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Voices in Britain during the Napoleonic Wars: Jane Austen

Lindsay Prescott

The life of Jane Austen, extending from 1775 to 1817, was a time of momentous change in British history. This period saw the nation almost perpetually engaged in warfare, first with the American colonies, and then with France. The bulk of the warfare came with the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), which affected the Austens largely through direct participation in the war by several members of the family. Jane Austen is famous for leaving the 'real world' out of her novels, but some of the details of history in this period do bleed through. Her novels and, even more importantly, her letters, give some insight into the effect of the Napoleonic Wars on the everyday people in England. Though the war could and did affect her life, Jane Austen's experience was largely unaffected by the horrors war can bring.

The Austen family's greatest link to the Napoleonic Wars comes through the naval careers of two of the Austen sons, Francis (Frank) and Charles. It should be noted that the Austens also had relatives who had a French father that was killed at the guillotine by the Revolutionaries, so the tragedies of societal upheaval were also not unknown to them. In addition, the fourth brother, Henry, joined the Militia for a few years during the war. The family had other connections who were also involved in the war, but these three brothers represent their direct connections to the conflict.

The lives of Austen and her friends and family were generally comfortable in the war years. The early life of the family was hard, but Jane Austen's clergyman father, George Austen, took pupils and focused on the education of his sons. The importance of maintaining family connections, no matter how distant, was paramount to finding success in British society at this time, and the Austens were successful in this endeavor. The second eldest brother Edward was adopted by wealthy relatives, and Francis and Charles' naval careers were aided by the connections the family worked to maintain. For Jane and Cassandra, the two girls in the family,

these connections meant that they sometimes were able to engage in social events of the highest order. At one ball, Jane writes to Cassandra that “I am not to wear my white sattin cap tonight after all; I am to wear a Mamalouc cap instead…It is all the fashion now, worn at the Opera, & by Lady Mildmays at Hackwood Balls…”[1] This exotic fashion was being worn in 1799 after Nelson’s first victory of fame, that of the defeat over the French at the Battle of the Nile.

Jane Austen represents a typical societal trend of celebrating the war in high society through fashion and parties. The parties thrown by the wealthy may have celebrated military victories, but propriety meant that “politics, the war, [and] the riots in the streets outside, were all taboo as subjects of permissible conversation.”[2] Different military accruements became fashionable from time to time, including when “ … the Duchess of Devonshire redesigned [uniforms] to clothe herself and the other ladies whom she formed into a female auxiliary corps … ” while they lounged in tents, watching the militiamen practice.[3] In all, the blatant disregard for the larger chaos that developed in the world at this time is the most shocking aspect, that “It seems almost unbelievable in the context of the political and economic situation at the time that one small section of the population … should have devoted so much of its energy to a series of dazzling parties.”[4] Jane Austen’s general silence on the subject of the war therefore reflects a larger societal trend which did not dwell on the realities of a war which was being fought outside of England.

For many in the Prince Regent’s circle and elsewhere among the rich and titled, anti-French feeling was largely absent. In this way, the feelings about the war and the enemy being

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[1] “Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 8-9 January 1799,” in Dierdre Le Faye, ed. *Jane Austen’s Letters: New Edition.* New York, Oxford University Press, 1995. 33. Critic Brian Southam mentions that this cap is likely named after the Mamelukes, who were the current ruling class in Egypt (Southam, 57).

[2] Venetia Murray, *An Elegant Madness: High Society in Regency England*. New York: Viking, 1999. 52.

[3] Tim Fulford, “Sighing for a Soldier: Jane Austen and Military Pride and Prejudice” *Nineteenth-Century Literature,* 57 (2002), 153-178.

[4] Murray, 201.

fought were largely divided along class lines. For those in the lower classes, the enemy was the French people as a whole. For the upper classes, the enemy was often defined as Napoleon, the tyrant who needed to be taken down, so that the 'French people' could reclaim their country and their monarchy. This feeling was shared by the "… elites and the liberals: [and while] the great majority of the public were violently anti-French … All those with the slightest pretention to fashion or taste remained dedicated Francophiles, filling their houses with French furniture, eating French food and drinking French wines."[5] This feeling was highlighted by the fact that the earlier events of the Revolution and the war with France gave cause for a great influx of French aristocrats to flee France and enter into British society.[6] Jane Austen, while not professing an obsession with French fashions or foods, also does not write any anti-French remarks within the novels and letters. The British way of life may be celebrated in the novels, but they do not specifically seek to disparage France or any other country in this celebration.

