



Why Irish History Starved

A Virtual Historiography

Guy Beiner with Joep Leerssen

The emergence of a ‘New Irish History’ has been hailed as a ‘historical revolution’. Here **Guy Beiner** and **Joep Leerssen** debate the development of historical scholarship in Ireland and, in particular, the rejection of antiquarianism by professional historians.

- 1 Niall Ferguson, ‘Virtual History: Towards a “Chaotic” Theory of the Past’, in Niall Ferguson, ed., *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (London, 1999 [1997]), 1–90
- 2 Ferguson, ‘Virtual History’, 87, 64; the emphasis is in the original.

BEINER: The temptation to indulge in counterfactual speculations is tantalizing. What if there had been no ‘Protestant wind’ in 1796 and the French had landed in force at Bantry Bay? Or if O’Connell’s monster meetings had succeeded in repealing the Union, if the masses had rallied to Young Ireland’s confederate flag and risen in 1848, if one of the Home Rule Bills had successfully passed, if the anti-Treaty irregulars had defeated the Free-Staters in the Civil War and declared a republic in 1923? The possibilities are endless, but perhaps the only viable counterfactual is: what would have happened had the study of Irish history developed in a radically different direction?

In a ninety-page essay on ‘virtual history’, Niall Ferguson forcefully presented a (perhaps overstated) case for the value of historical counterfactuals. Counterfactuals can undermine teleological thinking and offer an escape from the pitfalls of historicist determinism by reminding us that the past was, to borrow from Jorge Luis Borges, a ‘Garden of Forking Paths’ (*Jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*). Virtual history is useful in reminding us that things *could* have been different. However, it is not clear that historians can actually sketch out the development of alternative pasts. Chaos theory, which examines stochastic behaviour

in deterministic systems, may appear to offer new possibilities for historians straddling the dilemma of contingency and causation, yet such analysis, as Ferguson concedes, inevitably results in ‘unpredictable outcomes even when successive events are causally linked’.¹ The possibility of writing ‘chaostory’ is undermined, in practice, by the infinitude of incommensurables, environmental and human. For all their knowledge of the past, historians have a dismal track record in predicting future outcomes (the collapse of the Iron Curtain may serve as the ultimate cautionary case). Moreover, academic historical training does not encourage its practitioners to imagine anything beyond the boundaries of what is already familiar. Historiography, on the other hand, is perhaps one of the few fields in which historians are consciously aware of practically all the conditions and determining factors. It could therefore be reasonably argued that the only feasible form of virtual history is virtual historiography.

Ferguson was interested in a quasi-factual, counterfactual history of ‘*how it actually wasn’t*’ — but how, to contemporaries, it might have been’, as opposed to a focus on that history of *mentalités* and historical consciousness characteristic of the new cultural history; this, he avers, ‘represents a relapse into antiquarianism’.² But we

Paul Mosse
Catacomb
2004
acrylic, plywood, sawdust,
glue, wire, foam
105 x 107 x 22 cm
courtesy of the artist and
Green on Red Gallery

find that it is the spectre of antiquarianism which was taken to be a threat at the very moment of the professionalization of history. Irish historians have been told that ‘we are all revisionists now’, but is that, in the words of *A Memorable History of England*, a ‘Good Thing’?³ Small as it is in size and population and despite its peripheral location on the outskirts of Europe, Ireland’s cultural contribution to the world is truly remarkable. Ireland has been repeatedly and innovatively ‘invented’ in its art. Historians have undeniably written many fine works and contributed much to a better understanding of Ireland’s past, yet it is hard to think of Irish historians who have made international innovations that have changed the way we understand history.

On the other hand, historians who took an active part in the professionalization of Irish history, or who see themselves as the inheritors of its legacy, have frequently described the process as a ‘historical revolution’. This self-congratulatory tone could be tempered by some Burkean reflections on the historical ‘revolution’ in Ireland. Tradition was so thoroughly consigned to the dustbin that a reading of the ‘revisionist debate’, which rarely shows any long-term historiographical awareness, raises the question if there was *any* history writing of value in Ireland prior to the launch of *Irish Historical Studies* in 1938. W. E. H. Lecky, of course, stands out as the only Irish historian to have made it to the centre stage of British historiography. At least in some ways, this great Victorian champion of rationalism, an unreconstructed liberal (and as such, extremely wary of democracy and deeply suspicious of the masses) and a pioneer of archival research into the Irish State Papers, anticipated what would later be known as the ‘New Irish History’. Seen in this light (and there are other facets to Lecky), he is a precursor of and not an alternative to academic historiography in its current form. We are routinely presented with a Whiggish interpretation of Irish

historiography that begins with Lecky, then undergoes a ‘glorious revolution’ in the 1930s and is then reinvigorated by the missionary spirit of iconoclastic revisionism in the 1980s. This, in its triumphalism, has consigned all other voices to the kind of roles once attributed to ‘Jacobite reliques’. Here, unmistakably, is a teleology waiting to be questioned. As in the ‘Whig version of the course of history’, here too can be found ‘certain methods of historical organization and inference — certain fallacies to which all history is liable’, which Herbert Butterfield famously deplored.⁴

Kevin Whelan has criticized the Irish historical revisionism of the 1930s for being parochial, denouncing it for its ‘insulation from the intellectual revolt in historiography spearheaded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in France, and signalled by the advent in 1929 of the innovative journal *Annales*’.⁵ The historiographical counterfactual in this critique assumes that if the professionalization of Irish history had taken its direction from the University of Strasbourg and subsequent historical developments in Paris rather than from the Institute of Historical Research in London and Peterhouse College in Cambridge, it would have been at the cutting edge of European historiography. Yet that too would have been a form of mimicry. In contrast, the various novel artistic movements in Ireland seem to have sprouted out of a creative engagement with long-standing traditions. Nowhere has it been considered what would have happened if a distinctly Irish historiography had emerged from indigenous antiquarian traditions of writing history. Under the surface, there appears to be an a priori assumption that any such evolution would have been inherently sectarian and ridiculously amateurish.

