Essay review:

**Continuity and Discontinuity in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German History**

by Lars Fischer


*Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, edited by James Retallack. New York, Oxford University Press, 2008. xv, 328 pp. $120.00 Cdn (cloth), $40.95 Cdn (paper).


Reviewing these volumes in conjunction has not been easy since they are so diverse in type and purpose. The volume edited by James Retallack forms part of the *Short Oxford History of Germany* series, designed to provide a "concise, readable, and authoritative point of entry" to its topic — in this case Imperial Germany. Although all of its contributors maintain a level of historiographical reflectiveness that distinguishes this volume from the bulk of conventional textbooks, it is clearly pitched at a student audience, as is Matthew Jefferies's historiographical survey. The collection edited by Sven Oliver Müller and Cornelius Torp springs from a conference held in Berlin in 2007 in honour of Hans-Ulrich Wehler on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday. It shares the strong historiographical interest of the previous two volumes yet differs from them in that it is clearly directed at a scholarly audience. Eric Weitz's volume, by contrast, seems designed mainly for students and general readers. It is the least historiographically inflected of the books under review and obviously differs from the previous
three in that it focuses not on Imperial Germany but on the Weimar period. Helmut Walser Smith’s call to (re-)integrate “the nineteenth century into the history of the twentieth, and the longer life of the past into the shorter moment of cataclysm” is clearly directed at his peers and flies squarely in the face of the currently widespread notion that the story of the short twentieth century and its catastrophes and cataclysms is ultimately best told as one of radical discontinuities. Even a slightly longer review piece like this cannot but be ruthlessly selective in its discussion of five volumes of this scope and ambition.

I

Jefferies clearly has a point when he suggests that “diversity has become the new orthodoxy” in the treatment of Imperial Germany. On his account, “all recent historians have sought to provide a balanced picture of this fascinating era, in which one can find examples of light and shadow in remarkably equal measure.” Retallack places similar emphasis on the notion that “both stories — the triumph of modernity and the long shadow cast by authoritarianism — are true. But when kept separate,” he adds, “their plot lines are too neatly drawn to depict an era when boundaries were fluid, beliefs were in flux, and conflict was the only constant.”

Yet for all the diversity and aspirations to even-handedness characteristic of much of the recent historiography, the volumes under review demonstrate that well-established themes relating to the complex and thorny issue of continuity and discontinuity in modern German history are still a major preoccupation for most historians working in the field. And how could it be any other way? Within less than thirty years of the demise of Imperial Germany, the Nazi regime had been and gone, and had committed unprecedented crimes in interaction with a German population of which a substantial proportion had to varying degrees been shaped by Imperial Germany.

The desire, formulated programmatically by Richard Evans in 1978, “to rehabilitate Wilhelmine society as an object of study in its own right, and not to treat it merely as a prelude to the Nazi era,” is perfectly reasonable and potentially problematic roughly in equal measure. The crucial term in Evans’s formulation is, of course, “merely.” Who would seriously suggest that one ought to study Imperial Germany only “as a prelude to the Nazi era”? Yet for better or for worse, Imperial Germany does also form part of the prehistory of Nazi Germany, and what is actually at stake here is the degree to which one assumes or acknowledges that this nexus ought to inform historians’ approaches.

3 Ibid., p. 46.
5 Cited in Jefferies, Contesting the German Empire, p. 33.
This may ultimately be more of a normative or ethical issue than a methodological one in the narrower sense. The claim formulated most sharply in the form of Adorno’s statement that Auschwitz has foisted a new categorical imperative upon humanity has the potential to create a sharp divide between those who feel in some form seriously committed to it and those who are rather less inclined to acknowledge it — all the more so if scholars give the impression, perhaps inadvertently, that they consider it an imposition. At a fundamental level, this divide potentially cuts across all walks of life and all disciplines and specialisms, yet there are obvious pragmatic reasons why it would be more acutely felt in the historiography of Imperial Germany than that of, say, medieval monasticism or Renaissance Florence.

This underlying division has done much to confuse and over-determine the long-standing debate regarding the *Sonderweg* concept, the once widely accepted notion that Germany’s modernization process from the late eighteenth century onwards followed a peculiar path that helps explain German society’s susceptibility to National Socialism. On one level, this debate has obviously concerned the specific issue of whether the existence of this peculiar path really can be proven or not. Yet another, rather more fundamental question resonates throughout this debate, namely that of whether the doubtless peculiar outcome, namely National Socialism, does or does not require a special commitment on the part of those studying the pre-history of that peculiar outcome. As Jürgen Kocka put it in 1988, “one should reserve the *Sonderweg* concept (although not necessarily the misleading word) for the (comparative) discussion of one basic and startling fact, namely, that Germany turned into a fascist and totalitarian state while those countries in the west with which Germany likes to compare itself and with which it should compare itself, did not — despite the fact that they were confronted with similar challenges and conditions.”6 In this sense, Kocka suggested, the *Sonderweg* concept remained “a meaningful, though not necessarily accurate, contribution to historical understanding.”7 As Jefferies has rather aptly put it, “it was for political and pedagogic rather than scholarly reasons” that Kocka and many others initially continued to defend the *Sonderweg* concept, albeit in increasingly modified guises.8

As Kocka’s formulation already indicates, there is an added twist to this element of confusion and over-determination. For “the *Sonderweg* debate was,” as Helmut Walser Smith has observed, “ultimately concerned with 1933 and not with 1941, with politics and not with mass murder.”9 Yet over the last two decades or so, 1941 has increasingly displaced 1933 as the decisive point of ref-

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7 Ibid., p. 3.
8 Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire*, p. 44.
ference for the scholarly engagement with National Socialism. The seemingly straightforward divide between proponents and critics of the Sonderweg concept therefore potentially masks another more complex divide.

To the extent that the Sonderweg concept still has proponents we arguably need to distinguish between “old” and “new” supporters. On the one hand, there are the few remaining stalwarts of the concept in its classic guise, foremost among them Wehler himself, although even he has substantially modified his position. On the other hand, there are those who for “political and pedagogic rather than scholarly reasons” are far from entirely convinced by the concept on its own terms but nevertheless feel profoundly uneasy about the wider implications of its wholesale rejection. The crucial point here is that the latter tend to be firmly oriented towards 1941, while both the concept’s proponents and critics in the original Sonderweg debate were firmly wedded to 1933 as the crucial point of reference. The Sonderweg debate, in other words, has been underpinned both by divergent views regarding the extent to which nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German history necessarily needs to be conceptualized as always being also the prehistory of National Socialism and by divergent views as to what exactly the primary point of reference for possible continuities should be.

