

Romantic Representations of the Peninsular Wars (1810-1840) – Imag(in)ing and Re-creating the Other Europe in English Poetry

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Introduction – Alternative Poetic Reflections on War

History and Imagination, seemingly contradictory concepts with widely disparate objects, sometimes 'walk hand in hand', in ways that are mutually illuminating or suggestive. In particular, the whole 'landscape' of Romanticism will seem very different, not only when viewed specifically through the 'lens' of war and conflict, as has been the case of critics like Shaw, Watson and Bennett,¹ but also from the context of specific locations and nationalities, or the perspective of the non-British Other, as I will attempt in this essay. For Simon Bainbridge, poetry played a major role in the mediation of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars to the British public, producing a major transformation of the 'imagining' of war, and these conflicts had, in their turn, a significant impact on poetic practices and theories in the Romantic Period.² He explains "the extent to which the unfolding events in Spain have been imagined, and written, as romance", examining in particular the prevalent poetic questioning of the conflict.³

And, to Bainbridge's central combination of geography and genre, I add a third element in my essay: gender or the perspective of women. As he himself recognises, a number of significant women poets of the period took War as their subject. They not only 'moved' the damage of war from the public dimension of the military into the more private, feminised sphere, as was the case of Felicia Hemans and Charlotte Brontë, but they were also openly critical of it, like Ana Barbauld and Emily Brontë, suggesting that the epic or 'chivalrous' had to be reconsidered.⁴ As will be seen, many male Romantic poets, like Byron and Shelley, were also very critical of the wars, but for different reasons. Traces of doubt, melancholy, and even hysteria (as in the case of Branwell Brontë) emerge in many of their respective works, suggesting many alternative readings, namely involving Portugal – a country and a culture not usually considered in the vast majority of those studies.

¹ Philip Shaw's analysis, in *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (Palgrave, 2002) centres on the canonical male poets of the period, like Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Byron. J.R. Watson, in *Romanticism and War: A Study of British Romantic Period Writers and the Napoleonic Wars* (Palgrave, 2003), examines some of the less studied writers, such as Thomas Campbell. See also Betty T. Bennett, *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793–1815* (Garland, 1976).

² Simon Bainbridge, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

³ *Ibid.* "History in the Land of Romance: Poetry and the Peninsular War, 1808-1814", pp. 148-189 (148-150).

⁴ See Mary A. Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton, 2010).

The First Generation of Poets and the Iberian Wars – a Revival of Freedom?

Although not usually mentioned, the specific impact of the Napoleonic wars and, in particular, of the Peninsular War on the English Lake poets was considerable. One might not imagine William Wordsworth as a ‘war poet’, but he was in fact ‘wrapped up’ in the war with France from its very beginning, in the early 1790s, to its denouement at the battle of Waterloo, in 1815.⁵ Yet, his personal involvement with those conflicts assumed different forms throughout the years. As Simon Bainbridge explains: “When [Wordsworth] is writing about the suffering figure of war, that is a form of protest poetry. He’s an anti-war poet and he’s identified by the reviewers in political terms”.⁶ Soon after, as we know, the poet’s political sympathies would change and he encouraged the people of Britain to join up and resist Napoleon’s invasion. As Bainbridge notes, even if Wordsworth was delighted at the eventual defeat of the French, his patriotism was always ‘tempered’ by an awareness of the suffering caused by the war.⁷

This is clear not only from the *Thanksgiving Ode* he wrote to celebrate the English victory, in 1816, but also from the sonnet composed *On Visiting the Battlefield of Waterloo*, of 1820.⁸ This poem is full of solemn and sombre reflection, as the poet is too aware of the carnage that had taken place and the piles of dead bodies that had lain there. And, at the conclusion, Wordsworth’s view essentially echoed his sister Dorothy’s account of the visit:

All was joyless, blank and cold;
But if from wind-swept fields of corn that roll’d
In dreary billows from the meagre cot,
And monuments that may soon disappear,
Meanings we craved which could not there be found;
If the wide prospect seemed an envious seal
Of great exploits; we felt as Men *should* feel,
With such vast hoards of hidden carnage near,
And horror breathing from the silent ground!
(ll. 6-14)⁹

But perhaps the most famous protest, although not well known to readers in its day, is Wordsworth’s pamphlet *Concerning the Convention of Cintra*, which S.T. Coleridge himself helped to write and which Thomas De Quincey saw through the press;

⁵ Richard Moss, “Wordsworth the War Poet emerges from the Napoleonic war clouds in *Wordsworth, War and Waterloo* in Grasmere”, 31 March 2015, <http://www.culture24.org.uk/history-and-heritage/literary-history/art522065->

⁶ Quoted by Moss.

⁷ Quoted by Moss.

⁸ “Thanksgiving Ode” was written seven months after the battle, on the date for national thanksgiving. But the poem proved controversial because of its claim that war was part of God’s divine plan. Only in 1820 did Wordsworth travel to see the battlefield, with his sister Dorothy.

⁹ *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (1936), new edition revised by Ernest de Selincourt, London: Oxford University Press, 1950, p. 329. All the quotations from the poems of Wordsworth are from this edition.

it finally appeared on May 27, 1809, when public indignation had already subsided.¹⁰ By then firm supporters of the war against France, their pamphlet regarded the treatment accorded the French troops as unnecessarily kind and as profoundly detrimental to Spanish and Portuguese nationalism. It suggested that the national feeling of these peoples had, instead, to be aroused in order to defeat Napoleon.¹¹ Wordsworth not only commiserated the Spaniards, who had had a Bonaparte king imposed on them, but also the Portuguese for seeing their Prince Regent and his whole court chased into exile in Brazil. The 'cause of Spain' thus became the most righteous cause an animated Englishman could defend at home and fight for abroad.

Wordsworth emphasises what he calls 'the war of a people against armies', as he sees the Spanish rising in a huge popular revolt, not only against the Peninsula's *anciens régimes* but also against the Bonapartes: "These millions of suffering people have risen almost like one man, with one hope".¹² He sees them as motivated by "exalted sentiments of universal morality", and as expressing "a rational hope of reconstructing their ancient institutions, customs and laws...".¹³ Wordsworth recalls that as soon as the facts had reached them at home, "never was there such a burst of rage and indignation – such an overwhelming of stupefaction and sorrow" and, in regard of those who had allowed the outrage, he claims that "The heart of the country was turned against them, and they were execrated in bitterness".¹⁴ Because Portugal did not sign the Cintra Convention, and was not even consulted on its terms, Wordsworth deplors such treatment of Britain's oldest ally, as well as Wellesley's "deadness to the moral interests of the cause in which he was engaged, and of such a want of sympathy with the just feelings of his injured Ally".¹⁵

In *Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty* (1808-1811), we can find fourteen sonnets on the topic of the Peninsular War, reflecting upon the suffering and bravery of the Spanish people, who for Wordsworth symbolise liberty and freedom. All of them reflect the poet's unwavering confidence in the ultimate triumph of Spain over the tyranny of Napoleon; he even celebrates the tactics of the Spanish guerrillas, who are "Charged, and dispersed like foam", but "by signs do reunite," reappearing where least expected:

The roving Spanish Bands are reached at last,
Charged, and dispersed like foam: [...]
With combinations of long-practised art
And newly-kindled hope; [...]
[...]—Their sword is at the Foeman's heart;
And thus from year to year his walk they thwart,

¹⁰ *Concerning the Relations of Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal to each other, and to the common enemy; at this crisis, and specifically as affected by the Convention of Cintra* (1809). The original Cintra pamphlet runs to 4970 lines, and has an appendix of almost another 1000, including the twenty-two articles of the Convention, signed in late August, 1808.

