

Passions of War: Gender, Sexuality and Conflict in the Long Eighteenth Century

Introduction

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Abstract: This article provides an introduction to the *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* special issue ‘Passions of War: Gender, Sexuality and Conflict in the Long Eighteenth Century’. Following an overview of the rationale for the AHRC Research Network ‘Passions of War: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality and Conflict, 1550–1945’, the introduction goes on to discuss the literary, artistic, historical and intellectual contexts that inform the issue. Particular attention is paid to the representation of military masculinities, sexual violence, cross-dressing, same-sex intimacies, and to alternative interpretations of gendered patterns of behaviour. The introduction then offers summary accounts of the individual articles.

Keywords: war, the long eighteenth century, gender, sexuality, military masculinities, same-sex desire, sexual violence, cross-dressing

This special issue of the *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* takes as its subject the relations between gender, war and sexuality in history, drama, literature and visual media of and concerning the long eighteenth century. Arising from papers presented at three workshops facilitated by the AHRC Research Network ‘Passions of War: Cross-disciplinary

Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality and Conflict, 1550–1945’,¹ the issue presents the work of established and emerging scholars from Britain, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Australia and the United States of America. This international, cross-disciplinary emphasis is reflected also in the content of the articles, which focusses on the representation of gender, sexuality and warfare in historical documents, literary works and visual materials produced in England, France, Germany and the Netherlands.

One of the main issues that will be discussed in this special issue is the transformation of the concept of masculinity in relation to eighteenth-century representations of war and violence. In an essay collection of 2004 about masculinities in war, the editors insist that the idea that warfare should be the exclusive domain of men was rarely discussed in the eighteenth century, despite the fact that masculinity was a recurring trope in new conceptions of citizenship and the militarization of society from the eighteenth century onwards.² This special issue is distinguished, therefore, both by its interdisciplinary approach, and by the attention it pays to the formation of notions of military masculinity in a period in European history that, until recently, has been relatively neglected in scholarly literature.³ The issue is not, however, restricted to the consideration of military masculinity. As the articles in this issue reveal, cultural representations of war in the long eighteenth century covered a wide range of subjects, from accounts of sexual violence to cross-dressing, and from same sex intimacies to alternative interpretations of gendered patterns of behaviour. It will be one of the aims of this special issues to explore this gendered ‘underground’ of eighteenth-century war experience and imagination and to disclose alternative representations of war and violence that directly or indirectly reflect on issues of gender and sexuality.

As will become clear, particularly in the articles about theatrical representations of war and prose narrative accounts of military cross-dressing, the gender divisions in eighteenth-century military culture were in some ways far less rigid than is commonly

assumed. Cultural imaginations of war and the military allowed for mixed gender identities, such as, for instance, the female warrior or ‘Amazon’ as an example of gender transgression that seemed to celebrate the extraordinary.⁴ According to Dror Wahrman, early modern ‘engines’ of imagination, like plays, magazines and public events, offered spaces ‘to foreground experimentation and fluidity, where identities were self-consciously constructed and reconstructed, and liberties could be expected to be taken and stretched to their permissible limits’.⁵ This is one of the reasons, according to Wahrman, why in the ‘ancien regime of identity’ certain ‘masquerades’ (like the female soldier) could remain undetected for years.⁶

Just as the rigid, close-order linear formations of late eighteenth-century warfare gave way to looser, more flexible formations, so new conceptions of identity began to emerge that were intended to support, but also often contested, fixed and unchanging notions of gender and sexuality. According to Dudink and Hagemann, during the eighteenth century the relations between concepts of gender, sexuality and warfare were often blurred, resulting in an importation of feminised codes of politeness and sensibility to the military sphere alongside a corresponding militarisation of civil notions of masculinity.⁷ In this collection, therefore, we would like to investigate the extent to which changing conceptions of gender and sexuality in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century opened up new discursive spaces, allowing for different potentially conflicting views on, for example, gendered codes of behaviour and friendships between men. Military diaries and autobiographies, for instance, reflect on topics like same sex intimacy in the army in a strikingly straightforward way, transferring revolutionary civic concepts like ‘fraternity’ to the issue of homosocial desire within the Grande Armée. In a related manner, fiction, drama and visual culture made frequent distinctions between notions of feminine vulnerability and masculine inviolability to express concerns about threats to national integrity during wartime.

