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## **Manipulating Masculinity War and Gender in Modern British and American Literature**

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## Introduction

It was a bloody century. Nine million soldiers died in World War I, seventeen million in World War II. To take just one of the innumerable, smaller wars of the twentieth century, America's war in Vietnam left 58,000 Americans and three million Vietnamese dead, including two million civilians (Turner 8). In the world wars, some sixty million civilians died (Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale* xii). The mind shuts down. In fact, opposing sides have a remarkable capacity not to see war as death and suffering, blocking that view before, during, and after hostilities with a more palatable vision of noble and always defensive manliness.

Many ordinary citizens all over Europe, Allied and Central Powers alike, actually welcomed World War I (Eksteins 174; Stromberg 198). In England, people expected the war to unify a fragmented population, at a time when street demonstrations over three issues had been exposing profound divisions. In these protests, the Irish were contesting English colonization, workers were threatening a general strike, and women were agitating for the vote and a different view of gender (Macaulay 6). Germans too hoped to stitch over their own domestic schisms by making the war a common cause.<sup>1</sup> On the whole, both sides seemed to prefer waging real battles to facing these "internal wars," as the newspapers had dubbed them (Hynes, *War Imagined* 7). The antagonists found it more comforting to rally against a foreign power than to address questioners at home, easier to confront the guns than to think and change.

The first two protests in England, concerning colonies and incomes, point to some of the underlying causes of twentieth-century wars. Yet if such prizes lure governments and businesses, why do citizens agree to war, when they have small prospect of making much money and a clear prospect of losing everything most valuable: life, limb, and loved ones? For one thing, people might hesitate to object when they face jail time for evading the draft, the firing squad for deserting, and police action for protesting.<sup>2</sup> Despite these Repressive

State Apparatuses (in Louis Althusser's term), some Britons and Americans did oppose World Wars I and II.<sup>3</sup> America's war in Vietnam provoked large demonstrations, by protesters of all ages and backgrounds, who poured into the streets a half-million or more at a time (Franklin 70–75; Moser 3; Dickerson). Nevertheless, even for the Vietnam War, more Americans enlisted than were drafted (Baritz 284).<sup>4</sup> Why were millions in all three wars so ready to fight?

*Manipulating Masculinity* addresses not the causes of World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War but the consent to them. The theorist Antonio Gramsci explains "consent" as a "collective pressure," exerted though "an evolution of customs, ways of thinking and acting, morality," in such a way as to make "necessity and coercion" seem like "freedom" (242). Althusser similarly suggests that societies control people not only through Repressive but also through Ideological State Apparatuses (such as media, schools, religions); he defines ideology as the "imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (143, 162). One major clue to consent to modern war can be found in the third of the British street protests conveniently hushed up by World War I: the women's movement, which was jostling contemporary ideologies of gender. While changing views of women may appear tangential to war, the polarization of gender (the construction of masculine and feminine as if they have little in common), along with the positioning of women as lesser, powerfully enabled the wars of the twentieth century. My thesis is that societies which arbitrarily label a number of purely human traits "feminine" possess a tactic useful to war-making, for men are bound to detect some of these human traits in themselves—and then worry that they have strayed into a feminine, inferior realm. Placed in a constantly renewed insecurity about their status, men must scramble to amass "proofs" of masculinity. If a society also convinces its citizens that men love to fight and women hate to fight (or cannot fight), then that society can manipulate men to go to war, simply to verify that they are not women.

But would a man go to war just to prove a point in a gender debate? Surely soldiers wish to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. However, servicemen from World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War seldom mention any grand cause for which they are supposedly fighting (Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale* 11). Even if some idealistic recruits resolve to make the world better, governments on both sides of a war can often assuage the need to fight on the side of "right" with a tag of "patriotism" that has little to do with a country's real aims. Even indisputably good causes, such as stopping Nazi extermination of Jews, may be recognized only in retrospect. Apparently, only five percent of

American GIs during World War II knew anything about fascism (Adams, *Best War* 88), and governments were slow to respond to the persecution of the Jews (Shalom 113–17). As Samuel Hynes looks over the memoirs and letters from the wars of the twentieth century, he finds that "Why is not a soldier's question" (*Soldiers' Tale* 11).

