American Poetry and the First World War, by Tim Dayton, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, xi + 278 pp., (hardback), £83.99, ISBN-9781108418782

Battle Lines: Canadian Poetry in English and the First World War by Joel Baetz, Waterloo, ON, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018, x + 192pp., (hardcover), $85.00, ISBN-9781771123198; (paperback), $34.99, ISBN-9781771123297

International Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology of Lost Voices edited by Constance Ruzich, London & New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, xiv + 416 pp., (hardback), £160.00, ISBN-9781350106444; (paperback), £28.99, ISBN-9781350226067

Reclamation is at the heart of these three books published in the wake of the Centenary. All three seek to recover and reorient the poetic 'voices' of the First World War that have been overshadowed by the emphasis on a select group of mainly British, mainly male, and mainly combatant-writers—whose visions have—until recently—dominated not only study of the literature of 1914-18, but shaped cultural memory the war. Owen, Sassoon, Rosenberg, Blunden, Gurney, Thomas, and Jones have – with good reason – been studied and quoted; the best of their work combining mastery not just of message but of poetic technique and, in the case of Owen and Jones in particular, experiments in form. But such privileging – or as James Campbell famously dubbed it 'combat gnosticism' – has also led to the exclusion of other poets and poems whose messages diverge from the 'pity of war' trope and whose style was more traditional than 'modern'. This also has implications for national imaginaries. As Joel Baetz notes in *Battle Lines*: 'Nowadays, ask someone about Canadian poems from the First World War (or tell them you are writing a book about them), and most people will mention McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" and then quickly run out of names and titles' (p. 8). Similarly, the belated entry of the United States into the war in April 1917, the lesser stature (and indeed far fewer casualties) of the First World War in comparison with the Second World War or the Vietnam War, and the prioritizing of fiction by the 'Lost Generation', has meant that meant that poetry is accorded a relatively minor place in American literary and cultural memory, if it has a place at all. On a larger scale, the emphasis on the British, mainly Western Front/trench experience, has obscured what was a global output of poetry.

Dayton, Baetz, and Ruzich seek to broaden our understanding of the poetic output of the Great War, not simply to correct or expand the literary record, but to highlight the wider social and political ramifications that have resonance today. Each in their own way examines the poetry of the war in its historical context, unencumbered by what might be termed the high-literary value systems imposed by the modernist aesthetics that came to define what could or should be included the 'canon'. Sentimentality, support for the war effort, patriotism were just some of the stances rejected as the ironic view of the war (*pace* Fussell) seemingly took hold. All three authors explore the variety and complexity of what was vast outpouring of verse that was 'inspiring and loathsome and weird and noble and terrifying' (Baetz, p.11).

The popularity of poetry in the early years of the twentieth century underpins each book's central focus. Whether printed in newspapers and magazines, or published in individual volumes and anthologies, poetry was ubiquitous and had a social currency that it lacks today. Dayton identifies a 'staggering' quantity of American poetry—'around 400 volumes in whole or in significant part devoted to the war, not to mention countless individual poems' (p. 43) and Ruzich reminds us of the deluge of poems that appeared in European newspapers, particularly in the early months of the war.

For Dayton and Baetz, such a quantity of verse offers particular insights into the shaping of national consciousness, ideology, and purpose.

Employing a theoretical framework of historical materialism, Dayton sees American literature of the First World War, and poetry in particular, in 'the larger context of political and economic conflict and development' (p. 38) and America's rise to global hegemony (Chapter 1). He analyses American intervention the First World War (Chapter 2), through poems marked by a 'pervasive anachronism'. Such anachronism, particularly medievalism, is especially evident in the poetry of Alan Seeger (Chapter 3), perhaps the most well-known of American First World War poets. Like McCrae's 'In Flanders Fields' and Rupert Brooke's 'The Soldier', Seeger's 'I Have a Rendezvous with Death' has an iconic status that obscures the complexities of his poetic output. For Seeger, the martial ideal and military experience offered 'an escape from and an alternative to the alienating individualism of modernity'—and yet, as Drayton reminds us, 'the kind of military experience Seeger underwent was decidedly modern' (p. 113). Far from inspiring the ironic mode, however, Seeger continued to believe that 'war revivifies those who fight' (p. 117). Drayton offers a fascinating contrast between this vision of war's revivifying power as understood by Seeger to that espoused by Edith Wharton (Chapter 4). As shown through close readings of *A Son at the Front* and *Fighting in France*, Wharton believed that the cleansing ritual was not confined to the self as a 'private drama', but one which is deeply embedded In the 'value systems and social institutions outside the self' (p. 175). The epic form (Chapter 5) – as exemplified in seven long poems – offered 'a means of synthesizing a world that many felt was dissolving into fragments' (p. 181). These previously ignored texts, such as *The Gates of Janus* by William Carter, *St. Michael and the Dragon* by Lincoln Harvey, and *Epic of Verdun* by Georges Lewys, are given sustained critical treatment, before Dayton turns his attention to E.E. Cummings (Chapter 6). The poems 'next to of course god america i' and 'my sweet old etcetera' are, argues Dayton, indicative of how Cummings 'set out to destroy, through satirical means, part of the ideological armature of the American war effort' (p. 239).

