

# WAR AT A DISTANCE

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Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime

Mary A. Favret

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Princeton and Oxford

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To Andrew, with love

and

In loving memory of

Patrick J. Favret 1956–1988

Sophia Patrick Miller April 9, 1996

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## A Winter's Evening

On a winter's evening, a man looks into the fireplace and contemplates a world at war.

It is February of 2003; the poet has just turned off the evening news. The buildup to the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq goes without saying. Sleet is "slashing" outside on this "bitter evening," while C. K. Williams's attention wanders to the hearth.<sup>1</sup> There he sees a plastic coffee cup teetering "on a log for a strangely long time, / as though uncertain what to do" (7–8). The hesitation and subsequent collapse of this strange "creaturely" thing calls forth a series of meditations on distant violence: memories of a friend injured during the Vietnam War, thoughts of the upcoming invasion of Iraq, and the prospect of a world devastated by such violence. Suffering is made remote by time and geography but also, despite the marvels of modern telecommunications, by the limits of human perception and feeling. The experience of distant warfare is, for this man at home in the evening, clouded by uncertainties, hesitations, lapses, and collapses. Williams's "The Hearth" is a poem, in other words, of wartime, of the complex working of time-consciousness and feeling that accompanies and shapes the awareness—but also the unknown-ness—of modern, distant war.

Time teeters: past, present, and future all threaten to surrender to an obliterating violence. Seeing the melting cup, Williams remembers a friend "I once knew" who had been ravaged by flames in the Vietnam War after loading a faulty napalm shell. His skin now "lavaed with scar," his soul fails to learn "to not want to die" (24). The poet turns from this absent friend who cannot but wishes to die, to describe a present, impassive violence: an owl "here tonight, after / dusk" "helicoptered" in the dark to kill its prey. In this instance there is "nothing to mourn": "[I]f the creature being torn from its life / made a sound, I didn't hear it" (29–30, 33, 38, 39–40). The suffering outside happens at a remove, imaginable yet inaudible. Meanwhile, the flying predator, equipped

<sup>1</sup> C. K. Williams, *The Singing* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 65–66.

with sophisticated night vision, has turned the poet's thoughts even further away—to a battlefield, and beyond, to prophecy:

But in fact I wasn't listening, I was thinking,  
as I often do these days, of war;  
I was thinking of my children, and their children,  
of the more than fear I feel for them,

and then of radar, rockets, shrapnel,  
cities razed, soil poisoned  
for a thousand generations; of suffering so vast  
it nullifies everything else. (41–48)

The fire blazes up when the “uncertain” plastic cup finally falls, fueling the flames. Against this burning light, the night outdoors becomes “even darker” (54) while the interior room is “barely . . . warm” (55). The poet stokes the fire again and “crouch[es] closer” (56).

On a winter's night a man looks into the fireplace and guides his mind away from war. It is February of 1798; Samuel Taylor Coleridge has been closely following the news from abroad. In the next few months he will compose poems in response to France's bloody invasion of Switzerland and to the “alarm of invasion” of his native country; but not tonight.<sup>2</sup> Now he's couched at the hearth at midnight, staring into its dying embers. An “owl's cry” comes loud, “and hark, again! loud as before” (2, 3); otherwise all the “numberless goings on of life” are kept at a distance, “[i]naudible as dreams” (12–13). One “sole unquiet thing” seems to hover over the coals (16): a “film, which fluttered on the grate, / Still flutters there” refusing to die and calling forth “dim sympathies” from the poet (15–16, 18). “In all parts of the kingdom,” he explains, “these films are called *strangers* and supposed to portend the arrival of some absent friend” (515n). A stranger's intrusion foretells the coming of a friend: the distance between thing and person, foreign and familiar, falters.<sup>3</sup>

The flimsy soul or thing is even less substantial than a melting coffee cup, yet its hovering too opens up mortal time, casting the poet backward into memories of his childhood with its loneliness and anticipations, only to throw

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (New York: Penguin, 1997), 515–16. “Frost at Midnight” was written in February 1798 and revised in the following months. Coleridge wrote “France: An Ode” and “Fears in Solitude: written in April 1798, during an alarm of invasion” that April. The three poems were published together in a quarto volume by Joseph Johnson in October of that same year. Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions, 1772–1804* (New York: Viking, 1989), 182–85, 201–4.

