

paign to integrate southern territories into the Yugoslav state, as well as the ideological and national conflict between veterans and a younger generation which had not seen active service. As Newman persuasively argues, the culture of commemoration failed to construct a shared Yugoslav identity among veterans, and hence the wider population, since the celebration of the Serbian army's victories in the First World War was inevitably perceived as delegitimizing those who had fought on the other side of the barricade.

Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War is extremely effective at explaining the complexities and ambiguities of veteran associations and the state's culture of commemoration, drawing on a wide range of archival and printed primary sources. Despite the extensive research and wide-ranging discussion, however, I do have some reservations. First, while the legacy of the war and the status of veterans clearly played a role in the unmaking of the Yugoslav state, it is not clear how important, in the long-term, that role was. As Newman concedes, many of the radical ideological organizations established by veterans enjoyed marginal support and their connection to the veteran generation was often tenuous. While the book correctly argues that the story of veterans in the first Yugoslavia has wider European resonance, it lacks a meaningful comparative framework. Additionally, although the author approvingly cites the work of a number of cultural historians of the 1914–1918 period, those expecting a cultural history will be disappointed. Brief references are made to veteran novels and poems but with one or two exceptions they are neither cited nor analyzed. Nor are the diaries or letters of veterans utilized so the reader gains relatively little sense of “the human factor” of veterans and their status as “active historical agents” (4). Instead, the study frequently falls uncomfortably between political and social history rather than being genuinely interdisciplinary. Finally, for a book which discusses the cultural politics of war commemoration, the absence of photographs or illustrations is disappointing, while the number of typographic errors is far too high. With these caveats, though, *Yugoslavia in the Shadow of War* makes an important and nuanced contribution to the history of war commemoration, veterans, and nation building in interwar southeastern Europe even if it is never quite the sum of its parts.

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Art and Life in Modernist Prague, Karel Čapek and His Generation, 1911–1938. By

Thomas Ort. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. xiv, 258 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Illustrations. Photos. Figures. \$95.00, hard bound.

Thomas Ort introduces his study of modernist Prague by contrasting it with the gloomy picture of the Habsburg Empire's terminal years that emerges from contemporary historians focusing on Vienna. Peter Hanak's *The Garden and the Workshop: Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest* (Princeton, 1998), is an authoritative example. The essays draw an indelible image of a culture of narcissistic withdrawal from social life, a nervous splendor with a fatal attraction for the escapist fantasy of protofascism.

From his observatory in Bohemia, Ort counters: “This book tells a different story” (1). He argues that in the decades preceding the Great War, Prague stood out by its cultural vitality, developing in *pari passu* with the growth of a vigorous middle class, both Czech and German. Yet, an undertow of ambivalence exists in Ort's description of the unique cultural space that was Czechoslovakia after the collapse of Austria-

Hungary. He points out that, as the sole functioning democracy to emerge from the Habsburg Empire, Czechoslovakia also had “the dubious distinction as ethnically the least homogeneous of all the new states of Europe” (6). The witty comment that follows seems etched in acid as Ort calls Masaryk’s republic “in certain respects, Kania in microcosm” (6).

Not quite. Ort’s report on the ethnic tally from the census of 1921 does not tell the whole story. Czechs and Slovaks together comprised 65% of the country, followed by Germans at 23%, with the remainder divided between small ethnic minorities of Hungarians, Ruthenians, Poles and Jews. Only in his conclusion does Ort note that the census was based on linguistic allegiance, a matter of choice not exclusively determined by heredity. Since the new republic established religious freedom as a constitutionally guaranteed right, Jewish identity was fluid. Franz Kafka wrote his letters to Milena Jesenská in German, but asked her to reply in her native Czech, the language of Božena Němcová. My disagreement with Ort stems from his treatment of Czechoslovakia solely as a successor to the Habsburg empire, while ignoring the perspective of its founders, who framed their claim to national independence as a restoration of the autonomous existence of the Kingdom of Bohemia.

The core of Ort’s study is the imaginative chapter on Cubism in Prague, leading with the seminal exhibits of 1911 and 1912, which took the city by storm. By 1914, Prague had staged five exhibits, all of them organized by the Čapek brothers, Karel and Josef. Young Czech painters and architects displayed their work alongside the famous Parisian masters such as Braque, Juan Gris and Picasso. Ort is particularly perceptive in assessing the role played by the symbiotic creativity of the two brothers. Josef, the articulate painter, admired the intellectually playful aspects of Cubism while the writer Karel was drawn to the cubist experiments with form, which created a mobile order of multiple perspectives by breaking down the single flat plane on the canvas.

