

Aránzazu Usandizaga and Andrew Monnickendam, eds. 2001: *Dressing Up for War: Transformations of Gender and Genre in the Discourse and Literature of War*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi. 292 pp.

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The volume *Dressing Up for War*, edited by Usandizaga and Monnickendam, is an interesting compilation of seventeen articles on the discourse of war and the way in which “wars have always been profoundly connected to subversion in the representation of the functions of gender and changes in the use of literary genres” in the editors’ words (ix). Resulting partly from an international conference on the nature of war discourse organized by the University of Barcelona in 1999, this publication adds to the ongoing debate on the profound transformations wars have always entailed for both gender and genre, by offering enlightening and suggestive perspectives. The title itself proves very appropriate, since it foregrounds the ambivalent and manifold meanings that can be verified in the processes of role inversion and transvestism pervasive in war literature. Conversely, it also links to the subversion and expansion of literary genres to accommodate new subject positions and world views. As a whole, the book is a significant contribution to the number of critical treatises on the topic, also including “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War” by Sandra Gilbert (1983), *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation* edited by Helen Cooper, Adrienne Munich and Susan Squier (1989), and more recently, *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* edited by Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (1993) or *Women and the War Story* edited by Miriam Cooke (1996).

This collection of articles approaches the proposed subject from diverse angles and viewpoints, providing enriching and stimulating reading. Indeed, its multiplicity is quite evident in the tripartite division of the work: the first section devoted to World War I, ironically entitled “The War to Change all Words,” focuses on the changes brought about by the Great War and its lingering effects, especially concerning the redefinition of gender roles and their literary representation with the rise of new genres such as the nurse autobiography, the thriller or the spy novel. It reflects on the difficulties encountered by the female self to express herself and the anxieties generated by the endangered position of men at the time. The second section, “Dress Rehearsals: Earlier Performances and Scenarios,” investigates the literary rendering of those concerns in previous scenarios such as the American Civil War, the Mexican Revolution or the early modern period. Gender masquerade, women’s marginal position and images of women warriors (Judith, the Amazon) figure prominently in this section, together with the deconstruction of the heroic war narrative and the instability of early modern military treatises. Finally, the last section “Modern Times: Redressing Old Wounds” introduces readers to more recent wars (World War II, Mexican-American tensions, the Vietnam War or the Irish conflict) and their consequences. In many cases, these consequences have led to a radically altered positioning of the subject, both female and male, and a sustained critique not only on war and militarism, as in the other sections, but also on related topics like ethnic confrontation and misogyny.

Inaugurating the section on the Great War, Laurie Kaplan’s “‘How Funny I Must Look with My Breeches Pulled Down to My Knees’: Nurses’ Memoirs and Autobiographies

from the Great War” interprets with lucidity the motif of cross-dressing, essential for understanding the transformations effected in these nurses’ writing. Examining closely the memoirs of the Baroness de T’Serclaes and Florence Farmborough, Kaplan explains the crisis of identity these women had to undergo due to their public exposure, which signified a direct challenge to the traditional separation of public/private spheres. Moreover, their efficiency and pride in their duty also questioned normative roles. Their “dashing and mannish identity” served, then, the purpose of liberating them from imposed definitions, so they could also renegotiate their ambiguous position in their writings. As Kaplan puts it, “these women had re-visioned themselves” (7), and they liked what they saw, as is apparent from the happiness and sense of purpose distilled from the memoirs.

The second article in the section also discusses the subversion of female gender roles, but now with respect to motherhood, as Peter Buitenhuis’ suggestive title indicates: “Motherhood Perverted: The Trope of the Son at the Front.” As Buitenhuis observes, the conventional trope of caring and nurturing motherhood underwent a significant change so that “mothers should willingly sacrifice their sons for the sake of an Allied victory” (13). Beginning with this premise, the article fails, however, to respond to the expectations raised, as it offers an account of the strain on gender roles caused by the war in some narratives without considering the actual implications for the sons and mothers that populate them. Nevertheless, the author provides some useful insights into the ways in which propaganda manipulated mothers’ feelings, which eventually resulted in the subversion of the trope of motherhood.