<sup>3</sup> Rei Terada suggests that Coleridge's use of phenomenal apparitions such as this unquiet “film” “occup[ies] a fluid middle ground where [the poet] has the opportunity to reimagine relations.” “Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction in Coleridge's Notebooks,” *Studies in Romanticism* 43.2 (Summer 2004): 262.

him forward to the present and to prophecies of the future. The breathings of the poet's child, asleep in the room, "[f]ill up the interspersed vacancies / And momentary pauses" that had opened (46–47). "[T]hou," the poet tells his child, "shalt learn far other lore / And in far other scenes" (50–51).

The fire in the hearth does not blaze up at this view of the future. The prophecy is underwritten instead by "the secret ministry of frost" (72). If the poet is fearful for his child's future in a world torn by war, the silent, shining icicles of the winter night are there to transform his fear. They signal the hope that something beautiful—not yet fallen or lost or nullified—may survive the wintry blast.

Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,  
 . . . ; whether the eave-drops fall  
 Heard only in the trances of the blast,  
 Or if the secret ministry of frost  
 Shall hang them up in silent icicles,  
 Quietly shining to the quiet Moon. (65, 70–74)

On another "Winter Evening," a man sits by the fireside and reads about a world at war. It is 1783, the British had recently surrendered after two bitter and unpopular wars, one in North America, one in southern India. The newspaper arrives, and William Cowper retires to the hearth to read and ponder the teetering fate of empire.<sup>4</sup> A "freezing blast" and "frost" are "raging abroad," yet the coming storm "endear[s] / The silence and the warmth enjoy'd within" (IV: 303, 308–10). In elaborating his evening rituals, the poet aims to shut out the "noisy world" in the silence of his nightly reading (IV: 5).

. . . I behold  
 The tumult, and am still. The sound of war  
 Has lost its terrors ere it reaches me;  
 Grieves, but alarms me not. I . . .  
 Hear the faint echo of those brazen throats  
 And sigh, but never tremble at the sound. (IV: 99–102, 104–6)

His reflection on the news leads to no individual memory, just to "the comforts that . . . the hours / Of long uninterrupted ev'ning, know" (IV: 141–43). There are nonetheless birds on the wing, and they do rupture the quiet of the night. "Time, as he passes us, has a dove's wing, / Unsoil'd, and swift, and of a silken sound" but, Cowper continues, the "world's time" is "tinctur'd black

<sup>4</sup>William Cowper, *The Task*, in *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. H. S. Milford, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967), 129–241. "The Winter Evening" serves as Book IV of William Cowper's six-book *The Task*, begun in 1783 and first published in 1785. In 1798, Coleridge thought Cowper "the best modern poet" (qtd. in Holmes 195).

and red" and leads to "untimely graves" (IV: 211–12, 213, 216, 219). In this quiet zone sounds the faint echo of Passover and blood sacrifice. Not memory, but sacred history invades the poet's "season of peace" (IV: 243). Later celebrating the pleasures of the hearth, the poet suddenly imagines that he sees in his mirror Goliath, the great enemy warrior, "tow'ring crest and all" (IV: 271).

In response to these strange invasions, the poet's unthinking "soul" gazes into the dwindling fire on the hearth where he sees "houses, tow'rs, / Trees, churches, and strange visages" amidst "the red cinders" (IV: 288, 289). The vision fades, not quite suggesting the ravages of war. His focus rearranges itself: now he watches "films that play" on the grate,

Pendulous, and foreboding, in the view  
Of superstition, prophesying still,  
Though still deceiv'd, some stranger's near approach. (IV: 293–95)

As in Coleridge's poem, something from the superstitious, premodern past survives to call forth an unsure future. Home and hearth are invaded by strange worlds and other times and the poet is pressed to prophecy: "To-morrow brings a change, a total change!" (IV: 322). But uncertainty lodges itself in this lapsed time, in the "vacancies" of the poet's contemplative mind. He looks out the window and sees snow falling "with never-ceasing lapse" (IV: 327). It will "[a]ssimilate all objects" in its blank unreadability (IV: 329). Will change bring a new creation or, as Williams imagines, vast nullification?

