***The Great War,* The Waste Land *and the Modernist Long Poem*. Oliver Tearle. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. Pp. 208 (cloth).**

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If modernist poetry sometimes seems to have been an exercise in the dismantling of genre, it also developed its own genres, with their own characteristic themes and forms, modes of distribution, and habits of interpretation. In this engaging, learned study, Oliver Tearle takes for his subject what he calls a "miniature genre-within-a-genre,"[1] the modernist long poem, and he seeks to explore the relation of this genre to the Great War. The task of his book, then, is to establish a significant relationship between genre and representation.

By "modernist long poem," Tearle does not mean works like Ezra Pound's *Cantos* or H. D.'s *Trilogy*. Tearle's six case studies are long, but not too long: Hope Mirrlees's *Paris*, Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Eliot's "The Hollow Men," Richard Aldington's *A Fool i' the Forest*, and Nancy Cunard's *Parallax*. For Tearle, the history of this "micro-genre" (33) is "so little known as to be almost a secret history" (1). If this is true, it is partly because Tearle constructs his genre in so particular a fashion. Nevertheless, his selection of poems is strong, ranging from the long canonical to the long marginalised. One of Tearle's primary aims is to show that bringing the familiar and the unfamiliar together in this way, under a generic rubric, newly illuminates both.

How real is this genre, and what sort of genre is it? It is important to Tearle that his modernist long poems can be viewed as single poems, rather than as sequences of discrete poems (68). Mina Loy's "Love Songs to Joannes," for instance, is not a modernist long poem as Tearle understands it. It helps if the work was published as a book in its own right (62), though "The Hollow Men" is an exception to this rule. The poets in question are either British or, as was the case for Pound and Eliot, living in Britain at the time of writing. Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams do not qualify. Perhaps the poet's age is a factor, too. Tearle never mentions W. B. Yeats's "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," though it certainly responds to the Great War and though its six sections are in total some thirty lines

[1] Oliver Tearle, *The Great War,* The Waste Land *and the Modernist Long Poem* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 33. Subsequent references cited parenthetically.

longer than the five sections of "The Hollow Men". Summing up what *Paris*, *The Waste Land*, and, by implication, his other chosen poems have in common, Tearle remarks at one point that each is a "long poem containing classical and modern parallels and utilizing literary allusion" (43). But more important than formal criteria, publication history, or the nationality and age of the poet, is the history of influence, collaboration, and rivalry which generated Tearle's micro-genre—or, we might say, micro-tradition. Many critics have speculated as to whether *The Waste Land* was influenced by *Paris*, but it is clear that Eliot's poem benefited from the example of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, as well as from Pound's editing, and it is clear in turn that "The Hollow Men," *A Fool i' the Forest*, and *Parallax* all engage actively with *The Waste Land*. In contrast, because Loy's *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* does not, it falls beyond the book's scope (22-3). Tearle's conception of genre is historicist, then; he is interested in tracing the history of a genre in the making.

In the course of his readings, Tearle touches on many other poems, more or less long and more or less modernist, from Lola Ridge's "The Ghetto" and Ford Madox Ford's "Antwerp" to H. R. Barbor's "Subjective Odyssey" and May Sinclair's *The Dark Night*. But his major case studies are distinguished by some form of "dialogue" (23) with *The Waste Land*, which thus becomes the fulcrum of this micro-genre. There is an historical truth to this, insofar as Eliot's poem was widely read upon publication and rapidly canonised. In contrast, though it may well be that "Mirrlees's poem seems to outstrip even Eliot's in terms of its determination to push the boundaries of creative expression into new and daring territory" (8-9), it had no comparable influence on other modernists, not least because so few copies of the first edition were published, because it received so few reviews, and because Mirrlees refused to republish it for over fifty years. This history does complicate Tearle's desire to expand and to reconfigure the canon. Tearle sometimes defends the legitimacy and worth of Mirrlees's, Aldington's, and Cunard's poems by emphasising their differences from *The Waste Land*, and yet even in this Eliot's poem maintains a kind of centrality. This is not a dilemma unique to Tearle's project, of course; it is common to many attempts to revise canons.

Tearle is careful to read *Paris* "not simply as a precursor to Eliot's poem but also as an important post-war modernist long poem in its own right, which vividly

captures the fragmented consciousness which the war had partly brought about" (7). This is Tearle's other major concern: the aftermath of the Great War. His book thus seeks to correlate a generic history with a profound and widespread collective trauma. The question is what the modernist long poem, as Tearle conceives it, had to say about this experience which other kinds of poem, be it a lyric or an epic, could not. In tracing an arc from 1920, the year of *Paris* and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, to 1925, the year of "The Hollow Men," *A Fool i' the Forest*, and *Parallax*, Tearle argues that the modernist long poem moved "from a cry of despair in the immediate wake of the Great War to a creative critique of the first wave of modernist long poems" (6). The book is at its best when representation and generic history are shown mutually to inform each other. In what may be Tearle's most successful chapter, he demonstrates how *A Fool i' the Forest* responds, not to the war in and of itself, but to Eliot's "vision of post-war modernity" (136). The poetic agon thus becomes the mechanism for a new reflection on and response to that post-war condition.

