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[Review of: P. Fox (2018) The Image of the Soldier in German Culture, 1871-1933]

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BOOK REVIEWS

Paul Fox, *The Image of the Soldier in German Culture, 1871–1933* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

Today, the best-known visual images of German soldiers in the early twentieth century are anti-militaristic works by the likes of Otto Dix, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Max Pechstein. The monograph under review has a different focus. Paul Fox, an art historian, foregrounds representations of combat – paintings as well as caricatures and illustrated books – that reflected and promoted a ‘German way of war’. This term, coined by the military historian Robert Citino, aims to capture a specifically German emphasis on offensive tactics, and a concurrent claim to martial masculinity and moral superiority. Such tropes stemmed from the Prussian ‘wars of liberation’ against Napoleonic France and were inspired by Romanticism. Fox analyses how their continued significance between 1871 and 1933 translated into visual imagery, thus elucidating a theme that was treated, *inter alia*, in the 2017 special issue of this journal. The author is well aware of extreme-right endorsements of total war during the Weimar era but, echoing Citino, defends a continuity thesis, according to which the ‘militarized mode of representation’ (p. 186) remained fundamentally unaltered.

What aspects are rubricized under this ‘militarized mode of representation’? Via Adolph Menzel’s wood engravings of Frederick the Great and Anton von Werner’s painting of the war council during the conflict with France in 1870/1, Fox’s opening chapter highlights the value put on decisive military leadership. His next chapter starts out with caricatures and posters that promoted volunteering for the paramilitary struggles with Poland post-1918, and relates these to earlier representations of war in the German borderlands. Fox subsequently turns to

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representations of trench warfare in illustrated war histories such as *So war der Krieg* (1927) and *Das Antlitz des Weltkrieges* (1930), edited, respectively, by Franz Schauwecker and Ernst Jünger. He argues that despite the novelty of the First World War, individual heroism and battlefield dynamics continued to play a crucial role, in line with the assault tactics employed by the German army whenever an opportunity arose. Whereas the fascination with aerial photography in these volumes continued an earlier visual tradition associated with mapping battlefields, the overall preference was for local experiences that served to bolster a sense of moral superiority over the enemy.

The final two chapters discuss the interaction between new military technologies and soldierhood. From the needle-gun in 1870/1 to the tank between 1914 and 1918, with heavy artillery playing a crucial role in both conflicts, technological innovation did not mean that martial virtues such as heroism and initiative ceased to matter. On the contrary, both appeared to work in conjunction, thus enabling offensive tactics even in an age of industrialized warfare. Here, Fox acknowledges change alongside continuity, stating that combat 'was increasingly represented as an encounter between man and machine' (p. 157).

Fox's detailed analyses, which combine an art historian's feel for images with an awareness of relevant cultural history, are illuminating, even if their empirical basis could be broader and the structure of the chapters is at times a bit meandering. He is right in stressing the cultural significance of offensive tactics and martial virtues in Germany between 1871 and 1933. Notwithstanding the increasingly massive scale of combat and the growing predominance of technology, important interpreters of the conflict had a stake in upholding older values wherever this remained remotely plausible. Fox thus joins a number of scholars who have downplayed the break of the First World War. Yet this questioning of the 'modernist' interpretation of 1914–18 also applies to other countries, which raises the issue of specificity. It is plausible to assume that Germany was particularly invested in adapting nineteenth-century notions of warfare to twentieth-century conditions. However, a comparative analysis of militaristic imagery in, say, France or Italy would be necessary to substantiate the thesis that there was a German way of representing war.

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