Winter, night, the hearth, the news. Invasions, interruptions and flickering, foreboding strangers. Flights of memory and winged predators. Tumult and quiet; listening and not listening; thinking and not thinking; blaze and frost. Lapse, vacuity, absence, nullity. Uncertainty and prophecy. The poems here collected gather some of the recurrent motifs of this book and in doing so, reveal in small its claims. If in these works warfare itself occurs *at a distance*, outside and beyond our reach, the experience of wartime begins *here*, in such domestic settings: in the intimacies of the home and hearth, the wanderings of the mind, the interruptions and lapses—of time, knowledge, and feeling—that compose the everyday. The geographies of such wartime experience cannot be easily compartmentalized *there* and *here*; it overflows these spaces, somehow fugitive and omnipresent at once. At the same time, the sequence of poems presents wartime as something neither firmly sequestered in the past nor thoroughly our own. To be sure, Cowper's and Coleridge's poems speak of wars of one period, crossing the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; and I will be arguing that the generation of writers from Cowper to Coleridge—artists as celebrated as William Wordsworth and forgotten as the anonymous poets of the periodical press—helped to construct the first wartime of modernity. C. K. Williams's poem alerts us to this overlooked history, the continuity

between the way war figures in romantic writing and the way war figures today. But the wartime so constructed does not obey the enclosing actions of periodization; instead it presents a more unsettled and unsettling temporality. Shot through with expressions, imagery, and figures of speech assembled over two hundred years ago, wartime is a present experience handed down from a past uncertain of its future. We have inherited what wartime looks and sounds and feels like from this other time, which remains both strange and familiar.

Thus the young Robert Frost would draw on Cowper and Coleridge in the recently discovered “War Thoughts at Home,” where a woman looks out her window at a “bird war” in a winter landscape (1918). More powerfully, his earlier “Snow” (1916) takes place at night in a Vermont farmhouse, during an obliterating snowstorm, and centers on a debate about whether or not the character Meserve, a bit of a prophet, ought to venture outdoors. Not unlike Cowper, he finds “I like it from inside / More than I shall out in it” (227–28).<sup>5</sup> In the end Meserve does leave, after explaining how the snowfall recruits his leaving: “Hear the soft bombs of dust / It bursts against us at the chimney mouth” (225–27). True to his name, he will serve:

“Well, there’s—the storm. That says I must go on.  
That wants me as a war might if it came.  
Ask any man.” (260–62)

Before this climax, Frost substitutes for the hovering film on the hearth a wavering “something,” the leaf of a book, perhaps a book of romantic poetry:

Meserve seemed to heed nothing but the lamp  
Or something not far from it on the table. . . .  
“That leaf there in your open book! It moved  
Just then, I thought. It stood erect like that, . . .  
Trying to turn itself backward or forward,  
I’ve had my eye on it to make out which;  
If forward, then it’s with a friend’s impatience—  
. . . if backward  
It’s from regret for something you have passed  
And failed to see the good of. Never mind,  
Things must expect to come in front of us  
A many times—I don’t say just how many—  
That varies with the things—before we see them. . . .” (128–42)

Epistemological uncertainty and wavering temporality provide the very texture of this wartime meditation, of wartime as meditation. Frost, attentive to

<sup>5</sup>Robert Frost, *Mountain Interval* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1916), 76–98.



the poetic tradition, discovers in the winter evening forms—the storm without, the ambivalent leaf or medium—for what we both recognize and fail to recognize.

Why would these poets of the twentieth and twenty-first century—Frost, Williams—find their coordinates for wartime in motifs taken from poetry of the late eighteenth century? Something from that past survives to call forth the future.

