

IDEAS, INSTITUTIONS, AND WISSENSCHAFT: ACCOUNTING FOR THE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

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Theodore Ziolkowski, *Clio the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in Germany* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004)

Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006)

In the same symbolic way that the modern political world can be traced to revolutionary Paris, and the modern economic world to industrial Manchester, so modern academia and modern scholarship trace their origins to Germany at the turn of the nineteenth century. There and then the study of history, philosophy, philology, linguistics, and, somewhat later, the natural sciences was transformed in content and methodology onto the lines that would characterize them until deep into the twentieth century. Some argue that the period from 1770 to 1830 launched a still more fundamental transformation in the very structure of academic knowledge: the creation of modern “disciplines” as the new social and intellectual forms through which knowledge would be classified, produced, and communicated.

This transformation in how knowledge was produced and structured was paralleled by the rise of the “research university” in Germany—the university institutionally and ideologically committed to the production of knowledge and to an understanding of the professorial role as primarily one of researcher, not teacher. Rudolf Stichweh remarks that in creating the research university Germans harnessed a fledgling social system for the formal creation of knowledge to the much more robust social systems for professional credentialing, elite education, and upward educational mobility, all within a single institution, the old university. That unexpected confluence of functions allowed the research system to piggyback (in terms of resources, status, and autonomy) on the incomparably greater social importance and resource entitlement of the latter

systems, all at a time when the concept of “research” scarcely existed, before the professionalization of the research role had been envisioned, and before the utilitarian value of research to state and society had been demonstrated.¹

So potent was this coupling of systems that within seventy years every country in the world that possessed a higher-education system had been forced to adopt the German model or compromise with it. How did it begin? Was this a romantic tale of national self-realization? An epic of visionary leadership reified in institutions? An ironic story of disjunction between intentions and consequences? Or a paradox re-posed about the mysterious relationship between ideas and institutions? Today every academic lives and works within the long shadow cast by the German universities and the new academic persona they created in the early nineteenth century. No wonder that histories of universities are always about our present as well as their past. To account for the research university means giving an account of our professional selves. In one way or another, all three books reviewed here wrestle with these questions, and with those issues of legacy and identity.

Neither universities nor institutions occupy center stage in Theodore Ziolkowski’s lucid volume *Clio the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in Germany*. Ziolkowski is out to demonstrate that German Romanticism was more than a literary or aesthetic movement; it represented a pervasive cultural consciousness that permeated and transformed all aspects of science and scholarship in Germany between 1789 and 1815. He finds the common denominator of Romantic consciousness in a new reverence for history and a growing devotion to historical forms of explanation, a claim anticipated by thinkers as different as Friedrich Meinecke and the early Michel Foucault.

But if universities do not occupy center stage in Ziolkowski’s book, they are the stage itself. An early modern commonplace held that the structure of the northern European university, with its four faculties of theology, law, medicine, and philosophy, mirrored the natural divisions of all human knowledge, dealing as the faculties did with the human soul, society, body, and mind. Accordingly Ziolkowski sets out to prove the all-pervasive impact of romanticism by showing how each of these four realms of knowledge—the so-called *Fakultätswissenschaften*—were transformed between 1789 and 1815 by the historicizing impulse. After an initial chapter dealing with history as a distinct discipline, the book proceeds through chapters devoted to philosophy, theology, law, and medicine, each presenting the scholars mainly responsible for the historicization of the field. The great historicizers include all the expected

¹ Rudolf Stichweh, *Zur Entstehung des modernen Systems wissenschaftlicher Disziplinen. Physik in Deutschland 1740–1890* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1984), esp. 7–93.

names, such as Herder, Niebuhr, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and Savigny, as well as an array of lesser-known physicians and biologists from various medical faculties (where most of the natural sciences were then taught) who sought to temporalize the study of nature. The professoriate at the University of Berlin is significantly well represented among the historicizers.

Behind this neat isomorphism of ideas, institutions, and book chapters lurks a venerable interpretation of university history. During the Enlightenment the traditional four-faculty structure of the German university had been widely attacked as an outmoded Gothic survival, conducive only to the continuing entrenchment of corporate obscurantism and academic pedantry. Prussia, when faced after 1806 with the necessity of reorganizing and revitalizing its institutions of higher learning, famously rejected the Enlightenment's preference for academies and special schools and elected instead to preserve and reaffirm what Schleiermacher called the historical organization of the university "in the German sense." Older interpretations of university history have looked back upon that epic decision, and especially upon the founding of the University of Berlin in 1810, as a symbol of German patriotic and cultural reawakening, the springboard to the unparalleled success of the German university in the nineteenth century, and the epitome of heroic, romantic, national consciousness. The very plan of Ziolkowski's book, therefore, marries Romanticism's achievement at the level of ideas—the epic historicization of the four faculty sciences—to its achievement at the level of institutions—the historical reaffirmation of the universities in whose structures and practices those sciences were reified.

