

Jay Winter. *War beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xxii + 234 pp. \$29.99, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-87323-9.

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Jay Winter is widely regarded as one of the foremost cultural historians of the First World War and as a major contributor to the study of the history of memory. His latest work, *War Beyond Words*, demonstrates his wide-ranging interests and the ambition of his intellectual project, ranging as it does over representations of war including poetry and film, the architectural conventions of war memorials, and even the function of silence in the memory of conflict. The study is framed as an investigation of the different “languages” through which we imagine warfare and is divided into two sections: “Vectors of Memory” and “Frameworks of Memory.” The “Vectors of Memory” section might equally be titled “Media of Memory,” since here Winter explores visual art, photography, fiction film, and poetry as means of expressing the experience of conflict, attempting to identify broad historical trends over the century of the book’s chronological scope. The “Frameworks of Memory” section analyzes various rhetorical and metaphorical strategies for coming to terms with war and its aftermath, which potentially cut across different media. In addressing these themes, Winter revisits a number of issues already explored in his *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the 20th Century* (2006), but seeks to expand the scope of his analysis beyond a consideration of

memory of the First World War, taking in the whole of the twentieth century.

The breadth of Winter’s scholarship is as impressive as ever in this new book and his insights will doubtless provide a valuable stimulus to scholars working across a range of disciplines, in particular in history and memory studies. Nevertheless, some of the chapters are more convincing than others. The “Frameworks of Memory” section is by far the more satisfying, in that Winter is able to identify important trends in the representation of war that are particularly relevant to current memory conflicts. He notes, for example, how the framing of death in wars and massacres as martyrdom, once such a universal in nationalistic memory cultures, has been replaced in the post-Holocaust period by a new emphasis on the victim of human rights abuses and crimes against humanity. Martyrdom, he observes, is a zero-sum game, in which different groups feel compelled to hold their own suffering up as the one and only true victimhood, thereby providing the fuel for further conflict. Winter shows how, in the wake of the Cold War, western Europe is now faced with partners and neighbors to the east whose memory culture persists in its celebration of its own victim-martyrs, potentially undermining the cosmopolitan, peace-oriented ideology of the European integration project.

This move from a focus on parochial martyrs to universal victims in the Western world more widely is paralleled by shifts in the iconography of war memorials, Winter notes, in which a new language of memorialization has inclined ever more toward the horizontal axis, presenting flattened-out spaces for mourning and contemplation of the horror of war, as opposed to the more traditional, heroic, and vertical presentation of victorious struggle.

In a sensitive and often moving account of the role of silence in the lives of traumatized combatants, Winter pays particular attention to the poet Ted Hughes's thematization of his father's refusal to talk about his combat experience in the First World War. More broadly, Winter makes the point that the gradual acceptance of the meaningfulness of such silence has marked a shift to a more humane recognition of the inherently wounding effects of the battlefield, even for those left physically intact.

The overarching narrative offered in these chapters is therefore essentially progressive, with the author expressing concerns that western Europe's path to forms of remembrance that are more conducive to peace and respect for human rights may be challenged by older languages of memory still prevalent elsewhere. The analyses in the first half of the book, the "Vectors of Memory," are not always as stimulating as these later chapters, however. While the chapter on war poetry, which analyzes the decline of the metaphor of "glory" in British First World War poetry in particular, is persuasive and can be broadly accommodated in the progressive narrative identified above, the chapters on war art and war film often seem to be attempting to impose a periodization on the material in an arbitrary fashion.

This weakness is particularly noticeable in the chapter "Filming War." Here Winter claims that war films operate in two registers, with some emphasizing a direct and "spectacular" account of conflict and others working by "indirection," deal-

ing with the battlefield experience in metaphorical terms (p. 73). Winter's argument is that the balance between these tendencies has shifted between different "generations" of war films, yet the periodization he argues for becomes rather overwhelmed by the wealth of examples offered, many of which are dealt with by means of brief plot summaries. In addressing the representation of war in film, it seems curious to pay so little attention to the aesthetic qualities of individual films, and Winter's analysis too often focuses on what individual films show and too little on how they show it. The theoretical claim that this chapter wishes to stake simply seems too big to be dealt with in such a relatively short analysis, and the author does not have enough time here to really engage with the kind of detailed filmic analysis that would make his case convincing. Ultimately, Winter finds he can only offer the "modest conclusion" that "war defies simple representation, but men at war can be presented, with clichés or human qualities attached, depending on the actor, the director, and the audience the producers want to reach" (pp. 89-90). This rather platitudinous statement amounts, it seems to me, to an admission that the chapter cannot quite live up to the theoretical ambition with which it began.

Winter runs into similar problems in the chapter "Configuring War: The Changing Face of Armed Conflict," which seeks to document a "turning away from a naturalistic or expressionistic representation of the human face and figure in a number of important meditations on war and terror" (p. 31). Winter's approach is highly selective in terms of the artists he analyzes, which is a methodological weakness if he is seeking here to make a universal claim. At times, the author wants to have it both ways, insisting that there has been a general shift in such artistic conventions, while later acknowledging "that this turn is not uniform or universal" (p. 30). This is a shame, as the observations on the individual artists concerned are highly enlightening and persuasive. However, the underlying desire to identify alleged

historical trends, only to then equivocate over such claims, proves distracting.

Winter's chapter on the war photography produced by combatants themselves escapes this trap by being clear from the beginning that it is dealing with a heterogeneous and "unstable field" (p. 59), in which competing and even contradictory orders of signification may be present in the same historical moment. The analyses of the images selected are intelligent and compelling, all the more so for their not being yoked to an overarching historical periodization. Winter is up front with the reader here about the state of our understanding of the "vast archive" of soldiers' photography (p. 68), but his analyses of the relationship of the photographer and the viewer to the suffering these images often portray will provide a useful point of reference for others working in the field.

In summary, this lavishly presented volume (with fifty-eight pages of glossy color photographs) will prove a valuable resource for any scholars interested in the cultural history of war and the collective memory of conflict. It addresses a vast range of material and, above all in the second half of the book, it is able to identify trends in the representation of war that will provide important points of reference for future research, as well as helping a more general readership to understand the relationship between our means of representing past violence and our culturally determined understanding of its significance for our lives today. The first half of the book contains material that fails to convince entirely, as outlined above, but even here Winter frames his arguments in ways that will stimulate further debate. This is an important contribution by a major scholar in his field that will command significant attention, if not always wholehearted assent.

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