanings none of which attaches itself to anything real and none of which bears the marks of an authentic struggle to understand. With this simple but shattering conversation, Flaubert reveals the form of his narrative and certifies it as an ironic reversal of the standard Bildungsroman.

Sentimental Education, then, is emplotted as an anti-Bildungsroman. It denies the winning of meaning, the learning of lessons, the wresting of knowledge from experience. Failure stands uncompensated and unredeemed by gains in understanding. Life stands denuded of meaning, history bereft of destiny. Flaubert parodies every character's attempts to unify his or her self into a personality, to shape the disparate events of his or her life into a meaningful destiny. He depicts such attempts as riddled through and through with evasions

and inconsistencies. He undermines every system used to confer meaning upon the Second Republic experience. He portrays every political ideology, every aesthetic, every social idea and alliance as rooted in resentment, bad faith and opportunism. No contemporary philosophy, opinion, or programme escapes untouched; all are reduced to clichés or mere rationalizations and this by virtue of being put into the mouths of the likes of Frédéric and company, if not by virtue of inherent deficiency.

Flaubert's ironic reversal of standard characterization techniques and plot structures results in the creation of a new and characteristically modern tragedy, one which we saw was excluded by the terms of the Marxian-Balzacian aesthetic. Unlike the classical mode, Flaubertian tragedy does not turn upon the conflict between desire and reality. It turns rather upon the trivialization of desire itself. The tragedy is not that Frédéric's dreams remain unrealized; it is rather he ceases to be capable of any ennobling dreams and is left only with tawdried, clichéd parodies of dreams.³³ Similarly, in the Second Republic at large, the tragedy is not, as in Marx, the failure to realize the programme of any given favored party; it is rather the unimaginative

³³ Cf. Culler, op. cit., pp. 140-141.

impoverished character of every programme of every party. Unlike the classical mode, Flaubertian tragedy does not consist in the hero's being rebuffed by a hostile world while pursuing his goals. On the contrary, the bleaker tragedy here is that the indifference of the world prevents that sort of tragedy by denying Frédéric the sorts of meaning-conferring conflicts which might conduce to discovery, self-recognition and compensatory wisdom. Again, in the Second Republic at large, the tragedy is not, as in Marx, the defeat or suppression of some favored party; it is rather the paucity of self-understanding of all parties.

Flaubertian tragedy, then, is a tragedy of life slowly winding down towards death without climaxes or resolutions. Tensions merely exhaust themselves with the progressive decrease in the vital energy of individual characters and of society at large. In the anti-Bildungsroman, "illusion after illusion is pricked until all knowledge, belief and passion die away."³⁴ Instead of recognitions and reversals, characters experience only the dimmest awareness of a gradual enfeeblement over a

³⁴ Raymond Giraud, "Introduction," Flaubert: A Collection of Critical Essays, Raymond Giraud, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964).

long period of time. They feel a weariness accompanied by an inexplicable melancholy. It is as if a vital fluid is steadily seeping away, like being bled to death one drop at a time over many years. They grow dimmer and weaker, and feel increasingly disoriented. There is a vague sense that something has gone wrong somewhere, but it feels as if it must have happened so long ago as to be beyond memory.

This is precisely the shape and feel of the tragedy which Flaubert evokes at the very beginning of the epilogue. We have seen that the narrative proper ends with the simultaneous fizzling out of both the Second Republic and all of Frédéric's hopes in December 1851, and in the murder of Dussardier by Sénécal. The transition between this ending and the reunion scene just described is made as follows:

He travelled.

He came to know the melancholy of the steamboat, the cold awakening in the tent, the tedium of landscapes and ruins, the bitterness of interrupted friendships.

He returned.

He went into society, and he had other loves. But the ever-present memory of the first made them insipid; and besides, the violence of desire, the very flower of feeling, had gone. His intellectual ambitions had also dwindled. Years went by; and he endured the idleness of

his mind and the inertia of his heart.³⁵

This gradual shrinking and shrivelling of life is the heart of Flaubertian tragedy. It is a tragedy of a bleak and hopeless continuity of life, not that of the brutal interruption of life. It is the form not only of Frédéric's personal life, but also of the life (and death) of the Second Republic.

This modern anti-tragedy, if you will, has a temporal structure which is markedly different from the fast-paced, action-packed temporality of Marxian and Balzacian narrative. Given the absence of climaxes and resolutions, and given instead the slow winding down of energies, the movement of time in Sentimental Education is slow and heavy. Whereas The Eighteenth Brumaire was all intelligibly building, tension-propelled action driving toward a conclusion, Flaubert's narrative is a series of static tableaux. The action occurs for the most part offstage in the spaces between the scenes rather than within them. Instead of action scenes, we often get scenes of solitary meditation and ennui, tinged with an anxious oppressive boredom that would be inconceivable in a Marxian narrative. And even where Flaubert does give us scenes which have the surface appearance of

³⁵Flaubert, op. cit., p. 411.

action scenes, he manages to narrate them in such a way as to suggest that nothing is really happening. The action and accompanying talk is deliberately given a hollow ring as if it were mere surface bustle masking an underlying nothingness, a great sound and fury signifying nothing.

This last point takes us to a theme of great importance for Flaubert's emplotment of the history of the Second Republic as entropic anti-Bildungsroman. This theme is the constant coupling of diversity with sterility in Sentimental Education.³⁶ We have seen it in Flaubert's depiction of his characters' careers: the variety of their activities was not a sign of richness of life, but rather of poverty. Similarly, Flaubert dazzles us with a vast array of possibilities in the novel: the social world of the Second Republic abounds in competing political ideologies and parties, aesthetic theories and stances, social philosophies and programmes, literary projects, opinions on every conceivable subject, domestic and amorous options, entertainments, and so on.

³⁶The theme of sterility in the midst of diversity in Sentimental Education is discussed by Victor Brombert in "L'Education sentimentale: Profanation and the Permanence of Dreams" in Flaubert: A Collection of Critical Essays, op. cit., Cf. pp. 163-164.

