

## A refutation of (post-) narrativism, or: why postmodernists love Austro-Hungary.<sup>1</sup>

Review of:

Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist philosophy of historiography*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. 252 pp., AIAA 2015 edition (1 July 2015), ISBN-10: 113740986X, ISBN-13: 978-1137409867, £60.00

Branko Mitrović

It is more exciting to write true history (or as true as you make it) than fictional history, else historians would choose to be novelists rather than historians; more exciting to try to rise above our interests and prejudices than to indulge in them; more exciting to try to enter the imagination of those remote from us in time and place than to impose our imagination upon them; more exciting to write a coherent narrative while respecting the complexity of historical events than to fragmentize history into disconnected units; more exciting to try to get the facts (without the benefit of quotation marks) as right as we can than to deny the very idea of facts; even more exciting to get footnotes right, if only to show others the visible proof of our labours.<sup>2</sup>

Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen's book *Postnarrativist Philosophy of History* is a contribution to the efforts of those authors who have, since the 1970s, endeavoured to introduce postmodernist perspectives in the understanding of history writing.<sup>3</sup> The tone of the book resembles the style of analytic philosophers, but more profoundly, it is the postmodernist narrativist tradition, and especially the work of Frank Ankersmit, that provides the wider philosophical framework of the book.

The idea that history writing is a kind of literary work and that historians produce narratives was hardly novel in the 1970s when Hayden White and Arthur Danto began to insist on it—the view was a commonplace, for instance, among the

<sup>1</sup> I should like to express my gratitude to Adam Timmins for his help and advice in the preparation of the review and to Karen Wise for her help with the written English of the article.

<sup>2</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, 'Telling as you like it: postmodernist history and the flight from fact', in Keith Jenkins, ed., *The Postmodern History Reader*, London: Routledge, 1997, 158-174, 173.

<sup>3</sup> Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist Philosophy of Historiography*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. See also his summary of the book in Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, 'Why we need to move from truth-functionality to performativity in historiography', *History and Theory*, 54, 2015, 226-243. A recent review of the book, that analyses it from the perspective of analytic philosophy is Paul Roth, 'Back to the future: Postnarrativist historiography and analytic philosophy of history', *History and Theory*, 55, 2016, 270-281.

Renaissance theorists of historiography.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the postmodernist perspective on narratives was different from that of older theorists. Postmodernists understood narratives as holistic entities in their own right, irreducible to the sentences that constitute them; in the words of Frank Ankersmit, one of the most prominent proponents of this view, a narrative is a *totum* and not a *compositum*.<sup>5</sup> From this point of view, a historian who writes about Napoleon creates a narrative substance that is comparable to a picture or an image, (a 'presented' as Ankersmit says) of historical Napoleon. Historical representations thus created do not refer to historical events, objects or periods, but rather construct them—an understanding profoundly opposed to the classical understanding of historical narratives. For postmodernists, past is not given, but constituted by a historical narrative. There is consequently nothing in historical reality that historical concepts such as 'the Cold War' or 'the Renaissance' could refer to. The proponents of narrativism do not deny the possibility that individual statements about historical objects and events can be true or false on the basis of the historical objects they refer to, but once a large number of such sentences get together in a historical text, the result is a new entity that has no reference. It becomes pointless to ask whether it is true or false.

### *Perturbata doctrina*

Kuukkanen's book builds on and further refines these efforts while, at the same time, he also opposes some of the assumptions of his predecessors. In particular, he rejects the view that a historical work constitutes a narrative substance that exists on its own (representationalism) as well the view that it cannot be decomposed (holism). In these aspects, his position substantially differs from Ankersmit's and one can indeed talk about postnarrativism, in accordance with the title of the book. Nevertheless, Kuukkanen stays within the postmodernist tradition, by endorsing constructivism and anti-realism—and therefore shares the view that there is nothing in historical reality that would make synthesizing historical statements true.

In general, his argumentation goes like this. The problem with representationalism is that the nature of representations is unclear—they seem to be abstract objects that exist on their own, and this substantially complicates their

<sup>4</sup> See Roth, 'Back to the future', 273-274, for an analysis of the views of Arthur Danto, Frank Ankersmit, Morton White and Hayden White. The idea that historians produce narratives is an old one: 'Historiae finem est narrare res gestas ...', Francesco Robortello, *De historica facultate*, Florence: apud Laurentium Torrentinum, 1568, 8. '... sed narrationem rerum gesterum historiam voco'. Antonius Viperanus, *De scribenda historia*, Antwerp: Christophorus Plantinus, 1569, 9. See also the discussion about the definition: 'La historia è narratione, di cose fatte, si come elle sono fatte' in Francesco Patritio, *Della historia diece dialoghi*, Venice: Andrea Arrivabenne, 1560, 2r. All three books are reprinted in Eckhard Kessler, *Theoretiker Humanistischer Geschichtsschreibung*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971. Possibly, in the 1970s, the idea that history writing is a literary pursuit may have sounded novel in English-speaking scholarship because of the domination of German scholarly models and the understanding of history as *Wissenschaft* at the time.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012, 79.

philosophical explanation.<sup>6</sup> Another, simpler way to state the same criticism (though not necessarily an explanation that Kuukkanen would endorse), is that there are historical events, historical works (books) and the mental states (thoughts) of the historian and his or her readers, but that there are no separately existing historical representations that would exist in an abstract world on their own, independent of the world in which we live. Kuukkanen also accurately describes problems with holism. (44-47) Holism implies that the segments of historical works (for instance, descriptions of individual battles) cannot be considered, or be true or false, on their own, but only in the context of the whole work, and then they are true as parts of the total historical account in which they participate independently of any historical facts. In other words, a historian's description of Napoleon constitutes a narrative substance, and its segments can be true only in relation to the whole narrative, but cannot be empirically refuted or corroborated by historical facts. It is hard to disagree with Kuukkanen in his criticism; the rejection of these two important tenets of narrativism is well justified.

At the same time, the 'postnarrativist' position that Kuukkanen advocates remains loyal to the constructivist perspective and re-defines historical reality in accordance with it. 'Constructivism' is here understood as the view that historical objects are constructed through the historian's activity, that they do not exist independently of the knowing subject.<sup>7</sup> (187) In general, he endorses the view of White and Ankersmit that a text 'seems to have qualities and structures that historical reality lacks'. (53) According to this view, the truth-claims of historiographical theses, insofar as their truth is understood as correspondence to historical reality, 'cannot be in isomorphic to, or structural similarity relations with, the past, due to the lack of truth-makers'. (142) In Kuukkanen's view,

... there is a *morphological* or *structural* difference between the historian's presentation and historical reality, which explains why any idea of copying or matching between the two is fundamentally misconceived. One simply cannot make two structurally totally different entities correspond with each other. Elephants cannot be made to correspond with butterflies due to the obvious structural difficulties. The historian's narrative is verbal and textual, while historical reality is non-narrative and non-verbal in nature. (42)

The claim is unclear, for it is hard to see why one should expect *any* kind of morphological or structural similarity between a set of propositions expressed in a text on the one hand, and the events, objects or situations in the world that make it

<sup>6</sup> Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist*, 9. See also the section between pages 55 and 66 in the same book for the discussion of the problem of representationalism in Ankersmit.

