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The Concept of Anachronism and the Historian's Truth (English translation)

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The Concept of Anachronism and the Historian's Truth (English translation)

Cover Page Footnote

This text is the first translation into English of a key text from the French Philosopher Jacques Rancière and he has given permission to Noel Fitzpatrick and Tim Stott to translate the text and read through the final draft.



The Concept of Anachronism and the Historian's Truth *Jacques Rancière*²¹ In the preface to his book *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, Lucien Febvre tells us the following: “The problem is to determine what set of precautions to take and what rules to follow in order to avoid the worst of all sins, the sin that cannot be forgiven—anachronism.”² Febvre’s text raises, for us, three questions, which I shall try to untangle here. Firstly, why, for the historian, is anachronism the unforgivable sin above all others? Secondly, to be such a sin, what must anachronism be? Thirdly, to give anachronism the status of a sin fatal to the spirit of history, what must history be? This triple questioning falls within the framework of a larger reflection on the question of truth in history, a reflection led by a hypothesis that

²¹ Jacques Rancière 'The Concept of Anachronism and the Historian's Truth

1. Trans. Originally published as 'Le concept d'anachronisme et la vérité de l'historien,' *L'Inactuel: psychanalyse et culture* 6, Autumn (1996): 53–68

2. Lucien Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI^e siècle. La religion de Rabelais*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 1968), 15. *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais*, translated by B. Gottlieb, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985),

5. Trans. We have given a direct translation from the French quoted by Rancière. This is because the English translation by Gottlieb corrects Febvre's use of the present tense by using the past tense. For example, the Febvre text in French, "Un enfant naît. Il vit. Sans délai, on le porte à l'église," which translates directly as "A child is born. He lives. Without delay, they take him to the church," Gottlieb translates as "A child was born, and it was living. It was carried without delay to the church." For reasons that become clear below, it is important to leave the French in the historical present.

I now formulate in the most general way. The hypothesis is that the constitution of history as a scientific discourse involves a knot of philosophical questions which have nothing to do with questions concerning the "methodology" or the "epistemology" of history. This knot concerns rather the relations of time, speech, and truth. Yet it is never treated as such in the historian's discourse. It is treated instead by poetic procedures for the construction of historical narrative. I understand "poetic" in the classical sense, namely that which comes under a *techné* for the construction of a plot, for the arrangement of its parts and its appropriate mode of enunciation. In other words, the three traditional functions of *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio*. The hypothesis, therefore, can be summarised as follows: history is constituted as a science by resolving philosophical questions through literary procedures. Nevertheless, history fails to acknowledge these procedures. This applies to the problem of anachronism in the following way: anachronism is a *poetic* concept that serves as a philosophical rule for the question of the status of truth in the historian's discourse.

Having set this out, we can return to our quotation and to the first question to which it gives rise. Why this negative privilege of anachronism? To understand this, first of all we must ask, in the first analysis, what is the minimal meaning of this word. The Robert dictionary summarises it thus:

"Action de placer un fait, un usage, un personnage, etc., dans une époque autre que l'époque à laquelle ils appartiennent ou conviennent réellement [The act of placing a fact, a use, a character, etc. in a time other than the time to which it really belongs or to which it is really suited]."

This definition poses a first problem. According to the primary meaning of the prefix *ana-*, which describes a movement from the rear toward the front, from one time toward an earlier, anachronism is the mistake that consists of putting a fact too early. In good logical fashion, there must be a symmetrical mistake that consists of putting a fact too late. In fact, nineteenth-century dictionaries attest to just such an attempt at lexical rationalisation. Faced with the sin of anachronism, they invent that of parochronism. They even invent a general concept of metachronism, of

which "prochronism" and "parachronism" are particular types. Yet these rationalisations do not last long. Anachronism has remained alone to indicate the mistake against chronology in general.

What is the reason for this privilege? For me, one must look for it in the double sense of *ana-*. This prefix indicates another movement, from below to above. A hypothesis can be deduced from this: anachronism is so called because what is at stake is not only a problem of succession. It is not a horizontal problem of the order of times but a vertical problem of the order of time in the hierarchy of beings. It is a problem of the division (*partage*) of time, in the sense of "what one receives as one's share" (*ce que l'on reçoit en partage*).³ The question of anachronism concerns what truth time has as it is divided, in a vertical order that connects time to what is above it, that is to say, what one ordinarily calls eternity.

To break down the terms of the problem, anachronism, let us say, does not concern the simple turning back (*la remontée*) from one date toward another. It concerns moving on from (*la remontée*) this time of dates toward *that which is not the time of dates*.⁴ This movement indicates two different relations, which I will examine in turn. It is, first of all, a movement toward the time that one cannot date, the time of legends. The European humanist tradition has known three great chronologies: the Christian chronology defined by the birth of Jesus Christ, the Roman chronology *ab urbe condita*, and the Greek chronology linked to the Olympiads.⁵ However, anachronism first of all concerned this junction of times. It consisted of an overlapping of legendary times with those of a certified chronology (whatever its exactitude might be). The major example of anachronism mentioned in the classical age is that of which Virgil writes, the loves of Dido and Aeneas. It could be noted that anachronism, the mistake against history par excellence, concerns two perfectly fictional characters, lacking any historical reality. The reason for this apparent strangeness is simple. Anachronism, before defining the requirements of the historian, defines those of poetry and fiction. The fault of Virgil is not to have put what is after before (Carthage before the time of the Trojan War). It is to have put together two times that come under two different regimes of truth and define two different requirements for fiction. The Trojan War and Aeneas belong to legendary

3. Trans. The verb *partager* means both to divide and to share out. Here, Rancière uses both senses.

4. Trans. Rancière here uses the numerous senses of the noun *la remontée*, which can mean an upstream journey on a river, some process of catching up or going back up, or a recovery. 'Remonter du temps' means to go back in time

5. Trans. *Ab urbe condita* (AUB), "from the founding of the City (Rome)," that is, from the year 753 BCE. AUB was the system of dating used by pre-Christian Rome.

times. The foundation of Carthage, even if it predates that of Rome, falls under Roman chronology. Concerning the time of Aeneas, the poet has total freedom, on condition only that he does not contradict Homer. But this is not at all the same concerning the time of Carthage, which cannot be married to any time whatsoever.

Thus anachronism comes under the truth of poetry before it comes under that of the scholar. And it is in the debate on the rights of fiction that the characteristics of this concept inherited by historians will be defined.⁶ The lively debates of the sixteenth century concerning the rights of poets produce an essential rule: the rights of fiction are inversely proportional to temporal proximity. The closer one is to the present, the less one can invent, and the more fictional invention approaches the limit of the verifiable lie. The debate on poetics reveals the idea of an essential relation between the truth and the present, the scientific consequences of which we will see.

The above concerned the movement of historic times toward legendary times. But the essential relation plays out in another movement. The sin against the order of succession of historic time refers to another sin, that is, the sin against the hierarchical order according to which the times of succession depend upon a time that ignores succession. Chronological time depends upon a time without chronology: a pure present, or eternity. As we have already seen, anachronism is not the confusion of dates but the confusion of epochs. Yet epochs are not simply cut out from the continuity of successions. Epochs mark instead specific regimes of truth, relations of the order of time to order that is not in time. At the beginning of *Discourse on Universal History*, Bossuet teaches his royal student the need to distinguish between times.⁷ That means, first of all, to distinguish between what belongs to the time of natural law, written law, or evangelical law. An epoch is, then, a cut-out (*découpage*) from time determined within an economy of revelation and an economy of the manner in which the eternal deploys truth and makes it known in time.

