

Virtual War: States of Prolepsis and the Aesthetics of Violence

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I. Introduction

The focus of my discussion, in response to the 2019 ELLAK International Conference theme “Nurturing Global Citizens within War and Violence Narratives,” centres upon what I am calling “virtual war.” When I was growing up in England during the 1970s, memories of World War Two were still very much alive for my parents’ generation—the air raids, the bomb shelters, and in my father’s case, evacuation during his early teenage years from the family home near London to stay in a safer environment with a family completely unknown to him in Derbyshire, a county in the English Midlands. This also led after the war to a certain nostalgia in my parents’ generation about what they took to be the collective social spirit that was common during that period. Later on as a student of literature, I became familiar with many representations of war in relation to the blood and thunder of military conflict, in novels such as Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), which was set in World War I, or Norman Mailer’s *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), which focused on the Pacific theatre of World War II. More recently, I became interested in how the atmosphere of the Cold War, with its sense of suspension and what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has referred to as “frozen time” (26), helped to shape the absurdist dramas of Samuel Beckett or the representation of boredom as a direct response to the tedious regimentation associated with military operations. This kind of ennui is represented in novels such as Evelyn Waugh’s *Put Out More Flags*, published in 1942, and in various novels of Anthony Powell set during the Second World War, such as *The Soldier’s Art* (1966) and *The Military Philosophers* (1968), both of which address ways in which English society responded to the changes brought about by war. In all of these cases, literary works

were understood to be a reaction, either direct or indirect, to the trauma and calamity of war, and this situation led by way of reaction to the ubiquitous peace movements that became so popular in the 1960s: John Lennon's "Make Love Not War," "Give Peace a Chance," and so on. All of this was crystallized also by the projection of the Vietnam War as a focal point for radical protest in American culture of the late-twentieth century. We see the latter scenario in the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, most famously, and also in films such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, released in 1979, which drew on Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* to probe what it took to be various atavistic compulsions at the heart of human experience.

What I am arguing here is that war in the twenty-first century should be understood as a fundamentally different kind of experience, and that its displacement from direct military conflict into a more amorphous state of "terror" has important implications for how we understand the notion of war throughout literary and cultural history. I want to suggest that in a curious way the intermingling of war and peace in our current global environment allows us to have a clearer understanding of how war has been presented socially and historically across the ages. History is always written backwards, of course, rearranging events of the past in accord with the priorities of the present, and in this sense our contemporary displacement of war into a virtual zone enables us to rethink how the coordinates of war effectively operated in earlier eras.

II. Virtual Wars

George W. Bush's address to the joint session of Congress on September 20, 2001, shortly after 9/11, described the attacks not as an act of terror but as "an act of war," and this introduces some interesting rhetorical complications about exactly what a state of "war" should involve. The notion of armed conflict or boots on the ground, such as we typically find in Hemingway or Mailer, has now generally been superseded by an environment in which warfare involves high-tech operations, often attached to the complexities of computer programmes or cybersecurity. Jean Baudrillard was I think rightly criticized by Edward Said for his provocative book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, in which Baudrillard argued the 1991 Gulf War was not really a war, but rather an atrocity that masqueraded as a war. Baudrillard described how, using

overwhelming airpower, the American military for the most part did not directly engage in combat with the Iraqi army and suffered few casualties, with almost nothing being made known about Iraqi deaths. Thus, he said, from the point of view of the West, the fighting “did not take place” (65). All that spectators got to know about the war was in the form of spectacle or propaganda imagery. The closely watched media presentations made it impossible to distinguish between the experience of what truly happened in the conflict, and its stylized, selective misrepresentation through simulacra. However, Said correctly pointed out this did not mean that the material conditions of suffering did not exist, and the issue raised by Baudrillard—an important issue, I think, though it was perhaps presented in his work in rather too careless a fashion—was the impact this hi-tech scenario had made on the nature of warfare generally (Beezer and Osborne 32). Despite Said’s critique, Baudrillard had in fact put his finger on an important shift in cultural consciousness, even if his own tendency to hyperbole and attachment to spectacle led him not to couch it in the most convincing manner. Although I would agree with the comments made by Professor Peter Paik yesterday after the interesting papers by Camelia Raghinaru and Jeremy Sullivan about the ubiquity of “fake news,” when Paik commented on how such a concept of the “fake” might be seen as equally applicable to the Western Establishment’s manipulation of the media before and after the second Iraq war in 2003, I would perhaps disagree with his suggestion that the subsequent neglect of this Iraq war has resulted from projections of collective guilt, schizophrenia or repression. Arguably it is more a result of the kind of disorientation Baudrillard talked about, where simulations overlap and the categorical distinction between war and peace gets fundamentally blurred.

