The Forbidden Zone Writers: Femininity and Anglophone Women War Writers of the Great War

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Abstract
This dissertation examines the texts of Anglophone women writers from the First World War. Women’s roles in the war—volunteer nurses, ambulance driver, munitions workers, and land girls—gave them the opportunity to leave the protection of their homes and enter the masculine dominated public sphere. In this dissertation, I examine different genres of women’s writing from the war and trace three aspects of simultaneity as these writings explore the new freedoms, and new and old constraints, that the war brought to women. The three principles of simultaneity explain the conflicting emotions women feel over what the war means for them in terms of gains and losses in freedom: the freedom to leave the private sphere and enter the public sphere, offset by the inability adapt to the heavily male-dominated public sphere, one in which rejects women’s entrance; the freedom to be in a place where the ideals of femininity need to be abandoned, offset by the expectation to maintain those ideals; and finally, the freedom to shake off the controlling hands of their families and engage in life-altering and dangerous experiences, while being exposed to traumatizing and dehumanizing consequences. I trace these instances of simultaneity in Vera Brittain’s The Testament of Youth (1933), Irene Rathbone’s We That Were Young (1932), Enid Bagnold’s The Happy Foreigner (1920), Mary Borden’s The Forbidden Zone (1929), and Evadne Price’s Not So Quiet... (1930), concluding with Virginia Woolf’s Three Guineas (1938) as she reflects on women’s rights and roles after the Great War. This particular group of authors has not been studied as a group, and by doing so, I hope to demonstrate how they collectively show that, for women, the war liberated, failed to liberate, remade, and destroyed them, all at once.