

Department of English and Cultural Studies  
McMaster University

English and Cultural Studies 725  
Course Description (Autumn 2013/Revised)

## Romanticism, War, and Peace



Gottfried Helnwein  
*The Disasters of War 13:  
In Memory of Francisco de Goya* (2007)  
180 cm x 125 cm  
mixed media (oil and acrylic on canvas)

Can the university stand for peace?

--Susan Searls Giroux,

*Between Race and Reason: Violence, Intellectual  
Responsibility, and the University to Come*

As Canadian troops pass the twelve-year anniversary of their deployment in Afghanistan, it seems apposite to offer a graduate seminar that explores the question of war and peace, and that traces modern notions of these concepts and cultural phenomena back to the end of the eighteenth-century. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars mark a consequential and deadly shift in the nature and aims of state-sponsored armed conflict. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, war is transformed *from* a dynastic and, to a certain extent, self-limiting affair, *to* “total war,” war drawing on the entirety of a nation’s resources (human, economic, cultural, etc.) and having as its object not only military supremacy but also the annihilation of the enemy. In 1795 Immanuel Kant is the first philosopher to give a name to the advent of this horror: “war of extermination.” He worries aloud that war has become a perpetual fact of global life, always happening or about to happen. Around 1800, Europe and Britain bear witness to the

massification of war and war deaths, and to the development of economies more closely wedded than ever before to war financing. The insurgent and guerrilla emerge as militarized subjects, while the lines between civilians and combatants irreversibly blur. In what ways does total war shape the Romantic cultural imaginary, differently forming and deforming literary, philosophical, and artistic practice? Is the spectre of wars of extermination the primary historical referent of Romanticism rather than, as has been previously thought, the French Revolution? How does war unsettle the very idea of Romanticism? What does early nineteenth-century war discourse make of war? Is armed conflict generative, regenerative, and even redemptive, or is it murderously destructive? And if the nature of war undergoes a sea-change around 1800, what then of peace? How does the invention of modern warfare also mark the emergence of new ways of thinking about just communities and non-violence? What is the difference between

peace and pacification? Is what comes after war a time of repose, reaction, and abstention, or is it a moment of intensified critique, a chance for dissenting imaginations to flourish and be heard? Or both? Amid and after war, how do key concepts like domesticity, nationality, sexuality, subjectivity, history, cosmopolitanism, citizenship, readership, spectatorship, capital, and representation warp, tremble, and morph? What is the fate of “the laws of hospitality,” as Kant had described them, in a deeply belligerent and inhospitable age? What does it mean to bear witness to war?

These are the primary questions that this graduate seminar seeks to explore. To establish a set of working principles and useful theoretical provocations we will begin with Mary A. Favret’s *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime*, a text that augurs a new line of thought in Romantic studies focussed on the symptomatic presences of war in everyday life, and that gives us a generative critical language with which to consider the ways in which Romantic war inscribes present day understandings of both armed conflict and peaceful cooperation. We will also consider Jan Mieszkowski’s recent examination of the emergence of war-as-spectacle in the Napoleonic era, a shift that has ambiguous political, cultural, and ethical consequences in whose wake we still struggle. After considering Favret’s and Mieszkowski’s book (and their Romantic archives--which range from poems to letters and from meteorological discourse to paintings to battlefield accounts), we will consider a range of other materials which explore the cultural and conceptual churn that late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century warring violence imposes, and the ways in which that violence contributes to the radicalization of the notion of peace and war...both then and now. We will address and in turn be addressed by Francisco de Goya’s infamous series of etchings, *The Disasters of War*, about eighty images from the 1810’s that open a gruesome window on the Peninsular War’s culture of cruelty, images that we will engage in conjunction with the work of two contemporaries: the Austrian-American artist, Gottfried Helnwein, whose sometimes shocking photo-series, *Disasters of War*, re-imagines Goya’s scenes of torture and death for the twenty-first century; Jake and Dinos Chapman’s notorious graffiti “destruction” of Goya’s prints, *Insult to Injury* (see example reproduced below). We will also read Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*, for which global war forms an absent presence that informs the novel’s *mise en scène*, reminding us that when the war comes home, home is never the same because of it. We will conclude the course with a close and careful reading of *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795), Kant’s experimental text indicting European warfare and colonial aggression, a text that is written in the form of a treaty and anachronistically modelled on several “failed” eighteenth-century peace projects. In addition to locating Kant’s text in its historical and cultural contexts (including its almost instantaneous translation and reception in Britain and France), and investigating its odd nooks and crannies, we will examine how and why Kant’s text speaks to the present day through a consideration of the *Perpetual Peace Project* (2010)--materials collected by the Slought Foundation that include interviews with leading philosophers and cultural theorists who are invited to explore why Kant’s text matters now.