The emphasis now on surveillance, on hypothetical terror plots and on confrontation as a form of prolepsis—where authorities try to arrest people not after they have committed crimes, as in the more traditional policing model, but before they have had the opportunity to do so—has led to an anomalous situation in which war is no longer carried out between nation states but across transnational networks of insurrection and suppression. Unlike the military conflicts of old, these are not wars that can be conclusively won or lost. There are no white flags or elaborate surrender ceremonies. What we find instead is a constant state of disruption and disturbance, with the public constantly being urged to be vigilant, and everyday movements along aeroplane or subway systems now fraught with a sense of collective anxiety. The security state typically tries to

enhance this anxiety through its ubiquitous but largely redundant body checks at airports and so on, all of which are designed primarily as a spectacle to reassure travellers, rather than as a pragmatic strategy to actually make the act of flying more secure. You are still much more likely to die of a heart attack than a terrorist attack while in the air, but you would never know this from the way airports are currently organized.

There is an analogy to this redefinition of war in the new medical sciences that seek genetically to map the human body and thus to identify which illnesses any particular person might be prone to. Just as biogenetics seek to predict human illness before it actually happens, so surveillance technology seeks to forestall and pre-empt disruption within the body politic. This means that it is now as difficult to say whether a country is at war as whether an individual person is sick or well. If a biogenetic scan tells me that I will probably die of a degenerative disease in ten years' time, does that mean that I am sick or well at the present moment? Similarly, if the security apparatus identifies terrorist plots to destroy national monuments, does that mean the "War on Terror" is an active war, or merely a constant lurking threat? Eric Cazdyn has described this shift in temporal formations as what he calls a "new chronic" condition (9), and he has described how this has complicated structures of time in the realms of both the individual human body and also state security. In the second half of the twentieth century, all of the fears about the apocalyptic destruction of the planet were linked specifically to fears of nuclear war, something represented for example in the poems of Sylvia Plath and William Carlos Williams. In Williams's poem "Asphodel, that Greeny Flower," published in his old age in 1955, asphodel is represented as a flower of hell and also the atomic bomb, since "the bomb / also / is a flower" (165), although as J. Hillis Miller observed "the space of the poem is not hell but is the flower which rises above death" (358), for, in Williams's words, "love and the imagination / are of a piece, / swift as the light / to avoid destruction" (179). In the twenty-first century, however, nearly all these fears of planetary apocalypse have shifted emphasis to confront questions of climate change, which is now presented as the overriding global threat to the planet, while the idea of war has been relegated to something more like a naturalized or everyday condition, a process without end, rather like the growth and decay of any human body.

III. The Nation State and War

This tells us some interesting things, I think, about the relative decline of the nation state as a conduit for war. In nineteenth-century English literature, for example, war is sometimes presented directly, as in Tennyson's 1854 poem about the Crimean War, "The Charge of the Light Brigade":

Half a league, half a league,
 Half a league onward,
 All in the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.
 'Forward, the Light Brigade!
 Charge for the guns!' he said:
 Into the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'
 Was there a man dismay'd?
 Not tho' the soldier knew
 Someone had blunder'd:
 Their's not to make reply,
 Their's not to reason why,
 Their's but to do and die:
 Into the valley of Death
 Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
 Cannon to left of them,
 Cannon in front of them
 Volley'd and thunder'd . . . (420)

More often, however, war is a hovering presence just off stage, as in the novels of Jane Austen, where the shadow of British wars with France haunts the protected rural spaces that she evokes in her fiction. The critic Warren Roberts detected coded references to war in some of Austen's letters, a subterfuge that would have been all the more pointed because she had learnt a great deal about Napoleon's plans to invade England from her brother Francis, a Captain in the Royal Navy who was stationed in 1803 on the north coast of Kent (80-81). In *Emma*, published in 1816, we are told that Jane Fairfax's father was killed "in action abroad" (174), as

if to signify the world of military conflict beyond the confines of Emma's Highbury. Under the influence of her possessive and repressive father, Emma has never even seen the sea: "Southend is prohibited" (108), she says. As Gillian Russell has noted, Southend on Sea and other British coastal towns were dependent during the early-nineteenth century on military establishments and effectively operated as places of mediation between shipboard and civilian life (97), so *Emma* here is implicitly confessing to her ignorance of naval and political affairs. But there is, I think, little doubt that Austen, like Tennyson, is giving allegiance to a version of national identity that the author's literary expression both reflects and upholds, so that much nineteenth-century English literature uses the spectre of war as a guarantee of national identity and autonomy, the protection of a specific cultural heritage, along with the defence of a specific geographic space.

