



Paul Fox. *The Image of the Soldier in German Culture, 1871-1933.* A Modern History of Politics and Violence Series. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. Illustrations. xii + 225 pp. \$114.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4742-2614-1.

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In a particularly famous episode from Ernst Jünger's wartime memoir, *Storm of Steel* (1920), the author recalls the moment in 1916 when he first encountered a German soldier wearing the *Stahlhelm*, the steel helmet. The soldier left a lasting impression on the young officer Jünger: "The impassive features under the rim of the steel helmet and the monotonous voice accompanied by the noise of the battle made a ghostly impression on us." With his simplistic, rational, and bare head guard, the soldier—though hardly better protected—appeared more adequately equipped for the cruel and erratic environment of modern, industrialized warfare. He eerily resembled a "denizen of a new and far harsher world." [1]

Soon, Jünger would put on a steel helmet, too. Ever since, he has been considered a crown witness of the First World War's quintessentially disruptive character. A popular argument that reached back as far as Paul Fussell's seminal 1972 study on British wartime memoirs, *Great War and Modern Memory*, stated that as long-held beliefs about warfare were shattered in the trenches, new modes of postwar remembrance and representation were needed to express such unprecedented experiences. *Storm of Steel*, then, provided just that: an account of the First World War as a fundamental turning point.

In *The Image of the Soldier in German Culture, 1871-1933*, art historian Paul Fox sets out to question our readings of representations of World War I as documents of utter rupture. Taking Jünger as the vanishing point of his analysis, Fox aims to conceptualize a history of the conservative imagery and imagination of the German soldier, dating back to the Franco-Prussian War. It is a history that, as Fox argues, is characterized by striking stability and persistence, even in the face of drastically changing conflicts.

To illustrate these underlying continuities of German conservative thought, he closely considers popular illustrated histories of the eighteenth-century wars by Frederick the Great; publications of the Franco-Prussian War produced in the context of its twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations; drawings and photographs in the aftermath of the First World War, taken from both the illustrated press outlets and popular history books; and, finally, photobooks edited by Jünger from the later years of the Weimar Republic. Taken together, these "broadly patriotic visual accounts of recent armed conflicts" marked the contours of a mainstream medial memory of the bygone conflicts, meant to appeal to a broad, military affirming, and more often than not conscripted audience (p. 11).

If popular among contemporaries, such accounts, with the exception of the ever-referenced Jünger, have been largely neglected by art historians. Fox, in turning to a conservative canon, pushes against art history's prevalent preoccupation with deviance, opposition, and trauma in modern art. Indeed, he aims to develop a conceptual framework for the mere opposite of the spectrum, that is, to understand "what oppositional movements turned against" (p. 40).

Situating his study along the lines of the "new art history" and the cultural turn in military history, Fox is less interested in what these accounts might reveal about German war tactics and practices and more in how they "represent, and define, a 'German way' of war" (p. 7). It is not the battlefield itself that matters to Fox but the narratives and meanings derived from it by means of its visual representation. Reader-viewers of the "positive, popular, fundamentally conservative illustrated accounts of conflict" from the newly found German state all through the late Weimar Republic, he states, "gazed at images of recent wars in order to formulate what it meant to be German" (p. 6). What they quintessentially found in all of them was a "manifest will to battle" (p. 23). Implying the Clausewitzian tripartite of a moral, conceptual, and physical realm of war, it was thus the first, the uncompromising will to performing excellence, that came to signify the German soldier—and subsequently: the German spirit—in conservative visual representations.

Throughout the course of three parts, Fox differentiates his argument along numerous sites of soldierly imageries. The parts follow a loosely chronological structure, although cross-references are a common occurrence. Thankfully, the book is richly illustrated, as Fox maneuvers through his vast material of images by ways of consecutive close-up analyses.

In the first part, he examines Adolph von Menzel and Franz Kugler's *Life of Frederick* (1842). The work, immensely popular in the early

years of the new German state eager to shape its own past, stands out as an example of "how visual accounts of German warfighting prowess were rooted in established Prussian traditions of writing, painting, and drawing" (p. 49). Be it in their depictions of the "enlightened autocrat" Frederick, a thoughtfully negotiating general staff, or tumultuous battlefield sceneries displaying the Hohenzollern king dramatically trapped in the fog of war, Menzel and Kugler made sure to illuminate the central idealist argument of the book: "the quality of the Prussian army rests not so much on accounts of its success as on its reputation for performing excellence" (pp. 62, 66).

Part 2 discusses the visual representation of borderlands, both during and after the First World War. In the opening section, Fox explores how at the outset of the war, images of the eastern border depicting soldiers and farmers in seemingly symbiotic cooperation "staked a moral claim to German ownership of territory represented as hallowed ground," a tradition whose origins, once more, are traced back to the Franco-Prussian War (p. 83). The subsequent chapter, then, focuses on the western front and its representations in late Weimarian photobooks by Franz Schauwecker and Jünger. Speaking as veterans "on behalf of the veteran population," the author-editors in countless variations portrayed trench warfare through the perspective of the common soldier performing minor maneuvers and tactics (p. 121). In omitting depictions of the Supreme Army Command, Fox argues, Schauwecker and Jünger successfully managed to avoid the issue of defeat, instead emphasizing "the moral superiority of the German soldier's will to battle" (p. 124). This narrative is further advanced in the following chapter. Here, Fox analyzes Schauwecker's and Jünger's employment of aerial photography. Taken out of context, the pictures seem to imply a cold, distant perspective. After all, they were not produced for propagandistic but for practical mapping purposes. Within the photobooks, however, their effects are all but re-

versed. Reader-viewers could likewise act as analysts and armchair-combatants, deciphering the often opaque images of wartime landscapes, and thereby reassuring themselves not only of their former army's moral superiority but even more so of their own.

The final part, similarly the final analytical chapter, zooms out from the specificities of war photography's varying angles. Fox sets out to deconstruct the image of the German soldier in relation to the technological component of warfare. Although he finds the significant developments and alterations of armament from the Franco-Prussian War to World War I necessarily to be well reflected within the corpus of works considered in his study, Fox, again, concludes that it was ultimately subordinated to the ever-conjured Prussian moral superiority. Surprisingly, however, this relationship of supportive technology and decisive morality is reversed in the postwar images of the counterrevolutionary movement.

The Image of the Soldier in German Culture convincingly argues for a deep-seated entanglement of "military doctrine and battlefield manifestation, on the one hand, and its visual representation, on the other" (p. 185). Fox constitutes a powerful conjunction that was able to persist from the foundation of the new German state up until the demise of the first German republic. Indeed, its narrative appeal to conservatives lay precisely in its promise of continuation, in the connectivity of values in an otherwise radically changing world.

In some ways, the study's strength, its in-depth focus on a specific spectrum of German military-infused art, is also its inherent weakness, for Fox's limitation on solely German sources bears some analytical issues: most important, the question of *Deutschtum* itself. How, for example, are we to know that the emphasis on performing excellence is specifically German? To be sure, this is not to suggest that the study should have been expanded into a comparative frame, mirroring Ger-

man imaginations of the soldier with, say, British, French, Austrian, or US troops. Yet a border-crossing glimpse into the history of symbolic and artistic transfer, appropriation, and distinction might have further underlined his argument.

Nonetheless, *The Image of the Soldier in German Culture* is a well-crafted, extensively researched study. Fundamentally reversing a dominant strand in the historiography of military art and cultures of memory through the persistence of continuation, not rupture, Fox's study provides a valuable contribution to both fields that should interest students and scholars alike.

Note

[1]. Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, trans. Michael Hofmann (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), 92.

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