Foreword

THE VALUE OF A "NAIVE" RETURN TO TEXTUAL CRITICISM

When asked not "how one writes history" but "how one does history," I am tempted to answer, somewhat jocularly, but with the intention of being enlightening: is there much difference between "doing history" and "doing art?" History has its classic and its baroque styles, its impressionistic and its abstract works, its cubists, as well as its fauves, hacks, and engagés, weekend scholars as well as professionals. And in history as in art only talent distinguishes between those who can uncover a whole universe in a few lines and those who will never uncover anything. To explain why Herbert Southworth's historical method so enchants me I can do no better than to compare him with the so-called naive artists.

Let me be clearly understood: that is the greatest compliment I can give. Beyond all snobbism, all fashion, I have not only loved but admired the "Naive" school of painting for its purifying role among the modern imbroglio. Naturally I speak of the true "Naifs," those whose every touch is sincerity itself, each reworking a scruple, each emphasis a necessity, each hesitation a search for certainty.

I am told such a search is chimerical and that history is an artificial construction just as a painting is not a photograph. But every passionate quest for a concrete truth is in effect a spontaneous critique of false constructions, of fake compositions. The true naif never has the ambition to achieve reality. On the contrary, he begins with the images imposed upon the public by bad painters and photographers,

and because he cannot accept these images, he draws nearer—and draws us along with him—to the inaccessible “truth.” Southworth proceeds in a similar manner for the event, by proceeding to a critique of its image.

THE RETURN OF THE EVENT

Much has been said against the event. I do not wish to repudiate my own adherence to the effective criticism—already three-quarters of a century old—brought against history reduced to the event, such as positivists had conceived it. Paradoxically, however, the period of this criticism has coincided, through the accession to information of growing masses, with a metamorphosis of the event—a new dimension of the event that is now capable of becoming “monstrous.” And this even before the bewitchment of television, as soon as the printed media were able to relay, immediately and with awareness, the “news.” For each event, then, has posed a political problem: is it to be revealed or should it be suppressed?

It is striking to be able to use almost word for word Pierre Nora’s enumeration of the phases of the Dreyfus case in order to describe the themes of Southworth’s *Guernica! Guernica!*: “Initial rumors; the exploitation of silence; the persistent paralysis of official information; hints of compromise within the spheres of power; the affront to great principles; dichotomy of the world into good and evil people; augmented suspense through false documents and a series of leaks; appeal to public opinion through open letters and manifestoes; the mediating function of ‘intellectuals’ between the public and the event.”

In this sense Southworth’s work, easily mistaken as a classic study of documentary evidence, will be shown to be, in some future historiography, as one of the first and best responses to Pierre Nora’s call: “Today, when the whole of historiography has based its modernity upon the obliteration of the event, the denial of its importance, and its dissolution, the event returns—a different event—and with it, perhaps, the potential for a purely contemporary history.”¹

With Southworth we are plunged into contemporaneity. Forty years have not yet gone by since Guernica was destroyed. At least 6,000, perhaps 10,000 individuals felt the destruction in their flesh, their belongings, in any way through several hours of anguish. And yet, even today, even in far away American universities, the evidence is suspect because a press staff in a military headquarters, on the evening of April 27, 1937, twenty-four hours late and with error in the date, dared to deny the event. Thus, the case is not one of an event becoming a problem but of the problem itself taking the place of the event: why is a local but widely witnessed incident blown up, deflated, reconstituted, distorted, and reborn into two contradictory images, passionately argued throughout the entire world? It is because there are symbolic events.

THE ADVENT OF THE SYMBOLIC EVENT

From the very first day Guernica became a symbolic event, owing to its unexpected repercussions.