Leerssen: But then again ... ‘what if’ ain’t history, and we should be wary of the metaphor of Forking Paths. That metaphor describes plot lines, not events, and there

- 3 Roy Foster, ‘We are All Revisionists Now’, *Irish Review*, 1 (1986), 1–5. See W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That: A Memorable History of England* (Stroud, 1993 [1930]). This witty parody of English schoolbook history, ‘comprising all the parts you can remember’, lists 103 ‘Good Things’. It only includes several passing references to Ireland, such as ridiculing ‘Blood-Orangemen’ for being ‘so loyal that they are always ready to start a loyal rebellion’, while commenting that after the Battle of the Boyne ‘the Irish who remained were made to go live in a bog and think of a New Question’; see 87–88.
- 4 Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London, 1931), v
- 5 Kevin Whelan, ‘The Revisionist Debate in Ireland’, *boundary 2*, 31, 1 (2004), 185

- 6 Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt, 1979)

is a specious fallacy in the notion that the Course of History (a term which is itself a descriptive extrapolation from historical narrative, not a description of the past) would have Turned Out All Different if a certain event had panned out otherwise. Most of us nowadays see our world as a chaotic welter of free-floating contingencies — the ‘butterflies and hurricanes’ paradigm; but that is only one way of looking at things.

Anyone with a word processor can check this out. Take a long document with a ‘tight’, densely filled and heavily footnoted page layout. One might expect that by adding or deleting a word or even a sentence, the different line-breaks, paragraph-lengths and page-breaks would ripple throughout the rest of the document, possibly having a knock-on effect that will eventually cause the document to occupy one or two pages more, or less. However, contrary to that expectation, you will find that invariably, after one or two pages, the document will retain its original page-breaks despite the alteration. In other words: alterations do not necessarily spread into widening chain reactions. Not all hurricanes are caused by fluttering butterflies, and many a flutter failed to become a storm. There is a noticeable tendency for surface destabilizations to be buffered back into the inertia of a default state.

So too with the course of history. We tend to read Borges’s story of the ‘Garden of the Forking Paths’ too much through the eyes of Robert Frost, whose ‘path not taken’ stands for an irreversible life-choice. But although single choices and incidents may later be remembered and invested with symbolism (or ‘importance’, or ‘meaning’), they rarely make ‘all the difference’ in the larger scheme of things. Indeed Borges’s story argues precisely that point: the entire ‘Forking Paths’ episode is only a footnote to the fact (related in the story’s opening paragraph) that a battle scheduled for 24 July 1916 was postponed for five days, owing to torrential

rains; the narrator comments that the delay ‘lacked any special significance’.

One of the first things first-year history students learn is to avoid ‘monocausality’: the idea that important historical situations can be adequately explained from one single cause. They are always the outcome of many contributory causes, which hang together and interact in complex ways. ‘What if’ history is monocausality in reverse: it presupposes that the alteration of one single event might have overturned the entire complex web of manifold causes and their interrelated effects.

I don’t want to stumble into the opposite error — that of determinism, the idea that human agency and choices are insignificant in the preordained scheme of developments — but the case against the Path Not Taken model needs to be made. In history, there are *no* Paths Not Taken. Everything has been attempted, all scenarios have had their zealots and proponents, all arguments have been raised, and even the models and ambitions that failed to achieve dominance in actual practice are still there for us to resuscitate and retrieve. History is not just a successive series of events; it is also a cumulative growth of models, outlooks, examples. We cannot re-enact past events, but we can still read the books that have come down to us.

As Reinhart Koselleck reminds us, history is not just the track record of how things turned out the way they did; the task of the historian is also to reconstruct the hypothetical scenarios that were present and operative in the past, as models of inspiration or fear, without ever having been realized (say, the possibility of a Union between Great Britain and Ireland in the 1720s, or of a Redmondite or ‘Dual Monarchy’ settlement in the 1910s).⁶ The past carries within itself, within the experience of its actors and protagonists, a plethora of potential futures, none of which can be neglected by the historian. Within that overwhelming

multiverse of ‘past futures’, the fictitious counterfactual option of Hitler having died at birth, Napoleon having won the Battle of Waterloo, or Trinity College Dublin historians having become *Annales* adepts in the 1930s, becomes a piece of flippancy. It confuses two modes of irreality: the fictional and the potential.

In setting up a Paths not Taken model, we run the risk of losing ourselves in a poetically binate rhetoric. On the one side, we see history as it turned out to be: academic, jejune, factualist, revisionist, “liberal”-elitist. On the other side, we are given all the lost opportunities, creative, poetical, the lost heritage of antiquarianism, democratic. That schematization is loaded from the outset. For one thing, Lecky deserves to be remembered for the victory he won in his showdown with James Anthony Froude, not to mention his multivolume *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* (1869) which places him in the company of intellectual historians such as Henry Hallam, Henry Thomas Buckle and Leslie Stephen.⁷ For another, the rule of the *Annales* school, here cited by Whelan as a comment on the parochial tweediness of the TCD historians, resulted in the profession’s stultifying and arid preoccupation with economic infrastructures and demographics throughout the mid-twentieth century. I cannot imagine that its adoption among Irish historians (who in any case were far from ignorant of that approach) would have constituted a ‘Good Thing’. I am very certain, on the contrary, that being a revisionist is a Good Thing. More than that, it is an indispensable thing. It is for the historian what Salvadore Dali said about being modern: not an aspiration, but an unavoidable condition. All history-writing is by definition revisionist; that’s what makes it different from novel-writing, that’s what makes it an academic field of research rather than just a genre in *belles-lettres*.⁸ If we see no reason to revise previous histories, we

can just reprint the old ones and close down our departments. Is that what we want: just reprint the Good Old Boys, return to the days when it was still Fun and we did history to reaffirm our certainties as to who were the Good Guys (us) and who the Bad Guys (them)?

Faced with the multifariousness, the contradictions and the clashes of the present, I perceive everywhere a tendency to represent the past as a situation of homogeneous integrity, something unitary, at least in the moral terms of who mattered, who was the Hero of the Tale, the protagonist we identify with. What history (as opposed to antiquarianism) shows, is that the past was at least as fraught, contradictory and torn as the present, and that understanding the past means trying to enter into alien points of view, even those of the Bad Guys. The danger of a new Antiquarian Turn is that it leads us into an a-critical direction. Nietzsche, when distinguishing three different modes of history-writing, identified them as monumental, antiquarian and critical. None of us these days is much into Monumental History (although the celebratory mode is still with us, from Christy Moore’s execrable song ‘Irish Ways and Irish Laws’ to the movie *Michael Collins* (1996) and the more popularizing publications in Eason’s or Waterstone’s); but going antiquarian must not mean that we can use it as a pretext to become less critical. Are we, by any chance, nostalgic for a Paradigm Lost, like a path not taken in the woods on a snowy evening?

