Modern Intellectual History, 3, 1 (2006), pp. 167–178 © 2006 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S1479244305000661 Printed in the United Kingdom

THE BIRTH OF MODERN MEMORY*

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John Edward Toews, *Becoming Historical: Cultural Reformation and Public Memory in Early Nineteenth-Century Berlin*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. pp. xxiv + 466.

George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004. pp. xiv + 428.

Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004. pp. 268.

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.

Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 1940.

Each generation chooses its own objects of historical inquiry. Over the past decade or two, many historians have moved away from perennial topics in social and political history, turning their gaze on more ethereal questions in the realm of "memory studies." The three splendid books under review here examine elusive phenomena in nineteenth-century Europe: the transformation of historical consciousness, the invention of national myths, and the emergence of nostalgia as a prominent element of European culture after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic age. Taken together, these works vividly illustrate both the value and the challenges of scholarship on the modern historical imagination.

All three books explore what Peter Fritzsche terms "our invention and possession of the past"—or, more precisely, "the meanings we take from the past and the investment we put in the past." Fritzsche observes that Western culture since the French Revolution has displayed an ambivalent attitude toward history: "Although the modern era has often been regulated by rationality and science, it also conjured up fantastic stories about national origins and tall tales

* Parts of this essay appear in my review of George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche*, in *Central European History* (forthcoming 2006).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244305000661 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of lost childhood, along with a passionate longing for the things of the past" (p. 1).

In their chronological and thematic scope, the three books might be visualized as spanning concentric circles. Toews takes as his subject the rise of historicism in early nineteenth-century Berlin, focusing on a small cadre of Prussian artists and intellectuals, including Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Felix Mendelssohn, Jacob Grimm, Joseph Schelling, Friedrich Karl von Savigny, and Leopold von Ranke, all of whom were appointed to prominent positions by King Frederick William IV after his accession to the throne in 1840.

Williamson examines the evolution of "mythical narratives" about the origins of the German nation, which he depicts as a central preoccupation of German educated elites throughout the era from the French Revolution to the eve of World War I, and through the writings of a wide range of intellectuals.

Peter Fritzsche's thematic reach is the most ambitious of all; drawing on literary and artistic sources from Germany, France, Britain, and the United States, he seeks to explain the emergence of a new "historical consciousness" and "idea of subjectivity" (p. 261) in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era. In the post-revolutionary era, he claims, denizens of the West developed an acute awareness of the rupture between past and present, accompanied by a melancholic sense of loss. Although most of his discussion focuses on the first half of the nineteenth century, he suggests that this pervasive "melancholy of history" has persisted into our own day as a powerful cultural and political force.

Toews's book may be regarded as a sequel to his acclaimed 1980 study *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841,* which illuminated the theological and institutional contexts of the Young Hegelian movement, and the fracturing of Hegel's philosophical legacy during the decade after his death in 1831. In this new book Toews takes up his story with the arrival of one of Hegel's leading rivals and antagonists, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, in Berlin in 1841, where King Frederick William IV had summoned him to serve as royal adviser, "public professor of philosophy," and "teacher of the age" (Toews, pp. 1–2). Schelling, who dismissed Hegelianism as his own "unruly 'stepchild'" (p. 5), emphasized the need to recognize "the self's origin and essence in the transcendent personality of absolute being, thus changing the isolated ego into an integrated person that was both culturally and cosmically 'at home'" (p. 19). Schelling defended the legitimacy of Frederick William's claims to divine-right kingship; any ethical community, he argued, must be grounded in divine revelation rather than in a secular constitutional state.

Schelling was far from the only Prussian intellectual to denounce the arid rationalism of Hegel's "Philosophical School." In the early 1840s Frederick William assembled around him many of the leading lights of German culture

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in order to bolster his role as father and benefactor of the nation. Thus, for example, he lured Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm to Berlin—despite their having participated in the 1833 protest of the "Göttingen Seven" against the suspension of the Hanoverian constitution. In Berlin the Grimms edited a series of volumes on German grammar, mythology, and legal precedents. Though initially leery of associating themselves with the authoritarian Prussian state, they soon warmed to the overtures of the king, who invited them to spend evenings with the royal family and appointed Jacob one of the original thirty German "cultural knights" in 1842. Two years later Wilhelm addressed a group of students who had come to celebrate his birthday with a torchlight parade:

> We do not investigate German antiquity in order to lead us back into [an] age which has long passed away into the stream of history; we investigate it in order to truly understand ourselves and through this understanding to contribute to the present, to which we owe our capabilities, our love and our concern (p. 362).