For Dayton, 'actively seeking out the now devalued texts of the era' is crucial: 'The entire range of texts must be engaged, since this is the ground upon which literary and cultural history, as a subset of history in general, is found.' Arguing about 'merit' is not the point: 'The point is that history is registered in these texts in a way that needs to be explored' (p. 246).

Baetz's book is underpinned by similar concerns as they relate to Canadian history and cultural memory. The story of the Canadian National Exhibition of 1919, illustrated with colour plates of paintings and posters, provides the striking opening of *Battle Lines,* a study whose abiding image is that of 'the textual solider who walks the lines of [the] poetry' (p. 16). Examined over five chapters, the idealised image of jolly 'Johnny Canuck' gives way to 'alternative images' created by those Baetz labels 'the unacknowledged poets of the harsher manners' (p. 21): Helena Coleman, John McCrae, Robert Service, Frank Prewett, and W.W.E Ross. Their soldiers are 'more troubled, more isolated, more disjointed. [….] To varying degrees, they are fractured, fractious, and fading' (p. 22). Central to this study is Baetz's 'desire to expand and challenge the Canadian Great War myth of national emergence' and to offer 'a counterbalance, one that recognizes war's struggles, pains, and discontinuities even as it testifies to the cultural persistence of the idea of military sacrifice and national glory' (p. 22). The conclusion, 'What Can Memberless Ghost Tell?', examines the longevity of this myth, particularly in cultural institutions – 'the press, publishers, theatres, and governmental granting agencies' – that all 'tend to traffic in the myth, repeating (with some minor challenge) how Canada bloomed in the mud of France and how wartime sacrifice led to a peace-loving nation.' Such a 'durable collective memory' (p. 140) has ramifications for the country's response to 'current militarized conflicts' (p. 142).

Thus, far from being studies of rarefied literary criticism, both Dayton's and Baetz's works attest to the lasting resonance of poetic forms and the cultural imaginaries they helped to create and sustain.

Their studies complement Ruzich's anthology; their theoretical lenses offer a way to read the texts, or the 'lost voices', contained her *International Poetry of the First World War.* The full title recalls that of Tim Cross's ground-breaking, but now out-of-print *Lost Voices of World War I* (1988) and Ruzich follows on from and expands it. An extension of her blog/website Behind Their Lines (which continues to be updated), Ruzich's anthology features a substantive Introduction that reviews past and current scholarship, and includes, like Drayton and Baetz, a discussion of the role and popularity of poetry and verse in the years before and during the war. 'After the war,' Ruzich reminds us, 'modern understandings of the conflict adopted an increasingly ironic stance, so that writings that were more earnest or emotional came to be labeled as naïve and sentimental' (p. 7), and hence to dismissed and even denigrated.

Poems in Ruzich's anthology span the globe, although she admits that there nevertheless 'remains a disproportionate focus on the Western Front and the experiences of writers from English-speaking countries. This is mostly owing to the difficulty of finding translated works from such places as Turkey, Armenia, China, Japan, and Africa.' This is indicative of the need for on-going scholarship. Some names will be familiar to readers of First World War poetry: among them Mary Borden, Vera Brittain, May Wedderburn Cannan, Rose Macaulay, Francis Ledwidge, William Noel Hodgson, Wilfrid Wilson Gibson. Anna Akhmatova, Emile Cammaerts, Georg Trakl share space with Guiseppe Ungaretti, Apollinaire, and Hedd Wynn. Yet is likely that few will recognise Maxwell Bodenheim, Ada M. Harrison, or William Kersley Holmes. Such an 'interleaving' of these of the well-known and the lesser-known, Ruzich asserts, 'allows readers to more readily see and compare the ways in which the war was experienced by various individuals across cultural and national boundaries' (p. 10). Arranged thematically under the headings 'Soldiers' Lives', 'Minds at War', 'Noncombatants', 'Making Sense of War', 'Remembering the Dead' and 'Aftermath', the roughly 150 poems by men and women in this collection demonstrate that 'there was no single representative experience of the Great War, nor was there a typical response to the conflict' (p. 16). Drawing on 'reviews and early critical receptions, authors' biographies', and historical records Ruzich provides a contextual explanation for each poem that both orients the reader and offers leads for further research.

These three texts, in their different approaches and through their individual critical lenses, not only bring to our attention the forgotten voices and hidden complexities of First World War poetry, but represent the rich variety scholarship that sets the tone for scholarship beyond the Centenary.

Jane Potter

Oxford Brookes University

j.potter@brookes.ac.uk