The idea of a unique and stable modern self not only opened up new spaces of gendered self-reflection, it also forced individuals to participate in a collective regime of control and surveillance that meant that most personal experiences were no longer shareable but remained hidden behind a discourse of sacrifice and national identity. According to scholars such as Elaine Scarry this ‘unmaking’ of the human being is fundamental for modern national discourses about war.⁸ The figure of the national hero as the emblem of national bellicosity became an important instrument for transferring individual suffering in the military to a victorious national fiction, as we will learn from the examples of Frederick the Great in the German tradition and of Napoleon in the French. These hyper-masculine patterns of behaviour were meant to be sources of inspiration for those ready to offer their own bodies to the fatherland but, as we shall see, were in practice far more nuanced and open to alternative interpretations.

The ideology of eighteenth-century patriotism and early nationalism also produced its internal contradictions. The king in the Prussian tradition for instance was seen not only as a general, but also as a soldier among soldiers, a close comrade-in-arms. The two images of Frederick the Great that will be discussed in one of the articles seems to be closely linked to this double-sided image of the Enlightenment military hero: at once harsh and authoritarian, but also gentle and close to his subjects as a fellow soldier. The image of Frederick as a sentimental ‘queer king’ does not destabilize the traditional image of the martial soldier-king but rather works to soften his aggressive masculine and imperialist side, making it more acceptable in a civic context instead of undermining it. Furthermore, as the case of Napoleon demonstrates, the potentially disruptive image of the wounded leader rather becomes a badge of honour and an example for others, counterbalancing the Emperor’s sacred and immortal body in other representations.

This collection of essays will move from the image of the suffering country embodied by a raped virgin in a Dutch morality play of the late seventeenth century, to the depiction of a wounded Napoleon as Philoctetes, after the turn of the eighteenth century, and beyond to mid to late-nineteenth century reflections on eighteenth-century representations of military masculinity. By doing so, the issue aims to connect not only different genres of representation, from drama to diaries, and from novels to paintings, but also different traditions and territories, from the Dutch Republic to the French Empire. The exploration of cultural representation of violence and its gendered nature in the eighteenth century may confront us with examples that either support or criticize violent behavior, but more often than not we can expect to encounter hybrid or even contradictory images of war and violence.

Yannice De Bruyn's 'Help! Help! War wants to rape me!': War and Rape in a Dutch Peace Play of 1678' explores a subject that continues to inform modern day representations of conflict, namely the depiction of rape as a metaphor for war. De Bruyn's particular interest is in theatrical and visual representations of rape on the early modern Dutch stage. As De Bruyn notes, in Dutch culture of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the female body was often used as a cypher for the abstract processes of wealth accumulation or violent intrusion. These seemingly opposing processes are addressed in a late seventeenth-century Dutch allegorical play that not only features rape as a metaphor for war, but also extends this metaphor to raise questions about national well-being and the debilitating effects of wealth accumulation. The play in question is a 1678 Dutch work entitled *Vertooningspel, op de vrede* (Pageant Play, on the Peace), which was written and performed in the immediate aftermath of the six-year Franco-Dutch war (1672–1678). Featuring allegorical representations of *Mars/Krijg/Oorlog* (War), *Vrede* (Peace) and *Welvaart* (Prosperity), the play offered audiences an immersive audiovisual spectacle that signaled the Republic's vulnerability to foreign invasion while serving as an encouragement to men to defend the

honour of their symbolic mother. While the portrayal of the virgin-mother as imprudent and impious implies that Holland is at least partially responsible for her violation, as the play progresses she overcomes her weaknesses to become a redoubtable leader. By way of a morally dubious emphasis on rape as a mode of trial by combat, the injured woman thus reemerges as a robust defender of the nation state.

In Cornelis van der Haven's 'Military Men of Feeling? Gender Boundaries and Military-Civil Encounters in two German Soldier Plays (1760–1780)' the focus is again on the representation of gender on the early modern European stage. Van der Haven pays particular attention to the influence of the Enlightenment in contesting the boundaries between the military and the civilian spheres; the former informed by notions of masculine heroism and the latter by public interests and civic of behaviour. By way of a comparative reading of Heinrich Ferdinand Möller's *Der Graf von Walltron, oder die Subordination* (1776) and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's soldier comedy *Minna von Barnhelm, oder das Soldatenglück* (1763) van der Haven argues that 'the military's entrance in the world of the citizen *and* the citizen's involvement in the military could create tensions and destabilize the gendered regimes of behaviour in both spheres'. The clash between martial and pacific values explored in De Bruyn's article thus reemerges in this setting as a contest between the hard-bodied warrior and the permeable man of feeling. Required, on the one hand, to respond to orders and to engage in acts of violence without question or compunction, the military man was also expected to demonstrate compassion and empathy. Caught between these competing emotional regimes – the one associated with the military, the other with the public sphere – the military man of feeling thus emerges as a somewhat contradictory figure. As van der Haven shows, the dramas of Möller and Lessing question the extent to which 'a military social community based on "stoic" moral principles and strict discipline' is able to 'accommodate the new behavioural codes' of sociability and sentiment.