Ziolkowski's treatment of his great historicizers is compact, informative, and accessible. He blends biographical sketches with expositions of their central ideas, in the process ranging over an impressively wide swath of the history of scholarship. I particularly admired the useful review of the history of German law and legal theory before the 1790s, the account of Savigny and the peculiarities of the *Rechtswissenschaft* tradition, and the discussion of the codification controversy and the subsequent creation of the historical school of law in northern Germany. Ziolkowski looks to Hegel as the agent responsible for the alleged historicization of philosophy, a position that may understate the importance of history in Kant's writing. But the account atones with a marvelously lucid explanation of Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, one which attempts to link Hegel to other romantic thinkers of their period through his commitment to a new "language of estrangement" and to "triadomania."

Still, this usually surefooted book stumbles over its reluctance to grapple with the contradictory meanings of "history" itself. Georg Iggers has distinguished between two opposed currents within German historicism, one seeking to discover the laws of historical development in sources outside historical processes, the other seeking meaning and intelligibility in the radical uniqueness and

individuality of historical events and entities themselves.² Ziolkowski, for his part, acknowledges this Janus-faced nature of historicist thought, but underestimates its significance for his own project and downplays the extent to which it divided the scholars whose work he traces. The complexities of historicizing time and change become similarly blurred in the discussion of how medicine and biology were “temporalized” at the hands of the Romantic philosophers and physicians such as Schelling, Oken, and Schubert. As later philosophers of history would argue, organic development is not history, and change in the natural and historical worlds calls for different theories of causation and different forms of time-consciousness. The study leaves these distinctions mostly undrawn, and so allows to slip away the opportunity to speculate on how different varieties of Romantic consciousness could engender subtly different concepts of time, change, and meaning.

This work also teaches an ironic and perhaps unintended lesson about the problematic relationship of ideas and institutions in the age of Romanticism. To demonstrate the historicization of the philosophical faculty, Ziolkowski looks mainly to philosophy proper and the triumph of Hegelianism, and to a lesser extent to the work of actual historians like Niebuhr. In reality, the historicizing impulse emanated even more strongly from classical studies, from the powerful currents of neohumanism, or *Alterthumswissenschaft*. This was the discipline that first framed the quintessential problem of Romantic scholarship, namely the relationship between language, culture, and history. It was Germany’s classical philologists who grappled with issues of transmission, corruption, and temporality, and who set the techniques for dealing with them as the methodological core of their science. Already in the age of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel the philosophical faculty was no longer “about philosophy.” Soon the explosive growth of the philosophical faculties and their fragmentation into a hundred disciplinary specializations, many of them spun off from classical philology itself, would shatter the traditional structure of the German universities, give the lie to the romantic ideal of the unity of knowledge, and destroy forever the ideal of the *Fakultätswissenschaften*. In the end the historicization of the faculties in the age of Romanticism would prove to be an act of institutional deconstruction, not of affirmation.

Thomas Howard strikes a less celebratory note in his *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University*, a study that also unfolds along the complex interface of ideas and institutions. He writes in sympathy with a growing body of criticism which charges the university of today with “moral and epistemological incoherence” (41). That incoherence is often traced

² Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1968).

to contemporary academia's alleged inability to reconcile its philosophical commitment to an autonomous, value-free concept of knowledge centered on the individual knower with the intellectual requirements necessary to the practice or analysis of systematic moral reasoning. Howard, for his part, finds this alleged crisis of contemporary academia prefigured in the institutional fortunes of the Protestant theological faculties of nineteenth-century Germany and in what he portrays as their exaggerated accommodation to modernity.

Howard's historical survey ranges back to the Reformation and forward to the 1920s, but it concentrates on Prussia during the reform era from 1789 to 1815. In that period, he argues, two developments began to undermine the traditional, privileged place of the theological faculty within the university. The first was Prussia's embrace of what he calls "Erastian Modernity." This policy radically subordinated ecclesiastical and religious affairs to the will of the state, and it became feasible only after the administrative centralization of the reform era allowed the state to control ecclesiastical affairs in its provinces effectively for the first time. Prussia's Erastian Modernity espoused the ideal of the *Kulturstaat* or the *Erziehungsstaat*, by which the state and its civil service would become agents responsible for the civic, moral, and cultural development of their citizens. Formulated and adopted during the reform era, this ideal implied that churches would henceforth serve as subordinate tools of the state in the realization of this politico-cultural program.