The Christian economy of revelation is an economy of the redemption of error [*une économie du rachat de la faute*]. But, behind the redemption of error *in* time, there is the question of the redemption of time itself. Behind the relation of fallible, mortal man to Eternity, there is the relation of the

order of becoming to the order of that which is always identical to itself. That is to say, in brief, the relation between *Chronos* and *Æon*, between time and eternity. Behind the Bible and Saint Augustine, there is the *Timaeus* and the formula that history retains from it, even if it is not literally exact: “Time is the mobile image of immobile eternity.”⁸ The formula gives its precise meaning to the idea of the “redemption of time” (*rachat du temps*). To redeem time (*racheter le temps*)—to redeem the error and falsity of becoming—is to make time as “similar” as possible to that which it copies: the eternity of *Æon*. The truthfulness of history depends, before any concern with “method,” upon this act of redemption. Yet to redeem time cannot mean to put it in order according to the law of succession, since it is precisely the constraint of succession that makes time dissimilar to eternity. On the contrary, it is to abolish succession as such and to put in its place an image as similar as possible to the eternity of truth. It is to oppose time as a totality to time as a heterogeneity of successive parts. There are two privileged images of the identity of truth in time. The first is the causal order that puts the sequence of cause and effect in place of the simple *before* and *after* of events. The second is permanence, time coagulated into epochs, each defined as the law of immanence of its own phenomena.

The first image, the first form of the redemption of time, substitutes for the successive order of events the logical order of their reciprocal implication. What Polybius, in the second century BCE, calls their *symploke* (‘entwinement’). The work of the historian, as Polybius is the first to define, is to manifest this *symploke* that makes it so that there is not one event and then another, but rather, a meaningful totality. It is very clear that when Polybius defines these conditions he has in mind a particular text by Aristotle: not the *Physics*, but the *Poetics*. The theory of *symploke* responds to the Aristotelian hierarchy between philosophy, poetry, and history. Poetry is, Aristotle says, more philosophical than history. Indeed, history is the domain of *kath’ hekaston*, of “one by one,” which informs us that there is just one thing and then another. As for poetry, it is the domain of the general, of the *katholon* (‘relating to the whole’) that places actions under a single, articulated totality. And there are two ways to constitute it, either according to necessity or according to verisimilitude (*vraisemblance*). There

6. Concerning these debates, see in particular the work of William Nelson, *Fact or Fiction: The Dilemma of the Renaissance Story* (Teller, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973)

7. Trans. The theologian Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet was a renowned preacher and in 1670 was appointed tutor to the Dauphin, eldest son of Louis XIV of France. His *Discourse on Universal History* was published in 1682. The standard English translation by Elborg Forster, edited and with an introduction by Orest Ranum, was published in 1976 by

8. Trans. Rancière here refers to the Socratic dialogue. The relevant section, which Rancière paraphrases rather than quotes directly, is 37c–38b.

is a theoretical superiority of poetry, which sets up a likely (*vraisemblable*) connection between fictive events, over history, which says exactly that there was some verified event, then another, and then another.

A significant consequence emerges from this, which disturbs somewhat the honest teleologies of the conquest of scientific truths over the fantasies of poetic fiction. The promotion of history as discourse of truth comes out of its capacity to make itself similar to poetry, to imitate for its own benefit the power of poetic generality. This is exactly what Polybius does when he constitutes for science a philosophical intrigue (*intrigue*) of the future, the intrigue of necessity. He has to recount a slice of fifty years marked by the successive victories of the Romans over the Carthaginians and the Macedonians. To do a scholarly history consists, then, of showing that the successive victories and violent expansion of the Roman Empire are not works of chance but of providence. So, the truth regime of history is constituted in a specific connection between the poetic logic of a necessary or likely plot (*intrigue*) and a “theological” logic of the manifestation of the order of divine truth in the order of human time.⁹

Such is the first way to redeem time and to ground history in truth. It consists of subsuming time under the plot of a necessary series [of events]. I now arrive at the second way, which leads us to the heart of our initial question. It is a matter always of constituting time as a whole, but with this second figure, it is not a matter of thinking this whole as the interweaving of causes and effects according to a principle of transcendence. It is a matter of constituting time itself as the principle of immanence that subsumes all phenomena under a law of interiority. The truth of history is then the immanence of time as the principle of co-presence and co-belonging of phenomena. Time thus functions as that which is similar to or substitutes for eternity. It doubles up, being the principle of presence—and so of eternity—interior to the temporality of phenomena. This second way is at the heart of the modern definition of the scientific nature of history (*la scientificité de l'histoire*). And for this [reason] history places at its heart the question of anachronism as mortal sin, a sin against the presence of eternity in time, the presence of eternity *as* time.

To illustrate the above propositions, we can return to the sentence from

Lucien Febvre that served as our point of departure. Cofounder of *Annales* and founding father of the French historical school, Febvre is, as is well known, the incarnation of a certain modern paradigm of the scientific nature of history. It is also known that this foundation rests upon a number of principles of theoretical rupture. The first affirms the rupture with the so-called history of events, that of the Aristotelian *kath' hekaston* materialised by the succession of princes, battles, and treatises, told according to their princely chroniclers. In passing, one can remark that the sin of anachronism cannot be, without contradicting this rupture, a matter of erroneous chronology and of dates ahead of time. The second principle breaks with the first form of redemption from the contingency of historical events (*rachat de l'événementialité*). Inaugurated by Polybius and perfected by Saint Augustine and Bossuet, this form makes of history a providential series. Between the eighteenth century and nineteenth century, this providential history is rationalised. At first, it takes the secularised form of universal history as the history of the progressive development of the human spirit, and then it takes the scientific form of causes necessarily drawn from the conditions of human action. However, the scientific historical paradigm of *Annales* also refutes this scientific nature of history in terms of laws and causes. What, then, defines the scientific nature of historical discourse? Traditional descriptions define it by two inversions of perspective, along the two axes of diachrony and synchrony. Upon the first axis is imposed the long time of cycles and structures against the short time of events. The second axis opposes to the history of princes, battles, and treatises, the thickness of the social, the interweaving of ways of doing, being, and thinking, from the elementary core of productive and reproductive activities up to the more or less elaborate forms of representation through which humans live out their relation to these elementary conditions.

My hypothesis is that this double privileging, of long time over short time and of the thickness of the social over the superficiality of events, is first of all the privileging of a certain type of time: a time that acts as the measure (*l'efficace*) of its own truth, the measure of the eternity that is hidden within it. I want to show this by starting from the particular object of Lucien Febvre's book, the question of Rabelais' “religion.” This book

9. Trans. There are two meanings of *l'intrigue* in use here, both as a 'puzzle' or 'enigma,' but also, a meaning that is lost from the word in English, as a 'plot.'

comes about due to an apparently quite short term circumstance, namely Abel Lefranc's preface to his own edition of *Pantagruel*. According to this latter, the forms of Rabelaisian parody hide a demolition of Christian religion. Lucien Febvre seeks to refute this thesis, which makes of Rabelais a non-believer obliged, quite simply, by the constraints of his time to mask his non-belief in the ambivalences of parody. But Febvre's problem is, of course, not to clear Rabelais of the charge of atheism. It is to refute the conception of history that supports Abel Lefranc's claims, a conception according to which, in a given epoch, there are people who are in advance of their time. It is to combat anachronism. Only, let us take note, anachronism is not a question of facts. It is a question of thought.

Lucien Febvre's thesis is, therefore, the following: it is wrong to make of Rabelais a non-believer in disguise because that would be anachronistic. That would make contemporary to Rabelais' time a thought that does not belong to it. What Abel Lefranc does, Febvre tells us, is to "commit the most serious and the most ridiculous of all anachronisms: in the realm of ideas it is like giving Diogenes an umbrella and Mars a machine gun."¹⁰

The comparison is striking, but obviously specious. We have enough information to assure us that in the time of Diogenes they did not use umbrellas and that in the time of the sculptures and figurines of Mars they did not use machine guns. Therefore we can say with confidence that Diogenes did not have an umbrella and Roman generals did not have machine guns available to them. To say, on the other hand, that Rabelais had not in mind the idea that the Christian religion was an immense joke poses completely different problems of verification. Yet it is precisely at this point, where the domain of the verifiable comes to an end, that the accusation of anachronism comes into play. The accusation of anachronism is not the claim that something did not exist at a given date. It is the claim that something *could not have existed* at this date.

