

Book Reviews

Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939. By Rosa Maria Bracco. Oxford: Berg, 1993. 210 pp. \$49.95.

Until recent years, the English cultural legacy of the Great War was easy to characterize: the slaughter along the Western Front, critics such as Bernard Bergonzi and Paul Fussell argued, proved too vast, horrible, and modern to be translated into traditional constructs of martial heroism or romance. As a result, the war unleashed what Fussell termed “modern memory,” a mode of cognition characterized by the relentless application of irony, and gave rise to the myth of the post-1914 world as a hopelessly shattered wasteland.

An intriguing study of non-canonical literature, *Merchants of Hope* joins a body of scholarship that has, within the past decade, begun to challenge the accuracy of this interpretation. Similar revisionist works—all of them valuable—include Martin Stephen’s *Never Such Innocence* (1988), a boldly inclusive First-World-War poetry anthology that acknowledges both “anti-war” sentiments and more ambiguous responses, George L. Mosse’s *Fallen Soldiers* (1990), which traces the perpetuation of militaristic values during the 1920s and ’30s, and Adrian Caesar’s *Taking It Like A Man* (1993), which proceeds from the unsettling conceit that poetic condemnations of violence, such as Owen’s or Sassoon’s, actually glorify suffering and perpetuate aggression. Indeed, it is no coincidence that Bracco and Caesar open their studies in similar ways. Bracco notes that the supposed death of martial idealism in World War One has become a “history lesson which every student learns at school,” but a lesson hardly born out, she claims, by post-war popular literature (1). Likewise, Caesar regrets that “thousands, if not millions, of school children in the western world” study Owen and Sassoon as debunkers of “patriotism, heroism, and glory” without realizing the subtle espousal of violence contained in their work (1). Both of these writers, like many others now turning to the Great War, are impatient with interpretations formulated by scholars in the 1960s and ’70s and currently ensconced in anthologies and textbooks.

Bracco’s claim that the cultural significance of the Great War has been misunderstood rests upon an investigation of forgotten popular fiction so vast, in terms of reading, that one hesitates whether to offer praise or condolence. In all, *Merchants of Hope* draws upon more than one hundred English novels from the interwar decades—with scarcely a familiar title among them—all the products of what Bracco, reviving a then-prevalent usage, refers to as middlebrow writers. Citing the pervasiveness of the word “middlebrow” in trade journals and literary debates, Bracco convincingly asserts that this term was applied, between the wars, to writers with middle-class backgrounds, a strong sense of literary and cultural tradition, and a repugnance for the “clever” practices of modernists. Thus her concern is not with “highbrow”

artists such as Virginia Woolf or Ford Madox Ford, who exiled themselves from the mainstream fiction market through experimentation and obscurity, but with writers who spoke directly to the middle classes through traditional narratives, and who cast themselves as agents of post-war reconstruction and cultural continuity. Unlike modernist works, middlebrow novels, Bracco contends, were “the staple of the circulating libraries”; they “adorned bookshop windows, filled review columns and, most importantly, made up the bestseller lists” (11).

Yet while the term “middlebrow” is helpful—in so far as it can be tied to a non-ironic and anti-modernist vision of the Great War—its use throughout this study becomes a minefield. Thus, before addressing Bracco’s treatment of a vast array of previously ignored cultural artifacts, I must point out two major weaknesses. The first involves terminology, the second some matters of format. Although Bracco has ostensibly narrowed her focus to a group of writers bound together by class background, ideology, and technique, her adoption of the word “middlebrow” also seems entangled with unstated aesthetic biases. Consider, for example, the following assertion, which appears amid Bracco’s otherwise lucid explanation of her terms: “Middlebrow novels laid claim to respectable status but rarely pretended to any lasting value” (11). Since Bracco includes among the middlebrows Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy—some of whose novels have remained constantly in print—this denial of genuine literary ambition seems a shaky claim. And, in the next chapter, Bracco further clouds the issue when she mentions that Henry James—a highbrow if ever there was one—selected three middlebrow writers (Compton Mackenzie, Gilbert Cannan, and Hugh Walpole) for his 1917 list of the “four great novelists of the future” (54). Is Bracco really talking about writers who “rarely pretended to any lasting value,” or writers who fail her own unstated test of literary greatness? Is modernism implicitly equated with aesthetic virtue?

