

James, Pearl. *The New Death. American Modernism and World War I*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2013. 272 pages. ISBN: 978-0-8139-3408-2. \$29.50

How can death be “New,” one might wonder, and why should “Death” and “New” be spelt with capital letters? Pearl James makes a strong case for both features in her complex but exciting study. By “New Death” she means the unprecedented and shocking scale of death caused by World War One, and the new and intense thoughts of death as well as naked intimacy with facts formerly avoided in earlier accounts of the War. Exploring the relationship between traumatic death and modernism in post-war novels, James identifies a number of paradoxes, including the denial but also sanctification of death, the need for and yet disbelief in heroism, and civilians’ curiosity about the unpleasantness and menacing nature of death and their reluctance to understand it. These paradoxes point to the rupture with the past—the very core of modernism—that the War brought about. It became increasingly clear that the future, whatever it held in store, would be very different.

The cultural meaning of death, argues James, was changed by the War. To understand this properly, we must return to American writing after the War. It was novelists like Willa Cather, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and William Faulkner who were responding to the major problem that emerged from the cultural experience of World War One: how was it possible to represent in narrative form the horror of young men’s death on such a mass scale (Americans had not dealt with issues of death and burial on such a scale since the Civil War)? Modernist writers solved the problem by relocating aspects of modernity and violence to either female actors or female victims, or by representing the horror of bodily disappearance as the *absence* of witnessing death. The novels bear witness to the fact that the War had disrupted people’s ability to prepare for, witness and ritualize death in the form of death-bed attendance, funerals and burials. In order to mourn, it is necessary to confront evidence and name the deceased.

Male veterans returning to the home front were wounded by New Death as they discovered that civilians, and particularly women, were unable to witness their pain. New Death happens primarily to and/or because of women, argues James.

She invites us to draw parallels with modernists’ representations of war and our own accounts of World War One. She argues that there is a need to broaden the consideration of texts that respond to World War One’s “New

Death.” Recent contributions to the fields of cultural studies, for example, as well as memory and violence studies, have given us new ways of measuring how Americans “experienced, thought about and represented that war” (202). James claims that “our new and developing understanding of war and its pain” (202) will enable us to better understand the works and contributions of modernist writers. Popular genres such as the American post-World War One detective story, she concludes, and “the corpses they portray recall, in both inexact and gruesome ways, the unfinished business of New Death” (206).

The New Death is thus a beginning and not an end: a challenge to re-think how death, trauma and memory have been portrayed in relation to the events and losses of World War One. American detective writers like Charles Todd—in his two series about Ian Rutledge and Bess Crawford—have already taken up the challenge. It is to be hoped that there will be more like these!

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Clive Bush Presents the Best of Clive Bush

Bush, Clive. *Holding the Line: Selected Essays in American Literature and Culture*. American Studies: Culture, Society and the Arts. Volume 1. Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2009. XXIV, 352 pages: ISBN 978-3-03911-571-6. soft-cover \$76.95

This collection of selected essays by Clive Bush was published in 2009 by Peter Lang. *Holding the Line* officially opened the publisher’s series on American Studies: Culture, Society and the Arts, although judging by the dates of publication of the other titles in the series, as specified by the publisher on the website, it is actually the 4th book in the series. Moreover, the essays included in this volume are much older than the date of publication would suggest: some of them were written as early as in the beginning of the 1970s and most of them in the 1990s. Only one essay and the introduction to the book were written in 2000s. All the texts collected in this volume have been published before in places such as Aarhus, Cambridge, London, Budapest and New York, both in scientific journals and books. They form a large part of the total scholarly output of the author, which we learn from the bibliography included in the volume. Therefore, *Holding the Line* constitutes a selection of Clive Bush’s best essays.

The volume revolves around classic American literature, commodity cul-