<sup>7</sup> Kuukkanen also tries to justify his endorsement of constructivism by pointing out that many physical objects such as smart phones are constructed by someone and that many chemical elements are not found in nature but require synthesizing by humans. But this argument is a mere play with words: it is certainly different if one uses the verb "to construct" in order to talk about objects physically made by other people and quite another if I use that verb to say, metaphorically, that these objects are not really there but merely result from my mental processes and the beliefs I have acquired.



propositions about reality, it is simply not applicable to those historical statements that rely on (include) colligatory concepts.<sup>11</sup>

Kuukkanen presents two arguments against the view that colligations refer to something in historical reality, that they have truth-makers, as he says.<sup>12</sup> (He uses the term 'colligation' for the expressions that rely on colligatory concepts.<sup>13</sup>) The first argument pertains to the metaphorical nature of the words that are often chosen to express them. His example is 'Khrushchev's Thaw' in Soviet politics and public life that followed Stalin's death. The 'Thaw' manifested itself as the liberalization of public life, release of political prisoners from Gulags, greater freedom in creative activities, the re-establishment of communication with countries that were regarded as hostile in the final years of Stalin's rule and similar trends and events. Kuukkanen argues that metaphors such as 'Khrushchev's Thaw', that are commonly used to express colligatory concepts, cannot be true because the world was not literally frozen in Stalin's time. (106) The metaphor also covers such a great diversity of social and political phenomena that there is 'no possibility that she [the historian] would stumble upon a unifying link between phenomena in the source material itself'. (117)

The second argument is best presented by citing Kuukkanen directly:

Let us consider a statement containing a colligatory expression: 'The Cold War was dangerous'. Does the 'Cold War' in the sentence refer? It seems very odd to think so. It is worth clarifying that 'reference' is understood here as in the case of proper names, which refer to individuals, and thus provides a kind of default understanding also in discussions that focuses on theoretical terms in the philosophy of science. The name 'Barack Obama' refers to one individual only, namely to the person who is the president of the USA in 2015. What would be a *particular* to which the 'Cold War' refers? Colligatory expressions do not seem to instantiate any individual—they do not seem to correspond to any singular object in the historical world. (106-107)

Now, if colligatory concepts refer to nothing in historical reality, then propositions that contain them cannot be evaluated as true or false in the sense of their correspondence to facts and reality. The obvious concern is that if these expressions

<sup>11</sup> '...the most intuitive *theory* of truth, the correspondence theory, is judged as unsuitable for providing the needed epistemic authority for the most important knowledge contributions of historiography, which are the synthesizing historical theses about the past.' Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist*, 142.

<sup>12</sup> Ankersmit has stated more arguments in his various writings. See my survey and refutation in Branko Mitrović, 'Opacity and Transparency in Historical Representations', *History and Theory*, 53, 2014, 277-294.

<sup>13</sup> Kuukkanen's formulations are not always sufficiently precise when it comes to the use of the term 'concept'. Occasionally he seems to consider the question whether colligatory *concepts* can be true or false (113, 128) or whether they can be truth-bearers. Obviously, no concepts (colligatory or otherwise) can be true or false; concepts only participate in propositions that can be true or false.

cannot be true or false, then this may open gates to 'anything goes' historiography. Kuukkanen is very concerned to avoid such nihilist implications.

Historical works are not to be conceived as holistic narratives, he submits, but as structures that consist of a thesis and the argumentation that supports it. For a narrativist philosopher of historiography, a historian is a descriptivist story teller; Kuukkanen says that in his view a historian is a critical reasoner. Historians 'advance a central thesis and ... such theses are made reasonable through the reasoning displayed in their books, which almost invariably contain long descriptive sections'. (91)

The point of evidence is to give a reason or reasons to accept a historiographical thesis. The primary mode is to bring forward factual evidence that supports the thesis, but the historical data should naturally be so connected as to lead to the conclusion defended in the book. This connected evidence should in turn create a structure that makes a case in favor of one's claims ... (88)

Kuukkanen also presents, as examples, Christopher Clark's *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe went to war in 1914* and E. P. Thompson's *The making of the English working class*.<sup>14</sup> He emphatically endorses both examples, and later in this review I will analyse, in some detail, the characteristically postmodernist approach to history writing of the former book, which is indeed a well-chosen example. (I do not have enough knowledge to comment on the second.)

### Reasoning without truth

One is naturally sympathetic to Kuukkanen's optimistic rationalist programme, which results from his efforts to avoid free-for-all history writing. As Alan Sokal once remarked, 'no one will admit to being against reason, evidence and logic – that's like being against Motherhood and Apple Pie'.<sup>15</sup> It is nevertheless peculiar that according to the postnarrativist perspective, the structure of historical works is expected to resemble so closely the structure of articles in analytic philosophy journals. (Why does there have to be only one thesis? Can't a historian write a book with more than one thesis? What is actually the thesis and what are the arguments in the works of Edward Gibbon or Herodotus or Livy? Can one develop a general theory of historiography on the basis of only two book-examples?) One also wonders whether and how one can argue rationally (and why would one care!) about historical theses that do not pertain to anything in historical reality. Can one give up the assumption that there has to be something in historical reality that

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers. How Europe went to war in 1914*, London: Penguin, 2012. My citations pertain to the 2013 edition. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of English working class*, London: Penguin, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Sokal, 'A plea for reason, evidence and logic', [http://www.physics.nyu.edu/sokal/nyu\\_forum.html](http://www.physics.nyu.edu/sokal/nyu_forum.html), accessed 15 July 2016.

makes a historical work true or false, and yet expect the work to provide rational argumentation in favour of a thesis?

Showing that such rationality without reality is possible can be seen as Kuukkanen's main effort in the book. As he puts it, 'The book attempts to establish a way in which it is possible to reject absolute truth-functional standards and replace them with a cognitively authoritative rational evaluation without implying that there are absolutely correct interpretations'. (2) The main idea is that one should define certain arguing procedures and standards to which historical reasoning should conform. The fact that certain reasoning standards have been satisfied would then ensure the validity of historical reasoning, even though its results (the theses that it confirms) pertain to nothing that actually happened. As Kuukkanen puts it, 'historiography should be seen as making assertions concerning the past, and when these assertions are successful, they are warranted'. (166) Asserting is justified by stating reasons, Kuukkanen says, and the inferential practice of providing reasons is thus itself a form of justification. Asserting 'authorizes certain sorts of inferences and makes the asserter responsible for giving reasons for the assertion'. (145) The theses of historical works, from this point of view, are knowledge claims that are evaluable by other cognitive criteria and not truth-functionally. (154) The necessary assumption is then that one can provide evidence for a statement without providing the evidence that the statement is true. In other words, descriptions of historical events need not pertain to anything that actually happened, and insofar as they employ colligations, they do not and cannot. Historians' argumentation is a rational practice and can be evaluated by the strength of the evidence provided for the main thesis. (154) Historical knowledge, as Kuukkanen presents it, is not knowledge in the sense of being a true belief (the classical definition of knowledge is that it is a 'justified true belief'), but rather a belief that has been confirmed following certain procedures. Synthetic historical knowledge depends on colligations and cannot be true, since, he insists, colligations do not have truth-makers in historical reality that would make them true. (132) Instead, there are three interrelated ways to evaluate historical knowledge that relies on colligations: epistemic, rhetorical and discursive.<sup>16</sup> (155)

The idea that historical assertions can be justified by the use of specific procedures without any reference to historical reality is not novel. Tony Bennett described the same view decades ago by saying that the past is only 'a product of the specific protocols of investigation which characterize the discipline of history in its concern to establish, classify and order the relations between events pertinent to the inquiry in hand'.<sup>17</sup> Kuukkanen illustrates this position on the example of the