As David Barclay has ably shown, the years after the coronation of King Frederick William IV in 1840 represented a peculiar moment in Prussia's political evolution.[1] Frederick William, who has often been discounted as a romantic by temperament and as a political reactionary, invested considerable energy in seeking to invigorate communal life in Prussia and in Germany after the two decades of stagnation in public life that had concluded the reign of his father, Frederick William III. Though the new king rejected demands for a constitution, insisting on his prerogative to rule by the grace of God, he relaxed the enforcement of press censorship and dedicated himself to the completion of the unfinished Cologne Cathedral, which he called "the spirit of German unity and power" (p. 41). Frederick William presented himself as a foe of revolution but as a "friend of reformations"; he aspired to be "the ideal prince who embodied the collective will of his people," identifying Prussia as the "shield for the security and for the rights of Germany" (pp. 44, 39, 40).

This strange amalgam of absolutism and populism, of medieval Christianity and modern nationalism, ultimately foundered on the rocks of the revolution of 1848. But Toews contends that the intellectual ferment of these years forged a critical missing link between Hegelian idealism and the notion of "the contingent, historically specific identity of the autonomous individual self" (pp. 420–21) found in the works of both Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Marx. Toews characterizes the views of Leopold von Ranke as follows:

> Historical consciousness did not simply unveil a narrative into which one could insert oneself, but opened up a field of possibility in which one was asked to produce one's own

1 David E. Barclay, *Frederick William IV and the Prussian Monarchy 1840–1861* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1995.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244305000661 Published online by Cambridge University Press

story. . . . Historical knowledge of how the self was constituted as an historical subject, a knowledge of itself as "object," was a necessary condition for becoming truly historical (pp. 417–18).

Though Ranke and other leaders of the Historical School were motivated by a conservative impulse to defend the Prussian state, Marx showed that history could also be used to justify revolution.

Toews displays considerable virtuosity in his extended chapters on various defenders of the "historical principle," including Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Felix Mendelssohn, Friedrich Karl von Savigny, the Grimms, and Ranke. Particularly commendable are the chapters on Schinkel and Mendelssohn, in which Toews moves beyond his established comfort zone as a historian of philosophy, writing insightfully on the music and architecture of the age. He notes in his Preface that these two chapters "added years to the project," but they were worth the effort.

The Schinkel chapter, entitled "Building Historical Identities in Space and Stone," includes beautiful reproductions of almost thirty of Schinkel's paintings and architectural drawings, depicting his plans for structures including a "Cathedral of Liberation," the Altes Museum, the Prussian Bauakademie, and a projected palace for King Otto of Greece to be built on the Acropolis in Athens. Toews vividly illustrates how Schinkel adapted classical and Gothic elements to create an "architectural form of the German national spirit" (p. 122), as well as how Schinkel's architectural imagination—and political predilections—evolved from the Napoleonic era until his death in 1840. In his early writings and artistic works of the 1810s Schinkel portrayed the Gothic cathedral as "the idea of freedom built in space, made visible in art"; it used "modest earthly materials of brick and stone to articulate the self-transcending qualities of the human and divine spirit" (pp. 125, 124). But Schinkel soon backed away from celebrating the ideal of human emancipation through the vehicle of the German nation. His 1821 design for a memorial to Frederick the Great lauded the "heroic will of the eighteenth-century creator of a rationally ordered secular state" (p. 157), and in an 1835 sketch of a utopian "Ruler's Residence" he imagined the ruler "as a kind of philosopher king operating at the highest levels of knowledge and cultural refinement and surrounded by a 'court' of cultural and political administrators drawn from the educated classes" (p. 191).

Toews's chapter on Felix Mendelssohn explores the "generation of ethical community from the spirit of music" (p. 207). He covers some of the same ground as Celia Applegate's wonderful new book *Bach in Berlin*, which tells the story of Mendelssohn's 1829 revival of Bach's St Matthew's Passion;[2] but he devotes more than half of the chapter to the evolution of Mendelssohn's music

2 Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St Matthew Passion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244305000661 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from 1830 to his death, at the age of thirty-eight, in 1847. In his later works, such as the *Elijah* oratorio of 1846, Mendelssohn sought to "validate Jewish culture as a moment . . . that was equal in value to classical and Christian cultures. . . . All past and present historical cultures were 'absolute' or immediate to God—the dilemmas of human finitude were equally present in all—but absolute precisely in their common historical limitations" (p. 277).