In similar fashion, Tearle calls *Parallax* "as much a response to Eliot's response to the war as it is a response to the war itself" (155), and he claims that the trope of cannibalism in "The Hollow Men" both registers a fear about the breakdown of civilization and "reinforces the cannibalistic nature of Eliot's work at this time, which feeds on some of his other poems" (130). But it is remarkable how little the war features in Tearle's chapter on "The Hollow Men"; instead the chapter focuses squarely on processes of revisiting and repetition. The analysis is strong, but Tearle's selection of the poem thus seems determined almost wholly by its dialogue with *The Waste Land*. As a consequence, and despite the book's apparent project, representation and generic history part ways.

This is perhaps an inevitable result of the project's ambition, and comparable issues arise throughout the book. One of Tearle's primary arguments is that the modernist long poem develops a technique which he names "homorhyme," by which he means the repetition of a word or phrase at the end of lines or, less often, the end of phrases. (The established term *epistrophe* may have sufficed.) *The Waste Land* features striking examples:

> "What are you thinking of? What thinking? Think.
> I never know what you are thinking. Think."[2]

Such moments, Tearle argues,

> take the idea of the (mock-)heroic couplet and imbue it with a quality which at once disrupt[s] the notion of conventional rhyme […] and reflect[s] the sense of mental deadlock and physical stasis which afflicts so many speakers of the poem. (104)

This mimetic understanding of poetic form is crucial to Tearle's close readings: time and again homorhyme is said to capture the experience of the war or its aftermath. The repetition of "drowning" at the end of two lines in Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est" is said "perfectly" to convey "the helpless experience of suffocating, or watching somebody be suffocated, by poison gas" (33). "Dulce et Decorum Est" is not a modernist long poem, however, and Tearle is careful not to argue that homorhyme is unique to his micro-genre; his first chapter introduces the technique through readings of Owen, Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, and T. E. Hulme. But nor is it even the case that Tearle's six case studies themselves all feature homorhyme, for his discussions of *Paris* and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* never mention it. Just as the war all but disappears from the chapter on "The Hollow Men," what had seemed to be the modernist long poem's chief technique, a nexus of genre and representation, disappears from the chapters on Mirrlees and Pound.

A similar issue complicates Tearle's argument about the figure of the classical hero and, in particular, of Odysseus. It seems reasonable to think that substantial works reflecting on the Great War and its aftermath would be likely to critique inherited ideas of the hero, and this is clearly the case in the poems of Pound and Aldington, who, not long after writing *A Fool i' the Forest*, wrote a war novel titled *The Death of a Hero*. At the same time, as Tearle reminds us, Pound, Eliot, and many other modernists were profoundly influenced by James Joyce's reinvention of the *Odyssey* and its hero in *Ulysses* and Leopold Bloom. Partly through analyses of Eliot's manuscript drafts, Tearle works hard to prove "the

[2] T. S. Eliot, *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, 2nd edn, ed. Lawrence Rainey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 60.

extent to which the Homeric archetype of Odysseus inhabits *The Waste Land*, a flickering figure on the margins of Eliot's poem" (92). (To what extent, exactly, is a flicker on the margins a major and informing presence?) But the motif of the classical hero, whether Homeric or Joycean, disappears almost completely from the chapters on "The Hollow Men" and *Parallax*. In sum, all six case studies belong here, but they do not all belong for the same reasons.

The result is an argument which proceeds tactically, emphasising this feature here and that feature there, in order to establish both a tradition of the modernist long poem and that genre's significant relationship with the post-war condition. If the process sometimes seems uneven or inconsistent, it might instead be construed as flexible or even supple. Regardless, the book's principle virtue lies in devoting as much careful attention to forgotten as familiar poems. The motif of the classical hero, the use of homorhyme, self-conscious intertextuality, the struggle to represent the trauma of war—all are important facets of poetry at this time. It may be that a more theoretical approach to questions of genre, form, history, and intertextuality would have helped to tighten the argument, but one of the book's genuine merits is that it discovers frameworks for interpretation in the poems themselves. Though Tearle's analyses are sometimes leisurely, his style is always lucid. His conclusions can on occasion be underwhelming and he is unafraid to work through well-known details and well-accepted ideas, especially when reading Eliot's and Pound's poems, but his book provides an excellent introduction to all six poems. If at first this seems most valuable when it comes to *Paris*, *A Fool i' the Forest*, and *Parallax*, the whole is yet greater than the parts, for the book offers a rich and compelling picture of modernist poetry in the decade after the Great War.