It is a commonplace to refer to the First World War as a historical watershed, but the nature of that great cataclysm's impact upon European society and culture remains a hotly debated topic. Many recent works have dealt with the Great War's role in shaping artistic and intellectual modernism and with the social history of the war. Yet the English-language literature remains dominated by a disproportionate emphasis on the western European experience.

This book seeks to redress the balance by giving equal attention to the countries of eastern and central Europe, where the consequences and repercussions of the war were arguably even more drastic than in the west. This volume also distinguishes itself by focusing specifically on cultural change during the course of the war, as distinct from the after-effects and memories of the conflict. The broad comparative scope of this work is further enhanced by its treatment of high culture and popular culture in relation to one another, and within the framework of the political and military events of 1914–18.

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Introduction

Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites

World War I is widely recognized as a turning point in the political, ideological, economic, and social history of Europe.[1] Yet, while most historians would agree that it marks a watershed, considerable disagreement exists about the nature of its impact. Did the war catalyze and accelerate tendencies that were bound to rise to prominence in any case or did it decisively change the course of historical evolution? Was its cultural impact as clearly discernible as its material consequences? Did the responses of common folk to the experience of war roughly correspond to, or diverge significantly from, those of socio-political and intellectual elites?

In recent years, much of the scholarly debate about the specifically cultural repercussions of the war has focussed on the relationship of the conflict to the development of modernity and modernism. In his seminal study of British literary culture and the war, Paul Fussell argues that the hellish trauma of the Western Front experience defied the expressive power of conventional literary tropes and undermined traditional cultural sensibilities.[2] Long-held notions about sacrifice, duty, honor, respect for one's social betters, and trust in government gave way to an attitude of cynical disillusionment and ironic skepticism that established itself as the quintessential characteristic of the modern worldview.

Modris Eksteins has proposed an alternative conception of modernism and its relation to the war.[3] Focussing primarily on the international artistic avant-garde and on German society and culture during the first decades of the twentieth century, he describes cultural modernism as a backlash against what was seen as the alienating materialism and stultifying rationalism of industrial modernity. The cult of the irrational, the fascination with violence, the notion of self-sacrifice in warfare as the path to "inner freedom" – such neo-romantic and Nietzschean ideas were already widely prevalent in German society before the war. The conflict itself reinforced many of these tendencies and contributed to the divorce of politics from ethical values and the aestheticization of politics, a process that was to culminate in what he terms "Nazi kitsch."[4]

Eksteins also contends that variants of this sort of modernist sensibility became increasingly influential in France and Britain over the course of the war, as traditional notions of order and morality – which had survived in those societies longer than in Germany – were fatally undermined by the cataclysmic conflict.[5]

Jay Winter has been the most noted among a group of historians dissenting altogether from the notion that World War I marked the incontestable triumph of cultural modernism.[6] Winter argues that a study of war memorials, commemoration ceremonies, and other loci and modes of bereavement in post-war France, Britain, and Germany suggests that the war's survivors tended to cling to familiar rituals, symbols, and forms of communal behavior in their attempt to honor the dead and find meaning in their "sacrifice." The design of some war memorials can be seen in retrospect as having protofascist implications[7], and some members of wartime and post-war intellectual elites may have had iconoclastic impulses; on the whole, though, Winter argues that it was not until Auschwitz and Hiroshima that the expressive potential of premodernist artistic themes, spiritualist ideas, and religious iconography was surpassed and that true modernism came fully into its own.

Controversies such as these are partly semantic in nature. Fussell's identification of the modern with the ironic, for example, allows him to characterize as modern the many writers and artists who deployed conventional images in a caustic and sardonic manner. In Winter's view, the very fact that such works hark back to earlier frames of reference sets them apart from modernism, which in his definition involves a complete break with the past. But, more substantively, these interpretive disputes reflect disagreement about what type of source material and which social classes are most representative of a given period. Focussing on the writings of highly educated people will lead to conclusions very different from an approach that is founded on the exploration of popular sensibilities.[8] Moreover, much depends on which countries one selects as one's primary case studies. Fussell's literary analysis is explicitly limited to the Anglo-American sphere; Eksteins clearly encounters difficulties when he tries to find a way of incorporating Britain and France into a thesis that is largely informed by the study of German cultural history. More generally, most English-language contributions to the debate have hardly paid any attention whatsoever to the dramatic wartime developments in Eastern Europe.[9]

It is our hope that this book will encourage the development of analytical approaches that explore the nature and origins of modernism in the context of the evolving relationships between "high" and "mass" cultures and within the framework of the wartime political and military

history of Europe as a whole. In so far as culture is both a reflection of broader socio-political trends and a dynamic factor in shaping historical development, a comparative analysis of European culture during the Great War can serve as a critical tool in helping to understand the war's impact on European society. Furthermore, a study of cultural developments in the midst of political and military upheaval may serve to focus attention on the intimate connections between cultural and material factors in history. Indeed, a major purpose of this collection is to increase interest in cultural history and its relationship to politics and society for all eras of modern European history. The editors believe it is useful to begin with a volume on the war that is thought to have been the first great transformative experience of the twentieth century.

