**Brett, Laurel. *Disquiet on the Western Front*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, $78.95. 120 pages.**

*Reviewed by Heidi Turner, M.A., Independent Scholar*

In this relatively short work, Laurel Brett argues for an understanding of the modern novel and postmodern novel as products of their two wars: World War I and World War II. She examines two post-World War I modernist novels (*The Sun Also Rises* and *To the Lighthouse*) and two post-World War II postmodern novels (*Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*) to demonstrate the differences between the two periods and the way they informed each other, followed by several chapters on the effect of these works on postmodern novels dealing with war in general. Brett strongly reminds the reader that modernism and postmodernism are by no means the same movement, but that their engagement in the same period (at least for certain years) provides a useful contrast by which both can be more accurately understood.

The first chapter discusses *The Sun Also Rises* in terms of the modernist narrative and approach to dealing with the First World War while pointing out its intense anti-sentimentality. This chapter also contrasts the traces of romantic plotlines in *A Farewell to Arms* with the nihilistic views in *The Sun Also Rises* and establishes Hemingway as a major starting point for postwar modernism. In the following chapter, Brett reads Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* through the lens of war: "She demystifies war, and at the same time elevates private experience. In refusing to privilege the experiences of war, Woolf denies war-mongering its political cover. In her novel, loss and grief are not a result of their pedigrees" (11). Here, the War informs the modernist themes and plots of a stream-of-consciousness novel.

After concluding remarks on the modernism born after World War I, Brett shifts her attention to the postmodern world after World War II, focusing on Salinger's modernist *Nine Short Stories* as a transitional work between the world after each of the wars as well as the aftermath of the Allies' clear moral superiority, namely, a societal vacuum requiring "unmasking," a task the postmodernists would take much

further. She also demonstrates the unifying thread of the broken psychology of Holden Caulfield, present in all of Salinger's protagonists. Chapter Four calls *Catch-22* the definitive "postmodern World War II novel;" here, Brett emphasizes the circular nature of a Catch-22 and its ability to override humanity as an early development of postmodern understanding. The following chapter, discussing *Slaughterhouse-Five* and comparing it to *Catch-22,* shows a full transition: the crumbling moral world present in *Catch-22,* Brett argues, has failed entirely.

Here, Brett begins a set of four chapters on the lasting effects of war within the discussion of postmodernism and World War II, each interpreted through Vonnegut and Heller. In chapter six (on *Gravity's Rainbow*), Brett shows Pynchon's work to be primarily antiwar, but in such a way that it also undermines all epistemological assumptions held by both the reader and the characters. Chapter seven turns to the Vietnam War and *Going after Cacciato,* where Brett leans on the similarity between magical realism and O'Brien's work to demonstrate the postmodern shift toward blurring fantasy, reality, and possibility; the following chapter continues this type of exploration through another work of O'Brien's, *The Things They Carried*. Here, Brett emphasizes not only the episodic nature of the novel, but the creation of Tim O'Brien the character, who differs from the author in significant ways while maintaining a tension in the reader between fiction and fact: "[it] assumes a postmodern world" (80). The final work to receive a chapter is Vonnegut's *Hocus Pocus* in chapter nine. Brett calls this Vonnegut's "most fully realized work," drawing upon Hartke's moral bankruptcy and corruption as protagonist in an understanding of postwar sentiment as well as a strong tendency toward dismantling societal moral structures. The following two sections give a broad overview of the entire study and strengthen the connections between each of the works and their place in literary chronology. The conclusion also historically grounds Brett's entire book, as it reviews real events mentioned in the pieces examined and reminds the reader of the authors' reality upon composition or experiential germination. Additionally, Brett examines the possibility of an understanding of war beyond or outside of postmodernism.

While postmodernism is often understood as satirical at its heart, Brett proposes something quite different: "postmodernism was born of post-traumatic shock" (97). In this, she predicts possible reasons for movements away from the treatment of shock from war through the postmodern novel. While this particular piece of scholarship relies heavily on close reading and interpretation (rather than scholarly debate), this seems to be a necessity of the field, as the postmodern war novel is not as well-documented as, say, the Victorian novel. With that caveat in place, Laurel Brett's *Disquiet on the Western Front* is a helpful guide to the emergence of postmodernism as

well as a clear argument for its parentage: it is the result of modernism's collapse under the weight of World War II.

