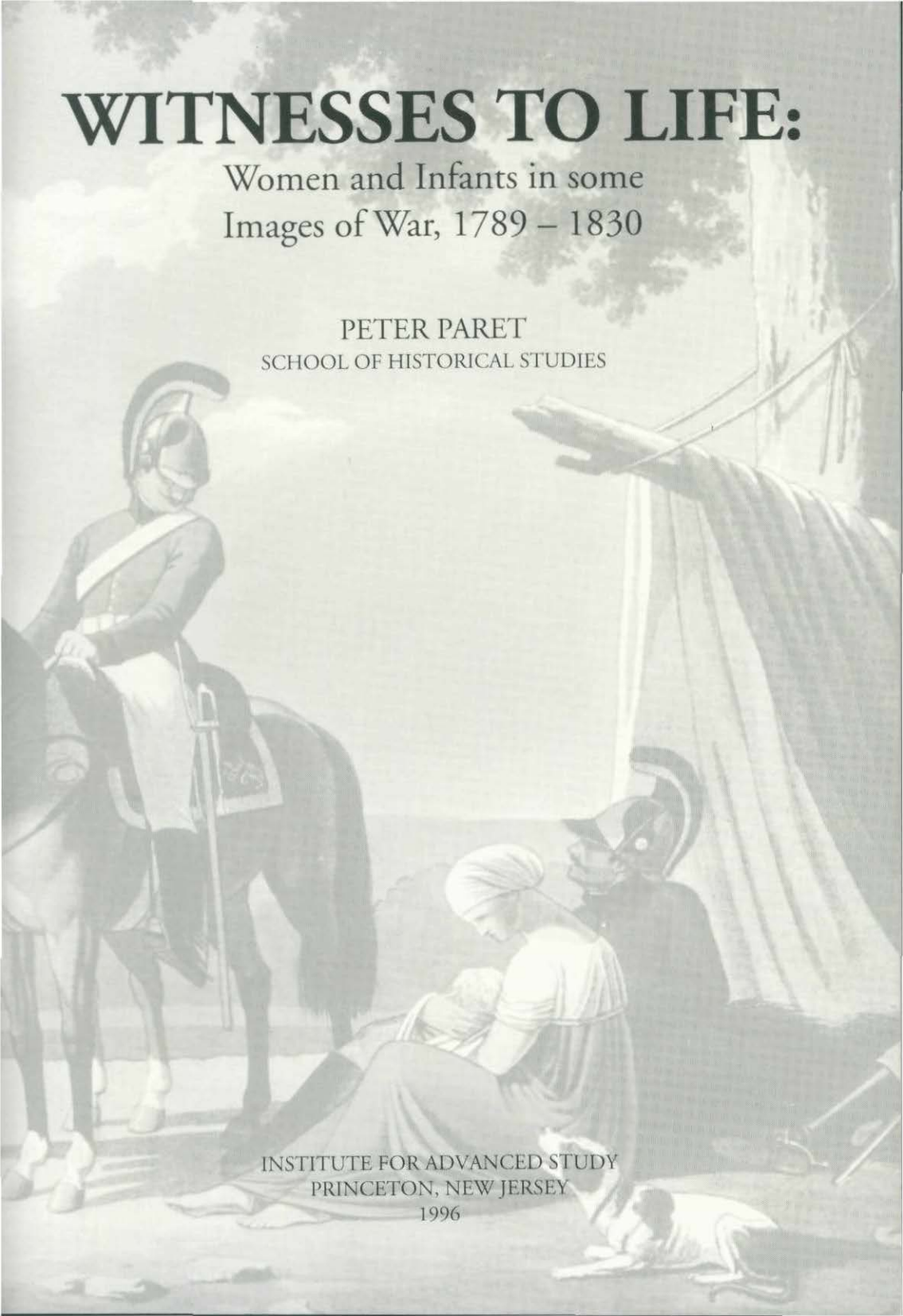


# WITNESSES TO LIFE:

Women and Infants in some  
Images of War, 1789 – 1830

PETER PARET  
SCHOOL OF HISTORICAL STUDIES



INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY  
1996

# WITNESSES TO LIFE:

Women and Infants in some  
Images of War, 1789 – 1830

PETER PARET  
SCHOOL OF HISTORICAL STUDIES

INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY  
1996



To  
J. Richardson Dilworth

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This lecture, given at the Institute for Advanced Study on Friday, May 3, 1996, is based on the author's work on images of war in European history, pursued under the auspices of the Institute Seminar on Force in History. The seminar is funded in part by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation and by J. Richardson Dilworth, Trustee Emeritus of the Institute. The author wishes to express his gratitude to the participants of the seminar for their comments, and to J. Richardson Dilworth, and James Hester and Nancy Colvard of the Guggenheim Foundation for the interest they have shown in the work of the seminar. It is also a pleasure to thank Professor Beth Irwin Lewis, Visitor in the School of Historical Studies in the summer of 1996, and Professor Reva Wolf, Member of the School of Historical Studies during the academic year 1995-96, for their criticisms and suggestions.

