Still Winter Falls

MARY A. FAVRET

> *Mean-time, in Sable Cincture, Shadows vast,*
> *Deep-ting'd and damp, and congregated Clouds,*
> *And all the vapoury Turbulence of Heaven,*
> *Involve the Face of Things. Thus Winter falls, . . .*
> —Thomson, "Winter"

WARTIME SUMMONS WINTER. IT WOULD PERHAPS BE BEST FOR this essay to be read as it was written—at the darkest time of the year, in weather able to chill the blood, numb the body, and halt the movement of clocks. Were it presently December in London, or in William Cowper's Olney, the sun would not rise before 8:00 a.m.; it would illuminate the sky for fewer than eight hours. Imagine the length of the cold night before electricity. Imagine your dependence on the fire you have built and before which you now sit, reading about a world at war. What makes you put down your reading, step away from the hearth, where "strange visages [are] express'd / In the red cinders," and look out the window at snow falling in the night?

> Tomorrow brings a change, a total change!
> Which even now, though silently perform'd
> And slowly, and by most unfelt, the face
> Of universal nature undergoes.
> Fast falls a fleecy show'r. The downy flakes
> Descending and with never-ceasing lapses
> Softly alighting upon all below,
> Assimilate all objects. (*Task* 4.288–89, 322–29)

When Cowper inserts these lines into "A Winter's Evening," he gives testimony not only of the night weather but also of a tradition of

MARY A. FAVRET teaches in the English department at Indiana University, Bloomington. Her latest book, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime*, is forthcoming from Princeton University Press.

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writing about winter and war, a tradition that raises haunting questions about the very possibility of writing in or of wartime.

Cowper has in mind, here as elsewhere in *The Task*, James Thomson's *The Seasons*, with its famous description of winter. In Thomson's "Winter," shadows, clouds, and turbulence "Involve the Face of Things" such that "Things," or what Cowper calls "objects," all wear the same inscrutable face. This is how "Winter falls"—a lowering opacity (line 57). Cowper moves from falling winter to an image of winter having fallen, a landscape transformed. Thomson's rendition similarly turns from the event and stages of snowfall to the very condition—the ground, as it were—of winter:

> Through the hush'd air the whitening shower descends,
> At first thin wavering; till at last the flakes
> Fall broad, and wide, and fast, dimming the day
> With a continual flow. The cherish'd fields
> Put on their winter-robe of purest white.
> 'Tis brightness all; save where the new snow melts
> Along the mazy current. Low the woods
> Bow their hoar head; and ere the languid sun
> Faint from the west emits his evening ray,
> *Earth's universal face, deep hid, and chill,*
> *Is one wild dazzling waste, that buries wide*
> *The works of man.* (229–40; emphasis added)

As with Cowper's view out the window, the promise of redemption in Thomson's verse (the robes of "purest white" and the hint of a *felix culpa*) opens onto obliteration: "one wild dazzling waste."

It is reasonable to read Thomson's image as a frozen repetition of the biblical deluge or wintry intimation of apocalypse, not necessarily linked to man's prosecution of war. Yet in this scene Thomson recapitulates a passage from Homer's *Iliad*, suggesting that the scene of snowfall and snow fallen is intimately linked with a long history of imagining warfare. Here is Alexander Pope's 1715 translation of a famous extended simile from book 12 of the *Iliad*, when the Trojans attack the Greek camps with a barrage of stones:

> Their Ardour kindles all the Grecian Pow'rs;
> And now the Stones descend in heavier Show'rs.
> As when high Jove his sharp Artill'ry forms,
> And opes his cloudy Magazine of Storms;
> In Winter's bleak, uncomfortable Reign,
> A Snowy Inundation hides the Plain;
> He stills the Winds, and bids the Skies to sleep;
> Then pours the silent Tempest, thick, and deep:
> And first the Mountain Tops are cover'd o'er,
> Then the green Fields, and then the sandy Shore;
> Bent with the Weight the nodding Woods are seen,
> *And one bright Waste hides all the Works of Men*:
> The circling Seas alone absorbing all,
> Drink the dissolving Fleeces as they fall.
> So from each side increas'd the stony Rain,
> And the white Ruin rises o'er the Plain.
> (lines 329–44; emphasis added)[1]

Hector's army may attack in summer, but still winter falls.

What Thomson—or Cowper after him—hears in the fall of winter are the muffled sounds of this distant battle, which he echoes closely. The stones that initiated Homer's description have been erased from the scene, as have the fighting armies and the specific circumstances of ancient warfare raging on the shores of Ilium. But in erasing these details the English poets are only following Homer's lead. The work of the simile tends toward assimilation and annihilation: differences, feelings, motives, bodies, structures, landmarks all fall away while "white Ruin" rises.[2]

Homer, Pope, Thomson, or Cowper could not have known of absolute or total war, or of nuclear winter. Yet the modern understanding of these terms, our conception of what war can come to, its prospects, owes something to these older poets and their vision of winter.

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For in addition to the mobilization of mass armies, domestic populations, and state economies to its ends, total war is distinguished by its tendency to limitlessness in scale and intensity and by its thorough lack of discrimination. Roger Chickering provides the definition accepted by most military historians:

> Total war is distinguished by its unprecedented intensity and extent. Theaters of operations span the globe; the scale of battle is practically limitless. Total war is fought heedless of the restraints of morality, custom, or international law. . . . The most crucial determinant of total war is the widespread, indiscriminate, and deliberate inclusion of civilians as legitimate military targets. (16)

A more chilling if curiously poetic rendering of total war comes from General Philip Sheridan, who, after his successes in the United States Civil War, advised the Prussians during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. "The people must be left nothing," Sheridan instructed, "but their eyes to weep with over the war" (qtd. in Stromberg). In a sense, the poets offer a more dire vision: in winter, even the ability to weep can be taken away.

