The Poetry of History

What is History?

Is it public or private?

How does it differ from a chronicle of events….on this day, the next day…

Is it a science or a story? Art? Craft?

What is objective? Subjective? Does objective history even exist?

Does history always mean progress? (Fall of Rome -> Dark Ages)

Does point of view matter?

Does it depend on point of view (Great Patriotic War; War of Independence)

Causation? Accident? AJP Taylor said WWI was caused by European railway timetables because they dictated whose troops could mobilize fastest.

Is History what Historians say it is?

Does time move at different speeds (wright brothers first flight in 1903 was 120 feet—shorter than the wingspan of a Boeing 747.

Eisenhower lived to see Gatling Guns and Indian wars to thermonuclear weapons in a single lifetime.

The Poetry of History

“History is only a pack of tricks we play on the dead.” ~ Voltaire

“The appeal of history to us is . . .poetic. But the poetry of history does not consist of imagination roaming at large, but of imagination pursuing the fact and fastening upon it.” ~ G.M. Trevelyan

\* \* \*

“History was a trash bag of random coincidences torn open in a wind.”

~ Joseph Heller

“History is the biography of great men.” ~ Thomas Carlyle

Also Thomas Carlyle: “Hunger and nakedness and righteous oppression lying heavy on 25 million hearts . . . was the prime mover in the French Revolution; as the like will be in all such revolutions, in all countries.”

Do numbers count in History? Example?

**Coffeemaker Metaphor**

Facts are the water

YOU are the coffee grounds

Result = History

“History is an unending dialogue between the present and the past.” ~E.H. Carr

“The study of history is the beginning of wisdom”

~ Jean Bodin, French thinker, 1530-1596.

“To write history is to make an argument by telling a story about dead people.”

~Jill Lepore, Harvard History professor, historian, writer

“Thinking about what is the very essence of history:

the weight of the dead on the living.”

~ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker

“People that complain that history has too much politics presumably complain that math has too much counting.” ~ British Historian

“Most people, in fact, will not take trouble in finding out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first story they hear.” ~Thucydides