One of the most striking phenomena revealed by Toews's study is the grandiosity of many of his protagonists' self-conception as world historical figures. In a diary entry of December 1816, Ranke (that paragon of "objective" historiography) declared,

> The spirits stir within me. This is life, and vital life [*lebendiges Leben*]. Let them stir. Thus forms are in a constant process of external transformation. Is not the form simply an expression of inner life? How could the former remain stable while the latter changes? Everything good must have space. I hear you speak within me, marvelous, with many voices. . . . The seed has fallen; you are like roots pushing out from it. And if the soil is good, then the green twig will not be long in coming, and only a warm sun will nourish it. But this sun already shines: I call you my sun; you united spirits of past and present ages. You stood far off, scattered and isolated, but now you are a single choir. . . witnesses of the gods among men (p. 394).

Likewise Christian Bunsen, religious adviser to Frederick William, wrote to his wife in 1839, having witnessed parliamentary debates in England,

> I wish you could form an idea of what I felt. I saw for the first time *man*, the member of a true Germanic state, in his highest, his proper place, defending the highest interests of humanity with the wonderful powers of speech—wrestling (as the entire vigorous man instinctively wishes), but with the arm of the Spirit, boldly grasping at, or tenaciously holding fast power, in the presence of fellow citizens submitting to the public conscience the judgment of his cause, and of his own uprightness (p. 96).

Though such ecstatic effusions might be dismissed as romantic hyperbole, to do so begs the question of why so many romantics of the early nineteenth century believed themselves to be standing at the pivot of history. Why, in 1816, did Ranke come to believe that he could hear the voices of the gods? Why, in 1841, was Schelling embraced by a rapturous public in Berlin, only to be abandoned by the bulk of his followers three years later, when he lamented that "his time and his culture were not ready for his message" (p. 15)? Toews does not persuasively answer these questions: "Members of the Hegelian School effectively defended their positions and attacked Schelling in print," he writes, and by the mid-1840s Schelling's idealist philosophical system "simply faded into irrelevance" (pp. 14–15).

Although Toews provides keen insights into various cultural artifacts from nineteenth-century Berlin, e.g. philosophical treatises, architectural drawings,

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and musical compositions, the significance of these artifacts for the lived experience of the age frequently remains a puzzle. In his earlier book on Hegelianism, Toews brilliantly illuminated the career struggles and theological disputes that informed the reception of Hegel's works by young Prussian intellectuals during the early nineteenth century. In his new book the reader glimpses only dimly the world beyond the texts. A more robust contextualization of his materials would be helpful in conveying why the figures in his study cared so much about the historical roots of their communities, and why their obsession with history should matter to us today. The books by George S. Williamson and Peter Fritzsche grapple with these questions more directly.

> Christianity has emptied Walhalla, felled the sacred groves, extirpated the national imagery as a shameful superstition, as a devilish poison, and given us instead the imagery of a nation whose climate, laws, culture, and interests are strange to us and whose history has no connection whatever with our own" (Williamson, p. 72).

The young Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel voiced this lament in 1796, while working as a private tutor in Berne.

Two years earlier, across the Rhine, Maximilien Robespierre and his fellow leaders of the Jacobin Terror had culminated their own campaign against Christianity, replacing Catholicism with a new French state religion, the "Cult of the Supreme Being." Yet Hegel and Robespierre articulated starkly contrasting attitudes toward history. Whereas the French revolutionary had invented a deistic cult as a means of clearing away the underbrush of Old Regime culture, the German idealist was obsessed with rediscovering and revivifying lost traditions.

Williamson's study presents a compelling account of the "longing for myth" in nineteenth-century Germany. He demonstrates that Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* and Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* were far more than ornamental outliers of German culture in the age of Bismarck; rather they reflected a widespread desire among nineteenth-century German intellectuals to "infuse the public sphere with mythical meaning" (p. 12). Although this quest for common myths revealed "the persistence of confessional and theological modes of thought in the modern era," Williamson insists on the specifically modern character of the German intelligentsia's efforts to "replace the Old Testament with a pagan mythical substrate grounded in ancient Greece, Germany, or the Orient" (pp. 7, 11). The practice of myth-making, he argues, was part and parcel of "the emergence of the public sphere, national identity and the formation of collective memory" in modern Germany (p. 7).