Carole Zilboorg’s “The Centre of the Cyclone: Gender and Genre in H.D.’s War Novel” tackles the issue of the female experience of war from the privileged stance of the woman artist. In her detailed close reading of H. D.’s *Bid Me to Live*, Zilboorg builds a challenging and thought-provoking case for the construction of a female self who has to come to terms with the multiplicity of her experience during war time and finds that the best means of performing doubleness and openness is to resort to generic diversity. Key ideas such as fragmentation, disruption, impossibility of closure, etc., are constantly invoked as tokens for depicting a woman artist’s experience. Zilboorg thus highlights the weight of war on the female artist’s discourse, which drove H. D. to develop a new kind of war novel, an experimental modernist autobiography.

The other two articles in this first section are devoted to the male processes of identity formation and their shifts within war discourse. María Ángeles Toda Iglesia’s “Deadly Marriages: Masculinity and the Pleasures of Violence in H. R. Haggard’s Romances of Adventure” aptly interrogates the nature of male images in the genre of adventure romance and its link to war discourse as part of the ideological framework of late Victorian/Edwardian times. The author scrutinizes the defence of war and masculinity in H. R. Haggard’s novels by relating them to the classic debate between romance and realistic novel and to the description of the hero. Her perceptive analysis contends that these romances do not present a chivalric conception of war; quite the opposite, their emphasis on violence and male pleasure implies a chauvinistic standpoint that rejects the “Other” with respect to the hero (either racialized or gendered). In this way, the texts reveal a “homoerotic involvement” (49) that calls into question the very essence of the canonical heroic figure and demonstrates the anxiety about male identity felt at the time.

“(Un)masking the Self: The Hero in Edwardian Popular Fiction” by António Lopes

connects to the previous article by analyzing the emergence of specific genres due to the influence of war; specifically he comments on popular genres like invasion-scare, occupation and spy novels. He provides an illuminating review of history and politics as a suitable framework for the imperial novel and its models of masculinity, which are later questioned by the turn-of-the-century crisis. Within this latter context, the invasion-scare novels stage the fear of German prowess, especially in their recreation of the “atmosphere of paranoia, mass hysteria and germanophobia” (60) that pervaded the period. In the occupation narratives, the decline of the British empire is also endowed with similar connotations of xenophobia and affirmation of racial pride. On the contrary, the turn of the century spy novel is tied to imperial fiction in its open celebration of the hero, although placed in an everyday setting. Lopes’ consistent rendition of the Edwardian hero acknowledges, nevertheless, the devastating impact of the changing times on the hero, who is finally portrayed as indecisive and self-centered.

The second section of the volume explores the conflicts prior to World War I. It is inaugurated by Jane Schultz’s “Performing Genres: Sarah Edmonds’ *Nurse and Spy* and the Case of the Cross-dressed Text.” Schultz’ well-grounded and insightful analysis of Edmonds’ text takes advantage of the ambiguity surrounding nurses as cross-dressers in the American Civil War to foreground the way in which narrative can be used to display “the arbitrariness of gender constructions and the creative use of sexual alternatives” (77). Moreover, the gender hybridity that characterizes the text claims a third space as far as gender constructions are concerned, which further underlines the performativity, not only of gender, but also of race and nationality. Edmonds is depicted as a writer quite aware of the uses of cross-dressing and disguise, who somehow seems to miss the racist connotations implicit in the situation. Despite this flaw, Schultz contends, Edmonds’ narrative undoubtedly demonstrates the fluidity of gender identities during wars and the opportunities offered to cross-dressers to escape constraining parameters of womanhood.

Ana María Sánchez-Arce in “The Prop They Need: Undressing and the Politics of War in Beryl Bainbridge’s *Master Georgie*” concentrates on debunking myths about the Crimean War. Focusing on the attack on the heroic war narrative Bainbridge’s work carries out, the author convincingly argues for a reading of “home” as a site for conflicts/confrontations intimately related to the war outside. The generic indeterminacy of the work—novella/novel—substantiates the denunciation of the manipulation of war accounts about the Crimean war, as well as the polarised gender system those accounts fostered. In opposition, the text centers on the confusion about gender roles and domestic violence to show the ways in which gender and domesticity are mere constructs that reflect the ideological vision of the Empire and the unstable sense of masculinity which colours that period.

