

EnterText volume 6 number 2

WAR AND SOCIETY

Abstracts

Tracy E. Bilsing, *Mors ab Alto*: The Dangerous Power of Women's Images in Second World War Nose Art

The depiction of women's images on military aeroplanes became popular during World War II when soldier-artists were informally commissioned to paint pictures on planes in order to personalise the machines for the crews who flew in them. The most famous images are of playful, obviously sexualised women whose illustrated presence on the planes provided the troops with, among other things, reminders of home. Despite criticism from feminist scholars for its objectification of the feminine, nose art is a complex cultural icon which has its roots in ancient history and which appropriates sexuality as a specific form of female power during a predominantly masculine event.

Frank D. Casale, W. D. Ehrhart and the Extremes of Foreign Policy, Ideology, and the American Hegemony

In the years following the Vietnam War, we have seen and heard many conflicting images and stories about the meaning and importance of the conflict. Television shows such as *China Beach*, and movies like *The Deer Hunter* and *Forest Gump* have radically re-imagined the war and the events surrounding it. However, when we compare this modern-day myth-making, much of it engineered in Hollywood and the editorial press, with much of the literature produced by *veterans* of the war, a startling insight becomes apparent. While the popular media seems intent on repackaging the meaning of the war, the literature of the veterans seems intent on exploring the meaning of the war and defining the effect the war had on American consciousness. The extreme experience of the war (heavily and graphically depicted in these novels and poems) clashed with the preconceived notions of these writers and produced drastic shifts in their consciousness. Thus, their literature of extreme foreign policy provides an insight into how extreme material practice can radically transform ideology, and how a dominant hegemony must respond by attempting to contain and neutralise any such radical articulation. This paper, through a close reading of *Passing Time*, explores the American hegemony and its mythmaking around the Vietnam War, investigates how extreme material practice can transform a subject's ideology, and examines how these Vietnam-Veterans-turned-writers attempted to understand their ideological changes through the textualisation of their experience.

Patricia Chogugudza, Gender and War: Zimbabwean Women and the Liberation Struggle

In revolutionary war situations there is often no defined front line and both women and children can not only come directly under attack, but are involved actively in the struggle. This paper argues, therefore, that the story of a liberation struggle cannot be complete without an analysis of the role women play in guerrilla warfare revolutions. Using an African feminist approach to women and war, it explores the nature of women's participation in the guerrilla war in Zimbabwe. The discussion analyses the challenges faced by Zimbabwean women freedom fighters not only from the male-centred attitudes of the nationalist movement but from Zimbabwean society as a whole during and after Zimbabwe's war of liberation. It argues that in revolutionary struggles, women encounter conflict in different ways from men. As armed conflicts affect revolutionary cadres and non-participatory civilians, the coping strategies adopted under the pressure differ according to, and, to a large degree, are determined by, gender. This paper uses oral testimonies to examine the impact of gender on the experience of women involved actively in the Zimbabwean struggle and demonstrates that the disappointment of women with the liberatory consequences of the struggle for themselves, as women, was foreshadowed in their treatment during the struggle by their own leaders and male fellow-fighters. These males encouraged women to join the cadres and publicly celebrated their involvement, at the same time as applying notably traditionalist policies towards them, which were to be continued in the post-revolutionary period.

Casey Clabough, Which Ones Are The Enemy? The Military Writings of George Garrett

This essay considers the military writings—fiction, non-fiction, and poetry—of the contemporary American writer George Garrett, perhaps best known for his trilogy of Elizabethan novels (*Death of the Fox*, *The Succession*, and *Entered from the Sun*). It holds that the best military fiction often seeks to abstract narrative beyond immediate historical events and into an arena where the ambivalent underpinnings of war are laid bare as timeless variables.

Ian Edwards, An “Uncompromising Allegiance to Obscenity and Evil;” *Dispatches*, the *Jouissance* of War, and the Responsibility of Spectatorship

Michael Herr's work of Vietnam reportage, *Dispatches*, is addressed as a representation and critique of the USA's involvement in Indochina, through the theoretical optics provided by Slavoj Žižek and Pierre Bourdieu. The essay's two main aims are, firstly, to establish the text as a “bottom-up” re-historicisation of the Vietnam War, from the perspective of the common soldier or “grunt.” The proximity between Herr's narrative voice and the common soldier it attends to is central to his technique, which dramatises a series of subjective trajectories whereby the many existential implications of the combat soldier's position are rendered. This positioning is further emphasised by the cynical representation of the text's officers, producing a

damning indictment of the conduct of the war as a whole. The still more sobering conclusion to be drawn from the text, however, lies in its portrayal of the media influences on the war. The article therefore locates Herr in relation to the field of journalism and media in general: the omnipresence and pervasiveness of media representations of war implicate *all* spectators as complicit in the violent spectacles they consume.