## PART I

---

### Modern Wartime: Media and Affect

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### Introduction: A Sense of War

This book considers how war becomes part of the barely registered substance of our everyday, an experience inextricable from sitting at home on an evening, recalling absent friends, staring at a fire, gazing out a window. As it looks back over two centuries, *War at a Distance* tells how military conflict on a global scale looked and felt to a population whose armies and navies waged war for decades, but always at a distance. For those at home, the task was to find sentient ground for what often appeared a free-floating, impersonal military operation, removed from their immediate sensory perception. The literature and art produced in Britain during its twenty-year conflict with France cultivated this ground obsessively—and in doing so, it established forms for how we continue to think and feel about war at a distance. As a wartime phenomenon, British Romanticism gives its distinctive voice to the dislocated experience that is modern wartime: the experience of war mediated, of time and times unmoored, of feeling intensified but also adrift.

Modern wartime refers first to the experience of those living through but not in a war. As writers in England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century went about their everyday routines, their country was sending men to kill and be killed across the globe. In the course of the eighteenth century the newly United Kingdom had crushed two armed rebellions at home; participated in a half dozen wars on the continent; expanded its imperial holdings on the Indian subcontinent, in the Caribbean, and in Africa; increased and then lost a good portion of its North American colonies—through warfare. At the turn of the new century, Great Britain entered a worldwide campaign, fighting first against regicides and Terror and later against an evil despot (the French Revolution and Napoleon, respectively), emerging in 1815 as the world's dominant military power.<sup>1</sup> The intensity and length of fighting have led historians to refer to the eighteenth century as a "Second Hundred Years War," and Linda Colley has shown that British national identity was decisively forged through

<sup>1</sup> Great Britain joined the First Coalition against Revolutionary France after the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793. The rule of Terror in France commenced that fall. Napoleon seized political power on November 9, 1799—the 18th Brumaire.

this century of nearly constant military action.<sup>2</sup> But that military action, again, was undertaken at a remove: after the defeat of Stewart loyalists at Culloden in 1745, distance—either geophysical or temporal—was increasingly built into the British nation's understanding of war. War on home turf happened back then; it was history. If it occurred now, it occurred beyond the reach of eyes and ears, somewhere else, over there.

In trying to capture this modern wartime, the chapters of this book take up materials as varied as meditations on *The Iliad*, the history of meteorology, landscape painting in India, popular poetry in the newspapers and periodicals, theories of history and the everyday, the work of dictionaries, and various modes of prophecy and prognostication; they contemplate forms of war and wartime that range from the early years of the eighteenth century to the present. Yet their primary material (their “hearth” as it were) is the literature of romantic wartime. This material makes clear that wartime responses move in several directions. In some instances the experience of war at a distance prompts a move toward abstraction, an increasing distance from the human body. Here the consolations of system, idea, and purpose hold sway: as from a bird’s-eye view, you see patterns emerge; you comprehend why and when, where and how war operates. War becomes an object of knowledge, a universalizing abstraction; indeed, in wartime it threatens to become all you know. In other instances, the reverse occurs: wartime promotes a sense of atomism and despair which folds into the body so completely that inertia and apathy—lack of feeling—are its only signs. Wartime here defeats human responsiveness. There is a third, perhaps more productive response, suspended between and resistant to the polar pulls of abstraction and numbness. The last chapter of this book locates this third response visually and spatially in a “middle distance.” But it surfaces throughout the book as a poetic or aesthetic response, a response that strives to produce and give form to feeling. And it is this third term, the productive aspect of wartime writing, which opens wartime—and the romantic writing that conceived it—to the present.

*War at a Distance* works, then, at the intersection of two academic fields: the study of wartime literature and the study of affect. The scholarship on wartime literature and culture—for example, Paul Fussell’s masterpieces, *The Great War and Modern Memory* and *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*; Bernard Bergonzi’s important *Wartime and Aftermath: English Literature and Its Background, 1939–60*; Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert’s *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*; Jay Winter’s *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*; or more recently, *The Writing of Anxiety: Imagining Wartime*

<sup>2</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992).

in *Mid-century British Culture* by Lindsey Stonebridge or *Grief in Wartime: Private Pain, Public Discourse* by Carol Acton—has been weighted heavily toward the two world wars of the past century. In recent years, the categories of “wartime” and “wartime literature” have been extended to the period of the American Civil War when, as Drew Gilpin Faust puts it, “the United States embarked on a new relationship with death.”<sup>3</sup> Even as I learn from this work, I reach back to a yet earlier, but still self-consciously modern period of war, to acknowledge its continued currency.

