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ON WAR AND PEACE: GERMAN CONCEPTIONS OF CONFLICT, 1792–1815

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ABSTRACT. This article re-examines some of the principal portrayals of military conflict in academic treatises and works of art, arguing that the changing visions of war and peace which they presented were indicative of a wider acceptance within critical sections of the various public spheres of the German lands. The majority of recent studies, which have sought to debunk the myth of national ‘wars of liberation’, have tended to overlook the reasons for and ramifications of such shifts. This study shows how contemporary commentators, faced with an unending series of revolutionary and Napoleonic campaigns, gave up any hope of a perpetual peace and accepted, however reluctantly, the necessity of military conflict. Writers’, artists’, academics’, and other publicists’ failure to acknowledge the actual conditions of revolutionary and Napoleonic warfare, despite evidence that the nature of combat had altered, meant that conflicts could be viewed as patriotic, heroic, and defensive struggles, which served to simplify the divided loyalties and complicated diplomacy of the Napoleonic era.

Three of the best-known philosophers in Germany—a country of poetic and thinking people according to the Romantic distortion of Germaine de Staël in 1810—showed how reactions to war differed during the two decades after 1792, and how they had changed.¹ Immanuel Kant produced the most famous treatise on ‘perpetual peace’ (Zum ewigen Frieden) in 1795, criticizing the dynastic wars of absolutist regimes and praising the pacifism of republics, which listened to the frightened pleas of their own citizenry and the cautious counsel of commerce.² Republics had, ‘as a result of their nature, to be inclined towards perpetual peace’, wrote the Königsberg philosopher, alluding both to the moral imperatives which he had explored in his Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (1788) and to hopes which he continued to entertain of the revolutionary French republic.³ War, it appeared, could be prevented by an internal political

¹ M. Wallenborn, Deutschland und die Deutschen in Mme de Staëls De l’Allemagne (Frankfurt, 1998).
revolution, which had already given a voice to those most affected by war in France and, if the French model were followed, would do so elsewhere. Like Kant, who was his principal academic preceptor, the Swabian-born philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, teaching at the University of Jena between 1801 and 1807, admired the modernizing policies of French revolutionaries. He even extended such admiration to Napoleon, whose soldiers looted the university city after battle in October 1806, describing him as ‘this soul of the world (Weltseele)’ and marvelling at him ‘raising his arm over the world and ruling it’. Unlike Kant, Hegel maintained that war, which he claimed ‘no one’ had ‘imagined’ ‘as we have seen it’ in Jena, played a vital role in reinforcing the moral purpose of the state, which remained separate from the self-interested transactions of civil society and the altruistic limitations of families or nations.

Johann Gottlieb Fichte, a student of Kant and the predecessor of Hegel at the new University of Berlin, tended to agree, in this respect, more with the latter than with the former.

Scholars’ understanding of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century representations of military conflict is still coloured by justified criticism of earlier myths of national ‘wars of liberation’. The ‘(war) picture of the era was dominated for a long time by the events after 1813’, writes Ute Planert:

This rests, not least, on the fact that the ‘war of liberation’ against Napoleon functions in the popular understanding of the nation as in the accounts of certain scholars, now as before, as a foundation myth, comparable to the status of the French Revolution in France or the Risorgimento in Italy.

Much of the recent literature derives from this critique of ‘Borussian’ historiography and is still influenced by its particular emphases, albeit via various forms of inversion, which have brought into question virtually all accounts – that of Thomas Nipperdey as well as Hans-Ulrich Wehler – depicting ‘the Napoleonic period as a watershed that divides the old Reich from the modern world in respect of the emergence of modern nationalism’. Many historians have echoed Jörg Echternkamp’s doubt that a ‘national awakening’ took place during the Napoleonic era, even in Prussia. In the states of the south and west, the evidence for such an awakening seems much more tenuous. What is more, German subjects’ experience of military conflict differed radically, as much of the recent historiography on the subject, which examines regional variation, has pointed out. Thus, a Rhinelander such as Karl August Varnhagen von Ense, born in Düsseldorf and travelling around western Germany in the 1790s, was relatively insulated from events only a few miles away, noting in Aachen, for example, that ‘I learned almost nothing here of all the occurrences of war and revolution, which had been daily and hourly before my eyes and within earshot in Strasbourg’. Having moved to Berlin to study medicine, he and his circle never reached a state of ‘true political elan’, although ‘not indifferent’, even after the shock of Napoleon’s victory over Austria in 1805. How subjects experienced the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars was contingent on where they lived, whether they were burghers, peasants, or nobles, and whether they had been enlisted or conscripted, or not. Scepticism about the extent of early, wartime nationalism and the consistency of different regions’ – and, even, social groups’ – exposure to warfare, however, has tended to obscure significant shifts in contemporaries’ conceptions of

11 For further details, see Planert, Der Mythos.
14 Ibid., pp. 169–71.
conflict, which occurred partly as a consequence of writers’, artists’, academics’, and other publicists’ reactions to the revolutionary military campaigns of the French state.\textsuperscript{15}

To Varnhagen, ‘peace’ after 1806 had become almost indistinguishable from ‘war’, which itself differed in kind from previous conflicts.\textsuperscript{16} Historians such as Planert have disagreed with the diarist’s contention, arguing that older forms of warfare persisted so that contemporaries—in some regions, at least—barely distinguished between the Napoleonic campaigns and earlier eighteenth-century ones.\textsuperscript{17} Others have maintained that the distinction between war and peace was established fully only during the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods, abetted by the dismantling of the defensive security arrangements of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806.\textsuperscript{18} A further group of scholars—most notably, Otto Dann—has contended that the threshold between ‘peace’ time and the outbreak of military conflict had been lowered, as patriotic citizens began to justify war within the public sphere, not only as an act of self-defence, but also as a means, and a simpler one than via interstate treaties and conventions, of creating a nation-state.\textsuperscript{19} ‘With the establishment of revolutionary France as a political power, the parameters of the peace model of the Enlightenment was altered’, claims Dann, pointing to the end of the putative compromise between the nobility and the Bürgertum, on which Kant’s and others’ hopes of perpetual peace had been founded, with war commonly understood as a product of absolutism.\textsuperscript{20} The realization of a ‘modern civil society as a nation’ in France demonstrated the potential of ‘a political use of violence’, in Dann’s words, making revolutionary civil wars and national ‘wars of freedom’ into the most ‘successful political recipes’ of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{21} Even a conservative like the Prussian official and academic Jean-Pierre Frédéric Ancillon, who became the tutor of the crown prince—the future Friedrich Wilhelm IV—in 1810, had become convinced that ‘A nation must never forget that there is a greater evil than war, namely the loss of its political independence

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Varnhagen von Ense, \textit{Denkwürdigkeiten}, 1, pp. 231–2.
\item \textsuperscript{19} I agree with much of Dann’s case: M. Hewitson, ‘Belligerence, patriotism and nationalism in the German public sphere, 1792–1815’, \textit{English Historical Review}, 128 (2013), pp. 839–76.
\item \textsuperscript{20} O. Dann, ‘Mitteleuropa im Zeichen der napoleonischen Herausforderung’, in Dülf fer, ed., \textit{Kriegsbereitschaft}, p. 16.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
and national existence.’\textsuperscript{22} Within a broader Prussian public sphere, the prominent theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher was already anticipating in 1807 that an anti-Napoleonic movement of resistance could be a ‘palliative cure for much other evil’, whereas Fichte could be found advocating a ‘war against arbitrariness and autocracy’ (\textit{Alleinherrscheri}), not merely against external enemies.\textsuperscript{23} The purpose of a ‘true’ war, continued Fichte in his defence of national warfare, ‘\textit{Über den Begriff des wahrhaften Krieges in Bezug auf den Krieg im Jahre 1813’ (1815), was the establishment of ‘a true empire of law and right, such as has never existed in the world, in full enthusiasm for the freedom of the citizen …, founded on the equality of everything which has a human face’\textsuperscript{24} For such ends, it was legitimate to wage ‘just wars’, with the nation at once the beneficiary and the judge of the rectitude of a conflict.\textsuperscript{25} Since a ‘new model of peace on the basis of nation-states’, which was required to stabilize diplomatic relations under these conditions, was ‘nowhere to be seen in this epoch’, in Dann’s opinion, with the domination of Napoleon proving temporary, the reversion of statesmen to the principles of the ancien régime in 1814–15 could be perceived to be little more than a stop-gap, open to challenge and leaving international treaties ‘fragile’.\textsuperscript{26}

The majority of historians have challenged Dann’s account.\textsuperscript{27} Above all, the Cologne historian has been accused of a ‘narrowing of his focus onto the educated \textit{Bürgertum}, to which ‘barely two-and-a-half to five percent of the population as a whole could be reckoned to belong’ and which has been conflated with ‘a few spiritual heroes like Kant, Herder, Jean Paul, Wieland, Schiller and, of course, the inevitable national pioneers Gentz, Fichte, Arndt and Heinrich Luden’, in Planert’s words.\textsuperscript{28} Instead, a change of perspective has been called for that directs attention away from ‘that multitude of discursive texts, frequently propagandistic in their aims, on which most of the German-speaking publications on the era of the anti-Napoleonic wars rest’, and towards the ‘living conditions and war experiences of wider circles of the population’.\textsuperscript{29}

Other aspects of this change of perspective have been temporal, treating ‘the era of revolutionary and Napoleonic wars as a unity’ rather than heeding the ‘usual epochal limitation of 1806’, and geographical, criticizing an ‘overly hasty equation of Prussian events with conditions in the entire German-speaking area’ and favouring an investigation of the lands of the medium-sized and

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 73.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Fichte wrote this in 1806, ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Dann, ‘Mitteleuropa’, p. 16.
smaller German states, especially those belonging to the Confederation of the Rhine. By questioning the dominating grand narrative in which modern German political nationalism emerged as a reaction to the French Revolution and Napoleonic warfare, scholars differentiate among the perceptions of war in various parts of German central Europe’, Katherine Aaslestad and Karen Hagemann have contended in a recent survey of the literature. Apart from stimulating a proliferation of regional case-studies and comparisons, such differentiation has also sought to overcome neglect of ‘the experience of state-formation, military occupation and economic dislocation from the bottom up’, which in turn has widened the definition of ‘war’ to include the effects of material hardship, conscription, billeting, disease, occupation, requisitioning, resistance, and the collapse and reconstitution of states ‘from the perspective of civilians on the home front’. In themselves, the new emphases do not preclude a re-evaluation of the relative significance of and relationship between warfare, nationalism, state-building, dynastic ties, and local, regional, confessional, and other social identities and forms of politics, but in practice they have tended, in their reaction to ‘Borussian’ myths of national liberation, to pay correspondingly less attention to national discourses, the development of a German public sphere and the role of Prussia, which has sometimes – with reference to Ute Frevert’s work on conscription and civil–military relations– been labelled ‘an exception to the rule’. The varying impact of revolutionary and Napoleonic warfare, which overlay longer-term processes of nation-building, state consolidation, and the defence and formation of other identities, has encouraged many scholars to concentrate on contemporaries’ co-operation with French authorities, their lack of resistance, ‘Rheinbund patriotism’ (Robert Billinger, Gerhard Schuck), and the idea of a federative nation (föderative Nation), advanced by Dieter Langewiesche and Georg Schmidt. With many qualifications, such historians have stressed continuity, not the existence of an historical break (in 1792, 1806, 1813, or 1815), tracing persisting peculiarities and later appropriations of ‘polyvalent interpretations.