Beiner: There is a Kuhnian logic in labelling antiquarianism a ‘lost paradigm’ (on a par with, let’s say, pre-Copernican astronomy). Is antiquarianism essentially antiquated, an outdated practice which by its very nature could not have survived into modern (let alone post-modern) times? Just as historiography follows developments in the study of history over time, antiquarianism

7 See my *Komparatistik in Grossbritannien. Eine Einführung* (Bonn, 1984), 57.

8 On the distinction between history and fictional narrative, including the agonistic element that makes historians ‘rewrite’ in an ‘against-their-predecessors’ mode, see Ann Rigney, *The Rhetoric of Historical Representation: Three Narrative Histories of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), and *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism* (Ithaca, 2001).

- 9 Clare O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland, c. 1750–1800* (Cork, 2004), 3
- 10 Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Ancient History and the Antiquarian', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 13, 3–4 (1950), 285–315; Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley, 1990)

also has an 'antiquariography', which shows it to be a constantly evolving field, influenced by cultural trends that are part of a wider international intellectual discourse. Though antiquarians may have championed a static, or spatial, conceptualization of history, the practice itself was by no means static but under continuous development. In a sense, antiquarians were also 'revisionists'. Antiquarianism responded to an internal crisis in the nineteenth century by effectively undergoing an overhaul and introducing more rigorous self-criticism into its scholarship. Moreover, antiquarians in Ireland were in constant dialogue with scholars across Europe and were informed of shifts in wider cultural–scholarly trends. It would therefore be 'virtually a-historical' to contemplate eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century scholarship persisting unchanged into today's world.

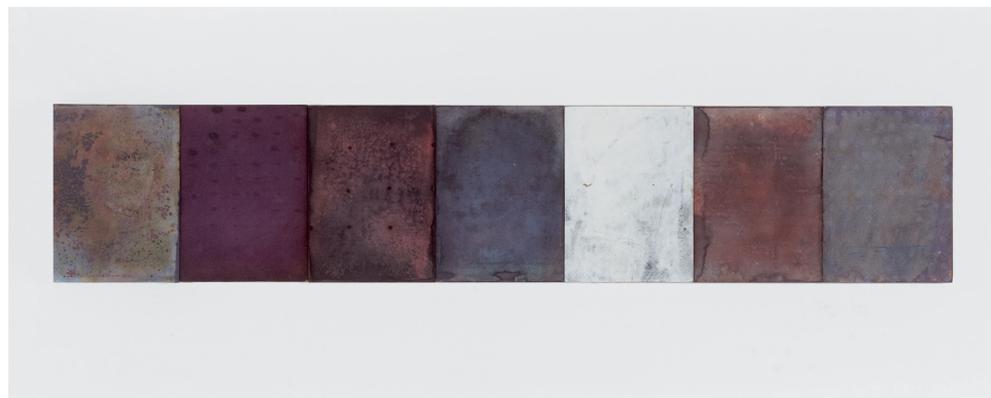
For example, Protestant antiquarianism in Ireland was originally an Anglican affair and there was apparently little, if any, Irish Presbyterian antiquarian writing in the eighteenth century.⁹ However, this was clearly not the case for the thriving nineteenth-century Presbyterian antiquarian scene in Belfast and its environs, which emerged in the middle of the century and went through a transformation around the *fin de siècle*. Significant developments in the scholarship of northern antiquarianism are evident from a comparison between the first series (1853–62) and second series (1894–

1911) of the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* (and its many monographic offshoots).

Part of the virtual challenge is to envisage how antiquarianism would have continued to evolve had it been given a chance. Contemplating the perseverance of antiquarianism should therefore not be a sweeping negation of the professionalization of Irish history, but rather an exercise in imagining other ways of professionalization. Arnaldo Momigliano is particularly insightful in this context, as his take on the emergence of modern history is not one of a Rankean rupture with an antiquarian past but of a convergence (that pre-dates Leopold von Ranke) of classical traditions of history and antiquarianism, which he characterized as a reclamation of a lost Herodotean historical tradition that transcended the limitations of the predominant Thucydidean tradition of political-diplomatic-military history.¹⁰ The notion of a rediscovery of an ancient historical tradition rather than a new invention is of course in line with the self-perception of antiquarians, who regarded their practice as a relic of antiquity (though Varro's *Antiquitates* would be the appropriate classical model, rather than Herodotus).

The decline of antiquarianism and the rise of professional history is part and parcel of the same process. However, since antiquarianism continued to flourish into the early twentieth century, one should be weary of setting a premature 'time of death'.

David Quinn
vent
2005
mixed media on panels
14 x 10 cm
courtesy of the artist and the
Kevin Kavanagh Gallery



Phillipa Levine has portrayed the officials of the Public Record Office in London as the first practitioners of professional history and suggested that the use of archives may distinguish between professional historians and antiquarians. Yet she observed that in the early years archives were frequented by antiquarians.¹¹ Furthermore, was it not J. T. Gilbert, an antiquarian, who set up the Public Record Office in Dublin? It would be more accurate to claim that, unlike positivist historians, antiquarians did not confine themselves to the archive but enthusiastically engaged with a wide range of sources that were later pushed out of Irish historical studies, such as Gaelic (Irish language) literature, material objects and oral traditions.

Ciaran Brady's survey of Irish historical revisionism noted that the Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies and the Irish Historical Society — the flagships of what was to become the 'New Irish History' — made a point from the outset of discouraging antiquarian studies.¹² This conscious determination to reject antiquarianism is the historical moment that begs to be revisited. There is of course a long history of historians denigrating antiquarians but this exclusion from the respectable halls of a newly institutionalized academy dealt antiquarians a knockout blow from which they could not recover. In the early twentieth century historians and antiquarians could still make common cause in seeking to preserve archival records.¹³ Later on, such co-operation was no longer tenable. For example, J. C. Beckett's introductory comments to one of the volumes of the *New History of Ireland* exemplify the demonization of antiquarians as those who 'impeded rather than advanced the cause of scholarship'.¹⁴ Such rhetoric from the mouth of an assertive new historical establishment marks antiquarians' fall from grace — the transition in their image from torch-bearers of erudition to Luddite saboteurs. The important

contributions of antiquarians were all too readily dismissed and forgotten.