Such devastation has a temporal aspect as well. In holding together the past and the future of warfare, and at the same time erasing nearly all but war's capacity for erasure, Thomson's imagery in "Winter" suggests a freeze or collapse of historical narrative; it even blocks one's sense of any particular historical situation. In his lines, the anthropological or cultural (the "works of man") lies buried, along with—almost—the literary allusion to the Trojan War. If the snowy field provides a figure for the field of war, it also serves as a figure for disfiguration, the effacement of what Cowper calls the "face / Of universal nature" and Thomson "Earth's universal face." Such burial leaves the field of history unmarked, inscrutable, and illegible: a white sheet.[3] There looms in the view out Cowper's window something that Susan Stewart identifies as the "third and anonymous possibility" of point of view, the view of "blindness, [or] the end of writing" (*On Longing* 3). Yet in dazzling but not quite blinding one's sense of what remains, the winter scene resists even as it accomplishes this blankness. Not only does Thomson's poem (following Pope, following Homer) carefully itemize what now appears lost to sight but also the alliteration of the verses, the laboring hexameter ("Fall broad, and wide, and fast . . ."), the epic echoes all insist on an aural sense that survives the blanked, blanketed field.[4] There are, if one listens or reads carefully, many layers to the snowy ground, not one final blankness but a sonic archaeology of "things," "objects," and even "faces" otherwise assimilated, covered over. The snow hasn't fallen; it is still falling.

Such scenes of winter fallen or falling suggest that writing about war in wintertime or about winter in wartime might be understood as the poets' desperate act against obliteration, against laying waste to the work of human hands, against what Hannah Arendt identifies as the absolute silence of violence: "Where violence rules absolutely . . . , everything and everybody must fall silent. . . . The point here is that violence itself is incapable of speech, and not merely that speech is helpless when confronted with violence" (18–19).

Layer 1: A History of Snow

Among the words used by Indo-European languages to designate the seasons, words for winter have shown "the greatest stability and the largest extension," according to Émile Benveniste, making winter a uniquely suggestive element of the common "Indo-European cultural lexicon" (31; my trans.). What makes winter's provenance particularly interesting to the linguist is an ambivalence built into the term from its most ancient appearance. From the first, Benveniste explains, "at the interior of this great lexical unit" two related meanings or "themes" emerged: the radical terms for both winter and snow. Though the associa-

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tion has been phonetically buried in English, it remained close and audible in many other languages of this group. In Ancient Greek, for instance, the root split between *xeimon* and *xion*; in Latin, between *hibernus* and *hiems*; similar pairings occur in ancient Armenian, Indian, and Iranian (31–32). The two meanings evidently parted to express related but distinct themes: one became a division of time, the cold part of the year, and thus a state or condition that could be used for marking time. The other theme, Benveniste reports, comprehends "everything else"; you might say it carries winter's figural and emotional baggage. It is "charged with qualifications and evocative of imagery"; it can be described as "rude," as "destructive"; it falls "like a calamity"; it is "created by demons." It lends itself to anthropomorphism and allegory. In brief, from ancient times, this "face" or figure of winter, the one aligned with snow, signifies less a portion of the calendar than "a time of cold and suffering" (34). It is clear, though, that Benveniste's two winters readily fall back into their ancient congruity, as in the opening lines of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," which mark the years since Britain entered into war with revolutionary France: "Five years, . . . with the length / Of five long winters" ("Lines," lines 1–2). This doubling at the heart of winter, a time of the year but also a time of suffering, may be one reason winter has served for so long as a marker—temporal but also affective—for war. Yet this part of the linguistic genealogy offered by Benveniste does not account for what appears, in the poems reviewed above, as a virtual anesthesia, where suffering—along with other powerful feelings, as well as the built world of humankind—is obliterated by snow. "On every nerve," Thomson remarks, imagining a man caught without shelter,

> The deadly Winter seizes; shuts up sense;
> And, o'er his inmost vitals creeping cold,
> Lays him along the snows, a stiffen'd corse,
> Stretch'd out, and bleaching in the
> northern blast. (317–21)

In the Ancient Greek of Homer's *Iliad*, the semantic ground of *snow* reveals a further ambivalence. Homer makes use of two separate radicals: *xion*, the term for snowy matter, the stuff itself; and *niphas,* which refers to "the atmospheric phenomenon," the sensation or felt experience of falling precipitation (Rosenmeyer 221). Thomas Rosenmeyer has surveyed the recurrent equation in classical literature of snow with warfare, and in his "inventory of the frozen wastes" he attends especially to *niphas* (222). In its variants he finds persistent connotations of "impetus, violence, and disturbance"; *niphas* is "snow as movement, and experience of movement," which is at the same time "cruel" and "injurious" (221). The *Iliad*'s several uses of wintry snowfalls emphasize the "density, swiftness and sheer energy" of snow as "bombarding atoms" (215, 219). The equation of wintry snows with military attack thus operates, at least in part, on the level of psychophysiological sensation. Yet in his analysis of the extended simile from book 12 of the *Iliad*, the attack of the Trojans, Rosenmeyer observes something different: not the dynamism of violent motion but rather an "ominous calm, [a] seeming motionlessness, [a] stifling of all other sensations." In Homer's simile, snow brings with it a "violence . . . held in suspense while nothing *seems* to move." Rosenmeyer continues, "But of course . . . [t]he violence persists, and is effective, in spite of the momentary delusion of motionlessness." This is a "pseudo-calm produced by the dove-tailing of contrary motions" (212). Despite the semblance of stillness, despite the dovetailing concord, violence still prevails.

