War Plays by Women

An international anthology

Edited by
Claire M. Tylee with Elaine Turner and Agnès Cardinal

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This anthology consists of ten plays from countries involved in the First World War, including plays from Germany and France never before available in translation.

The playwrights reconstruct imagined communities, challenge concepts of national identity, and rewrite history. Representing a range of dramatic forms, from radio play to street-epic, from comic sketch to musical, this anthology includes plays by:

- Muriel Box
- Alice Dunbar-Nelson
- Dorothy Hewett
- Berta Lask
- Marie Lenéru
- Wendy Lill
- Christina Reid
- Gertrude Stein
- Marion Craig Wentworth

Highly successful in their day, these plays demonstrate how women have attempted to use theatre to achieve social change. The collection explores their varied deployment of theatrical conventions and genres, and the historical context of social and gender issues raised.

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Edited by Claire M. Tylee with Elaine Turner and Agnès Cardinal

London and New York

First published 1999
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York NY 10016

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

Transferred to Digital Printing 2006

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Typeset in Veljovic by Keystroke, Jacaranda Lodge, Wolverhampton

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
War plays by women: an international anthology / [compiled by] Claire M. Tylee with Elaine Turner and Agnes Cardinal.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Drama–Women authors. 2 World War, 1914–1918–Drama.
I. Tylee, Claire M., 1946– . II. Turner, Elaine, 1937– .
III. Cardinal, Agnès.
PN6119.8.W37 1999
808.82'9358–dc21 99–18343
CIP

ISBN 0–415–17377–9

To our Grandmothers

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Contents

Illustrations ix
Acknowledgements xi
Copyright acknowledgements xii

General Introduction 1

1 **Marion Craig Wentworth (1872–?)** Introduction 13
War Brides (USA 1915: one-act play and film) 16
Feminist anti-war play

2 **Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1875–1935)** Introduction 27
Mine Eyes Have Seen (USA 1918: one-act play) 31
African-American recruitment play

3 **Gertrude Stein (1874–1946)** Introduction 36
Please Do Not Suffer: A Play (USA 1916) 40
Accents in Alsace: A Reasonable Tragedy (USA 1919) 43
Modernist sketches of civilian life in France

4 **Marie Lenéru (1875–1918)** Introduction 46
[*La Paix*] *Peace* (France 1918: four-act play) 50
French play debating pacifism and militarism

5 **Berta Lask (1878–1967)** Introduction 81
[*Die Befreiung*] *Liberation: 16 Tableaux from the Lives of German and Russian Women, 1914–20* (Germany 1924: play in 16 scenes) 85
Epic drama about women on the Eastern Front

6 **Muriel Box (1905–91)** Introduction 111
Angels of War (UK 1935: three-act play) 115
Play for amateurs about British women ambulance drivers on the Western Front

7 **Dorothy Hewett (1923–)** Introduction 140
The Man from Mukinupin (Australia 1979: two-act musical) 143
A celebration of Western Australian identity

8 **Wendy Lill (1950–)** Introduction 185
The Fighting Days (Canada 1984: two acts) 188
Episodes in the life of Francis Marion Beynon, Canadian suffragist

9 Christina Reid (1942–) Introduction 210
My Name, Shall I Tell You My Name (N. Ireland 1988: one-act radio play) 213
The Great War and the Troubles in Northern Ireland

Appendix: Checklist of war plays by women, 1915–39 224

Illustrations

1 Vesta Tilley at the Bradford Alhambra, May 1918 3

2 "Goodby! Goodby" – original production in New York, 1915 5

3 Alla Nazimova as "Joan" (Hedwig) in the film of *War Brides*, 1916 20

4 "Enlist!": American recruitment poster, 1917 28

5 Millicent Gower, Duchess of Sutherland, tending wounded soldiers, 1916 48

6 Theatre placard for Lask's play *Gas Warfare against Soviet Russia!*, 1927 81

7 British women ambulance drivers, Western Front, 1918 112

8 "Jack Tuesday" and "Lily Perkins" sitting in front of the war memorial, Act II of *The Man from Mukinupin* 172

9 Manitoba Political Equality League, 1915; Lillian Beynon Thomas in the back row 186

10 Banner paraded on Orange Day, showing the Ulster regiment at the Battle of the Somme, 1916 211

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Acknowledgements

Above all we wish to thank Gunhild Muschenheim of the Goethe Institute, London, and Odile Krakovitch in Paris for locating plays and information about the German and French playwrights for us. Without their help this project would not have left the ground. It was a footnote to *War Brides* by Margaret Kamester and Jo Vellacott in their edition of *Militarism and Feminism* (Virago, 1987: 165) that first sparked Claire Tylee's curiosity about Great War drama, so thanks to them and to Women's History Network. We are indebted to the three anonymous readers of the original proposal for their constructive comments. Many friends deserve our gratitude for their encouragement and suggestions: Meretta Elliott, Margaret Higonnet, Mary Joannou, Jane Marcus, Sybil Oldfield, Angela Woollacott, Mandy Zwarts, and all the delegates to the "Women, Drama and the First World War" conference at Brunel in 1997 who took a chance on the idea. Various archivists helped with the research: Janet Birkett at the Theatre Museum, Elizabeth Bright at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Ian Carter at the Imperial War Museum, Kevin Curran at Brunel University Library and Ian O'Sullivan of the British Film Institute. We are grateful to them for their care and attention to detail. Sam Walters' imaginative choice of plays and seminars at The Orange Tree Theatre was a practical inspiration; thank you, Sam, for staging Susan Glaspell and Christina Reid.

