Ann-Marie Einhaus and Katherine Isobel Baxter, editors
THE EDINBURGH COMPANION TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND THE ARTS
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In an article for the *Daily Mail* in 2014 – with the headline "Why does the Left insist on belittling true British heroes" – Michael Gove wrote of his government's ambition "to give young people from every community the chance to learn about the heroism, and sacrifice, of our great-grandparents" in the First World War. Gove complained that a disproportionate emphasis on suffering entailed the rejection of patriotic values, and concluded that these "misunderstandings and misrepresentations" make it "so important that we commemorate, and learn from, that conflict in the right way".

The uneasy relationship between truth and myth, ideals and reality, reverberates through representations of the First World War, as the editors of this substantial and formidable volume observe: "the memory of war – and by extension the 'best' or 'right' way to commemorate it – continues to be contested". An array of essays re-examine the artistic responses to the war in Britain both in its immediate historical context and evolving popular memory. The book's sheer range – from literature, visual art, film and music to pamphlets, journals and newspapers – stands as a testament to the myriad roles of cultural production in processing the shock of war, even to the present day. Against Gove's need for decided ideological categories, every scrupulously researched contribution here suggests that it is precisely their emphasis on ambivalence and uncertainty that makes the arts such a powerful medium through which to assess the war's legacy.

Given *The Edinburgh Companion to the First World War and the Arts*'s focus on compilation and comparison rather than detailed interpretation, the essays on canonical works of poetry, prose and drama are often surpassed by pre-existing studies. This book is instead at its most valuable when traversing sparser terrain; for example, Alice Kelly explores the logistics and semiotics of wartime correspondence, arguing that letters occupy "a uniquely important place in wartime culture" as one of few textual artefacts able to cross the boundary between home and the Front; and four essays look at soldiers' songs, requiems and the music hall to identify how these boosted morale, aided recruitment and simultaneously "set the standard for the shape of musical mourning in the twentieth century". Kate Macdonald's essay, tracing the war's effect on periodical markets in Britain, charts genuinely new ground, filling in a missing link in the history of the production and circulation of little magazines, recording "the impact of the war beyond the aesthetic into the tangible and practical".

The most frequently cited historian in the collection is Jay Winter, and it is by drawing heavily on his work about collective memory that *The Edinburgh Companion* offers such a useful reminder of the continuities evident in artistic responses since the conflict – including the future pedagogical possibilities of computer games about the First World War.

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