After Friedrich Hölderlin’s elegy, “Brod und Wein” (1807), this course asks: “In a destitute time, what are poets for?” The seminar wagers answers to this pressing question, and considers how Romantic texts about war and peace speak both to and from a history that we have not yet exhausted. Favret argues that wartime deeply troubles the comforting boundary between a Romantic “past” and our contemporary “present,” and for that reason our seminar will move restlessly between the two times and places, each disfigured by war and each struggling to imagine peace.

In addition to contributing two response papers each for circulation and discussion in class, students will write a research essay due at the end of term. Students will also be invited to compose a collective multi-media memorandum about war and peace (modelled on the Slought Foundation's *Perpetual Peace Project* documentary), a memorandum that will then be posted on my website. In other words, students will ultimately be asked to create their own cooperative version of Kant's *Toward Perpetual Peace*, the critique of present-day violence and an affirmation of a more peaceful tomorrow with which the course begins.

No previous knowledge of Romantic literature or criticism is assumed or required. All students possessing intellectual courage and a robust spirit of curiosity are welcome!

**Email:** dclark@mcmaster.ca  
**Class day and time:** Monday, 12:30-3:20 pm  
**Office Hours:** Monday, 3:30-4:30 pm

### **Work and Mark Distribution**

Seminar Participation and Creation (15%)  
Response Papers (2-3 pages each; 2 x 15%=30%)  
*Occupy Peace Project* (10%)  
Research Essay (15-20 pages; 45%)

### **Assigned Texts**

Lots of supplemental materials designed to help you work with the course materials will also be provided to you along the way in the form of links to archives, attachments sent to all members of the class, and materials uploaded to Dropbox. One richly suggestive archive is the digitalized edition of Betty Bennett's monumental edition, *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793-1815*. <http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/warpoetry/about.html>

Austen, Jane. *Persuasion*. Ed. Linda Bree. Broadview, 1998.

Favret, Mary. *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010.

Mieszkowski, Jan. *Watching War*. Stanford UP, 2012.

Chapman, Dinos and Jake. *Insult to Injury*. [available on Dropbox]

Goya, Francisco. *The Disasters of War*. With a new Introduction by Philip Hofer. New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1967.

Helnwein, Gottfried. *The Disasters of War*. [www.helnwein.org](http://www.helnwein.org).

Kant, Immanuel. *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP. 2006.

*Perpetual Peace Project: Dialogues revisiting 21<sup>st</sup>-century prospects for international peace.*

Dir. Laura Hanna, Alexandra Lerrman, and Aaron Levy. (2010)

<http://perpetualpeaceproject.org/initiatives/film.php>

To see the film in two continuous parts, see: <http://vimeo.com/32634064> and

<http://vimeo.com/32635976>

### **Provisional Seminar Schedule**

September	9	Prefatory Remarks
	16	Introduction
	23	Introduction
	30	Favret, <i>War at a Distance</i> (Part 1)
October	7	Favret, <i>War at a Distance</i> (Part 2)
	14	No class on Monday because of Thanksgiving but a class on Mieszkowski will be held later this week.
	21	Austen, <i>Persuasion</i>
	28	Austen, <i>Persuasion</i>
November	4	Goya, <i>Disasters of War</i>
	11	Goya, <i>Disasters of War</i>
	18	<i>Perpetual Peace Project</i> (screening and discussion)
	25	Kant, <i>Toward Perpetual Peace</i>
December	2	Kant, <i>Toward Perpetual Peace</i>
	9	<i>Occupy Peace</i> presentation

