
 RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT

Says Richman: "Driving a car to work is over 150 times more dangerous."

But because Congress and the EPA act on the zero-risk principle that *all* carcinogens should be eliminated from the workplace, the government is requiring actions that will force taxpayers to pay large sums to save relatively few lives. For example, this October the EPA will require the nation's 31,000 school districts to draw up asbestos abatement plans. The cleanup cost: perhaps \$3.1 billion over three years.

Large insurance firms and pension funds are refusing to finance asbestos-laden buildings. Removal can cost up to \$1 million a floor, and "rip and skip" cleaners can, by leaving behind dangerous dust, make buildings *less* safe than they were before the "cleanup" began.

Richman believes that laws making building owners liable for "dubious health risks they had no part in creating" ensure one thing only: that the economic damage caused by asbestos will vastly outweigh any health problems it may cause.

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The Birth of the Novel

"'News, and New Things': Contemporaneity and the Early English Novel" by J. Paul Hunter, in *Critical Inquiry* (Spring 1988), Univ. of Chicago Press, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

"We are all tainted with the *Athenian* Itch," English poet Robert Wilde wrote in 1683. "News, and new Things do the whole World bewitch."

This "itch," suggests Hunter, a professor of English at the University of Chicago, turned out to be important. The ephemeral pamphlets produced to satisfy the thirst for novelty among late-17th-century English readers inadvertently resulted in the birth of the modern novel.

England was a land with few newspapers; not until 1702 did the first London daily journal begin publication. Much information was transmitted orally; coffeehouses were an important source of news *and* gossip. But the literate of the population hungered for more; they provided a ready market for publishers of pamphlets.

Although most authors promised true stories (typically, such phrases as "Exact Relation" and "Faithful Account" were part of the title), the pamphlets were a mixture of fact and fiction. Some pamphlets, describing hurricanes, wars, or murders, were mostly true. Others, describing cases of witchcraft, miraculous cures, or demonic possession, were not. Readers devoured both genres with equal gusto.

Around 1700, however, tastes began to change. Fact-based accounts began to lengthen; Daniel Defoe's *Storm* (1704) was 285 pages long. Sketches of contemporary life, the precursors of short stories, started to appear. These sketches typically commented on the relations between men and women; *An Almanack-Husband: or, a Wife a Month* (1708), for example, was a comic examination of polygamy. Other pamphlets pre-

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sented stories as "true" collections of letters, or fragments from diaries.

Early English novelists, notably Defoe (1660?-1731), learned to write by producing scores of journalistic pamphlets. Later writers, such as Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), presented their works of fiction, following the old pamphleteering tradition, as if they were "real." Thus Richardson's novel *Pamela* (1740) is presented as a collection of long-lost letters. Novelists also continued, in various ways, to practice journalism. Defoe and Henry Fielding (1707-1754) edited their own journals; Richardson headed the Stationers' Company, a London guild of newspaper, book, and magazine publishers.

Thucydides

"The First Revisionist Historian" by Donald Kagan, in *Commentary* (May 1988), 165 East 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10022.

"My work is not an essay in a contest meant to win the applause of the moment," Thucydides (c. 460-404 B.C.) wrote in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, "but a possession forever."

Kagan, a professor of history and classics at Yale, argues that Thucydides's account of the struggle between Athens and Sparta for control of Greece was the first—and greatest—revisionist history.

Thucydides "all but obliterated [conflicting] arguments" of the period. For example, the "fact" that the Peloponnesian War was fought continuously from 431 to 404 B.C. seems to be purely Thucydides's invention. Some contemporaries considered the war to be *two* wars, separated by a six-year truce beginning with the Peace of Nicias (421 B.C.). Without elaboration, Thucydides dismisses as "quite wrong" anyone who believed that this "insecure truce" between the two Greek powers was peace.

As for the origins of the war, Thucydides scarcely mentions the Megarian decree (issued by Athens' leader, Pericles, in 432 B.C.), which barred Megara, an ally of Sparta, from trading in the Athens marketplace and all harbors of the Athenian empire. Many Greeks, from Aristophanes in Thucydides's time to Plutarch 500 years later, saw this decree as the cause of the war. Thucydides, however, simply claims that the rise in Athenian power brought "fear to the Spartans," thus leading to conflict.

Why was Thucydides so vague about the war's origins? Kagan notes that Thucydides rarely criticizes Pericles. While Aristotle described Pericles as a demagogue who engendered corruption, and Plato saw him as "the first who . . . made [the people] idle and cowardly," Thucydides's portrait of Pericles is spotless, even though Pericles' war strategy brought on bankruptcy, a rebellion, and a plague that killed a third of the Athenian population. In 430 B.C. Pericles was removed from office by popular consensus. But Thucydides says "that Pericles was right in every respect."

Why? Consider Thucydides's biography. Seven years into the war, he became an Athenian army general. (Pericles had died five years earlier.) But during his term of office, Thucydides lost an important Athenian colony to Sparta. Like Pericles, he was removed from office. Kagan contends that the *History*, written during his 20-year exile, was Thucydides's *apologia pro vita sua*. By upholding Pericles' judgment against that of the masses, Thucydides indirectly absolved himself.