Reaching back brings up a question all these studies tend to overlook: the question of “war time” itself. How do we know or measure, how do we *tell* the time of war? What sort of historiography does it require? My answers to these questions derive in part from recent work in the second of the fields I mention, the history of affect, which studies modes of response or apprehension that lie outside of cognition per se. Affect often eludes the usual models for organizing time such as linearity, punctuality, and periodicity; it eludes as well the usual models for organizing history. If we take wartime less as an object of cognition bounded by dates—a period—and more as an affecting experience which resonates beyond the here and now, then wartime literature becomes an attempt to trace and give shape to such affect, to register its wayward power.

This introduction will begin to spell out some of the human consequences of war at a distance. These consequences were of the most fundamental sort: most strikingly, we will see that distant war unsettled basic temporal experiences of the British population. How time and knowledge were registered in daily life became newly uncertain. And with that uncertainty came a set of disturbing affective responses, including numbness, dizziness, anxiety, or a sense of being overwhelmed. In taking romantic writers as architects of modern wartime, I want to bring forth these relations of distance, temporality, epistemology, and affect: the felt distance from crucial events, the limits of knowledge in a mediated culture, the temporal gaps in the transmission of information, and, finally, the difficulty of finding sounds or forms to which feeling can attach itself.

The chapters which then follow divide themselves into three parts. The first deals in particular with the conversion of war at a distance into a matter of time, into wartime. Wartime, as many romantic writers realized in their work, was the effect of war mediated, brought home through a variety of instruments. As the poems discussed in the prelude already suggest, a mediated war sets in motion various and conflicting senses of time, and unsettled times

<sup>3</sup>Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), xi.

unleash unsettled feelings. This opening section, therefore, sets out the complex temporal structure of wartime, understanding it as a zone of affect which troubles what we can know and especially what we can know of history. The second section, while still underscoring how war conducted at a distance intensifies time-consciousness and charges it with affective resonance, concerns itself more with the ways distant war invades and becomes implicated in the most familiar forms of the everyday. The chapters of this section center on the thought that the everyday itself, its peculiar status in modern thought, derives from its intimate relationship with war. Indeed, writing in the romantic period illuminates how war invades thought itself, threatening to become the very ground of thinking, understood in ways that make it—like the everyday—familiar and routine, easy to overlook. The final section of the book then turns from written to visual texts, in part to demonstrate continuities and discrepancies between romantic mediations of war at a distance and more contemporary mediations which privilege the visual and televisual: our own “films upon the grate.” But in directing attention to representations of the landscape of war-torn India in the 1790s, my goal is also to insist upon the global nature of a war often taken to concern only Europe. The very idea of a world war, as it emerged in this period, poses anew a question which lurks throughout the study: the question of our modern intimacy with and response to the suffering stranger who, though seen perhaps fleetingly and at a distance, nevertheless comes almost daily into our homes.

### War Mediated

Taking up “modern wartime,” let alone something called “wartime literature,” means entering into the history of war and mediation. When war is conducted at a distance, how one can know or learn of war becomes massively important, as do the obstacles (psychological, ideological, practical) to such knowledge. The epistemology of modern wartime is an epistemology of mediation. Consider again C. K. Williams’s “The Hearth,” written in the wake of television reports; consider too his poem “Doves,” a 2003 response to media reports on the war in Iraq:

So much crap in my head,  
 So many rubbishy facts,  
 So many half-baked  
 theories and opinions, . . .  
 So much political swill.  
 So much crap, Yet

so much I don't know  
and would dearly like to. . . (I-4, 8-11)<sup>4</sup>

Or consider the familiar stories of soldiers found in remote places, still primed to fight because they have not heard what those back home know already, that peace treaties have been signed months before. These stories, circulating widely in the media, not only advertise the more "accurate" knowledge of the viewer or reader compared to the benighted warrior ("too close" to the action); they also provide an ironic fable of the larger indeterminacies of wartime (when does wartime begin or end? where exactly does it take place?) and their tight links to the work of communication.