Ort notes that the Čapek generation overlapped with the German generation of 1905, which includes the two great novelists, Thomas Mann and Robert Musil, with whom the Čapek brothers interacted. With their fundamentally skeptical posture and dislike of intellectual regimentation, neither of the two Čapeks was at ease with the peremptory rhetoric of the young avant-garde of the 1920s. The core group meeting in the café Slavia chose the collective name of *Devětsil*, which Ort translates as the plant butterbur. The initiates and soon most of Prague’s cultural elite understood it as an allusion to the Nine Muses, signifying the ambition to renew and cross-fertilize all artistic modes of expression, from poetry to all the visual arts including architecture, the lively arts and the art of dramatic staging. Because of his exceptional versatility, Ort identifies Karel Teige (1900–1951) as the theoretical leader of the group. Trained as an architect, Teige wrote the manifesto of the literary movement of *Poetismus* (1924) and built a bridge to poetry with his seminal categories of *stavba a basen* (construction and poem). In my judgment, the most lasting achievements of the movement belong to the poets. They received from Karel Čapek the transformational gift of his translations of the poets of French modernity. Čapek’s range and linguistic virtuosity commanded a variety of styles and voices, ranging from Baudelaire to Rimbaud and Lautreamont to Apollinaire, whose lyrical persona as “the walker of Prague” would become integral to Vítězslav Nezval’s founding myth of Czech Surrealism.

In his last chapter, Ort delivers a paradoxical judgment on the historical fate of Czechoslovakia. He argues that the small multiethnic nation-state that was destroyed by invasion from outside also carried the genetic code of its demise from within. Turning to Čapek’s novel *An Ordinary Life* (1933–1934), the story of a Czech man born in Bohemia in 1864 and married to a German wife, Ort weaves in the motif of the empty self and the metaphor of the train from Musil’s retrospectively nostalgic essay on

Kakania. In Čapek's narrative of the long life of a cultured railway official, the transition from the old empire he served and the new republic he welcomed was seemingly successful. In the early 1930's as an aging man seeking to recount his life, he discovers an empty, invisible space within himself. Looking outside of himself from the moving train of time, he cannot find his way back home.

The political crisis in Czechoslovakia exploded in the parliamentary elections of 1935. With Hitler now Chancellor of Germany, the *Sudeten Deutsche Partei* won a plurality of the votes and the Czechoslovak Agrarians who ran a close second managed to eke out a single vote majority. Ort cites the participation of Czechoslovak fascists but names no names. In the arena of history, the consequences of the fatal *mesalliance* between Czechs and Germans were brutal. In the conclusion, Ort steadies his gaze on the Čapek brothers in the cynosure of national tragedy, pathos vaults over situational ironies. Karel died of pneumonia on December 25, 1938, knowing that his world had died. Josef survived him to be picked up by the Gestapo on the first day of the war. His remains have not been separated from the ossuary at Auschwitz.

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The Czech Avant-Garde Literary Movement Between the World Wars. By Thomas G. Winner. Ondřej Sládek & Michael Heim, Eds. New York: Peter Lang, 2015. v, 200 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Illustrations. \$77.19, hard bound.

The late Thomas Winner's study is a welcome addition to a growing body of critical studies on modern Czech literature in English. One could see it as a sequel to Thomas Ort's 2013 *Art and Life in Modernist Prague*. While both books cover roughly the same historical period, Ort is concerned with the Karel Čapek generation rallying under the banner of Cubism, while Winner deals with the seminal writer only in his "Prologue" subtitled "The Antecedents." Indeed, Čapek's translations of Apollinaire, Vildrac, and others, collected in 1920 as *French Poetry of the New*, are justifiably seen as the chief inspirational source for the bold verse experiments of the poets coming after him. Besides Čapek, Winner also comments on "the pioneering role of S. K. Neumann" (20), whose political radicalism had a direct bearing on the rise of Czech proletarian poetry in the early 1920s.

"The most important representative" of this movement, Winner continues, was Jiří Wolker, a consumptive youth who died "at the age of twenty four" (44). Despite their author's untimely demise, his ballads continued to exercise a magic spell over many generations of poetry lovers because of Wolker's disarmingly naïve lyricism that was capable of tempering his poems' hard-shell ideological message. The revolutionary politics and aesthetics coalesced in the most important Czech avant-garde group with an evocative botanic name *Devětsil* (*Tussilago farfara* in Latin). Led by the theoretician, Karel Teige, it brought together young iconoclasts across arts. And it was Teige who by gradually modifying his initial aesthetic program, launched in 1924 the first made-in-Czechoslovakia -ism: Poetism—the synthetic art for all five senses.

The middle three chapters of the book focus on a trio of the most outstanding writers of *Devětsil*: the poets Vítězslav Nezval, Jaroslav Seifert, and the prosaist Vladislav Vančura. Meticulously, Winner goes through all major Nezval's Poetist texts paying special attention to the poems *The Acrobat* and *Edison*. The former, Winner argues, "may be read as a meta-poem commenting on the nature of poetry and Poetistic poetics" (87). The latter, extolling Edison's genius, is striking because of its musical quality achieved not only through the phonic instrumentation but also