Yet there is something oppressive about this diversity. Instead of being a source of liberation it is a source of debilitation. We have seen, for example, how Frédéric is in effect paralyzed by diversity, rendered impotent and unable to harness his will to the attainment of any one meaningful goal, whether it be in the realm of love, politics, business or art. And he is not alone in this difficulty.

Flaubert portrays the whole world of the Second Republic as one suffocating under the weight of a meaningless, superabundant heterogeneity. This incoherent, indeed incongruous collection of phenomena resists all attempts to impose order and meaning upon it. It persists instead in its brute facticity, a monument to human finitude. It is a symbol of a world and a culture out of control, of disintegration and dispersion, of a nothingness underlying the frenetic runnings-around of humanity, of sterility at the heart of diversity.

Once again this puts Sentimental Education at a vast distance from The Eighteenth Brumaire. We saw the latter to be a heroic attempt to domesticate the diversity of politics in the Second Republic to sort it all out and weld it into an intelligible story. Flaubert, on the other hand, treats such attempts as still further components of the diversity; he simply adds them to the growing

mountain of phenomena where they take a place alongside all sorts of competing efforts and are thereby undermined, and left to subsist in all their incongruity.

Now we can summarize what we have discovered concerning Flaubert's use of narrative techniques and conventions in Sentimental Education. And at the same time we can note explicitly how it differs from what Marx is doing in The Eighteenth Brumaire.

Let us begin by noting once more that Flaubert's emplotment of the story of the Second Republic involves the rejection of all the standard plot modes. There are no moments of recognition and reversal such as lend pathos and intelligibility to classical tragedy. Nor is there the actuality or prospect of an outsider's integration into society such as is found in traditional comedy. And furthermore, we find an explicit ironic rejection of the conventions governing the Bildungsroman mode in which wisdom is gained through a young hero's encounters with social reality. In sum, then, Flaubert eschews all the standard plot modes which Marx combined so ingeniously in The Eighteenth Brumaire.

Furthermore, Flaubert rejects standard characterization techniques. He treats those who people his narrative not as foci of meaning-accretion, but rather as nodes

of meaning-dispersion. He characters drift through life in a confused, random fashion without clear-cut aims and intelligible life-stories. Marx's characters, on the other hand, are far more standard. They have definable aims and aspirations; their actions are clearly motivated even when unsuccessful. In addition, Marx's narrative makes use of approximations of stock dramatic character types, although in somewhat attenuated form: the proletariat is a hero, albeit one which is by and large in absentia; Bonaparte is a recognizable variant of the stock picaro combining knavery and buffoonishness, and the party of Order is a villain, albeit one treated more ironically than seriously. Flaubert's narrative, on the other hand, for the most part eschews recognizable character types. Everyone is as much villain as hero and vice versa. Or rather no one has the coherence of identity to be either. This means that the pattern of sympathies and antipathies created in the reader is far less clear-cut in Sentimental Education than in The Eighteenth Brumaire. In the former, the reader is not permitted to develop anything like the sort of "rooting interest" which emerges in the latter.

In addition, we have seen that Flaubert rejects the standard method of narration via an omniscient narrator with a favored, objective point of view superior to

that of the characters. Although there are times when Flaubert briefly adopts such a point of view in Sentimental Education, for the most part the story of the disintegration of the Second Republic is presented as seen through the eyes of a witness, Frédéric Moreau, who is himself disintegrating. This witness is not one who can be counted on to tell us "what is really happening," the way that Marx's omniscient narrator in The Eighteenth Brumaire putatively can. Indeed, Flaubert undermines confidence in his own vehicle of narration by frequently suggesting the bias and unreliability of the witness, not to mention his talent for self-deception. The effect of this non-standard narration technique is to cast doubt on the intelligibility of experience; Marx's use of the standard omniscient narrative vehicle, on the other hand, functions so as to guarantee intelligibility.

We have also seen that Sentimental Education has a temporal structure far removed from that of The Eighteenth Brumaire. Whereas the latter is all action surging forward toward a conclusion, the former is an entropic winding down of life toward nothingness. We have seen that this non-standard temporality, coupled with the rejection of standard plot and characterization techniques just noted, is tantamount to the invention of a new narrative mode: a very bleak sort of modern tragedy

concerning the problematic character of the human struggle to wrest meaning and historical destiny from a recalcitrant experience.

In sum, then, there are vast differences in the handling of narrative techniques and conventions by Flaubert and Marx. Whereas the former tends by and large to negate the standard forms outright, the latter tends rather to a distinctive modification and synthesis of them. Yet as different as they are from one another, both The Eighteenth Brumaire and Sentimental Education are narratives of extraordinary originality and merit. Each is rich, subtle, complex and superbly crafted, a perfect or near-perfect masterpiece of its own kind.

We saw in the beginning of the previous chapter that differences in the handling of narrative techniques and conventions carry along with them differences in the selection, weighting and effective coloration of story elements in competing narratives. This is certainly the case with Sentimental Education and The Eighteenth Brumaire. And we saw also that these sorts of differences cannot be adjudicated empirically in any standard sense. This is because they have less to do with facts per se than with alternative ways of arranging events qua narrative elements which permit the emergence of alternative interpretations of their meaning.

How, then can we speak of adjudicating between the Marxian and Flaubertian emplotments of the story of the Second Republic? It seems that we cannot do so without at some point involving ourselves in adjudicating between their handling of narrative techniques and conventions as such. It seems as if we cannot avoid asking some such question as the following: Which is more adequate--an emplotment of the Second Republic as anti-Bildungsroman with an entropic temporal structure, disintegrating characters, and an unreliable narrator or an emplotment of the Second Republic as farce inscribed within tragedy inscribed within comedy unified as Bildungsroman with relatively standard temporality and characterization and an omniscient narrator?

