CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> *Friktion ist der einzige Begriff, welcher dem ziemlich allgemein entspricht, was den wirklichen Krieg von dem auf dem Papier unterscheidet.*
>
> (Friction is the only term that corresponds more or less to that which distinguishes real war from war on paper.)
>
> (Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* 86)

In his memoir *Als wär's ein Stück von mir* (As if it Were Part of Myself, 1966), Carl Zuckmayer discusses the impossibility of writing about war: "Ich habe kein Kriegsbuch geschrieben und keine Kriegsgeschichte erzählt. Mir schien es unmöglich, das mitzuteilen – vergeblich, das als Wirklichkeit Erlebte, sei es in einem verklärten, heroischen, kritischen Licht, wiederzugeben oder auch nur sachlich davon zu berichten" (I did not write a book about war or tell a war story. It seemed impossible to communicate this – futile to reproduce what I experienced as real, either in an idealized, heroic, critical light or even to report it in a matter of fact way).[1] In his film *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995), set during the war in the Balkans, Theodoros Angelopoulos conveys the same topos visually. Instead of exposing us to a scene of cruel butchery, Angelopoulos shows a stark white screen. Like many others before them, Zuckmayer and Angelopoulos suggest that war is ineffable, that no representation can do justice to the violence and terror of war. And yet, flying in the face of this claim to unrepresentability is the fact that war forms the subject of countless novels, dramas, poems, and films. Texts about war are written to work through its trauma, to settle questions of guilt and responsibility, to promote pacifism, to celebrate the intensity of life under duress, or to gain a better understanding of the origin and mechanisms of war. The sheer mass of texts about war hints at a certain repetition compulsion: we keep telling stories about war because we can neither stop wars nor can we fashion a representation of war truly capable of conveying its terror. Carl von Clausewitz used the term "friction" to designate this rift between reality and fiction, claiming that

"Friktion ist der einzige Begriff, welcher dem ziemlich allgemein entspricht, was den wirklichen Krieg von dem auf dem Papier unterscheidet."[2] Of course, Clausewitz was primarily interested in friction on the battlefield. This study, in contrast, turns Clausewitz's theory on its head by locating the source of friction not in reality but on paper. As we shall see, every representation of war is also a failure to represent war, but it is not the fact of this failure itself that is interesting, but rather its how and why. Thus, this study proposes to investigate the theoretical and historical parameters of "friction," to explore the formal and thematic aporiae that demarcate the limits of war representations.

While this book foregrounds friction as a characteristic of texts about war, a literary scholar might object that "friction" is a much more fundamental problem that does not apply to war literature exclusively but is constitutive of all forms of writing and, generally, all products of signification. In this sense, friction designates the unbridgeable gap between word and world, between signifier and signified. To be sure, friction holds sway in the entire realm of representation, but there are pressing reasons why it acquires particular urgency and assumes specific formations in the context of war. Here, friction not only points to the radical disjuncture between the mortal danger of war and the comforting safety of fiction, but also measures the distance between the pacifist impulse of numerous war novels and the seeming inevitability of future wars.

Many authors of texts about war hope to convey the reality of war in order to prevent future wars. It is because of this imperative that the concept of authenticity looms so large in all writing about war: if only we could capture what this war was really like, no more wars would ever be fought. Of course, the failures that plague this idealist agenda and the theoretical reservations that attend it are manifold. First, the notion of a perfect representation in which life and text are completely co-extensive is as seductive as it is illusory. Secondly, the power of literature to shape and change social reality is circumscribed at best. But even if we concede that a text may approximate the reality it represents and, furthermore, that literature does possess the potential to transform the world, there is still the question of complicity. This applies not only to texts that deliberately engage in literary warmongering. As this study will show, many texts that oppose war on some level are complicit with its rationale on another. This ideological unevenness puts in question one of our most dearly cherished assumptions, namely the idea that anti-war texts are apt to pave the way towards peace. Indeed, one might even borrow from Giorgio Agamben and suggest that, in the war novel, the concept of peace represents an

inclusion by exclusion.[3] If we define peace from the vantage point of war, we have little hope of developing the qualities and orientations on which the peaceful collaboration of societies and nations might rest. Texts about war teach us about war. If we want to understand peace, we may require another kind of counsel.

