

GENDER AND NATIONAL IDENTITY
IN THE AMERICAN
WAR NARRATIVE

by

ELIZABETH W. WADE

FREDERICK WHITING, COMMITTEE CHAIR
PHILIP BEIDLER
AARON KUNTZ
DEBORAH WEISS
HEATHER CASS WHITE

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of English
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2012

Copyright Elizabeth W. Wade 2012
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT

My dissertation, “Gender and National Identity in American War Narratives,” explores the intersection of gender and genre in American War narratives from the Vietnam War to the present day, focusing on the way that women’s incorporation into the American military contributed to both the transformation and redefinition of American masculinity and, by extension, America proper. Building on Susan Jeffords’s tenet that “War is a crucible for the distillation of social and cultural relations,” this project interrogates the manner in which literary representations of war both reflect and help constitute the American gender system and the way this system in turn offers a historical commentary on inflections of American national identity. It also investigates the ideological complexities particular to war writing as genre, exploring identity politics and the tension surrounding issues of an author’s status as veteran or civilian, considering what set of generic criteria constitutes and defines a war narrative, and chronicling the specific inflections of war narratives at particular historical moments. Gender is a principal concern of war narratives, and this project follows that concern by identifying a taxonomy of sub-genres of the war narrative, ranging from what I term the direct participation narrative—the account of one who experiences the war directly—to the mediated narrative—the story of a person who strives to understand someone else’s war experience—and by analyzing the way those sub-genres reveal a gendering of the war narrative, both on the level of representational content and on the level of form. This work also explores the prevalence of a generic preference that dictates fidelity to the historical referent of the war being depicted. Authors may—and certainly do— fictionalize war; however, as this work argues, such fictionalization remains

tightly constrained by generic conventions and broader ideological considerations of which they form a part. Although no text exists in a vacuum, the war narrative's attempt to represent a geopolitical and historical moment that carries real-life (and real death) consequences enacts a particular set of constraints as it represents America, its people, and that for which they will wage war.

DEDICATION

Always the coach, my father taught me mental toughness. He's also provided an unwavering example of discipline, loyalty, and tenacity. Thanks, Dad. This one's for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My work is never created in a vacuum, and I am grateful to the many people who have assisted me in producing this text. I am particularly fortunate to have a stellar dissertation committee. Each member of it has rendered invaluable assistance to me in completing this work, and any faults it contains remain my own.

As my dissertation director, Dr. Frederick Whiting has fulfilled many roles, somehow intuitively knowing just which one to adopt at which moment. I deeply appreciate his mentorship and his commitment to guiding a person rather than merely directing a dissertation.

I have followed in Dr. Philip Beidler's footsteps for much of my academic life. He is a credit to our alma mater and a trailblazer in the field of war literature. I am not his equal, but this has never kept him from treating me as if I were.

In our first meeting, Dr. Aaron Kuntz spent as much time getting to know me as he did discussing my academic work. I'm grateful for his ability to connect theory with real-world applications and his helpful introduction into an unfamiliar realm of scholarship.

Before Dr. Deborah Weiss had even accepted her current position in the English Department, I asked her to serve on my dissertation committee. I feel slightly sheepish about that now, but I mention it here because it underscores how strongly I desired her input and assistance. Her perspective has provided valuable insight, and my work is much stronger because of it.

Dr. Heather White's gifts to me are far too numerous to enumerate, so I will cite only one of them here. During a season when I was surrounded by chaos, she entrusted me to help her

compose “models of exactness,” and, in the process, offered me a refuge of structure and grace. She has bolstered me as both a scholar and a person, and I’m ever indebted to her for that.

I have received a great deal of support from the University of Alabama, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Department of English. I am particularly grateful to have been awarded a Graduate Council Fellowship and several Research and Travel Grants during my graduate career. Each of these awards enabled a dedicated focus on my work. I’m also grateful for the patient assistance of Carol Appling and all the English Department staff.

I have worked with talented and engaging students at both the University of Alabama and the University of Mary Washington. My graduate career has been further enriched by my work with Donna Cox Baker, Susan Reynolds, and the entire staff of *Alabama Heritage*.

When I was a clueless college kid, virologist and racehorse trainer John Langemeier generously granted me a spot in his lab and entrusted me with his prized filly. He also set me on the path to a career in literary studies. I’m still grateful for this.

Dr. Merinda Simmons offers an exemplary model; I’m better for having it to follow.

Dr. Tim Waples first prompted me to consider the relationship between war narratives and gender, and his unwavering belief in me undergirds all of my accomplishments, both personal and professional.

I am forever gazing at trees, trusting Colin Rafferty to study the forest and guide my way. In writing, as in life, I’m incredibly fortunate to have him as a co-conspirator.

Finally, I first began grappling with the ideas explored here several years ago, during the hour-long commute to my brother Austin's house, and in the subsequent hours I spent with him in doctors' offices and physical therapy waiting rooms. It would be disingenuous to suggest that I undertook or completed this project because of my brother. However, it is no exaggeration to state that I did not craft a single sentence within these pages without being both mindful and heart-full of him. In the spirit of George Oppen, who writes that "things explain each other, not themselves," this work will, for me, be ever bound to Austin, who could not wait to read it.

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| ABSTRACT..... | ii |
| DEDICATION..... | iv |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | v |
| 1. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 2. THE DIRECT PARTICIPANT NARRATIVE: FROM PROVENANCE TO PROMINENCE..... | 13 |
| 3. GENDER, GENRE, AND SUBVERSIONS OF THE DIRECT PARTICIPANT NARRATIVE..... | 46 |
| 4. CONSTRUCTING MEN AND CORRUPTING WOMEN: NARRATIVES OF THE 1991 GULF WAR..... | 96 |
| 5. AMERICA'S TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WARS: MADE BY MEN, UNMADE BY WOMEN..... | 134 |
| 6. CONCLUSION: THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN MILITARY AND THE POLITICS OF SEXUALITY..... | 162 |
| REFERENCES..... | 165 |

Chapter 1—Introduction

First published in 1948, Norman Mailer's best-selling novel *The Naked and the Dead* remains one of the most prominent texts of the Second World War. Mailer, a cook who did not witness extensive combat and made only "a single patrol" during his service, follows a fictionalized unit of men serving in the Pacific Theater and defines war primarily as those events that occur while on the front (McGrath). The novel's final scene depicts the newly-promoted Major Dalleson, who excitedly considers his latest idea: "He could jazz up the map-reading class by having a full-size color photograph of Betty Grable in a bathing suit, with a co-ordinate grid system laid over it. The instructor could point to different parts of her and say, 'Give me the co-ordinates.' Goddam, what an idea! The Major chuckled out of sheer pleasure" (721). On one level, of course, Dalleson's plan is an apparent ploy designed to pique the attention of uninterested soldiers. However, it is also indexical of a more insidious connection between the state and its citizens, and of the extent to which the lives of individuals are inscribed with geopolitical events, particularly the operations of war. It is not surprising that Dalleson selects a pin-up image, because the rhetoric of war in America is often sexualized. Although Mailer's scene takes place over six decades ago, its technique feels contemporary, because the military's tendency to inscribe individuals with a particular, historically contingent iteration of gender and sexuality is prevalent in contemporary literary representations of war.

In addition to its presentation of somewhat familiar gender roles, Mailer's text also offers a literary form familiar to readers of late twentieth-century American literature. This form, which I call the direct participant narrative, is written by a veteran, follows a military man and/or his

unit through a series of missions or a tour of duty, and focuses primarily on events of the war in the field. During the Vietnam War era, the direct participant narrative became the most prominent form of American war writing, to the extent that for a time, other forms were considered subversive and apocryphal.

This formal dominance has not always been standard. Indeed, American literature is replete with diverse and innovative depictions of war literature. These works consider the broader effects of war rather than focusing on combat, define participants in war not just as military personnel but as any individuals affected by wartime, and emerge from authors who often lack first-hand knowledge of combat—and sometimes even of war itself. For example, two well-known literary representations of the Civil War, Stephen Crane's 1895 *The Red Badge of Courage* and Margaret Mitchell's 1937 *Gone with the Wind*, illustrate various iterations of these traits. Born after the Civil War, neither author witnessed or participated in it. Although Crane's protagonist is a soldier and the book's plot centers around his preparation for, participation in, and reaction to combat, Crane himself was born after the Civil War and thus wrote from the perspective of an outsider. The novel proved most convincing, and it remains widely read today as one of the best representations of America's Civil War. The book's popular and critical success underscore Crane's ability to recreate its events so accurately without having witnessed or participated in them and indicates the early twentieth-century belief that authors of war narratives need not be veterans.

Similarly, *Gone With the Wind* proved a critical and popular success, winning the Pulitzer Prize and selling nearly a million copies in its first year of publication.¹ In *Scarlett O'Hara*, Mitchell presents a female protagonist who is surrounded by war. As a Confederate widow, Scarlett nurses wounded soldiers and keeps the family plantation running in the absence of male

¹ Claudia Roth Pierpont, "A Study in Scarlett," *New Yorker* (August 31, 1992), p. 87.

oversight. She does not engage in official combat, though she does shoot a marauding Yankee soldier, proving her ability to handle weaponry. By evaluating a war's effect on communities and civilians in addition to its effects on soldiers, Mitchell demonstrates that war narratives need not be confined to stories about combat. While Mitchell's choice to present war through the eyes of a female protagonist may seem unconventional to readers of late twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature—in which women were so marginalized from war literature that they were often considered unable to write it, or, when they did, they were considered transgressive and unsuccessful—that would not have seemed atypical for nineteenth-century American readers. As Nina Baym argues, in the nineteenth century, women were entrusted as keepers and recorders of the nation's memory. Baym writes: "If one granted that women's and men's minds were alike, notwithstanding the difference in bodies, one could partition the labor of history between the sexes to make men out to be the soldiers and statesmen, women the scribes, transmitters, and, ultimately, the philosophers of history" (*Feminism* 110). In evaluating the textbooks of Emma Willard, Baym concludes, "a woman may quite demonstrably *write* war" (*Feminism* 133, italics original). The popular success of Mitchell's novel demonstrates that this belief remained intact several decades into the twentieth century.

Published several years before *Gone With the Wind* but set decades later than it, Ernest Hemingway's 1929 *A Farewell to Arms* combines representative male and female World War I experiences into a single narrative. The novel's narrator is Frederic Henry, an ambulance driver on the war's Italian front, but his story quickly intertwines with that of Catherine Barkley, a nurse he meets after being wounded collaterally. By creating characters who participate in war without engaging in combat, Hemingway implicitly argues that war's participants need not carry a weapon or hold a military rank. Unlike Mitchell and Crane, Hemingway witnessed war

firsthand; the novel is loosely based on his service as an ambulance driver in present-day Kobarid, Slovenia.² Similarly, in his 1951 novel *From Here to Eternity*, James Jones presents a broad spectrum of military life by depicting the members of an Army community stationed at Oahu's Schofield Barracks in the days leading up to the attack on Pearl Harbor. The authorial decision to introduce the catalyst for America's involvement in the war on the novel's final pages, along with Jones's sensitive depiction of the women whose lives are tied to military men, marks a broad interpretation of the war narrative genre. For Jones, himself a veteran of World War II, preparation for war proves a worthy topic, as do the lives of those affected by but not enlisted in the military. James Michener addresses a similar set of concerns in his Korean War novel *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*, which overtly considers the proper place of women during wartime. Initially, one of the characters believes that women should stay on the home front, not even visiting during their husbands' leave. "War's no place for women," Admiral Tarrant says (37-8). However, through the course of the novel, Tarrant changes his attitude and decides that women deserve to understand the full extent of the challenges their military husbands face: "If we refuse to acknowledge what we're involved in, terrible consequences follow sometimes" (60). Michener's depiction, in which high-ranking military officials prove concerned with both military leadership and the welfare of military wives, underscores war's effect on those who are not directly involved in it.

As this brief selection illustrates, American war narrative prior to the Vietnam War era typically depicted America's involvement in war, from preparation to engagement, and the changes in individual Americans' lives brought on by war. While veterans could and did pen war narratives, military service was not a prerequisite for authorship of war literature. Texts by civilians were widely read and often received critical acclaim as well as commercial success. In

² In the novel, the town is identified as Caporetto, which was the Allied Powers' name for the area.

some cases, as with *The Red Badge of Courage*, they “assumed a kind of classic status” and remain firmly entrenched in the literary canon (Baym, *Norton* 602).

In many regards, this inflection of genre—whereby war literature depicts a wide range of experiences, from the military to the civilian, from peacetime preparations to the chaos of combat—seems axiomatic. War, of course, affects social systems, political systems, and even ecosystems, and its consequences are felt by many more entities than combatants. However, in the late twentieth century, American war literature underwent a sea change, and the direct participant narrative—the male veteran’s description of events in country—became the dominant form describing the American war in Vietnam. Throughout the subsequent four decades, American war literature has grappled with issues surrounding the direct participant narrative, including who has the authority to compose and narrate war stories, how those stories should be shaped, and what relationship they should have to historical events, cultural circumstances, gender roles, and military history. This study surveys this field and these issues, tracing the intersection of gender and genre throughout American war literature during the forty-five year period spanning the 1965 publication of Robin Moore’s *The Green Berets* to Tatjana Soli’s 2010 novel *The Lotus Eaters*, and arguing that American war narratives during this period use geopolitical events to advance and advocate for particular inflections of national identity and the identity, including the gender identity, of the individuals within the nation. In other words, literary representations of war often contain ideological arguments similar to the kinds associated with many less artistic forms of war writing.

The Vietnam War era proves a fruitful starting point for such an investigation, because it offers a historical moment in which many of the social spheres affecting this literature underwent drastic revision. The 1960s in America saw great change in the status of women, the

understanding of warfare and the role of participants in it, and the role of authors in creating literary texts. It also ushered in a range of new technologies, making the Vietnam War America's first televised war. While war literature prior to the Vietnam War era presents limited and minor roles for female characters, the literature of the Vietnam War era reevaluates women's status in war writing. Several factors contribute to this change. The Vietnam War era in America proves a watershed moment marked by the prominence of second-wave feminism and the increased, albeit controversial, incorporation of women in military service. Vietnam War literature acknowledges women's wartime role and simultaneously marginalizes that role. Thus, Vietnam War literature remains a productive starting point to investigate the current status of women within and surrounding war literature, the relationship American women have with war and the military, and how those relationships relate to the traditional cultural association between war and masculinity.

Generally speaking, war narratives have been historically defined by time period, according to specific wars. Thus critics usually speak of "World War II novels" or "Vietnam War fiction," and comparatively few transhistorical studies of war narratives exist. Those that do exist often compare and contrast literature from two wars rather than the entire body of national war literature. Furthermore, war narratives have rarely been evaluated on the basis of form. Most critical considerations of war narratives concern content; the primary consideration is generally the extent of the narrative's veracity or an analysis of particular characters. This emphasis on the content of war narratives—on the rare occasions when this literature is the focus of analysis at all—has contributed to an erroneous assumption that the form of war narratives is fixed and stable. A close reading of war narratives will illuminate the shifting conventions that govern—implicitly or explicitly—the genre and, by extension, the culture within which that genre does

ideological work. At stake here is more than just generic tropes. War narratives simultaneously define and defy the culture of their production, and by understanding both the stories a culture promotes and those it prohibits we may further understand the informal and often implicit mechanisms that culture uses to govern its constituents.

In other words, war narratives comment not only on the geopolitical components of national identity but also on the mutually constitutive relationship between citizen and nation.³ Specifically, such formal elements of texts as plot, narration, and character help determine what roles remain available to women within war literature. Furthermore, as Susan Faludi illustrates, national identity, like individual identity, is often portrayed in gendered terms. Therefore, the intersection of war narratives and gender provides a starting point for making observations about the genre of war narrative overall, and for understanding that genre's contributions to contemporary concepts of national identity. An investigation of these elements considers the extent to which certain kinds of war narratives are available only to male or female authors, and it ultimately demonstrates that the literature of the Vietnam War simultaneously acknowledges a female presence while marginalizing that presence, that Gulf War literature accords military women equal or greater status to military men while responding to the fear that the war will simultaneously make male participants and unmake female participants, and that the literature of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan develops several different strategies for considering gender roles in twenty-first century America, ultimately responding to a concern that women, and particularly femininity, threaten the very existence of war and warriors. Among these strategies are a return to traditional gender roles, in which women remain connected to domesticity and are

³ For a similar approach to genre study, see Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000), which contends that the Bildungsroman genre considers the individual's formation into society while simultaneously reacting to the emergence of a middle class and the development of capitalism.

separated from the masculine sphere of war (or, if they do enter it, fail within it) and the 9-11 novel, which reflects the failure of masculinity and asserts women as the dominant figures of twenty-first century American life. Thus, war remains both a gendered and gendering force, and American identity is linked to wartime constructions and the deployment not only of troops, but also of assumptions about what American men and woman are or do or believe. The literary construction of war remains implicated in these beliefs, as they both construct and complicate contemporary understanding of individual and national identity. Each of the project's chapters contextualizes a particular set of formal and generic transformations with respect to both a particular military engagement and broader social changes in the U.S.

Beginning with narratives of the American occupation of Vietnam, this project traces the manner in which canonical literary representations of war render women as outside the war experience, both formally and in terms of their plots, creating the primacy of what I call the direct participant narrative and the dominant perception of those women who do write about war as unauthorized and unwelcome. Chapter 2 offers a brief overview of the range of approaches American war literature has brought to this topic, then focuses on how, during the Vietnam War, war literature undergoes a sea change, beginning with the production of Robin Moore's nonfiction text *The Green Berets*. The military required Moore, a World War II veteran, to undergo Green Beret training before he could write about the group, and this set a literary precedent which would subsequently become standard. The direct participant narrative gained a hegemonic primacy within Vietnam War literature for several decades, reinforcing the belief that war literature remained the province of those men who had fought the war and arguing that authoritative Vietnam War literature occupies a mode somewhere between fact and fiction, a mode I call the authentic. As this change occurs in the most contested war America had ever

entered into, such alignment appears to be a form of managing the message of the war. This chapter explores the origins of this form and its common concerns with the protagonist's relationships to the nation, to the masculine ideal, and to women, as illustrated by such texts as Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July*, Tim O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*, and Karl Marlantes's *Matterhorn*.

The primacy of the direct participant narrative, combined with the exclusion of women from combat in the Vietnam War, limits the type of discourse available to women writing about the Vietnam War. As Chapter 3 demonstrates, while women's perceived cultural, literary, and military roles increase, a form I call the mediated narrative emerges. In this form, a female character tries to understand and unearth someone else's war story. This positioning also creates a plural protagonist, as the text follows both the person(s) that experienced war and the person who tries to uncover that war story. A crucial component of the mediated narrative is the confession of the mediation, whereby the protagonists simultaneously out themselves as non-participants in the events they describe and highlight the tension that arises from telling another person's story. This confession confers narrative authority even as it marginalizes the women from the war experience. The plot of a mediated narrative thus proceeds as an act of reconstruction, piecing together details of another's story. In this, female protagonists resemble detectives rather than experts; their authors, trespassers rather than participants. This similarity proves significant, because it reveals a previously unacknowledged confinement of the narrative authority accorded to women. Bobbie Ann Mason's novel *In Country* and Danielle Trussoni's memoir *Falling Through the Earth*, for example, exemplify the mediated narrative, in which a daughter strives to uncover and understand her father's experience in Vietnam.

In addition to the mediated narrative, several other types of subversion challenge the male veteran's dominance of the direct participant narrative form. Early examples of direct participant narratives written by women, including Susan Fromberg Schaffer's *Buffalo Afternoon* and Danielle Steel's *Message From Nam*, met a great deal of critical resistance and even ridicule. Eventually, a handful of male veteran authors composed texts that contend women do have a place in the Vietnam canon and further complicate the authority of male veterans. Such texts, which include Nelson DeMille's *Up Country* and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, combine with changes in social and military practices to retroactively enfranchise women writers and protagonists in the Vietnam War genre. The exemplar of such enfranchisement is Tatjana Soli's 2010 novel *The Lotus Eaters*, which—though its plot bears significant resemblances to that of Steel's 1990 novel—received great critical and popular acclaim.

Chapter 4 charts how women's place in war narratives broadens as the military roles available to women expand, and it further argues that the literature of the Persian Gulf War demonstrates that the direct participant and mediated forms used to depict the Vietnam War are no longer deployed along neatly gendered lines. Although the Gulf War is a very small war with little attached literature, that literature nonetheless signals the advent of a crisis in the relationship between warfare and American masculinity. One set of novels addresses the burgeoning technology associated with contemporary warfare, arguing that in divorcing military personnel from combat, this technology also prevents the formation of masculinity. Another group of Gulf War texts takes up this concern by focusing on war as an instiller of masculinity. Among these texts are Andrew Huebner's novel *We Pierce* and Anthony Swofford's memoir *Jarhead*. By demonstrating the extent to which war transforms boys into men, these texts illustrate the gendered and gendering nature of war, reinforcing the fear that war unmakes

women and implicitly affirming the belief that femininity is anathema to the military experience. A final set of texts shows women participating fully in war, either alongside men or in place of those men who remain at home. While these texts grant female characters an increased presence in the events of war, they also foreground that female presence, responding primarily to the tenet that war makes men and unmakes women. In other words, these texts often grapple with the fear that the females who go to war will do so to the detriment of their femininity, though they advance different conclusions about this fear. One set of texts, exemplified by Tom Willard's *Sword of Valor* and Rhonda Cornum's *She Went to War*, argues that military women can balance femininity with successful military performance. Other texts disagree, though they identify the problems in a variety of areas, from the masculinization of military women to the refusal of military men to accept women as colleagues.

Chapter 5 looks first at the 9/11 novel, a facet of contemporary war narratives that revisits the association of the female with the domestic—a term that is inflected in this era to include not only the home, but all that is encompassed by the nation. Contemporary war literature depicts women in military roles but generally argues that to be successful in these roles, they must abandon their gender identity. The 9/11 novel, as exemplified in such texts as Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Ken Kalfus's *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*, depict a mother guiding and protecting her children in the absence of a strong masculine family figure. These novels do not depict all men as being at war, but they do demonstrate the scarcity of capable family men, and they situate the maternal figure in the domestic sphere—not just in the home, but on the home front. Taken in concert with the contemporary war narrative discussed in the next chapter, these texts suggest that while females may be found at war, femininity remains and belongs stateside.

This project then turns to the literature of America's twenty-first century wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which continue to mark the presence of the American military woman but often view her as what Tara McKelvey has termed "a destabilizing force," one that threatens war and warriors. Kayla Williams's memoir *Love My Rifle More than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army* details the complications surrounding the contemporary military woman, arguing that to be a successful military professional, a woman must eschew her femininity. Rick Bragg's biography *I am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story* presents a different take, arguing that military women, whether being rescued or raped, are unable to escape their gender, and their presence in the military remains aberrational and disruptive. The circumstances surrounding the publication of Bragg's text are equally compelling; his text's inclusion of a rape narrative that remains unsupported by factual evidence and disputed by his subject underscores his views on women as victims unsuited for military service. It also suggests that female participants in war may not be trusted to relay their own stories, indicating a continued belief that even when women participate in war directly, their narrative authority remains contested.

In Chapter 6, the conclusion, this project looks at contemporary negotiations surrounding homosexual military personnel and postulates several possible ways in which the war narrative form might respond to them. Although the ongoing nature of these negotiations, specifically the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, and the lack of overt literary treatments of military homosexuality, render this analysis preliminary, I anticipate this topic receiving more extended treatment when I develop my dissertation into a book project. The current debate suggests that while the primary focus may be shifting from gender to sexuality, the belief that an individual's identity affects his or her military performance pertains, and the debate over who may best represent America remains far from settled.

Chapter 2—The Direct Participant Narrative: From Provenance to Prominence

Prior to the conflict in Vietnam, American war literature represented a wide range of generic approaches and settings. However, early American narratives of the Vietnam War emerged along a very rigid set of generic standards, suggesting that the unofficial rules surrounding the production of military-themed texts had changed, and codifying the direct participant narrative as the most prominent and prevalent form of Vietnam War texts and establishing realism as the dominant mode of this form.

This change is best represented in the production of Robin Moore's 1965 text *The Green Berets*, a book whose origins illustrate the tension surrounding war narratives. Published one year after the Gulf of Tonkin incident and subsequent resolution and three years before the Tet Offensive, the book became one of the most popular books of its time, appearing fifth on Publisher's Weekly's year-end sales charts in 1965 and eventually becoming a Hollywood film starring John Wayne. Its effect was not only entertainment but also persuasion; as Sandra Wittman argues, the text and subsequent film "led many young men to volunteer for service in Vietnam" (xv-xvi). In addition to effecting this change in military enrollment, *The Green Berets* proved influential in literary terms, as it established what I call the direct participant narrative as the authoritative literary form of the Vietnam War. This form, which depicts a protagonist with a personal experience of war and privileges the status of the male veteran as author, has antecedents in the literature of earlier American wars. However, in the Vietnam era, the direct participant narrative gains a dominant status that inhibits the production of other forms of Vietnam War narratives. This dominance arises from the confluence of a number of literary and

socio-historical factors, including the unique nature of the Vietnam War in the history of American combat experiences, changes in the genre of war literature, and the contested status of women in American culture.

Commentaries on the American war in Vietnam often highlight the fact that this war was unlike previous American wars. Unlike World War II, America's entry into the war was not predicated by an attack on U.S. soil. No official declaration of war was ever made, no clear battleground existed, civilians and children often intermixed with the enemy, and the American populace proved sharply divided on America's involvement in the war—much more than in previous twentieth-century wars. While the war itself provoked domestic dissention, other changes also contributed to upheaval in American society. The Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement gained strength in the Vietnam War era. The Black Panthers and the National Organization for Women (NOW), both founded in 1966, represented movements that threatened the white male's privileged position in American society. Morris Dickstein connects some changes in social relations to evolution in literary forms, observing that when “the sixties sparked a revival of feminism... women reclaimed their vital position in the American novel” (25). Dickstein, of course, is speaking in more general generic terms, and it is interesting to note that this resurgence of woman in this era of American letters does not pertain to war narratives.

In addition to broader social changes, transitions in the American military contributed to the evolution of the war literature genre. In his preface to *The Green Berets*, Moore, a World War II veteran, describes his attempt to write “an inside informed view of...our Special Forces in Vietnam” (Moore 9). His adjectives prove telling, as they align the “inside” or firsthand knowledge with a heightened level of information and apparent accuracy. When Moore approached the military for permission to interview and accompany members of the Green

Berets, however, he received only provisional approval: in order to write the book, he must complete the same military training as the men he would write about. Military officials explained, “First jump school. If you get through that we’ll discuss putting you through the guerrilla course. If you graduate from the Special Warfare School, you’ll begin to understand Special Forces. Then, maybe, you’ll be qualified to write about the green berets...” (Moore 11). In other words, the military argued that in order to write about Special Forces, an author required specialized knowledge—not just of his own trade, but of the profession he depicts—and that such knowledge could only be obtained by participation, not research. This provision proves startling, particularly since Moore had not only received prior military training, he had also served in combat and even earned a medal for his service. To military officials, however, these credentials were insufficient. To write about a soldier, it was not enough simply to observe a soldier, or even to be a soldier. By their reasoning, the Vietnam War was unlike previous conflicts, and the Green Berets were unlike ordinary soldiers.⁴ In order to understand the Green Berets, officials argued, Moore must become one of them, their kind of soldier. He did, completing all the required training and composing an account of the men it shaped. In the wake of *The Green Berets*, this restricted view of authorship, whereby only a veteran of an experience is deemed qualified to write about that experience, was adopted by a substantial portion of early Vietnam War literature, and the direct participant narrative gained a dominance that would remain sacrosanct for decades.

Along with advocating military service in the Vietnam War era as a prerequisite for writing about that war, *The Green Berets* sets an additional precedent for the genre of war literature. In the book’s introduction, Moore calls his work “a book of truth” (9). However, he

⁴ Although the Special Forces had existed in the U.S. military since 1952, this branch received a rebranding of sorts under President John F. Kennedy, who authorized the use of the green beret as part of the uniform, calling it “a mark of distinction” (Moore 16).

also explains that he decided to classify it as fiction to protect the United States and its soldiers. He writes, “Special Forces operations are, at times, highly unconventional. To report such occurrences factually, giving names, dates, and locations, could only embarrass U. S. planners in Vietnam and might even jeopardize the careers of invaluable officers” (9-10). Moore asserts that he has changed names and details but remained faithful to “the basic truth” (9). He subsequently refers to his style as both a “blend of fact and ‘fiction’” and simply “fiction” (10). In keeping with the author’s approach, the Library of Congress categorizes Moore’s text as a novel.

Moore’s crisis of genre and the circumstances surrounding it illustrate the stakes of generic classification: in war narratives, the veracity of a tale matters. This is not necessarily to say that all war stories must be true; indeed, as Moore’s statements indicate, sometimes the veil of artifice proves useful. In either case, an extraordinary level of attention is devoted to the consequences of this classification of the factual versus fictional within narratives of the Vietnam War. This conflation between fact and fiction, and the subsequent suggestion of an authenticity that transcends facts such as names and details, will be reflected in many Vietnam War narratives. For this reason, and because the narratives generally conform to the same set of literary devices with respect to plot, character, and setting, a thorough study of Vietnam War literature must look generally at narratives of the war rather than confine its work to a single category such as fiction or nonfiction. Indeed, the early literature of the Vietnam War seems to disregard these literary classifications in favor of identifying authentic war stories. In this, the generic category of authenticity does not necessarily map onto the objective truth; rather, veterans assume a status that allows narrative license that non-veterans lack. As Moore argues, his text is not strictly factual, yet it offers an insider’s view, ostensibly an authoritative perspective. This classification, which privileges the authentic over the factual, remains linked

to—and possibly a cause of—the requisite veteran status of authors. Initially, the literature of the Vietnam War—and often, its characters—argues that people who did not experience the war directly could never understand it, because in its lack of clearly-defined battles, objectives, or enemies, it proved unlike previous wars. To tell an authentic war story you had to have lived it—or so assert the men who wrote the early Vietnam War narratives.

The conviction that wartime service distinguishes veterans from their peers remains a trope of war literature. However, literature of the Vietnam War further refines this trope, suggesting that veterans may only be understood by those people whose military service resembles theirs in both kind and degree. Prior to the Vietnam War, some narratives did argue that civilians could not fully understand the experiences of military personnel. However, participants in the Vietnam War extend this claim further, contending that their war remained unlike previous wars, and that veterans of other conflicts could not understand their experiences.⁵ In other words, Vietnam War veterans understood that the changing nature of geopolitics and warfare rendered their position in social and military history unique. This approach enacts a hierarchy of status that distinguishes between both the kind of service (which war or branch of the military a veteran participated in) and the degree of service (the extent of the participation). Thus, participants in war are categorized not only by their status as civilians or veterans, but also by the proximity of their service to the front itself. As Pete, a Vietnam veteran in Bobbie Ann Mason's novel *In Country*, observes, "You don't know how it was, and you never will. There's no way you can ever understand it....Unless you've been humping the boonies, you don't know" (136). Pete may be a fictional character, but his sentiments pertain to a wide spectrum of actual Vietnam War veterans, who proclaimed their experiences unique in the history of American

⁵ For another example of the distinction Vietnam War veterans make between their war experiences and those of veterans from other wars, see Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976), p.93-6.

warfare. Whereas previous wars constituted subject matter open to non-veteran authors, the direct participant narratives of the Vietnam War are authored almost exclusively by veterans. Furthermore, when non-veterans initially attempted to write this type of narrative, their authority was questioned, and their efforts were deemed invalid—not necessarily because of an absence of literary merits, but because of a perceived lack of authority on the subject of war.

It is worth noting that although authenticity remains the most prevalent standard for evaluating twentieth-century Vietnam War narratives, some veterans objected to this standard, advocating for what they considered a more objective truth—and, not incidentally—a more favorable view of the American military and its personnel. To put it in colloquial terms, these texts strive to set the record straight. They conform to the basic premise of the direct participant narrative, because they arise from a belief that only witnesses may speak accurately about events. However, they also argue that some witnesses are better than others. While the basis of this qualification is often left unexplored, the texts argue implicitly that witnesses who disparage the military are less reliable than those who admire it. In many cases, the authors of this sort of text served their entire careers in the military. Generally speaking, these texts are less concerned with literary value than with the presentation and protection of an uncompromised and uncompromising nationalism.

For example, Robert Hemphill's 1998 memoir *Platoon*, written as a correction to veteran Oliver Stone's movie of the same name, presents its intentions overtly: to tell what its author perceives as the true and laudable story of the platoon he commanded. That story, in Hemphill's estimation, is one that has been subject to "irresponsible portrayal by a revisionist and hostile Hollywood" (xi). The text's dedication, curiously presented as the first in a list of epigraphs, summarizes Hemphill's stance: "To the men of Bravo Company—/They answered their nation's

call/and they did their duty!” *Platoon* thus wages its own revision, weaving an account of noble men serving patriotically.

The book proceeds more as a military history than a literary text, and its plot—a mostly chronological recollection of events Hemphill experienced in Vietnam—proves of marginal interest. A majority of the text consists of recreated radio communications between Hemphill, the protagonist, and the soldiers of his company. Little to no character development occurs, and the structure lacks narrative coherence aside from the chronological progression. The text contains an abundance of exclamation points. While Hemphill asserts that his account is the real one, some scenes evoke a reader’s skepticism. For example, an account of the TET Offensive, which occurred while Hemphill was in country, reports: “I walked over to Lieutenants Sam Monroe (an alias) and Randy Lorne. ‘Well, I wonder what they’ll called this screwed-up mess in the history books. Probably the ‘TET Offensive’ or some other catchy term’” (139). While it is certainly possible that Hemphill presciently coined the phrase, it seems unlikely, and his presentation of the incident arouses skepticism. More significant to my purposes than the text’s literary weaknesses, however, is Hemphill’s assertion that his account of the events is more accurate than the account of one of his fellow men. In fact, the entire existence of the book *Platoon* may be traced to Hemphill’s desire to discredit the account of Oliver Stone, who also served in Bravo Company. Certainly Hemphill feels his personal honor is at stake, and he is at pains to clarify that the movie does not represent his war experience. He also goes one step further, stating that his men did not behave in the manner presented in Stone’s film, and that the movie is not the story of Bravo Company. Hemphill’s assertion that he alone may represent the story of a military unit establishes a clear, if misguided, restriction on who, even among veterans, has the authority to tell Vietnam War stories.

