PREFACE

The framework for this volume is a common belief that wars have always been profoundly connected to subversion in the representation of the functions of gender and changes in the use of literary genres. This is particularly true of wars in the past hundred years. Nobody questions today Paul Fussell's suggestions in his seminal study, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), that the First World War transformed the language of literature and poetry for ever. Nor is it possible to forget Sandra M. Gilbert's discussion in her article, "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War" (1983), and in her book, *No Man's Land. The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (1989), of the profound effects of the First World War on men and women's lives and writing.

Since the publication of their work, several other important studies have developed and expanded these ideas from different perspectives. Such contributions began in the late 1980s with Helen M. Cooper, Adrienne Munich and Susan Squier's collection of essays of 1989, *Arms and the Woman. War, Gender and Literary Representation*, were further developed by Claire Tylee, and continue in the more recent work by Dorothy Goldman, Sharon Ouditt, Phyllis Lassner, and others. Most of these volumes broaden the theoretical background of the subject by discussing important though less well known texts written by women. They describe the literary ways in which women's writing adds to the ongoing imaginative presentation of war in general, as well as of the specific wars they write about.

Our volume intends to add to the discussion by including important new approaches and suggestions. Our aim is to study not only the ways in which wars have affected women's culture and their writing but more generally we wish to prove that the performances of gender have always been questioned by war. To begin with, we have chosen an ironic title, *Dressing up for War*, precisely because its ambivalence implies the variety of meanings connected to gender and war: on the one hand, dressing up refers to the anthropological need for uniform in the performance of certain rituals, such as that of killing in periods of war, for no war has ever been fought without soldiers dressing up for war; on

the other, it suggests the feminine tradition of dressing up to please, a tradition which has been radically questioned and subverted since the turn of the century, but particularly since the First World War, when women not only had to take over men's jobs on the home front, but were also forced to approach the scenarios of war as nurses, ambulance drivers, and social workers. Indeed one of the most obvious but nevertheless surprising changes in Western societies after the war is that of fashions in female dress. Skirts are considerably shortened, hair is also cut very short, and clothes are allowed to fall loosely down the body without the old devices aimed at constraining women's bodies. For the first time in Western history women are allowed to dress comfortably and efficiently. But dressing up also suggests the possibility of disguise; it can indicate a desire or a wish to disappear behind a mask, to hide one's identity and one's gender. It can respond to a profound need to redefine gender roles. The changes in dress, that is, the changes in gender are translated into changes in genre. If women alter their dress habits, they also radically transform their writing habits.

As Lorrie Goldensohn indicates in the figures she offers in her article included in this collection of essays, this new freedom in dress was won by women with extreme hardship. According to twentieth-century war records, Goldensohn writes, during the First World War only 15% of the total casualties were inflicted on civilians, a figure that rose to an unexpected 65% during the Second World War, and to 95% during the recent conflict in the Balkans. The implications of these figures are of course crucial for women who during the second half of the twentieth-century become the targets of war and its victims. It is interesting to read American writers and war reporters, Martha Gellhorn, Josephine Herbst and Lillian Hellman describe the disagreeable surprise they felt at being bombed while lying in bed in their hotel in Madrid in 1937, during the Spanish Civil War. According to Gellhorn, "[though civilians] did not go to war, the war was brought home to them."[1]

The anxiety to help and to survive becomes also an urgency to write, and if women needed to adapt their dressing to the terrible circumstances of war, they also had to adapt their writing in order to report, to describe and to interpret both historically and imaginatively first of all the events of war, secondly their own selves in their new

[1] Martha Gellhorn, *The Face of War* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988) 16.

functions and circumstances which would profoundly transform them. Simultaneously, the changes undertaken by women deeply affected men's understanding of themselves as well as their understanding of women, and triggered intense anxieties as to their role in a changing world.