The Austen family did their part to protect their English life from its foes in this period. The naval careers of Frank and Charles Austen appear in their sister Jane's letters, though the mentions are hardly ever accompanied by reflections on their safety. The principle interests lie in the successes and travels that accompanied their careers; for most men entering into the Navy (voluntarily), service meant a steady income and the chance to improve one's lot in society. In 1798, Jane writes to her sister Cassandra of their father having written to Charles' admiral, questioning his chance for promotion.[7] The Austens knew that a higher rank meant job security and, most importantly, the chance at a larger percentage of prize money when enemy ships were captured. A higher rank did not guarantee safety, however, as Admiral Nelson's death at Trafalgar clearly conveys. The numbers for the war give one explanation on why concern was

[5]Murray, 9.
[6] Murray, 7.
[7] "Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 24-26 December, 1798," in Le Faye, 28-9.

suppressed by those that had relatives in the Navy: death in action only accounted for 3% of deaths in the Navy during the entire war with France (1793-1815), even though the death toll came to 100,000 in the end.[8,9]

Historian David Bell has persuasively written on the characteristics of this war being a different war, a "total war,"[10] and in having such a magnitude of totality (meaning the use of all of society's resources) it was not something from which to be easily extricated. Surprisingly, the Napoleonic Wars killed a higher percentage of England's population (3%) than World War I would a century later. At its peak in 1804, fully one-fifth of military aged men in England had joined the volunteers, hitting the peak at about 400,000 men.[11] The volunteers were never to leave England, and for the comfortable middling classes, it was an opportunity to show patriotism, and to help England in some way during the war. For some in the lower classes however, joining the volunteers was a way to try to avoid being balloted, meaning required to join the Militia or Reserves, something which the wealthier members of society could pay to get out of.[12] The Army was not deficient of men, however; in all, approximately 745,000 men fought for England between 1792 and 1815.[13] Surprisingly, the odds of coming out of the Army alive are slightly better than those for the Navy, although the number of men actually killed in

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[8] Brian Southam, *Jane Austen and the Navy*. New York: Hambledon and London, 2000. 67. Southam's number are slightly different than those cited by Gaston Bodant below.
[9] Gaston Bodant, *Loses of Life in Modern Wars.* London: Oxford University Press: 1916. 117-125. The exact statistics given in Bodant's treatise for the Navy in the years 1792-1815 are as follows: Total Fighting Men: approx. 250,000; Killed in Action: 6,663; Shipwrecked, Fire, Accident: 13,621; Disease (including wounded who died later): 72,102; Total Dead: 92,386 (37% of the estimated men who fought in the Navy).
[10] David Avrom Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as we Know It.* New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007.
[11] Austen Gee, *The British Volunteer Movement 1794-1814.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 2.
[12] Clive Emsley, *British Society and the French Wars 1793-1815.* New York: MacMillan Press, 1979. 102.
[13] Bodant, 117-125. In 1815, the population of England was estimated to have been 10.5 million, and the number of dead from the war was estimated at 311,806. This represents a 3% loss of population during the Napoleonic Wars. It must also be noted that this does not count men lost during the War of 1812, and that England had just lost men in the war against the American colonies. In the aftermath of WWI, the population of England was reckoned at 45.4 million, with 885,138 military dead, thereby representing a 2% loss of population. Though the Napoleonic Wars lasted much longer than WWI, the Great War is chiefly remembered for the advent of brutally affective new technologies and a generally appalling loss of life, so the numbers are still surprising.

action stood at 3% for both. Death by disease, whether by contracting it or as a consequence of being wounded, killed over 70,000 men, roughly 29% of the Naval force. [14] The overall numbers do show that while missing letters between Jane and her family may have expressed concerns over the safety of her brothers in the Navy, any hint of disease on their part in letters home would have likely been regarded as a serious danger. This feeling could only have been compounded by Cassandra's fiancé Tom Fowle dying of fever in the West Indies in 1798 while serving as a curate on a Navy ship.

