

The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences

LANGUAGE AND ARGUMENT

IN SCHOLARSHIP AND

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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13

THE RHETORIC OF HISTORY

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The rhetoric of history is concerned with the tropes, arguments, and other devices of language used to write history and to persuade audiences. Fustel de Coulanges once interrupted applause for a lecture: "Do not applaud me. It is the voice of history that speaks through me."¹ Cunning fox, he knew well that the applause would redouble. Denying as Descartes did the human and rhetorical character of one's performance is commonly an effective rhetoric. The rhetoric of history deserves more than this.

A small but suggestive literature on the rhetoric of history exists now, including works by J. H. Hexter, Paul Veyne, Hayden White, Richard Vann, Lionel Gossman, Stephen Bann, and Hans Kellner.² It is a promising beginning, though some of it identifies rhetoric too closely with the pleasing and seductive arts of fiction—with tropes (often called "literary" devices), with narrative, with the multiple meanings of poetry. The rhetoric to which we here appeal includes these but more: it is the full art of persuasion. It is the "rhetoric" of olden times, of Aristotle and Quintilian. It is an art of doing things with words that many since the seventeenth century have held in low esteem, though using it daily.³ A work of history, we argue, does not derive chiefly from solitary illumination in the archives. It is a writing, an attempt at persuasion. Histories can be read as orations.

There is much to be learned from such a reading. Social scientists and philosophers might learn how ineradicable is the context of persuasion—so different from the "context of justification" in which they claim to work. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan note that "as long as there has been a social science, the expectation has been that it would turn from its humanistic infancy to the maturity of hard science, thereby leaving behind its dependence on value, judgment, and individual insight."⁴ History has been insulated from such expectations,

perhaps because of its rhetorical ancestry in the Renaissance. It has not set aside its interpretive and public dimension. The social sciences were born of a Cartesian philosophy that proclaimed its hostility to rhetoric: Descartes, Locke, and Kant saw rhetoric as a deceiver. Such philosophy gives allegiance rather to Method, seen as rhetoric-free. The social sciences have had recourse to a methodological rigorism, insisting that one Method alone has legitimacy and that Science is no mere argument before the Athenian Assembly.

On the Resistance to Rhetoric of History

The writing of history is rhetorical—that is, argumentative, using at its best all the devices of language and fact and logic to sustain an argument. “Rhetoric” is not confined to falsehoods. Trying to write history unrhethorically is like trying to tell a joke unverbally. “The rhetoric of history,” it should be noted, has the same maddening ambiguity as “history” itself, being either the events of Bull Run or the account of the events; it can be either the metaphor of a river of retreating Union troops or an account of the use of metaphors in Allan Nevins’s account of the retreat—or it can be the rhetoric of the event itself, if the roar of retreating troops is argument.⁵

Historians will resist the notion that their writing is “rhetorical.” Few want to be caught in company with so nasty a word. Since the decline of classical civilization, rhetoric has acquired a bad name, worsened by abuses in the age of Goebbels and J. Walter Thompson. In the popular sense rhetoric comes from the mouths of bad politicians (“heated rhetoric”) or from our enemies (“mere rhetoric”). Yet, to repeat (for it bears repetition), the word has an older, wider, and more useful definition, embodied in the present volume, namely, the art and science of argument.

Some historians do not think of themselves as arguing anything or persuading anybody. History, they believe, is merely “written up,” as scientists like to say about their lab reports. The issues are settled in the archives and are at the writing desk merely reported. Only philosophers and other questionable folk are constrained to persuade. Historians “study,” then tell it like it is—history being so much more *solid* than philosophy will ever be.

The metaphor of going to the solid facts and looking at them is powerful in our culture, embodied, for example, in the objectivist rhetoric of the scientific paper since Newton.⁶ In historiography it takes the form of what might be called “archivism.” By this we mean the tendency of the historian to think that the most important relation is not

with the readers, the times, or the questions but with the archives—with what the historian misleadingly calls “the sources” of history.