¹¹ Until the 1808 uprising of the Spanish against the French, Spain was depicted in British poetry as a land governed by a tyrannical monarch and a repressive, corrupt church. After 1808, however, Spain is treated in numerous poems as a nation defending liberty.

¹² *Prose Works*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and J. B. Smyser, 3 vols, Oxford, 1974, i. 247, ll. 973–4. All the subsequent prose quotations from Wordsworth are taken from this edition [PW].

¹³ PW, ll. 983–9.

¹⁴ PW, i. 252, ll. 1181–1191.

¹⁵ PW, i. 251, ll. 1126–1146.

And hang like dreams around his guilty bed. (ll. 6-10, 12-14)

They seek, are sought; to daily battle led,
Shrink not, though far outnumbered by their Foes,
For they have learnt to open and to close
The ridges of grim war; (ll.1-4) ¹⁶

Wordsworth's 'Iberian Sonnets', not published until 1815, thus seem to echo *Cintra* in celebrating Spanish resistance. Joseph Palafox and the citizens of Saragossa are praised for their heroic, if ultimately unsuccessful, resistance to besieging armies. And the central theme of the *Convention of Cintra* recurs in another 1811 sonnet:

The Power of Armies is a visible thing
Formal and circumscribed in time and space.
But who the limits of that power shall trace
Which a brave People into light can bring
Or hide, at will — for freedom combating
By just revenge inflamed? [...] (ll.1-6) ¹⁷

At first seen as a Jacobin, S.T. Coleridge also contributed poetry on the war to anti-war papers and later to the government press. In particular, during the peace created by the Treaty of Amiens, Coleridge wrote anti-Napoleonic works for some papers, including *The Courier* and *The Morning Post*. And, as Stuart Andrews explains,¹⁸ it was in the *Courier*, from 7 December 1809 to 30 January 1810, that Coleridge's own "Letters on the Spaniards" were published – forming what he called 'an Appendix' to Wordsworth's *Cintra* pamphlet. Although Coleridge was now more concerned with the broader themes of Spanish independence than with the rights and wrongs of *Cintra*, he still exclaimed – "This is the true Question – Wretches! You were sent to deliver Portugal from the French – why then did you deliver the French out of Portugal?" ¹⁹ Ironically, when Coleridge eventually praised Wellington, in May 1811, for the 'victory' of Almeida, his laudatory words were undeserved. Massena's army had indeed been forced to withdraw, but Wellington had left his siege-engines at Lisbon, and so could not bring them against the fortified walls of Almeida until late in July; meanwhile, one thousand French troops succeeded in breaking out from the besieged town and re-joined Massena's forces.²⁰

Like Wordsworth and Coleridge, Robert Southey began as an anti-war poet who gradually changed his position to become a firm supporter of the war. During the protracted pre-Napoleonic stage, Southey had written "The Soldier's Funeral" and "The Battle of Blenheim", which he published in his *Annual Anthology* (1799), though he had already come to favour the war against France. The irony directed against the inhumanity

¹⁶ *Poetical Works*, 320-321.

¹⁷ *Poetical Works*, 255. Wordsworth wrote and published two other sonnets, in 1816, this time commemorating the Waterloo victory, the first containing six lines 'intended for a monument'. Also written and published in 1816 were Wordsworth's longer poem '1815' and 'On the day appointed for a General Fast'. Both echo the call for celebration (*Poetical Works*, 259–64).

¹⁸ Stuart Andrews. "Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge: Their Iberian Spring." *The Wordsworth Circle* 45, no. 1 (2014): 49-53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24044356>.

¹⁹ Quoted in Andrews (2014), p. 51.

²⁰ Andrews, p. 52.

of war present in those poems stands in striking contrast to his vindictive *Ode Written During the Negotiations with Bonaparte, in January 1814*, where he argues against the peace negotiations and in favour of the complete destruction of Napoleon.

Thus, Southey applauded the sending of an expeditionary force to Portugal, and rejoiced over England's intervention.²¹ But he also blamed the British government for their rather belated aid, as he thought that Wellesley had lingered too long before his forces disembarked in Lisbon. Southey's indignation at French occupation of the Iberian Peninsula intensified when details of the Cintra Convention reached the Lake District.²² Later, in 1809, Southey began writing his own history of the Iberian campaigns in Ballantyne's *Edinburgh Annual Register*; the 1810 volume covered 1808, and therefore events surrounding the Cintra Convention. This treaty (1808) indeed led to many cries of outrage in England, with the strongest protest appearing in the Whig press; for instance, *The Morning Chronicle* published a series of poems on the events in Portugal, many of which, like *Catch*, are angry satires which hold Wellesley and Dalrymple, as well as the entire ministry, responsible.²³

Later in the war, when public interest had already shifted from the peninsular campaigns, Southey's emphasis was different, as is clear from his *Inscriptions Triumphal and Sepulchral Recording the Acts of the British Army in Spain and Portugal*. His inscription "For a Monument at Vimeiro", written between 1814 and 1815 to commemorate Wellesley's victory preceding the Convention of Cintra, ends with the lines: "That day delivr'd Lisbon from the yoke/And babes were taught to bless Sir Arthur's name".²⁴ In fact, Southey had pictured for the Spanish and Portuguese peoples "their regeneration—a new birth into freedom, a resurrection of glory" and, among various constitutional options, envisaged the whole Peninsula being formed into "a great federal commonwealth".²⁵ But, instead, Ferdinand reclaimed the Spanish throne, going back on his word to preserve the new liberal constitution, while the exiled Portuguese Prince Regent returned from Brazil as John VI. As Stuart Andrews states, Southey's 'Iberian Spring' never turned into summer.²⁶

²¹ In 1807, the French invaded Spain, and by November had occupied Lisbon, ostensibly to close Iberian ports to British trade. The dethroned Portuguese royal family escaped to Brazil, and Portugal appealed to Britain for assistance. An expeditionary force was hurriedly assembled under the future Duke, then still Arthur Wellesley and only newly appointed Chief Secretary of Ireland.