European Culture in the Great War is a title that invites explanation, if not justification. We have reverted to the earlier term, "Great War," precisely because it shucks off the semantic burden placed on that war by the more familiar "World War I," with its inevitable link to World War II. Not that these wars are not linked; if anything, their connections have been understated in most of the literature. But recovering the language of our parents or grandparents might go some way to promote thinking about the earlier war in its own time and on its own terms. It was called the Great War in those days because nothing like it in scope had been seen since the titanic Napoleonic struggles which had rolled across Europe a century earlier. And of course nothing like it in terms of technological devastation had ever been seen. Contemporaries, for various reasons, wanted to make that point, just as recent generations refer to World War II as "the big one" in order to distinguish it from the lesser hostilities that have followed. We also wish to emphasize that this volume is explicitly and specifically intended to focus on the evolution of European culture *during the course of the war*. The memory of the war and the nature of its legacy are worthy subjects in their own right, which should not be confused or conflated with the topic of this book.

Our globalizing inclinations notwithstanding, we have limited this study to the European continent. As Michael Howard has observed, "in spite of the title, 'The First World War,' bestowed on it after the event, [the conflict] was Eurocentric – far more so, indeed, than the earlier great European wars fought between 1689–1815."[10] The war, of course, did extend to the Middle East and parts of East Asia and Africa; it had an impact on India, North America, and Australasia. The geopolitics of empire pulled in subjects from diverse colonies of the great powers: Indian recruits to the British war effort, Central Asian Muslims conscripted into Russian labor battalions, Senegalese troops and porters and Vietnamese coolies among the French forces on the Western Front,

indigenous people forced to fight one another by their German, French, and British imperial overlords in the struggle over German colonies in Africa, and so on. The war also involved troops from Canada, Australia, New Zealand – and ultimately, the United States. But the intensity of fighting and the oceans of blood were concentrated most heavily on the European continent, and its cultural impact may have been even greater there than elsewhere.

Since the bulk of the historiography is fixated on the Western Front and on the major powers, in this book we sought balance by including as much as possible the "small nations" of East Central Europe that are so often marginalized in general histories. We examine, therefore, not only the understudied countries of the Balkans and some of the peoples of the Habsburg and Romanov empires, but also the dispersed people who played such a prominent and distinct role in the cultural life of Central and Eastern Europe – the Jews. The cultural as well as physical experience in this great sweep of territory between the Baltic and Aegean Seas was complicated by alien occupation, among other things. In the West, only Belgium found the majority of its territory, including its capital, under foreign occupation. Small areas of northeastern France, northern Italy, eastern Galicia and Bukovina, and, briefly, German East Prussia were invaded and/or occupied during the conflict; but the residents of Berlin, Paris, London, Rome, Vienna, and Budapest knew nothing of the rigors of occupation that were experienced by Warsaw, Belgrade, or Bucharest (all of which fell into Central Power hands in the course of the war and remained occupied by Germany and Austria-Hungary until the war's end). Vast stretches of land whose names sound so poetic in English – Bukovina, Galicia, Dobrudja, Lithuania, White Ruthenia (as the Germans called Belarus) – were scenes of raging battles as well as foreign rule. The chapters in this volume vividly evoke the kaleidoscopic nature of cultural colonialism, collaboration, and resistance in Belgium, the Ober Ost (German-occupied Lithuania and northeastern Poland), Poland, Galicia, Romania, Macedonia, and the southern Slav lands. A striking feature of occupation policies in the East was the occupiers' obsession with ethnographic, statistical, and other forms of local study of the conquered populations.

It is the word "culture," of course, that generates so many conceptual problems. Some cultural historians, for understandable reasons, focus primarily on the role of intellectuals, with a particular emphasis for the World War I era on their political thought, national consciousness, and racial fantasies. Literary scholars, out of habit, often equate culture with *belles lettres*. And, curiously enough, historians of art, music, and theater have seldom entered or been invited into the broader historical discourse.