THE title of my talk refers to a number of paintings and prints on war, made some two centuries ago, which include elements that do not seem to belong to their subject. These alien figures – women and infants – form an interesting iconographic theme; but more than that, their presence affects the scene in which they find themselves; they expand its meaning, and the change defines and puts us in touch with issues that in somewhat different guise are still with us today.

Allow me to outline briefly the context in which these images appeared. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Western world was exposed to vast changes, some overt, others at first barely perceptible, but all of fundamental importance. They ranged from the political organization of society – notably the American and French Revolutions – to the early stages of the industrial revolution and of rapid population growth. One strand in this complex of changes was a revolution in war. For a variety of reasons – political and social as much as military – war expanded to an unheard-of degree: in the duration of campaigns and distances covered, in the magnitude of goals sought and sometimes attained, and in its human costs. The enormous casualties – in France alone, between 1800 and 1815, over 900,000 soldiers were killed or disappeared from the rolls – and the devastation of parts of Europe and Russia severely damaged society, even if the population explosion and industrialization soon healed some of the wounds.

The arts always respond to broad social and political developments, but not automatically, and mostly in unexpected ways. With war now such a major force in people's lives, one might expect that they would give more thought to it, and that this new

interest or concern would be reflected in literature and the fine arts. But this was true only in part. Poetry certainly addressed war from every conceivable perspective, from the exaltation of self-sacrifice in Theodor Körner's songs of 1813 to the implied pacifism of Robert Southey's *Battle of Blenheim*. Popular novels turned to war to recharge their tired plots. On the other hand, more demanding literature had little to say about war. It has often been noted that Jane Austen's novels scarcely hint at the world war fought just across the English channel, and much the same detachment is found in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and *Elective Affinities*. Apart from the short stories and dramas of Heinrich von Kleist, in which war is a major tragic presence, the great interpretations of war in this epoch – by Stendhal and Vigny, for example – were written long after the event.

It was different in the fine arts. Throughout the seventeenth century, war in its contemporary form and war as a permanent phenomenon of social existence had been of considerable interest to artists and patrons. In the early eighteenth century this interest seemed to lessen somewhat. The treatment of war in allegories and in the slowly expanding field of history painting rarely showed the vigor and inventiveness of the previous period, while contemporary war tended to be treated as an undemanding genre subject or was compressed in stylish vignettes that were added to enliven the background of portraits of successful military leaders. But in the 1760s and '70s we see signs of movement in a new direction, and with the advent of the French Revolution the interest of artists in war and in its changed, contemporary appearance intensified.