But successes remain the focus, and in 1798, Jane writes to tell Cassandra that "Frank is made"[15] – he became commander of his own ship. Many men of limited means joined the Navy to enable themselves to rise in society, and the promise of remuneration was great when an enemy ship was caught, and its spoils split amongst the crew. For families like the Austens, this sort of promise for societal success and financial security was a *raison d'etre* for the Navy to be an institution to admire, but this feeling was not universal among all peoples in England. Jane Austen gives some insight into differing attitudes in her final full novel, *Persuasion.* Sir Walter Elliot, father to the heroine Anne Elliot, speaks thus of the Navy: "[The Navy] is … offensive to me … as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of … "[16]

Of course, with such snobbish views, Sir Walter is a figure of fun in the novel. This line does, however, show that Austen felt there was the presence of such attitudes in society at the time, and that the improvement of the lot of the lower classes must have spread fear amongst some of the upper class. These advances might lead to the kind of Revolution that led to war

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[14] Bodant, 117-125. The statistics for the Army for the years 1792-1815 are as follows: Total Fighting Men: 747,670; Killed in Action: 25,569; Disease (includes wounded who died later): 193,851; Total Dead: 219,420 (or 29% of the men who fought in the Army).

[15] "Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 28 December 1798," in Le Faye, 32.

[16] Jane Austen, *Persuasion*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2004. 22.

with France in the first place. The truth of the matter is that there were many men who were raised high by the profession: Admiral Lord Nelson was himself the son of a clergyman, like the Austen brothers.[17] Hard work enabled many to raise themselves via the Navy, including *Persuasion*'s hero, Captain Wentworth.

Nelson's dying in battle was in some ways a boon to his memory for the people of England; they were able to romanticize him as much as they wished because he was not alive to ruin the rose-colored picture, to remind society of his 'low' origins, (for those who saw this as an evil) or to continue to live with his mistress and illegitimate daughter. He was a key figure for creating a post-war memory, unlike Wellington, who went on to become a relatively unpopular Prime Minister. It does not surprise one, then, to find Trafalgar Square and Nelson's Column in central London, and not Waterloo Square and Wellington's Column. This is not to say that there was no positive social memory for Waterloo; in Austen's unfinished last novel, *Sanditon*, the proprietor of a seaside town named his home "Trafalgar House" – which, by the by, I almost wish I had not named Trafalger – for Waterloo is more the thing now. However, Waterloo is in reserve; and if we have encouragement enough this year for a little crescent to be ventured on … then we shall be able to call it Waterloo Crescent …"[18] Critic Brian Southam believes that this quotation is evidence of a general move towards favoring the Army within society after the win at Waterloo, and the Navy's losses in the War of 1812, but in the context of this last novel Austen is probably not saying this.[19] Jane Austen had two brothers in the Navy and would therefore not abandon her favoritism so easily. It is more likely this comment is another way to

[17] Southam, 268.
[18] Jane Austen and "Another Lady," *Sanditon: Jane Austen's Last Novel Completed*. New York: Scribner Paperback Fiction, 1998. 19-20. Austen wrote eleven chapters of *Sanditon* before relenting due to her final disease.
[19] Southam, 264.

build upon her satirical tone in a novel about a seaside town with fashionable aspirations and the hypochondriac characters who visit it and follow every latest medical trend.

Life aboard the naval ships was not something that ever directly appears in Austen's novels, though it is mentioned, and hints of her brother's naval life do appear in the letters. Austen's letters more often reference the taking of prizes than the danger that may accompany life at sea during wartime. In 1801, she tells Cassandra that Charles is well and that his ship "The Endymion has not been plagued with any more prizes."[20] Later in 1801, Jane again tells of her brother's escapades to Cassandra, telling her that "[Charles] has been buying Gold chains & Topaze Crosses for us; - he must be well scolded."[21] Another memorable exchange comes in a letter to Frank from 1813, where Jane ponders if "It must be real enjoyment to you, since you are obliged to leave England, to be where you are, seeing something of a new Country [Sweden] … Your Profession has its douceurs to recompense for some of its Privations … "[22] This serves principally to show that while England was often at war with the other countries in Europe, the English did not develop a universal sense of xenophobia. The feeling remained Anti-French or Anti-Napoleon, if there was any feeling at all about the enemy. This exchange also illustrates the persistence of religiosity being tied to national feelings; for a devout Anglican and Tory like Austen, a Protestant country was always preferred to a Catholic one.