Claire Tylee wants to take this opportunity to record her appreciation of her two collaborators: we excitedly talked and argued and e-mailed to the point of exhaustion and, as readers will see, we still did not always agree. Fortunately, because of the constraints of time, space and cost, in the end we had to compromise on the choice of plays and what could be said about them. The book that has resulted is all the better for that debate between our disciplines and we hope it will inspire other inter-disciplinary work beyond the area of women's studies.

Lastly, and of course by no means least, we want to thank our editor at Routledge, Talia Rodgers, for her vision in commissioning this book, the confidence she has shown in the project throughout, and the patience with which she has awaited this polished object of desire.

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"British Women Ambulance Drivers with the Belgian Army, 1918" (Figure 7) Q3257; and "Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland" (Figure 5) Q2606 by courtesy of the Imperial War Museum. "Manitoba Political Equality League, 1915" (Figure 9) by courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N9905. Queensland Theatre Co. production of Dorothy Hewett's *The Man From Mukinupin* 1989 (photo by Fiora Sacco) (Figure 8) by courtesy of Royal Queensland Theatre Company.

General Introduction

> In any new dispensation, the idea of a nation must be seen as an expendable construct. After all, it has never admitted of women. Its flags and songs and battle-cries, even its poetry . . . make use of feminine imagery. But that is all. The true voice and vision of women are entirely excluded.
>
> Then why did I not walk away? Simply because I was not free to.
>
> (Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons*)

The First World War was crucial to the formation of twentieth-century national identities and cultures. However, with the notorious exception of individuals such as Mata Hari and Edith Cavell, women are kept to the periphery of First World War history in the popular imagination. Even the writings of women like Rosa Luxemburg and Gertrude Stein have been marginalised, and the efforts of later women to write them back into history of the "Great War" have been kept in the wings. This anthology puts the "true voice and vision of women" at centre-stage, not only of national history but of world theatre.[1] Because they are so challenging to hegemonic accounts of the history and literature of the 1914–18 war, and to dominant discourses of war in general, this general introduction suggests various ways in which these war plays by women might be related to one another and positioned within cultural networks. It then makes explicit the political implications of the dramatic conventions employed by these women playwrights. Each play then has an individual introduction followed by a range of recommended reading, to identify the author and to situate the play historically, indicating cultural connections.

History

The first six plays are documentary evidence of the war's political issues as perceived by women who lived through it, and of the ways in which they tried to affect the outcomes of the war by the use of drama. The second group of four plays shows how women dramatists attempted to (re)construct historical accounts of the war later, foregrounding events and/or issues which had been obscured by dominant histories/male historians.

Hegemonic histories tend to concentrate on battles, politico-military strategy, and changes in maps and boundaries. Above all, like dominant war drama, the focus is on male experience at the battlefront.[2] By contrast, women's history/plays are more likely to focus on women's experience behind the lines, especially on the home front, and on groups opposing war. Several of these plays remind us of wider political issues raised by the war but often "lost" in national histories, such as Irish volunteers to the British Army (Reid), the conscription of African-Americans (Dunbar-Nelson), and German working-class resistance (Lask). Others recall events and experiences that are crucial to our understanding of women's history, particularly the effects of the war on the women's suffrage movement, for instance Lill's play about Canada, and the importance of the pre-war suffrage movement to women's involvement with war activities: Lenéru's heroine, a wartime nurse, had been a suffragette, and women's auxiliary groups like Box's ambulance driver were sponsored by suffrage societies. Lask's play recalls the part women played in the revolutionary situation in Germany and Russia towards the end of the war. Craig Wentworth's *War Brides* arose from the international women's peace movement, inspired by Bertha von Suttner,

which was active before the war, led to the League of Nations and finally resulted in the United Nations.[3]

Women's politics particularly involved sexual politics at the time of the First World War, when women were expected to become mothers.[4] The specific relation of mothers to war is an issue in a number of the plays, especially Box's and Lenéru's. The problem of war babies, sensitive in Alsace-Lorraine where French girls had babies fathered by German soldiers in the occupying army, is hinted at in one of Stein's plays and made prominent in Craig Wentworth's.

Dominant histories also tend to be nationalistic. These plays have been selected to cross national boundaries and to foreground alternative points of view, especially those of ethnic minorities. The plays by Dunbar-Nelson, Stein, Hewett, Lill and Reid all raise questions of race, ethnicity and national identity which become acute in wartime; wars, after all, aim to define nations. The status of racial minorities such as African-Americans and Aboriginal Australians, obscured by official remembrance celebrations, is highlighted by Dunbar-Nelson and Hewett. The post-Second World War plays show the legacy for later generations of wartime recruitment/conscription into national armies. Who has the obligation or the right to defend a country? Whom does this personal sacrifice benefit? The relevance of these issues to the contemporary world is made only too apparent by Reid's play, which alludes both to the troubles in Northern Ireland and to the Greenham Common campaign.

