UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

Faculty Research Grant Proposal Cover Sheet

DUE: November 6, 2017

Name:	Mara Scanlon	**Funding Period:**	**July 1, 2018- June 30, 2019**
Department:	ELC	**IRB Required** ☐	
Project Title:	"That was the precipice": Considering Beauty and Pain in the War Writing of Mary Borden		

Abstract (250 words maximum)

The proposed research focuses on the twentieth-century American writer Mary Borden, whose wide output includes works of various genres responding to or including her experience as a nurse in a hospital unit just behind the lines in World Wars I and II. The goal of this project is to educate myself more deeply about Borden's work and its (literary, critical, and historical) contexts, eventually addressing these specific questions: how is Borden's work similar to and different from the work of male soldiers and veterans of World War I (my anticipated focus, though it may extend to World War II), especially in its literary representation of the body (traumatized, in pain, wounded); gender roles; and heroism/vulnerability (a common theme of war texts)? My analysis is likely to also draw on the philosophy of Elaine Scarry, who writes both about bodies in pain and about beauty, the latter of which shapes my thinking about vulnerability and self-protection in Borden's war writings. The anticipated result of this project is a full-length critical essay on Borden, published in a peer-reviewed scholarly journal.

Budget Request: ☒ Summer Stipend Only ☐ Summer Stipend with expenses ☐ Project Expenses Only ☐ Fall Course Release ☐ Spring Course Release

Simultaneous Applications ☐ Internal Grant ☐ External Grant

Previous FRG Awards (funding period): ☐ 2015-16 ☒ 2016-17 ☐ 2017-18 if the funding period has ended.

☒ By checking here I indicate that I understand that my application will not be considered if the office of the dean cannot verify the receipt of a final report for a previously funded faculty development research grant.

☒ By checking here I indicate that I have followed the guidelines (http://cas.umw.edu/dean/guidelines-for-faculty-research-grant-applications/) and that my application consists of the following eight elements: project description, project significance, timeline and logistics, results, documentation, budget, simultaneous applications, and supporting materials.

SIGNATURES:

Applicant: Mara Scanlon	Date: 11.2.2017
Department Chair:	Date: 2 Nov. 2017

Updated 9/25/17

Mara Scanlon
Professor of English
Faculty Research Grant Proposal, 2018-2019
"That was the precipice":
Considering Beauty and Pain in the War Writing of Mary Borden

Project Description

Comprising both significant secondary research and writing, this project will culminate in a new scholarly article on the underexamined twentieth-century writer Mary Borden, focusing specifically on her war texts of various genres.

Mary Borden, an American heiress, was already a married mother of three when the First World War erupted. Discontent to sit idle, Borden funded and administered a hospital unit that served just behind the Western Front in Belgium and France (*le zone interdite*, the forbidden zone, from which she took the title of her best known work) for the duration of the war, and she also nursed in WWII. Already an active writer who was well connected in literary circles by 1914, Borden wrote about the wars in fiction, creative nonfiction sketches, poetry, and a memoir, in addition to continuing a broader production of novels and essays. There are several characteristics, then, that make Borden unique: she was an American who served throughout the war although the U.S. didn't enter it until 1917; she was a woman who served very close to the fighting front; she was a woman in charge of her own unit; and she was a female author who did service in the war and then wrote diverse literary pieces informed by this experience (very few American women wrote anything about the war, and those that did wrote either homefront novels or straightforward memoirs). Another characteristic unfortunately makes her less unique: despite being a prolific female writer, she is now largely unknown and most of her works are either out of print or only recently reprinted by minor presses.

The goal of this project is to educate myself more deeply about Borden's work and its contexts, eventually addressing these specific questions: how is Borden's work similar to and different from the work of male soldiers and veterans of World War I (my anticipated focus, though Borden's writing on the Second World War may broaden it), especially in its literary representation of the body (traumatized, in pain, wounded); gender roles; and heroism/vulnerability (a common theme of war texts)?