Rather than focusing on a narrowly circumscribed disciplinary community, such as philologists, historians, or museum professionals, Williamson traces his themes through the writings of a wide range of intellectuals—including poets, theologians, philosophers, and composers—from Johann Gottfried Herder to

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Friedrich Nietzsche. By casting his net so widely, he makes a persuasive case that the obsession with national myths represented a deep and lasting current in German culture from the French Revolution to the eve of World War I.

One of the most striking themes of Williamson's book is the anti-Christian sentiment articulated by a wide range of German intellectuals during this era. For Herder, writing during the French revolutionary conquests of the 1790s, Christianity was the "state machine of foreign peoples" that "mutilates [the] unique character" of nations (p. 110). Williamson unearths deep ambivalence or outright hostility toward Christian doctrine and ritual in the writings of authors including Hegel, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Joseph Görres, Jacob Grimm, and many others. But rather than abandoning Christianity altogether, these authors strove to create a new "national mythology" that "was framed within a narrative that built on, transformed, or inverted traditional Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish self-understandings" (pp. 16, 17).

The subtlety and range of Williamson's study makes it essential reading for cultural historians of modern Germany. The book provides a fascinating context not just for the works of Wagner and Nietzsche, but also for a host of other issues, e.g. historical criticism of the Bible from the early Romantics through David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, the origins and significance of the *Kulturkampf*, as well as the transformation of anti-Semitism and the rise of *völkisch* racial theology during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

At the heart of this work lies a tantalizing question that Williamson—like Toews—answers only incompletely: what accounts for the German intelligentsia's obsession with rediscovering old myths and creating new ones? Williamson rejects the crude *Sonderweg* interpretation depicting nineteenth-century Germany as mired in archaic customs; he also denies that this phenomenon stemmed from the bourgeoisie's "political impotence or compensation for something not achieved in the realm of government or legislation." Instead, he argues, the "longing for myth" reflected the pervasive experience of "dislocation and disorientation" caused by industrialization, free-market capitalism, and political upheaval, compounded by the fragmentation of German society "along confessional, social, and territorial lines" (298). The splintering of traditional social and cultural bonds, he argues, gave rise to the desire for an "aesthetic-religious imagery" that would "unite modern society just as Greek mythology had supposedly once united the polis" (p. 299).

As the above observations suggest, the title of Williamson's book is imprecise. The subjects of his study expressed not so much a "longing for myth" as a longing for what they conceived as the fruits of myth, namely a sense of belonging to an organic and glorious national community. But Williamson does not explain why this longing for community should have been more intense in Germany than elsewhere in nineteenth-century Europe. Germany's economic transformation,

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at least until mid-century, was no more abrupt than that of England or various countries of continental Europe. Nor was Germany the only part of Europe confronting confessional or class divisions.

One might suggest two possible explanations for the intensity of German longing. First, Germans' myth-making may indeed have reflected their sense of political "impotence" over the lack of a unified nation state before 1871, along with their striving to secure a "place in the sun." Imperial Berlin, as Thomas Levenson has written, was "a city marked by enormous ambition and a deep, persistent ambivalence about itself."[3] The same characterization may have applied equally well to the German Empire at large. Alternatively, one might postulate that the quest for common myths has played an equally prominent role in other nations' transition to an individualistic capitalist order. Perhaps the restless quest to rediscover age-old communities is an integral element of the rootless experience of modernity.

Peter Fritzsche's fascinating book *Stranded in the Present* takes this latter approach, arguing that nostalgia for an imagined past became a pervasive cultural phenomenon throughout Europe and North America in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. Fritzsche (p. 204) contends that in many ways

> history should be regarded as a globalizing mass medium in the nineteenth century. It enabled contemporaries to recognize themselves as contemporaries, that is, as very differently situated subjects who nonetheless shared the same time and place; who, moreover, could be regarded as products of historical forces; and who were seen to have investments in how those forces resolved themselves.