Equally puzzling is the omission of better-known authors whose class orientation or artistic sensibility would seem to place them firmly in the middlebrow camp. H.M. Tomlinson, for example, is never mentioned, nor C.E. Montague. R.H. Mottram appears in Bracco’s account of the 1929 City Literary Institute debate over tradition and experimentation—together with Edmund Blunden, Mottram defended tradition—but disappears without explanation from her ensuing analysis of interwar fiction. There is then a sense of arbitrariness about Bracco’s categories that emerges despite her efforts to recreate their specific, contemporary significance. Perhaps “traditional” or, better yet, “non-canonical” might serve as more accurate and less problematic labels for the narratives that Bracco examines.

A second weakness is the format of this book—namely, the insertion of a gigantic notes section after each chapter,

which interferes with the flow of ideas from one chapter to the next, and the absence of a bibliography. Given that this study focuses almost entirely on obscure, out-of-print titles, the latter deficiency is particularly unfortunate; although Bracco's generally meticulous notes provide the necessary bibliographical information on her sources, the parameters of her investigation and the relevance of her conclusions remain hazy. Are there additional First-World-War novels, aside from the one hundred or so cited in Bracco's notes, to which the term "middlebrow" applies? And who, exactly, were the highbrows? Should we assume that any well-known writer omitted from Bracco's study falls under this heading? What the reader needs is a straightforward list of both primary sources and other examples of First-World-War fiction organized according to the categories—high, middle, and lowbrow—that Bracco has revived.

These defects aside, however, *Merchants of Hope* effectively demonstrates that not everyone during the interwar decades converted, as Samuel Hynes has put it, to "Wilfred Owenism" or believed themselves the inhabitants of a post-Armageddon wasteland. Indeed, Bracco summarizes the middlebrow response to the Great War in an appropriate inversion of Yeats' "The Second Coming": the center *can* hold. The middlebrows, she contends, "were engaged not with the sense of an irretrievable world, but with a commitment to avoid the fragmentation of what they saw as 'English' culture" (197). Thus, through a "didactic literature of social communication," they spoke of traditions and values that somehow transcended politics, and envisioned a cultural heritage shaken but far from destroyed by the cataclysm of 1914 to 1918 (196). As the title of Bracco's study aptly suggests, these writers offered a vision of confidence and renewal.

Some of the most valuable analysis in *Merchants of Hope* concerns the middlebrows' interpretation of war experience, one that acknowledged the horror of industrialized conflict, and rarely lapsed into outright patriotism, but steadfastly defended traditional meaning against the intrusion of irony. In her chapter "The Invisible Hand of the Cause," for instance, Bracco traces these writers' unwillingness to concede that all had been for naught; yet their assertion of a meaning and purpose behind the war had little to do with the specific causes of the conflict. Instead, Bracco argues, the middlebrows imbued the war with a kind of significance that defied clear expression—or political analysis. The unspoken commitment and sense of duty felt by soldiers, for example, become their own justification; both are manifestations of traditions and values—of "Englishness"—too profound and ineffable for debate.

In addition, the middlebrows often cast the war as a test of

the individual, and posit a "new, more intense degree of understanding" as a beneficial outcome (81). For example, novels such as *The Man Who Went, God and Tony Hewitt*, or *A Man and His Lesson*—to cite only three out of the dozens that Bracco mentions—describe, as their titles imply, a personal trial that brings the protagonist into a cathartic, sometimes spiritual confrontation with reality. And, in her central chapter, entitled "'Standards are Different Here,'" Bracco carries this theme a step further by suggesting that many popular writers located a positive value in the "troglodyte world" of the Western Front, a ghastly arena, but one in which the individual was profoundly tested, sustained by comradeship, and faced with truth. Contrasted with the ignorance and self-deception of the home front, trench warfare becomes an experience both ennobling and revelatory, its survivors "a generation set apart."

Bracco concludes this analysis with a lengthy case study of R.C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* (1928). Drawing extensively on Sherriff's papers, housed in the Surrey Record Office, she provides the fullest analysis to date of this celebrated play, and convincingly presents Sherriff as the archetypal middlebrow artist. While some readers may regard this chapter as an inconsistency—the rest of *Merchants of Hope* does, after all, focus on fiction, rather than drama—I found it by far the most engrossing section of the book.