Most readers today will probably answer that Sentimental Education is a more realistic narrative than The Eighteenth Brumaire. And they will mean by that that they are suspicious of the neatness and symmetry with which Marx ties up what they take to be the otherwise unruly strands of historical experience. They will perhaps say that there is something contrived about his narrative with its ingenious repetitive cycles of betrayal and self-destruction, its neat poetic justice, its lessons for revolutionaries, its nesting of farce within tragedy within comedy as Bildungsroman. Sentimental Education,

on the other hand, will be deemed more realistic and less contrived, precisely to the extent that it lacks pace, resolution, and other standard dramatic features. It will be deemed more realistic by virtue of its success in capturing what is taken to be the lived anxiety, disorientation and chaos of revolutionary experience, and by virtue of its denial of facile (if indeed not all) meaning-conferring interpretation schemata.

What are we to make of such a hypothetical response? It seems to suggest that the ironic anti-Bildungsroman is a more faithful copy of historical reality than is the Marxian emplotment. But we have seen that such an objectivistic argument is philosophically unsound. And yet there is something persuasive about the sentiments expressed in this hypothetical response. We need to find another construal of them which preserves what seems right without presupposing a naive, indefensible objectivism.

I suggest that we construe the sentiments expressed in our hypothetical response as indications of historical changes in the conventions governing narration. Whereas Marxian or Balzacian narrative, with its neat resolutions and fast-paced action, was once considered to be the very essence of realistic dramatic representation, this is no longer the case. These very characteristics have come

to seem contrived and thus, "unrealistic." A feeling of quaintness and naiveté has come to attach itself to such narratives. Consider, for example, how we now read Dickens and Balzac as dated, at the same time that we admire and are entertained by the ingenuity with which they knit together complex plot strands. The aura of verisimilitude which once surrounded them now attaches instead to Flaubertian-type narrative constructions. The heaviness of time, the sense of oppressive boredom, the lack of resolution have in our century become the hallmarks of a new realism in narrative literature.

What we are facing here, then, has more to do with historically changing narrative conventions than with the relative faithfulness of two representations of reality. This can be seen clearly if we consider the initial critical reception accorded to Sentimental Education. Upon publication, Flaubert's book was nearly universally panned. Readers found it baffling. They could see in it no recognizable shape or plot. It had a lot of realistic-seeming detail yet defied every rule for the construction of a realistic historical novel. It strayed so far from the Balzacian ideal as to be virtually uninterpretable by those for whom the latter epitomized the very nature of realistic representation and emplotment. The story seemed to peter out without

really ending. It was felt to be neither intellectually nor emotionally satisfying, hence implausible if not downright unintelligible. In short, it was simply a bad book.

We are familiar with other examples in the history of art of works that were later recognized as masterpieces after having been dismissed as unintelligible by contemporary opinion. Beethoven's late string quartets are a paradigmatic case from the history of music. What sounded like mere noise to ears attuned to the early classical style of composition became for later generations the quintessence of musical expression.

Similarly, after a period in which it was not understood, Flaubert's Sentimental Education helped begin a revolution in narrative form. It brought within the purview of narrative possibilities a whole set of experiences which had been previously unnarratable, including modern boredom. It opened up the possibility of a new narrative shape--the entropic anti-Bildungsroman. There is no doubt that these innovations, once assimilated, have changed our expectations and our conception of realistic narration. In part as a result of Sentimental Education and other works in a similar mold, the Balzacian conventions used by Marx have come to seem dated and naive. In this respect Sentimental Education has helped

to alter our idea of social reality and our conception of a faithful narration of socio-historical events.

What conclusions, then, should we draw from this discussion? First of all that narratives are interpreted in the light of the broader background of conventions which readers have learned to interpret, which shape their expectations and which constitute standards as to what counts as an intelligible, plausible and satisfying story. And that such conventions, and hence such expectations and standards are subject to historical change. It follows then that with such changes in the background narrative conventions the way in which readers interpret any given narrative will change. Thus, Sentimental Education, once unintelligible, is now read as a great realistic tragic entropic anti-Bildungsroman. At the same time, The Eighteenth Brumaire, like Balzac's fiction, once thought the ultimate in realism, is now thought contrived.

So if today we are likely to consider Flaubert's emplotment of the story of the Second Republic more realistic than Marx's, this has nothing to do with historical truth in the limited sense of faithful representation of the facts. Rather it has to do with standards of intelligibility and plausibility operating in the construction and interpretation of arrangements of facts

in narratives. The narrative conventions most in use are taken as most "natural" and "realistic." As opposed to those no longer so much in use, the former seem more naturally applicable to social reality.³⁷ But we must be careful as to make what we make of this. It says more about our form of life than it does about the structure of reality in any absolute sense.

It appears, then that those who expected an absolutist, non-relativistic strategy for adjudicating between competing narrative schemata will be disappointed. At least the notion of "realism" cannot function as a touchstone for such a strategy.

But it does not follow that there is no more to be said about adjudication between competing narratives. It is still possible to raise questions similar to those we raised in our previous discussion of empirical adequacy. We can, that is, ask about what and how much each of the two narrative emplotments of the fall of the Second Republic permits us to see. And conversely, we can ask what and how much each blocks off to us.

Overall, Marx's method of narrative construction consists in making visible connections between phenomena

³⁷For a discussion of the conventional character of realistic forms of representation in art, Cf. Nelson Goodman, Languages of Art, op. cit., pp. 34-39.

which might otherwise have gone unseen. The motif of poetic justice, whereby the punishments meted out to betrayers of allies are precisely tailored to fit the crime, is one example which was discussed in the previous chapter. Another is The Eighteenth Brumaire's "nursery theme," i.e., the way in which the party of Order by its own example unwittingly schooled Bonaparte in the tactics he used to defeat them. And so on. These are all connections between phenomena which, once made, alter the meaning of the incidents so connected. We saw, to continue with these examples, that the effect of emplotting the narrative so as to make these connections was to undercut the reader's tendency to identify with Order and to mourn its defeat of December 2, 1851. The meaning of the coup d'état was thus transmuted from a simple outrageous violation of established political principles to (in part) the just deserts owing to a declining, incompetent and unjust bourgeoisie. There is no doubt that in emplotting the story as he does, Marx permits the emergence into visibility of such meaning-altering connections and thereby extends our horizon of vision.