Durango had suffered before Guernica, other villages had been razed to the ground, and there had been protests; corpses had been counted. Yet the world had barely reacted. No one thought of denying these events. Thus, after Guernica, the representatives of Germany, Italy, and Portugal easily proclaimed, and had their colleagues proclaim in turn, at the Non-Intervention Committee that the bombing of open cities, however regrettable, was not the first atrocity in this nine-month-old war. But what they did not say, what they could not say, was that they had insisted (and succeeded in obtaining) that the word *Guernica* never be uttered, not only in the motion voted upon but even in the discussion of the motion. Southworth details this stupefying episode in diplomatic history. In a few days the very name of Guernica had become a more burning subject than the flames of its conflagration.

And this is indeed the first distinctive aspect of a symbolic event.

If it bears heavy human responsibilities, and once the controversy is started from below, the unavowable can no longer be admitted from on high nor the confession be demanded without a dramatic rupture. Disquiet then becomes cynicism, and prudence becomes cowardice. Could a "non-intervention committee" utter the name of a town bombed by Germans and partially occupied by Italians? This prelude to Munich, as viewed by the Powers, is frightening in its simplicity.

It is less simple to establish how one had proceeded from intention to the event, from the event to the news, and from the news to myths and to silences. It is through this labyrinth, full of logical constructions of the collective imagination—bright spots as well as dead ends—that Southworth offers to guide us. He hides no zone of doubt, no hole in the documentation, no area where hypothesis replaces certainty. He fustigates only those propositions that go against the evidence in the service of an undeniable initial lie.

The most difficult problem lies at the origins of the event: intentions, decisions, where these were elaborated. Charles Morazé once demonstrated that the documentary evidence behind a decision is all the more likely to be destroyed the more important the political significance of that decision becomes. The same is true of course of military decisions. Can one picture a headquarters carefully preserving orders whose very existence are denied, directed at a body of troops that is not supposed to exist? It is true that all parties soon agreed that the bombing had taken place, only to minimize its importance by discovering a tactical justification for it. The order, then, could be exhibited. But only reports written after the event were furnished. The quest for the objective document, at the sources for the event, is often illusory.

Southworth offers only reasonable conjectures on this point, none favorable to the dramatized versions. Mola, in order to hasten the fall of Bilbao and avoid

another Madrid, needed (as his campaign shows and his threats emphasized) intensive bombings of the Basque communication network. His instrument was the Condor Legion. It was under his command, and he was thus responsible for its actions. Technically, it was autonomous. Was Mola aware of its strength? Was the Legion itself aware of its own effectiveness? In fact, they were experimenting. Although bombing Guernica for more than three hours, alternating explosive bombs, incendiaries, and strafing, the Legion did not destroy the bridge and the munitions plant on the edge of town: an annoying detail for the tactical justification. It did not touch the "Casa de Juntas" or the tree of Guernica: an annoying detail for the symbolic version, particularly one that claimed that the fire was a provocation started on the ground (it is easy to make mistakes from the sky).

Thus, another lesson for the historian: the concrete event does not bend to either the logic of avowed intentions or to that of attributed intentions. The event does not of itself clarify the aim it carries out.

If the event is sufficiently significant, however, and touches some sensitive points, then, once broadcast by the mass media, it can set in motion psychological responses on an unpredictable level. The responsible parties must then deny, equivocate, reverse roles. This is still being done in the case of Guernica. In 1937, in order for the wave of indignation to surface, and in order that an ambiguity be opposed to it, it was necessary that the event assume an amplitude that transcended it, by its meaning in the group structures and in the class structures, in their ideological makeup, and in the terrible conjuncture of that springtime. Since then one can measure the continuity of the conflicts and their varying intensity by the softening or hardening of the Franco version of the Guernica affair. One of the great merits of Southworth's work is to have opened this theme: the relationship, up to our own time, between official history and a political drama, between the renewed sharpness of the Basque problem and the bad conscience remaining from an incident.

GUERNICA: THE COMPLEXITY OF THE SYMBOL AND THE LOGIC OF THE IMAGES

The Guernica event transcends Spain. As an assault against a national shrine, it is also, on the world scale, the revelation of a danger. It is both Reims and Hiroshima. The two symbols complement each other without being confused.

