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D. H. Lawrence Society of Great Britain**

Nanette Norris, ed., *Great War Modernism: Artistic Response in the Context of War, 1914–1918*.

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Reviewed by Andrew Frayn

The First World War centenary has led to the publication of a significant body of new critical and historical work. Scholarship across a range of disciplines has worked hard to expand our knowledge about the conflict and its contexts, from the Shakespeare tercentenary of 1916 to the objects, letters and songs of Indian soldiers.¹ In *Great War Modernism*, Nanette Norris and her contributors stake a claim to the enduring value of canonical literature. The collection's three sections address non-combatant responses, high modernists, and soldiers' experiences and their representation. Norris contends, in her introduction, that in reassessing these years "we find ourselves once more studying 'the giants,' about whom there is so much more to say, as well as adding hitherto marginalized writers—and a few visual artists—to the canon" (2). In the face of the apparently relentless expansion of modernist studies, temporally and archivally, I have some sympathy with this position.

Norris asserts that there is a "Great War modernism" in response to the First World War. Claims are repeated such as that the "Great War altered the direction of turn-of-the-twentieth-century modernist expression, placing Great War modernism in a distinctive category vis-à-vis other modernisms" (4). However, it does not become clear how this is distinguished, firstly, from the basic principle that literature is historically contingent, or from other definitions of modernism. Fragmentation and trauma are identified as key tropes in the introduction, but these are regularly reiterated as aspects of modernist style. To use the titular term, Norris suggests, allows us to broaden the canon beyond the "men of 1914", yet this sits awkwardly with the reassertion of high

modernist tradition and, indeed, is work that is already being done by many modernist scholars.

The defence of canonical literature and this conservative position in the introduction is at times articulated troublingly. Norris posits that “it should not surprise us that the British-American-European trio is uppermost: although over one hundred countries participated in this war, they did not have equal levels of involvement, and many were drawn into the conflict through their colonial ties” (7). This presupposes a possibility for equal involvement which was consistently and systematically denied on a racial basis within imperial armies. Furthermore, the book’s title misleads: the texts considered in the volume range from the pre-war to the contemporary. One of the enduring issues that remain to be addressed in studies of war literature is the difference between wartime and post-war texts, whose narrative forms are substantially different.

Of primary interest to Lawrentians in this volume is Joyce Wexler’s chapter ‘Violence and Laughter in *Women in Love*’ (also reprised in Wexler’s book *Violence without God*, reviewed in this number of *JDHLS*). These two topics are linked via Freud’s claim that aggression underlies both. The essay begins by reiterating the familiar claim that this is a war novel not about the war, before moving into a perceptive discussion of the difficulty of situating Lawrence’s texts in a precise historical moment when revisions and re-workings mean that they are stretched across different presents. Interestingly, Wexler sees Lawrence’s prose style in artistic terms, arguing that his “use of symbolic cues such as rhythm, repetition, and extremity creates a verbal version of the visual abstraction in expressionist painting” (123). Kandinsky’s belief that art should aspire to the condition of music as an ideal visceral music, Wexler posits, “provides an aesthetic principle as useful to writers as to visual artists” (121). Connections between art and literature are also sought in chapters by Michael J. K. Walsh, who offers a transhistorical comparison of John Ruskin and F. T. Marinetti, and Graeme Stout, who situates Paul Nash’s magnificent First World

War paintings in the context of contemporary anti-war texts by writers such as Henri Barbusse and Erich Maria Remarque.

The collection's focus on high modernism means that there are several other chapters on writers with connections to Lawrence. With his chapter on Ford Madox Ford's Georgic responses to the First World War, Jeffrey Mathes McCarthy adds to his strong existing body of work on that author. "Modernist novelists hover along the edge of pastoral", McCarthy argues, "but for every intimation of idyllic escape, they offer an offsetting image of its impossibility" (53). Astutely tracing the tensions between country and city, he suggests "that we understand *No Enemy* and *Parade's End* in terms of an ironic pastoral that explores the distances between pastoral clichés and the hard-edged actuality of an industrial capitalist world trampling nature with steel and steam" (53). This is a good assessment of Christopher Tietjens's central dilemma in *Parade's End* and, pleasingly, McCarthy makes a persuasive claim to recuperate to a more important place in its criticism the final volume of the tetralogy, *Last Post*. Norris also contributes a chapter contextualising H. D.'s war writing in terms of the Doolittle family's Moravian heritage. James Brown does valuable, detailed work in tracing a line from Romanticism to modernism in Isaac Rosenberg's poetry; F. R. Leavis notably drew parallels between Rosenberg and Lawrence.²

Chapters on familiar British and American high modernist authors offer some critical ways forward. Camelia Raghinaru returns us to Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, offering a rigorously theorised reading of its "messianic voids". While some of the ethical problems of seeing the First World War as a transformative force might be explored further (93), the method is salutary for the canon of war literature. To situate the war in the context of its overarching structures is to see it not as an aberration, but as a product of the contemporary world, and Raghinaru's work intersects with recent analyses of the nature of wartime by critics such as Mary L. Dudziak and Paul K. Saint-Amour.³ Matthew David Perry's chapter on John dos Passos's *Three Soldiers* rethinks

the notion of retreat in the mass army, observing that it: “in essence, changed from a term that marked a valid collective act done on a battlefield to a signal releasing soldiers from daily duty[;] ... the bugle calls release soldiers to disorganized, individual action” (186). Gregory M. Dandele’s chapter on modernism and survival in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* offers an interesting counterpoint to Perry’s essay.

Other essays in the collection feature less frequently analysed authors. David A. Davis addresses the conservative modernism of US southern agrarian poets and critics in response to the First World War. Taryn L. Okuma sees Henry Green’s 1940 memoir *Pack My Bag* as a piece of writing addressing both wars, while Travis L. Martin’s chapter on another text written on the cusp of the Second World War, David Jones’s *In Parenthesis*, offers a comparative connection with Brian Turner’s poetry of the Iraq War. Erica Kuhlmann’s well-written chapter on the anonymous but putatively autobiographical *A German Deserter’s War Experience* – the one essay in the collection with a primary focus outside the Anglo-American sphere – seeks connections outside of the text, situating it in the context of unknown soldier rituals and the experience of time in war.

That the framework for the volume does not entirely persuade may be due to my own very different views on the development of First World War literature within modernist studies, which I set out in the introduction to my recent special issue of *Modernist Cultures*.⁴ However, there are useful essays in this collection, some of which offer new ways to revisit familiar texts, and it is certainly worth continuing to think about the connections between modernism and the First World War: too often studies of the former have little to say about the latter.

¹ Matthew C. Hendley, ‘Cultural mobilization and British responses to cultural transfer in total war: the Shakespeare tercentenary of 1916’, *First World War Studies*, 3.1 (2012), 25–49; Santanu Das, ‘Reframing life/war “writing”: objects, letters and songs of Indian soldiers, 1914–1918’, *Textual Practice*, 29.7 (2015), 1265–87.

² F. R. Leavis, 'The Recognition of Isaac Rosenberg', *Scrutiny*, vol. 6.2 (1937), 229–234, 231.

³ Mary L. Dudziak, *War-Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012); Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015).

⁴ Andrew Frayn, 'Introduction: Modernism and the First World War', *Modernist Cultures*, vol. 12.1 (2017), 1–15.