²² Wellesley was apparently prepared to pursue the retreating and disorganized enemy, but his manoeuvre was vetoed by his newly arrived superior officers, who instead offered a peace treaty – the notorious Convention of Cintra. This required the French to evacuate Portugal, but provided for 20,000 French troops (and their booty) to be conveyed to their home ports in British ships.

²³ *Catch* is written in the form of a song with each verse attributed to the People, Sir Arthur, Sir Hew, and the Ministers.

²⁴ *Robert Southey: Later Poetical Works 1811-1838 [RSLPW]*. Ed. L. Pratt and T. Fulford. 4 vols. Pickering & Chatto, 2012, 1: 224. On the first of August 1808 Wellesley had landed his brigade on Portuguese soil, and occupied ground at Vimeiro to cover the disembarkation of the remaining British troops.

²⁵ *The Collected Letters [RSCL] Parts 1-4*. Ed. C. Boltom, T. Fulford, L. Pratt, I. Packer. Online edition. *Romantic Circles* 2005-2013, 3: 1710; *RSCL* 4: 2079.

²⁶ Quoted in Andrews (2014), p. 52.

According again to Stuart Andrews,²⁷ Southey's long celebratory poem, *The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo* (1816), does not offer a narrative of the battle, but rather reflections on war – prompted by a visit to the battlefield. Yet, as Laureate, he insists that his *Pilgrimage* is 'in a very different strain' from Walter Scott's triumphalist *Field of Waterloo*, published in the year of victory and dedicated to 'Her Grace the Duchess of Wellington'. When visiting the hospital where a Keswick resident had recently died, Southey notes even worse scenes outside:

What had it been then in the recent days
Of that great triumph, when the open wound
Was festering, and along the crowded ways
Hour after hour was heard the incessant sound
Of wheels, which o'er the rough and stony road
Conveyed their living agonizing load.²⁸

The second part of *The Pilgrimage*, 'The Vision', confronts the moral question that the youthful Southey had raised in previous poems: was so much death and destruction justified by the fruits of 'a famous victory'? And Southey's affirmative conclusion, summarised in his prefatory 'Argument', is that defeating Bonapartism offers hope of a better world, in which England will occupy a proud place.²⁹

More importantly, Andrews states that Southey recalls how, in the Peninsular campaign, the Spanish and Portuguese rebellions indeed transformed the Napoleonic war; even if the facts of the Portuguese insurrection against the French were (wrote Southey) "little known at the time, and have not been detailed in any language except their own".³⁰ And Southey significantly explains that it was "a general and simultaneous movement of the people", which Wellington himself had "thought even more extraordinary than that for which the Spaniards deserved and obtained universal sympathy and admiration".³¹ The two men – one a poet and the other a soldier – thus briefly acknowledge what history, and namely British history, has left unsaid to our days – the decisive role played by the Portuguese people in the defeat of the French.

Andrews concludes that the Lake poets may well have been politically innocent, but they were consistent in their defence of liberty, independence and republican principles for more than two decades; by 1810, they had not really abandoned libertarian causes.³² This idea could be confirmed by Southey's perceptive note (in January, 1811) on the crucial change that had occurred since their youthful 'Jacobin' opposition to Pitt's war: "The revolutionary ground of hope is Spain instead of France".³³

²⁷ S. Andrews, "Pilgrimage to Waterloo: Lake Poets and the Duke", *Romanticism*, Volume 23 Issue 1, pages 53-61, available Online Mar 2017.

²⁸ *RSLPW*, iii. 269, ll. 62-6.

²⁹ *RSLPW*, iii. 237-8.

³⁰ *Quarterly Review [QR]*, 13 (April and July 1815) 215-75, 234-6.

³¹ *QR*, 13, 236.

³² Andrews (2017).

³³ *RSCL* 4: 1851.

The Second Generation of Poets – Fighting Tyranny in Southern Europe

At home, the younger generation of Romantic poets who opposed Pitt's conservative policies – Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and Moore – were calling for a drastic reform in government, basing their agitation against the Tories mostly on what they believed to be the immorality of the war. Even before Napoleon's defeat in 1815, it was clear for them that Britain and her allies intended to restore the Bourbons to the throne of France, totally destroying the democratic spirit of the French Revolution. Thus, while the majority of Britons, having endured the long privations of war, were now far more concerned with conditions at home, Byron, Shelley, and other young radicals focused instead on international reform. To them, the war and its outcome represented a league of tyrants that had associated to defeat another tyrant; instead of advancing the establishment of government on the basis of liberty and justice, this coalition would, on the contrary, delay it on a Continental scale.

Byron's personal disappointment and disillusion at the outcome of the war were expressed in two poems printed anonymously in Whig-affiliated periodicals.³⁴ Yet, there is a great difference in tone between the works. In the earlier *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte* (1814), written when his hero was not yet completely defeated, Byron criticises and mocks Napoleon for having promised so much, delivered so little, and ended so ingloriously:

'Tis done – but yesterday a King!
And armed with Kings to strive –
And now thou art a nameless thing:
So abject – yet alive!
Is this the Man of thousand thrones,
Who strewed our earth with hostile bones,
And can he thus survive?
Since he, miscalled the Morning Star,
Nor man nor fiend hath fallen so far. – (1, ll. 1-9)³⁵

In the later *Napoleon's Farewell* (1815), written when his hero had already lost Waterloo and been sent to St Helena's exile, Byron shows much more sympathy for him and his defeat, probably as a consequence of the poet's own personal domestic misery at this time:

I have warred with a World which vanquished me only
When the meteor of Conquest allured me too far –
I have coped with the Nations – which dread me thus lonely,
The last single Captive to Millions in war. – (ll. 5-8)³⁶

³⁴ While his compassionate *Napoleon's Farewell* appeared in *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Examiner*, these together with *The Champion* and *The European Magazine* had already published his *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte*. Perhaps to avoid trouble, Byron pretended that these poems were mere translations from the French.

³⁵ *The Works of Lord Byron [WLB]*, the Wordsworth Poetry Library, Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1994, p. 84.

³⁶ *WLB*, p. 85.

But, in a similar vein to Wordsworth's and Southey's, Byron would also express his critical view of the infamous Convention of Cintra in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, initially published in 1812:

And ever since that martial synod met,
Britannia sickens, Cintra! at thy name;
And folks in office at the mention fret,
And fain would blush, if blush they could, for shame.
How will posterity the deed proclaim!
Will not our own and fellow-nations sneer,
To view these champions cheated of their fame,
By foes in flight o'erthrown, yet victors here,
Where Scorn her finger points through many
a coming year? (Canto I, xxvi)³⁷

Unlike other fellow poets, Byron indeed saw during his travels many of those places that were ravaged by the Napoleonic Wars, and he duly depicts them in the *Pilgrimage*. The First Canto of this epic poem describes Harold's travelling from Britain to Lisbon, and then through Spain. The part of crossing the Iberian Peninsula is most important from the perspective of the Wars, as Harold witnesses cities full of soldiers, battles, bloodshed and death.

