

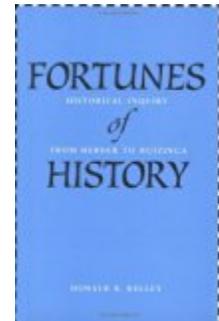
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Donald R. Kelley. *Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. xiii + 426 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-09578-4.

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The Myth of New History Historicized

Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga is the second installment in Donald Kelley's projected three-volume survey of Western historiography from antiquity to the present. The first volume, which took the story from the Greeks to the Enlightenment, appeared in 1998, having been preceded by a wide-ranging reader with primary texts from the same period.[1] Along the way Kelley has also written a separate book focusing on the subdiscipline of intellectual history.[2] Kelley's project is truly a landmark. The only Anglophone study even approaching it in terms of range, depth, and ambition is *A History of Historical Writing* (1942) by James Westfall Thompson, namesake of the endowed chair at Rutgers University that Kelley now fittingly holds.

Fortunes of History picks up where the previous volume left off and takes the narrative through the interwar period of the twentieth century, with occasional glances beyond. A brief review of the book's contents will indicate something of its range. The first three chapters examine major problems and trends in historiography from the late eighteenth through the first third of the nineteenth century. Some of the key issues here concern varieties of Enlightenment historiography, including philosophical history and what Kelley dubs the "old historicism"; German debates over the theory and "art" of history, including the problem of subjectivity and the rhetoric of alterity; the shift from universal to cultural history; the impact of the French Revolution on historical writing and the ways in which post-Revolutionary historiography charted the main paths still trodden on

the vexed question of the Revolution's origins; the relationship of history to biblical criticism, hermeneutics, and church history, and to the fields of mythology, philology, philosophy, and law; and how expanding temporal and geographical horizons and the "shock of ethnic alterity" subverted Europeanist cultural assumptions and Christian chronology.

Next come six chapters devoted, two apiece, to the national traditions of British, German, and French historiography in the nineteenth century. Here some common themes emerge, including conceptions of national and constitutional history and their relation to the ancient and medieval past, history's contested status as an art or a science, the frequently combative relationship between political-institutional history and various forms of cultural history, and the question of history's public utility. But Kelley also pays ample attention to the political, institutional, and ideological peculiarities that conditioned the specific forms that historiographical practice and debate took within each national tradition. We are treated to astute analyses of a number of major figures, including Walter Scott, Thomas Babington Macaulay, William Stubbs, Lord Acton, B. G. Niebuhr, Theodor Mommsen, Leopold von Ranke, J. G. Droysen, Jacob Burckhardt, François Guizot, Augustin Thierry, and Jules Michelet, among others. Kelley places these giants of the field within a lively storyline whose cast includes numerous lesser-known historians and "schools" of historiography, all depicted in their various contexts.

From here Kelley ventures briefly "beyond the canon"

to consider emerging conceptions of prehistory, changing ideas of cultural history, the special case of Italian historiography, and various historiographical traditions on the European “margins” (Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, Spain, Switzerland, and the Low Countries). A chapter on American parallels considers prehistory in the New World, the project of constructing a national history, the ideal of scientific history in an American key, and Henry Adams’s literary historiography.

The last chapter canvasses various “new histories” being propounded around the turn of the twentieth century. Kelley pays particular attention to the *Methodenstreit* surrounding Karl Lamprecht’s *Kulturgeschichte* and the opposing neo-Rankean school of political history, the passing of New History in America from the generation of Frederick Jackson Turner and James Harvey Robinson to that of Charles Beard and Carl Becker, and Henri Berr and the *Annales* school in France. The chapter closes with insightful discussions of Johan Huizinga’s resurrection of Burckhardtian cultural history, the German “crisis of historicism” (where Kelley brings clarity to a discussion often confused by different understandings of the term “historicism” itself), and hermeneutics from Nietzsche to Heidegger.

As this inventory suggests, this is a dazzlingly erudite book informed by a breath-taking perspective. It represents the fruit of a lifetime of painstaking scholarship and mature reflection. Kelley cites Fustel de Coulanges’s adage that “one day of synthesis takes years of analysis” (pp. 210, 318), and one senses that this project reflects the truth of the dictum. Precisely because he is so familiar with the nooks and crannies of the vast terrain he covers here, Kelley can give us panoramic vistas that allow us to see the movement of the landscape as a whole, including continuous and recurrent features in the land. He also knows when to zoom down to particulars and, in doing so, provides expert orientation to key actors, movements, and intellectual battle zones. While Kelley is thoroughly conversant with the relevant secondary literature, his analyses are invariably grounded in primary texts. (I noted sources in seven languages.) He possesses, moreover, a marvelous gift for compressing a vast amount of information into fluent and elegant prose.

