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Tony Judt. *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century.* Penguin, 2008. 464 pp. \$29.95.

Tony Judt. *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945.* Penguin, 2005. 960 pp. \$37.95.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/essays/Deighton-Judt.pdf>

Reviewed for H-Diplo by **Anne Deighton**, University of Oxford

It is perhaps quixotic to start this review by reviewing a book of reviews. Yet Tony Judt has acquired his international reputation not only because of a remarkable output as one of the leading historians of the twentieth century, but also because of his reputation as an outstanding reviewer and essayist, in particular for the *New York Review of Books*.

Reappraisals is an engrossing collection of provocative reviews and essays that were mainly written at the time he was engaged in the larger historical project. It is a potpourri of over twenty chapters that deal with European history and European intellectuals; essays on European leaders (the one on Tony Blair is delightfully acerbic: 'he is the gnome in England's Garden of Forgetting' (p. 224)); and several essays on the U.S. and on Israel. His style is charged, openly partisan, and wonderful to read. He introduces each topic, setting it in context for the less-well informed reader.

To give one example: in *The Catastrophe: the Fall of France in 1940* Judt reviews Ernest May's 2001 study, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France*, by setting out the wider debate on Hitler's invasion of France. The review, complete with the almost compulsory NYRB battery of footnotes, reminds the reader of much of the other key literature on the topic. He cites Michael Howard's work on the Franco-Prussian war and the strategic confusion of the French in 1870 - and also that Weygand and Pétain (the obvious objects of so much criticism) were both old enough to remember the Paris Commune of 1871 - 'the bogeyman for conservatives everywhere', (p. 195). Drawing also on the work of Marc Bloch through to DC Watt and others, he revisits not only the debates about the hideous politics of France in the 1930s which was riven by anti-semitism, anti-communism, incompetence, strategic myopia, corruption and intrigue, but also politics in Germany

(upon which May puts more weight). In this way, Judt convincingly reassesses the reasons for the unexpected, dramatic, and successful push by the Germans across the deeply wooded Ardennes and into France in 1940.

Judt's essays on Hobsbawm, Kolakowski and Edward Said (grouped in a section called 'The Politics of Intellectual Engagement', and also including assessments of work on Camus, Althusser, and Pope John Paul II, as well as a sideswipe at EP Thompson) are vignettes of the highest order. There is irony – Eric Hobsbawm - a 'Communist mandarin' – 'is the best known historian in the world.... [but]... he has somehow slept through the terror and shame of the age' (*Eric Hobsbawm and the Romance of Communism*, passim). There is informed admiration for Edward Said ('probably the best-known intellectual in the world') in a piece that gave at least this non-Mid Eastern specialist the clearest overview of the development of Said's honest interrogation of the Israel-Palestine tragedy through Oslo to the two-state and single-state options, including the prophetic and grim observation of the Palestinian national story as a 'reproachful mirror to Zionism, a tale of expulsion, diaspora, resurrection, and return' (p172). Both historic Palestine and historic Israel appear to be lost causes (p175), but Judt argues that Said virtually and single-handedly initiated a real conversation in the United States – though it sometimes still seems to be very faint to European ears - about Israel, Palestine, and the Palestinians.

One could go on: Judt's demolition piece on Gaddis' 2006 book (*Whose Story is it? The Cold War in Retrospect*) is helpfully reproduced here, although it is probably on the bibliography of every graduate cold war course already; there is a clever piece on Belgium; the culture surrounding U.S. espionage is revisited in a study on Whittaker Chambers; and European /American differences are also examined. It is worth noting that Judt includes a short passage after each chapter that tells the reader about the initial reaction when it first appeared – U.S. readers apparently disliked his criticisms of Starbucks in this latter essay.

However, there are more substantial themes that lurk behind this collection: Judt reflects on the nature of historical memory, and how well we deal as societies with remembering and losing our pasts. This is a recurrent theme in his work, and it is developed again in the 'Introduction' to *Reappraisals*. 'We live in an age of forgetting', he says, in which we seem to be happier building often vacuous 'moral memory palaces' than thinking constructively, and trying at least to understand, if not to learn from the past. He thinks that intellectuals are largely ignored as we forget how to talk about, let alone to deploy the power of ideas. It is not anti-semitism alone to which he is referring, but the gross displays of totalitarianism and the horrors of General War that the leaders of the 1990s in particular airbrushed away.