Yet, after his arrival to Portugal, Byron comments on how much the British had done for their ungrateful allies. Not only had they helped to preserve the capital in its former glory, but they also, at the time of Byron's visit, kept a considerable force present in Lisbon as a protection – all part of Wellington's brilliant defensive tactics.

What beauties doth Lisboa first unfold!
[...]
But now whereon a thousand keels did ride
Of mighty strength, since Albion was allied,
And to the Lusians did her aid afford
[...]
Who lick, yet loathe, the hand that waves the sword.
To save them from the wrath of Gaul's unsparing lord. (xvi)³⁸

Rather than pushing into Spain, and being surrounded, Wellington chose to hold Lisbon, secure it and its supply routes and, only after that, attack. Byron refers that, even though the British were helping to save the Portuguese homeland, they were not much liked in Portugal. Still, in order to overcome the French conquerors, preserving their trade and alliance was essential for both countries.

And, though the Convention had seemed a very detrimental move,³⁹ Byron was aware that one of its consequences was that it had allowed the British forces to enter Spain – a great nation, one that the poet saw as being perhaps worthier of their efforts.

Awake, ye sons of Spain! awake! advance
Lo! Chivalry, your ancient goddess, cries,

³⁷ *WLB*, p. 180.

³⁸ *WLB*, p. 179.

³⁹ The Convention had permitted the French a free withdrawal from Portugal, and subsequently allowed Napoleon to return to the Peninsula with 200,000 men. From that point on, there would be no peace in the area until after Napoleon's abdication.

In every peal she calls—'Awake! arise!' (xxxvii)⁴⁰

Thus, the poet himself seems to be urging the Spanish nation into rebellion against their French oppressors. Even if, in 1809, when Byron or Harold was travelling through Spain, there was already a strong existing resistance, the French still controlled the majority of the territory. What is more, Napoleon had put his own brother on the Spanish throne.

Such be the sons of Spain, and strange her fate!
They fight for freedom, who were never free; (xl)⁴¹

Yet, with these words, Byron points out the strange situation for the Spaniards: they were fighting and dying to regain their freedom from the French, not realising that before the invasion they had also been oppressed. The only difference was that, before, the oppressor was Spanish.

Three hosts combine to offer sacrifice;
[...]
To feed the crow on Talavera's plain. (xli)⁴²

O Albuera, glorious field of grief!
[...]
A scene where mingling foes should boast and bleed. (xliii)⁴³

In this passage, Byron is also putting into relief the two famous battles of the Peninsular War, as both Talavera and Albuera were extremely bloody conflicts; they were fought on Spanish soil and, in both of them, there were huge casualties. For Byron, as a sarcastic opponent and commentator of the war, such wasting of human lives on all sides, just for the sake of individual glory, was incomprehensible.

The foe, the victim, and the fond ally
That fights for all, but ever fights in vain,
Are met – as if at home they could not die –
To feed the crow on Talavera's plain,
And fertilise the field that each pretends to gain. (xli)⁴⁴

[...]
Enough of Battle's minions! let them play
Their game of lives, and barter breath for fame:
Fame that will scarce reanimate their clay,
Though thousands fall to deck some single name. (xliv)⁴⁵

Simon Bainbridge compares Byron and Hemans's post-Waterloo Poetry and their continued reflection on conflict, suggesting that their obsession developed from the

⁴⁰ *WLB*, p. 182.

⁴¹ *WLB*, p. 182.

⁴² *WLB*, p. 182.

⁴³ *WLB*, p. 182.

⁴⁴ *WLB*, p. 182.

⁴⁵ *WLB*, p. 183.

Peninsular War.⁴⁶ He claims that one of their most pervasive representations is the siege, as the poets believed it clearly illustrated modern war's effects on the whole of society. For them, the siege combined the two spaces that poetry frequently strives to link, the scene of conflict and the home, and conflated them within one site — the fortress, the citadel, or the walled city. He concludes that both writers used the siege to explore the relations between war, gender, and history, exploiting the siege's rich allegorical and symbolic potential and, ultimately, finding in it a figure for their own poetic identity.⁴⁷

An even stronger sense of moral and political duty had always moved Byron's friend and co-member of the 'Pisan Circle' – Percy Bysshe Shelley, and it is perhaps significant that, as a young poet, he lived almost his entire life during the Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath. The major difference that they brought into his poetical production was the ferocious criticism of war and the graphic depiction of its brutality, as in *Queen Mab* (1813):

Now swells the intermingling din; the jar
Frequent and frightful of the bursting bomb;
The falling beam, the shriek, the groan, the shout,
The ceaseless clangor, and the rush of men
Inebriate with rage: – loud and more loud
The discord grows; till pale Death shuts the scene
And o'er the conqueror and the conquered draws
His cold and bloody shroud. (Canto IV, stanza 3, ll. 9-16)⁴⁸

He particularly mourned the carnage, waste, and poverty that he saw as the result of the conflict, while rulers seemed insensitive to these consequences and kept their power amid the destruction. He would make good use of the broadside format to circulate war verses, stating his early opposition to the war, as well as to the aristocracy and Napoleon.⁴⁹ This is also demonstrated in his *Esdaile Note-Book* poems – “The Crisis”, “To the Emperors of Russia and Austria who eyed the battle from the heights whilst Buonaparte was active in the thickest of the fight”, and *Henry and Louisa*. As Watson points out, “All Shelley's poems of this period when they mention the war, recoil in horror from the suffering which it engenders, and the inhumanity which it produces.”⁵⁰

Already in Shelley's juvenilia, we can find references to this theme. That is the case of an early composition,⁵¹ in which the speaker blames monarchy for the permanent state of war in the world and the prevalence of fear and terror among the humankind:

⁴⁶ “‘Of War and Taking Towns’: Byron's and Hemans's post-Waterloo Poetry, 1816–1828”, *British Poetry and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Visions of Conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 190-224.

⁴⁷ The theme of the siege is also recurrent in the fictional poetry written by the Brontë Sisters. But their fascination for it may well have derived in part from their readings of both Byron's and Hemans's works.

⁴⁸ P. B. Shelley, *The Complete Poetry*, Vol. Two, Eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, The Johns Hopkins U.P., Baltimore and London, 2000, p. 198.

⁴⁹ All copies of his protest verse were thought to be lost, but resurfaced from a private collection in 2006.

⁵⁰ J. Watson, (2003). *Romanticism and War*, Palgrave Macmillan, p.60.

⁵¹ A poem included in *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson* that Shelley published in November 1810, after taking up residence at University College, Oxford.