<sup>16</sup> Epistemic evaluation stands for 'any appropriate and *reasonable* criteria that make a historiographical thesis or expression concerning the past – that is, as a knowledge claim – *compelling* to accept'. (156) The rhetorical dimension pertains to the fact that 'every work of history attempts to persuade its readers to accept its central historiographical thesis'. (157) The discursive dimension pertains to the fact that 'no historical work appears as a self-contained piece from an intellectual vacuum but emerges, instead, inevitably as molded by existing historical knowledge and historiographical arguments'. (157)

<sup>17</sup> He attributed this view to Marx Cousin. See Tony Bennett, 'Outside literature. Texts in history', in Jenkins, ed., *The Postmodern History Reader*, 219-230, 222-223.

colligatory concept 'Holocaust'. (In an earlier polemic, Ankersmit's critics pointed out that if colligatory concepts do not have reference, as he claimed, then it follows that 'Holocaust' has no reference, which amounts to saying that the Holocaust did not happen.<sup>18</sup>) Kuukkanen says that

...although the Holocaust, for example, as a colligated historiographical phenomenon is not carved as a given in the 'joints of the past', it has a strong cognitive warrant and epistemic authority as a consequence of which its reality should not be doubted. (184)

Presumably, this means that the existing body of historical research provides a strong cognitive warrant and epistemic authority so that the reality of the Holocaust cannot be doubted, but this reality is that of *a colligated historiographical phenomenon* (and not a cluster of real historical events that happened in the period 1933-1945). Since he explains elsewhere that by 'historiography' he means history writing, this means that the Holocaust is real as a phenomenon of history writing—that is, it is true that historians write about it.<sup>19</sup> The metaphorical statement that the Holocaust is not 'carved as a given in the "joints of the past"' is (presumably) to be understood in the context of Kuukkanen's explanation that the problem with the truth-claims of historiographical theses that rely on colligatory concepts is that they lack truth-makers. (142) As he states elsewhere, 'since colligatory and other synthesizing notions are in effect organizations of lower-level elements, they have no corresponding parts in the past'.<sup>20</sup> If I understand this correctly, all this suggests the view that there is plenty of research about the Holocaust, but, at the same time, the statement 'The Holocaust happened' cannot be true because it has no truth-makers in the past and consequently the very term 'Holocaust' does not refer to any historical events that happened. It may be pointed out that, for the same reason, the statement cannot be false, but it nevertheless follows that a statement such as 'It is true that the Holocaust happened' on this account has to be false. In other words, according to the postnarrativist perspective, it is the historiographical phenomenon (i.e. the fact that historians write about the Holocaust), whose reality is beyond any doubt because of its strong cognitive warrant and epistemic authority—but not the tragic historical events from the period 1933-1945.<sup>21</sup> If this understanding is accurate,

<sup>18</sup> Heikki Saari, 'On Frank Ankersmit's Postmodernist Theory of Historical Narrativity', *Rethinking History*, 9, 2005, 5-21. Frank Ankersmit, 'Reply to Professor Saari', *Rethinking History*, 9, 2005, 23-33. For a summary of arguments in the debate see Branko Mitrović, 'Opacity and Transparency in Historical Representations', *History and Theory*, 53 (2014), 277-294, 285-286.

<sup>19</sup> 'History', he explains, refers to past events and phenomena; historiography then signifies 'the results of inquiries about history—which almost always take a textual form. If one wanted to express historiography briefly with a non-technical term, it would be the writing of history or simply history writing.' Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist*, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Kukkanen, 'From truth-functionality to performativity', 235.

<sup>21</sup> This interpretation is confirmed by Kuukkanen's discussion of another colligatory concept, 'Renaissance'. According to Kuukkanen, there was no such a process as the 'Renaissance', that preexisted a historian's practice. (174) The concept Renaissance, he claims, was

then postnarrativism is certainly a highly unsatisfactory perspective on history writing.

### Alternative perspective

In any case, these anti-realist implications certainly follow from the claim that colligatory concepts have no reference—and it is important to note here that this claim was based on two weak arguments. According to one, traditional, understanding of concepts (in general), they are mental representations that encode the set of criteria that something must satisfy in order to be taken to belong (subsumed) under that concept.<sup>22</sup> In other words, in order to possess a concept, a person must know the criteria of its application.<sup>23</sup> If the events and phenomena subsumed under the concept ‘Khrushchev’s Thaw’ really had nothing in common, we would simply not be able to say which events or phenomena belong under that concept. (Kuukkanen actually comes to struggle with this problem but does not resolve it. On page 112 we read that if a colligatory category is to be meaningful, there has to be a feature that applies to all subsumed entities; on the next page we read that colligatory concepts categorize without any necessary shared features or resemblance among sub-ordinated entities.<sup>24</sup>) However, it is simply not true that the phenomena that are taken to belong under ‘Khrushchev’s Thaw’ have nothing in common. As mentioned, here belong the liberalization of public life, the release of political prisoners, the greater freedom of press, and so on—and what they all have in common, and what constitutes the concept expressed by the phrase

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constructed by Michelet in 1855. This latter claim is false (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986, 488–491, for instance, discussed the Renaissance before Michelet and called it *Restauration*)—but, presumably the idea is that there is plenty of research that gives cognitive warrant and epistemic authority to statements about the Renaissance, although these statements are not true in the sense of correspondence to any past events (‘process’).

<sup>22</sup> This is the so-called ‘classical theory’ of concepts, see Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, *Concepts. Core Readings*, Cambridge Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999, 8–26. They define concepts according to the Classical Theory as ‘structured mental representations that encode a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for their application, if possible, in sensory or perceptual form’. (10)

<sup>23</sup> See Branko Mitrović, ‘Attribution of Concepts and Problems with Anachronism’, *History and Theory* 50, 2011, 303–327.

<sup>24</sup> Here is the full text of both sections:

It is reasonable to say that although members of a colligatory concept category are not kinds of that colligatory concept, they need to *exemplify* it or its sense. There is thus this one feature or principle that has to apply to all subsumed entities in order for the colligatory category to be meaningful. Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist*, 112.

Colligatory concepts (1) *organise* lower-order data into higher-order wholes; (2) categorize *without* any necessary *shared features* or resemblance among sub-ordinated entities; ... Kuukkanen, *Postnarrativist*, 113.

‘Khrushchev’s Thaw’, is that they are all manifestations of different, more liberal attitudes of the Soviet government after Khrushchev came to power.<sup>25</sup>

From this perspective it is easy to respond to both arguments against the reference of colligatory concepts that Kuukkanen mentions. It is true that the *phrase* ‘Khrushchev’s Thaw’ is a metaphor, but this merely means that the *phrase* used to express the concept has been chosen as a metaphor. The fact that the world was not literally frozen in the Stalin era has no effect on the nature of the concept that the phrase ‘Khrushchev’s Thaw’ expresses (at most, this can be used to criticize the choice of that specific phrase). The same applies to another example mentioned by Kuukkanen, ‘the Cold War’. The phrase that is chosen to express the concept is metaphorical (there was no real war between the USA and the USSR at the time)—but the concept pertains to a series of phenomena and events in international politics that were real enough and can be described as the manifestations of the confrontation between two superpowers. Or, consider the word ‘Holocaust’. Originally, in Greek, the word *ὄλοκαυστέω* meant ‘to bring (make) a burnt offering (to gods)’ and from that ‘to burn entirely’—but it would be certainly be absurd to argue that the Holocaust did not happen because Nazis did not sacrifice their victims to Greek gods.