Particularly impressive is Bracco's probing into Sherriff's war record. We learn, for example, that Sherriff may have feigned illness (just as his character Lt. Hibbert does) to avoid participation in a trench raid; that he suffered from recurring neuralgia symptomatic of shell-shock; and that he longed to escape the trenches by joining the Royal Flying Corp. In short, Bracco looks beyond the more celebrated and "honorable" details of Sherriff's military service, such as his wounding at Passchendaele, to redefine his war experience as "a nightmare no man's land between courage and nervous collapse." Thus, *Journey's End*, a romantic and sentimental celebration of public-school values in wartime, becomes the perfect example, in Bracco's view, of middlebrow art, art that transforms terrifying ambiguities into traditional, ultimately consoling patterns of meaning.

Overall, then, *Merchants of Hope* represents a valuable, if problematic, supplement to studies of better-known First-World-War writers, as well as a thoughtful challenge to cultural historians who perceive a more profound break between pre- and post-1914 Europe. As much as I enjoyed Bracco's discussion of middlebrow fiction, however, her meticulously researched analysis of *Journey's End* stands in a class by itself.

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Taking it like a man: Suffering, sexuality and the War Poets Brooke, Sassoon, Owen, Graves. Adrian Caesar. Manchester University Press, 1993. 246 pp.

The scope of this interesting and original book is ambitious, and it draws upon a wide range of sources. Over 140 poems are discussed, mentioned or quoted, with the support of letters, autobiographical material, and the work of familiar Great War scholars such as Bergonzi, Fussell, Hassall, Hibberd, Seymour-Smith, and Stallworthy, among others. Each poet is given equal treatment—approximately fifty pages—and the introduction and conclusion are each a dozen pages long. The index has an exhaustive taxonomy: along with the usual heading ‘poetry’ and ‘works’, under each poet are found the following rubrics: ‘militarism’, ‘neurosis’, ‘pacifism’, and ‘sexual identity’, this last one subdivided into ‘and death’, ‘and pain’, ‘and suffering’. Under ‘homosexuality’ we find ‘and art’, ‘in public school’; under ‘sado-masochism’: ‘and Christianity’, ‘and sexuality’, ‘and war’; under ‘Christianity’: ‘and self-sacrifice’, ‘and sexuality’. Though there is no bibliography, all sources are given after each chapter, for a total of 585 notes.

It is clear that Caesar has made every effort at being exhaustive, and rightly so given the broad nature of the central argument of *Taking it like a man*: the work of Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfrid Owen and Robert Graves “has been read and taught in particular ideological ways which elide a consideration of the psychological and cultural complexities involved in both the poetry and our responses to it. As well as communicating to the reader that war is wasteful, absurd, appalling, horrific, there is, I think, in this work a celebration of war a vehicle of pain and suffering” (2). Caesar is careful to point out that the expressions ‘sadism’, ‘masochism’, and ‘sado-masochism’ are used to “describe the gaining of pleasure or fulfillment through the suffering and infliction of pain, whether conscious motivation is present or not,” rather than “as a physical practice in which orgasmic sexual fulfillment is gained from the administration of suffering” (3)—as in the case of T.E. Lawrence, for example.

By delving into each poet’s childhood and adolescent experiences, Caesar demonstrates how the dominant religious, political and aesthetic ideologies “were instrumental in the formulation of sexual repression with its attendant confusions and feelings of guilt” that “helped to produce in them ambivalent attitudes to their own and others’ sufferings” (4). These influences include literature (Keats, Shelley, Dowson, Swinburne, Wilde, Edward Carpenter’s *The Intermediate Sex*); Christianity (whose icon is a crucified young man representing martyrdom); Imperialism (masculine stoicism and aggression of the Christian soldier); sexist Victorian Pauline theology; a Puritanical, Edwardian family life; and the English public school ethos: wherein young men were segregated from women yet were taught strictures against effeminacy and homosexuality, along with “the ideology of self-sacrifice, and the ‘beauty’ of pain and death” via the classics” (7), and where “the love between David and Jonathan” was greater than erotic, heterosexual love because it

was supposed to be chaste and cerebral (226). Even in Owen, who was spared the public school experience, one finds a “suspicion of heterosexual erotic love, and an elevation of a sado-masochistic homosexuality into an ideal ‘greater love’” (227).