But the roots of these familiar stories about the mediation and uncertainties of war reach down to an earlier period. If modern wartime is the experience of noncombatants in a time of war, it is worth recalling that it was in fact during the Napoleonic period that the term "noncombatant" as well as the popular understanding of "civilian" as nonmilitary first emerged in English; and the notion of "wartime" as a distinct category emerged along with them.<sup>5</sup> With the advent of mass media, in the print culture that rose in the eighteenth century, and in an increasingly popular visual culture of prints, panoramas, and theatrical performances, wartime stepped forth as a mediated relationship to distant violence.

Caught within these examples is the revelation that, by calling up questions of epistemology, of certainties and doubts, a mediated war evokes as well the unsettled terrain of wartime affect. Within such conditions of mediated knowledge, feeling responds not only to the war itself but to one's privileged experience of it—the privilege of knowing war at a distance. A 1798 pamphlet, written to raise the alarm of invasion by French forces, could invoke this privilege almost smugly, insisting on the war's distance and invisibility:

[I]t has been our peculiar privilege, through the whole of this unprecedented War, to triumph over our enemies without ever seeing them, without any exposure of our personal security, without any interruption of our domestic quiet, while a great part of Europe has experienced all the horrors of War, while its cities have been sacked, and its fields drenched with blood. . . . [W]e have it in our power to frustrate the

<sup>4</sup> Williams read his poem "Doves" in his acceptance speech for the National Book Award in Poetry in 2003. [http://www.nationalbook.org/nbaacceptspeech\\_ckwilliams.html](http://www.nationalbook.org/nbaacceptspeech_ckwilliams.html).

<sup>5</sup> The *OED* quotes Gen. Wellington, writing in 1811 and 1813, for the first two instances of the use of the word "non-combatant." A "civilian" originally studied or followed civil, as opposed to canon law. "civilian, *n.*" *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1989, *OED Online* (Oxford UP), 30 August 2007, <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50280633>.



designs of the enemy without seeing our Country become the seat of War,—without, even any violation of our Coasts.<sup>6</sup>

This sense of privileged security sits uneasily, though, in a work dedicated to rousing its countrymen to a constant vigilance. Elsewhere, the author paints scenarios of “violence and rapine” on British soil and reports on incendiary speeches in Paris, making visible and proximate the very violence it hopes to defend against. The picture of domestic quiet remains meaningless without this threat of “interruption.” Pamphlets like this one—and there were dozens—mediated between the known and the unknown, seen and unseen, prompting wild fluctuations of feeling. They could, for instance, be at once contemptuous of France’s ability to fund an invasion, and certain that the threat was real and imminent. They offered the feeling of security always bundled with the feeling of vulnerability.

The arrival—or not—of news from abroad was one determining factor of wartime experience, of what you might know and how you might feel. Already in 1798, Samuel Taylor Coleridge could lament that reading the morning news only dampened his ability to respond feelingly to distant warfare: the papers offer “dainty terms for fratricide; . . . mere abstractions, empty sounds to which / We join no feeling and attach no form!” (113, 116–17).<sup>7</sup> Coleridge’s “un-joined” feelings—un-articulated affect—were encouraged not only by the newspapers’ euphemism and abstraction but also by the sheer facts of physical and temporal distance. In the late eighteenth century, news of war came with considerable lag time; reports of a particular event, the loss of a battle or the death of your brother, could take months to be communicated home and confirmed. Today we depend on the illusion of immediacy granted by instantaneous and unceasing news reporting, as if we can always know what is happening elsewhere in the world as it occurs; yet un-joined feelings persist. Such feelings—empty, lacking solid attachment—contribute to the experience of any war at a distance. The wartime writing of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic period gives expressive form to this experience of mediated distance—distance spatial, temporal, epistemological, and, in the end, mortal—and the responses it generates. For these reasons, reading this literature has taught me that wartime is not just a period of time that can be got over or settled, but rather a persistent mode of daily living and a habit of mind.