The second argument (cited above) relies on the assumption that colligatory concepts have to refer to singular, particular objects and function as the names of individual humans, in order to have reference. Obviously, they do not, because colligatory concepts by definition refer to numerous historical objects, events or phenomena that share the characteristics according to which historians classify them under the same colligatory concept. In this sense ‘Khrushchev’s Thaw’ is no different from ‘Venetian ships in the battle of Lepanto’—the former pertains to a set of phenomena that resulted from the same attitude change of the Soviet government; the latter is a set of ships the *Serenissima* sent into the battle.<sup>26</sup> In both

<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the concept of the Renaissance (another example often mentioned by Kuukkanen), will subsume, and the word will be the joint name of, a set of trends (types of events, actions, motivation, worldview, and so on) that were characteristic of Italian life of the *quattro-* and *cinquecento* and that differentiate it from previous and subsequent centuries, such as intensified cultural and intellectual production whose artifacts differ significantly from those of the previous centuries, intensified interest in classical antiquity that coincided with the influx of Byzantine scholars, the importation of Greek manuscripts and the ability to disseminate knowledge using the printing press, the increased independence of intellectuals from the Church, and so on.

<sup>26</sup> Admittedly we do not say that the release of a specific prisoner from the Gulag or the publication of a specific book was ‘a Khrushchev’s Thaw’; instead, we say that it was a case or example or illustration of Khrushchev’s Thaw. Similarly, we do not say that a building by Palladio is not itself the Renaissance; it is an example of Renaissance architecture. The latter phrase need not imply that there is a separate entity ‘Renaissance architecture’ that exists beyond and over individual buildings and activities of architects. The use of the words and phrases that express colligatory concepts resembles the way the names of various disciplines are used. An individual surgery performed on a patient is said to be a case of medical practice; it is not said to be Medicine itself. Nevertheless, this does not mean that ‘Medicine’ has no reference, nor that it refers to an abstract entity.

cases, there is a set of phenomena, events or objects that satisfy the classificatory criteria of the given concept.

So here is an alternative picture. Concepts (expressed using words or phrases) define sets of classificatory criteria; when we subsume an object or event under a concept we establish that it satisfies these criteria. Propositions (expressed using sentences) are defined by their conditions of satisfaction—in other words, the conditions that need to be satisfied if the proposition is to be true. For Ankersmit, a historical work is a narrative, a holistic entity that is more than all the propositions expressed by the sentences that a book contains; for Kuukkanen, it is the thesis of the work plus the arguments in its favour. But the justification of both Ankersmit's and Kuukkanen's claims is, as we have seen, uncertain. What is certain is that historical works consist of sentences and each sentence on its own expresses one or more propositions. Let us call this set of propositions the basic content of the historical work. A reader can, and is often expected to, infer additional propositions from the various propositions expressed by the sentences that make up the work, as well as from the specific use of words, literary style and so on. The author may rely on irony in order to remind the reader of the wider context of the situation described, or (as Gibbon often did) omit the sentence that states crucial information in order to let the reader infer it and grasp its significance.<sup>27</sup> Sometimes, the author may be motivated to argue in favour of a certain thesis when writing a historical work, but a reader may be interested in what the author implicitly wants to deny by asserting that thesis. There are also propositions that an individual reader will infer from the content of the book in combination with the information that is external to the book. For instance, a reader who takes into account that the Christopher Clark, the author of *Sleepwalkers* (one of the two books that Kuukkanen cites as his examples), was knighted for his contribution to German-British relations, may, or may not, infer that this is the kind of scholarship that will get its author knighted.<sup>28</sup> It is certainly hard to imagine that all historical books are read (by other historians especially) merely for a single thesis and the argumentation of that thesis.

In other words, there is obviously the meaning that the author intended the work to convey, and to achieve this he or she had to rely on his or her beliefs about what the readers do or do not know, believe and expect in order to decide which propositions need to be stated explicitly. But there is nothing that says that the author must have conceived of the historical work as a single thesis and the reasoning that supports it. At the same time, readers' meanings need not coincide with the one intended by the author; a reader's interaction with the basic set of propositions that a historiographical work expresses need not coincide with the author's expectations.<sup>29</sup> As Thomas Aquinas put it, whatever is received, can only be

<sup>27</sup> See Mitrović, 'Opacity and Transparency' for the examples of such procedures and their analysis.

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/434645/Birthday\\_Honours\\_2015\\_diplomatic\\_and\\_overseas\\_list.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/434645/Birthday_Honours_2015_diplomatic_and_overseas_list.pdf). Accessed 30 July 2016.

<sup>29</sup> These basic propositions also result from the interaction between physical sentences and the reader's capacity to understand them (his or her command of language).

received according to the nature of the recipient.<sup>30</sup> This is precisely what happens when one reads, analyses, reviews, and so on, a historiographical work: one engages with its basic set of propositions as well as those propositions that can be inferred from it.

### **Freiherr von Münchhausen**

Let us now consider the second aspect of Kuukkanen's claim, that it is possible to state rational arguments in favour of a historical thesis without that thesis being true or false in the sense of correspondence to historical reality. Can one provide rational arguments in its favour or against a proposition that includes colligatory concepts and consequently (according to Kuukkanen) lacks truth-makers in historical reality that would make it true or false?

The obvious problem is that what makes a proposition a proposition, is its conditions of satisfaction—that is, the conditions that must be satisfied for a proposition to be true. When these conditions are not satisfied, and when there is nothing in reality (including historical reality) that satisfies the conditions that a proposition specifies, the proposition is false, plain and simple. The famous example is 'The present-day King of France is bald' which, as Bertrand Russell pointed out, is equivalent to 'There exists the present-day King of France and he is bald'—and that sentence is false. Following the same analysis, the proposition 'The Cold War was dangerous' becomes 'There was a cluster of phenomena in international relations called the Cold War and it was dangerous'—and since, according to Kuukkanen, 'the Cold War' does not refer to anything, this proposition must be false. But we know that it is not!

Consequently, the important (though not elaborated) aspect of Kuukkanen's perspective has to be that colligations (propositions that employ colligatory concepts) simply do not have the conditions of satisfaction. If we ask what needs to have happened for such a proposition to be true (or false), the response has to be 'nothing'. If one could state such conditions, they would be, or would not be, satisfied—and the proposition would have to be either true or false. Most likely it would be false, insofar as its truth would depend on the existence of the historical objects or phenomena which, according to Kuukkanen, do not exist in historical reality. Since he explicitly denies that such propositions are true or false, the implication is that they do not have the conditions of satisfaction.<sup>31</sup> In other words, the assumption has to be that insofar as the statements in a historical work employ

<sup>30</sup> Aquinas often used the phrase 'quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur' or its equivalents; for a survey of these *loci* see Dunstan Robidoux, 'Applying a Thomist principle: "Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur"', <http://lonergan.org/?p=599>, accessed on 16 August 2016.

<sup>31</sup> See Kuukkanen, 'From truth-functionality to performativity', 235: 'There is no "sleepwalking of European powers" or "Thaw" that would make these expressions true. It would be senseless to suggest that they are therefore false either, because one would have misunderstood the nature of statements like these.'

colligatory expressions (and many of them do) they have no conditions that need to be satisfied for it (them) to be true.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, it is

(a) legitimate to include in the text the statements that contradict such statements in the remaining text and, also,

(b) to omit from consideration the facts that would contradict such statements.

These two procedures cannot have effect on the validity of the assertions that include colligatory expressions.

