

Localism, Landscape, and the Ambiguities of Place: German-Speaking Central Europe, 1860-1930

Edited by David Blackbourn and James Retallack

Opinion

Historians of modern Germany have recovered the persistent significance of localisms. In the engaging introduction to this rich collection of essays, both the possibility of a mythical, local “authenticity”, and the polarization of national versus local are rejected as analytical frameworks. Editors David Blackbourn and James Retallack emphasize instead questions of scale, both in the sense of weighing significances and in terms of bringing national and natural borders into comparative study ...

... Comparative historical links between American and German contexts are fascinatingly elaborated ... in Retallack’s discussion of Julian Hawthorne’s 1870s Saxon travelogue, in which “Dresden is best seen in a rear view mirror” (p. 94). He argues that Hawthorne had the Civil War in the mirror as well, reflecting American concerns about localism (states’ rights) in a consideration of Saxon provincialism...

– Susan A. Crane, *American Historical Review* 114, no. 1 (February 2009): 222-3.

Localism, Landscape, and the Ambiguities of Place is an outstanding edited collection that will have to be read by anyone with a serious interest in Imperial Germany. All of the contributions are of extremely high quality and scholarship, they work well together, and they are linked by an excellent introduction. This is truly a fabulous and path-breaking book that makes an invaluable contribution to the study of German history.

– Jan Palmowski, *Department of German, King’s College, London*

The essays wrestle with the ambiguities of identity, home, language, and place ... They amount to a set of fascinating reflections on the ways inhabitants came to identify and to identify themselves with ‘this work-in-progress called Germany.’ ...

Retallack delves into Julian Hawthorne's (son of Nathaniel) *Saxon Studies* published in 1876. Describing the obsession evident in the Saxon forests where all the trees were numbered and catalogued, Hawthorne could only wonder 'What is to happen to a people who can do such things as this?' The travel book was lambasted by just about everyone who read it as inept caricature. But Retallack insists that there is a hidden joke on us. Hawthorne himself meant the book to be a parody, and the lesson is that identity 'is not about one's given place, but about one's chosen position.' ...

Collections of essays based on conference papers often suffer from a lack of cohesion or uneven quality, but this is not the case here. The chapters, though on diverse themes, nicely complement and play off each other. There is no weak link in the chain. The chapters are interesting and well argued. Together they represent a fresh and evocative study of the interplay between landscapes and localities in the shaping of modern German culture, politics, ideology, and identity. This is therefore a model for an edited volume of collected essays.

– Michael Gross, *Central European History* 42, no. 3 (2009): 556-8.

This well-edited volume, divided into four parts, contains ten essays.... An excellent thirty-page editors' introduction, grounded in theories of place, culture, and identity, provides a framework for the themes addressed in the essays that follow.

Part I, "Placing Cultures, Moving Cultures," contains three essays that have in common surprising new perspectives on German culture. ... James Retallack's "'Native Son': Julian Hawthorne's *Saxon Studies*" looks at the interplay between nation and province. In 1876, Julian Hawthorne (1846-1934), the thirty-year-old son of Nathaniel Hawthorne, published his 452-page *Saxon Studies*, an often crudely stereotyping and misanthropic work. Despite Henry James's prediction, Hawthorne later in life did not regret having published this tome. ... Retallack shows us a proud Saxony struggle with the Wilhelmine authorities who made claims on it after 1871. ...

The contribution this volume makes to the field of cultural studies goes well beyond its German scope. Its greatest contribution—the whole being larger than the sum of the parts—lies in its testing and stretching of theories of place and identity. In the end, *Localism, Landscape, and the Ambiguities of Place* exposes some of the very assumptions that have gone into the notion of hybridity itself. Hence its focus on localism generates, as Blackburn and Retallack promise in their introduction, scholarly questions "that have been addressed tangentially, if at all, from national perspectives" (14).

— Peter Blicke, *German Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (Summer 2008)

Much of the German past in the English-speaking world has been studied from a national perspective. Twenty years ago a few isolated studies ... began to explore regions for their relationship to the nation and for their own trajectories toward the present. Looking in from the margins has become an accepted approach, and this book's authors also seek to see landscapes and places in terms of identity and relationships to larger entities, such as the nation.

The editors and authors of this volume set themselves huge tasks at the Toronto conference where the original papers were presented and discussed. They acknowledge the geographical diversity and federated makeup of the many Germanies which existed then, and hence the volume can touch upon only a few localities. ...

Many personal trajectories would have to be investigated to discover how much store the average person put in the myths of the *Heimat* advocates. By fostering such questions, this book moves beyond the national, central-state approach to peoples' histories.

— Dieter K. Buse, *Canadian Journal of History* 43, no. 3 (2008): 543-6.

Theoretische und forschungspraktische Probleme mit dem spatial turn hin oder her – eine kultur- und sozialhistorische Auseinandersetzung mit den „ambiguities of place“ kommt langsam in Schwung, und wird auch in der breiteren Öffentlichkeit mit Interesse zur Kenntnis genommen. Der Band „Localism, Landscape, and the Ambiguities of Place. German-Speaking Central Europe, 1860-1930“ versammelt einige der prominentesten Vertreter dieser Forschungsrichtung, so dass die Leser auf innovative Herangehensweisen an die besprochene Fragestellung hoffen konnten. ... Der Versuch, ... die unterschiedlichen Forschungsansätze zusammen zu bringen, ist ausdrücklich zu würdigen, und lässt auf weitere inspirierende Kooperationen von Gesellschafts-, Kultur-, Politik- und Umwelthistorikern hoffen.

...

Der vorliegende Band ... entfaltet ... eine inspirierende Bandbreite an Annäherungen an kulturelle Ortskonstruktionen in der neueren deutschen Geschichte. ... Für zukünftige Untersuchungen auf diesem Feld liefert der Band eine Reihe interessanter Befunde, und kann auch dank seiner guten Lesbarkeit dem interessierten Leser empfohlen werden.

– Mateusz J. Hartwich, *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 29.11.2008