A more complicated version of this correlation between war and national identity emerges in Leo Tolstoy's epic novel *War and Peace*, first published in Russian in 1869 and in English translation in 1886. Particularly in the novel's epilogue, which stretches to some hundred pages, there is a self-conscious meditation on how narrative history is created, and this distinguishes the novel from some of its precursors in Victorian realism. *War and Peace* thus meditates on the Napoleonic Wars of sixty years earlier—the date of July 1805 is given in the book's second paragraph (1), and there are many further specific dates as the narrative unfolds—yet the book's overall effect is to represent war and peace as all mixed up with each other, as the Napoleonic Wars overlap with questions of social hierarchy, pageantry and simple enjoyment. Rostov in battle, for example, is said to have "the happy air of a schoolboy called up before a large audience for an examination in which he is confident that he will distinguish himself" (155). Just as Tolstoy's novel features human growth as an organic concept, representing how "children do imperceptibly from the cradle grow up into men" (261), so it presents war and peace as two sides of the same coin, a vast social landscape comprised of human energy, conflict and regeneration. Military manoeuvres here are bound up with complex issues of social etiquette and patronage, and in this sense Tolstoy uses war as a metaphor for life rather than its merely destructive or negative antithesis. The narrator tells us that people participate in this war out of a wide variety of mixed motives—"impelled by fear or vanity, enjoyment, indignation, or national consideration" (778)—and also that the complexity of the operation of war ensures that the characters cannot

be understood merely in terms of their own individual biographies. Tolstoy's work is thus in part a critique of the liberal individualism that characterized the nineteenth-century novel, using the social scene of war to encompass human society in all of its rich variety and vitality. I do not think that a simple anti-war stance, on ethical grounds, would get us very far with a reading of Tolstoy's novel. This is not of course to say that ethical or political critiques of warfare might not be quite appropriate in their place, but for a literary critic to disparage Tolstoy's novel because he represents war as in some ways a positive phenomenon would not seem to me very helpful or intellectually constructive.

One of the things that is especially foregrounded in Tolstoy's retrospective style of narration is how war is memorialized, the process through which action is transposed into narrative forms. In Part Ten of the novel, there is a specific critique of Napoleon's historian, Adolphe Thiers, for over-emphasizing the role of individual heroism and not being sufficiently conscious of what Tolstoy here calls the "law of 'retrospectiveness,' which gives the illusion of making all the past appear a preparation for the subsequent facts" (810), whereas actually the process of war is more complex and multidirectional. Such illusions of memorialization have also been addressed in recent English fiction, for example in Ian McEwan's 2001 novel *Atonement*, which demystifies the myth of Dunkirk as a heroic endeavour that sustained Britain after World War II. In his valuable book *Culture in Camouflage*, Patrick Deer described how British culture during World War II was shaped by "systems of propaganda, censorship, film, speeches, press, and radio statements" (4), all of which made creative writers in the middle years of the twentieth century wary of becoming merely the instruments of official government policy. For example, Virginia Woolf, in her essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," written in 1940, wrote of the need to, as she put it, "think against the current" of propaganda and militarism (174). But my suggestion would be that this correlation between war and state propaganda mainly applies to a particular period of cultural history, extending from the mid-nineteenth until near the end of the twentieth century. This was the era when the national apparatus was at its most dominant, when governments could more easily control and manipulate the flow of information through centralized engines of state media, because there were not too many other channels of information available. Possibly the last example of this kind of conflict was the Falklands War between Britain and Argentina in 1982, when British prime minister Margaret Thatcher was

able to maintain a tight hold on newspapers and broadcasting and make sure that no messages detrimental to what she conceived national security interests were able to get abroad. After that, the proliferation of television cable channels and subsequently the Internet meant that official nationalistic lines became more difficult to sustain, and information began to circulate more widely, across multiple channels. Michael Denning has suggested, for example, that both the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of apartheid in South Africa around the same time could be attributed in part to the growth of mobile phone and satellite technologies, which made it much harder for national governments of any kind to keep the population in ignorance of what was happening in the outside world (46).

