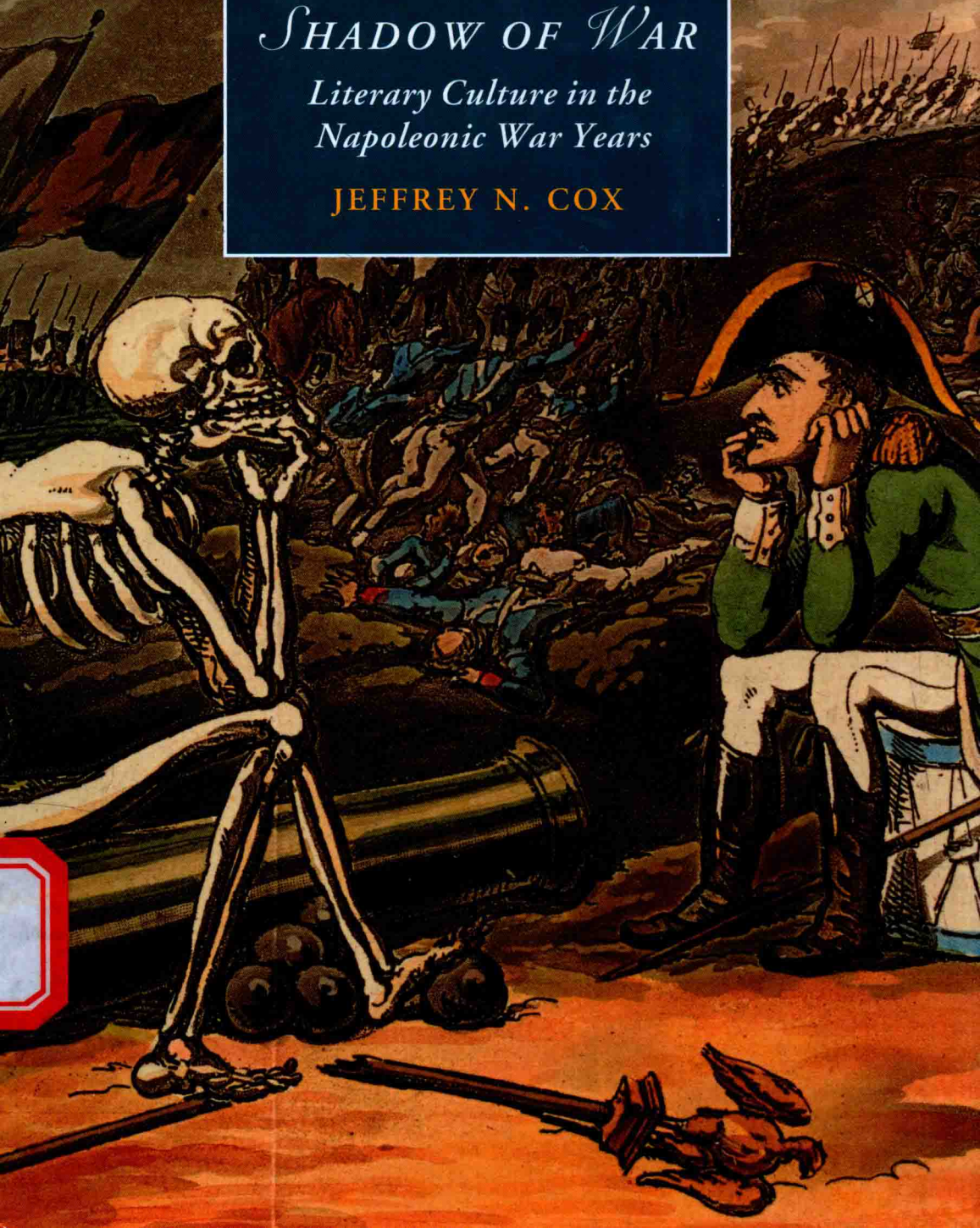


*ROMANTICISM
IN THE
SHADOW OF WAR*

*Literary Culture in the
Napoleonic War Years*

JEFFREY N. COX



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ROMANTICISM IN THE SHADOW OF WAR

Jeffrey N. Cox reconsiders the history of British Romanticism, seeing the work of Byron, the Shelleys, and Keats responding not only to the “first-generation” Romantics led by Wordsworth, but more directly to the cultural innovations of the Napoleonic War years. Recreating in depth three moments of political crisis and cultural creativity – the Peace of Amiens, the Regency Crisis, and Napoleon’s first abdication – Cox shows how “second-generation” Romanticism drew on cultural “border raids,” seeking a global culture at a time of global war. This book explores how the introduction on the London stage of melodrama in 1803 shaped Romantic drama, how Barbauld’s prophetic satire *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* prepares for the work of the Shelleys, and how Hunt’s controversial *Story of Rimini* showed younger writers how to draw on the Italian cultural archive. Responding to world war, these writers sought to embrace a radically new vision of the world.