<sup>6</sup> *An appeal to the head and heart of every man and woman in Great Britain, respecting the threatened French invasion, and the importance of immediately coming forward with voluntary contributions.* London, 1798, 118–19. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO)*. Gale Group. <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>. My thanks to Lily Gurton-Wachter for pointing out this passage.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (New York: Penguin, 1997), 95.

In such circumstances, mediation itself becomes an object of emotion: of comfort, complacency, relief, anxiety, impotence, complicity. In response to the mediated versions of war we receive, we may admit, as William Cowper did while reading his newspaper in 1783, that “The sound of war / Has lost its terrors ere it reaches me; / Grieves, but alarms me not” (IV: 100–2).<sup>8</sup> Yet, at the next moment we may discover in the safe space of our living rooms, as he did, the fleeting presence—however imagined—of towering warriors and cities in flames, or towers in flames and cities full of warriors. Distant violence becomes at once strange and familiar, intimate and remote, present and yet not really here. “Being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country,” Susan Sontag noted, “is a quintessential modern experience.”<sup>9</sup> In saying this, she echoes a well-known radical preacher of the romantic period, Joseph Fawcett, who published his famous anti war poem, *The Art of War*, in 1795. In his later *War Elegies* (1801), Fawcett put succinctly the operation of wartime affect as it fluctuates somewhere between minds, hearts, and bodies, here and elsewhere. The misery of war, he remarks, consists in part “in the pain it inflicts upon the mind of every contemplator of its ravages, *at whatever distance* he stand from its theatre . . . whose heart can bleed at home along with the thousands whose bodies are bleeding in the field.”<sup>10</sup> Appealing without apology to the bleeding heart in wartime, Fawcett asks us to reexamine this overworn figure as it presses closely on the problem of mediation: of what is far brought close, what outer made inner. Fawcett expects hearts and minds to respond to war conducted anywhere at all, at whatever distance from “home”—and yet it is difficult to pinpoint where and when such misery takes place. For Fawcett, what is at a great distance seems also somehow (through some unspoken mediation) to penetrate us.

As this thought suggests, war itself does not necessarily *make sense*. Indeed, wartime is often the experience of an undoing or damaging of rational sense—which is to say that war, even at a distance, works to dismantle the forms that prop up our sense of the world and our place in it. In *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Elaine Scarry anticipates this thought, arguing that war has as its target “a people and its civilization (or . . . the realms of sentience and self-extension).”<sup>11</sup> In the face of such absolute destructiveness, she tries to give voice and shape to the “interior and inarticulate . . . sentience” that accompanies and registers the prosecution of war (60). Deprived

<sup>8</sup> William Cowper, *The Task*, in *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. H. S. Milford, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967), 129–241.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2003), 18.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Fawcett, *War Elegies* (London: J. Johnson, 1801), vii; emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), 61.

of the fortifications of intellect and understanding, deprived even of the immediacy of empirical evidence, the inhabitants of modern wartime often rely on another and less categorizable “sense” of what war is and does; affect is this alternate sense or sentience. Usually associated with the body and autonomous sensation, it names an awareness, not distinctly psychological or physiological but sharing aspects of each, that remains at some remove, at a distance, from rational comprehension.<sup>12</sup>

Fawcett and his contemporaries respond to the wars they live through according to this more extensive view of distance, knowledge, and affect. In this they run athwart twentieth-century theorist Carl Schmitt, who, arguing from the aftermath of the Treaty of Westphalia (1711), famously called up the Lines of Amity to “bracket” eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European warfare from violence conducted elsewhere on the planet. Warfare in Europe was so-called limited war: limited to familiar and respectable enemies (*justis hostes*), limited in scale, and, ultimately, limited in its ethical consequences.<sup>13</sup> Fawcett’s view partakes instead of the cosmopolitan perspective provisionally outlined by Immanuel Kant in “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” (1795).<sup>14</sup> This perspective admits the claims of that stranger we saw in the prelude, coming from no matter how remote a place, who might intrude upon the winter evenings of contemplators such as Fawcett, Cowper, or Coleridge. For Kant, the stranger may claim

a *right of resort*, for all men are entitled to present themselves in the society of others by virtue of their right to the communal possession of the

