

Choice, for November, 2008

This is an extraordinarily thorough investigation into the life of a great (and greatly maligned) scientist. Richards (Univ. of Chicago) points out that Haeckel's publications promoting both popular and scientific evolutionary theory were much more widely read than Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Haeckel coined many words still in use today, including "ecology," named thousands of species of marine animals, and mentored many students who became famous in their own right. Furthermore, Haeckel's blunt criticisms of religiously motivated critics of Darwin set the stage for the current political struggles between evolution and religion in modern America. Finally, Richards thoroughly debunks the thesis that Darwin's ideas, via Haeckel, were an important source for Nazi political or scientific thinkers, and thus a root cause of the Holocaust. The tragedies in Haeckel's life, and the influence of these tragedies on his zealous scientific and political activities, add a poignant touch to the work. The appendixes not only enhance the reader's understanding of this specific history, but also are extremely valuable guides to reading other histories. This is a masterly work, and belongs in the library of anyone who has an interest in the history of evolutionary science. **Summing Up:** Highly recommended. General readers; upper-division undergraduates through professionals. -- *D. A. Rintoul, Kansas State University*