Instead of asking about bigger purposes, men at the time of their wars predominantly pursue smaller, more personal aims. A man who seeks out or accepts a soldier's life may lack employment or feel bored in a tedious job. He may flee parents, escape a soured domestic relationship, or tire of a conventional life. If frustrated and angry enough at the limitations of his present society, he may dream an apocalyptic overthrow of everything—including his own street; at the turn of the century, popular future-war stories treated England to the savory spectacle of the familiar swept away (Keep 8). And, as Virginia Woolf points out, if stifling conditions for women persist, a soldier's sisters may similarly welcome a cataclysm, as they too savagely endorse "our splendid Empire, our splendid-war" (39).

According to Hynes, dullness plus lack of economic opportunity sent soldiers searching for adventure in World Wars I and II and the Vietnam War. However, instead of probing the economic and social factors that keep work at home so unfulfilling, Hynes indulgently backs the quest for excitement through wars. No doubt many veterans fondly look back on a cherished chance to travel or establish their closest friendships. Nevertheless, Hynes has to admit that beyond adventure and glory, "the strongest and commonest motive for enlisting," in all the wars of the twentieth century, is simply, "I hated being thought a funk" (qtd. in *Soldiers' Tale* 49). Caught up in the tide of what everybody is doing, a man doesn't want to be thought a coward. But why is that particular reputation so central? Although Hynes does not say so, the subtext for the label "funk" or "coward" is the socially induced, gendered assumption about who is a "sissy" and who is not.

A surprising number of British and American men in the twentieth century went to war to prove they were not "sissies," that is, to assert they were not "sisters," as the etymological root of the taunt suggests. Looking back at World War I in her memoir *Testament of Youth* (1933), Vera Brittain recalls that early in the mobilization, her fiancé, Roland, who "neither hated the Germans nor loved the Belgians," fretted because "effeminate" Englishmen, whom he "despised," had already gone to France (129, 126). Some of these men, Roland noticed, were even starting to return with wounds (that automatic badge of courage), whereas he had yet to embark. Brittain is astounded to have to conclude that Roland hurried from Oxford

University to the trenches not for specific community causes but to pass a manliness test of "heroism in the abstract" (129).

The British middle and upper classes at Roland's Oxford did not monopolize this need to project a manly image. The working-class soldier Weeper Smart in Frederic Manning's novel *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929) also felt peer pressure pushing him to sign up: "When a [I] saw all them as didn' [sic] know any better'n we did joinin' up, an' a went walkin' out wi' me girl on Sundays, as usual, a just felt ashamed . . . . But a tell thee, now, that if a were once out o' these togs an' in civvies again, a wouldn't mind all the shame in the world" (150–51). It wasn't his girl's presence in private—kissing behind the barn, say—that decided Weeper to enlist, but rather walking with his girl in public. Something about being seen by other men, vis-à-vis women, determined his military service. However, now that he experiences war for himself, he is learning not to care if others consider him manly or not.

World War II veterans also recall motives centered on a desire to verify masculinity. An infantry rifleman tells interviewer Studs Terkel, "I was going to gain my manhood then. I would forever be liberated from the sense of inferiority that I wasn't rugged. I would prove that I had the guts and the manhood to stand up to these things" (37). Similarly, Paul Fussell, trained as an officer, looks back on his company plodding through Alsace in 1944: "Some few may have been following the higher morality and offering their lives and limbs for the Allied cause and the Four Freedoms, but 90 percent of us were engaged in something much less romantic and heroic. We were maintaining our self-respect, protecting our manly image from the contempt of our fellows" (*Doing Battle* 124). The ringing rhetoric of Freedom from "want and fear" or Freedom for "speech and religion" (Adams, *Best War* 136) lost out to an inner clamor to meet an elusive standard of masculinity.

By the time of America's war in Vietnam, the cause of manliness was still drowning out all other motives. A high school teacher advised John Ketwig to enlist because the war would "make you a man . . . get you out from under mommas's apron" (18). African American Stephen Howard remembers that his mother, drilled in racial and gender stereotypes, lectured him "to work hard to strive to be as good as" whites; indoctrinated that war would produce that transformation, she greeted her son's draft notice with satisfaction: "You'll be back a man" (W. Terry 123). However, when Howard's deeds do match his white companions', he can only grieve: "And the lie was you ain't have no business bein' there in the first place . . . . And you don't fight a

civilized war. It's nothing civilized about—about war" (W. Terry 133). Similarly altered, paratrooper Gene Woodley performed whatever it took to achieve "combat-type manhood," but he realizes that the "man" in him was nowhere in sight: "Before I reached my nineteenth birthday, I was a animal" (W. Terry 243, 251).