Men alone were conscripted in the First World War, but women also were deeply affected by the war and many volunteered as uniformed auxiliaries. Celebrities such as Vesta Tilley, Lena Ashwell and Cicely Hamilton supported their government by morale-raising entertainment.[5] Plays by Lenéru, Box, Lill and Lask remind us how significant women's war activities were, not only to promoting belligerence but to opposing it. Rosa Luxemburg should be at least as well known as Mata Hari![6] The specific effects on women, as refugees, as mothers, sisters and lovers and as war workers, are interpreted by Craig Wentworth, Lenéru, Lask and Lill. Their plays are evidence of specifically feminist responses to debates about the role of women in wartime, especially to the state's expectation that women will care for the wounded and quietly provide more cannon-fodder.

Women's studies and gender studies

All the plays challenge us to reconsider matters of gender normally taken for granted, but which were being contested at the time of the Great War, especially the idea that veterans are heroes, but that refusing to fight is cowardly and unmanly. While Lenéru's play debates how these issues affected occupied France, Hewett's play tackles them in relation to Australia and it is stimulating to set her play alongside such films as *Gallipoli*. The plays by Lask and Dunbar-Nelson recall the international socialist opposition to the war and give voice to working-class responses, but from feminist standpoints. Where the plays written before the Second World War participate in the feminist movements founded in America and Europe before the First World War, the three plays written since the end of the Second World War attempt to renew feminist consciousness by recalling that female independence. Although all the plays can be seen to contribute to the general historiography of the First World War, they also make a specific contribution to the history of women, especially to our understanding of the connections between war, the women's suffrage campaign, and the emancipation of women.[7] Above all, Lill and Reid enable us to see how patriotism may conflict with feminist solidarity.

In Western society war is pre-eminently a gendering activity where men and women are divided from each other, and primitive notions of masculinity and femininity are reasserted. The ritual commemoration of the Great War and succeeding wars in annual, so-called remembrance ceremonies, perpetuates this gender division.[8] The study of war literature can make gendering plain, and can be used to examine debates about gender roles and stereotypical expectations at particular historical moments. Most of these plays raise questions about the expectation that women will become mothers, and the centrality of nurturing and pacificity to ideas of femininity, by contrast with the

Figure 1 Vesta Tilley in a propaganda sketch at the Bradford Alhambra, 3 May 1918. [Author's own collection.]

requirement that men be prepared to achieve heroism through armed combat.[9]

In the face of the traditional emphasis in men's war plays on the brotherhood of warriors, these plays suggest that war is also women's business. Some look at comradeship amongst women, and they all foreground the possibility that women could be active, autonomous agents instead of submissive victims. It is provocative to study these plays in parallel with contemporary plays by men, for instance comparing the two plays about Ulstermen, Christina Reid's *My Name, Shall I Tell You My Name* and Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster*; or two plays about "Diggers", Dorothy Hewett's *The Man from Mukinupin* and Alan Seymour's *The One Day of the Year*; or Muriel Box's *Angels of War* with R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*, both set on the Western Front. Berta Lask's *Liberation* displays a different attitude to women's socialism from Sheila Rowbotham's *Friends of Alice Wheeldon*, Bill Bryden's *Willie Rough* or Chris Hannan's *Elizabeth Gordon Quinn*, and the plays written in wartime France by Marie Lenéru, Gertrude Stein and Guillaume Appollinaire take extraordinarily divergent approaches to patriotism.[10]

Literature

In Britain, the First World War is usually approached through poetry, and secondarily through novels and autobiographical fiction. This is so much the case that the names of Owen and Sassoon (followed by Graves, Blunden, Aldington and Jones) are almost synonymous with Great War literature. Associated with them are Hemingway, Lawrence, Barbusse, Remarque and Jünger.[11] Two plays about the war are also widely studied: *Journey's End* and *Oh What a Lovely War*. These are frequently performed and film versions have been televised.[12] Although over the past 25 years the dominance of male poets and novelists with their concentration on men's point of view has been challenged, up until now women's drama has not been placed alongside such plays as *Journey's End*.[13]

This collection brings together different dramatic forms, from the one-act to the four-act play, from radio drama to musical theatre, from the classical French to the modernist German and American. Even this does not exhaust women's dramatic versatility, and we have reluctantly excluded performance pieces by Ruth Draper, comic sketches written by Gertrude Jennings for Lena Ashwell's groups to entertain the troops, a wartime drawing-room comedy by Fryn Tennyson Jesse that was a West End success, a nativity play set on the Western Front by Cicely Hamilton, and a post-war expressionist drama by Velona Pilcher with music by Edmond Rubbra. Not to mention Vernon Lee's philosophic tour-de-force, *Satan, the Waster*,[14] nor any of the unpublished pageants by women lodged in the Birmingham Public Reference Library. More recent works such as Rowbotham's community drama, *Friends of Alice Wheeldon*, and the extraordinarily inventive ghost-play, *Salonika*, by Louise Page, are already widely available. What links the chosen plays is that they are all text-based dramas that are responsive to reading.

Whilst it enables us to interrogate theses propounded by Paul Fussell, Samuel Hynes, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar about how war is imagined, this anthology also helps us

to see why women may have had difficulty using traditional dramatic forms based on theories of conflict and resolution, if they wished to counter conflict[15] and the use of force to resolve dilemmas. Most strikingly, it provokes us to consider whether if, as Fussell argues, men's war plays tend to demonstrate irony and to have a dynamic of hope abridged (Fussell 1975: 33–5), women's war plays by contrast reveal tentative optimism. Despite their confrontation with the facts of random violence, cruelty and genocide, do they suggest the possibility of change?