Flaubert's method of "letting us see" is somewhat different from Marx's. Instead of setting out to draw new explicit parallels between previously unrelated phenomena, Flaubert concentrates on the more negative

work of breaking down the established connections which constitute the ordinary way of seeing. We saw, for example, how he repeatedly suppressed the connections between various stages of his characters' careers so as to make them appear random, unmotivated and indeed, stupid. But the suppression of usual connections also has the more positive effect of renewing perception. It makes possible what Wittgenstein would have called a "perspicuous rearrangement" of the phenomena. Thus, for example, although we do not see much in the way of the transitions from Sénécal's original socialism to his ultimate murderous Bonapartism, we get a sense of the attraction for him of order, totalitarian control and anti-individualism. In these terms we discern an underlying affinity between the apparently diverse beginning and end points of his career.

Thus, in his own, ostensibly more negative way, Flaubert, too, permits the emergence of new connections. Like Marx's new connections, Flaubert's alter the meaning of the phenomena which are first disconnected and then re-connected in a different way. In the example of Sénécal, when we see that it was possible for him to undergo the evolution that he did, the revolutionary fervor of the June insurgents whom he represents becomes a far more complex phenomenon than it was in The Eighteenth Brumaire.

This last example can help us to adjudicate between Flaubert and Marx in terms of what their respective emplotments permit and don't permit us to see. We saw in our chapter on empirical adequacy that a major weakness of Marx's description was its tendency to block off avenues of perception with respect to the character and role of the June insurgents in the Second Republic. Once again we see that Flaubert's emplotment lets us see things about them (or at least about one of them who, if not exactly typical, is nonetheless instructive) which point up the limitations of the vision enforced by the Marxian emplotment.

This example shows that narrative structures can be treated as in some respects similar to conceptual frameworks for purposes of description adjudication. That is to say, they can be evaluated in terms of what they permit to be seen and what they prevent from being seen, just as conceptual frameworks were evaluated in our earlier chapter on empirical adequacy.

But this is not all to be said about the adjudication of narrative structures. We can also approach adjudication in terms of the choice of beginning and end points, which we previously saw to be such an important determinant of the content and meaning of social descriptions. We said earlier that an objectivist evaluation of

such choices would not be possible since there was nothing in social reality which necessitated that a narrative account begin and end at any particular points. What was meant was that there are no absolute beginning and ending points which are given absolutely once and for all by reality independently of readers and writers of narratives. Once, however, the question of choice of beginning and end points is relativized to the interests of readers and writers, the merits of such choices can be debated. Again, the absence of absolutist grounds for such choices is not equivalent to the absence of all grounds whatsoever. Such grounds as remain are still subject to intersubjective evaluation standards. It is not the case that any choice is as good as any other.

If we return to a consideration of the respective end points of the Marxian and Flaubertian narratives, we can see how a non-objectivist standpoint can still yield an acceptable adjudication procedure. We saw that Marx's narrative was constructed so as to superimpose a comedic emplotment of the Second Republic history upon the farcical and tragic emplotments. We saw that this superimposition involved a self-conscious attempt to treat the defeat of the proletariat in June 1848 not as the end point of a tragedy, but rather as the beginning

point of a comedy whose end point would be a projected future proletarian socialist revolution. With that as the new (covert) end point, the June defeat appeared as an early testing and learning ground for the proletariat and thus as an event with positive long-term consequences.

We saw that Flaubert's narrative, on the other hand, took as its end point (leaving aside for the moment the epilogue) the coup d'état of December 2, 1851. This event was emplotted as the culmination and convergence of a series of personal and social disintegrations. Its meaning was epitomized in Sénécal's murder of Dussardier as depicted in the final scene. Superimposed upon this emplotment was the anti-Bildungsroman. This gave us an epilogue and a new end point--some time in 1867. Here in the reunion of Frédéric and Deslauriers, the earlier end point is reflected upon. The upshot of the reflection is that no glimmer of positive meaning can be discerned which would give grounds for a revaluation of the Second Republic experience. No lessons were learned as a result of the outcome; no agreeable consequences are traceable to it. Life has simply continued on its dreary course, minus a few ideals and illusions. In sum, the effects achieved by Flaubert's lengthening of his end point in the epilogue are only a more confirmed cynicism and an even bleaker pessimism.

These differences between the Flaubertian and Marxian end points and between their respective meanings are enormous. Marx uses the lengthening of the story as a vehicle for the introduction of positive hopes. Flaubert, on the other hand, uses it as a vehicle for precluding any possibility of such hopes. Given the diametrically opposed nature of their respective techniques, how might we go about justifying a preference for one over the other?

Consider the following rather plausible argument which might be given by a reader today against Marx's projected comic end point: Marx emplots the destruction of the Second Republic as a phase of the "death-agony" of bourgeois parliamentarianism, as a certification of that form's exhaustion of its historical possibilities, and hence as in effect a proof of its ultimate nonviability. But we know that bourgeois parliamentary democracy has persisted long beyond the demise of the Second Republic and that it has even undergone subsequent development. In the light of this subsequent history, we can see that the state of parliamentarianism in France in 1848-1851 was not at all "perfect" and overripe as Marx took it to be. Rather, it was decidedly underdeveloped and immature.

Let us develop this argument in greater detail

before we step back to see what is going on here. It might be said with good reason that despite the (short-lived) existence during the Second Republic of universal manhood suffrage and related constitutional forms, the social conditions and traditions which, in conjunction with these, might have conduced to a developed, mature, stable, and hence "perfect" parliamentary democracy were lacking. Whereas Marx has it that parliamentary democracy failed because it had attained the zenith of perfection and could go no further--hence that it was overripe, effete or whatever--it seems that it was actually the immaturity and lack of ripeness of the parliamentary tradition in France which doomed the Second Republic.

