

Muslim identity, the novel finds itself unable to move beyond the binary of “minority communitarianism against individual freedom” (177). As a result, and similarly to the other texts that Ahmed explores, little room is allowed for an exploration into the possibilities of a political Muslim (but not Islamist) identity. From the perspective of gender, in particular, Ahmed shows how although the novel narrates the lives of Muslim women, the only roles offered to them are victimhood, “complicity with the oppressive misogynistic practices of the community” (171), or withdrawal from the culture and community itself, meaning that the possibility for a collective, Muslim femininity that works against oppression is not considered. Ahmed’s final chapter on Muslim memoir addresses a number of texts that have so far received little critical attention and explores the complexities of Muslim self-representation and the burden of authority on the Muslim writer.

In *Writing British Muslims* Ahmed takes an overused and simplistic understanding of Islam as inherently oppressive and restrictive in contrast with the supposedly liberating force of Western secularism and offers a new and critical perspective. While much has been written on the intersections between race, culture, religion, and gender in multicultural Britain, there has often been a lack of recognition for the role that class plays. In her thoroughly well-researched and elegantly written monograph, Ahmed addresses this significant lack and shows the role that fiction by Muslim authors plays in addressing secular liberalism’s resistance to political, faith-based identities.

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AMANDA ANDERSON. *Bleak Liberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. Pp. 171. \$75.00 (cloth).  
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Though written before the British referendum on whether or not to leave the European Union and the 2016 United States presidential election, Amanda Anderson’s *Bleak Liberalism* reminds us that liberalism, as a political and philosophical project, has long conceived of itself as having limited appeal and little hope of success. By highlighting liberalism’s bleakness, Anderson is defending liberalism as a complex lived practice that, in her view, is unjustly associated with naïve ideas of “human perfectibility and assured progressivism” (1). In a wide-ranging argument that spans the liberalisms of Victorian Britain and the Cold War United States, Anderson shows how novelists as diverse as Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, E. M. Forster, Lionel Trilling, Ralph Ellison, and Doris Lessing all variously emphasized liberalism’s “bleak prospects and reduced expectations, on the one hand, and the absolute necessity of defending basic liberal principles, programs, and institutions, on the other” (25). For Anderson, the payoff for attending to liberalism’s bleakness is that once we see the liberal life as genuinely vexed, we might better imagine living a commitment to its ideals when they seem most under attack. Whether one is looking to defend, critique, or investigate “liberalism,” Anderson’s admirably concise monograph (weighing in at a trim 171 pages) is worth engaging.

*Bleak Liberalism* begins with two introductory chapters where Anderson surveys the critical landscape in which “liberal” has become a term of derision for both conservative and radical critics. She writes, “philosophical liberalism is often contrasted not only with radical philosophies that call for wholesale transformation, but also with a conservative tradition that claims a monopoly on tragic, pessimistic, and “realistic” conceptions of humanity. From this

perspective, liberalism is seen as naively optimistic, failing to attend to structural inequalities or economic, psychological, and political actualities” (1). Attacked on all sides for being “a mere investment in neutrality, principle, or critical distance,” the leftist claims liberalism lacks a systematic critique, while the conservative argues that liberalism is blind to the complexities of individual lives (3). But in Anderson’s telling, liberalism’s structural problem is that it does earnestly try to do both, and that double commitment produces “a kind of existential challenge” (3): Can the committed liberal move between cultivating complex interpersonal attachments while also maintaining a general social analysis? Anderson argues that this dilemma is the source of liberalism’s internal complexity and the various aesthetic possibilities that this supposedly milquetoast political philosophy allows.

In the next four chapters, Anderson turns to the realist novel as the genre that best exemplifies liberalism’s push and pull between social critique and individual self-reflection. Two chapters on the Victorian novel show how taken-for-granted formal features like third-person narration and dialogue make liberalism’s existential quandaries the source of the realist novel’s experimental art. In one of many astute readings, Anderson argues that the romantic plot of *North and South* does not defuse Gaskell’s critique of industrial capitalism; instead, contentious conversations between romantic partners model an individual relationship in which the critique of social systems becomes the basis for personal connections (93). Anderson then crosses into the twentieth century to pursue the idea that our arguments might be more than an exchange of opinions. In her reading of Lionel Trilling’s 1947 novel, *The Middle of the Journey*, chastened liberals and disillusioned Marxists gather for debates in which no one persuades anyone, but each individual’s presence animates every other. Liberals and leftists, Anderson seems to plead, are doing something more than arguing when they argue with each other: they are also sharing a bleak terrain where recognizable ideological positions give way to the vicissitudes of personal connections, and these connections, in turn, make further debate about our shared social condition possible.

