

## Book Reviews

Franz Stanzel and Martin Löschnigg, eds. *Intimate Enemies: English and German Literary Reactions to the Great War 1914-1918*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1993. pp. 571. 198 Swiss francs.

Although the literature of the First World War invites a comparative approach, no studies to date have attempted a comprehensive treatment of English, German, and French war accounts. Following in the tradition of Holger Klein's *The First World War in Fiction* (1976), *Intimate Enemies: English and German Literary Reactions to the Great War 1914-1918* provides a collection of critical essays whose comparative and interdisciplinary aim is to map out some similarities and differences in English and German documents about the First World War. The strength of this collection is its balance between treatments of poetry and fiction, while its weakness is the meagre representation, through 28 essays, of drama (three essays), painting (two essays), and gender issues (three essays). The essays are arranged according to thematic and generic categories ("Anthems for Doomed Youth," "The Foe Imagined," "The War in Retrospect: Autobiography—Autobiographical Fiction—Fiction," "Staging the War," "A Gendered Perspective of 1914-18," "The Professor's War," and "Painters at War"). Given the diversity and often-idiosyncratic choice of subject matter, the essays are organized as logically as one has a right to expect.

Anyone interested in war literature will appreciate the two thoughtful introductions by the editors and will find something of interest in this variety of essays. Most essays situate themselves within conventional literary concerns (authenticity, attitudes to war, reactions to the enemy, sacrifice, nationalism, myths about atrocities, and use of the bayonet) and in connection to historical events (mutinies, the Christmas Truce of 1914, the Battle of Loos). Much attention is also focused on re-assessing in a comparative context individual authors such as Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, David Jones, Wilfred Owen, Charles H. Sorley, Ernst Jünger, Ludwig Renn, and Otto Nebel. The essays are generally scholarly and informative, intent on either correcting or reinforcing established interpretations. Although *Intimate Enemies: Eng-*

*lish and German Literary Reactions to the Great War 1914-1918* covers much familiar ground, the comparative approach succeeds in introducing previously unknown authors and placing familiar names in unaccustomed contexts.

However, a greater variety of critical approaches would have been welcome. The predominantly thematic approach often leads to all-too-familiar topics and predictable conclusions. In addition, the tendency to illustrate a point with reference to texts (especially poems) deemed to be of inferior aesthetic interest can become irritating. The section on "The Foe Imagined," although in many ways successful in juxtaposing British and German stereotypical attitudes towards each other, is especially vulnerable to this criticism.

More compelling to me are the essays that seek to uncover less obvious patterns of attitudes to the war. Complementing Paul Fussell's focus on the "literariness" of English war literature, Patrick Bridgwater, for instance, traces the German literary tradition (Heine, Hölderlin) that informed German war poets. I found essays focusing on the complex relationship between aesthetic and ideological tendencies particularly interesting. Klaus Vondung shows how pre-war calls for the destruction and rejuvenation of the sterile culture produced by a highly industrialized society were reinforced by apocalyptic interpretations of the war. Tracing images of transformation, renewal, rebirth, and purification in war literature, Vondung demonstrates Germany's self-identification with the forces of world history that have assigned it the tragic task of sacrificing itself to save the world from the forces of evil associated with culturally exhausted Western civilizations. Along similar lines, Hans Ulrich Seeber discusses the "role played by the concept of violence in the rise of modern aesthetics" (121), demonstrating that "brutal" language dominates not only the poetry of combatants but also that of avant-garde poets such as Futurists and Vorticists. In his study of Marinetti's exaltation of the war and concomitant destruction of syntax, Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus enjoins us to read the author's pro-war stance literally rather than apologetically as mere allegory. These essays suggest that aesthetic practices were more complicit with the ideology of war than resistant to it.

Questions of authorial attitudes for and against the war characterize many essays in the collection. This issue has always been central to interpretations of war literature and continues to fascinate. I found Bruno Schultze's historically contextualized reading of well-known anti-war novels in both Britain and Germany particularly helpful. Not satisfied with the usual psychological explanation for the fact that anti-war novels in Britain were not published until approximately ten years after the armistice, Schultze connects the publication and favourable reception of these novels to the political climate of the times. He then contends that different circumstances obtained in Germany. Paying at-

tention to the politics of publication, Hans-Harald Müller similarly seeks to explain why Jünger's *The Storm of Steel* was popular in England at a time when it was barely known in Germany. He highlights national differences in attitude towards war narratives as literary texts, as officers' memoirs, and as ideological statements. By focusing more on differences than similarities, these essays effectively exploit the comparative perspective.