Indeed, to continue the argument, Marx himself shows how ill-prepared virtually all sections of French society were for parliamentary democracy; he documents the apathy, isolation, and continued deference of much of the peasantry, the hostility of the elites of the countryside and of the cities. It emerges clearly from his own account that only a relatively thin stratum of the urban lower middle class engaged in small manufacturing and some related petty bourgeois ideologues could be considered truly committed to parliamentary democracy, and these were quite conscious of their numerical inferi-

ority and hence often less than stalwart in pursuit of their goal.

The argument concludes, then, that Marx was wrong in assuming that parliamentary democracy was perfected in the Second Republic and that it broke down under strains inherent in modern social life. Rather, the presence of pre-modern forms of life and culture made the establishment of a stable parliamentary democracy impossible. So the demise of the Second Republic is not proof of the inherent bankruptcy and nonviability of bourgeois parliamentary democracy.

Now this argument, as good as it is, is perhaps not quite what it appears on the surface to be. It is less a factual refutation of some factual claims in The Eighteenth Brumaire than an implicit replotment of the story with a different end point. This will be clear if we see how the argument can be rewritten in such terms.

It might go something like this: Living as we do in the late twentieth century, it is natural for us to adopt (at least covertly) our own age as the end point for a narrative about the political history of the Second Republic. Our covert end point, then, is the persistence and further development of bourgeois parliamentary democracy beyond the Second Republic. In the light of our end point, that is, of our twentieth century picture

of a "perfected" modern parliamentary democracy, we see the Second Republic as an early, immature, unripe approximation. Thus what Marx emplots as the death-agony of the form, we tend to emplot as its birth-agony. What Marx emplots as the rotting of an overripe and effete bourgeois political culture, we emplot rather as one still in the process of working itself out of the cocoon of pre-bourgeois practices and modes of life in which it is yet gestating. Rather than emplotting the destruction of the Second Republic as signalling the exhaustion of parliamentarianism's historical possibilities, we emplot it as the playing out of the last monarchist and imperial options in France, the branding of them as bankrupt, and thus as the preparation for the future emergence of a more "perfect" and mature parliamentary political universe.

It should be clear that what we have done in arguing as we have is to substitute for the end point of Marx's projected comedy a different end point of our own. In making this substitution we have at the same time necessitated a replotment of the story. Since the ending is different, the treatment of what leads up to the ending must be different. Since bourgeois parliamentarianism persists, the story of the Second Republic cannot be the story of the death-agony of bourgeois parliamentarian-

ism. It becomes instead, perhaps, that of its birth-
agony. The event assumes a different function in the
story and therefore a different meaning. If we were to
adopt the new end point without at the same time altering
the narrative function and therefore the meaning of the
destruction of the Second Republic, we would not be
able to tell an intelligible, plausible and satisfying
story. At least, that is, given the prevailing conven-
tions which determine what counts as such a story.

What, then are we to conclude here? While the
argument against the Marxian emplotment is a good one,
it is not one which is independent of assumptions about
the proper (at least, covert) end point of the story.
This means that it is not independent of our present
historical situation and of our judgment of that situa-
tion. We need only imagine the occurrence at some future
time of a beneficent proletarian revolution in France in
order to see that our own end point might itself be super-
seded and that in that case the story of the Second
Republic would need to be replotted once again.

What this means is that the adequacy of ways of
emplotting historical narratives can be judged only
relative to the obtaining historical situation. What was
at one time an acceptable emplotment may cease to be
such. What will be an adequate emplotment from the stand-

point of one age may not be so from the standpoint of another. This is only to say what many people have long recognized: history is always being rewritten. And this is inherent in the very enterprise of historiography given the inherent historicity of historians.

Assuming, then, that we have found good, albeit historically relative, grounds for rejecting at least one main prop of Marx's narrative, what can we say about the relative merits of Flaubert's narrative? Here I think it would be natural to give a different, but related sort of argument such as the following: Marx's emplotment involved the raising of certain hopes and expectations about the likelihood and desirability of proletarian socialist revolution. This was the whole raison d'être of both the Bildungsroman and comic subplot of The Eighteenth Brumaire. Flaubert's emplotment, on the other hand, involved the deflating of all such hopes and expectations. This was the import of the closing reunion scene between Deslauriers and Frédéric in which no sense, no lesson, and certainly no fortunate consequence could be traced to the Second Republic experience. Furthermore, Flaubert's penultimate scene in which Sénécal, now a policeman in a three-cornered hat, kills Dussardier while the latter shouts, "Vive la République" on the Wednesday following the Bonapartist

coup d'état was about as chilling and forceful dashing of all hopes attaching to the anticipation of revolutionary socialism as one could imagine.

The argument goes on to note that the experience of socialist revolution in our own century has been such as to make no longer entertainable the sorts of hopes the Marxian emplotment attached to this notion. On the contrary, the experience makes Flaubert's penultimate scene seem uncannily prescient. It follows from the way that things have turned out since the writing of both of these narratives that Flaubert's emplotment of the story of the Second Republic is to be preferred to Marx's:

Once again this argument, as good as it is (given, of course, that one accepts the premise about the character of twentieth century socialism), is not quite the empirical matter that it appears to be. Rather it is a matter of the aesthetics of narration. It amounts to something like the following: Given the end point we naturally assume, we need a way of emplotting the story of the Second Republic that can accommodate the possibility realized in that end. We need an emplotment, that is, that can accommodate the possibility that the triumph of proletarian socialism will turn out to be an even more profound and disturbing tragedy than that of its defeat.

But the Marxian aesthetic cannot and does not accommodate the possibility of such a tragedy. On the contrary, we saw that the defeat of the June insurrection of 1848 was emplotted as fairly standard tragedy and that the projected future reversal of that defeat was emplotted in the classical comedic mode. It followed from the use of these standard modes that there were villains and heroes and that dramatic tensions were built up and then resolved in the course of the narrative.