In the introduction to his text, he demeans the treatment servicemen received from their “fellow Americans” (xi). However, his explanation for such treatment further reveals criteria the by which he evaluates war stories. Initially, Hemphill blames what he views as the American people’s misconceptions about the war on “a constant barrage of negative information and misinformation,” presumably provided by the media. He then argues that the misconceptions were also the result of the typical American serviceman’s choice not “to talk about why he went, what positive things were accomplished, and what he learned there.” The public perception, Hemphill contends, “might have played out differently had our combat veterans chosen to speak out about their efforts and achievements” (xii). In this, Hemphill makes an argument about the content of war stories, which, according to him, should be laudatory and positive, always pointing to military success. In this case, the storyteller’s identity matters less than the story itself. And that story’s content proves quite significant—according to this argument, the narratives themselves have a hand in shaping both public reception to historical events and the material and social circumstances surrounding participants in those events.

Although this precondition appears to have originated with the American military and authors writing about it, many literary critics adopted its premises. Distinguishing between the soldier’s “unofficial narrative” and official but often distorted military history, critic Jen Dunnaway celebrates soldier-authors, who hold “an almost mythic level of narrative power” (37). As the title of her article indicates, its argument concludes that veterans possess “a Truer form of Truth,” and that their accounts hold a different stature than those of non-veterans. Tobey Herzog assigns a similar purpose—“a higher level of literary truth”—to war narratives, and he uses the conditions common to soldiers’ experiences to formulate what he considers appropriate themes for Vietnam War literature (3). Nicholas Vanover offers a slightly different inflection of

this argument, contending that the experience of war necessitates the creative and fictional nature of its participants' stories, which are primarily cathartic coping mechanisms: "The soldier's mental survival depends on his ability to provide for himself an illusory meaning to the surrounding chaos. Almost without exception, he must go to the lengths of transforming the identities of his compatriots, as well as his own" (417). Thomas Bowie mediates the generic distinction, arguing that postwar writing is often "a struggle to find a story that the writer can live with" (185). While this sort of argument allows for the fictional nature of war narratives, it is complicated by Bowie's overall project, which attempts to read the works of Tim O'Brien as a record of the author's "personal narrative journey" (196). Thus, this argument contends that while the works may be fictional, taken together, those fictions constitute a sort of autobiography.

Philip K. Jason similarly blurs the genres of fiction and nonfiction, arguing that in the post-Vietnam era, war stories increasingly reject the traditional distinction between fact and fabrication (4). Jason's project, which entails establishing new criteria for evaluating Vietnam War literature, takes issue with what he terms "the test of authenticity," because it is deployed differently by different critics, some of whom take the term to mean "real," while others interpret it as "original" (43). Among the former, this test also presumes that authors must be veterans. Jason's argument proceeds from the belief that "one goal of literature is to render convincingly a vision of life," and it contends that the formal components of Vietnam War literature must reflect the conditions surrounding that war itself (15). Thus, he distinguishes between novels that present "traditional realist narratives," which he finds unable to represent adequately "the essence of [the Vietnam War]," and novels that use formal techniques to disrupt the reader's expected experience (24). Members of this latter group, which includes novels such as Tim

O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* and which rely on "a severely limited perspective... passages of lyrical, surreal description that create distortions of time, place, and action (or illusions of such distortion); and little or no backgrounding of assumptions," position the reader in a chaotic and absurd experience that evokes the absurdity of the Vietnam War (16). Thus, Jason's argument asserts the importance of a realistic portrayal of war, but it locates that realism in the effect the narrative has on the reader rather than in the presentation of rigorously authenticated facts. In this line of thought, which has roots in the work of Poe, a narrative's success depends on its ability to evoke certain psychological responses in readers. These critical theories remain unified by the belief that veterans possess a superior narrative authority, one that may even supersede historical truth in pursuit of emotional or personal truth. These theoretical approaches indicate the particular limiting circumstances surrounding both the creation and the content of war narratives and show one basis for non-veteran authors to be excluded from such narratives.

In addition to specific—albeit sometimes implicit—guidelines concerning authorship and narrative authenticity, direct participant narratives in Vietnam War literature exhibit several common concerns—for the protagonist's relationship to the nation, to the masculine ideal, and to women. Each of these themes will be fully discussed below, using examples from three prominent texts—Tim O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*; Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July*; and Karl Marlantes's *Matterhorn*. These texts establish an individual's sense of patriotism as one of the primary reasons he enters military service. This emotional circumstance situates the individual in the context of the nation: patriots gain their definition by that which they defend. Although it is by no means the only context in which individuals view themselves, this situation grants the nation great latitude in individual identity formation, and authors of war narratives identify their status as citizens of the nation as a primary

factor in their sense of themselves. This relationship between nation and individual does not only encourage men to enter military service. It also makes them soldiers, and in so doing, establishes a set of identity markers that encode “proper” roles for soldiers and civilians, men and women. Additionally, the military and social rhetoric “deploys” along gendered lines, associating war with the masculine and coding as feminine anything that is anti-war. As a result of this rhetoric, gender serves as shorthand for war experience. Although some women did participate in military service in the Vietnam War era, their experiences remain outside the accepted norms of the Vietnam War. Direct participant narratives of the Vietnam War thus acknowledge a female presence (whether military or civilian) while marginalizing that presence. Of course, these themes often intersect—for example, in the military’s alignment of war and patriotism with masculinity—but the following discussion will treat them as somewhat separable entities for ease of discussion.

This concern for the protagonist’s patriotism, masculinity, and relationship with women permeates several direct participant narratives that appear, on their surfaces, more divergent than convergent. Tim O’Brien’s memoir *If I Die in a Combat Zone Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*, explores the author’s formation through military experience and charts how that experience alienates him from women. Lauded as “one of the best books to come out of the [Vietnam] war,” *If I Die* is also one of the war’s earliest texts (Wittman 141). First published in 1973 and considered a “typical” account, the book appeared while American troops were still engaged in combat and several years before the fall of Saigon (Whittman 141). Rather than glorify the military, as Robin Moore’s *The Green Berets* did, O’Brien’s work highlights the everyday tensions of a soldier who reports for duty despite his misgivings about war. The episodic memoir proceeds a-chronologically, interspersing accounts of the author’s military experiences with

sections that trace his familial heritage—a heritage that he finds inextricable from military history. *If I Die* illustrates the role of nationalism in sending men to war and the extent to which the military promotes certain identity tropes in its soldiers. It also follows one man's attempt to retain a sense of self in resistance to those tropes, and it charts his formation in the process.

While O'Brien's text marks his growing acceptance of his military identity after a youth of resistance, Ron Kovic's memoir *Born on the Fourth of July* marks his transition from a patriotic enlistee into a prominent anti-war activist⁶. First published in 1976, Kovic's memoir follows the aftermath of his wounding in Vietnam, with particular focus on his transition home and his transformation into an anti-war protestor and speaker. An episodic memoir, the book proceeds in a-chronological fashion and alternates between first- and third-person points of view. As in *If I Die*, Kovic's text highlights the pervasive influence of nationalism. However, the men's experiences differ in that O'Brien enters the war despite his misgivings about its morality, while Kovic enlists voluntarily. Kovic's initial embrace of the national project allows for a more substantial impact when he realizes the flaws of that project; the narrative charts his transformation from a proud Marine to an anti-war protestor. In the process, it adheres to many of the same conventions as O'Brien's text and illustrates that the rhetoric of the Vietnam war was inseparable from nationalism and gender politics. Furthermore, it demonstrates the consequences of such politics by showing the rhetoric's effects on a soldier returning home to substantially less than a hero's welcome.

Published in 2010 to coincide with the thirty-fifth anniversary of the fall of Saigon (and the end of America's occupation of Vietnam), Karl Marlantes's novel generated a great deal of popular recognition, accruing significant sales and spending several weeks on the *New York*

⁶ To the extent that they are also working in the bildungsroman form, these texts seem to plot onto Moretti's idea of the novel of classification and the novel of transformation. Thinking about if and how this observation could be helpful to my analysis.

Times best sellers list. Critic Sebastian Junger called the novel “not a book so much as a deployment” and found within it a realistic evocation of the emotional and mental confusion arising from time in a war zone. Marlantes’s narrative tracks the fates of the men composing a single military unit (the reserve regiment Bravo Company of the Twenty-Fourth Marines) as it pursues a specific objective: the occupation, abandonment, and reclamation of Matterhorn, a mountain ultimately believed crucial to the American war effort. The plot of *Matterhorn* explores the tensions between enlisted men and their officers, traces the connection between war and masculinity, and foregrounds the extent to which war instills maturity in its participants. Although published in the twenty-first century, *Matterhorn* presents the direct participant narrative’s typical treatment of women, who function as what might be called mediated characters: figures relayed through the male characters’ memories and stories, but rarely depicted as physically present in the novel’s primary narrative.

A conventional trope of both memoir and the bildungsroman is the biographical section recounting the author’s birth and describing his family of origin. In the direct participant narrative, this trope generally situates the protagonist’s origins with respect to his nation, contextualizing his birth and formation. In *If I Die ...*, the familial is subsumed into the military; rather than arising from a mother’s womb or a couple’s love, O’Brien “grew out of one war and into another” (11). Instead of recounting the family situation—where they lived, his parents’ names or personalities, the existence or absence of siblings—O’Brien introduces himself through his parents’ involvement in American military history, in a chapter titled “Pro Patria”: “My father came from leaden ships of sea, from the Pacific theater; my mother was a WAVE. I was the offspring of the great campaign against the tyrants of the 1940s, one explosion in the Baby Boom, one of millions come to replace those who had just died” (11). O’Brien thus presents

himself not as an individual, but as a type, a child whose future military purpose seems apparent from birth. He is not just a family's baby but a nation's citizen and its future protector.

Given this background, O'Brien's military service appears inevitable. However, he also presents it as a disputed war, one he could have avoided. He notes that many of his friends found academic or medical deferments (21). His family views his reporting for service as a choice, one they allow him to make alone: "The decision was mine and it was not talked about" (17). In making this decision, however, O'Brien returns to the heritage of "Pro Patria." His town's veterans have taught him about war (13). Members of the draft board are "calling [him] to duty, smiling so nicely" (17). In the end, O'Brien subordinates his objections to the patriotic ideal and reports for duty, feeling he "owed the prairie something" and recognizing that his "was not a town where the son of a father can sometimes escape scrutiny" (18). One of his acquaintances puts it succinctly: "No war is worth losing your country for" (21). He gets on a bus, takes an oath, and eventually becomes an infantryman in Alpha Company.

By titling the section, "Pro Patria," which references both a line in Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et decorum est" and Horace's original use of the phrase, O'Brien reveals his awareness of the literary tradition's concern with war. However, Owen's anti-war text is not mentioned in the events of the narrative and seems not to have shaped the young O'Brien. Rather, its appearance as a title marks its relevance to O'Brien the author, who retells his story after he has seen the war. The author understands what the would-be soldier did not: that finding glory in dying for one's country is "the old lie" (Stallworthy 140). Indeed, the young O'Brien more closely resembles the youths of Owen's poem, who believe the mythology. O'Brien's friend Erik, whom he meets in training at Fort Lewis, understands this better: "We come to Fort Lewis afraid to admit we are

not Achilles, that we are not brave, not heroes” (38). Erik realizes that they are already indoctrinated—shaped not only by their national ideals, but by literary myth.

Once enlisted, O’Brien faces further indoctrination, as he learns that a great deal of the military’s training consists of shaping men into particular types of citizens and soldiers. In O’Brien’s account the military instills obedience and conformity through two primary mechanisms: a rigid system of hierarchy and discipline and a complex deployment of rhetorical devices that work unofficially to shape soldiers’ identity. Soldiers in O’Brien’s unit learn quickly not to question their superiors, even when those superiors provide inaccurate information or issue commands that counteract military policy. At Fort Lewis, the squad leader lies when promising the men a late wake-up call (46); in the field, O’Brien’s Captain orders him not to report certain firefights (8) but instructs him at other times to call in coordinates for ambushes that never occur (86); when asking advice from the Army Chaplain, O’Brien may not express disagreement with him (56). Soon, the infantrymen do not even question each other. When Barney, a fellow soldier, asks O’Brien “the name of this goddamn place,” O’Brien tells him, then offers to show it to him on the map. Barney refuses the chance for proof: “What’s the difference? You say St. Vith, I guess that’s it” (5). In terms of the military structure O’Brien presents, Barney remains a success, a soldier who does not question the information presented to him. According to the narrative, the successful soldier is one who blindly accepts information and instruction in the name of patriotism.

Like O’Brien, Kovic situates his personal history within that of their nation. In a passage that explains his memoir’s title, Kovic writes, “For me it began in 1946 when I was born on the Fourth of July” (35). Although the date was simply a coincidence, it is one the young Kovic takes seriously: “Being born on the exact same day as my country, I thought was really great. I

was so proud” (38). Guests at his birthday parties sang the customary “Happy Birthday” along with “I’m a Yankee Doodle Dandy,” never separating Kovic’s own birth from their identity as Americans. Kovic’s sense of nationalism emerges from his birth, but it is also fueled by other events. Kovic describes his childhood through characteristically American scenes, from playing baseball—America’s pastime—to watching Elvis Presley perform on the Ed Sullivan Show (35-39). He idolizes “Mickey Mantle, the fabulous New York Yankees, [and] John Wayne,” whose film *The Sands of Iwo Jima* inspires Kovic and his friends to enact their own war stories, “turn[ing] the woods into a battlefield” (43-4). Whereas O’Brien expressed some ambivalence about serving in Vietnam, in Kovic’s telling, a typical American boyhood incorporates aspirations of military heroics and national service.

The military indoctrination may begin in childhood, but it certainly continues during military training, as Kovic discovers after enlisting. At Paris Island, he and the other recruits are referred to alternately as “ladies” (63), “sweet little ladies,” “sweetpeas,” (64), and “babies” (71). Kovic describes them as “schoolchildren,” underscoring their dependence (75). However, once they complete training, Kovic and the others are considered Marines, and their status is elevated; they are going to become heroes. Although his time in the war causes Kovic to question the efficacy of war, he does not question that his service will result in a hero’s status. Even when he is wounded, Kovic thinks, “I was getting out of the war and I was going to be a hero” (204-5). Kovic, who idolized military men as a child, cannot believe that he, too, will not be worshiped for his military service. From the military hospital in Vietnam, Kovic dictates a letter to his family but fails to describe adequately his condition, telling them only “I am hurt pretty bad but I have done it for America and...it is worth it” (14). “Pretty bad” proves somewhat of an understatement; Kovic’s wound has paralyzed him from the chest down. He remains committed

to the military ideals of sacrifice and duty—even in the face of physical trauma. Thus, the individual’s identity is sacrificed to protect the identity of the nation.

Of course, Kovic does not initially understand the extent of his sacrifice, believing it to be a trade-off that will prove “worth it” for the hero’s status he will receive. On his return to the states, however, Kovic quickly realizes that he is not considered heroic, and, furthermore, that rather than uniting him with other Americans, his service in Vietnam has alienated him from a majority of his countrymen. He details the deplorable conditions of the VA hospital, asserting, “This isn’t like the poster down by the post office where the guy stood with the shiny shoes; this is a concentration camp” (24). He is lied to by members of the American Legion, who exaggerate the accolades he should expect (19). When he rides in a Memorial Day parade, he expects to be met with cheers and waves but is greeted instead with silence and “staring faces” (90). Kovic, too, remains silenced, told by a television producer that he cannot appear on her show, because “she didn’t think it would be tasteful at all to let the people of L.A. see a crippled kid on a Sunday morning” (135). Kovic thought he would be revered as the American ideal, but he is considered profane instead. He feels disconnected even from other veterans, who “had never been to his war” and who he believes cannot then understand his experiences in it (93).⁷

Whereas Kovic’s and O’Brien’s texts remain primarily concerned with the patriotism and individual identity formation of a single protagonist, Karl Marlantes’s 2010 novel *Matterhorn* presents a different inflection of the intersection of national and individual identity by addressing overtly the racially-motivated conflicts enacted by the integrated troops. Marlantes’s treatment of race considers the extent to which issues central to the civil rights movement accompanied African American soldiers to Vietnam and informed their conduct there. This narrative thread

⁷ This belief, of course, remains a hallmark of the direct participant narrative and offers a rationale for the narrative’s existence: if no one else can understand Kovic’s past, then only he has the ability to narrate it.

acknowledges the intersection between American cultural history and American military history, and it recuperates a group of Americans whose wartime service in Vietnam has traditionally been underrepresented in the literature of the war. Although many texts consider relationships between American military personnel and the Vietnamese people, *Matterhorn*'s approach complicates these concerns, demonstrating the extent to which the nation's problems spanned the domestic as well as the international.

As these three texts indicate, a primary concern of the direct participant narrative is the role of nationalism and patriotism in individual identity formation. This concern spans decades, permeating both memoirs and novels, and remains a common theme of the direct participant narrative form.

War discourse itself is often gendered, and, as critic Jacqueline Lawson observes, American rhetoric of the Vietnam War commonly aligns the Vietnamese with femininity and the U.S. military with masculinity (15). The direct participant narrative typically adopts this sort of concern for the protagonist's masculinity, which is often presented as directly proportional to his effectiveness as military personnel. Indeed, literature of the Vietnam War tends to depict the military using two common rhetorical techniques—the hypermasculinization of anything war-related and the accompanying feminization of anything anti-war—to shape its members into the military ideal.

If I Die highlights these rhetorical techniques as significant aspects of military training and considers their effect on O'Brien and his colleague Erik. When Erik shares his anti-war sentiments with a superior at Fort Lewis, he is called a "pussy" (36). When Erik and O'Brien are subsequently discovered sitting on a log behind the barracks while discussing literature and shining their boots, their superior qualifies the slur, calling them "college pussies" and adding

“You’re afraid to be in the war, a goddamn pussy, a goddamn lezzie?” (47). While Erik and O’Brien voice moral objections to the war, not fear of it, Drill Sergeant Blyton finds any anti-war sentiment feminine. Furthermore, he aims to punish the apparent aberrance not only through rhetorical but also physical means: “You know what we do with pussies, huh? We fuck ‘em. In the army we just fuck ‘em and straighten them out” (47). Blyton’s conception of masculinity depends on violence—it is expressed through the violence of war and regulated through sexual violence.

The rhetorical equation of masculinity with the military does not just hinge on aligning civilians with the feminine. Indeed, as the military teaches men to essentialize women, it also defines soldiers by their sexual organs, even going so far as to refer to enlisted men as “swinging dicks” (52). Once in country, soldiers judge the success of their tours not only by their survival, but also by their sexual responses. One soldier hopes to leave intact, “alive, so my girls can grab me so I’ll know it” (141). An officer at Fort Lewis uses a similar trope, telling trainees that “I been over there [Vietnam] twice now, and I’m still alive and screwin’ everything in sight” (52). For such soldiers, being alive encompasses more than a general physical state; it is also tied to sexual ability.

While O’Brien is drafted into military service, *Born on the Fourth of July*’s Ron Kovic enlists in the military willingly as a teen, convinced that military service will lead to fully-realized masculinity. He recalls afternoons playing war, when he and his friends would strut “out of the woods like the heroes we knew we would become when we were men...we dreamed of becoming United States Marines and fighting our first war” (44-45). Kovic’s causal language proves telling; shaped by John Wayne films and other popular representations of war, throughout his childhood—and indeed, up through his military service—Kovic associates masculinity with

the military. His boyhood decision to enlist in the Marines is solidified by the presentation of Marine recruiters who speak at his high school, promising the students “that the Marine Corps built men” (61). Kovic believes that military service will invariably be accompanied by other attributes of masculinity, including heroism and female admirers. At one point, he summarizes his high school daydreams, writing that wanted to be a hero and wanted to get a girlfriend (51). The two seem inseparable, as if heroics, the exhibition of one’s manhood, are to be rewarded with a woman, the fulfillment of that manhood.

Matterhorn offers a less overt treatment of these ideas, but it still associated masculinity with military proficiency. The novel’s protagonist, Waino Mellas, arrives in country bathed in inexperience—as both a Marine and a man. He carefully hides the fact of his virginity from his fellow Marines, but it haunts him personally, and men sense his immaturity, teasing him because he “ain’t got nobody to write except [his] mother” (16). Throughout the course of the novel, Mellas gains authority and confidence, finally gaining the title of acting commander—a responsibility he had long desired. Somewhat ironically, Mellas’s time outside of combat proves crucial in determining his military identity. Early in his combat tour, Mellas suffers an eye injury and gets evacuated to a hospital ship. When embarking the vessel, Mellas is forced to relinquish his weapons—not just the standard issue machinery, but a sword he acquired upon another Marine’s death. His attempts to reclaim the sword occupy his time on the ship, and this quest, more than his physical recovery, defines his passage back to combat. His efforts hinge on the assistance of a nurse, who agrees to help him regain his weapon but refuses to engage with him physically or romantically. In this, the sword becomes a surrogate for Mellas’s health and his masculinity; once he regains it, he rejoins his unit.

By earning military experience Mellas apparently gains his surrogate masculinity, but this is not the case, and many Vietnam War texts remain concerned with the elusive nature of such identity. In texts such as *If I Die in a Combat Zone* and *Born on the Fourth of July* O'Brien and Kovic are told repeatedly in their military training that going to war will make them men. As Lawson has shown, however, such a formulation equates losing a war with emasculation (15). It is their recognition of the fallacy of this "war as a maker of men" myth that ultimately compromises their characters' own masculinity.⁸

Thus, when the national myth of war—that it makes males into men—fails, veterans must resort to their own methods for establishing their masculinity. In *The Remasculinization of America* critic Susan Jeffords identifies the Vietnam War as one focal point of this destabilization of masculinity, contending that "established as victims—of their government, their war, the Vietnamese, American protestors, and the women's movement—Vietnam veterans are portrayed in contemporary American culture as emblems of an unjustly discriminated masculinity" (116). According to Jeffords, these feelings of discrimination contributed to an attempt to reinscribe patriarchal systems in American culture. Jeffords accurately identifies the primacy of gender among narrative tropes of the Vietnam War, and she argues that they wage a "remasculinization' of American culture, the large-scale renegotiation and regeneration of the interests, values, and projects of patriarchy now taking place in U.S. social relations" (xi). Building on the assertion that "War is a crucible for the distillation of social and cultural relations," Jeffords's argument claims that the primary concern of literary and cinematic

⁸ It also renders their texts incompatible with Jeffords's ideas, which proceed with little acknowledgment that men within the patriarchal system can recognize the biases of that system. Thus, she fails to consider O'Brien's work at all, and offers only a two-page mention of Kovic's text, which she uses to substantiate her claim that "Vietnam soldiers/veterans were seen as victims" (121).

representations of the Vietnam War is the reassertion and rehabilitation of American masculinity (182).

The scope of Jeffords's argument, which emphasizes narrative tropes across media, limits the extent of analysis possible for each text, and the study gives only a passing mention of the formal and generic aspects of Vietnam War texts. It identifies two characteristics that "typify Vietnam narratives: first, that personal experience is the 'documentary' of the war and, second, that histories written about the war should be 'collective novels'" (24). While this classification system, which Jeffords derives from an analysis of Mailer's *Armies of the Night*, correctly acknowledges for the primacy of the personal experience narrative (which I have called the direct participant narrative), it fails to account for the existence of other iterations of Vietnam War literature. Furthermore, the conflation of history and novel collapses the division between the historical and the literary in overly simple ways. While these categories may certainly overlap, as they do in such forms as the historical novel, this definition evaluates history on the basis of its identity as a novel. Critics such as Hayden White have identified the extent to which history as a genre relies on literary devices and poetics⁹, but this is not to say that the historical and the literary are the same category. Indeed, despite the overlays White identifies between history and British literature, my contention is that the dominant mode of American interpretation, particularly prior to the era of the Vietnam War, resists the belief that history is not "true," that it is constructed in any way. Additionally, the texts considered in my work illustrate the opposite of what Jeffords's argument suggests, and in the Vietnam War era, a sharp demarcation exists between the "official" story of the nation and the collected individual accounts of the war's participants. Jeffords's argument recognizes the narrative separation

⁹ See White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1973.

between individual and nation, but its failure to consider the formal effects of this separation renders the analysis incomplete. What I am arguing is that this separation is reflected and refracted not only in the content of Vietnam War narratives, but also in their forms. Whereas World War II veterans constituted “the greatest generation” and rested secure in having saved the world from Hitler, the Vietnam War veteran remained ostracized for a conflict that he did not win and, in many cases, did not willingly enter. It is the realization of the mythical connection between war and masculinity that causes veterans to seek (to use Jeffords’s term) “the remasculinization of America.”

Thus, the remasculinizing impulse arises from the disillusioned veteran, who realizes that his wartime experiences did not heighten his masculinity.¹⁰ Perhaps the most incisive illustration of this emasculation appears in *Born on the Fourth of July*, in which Kovic suffers a wound that, while failing to make him a the sort of hero he anticipates, also shatters his physical and social manifestations of masculinity. Kovic protests that he was not prepared for such sacrifice, that “Nobody ever told me I was going to come back from this war without a penis” (98). The protest proves telling, because Kovic has not literally lost his penis; rather, the organ remains intact but non-functional. Thus, his protest underscores the connection between this symbol of masculinity and its functionality: if you cannot use the symbol, the identity it symbolizes crumbles.

Kovic does not share the extent of his dependency with his mother, “who will never understand” (26). Kovic feels defined by his impotence and thinks of himself as “the cripple, the sexlessman, the sexlessman, the man with the numb dick, the man who can’t make children” (27, repetition original). Where before he longed for the girlfriend he considered the hero’s due, he

¹⁰ Mellas, the protagonist of *Matterhorn*, remains outside this disgruntlement (and thus, this portion of the discussion), though he is disavowed of another ideal—that of military leadership. By the time he assumes leadership of his unit, he no longer desires it, as he recognizes that military authority lacks the sacrosanct qualities he attributed to it previously.

now resents “the pretty girls with their tight short skirts” (27). Because he knows those girls are not for him, he resents the implicit invitation of their provocative clothing. His wrath is not confined to them, however. He also blames the nationalistic system that indoctrinated him: “I have given my dead swinging dick for America. I have given my numb young dick for democracy....I gave my dead dick for John Wayne and Howdy Doody, for Castiglia and Sparky the barber” (98). Kovic’s protest highlights what he had been told about war: that it would make him a man. Ironically, it has done exactly the opposite, rendering him physically incapable of demonstrating his manhood, and leaving him socially handicapped by the knowledge of his perceived inadequacy.

After his return to the states, Kovic embarks on a series of unsuccessful encounters with women, but he only finds sexual fulfillment upon leaving the U.S. and visiting a Mexican brothel, “where the whores were very understanding, where even paralyzed men could get fucked” (105). Military service promised Kovic inclusion in the American mythology, but it actually renders him outside of it, alienating him from his own culture and forcing him to seek physical fulfillment in foreign lands. Kovic remains an American, however, and much of *Born on the Fourth of July* charts his transformation into various iterations of this identity. The text proceeds as a coming of age story, in which the protagonist trades the views of the nation for his own identity and views. This transition appears most visibly when Kovic, who enlisted in the military voluntarily, becomes an anti-war protestor upon his return to the U.S. Where O’Brien’s text ends with the protagonist’s arrival home, Kovic’s plot illustrates that veterans can never truly escape the effects of war. By asserting that people who are not Vietnam veterans can never understand the Vietnam War experience, Kovic adheres to the standard of the direct participant narrative. However, in chronicling his own realization of the horrors of war and the fallacy of the

heroic myth espoused by the military, Kovic's text highlights the perils of nationalist thought and indoctrination.

O'Brien's text offers a similar commentary, though these texts set up divergent inflections of the direct participant narrative. O'Brien's focus on the preparation for and participation in the events of war implies that when a soldier's tour ends, his war is over. Kovic, however, traces the war experience and the subsequent effects of that experience. Thus, each text presents an implicit argument about the extent of the war's influence. They also stand in a sort of opposition to each other: O'Brien, who went to war despite his objections to it, is in some ways formed into the military ideal, and the text charts his indoctrination into that ideal. However, the indoctrination remains limited: O'Brien retains some sense of awareness, as when he turns in another trainee while on patrol, knowing this will earn the trainee the punishment of taking over O'Brien's watch, then "wondered if Blyton [the Drill Sergeant who represents the military ideal] hadn't won a big victory that night" (49). While O'Brien's cognizance of the fallacy of national myths and the military's complicity in those myths allows him some level of resistance throughout his military experiences, *If I Die* charts the extent to which that resistance fails, and O'Brien, too, is fashioned into the national ideal. Kovic takes an opposite trajectory from O'Brien. Enlisting in the Marines, Kovic has fully accepted the national myth that war makes men, and his text charts the process through which he is disillusioned and establishes his own identity through his resistance to that myth and the war that embodies it. Thus, these two texts represent two versions of the direct participant narrative: one in which the protagonist's identity conforms in some ways to the military and national ideals, and one in which the protagonist's identity is established through a rejection of those ideals.

As shown, the direct participant narrative's concern with masculinity necessitates a concomitant preoccupation with the feminine, which is typically construed as antithetical to war. Because the direct participant narrative presents war as the province of men, it positions women as similarly antithetical to war. John Lowney argues that women, although generally outside of combat itself, remain affected by war, which contains what he identifies as "the masculinist discourse of warfare that reinforces hierarchical social relations" (261).

Katherine Kinney develops this concept, arguing that the gendered rhetoric of war extends to war narratives, in which the status of women has "typically been determined by male desire" (147). Accordingly, women figure in canonical direct participant narratives primarily as problems—as entities to be conquered, loci of rejection, and symbols of emasculation.

O'Brien details the lyrics soldiers chant while marching, many of which concern female sexuality. The primary figure is the wanton woman: from the promiscuous sister to the girls who earn a living "on her back" and "in a bed," respectively (44-5). These songs also reveal information about the male singers, who remind listeners every few lines that they "know" the girls being discussed (44-5). This context evokes a dual meaning of the word "know," as these men are not just reporting casual familiarity with the women. This is not to say that each singer has "known" each woman sexually; rather, it signals the extent to which the women are homogenized. By referring to types rather than individuals, the marchers suggest that they could have "known" the women under discussion. Furthermore, by identifying the women as prostitutes, the soldiers suggest that they are available to each and every man. If they have not yet known these women, it seems only to be a matter of time.

One song reinforces the belief that women are a soldier's due while simultaneously trivializing and glamorizing the possibility of death. The song's first verse, from which O'Brien

takes his memoir's title, makes the possibility of death something not to be feared but to be mocked in sing-song rhymes. Its second verse, "If I die on the Russian front/bury me with a Russian cunt," aligns death with masculinity: even the dead soldier gets the girl (44). Defining the woman generically, by pairing her nationality with her sexual anatomy, is also a trope of the marching cadence. Here, women are presented not as characters but as simply ethnically- or nationally-identified body parts: "Eskimo pussy is mighty cold" (45). The connection between anatomy and ethnicity is not innocent; even as they sing of sex, these soldiers are being trained to identify those who are not like them, those who could be enemies. This aligns gender and nationality or ethnicity as classification systems and identity markers: soldiers define themselves by demonstrating dominance over and inflicting violence upon members of these "other" groups. The association further marginalizes women: not only are they separated from men through their lack of participation in war, but they are also aligned with an exotic other and potential enemy.

If the women that soldiers sing about encountering at war can be characterized generally as the foreign or exotic whore, the women that the soldiers sing about leaving at home are chaste and virginal. The text's first song references a girl in a yellow bonnet, who wears it "for her soldier/Who was far, far away" (42). The lyrics fail to classify her based on nationality or ethnicity, therefore implying her lack of "otherness" in this respect. The bonnet covers the girl's hair, but otherwise the lyrics offer no discussion of her anatomy. However, this apparently innocent reference does comment on the girl's sexuality, as it stems through a long tradition connecting sexuality with female hair. Elisabeth Gitter summarizes this symbolism, writing, "The combing and displaying of hair, as suggested by the legends of alluring mermaids who sit on rocks singing and combing their beautiful hair, thus constitute a sexual exhibition. And the

the more abundant the hair, the more potent the sexual invitation implied by its display” (938).¹¹ Stemming from such a tradition, the girl who covers her hair for her absent soldier secludes herself, protects herself from male attention, and signals her unavailability. Furthermore, the fact that she wears the bonnet “in the springtime,/In the merry month of May” shows her commitment to her beau. Springtime is the traditional season of birth in agricultural communities; May and its merriness suggest festivals and sexual debauchery.¹² By keeping herself covered through this fecund, festival time, the girl in the yellow bonnet demonstrates her fidelity and her chastity. The girl who keeps her hair covered will also keep her body covered—or so her soldier believes.

These songs thus demonstrate a divide between women at war and women at home. Initially, O’Brien accepts this divide. He views women at home as supportive and concerned, from the maternal figure, who “would probably...cry a little” after their sons departed (19) to the stewardess who escorts a soldier to the war, then “wishes [him] luck over the loudspeaker” and sends him off with a kiss (67). These women contrast with the women that soldiers encounter at war. These women are promiscuous and rebellious, from the strippers brought to perform at the Combat Center to the escorts procured by the R & R Center for men on furlough (182-4). O’Brien encounters these women on his first day in Vietnam, at the “resortlike” Combat Center, describing them not as individuals but as “native girls” and “the grinding female pelvis,” employing the descriptive techniques he learned from the marching cadences (70). At the narrative’s opening, O’Brien appears to be a sensitive draftee who possesses a significant amount of awareness about his world and an anxiety about the military and its practices. After his

¹¹ The marching cadence’s symbolic use of the girl’s hair stands in contrast to Gitter’s assertion that the 20th century woman in literature has exchanged her symbolic hair for the power of speech.

¹² See, for example, William Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation*, in which Thomas Morton and other rebellious revelers set up a Maypole and consort drunkenly with Indian women.

military training, however, he adopts the biases of such training, revealing its success at indoctrinating recruits.

Although he has adopted the essentialized view of women at war, O'Brien soon learns that actual women do not always conform to the soldier's ideal. While at Fort Lewis, he spends a substantial amount of time thinking about a girl back home. He believes she is his girl, and when she sends him an Auden poem, he "pretend[s] that she wrote the poem herself, for [him]" (34). He wants her to be able to relate to him and his situation directly, without a mediator. Once he reaches Vietnam, he continues to think of her to pass time, but his memory fails: "I tried forcing out the memory of the girl, tried placing her in situations, tried reciting the Auden poem in a very brave whisper. For all this, I could not see her" (92). War strips him of his illusions, and his girl does not wait chastely at home for him; instead, she "traveled in Europe, with her boyfriend" (121). Although the reality changes, O'Brien's language does not; he still defines the relationship by its pre-war status.