How, then, do the three volumes under review that focus directly on Imperial Germany assess the current status of the Sonderweg concept? For Jefferies, it would seem to be to all intents and purposes beyond redemption. To be sure, he does at one juncture caution that “one should be wary of pronouncing the Sonderweg dead and buried — it is unlikely to ever fully disappear.” Yet elsewhere his formulations are rather less reticent, and he refers to “the demise of the once-mighty Sonderweg paradigm” that was “finally fading from view in the 1990s.” Torp and Müller suggest that it in fact continues to exert a considerable indirect influence simply because their rejection of it continues to render the concept’s opponents heavily dependent on its logic. This is undoubtedly true, but, in and of itself, could quite easily be taken as evidence for the persistence of the concept’s harmfulness. Rather more convincingly, Retallack insists that “it is important to note that both the proponents of the Sonderweg and its critics agree that continuities and national comparisons are valid: they disagree mainly about which continuities and which comparisons are important. Thus discussion of the Sonderweg is not inadmissible; only the demand that it be accepted or rejected as an all-or-nothing proposition should be resisted.” Indeed, in the Wehler

10 Walser Smith, Continuities, p. 16.
12 Jefferies, Contesting the German Empire, p. 44.
13 Ibid., pp. 104, 18.
Festschrift, if I understand it correctly, Retallack expresses his exasperation at the degree to which ostensible criticism of the Sonderweg concept has itself become something of a red herring. "How many more times," he asks, "will we be required to take a burning torch to the straw man argument of a sclerotic, backward Empire governed by pre-modern elites?"  

Walser Smith has in any case made the important observation that there is a crucial distinction between proving that certain problems were not unique to Imperial Germany and demonstrating that they did not exist in Germany and/or were not problematic. For obvious reasons, the former has been the main preoccupation of the critics of the Sonderweg concept, arguably to the neglect of the latter. As Shulamit Volkov points out in her rather energetic and at times almost intemperate contribution to the Wehler Festschrift, the Sonderweg concept was always designed to elucidate possible fundamental continuities between Imperial and Nazi Germany. Yet historians’ perceptions of both regimes have changed radically. Put simply, the relationship of both regimes to modernity is now considered by many to be much more complex and ambiguous than was generally assumed a quarter of a century ago. In other words, demonstrating that Imperial Germany was not as “backward” as initial formulations of the Sonderweg concept suggested, far from calling into question continuities between Imperial and Nazi Germany, only underscores them if Nazi Germany is no longer perceived as “backward” either. In this sense the issue of Imperial Germany’s “modernity” is now perhaps increasingly turning into a red herring as well.

Jefferies’s account of the assault on the Sonderweg concept signalled by the publication of Richard Evans’s collection, Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany, in 1978 and David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley’s Mythen deutscher Geschichtsschreibung in 1980 is lively and engaging but also raises some important questions. According to Jefferies, the interventions by Evans and Blackbourn and Eley were pathbreaking events in more respect than one. “Until these two volumes,” he explains, “the notoriously insular guild [of German historians] had generally ignored British studies of German history, unless they could be instrumentalized for propaganda purposes.... Such complacency would change, however,” with the publication of these two volumes. Yet whence his certainty that this case was so different? Jefferies himself suggests that “one reason for the ... initial hostility” that characterized the response of proponents of the Sonderweg to this critique “was no doubt the suspicion” that the new-found

17 Walser Smith, “Jenseits der Sonderweg-Debatte,” p. 49.
19 The latter was an earlier version of their better-known volume, The Peculiarities of German History (1984).
20 Jefferies, Contesting the German Empire, p. 32.
“emphasis on the pluralism and modernity of Wilhelmine Germany ... had apolo-
gist undertones.”21 He goes on to point out that the critique of the Sonderweg
did in fact find “a positive reception from some of German history’s most con-
servative figures, ever eager to ‘normalize’ their country’s past.”22 Blackburn
and Eley, he suggests, were “no doubt embarrassed by this unwelcome sup-
port.”23 The concept’s subsequent decline, he adds, “was in part a consequence
of the ‘normalization’ of German affairs brought about by reunification.”24 Yet
none of this, it would seem, merits serious concern, presumably because this was
not what the critics intended and because, as Jefferies sees it, “the 1990s pro-
duced no significant study of the Empire which genuinely merits the label ‘apol-
gist’.”25 Even if we accept this diagnosis, the fact that things did not turn out as
badly as expected would not, in and of itself, automatically invalidate the initial
fears. But there is a rather more important issue at stake here.

As Jefferies points out, Blackburn and Eley’s central point was that the
very real continuities between Imperial Germany and the Nazi period “should be
located not in the discrepancy between economic modernity and socio-political
backwardness” that the proponents of the Sonderweg concept claimed to have
identified in Imperial Germany, “but in the pathology of bourgeois modernity
itself.”26 While there is a lot to be said for this line of argument, surely nobody
would claim that this assumption is the genuine core of the systematic routing of
the Sonderweg concept that has ensued since Blackburn and Eley’s interven-
tion. To put it bluntly, of the academics and students who have routinely been
teaching and learning over the last two decades or so, and continue to teach and
learn, that the Sonderweg concept was really rather silly, surely only a minority
seriously share the conviction that bourgeois modernity is inherently pathologi-
cal. On a similar note, Jefferies points out that, “although it is commonly
assumed that parliamentarization and democratization march side-by-side, this is
rarely the case.”27 Again my quibble is not with the argument itself, but I very
much doubt that this insight consistently underpins the assumptions about
democratization in Imperial Germany that have become fashionable in recent
years.

The model of liberal modernization from which the German Sonderweg had
supposedly deviated may have been a myth; in this respect the concept’s critics
were entirely right. Yet among those who now have learned to reject the

21 Ibid., p. 36.
22 Ibid., p. 35. Cf. also Jürgen Kocka’s comment in 1988 that Blackburn and Eley’s interven-
tion was “well received by those more conservative German journalists and scholars who prefer a
more positive view of German national history” (Kocka, “German History before Hitler,” p. 7).
23 Jefferies, Contesting the German Empire, p. 35.
24 Ibid., p. 45.
25 Ibid., p. 46.
26 Ibid., p. 36. For a very interesting discussion of this issue cf. also Edward Ross Dickinson,
“The bourgeoisie and reform,” in Retallack (ed.), Imperial Germany, pp. 166-69.
27 Jefferies, Contesting the German Empire, p. 106.
Sonderweg concept more or less out of hand, the proportion of those who in fact continue to believe in this myth without much hesitation is surely considerable. The contention that Germany deviated no more from the mythical model of liberal modernization than the countries that supposedly epitomized it has thus, in large part, been translated into the assurance that Germany came just about as close to realizing that model as everybody else. Effectively stripped of its critical core, the critique of the Sonderweg concept has thus, in terms of its wider impact, become apologetic after all, its authors’ intentions notwithstanding. Perhaps they were genuinely oblivious to this possible outcome, although it was hardly unforeseeable; perhaps they took a calculated risk. Either way, while there is little point in crying over spilt milk, and while one needs to be very careful about the degree to which one can hold historians responsible for the long-term impact of their conceptual interventions, there is surely nothing to be gained from adding new myths to old by maintaining the pretense that the Sonderweg concept has fallen prey to a universal consensus that bourgeois modernity is inherently pathological.