We have divided our collection of essays into three parts and have taken the First World War as the reference point for war writing before and after. We have named this first part, **The War to Change all Words**, because though this war failed to be what it was initially fought for, the war to end all wars, it certainly changed the ways in which traditional genres wrote about the war. In her article, "'How Funny I Must Look with my Breeches Pulled Down to my Knees': Nurses' Memoirs and Autobiographies from The Great War," Laurie Kaplan investigates some of these changes in the texts written by the Baroness de T'Serclaes and by Florence Farmborough. Both texts confirm some of the most important changes women underwent in war. They both recognise and prove how uniforms affect nurses and their autobiographical writing at the war front. If in Victorian England women's writing of the self "savoured of egotism as well as indecency" (Valery Sanders 1989, quoted by Laurie Kaplan), Kaplan shows that "the trauma of war" and their change in clothes "transformed the language women would use in their self-writing." "[Their writings] project a dashing identity for the writers: bold, adventurous, analytical, *mannish*." Further, Kaplan recognises that war writing allowed women "to analyse the significance of their activities." But the texts Kaplan studies also confirm Sandra M. Gilbert's rather paradoxical recognition that the war stimulated a "release of female libidinal energies."[2] They express these women's huge pleasure at being able to join the front. Kaplan quotes the Baroness writing: "I liked the smell of danger and the tension of battle: I throve and blossomed in it.... Only in time of war have I found any real sense of purpose and happiness."

The effects upon women's culture are far from simple as Peter Buitenhuis' article, "The Perversion of Motherhood: The Trope of the Son at the Front," demonstrates. Buitenhuis' starting point is also

[2] Sandra M. Gilbert, "Soldier's Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War," *Signs* 8. 3 (spring 1983): 295.

Gilbert's important article of 1983, but his paper adds new perspectives to our understanding of the tremendous pressures mothers suffered during the First World War in Britain as reflected in the fiction of the period. He analyses how war propaganda manipulated mothers' feelings, encouraging them to send their sons to the front to an almost certain and most terrible death. Buitenhuis argues that many war texts show a tragic breach of trust of soldiers towards their mothers, and as a consequence the position of women is profoundly questioned in many texts.

Though not having taken active part in the theatre of war, one of the best known women writers whose work is deeply transformed by the First World War is Hilda Doolitle, H.D. A radically experimental modernist writer, H.D.'s attempts at developing a new form of autobiography have received much critical attention in the past two decades. Taking into account previous readings of her writing, in her article "The Centre of the Cyclone: Gender and Genre in H.D.'s War Novel," Caroline Zilboorg provides an original way of subtly connecting H.D.'s intricate search for the expression of women's self dominated by an awareness of the total destructiveness of war, that is to say, of how the war profoundly determines woman's projection of her self.

But if the construction of women's identity is radically transformed during World War I, the literary representation of men also undergoes important changes. According to Ángeles Toda's article, "Deadly Marriages: Masculinity and the Pleasures of Violence in H.R. Haggard's Romances of Adventure," the immense response to Haggard's adventure narratives, *Eric Brightness* (1889) and *Nada the Lily* (1891), proves men's growing uncertainty as to the imaginative dramatisation of the hero. The nostalgic and almost parodic emphasis on traditional male bonding seen in these texts shows the anxiety felt by a wide readership and their need to reaffirm an endangered position. Closely related to this topic is António Lopes' contribution, "(Un)masking the Self: the Hero in Edwardian Popular Fiction," a study of how the uncertainties of the times, both in terms of gender roles and of genre, are reflected in the emergence of new literary genres such as the thriller and the spy novel. These new genres echo the contemporary ideological and political confusion and allow for the invention of new literary heroes disconnected from those of the past.

After allowing for the analysis of some of the most important changes of gender and genre brought about by World War I, our collection of essays focuses on the past, and specifically on earlier representations of gender. We have consequently called the second part of this volume, **Dress Rehearsals: Earlier Performances and Scenarios**. In the first essay of this second part, Jane Schultz discusses the matter of dressing for war and of writing about it in "Performing Genres: Sarah Edmonds' *Nurse and Spy* and the Case of the Cross-Dressed Text," which reads a woman's autobiography of her experience during the American Civil War. Written in the framework of Judith Butler's theory of the performativity of gender, Edmonds disguises her female self behind many masks in order to be able to share in the most important events of her time, and take part in the war: "white male nurse, Union soldier, courier, civilian, and intelligence agent: black male laborer, Irish female domestic, and black female cook, render not only gender unstable but a host of other social categories." In Schultz's opinion, "The fact that [Sarah Edmonds] assumed a male identity must be seen in larger cultural terms as a critique of the restrictions upon mid-century womanhood." She concludes citing Elisabeth Young that "Gender masquerade distills the social dislocations of war, and is both its own form of revolt and a protean metaphor for myriad forms of misrule."