Fritzsche's compelling opening chapter explores how a range of leading European intellectuals—e.g. François René Chateaubriand, Rahel Varnhagen, Friedrich Gentz, Germaine de Staël, Dorothea Schlegel, and Joseph de Maistre—experienced the continuing dislocations wrought by the French revolutionaries and Napoleon from 1789 through 1815. Fritzsche's protagonists experienced the revolution as "discontinuous, explosive time" (p. 32). Dorothea Schlegel wrote from Vienna in 1810, "As of late, the newspaper reports have been getting more awful, hugely horrible, we are frightened like children again who are told the fairy tale about the giant who wears seven-league boots and catches up with the poor refugees underfoot again and again" (p. 26). Five years later Rahel Varnhagen declared, "We are not headed toward the future", rather "the future comes from behind" (32)—foreshadowing Walter Benjamin's "Angel of History," whose "face

3 Thomas Levenson, *Einstein in Berlin* (New York: Bantam Books, 2003), 4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244305000661 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is turned to the past" and who perceives history as "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet."[4]

The subsequent four chapters of Fritzsche's narrative—"Strangers," "Ruins," "Along the Hedges," and "Household Fairies"—address the cultural reverberations of this shared experience of historical rupture. The first two of these chapters are particularly eloquent and moving. "Strangers" illuminates the melancholia of exiles from the French Revolution, some of whom, like Chateaubriand, identified their fate with that of the American Indian: "both had suffered a historic defeat and were condemned to live amidst the ruins of what once had been a noble existence" (p. 86). "Ruins" explores how artifacts of the past "became the site of anguished memory work and the location of alternative identities" after the revolution (p. 107). For eighteenth-century Europeans ruins had evoked "the power of nature and the subordination of all worldly things to the cycle of death and birth, degeneration and regeneration." In the nineteenth century ruins became "more proximate and more dense, and they evoked more precise and terrifying sentiments" (pp. 99, 98). They became emblems of history, rather than of nature, signifying the irreversible losses incurred in the course of "unrepeatable, heterogeneous time" (p. 103).

Chapters 4 and 5, "Along the Hedges" and "Household Fairies," examine the nexus between the private and the public—how "domestic spaces came to define the character of the nation" (p. 160). They discuss topics such as the role of the Grimm brothers' fairy tales in creating a "cultural space for a German national vernacular" (p. 156), the "historicization of private life" (p. 183) reflected in the spread of diary-writing and the collection of souvenirs, and the popularization of the "haunted house" and of Thanksgiving as an American national holiday in the 1850s. These chapters, although they contain much intriguing material, lack the urgency and immediacy of the earlier parts of the book.

Fritzsche's concluding chapter, entitled "The Historical Age," reflects on the consequences of the post-revolutionary view of history as "relentless, often painful movement away from the past and toward an uncertain future," and of "a way of thinking about time that dramatized radical transformations and inserted fundamental differences into history" (201). He expresses ambivalence about the impact of this new historical imagination on culture and politics in the modern world. Although the consciousness of history can be "politically liberating" by creating "new political possibilities," it also

> destroys very different ways of thinking about time, organizing continuity, and creating intimacies with people, spirits, and nature. Insofar as history is ultimately a story of departures, it is predicated upon a self-consciousness of insufficiency and impermanence

4 Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History," quoted in Fritzsche, 32.

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and it establishes a kind of globalizing synchronicity. This is not easy to accept. Historical mindedness disenchants before it re-enchants; it presumes that whole forms have been irretrievably broken (p. 217).

One might question Fritzsche's claim that this shared sense of loss—or indeed the sense of universal synchronicity—is a uniquely modern phenomenon. Fritzsche himself points out that the basic plot line of the modern historical imagination, emphasizing catastrophic loss and the possibility of redemption, is borrowed from Christian theology. He quotes an observation by M.H. Abrams:

> While the main line of change in the prominent classical patterns of history, whether primitivist or cyclical, is continuous and gradual, the line of change in Christian history is right-angled: the key events are abrupt, cataclysmic, and make a drastic, even an absolute, difference.[5]

Moreover, the Christian narrative of the fall of humanity and the promise of a Last Judgment is just as "global" as modern historicism. Although the medieval imagined community of Christendom excluded the pagan world, Fritzsche notes that Hegel and other nineteenth-century European intellectuals likewise excluded Africa and Asia as existing outside the pale of history. Perhaps the birth of modern historical consciousness represented less an entirely new development than what Anthony LaVopa has called the "reformulation of the sacred within a desacralized discourse."[6]

Yet the core of Fritzsche's argument is not so much that the concept of "right-angled" history was utterly new after 1789, but that the penetration of this view into European public consciousness during the nineteenth century had profound historical consequences. Walter Benjamin, among the most unorthodox members of the tribe of right-angled historians known as dialectical materialists, observes that articulating the past historically "means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger." Many of the characters in Fritzsche's narrative vividly articulate their experiences of traumatic loss. Their sense of self—and often their very lives—have been imperiled; they describe themselves as survivors of a "shipwreck" (p. 73). These dangers and dislocations inspire a powerful desire to find a firm grounding in an imagined past.