The next contribution, Renate Peters’ “The Metamorphoses of Judith in Literature and Art: War by Other Means,” deals with the theme of a woman “dressed for war,” but in this case the battle takes place in the intimacy of a bedroom. Peters addresses the controversial figure of the biblical Judith and its diverse artistic representations—covering painting, sculpture and literature mainly—simplifying the terms of the debate between means and ends, between the *femme fatale* and the female warrior. Going all the way back to the Renaissance, the critic engages in a project of ascribing labels to the different stages in the evolution of this mythical figure which even accounts for recent versions illustrated by

Rolf Hochhuth's play. Displaying his impressive command of the subject, Peters concludes that overall the figure is identified as a castrating virago, since the uncertainties and objections raised by a woman who uses her body as a weapon to seduce and destroy men are not easily dismissed.

"Adelita's Radical Act of Counter-Writing" by Tabea Alexa Linhard also takes up the issue of the female body as a weapon, articulating a counter-narrative with the only means at her disposal, her own body. This study of Adelita's myth repropounds the problematic position of women during the Mexican Revolution, paying special attention to Josephina Niggli's play *Soldadera*. Linhard contends that Niggli's negotiation of myths and her treatment of violence are characteristic features of her female protagonists. Grounding her commentary perhaps excessively on Spivak's influential article "Can the Subaltern Speak?," Linhard points out that the death of Adelita is necessary for the stock character it represents and the oppressive myth it inhabits, nevertheless granting some space for ambiguity and the possibility of a counter-narrative within it.

The two subsequent articles deal with the early modern period. Simon Barker's "Dressing Up for War: Militarism in Early Modern Culture" discusses militarism as "an index of masculinity and a panacea for social ills" (145) within the context of early seventeenth-century Britain. The author conceptualises the debate about militarism through the theory of the privatisation of the body and of economies of surveillance and control at work, which found expression in the military writing of the time. Barker further argues that this kind of writing primarily propounded the soldier as the masculine ideal versus the femininity of the lands and peoples to be submitted to his will. However, this ideal was rapidly undermined by the widespread resistance to conscription noticeable in the period that manifested itself in the form of mutinies, riots or the so-called phoney-soldiers. Another form of resistance could be found in the literary production of the time, especially in drama, exemplified by Shakespeare and other playwrights. Their plays dramatise the distance between the ethics of war and civilian life, even openly celebrating the latter.

In "Repressing the Amazon: Cross-Dressing and Militarism in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*" Joan Curbet makes a convincing study of the meaning ascribed to the Amazon topos during the early modern period as a symbol of inversion of patriarchy. More concretely, Curbet investigates Elizabeth I's need to repress that topos in order to legitimate her rule. Constantly referring to her "exceptional condition" as a female warrior, Spenser's book invests in cross-dressing as a means of preserving patriarchal order, in contrast to Margaret Tyler's alternative in her translation of a Spanish romance entitled *The Mirrour of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*. After a careful and detailed description of both texts, Curbet finally asserts that the poetics of transvestism does not question the patriarchal rule in Spenser's political allegory, articulating instead a rejection of gender equality.

The third section of the volume under scrutiny is related to recent wars during the second half of the twentieth century. The essay that opens this section, Jenny Hartley's "Warriors and Healers, Impostors and Mothers: Betty Miller's *On the Side of the Angels*," places different characters, male and female, under the strain of World War II to show the destructive side of the conflict and the devastating effects it has on their mental states. Miller's book is especially concerned with a psychoanalytical reading of the changes that

these characters undergo, following Freud and Melanie Klein's theories, concretely the latter's studies on the role of motherhood.

Mexican-American tensions are revisited in "Sangre Fértil/Fertile Blood: Migratory Crossings, War and Healing in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*" by María Antònia Oliver Rotger. Taking an elegy to dead *Californios* as its starting point, the commentator studies Anzaldúa's work in the light of the articulation of a voice for herself and for others that Anzaldúa achieves in her groundbreaking work. The war is in this case internal and has to do with her in-between position, realized in the motif of "sangre fértil/fertile blood" pervasive in the article. Drawing from diverse sources such as Caplan's notions of outlaw genres and cultural autobiography, Kristeva's idea of the abject, and Butler's or Spivak's theories, the author understands Anzaldúa's multiplicity of self as empowering to launch her political and intellectual project. Anzaldúa's resistance to the status of exotic commodity and the creation of a new culture are the key factors that contribute to the success of her enterprise.