New readings of the very literary Crimean War are suggested by Ana María Sánchez-Arce in "The Prop They Need: Undressing and the Politics of War in Beryl Bainbridge's *Master Georgie*." In her interpretation of Bainbridge's novella, Sánchez-Arce suggests that the aim of the author is to attack the heroic war narrative in her text by showing the incoherence of canonical war accounts when dramatised in the actual experiences of the characters in her novella. Bainbridge successfully shows the instability of gender roles in spite of the powerful rhetoric of war of the times, as well as the inconsistency of the traditional notions of home front and battlefield. The final purpose of the story is, according to Sánchez-Arce, to exemplify the impossibility of creating true war heroes in a war that was in many ways totally unheroic.

Closely related to the meanings of dress in war is Renate Peter's essay, "The Metamorphoses of Judith in Literature and Art: War by Other Means," which analyses one of the most controversial women warriors of Western culture: Judith, who dresses in the traditional

feminine attire to mask her military mission. Peters follows up on the best known historical representations of Judith both in literature and painting, and sees how interpretations change with time. If Judith is initially seen as a religious figure, she falls from grace with the Renaissance and is transformed from Mary to Eve. The *fin du siècle* will see her as a *femme fatale*, her action often dramatised in psychoanalytical terms. In her discussion of contemporary readings of the heroine, Peters discusses a recent version of Judith's drama by the German dramatist Rolf Hochhuth, in which she is made to incarnate the tensions of opposing contemporary political ideologies.

"Adelita's Radical Act of Counter-Writing" by Tabea Alexa Linhard, takes us to a very different scenario and offers an interesting perspective of the uncertain value of Adelita's heroic act of self-sacrifice during the Mexican Revolution. In the context of post-colonial criticism Linhard questions whether Adelita's self-sacrifice for the revolution is a true act of counter-writing or another fragment of the dominant narrative of a revolution in which women played a marginal position. Linhard carefully analyses the inevitable loss for these revolutionary women whose eloquent voices will never resonate.

Two essays in this part concentrate on the early modern period. Simon Barker's "Dressing up for War: Militarism in Early Modern Culture" and Joan Curbet's "Repressing the Amazon: Cross-Dressing and Militarism in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene.*" Barker convincingly identifies the instability of the early modern military ethic. He traces this instability in the extensive genre of military theory that was written during the period, which, though centrally concerned with larger issues of military ethics and organisation, also discusses the private body of the ideal modern soldier, "to be 'rewritten' according to a range of knowledges." He proves how Tudor and Stuart state documents problematise the suggestions proposed by such texts. He further focuses on how the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher as well as those of Shakespeare and Marlowe, and also contemporary prose, dramatise resistance and opposition to the military ideals and show how they are debased in practice.

Curbet's contribution discusses the active repression of the central classical myth of the woman warrior, the Amazon, in the Elizabethan era, and the complex strategies that were used to erase this image from the

official iconography of the period. The article takes Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* as a crucial example, and shows how the ideal representation of the female warrior (an avatar of Elisabeth I herself), depends on cross-dressing to link the concepts of womanhood and military capacity, while the image of the Amazon awakens the nightmarish vision of a symbolic castration of the state.

The last part of our volume, **Modern Times: Redressing Old Wounds**, is centered in the writing of more recent wars. Jenny Hartley starts this third part with her essay, "Warriors and Healers, Impostors and Mothers: Betty Miller's *On the Side of the Angels*." Hartley reads in Miller's work the contradictions and changes different characters, male and female, undergo during World War II. The novel is significantly concerned with the enormous relevance of dressing for war, with how, in addition, uniforms affect people's behaviour. Miller, who was the wife of a well known psychiatrist, explains these changes both in the light of Freud's theories, as well as of his follower Melanie Klein, and in particular her studies of the role of motherhood.