This is indeed how Lucien Febvre proceeds. His initial question could be formulated as follows: is it true that Rabelais was a non-believer? But, he tells us, the formulation of this questions sounds like an examining magistrate. The scholar formulates the question differently: is it possible that he was a non-believer? And the historian shapes and temporalises

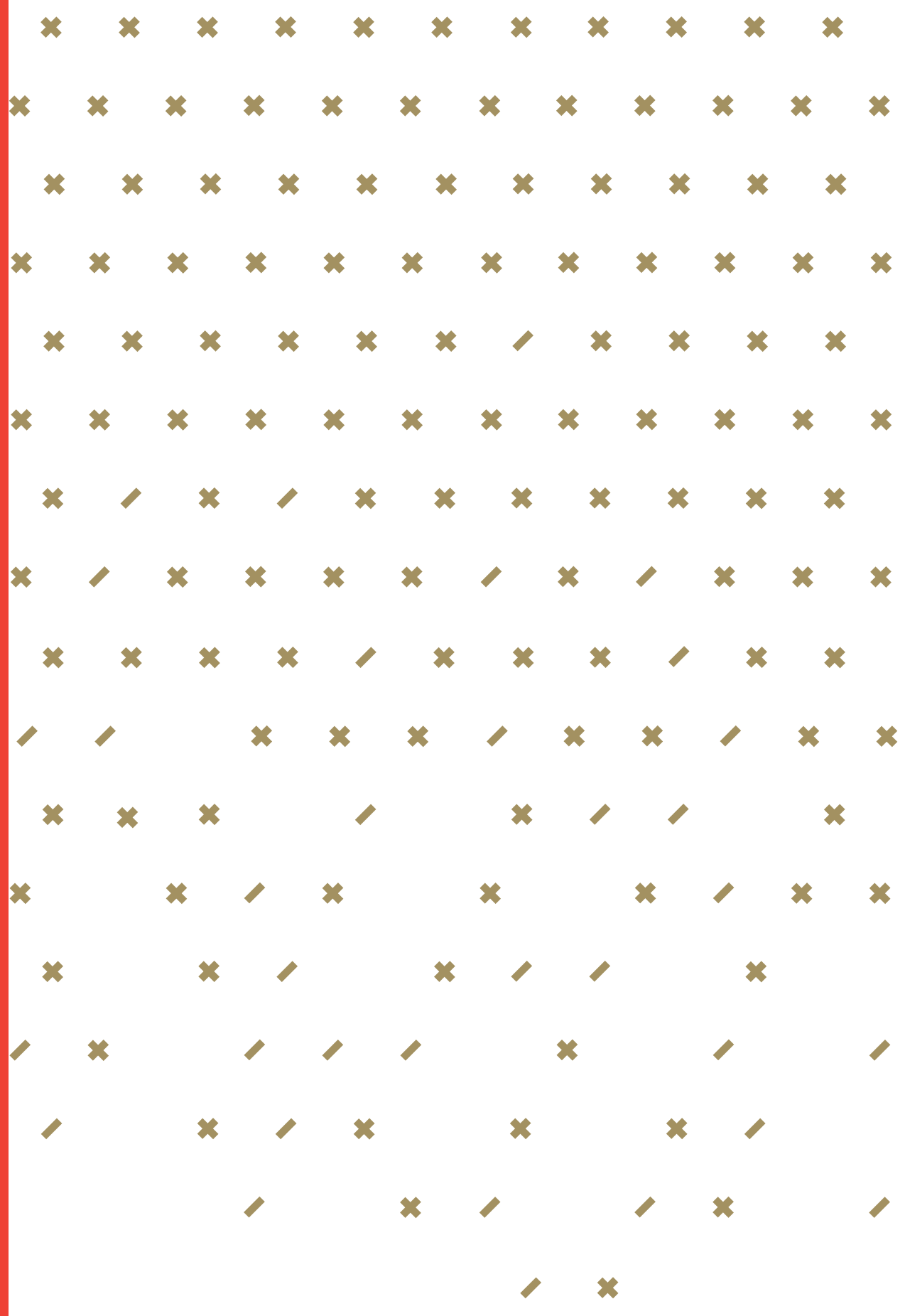
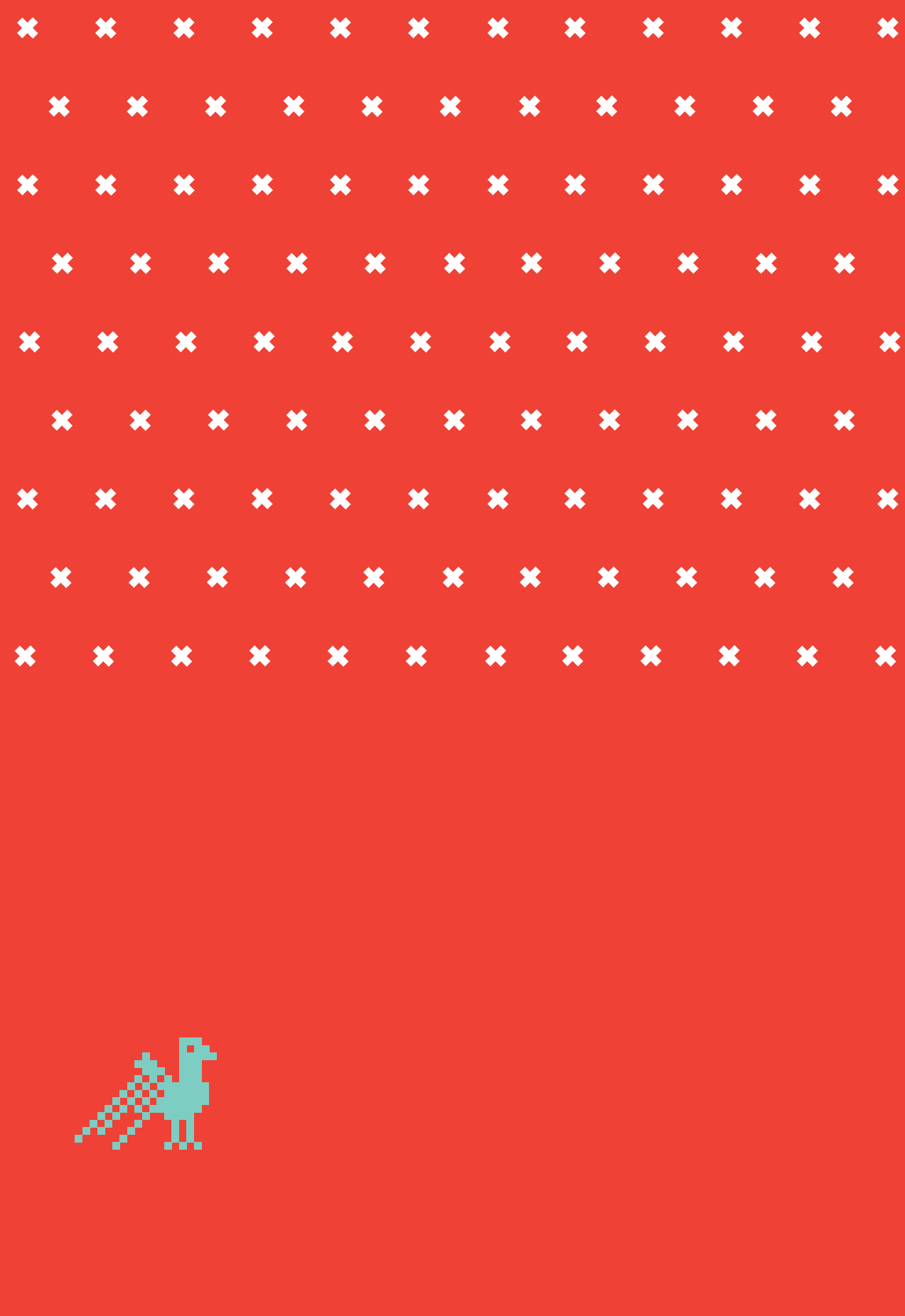
this logical formula in the following way: *Was it possible that he was not a believer?*