The tasks of my proposed project in support of that goal are as follows:

- To read a multi-genre selection of Borden's publications, chosen for their relevance to the world wars (these are indicated under **Documentation**);
- To read the existing critical and biographical sources on Borden;
- To read more broadly in secondary sources on the writings by female medical workers in the First World War;
- To produce my own analytical scholarship on Borden's works for dissemination as an article and possibly conference presentation (see **Results** below).

I am prepared for this research, having begun a pattern of professional and public work on literature from the First World War (a section of a newly published article in the *Journal of Modern Literature* that was first funded by an FRG; a presentation at a major conference in my field on Borden's collection

The Forbidden Zone; and two local lectures), but my interest in Borden first arose from my teaching of literature of the First World War in two classes: Women Writers of the Great War (5-week summer study abroad class in England) and Literature of the Great War (four sections at UMW, now proposed as a catalog class); in the latter, I teach Borden's aforementioned book *The Forbidden Zone*, an experimental collection of stories, sketches, observations, and reflections about her experience as a medical provider in WWI.

A discussion of one piece in *The Forbidden Zone*, one of its most striking, illuminates my current thinking about the project's anticipated focus. Titled "Moonlight," the story animates Death, Life, and Pain as beings with agency: Death is a gentle angel and Life a sick and ruthless animal, but Pain is the compelling focus: a perverse seductress, she torments the bodies of wounded men. One other element of the story that interests me is the subject of its title, the moonlight, which is one of several natural, beautiful energies in the story that are seen as threatening to the nurse narrator, dangerous in their very beauty because they might break through the protective desensitization of the traumatized soldiers and staff. This story is just one that I anticipate analyzing as I address the research question and goal stated above. In my preliminary thinking and short writing about the story, I have been drawn to the philosophy of Elaine Scarry, whose work includes theorization of both pain and beauty (see **Documentation**). Though Scarry postulates that beauty causes a transcendent joy in the viewer, which she calls "opiated adjacency," my reading of Borden's story suggests the opposite: that in certain circumstances such as violent conflict, beauty causes painful vulnerability. I have tentatively been calling this "abraded adjacency," and it's traceable in some other war books as well.

Compelled by my rudimentary analysis of "Moonlight" and a few other pieces from *The Forbidden Zone,* I propose to see if my own theoretical lenses for interpreting Borden's wartime work hold up in some of her other texts (poetry, memoir, and novels with the war as a backdrop); are illuminated further in dialogue with Scarry's philosophies on pain and beauty; and/or respond to contextual circumstances and other war writers. In doing so, I hope to add substantially to the understanding of a gifted and largely overlooked writer in my discipline and three of my specific areas of professional focus (Modernism, women's writing, and literature of the Great War).

Project Significance

The university's funding of this project will have substantial impact on my professional development as a researcher and thus my status as a scholar in my field; on my upper-level teaching; and on the critical reception of an overlooked author and the continued expansion of the body of texts that are considered to be "war writing." Professional work on Mary Borden represents a largely new avenue of research for me and thus will continue to develop my reputation and output as a scholar of both Modernist women's writing and literature of the First World War. In addition, I teach Borden's collection *The Forbidden Zone* in my class Literature of the Great War (under review by the curriculum committee as a new catalog class), so deeper knowledge of the scholarship on her work will also benefit my students, who tend to draw widely from English, WGST, and History majors. Furthermore, though she is a very rare specimen in being an American woman who worked on the Western Front and recorded her experience in writing, Borden is not widely studied by literary critics (no doubt in part because of the limited availability of her books for so much time, and also perhaps due to the privileging of British WWI texts), so my essay will advance the field on a truly worthy writer. Too, the study of war literature has, in recent years, begun to challenge the definition of "authentic" war writing as being only that of male soldiers and veterans, and scholarship on Borden's books furthers that crucial interrogation.

Timeline and Logistics

This project will require no special facilities, equipment, or travel. In the May/June summer session of 2018, I anticipate teaching one online class for English majors; during the academic year covered by the grant period, I will be teaching my regular 4/4 load.