Given the range of phenomena it covers, what, if anything, holds *Fortunes of History* together? On the one hand Kelley does delight in detail and sprinkles his narrative with interesting tidbits and apt quotations that generally add color and life rather than distraction. There

are moments, it is true, particularly in the chapters dealing with extra-canonical and American material, when the writing almost lapses into encyclopedic mode, and the attempt to cover ground comes at the cost of the incisive analysis and integrated narrative that characterize most of the text. But, like Friedrich Schlegel, who warned against “losing ourselves in the details” of history (quoted, p. 52), though with a higher regard for the importance of facts than the German philosopher-historian, Kelley keeps the forest as well as the trees clearly in view. That he renders his fact-packed story a highly readable one is one of the book’s great feats.

But the book is indeed sustained by an overarching argument, by a message Kelley has sought to convey throughout the larger project of which this volume forms a part. In short, Kelley argues that the continuities in Western historiography far outweigh the supposed ruptures. For all the diversity of the approaches explicated here, historiography has continued to move within a circumscribed set of subtraditions that can be traced back to the ancient world. In fundamental ways the cultural-anecdotal history of Herodotus, the political-structural history of Thucydides, and the various forms of “national” history of Livy, Josephus, and Eusebius set the terms of debate, providing a set of languages that define, in Hans-Georg Gadamer’s terms, a horizon of understanding and meaning in which historians down to the present still operate. Does this seem an overstatement? If so, consider that virtually all the “big questions” that animated historiographical debate in the modern period had already been posed by the ancients—and the range of answers given largely echoed them, as well. What is the meaning and use of history? (That it teaches us how to live? Reveals God’s plan or the way of Progress? Liberates us from the past? Imparts collective self-knowledge?) Is it a science or an art? Is it to be linked with political science, geography, and environment, or primarily with rhetoric? Is recent or remote history of greater value? What is the relative merit of political, institutional, and military history vis-à-vis cultural and social history? How to balance the historian’s “point of view” and creative role with the constraints of facts and evidence? Even such seemingly new departures in the modern era as the field of “heterology” (inquiry into the other), the hermeneutical turn, and the rediscovered connection between history and myth, for the most part, rehearsed questions and insights that could be traced back to the beginnings of Western historiography. History, Kelley shows, has been nothing so much as an unending series of debates on topics of recurrent and en-

during interest.

This perspective, Kelley stresses, renders deeply suspect the perennial claims of historians, past and present, to novelty. When the concept of “new history” was reinvented at the end of the nineteenth century, the idea was already at least four hundred years old (p. 304). Take the example of cultural history, which perhaps more than any other field has preserved its claims to novelty while repudiating or forgetting its forebears (cf. p. 310). When Johan Huizinga in the 1920s pursued culture beyond then conventional bounds—asking about social psychology, anxiety, eroticism, sexuality, symbolism, rhetoric, ceremony, witchcraft, irrationalism, madness, festivals, sense of time, popular entertainments, etc.—and defined the task of cultural history as determining human meaning and imposing form upon the past through aesthetic judgment, imagination, and story-telling, he was already reverting to a tradition that stretched back, in its modern guise, through Karl Lamprecht to Jacob Burckhardt. With due regard for the accomplishments of the post-1970s “new cultural history,” particularly in recovering many previously marginalized voices of the past, it may be asked to what extent it has added appreciably to the basic Burckhardtian program.

Kelley returns to the point in his conclusion, and here one detects a note of exasperation with the phenomenon of never-ending claims to innovation: “History has ever to be rewritten and the errors of our elders not only corrected but edited out of our stories. What is old must be revered and studied, but out-of-date historiography must be replaced, or anyway historicized, into conceptual irrelevance—unless it is vouchsafed classic status. The old name for this was progress; the newer name is revisionism, and we are all victims of the process” (p. 339). If Kelley aims to teach anything, it is to instill a dose of humility to practicing historians, a humility born of knowl-

edge. It is surely true that, in the words of Huizinga, “every culture must create its own form of history,” but we do well to remember that those forms are themselves inevitably conditioned by the horizons of understanding opened up to us by our predecessors.

Fortunes of History is precisely the sort of antidote needed to remedy the tendencies towards amnesia and premature claims to novelty that Kelley exposes. I hope, for this reason, that the book makes its way onto syllabi for graduate seminars in historiography, which, ironically for a field devoted to the past, often take a notoriously presentist cast. (An excellent companion volume would be Fritz Stern’s classic reader *The Varieties of History from Voltaire to the Present* [2d ed., 1973], which contains many of the texts that figure centrally in Kelley’s book.) The historical profession as a whole owes a debt of gratitude to such a skilled preserver of its collective memory—and it can look forward with anticipation to the final episode of Kelley’s epic tale.

Notes

[1]. *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and Kelley, ed., *Versions of History from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

[2]. *The Descent of Ideas: The History of Intellectual History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

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