Yet Fritzsche's protagonists are far from sanguine about the possibility of their reintegration into a redemptive community. He contends that M.H. Abrams and other scholars have exaggerated the Romantics' faith in "a new harmonious order to come on earth" (p. 103). Fritzsche draws a contrast between the reactionary

5 M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, 1971), 36–7; quoted in Fritzsche, 103.

6 Anthony LaVopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13; quoted in Williamson, 9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244305000661 Published online by Cambridge University Press

attitude, which protests "ignorance of tradition's validity," and nostalgia, which "yearns for what it cannot possess, and defines itself by its inability to approach its subject" (p. 65). In his view, nostalgia, not reaction, was the dominant impulse of the nineteenth century; Europeans and Americans were acutely aware of the irreversible nature of historical change.

Although each of these three books puts forth compelling arguments, none of them breaks much new ground in their analytical methods. Some of the most exciting recent scholarship in nineteenth-century German intellectual history, e.g. Suzanne Marchand's *Down From Olympus* and Kevin Cramer's forthcoming book *The Blood State: The Thirty Years War and German Memory in the Nineteenth Century*,[7] anchor the history of ideas in a close and sustained analysis of the social and institutional contexts in which those ideas were articulated. Rather than writing "pure" intellectual history, these scholars seek to fuse the methods of intellectual, social, and political history.

The absence of such contextualization makes it difficult to determine the origins of such an elusive phenomenon as the "longing for myth" or the "melancholy of history," or to judge how significantly, and in what ways, these cultural currents affected Europeans of the Romantic era and subsequent generations. On this score, Fritzsche's book is the most effective of the three works discussed here. He vividly illustrates the social upheavals that gave rise to his diarists' and correspondents' melancholy; his closing chapters also suggest the pervasiveness of nostalgic elements within European and American popular culture in the nineteenth century. In Toews's study, by contrast, virtually all of the evidence is internal to the texts, and his overarching argument—i.e. that the theories of neither Marx nor Kierkegaard would have been possible without the Prussian Historical School of the 1840s—is also based on evidence drawn from philosophical (or "anti-philosophical") treatises. Williamson, like Toews, builds his argument primarily from published writings by representatives of the German intelligentsia—but the broad scope of his inquiry, as well as his allusions to the rise of *völkisch* racial theories and movements in nineteenth-century Germany, provide a richer sense of the cultural atmosphere surrounding these works.

Despite these limitations, all three books offer keen insights into the cultural upheavals in Germany and Europe that transpired in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era. They demonstrate that the label "Romanticism" is a pale and anodyne label for the culture of this age; they reveal how intellectuals throughout Europe were seized by a new awareness of

7 Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down From Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Kevin Cramer, *The Blood State: The Thirty Years War and German Memory in the Nineteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming 2006).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244305000661 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the fractured nature of their identities and by a longing for firm grounding in an imagined past. These books also show the multivalent implications of this transformation of historical consciousness that allowed Europeans to conceive of themselves as citizens of a "modern" world profoundly different from the past.

Unfortunately, the embattled souls depicted so vividly by Fritzsche—and in more abstract terms by Toews and Williamson—often sought solace in xenophobia. For Fritzsche (p. 129), "National identity was suffocating . . . in the ways that it threw up boundaries against France and inhibited the intellectual exchange that had been characteristic of the Enlightenment." Williamson (p. 299) makes a parallel observation: the problematic aspect of a "society infused by myth," he writes, was that "it tended to harden already existing divisions of class, religion, and ethnicity" and denied the "very possibility of meaningful cultural transfer or translation from one epoch, nation, or 'race' to another."

As Toews points out in his concluding chapter, both Kierkegaard and Marx struggled with the challenge of how to reconcile the dual character of the self as both product and producer of history—i.e. as both historically determined and free. The modern forms of historical consciousness illuminated in each of these books likewise have a dual aspect: on the one hand, historical narratives offer consolation for the subjective experience of loss and dislocation; on the other hand, they offer guideposts for action in the present. As all three authors show, the stories we tell about the past have the potential to be both liberating and constraining. Perhaps the ultimate test of the value of historical consciousness is to what degree it imprisons the imagination, and to what degree it sets the imagination free.

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