The second development that undermined the status of the theological faculties was the contemporaneous Prussian university reforms. They began around 1806 with the well-known series of classical treatises on the idea of the university by Schelling, Fichte, Steffens, Humboldt, and Schleiermacher. Collectively these works defined a new conception of the university, the "Humboldtian" university. In the Humboldtian ideal the university existed solely to serve truth, science, and learning. Reformers looked with suspicion on the three "upper" faculties, which ultimately served not *Wissenschaft* but the utilitarian needs of society and the state for professional practitioners. Their suspicion fell especially heavily on the faculty of theology. They insisted that if the faculty was to continue to exist at all as a part of the university, it must abandon its claim to revelatory knowledge transcending science, must treat theology entirely as a branch of *Wissenschaft*, and must abandon or radically de-emphasize the educational task of preparing clergymen for the pulpit and pastoral duties. In the new university, scientific theology must always take precedence over practical theology.

Howard contends that this Humboldtian *Wissenschaftsideologie*, soon to become the official rhetoric of all German universities, had long-term implications for Protestant theology. It promoted a theology that stressed critical historical and textual analysis of theological claims; was deeply skeptical of

revelation and dogma; belittled or dismissed confessional and ritual differences among believers; identified the purpose of religion with the promotion of civic, educational, and cultural development; and was instinctively anti-Catholic. As such, it conformed to and buttressed the state's policy of Erastian Modernity. A series of powerful Prussian ministers of education from Altenstein to Althoff furthered its academic entrenchment through their policy of professorial appointments. The success of ministerial policy could be seen during the bitter political and religious struggles which erupted in the wake of the state's attempts, initiated in 1817, to force amalgamation of the Lutheran and Reformed congregations. Prussian theology professors remained largely aloof from the religious turmoil around them, true to the supra-confessional, sometimes anti-confessional, conception of Christianity that was essential to Erastian Modernity.

The kind of Protestant theology pursued in university theology faculties may have served the needs of the *Kulturstaat*, but it did not endear the institutions to other elements in society. It contributed to a widening gulf between universities and the churches, and indeed between theology and faith, that excited protest and lament all through the nineteenth century. It fed the paradoxical reputation of German theology abroad, admired and sought after for its indispensable sophistication and profundity, yet simultaneously infamous for its rationalism, infidelity, and skeptical dismissal of all personal religion. Nor did German theology satisfy critics on its left. Periods of radical reform, such as 1806, 1848, and 1918, produced calls for the abolition of the theological faculties as incompatible with the mission of the university. The complaints of critics were fueled when the faculties proved themselves institutionally inhospitable to the emerging new field of comparative theology (*Religionswissenschaft*). Theology professors, critics complained, for all their ostensible liberalism, were actually mired in a continuing obsession with Christianity and its role that was alien to the scientific spirit of the university.

Two great defenders of university theology frame Howard's study: Friedrich Schleiermacher and Adolf von Harnack. Schleiermacher's defense, mounted during the era of the Prussian reforms, initiated the grand age of German university theology during the nineteenth century. Harnack's, written during the notorious crisis of historicism at the beginning of the twentieth century, compelled him to respond to new and ultimately devastating attacks on university theology. Karl Barth and others during the 1920s began to charge that the historicizing impulse of scientific theology had corrupted the very mission of theology by allowing it to fall under the spell of *Wissenschaft* and abandon the search for "the Word in the words." Howard's decision to close his history in the 1920s with Barth and crisis theology deftly reinforces the parallel he seeks with challenges to the moral relevance of the university today. But in Germany a moral

crisis awaited theology professors in the 1930s that was far more acute than today's anxious nostalgia for tradition and ethical certainties. A study framed morally, as this one is, begs for some acknowledgment of that impending tragedy.