To study connections between gender expectations and war, I follow Michel Foucault in focusing on "discursive events": scrutinizing what actually gets said, why only certain utterances can occur at given times and places, and, especially, what experiences those discursive events create (*Archaeology* 27–28). Foucault treats discourses not as "signs" referring to already existing "contents," but as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (*Archaeology* 49). Applied to writings on war, this focus exposes that when speakers do occasionally stray into vocabulary considered feminine, other words considered ultramasculine surge up on the same page, as if to neutralize the transgressive womanliness. An investigator must then question to what degree these language games dictate and require the masculine experiences that the discourse claims to discover already formed by biology.

Most of my examples of war discourse derive from novels, stories, poems, and plays about World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War (with some references to the Korean War), written either at the time of hostilities or long afterward.<sup>5</sup> I am not claiming that literary works about war, even those produced by veterans, can uncover how all soldiers felt but only how consent or resistance is imagined. However, when I compare literature to memoirs, letters, newspapers, and essays (such as Freud's), I take as axiomatic that this "nonfiction" also participates in elaborating and perpetuating artificial social constructs. As the practitioners of "new cultural history" contend, "systems of representation bear directly on historical change by establishing habits of thought crucial to rationalizing particular actions. In this way, culture and social practices are inextricably linked" (Gullace, "Blood" 10). To the extent that literature is read (and surely *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *Catch-22*, and *The Things They Carried*, for example, have attracted millions of readers), literature ferries many socially assumed connections between gender definitions and war.

In more specific terms, I highlight imaginative literature for several reasons. First, the emotion generated draws readers' attention to social problems and renders these problems real and urgent. Raymond Williams makes this point in an example from nineteenth-century Britain. Whereas early Victorian ideology was blaming the effects of poverty, debt, and illegitimacy on personal failure, novels by Charles



Dickens and Emily Brontë shifted the view of private catastrophe to a "general condition," which may befall anyone, not just "deviants" (*Marxism and Literature* 134). Only later did an explicit, alternative ideology develop, blaming economic systems rather than personal deficiency; yet the new formulation about social causes would not have been possible, Williams implies, without the novelists' prior promotion of emotional involvement, which helped dislodge the explanation for suffering away from personal flaws.

The force of fictional emotion will be familiar to anyone who has ever winced through Wilfred Owen's controlled but seething poems about World War I, endured Alexander Baron's alternately tender and despairing World War II novel *From the City, From the Plough*, or stood aghast, horrified and pitying, at the revelations in Emily Mann's implacable Vietnam play *Still Life*. For those who engage such literature, the impetus to question why these wars were fought and how they may have been prevented is, I believe, much greater than for those noncombatants aware of war either through popular media (TV, movies, pulp novels, children's toys, video games, or news bites without analysis) or through the scholarly offerings under military history, which overwhelmingly dwell on tactics and immediate causes, rather than on effects on people and long-term, underlying social causes of wars. Literature may also enable combatants to distance themselves from a need to justify their wars, allowing veterans to assess larger causes, since the fictions typically provide a cushioning of sympathy for individual soldiers.

A further reason for highlighting literature among possible discourses on war is that imaginative works expose the contradictions in ideologies particularly well. Perhaps because novelists or playwrights or poets do not need to keep to a thesis or set out consistent arguments, these authors can (sometimes consciously, often inadvertently) usefully mirror and crack open the inconsistencies in social constructions of gender and in war rationales. The questions I pose for the discourses of war follow Foucault's prompting to look for the "rules of [discursive] formation," including "correlations," "functionings," and "transformations" (*Archaeology* 38). Does calling a man a "sissy" insult him more in some decades than in others? Does the content of womanliness remain constant or change? What factors influence any changes? How do nations forge links between gender fears and other motivations driving men to war?

The taunt of womanliness to goad a man to war is not, of course, new. Even the god Krishna, in the ancient Hindu classic *The Bhagavad Gita*, reminds the reluctant warrior Arjuna that if he fails to

fight, people will dishonor him for "unmanliness" and "cowardice" (Purohit 15, 18). Ironically, Krishna's needling contradicts some of the god's other arguments, for he has already told Arjuna that he can fight only if he ignores the personal "fruit" of the action (Purohit 21). This prohibited personal fruit may offer either the lure of reputation and possessions, or the threat of danger and trouble. Such private ego involvements must not determine a war, Krishna warns, only beneficial effects (which he assumes but nowhere specifies) for the larger community. However, when Krishna then stoops to conjure up possible disgrace, he contradictorily does feed Arjuna's ego, encouraging him to worry about glory or disrepute. Could a little snickering rattle a soul at peace with itself?