Thus formulated, the question calls for an almost automatic response. Rabelais could not have been a non-believer. And why not? Not because we know that he was not one. We know nothing of what he thought deep down. He could not have been a non-believer because, to be one, it would have been necessary that it was possible for him to be one. And for that, it would have been necessary that the possibility of this possibility existed. The question, Lucien Febvre tells us, is not to know whether or not it was easy to be a non-believer in the sixteenth century. At all times, there are "hot heads" (*cerveaux brûlés*) who allow themselves to affirm or to deny whatsoever they choose, which is why they also end up as burnt bodies (*corps brûlés*). Hot heads who do not know what is possible and what is impossible prove nothing. One must, therefore, keep to the strict form of the question: "Let us not inquire whether a break was *easy*, but whether or not conditions were met that could have made a break *possible*."¹¹ To this question, the response is negative: the conditions of possibility for this possibility were not in place during Rabelais' time. Why not? Quite simply, because he did not have time for it. The reality of empirical time confirms the impossibility which is registered in time as a transcendental condition. The "epoch" of Rabelais did not allow him non-belief, because the empirical time, of which the "epoch" itself is the transcendental principle, was a time completely determined in its "uses" by the Christian religion. This is what Lucien Febvre shows us when he sets out the conditions of individualisation and socialisation of some ordinary individual:

A child is born. He lives. Without delay, they take him to the church and baptise him whilst the bells ring, which are themselves baptised by the bishop [...] A man dies. Whether or not his funeral services are arranged in his will (and those who shirk this obligation are rare), he is buried "as he must be," in the Christian manner, in his family tomb [or] more often in some monastic church of the Dominicans, the Franciscans, or the Carmelites; and without social distinction, whether [he is] a baron or simple artisan. Could one refuse oneself a Christian burial? This was impossible, and unthinkable [...] Man

10. Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance*, 307.

11. *Ibid.* 335.



eats, and religion surrounds his diet of prescriptions, rites, and prohibitions [...] They are ill. They fear sickness. Certainly, the doctor is there to relieve patients. But the true recovery depends upon God, whether directly or by the mediation of the Saints of Paradise. And if it concerns an epidemic, especially the plague, what then? Quick, pilgrimages and vows to Saint Sebastian [...] The legacy is that there is nothing in all Christendom that does not begin with an invocation and a sign of the cross.¹²

12. Ibid. 309, 310, 312, 313, 314

In brief, private life, professional life, public life, all have their time completely determined and articulated by religion. That goes both for the ordinariness of days and for the extraordinariness of events. The conclusion is obvious:

This religion, Christianity, is the coat of the Merciful Virgin Mary, so often represented in this way in our churches. All men, in all states, take shelter beneath this coat. It is impossible to want to escape from this coat. Huddled beneath these maternal folds, men do not feel that they are captive. To rebel, it would be necessary first of all to surprise oneself.¹³

13. Ibid. 323

Rabelais' time does not allow him not to believe, because the form of this time is identical with the form of belief. Belonging to a time determines for mortals the very fact that they exist. Yet this belonging to a time is strictly identical to belonging to a belief. To not believe in the belief of his time would have meant for Rabelais to not exist. This presents itself in the form of a simple alternative: either Rabelais did not exist or he believed. Yet he existed, so he believed.

Of course, Lucien Febvre is not naive. He understands well that this shows a gap in his argument:

However, let us imagine an exceptional man. One of those few men that shows himself capable of being ahead of his contemporaries by a century, of formulating truths that will only be accepted as such fifty, sixty, or a hundred years later.¹⁴

14. Ibid.

But to unburden (*soulever*) oneself of the belief system of one's time, one must have, he tells us, a lever (*un levier*). And where would Rabelais have found such a thing? Neither the philosophy nor the science of his time gave

him the supports necessary for that. As a consequence, it was impossible for him to put together a system of reasons sufficiently solid and well-supported to insist upon an effective negation of this Christianity that was the form for the organisation of the life of each and every one. In brief, so that Rabelais could be a precursor [of free thinking], he already would have needed his own precursors. It would have been necessary that the conditions of free thought—a free thought worthy of the name—existed for Rabelais to be able to be a free thinker. Yet they did not exist. And the alternative is posed anew: either Rabelais was not a non-believer, or he was a non-believer but without sufficient reason for being so. Consequently, his non-belief was only the individual fantasy of a hot-head. This fantasy was not non-belief of his time, in his time. It had no historical consistency.

It hardly deserves to be discussed, any more than the sneers of the drunkard in the tavern who guffaws when he is told that the earth is moving, under him and with him, at such a speed that it cannot even be felt.¹⁵

15. Ibid. 324.

If there existed at the beginning of the sixteenth century someone called Rabelais who did not believe in Christianity, his non-belief was not an object of history. “And from that point on, nothing remains for the historian but to forget all about it, and to leave Rabelais there.”¹⁶

16. Ibid.

To be an object of history is, therefore, to believe in the belief “of one’s time,” to belong to one’s time by the mode of belief, by the mode of unflinching adherence. This is what we are told by Febvre’s alter ego, Marc Bloch, in a formula that appears anodyne, but is nothing of the sort: “History is the science of men in time.”¹⁷ Marc Bloch liked to illustrate this with an Arab proverb: “Men resemble their time more than they resemble their parents.”¹⁸ One must give these formulae a strongly theoretical meaning. They tell us this: For history to be a science, which is to say, so that it gains something of eternity, its time must as far as possible resemble eternity. How does a time resemble eternity? In being a pure present. For time to be redeemed there must be a pure present, a principle of the co-presence of historical subjects. Historical subjects must “resemble” their time, which is to say, they must resemble the principle of their co-presence. Two conditions therefore go together. Firstly, a time that is the principle not of succession but of simultaneity, of co-presence, and secondly, beings who resemble their time

17. Trans. Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l’histoire, ou métier d’historien*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949), 18. Translated as *The Historian’s Craft*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953).

18. Ibid. 22.

(by the principle of co-presence) and not their parents (by the principle of succession), beings defined not by the vagaries [*aléa*] of successions, bodily and intellectual, but by contemporaneity with “their” time, beings that carry their time on their bodies, in all their ways of being and doing, and who carry it in their soul under the name of belief.

Earlier, I mentioned the formula on time taken from the *Timaeus*: “the mobile image of immobile eternity.” Yet, in the same text, this analogy finds itself completed by another, formulated thus: “What essence is to becoming, truth is to belief.”¹⁹ For Plato, of course, the analogy tends toward the opposition of two worlds of a radically unequal ontological content. For the historian, on the other hand, the eternity of simultaneity finds itself at home in the time of successions, as this latter’s principle of interiority. Which is to say that “belief” will become the very mark of this truth lodged in time itself. Belief is nothing other than the subjective form of time. It is the resemblance of the historical agent to his time, and this resemblance is precisely the ersatz eternity that confirms for the historian’s discourse its position in truth. It is where time imposes its presence as belief that time resembles eternity. In an exemplary fashion, the everyday time of Rabelais does not allow time not to believe. It does not allow the time to not be of one’s time.

We now understand just what is at stake in the proscription of anachronism: this knotting of time and belief that assures the redemption of time and, therefore, the “truth” of the historian’s discourse. We also better understand the unpardonable character of the “sin of anachronism,” by comparing Febvre’s analysis to that of an historian whose declared Nietzscheanism should place him in complete opposition to the solid radical-socialist rationalism of Febvre. That historian is Paul Veyne. When, in his book *Bread and Circuses*, Veyne analyses the institution of charitable practices in antique Rome, he raises in passing the question of Christian charity as it is expressed not in the speculations of theology but in the original freshness of the Sermon on the Mount. Looking at it with the eyes of a historian, Veyne tells us that there is nothing original to the evangelical ideal expressed by these texts. This ideal was already the common good—the belief—of the Jews at the time of Jesus. Consequently, nascent

19. Trans. *Timaeus* 29c: Zeyl’s translation gives the following: “What being is to becoming, truth is to convincingness.”

