becomes a political, cultural, and social battleground, on which national identity is constructed. Be that as it may, we seem to have come a long way from the days in which the local was viewed as marginal to the making of nationhood.

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*Wege in den "Kulturkrieg": Zivilisationskritik in Deutschland 1890–1914.* By Barbara Besslich. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft. 2000. Pp. xi + 416. EUR 49.90. ISBN 3–534–14930–0.

The chief contribution of this monograph is to demonstrate how the German "*Kulturkrieg*" of the First World War had its roots in a *Zivilisationskritik* elaborated earlier. Thus, the author asserts, it is misleading to view the efflorescence of wartime polemics as solely an epiphenomenon of the intense nationalism unleashed by the outbreak of the war. Rather some of the most emblematic expressions of the "Ideas of 1914" represented the successive radicalization of a prewar confrontation with modernity, one that was not primarily nationalist in inspiration, although it proved easily nationalized. Arguing against a too ready dismissal of the "*Kulturkrieger*" as regressive escapists, Besslich considers these prewar critiques to have been — at least in part — serious attempts to confront the traumas of modernity. She takes pains as well to show that the path from *Zivilisationskritik* to *Kulturkrieg* differed significantly depending on which individual is considered. She invites a comparison with Fritz Stern's *The Politics of Cultural Despair* and sees her book both as a successor and as a corrective to that classic.

The bulk of the book is dedicated to detailed studies of the trajectories of four individuals: the philosopher Rudolf Eucken, Thomas Mann, the critic and author Hermann Bahr, and the political economist Johann Plenge. All four participated prominently in the *Kulturkrieg*. Aside from this not much else binds these four men together, and despite a number of direct and indirect connections they do not form in any way a school. The author does claim, however, that her four subjects offer exemplary case studies of what she identifies as the two major components of the prewar *Zivilisationskritik*: neo-idealism, which she associates with Eucken but also with Mann; and the critique of capitalism, associated with Bahr and Plenge. Common to the wartime writings of all four was the *Kultur-Zivilisation* antinomy, but the author is careful to distinguish between the more nuanced, scholarly debates employing this discourse, and the more popular, worldview literature that is the subject of her examination.

The story of Rudolph Eucken's transformation from an academic philoso-

pher to the popular purveyor of a warmed up, platitudinous neo-idealism seems most familiar. Alarmed by the emergence of a mass society, and especially by the threat he imagined the increasing prestige of the natural sciences and technology posed to the privileged status of his own discipline, he was a central figure behind the prewar Fichte revival. This encounter with Fichte, along with a prolonged stay in America in 1911, helped to nationalize what had hitherto been a more general critique of modernity, directed against Germany as much as any single nation. By 1913 then Eucken was primed for his career as *Kulturkrieger*. Besslich's discussion of Thomas Mann yields more surprises. Key to it is her insightful analysis of his short stories, particularly "At the Prophet's" where the central figure is based on the vatic poet Ludwig von Derleth. Beneath the gentle irony with which the narrator — clearly a representation of Mann himself — describes the otherworldly ambiance cultivated by the would-be prophet and his high priestess-sister, Besslich nevertheless detects a yearning for an alternative world to that of the author-narrator's "*Bürgerdasein*." In a persuasive analysis of the unpublished essay "Geist und Kunst," on which Mann worked between 1908 and 1912, the author shows how Mann's thinking evolved from a position mocking the "nudist literary culture" of his day to one that increasingly valorized the Dionysian irrational at the expense of the analytic-critical. Besslich ascribes this change of heart in large part to Mann's reading of Walt Whitman and to his growing appreciation for the new generation influenced by the *Lebensreform* movement, a sentiment not unmixed with homoeroticism. By the time he completed *Death in Venice* in 1912 then, Mann had already established the binary oppositions that would structure his early wartime writings, so much so that he could write in a letter of 1913 that "a nation in which such a novella could not only be written, but even to a certain extent acclaimed, needs perhaps a war."

Turning to the critique of capitalist strain in the prewar *Zivilisationskritik*, Besslich discusses first Hermann Bahr who studied national economy as a student of Adolf Wagner in Berlin. There he developed the critique of capitalism and ideas about a nationalist socialism that, according to Besslich, remained an important theme in all of his later work and gives it a unity that many Bahr specialists have missed. Even when he turned to literary journalism and eventually the theater Bahr continued to be a harsh critic of capitalism, particularly its emphasis on a one-sided rationality. In fact, Bahr embraced modernism in part because it emphasized the nerves and disparaged ratiocination. Like Mann Bahr yearned for a heroic and exciting way out of the impasse of aesthetic decadence on the one hand, and capitalistic *Betrieb* on the other. In the plays he wrote just before the war, such as *Der Apostel, Der Meister*, and *Die gelbe Nachtigall*, Bahr employed many of the stock characters and concepts common to the German cultural Right, including the longing for the charismatic leader and an anti-individualistic elitism, works that anticipate his subsequent stance in

the *Kulturkrieg*. Next, Besslich turns to Johann Plenge, the youngest of all of her subjects and the only one who seemed never to have had any misgivings about the disenchantment of the world and indeed, under the program "Organization," to have positively embraced it. As the author points out, however, Plenge's motto was a "floating signifier," pointing to a wide variety of positions and cloaking what remained an elusive conception of socialism, one that was easily coopted by the German right wing after the war. Perhaps it is this vagueness that renders the analysis of Plenge the most tepid part of the book.

The author concludes with a short discussion of both Jewish *Kulturkrieger* and of Gustav Radbruch's critique of the *Kulturkrieg*, adumbrations of what appears to be her next project. Wisely she leaves it largely to the reader to draw his or her conclusions about her four principal subjects. One striking feature common both to Mann and to Bahr is how they came to celebrate irrationalism and the outbreak of war because in part of their boredom with the prewar world. While passages in her book suffer from repetitiousness, Besslich provides for the patient reader a frequently illuminating intellectual history of the prewar roots of the *Kulturkrieg*. The exhaustive, up-to-date scholarly apparatus alone makes the book worth consulting.

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*The Challenge of Modernity: German Social and Cultural Studies, 1890–1960.* By Adelheid von Saldern. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2002. Pp. xxii + 383. $64.50. ISBN 0–472–10986–3.

The evolution of British and American labor history seems to reverse Charles Peguy's famous dictum that things start out as mysticism and end up as politics. Anglophone scholarship on the labor movement began with studies of political parties, and then emphasized work and community before becoming absorbed with culture and language. At the moment, labor history seems to be ready for the list of endangered historiographical species. As one can see in this collection of essays by Adelheid von Saldern, German historians have been powerfully influenced by their British and American counterparts, but have not uncritically followed their example. Political issues and problems, if not political parties and organizations, remain significant for Saldern, as they do for most of her colleagues. Conceptual and methodological debates, especially debates over *Alltagsgeschichte*, the history of everyday life, have a peculiarly German character and tone. And, to judge Saldern's exemplary work, labor history retains a vitality in Germany that it has lost in the English-speaking world.