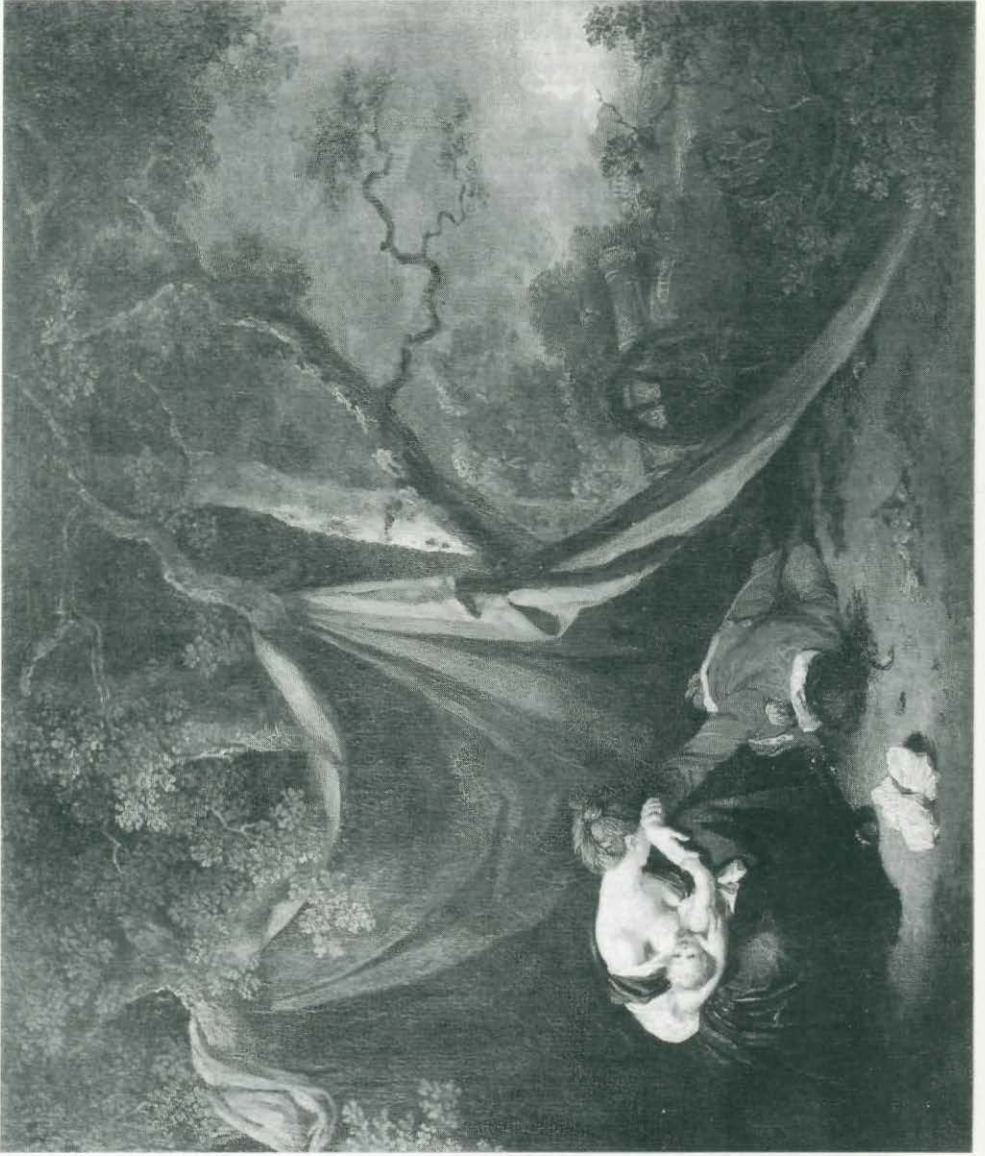
A stimulus was the recognition by new political systems of the value of art as a tool for self-definition and self-assertion. The paintings that the first French Republic and its successors commissioned often emphasize violence – which is hardly surprising because violence was instrumental in creating these regimes. We need only to think of the official paintings of Napoleon on campaign, which still

define our image of the emperor today. Already at the time, critics noted that these works had little to do with war as it actually is; instead they are portraits that exploit a dramatic context to glorify the great man. Other works, however, now address war in its specific reality, give some attention to the men who do the actual fighting, and try to interpret the tremendous events, the vast military disruptions of the time, which usher in a century-and-a-half of ever greater wars in Europe and elsewhere. War became a central rather than a marginal subject in the fine arts.

Among the many themes that together give voice to this new interest and emphasis is our theme today: the presence of women and infants in battle. I want to be precise here. Carrying off women, the rape of women, is of course an old motif in art, usually expressed allegorically, taking place in mythology or antiquity. More realistic treatments of camp followers and of soldiers looting and raping also exist – well-known seventeenth-century examples are etchings on this theme by Jacques Callot. During the years we are discussing, dozens of popular prints show soldiers of invading armies pursuing local women, or being pursued by them – prints often driven by sexual resentment, which caricature and condemn the women's interest in these conquering strangers. Another common image is that of the soldier parting from his wife or sweetheart. Again a sexual note is often apparent: the young volunteer or conscript proves his manhood by going to war, and will be rewarded when he returns. The woman functions as a recruiting device. Prints with this theme were especially popular in the French Revolution, and posters still used it widely in the world wars of the twentieth century, in this country as well as in Europe.

What I want to discuss is quite different: scenes of combat or of incidents immediately before or after battle, in which women and infants appear as major figures. It is not a very frequent theme, but it does crop up repeatedly. I now turn to several images of this kind. All had some critical and commercial success – evidently they struck a responsive chord in the European psyche. I shall discuss