Martin H. Folly, Seeking Comradeship in the “Ogre’s Den:” Winston Churchill’s Quest for a Warrior Alliance and his Mission to Stalin, August 1942

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s first meeting with Soviet dictator Josef Stalin in August 1942 is one of the least discussed of the Second World War summit meetings. This paper argues that it set up the parameters for what turned out to be the war-winning alliance. Churchill went to Moscow to tell Stalin there would be no invasion of Europe from the west that year, but more significantly, this paper argues, to build a relationship with Stalin based upon a shared comradeship, focusing narrowly on the task of victory and eschewing more contentious political issues.

Rosemary Haskell, War and Writing in the Undergraduate Literature Classroom: Modal Analysis and the Destabilisation of the Soldier’s Heroic and Idyllic Worlds

In a second-year university literature course for the general student, use of a type of formalist criticism involving the modal paradigms epic and romance, gothic, and pastoral, enabled students to analyse and evaluate the nature of war and the personal experience of combat with considerable acuity. The soldier’s combat relationship with his enemy, with his fellow-soldier, and his links with the civilian world he has left and to which he must return, form the centre of this account. A description of how modal analysis was used reveals the complexities, ironies and connections within and between these important facets of war and the war experience.

Daniel Keyes, *The Big Lebowski*: The First Gulf War and Masculinity

Hollywood has produced a handful of films that have dealt with the first Gulf War. The Coen brothers 1997 cult film the *Big Lebowski* might seem an unlikely choice for a Gulf War film; however, this film re-creates 1991 Los Angeles to comment on the Gulf War in relation to American colonialism and masculinity. This paper uses Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope to demonstrate how the film’s and character’s use of genres like the western, pornography, white-male rampage film, *film noir*, and buddy film, demonstrates how the past shapes the present and anticipates an America that “abides” rather than expands its frontier.

Rodney Sharkey, Perpetual Transit in the TRNC: A Director’s Notes on Staging Fateh Azzam’s *Baggage*

“A Director’s Notes on Staging Fateh Azzam’s *Baggage*” addresses how physical performance is paramount in the play and draws attention to the usefulness of Samuel Beckett’s sense of theatrical repetition in utilising the dramatic possibilities of the character’s baggage. Further, the paper also suggests that while serious repetition in the play echoes Beckett, comic repetition echoes both Charlie Chaplin and Beckett. In short, the paper suggests that through the activity of directing Azzam’s play one comes to understand both the influence of Chaplin on Beckett’s sense of theatre, and the usefulness of Beckettian theatrical repetition in drawing out both the comic absurdity of the character’s situation, and the underlying ritualised forms of institutional exclusion (and institutionalised aggression) responsible for putting Azzam’s Palestinian character in the situation in which he finds himself.

Carol Vernallis, Militarism, Misanthropy and the Body Politic: *Independence Day* and “America’s New War”

Techniques of close reading are employed to argue that *Independence Day* served as a rehearsal for 11 September 2001 and “America’s New War” on terrorism. It shows the mechanisms by which characters and extras who are misaligned with the status quo—because of sexuality, race, gender or ethnicity—are othered or removed. The film operates on two registers, not only presenting its characters as broad stereotypes, but on another level underscoring these characterisations with detail so finely etched in the background that it can easily be missed. Also important are the mechanisms by which the film switches between character-driven story and spectacle. The article closes with an examination of the parallels between the *Independence Day* mindset and that of George W. Bush’s Administration in the United States. The film’s modes of representing the body politic and those who lie outside, its handling of information and disinformation, and its rallying around the military-industrial complex can be seen as enabling the current Administration’s invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Alex Vernon, Fiction from the First Gulf War: A Veteran Views Writing From His War

This essay-review reflects on three works of fiction from the first Gulf War (*Dear Mr. President*, *We Pierce* and *Prayer at Rumayla*), placing them in the context of other war literature and the author’s own experiences.