

Neil Ramsey and Gillian Russell, eds., *Tracing War in British Enlightenment and Romantic Culture*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. 239. £55. ISBN 9781137474308.

This collection of essays is prefaced by an excellent overview of the field by the editors, making the case that Romanticism is defined as much by war as by revolution, and has in turn been seminal in the creation of a modern aesthetics of war. The zone of culture and creativity was in no way cordoned off from the state of almost perpetual warfare in the period. Even as Enlightenment thinkers ventured to denounce war as an aberration in civilized society, the long-running rivalry between France and Britain, civil war in America, and imperialist conquest in the East demonstrated its insistent pertinence. Warfare played an essential role in many of the characteristic features of modernity, from the factory system to internal and external transport and trading networks. It provided constant stimulus for the arts and media, whether in the form of newsprint, nationalist propaganda, and protest literature. It also gave rise to more intangible phenomena, the arts of memory and memorialization, perceptions of loss, the articulation of pity and sensibility. If war was, as Clausewitz put it, 'a realm of uncertainty', it was nevertheless certain that its consequences in the period were inescapable.

As in Mary Favret's *War at a Distance* (2010), the topic of war is reinvigorated by a theoretically-informed approach. Contributors concur that the temporality of war is always now, and employ concepts of 'trace', trauma, and repetition compulsion. Jonathan Lamb grippingly claims that Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is 'a quilt of simultaneous events, all coloured by military actions and metaphors' (p 17). The experience of Uncle Toby at the siege of Namur in 1694, his reconstruction of the fortifications in peacetime Yorkshire in the 1710s and the psychic paralysis resulting from his physical wound, is echoed sympathetically in the frustrated convoluted narrative form. Daniel O'Quinn tells the curious tale of Colonel André staging an allegorical battle at the start of the American war, himself allegorised following his execution as a spy in the popular, exonerating elegy by Anna Seward, and then his pointed exclusion from another symbolic entertainment held privately in England at the moment of Britain's imperial defeat and loss.

Although Romantic literature is acknowledged as a prime site for contesting the meaning of war, the overall emphasis is on visual and material culture in essays piecing together the stories belonging to an assortment of artefacts and archival fragments. R.S. White begins with an engraving *Waterloo, the Day After* presenting a scene of ruin and suffering: a heap of the dead and dying fills the foreground and at its centre is a despairing woman with clinging child. The presence of civilians at the battle, the shortcomings in medical practice, and the humanitarian concerns stimulated by the carnage are all reviewed as part of a survey ending with Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. Deirdre Coleman takes as her point of departure a gilded automaton clock in an Australian collection of *objets d'art*, manufactured in France at the time of the attempted suppression of a black republic founded in the former slave colony of Saint-Domingue. This costly yet cartoonish item constitutes the erasure of the intense ideological battles surrounding the rebel leader Toussaint Louverture, including his physical person, back in France.

Simon Bainbridge wittily analyses the post-war craze for effigies of Napoleon, from the nude Canova statue ingloriously positioned in the stairwell of Wellington's Apsley House (rumoured to be used 'to hang cloaks and hats on') to the mass-produced busts whose ubiquity gave rise to the Sherlock Holmes mystery of 'The Six Napoleons'. From material to immaterial culture, Philip Shaw undertakes a reconstruction of the cultural significance of a lost painting, *The Army of the Medes* (1801) by J.M.W. Turner. Situating the Biblical scene of a military force destroyed in a sandstorm in relation to the British campaign against the French in Egypt, Shaw pursues his investigation through preparatory sketches and reception

evidence, concluding that the artwork was a radical attempt to deliver to viewers a disorientating ‘intimation of the horrors of war’ (p. 155) defying conventions of distancing and mediation found in standard military art.

The editors each contribute an essay exploring the way war is woven into Romantic-era sociability in London in the aftermath of the Napoleonic era, Russell analysing the spaces of the military complex known as the Woolwich Rotunda post-peace, and Ramsay the Naval and Military Library and Museum first envisaged in the 1829. Both offer compelling accounts of war curated and produced as science.

Carl von Clausewitz looms large in this collection, notable for his attention to the role of emotion in combat and insight into the permeability of military and civil realms (‘War is a mere continuation of policy by other means’, cit. p. 191). Thomas H. Ford’s probing exploration of the cultural mediation of war moves from David Wilkie’s *Chelsea Pensioners* (1822), a permanent enactment of victory via the medium of newsprint, to the claim that the Romantic period anticipated Jean Baudrillard’s contention that the Gulf War existed primarily as simulacrum, and then to Clausewitz, who conceptualised war itself as ‘*Mittel*’ (means / middle / method / medium), yielding the epiphany that war is as integral as air. Nick Mansfield in the final essay uses Clausewitz’s Kantian method to interrogate the very category of war, showing that wartime in the modern era has typically been regarded as a privileged and autonomous phenomenon, separate from the specifics of political violence, as self-referential as art.

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