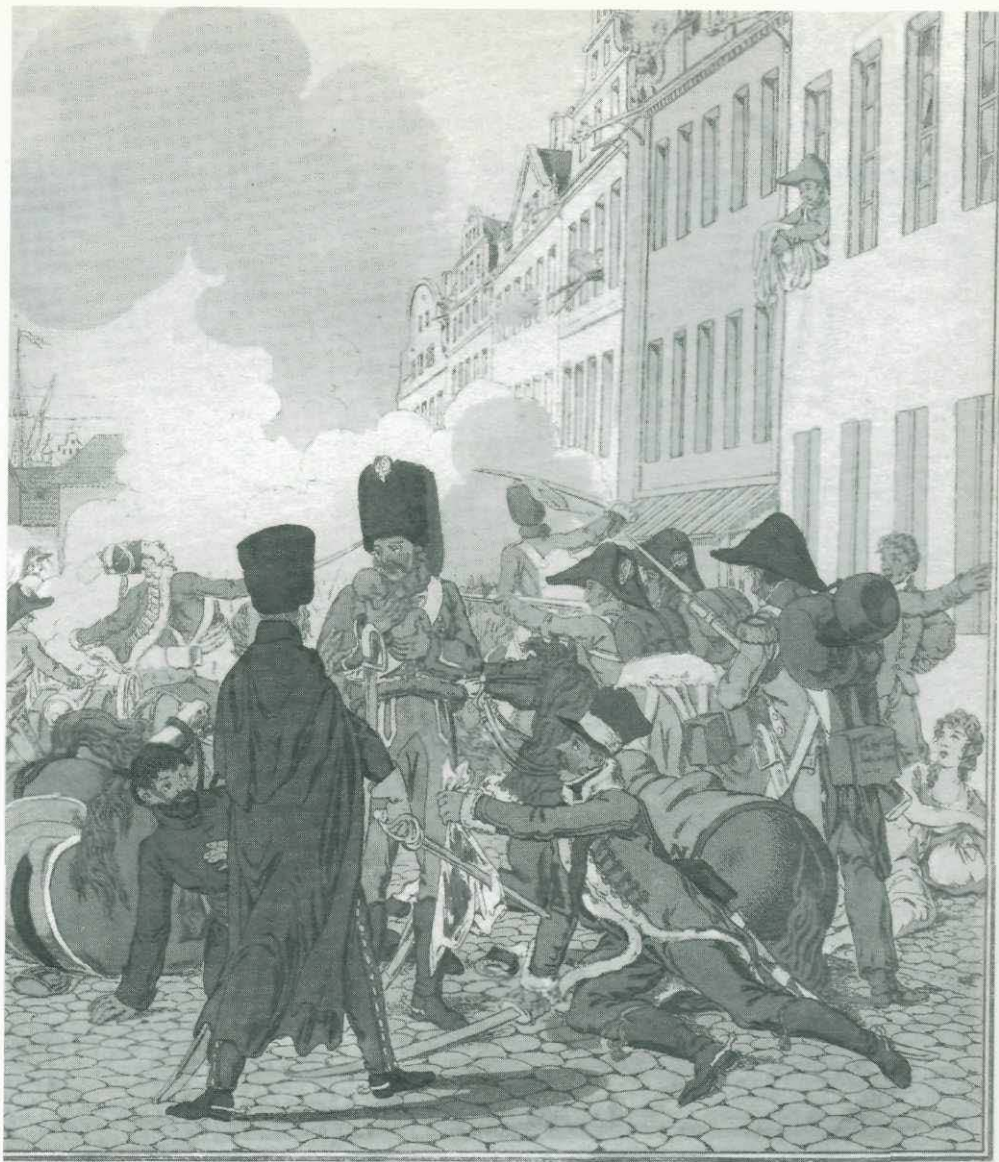
Joseph Wright, *The Dead Soldier*, oil, 1789.

them less as works of art than as documents that convey ideas and attitudes, and unlike many documents the historian uses – which are often paraphrased, or quoted in part, or merely referred to – these are out in the open for us to examine together.

The first is a painting, *The Dead Soldier*, by Joseph Wright of Derby, a well-known British artist of the second half of the eighteenth century – one of the earliest painters of industrial landscapes. The work caused a sensation. It aroused so much interest that Wright painted several versions, this one in 1789, and two engravings that were made of it sold many thousands of copies. They were among the commercially most successful British graphics of the 1790s and the first years of the new century.<sup>1</sup>

The painting is divided into two parts by a canvas thrown over the branch of a tree. The cloth is meant to suggest a soldier's tent, but rather resembles and functions as a curtain or backdrop, which adds to the highly theatrical character of the scene. A dead soldier lies on the ground before the canvas. Next to him sits a young woman; in one arm she holds an infant to her breast, with the other she has lifted the dead man's right arm and presses his wrist against her face, while the child appears to hold two of the soldier's fingers in its small hand. Behind the edge of the cloth a cannon is pointed at a battle in progress in the distance, and to underline further the link between foreground and background, a horseman gallops over the space between the gun and the battle.

The painting makes a straightforward statement about love, loss, and grief. Admittedly, the presence on the battlefield of the woman and child is puzzling, but the puzzle is easily solved. For the sake of dramatic unity, Wright combines two scenes: the man's death, and the woman back in England receiving the bad news; and faced with this theatrical or operatic invention, we have no difficulty in suspending our disbelief. That the painting's dramatic play on our sympathy is accompanied by a less overt but sufficiently plain note of morbid sexuality no doubt added to its popular appeal. But because we are well-informed of the artist's



*Scene in Lübeck d. 6<sup>ten</sup> November 1806*

Christian Gottfried Geissler, *Incident in Lübeck*,  
hand-colored etching, c. 1806/07.

intentions, we can further expand on the work's meaning.