As the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility sought to challenge rigid distinctions between the military and public spheres, thereby destabilizing traditional conceptions of heroic masculinity, so it also enabled women to transgress their habitual roles. In 'Between Dissimulation and Sensation: Female "Soldiers" in Eighteenth-Century Warfare' Marian Füssel examines how women donned masculine identities so that they could enter into military service. Although admittedly a marginal figure, a consideration of the cross-dressing female soldier provides useful insights into the relations between gender roles and the structures of everyday life in eighteenth-century standing armies. Inspired by the work of the Italian micro historian Edoardo Grendi and by Michel de Certeau's theoretical distinction between strategies and tactics, Füssel argues that 'some women, particularly those who lacked traditional family structures', resorted to the tactical operation of disguising their identities in order to serve in the military. Through consideration of a range of examples Füssel demonstrates how the presence of cross-dressing female soldiers within eighteenth-century armies raises broader issues 'concerning the relations between military participation and gender' that touch, in turn, 'on questions of general motivation for military service, the image of the ideal soldier, and women's working roles'. Füssel concludes that while such cases could be used to challenge traditional gender boundaries 'they could work as an *ex negativo* support for these boundaries' by showing how gendered identities should 'really' be performed.

In Brian Joseph Martin's 'Military Mates: From Revolutionary Fraternity to Napoleonic Intimacy in the Memoirs of Sergeant Faucheur', the focus turns again to the relations between male soldiers, but with a particular emphasis on how intimate friendships between men were nurtured and sustained in the French military during the Napoleonic period. For Martin, the open display of friendship in Napoleon's armies reflects 'radical changes in French military culture, from the Royal Army of the Ancien Régime to the new

armies of the Revolution and Empire'. Inspired by the 'fraternal ideology and meritocratic reform', as illustrated in the 'Romantic melancholy and Realist horrors of Napoleonic military fiction, from Balzac to Stendhal and Hugo', and in popular military memoirs, such as Emmanuel de Las Cases's best-seller, *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* (1823), Philippe-Paul de Ségur's equally celebrated *La Campagne de Russie* (1825) and Narcisse Faucheur's posthumously published *Souvenirs de campagne du Sergent Faucheur* (1886), Napoleon's soldiers were discovering 'new opportunities for expressing solidarity, intimacy, and affection'. As such, the numerous instances of tenderness and support between men, manifested in both fictional and non-fictional contexts during the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic eras, lends support to Foucault's tracing of the modern origins of male intimacy to the army, where love between men is both acknowledged and honored.⁹

Images of the wounded Napoleon in post-war French culture are discussed by Philip Shaw in 'Napoleon as Philoctetes: Military Masculinity, Sacrifice and the Image of the Wound'. Opening with a consideration of how sacrifice was understood in republican and royalist rhetoric during the revolutionary and imperial periods, Shaw goes on to explore how visual representations of the wounded Emperor 'helped to negotiate the complex relations between acknowledgements of corporeal vulnerability, ideas of military masculinity and assertions of national unanimity'. In Pierre Gautherot's painting, *Napoléon blessé au pied devant Ratisbonne est soigné par le chirurgien Yvan, 23 avril 1809* (1810) an athletically posed and healthy-looking Emperor is shown receiving medical treatment for a minor foot injury. Intended as an exemplum of stoical endurance, and thus as a lesson to the citizen-soldier, the image of the wounded Napoleon may be read 'as a guarantor of the Emperor's centrality to the body politic, as well as of his invulnerability not only to personal suffering'. This image is qualified, however, by a later anonymous graphic satire, *Nicolas Philoctète dans l'isle d'Elbe* (1814–1815). Produced in the period between the Emperor's first exile and

his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo, the print depicts Napoleon as the wounded ancient Greek hero Philoctetes. While in many ways complex to the point of unreadability, the representation of Napoleon as Philoctetes suggests that corporeal vulnerability may yet become a principle of imperial restoration.