If there is an explanation for this paradox of violent movement yoked to suspension or "ominous calm," it might be found in a return to the materiality or stuff of snow, *xion* rather than *niphas*. Both Benveniste and Rosenmeyer note that words for *snow* (including *xion*) have descended from the Indo-European morpheme *sneigh-,* which connotes adhesion or coagulation, stuff stuck together in a way that does not allow for movement

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or differentiation. It could be (and once was) used to refer to a warrior fallen to the ground: instead of saying he got himself killed, you could say in Attic Greek, "the fool got himself . . . stuck [*snowed*] to the landscape": it suggests a sort of ontological collapse into the ground itself (Rosenmeyer 221). When Thomson finds his poor man lying "along the snows," inert and ultimately "bleaching," he maintains this archaic meaning: the poor man has been rendered snow. Individual bodily integrity as well as feeling are laid waste. To be *snowed* in this sense is to suffer the violence of un-feeling: to become an object assimilated, to become silently snow. Two sorts of violence, then, seem to be at work in Homer's simile of battle as snow. On the one hand, there is a violence of hurled weapons, an injurious motion that the human body can feel and is meant to feel acutely. On the other hand, there is a violence of nearly molecular surrender, where all difference is subsumed or coagulated into this blanket of smooth white stuff, in which nothing moves or changes, because everything has been changed totally—assimilated.

The linguists insist that the meanings built into the ancient words for snow are not distinguishable temporally as snow falling and (then) snow having fallen; rather the two coexist along the hard-to-distinguish lines of physical force and one's simultaneous experience of that force. Or perhaps the experience is of force as cancellation of that experience, an ominous calm.

Winter fallen and falling tells one kind of history of war: war as something that you experience, an experience that deprives you of the ability to experience; war as sensory violence, felt and thereby unfelt; war as the erasure of these distinctions. So Cowper searches in his newspaper for news of a distant war, then looks out his window, sees the snow falling out there beyond his reach. In echoing the language of Thomson, Pope, and Homer, he offers the prospect, but also the history, of some unfelt, total change.

Layer 2: Still and Still

Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters!
—Wordsworth, "Tintern Abbey"

This is not winter as forgetting, though T. S. Eliot in the wartime reflections of *The Waste Land* would suggest something like the equation of winter snow and forgetting: "Winter kept us warm, covering / Earth in forgetful snow" (lines 5–6). Eliot's winter is conjured in retrospect; the snow may be forgetful, but the speaker certainly remembers something now gone. The poets I have been considering are not interested in winters (or wars) past, or they are only insofar as more winter, not spring, follows winter. Still winter falls. For Cowper, looking out the window on a winter's night and imagining a snowy prospect, stillness itself, the very word *still* forestalls forgetfulness. Its unsettled temporality finds a topographic equivalent in the snowy scene. Consequently, the word also raises questions about the supposedly settled matter of winter. In so doing, *still* marks Cowper's unsettled sense of distant war. At the outset of his "Winter's Evening," with the arrival of the newspaper, and in the only two direct references he makes there to warfare, he asks, "[H]ave our troops awak'd? or do they still . . . / Snore to the murmurs of th' Atlantic wave?" And again: "Is India free? . . . / Or do we grind her still?" (25–26, 29–30). If the remote battle of *The Iliad* lies buried beneath snow outside, then something related hovers still in these questions about distant imperial warfare. Cowper refers here to the final phase of Britain's war with its American colonies and to the ongoing wars in southern India conducted by the British East India Company. By the time *The Task* appeared in print (1785), the answers to these questions should have been settled. But they hang nevertheless unanswered in the text, open questions.

A sense of temporal irresolution, of uneasy persistence, works in tension with the other

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use of stillness that does settle, like a snowy blanket, elsewhere in book 4 of *The Task*. Recall Cowper as he reads the newspaper:

> I behold
> The tumult and *am still*. The sound of war
> Has lost its terrors 'ere it reaches me;
> Grieves, but alarms me not.

and as he imagines himself, as reader, traveling the globe:

> While fancy, like the finger of a clock,
> Runs the great circuit and *is still* at home.
> (99–102, 118–19; emphases added)

These latter uses of "still" suggest unmoved movements, changes without change, sounds silenced. When Cowper insists that amid the tumult "I . . . am still," he invites both the adverbial meaning ("even now," "yet," "persistently," and "enduringly") and the adjectival meaning of *still* ("quiet," "calm," "inert," perhaps "dead"). In "A Winter's Evening," stillness thus forms a troubled pivot for the poet on matters both temporal and geopolitical: "Hail, ruler of th' inverted year . . . ," the poet muses, "Thou hold'st the sun / A prisoner in the yet undawning East, / . . . But kindly *still* / Compensating his loss with added hours / Of social converse and grateful ease." Later in the evening, a lyre accompanies a singer, and together, "in the charming strife triumphant *still* / [they] Beguile the night." When the poet gazes on the "sooty films" hovering on the hearth, he imagines them "prophesying *still* / Though *still* deceived, some stranger's near approach." Situated at the end of a line, "still" serves as the hinge or turning point of his thought (120, 129–30, 133–35, 163–64, 294–95; emphases added). Even as irresolution marks Cowper's use of the word, elsewhere it inclines to a trade-off (compensation) between loss (or triumph) and ease (or strife). For Cowper, "still" often presses to the far side of its synonym "yet," where it shades into "nevertheless." Less a temporal marker than a hesitation in what otherwise might seem as settled as the snow, it introduces a doubt or counterthought. In either case, as temporal or ideological irresolution, the stillness of Cowper's winter evening does not readily fall into peacefulness.