Retallack argues that the contributions in his edited volume “cast a distinctive, overarching argument that Germany could have been authoritarian and modern at the same time.”28 He himself refers to “middle-class Germans as reluctant modernizers” and rather aptly characterizes Imperial Germany’s political system as “a dynamic, flexible, even consensual form of authoritarianism ... that differs substantially from the fascist and totalitarian models with which it is so often confused.”29 This is, of course, an extremely important point. Just as various forms of heinous mass murder have a tendency to pale in the shadow of Auschwitz, Imperial German authoritarianism looks positively cozy when compared to the Nazi regime. To get a sense of this, one need only think of the confusion in students’ eyes when one tries to explain to them that Social Democrats were allowed to participate in elections while the party was banned under Bismarck. To insist on lines of continuity between Imperial and Nazi Germany does not imply that the two were fundamentally the same but that without the formative influences of Imperial German political culture National Socialism would have seemed an altogether less plausible option in the 1930s.

Retallack’s own interpretation notwithstanding, his contributors clearly form a broad church, and his emphasis on Imperial Germany’s authoritarianism seems a far cry from, say, Mark Hewitson’s Wilhelmine Germany, in which “social policy was underpinned by the protection of civil liberties” and the “obstacles to democratization” that remained feature more as an afterthought than a key feature.30 Ultimately, as in so many other cases, when it comes to the assessment of the political system and political culture of Imperial Germany, a great deal depends on where one places the goalposts. For his discussion of these issues,

30 Mark Hewitson, “Wilhelmine Germany,” in Retallack (ed.), Imperial Germany, pp. 48, 49.
Jefferies appropriates the catchy title of Brett Fairbairn’s monograph, *Democracy in the Undemocratic State* (1997). Much recent research has been predicated on the assumption that one will come to radically different results depending on whether one looks at the political system or at political processes in Imperial Germany. While the former may have been far from democratic, the latter were characterized by a clear trend towards democratization, so the argument goes.

Jefferies quotes Fairbairn’s contention that the “suffrage Bismarck created with unliberal intentions became within a generation the most potent vehicle of political participation in Germany. The Reichstag suffrage was the single most important precondition, or engine, for the growth of participation before the turn of the century.”

It is no coincidence, of course, that Fairbairn refers twice in short succession to participation rather than democracy or democratization. Dickinson similarly claims that “bourgeois reform ... was potentially democratizing (or at least participatory), in its form if not always in its values.”

Yet participation, surely, is an ambivalent phenomenon, and as integral to populism and at least some forms of dictatorship as it is to any model of democracy. As Retallack has pointed out elsewhere, “living in democratic and multicultural societies today, we find it easy to applaud the self-mobilization and self-emancipation of the masses. But telling this story with too much fervour skews our conclusions to the point that any self-mobilized social group can be seen as contributing to the pluralization of political culture.” Instead, Retallack suggests, we need to understand various forms of participation as “falling somewhere on the spectrum between participation-as-emancipation and participation-as-regimentation.”

It is only against this backdrop that it makes sense to suggest, as Kühne does, that “it was democratization itself, based on and accelerated by introduction of the universal suffrage, that blocked Germany’s transition to a parliamentary form of government”; that Kühne initially refers to “broad-gauged democratization” suggests that he himself is aware of the problems involved in invoking the concept of democratization in this context.

Nor is this the only complication. Dickinson, notwithstanding all his enthusiasm for the reform-mindedness of parts of the German bourgeoisie, is in no doubt that “for many bourgeois Germans, reform activity in private associations seems to have been an alternative form of political engagement — a means of shaping and governing their society independent of the formal political process.” In other words, “bourgeois Germans ... were highly motivated to attempt to use non-political means to exercise what they saw as their natural right and obligation to play a leading role in shaping their society, and particularly in

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31 Jefferies, *Contesting the German Empire*, p. 99 (emphasis added).
34 Ibid., p. 22.
shaping their society's response to the challenges and opportunities of modernity.\textsuperscript{37} This may well make their activities modern, although one might question even that, but does it make them democratic or part of a larger democratization process if by that one means more than mere participation? There is an added twist here: as is well-known, bourgeois reform-mindedness found its principal arena in the cities, where "the heart" of "bourgeois political power in the empire," such as it was, was formed. Why? For the simple reason that "the suffrage for German municipal elections was in general severely restricted (usually to less than 10 percent of the population)."\textsuperscript{38}

Ultimately, all this talk of increasingly widespread and diverse participation/democratization hinges overwhelmingly on an appreciation of form over content. Take Dickinson's argument as a case in point. "Whether their agendas were modernist or anti-modernist," he explains, "almost all bourgeois reform movements adopted a particular modern institutional structure, and a modern strategy of agitation aimed at influencing public opinion." Dickinson then argues that, "whether they liked democracy or not, most German reformers assumed that they had to operate in a political context — or at least a civil society — that was at bottom democratic in structure."\textsuperscript{39}

How "liberal" Imperial Germany was or how strong a force liberalism was in Imperial Germany is similarly a question that will generate differing answers depending on one's criteria. Jefferies suggests that "nowhere was the liberal contribution to unification more apparent than in the raft of legislation enacted in the North German Confederation between 1867 and 1870," and then immediately proceeds to cite Eley's contention that "Germany was re-made ... along the lines German liberals had broadly envisaged."\textsuperscript{40} Liberalism, the suggestion would seem to be, is not a specific political programme but simply what liberals do. This is by no means an unreasonable suggestion; rather than measure the actions of liberals against an abstract normative concept of liberalism, one operates on the assumption that whatever liberals do or try to do is liberalism. One is reminded of Gershom Scholem's bold statement that Judaism is its history or, to use Amos Funkenstein's paraphrase, "everything Jews were occupied with at any given period."\textsuperscript{41} Yet for Jefferies at least, the liberals' own perceptions and aspirations apparently only qualify as an authentic representation of liberalism when they concur with his own interpretation. For elsewhere he cautions his readers that "just because Germany's liberals saw the move away from free trade and the ending of the Kulturkampf as a triumph of reaction, does not mean we should make their viewpoint our own."\textsuperscript{42}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 154 (emphasis added).  
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 164.  
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 170.  
\textsuperscript{40} Jefferies, \textit{Contesting the German Empire}, p. 57.  
\textsuperscript{42} Jefferies, \textit{Contesting the German Empire}, p. 68.}
Retallack's collection consists of 13 chapters (including his introduction and conclusion) and is rounded off by fairly detailed recommendations for further reading and an interesting chronology. Katharine Anne Lerman and Mark Hewitson offer initial surveys of the Bismarck and Wilhelmine eras respectively, the former more conventional, the latter more revisionist in approach. Both are exemplary in their clarity and even-handed to the point of being a tad tepid. Among the remaining thematic contributions those by Brett Fairbairn, on economic and social developments, and Christopher Clark, on religion and confessional conflict, stand out. Fairbairn makes an interesting argument that while "inequality and hierarchy" were obviously no Imperial German innovations; "what was new was the degree to which they were removed from the spatial, moral, and social context of traditional communities and defined instead in relation to the market." His contribution gives a good sense of just how "grim and insecure ... the lives of ordinary Germans" actually were, especially in the cities.