30 Planert, Der Mythos, pp. 20–1, 23.
31 Aaslestad and Hagemann, ‘1806 and its aftermath’, p. 568.
32 Ibid., p. 575; Aaslestad, ‘War without battles’, p. 132.
of the meaning and memories of war’ through the commemoration of the revolutionary and Napoleonic conflicts in the years after 1815.  

By contrast, this article argues that the development of an incipient German public sphere countered regional and social diversity, tending over the long and cumulative era of conflict between 1792 and 1815 to reduce disparities—in respect of contemporaries’ attitudes to war—between the German states. Its approach, which rests on a close reading and historical contextualization of the works of prominent writers and artists from various political and intellectual backgrounds, is different from those of many recent studies of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, in which—it can be held—an emphasis on the social history of regions through an examination of particular types of new evidence (parish records, municipal archives, village chronicles) has led to the neglect of, or failure to integrate, the changing attitudes of those belonging to a limited but politically fundamental ‘reading public’. Historians have, of course, long paid attention to such a public sphere and the reception, transfer, and evolution of debates about war within it. Scholars such as Echternkamp and Hagemann have examined how ideas evolved ‘in elite political debate and the bourgeois public sphere, as well as how [they] resonated among broader social strata within various regions’. Others have investigated how ideas, images, and identities were constructed and disseminated within politics (Rudolf Ibbeken,
Bernd von Münchow-Pohl), poetry (Ernst Weber), sermons (Gerhard Graf), in the press and other media (Michael Jeismann), and within the writings of academics and publicists (Jörn Leonhard). They have concentrated, though, on the relationship between nationalism and war, in part to counter conservative and liberal interpretations of the Napoleonic era, both of which are held to have converged—in Hagemann’s opinion—in ‘surprising agreement about the evaluation of the wars of 1813–15 as a “glorious time”, a “truly heroic time” of German national history’.40 Jeismann’s starting point is to find out ‘what meaning is attached to enmity for the emergence and development of the modern nation and national consciousness’.41 To Leonhard, ‘the modern concepts of nation and nation-state were inextricably linked with experiences of war’, as part of a ‘complex process’ in which ‘justifications of war changed and the new meaning of nation and nation-state’ emerged ‘as dominant paradigms of political and social legitimacy’.42 Accordingly, his principal question concerns ‘the interpretation of experiences of war in their connections to national configurations of meaning’ in cases where military conflicts were ‘one of the most important … causal factors’ in the process of state- and nation-building and where ‘the conjunction of war, the development of states and the construction of nations and nation-states is not to be doubted’.43 The premises underpinning these legitimate lines of enquiry preclude a full examination of the question why and to what extent leading writers from different political milieux altered their view of war. Because they are seeking to elucidate the role of military conflict in the consolidation and limitation of nationalism, many authors have been content, in Hagemann and Aaslestad’s words, merely to confirm the existence of a relationship between the two: ‘In Germany—as elsewhere—modern nationalism was very much a child of war and simultaneously a bearer of war.’44 There is little indication in such accounts of whether war or nationalism came first and whether one or the other was more important in specific historical conditions.

Here, I have selected representative and prominent writers, including some of ‘the inevitable national pioneers’, in order to explain their changing attitudes to warfare. My purpose is not to analyse the dissemination of their ideas but to understand their reasons for adopting and altering their positions.


41 M. Jeismann, Das Vaterland der Feinde: Studien zum nationalen Feindbegriff und Selbstverständnis in Deutschland und Frankreich 1792–1918 (Stuttgart, 1992), p. 11.


44 Aaslestad and Hagemann, ‘1806 and its aftermath’, p. 569.
The context in which they wrote was varied. Famously, Prussia had enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace between 1795 and 1806, while Austria had been at war (1787–90, 1792–1800, and 1805), yet—overall—few lands escaped conflict, which became more regular, burdensome, and destructive after 1806: having been defeated at Jena and Auerstädt in October 1806, Prussia existed precariously between French and Russian forces until the end of 1812, after which it joined the Coalition to defeat France at Leipzig in October 1813 and to take part in two successful advances to Paris in 1814 and 1815; for their part, the southern and central German lands served as a battleground or billet for Coalition and French forces between 1792 and 1800, 1805 and 1806, and 1812 and 1815, fighting on France’s side between 1805/6 and 1813. As one bailiff from Erlach put it, looking back on the previous twenty-five years in 1815, ‘If we think about our time and conditions, compared to those in which we found ourselves before these wars, uprisings and invasions, we are overcome by a painful melancholy, for ... instead of peace, tranquillity and unity, we have got war, unrest and division, partisanship and ruins, piles of debris and the graves of such dear family, friends and kin.

This study examines the works and other public justifications of writers against such a background of more or less constant conflict during the Napoleonic era. It shows, in the second section, how contemporary commentators (even ‘enlightened’ ones), faced with a series of military conflicts after 1792, gave up any hope of perpetual peace and accepted, however reluctantly, the necessity of war. In the third section, it evinces the extent to which war came to be viewed by conservative thinkers—sometimes termed proponents of ‘reaction’ or of a ‘principle of preservation’—as part of a natural political and international order. In the fourth section, it reveals how military conflict came to be seen within literature and art as one of the principal sites of political, poetic, and religious ‘truth’, notwithstanding the fact that writers and artists abided by, and helped to establish, conventions of individual heroism and sought to limit the extent of national antagonism—or ‘hatred’, in the words of


46 Planert, Der Mythos, p. 114.

the academic, publicist, and nationalist, Ernst Moritz Arndt.48 A common, hazy, and disputed stock of motifs and images of warfare always underpinned and undermined the more exact and rationalizing accounts of ‘enlightened’ and ‘conservative’ writers on the subject of conflict. Alongside analysis of such ‘political’ treatises, I examine the ways in which well-known writers and artists treated and deployed these tropes, since their treatment coincided with and informed, in often unarticulated fashion, the case for and against war. In order to assess the relevance and representativeness of differing points of view, the next section examines their place within an evolving German public sphere.

I

There is tacit disagreement among historians about how contemporaries’ conceptions of conflict were created and shaped. Arguably, what mattered most was whether a subject had experienced war directly, as a civilian or – especially during a period of conscription after 1806 – as a combatant. Thus, Varnhagen only became ‘ready for anything’, an opinion he expressed in the wake of the ‘retreat and destruction’ of French forces in 1812, after he had volunteered to serve in the Austrian army in 1809.49 At the battle of Wagram in that year, which was the scene of the largest massing of troops in history to date, the diarist revealed how he had been overcome by the ‘enormous sound of repeatedly renewed fire’ and the impression made by ‘so-called small arms, these weapons by means of which our new battles habitually become murderous’.50 Having been shot during the enemy’s first attack, with ‘two streams of blood pouring out where the bullet had gone right through’, he was dragged behind battle lines, where he was left in the open, suffering ‘just like the others from terrible thirst’ and letting his wounds bleed ‘the entire night’.51 Abandoned in a billet with his femur broken, which was ‘a kind of death sentence’, Varnhagen awaited the end in a more or less constant state of fever.52 From a reading of his diary, there is every indication that the author’s attitude to war was altered by this and other subsequent experiences of combat but there are few signs that such sentiments found an echo away from the fighting, not least because combatants generally kept their feelings to themselves.53 Correspondingly, Varnhagen assured his fiancée, the writer Rahel Levin, with whom he enjoyed an unusually frank intimacy, that his wounds were ‘nearly healed’, which was a fabrication.54 It is difficult to gauge how significant such experiences were

50 Ibid., p. 316.
51 Ibid., pp. 321–2.
52 Ibid., pp. 323–4.
53 Varnhagen reworked his diary material in order to produce his account retrospectively, but in the respects referred to here, his points can be cross-referenced with contemporaneous correspondence.
and to determine what kind of relationship existed between experience and mediation. On the one hand, few soldiers had returned from the worst campaign of 1812 in Russia and many who had survived the other campaigns were apparently unwilling to divulge the full horror of what they had seen and felt. On the other hand, a large number of men—approximately 190,000 troops, mainly conscripts, from the Confederation of the Rhine in 1812 and 848,000 men from Prussia and the Habsburg monarchy in 1815—had been mustered, with many of them experiencing combat directly.\footnote{The Prussian army numbered 280,000 and the Austrian 568,000 in 1815. The figures for the Confederation of the Rhine rose from 63,000 in 1806 and 119,000 in 1809; T. C. W. Blanning, \textit{The pursuit of glory: the five revolutions that made modern Europe, 1648–1815} (London, 2007), p. 668.}

The majority of subjects—and, certainly, writers—were not combatants but they nonetheless had direct or intimate, indirect experience of war. Some such as E. T. A. Hoffmann, who witnessed the Coalition’s attack on and occupation of Dresden in August 1813, seemed to remain almost nonchalant, at least in their public accounts of events. ‘Ah, dearest! It’s war! – wicked, evil war!’ he wrote to his publisher:

The emperor with the garden went off last Sunday, and since that time the street has not been empty of troops – like a perpetual procession, artillery, cavalry and infantry go up and down the \textit{silesische Strasse}. To date, we don’t know whether a battle has taken place or not; but everything is very tense, and God knows what will happen to us! We trust entirely in chance and Napoleon’s weapons, otherwise we are done for. I’m moving into the city incidentally, since my little house – extremely agreeably – is in the firing line of an entrenched position.\footnote{E. T. A. Hoffmann to C. F. Kunz, 19 Aug. 1813, cited in E. Klessmann, ed., \textit{Die Befreiungskriege in Augenzeugenberichten} (Düsseldorf, 1966), p. 133.}