It is the goal of this study to gain a precise, accurate, thematic, and theoretical understanding of war texts and of the different forms of friction that define their limits. Based on my readings of German-language war texts from the eighteenth to the early twenty-first century, I differentiate four forms of friction: metonymic slippage, the content of the form, the dilemma of the body in pain, and gender subtexts.

METONYMIC SLIPPAGE: THE SUBLIME AND TERROR

One of the most surprising results of a study of war literature consists in the fact that, quite frequently, texts that ostensibly focus on the representation of warfare are actually concerned with issues of an entirely different nature. Let me give an example. As the title indicates, Friedrich Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans* (The Maid of Orleans, 1801) revolves around an episode in the Hundred Years' War. On a deeper level, however, the text is not primarily concerned with a historically specific formation of violent conflict, but rather uses warfare as a trope to explore the relation between mind and body. It is my argument that such metonymic slippage, which results in a conflation of different discourses, is likely to produce a structural *méconnaissance* of war. In other words, a text that is characterized by metonymic slippage is not primarily beholden to the topic of war, but, by employing war as a metaphor or metonymy, it necessarily conveys messages about warfare. After all, in creating links and connections between two different arenas, metaphors and metonymies redefine both. By conflating warfare and the mind–body dichotomy, for example, an author may not only define the relationship to one's body as combative but also transpose the model of physical disease onto the body politic.

As the Schiller example indicates, the most common form of metonymic slippage uses the theme of war to showcase the triumph of mind over body. This is hardly surprising since, in warfare, the soldier's spiritual and emotional energies are engaged in a constant battle to overcome the fear of physical extinction. According to Margot Norris, war is frequently seen as "coeval with the moment of becoming human . . . because the transition from animal to human required the willingness

to risk life, to transcend the survival instinct and set immaterial values above material life."[4]

The interpretation of warfare as quintessentially human is intimately related to the conflation of warfare and the sublime that dates back to the eighteenth century but is still evident in works by Ernst Jünger and Peter Handke. Like warfare, the concept of the sublime goes to the heart of the relation between body and mind, reason and sensuality. Immanuel Kant, whose philosophy had a defining influence on both Schiller and Heinrich von Kleist, defined the sublime as the moment "welches uns die Überlegenheit der Vernunftbestimmung unserer Erkenntnisvermögen über das größte Vermögen der Sinnlichkeit gleichsam anschaulich macht"[5] (which illustrates the supremacy of the faculty of reason over the greatest power of sensuality). Kant claims that the sublime causes "negative Lust" (165) (negative pleasure) and repeatedly links it to "Gewalt," which in German encompasses the notion of power but also violence. Interestingly, in Kant's theory, the link between the sublime and warfare as a historical phenomenon is incidental (see chapter 2) whereas the connection between the sublime and the *fiction* of war is intimate and insoluble. According to Kant, the true moment of the sublime arises when we imagine danger but are not actually confronted with it: "Man kann aber einen Gegenstand als furchtbar betrachten, ohne sich vor ihm zu fürchten, wenn wir ihn nämlich so beurteilen, daß wir uns bloß den Fall denken, da wir ihm etwa Widerstand tun wollten, und daß alsdann aller Widerstand bei weitem vergeblich sein würde" (184) (But one can consider an object terrible without being afraid of it if we think of it in such a way that we are merely imagining the possibility of wanting to resist it and then that all resistance would be futile). To Kant, only an observer who is safe from actual danger can appreciate the phenomenon of the sublime: "Wer sich fürchtet, kann über das Erhabene der Natur gar nicht urteilen" (185) (He who is afraid cannot assess the sublimity of nature). Kant's point is well taken, and yet, as the following chapters will show, the reality of war can and did invite fantasies of transcendence, and the fiction that springs from this experience can, in turn, inspire others to pursue transcendence in war.

This study traces the relation between warfare and the sublime from the late eighteenth century to the present. Part I shows that, while Kant laid the theoretical foundation for an association of warfare and the sublime, Schiller's *Wallenstein* (1799) and his *Jungfrau von Orleans* oscillate between condemnations of warfare as slaughter and the celebration of warfare as the practice of man's most sublime freedom. Although Schiller's plays are characterized by a great ambivalence toward war, they also toy with the

notion of war as a moral institution capable of effecting personal and national catharsis. In contrast, the plays of Kleist deconstruct the nexus of warfare and the sublime by embracing it and taking it to extremes. In Kleist's work, the concept of terror emerges as the dark "Other" of the sublime.