On his return flight to America, however, O'Brien begins to accept the fallacy of the myth of the patient, faithful, and understanding woman at home. Where he found the figure of the stewardess relatively unobjectionable prior to the war, at the conclusion of his tour, he cannot countenance her "carefree smile and boredom" (205). He finds her manipulative rather than accepting, interested in sterilization and sanitation rather than the dirty reality of war and its participants. Before, she was an escort, a talisman. Now, he recognizes her only as a symbol: "It's to say we did well, America loves us; it's over here, what you missed" (206). However, he has seen the myth's fallacy, the fleeting faithfulness of the girl back home, and for him, the stewardess conjures images only of what was lost—the "blond and blue-eyed and long-legged and quiet and assured" girlfriend (206). While O'Brien was at war, the woman at home changed

from a patient and loyal supporter to a threat. He recognizes that the war “begins and ends... with a pretty girl,” but his feelings about that girl prove less constant than her appearance (207).¹³

In addition to the general experience of war, two specific experiences stand as markers of O’Brien’s changing view on women. One is related from a fellow soldier, who spends his time in the field imagining sexual exploits. Rather than the anonymous woman described only for her anatomical features, however, this man dreams of conquering the “daughter of this famous politician,” of having “her undressed on a beach down in the Bahamas” (27). This soldier’s fantasy connects sex and revenge; the object of his desire is not just an anonymous female anatomy but an individual woman who is primarily defined by her relationship to another man—a man responsible for sending the dreamer to war. This daydream illustrates a significant shift from the standard trope of the girl back home. Instead of being, as the stewardess was meant to symbolize, the reason for fighting, the American girl becomes yet another tool of the enemy, another outlet for the soldier’s aggression.

In its connection of gender and the Vietnam War, O’Brien’s text illustrates Jeffords’s concept of remasculinization. Given both the critical success of O’Brien’s book and those aspects which illustrate her claims, it is surprising that Jeffords does not consider his text. However, O’Brien’s text may itself hold the reason for this omission. When O’Brien’s unit discovers it has shot a female Vietnamese soldier, the unit’s men seem confused about how to handle the situation. They are thrown not because the enemy soldier is not yet dead, or just because she is a woman, but because of her beauty, which is identified in the first comment made about her: “She’s a pretty woman, pretty for a gook” (113). After acknowledging her appearance,

¹³Given such tendencies, it is perhaps not surprising that James Campbell locates gender as the underlying concept that structures what he calls “the coming home metaphor, which he identifies as a common trope of Vietnam War narratives. This metaphor “constructs the reconciliation of the (male) Vietnam veteran with American culture as a sexual relationship” (201). Campbell takes the name of this metaphor from the title of *Coming Home*, the 1978 film starring John Voight and Jane Fonda, who both received Oscars for their performances.

the men revert into the same mode they assume for other pretty women: they try to protect and comfort the wounded soldier, brushing the flies from her, trying to provide shade for her, calling in a helicopter to take her for medical treatment, and even stroking her “lustrous black” hair (114). They lament the violence—not on any general humanitarian account or moral objection, but because of her beauty: “Damn, she is pretty. It’s a crime. We could have shot an ugly old man instead” (114). The scene proves significant, because it challenges the standard military belief that men go to war to protect the women at home. Harming a woman—particularly a feminine, attractive one—upends the soldiers’ concept of their mission, and it calls into question both the danger of their assignment and the American military’s common definition of war as a masculine endeavor. The American military may be defined by masculinity, but, as O’Brien learns, other nation’s forces do not necessarily share this identity marker. This realization underscores the particular nature of the American military’s relationship to gender norms, a subject O’Brien will revisit in subsequent texts.

Although O’Brien’s memoir *If I Die* precedes *Matterhorn* by nearly four decades, the texts reflect a similar approach to gender. *Matterhorn* addresses the sweeping social changes of the civil rights movement, but it overlooks the similar momentum of the women’s movement, implicitly arguing that war remains a province of men. When female characters do appear in the novel, they are generally at a distance, as lovers in different countries, uninterested girls back home, or models in magazines. Mellas’s virginity further reinforces this distance. His former girlfriend, Anne, ended their relationship before his deployment, remaining as unmoved by the war as she had been by the possibility of sex. Mellas compensates for his virginity (which he keeps secret from his fellow Marines) with vulgarity. When he asks for the radio code name

“Vagina,” he is rebuffed and informed that Marines “[c]an’t be cluttering up the airways with filth” (151). The implication remains clear: women are antithetical to the war experience.

When Mellas suffers an eye injury and gets evacuated to a hospital ship, *Matterhorn* initially appears poised to revise or complicate its approach to women and war. The ship’s nurses offer actual female presences, in contrast to the ephemeral females conjured through men’s memories or stories. Unlike the ex-girlfriend repelled by Mellas’s participation in war, the nurses accept the Marines’ relationship to combat and even support and enable further participation. However, *Matterhorn* offers repeated narrative clues that suggest that rather than being part of the war, the nurses inhabit a physical and social space that relates to war while remaining distinct from it. For example, to reach the ship, which is anchored in the South China Sea, the helicopter leaves not only the battlefield but the entire continent. Furthermore, Mellas’s attempt to recover his prize sword is repeatedly thwarted by one of the nurses, suggesting that she remains indifferent to both the spoils of war and the bonds formed between warriors. Once he regains the sword, Mellas rejoins his unit, connecting his physical recovery with his recovery of the weapon. As he approaches the place where he will reunite with Bravo Company, Mellas remains reticent with “the uninitiated” Army driver who transports him, further underscoring the novel’s insistence that the crew of hospital ship, like that of the transport caravan, may constitute part of the war effort, but it exists separately from the war proper (538).

Although *If I Die* and *Born on the Fourth of July* are two of the earliest examples, the direct participant narrative has become the most prominent iteration of the Vietnam War text. Subsequent examples of it include Philip Caputo’s memoir *A Rumor of War*, Larry Heineman’s novels *Paco’s Story* and *Close Quarters*, and Donald Bodey’s novel *F. N. G. Matterhorn*, the most recent direct participant narrative to emerge among Vietnam War literature, reiterates

several of the form's crucial components, reaffirming the form as the realm of male veterans and using its pages to consider the relationships of individual military personnel to the nation, masculinity, and women. The form itself, with its restricted access to authorship, marginalizes a number of individuals, effectively excluding even those women who served in Vietnam.

Chapter 3—Gender, Genre, and Subversions of the Direct Participant Narrative

The prominence of the direct participant narrative, along with its preclusion of non-veteran authors, consigned many works by such authors, particularly women, to the outskirts of the genre. Eventually, anthologies collecting the war narratives of women emerged, attempting to promote those works from their relative obscurity. In the introduction to one such anthology, *Her War Story: Twentieth-Century Women Write About the War*, Sayre P. Sheldon explains the need for such texts: “By limiting war literature to actual combat, men have claimed war as their subject. The claim is no longer valid, if it ever has been” (x). Similarly, Bettina Hoffman argues for the expansion of war literature, traditionally confined to combat narratives, to include “the life stories of women” in Vietnam (“On,” 202). Among the three texts included in Hoffman’s argument, only one is authored by a woman who actually served in the military during Vietnam. (One other is written by a military wife, and the third text is co-authored by a former POW and his wife.) By contending that these women successfully master “traditional male strategies for representing war,” this argument seeks to expand the genre of war literature to include more than combat narratives. Maria Bonn offers an even broader interpretation of the genre, arguing that the Vietnam “war has become a set of signs about the way we live now,” and that those signs constitute a “cultural code” available to all writers (211). Arguments such as these seek to establish a place for the war narratives of women, which have often been relegated to non-canonical status.

Although early iterations of the direct participant narrative form render women outside of the war experience, such exclusion of women remains predicated on an elision of historical fact.

Although the belief that women had little to no place in the American military or in war remained widespread at least until the Persian Gulf War, American women actually have a long, albeit occluded, history of military service dating back to the Revolutionary War.¹⁴ In conflicts occurring on American soil, the geographical proximity rendered women's involvement somewhat conspicuous. During certain foreign conflicts, groups such as the WACs and WAVES granted women military-endorsed channels for their service. According to statistics from the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation, "[a]pproximately 11,000 American military women were stationed in Vietnam during the war." However, *Matterhorn*, like many direct participant narratives before it, largely ignores women's participation or presents it as an inferior version of military service, one that fails to emulate the traditionally masculine realms of deployment and combat. Thus, although women have actually been officially involved in military service for decades, the prevalent social conception of war elides the presence of women and renders war as the province of men. When women's military presences are acknowledged, they are often recognized as what Tara McKelvey calls "a destabilizing force," an entity that disrupts the masculine and masculinizing activities of war and the military (12).

Twentieth-Century Direct Participant Narratives by Women

In many ways, America's involvement in Vietnam differed from its previous military conflicts. It was an undeclared war, a conflict with no clear theater of battle, no clearly-identified enemy, and, due to the one-year term for draftees, an ever-shifting and unstable military corps. It also differed from previous wars in that women were increasingly involved in service in

¹⁴ For example, in *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution* (Novato: Presidio, 1992. p. 4.), Jeanne Holm discusses the women who received military rations in exchange for such services as uniform upkeep and preparation of meals for Revolutionary War troops. For a discussion of the many roles occupied by women during the Civil War, see Lisa Tendrich Frank's *Women in the American Civil War* (vol. 1. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008. p. xx).

Vietnam.¹⁵ As the previous chapter demonstrates, the prevalence of the direct participant narrative causes the evaluation of war narratives on the status of their authors, and in the Vietnam War literature, a particular emphasis on authorial participation exists. Based on these circumstances, women who served in Vietnam should not be precluded by the critical establishment from writing texts about the Vietnam War. However, further investigation of the literature reveals that America's Vietnam War literature allows women little narrative authority, even when those women were also participants in the war. Tom, a vet in Bobbie Ann Mason's novel *In Country*, reflects this denial, asserting, "it's funny, how special it was, in a way, like nobody else could ever know what you went through except guys who have been there" (78). Tom's use of the word "guys" arguably confines this camaraderie to men; even if the word is viewed in a gender-encompassing sense, in which "guys" refers to males and females, it reminds readers that the male experience incorporates and represents the female experience. Although this gendered power imbalance has many socio-cultural manifestations, Judith Stiehm connects it specifically to the masculine nature of war, positing the idea that a male "military [that] competes on behalf of a nation" will inevitably come to believe that "representation of a nation [is]. . . basically a male prerogative" (148). The late emergence of narratives about women's experiences in the Vietnam War reinforces Stiehm's speculation and further suggests that while women may serve their country, that service may not be easily acknowledged.

W. D. Ehrhart further reflects this marginalization in the introduction to *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace*, a 1991 anthology of poems by women who participated in the war. Ehrhart writes, "Men wage war; men write about war. No such tradition exists for women. Because they

¹⁵ Precise records for the number of women in military service in Vietnam do not exist, but historians largely agree that the number of women in official capacities exceeded that of previous conflicts. According to the Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation, America sent nearly 10,000 military women, most of them volunteer nurses, to Vietnam during the war ("Vietnam"). Jeanne Holm reports that the number was closer to "7,500 military women" in all of Southeast Asia (206).

have been excluded from war in our cultural imagination, they have also been excluded from war literature” (xviii). The aim of this and other such texts is to correct such exclusions. However, rather than assert that women have shared the war experience of men, the anthology’s preface creates a “separate spheres” approach, one which identifies a separation between the masculine description of the events and mythology of war and the feminine depiction of the “consequences of war” (xxiii). Furthermore—and perhaps more insidiously—the anthology’s editors admit to selecting poems based on the author’s war participation and gender rather than the quality of the writing itself. They endorse this decision by arguing that “first writings” are infrequently considered “great literature” (xxiii). The problem with this argument, and with its proclamations hailing the “intimacy” and emotionally-charged nature of the work (xxii), is that it reinforces the gendered divide that it strives to combat. By associating women with emotional responses of little literary value, the anthology further marginalizes these women and their war experiences.

The 2002 volume *War Torn*, which collects memoirs of American women who served as correspondents during the Vietnam War, suggests that even those civilian women who were trained to report on the situation remained largely silent about their personal experiences in country. The anthology arose from a symposium on female Vietnam War correspondents held in 2000, a full quarter century after the fall of Saigon. After many of the women shared their experiences, “a man stood up and asked, ‘Why have we never heard these stories before?’” (Bartimus vii-viii). The answer was simple: “no one ever asked” (Bartimus viii). Correspondent Denby Fawcett, one of the reporters anthologized in the volume, states that she and her colleagues were so controversial that General Westmoreland threatened to restrict their access to the fighting, out of fear that soldiers would try to protect the women, who “might collapse emotionally when faced with the horrors of combat” (13). Read in light of such stereotypes, the

personal silence demonstrated by female correspondents appears to be a rational attempt to prove that their gender was not a handicap, and it is no surprise when Fawcett reflects, “I never talked about *my life* in Vietnam until now, thirty-six years later” (31, emphasis added). Fawcett’s distinction proves telling: although she was in Vietnam primarily because of her journalistic and narrative abilities, the scope of her articulations was severely limited by her gender. Fawcett’s wording implies that to speak of the daily events constituting her personal life would be to enter the realm of feminine—as opposed to professional—speech. Her recognition of the perils of such feminine speech stands in contrast to works such as those collected by Van Devanter. While Van Devanter celebrates the emotional and intimate as hallmarks of women writers and as a necessary antidote to the masculine narratives that permeate the Vietnam War canon, Fawcett strives to maintain a professionalism that precludes the sort of intimacy Van Devanter celebrates. However, as her memoir acknowledges, the price of that professionalism is more than two decades of silence.

Generic endorsements of women’s ability to represent war remain rare, and they often appear in texts such as *Up Country*—those that are popular, rather than critical, successes. One such text is Danielle Steel’s *Message from Nam*, which argues that women can perform capably in war zones. Steel’s plot follows Paxton Andrews, whose interest in the Vietnam War is sparked by its effects on Peter, her fiancé. When he dies during a combat tour, she decides she must go to Vietnam in order to comprehend his death: “I want the truth. . . . why he really died. . . . What’s *really* going on over there” (148, italics original). She assumes others share her motivation and that her task is “to see what was really happening and tell people in the States, so they would know why their husbands and sons were dying in Viet Nam” (151). Despite Andrews’s eventual success, she demonstrates quite a bit of naivety and is met with a great deal of skepticism. A

soldier on the transport plane warns her that Vietnam contains things he “wouldn’t want no little sister of mine looking at” (167). When she steps off the plane, she mistakes the sound of artillery for fireworks (168). That evening, she leaves her keys in her hotel door and is awakened by a soldier bringing them into her room and hitting on her (174). Over time, however, Andrews matures and handles the war much more capably, even becoming adept at tending the wounded when she witnesses combat (197). This transformation reveals one of Steel’s aims: the assertion that women can handle the war experience.

Of course, Steel’s novel is a war novel mapped onto a romance novel, and its plot contains a series of romantic entanglements. As discussed previously, this generic condition has caused many critics to dismiss the novel from critical consideration.¹⁶ Andrews initially falls for Bill Quinn, a married officer whose subordinate, Tony Campobollo, disapproves—not because Bill is married, but because he fears Andrews will distract Quinn and jeopardize his safety. Quinn’s death in a tunnel confirms Campobollo’s anxiety, but eventually he reconciles with Andrews, in time becoming her lover. When he goes MIA, Andrews continues to search for him, and the novel’s conclusion climaxes when she discovers him and secures their transport out of the country during the fall of Saigon. This plot vindicates Andrews and, by extension, it advances the role of women in war settings. Campobollo feared the presence of women would threaten military men, but he ends up indebted to one of those women for rescuing him. To be sure, Steel’s novel is not an example of fine literature.¹⁷ However, by charting Andrews’s

¹⁶ See Maria S. Bonn, “New Battles in Cultural Signification in Contemporary American Narrative.” *The United States and Viet Nam from War to Peace: Papers from an Interdisciplinary Conference on Reconciliation*. Ed. Robert M. Slabey. Jefferson and London: McFarland & Co., 1996. 208-13. [E: when you receive article, double check the comments and add a more detailed note. From your notes on the article, it looks like Bonn cites the incorrect title and also slurs the text. Confirm this, then consider a note citing her exact words—not commenting on them, but letting the derision stand for itself.] Tobey C. Herzog laments Steel, who he claims “gratuitously uses the Vietnam War as a setting” (2).

¹⁷ Even DeMille—himself more a popular than literary success—pokes fun at Steel. A minor episode in *Up Country*’s concerns Brenner’s attempts to discard a Danielle Steel book prior to his departure for Vietnam. He

transformation from fiancée to competent war reporter rescuing her military lover, Steel modifies the mediated narrative. Although Andrews initially travels to Vietnam in an attempt to understand her fiancé's death, she establishes her own identity and demonstrates her wartime capabilities while there. Unlike many women in mediated narratives, who seek to understand the Vietnam War from a geographical and temporal distance, Andrews has her own war experiences. She lives in country, witnesses combat, and nurses the wounded. In the process, what began as a process of mediation becomes an experience of direct participation. Thus, Steel creates a female-protagonist version of the direct participant narrative. In doing so, she creates a generic opportunity previously untapped by women writers of Vietnam War literature and establishes a model that other authors subsequently amend for their own purposes.¹⁸

Although it is possible to imagine that Danielle Steel's status as a writer of romance novels sparked some of the negative criticism she received for writing a war novel, the response to other direct participant narratives by women suggests that the bias is leveled more generally against women writing about war rather than against romance novelists more particularly. Published in 1989, Susan Fromberg Schaeffer's novel *Buffalo Afternoon* depicts the intertwining stories of a Vietnamese woman and an American family of Italian immigrants, particularly the son who enlists in the military, choosing to go to the Vietnam War as an escape from his troubled stateside life, and whose wartime experiences shape him even after his return to the U.S. In one of the few critical considerations of the form of Vietnam War texts, Philip K. Jason considers Schaeffer's text and summarizes its critical reception, which contends that¹⁹

received the book from a book club when he forgot to send in the slip declining it, and he worries that if he dies on the mission, someone will come to his apartment, see the book, and think he would actually have read it.

¹⁸ These revisions come to fruition most prominently in Tatjana Soli's 2010 novel *The Lotus Eaters*, discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁹ Jason approaches the issue of genre by investigating the relationship between fiction and nonfiction in Vietnam War literature. He argues that these categories prove irrelevant to Vietnam War narratives, which operate instead on a complex hierarchy of authorial credentials and stylistic treatment of the material.

Schaeffer's "'outsider' attempt to represent the day-to-day experience of soldiers in Vietnam is outrageously arrogant and inevitably doomed to failure" (45). Jason argues against this reading, contending that precisely because of their removal from the events depicted, outsiders may be best positioned to reveal "a more comprehensive vision" (46). In other words, Jason believes that authors of Vietnam War literature may be men or women, participants or non-participants. However, his belief departs from the majority of the criticism, which advances the position that Vietnam War literature must be written by direct participants rather than outsiders. This critical stance reveals once again the primacy of the direct participant narrative.

Read in the context of Vietnam War literature written by women, however, Schaeffer's novel and its critical reception reflect the polarized nature of Vietnam War literature authorship and underscore the view that war literature remains a man's field. Thus Vietnam War literature by women reveals that much more is at stake than the author's participation (or lack thereof) in the events of war. Indeed, the entire realm of authorship and agency emerges here, because the criticism of Vietnam War literature reveals that form is more than an author's casual choice. For women who write about Vietnam, the available forms are limited by the social conditions surrounding female speech. A work's intelligibility, then, becomes the result of conforming to a cultural bias of woman as observer and interpreter of the American War in Vietnam rather than direct participant or observer. At stake in this restriction is much more than simply the way in which Vietnam narratives are told; indeed, the concept that a woman is not free to write a novel with the form and content of her choosing contains an implicit challenge to the entire concept of female authorship. In order to write critically accepted texts concerning the Vietnam War, women, it appears, must write reconstructive texts, works that piece together someone else's story and confess to that retelling. That act of confession suggests the female's lack of authority

to speak on such subjects, and it reveals the prevalence of implied restrictions against female authorship on traditionally male topics such as war.

Mediated Narratives

Of course, generic conditions do change over time. As a survey of female-authored Vietnam War narratives indicates, as women challenge these conditions, through both social and literary interventions, new generic forms arise. They in turn engender new perceptions, and eventually the literary canon changes. Thus, a survey of the intersection of gender and genre in American literature of the Vietnam War reveals the historical contingency of genre systems and positions this literary era as a particularly rich moment of generic evolution.

One generic intervention that emerges as a response to the direct participant narrative constitutes what I call the mediated narrative, exemplified by texts such as Bobby Ann Mason's *In Country*, Sigrid Nunez's *For Rouenna*, and Danielle Trussoni's *Falling Through the Earth*. In contrast to the female direct participant narrative, the mediated narrative argues not just that women can understand war, but also that they can understand the masculine war experience. This form explores the role of the outsider by focusing almost exclusively on women who attempt to uncover and understand the war story of a man she loves. This positioning aligns the protagonist with the reader, who uncovers that war story along with the protagonist. This positioning also creates a plural protagonist, as the text follows both the person(s) that experienced war and the person who tries to uncover that war story. A crucial component of the mediated narrative is the confession of the mediation, whereby the protagonists simultaneously out themselves as non-participants in the events they describe and highlight the tension that arises from telling another person's story. This confession accords narrative authority even as it marginalizes the women from the war experience. The plot of a mediated narrative thus proceeds as an act of

reconstruction, piecing together details of another's story. In this, female protagonists resemble detectives rather than experts; their authors, trespassers rather than participants. This similarity proves significant, because it reveals a previously unacknowledged confinement of the narrative authority accorded to women. While it would seem that a novelist could write on any subject she desired, so long as she researched her topic thoroughly, the fiction of the Vietnam canon suggests this is not the case. The mediated narrative incorporates that marginalization into its plot, as female protagonists stand outside of someone else's Vietnam experience and strive to interpret it. This marginalization responds to a belief that women cannot experience war directly and that their stories emerge from their relationships with others rather than their own actions and experiences.

An early, albeit somewhat abbreviated, example of the mediated narrative plot is Jayne Anne Phillips's 1984 *Machine Dreams*, which follows the Hampsons—middle aged Mitch and Jean, daughter Danner, and son Billy. When Billy becomes MIA in Vietnam, Danner seeks out veterans so that through them she may remain tied to her brother and better understand his Vietnam War experience. Even when this association is to her detriment, she continues to seek out veterans: “they were guys Billy wouldn't even have drunk beer with. But they'd stood on the same ground he had or they'd flown in the same kinds of machines....In the first year Billy was missing, that was all I needed” (320). Because *Machine Dreams* follows the stories of each family member, the novel has a plural protagonist, and Danner's story constitutes only part of the novel's plot. Thus, Phillips marginalizes this aspect of the narrative, making it one of several stories rather than the primary story. Similarly, she gives only limited attention to Billy's experiences in Vietnam, which is narrated through letters he sends back to his family. Thus, the information she presents to readers mimics the limited information Billy's family would have

about his time in Vietnam. Phillips's decision to restrict the novel's plot, not allowing it to follow Billy to war, remains another form of mediation, in which the novel's content mimics the boundaries of the world it depicts.²⁰ Whereas Schaeffer's narrative offers a straight-forward depiction of Paul's war experiences, Phillips presents war only through the mediation of the letter. This mediation may be one reason *Machine Dreams* received a more positive critical response than *Buffalo Afternoon*.

A more extended mediated narrative occurs in Bobbie Ann Mason's 1985 novel *In Country*. Sam Hughes, the protagonist, exists outside the Vietnam experience of her father, who died without ever meeting her. His identity and personality, revealed through only small anecdotes relayed by family members, remain largely a mystery, and the novel proceeds as Sam's attempt to discover his personality and understand his experiences. Although the events of Mason's novel transpire during the summer after Sam's high school graduation, its content concerns things far beyond Sam's hometown of Mayfield, Kentucky. In observations such as "It was the summer of the Michael Jackson *Victory* tour and the Bruce Springsteen *Born in the USA* tour, neither of which Sam got to go to," Mason delineates the extent to which defining moments occur outside of her protagonist (23). Such positioning reinforces Sam's cultural marginalization, and that of her gender, even as it demonstrates the extent to which, paradoxically, Sam remains shaped by things she has not directly encountered. Mason's focus on the ways individuals are influenced by pop culture reinforces the claim that Vietnam has on Sam's development.

Bettina Hofmann correctly interprets Mason's novel as a coming-of-age story. What is most interesting for my purposes, however (and what is absent from Hofmann's argument), is that Sam's formation hinges on her father's war: Sam must define her father in order to discover herself. Of course, as Katherine Kinney correctly observes, this is not the only way for a teenage

²⁰ Hoffman makes a similar point, though I reached these conclusions before reading her work.

girl to come of age in *In Country*; however, it stands in contrast to pregnancy, which is what marks the arrival of adulthood for Sam's best friend (179). This contrast proves telling, because it marks the extent to which Sam's development subverts traditional gender roles, and it highlights the limitations of those identities—limitations that force Sam to develop vicariously, by learning of her father's tour of duty and death during combat.

Throughout the novel, Sam tries to recapture her father's experience in Vietnam. She plies her uncle Emmett, a Vietnam vet, with questions and watches *M*A*S*H* weekly, learning to mourn her father as she mourns for Colonel Blake (25). She reads books about Vietnam, though she recognizes that they "didn't say what it was like to be at war over there" (48). The lone photograph she has of her father does not reveal much, either, and rather than answering Sam's questions about her father, it simply serves to associate her father with absence: "You missed Watergate," she tells the picture, then looks around her room, concluding, "You missed this, too" (67). Indeed, absence seems to be the trademark emotion associated with Sam's existence. Sam's mother lives in another town with her second husband and their infant, and because Emmett cannot hold down a job or run a home, Sam becomes the adult figure in the household.

Eventually, her attempt to internalize her father's war experience leads Sam to spend a substantial amount of time with a Vietnam vet named Tom. She probes him for details on the war, though his answers to her questions are cryptic: "You don't want to know how real it was" (95). Eventually, Sam and Tom end up at a veterans' dance together, and the night culminates in bed, where Tom bars Sam from yet another experience by revealing his impotency (127). When another veteran warns Sam that she will be unable to surmount the distance separating her from

Tom, because he's inhabited realms she has not, he inadvertently gives Sam a new source for understanding Vietnam: direct experience (136).

The idea of traveling to Vietnam itself does not occur to Sam, who has grown up in a poor Kentucky town where "Boys got cars for graduation, but girls usually had to buy their own cars because they were expected to get married—to guys with cars" (58). Therefore, she puts herself in the closest situation to Vietnam that she can imagine, by spending a night alone in a local swamp, Cawood's Pond. Sam is pleased by the danger associated with this site, "the last place in western Kentucky where a person could really face the wild," where even the Boy Scouts refuse to camp (208). Although Sam tries to compare the swamp's danger to Vietnam, she eventually realizes that "this nature preserve in a protected corner of Kentucky wasn't like Vietnam at all" (214). She acknowledges the distinction between her experience and her father's, and she begins to confront the impossibility of fully understanding his time in Vietnam.

Sam's approximation of a Vietnam experience is preceded by several actions that declare her autonomy. She buys a car and decides that she will not allow her boyfriend to dictate where she drives it (174). Instead, she considers the many places she might travel: "Mammoth Cave, the Grand Ole Opry, Six Flags over Mid-America" (178). She counsels her newly-pregnant best friend, and she starts to see her hometown in a fresh light, recognizing things like traffic patterns for the first time (177). She explores her mother's closet, uncovering the letters her father wrote home from the war. Although Sam is disappointed because the letters talk more about Kentucky than about Vietnam, one letter answers a question Sam's mother had never explained—where Sam's name came from. Upon news of his wife's pregnancy, Sam's father advised, "If it's a girl, name it Samantha....I think it's a name in Chronicles" (182). After exploring a weathered Bible, Sam learns that her name does not appear in either book of Chronicles, and that her identity and

heritage are blank slates, open for her to define as she will. Rather than pretend she can understand her father's experience, she embraces her own, deciding to go to college in Lexington, and embarking on travels well beyond those she originally envisioned. Mason's novel culminates with Sam driving Emmett and her paternal grandmother to Washington to see the new Vietnam Veterans Memorial, where Sam locates both her father's name and her own name—obviously shared with a veteran—on the wall. When touching "her" name, Sam reflects, "How odd it feels, as if all the names in America have been used to decorate this wall" (245). Readers, of course, know that while a Sam Hughes may have fought and died in Vietnam, that boy was not the young girl of *In Country*, and critics often consider this moment a flaw in the novel's plot. For example, James Campbell argues that in this scene, Mason commits a form of violence by allowing the girl standing at the wall to appropriate the Vietnam experience of the dead person whose name she finds there (200-1). Campbell is in some sense right: Sam Hughes the teenage girl is not the Sam Hughes who died at war. However, the injustice in the scene is not rooted in the protagonist's empathy; rather, it is in argument that her story proves less valuable than that of the dead veteran. Sam's reflections reiterate her tentative peace with the war; she accepts her inability to relive her father's experiences and accepts that she has her own form of Vietnam legacy.

Although *In Country* garnered substantial critical success, another critique leveled at it belies a misunderstanding of its purpose. Matthew Stewart's reading of the text correctly recognizes that war representation is often gendered, observing that "The major female characters attempt to take care of men, to restore or rejuvenate them" (171). However, his argument—that *In Country* fails because its ending unrealistically depicts a veteran's reentry to "normal" civilian society—judges the novel on the basis of its realism, to the exclusion of its

other aspects. Stewart's reading presumes that the novel's primary concern is with Emmett rather than Sam. It is further predicated on the belief that narratives of war and its participants must be realistic. Stewart is not alone in this belief that realism is the appropriate narrative mode for war literature. However, arguments that make realism the ultimate criterion by which war literature is evaluated often suffer from a form of critical myopia, because they privilege one formal aspect of the text rather than considering the intersection of various formative representational systems. A more complete reading acknowledges both the gendered system that pervades representations of the Vietnam War and the manner in which that gendered system both reflects and refracts the generic system surrounding war literature. Read in this light, the conclusion of *In Country*, rather than signaling the novel's failure, marks instead both the flexibility of genre and the emergence of a new form of war literature.

Complications of the Meditated Narrative

Several subsequent texts complicate the mediated narrative form, offering revisions to the iteration presented in *In Country*. One such generic adaptation is Sigrid Nunez's novel *For Rouenna*, which combines a mediated narrative with a direct participant narrative, thereby allowing Nunez to depict a woman's Vietnam War story while acknowledging the risks of doing so. The narrator of *For Rouenna* remains unnamed throughout the text, though she does offer several identifying details about herself. An author, she has recently published her first book, endured a break up, and moved into a new apartment that she longs to leave: "Instead of making order, instead of settling down in my new place and getting on with life, I dreamed of going away" (7).²¹ Escape from her life arrives in the form of a fan letter from Rouenna Zycinski, a woman whose childhood home was in the same Staten Island housing project as the protagonist's (18). Despite their common adolescent landscape, the narrator "barely remembered" Rouenna,

²¹ Because she is unnamed in the text, I refer to this character as "the narrator" throughout.

and the two are marked opposites as adult women (21). They have different appetites, divergent opinions of artists, and widely diverse decorating preferences (15-6). Despite these distinctions, and the narrator's "uneasy feeling that [Rouenna] wanted something," the women become friends. Over time, the narrator learns that Rouenna, now a manager of a plus-size clothing store, had once been in the army and "wanted to write—wanted [the narrator] to help her write—a book about being a combat nurse in Vietnam" (29). Rouenna accepts the narrator's firm refusal, and their friendship continues until Rouenna's suicide several months later (36).

Although she refuses to help Rouenna compose her own story, the narrator begins constructing narratives about Rouenna on the first night they meet. While the narrator remains uninterested in writing for or with Rouenna, writing about her seems an attractive possibility. Rouenna's initial literary ambitions, which focus on accuracy, indicate that she would be unwilling to consider such ventriloquism. Her express reason for asking for help on the book is that, without someone to hold her accountable to truth, "[she'd] be tempted to make things up" (68). Throughout the novel, Rouenna demonstrates a marked disdain for inaccuracy in representations of war; she tutors the narrator in movies' misrepresentation of war, expresses skepticism for veterans' war stories, and challenges the medical establishment's ability to define the war's effects on participants (63-5). Based solely on Rouenna's preoccupation with truth-telling, the narrator's fanciful fictions would seem offensive, but she excuses her writing by relating an incident that occurred during a day trip with Rouenna: "And another thing [Rouenna] said that day . . . 'You know, if you ever want to use any of the stuff I told you, it's okay.' It was clear what she meant: if I wanted to use any of her stories for my own purposes, I could. She gave me her permission" (216). By adding this account, the narrator cements her authority to do what she has done since the night she and Rouenna first met—to speak for her. Although the

narrator presents this as a personal justification, it holds broader significance as a subtle commentary on the ability of non-veteran authors to compose war stories, thus undermining the mediated narrative from within.

The confidence with which the narrator states her narrative authority masks her long process of deciding if and how she should write about her friend. Unlike Rouenna, whose fierce allegiance to the truth dictates her choices, the narrator initially has no such compunction about manipulating evidence to create a story. Faced with Rouenna's confession that she needed a co-author to keep her honest, the narrator shifts the terms of the discussion (68). Rather than talking about issues of veracity, she casts the conversation in terms of genre: "My turn to laugh. 'Then you'd have a novel'" (68). The narrator's views remain consistent regardless of the creative medium; when Rouenna complains about the medical inaccuracies in *The English Patient*, the narrator longs to argue the point, to "say what difference does it make, it was a great story" (192). Rouenna knows the difference: for her, life imitates art, and the way a thing is depicted matters. Because of her career, the narrator understands the precarious nature of representation but—perhaps also due to her career—she values artistry more than she disdains artifice. On the morning of Rouenna's suicide, the narrator questions this conviction when she witnesses a man die on a transcontinental flight. She reflects: "I thought someone would cover the man's face—say with one of those small blankets the flight attendants hand out with the pillows—but no. When the plane began its descent, one of the attendants checked to make sure the man's seat belt was fastened, but she did not cover his face. (Was this something done only in movies?)" (32). The narrator, who has had no qualms about misrepresenting another person's experience, becomes disturbed when her own situation fails to match the situation she expected from popular representation.

Rouenna and the narrator had discussed riding the Staten Island ferry together, as a means of revisiting their childhood landscape, “but in the end it is [the narrator] alone riding the ferry” (53). As she takes her elegiac ferry ride, the author confronts her own questions about the efficacy and ethics of narration and representation. Soon after she gets off the ferry, the narrator travels to Rouenna’s apartment, where her neighbor misremembers her name, asking, “Ain’t it a shame about Roseanna?” (73). Though the narrator corrects her, she ignores the woman’s given name. After leaving the neighbor, the narrator visits Rouenna’s workplace, a plus-size clothing store decorated with photographs of Marilyn Monroe and the company’s advertising slogan, “THIS IS WHAT A SIZE TWELVE LOOKS LIKE” (73). In a scene that foreshadows her decision to write about Rouenna, the narrator refuses to accept this depiction: “Things change. That is not what a size twelve looks like anymore” (74). Soon after, in the middle of a conversation with Rouenna’s former coworkers, the narrator directly embraces her role as the custodian of Rouenna’s story. Frustrated by the women’s empty platitudes, the narrator reacts strongly: “I’ll bet none of you knew that she was a combat nurse. I’ll bet you didn’t know that she was in the army, she was a lieutenant in the U. S. Army, did you. I’ll bet you didn’t know that she served in Vietnam” (76). At this instant, literally a defining moment, the narrator commits to telling Rouenna’s story.