No Ordinary Soldier: My Father's Two Wars. **Liz Gilmore Williams. Charlotte, NC: Burkwood Media, 2016, $18.41, paperback, $12.99, e-book, 313 pp.**

Reviewed by Susan Jensen, Queens College, C.U.N.Y.

World War II generated a wealth of beautiful literature from memoir to fiction. Is there anything new that could be said about this experience? As it turns out, there is.

Long after her father's death, the author, Liz Gilmore Williams, embarked upon a personal quest to discover who he was before he became the angry person she knew. In particular, she wondered what role his wartime experience, which he never discussed, played in his personal problems. She dived into a treasure trove of letters between her parents during her father's service from 1940-45, researching the context of the letters. Along the way, she discovered some things most of us were unaware of about WWII, including a more complex story than the commonly told one of America being blindsided by the Pearl Harbor attack.

We learn through Herb Gilmore's correspondence and the accompanying narrative that the American military wasn't expecting an attack on the particular day it occurred but was keenly aware of the Japanese threat for some time. In the touching letters exchanged with his future wife, he reveals much about the hectic American military buildup the year before the United States entered WWII, life in Hawaii circa 1940, and the day-to-day existence of a soldier, including the loneliness and boredom even in a place as beautiful as Hawaii. We also hear the untold story of army soldiers on December 7, 1941 who were slaughtered just as the sailors but whose experience didn't receive news media attention.

There are personal problems hinted at in some of the early letters and more present in the correspondence after they become husband and wife. The threads of discontent start to slowly weave into a pattern. Ms. Williams travels to her father's old neighborhood, tries to contact surviving WWII buddies, and speaks to family members, historians, and archivists. Puzzle pieces start to click into place, explaining things as diverse as family eating disorders and her beloved older sister's difficulties with men.

The journey the author takes into national and personal history brings her face to face with modern-day problems her family likely wouldn't have been willing to look at in an earlier time. The blending of previously untold WWII history with one woman's personal journey into her family dynamics makes this a unique, interesting story. A must read for WW II buffs and anyone who ever wondered about the origins of a difficult parent's behavior.

Grand Illusions: American Art and the First World War**. David M. Lubin. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, $35.00, hardcover, 366 pp.**

Reviewed by Matthew Stewart, Boston University.

Exhibitions commemorating the First World War have been in full flow in Europe for several years, as has the stream of publications on the event. Indeed, Great War memorializing is a cottage industry in Great Britain. The United States marks the centenary of its own involvement in 2017. While the First World War does not have the cultural valence in the United States that it has abroad, the American public is not without resources. The National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City re-opened in a much expanded and modernized iteration in 2006. It maintains an active web presence, and has received rankings on social media sites that some would find surprisingly high. A major exhibit straightforwardly entitled *World War I and American Art* opened on November 3, 2016 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and from there will move on to the New York Historical Society and the Frist Center before closing on January 18, 2018. David Lubin, Professor of Art History at Wake Forest University, serves as one of the curators of this exhibition along with Robert Cozzolino of the Minneapolis Institute of Art and independent curator Anne Knutson.

Insofar as the general public has an awareness of the war, it is most often arrived at through its literature--the Trench Poets, *A Farewell to Arms, All Quiet on the Western Front*, all read by millions of students—and to a lesser extent, its movies. In *Grand Illusions*, Lubin has produced a thoroughly researched cultural history with the primary goal of expanding cultural knowledge to include the visual arts and graphic representations of the war era. Oxford University Press has produced a handsome, high quality edition with plentiful reproductions in full color. The book is cross-disciplinary in focus, not only analyzing a variety of visual media but also examining these visual arts within their broader cultural and literary contexts, the literary comparisons serving as one of Lubin's particular strengths. The book is reasonably positioned for a crossover readership of academics and motivated general public alike, and readers will come away with a richer understanding of the roles played by both high and popular arts during the war era. The text is often lively and the material, engaging. Lubin cares enough about his readers and is intelligent enough about his subject to avoid the turgid smoke and mirrors style so common in academic monographs (though he can't seem to help himself from repeatedly pasting in the hackneyed academic shibboleth *gaze*). The scholarly apparatus is extensive and clearly presented.