Seen in this light, the professionalization of the study of history can be construed as a colonization of the past by metropolitan-trained historians — a ruthless power struggle in which antiquarians (among other long-established interpreters of history) were ousted. In the name of modernity and progress, indigenous historiographical traditions were laid to waste and, in consequence, Irish history in this 'post-colonial' condition is all the poorer for its rejection of antiquarianism. To be fair, there may be another, more rounded, way of looking at the issue: perhaps remaining antiquarians also retreated in face of the political developments of the early twentieth century. The case of Francis Joseph Biggar, the iconic antiquarian of the period, is instructive, as partition seemed to deal a death blow to his life's work. All the same, antiquarians were marginalized and no longer treated with respect.

In practice, antiquarianism did not disappear wholesale but mutated into new forms. Its stubborn survival is comparable to the case of the so-called decline of magic (as charted by Keith Thomas), which seems to have gone underground only to later re-emerge in the guise of modernist spiritualism, New Ageism and a widespread fascination with the paranormal. Similarly, neo-antiquarianism crops up in various popular (if not populist) presentations of pseudo-science and sham-history. Nonetheless, not all remnants of antiquarianism have been co-opted by cranks and subsumed into counterculture (or perhaps post-modern popular culture). Old-style antiquarian erudition evolved into a wide range of recognized scholarly disciplines. Archaeology is the widely acknowledged heir apparent of antiquarianism but it does not stand alone. First of all, this pedigree could be extended to ethnological studies

- 11 Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians, and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838–1886* (Cambridge and New York, 1986)
- 12 Ciaran Brady, 'Constructive and Instrumental: The Dilemma of Ireland's First "New Historians"', in Ciaran Brady, ed., *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism 1938–1994* (Dublin, 1994), 4
- 13 See R. D. Edwards, 'An Agenda for Irish History, 1978–2018', in Brady, *Interpreting Irish History*, 56.
- 14 See J. C. Beckett, 'Introduction: Eighteenth Century Ireland', in T. W. Moody and W. E. Vaughan, eds., *A New History of Ireland*, vol. 4, (Oxford, 1986), lx–lxiv.

- 15 Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*, 155
- 16 See Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, *Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity* (Cork, 2000), 35–37.
- 17 See Gillian Doherty, *The Ordnance Survey: History, Culture and Memory* (Cork, 2004).
- 18 E. Estyn Evans, *The Personality of Ireland: Habitat, Heritage and History* (Cambridge, 1973)
- 19 See for example, Roy Foster, 'History and the Irish Question', in Brady, *Interpreting Irish History*, 128–29.
- 20 *Irish Press*, 3 April 1935; *Irish Times*, 3 April 1935
- 21 Aidan Clarke, 'Robert Dudley Edwards (1909–88)', *Irish Historical Studies*, 26, 102 (1988), 126–27

of material culture and to sub-areas of archaeological specialization which have practically become fields in their own right, such as numismatics and epigraphy. Writing in the early 1960s, when structuralism was in fashion, Momigliano identified sociology as the 'refurbished form of antiquarianism which our age requires'.¹⁵ There are also other legitimate progeny. The study of folklore can partly trace its roots to the field trips of antiquarians who interviewed locals and documented popular customs in works such as John Brand's *Observations on Popular Antiquities* (1777), which annotated Henry Bourne's *Antiquitates Vulgares* (1725).¹⁶ Perhaps the most dynamic exponents of contemporary antiquarian scholarship can be found in local history societies and their journals. It could be reasonably argued that some of the most exciting work in Ireland is happening on a local level but is rarely acknowledged on the centre stage of Irish Studies. This would strongly suggest a need to reconsider prevalent notions of centre and periphery in the mental geography of Irish historical scholarship.

With local geography in mind, it is worth revisiting the historical and ethnographical work of the Topographical Department of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland, in which antiquarian scholarship for a time flourished again.¹⁷ Here we can find a possible starting point for an alternative direction for Irish studies, one which could take into account all the elements that E. Estyn Evans would later prescribe in his *Personality of Ireland*, a trilogy of regional studies that examined habitat — 'the total physical environment', history — 'the written record of the past', and heritage — 'the unwritten segment of human history'.¹⁸ It is too readily assumed that the pioneering scholarly initiatives introduced by the Ordnance Survey were doomed to fail on account of embedded sectarian politics.¹⁹ Though this exercise in applied antiquarianism was terminated by the authorities in 1842, it survived in

memory as an inspirational model. Upon inaugurating the Irish Folklore Commission (1935), the Minister of Education, Tomás Ó Deirg, described the collecting of folklore under the aegis of the state as a continuation of 'work abandoned 100 years ago' by the Ordnance Survey.²⁰ The institutionalizing of Irish folklore, which documented thousands of oral traditions of significant socio-historical interest (*seanchas*), was contemporaneous with the professionalization of a kind of Irish history that made a point of dismissing oral tradition. Both these developments were happening in tandem in the halls of University College Dublin in the mid-1930s.

The rejection of folklore would appear to be part of a calculated policy, which required that historians disavow any proclivities that might appear to conjure up associations of antiquarian excesses. Seeking to explain the noticeable 'disjuncture' between the flamboyant personality of Robert Dudley Edwards (who alongside T. W. Moody was a pillar of the New Irish History) and his restrained writing, Aidan Clarke noted that his characteristic

ability to see unlikely consequences, to make intuitive connexions, and to draw startling inferences; the eagerness to explore irreverence, disturb complacency and contemplate the outrageous; the delight in jibes and oracular utterances — were all attributes of precisely the kind that were eschewed by the disciplinary canons that Edwards and Moody imported into Irish historical scholarship and promoted thereafter.

