

Philip Shaw, *Suffering and Sentiment in Romantic Military Art*. Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. 248. £58.50. ISBN 9780754664925.

Adding to a growing body of research into Romantic cultural responses to war, Philip Shaw's *Suffering and Sentiment in Romantic Military Art* focuses on representations of the military in British Romantic painting. In this, his book can be placed alongside earlier studies by J.M. Hichberger and Peter Paret, while it also builds on Shaw's own earlier *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination*. Shaw, however, wonderfully expands upon this previous material, providing a beautifully written, theoretically deft and historically detailed study that focuses on the humble forms of genre painting rather than sublime history paintings or military panoramas. In doing so, he pays careful attention, as his title suggests, to the complex issues of suffering and sentiment that inform this material.

Shaw shows how paintings of military scenes, such as Henry Bunbury's *Affliction* (1783) and *The Deserter* (1784), or William Hodges's *The Effects of Peace* (1794) and *The Consequences of War* (1794), repeatedly drew upon sentimental strategies for depicting the impact of war on domestic life. Images of burning villages and broken families served as powerful tropes of the suffering caused by war. But the main thrust of Shaw's argument is, nonetheless, to question the precise effect of these sentimental depictions of war. He claims that however much sentimental military art enabled a consciousness of war's suffering by inviting audiences to respond with compassion or pity for war's victims, this art typically did little to question the underlying commitment of the nation to war. The benevolence of sentiment could enable audiences to attenuate the shocking sight of the war wounded, while the soldier who feels cared for could be encouraged to fight all the harder. Far from directing audiences to take action against the waging of wars, therefore, sentiment was recuperated in the service of a national war effort. Soldiers appear in military painting principally as figures of stoic heroism, manfully bearing their suffering as a noble sacrifice for the nation.

Although focussed on painting, Shaw also draws frequent attention to the related efforts of Romantic artists and authors to portray war through sentimental techniques. Many of the paintings featured in this study even took their initial inspiration from 'poems, aesthetic treatises, travelogues and journalistic accounts of war' (5). Shaw thus proposes, for example, that Hodges's sentimental paintings of war's devastation provide a visual equivalent to moral tales by Wollstonecraft or Charlotte Smith (108). William Wordsworth's 'The Discharged Soldier' is also a constant touchstone for the study. Representative of Wordsworth's oft expressed concern in his early poetry for the victims of war, the poem also draws attention to the complex ways in which the traumas of the battlefield haunted Romantic culture.

Shaw believes that, for the most part, poetry offered a more complex response to war and its horrors than military painting. Nonetheless, he views the sentimental as representing a 'risky business' because of its affective indeterminacy (5). The starkly realised image of pain and suffering inherent to the sentimental could refuse to be appropriated by social, political or medical discourses. Shaw thus draws attention to a handful of paintings that he believes instantiate this greater indeterminacy, most notably John Opie's *The Tired Soldier* (1806) and William Mulready's *The Convalescent from Waterloo* (1822). Both present their viewers with returned soldiers who appear as embodiments of trauma. Subtly refusing to accede to a viewer's compassionate gaze, they remain haunted by war's injury.

The study also offers strikingly detailed analysis of David Wilkie's *Chelsea Pensioners* (1822), highlighting the 'baleful expression' of a young mother and the equivocal look of a disabled veteran in response to the news of Wellington's victory at Waterloo (164). Standing in contrast to the painting's depiction of patriotic joy, both figures point to the

possibility that the correct affective response to war could be open to contestation. Shaw strengthens his claim by drawing attention to the surgeon Charles Bell's *Essays on the Anatomy of Expression in Painting* (1806), a book written to help artists accurately portray emotions. It offers a description of melancholy that could well have served as a source for Wilkie's depiction of these two figures. Shaw also notes how Bell himself made innumerable sketches of wounded soldiers following Waterloo that similarly reveal such individuated, doleful expression even as they strive for an objective 'medical impersonality' (187). Bell's paintings may never have been exhibited in the public galleries, but they do reveal a 'distinctive melancholia of Romantic visions of war' that Shaw views as the earliest stirrings of an effort to understand and represent the brutality and waste of war (217).

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