History without historiography is not only oversimplified and impoverished but is a contradiction in terms. The study of the past cannot be divorced from a linked awareness and investigation of its practitioners and intermediaries. No historian writes in isolation from the work of his or her predecessors, nor can the commentator – however clinically objective or professional – stand aloof from the insistent pressures, priorities and demands of the ever-changing present, and they are sometimes deliberately prevented from doing so. In truth, there are no self-contained, impregnable ‘academic towers’. Historians are responsive, porous beings. Their writings are an extension of who they are, where they are placed, and whom they speak for. Though historians address the past as their subject, they always do so in ways that are shaped – consciously or unconsciously as the case may be – by the society, politics and systems, cultural ethos, and pressing needs of their own day, and they communicate their findings in ways that are specifically intelligible and relevant to a present-minded reading public consisting initially of their own contemporaries. For these reasons the study of history is concerned most fundamentally not with dead facts and sterile, permanent verdicts, but with highly charged dialogues, disagreements, controversies and shifting centres of interest among its presenters, with the changing methodologies and discourse of the subject over time, and with audience reception. Issues in Historiography is a well-established, well-stocked series designed to explore such subject matter by means of case studies of key moments in world history and the interpretations, reinterpretations, challenges, debates and contests they have engendered.
The Revolution of 1918–19 stands out as one of the most controversial episodes in German history and, in the words of one commentator (Martin Sabrow), has been variously ‘hated, honoured and forgotten’. Leading scholar Matthew Stibbe, in this well-structured, accessibly written book, presents an irresistible case for taking the Revolution seriously and according it a landmark status. With chapters arranged in three main chronological sections, it brings out very clearly the different ways over time that the Revolution has been defined, depicted, and ‘owned’ and ‘disowned’ in successive phases of German history – Weimar, Nazi, postwar divided Germany and Cold War, and then reunified Germany. It also examines how at times the 1918–19 Revolution has been crowded out of the national picture or rendered less clear by alternative and more insistent historical preoccupations with the First World War and with the Holocaust, and by changing historical emphases associated, for example, with the new cultural history. There is a helpful discussion in these pages of the gendering of the historiography of the Revolution and of its spatial turn. The transnational dimensions of the subject are never lost sight of, and useful bridges are constructed between the historiography of this revolution and those of other revolutions – English, French, German (1848) and Russian. Indeed, in one case at least, there is overlap between the actual cast list of Stibbe’s German study and that of the mid-seventeenth-century English Revolution in the person of Eduard Bernstein, a participant in the German Revolution and also a commentator on Oliver Cromwell and the proto-Communists of the earlier period. Detailed, perceptive appraisals are offered of the contributions of differently positioned individual historians to the fraught historiography of this subject. The book ends with some thoughtful reflections on possible future trajectories of research: an understandable wariness of cultural determinism and its effects, a greater emphasis on the construction of revolutionary subjectivities, and a return to questions relating to sovereignty and the political history of the Revolution.

In these respects, as in others, Stibbe’s volume will do much to guide student readers through an abundant and contentious literature, enabling them to make sense of the various items listed in its dense bibliography and the relationships among them.
The inclusion of graphic contemporary images provides another helpful dimension taking us beyond the written text itself. As such, *Debates on the German Revolution of 1918–19* makes a very welcome and provocative addition to the Issues in Historiography series. And to include reference to today’s ongoing Russo-Ukrainian struggles certainly proclaims a self-conscious anchoring in the ‘now’ as well as the ‘then’ – the quintessence of historiography.

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