The result is thus not quite facts-free scholarship, but rather facts-resistant scholarship. Not unexpectedly, at this point many historians may become very sceptical about Kuukkanen's understanding of their work. In order to avert the criticism that Kuukkanen's postnarrativism (and Ankersmit's narrativism with it) have nothing to do with the actual practice of history writing, it is therefore important to analyse here, in some detail, Christopher Clark's *Sleepwalkers* as the example of history writing that, as mentioned, Kuukkanen strongly endorses.<sup>33</sup>

The structure (and as we shall see the methodology) of Clark's book indeed conforms to Kuukkanen's understanding of historical works, since it has a thesis and supporting reasoning. The main thesis of the book, as Kuukkanen summarises it, is that World War One broke out because 'European decision-makers were like sleepwalkers who moved step by step towards a goal without being fully aware of or without fully understanding what the end station of this process would be'. (77) The supporting reasoning is the description of the July 1914 crisis. Clark's is a revisionist perspective to what one could call the standard scholarship about the origins of the First World War. The latter attributes the 'direct, proximate cause' of the war to the actions of German and Austro-Hungarian leaders.<sup>34</sup> Since the 1960s

<sup>32</sup> Kuukkanen insists that '...historiographical (re)presentation cannot be a faithful copy of historical reality' because '(1) historiography cannot do without colligatory concepts; (2) colligatory concepts are not objectively given and do not refer to corresponding entities in historical reality; (3) the truth of a statement in the sense of correspondence requires reference; (4) therefore historiography cannot be true in the correspondence sense'. (105) Elsewhere he points out: 'even if a colligatory expression could be regarded as a potential truth-bearer, and I think it can, it does not have a truth-maker that would make it true'. (132) Since he is certainly not assuming that all colligatory expressions are false, we can only deduce that the idea is that they do not have truth value.

<sup>33</sup> He says that he chose these two books because (in his view) 'they represent good historical scholarship and that they exemplify the kind of research that is commonly practiced in historiography'. (10) He also cites RJW Evans's evaluation of Clark's book as "the most consistently subtle, and thought-provoking" in *The New York Review of Books*, see <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/02/06/greatest-catastrophe-world-has-seen/> accessed on 22 August 2016.

<sup>34</sup> That standard story has been summarized by Paul Schroeder as follows:

By common agreement, the direct proximate cause of World War I was the German and Austro-Hungarian decision that Austria-Hungary issue an ultimatum to Serbia in July 1914 following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Bosnian

(in reaction to Fritz Fischer's emphasis on the German government's role in the inception of the war) scholarly attention has turned to the independent actions of their Austro-Hungarian allies as the main cause of the war and Clark's book opposes this perspective.<sup>35</sup> Quite in line with the tenets of postnarrativism Clark's argumentation relies heavily on omissions and contradictions that, it is important to point out, do not result from sloppy scholarship (as one might think), but rather

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nationalists with connections to Serbia. The German powers intended by this ultimatum to provoke a local war against Serbia and eliminate it as a political factor in the Balkans, thus shifting the balance there and in Europe generally in favour of themselves. ... Disagreement persists over the motives and attitudes prompting this go-for-broke gamble, with some historians emphasizing the fear and desperation felt by leaders in Germany and Austria-Hungary, others stressing their aggressive aims and their hopes that they could either get away with a successful local war or win a wider one. ... everyone agrees that Germany and Austria-Hungary, whatever their reasons, chose to take this gamble; they were not forced into it. ... A similar consensus prevails that the other great powers, Russia, France, and Britain, reacted essentially defensively to the German-Austrian move and had little choice other than to do so in self-defense, given their vital interests and the unmistakable challenge presented them.

Paul W. Schroeder, "Embedded Counterfactuals and World War I as an Unavoidable War" Accessed from <http://www.vlib.us/wwi/resources/archives/texts/t040829a/counter.html>, 22 August 2016, ii.

<sup>35</sup> A recent comprehensive survey of this perspective is Geoffrey Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe*, New York: Basic Books, 2014. T. G. Otte's *July Crisis. The World's Descent into War, Summer 1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014 also brings the actions of Austro-Hungarian leadership to the forefront. As pointed out by Marvin Benjamin Fried, *Austro-Hungarian War Aims in the Balkans during World War I*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 233: 'We have moved away from the traditional account beginning with Fischer that Germany was the driving force in formulating the war aims of the Central Powers. On the contrary, Austro-Hungary formulated extensive and independent war aims which led to serious disagreements between Vienna and Berlin'. See similarly Annika Mombauer, 'The Fischer Controversy 50 years on', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 48, 2013, 231-240, 238. Solomon Wank, 'Desperate counsel in Vienna in July 1914: Berthold Molden's unpublished memorandum', *Central European History*, 26, 1993, 281-310, 282 points out that 'In their reassessments of Vienna's actions in July 1914, several historians, chiefly American and English, have shown that Austro-Hungarian leaders, far from being passive instruments of German will, were independent actors who first decided on war against Serbia and then sought and used German assurances of support to initiate it'. See also Fritz Fellner, 'Die Mission Hojos' in Vasa Čubrilović, ed., *Les grandes puissances et la Serbie à la veille de la première guerre mondiale*, Belgrade: Naučno Delo, 1976, 387-419. Barbara Jelavić in her *Modern Austria: Empire and Republic 1815-1986*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 134, states that the ultimatum to Serbia 'was drafted with the expectation that it would be rejected ... It was a Habsburg action that precipitated the general conflict'. Similarly, F. Roy Bridge, *The Habsburg Monarchy among the Great Powers*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1990, 340-342 observes that while German support for any plan of action was essential, it was Austro-Hungarian statesmen who asked for it; they opted for war against Serbia fully aware that this might entail a European war.

derive from a systematic approach to history writing whose aims and perspectives I will be able to analyse only once we see how it works.

For instance, it has been mentioned that Clark's thesis is that the main protagonists of the diplomatic crisis of July 1914 were unaware of the consequences of their actions. In line with the assumption that the main thesis of the book is not refutable by counterexamples, it is irrelevant (and Clark can comfortably omit it from consideration) that according to the testimony of Leon Bilinski, the Austro-Hungarian Minister of Finance in 1914, 'it was already known that it would be a great war, the Emperor [Franz Joseph of Austria] has especially expected it'.<sup>36</sup> In fact, through the book Clark himself cites statements by French (296), British (354), Russian (411), German (414) and Austro-Hungarian (429) diplomats and politicians who all predicted that an Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia would result in a European-scale war—and he obviously does not think that such counterexamples diminish the validity of his central claim. Similarly, one would expect that a book that deals with the outbreak of World War One would include a complete account of war declarations—who declared war on whom, how and in which order. Arguably, the side that declares a war starts it. But the discussion of war declarations is partial and incomplete. The events that led to Germany's declaration of war on France are, for instance, undescribed: what actually happened was that German mobilization plans envisaged that their armies had to defeat France before marching on to Russia (plans for a separate war with Russia were non-existent) so