There are gaps, of course, in the story the narrator knows, and no matter how long she stares at Rouenna’s photographs, the details do not all connect. Nunez’s book contains three sections; the first and third form a mediated narrative, integrating the narrator’s story with Rouenna’s. The second section, though, proceeds as a direct participant narrative, as it details Rouenna’s individual story, primarily her time in Vietnam. This section appears to be based on fact, but the final scene of section one implies that, like the narrator’s dream-like imaginings of

Rouenna's feast on the night they first met, the section on Rouenna's Vietnam experience is an imaginative creation rooted in fact. In the first section's climactic scene, the narrator has stared at the photographs repeatedly, spreading them out on the table "like tarot cards," scouring them for the detail that will illuminate a life (94). It fails, and the narrator reacts in frustration: "With both hands I push the photographs away, push them right off the table, onto the floor, and in the cleared space I cross my arms, I rest my head" (94). When she lifts her head, she focuses on the stark apartment wall before her, finally realizing that if you "stare at any blank space long enough, intently enough . . . some image is sure to emerge" (95). The narrator decides to embrace that image, though, because she has wrestled with the danger of narrative and recognizes that every representation is a misrepresentation, she cannot present her reconstruction as fact. Here, then is her confession of genre: Rouenna's stories consist of the author's imagination polishing the book's blank page.

Once established, the narrator's authority to speak for Rouenna remains distinct from her authority on Vietnam. Therefore, she devotes several pages to recounting her own relationship to the conflict, mediated through the older, married journalist who was the author's lover after college (76). Throughout the scene, the narrator juxtaposes her younger, naïve self with her wiser, adult self, effectively conveying the sense that she, too, has wrestled with images of Vietnam, and that she has matured enough not to take information only on face value, as she did with the journalist. Because her journalist loves *The Quiet American*, the narrator names it her favorite book, eventually recognizing many of Thomas Fowler's characteristics in the journalist (84). As an adult, the narrator reconsiders her belief, confessing: "Now I don't know whether to believe my own story about my journalist and the Vietnamese love of his life" (85). Although she was not in Vietnam and has not been in combat, the narrator subtly relates the indeterminacy

of her own perceptions of Vietnam to the chaos of the era. Not willing to overplay this point, though, she does not pretend she is an authority on the issue. Upon rereading her battered copy of *The Quiet American*, the narrator offers her own critique of its characters (“none of them quite comes to life”) then wonders “what Rouenna would have made of it” (86). The narrator’s willingness to state an opinion and her acceptance of other people’s views work on the level of content to reinforce the novel’s structure, specifically the way that Nunez chooses to tell the story of an narrator and her subject rather than a straightforward account of an army nurse in Vietnam. This structure, which presents a woman’s direct participant’s narrative and the mediation of that narrative, allows Nunez to subvert the generic restriction against women’s war stories while also acknowledging that act of subversion.

Far from being an accident or a chance occurrence, this structure arises from the precarious status of women writing about the Vietnam War. The book’s cover boasts, in a blurb from *The Washington Post*, “*For Rouenna* is about everything,” not just war. There is no way it could be otherwise, for Nunez’s unmediated depiction of war would likely have been dismissed out of hand. Even Rouenna, who actually served in the military, was largely dismissed when she first tried to talk about her Vietnam experiences: “whenever she brought up the war, people would change the subject or turn away” (63). Eventually Rouenna quit bringing it up, until her Vietnam experience became completely marginalized: “She did not talk about the war, she did not join any veteran’s groups or participate in any veterans’ events” (64). Until she reads the narrator’s book, Rouenna fails to understand that she can explicate her own experience, that she can break her lengthy silence.

Rouenna’s silence, like the silence of the female correspondents before the development of the anthology *War Torn*, is conditioned rather than innate. This conditioning began as soon as

the women arrived on foreign soil. Even among the medical staff in-country, dissention existed about women; one of Rouenna's stories includes a description of how "this doctor is carrying on about how we women don't belong there" (90). Despite their official authority, in Rouenna's experience, female nurses were largely disregarded: "All the army nurses were officers, but that didn't mean shit to the men. You were still just a chick – not someone they were about to take orders from" (89). The extent to which the women quickly learned their place is illustrated in Rouenna's statement that "everyone knew the story about the nurse at Chu Lai who'd been raped in the middle of an attack then crawled out of the trench and reported to Triage [saying] 'What was I supposed to do? Men lying dead, bleeding or in pieces all over the place— what was I supposed to do, raise a fuss?'" (118). The woman's submission pales only next to the fact that it was institutionalized, that everyone knew the story, but apparently no one challenged it. The Army, which stocked no feminine products, provided no place in Vietnam for real women, who menstruate and suffer and cry in closets to hide their tears (144-5).

The U. S., which offered little support for Vietnam veterans of either gender, offered no comfort to women. As the narrator of *For Rouenna* summarizes, "A female Vietnam veteran: it was Weirdo and Loser all over again" (138). When Rouenna does finally confide in the narrator, her perceived distance from the combatants' experience is so great that she fails to accept the same terms used to describe other military victims, even after the narrator relates that "many of the women who served in Vietnam later experienced the same problems as male veterans" (67). Rouenna's response is vehement: "One thing I can say for sure: I never had no PTSD" (67). The narrator defines the term for Rouenna, who later admits that she demonstrated nearly all the condition's symptoms, but refuses to accept the label, which she believes applies only to male combatants. Her silence has been well conditioned; on a different occasion, Rouenna admits to

the narrator, “Vietnam was the last thing I felt qualified to talk about” (63). Even strangers reinforced the sentiment that women were unqualified. One patient tells Rouenna, “That’s what you get for going over there where you had no business being,” suggesting that her decision to become an Army nurse was a rebellion requiring some form of punishment (172). Even the narrator’s friends, the sophisticated artistic set that Rouenna disdains, dismiss the idea of a female veteran. The narrator observes: “My friend—the writer, the veteran—was not particularly interested in Rouenna’s story. He had never been wounded, and though he knew there were nurses in-country he had never met one. He did not see them as having had much of a role in the great Vietnam epic. A footnote, he said” (183). In the face of this comment, the narrator’s project takes on even greater significance. Not only has she finally done what she swore she would never do—write a book for someone else, but the fact of that book proves the narrator’s friend wrong. *For Rouenna*, and the fictional book within it, are volumes, not mere footnotes.

Rouenna’s difficulty in speaking about her experiences and the narrator’s struggle to gain the credibility to narrate the story both reinforce the difficulty faced by American women who write about the Vietnam War. As the narrator’s former boyfriend expresses, women are expected to write “love stories,” and when they work outside this subject matter, they must delineate their authority carefully, explaining how they inherited these stories, and why they are qualified to tell them (225). This narrative restriction proves to be more than an issue of content, as the Vietnam narratives written by American women reveal a socio-cultural restriction against the female speaker, and the extent to which her literary articulations must conform to specific narrative forms.

In a similar attempt to present a self-conscious form of mediated narrative, Danielle Trussoni, the narrator-author of the 2006 memoir *Falling Through the Earth* chronicles her

relationship to the Vietnam War, Vietnam itself, and her father Dan Trussoni, who was a tunnel rat during the war. Unlike Sam in *In Country*, Danielle receives her father's war stories directly, as Dan thrusts the tales upon her at nearly every possible opportunity. In an attempt to establish the author's credibility, the narrative opens with a scene from Danielle's own trip to Vietnam. This initially appears promising: perhaps this author will speak from her own experiences. However, while Danielle's narrative reinforces the idea that she has experienced the country for herself, this assertion is undermined by the fact that her trip consists of retracing her father's wartime footsteps. Therefore, rather than establishing the female author as an authority on her own merits, the narrative connects Danielle's credibility to the extent to which she channels her father's experience. She repeatedly reminds readers of the connections, imagining that she hears "the same rich voice" as her father had heard from the tunnels, finally concluding, "At heart, I was my father's daughter" (2). The association throughout is clear: Danielle's narrative authority is directly proportional to her similarity to her father.

On some level, Danielle has courted this similarity for years. The memoir traces the extent to which, as a child, she modeled herself on her father. The resemblance is physical as well as emotional; in the company of her father, she strives to "match his pace" and recognizes herself in his skin tone and his demeanor (4). At night, she snuck into her parents' bedroom, listened to her father's slumber, and "imitated him, breathing as he breathed, exhaling as he exhaled" (14). In time, she learns to speak for her father, to translate his silences to her siblings, developing a "Dad Code" that she alone interprets, ascribing emotions to his reticence (70). Rather than resent his daughter's role as his impersonator and translator, Dan remains complicit in her storytelling. He shares his stories with his young daughter and allows her to accompany him to places unfitting for a child, such as the house of the woman with whom he has an affair

(66). The idea of an impersonator does not seem to scare Dan Trussoni, who longs to pass on to his daughter not only his name but also his struggles and his ghosts. When he fears his wife is having an affair, Dan makes Danielle call all over town to ask where her mother is. Even when she is a child, he takes Danielle with him to Roscoe's, the local bar where "everyone in town knew [she] was Dan Trussoni's girl" (5) and she is the only child "on a first-name basis with the bartender" (105). On one visit to the bar, when Danielle has traveled home from college to interview her father for a history paper she is writing about the use of tunnels in the war, Dan acknowledges his own complicity in granting his daughter the authority to narrate his experience. Initially, he claims (uncharacteristically) that he is unaffected by the war, that he has "let it go." An incredulous Danielle pushes her father, asking what he has done with his war memories: "He was quiet for a moment, and I suspected that he might be gearing himself up for some confession, a bit of self-reflection about how the war had changed his life. But he gave me a devious look—half love, half malice—and flicked my notebook with his finger. He said, 'I gave that war to you'" (92). Dan's admission cements his daughter's authority, showing that her narrative transcends the realm of ventriloquism and runs closer to biography than fiction.

The memoir is autobiography, too, of course, and a large part of the narrative concerns Danielle's attempts to separate herself from her father. She grows from the child who eavesdropped on war stories, who "trailed behind, mopping up blood with cocktail napkins" (7) to a young woman who invests in a twenty dollar notebook to keep a scrapbook of "[her] Vietnam, one that [she] had made distinct from [her] father's (49). When describing her visit to the country, Danielle is careful to explain her motivation, saying that she went to Vietnam "because of him and because of me" (51) and that she "wanted to go to Vietnam on [her] own terms" (170). This independence sounds initially promising, as if the female narrator were

liberated enough to change the accepted norms of women's Vietnam narratives. However, defining her terms proves challenging for Danielle, and her narrative traces the difficulty she has separating herself from her father. Ultimately, her decision to travel to Vietnam arises only after her father develops throat cancer and his larynx is removed, leaving him literally voiceless (226, 230). Instead of finding a space where father and daughter may exist as equals, then, *Falling Through the Earth* chronicles the genealogy of Vietnam narratives and marks the extent to which Danielle's claims to the story are directly inherited from her father's experience. This mediated narrative labors to establish the daughter's authority to tell war stories, but ultimately, those stories remain her father's, not hers. Thus, even as women strive to assert their own abilities to understand and enter into the consciousness of the Vietnam War, the mediated narrative builds on, rather than challenging overtly, the premise that women remain outside the war experience.

Male Veterans Subvert the Direct Participant Narrative

Although many male veteran authors proved instrumental in establishing the prominence of the direct participant narrative, several of them also composed texts that subvert the form. Nelson DeMille's 2002 novel *Up Country* subverts the traditional gender roles in Vietnam War literature by featuring Vietnam veteran Paul Brenner, who returns to Vietnam in the 1990s on an off-the-record investigative mission for the U.S. Army's Criminal Investigation Division. Brenner's assignment is to uncover the details of the alleged murder, during the Vietnam War, of a U.S. soldier by his commanding officer. While in Vietnam, Brenner is paired with a female CIA agent, and with her help, he discovers the veracity of the murder and seeks justice for it. DeMille's book, which was acclaimed by popular sources,²² offers some attempts to bridge the distance between women and the Vietnam War experience. When receiving his mission, Brenner

²² The author's website lists the following representative praise from *People* Magazine: "Grunt's-eye detail and double-time pacing...DeMille is a muscular storyteller" (<http://www.nelsondemille.net/books/up_country.asp?id=praise>, accessed 29 Nov. 2009).

stands in front of the controversial Vietnam women's memorial and reflects to his former employer, "These statues should be closer to the Wall. The last person a lot of those guys over there saw or talked to before they died was a military nurse" (19). Embedded within a conversation about Brenner's upcoming mission, the statement appears to be a throw-away piece of dialogue. Actually, it is a political statement; the memorial, which was dedicated in the 1990s amid much protest, has evoked extensive debate about the role of women in the military and the need to memorialize them. Brenner's recognition of the memorial and the women it represents, along with his insistence that it remains too far removed from the Vietnam Wall, stand as both recognition and protest of the marginalization of women from the Vietnam War experience. Of course, his reasoning for the inclusion is based on the role women played for men in country, so his recognition is based not on women's own experiences, but on how those experiences overlapped with that of veterans such as himself. Thus, his recognition defines the women by their relationships to men, even as it argues for their inclusion in the nation's formalized memory of the war.

This simultaneous inclusion of women and the insistence that war remains a masculine experience occurs elsewhere in the text, namely in the opposing views that Brenner and Susan, his CIA contact, express about women and war. Brenner remains steadfast in his belief that women cannot understand or even imagine the cost of war, and he references the burden of carrying "this secret... your girlfriend can't guess at" (414). When touring Khe Sahn with Brenner and several other veterans, Susan offers a different perspective, observing, "I wasn't here, but you three guys made me feel like I was" (445). One veteran asks if he should have brought his wife, and Susan urges him to do so immediately. His response—"She wanted to come... it was me who didn't want her to" (446)—locates the root of the problem not in

uncomprehending women but in reticent veterans. Thus, DeMille allows for the possibility that women's exclusion from the Vietnam War originates not from their own abilities but from socio-cultural circumstances. In this suggestion, it stands as the rare male-authored endorsement of women's inclusion in the representational field of the Vietnam War.

Perhaps the most pointed, and certainly the most prominent, subversion of the male-dominated arena of war arises in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. Published in 1990—the same year as Steel's *Message from Nam*—the short story collection demonstrates a concern with women's approaches to the war and challenges the concept that veterans' understanding and representations of war are inviolable. By asserting that even participants of war may not fully comprehend the events of war or their own actions and motivations as combatants and by depicting non-traditional warriors such as American females, O'Brien's text undermines the monolithic authority of participant narratives and allows for the idea that even those considered outsiders to war can research and imagine it productively. This type of endorsement, combined with historical changes in the military (particularly its increased roles for women) eventually modulates the direct participant narrative, expanding the form to allow for female protagonists and authors.

Unlike O'Brien's memoir, *The Things They Carried* is a postmodern novel depicting a main character named Tim O'Brien whose life resembles that of the author Tim O'Brien. However, the text complicates and resists the assumption that this is simply an autobiographical novel, though it contains autobiographical elements. O'Brien's book, which has earned canonical status as an ur-text of the Vietnam War, departs from other Vietnam War texts in its willingness to question the narrative authority implicitly granted to war's participants and in its revision of the common belief (advanced in, among other texts, O'Brien's memoir *If I Die in a Combat*

Zone) that women cannot understand or participate in the war experience. In its treatment of women, it further demonstrates that the ability to participate in war is not limited by a biological imperative; rather, the equation of masculinity and war is a social and cultural construct that upholds traditional American gender roles. In these departures, *The Things They Carried* simultaneously unfolds as a direct participant narrative while undermining or questioning the status of such narratives and acknowledging the constructed nature of their underpinnings. Perhaps this apparent contradiction is not actually a contradiction at all: the war is incomprehensible, O'Brien, argues, but you must have been there in order to understand the impossibility of grasping it.

An area of thematic concern—and one which will also inform the novel's view on the status of the direct participant—for *The Things They Carried* is the ability of women to comprehend the war experience. O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone* establishes women as outside the events of war, and therefore renders them unable to grasp it. However, just as *The Things They Carried* revises O'Brien's certainty in his narrative authority, it also revisits and amends his earlier conclusions on war and gender. Whereas the O'Brien of *If I Die* refuses to share his war experiences with the women around him, the O'Brien of *Things* actively, though unsuccessfully, strives to tell his stories to females. When speaking in public, he struggles to make female audience members understand his stories and claims that "it is always a woman" who misinterprets his words (90). Years after his military service, he even takes his daughter Kathleen to Vietnam with him. He calls the trip "a birthday present" for his daughter, now ten, but he also acknowledges a sense in which he hoped to share with her his own history (208). Kathleen expresses a fair amount of confusion at the causes of war, the reasons for her father's service, and his inability to put that service behind him. At other points in the novel, she urges

him to “write about a little girl who finds a million dollars and spends it all on a Shetland pony” (38). Despite his best efforts to help them understand the war, the women in O’Brien’s life repeatedly fail to grasp it. The failure is not confined to O’Brien; fellow veteran Norman Bowker experiences it as well and eventually self-censors, believing that he cannot share all of his war stories with the woman he loves (165).

O’Brien’s “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong” stands in contrast to these events and suggests that women can indeed understand the war experience, under the right circumstances. In the story, which depicts the two primary literary roles available to women in Vietnam War books: uncomprehending outsider and inhumane participant, O’Brien illustrates that the gendering of war arises not from the inadequacy of women to understand the war experience, but from the fact that such understanding threatens traditional gender relations—the patriarchy. This generic restriction, whereby women are considered to lack the authority to narrate or create war literature, resembles the social restrictions O’Brien investigates, those which barred women not just from the representation of war, but from certain aspects (including combat) of war itself. Thus, the dominant form of the Vietnam War engenders the implication that women also are not considered sufficiently able to represent even their own wartime experiences.

“Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong” revolves around the tale of Mark Fossie, a homesick American medic, and his successful attempt to “[ship] his honey over to Nam” (102). According to Rat Kiley, a medic who witnessed the account and relays it to his new company of soldiers, when she arrives in Vietnam, Mary Anne Bell “shows up with a suitcase and one of those plastic cosmetic bags” (102). Initially, the soldiers envy Fossie, who accomplishes the feat they only dreamed about. The men of the Tra Bong compound flourish in the company of the “seventeen year old doll” with “long white legs and and blue eyes and a complexion like strawberry ice

cream,” but their affection stems from more than her looks (105-7). Recalling the story, Kiley even admits that he “loved her,” and he directly connects his sentiments to Mary Anne’s experience in country:

Mary Anne made you think about those girls back home, how clean and innocent they all are, how they’ll never understand any of this....It’s like trying to tell somebody what chocolate tastes like....you got to taste it, and that’s the thing with Mary Anne. She was *there*. She was up to her eyeballs in it. After the war, man, I promise you, you won’t find nobody like her. (123, italics original)

Initially, Mary Anne becomes every G.I.’s dream: the woman who comprehends their war stories. However, by writing a woman who understands only through her own direct experience, O’Brien substantiates the authority of the direct participant narrative. He also expands the definition of participant so that it may include members of both sexes. As Rat Kiley chastises his audience, “You got these blinders on about women. How gentle and peaceful they are. How if we had a pussy for President there wouldn’t be no more wars. Pure garbage. You got to get rid of that sexist attitude” (117). O’Brien demonstrates that women may enter into war on equal footing with men. However, he does not stop here but chooses also to expose the cost of such equality. While Mary Anne’s efforts to enter into the soldiers’ world initially align her to the men, because she proves able to understand their wartime experiences, O’Brien undercuts that by detailing how Mary Anne’s actions ultimately sever her relationships and mark her exit from society.

Mary Anne’s exposure to war expands her consciousness but eradicates trappings of her femininity. When Mary Anne’s interest moves beyond exploring Vietnamese culture and village life—traditionally female interests—her femininity diminishes as well. As she learns how to triage victims of firefights and to use an M-16, she abandons make-up and home manicures,

quits wearing jewelry and chops off her hair (109). Eventually, she joins up with a band of Green Berets and accompanies them on missions. These exclusive, special forces soldiers apparently accept her without incident, causing Kiley to react somewhat incredulously: “Ambush. All night long, man, Mary Anne’s out on fuckin’ *ambush*” (113, italics original). Fossie attempts to tame Mary Anne’s wanderings by proposing to her and planning her return to America, but his efforts prove fruitless; Mary Anne’s missions with the Green Berets lengthen, causing her to disappear for weeks at a time. Despite their engagement, no wedding awaits the high school sweethearts.

Unlike other women in *The Things They Carried*, Mary Anne fully grasps the war experience, apparently because she has actually lived it. However, this experience proves incompatible with her social identity; thus, her immersion in war preempts her engagements and wreaks havoc on her relationship with Mark. In entering war, she abandons all trappings of femininity and abstains from the roles traditionally associated with women; perhaps not coincidentally, she also descends into savagery. Although O’Brien does not state this explicitly, Mary Anne has exchanged her femininity for an identity as a soldier. In so doing, she also disrupts the roles associated with masculinity. If she is never a wife, then her fiancé will never be a husband. While Fossie grows more domestic and fantasizes about married life, Mary Anne becomes stealthy and even feral as she accompanies the Green Berets. Eventually, Fossie receives a medical discharge, and the story concludes with “Mary Anne ...still somewhere out there in the dark....She had crossed to the other side. She was part of the land. She was wearing her culottes, her pink sweater, and a necklace of human tongues. She was dangerous. She was ready for the kill” (125). O’Brien does not question Mary Anne’s ability to kill or to perform other duties of wartime service, but he does demonstrate that her acceptance of this role abolishes her feminine identity and subverts traditional gender relations, in both society and war

literature. Katherine Kinney states this succinctly: “Mary Ann [*sic*] Bell’s trip to Vietnam violates every operative assumption regarding how and when and where and why women enter war stories” (150). In his description of this trip, O’Brien demonstrates that the exclusion of women from knowledge of war is not a biological but a social imperative—one based not on the abilities of the female sex but on the precarious status of American gender norms. Thus, O’Brien simultaneously elevates women by demonstrating their capabilities and reaffirms their outsider status by exposing the social costs of those capabilities.

A further concern of the protagonist of *The Things They Carried* is his inability to recount his experiences in Vietnam. He acknowledges that “Much of it is hard to remember” and that retelling is a form of shaping (36). To the extent possible, O’Brien resists narrative closure, admitting that memory often consists of “those odd little fragments that have no beginning and no end” (39). Much of the book is episodic, though the chapters are interconnected. Events occur, then recur. Facts change. Whereas Hemphill concedes the merits of the direct participant narrative—so long as the right participant is narrating—O’Brien asserts that no one, even those people who were there, can tell a war story that is simultaneously authentic and factual. O’Brien’s separation of truth, which he seems to identify as an emotional quality, from fact, which he views as the actual lived events, questions the ability of conventional narrative to represent adequately war stories. O’Brien’s choice of a postmodern form further underscores this position. Where Hemphill argues that the truth of war can be told, so long as the right person is doing the telling, O’Brien believes that war’s truth defies standard narrative conventions: “In war you lose your sense of the definite, hence your sense of truth itself, and therefore it’s safe to say that in a true war story nothing is ever absolutely true” (88). Rather than debate which authors retain the most authority, O’Brien calls into question the entire premise of telling. Thus, he uses

his status as a direct participant to create a direct participant narrative that challenges the premise of the very form. O'Brien's admission—that even those who live war experiences have difficulty granting their war narratives coherence and veracity—suggests that Vietnam War narratives may also deploy through methods such as expression rather than representation. In his estimation, all war stories—even those by direct participants in war—remain suspect.

Perhaps as a codicil to what he identifies as this narrative inadequacy, the form and mode of O'Brien's text depart from that of the typical direct participant narrative in several ways. While some other texts, including O'Brien's *If I Die*, forego use of episodic narration to present glimpses of a character at various points in his life, *The Things They Carried* employs it to create a multiplicity of narratives. The text proves more circular than its predecessors, presenting its characters exploring the same events from different perspectives. They repeat stories, telling them in various versions, revising and revisiting. The text's form reveals an emphasis on telling war stories, and on the characters' repeated inability to do so. The act of narrative is questioned through this repetitive form; no narrative utterance is simple or straightforward. Because the primary mode of *The Things They Carried* is postmodernism, rather than the realism of previous texts, the text emphasizes instability and chaos rather than stability and certainty. In these authorial decisions, O'Brien uses the mode and form of his text to do what the narrative cannot do—to replicate some aspect of the war experience. While I am certainly not arguing that reading a postmodern novel is equivalent to being shot at in a foreign jungle (nor am I contending that any reading experience could enact in the reader the physical conditions of an actual experience, much less a life-threatening one), O'Brien's formal adaptations of the conventions of direct participant narrative serve to displace readers. The Vietnam War proved unlike any previous American war in a myriad of ways, among them its ambiguity of purpose, its

lack of international support, and its absence of a clearly defined enemy. A trope of the direct participant narrative is the soldier's initiation into the new war experience, one for which the stories of previous conflicts did not prepare him. In *The Things They Carried*, O'Brien's formal decisions offer a similarly disorienting experience for readers who believe that reading previous direct participant narratives—including O'Brien's own—has prepared them for this one. In refining the generic conventions of the direct participant narrative, O'Brien uses formal techniques to comment on the text's subject matter in ways that more traditional narrative techniques cannot.

The story argues that only cultural bias precludes women from attending to and succeeding at issues of warfare. Thus, this text assaults both the primacy of the veteran's account and the perceived unsuitability of women for war zones. In doing so, it wages an intervention against the war narrative form, implicitly arguing for an expanded set of narrators and authors.

Revisiting the Direct Participant Narrative by Women: Tatjana Soli's *The Lotus Eaters*

In the wake of such subversions—and, in extra-literary realms, changes that allowed for women's increased participation in the American military—attitudes toward women's roles in the direct participant narrative changed. Perhaps the most revealing index of these changing attitudes is the critical acclaim received by Tatjana Soli's 2010 novel *The Lotus Eaters*—a novel that bears strong plot resemblance to Steel's *Message from Nam*, which critics lampooned. *The Lotus Eaters* addresses the difficulties faced by women serving in Vietnam, but it ultimately presents a woman's story, thus appropriating the direct participant in a new manner. Soli's and Steel's novels bear strikingly similar content but receive divergent critical responses, suggesting

that the twenty years between their publication encompassed a shift in cultural attitudes governing the genre of Vietnam War literature.

Generally regarded as the final installment of America's conflict in Vietnam, the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975 encompassed the entrance of North Vietnamese troops and the exit of American personnel. Published in March, 2010, one month before the thirty-fifth anniversary of this event, Tatjana Soli's *The Lotus Eaters* illuminates an often-overlooked aspect of America's history in Vietnam by charting the experiences of a female photojournalist, Helen Adams, as her professional and romantic pursuits unfold against the backdrop of the American occupation of Vietnam. In one sense, Soli's novel would seem to accord belated recognition to a group that has been traditionally underrepresented in the literature of the Vietnam War, which rarely presents women as protagonists. This traditional absence remains true of both fictional and nonfictional texts; as journalist Denby Fawcett observes, for many years, "no one ever asked" her to share details of her experience covering the Vietnam War (Bartimus viii). Soli's novel thus illuminates a facet of social and military history that deserves further exploration, and its project was well-received.

However, while the text's critical acclaim departs from the typical response to female-authored Vietnam war novels, the novel itself is not as unique as it initially appears. The plot of *The Lotus Eaters* bears significant resemblance to that of Danielle Steel's 1990 romance novel *Message From Nam*. In both texts, a young woman with little professional experience travels from California to Vietnam to cover the American occupation as a journalist, drawn to war by the death of a man she loved. In Vietnam, she loves again, and, again, her beloved dies. Undaunted, she seeks love once more. Separated forcibly by events of the war, the lovers reunite in the novels' final pages, where they depart for the U.S. to build a life together.

These texts do hold some differences, and these are discussed below. However, on the level of plot, they bear a sustained and significant resemblance to one another. Given the vitriolic and outraged response typically leveled against any suspected case of plagiarism, it is perplexing that critical responses to Soli's text have not addressed its resemblance to Steel's novel. This omission may be attributed to two basic circumstances: either the similarity between texts has gone unnoticed, or it has been observed but considered unremarkable. This suggests several interesting things about the practices and attitudes of contemporary readers. First, it indicates that only a small set of individuals reads both literary fiction and romance novels. It further indicates that although people who read texts from both these modes may have noticed the connection between Steel's and Soli's novels, they have dismissed it, possibly assuming that the relays between high and low art are unidirectional—that ideas and ideology trickle down from literary to pulp fiction, but do not move reciprocally between works of various literary modes.

In contrast to these attitudes, Steel's and Soli's texts suggest the possibility of a multidirectional relationship between high and low art, and reading them in context of one another further illuminates the relationship between gender, mode, and the genre of Vietnam War literature. Upon publication, *Message From Nam* was disparaged by a wide range of critics, and it has rarely been considered alongside of other Vietnam War literature. This suggests that the genre of war literature is governed by a complex set of rules concerning mode. While romance and war have certainly been treated as compatible subjects in many works,²³ the romance novel mode is perceived as antithetical to the genre of war literature. Despite this perception of it as an apocryphal text, recontextualizing Steel's novel within the genre of war literature—and, specifically, reading it in conjunction with *The Lotus Eaters*—reveals that in embracing an expanded role for women as both writers of and protagonists within this literature,

²³ Notable examples include *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *From Here to Eternity*, and *Gone with the Wind*.

Message From Nam disrupts the genre. Reading these two books in the context of each other further reveals a complex intersection of military, social, and literary history. The structural similarities between these novels indicate the prevalence of gender as a determining factor on the possible plots available to authors writing about the Vietnam War. The absence of critical discussion concerning those textual similarities reveals a chasm between popular and literary fiction, and the different critical reception of each text reveals changing attitudes about women as authors and protagonists in Vietnam War literature. Over the two decades separating the publication of *Message From Nam* and *The Lotus Eaters*, the acceptable roles of women as authors and protagonists of the genre of Vietnam War literature has expanded significantly. Due to a number of changing views and attitudes—on the American military, the status of women within that military, the Vietnam War and its participants, and the appropriate manner of representing war—women now occupy a more substantial role in literary representations of the Vietnam War and the production of that literature.

Before I take up my primary concern with *The Lotus Eaters* and *Message from Nam*—how the similarities between their plots reveals the changing socio-historical and critical context for Vietnam War literature and its generic inflections—those similarities necessitate a brief discussion of the topic of plagiarism. In identifying the resemblance between these texts, my purpose is not to suggest that plagiarism is occurring. Certainly some narratives transcend cultures and remain in circulation, with various updates and modifications, for centuries, and that sort of continued cultural relevance remains my interest here.²⁴ Rather than assume that one text has stolen from or modeled itself on another, my approach to these texts considers the apparent primacy of this particular story and interrogates its emergence in diverse spheres of literature,

²⁴ Here, I am thinking of Shakespeare's plots, particularly *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, though certainly others would pertain, too.

considering why certain plots gain traction and continue to be told, why those plots receive different critical reception at different historical moments, and what the plots we circulate reveal about our own preferences and desires. The fact that two novels—one a popular success, the other a critical success—published twenty years apart have the same basic plot raises a slew of questions about the historical, literary, and social conditions that accommodate this plot’s longevity and continued relevance.

I am aware, of course, that my approach is not the typical response to the emergence of such textual similarities. Indeed, cases of perceived plagiarism receive a great deal of attention and generate much indignation from readers and critics alike.²⁵ Given that history of objection, it is peculiar that no one has remarked on the connection between *The Lotus Eaters* and *Message from Nam*. One possible reason for this could be that few people have noticed the resemblance, possibly because few people have read both texts. Although exceptions exist, the divide between popular and literary fiction remains wide, and it is a commonly-held notion that Danielle Steel aficionados typically do not consult the *New York Times*—where *The Lotus Eaters* received two separate reviews—for reading suggestions.

Certainly, though, works of literature are often revised, parodied, and reinterpreted. Sometimes the reinterpretations themselves garner a place in the canon—think, for example, of

²⁵ Take, for example, the situation of Brad Vice, whose short story collection *The Bear Bryant Funeral Train* received University of Georgia Press’s Flannery O’Connor Award for short fiction in 2004 and was published by the press in the subsequent year. After reading Vice’s book, a librarian alerted publishers that some sections of it resembled Carl Cramer’s *Stars Fell on Alabama*. Although Vice claimed his work paid homage to and offered a postmodern revision of Cramer’s text, UGA Press reacted strongly. It ceased publication of the book, recalled and destroyed all extant copies of it, and rescinded Vice’s award (Hogan). Vice suffered professionally from the fall out; the university where he taught and the university where he earned a graduate degree both conducted formal investigations into the authenticity of his work (Hathcock). While a vocal group of authors and editors contended that the judgment on Vice had been too hasty, a strong reaction to claims that an author has misrepresented the nature of his work is not unprecedented. Consider, for example, Oprah Winfrey’s tearful confrontation of author James Frey, whose “memoir” turned out to present some fabricated information as fact. Winfrey spoke of Frey’s “betrayal,” underscoring the severity of her reaction (“Frey”). The implication appears clear: when authors fail to acknowledge their sources or misrepresent the authenticity of their work, readers object.

Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. But more often, they are works of popular culture, more closely aligned to low art—think *Gnomeo and Juliet* or *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*. An interesting aspect about the plot similarities between *The Lotus Eaters* and *Message from Nam* is that the earlier text is a work of popular fiction, while the revisionary work has garnered recognition (such as the *New York Times* reviews) typically reserved for more literary and canonical texts. Although my primary concern with these novels resides elsewhere, the relays between their plots also suggests the need for a reappraisal of the relationship between high and low art and raises the possibility that this relationship may be more fluid and reciprocal than has traditionally been believed.

Thus far, my emphasis for aligning high and low art and my comparison of *The Lotus Eaters* and *Message from Nam* have suggested that these novels are more alike than different. With respect to their plot, this is certainly true. However, I am not trying to argue that they are equitable in other regards, as they depart from one another in terms of prose and the complexity with which they treat their subject. Steel's prose is clear but banal, often falling into cliché. The novel opens with a heartfelt poem by Steel. An excerpt establishes the novel's tone:

the fight
 so long,
 so sad,
the pain
 so bad (xi).