If *Reappraisals* opens doors into a more complex way of remembering and understanding the complexity of the past, *Postwar* is – with apologies for the turn of phrase – a genuine door-stopper of a work that shows more fully what arguments Judt is making. It is a long book: nearly 900 pages, with an additional full bibliography available on line. It is

organised chronologically, breaking the period down into the phases up to 1953, to 1971, to 1989, then beyond the Cold War. (The last two hundred pages can be read as what is essentially a second book, on Europe, post-Cold War.) Based upon an enormous range of secondary and primary literature it is synthetic, not a monograph in the sense that historians might expect (it is lightly footnoted, for example). It is avowedly partisan – an account that is permeated by a desire to set the period after 1945 into a rounder and more comprehensive intellectual landscape, and to escape much of the self-congratulatory and teleological thinking that he feels overtook many in the West after the end of the Cold War. Judt deploys two devices to accomplish this task. Like others who have written about Twentieth Century Europe – Mark Mazower immediately comes to mind – Judt mixes international, political, social, and economic history as he burrows beneath any merely superficial narrative account of national or international developments.

The greater innovation is that he has written a genuine history of Europe – West and East, west and east-central. The narrative thus swings between the two competing periods of reconstruction on either side of the iron curtain: the similarities – relations of West and East Europeans with their respective superpowers; the drive for reconstruction and then modernisation in both the West and the East, (the alarm in the West when Sputnik was launched, indicating that perhaps the West could not keep up with the East); the need for those on both sides of the iron curtain to forget or reinvent the first half of the century so that the myths and ideologies of the second half made better sense. Yet, Judt does not try to argue that there was ever a golden age of one Europe: the experience of the 1930s also varied between Spain, Britain, France, Poland, the Baltic states; and before the first World War, imperial European powers also shaped their European empires in vastly different ways. Indeed, he is at pains to argue that there is not necessarily one grand narrative to find and expose – there is a whole chapter devoted to ‘The Varieties of Europe’. Yet he does acknowledge the success of the West Europeans in designing and sustaining a European ‘model’ that may mimic, but which is also still in contra-distinction to the model of that other effectively European, or quasi-European country, the United States of America.

The book is a real achievement and a major contribution to the literature on postwar Europe. One may not agree with all Judt argues: he is perhaps too severe on the 68-ers – ‘boys and girls’ he calls them (p407). How this judgement stands up in the face of the rash of new research that is now emerging on 1968 will be of great interest to historians.

With good reason, he judges very harshly the truly grotesque forms of control over its own and its East European citizens that the Soviet Union deployed. Maybe there was complacency in parts of Western Europe – after all the Cold War settlement artificially enhanced the importance of both France and Britain in the international system, and the West European project was deeply embedded in the new multilateralism, and was in the interests of the U.S. Yet the so-called stability of the bipolar system did not always seem that way at the time. Judt must be aware of the limits of action of the West Europeans. René Girault once famously talked of the ‘powerlessness’ of Europe after the Second

World War: the background fear of another war in Europe, or, worse, nuclear war in Europe rendered useless those early efforts at European détente as followed by the British and the French. West Europeans thought that they were living with the enemy within, as well as alongside their half of the continent. It was only the West Germans who could bring about a systemic sea-change through an Ostpolitik that was mirrored by continual support for West European integration in all the institutions of European Community, the Council of Europe, Western European Union – and of course, NATO. Europe's division was characterised and crystallised by a divided Germany and Berlin. This only changed when the West Germans themselves could soften, modify, then overcome the postwar German settlement, always reminding their Western partners of their ongoing commitment to Western multilateralism, and the Soviets of their pacific intentions.

Since the end of the Cold War, new archival and other materials allowed Judt to develop a west/east European axis to shape the structure of *Postwar*. This means that he can move forward the intellectual interpretations of the century in Europe as a wider whole, yet without falling into the temptation of trying to 'distil the essence of Europe' (p752). Further, the wider and longer perspective means that he has categorised the 1945-89 period as an extended finale and coda to the European civil war that had begun in 1914, 'a forty-year interregnum between the defeat of Adolf Hitler and the final resolution of the unfinished business left behind by his war' (p749). The importance of not forgetting, but rather, of remembering in significant ways is central to his work as a historian, and shapes the kind of history that he writes. In *Postwar's* epilogue, entitled 'From the House of the Dead' for example, he rehearses the political dimensions of memories, and in particular, how the public space deals with public and private memory of holocaust and genocide. Individuals, intellectuals and politicians are also given a well-defined place in Judt's historical approach – a welcome alternative to mechanistic approaches to history shaped by too much political science. Those who have already read *Postwar* should buy and savour *Reappraisals*: those who have read neither, and who have anything more than a passing interest in what still remains one of the most enigmatic and complex continents on the planet, should certainly buy and read both.

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