<sup>36</sup> Robert A. Kann, 'Kaiser Franz Joseph und der Ausbruch des Weltkrieges. Eine Betrachtung über den Quellenwert der Aufzeichnungen von Dr. Heinrich Kanner', *Osterreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte*, Vienna: Hermann Bohlaus Nachf., 274/3, 1971, 3-24, 16: 'Ich sagte nun, er [Kaiser] habe vielleicht damals gemeint, daß es sich bloß um einen Krieg gegen Serbien handeln würde. Bilinski sagte darauf, nein, das hat man schon gewußt, daß das ein großer Krieg werden kann, der Kaiser speziell hat damit gerechnet'. He also states that the Emperor regretted that the war did not start in 1913. (13) Similarly F. R. Bridge, *From Sadowa to Sarajevo. The Foreign Policy of Austria-Hungary, 1866-1914*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, 358. A non-expert who makes the effort to read analytically the bulk of contemporary publications on the topic may find it hard to avoid the impression that, taken *in toto*, they place, without stating it explicitly, the guilt for the entire war on the shoulders of one man, the aged and respectable-looking Emperor Franz Josef—which would make him, after Adolf Hitler and Joseph Visarionovich Stalin, the third greatest mass murderer in European history. At least it is hard to read Wawro's *Mad Catastrophe* or Otte's *July Crisis* without getting that unstated impression. More general judgment by Alan Sked, *Decline and Fall of the Habsburg Empire 1815-1918*, New York: Longman, 1989, 269, is that Franz Josef 'allowed tens of thousands to die needlessly for his honour in Italy in 1866, so too in 1914 did he overlook the fact that the millions who would now die in what he almost certainly knew would be a world war, would not be consulted either'. Sked's argument is that irresponsible initiation of wars was a Habsburg tradition: 'it was Prussia or Germany in the nineteenth century who had, consistently, to restrain Austria. It was Prussia or Germany after all who had to restrain Austria in 1830, 1854, 1878, 1887 and during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913. Again it was Austria who issued the ultimatum 1859 to Sardinia, sought German backing for her breach of the Treaty of Berlin in 1908 and for her ultimatum to Serbia in 1914, which was deliberately designed to start a war and probably a world war'. (246)

German leaders falsely alleged that the French air force bombed Nuremberg in order to have a justification for the declaration of war.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from the contradictions to the main thesis, even an uninformed reader will easily spot a good number of further contradictions throughout the book. For instance, we read that the Kaiser's remarks 'during 1913 suggest that he continued to regard an Anglo-German war "unthinkable"' (334)—while it is not clear how he could have *continued* to regard the war with Britain as 'unthinkable' in 1913 because as late as December 1912 (as Clark describes five pages before) he insisted that the German navy should step up U-boat production in order to torpedo British ships. (329) When Clark suggests that Austro-Hungarian heir apparent, Franz Ferdinand was in favour of 'the egalitarian handling of the nationalities' (109) while he wanted to create 'Croat-(and thus Catholic-) dominated "Yugoslavia" within the empire' (108), one has to wonder how the domination of a single religion can be squared with the egalitarian handling of nationalities that chiefly differ by their religion. There is about half a page of the citations of praises by Theodore Roosevelt and an unnamed American journalist from 1902 and 1904 who thought that Austro-Hungary (in general) treated its ethnic and religious groups evenly and that the courts were 'wisely and honestly administered'. (76)<sup>38</sup> Clark obviously endorses this opinion (otherwise it is hard to see the reason for citing it)—in spite of the devastating description that he previously provides of the situation with minority rights in the Hungarian part of the empire, extensive magyarization programs in education, and degradation of the language rights of the minorities. (67) Through the manipulation of the electoral system, ethnic Hungarians, who made up 48.1% of population, received 90% of the parliamentary seats; the Romanians in Transylvania, who made up 15.4% of the population, controlled only 5 out of 400 seats in the parliament. (66) (Clark does not mention the prosecution of the attempts by minority groups to petition the Emperor; when a group of Romanian leaders attempted it in 1892, they received sentences of up to five years<sup>39</sup>—and he need not mention it, since following postnarrativist principles, counterexamples cannot refute a statement that includes a colligation such as 'the wise and honest administration of Austro-Hungarian empire'.)

<sup>37</sup> See for instance Luigi Albertini, *Le origini della guerra 1914*, Gorizia: Libreria Editrice Goriziana, 2011, vol. iii, 218-237.

<sup>38</sup> However, as Robin Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy c. 1765-1918*, Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2001, 366 observed about similar perspectives on Austro-Hungary:

The thirteen Slovaks dead by gendarmes in Černova in 1907, the assassination of the Galician Governor and ethnic riot victims in Ljubljana in 1908, the six dead in the Budapest socialist demonstration of 1912 and the frequent ethnic brawling and states of siege in Prague need a note too. Without awareness of the bitterness and continuing sense of ethnic subordination and injustice which infected the Monarchy's political life, the slogan of it as 'the prison of the peoples' is hard to understand.

<sup>39</sup> Sked, *Decline and Fall*, 212.

The postnarrativist approach to historiography also dominates Clark's description of the political situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the years preceding the Sarajevo assassination. Clark says it was 'a relatively fair and efficient administration' (76)<sup>40</sup> and that 'the Habsburg administration treated the new provinces as a showcase whose purpose was to "demonstrate the humanity and efficiency of Habsburg rule"' (75), regardless of the fact that, as he admits, Austro-Hungary failed to abolish the Ottoman feudal *agaluk* system, and by 1914 there were still 90,000 serfs (*kmetovi*) in the country.<sup>41</sup> (74) From the postnarrativist position it is also irrelevant that the description of Austro-Hungarian rule as 'a relatively fair and efficient administration' is contradicted by the fact (unmentioned by Clark) that in the aftermath of the Sarajevo assassination between 3300 and 5500 people were interned, 460 executed and between 700 and 2200 died in concentration camps.<sup>42</sup> Clark actually talks about the 'relative serenity' of the period 1880-1914 in Bosnia-Herzegovina (74), while admitting, two pages later, that in 1913 the military governor 'suspended most of the Bosnian constitution of 1910, tightened government controls of the school system, banned the circulation of newspapers from Serbia and closed down many Bosnian Serb cultural organizations ... in response to an escalation in Serbian ultra-nationalist militancy'. (76) Obviously, if 'ultra-nationalist militancy' was present in the provinces, then the situation could not have been serene. The fact that the army had to be used in 1910 to suppress the massive protests of serfs in Northern Bosnia is left unmentioned.<sup>43</sup> Clark's claim that

<sup>40</sup> Sked, *Decline and Fall*, 245, summarized the situation differently: 'taxes increased fourfold under Austria's administration and that the bureaucracy which had comprised only 120 men under the Turks rose to 9533 in 1908. Moreover, under the terms of the Land Statute introduced to give the provinces some sort of constitutional structure after 1908, the diet, elected on an extremely limited franchise, had only limited powers. The common finance ministry could veto any legislation which it did not like. Finally, the administration played off Croats and Serbs and encouraged Croats and Mohammedans to cooperate. If all this did not represent imperialism, it is difficult to know what it did represent'.

<sup>41</sup> The feudal system in Bosnia could have been also interpreted as landlord-tenant relationship. Robin Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism. The Habsburg 'Civilizing Mission' in Bosnia 1878-1914*, 31 summarized it as follows: 'Controversy waxed as to whether this status was a private landlord-tenant relationship or a form of feudalism, which the new government could simply abolish. In December 1879 a conference in Sarajevo voted 15-3 for the latter position, but as they also recommended that peasants pay compensation, Vienna sided with the minority's view that this solution would satisfy nobody'. One way or another, agrarian reform was urgently needed. See also Hamdija Kapidžić, ed., *Agrarni odnosi u B. i H. 1878-1918. Gradja*, Sarajevo: Arhiv B. i H., 1969, 53-73, 139-42, 145-8.

<sup>42</sup> Mitja Velikonja: *Religious Separation and Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 141. Clark merely mentions that general Oskar Potiorek imposed 'repressive measures' (393); 'demonstrations that followed the assassinations' (407); or that it made no sense to point out that South Slavs loathed the Hapsburg empire because of 'the attacks on Serbian property there by crowds of angry Croats' (411).