In the German-language canon of First World War literature, the works that are most commonly associated with the relation between warfare and the sublime are those of Ernst Jünger. In Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* (Storms of Steel, 1920), in particular, the experience of violence and warfare offers access to a transcendental realm, violence appears as the ultimate reality, and warfare is in close proximity to religion. Finally, parts III and IV show that, while the sublime recedes into the background in the works of Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass, it resurfaces in the Yugoslavia essays of Peter Handke.

THE CONTENT OF THE FORM: FROM THE NOVEL OF 'BILDUNG' TO THE FARCE

If we compare memoirs, diaries, and letters from the front with war novels, we find that they share many motifs and themes.[6] Both types of text convey the chaos of battle, the horror of close proximity to death, the cruelty of captivity, the constant hunger due to scarcity of supplies, the extreme discomfort that arises from lice infestation, sleep deprivation, and exposure to cold and rain, and the suffering caused by injuries and diseases including dysentery, typhoid, and cholera. Both autobiographical documents and literature alternate between patriotism, propaganda, critique, and despair. And both describe the exhilaration of victory, the thrill of adventure, and the excitement of wartime romances. Indeed, the main difference between war literature and the many documents of soldiers and civilians who recorded their experiences of war is not one of content, but of form.

One of the most fundamental challenges in any analysis of war literature concerns the congruence of content and form. Again, in this, texts about war are like any other kind of text. What is different, though, is a persistent tendency in secondary literature that deals with war texts to overlook narrative structure and stylistic choices in favor of questions of historical accuracy. Consciously or subliminally, authenticity emerges as the gold standard of war writing. But while such a focus is understandable – after all, a truthful account of events is imperative where human lives are at stake – it is also problematic. Narrowing one's field of vision in this

way is apt to produce misreadings since, as Hayden White and others have shown, narrative devices and stylistic idiosyncrasies are themselves carriers of ideological meaning. Departing from this assumption, I argue that an incongruence of content and form introduces its own measure of friction into the representation of war; a friction that relates not only to stylistic, rhetorical, and narrative devices, but also to questions of genre, which, as I will show, have particular purchase on the representation of war.

It is not accidental that many prominent eighteenth-century representations of warfare belong to the genre of drama. Unlike the First World War, which is generally perceived to defy meaning and is identified with the erasure of individuality in mass death, eighteenth-century warfare does not preclude an investigation into its origin and rationale. Thus, the eighteenth-century drama, with its emphasis on heroic individuality and its staged negotiation of competing arguments, offers an ideal venue to probe the legitimacy of the goals and methods of war. In contrast, the genres that are most closely allied with representations of the First World War are the novel, the memoir, and the poem.

As part II demonstrates at length, First World War novels frequently draw on the nineteenth-century literary tradition of realism even though, or possibly because, they must deal with the chaos and butchery of modern warfare. In so doing, these novels introduce narrative conventions that impose order, stability, and a teleological trajectory on the subject of war. To put it plainly, many First World War novels rely on a structural and aesthetic heritage that proves incompatible with the horror of twentieth-century warfare. As Evelyn Cobley points out, "if realism can be seen as affirming bourgeois values and modernism as questioning them, then First World War narratives display through their formal choices attitudes to the war which may or may not be confirmed on the thematic or propositional level."[7]

Erich Maria Remarque's and Jünger's war novels exemplify the contradictions that arise from this disjuncture. Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (All Quiet on the Western Front, 1929) is strongly influenced by the genre of the *Bildungsroman*. Because of this affinity, Remarque's novel reintroduces a teleological structure that the thematic focus on the suffering and chaos of war appears to deny. Conversely, Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* is commonly seen as a celebration of the warrior ethos and lifestyle. But even though Jünger stands accused of glorifying war, the numerous disconnected and self-contained episodes that make up *In Stahlgewittern* bear no trace of any narrative of progress or development and evoke the genre of chronicle. Of course, this is not to say that Jünger's

text is truly an anti-war novel. Nor do I mean to imply that there is an ideal form that resolves all ideological dilemmas. As Cobley points out, modernism comes with its own ideological baggage, some of which is equally unsuited to further a pacifist agenda. Clearly, it cannot be the goal of a literary analysis to search for an ideal form. At the same time, it is imperative that we attend to the tensions that riddle these texts if we want to understand how "the content of the form" affects the trajectory of the text and hence our perception of war.