But if one were to accommodate the possibility that the triumph of proletarian socialism will be a more profound tragedy than its defeat, one would need a less classical, more ironic and modern set of narrative conventions. This is because such an emplotment would not be a simple reversal of Marx's; it would not be one in which the revolutionaries were cast as villains and the defenders of "order" were cast as heroes. Rather it would be an emplotment without standard heroes and villains and without any potential "rooting interest." It would also be an emplotment which did not build toward a conclusion in which dramatic tensions were resolved, but rather one in which life simply went on despite the impossibility any longer of a sense of destiny to confer meaning and intelligibility upon historical experience. Such a narrative, as will already be obvious, is

certainly a post-Marxian, post-Balzacian one. It is in fact a Flaubertian one, at least insofar as we have understood Flaubert. We said earlier that Flaubert's break with the standard narrative conventions permitted him to tell a kind of story which had not previously been narratable. This story was the modern entropic tragedy of the anti-Bildungsroman, of the winding down of life without destiny and without resolutions. That is precisely the emplotment we want for the story whose end point is the state of proletarian socialism in the late twentieth century.

The argument, then, for the superiority of Flaubert's emplotment of the history of the Second Republic to Marx's, boils down to this: In excluding the possibility that the triumph of proletarian revolution might be a modern entropic tragedy, Marx's narrative cannot be fit into a longer narrative which extends into the twentieth century. Flaubert's, on the other hand, can; it can precisely because it allows for, indeed even anticipates, precisely this possibility and has available the modern narrative conventions for emplotting it. On these grounds, Sentimental Education is more adequate than The Eighteenth Brumaire.

Once again, the argument is a good one in spite of its not being independent of our own choice of an end

point and hence of our own historical situatedness. Of course, it will perhaps cease to hold when unforeseen historical developments impose the need for choosing a new end point. And it will perhaps cease to hold when changes in the prevailing narrative conventions impose the need to tell a different kind of story. In other words, it is possible at least in principle that unforeseeable developments will require a reversal of the judgment that Flaubert's emplotment is superior to Marx's. It is certainly also possible, and perhaps more likely, that new developments will require that Flaubert's emplotment be judged inferior to some other as yet unavailable alternative.

But be that as it may, it is still the case that this way of looking at the matter gives us rational grounds for adjudicating between Marx and Flaubert. We can give reasons for our preference and these reasons will be intersubjectively valid, at least for our contemporaries. So again, the impossibility of the sort of decision-procedure which was once thought to govern theory-choice in the natural sciences does not lead us into the subjectivist-relativist abyss. The alternative to episteme is not chaos and unreason, but phronesis. Just as we saw that phronesis permitted us to adjudicate between competing empirical descriptions across incom-

measurable conceptual frameworks, so now we see it permits us to adjudicate between competing historical interpretations across incommensurable narrative aesthetics. The latter process, just like the former, does not consist in the mechanical application of a set of formal criteria or rules which can be specified in the abstract. Rather, it involves sensitivity to the particularities of the narratives, of the aesthetic conventions and traditions in which they participate, and of our own historical situatedness. It is this sensitivity to particulars and not the following of formal rules which constitutes rationality here.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

We have examined in considerable detail and from several different points of view a number of conflicting social descriptions of the French Second Republic. Let us reflect back upon our investigation and determine precisely what has been accomplished and what conclusions can be drawn.

One result has been a concrete demonstration of the complexity of social description. It has been shown that social descriptions may contain at least as many as three analytically distinct components: critical, empirical-conceptual, and narrative. We succeeded in isolating the first of these components by reading Marx's The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis-Bonaparte as a critique of Victor Hugo's rival description, Napoleon the Little. We isolated the second by reading this same text of Marx's in the light of rival accounts by two recent social historians. Finally, we isolated the narrative component of social description via our comparative interpretation of The Eighteenth Brumaire and Gustave Flaubert's Sentimental Education.

In demonstrating the existence of at least the critical, empirical, and narrative components of social description, we have at the same time shown that the process of description adjudication can involve at least three corresponding dimensions. We have shown, that is, that rival descriptions can be adjudicated in terms of their critical power, their empirical adequacy, and their narrative strengths. Indeed, we attempted to get a picture of what each type of adjudication procedure looked like by evaluating Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire with respect to each in turn. We subjected it to comparative evaluation qua critique, qua empirical historiography and qua narrative.

In evaluating Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire as critique, we considered its capacity to describe and point up the limitations of Victor Hugo's rival description. We adjudged the degree to which Marx's description made possible a redescription of Hugo's description which permitted us to notice and account for various types of incoherences in the latter. We considered the degree to which Marx's description permitted us to see beyond Hugo's, thereby persuading us of the latter's limitedness. We considered the extent to which Marx's description subsumed and thus superseded Hugo's.

In evaluating Marx's description as empirical

historiography, we adduced somewhat different but related considerations. We focused on the incommensurability of the conceptual frameworks respectively informing The Eighteenth Brumaire and two rival twentieth century accounts. In assessing the relative empirical adequacy of these competing social descriptions, we considered the ways in which each such framework constituted its own proper domain of relevant facts incommensurable with that of its rivals. We saw that while the adoption of an alternative conceptual framework could not yield data capable of directly falsifying Marx's description, it could nonetheless highlight the latter's limitations by bringing into view material which Marx's categories blocked from view. We considered, in other words, the assessment of empirical adequacy to be a matter of assessing the relative factual blindnesses and insights shaped by the incommensurate conceptual frameworks of competing descriptions. We considered the extent to which Marx's description failed to construe as relevant and thus denied us access to factual domains opened up by its rivals.

Finally, we saw that comparative interpretation of social descriptions in the narrative dimension involved still different, though related considerations. When we sought to contrast The Eighteenth Brumaire with Flaubert's Sentimental Education, we concerned ourselves with the opera-

tion of narrative techniques and conventions having to do with plot mode, characterization, temporality, beginning and end points, etc. We considered how the choice among various alternative ways of handling each of these narrative variables affected what sort of material could find its way into descriptions and what form that material could take therein. We considered also how such choices carried with them certain standards as to what could count as a realistic, intelligible and plausible narrative social description. We saw how, despite the incommensurability of content and standards in descriptions of incommensurable narrative form, we could approach comparative interpretation and evaluation.