The sources of a historian’s work are to be found almost every place except the archives. Problems in the present impel the writing of history. The problems that arise in the conversation of historians owe their life to the wider world. Does “entrepreneurial decline” account for England’s falling economically behind Germany and the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?⁷ What effect did Wesleyanism have on the politics of the British working class?⁸ Was there really a “Jacksonian democracy” in early nineteenth-century America?⁹ What is the relationship between Protestant sectarianism and wealth accumulation?¹⁰ Though scholastic-sounding to non-historians, these are not questions only of the schools. And still more obviously public are the immense literatures generated by World Wars I and II. Recently, the women’s movement has generated an entire new field.¹¹

Yet archivism maintains its grip. The mythology of the profession supports it. The legend says that Leopold von Ranke’s achievement was the examination of hitherto unexamined archives, on the basis of which he wrote history *wie es eigentlich gewesen*.¹² It is forgotten that Ranke’s main documentary “source,” the reports (*relazioni*) that Venetian ambassadors wrote home, were connected accounts—not, as one might assume, disconnected collections of “objective facts” known with certitude.¹³ The *relazioni* were “always already” rhetorical. Had this not been the case Ranke could not have made use of them. In the shadow of positivism and scientism, though, historiography came to be seen as a matter of gathering discrete, disconnected facts, and then in a separate operation inducing to generalizations.¹⁴

In the way of myths the Rankean one is based on experiences that historians frequently have. There is a romance in the quest through British Museum Add. MSS or the Archives Nationales *manuscrits français*. Historians do experience a spiritual movement from archival dust to the glinty fact. The apprentice is particularly susceptible to the romance, which is easier to teach than the muddy complexities of writing and talking to other historians. The archive missed is the commonest explanation of the book unfinished, as though the main work of the historian were squirrelish nut-gathering.

On Rhetoric in History

It is notable that historians have written rhetorically with little accounting for their rhetoric. In 1968 J. H. Hexter observed:

Rhetoric is ordinarily deemed icing on the cake of history, but our investigation indicates that it is mixed right into the batter. It affects not merely the outward appearance of history, its delightfulness and seamliness, but its inward character, its essential function—its capacity to convey knowledge of the past as it actually was.¹⁵

Since then historians have not much heeded Hexter's call that they "subject historiography . . . to an investigation far broader and far more intense" than they have done in the past. This is not to say that considerations of the rhetoric of history do not exist; for, as we have noted, they do. It is to say that the bulk of attention to historiography has focused on different issues.

There is one full-scale analysis of historical rhetoric, Hayden White's widely noticed *Metahistory* (1973). White does not mention Hexter's earlier call for a rhetoric of history, which oversight suggests that a general conversation had not yet developed. Dealing with a different aspect of rhetoric than does Hexter, White seeks to provide an analysis of "the deep structure of the historical imagination."¹⁶ He tries to trace the ways that historians constitute historical facts back to their "deep" styles of writing history. As John Nelson and others have pointed out, White does not make good on this promise.¹⁷ Nonetheless, *Metahistory* remains an important work, for it focuses attention on the tropal, stylistic aspects of historiography, seeing how these interact with the arguments and politics of writing history. It teaches sensitivity to the fact that *what* is said, in historical "sources" or in historians' accounts, can be fully grasped only if we attend to *how* it is said.

White's contribution is mainly to the *study* of historical rhetoric. In Paul Veyne's *Writing History* (1971; English translation 1984), the practical dimension of rhetoric is prominent, as suggested by the French title of the work, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*.¹⁸ Veyne is alert to the difficulties that historians confront in the course of their work and shrewd in his account of how those difficulties are actually overcome. Perhaps because he is a classical historian and thus works in a field notorious for the fragmentary character of its documentation, he is acutely conscious of the extent to which history deals in uncertainties. Where Fustel de Coulanges was a historical Cartesian, Veyne is an anti-Cartesian. His approach is not to claim certainty but to admit uncertainty: thus he suggests that instead of titling a chapter "The Rural History of Rome," we might better title it "What We Know of the Rural History of Rome."¹⁹ This (and other things) suggest a sympathetic relation to rhetoric, for the rhetorical tradition has always traded in uncertainty. Yet, remark-

ably, Veyne does not mention the rhetorical tradition: perhaps he thought it too obvious to mention. Nor does he mention Hexter's earlier essay. Until recently, Veyne's book was itself unmentioned in the English-reading world. The *disjecta membra* of historical rhetoric lay strewn about, the body unassembled.

A rhetorical criticism could be of use to history, just as the best literary criticism enriches and improves literature. Criticism is accounting, a giving of accounts. The writing could use such criticism, helpfully modest. The intervention of philosophers, usually hostile to the very notion of rhetoric, has mostly been unhelpful criticism. The logical empiricists (Hempel, for instance) narrowed what historians do in order to make it analyzable by their favored methods.²⁰ The work of some more recent philosophers has been broader, more willing to understand that history is not some imagined social physics. One notes for instance Danto's examination of *Narration and Knowledge* and Ankersmit's *Narrative Logic*.²¹ But even these works have paid little notice to rhetoric.