This led Clarke to wonder whether 'the reformers were not too literal and mechanistic in their exposition of the creed, too intolerant of the undocumented statement, too unappreciative of the contribution that the historian himself can make to the understanding of the past'.²¹



James Dixon
Arlin Point
 1966
 mixed media on board
 The Anthony Petullo
 Collection

Let us imagine that Irish history had not purged itself of antiquarianism but had developed in dialogue with long-standing indigenous historiographical traditions. In such a scenario, I would like to suggest that the Irish language would be prominent; oral tradition would be accorded respect; investigations of material culture would be integrated into historical work; local studies would be to the fore; and there would be a readiness to transcend rigid disciplinary boundaries. In its multifaceted inquiries, antiquarianism offered a model for the currently lionized interdisciplinary ideal. (More often than not, this is a guise for crude and half-hearted multidisciplinary incursions.) The old–new Irish history that would emerge by integrating antiquarian and professional traditions would not necessarily be outlandish or quixotic, though it would be distinctly Irish, without succumbing to insularity or parochialism. It would still maintain contacts with and absorb influences from other historiographical traditions. It would not be a question of unreconstructed

antiquarianism replacing scientific history but of an emerging synthesis, which could also allow for creative combinations between antiquarian–synchronic and historical–diachronic (or chronological) analyses.

In turn, interactions with historians could reduce antiquarian credulity and perhaps also cure antiquarianism of its predisposition to flowery language and its obsession with trivial minutiae. At the same time, antiquarianism could also offer history a bridge to literature. Nineteenth-century writers of historical fiction regularly consulted antiquarian scholarship and adopted an ‘antiquarian impulse’ for reconstructing the past in picturesque detail. Walter Scott is a prime example; although *The Antiquary* (1816) is often cited as a parody of antiquarianism, behind the humorous depiction of Jonathan Oldbuck of Monkbarns there is a noticeable reverence. After all, Scott himself was an unabashed antiquarian (as was made clear in the well-advertised case of his discovery

- 22 Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional*, 14
- 23 See my article ‘Celticism’, in Terence Brown, ed., *Celticism* (Amsterdam, 1996), 1–20, and *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Cork, 1996).
- 24 Mairéad Carew, *Tara and the Ark of the Covenant: A Search for the Ark of the Covenant by British-Israelites on the Hill of Tara (1899–1902)* (Dublin, 2003); Máirín Ní Cheallaigh, ‘Perceptions of Archaeological Monuments in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: A “Past of Excessive Human Thought and Action”’, unpublished PhD thesis, University College Dublin, 2005; Lesa Ní Mhangaile, ‘Joseph Cooper Walker (1761–1810): Beatha agus Saothar, Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards’, unpublished PhD thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway, 2001; John Waddell, *Foundation Myths: The Beginnings of Irish Archaeology* (Bray, 2005).
- 25 Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 2004)
- 26 Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l’histoire, suivi de Foucault révolutionne l’histoire* (Paris, 1978)

of the Scottish crown jewels). The mediation of antiquarianism in establishing a closer relationship with historical fiction could have served to circumvent some of the recent historiographical conflicts, which wearily pitted historians against literary critics. Irish scholarship in general would be enriched by the enthusiastic passion for learning, characteristic of antiquarians, exemplified, for instance, by Thomas Crofton Croker, who would regularly attend meetings of two or three learned societies in an evening and, like so many other prominent antiquarians of his time, exhibited an astonishing range of knowledge.²² Above all, historical inquiry would be enthused and empowered by imagination. Hence such a virtual historiography pre-empts the need for virtual history, as counterfactual speculation would already be embedded in it.

Leerssen: To the extent that history is an academic discipline, it is subject to a progressive logic, involving paradigm shifts. We can read Sir Thomas Browne, Gibbons or Michelet as literature, but their compelling power as scholars has been ceded to younger generations. Even so, old paradigms never die. Even the discarded historical models remain latent and available, and can be susceptible to reactivation. The orientalist speculations of antiquarians in the Charles Vallancey and William Betham mode may have been ousted by the new paradigm represented by George Petrie, but it kept a tenacious existence among non-academic believers, was kept alive by a fringe following of Freemasons, theosophists and British-Israelites, and indeed, through the remarkable stepping-stone of Robert Graves’s *The White Goddess*, has resurfaced again in a New Age context.²³

What do we make of this? To begin with, it means that antiquarianism is still with us as something that *has* a history. Any history of ideas or history of *mentalités* will need to study, not just how people in the past envisaged their future, but also how they

envisaged their past. The antiquarian view of the past, as a cultural presence, is part of any cultural history worth its salt. In Ireland we have many excellent examples of this historical interest in the antiquarian past. Clare O’Halloran’s work has been mentioned; one could add the great work now being done in the field of Irish Studies, in particular in Irish archaeology.²⁴ This new interest in antiquarian models is part of a Europe-wide growth in what has been called ‘identity history’ or ‘remembrance history’; Rosemary Sweet’s work on English antiquarians is a case in point.²⁵ Indeed, the rediscovery of antiquarianism is part of a general ‘cultural turn’ in the historical sciences, which was, ironically enough, a rebellion of the post-Foucault generation against the older *Annales*-style preoccupation with social and economic infrastructures. Much as sociology went through a ‘cultural turn’ following Bourdieu, so the historical sciences went through a cultural-cum-anthropological turn following Foucault — a shift first spotted by Paul Veyne and made famous in the work of scholars like Robert Darnton, Nathalie Zemon Davis, Carlo Ginzburg, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Keith Thomas and Marina Warner.²⁶ That particular turn has certainly affected Ireland. However, in Ireland, as elsewhere, it has tended to manifest itself around the fringes of the established historical departments. The rise of Irish Studies is a case in point, and the work of both of us would fall into that category.

So the crux becomes: what do we call *history*? The historical university departments continue to stress archive-based research in the social, political and economic fields. If anything, this particular topical and methodological restriction seems to be what you denounce as ‘starvation’. The problem is one of perception rather than practice: so much historical research, which works on other corpuses of material from other cultural fields (like folklore, literature, the arts, scientific thought,

Church history, legal history, historical geography, etcetera), is flourishing, but tends to be ignored as *history*. This is regrettable. It offers us a meagre idea of what the term *history* stands for. There is no denying that historians tend to direct their acumen to dry, factualist topics and pretend that there is no proper ‘history’ outside that narrow ambit. But it also means that scholars in the para-historical specialisms often work, heedless of the achievements that history *does* have to offer (with its high standards of source criticism, even-handedness, openness to diachronic variability, avoidance of presentism, etcetera).

