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Jay Winter, *War Beyond Words: Languages of Remembrance from the Great War to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xxii + 234 pp. \$29.95 U.S. (hb). Figures, illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$30.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-521-87323-9

Review by Susan McCreedy, University of South Alabama.

Jay Winter is of course known as one of the leading historians of the First World War and its cultural aftermath, and his latest book is grounded in that conflict. He begins from the premise that the Great War was a turning point in the representation of war, “a shift...from representing war to representing warriors” that “opened up the possibility that soldiers themselves were victims of war” (p. 3). Winter then embarks on an expansive survey of war representation across the twentieth century and up to the present day. Throughout, Winter takes into account the changing nature of war, the emerging imperative to represent civilian victims of war and genocide, and the developing technologies that have inflected both the creation and dissemination of images of war.

Winter’s oft-repeated structuring insight is that “language frames memory.” By “language” he means not only the literal languages in which we express our collective understanding of events but also the figurative languages of different art forms, the conventions and constraints that govern production and reception of various artistic media. He also includes under the rubric of language what we might call modes of representation, such as sacred and secular, horizontal and vertical, speaking and silence. Winter posits that the memory of war is shaped differently by French speakers than by Anglophones, for example, and takes on a different form in cinema than in poetry. This seems to me to be a relatively uncontroversial claim but one that nevertheless offers the possibility for illuminating comparisons.

In the first half of the book, Winter tests his idea in chapters devoted to different art forms. Provocative claims, a number of which I hope will become the subjects of books in their own right, emerge here. In the chapter on painting and sculpture for example, Winter states boldly that “Facelessness is a language of post-Shoah art” (p. 12), but his limited and idiosyncratic choice of case studies to support this claim left me wishing for a much larger corpus studied much more in depth to explore this theory. Similarly, his chapter on cinema ranges broadly over a century of war films and proposes a useful rubric for thinking about the different stages of cinematic war representation, but engages only superficially with the technical language of cinema.

The second half of the book is Winter at his best. Here he takes a thematic rather than generic

approach. In his chapter on the language of the sacred, for example, Winter examines the way in which twentieth-century genocides have deployed (or not) a language of martyrdom. He proposes “a language of human rights” an alternative to the rhetoric of martyrdom, which he argues “perpetuates the conflicts which led to the bloodletting in the first place” (p. 125).

The chapter titled “The Geometry of Memory” is the most persuasive, drawing on memorial art and memorial spaces relating to a number of conflicts to explore the relationship between “the vertical, the language of hope and pride” and “the horizontal, the language of mourning and loss” (p. 145). In a variety of compelling case studies, Winter ties horizontality to ambiguity about war and even to pacifism. His pages on the Historial de la Grande Guerre are among the finest in the book, as his decades-long career in Great War studies and his personal involvement with that museum lend depth and poignancy to his insights.

Winter’s prose is delightful, as clear and free of jargon as ever, offering his reader easy access into what he modestly describes as “a meditation on war and remembrance” (p. 203). *War Beyond Words* is indeed more meditative than analytic, and that is its great strength. Winter has marked out a clear path forward, and this book will certainly inspire a great deal of future scholarship.

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