JEFFREY N. COX is Professor of English, of Comparative Literature, and of Humanities at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he is also the Vice Provost and Associate Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs. He is author of *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Shelley, Keats, Hunt, and their Circle* (Cambridge, 1998) and *In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England, and France* (1987).

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In memoriam
Kenneth A. Cox
Jane Moody

Acknowledgments

This project began as an invited talk at the 2004 meeting of the International Conference on Romanticism held at Texas A&M International in Laredo on “Romantic Border Crossings.” I want to thank ICR, the conference organizers, and above all Jeffrey Cass for providing the impetus to begin thinking about the issues I engage here. The colleagues who were there and the border site itself made this a meeting to remember.

The first actual audience for these ideas was Dana Van Kooy, Terry Robinson, and Jennifer Jones, who were good enough to listen to a practice version of the ICR talk. One of the last audiences for the book was Michele Speitz, who offered advice on final revisions. They were all once graduate students or post-doctoral fellows at the University of Colorado Boulder and are now colleagues whose own work inspires mine and gives me a sense of where Romanticism as a field is headed. I owe a great debt to them and to other fine Colorado graduate students, former and current, including John Leffel, Kurtis Hessel, Scott Hagele, Priya Jha, Daniel Larson, Kirstyn Leuner, Deven Parker, and Jim Walker.

This project has grown within a series of intellectual communities. Most immediately are my colleagues in the Colorado Romanticism Collective and its core members, Jill Heydt-Stevenson (who sees into the “life of things”), Padma Rangarajan (“seemed made to shew / How far the genuine flesh and blood could go”), John Stevenson (“Philosophy like thine turns to pure gold / Earth’s dross”), and Paul Youngquist (“Who is, what others seem” and who acts upon the committed, collective Romanticism others talk about). Through daily acts of friendship and through career-long scholarly accomplishments, their efforts make mine possible. These are the local representatives of a larger gathering of Romanticists who care for each other and create new knowledge, who have welcomed me and my students into the profession, and who have created the warmth of community amidst what can be cold professionalism. I cannot name them all, but as representatives of the rest: Mark Lussier, Greg Kucich, Michael

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related papers at Boston University, the University of St. Andrews, the Washington Area Romantics Group held at the University of Maryland, the University of Zurich, and the LA Area Romantics Group hosted by Anne Mellor. I owe debts to many friends and colleagues at such events, including Chuck Rzepka, Neil Fraistat, Orrin Wang, Fred Burwick, Marilyn Gaull, Paul Douglass, Tim Fulford, Tracy Davis, Peter Holland, Mary Favret, Franca Della Rosa, Lilla Maria Crisafulli, Anna Maria Sportelli, Diego Saglia, Timothy Morton, Alan Richardson, Anne Mellor, Marjorie Levinson, Stuart Curran, Kevin Gilmartin, and William Galperin.

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Ideas set forth in this book have appeared in different forms in other places, and they are reprinted with permission. Chapter 1 draws upon "The death of tragedy; or, The birth of the melodrama," in *The Performing Century: Nineteenth-Century Theatre's History*, edited by Peter Holland and Tracy Davis (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007), pp. 161–81. Chapter 2 uses material from "Manfred and the melodrama," in *Poetic and Dramatic Forms in British Romanticism*, edited by Franca Dellarosa (Bari, Italy: Laterza and Figli, 2006), pp. 17–38. A version of Chapter 5 appeared as "Revisioning Rimini: Dante in the Cockney School," in *Dante and Italy in British Romanticism*, edited by Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011), pp. 183–204. Thanks to all these editors for including me in these wonderful projects.

This book would not have been done, given my other obligations, without the forbearance of my family. Amy, Julia, Emma, and Claire have all supported this work in ways they probably do not even know. My parents have always stood behind my efforts, and I am saddened that I did not complete this project before my father, Kenneth Cox, passed away. I hope he would have seen some of his own buoyant spirit in this account of keeping hope alive in difficult times.

