

IMAGINING WAR AND PEACE IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN,
1690–1820

Ranging over political, moral, religious, artistic and literary developments in eighteenth-century Britain, Andrew Lincoln explains in a clear and engaging style how the ‘civilizing process’ and the rise of humanitarianism, far from inhibiting war, helped to make it acceptable to a modern commercial society. In a close examination of a wide variety of illuminating examples, he shows how criticism of the terrible effects of war could be used to promote the nation’s war-making. His study explores how ideas and methods were developed to provide the British public with moral insulation from the overseas violence they read about, and from the dire effects of war they encountered at home. It shows, too, how the first campaigning peace society, while promoting pacifism, drew inspiration from the prospects opened by imperial conquest. This volume is an important and timely call to rethink how we understand the cultural and moral foundations of imperial Britain.

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To W.A.L and K.R.L

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Preface

There is now a large and growing area of scholarship devoted to the cultural impact of war in the eighteenth century. Much of this work has appeared in the wake of Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (1992) which examined among other things the role of war in shaping a sense of 'Britishness' in the eighteenth century. Since Colley's book appeared a range of studies has illuminated the social impact of war, the role of women in warfare, the representation of the armed forces in British culture, and the influence of war on poetry, drama, and the novel – work that has run in parallel with, and drawn upon, more specialist studies of the navy, the army, and militia, as well as upon new political histories. As a result of this activity, we now have a much better understanding of just how pervasive the cultural influence of war became in the eighteenth century, and are less likely to see warfare and culture as separate entities. Gillian Russell in *Theatres of War: Performance, Politics and Society 1793–1815* (1995) revealed the close interrelationships between the armed forces and the theatre during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, as soldiers and sailors become actors themselves, and plays were performed in the war zone. Margarete Lincoln, in *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power 1750–1815* (2002), showed how the image of British sea power was constructed and deployed in the public sphere through a variety of cultural practices. Simon Bainbridge demonstrated that war was a powerful influence upon British poets during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, in *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict* (2003). Philip Shaw has explored a range of responses to the Battle of Waterloo in *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (2002) and has examined the relationship between sentiment and the representation of suffering in Romantic military art in *Suffering and Sentiment in Romantic Military Art* (2013); I share his interest in the process by which audiences were conditioned to respond to scenes of ruin with revulsion but not to undertake political action against war. A number of studies have

focused on the complex interactions between war, culture, and politics during the Seven Years' War, including John Cardwell's *Arts and Arms* (2004) and a collection of essays edited by Frans De Bruyn and Shaun Regan, *The Culture of the Seven Years' War* (2014).¹ In some studies, literary works have been approached as lenses through which to look at the wider impact of hostilities upon the life of the nation. Carol Watts, for example, in her 2007 book *The Cultural Work of Empire*, argued that the Seven Years' War (1756–63) gave rise to a re-imagining of relations between the individual and the state, a process she approached through a discussion of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Mary Favret, in *War at a Distance* (2009), took William Cowper's poem *The Task* as a starting point for a complex account of how war impinged upon and shaped the everyday consciousness of civilians. Holger Hoock, in his monumental *Empires of the Imagination* (2010), looked at a century of British history from 1750 to 1850 and included both art works and exhibitions; here culture itself became a site of battle, as Britons engaged in 'culture wars' in the process of legitimating their developing empire and its military aggression. In other works, scholars have focused upon the impact of war on special areas of eighteenth-century culture, including gender and sentiment, or have considered how the study of war contributes to the history of emotions, or how war give rise to new forms of writing, including the military memoir and the military tale.²

My own study is indebted to the example of these works, and to some of their findings, although its aim is rather different. The book has grown out of my work on William Blake and Walter Scott, who, in spite of their many differences, share an interest in the processes by which the violence of war is justified in a modern commercial society. I am primarily concerned with the question: how do such societies reconcile themselves to war? I attempt to find some answers by looking at a range of materials – including poems, novels, periodical essays, philosophical studies, sermons, historical writing, paintings, and some plays – selected from the field of British culture in the long eighteenth century.

In writing this book I have incurred many debts. I owe special thanks to the late John Richardson, from whose writing on war I learned a great deal, and to whose generosity as a scholar, and at a more personal level, I am much indebted. I have benefitted from numerous conferences that have been organised to represent the field. The 'Soldiers and Soldiering' network and conferences set up by Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack, the 'Complicity and Politics of Representation' conference organised at Ruhr-Universität Bochum by Cornelia Wächter, Alex Adams, Robert Werth,

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the Kings College conference on ‘War and Peace in the Age of Napoleon’ organised by Zac White, and the ‘War, Literature and the Arts’ at the US Airforce Academy, Colorado Springs (where I learned, among many other things, that the Academy introduces its cadets to anti-war literature in an attempt to make them better warriors) – all of these have played an important role in the development of this book. I owe thanks to the members of a University of Singapore workshop John Richardson organised: Ala Alysse, Anders Engberg-Pederson, Thomas Keymer, Lynda Mugglestone, Melinda Rabb, and Neil Ramsey, whose knowledge and enthusiasm, as well as their critical insight, proved invaluable. I thank Markman Ellis and Christopher Reid, who read parts of this work in typescript. Parts of this study incorporate material that first appeared in a different form in articles published in *Eighteenth Century Life and Eighteenth-Century Studies*. I am grateful to the editors of these publications for their permission to include the material here. My deepest debt is to Margarett Lincoln, who was a patient and knowledgeable adviser at every stage of this project.

Notes

- 1 John Cardwell, *Arts and Arms: Literature, Politics and Patriotism during the Seven Years War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Frans De Bruyn and Shaun Regan, eds., *The Culture of the Seven Years’ War: Empire, Identity, and the Arts in the Eighteenth-century Atlantic World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).
- 2 On gender: Margarett Lincoln, *Naval Wives & Mistresses* (London: National Maritime Museum, 2007); Julia Banister in *Masculinity, Militarism and Eighteenth-Century Culture, 1689–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). On the history of emotions: Stephanie Downes, Andrew Lynch, and Katrina O’Loughlin, eds., *Writing War in Britain and France, 1370–1854: A History of Emotions* (London: Routledge, 2018). Neil Ramsey, *The Military Memoir and Romantic Military Culture* (London: Routledge, 2016).