Steel's prose contains the same type of language. The heroine's "heart skipped a beat" upon receiving good news (30); when faced with a difficult reality, "just thinking of it tore at her heart" (369). When she departs for Vietnam, Paxton realizes "Even if she came back, it would never be the same....She had left as a child, and she would return different, battle-scarred..." (159). Her prediction appears both accurate and naïve. Certainly, the wounds of war transcend

the physical realm into the psychological. And scars are not reserved for only combatants; history is replete with examples of civilians who have been wounded, physically or psychologically, by wars being waged around them. However, the language remains problematic, because it implies either that Paxton will actually participate in combat or that her own pursuits will be equitable to combat. This trend continues throughout the novel, which resists a complex consideration of the difficulties facing female journalists in Vietnam during the war and instead opts for an easy alignment of journalist and soldier.

The novel's language remains consistent through its concluding lines, which attempts to extrapolate from the novels' characters to humanity at large. It is April 1975—the fall of Saigon. Paxton and her lover, who has spent many years as a POW, make it onto the last American helicopter to depart the city, then secure passage on a boat back to America. Steel concludes, "...Nam was gone now....For them, and everyone else, now, it was finally over" (389). This reads too simply. While the American occupation was over, its physical toll remained inscribed on the bodies of many combatants. And certainly the psychological and cultural wounds inflicted by the conflict would be pertinent for years—even decades—to come.²⁶ To argue that an entire country and the consequences of our involvement there have simply receded is facile, and it undermines Steel's choice of topic. If it is genuinely over and resolved, why revisit it in a novel?

In contrast, Soli's text uses lucid prose to offer a much more nuanced and complex depiction of the war and its consequences. Through the novel's title and epigraph, taken from *The Odyssey*, Soli situates her text within the canon and within narratives that consider war and its aftermath. By evoking Homer's depiction of the Lotus-eaters, which discusses the threat of immersion in a foreign land with no desire to return home, Soli hints at her novel's treatment of

²⁶ Consider, for example, President George H. W. Bush's triumphant exclamation upon the conclusion of the first Gulf War: "We have finally kicked the Vietnam syndrome."

the war, which presents an alluring, albeit divided, nation with a rich cultural heritage and which refuses simplistic dichotomies of right and wrong or us and them.

Characters in *The Lotus Eaters* struggle to return to a pre-war existence, and the novel uses one of its only major departures from the plot it shares with *Message from Nam* to extend this nuanced treatment.²⁷ In both novels, the protagonists become involved first with an American man and then, after his death, with his subordinate. However, Steel's characters are both American servicemen, while the lovers in Soli's novel are an American journalist and his Vietnamese assistant. The assistant has worked for both sides of the Vietnamese conflict, and his loyalties are, if not completely absent, then certainly fluid. While Steel's novel promotes members of the American military as ideal romantic partners, Soli's novel refutes such jingoism and explores how romantic love transcends cultural and political divides. Furthermore, by aligning herself with Linh, a Vietnamese man, protagonist Helen Adams cements the place Vietnam occupies in her life. It will never simply be "over," as it apparently will be for Steel's characters. Indeed, when Linh and Helen are reunited upon her release from Cambodian rebels, Soli evokes absence more than closure. In the novel's final paragraph, Linh touches Helen's face, considering "This body that had come to stand for everything that had been lost" (386). In

²⁷ The novels do have several other plot disparities. Many of them are insignificant: Steel's protagonist travels in 1968, prompted by the death in Vietnam of her fiancé. She has planned to be a journalist her entire life, training with Berkeley's campus paper, the local press in Savannah, Georgia, and the San Francisco *Morning Sun*, which hires her, at her urging, as a war correspondent. Motivated by her brother's death in country, Soli's protagonist arrives in Vietnam in 1965. She is a twenty-two year old freelance photographer. She has had little professional training and must ask colleagues to show her how to work her camera. Despite their somewhat divergent professional backgrounds, the protagonists' experiences soon display more resemblances than uniqueness. The only other significant plot difference is that Steel offers her protagonist a back story, delving into discussion of the years leading up to her departure for Vietnam. This background material allows Steel to situate her character within a grand historical context that includes the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the civil rights movement. Situating a narrative within a sweeping historical context is a common trope of Steel's novels, which include one story set around the sinking of the *Titanic*.

this text, rather than erasing all wounds, the lovers' reunion confronts them, and helps Soli achieve a poignant and complex conclusion for her novel.

Certainly many Vietnam War novels present interracial relationships. However, by inverting the common alignment between gender and nationality, Soli's depiction complicates the relationship between lovers and, by extension, comments on the cultural value and power of the nations they represent.²⁸ Helen Adams remains sensitive to cultural difference and recognizes the humanity inherent in the Vietnamese people. Linh reads her "the most beloved of all Vietnamese tales," then share his own writing with her (303). He introduces Helen to his family, who embrace her wisdom and maturity (307). When they marry, it is in a traditional Buddhist ceremony held in Linh's village. And in the novel's conclusion, Linh helps secure Helen's release from captivity, proving his political savvy. Such depiction offers a more complex treatment of the Vietnamese people than is represented in many texts, particularly those which present sexual relationships between Vietnamese and Americans. In offering this view, Soli further nuances perspectives such as Steel's. Rather than a problem to be solved or a place to escape, in Soli's novel, Vietnam is a land of tradition, beauty, and cultural value.

It would be possible, given this comparison, to declare Steel's book inferior to Soli's. In many ways, this seems logical. Romance novels—as Steel's book unapologetically is—typically occupy a less heralded place than works of literary fiction. While certainly not a critical success,

²⁸ This approach subverts the more common depiction, as illustrated in Larry Heinemann's acclaimed novel *Close Quarters*. Early in his combat tour, protagonist and narrator Philip Dosier learns of Claymore Face, a Vietnamese woman who prostitutes herself for the servicemen, who coin the name "Claymore Face" to refer to her pock-marked skin and whose ridicule of her spirals throughout the novel. Initially, they insult her verbally, offering comments such as "She ain't much ta look at but she puts out like crazy. Just put a paper bag over her head" (35). On their first encounter, Dosier refuses her services. Eventually he succumbs, and his relationship with her serves as a marker of how combat has corroded him. By the middle of the novel, Dosier has "started hustling Claymore Face, freak-show fashion," to the new servicemen (258). In their final encounter, Dosier and others watch as Claymore Face sleeps with one of the men. During this, they toss money at her face, then instruct her to perform oral sex on them all. When the woman resists, Dosier reaches for his weapon, threatening her with violence if she fails to comply (260). This scene reveals the extent to which sexual relationships between Americans and Vietnamese are depicted as power struggles in which the American subdues the anonymous or misrepresented Vietnamese with force and threat of violence.

Message from Nam was the fifth-best selling work of fiction in 1990, proving that it was a popular success (Strauss). It is worth noting, however, that *Messaage from Nam* failed to attain Steel's normal level of success. While it did reach the *New York Times* Best Sellers List—as have sixty-nine of Steel's other books—*Message from Nam* never occupied the list's top spot (Ericson). Twenty years later, Soli's book earned both popular and critical acclaim, spending time on the Best Sellers list and garnering several awards, including the James Tate Black Memorial Prize for Fiction (“Tatjana”). Although critics have not directly compared the two texts, a survey of the reviews written on each text individually supports this judgment; critics generally appreciated Soli's book and disdained Steel's. On the surface, all this makes sense. However, reading the books and the critical responses to them with an eye to the different modes of each novel illuminates broader interpretive opportunities and reveals a complex and dynamic conversation about the intersection between war narratives and women.

It is not incorrect to generalize the reviews by stating that Steel's book was poorly received while Soli's was favorably received. However, a closer look at the nature of the reviews, and the particular objections within them, reveals an interesting trend—a focus on the plot itself and its proper place within the novels' literary modes. The reviews, in other words, wage a running commentary on genre, expressing compelling information about the intersection of the romance plot, war narratives, and the canon and ultimately wrestling with the proper relationship between these entities. Critics' repeated conversations about how to classify these books reveals anxiety about the status of women in war narratives. Implicit in these conversations are concerns about what defines the genre of war writing, what type of authors should have access to that genre, and what plots it should encompass.

Despite the popular success of *Message from Nam*, many critics disparaged the work, objecting to the characters themselves and to the plot surrounding them. In a review rendered rare for its inclusion of several positive comments, Helen Allard praises Steel's "passion" but bemoans the characters' lack of depth. D. G. Campbell offers similar objections, calling the protagonist "a major albatross around [the novel's] neck." Other critics were less balanced. Reviewing the novel for *USA Today*, Deirdre Donahue bemoans Steel's choice of subject matter, noting, "our Danielle has gone serious with disastrous results." The possessive is telling: the paper's general readership is likely to be familiar with Steel's books, which Donahue notes, had sold up to an estimated 125 million copies. (The pairing of the possessive and Steel's first name is also, of course, condescending. It's difficult to imagine a reviewer bemoaning the choices of "our Tim" when discussing another 1990 novel, O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*.)

Donahue further excoriates Steel for the book's "ridiculous-beyond-speaking plot." The editor's introducing the review critiques Steel's book, among others, for failing to fit its mode, that of the romance novel. Indeed, by the note's standards, the novel fails precisely because it attempts an undesired level of seriousness rather than the "merely fun and frivolous." In other words, the novel is too ambitious for its mode. It is interesting that the criticism was leveled from all facets of the reviewing world and was expressed in both popular and academic venues. Writing in a full-length, academic survey of Vietnam War literature, critic Tobey Herzog also objects to popular culture's appropriation of the war, complaining, "Even Danielle Steel... gratuitously uses the Vietnam War as a setting" (2). Implicit in the arguments here is the belief that romantic fiction as a mode must be divorced from serious topics such as war.

Despite this sentiment, Steel is not alone in her decision to employ such settings or in a romance plot; as Phil Beidler has noted in his survey of mass-market Vietnam War fiction, "the

essentially female conventions of the popular romance, or supermarket gothic, a mode less frequent but visible, at least in its basic formula (grieving heroine commits herself to Vietnam in memory of dead lover, often finding new lover or lovers)” appear in several popular, female-authored representations of the Vietnam War (65). Thus, although neither popular nor academic reviewers appear to condone this choice, these authors continue to make it.

Tatjana Soli acts similarly, although arguably her work operates in the mode of literary fiction rather than romance novel. *The Lotus Eaters* met with both critical and popular acclaim, earning cover space on the *New York Times Sunday Book Review* and garnering mention in *People* and *O* magazines and reviews in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. As literary fiction, *The Lotus Eaters* appears to be in a realm well-suited for a treatment of the Vietnam War. However, many of its reviewers, while speaking favorably about the novel, foreground the novel’s plot, acknowledging some level of concern over its apparent connection to traditional romance plots. While these critics do not agree on how to reconcile the narrative threads depicting romance and war in Soli’s novel, they generally acknowledge these topics as separate—and even competing—entities.

Writing in the *New York Times*, Janet Maslin offers a plot synopsis, only to interrupt it to justify the novel’s merits, writing, “If it sounds as if a love story is the central element in ‘The Lotus Eaters’...Ms. Soli’s book is sturdier than that.” Maslin’s attempts to reassure readers of the text’s “sturdiness” suggest both that romance is an inherently weak form and that it is likely to be dismissed or disdained by the *New York Times*. Further into the review, she praises Soli’s “prodigious research,” arguing that it allows her “to imbue an otherwise deeply romantic book with a strong sense of history.” By depicting the romantic and the historical as oppositional concerns, the review implies that one must be corrected or mediated by the other. Thus, a text

that resembles a love story requires propping up with narrative structures outside information, and it remains unpalatable without such additional generic concerns.

Writing less than a week later in the *New York Times Book Review*, reviewer Danielle Trussoni expresses no such compunction about the presence of the romance plot in *The Lotus Eaters*, accepting its presence without any apparent anxiety. However, her criticism maintains the oppositional stance of war and romance, and she notes that it is a difficult pairing for authors to compose successfully. Trussoni contends, “Soli portrays these love stories so thoughtfully, and with such care, that they take precedence over the fireworks of battle. In this novel, love eclipses war, at least momentarily.” In other words, this analysis allows little room for these narrative threads to be woven together; rather, one “eclipses” the other, effectively covering it and blocking it from view. Thus, the two threads compete with each other rather than working reciprocally.

On one hand, these reviews offer a mere difference of opinion on the relative value of love stories in literature. However, their focus on the role of the romance plot proves significant in that it also suggests a set of larger cultural concerns surrounding war narratives, particularly narratives by women. Indeed, the war narrative genre has historically been fraught with debate, and little consensus exists concerning who may write about war and what scope their war narratives should hold. The views of the *Times* critics reveal a portion of these debates as they pertain to a single novel; however, reading this novel in the context of its genre exposes a historical uncertainty about the relationship women have to war narratives. This debate did not start with the publication of Soli’s novel. Rather, like Steel’s novel, Soli’s text is simply the latest to be caught in intersecting webs of genre, gender, and war.

In charting the story of an American woman's experience in Vietnam during the war, both *Message from Nam* and *The Lotus Eaters* foreground members of overlooked facets of American society, whose wartime service remains largely ignored by canonical literature. The fact that they employ the same plot to do this suggests a limited number of Vietnam War plots available to women writers constructing novels with female protagonists. Indeed, in his mention of the romance plot's appearance in Vietnam War fiction, Beidler cites examples—each of which is authored by a woman—that reinforce this suspicion. The canon of Vietnam War literature is saturated with male-authored accounts of wartime experiences, and even the most prominent fictional versions are penned by veterans.²⁹ Far from incidental or idle, this prevalence of male-authored Vietnam War narratives, coupled with the employment of the romance plot by writers as distinct as Soli and Steel suggests that the forms available to women writing war narratives have been governed by a different set of conventions than those available to male authors. The divergent responses received by Soli's and Steel's texts suggests that as those histories have changed their ideas on the status of women, the critical reception of work by women has also been modified.

Given this trend, it is unsurprising that one plot adopted by many women authors seeks to reinscribe women as protagonists in war literature, to highlight their presence as nurses and journalists and to chronicle the resistance they met. This is not to suggest that all novels succeed in this attempt; Steel's seems to fail somewhat in its stubborn insistence that Paxton Andrews can cover the war, get her man, and remain unscathed at novel's end, when she and her lover plan to return home to his child, which Paxton considers her own. It is perhaps too simplistic for Steel to suggest that women are capable of having a career, enduring a war zone, finding love,

²⁹ For example, consider the most prominent Vietnam War texts: Philip Caputo's *Rumors of War*, Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* and *Close Quarters*, Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July*, Karl Marlantes's *Matterhorn*, and various fictional and nonfictional texts by Tim O'Brien.

and starting a family, all without any overt strain, but this is, of course, a romance novel, and thus the happy ending—with its promise of the domestic bliss awaiting its heroine—is to be expected.

Soli's novel, however, offers a more complex consideration of the ways that women's involvement has been challenged, detailing the resistance the protagonist, Helen Adams meets upon her arrival in Vietnam. Fellow journalists, all male, call Helen "Prom Queen" (78), complaining, "now the girls are coming. Can't be much of a war after all" (75). Adams eventually earns the respect of the men around her, but that respect is based on her absence rather than her presence, as illustrated by a soldier on the Ho Chi Minh trail who "complimented her: 'You're almost invisible'" (259). Thus, even as it demonstrates her successful wartime service, the book continues to cast Adams's presence in war as something incompatible with traditional womanhood and detrimental to the success of male military personnel. When Adams sustains a wound while covering troops in the Bong Son, rather than showing concern for her own condition, she worries about "the sight of a wounded woman demoralizing the men" (300). Her extensive injuries result in an emergency hysterectomy, further underscoring the extent to which her participation in war separates her from such aspects of womanhood as maternity. Unlike the conclusion of Steel's novel, Soli's confronts the reality of a couple unable to bear children. Linh reassures Helen that he doesn't mind this, but the conversation reveals the topic's significance. Unlike Andrews, for whom the threat of scars proves fleeting, Adams will bear her wounds perpetually.

Given the history of resistance to Vietnam War literature by non-veterans, Soli's critical success is somewhat remarkable. Several events occurring in the decades since the publication of *Message from Nam* may have contributed to this climate that embraces a female-authored novel

depicting a woman's Vietnam experiences. First, women have been increasingly incorporated into the American military, thus narrowing the perceived distance between women and war. Contemporary accounts of military women abound, suggesting that women are increasingly accepted as protagonists of war narratives.³⁰ Although the military involvement of contemporary servicewomen does not change the more limited involvement of women during the Vietnam War era, it is possible that contemporary standards have rendered the reading public less resistant to acknowledging that involvement from an earlier era.

Generally speaking, war narratives have been historically defined by time period, according to specific wars. Thus critics usually speak of "World War II novels" or "Vietnam War fiction," and comparatively few transhistorical studies of war narratives exist. Those that do exist often compare and contrast literature from two wars rather than the entire body of national war literature. Furthermore, war narratives have rarely been evaluated on the basis of form. Most critical considerations of war narratives concern content; the primary consideration is generally the extent of the narrative's veracity or an analysis of particular characters. This emphasis on the content of war narratives has contributed to an erroneous assumption that the form of war narratives is fixed and stable. A close reading of war narratives illuminates the conventions that govern—implicitly or explicitly—the genre and, by extension, the culture for which that genre does ideological work. At stake here is more than just generic tropes. War narratives simultaneously define and defy the culture of their production, and by understanding both the stories a culture promotes and those it prohibits we may further understand the informal and often implicit mechanisms that culture uses to govern its constituents.

³⁰ For examples from the first Gulf War and the Iraq War, respectively, see Rhonda Cornum's *She Went to the War* and Kayla Williams's *Love My Rifle More than You*.

In other words, war narratives comment not only on the geopolitical components of national identity but also on the mutually constitutive relationship between citizen and nation.³¹ Specifically, such formal elements of texts as plot, narration, and character help determine what roles remain available to women within war literature. Furthermore, as Susan Faludi illustrates, the national identity and the identity of its individuals are often portrayed in gendered terms. Therefore, the intersection of war narratives and gender provides a starting point for making observations about the genre of war narrative overall, and for understanding that genre's contributions to contemporary concepts of national identity. An investigation of these elements considers the extent to which certain kinds of war narratives are available only to male or female authors, and it ultimately demonstrates that literature of the Vietnam War simultaneously acknowledges a female presence while marginalizing that presence. Thus, war remains both a gendered and gendering force, and American identity is linked to wartime constructions and the deployment not only of troops, but also of assumptions about what American men and women are or do or believe. The literary construction of war remains implicated in these beliefs, as they both construct and complicate contemporary understanding of individual and national identity.

³¹ For a similar approach to genre study, see Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (London: Verso, 2000), which contends that the Bildungsroman genre considers the individual's formation into society while simultaneously reacting to the emergence of a middle class and the development of capitalism.

Chapter 4—Constructing Men and Corrupting Women: Narratives of the 1991 Gulf War

Although perhaps not so strikingly as with Vietnam War narratives, the cultural and critical circumstances surrounding the Gulf War prove deeply connected to the gender representations in Gulf War narratives. Viewed as part of a larger social history, military history of the Gulf War era reflects both a largely supportive national community and a larger incorporation of women in the social sphere. This war “marked the first time significant numbers of American female soldiers (41,000) served near combat zones or in combat roles” (Owen 201). Unlike the Vietnam War, the Gulf War had a volunteer military, a clear objective, a short duration, a rapid and decisive conclusion, and a generally supportive environment at home. In January, 1991, Congress approved the use of force; by June, victory parades marched through Washington.³² Although casualty reports remain disputed, many fewer Americans died in the Gulf War than in previous conflicts. Thus, this era demonstrates a different inflection of national identity than the Vietnam War era, because in terms of scope, duration, and overall loss of life, the Gulf War proved less nationally traumatic than the Vietnam War. These factors, in contrast to those surrounding the Vietnam War, combined to create a nation that appeared generally supportive of its military personnel, even if it did not support the military itself or the actions it took. Furthermore, although the domestic social climate during the Gulf War was not completely static, it did appear more stable than the atmosphere of social upheaval that marked the Vietnam War era. In some ways American society can be seen during this period as resistant to heterogeneity.³³

³² <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/cron>.

³³ In his call for a new approach to cultural studies, Douglas Kellner argues that in the days leading up to and during the Gulf War, anti-war sentiments were largely absent from national media. (“Cultural Studies and the Gulf War: A Multiperspectival Approach.” *Styles of Cultural Activism: From Theory and Pedagogy to Women, Indians, and Communism*. Ed. Philip Goldstein. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1994. 103-29.) See also Stephen Reese and Bob Buckalew, who explore the generic conditions applied to news reports of the Gulf War and argue that the media often equated support for troops as a pro-war sentiment. (“The Militarism of Local Television: The Routine Framing

This is not to suggest that no social, military, or literary changes occur in this time period. As the military roles available to women expand, women's place in war narratives similarly broadens, and the literature of the Persian Gulf War demonstrates that the direct participant and mediated forms used to depict the Vietnam War are no longer deployed along neatly gendered lines. However, gender remains a primary concern of this literature.

The Gulf War produced an extremely low number of literary texts, and very little literary criticism has emerged to consider those texts. This relative scarcity of literary representation arises from a number of factors, but for my purposes, the most significant ones are as follows: the brief duration of the war itself, which included slightly longer than a month's worth of combat and a ground war of only one hundred hours; the advent of an all-volunteer military; the relatively small number of American casualties; and the apparent supremacy of technology as a mechanism of both waging and representing contemporary warfare. Indeed, although the Vietnam War was often referred to as the first television war, the advent of the Gulf War marked a new union between war and television. Americans watched live coverage via CNN, and the time elapsing between an event's occurrence and its representation by the media grew ever briefer. This is one reason that literature of the Gulf War remains scant: by the time an author could publish a book, the events within it would be, literally, old news. Other reasons, of course, exist—the war affected relatively few people, was largely uncontested, and concluded rapidly. Although the Gulf War is a very small war with little attached literature, that literature nonetheless signals the advent of a crisis (expressed in several different generic inflections) in the relationship between warfare and American masculinity.

Technology and the Masculine

of the Persian Gulf War." *Cultural Studies in Mass Communication* 12 [1995]: 40-59.) This is not to suggest that American society actually was heterogeneous; rather, it is to acknowledge the demonstrated and repeated desire for it to be that.

During the Gulf War, technological advances render participants in war at great distance from one another, making warfare more like a video game than an encounter with an enemy. One iteration of the literature considers these developments in modern warfare, exploring what happens to the masculinity-instilling project of war when combat is waged by machines rather than people. This reliance on technology also gave rise to a heightened awareness of the issues surrounding representation—issues that often constitute a central concern of Gulf War literature and criticism.

Because of the rapidity of this geopolitical conflict, cultural criticism concerning it emerged relatively early, in some cases even prior to the outbreak of war itself. Thus, the literature of the conflict is often shaped by such criticism. Perhaps the most prominent piece (and certainly one of the most provocative pieces) of critical work emerging from the events surrounding the Gulf War is the series of three articles published by French philosopher Jean Baudrillard between January and March 1991. These articles, titled “The Gulf War will not take place,” “The Gulf War: Is it really taking place?” and “The Gulf War did not take place” are collected in revised form in a book bearing the title of the final article. Baudrillard’s primary concern in each of these articles is to highlight the level of media involvement in the world political sphere. He argues that contemporary warfare bears little resemblance to earlier wars, and that the Gulf War, which was designed to prevent what America perceived as Iraq’s continued aggression against Kuwait, was a “non-war,” one predicated on the idea of deterrence and designed to prevent, rather than create, further conflict. Lest readers believe this non-war is a noble aim, Baudrillard explains its hegemonic nature: it arises “from the will to impose a general consensus by deterrence” (83). In other words, geo-political entities rely on the threat of force to

coerce submission to their desires.³⁴ Baudrillard finds this sort of coercion to be an abuse of power, despite its absence of combat.

Baudrillard further questions the veracity of media representations of the war, arguing that these images, combined with the antiseptic nature of military technology, which removes perpetrators from their victims, create a media spectacle that poses as war. He bemoans the disparity between opposing forces, arguing that the results of the war were predetermined on account of American might, and he complains that “we will never know what it would have been like had [the war] existed” (61). Of course, an entity called the Gulf War did exist—weapons were fired, and people died.³⁵ However, Baudrillard’s point is that what happened was not a war in the traditional sense, but more of a spectacle with casualties. The certainty of success, the physical separation between enemies even during combat, and the media (mis)representation of the events all combined to render the Gulf War a non-war. The U.S.’s victory was never in doubt. Because Baudrillard’s analysis is concerned with the representation of war and the related perception of war in the civilian psyche, it fails to foreground the actual events of the war. By Baudrillard’s logic, if these events remain undepicted, they will not affect the majority of civilians, who understand the war only through representations of it. Thus, his failure to consider the casualties of the war makes sense in this context—after all, the casualties of the war remain uncalculated, and certainly unreported publically—even though it raises moral issues.

Baudrillard’s ideas have proven provocative, eliciting support and evoking sharp criticism. Perhaps the most passionate critique of his ideas appears in Christopher Norris’s *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals, and the Gulf War*. In this text, Norris polemically argues against what he terms the postmodernists and neo-pragmatists and what he

³⁴ This is, of course, not a new idea—one thinks of Clausewitz’s definition of war as “politics by other means.”

³⁵ Chesterman reports the casualties suffered by coalition forces in the ground war as 240 (5).

views as their belief in a complete absence of historical referents. Although the work began as a response to Baudrillard's articles, what emerges is a condemnation of contemporary postmodernism, what Norris views as its repeated corruption of philosophy, and many of its proponents and adherents. (He does make exceptions in his critique for Derrida and Chomsky, who he views as theorists who retain "criteria of reference" in their works (17)). Writing about Baudrillard and Hayden White, two of the primary foci of his attention, Norris argues against their "assumption... that because every text can be shown to involve some kind of narrative or story-telling interest, *therefore* we can be in no position to distinguish factual, historical or documentary writings on the one hand from fictive, imaginary or simulated episodes on the other" (20; italics original). Norris's approach, while in the minority of the criticism, accurately reflects a prominent cultural attitude toward historical representation—an attitude that views representation as a straightforward mechanism for the dissemination of information.³⁶

I raise the conflict between the ideas of Baudrillard and Norris because it offers perhaps the most succinct glimpse of a prominent question surrounding representations of the Gulf War: what is the nature of the relationship between representations (literary and otherwise) of the war and the actual historical events of the war itself? This is not, of course, a completely new phenomenon. As the last two chapters show, the Vietnam War highlighted the common disparity between an "official" war narrative and the accounts of the men who participated in the war. This concern remains present in the Gulf War era, where it is also expanded to the point that every narrative remains suspect.³⁷ Furthermore, these texts investigate the extent to which

³⁶ In contrast to Norris's argument, which advances a view of history as a monolithic entity, I agree with critics such as Hayden White, who I read as arguing that although history does consist of facts, those facts are disseminated through narrative, and, as a result, the recording of history is shaped—intentionally or unconsciously—by its teller or recorder.

³⁷ A variety of critical articles reflects this suspicion. Stacey Peebles traces the influence images of war have on viewers, arguing that during the Gulf War, "Media coverage assured the public that the war was just, efficient, and, after late February, over and done with. Subsequently, however, reports and images would leak out that indicated

military personnel may dissociate from war if they wage combat primarily through representations (ie, screens and machinery controls) rather than with people (ie, the enemy)—and the effect of such distancing on their masculinity. Many of the critical discussions of the war take these as their central questions, and several novels address these concerns as well.

One such novel, Farrell O’Gorman’s *Awaiting Orders*, focuses on a protagonist’s preparations for war and explores the consequences of a new kind of war—one that eliminates traditional combat experiences. Although O’Gorman’s novel is a direct participant narrative, its content differs from the inflection of this form that dominated the Vietnam War era. Thus, the Gulf War era produces a new strain of the direct participant narrative, one in which the protagonist, a military man, need not necessarily engage in combat or even go to war but remains prepared and able to do so at a moment’s notice. This inflection serves to bolster an already-strong sense of national security; it reminds readers of American strength and capability by highlighting the number of available troops. However, during the Gulf War many of those troops proved extraneous and remained undeployed. In narratives such as *Awaiting Orders*, the men prove unable to enter into what has traditionally been conceived as the fullest expression of masculinity; they are military men, but their failure to see combat prohibits them from becoming fully-realized American men.

Wes Hammond, the novel’s protagonist, never reaches the war. As a result, he never develops into a mature man. Along with other Navy helicopter pilots, Wes merely waits, following his assigned mission: “stand by to stand by” (23). Like many protagonists in war narratives, Wes’s family tradition connects him to the military, but despite this, he does not feel coerced into military life. Wes’s grandfather was at Normandy during World War Two, and

otherwise” (1669). Geoffrey A. Wright distinguishes between media and several artistic depictions of the Gulf War, arguing that while media representations show “the technological and bird’s-eye point of view of a smart bomb,” certain literary and cinematic representations present the rarely-depicted human dimension of the Gulf War (1678).

while his father did not serve in Vietnam, he “spent a lifetime compensating for” his lack of service (6). Although he has other opportunities, Wes eventually selects a military career, and eventually he realizes that “his own history had become fused with that of the Institute,” the military school he attends after leaving business school (15). Wes is ready for military service, but it does not arrive in the form he expects.

When the Gulf War breaks out, Wes and other pilots are put on standby, because the Navy has more pilots than it needs. The advent of technology leads to a drastic reduction in casualties, so fewer troops are deployed than in previous conflicts. Additionally, because the Gulf War concluded in a relatively brief time, it required a smaller number of military personnel. While waiting for their deployment, Wes and his Navy buddies try to evoke the war experience. They read novels about war, eventually turning to Hemingway. Inspired by him, they take road trips, hoping to revel in “drinking, shooting guns, and screwing foreign women,” which they take to be the core of his books’ plots (144). Occasionally the men are required to check in with the military, and “Once every two weeks or so each of them would report to the building, sign in, receive a pistol, and spend four hours patrolling” (46). These patrols cease after an ensign on watch is “caught naked” with a female military engineer, causing the patrol organizer to decide “that Muslim extremists posed less of a threat to the ensigns than the female sailors did” (47). This presentation of women as a hindrance to a man’s successful military service proves more than an isolated episode in O’Gorman’s novel. Women and the military experience go hand in hand—or Wes expects them to do so. Indeed, as the men recognize that the war has no place for them, they begin to fill their days with women as a substitute.

Wes’s most vivid memory from his arrival at the base in California where he will wait out the war underlies this connection between women and war: “What he would remember was

the hour the warrant officer spent talking to them, slowly and sensuously, about chasing whores in the Philippines and Thailand” (18). Wes even chronicles world events through the actions of women, recalling, “Iraq invaded Kuwait, and the women showed up” (47). Instead of marking the men’s participation in war (and the concomitant arrival of masculinity traditionally associated with that participation), however, the presence of the women only underscores Wes’s distance from military action. He longs for Cynthia, one of the women, to be the soulmate he has searched for, but she desires his friend Cullen, who bears the strongest connection to the war. Although Cullen, like Wes, does not serve in the Persian Gulf, his brother Joe does, and his MIA status, subsequent discovery, and recovery from war wounds provides the only military drama Wes and his friends experience. Of the four men constituting Wes’s peer group, only Cullen enters into a fully-realized male role after the war. He marries Cynthia and has children, sowing his seed and demonstrating his masculinity. None of the other men share his fate, or the realization of any traditionally masculine fate. One dies in a drunk driving accident (40). Another becomes a priest, choosing a life of the spiritual and the celibate after realizing during his military service that he believes he is not “meant to be shooting at anybody” (114). At the novel’s conclusion, Wes, too, remains outside traditional masculinity. He has no real relationships, no fulfilling work, nothing from which he draws any solace. Rather than blame this unrootedness on Wes himself, the novel situates it in his pseudo-relationship to the war. Wes believes “it was somehow responsible for his own predicament, the knowledge of his own inadequacy that grew deeper every day” (108). O’Gorman’s novel investigates a culture that has traditionally viewed warfare as a man-making event, and the consequences of those views on males who do not actually go to war. Like Wes, they remain largely divorced from society, untethered and unable to settle into any coherent gender identity.

Taking up the Gulf War's extensive reliance on technology, James Blinn's *The Aardvark is Ready for War* offers a postmodern direct participant narrative that highlights the absurdity of contemporary warfare and its failure to instill masculinity in its participants. Critical responses to Blinn's novel often reference *Catch-22* as its literary ancestor, and with good reason. *Aardvark* follows an unnamed narrator through his repeated attempts to avoid serving on a naval aircraft carrier. Nicknamed Aardvark because of the gas mask he wears constantly, the narrator remains terrified of the war and preoccupied with issues of surveillance and the gaze. This is fitting, as his job is to track submarines on the ship's radar. Unable to separate the real-world events from the simulacra he views on the screen, Aardvark approaches war as he does the rest of his life—as a scene to be observed rather than an event which he could shape.

Blinn's highly self-conscious novel depicts Aardvark approaching everything—not just the war—as representation. The nickname itself reinforces Blinn's point: readers know the protagonist only through layers of representation—in this case, the arbitrary nickname derived from his appearance during wartime reminds readers that they know little of Aardvark, and that the little they do know is linked to a specific moment in his life, as (one assumes) he does not bear this nickname when he is not at war (and therefore not wearing his gas mask). The text's epigraph from Baudrillard foregrounds this concern, which seems particularly apt for a representation of the Gulf War, which deployed technology that distanced participants in the war from one another and the consequences of their actions. While considering the USS Arizona Memorial in Honolulu, Aardvark presents this distinction between wars: "Program a Tomahawk from two hundred miles away and let her loose. Drop a torp from a thousand feet up on a sun a thousand feet under. Where's the heroics? THOSE guys fought eye-to-eye. They SAW who they were shooting at. Close up and personal. I don't want to sound like some gung-ho kill-crazy

jarhead or something, but there's a difference" (59). Although he recognizes that traditional warfare forms heroes, Aardvark remains uninterested in it. When he does finally participate in a mission, his aircraft has difficulty landing on the carrier, and Aardvark is forced to eject. When he arrives back on the boat, he learns the war has ended. His war, actualized in only a brief and inept moment, had barely begun, and his only entrée into it remains marked by failure.

Early in the novel's plot, Blinn draws a connection between surveillance and gender relations, depicting Aardvark's practice of routinely spying on his neighbor, who he calls, self-consciously, Madonna. Aardvark's camera accompanies him everywhere, and he seems unable to believe something is real until he has seen it on screen. Whereas Aardvark understands the distancing and distorting effect that representation has on traditional warfare, when it comes to sex, he favors the representation over the actual. Speaking of Madonna, he admits, "I don't even think about fucking her or anything. I just get off surveilling her" (4). The pleasure of the representational pervades the novel; Aardvark's colleagues agree that it is easier to achieve sexual satisfaction from images than from interaction with real women (149). Eventually, Aardvark views any form of representation as sexualized, and he describes the process of familiarizing himself with a target on radar as "the in and out thump-thump rhythm of sex" (42). A common trope of war narratives is the feminization of the enemy, so in a sense, the connection between representations of women and representations of the enemy is traditional.