Clark does a superb job of illustrating how "religion became one of the structuring facts of German public life" in this period and explaining why, since the 1980s, it has become "one of the most vibrant growth areas in the historiography of Imperial Germany." While he notes that confessionalism in this period "extended beyond the domain of religious institutions and practices to the realm of everyday life," he cautions that there is also "a danger of pushing the argument too far" since "the harsh binary oppositions of culture-war rhetoric belied a more complex reality of compromise, interdependence, and convergence." He draws attention to the "paradoxical intertwining of secularization and religious revival," emphasizing that "the two processes did not merely coexist" but were "dialectically interdependent" and "conditioned each other." Retallack's contributors were not only called upon to strike a balance between modernity and authoritarianism. Retallack also stresses that they "do not privilege the local and the regional at the expense of national and global contexts." Readers tempted by the various local, regional, and global perspectives that currently feature so prominently in the historiography of Imperial Germany "to leave the nation behind," he warns, "do so at their peril." On his understanding, the various approaches reflected in the contributions facilitate a

44 Ibid., p. 65.
45 Christopher Clark, "Religion and confessional conflict," in Retallack (ed.), Imperial Germany, pp. 84, 85.
46 Ibid., pp. 91, 93.
47 Ibid., p. 102.
49 Ibid., p. 8.
playing with scales ... akin to looking through a kaleidoscope: each slight twist reorients our understanding of German histories in subtle ways, rearranging shards of historical evidence and casting them in a new light. ... the point is not to suggest that one measure or pattern reflects a truer image than another, but rather that each one refracts a familiar picture of Imperial Germany in fresh and interesting ways.50

It will be interesting to see what students make of this attempt to offer them "a concise, readable, and authoritative point of entry" from a variety of perspectives. For the most part the concept seems to work well, although there is occasional potential for confusion. To find that the war enthusiasm of 1914 both “took most observers by surprise” and in fact never really existed may make some students wonder.51 Likewise, Verhey argues that “no Germans actually starved to death during the war” while Hewitson suggests that “severe malnutrition ... was arguably responsible for 750,000 deaths.”52 These need not be contradictory statements, of course, but they confuse the issue. It is not so much the divergent viewpoints that are the problem at junctures like this but rather the fact that the necessarily synthetic nature of these overviews leaves readers with the option to take or leave claims of this kind without being able to understand the source of the divergence. Overall, though, the volume does exactly what it says on the cover and indeed offers a useful first port of call for students interested in Imperial Germany.

One item recommended emphatically for further reading by Retallack’s collection as “an outstanding guide” is Jefferies’s historiographical survey.53 It comes with an endorsement from Geoff Eley, who accurately describes it as “just the kind of critical introduction the bright and interested undergraduate needs.” It is lucid and engaging and at its best will give students a real sense both of how much fun historiography can be and why it matters. More advanced scholars may be interested to see how Jefferies presents his material, but there is little of sufficient novelty or depth here to be of interest to them in its own right. Jefferies’s exposition of the debates is generally even-handed, and, like Retallack he maintains that “transnational history is at its most convincing when it takes the nation-state seriously.”54 Occasional instances of self-indulgence are endearing in some cases and less so in others. The discussion of psychohistory, for instance, could have been rather shorter, but the fun Jefferies had with it is palpable.55

50 Ibid.
53 Retallack (ed.), Imperial Germany, p. 277.
54 Jefferies, Contesting the German Empire, p. 172.
55 Ibid., pp. 79-83.
other hand, I fail to see how dragging in the wretched Carl Schmitt adds one iota to the substance of the discussion.\textsuperscript{56}

Jefferies’s greatest problem arguably springs from the nature of the beast itself. A historiographical survey whose author refuses to come off the fence would obviously make for considerable tedium, yet, at the same time, the genre is essentially synthetic and when it comes to judgments that are not predominantly based on hermeneutical considerations, there is obviously a very real question as to how the author of a historiographical survey — not unlike the author of a review article! — can support those judgements. This is not a major problem, but at a few junctures the reader is rather left wondering how Jefferies has arrived at the conclusions he presents or avows. All these are mere quibbles, though, and overall this is a wide-ranging, competent, and well-presented introductory textbook that gives a good initial sense of “the remarkable pluralism that currently characterizes the historiography of Imperial Germany.”\textsuperscript{57}

While the contributions in the Wehler \textit{Festschrift} are far from uncritical of Wehler’s work, various underpinnings and implications of the Sonderweg concept doubtless receive a slightly more sympathetic hearing here than they do in the previous two volumes. The collection is sub-divided into four sections focusing on the empire’s place in German history; the dynamics of society, politics, and culture in Imperial Germany; war and violence; and the global context. Most of the twenty-eight contributions offer thought-provoking insights into the current state of debate, and, taken together, they do so from an unusually broad range of perspectives.

Ute Planert’s comparative discussion of anti-feminism in Germany, Britain, and France on the eve of the First World War is predicated on the assumption that the stronger the anti-feminist movement in any given country, the stronger the feminist movement must have been. Consequently, “the existence of anti-feminist movements ... demonstrates not the backwardness of a society but rather its aptitude for reform.”\textsuperscript{58} This is an interesting but surely not unproblematic suggestion. By the same logic, strong antisemitism would invariably be an indicator of genuine Jewish power and/or widespread support for the cause of emancipation, and this is obviously not a tenable suggestion. Planert is altogether more convincing when she argues that the mere presence of anti-feminist rhetoric in and of itself tells us precious little without a fuller understanding of its social base. Her survey portrays anti-feminism as coming predominantly from above in Britain, from the centre in France, and from the right in Germany, hence also the close association of anti-feminism with ideological antisemitism in Imperial Germany.