Lorrie Goldensohn's contribution, "Towards a Non-Combatant War Poetry: Jarrell, Moore, Bishop," revises some of the poetry produced in World War II in comparison with that of the Great War, especially the motif of the soldier as victim and the anti-war attitude of the poets. Although the title proposes three poets, the article mainly deals with Jarrell and Bishop, as Moore appears only briefly mentioned. The focus on non-combatant poets sets up an interesting contrast between both poets: Jarrell did wear a uniform but remained sidelined in the States, something Bishop could not do. Jarrell criticized the infantilized condition of soldiers under the totalitarian institution of the army, while Bishop acknowledged the injuries inflicted on the concept of heroic masculinity. Goldensohn also pays attention to the rivalry that existed between the two, especially when Bishop was awarded the Pulitzer Prize instead of Jarrell. Despite a rather disconcerting structure, the author reaches an interesting conclusion by affirming that "dressed in soldier's khaki, Jarrell finally brought himself to critique the Old Boy's ideology of adventure . . . But Bishop, unable to change the deeper dress of gender, perfected her single strike against the drape of masculinity itself" (234), alluding again to the manifold meanings associated with dressing for war.

Simon Philo brings the Vietnam War to the forefront in "Breaking the Silence, Crossing the Line: Women Veteran Poets of the Vietnam War." The struggle of women veterans for a more inclusive definition of the term "veteran" acquires its full expression in Philo's analysis, as these women are still fighting to become active subjects. In his original approach to the subject, Philo argues for the many similarities between male and female writing about the Vietnam war. Both men and women refer to similar reasons for going to the war and also similar ways of using writing with a twofold objective: to record experience and as a therapeutic means not only for their traumatic experiences in Vietnam, but also for their problems upon their return to the States. As far as established conventions are concerned, they also respond to the stereotypical depiction of Vietnam literature as "undomesticated writing." The only difference Philo allows between them is the existence of a "gendered lexicon" which explicitly voices these women's need for self-assertion and inclusion.

In "The Enemy Is 'Us': Misconstruing the Real War in *The Deer Hunter* and Other Post-Vietnam War Narratives" Kathleen Brady, John Briggs and Edward A. Hagan take

a look at the subversion of the war story genre Cimino's film represents thanks to its concern with misogyny as a necessity of American masculinity. According to the authors, critics in general have failed to acknowledge this concern about the fallacy of the dominant code of masculinity and domesticity, so they have missed a great part of the film's intentionality. The authors link *The Deer Hunter* to other movies and narratives which also stage the connection between war and misogyny and the consequent lack of distinction between the two. This strategic move allows them to state that the attraction men feel for war is caused by their need to escape from some kind of "normalcy" that threatens a chauvinistic notion of maleness.

"Name upon Name': Myth, Ritual and the Past in Recent Irish Plays Referring to the Great War" by Claire Tylee closes this section completing the circle, making explicit allusion to the connection between recent plays and the Great War within the context of the Irish conflict. Starting from the premise that the ghost story and the Bildungsroman are adequate genres whereby to voice the repressed and the continuance of conflictive situations or what she calls "subterranean social currents" (271), Tylee contends that Irish drama is an exception as an outlet for the Irish conflict. To support such a claim, she offers an engaging discussion of two recent plays, Frank McGuinness' *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* and Christina Reid's *My Name, Shall I Tell You My Name*. In both plays the scenario is Ulster but the remembrance of the Great War is ever present. Articulating the bond between the present and the past, the critic asserts both the importance of Irish cultural patterns and the subversion of gender roles, particularly in Reid's play.

Therefore, the volume discussed here undoubtedly contributes to the study of the interrelation between war, gender and genre, and the important transformations that such interrelation brings about. It offers new and interesting insights into the nature of war discourse and the multiplicity of meanings that can be ascribed to the fluidity of gender roles, which is a key concept in current formulations provided by gender studies. Furthermore, the analysis of the ways in which war discourse affects the recreation of genres raises important questions that can apply to the analysis of other genres and literatures. Its impressively wide range of topics and motifs will surely add to our understanding of the subject and will open new venues for fruitful research, enhancing the scope of current critical endeavor.

#### Works Cited

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