Arjuna knuckles under and fights. Mainly, he succumbs to Krishna's insistence on caste duty and the god's reassurance that the souls of the enemy (whose bodies Arjuna pities) will survive to reincarnate in other bodies. Nevertheless, Krishna's jibe about unmanliness at least reinforces his other arguments in favor of war. Does the fact that this name-calling continues to prod men, whether Arjuna or Vera Brittain's fiancé, mean that we're dealing with something universal? Not at all.

For one thing, the taunt "womanly" only works to send men to war in cultures that strongly polarize the sexes and count women as lesser. This hierarchy of men over women does organize gender formations (in different ways and to varying degrees) in third-century India, 1914 Britain, and America in the years of the Vietnam War. Without such polarization, a man called "sissy" might rejoice, "Oh, do you think so? I've been trying to live up to the example of that great sister of mine. Thank you!" Furthermore, a number of factors converged by the end of the nineteenth century to make the label "sissy" not just peripheral but central as a manipulator to war, and these factors stayed active throughout the twentieth century. The risk of perceived unmanliness is likely to compel modern European and American men even more than Arjuna because of (1) the inheritance from nineteenth-century imperialism, (2) the particular way sexologists defined homosexuality as effeminacy, and (3) backlashes against the women's movement and its renewals. These three forces render the appeal to manliness in the twentieth century both specific and formidable.

In Europe and America, the nineteenth century bolstered the link of manhood to bellicosity (a connection learned in part from the Greek and Roman classics), because it was useful to empires. In *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857), long popular in England, Thomas Hughes circulates the message of his imperial culture by urging young readers, "what would life be without fighting, I should like to know? From the

cradle to the grave, fighting, rightly understood, is the business, the real, highest, honestest business of every son of man" (280). Sports prepare the boys for their inevitable, belligerent future. On a personal level, competitiveness sinks in so deeply because it has been linked to proof of manliness, more than acquisitiveness or even righteousness: "I am as sorry as any man to see folk fighting the wrong people and the wrong things, but I'd a deal sooner see them doing that, than that they should have no fight in them" (Hughes 281).

In America, the same goals of national conquest in an imperial era pushed boys to fight and girls to wait. Although nominally bestowing on women the high charge of guiding men toward spirituality, this ideology, in reality, devalued girls. In one of the autobiographical "Camera Eye" sections of the novel *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), John Dos Passos recalls that, in the years leading up to World War I, comparing a boy to a girl slurs him beyond any other mockery. The sole proof that a boy carries no taint of girlhood resides in the fight: "you've got to fight the Kid" (104). Interestingly, none of the principal contenders in Dos Passos's scene want to scrap at all, but the crowd is able to egg them on with the worst epithet in the world: "Gotta fight him . . . if not you're a girlboy" (104). Mark Moss reports that in Ontario of the same time period, increased nervousness about manliness after losses in the Boer War pressured boys to fight rather than laugh off a taunt of "sissy" (17). All these North American boys schooled to fear supposed girlishness would mature just in time for Great War butchery.

The examples under "sissy" in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) for the usage newly applied to men in the late nineteenth century make it clear that the most accepted way to certify manhood was the fight. A fragment cited from the *New Orleans Lantern* in 1887 links fighting and manhood through a description of men who "Look and walk too much like sissies to do much fightin'," and the *British Weekly* in 1926 tries to promote someone's merits by boasting, "There was nothing 'sissy' about him. He was a born fighter" (1989 ed.). Interestingly, the OED does not mention that "sissy" ever insinuated anything about sexual orientation. By contrast, *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language* explicitly gives as its second definition for "sissy" "a homosexual" (1953, 1974). The section in chapter 1 on early-twentieth-century sexologists discusses the complex process by which societies construe homosexuality in men to mean effeminacy, and the effects of this arbitrary social construction in increasing the need for men, both homosexual and heterosexual, to validate manhood through war.

The confidence with which mudslingers affixed the labels "sissy" (sister-like) or "effeminate" to men implies, of course, an equal

complacency in defining "feminine" traits for women. Charles Darwin, for example, asserted in *The Descent of Man*, "the average standard of mental power in man must be above that of woman"; once he had excluded her from the arenas of intellect, Darwin elbowed her away from most other endeavors too (everything except "tenderness"), declaring wildly that "man" surpasses her in any task requiring "deep thought, reason, or imagination, or merely the use of the senses and hands" (2: 311–12). Even supporters who thought that they were praising women and working for their causes strictly separated and ranked the sexes. Ralph Waldo Emerson separated womanly "sentiment" from manly "logic" and believed that women monopolized the "affections," whereas men cornered "will" (338–39). As assigned "civilizers," women might restrain combatants, but more often the civilizing task left wives to decorate drawing rooms, in "that ornamental life in which they best appear" (340–41).