Some of these plays have been significant in the development of drama by national groups, or in the development of new dramatic forms. Thus, Alice Dunbar-Nelson was important to the Harlem Renaissance and the founding of an African-American theatre; Gertrude Stein was an important catalyst to the development of modernisms in various genres, including opera; and Berta Lask's experiments with epic street-theatre supported the Brechtian revolution in theatre practice. That these and other women dramatists such as Muriel Box worked with and wrote for amateur groups reminds us of the role of drama in education and the community. This role is usually lost sight of in dominant histories that concentrate on commercial theatre and national organisations, although we should not forget that Marie Lenéru's plays were premiered by the Comédie Française and at the Odéon in Paris, nor that Dorothy Hewett's *The Man from Mukinupin* was commissioned to mark the official sesquicentennial celebrations of Western Australia.

Drama

One must beware of reading plays of the past with the eyes of the present. These plays, with their focus on war, are particularly vulnerable to a projection of late twentieth-century perception and cynicism. A consideration of their structure and use of dramatic devices, especially their use of the stage space with its implicit social/political implications, can serve to mitigate against taking their apparent content for granted and provide insight into the limits and possibilities offered by dramatic form and particular performance styles.

The dominant dramatic stylistic form in the first half of the twentieth century was the realist/naturalist construct. (I use both terms because there is *still* no clearly accepted distinction and I wish to be understood!) This form assumes a one-to-one relationship between the actual world and the dramatic world and seeks its confirmation through details borrowed from the actual world. The stage-world tends to be enclosed within the static representation of an interior setting, implicitly separating characters from interaction with the larger context and forcing them into positions of re-action rather than action.

The "placing" of women in space and the larger social context is central to the feminist critique. Even today, the assumption remains that the outside world, the world of "action", is the dominion of men whereas the "inside" domestic world is the "natural" domain of women. In plays focusing on war, this assumption is inevitably at issue.[16]

Performance is the aim and temporary completion of a playtext. The text sets the possibilities and limits of its possible performance through its structure, setting and language. One element often ignored in reading plays is the visual information which makes up a considerable part of a live audience's experience. ***War Brides***, for example, ostensibly takes place inside the home. It presents the women as victims of the war and of men's actions, awaiting the deaths of their loved ones in the manner of Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, and celebrates women's bravery, their stoicism and their sense of loss. The setting in a foreign country implies unity between women in contrast to the men engaged in fighting. The use of setting also offers another active opposition to male wartime activities. The outside door is open. Women are constantly seen outside, harvesting. The internal room is thus transformed from a defining environment to a threshold, a proposal for an alternative to the restrictions of the domestic environment and its demand for passivity. In other words, the use of the setting proposes an implicit active dynamic beyond the issues overtly discussed. Inside and outside interact. The internal domestic world spills out to suggest alternatives which the women are, as yet, unable to bring to fruition.

By contrast, the content of ***Angels of War*** is severely limited and reduced into its

Figure 2 "Goodby! Goodby!" from *War Brides* by Marion Craig Wentworth, showing Alla Nazimova as "Hedwig" in the original production at the Palace Theatre, New York, January 1915 (with Mary Alden as "Amelia" and Gertrude Berkeley as "Mother") at the threshold between the peasant home and the working-countryside.

setting. The more enclosed and permanent the setting, the more action is drawn to the personal. While the women are confined and domesticised, the war is reduced to a credible context for justifying the elaboration of personal angst. The characters are defined by personal details, few of which are related to the war or their participation as ambulance drivers. The intense personalisation finds expression in the arguably misplaced issue of "the individual vs. authority". The audience is encouraged to take sides with the "girls" against the Commandant who, instead of being allowed her rightful role as their leader and protector in a dangerous wartime situation, is presented as representative of restrictive authority. The hierarchy of responsibility and its function in wartime becomes merely a restriction to generalised individual "freedom", and the war is virtually divested of its power and significance.

The language, disarmingly literal and middle class, also neutralises the wartime situation and dampens the emotional content. There is little build-up or suspense leading to Cocky's death, so the audience is not particularly affected by her loss. Her death, like the war, is merely an opportunity to express personal grievances rather than grief. It is these personal grievances the audience is invited to share. Although, with imagination, we can project on to the play the situation of the women ambulance drivers, with its bravery and dangers, its extraordinariness is never brought to the fore or developed.

Mine Eyes Have Seen offers a fascinating and surprisingly sophisticated use of the dramatic medium. The difficulties of the issues at stake are developed and complicated by on-stage dynamics between two specific, powerful styles, both prevalent in the period. A ruthless Realism expressed through the poverty of the setting and the incapacities of Dan and Lucy is dynamically opposed by the Expressionism of Dan's nationalistic fervour. The confrontation of these two diametrically opposed styles of expression exposes the strengths and weaknesses of each and opens a highly sophisticated discussion about "style" itself. Highlighted through their opposition, each style is elaborated as a mode of expression fitting to a particular, viable context. This overt elaboration proposes the argument that the *way* one expresses oneself determines *what* one can express; that the limits and possibilities of content are determined by the style and form of expression.