Wright borrowed the idea for the painting from a poem, *The Country Justice*, by John Langhorne, which recounts the daily life and work of a magistrate in rural England. One section discusses vagrants and their petty crimes, and the poet begs the magistrate to show leniency to people who are driven by poverty to steal and poach. To explain how they came to be destitute, Langhorne tells the story of a woman, whose soldier-husband is killed in one of the seemingly endless wars on the continent or in America, and who with her infant – “The child of misery, baptized in tears” – now can look forward only to poverty and crime.<sup>2</sup>

Some engravings of *The Dead Soldier* were sold with Langhorne's lines on the page, and it was widely known that the painting interpreted the poem, which allows us to incorporate Langhorne's ideas into our reading of the work. Wright not only shows a casualty of war, and the woman and child as further victims; he generalizes their pain by pointing to the hurt society suffers when war turns people into vagrants and thieves. The tragedy of the dead soldier and of the woman and child condemned to a hopeless existence expands into a comment on the evil effects of war in general.

The next picture, an etching by Christian Gottfried Geissler, was produced some seventeen or eighteen years after Wright's painting. Copies of the print were hand-colored by people doing such piece-work according to an instruction sheet prepared by the artist, and sold in large numbers throughout Central Europe and Scandinavia. Its title, *Incident in Lübeck*, refers to the capture of the town by the French in 1806, which provides the factual context for an apparently invented incident. When we look at the photographic reproduction of a graphic work, we must of course keep in mind that the original may be of a different size – this etching is about 8 by 6½ inches. Prints were made to be looked at from close by, and were designed for engaged viewers, who would search out details and decipher the narrative. Here the soldiers' uniforms are

drawn so accurately that most of their units can be identified, and the facades of the houses are exactly right for a Lübeck street by the harbor or along the river – the mast of a sailing vessel in the left background indicates that that is where we are. Evidently the artist wanted to show his fantastic incident in as realistic a setting as possible.

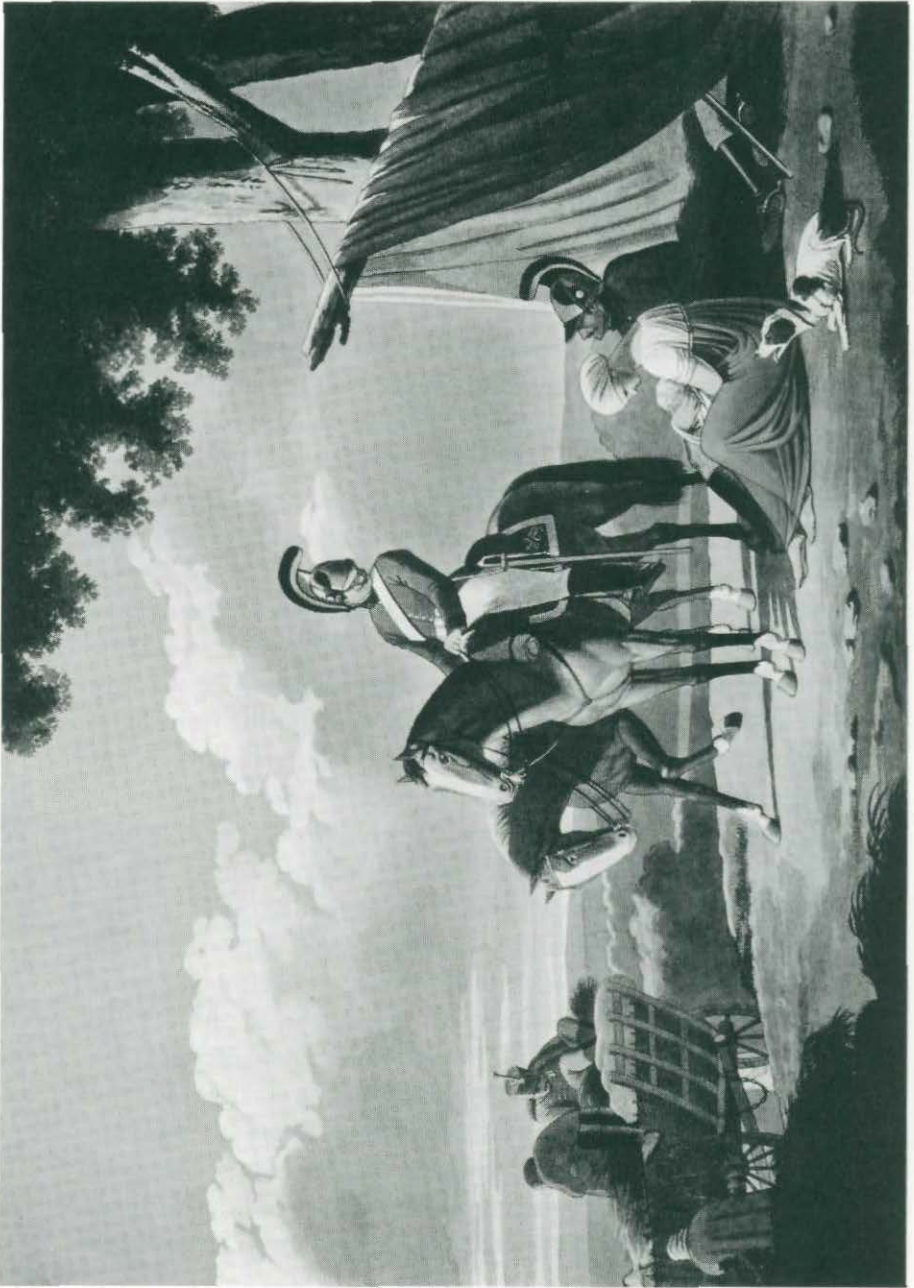
On the right we see three men of the French 96th infantry regiment pushing into the crowd. A fourth has already broken into a house, and is about to drop his loot, wrapped in a sheet, from a window to the pavement below. From other windows people are firing into the crowd. A French hussar rides into the smoke that envelops the street further back. To his left, a Prussian officer in the red uniform trimmed in white of the Blücher hussars has just been struck by a bullet. The foreground is occupied by four soldiers – two standing and two who have fallen with their horses to the cobblestones. The bearded man on his knees on the left is bleeding from a cut on the temple. His regiment cannot be identified, but he does not wear a Prussian uniform. In the center, a French *chasseur à cheval*, his back to the viewer, faces a tall French cavalryman, possibly of the Sixth Hussars, who holds a naked infant in his hands. On the right, an officer of the Polish Legion in French service holds up a cloth bloodied from his wounds on arm and knee, which he seems to offer to the hussar as a covering for the infant. The child has become separated from its parents, the man and woman on the far right, civilians caught up in the violence that has suddenly erupted in their peaceful everyday world. For an instant the four soldiers in the center are turning away from the mayhem to save a new life.