Others, like the writer Johanna Schopenhauer, were much more earnest. As Weimar was set on fire in October 1806, ‘few dared to come out of their houses’, fearing the French soldiers, she had written to her son Arthur:

The city was formally given over to plunder; the officers and cavalry remained free of the horror and did what they could to help and protect us. But what could they do against 50,000 raging people, who could do as they pleased here, since their leaders, at least negatively, allowed it!\footnote{J. Schopenhauer to A. Schopenhauer, 19 Oct. 1806, in F. Schulze, ed., \textit{Weimarische Berichte und Briefe aus den Freiheitskriegen, 1806–1815} (Leipzig, 1913), p. 50.}

Seven years later, in 1813, the same burghers of Weimar—whose number still included Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Christoph Martin Wieland, and other prominent writers—feared ‘a similarly violent catastrophe’ to that of 1806, in the words of the diarist Johannes Falk, with Napoleon ‘throwing himself on the city with more overwhelming force and giving it up to the flames out of a desire for revenge’.\footnote{J. Falk, \textit{Kriegsbüchlein} (Leipzig, 1911), p. 56.} Goethe himself was notoriously aloof from such events,
recording the alternation of ‘quiet’ and ‘disquieting’ October days and nights in his diary.\textsuperscript{59} He, too, accepted the centrality of warfare between states, however, despite treating it—in Wilhelm von Humboldt’s opinion—in a ‘very relaxed and casual way’, maintaining that ‘world history must also have its fun’.\textsuperscript{60} All the same, the philosopher and linguist continued, ‘the devastation wrought by the Cossacks, which is very bad, takes away all his joy in the fun’: ‘He maintains that the cure is worse than the malady; one will be free of servitude in order to go under.’\textsuperscript{61} To Falk, in Weimar, it seemed that the menace of war had provoked a ‘general fear and trembling’.\textsuperscript{62} Those who had not witnessed such events, even Hoffmann conceded, could have ‘no idea’ what it was like to be ‘in the midst of war’.\textsuperscript{63}

What effect did these infrequent but repeated experiences of what Johanna Schopenhauer called ‘terrible misery in the city’, which was duplicated—albeit unevenly and at different times—throughout the German lands in the Napoleonic era, have on subjects’ understanding of military conflict?\textsuperscript{64} This question can be seen, at once, as a communicative and political one. The majority of subjects seem to have balanced their own experiences—or those of relatives, friends, and neighbours—against second-hand rumours, stories, and reports provided by various types of commentator. There is evidence from contemporary correspondence and diaries that members of the \textit{Bürgertum} and many others making up a ‘reading public’ relied on such external accounts, mediated by word of mouth, letters, and newspapers, to verify and make sense of local impressions and circumstances. In Hamburg, for example, the bourgeois memoirist Marianne Prell, who was a child in 1813, recalled how her family’s view of the ‘terrible’ conflict was moulded by press reportage in spite of censorship and disruption, which had meant that even news of the victory of Coalition armies at the battle of Leipzig had ‘come to us drip by drip’.\textsuperscript{65} With the city still under siege from French forces in 1814, her father used to read the \textit{Altonaer Merkur} in secret and had gladly paid 60 Pfennigs for cuttings of reports smuggled across French lines.\textsuperscript{66} In Prell’s ‘recollection’, which she had garnered from family records and interviews, citizens were hungry for news. According to contemporary correspondents elsewhere, this hunger was shared by others. It extended, in the words of Amalie von Schön (the wife of a Prussian official living temporarily in Dresden), ‘down to the least

\textsuperscript{60} W. v. Humboldt to his wife, 26 Oct. 1813, ibid., p. 205.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., pp. 111–12.
important man, at least in my house’, and it complemented letters from those in authority or closer to the fighting.\(^{67}\)

Governments were interested in all such ‘opinions’ because they were mindful of popular resistance and were reliant, in ways which were particular to periods of war and occupation, on public support.\(^{68}\) For reforming ministers such as Heinrich Friedrich Karl vom und zum Stein, as he wrote to his successor as Prussian Staatsminister Karl August von Hardenberg in August 1811, ‘public spirit (der öffentliche Geist) can only be brought to life through institutions which awake, inflame and maintain religious feelings and through such political institutions which make use of all the forces of the nation’.\(^{69}\) Beyond the church and the political institutions of the state, the press was expected to play an important part in awakening ‘the forces of the nation’, with the former first minister taking the time to specify—in correspondence with a newspaper editor—what was required of journalists in 1814: namely, an ‘adequate political and historical knowledge’, so they could ‘follow the course of world events and the tendency of public opinion attentively’, together with an attachment ‘to a German fatherland with their heart and their mind’.\(^{70}\) Stein’s principal adviser on the press and his main propagandist during his collaboration with Russia in 1813 and his time as head of the Allied Central Administration Authority (Zentralverwaltungsbehörde) in 1813, Ernst Moritz Arndt, shared his evaluation of the role of newspapers and periodicals in the public sphere, notwithstanding occasional despair at the distance of some writers from ‘life’ and at the defencelessness of journalists before an ephemeral course of events, flowing ‘thoughtlessly with the tide of the time’.\(^{71}\)

In an era of occupation and war, in which he feared that he might ‘go under’, ‘to tell the truth is not easy’, he recorded in the first volume of Geist der Zeit (1806).\(^{72}\) Tragically, went on the publicist, ‘the machinery of state’ in Europe continued to move people around, using its subjects like ‘blindfolded mill-horses’, and—even in the new order—tolerating the ‘old inequalities and injustices’ and fostering a ‘sense of slavery’ among its populations, with few links ‘between citizens and the state’.\(^{73}\) Nevertheless, these residues of absolutism or ‘despotism’ in the German lands had not prevented the ‘enlightenment’ of the eighteenth century, ‘to which we all belong’, and the historical transformations of the revolutionary era, of which a growing ‘family’ or ‘social class’ (Bürgerklasse) of ‘writers’ (die Schreiber) had


\(^{68}\) Even Metternich was convinced in June 1808 that ‘public opinion’ was ‘the most powerful of means’, cited in Weber, Lyrik der Befreiungskriege, p. 82.


\(^{71}\) E. M. Arndt, Geist der Zeit (2 vols., Leipzig, 1806–9), I, pp. 46, 10–47.

\(^{72}\) Ibid., p. 14.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., p. 62.
become the most important mediators. The age is in flight and flashes its momentous pictures past in such rapid change’, he wrote in 1886: ‘Whoever has lived through the last twenty years has lived for centuries. Although Arndt opposed the ‘one-sidedness’ of the French Revolution, he was convinced that it had raised ‘the political – the overthrowing of old thrones and constitutions, destructive wars, the exploitation and downfall of peoples’ – to unprecedented prominence and popularity. French revolutionaries had produced ‘thousands upon thousands of pamphlets, broadsheets, annuals and newspapers, by means of which the Volk was enlightened or confused and was prepared for the most disgusting scenes of abomination or infused with the fieriest enthusiasm’. Writers both interpreted this new form of ‘politics’ and helped to create a political sphere.

The notion of a single German public sphere, within which writers publicized their views, is a contested one. Certainly, such Öffentlichkeit was characterized by fragmentation and discontinuity during the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods compared to that of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hegel’s remark that the act of reading newspapers had become the morning prayers of ‘realistic’ nineteenth-century men dated back to his time as an academic in Jena in 1806, before he became the pro-Napoleonic editor of the Bamberger Zeitung in Bavaria a year later. Clearly, during the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, the ‘men’ to whom the philosopher alluded were preponderantly the notables of German towns, with whom he socialized and into whose circles he eventually married. In wartime, even these notables occasionally found their access to the press restricted, but their desire for ‘news’ seems to have increased, satisfied by the smuggling of newspapers and the circumvention of censorship. According to one prefect of the Rhineland territories annexed by France, newspapers from Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Augsburg, and Neuwied, all of which were banned, were read avidly by significant sections of the population on the left bank of the Rhine and were thus considered ‘dangerous’ by the French authorities, since they were ‘continually sounding the alarm about the fate of our armies and about the domestic situation of the Republic’. Much of this continuous and extensive, if also precarious, public sphere was perpetuated by ‘writers’ – poets, academics, essayists, editors – who contributed to and published books, periodicals, and newspapers; people such as Arndt himself, who edited Der Wächter in Cologne, the Jena historian Heinrich Luden (Nemesis), the Rhineland publicist Joseph Görres (Rheinischer Merkur), the Swabian publisher Friedrich Cotta (Deutsche Beobachter), and the Freiburg historian Karl von Rotteck (Teutschen Blätter). The published views of these writers and publicists reflected and

informed changing conceptions of warfare in the public sphere, which constituted the main political reference point for ministers, beyond the social circles of officials, officers, and courtiers. The next two sections investigate, respectively, the opinions of prominent exemplars of such ‘enlightened’ and ‘conservative’ writing.\(^8^1\)

II

Under public scrutiny, the nature of revolutionary warfare and the meaning of peace altered after 1792. To Friedrich II, who had wanted to conceal the very fact that the state was at war from his subjects, the distinction between war and peace was largely a diplomatic matter, to be decided by the monarch and his officials in accordance with *raisons d’état*. Military conflicts were instruments of policy designed to attain important goals which were assumed to outweigh the costs of combat, despite the possibility – evident during the Seven Years War – of escalation. ‘All wars whose sole design is to guarantee against usurpation, to maintain unquestionable rights, to guarantee the public liberty and to ward off the oppression and violence of the ambitious are agreeable to justice’, he maintained: ‘When sovereign states engage in wars of this kind, they have no reason to reproach themselves with bloodshed; they are forced to it by necessity and in such circumstances war is a lesser evil than peace.’\(^8^2\) Wars were part of a constant struggle on the part of states to defend, consolidate, and expand their territories and interests, acceptable in terms of their financial and human expenditure and justifiable on a number of grounds ‘as a lesser evil than peace’. Pre-emptive strikes and other forms of aggression could be warranted in many instances, went on the Prussian monarch: ‘Great men have always been successful when they make use of their forces before their enemies take such measures as tie their hands and suppress their power.’\(^8^3\) The transition from ‘peace’ to ‘war’ to ‘ceasefire’ was marked by ambiguity in such circumstances. Peace treaties were regarded as ‘little more than war-terminating instruments, mere cease-fires, ... despite their flowering terminology of “perpetual amity” and concern for the “tranquillity of Europe”, in the opinion of one scholar.\(^8^4\) Words such as ‘Krieg’ and ‘Frieden’ were certainly distinguished from each

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\(^{8^3}\) Ibid., p. 349.

other by contemporaries, with some enlightened thinkers foreseeing and others denouncing the end of all war and the institution of a perpetual peace before the French Revolution. Nonetheless, the terms were widely perceived to encompass different forms of relation and conflict on a continuum of inter-state rivalry and competition.