<sup>43</sup> See Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, 203.



to express agreement by saying that it is true? The problem is unavoidable in constructivist history writing. A historian is supposed to write a whole book of such statements, but how to generate them? It makes no sense to justify the claim 'The Austro-Hungarian rule of Bosnia-Herzegovina was serene' by stating a large number of sentences about the battle of Salamis. Obviously, they have to be related to the topic. Here is what Kuukkanen says:

[T]he descriptive content of a colligatory expression must appear as appropriate with respect to the historical data, which entails a minimal requirement of truth. The colligated statements describing historical data should be assumed to be true, unless they are colligatory statements themselves. On the other hand, what appears as appropriate is relative to what each feature is seen to represent in the historian's own time. (124)

Once again, one has to be careful not to misunderstand Kuukkanen's use of the terms 'true' and 'historical data'. Insofar as they do not include colligatory expressions, individual statements can be true or false, and (as we have seen in the case of Clark's book) it is legitimate to combine contradictory ones when presenting a wider picture. But those statements that include colligatory concepts are sublimely unaffected by singular facts.<sup>48</sup> As Kuukkanen states: '...colligatory expressions do not emerge from the historical record; nor can they be uniquely correct regarding any given historical data'. (128) The important word in the paragraph cited above is 'appropriate': the content of the colligatory expression must *appear as appropriate* with respect to the data, while this appropriateness is relative to time.<sup>49</sup> The appropriateness to time thus determines the validity of the colligated expression, *regardless* of specific facts; specific facts, we have seen, cannot challenge it. The point is not that from this point on the gates are wide open to presentism; this point is that presentism becomes the only valid criterion of history writing.

Appropriateness to time, of course, is what the classics abhorred: 'Whoever serves the present will rightly be counted a flatterer—a person on whom history long ago right from the beginning has turned its back', says Lucian of Samosata.<sup>50</sup> The observation is very relevant for our discussion, since it is much easier to write a eulogy when facts do not matter—and in our time of mass media, the adulation of the establishment, Lucian's *κολακεία*, has the important job of providing narratives that are in line with and conform to the actions and intentions of the establishment, while also strengthening the wider perspectives that justify these actions and

<sup>48</sup> We have already seen that he says that 'the primary mode' is state the factual evidence that supports the thesis', while 'the historical data should naturally be so connected as to lead to the conclusion defended in the book. This connected evidence should in turn create a structure that makes a case in favor of one's claims ...'. (88) This does not preclude open admission of contradictory evidence or its omission or suppression.

<sup>49</sup> See Roth, 'Back to the future', 279, for an analysis of Kuukkanen's use of the term 'appropriate'.

<sup>50</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *De scribenda historia*, 40. According to *Lucian with an English translation by K. Kilburn*, parallel Greek-English edition (Loeb), Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press 1959, vol. vi.

intentions. In this sense, Clark's book is obviously *very* appropriate to the time, since the edition of the book published in 2013 proudly lists the laudatory statements from the reviews published by the BBC, *Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Foreign Affairs* and *Financial Times*—one can thus talk about a unison of endorsement by the core media of the American and British political establishment. Such a unison of endorsement is not easily granted to books that (one might think because of the contradictions and omissions as are listed in the previous section) are merely examples of shoddy scholarship.

So in order to understand how appropriateness works, we need to analyse the reasons for the media support for Clark's book, as an example of scholarship that Kuukkanen has strongly endorsed. This is an interesting phenomenon because these are, after all, British and American media and one would not expect them to be overly enthusiastic about a book whose narrative is marked by dismissive and derogatory statements about British and American allies in the Great War, to the point that the author's germanophile sympathies seem obvious.<sup>51</sup> Also, the motivation could hardly be the reviewers' democratic bias—democratically biased reviewers are unlikely to be sympathetic to a book that seems to favour the governments of Kaiser's Germany or Austro-Hungary. However, if we look at the value system that the book articulates, and especially the assumptions on which Clark's value judgments are based, rather than the main thesis that the book parades, it becomes obvious that the impression of the germanophile perspective is merely a collateral consequence of Clark's faith in the special rights of political elites and Great Powers, and the systematic application of this faith to the analysis of historical material. Here are some examples of Clark's value judgments. The British

<sup>51</sup> A subchapter of *Sleepwalkers* is called 'Dangerous Liaison: the Franco-Russian Alliance' (124)—and it is never explained why German-Austro-Hungarian alliance was less dangerous. He talks directly about the aggressiveness of the French-Russian alliance; no such qualifications are made about the German-Austro-Hungarian Alliance. (400) Similarly, it is hard to believe that Edward Grey, who remained the British foreign minister for eleven years through some of the greatest diplomatic crises of the early twentieth century, could have been 'totally ignorant of France and of Europe'. (539) The historian Heinrich Friedjung, whom A. J. P. Taylor (*The Habsburg Monarchy*, 205) described as 'a violent German nationalist' is 'the good doctor' in Clark's description (88). The characterization of the French ambassador in London Paul Cambon as 'hypertrophically French' (539) borders on the explicit expression of ethnic prejudices. At the same time, the hostility towards Russia occasionally undermines not only the credibility but even the composition of the narrative. At page 433 the narrative suddenly breaks in order to describe the discomforts that Count de Robien, a newly appointed attaché to the French embassy in St Petersburg, faced upon arriving to Russia in 1914. The description goes on for five pages, as we follow the misery of the young Count who was disappointed by the fact that not everyone in St Petersburg speaks French (434) and did not like the fact that Russians wore boots and had long beards. (433). Clark even compares Russian Pan-Slavism (that motivated the Russian support for the Slavs in the Balkans) with Hitler's concept of *Lebensraum*. (279) Unlike Hitler's plans with Poland, Russians had no ambition to rule the Balkans or to exterminate non-Slavic populations in the region; the comparison is thus highly inappropriate. At the same time, the Kaiser's own ruminations on *Lebensraum* are mentioned on p. 179, but no parallel with the Third Reich is drawn.

foreign minister Edward Grey is criticized because he denied Austro-Hungary 'the right to defend its close-range interests in the manner of a European power' (356); similarly, British policy-makers assumed 'that whereas British imperial interests were "vital" and "essential", German ones were a mere luxury' (145); 'Austro-Hungary, like every other great power, possessed interests that it had the right robustly to defend' by the annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908. (558) The guiding principle is that Great Powers have valid imperial interests as well as the right to oppress smaller countries, ethnic groups or individuals in pursuing these interests. The only problem that Clark sees in the Austro-Hungarian annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908 is that the Austro-Hungarian foreign minister did not attempt to achieve it through an international diplomatic conference of Great Powers.<sup>52</sup> The idea that the local population had *any* political rights, or could decide about their country, or about who was going to tax them and how much, is not even considered.<sup>53</sup> Rather, Clark assumes that political elites have the right to rule independently of the will of their subjects. Here too, Austro-Hungary is a good example: Clark describes that the Bohemian Diet was closed down in 1913, Austrian ('Cisleithanian') in 1914, the Croatian Diet in 1912. (68) (The use of military to suppress the Hungarian Parliament in 1906 is unmentioned.<sup>54</sup>) He interprets the situation (in the Austrian part) as 'a chronic ailment, rather than terminal disease' (69) because government could proceed with its business on the basis of emergency powers provided by the Constitution.<sup>55</sup> As A. J. P. Taylor described, '[e]verything, from the budget downwards, ... became an emergency regulation.'<sup>56</sup> Clark's use of the word "chronic" means that it is not a major problem if the political elite uses emergency measures in order to rule long-term (chronically) without consulting its subjects, and that a system in which the Prime Minister dismisses the Parliament and not the other way around is how the things should be.

