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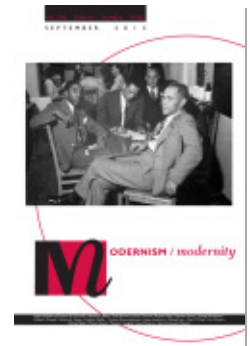
Terrorist's Creed by Roger Griffin (review)

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594 morale and its actual comprehension of popular music aesthetics: the DMPC initially set about its task by focusing on sheet music rather than sound, in line with the “high modernist notion that performers were conduits for compositional intensions, rather than shapers of musical meaning” (144). Baade is especially adept here at parsing the DMPC’s distinction “between slush and healthy sentiment” (141) in relation to the elements of breath control, portamento, and Americanized accent (147–48); as elsewhere, her explanations are helpfully supported by the snippets of musical examples on the book’s companion website.

Gendered anxieties surfaced again in 1944, Baade explains, when the fusion of Overseas and Forces Networks meant that civilians could, newly, hear what the troops overseas had been enjoying for years—the strategic but anomalous use of female hosts (or in BBC parlance, *com-mères*)—and be aghast at what they deemed a sapping effeminacy. But by then things had changed for good, at least in terms of the BBC attitude towards popular music. Indeed, the information that the BBC had gleaned by war’s end about the tastes of its listenership—including the key datum (unsurprising to us now) that age, rather than class or gender, was most predictive of musical choice—made it unfeasible to return entirely to the Arnoldian paternalism of the past. Thus, providing a more varied menu of musical choice was key to the Corporation’s strategy in planning for its postwar charter review (198).

Baade’s survey of this rich and complex terrain is assiduous and extremely detailed (indeed, at times the overlapping chapter chronologies can make the volume feel repetitive). Although the tale she tells is gripping, one could wish that she had made her argument speak more fully to broader issues of wartime broadcasting. Although, for example, Baade takes note of the of the working-class roots and regional accents of many of the performers she describes—Gracie Fields, Vera Lynn, Geraldo, Chilton—she never gestures beyond the realm of popular music politics in explaining their significance. To place such cases in dialogue with the controversies stimulated by the popularity of J. B. Priestley and the brief advent of Yorkshire broadcaster Wilfred Pickles as a Home Service newscaster, for instance, might have helped illuminate the redirection of regionality within the wartime services and the pressure on the politics of accent provoked within the BBC by the need to promote “People’s War” ideologies. But there’s no doubt that such connections will be facilitated in future because of Baade’s remarkable contribution in *Victory through Harmony*.

**Terrorist’s Creed. Roger Griffin. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.
Pp. x + 270. \$40.00 (cloth).**

Reviewed by Matthew Feldman, Teesside University

For some twenty years, Roger Griffin has been at the forefront of research into fascism as a generic ideology. By way of declaring my longstanding interest, for nearly half of that time we worked closely together; in 2004, we published the five-volume *Fascism: Critical Concepts*, and in 2008, *A Fascist Century* appeared, my edited selection of his essays. What made his theorizing so groundbreaking was his forensic search for the lowest common denominator of fascist belief—crucially, *as empirically propounded in fascists’ own words*. In treating fascist ideology with “methodological empathy”—exemplified by his 1995 anthology *Fascism*, assembling cognate excerpts from some two hundred leading ideologues—Griffin could “heuristically” characterize fascist ideology as a form of revolutionary praxis that, at its core, emphasized a regenerative ultranationalism which was totalitarian in ambition and “third way” in politico-economic structure; that is, one distinct from communism and liberalism.

Griffin's most recent study attempts "to demystify terrorism" in much the same way (6), now training his lens upon the "*non-instrumental rationales, the symbolic, existential, metapolitical motivations of terrorist acts*" (7). A motivation for this shift in focus is suggested later, where Griffin argues that 9/11 "*terrified ontologically*," meaning that "[a]cademics (myself included) hastily retrained to be able to contribute to the updating and reprogramming of the SatNav systems provided by the human sciences" (158) to address the "emotional pandemic" (2) ignited by contemporary terrorism. Space permits three straightforward criticisms raised in response, deriving from the observation that not all terrorists—quite few, in fact, in the long-established and, here, roundly-neglected literature on the subject—are like Griffin's fictional model, Brad Pitt's Tyler Durden from *Fight Club*. Contra the utopian visions Griffin projects onto terrorists of every time and place since the beginning of recorded history, baser motives like hatred or self-interest, let alone mental illness, more often than not act as radicalizing agents for terrorism. Yet you would scarcely suspect that reading *Terrorist's Creed*; here, terrorists tend to be rendered as mildly endearing Bond villains.