There was a movement away from arguments for a perpetual peace in Germany’s various public spheres during the 1790s. Even in the 1760s, 1770s, and early 1790s, such arguments had been salient rather than dominant, opposed by authors writing after the Seven Years War such as Thomas Abbt, who had sanctioned – in the words of his most famous work – ‘death for the fatherland’, provided that the government of that land was ‘enlightened’ and its wars ‘defensive’; Wilhelm Friedrich von Meyern, whose anti-military ‘Indian’ fiction Dya-Na-Sore (1787–91) had championed the notion of a patriotic war as a source of ‘immortality’; and Johann Valentin Embser, who had aimed to replace the ‘gods’ of the ‘philosophical’ eighteenth century by starting with the ‘first idol’, namely ‘ewiger Friede’. Looking back in 1788, the popular and academic historian Johann Wilhelm Archenholz was confident that his thesis about the transition from war as a purely state affair before 1756 to freedom-loving, patriotic, and national conflicts as sources of spiritual renewal after that date would find broad support: ‘The culture of the age, and the type of freedom which resulted from it, had produced a patriotism, awoken by the admiration of Europe, amongst the inhabitants of North Germany, especially amongst those of the Prussian territories, which had hitherto been alien in Germania.’ His history was designed to demonstrate ‘to the Prussian patriot of every estate’ the ‘moral greatness of his people’ and ‘to the German patriot of other provinces’ what can be achieved by the efforts of a whole nation (Nation),

directed towards a single goal, under a wise government’.\(^8^8\) Previously, conflicts had been perceived only as ‘the piling up or distancing of new burdens’, according to Archenholz, giving succour to the idea that they should be abolished altogether.\(^8^9\) This hope, it seemed to many of the advocates of patriotic warfare, had become the framework of the debate about war and peace as a whole.

For the ‘enlightened’ philosopher and essayist Kant, whose *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1795) found a comparatively wide readership and was reviewed in at least twenty publications, war had previously fostered the development of culture but it was now being replaced by the steady progress of humanity and by the expansion of trade, which demanded peaceful relations as a matter of individual and state self-interest.\(^9^0\) To both the Königsberg philosopher and to critics such as Wilhelm Traugott Krug, ‘The idea of peace is contained within the idea of law … Thus, the ultimate tendency of all pieces of writing which treat so-called natural law through the inclusion of the state and international law (Völkerrecht) necessary for it is none other than to demonstrate the viability of the idea of law in its greatest possible scope, which is then tantamount to coming up with a design for perpetual peace.’\(^9^1\) Kant overturned the premise of natural law that the right to declare war could be derived from a state of nature, where contemporary states could be compared to earlier human beings, claiming instead that ‘the state of peace amongst people living together is no state of nature (status naturalis), which is much more a state of war’: a state of peace had ‘to be created’ by one neighbour for the other, ‘which can only happen in a legal set of conditions’.\(^9^2\) Although not attempting to rule out military conflict forever, the majority of proponents of natural law, too, had been anxious to limit and inhibit warfare.\(^9^3\)

The limitations which advocates of natural law attempted to place on the waging of war – that conflicts required an injury or insult to justify their declaration, that they should serve to recreate peaceful and legal conditions, and that they should be conducted through means proportionate to the injury incurred – could themselves be seen to facilitate a barely distinguishable alternation of war and peace, typical of absolutist states.\(^9^4\) Such states had, contended Kant, ignored their subjects’ interests and availed themselves of standing armies, which ‘threaten other states constantly with war, by their readiness always to appear to be armed for this’, and which ‘make use of people

\(^8^8\) Ibid., pp. 12, 15.
\(^8^9\) Ibid., p. 463.
\(^9^1\) W. T. Krug, ‘Allgemeine Uebersicht und Beurtheilung der Mittel, die Völker zum ewigen Frieden zu führen’ (1812), in ibid., p. 137.
\(^9^2\) I. Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden* (Königsberg, 1795), p. 22.
\(^9^3\) Klippel and Zwanzger, ‘Krieg und Frieden’.
\(^9^4\) Ibid., p. 142.
as mere machines and tools in the hands of another (of the state)’. Kant, Zum ewigen Frieden, p. 8.

95 Kant, Zum ewigen Frieden, p. 8.

96 Ibid., pp. 23–4.

97 W. von Humboldt, Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Gränzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen (1792), cited in Leonhard, Bellizismus, p. 221. The treatise was one of the most striking defences of the principles of ‘enlightened’ government.


Tuscany in 1799 and was ‘chased away’ more quickly than he had anticipated, returning home via Nice, Marseille, Paris, Brussels, Cologne, Frankfurt, Leipzig, and Berlin.\(^{101}\) Although troubled by ‘every French victory against the Germans’, despite being ‘far from the scene and uproar’ in Swedish Pomerania, Arndt recognized that French revolutionaries’ aims were ‘undeniably right and holy’, creating turmoil in ‘the hearts of half of Europe’ and finding ‘more friends than enemies’ in the academic’s ‘Heimat’.\(^{102}\) Napoleon’s defeat of Austria in 1805 and Prussia in 1806 purportedly altered the journalist’s view definitively, persuading him ‘to love Germany’, together with the Habsburg and Hohenzollern monarchies, ‘with true love and to hate the “Welschen” with a true and loyal contempt’.\(^{103}\)

Another North German academic, Barthold Georg Niebuhr, who had studied at the university of Kiel in the mid-1790s before entering the Danish civil service in 1796 and, again, in 1799, likewise paid little attention to the early revolutionary wars, continuing to harbour the hope of becoming a professor at the new École normale in Paris as late as November 1794 and prophesying ‘great happiness and general enlightenment, which will serve to excuse much of what has happened’ in France during the Jacobin ‘terror’.\(^{104}\) The first real impact of war came in 1798, he reported, as rumours of a French expedition against Hanover and Hamburg began to circulate, with the prospect of an extension of ‘the terrible consequences of such an undertaking’ into Holstein, which was ‘the most valuable thing in the world’ to him.\(^{105}\) Niebuhr’s desire was for ‘the experience of a glorious war, combined with the abolition of privileges and the formation of a general militia with civilian officers who are partly elected’, to dispel the people’s ‘fear of the military estate’.\(^{106}\) The academic and administrator’s conception of war, notwithstanding the fact that it seemed imminent, was still characterized by historical distance and disinterest. When he again was caught up in hostilities, as Britain prepared to bombard Copenhagen in 1801, he was filled with ‘wonderment’ at the prospect of writing ‘of war and armaments, and of things which are quite alien to us’, he wrote to his life-long confidant in Kiel, Dore Hensler.\(^{107}\) It was only when Copenhagen was actually bombarded in April 1801, with thousands reportedly dead, that Niebuhr was faced with ‘the terrible picture of a murderous struggle, which only experience gives us knowledge of’.\(^{108}\) Such experiences meant that, when the wars of Austria and then Prussia against ‘this terrible empire’ of Napoleon and against ‘French tyranny and outrage’ took place in 1805–6, the academic, banker, and

\(^{101}\) Arndt, Erinnerungen, p. 106.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., pp. 109, 112.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., p. 114.


\(^{105}\) Niebuhr to his parents, 16 Nov. 1794, ibid., pp. 109–112.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., p. 114.

\(^{107}\) Idem, Erinnerungen, p. 106.

\(^{108}\) Idem to idem, 6 Apr. 1801, ibid., p. 263.
administrator portrayed the conflicts in much darker colours.\footnote{Idem to A. Moltke, 17 Jan. 1806, ibid., pp. 321–5.} Entering the Prussian administration of Stein in the summer of 1806, he was confronted by a ‘tragedy of horrors’, after the kingdom’s defeat in October.\footnote{Idem to J. Gibsone, 17 Oct. 1806, ibid., p. 351.}

Even at that late date, however, other subjects elsewhere continued to welcome invasion and occupation by the French, as Heinrich Heine recalled in Das Buch Le Grand, which recounted his youth in Düsseldorf in half-fictional form. As well as a cipher for Napoleon, Le Grand was a drummer billeted in the Heine household, whose drumbeats told the writer that ‘the Prussians had been dumb, dumb, dumb’ and promised equality, fraternity, and to ‘hang the aristocrats from the lamp-post’.\footnote{H. Heine, Ideen: Das Buch Le Grand (1827), cited in P. Paret, The cognitive challenge of war: Prussia, 1806 (Princeton, NJ, 2009), p. 37.} To such citizens, who constituted – if Heine is to be believed – the majority of the city’s inhabitants, French wars, as late as 1806, remained a matter of enthusiasm and exhilaration, not fear or repulsion. Their responses arguably betray how far away military conflict had appeared in the late eighteenth century to the burghers of many German towns, whose opinions were at once formed and reinforced by depictions of the more or less capricious and self-interested armed disputes of princes and their standing armies.

