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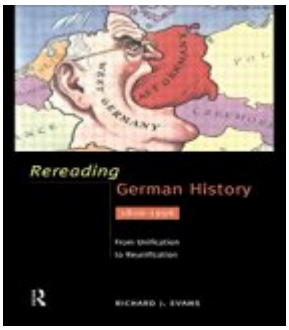
Richard J. Evans. *Rereading German History: From Unification to Reunification, 1800-1996.* London and New York: Routledge, 1997. xvi + 256 pp. $23.99, paper, ISBN 978-0-415-15900-5.



Reviewed by Diethelm Prowe

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To review a collection of reviews feels a bit like a parody of our scholarly (scholastic?) enterprise. Yet these old reviews (published between 1986 and 1995) were written by one of the most innovative and magisterial historians of modern Germany--even if calling him "one of the single most important," as the publisher's blurb does on the first page, is hyperbole. Richard J. Evans's books on feminism, family, peasants, proletarians, deviants, and capital punishment have provided critical innovative impulses to German history, and his synopses of important and critical new work in Germany for the English-language readership on Wilhelmine society and on the battles over the place of Nazi history have provided a vital bridge to Germany. A previous collection of his review essays, *Rethinking German History* (1987) has been a handy window for students to the German debates and the development of the seminal work of the 1970s and 1980s. Given the wide range and quality of this prolific output and his mastery of the field, one takes notice of any new Evans book.

His essays in this volume, Evans promises the reader, "attempt to set German reunification in its longer-term context," and "discuss how reunification itself has affected the way German historians have written about their country's past" (p. 2). Yet the review essays, most of which are reprinted pretty much as they originally appeared, achieve this goal only incidentally in a few cases. In fact, he comes to the conclusion in the final chapter--the only one written fresh for this book--that reunification has had very little impact on the key debates in German history. Most of those debates, including the self-conscious concern over national identity, reach back to the 1970s and 1980s.

This conclusion is in itself enlightening and goes against the grain of the view offered by those books that have been proclaiming the urgent need for reevaluation or even positing another break in German history. But in reality this book lacks a sustained argument in spite of the general introduction and the five somewhat redundant section-introductions, all of which try hard and with some success to synchronize the individual reviews. Even though the essays are all models of

well-written, insightful reviews, which show an impressive mastery of the context and surrounding literature, they remain old reviews of what are by now generally well-known or faded books, which were never meant to speak to each other and do not do so presently. Except for the reviews of five major German history surveys in the first section, the articles are grouped together artificially by very generally related topics. For instance, do the commentaries on books about police, Catholic repression in Prussia, workers' cooperatives, and the role of the Social Democrats in the collapse of Weimar really fit logically together under "patterns of authority and revolt?"

Most of the book has the feel of reading old book reviews with the usual evaluative comments appropriate for readers who are making buying or reading decisions, such as how well the volumes are researched, how well the authors know the field, and so forth. At the very least those sections should have been edited out. While the introduction does an interesting job comparing five German history surveys, one wonders why anyone would still be interested in reading full-length reviews of the well-known Sheehan, Wehler, and Nipperdey texts, let alone a review of the clearly unsuccessful history by the French historian Joseph Rovan, which was never translated into English. I can see a justification only for the essay on the major German text by Wolfgang Mommsen, which is not as well known in North America as the Wehler and Nipperdey volumes are --although the latter seems to have faded quickly. Why would anyone want to read another thirty-two-page commentary on the Goldhagen diatribe, which was "axed" by *Die Zeit* because they had exhausted the subject? The piece is perfectly good and thoughtful, but it understandably adds nothing new and it wrongly calls Gordon A. Craig's review favorable. Craig's only clear praise was for the material on the police unit because Browning's book had slipped his mind. There is also yet another commentary on the *Historikerstreit* about a weak and already outdated book. And what is an old review of a preposterous Churchill biography doing in a book on rereading German history?

The only essays that have enough strength to stand on their own, beyond their particular, dated use as reviews of books or debates, are the review of the new literature on the early police, the background on German Social Darwinism, the eloquent piece on Gitta Sereny's *Albert Speer*, on the new German neo- conservatives, despite the consistent misspelling of Zitelmann (because the critically important Schwilk/Schacht collection has never been translated), and the final, newly written chapter on Germany after reunification. Of those, the Social Darwinism essay is already more readily available in Manfred Berg and Geoffrey Cocks's *Medicine and Modernity* (Cambridge, 1996).

Certainly, most of the reviews in this collection contain important insights that help one to understand the direction in which German historiography has evolved. But these ideas deserved to be woven into an integrated essay, with a sustained argument. Some of the introductions point in that direction. A book of dated reviews, however, does not achieve this.

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