This recalls the previously mentioned connection between the growth of academic history and the growth of revisionism. It is significant, and regrettable, that on the whole there are more ‘narrow-historians’ in the revisionist camp (that is to say: alumni of academic history programmes working in history departments), while the anti-revisionist camp has a higher representation of practitioners from the para-historical disciplines (literary history, historical sociology, art history, media studies, historical geography). There is no need for the fault lines to have run that way, but it does create institutional as well as ideological barriers to interdisciplinary exchange and dialogue: ideally, history should embrace all aspects of ‘the way in which a society takes reckoning of its past’ (to quote Huizinga’s famous definition).

Beiner: Must we necessarily define antiquarianism in opposition to history? In a similar way, David Lowenthal has argued that ‘heritage and history rely on antithetical modes of persuasion’ so that ‘heritage and history are closely linked, but they serve quite different purposes’. Such an approach inevitably reaches the conclusion that heritage is essentially ‘bad history’, or as put by Lowenthal: ‘heritage everywhere not only tolerates but thrives on historical error’.²⁷ But this is not the only way of

looking at the issue. Raphael Samuel, for example, rejected the standard dichotomy and presented in his *Theatres of Memory* a plea for the inseparability of popular and academic history.²⁸

There may be, as you have argued elsewhere, a qualitative distinction between ‘situational’ antiquarianism (with its spatial conception of the past) and *événementiel* history, separated by contrasting spatial and temporal modes of engagement with the past. However, antiquarians did not ignore time; in fact chronology was one of the main interests of classical antiquarianism.²⁹ They were also preoccupied with writing biographies, which inexorably follow changes over the course of a lifetime. When R. R. Madden chose to write the history of 1798 through his monumental *Lives of the United Irishmen*, he opted for an unusual history, which does not conform to a standard narrative. The outcome is a work of history achieved in an antiquarian genre. There were many other such ‘transmuters’ — antiquarian historians and historians who engaged in antiquarian pursuits. The more we probe the distinction, the less certain we become about its validity and begin to speculate whether it is not a specious schematization, imposed in order to simplify and regulate a hybrid situation. Instead of clearly demarcating two fundamentally dissimilar studies of the past, we may have to be content with differences in emphases, by which antiquarians showed a preference for the study of cultural production (as opposed to high politics) — subject matter which is more amenable to thematic (as opposed to sequential or temporal) study.

Its polymathic scope has allowed antiquarianism to defy the standard boundaries and perils of compartmentalization; it has been engaged with poetry, historical fiction and historical writing, painting, archaeology, natural history, biology, geography, philology, musicology, folklore, and social reform

27 David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge, 1998); quotations respectively from 12, 194, 6.

28 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol. 1: *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London, 1994), vol. 2: *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain* (London, 1998)

29 See Anthony Grafton, ‘Tradition and Technique in Historical Chronology’, in M. H. Crawford and C. R. Ligota, eds., *Ancient History and the Antiquarian: Essays in Memory of Arnaldo Momigliano* (London, 1995), 15–31.

30 Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, vol. 1, 250–73, 271; see also 16–17.

31 See for example Stuart Hannabuss, ‘How Real is Our Past? Authenticity in Heritage Interpretation’, in J. M. Fladmark, ed., *Heritage and Museums: Shaping National Identity* (Dorset, 2000), 351–65.

32 The National Museum in Ireland is a case in point. See Elizabeth Crooke, *Politics, Archaeology and the Creation of a National Museum in Ireland* (Dublin, 2000).

(which can also be defined as a scholarly, if not scientific, field in the terms of the period). This was not interdisciplinarianism *avant la lettre*, rather it was characteristic of the much more fluid situation that preceded the modern delineation of disciplines. History wilfully separated itself from its traditional partner and was elevated by its newly acquired professional status so that subsequent collaboration could only be contemplated on unequal terms. There was, however, an unacknowledged price to be paid for this self-imposed exclusivity.

Samuel provocatively asked fellow-historians: ‘Do we not require of our readers, when facing them with one of our period reconstructions, as willing a suspension of disbelief as the “living history” spectacle of the open-air museum or theme park?’³⁰ Historians relying solely on a restricted concept of history have often discovered that they are insufficiently equipped to present convincing reconstructions of the past and therefore the new wave of cultural micro-histories (by such innovators as Ladurie, Zemon Davis, Darnton, and Ginzburg) moved in the direction of a *rapprochement* with antiquarianism. This may seem to be a pioneering historiographical move forward and yet it can also be seen as a step backwards towards scholarly engagements that were once readily available and, had it not been for the professionalization of the discipline, may have been part and parcel of modern historiography (though this would depend on a conceptualization of ‘modernity’ that is not defined in opposition to ‘tradition’). Historiographical revolutionaries can therefore also be considered reactionaries.

In the context of the conflict between history and antiquarianism, it is necessary to push forward ‘the time of death’ of ‘respectable’ antiquarianism. In spite of growing condescension and denigration from professional historians, antiquarianism remained a distinguished preoccupation

through the entire nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. For this reason the Irish case, with its historical professionalization dated to the 1930s, is pertinent. This time line does not confirm a liquidation of antiquarianism corresponding with the rise of historicism on the one hand and the historical novel on the other, but rather a period of co-existence and interaction, in which the former was on the wane while the other was waxing. This dating is also true for the splintering of antiquarianism into separate scholarly fields, as antiquarians continued to pursue wide-ranging investigations over this period. The transition was therefore an evolutionary paradigm shift rather than a revolutionary moment.