Both the relative distance of late eighteenth-century warfare from civilian society and its greater impact after the turn of the century could be perceived in the writings of one of the few remaining advocates of a perpetual peace, the writer Jean Paul. Commenting after the defeats of 1805–6, the author, whose early novels in the 1790s had made him appear a literary equal of Goethe as he moved from Weimar via Berlin to Bayreuth in the early 1800s, was criticized for suggesting that German states should accept the imposed Peace of Tilsit (1807) as the basis of a new, French-dominated international order.\footnote{Jean Paul, Friedens-Predigt (Heidelberg, 1808), p. 16.} With his adopted city of Bayreuth occupied by French troops after 1806, having been taken by Prussia in 1791, Jean Paul saw defeat at Austerlitz (1805), Jena, and Auerstädt (1806) as proof that ‘we had lost the old regime earlier than we had lost our battles’: ‘War exposed the weaknesses of our constitution rather than taking it from us.’\footnote{Ibid., p. 13.} In some respects, the writer’s critique of the old order was an extension of that of Kant and the late Enlightenment, depicting military conflict as the corollary of the ‘bellicose disposition’ of absolutist states and noting a ‘growing insight’ into the ‘injustice’ of war, which was a sign that ‘the head always precedes the heart, amongst peoples, by centuries, as with the trade in negroes; even by millennia, as perhaps is the case with war’.\footnote{Jean Paul, Levana oder Erziehlehre (1806), cited in G. Niedhart, ‘Jean Pauls “Kriegs-Erklärung gegen den Krieg”’, in Dülffer, ed., Kriegsbereitschaft, pp. 97–8. See also O. Dann, ‘Die Friedensdiskussion der deutschen Gebildeten im Jahrzehnt der französischen}
Erziehlehre (1806), which was written before Jena – there would be a movement, beyond sovereign states, towards a ‘universal republic’, which would make every conflict a destructive and avoidable ‘civil war’ (Bürgerkrieg) and which would be accompanied by the spiralling and inhibiting costs of warfare. In other respects, however, Jean Paul’s Levana, Friedens-Predigt (1808) and Dämmerungen für Deutschland (1809) betrayed how publicists’ attitudes to war had altered during the late revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, as conflict came to seem like a more or less constant state, with deleterious consequences for civilian life. ‘War’, he wrote in 1806, ‘is like a river of hell encircling and constraining the living earth.’

From such a starting point, the novelist attempted to shatter common illusions in the press and literature that war was a test of manly virtues and that it was a source of reputation, glory, profit, and strength. It was necessary to dispel ‘press commonplaces’ and popular misconceptions of heroism, which honoured the ‘arsonist’ – or general – more than those who had built the temple – namely, citizens – and which ignored the fact that heroic acts rested on ‘mechanics’, ranks of soldiers (‘die Sieger’ not ‘der Sieger’), and the commonsense and reason of citizens during peacetime. Whereas the duel of two individuals produced ‘honour’, the duel of millions, which should be proscribed by ‘morality’, resulted only in ‘unhappiness’: ‘the misfortune of the earth until now rests on the circumstance that two people have decided on war and millions carried it out’; it would be better, ‘although not good, if millions decided on it and two fought’. The contrasting examples of representative government in Britain and the tyrannies of the east showed that internal order and peace could be extended, through the participation of citizens, to the relations of states, continued Jean Paul: ‘The Orient lives at the same time in perpetual wars and perpetual powerlessness; England, by contrast, without land wars and without acts of cowardice.’ Yet, the writer accepted, as the very form of his warnings made plain, that ‘public opinion’, urged on by ‘big mouths’ such as Arndt advocating wars of national defence, was still to be convinced of the case for peace, not least because, ‘until now, the chapters of history were filled with war, between which peace placed a few footnotes’. This ‘perpetuum mobile of the devil’ remained in place in the Napoleonic period, like a ‘machine of hell’, perpetuating a ‘history of annihilation’ which had existed since the ‘history of creation’. In such conditions, defensive wars against Napoleon


116 Ibid., p. 97. See also K. Hokkanen, Krieg und Frieden in der politischen Tagesliteratur Deutschlands zwischen Baseler und Lunéviller Frieden, 1795–1801 (Jyväskylä, 1975).

117 Jean Paul, Dämmerungen für Deutschland (Tübingen, 1809), pp. 97–104, for a denial of the supposed ‘Verweichlichung’ caused by peace.


119 Ibid., p. 90.

120 Ibid., p. 97.

121 Ibid., p. 84.

122 Ibid. For the reference to war as a ‘machine of hell’, ibid., p. 90.
and ‘death for the fatherland’ were justified, notwithstanding the bloodiness of battle, it seemed by 1812. Any transformation of popular conceptions of conflict and the order of states looked likely to be slow and uncertain.

Like other ‘enlightened’ publicists of the Napoleonic era, Jean Paul was aware of the proximity, destructiveness, and—at least momentary—inescapability of war, even though he never gave up the ultimate goal of peace. Paradoxically, his raising of the possibility of perpetual conflict in Friedens-Predigt and of a ‘war declaration against war’ in Dämmerungen für Deutschland served to distinguish, more markedly than in the late eighteenth century, between war and peace as separate states of affairs, with the former relying on the latter for the accumulation of resources necessary for combat.

During the 1790s, many commentators had, at different points in time, repudiated the French Revolution and a French-backed peace. In Weimar, one of the pillars of German classicism, Wieland, had championed the French National Guard, the National Gendarmerie, and ‘national soldiers of the line’ in 1792 as ‘particles of the sovereign’, from whom ‘shines a ray of original majesty (Ur-Majestät)’ and who ‘only obey whom, when and how they want to’. By 1793, he was condemning the declaration by French revolutionaries of an international civil war for the alleged emancipation of oppressed peoples because it risked starting a conflict with ‘all the kings and princes of the earth’ at the same time as offering ‘peace and brotherhood to all peoples’. The following year, Wieland warned that ‘bloody experiences should … finally convince us that violence can do little or nothing against this fanaticism for freedom and equality, by which the majority of the French nation is already possessed’. War during the revolution seemed to have become more similar to the civil wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In the Rhineland, the ‘enlightened’ Catholic journalist and writer Joseph Görres—like Fichte, who changed his mind after 1797—took longer to distance himself from events in the neighbouring state, where ‘a form of government, in which public opinion has a decisive weight’, looked set gradually to rule out ‘the proclivity towards war’, as he put it in an essay on

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125 Paul, Friedens-Predigt, p. 7; idem, Dämmerungen für Deutschland, pp. 85–124.
127 Wieland, ‘Betrachtungen über die gegenwärtigen Lage des Vaterlandes’ (1793), ibid.
‘the ideal’ of ‘general peace’ in 1798. After a trip to the French capital between November 1799 and March 1800, the later editor of the Rheinischer Merkur outlined the ‘Resultate meiner Sendung nach Paris’ (1800), in which he alluded to the ‘inevitable self-tearing-apart of popular sovereignty and absolute democracy’. As a result, ‘the emancipation of humanity’ had not been achieved and French wars in its name were suspect. In turn, ‘the great idea of a perpetual peace in the world of states’ had proved a deception, he wrote in 1802. War, Görres later held, was a ‘potent life force’ with a positive function, akin to the ‘destroying’ element designed to determine and check ‘every great life process in nature’. Although still subject to many limitations, the use of force was warranted in defence of nations and their territories: ‘No tribe has a claim on the possessions of another; none may drive their neighbour out of its territory.’ Since Napoleonic France was acting aggressively, German states had ‘the higher right of defence and retaliation’ in a ‘holy crusade’ by 1814. A nation (Volk) should never let itself be ridiculed and injured in an unpunished fashion’, he asserted in May of the same year, implicitly criticizing Germany’s passivity in the past vis-à-vis its neighbour. What was more, ‘hellish powers have again found their centre in France, where Lucifer has returned and everything is moving and running in all haste to the taking up of weapons’. Within a decade or so, Görres had passed from anticipation of a perpetual peace to the justification of military conflict against a national and religious enemy.

III

Surprisingly, many ‘conservative’ authors followed an intellectual trajectory on the subject of war similar to that of their ‘enlightened’ counterparts. The distinctions between positions were, of course, blurred in German states which – although ‘their greater or lesser powers’, in Wieland’s words, were ‘limited on every side by laws, tradition and in many other ways’ – had been partly protected from ‘public’ discussion and from ‘politics’ by the structures and practices of absolutist rule. Friedrich Gentz, a former Prussian and later

\(^{130}\) J. Görres, ‘Der Allgemeine Frieden, ein Ideal’ (1798), in Leonhard, Bellizismus, p. 219.
\(^{132}\) Ibid., p. 82.
\(^{134}\) Ibid., pp. 86–7.
\(^{136}\) Ibid., xxix, 19 Mar. 1814.
\(^{137}\) Ibid. in Portmann-Tinguely, Romantik, p. 97.
\(^{138}\) Rheinischer Merkur, llxv, 30 Mar. 1815.
\(^{139}\) Cited in Blanning, Pursuit of glory, p. 284.
Austrian official and one of the most prominent conservative publicists of the period, made the same transition as Görres. As an old student of Kant, his first articles in the Berlinische Monatsshefte at the start of the 1790s were in support of natural rights, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, as ‘the first practical triumph of philosophy’, according to a letter of December 1790: ‘It is our hope and comfort in the face of the multitude of old evils under which mankind sighs.’ Although Gentz later became known as a ‘conservative’ (or advocate of ‘reaction’ or ‘preservation’), after he translated Edmund Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) in 1793, he refused simply to repudiate natural rights, preferring to reinterpret them as part of the conjunction between the rule of law, the normative principles, and empirically describable institutions of the political order and the idea of evolutionary progress, as outlined by the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment. Thus, he opposed Fichte’s notion of autarky as a means of creating peace, since it militated against the curiosity, competition, and strife which underpinned economic and cultural advances. Because war could become purely destructive, as the revolutionary conflicts had demonstrated, the role of politics was to contain such violence, which remained inevitable and—in certain circumstances—necessary, in order to permit the development of European societies and economies. French revolutionaries had failed to curb violence at home, the countering of which was Gentz’s priority until the turn of the century, and they had encouraged the unleashing of destructive conflicts abroad, prompting the publicist to concentrate on the relations between states during the 1800s and 1810s, before becoming one of Clemens von Metternich’s main advisers at the Congress of Vienna in 1815: ‘When a nation’ severed ‘all ties of duty, loyalty and subordination’, overrode the highest power in the state through an ‘act of violence’, claimed sovereignty for itself ‘amidst this horrible and self-constituted anarchy’, abolished hierarchies and mocked religious ideas, ‘then the right of other nations to lead it back within the limits of social order are incontrovertibly established’.

In the Historisches Journal, which he edited and supplied with articles, Gentz openly opposed Kant’s idea of a perpetual peace in ‘Über den ewigen Frieden’ (1800) with the claim that any attempt to impose a Völkerbund and rights without the agreement of the majority of states would provoke another war.

\[140\] Cited in G. Kronenbitter, “The most terrible world war”: Friedrich Gentz and the lessons of the revolutionary war’, in Chickering and Förster, eds., War, p. 120.

\[141\] Ibid., p. 121.