Dunbar-Nelson skilfully anchors each style with the perspective, needs and situation of each character. The closed domestic setting pins the characters to the details and difficulties of day-to-day survival. Their situation is extreme; their concerns unquestionable. The poverty of their existence and their struggle in the material world are rigorously elaborated through the realist/naturalist form which serves to engage the audience with their struggle. The only escape available is transcendence into the inspiration of spiritual goals.

Realism is unable to find expression or justification for motivating passions of the

spirit (at best, it reduces them to psychological explanations). Expressionism, however, devised to express the ineffable, the spirit of ideals and passions, must override personal and mitigating details of the everyday material world and inspire with the fire of that spirit. The inspirational inclusiveness of spirit over matter is expressed not only in Chris's conversion but by the fervour of Jake, the Jewish youth.

Each style is shown to have its own focus and emotional content. Each style is at its peak of expression. Its strengths are celebrated and, simultaneously, because it is confronted by its opposite, its inherent limitations are exposed. Hence, the play offers a discussion of "style", posing, ahead of its time, questions regarding the inter-dependency between form and content.

Accents in Alsace takes us as near as we are likely to come to an "anti-play". To read it as "drama" necessitates confrontation with issues of "performance". No setting, characters or expressed narrative are indicated. There are act and scene numbers but they are erratic: some are numbered with Roman numerals and some with Arabic, and St Valentine's Day is indicated by Roman numerals. The idiosyncratic numbering calls into question assumptions about chronological narrative and the conventional means of dividing it into sections. To call attention to these issues in performance, one would need to expose them to the audience, perhaps on placards. Moreover, although called "scenes", they are more accurately "units", clusters of expression isolating a possible action or image. The play takes only minutes to read; it would take much longer to perform.

The opening indicates a general structure. A predominantly prose commentary, clearly in contrast to the verse, offers a condensed history of the Schemils, suggesting that although "Germanic" they are not "German". In comparison, the Schemmels' opening verse defines their French origins. Overriding both, the towering figure of Alsace herself promises to divide and set them against each other. The action following is presented in a series of associative crystallisations which develop a dynamic between personal responses and wider, general associations.

Performance would require fundamental considerations: Who says what? How shall they be said? Both the verse and the frequently sloganistic form of the language open possibilities: different people might speak the same lines; sentences might effectively be repeated, interchanged, spoken in unison and in different contexts. Although speeches are written as a typographical whole, they might easily be comprised of contributions from different characters, offering different perspectives. How the lines are allocated will affect both meaning and effect.

For example, consider three different approaches to the section beginning "Alphonse what is your name":

1 A teacher who is teaching the children French speaks the entire sequence as a lesson, emphasising changes in the culture as a result of the war;
2 A teacher asks and the names are given by individual children in response, presenting a situation where children are brought together for the first time;
3 Each line is said by a different person as speakers warmly introduce themselves and ask each other's names in a round, creating an image of hope in a new inclusive society.

There is enough material in structure and language to focus performance choices, but an unusual freedom to explore the range of meaning-making possibilities. When reading Stein "playlets", it is valuable to take the time to consider their possibilities as performance and how specific choices would affect audience perception and response. One could envisage an evening in which *Alsace* was performed in, say, three different ways.

The structure of Lenéru's ***La Paix*** [*Peace*] suggests an uneasy marriage between the realistic drawing-room play of the period and remnants of French neo-classicism. The drawing-room suffices as an area where a collection of people might credibly meet and exchange views. The central neo-classical dilemma – Love vs. Duty – is still recognisable, but diluted by the fact that the characters are in no position to turn their opinions into effective, viable action. They are limited to conversation and their characters do not evolve beyond the delivery of their opinions.

The implicit restrictions of the domestic setting, especially on women, are particularly evident. Despite her passion, Mabel is confined and rendered inactive by the

domestic space. She is entirely reliant on men entering her space to bring her information from the outside, act as sounding-boards for her ideas and take action on her behalf. Her influence is limited to her effect on her personal circle. It's no surprise that, lacking an active arena, she is defeated by events taking place outside her range of influence. In the last Act, she is literally cornered in her bedroom. The image is contradictory: on the one hand, she is holding court; on the other, she is domestically isolated and disempowered.

All three women are reactive; their influence and effect minimised, if not stymied, through domestic marginalisation. One might even see Simone's idiotic bloodlust and incessant sloganising ("I am convinced that peace is a utopian dream") as a consequence of the frustrations of enforced ineffectuality ("It seems to me war and peace don't depend on me"). The question is asked "Are words enough?" Clearly not! But the women, imprisoned in their domestic setting, have nothing else to work with. Perhaps Mabel's sacrifice of private life for ideal is an expression of the limits of the merely personal?

Berta Lask's ***Liberation*** is an extraordinary experiment in political drama. Unashamedly agit-prop, its roots are in the "Living Newspaper", where performers exposed the political implications of current news events in street performances in order to "politicise" the audience and inspire it with the desire for change. Its enormous cast and forthright style suggest *Liberation* was envisaged as a huge street pageant, although, given enough willing performers, there is no reason why it could not be performed on stage.

The focus and strong line of development are clearly stated in the Prologue and developed through an enacted comparison between the experiences of women in Germany and Russia focusing on both class *and* gender. Lask addresses both audience and characters as "fellow women workers". Within the Tableaux, national power structures are exposed through their effects on the everyday lives of women. Simultaneously, there is an attempt to draw audience sympathy to the effects of the power structure on personal lives, especially through the development of Anna as an individual character and, most important and necessary for a "political" play, to expose the necessity of and possibility for change.