Not whilst some King, in cold ambition's dreams,
 Plans for the field of death his plodding schemes;
 Not whilst for private pique the public fall,
 And one frail mortal's mandate governs all.
 [...]
 Now o'er the palsied earth stalks giant Fear,
 With War, and Woe, and Terror, in his train; –
 List'ning he pauses on the embattled plain,
 Then speeding swiftly o'er the ensanguined heath,
 Has left the frightful work to Hell and Death.
 See! gory Ruin yokes his blood-stained car,
 He scents the battle's carnage from afar;
 (ll. 47-50, 68-74) ⁵²

We also find a political poem that he called *Poetical Essay on the Existing State of Things*, and published in 1811. Here, the young poet deals with issues including the abuse of the press, dysfunctional political institutions and the global impact of war;⁵³ in particular, the radical 18-year-old Oxford student points out the horrors of the war and the suffering it brings to all:

Destruction marks thee! o'er the bloodstain'd heath
 Is faintly borne the stifled wail of death;
 Millions to fight compell'd, to fight or die
 In mangled heaps on War's red altar lie.
 The sternly wise, the mildly good, have sped
 To the unfruitful mansions of the dead.
 (ll. 1-6) ⁵⁴

Here, Shelley explicitly accuses the rulers and the ruling class of bringing the war upon common people, implying that the despotism itself incites the conflicts, and then spreads them to the world.

Ye cold advisers of yet colder kings,
 To whose fell breast no passion virtue brings
 Who scheme, regardless of the poor man's pang,
 Who coolly sharpen misery's sharpest fang,
 Yourselves secure. (ll. 37-41) ⁵⁵

But, in contrast with Byron's more sceptical view, Shelley still believed that all the suffering had to end one day; and, in his hopeful vision, those countries and their people would one day be free and equal, after having learnt from their previous mistakes:

Oppressive law no more shall power retain,
 Peace, love, and concord, once shall rule again
 [...]
 And error's night be turned to virtue's day. (ll. 166-172) ⁵⁶

⁵² P. B. Shelley, *The Complete Poetry*, Vol. One, Eds. Reiman and Fraistat, The Johns Hopkins U.P., 2000, pp. 89-91.

⁵³ The *Poetical Essay*, a 20-page pamphlet containing a 172-line political poem is "most respectfully inscribed" to Harriet Westbrook. Shelley wrote it during his first year at Oxford in 1810.

⁵⁴ P. B. Shelley, *The Complete Poetry*, Vol. One, Eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, The Johns Hopkins U.P., Baltimore and London, 2000, pp. 444-47.

⁵⁵ *The Complete Poetry*, Vol. One, p. 445.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 447.

During the 1793-1815 period, it was very common for entire poems to treat the experience of the war widow or of lovers parted by war. Quite often, the poems depicted a wife or sweetheart searching for her soldier on battle sites. Shelley's 1809 *Henry and Louisa* is written in this vein, with an anti-religious theme added to the anti-war theme. Louisa, too, searches the battlefield:

"Where is my love!—my Henry—is he dead?"
 Half-drowned in smothered anguish wildly burst
 From her parched lips—"is my ador'd one dead?"
 Knows none my Henry? War! thou source accurst,
 In whose red blood I see these sands immerst,
 Hast thou quite whelmed compassion's tearful spring
 Where thy fierce tide rolls to slake Glory's thirst?
 (II, ll. 194-200) ⁵⁷

Finding her Henry wounded and dying, Louisa willingly dies with him. Shelley depicts Louisa's death as an act of virtue based on love, and envisions a new anti-despotic movement as the result. As such, this early poem seems to anticipate his later treatment of the subject in *Queen Mab*.

Another critical, politically concerned poem, of 1811, bears the curious title of *A Tale of Society As It Is: From Facts*, which adds to its supposed authenticity. In line with the more sentimental literature of the period, it presents the pungent story of an old disabled woman, whose only son and support had been forced to go to war:

She was an aged woman; and the years
 Which she had numbered on her toilsome way
 Had bowed her natural powers to decay.
 [...]
 One only son's love had supported her.
 [...]
 But, when the tyrant's bloodhounds forced the child
 For his cursed power unhallowed arms to wield--
 Bend to another's will--become a thing... (ll. 1-3, 13, 18-20) ⁵⁸

In Shelley's critical interpretation, the son was taken away from his mother to fight for a tyrant and the tyrant's cause; he was turned into 'a thing', a soldier without emotions or a will of his own. As a result, the man's soul is shattered, and it is hard for him to come back to normal life, as he is traumatised forever; it is in this way that Shelley presents the psychological effects of the extreme brutality of the war on common men.

The year of 1812 was one of breakthrough in the Napoleonic Wars, because the British led their successful campaign across Spain under the command of the Duke of Wellington, and Napoleon was finally defeated in Russia. As a reaction to these events, and other forms of oppression, Shelley had written *The Devil's Walk: a Ballad*, a satirical poem, where the Devil and Reason stand in opposition:

Fat as the Fiends that feed on blood,
 Fresh and warm from the fields of Spain,
 Where Ruin ploughs her gory way,

⁵⁷ *The Complete Poetry*, Vol. Two, p. 123.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 32-38.

[...]
Where Hell is the Victor's prey,
Its glory the meed of the slain. (ll. 51-56) ⁵⁹

The Devil is inseparably connected to the Peninsular War, where for several years the British soldiers had been dying. The poet points out that the war was being led only for the good of the Devil, and only he was profiting from it, literally 'feeding on blood.' As in the other poem, Shelley ends this one with a prophecy (which only the Reason sees) that tyranny will end one day.⁶⁰

Three years after the end of the Napoleonic wars, in 1818, Shelley would publish a symbolic sonnet called *Ozymandias*. The poem bears the name of a powerful Egyptian pharaoh, whose old and cruel majesty had eventually been forgotten and buried under the desert sand. With this powerful image, Shelley again reminds his readers of the finality of monarchs and absolute rulers:

My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
[...]
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away. (ll. 1-2, 12-14) ⁶¹

Considering his previous criticism, it is quite possible that Shelley was depicting the story of Napoleon through that of Ozymandias: Napoleon had also led a military campaign in Egypt in 1798; and once a great leader, feared all around Europe, he too was defeated and his memory inevitably began to fade away.

Women Poets and the Wars – Engaging Imaginatively with Southern Europe

For long considered as exclusive masculine areas of influence and power, war and military conflict have also affected and interested a great number of female writers of this period. Their poetry, particularly that written about the historical events and public figures of the Peninsular Wars in Portugal and Spain, would not only constitute an alternative view of the 'theatres of war', but also a personal strategy to (re)write the texts, contexts and intertexts of European history.