Cowper is not alone in appreciating the peculiar charge of *still*, a charge that becomes all the more urgent in wartime. In a review of Wordsworth's reliance on the word, Heather McHugh has shown how *still* permits a singular form of historical perception, one that teeters between the adjectival and the adverbial, between what she calls "the natural life of events" (understood as past, finished, and fixed) and their "relationship to eventuality" (their ongoingness or persistence; 174). The poet's *still* thus holds together what would otherwise be two separate temporal levels in historical representation: the level of event and the level of preconditions or underlying circumstances. It provides a knotted temporality that lies within historiography. Reinhart Koselleck identifies the level of preconditions or ground as "those structures *in eventu* . . . that only '*post eventum*' become semantically comprehensible" (109). The eventual tendency of a situation is realized only in retrospect, after the event that the situation is now seen to have made possible. (His example for this relation is a battle).[5]

To see what McHugh and Koselleck are driving at, we can take a typical image from Wordsworth, such as "Black tempests bursting, blacker still in view" ("His Descendants," line 7). McHugh notices in these lines the sort of knotted temporality I have located in the earlier poets' depictions of snowfall: "a balance between what bursts and what remains motionless; between what happens merely to pass and what is held fast in the mind." She elaborates: "its image [is] taken into the memory; and [yet lingers] between what is happening now and what is about to happen (since 'still in view' can mean 'yet ahead')"—Koselleck's *in eventu* (174). For McHugh, the

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value of stillness for a poet lies in this "act of lovely equilibrium," which provides a "literary restoration, to time . . . of its all-at-onceness" even as it removes motion "from its perishing ways" (175). McHugh's is, needless to say, an optimistic, even therapeutic view of stillness, not knotted but resolved. It emphasizes balance over conflict and, in the end, discovers in stillness a host to feeling, perception, and memory. In a deft reading of the famous ice-skating episode from book 1 of Wordsworth's *Prelude*, McHugh follows the movement of stillness ("flying still," "spinning still") to its culmination in finite verbs and a simile: "but still the solitary cliffs / Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled" (lines 451, 455, 458–59). In this winter scene stillness works to introduce a phenomenological "intertransitivity," an affecting movement back and forth between the figure of the perceiving subject and what would otherwise remain background, the perceived world, the earth itself. If the experience seems earthshaking, "it's because the skater is shaken; if the moment is moving, it's because the man is moved" (McHugh 177). The event and the phenomenological ground of the event, its preconditions or eventuality, are whirled into one.[6]

Wordsworth aligns stillness here with the emotionally momentous: he delivers a fleeting image or event into the hold of memory, where it can work on and be reworked by feeling. What then do we make of the anesthetizing impulse of Cowper's stillness, linked as it is with the blank whiteness threatening to cancel poetic figuration? "I behold / The tumult [of distant war] and am still." What happens when "the balance between what bursts and what remains motionless" is enlisted in the consideration of a war (bursting shells, motionless bodies) that hovers between violent events and their relation to eventuality? Who dares be moved along with this movement?

Unlike the Wordsworth that McHugh reads, Cowper catches the stillness of violence itself, of seemingly dovetailed yet ominous calm. In the irresolution that he maintains, stillness hesitates before the prospect of such all-at-onceness as well as its all-at-oneness, before the assimilation of all objects into what offers to be an absolute intertransitivity. (Recall the phenomenal intertransitivity, that union of subject and object experienced by the fallen Greek soldier, "snowed" along with the snowy world). In Cowper's lines, stillness does not collapse the difference between two temporal levels but rather sets them in jarring contrast, unsettling historical representation. If, in his rendering of a winter episode, Wordsworth achieves a sort of comprehension of the movement of the world, Cowper does not share that comprehension. His repeated invocation of the word "still" in "A Winter's Evening" is less a reparative strategy than a way of summoning alternatives to the lowering stillness of violence and its silence. It is crucial to hear in his "I . . . am still" the risk of being unmoved—frozen?—by the movements of the world, but it is also important to hear in its ambivalence (still prophesying, still deceived) something that keeps it from falling into absolute, earthshaken stillness, keeps it from being snowed. "Is India free? . . . / Or do we grind her still?"

Layer 3: Inactive War

Twenty years later, during the Peace of Amiens, Joseph Fawcett published his poetry collection *War Elegies* (1803), in which, perhaps following Cowper's prospect of a snowy world, he addresses a "stillness in the military tempest" (i). This stillness signals no end to war.