<sup>52</sup> As Clark puts it, Aehrenthal 'chose to operate with the tools of the old diplomacy: confidential meetings, the exchange of pledges, and secret bilateral agreements, rather than attempting to resolve the annexation issue through international conference involving all signatories of the Treaty of Berlin'. (86)

<sup>53</sup> What was going on in practice was a classic case of taxation without representation: according to the Austro-Hungarian laws of 1880, Bosnia-Herzegovina was to meet its own expenditure, while all the decisions about the way the money was going to be spent had to be approved by the governments of Austria and Hungary. (Okey, *Taming Balkan Nationalism*, 30.) The excessive taxation of serfs (over 43%), to which various other duties (forced labor) were added, was the original cause of the rebellion against the Turks in 1875, it resulted in peasant protests in 1910 and the right to impose taxes was even discussed during the court process against the conspirators in the Sarajevo assassination. (For a description of taxation system see Dedijer, *Road to Sarajevo*, 79-80. For the discussion of taxation as one of the motives for assassination see Professor Pharos with Introduction by Josef Kohler: *Der Prozess gegen die Attentäter von Sarajewo*, Berlin: Decker's Verlag, 1918, 11.)

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, 1985.

<sup>55</sup> Between 1897 and 1904 the emergency article of the Basic Law was used seventy-five times and for five of the seven annual budgets. Robin Okey, *The Habsburg Monarchy c. 1765-1918*, Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2001, 366.

<sup>56</sup> Taylor, *The Habsburg Monarchy*, 213.

At the same time the demands of local populations for political rights or the control of taxation are dismissed as nationalistic. In my counting, the term 'nationalism' (or 'nationalist') appears sixty-four times throughout the book and in many occasions Clark uses it to refer to objections and resistance to oppression based on ethnicity. According to Clark's use of the word, Czechs are nationalistic when they object to Austrians ruling their country (67, 77), but he does not say that Austrians who want to rule the Czechs are nationalistic—the assumption seems to be that it is normal that some nations rule others. In the case of Ireland, those Irish who do not want to be ruled by the English are called 'nationalists' while those English who want to rule them are 'Unionists'. (488) Hungarians, in Clark's narrative, are nationalistic insofar as they object to the dualist arrangement of Austro-Hungary and demand full independence, but the extensive policies of magyarization and the suppression of minorities that Clark also describes are not characterized as nationalistic. (66) Arab nationalism, we read in Clark's book, starts with the Libyan struggle against Italian occupation. (249, 337) Germans are nationalistic when they have concerns about the situation of German settlers in Transvaal, but this adjective does not apply to Germany's colonial ambitions or the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine. At the same time, the word 'imperialism' occurs only three times through the book.<sup>57</sup> The word is once used to refer to Italian designs on Libya (245), another time to remind that Germany was the only imperialist power at the time (561), and in the opening section of the book in order to reject the search for 'remote or categorical causes' that relies on terms such as imperialism.<sup>58</sup>

By this time, the role of omissions and contradictions in Clark's narrative should be obvious: far from being results of sloppy scholarship, they provide assertions that justify the special rights of Great Powers, and especially their right to oppress individuals, ethnic groups and smaller countries. And insofar as these perspectives are appropriate to our time, Clark's narrative is a valid and good example of postnarrativist scholarship.

## Conclusion

It has been necessary to consider here in some detail Clark's masterful and passionate promotion of the special rights of elites and the exceptionalism of Great Powers in order to understand the final, and possibly the most important, objection to postmodernist constructivism and anti-realism in history writing: for many people it may be hard to avoid the harsh judgment that they are morally repugnant. This is a severe verdict that can be meaningfully stated only if one has strong reasons for it. Let us therefore consider here the argumentation that the proponents of this view may present.

<sup>57</sup> I am not counting additional four times when it is used as part of the phrase 'liberal imperialists' which is merely a name for a faction in British Foreign Office.

<sup>58</sup> Clark, *Sleepwalkers*, xxvii. He also includes nationalism among such 'remote or categorical' explanations, but then uses it profusely in order to explain the actions of protagonists, and as mentioned, extends its meaning to include objections and resistance to ethnic oppression.

There is a principle, expressed in the Preamble of the United Nations' Charter about 'the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small'. It is not implausible to say (and I assume that many people think so) that the ideologies that reject this principle, as well as the theoretical positions that enable (or advocate) its rejection, are morally repugnant. This is a moral judgment, and conceivably, some people may also disagree with it. At the same time, it is hard to avoid the impression that, as Elisabeth Ermarth pointed out, '[t]he postmodernist subversion ... threatens ... idea of "natural" or "human" or "inalienable" rights'.<sup>59</sup> When Jacques Derrida dismissed protestations 'against Law, the Powers, and the State in general' as anarchistic and libertarian relations of self-presence and transparent proximity, he made an important point.<sup>60</sup>

These are general considerations, but when it comes to historiography the picture is reasonably straightforward. For oppressed individuals and groups it is (and has always been) vital to establish that the acts of oppression that they suffered were real. As Alan Ryan observed,

It is, for instance, pretty suicidal for embattled minorities to embrace Michel Foucault, let alone Jacques Derrida. The minority view was always that power could be undermined by truth: that it was unjustly distributed, that its holders wanted this overlooked and purchased all sorts of intellectual disguises for this purpose ... Once you read Foucault as saying that truth is simply an effect of power, you've had it. Those with power have 'truth' on their side, and the old radical hope that we can undermine power with truth is incoherent.<sup>61</sup>

Saying that the injustices people suffered are historiographical constructs that do not refer to anything in historical reality is the most efficient whitewashing strategy that one can think of. It is hard to imagine a better way to exculpate the oppressor. Sooner or later, for instance, some historian will write the history of the most recent Iraq war—and it will be profoundly wrong to argue that, since 'Iraq war' is a colligatory concept, the war was as real as Saddam Hussein's alleged arms of mass destruction that were used as the pretext to start it. The fact is that the war was real, many people were killed and many people suffered tremendously; the arms of mass destruction were nowhere to be found.

It would be therefore fair to recommend that the proponents of postmodernist constructivism and anti-realism respond to these concerns if they want to receive respect or convince their opponents. Otherwise it may be hard not to see in postmodernism merely a yet another sort of the 'intellectual disguises' that Ryan describes and consequently identify their positions with the callous approval of the sufferings of millions. Meanwhile, the lengthy reign of postmodernism

<sup>59</sup> Elisabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Sequel to History. Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, English translation by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1997, 138.

<sup>61</sup> Alan Ryan, 'Princeton diary', *London Review of Books*, 26 March 1992, 221.

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postmodernists love Austro-Hungary

suggests that the time is ripe for its historical analysis: how did it come about? Are we to believe that a generation of scholars woke up one morning and suddenly experienced the 'postmodernist insight'? Or should we seek to establish the social forces that contributed (or caused) the exceptional proliferation of anti-realist and social-constructivist perspectives in the scholarship of the 1980s and the 1990s? Can one understand and explain this latter phenomenon independently of its capacity to provide justifications for post-Soviet era imperialist projects? I wonder.

**Branko Mitrović** received his doctorates in architectural history and philosophy. He is author (or co-author) of seven books and has been a recipient of Humboldt Research Award.

branko.mitrovic@ntnu.no



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