One of the most frequent occurrences in relation to nineteenth-century wars was their transposition into myth, according to narratives imposed by the victors. The American Civil War between 1861 and 1865 is an illuminating example of how the multiple viewpoints and regional variations that were embedded within the nation state at that time were subsequently collapsed into one federal agenda, partly through Abraham Lincoln's brilliant work of national mythologizing, at Gettysburg and elsewhere, and also because of what historian Michael Kammen has called the "mystic chords of memory" which ensured that a transcendental notion of a unified nation, linked together from sea to shining sea, came to supplant the local differences that had been only too apparent up until that point. Lincoln's rhetoric at Gettysburg sought consciously to transpose the chaos of battle into a scene of mythic regeneration:

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. (295)

Similarly, Walt Whitman's post-Civil War poetry, particularly "When

Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed” written in 1865, positioned Lincoln as a mythological healer and binder-up of the nation’s wounds, drawing on some of the imagery from hospital scenes in the Civil War that he deployed in his *Drum Taps* collection, published the same year. This is from the penultimate section of “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed”:

To the tally of my soul,
Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown bird,
With pure deliberate notes spreading filling the night.

Loud in the pines and cedars dim,
Clear in the freshness moist and the swamp-perfume,
And I with my comrades there in the night.

While my sight that was bound in my eyes unclosed,
As to long panoramas of visions.

And I saw askant the armies,
I saw as in noiseless dreams hundreds of battle-flags,
Borne through the smoke of the battles and pierc’d with missiles I saw them,
And carried hither and yon through the smoke, and torn and bloody,
And at last but a few shreds left on the staffs, (and all in silence.)
And the staffs all splinter’d and broken.

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,
I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of the war,
But I saw they were not as was thought,
They themselves were fully at rest, they suffer’d not,
The living remain’d and suffer’d, the mother suffer’d,
And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer’d,
And the armies that remain’d suffer’d. (358)

In this poem, Whitman projects Lincoln as a martyr who gave his life to ensure the unity of the United States. But just as Virginia Woolf adopted a position of opposition to the British state apparatus during World War II, so William Faulkner’s fiction in the early-twentieth century sought to deconstruct the legends of national identity and unity that had arisen after the Civil War. Faulkner’s 1938 short story collection *The Unvanquished* portrays how the defeated Confederate armies in Mississippi nevertheless

refused to subscribe to Lincoln's invocation of a new dawn for the nation, with the psychologically divided characters in Faulkner's novels testifying to his understanding of a national body still fundamentally divided along geographic and racial lines. The very centralization of national myths during this nationalist period often incited modernist experimental writers such as Woolf and Faulkner to position themselves in opposition to the myth-making imposed by centripetal government policies.

IV. Civil War and Transnationalism

This leads us to consider Civil War writing as an important sub-field within war literature more generally, particularly within the spaces of English and American literature, although it has a special relevance also to the recent history of Asia, in relation to wars in Korea, Vietnam and Syria. Civil war is also familiar to Africa, from the twenty-first-century context of Sudan, a scenario of homelessness and displacement brilliantly evoked in American writer Dave Eggers's novel *What is the What* (2006). In relation to the main trajectory of English literature, however, it has always seemed to me that the Civil War of the seventeenth century has been underestimated as a formative influence on the constitution of the subject, in part, as David Norbrook has described, because the restitution of the monarchy in 1661 has usually been seen by literary scholars as so beneficial to the literary culture of England, with the period of Oliver's Cromwell's Commonwealth and Protectorate from 1649 to 1659 being regarded simply as "an anomaly" (3). It is obvious enough that the restitution of playhouses and so on in the 1660s allowed British drama to flourish in a way that would not have been possible in the previous generation, but this has led to an unbalanced view whereby the English republican culture of the mid-seventeenth century has more or less been written out of the equation. This ideological slant has also meant, for instance, that the American influences on seventeenth-century English literature have been badly neglected. Many of those involved in the Massachusetts Bay experiment during the 1640s and 1650s also spent much time campaigning in London for Cromwell's republican party—Roger Williams, for example, who persuaded Cromwell to protect Rhode Island, and Sir Henry Vane the Younger, who was beheaded in 1662 by King Charles II after the Restoration—and it could be argued that New England literature of the seventeenth century was really English literature from another geo-

graphical and ideological vantage point.

After the Civil War there was no open warfare across this transatlantic divide, but there were certainly political disputes, and of course in 1776 there was an actual war, driven by demands for American political autonomy. Whether this latter conflict is described as the American Revolution or the War of American Independence is, I think, significant. The first term positions the Americans as rebels, or insurgents; the second is a more retrospective designation, implying that national independence involved simply a process of natural growth and maturity. In fact, of course, the British government of the day was most reluctant to cede independence to the new United States, and in my book *Atlantic Republic* I tried to trace how these political and philosophical conflicts continued all through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the British belief in monarchy and an organic, hierarchical society being pitted against American investments in representative democracy and the constitutional freedom of the individual. There is an important but relatively marginalized tradition of writers in English literature who endorsed the latter set of values, ranging from Lord Byron and Arthur Hugh Clough in the early-nineteenth century through to George Gissing in the 1890s and then twentieth-century figures such as W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood and Angela Carter, some of whom actually went to live in the United States for at least a portion of their lives. My point is that civil wars have an afterlife that extends far beyond the mere facts of physical conflict, since they speak to structural divisions within any given body politic, so that to trace the legacy of the English Civil War or the American Revolution across English and American literature is to identify fault-lines within either national literary sphere. William Wordsworth, for example, would not normally be thought of as a war poet—indeed, his pastoral landscapes seem to evoke the very opposite of war, a realm of tranquility and peace—but his deliberate decision to enclose himself within rural borders was taken in conscious reaction against the confusion and upheavals that he saw going on in America, France and other parts of the world, and in this sense Wordsworth might be described as a war poet by proxy, or perhaps a virtual war poet.

