“This is the age of war.” So thundered an anonymous poem of 1798 in the *Courier*.¹ Yet for nearly two centuries since, it was largely unnoticed by literary scholarship that Britain was at war with the French Revolution and Napoleon for twenty-two years on four continents and three oceans. After the Revolution had declared war on Britain in 1793, world war lasted with but two brief intermissions until 1815. News reached England that French Royalist towns and villages had been decimated by the Revolution’s cannonades and mass drownings; combined with deaths by guillotine during the Terror and the September massacres in 1792, the French population was reduced by one-fourth in 1793–94.² Rumors spread that French armies had murdered their prisoners. And although three French invasion attempts had failed between 1796 and 1798, Napoleon’s boast that he needed only to “jump the ditch”³ of the Channel during any of twelve more invasion attempts gives the background for mothers’ warning to unruly children, “Old Boney will get you!” and the close of Nelson’s standard speech to his new midshipmen: “And, young gentlemen, you must hate a Frenchman as you do the devil.”⁴

So fears flew fast as Britons readied themselves during the time that they called “the great terror.” Indeed, Charles James Fox said that “a Picture of a People so terrified . . . was never before seen.”⁵ Volunteers came forth by the tens of thousands, and men from seventeen to fifty-five were eligible for conscription.⁶

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² David A. Bell, The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 156, 182. Robert and Isabell Tombs allow that some sixty thousand to eighty thousand French refugees from the Revolution fled to England, among them many of the Bourbon royal family, including France’s next three kings, the Marquis de Lafayette (who had designed the Republic’s tricolor flag), other aristocrats, priests, and the novelist Chateaubriand; see That Sweet Enemy: The French and the British from the Sun King to the Present (New York: Knopf, 2007), 211–13.
Gun towers studded the southern and eastern coasts, redoubts lined the shores, and a triple arc of Royal Navy warships was moored offshore while England stood largely alone. Wagons waited in the southern counties to evacuate women and children; vicars instructed on civil defense from their pulpits; drums and bugles sounded in some fourteen thousand British towns and villages to call men to morning drill; boys marched with mock muskets, and old men watched the coasts by night. In a population of some thirteen million, food shortages were common, and every year of the Napoleonic wars closed with sixteen to twenty-four thousand wounded, missing, or dead. For nearly a generation, every dawn was not bliss to be alive.

But for almost a century since Henry Beers’s History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1899), the mainlines of literary scholarship, criticism, and popular thought have viewed the literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as one of unbraced revolutionary spirit, sensibility, the self, and transcendent imagination at the high level and, nearer earth, of daffodils, nightingales, west winds, and washing days. Indeed, Frederick Burwick’s Romanticism: Keywords (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2015) lists seventy terms “frequently deliberated by critics and literary historians of the period” (x). Unlisted is War.

Excepting studies of the Jacobin and anti-Jacobin novels built, respectively, to Painitive and Burkean blueprints because their concern is with the intellectual, not the shooting, war, only two books on war in Romantic literary scholarship

8 David Gates, The Napoleonic Wars, 1803–1813 (London: Arnold, 1997), 3. And the caricaturist George Cruikshank said in 1806, “Every town was a sort of garrison—in one place you might hear the tattoo of some youth learning to beat the drum, at another place some march or national air being practiced upon the fife, and every morning at five o’clock the bugle horn was sounded through the streets, to call the volunteers to a two hours’ drill . . . and then you heard the pop, pop, pop of the single musket or the heavy sound of the volley, or the distant thunder of the artillery” (quoted in Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837 [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992], 307–8). Among the major poets, Wordsworth served in the Grasmere Volunteers; Coleridge for a time was a cavalryman in the 15th Dragoons; Clare marched in the Northamptonshire Militia; Scott rode as an officer in the Edinburgh Light Dragoons; and Burns drilled twice weekly in the Dumfries Volunteers, wrote their song, and was given a military funeral by them. Three of Austen’s six brothers were in uniform, two of whom were admirals in the Royal Navy and the third an officer in the Oxfordshire Militia, while two of Hemans’s brothers and husband were officers in the regular army. Among the minor poets, Tom Campbell was a volunteer; William Falconer was a midshipman; William Sothby was an ensign in the 10th Dragoons; John Gabriel Stedman was a lieutenant colonel in the Scots Brigade; Lawrence O’Halloran was a lieutenant in the Royal Marines and later a Royal Navy chaplain at Trafalgar; John Mitford (“Alfred Burton”) was a commander in the Royal Navy; and Henry James Pye, named poet laureate in 1790, was a Berkshire militiaman. For the military service of other authors of the period, see H. G. C. Matthew et al., The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 60 vols. (Oxford University Press, 2004).