On the whole, the "tableaux" structure enables Lask to achieve these ambitious ends. The open use of the stage calls on the audience's imagination to fill the the specific context, while the easy movement between Russia and Germany accentuates the possibilities of movement and change. The juxtaposition between Germany and Russia stimulates an automatic comparison while simultaneously implying an even larger context spreading internationally, culminating in overt manifestation in the final scene at the World Congress.

"Character" is defined through the relation of the individual to the political situation, firmly anchoring even personal sympathies to political choices. Thus, a strong focus is activated which forms and directs the expanse of action and assists the audience in responding to the significances of the information.

The weaknesses in the play lie not in its structure but in how the structure is used. The text does tend to be over-dependent on verbal information. Though the information is usually elaborated and supported through character response, there tends to be rather too much of it for an audience to take in. The presentation might arguably have been more effective if full use had been made of its formal possibilities. "Tableau" usually refers to a static image. The use of visual image to "sum up" each Tableau would have centred its emotional power while simultaneously creating an emotional and memorable through-line. A rare example is Tableau 11: both the action and its consequences are crystallised in a simple, emotive visual image when her comrades sing a hymn over Nasdja's dead body.

Liberation is a vast project in using drama to inspire political consciousness, especially as it foregrounds both a socialist and a feminist perspective. The "tableaux" format allows this expanse. The use of multiple settings and the comparisons between Germany and Russia encourage the audience to form connections and continuity between separate scenes: whilst being drawn into the characters' personal lives they are also made aware of the political implications. The final scene of the Women's Congress ostensibly includes the audience. As the women express their changing consciousness and

commitment to socialist ideas, these ideals reveal themselves to have emotional content, and each member of the audience is invited to assess her own life and perspective in their light.

Radio is necessarily audience-centred. The listener must be engaged in the creation of context. All there is to go on is voice and, occasionally, sound effects. ***My Name, Shall I Tell You My Name*** is totally dramatic in that it makes its world as it goes along without the aid of commentary. Character is created not only by *what* is said but by syntax, vocabulary and emphasis. Cleverly, Reid makes use of the formal requirements of radio to centre issues of self-definition and extend their relevance using the fluidity of the medium to move swiftly through time and space, leading the listener not only to construct the fuller picture but to compare and assess.

An instigating opposition is set up between past and present, leading us to project the final separation of the protagonists, complete with its nostalgia and sense of loss and waste. At the same time, the context poses a central question which is not answered until near the end of the piece. We don't know exactly where Andrea is! Even if we assume from the slam of the metal door that she is in prison, we still don't know why. This question, as well as the significance of her remembering to the present situation, underlies our response to the action.

A process from unity to separation, then, is implicit in the opening, allowing Reid to elaborate the terms of its necessity and extend them from the personal to a social/political perspective. Andrea's personal memories of her grandfather, her self-definition as "Granda's pet", and his definition as her Granda, soon take root, first in family situation and then in a national and international context. His memories contrasted with hers establish his need for self-glorification while encouraging the audience to assess what is being said throughout rather than accept it wholesale.

Radio is dependent on imagery. The play's images focus on a distinction between men and women and their terms of evaluation. Men not only find self-definition and justification in war but also pass down the generations a conception of opposition and violence as admirable proof of manhood. Eddy and his father are denigrated, yet the Battle of the Somme fought by Ulstermen as a replay of the Battle of the Boyne suggests the failures of war as a solution. Andy takes pride in his grandson's participation in the Falklands while Andrea's husband is destroyed by the unofficial use of violence as a means of gaining manful pride. The images of women centre on their caring, struggling against and surviving the consequences of male insistence on violence as a solution. Even at the end, while Andy prides himself on his rigid separation from his beloved granddaughter, Andrea longs for a "no man's land" where they can meet; a dream of resolution.

The child's innocent voice contrasts vividly with Andy's rigid, self-censored memories and the adult Andrea's growing politicisation. The child unwittingly uncovers the oppressive political hierarchy underlying her grandfather's pride. As an adult, Andrea personally experiences the results of such pride in the destruction of her husband, her separation from her grandfather, and her arrest at Greenham where giving her "name" results in misdefinition and incarceration. The image of the old woman with her cake of lighted candles, its associations with hope and loss, calls into question the images of war and puts the final tarnish on its glory.

"In the theatre everything is possible" says Clarry who, with her sister Clemmy, serves as virtual Ringmaster to the action of ***The Man from Mukinupin***, creating the overall impression of Australian national identity as a "stage-managed" project. An open stage and overt theatricality give rise to a circus/music-hall structure and style presenting, instead of a linear narrative, a series of interactions forming a broad panorama through which Mukinupin becomes a microcosm of Australia. At the start of this meta-narrative, Mukinupin appears to conform to typical small-town, ordered life, its rigid class-system and materialism unacknowledged, its darker secrets – illegitimacy, mass murder, racism – hidden. After the war, its façade begins to crumble and requires acknowledgement and integration.