Whatever their upbringing, these young men were to find in the army an outlet for their early experiences and attitudes. It represented for them a world where manhood and ‘brotherly love’ could be proven through courageous sacrifice. What is original in this study—and crucial to Caesar’s argument—is that “[t]he trenches provided a venue for the heightening of emotional conflict which had its origins prior to the outbreak of the war” (228). Thus it was that adolescent friendships and love affairs (homoerotic but sometimes Platonic), male (and often predominantly homosexual) literary circles, strong female influences in the home, religious indoctrination and other pre-war experiences contributed in large measure to the sensibilities and ambiguities that informed the way Brooke, Sassoon, Owen, and Graves wrote about love, sexuality, heroism, and martyrdom. The book’s clever title hints at all of these.

Each poet in his own way exorcised his psychosexual demons. Disgusted with his own bisexuality, Brooke in his poetry worshipped the sacrificed youth as ‘beautiful’ and ‘clean’. Sassoon, torn between being an athlete and an aesthete, celebrated sacrifice and found consolation in suffering. For Owen, whose mother was the agent of his sexual repression and guilt, war legitimated love between men, and in his poetry soldiers became Christ-figures suffering in loving self-sacrifice. Finally, one can trace in the poetry of Graves his progress from a homosexual identity (as one of Carpenter’s chaste ‘Urnings’) to a heterosexual identity asserting the dominant masculinity in poets, to a post-war male masochism under “a Goddess of cruelty and vengeance who, like the Christian God, punishes in order to save” (213). For all four men, one thing is clear: the war acted as the catalyst to ideas and feelings that had been germinating for some time, rather than as the ‘inspiration’ or ‘Muse’ of poetic cliché.

One shortcoming of this otherwise fascinating and meticulously-documented volume is its very breadth, which is sometimes undercut by a certain fragmentation: stanzas, lines, words, or only titles are cited to support this or that psychosexual tendency, leaving the reader frustrated for the whole. Moreover, this decontextualization may be partly responsible for conclusions that can seem tenuous or overstated, as if Caesar were too eager to make the poets adhere to his thesis. For instance: “One might even speculate that Brooke saw a homosexual identity as a necessary condition of becoming the artist that he wished to be” (23). Sassoon’s bayonet (“Sister steel”) plunging into an enemy with a “darting kiss” evokes this analysis: “That the phallic bayonet is metaphorically transformed into a woman who demonstrates a powerful, destructive sexuality, suggests both a self-hating fear of male sexuality and a fear and hatred of women” (78). When Owen ends a poem commemorating Keats’s death with raindrops “[q]uivering in anguish to the

sobbing breeze,” Caesar states that “in the ‘yearning’, ‘quivering’, ‘sobbing’ of this poem we may detect the sublimated sexuality which is a large part of his [Owen’s] response to the ‘dead youth’,” and he concludes: “There is positive relish of pain here” (123). Finally, Nancy Nicholson’s boyishness (short hair, trousers), her work in the Women’s Land Army, her “aggressively feminist” attitudes: all this “seems to have made it easier for Graves to math the adjustment to ‘woman love’” (200) and to turn away from his

homosexual feelings.

Nonetheless, though these and other statements might call for clarification or subtlety of expression, *Taking it like a man* remains a volume whose fluid writing, thorough research, and seductive thesis make it a valuable reference source not only for Great War scholars, but for anyone interested in cultural history, war literature, poetry, sexualities, and psychoanalysis.

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Intimate Enemies. English and German Literary Reactions to the Great War 1914-1918.