This connection breaks down, however, in the fact that the rhetoric of war has traditionally associated masculinity with physical prowess, and if military technology removes the need for physical combat, it therefore threatens the acquisition of masculinity. It is perhaps because of this that Blinn refuses to allow Aardvark a complete escape into the representational. Just as in traditional war novels, Aardvark undergoes a maturation process, but what proves

atypical about this maturation is that it arises not from direct participation in war (in this, Aardvark fails) but from his discovery of the body of a dead teacher, apparently killed by a fellow seaman. Mel, the dead teacher, was effeminate, and the murderer's confession contains his apparent rationalization for his act: he considered it his moral obligation (186). After Aardvark discovers Mel's body, he realizes "It changes you. What you watch, what you see. You change it and it changes you. I should have known" (200). In this realization, Aardvark demonstrates the maturity and changed perspective that often appears in war narratives.³⁸ However, while his transformation does arise from an encounter with death, it is not connected to the war itself, which remains mediated by the technology used to wage it. In this, Blinn has created a novel which shows a character's developing maturity during wartime, but which divorces that maturity from the events of the war itself. Based on this postmodern text, it would seem that the Gulf War and its highly-touted technology changed the paradigm of war in American culture: where boys such as Ron Kovic went to war to become men, characters such as Aardvark discover their maturity outside of the events of war. However, these men enact a form of civilian combat, displacing the act of war from a battlefield. Although it recognizes modern warfare's inability to instill masculinity in its participants, *Aardvark* does not proclaim the death of American masculinity in general. Rather, by demonstrating alternative routes to masculine development—as in Aardvark's discovery of the corpse—it reveals a cultural shift displacing war as the crucible of contemporary manhood.

Although these novels align in their anxiety about war's waning ability to instill masculinity in American men, and in their attribution to this problem in the increasingly technological character of contemporary warfare, *Awaiting Orders* and *The Aardvark is Ready for War* diverge in their analysis of the consequences of such a decline. While O'Gorman's

³⁸ For a canonical example, see "The Man I Killed" in Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*.

characters struggle to become men in the absence of combat experience, Blinn's novel turns to other arenas of violence to recreate the formative masculine experience.

Traditional Inflections of the Direct Participant Narrative: War as Man-Maker

In contrast to the novels discussed above, several direct participant narratives of the Gulf War era return to a more traditional understanding of war as a masculine province. Although the Gulf War marked the entrance of women into high-profile wartime roles, these texts largely overlook the presence of female American military personnel, and present narratives of male protagonists who go to war and become men. Of course, the admission of women into military roles is not the only factor affecting masculinity. Because the Gulf War was America's first major military action in the post-draft era, several of the texts explore the status of American masculinity in the absence of compulsory military service. This combination of factors—the existence of an all-volunteer military and the inclusion of women in the military—foregrounds gender issues as a primary concern of Gulf War texts, which situate that concern with respect to the war itself. Ultimately, texts of the Gulf War prove concerned with primarily one of two basic ideas: the belief that war constructs men, and the fear that it corrupts women. In texts such as O'Gorman's and Blinn's, which focus on contemporary military technology, war is viewed as less successful at masculine identity formation. However, another set of Gulf War texts, represented here by Anthony Swofford's 2003 memoir *Jarhead* and Andrew Huebner's novel *We Pierce*, maintains the association between war and masculinity.

In a review of *Jarhead*, critic Laura Miller offers a compelling account of the cultural association between masculinity and warfare, and of its contemporary inflection: "For our average male citizen, military service—a universal experience for most men throughout human history—is an alien notion. Yet we haven't shaken our age-old sense that war is a crucible of

masculinity.” Arguably the most prominent literary representation of the Gulf War, *Jarhead* was adapted into a 2005 Hollywood film directed by Sam Mendes. Swofford’s text, which recounts his experiences as a Marine during the Gulf War, resembles Tim O’Brien’s *If I Die In a Combat Zone...* in its acknowledgement of the tension between individual identity and military service, its disillusionment with the myth of the American military man, and its recognition of the gendered rhetoric surrounding warfare.³⁹

As a boy, Swofford grows enthralled by the myth that military service, specifically combat, builds masculinity. He writes, “I understood that manhood had to do with war, and war with manhood, and to no longer be just a son, I needed someday to fight” (128). Acting in the same manner as Rob Kovic, Swofford enlists voluntarily in the Marine Corps, against the advice of his mother and motivated by the same faith Kovic demonstrates in masculinity’s connection to the military. Miller points out that this sort of faith is exploited by military recruiters, who “made access to inexpensive foreign prostitutes a highlight of their pitch.” However, Swofford does not follow the military blindly, and he both resists and resents his assimilation into the military structure. This tension arises most prominently when Marines are exposed to the media and offer comments contradictory to the “official” military story. Swofford and his fellow “jarheads,” as Marines are called by other military personnel, are under gag orders, told by their Staff Sergeant, “You do as you’re told. You signed the contract. You have no rights, you can’t speak out against our country. We call that treason. You can be shot for it” (14). Swofford obeys, but wishes he could admit to the *Times* reporter “I can hear their bombs and I am afraid” (17). Eventually, Swofford develops a viewpoint which prevents mutual exclusivity; he decides that “Though you might be an individual, first you are a symbol, or part of the larger symbol... you are part of the

³⁹ In her consideration of veteran authors’ disillusionment with war, Laura Miller has also noted a set of similarities between *Jarhead* and O’Brien’s writing, although her article’s interest lies elsewhere.

goddamn thing” (119). By recognizing that he simultaneously retains his individuality and operates within a system that affects that individuality, Swofford offers a nuanced depiction of military life, one reminiscent of O’Brien’s realization in *If I Die ...* that even in his acts of rebellion he, too, was shaped by the military system he resisted. Swofford acknowledges the tension between the preservation of individualism and assimilation into the ideal Marine—which, in this text, as in many war narratives, is connected to paragons of masculinity.

Swofford strives to resist such gendering, in keeping with his belief that war’s man-making tendency is more myth than fact. However, several instances in the text suggest that Swofford remains blind to some aspect of the gendered nature of representations of war. He knows that some participants in war employ gendered rhetoric, but he draws a contrast between those combatants and himself, arguing, “Some shooters might liken the trigger to a clitoris, and the well-placed shot to the female’s orgasm, but...we refrain from anthropomorphizing our weapons.... Trigger pull is trigger pull” (134). However, writing about a man’s memory of wartime, Swofford aligns a rifle with power and acknowledges its allure, which he casts in sexual terms: “the sexy slope and fall of the trigger guard” (123). The apparent contrast between event and memory suggests that while participants in war may not construe their actions in sexual terms at the time those actions occur, when they represent those actions retrospectively, the representations are not just gendered but sexualized. Swofford acknowledges that women become currency in wartime, and that buying someone his first prostitute on tour is an act that cements a “blood bond” between the men (72).

To his credit, Swofford does not pretend that war contains no gendered or sexualized acts. The relative absence of women in the narrative affects male behavior, and men who stand outside the normal actions of model Marines are corrected through feminization and violation.

Swofford defines this event, called the “Field-fuck,” as “an act wherein marines violate one member of the unit, typically someone who has recently been a jerk or abused rank or acted antisocial, ignoring the unspoken contracts of brotherhood and camaraderie and esprit de corps and the combat family. The marine is held fast in the doggie position and his fellow marines take turns from behind” (20-1).⁴⁰ One victim plays along by referring to himself as “the prettiest girl” and reinforces the gendered nature of the violation (21). Swofford argues that this display of aggression emerges as a demonstration of correction and power and a solidifier of communal bonds between the aggressors. However, while Swofford understands this act as an expression of power and dominance, his insistence that “it isn’t sexual” seems indexical of a larger cultural blindness to the sexualized nature of war (21). This is not to suggest that the act is not also about power. However, it is unlikely that any act of “violat[ion]” that imitates or enacts sexual aggression is not at all about sex. Despite his best intentions, Swofford proves unable to recognize the extent to which gendered tropes penetrate military lives. Stacey Peebles states this relationship between dominance, sexuality, and violence succinctly: “Swofford sees watching, fighting, and fucking as roughly equivalent, and... he is firmly established in this position of power: he watches, he will fight, he will fuck” (1665). The gendering of violence and power relations reinforces the gendered rhetoric of war itself, in which the aggressor is masculine, while the target of aggression becomes feminine. This rhetoric reinforces the belief that warfare is the domain of men and, by extension, further substantiates Swofford’s admission. Thus, the “field fuck” emerges as an unofficial disciplinary measure to punish errant Marines, further reinforcing the gendered nature of the Corps: bad Marines are treated as if they were women, subjected to the whims of the good Marines, who remain fully potent men.

⁴⁰ Miller argues that this is not actualized but simulated violence, that it is “pantomimed sodomy.” However, my reading of Swofford’s description suggests otherwise. Despite the apparent ambiguity, Swofford’s depiction of the event as a violation underscores the transgressive nature of the act—be it simulated or actual.

Building on this traditional association of masculinity as the result of fully-formed military service, Andrew Huebner's novel *We Pierce* explores the state of American masculinity in a post-draft era by presenting a mediated narrative that intertwines the story of a participant in war with the narrative of a non-participant who remains tied to war out of love for that military man. What is provocative about Huebner's text is not its parallel narrative but that those narratives follow two men, rather than a man and a woman. The novel traces the divergent lives of two brothers, Sam and Smith Huebner, ultimately reinforcing both the belief that wartime service accompanies the development of masculinity and the corollary that men who do not complete military service remain feminized and unable to become productive members of society. Thus, in a post-draft world, the male who goes to war becomes masculine, while the male who stays on the homefront—the domestic sphere—remains feminine.

Although his text is a novel, Huebner shares his last name with the book's brothers, suggesting some collapsing of the authorial remove. Using third-person narration, the book shifts between Sam's perspective and Smith's perspective. The brothers' family boasts a long line of military service, which formed the basis of Huebner's first novel, *American by Blood*. In *We Pierce*, Sam and Smith share biological and social origins, but their lives bear little resemblance to each other, almost as if they are two aspects of the same self. The novel, which traces the brothers' lives in the days surrounding and encompassing Smith's tour of duty in Iraq, repeatedly associates Smith with masculinity and Sam with femininity, further reinforcing the idea that together, the brothers form a complete person. Thus, the novel further comments on the fragmented nature of identity formation in contemporary American life, and it roots that fragmentation in the gender disruption of the volunteer military. If boys do not go to war, *We*

Pierce argues, they never become men. Instead, they grow domesticated and decrepit, a drain on the resources of society and the men who fulfilled their wartime duty.

As is common for protagonists of war narratives, Smith and Sam come from a family with a long military heritage. As Sam tells a girlfriend, “We’ve had someone in every war since the Revolution” (61). When Smith joins the Army after college, it is a confirmation of his inheritance: “He had taken up the family legacy” (224). However, Smith also views this as part of his national identity as a citizen “born in America from where the best machines of death were spawned” (2). In many respects, military service comes naturally to Smith, who has spent his life seeking to instill order in a chaotic and troubled family. He has also grown accustomed to the role of the protector; as the oldest son, he found it his job to shield Sam and their mother from their father’s drunken rages (108). While in the Army, he marries his girlfriend Meg, buys a home, and hopes for a family, eager to embrace the traditional trappings of suburban life. The trajectory of Sam’s life proves different: although he often imitates his brother as a child, he charts his own course in college, choosing to drop out and cobble together enough money to crash with a local band. The brothers used to smoke pot together, but while Smith gives it up easily for the Army—showing the discipline that will mark his adult life—Sam begins to experiment with stronger drugs.

As it compares Smith’s assimilation into an orderly and respectable military life with Sam’s peripatetic and chaotic existence, the novel also maps these choices onto gendered identities, routinely aligning Smith with the masculine and Sam with the feminine. When Smith enlists, choosing the military life shared by nearly all of his male ancestors, Sam moves in with their grandmother, choosing a life “at the old family house” that is associated with the domestic and feminine (40). Later in the plot, he no longer lives with his grandmother, but he still has no

home of his own. For a while, he prefers “the girlfriend method” of apartment hunting, whereby he simply moves in with his current paramour (22). Although the novel fails to make this connection explicit, this method proves reminiscent of that favored by women of a certain generation, who moved from their father’s home into the home of their husbands. They were defined by their relationship to men. Sam, however, shows a reversal of roles by depending on women for support. As his drug habit intensifies, Sam’s housing arrangements grow even more precarious: from other druggies, he learns to squat in an abandoned building (90). Eventually he is offered space in the bed of an actor who brags about owning “the biggest gun a man can hold in one hand” (57). Although Sam refuses the offer and the sexual advance it accompanies, its implication in the novel’s plot remains clear: he has been accorded a space normally reserved for women. Sam has so subverted the roles traditionally associated with heteronormative masculinity that he is no longer treated as a heterosexual male. Sam’s role within his family structure reinforces his alignment with the feminine. He understands that he does not take after his father (61), who calls him “the sentimental type” and likens him to his mother, who was also an addict (162). The fact that Sam is the only immediate family member to attend her funeral further cements Sam’s connection to the feminine—viewed as an emotional sphere of weakness and dependency.

Although the novel’s plot offers some evidence that Smith has always been the more masculine of the brothers (as a child, he did assume the stereotypically male role of protecting his brother and mother), it primarily demonstrates that masculine identity is something accorded and developed by military service. Before his deployment, “His wife had kidded him about how horny he was” after getting the news about his imminent departure. Smith responds succinctly: “Hey, war is sexy” (3). His superiors reinforce this concept, aligning weapons to wives (4). On

the day Smith is deployed, he learns that he is to be a father, thus reinforcing his masculine ability to sire offspring and simultaneously connecting that virility with war (3). Despite the fact that women were indeed present as military participants during the Gulf War, *We Pierce* makes little mention of their presence, noting that women “were back in the support positions” and that they sometimes served as mail carriers (14). Although the soldiers have little personal contact with women at war, they remain surrounded by images of them, on the “pages ripped out of their favorite skin magazines” and used to decorate the walls (46). The text implies that women’s absence at the front was equivalent to their absence from the war overall, and it repeatedly encodes war as a masculine realm.

As the text details the brothers’ opposite trajectories, it seems to set up a dramatic conclusion in which these apparently irreconcilable entities finally break from one another. Smith’s experience of combat reinforces this idea by supplanting his biological relationship with Sam with the relationship forged between brothers in arms, a relationship marked by “an intensity of shared feeling that was almost sexual, deeper than any other kind of brotherhood they had ever felt before” (134). However, while it introduces this concept and the idea that no one at home will be able to understand Smith’s experiences as a soldier, it grants them little purchase. Throughout the novel, Sam remains convinced that the brothers are more alike than different, “moving to New York and trying to become a writer meant the same thing to [him] as becoming a soldier and going to war meant to his older brother” (40). He believes that they both strive to do what they believe is their duty and even—following their uncle Pete, a Vietnam veteran turned protestor—their family duty. Sam also sees “a connection” between Smith’s wartime service and Sam’s “losing his way,” as if the brothers’ lives were inversely proportional, like two sides to the same coin, one the heads to the other’s tails. And Sam is not the only one

who longs for a connection. After his deployment concludes, Smith visits Sam in New York, where he remains unemployed, incapacitated by drug use, and unable to care for even his basic needs. Rather than isolate himself from his brother, Smith cares for him, sending away the addict who stops by for a fix and even going grocery shopping to stock his brother's cabinets (261). This act, which seems initially incompatible with Smith's masculine nature, actually marks a transition in Smith, who will leave New York and head home to meet his infant daughter for the first time. His grocery run foreshadows his later trip to the store to buy milk for his baby, and taken together, these illustrate that Smith has learned to balance the traditionally masculine position of warrior and protector with the traditionally feminine role of caretaker and nurturer. Rather than threaten Smith's masculinity, this balance represents the new masculine ideal arising from what Brenton J. Malin refers to as the set of conflicting ideas commonly termed the "crisis of masculinity" in the 1990s. Malin's work details how the traditional icons of masculinity were revised in the 1990s to reflect a contemporary American man who remained tough while also demonstrating sensitivity (59). Smith's ability to be both a capable warrior and a loving father and family man illustrates this ideal. Thus, the novel suggests that a "real man" can do some things traditionally associated with the feminine, so long as he retains his masculine core. When he fails to fully develop that masculine side, he remains, like Sam, outside of productive society.

Unlike other war narratives, which chart the lasting effects of war and argue that it permanently divorces its participants from non-combat society, *We Pierce* locates war and military service as stabilizing forces, ones that instill a masculine identity strong enough to embrace roles that appear outside of them. The novel concludes with Smith and his wife Meg, who has listened to and understood his war stories, at peace with each other and with the world, as if the war itself had never happened. In Hubener's text, the really destructive force for

American men is not war itself; rather, as illustrated by Sam's character, it is not going to war. Sam's identification with the feminine eventually leads to his destruction and ruin. In other words, so long as a man can act as capable provider and protector, as he learns to do in the military, it is acceptable for him to venture out occasionally for groceries. Because a man is made up of both natures, he has to go to war as a way to set the masculine side into a more dominant position. Huebner does not seek to completely discredit the new masculine ideals, but he does explore what happens to men who are unable to maintain a balance between the masculine tough side and the (necessarily smaller) side of feminine sensitivity. The novel ultimately argues that the only crisis of masculinity arises when masculinity is forsaken altogether.

Both *Jarhead* and *We Pierce* stand as more traditional examples of the direct participant narrative, in which males go to war and become men. Of course, in emphasizing war as a masculine and masculinizing pursuit, these narratives ignore the unprecedented numbers of women who participated in the Gulf War and, significantly, how their presence affects war's role in gender formation.

If War Makes Men, What Happens When Women Go to War?

Thus far, the texts discussed have focused on the male war experience, and thus have bracketed the significant presence of American military women in the Gulf War.⁴¹ This is not to suggest, however, that all Gulf War literature adopts this posture; indeed, a substantial component of it addresses the state of women in the traditionally-masculine realm of war. Unlike Vietnam War narratives, in which the direct participants are typically male, Gulf War narratives expand the direct participant form to include female protagonists—just as the American military

⁴¹ During the events leading up to and encompassing the Gulf War, the U.S. military deployed over forty thousand women.

embraced expanded opportunities for women. This generic expansion allows for depictions of women as active participants in the full spectrum of war.⁴² Starting with the premise that war shapes men and threatens women, these texts explore both what it means to be masculine and feminine and the influence of military service upon those meanings. Femininity is always a concern in this literature: in a Gulf War narrative, a woman may pursue a military career, but that career is read in light of its relationship to her potential or prior performance as a wife and mother. These narratives approach female soldiers as women first, then as military personnel. In doing so, they expose and explore a fear that military service and traditional expressions of femininity are incompatible. As might be expected, two strains of texts emerge within this subset of Gulf War literature: one that endorses military women, arguing that their profession does not impede their femininity, and one that argues against them, offering a variety of reasons that women remain anathema to the American military.

Portrayals of Successful Military Women

Given the long-held belief that war is a masculine project, one apparent fear in sending women to war was that they would become less feminine, thus corrupting the traditional gender norms of American society. One set of literature, exemplified by the novel *Sword of Valor* and the memoir *She Went to War*, combats this fear by arguing that women may render successful military service without threatening their femininity or their acceptance of traditional female roles such as of wife and mother.

Although his primary interest as a novelist has been to chronicle African-American involvement through several periods of American military history, in the novel *Sword of Valor*, Tom Willard embraces the additional task of exploring the role of women in the contemporary

⁴² Although women were not officially allowed in certain combat areas during the Gulf War, several of the narratives depict female characters taking fire.

military. In the novel's preface, Willard situates his text's interest in gender and race within the military, writing, "The Persian Gulf War was the first declared war in which African-American women officers would lead men and women of all races into battle" (13). Published in 2003, Willard's novel, one installment in a series charting the military involvement of a single African-American family through many generations, follows Lt. Argonne Sharpe, a female helicopter pilot who travels to the war with the 101st Airborne division.⁴³ Although the novel's primary plot follows Sharpe as a means of tracing her family's lengthy involvement with the American military, several secondary plot lines follow other female characters. These characters—Capt. Elaine Crager, whose deployment forces her to juggle her identities as a military officer and as a single mother, and Mickey Martinson, an enlisted woman who longs to advance to the ranks of pilot while simultaneously wondering if enlisting were a mistake—demonstrate different experiences of women in the military, and their inclusion in the novel allows Willard to represent not just one woman's story, but several experiences available to women in the military. However, through the protagonist's story, the novel acknowledges the tension that surrounds women in the military while depicting a character that successfully performs her duties at the same time that she embarks on a romantic relationship. Ultimately, the text argues that war does not threaten traditional femininity.

While Willard's scope is admirable, the primary experience depicted in the novel remains Sharpe's, and it is significant that her war experience encompasses a romance plot. Descended from a long line of veterans, including her father, who died in Vietnam, Sharpe has been well-prepared for her service by her family. Willard's previous works follow Sharpe's ancestors through their "more than 130 years of honorable and dedicated military service to the United States," so this novel only references that service briefly (27). However brief, these references

⁴³ Her name evokes the WWI conflict at Argonne Wood, further underscoring her military heritage.

serve to situate Sharpe within a rich tradition of military involvement; they also allow Willard to connect his female protagonist to the same trope of military service as family inheritance used by writers such as Tim O'Brien. While Willard's novel follows Sharpe's relationships with her family, particularly the support they offer her, its primary plot concerns are the integration of women into the military and the development of Sharpe's love for another officer, Maj. Jerome Moody. Thus, despite its presentation of a capable military woman, Willard's novel adheres to the common trope of Gulf War literature, which remains preoccupied with the effects of military service on expressions of traditional gender roles.

In contrast to female protagonists whose gender appears to compromise their job performance, Lt. Sharpe remains a professional throughout, consistently advocating women's inclusion in the military but also mature enough to understand which battles deserve fighting. Told by a coworker "I'll look after you, little lady," Sharpe stays quiet, confident in the knowledge that "she could fight as well as any man and, if necessary, was prepared to prove that with guns, knives, teeth, and claws" (62). In other situations, she confronts those who patronize or harass her, reminding a group of gawking and whistling soldiers that they must salute officers such as her and telling them "Next time you act like soldiers, not trash on some street corner" (64). She even corrects a visiting congressman who voices fear that women will be sexually assaulted behind military lines: "rape and sexual abuse is [sic] not a special treatment by the enemy that is reserved for women. In most wars, especially in the Middle East and Asia, men who are captured are systematically raped....It's another tool in subjugating, breaking down the resistance of the captured soldier" (240). Sharpe proves her awareness of the potential threats, but she also consistently advocates women's abilities to respond capably to those threats. Willard's novel thus explicitly advances the military as an appropriate place for women, and

Sharpe's successful tour of duty subtly reinforces her overt statements about women in the military.

In a departure from the traditional treatment of women in the military, Willard's novel presents Sharpe's military career as an enabler to her romantic life rather than a detriment to it. A more typical presentation shows military service as rendering women outside the traditional realms of femininity. For example, Mary Anne Bell's Vietnam War experience in *The Things They Carried* destroys her engagement and renders her outside the realm of humanity; by the end of the narrative, she "had crossed to the other side" (O'Brien 125). Sharpe, too, has undergone a passage, but it is not as destructive as Bell's. Rather, in the transition from being unattached to dating, Sharpe conforms to the traditional expectation of the romance plot. She also pleases her mother, who urges her to find "someone special" (108). Sharpe has resisted this prodding, claiming that a romantic entanglement would be a liability during wartime. Given her adamant resistance, it is perhaps ironic that she meets her boyfriend-to-be during a mission, when she daringly pilots a rescue helicopter to pick up Maj. Jerome Moody, a Green Beret, behind enemy lines. Because Sharpe completes the mission without a co-pilot or backup aircraft, she is reprimanded by her superior; Moody, however, nominates her for a Bronze Star (177). Throughout the war, Sharpe and Moody manage the occasional rendezvous, and the novel ends with them back in the U.S. with Sharpe's family, according their romance the promise of longevity. In this depiction, Willard argues that military service does not render women asexual or hypersexual. Argonne Sharpe remains capable and cogent throughout, and thereby serves as an endorsement of all military women and, initially at least, a departure from the traditional depiction of those women. The novel's conclusion, however, reinscribes traditional female roles,

thus reassuring readers that a female may be both a good soldier and a good woman and assuaging the fear that wartime service is incompatible with traditional femininity.

Although Williard's text is a novel, the nonfictional account of Major Rhonda Cornum, an American Army flight surgeon captured and held as a POW in 1991, offers a similar view of women and wartime service. Cornum was injured when her Black Hawk was shot down and was one of three people to survive the crash. Although she was treated fairly well for a POW and was released to the Red Cross and repatriated after about a week in captivity, Cornum's experience, which included being fondled by one of her captors, proved troubling for the American psyche, and it caused many Americans to question the military's acceptance of women.⁴⁴ Cornum's memoir, titled *She Went to War* and ghostwritten by Peter Copeland, rebuts this line of questioning by offering an account of Cornum's time in the military, focusing on her wartime service and her time as a POW, and highlighting the ability of a woman in a combat setting. While downplaying traditional femininity remains a common coping mechanism for military women,⁴⁵ Cornum's text acknowledges the value of femininity, even at times crediting it with Cornum's abilities to survive as a POW and assist the male subordinate captured with her. This treatment of gender marks a departure from some of the theory surrounding women in the military, and therefore from the narrative possibilities those theories produced. According to *She Went to War*, Cornum successfully endures imprisonment not in spite of her femininity, but because of it. Thus, her femininity is an asset rather than a liability.

⁴⁴ The next chapter will discuss the treatment of Jessica Lynch's account as a POW and the manner in which her account was manipulated and at times fabricated to heighten fears of female vulnerability. Her biography, *I Am A Soldier, Too*, written by Rick Bragg, plays into the cultural concern and fascination with the sexuality and perceived vulnerability of American military women. As I will show, Bragg's narrative paints Lynch as a sexual victim so that it may create an ideal American man—the hero who saves and rescues the female victim.

⁴⁵ See John W. Howard, III, and Laura C. Privera "Patriarchy or Saving 'Jessica Lynch': The Rhetorical Construction of the American Woman Soldier." *Women and Language* 27.2 (2004): 89-97.

Although it is not overly didactic or argumentative, Cornum's text does present her advocacy of the inclusion of women in the military. She argues that "The qualities that are most important in all military jobs—things like integrity, moral courage, and determination—have nothing to do with gender" (198). She traces her own childhood identity as a tomboy and her actual experiences in the military. She acknowledges the desire of some individuals for military men and women to inhabit separate quarters but ultimately disagrees with this concept and advocates full integration (27-8). Cornum finds her experience uncontroversial: "when we're all busy doing our jobs, it doesn't matter to anyone if I'm a woman or a man. We're all soldiers" (68). Cornum's position as a military doctor likely contributes to her comfort; because she is not a grunt, she enjoys a better standard of living in country. Perhaps because of the apparent ease she feels as a woman in the army, Cornum does not eschew the trappings of femininity during her military service, even temporarily evicting her tentmates so she may bathe in private (1). As a POW, Cornum continues to embrace her femininity, and she even finds it a significant source of her leadership abilities. She comforts another POW, a young man named Dunlap who is her subordinate, by saying "something motherly" (16). Later, when he refuses to eat the lentils offered by their captors, Cornum instructs him to "eat everything" (79). Although she does not state this explicitly to Dunlap, she recalls in the text that her admonition made her feel maternal and "reminded [her] of telling [her] own daughter to eat her peas" (80). Like an obedient child, Dunlap follows orders and eats the entire meal. He later tells her he believed upon their capture that she would cry and break down; Cornum responds with a laugh, saying, "That's okay...I thought you would cry, too" (84). This admission reinforces the prisoners' equality; neither has cracked under the pressure of captivity. If anything, Cornum has demonstrated the superior abilities, remaining capable of leading her subordinates and attending to their well-being under

even the most difficult of circumstances. Coupled with her overt statements about women's ability successfully to perform military duties under great pressure, Cornum's demonstration of competence and confidence serve as a strong endorsement of women's military service.

Significantly, Cornum's conclusion reports that her "family has recovered, and if anything, [they] are closer now after what happened" (201). In other words, despite her service and imprisonment, her role as a wife and mother has remained intact. Thus, her narrative serves as an endorsement of military women. However Cornum's sentiments and those expressed in similar texts, most characters in Gulf War fiction continue to view war and femininity as oppositional forces rather than complimentary ones.

Portrayals of War and Femininity as Incompatible

Texts that offer such a portrayal—with women performing their military service and returning, with little disruption, to the domestic sphere—prove infrequent, and the more common treatment of military women during the Gulf War era presents femininity and military service as incompatible forces. In these novels—which include *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight*, *Betrayal in Paris*, and *Courage Under Fire*—either war threatens women or women threaten war (and the men who wage it). Although these novels advance divergent solutions, each perceives the military woman as a disruption of traditional gender norms and, by extension, the traditional social arrangements surrounding men and women domestically.

Kim Ponders's novel *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight* traces the military career of one woman to highlight the perceived dangers of granting women expanded access to military service. The novel follows the story of Annie Voila Shaw, who follows her father's footsteps by becoming an Air Force pilot. As a child, Shaw would imitate her father's career by playing with "instruments"—a mirror, compass, and charts that doubled as aircraft equipment, and her

admiration continues into adulthood (10). In this, Shaw resembles protagonists of other war narratives, who often trace their military ancestry as an indication of the inevitability of their own military service. Like Tim O'Brien and Ron Kovic, Shaw also finds military experience challenging; however, whereas O'Brien and Kovic found themselves struggling to retain a sense of self in an entity which would assimilate them, Shaw longs for that very assimilation, which is apparently unobtainable because of her gender. Shaw admits, "I would be judged first, always, as a woman, and then as a soldier" (95). She recognizes the opposition between femininity and military service even before entering the Air Force, when her father sends her off to the Academy with a going away gift of "silver and turquoise earrings and a bottle of Yves Saint Laurent perfume—strange gifts, she thought, for a military cadet" (45). While Shaw's father may try to preserve her femininity, Shaw has no such ambition, and while in the military, she actually labors to erase all signs that she is a woman.

Sexuality is so much a part of military identity that women must strive to become men, even to the extent of occupying male sexual roles. Shaw cuts her hair short and whittles her body down to "twelve percent body fat," effectively eradicating any womanly curves and causing amenorrhea (46). Shaw's new body thus not only fails to look feminine; it also lacks the biological ability to conceive. Shaw connects her transformation to her military training: "She learned at the Academy how not to be like a woman" (62). This transformation is cemented when she visits a strip club with other men from the Academy, and one of the men buys her a lap dance. Describing the scene later, Shaw asserts, "I'm one of them now," indicating that rather than being a lesbian, she is closer to a female man (69). Shaw believes that her military success depends not on her technical abilities, but on her ability to eradicate all trappings of femininity and womanhood and to assume the social and sexual positions normally reserved for men.

Consistent with her military training, Shaw generally resists the trappings of femininity even in her civilian life. In contrast to the marriage fantasy that stereotypes insist every woman harbors, Shaw expresses ambivalence about marriage. When her stepmother shows off her engagement ring, Shaw dutifully exclaims at the jewelry but feels “revulsion” upon doing so (29). She also subordinates her own marriage to military service. As Shaw prepares for deployment to the Persian Gulf, her husband Dexter watches her, growing aroused but resisting, aware that “She wouldn’t take him now, squatting next to her chem gear, counting her gloves and booties, thumbing the seal on the plastic panel of the face mask” (56). No intimate farewell awaits this couple; Dexter understands that his wife’s preoccupation with the trappings of war will prevent her from having sex with him. Emasculated by his wife’s commitment to the military, Dexter engages in actions that reinforce his association with the feminine. He repacks Annie’s duffel bag, because “She feels that packing is inconsequential, that her hands are reserved, monogamously, for the controls of an E-3” (72). In case readers miss the exchange of traditional gender roles taking place in the household, whereby Dexter remains in the feminine position of making domestic preparations for his spouse’s departure for war, Ponders states this clearly at the end of the scene: “‘You’d make a great officer,’ [Annie] says. ‘Instead, I’m just a great officer’s wife,’” Dexter replies. The concept is clear: Shaw’s physical and social femininity have been obliterated by her entrance into the military. Furthermore, the social aspect of that identity has been displaced onto her husband, effectively compromising his own masculinity. Thus, whereas male military service creates masculinity, female military service destroys it.

Given the extent to which she shuns femininity, it is ironic that Shaw’s apparent success in the military ultimately stems from her gender. After being shot down and wounded in the Gulf War, she is awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross medal. The first female recipient of the

award, she becomes a darling of the press. As a result of the press attention, the military drops the investigation into the crash for which Shaw received the DFC—an investigation that would have proved warranted, as Shaw's jet suffered an attack after she allowed it to wander some eighty miles off course. Shaw's superior, Jago—with whom she has been having an affair—covers for her, taking responsibility himself for the error. Perhaps this is fitting; although he does not realize it, Shaw's distraction arose because she was filled with regret over her affair with Jago. In other words, acting on her sexuality during her deployment leads directly to Shaw's incompetent performance. This could be read as a condemnation of adultery more than any sexual activity; however, Jago suffers no similar lapse. In fact, he catches the error before any other crew member. Therefore, it seems only Shaw experiences performance-inhibiting distraction, and it is not insignificant that this distraction arises as the direct result of her sexual activity—the one lapse she allows her femininity during her tour of duty.

After completing her service, Shaw leaves the military and returns home to her husband and—significantly—the feminine identity she temporarily exchanged for her military career. Although they experienced some marital problems earlier in the narrative, Dexter and Annie appear happy and content at the novel's conclusion. They move to a ranch in west Texas, where Annie teaches Dexter to fly, thereby ceding her passion to him. She accepts a more traditionally feminine role, embracing domesticity and becoming “determined to learn how to cook” (169). And in perhaps the ultimate expression of femininity, she becomes pregnant. At the outbreak of the Iraq War, she longs “to go inside and pack her bags, fly back to the squadron and line up for mobility,” but this dream proves only an idle fantasy (111). The baby in her belly “kicks and sways,” calling her back from her dream of flight and reminding her of her ties to home (111). Thus, if we take Shaw as an emblem of women in the military, Ponders's novel concludes with

the message that women remain unsuited for military work, which corrupts and compromises their femininity. In this narrative, they can never escape their gender identity, femininity remains incompatible with military competence, and closure, in the form of traditional gender roles, arises only when they surrender to traditional domesticity.

Doris Elaine Fell's novel *Betrayal in Paris* offers a similar indictment of femininity and military involvement in the Gulf War era, but it does so through a different form, replacing the direct participant narrative with a mediated narrative. Although it does see women as able to conduct significant social work, Fell's text ultimately argues that military women pose threats to the nation and its men, and that women's proper role is outside the military, where they may reconcile the military man to his rightful place in his society and his family. In this conclusion, Fell's version of the mediated narrative offers a different inflection of the form than that presented in the Vietnam War era. Whereas novels such as *For Rouenna* and *Message from Nam* use the mediated form to show the extent that women's war experiences existed but were rendered secondary to the male experience, Fell's plot treats the outsider position as a woman's proper place in wartime, and ultimately it argues for a return to the traditional gender roles in which women remain homemakers and helpers.