The impulse to come to terms with the legacy of the *Bildungsroman* is evident not only in Remarque's First World War novel, but also in Heinrich Böll's and Günter Grass's Second World War texts. Unlike Remarque, who finds comfort and solace in the structure of the *Bildungsroman*, Böll and Grass reject its heritage. Heinrich Böll devised texts that appear in the guise of traditional realism but actually undermine their ostensible moral and narrative simplicity. Böll's ruptured chronologies and unreliable narrators introduce a second level of meaning in seemingly conventional texts. Grass's *Die Blechtrommel* (The Tin Drum, 1959), on the other hand, abandons realism altogether in favor of surrealist and picaresque modes of emplotment and turns the journey for *Bildung* into a farce.

The farcical aspects of Grass's text come into their own in the post-modern war texts of Elfriede Jelinek. In Jelinek's *Sportstück* (A Sport Play, 1989) and *Bambiland* (2003), her dramatic rendering of the Iraq War, war is a travesty in which we amuse ourselves to death. In this, Jelinek would appear to be the polar opposite of Peter Handke, whose Yugoslavia essays seek to transcend the arena of war into the sphere of myth and poetry. And yet, in spite of their apparent differences, Jelinek and Handke also have much in common. Unlike their predecessors whose texts deal with the experience of war, Jelinek and Handke are primarily concerned with a critique of war representations. Both Jelinek's and Handke's war texts have as their point of departure the inalienable distance from and unrecoverable reality of war. In the privileged West, the new wars are media wars, and media criticism has become a privileged form of war writing.

THE BODY IN PAIN: VICTIMIZATION AND AESTHETICIZATION

In her path-breaking study *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry has drawn attention to the problematic disappearance of the human body from accounts of war. Scarry's study traces the multiple strategies with which representations of war seek to elide the body in pain and eliminate

from their surface the facts of wounding and killing.[8] Based on this thesis, one might assume that an honest account of injuries and death in battle presents the most powerful challenge to recuperative treatments of war. But, as I will show, reintroducing the body in pain into texts of war is itself fraught with multiple problems. Indeed, representations of the body are as much a source of friction as are the sublime and the content of the form.

In recent years, critics have become increasingly wary of the sensationalist implications of war spectacles, arguing that "the meticulously detailed aping of an atrocity is an atrocity . . . the unmediated representation of violence constitutes in itself an act of violence against the spectator."[9] Although this criticism originally stems from film scholarship, it holds equally true for the blood and gore of war novels. Instead of inciting horror, the body in pain may be a source of lurid excitement. Similarly, several scholars have drawn attention to the fact that representations of war run the risk of aestheticizing and anaesthetizing the horror of war, thus turning war into a source of pleasure. As Robert Reimer points out, if images of war are framed in an aesthetically pleasing form, the beauty of the form may overpower the horror of the content.[10] Seen in this light, artworks about war do not alert us to the lethal nature of war but rather inoculate us against it. Instead of working against it, they perpetuate the horror of war.

In addition to their vulnerability to sensationalist exploitation, representations of the body are heavily, and problematically, invested in conceptualizations of agency and victimization. In the Cartesian hierarchy of body and mind, the body connotes passivity and the mind agency. Consequently, if a text focuses exclusively on the impact of war on the physical side of life, it runs the risk of reducing humans to pure bodies, thus blocking all recourse to rational and political agency. If soldiers are portrayed as body machines, the only subject positions available are those of victimization and reactive violence. Consequently, the representation of the body in pain takes us back to a fundamental incongruence between texts of war and texts of peace. Even if we are prepared to accept that the representation of the wounded and dead effects a powerful critique of war, we would still have to admit that any pacifist agenda must be subtended by concepts of agency. A soldier who is defined exclusively as victim cannot be a political agent. And in a nation of disempowered victims instead of responsible citizens, war is always an option.

As parts III and IV will show, questions of victimization and agency are of particular salience in German texts about the First and Second World Wars.