Attention to the conceptual significance of the injured masculine body is resumed in Neil Ramsey's study 'To Die as a Soldier': The Vital Romance of the Military Novel'. From Daniel Defoe's *Colonel Jack* (1722) to Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), the eighteenth-century novel in English has maintained a long and steady fascination with the effects of war on soldiers and civilians. As Ramsey points out, in the military novel traumatic memories of recent conflicts resurface to trouble the assumption of narrative continuity and to contest the formation of identity. Ramsey's particular focus in this article is on Thomas Hamilton's *Youth and Manhood of Cyril Thornton* (1827), a work that adapts the framework of the historical novel to establish a new kind of aesthetics based on the soldier's suffering body. As the title of Hamilton's novel implies, the hero's journey to maturity, fashioned on the basis of his rejection of the 'archaic romance of military honour in favour of marriage and domestic life', may be read as an allegory of 'the nation's own movement away from a past dominated by national conflict and towards a modern, liberal world of commercial prosperity and peace'. The novel thus echoes concerns outlined by van der Haven in his reading of mid-century German military dramas. Where *Cyril Thornton* departs from the previous explorations of the relations between military and civic virtue is in its attempts to incorporate older notions of military masculinity within the new experience of total war, 'centred', as Ramsey puts it, 'on the suffering body as a witness of its own survival'. Informed by Foucault's notion of biopolitics, Ramsey reads the novel as an attempt to reconfigure the sacrifice of the soldier hero 'as a redeeming, vitalising force that can help forge a unified nation'.

In the issue's final article, 'Affective Battlefields: Royal Gender Hybridity and the Cultural Afterlife of Friedrich II', Kathrin Maurer examines the representation of Friedrich II in a mass-produced German history book. In common with Ramsey and Shaw, Maurer is interested in how the representation of the soldier hero, in this case the Prussian king and military leader Frederick the Great, works to challenge as well as to reinforce the construction of military masculinity and the forging of national unanimity. In Franz Kugler and Adolph Menzel's *History of Frederick the Great (Geschichte Friedrichs des Großen)* (1842) the attempt to legitimize 'a pro-Prussian attitude, backing the militaristic and aggressive power-politics of the regime' is often compromised by illustrations that query the 'consistently pure image of heroic masculinity' needed to reinforce this attitude. The portrait of Friedrich that emerges from this history is complex and nuanced, at once conforming to the 'hard', 'cold', 'fast' attributes of the masculine military leader while, at the same, performing 'feminine' characteristics, such as playfulness, coquettishness and submissiveness. In these images, according to Maurer, 'Friedrich's sexual in-between-ness resurfaces, constructing a royal body that blends "masculine" and "feminine" features', thereby rendering the king 'a figure of gender hybridity'. The representation of the king as a sensitive, sexually ambivalent, art-loving man undercuts the model of a military leader 'whose future mission is to build a national unified Germany. As Maurer concludes, by 'portraying the king's gender as hybrid and ambivalent, the images gain a degree of performativity and theatricality that in turn critically undermines the desired monolithic conception of royal power'.

In addition to offering new knowledge and new perspectives on the complex, nuanced and often surprising relations between war, gender and sexuality in the long eighteenth century, these articles seek to raise broader awareness of how a unstable conceptual categories, from the vulnerable, feminised nation state to the cross-dressing Amazon, or from

the cold, hard-bodied masculine warrior to his softer, fraternal counterpart, continue to inform current thinking about the place of war in the formation of our everyday notions of national and personal identity.

NOTES

¹ Further information about ‘Passions of War: Cross-disciplinary Perspectives on Gender, Sexuality and Conflict, 1550–1945’ can be found on the research network website:

<https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/english/research/passions-of-war>

² Stefan Dudink and Karen Hagemann, ‘Introduction’, in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2004), p. 4–6.

³ Notable recent studies include: Karen Haggeman, ‘The Military and Masculinity: Gendering the History of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1793–1815’ in *War In An Age of Revolution, 1775–1815*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 331–52; *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775–1830*, ed. Karen Hagemann, Gisele Mettelle and Jane Randell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Brian Joseph Martin, *Military Fraternity, Intimacy and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France* (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011); Michael J. Hughes, *Forging Napoleon’s Grand Armée: Motivation, Military Culture and Masculinity in the French Army, 1800–1808* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Marriage and the British Army in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Mathew McCormack, *Embodying the Militia in Georgian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Owen Brittan, ‘Subjective Experience and Military Masculinity at the Beginning of the Long Eighteenth Century,

1688–1714’, *Journal For Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 40.2 (June 2017), p. 273–90; Julia Banister, *Masculinity, Militarism and Eighteenth-Century Culture, 1689–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

⁴ Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 20–21.

⁵ Wahrman, p. 48.

⁶ Wahrman, p.169.

⁷ Dudink and Hagemann, ‘Introduction’, p. 6.

⁸ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 122.

⁹ See Michel Foucault, ‘Friendship as a Way of Life’, in *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966–84)*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hothroth and John Johnston (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), p. 308–12.