Howard's is an admirable book with a dramatic theme—detailed, ambitious, well-researched, and *au courant* with the newest literature on the history of the German universities. It engages previous historiography conscientiously and thoroughly. But it also demonstrates the difficulty of balancing institutions and ideas in a single historical interpretation. Howard announces the theme of his study at the outset: “how [Protestant] theology occupied, defended, and successfully maintained a limited position within a radically modernizing university.” But he concedes immediately that “I focus largely on the fortunes of the theological faculty . . . as a component of the University, not on theology *per se*” (10). Unfortunately, the strategic decision to downplay theological ideas condemns the theology professors who parade through Howard's pages to remain illusive figures, their moral voices muted or ambiguous. Were they aware of the dilemmas of science and faith that their institutional identities forced upon them? Did they formulate strategies for reconciling them? In the absence of the theological ideas they produced, these questions are too often left hanging.

For university history itself, the most essential of the books reviewed here is William Clark's long-awaited *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University*. Clark's formidable study unfolds like a Foucauldian archeology—not an archeology of knowledge, but an archeology of the knowledge practices and academic conventions that ground the modern research university. He offers separate chapters on the lecture catalogue, the lecture and the disputation, the examination, the research seminar, the PhD degree, professorial appointments, and the library catalogue, each organized around snapshots or vignettes of these institutions and practices at incipient stages, over a period ranging from the Reformation to the mid-nineteenth century and drawn from the archives of universities in German-speaking Europe. Each constitutes a highly original history on its own; nevertheless, the effect that Clark achieves is far from that of standard history. Rather, it is that of exposing to view a series of stratigraphical discontinuities that simultaneously defamiliarize the modern forms of these academic institutions and practices while substantiating his claim for the gradual displacement of an oral academic culture by a written one. The discontinuities reveal the university as a “juridico-ecclesiastical space” supplanted by the university as the “political-economic world” it is today. Clark also devotes attention to Oxford and Cambridge, largely to explicate how the English and German models of the university evolved so differently, as well as to Jesuit colleges. The book's acute final chapter reviews the older historiography on the rise of the research university; summarizes earlier interpretations and distances Clark's own from them; traces the influence of the German university model on

the institutions of England, France, and the United States; discusses the nostalgic complaints of Max Weber about the German university as *Grossbetrieb*; and more. That chapter can be read alone and will be much excerpted, offering as it does a wide-ranging synthesis of university historiography and a provocative reprise and elaboration of Clark's central theses.

As a work of empirical research, Clark's achievement is remarkable. He has left few if any university archives in Germany and Austria unexamined; his bibliography runs to fifty-six pages; and thirty-six pages of appendices lay out systematic information on such matters as surviving lecture catalogues, doctoral graduates and dissertations, the first philological and pedagogical seminars and their enrollments, leadership, and statutes. The close attention paid to classical philology and philological seminars, both in the appendix and in the text, reflects Clark's insistence that classical philology constituted the modern and modernizing academic discipline par excellence—the principal field in which modern forms of academic practice and consciousness were established and from which they spread to influence other disciplines in the philosophical faculty.

The explanation that William Clark offers for the rise of the research university carries on central themes of a revisionist tradition that emerged in the 1960s, one that radically discounts the causal influence of ideas, ideology, or the Prussian university reforms. In place of these, Clark draws on the revisionist tradition to invoke the overriding importance of “ministers and markets.” Throughout the early modern period, princes and their ministers struggled to bend their universities to their wills; break the corporate autonomy of the institutions; and establish their right to appoint professors, oversee budgets, and ensure standards of diligence and behavior. This meant imposing bureaucratic standards of rationality and accountability on recalcitrant professors, academic senates, and rectors. Such initiatives became particularly aggressive during the eighteenth century, the heyday of cameralism and the *Policey-Staat*. Clark is mordantly funny with his tales of questionnaires, annual reports, visitations, dossier-compiling, and behind-the-scenes spying that German ministries resorted to as part of this long-term program to subordinate and rationalize their universities.

As one element of this program, ministries grew increasingly insistent during the eighteenth century that professors should earn “fame” by writing and publishing, both to prove their diligence and to attract well-to-do students to their institutions. Perhaps in emulation of the wealthy and much-envied University of Göttingen, Prussia decreed in 1749 that anyone seeking to be made a full professor must have already produced a minimum of seven article-length publications. True, the statute allowed the page-count to include printed “dissertations” written for use in academic disputations, and so of limited interest and circulation, but ministers also pressured academics to produce popular works that would find a wide market. This leads Clark to date the effective arrival of the

research university earlier than most other commentators, including those in the revisionist tradition. If rigorously enforced, state-mandated policies of publish-or-perish mark the existence of the research university, then it had appeared in key states of northern and central Germany well before the nineteenth century and before the Humboldtian reforms.

