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John Bonehill and Geoff Quilley, Eds., *Conflicting Visions: War and Visual Culture in Britain and France c. 1700-1830*. Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005. xiv + 231 pp. Illustrations, notes, works cited, index. 54 b&w ill. \$99.95/£55.00. ISBN 0-7546-0575-2.

Review by David O'Brien, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.

I once visited the Vienna Kunsthistorische Museum in the company of a young Marine. After an enjoyable afternoon discussing pictures, he remarked that, "Almost all the paintings here are about war or sex." That was an overstatement, meant to be provocative, but it is indeed curious that, as the editors of this volume note, "the prevalence of war and military themes in this period [from c. 1700 to 1830] has been somewhat neglected" (p. 3). To be fair, images of war have recently inspired or played an important role in a number of excellent studies, particularly in the case of nineteenth-century French art.[1] There is nonetheless plenty of room for a book like *Conflicting Visions*, which sets out specifically to explore "the relation of visual culture and aesthetics to conflict in the period, taking into account a wide variety of materials, including paintings and prints, maps and topographical drawings, commemorative sculpture and historical artifacts" (p. 1).

The editors of the volume explain its exclusive focus on Britain and France by noting that these were "the two outstanding 'fiscal-military states' of the early modern period" and the central rivals of "every major conflict of the 'long' eighteenth century" (p. 2). Be that as it may, readers of this site may want to know that only two of the nine essays are devoted primarily to French culture. If the national focus of the volume is narrow, there are other ways in which its scope is broad: colonial warfare receives the same attention as war in Europe; the authors turn to an exceptionally wide range of media; and the types and experiences of warfare treated by the authors vary greatly.

Julie Plax relates Antoine Watteau's little-studied military paintings to emerging attitudes toward war and sociability at the tail end of Louis XIV's many military campaigns, when there were few victories for the French to celebrate. She suggests that the paintings purposefully subverted official conventions for representing warfare by insisting on undisciplined moments of repose, gallantry, and potentially erotic encounters. For the cultivated elite who purchased Watteau's work, his paintings "were about the distance between a set of outmoded military ideals, encoded in the conventions of the official tradition, and the contemporary experience of war" (p. 25).

Matthew Craske's essay demonstrates that most military and naval monuments constructed in the early and mid eighteenth-century England were "more intended to promote reputations of families and political factions than the interests of the state as conceived by the prevailing ministerial establishment. Privately funded monuments were [...] largely intended to benefit private social interests, whatever the superficial rhetoric of patriotic service contained within them" (p. 43). Craske notes interesting shifts in the iconography of these monuments. From the 1730s to the late 1750s, for example, when Britain's military triumphs were generally mediocre or absent "great heroes and patriots were assumed to transcend, rather than exemplify, the spirit of the age" (p. 52). After the imperial victories of the 1750s, however, there is a new triumphalism as well as a more uncompromising image of masculine military heroism, and a rise in the use of slave imagery.

Craske's essay flows nicely into that of Joan Coutu, which argues that Joseph Wilton's *Monument to Major General James Wolfe* in Westminster Abbey was consciously formulated to reinforce William Pitt's

vision of empire. The details of Wolfe's life and death as well as the peculiar style of the monument, which combines historical narrative and allegory, antique and modern dress, and representatives of various parts of the British Empire, all conform to the patriotic, broadly popular vision Pitt used to consolidate his power base. Coutu's argument is based largely on the correspondences between Wilton's sculpture and Pitt's use of Wolfe in his own political machinations, but it is convincing.

Sarah Monks examines a series of engravings of the British capture of Havana in 1762, done after drawings by Philip Orsbridge, a minor naval officer of very modest origins. She convincingly reconstructs the motivations that led Orsbridge to publish his handiwork. In particular, she relates them to the policies of George Anson, First Lord of the Admiralty from 1749 to 1762, who encouraged men like Orsbridge to improve themselves through scientific inquiry and draftsmanship. The engravings were, in effect, an elaborate effort at self-promotion. Monks's essay reveals the impact of changes in military policy on the British visual culture, but at the end she steps back to reflect on how the prints belonged to a "scopic regime" that combines an apparently "natural" point of view with a national one. Orsbridge's personal motivations coincided with a broader shift in visual culture: "In and through such sets of images, a coherent subject matter of national significance (colonial warfare) was formed and represented for a public itself increasingly unified by a national culture of politeness" (p. 99).