Olaf Blaschke’s thought-provoking contribution questions the increasingly fashionable use of the term “culture wars” for a broad range of contestations.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 94.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p. 3.
regarding the status of (especially Catholic) religion in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe. Blaschke proposes instead to make more of the notion of an underlying second confessional age that underpins most of the conflicts subsumed under the "culture wars" concept but is itself a far more comprehensive and open-ended phenomenon and "runs alongside the eras of secularization and nationalism without claiming primacy as the key determinant of the age." Blaschke demonstrates with a number of fascinating case studies that the sense of a steady decline in church affiliation that arises from a straight comparison of data from the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries needs to be fundamentally revised when the entire period between ca. 1830 and 1970 is taken into account. What emerges instead is a steady rise in church affiliation that peaks in the mid-twentieth century before rapidly falling off from the 1960s onwards.

Stephan Malinowski's discussion of the nobility, or rather the nobilities, in Imperial Germany presents the class as predominantly "a driven rather than a driving force" in whose midst antisemitism was rampant. While his highly differentiated "bottom-up history of the nobility" makes for a very different picture than that propagated by "late Marxism and early Bielefeldism" it certainly does not detract from the fact that the nobility's role overall was "fatal and destructive."

Thomas Mergel's contribution on migration, both internal and external, offers an exemplary combination of survey and interpretation, clearly demonstrating the "normality" of migration in Imperial Germany. His discussion of the truly staggering scale of internal migration and fluctuation and the extent to which the divide between urban and rural settlement remained porous is extremely interesting. Not least, this state of flux led to widespread disenfranchisement since the franchise tended to be dependent on a year's residence in any given location. Many readers may be startled to read that by 1914 Germany had in fact become the second largest importer of labour after the United States. At the same time, Mergel cautions against an overly optimistic evaluation of the empire's multicultural credentials, since the manifold forms of confrontation with various "others" all too frequently mobilized resistance and völkisch aggression.

Jörg Echternkamp contributes a thoughtful meditation on the usefulness of bracketing the period between 1914 and 1945 as a second Thirty Years' War, a concept dear to Wehler's heart. For Echternkamp a number of implications render this periodization problematic. It detracts from important connections between the long nineteenth and short twentieth centuries, makes a comparative perspective on the two post-war periods difficult, and risks over-emphasizing similarities between the two wars (for example, as "total wars"). Yet above all

61 Ibid., pp. 216-218.
else, it is the radical rupture of the Shoah that establishes a fundamental discontinuity between the two wars and thus renders an overarching periodization stressing the continuity between the two problematic.62

III

One striking feature that these three volumes on Imperial Germany have in common, and that may well be a reflection of the extent to which the historiography of Imperial Germany for the most part continues to approach the vexed issue of continuities and discontinuities from the perspective of 1933 rather than 1941, is the relative marginality of both Jews and antisemitism. It may be worth emphasizing that this makes not for one but for two absent stories, since "the Jews" as they existed in the minds of the antisemites, and indeed of many in Imperial Germany who would not have dreamt of considering themselves antisemitic, generally had precious little in common with the Jews actually living in Imperial Germany.

In Jefferies's case the problem is compounded by the fact that on the few occasions that he does touch on either topic he seems lacking in sureness of touch. Social Democrats, "like practicing Jews," we are told, were "effectively" excluded from professorial chairs.63 While it was doubtless extraordinarily difficult, though not impossible, for members of the Jewish community to become regular professors, the crucial issue was their affiliation with the community; whether they were "practicing" Jews was neither here nor there. The matter would have merited closer inspection because the chances for Jews who had not left the Jewish community to obtain chairs at German universities were closely tied to what has traditionally been interpreted as the rise and fall of liberalism in Imperial Germany; this, too, a notion that has become profoundly unfashionable. Jews began to obtain chairs at first-rate German universities in the 1870s, most famously the neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen in Marburg. Subsequently, it became virtually impossible for Jews to be appointed to chairs in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, but the share of Jewish professors initially continued to rise all the same, due to the rapid expansion of the exact and natural sciences, only to decrease markedly from the 1890s onwards.64

The women's movement in Imperial Germany, Jefferies explains, was "divided into bourgeois, socialist, and Jewish factions."65 He then goes on to clarify that even though the Jewish Women's Association was a member of the

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63 Jefferies, Contesting the German Empire, p. 11.

64 The share of regular chairs held by Jews went from 2.8% in 1889 to 1.2% in 1917. Cf Peter Pulzer, "Rechtliche Gleichstellung und öffentliches Leben," in Steven M. Lowenstein et al., Deutsch-Jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit, vol. 3 (Frankfurt/Main, 1997), pp. 155-57.

65 Jefferies, Contesting the German Empire, p. 148.
bourgeois umbrella organization of Imperial German women’s organizations, it “generally pursued specifically Jewish aims.”66 What, one wonders, were these “specifically Jewish aims,” how did they render Jewish bourgeois women non-bourgeois, and where does all this leave Jewish women in the bourgeois and socialist women’s movements?

Or take, as a final case in point, Jefferies’s introduction of Nonn’s and Walser Smith’s work on the ritual murder accusation that took place in Konitz. It features not in the context of a discussion of antisemitism in Imperial Germany, but as an example for the merits of *Alltagsgeschichte* (the history of everyday life) and microhistory. Jefferies refers to the goings-on in Konitz as a “hitherto obscure” event, which seems an odd characterization.67 To be sure, Nonn and Walser Smith have done a great job of presenting the details of the case and opening it up for a broader scholarly audience, but neither for contemporaries nor for scholars with more than a fleeting interest in German-Jewish history has this ever been an “obscure” case — if by obscure Jefferies means little known rather than bizarre.

All this presumably comes down to clumsiness more than anything else. Indeed, Jefferies goes on to explain that both Nonn and Walser Smith approached the Konitz case as “an opportunity to explore much larger questions about the relationship between Protestants, Catholic, and Jews in Wilhelmine Germany.”68 Similarly, he suggests elsewhere that “arguably the most important works” focusing on religion in Imperial Germany “are those that address confessional interaction, and in particular the three-way relationship between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews,” but this is certainly not a perspective that has in any way helped shape Jefferies’s book as a whole.69

Retallack’s collection presents us with a similar picture. Lerman refers to “a growing climate of racism, xenophobia, and intolerance in the 1880s” yet makes no mention of antisemitism in this context and it is not until page 80 that antisemitism is first mentioned even in passing.70 The volume includes a twelve-page chronology that includes four entries pertaining to Jews (the same number as there are references to individual plays and operas) and ten entries pertaining to antisemitism. Taken together, Jews and antisemitism thus receive the same amount of attention as do individual literary texts and artworks. Perhaps most startlingly of all, Jeffrey Verhey’s contribution on war and revolution does not even mention the *Judenzählung*, the infamous Prussian census designed to show that Jews were supposedly shirking their military duties. There are exceptions, to be sure: Celia Applegate mentions an instance in which Max Liebermann painted an “almost stereotypically Jewish-looking Jesus,” precipitating a “storm of

66 Ibid., 190.
67 Ibid., 140.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid., p. 161.
criticism” that “became explicitly antisemitic and hysterically defensive of Christian Germany”; and Angelika Schaser dedicates half a paragraph to the Jewish Woman’s Association.  