Establishing “fame” gained through publication (read here: symbolic capital) as the new coin of the academic realm created a competitive market in which literary reputation could be exchanged for institutional appointments, promotion, and patronage. The new emphasis on publication furthered the demise of the oral university and with it the centrality of disputations, the oral examination, and the declamatory or dictatorial style of lecture. It swelled the flood of new periodicals and review organs that were revamping the landscape of German literary and intellectual life in the eighteenth century. The new, unregulated market in literary reputations, working in tandem with ministerial imposition, eroded the foundations of the old corporate university, which had made hierarchy, seniority, tradition, patronage, orality, and family connections the key to status and institutional entrée.

Clark is far from suggesting that the growing academic market for literary fame made “objective” evaluation possible or rendered the academic career more calculable and rational than it had been. On the contrary, symbolic capital in the form of academic reputation hinged on the vagaries of book reviewers, critics, publishers, referees, testimonialists, patrons, and ministerial advisers, and all the things that these agents were prepared to report, confide, or whisper, about one. The new market plunged the would-be professor into a treacherous, subjective world of “academic gossip”—a world in which, Clark insists, the “voice,” the “ear,” and the “oral” lived on ineluctably in an era that bowed increasingly to the eye, to print, and to bureaucratic formulae. Clark paints that new academic world in mordant terms, ransacking university archives for appointment intrigues, visitation reports, secret evaluations, the margin-scribbling of ministers and underlings, and the self-presentations of office-seekers. His chapter titles tell it all: “Academic Babble and Ministerial Machinations,” “Conscientious Hearing and Academic Commodification,” “Academic Voices and the Ghost in the Machine.” The research university was less about *Wissenschaft* and the rational production of knowledge than about academic “noise” and who could make it loudest.

In addition to the “ministries and markets” mantra, the concept of “charisma” runs sporadically through Clark’s book. He draws loosely on Max Weber to argue that the modern professorial role embodies charismatic aspects. The traditional charismatic figure was a teacher, or a spiritual or a cultic leader, much as modern academics aspire to be; or he was a warrior, as professors imagined themselves to be in disputations of the early modern period or in the scholarly polemics and school-wars of the nineteenth century. Charismatic authority, displaced

elsewhere by the authority of tradition or reason, survives today in the research university, where in the professorial role rationality itself has become charismatic. Not that universities were not always charismatic places, Clark observes, but in the early modern university charisma adhered in institutions and things such as chairs, offices, and vestments; the rise of the modern university saw charisma transferred to persons, to professors, who presented themselves as authoritative and individualistic heroes of knowledge.

In the past, charismatic individuals were often rebels challenging tradition and established order with new ideas and convictions; that element, Clark notes, is preserved in the modern professorial role through the requirement of original research that adds to knowledge or challenges traditional scholarly certainties. And it is here, in Clark's interpretation, that traditional charisma met and was transformed by Romanticism. For Clark, Romanticism contributed to the rise of the research university not by forging a new awareness of history as Ziolkowski would have it, but by forging a new cultural ideal: the romantic, creative genius:

This Romantic ideology translated the Enlightenment's notion of fame into a new emphasis on the originality of the researcher's work, a new sort of academic charisma . . . In brief, the Enlightenment's notion of fame was shamelessly politico-economic at base. Famous academics meant cash flow and credit for the realm. Romanticism's notion of originality, in my view, mystified the notion of fame by substituting a cultural criterion for the economic one. Academic charisma flowed not from fame, but rather from one's genial originality, the recognition of which generated one's fame (and thus the cash flow and credit and so on). (442)

This romantic modulation of academic charisma shifted the demand that professors achieve "literary fame" toward a demand that their publications evince creativity, originality, and the new, and so the research university was born. In the process, Clark writes with regret, the rebellious and disruptive nature of the charismatic hero was tamed and institutionalized. The research university encourages and accommodates wars of truth but neutralizes (trivializes?) them within a contained and static institutional framework.

No historian writing today is more acutely aware of historiography's narrative turn than William Clark, already known for his scintillating application of tropological and emplotment analysis to works in the contemporary history of science.³ In this book as elsewhere in his writing the dominant trope is irony, indeed hyper-irony, irony so thick and relentless it runs to mockery if not quite to meanness. His university is a ship of fools, crewed by academics less tragic than clownish; the historical vignettes invite us to laugh at professors' antics

³ "Narratology and the History of Science," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 26 (1995), 1-71.

and pretensions (and indirectly at our own). No reader is surprised when, on page 474, David Lodge is invoked as an authority on academic charisma, ambition, and silliness. University practices and conventions may change over history, Clark suggests, but academic vanity and relentless self-interest are historical constants; indeed, he seems to hint, they make up the driving force of university history.