Fawcett's collection contains the poems "The Battle," "The Siege," and "Famine," but also poems on popular sentimental topics, like "The Despairing Mother" and "The Mournful Maid." In this wartime litany, his poem "To Winter" is an anomaly, for here Fawcett praises the season for putting a halt to warfare: winter seems to offer a climatological peace treaty. Yet his figuration of a

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pacific winter covers now-familiar ground: blank waste and the cessation of feeling:

> Hail, Winter, hail! Thy horrors glad my soul!
> Welcome thy bulkiest mass of rigid snow!
> Thy blasts, that roar as loud as thunders roll,
> And stern arrest, that stops the water's flow!
>
> *Tho' thy white scene, one blank, unfigur'd waste,*
> Nature's green charm and varied beauty veil,
> And thro' thy groves unloitering footsteps haste,
> Staid by no soothing note, nor balmy gale;
>
> Tho' shivering millions, while thy fury reigns,
> Feel thy cold empire o'er their idle blood;
> Who need alike, to shoot it thro' their veins,
> The hearth's kind sunshine, and life-gladdening food;
>
> Tho' many a traveler lose his viewless way,
> *Till thou have time on all his frame to steal*
> *The sleep, that bids his pulse give o'er its play,*
> *And his check'd heart for ever cease to feel, . . .*
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Yet, Winter, hail! Thy frowns my bosom cheer!
> I hear the voice of Mercy in thy wind;
> It calms inclemencies far more severe –
> It stills the wilder tempest of mankind!
>
> Thy blasts suspend the cannon's direr war:
> Thine edged cold the keener sword restrains:
> And, drench'd howe'er thy fields, no flood of gore
> Thy guiltless plain with human crimson stains. (1–16, 25–32; emphasis added)

Fawcett is writing before Napoléon's disastrous encounter with winter in Russia following the Siege of Moscow. The poem alludes to an earlier practice, common in Europe throughout the eighteenth century: armies retreated for the season to winter quarters to await weather more conducive to fighting.[7] Yet the hardship of the 1777–78 winter camp at Valley Forge, widely reported in the British press and soon worked into the mythology of the American War of Independence, had already complicated accounts of winter's inclement clemency. The first winter of that war found both armies holed up in winter quarters, with relatively comfortable shelter and access to supplies. During the second winter, however, the British quartered in the city of Philadelphia, and the revolutionary troops retired to Valley Forge. Poorly clothed (one man in four had no shoes) and housed for much of December and January in tents and temporary huts without any heat, the American troops saw with despair the snow fall relentlessly. Starvation and exposure pushed the rate of disease and death higher than anyone anticipated. In his report to Congress at the end of 1777, General Washington wrote that "unless some great and capital change takes place, . . . this Army must inevitably . . . starve, dissolve, and disperse" (qtd. in Trussell 17).[8] The American Joel Barlow, in his popular *The History of England, from the Year 1765 to the Year 1795*, contributed to the myth by making the frozen waste of that Pennsylvania winter starkly legible—and newly modern:

> The American army might have been tracked by the blood of their feet, in marching without shoes or stockings over the frozen ground from Whitemarsh to Valley Forge. Some hundreds of them were without blankets. In the circumstances they had to sit down in a wood, at the latter end of December, and to build huts for their accommodation. This mode of procuring winter quarters, if not entirely novel, has been rarely, if ever, practiced in modern war. (385)

In Barlow's and other contemporary accounts, Valley Forge marks the army's submission to winter in the name of liberty.[9]

Fawcett's "To Winter" proposes a different sort of submission, similarly dangerous but unredeemed by an ideology of patriotism or by a distinct (that is, completed) historical narrative. His winter and its devastations are therefore harder to read. Indeed, even as

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he calls winter merciful, he lists the familiar "horrors" by which winter has laid waste to the freedom and feeling of "millions." In bypassing the historical for the allegorical, he borrows extensively from the tradition of a warlike winter passed down from Homer to Pope to Thomson and Cowper. The epigraphs for his poem cite Horace: "*Informes hyemes reducit / Jupiter*" ("Jupiter calls back deforming / shapeless winter snows" [my trans.]); and Thomson: "Wintry blasts / Deform the year delightless," lines echoed in Fawcett's advertisement to *War Elegies*, where he calls attention to the "undisguised deformity of War" (iv). If winter is the only alternative to war, he seems to say, it is no less devastating. Here allegory serves as the form for deformation; consequently, the difference posited between war and winter is blurred.

Fawcett nevertheless places his poem of winter as war suspended in a particularly telling historical context: he locates it in the "stillness in the military tempest" associated with the 1803 peace treaty, a stillness he also characterizes as "armed peace" or "inactive war." The "stillness in the military tempest," in other words, rests in the fact that the military tempest is still present: Wordsworth's "blacker still in view." In the advertisement to his *War Elegies*, Fawcett offers perhaps the most incisive contemporary analysis of this season of ominous calm:

> [I]nactive war [is] an armed though a quiet scene; a season of calm, in a system of society containing all the materials of tempest and principles of storm; a motley picture, at variance with itself . . . of steel wiped of its sanguinous stain, but retaining its dangerous shape; of arms, put off by the wearers only to be reposited in arsenals; of forts, whose thunder is hushed, but that still threaten in silence with frowning battlements; of fleets and armies ceasing from murderous action, but maintained in proud existence; and having the venerable name of ESTABLISHMENTS; and of garments, though no longer "rolled in blood," continuing to be worn, with undiminished ornament, as the gay badge of barbarous occupation. (iii–iv)