Yet all in all the Jews have essentially been banished to the religion section and this although Christopher Clark himself points out that “in several respects, of course, the Jews were quite unlike either of the two mainstream Christian groups.” The “Jewish Question,” he explains, “which produced a flood of pamphlets, books, newspaper articles, and political speeches from the 1870s onwards, had no direct parallel in the historical experience of the other minorities. No other minority faced a concerted campaign of vilification to compare with the assault mounted by the political antisemites against the German Jews.”

I have few quibbles with Clark’s presentation, which is competent and up-to-date. He emphasizes that the “rupture” and “continuity” theses, as he calls them — in other words emphasis on the modernity of political antisemitism as it emerged in the last three decades of the nineteenth century on the one hand, and the long-term continuity of (in large part religiously motivated) anti-Judaism on the other, “should be seen as complementary rather than contradictory.” As he points out, conservative antisemites “blended traditional, modern anti-capitalist and racist arguments in promiscuous fashion.” Indeed, “it is remarkable how ubiquitous this circular interweaving of religious, ‘socio-ethical,’ economic, and ethnic themes was in the various discourses of German antisemitism.” Consequently, “Christian publicists could expound antisemitic views while at the same time claiming on theological grounds to reject the doctrine of race.”

Clark makes some suggestive remarks about the “need to move beyond a binary model” that pre-assumes a straightforward “bipolar relationship between a monolithic Jewish minority and a monolithic ‘Christian’ bloc.” Imperial Germany, after all, was a “tri-confessional system.” Yet one would be hard-pressed to get any sense of this “tri-confessional” nature of Imperial Germany anywhere else in the volume.

Given Wehler’s own minimal interest in antisemitism and Jews, it may come as no surprise that these are hardly prominent themes in the Festschrift either. Here too there are exceptions, such as Volkov’s contribution and Malinowski’s already mentioned piece on the nobility. Sebastian Conrad, drawing on Heinz Gollwitzer’s earlier research, hints at interesting connections between anti-Chinese rhetoric in the US and antisemitic rhetoric in Imperial Germany, not

73 Ibid., and p. 97.
74 Ibid., pp. 97-98.
75 Ibid., p. 98.
77 Ibid., p. 101.
because he is interested in the latter as such but because he considers this yet another opportunity to demonstrate the advantages of conceiving of anything and everything in a transnational context. This suggests an interesting perspective, but he is surely going over the top with his claim that anti-Chinese rhetoric formed the "preferred" source for the antisemitic critique of Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe.

The contribution in the Festschrift that arguably comes closest to treating antisemitism and non-Jewish attitudes towards "the Jews" as integral to the functioning of Imperial German society is Dieter Gosewinkel's discussion of citizenship legislation. On his account, it would be no exaggeration to identify antisemitic sentiment as the begetter of the Prussian naturalization statistic and to call it "a specifically anti-Jewish citizenship policy" that allowed denominational, antisemitic, and nationalist modes of exclusionism to merge and focus specifically on immigrants from Eastern Europe, among whom there was a significant proportion of Jews.

Going by these three volumes one gains the clear impression that mainstream historians of Imperial Germany and historians of Imperial German Jewry and Jewish/non-Jewish relations inhabit distinct universes. Neither of these three volumes gives the slightest inkling of the richness and diversity of recent research on German-Jewish history and Jewish/non-Jewish relations in the German context, a field now so well established that even experts are finding it increasingly difficult to keep up; a field in which the interpretation of continuities and discontinuities in modern German history is, if anything, even more contested than it has been among modern German historians more generally; and a field that is characterized by a high level of conceptual sophistication and finely attuned to trends in the wider historiography of modern Germany in a way that most mainstream historians of Germany evidently are not to the historiography of German Jewry and Jewish/non-Jewish relations. These three volumes, for all their strengths in other respects, would emphatically suggest that historians of German Jewry need to think again if they are under any illusion that more than a handful of colleagues outside their own specialism have seriously taken on board how significant Jewish/non-Jewish relations are for the understanding of society at large.

IV

Helmut Walser Smith's contribution to the Wehler Festschrift, it turns out, was originally going to be part of The Continuities of German History. Responding

to a review forum organized by *sehepunkte*, he explained that, “from the standpoint of intentions”, the starting point for the book had been “the critique of the criticism of the *Sonderweg*.” Indeed, “the title of the book ... is meant to shadow [Blackbourn and Eley’s] *The Peculiarities of German History* ... I did however,” he then added, “take the polemical chapter out of my book, and published it instead” in the Wehler *Festschrift*. “In *Continuities*,” he went on to explain, “I was not writing a general history of Germany, but a history of nationalism, religious violence, and racism, and making an argument for their causal force with respect to the Holocaust.” Antisemitism (if not the Jews) certainly features prominently here, and Walser Smith is adamant that antisemitism, as he aptly puts it, “has long been precise mercury measuring the rise and demise of humane attitudes towards others.”

To avoid any misunderstanding, and the possibility of Walser Smith being punished for sins that are mine and not his, it is worth clarifying that his emphasis on the “vanishing point” of 1941 is not primarily normative in nature. This is evident not least from his statements that “perspective generates as well as limits knowledge” and that “a characteristic of the vanishing point is that it powerfully structures the visual field, even to the point of distortion.” It is difficult to envisage Adorno making similar statements about the new categorical imperative he saw resulting from Auschwitz; rather, the whole point of Adorno’s argument was surely that we have no choice in the matter. Limitations or distortions that may result from adherence to this categorical imperative only underscore the measure of irrevocable destruction wrought by Auschwitz. These limitations and distortions, after all, are the products not of the categorical imperative but of the barbarism that necessitated it.

In his response to the *sehepunkte* review forum, Walser Smith explicitly confirmed his position. “I would note here,” he clarified, “that I had originally intended the vanishing point to be a descriptive metaphor, describing a certain pull, and not necessarily a normative metaphor. That almost all readers and reviewers have taken it to be also normative suggests that the problem lies in my own narrative. As a historian, and as an evaluator of other historical work, I try not to take this normative view. But I can see where the book pulls in a different direction.” Note, though, the hint at some measure of ambivalence suggested by the wording (“I had originally intended...”).