But Gillian Russell’s superb *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793–1815* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) showed the extent to which military ideology permeated British culture. So in the mode of “symbolic practice,” Russell presents Britain as a vast public theater. The widespread presence of war unfolded in the omnipresence of resplendent uniforms, barracks, mock battles and reenactments, festivals, and military reviews. In the patent houses of Covent Garden and Drury Lane, naval and military theatricals were frequent, propaganda plays and Shakespeare’s *Henry V* held the boards, and in popular spas, panoramas and mock land and sea battles mediated the wars. In other contexts, ceramic cups and plates depicting admirals and generals raised them to rock star status. All Britain was a stage.

In another cultural study, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Warfare* (Princeton University Press, 2010), Mary A. Favret takes a longer view in her concern not only with mediation to the public of the 1793–1815 conflict, but also with global wars since. In an extended metaphor, Favret suggests that the atmosphere of the Romantic wars fell like a wintry evening on the public, a condition different from the generally high spirit and exuberance that Russell finds in home-front spectacle. And by assuming a numbing British chill of debilitating fear rather than a heated passion against the French, she concludes, contrary to Russell, that “the wartime perspective sees very little out its window” (39). Perhaps. But what is silent but certain is not only what Clausewitz called “the blind instinct of hatred” by the people for the enemy fired by the terror of

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11 Claiming that “war was the single most important fact of British life from 1793 to 1815,” Bennett allows that some three thousand more war poems appeared in contemporary periodicals (*British War Poetry*, ix).

12 While the shooting war is not his concern in *Romanticism at the End of History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), Jerome Christensen warrants Russell’s and Favret’s presentations of the home front: “Reflection on war during wartime is just another way of making war” (5). The Treaty of Amiens in 1802, for example, was seen both as disastrous by the conservative *Edinburgh Review* and many who had exulted in the imaginary nationhood of the union of England, Scotland, and Ireland in withstanding France and as joyous by many who welcomed the short respite from war and others who flocked to France as tourists.


14 Clausewitz, *On War*, 121.
invasion and the war deaths that left many a Georgian Rupert Brooke under some corner of a foreign field. And the loss of so many Jack Tars at sea makes Felicia Hemans’s verses on watery graves poignant: “The sea, the blue lone sea hath one, / He lies where pearls lie deep. / He was the lov’d of all, but none o’er his low bed may weep.”¹⁵ Recently buried in the memories of their families and friends and their names inscribed on tablets and read by vicars from pulpits in some ten thousand churches, thousands of those soldiers and sailors must surely have been part of the home front’s collective sentience, one possibly chilled, but certainly hateful and angry—witness the enlistment numbers—at the Second Horseman’s threat and toll.

And in the essential Tracing War in British Enlightenment and Romantic Culture (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), the editors Neil Ramsey and Gillian Russell assemble ten new essays mainly on affective responses to the war. How wounds were presented textually is the concern of chapters on sensibility by Jonathan Lamb and Daniel O’Quinn. R. S. White and his analysis of John Heaverside Clark’s painting Waterloo the Day After (1816) and Nick Mansfield’s of David Wilkie’s Chelsea Pensioners Reading the Waterloo Dispatch (1822) assess the passionate and political in the works. Mansfield’s conclusion is Clausewitz’s: war is violent but rational.

Three recent aesthetic studies frame the new literary scholarship on the war and counter the triumphalist tendency of much of the period’s poetry and drama. Philip Shaw’s Suffering and Sentiment in Romantic Military Art (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) is directly on titular point as it documents images of death and wounding that evoke sympathy for the suffering and death of common soldiers. Prefiguring battlefield photographs of World War I, the book details a turn from the geometry and imagery of neoclassical death-in-battle scenes. Recall, for example, Benjamin West’s Death of General Wolfe (1770) or Denis Deighton’s Death of Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar (1805), each prompting awe and admiration of the highborn dying rather than shock and horror at the lowborn dead. The book’s scenes construct grotesque renderings of Gray’s melancholy plaint of the hamlet’s rude forefathers sleeping in their lowly graves. In Romanticism and Caricature (Cambridge University Press, 2013), Ian Haywood studies rich depictions by the “recording angels”—Gillray, Rowlandson, Cruikshank, Hone, Heath, and Grant from 1792 to 1831—pictorial arguments on hanging offenses for treason, forgery, and conspiracy, as well as blasts against Napoleon, radicalism, and Paine. But in Bloody Romanticism: Spectacular Violence and the Politics of Representation, 1776–1832 (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Haywood’s canvas is wider, depicting the inglorious and violent in Romantic culture. Surveying the slave trade, the American war, the Gordon Riots, the Irish Rebellion, and the French Revolution, Haywood shows how contemporary literature, sermons, journalism, slave narratives, and painting informed the times as did works by Coleridge,