### **Assignment Descriptions**

#### **Seminar Participation and Creation (15%)**

Instead of delivering formal presentations, members of the class will be encouraged to *create*, on an ongoing basis, a *lively graduate seminar*—i.e. an inquisitive and informed space of critical labour, discussion, and debate. All students will therefore be expected to contribute consistently and meaningfully to the intellectual life of the seminar, developing and volunteering questions and arguments as well as responding mindfully to queries and challenges that are put to them by their classmates and by their instructor.

Students must be willing and able to:

- read and engage all assigned materials.
- attend all classes and participate in all classes.
- explore and absorb as much related critical material as possible, both seeking this material out independently and in consultation with their classmates and instructor.
- develop questions and arguments that are directly relevant to the materials at hand, and actively to introduce these points into the class discussion on a consistent basis.
- listen and respond thoughtfully to the issues raised in class, engaging the issues in ways that complicate and advance the intellectual life of the seminar.
- foster a developing scene of pedagogy, bearing in mind that a central part of our task is to learn and to *teach* others.

At midterm, students will be given an informal assessment of the quality of their seminar participation work.

Authors of response papers circulated in a given class should contribute to the class discussion in an especially robust way, taking particular responsibility for *leading* the seminar on that day. In other words, be careful not silence yourself in class because all of us have your response papers in front of us.

### **Response Papers (2 x 15%=30%)**

Each student will be responsible for two 750-word (3 pages) responses to the readings, each of which is worth 15% of your final grade, for a total of 30%. Response papers should provide a succinct summary of and engagement with some of the text's most pressing themes, arguments, and questions. The response paper should be written in such a way to prompt and provoke discussion in class. Students who have submitted response papers for a particular class will be expected to defend and to elaborate upon their remarks. Remember: critique is welcome, but the object here is not simply to find fault, or be *seen* to be finding fault, but rather to *engage* the materials at hand, and risking the chance of taking some of their arguments on-board.

Note that it may not always be possible to take up particular questions raised in your response paper. It depends largely on the sorts of problems that the class on any given day wants to explore. But don't ever hesitate to press the class to address a question you have raised in your response paper! A simple intervention like this will do: "Okay, we've talked about the actions of Austen's female characters in the presence of the naval officers. But I'd like to point the class towards a related question, one that I raise in my response paper, and that is how the naval officers behave in each other's company...."

The response papers must be completed and circulated by e-mail to all members of the course (as well as to me) at least **24 hours** before the start time of class. Beyond that point no response paper may be submitted since it does not give the class or me time carefully to consider that paper. Failing to submit a response paper according to these stipulations will result in a zero grade for that paper. If for significant reasons you are unable to submit a response paper, a new and different response paper may be submitted for another class, but only after making special written arrangements with me. Students are free to exchange response paper assignments among themselves, but should inform me of this swap. Note: Ensure that the e-mail list to which you are sending your response paper is complete, i.e., that all members of the class, including your instructor, receive your response paper.

### **Occupy Peace Project (10%)**

The class will create a co-operatively developed video presentation, to be posted on the course web-page, that addresses the question of war and peace and that reflects the work that this seminar has accomplished over the course of the winter term. The objective here

is to reflect collectively on the question of peace—its problems and possibilities, its histories and futures, its conceptual, political, and ethical difficulties in wartime and in the wake of the wartime that is Romanticism.

### **Research Essay (45%)**

15-20 page essay. Students will write a research essay—i.e., an essay that fully engages extant theory and criticism and that either breaks new ground or significantly reframes existing arguments--on a topic of their own choosing. It's important to begin work on your essay earlier in the term rather than later, not only because of the complexity of the questions and problems with which you will be engaging, but also because it will take time to gather together the relevant primary and secondary sources. With the approval of the student, essays will subsequently be made available on the coursepage. I am happy to discuss your research essay with you at every stage, but all students are expected to consult with me about their work at least once prior to submitting the essay. Research essays are due in class 9 December 2013. Essays submitted after that date may not have a marking commentary. The very last day essays may be submitted for this course is 19 December 2012.