Anthropologists, on the other hand – though differing greatly among themselves – have a much wider notion of culture which embraces not only the familiar arenas of kinship, ritual, symbolic language, and religious behavior, but also what some of them call "crystallized culture": the artifacts and products of a given society. In designing this volume, the editors did not wish to exclude the familiar: propaganda in various media, political moods and attitudes, or well-known fiction. But, in order to emphasize what has usually been neglected in the study of wartime culture, we have tried to correct the imbalance on two fronts: first, by including prominently all the arts alongside discussions of literature; second, by enlarging the notion of the arts to include what is called "mass culture" or "popular culture," however it is produced and consumed and whether it comes from inside or outside a given society. Thus, we are concerned with the cultural experience and expression of people, and not just forms of creativity that were invested with the status of "national art."

It is also our hope that this book will contribute to bridging the gap between political/diplomatic and cultural history. Recent work in cultural history has bravely attempted to demonstrate the importance of expressive life – producing and enjoying art, culture, entertainment – in human experience. Unlike older modes of incorporating culture into history (by means of a selective addition of pages and chapters on "literature and the arts"), the newer work has broadened the understanding of the word culture to include folk and urban popular culture; and it has also expanded the utility of that study by linking culture to wider social impulses and values and examining relationships among cultural communities and creators. World War I is an ideal framework for a comparative analysis of such relationships, given that the attempted total mobilization of society, the cooptation of artists into the propaganda effort, the recent emergence of film and other media technologies, and the immersion of many writers and artists in the trench experience all served to make it a turning point in the development of new cultural syntheses.

In diplomatic history, the most interesting recent work has gone well beyond the realm of "what one clerk wrote another" to explore the interconnections among domestic politics, political culture, ideology, and international relations. Crystallized culture has rarely found its way into the analysis of international history. Yet, in time of war, emotions and popular impulses play a great role in the domestic and battlefield efforts of belligerent populations; and much of this emotion is evoked through the use of both formal propaganda, with its relatively direct messages, and the more subtle or indirect approaches of the cultural community at

all aesthetic levels: opera, film, spy fiction, theater, spectacle, war novels, graphic art – to name a few. These works of art and artifice feed into the political culture that takes shape in wartime (though almost always grounded in traditions of the pre-war period). And, we must add, they are interesting for their own sake and for their role in the history of art and culture and in the parallel history of social communication.

The convergence of our interests has led us to this project, which is conceived of as an occasion to spur the development of interdisciplinary approaches to history and to highlight the complex web of relations between cultural and political history. We strongly believe that a synchronic approach – which to some minds would imply comparing the incomparable in terms of levels of cultural development – is precisely the one that will allow students and scholars to look at the face of Europe in the 1910s and beyond in a novel way.

In this collection there was no possibility and no intention of imposing uniformity. Contributors have rightly stressed what they see as crucial for their particular case. And the result has been, we believe, a healthy variety. The volume clearly demonstrates what most students would already have surmised about the cultural life of a four-year period in a continent like Europe: namely, that this book might very well have been titled "European Cultures in the Great War." Yet the differences among the experiences of various social and national groups are at least as fascinating as the similarities. This volume is meant, therefore, not only to fill in the missing pieces or complete the record – worthy as that aim may be – but also to sharpen and extend the comparative insights that we have already derived from those histories of the war that focus on combat, occupation politics, the economic sinews of warfare, manpower, hardware, and all the rest.

To be sure, the geographical scope of this volume comes at a price, and we are well aware of the many lacunae in this study. The chapters in this collection focus, of necessity, on a small selection out of the vast array of possible topics for each nation. The general paucity of sources on wartime peasant culture leads to a disproportionately heavy emphasis on urban life in these pages. Much to our regret, we were unable to convince any scholars of Greek or Turkish history to participate in this venture, and those countries have therefore been left out. Our very decision to arrange the book by ethnic groups and nation-states could be challenged as arbitrary. It is our opinion that such an organizational scheme does make sense in so far as – particularly under twentieth-century conditions – shared language and shared political institutions create common media of inter-class communication (and miscommunication) and form common hindrances to relations with people across

the political and/or ethno-linguistic divide. It would also be very difficult to explore the connections between wartime politics and culture without taking into account the central role that political-territorial and ethno-national categories played in mediating many people's experience of the war, particularly in the urban settings that form the primary focus of this book. But this should not be taken to mean that we are adopting an essentialist view of nationhood or that we uncritically take it for granted that all members of a given ethnic group necessarily had more in common with each other than with anyone else. On the contrary, two of the themes that interest us are how conceptions of nationhood evolved under the impact of the war, and to what extent patterns of cultural development cut across political frontiers.

In brief, this book should be seen as but an initial step in the direction of a synoptic cultural history of Europe during the Great War. It is our hope that the volume will stimulate other scholars to cross traditional analytical and disciplinary boundaries in their pursuit of historical understanding.