The innovation and success of the historical novel can be partly explained by its accessibility, in contrast with the arcane erudition of antiquarians, who, as Scott jokingly noted, ‘wrote essays on medals in the proportion of twelve pages to each letter of the legend’. This difference between the two is more a matter of form than content. The historical novel is an achievement of style, which accommodates the ‘suspension of disbelief’, that antiquarians employed in reconstructing the past. This relates to current debates on heritage and the constructed category of ‘authenticity’, which is at the heart of antiquarianism.³¹ Antiquarians not only uncovered, restored and collected monuments — they authenticated them. Antiquarians generally preferred to preserve the heritage artefacts they restored in private possession but when they experimented with public exhibitions they laid the foundations for yet another modern field — museology.³²

When Robert McAdam and his fellow antiquarians in Ulster advertised an ‘Exhibition of Objects of Antiquity and Irish Historical Reliques’, held in Belfast in September 1852, they boasted that ‘Surrounded by such a collection of

memorials from all parts of Ulster, the visitor could, for the first time, realize in some degree, the very different states of society which have prevailed in Ireland, and of which our historians convey a very feeble idea.³³ Note the antiquarians' disregard for historians at a time when the two practices could still apparently address each other on equal terms. Later in the century, Francis Joseph Biggar purchased the Norman castle of Ardglass and turned it into a heritage site open to the public (which he later put in the custody of the government of Northern Ireland). To quote a contemporary visitor: 'Everywhere around one's eyes are feasted on rare antique objects of priceless value.'³⁴

This kind of 'living history', facilitated by staged authenticity that locates 'genuine' artefacts in reconstructed settings, is of course antithetical to a history that thrives on the 'death of the past', as famously advocated by J. H. Plumb.³⁵ The widespread desire today to reclaim an intimate and vital relationship with the past is part of a contemporary obsession with remembrance and commemoration or, as labelled by Jay Winter, a 'Memory Boom' that has become 'the historical signature of our own generation'.³⁶ Pierre Nora has diagnosed this phenomenon as a reaction to a growing sense of 'the acceleration of history' caused by the passing away of 'living memory' and the last remaining vestiges of tradition. Instead of the familiar academic history that was constructed in opposition to memory as a discipline that aspired to scientific status, his innovative historiographical model of *lieux de mémoire* that are located 'between memory and history' can be read as a reformulated antiquarian approach to the past.³⁷ Historians may have appeared to have emerged victorious in the first round of their struggle against antiquarians but they now find themselves overwhelmed by new manifestations of antiquarianism with which they need to come to terms.

It is evident today that professional academia does not have a monopoly on authoritative knowledge on the past. One could argue that this has always been the case. Historians (alongside other scientists) may beg to differ, but ultimately the snobbish dismissal of 'amateurs' has not played in their favour. Moreover, the conscious breakaway from the rich tradition of antiquarianism in Ireland can serve to explain the underperformance of contemporary historiography or, in other words, why Irish history starved.

Leerssen: Let us not, in denouncing academic snootiness, over-glorify anything non-academic. The realization that academic scholarship has no binding authority in the real world should not mean that academics must therefore prostrate themselves before the Real World's Last Word. Do immunologists have to endorse or condone homeopathy because that's what scores with the self-medicating drugstore customers? I remember an eminent colleague of ours giving a highly informed lecture to an audience combining fellow-academics and sponsors from the Irish-American business community — only to have to face, at question time, queries from a sponsor as to Irish holiday recommendations.

What do we mean when we speak of 'authoritative knowledge', even whilst denying academia a monopoly to that quiddity? The *American Historical Review* felt called upon, a while back, to start reviewing historical blockbuster movies like *Michael Collins*, *Braveheart*, etcetera, because they realized that it was a hugely important mode of society's collective preoccupation with the past. Some of that was in the sniffy 'they got it all wrong' mode, but even this urge to correct errors is interesting and should not be dismissed. We do not quarrel with Tolkien when he tells us elves have grey eyes, because Middle Earth is his creation and he can give his elves' eyes

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34 J. K. Owen, *An Irish Chieftain of To-Day* (Belfast, c.1910), 9

35 J. H. Plumb, *The Death of the Past* (1969). For an Irish equivalent see Roy Foster, 'Theme-parks and Histories', in his *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland* (London, 2001), 23–36.

36 Jay Winter, 'The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, 27 (2000), 69–92

37 Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History', in Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York, 1996), vol. 1, 1–20. See also Pierre Nora, 'Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory', *Eurozine* (April 2002); <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-04-19-nora-en.html>.

Hughie O'Donoghue
A Long Time Gone
 2006
 oil, mixed media on wood
 construction
 private collection



any colour he damn well chooses. All we do is follow the story, on his terms. But with history, the past is Out There, and we readers have as much a title to it as anyone else. So historians are congenitally cursed with *far less* authority than the fictional novelist. In the case of reading history, the suspension of disbelief is, *pace* Samuels, by no means a willing one, rather a grudging one. We reserve the right to second-guess, to disagree.

Ironically, therefore, the carping historian who criticizes popular historical narrative (like a movie review in the *AHR*) for getting the facts wrong — is treating that narrative as history, not as fiction. That being said, everyone will realize how quixotic the idea is: academic history to legislate for popular remembrancing. So the ‘authoritative knowledge’ that, as you claim, was claimed by academic historians, is unauthoritative in a double sense. It cannot legislate for what people think, and it cannot coerce the reader’s reactions.

If the word ‘authoritative’ has any meaning in this context at all, it must be in the very old-fashioned sense that it is knowledge underwritten by third parties — authorities. That is the very definition of academic knowledge, as opposed to general

knowledge. Academic knowledge is to know, not just a given fact or piece of information, but also to know where you obtained that knowledge. It is meta-knowledge: knowledge that is aware of its provenance.

Now here’s an article of faith. I can only assert it, no more, but I feel very deeply about it. Given a choice between general knowledge and academic knowledge (as defined above), I consider academic knowledge epistemically superior. It is not perfect but it is more transparent, less easily confused with *doxa*, ideology or unproven belief. And while I cannot and would not want to enforce the social superiority and authority of academic knowledge, I do firmly hold fast to the superior epistemic quality (call it ‘authority’) of academic knowledge. That’s why I’m a Darwinist rather than a Creationist. To the extent, then, that the development of antiquarianism into academic history involved a shift towards the epistemic standards of academic knowledge, I do not consider that a matter of history ‘starving’, but rather shedding some flab and acquiring some muscle tone.

Is there such a thing as Bad History? Yes, like bad engineering, bad medicine, bad chemistry. The risk of going Bad keeps Good

History on its toes. Is there such a thing as Bad Antiquarianism? No. Because with antiquarianism, like free jazz, Anything Goes. Antiquarianism lacks quality control.

Beiner: Did professionalization result in the starvation of Irish history or did it rather implement an athletic diet that can be credited with a loss of excess flab and the acquiring of muscle tone?