### **E-mail protocol:**

The Faculty of Humanities has issued the following set of instructions to students: "It is the policy of the Faculty of Humanities that all email communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University email account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. Instructors will delete emails that do not originate from a McMaster email account."

All e-mails must be written in full sentences (i.e. no point form, no text-messaging short form), and must contain a subject line that includes the course designation, i.e., "725." Receipt of all e-mails from me must be acknowledged.

### **Class cancellations:**

In the unlikely event of a class cancellation, students will be notified via their McMaster University email address.

### **University Statement Regarding Academic Dishonesty:**

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, specifically Appendix 3, located at:

<http://www.mcmaster.ca/univsec/policy/AcademicIntegrity.pdf>.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- i) Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- ii) Improper collaboration in group work (Insert specific course information)
- iii) Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld. See:

[http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/ac\\_ethics.htm](http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/ac_ethics.htm)

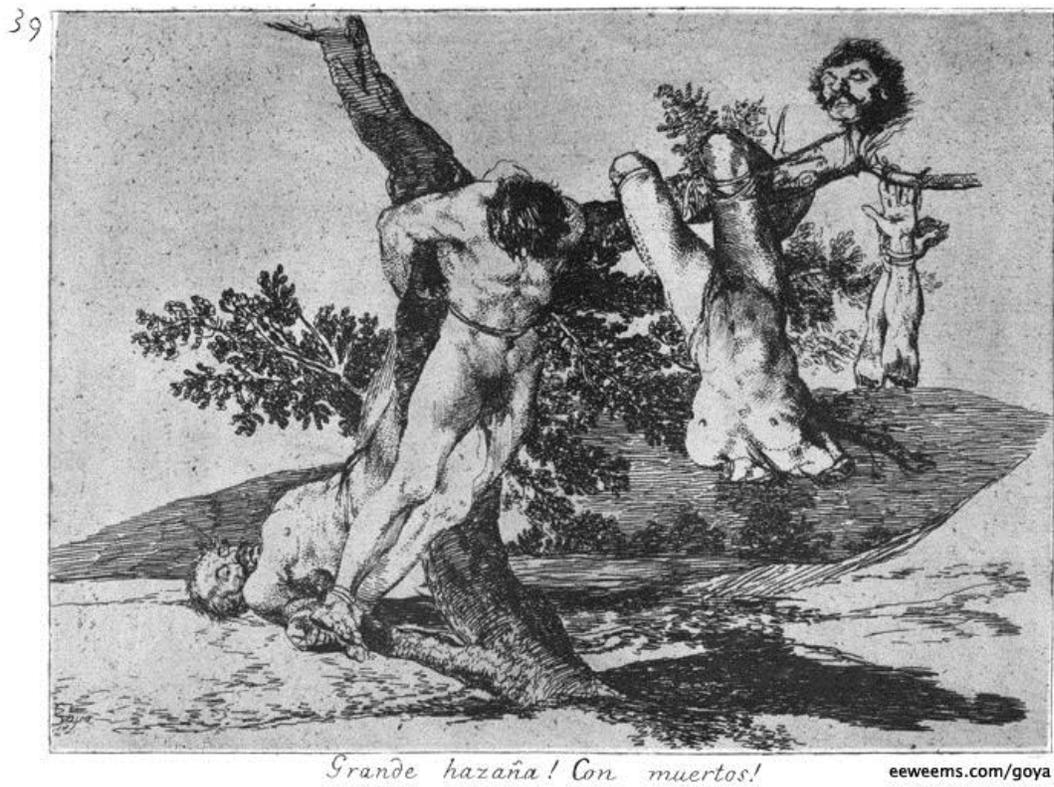
<http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>.

**Statement from the Office of the Associate Dean, Faculty of Humanities**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.



Jake and Dinos Chapman, from *Insult to Injury* / Francisco Goya, from *Disasters of War*



*Great deeds—against the dead!*