<sup>12</sup> See Kevis Goodman’s discussion of the “*history of the sense of history*” in *Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 5, 145–46n12; Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996); and Julie Ellison, *Cato’s Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999). For more general discussions of affect and feeling, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke UP, 2003); Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the “Death of the Subject”* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001); Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002); and Denise Riley, *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (Durham: Duke UP, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> In *The Nomos of the Earth* (New York: Telos, 2003), Carl Schmitt called the “bracketing of war” the great accomplishment of the European powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This “bracketing” depends upon the concept of *justis hostes*, the just or respectable enemy, which structures war as a duel between personified sovereigns and as “war in form.” His influential account argues that after the Treaty of Westphalia an international law prevailing within the Lines of Amity marked Europe as the supposed zone of limited war (among *justus hostes*). Outside these lines—notoriously in the colonial holdings of European states—war was exempted from this law. Schmitt can see the Napoleonic period only as an anomaly (140–47). See Garrett Mattingly, “No Peace beyond What Line?” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th Ser. 13 (1963): 145–62; Eliga H. Gould, “Zones of Law, Zones of Violence: The Legal Geography of the British Atlantic, circa 1772,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 60.3 (July 2003): 471–511.

<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991).

earth's surface, . . . since the earth is a globe, they cannot disperse over an infinite area, but must necessarily tolerate one another's company. (106)

Taking the globe as a finite space, Kant sees the line between near and far dissolving. The principle of hospitality consequently extends beyond the realm of the "civilized states . . . especially the commercial states" of Europe to all "foreign countries and peoples" (106).<sup>15</sup> To give that principle force, to make it felt, Kant turns from the abstraction of states (his main concern) to the figure of an individual stranger knocking, as it were, on the door to your home. Kant understands such visitations in a quite literal and geographically grounded sense: "when he arrives on someone else's territory" a stranger should not be "treated with hostility" (105–6). For Fawcett and other romantic writers, the visitations from other lands are stranger, both more intimate and more metaphorical. Fawcett draws his lines not geopolitically, but as the difference between an inner and an outer "bleeding": in the heart or on the field, invisible or visible to the outward eye. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the bleeding that is not visible because it takes place at a geographical distance elicits this other invisible bleeding, located in the inner terrain designated by the conjunction of "heart," "mind," and "body." Such mediation between inner and outer worlds provides no improved access to sensory perception. Indeed, it puts the problem of distance on a new footing: how remote or accessible is this inner world? And yet the mediation produces a "sense" that movements across the globe can be felt and registered, can even inflict with pain the wartime "contemplator."

The wartime affect described by Fawcett, produced in response to wars which cannot be seen or heard, smelled or touched, might thus recall the "sense of History" Alan Liu describes as "the absence that is the very possibility of the 'here and now.'" <sup>16</sup> But precisely as a "sense" of History, the affect of wartime also resists such abstraction (resists the sheer negativity of "absence" or Kant's "infinite distances") to attach itself to a feeling body. Throughout *War at a Distance*, writing and art are attuned to this new sense of a war that has potentially no limits or end, whose scope expands both internally and externally. They ask: how can the human form, with its mortal limits, register and check what remains beyond its ken?

<sup>15</sup> Here Kant states his difference from the Grotius-Pufendorf school of international law and its Westphalian view of European exclusivity. In his critique of colonial violence (105–6), Kant echoes William Godwin's concurrent thoughts in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, vol. 2 (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1796), 156–57. See also Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 219–25.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Liu, *Wordsworth: The Sense of History* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 39. Liu takes the concept of history structured as "absent cause" from Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading "Capital,"* trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1970), 188.