Thus, we presented pictures of three different sorts of social description adjudication corresponding to three different component dimensions of social description. Although each involved its own proper sorts of considerations, the three nonetheless shared some general features. These shared features included a concern for the extent of relative visibility afforded by the competing descriptions, a concern for their relative limitedness, and a concern for their relative persuasiveness (intellectual, as opposed to merely rhetorical). That such features should be common to all three sorts of description adjudication is not surprising when we remember

that the three are mutually interrelated.

Our investigation has also shown that the critical, empirical, and narrative adjudication standpoints are not wholly independent of one another. Rather, they supplement one another. We saw this by virtue of the sorts of transitions we marked out between them. We began with the critical dimension, but saw that it brought us to the brink of a problematic which made it necessary to embark on a consideration of empirical adjudication. We saw that a persuasive descriptive critique presupposed empirical assumptions which could not be validated from within the critical dimension. Thus, we left that dimension for the empirical. But the latter, too, was soon revealed as not self-contained or self-sufficient. It brought into view the problem of the role of temporal structure or narrative plot in social description adjudication. But this problem, once raised, could not be handled within the framework of empirical adjudication and it was necessary for us to leave that behind and to proceed to the narrative dimension of description adjudication. Thus, again, we found that one dimension led us directly to another.

The movement from one dimension to another did not, of course, lead us to some ultimate foundation of description which could be treated as epistemologically

prior to the previously considered one(s). Rather, it led us to a picture of the mutual interrelatedness of the three dimensions. We acquired a sense of the way the critical, empirical and narrative components presuppose one another and are relatively continuous with one another. We acquired, that is, a sense of how the three supplement one another.

The relative continuity of the critical, empirical and narrative dimensions with one another makes possible the drawing of some further general conclusions about the nature of description adjudication. In each of the three cases we considered, the process of comparative evaluation was more a matter of hermeneutical interpretation and practical judgment than of the application of a decision-procedure. In the case of critical adjudication, our concern, as we have just noted, was with the capacity of a preferred description to persuade us to adopt a redescription of its rival such that we could come to see beyond the latter. Certainly this was not a process governed by a mechanical decision-procedure. As exemplified in our comparative reading of Marx and Hugo, it was rather a process of concrete interpretation guided at every point by judgments appropriate to the specific character of the texts and not capable of being divorced therefrom.

The same goes for our picture of empirical adjudication. There we specifically ruled out a falsificationist decision-procedure. We substituted for that a hermeneutical process of considering what domains of phenomena were opened up and construed as relevant by competing descriptions. This involved notions such as blindness vs. insight and was thus not reducible to a set of formally specificable criteria.

Finally, in our comparative interpretation of alternative narrative descriptions, we saw that the choice of one set of narrative techniques and conventions over others could not be justified by appeal to a set of abstract, atemporal standards. Rather, once again, it was necessary to make a variety of subtle practical judgments relating to the suitability of various narrative conventions and end points for our historical situation. It was also necessary to evaluate the extent to which conflicting narratives yielded a renewal of perception by their arrangement and choice of meaning-conferring story functions for their materials. This was certainly a matter of interpretive and aesthetic judgment, not a matter of the mechanical application of a decision-procedure.

It appears, then that we can conclude from our investigation not only that conflicting social descriptions

can be approached in several different ways but also that none of these ways involves the application of a mechanical decision-procedure. This means that we have succeeded in developing the first prong of our attack, the prong, that is, that was directed against Hempelian positivism and similar decision-procedure models of description adjudication.

It will be remembered that the other prong of our attack was to be directed against the relativists and anarchists who assumed that without a decision-procedure there was no way of rationally justifying choices between conflicting descriptions. As against that position, our aim was to show that rational, but non-canonical, adjudication is indeed possible. Now we need to consider whether in fact this has been shown.

In each of the three adjudication cases taken up in this work, we have attempted to justify preferences for one description over its rivals. In our treatment of the critical dimension of social description, we sought to show that Marx's description was preferable to Victor Hugo's on the grounds that it was a persuasive critique of the latter, while the reverse was not the case. This was a procedure involving the grounding of a preference upon argument, discussion and debate. We submitted for intersubjective consideration various lacunae

and contradictions in Hugo's account which only came to light via the framework provided us by The Eighteenth Brumaire. Had someone wished to argue that these difficulties with Hugo's description were only apparent and that there was another way of looking at his text which saved it, then we could have and would have discussed the merits of the case and of the newly proffered interpretation. In the absence of such an objection, we reasonably concluded that Marx's critique of Hugo was persuasive in that it made possible insight into Napoleon the Little beyond what that text itself provided.

When we turned to consider the empirical dimension, we also were able to rationally adjudicate between conflicting descriptions despite the fact that they did not share the same conceptual framework and hence were not susceptible to the application of a falsificationist decision-procedure. We adjudged Marx's description of the nature of the June insurrection of 1848 and of that of the insurgents as limited and empirically less adequate than the rival description of a twentieth century social historian, William H. Sewell, Jr. We grounded our preference upon the circumstance that Sewell's choice of conceptual framework permitted him to construe as relevant material concerning the corporatist traditions and heritage of the insurgents. Consequently, it permitted the

emergence into view of a domain of facts about the June insurrection which substantially affected our understanding of the meaning of that event. Once we had access to this background, these facts and this view of the event's meaning, we could see the limits of the Marxian description. The latter was not falsified in the technical sense, but it was seen to block off access to certain background, facts and meanings deemed relevant and important.

Once again this was a rationally arguable claim. It might have been objected that the domain opened up by Sewell and closed off by Marx was not really relevant. Someone might have presented some concrete new material which might have persuaded us to reverse our judgment. Had anyone done so, we could have argued the merits in terms of the specifics of the texts. But once again, in the absence of such real objections it was reasonable to conclude as we did that with respect to the June insurrection and insurgents Marx's text was limited and empirically less adequate than more recent descriptions.