Edited by Franz K. Stanzel and Martin Loschnigg.
Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter. 1993. 574 pp.
DM 148.00

Among the wealth of critical literature dealing with the literary heritage of World War I not many items can be found that feature a truly comparative approach. Many books concerned with the responses to the war as evident in various national literatures tend to merely list of separate these without making explicit mutual influences or, equally important, significant idiosyncrasies. In the volume under review, Franz L. Stanzel and Martin Loschnigg have gathered together some thirty papers which were given at the Graz Symposium on "The First World War in English and German Literature: A Comparative View" in September 1991. These feature twenty-eight authors, more or less equally divided in Continental and Anglo-American origin, among whom many well-known proven experts in the field. The papers, in fact, not only cover British and German literary responses to the war, but also Scottish, Irish, American, Canadian, Italian and Austrian authors. What is more, while some twenty-odd papers focus on genuine 'war literature', others deal with hitherto neglected topics such as "Painters of the First World War" (Patrick Bridgwater on German artists, Maria Tippett on British and Canadian ones), "Sexual Mores and Sexual Consciousness in Britain and Germany" (Alan Bance), "Mutiny as a Theme in English and German Literature" (Douglas Fill and Ulrich Schneider), "War of the Professors" (Peter Firchow), "Russell, Wittgenstein and the Poethics of War" (Marjorie Perloff), and "English and Irish Plays about the First World War" (Heinz Kosok). As is apt with such a diversity of different aspects relating to the Great War covered, the volume is carefully organized into nine sections. The four papers written in German are preceded by a concise English abstract each; the volume is garnished with twelve carefully reproduced paintings or cuttings from the war period.

In the first section ("Introduction"), the editors each give a brief survey of the main drifts of war poetry, the war novel, and other artistic reactions to the War as they manifested in European and American writing between, roughly, 1911 and 1930. Martin Loschnigg connects the papers that follow and, thus, skillfully points ways to what might become new fields of comparative research. Section II ("Anthems for Doomed Youth") features nine papers concentrating, in the main, on the title-induced topics as covered in British, Canadian and German poetry and prose. There is no space here to discuss all of these in great detail, but we would like to highlight especially Hans-Ulrich Seeber's interesting comparison of Wilfred Owen, Lascelles Abercrombie and other (German) poets under the heading of "Modernization, Violence and Modern Poetry", and Tim Cross's neat philological evidence of "Skepticism towards the First World War before 1916" in the writings of Arthur Graeme West and German novelist and playwright Gusrtav Sack. The most fascinating reading in this

section, however, makes Hilda D. Spear's account of "Dundee and the Battle of Loos". Taking the City of Dundee as her example, she meticulously related the consequences of the war for a city where, almost literally,

everyone knew everyone else and the losses were mourned at home not merely by the family but by the whole community (162).

In the concluding essay to this section Thomas B. Vincent demonstrates the complex relationship between Canada's involvement in the war and its own "[s]earch for [n]ationhood" (165) through a close reading of some of the more prominent Canadian war poets.

The third section ("The Foe Imagined") comprises four papers all dealing with the stereotypes, clichés, and imagery British and German War Poets employed with regard to their respective enemy nation. While Dominic Hibberd (on Owen and others) and Herbert H. Foltinek (on Sorley) concentrate on major English poets, Jans-Joachim Lang points out various less known German epigones of Ernst Lissauer's "Haßgesang" ("Hymn of Hate"). Holger Klein's extensive critique of English, French, and German poets, finally, shows that, when concerned with rendering personal contacts with the enemy, their "similarities are very far-reaching" (192), both in style and in poetic empathy.

Section IV ("Old and New Paradigms of War") has only two papers. Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus supplies yet another link between 'avant-garde' and 'avant-guerre' by analyzing images of violence and the use of broken syntax in the works of Italian Futurist author I.I. Marinetti. Gunther A. Hofler compares German prose fiction from the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71 with, among others, Ernst Junger's *Im Stahlgewittern* (*The Storm of Steel*), and convincingly argues that the Great War if "profoundly unepic" (277): anonymous slaughter and technological warfare leave no place for celebrating individual heroism.