Clark describes his own book as “a long-winded diatribe on the ultimate identity of narcissism and nihilism” (475). Certainly the irony that permeates the study expresses a moral ambivalence about the modern university as deep as Thomas Howard’s. Clark refers to his book as an “academic confessional and apologetic work,” and admits that such works “trace a perilous path between the alternation of love and hate, if not of one’s friends and enemies, then of one’s self” (475). What Clark loves about the university he never makes clear. What he hates about it includes the indictment—I think made without irony—that “the modern regime of research [has today] created . . . a neofeudal order of academic plutocrats” for whom the pursuit of critical truth has been replaced by grant-mongering and academic entrepreneurship. All this results in a book that is brilliant, intimidating, original, disconnected, often hilarious, intentionally disconcerting, and sometimes awkwardly personal.

But the methodological question remains. Does the trope dictate the interpretation, as narrativists insist it must? Clark stands up very close to his universities, and his view of them is circumscribed. His discussion gives little hint that universities actually do anything for or to the larger society. The picture he draws serves the ironic tone of the interpretation marvelously: self-absorbed academics at their ivory-tower games, fending off or capitalizing upon the silly impositions of equally self-seeking ministries. But at the turn of the nineteenth century universities were simultaneously implicated in vast social and political upheavals going on in northern Germany: codification of the notorious *Berechtigungswesen* that would lead to the mandarin state; civil service and constitutional reforms; re-definition of the state’s relationship with its churches, courts, and medical systems; reorganization of the secondary-school system; and even the creation of a new social class, the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Can the rise of the research university be accounted for adequately without reference to any of these seismic changes in the relationship of the university with society? Are they not at least required to answer the question “why in Germany first, and not elsewhere”? Ironic accounts of the research imperative, for better or worse, deflect attention from macro-issues of university history.

And what of the relationship between institutions and ideas? Obviously, the ironic institutional account sets the stage for equally ironic explanations of the kinds of science and scholarship that necessarily unfolded within the academic market that was the research university. One need only consider how the process

of disciplinary fragmentation and rampant specialization that was launched in the early nineteenth century functioned precisely so as to allow as many researchers as possible to pose as discoverers, and so reap the institutional and symbolic benefits of original genius. Historicism, with its glorification of the past in all its diversity, individuality, and complexity, conveniently multiplied to virtual infinity the number of research topics around which expertise could be developed, scholarly originality evinced, and market value claimed. Textual criticism and critical method, so fervently embraced by German scholars, provided approaches that allowed originality, discovery, and creativity to be endlessly milked out of old sources which might otherwise have crystallized into dangerously stabilized entities with static, accepted meanings, and so rendered useless for accumulating academic capital.

Clark himself, however, rarely indulges in these extrapolations from ironic institutions to ironic ideas. Perhaps he abstains because many of the extrapolations are obvious if not trivial, or because some have been anticipated within the revisionist tradition already. Perhaps he abstains because such extrapolations raise the ugly quandary of causal primacy: did the research university and the market interests it created promote science and scholarship of particular kinds? Or did an inner dynamic of science and scholarship create the research university? But Clark may abstain for the deeper reason that such extrapolations cause the ironic emplotment to undermine itself. The narrative efficacy of ironic stories requires that the unforeseen consequences they demonstrate be commensurate with the causes revealed in the narration as having set those consequences in train. But ironic consequences that far exceed their causes, so that they become incommensurate with them, threaten the narrative not only with implausibility but with mutation into tragedy or romance. Extrapolating the ironic account of the research university to a broader, ironic account of modern scholarship poses that very threat. That “ministers and markets” might have given rise to the modern research university is a compelling ironic tale. But that same tale goes beyond simple irony, if such a history of the research university compels us to confront and accept unexpected continuities between our social being and the forms of our cognitive consciousness, between our institutions and our ideas. That account might even be read as a romantic quest, as a story about self-discovery and self-understanding, of coming to know ourselves better through the lessons, ironic or otherwise, that history can teach us. No wonder that the ironic voice pulls back from such an extrapolation. In William Clark’s milestone volume, revisionist accounts of the research university find their culmination and meet their ultimate limits.