Accordingly, underpinning his panoramic theorizing is an essentialism initially denied in strenuous terms and yet, especially in later chapters, quite difficult to miss:

The most modern terrorist's outlook on reality is generated by the same faculty for mythopoeia and sacralization that enables an objectively meaningless reality to be sacralized, that came into being when human consciousness first emerged into reflexivity, and the resulting knowledge of death and intimation of absurdity demanded a sacred canopy of magic and faith to be collectively constructed to protect life from the chill winds of nihilism. . . . [To] study terrorism is to study the extreme product of this instinct for self-preservation. (201)

Dozens of similar passages insist upon the banal shibboleth that we (referring implicitly to contemporary western Europeans) live in a "post-religious age" (202). From this assured perspective, enlightened humanity *knows* that the world's major religions are merely hybrid products of a "mazeway resynthesis" that "contributed decisively" to the formation of every human sacred canopy, or "nomoi," in history—"namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam" (51). Given the centrality of this theme, it is treated with remarkable superficiality. For example, tellingly, religion is defined *en passant* in one sentence near the end of the book (160), while the apparently more nettlesome definition of terrorism is exhaustively traversed in an introductory two pages (11–12). In sum, through a process of radicalizing self-aggrandizement that Griffin dubs "heroic doubling," "every act of terrorism has at its heart an ideal to realize, a cause to sacralize, a creed to live out in reality" (200).

For Griffin every act of terrorism is, then, to some degree a "primordial human response to anomaly" (54). But then again, so is every kind of religion or ideology for collective groups, or any individual's intense dedication to Yoga or crochet. Consequently, "a liminoid crisis of extreme alienation from society" thus "becomes the precondition for the fanatic" to carry out "violent symbolic action" (57). Since this "liminoid crisis"—especially ruthless, for Griffin, under the "liquefying" impact of modernity" (4)—is an allegedly ineliminable feature of human life, it thereby *ipso facto* provides little in the way of explaining terrorism, which is a contingent feature of human life. The first quarter of the book may therefore be summarized via the truism that there are psychological motives behind all terrorist attacks. If this motive is the "human mythopoeic urge to create a sacred canopy" (60), then terrorism simply becomes yet one more "meaning-making" response to existential despair: it is like creating modernist art, among much else.

Nor is the above simile haphazard, for it raises a second interpretative generalization discernible across *Terrorist's Creed*. Terrorism is "heuristically" broken into two distinct types—even if, in practice, most recent movements glossed here (jihadi Islamism; Tamil Tigers; Chechen separatists, and the Baader-Meinhof Gang) invariably turn out to be a combination of the two. These are the "Zealotic" type, meaning terrorist violence that aims to *retain* a homeland, ethnic

596 group, religion or any other traditional “sacred canopy,” and the “Modernist” type, shorthand here as “Modernism of the deed” (63ff, 141). If this phrase conjures up images of, say, a Shoenberg opera or Pirandello play, that is because of “the deep structural affinity that exists between the aesthetic modernism of serious artists and the programmatic modernism of ‘nomos-creating’ terrorists, both of whom in their very different ways want to break the continuum of history, after ‘normality,’ and create a new sensibility” (213). The all-important “modernist” mechanisms leading to these “very different ways”—meaning artistic production as opposed to asymmetrical political violence—remains astonishingly vague, and like the ontological certitude underpinning humanity’s inescapably “acute nomic crisis” or modernity’s “permanently liminoid conditions” (167), seem more suited to rhetoric than research.

That is because *Terrorist’s Creed* is heavy on assertion but light on facts, figures, and actual examples. Thirdly, then, and most problematically for this avowedly psycho-historical account, Griffin considers very few actual terrorists. When he does, matters get still more confused: the nihilist Sergei Nechayev is placed directly alongside Robert DeNiro’s Travis Bickle from *Taxi Driver* (187); or again, after eschewing the very term “lone wolf terrorism,” he name-checks “loners” such as McVeigh and Breivik” (212) several pages later; this is despite the former being one of two (!) men convicted for the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombing. Although largely overlooked by Griffin, self-directed terrorists, one might imagine, would be his bread and butter—that is, terrorists created through individual (psychological) radicalization. Equally absent are any of the ten thousand plus cases in the Global Terrorism Database. Instead, Griffin presents a chapter titled “The Metapolitics of Terrorism in Fiction.” The point seems to be that reading *Mao II* or *The Secret Agent* offers insight that merely pedestrian, factual case studies cannot, revealing “a far more complex and profound process of radicalization at work” (84) than genuine radicalization in the real world.

Still, modernist fiction might just be relevant here. Put another way, it is true that some terrorists—like the Professor, bomb-maker, and son of a preacher in Conrad’s 1907 *The Secret Agent*—believe “that the framework of an established social order cannot be effectually shattered except by some form of collective or individual violence.” Correspondingly, this “most ardent of revolutionaries,” driven by the “secularly holy” ambition to spread anarchy, viewed himself as “a moral agent.”¹ Yet look more closely: Conrad’s actual bomber is not an eloquent mastermind but the eager-to-please, “simple” Stevie—so characteristically neglected in *Terrorist’s Creed*—who is manipulated into a shambolic strike in which he kills only himself. Conrad’s rendering of the failed bombing of the Greenwich Observatory in 1894, ironically enough, probably says more about terrorist motivation than Griffin’s typically sweeping contention that “even many ‘experts’ fail to understand the powerful well-springs of nomic despair, identity crisis, and fanatical hatred lying just below the surface of plural modernity” (211).

