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**Nathan Uglow**, *The Historian's Two Bodies: The Reception of Historical Texts in France, 1701-1790*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2001. xiv + 255 pp. Notes, appendix, bibliography, and index. \$84.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-7546-0223-0.

Review by Paul Cohen, Université de Paris-VIII.

Historians have devoted considerable energy to exploring how their predecessors went about studying history, and scholars of French history have been no exception.[1] They have justified the study of the past in a number of ways: as a long-standing and influential discipline in European intellectual life, a crucial building block for the invention of national identities, an instrument of political propaganda, a contested terrain for religious polemic, a crucial feature of certain kinds of legal culture, and, of course, the forerunner of our own practice of history.

Nathan Uglow's new book, a revised dissertation in the philosophy of history, proposes to revisit the intellectual history of historical writing in the eighteenth century. Uglow is not interested in analyzing the content of eighteenth-century historical writing, what historians wrote about, or the specific points of interpretation that divided historians and ignited debate. Instead, Uglow sets out to reconstruct the epistemological underpinnings of eighteenth-century historical scholarship and to establish an archeology of Enlightenment historical knowledge. It is the rules of the historians' game, rather than the actual substance of their accounts, that intrigue Uglow. How did eighteenth-century historians conceive of the discipline of history? How should history be practiced? How could the validity of specific historical arguments be tested? What kinds of lessons could be drawn from the study of history? Was a final, fixed, objective, and true historical account possible?

Leaving aside the canonical works of eighteenth-century history, such as Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734) or Voltaire's *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* (1752), Uglow instead sets out in search of sources that wrestle explicitly with the question of what history is and how it should be practiced. His book offers an analysis of eighteenth-century journal reviews of books about history, arguing that these notices constituted vital contributions to an ongoing debate about the nature of historical interpretation. It is precisely texts like reviews that hunt out the shortcomings of history books, Uglow argues, that best lay bare the nuts and bolts of eighteenth-century historical practice, the spoken and unspoken assumptions which framed the historical discipline, the ways in which its Enlightenment practitioners thought history should operate, and the rhetorical operations historians employed to establish their own authority and to discredit their rivals. Uglow limits his study to some 400 reviews published in two Catholic journals hostile to the *philosophe* movement, the *Journal de Trévoux* and the *Année littéraire*—an intriguing choice to which we will have occasion to return below.

Uglove's book defines its object of analysis as the "discourse' of history: the sum total of credible principles that allow statements to be made, and that can be recognised, as referring to history ... [It] is the way in which such techniques and efforts are defined, defended, and exposed to potential reformulation" (p. ix). As a consequence, this work offers an unapologetically internalist account of eighteenth-century history-writing. Uglove has little time for the social, political, or cultural contexts within which these writings were produced, circulated, and consumed. Making liberal use of post-structuralist literary criticism, Uglove builds his book from a succession of close readings of textual examples drawn from journal reviews in order to deconstruct the language which eighteenth-century writers employed to speak about history. His discussion unpacks the internal logics, slippages, and contradictions embedded within the discourse of history.

Uglove's principal claim is that historians in the *siècle des Lumières* grounded their conception of history in a paradox: they defined history as the construction of a fixed and true account of the past, while at the same time they conceived these stories about history as inherently and irremediably deformed by historians' failings and biases. This conception of history offered two competing models for the discipline. Historians sought to compile a definitive narrative that would make any subsequent historical accounts pointless—therefore putting an end to the practice of history. Yet they also subjected each new historical interpretation to critical examination for incompleteness, error, and bias as part of a continuous process of debate and revision—therefore making a fixed, definitive account unattainable.

To illustrate this paradox, Uglove constructs an elaborate corporate metaphor inspired by Ernst Kantorowicz's well-known discussion of the "king's two bodies"—the physical body of the living, mortal king and the abstract, immortal, political body that "embodies" the monarchy's political authority.[2] For Uglove, Enlightenment historians, like medieval kings, were torn between two starkly different ways of imagining their identities. On the one hand, historians saw themselves as *homo scriptans* ("the person writing"), scholars whose hard work and keen judgement enabled them to compile archival documents and facts, discern truth from falsehood, and author an exact account of history. Like Kantorowicz's imaginary, immortal royal body, *homo scriptans* stood above the vagaries of history and mastered the past fully. On the other hand, historians criticized their rivals as *homo scriptus* ("the person written about"), writers inescapably bound up within the social pressures, cultural attitudes, and professional imperatives of their time and whose writings were therefore necessarily flawed. *Homo scriptus*, then, bore the same physical and moral imperfections that characterized Kantorowicz's mortal royal body. For Uglove, all historical writing in the eighteenth century wrestled in some fashion or another with the incompatibility of these two figures of the historian: "in the historical discourse, it will always be a matter of negotiating a position relative to both bodies. This negotiation of the historian's two bodies contaminates each intervention in the historical discourse" (p. 19). For Uglove, this implies that historians could never escape "key areas of confusion at the heart of eighteenth-century definitions of history ... [and] the conflicting imperatives that were felt at each stage of the historical process" (p. 93).

