



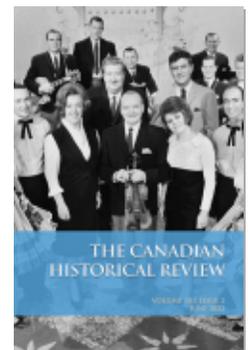
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Trauma, Primitivism and The First World War: The Making of Frank Prewett by Joy Porter (review)

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The Canadian Historical Review, Volume 103, Issue 2, June 2022, pp. 334-335 (Article)

Published by University of Toronto Press



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of the many important themes revealed by this wide-ranging prosopographical work.

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Trauma, Primitivism and The First World War: The Making of Frank Prewett. Joy Porter. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. Pp. xii + 289, \$115.00 cloth

Born near Kenilworth, Ontario, Frank Prewett (1893–1962) studied at the University of Toronto before serving in the British Expeditionary Force in France where, in 1918, he was buried alive in a collapsed trench. Somehow, he dug himself out, his lungs crushed and his tongue blue, but was never the same again, suffering shell shock and ill-health for the rest of his life. Prewett is best known as a war poet, wrestling with topics of trauma, violence, and dissociation.

In the first half of Joy Porter's fascinating monograph, Frank Prewett remains elusive. Before approaching his biography and his poetry, Porter works through a number of micro-histories, including the history of shell shock, a discussion of primitivism as an outgrowth of late nineteenth-century anthropological studies, and a "long overdue" reconsideration of Dr W.H.R. Rivers who pioneered the treatment of shell shock (69). This careful setting up of Prewett is both confirmation of the massive, interdisciplinary field of First World War studies and a signal of Porter's animating concern with the issue of identity – in particular, the implications of Prewett's repeated false claims to Indigeneity. Importantly, Porter's key inquiry into "how combat-induced trauma caused someone to present himself as Indigenous" (5) is not treated as a historical puzzle to be solved but, rather, as a framework for interrogating the multiple benefits that accrued from the aestheticization and fetishization of Indigeneity, especially against the context of post-First World War anxiousness about modernity and the collapse of the British Empire. Further, while Porter's research is focused on overlapping early twentieth-century discourses of trauma, class, race, and nation, she remains attuned to extant colonizing erasures of Indigenous bodies and Indigenous trauma, for example, in the field of Canadian literary modernism.

Porter establishes an overlapping context for her consideration of Prewett, which – as she notes – is not meant to be a comprehensive biographical portrait, although her research, especially into Prewett's life in Canada after the war, is fresh, examining his poetics against his enthusiasm for farming and rurality. Her opening chapters – on European fetishization of Indigeneity and Canadians, on Indigenous participation in the war effort and subsequent efforts by the Canadian government to rob Indigenous communities of resources, on the military, clinical, historical, and conceptual valences of the term "shell shock," and on the social evolutionary theories and treatment practices of Dr Rivers – are meticulously researched and fluidly written, if, on occasion, a bit digressive. (See, for example, Porter's exploration of electro-shock therapy, which Prewett did not undergo.) The chapters on Prewett's relationships with Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves act as hinges, leading into the later chapters that take a more focused look at Prewett's postwar life and literary outputs, though Porter's interdisciplinary approach remains visible. For example, the discussion of Prewett's 1933 novel, *The*

Chazzey Tragedy – which has received little attention beyond a few paragraphs in a 1987 article in *Studies in Canadian Literature* on Prewett and the Garsington Circle – is explored against other novels and discourses focused on the rural poor and anti-romanticism. In her conclusion, Porter again widens the scope of her discussion, considering “soft primitivism” as a kind of colonial nostalgia as well as a protest against modern inauthenticity. Though the extensive use of subsections within chapters occasionally gives a jarring impression of diffuse concerns, the work attains a sense of cohesion via the readability and liveliness of Porter’s clear prose as well as through her persisting inquiry into Prewett’s identity as a refracting and fragmented mirror of multiple cultural influences.

Prewett’s elusiveness within Porter’s study might be considered as conceptually linked to the examination of war trauma – in particular, his sense that he was “ghost-ridden” (119) and, indeed, that he had more in common with the dead. As Porter comments throughout the later chapters devoted to Prewett’s often disappointing postwar endeavours in literature and in farming, his deep appreciation of non-human animals and care for natural spaces and rhythms are not enough to shake his sense of irritability and alienation. There is much analysis here that will be useful to scholars of the soldier poets, though Prewett’s standing among this cohort is well established (as Porter implicitly acknowledges, taking on his most famous war poem, “Card Game,” early in the monograph). More interesting perhaps, and as another effect of Porter’s interdisciplinarity, her range of research, and even her periodic digressiveness, is that Prewett comes across as a minor character among (mostly British) intellectual elites within a rapidly changing world. Thus, for scholars keen to consider less well-known examples of Prewett’s writing, especially against renewals in the field of Canadian literary modernism, Porter’s detailed index is essential, allowing readers to “find” Prewett among the numerous chapters and subsections. Further, the sense of Prewett as diminished or minor is an ironic upshot to the early predictions by Sassoon and Graves of Prewett’s potential for literary greatness and the popularity of “Toronto” Prewett among the glitterati at Garsington. It is also of a piece with Porter’s examination of European fetishization of, and play-acting with, the so-called exotic or what she calls the “ornamentalism that oiled the cogs of Empire” (99). Key here is that Porter is not satisfied to present a referendum on whether Prewett appropriated an Indigenous identity (she states simply that he did). Rather, the entirety of her monograph is concerned with how European and Canadian First World War trauma narratives are bound up with broader discursive laments about Western cultural decline and ensuing nostalgia for “primitive” values, and how those narratives come to be understood as more important than the ongoing destruction of Indigenous histories and communities.

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Monty and the Canadian Army. John A. English. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021. Pp. 333, \$39.95 cloth, \$29.95 paper

In this detailed examination of the influence of one man, British General Law Bernard Montgomery, on the Canadian Army and its operations in the Second