No doubt, Geissler used the infant to make the scene of street fighting more interesting. But that purpose could have been achieved in more sensational ways. Here, the infant is not a victim, shot or trampled underfoot; on the contrary, although absolutely vulnerable, the child by its presence has awakened a basic sense of humanity in the soldiers, who interrupt their bloody work and expose themselves to danger for the child's sake. More than that,

the German artist specifically shows the child's saviors to be members of the French army. His motives may have been political or economic, but the soldiers' allegiance also underlines the picture's message of universal values that transcend political antagonisms and physical violence. In this crisis, the mother and father are helpless; but the infant – and the religious allusion would have been clear – retains the power to guide at least some men to salvation.

Our third image, *A Chance Encounter*, is another hand-colored etching, produced in 1808 by Johann Baptiste Seele, who had already painted several pictures of this theme.<sup>3</sup> The print shows a slice of the world of the common soldier – no officer is present – an episode on a road in an army's rear area. The central figure is a mounted trooper of the Austrian *Chevaulégers* regiment Hesse-Homburg No. 2 – again the uniforms are drawn with great accuracy – who is leading a horse by the reins and has stopped to talk with a soldier from the same regiment, sitting before a makeshift tent by the side of the road. Next to the trooper sits a woman cradling an infant. Behind them, under the canvas, we can make out the boots and sword of a third soldier, resting on a pile of cut grass. At first glance the scene appears to be an idyllic variation of Wright's *Dead Soldier*. Even the rudimentary tentcloth is not missing. Closer attention reveals the print to be a morality play in three parts, which turns the innocent group of the soldier, his woman, and their child into a prelude of tragedy.

We do not know whether the horseman is merely chatting – whether the title of the print is unambiguous and we really are shown a chance meeting – or whether he is transmitting an order to the other man, to be carried out perhaps on the horse he is leading. Whatever the trooper's reason for being where he is, his narrative as well as compositional function is to link the peaceful domestic group on the right with the very different group on the left. A wagon has passed the tent, and now disappears down the road, into a valley. The wagon, like the tent, is laid out with cut grass, on which two weary, probably wounded men sit hunched



Johann Baptiste Seele, *A Chance Encounter*, hand-colored etching, 1808.

over. One man, a hussar in a blue tunic, has lost the plumes from his shako, only the bare rod remains. Next to them, almost hidden in the grass (at the left edge of the picture) lies a third man. We see merely his right arm, and the lower half of his face, mouth open staring at the sky. A fourth soldier, bandages around his head and neck, walks heavily by the side of the wagon. The four men, who are drawn with greater pathos than the other figures, foretell the conclusion of the print's narrative – the future of the two splendidly appareled troopers and of the third still resting in the tent, and also that of the woman and infant, which is the same as that of the woman and infant in Wright's *Dead Soldier*. A decade later, incidentally, Géricault used the motif of a cart filled with wounded for a painting and a lithograph that are among the most impressive of his many works on war.