There are a few mentions of naval life in the novels, including one admiral's wife in *Persuasion* commenting that she was more than happy to live on board ship with her husband.[23] Biographer Claire Tomalin believes that this means Austen did not know what life aboard ship

[20] "Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 11 February 1801," in Le Faye, 80.
[21] "Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 26-27 May, 1801," in Le Faye, 91.
[22] "Jane Austen to Francis Austen, 3-6 July 1813," in Le Faye, 214.
[23] Austen, *Persuasion*. 61.

was like, but this seems an unlikely deduction.[24] Austen rarely wrote about events and places of which she had no first-hand experience, but she evidently felt comfortable mentioning the Navy in her novels because she had two brothers to appeal to. After all, Austen would have been able to see the reports published in newspapers about the events and punishments carried out aboard naval ships.[25] In addition, Mary Crawford, the seductress of *Mansfield Park*, says "'Certainly, my home at my uncle's brought me acquainted with a circle of admirals. Of *Rears*, and *Vices*, I saw enough. Now, do not be suspecting me of a pun, I entreat.'"[26] This indelicate reference to the rumors of homosexual activities aboard naval ships, among other 'vices,' is a clear indication that Austen knew as much about naval life as anyone in society.

Despite indelicate references and other acknowledgements of the kind, naval men in Austen's novels are almost universally glorified. In *Mansfield Park*, heroine Fanny Price has a beloved brother who enters into the Navy. The most Navy-heavy book is *Persuasion*. In the novel, Anne Elliot is persuaded to reject an offer of marriage from Frederick Wentworth, for his position as a naval officer is not of sufficient social standing to satisfy her intensely classist baronet father. Eight years and much warfare later, Wentworth returns to England extremely wealthy, and holding the rank of captain. The 'one down' comment, the death of a navy man, is described as "death abroad," which either means he died of disease or that Austen is being discreet, and he died in action.[27] For Wentworth, however, the war did not mean anything negative; like Austen's brothers, he found money and success under the extraordinary circumstances that characterized England's position in a time of war.

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[24] Claire Tomalin, *Jane Austen: A Life.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997. 193.
[25] Southam, 184.
[26] Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003. 57.
[27] Austen, *Persuasion.* 46. The most tragic off-screen deaths in *Persuasion* do not happen at sea, but at home and due to illness. One is Lady Elliot, and the other is Captain Benwick's fiancé, Fanny Harville. Normally one might expect, in a novel set during wars, to find women characters mourning men lost in action, but instead we find Captain Benwick in a depression after his fiancé dies at home while he is at war. Whether it is an irony or a purposeful commentary by Austen is debatable.

Austen thus shows herself to be a clear advocate of personal responsibility and hard work, which characterized the developing middle classes in England of which her family was part. Though she was religious, she was not an obvious advocate for predestination - she recognized that people have a degree of control over their lives. This idea is best expressed by Eleanor in *Sense and Sensibility*, when Willoughby speaks of his cruel letter to Marianne, claiming he had no choice but to dictate it, and that "In honest words, [Miss Grey's] money was necessary to me, and in a situation like mine, anything was to be done to prevent a rupture."[28] Eleanor retorts with her opinion that "You are very wrong … very blamable … You have made your own choice. It was not forced on you."[29] Eleanor thus maintains that there is always a choice, and that Willoughby could have chosen to be a better person, and to stay with Marianne despite the hardships it may have caused. His deep-seated self-centeredness remains in power, and he does not strive to make the relationship work. This belief also relates to Austen's celebration of men like Captain Wentworth, who works hard for his fortune, and is rewarded with a comfortable life and marriage to the woman he loves. Men like Wentworth challenged the position of the nobility during the period of the Napoleonic Wars, as they became the ones who made the money and saved the country, whereas the position of the nobility and landed rich as stewards of the nation came under serious scrutiny.