"Guernica: holy city of the Basques," say the guidebooks. The word *holy* may surprise, but it is proper for a community anchored in the "immemorial" and which still feels religious sentiments. The word *holy* is present in the "Gernikako arbolo," the hymn of Carlist origin, but sung by all Basques as a popular song. Of course, the distance is great from the "liberties" sworn to under the tree of Guernica by the lords of Vizcaya to national freedom in the modern sense. Yet the symbolism of Guernica, precisely because it was revived in the nineteenth century, took its place

in its ideology. The duality community-liberty retained its emotional weight: the proof is that people still die in 1970 in its name—"Euzkadi ta Askatasuna." In a war carried on in the name of Basque liberties, the word *Gernika* touched the very deepest chord. To tax with hypocrisy, or to suspect a scenario behind the tears of those who told newspapermen "Guernica burns," or behind the religious tone of President Aguirre calling upon world conscience, is even more absurd than it is in bad taste. The Guernica operation had a painful and contradictory effect on the Basques: it broke their morale, while binding them to fight to the end.

Was this effect purposely sought? Can one, following Aguirre, accuse "the Germans in the service of the Spanish rebels" of wanting to wound the Basques in their very soul by attacking their sanctuary? It is hard to conceive of the Condor Legion realizing this was the meaning of their objective, or of receiving instructions to that effect. Was the attack deliberate? All evidence points to it: the vocabulary and the terroristic practices of the generals, the passionate centralization of their doctrine, the denunciation of separatism by the Falange as a "sin that cannot be forgiven." The event seemed to echo only too well a publicly avowed hatred to be merely an accident.

Thus it was not enough for the Franco government, faced with a bombing of such dimensions as to affect the entire world, and whose objective could shock its own supporters in the Carlist sector, to state: "We did not wish to do this." It preferred to say: "We did not do it." But it erred by twenty-four hours in its justification. Yet, within its own camp, its credibility was hardly weakened. Another lesson—an existential adhesion needs coherence: the "reds," in their retreat, had burned Irún, Eibar (and even Moscow in 1812: the argument was made!), therefore they had burned Guernica. Those who did not wish to express their indignation—ambassadors, ministers, the moderate press—were eager, outside of Spain, to grant the Franco government the benefit of the doubt. The most anxious to prove, to demonstrate, were the Anglo-Saxon Catholic circles, to whom Southworth devotes deserved attention. Bothered by the event, they discriminated between men: good versus bad, God against the Devil. But who is closer to God than the Basque people? A fault appears within the logic of the myth. How is one to believe that among God's enemies victims pray, priests bless, or even that Canon Onaindia, a witness shouting in anguish, is truly a canon? The relentless denials and the disqualifications of witnesses, surprise by their violence. In high circles, the campaign was organized. On lower levels, there most probably was sincerity in the belief. A veteran of 1914 can honestly ignore a new aerial technique; an honest parish priest can think it impossible that pilots might enjoy shooting at fugitives and at sheep. Those people think with their leaders. And they did not live through 1940.

Those who did, know better. I retreated through Villers-en-Argonne in flames, after a bombing with incendiaries. I did not set the fire myself! And a Spaniard, a member of a "worker's regiment," retreating along with me, declared: "Ahora os toca a vosotros" ("now, it's your turn").

Guernica was the key to the realization that the Spanish conflict might prefigure further conflicts to come. This realization was massive in England, much more attenuated in France. Southworth explains why: In France, the news of Guernica was voluntarily blocked, while in England there was a traditional interest in Bilbao coupled with a denser journalistic network. By April 28, the English press lucidly predicted Coventry.