Despite all their peculiarities and oddities, the invaluable contributions of antiquarians cannot be overlooked. Even if antiquarian preoccupation with time can be branded as essentially a-historical, it would be inaccurate to sum up, for example, J. T. Gilbert's monumental volumes merely as a situational chronology when they are laden with *événementiel* references that accumulate into an incomparable history of Dublin.³⁸ If we acknowledge the range of scholarly depth and innovation of such luminaries as Petrie, then we cannot but echo the despair of an American scholar who pertinently asked, 'Why is there no archaeology in Irish Studies?'³⁹ The same can be said for the other fields that brilliant antiquarians like Petrie pioneered but were subsequently brushed aside to the margins of Irish Studies and were, by and large, completely ignored by historians. Contrary to a common misconception, antiquarianism was not synonymous with a simplistic lack of critical thought and did not peddle its ware to a credulous public. Excluding forays into historical fiction and folktales, the great bulk of antiquarian writing was primarily circulated within esoteric erudite circles. The impassioned debates and controversies among antiquarians (such as the furore over the origins of the Round Towers in Ireland) were all about subjecting scholarship to rigorous peer criticism.

At its best, virtual historiography should not be concerned with Irish history merely catching up with current historiographical

trends and enhancing its engagement with sources drawn from popular culture. It is about envisaging a 'road not taken', revisiting the deliberate dismissal of an alternative historiography which in this case 'has made all the difference'. This does not refer to the emergence of a local variation of a history of *mentalités* grounded in Ireland but of an *Irish* history that redresses the shameless rejection of 'native' resources (such as Irish language, material culture, and oral history) and of indigenous historiographical traditions, which are not only to be found in antiquarian scholarship but also in vernacular folk history.⁴⁰ In Nietzschean terms, this would not be a case of a hackneyed rendition of revived 'antiquarian history' replacing academic 'critical history' but of the formulation of a new-old history, which would synthesize antiquarian, critical and monumental (or commemorative) modes of history into a multilayered and multifaceted exploration of the past. The feasibility of fulfilling such an aspiration in today's world may seem to be questionable. Such attempts were made in the past but were extinguished by the professionalization of history, which effectively starved Irish history, or deprived it of ingenuity. For all its muscle tone, the writing of Irish history is at best a third-rate player in an international arena, as opposed to other areas of Irish creativity, which have remained within an Irish tradition, or are in dialogue with tradition, and yet time and time again have won international laurels and have been widely recognized both by popular and academic standards for their outstanding merits and resourcefulness.

Leerssen: When exactly and how exactly did we pass those paths converging in the snowy woods? Was the Ordnance Survey still an antiquarian enterprise or already a manifestation of the new statistical-empirical phase of history and archaeology? Its popular commemoration has been famously distorted, first in Douglas

38 See T. J. Gilbert, *A History of the City of Dublin*, 3 vols. (Dublin, 1978; facsimile of 1st edn. 1854–59).

39 See Charles Orser 'Why is there no Archaeology in Irish Studies?', *Irish Studies Review*, 8, 2 (2000), 157–65.

40 For a critical examination of Irish traditions of vernacular historiography, see Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison, 2006).

41 Starting of course with John Andrews, *A Paper Landscape: The Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Oxford, 1975).

42 Nicole Belmont, *Aux sources de l'ethnologie française: L'Académie celtique* (Paris, 1995); Mona Ozouf, *L'École de la France: Essais sur la révolution, l'utopie et l'enseignement* (Paris, 1984)

43 For example, see Stephan Jordan, *Geschichtstheorie in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts. Die Schwellenzeit zwischen Pragmatismus und Klassischem Historismus* (Frankfurt, 1999). I have dealt with these issues more extensively in my articles 'Literary Historicism: Romanticism, Philologists, and the Presence of the Past', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 65, 2 (2004), 221–43, 'Ossian and the Rise of Literary Historicism', in Howard Gaskill, ed., *The Reception of Ossian in Europe* (London, 2004), 109–25, and 'Historisme en historicisme', *De Negentiende Eeuw*, 30 (2006), 110–17.

Hyde's lecture on 'The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland', and then by Brian Friel in his *Translations*, and its importance is only slowly being retrieved by, dare I say it, *historical* and revisionist reappraisal.⁴¹

More to the point, it should be seen in the context of those state-led total-inventory projects that all of them seem to have taken their cue, directly or indirectly, from the Parisian *Académie celtique* in 1806, itself probably influenced by the Napoleonic description of Egypt.⁴² Its empirical procedures stood at odds with the speculative antiquarianism of the preceding generation, the Vallanceys, Bethams and Henry O'Briens. There is, then, a first anti-antiquarian moment in the decades of romantic historicism. The rise of historicism (Savigny, Grimm, Ranke, Thierry, Michelet) is one of the contributing causes to the decline of antiquarianism; it is this that causes Scott's attitude to antiquarianism to be so full of mixed-feeling irony.⁴³

Still, much of what you seem to consider the prelapsarian, vibrant, inclusive and 'antiquarian' form of doing history survives throughout the nineteenth century and the definitive narrowing down of history to the archive-driven investigation of social, political and economic history only occurs in the twentieth century. And indeed, none of these paradigm shifts is absolute. The tradition of intellectual history continues, and is graced by names such as Burckhardt and Huizinga. If we allow our gaze to dwell on the fields adjacent to 'narrow history', we encounter names such as Paul Hazard, Paul

Van Tieghem, Mario Praz, Albert Béguin, Ernst Gombrich, Ernst Robert Curtius, Lewis Mumford, Eduard Dijksterhuis; all this before the post-Foucault 'cultural turn'.

Strikingly, of course, I can find no Irish names to include in that list. That would indicate that the problem is at least in part one of Irish academic provincialism. In the nineteenth century, we see Trinity scholars such as Lecky, Dowden and Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett (a pioneer of comparative literature, with affinities to E. A. Freeman and Walter Bagehot) continue a sociologically and anthropologically inspired style of intellectual history. That tradition, too, gets etiolated in the course of the twentieth century. And one of the contributory causes, I would suggest, lies (alongside the rise of 'academic history') in the nationalistically introspective, indeed self-obsessed, climate of the Free State and the early Republic, which was concerned only with its own identity, its own past, its own nationhood, and which turned its back on the wider academic world.

I would therefore argue that a return to the vibrancy of an interdisciplinary 'broad history' cannot take place without a simultaneous growth towards a new internationalism. A wholesome example to that effect is offered by the field of Irish folklore, which, as I have learned from Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, is now thriving, thanks to intense contacts with, and theoretical impulses from, folklore studies worldwide. ■