In his "Fighting words", ⁶² Evan Gottlieb argues that the young Felicia Hemans and the older Anna Laetitia Barbauld intervened, with their own poetry but with very different motivations and results, in the vigorous public discourse surrounding the ongoing wars with France. These women felt empowered to write in a very informed,

⁵⁹ *The Complete Poetry*, Vol. One, pp. 123-27.

⁶⁰ Influenced by Coleridge's and Southey's *The Devil's Thoughts*, Shelley wrote this anti-establishment, anti-war ballad and had it printed as a broadside, which resulted in the arrest of Shelley's servant, as he was the one distributing the broadside.

⁶¹ *The Complete Poetry*, Vol. Three, p. 946.

⁶² Evan Gottlieb, "Fighting words: representing the Napoleonic Wars in the poetry of Hemans and Barbauld", *European Romantic Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3, July 2009, 327–343.

cogent, and rigorous manner about subjects deemed to be traditionally male. While Hemans's enthusiastic *England and Spain; or, Patriotism and Valour* (1808) explicitly supported the British participation in the Peninsular War, and was well received by the critics, Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812), by contrast, not only drew attention to the costs of war but also foretold Britain's eventual decline, being famously reviled by those same critics. In each poem, Gottlieb defends, "the poet challenges her readers to think of Britain, [...] as part of an interlocking web of nations making up the global world order."⁶³

For Gottlieb, Hemans's political meditation becomes somewhat problematic when, in her poem, she first tries to justify the destruction of past civilizations in the name of Freedom ("O'er Europe's cultur'd realms, and climes afar, / Triumphant Gaul has pour'd the tide of war", 5–6)⁶⁴ and, later, appears to promote a deadly kind of guerrilla warfare:

Rise, Freedom, rise! And breaking from thy trance,
Wave the dread banner, seize the glitt'ring lance!
With arm of might assert thy sacred cause,
And call thy champions to defend thy laws! (29–32)⁶⁵

She then establishes a major difference between the 'noble' motives that inform each country's war effort: in the case of the Spanish, it is the love for their nation that moves them and not, as might be expected of a powerful empire, the ambition of conquest:

Not to secure dominion's boundless reign,
Ye wave the flag of conquest o'er the slain;
No cruel rapine leads you to the war,
Nor mad ambition, whirl'd in crimson car;
No, brave Castilians! your's a nobler end,
Your land, your laws, your monarch to defend! (201–6)⁶⁶

But Hemans moves in uncertain terrain as to Britain's (real) motives for getting involved in the Peninsular War; it certainly was better for the English to fight the French on the Peninsula rather than closer to home, whether to defend their own nation from invasion or 'just' its strategic interests. Thus, her high 'moral ground' does not seem to be informed by the knowledge of what exactly was at stake in the major geopolitics.⁶⁷

In turn, Gottlieb reads Anna Laetitia Barbauld's *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* as a counterstatement to the optimistic patriotism of Hemans, refusing to offer the comfort of a happy ending. And if reviewers like J. W. Croker criticised it as inappropriate for a woman and the time of war, Gottlieb argues that the disquieting aspects of Barbauld's poem derive precisely from a female-centred viewpoint and a more universal scope,

⁶³ Gottlieb, "Fighting Words", 2009, p. 340.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

⁶⁵ P. 3 of Felicia Dorothea Hemans, (*née* Brown). *England and Spain: Or, Valour and Patriotism*. London: Caddell, 1808. Electronic Edition: <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/b/bwrp/HemaFEngla/1:4?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>

⁶⁶ Hemans, *England and Spain*, p. 10.

⁶⁷ As Gottlieb points out, "only later, and only once, does Hemans acknowledge that Spain had its own imperial ambitions in the not too distant past – ambitions that drove it directly into conflict with Britain" (391–6).

aspects that Hemans's poem seem to lack.⁶⁸ In contrast with her, Barbauld describes the situation as one endless, restless calamity, in a more abstract and timeless sense. She imparts a more general sense that warfare disrupts everyday life across Europe: "And where the Soldier gleans the scant supply, / The helpless Peasant but retires to die; / No laws his hut from licensed outrage shield, / And war's least horror is the ensanguined field." (19–22).⁶⁹ Barbauld shows that, in modern warfare, civilian people suffer almost as much as soldiers do, suggesting some knowledge of the havoc frequently wreaked on civilian populations in Spain:

Oft o'er the daily page some soft-one bends
To learn the fate of husband, brothers, friends,
Or the spread map with anxious eye explores,
Its dotted boundaries and penciled shores,
Asks *where* the spot that wrecked her bliss is found,
And learns its name but to detest the sound. (33–8)⁷⁰

Newspapers and maps provided the main sources of knowledge about the fate of loved ones across the Channel, as Gottlieb detects in Barbauld's scene of female reading, yet the knowledge gained serves only, he adds, to increase the misery of the surviving spouse.⁷¹

Gottlieb thinks that Barbauld demonstrates a more realistic pessimism: a desire to 'tell it like it is', against Hemans' sentimentalised idealism.⁷² She indeed declares that the end of Britain's financial strength and of its ability to resist the pressure of the Continental Blockade is near, seeing (like Shelley) its imperial expansion as a sign of its already fading eminence:

If westward streams the light that leaves thy shores,
Still from thy lamp the streaming radiance pours.
Wide spreads thy race from Ganges to the pole,
O'er half the western world thy accents roll. (79–82)⁷³

But, in contrast with Barbauld, Hemans possessed very personal reasons for addressing such a momentous theme.⁷⁴ Both her husband, Captain Alfred Hemans, and two of her brothers (Thomas and George Browne) were doing military service in the Iberian Peninsula at the time of the Wars,⁷⁵ and, for this reason, she had become interested in all aspects of Spanish and Portuguese histories and cultures. For example, in an 1811 poem, written in heroic couplets, and entitled "To my Eldest Brother, with the British Army in Portugal", she envisions her dear relative "distant far, amidst th'intrepid host, /

⁶⁸ Gottlieb, "Fighting Words", p. 336.

⁶⁹ Anna Lætitia Barbauld. *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven, A Poem*. London: Printed for J. Johnson & Co., St. Paul's Churchyard. 1812. <https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/barbauld/1811/1811.html>

⁷⁰ Barbauld. *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*.

⁷¹ Gottlieb, "Fighting Words", p. 338.

⁷² Gottlieb, "Fighting Words", p. 338.

⁷³ Barbauld. *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*.

⁷⁴ Regarding Hemans and Charlotte Tonna, see Paula Guimarães, "The Rescue of Lusitania by Albion: Representations of Portugal in British Women's Peninsular War Poetry", *Journal of Anglo-Portuguese Studies*, no. 25, 2016, 147-166.