It is true that political logic immediately transcends concrete information. Prieto, Perí, Pertinax, the English labourites pointed to one responsible party: Göring. This was an oversimplification. Yet it serves today to free the Franco government of any responsibility. Southworth shows that the hypothesis of an order issued by Berlin is in no way supportable. Göring is supposed to have said to officious inquirers in Nuremberg (the question was never asked during the official trial) "Guernica? We had to gain experience somehow." This only confirms one fact, that the Condor Legion was indeed experimenting. But let us not forget—under Spanish orders, in a civil war. The "accidental" aspect resulted from the intensity of the bombing, the violence of the fire, and the fact that only the inhabited town was hit, and not the military objectives, or the symbolic quarter. It is probable that there were recriminations, even some violent scenes, and possibly some sanctions were taken. But this is easier to imagine than to document. Yet the telegrams specifying the common version to be upheld, and the refusal to allow an international inquiry are in our hands. The final word probably was uttered by Jaime del Burgo: "What rotten help they gave us!" But, after all, their help was requested.

It is somewhat artificial, or calculating, to dismiss, as has been done recently, both Guernica mythologies: one based on an idyllic, conventional view of the Basque city, and on an exaggeration of the catastrophe; the other on a lie conceived in panic, because of the very innocence of the responsible parties. There is myth on both sides, in the sense that on each side an existential logic prevails. But is it unimportant to note that one image is constructed upon a conscious lie, while the other is based upon a reality perceived as a symbol and a symptom: a symbol of the broken Basque people; a symptom of a sickness that gave us Coventry, Dresden, Hiroshima, and Hanoi? It has been fashionable for some time to "demythify" both "memories" left over from the Spanish conflict. Some say that without Picasso Guernica would not be Guernica. Picasso answered that point himself: "Did you make Guernica?" he was asked by a German officer. "No, you did." The answer, according to Vicente Talón, is itself part of the myth. Its authenticity is not important; it demythifies the demythification.

There are many ways to handle a myth. One consists in building a new one. Others consist in concentrating only on the psychosociological fact—that is, on the acceptance of the myth as the sign of belonging to a group, a class, that secretes an ideology. Perhaps this is the most important aspect for the historian. Yet the latter cannot ignore, at the birth of this acceptance, the original propositions. Southworth has made it his specialty to research, around the most controversial episodes of the

Franco "crusade," the organization of silences, of denials, of affirmations, of transmissions, of repetitions, that impose doubts and negations, beliefs and attitudes. He has brought the problem of "myth" to the level of information, of directed information, of "disinformation."

INFORMATION: ITS MECHANISMS AND ITS MYSTERIES

Southworth places a primordial importance to the "first news," the initial manner in which the event, or the imaginary affirmation, is presented. Then he follows step by step, in strict chronological order, the transmission, denials, distortion of this "news" item. This is classical scholarship, although rarely pushed to so deep a level as in *GUERNICA! GUERNICA!* A comparison only brings forth the weaknesses of earlier works in this field. The reader, at first surprised, quickly discovers that although Franco, Mola, Göring, or Sperrle cannot be dismissed at the origin of the drama. Bolín, Steer, Onaindia, and Botto, are just as important as historical personalities, since they were responsible for the repercussion that followed the event—that is, for its new dimension.

Thus, since the problem is essentially that of this repercussion, it is essential to know, in order to illuminate the problem, that Bolín, the author of the absurd denial, was bound to Franco since before the insurrection, that Steer, a passionate and the adventurous reporter, still had the full confidence of the *Times*, that Canon Onaindia was heard by only very narrow French circles, that Botto, who managed to have Havas distribute the Bolín denial, was a venal character who ended with the collaborationist "Radio-Paris," despised by everyone, and that Captain Aguilera, who acted as a guide for foreign journalists on the Franco front, confided to them that he regretted the loss of those hallowed times when pestilence, thanks to the absence of sewers, decimated the always-too-numerous lower classes. This world of the news media deserves to be thus unveiled, since it has become one of the great historical agents.

The connection between information and power is no less important. Southworth shows how the French foreign ministry controlled, through the Agence Havas, the diffusion of news, and also how this diffusion, within the agency itself, was operating according to the wishes of this or that manipulator. We can see in some high functionaries, in Yvon Delbos himself, the relief felt when the Havas dispatch cast some doubt upon the English version of Guernica. And this despite the triumphal acceptance accorded it by Berlin.