An example of what can go wrong in the absence of the rhetorical tradition is the compilation of *Historians' Fallacies* (1970) by the historian David Hackett Fischer. This learned book, filled with pregnant examples, takes as "fallacious" many supporting arguments in works of history. A piece of storytelling or an apt metaphor or an argument from probabilities does not match a proper syllogism and is tagged "fallacious." The tagging satisfies a philosophical urge, but it does not generate a helpful account of human reasonings, even by recent philosophical standards.²² Irving Copi, in the fifth edition of his elementary text on formal logic, praises Fischer's zeal in rooting out no less than 112 fallacious heresies in the arguments historians actually use.²³ It does not occur to him that he and Fischer repeatedly commit the "fallacies" they attack—a reflexive criticism rhetoricians would not miss. The very use of the word is a *fallax ad indignationem*, that is, name-calling; and it is a *petitio principii*, for it assumes the conclusion that arguments identified as "fallacies" are to be set aside.

On Style as Voice

Twenty years ago Hayden White characterized history as "perhaps the conservative discipline par excellence," suggesting that it combined "late-nineteenth-century social science" (Freud, Weber, et al.) with "mid-nineteenth-century art" (Scott, Thackeray, et al.).²⁴ At about the same time in literary criticism, Scholes and Kellogg were deploring the tendency of critics to apply "the standards of nine-

teenth-century realism" to all fiction of whatever period.²⁵ Literary criticism today no longer exhibits this tendency, but among historians the hold of nineteenth-century literary convention is strong.

In particular, many historians remain unconsciously wedded to the historiographical equivalent of mainstream nineteenth-century narrative fiction.²⁶ Most nineteenth-century novelists strove to create an impression of omniscience, of continuity, of unbroken flow. The "voice" of professional historians has traditionally been a variant of this novelistic voice. Novelists have an easier time claiming omniscience than do historians. Historians have their often fragmentary "sources" to contend with. Yet the style exerts pressure to produce a whole and continuous story, sustaining the impression of omniscience, leaping over evidential voids.

The voice of continuity is not the only conceivable one. In modernist and postmodernist literature from Joyce onward the role of the authoritative narrator is rejected. There are occasions where historians, too, ought to reject it. Much better is Veyne's notion of the "incomplete nature of history": "from one page to the next the historian changes tense without warning, according to the tempo of his sources; . . . every history book is in this sense a fabric of incoherences, and it cannot be anything else."²⁷

The old ways are not obsolete, but would be more persuasive if they were self-conscious. Consider, for example, the vista of Samuel Eliot Morison's two-volume *European Discovery of America* (1971, 1974).²⁸ Morison's work is written in the expansive style of late nineteenth-century American historiography; he tells us that his mode of presentation is based on Justin Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America* (1884-89). The narrative is ample and personal; it introduces his own travels and takes account of the uncertainties in the evidence. Its style is studied as to author, subject, and audience.

For some historiographic problems a new style might be appropriate. Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (1976; English translation 1980) is one of the most interesting and widely discussed works of history of the last decade.²⁹ Ginzburg examines the encounter between Menocchio—the miller of his title—and the Inquisition, seeking to reconstruct his world view. Ginzburg had at his disposal inquisitorial records (fashionable now after long neglect), which give a detailed account of Menocchio's encounter with the authorities. But beyond the actual encounter the documentary evidence is lacking, and the world of the sixteenth century is far from our own. How is he to tell Menocchio's story?

The book is written not in long, flowing, omnisciently narrated chapters rising smoothly to a climax, as in Ranke, Parkman, and other masters of nineteenth-century historiography, but in short, numbered sections, which in the table of contents are assigned descriptive titles. The format encourages the back-and-forth movement of Ginzburg's intellect. It accords with the fragmentary nature of much of his evidence. By distancing himself from the telling of a continuous story, he also distances himself from the temptation to fill in gaps more enthusiastically than his evidence allows. At the same time he becomes free to speculate where speculation is called for, knowing that the speculation can be marked off. He is able to shuttle between Menocchio's testimony and other evidence that illuminates its meaning. He can more easily bring into play the different voices in the story—Menocchio, his friends and neighbors, the inquisitors. Perhaps most important, the format makes it easier for him to modulate his own voice. Sometimes it is the earnest historical researcher who speaks and sometimes the committed intellectual; sometimes the tone of irony is uppermost, sometimes that of compassion. Ginzburg refuses to filter his message through the ready-made model of style that most historians take as given. His is the analytical prose of Marx and his successors, given suppleness and changeability by resources derived from newer traditions, from writers like Queneau and Calvino.