Abbreviations

- Allot *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Miriam Allot. London: Longman, 1970.
- BLJ *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie Marchand. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973–82.
- BCPW *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller. 7 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93.
- Cox *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Shelley, Keats, Hunt, and their Circle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- CWH *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe. 21 vols. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930–34.
- KL *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–1821*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins. 2 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958.
- KPP *Keats's Poetry and Prose. A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2009.
- SL *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.
- SPP *Shelley's Poetry and Prose. A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002.
- SWLH *Selected Writings of Leigh Hunt*, General Editors: Robert Morrison and Michael Eberle-Sinatra. 6 vols. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003.
- Wordsworth *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest De Selincourt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936.

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Introduction

Border raids as cultural practice

The story of Romanticism is told as a tale of two generations, two “moments”: in this account, the “first” generation of Romantic poets burst onto the artistic scene in the 1790s, following upon the heels of the French Revolution; the “second” generation, growing up in the shadow of war, wrote most of their poetry in the aftermath of Waterloo and drew upon the work of their elders to explore not the blissful dawn of the Revolution’s first days but the grim twilight of reaction and “despondency,” to use Wordsworth’s term from his monumental *Excursion*, written to bury revolution in its church graveyard. The distortions of this tale of fathers and sons are many: forcing us to cut short the careers of Blake, Coleridge, and particularly Wordsworth, all of whom outlived the younger generation, to make way for Byron, Shelley, and Keats; masking the centrality of women writers in the era; privileging a story of intergenerational psychological struggle over what was actually an aesthetic and ideological contestation between contemporaries.¹

It also casts into the shadows a decade and more of the period, an era that might be marked off by the publication of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* and the release of the first collected works of Lord Byron in 1815, or, to use other markers, by the Peace of Amiens and the Hundred Days. Most simply put, these are the years of the Napoleonic Wars.

When we as Romanticists turn from our own conflicted and confusing world to the literature we study and love, we would rather think of powerful literature than the force of arms, of Keatsian luxuries, Austenian order, Wordsworthian hushed solemnities, of Blake’s mental strife not actual combat, of the Cockney culture wars rather than wars of conquest; but a range of scholars, including Betty Bennett and Simon Bainbridge, Mary Favret and Philip Shaw, have reminded us that the Romantic era witnessed a world almost constantly at war.² As such scholars have shown us, war is never far from the central works of the Romantic imagination – Wordsworth’s beautiful landscapes contain demobilized soldiers, cottages

ruined by a wartime economy, solitaries left despondent by the wars of revolution; Keats's romances are offered against accounts of what he calls in *Endymion* "the death-day of empires" (2.34); Austen's wedding bells sound in a world that also echoes to naval cannonades.

If, somewhat against our will, we do think of Romantic wars, we tend – in keeping with our monumentalizing turn towards the "Big Six," towards big ideas such as the sublime and national identity, towards hot dates such as 1789 or 1819, towards larger than life figures such as Napoleon or Nelson – to reflect on relatively large actions taking place in and around Europe – Austerlitz or Trafalgar or Waterloo. But we need to remember the struggles at the periphery – the War of 1812 in North America, the Russo-Ottoman war, the wars of liberation in South America. Even the battle for Europe was in many ways settled at the margins, in Spain and Russia. These military actions were often quite small. As Patrick O'Brien reminds us in his novels, most naval battles involved a very small number of ships, with engagements often pitting a single vessel such as HMS *Shannon* against a solitary enemy such as the USS *Chesapeake* on June 1, 1813. As Leigh Hunt repeatedly complains, the major British military tool against Napoleon was the "expeditionary force," not a full-scale assault upon the continent but contained actions seeking to achieve particular goals.³

Such expeditionary raids might meet cataclysmic ends, as was the case of the Walcheren expedition (discussed at greater length in Chapter 3), which was a relatively large action, involving 40,000 men, but which had the distinctly limited aim of disrupting France's military progress through a feint against the Dutch coast, ultimately aimed at Antwerp. The departure of this expedition was delayed, Napoleon learned of the British plans, and the attack was thwarted. While losses in battle were not that great, the remaining British troops, trapped on Walcheren, fell prey to disease; by the year's end, there were 4,000 dead and 11,000 ill, and the army faced a crisis of confidence at home. Even a successful British expedition, such as the one launched in 1808, with 15,000 men landing in Portugal under the command of Sir Arthur Wellesley, could end in disgrace, as the British commanders, after defeating French forces at the Battle of Vimeiro, signed the Convention of Cintra, replacing the French flag with the British rather than Portuguese colors and allowing the French troops to depart on British ships, with many Portuguese national treasures still in possession of the French. While these expeditions involved large numbers, they had restricted aims and even more limited results; they were contained raids on Napoleonic Europe, not a concerted campaign.