France, with the help of a new type of warfare resting on the revolutionary zeal, defence of the republic, and love of glory of citizen-soldiers, had ignored the injunction that ‘relations between states’ should be regulated ‘in the same ways as relations between individual members of civil society’ and it had, instead, exported ‘armed opinions’ to territories—above all in Germany—defended by a badly organized, under-funded, sclerotic Coalition, which ‘forgot about the revolution’.\(^{144}\) Although Gentz still entertained the possibility that Napoleon Bonaparte might reverse revolutionary changes in 1797–9, he conceded ‘that the French Revolution has really happened’, in a letter to the Romantic conservative Adam Müller in 1802: “It is immortal, for it exists.” Nothing on earth can make it un-happen.”\(^{145}\) Napoleon’s ‘European federative system’, which was nothing more than a bid for ‘world domination’ (\(\text{Weltherrschaft}\)) or an attempt to set up a ‘universal monarchy’ (\(\text{Universalmonarchie}\)), was an outgrowth of the interventionism and expansionism of the French Revolution, which was founded on the disruptive ‘principle of so-called popular sovereignty’, or ‘the pivot around which the entire revolutionary system turns’, as Gentz had declared to Metternich on 15 February 1814.\(^{146}\) French revolutionaries had aimed to end war and create an alliance of nations, but they had succeeded only in precipitating the ‘most terrible world war’.\(^{147}\)

Military conflict was necessary as a means of channelling human aggression and maintaining domestic order; it was also required, in a new form but ‘with regular troops alone’, to counter the military threat of the revolutionary Napoleonic regime.\(^{148}\) The main way of controlling such war was not to revert to an eighteenth-century ‘balance of power’—or ‘anarchy, in the sense of international law’, as Gentz termed it in ‘Über den ewigen Frieden’—with its constant warfare and misleading fiction of ‘equality’ of states, which had been easily overturned by France after 1792, but to institute ‘an extensive social union … among the states in this part of the world, of which the essential and characteristic aim was the preservation and mutual guarantee of the well-won rights of each of its members’.\(^{149}\) ‘Men became aware that there were certain basic rules in the relationship between the strength of each individual part and the whole, without whose constant influence order could not be assumed’.


\(^{147}\) Cited in Kronenbitter, “The most terrible world war”, p. 130.

\(^{148}\) Ibid., p. 128; G. Kronenbitter, \(\text{Wort und Macht: Friedrich Gentz als politischer Schriftsteller}\) (Berlin, 1994), pp. 308–9.

wrote the publicist in *Fragmente aus der neuesten Geschichte des politischen Gleichgewichts in Europa* (1806):

not *how much power* one or the other possesses; but only whether he possesses it in such a way and under such limitations that he cannot with impunity deprive one of the rest of its own power – this is the question that must be decided in order to pass judgment at any given moment on the relation between individual parts or on the general proficiency of the edifice.\(^{150}\)

The ‘diverted, split forces of our great nation, channelled into weakly flowing streams, into foul swamps or disloyal, outflowing canals’, had been responsible for much of the disorder of the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods: ‘Europe fell because of Germany, and it must rise again through Germany.’\(^{1151}\) In order to end the ‘slavery’ of Germany and entrench a more stable international order, which might bring the regular conflicts of the eighteenth century and the constant warfare since 1792 to an end, the Allies needed to organize themselves for the decisive defeat of France.\(^{154}\) In all such calculations, Gentz at once recognized and sought to control a different type of revolutionary conflict, necessitating a sharper and more effectively enforced distinction between war and peace.

Influential conservative writers such as Adam Müller, Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, and Achim von Arnim, many of whom were connected to overlapping circles of Romantics in Vienna (Müller, the Schlegels, Gentz, Beethoven), Heidelberg (Brentano, Eichendorff, Arnim, Loeben, the Grimms, Görres), and Berlin (Arnim, Kleist, Tieck, Schleiermacher, Schelling, Fichte), shared Gentz’s opinion of war as part of a natural, historical order. For Friedrich Schlegel, who entered the Austrian civil service in 1809, Christian states were perceived to have prevented internal feuding, or a war of all against all, but they were not believed to be capable of eliminating a God-willed struggle of good against evil: military conflicts were an indication of the imperfections of humanity. Although, like Gentz, initially backing Kant’s idea of a perpetual peace as ‘brave and worthy’, with ‘universal and complete’ republicanism as its prerequisite, the academic and poet quickly realized that the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars constituted an ‘age of the violence of war’, with the French as the ‘Huns of the new times’.\(^{153}\) Similarly, Arnim, despite earlier anticipating the ‘political dissolution’ of states as an obstacle ‘to the spread of knowledge and the arts’, came to see conflicts between states as a series of dichotomies of good and evil, being and appearance, spirit and matter, providing, in idealistic terms, the judgements of ‘partial world courts’: ‘Whoever wins becomes the spirit of

\(^{150}\) Kronenbitter, “The most terrible world war”, pp. 132–3.


\(^{152}\) Ibid., p. 54.

Although they could appear to be little more than the ‘common slaughter of people’, with ‘the individual appearing infinitely small compared to the mass’ in the ‘great events of war’, requiring ‘schnapps rather than heroic courage’, battles could be seen to be exciting – ‘Nothing on earth is more fun than we hussars on the field, when we are in battle’ – because they constituted part of a meaningful religious dialectic: any order ‘in which war is merely calamitous’ destroys itself, for ‘this order is only a foreground, and leads via its own destruction, as its antithesis, to the synthesis of a higher truth, to world harmony, in which calamity stands in the service of salvation, and negative produces positive, evil creates good’. In Arnim’s opinion, conflict was creative.

Peace could not exist without war, Müller averred, as a constituent of his ‘theory of opposites’ and as an element of the natural order, ‘where laws are shown in nature and its unending wars’. Just as individual freedom was founded on restless and defensible activity, with ‘every single character who belongs to the state as a whole’ being ‘able to create, argue and defend themselves in their own way’, so nations and states had to be allowed to compete and fight for their own sets of values and goods: ‘Wars are, from the standpoint of individual people, unpleasant things, which the living-side-by-side-with-one-another of individual peoples brings in its train’, wrote the philosopher and administrator in 1809: they ‘cannot be separated from the living-side-by-side-with-one-another of individuals’. Whereas the ‘old Staatswissenschaften’ had looked on war as an exceptional state and had strived to attain perpetual peace, Müller saw such propositions as ‘madness’, ‘as if wars between nations (Völker) were a suspension of law, i.e. illegal conditions, and the disputes of private persons within the same state were legal, because a real and effective judge exists for them’. It was possible to achieve ‘perpetual peace between peoples, i.e. security from wars’, and ‘perpetual peace within states, i.e. security from revolutions’, by establishing a ‘Weltpolizei’, but at the expense of ‘the competition of forces, true war, freedom, the good of all goods’, which was unthinkable. Conflict was part of the disputation necessary for life: ‘Peace only becomes a living idea through war, the law only through freedom’, he concluded. Like his fellow Catholic-convert Friedrich Schlegel, Müller assumed that the moral and legal precepts generated by free disputes would, together with Christianity, limit war and prevent savagery. Military conflicts, with the standing armies of

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155 Ibid.
157 Müller, *Die Elemente der Staatskunst*, 1, pp. 152–3, 80.
159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
absolutism in retreat, were not seen to endanger but rather to constitute and maintain political and cultural life.

IV

In literary and artistic circles, especially within those of the Romantics but also beyond them, war had become an important and acceptable theme, not least because it seemed to pose fundamental questions about human existence and death. In revolutionary France, artists’ representations of battles and the other events of war quickly became a ‘drama of the passions’, with large allegorical and real figures occupying the foreground in struggles of principle and survival. In Germany, the subjects and traditions of art changed less markedly and more unevenly, with some artists like Christian Gottfried Geissler producing detailed, realistic, unjudgemental studies of everyday life, as in his depiction of the colourful, ragged, pillaging soldiers of *Französische Infanterie zieht in Leipzig ein* (1807) or his account of the delivery and protection of a baby by French troops in *Straßenszene in Lübeck* (1806–7), and with others such as Jacques François Swebach portraying, in a mixture of fantasy and nightmare, the realities of killing in *Der Tod des Prinzen Louis Ferdinand* (1807), where the French cavalry converge on the isolated, flailing, bare-headed Hohenzollern scion, in the middle of a corpse-strewn battlefield, in order to end his life.

This same sense of dream-like, subjective isolation could be found in the Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich’s painting of *Der Chasseur im Walde* (1813–14), in which a helpless, dismounted French cavalryman faces death, alone before a dark, snowbound forest. Yet, such depictions were rare, even if echoed in many of Friedrich’s other portrayals of lone figures and motifs within a meaningful, sometimes foreboding, natural world. They were more common and better known within poems, prose, and plays.

One of the most famous plays, although only staged in private before the 1820s, was Heinrich von Kleist’s *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg* (1809–11), which referred obliquely to the death of Prince Louis Ferdinand von Preussen at the battle of Saalfeld (1806), four days before Jena and Auerstädt, and to the battle

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164 See E. Krimmer, *The representation of war in German literature from 1800 to the present* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 19–64, which likewise concentrates on Schiller and Kleist. In addition to the plays examined here, see also Zacharias Werner’s *Die Söhne des Tals* (1803–4), which treats the downfall of the Knights Templar, *Das Kreuz an der Ostsee* (1805–6), about the occupation and Christianization of ‘old Prussia’, *Attila, König der Hunnen*, which details Attila’s death, *Wanda, Königin der Sarmaten* (1808), about the battle between the ‘Polish’ queen and Rüdiger, her Germanic suitor; Friedrich de la Motte Fouquié’s *Nibelungen trilogy, Der Held des Nordens* (1808–10); and Heinrich Joseph von Collin’s *Coriolan* (1804). On poetry, see Weber, *Lyrik der Befreiungskriege*, pp. 145–281.
of Aspern (1809), which Kleist had witnessed. Set in Brandenburg during the war of 1675, as the Elector’s forces were attempting to push Swedish troops back to the Baltic, the plot turns on the sentencing of the prince of Homburg to death, after he had attacked the retreating Swedish army too early in defiance of his orders (he is still in a trance, which he is unable to separate from reality), allowing the Swedes to escape across a river. The Elector refuses to revoke the sentence in the name of the law, despite the fact that his general had attacked early in part because he had believed his ruler, who had switched horses, to have been slain. Yet, the Elector is opposed by his niece, Natalie, and his own officers, one of whom tells him, in direct reference to Prussia’s defeats in 1806, that what matters is not rules but the vanquishing of the enemy. At first, when he learns of the Elector’s decision and sees his own grave being dug, Homburg pleads for his own life at any price: ‘Since I saw my grave, I want only to live, and won’t ask whether honourably or not.’ He has been wrenched from his reverie and confronted with the finitude of existence. He subsequently rejects the offer of a pardon, declaring that ‘to triumph over one’s own weakness means more than gaining a cheap triumph in battle.’ As he declares from the scaffold, before being freed from the sentence at the last minute by his ruler:

Now, immortality, you are all mine!
Your light, as of a thousand suns,
streams into my blindfolded eyes.
My shoulders become wings,
On which my spirit soars
through boundless realms of silence.
As from a ship, abducted by the wind,
We see the busy harbour slip from sight,
So does my life fade in the gathering dusk.
Colours I still perceive, and shapes,
And now fog covers all.