Christianity could not fail to endorse it, for two reasons. The first is that, taking into account the state of the general mood, “no popular preacher would have been listened to if he had not done the same.” The second, and most fundamental, is that no preacher could even have the idea to stray from this mood:

And why should [Jesus] not have adopted it? He himself was only a man of the people, a member of the crowd that from below looks in awe at those who, in their palaces, live in honour and luxury [...] As for evangelical morality so for universalism: one should not ask questions that a man of the people, as brilliant as he might be, could not ask himself.²⁰

In brief, in all epochs, one could only be a believer, which is to say, contemporary to one's time. Jesus could only be a Jew of his time, Rabelais a Christian of his. In other words, Christianity has no more reason to be born at the time of the first than to die at the time of the second. To me, this text [*Bread and Circuses*] seems to summarise in an exemplary fashion the displacement of the status of truth that defines modern historical science. At the time of the Enlightenment and of critique, the question was asked: Is there a verifiable historical reality to what the Evangelists told us, or is it only a matter of fables? What testimonies do we have that an individual named Jesus had at that time spoken those words and accomplished those miraculous acts that the Evangelists attribute to him? In no time at all, the modern historian upsets the game and imposes another idea of truth: not “Is it true that...?” but “Was it possible not to...?” The word of the Evangelists is true because it was impossible for any contemporary of Jesus to say something other than what is said by the Evangelists. Belief is to truth what becoming is to essence. It is the necessity of belief that confirms the truth of science, which is to say, in Platonic terms, the presence of essence in becoming.

Of course, this confirmation has a very specific form. Belief is the object of science. The mark of analogical relation is also the mark of knowledge. For the historical agent, to resemble one's time is to resemble it in the mode of belief, which means to not know one's time. To be made of one's time is to be made in ignorance. It is on the other side, the side of the scholar,

20. Paul Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque*, (Paris: Seuil, 1976), 46–7. Translated by B. Pearce as *Bread and Circuses: historical sociology and political pluralism*, (London: Penguin, 1990), 21–22.



that the “resemblance” of belief is known for what it is. The time of the historical agent, as Febvre tells it, is a pure present. But the time of the scholar who alone knows this present for what it is, he is above this present (*un surprésent*), a more-than-present (*un plus-que-présent*) who retains resemblance [to his time] but eliminates its identity with ignorance.

The resemblance of man to his time, the impossibility of him to think otherwise to what his time makes thinkable, then becomes the allegory for the relation of science to its object. One who believes is, in Platonic terms, one who does not know. It makes an allegory of the difference between the science of the scholar and the ignorance of the one who does not know (*l'ignorance de l'ignorant*), the ignorance of the object of science. The theory of time implied by the denunciation of anachronism therefore has a double power. On the one hand, it redeems time. As far as possible, it makes time similar to eternity. Those who are conditioned by time, it fixes with the identity of belief/resemblance. In this sense, it guarantees for the first time the truth of history. But it does this a second time by giving to science, as a specific object, its other, which is to say, the being made of time, therefore of belief, and therefore of ignorance. Temporal “resemblance” normalises both the science of the scholar and the ignorance of the one who does not know. It therefore knots together the constraint of truth with a social constraint. I made reference above to the formulae in the *Timaeus* about the mobile time image of eternity. But, in the fictional construction of the Platonic dialogues, the *Timaeus* follows on from another dialogue, the *Republic*. In the *Republic*, time plays a particular role of division. There are those who have time and those who do not have time. In Book II, it is time, or more precisely, *the absence of time*, the absence of another time, that fixes the artisans in their place. They do not have the time, Socrates says, to occupy themselves with anything but their “own affairs,” the tasks that correspond to their nature and their function. Time thus assures the equivalence of a social distribution and an epistemic distribution. It separates the different ways in which to take part in the task of the city, thereby imitating the eternity of justice in the time of human affairs. On the one hand, there are those who have time to concern themselves with contemplation of the divine model and the forms of its temporal realisation. On the other hand, there are those

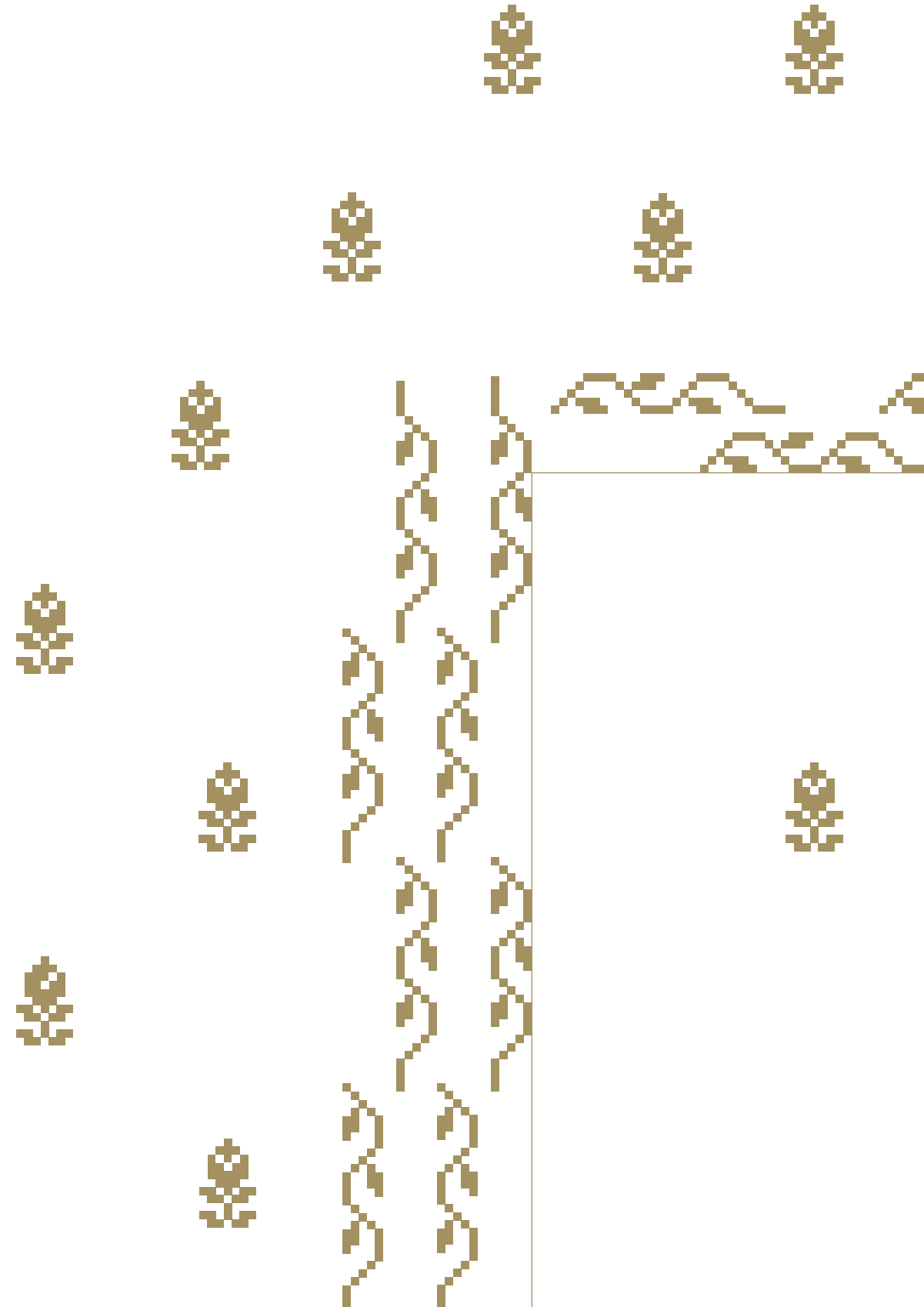
who have not the time for this, and who, as a consequence, only imitate eternity passively, by the fact of not having the time to do anything but the work to which their nature predestines them.