All of this goes against the simple association of war with the apparatus of national mythologies or slogans, such as became apparent in Britain during the 1940s. Instead, it highlights ways in which any national literature is a fraught and contested phenomenon, made up of multiple competing and often antagonistic strands. It might in fact be argued that Civil

War could be understood as an analogue to transnational accounts of literary formation, since both dissolve the supposed unity of national narratives into a series of paradoxical, internecine conflicts. One very interesting example of this, though it is a novel not much read these days is Samuel Jackson Pratt's *Emma Corbett*, published in 1780 at the height of the American war, and a work that was very widely read in the American colonies. Pratt's book draws upon the metaphor of the Anglo-American family as one organic nation, and it chronicles a family torn apart by the war. The father of the title character sympathizes with the American cause, but the story ends badly for him, as he loses not only his property interests in America but also most of his immediate family to death on the battlefield. Lamenting "that civil fury which hath separated the same interests of the same people" (85), Corbett foresees that the wounds of this conflict will lead to "deep-mouthed gashes in the heart of Britain." *Emma Corbett* thus organizes its discourses of family sentiment around representations of civil war as a transgression against the laws of nature. "Nature herself lies bleeding on thy shore," declares Corbett, "and there the inhuman mother has plunged the dagger (with her own barbarous hand) into the bowels of her child!" (95).

This idea of war in *Emma Corbett* as involving a state of ontological confusion foreshadows its representations in some subsequent fictional narratives during the first half of the nineteenth century, extending through the antebellum era. For example, in Herman Melville's *Israel Potter*, published in 1855 but set during the American Revolutionary war, the American hero finds himself imprisoned by the English, and this becomes symptomatic of the overall confusion of the conflict, as when Captain John Paul Jones's warship engages in battle with an English vessel, the *Serapis*, and the narrator comments: "Never was there a fight so snarled. The intricacy of those incidents which defy the narrator's extrication, is not illy figured in that bewildering intertanglement of all the yards and anchors of the two ships, which confounded them for the time in one chaos of devastation" (136). Similarly in James Fenimore Cooper's 1821 novel *The Spy*, again set during the American Revolutionary war, there is a structural subversion of the idea of a unified and homogeneous national identity. As the book acknowledges, the American War of Independence "had many of the features of a civil war" (3). At the centre of the plot is one Harvey Birch, an American spy who infiltrates the British ranks and who, despite finding himself disturbed and harassed by the American army, is eventually congratulated by George Washington himself for act-

ing “with a strong attachment to the liberties of America” (397). One interesting element here is how all the masks and disguises associated with Birch’s chameleonic character seem to epitomize, on a more general level, the novel’s contention that “[a]t the time of our tale, we were a divided people” (150). We are told that “British and American uniforms hung peacably by the side of each other” in Birch’s secret cavern where he keeps his changes of costume (356), and this image seems to betoken a larger structural ambiguity within the novel, where national identity is never quite as clear-cut as it seems. However, Cooper’s expository method involves starting with these divisions and then dissolving them in the interests of moral unity and truth. In the concluding chapter, Birch is represented as a veteran fighting for the United States against Britain in the later war of 1812, as if to exemplify his devotion to the cause of American independence, and the narrative seeks ultimately to validate this sense of patriotism by describing an environment underwritten by the imperatives of American exceptionalism: “What a magnificent scene . . . Such moments belong only to the climate of America” (50). Nevertheless, this rhetoric of military triumphalism and national identity is counterpointed against a world in which allegiances are divided, and this is where much of the transnational impetus of Cooper’s novel comes from. While endorsing the virtues of American independence, it also represents them as complicated and ambiguous in their provenance.