There are contrary approaches to style. At least since G. M. Trevelyan's "Clio: A Muse" (1903), there have been laments that the growing scientization of history robs it of a wide public and ignores its literary dimension. Such appeals to the importance of "arrangement, composition, and style" sharply distinguish the presentation of history from research and reflection. Trevelyan holds that history has three "functions" or operations: the scientific, the imaginative, and the literary. We have heard this before. Historians first accumulate facts and sift evidence. Then they make guesses and generalizations. Only at the close do they exercise "the literary function, the exposition of the results of science and imagination in a form that will attract and educate our fellow-countrymen."³⁰

Those who go beyond Trevelyan's premise that style is a matter of presentation alone sometimes step into other traps. Peter Gay, in *Style in History* (1974), does not think that style is mere icing on the cake of historiography.³¹ But he confines his treatment of "style in history" to four historians of previous centuries—Gibbon, Ranke, Macaulay, and Burckhardt. The implication, clearly unintended, is that "style in history" is a category applicable to an earlier stage in the evolution of his-

oriography but not to serious professional historiography today. Interest in such a subject is made to seem retrograde.

Another trap is to identify the rhetoric of history with evocative, ambiguous, "literary" expression: the multiple meanings of poetry, as we have said. J. H. Hexter comes close to doing this in praising historians for using imprecise language having "a rich aura of connotation," sacrificing "exactness" for "evocative force."³² He distinguishes, too, between study of "the structure of historiography" (which he identifies as the particular concern of rhetoric) and study of "the nature of data, evidence, and inference in works of history" (which he says has so far been the "central preoccupation" of historians).³³ Separation of rhetoric from data, evidence, and inference is a mistake, for persuasion in history cannot take place without these. Hexter here seems under the influence of a literary view of rhetoric and an idealized view of logic and science.

Historians are not in the business of producing literary artifacts that stand isolated from the world. They do produce literary artifacts, but in doing so they also produce arguments intended to persuade particular audiences of the truth of particular statements. A rhetorical criticism of history would by-pass the audience-free excesses of the New Criticism and literary studies. A history that is more than solipsistic has occasion to speak, and in speaking is rhetorical. On emerging from the archive the historian cannot say everything. Rhetoric supplies the standards of inclusion and exclusion. Is this fact or connection *telling*? Does it *persuade*? Does the audience *want* it?

On Argument

One way of addressing the speech of historians is by the detailed disassembly of tropes. We have in mind here not the deep tropes of consciousness and prefiguration that White seeks to expose but surface tropes of language and argument, intended to seduce and persuade. Consider Robert W. Fogel's "cliometric" classic, *Railroads and American Economic Growth in the Nineteenth Century* (1964).³⁴ Self-consciously scientific, *Railroads* is also rhetorical even in its most quantitative and trivial details. In setting his argument Fogel uses nearly twenty classically recognized figures of speech in barely two pages.³⁵ The classical names of the figures show the rhetoric. One sees a house—really sees it—only when equipped with the carpenter's vocabulary of soffit and quoin and gable.

The whole of Fogel's argument is the piling up of arguments on one point (*diallage*), the point being that what matters to the question of

whether railroads had a significant impact on American economic growth is how good the possible substitutes were—the rivers and canals and carts that would have carried corn and passengers had the railroad not been invented.

Within the *diallage* he repeatedly concedes a smaller point to achieve a larger (*paramologia*): "If the axiom of [the railroads'] indispensability merely asserted [X] . . . there would be no reason to question it." "Although the evidence demonstrating that the eruption of a boom psychology . . . is considerable . . ." "Even the demonstration that railroads produced effects that were both unique and important . . ." The concession is part of his most characteristic rhetorical figure, by which he says, in effect, "Even if I concede to my opponents such-and-such a point, my argument wins." The figure is lawyerly—and mathematical and Socratic: it is the *elenchos* that so annoyed Socratic Athens. It is far removed from the apparently unargumentative tone of narrative.

Repeatedly, he draws attention to what he claims is the important aspect of a case. Thus he emphasizes the importance of substitutes for railroads by the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive sentences (*anaphora*): "The crucial aspect. . . . The crucial aspect. . . ." These two expressions of the same idea are repeated for effect: *commoratio*. Each of the two sentences contains a strongly parallel structure, balancing the phrases in the first sentence (*isocolon*), leaving out phrases in the second (*ellipsis*, as this sentence left out the second occurrence of "sentence").

The beginning of the paragraph that follows repeats the point again; the second sentence repeats still again: four repetitions of the point in different words (*tautologia*), bordering on *pleonasm*. It is the main point of the book, and one difficult for much of Fogel's implied audience to grasp. If any point warranted emphasis, this one—a fortiori—did. The subsequent paragraphs draw attention to the central point by attacking its alternatives—that is to say, by attacking various alternative definitions of what it might mean for railroads to have been "indispensable": the figure is *apophrisis*, the orderly rejection of all the alternatives except one.