After briefly surveying the history of the *ars historica* in antiquity and the early modern period, modern historiography, and his journal sources in chapter one, Uglove presents his argument in the remaining four chapters.

In chapter two Uglove reconstructs the ways in which eighteenth-century writers defined history. By teasing out slippages in their formulations of what constituted the study of the past, he argues that history was defined by a series of oppositions: between what actually took place in the past and our present understanding of the past; between history as an autonomous body of knowledge about the past which we contemplate as detached observers and history as an inseparable piece of ourselves, constitutive of our identity. All of history, in short, was a vain attempt to parse "the impossible unity of *homo scriptus* and *homo scriptans*, at the same time" (p. 45).

Chapter three considers eighteenth-century attempts to resolve the practical aspects of history writing. How should historians conduct archival research? How could the reliability of sources be tested? How should historical accounts be written? Again, Uglow argues that the eighteenth-century historical enterprise was framed by a series of irreducible tensions, maintaining that even the technical procedures developed to sort fact from fiction were sabotaged by fundamental paradoxes. Faced with the impossibility of reading even a fraction of archival materials, how could a historian claim to have mastered a particular area of inquiry? Indeed, how could any historical account, presenting only a finite selection of the available facts, pretend to offer a complete description? Incapable of resolving these paradoxes in their scholarship, historians found themselves compelled to assume authorial identities that elided these limitations in order to assert their claims to scholarly authority.

Chapters four and five analyze the rhetorical and methodological moves historians made in order to establish their scholarly credibility. For Uglow, the historians' two bodies represent the two types of rhetorical strategies historians could resort to in order to invest their historical accounts with impartiality and authority. Historians who conformed to the *homo scriptans* discourse constructed coherent narratives assembled from facts arranged according to principles of causality and explanation, ascertained from the judicious application of reason. During the *Grand siècle*, the monarchy constituted the principal explanatory fiction in historical writing—historians pinned their explanations of the French past to the king, conceived as source and cause of history. Uglow argues that the very logic of the *homo scriptans* figure ultimately compelled eighteenth-century historians to abandon the figure of the monarchy. When historians evaluated their rivals' accounts in forums such as journal reviews, they searched for evidence of their colleagues' entanglements within political and social networks likely to compromise the objectivity of their interpretations. Constantly challenged to demonstrate their impartiality, historians during the eighteenth century found themselves increasingly obliged to disassociate themselves rhetorically from patrons like the king. Having abandoned the monarchy as historical cause, historians needed to develop a new set of analytical frameworks ("*ressorts*" in Uglow's terminology) such as law and culture, to explain the true meaning of history and the true causes of historical change. Such an explanatory framework "enables the historian to speak, or write, of causation in an authoritative way since it implies that the historian has access to a more complete picture, of which the event is only the temporal, evanescent, manifestation" (p. 99).

Historians used the *homo scriptus* discourse in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. While some mobilized the image of self-interested scholars swayed by the fashions and pressures of their time as a rhetorical weapon to criticize rival historians, others held up *homo scriptus* as the proper model for historical writing. Such historians no longer claimed privileged access to a higher plane of historical understanding but instead "experienced" history in precisely the same way that their readers did. Rather than impose a narrative of causation or explanation, historians were to stage their effacement from the process of historical understanding and let their sources speak for themselves. Such historical "mastery is no longer the position of stable truth, present to itself, but the ability to yield oneself up to the correct source ... the historian must appear to disappear" (p. 156). Reviewers drew on this discourse—and criticized the discourse of *homo scriptans*—when they decried the arrogance of historians who "depicted themselves as privy to the true picture of the past...as erroneous and therefore maliciously deceptive and self-promoting" (p. 159). Historians were not meant to exercise their critical judgement, but rather to surrender control to their sources just as Biblical prophets conveyed God's message (p. 174).

Uglow's book represents what could be termed a "strong" kind of postmodern historical writing. Not only do its methodology and endnotes reveal his debt to thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Paul Ricoeur, and Hayden White, the author's larger point is that the Enlightenment claim that historians can uncover the "true" mechanisms of historical causation constituted a "fiction" and that this state of affairs was acknowledged by Enlightenment thinkers themselves (p. 106). For Uglow, the impossibility of arriving at final, objective historical interpretations that ran through eighteenth-century historical practice remains true today.

Dense and complex, and written in a style that reflects a taste for Derridean word-play and the passive voice that proves opaque at times, this book is by no means an easy read. Beyond awkward syntax, all too frequent misspellings, and grammatical errors (see for example pp. 58, 62, 114, and 177; p. 166 contains no less than four serious grammar and usage problems), a disconcertingly unreliable index (Racine is on p. 116, not p.106; it is unclear why Erasmus and Quintilian figure in the index and Augustine does not, despite the fact that all three are discussed together on p. 184), and a bibliography that omits a number of works cited in the endnotes betray sloppy copyediting. This lack of attention to editorial detail does little to inspire the reader's confidence and renders the book more difficult to follow. This is unfortunate, since Uglow's argument would have been better served by a more polished vehicle.