The novel's complicated plot follows Adrienne Winters, who is fifteen when she learns that her brother Jon has been killed on a CIA mission to Kuwait during the Gulf War. In 2002, she encounters Jon at the Rodin Museum in Paris; Jon, of course, pretends not to know his sister. Adrienne pursues him, finally learning the truth about his past. Jon entered the CIA to avenge his father, whose reputation had been sullied by Jon's mother, Mara, who allowed a family friend to retrieve classified government information from the family safe. Jon's father chose not to betray his wife, and died, if not quite in disgrace, then without government clearance. While on his

mission in Kuwait, Jon is himself double-crossed and framed by the same person who conspired with his mother. Upon reports of his death, Jon goes into hiding, until his sister stumbles upon him over a decade later. Once reunited (in the novel's terms, by divine providence), Jon and Adrienne work to expose his betrayer and clear both Jon and their father.

Several issues of classification arise with this text. This multi-generational tale spans several American conflicts, and it could arguably be considered a post-9/11 novel. However, as I will show in the next chapter, the 9/11 novels I am considering take the events of 9/11 as a primary plot concern, and they detail the characters' response to that specific day. The plot of Fell's novel, which relies on a number of flashbacks to the Gulf War era, is primarily backwards-looking, and its protagonists are concerned with understanding and correcting past sins. Thus, its primary narrative concerns the events of the Gulf War, not the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Another distinction between this novel and other war literature is Fell's depiction of a CIA agent rather than an enlisted soldier or officer. While this does prove different from the typical circumstances of previous war narratives, as they tend to follow individuals who actually participated in combat, it is an accurate reflection of the changing nature of American warfare, and is a subtle reflection of the subterfuge used to lead America into the Gulf War. Finally, the fact that the novel's protagonist remains outside of the military could mean that at first glance, this novel appears not to be a war narrative at all. However, rather than render this text outside of the realm of war literature, this situation actually underscores its inclusion within it—and marks a return of the mediated narrative form for war narratives with female protagonists.

An additional concern here is that the text operates within two generic systems, that of war literature and that of Christian fiction. The novel is published by Howard Publishing, and the book's bibliographic page features the company's mission statement: "*Increase faith* in the

hearts of growing Christians/*Inspire holiness* in the lives of believers/*Instill hope* in the hearts of struggling people everywhere/**Because He's coming again!**" (italics and bold original). Rather than detract from my argument, the text's evocation of these two particular genre systems actually proves apt. The Gulf War era saw substantial expansion in military roles available to women, but this text inflects the mediated narrative to reinforce traditional gender roles and to render the female protagonist simultaneously outside of the military and yet still crucial to restoring a man she loves to rightful family relationships. Thus, Fell's text argues that while women should indeed help their country and its men, they need not be in the military to do so. Therefore, where the mediated narrative in the Vietnam War literature was used to acknowledge the extent to which women stood outside the traditional experience of war, Fell uses it in the Gulf War era to advocate women's return to a position outside the bounds of war.

This reading is supported by Fell's presentation of women who enter the military and national security realms on their own rather than in support of their male family members. Mara made the treacherous decision to open her husband's safe to another man, thereby betraying her husband and her country, and setting in place the chain of events that led to her son's apparent death. Her actions dissolve the family unit. In contrast, Adrienne's efforts, which support her brother's work, restore their father's reputation, clear her brother's name, and reestablish her filial relationship with Jon. Because Jon and his girlfriend have children of their own in Paris, Adrienne's work also unites and unifies the extended family. Jon also vows to marry his girlfriend, thereby legitimizing his family. Eventually, Jon also forgives Mara, reconciles with her, and restores the familial bond. It is important that Mara herself cannot evoke this restoration; although she has severed the family, only Jon's forgiveness can erase the consequences of her sin.

Fell's critique of women who enter into the military realm is not limited to Mara's character. Lest readers attribute Mara's betrayal to the isolated act of a faithless female with no official government responsibilities, Fell includes in her text another woman whose service to the nation and her career, while stemming from good and noble intentions, also compromise her entrance into woman's traditional role as a wife and mother. Naji Fleming, Chief of the American Embassy in Paris, proves capable at her job, but Fell repeatedly argues that this job compromises Naji's proper familial roles. Naji is married to (but separated from) an American intelligence agent, and her apartment in Paris proves to be "little more than bachelor accommodations" (184). When her husband, Rick, questions her about its small size, she admits she selected it because "it cuts down on the scrubbing, cleaning" (184). Not only is she separated from her marriage; Naji has also distanced herself from the traditionally female duties of housework. Rick directly connects her promotion to Station Chief with the demise of their relationship, realizing that it "might well be the downfall of their marriage" (200). Later, Rick compares Naji to Adrienne: "Miss Winters was elegant, charming. Naji's beauty was lost behind her efficiency and her determination" (245). In other words, the very traits that make Naji competent at her job subvert her femininity.

In contrast, Adrienne, who works not to further her own ambitions, but only in the aid of her brother, remains unsullied. Given the novel's generic concerns, it is no coincidence that Adrienne's selflessness is aligned with her acceptance of Christianity. Accordingly, the text charts the progression of her faith, from disillusionment at a God who would allow painful events to occur, to the point where she prays, "*Lord, I've come to make peace with You*" (279, italics original). Once Adrienne returns to her faith, the plot wraps up quickly. Her brother is cleared, and Adrienne is aligned with another man she will serve—this time as a wife. Her

newfound spirituality makes her realize she is in love with Robbie, a family friend who has remained faithful to his religion and to his long-unrequited affection for Adrienne. The novel ends when she professes her love, admitting “My brother told me to propose to you.” Robbie’s reply reiterates the gendered spheres Fell’s novel advances throughout: “Call me chauvinistic,” he says, “but I’ll have none of that” (366). His “proper” proposal is accepted, and the novel ends with traditional gender roles securely in place.

Such resolution is significant, as while both *The Art of Uncontrolled Flight* and *Betrayal in Paris* show the manner in which military women prove disruptive, they also argue that this disruption is able to be repaired when those women return to more traditional spheres. In contrast, Patrick Sheane Duncan’s novel *Courage Under Fire*, departs from this perspective by depicting a capable military woman who, despite her ability to balance military leadership and femininity, remains threatened—not by the loss of her gender identity, but by the men whose masculinity is threatened by serving alongside a feminine woman. Of additional significance is this novel’s modification of the mediated narrative—one in which a man traces a woman’s military actions, and in which those actions, while recuperable, evoke irreparable damage. This formal inversion demonstrates not only that women may have war stories, but also that the recovery and dissemination of these stories are worthy of men’s time and effort, and that these stories, like all war stories, prove challenging to apprehend. Duncan’s novel highlights the precarious nature of war stories while celebrating a heroic military woman—one who proves far superior to some of the men she worked with. His text simultaneously demonstrates the ability of servicewomen while acknowledging some of the discrimination they face. However, it does not blithely argue that women’s involvement in the military remains unproblematic. Rather, he acknowledges problems but roots them in military men, not the women themselves. In doing so,

Duncan changes the underlying question surrounding women in the Gulf War military. Instead of asking if femininity will be corrupted by military service, his text explores whether or not American masculinity can accommodate and withstand such implicit challenge. In generic terms, it also represents a watershed moment, one in which the mediated form no longer carries an implicit proscription of gender roles.

Courage Under Fire follows Lt. Col. Nat Serling, an African American Army officer with a tainted military record. During Desert Storm, he accidentally orders fire on what turned out to be an American tank, and thus he was responsible for American casualties. After being acquitted for this mistake, Serling is moved to a desk job, where he receives the assignment to investigate “the first woman eligible for the Medal of Honor,” Capt. Karen Emma Walden (14). True to the novel’s mediated form, Serling delves into the war story of the absent soldier. As he begins his routine inquiry into the events surrounding Walden’s death, however, he quickly discovers that something is amiss. Walden’s death proves no accident, nor an attack by enemy combatants. Rather, she was shot by one of her own men, who rebelled against her leadership and her very presence in the military. In this, Duncan’s plot both advocates the military capabilities of women—Walden was a heroic and capable soldier—and the difficulties surrounding their presence in the military. Thus, *Courage Under Fire* offers a nuanced depiction of women in the military, while arguing formally that the stories of these women deserve representation. Because Serling’s inquiry into the events also leads him to reconcile his own complicated relationship to the events of war, Duncan’s text argues that such exploration may be healing and restorative. Thanks to Serling’s efforts, Walden posthumously receives the Medal of Honor, thereby cementing the belief that women may perform adequately and even heroically under fire. This is not to suggest that Duncan’s text (or the subsequent film adaptation of that

text) remains a straightforward critical success. Indeed, critics have identified a range of issues with these texts. However, my interest here is less in the critical success of the book than it is in the book's generic modification. Despite plot issues, the book remains generically innovative and marks a significant transition in the status of women in American war narratives and in the genre of war narratives itself.

In its refusal to return the female protagonist to the domestic sphere, *Courage Under Fire* suggests that the issue of military women is more than one-dimensional. Where other texts suggest that military women threaten through their absence to disrupt the domestic sphere, Duncan's novel roots that disruption in the area of war rather than the home. Furthermore, by changing the terms of the discussion, Duncan postulates the idea that women's inclusion in the military may pose less of a threat to femininity than it does to men, and he argues that masculinity, not femininity, is the gender identity under pressure. If war is no longer the exclusive crucible from which masculinity emerges, what is it? And where may American masculinity take refuge? Within mere decades, world events would provide an answer.

Chapter 5—America's Twenty-first Century Wars: Made by Men, Unmade by Women

In contrast to Gulf War literature, which responds to the central concept that war makes men and unmakes women, the literature of America's post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan primarily considers the idea that war is made by men and unmade by women. In this literature, war may threaten women, but the primary concern is that women threaten war. Several reasons exist for this difference. Generally speaking, the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan proved more chaotic than the Gulf War: these conflicts extended into years rather than concluding within hours, and, in contrast to the resistance to homogeneity that pervaded the Gulf War era, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan proved polarizing and fractured traditional ideas about gender, the military, economics, and America's role internationally. These fractures also appear in the literature.

Because the catalyst for these wars was an attack on American soil rather than an attack on a foreign entity, many considered America's military response to be less an expression of heroic rescue (as the first Bush administration presented its relationship with Kuwait) than a reactionary attack. In his essay collection *The Second Plane: September 11: Terror and Boredom*, Martin Amis observes, "85% of American soldiers said that their 'main mission' was 'to retaliate for Saddam's role' in the September attacks. About two-thirds of American civilians...share that misapprehension" (137). In addition to being based on what many considered false pretenses, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan proved anything but tidy. As responses to the September 11 attacks, they proved lopsided, as they waged geographically-defined aggression against an enemy that is defined ideologically, not spatially or geo-politically.

Amis notes, “the new enemy isn’t even a state” (8). Thus, the fragmented nature of war narrative remained at the forefront of this conflict from the start; social questions about why America went to war and who it was trying to fight highlighted skepticism toward the official war narrative.

In addition to acknowledging the apparently slippery reasoning for starting the current war, Amis also notes its untidy progression, calling it “a misadventure in search of an exit strategy” (82). Amis is not alone in his concerns, as the wars prove increasingly difficult to conclude tidily. Robert N. Bellah roots this difficulty in the nature of these wars, arguing that “The very idea of a ‘war on terrorism’...does not seem to be like what we ordinarily consider a war to be: someone wins and someone loses, or there is an agreed end of hostilities. Like a war on drugs or a war on poverty, a war on terrorism would seem to have no end. It is hard to think of instances in which such wars have been won” (18). Such uncertainty of purpose and progress has also been reflected and refracted in the literature of the current wars.

On first glance, this literature appears less homogeneous than that of previous wars. Texts represent civilians and military personnel, male and female, American and international citizens. Some protagonists are adults; others are children. Some texts follow families or other social units, while others track an individual. They are written by both men and women. However, this literature coheres when read in light of the general uncertainty of America in the aftermath of September 11. Susan Faludi argues in *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* that the September 11 attacks provoked a realignment of American society and ushered in a return to 1950s gender roles, which promote a sophisticated and active masculinity and a domestic and submissive femininity. Faludi interprets this realignment as one result of the popular interpretation of the World Trade Centers as phallic symbols and their destruction as a

symbolic threat of emasculation of American men. Thus, this argument views the reinscription of 1950s gender roles as motivated by fear. Faludi writes, “The post-9/11 commentaries were riddled with apprehensions that America was lacking in masculine fortitude, that the masses of weak-chinned BlackBerry clutchers had left the nation open to attack and wouldn’t have the cojones for the confrontation ahead” (8). Although Faludi’s critique focuses primarily on mainstream media representations rather than literature, read within the social context she describes, the literature offers a series of reactions—ranging from acceptance to anxiety—to the general fear that the September 11 attacks highlighted not so much the vulnerability of a nation as the inadequacies of its men. These inadequacies are explored in two primary ways: first, in a subset of literature that considers the immediate effects of September 11, 2001 and is unified by the absence of capable fathers and the significance of the woman in the domestic sphere; and second, in a series of texts that explore the wars themselves and grapple with the belief—and for some, fear—that women unmake war. In both of these, the literature returns to earlier concerns about the proper relationship between war and gender, ultimately arguing that these two realms remain inherently linked.

The 9/11 Novel and the Crisis of American Masculinity

Just as a subset of Gulf War literature advocates that women belong in the domestic sphere, several 9/11 novels—including Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Ken Kalfus’s *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*, and Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man*—share this preoccupation with the domestic, though they approach it with a different set of concerns and conclusions. These texts do not argue that women have no place in wartime; rather, they contend that women are necessary components of the domestic front because of the inadequacy of the American male. Set in New York City in the days surrounding September 11, 2001, these

novels consider a mother's responsibilities to children who have inept or absent fathers.

Although the texts offer distinct commentaries on the woman's role as a wife, each of the novels demonstrates an interest in the effect of national crisis on fractured family relationships and particularly on the relationship between mother and child. Ultimately, these texts advance a positive, life-affirming, and rehabilitative interpretation of the maternal, in contrast to the absence (physical or emotional) of the paternal.

Published in 2005, Foer's novel was one of the first literary texts to situate its plot directly within the events of September 11, 2001. The novel follows Oskar Schnell, a young boy grieving his father's death in the World Trade Center attacks. Using a variety of narrative threads, the novel weaves together Oskar's first person accounts, his letters to various celebrities (Jane Goodall, Stephen Hawking, Ringo Starr) and some of their responses, letters Oskar's grandmother writes to him, and unmailed letters Oskar's grandfather wrote to Oskar's grandmother over a period of years. Foer presents these texts as both authoritative and susceptible to revision. For example, the letters written by Oskar's grandfather, a native German whose first love (Oskar's grandmother's sister) dies in the Dresden bombings, are "corrected" in the novel: the text as Oskar's grandfather wrote it is printed in black, but red ink is used to edit his words to reflect Standard Written English. Thus, Foer complicates and undermines narrative authority, even as he draws parallels between Oskar, who searches for details of his dead father's life, with Oskar's grandfather, who never met his son and never mailed him the letters he wrote.

Oskar's quest is metaphorical, of course—he longs to recapture the absent father—but it is also literal. Oskar discovers a vase in his father's closet. Inside the vase is an envelope with the word "Black" on it and a key inside it. The novel centers around Oskar's search to discover who "Black" is and what the key fits. The answers, when he finds them, are banal enough, and reveal

little about his father. As with most quest narratives, what proves significant is not the end, but the journey itself. Oskar's journey takes him throughout the city, and as he ventures into distant boroughs, what he gains is not so much his father as himself. Lest readers believe that this novel is a story of self-sufficiency in an era of terror, however, Foer alerts them to what Oskar does not realize: although she lets him venture out on his own, Oskar's mother follows his search closely. Oskar traverses the city seeking out strangers named "Black," but his mother has called ahead, alerted these strangers of her boy's quest, and guaranteed his safe passage. Thus, even when he believes himself to be venturing bravely into a dangerous and unknown world, Oskar travels within his mother's care.

Of course, Oskar's mother does not raise him alone. He remains close to his grandmother, who lives nearby, and he forges a friendship with one of the men (Mr. Black) he meets along the way. Oskar also befriends his grandfather, who left town the day he discovered he was to be a father but returns on September 11. Oskar's family initially calls the grandfather a renter, but eventually Oskar discovers his true identity, and they form a close relationship. It is with his grandfather that Oskar finally resolves his father's death: together, the males dig up the empty coffin and fill it with the grandfather's letters, thus burying the nonexistent relationship between father and son in exchange for the lived relationship between grandfather and grandson. Thus, Foer's novel lauds the maternal but also advocates a reinvention of the traditional nuclear family. The father may be absent, but father figures abound—and are necessary. Oskar's mother may keep him safe, but she may not accompany him on his quest. For that, he needs men.

In structural terms, Foer's novel resembles the mediated narratives of the Vietnam War era, in which women removed from the war experience sought to uncover the war stories of their male loved ones. What is interesting about this resemblance is that the protagonist—the seeker—

is male, and the father's experience is one of victim rather than warrior. Whereas in the Vietnam War era, the compulsory draft and the limitations on women in the military made the mediated narrative inherently gendered, in the twenty-first century, American war literature is refracted along different lines. Gender still pertains, of course, but the narratives here are also concerned with military personnel and civilians, with victims and survivors and, as such, provide a twenty-first century generic inflection that reflects the socio-political circumstances that ushered in the early twenty-first century. Despite these departures from earlier forms of war literature, the novel remains invested in gender roles, arguing that women are necessary, albeit inadequate, in the absence of the father.

Ken Kalfus's novel *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* uses the setting of post-9/11 New York City to offer a similar indictment of the traditional father figure and reaffirmation of the maternal. Both Joyce and Marshall, a divorcing couple, initially believe the other has died in the September 11 attacks, and neither is distressed by this. However, they do feel remorse when realizing their spouse has survived: Joyce's meeting was cancelled, preventing her from taking one of the fated flights, and Marshall escaped his collapsing office in the twin towers. Their crumbling marriage does not fare so well.

The novel offers a glimpse of post-9/11 life and culture, and it is valuable as an index of the psychological and sociological situation of that era.⁴⁶ However, it is most pertinent for my study in its treatment of the degree to which Joyce and Marshall embody or reject their familial responsibilities. Neither remains blameless in the relationship, and both attempt to undermine or thwart the other as the divorce proceedings progress. However, in the aftermath of the attacks

⁴⁶ For example, it explores the concept of "terror sex," which Joyce's colleagues are having in the aftermath of the attacks. The novel explains this concept—essentially, casual sex with strangers—as necessary in a post-attack world: "Everyone needed something now, some release of payback or just acknowledgement that their lives had been changed" (22-3).

and the dissolution of their marriage, Joyce prospers, losing weight, caring for the children, and dating respectable men. Although her marriage failed, she strives to reenter the traditional sphere of domestic relationships by seeking out a new mate. It is no doubt significant that one of her suitors is an FBI agent, a professional man whose position impresses Viola, Marshall's and Joyce's daughter. "They catch terrorists," she tells her father, clearly impressed with her mother's companion (172).

In contrast to the FBI agent, who represents the nation and the stability it strives to enforce, Marshall remains slovenly and inept. He has lost his job and remains aimless, with "no plans, no road map" (177). He is broke and broken, resigned to socializing with his children's teacher, who is much younger than he is and who takes him to parties flocked by drug users. Marshall, a typical American male, remains outside of polite society, until the novel's final pages. As the narrative concludes, Marshall returns to work, even winning a raise and a promotion (231). Osama Bin Laden is captured, and a jubilant female coworker "embrace[s] Marshall and kisse[s] him...the first time in years that he had been kissed by a woman who was not, say, his mother" (235). In case readers miss the message here—that normalized relations between the sexes are connected to the fate of the nation—Kalfus concludes the novel with a chance reunion between Marshall and Joyce. Joyce trips, and Marshall catches her fall, and continues to hold her as the city around them thrives, apparently healed. Even ground zero, the site of so much tragedy, becomes rehabilitated: "the vastness of the emptiness of the hole in the city was inflamed with human noise and aspiration" (237). In the wake of tragedy, the novel recommends healing through reconciliation and a return to traditional gender roles, in which the woman cares for the children and oversees the domestic while the man advances his career and protects the woman from falling. Marshall may not become a warrior, but he may gain

masculinity through adopting some of a warrior's responsibilities of protection and advancement. Joyce and Marshall stand as a microcosm of the nation, and their reunion suggests that if the nation's people return to their "proper" places, the nation, too, will be healed—the site of tragedy will be transformed with the ambition inherent in the stereotypical American dream.

Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* offers a similar take, presenting the events of September 11 as a catalyst for domestic and familial rehabilitation. As the novel begins, lawyer Keith Neudecker escapes his office in the north towers and stumbles his way to the home of his estranged wife and children. His own apartment, near the towers, remains inaccessible, and his wife, Lianne Glenn, accepts his return, although not without some level of conflicting emotions. According to her mother, initially "[Lianne] washed his clothes in a separate load. She had no idea why she did this. It was like he was dead" (104). And in many ways, Keith is dead, at least to his former life. He has returned to it, but not inhabited it; he lives with his wife and children, but he fails to connect with them in meaningful ways. Instead, for much of the novel, Keith's most significant relationship is with Florence Givens, whom he meets after he absent-mindedly picks up her briefcase when escaping the tower. Florence, who worked on the next floor from Keith, also escaped the towers, and in her presence Keith learns to revisit the events he suffered: "[s]he talked about the tower, going over it again claustrophobically, the smoke, the fold of bodies, and [Keith] understood that they could talk about these things only with each other" (90). Florence and Keith eventually consummate their relationship, but for Keith, the physical connection they share pales in light of "what they knew together," their common experiences (137).

Of course, the events of September 11 affected people beyond those who were in the towers, and the other characters in DeLillo's novel struggle to process their reactions, too.

Lianne strives to care for her husband's physical and emotional wounds, but she also demonstrates a great deal of concern for Justin, the couple's son, who struggles to understand what has happened. Justin and his friends take to watching the sky through binoculars, scanning for planes (71). They speak incessantly of "Bill Lawton," and only eventually do their parents realize this is their corruption of "Bin Laden," gleaned from the snippets of news from which their parents tried to shield them. Lianne's preoccupation for Justin's response to the attacks reflects what Amis calls the "most durable legacy" of the September 11 attacks, parents' fear that they may not keep their children safe (7). Danger lurks at every turn, be it the threats implied by heightened terror alerts or the stunts performed by the book's title figure, a performance artist whose installations take the form of imitating (with the use of a safety harness) the businessmen who jumped from the towers to their deaths. He arrives "unannounced, in various parts of the city, suspended from one or another structure, always upside down, wearing a suit, a tie, and dress shoes. He brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump" (33). The Falling Man's insistent appearances force the novel's characters to deal with something they prefer to set aside, and he makes present the extent to which their lives have become permeated by fear.

Eventually, though, the children move to other pursuits, Keith's relationship with Florence ends, and even the Falling Man dies, apparently of natural causes. This is not to suggest that everything has resolved neatly; indeed, the novel's final scene returns to the events of its opening, and readers follow Keith through his office, his discovery of his poker buddy who dies in his presence, and his exit from the tower. However, DeLillo's novel suggests that through a return to the trauma of September 11, some level of reconciliation may occur, and readers wonder if Keith's decision finally to face his past will enable a renewed relationship with his

loved ones. DeLillo refuses to comment on such speculation, however, acknowledging only that Keith has emerged from his limbo. Where he will go next remains uncertain.

What remains compelling about this set of 9/11 novels is their consistency in portrayals of fathers. Oskar's father is physically absent, and although the other fathers survive physically, they remain emotionally unavailable to their children. Read in light of Amis's assertion that fear for their children remained the prevalent emotion surrounding American parents in the aftermath of September 11, these novels suggest that it falls to women, specifically mothers, to negotiate the domestic sphere and protect their families. It also indicates that the attacks had a disproportionate effect on the American male psyche. Susan Faludi's consideration of media responses to September 11 supports this claim. She acknowledges the prevalent depiction of "homemakers in the suburbs held hostage by fear and little children traumatized by television footage," and argues that "[t]he threat, according to this revised script, wasn't to our commercial and governmental hubs but to our domestic hearth" (5). A general media endorsement of marriage and domesticity as the proper spheres for women reigned (117). Although Faludi's focus is not on literature, the 9/11 novels by Foer, Kalfus, and DeLillo reiterate this impetus by identifying the mother as the stable figure who protects the family. Furthermore, in considering the state of fathers who cannot protect their children, they indicate the crisis surrounding American masculinity.

Iraq War Narratives

This alignment of women with the domestic also figures into texts which take the Iraq War as their central focus. Two primary subgenres emerge in this era with respect to women and war writing: one takes the form of a traditional homefront novel, in which women remain largely outside of the war experience and that experience, to the extent that they are able to access it, is

available only through the mediation of men, and another form which acknowledges the presence of military women but highlights the threat those women pose to military men and to the military itself, thus advancing the idea that women unmake war. Read together, these works collectively reiterate the ideas that women belong at home, not in the military.

A Woman's Place Is In the Home(front)

As is common among literature of various wars, a number of Iraq War novels present the domestic sphere as the proper place for women. Unlike the 9/11 novels discussed above, which highlight the domestic as a way of exploring the crisis in American masculinity, these novels take femininity as their primary concern and argue for traditional inflections of it, expressed through an alignment of the female with the domestic.

Ellen Gilchrist's *A Dangerous Age* follows a series of related women as they struggle to deal with various aspects of wartime America. These women consider the September 11 attacks an act of war, and thus they view the war era as beginning on September 11, 2001, not with the deployment of troops. Louise Hand Healy, a documentarian, tracks the story of her cousin, Winifred Hand Abadie, whose fiancé Charles Kane⁴⁷ dies in the September attacks. After his death, his family devotes itself to avenging it: his twin cousins join the Marines the day after his memorial service, and his fiancée realizes that she should "do something for other people not because it's finished for [her]. It's over" (5). Initially unable to conceive of a life for herself without Charles, Winifred, who considers herself a widow, eventually finds her place as a caretaker for Brian, one of her fiancé's twin cousins, who is wounded in Iraq. Meanwhile, Louise, the documentarian, becomes involved with (and eventually marries) the other twin, Carl, who has not yet been deployed. The novel presents these unions as rightful and fulfilling; the

⁴⁷ It is perhaps no coincidence that this character shares his name with the protagonist of the film *Citizen Kane*, as in that movie, Charles Kane's dying word, "rosebud," suggests a longing for the sled that symbolized his childhood, and thus the domestic-centered existence he led prior to entering the commercial realm that marked his adult life.

women prove most comfortable when in relationship with military men. The twin towers may have fallen, but the novel's twins remain safe in the care of the women who love them.

In contrast, the text presents another relative, Olivia, a newspaper editor whose on-and-off-again husband (they marry, divorce, and remarry) is deployed with the National Guard after their second marriage. His death precedes the birth of their son, in another iteration of the novel's economy: just as her "widowed" cousin finds another military man to care for, Olivia loses one male but quickly gains another. The novel consistently evaluates women on the basis of their relationship to men. Although Olivia has a prominent career, she, too, is linked to the domestic through her obligations to her infant son. Thus, the novel's plot resolves each woman's life by pairing her in a relationship with a male and aligning her with the domestic roles of wife, caretaker, or mother. While it does not completely divorce women from the war experience, it does not depict them in any direct relationship with it. Even Olivia, whose position as a newspaper editor allows her to question and critique the circumstances of war, remains perplexed by those circumstances. The novel concludes with one of Olivia's editorials, which advocates concern for the troops before concluding, "A bumper sticker in Fayetteville, Arkansas, reads, 'We are making enemies faster than we can kill them.' What the hell are we supposed to do next?" (245). Such uncertainty, particularly when paired with the domestication of each female character in *A Dangerous Age*, situates women outside of the war experience, both physically and intellectually.

While Glichrist's novel advocates women's role as caretakers, a slightly different investigation of the outsider status of women in wartime is found in Kristin Tsetsi's *Homefront*, a novel set during the Iraq War, and Tanya Biank's *Under the Sabers*, a nonfiction investigation into the lives of military wives. Each of these books considers the unique stresses and dangers of

being involved with soldiers during wartime, and they offer a rare glimpse of the toll women pay for their relationships with military men. Tsetsi's novel follows Mia, the girlfriend of a soldier deployed to Iraq, through a chaotic six-month period. During this time, Mia struggles to choose a career and figure out what she wants from her life. Mia feels increasing resentment for the subordinate role she finds herself in, though she also feels unable to correct the relationship imbalance. In an unsent email, she complains to her boyfriend, "*I can't be mad, can I? I don't get to be mad. You're at war, after all. Anything I feel is inconsequential*" (218, original in italics). Mia's frustrations remain clear, and though at one point in the novel she decides to leave Jake, the text ends with her return home, where Jake, on leave, awaits. Tsetsi's novel thus explores the confinement and limited choices that define the life of a military wife, but it fails to offer an alternative to this condition.

In contrast to Tsetsi's fictional approach, Tanya Biank's 2006 text *Under the Sabers: The Unwritten Code of Army Wives* began as a journalistic investigation. Biank, a military beat reporter, noticed the high number of military wives murdered by their husbands and decided to explore the circumstances surrounding this reality. Her book, which follows four women living in Ft. Bragg from 2000 to 2002, stands as a frank depiction of the tensions and dangers surrounding military wives. The book takes as its central focus the stress military service adds to marriage, concluding that previously-strained marriages suffer an exponential increase in stress when a spouse performs military service. It further argues that military culture—which is marked by machismo, a code of silence, a high level of scrutiny and surveillance, and a fear of reprisal—encourages its constituents to avoid or cover up difficult issues rather than acknowledging and seeking help for them. The book suggests that military culture proves inhospitable to family life

and marital relations, and that women who dwell with warriors are at particular risk of violence and even death.

The commercial trajectory of Biank's text provides a brief but interesting digression. Biank, herself a military brat and a military spouse, has become a veritable poster child for military wives. Her book has been adapted into the Lifetime channel's hit television series *Army Wives*, and the text itself has undergone rebranding. It is now published under the title *Army Wives: The Unwritten Code of Military Marriage*. The content, too, has changed, and the threat of violence women suffer at the hands of their military husbands has largely (but not exclusively) dropped out of the show's plot. This adaptation proves a telling reflection of the times: rather than acknowledging the severe and sometimes deadly costs military wives pay, the show focuses instead on how women's actions support or harm their spouses. Women's actions are chronicled in the drama, but they are evaluated primarily through their effects on men and the military they serve. For example, one of the four subjects of Biank's nonfiction narrative is Delores Kalinofski, happily married to a Sergeant Major. Their son also enlists in the military, and tells his mother before he leaves that she should do something for herself—go to school or pursue a career. In the text, this is viewed as necessary and healthy. In the television series, however, when Delores's fictional counterpart Denise takes up nursing again, her husband grows jealous, and it threatens her marriage. This is just one example of the revision Biank's text undergoes, but it illustrates the extent to which fictional narratives of war situate women's actions within the greater context of masculinity and the military. In other words, the revision demonstrates that where Biank's text emerged from an interest in the threat posed to wives of military personnel, the television show takes as its primary concern the threat that women pose to the military and its men.

The Military Woman—A Threat to the System

Far from anomalous, this concern that women compromise both war and warriors permeates much of the literature surrounding the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, most notably the novels *Ever After*, *Man in the Middle*, and *Summer Snow*. One dogmatic example of the fear that the presence of military women threatens the military, military men, and by extension, American society is Karen Kingsbury's evangelical text *Ever After*. This novel chronicles the experiences of Lauren Gibbs, a female reporter whose liberal, anti-war views are "corrected" when she witnesses war firsthand. Before *Time* sends Gibbs to Iraq to cover the war, she remains ideologically opposed to Shane Galanter, her first love and the father of her nineteen-year-old daughter Emily. Reunited by their daughter, Gibbs and Galanter, a career army man, long to rekindle their relationship, but their disagreement on military affairs prevents such reconciliation. Galanter's friends berate Gibbs, saying that Galanter needs a different woman and Gibbs needs "a partial lobotomy" (33). Actually, a trip to Iraq does the job: when Gibbs witnesses an IED that explodes near several American soldiers and kills one of her sources, her perspective changes completely, and she decides that the soldiers' need for support outweighs her feelings about the war itself (255). After she returns home, she marries Galanter, legally and ecclesiastically forming the family they had never previously recognized. When Emily's fiancé dies in Iraq, Gibbs's transformation is finalized. Speaking about her decision to step away from her former self, Gibbs trades one set of idealism for another, as she realizes "It was time for her to be a mother" (255). The novel concludes with Gibbs happily ensconced at the center of her family—just where it believes she belonged all along. This conclusion reveals the perceived stakes of women's views on the military by positioning dissent as a detriment to the military man and his family and, by extension, American society itself.

This belief that women are detrimental to the military and its men spans several different plot inflections. Kingsbury shows witnessing war as a corrective to Gibbs's perceptions, but certainly this plot fails to carry traction in an era where women serve in the military in unprecedented numbers. This does not mean that no woman could experience what Kingsbury suggests, but it does demonstrate that many women do not adhere to her model. Furthermore, given Kingsbury's evangelical goals, readers could attempt to dismiss her novel as a reflection of the conservative world view shared by only a portion of Americans. However, read in the context of Iraq War literature, Kingsbury's novel appears more homogeneous than heterogeneous. Indeed, several other war narratives take up Kingsbury's fear that women threaten war and its male participants, although they focus on military women rather than civilians. Thus, like Kingsbury, they argue that women do not belong at war. Tara McKelvey argues that despite their presence and performance in the contemporary American military, "[w]omen are seen as a destabilizing force" that proves more detrimental than helpful (12). Thus, women are not warriors; rather, they threaten warriors.

According to the literature, this threat emerges in many guises—even ones that appear innocent on the surface. Brian Haig's *Man in the Middle* synthesizes a Vietnam-era murder investigation with an Iraq War drama. In a variation on the Vietnam-era mediated novel, in which a female longs to unearth her beloved's war story so that she may better understand or retain closeness to her beloved, this text offers a female who apparently searches to unearth the secrets of strangers. Bien Tran is a Vietnamese national who has become an American citizen and serves as a military investigator. She has served in Iraq, where her fiancé still serves. Tran meets Sean Drummond, a JAG lawyer and Army veteran, at a murder scene. Together, they seek to uncover the circumstances surrounding the murder of Clifford Daniels, a Pentagon employee.

