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Article:

Meyer, JK (2015) Book Review: The Silent Morning: Culture and Memory after the Armistice by Trudi Tate and Kate Kennedy. *War in History*, 22 (1). pp. 117-118. ISSN 0968-3445

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344514547299d>

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The Silent Morning: Culture and Memory After the Armistice. Edited by Trudi Tate and Kate Kennedy. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2013. 352pp. £70.00. ISBN 978 0 71 909002 8

British servicemen writing letters home from the front line during the First World War often attempted to describe the level of noise which they experienced. Later, veterans recalled noise as a central element in their memoirs, usually associated with fear, with the sounds of shellfire and snipers bullets both described as inducing instinctive and fearful reactions in men. One contemporary theorist even went so far as to posit that the noise of war was the causal factor in the overwhelming number of cases of shell shock diagnosed, due to the damage caused to brains and nerve endings by the percussive force of shellfire.

After the war, by comparison, came silences: the literal silencing of the guns at 11 a.m. on the 11th of November, 1918, the symbolic annual two-minute silence in Britain commemorating the Armistice, and the metaphoric silence of various groups whose was experiences slipped into obscurity in face of the dominant hegemonic practices of commemoration. These last silences have been the subject of a number of studies seeking to either rescue a particular set of experiences for historic memory or explore the process by which some narratives came to dominate. *The Silent Morning*, however, sets out to examine the impact of that first, most literal silence, ‘to ask how that moment of silence was to echo into the following decades.’

(1) In doing so, it seeks to make the argument that ‘the idea of silence ... framed cultural thinking about peace throughout the 1920s and 1930s.’ (5)

Despite this explicit intention, not all the contributions, which cover a range of cultural expressions, including literature, both popular and avant garde, literary criticism, music, visual arts and memorials, engage directly with the central metaphor. Claudia Siebrecht’s discussion of German women’s post-war art is a vivid and poignant analysis of responses to

the social collapse in Germany after the war. Jane Potter's investigation of reviews in the *Bookman* and the *Times Literary Supplement* provides a fascinating new angle on interpreting British cultural responses to the war and its aftermath. Neither, however, tackles the metaphor of silence. Interesting as these analyses are, it is not altogether clear how they link with the chapter that do tackle the question of silence directly, such as John Pegum's discussion of the role of silence in Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*, or Trudi Tate's fascinating analysis of the relationship between silence, psychological trauma and post-war theories of childcare in Britain, possibly the most original chapter in the book. While a general organisational theme does emerge, with paired chapters exploring specific cultural forms in Britain and Germany, or around the themes of comparative memory, there is simply not enough evidence in either the chapters themselves or the organisation of them to carry the weight of the argument for the importance of silence made in the introduction.

Also problematic is the decision to limit the discussion to British and German cultural expressions. While the comparison allows for some interesting discussions of the problems of the Armistice for a defeated nation, most notably in Klaus Hofmann's chapter on Alfred Döblin's novel *November 1918* and Alexander Watson's comparative discussion of the immediate reactions of British and German soldiers to the Armistice, it leaves open the question of why other cultural perspectives, principally French perspectives, were excluded. The inclusion of examinations of the reactions to the Armistice of a nation which had suffered under occupation would have provided an interesting element of comparison and might have prevented the tendency for British cultural forms to dominate throughout. Not only do eight out of the 14 chapters deal exclusively with British culture, but one of the two comparative chapters, Adrian Barlow's on British and German war memorials contains far more discussion of British memorials than German ones. The volume thus struggles to make

the case for its claim to be a comparative history of the cultural response to the war and its ending.

Overall it is an uneven volume. Individually, the occasional analytically incoherent chapter, such as Alison Hennege's discussion of the works of Helen Zenna Smith and T. Werner Laurie, are balanced by stronger contributions such as Andrew Frayn's analysis of C.E. Montague. But as a whole the volume does not maintain internal coherence, as neither the thematic nor the methodological approach set out in the introduction are sustained throughout. Scholars of the cultural history of the war will find particular elements useful, not least the extraordinarily thorough selected bibliography, evidence of the range of expertise assembled here. As a whole, however, this volume indicates that the silence of the Armistice is not as coherent an analytic force as the editors might have hoped.

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