Actions elsewhere were smaller: In 1803, Wellington won the battle of Assaye in India – considered by some to be his greatest military feat after Waterloo – with only 4,500 troops against 30,000 Mahrattas, though he did lose one-third of his men. In 1814, 4,500 British troops sacked Washington, DC. Andrew Jackson took Pensacola, FL, with 4,000 regular troops, militia men, and Indians. Battles on the frontiers of the US and Canada often involved only a few hundred men. The Shawnees, who battled for the Ohio valley for decades, never numbered more than 2,500 as a people. The liberators of Chile – San Martín and O’Higgins – fought the Spanish for years with the forces on both sides never exceeding a few thousand. Our period offered global war, but most of the action involved relatively small numbers of people in often far-off places, so far-off they often continued to fight after peace had been declared – we might think of the Battle of New Orleans, settled after peace had been declared at Ghent between the United States and Britain, or of the final action of the Napoleonic Wars, which was not Waterloo but the British assault upon Guadeloupe, which had sided with Napoleon during the 100 Days, where the first of three landings on the island involved 850 Royal York Rangers against 500 French defenders; the French capitulated on August 10, almost a month after Napoleon had surrendered. Even with the 1815 Treaty of Paris structuring a peace for Europe, war, of course, still shadowed the present: to take a few examples, August 27, 1816 saw a European alliance bomb Algiers, the First Seminole and the Third Maratha Wars began in 1817, the Battle of Maipú, a turning point in the Chilean struggle for independence, took place on April 5, 1818, and on August 16, 1819 England witnessed the Peterloo massacre. The era did not see the kind of total war of which the twentieth century made us all too aware, but instead limited expeditions, sallies, and border raids, often accompanied by extended negotiations. This scattered mode of war was more tactical than strategic. It lacked decisive actions, at least until Waterloo, and thus noncombatants in England experienced it at a distance, as Favret argues, with war becoming not so much an existential threat as an ongoing background state of terror.

As the assault on Guadeloupe suggests, there are border dates as well as border lands, times as well as places we tend to overlook. In locating a culture of the border raid, I am proposing that we examine more fully a temporal border land in our period between the two most studied outpourings of creativity, one in the 1790s and the other after Waterloo. I want to examine the culture of the period between these two Romantic moments, roughly the culture produced during the period when the war was clearly against Napoleon rather than revolutionary France, to look at less “hot”

dates such as the Peace of Amiens, the Regency crisis, and Napoleon's first abdication, and to see how certain cultural innovations taken during those years of violence and frustration shaped the writings of Byron, the Shelleys, and Keats: that is, how what we call second-generation Romanticism arises in part as a response not just to the work of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, or Blake but also to writers such as Thomas Holcroft, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and Leigh Hunt. It is not coincidental that my three writers from these war years are the self-educated son of a shoemaker who became a "Jacobin" novelist and a cosmopolitan playwright, a woman from a prominent family of dissenting intellectuals who taught geography and became a leading voice on issues from slavery to war, and the king of the Cockneys, a transplanted trans-Atlantic writer with roots in North America and the Caribbean. Holcroft, Barbauld, and Hunt both came from outside the national centers of cultural and political power and were connected with a global culture. Their works emerged in a moment of global warfare and reflected upon the movements of global empires. These writers did not look just to some native tradition but to models found in different places and times. Their diverse kinds of borrowing are the subject of this current essay into Romantic culture. I am not interested in either some benign model of cultural tradition or one that focuses on the struggles of individual writers to assimilate that tradition. Remembering that the Romantic era was one of warfare and wanting to resist a monumentalizing turn, I suggest that we should think of the Romantic period – both in its military actions and its cultural productions – as the era of small feints, limited campaigns, border raids. Working below social barriers and beyond national boundaries, these writers created key modes of modern literature, raiding their own and other cultures to create new sociolects, new ways of speaking about themselves and their worlds.