All of the exchanges to and about the naval Austen brothers also give some insight into the minds of their family while they are away, both about the war and about the military and its place in society. Austen says in *Mansfield Park*: "Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery" and so she does in the letters as well.[30] While there is some acknowledgement of danger and discomfort associated with the profession, Jane Austen prefers to see her brothers' careers as a

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[28] Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003. 306.
[29] Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*. 307.
[30] Austen, *Mansfield Park*. 428.

means of enriching them, and of allowing them to see the world outside England. This world is very distant from Jane and her sister Cassandra, living with their mother in a lonely Hampshire cottage, and so the war is distant from their minds as well. They knew of Napoleon and his war, and likely worried more than their Georgian mores and familial habit of stoicism would allow them to express in their writings, but they seemed to have spent the war years focusing on other things. It was, after all, in these years that Austen wrote most of her published novels.[31]

This is not to say that Jane Austen was callous, or that she regarded the war as beneath her concern. Her consciousness about the subject was shaped by her position in society and her conservative political leanings, just as her novels are often shaped by these same conditions. As shown above, she did worry about her brothers; this comes through clearly in the subtext of a letter to Cassandra in mid-1805, the height of naval tension in the war: "The Ambuscade reached Gibralter on the 9th of March & found all well; so say the papers. - We have had no letters from anybody, - but I expect to hear from Edward tomorrow, & from you [Cassandra] soon afterwards."[32] Later in the war, she also reflects on the death of a family connection, Sir John Moore, who died in 1809 during the Peninsular Campaign: "This is grievous news from Spain. - It is well that Dr Moore was spared the knowledge of such a Son's death."[33] Her compassion for the army did not go far, however. She tells Cassandra a few weeks later that "Thank Heaven! we have had no one to care for particularly among the Troops - no one in fact nearer to us than Sir

[31] Austen's novel were written in the years as follow: 1795: first rendition of *Sense and Sensibility* written (published 1811); 1796-7: *First Impressions* or *Pride and Prejudice* written (published 1813); 1798-1799: *Susan* written (published as *Northanger Abbey* posthumously with *Persuasion* in 1818); 1813: *Mansfield Park* written (published 1814); 1815: *Emma* written and published; 1815: *Persuasion* written (published posthumously in 1818). Austen, *Mansfield Park*, ix-x.
[32] "Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 8-11 April 1805," in Le Faye, 99.
[33] "Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 24 January 1809," in Le Faye, 171.

John himself."[34] The men in the Army fighting for Wellington and the other British commanders were often of a lower class than the Austens, something which likely affected her views.[35]

Wellington himself was prejudiced against the class of his own soldiers, saying "The French system of conscription brings together a fair sample of all classes; ours is composed of the scum of the earth — the mere scum of the earth. It is only wonderful that we should be able to make so much out of them afterwards."[36] He gives tribute here to the fact that his soldiers have gone through a successful transition into worthy soldiers, but it is clear that he feels that these soldiers could not have completed this transition under their own volition. Austen shared the feeling, and in her novels, Navy men are always treated better than men in militias or the 'Regulars.'

Jane Austen's brother Henry joined the militia in 1796, and she wrote to Cassandra that "Henry is still hankering after the Regulars, and … he has got a scheme in his head about getting a lieutenancy and adjutancy in the 86th, a new-raised regiment, which he fancies will be ordered to the Cape of Good Hope. I heartily hope he will, as usual, be disappointed in this scheme."[37] This could be taken two ways, both of which could be valid: one, Austen does not wish another brother to be taken so far away from home; or two, Austen did not have a high opinion of the Army.

The former seems the most likely explanation, but it is also true that characters from the novels in the Army or militias are generally not good characters. There seems to be a difference between men who choose the profession and those who do not. For the Naval men, most chose the profession, and they are seen as morally worthy. For the Army men, those that chose the

[34] "Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 30 January 1809," in Le Faye, 173.
[35] Cecil, Lord David. *A Portrait of Jane Austen*. New York: Penguin Books, 2000. 156.
[36] Stanhope, William Henry. *Notes of Conversations with the Duke of Wellington.* 1886.
[37] "Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 9-10 January 1796," in Le Faye, 2.

profession seem universally to be wicked: in *Pride and Prejudice,* Wickham chose the militia instead of taking advantage of Darcy's charity; in *Northanger Abbey*, Frederick Tilney presumably chose to follow in his father, General Tilney's, footsteps. Colonel Brandon of *Sense and Sensibility* was forced to go by his father; Colonel Fitzwilliam, Mr. Darcy's congenial cousin in *Pride and Prejudice*, was probably forced to enter the Army as the second son of a nobleman, but it does seem likely he could have chosen to be a clergyman, or to be in the Navy. Wickham and Frederick Tilney both seduce women in their respective novels, demonstrating their dissolute tendencies.