In thus reducing everything from fact to fiction to religion and modernism (whether aesthetic or terroristic), *Terrorist’s Creed* actually explains very little. It may be that some terrorists, like Breivik and the Unabomber (both tractarians, and given only about four pages each, although these are incisive), went through the “Alice Syndrome” of “heroic doubling” to psychologically conceive themselves as “nomic warriors” (133). Yet truth be told, as trained experts on terrorism know, far more do not have such a sophisticated self-conception. Jessica Stern, for one, finds humiliation to be the leading psychological driver for terrorists; alternatively, John Gilbert Graham, the first major U.S. plane bomber who killed forty-three in 1955, greedily sought to collect on his mother’s life insurance.² Motivations can be both utopian and banal, and metaphysical speculations about “nomic crises” are irrelevant in most cases. Had he looked, Griffin would have found that actual terrorists are rarely the articulate ideologues who gave his previous work on generic fascism such a valuably empirical underpinning. Regrettably, what was once a well-delimited and useful “methodological empathy” honing in on fascist ideology has now ballooned into “pop theory,” sustained not by rigorous research, but by unsubstantiated judgments on the human condition—now adapted to “the new terrorology industry” (203).

Notes

1. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale* (London: J.M Dent and Sons, 1965), 80–81.
2. See Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Mind of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003); and Jeffrey D. Simon, *Lone Wolf Terrorism: Understanding the Growing Threat* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2013).

The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Poetry. Fran Brearton and Alan Gillis, eds. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp.xx + 723. \$150.00 (cloth).

Reviewed by Nicholas Grene, Trinity College Dublin

The primary OED definition of “handbook” is “a small book or treatise, such as may conveniently be held in the hand.” At over seven hundred large-format pages and weighing in excess of three pounds, this *Oxford Handbook* is neither small nor handy to hold. The next definition sounds more like it: “A compendious book or treatise for guidance in any art, occupation or study.” Certainly, with forty chapters by specialist scholars on different aspects of modern Irish poetry from the emergence of Yeats in the late nineteenth century to the current generation in the first decades of the twenty-first, the book is compendious enough.

This handbook, like the others in the Oxford series, is intended as a reference book, with its individual chapters eventually to be made available for download online. No one but the dutiful reviewer, it is likely, will set out to read the book from end to end. But its great strength is in fact the way the editors have re-mapped the territory of Irish poetry by their organization of the volume. Chronological sections like “Poetry and the Revival” or “Mid-Century Irish Poetry” alternate with thematically focused sections like “The Poetry of War” or “Poetry and the Arts.” The generous allocation of chapters, each of a substantial eight thousand words, allows for the inclusion of senior scholars such as Edna Longley, Warwick Gould, and Dillon Johnston, of a much younger generation of critics such as Tom Walker, Maria Johnston, and Gail McConnell, and of a number of poet practitioners such as Justin Quinn, Leontia Flynn, David Wheatley, and Alan Gillis, all of whom figure in the book both as contributors and authors discussed.

Not all the poetry in the book is treated reverentially. There is a judicious evaluation by Kit Fryatt of the “potentialities” of Patrick Kavanagh and his failure fully to realize them, and there are some stern judgments by John Redmond on Brendan Kennelly and Paul Durcan’s engagement with the public sphere in their poetry. But for the most part, the contributors write in patient and informed appreciation of the work they analyze. The scale of the volume makes possible specialist chapters such as Damien Keane’s “Poetry, Music, and Reproduced Sound”—which discusses a range of Irish poets—or Paul Simpson’s stylistic analysis of modern Irish poetry. The book is primarily limited to English language poetry, but there is a chapter by Aodán Mac Póilin on translations from Irish and a fine discussion by Eric Falci of the collaborations between Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Paul Muldoon.

Inevitably, Yeats looms large throughout. Even apart from the dedicated essay by Warwick Gould on his relationship with symbolism and Edna Longley’s wonderfully perceptive essay on Yeats and violence, he is an inescapable presence, compared with Austin Clarke in his relationship with English (Michael O’Neill), used as the starting point for Neil Corcoran’s exemplary overview of modern Irish poetry and the visual arts, and presented as the figure that subsequent Irish poets have had to imitate, resist, or try hard to ignore. But the range of later writers is well represented in the volume also, with two chapters devoted to Louis MacNeice (Tom Walker, Jonathan Allison), an excellent essay by John McAuliffe on Clarke and Thomas Kinsella (which very usefully focuses on the presses that published their poetry), and an extended treatment of the