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Tim Kendall, ed., *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). 322 pages. ISBN 978-0-19-870320-4

At the beginning of the 20th century, modern Europe was the scene of various conflicts, havocs and displacements that led to significant socio-political discontinuities. The literary scene was nearly overflowed with works on war often framed by patriotic slogans as well as nationalistic attitudes. The success of such literary productions was sometimes fleeting, and therefore most of them became unknown to posterity. Nowadays, a hundred years after the Great War, to revisit *les lieux de mémoire* has become a prerequisite for the process of retrieving and consigning the past to the future.

In 2013, Tim Kendall, professor of 20th-century poetry at the University of Exeter and a producer of literary documentaries, published *Poetry of the First World War*, an insightful survey of major poets whose works focus on the Great War. Within this broad frame, the anthologizer proceeds to explain the reasons behind his selection of the poets and their works. The introduction to each poet is meant to supply the “immediate biographical and historical circumstances of the poems’ composition” (xxviii) which, combined with details of the literary context presented in the notes, offer the reader a broader and clearer perspective on the poetry of the Great War. Kendall is eager to give “the best poems in the best order” (xxviii) and focuses on major poets and poems. As he puts it, sometimes editors are forced to exclude some of their choices and preferences as a result of financial constraints. His attempt as an anthologizer succeeds in presenting his perspective on the poets that captured the realities of the Great War in poetry. The selection includes the most important figures of the poetical scene during the Great War: Thomas Hardy, A.E. Housman, May Sinclair, W.B. Yeats, Rudyard Kipling, Ivor Gurney, Wilfred Owen, Margaret Postgate Cole, as well as a section of music-hall and trench songs.

By exploring the works of these poets, Kendall aims to familiarize the readers with the socio-political and cultural context within which war

poetry emerged: “during the First World War, poetry became established as the barometer for the nation’s values: the greater the civilization, the greater its poetic heritage” (Kendall xv) By stating this, he underlines that the British poetical scene “was already being refashioned” (xvi) at the beginning of the 20th century. Experimental verse was written by the Modernists who brought to light abstract visions, whereas a more intelligible simple poetic expression celebrating rural landscapes and traditional poetical forms was praised by Georgian poetry. It was obvious that readers preferred the explicit poetical forms recalling the rural areas so much longed for by the inhabitants of the cities. In this case, the frame of reference was patriotism, as well as the British nation’s supremacy. In 1914, writers such as Thomas Hardy, Henry Newbolt or G.K. Chesterton were invited to Wellington House in London to be part of the War Propaganda Bureau and “encouraged to dedicate their art to the war effort” (xvi). In this context, Kendall also mentions Edward Marsh, Winston Churchill’s private secretary, whose first anthology had a huge commercial success: 15,000 copies were sold immediately, whereas *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot took almost eighteen months to sell out. Yet, as Kendall underlines, just a few decades later, the Georgian poets of the Great War and their poetry became less popular. After the 1930s, Georgianism was no longer regarded as a significant literary movement, its influence and prestige consequently diminishing.

Georgianism was less concerned with the atrocities of war, whereas the modernist poets “were experimenters, responding with appropriate urgency to a broken world” (xvii). As Kendall puts it, Gibson, Sassoon, Rosenberg or Owen bear witness to trench, battle and soldier life. Poems written on the front line by soldiers or at home by civilians, as well as by foreigners who fought in the Allied forces, were often concentrated in anthologies published during the war, clearly responding to the readers’ requirements and preferences for bucolic landscapes, bravery, patriotic and romantic attitudes. In times of war, reading was shaped by war itself.

Tim Kendall’s anthology *Poetry of the First World War* is a critical attempt to re-establish and redefine a tradition that at the time of its emergence represented the Romantic and humanistic views revived around and during the Great War. The Georgian poets were conventional

while the Modernists preferred innovative forms of literary expression. Georgianism focused on themes such as work during the industrial age, poverty, the instabilities of capitalist British society, and the realities that ordinary people had to defy in times of war. To retrieve such a literary movement is part of a wider attempt to revalorize the past and its heritage based on realistic and humanist visions of everyday life. The anthology allows the readers to better understand what war poetry means, by acquainting them with the manifold war experiences of soldiers as well as civilians at the beginning of the 20th century. It re-purposes the meaning of the Great War in poetry by re-establishing a red thread for good readings to enhance an overall cultural experience integrating various poetic elements, techniques, critical and biographical data. Thus, Kendall's exhaustive scholarly perspective on war poetry conveys a multidimensional reference overview meant to engage new generations of readers.

ANAMARIA ENESCU,
ASTRA Sibiu, Romania