To upset the assumptions of women's deep handicaps in logic and action, feminists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries tried two tactics. One group accepted the divisions laid down by many patriarchies and just reversed the evaluation of them. If women were naturally more loving, unselfish, and peaceable than men, as Darwin (2: 311) and Emerson (339) thought, then all the more reason that women should participate in government and business (Higonnet et al. 7).<sup>6</sup> A second group of feminists, instead of arguing that women occupy a superior position by automatically opposing war, have claimed that women could engage in "patriotic" war equally with men. To prove their worth, women may attempt to enlist or, if thwarted there, may undertake war-related tasks that require the same manliness.<sup>7</sup>

Helen Zenna Smith's novel *Not So Quiet* (1930), for example, depicts the pressures on women in World War I to be as good as men, in exactly the same terms: endure hardships stoically, suffer pain and perhaps death, never flinch, and never ask why. The narrator, Nellie, does keep bravely driving her ambulance at the front, despite roads icing over and bombs falling, and she watches the bloody deaths of companions impassively, convincing all of her heroism. Eventually, however, she dissects this heroism as at base a numbness, more and more difficult to thaw once the immediate danger has passed (239). In her most profound insight, she devalues the "masculine" bravery that she does muster and rejects her much-praised "professional calm," because the two together lend an aura of legitimacy to the "futility" and immorality of further carnage: "I may be helping to alleviate the sufferings of wretched men, but commonsense [*sic*] rises

up and insists that the necessity should never have arisen . . . . In twenty years it will repeat itself" (90). She implies that now both men and women need wars, simply to go on painting their own manly or as-good-as-manly image of stoicism.

Usefully summing up these two main routes that feminism has taken, Sheila Rowbotham in *A Century of Women* points to "the continuing tug among feminists" whether to attempt a "strategy of equality with men in the world as it was," or to argue that "women were indeed different from men," including women's supposedly greater cooperativeness and peacefulness (514, 575). However, a third position insists that if women do differ from men, they have done so only situationally, not essentially, and that the social "world as it is" needs to change for both women and men. Among feminists who have deconstructed gender and war to call for changes for both sexes are Helena Swanwick in *Women and War* (1915); Cynthia Enloe in *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989); Susan Jeffords in *The Remasculinization of America* (1989); Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (eds.) in *Gendering War Talk* (1993) (especially the excellent essays by Lynda Boose, Carol Cohn, and Stanley Rosenberg); and Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (eds.) in *The Women and War Reader* (1998). Yet as Joshua Goldstein warns in *War and Gender* (2001), "Feminist literatures about war and peace of the last 15 years have made little impact" in the fields of political science, military history, or international relations (34). He finds that most books in these areas index nothing at all under "gender"; a "recent and comprehensive survey of scholarship on war and peace" does list six items but "devotes only about one-tenth of one percent of its space to gender" (35). Moreover, any of the rare "gender references concern women; men still do not have gender" (35).<sup>8</sup>

These authors and others have taught me several theoretical assumptions about masculinity: (1) it's a social construct; (2) in a given society, requirements for masculinity shift over time; (3) at any one time, masculinity is multiple, providing for masculinities; and (4) masculinities are contradictory, not just over time and in different domains, but at any moment in the same domain.

*Masculinity is a social construct.* Gayle Rubin, in her influential essay "The Traffic in Women," draws from anthropological studies to explain how made-up "sex/gender systems" can smooth economies, enforce reproduction, and give a false impression of inherent gender differences. She looks at the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who finds that while most societies fashion some kind of division of labor by sex, the exact roles vary widely (i.e., in some, women farm and carry heavy burdens; in

some, men care for children). Lévi-Strauss concludes that these gender assignments cannot therefore derive from biology but from a need "to insure the union of men and women by making the smallest viable economic unit contain at least one man and one woman" (Rubin 178). As Rubin provocatively points out, Lévi-Strauss "comes dangerously close to saying that heterosexuality is an instituted process. If biological and hormonal imperatives were as overwhelming as popular mythology would have them, it would hardly be necessary to ensure heterosexual unions by means of economic interdependency" (180).

