# Response to Evans

PETER BALDWIN

Because my article was not a review of Richard J. Evans's book, but a thought piece on broader topics prompted by his work, it does not stick only to issues discussed by him. What a shame that *Cosmopolitan Islanders* was largely ignored, as Evans reports, for he raises important questions. Part of the reason for the book's stillbirth is exemplified in Evans' response here: the self-isolation of the historical profession that is met by increasing indifference from the rest of the thinking world. Evans's concern to draw fine distinctions and quarantine history apart from all other social science is telling. Yes, Myrdal was a sociologist (well actually an economist, but no matter). And, yes, some of the foreign scholars I mention who write about the Anglosphere work on literature, not history as such. Why such vigorous policing of the disciplinary boundaries when larger issues are at stake? No wonder historians now have their largest audiences among the military history buffs while the more adventurous social sciences cash in on our work in ways we spurn. What William McNeill used to do has become the province of Francis Fukuyama.

The overarching issue is the market for historical topics. Evans emphasises the supply side: Anglophone historians export their attractive product. I tried to point out that the reasons for the demand are equally important. The world is not clamouring for Anglophone historians' work only because it is good. Larger issues also affect the overall market, one of which is the increasingly monopolistic position of English. What effect does the dominance of English have on historians the world over? Just as a bull market allows the financial industry to siphon a disproportionate fraction of university graduates off from other intellectual pursuits, so the renown and riches given to historians writing well on popular topics in English has distorted the allocation of academic effort. Does Evans really think that what the world needs is yet another general book on the decline of the Weimar Republic or the rise of the Third Reich? Does he understand that that is a different question from whether another such book will sell well and be widely translated?

The dominance of English as the lingua franca helps create the market in which Anglophone historians do well. So, to take the case of the Scandinavian courses teaching French history via English-language books that Evans misconstrues:

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obviously courses on Danish history taught at the University of Copenhagen use Danish-language books – if for no other reason than because non-Danish historians rarely, if ever, tackle the topic. In the 1950s, before the cresting of the Anglowave, courses taught in Sweden or Denmark on French or German history would have used French or German books. But today even the formerly multi-lingual citizens of small nations have cut the corner to the global lingua franca and rely on English-language historiography to study their fellow Continental nations.

Backed up by the dominance of English and not only thanks to its intrinsic qualities, Anglophone scholarship has gained a hammerlock on the study of nations outside its own linguistic sphere. We ought to examine the broader consequences of this linguistic dominance – not just its virtues (facilitating exchange, a sellers' market for certain historians), but also its vices (giving the preoccupations of a few nations too great a weight). In the sciences, English is a neutral medium that allows scholars working on subjects that have little nationalistic inflection to communicate without friction. With history writing, the language – and its attendant national baggage – determines much of how the subject is approached. That is why the Scandinavians – and other small nations – can be world-class scientists, but remain provincial historians. Their national histories – largely off the Anglophone historiographical radar – will not be written unless they do so themselves.

My thought experiment on the relative strength of the respective armies of historians of the Anglosphere and Continent sought to call attention to this gorilla in the room. Size does matter. Why is it 'manifestly' not the case that the Anglosphere has a crushingly larger number of historians than any single Continental nation and therefore more troops to send abroad? I was wrong only in not making the ratios accurately large. The Anglosphere has a total population of at least 425 million (of whom 350 million live in nations with only a couple centuries of past, whose historians are therefore underemployed), the average EU nation has 18 million. Assuming that everyone produces the same number of historians per capita, a more accurate ratio would have been 20:1, not merely 10:1, in favour of the Anglosphere. Since the English-speaking world has twenty times as many historians to employ as the average Continental nation, while each nation has equally many foreign ones that it ought to be studying, the sheer size of Anglophonia means that more intellectual traffic will be running from it towards the Continent than in the other direction. It is predictable that the almost half-billion members of the Anglosphere have produced one historian of Finland. It is more surprising that the five million Finns have produced Pekka Hämäläinen, writing the definitive history of the Commanche. That the Finns do not also have a historian working on Britain (as Evans demands) is – purely statistically speaking – only to be expected.