Recovering from a faint, as his blindfold is removed, the prince asks ‘Is it a dream?’ to which an officer replies: ‘What else?’ Simultaneously, other soldiers raise the cry ‘to battle, to victory …; into the dust the enemies of Brandenburg!’ Amongst other things, the play examines the tension between law and military discipline and individual initiative and passion, and between reality and life and dreams and death, where Brandenburg’s fate – or

165 His account, like those of other contemporaries, betrays the two-way relationship between depictions of warfare and the wider aims of Romantics: see, for instance, R. Safranski, Romantik (Munich, 2007), pp. 172–92.
168 Ibid., p. 295.
169 Ibid.
Prussia’s in 1806 – depends on a military encounter and the predicament of a soldier represents the choices, in a stark form, facing every subject.

The gap between war and peace is at once shortened and deepened in such works, as the audience learns of the humanity and exceptionality of soldiers’ actions and fates. In the most celebrated plays of the period, Friedrich Schiller’s trilogy Wallenstein (1798–9), war reveals truths which are obscured in peacetime. For Goethe, its historical subject matter was merely a thin cover for the purely human.¹⁷⁰ Albrecht von Waldstein or Wallenstein was an unknown Bohemian noble who became the commander of the principal Habsburg army in the first half of the Thirty Years War and who was assassinated in 1632 with the consent of the Kaiser, as he contemplated switching to the side of the Protestant princes and bringing the war to an end through a compromise peace. The first play of the series, Wallensteins Lager (Wallenstein’s camp), focuses on the army itself, with the audience learning of Wallenstein’s position (fearing the intrigue of the emperor and court and failing to keep control of his divided forces) from the snippets of conversation of common soldiers, set amidst the open spaces of the encampment, which Schiller conceives of as ‘a small universe’.¹⁷¹ Here, the leader and the mass of individual troops, who are not named, merge in a series of actions which will decide the fate of the empire and the religious settlement of Europe. Low-born men have been liberated from the conventions, corruptions, and distinctions of a society of estates through association with a successful general and they have been freed from the constraints of daily life, able to rob and to kill. Their courage also liberates them from a fear of death, which limits the lives of others, pointing to the paradox that external adversity and regimentation are compatible with inner freedom, as the closing song of the play spells out: ‘Saddle up, comrades, to horse, to horse./On to war and to freedom./In war a man still counts,/His heart is still weighed and valued./No one can take his place,/He is on his own.’¹⁷² ‘Freedom has passed from this world of lords and slaves./… Only the man who can look death in the face,/The soldier, is free!’ continues the second verse, before the song ends with, ‘And if you don’t stake life,/You will never have gained life.’¹⁷³

As the action switches in the second and third plays to the enclosed chambers of castles, to the high politics and intrigues of his generals and figures from the court, and from informal German to the blank verse of nobles, the fortunes of the protagonists become tragic, caught within an accelerated sequence of what Schiller termed ‘interlocking events’.¹⁷⁴ Die Piccolomini follows the deception of Octavio Piccolomini, one of Wallenstein’s generals and a close friend, as he plots on behalf of the Kaiser, leaving his son Max, for whom the commander is a second father, to escape from the corruptions of his milieu through death

¹⁷¹ Schiller, cited ibid., p. 224.
¹⁷² Paret, Cognitive challenge, p. 51.
¹⁷³ Ibid.
¹⁷⁴ Cited in Sharpe, Schiller, p. 220.
in battle. Octavio’s warning that Max has known only war and that he must accommodate himself to peace, prosperity, and tradition is undermined by the audience’s awareness of the father’s own civilian-inspired duplicity. The final play, *Wallenstein’s Tod* (*Wallenstein’s death*), shows how the soldiers refuse to betray the emperor and how power slips from the commander’s hands. On one level, the trilogy anticipates the struggles of the revolutionary regimes and the emerging Napoleonic one, with the prologue of *Wallenstein’s camp* identifying the French general and later emperor—‘You know him’—as ‘the creator of strong armies, idol of the camp and scourge of many countries, the adventurous son of fortune.’ On another level, the works, which recreate Wallenstein’s last days in what Hegel described as a horrific, unredeeming, and desolate—rather than tragic—way, reveal to spectators how the soldiers’ lives, including that of their leader, illuminate and expose their own, by removing the hindrances and increasing the tempo and stakes of social existence.

The soldier-poets of the ‘wars of freedom’, who achieved popularity in the 1810s, attempted to extend, aestheticize, and heroicize Schiller’s intimation of soldiers’ special knowledge, deriving from their proximity to death and their separation from civilian society. The Weimar playwright’s account of warfare is certainly not heroic, with Wallenstein subject to overwhelming historical forces, yet responsible for his own actions, the consequences of which eventually lead to his death. By contrast, the poems of Max von Schenkendorf and Theodor Körner were heroic, resting on many of the new commonplaces about war—that it was inevitable and natural, that it should be waged by citizens not standing armies, that it was a moral, social and political test rather than a danger—but radicalizing such tenets for the sake of soldiers’ martyrdom. In Körner’s posthumously published *Leier und Schwert* (1814), after he had been killed in combat in August 1813 at the age of twenty-two, all except five of the thirty-seven poems are about dying and death, conceived of in valedictory terms, as the poet’s dedication to the Lützow Corps, in which he had served, evinced: ‘And should I be missing in the victory march home:/Don’t cry for me, envy my good fortune! /For what, intoxicated, the lyre had sung,/The free act of the sword had already done.’ The war of 1813 was not merely a national necessity, it was a religious calling, as Körner explained to his father on volunteering in March:

Germany rise up; the Prussian eagle is awakening, through brave beating of its wings, the great hope of a German, at least a North-German, freedom . . . Yes, dear father, I want to become a soldier . . ., in order to fight for a fatherland, even with my own blood . . . Now, in God’s name, it is a worthy feeling which drives me on, now it is the powerful conviction that no sacrifice is too great for the highest human good, for

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175 Paret, *Cognitive challenge*, p. 49.
177 Jeismann, *Das Vaterland der Feinde*, p. 34.
the freedom of one’s Volk… no one is too good for the sacrifice of death for the freedom and for the honour of one’s nation (Nation), but many are not good enough for this! … Great times need great hearts … That I risk my life is not much.  

To Körner, ‘This is no struggle for the goods of this world, [since] we are protecting the most sacred thing with the sword’; ‘This is no war that the kings of the earth lead’, but a struggle led by the king of heaven; ‘This is not war which crowns know of, it is a crusade, it is a holy war.’  


Körner, ‘Gebet’ (1813), ibid., p. 277.


Enemies were demonized in a war against ‘hell’, an ‘edifice of lies’.  


To Schenkendorf, Napoleon was ‘satan’, an anti-Christ, a ‘wolf’, a tyrant, and a ‘prince of slaves’, from whom—as a ‘devil’—Germans should free themselves forever, after imploring the ‘holy spirit’ in accordance with the justified enmity of the majority. It was not evident how a conflict against such an enemy could be limited, especially when death was ‘a mockery’ and offered the promise of immortality: ‘Let us inherit the earth./You, eternal, true God…/ This is a beautiful war/In such holy hatred.

Action and death seemed to be linked to ‘life’, bringing poets such as Schenkendorf and Körner to long to die in a good cause. ‘Tranquillity kills, only he who acts, lives, and I want to live, and will not die in front of death’, intones Körner’s Soliman, before dying. In such romanticization of death, war is not only the opposite of peace, it is a means of reinvigorating life; it is no longer a distant and necessary event after the breakdown of peace, but a constant fantasy which citizens are encouraged to create and to make real in order to escape the ‘tranquillity’ and constraints of peacetime.

Most commentators, of course, did not perceive war in such terms. There were many ways to think of death, some religious and others not, which invoked fear and suffering rather than action, truth, and immortality. What was more, the relationship between military conflict, dislocation, violence, and death was a confused one. The starting point of the majority of authors, however, was that war and peace were at once more clearly defined and more closely connected than in the past.

V

Representations of conflicts changed between 1792 and 1815, as the nature of warfare altered and as a succession of wars, waged by seven separate coalitions, affected all the German lands. Most notably, long-established critiques of
absolutism and hopes of a long-lasting or perpetual peace were eclipsed by new conceptions of ‘revolutionary’ conflict and wars of the ‘Volk’. Although their reports varied, the majority of commentators came to assume that greater popular participation in wars was required in order to defeat—or protect German states from—the revolutionary or Napoleonic regimes of France. Such mobilization of the Volk was often ‘patriotic’—that is, linked to the defence of individual German states—rather than ‘national’, which required the conceptualization of a future German polity. Either type of mobilization, however, permitted the heroicizing of combat in the press, academic treatises, literature, and art.

In spite of the injunctions of Arndt and others for citizens to hate their enemies, heroism, bravery, and bloodlessness, rather than terror, were characteristic of press, literary, and artistic accounts of war, which generally avoided the worst consequences of military campaigns. Thus, even Körner, who confronted death most directly in his poems and constantly used words to allude to the senses, referred only to ‘der Tod’ as a ‘duty of heroes’ and to flesh and blood as elements of life, to which heroic acts gave meaning: ‘That is my body, which I have given to you, that is my blood, which I have spilled for you. For your life, I go to my death.’ He envisaged ‘corpses on corpses’, ‘hills of corpses’, as well as ‘floods’ and ‘earthly fires’, as obstacles which it was necessary to traverse in the quest for a promised land: ‘Through! There is the Vaterland!’ Death for the fatherland offered the chance of martyrdom ‘in the temple of immortality’, deriving from Christian and classical sources: ‘Calm kills, only he who acts lives, and I will live, I will not die in the midst of death.’