Organized chronologically, the study provides detailed descriptions of many works both high and popular. Photography and cinema lovers will find coverage of those arts, and readers who are taken with the war's colorful propaganda posters will be gratified by Lubin's interest in this medium. The volume is well illustrated with several dozen full-color reproductions, and the author provides credibly detailed description of works not illustrated. The study is careful to place these works in the context of artistic trends as well as in their military or historical context. As a work of art history, there is no stinting on the latter term. There is considerable attention paid to women and to African-American artists, almost all of which seems germane and relevant to the project at hand rather than forced or foisted onto the topic in an effort to satisfy current academic trends and cultural politics. A typical chapter will discuss the war art of several artists in considerable fullness, while several other figures will be brought in, deepening the analysis.

Edward Steichen, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp are amongst the celebrated artists discussed at length. Generally more valuable and certainly more groundbreaking are the introductions to lesser known artists. By way of example, we can look at a typical chapter, this one entitled "Being There," which examines Harvey Dunn, Claggett Wilson and Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. Dunn was part of the "AEF Eight," a group of "civilian illustrators inducted as captains in the American Expeditionary Forces" in 1918 and sent overseas to document the daily life of doughboys at the front (173). Despite the fact that they were forbidden to visit zones of direct combat, considerable AEF work depicts the grim and the horrific. Upon arrival in the war zone, Dunn was capable of producing heroic scenes such as stretcher-bearers daring no man's land to make rescues; at first he illustrated men in traditionalist vein, as in one of his most familiar works *The Machine Gunner*, wherein the subject adopts a heroic pose. But as he passed more time on the Western Front, Dunn began to displease the officials who had commissioned him. As Lubin writes, "his work increasingly de-heroicized the American soldier and occasionally committed the even graver sin of making the enemy humane" (175). Dunn's war masterpiece is *Prisoners and Wounded*, an after-the-battle scene depicting stretchered and limping casualties from both sides walking together. Blood, fatigue and shock dominate. Indeed, Dunn became a master of portraying what would later become known as the thousand-yard stare, and thus providing an artistic record of one of the war's most famous coinages: shell shock.

While giving Dunn his due, Lubin seems to prefer Wilson's painting on account of his "credentials as a bona fide modernist" (181). Wilson was actually a fighting man, a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps who was in the famous Belleau Woods battle of 1918, where he "was drenched in poison gas and spent three hellish days stranded in

no man's land" (181). To my mind, *Runner Through the Barrage* is Dunn's mostly fully realized work. In it a solitary soldier, shocked and staring straight ahead occupies the center of a vertically oriented composition. He grasps his upper left arm, while blood flows from left sleeve, which shows no hand beneath and seems to hang formlessly as if only a stump remains above his elbow. Surrounding the soldier are trees, many of them blasted and showing equivalent damage to their limbs. The painting echoes King Vidor's filmed version of Laurence Stallings' *The Big Parade*, with its famous walk through Belleau Woods choreographed to the metronomic beat of a drum—or rather the movie, which came later, echoes the painting. In contrast to Wilson's collection of yellow-dominated war paintings, *Runner* is composed primarily in shades of tan and brown, and the predominance of the wounded soldier seems to have allowed Wilson to overcome the sort of derivative Vorticist gestures that appear to be his primary interest in other paintings. Lubin notes that wounding becomes a thematic focus for Wilson, and he seems at his best when allowing that subject to occupy his artistic energy rather than attention to the modernist techniques that had been trending in the pre-war years.

The sculptor Whitney provides a third focal point. Long before American involvement in the fighting, this wealthy Vanderbilt daughter had established a 225-bed hospital in the Marne village of Juilly where she was able to channel "her impressive organizational skills and impassioned desire to be of service to others" in an effort that immersed her for a brief period in the most difficult and heart-rending work, and which surely provided aid and comfort to many (200). The author draws no contrast here to Duchamp's frivolous and egoistic Dadaist productions, but I could not help making one. Indeed, Lubin openly admires Duchamp as a daring and politically engaged pathfinder in a chapter-length treatment earlier in the book. Of the *Fountain,* he writes, "we can imagine that the mute piece of plumbing served for the artist as a rejoinder against the appalling naïveté of Americans who were ecstatic about sending their young kinsmen to war" (122). Yet, to my mind, Duchamp did little service either to art or man, and Lubin's analysis of the famous urinal, while enormously learned and replete with detailed contextualization, is ultimately overdone, strained into an anti-war statement. It seems to me more plausible to view the wartime Duchamp as a self-centered and supercilious founding father of the ever lengthening line of modern and post-modern artists as charlatans (or is it the other way around, charlatans as artists?).