A judgment call could be being made on the part of Austen and her society: men who joined the Navy were cleverer, more useful and more ethical than those that joined the Army. Wellington's opinion of his army cited above demonstrates this opinion, at least among the middle and upper classes, of which he and Jane Austen were part. This low opinion of the "Regulars" did not spread to the militia, however; they were quite separate. The militia was something singular, where

> All this cross-dressed fashion parade [of the nobility] was a long way removed from the horrors - and the glories - of battle, and it seemed still more so when it emerged that the noblemen and noblewomen at Coxheath had played at other games besides soldiering … The Duke of Devonshire dallied with Lady Jersey while his wife paraded … and-in a scandal that fascinated the press - Lady Derby left her husband and children to live with the Duke of Dorset … The militia's reputation, after these scandals, would be more about the risks it posed to English ladies' virtue than the threat it made to Frenchmen's lives.[38]

In *Pride and Prejudice*, George Wickham runs away with the Bennet family's youngest daughter, and although they are eventually married, he ends up being posted to the Regulars and sent into the north of England; like so many other army and militia men, he was able to escape his bad reputation in one town as his regiment moved on to another. In *Northanger Abbey*,

[38] Fulford, 156.

Frederick Tilney visits Bath with his family, seduces the scheming and flirtatious Isabella Thorpe, and then returns to his regiment, who will never know about his dallying. When the heroine Catherine Moreland asks his brother Henry Tilney why he pretended to have a real interest in Isabella, his vague answer makes her ask if he " … only made believe to do so for mischief's sake?"[39] Like the militiamen in the camps of the Duke of Devonshire, these fictional militia and army men roamed England making trouble, and stayed far away, both mentally and physically, from the actual fighting.

What this means in the context of domestic views on the Napoleonic Wars is that for people in the middling classes in England, there was little contact with the war or its consequences, except for their part within the general national consciousness that celebrated victories and mourned defeats. The contact they did have may have been with family members who entered the war, or with the lascivious militiamen roaming the country. Even those who, like Henry Austen, joined their local militias out of a sense of patriotism did not really know what it was to be in the military in the traditional sense. Some groups of militiamen and volunteers were used for coastal policing and for policing dissident workers in the north, but for the most part, their lives were social and not martial.

The policing of workers in the north came after some violence erupted, as men and women workers' lives were strained by the coming industrialization, and some bad harvests in the wartime years. The advent of new machinery in the northern mills brought out the wrath of the workers, who felt the machinery was going to displace them. In 1811 and 1812, a group called the Luddites caused the government major trouble by becoming more violent and better organized, smashing the machines they saw as a threat.[40] Austen does not discuss these events,

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[39] Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*. New York: The Modern Library, 2002. 123.
[40] Emsley, 157.

and when her brother Henry joined the Oxfordshire militia, he had no contact with these groups. These events do tell something about the experience of the war: if there was a burgeoning sense of nationalism in England during this time period, it was not universal. For men and women like the Luddites, the war was not as important as their own economic welfare.

For the lower classes, the sense of regional differentiation is fairly clear. In 1811, French-American traveler Simond noted that in the southwestern counties of England he traveled through he glimpsed some impoverished peoples and "I have necessarily seen them at their daily labour, in transversing the country, and I have had a glimpse of their habitations. All I can say is, that the poor do not look so poor here as in other countries: that poverty does not intrude on your sight; and that it is necessary to seek it."[41] He also notes that " … the houses [are] very poor indeed; the walls old and rough, but the windows generally whole and clean; no old hats or bundles of rags stuck in, as in America, where people build but do not repair."[42] Simond's notes reveal that life continued much as it ever did in the southern, rural parts of England, the area where Jane Austen spent her life and where her novels are set. Though port towns were full of sailors, and some towns had troops of volunteers, no great crisis loomed. This is in marked differentiation to a similar account published by an American who had been to France in 1807, and remarked that "The fields were principally cultivated by women … "[43] Such a deficit of men was not noted by Simond throughout his travels in England.