The word war itself originates from the Old English *wyrre* or *werre*, adopted around the eleventh century from the Old High German word for “confusion, discord, strife” and related to the word *werran*, which means to “bring into confusion or discord.” War literature such as we see in the novels of Melville or Cooper represents war as a state of philosophical confusion, and this is at least as powerful as the more direct representation of war as a state of gruelling physical suffering, such as we see in more recent war literature influenced by New Journalism, such as the work of Michael Herr or of Tim O’Brien, whose deliberate blending of truth and fiction was discussed here yesterday by Min Jae Kim in an interesting paper. The notion of war as involving straightforward “track and kill” narratives thus gets complicated by shifts of perspective and a sense of disorientation for the reader or the audience. This manifests itself as well in more off-beat presentations of war, such as that in John Ford’s film *The Searchers* (1956), set during the Texas-Indian wars, which features John Wayne as a veteran of the Civil War intent on heroically tracking down the tribe that slaughtered his family and kidnapped his

niece, but who then comes to be drawn into sympathy with the Indian culture he is fighting against. Similarly, Kathryn Bigelow's recent film *Zero Dark Thirty*, released in 2012, focuses on the American search for Osama bin Laden but deliberately eschews a straightforwardly triumphalist narrative by the way it highlights the psychological traumas involved for combatants caught up within this violent process. It's the scenes of torture in this movie that have tended to dominate critical discussion, but the most interesting aspect of Bigelow's film is the way it represents violence as an amorphous phenomenon, with bin Laden's followers engaged in irrational compulsions to destroy the United States and its allies, and the Americans equally intent on vengeance as a form of justice. By eliminating the moral and political dimension of state-sponsored violence, Bigelow's film effectively invites the audience to regard war and conflict in the traditional Old English sense of that word, as irreducible aspects of the confused human experience. This is not meant to be depressing or pessimistic, merely to suggest how war has long been an integral part of human social experience, going back as far as Beowulf's fights with Grendel and the dragon in the epic poem of the tenth century. The purpose of literature, as always, is to enable us to understand human issues within a broader compass and thus to position them within a more illuminating contextual framework.

V. The Ambiguities of War

Rather than just assuming a polemical or one-dimensional political stance towards the question of war in literature, then, I believe it would be more productive to consider how war becomes embedded within English literature as an integral aspect of both subjective and cultural consciousness. In Shakespeare's play *Henry V*, first performed in 1599 but set in 1415 at the Battle of Agincourt during England's wars with France, the *casus belli* (as historians call it), the cause or provocation of war, is portrayed in quite straightforwardly Machiavellian terms, as Henry V's court invokes the complicated labyrinth of Salic Law and primogeniture to fabricate a case for war against France. This is the Archbishop of Canterbury in the second scene of this play:

Then hear me, gracious sovereign, and you peers,
That owe yourselves, your lives and services

To this imperial throne. There is no bar
To make against your highness' claim to France
But this, which they produce from Pharamond,
'In terram Salicam mulieres ne succedant:'
'No woman shall succeed in Salique land:'
Which Salique land the French unjustly gloze
To be the realm of France, and Pharamond
The founder of this law and female bar.
Yet their own authors faithfully affirm
That the land Salique is in Germany,
Between the floods of Sala and of Elbe;
Where Charles the Great, having subdued the Saxons,
There left behind and settled certain French;
Who, holding in disdain the German women
For some dishonest manners of their life,
Establish'd then this law; to wit, no female
Should be inheritrix in Salique land:
Which Salique, as I said, 'twixt Elbe and Sala,
Is at this day in Germany call'd Meisen.
Then doth it well appear that Salique law
Was not devised for the realm of France:
Nor did the French possess the Salique land
Until four hundred one and twenty years
After defunction of King Pharamond,
Idly supposed the founder of this law;
Who died within the year of our redemption
Four hundred twenty-six; and Charles the Great
Subdued the Saxons, and did seat the French
Beyond the river Sala, in the year
Eight hundred five. Besides, their writers say,
King Pepin, which deposed Childeric,
Did, as heir general, being descended
Of Blithild, which was daughter to King Clothair,
Make claim and title to the crown of France.
Hugh Capet also, who usurped the crown
Of Charles the duke of Lorraine, sole heir male
Of the true line and stock of Charles the Great,
To find his title with some shows of truth,
Though, in pure truth, it was corrupt and naught,
Convey'd himself as heir to the Lady Lingare,
Daughter to Charlemain, who was the son
To Lewis the emperor, and Lewis the son

Of Charles the Great. Also King Lewis the Tenth,
 Who was sole heir to the usurper Capet,
 Could not keep quiet in his conscience,
 Wearing the crown of France, till satisfied
 That fair Queen Isabel, his grandmother,
 Was lineal of the Lady Ermengare,
 Daughter to Charles the foresaid duke of Lorraine:
 By the which marriage the line of Charles the Great
 Was re-united to the crown of France.
 So that, as clear as is the summer's sun.
 King Pepin's title and Hugh Capet's claim,
 King Lewis his satisfaction, all appear
 To hold in right and title of the female:
 So do the kings of France unto this day . . . (I, ii, lines 33-90).