Walser Smith’s discussion of nationalism seeks to identify a novel perspective cutting across the divide between perennialists and modernists. He emphatically takes issue with the constructivist position of Gellner and others. “Far from

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82 Walser Smith, *Continuities*, p. 192.
83 Ibid., pp. 14, 22.
making nations, or inventing them,” he concludes, “modern nationalism departed from earlier senses of nations: as nations among other nations.” He identifies a crucial “epistemic shift, from ... mimesis to expression, outer to inner” that did not facilitate the invention of the nation but rather placed the already existing nation “on an altogether different epistemological ground.” For Walser Smith it is above all Fichte who is “the starting point of the new nationalism, not because of the oft-quoted, but seldom read Addresses to the German Nation, at the time hardly heard by anyone, but because he put the nation onto an altogether new philosophical ground — beyond the senses.” Nations existed prior to the eighteenth century, and language was one of a number of markers of them,” Walser Smith insists, but “prior to the epistemic shift ... language could not, in the way that the German nationalists imagined, constitute nations as such.” He is so adamant about this because, as he sees it, “to continue to insist that nations are imagined not sensed, posited not given, invented not found, is to remain enmeshed in epistemological coordinates first mapped out by Fichte. More prosaically, it means that modern nationalism still determines our sense of nations.”

Thought-provoking as Walser Smith’s argument is, I do wonder whether it does not in the end amount to something of a zero-sum game. Most modernists would acknowledge a measure of continuity between what has come to be defined as nationalism, nations, and/or nation states and various pre-existing phenomena and entities. For them, the crucial distinction is that for all the similarities, parallels, and analogies that may exist, the conceptual and interpretative framework of nationalism lent these phenomena and entities a distinct new meaning and with it a distinct new dynamics and mode of functioning. In short, historical entities that may well in many respects look like nations in the modern sense would not have been understood as such or functioned in the same way at the time. If I understand it correctly, Walser Smith would agree this far. Yet where most modernists conclude that if the phenomena differ one should not call them by the same name, Walser Smith’s suggestion seems to be that one should call them by the same name while not forgetting to emphasize how different they are. Presumably this strategy is born of a desire to salvage an alternative, less harmful concept of nationhood (rather than formulate a radical critique of nationalism as the distinct — and distinctly modern — scourge on humankind that it is).

The following chapter offers an intriguing discussion of the nexus between “catastrophic religious violence and national belonging.” Walser Smith focuses on the very different ways in which the horrors of the Thirty Years’ War on the one hand, and violence against Jews on the other, featured in the public imagination. While “a kind of forgetfulness descended over the cataclysmic violence that

84 Ibid., p. 73.
85 Ibid., p. 58.
86 Ibid., p. 59.
87 Ibid., p. 58.
88 Ibid., p. 73.
attended the war" and "German Christians rehearsed reconciliation, and concurred in their forgetting of the ravages of the Thirty Years War," their attitudes to the anti-Jewish violence of the past were entirely different.89 Here "the events that initiated violence, or justified it, became part of a material culture that marked and celebrated the exclusion of Jews."90 On the one hand, he suggests, there was forgetting with recognition of the other. This was the central story of the memory of the Thirty Years War in the early modern period. On the other side was memory twined with disavowal of the other’s full humanity — as in Christian violence against Jews. ... One story tells of violence as scourge and the peace as delivery from it. The other tells of violence as a just act, which can be rehearsed again. In one story, Germans tilled markers recalling catastrophic violence; in the other, they erected them in stone.

Consequently, in the long run “the legacy of catastrophic religious violence enabled Christians throughout the German lands ... to imagine community, even a national community, with other Christians, but not with Jews."91

Walser Smith then makes a “preliminary attempt” to offer a comprehensive sketch of anti-Jewish violence in Europe “across the long nineteenth century” focusing on “the significance and meaning, in an anthropological sense, of violent acts and words” rather than possible causes of the violence.92 He discerns three major shifts: firstly, a “transition from community-based violence to violence defined in national terms” that culminated “in the accusation that Jews were traitors to the nation”; secondly, a “transition from the threat of murder to actual murder”; and thirdly, a change in the role of the state.93 While the state traditionally played a crucial role in containing anti-Jewish violence states now repeatedly either “proved unable to exert that control,” with the result that “violence of apocalyptic dimension followed,” or, and this was “a still more decisive step,” in some cases states “exploited anti-Jewish violence for their own end.”94 Interestingly, Walser Smith has since stated that “if I were to write the book again, I think I would add a chapter on the state,” not least because “a longer, more sustained discussion of the state would be required ... to explain ‘Why Germany?’”95 The subsequent chapter on eliminationist racism explores a number of “fateful imbrications: modern anti-Semitism with racism, racism with

89 Ibid., pp. 87, 95.
90 Ibid., pp. 76-77.
91 Ibid., p. 101.
92 Ibid., pp. 115, 116.
93 Ibid., pp. 8, 117.
94 Ibid.
95 Walser Smith, “Kommentar.”
elimination, and anti-Semitism with the kind of racism that imagined that people could be eliminated. As if braids stretched and then tied, these histories ran parallel before being twisted together.\textsuperscript{96}

Walser Smith’s focus is on long-term continuities “both within Germany history and across it,” and he stresses that “continuity need not imply particularity” — indeed, on his own account, “precisely the most important continuities ... are not peculiar to Germany.”\textsuperscript{97} Consequently, as he himself concedes, his suggestions thus far “do not ... answer the question: why Germany?”\textsuperscript{98} It in any case lies in the nature of the unprecedented descent into barbarism that the Shoah represents that “here there was not continuity.”\textsuperscript{99} The continuity, he concludes, lies “not in genocide, but in the imagination of expulsion, in the severing of ties to others, and in the violent ideologies, nationalism, anti-Semitism, and racism, that made these things possible to think, support, and enact.”\textsuperscript{100}

Doubtless much of what Walser Smith has tentatively suggested in \textit{The Continuities of German History} will require more nuance when investigated in earnest, but as an impassioned plea to frame the question of how the Shoah could occur much more broadly than most historians are currently inclined to contemplate, this is an enormously stimulating book bursting with tantalizing ideas, observations, references, and research questions. There are obvious weaknesses that spring almost inevitably from the nature of the project. The primary focus is on intellectual history, and, as a book of some 230 pages that grapples with a number of big themes and complex ideas from a variety of perspectives, it cannot also take on the many questions his account obviously begs about the extent to which and the ways in which the ideas he reconstructs resonated in, and helped shape, wider society. Clearly, although the book has plenty of empirical observations and telling detail to offer, Walser Smith has had to pay for breadth with depth. \textit{The Continuities of German History} is an opening and not a closing statement and as such it is bold and refreshing, perceptive, compassionate, and unusually judicious.