Among the men who did engage in military careers, the exception of Colonel Brandon as both an Army man and a good man is a notable one. He shares a sense of romanticism, morality

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[41] L. Simond, *Journal of a tour and residence in Great Britain during the years 1810 and 1811 with remarks on the country.* Microprint. Worchester, MA: The American Antiquarian Society, 1978. 13.
[42] Simond, 12.
[43] Paul Frichauser, *England's Year of Danger: A New History of the World War 1792-1815 dramatised in Documents.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1938. 181.

and honor with men like Captain Wentworth, as well as the experience of fighting abroad. Critic Tim Fulford believes:

> In both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion*, then, … Austen depicts British society as only semi-adequate to form the character of the nation's ruling class (and sex); instead, the renewal of the gentry must come from the hard school of engagement in action. In showing that such action will occur mostly on the far-flung seas and shores of Britain's empire, Austen anticipates the imperialist novel of the later nineteenth century.[44]

But it seems more likely that Austen is not looking forward to Imperialism but the rigidity of gender relations in the Victorian Era. Imperialism was only one venue in which the evolution of gender relations was played out. Men could still be men in Austen's novels without having engaged in action (see Henry Tilney, Mr. Knightley and Mr. Darcy). Their manly responsibilities as landlords, sons, fathers and churchmen reflects a general move away from the effeminate habits of the fashionable classes (both genders) which developed in the eighteenth century, and were instead replaced by the morality and familial duty that were hallmarks of the Victorian Age. The aristocracy, who had once defined all of society had in the eighteenth century become self-indulgent as they moved further away from any real work, or engagement in the fields of battle, which had once been a fundamental part of their lives. So, yes, military action has something to do with changing notions of manliness, but it is not the total picture. Being a hero, in Austen's view, meant more than manly action in foreign places; her brothers and her fictional men all share a sense of duty, moral conscience and responsibility that could be fostered and developed through situations other than those found in the military.

As has become evident, Austen's novels are not as historically unconscious as her critics have always claimed. The war generally remains out of sight, except in a few cases, but given what we know about Austen and her own experience of the Napoleonic War, this is an accurate

[44] Fulford, 178.

depiction of England at the time. Did real-life people, whose lives were like those in novels such as the bucolic *Emma,* or the intellectual *Sense and Sensibility,* really think about the War?

As has become evident, they did not; it did not deny them work or make bread too expensive, or severely endanger the lives of relatives who were not directly involved in the fighting. Austen's only explicit mention of Napoleon has nothing to do with the war: in sarcastically critiquing *Pride and Prejudice*'s lack of seriousness, she says that "… it wants to be stretched out here & there with a long Chapter – of sense if it could be had … about something unconnected with the story … a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparte … "[45] She also makes one comment on Nelson, writing in October 1815: "Southey's Life of Nelson' – I am tired of Lives of Nelson, being that I never read any. I will read this however, if Frank is mentioned in it."[46] Critic Brian Southam ponders the lack of concern with the war in his *Jane Austen and the Navy*, and questions whether it is heartlessness or something else. For Jane Austen, undoubtedly like many of her contemporaries, the lack of outward show of concern was not only the proper course of action but a way of building a defense mechanism. She certainly loved her brothers and wrote to Francis on the *HMS Elephant* in 1813 that "I hope you continue beautiful & brush your hair, but not all off."[47] Her sense of humor never left her, and for her family it was a source of joy through their troubles, whether they were related to the war or not.