Repeatedly in these two pages Fogel disparages opposing arguments (*diasyrmus*), a technique so obviously forensic that most historians use it gingerly. Repeatedly he notes the absence of decisive evidence. He makes an appeal to the ideally modernist historian-scientist, who does not take an umbrella without a scientifically certified prediction of light rain. The "evidence" so often mentioned is quantitative. The figure (*quantitas*) is therefore a modern one, little used in the nonquantitative civilization that thought most carefully about the means of persuasion.

A derivative of the modern enthusiasm for properly quantitative evidence is the following figure: "no evidence has been supplied. . . . And it is doubtful such evidence can be supplied" (note the parallel construction). This is one of the common *topoi* of modern intellectual life, carrying conviction nowadays among all who pretend to intellectuality.

The most important of Fogel's rich array of common topics with his argument from lower or upper bounds. The book consists of an attempt to find the least upper bound on the benefit from railroads. If the upper bound is small, then a fortiori the true effect is small. He draws on the argument here and throughout the book, biasing the case against himself.

Fogel's use of this particular figure led many graduate students to take up careers of under- and overestimating things. In such matters the usual rhetoric of history (and of economics, though less prominently displayed) demands "accuracy." An estimate of the population of fifth-century Athens must be "accurate"; a description of the American economy as competitive is to be judged for "accuracy." Any physicist would attest that the word is meaningless without bounds on the error, and any literary critic would attest that the accuracy necessary to an argument depends on the conversational context. There is no absolute sense of "accuracy."

Heavy use of the common topics will inspire a charge of "mere rhetoric," such as Fogel faced for his trouble. But he also uses topics special to a particular field. The example at the end of page 11 is known among engineers and scientists as "simulation" (a Fogelian favorite, occurring repeatedly throughout the book), one of the special topics in economics and other quantitative subjects. These carry conviction only among experts. The use of special topics characteristically inspires commendations for eschewing mere rhetoric, the rhetoric disappearing from view behind the mask of the economic or historical Scientist. But Science is not an alternative to rhetoric: science, whether economic or historical, must be rhetorical to achieve its end.

On Audience

Since rhetoric aims at persuasion, it directs attention to audience, as logic does not. Fogel would seem to require two implied readers, both close to contradictions in terms: the Historically Interested Economist and the Economically Sophisticated Historian. Fields under dispute between two methods, as American economic history was during the 1960s, cannot have one reader. Yet much writing,

Fogel's included, presupposes one alone, able to appreciate every nuanced remark about fixed capital-output ratios or the wisdom of the Joint Traffic Association, *Proceedings of the Board of Managers*, 1896. At the time Fogel wrote there were few actual readers who could take on the role of his ideal implied reader.

Fogel created an implied reader more definite than merely a generalized historical economist. His reader is an earnest fellow, much impressed by Science, in love with figures and the bottom line, a little stubborn in his convictions but open to argument and patient with its details. Such an implied reader is less attractive than the one more commonly addressed in successful academic prose. A book written about the same time on about the same subject by another economist and historian, Albert Fishlow, had less impact.³⁶ It created an implied reader who was more distant and disengaged, one sensitive to ironies, amused by verbal rotundities, impatient with close economic argument but very patient indeed with narrative indirection—something like the implied reader of the best history.

The relation between argument and implied audience can be illustrated again by comparing William L. Shirer's immensely popular *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (1960) with Karl Dietrich Bracher's *The German Dictatorship* (1969; English translation 1970).³⁷ The two works deal with the "same" topic—namely, the history of the Third Reich—but in their styles and narrative strategies differ radically. Shirer's account is characterized by its simplicity and immediacy. He reduces the rise and fall of Nazi Germany to the story of Hitler and a few of his henchmen. Shirer was on the scene during much of the Third Reich and he does not hesitate to introduce himself into the book, referring to his own thoughts and experiences. The word "narrate" is especially appropriate (it is never out of place in history) considering the single plot line and audible voice of the storyteller that mark the book.

Bracher's *German Dictatorship* is different. Bracher seeks to understand "the multiplicity of conditions and causes, the multicausal nature of historico-political processes."³⁸ At once the reader knows that the voice is academic. Bracher rejects single-tracked formulas; he rejects narrative itself, so far as it is distinguished by "the presence of a story and a story-teller."³⁹ The straight-line narrative rhetoric of Shirer, in which event A leads to event B to event C and so on, gives way to an analytical rhetoric, in which the historian deliberates.