It is worth asking, however, whether the ministries relied solely upon the press agencies for their information. Still, the French and the British ambassadors, both frankly pro-Franco, lived in Hendaye and received their information from Irún. Sir Anthony Eden, more tortured, had in his hands the Stevenson report from the Bilbao consulate, which left no possible doubt on the Guernica affair. He kept it hidden, for fear of unleashing the opposition of the Labour party and of compromising "nonintervention." This too must be known.

Finally, as far as the current use of archival sources is concerned, it is both sad and comical to hear through Southworth how the French archives carefully preserve the secrecy of the records from the Non-Intervention Committee that are freely available in London; or how an official Spanish historical office recently announced as a sensational revelation the existence of a new report on Guernica—that had been published in English in 1938, although it is true that no one had ever dared to publish it in Spain. In order to be blind to the contradictions, one had to be a good English or American Catholic, solidly anchored in one's vision of Spain. Southworth has been aware of this for a long time.

SOUTHWORTH, OR PASSIONATE OBJECTIVITY

GUERNICA! GUERNICA! will anger some people. Southworth has already been called, by those whom he has not treated gently, an "anti-Spanish propagandist." Few foreigners, however, have loved Spain as much as he. He simply believes that the best way to love a country is to try to understand its history.

Can one be objective in writing contemporary history? I have long ago stated my views on this. The historian is part and parcel of his work, and his own time is ever present within himself. Differences among historians are to be found in their attitudes. There is the dishonest attitude: to call oneself objective, while knowing oneself to be partisan; there is the blind attitude: to be partisan while believing oneself to be objective; and then there is the attitude of clarity: to state one's position, while believing firmly that thorough analysis is the best way to buttress that position. It is pejorative to say of a work of history that it is a plea for a cause. Yet a good plea made by a good lawyer and for a worthy cause can become a model to the historian.

Southworth, however, and with a very personal style, has adopted a solution that at the same time safeguards and exposes. He has been careful not to be a propagandist. He has preferred to be a polemicist, and that is often less easily forgiven. He has never hidden his point of view, that of Republican Spain. He has not taken on the task of defending or exalting it. He has attacked the theses of its enemies, not the ideological theses, known and understood by him, but the factual affirmations, the presentations of events, the organized silences, the systematic distortions. When he is passionate, it is not against partisan blindness, but against the lie that supports it. Southworth believes in the value of information, but he knows its pitfalls. And he will not allow a compromise between half-truths and half-lies to pass as history.

He is not, in any case, an amateur, a weekend historian. He began in the world's temple to bibliography, the Library of Congress. He has remained, by vocation, a collector and a bibliographer. He gathered together one of the greatest collections of documents on the Spanish Civil War, now in the library of the University of California, San Diego. He has practical experience in the news media, something

most historians lack. And all this results in a work whose origin is in bibliography and textual criticism, and opens up onto a new vision of the event as transformed by news—that is, history in the grand manner. I should like to terminate this foreword by saying why I have particularly appreciated Southworth's work on Guernica, and why I have desired for him the sanction of the university.

At the International Congress on Historical Sciences in Moscow in 1970, I overheard, on a tourist bus, a Spanish university professor loudly proclaim that recent historical research, especially in the United States, had finally established definitively that Guernica had been burned by the red “dinamiteros,” by the fleeing militiamen.

I must admit that in 1939 I had believed such an opinion could come only from the pen of a Bardèche or of a Brasillach. I was wrong. I did not realize the power of an official denial upon those who are inconvenienced by the impact of an event upon the vision they want to have of things. Here we were, in 1970, at a convention of historians, faced with yet another form of that informatory terrorism: “the latest research proves . . .” I made a vow to find out for myself.

I hardly expected to be so soon faced with an exhaustive, irrefutable analysis of the phenomenon “event-information,” leading us through the Guernica affair from the first Steer dispatch to the latest book by Talón and to the rediscovery of Bolin by Professor Jeffrey Hart of Dartmouth College. I now know that there are two “memories” of any Spanish event. But this does not mean that the lie is as strong as the truth.

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