⁷⁵ Her brothers, Thomas and George, had served Sir John Moore and the 23rd Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

Albion's firm sons, on Lusitania's coast" (ll. 25-26), and anxiously anticipates the happy moment of his return.⁷⁶ Hemans imagined Southern countries, like Spain and Portugal, as the embodiment of a fading chivalric ethos, thus defending a preservation of a common European Gothic identity.⁷⁷

The famous *Pax Britannica* would indeed be an illusory pronouncement, as the immediate post-war generations came soon to realise, and the Brontës were very much part of this post-conflict environment.⁷⁸ Deeply rooted national fears surface their poems, written between 1829 and 1846, such as the fear of invasion and of an impending revolution. In particular, their fictionalised war poems should be interpreted as an important poetic reflex of their times; this awareness of historical and existential conflict is suggested in Charlotte's poem "My Dreams" (of 1837):

My dreams, the Gods of my religion, linger
In foreign lands, each sundered from his own,
And there has passed a cold destroying finger
O'er every image, and each sacred tone. (ll. 19-24)⁷⁹

As early as July 1829, she wrote one of her first extant poems in collaboration with her brother Branwell. "High minded Frenchmen love not the Ghost" is an allusion to the impending victory of Lord Nelson over Napoleon, a warning to the 'Kingdom of France' of "the storm that is drawing nigh"; an omen of defeat for the French is present in "the troubled shimmering air" which foretells surrender, "shall bow at his knees" (ll. 3, 14-15).⁸⁰ Thus, the motives of war and nationalism are present from the very beginning of the Brontës' literary partnership, because it is from recent British history that they conceive their story(ies) in the form of poems.

As Emma Butcher refers, "throughout the 1820s and 1830s the air was still abuzz with war", and the Brontë family saw multitudes of soldiers return from battle overseas, suffering physical and psychological damage.⁸¹ Within the Haworth parsonage, their father, the Reverend Patrick Brontë held a lifelong obsession with the Napoleonic Wars; and this obsession, namely his hero worship of the Duke of Wellington, was passed onto Charlotte and Branwell. Besides, the newspapers and periodicals of the day were saturated with war commentary; Wellington and Napoleon, Butcher states, especially dominated the media: a favourite periodical, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, indeed dramatised the relationship between the two figures.⁸² Their rivalry was thus

⁷⁶ Felicia Dorothea Browne, *The Domestic Affections and Other Poems*, London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, Strand, 1812, pp. 145-147.

⁷⁷ In this context, *The Convent Bell*, a long narrative poem in seven cantos, published for the first time anonymously in 1819, constitutes a curious and pertinent example of that ethos/identity and of the polemic intervention in Portuguese soil. See Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, *The Convent Bell and Other Poems*, New York: Baker & Scribner, 1846.

⁷⁸ For example, Charlotte was born in 1816, just a year after the decisive battle of Waterloo ended.

⁷⁹ *The Poems of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Tom Winniffrith, Oxford and New York: Shakespeare Head Press / Basil Blackwell, 1984, p. 204.

⁸⁰ *The Poems*, p. 259.

⁸¹ Emma Butcher, "The Brontës at war: how Charlotte and Branwell brought Waterloo into their drawing room", Friday 29th April 2016, *BBC History Magazine*.

⁸² Butcher, "The Brontës at war".

sensationalised, leading to a form of cultural mythology: while Wellington emerged as a hero, Napoleon was presented as a tortured, evil genius.⁸³

But the children's imagination had also been fired and nurtured on more private events. In 1826, the Reverend Patrick Brontë had brought home a box of toy soldiers for his son, Branwell; almost immediately, each of the siblings picked one soldier and started to play war games. Entranced by the contemporary worship of military celebrity, Charlotte named her soldier 'Wellington' and Branwell named his 'Boney', after Bonaparte; more importantly, they began writing stories about their chosen characters.⁸⁴ In an attempt to rewrite recent history, Charlotte's early writings describe how her fictional Wellington, after winning the battle of Waterloo, sails to Africa to be crowned as its sovereign.⁸⁵

Branwell, in turn, reimagined Napoleon as the evil ruler of "Frenchysland", which was located off their fictionalised coast of West Africa. As Butcher recalls, his hero constantly plots to invade and is a repeated threat to Wellington's new kingdom; as a tyrannous ruler of degenerates and reprobates, his is a tortured self often subject to fits of paralysis and hysteria. Branwell eventually becomes bored of him and seeks to create his own character, who with the new pseudonym of Northangerland, is interestingly a revolutionary and a Republican.⁸⁶ With this personal conflict dominating the majority of Branwell and Charlotte's writings, Butcher observes, "it could be said that the siblings brought the battle of Waterloo into the drawing room"; she concludes that by staging and re-enacting a war with one another "they manage to translate mass conflict to domestic sibling warfare."⁸⁷

Emma Butcher has, more recently, argued that throughout their adolescent years, and into their early twenties, brother and sister combined an analysis of combat and individualism, demonstrating an understanding of contemporary perceptions of war trauma that were present within the publications of the period.⁸⁸ But her major argument is that "the siblings' vicarious response to the psychological impact of battle, [...], reveals the post-Napoleonic traumatic undercurrent running through society."⁸⁹ She states that within the biographies and periodicals, allusions to an unsettling mentality were evident, and the Brontës fed these influences into their fantasy world.⁹⁰ She argues that "the

⁸³ The children also read specific military journals, such as *The United Service Journal*, and military biographies; notably, by the early age of 13, Charlotte and Branwell had each read Walter Scott's eight-volume memoir *Life of Napoleon*.

⁸⁴ The Brontës interestingly imagine a close relationship between two military giants who had never met or even corresponded in reality.

⁸⁵ Between 1829 and 1839, Charlotte Brontë and her brother, Branwell, collaborated on a fantasy saga that was set in the imaginary, metropolitan kingdoms of Glass Town and Angria.

⁸⁶ Branwell's *alter ego* Alexander Percy was also known as Rogue, Lord Elrington and, finally, Northangerland.

⁸⁷ Butcher, "The Brontës at war".

⁸⁸ In her article of 2017 on 'War Trauma and Alcoholism in the Early Writings of Charlotte and Branwell Brontë', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 22:4, 465-481.

⁸⁹ Butcher, "War Trauma", p. 465.

⁹⁰ Butcher, p. 466. Charlotte and Branwell read and engaged with military memoirs in their early writing lives, namely George Gleig's *The Subaltern* (1825), serialized in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, and John Malcolm's *Tales of Field and Flood* (1829).

siblings were able to draw on a cultural recognition of trauma that had encoded itself artistically into post-Napoleonic culture.”⁹¹

In this line, Charlotte’s perceptive poem “He could not sleep!” (1837) depicts an anxious Zamorna lamenting over the battle of Evesham, the final battle of the Angrian Civil War (1834–7):

He could not sleep! his temples pressed
To the hard pillow throbbed with pain
The belt around his noble breast
His heart’s wild pulse could scarce restrain.

And stretched in feverish unrest
Awake the Great Commander lay [...]

