different, because (9) this is Elizabeth's 'last dalliance'. The idea (10) of Elizabeth's new part, 'unapproachable virginity' is slightly rephrased in order to keep the flow going. For we now move to the idea (also rephrased for the same reason) that we are back again to a period unfavourable to revels and progresses (11). The final idea (12), badly expressed in two separate disjointed sentences in the original, is that although Elizabeth herself is now an old woman, gaiety could again break out: we have already been talking of luxury (and by implication, gaiety) earlier in the reign so the phrase about how 'the spirit of gaiety awoke' (implying that it now appeared *for the first time*) is confusing; the point, apparently, is that it is bigger and better gaiety than before, gaiety 'in full flood'.

However, that is only the start; the writing of history presents certain important problems of its own, many of which are encountered at every level of historical writing. Because of the intense richness and complexity of historical experience, the problem of selection is a particularly acute one. Information provided for the sake of information is not really information at all: the writer must be aware of its significance and make that significance clear to the reader. The phrase 'it is important to note that . . .' is often a warning that the writer has a piece of information which he feels he'd better set down, but about the importance of which he is not really at all clear. As Kitson Clark has remarked: 'One of the earliest and most painful lessons which a young researcher must master is that much that he has discovered with difficulty, and with some exaltation, will prove in due course to be of no significance and of no imaginable interest, and in the end will have to be left out.'[3]

2. Narrative, Description, Analysis, Explanation, Rhetoric and Structure

Good historical writing should present a balance between narrative and analysis, between a chronological approach and an approach by topic, and, it should be added, a balance between both of these, and, as necessary, passages of pure *description* ('setting the scene', providing routine but essential information, conveying the texture of life in any particular age and environ-

ment). When S. R. Gardiner wrote his massive seventeenth-century *History*, he composed it year-by-year, completing his study of one year before he would even allow himself to turn to the documents he had amassed for the study of the succeeding year. Thucydides and the other ancients never departed from the strictly chronological approach. Diplomatic and political historians may sometimes find the purely chronological method the most satisfactory one. On the whole, however, it can be said that any historical writer, whether at the undergraduate or the highest professional level, who reduced his subject entirely to chronological narrative would incure the risk of being accused of intellectual naïvety – though it is too easily forgotten that the establishment of the sheer chronology of events can in itself be a difficult task. However, generally speaking, straight narrative is the easiest form of historical writing, though often a very inadequate one. Its fault, say Barzun and Graff is

> that it mixes events great and small without due subordination, and that it combines into a parody of life incidents that occur only once with permanent truths about habits and tastes, character and belief.[4]

On the other hand it *may* be possible (contrary to the views of Barzun and Graff) to produce an excellent historical study based entirely on analysis by topic: Namier did this in his studies of the structure of eighteenth-century politics (though, in terms of his original intentions, they *were* incomplete). Undoubtedly there is a danger in the purely analytical approach, for it may easily forfeit the important element of change through time. Furthermore an analytical study spread over too long a period may seriously distort the past as it actually happened if it treats on the same footing material culled throughout the period on topics which may have been undergoing significant change, as, for instance, might happen in a book covering the three hundred years from 1500 to 1800 which allocated one analytical chapter to each of 'the merchants', 'Puritan attitudes', 'the constitution', and 'the price of corn', and treated each one as if fixed in time. In general, therefore, the writer of history will usually strive for the combination of narrative and analysis which best conforms to the requirements of his subject and to the requirements of form.

One method, useful, if not always very elegant, is to alternate chunks of narrative with chunks of analysis: by and large this was

the pattern of the older volumes of the *Oxford History of England*. Another effective technique involves breaking the entire chronological period of study into a number of sub-periods, chosen, not arbitrarily, but on the basis of some logic of historical development perceived by the historian in the course of his inquiry: then, within each sub-period the material is analysed topic by topic, one topic possibly being given primacy in one sub-period, while perhaps a completely new topic is introduced in a different sub-period. Christopher Hill's study of the seventeenth century, *The Century of Revolution* (1961), is a good example of this method at its most straightforward. The separate sub-periods taken are 1603–40, 1640–60, 1660–88 and 1688–1714: within each sub-period he discusses in turn 'Economics', 'Politics and the Constitution' and 'Religious Ideas'. An effective compromise which keeps up the narrative flow throughout the book is that adopted by Asa Briggs in his study of Britain in the period 1780–1867, *The Age of Improvement* (1958), where the material is grouped round a succession of key concepts which form the chapter headings, with a flexible range of sub-sections within chapters allowing for a balance between narration and analysis. An early chapter, for instance, is fixed on 'The Impact of [the French Revolutionary] War'; there are two later ones which in fact cover the same chronological period, the 1830s and 1840s, first from the aspect of guided political change – 'Reform' – then from the aspect of the nature of society at the time – 'Social Cleavage'. Denys Hay's *Europe in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (1966) adopts a tripartite design: the early chapters display and analyse the main social groups; the long middle section carries the narrative forward by outlining the main changes in political life; finally thematic unity, which political narrative always threatens to tear apart, is restored through a survey of the main unifying forces, religious, cultural and commercial.

These, however, are examples of very high level textbooks (incorporating much of the author's own research, certainly, but covering periods of history which have already been thoroughly charted). The problems of organisation and structure (always serious) become particularly intense where the historian has been involved in very detailed research in a new area of investigation. The categories and headings, the balance between topics, analysis, and the necessary sense of change through time, will only emerge

as the research progresses, and only then if the historian reflects long and hard upon the discoveries that have been made. I can still recall (quarter of a century later) how, having completed drafts of the first six of the eight projected chapters of my study of the effects of the First World War on British society (a relatively unexamined topic in the early 1960s) I came to a point of complete collapse in agony and despair because my attempt to distinguish both the main areas of society which were affected by the war, and to distinguish between the different chronological phases of the war (the first eight months or so; 1915/16; 1917/18; and then, of course, the aftermath) simply did not fit together coherently and persuasively (that is how it goes: one must at some stage settle on chapter headings; one must then get on and write the chapters, without at that stage being really sure that one chapter will logically lead on to the next). Then came the revelation: I needed to take much of the material out of Chapters 5 and 6, where increasingly it did not relate to any structure, reorganise it, and put it into a completely new Chapter 4 – so that eventually the book had nine chapters not eight. My next book of any significance, commenced a decade later, endeavoured to develop a non-Marxist approach to class which would pin down class as actually perceived *and* experienced by people in contemporary British, French and American society (since 1930 that is), and would establish the significance of class in, say, political behaviour, and as against such other sources of inequality as race and sex. Here the categories I used were only hammered into final shape after very many papers had been given, and attacked, at very many seminars. The first draft of the book, as I still recall with a shudder, was quite unspeakably awful. In the end the problems resolved themselves by forcing me to consider at every step what exactly I was trying to say and trying to say it clearly and straightforwardly (in place of the half-baked verbiage which concealed, or rather failed to conceal, uncompleted thought processes), making sure that every controversial utterance could be supported (or, alternatively, was simply dropped), and adding a good deal of additional linking material making the stages of my argument fully explicit. I know that colleagues who have written more important books go through the same agonies; I personalise because that is the simplest way for me to make points of universal validity.