Geoff Quilley looks at other representations of the West Indies during the American Revolutionary war: John Singleton Copley's *Watson and the Shark* (1778) and the illustrations for Edward Long's infamous *History of Jamaica* (1774). He argues that the conflict on the North American continent must be seen as part of an imperial and circum-Atlantic world that necessarily affected the literary and visual culture from or about the Caribbean. Thus, both landscapes illustrating contemporary Jamaica and *Watson and the Shark* raised vexing questions about the meaning of slavery and liberty, as well as loyalty and opposition, in the colonial context. Quilley's analysis demonstrates that already in the 1770s, a war fought between Britain and its American colonies had global consequences affecting understandings of commerce, political beliefs, and conceptions of self and other throughout the British Empire.

Anxieties raised by Britain's defeat in the American war were allayed by its successful defense of Gibraltar against French and Spanish forces in 1782. Copley's monumental *Siege of Gibraltar* (1783-1791) and its relation to the many other representations of the event that appeared during its long gestation is the subject of John Bonehill's essay. Bonehill demonstrates that the painting relied on the contemporary viewer's expected familiarity with other narratives and representations of the siege. Copley responded to an evolving account that increasingly lent prominence to sentimental episodes intended to evoke sympathy from the audience, which Copley was more than ready to incorporate into his painting. He also had to adapt his popular sources to the conventions of history painting, finding a middle ground between the expectations of those familiar with the theoretical aspirations of the genre and a public eager to be entertained.

Tony Halliday argues that a large drawing by Jean-Baptiste Isabey and Carle Vernet entitled the *Revue du Quintidi*, exhibited publicly in Paris in 1800, was part of a campaign to establish Napoleon Bonaparte at the head of a constitutional monarchy. Bonaparte appears in the middle ground as a frail, slightly hunched and modestly dressed figure, while in the foreground buff cavalymen parade about. Halliday ingeniously explains Bonaparte's diminutive stature through the theories of Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis, who posited that physiques such as that of Bonaparte were proper to men of intellect, while men with muscular builds generally possessed a merely "mechanical power," more apt to attack than to observe, nurture, or conserve. Bonaparte was thus not only presented as fit to lead the military, but also to govern the brutish masses that had purportedly led the French Revolution astray.

Phillip Shaw examines two types of responses to the battlefield of Waterloo and the fragments of bodies that filled it: the reactions of tourists and the drawings and letters of the surgeon Charles Bell. Both alternated between all-encompassing, elevated viewpoints that offered a sense of command and mastery,

and shocking confrontations with horrific remains that testified to the violence and suffering engendered by war. They dealt with the trauma by variously assimilating it to the aesthetics of the sublime and the picturesque. Bell's drawings seem to offer an exceptional account of the mutilated bodies of the wounded, yet even he, in Shaw's account, elided the fragmented body with the dispassion of scientific inquiry, and with an aesthetics of the sublime and of loss and ruins, allowing him to recuperate "the illusory wholeness of the victorious nation" and a vision of war as "a struggle between conflicting ideals" (p. 199).

Waterloo is again the subject of Susan Pearce's essay which explores how English understandings of the battle took shape in relation to the objects flowing from the battlefield, principally items of dress and equipment. Pearce couches her argument within a broader understanding of cultural shifts in the years around 1800, asserting that "the exhibition of material culture came to focus on experience rather than exposition, privileging feeling over understanding" (p. 209). Pearce's inventory of the ways in which objects from the battlefield were used is indeed striking: some were treated like religious relics; others created identities for regiments, acting like heirlooms for families with long genealogies; many served as souvenirs for tourists; still others provided displays for museums and exhibitions. Pearce observes that objects were manipulated to promote sociopolitical myths, and she notes in particular the success of souvenirs associated with a heroic account of Scottish participation in the battle. All these objects emanating from Waterloo, however, provided a more experiential, passive form of viewing, filled with vicarious and derivative emotions, different, Pearce claims, from the ways in which material culture functioned before the Revolutionary period.