The suspension of hostilities takes a decided leap from the dovetailed calm of Homer's battle scene outside the walls of Troy and from Thomson's "dazzling waste." It jumps to the institutions ("ESTABLISHMENTS") of the modern militarized state. These are war's disguised forms as opposed to its "undisguised deformations" (iv). It's as if the deformations found in the form of poetic allegory, in the winter of the poems, tell what the established forms of this historical moment would otherwise obscure: winter displays the truth of the decreed stillness. Under the Peace of Amiens, Fawcett understands, Britain is still at war; which is to say, war has established itself on the landscape, assimilating everything it touches into one "system of society" (34). At the same time, war as winter has shifted from unique event to exigent precondition or underlying structure: war quieted (stilled) and cleaned up (wiped of its bloody stain), but nevertheless and all the more *in eventu*, an eventuality.[10]

"Hail, all the rigours of thy tyrant's reign!" cries the poet in submission to this winter (34). The speaker of "The Mournful Maid," a later poem in Fawcett's collection, understands the situation even more intimately. "Alike to me if lowers or smiles the day," says the maid, whose lover has died in battle:

> If snows deface or flowers adorn the plain;
> My frozen breast admits no genial ray;
> There winter, everlasting winter reigns!
> (p. 36, lines 5–8)

Submission to winter is submission to a loss of distinctions, to everlasting unfeeling, to war—and here Fawcett is especially prescient—by other means.

Layer 4: The Faces of Winter

Thus far my archaeology of war and winter has yielded two crucial formal features, two

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aspects or faces that recur at every layer in the snow. Their recurrence makes it difficult if not impossible to distinguish one layer, one shade of whiteness, from another. The first feature is a sort of catachresis, where two separate levels of representation—falling and fallen, events and their preconditions, figure and ground—collapse into each other in ways that undermine historical narrative and thwart epistemology; critical differences become hard to see, allegory supplants history. One way to register this is to say that the figure that takes war for winter (or winter for war) resists being differentiated into this or that war, one winter and not another, one set of verses and not another; its totalizing impulse resists, in other words, an archaeology like mine. The second, related formal feature occurs at the level of sensation and motion, where violent activity is assimilated to blank unfeeling, so that violence—specifically, the violence of war—is conceived not as injurious action so much as an unfelt state: a quiet scene, a season of calm. The collapse of the event into *in eventu*, figure into ground, coincides with a numbing or cancellation of the senses; no sentient being is left to feel the violence. The prospect offered is profoundly disturbing: if the world were to go blank, who would feel it? Or, when you can no longer feel, will the world go blank?

It seems worthwhile, confronted with this bleached and bleaching prospect, to recognize that the poetry that brings together war and winter to create scenes of absolute effacement is itself elaborately figured. If Homer sees Jupiter as the agent of winter's onslaught, Homer's successors move from myth per se to personification. "See! where Winter comes," calls Thomson, "himself / Striding the gloomy Blast" (112–13). The poets call out to "him," to Winter, as if challenging his silence. "Hail, ruler of th' inverted year," sings Cowper in his "The Winter's Evening" (120). Fawcett concludes his poem, "Hail, all the rigours of thy tyrant's reign!" "Hail! Tyrant of the gloomy season, hail! . . . Lord of the freezing hour!" echoes Mary Robinson in the taunting notes of her "Ode to Winter" (lines 1, 25). William Blake, in his early "To Winter," calls out with supplication to the conquering figure: "O Winter!" And when Blake's apostrophe, like those of his contemporaries, falls on unhearing ears, his efforts to personify winter—to clothe it with skin and bones and put a scepter in its hand—only intensify, even as winter "unclothes" creation:

> He hears me not, but o'er the yawning deep
> Rides heavy; . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I dare not lift mine eyes
> For he hath rear'd his sceptre o'er the world.
>
> Lo! now the direful monster, whose skin clings
> To his strong bones, strides o'er the
> groaning rocks:
> He withers all in silence, and his hand
> Unclothes the earth, and freezes up frail life.
> (lines 5–6, 9–14)

Blake's poem does not give winter a face ("I dare not lift mine eyes," he writes, as if abased by the figure he has conjured), but his contemporaries press further. Fawcett insists that he can discern the tyrant's face: "Thy frowns my bosom cheer!" (25). Robinson, in her "Ode to Winter," accosts this "Tyrant" and "Intolerable Despot" (1, 23), insisting on meeting "him" face to face:

> I greet thine hoary brow and visage pale:
> I greet thy grey and solemn eye,
> Thy bosom deathly cold,
> Thy breath, that breathes to petrify. (2–5)

The animating force of such verses is relentless and intense. Winter's silent violence and violent silence are all the more cruel because Winter is personified; before such imagining, winter is simply voiceless, without eyes or ears, without in fact any human feature or feeling. So even as they turn to a long tradition, a culture of writing about winter and

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war in order to fend off the negation of that tradition and culture, the poets also cry out, desperately creating personifications in the face of this depersonalizing force.