Professional historians commonly reject Shirer's work out of hand, as bad history. Bracher is subtle, distanced, self-critical; Shirer is attuned to immediate answers and is disinclined to search further. Shirer notes in his foreword: "I have tried to be severely objective, letting the facts speak for

themselves and noting the source for each."⁴⁰ But facts never speak for themselves; it is always historians who speak for them. Moreover, *The Rise and Fall* depends for much of its force on an appeal to its readers' preconceptions about the Third Reich. It allowed its readers to retain those preconceptions, building on wartime stereotypes. Thus in a certain sense readers of *The Rise and Fall* learned nothing from it. Yet it was not simply because it appealed to preconceptions that the book became a worldwide bestseller. For all his historiographic limitations, Shirer is a superb storyteller. To what extent is it possible to write history as accessibly as Shirer does while retaining the analytical sophistication found in Bracher? The question is forced by a rhetoric of history.

The quality of works of history is dependent on the quality of the audiences available to them. A Shirer-type audience is willing to listen to a long story but is resistant to ideas that it finds unfamiliar; a Bracher-type audience is willing to live with complexity (indeed, demands it, even when it is not there) and can learn something from it. The quality of the audiences is to a large degree dependent on what the historian is willing to make of them. To assume a pedestrian audience is to get one. Some assumed audiences are great of soul; some are not, regardless of the author's quality. Shakespeare wrote for groundlings too.

The matter of audience is often missed. Geoffrey Elton, to take a relevant example, gives an account of historical scholarship in which audience is an afterthought. The historian is alone with History, seeing her plain. He immerses himself in "the sources"—ideally in *all* the sources. From his knowledge of this evidence he comes to know the "right" questions to ask of it. The questions do not come from the historian's present, for this would go against "the first principle of historical understanding, namely that the past must be studied in its own right, for its own sake, and on its own terms." No need to argue—just look, or study; and when the studying is done, the historian "turns to write up his findings."⁴¹

On Professional and Amateur Rhetorics of History

One of the most striking developments in the historiography of the last twenty or thirty years—a development that an exclusively literary conception of rhetoric might overlook—has been the marked rise in the rigor of the evidential demands that historians make upon their colleagues. In other words, standards have arisen: Fogel,

and "cliometric" history in general, is one manifestation among many. Confident generalizations that in 1960 might have passed muster are likely now to be greeted with suspicion. Professional historians now recognize, more clearly than they once did, that the judgments they make are often quantitative and are properly subject to quantitative test. As a result, many shibboleths have been demolished.⁴² W. O. Aydelotte speaks for a large community when he points out the uncertainties of historical inference and suggests that historians "may have more to gain not by extending our generalizations but by restricting them, by pursuing limited (and quantitative) generalizations on which we have some prospect of reaching tenable ground."⁴³

With the rise in evidential standards a growing split has developed between professional historians and the wider public. A work of history that satisfies the wider public is unlikely to satisfy a professional audience; and only a few works that satisfy a professional audience manage to have a wider appeal. In other words, divergent historiographic audiences now exist. Journalistic historians retain an epistemological naiveté and a predilection for focusing on heroes and villains; they also retain a wide audience. Professional historians question their evidence and increasingly refuse to let the prominent men of an age stand for the age as a whole; their audience is small.

Still, some of the most interesting presentday historians try to combine audiences, articulating a rhetoric capable of working with both. The trick is to appeal to the nonprofessional reader while still living up to the epistemological and subject-matter expectations of professional historians. The trick is not easily done. It requires compromise; it also demands something of audiences. But it is worth the attempt.

The Cheese and the Worms again provides an example. The book, Ginzburg tells us, "is intended to be a story as well as a piece of historical writing. . . . it is addressed to the general reader as well as to the specialist. . . . I hope that both will recognize in this episode an unnoticed but extraordinary fragment of a reality, half obliterated, which implicitly poses a series of questions for our own culture and for us."⁴⁴ Notice Ginzburg's various cross-cuttings: history, but also story; addressed to specialists, but also to general readers; presenting a fragment, but the fragment of a (half-obliterated) totality.

Or consider Natalie Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre*, the story of an impostor in sixteenth-century France. (Early modern European historiography seems rich in innovative work—in part, one suspects, because of the imaginative demands of bad evidence.) Here is the opening of the work:

"Femme bonne qui a mauvais mary, a bien souvent le coeur marry" (A good wife with a bad husband often has a sorry heart). "Amour peut moult, argent peut tout" (love may do much, but money more). These are some of the sayings by which peasants characterized marriage in sixteenth-century France. Historians have been learning more and more about rural families from marriage contracts and testaments, from parish records of births and deaths, and from accounts of courtship rituals and charivaris. But we still know rather little about peasants' hopes and feelings; the ways in which they experienced the relation between husband and wife, parent and child; the ways in which they experienced the constraints and possibilities in their lives. We often think of peasants as not having had much in the way of choices, but is this in fact true? Did individual villagers ever try to fashion their lives in unusual and unexpected ways?