I believe it is important that these experiments appeared during years of realities of war and dreams of peace, and that, in particular, they came at moments when there seemed to be some hope that the war might end and the world be changed: the Peace of Amiens, the Regency Crisis, Napoleon's first abdication – each promised hope, particularly for the parts of the left working to reform the government, that the future could be freed from a past of violence and oppression. As each hope was dashed, these cultural experimenters worked to keep hope alive through other means. Through three texts that pursue different kinds of border-crossing cultural work – Holcroft's *Tale of Mystery* taken from the French and performed at Covent Garden in 1802, Barbauld's juvenalian satire *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, and Hunt's *Story of Rimini* based on Dante and written in large

part while he was in prison between 1813 and 1815 – I hope to outline a history of this period that is also an account of cultural border raiding, of the ways in which British culture was always in this period hybridized, international, diversified as is fitting for works born in an era of military and cultural border crossing. While almost any literary text could be described as engaging across cultural boundaries – we need only think of Chaucer, Shakespeare, or Milton turning to Italy – I want to stress the specificity of these cultural tactics at this moment of war. Cultural exchange in a time of war operates under particular restraints. To take a simple point, the writers I treat could not during the war years travel easily to Paris or Rome for an extended exposure to those cultures but had to raid them, as it were, briefly and from a distant base in England. I am, of course, also suggesting that this type of literary exchange is analogous to the kind of war being conducted at the time, that the forms I take up are appropriate to this particular time of war with its limited expeditions and sallies. Moving from the reality of war's violent incursions to a metaphoric sense of cultural border crossings becomes more than verbal sleight of hand when we recognize the real social and cultural tensions that arise as these authors cross barriers of language, gender, and class.

When we make such an attempt to relate the literature we love to its historical moment, we are still, at this late date, likely to be accused of really hating that literature, of sullyng the aesthetic, of reducing poetry to ideology. Critics of historical literary work object that what is often known as the new historicism is based on an assumption that the critic knows more than the poet, that our scholarship arises from a hermeneutics of suspicion, that we work to correct the poets for their ideological errors. I rarely find that to be the case, and particularly not in the work of such key historicists as Jerome McGann or Marjorie Levinson, who clearly celebrate the sheer power of the aesthetic even if they may worry about how that power is wielded. What may be true is that historical work tends first to think of literature as an ideological effect, that there is a tendency to explain as much as possible of the work of art in relation to a context that always precedes as well as includes it; in the end, one may feel that what makes the work unique – usually its form, its beauty but also its imaginative vision – has been explained away. The aesthetic, we are told, has been reduced to the merely political.

There are several points to note here, including the demotion of politics to some lower form of human endeavor, which is certainly in keeping with current ideological positions that want to assert that solutions lie not with the political (i.e. collective governance) but in the “private” sector

(i.e. corporate power). We might also want to query our use of “reductive,” which has moved the word from its original sense of bringing back, of recalling, of returning something to its place to the sense of bringing down, diminishing; it is as if the history of the verb “to reduce” tracks the intervention of a sense of a separate aesthetic realm in relation to which the things we value such as art are “diminished” by being “brought back” to the place, the context, from which they came. (We could come at this point from the other end, as it were, by taking up Hegel’s essay, “Who Thinks Abstractly?,” where he argues that abstraction occurs when something is abstracted or taken from its context.) In any event, for me, politics involves the ways in which people understand themselves when they come together in communities, small and large; that is why politics is not simply what happens in, say, Parliament, it is why there is, for example, a sexual politics, why the personal is the political, why we can speak of a politics of the workplace, of the home, or even of leisure. To say that art is political is, then, not to say it can be “reduced” in the sense of “diminished” to a series of political causes but that it is part of the human community and has communal effects, that it *does* work in the world. It is important to track the contextual forces that shape a work of art, to return it to the place from which it came: culture is not born full grown from the brow of some poetic Zeus. It is equally important to note that any work of art exceeds those forces in that it in turn gives them shape, provides them with form, helps us understand ourselves, for example, within the realm of the political, in Habermasian terms, the public sphere. Art makes what goes under the unyielding name of the “real” perceptible to the human senses as beautiful and thus as meaningful in human terms. This aesthetic value added does not remove the work of art from politics, but instead converts it from effect to cause. The work of art does work in the world, in the realm of the “real” – and it does so, for example, by enriching my sense of nature that might shape my behaviors, by providing insights into desire that might then be acted upon, or by suggesting if only for a moment that the world can be organized in some way different from the way it is now, as a space for change is imagined. Art, reshaping what shapes it, changes us and through us the world. As the very late Romantic André Breton would have it, “Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all.”⁴ Even the cultural border raid or the artistic feint can wrench us from a savage torpor and perhaps allow us to agitate the world around us.

In taking up the literature of the Napoleonic war years, I am not especially interested in particular writers’ reflections on war. In tackling texts that arose at moments of hope and then disappointment for those seeking