This social division of labor by sex then produces the illusion that the sexes must differ inherently and radically. However, Rubin cautions, "Far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. It requires repression: in men, of whatever is the local version of 'feminine' traits; in women, of the local definition of 'masculine' traits . . . . The same social system which oppresses women in its relations of exchange, oppresses everyone in its insistence upon a rigid division of personality" (180). Contrary to the view commonly promoted by popular media, feminism is not women "talking stink" about men, but women and men talking about social systems that hurt both women and men. The clearest way that gender polarization oppresses men is to designate them expendable, in war.

*Masculinity shifts over time.* Although some notions of gender stay depressingly the same, such as women's supposed lack of rationality, other stereotypes may gyrate 180 degrees. One requirement for manliness that seems to have changed most radically from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries is the reversal (at least at first sight) from an ideal of sexual restraint to an ideal of sexual license. Using a medical language crossed by economic concepts, nineteenth-century European and American doctors schooled the middle classes that each man possessed a limited amount of sperm and overall bodily energy; release of sexual energy would "deplete the supply available for other purposes and would thus lead to enervation and lethargy, if not more dire consequences [such as madness]. Ejaculation was described as 'spending' the semen, a metaphor that would have made sense to those who had been taught that 'a penny saved is a penny earned' " (Greenberg 362). This medical language, decreeing health and illness, plus an economic idiom delineating thrift and waste, joined the long-standing religious discourse of good and evil, which had already pushed the body into the inferior camp as "fallen nature." These languages reinforce each other, to blame masturbation, homosexuality, heterosex outside marriage, or birth control within marriage, all as an equal waste of capital.



In the twentieth century, by contrast, the dominant masculine ideal moved from “saving” semen to spending it—in some quarters, to spending profligately. In Richard Currey’s novel of the Vietnam War, *Fatal Light* (1988), the soldier Perelli cannot wait to boast to the narrator, “I was meaning to tell you. Scored me some maximum slope trim night before last. Prime cut” (142). As in the nineteenth century, the language for sex combines discourses from several other contexts. Perelli’s slang mixes the sports arena (“scored”) and the butcher shop (“prime cut”). Sex plays out a competitive game, where winners triumph over losers: over other soldiers, for example, who haven’t scored so often. The losers also include, one suspects, the woman herself, who falls behind by both race and gender. The racist term “slope” (a version of “slanty eyed”) diminishes her, and the butcher shop terms reduce all women to dead meat. He’s the privileged consumer; she’s the inanimate consumed.

The values taught to the twentieth-century man have not only shifted from retaining semen to multiplying it, but from tacitness to talk. If Victorian men did not always live up to the ideal of restraint and slipped off to flourishing brothels, they at least hushed up the event in their primary circle of family and business associates. Currey’s Perelli, by contrast, cannot wait to advertise: “I was meaning to tell you” (142). He brags in a short, quick, esoteric jargon, packing a punch of density, which enables him to feel superior to outsiders, who don’t know his code.

Nevertheless, despite these two changes in the definition of masculinity, toward indulging sex and telling about it, in other ways the new license does not after all mark much of a departure from the nineteenth-century devaluation of the body. From the 1860s to the 1960s, the governing metaphors remain economic. If the Victorian manly man saved bodily fluids, he could invest better elsewhere, putting his energy into tying up business deals, or putting semen into making legitimate sons who could inherit his riches. Perelli also sets economic markers. He doesn’t consume ordinary meat but a “prime cut,” a “trim” piece. He’s eating high on the hog, and he is anxious to let others know that he can afford the best, in a world where money and status count.

Of course, this economic aspect of Perelli’s transaction does not stay at the level of metaphor. When the narrator cautions, “Be sure you pay her,” Perelli grumbles, “I paid her, asshole. Fucking bleeding heart” (142). Although the narrator, unlike Perelli, seems to have some inkling of the economic need driving this woman to accept paying customers, neither man registers the huge change in mores and

economics brought about in Vietnam by America’s participation in the war. With 25 million acres of farmland destroyed, 12 million acres of forest wiped out, and 1.5 million farm animals killed in the South alone, income for Vietnamese peasants diminished radically. As a result, the bodies of women—some 200,000 new prostitutes—became a primary source of subsistence for their families (Young 301–02). To Perelli, the quirky detail that his Asian whore has dyed her pubic hair blonde simply enhances storytelling (“Know what? . . . You’ll love this”), whereas the narrator uneasily glimpses that a saleswoman desperately needs a gimmick, “Something to bring you back for next time,” for the next dollar (142).