The fourth image I want to discuss was painted in 1826 by Horace Vernet, one of the most prominent of the artists who glorified Napoleon and the French military experience. Even in his larger canvases of battles or of apotheoses of great commanders, Vernet introduced anecdotal groupings, either of the principal figures or of minor characters, which contributed to the main message. Here the entire painting is a concise narrative. The painting reminds us of the ubiquity of the theme "women and children in war," which appears in academic art and in works intended for the salons of the wealthy as well as in popular prints. Vernet called the work *Incident in the Campaign of 1814*, which refers to the Allied offensive on Paris in the spring of that year. It is dominated by a young woman, standing over a man who has been shot and who has fallen to the ground. A small boy buries his head in the woman's lap, his hands cover his ears to block out the noise of musket fire. The little group, in a vineyard that has been crushed by people running through it, finds itself in the middle of a skirmish. On the left, some Russian soldiers and a cossack have set fire to a small farmhouse and are driving off the farmer's cows. They are being shot at from the right by a French dragoon and a few





Horace Vernet, *Incident in the Campaign of 1814*, oil, 1826.

civilians, and one or two of the soldiers are returning their fire. They must have just hit the man on the ground, whose hunting rifle lies next to him – probably he is the farmer himself.

The woman tries to assist and protect both the man and the boy. Unlike the women in the other pictures we have seen so far, she is more than a helpless victim or potential victim. The pitchfork in her right hand is as much a weapon and symbolizes her active rather than passive role as it is a symbol of work, of constructive effort, which the artist contrasts with the destruction around her. I might add that the painting's very specific title later was generalized and it was called simply *War* – evidently in response to its comprehensiveness. It shows fighting, a casualty, material destruction, civilians as victims, and women and children who are as much a part of war as men.

We have looked at four images, painted or drawn between the 1780s and 1820s, which take somewhat similar views of the wars that were a major phenomenon of the age. They indicate the human costs of their subject, more or less explicitly, and use women and children to make the argument. Together with other works in a similar vein they constitute an interesting but certainly only a small fraction of the many paintings and graphics on war at this time.

Their small number in relation to the total raises the question of their significance. The measure of critical and commercial success that they enjoyed in different degrees may suggest that they expressed feelings and reservations found in more than a few people. If we are interested in social and cultural attitudes of the time, they deserve attention; they belong to a mass of evidence on attitudes toward war in Western society that has not yet been thoroughly studied. But we can say that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as in other periods, these attitudes were, broadly speaking, of three kinds. Some people were committed to an idea or cause. Others shirked service or, once in uniform, tried to desert. The majority fell between these extremes. Memoirs and letters tell us that many people on every social level were indifferent

to the officially proclaimed reasons for the wars that swept across Europe, and hoped that they and their families would not be caught up in them. Our pictures are another expression of this attitude, not one of open opposition to war but rather a fatalistic acceptance of its existence, about which nothing can be done but the consequences of which should be acknowledged. No doubt this message, inserted in interesting scenes of war, was ignored by some, but others surely recognized it.