Whitney, on the other hand, "observed the torment of the wounded, watching and listening to men die, sometimes holding their hands as they expired" in the hospital which she funded and organized (203). She suffered several deep personal losses to the war, including her brother who died when the *Lusitania* was sunk. In artistic response

to the war, she first produced a series of "emotions gouged in clay" [her words]. The works are direct and unsparing. Lubin finds them praiseworthy, "relatively brutal and direct, despite their old-fashioned anecdotal and sentimental qualities" (203). This seems a fair assessment, as the figures combine rough and ready impressionist modelling and details of humble verisimilitude with archetypal and melodramatic poses. To give Whitney her full due as an artist, Lubin notes a 1919 *New York Times* profile that recognized the difficulties she faced as a woman artist and acknowledged her efforts as "the only American sculptor who has given any considerable study to the part our soldiers played in the fighting" (204-5). On the heels of her production of more than twenty of these smaller sculptures, Whitney then contributed to various public monuments, including one in Saint-Nazaire harbor in Brittainy, where she was awarded the French Legion of Honor in 1926. German engineers destroyed the monument during World War II, but it was reconstructed in 2004, an epic monument that is probably "more seen than noticed," in the author's wise but sad formulation that applies to so much civic art (209).

It is worth noting several strengths that Lubin brings to his study. His descriptions of the art works are detailed, lucid and accurate as long as he remains on objective grounds, describing what the painting looks like. This talent, evident in the descriptions of works which are illustrated in the book, is doubly valuable when the author is referring to other works that are not illustrated. Lubin can and does work imaginatively and associatively as a cultural historian. His knowledge of literature is particularly apropos and frequently enriches his analyses. On the other hand, while generally plausible, his occasional forays into military history tend towards the conventional wisdom of a previous generation. At his best, as, for example, in his discussions of propaganda posters that thematize "Women in Peril," Lubin ranges through pre-war and post-war popular culture to find interesting echoes and to describe the interplay between various media and genres. These overlapping cultural vectors are, for the most part, presented plausibly and without violation of the actualities of the works themselves.

The study's weaker chapters feature instances where the scholarly imaginative devolves into the merely clever or the outright implausible. In these instances the descriptive passages shade into the subjective and interpretive and become labored or tendentious. Speaking of Alfred Leete's recruiting poster of Lord Kitchener, for example, hyperbole and academic cliché override the author's good sense. "The viewer finds himself subject to the [general's] panoptic gaze, unable to escape its searchlight glare," Lubin writes (56). In a two-dimensional work of art, how can one set of eyes staring straight out from the poster be described as panoptic? This is theory terminology of a particular academic flavor imposed on actuality. In this instance, even the factual description

of the poster breaks down, as the author refers to Kitchener's "leonine mane," when in fact Kitchener is shown face-on, nothing of the back of his head even visible (56). Here and elsewhere associative thinking and broad knowledge of cultural contexts are misapplied, contextually overloading pictures in order to educe a seemingly predetermined interpretation.

Lubin's ability to write contrastively is another noteworthy strength. The shorter contrasts, running to a page or two and typically made between two works of art, are full of close observation and governed by sound judgment. They are that well-executed as to serve as examples in writing or rhetoric instruction. Likewise the chapters which are built on contrastive foundations are amongst the book's strongest. "Opposing Visions," elaborates the clash between patriot and pacifist strains at the outset of American participation in the war. "To See or Not to See" discusses the moral and political ramifications of realist art. Lubin seems at his most generous in this latter chapter. Clearly his own preferences are for the avant-garde over the traditional and for the conceptual over the representational. Yet, he gives more conventional artists such as John Singer Sargent a fair reading while maintaining a nice balance between theoretical considerations and analyses of artistic performance.

The book's collection of materials and the author's insights are worthy of attention by scholars in a variety of disciplines and it's reader-friendliness and high production values merit institutional collection and the interest of the general public. While, his wide-ranging imagination can lead him astray, alert readers should be able to sort the sound from the speculative in Lubin's thorough study of American art of the First World War.