The opening is ambiguous and threatening, drawing the attention of the viewer by withholding sight. Suggesting dark, underlying intonations, it contrasts sharply with the comic Morris dance that follows. Because both characters and situations are

drawn in broad stereotype, deviations from the norm create issues and alternative perspectives: in Brechtian terms, they serve as "distancing devices", exposing the underlying assumptions that formed the original stereotypes and encouraging comparison and assessment by the audience. The four sets of twins/alter egos accentuate the process of comparison, highlighting issues of social mores and values.

The songs not only break up the action and pump up the energy but, more significantly, they crystallise the singer's attitude and situation, setting the particular into a wider context by identifying it as a general condition. A dynamic is created between the personally particular and its archetypal representation, reinforced by the use of theatre, poetry and performance as metaphors for Life. Edie's poems, *Othello*, even Mrs Tuesday's self-presentation as "Melodrama Widow", are some examples of the multiple use of performance which call attention to the play as construction and emphasise the incidents as expressions of the archetypal process of life ("all the world's a stage"). This overt theatricality also supports the use of visual imagery as an emotive signifying device. The central image of Harry drinking beneath a cardboard war memorial, for example, crystallises a cluster of associative resonances.

The Man from Munikupin celebrates not only Australia (warts and all) but also the process of living and theatre itself. None the less, women in the audience may well be disappointed that their female counterparts are left requiring "an eligible bachelor and an eye for the main chance"!

The Fighting Days is an engaging example of a genuinely "political" play neatly linking feminist issues with international politics and confronting the audience with the necessity to assess the implications of both.

The movement of the action through time and space empowers the characters, and the characters are developed through their responses to current issues. Owing to their occupations, feminist and political issues are an integral part of their lives, centralising the political implications of everyday life and personal choices. Thus, both characters and ideas are exposed and tested through interaction and comparison. The personal is melded to the ideological and principle is extended through practice as the characters are required to take action. This process comes to fruition in the closing scene where McNair is "forced" to sack Fanny and she rejects his proposal in order to remain a "free thinker".

The open stage encourages audience engagement with the application and effect of various ideologies in a variety of situations. Depth is given to this dynamic as the characters change and adjust their points of view. Particularly moving is Lily's confusion over the war as, affected by patriotic propaganda, she considers how emotional commitments dull ideological clarity. A further dynamic is added by the unseen Vernon, whose ideas interact with those on-stage and who suffers the consequences of his unpopular ideas. It is one of the strengths of the play that off-stage action has active effect on-stage. The voices of the Prairie women create a powerful experience of the wide-ranging influence and effect of ideas, setting a context in which perspectives on the war take on viable significance. Ironically, it is the responses of these women which force the final confrontation.

Lill's process of foregrounding and dramatising political concepts through the interaction of committed characters offers the audience credible, opposing perspectives and their implicit consequences which the audience is encouraged to consider and assess. Because Francis is constantly present, she invites a bias towards her view. However, her arguably romanticised terms of self-justification expose even Francis's final decision and its justification for audience assessment.

Theatre is inherently social. The setting and structure of any play limits and/or empowers its characters. An examination of a play's structure, and its use of the stage and formal conventions, will contribute to our understanding of the social/political possibilities inherent in the play's world and of their implications for women's role in the social order. The performance/reading of these plays enables their authors to engage with political debate and to influence public ideas. We hope that this anthology will not only enlarge the reader's appreciation of the creative vision and voice of women writers, but enable her/him to see the scope for new social roles for women and for men and new

ways of dealing with aggression in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1 Quotation from Eavan Boland (1995) *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman Poet in Our Time*, Manchester: Carcanet, p. 145. For changes in the gender division of national memories, see John R. Gillis (1994) "Introduction" to *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

2 One example of hegemonic history will suffice: the widely republished Marc Ferro (1969) *The Great War 1914–1918*, Paris: Gallimard (translated 1973, London: Routledge). Newer exceptions that explicitly take account of gender include: Stephen Constantine, Maurice W. Kirby and Mary B. Rose (eds) (1995) *The First World War in British History*, London: Arnold, which has a theoretical discussion by Gail Braybon, "Women and the War", pp. 141–67 that is particularly relevant to this volume. The seminal essay which asks whether there is a politics of gender in the politics of war, and what they reveal about each other, is by Joan W. Scott "Rewriting History" in Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret C. Weitz (eds) (1987) *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 19–30. Scott argues that women's experience provides insight into the discrepancy between private history and official, national history, and also (more importantly) a means of analysing how and by whom national memory is constructed (p. 28).

3 Beatrice Kempf (1972) *Woman for Peace: the Life of Bertha von Suttner*, London: Wolff. Other relevant studies, by Wilsher, by Liddington, and by Hinton, will be found in the lists following individual introductions to the plays.

4 Susan Kingsley Kent (1987) *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860–1914*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

5 Sara Maitland (1986) *Vesta Tilley*, London: Virago, pp. 48–9, 118–21. Lena Ashwell (1936) *Myself a Player*, London: Michael Joseph, chapter 8; Lena Ashwell (1922) *Modern Troubadours*, London: Gyldendal. Cicely Hamilton (1935) *Life Errant*, London: Dent, chapters VIII–XIV.