Since much attention recently has been devoted to women and war, it is disappointing to find only two essays that directly address this issue. The biographical approach of Hanna Behrend's comparison of Vera Brittain and Käthe Kollwitz seems intended primarily to apologize for the two women's complicity with war, while Walter Hölbling's survey of war novels by women concludes that there is no "gendered eye" at work to provide an alternative to conventional depictions of war. By far the most intriguing essay is Alan Bance's analytical exploration of gendered perspectives on war. Although he makes some pertinent observations about the relationship between the war and feminism, he seems at his best when discussing what he calls the "crisis of male identity" (417) created by a war that subjected men to a "feminizing" process (418). One can only wish that the collection contained more analytically sophisticated essays on gender issues.

The section "Professors' War" happily strays from the stock of familiar, conventional themes. Firchow's comparison of the reaction of professors of German to Shakespeare and of professors of English to Goethe illuminates how stereotypical thinking beset even intellectuals who ought to have known better. Firchow's cautionary narrative indicates that English Goethe specialists tended to malign "virtually all great German writers," thereby committing "acts of greater intellectual iniquity" than German Shakespeareans who chose to appropriate "Shakespeare's prestige and virtues for themselves" (485). Discussing Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein, Marjorie Perloff similarly complicates any simple valorization of the British anti-war philosopher over the Austrian volunteer. Aside from teasing out cultural conditions to explain each philosopher's attitude, Perloff emphasizes the paradox that "whereas Russell felt a need to renounce philosophy because of the war," Wittgenstein's "actual war experience became one of the mainsprings of his philosophy" (495). Although not dealing with front-line experience, these essays shed important light on the role of intellectuals torn between their allegiances to their countries and to their profession.

On the whole, the essays in *Intimate Enemies: English and German Literary Reactions to the Great War 1914-1918* constitute a solid scholarly achievement. However, for a book published in 1993, I deplore the absence of theoretically informed interpretations. In many ways, the collection retraces ground that already has been explored instead of

making an effort to strike out in new directions. The time surely has come to break the hold of thematic and cultural-historical approaches on critical explorations of responses to the First World War.

EVELYN COBLEY

Robert Kiely. *Reverse Tradition: Postmodern Fictions and the Nineteenth Century Novel*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993. pp. x, 320. \$34.95.

Yogi Berra's advice, "when you come to a fork in the road take it," applies readily to the literary historian as postmodernist for whom intertextuality is multidirectional and simultaneous and for whom all reading is re-reading. (Berra's "it's *déjà vu* all over again" works pretty well, too.) In Robert Kiely's re-readings, however, what may look like a theoretical move that occludes history turns out to be a strategy for its uncovering. And what seems like a common-sense notion—that literary history is always linear—is revealed as largely a fiction, and one, moreover, that itself defies common sense. We can't help but read backwards; we are always here first: "However hard we may try to apply historical hindsight, we cannot truly read the texts of the past unless we make them our own" (18). It is on this Bloomian/Borgesian foundation ("every writer creates his own precursors"—which B said that?) that Kiely elaborates his intricate, often-brilliant edifice out of what Hans Jauss calls "consciously anachronistic readings" (5).

The readings are a pleasure, each enormously rich in its own unfolding, at the same time gaining density and suggestiveness from the juxtapositions and "times trans-shiftings" in which it is embedded. The argument that generates the pairings and contrasts is very carefully laid out. It is flexible and accommodating, heuristic rather than probative. Indeed, one can still hold on to a more positivist model of chronology and influence (they are not discarded here, rather set aside and deprived of neutrality and transparency) and yet learn a great deal from the readings themselves, for Kiely is an exceptionally deft reader, attuned to text and subtext, to formal details and a text's historical situatedness and allusiveness. What I miss in the theoretical model, however, is sufficient pull from a counter-position, where estrangement and defamiliarization are the operative concepts, which might make problematic so ready an assimilation of the past.

Kiely employs a strategy of reading aimed at discovering the "ideological 'latencies'" in earlier texts in so far as these can be activated by later ones (5). Postmodern fiction becomes a lens through which one can see more clearly the features of certain nineteenth-century texts, especially those that most resisted interpretation within the expectations and assumptions of their own period. The model of intertextuality he proposes privileges reader over writer. It depends on a temporal reversal: the present is prologue to the past. Thus influence has less to do with the writer's relation to her/his materials than with