The title section V ("The War in Retrospect: Autobiography - Autobiographical Fiction - Fiction") illustrates that the three articles grouped together are concerned with borderline and cross-genre cases of prose writing during and after the war. Bruno Schultze's "Fiction and Truth: Politics and the War Novel" draws an interesting distinction between English and German war novels of the 20s and 30s propagating "the anti-war myth" (307) and "a pro-war myth" (309) respectively, while Ulrich Froich sees Graves's *Goodbye to All That* as a hallmark of "semi-fictional autobiography", as distinct from "semi-autobiographical fiction" (314). Broich builds on Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* when he argues that German novelist Ludwig "Renn translated history into fiction, whereas Graves, conversely, 'retranslated' his novel into history" (318-319). Hans-Harald Muller summarizes the publishing history of Junger's *The Storm of Steel* in Britain where, he argues, it was conceived of "from the outset as a literary test" (337). As such, the book attracted attention in the wake of Remarque's *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (*All Quiet on the Western Front*).

By contrast, the novel was (and sometimes still is) regarded as predominantly 'war-mongering' pulp in Junger's native Germany.

Section VI ("Staging the War") starts off with Heinz Kosok's stocktaking of English and British plays dealing with the Great War. Deserving merit in itself as the first full bibliography of the field, ranging from G.B. Shaw's *O'Flaherty V.C.: A Recruiting Pamphlet* (1915) to Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), the paper centers on the presentation of "personalized war experience" (345) in various plays and on the role of censorship in the early after-war period which, according to Kosok, helped ban "over-critical" (357) attitudes towards the war from the stage. Similarly, Douglas Gill and Ulrich Schneider show how pre-war mutinies in both the German and the British forces (Percy Toplis, the "monocled mutineer") figured prominently in plays by Ernst Toller and Theodor Plivier and *The Spanish Farm Trilogy* by novelist R.H. Mottram. Stanley Weintraub's "The Peace of 1914. Christmas Truce" features another first-rate example of 'staging' the war by giving a detailed chronological account of how this one chance for an early end of the war was rendered impossible by the authorities: "It was not that soldiers in the trenches wanted to fight on, but that their governments did" (399). Looking past, this seems by no means to be true only of 1914.

The seventh section ("A Gendered Perspective of War") comprises three articles on what was, in one of the editors' words, the war's function "as a catalyst in the emancipation of women" (35). Alan Bance compares Edlef Koopen's *Heeresbericht (Higher Command)*, Aldington's *Death of a Hero*, and others to highlight what for him resulted in a gradual liberation of attitudes from old stereotypes:

The Great War is the great surgical intervention against men, who, precisely as a result of setting out on the ultimate 'macho' adventure, became as passive in the hands of the medics as women traditionally are (418).

Bance argues that the collapse of pre-constructed roles

and identities in the 20s, to a large extent, was connected to the, traditionally speaking, 'unmanly' treatment men saw themselves exposed to during and after violent fighting. Hanna Behrend (on Vera Brittain and Kathe Kollwitz) and Walter Holbling (on Willa Cather, Edith Wharton, Ina Seidel and others) come to similar findings in their investigations of individual woman artists. It seems that it was especially the women who realized that the "loss of illusions" (433) caused by the war was the same in all nations involved.

The penultimate section ("The Professors' War") consists of Peter Firchow's painful report of how Germanists in Britain and Anglicists in Germany joined in the common hysteria about that had all of a sudden become the enemy nation. Without many exception, these alleged cultural mediators tolerated being abused as 'scientific' supporters of chauvinism and propaganda. It is sad to read how easily literary and cultural criticism can become merely a blanket term for nationalism running wild. Marjorie Perloff contrasts Bertrand Russell's and Ludwig Wittgenstein's very different responses to the War; yet her explanation via the philosophers' opposed ancestry, educational background, and cultural heritage remains sometimes unconvincing.

The last section ("Painters at War") again makes for a illuminating comparative reading in contrasting the work of painters of various countries. Though difficult without actual recourse to the paintings discussed, Patrick Bridgwater (on German painters) and Maria Tippett (on British and Canadian ones) make it clear that artists in all nations partly foresaw the war's atrocities, partly backed its justification, and partly had a major share in creating its myths of heroism and patriotism. Their 'merit' and their 'guilt' indeed look very similar from today's perspective.

In sum, this volume is a more than welcome addition to the stock of critical studies of First World War Art and Literature. It displays fresh readings of well-documented texts, but also deals with a handful of unjustly neglected topics. Broad in scope and meticulous in some of its textual analyses, it points out a wealth of features either peculiar to the cultural scenery of one war nation, or symptomatic of the situation of several. In this, it is comparative in the best sense of the word.