6 Elzbieta Ettinger (1986) *Rosa Luxemburg: a Life*, London: Harper.

7 Specific references are given after the plays mentioned. A more general survey is provided by Arthur Marwick (1977) *Women at War, 1914–18*, London: Fontana. Arguments about the impact of the Great War on the Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain are debated in Martin Pugh (1992) *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914–1959*, London: Macmillan, chapter 2, and Jo Alberti (1989) *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914–28*, London: Macmillan.

8 See Margaret Randolph Higonnet *et al.* (1987) *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 4; and Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott (eds) (1993) *Gendering War Talk*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Bob Bushaway (1992) "Name Upon Name: The Great War and Remembrance" in Roy Porter (ed.) *Myths of the English*, London: Polity, pp. 136–67; Raphael Samuel (ed.) (1989) *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity: volume 1*, London: Routledge, pp. 57–89; John R. Gillis (1994) "Introduction" to *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

9 See Cynthia Enloe (1983) *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarisation of Women's Lives*, London: Pluto, pp. 12–15; Marilyn Lake and Jay Damousis (1995) "Introduction" to their *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–20; and Malcolm Smith (1995) "The War and British Culture" in Stephen Constantine, Maurice W. Kirby and Mary B. Rose (eds) (1995) *The First World War in British History*, London: Edward Arnold, pp.168–83.

10 Bill Bryden (1972) *Willie Rough: A Play*, Edinburgh: Southside. Chris Hannan (1985) *Elizabeth Gordon Quinne: A Serious Melodrama* in Alasdair Cameron (ed.) (1990) *Scot-Free: New Scottish Plays*, London: Nick Hern. Sheila Rowbotham (1986) *Friends of Alice Wheeldon*, London: Pluto (reprinted 1987 ed. Blanche W.

Cook and Sandi E. Cooper, New York: Monthly Review Press). Also see: Peter Whelan (1982) *The Accrington Pals: A Play*, London: Methuen. Louise Page (1990) *Salonika*, in her *Plays: 1*, London: Methuen. Publication details for other titles are given in the reading lists following the plays in question.

11 Examples of the dominance of these male writers in studies of the First World War include: Dominic Hibberd (1990) *The First World War*, London: Macmillan; and Holger Klein (ed.) (1976) *The First World War in Fiction: a Collection of Critical Essays*, London: Macmillan.

12 These two plays are central to the thesis propounded by Paul Fussell (1975) *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 33–5, 195. Their impact has been augmented by the mass media. R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983, first performed in 1928, was filmed in 1930 (directed by James Whale, GB/US), and a television version broadcast by BBC2 1995 is available on video. Theatre Workshop's *Oh What a Lovely War* (London: Methuen, 1965) was first performed in 1963 and was also adapted to film (dir.: Richard Attenborough, GB 1968). A lesser-known play by John Wilson, *Hamp* (London: Evans, 1966) first performed in 1964, was made into the successful film *King and Country* (dir.: Joseph Losey, GB 1964). In the USA, the comedy by Maxwell Anderson and Lawrence Stallings, *What Price Glory?*, first performed in New York, 1924, was similarly successful both on stage and in the cinema (dir.: Raoul Walsh US 1926; John Ford US 1952). No play by a woman has had such an impact, although Elaine Morgan's BBC television adaptation of Vera Brittain's autobiography, *Testament of Youth* (1933/1979), was broadcast worldwide.

13 Challenges to this dominance were developed in such works as: Catherine Reilly (ed.) (1981) *Scars upon My Heart: Women's Poetry and Verse of the First World War*, London: Virago; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1987–92) *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Modern World*, 3 volumes, London: Yale University Press; Claire M. Tylee (1990) *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, London: Macmillan and Iowa: University of Iowa Press; and Dorothy Goldman (ed.) (1993) *Women and World War I: The Written Response*, London: Macmillan. Despite their titles, the lack of attention to women's drama is true even of such recent studies as Samuel Hynes (1990) *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, London: The Bodley Head; and John Onions (1990) *English Fiction and Drama of the Great War*, London: Macmillan. An exception to the general disregard for women's war drama is Gillian Beer "The Dissidence of Vernon Lee: *Satan the Waster* and the Will to Believe" in S. Raitt and T. Tate (eds) (1997) *Women's Fiction and the Great War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 107–31. A collection of essays edited by Claire M. Tylee and Rose J. Atfield, *Women, Drama and the Great War* is forthcoming from Mellen Press, Lampeter. This will form a companion to this anthology, dealing with several of the dramatists included here.

14 Fuller details of these other war plays by women, 1915–39, are given in the Appendix. The editors were particularly disappointed not to be able to include a translation of Annie Vivanti's 1918 play, *Le Bocche inutili*, or Louise Page's *Salonika*, available in her *Plays: 1*, or her unpublished radio play, *Armistice*; Sheila Rowbotham's *Friends of Alice Wheeldon* had to be omitted because of its length, although its depiction of the harassment of Anglo-Scottish draft-resistance makes it historically invaluable. These are all strongly recommended. For reasons of space we have ended the Appendix at 1939, and have restricted suggestions for further reading to books rather than scholarly articles that may be less widely available but are more easily identified through databases. This volume provides a starting-place.

15 See note 13 above. The introduction to the Methuen student edition of Caryl Churchill's play, *Top Girls*, (ed.) B Naismith (London: Methuen, 1991, p. xxii), contains pertinent remarks by Churchill about traditional dramatic structure and her need, as a woman, to find a new form.

16 Useful aids to beginning an analysis of