For Jane Austen, the war years ironically represent the best years of her life. After the war concluded, she began to fall ill. Her brother Henry also lost his bank (the venture he undertook after his militia plans ended) in the post-war economic slump. Francis and Charles both rose to Admirals in the Navy, but long after Jane was able to see their successes. She died knowing England was safe but not knowing the success of her novel most heavily influenced by

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[45] "Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 4 February 1813," in Le Faye, 203.
[46] "Jane Austen to Cassandra Austen, 11-12 October 1813," in Le Faye, 235.
[47] "Jane Austen to Francis Austen, 3-6 July 1813," in Le Faye, 217.

her infatuation with the Navy, *Persuasion*. In the novel, she shows the ways in which naval men are " … belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance."[48] Naval men would not lack for occupation in the peace, either because the Empire needed them or because they could find useful employment at home. This is in marked contrast to army veterans, who came home to flood industries, and to cause some worry over where they would find employment.[49]

The remarkable aspect of this war was the fact that its effects were felt, in some ways, more by later generations than by the one which lived through it. The experience of Jane Austen can serve to show that the war was only a side-show to life in general, just as it was less important in the eyes of the working classes in comparison to their economic problems. The Napoleonic War caused considerable problems for those who fought in it or those who experienced economic problems, just as it caused success and provided a reason for celebration for others. This war also did much to change the way in which warfare has been understood in the years following. For people like Jane Austen or the Duke of Wellington, the war principally represented the triumph of the old order over the Revolutionaries and the power of tyranny that characterized Napoleon's reign. The French had rebuilt their feelings of nationalism in a Revolution that in many ways failed. They were united by the shared suffering of it, and by the call to fight for France, and not for a King. The British, however, were called to a sense of nationalism by the victory of the war, of the victory of their mode of life over all others. Jane Austen's novels celebrate the virtues of what she understands as a uniquely British mode of life, the way of life that had won out by 1815.

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[48] Austen, *Persuasion* 203.
[49] Emsley, 167.

It is understandable, then, that a sense of conceit was displayed by the Victorians over the next century. During that time, they fought few wars and expanded their imperial holdings, only slowly relenting to changes and reforms. The feelings of patriotism remained strained along class and regional lines, which is beautifully demonstrated by Elizabeth Gaskell's 1855 novel, *North and South.* In the novel, the heroine Margaret Hale comes from the South and represents all that is traditional and patronizing about the comfortable life she has always led in the southern parts of England. As she moves to the North, she finds people who are independent-minded and not unwilling to demand change, as their predecessors did during the Napoleonic Wars. The war had provided some impetus for change because the men who fought for Great Britain proposed strong demands for the extension of male suffrage; if they could die for their country, they should be able to vote in it.[50]

The Napoleonic Wars produced many memoirs from soldiers and sailors, and the wars began to be romanticized as Britain moved on into a new age. The Victorian Era is marked by this subtle shift, and it is evident that war can be gloried in easily by those who are not engaged in it. The nineteenth century and the *Pax Britannica* allowed for Britain to become very comfortable in its status and security, and to gain the luxuries of being nationalistic and Romantic. Demonstrations of the Battle of Waterloo became traditional spectacles on the anniversary of the battle each year.[51] Not all forgot the carnage of war, however: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote several shorts stories on the experience of the Napoleonic Wars in midcentury, and he imagines the after-effects of Waterloo:

> So off we set, the Major, the two sergeants, and I; and oh! but it was a dreadful, dreadful sight!-- … It was bad to see in the heat of fight; but now in the cold morning, with no cheer or drum-tap or bugle blare, all the glory

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[50] Emsley, 176.
[51] "Advert for a Model of the Battle of Waterloo." 1845. The British Library. http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/evancoll/a/014eva000000000u02510000.html (accessed 30 April 2009).

> had gone out of it, and it was just one huge butcher's shop, where poor devils had been ripped and burst and smashed, as though we had tried to make a mock of God's image. There on the ground one could read every stage of yesterday's fight—the dead footmen that lay in squares and the fringe of dead horsemen that had charged them, and above on the slope the dead gunners, who lay round their broken piece.[52]

Like the war itself, the period in which it was fought was a blaze of glory, gluttony and triumph. Doyle here represents the realism and scientific detail that characterized his Sherlock Holmes series, and the move toward scientific thought introduced by Darwin and others that represented the competing side of the dichotomy against Victorian conservatism. Only after the war did England change, did the economy fail, did reforms get pushed through, did the advancement of warfare cause battles whose magnitude had never before been seen. But like Jane Austen with her wit and her glorification of naval men and her celebrations of English life, the Romanticization of the war by the Victorians was perhaps just a way to cope with and to re-appropriate current and past events.

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[52] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. 2004. *The Great Shadow and Other Napoleonic Wars.* http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/11656 (accessed 14 March 2009).