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A Deep Cry: A Literary Pilgrimage to the Battlefields and Cemeteries of First World War British Soldier-Poets Killed in Northern France and Flanders. Edited by Anne Powell. Aberporth: Palladour Books. 1993, xxi + 470 pp. 20.

The subtitle of Anne Powell's book says it all. This is an impressively researched and compiled anthology of British Soldier-Poets Killed in Northern France and Flanders. The first to die was Lt R.W. Sterling of the First Royal Scots Fusilliers on 23 April 1915, and the last Lt W.E.S. Owen, of the Second Manchester Regiment on 4 November 1918. In between there are the poems, supplemented by biographical information, of sixty-four other soldier-poets, all killed on the Western Front.

The criteria for determining 'entry' into the anthology, was that each soldier-poet had to have had a volume of war verse published or had to have appeared in an anthology. And of course, all had to have died on the Western Front. Each entry includes a minimum of biographical information (birth date, age at death, the place of burial, and unit served with), poems, and biographical contextualisation culled from letters, diaries, school records, Regimental Histories and Battalion Diaries. In addition, an impressive array of appendices, including a series of maps which link cemeteries in which poets are buried by region, add to the scholarship already in evidence throughout.

It is clear from even the most cursory glance at *A Deep Cry* that this is the product of a labour of love. Anne Powell spent over a decade researching the book. Initially there were eighty poets to be included in the anthology, but twenty were dropped 'because of scant information'. It is a pity that the twenty were not somehow included, even in an appendix, as the publication of this book might jog memories and bring dusty scrapbooks and packets of letters out of attics.

Nevertheless, the poems and biographies of the sixty-six poets included here comprise an eloquent testament to an age that is fast fading from memory and being transformed into history. This is a book to be dipped into at random, for although the entries are arranged in chronological order according to date of death, the entries are not interdependent, and whether one begins in 1918 with Owen's poems in their unrelenting need to record those who 'rushed in the body to enter hell' knowing that their lights 'had long died out'; or one ends in 1915, with Sterling's poems with their need not to express the horror too horrifically 'Ah! Hate like this would freeze our human tears' — the overwhelming feeling of tragedy is tantamount.

As Powell notes in her introduction, the entries are uneven depending on the amount of information she had

available to her. Some of the entries have poems augmented by long diary entries, as in the case of Second Lt. Bernard Pitt (died 30 April 1916, aged 35). Powell amplifies four poems by Pitt with eight pages of closely packed diary entries and letters which seem to bear no relation to the poems. Yet, upon further reflection, this approach highlights the poems and diaries as belonging to two distinct types of discourse: the public and the private.

The poems with their camaraderie and patriotism belong to the public that most Great War anthologies stress simply by the fact of their being republished:

Our days of dreaming passion, dear days past,
Our days of toil, our night of sweetest ease,
Our home, our little children, and the last
Love of our land, and peril of all these

Yet, this anthology forces us to recontextualise the public with the private diaries and letters simply by the fact that they physically surround the poems:

What is life like in the trenches, well, muddy, and cramped, and filthy. Everything gets covered with mud; you can't wash, for water has to be fetched for a mile. There is no room, and if you walk upright in many of the trenches, you run grave risks; and you sleep, huddled together, unable to stretch. Of course one gets greasy and smutty, and the place smells bad, as you can imagine.

An although this idea of a division between the public and private is old hat in Great War discourse, Powell's book powerfully demonstrates how endemic it was. Indeed, looked at in this way, the book is quite subversive, and highlights the code of silence that most of these soldier-poets lived, and indeed, died by.

Yet, this is a peculiar silence, as they all wrote poems. Most sent them home, others went a step further and sent them in for publication. Yet, for many, an enormous and probably unconscious self-censorship took place, certainly until late in the war. What Powell's book does in highlight the tension between silence and the need to record 'the truth'. The truth, I suspect, lies somewhere between the poems and the diaries; between the 'mud' and the 'Love of our land'.

Read in this way, *A Deep Cry* goes a long way in providing the tools for us (without spending countless hours in The Imperial War Museum or the Public Record Office at Kew) to unmask the art and the artist, and to reread the poems once again anew.

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