All the essays in this volume tend to focus more on the production and consumption of images and objects than on the military and the conduct of war. That is to say, the emphasis is far more on visual, as opposed to military, culture; the volume belongs to art history, as opposed to military history. The arguments revolve primarily around historical changes in the representations of warfare and military subjects. The efforts of military historians to relate changes in warfare to broader cultural trends on intellectual and conceptual grounds are largely absent, but military historians will still find much to take from this book.[2]

Perhaps partly as a result of its breadth, in terms of the variety of media, types of warfare, and inclusion of the colonies, the volume struggles to find a collective voice. There are many thematic overlaps that are more specific than the somewhat general rubric of war and visual culture, but they seem felicitous rather than consciously developed. For example, all the essays point up the imbrication of war with ideals of masculinity, yet drawing out an overarching historical narrative around this theme, as Martin Myrone has done in his recent study of British art from 1750 to 1810, is left to the reader.[3] A number of essays suggestively broach another, more specialized question without pursuing it at length: we clearly see the signs of Edgar Wind's "revolution in history painting," in which contemporary subjects replaced classical ones as the main narratives of history painting, but we are given little in terms of its effects on artistic practice, doctrines, and institutions, or a comparison between the British and French cases, or even a consideration of the causes of the revolution itself.[4]

Edited volumes that are unified by a few, strong narratives are rare, and it would be unfair to judge this one primarily on the basis of that criterion. All of the essays in this book are of considerable interest and quality. Many are strikingly original, both in terms of their subject matter and methods. Together they make plain the extent to which visual culture was informed by war and military culture, and the dramatic ways in which representations of warfare changed as shared experiences and memories came to displace individual ones as the critical points of reference in images and monuments, and as representations of war came to involve a broader cross-section of society.

LIST OF ESSAYS

John Bonehill and Geoff Quilley, "Introduction"

Julie Ann Plax, "Gloire Surrenders: Watteau's Military Paintings"

Matthew Craske, "Making National Heroes? A Survey of the Social and Political Functions and Meanings of Major British Funeral Monuments to Naval and Military Figures, 1730-70"

Joan Coudu, "Legitimizing the British Empire: the Monuments to General Wolfe in Westminster Abbey"

Sarah Monks, "Our Man in Havanna: Representation and Reputation in Lieutenant Philip Orsbridge's *Britannia's Triumph* (1765)"

Geoff Quilley, "Questions of Loyalty: the Representation of the British West Indian Colonies during the American Revolutionary War"

John Bonehill, "Exhibiting War: John Singleton Copley's *The Siege of Gibraltar* and the Staging of History"

Tony Halliday, "The Embodiment of Strength: Depicting a General as Civil Leader"

Philip Shaw, "'Shocking Sights of Woe': Charles Bell and the Battle of Waterloo"

Susan Pearce, "The Matériel of War: Waterloo and its Culture"

NOTES

[1] On French art, see, for example, *L'Art de la guerre: la vision des peintres aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Editions ADDIM, 1998); Nina Athanassoglou Kallmyer, "Imago Belli: Horace Vernet's *L'Atelier* as an Image of Radical Militarism under the Restoration," *Art Bulletin* 68 (June 1986): 268-80; Darcy Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Michael Marrinan, "Literal/Literary/'Lexie': History, Text, and Authority in Napoleonic Painting," *Word and Image* 7 (1991): 177-200; David O'Brien, *After the Revolution: Antoine-Jean Gros, Painting, and Propaganda under Napoleon* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2006); Todd Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism 1798-1836* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Christopher Prendergast, *Napoleon and History Painting: Antoine-Jean Gros's La Bataille d'Eylau* (Oxford, Clarendon Press: 1997); Susan Siegfried, "Naked History: The Rhetoric of Military Painting in Postrevolutionary France," *Art Bulletin* 75 (June 1993): 235-258; and Musée des

Beaux-Arts de Lyon, *Triomphe et mort du héros: la peinture d'histoire en Europe de Rubens à Marat*, exh. cat. (Milan: Electra, 1988). For British art, see J. W. M. Hichberger, *Images of the Army: The Military in British Art, 1815-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

[2] See, for example, Peter Paret, *Understanding War: Essays on Clausewitz and the History of Military Power* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992); Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought from the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); idem., *The Development of Military Thought: the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); and John Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 2003).

[3] Martin Myrone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art 1750-1810* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). Myrone examines some of monuments discussed by Craske and Coutu and relies on the research of Coutu heavily for his interpretation of monuments to Wolfe.

[4] Edgar Wind, "The Revolution of History Painting," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 2 (1938-39): 116-127.

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