

in a mining community, the daughter of a doctor who dealt with mining accidents and diseases. She undertook a great deal of 'sleuthing' into various archives on the writing of the Coombes autobiography and says she has rewritten her account of it several times. She argues that Coombes, in the light of the drafting of *These poor hands* (1939), other tellings and archive materials (e.g., letters), can be shown to have regarded his life as a 'highly malleable commodity'. There was his perception of an intended, receptive (middle class) audience with an its expectation of a 'factual' account of the miner's life and his conscious self-portraiture as the 'naive' working miner. She then details the complicated communication between Coombes and the publisher, how the autobiography emerged (with a request for significant changes in content and a degree of replacement 'fictionalization'), while noting that the Gollancz Left Book Club's had its own purposes within the surrounding socio-political climate.

The particular approach by Prys-Williams, in using Freud, Bowlby and Jung in the interpretation of the sense of self as revealed in autobiographical writing, is certainly of interpretive interest and provides a highly readable and detailed investigation. But, it will not suit those wary of 'applying' such a powerful conceptual apparatus. The references to Eakin and Lejeune (and others) perhaps could have been expanded alongside other exciting recent developments in auto/biographical interpretation. However, the psychoanalytic approach is broadened by Prys-Williams with an intent to show how her writers undertook an important 'class positioning' in the formation of their identities, while noting the 'historical forces' that are significant in 'shaping achieved identity'. It seems, in addition, that for many of the subjects, the landscape of Wales was an important aspect of their lives, while (at least for some) the 'particular idiosyncrasies of their bodies have contributed to their sense of self' (p. 7). For, Prys-Williams, the autobiographies chosen inspired her 'through the personal meanings they have found in the self and the history that shaped it'.

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WOMEN EXPERIENCING WAR

Women's autobiography: war and trauma, Victoria Stewart, 2003. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan; ISBN 1403903069, 204 pp., £47.50 cloth.

Victoria Stewart's engagingly written book is a welcome addition to the growing literature on the long-term effects of war trauma on people's

lives. It deals specifically with the neglected subject of women's experience of war through comparing and contrasting the accounts of some well-known and not so well-known women writers. Because they have been for the most part non-combatants, women's experience of war has not received the same attention as that of men. Moreover the 'all or nothing' nature of medical diagnosis has meant that the category of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), although increasingly used, has not been applied to the chronic distress and disturbance felt by women civilians under bombardment, occupation and waiting in suspense for news of family members on military service, not to mention the effects of prolonged imprisonment and torture. Yet, clearly, the effects on women's lives of this prolonged suffering are long lasting. PTSD is a relatively new term – one that only entered psychiatric classification after the US war against Vietnam – although it refers to a phenomenon that has been recognized at least since the ancient Greeks. In the First World War the common expression for it was 'shell shock', but it was poorly understood and even more poorly treated. Women's experience of duress, powerlessness and incarceration during wartime has taken even longer to achieve the recognition it deserves.

Victoria Stewart's book examines in succession the writings of the following: Victoria Brittain, for whom the experiences of loss in the Great War acted as a catalyst for her pacifist activities in the years leading up to and through the Second World War; Virginia Woolf, whose creative life was also affected in major ways by the First World War and who committed suicide in 1941, partly it seems in response to her distress at the destruction she now saw being wreaked on a wider scale by the Second World War; Anne Frank, the young Dutch girl in hiding, who became the most famous diarist of the Holocaust of European Jews; and Charlotte Delbo, who wrote the autobiographical trilogy *Auschwitz and after*. Stewart ends her book with a consideration of the writings of three daughters of separate Holocaust survivors. Although their experience of trauma is second hand, consideration of their work leads to further important questions about the transmission of trauma between generations and the nature of memorialization. All the texts are closely examined and acute observations made about each author. Stewart demonstrates the superficiality of regarding autobiographical writing as a process in which the self is healed from the disturbance it has suffered. This model makes a number of false assumptions, including most importantly that a coherent subjectivity exists prior to the disturbance or even if it does that its retrieval is desirable. For none of the women discussed in this book does writing have this simple restorative character. Indeed an analysis of these authors leads Stewart to question not only such approaches to autobiography but also 'socially and culturally established forms of mourning and memorialization' (p. 170).