Similarly, our third and final exemplary description evaluation was rational though not governed by a decision-procedure. Our discussion of the relative merits of the Marxian and Flaubertian narrations of the

demise of the Second Republic permitted the judgment that the latter was in certain ways preferable. We argued that it used more modern narrative conventions and techniques and therefore better met the best current standards of what an intelligible, plausible, realistic story looks like. This had the result of permitting the representation within Flaubert's narrative of some phenomena excluded from Marx's. For example, Flaubert was able to portray the chaos, disintegration and modern anxiety afflicting various strata of society and contributing to the Republic's devolution. Furthermore, we argued that Flaubert's narrative, better than Marx's, enabled us to impose our own age as a covert end point without fundamentally violating the emplotment. We argued, too, that the Flaubertian narrative told a kind of story (an entropic anti-Bildungsroman) that was better able than the kind told by Marx to accommodate subsequent historical experience.

All of these claims, which we adduced in support of our preference for Flaubert's narrative, were and are in principle arguable. Someone might have objected to any of them by pointing out neglected aspects of the narratives, by offering putatively better interpretations of them, by producing an acceptable extension of the Marxian narrative capable of accommodating subsequent develop-

ments, by reinterpreting those developments, and so on. In any of these or related lines of attack, the claims and counter-claims could in principle be thrashed out on their specific merits. But in the absence of such substantive objections and the sort of rational interpretive debate surrounding them, it was eminently reasonable to accept our original arguments in favor of the Flaubertian narrative. This is so even though the precise form of those arguments was not specifiable in advance in terms of an abstract, atemporal decision-procedure.

It seems unobjectionable then, to call each of our three exemplars of description interpretation and adjudication "rational." Each involved the adducing of reasons which are in principle accessible to everyone and subject to debate. Each involved the weighing of essentially corrigible claims and counter-claims. Each involved in one form or another appeal to such standard values as coherence, relevance, comprehensiveness, and so on. None involved such essentially non-rational modes of persuasion as propaganda, threats, intimidation, etc. None involved the premature breaking off of debate or the standing on purely arbitrary, idiosyncratic personal whims. Each, therefore, exemplified a number of characteristics that are usually, and

I believe correctly, taken to be hallmarks of rationality.

Perhaps something more may be said about the nature of the corrigibility which pertains to our picture of description adjudication as rational though not governed by a mechanical decision-procedure. The notion of corrigibility or revisability in principle is typically one of the guarantors of rationality in any judgment process. And it continues to fulfill that function here. But corrigibility here does not consist in what Hempelians and Popperians have supposed. It does not consist in the possibility, in principle, of appeal to external neutral arbiters, which if accessible, would cause us to modify our judgment. That sort of appeal is one we take to have been ruled out by post-Hempelian, post-Popperian philosophy of science. But this does not mean that there are no circumstances which could cause us to modify or reverse our judgment.

Indeed, we have just sketched the outlines of circumstances which, were they to obtain, might lead precisely to such modification of adjudication judgments. These circumstances in each case involved the availability of a better interpretation. The fact that we can imagine at least in very general terms what such an interpretation might look like is enough to preserve corrigibility in

principle.

We have insisted, though, that in the absence of an actual argument, counter-interpretation, objection, etc., it is rational to accept the best judgment at hand. The mere abstract possibility of doubt about adjudication judgments does not constitute rational grounds for denying them in the absence of concrete counter-reasons. In this respect, our picture of description adjudication is neither different from nor worse off than any other picture.

There is a difference however, in that the adjudication strategies we have proposed and illustrated here do not amount to a "Method" which compels assent at every step along the way as mathematical or logical proofs are thought (at least on some philosophies of mathematics and logic) to do. They do not add up to a set of adjudication rules which admit of only one correct unambiguous application in any given case in the way that scientific method has often at least in the past been thought to do. And they do not translate into a set of formal criteria which can be stated abstractly and atemporally in advance of any and every interpretive practice.

But latitude in the application of standards is not tantamount to the absence of standards. The possibili-

ty of diverging from an ordered sequence of steps is not tantamount to going anyway whatsoever at any point. And the impossibility of laying down in advance the form an acceptable adjudication process will take is not tantamount to opening the door to anything and everything.

On the contrary, our exemplars have demonstrated that in giving up mechanical decision-procedures, one is not giving up rationality itself. On the contrary, these exemplars show that the lack of such decision-procedures is no bar to effective rational adjudication between conflicting social descriptions. This effective, practical demonstration, as we said in our Introduction, speaks to the concerns underlying our interest in a philosophical theory of truth, although of course it does not itself provide one.

To use the Wittgensteinian idiom, only someone in the thrall of a picture could deny that the interpretive processes presented in this work were rational ones. Only someone, that is, who sees unreason lurking wherever an imperfectly tight decision-procedure leaves the slightest opening for deviation at some point. Such a person operates with a picture that identifies reason exclusively with the putative compulsion of a mechanical decision-procedure. It is a picture which, after having

long dominated our ideas about knowledge and science, has lately become a source of great difficulty for us.

It is that picture of reason as the possession and application of a mechanical decision-procedure which is the true object under attack in the present work. Our aim has been to replace it with a different picture of rationality, one which sees reason as equally at home in hermeneutical interpretation and practical judgment. It is a picture which puts great value upon sensitivity to particulars and to, in the Aristotelian idiom, the making of the right judgment at the right time, in the right place and in the right circumstances.

The advantages of this hermeneutical picture of rationality over the decision-procedure picture of rationality are important and clear. Where the decision-procedure picture broke down and left us poised upon the brink of the relativist precipice, the hermeneutical picture stands firm. The latter allows for adjudication across incommensurable frameworks and thereby enables us to refuse the dilemma posed by the former. We need no longer choose between an untenable Hempelian positivism and an unpalatable relativism. The decision-procedure picture of rationality forced us to choose between reason and pluralism. If we admitted alternative incommensurable frameworks, we could not keep rationality. If we kept the

latter, we could not also have the former. The hermeneutical picture of rationality, on the other hand, restores both reason and pluralism to us by rendering them mutually compatible.

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