If the essay on Adelita's radical act of counter-writing by choosing death was discussed in Part II of this collection of essays, Part III also offers an example of a contemporary reading of Mexican-American tensions. In her essay "'Sangre Fértil'/Fertile Blood: Migratory Crossings, War and Healing in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera,*" Maria Antònia Oliver analyses the contemporary voice of the *mestizas*, the Mexican women living on the border of two cultures. If Adelita found no voice with which to speak her unknown truths about Mexican women during the Revolution, Oliver argues that Anzaldúa manages to find in contemporary America a mixed languge that will turn the blood shed in the lost revolution into a fountain of fertility. Her initial hypothesis is based on Gayatry Spivak's article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), but she proves how Anzaldúa manages to transform Mexican mythology, popular legend and memory into eloquent speech, and to recover "the unrecorded history of women" by transforming the symbol of the borderland from that of otherness to that of fruitfulness and creativity.

In "Towards a Non-Combatant War Poetry: Jarrell, Moore, Bishop," Lorrie Goldensohn offers an insightful reading of these poets'

war poetry in relation and contrast to the poetry written during the First World War, and more generally, in relation to the European idea originating in the Dark Ages, according to which suffering is ennobling; an idea linked to Christianity and the warrior ethic. Her essay covers these poets' particular response to such notions, and sees how Jarrell's poetry adds compassion to the confusing feelings of guilt and innocence expressed in war writing. But Goldensohn chooses Bishop's presentation of war in her poem "Roosters" as the most innovative reaction to the war. "Unable to change the deeper dress of gender, [Bishop] perfected her single strike against the drape of masculinity itself, and re-wrote the myth of holy sacrifice to represent not a ritual ennobling death, but essential and non-combative forgiveness."

Little is known about women veteran poets from the Vietnam War, and Simon Philo has undertaken considerable research on the subject. In his essay "Breaking the Silence, Crossing the Line: Women Veteran Poets of the Vietnam War," he introduces readers to some of their work. According to him, an estimated 50,000 women civilian volunteers went to Vietnam, and many wrote poetry about their experience. Like many men poets who took part in the war and wrote about it, many women also shared in the deconstruction of mythic readings about the war. Women Vietnam veterans wrote because they needed to work through their terrible experiences and emotions in order to try to find answers to the unanswerable questions the war pressed on them. Yet, as has been said about men poets, much veteran poetry is "Raw, visceral and artless." Philo argues that this artlessness should not be regarded as a failure of craft but "as a means of communicating the full horror of the war."

The Vietnam war is also the subject of Kathleen Brady, John Briggs and Edward A. Hagan's essay, "The Enemy is 'Us': Misconstruing the Real War in *The Deer Hunter* and Other Post-Vietnam War Narratives." In their discussion of Cimino's film *The Deer Hunter* and of several other Vietnam stories, the authors argue that Cimino reforms the war movie and revises American misogyny that can be traced back to Fenimore Cooper's fiction. The authors prove that the movie centrally presents war as an internal American cultural conflict. In "Name upon Name: Myth, Ritual and the Past in Recent Irish Plays Referring to the Great War," Claire Tylee links the First World War to the present Irish conflict in her analysis of two Irish plays: Frank

McGuiness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*, and Christina Reid's *My Name, Shall I Tell You My Name*. Both plays start from Ulster but are haunted by memories of the First World War. They also prove that gender is a key issue in these authors' complex representation of the intense connections between past and present.

We hope the reader will find that these essays further our understanding of the complexities involved in explaining and interpreting war. This is achieved, both in historical, cultural and psychological terms by, on the one hand, investigating further into the little known literary responses of relevant women writers to the experience of war; and, on the other, by analysing the ways in which the changing circumstances of war expand, enlarge, and question the boundaries of accepted gender behaviour. If, as Freud suggested, gender is a key element in the construction of identity, these essays show how in the context of war gender becomes radically performative. The consequences are far-reaching, in that they must necessarily add in further destabilizing and problematising subjectivity, and also in profoundly subverting traditional arguments which justify war. Yet as these essays show, the lessons in self and cultural knowledge brought about by their reflections on gender, genre, and war do not aim at becoming an end in themselves but a step further in the intricate understanding of human responsibility.