If Perelli’s whore approaches sex for survival, not pleasure, it may appear that Perelli hoards all the fun. Actually, neither partner escapes the nineteenth-century denigration of sex. For Perelli’s society is enjoining him not to seek and give joy but to get power. Moreover, a large part of the nineteenth-century need for manly self-control is still locked into place.<sup>9</sup> Though physically unbuckled, Perelli must not get too emotionally involved—he can’t be a “bleeding heart”—for emotion might make him womanly (142). Emotion might also render him vulnerable, and a twentieth-century man is still trained to fear vulnerability as something that might bleed him to death; he is not taught to attempt the courage that would open him to the rigors and rewards of love and compassion.

Although Perelli’s military sex code is an extreme case, his license duplicates an only apparent relaxation of sexual mores in American society as a whole. For the culture often uses increased sexual activity to further its values of command, not pleasure, and display, not emotion—whether that emotion be love for the long term or simple considerateness in a brief encounter. For a man, partnered heterosexual exhibits a manly image, consisting of status, power, control, and armored detachment. These requirements for image still eclipse the pure pleasures of the body, let alone the more difficult gifts of emotional attachments.

In fact, an important secondary thesis throughout this book is that, in addition to the role played by the polarization of gender definitions, a continuing devaluation of the pleasures of sex also contributes to war. To claim that twentieth- and twenty-first-century America and Great Britain disdain pleasure may look preposterous, but a condemnation of the body still persists. Chapters 2 through 4 (on World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War) highlight ways in which societies, while patently fearing sexuality, also use sex to further war. Although militaries co-opt sex most obviously by providing prostitution as a lure



(Enloe, "It Takes More Than Two"), I argue that a culture can further exploit sex to fuel wars in three ways: by encouraging the displacement of sexuality into violence; by fostering titillation in combination with guilt and its accompanying need for self-punishment (which war abundantly supplies); and by defining sexual orientations so as to provoke self-doubt and manipulability in everyone.

Few books link consent to war either with gender issues or with attitudes about sexuality. For example, Eric Leed's otherwise excellent study *No Man's Land* looks at the stories people tell themselves about war and shrewdly traces these stories to their conventional and social determinants, yet when he discusses imagery making conquered land feminine, he falls back on the oedipal complex as a biological given rather than another story in need of explanation (162). Leo Braudy offers to illuminate *War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity*, yet he never seriously questions his underlying assumption that men *must* fight, biologically. Much more promising, Cynthia Enloe's books and articles, Eva Isaksson's *Women and the Military System*, and Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott's *Gendering War Talk* open up exciting new questions about the connections of gender and war. Joshua Goldstein's *War and Gender* is important in arguing that war is not so much an *effect* of gender difference as a *cause* of the present constructions of gender in the West. Studies about the way sexual beliefs contribute to war are even more rare: see Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, George Mosse's *Nationalism and Sexuality*, and Liz Kelly's "Wars against Women." *Manipulating Masculinity* fills a gap by tying together the ideologies of sex, gender, and war.

*Masculinity is multiple.* As Raymond Williams explains the struggles and accommodations of competing ideologies, old concepts may remain "residual" under present "dominant" versions, while new "alternative" or "oppositional" ideologies may be emerging ("Base" 41). At any given time, those ideologies defining masculinity may incorporate residual masculinities or jostle against alternatives. For example, within social expectations about the relation of sexuality and war, one widespread assumption asserts that heterosexual "aggression" promises well for the fight and makes a man masculine. I call this assumption the Apollo Syndrome, after Ovid's classical tale of Apollo and Daphne. The Apollo Syndrome does have a long history in the West and dominates in the modern world. However, a contradictory view persists: a very active heterosexuality instead feminizes (i.e., weakens) a man and disables him from (still masculine) fighting. I call this residual notion the Antony Syndrome, from Shakespeare's play *Antony*

*and Cleopatra.* Such an assumption clashes, of course, not only with the competing Apollo Syndrome but also with the sexologists' emerging, late-nineteenth-century premise that homosexuality, not heterosexuality, feminizes a man. The one constant in these jumbled, often simultaneously held beliefs is that a man must not exhibit too many traits labeled "feminine," although just what constitutes such traits can shift to fit varying social needs for manipulating men as well as women. (See chapter 1 for a discussion of the Apollo and Antony Syndromes.)

