

Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact"

- White applies theories of fiction to historical writing (ie historiography).
- His essay raises questions about the disciplinary boundaries between HISTORY and LITERATURE (Fact vs. Fiction).
- He coins the term "meta-history" (histories/stories about history)
- This theory attempts to blur the disciplinary distinctions between Historiography and Literature (Fiction).
- He argues strongly that historians employ the "historical imagination" when depicting the past. In other words the historian relies on the narrative strategies of a literary writer.
- His idea is that HISTORY is narrative prose shaped by literary conventions and the historian's imagination.

- Perhaps historical narrative even employs types of "plots" or "emplotments" (tragic, comic, romantic, satiric).
- Hayden White returns to age-old considerations; like Aristotle who in the *POETICS* questioned the fundamental differences between "history" and 'poetry': "Poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular."
- Notion of a truly scientific (positivist) historical representation has its origins in the mid-19th century (Ranke: *Wie es eigentlich gewesen* = how it actually was); postwar theory questions the objectivity of the historiography.

Questions raised:

- Can events "value neutral" ? does the historian "emplot" historical events and to give them meaning?

- What are the possible modes of historical REPRESENTATION?
- Where lies the balance between factual reconstruction and imagination recreation?

We often question the "realism" of literature; Hayden White inverts this old question and questions the "fiction" in history! Can we make use of this idea in our study of literary texts and histories dealing with the WWII-period in the Nordic/Baltic region?