For Anderson, it is liberalism’s clear-sighted sense of its own limits that makes it both bleak and aesthetically complex. But Anderson’s reading of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* suggests that her framing of liberalism’s limits may itself be somewhat limited. In Anderson’s liberalism, individual self-reflection is set opposite to social analysis, and the realist novel mediates between the two. Thus, for Anderson, Ellison’s invisible narrator lives through one humiliation after another in “a world riven by dynamics of power,” but he also experiences “ongoing yearnings for individual self-actualization in conditions of imperfect justice” (123). Ellison seems to have been included in this study to answer the charge—justly made, Anderson admits—that many liberal thinkers have “displayed forms of bias and exclusion especially when it came to race” (22). By showing that at least one black intellectual engages in the liberal calisthenics of systematic analysis and individual self-reflection, Anderson hopes to show that the biases of past liberals are incidental rather than foundational to liberalism itself. But Anderson’s movement between responsible systematic analysis and dutiful self-reflection seems to circumscribe the potentials of Ellison’s black aesthetics in a rather narrow field of possibilities. In *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013), Stefano Harney and Fred Moten propose that we think about blackness as, in part, “the general antagonism” that “cannot be tamed ... by policy initiatives like agonistic dialogues or alternative public spheres” (109). Like Anderson, Moten and Harney are interested in the life that persists “outside” of politics, but Anderson posits that the outside is made up of people striving toward “individual self-actualization” while Moten and Harney attend to the unruly study and action that exceed and surround the realm of reasonable public policy (123). The bleakness of Anderson’s liberalism is the product of the predicament that she lays out, between individual relationships and systematic critique. But as Moten and Harney

suggest, there are other ways of conceiving what the limits of politics might be and the aesthetic possibilities that riot beyond them.

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IAN BECKETT, TIMOTHY BOWMAN, and MARK CONNELLY. *The British Army and the First World War*. Armies of the Great War. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. 476. \$29.99 (paper).  
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It is no easy task writing a comprehensive history of the British Army during the First World War. Even while the guns of the Western Front still fired, quiet debates began to arise over combat performance, leadership, and the army's strategic employment. The following century has only intensified these arguments. In one respect it is not surprising: more than eight million men served in the armed forces of the British Empire between 1914 and 1918, so many as to defy easy generalization. For every example supporting one line of argument, a comparable counterexample is rarely far away. It is into this enormous and difficult topic that Ian Beckett, Timothy Bowman, and Mark Connelly have sought to draw upon "the full breadth of the historiography" (5) and make a significant contribution. In some respects, they have achieved this. The ambitious scope and laudable focus on the social as well as the military aspects of the army ensure that this book makes a valuable contribution to the existing literature. Unfortunately, the project is undermined, to an extent, by inconsistencies in quality across the eleven chapters and by a narrow focus on the Western Front.

Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly cannot be faulted for ambition. The first five chapters cover the pre-war training, composition, and change in the officer corps, the national commitment to creating a nation in arms during the First World War, the citizen-soldier experience, and British strategy throughout the war. Given the authors' past work on these subjects, it is no surprise that these five chapters are exceptionally well crafted. They draw on an impressive range of sources, from the private diaries of key individuals to army personnel files and other official records, while a diverse range of more recent scholarship, from relevant monographs to unpublished PhD dissertations, has been used to persuasive effect. Of note is chapter 3, "A Nation in Arms," which scrutinizes the British voluntary recruitment drive and national mobilization. It employs qualitative and quantitative research methods, amalgamating contextual accounts and statistical data from a significant range of sources. Regional recruitment (including in Ireland), the challenge of implementing conscription mid-war, the plight of minorities such as the Russian Jewish community and women's volunteer organizations are all considered, making this section a triumph of breadth, depth, and succinct writing.

The rest of the book mainly covers the war on the Western Front, with a chapter dedicated to each year from 1914 through to 1918 and the final chapter considering the war "Beyond the Western Front." It is in these last six chapters that the book varies in quality more markedly. The authors have managed to cover an impressive amount of territory, analyzing the preparations, conduct, and aftermath of all the major battles the British took part in on the Western Front while never losing sight of the political context at home. Once more Beckett, Bowman, and Connelly demonstrate that there are few historians who can weave a narrative so succinctly and clearly. Still, the diversity of sources that propped up the first half of the book is here eroded by an overreliance on a handful of authors, predominantly Paul Harris, Robin Prior, and Trevor Wilson. These scholars are certainly important, and their frequent usage is