The complexity of the issues is well illustrated by contrasting the first two writers discussed. Brittain and Woolf knew each other's work. The latter regarded the former's *Testament of Youth* as 'a very good book of its sort. The new sort, the hard anguished sort, that the young write; that I could never write' (cited p. 58). Virginia Woolf's aesthetic of war was quite different. For Vera Brittain, Woolf's suicide was 'a deliberate protest against the sorry situation to which war has brought literature and its exponents'. But, as Stewart makes clear, to regard Woolf's death, as Brittain did, 'as more meaningful than her writings could ever be' is to fail to properly appreciate Woolf's response to war in her writings. The impact was less direct than in the case of Brittain, but certainly as profound. She predicted that the second war would involve a repetition and intensification of what had already been endured. For her the first and second wars were part of the same continuing conflict. She could be scathing of men's responses to war, even to the disregard for his family that her nephew showed in volunteering to serve as an ambulance driver for the civil war in Spain. To go to war to preserve civilization revealed the violent basis of that civilization. At the same time she was aware of other forms of masculine attitudes, as in the portrayal of the shell-shocked Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Vera Brittain's diaries and novels have been the subject of intensive psychobiographical analysis most notably by Abigail Stewart and colleagues at the University of Michigan. These analyses demonstrate the profound identity crisis into which the deaths of her fiancée, brother and other close friends in the first war led Brittain. She abandoned her studies at Oxford and became a nurse. But she was able to reconstruct, mainly because she never lost, the image of these men as heroic. Separating out the nobility of the ideals from such a dehumanizing conflict was not possible for Woolf. Her verdict on western civilization could not have been more damning: 'Nor is it strange that the foundation of European civilisation should be the "Iliad". For in a sense hardly any Europeans have ever been civilised, the Greeks least of all' (cited p. 66). Brittain did believe in writing as a means of catharsis, but the close analysis of her writings that both Stewarts provide show the never-ending struggle with her sense of self that war had brought her. Brittain herself creates in her fictional work examples of more effective means of closure and moving on from loss.

The substantial introductory chapter to the book provides a most interesting discussion of the term 'trauma' in relation to autobiography. Victoria Stewart reinforces Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma as that which 'is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known' (cited p. 9). This book succeeds in its objective of presenting how these very different women wrote about how their lives had been changed by the

trauma of war. Its major conclusion that reuniting the past and present selves is not achievable in any simple way is important for those engaged in therapeutic work as well as for literary theorists to consider.

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SETTING AN IMPORTANT AND POSITIVE TONE

Citizenship: personal lives and social policy. Gail Lewis, editor, 2004. Milton Keynes and Bristol: Open University and Polity Press; ISBN 1861345216, 184 pp., £17.99 paper.

In the spirit of being ‘Open to people, places, methods and ideas’, the Open University with this book has again confirmed its commitment to this ethos by its responsiveness to an urgent and growing lacuna in the third-level social policy and politics curriculum: the presence and experience of the ‘user’ in social care provision. *Citizenship: personal lives and social policy* – one of four core texts in the Open University course *Personal lives and social policy* – represents a bold initiative to ‘explore the relationship between personal lives and social policy’ through the ‘lens’ of citizenship, using what the authors commonly refer to as ‘personal lives’ research methods. In an area of scholarship that has lately been dominated by the macro-theoretical and quantitative influence of globalization and the international patterning of ‘race’, gender and migration to map subsequent changes to national identities and the systematic transformation of the welfare state, this book represents a welcome shift of critical attention back onto the level of the personal and the domain of lived, everyday life. Overall, it marks an auspicious moment in life narrative research with respect to its penetration into the wider field of social and political theory and praxis.

Divided into four main sections, the authors use the ‘personal lives’ approach to explore and contest the discourses of entitlement and belonging through a variety of policy initiatives that have collectively determined rights to housing, education and asylum in the UK since the Second World War. Among the laudable aspects of this book is its reflexive immediacy in implementing its own designated objective. Straightaway in Chapter 1, entitled “‘Do not go gently’...”, editor Gail Lewis introduces the reader to the complex and mutually constitutive terrain of social provision and personal need by recounting an episode from her own life history. Related in a manner that is at once deeply personal and yet integral to the aim of the book, Lewis successfully draws critical attention to the inter-subjective dynamics of ‘race’, sexuality, home and intergenerational