Such a manipulation of the facts to justify military conflict is very far from unknown in our own day, as George W. Bush could tell you, and the Archbishop's summarizing phrase "as clear as is the summer's sun" seems to make Shakespeare's irony apparent here. Yet for all of these wheelings and dealings, *Henry V* is not a dark play; the political dimensions of this scene are acted out in a partly satirical register, with comedy never far away, and the King himself is portrayed throughout this play in generally humane terms. Like the personnel in his army, King Henry is represented as looking on this war with France as offering scope for empathy, solidarity and public performance. *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare's later play about the Trojan war, is more sombre in tone overall, but there again moments of comedy and human interaction shine through, with Shakespeare again presenting the terrain of war as a mixed landscape, one where love, loyalty and death come together. The interpretation of *Troilus and Cressida* by Polish critic Jan Kott in his influential 1964 book *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*, where he took the bleaker aspects of Shakespeare's play to be an analogue to the Vietnam War, certainly made for a lively and provocative interpretation of the work, though it was never of course intended to be a conclusive one.

Going back even further in English literary history, in his Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, written around 1390, Geoffrey Chaucer introduces his Knight as a veteran of battles against the Spanish Moors, the Saracens and also Eastern European pagans. These battles are specifically enumerated by Chaucer: Pruce, Satalye, Algezir and other events that we know historically did take place:

A Knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,
 That fro the tyme that he first bigan
 To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
 Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.
 Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
 And thereto hadde he riden, no man ferre,
 As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,
 And evere honoured for his worthynesse.
 At Alisaundre he was whan it was wonne;
 Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne
 Aboven alle nacions in Pruce.
 In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce, —
 No cristen man so ofte of his degree.
 In Gernade at the seege eek hadde he be
 Of Algezir, and riden in Belmarye.
 At Lyeys was he, and at Satalye,
 Whan they were wonne; and in the Grete See
 At many a noble armee hadde he be.
 At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,
 And foughten for oure feith at Tramysse
 In lyste thries, and ay slayn his foo.
 This ilke worthy knyght hadde been also
 Somtyme with the lord of Palatye
 Agayn another hethen in Turkye;
 And evermoore he hadde a sovereyn prys.
 And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
 And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.
 He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde,
 In al his lyf, unto no maner wight.
 He was a verray, parfit, gentil knyght. (17-18)

There have of course been various critical controversies around Chaucer's knight, with Terry Jones arguing that he is presented by the author primarily in comic and satirical terms, and no doubt there is an element of truth to this. But there is also no question that Chaucer depicts the knight as the veteran of actual wars that took place in the fourteenth century between Christian and pagan communities, and this again exemplifies ways in which war is integral to the society that Chaucer evokes. War was not an anomaly in medieval England, but a naturalized state of affairs, and all of the heroic chivalry associated with the Knight's Tale thus carries as its correlative a recognition of the harsh material battles in

which these kinds of characters engaged.

In the April 2019 issue of *Modernism / Modernity*, Christopher Patrick Miller's essay "What the War is Doing with Us" started from an exchange of letters between American poets Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov about the roles of poetry and poets during the Vietnam War, but Miller's essay then went on to discuss how their letters open up to confront broader problems about how "art and literature should respond to the experience of a war unfixed in time, place and character. In the face of such amorphous, ongoing violence, Duncan makes the apparently perverse suggestion that the task of an artist is not only to express fear or indignation on what they witness, but also to realize what the war "strives 'to be in us'" (309). For Duncan, in other words, the truly unsettling aspect of war involves its capacity to illuminate a violence that is conventionally left latent or buried, concealed beneath the surfaces of civilized society. This is to suggest that war confronts us with aspects of our own human strangeness, and in a psychoanalytical sense reveals to us elements of a divided self. We see this for example in T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding," written in wartime London during 1942 and the last of his *Four Quartets*, which evokes in the wake of an air raid "The eyes of a familiar compound ghost / Both intimate and unidentifiable" (193). All of the imagery here turns on the idea of the stranger as a kind of spectral doppelgänger, something that detaches the poet from all of the rhetoric of national propaganda that was then associated with war, while linking it instead to a sense of radical insecurity. It would be possible to associate this of course with Eliot's guilt at his own intellectual collusion with Charles Maurras and other proto-fascists in the 1930s, his sense of friend and enemy being in some sense secret sharers; but on a larger view, this enigmatic landscape speaks to Eliot's larger understanding of war as a sinister, unsettling force, one that resists the easy polemics of taking sides.