In his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth famously rejects the poetic figure of personification for not dwelling, as he puts it, "in the company of flesh and blood" (200). Personification characterizes poems with less human feeling than the kind Wordsworth proposes; it sheds only "natural and human tears" (202). These poems about winter and war suggest precisely a personhood evacuated of "flesh and blood," bereft of "human tears." Stephen Knapp has argued that debates over allegorical personification throughout the eighteenth century turned on the issue of poetry's relation to impersonal power. If poetry could endow metaphors or abstract concepts "with the agency of literal persons," it also suggested that the process could be reversed, that literal persons could be metaphorized or turned into abstractions (2). Literary personification, it was understood, illuminated the vulnerability to sublime violence of what Knapp calls "literal persons . . . [with] empirical consciousness" (3–4).[11] By this logic, war literalizes, even epitomizes the figurative threat of personification: it converts flesh and blood into the sublime abstraction of the nation, into sacrificial metaphors. Fallen bodies can be made signs of, say, undaunted purpose. Blood on the frozen wastes can become legible as the figures of liberty. When these poets persist in giving War a face, animating Winter as conqueror, they emphasize not that warfare is the activity of persons but just the opposite: that war, like the snow of winter, saps real persons of feeling, features, and agency. In this way personification, as a form of animation, discloses the surrogation of life, the transfer of life from persons (and, in most of these instances, the natural world as well) to impersonal force.[12]

Stewart observes that "a ready animation of all things results in a widespread amnesia regarding death" (*Poetry* 333). She is speaking not about personification per se but about the animating powers of postmodern media. It is possible to imagine the personification of winter in these Romantic poems as forerunner to the abstracting force of our contemporary media, where the pain and suffering of individual bodies are either forgotten, discounted, or rendered spectacular, where animation lodges not in bodies but in technologies. But whatever technologies are at work in the medium of print poetry, I want to distinguish—not assimilate—them, insisting that they do not in this case provide the same "ready animation of all things." Rather they demonstrate that the animation of one thing, call it winter, requires the desolation of "all [other] things": the abjection of the poet ("Hail! Tyrant"); the rapacious "uncloth[ing]" of creation; the annihilation of a felt, sensual world. The destruction of life, the erasure of "the face of universal nature" is not forgotten by such animation but starkly attested. The response is dialectical, poised like Cowper's stillness between two possibilities, between a blank sheet and a densely layered field of felt experience, between what has happened and what is happening.

There is a great deal at stake here for the poets, for they understand that the work of their hands is uniquely threatened by the winter of war. They acknowledge the danger that war will literalize what poetry shows as figural; that war will anesthetize what art has made felt; that simile, allegory, personification will all be changed utterly into a new, senseless reality. These poems feel the danger intensely. "Tomorrow brings a change, a total change!" Cowper pronounces, as he looks out the window in Olney at the falling snow (322). Stewart, poet and critic, having finished a chapter titled "War and the Alienation of the Senses," looks out her window in 2002 and wonders, "Perhaps I am writing at the end of a world" (*Poetry* 333). C. K. Williams on an evening in February 2003 turns off the TV with

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its news of impending war in Iraq and writes a poem that opens with the "bitter" "slashing" winter weather outside (lines 1, 2), and ends, as I end too, thinking about feeling:

> I was thinking,
> as I often do these days, of war;
> I was thinking of my children, and their
> children,
> of the more than fear I feel for them,
>
> and then of radar, rockets, shrapnel,
> cities razed, soil poisoned
> for a thousand generations; of suffering
> so vast it nullifies everything else. (37–44)

Yet, the poem does not end there. None of the poems actually ends there. Another line follows, another stanza, and another; the poet is still writing.

Some of what I am about to describe is horrifying. I know, because it horrifies me. There is a tendency—psychiatrists call it "denial"—to put it out of our minds, not to think about it. But if we are to deal intelligently, wisely, with the nuclear arms race, then we must steel ourselves to contemplate the horrors of nuclear war.

The results of our calculations astonished us. In the baseline case, the amount of sunlight at the ground was reduced to a few percent of normal—much darker, in daylight, than in a heavy overcast and too dark for plants to make a living from photosynthesis. At least in the Northern Hemisphere, where the great preponderance of strategic targets lies, an unbroken and deadly gloom would persist for weeks.

Even more unexpected were the temperatures calculated. In the baseline case, land temperatures, except for narrow strips of coastline, dropped to minus 25 Celsius (minus 13 degrees Fahrenheit) and stayed below freezing for months—even for a summer war. (Because the atmospheric structure becomes much more stable as the upper atmosphere is heated and the low air is cooled, we may have severely underestimated how long the cold and the dark would last.) The oceans, a significant heat reservoir, would not freeze, however, and a major ice age would probably not be triggered. But because the temperatures would drop so catastrophically, virtually all crops and farm animals, at least in the Northern Hemisphere, would be destroyed, as would most varieties of uncultivated or domesticated food supplies. Most of the human survivors would starve.

—Carl Sagan, *The Nuclear Winter*

Notes

1. Cowper himself translated the *Iliad* later in the century but downplayed the absolutism of the "waste" in this passage, which concludes:

> while all beside
> Lies whelm'd beneath Jove's fast-descending shower,
> So thick, from side to side, by Trojans hurl'd
> Against the Greeks, and by the Greeks return'd
> The stony vollies flew; resounding loud
> Through all its length the battered rampart roar'd.
> (lines 335–49)

2. Shakespeare's Leontes catches the predicament exactly, just after he has witnessed his son whisper "a winter's tale" into his wife's ear and just before he unleashes lasting winter on his own household and kingdom:

> Why, then the world and all that's in it's nothing,
> The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
> My wife is nothing, not nothing have these nothings,
> If this be nothing. (*WT* 1.2.293–96)

3. Milton had taken this erasure one step further, suggesting in his characterization of the uncharted regions of hell that the "frozen Continent" will swallow up the traces of war itself:

> Beyond this flood a frozen Continent
> Lies dark and wilde, beat with perpetual storms
> Of Whirlwind and dire Hail, which on firm land
> Thaws not, but gathers heap, and ruin seems
> Of ancient pile; all else deep snow and ice,
> A gulf profound as that Serbonian Bog
> Betwixt Damiata and mount Casius old,
> Where Armies whole have sunk. (*PL* 10.587–94)

Unlike the later poets, Milton still ties this "profound" epistemological gulf to a particular geographic site: the region near Mount Cassius between Egypt and Jerusalem, on the coast of Sinai. In ancient times, Mount Cassius was the site of a plentiful mole of salt, which perhaps accounts for Milton's association with the snowy landscape of hell.