Trained in the study of International Relations, Charlotte Hooper emphasizes that dominant or "hegemonic" masculinities display considerable fluidity, gliding easily between popular culture and professions, while borrowing from subordinate masculinities and even former femininities: for example, appropriating the keyboards of "women's work" for "power" computing (61, 225). She cautions that analysts cannot automatically associate a hegemonic masculinity with "phallogocentric imagery." A society negates that centrality of the body for men when it relegates women to "nature" and makes men uphold "culture" (60), or, in the example I gave of Perelli's predecessors, when the nineteenth-century middle class made sexual restraint, not phallic prowess, the ideal for middle-class men.

Masculinities also multiply according to class, race, region, or occupation. In fact, intersecting categories of class, race, and gender only "come into existence in and through relation to each other" (McClintock 5). Darwin, for example, defined white masculinity against a backdrop of black masculinity, both mediated by a social construction of femininities. Darwin insisted that white women, like both sexes among the "lower races," must rely on their greater "powers of intuition," whereas all men (but especially white ones) are more "courageous, pugnacious, and energetic" (2: 311, 301). Although pugnacity as part of white masculinity may look like a flaw, Darwin rehabilitates the aggression necessary for imperial conquest by buffering it between positive courage and energy and by providing a backdrop of a "lower" race and sex.

This profusion of masculinities at any given time may occur even within one occupation. David Morgan cautions that military life itself offers a range of masculinities, from combatant to bureaucrat (175). Self-concepts differ for the members of particular military branches (all referred to as "soldiers" in my book) and for career servicemen, enlisted soldiers, or draftees (169). Among enlisted soldiers, "in societies with high rates of unemployment and with marked class or ethnic divisions, the degree to which a man may be said to have chosen military service may be open to question," so that differences

in class, race, and background further separate military identities (176). Lower echelons may survive by mocking higher ones, and a soldier may establish an ironic distance from his own role. While "room for maneuver and negotiation" within military expectations for manliness may simply lead to compartmentalizing one's life (Morgan 178), such room may also open up space for rebellion and reform.

*Masculinity is contradictory.* Separate chapters on World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War divide into the same four rubrics, indicating four aspects of the dominant gender ideology that drove British and American men to war throughout the twentieth century:

- (a) I fight to prove I'm not my sister (but I suspect I am).
- (b) I fight to prove I'm not attracted to men (but I do want to see male bodies).
- (c) I fight to prove I'm not emotional (but I do love my comrades).
- (d) I fight to protect my sister (but I hate my sister—so as not to be her).

Section (a) posits the gender motive for war in the most general terms, whereas sections (b), (c), and (d) investigate more specific versions of that motive. Section (b) shows that societies push men to hide homoeroticism and to use soldiering as a supposed guarantee of heterosexuality precisely by constructing homosexuality as effeminate. In section (c), militarized societies try to dampen men's compassion by assigning the so-called softer emotions to women. However, sections (b) and (c) do not divide neatly into bodily versus emotional ties, as homosexual and heterosexual behaviors constantly overlap in the literature of war. As a consequence, references to homoeroticism recur in all sections, as I examine how societies label, appropriate, and rechannel the possibilities for men's interaction by continual reference to stereotypes for women.

The four rubrics structuring chapters 2 through 4 name, then, the gender ideologies that have either stagnated or worsened from World War I to World War II to the Vietnam War. At the same time, however, the rubrics express (within a set of parentheses) flagrant contradictions in the ideologies. Even as these logical flaws confuse and frustrate individuals, they also provide hope for change. For if analysis can bring to consciousness the tensions that the literature of war exposes, the contradictions can then reveal that ideologies, far from the naturalness projected, are artificial and imaginary. And if human beings have made this hurly-burly of gender constructs promoting war, perhaps we can remake them.

Although this book focuses on the twentieth century, the need for such remaking is just as urgent in the twenty-first. "Sissy," the taunt

demoting a man to his "sister," has mutated into new forms. The derisive word "wimp" combines "woman" with "limp," still incorporating both misogyny and the manipulation of men, in part by using the familiar, inaccurate blurring of sexuality with gender. The slur "wuss" or "wussy" similarly derives from "woman" and "pussy" ("Bush" 6). These taunts all depend on men's detecting within themselves their basic human similarity to women and yet interpreting such commonality as a failure. The fear of showing this inevitably failed masculinity still feeds into war by requiring a perpetual fight as the only proof of a never-finished manhood. If enough men and women believe in this artificial construct of manhood as conquest-in-and-of-itself, they remain available as tools for wars offering profit in money or masculine image.