Similarly in Wilfred Owen's World War One poem "Strange Meeting," written in 1918 and first published the following year, we see a poem focusing on the idea of war as strangeness, using the tunnel of battle as psychoanalytical symbol to delve deeply into the recesses of the narrator's own mind:

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.

Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
 Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
 Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
 With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
 Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.
 And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,—
 By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.

With a thousand fears that vision's face was grained;
 Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
 And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
 "Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn."
 "None," said that other, "save the undone years,
 The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
 Was my life also; I went hunting wild
 After the wildest beauty in the world,
 Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
 But mocks the steady running of the hour,
 And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
 For by my glee might many men have laughed,
 And of my weeping something had been left,
 Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
 The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
 Now men will go content with what we spoiled.
 Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
 They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress.
 None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
 Courage was mine, and I had mystery;
 Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery:
 To miss the march of this retreating world
 Into vain citadels that are not walled.
 Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels,
 I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
 Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
 I would have poured my spirit without stint
 But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
 Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.

"I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
 I knew you in this dark: for you frowned
 Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.

I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now. . . ." (35-36)

War is used by Owen here as a metaphor for the conflicts of life more generally. Particularly revealing is that line just before the final stanza: "Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were." This poem is predicated upon the kind of depth model that was characteristic of modernism's search for buried truths, "truths that lie too deep for taint," as Owen expresses it here. The Freudian model of psychoanalysis was one of those discursive models of depth, of course, as was the interest in primitive cultures that we see in Stravinsky's 1913 ballet *The Rite of Spring*. But war was paradoxically welcomed by some modernist writers as a conduit to deeper truths that underlay the genteel world of Edwardian civility, and this is why World War I was such an important factor contributing to the culture of Modernist experimentation more generally. War, in other words, was used by modernist writers and artists to explode the sham surfaces of supposedly civilized society. We see this kind of iconoclasm also in the surrealist painting of Salvador Dalí, for example his 1941 work *The Face of War*, painted in California during World War II and featuring a human skull. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this painting is the fact that Dalí believed his own art to involve premonitions of war, though its projections of the aesthetics of violence and darker impulses lurking within the recesses of the human mind.

VI. Conclusion

Overall, then, within the broad arc of English literary history I would like to suggest that war and peace should be understood not as antithetical but as complementary categories. War and peace are bound up intimately together, not only in the most obvious examples of internal violence, when countries are divided by competing factions of civil war, but also through the corollary dynamics of psychoanalysis, which brings the idea of a divided self into the forefront of consciousness. Rather than associating war simply with apocalypse or annihilation, I am suggesting how it has always been intertwined in complex ways with various social realities, aesthetic forms and indeed courtly rituals. In this sense, the twenty-first-century condition of virtual war, where it is almost impossible to separate conditions of war and peace, might be seen as more continuous

with English literature across its *longue durée* than the radical anti-war literature of the late twentieth century, which understood war to be both anomalous and immoral. This is not of course politically to endorse war in any of its guises, merely to recognize, in a more neutral fashion, that it has long been a powerful motivating factor within the English literary tradition, even in its displaced, aestheticized or virtualized states. Being immersed as they have been historically within a fractured condition of war and internal conflict, my sense is that Korean scholars might well be especially well positioned to elucidate these more divisive aspects of English literature, aspects that have often remained relatively obscure to native-born readers who prefer to look inward and take refuge in their own patriotic tradition.

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Abstract

This paper discusses ways in which the definition of war has become more amorphous in the twenty-first century, being displaced from a series of material conflicts typically organized through competing national ideologies to a more generalized state of collective anxiety and terror. This shift in the definition of war is linked to technology and equated with similar shifts in the discursive patterns of medicine. The paper suggests that such a reorientation of the meaning of war allows us to reconsider literary history, with particular attention to the ways in which civil wars throughout history created fissures and lingering tensions within the body of a nation state. It also suggests that civil wars might be understood as precursors to transnational understandings of a national body, one always already fractured. By indicating how the rhetoric of war has long been embedded in various ways within English and American literary history, this paper offers new ways of understanding the relationship between war and society. Despite the tendency of war to lend itself to retrospective mythologies consolidating national identity, this paper suggests that war is always a scene of multiple ambiguities. With reference to Salvador Dali's painting *The Face of War* and Wilfred Owen's poem "Strange Meeting", it also suggests ways in which war may serve to illuminate some of the strangeness and alienation inherent within the human condition.

Key Words: Virtuality, Civil War, National Identity, Transnationalism, Psychoanalysis

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