Wordsworth, Scott, Southey, Edgeworth and other canonical Romantic authors. *Bloody Romanticism* is a gateway to the hell in British literature on war.

A correlative study is Jeffrey N. Cox’s *Romanticism in the Shadow of War: Literary Culture in the Napoleonic War Years* (Cambridge University Press, 2014). His interest is in the “border raiding” of the second-generation Romantics who write largely abroad and mainly after Waterloo. The borders they cross are not just geographical, but conceptual—especially disappointment in the failure of liberal hope after Napoleon’s fall. So peacetime travel to Paris during the respite of the Treaty of Amiens, the Regency crisis, the Peterloo massacre, and the Cockney imbibing of Italian culture allowed Byron, Shelley, Keats, Hunt, Helen Maria Williams, and others to create new texts of sad defeat and hopeful triumph that opened English literature to an international breeze.

Further literary scholarship also angles sharply to poetry. The collection of ten essays in *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict, 1793–1822* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), edited by Philip Shaw, focuses on works by Thelwall, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Charlotte Smith, Byron, and Leigh Hunt. Especially noteworthy in it are essays by Mark Rawlinson, “Invasion! Coleridge, the Defence of Britain and the Cultivation of the Public’s Fear,” and Simon Bainbridge, “‘Of War and Taking Towns’: Byron’s Siege Poems,” which neatly tackles the paradox about war in literature, of destruction made art and violence made formal beauty.

The year 2003 saw the best books on point. J. R. Watson’s *Romanticism and War: A Study of British Romantic Period Writers and the Napoleonic Wars* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), takes up questions of politics and the just war finally to affirm that honor and glory are not dishonorable, that because Britain was in a fight for its life, the arguments of its authors for English victory were commendable. With its twelve chapters arranged chronologically, each offers a set of years, their battles, their accounting in news and letters, their impact on the British population and politics, and their presentation in literature. In them we watch Scott, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Byron, Shelley, De Quincey, and Carlyle writing to the moment. Together they take the pulse of the times through their reactions to events and subjects such as the Revolution, Jacobins and Anti-Jacobins, Cintra, Corunna, Waterloo, and the army. Likewise, Simon Bainbridge’s excellent *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict* argues that poetic imagination presented the war and mediated it to the public. The book also advances a strong case for the long-discarded Sir Walter Scott as a major poet whose poems of wars past inspired soldiers and readers of the early nineteenth century. No less does Bainbridge show that the wars account for a restored masculinity of poetry. Thus the virile voice dominating the poetry squares with Wordsworth’s prescription in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, second edition (1802), as “a language really used by men,” 16

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one cleared of poetic diction, abstraction, sentimentality, and the colorful excesses of the Della Cruscans.

Two books focus on the paradoxes of the great man and the great battle of the wars. Simon Bainbridge’s *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) details the magnetism of the emperor as both God and devil for the Lake Poets and Byron, Hazlitt, and Hemans. Philip Shaw’s *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) assesses the same Romantic poets with Scott as they “negotiate the Scylla and Charybdis of public veneration and private reflection” (6) about Napoleon.

Two other books link war and individual writers. Eric C. Walker’s *Marriage, Writing, and Romanticism: Wordsworth and Austen after War* (Stanford University Press, 2009) argues that during the Regency and peacetime that should have again made marriage traditional and popular, his two authors countered radical attacks on what to them was a sacred and social blessing. And in Byron’s *War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), Roderick Beaton traces Byron’s development from the archetypal rebel to a kind of statesman in his active support of Greek resistance against the Turks and his plan for peace and a new Greek nation.