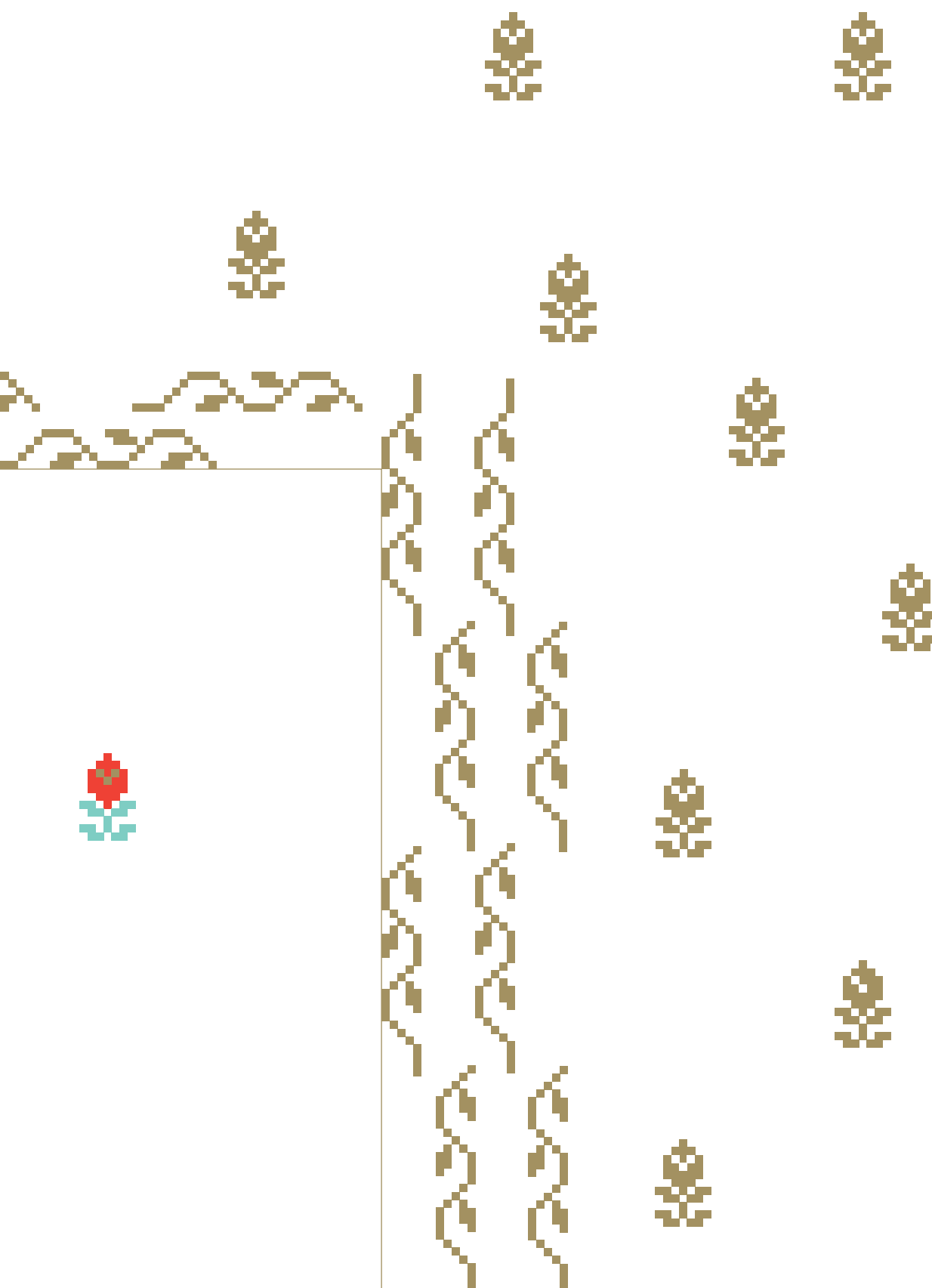
In the time of historical science, of course, there is no longer a Platonic tripartite division of classes. But there remains the divisional function assigned to time. There remains this remarkable relation of truth to time, in a double sense: the order of the imitation of truth in time and the division between those who know and those who do not know. In the order of historical knowledge, this “belief,” which cannot be other than what it is, is the strict equivalent of that *sophrosyne* (‘self-control’) that was, for Plato, the unique virtue of the third class, a virtue without any content other than the simple subordination of those who cannot be anywhere else but in their place. The scientific city of the modern human and social sciences is modelled on the Platonic philosophical city. In this city, the relation of the temporal order to the order of eternity must be assured by specialists according to a strict distribution. What threatens the Platonic philosophical city are the artisans who escape their condition, who want to occupy themselves with more than their “own affairs,” and engage with the affairs of the city, even the affairs of philosophy. Likewise, what threatens the scientific city of history are words and thoughts that leave behind the strict obedience to belief similar to time. What threatens is the fact that the ordinariness of productive and reproductive life is seized and divided by the power of words that separate bodies from their destiny. What threatens is *heresy*, in the original meaning of the word, namely *separation*, life separated from itself by the power of words that short-circuit the strong relation of time to eternity as the exact distribution both of bodies in the city and of objects for science. What assures and reassures this threatened order is belief, in the strong sense of the term: the state of one who cannot not think what his or her time alone presents as thinkable. Consider these ritual phrases that scatter works on the history of mentalities, dealing with the belief of men of the medieval or classical epochs: “How would they have?” “How would they have not?” These are phrases that make up a regime of evidence incapable of stating itself theoretically as such. The regulation of time that history needs to assure its regime of scientificity is a

philosophical problem that is regulated, not philosophically, but poetically. Febvre's book effectively gives a demonstration of this. Here, the doubling of time that gives truth to the knowledge of belief is never theorised as such. It is carried out, without being thematised, in the order of narration itself. The description of this sixteenth-century universe that does not allow non-belief thus uses a double poetic procedure concerning, in classical terms, *dispositio* and *elocutio*.

From *dispositio* comes a manner of composing a picture in such a way that the “anachronic” element—non-belief—appears there as an element visually incompatible with others, such as with a colour that clashes or a piece that is not cut from the same material. The “anachronic,” remember, is that which does not belong to *or does not suit* the time in which it is found. Where non-belonging cannot be demonstrated, which is to say when it is a matter of knowing what is and what is not in someone's head, one appeals to what is unsuitable (*la non-convenance*). The demonstration of the “anachronic” happens, then, according to a well-established poetic logic of verisimilitude and its absence. But verisimilitude, like truth, has changed regime since the Romantic age. In the time of Voltaire and La Harpe, the rules of verisimilitude to which the representation of some historical character or the painting of some era had to submit were clearly explained. In the time of Lucien Febvre, the demonstration [of the “anachronic”] no longer has to be argued according to rules. It is carried out directly. Description requires the sensible evidence of what is in place in the picture and what is not. In the description of the everyday life of a man of the sixteenth century, non-belief has the status of a detail that does not fit. It would be like portraying a rude medieval lord in perfumed fineries.

The second procedure [*elocutio*] has a syntactical order. It consists of the creation of a more-than-present. “A child is born. He lives. Without delay, they take him to the church.” One must understand, of course, if he lives—which means, if he does not die at birth as did so many children—then they take him to the church. But clearly this *if* would be unwelcome. It would slow down the story and introduce an element of chance into its purely assertory structure. If one suppresses it [this *if*], statistically uncertain survival becomes life. Not the life of this particular child, but





life in general; life, the power of self-confirmation that makes itself evident as the identity of what is actual and what is possible. “This” child is placed in a present where the general rule and its particular illustration are indiscernible. The same goes for “a dead man,” where one must hear: “Let us take the case of a man who has just died,” or indeed “The plague strikes? Processions.” A modal and temporal system is deployed here, imperiously governed by a time—the present of the indicative—and even by a quasi-time, a detemporalised time, essentialised and made similar to the identity of eternity, similar to the absence of time. It is the time of the nominal phrase. “To refuse oneself a Christian burial? Impossible and unthinkable.” The phrase “normal” would say more or less the same thing: he could not imagine refusing a Christian burial, for him that would have been unthinkable. But to place this impossibility in the past is already to reduce it, to assign to it only the slightest existence. It would be better to write, in the spoken present of narration, “He cannot refuse...” Better again is simply to write “Impossible,” which is to suppress every temporal mark, every verbal mark, to make better felt how the time of Rabelais defined immediately the being of those who inhabited it, or who are inhabited by it. By this technique of the more-than-present that culminates in non-time, the existence of each and every one finds itself established as immediately identical to its essence. In other words, the description of the empirical case is established to be similar to the statement of the general rule.