The representation of the soldier as victim was already firmly established in novels of the First World War. Although diametrically opposed in almost every other respect, both Remarque's *Im Westen* and Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* feature protagonists who lack political agency. While Remarque's protagonist is defined as a victim in every context, Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* embraces agency in the everyday context of the battlefield, but refuses to accept responsibility in the political realm. In Jünger's work, history is transformed into myth, and war is but an ineluctable stage in the eternal cycle of death and rebirth.

While novels of the First World War address questions of agency as one of many concerns, the categories of victim and perpetrator move to the foreground in literature of the Second World War. In the works of both Böll and Grass, questions of victimization and agency occupy center stage and even displace the representation of frontlines and battlefields. Of the two, Böll is more inclined to portray German civilians and soldiers as victims of the war, but his works also explore issues of complicity and guilt. Grass, on the other hand, frequently attacks, mocks, and ironizes what one might describe as a German propensity for self-victimization. Finally, in the postmodern context, the category of the victim is exposed to a radical critique. In Elfriede Jelinek's works, victimization is no longer identified with innocence, but liable to connote passivity, complicity, and even guilt. Paradoxically, it is perhaps the absence of a specifically Austrian discourse of coming to terms with the past that makes Austrian authors such as Handke and Jelinek particularly attuned to the hypocrisies and distortions inherent in concepts of victimization and agency. In fact, Jelinek characterized Austria's identity as a "non-identity, based on amnesia" and on "the myth that the Austrians were Hitler's first victims."[11] It would appear that, because of this national heritage, Austrian authors such as Jelinek and Handke are ideally positioned to question bifurcated categories of victim and perpetrator.

WAR AND GENDER

Numerous scholars have pointed out that warfare is one of the most highly gendered arenas of life. This holds true both historically and metaphorically. Joshua Goldstein's survey of female warriors throughout history concludes that women made up approximately 1 percent of all fighters. Of the soldiers serving in today's standing armies, approximately 97 percent are male.[12] Even when women are hired as soldiers, they are

frequently deployed in non-combat situations – or in situations that are labeled as non-combat. Relegating women to the sidelines of war is not a historical accident but crucial for the smooth functioning of the institution of war since concepts of masculinity and heroism are routinely employed to enable practices of war. Practices of war may be apt to erode gender roles – one need only think of Rosie the Riveter and the so-called rubble women in post-1945 Germany – but ideologies of war tend to uphold them. Men make war, and war makes real men. It is this link that has led Goldstein to postulate that the key to changes in our attitude to warfare lies in our ideas of gender: "for the war system to change fundamentally, or for war to end, might require profound changes in gender relations."[13]

Paradoxically, the more women are absent from the context of war, the more warfare is metaphorically associated with gender, sexuality, and procreation. It is not only the metaphorical conflation of fighting and sexuality,[14] evident in the phallic design of many weapons, that suggests an intimate link between war and gender. Since wars take lives and mothers give life, warfare and motherhood are often conceived as complementary. Interestingly, the association of war and maternity goes back to the foundational war text in the Western tradition, the *Iliad*, in which the pain Agamemnon suffers because of wounds incurred in battle is compared to labor pangs: "but soon as the gash dried and firm clots formed, sharp pain came bursting in on Atrides' strength – spear-sharp as the labor-pangs that pierce a woman, agonies brought on by the harsh, birthing spirits, Hera's daughters who hold the stabbing power of birth – so sharp the throes that burst on Atrides' strength" (*Iliad* 11.313–18).

Unsurprisingly, the complementary nature of soldier and mother was touted by National Socialist ideologues. In his novel *Michael* (1929), Hitler's minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, compares war and birth: "Ihn – den Krieg – abschaffen wollen, das ist dasselbe, wie wenn man abschaffen wollte, dass Mütter Kinder zur Welt bringen. Auch das ist schrecklich. Alles Lebendige ist schrecklich"[15] (To wish for an end to war is the same as to wish for an end to women bearing children. That too is horrible. Everything that is alive is horrible). Goebbels's sentiments were shared by the Italian dictator Mussolini, who famously declared that war is to men what motherhood is to women. In his path-breaking study *Männerphantasien*, Klaus Theweleit briefly sums up these various trends when he claims that "die Bewegung hin zu den Soldaten wird als eine Bewegung weg von der Frau dargestellt"[16] (the shift toward the soldier is represented as a shift away from woman).