The sods of battle round him welter
In noble blood that morning shed.

And gorged with prey & now declining
From all the fire of glory won
Watchful & fierce he lies repining
O’er what may never be undone. (ll. 5-10, 23-28) ⁹²

This dramatic language emphasizes the tormenting nature of the act of recalling the battle, and both the form and structure of the poem seem to emphasize Zamorna’s disquiet. The final line that laments “O’er what may never be undone” confirms the traumatic structure of the poem. In short, Butcher concludes, there is much language in this verse that implies Charlotte’s nuanced recognition and understanding of the mental effects of war.⁹³

Butcher also refers to Branwell’s tale *The Wool is Rising* (1834), within which his protagonist, Alexander Percy, formulates a similar lament to Charlotte’s Zamorna. Branwell’s story is written immediately after the ‘War of Encroachment and Aggression’, a fictional military campaign modelled on the Napoleonic Wars. After having witnessed a series of sustained and brutal attacks, Percy finds it difficult to adjust to post-war life and, feeling ‘harrassed’, locks himself away:

Man dashed on man, in trampled blood [...]
Where am I? Dashed into the hold upon a strangling foe
All men and smokes and shouts above
A writhing wretch below. (ll. 42-46)⁹⁴

Percy’s shocked, distressed mental state is indicated by the rhetorical question ‘Where am I’, suggesting that in his mind he is still in the thick of conflict. Butcher concludes that in the context of the early nineteenth century, when medical trauma was still under-

⁹¹ Butcher, “War Trauma”, p. 466.

⁹² *The Poems*, pp. 210-211.

⁹³ “War Trauma”, p. 467.

⁹⁴ Victor A. Neufeldt (ed), *The Works of Patrick Branwell Brontë*, Vol. 2, New York and London: Garland, 1999, p. 29.

researched, this psychological comprehension appears remarkable.⁹⁵ Thus, in their fantasy saga, both Charlotte and Branwell “construct a convincing pathology of trauma, in which a number of their military characters undergo life-changing psychological alterations as a result of their battlefield experiences.”⁹⁶

This process became gradually more sophisticated, as inner and outer conflict – body and nation – are symbolically merged in many compositions that emulate the real conflicts enacted in the Iberian ‘theatre’. One of Emily Brontë’s poems (of 1837) dedicated to the Gondalian wars, after describing the warrior’s frenzy in the heat of the bloody battle, gives way to a nightmarish despair:

‘Twas over – all the Battle’s madness
The bursting fires, the cannon’s roar
The yells, the groans the frenzied gladness
The death, the danger warmed no more

In plundered churches piled with dead
The weary charger neighed for food
The wornout soldier laid his head
Neath roofless chambers splashed with blood

I could not sleep through that wild siege
My heart had fiercely burned and bounded
The outward tumult seemed to assuage
The inward tempest it surrounded
(ll. 9-20, my emphasis)⁹⁷

Excerpts like these are important because, in the later Gondal saga, Emily introduced her charismatic heroine and *poetic persona*, Augusta Geraldine *Alme(i)da*, a tyrannical ruler interestingly named after a strategic Portuguese location and fortress. This historic municipality, in the northeastern border with Spain, Guarda district, was where (in July 1810) the first major battle on Portuguese soil occurred, at Rio Côa’s bridge overlooking Almeida. Napoleon’s troops, who outnumbered the allies, had forced the latter to retreat towards Almeida’s fortified walls. The French Emperor then decided to lay siege (of a type clearly alluded to in Emily’s poem above) to the strategically located town, before initiating a full attack on the heavily fortified walls. Masséna’s army started the assault in August and, after three days of intensive and ruthless combat, Almeida capitulated; this forced the British to surrender and hand over the Portuguese stronghold to Napoleon.

Augusta Almeida, as befitted a powerful female ruler, apparently collected several tragic lovers, including the handsomely dark ‘*Fernando de Samara*’, a passionate guitar player of a rival political faction, whose name was quite common in Portuguese, and who

⁹⁵ Although Haworth housed some of the returning veterans, there is no evidence to suggest that the children ever met them. It is more likely that canonical literary works containing soldierly suffering, and the tragic aftermath of conflict, indirectly influenced the Brontë siblings.

⁹⁶ “War Trauma”, p. 470.

⁹⁷ C.W. Hatfield (ed), *The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Brontë*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 50.

was also one of Emily's major (doomed) poetic speakers.⁹⁸ Furthermore, like the Portuguese female monarch herself during the Peninsular Wars – D. Maria I, the 'mad queen' – whom she resembles in many ways, due to her pride and caprice, Augusta would in the end be forced to flee into exile, as an outlaw, pressed by an overwhelming foreign invasion.⁹⁹

This interest in Portugal had originated from Charlotte and Emily Brontë's habit of ransacking contemporary maps and travel books, with real locations of the Iberian Peninsula; they searched foreign, exotic names and places, as well as the distinctive physical and mental traits of the Southern Other, to use in their juvenile creations. After succeeding in all his military campaigns, Charlotte's hero and *poetic persona*, Arthur Wellesley, first became the 'Marquis of *Douro*' – in a very clear allusion to the decisive battle against Marshall Soult's forces that was fought by that famous Portuguese river, in the city of Oporto, in 1809.¹⁰⁰ Later, when his ambition turned into colonial enterprise, he obtained the title, and Byronic reputation, of 'Duke of *Zamor(n)a*'. This choice of name is not merely coincidental: the Spanish city of Zamora, near the northeast border of Portugal, and of historical importance to it, had indeed housed a major French garrison, which suffered a blockade operation by a brave Portuguese general (Silveira). The Brontës must indeed have read or learnt that the location had been one of the main operation theatres of the decisive Battle of Salamanca (July 1812) -- one that gave victory to Wellington and contributed to removing the French definitively from Portugal.

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⁹⁸ For example, Brontë's poem *F. De Samara to A. G. A.*, of November 1838, reveals de Samara's last (bitter) words to his beloved Queen Augusta, as he commits suicide for her sake.

⁹⁹ Known as the Pious (in Portugal), or the Mad (in Brazil), Queen Maria suffered from religious mania and melancholia, though she was the first undisputed Queen regnant of Portugal. With Napoleon's conquests, her court moved to the then Portuguese colony of Brazil. At the urging of the British government, on 29 November 1807, the entire Braganza dynasty decided to flee to establish a Cortes-in-exile in the Portuguese Viceroyalty of Brazil.

¹⁰⁰ Marshal Soult held the northern Portuguese city of Oporto and, in May 1809, Wellesley marched north to attack his forces. Helped by the Portuguese militia, he forced the French army to abandon its strong position behind a river barrier, the Douro, and retreat out of Portugal. Sir Arthur Wellesley (the Duke of Wellington) considered the Douro to be one of his most successful battles and, apparently, adopted '*Douro*' as part of his title.

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