Drummond appears to be completely accepting of his new colleague, although he often uses her presence to ruminate on the intersection of women and the military. Drummond distinguishes between “the old Army,” which frowned upon women in any setting—even as spouses—and the new one, which understands that such sentiments are now taboo. However, he sees the ligature between the two, noting, “[t]he underlying philosophy hasn’t changed a whit, though” (86). Lest readers find him too progressive, however, Haig demonstrates that Drummond, too, remains aware of the threat posed by military women. Drummond roots these in male desire rather than female action, arguing, “[t]he modern battle dress uniform, baggy and shapeless as it is, is as aphrodisiacal as a knee in the groin; yet the fevered male imagination fills in the blanks and primitive impulses take over” (118). Thus, the problem is with unchecked masculinity rather than subversive femininity. Still, the solution remains the absence of women in the military—a solution that is underscored as the novel’s murder-mystery plot unfolds. Eventually Drummond discovers that his colleague is actually the perpetrator of the murder they investigate. While in Iraq, Tran commanded a mission based on intelligence she believed to be reliable. The information proved faulty, and soldiers died—including her fiancé. Tran embarked on a revenge plot that led to Daniels’s death. As the novel concludes, she escapes back to Vietnam, eluding capture and consequences. Thus, the novel argues that women are ruled by passions and are therefore unsuited for military service. Furthermore, those men who strive to embrace female colleagues suffer for their progressive nature. It is no coincidence that in the closing paragraphs of the text, Drummond’s superior sends him to recruit Tran for the CIA. The message remains clear: women may be suited for espionage and intrigue, but they are not capable of negotiating combat. By using the mediated form to make an implicit argument about appropriate military roles for women, this novel argues against female military efficacy. This

proves a great departure from Vietnam-era mediated novels. While they aimed to empower women, this text argues that military women use power to the detriment of their coworkers and their country.

This threat is not always viewed negatively. William Hathaway's anti-war novel *Summer Snow* offers a rare glimpse of female agency as a positive force. To be fair, Hathaway's pacifist beliefs accord him a different standard of evaluation than that espoused by most war writers, and it leads him to view any anti-militaristic agent positively, in contrast to those who would enact war and violence. The novel remains unremarkable in terms of its content—which follows a Sufi mystic through her relationship with an American veteran and intelligence agent—but the archetypes it establishes are useful for my discussion. In Hathaway's world, the Kyrgyzstani women are agents of peace, while American men are agents of war and violence. In case readers miss this point, the male protagonist, Jeff Madsen, reminds them of it, gushing about Cholpon, the mystic, “[h]er womanliness was the opposite of the killing out there” (33). In his estimation, “[h]er breasts...could erase the memories and heal the wounds” (34). Although Hathaway does not comment specifically on American (or other) women involved in the military, this, too, seems deliberate. Indeed, by aligning the female with the foreign and with what he views as the noble identity of the pacifist, he offers an essentialized depiction of gender, in which masculinity is associated with lust for power and perpetration of violence—characteristics he also identifies as uniquely American. In the final pages of the book, the Sufi women discover the missing WMD that started the war, and they bury it so that no more war can be perpetrated in its name. Thus, Hathaway's novel suggests that rather than international diplomacy, all that is needed is female agency. While I am not suggesting his work is sophisticated, it is rare in its positive view of the apparent threat that females pose to the waging of war.

Nonfiction Accounts of Military Women

Although the previous two examples are novels written by men, the argument that women pose threats to war and to male warriors is also taken up by nonfiction accounts of actual military women. While infrequent, several direct participant narratives tracing the military contributions of women do emerge from this period. One possible reason for the limited number of texts arises in the anthology *Powder: Writing by Women in the Ranks from Vietnam to Iraq*, which juxtaposes myriad responses to the war experience in its attempt to acknowledge the complexity of war narratives. The anthology's editors hoped to compile a text focused on the Iraq War, but they were unable to secure enough submissions from women involved in the current conflicts. Instead, they expanded their scope back to the Vietnam War era. They surmise that too many women were still involved in the military and thus were afraid to speak publically about their experiences in it (xiii). Thus, while the entries within the anthology may not share this view, the circumstances surrounding its production suggest that women remain unable to speak of their military experiences, because to do so would court reprisal. Implicit in the fear of punishment is the belief that their sentiments pose a threat to the military culture from which they speak.

This is not to suggest, however, that no accounts of military women in the post-9/11 era have been produced. The most well-known of these accounts is the story of Jessica Lynch, the West Virginian who was wounded and taken as a prisoner of war during her service on an Army resupply convoy in Iraq. Among the tales surrounding Lynch stands Rick Bragg's authorized account, *I Am a Soldier, Too*, labeled a memoir despite its presentation of circumstances (namely, a sexual assault at the hands of her Iraqi captors) that Lynch claims are falsified. Bragg's appropriation and manipulation of the Lynch story exemplifies the contested authority of

contemporary military women—a contest of authority that results not only from the nature of the subjects or their authors, but also from the national identity project being waged along with this war. As Susan Faludi has shown, the overall reaction to the events of September 11 was the cultural endorsement of a return to 1950s gender roles, which construe women as weak and men as hyper-masculine. Bragg's Lynch narrative emerges from and reflects this trend, demonstrating that when national identity is in flux, women's stories (and the authority to tell those stories) are often subsumed within or overwritten by the national narrative. Thus, the "official" story trumps the participants' stories.

Faludi's concern with post-9/11 journalism intersects with the Lynch story, and she takes it as one of her primary examples of the return to traditional gender roles in America. Lynch's story is well-known, but often mischaracterized. Lynch herself finds it difficult to remember the exact details, telling *Glamour Magazine*, "At the start of the war, in March 2003, my convoy was attacked in the city of An Nasiriyah. My Humvee crashed, and a few hours later I woke up behind enemy lines in an Iraqi hospital, badly injured and unable to move my legs. I was a prisoner of war" (Lynch). What happened between those certainties has been the subject of much speculation and a great deal of imaginative recreation.

Faludi contends that media portrayals of Lynch are sharply slanted to transform Lynch from a capable and trained member of the American military into a victim in need of male protection. This transformation arises because of what Faludi sees as America's post-9/11 need to reinscribe traditional gender roles. In order for men to be fully masculinized protectors, she argues, they must have someone to protect. After her capture and rescue, Jessica Lynch became a symbol of those victims. She argues, "[Lynch] may have been in uniform, but this wasn't a story about a soldier's return to her brother in arms. It was a tale of a maiden in need of rescue" (169).

Faludi argues that the rescue itself remains circumspect, because Lynch's fellow POWs—four men and an African-American woman—were “rescued” in a very different manner, with little fanfare and apparent disinterest from military personnel (166). In contrast, reporters at U.S. Central Command base in Qatar received a pre-dawn wake-up call by officials eager to share footage of Lynch's rescue (167). From those first moments, her story was shaped by military and media forces, and it quickly became clear that it was not “her” story any longer.

Faludi finds fault with many representations of Lynch, and as a whole, they seem to share many of the same qualities. However, one of the most egregious accounts is *I Am a Soldier, Too*, ostensibly Lynch's memoir. Faludi writes:

It would be more accurate to say that *I Am a Soldier, Too* belonged to its Boswell, Rick Bragg, a former *New York Times* correspondent who had recently left the paper under a cloud, after acknowledging that he had outsourced his reporting on an article to an intern who was neither paid nor credited for it. In this case, Bragg *had* interviewed Lynch, but she seemed strangely missing from the text, which was told in the third person. The ghostwriter had ghosted his subject. And imposed on her an interpretation of the hours right after the accident that she didn't recall, having been out cold. (166)

Faludi's ire focuses primarily on the manner in which Bragg fabricates the details of Lynch's attack, and she locates the source of that fabrication in the country's need for a victim. By joining the military, Lynch had shed the stereotype of vulnerability that often accompanies women. Americans typically do not want to believe their soldiers are vulnerable, so Lynch had to be represented not as a soldier but as a girl. And, Faludi argues, the best way to demonstrate female vulnerability is by showing her sexual violation. Lynch had no memory of being sexually assaulted by her captors, and the medical staff that treated her identified no evidence of such trauma (192). Bragg, however states that she was raped. He contends that Lynch must have repressed the memory (Faludi 190). This ludicrous depiction causes Faludi to read the memoir as more fictional than factual, and she argues that rather than a memoir, Bragg has written “a

fairy tale, a cautionary one, in which the princess goes to war—and pays the price for not staying in the castle” (193).

Faludi’s account proves persuasive. However, its focus on the events of the war itself precludes a thorough examination of the manner in which Bragg’s text advocates against any female involvement in the military. In his estimation, military women remain misplaced or misguided, filling an inferior space instead of assuming their proper roles in society. Bragg sketches Lynch’s childhood in a relatively poor West Virginia town. He employs alternate names for his subject, referring to her as the more formal “Jessica” in military settings and the colloquial and intimate “Jessi” in scenes describing her vulnerability. In setting the scene of the attack in which Lynch will be captured, Bragg writes, “...Private First Class Jessica Lynch steered her groaning diesel truck across a hateful landscape of grating sand and sucking mud, hauling four hundred gallons of water in the rough direction of Baghdad...” (7). However, when describing her reaction to the media coverage of her capture and recovery, Bragg depicts “Jessi...sitting at her kitchen table, her pain medication lined up in front of her beside a glass of chocolate milk” (5). In the first presentation, she appears a capable and competent military professional who controls large machines as they master a foreign landscape. The second depiction aligns her with the domestic setting of the kitchen. It infantilizes her, calling her by a nickname and drawing attention to her childish beverage. Furthermore, it highlights her injuries, reminding readers of “Jessi’s” wounding and vulnerability. By creating a bifurcated subject and consistently distinguishing between the soldier and the girl, Bragg underscores the belief that women do not belong in the military.

Bragg further dichotomizes Lynch’s identity by describing a military career as the antithesis of marriage and maternity—what he sees as her other options. He describes how

Lynch and her teenage friends “talked about boys and the future, which always seemed to be the same thing” (28). Bragg stresses the fact that Lynch could have followed a more traditionally feminine path, and he repeatedly mentions the romantic possibilities open to her. He points out that Lynch “could have...married, even married money” and cites the “old boyfriend” who “begged her to turn the army down” and offered her “a big house” if she stayed and married him (32-3). Bragg locates Lynch decision to enlist not in economics or patriotism but in worldly ambition: “Back home, boys with tears in their eyes had offered to marry her, to build her a brand-new house, anything, to get her to stay forever in the high, green lonesome. She had told them no, told them she was going to see the world” (7). Read in this context, Lynch’s decision to enlist seems cavalier, as if she has confused military service with the grand tour. In her own words, however, Lynch’s reasoning sounds more balanced. Although she mentions a desire to travel, she situates that at the end of a list of reasons for her enlistment: “I felt proud. I knew I was doing something important for my country. I’d signed up after high school, in July 2001, so I could pay for college and see the world” (Lynch). Lynch’s brother also enlisted at the same time, further underscoring Bragg’s assertion that her decision was not solely based on gender and was influenced by economics. Still, Bragg’s repeated references to Lynch’s “options” underscores his incredulity: he seems unable to understand why a woman would join the military when she could marry instead.

This approach permeates Bragg’s view of all military women, not just Lynch. When describing her best friend, Lori Piestewa (who dies in the ambush that wounds Lynch), Bragg summarizes her background succinctly: “[t]he army was what she had instead of a man” (50). Piestewa’s enlistment makes sense to Bragg, because he believes her options were limited. His narrative’s insistence on polarizing a woman’s life choices and reducing them to the military or

marriage reveals both his limited understanding of contemporary women and the hierarchy with which he organizes that understanding: in his view, marriage remains the appropriate place for women, and shunning it in exchange for military service is aberrational. Because of its subject's prominence, Bragg's narrative has permeated American society, giving further traction to his bifurcated view of contemporary femininity and the belief that women are victims of war, not participants in it.

Lynch remains one of the most well-known soldiers of the current wars, but her experience is not necessarily representative of contemporary military women. In her memoir *Love My Rifle More than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army*, Kayla Williams states this succinctly when explaining the need for her work, which she views as the only text to reflect accurately the experience of women in combat: "Don't count Jessica Lynch. Her story meant nothing to us. The same goes for Lynndie England.⁴⁸ I'm not either of them, and neither are any of the real women I know in the service" (15). Although she avoids the stereotypical views presented by authors such as Bragg, Williams's depiction of the military still reflects a gendered approach, one that seems to be the direct result of military practices. Williams avoids lumping women into neat stereotypical categories, and she offers a rare complexity, demonstrating that military women are diverse and varied. However, what is interesting about her text is that while she understands the complexities of military women, she also acknowledges the extent to which those complexities are subsumed by essentialized representations. She explains the system through which military women are evaluated, noting, "Slut. The only other choice is bitch. If you're a woman and a soldier, those are the choices you get" (13). Thus, Williams resists characterizations such as Bragg's, which dictate that women must be vulnerable victims of war,

⁴⁸ England, called "the face of the atrocities at Abu Ghraib" was sentenced to three years in prison for her role in the events there (Tara McKelvey, "A Soldier's Tale" *Marie Claire* 19 May 2009).

but she acknowledges the existence of other representational systems that essentialize military women.

Williams acknowledges the extent to which military women are viewed as hyper-sexualized, and she addresses the complex emotions this produces in them. On one hand, she notes, a female soldier must “toughen herself up” to prepare for her immersion in the “sea of nerdy, hyped-up guys who...are thinking about getting laid” (13). She must simultaneously, however, acknowledge the attention being accorded to her: “[t]heir eyes, their hunger: yes, they’re shaming—but they also make you special” (14). Thus, women are set apart as unique even while being berated for their separateness. It is significant that the categories that define military women—slut and bitch—classify those women based on their relationships to men. Williams locates the origins of these categories in “an old joke” commonly exchanged among military personnel: “What’s the difference between a bitch and a slut? A slut will fuck anyone, a bitch will fuck anyone but you” (13). Thus, military women are evaluated based on their sexual availability to their male coworkers. Williams’s narrative proves valuable because she does not endorse this dichotomy. Rather, she acknowledges the extent to which it defines even those women who discount its relevance. Her text thus serves as an index of the pervasive nature of gendered representations of war and its participants, and of one particular inflection those representations follow in the literature of the Iraq War.

A Last Word from *Last One In*

Although the war in Iraq has concluded and the war in Afghanistan has a timetable for completion, the literature of these wars is still emerging. If the literature of the Vietnam War is any indication, it is likely that the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars canon will not be complete for decades. Thus, any survey of the field at this juncture is by nature preliminary, and will need to

be tested against later works. However, it is interesting to note several trends in this literature. The literature remains focused primarily on the war in Iraq, and it largely ignores the war in Afghanistan. It is also interesting to note the relative absence of male authors and the prominence of those men who choose to write about this subject. Foer and DeLillo are acclaimed novelists. Bragg, despite his checkered reputation, has earned significant recognition as a journalist, as did Malcolm Macpherson, the author of *Hocus Potus*.⁴⁹ It remains to be seen if this trend becomes a bona fide characteristic of this literature, but the early literature of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars demonstrates a preoccupation with the actions of women. Even though masculinity is its ultimate subject, it approaches that through evaluating the effects women in various facets of society have on it.

I have chosen to conclude with Nicholas Kulish's novel *Last One In* because although it is a contemporary novel, published in 2007, it offers a somewhat dated illustration of this trend, and in doing so, suggests a return to earlier models of war narrative in which males go unwillingly to war, where they undergo a transformation into men. The novel follows Jimmy Stephens, a celebrity gossip columnist for the New York *Daily Herald*. Stephens appears to be perpetually scattered: he started out on the crime beat but vomited on his first murder scene, and as the novel opens, he has misconstrued some details in a story, thus embroiling the paper in a lawsuit for slander. He salvages his job only because the paper's war correspondent, James Stephens, is hit by a bus just as he is about to depart for Kuwait, which will serve as his base as he covers the Iraq War. The Pentagon will not allow substitute reporters, so the paper passes Jimmy off as James and ships its gossip columnist off to cover combat. In the process, he sheds

⁴⁹ The novel follows a plural and unorthodox protagonist—the international mélange of civilians, journalists, and military personnel who seek find evidence in support of the American president's assertion that WMDs exist in Iraq. Macpherson's text decenters the traditional war novel by situating the drama not in the event of combat but in the struggle to justify it.

his stereotypically feminine love for celebrity culture and gossip and develops into what his peers consider a fully-fledged man.

Before he even departs, Stephens learns to associate his upcoming experience with masculinity. His editor promises, “No one gets laid like a war correspondent” (14). Military personnel in country consistently use gendered and sexualized schematics to describe the combatants, their enemies, and combat maneuvers. When he arrives in Baghdad, Jimmy notices that “[t]he epic painting of Saddam with a rifle raised in the air above him featured breasts and panties” (205). In contrast to this feminization of the enemy, the American combatants and their cohort are masculinized by war. As one of the specialists tells Jimmy before his first ride-along, “If you come back, you will be certified as having testicles the size of bowling balls” (49-50). As in the traditional war novel, *Last One In* argues that war makes men.

The novel also represents war as a sexualized experience. When Jimmy fails to understand the logistics of the battle plan, a young Marine describes it to him, illustrating his description with images of female anatomy. On his map, Baghdad is the woman’s crotch, and the American forces “breaking through” and planning to “push through and penetrate the final defenses around Baghdad” are represented as a phallus (68-9). Such imagery is not new to the genre of war narratives; in fact, this specific scene evokes the conclusion of Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead*, in which a Dalleson, newly promoted to Major, eagerly envisions a revolutionary way to teach new recruits cartography: by mapping the coordinates of Betty Grable’s pin-up poster (721). Indeed, this evocation is precisely my point: Kulish’s novel takes a contemporary setting, but its depiction of war in sexualized terms situates it as the generic descendent of much earlier texts such as Mailer’s.

This is not to suggest that Kulish's novel fails to reflect any female presence in its wartime setting. When Jimmy first meets the Marines with whom he will embed, they tell him they were hoping he would be a female reporter (61). And his time in country is flanked by Becky Hardin, the paper's embedded photographer, who acclimates him to the situation and eventually arranges—nearly forces—him to take a short R & R. Despite her presence, however, the novel is primarily concerned with the formation of masculinity. At its start, Jimmy is a sushi- and sorbet-eating gossip columnist, aligned with the fussy and the feminine. The Marines he covers refer to him as a “chick” (83). By the novel's conclusion, those Marines have come to admire him as their equal. He has transformed from a celebrity reporter gleaning his current events from the E! television network into a journalist able to clarify and comment on complex international political relations. He has assimilated into the masculine ideal. He has seen war, and become a man. Kulish's novel thus reiterates a central myth of war narratives—the belief that war instills masculinity. Its decision to do so without any treatment of female military personnel reinforces its implicit argument that war remains the province of men, and in concert with the other novels of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, it suggests that women, who threaten war and its male warriors, belong elsewhere. Thus, the literature of this era remains connected to that of much earlier periods through the ideological assertion that women remain outliers to the war experience.

Chapter 6—Conclusion: The Contemporary American Military and the Politics of Sexuality

In this project, my research has focused primarily on traditional, heteronormative inflections of gender identity. This focus arises as a result of the literature, which largely excludes any consideration of homosexual characters. These texts, then, advance their own form of the contemporary American “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, which prohibited openly gay personnel from serving in the military, and which was repealed after each of the texts discussed here was published.⁵⁰ Given that as of September, 2011, this policy is no longer in force, it seems likely that American military narratives will begin to explore these changes, and just as the military itself changes its perspective on gender, the literature of the military will undergo a related evolution.

However, this is not to suggest that war narratives have always ignored these issues. Indeed, while homosexuality is largely absent from the narratives studied here, earlier texts proved more willing to address the intersection of homosexuality and military service. Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead* includes a subplot surrounding the latent homosexuality of General Cummings, whose relationship with Hearn, a subordinate includes sublimated desire and culminates in Cummings’s decision to transfer Hearn. Lest readers misunderstand Cummings’s unfulfilled desire, Mailer devotes an entire “Time Machine” section to tracing Cummings’s sexual identity, from his father’s anger at his affection for sewing and his insistence that Cummings “act like a man from now on” (405) to his sexless marriage and his attraction to his brothers in arms. While the text does not comment overtly on Cumming’s sexuality, it does present him as a foil to Hearn, not only in their sexual preferences, but also in their approach to the military. Cummings remains cold and calculating, and he embraces the military hierarchy

⁵⁰ Although this policy was enacted in 1993, and therefore after the first Gulf War, the sentiments underlying it had been present for some time and unofficially governed both military service and representations of it.

Hearn resists. Hearn's idealism dictates that he must treat all people with respect and consideration, and he initially struggles to understand and operate within the hierarchical structure that accords him officer's privileges. When Hearn's relationship with Cummings finally ruptures, it is because of Hearn's insubordinate rebellion against the whims of such privileges. Cummings secures the upper hand by banishing Hearn to combat, where he learns his idealism remains no match for weaponry, and he dies after an unsuccessful attempt at leadership. Mailer's text thus argues implicitly that while Cummings remains a cold and calculating official, he proves the superior military official.

Another World War Two novel, James Jones's *From Here to Eternity*, also investigates the relationship between sexuality and military service. As published, the novel considers a range of sexual practices, and its two primary subplots follow a military wife's adulterous relationship with one of her husband's colleagues and the relationship between a private and the local prostitute he comes to love. It also traces the heterosexual military personnel engaging in homosexual acts during their military service, either because of a lack of heterosexual opportunities or due to economic considerations. However, recent evidence has shown that Jones's manuscript was heavily edited by publishers, and its treatment of homosexual conduct was greatly reduced. Jones's daughter, who now serves with her brother as the executors of their father's literary estate, released this information in 2009, specifically citing the "don't ask, don't tell" debate as a catalyst for her disclosure (Flood). Kaylie Jones writes,

The soldiers in Hawaii were dead broke, barely one step up from homeless.... One character, Maggio makes extra bucks by hanging out with older, rich gay men who live in Honolulu, who pay good money for his company. The original manuscript goes into great detail about what kind of sexual favors soldiers like Maggio are willing to provide.... Maggio sees nothing wrong with this at all, since it is a means to an end – a way to make quick money so he can go back and hang out with the whores. Maggio never questions his own sexuality.... One soldier, Bloom, realizes he enjoys sex with men, and is so terrified and ashamed of being gay and of being called on it, that he commits suicide. The

sin and the shame, it seems, are not associated with the act itself or even in getting paid for it, but in whether or not a soldier enjoys it. My father saw the total hypocrisy and ridiculousness of this and Bloom's death is portrayed as a tragedy, absurd and unnecessary.

Jones writes that her father's experiences in the military largely influenced his depiction, and that he would be startled to find that the relationship between homosexuality and military service remained at the center of widespread and prolonged public debate.

Of course, this is interesting for the reasons Jones cites, but it is also compelling because her father's text (and his subsequent novel *The Thin Red Line*) remain some of the last prominent novels that address overtly homosexual acts and military service. Indeed, texts from the Vietnam era forward rarely consider these issues, as if they, too, had embraced a policy of willful omission. I suspect that the recent repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell will create a climate in which war narratives will once again represent more comprehensively the full spectrum of sexual identities available to their characters. The extent to which these narrative possibilities are embraced, and the manner in which they are received, will likely form the next chapter of this project. For now, however, the relative silence on such issues remains crucial to the literary representation of contemporary American warfare and the individuals who wage it. The unambiguous treatment of gender resembles the manner in which warfare itself is often approached: things are presented as crisply delineated rather than blurry; black and white rather than gray; friend or foe rather than something in between. By eliding the full experience of military personnel, the narratives representing that experience evoke their own level of silence. Although they are the most complete representations we have about contemporary military life, there is much they still do not tell.

REFERENCES

- Amis, Martin. *The Second Plane: September 11: Terror and Boredom*. New York & Toronto: Knopf, 2008.
- Bartimus, Tad, et al. *War Torn: Stories of War from the Women Reporters Who Covered Vietnam*. New York: Random House, 2002.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. Trans. Paul Patton. Indianapolis & Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995.
- Baym, Nina. *Feminism and American Literary History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992.
- , et al. *The Norton Anthology of American Literature Shorter Seventh Edition* ed. Vol. 2. New York: Norton, 2008.
- Beidler, Philip D. *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1982.
- Bellah, Robert. "Seventy-Five Years." *Dissent from the Homeland: Essays after September 11*. Ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Frank Lentricchia. Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003. 11-24.
- Blinn, James W. *The Aardvark Is Ready for War*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1997.
- Bonn, Maria S. "New Battles in Cultural Signification in Contemporary American Narrative." *The United States and Viet Nam from War to Peace: Papers from an Interdisciplinary Conference on Reconciliation*. Ed. Robert M. Slabey. Jefferson and London: McFarland & Co., 1996. 208-13.
- Bowden, Lisa, and Shannon Cain, eds. *Powder: Writing by Women in the Ranks, from Vietnam to Iraq*. Tucson: Kore Press, 2008.
- Bowie, Thomas G. "Tim O'Brien's Narrative Journey." *The United States and Viet Nam from War to Peace: Papers from an Interdisciplinary Conference on Reconciliation*. Ed. Robert M. Slabey. Jefferson and London: McFarland & Co, 1996. 184-97.
- Bragg, Rick. *I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story*. New York: Knopf, 2003.
- Campbell, James. "Coming Home: Difference and Reconciliation in Narratives of Return to 'the World'." *The United States and Viet Nam from War to Peace: Papers from an Interdisciplinary Conference on Reconciliation*. Ed. Robert M. Slabey. Jefferson and London: McFarland & Co., 1996. 198-207.
- Cornum, Rhonda, as told to Peter Copeland. *She Went to War: The Rhonda Cornum Story*. Novato: Presidio Press, 1992.

- Cox, Joseph T. "American War Myths and Vietnam Veteran Narratives." *The United States and Viet Nam from War to Peace: Papers from an Interdisciplinary Conference on Reconciliation*. Ed. Robert M. Slabey. Jefferson and London: McFarland & Co., 1996. 177-83.
- Crane, Stephen. "Red Badge of Courage." *The Red Badge of Courage, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, and Other Selected Writings*. Ed. Phyllis Frus & Stanley Corkin. New Riverside Editions. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- DeLillo, Don. *Falling Man*. New York: Scribner, 2007.
- DeMille, Nelson. *Up Country*. New York: Time Warner, 2002.
- Dickstein, Morris. "War and the Novel" From World War II to Vietnam." *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction 1945-1970*. Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 2002. 21-52.
- Duncan, Patrick Sheane. *Courage under Fire*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1996.
- Dunnaway, Jen. "Approaching a Truer Form of Truth: The Appropriation of the Oral Narrative Form in Vietnam War Literature." *Soldier Talk: The Vietnam War in Oral Narrative*. Ed. Paul Budra and Michael Zetlin. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2004. 1-25.
- Emerson, Gloria. *Winners and Losers: Battles, Retreats, Gains, Losses and Ruins from a Long War*. New York: Random House, 1976.
- Faludi, Susan. *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007.
- Fell, Doris Elaine. *Betrayal in Paris*. West Monroe: Howard, 2003.
- Flood, Alison. "Censored gay sex scenes in From Here to Eternity revealed." *The Guardian* 13 Nov. 2009. Web. 15 Nov. 2010.
- Gilchrist, Ellen. *A Dangerous Age*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin, 2008.
- Gitter, Elisabeth G. "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination." *PMLA* 99.5 (1984): 936-54.
- Hathaway, William. *Summer Snow*. St. Alberta: Avatar, 2005.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell to Arms*. New York: Scribner Paperback, 1995.
- Hemphill, Robert. *Platoon*. New York: St Martin's Paperbacks, 1998.

- Henley, Patricia. *In the River Sweet*. New York: Pantheon, 2002.
- Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*. New York: Vintage International, 1991.
- Herzog, Tobey C. *Vietnam War Stories: Innocence Lost*. London & New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Hofmann, Bettina. *Ahead of Survival: American Women Writers Narrate the Vietnam War*. European University Studies: Series XIV Anglo Saxon Language and Literature. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996.
- . "On the Battlefield and Home Front: American Women Writing Their Lives on the Vietnam War." *Arms and the Self: War, the Military, and Autobiographical Writing*. Ed. Alex Vernon. Kent and London: The Kent State UP, 2005. 202-17.
- Holm, Jeanne. *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution*. Revised ed. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1992.
- Huebner, Andrew. *We Pierce*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.
- Jason, Philip K. *Acts and Shadows: The Vietnam War in American Literary Culture*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.
- Jeffords, Susan. *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*. Theories of Contemporary Culture. Ed. Kathleen Woodward. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989.
- Jones, James. *From Here to Eternity*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951.
- Jones, Kaylie. "Was a WWII Classic Too Gay?" *The Daily Beast* 10 Nov. 2009. Web. 1 Dec. 2010.
- Junger, Sebastian. "The Vietnam Wars: 'Matterhorn.'" *New York Times* 1 April 2010. Web. 1 Oct. 2010.
- Kalfus, Ken. *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006.
- Kingsbury, Karen. *Ever After*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
- Kinney, Katherine. "Humping the Boonies: Women and the Memory of War." *Friendly Fire: American Images of the Vietnam War*. Ed. Katherine Kinney. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. 143-86.
- Kovic, Ron. *Born on the Fourth of July*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1976.
- Kulish, Ken. *Last One In*. New York: HarperPerennial, 2007.

- Lawson, Jacqueline E. "She's a Pretty Woman...For a Gook." *Fourteen Landing Zones: Approaches to Vietnam War Literature*. Ed. Philip K. Jason. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1991. 15-37.
- Lowney, John. "'Homesick for Those Memories': The Gendering of Historical Memory in Women's Narratives of the Vietnam War." *Burning Down the House: Recycling Domesticity*. Ed. Rosemary Marangoly George. Boulder: Westview Press, 1998. 257-78.
- Lynch, Jessica. "I'm Jessica Lynch and Here's My Real Story." *Glamour*. As told to Abigail Pesta. Web. 1 July 2010.
- Mailer, Norman. *The Naked and the Dead*. New York: Rinehart & Company, Inc., 1948.
- Malin, Brenton J. *American Masculinity under Clinton: Popular Media and the Nineties "Crisis of Masculinity"*. Popular Culture: Everyday Life. Ed. Toby Miller. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
- Marlantes, Karl. *Matterhorn: A Novel of the Vietnam War*. Berkeley & New York: El Leon Literary Arts & Atlantic Monthly Press, 2010.
- Maslin, Janet. "Learning About War Through a Camera Lens." *New York Times* 28 Mar. 2020. Web. 1 Oct. 2010.
- Mason, Bobbie Ann. *In Country*. New York: Perennial Library, 1993.
- McGrath, Charles. "Norman Mailer, Towering Writer with Matching Ego, Dies at 84." *The New York Times*. 10 Nov. 2007. Web. 10 Oct. 2009.
- McKelvey, Tara, ed. *One of the Guys: Women as Aggressors and Torturers*. Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007.
- Melling, Philip H. *Vietnam in American Literature*. Twayne's Literature and Society Series. Ed. Leo Marx. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990.
- Michner, James. *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*. New York: Fawcett Crest, 1953.
- Miller, Laura. "'Jarhead' By Anthony Swofford." *Salon.com* 10 March 2003. Web. 30 Nov. 2010.
- Mitchell, Margaret. *Gone with the Wind*. New York: Avon, 1973.
- Moore, Robin. *The Green Berets*. New York: Avon, 1966.
- Norris, Christopher. *Uncritical Theory: Postmodernism, Intellectuals and the Gulf War*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1992.

- Nunez, Sigrid. *For Rouenna*. New York: Picador, 2001.
- O'Brien, Tim. *If I Die in a Combat Zone Box Me up and Ship Me Home*. New York: Broadway Books, 1999.
- . *The Things They Carried*. New York: Penguin, 1990.
- O'Gorman, Farrell. *Awaiting Orders*. Salem: Idylls Press, 2006.
- Owen, A. Susan, Sarah R. Stein, and Leah R. Vande Berg. *Bad Girls: Cultural Politics and Media Representations of Transgressive Women*. *Frontiers in Political Communication*. Ed. Lynda Lee Kaid and Bruce Gronbeck. Vol. 6. New York: Peter Lang, 2007.
- Peebles, Stacey. "Lines of Sight: Watching War in *Jarhead* and *My War: Killing Time in Iraq*." *PMLA* 124.5 (October 2009): 1662-77.
- People Entertainment Almanac. Web. 7 Oct. 09.
- "Persian Gulf War: History and Collections." Women in Military Service for America Foundation. Web. 30 Nov. 2010.
- Phillips, Jayne Anne. *Machine Dreams*. New York: E. P. Dutton/Seymour Lawrence, 1984.
- Schaeffer, Susan Fromberg. *Buffalo Afternoon*. New York: Knopf, 1989.
- Sheldon, Sayre P. *Her War Story: Twentieth-Century Women Write About the War*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1999.
- Soli, Tatjana. *The Lotus Eaters*. New York: St. Martin's, 2010.
- Stallworthy, John, ed. *Wilfred Owen: The Complete Poems and Fragments*. Vol. I: The poems. New York: Norton, 1984.
- Steel, Danielle. *Message from Nam*. New York: Delacorte, 1990.
- Stewart, Matthew C. "Realism, Verisimilitude, and the Depiction of Vietnam Veterans in *In Country*." *Fourteen Landing Zones: Approaches to Vietnam War Literature*. Ed. Philip K. Jason. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1991. 166-79.
- Swofford, Anthony. *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles*. New York: Scribner, 2003.
- Trumpener, Katie. *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997.
- Trussoni, Danielle. *Falling Through the Earth*. New York: Henry Holt, 2006.

- . "The Vietnam Wars: 'The Lotus Eaters.'" *New York Times* 1 April 2010.
Web. 1 Oct. 2010.
- Tsetsi, Kristen. *Homefront*. Rochester: Penxhere Press, 2007.
- Van Devanter, Lynda and Furey, Joan A., eds. *Visions of War, Dreams of Peace*. New York: Warner Books, 1991.
- Vanover, Nicholas A. "Necessary Metaphors: Psychological Construction as Heroic Process in the Literature of the Vietnam War." *The Image of the Hero in Literature, Media, and Society: Selected Papers 2004 Conference, Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery*. Ed. Will Wright and Steven Kaplan. Colorado Springs The Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, 2004. 417-20.
- "Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation." *Vietnam Women's Memorial Foundation*. 2009.
Web. 29 Nov. 2009.
- White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1973.
- Willard, Tom. *Sword of Valor*. New York: Tom Doherty Associated, 2003.
- Williams, Kayla. *Love My Rifle More Than You: Young and Female in the U.S. Army*. New York: Norton, 2005.
- Wittman, Sandra M. *Writing About Vietnam: A Bibliography of the Vietnam Conflict*. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co, 1989.
- Wright, Geoffrey A. "The Desert of Experience: *Jarhead* and the Geography of the Persian Gulf War." *PMLA* 124.5 (October 2009): 1677-89.