But how do historians discover such things about anyone in the past? We look at letters and diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, family histories.⁴⁵

Davis's rhetoric is intriguing in its complexity, arising from her attempt to speak across disciplinary divisions. She seeks to address as broad an audience as she can manage, including people who know nothing about history or about how historians work.

Note the directness of Davis's beginning, with proverbs quoted first and then identified. How better to capture the attention of an audience than by using so elemental a literary form? (By providing translations she signals the kind of audience she hopes to have.) Having spoken with the voice of popular wisdom she shifts direction, and tells the audience about how historians operate ("Historians have been learning . . ."). In part this is a statement of required information, for the audience is quite ignorant of what historians do in general and of what they have been learning recently. But it is also a claim to authority: historians have been learning more and more, and I am one of these savants. Yet to claim that everything important is already known is to exclude the possibility that the work now being presented has anything original to say. Thus Davis shifts to something that historians are not well informed about—namely, the inner life of peasants, culminating in what is obviously (perhaps too obviously) a "rhetorical" question: Did peasants have choices? Finally, in an attempt to educate her audience, she turns to a discussion of historical "sources" in general and her own in particular.

The seams in the text are evident, its intentions clearly telegraphed. Such a beginning is not subtle. Ideally, perhaps, one would want a text that works simultaneously on different levels, speaking one way to an unsophisticated and another way to a sophisticated audience. Yet for all that, it is a beginning (and a book) that works well. It speaks a common, not a technical, language. It evokes problems of universal dimension. It informs its readers of two things: of the historian's effort to understand the past, and of the past in question. Its visible architecture is a sign of the difficulty of speaking of such a distant past to an audience initially both ignorant and indifferent. Yet if the writing of history is to be an enterprise worth pursuing the effort to assemble an audience must be made.

Conclusion

How then is history to create worthy audiences? The question is not much addressed. This is unsurprising, for professional historiography is a creation of the historical century par excellence, the nineteenth. The historian of 1870 already had his audience. But when historicism lost its hold early in this century so too did an important argument for the historical project in general.⁴⁶ Historians have seen their difficulties as lying in epistemology narrowly construed and have neglected problems of style, genre, figure, and audience. Especially because the increasing sophistication of the discipline creates barriers for nonhistorians, these problems are more compelling than before. What point would there be in a humanistic or social scientific discipline unable to speak beyond its own boundaries? Such a discipline would lose contact with the important problems that can alone justify it.

The need is not to abandon the epistemological standards. These too are part of the discipline and of its conversation. They mark out a successful attempt to make history, like science, cumulative. Yet at the same time they create an obstacle. History that tries to do without rhetoric loses its contact with the wider conversation of humankind. Rhetoric is not exhausted by imitation of certain nineteenth-century models. Other models, early and late, are ready for use.

NOTES

1. Quoted in G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Longmans, Green, 1913), p. 212.

2. J. H. Hexter, "The Rhetoric of History," in Hexter, *Doing History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 15-76, first published as "Historiography: The Rhetoric of History," in David L. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Crowell, Collier and Macmillan, 1968), 6:368-94; Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology*, trans. Mina Moore-Rinvolucii (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Richard Vann, "The Rhetoric of Social History," *Journal of Social History* 10 (1975): 221-36; Lionel Gossman, "The Go-Between: Jules Michelet, 1798-1874," *Modern Language Notes* 89 (1974): 503-41; Gossman, "Augustin Thierry and Liberal Historiography," *History and Theory, Beiheft* 15 (1976): 3-83; Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clío: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Hans Kellner, "Disorderly Conduct: Braudel's Mediterranean Satire," *History and Theory* 18 (1979): 197-222. Nancy S. Struever provides a compendious review of much recent work relevant to the rhetoric of history in her "Historical Discourse," in Teun A. van Dijk, ed., *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, vol. 1: *Disciplines of Discourse* (London: Academic Press, 1985), pp. 249-71.
3. On the marginality of rhetoric, see Robert Hariman, "Status, Marginality, and Rhetorical Theory," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 (1986): 38-54; on the most recent of its revivals, see John S. Nelson and Allan Megill, "The Rhetoric of Inquiry: Projects and Prospects," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 (1986): 20-37.
4. Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, "The Interpretive Turn: Emergence of an Approach," in Rabinow and Sullivan, eds., *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), p. 1.
5. Allan Nevins, *The War for the Union*, vol. 1: *The Improvised War, 1861-1862* (New York: Scribner's 1959), p. 219.
6. See Charles Bazerman's essay in this volume, and his *Shaping Written Knowledge: Essays in the Growth, Form, Function and Implications of the Scientific Article* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).
7. See Donald N. McCloskey, ed., *Essays on a Mature Economy: Britain After 1840* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).
8. Edward P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Knopf, 1963).
9. Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).
10. The starting point for historians' discussion is Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, with a foreword by R. H. Tawney (New York: Scribner, 1930 [orig. 1904-5]). For one attempt to test the "Weber thesis," see W. D. Rubinstein, *Men of Property: The Very Wealthy in Britain Since the Industrial Revolution* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1981), pp. 145-75.