\textbf{V}

Weitz’s history of Weimar Germany comes with ringing endorsements from a number of historians of considerable standing, and there can indeed be no doubt that Weitz’s account is vivid and engaging. Yet along with its strengths come the weaknesses characteristic of any account that goes a long way towards giving readers an ostensible sense of what it would have been like to be “there.” This is most evident in the second chapter, “Walking the City,” in which Weitz invites the reader to walk (or travel) along various routes through Berlin. Perhaps

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{96} Walser Smith, \textit{Continuities}, p. 192.
    \item \textsuperscript{97} Ibid., pp. 10-11.
    \item \textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p. 217.
    \item \textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p. 232.
    \item \textsuperscript{100} Ibid., p. 233.
\end{itemize}
inevitably, the temptation, and indeed the need, to enrich the narrative with a wide range of additional information simply does not square with the pseudonaturalistic pretense of the walk.

The problem is perhaps epitomized by the following fallacy. Weitz and his readers are accompanied on their walk, *inter alia*, by the writer and flâneur Franz Hessel. On one occasion, Weitz quotes an illustrative passage from one of Hessel’s published texts, telling us that this is something that Hessel “remarked ... as he was ambling through Berlin’s elegant shopping district.”101 Similarly, having given us an impression of “the heavily Jewish Scheunenviertel,” *inter alia*, with the help of reports that Joseph Roth published in 1920 and 1921, we are subsequently invited to walk off with a bank clerk who takes us home to a suburban settlement built between 1926 and 1930.102 For the accumulation of a diverse range of perspectives on Weimar Berlin all this is, of course, absolutely fine; compatible with the pretense that we are literally taking a walk through Berlin it obviously is not.

Incidentally, Weitz assumes that “the heavily Jewish Scheunenviertel” incorporates the entire Spandauer Vorstadt and claims that the New Synagogue on Oranienburger Straße was “the center of Scheunenviertel.”103 Yet the name Scheunenviertel historically referred to a much smaller area that certainly did not include Oranienburger Straße, and it was, ironically, the Nazis who initiated the practice of referring to the entire Spandauer Vorstadt as the Scheunenviertel. They did so in order to transfer the stigma of an area associated with East European refugees, overcrowding, and squalor to the acculturated Jews living adjacent to it. Whether one should maintain or try to abandon the now widespread habit of referring to the entire Spandauer Vorstadt as the Scheunenviertel may be another matter, but Weitz’s usage of the term is surely an anachronism that at the very least militates yet further against the pretense that we are having a real-time walk through Weimar Berlin. It is worth adding that in Weitz’s book, a handful of the usual iconic individuals apart, the Jews mostly remain confined to their reservation, in this case “the heavily Jewish Scheunenviertel,” and are of virtually no relevance to the bigger picture.

I also found Weitz’s unmediated use of literary material as empirical evidence a little troubling. “What did returning soldiers do when they got home” at the end of the First World War, Weitz asks, answering this question by citing accounts from two novels, one published in 1928, the other written in the 1930s.104 I do not doubt for a moment that these novels have something interesting and relevant to tell us about the immediate postwar reality, but it is surely postwar reality as refracted through a decade’s worth of discourse on this reality, and highly emotive discourse at that, that we find reflected in these texts.

102 Ibid., p. 57.
103 Ibid., p. 59.
104 Ibid., pp. 22-23. The latter is also deployed in the same unmediated way to tell us what women’s work in munitions factories during the war was like (ibid., p. 10).
Similarly, the fictional landlady of the character called Isherwood in the novel *Goodbye to Berlin* has become the actual landlady of the actual Christopher Isherwood. However fluid the boundaries between fiction and autobiography may be in this case, this transformation would surely have merited some sort of comment.

As Weitz states squarely at the outset, he has "chosen not to engage" the extant historiography, "but [I] have included a bibliographic essay after the notes." Clearly, then, his aim is not to make transparent the vagaries involved in trying to reconstruct the story but rather to tell the story in as graphic and engrossing a way as possible, to tell the whole story as far as possible, and to tell the whole story as though he is telling it for the first time. All in all, Weitz performs the task he has set himself well. Still, he is clearly much stronger on the culture than the straight politics, his source base is somewhat uneven and his reliance on basic reference literature is occasionally a tad heavy.

His basic historiographical commitments for the most part seem obvious enough. He insists that the Weimar Republic was not doomed from the outset, that it was only ever seriously threatened from the radical right but not the radical left, and that the National Socialist ascendancy was not inevitable, not even once the demise of the republic became increasingly likely. On the issue of continuities and discontinuities he seems somewhat torn. He suggests that an "uneasy mix of modernity and tradition ... contributed to Weimar's particular intensity" and unreservedly acknowledges popular mobilizations as "democracy in action, even when the specific goals of various pressure groups were profoundly antidemocratic." His account of the political right's forays into mass politics would suggest that this was a major shift taking place on a significant scale for the first time in the Weimar era, not the 1890s (as is usually assumed). Yet he also suggests that "Weimar politics had profound links to the past," speaks of "deeply etched lines of continuity with the German past," and refers to "the long-standing 'democratic deficit' in Germany, the persistence of authoritarian structures and mentalities going back to the founding of the state in 1871." Presumably one should not read too much into all this. Perhaps Weitz is especially interested in the dialectics of continuity and discontinuity; perhaps, having excluded the historiography from his explicit concerns, he has operated without genuinely making up his mind on these matters. What makes the latter seem more likely is the fact that Weitz's most frequently pronounced assessment amounts to the vaguely plausible-sounding but not overly meaningful claim that Weimar was for the most part just like any other place, just more (intensely) so.

105 Ibid., p. 360, n1.
106 Ibid., pp. 105, 106.
107 Ibid., p. 125.
108 Ibid., pp. 127, 358.
These various concerns notwithstanding, there is much that is engaging and likeable in Weitz’s book. Yet even at its best, readers can really only take or leave Weitz’s account. It is constructed in a way that rarely lends itself to scrutiny. This may not be immediately obvious to scholars in the field who are sufficiently versed to provide the historiographical contextualization themselves without needing Weitz to spell it out for them (hence perhaps the ringing endorsements). Yet while Weitz’s mode of presentation may be fine for a general readership it seems altogether more problematic when it comes to students. Undergraduates are likely to find Weitz’s book a smashing read. Because it forces them to consume its wealth of vivid images without really being able to tap into the reflection on Weitz’s part that has gone into the creation of these images, the book will implant them firmly in the imagination of at least one generation of students — and the rest of us will then have a very hard time even getting students to understand why Weitz’s portrayal is accurate when it is, let alone deconstructing it when it is not.

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