What are we to make, then, of a work that belongs to a somewhat rare historiographical genre in ancien regime studies, an unapologetically Derridean analysis of Enlightenment intellectual life? The core of Uglow's book--thoughtful close readings of the language of historical practice, of the ways in which eighteenth-century historians represented themselves and their discipline, of the inherent tensions embedded within these languages of history, and of the ways in which historians struggled to overcome these contradictions in their writing--represents a stimulating application of methodologies borrowed from literary theory to intellectual history.

But Uglow also makes larger claims for his book's historiographical weight, and his argument must be measured on these terms as well. Uglow sees two fundamental shortcomings of past historiography on eighteenth-century historical writing that he intends his own work to correct. First, previous scholarship has been too closely focused on uncovering the roots of modern historical practice, on constructing a Whiggish narrative of the "rise" of scientific, rational history. For Uglow, demonstrating that the Enlightenment did not witness the invention of a more "objective" way to do history helps to illustrate that the very notion of attaining an objective history is as much a myth for us today as it was during the eighteenth century: "the idea that an increase in attention to the nature of proof will render that area more rational and clear, rather than more open to confusion, is a pious hope rather than a reality" (p. 8). While interpretations that help problematize our understanding of the ways in which knowledge is constituted are always valuable, Uglow's analysis would have benefited from a dialogue with a growing corpus of work published over the past two decades on the Enlightenment, and not acknowledged in the book under review, which has done precisely this in varied and fruitful ways.[3]

Uglow's second historiographical target is recent work on intellectual life and the press during the Enlightenment. He is critical of historians who analyze ideas in the light of the political and social realities within which they were formulated and debated. For Uglow, scholars like Robert Darnton and Jeremy Popkin who attempt to use these sources in order to measure public attitudes, trace the contours of an emerging public sphere, or gauge their capacity to influence political or cultural life subscribe to the vain belief "that the journals can be seen to represent a putative public opinion or the voice of a provincial faction hostile to the *philosophe* movement" (p. 13). Indeed, Uglow contests the very feasibility of establishing a link between a set of opinions on the one hand and particular social groups and political factions on the other, and even of discerning the existence of coherent ideological fault lines during the Enlightenment. Uglow's choice to consider only sources drawn from Catholic journals, then, constitutes an attempt to recuse the very pertinence of the categories "philosophe" and "anti-philosophe" for the study of the Enlightenment.[4] Uglow's insistence that categories such as "people" and "public sphere" can only be understood on the level of discourse (see discussion on pp. 133-139) is illustrative of a larger methodological position that amounts to a retreat into discourse. Politics, religion, the institutions and circles within which knowledge circulated, and, indeed, French society itself are, by design, almost systematically excluded from this account of eighteenth-century intellectual life. On the rare occasions when these themes do appear, they are generally reduced to a discursive construct--the "public sphere," for example, "is made manifest only as a rhetorical strategy, only at the expense of denying, or occluding, the inevitable absence that structures every act of representation. It was a term appealed to by everyone and yet as we have seen above there is far from any consensus on its referent" (p. 135). Such

analyses constitute a radical position—indeed, one so radical that Uglow must at times abandon it, as when he explains that it was the rise of the absolutist monarchy as well as the emergence of writers working outside traditional patronage structures that caused historians to let go of the monarchy as a figure of historical explanation (pp. 126–127). In some sense, this retreat into discourse represents a retreat from history itself, a conscious choice to deprive the historian of the capacity to ask the discipline’s most basic and important questions: why are things the way that they are in a given moment in time, and why do things change? It is difficult, for this reviewer at least, not to worry whether such an approach closes more possibilities for future research and reflection than it opens up.

## NOTES

[1] For an overview of the history of history, see Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry From Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1998). For a recent work on prose history writing in medieval France, see Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). On the emergence of a Renaissance historicist sensibility, useful starting-points are Kelley’s *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance* (New York-London: Columbia University Press, 1970); Claude-Gilbert Dubois, *La Conception de l’histoire en France au XVIIe siècle (1560-1610)* (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1977); Julian H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Sixteenth-Century Revolution in the Methodology of Law and History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); and George Huppert, *The Idea of Perfect History: Historical Erudition and Historical Philosophy in Renaissance France* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970). Orest Ranum explores the ties between absolutism, royal patronage, and historical writing in seventeenth-century France in *Artisans of Glory: Writers and Historical Thought in Seventeenth-Century France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). On the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see also Blandine Barret-Kriegel, *Les Historiens et la Monarchie*, 4 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988). For the nineteenth century, see Kelley, *Historians and the Law in Postrevolutionary France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[2] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957). Uglow also acknowledges a debt to Natalie Zemon Davis’ use of the same metaphor, although in a different fashion, in “History’s Two Bodies,” *American Historical Review* 93, no.1 (February 1988):1–30.

[3] See for example Ken Alder, *Engineering the Revolution: Arms & Enlightenment, 1763–1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Jean and Nicole Dhombres, *Naissance d’un nouveau pouvoir. Sciences et savants en France, 1793–1824* (Paris: Payot, 1989); Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Catherine Maire, *De la cause de Dieu à la cause de la Nation. Le Jansénisme au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998); and Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[4] For a stimulating counterpoint on this question, see Darrin McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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