11. See issue on "Women's History Today," *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 593-732.
12. Bann, *The Clothing of Clío*, pp. 1-14, is one of several writers who have pointed out that Ranke's role is more complicated than the legend suggests.
13. As Leonard Krieger notes in *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 117.
14. On the positivist distortion of Ranke, which was particularly evident in America, see Georg G. Iggers, "The Image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought," *History and Theory* 2 (1962): 17-40. The summum of late nineteenth-century positivist historical methodology is Charles Langlois and Charles Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, trans. G. G. Berry (New York: Henry Holt, 1904 [orig. 1898]).
15. Hexter, "The Rhetoric of History," p. 68.
16. White, *Metahistory*, p. ix.
17. John S. Nelson, review of *Metahistory*, *History and Theory* 14 (1975): 75.
18. It is unfortunate that a book as important as Veyne's has been so badly translated into English. Readers able to do so may wish to consult the original, *Comment on écrit l'histoire: Essai d'épistémologie* (Paris: Seuil, 1971).
19. Veyne, *Writing History*, p. 16.
20. Carl G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History" (1942), reprinted in Patrick Gardiner, ed., *Theories of History* (New York: Free Press, 1959), pp. 344-56.
21. Arthur C. Danto, *Narration and Knowledge* (including the integral text of *Analytical Philosophy of History*) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); F. R. Ankersmit, *Narrative Logic: A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1983).
22. David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970). To be sure, Fischer is frequently acute in his observations on the limitations of particular historical arguments. The fault lies in their classification as "fallacies," defined by an idealized logic unrelated to field. The first work that Fischer cites in *Historians' Fallacies* is Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958). Fischer cites Toulmin favorably but does not understand Toulmin's argument. See also Douglas N. Walton, *Arguer's Position: A Pragmatic Study of Ad Hominem Attack, Criticism, Refutation, and Fallacy* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1985).
23. Irving Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 5th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1978), p. 87.
24. Hayden White, "The Burden of History," *History and Theory* 5 (1966): 112, 127, reprinted in White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 28, 43.
25. Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 5-6.
26. As Dominick LaCapra points out in "History and the Novel," in LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 115-34.

27. Veyne, *Writing History*, p. 16.
28. Samuel Eliot Morison, *The European Discovery of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, 1974).
29. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).
30. George Macaulay Trevelyan, "Clio: A Muse," in *Clio, A Muse, and Other Essays Literary and Pedestrian* (London: Longmans, Green, 1913), pp. 30-31.
31. Peter Gay, *Style in History* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 188-89.
32. Hexter, "The Rhetoric of History," pp. 18-19.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
34. Robert W. Fogel, *Railroads and American Economic Growth in the Nineteenth Century: Essays in Econometric History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964).
35. We here analyze pp. 10-11, the two most important pages in the book.
36. Albert Fishlow, *American Railroads and the Transformation of the Antebellum Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).
37. William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960); Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism*, trans. Jean Steinberg, with an introduction by Peter Gay (New York: Praeger, 1970).
38. Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, p. xii.
39. Scholes and Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, p. 4. To be sure, there is a wider sense of narrative, exemplified in Cicero's assertion that "the narrative is an exposition of events that have occurred or are supposed to have occurred"; see *De Inventione*, I:xix: 27, in Cicero, *De Inventione, De Optimo Genere Oratorum, Topica*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949). On this reading, all history is narrative history.
40. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, p. xii.
41. G. R. Elton, *The Practice of History* (New York: Crowell, 1967), pp. 66, 19, 65, 177. To be fair, despite the wrong-headed epistemology, Elton's book contains much good sense.
42. For some examples, see William O. Aydelotte, *Quantification in History* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1971), pp. 42-44.
43. See Aydelotte, "The Problem of Historical Generalization," in *Quantification in History*, pp. 81-82.
44. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, preface to the English edition, p. xii.
45. Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 1.
46. Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man, and Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), pp. 41-138, 369-370.