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Marjorie Gehrhardt. *The Men with Broken Faces: Gueules Cassées of the First World War.* Cultural History and Literary Imagination Series. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015. Illustrations. 304 pp. $64.95, paper, ISBN 978-3-0343-1869-3.

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Describing a visit to the operating room of British surgeon Dr. Harold Gillies in 1918, an English journalist recorded, “I can see that the patient is a man and I can see that once upon a time this man had a face; but I am thinking ... not even of the damnable wickedness of war; only how long I shall be able to stand looking at this dreadful creature who is still a man.”[1] In ***The Men with Broken Faces***, Marjorie Gehrhardt, lecturer in French studies at the University of Reading, examines how surgeons, patients, and civilians from England, France, and Germany interpreted facial disfigurement during and after the First World War. Such a conspicuous injury to the face has been a particularly shocking and difficult subject area because so much of human identity and social behavior depends on familiar facial features and expressions. For some sufferers and onlookers, the loss of a recognizable face implied a perceived loss of humanity.

During the First World War, technological advances which produced the destructive weapons that caused such terrible injuries, and the medical advances that allowed doctors to treat even severe physical damage, meant tens of thousands of soldiers suffered disfiguring yet survivable facial wounds. Gehrhardt effectively demonstrates that a cultural history of these “men with broken faces”—from the French term ***Gueules cassées***—provides fascinating insights into wider English, French, and German perceptions of warfare, disability, and normality. The book is divided into two parts. The first details the medical and social responses to facial injuries by following affected soldiers from the battlefield to treatment in special hospitals to their reintroduction and readjustment in civilian life. The second part analyzes the artistic and literary representations of facial disfigurement during the postwar period.

Relying on the published and archival writings of hospital staff and individual patients, Gehrhardt traces the experience of facially injured soldiers and those who treated them through the emerging field of plastic surgery and prosthetic fabrication. This approach is particularly effective at examining how the social relationships that developed

between surgeons, nurses, and soldiers in special maxillofacial hospitals became a crucial component in patients' physical and psychological recovery. As discharged patients moved away from the transitional space of the hospital to reintegration with civilian society, facially injured men confronted a range of public responses from horror and fear to sympathy and admiration. At the same time that injured men experienced difficulties readjusting to family and social life, press coverage often aimed to present them as either victims or heroes. The possible political and propagandistic implications of some newspapers to normalize injured veterans might have been explored in the work even further, particularly as journalists emphasized patients' cheerfulness and sacrifice in spite of their wounds.

As Gehrhardt points out, popular press depictions of the disfigured soldier whether as victim, hero, or ordinary veteran still reflected the perspective of onlookers. By devoting a chapter to the formation of the Union des Blesses de la Face (UBF), the book is able to also assess how a group of facially wounded French veterans attempted to take control over their own public profile. Organized by Colonel Yves Picot among others in 1921, the UBF was created as a support and advocacy association for and by facially injured former soldiers. Upholding traditional, patriotic values and emphasizing the collective contribution of disfigured veterans, the UBF aimed to project a positive image of Gueules cassées as respected citizens. Further comparison with England and Germany would have clarified why Gueules cassées became such a central symbol of the French war experience. Gehrhardt notes how the different political cultures of the three countries affected the treatment of veterans in terms of pensions and support, but greater elaboration on this point would have helped to explain the uniqueness of the UBF and why similar organizations were not as prominent in Germany or England.

After a thorough examination of the medical, social, and political dimensions of the topic in part 1, the book moves to an analysis of artistic and literary depictions of disfigured soldiers. As the experience of patients often defied description of the written word, the inclusion of several photographs and colored artistic reproductions make a compelling visual addition to the work. Whereas medical photography attempted to document the reconstruction process, artistic works aimed to capture the emotional and social impact of such injuries. Gehrhardt effectively connects the depiction of injured veterans with postwar political interpretations of the conflict in each country. In Germany, for instance, disillusioned artists portrayed disfigured soldiers as a metaphor for a broken society; at the same time pacifist activists like Ernest Friedrich used photographs of the injured to expose the true face of war.

The final section on postwar literature fits nicely with the theme of the book's series on cultural history and literary imagination. Gehrhardt makes a convincing argument for including an analysis of novels written a decade after the armistice by demonstrating how fictionalized works revealed many of the themes discussed in earlier chapters from veteran reintegration to the agenda of the UBF. Weaving together the study of literature and art with solid historical analysis, Gehrhardt makes an important contribution to scholarship on the First World War era culture by revealing the complex and nuanced responses to facial wounds and disfigurement.

Note

[1]. Harold Begbie, "A Miracle of the New Surgery," ***Current History*** (October 1918): 125.

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