Despite Evans's desire now to distance himself from his numbers, they are not only important, but crucial. Though they fill only a few pages of the book, they are its most interesting part. Indeed, they define what it is he is attempting to account for. Without his figures, apparently showing a greater interest among Anglophone historians for other nations' histories than is true abroad, there would have been no reason for the rest of the book. My spot checks suggest that the anomaly Evans sets

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out to explain may be a mirage of his own making – or at least not remotely as stark a contrast as he claims. If true, that undercuts the point of the rest of the exercise.

And Evans is certainly wrong if he thinks uncounted historians are not to be found in faculties other than the obvious one. Ronan Deazley, of the Law Faculty at Glasgow, is by any measure a historian. Hiding in full view under Evans's nose at Cambridge are Lionel Bently, Isabella Alexander and Catherine Seville, all of whom are historians of the English-speaking world, yet none of them in the Cambridge History Faculty. Their French pendant is Frédéric Rideau, of the Law Faculty at Poitiers, who writes not only about France, but equally about Britain. His German equivalent is Eckhard Höffner, who has just published a massive two-volume book making the sort of argument that Evans dismisses as solipsistic. He compares Germany and Britain and asks whether the absence of effective copyright protection until deep into the nineteenth century helped Germany overtake the UK economically. There is an entire literature in German by legal historians on eighteenth century British developments in authorship and intellectual property – unknown of course to the Anglophone scholars in the field – written by people such as Diethelm Klippel, Walter Bappert, Reinhard Brandt, Elmar Wadle, Walter Euchner, Helmut Holzhey, Wolfgang Kersting, Hans Medick, Albert Osterrieth, Robert M. Reuss and Pascal Oberndörfer. By the way, medievalists are thin on the ground everywhere, but no more so in America than Europe. Hard numbers are scarce, but here is a ballpark comparison: the International Congress on Medieval Studies, which meets annually in Kalamazoo, draws about 3,000 participants. The International Medieval Congress, established in 1994 in Leeds to provide an equivalent dark ages jamboree for Europe, attracts only half that number.

Popularisation is another question. Despite his complaints of being defamed, I can find nowhere in my article a suggestion that Evans's work is not scholarly. But there remains an issue. Professors are paid to do serious scholarly work – basic science as it were. Their topics should not be only what the market rewards, though they can certainly include that. Professorial duties are so loosely defined that it is almost impossible – barring gross negligence of teaching – to say when they are shirking them. When professors write bestselling novels and earn many multiples of their salaries in advances and royalties (Deborah Harkness, for example, or Bernhard Schlink) we assume this to be compatible with their professional duties. Plenty of our colleagues play tennis, cook homemade pasta, or do nothing whatsoever in their spare time. It would be churlish to punish those profitably active on the side.

Writing popular books in one's field is surely pertinent to the scholarly mission and thus laudable. But popular books have their own reward in the marketplace, as does applied science. How best, then, to ensure that the salaried professoriate does what it is paid for? Our colleagues in the sciences have long grappled with this problem. An academic scientist who ventures from basic research into applied knowledge to patent something marketable divides the spoils with his university. Why should something similar not also hold true for the social sciences? But there is also a more general problem here. In the cultural marketplace some subjects get more attention and airspace than others. Does that make them inherently more worthy?

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Or is it not precisely the university's central task to ensure that research is focused also on topics beyond the ken of the History Book Club, the History Channel or even the *London/New York Review of Books*?

Thus we come full circle: the predominance of English distorts the market as a new and growing captive audience is delivered to a select group of native English-speaking historians, convinced that its talents alone allow it to command the world's attention. English-speaking historians of the Second World War era and similar crowd-pleasing subjects are a bit like Michael Lewis' Big Swinging Dicks of Wall Street: deluded by fortuitous circumstances into thinking they are the navel of the world.

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