May-June 2018

- collect publications by and on Mary Borden

July 2018

- read/study the available literature by Borden, with special focus on *The Forbidden Zone*, *Poems of Love and War*, and *Journey Down a Blind Alley*

August-December 2018

- as necessary, continue reading primary texts by Borden
- read Conway's biography of Borden, *A Woman of Two Wars*
- read secondary sources and critical essays on Borden's work and women writers of WWI
- possible: present on research at the 2018 Modernist Studies Conference in November

January- May 2019

- draft essay on Borden (approximately 25-30 pages)

May 2019

- submit FRG report to CAS Dean

May-June 2019

- revise manuscript and submit to an appropriate peer-reviewed journal (see below)

Results

The primary result of this project will be a full-length (approximately 25-30 pages) scholarly article on the war writing of Mary Borden, informed by existing scholarship. The essay will be submitted to a respected, peer-reviewed journal (such as *The Journal of Modern Literature*; *War, Literature, and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*; or *The Journal of War and Culture Studies*). There is a possibility that the work will also be disseminated, in process, at the Modernist Studies Conference, a premier international, interdisciplinary conference in my field (Cleveland, November 2018).

Documentation

Acton, Carol. "Diverting the Gaze: The Unseen Text in Women's War Writing." *College Literature* vol. 31, no. 2, Spring 2004, pp. 53-79.

Borden, Mary. *Collision.* Forgotten Books, 2012.

---. *The Forbidden Zone: A Nurse's Impressions of the First World War.* Hesperus, 2008.

---. *Jane—Our Stranger.* Forgotten Books, 2015.

---. *Journey Down a Blind Alley.* Hutchinson, 1947.

---. *Poems of Love and War.* Edited by Paul O'Pray. Unicorn Press, 2016.

---. *The Tortoise.* Forgotten Books, 2012.

---. *You, the Jury.* Forgotten Books, 2017.

Conway, Jane. *A Woman of Two Wars: The Life of Mary Borden.* Munday Books, 2010.

Cooper, Helen M., Adrienne Auslander Munich, and Susan Merrill Squier, editors. *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation.* The U of North Carolina P, 1989.

Darrow, Margaret H. "French Volunteer Nursing and the Myth of War Experience in World War I." *The American Historical Review,* vol. 101, no. 1, 1996, pp.80-106.

Das, Santanu. "The impotence of sympathy': Touch and Trauma in the Memoirs of the First World War Nurses." *Textual Practice* vol. 19, no. 2, 2005, pp. 239–262.

---. *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature.* Cambridge UP, 2008.

Einhaus, Ann-Marie. "Modernism, Truth, and the Canon of First World War Literature." *Modernist Cultures* vol. 6, no. 2, 2011, pp. 296-314.

Freedman, Ariela. "Mary Borden's *Forbidden Zone*: Women's Writing from No-Man's-Land." *Modernism/Modernity* vol. 9, no. 1, Jan. 2002, pp. 109-124.

Goodman, Henrietta. "Sex and Suicide in Poetry from *The Forbidden Zone.*" *South Carolina Review,* vol. 44, no. 2, 2012, pp. 155-65.

Gromada, Jennifer. "Introduction [to newly published Borden poems]." *Modernism/Modernity* vol. 16, no. 3, Sept. 2009, pp.599-600.

Hallett, Christine E. "'Emotional Nursing': Involvement, Engagement, and Detachment in the Writing of First World War Nurses and VADs." *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives,* edited by Alison S. Fell and Christine E. Hallett, Routledge, 2013, pp. 87-102.

---. "Saving Lives on the Front Line." *History Today*, vol. 67, no. 7, pp. 24-36.

---. *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War.* Oxford UP, 2014.

Higgonet, Margaret. "Another Record: A Different War." *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 3/4, Fall-Winter 1995, pp. 85-96.

---. "Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I." *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2002, pp. 91-107.

---. "Telling Trauma: Women and World War I." *Savoirs et littérature*, 2002, pp. 123-136.

---, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz, editors. *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars.* Yale UP, 1987.

Hutchison, Hazel. "The Theater of Pain: Observing Mary Borden in *The Forbidden Zone.*" *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives,* edited by Alison S. Fell and Christine E. Hallett, Routledge, 2013, pp. 139-155.

---. *The War That Used Up Words: American Writers and the First World War.* Yale UP, 2015.

Kaplan, Laurie. "Deformities of the Great War: The Narratives of Mary Borden and Helen Zenna Smith." *Women and Language,* vol. 27, no. 2, Fall 2004, pp. 35-43.

Lambrecht, Nora. "'But If You Listen You Can Hear': War Experience, Modernist Noise, and the Soundscape of *The Forbidden Zone.*" *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 2 (online), 2017.

MacDonald, Lyn. *The Roses of No Man's Land.* Michael Joseph Ltd., 1980.

Mallios, Peter Lancelot. "Invisible Bullets: A Return to the 1910s in American Literary Studies." *American Literary History*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2016, pp.179-190.

Martin, Nancy. "'The Rose of No Man's Land [?]': Femininity, Female Identity, and Women on the Western Front." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 13, no. 6, Dec. 2012, pp. 5-17.

McGowan, Marcia Phillips. "'A Nearer Approach to the Truth': Mary Borden's *Journey Down a Blind Alley.*" *War, Literature, and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 16, no. 1/2, 2004, pp. 198-210.

---. "'Have I No Sanctuary to Defend?' The Great War Sonnets of Mary Borden." *War, Literature, and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2011, n. pag.

McLaughlin, Kate. "Muddy Poetics: First World War poems by Helen Saunders and Mary Borden." *Women*, vol. 26, no. 3, pp. 221-237.

Moran, Lia. "Journey Down a Blind Alley ... or is it Love that is Blind?" *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, November 2002, pp.167-169.

Ouditt, Sharon. *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War.* Routledge, 1994.

Potter, Jane. "'I Began to Feel as a Normal Being Should, in Spite of the Blood and Anguish in which I Move': American Women's First World War Nursing Memoirs." *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives,* edited by Alison S. Fell and Christine E. Hallett, Routledge, 2013, pp. 51-70.

Powel, Anne. *Women in the War Zone: Hospital Service in the First World War.* The History Press, 2013.

Saunders, Max. "War Literature, Bearing Witness, and the Problem of Sacralization: Trauma and Desire in the Writing of Mary Borden and Others." *Memories and Representations of War: The Case of World War I and World War II*, edited by Elena Lamberti and Vita Fortunati, Rodopi, 2009, pp. 177-191.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World.* Oxford UP, 1985.

---. *On Beauty and Being Just.* Princeton UP, 1999.

Schneider, Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider. *Into the Breach: American Women Overseas in World War I.* Viking, 1991.

Smith, Angela K. *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism, and the First World War.*" Manchester UP, 1988.

Tylee, Claire. *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings 1914-64.* U of Iowa P, 1990.

Williams, Lea. "Narrating Trauma in the Writings of World War I Nurses." *Gender Scripts in Medicine and Narrative,* edited by Marcelline Block and Angela Laflen, Cambridge Scholars, 2010, pp. 241-237.

Budget

I am seeking a summer stipend only. The money will be used to release me from teaching one summer class.

Simultaneous Application

None.

Previous Awards

Faculty Research Grant, 2016-2017, summer stipend. The project "Telegraphy, Morse Code, and H.D.'s Technopoetics" was new research on a writer who has long been a focus of my professional work and teaching. I proposed to undertake wide reading in H.D.'s newly available novels and in the cultural and technical history of telegraphy; the project was to culminate in a full-length scholarly article. I have worked through my significant reading list and have a section of the article drafted; I intend to have this article under review at the peer-reviewed journal *Configurations* (Johns Hopkins UP), which is the official publication of the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts, in Spring 2018. The final report for this grant was submitted to Dean Finkelstein on May 9, 2017.

Supporting Materials

None.