This temporal system noticeably clouds the opposition, made by Benveniste, between the system of discourse dominated by the present and the system of the story dominated by the past. According to this opposition, it is admissible to set down history as a mixture that narrates in the system of the past and explains in the system of the present.²¹ Yet Lucien Febvre presents us with a completely different articulation of the relation between the syntax of history and its semantics. He gives us a story that by the fact of being in the present—even the more-than-present—is already by itself the presentation of its own meaning. We know that he borrows this mode of account from [Jules] Michelet, the one who formulated the redemptionist programme of history. The historian is the character who crosses the river of the dead in order to redeem (*racheter*) at the same time the past, the

21. See Emile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 2, (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 83.

unknown, and death. Febvre himself no longer needs this programme, no longer needs to dramatise the relation of the truth of history to the non-truth of time. It is rather that he has at hand the product of Michelet's operation, a product from which the process has disappeared, namely, the story in the present, which abolishes at the same time the non-truth of words and of time. This shows the triumph of the present or of presence and the immanence of meaning in the body of what is presented. Such is the story of the Fête de la Fédération of the 14th of July 1790, when the talkative but mute stories (*les récits muets-bavards*) of the village writers vanish in favour of the picture that, in their place, gives voice to the immanent meaning of life, a picture of the forces of nature at the time of harvests and flowers.²² It is this mode of story/discourse that imposes itself anew in the short phrases that make us *see*, in the everyday life of the man of the Renaissance, the absence of what it excludes: namely, the possibility that Rabelais could have been a non-believer.

22. I here refer the reader to my book *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, translated by H. Melehy, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

Anachronism therefore concerns something quite other than a matter of defective chronology. It is the symbol-concept (*le concept-emblème*) by which history affirms its specificity and its scientificity. Anachronism is the symbol of a concept and a usage of time where this latter has absorbed, without trace, the properties of its contrary, eternity. The first paradox is that this mark of scientific difference is borrowed from the arsenal of poetics and rhetoric. A poetics of verisimilitude operating in these tableaux vivants shows us the impossibility that a thought make its home in a scene to which it does not belong. This poetics, we have said, regulates [thought] without posing the question of the relation of truth to speech and to time. But it regulates [thought] also by making itself invisible, by disappearing in the production of an immediate presence of concept in existence. The philosophical question [of whether or not thought fully belongs to its time] is hidden in the poetic resolution. But this poetic resolution is hidden in turn to make of the evidence of anachronism a clandestine ontological argument. Time, the principle of the co-presence of the phenomena to which it is present, becomes the very form of possibility of these phenomena. To exist is to belong to or to "suit" a time. It is to "suit" a concept of time identified with the principle of sufficient reason. It is to suit

a philosophical principle of sufficient reason identified, in the last instance, with the old argument of the possible and the impossible around which the birth of rhetoric was carried out and by which it asserted its control. "How could it have been?" The elaboration of this question to make up for an unattributable truth establishes the legal power of rhetoric. "How could it not have been?" This is the philosophised form of the rhetorical argument, which now becomes an ontological argument, in which historical science, under the guise of good method, finally encloses truth and submits it to a time identified with the possible. Poetic procedures have enclosed eternity in time. In turn, time is made the condition of belonging to or suiting this eternity. At the end of the process, the eternity of the true is led back into the service of rhetorical argument, which in order to declare that something does not exist only needs to argue the impossibility of this existence. Under the guise of freeing science from the "truth" of judges, it is, in the final instance, to the verisimilitude of lawyers that science is now delivered.

We know the drift of this argument. Negationism is only the provocative form of this shameful ontological argument that submits historical existence to this "possibility according to the time," which itself submits the principle of sufficient reason to the comforts of rhetoric.²³ But one must draw out the consequences. Negationism is not simply a perverse effect, due to a vicious diversion of anti-anachronic precaution. It is the concept of anachronism that is, in itself, perverse. It is the submission of existence to the possible that is, at its core, anti-historical. The historian does not have to pronounce verdicts of inexistence in accordance with impossibilities whose status is indefinite. Above all, he does not have to identify the conditions of possibility and impossibility for the form of time. It is the very idea of anachronism as error about time that must be deconstructed. To say that Diogenes had an umbrella is simply, in so far as we know, an error about the accessories available to Athenians in the fourth century BCE. There is no particular reason to put this in a specific class of errors that would be "errors against time." To say that Rabelais was a non-believer is a hypothesis that our knowledge about the forms of belief of his time and about his own biography allows us to hold in great suspicion. To say, on the other hand, that he could not have being [a non-believer] because his time denied the

23. Cf. J. Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, translated by J. Rose, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), and "Les énoncés de la fin et du rien," in J-J Forté and G. Leyenberger eds. *Traversée du nihilisme*, (Paris: Editions Osiris, 1994).

possibility of non-belief is to make an unwarranted use of the category of the possible and, likewise, the category of time.

To deconstruct the category of anachronism is to undo a double knot: the knot of time with the possible and its knot with the eternal. It is, first of all, to free historical rationality from the clandestine games of the possible. It is also to undo this time from the co-presence that, on the one hand, clandestinely places eternity in time and, on the other hand, makes of this eternalised time a principle of possibility and impossibility. The concept of “anachronism” is anti-historical because it obscures the very conditions of all historicity. There is history insofar as men do not “resemble” their time, insofar as they act in breach of “their” time, in breach of the line of temporality that puts them in their place by obliging them to “use” their time in some way or other. But this rupture is itself only possible because of the possibility to connect this line of temporality with others and because of the multiplicity of lines of temporality present in any “one” time.

It is this play of heterogeneous temporal series that, to refer here to my own experience, I have tried to highlight in *La nuit des prolétaires*.²⁴ With this book, it was a matter of questioning the connection between time, the possible and truth which was affirmed by the traditional definition of proletarian as “worker in heavy industry.” According to this definition, “proletarian” was the concept for an existence that was only possible at a precise moment in the course of history. It was explained that until the Industrial Revolution had attained a certain point, there could have been no true proletarians. It was therefore necessary to await the time in question up to the point where it appeared that this time had passed.

My own hypothesis was that, for reasons strictly opposed to the above, “proletarian” was the name of a historical agent and a historical mode of “making history.” It was the name for a rupture of the resemblance between workers and “their” time, the time of the ordinary cycle of time, the cycle of the day devoted to work and the night devoted to rest, which prevented workers from doing, in Platonic terms, anything other than what they should. It was, strictly speaking, a reversal of “their” time, and it was the connection of this topsy-turvy time with other lines of temporality: the new line of history, linked to the idea of history as a process in the making

(*processus d'un faire*), and born of the rupture with continuity already accomplished by the revolutions in England, America, and France; the progressive time of the new paligenetic religions; but also the broken time that characterises the life of words, sentences, and meaning. “Proletarian” is, in fact, a word with a curious history. In a text of the second century CE, the *Attic Nights* of Aulus Gellius, the modern reader is surprised to find a chapter entitled “Qui sit proletarius?” He is even more surprised to find this text devoted to a discussion among erudite Romans about the possible meaning of this word that, at their time, had gone completely out of use. By studying old texts, these scholars end up finding the meaning of this archaic term in the Law of the Twelve Tables, the founding text of ancient Roman legislation. *Proletarius*, they discover, comes from *proles*, which signifies race and descent. In the first Roman age, the term refers to those men who do nothing other than live and make children without giving them a name, an identity, or a symbolic status within the city.

This ancient discussion about an out of use word is apt to make us understand why, in the modern age, the name of proletarian has been suitable to refer specifically to the rupture with the temporal logic of production and reproduction. But the length of time that this word, which in the second century of our Christian era could scarcely be understood by scholars, has been forgotten, has given this word the power to name a new connection of times. It now links the time of rupture with the banality of works and days, with the future of new times, and with the broken time that characterises the life of words and meaning.

There is no anachronism. But there are modes of connection that in a positive sense we can call anachronies: events, ideas, significations that are contrary to time, that make meaning circulate in a way that escapes any contemporaneity, any identity of time with “itself.” An anachrony is a word, an event, or a signifying sequence that has left “its” time, and in this way is given the capacity to define completely original points of orientation (*les aiguillages*), to carry out leaps from one temporal line to another.²⁵ And it is because of these points of orientation, these jumps and these connections that there exists a power to “make” history. The multiplicity of temporal lines, even of senses of time, included in the “same” time is the

24. J. Rancière, *The nights of labour: the workers' dream in nineteenth-century France*, translated by J. Dury, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989)

25. Trans. The French word *aiguillage* refers specifically to the points used for changing from one railway track to another. Rancière here uses the

word figuratively. condition of historical activity. Effective consideration of this should be the departure point for a historical science, less concerned with its “scientific” respectability and more concerned with what “history” means.