4. The tactile register is also operative here, as if in defiance of the numbing cold: fleece and down are brought in to characterize the snow; the weight of bowing, bending, and burial are stressed.

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5. Koselleck elaborates on the interrelation of these two levels, their mutual work in the writing of history. To obtain meaning, he says, events need to be placed within these larger structures. Since his example is a battle, it is worth citing at length: "That a battle can be executed in the simple rhythm '*veni, vidi, vici*' presupposes specific forms of domination, technical disposal over natural conditions, a comprehensible relation of friends and foe, etc.; that is *structures belonging to the event* of this battle, which enter into it by determining it. The history of this one battle, therefore, has dimensions of different temporal extensions contained in the narration and description long 'before' the effect which lends 'meaning' to the battle is reflected. This is a matter of *structures 'in eventu'* . . . notwithstanding the hermeneutical reassurance that they only '*post eventum*' become semantically comprehensible" (108). The rhythm imparted by Caesar's famous triplet of verbs establishes the tempo of the narration of the event—the effective tempo of the event; but its decisive beat would be impossible without the "different temporal extensions" provided by the longer-term structures or circumstances that "enter into it by determining it." Koselleck insists that the two levels of historical temporality cannot be reduced to each other; their coexistence produces an "indissoluble remainder" or "hiatus" in the practice of history (110). In this thinking, the poet's use of *still* marks that impossibility in historical writing, that hiatus or remainder. In so doing, it blurs the outlines of history, collapsing figure and ground into one.

6. Like Cowper, Wordsworth is following the lead of Milton here, who also played with the versatility of *still*. Near the end of "The Winter's Evening," Cowper in fact plays tribute to Milton, echoing the very intertransitive (and intergenerational) use of the word that McHugh finds in Wordsworth:

> As twice seven years, [Milton's] beauties had then first
> Engaged my wonder, and admiring still
> And still admiring, with regret supposed
> The joy half lost because not sooner found. (714–17)

Here, too, however, Cowper sneaks in with his double "still" the question of loss and recompense.

7. The late-eighteenth-century "Treatise on Winter Posts," written in the wake of the Seven Years' War, explains the logic of this hibernation: "When the setting in of severe winter weather makes it probable that the end of the campaign is approaching, the army moves into quarters of cantonment, and remains ready to assemble in order of battle at the shortest notice, until reports of the separation of the enemy's forces are confirmed by the most indubitable intelligence" (Lindsay 269).

8. For accounts of the Valley Forge winter, see Bodle 1–13, 103–243, and Busch 67–80. For contemporary accounts, see "History," *Annual Register . . . 1777* 140–41; "History," *Annual Register . . . 1778* 211–38; Aikin 49–50; Andrews 379–80; and Barlow 384–86.

9. In both the United States and England, however, the periodicals took the Americans' willingness to submit to "all the extremity of the season" as a sign that the Americans would not submit to a tyrant ("History," *Annual Register . . . 1778* 212). The Americans were determined, observed the *Annual Register*, "to suffer all things rather than submit to force" ("History," *Annual Register . . . 1777* 140). Exposure to the freezing weather indicated by an inverted logic the "warmth . . . of their attachment, both to their general and to the[ir] cause" (Aikin 51). Not by fighting but by suffering winter, the Americans could be read as passionately resisting their opponents. The Americans' "willingness to submit to the various hardships, as well as inconveniences of so uncomfortable a situation . . . displayed a resolution and perseverance which were convincing proof to all reflecting people, that the war, however fatally it might terminate for them, would be of long duration, were Britain determined to prosecute it until America was totally reduced. The resources of a people who could bear trials and sufferings with so much patience and readiness, were, at all events, considerable, and not easily exhausted" (Andrews 380).

10. William Godwin, in a similar vein, protests the need for military training in peacetime: "It cannot be a matter of indifference to the human mind to be systematically familiarized to thoughts of murder and desolation" (2: 97).

11. Knapp aims, more broadly, to investigate the dynamics of the sublime, which he finds typified by the personified abstraction. In his reading of the Kantian sublime (modified by Coleridge), the sublime experience has an antithetical structure, often "divided between two agents: the personified abstraction, frozen in a posture of fanatic reflexiveness; and an urbanely skeptical speaker, who contemplates the personification as his own allegorical surrogate" (4).

12. In "A Winter's Day" (1798?), Joanna Baillie works extensively to counter this dynamic by having a human figure emerge out of the winter storm and elicit feeling from a group of people sitting around the fireside. As he is welcomed into the home of a poor farmer, the figure is recognizable as a war veteran. He appears first as personified Winter ("his hair white as the snow on which he treads" [line 187]), transposed, however, from allegory to the sentimental type of the veteran and nearly transposed again into a falling, but not fallen, tower (his body "shakes like some old ruined tower" [191]). He wobbles between personified abstraction and ruined thing; therein lies his pathos. His feebleness "shows still" his lost strength; he "still maintains" the bearing of a soldier while wearing the rags of poverty (190, 193). He is and he is not what he was and what he is, still.

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