One book of literary history looks to minor poets of the wars. George Hahn’s *The Ocean Bards: British Poetry and the War at Sea, 1793–1815* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2008) restores notice of the vast body of popular poems about the Royal Navy in newspapers and magazines. It highlights the verse of, among others, Charles Dibdin and his sons, Charles and Thomas, Tom Carter, John Mitford, Henry James Pye, John Bidlake, Lawrence Halloran, and many Jack Tars—all keyed to battles and naval life. The book includes chapters on invasion poems, ballads of the lower deck on the life of the wartime sailor, battle odes of admirals’ victories, and seascapes and elegies.

Evan Gottlieb’s *Romantic Globalism: British Literature and Modern World Order, 1750–1830* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013) is an important account of how writers during the title years visualized the worldwide sweep of European empires. Indeed, it is a gloss on Kipling’s question, “What do they know of England who only England know?” An essential chapter is “Fighting Words: British Poetry and the Napoleonic Wars,” which shows poems by Hemans, Barbauld, Anne Grant, and Scott in a debate about the implications of Britain’s long reach across oceans. Gottlieb also includes chapters on relevant novels of Radcliffe and Scott.

The single study of the nonfiction of the shooting war is Neil Ramsey’s *The

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17 Related is the newer scholarship of Atlantic and Black Romanticism, especially that of the West Indies. See, e.g., Paul Youngquist and Grégory Pierrot’s edition of Marcus Rainsford’s *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013).
Military Memoir: Romantic Literary Culture, 1780–1835 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). Arguing that the military memoir became a dominant genre after the war years, Ramsey assesses four of hundreds of unnoticed ones, each conveying a specific Romantic trait of sensibility—suffering, sentiment, the picturesque, and the stoic—an aggregate Romantic self. The book’s conclusion claims further that the memoir popularized wartime adventure to influence the military novel of the 1820s.

Drama’s presence emerges in three books. British triumphalist and Francophobic plays during the wars are nicely reviewed by Frederick Burwick in “Nationalism and National Character,” in his Romantic Drama: Acting and Reacting (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 33–55. While censorship shielded the royals, aristocrats, and church, the stage kept the war prominent by attacking the ancien régime, the Revolution, and Napoleon’s empire, an equal-opportunity attack on the French. On a lighter note, Robert Fahrner’s The Theatre Career of Charles Dibdin the Elder (1745–1814) (New York: Lang, 1989) studies Dibdin’s thirty-nine staged works at the patent theaters of Covent Garden and Drury Lane as well as at Saddler’s Wells and his own Sans Souci Theatre. The most prolific playwright of the war years, Dibdin introduced many of his countless poems and songs on stage before their separate printing and singing in the streets. Akin to Kipling’s Tommy, Dibdin’s recurring character of Jack Tar is a hero brave, goodhearted, and true to his captain, Polls, and Nans—and often to his wife. And Dibdin’s theme is that winning the war is the path to peace. All of his work provided light entertainment that buoyed public spirit. Finally, in Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres, 1807–1815 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), Susan Valladares shows how the theatrical treatment of Wellington’s Peninsular War reached large audiences of men and women of all classes in London and the counties to cultivate a nationwide patriotism. She analyzes diverse types of plays from wartime revivals of Shakespeare and Addison’s Cato (1713) to Coleridge’s Remorse (1813) and Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s Pizarro (1799), which draws a parallel between the Spanish conqueror’s invasion of Peru and Napoleon’s planned invasions of Britain.

With these studies, further literary scholarship of Romantic war and wartime might prompt the popular university anthologies to include war literature of 1793 to 1815 better to sharpen a high aim of liberal education by making student readers

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18 The military historian John Keegan’s tripartite classification of the battle memoir is useful: the jolly genre piece (the “Dutch low-life”); the large colorful, animated canvas (“the Second Empire Salon school”); and the somber, fateful tragedy (“the Neo-Classical” school); see Keegan, The Face of Battle (New York: Military Heritage, 1976), 36–46.

19 A related study, but of drama in earlier eighteenth-century wars, is Daniel O’Quinn, Entertaining Crisis in the Atlantic Imperium, 1770–1790 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

20 For his plays and hundreds of poems Dibdin enjoyed a royal pension to maintain public morale. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography allows that his work “brought more men into the navy in war-time than all the press gangs could” (5:910–11), and for that service, his monument stands at Greenwich Naval Hospital. For his songs, see The Songs of Charles Dibdin, Chronologically Arranged (London, 1842).
naturalized citizens of another time and place. And further scholarship also would complete the old unfinished landscape of literary history of those years that shows only the perennial tall oaks of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats by painting in the underbrush of the vivid annuals of minor literature and the dark war skies above.