In response

Brian Fay To respond briefly to Rancière’s expansive text is a difficult task. An essay so broad in scope, one that literally moves from pre-chronology to eternity, offers many diverse avenues to pursue. What strikes me most forcibly is Rancière’s proposition that time can be considered in and through a vertical divisible framework. This leads me to speculate what this framing might hold for the artist, via its consequences for the historian.

Rancière suggests that the prefix *ana-* offers us a vertical structuring of time, where time and the anachronic action can be understood as a move from below to above. This structuring is somewhat unusual. Our general understanding and indeed diagrammatic depictions of temporality usually configure time as a horizontally orientated schema, with the ‘now’ moment frequently depicted as moving along a single horizontal axis.¹ Rancière’s ascent of time has correlations with Rosalind Krauss’s temporal claims for the palimpsest, which as a structure can be seen also to vertically order time.² For Krauss, the palimpsest is “the emblematic form of the temporal and as such it is the abstraction of narrative, [and] of history.” While a palimpsest suggests a visual ordering, one stratum accumulatively placed upon another, its cumulative conclusion can be less determined, even abstract. Each layer may not fully obscure all that is beneath. Its vertical structuring creates an ambiguity in understanding its succession, or understanding how it is that an abstracted outcome arose from its construction. It asks the question what belongs where? Each layer may not visually belong solely to its own position, but can be seen to operate in multiple roles. In temporal terms each layer can be present in more than one time. This resembles Rancière’s suggestion that anachronism obscures the conditions of historicity by acknowledging the “multiplicity of lines of temporality present in ‘one’ time.” The palimpsest can be read, therefore, as two temporal models discussed in Rancière’s essay, the first, the causal model of before and after, being the accumulative action of layering, and the

1. See Bergson, Husserl and even to some degree Minkowski. For examples of time graphs in Bergson and Husserl see Daniel Birnbaum, *Chronology*, (New York: Sternberg Press, 2005), 98–103. James Arnold provides illustrations of Minkowski’s graphs in ‘An advancing time hypothesis,’ *European Scientific Journal* 9, no. 12, (2013). Available at: www.eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/viewFile/990/1020

2. Rosalind Krauss, ‘The Rock’: William Kentridge’s Drawings for Projection,’ *October* 92, Spring (2000): 3–35.

second, a containment of time framed (or coagulated) as an epoch, being when the palimpsest is viewed in its entirety.

Rancière suggests the sole method of history does not exist within a scientific claim but one that needs to resolve “philosophical questions by means of literary procedures.” Therefore, affinities can be considered between the work of the historian and that of the artist. John Lewis Gaddis reiterates this view.

Historians are able to manipulate time and space... they can compress these dimensions, expand them, compare them, measure them, even transcend them... the literal representation of reality is not their task.³

While the models of verification remain distinct in each activity—“Artists don’t normally expect to have their sources checked. Historians do.”⁴—Rancière in this text reiterates the need for our understanding of time to be plural, perhaps even “palimpsestic.”

Connell Vaughan Evental thinking is at the heart of Jacques Rancière’s philosophy. In a number of his works, Rancière offers us events in the shape of historical subjects: Gillard in *The Nights of Labour*, Jacotot in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, and Blanqui in *Disagreement*. From the historical activity of these subjects we learn that an event is something that claims a radical equality whereby those who normally are excluded by the political count, by its practices and systems of representation, are made to count.

Such events are more than mere occurrences in the sequence of time (*chronos*). The event, for Rancière, is the revelation and assertion of this historical subject on the basis of equality. Aesthetics, philosophy, education, politics and, in ‘The Concept of Anachronism and the Historian’s Truth,’ history, are seen by Rancière to condition and reinforce inequality. He charges history with performing the same ordering of inequality endemic to these other disciplines. In particular, the historian’s task has been to give the “appropriate” orders to different epochs. As regimes of order, however, these epochs are also regimes of power. The historian is, therefore, like the curator, the editor, the interior decorator, and the philosopher (for the latter, see *The Philosopher and His Poor*). The literary *techne* of history is a procedure of evaluation and re-evaluation, creation and re-creation of epochs bound

3. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17.

4. *Ibid.* 17–18.

by the constraints of *chronos*. Any confusion, any misplacing of epochs commits the sin of anachronism.

When bound by *chronos*, anachrony is illogical, indecent and fatal, be it a flashback (*analepsis*) or a flash-forward (*prolepsis*). One way to think of this is in terms of the status of time travel as a devalued currency, be it in cash or immunity. Whichever direction you go, your purchasing power, your level of immunity, is out of sync.

In the historian's pursuit of truth the prohibition of "anachronism" is that temporal procedure that simultaneously makes the practice cohere as history and, for Rancière, limits the possibility of a philosophy (*episteme*) or science of history. "It [anachronism] is the symbol-concept (*le concept-emblème*) by which history affirms its specificity and its scientificity". Yet, "The concept of 'anachronism' is anti-historical because it obscures the very conditions of all historicity".

A key condition obscured by anachronism is the possibility of the subject "breaching" her time, the epoch to which history has assigned her. This is, precisely, the evental activity mentioned above and it operates in a time that is explicitly not chronological. Rancière does not name this time, but it requires a view of history that is anachronic.

How would history become a science (or more science-like) and not simply a literary pretence? Rancière, not bound by the proscription of anachronism, points toward events that are more than mere occurrences in the sequence of time (*chronos*). True history, for Rancière, requires the assertion of a place in the count of the regime of power by those that have been allocated no part. It is a history unbound by the restrictions of history's sequence of epochs. The structure of reflection on history must, necessarily, attend to evental change.

Rancière explains history as it is practiced by the likes of Febvre as a literary inquiry conducted through the appropriate rhetorical modes (*invention*, *dispositio*, and *elecutio*) of enunciation. The additional two canons of rhetoric (*memoria* and *pronuntiatio*), unmentioned by Rancière, reveal a key feature of his evental approach. Within the canon of delivery (*pronuntiatio*) there is "the crucial moment" (*kiaros*). Equally, this crucial moment draws upon the canon of memory (*memoria*). *Kiaros*, as opposed





to *chronos*, is visible in the evental declarations of Gillard, Jacotot and Blanqui, and, I believe, is a useful way to articulate this evental breaching of *chronos* by the subject.

In summary, and despite the absence of an account of *kiaros*, evental thinking pushes Rancière from history to historicity. With respect to the latter, other accounts of historical time are available, such as the eternity of the Christian *Æon*. For Rancière, eternity is, however, a failed attempt to redeem time, because it maintains the prohibition on anachronism. To the Epochists, who would have all time ordered, Rancière proposes a historicity beyond the epoch. This would be a historicity filled with evental declarations. This historicity, Rancière seems not to recognise, need not only await us in the future. It is already ancient. Perhaps it is as old as historical inquiry itself. In the *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) was explicitly concerned with this notion of historicity. Like Febvre, Ibn Khaldun warned against anachronism. Here, too, history is understood in terms of social organization. Ibn Khaldun’s theory of “group feeling” (*asabiyyah* or *asabiya*), whereby history is understood in terms of social cohesion is analogous to the historical epoch. Over chronological time this will be lost *inevitably* and, potentially, dialectically by royal authority (*mulk*). Nonetheless, for Ibn Khaldun, like Rancière, history is more than a series of events. Admittedly, like Christian thinkers such as Saint Augustine, Ibn Khaldun sees a divine purpose to history. Yet this eternity is not subject to an equalling act of redemption, as witnessed in the case of the Christian *Æon*. Instead “perception by the soul does not take place in time and requires no consecutive order, but takes place all at once and within a single time element” (Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, p. 106). This time element is “atomic” (*zaman fard*). Without depending upon a notion of divine time, Ibn Khaldun’s insistence on the indivisible moments of atomic time can accommodate what Rancière describes as a “multiplicity of temporal lines”.

In conclusion, historiography may not be the dominant way of viewing the past but *Geschichteswissenschaft*, the historical science that Rancière seeks, is far from a novel pursuit in the tradition of philosophy. Rancière’s positive contribution to this *episteme* is undoubtedly his evental approach.