The poet was not waging a war ‘of which crowns know’, but a ‘crusade’ against hell and for the salvation of ‘justice, morals, virtue, belief and conscience’.

For Körner and other Romantics, the senses faced death in order to give meaning to it and to escape it. Although their outpourings have been described as ‘fantasies of annihilation and bloodthirstiness’, they rarely, in fact, ran out of control, despite their descriptions of sounds, sights, movements, emotions, and the body. Accordingly, Körner’s ‘Song of Revenge’ summoned up thunder and wild furies, dogs, hell, and the devil as it appealed for vengeful killing, but at the same time as acknowledging that it would be limited to soldiers (‘all who carry a blade’) and that it would require a religious demonology (with the enemy as ‘the crop of hell’s seed’ and

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184 For evidence about a larger number of commentators and the transfer of their arguments, see Hewitson, ‘Belligerence’.
188 ‘Toni’ (1812), ibid., I, p. 277; ‘Gebet’ (1813) and ‘Aufruf’ (1813), ibid., I, pp. 106, 90.
189 Jeismann, Das Vaterland der Feinde, pp. 78–94.
‘the devil’s brood’) to overcome his compatriots’ reluctance to avenge their ‘betrayed’ brothers and to keep to their ‘oath’:

Have at them! At them! the war trumpets blare!
At them! the roar of thunder does command!
Revenge calls out in storm and lightning’s glare
For Germany’s avenging iron hand!
Have at them, at them in the wild furies’ dance!
The toad yet lives and dares to swagger?
At it, my brothers, with rifle, sword and lance!
At it with poison and with dagger!
What of the law of nations? Those pledged to night
Are the crop of hell’s seed.
Where is the law these dogs have not defiled
With murder and deceit?
Avenge our blood with theirs! Kill all who carry a blade!
They’re all the devil’s brood!
Think of our oath, think of brothers betrayed
And drink your fill of blood!190

Here, in the drunkenness and fury of slaughter, as elsewhere in the representations of the early nineteenth century, there was little acknowledgement of the pain and meaninglessness of military killing.

For the majority of writers, artists, and academics, ‘war’ during the Napoleonic era was not merely different from ‘peace’, it was also a necessary and, frequently, heroic means of defending one’s own Volk, state, or fatherland, notwithstanding the existence of problematic cases such as the partitions of Poland (in 1772, 1793, and 1795), during which the aims of absolutist states and patriotic or national-minded publicists could be seen to have converged but which were generally glossed over.191 Discussion of worthy or heroic wars of defence within a German public sphere helped to shape educated citizens’ opinions of military conflict, influencing (but not dictating) the formulation of policy. These findings militate against the case presented by Planert, using local records, who has cast doubt on the fact that Napoleonic warfare was different in important respects from that of the eighteenth century, that civilians’ attitudes to war had changed, even if unevenly, throughout Germany and that policy-making had, correspondingly, been affected.192 Whereas ‘the French Revolution and the changes that accompanied it marked the beginning of modern political history’, from ‘the perspective of military history’ the French

191 D. Pickus, Dying with an enlightening fall: Poland in the eyes of German intellectuals, 1764–1800 (Lanham, MD, 2001).
Revolution is held to be ‘less of a caesura’. Consequently, ‘after the Congress of Vienna, the European states returned to limited warfare’, she continues. This military ‘restoration’ was supposedly disrupted less by nationalism, which had been stimulated in the states of the Confederation of the Rhine ‘only among an educated minority’ and even in Prussia ‘principally in urban centres’, than by ‘the battle of competing ideologies’ which – ‘with the survival of the revolution or Europe’s dynasties at stake’ – meant that ‘neither side was able to compromise’ and that both sides pursued a ‘quest for decisive warfare’. By contrast, I have argued here that commentators’ views of warfare altered in similar ways, under the force of extreme circumstances, notwithstanding their different ‘ideological’ or ‘national’ positions. These commentators played an important part in ensuring that post-war attitudes to conflict, including myths of 1813, were fundamentally different from those of the eighteenth century, with heroic conceptions of war quickly overshadowing diverse private and publicly enacted memories of suffering. What was more, their shared view of ‘war’ was a relatively narrow one, resting on an imagined essence of combat rather than the wider effects of warfare, even though most writers had not been conscripted and had no direct experience of fighting. In such writers’ and artists’ images of conflict, which shaped discourses after 1815, stories of economic hardship, political disruption, opposition to conscription, disease, and co-operation or conflict with ‘foreigners’ were regularly linked and subordinated to dominant narratives about violence, death, and heroism, qualifying – although not denying – the significance of ‘the recognition’ given by recent scholarship to ‘the diversity of war experiences’, in the approving judgement of Aaslestad and Hagemann.

This study has relied on a close reading of some of the most prominent ‘writers’ in their different, often interchangeable, early nineteenth-century guises – ‘enlightened’ critics, ‘conservative’ supporters of states, observers of contemporary events, contributors to newspapers, academics, and poets – in order to investigate the manner in which public discussions of warfare changed. Its approach has been selective, showing – for example – how a well-known advocate of peace such as Jean Paul came to accept the necessity of war, or how a defender of the right of states to declare and use war as an act of policy such as Gentz sought to limit the consequences of the resort to that right. Writers and

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193 Planert, ‘Innovation or evolution?’, p. 83. In answer to their own question of whether 1806 was a caesura for most recent scholarship, Aaslestad and Hagemann, ‘1806 and its aftermath’, pp. 549–54, emphasize the diversity and continuity of contemporaries’ experiences of warfare during the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras, whilst also conceding that the epoch was ‘one of great transformations’ and ‘a world turned upside down’.

194 Planert, ‘Innovation or evolution?’, p. 84.

195 Ibid.

196 My own current research on images and experiences of warfare in Germany during the long nineteenth century seeks to temper Chris Clark’s arguments about competing memories, which certainly continued to exist but were eclipsed by a dominant narrative about 1813: C. Clark, ‘The wars of liberation in Prussian memory’, Journal of Modern History, 118 (1996), pp. 550–76.

artists put forward their views in a German public sphere which extended, if sometimes haphazardly and discontinuously, beyond the localities explored by much of the recent historiography. Their articles, treatises, and other works did not merely reflect ‘public opinion’, which remained tied to the educated strata of towns; they also helped to confirm or challenge burghers’ opinions about the meaning of conflicts, which had come to play an important part – for many, at least – in their attitudes to ‘politics’, government, conscription, and diplomacy. ‘News’ and discussion of warfare in the public sphere, on the one hand, and subjects’ more or less direct experience of warfare, on the other, seem to have combined in a multiplicity of ways and with many exceptions to make conflicts between states appear inevitable, momentous, yet controllable. Thus, even before volunteering to fight, Varnhagen von Ense’s conception of war had changed fundamentally, after Prussia’s defeat in October 1806. ‘From day to day, the defeat of Prussia was shown to be greater and more humiliating’, he wrote in the immediate aftermath of battle, hinting that circumstance, reportage, and reflection had ‘shown’ the scope and significance of the kingdom’s defeat:

The misfortune of Prussia and the slender hopes which could be entertained of the continuing war were talked about over and over again, and – by way of contrast – the glittering circumstances and phenomena of Prussian military life before the terrible collapse. We couldn’t fully comprehend the intervening change, we saw the consequences looming massively before us, and we couldn’t believe them.¹⁹⁸

By 1809, he noted, everything in Austria, and possibly in Germany, seemed ‘to be heading towards a genuine people’s war (Volkskrieg), and enthusiasm and strength of every kind seem to be increasing’.¹⁹⁹ In the absence of a compelling alternative evaluation by contemporaries of the impact in Germany of French warfare, it is likely that such affirmative representations of military conflict had wider ramifications in the public spheres of the German lands.

Conflicts that had been refashioned as wars of the people, or Volkskriege, achieved a degree of popular legitimacy which, although still limited, would have been inconceivable before 1792. The ways in which contemporaries experienced and made sense of such wars were heterogeneous and complex, giving credence to scholars’ criticisms of Dann’s apparent conflation of warfare – or attitudes to warfare – and nationalism. Unlike the majority of commentators, many subjects seem to have had neither patriotic allegiances – in support of individual states – nor national aspirations. Even amongst writers and publicists, there were those – proponents of Rheinbund patriotism, for instance – who openly opposed the anti-French stereotypes and enmity identified by Jeismann.²⁰⁰ What such writers meant when they referred to a German ‘nation’

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., I, p. 298.
²⁰⁰ Jeismann, Des Vaterland der Feinde, pp. 27–102; also K. Hagemann, ‘Francophobia and patriotism: images of Napoleon and “the French” in Prussia and northern Germany in
and how they assessed its significance compared to other sets of affiliations and allegiances varied considerably. What united most of them was a conviction that the nature of warfare had altered, shifting the parameters of wartime and, especially, post-war diplomacy, conscription, and military strategy, and making war ‘constitutive’ of ‘processes of nation-building and the establishment of new nation-states’, as Leonhard has rightly suggested, but not making nationalism necessary for the waging of wars. Historians’ continuing focus on the relationship between war and nationalism, which derives from a desire to debunk earlier scholars’ creation of myths of national ‘wars of liberation’, obscures a more fundamental point, which tends to be disregarded as self-evident but whose consequences have not been adequately evaluated: namely, that representations of war (and peace) in the public sphere had changed as a result of contemporaries’ experiences of warfare. Both ‘enlightened’ and ‘conservative’ commentators, from different backgrounds and with opposing views of politics and state policy, altered their conceptions of, and attitudes to, war during the years between 1792 and 1815, at least in part, it appears from a reading of their works and other writings, because of what they had seen and learned of military conflict. War had come during the course of the revolutionary and Napoleonic campaigns—often without national legitimation or a demonization of enemies—to be accepted by most writers and artists, and probably by many of their readers and viewers, as a discrete, threatening, and necessary state of affairs. What to do about that necessary threat remained a matter of profound dispute, dividing advocates of ‘national’, Prussian, ‘federal’, ‘confederal’, ‘reactionary’, ‘liberal’, and other solutions. Few nineteenth-century German commentators, however, denied that the threat existed.


201 Leonhard, Bellizismus, p. 6.