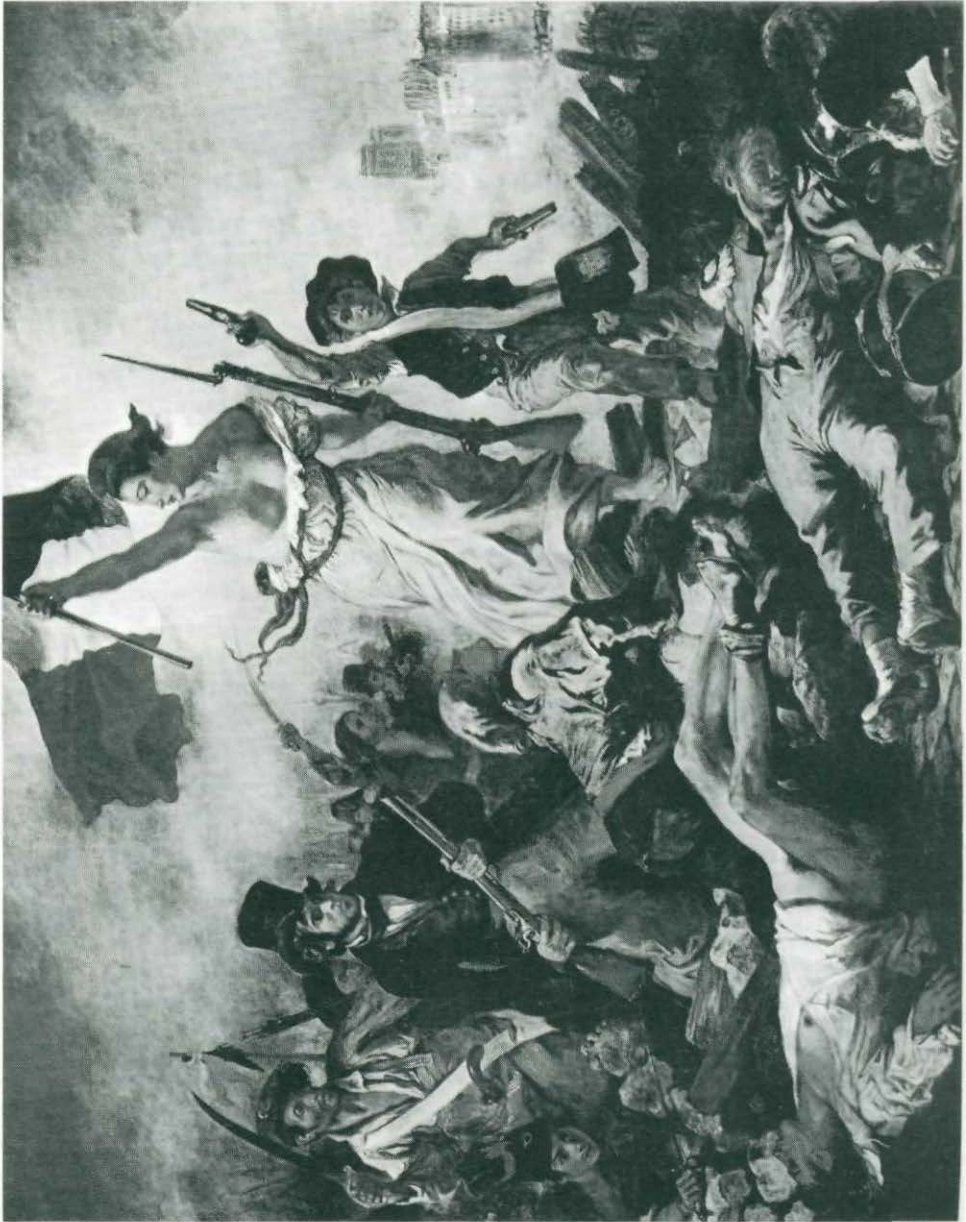
The images also have something to tell us about an even more universal subject than war. We should not fail to note that it is women and children who here stand for a normal, sane life. In these images they provide the standard against which war is measured and condemned. The standard is not necessarily objective – the reasons for any particular war, which may include self-defense, are never mentioned. Causes do not enter into the argument. The images measure war solely in terms of the private individual. And it is women and their infants who define what is life-asserting, who – as I have put it – are witnesses to life.

The images make this claim at a time when women still lacked legal equality with men. I am not, of course, referring to political rights, which few European males possessed, but to social and economic equality. It seems a remarkable conjunction that the part of the population that is deprived of rights is here cast as the representative of a deeper truth. I would guess that when we look at our images from this perspective, we encounter an underlying sense in European society, which is reflected in neither law nor custom, but nevertheless broadly held – that women have the capacity of being more than caretakers of children and the household, that from their perspective they have as good an understanding of the major issues of social existence and of human relations as men have, and at times probably see farther. It is a recognition that continues to grow in succeeding generations, all temporary checks notwithstanding, until it leads to changes not only in private but also in public life.<sup>4</sup>

Here our analysis might conclude. But the past rarely falls into a single neat pattern, and I would be wrong to imply that in the early nineteenth century images of war that include women present them only as the suffering witnesses to life. They appear in another role as well – not as passive victims but as fighters. The young woman in Vernet's painting points in this direction. I should like to end our discussion with two images that in different ways develop the theme of the active, armed, fighting woman.

The first is Delacroix's *Liberty leading the People*, which he painted soon after the July Revolution of 1830. The work does not include an infant, but the adolescent boy next to the figure of Liberty not only represents the boys who did, in fact, fight on the barricades, he also emphasizes Liberty's role as mother, the source of life – here healthy political life – who understands truths that enable her to lead men.

Liberty as Delacroix paints her is of course a descendant of allegorical figures that go back to the first French Revolution, which in turn came from political symbols of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that had their roots in antiquity. In 1792 a heroic female figure became the personification of Liberty, and by association soon also that of the French Republic; the state was made the political expression of the ideal, and the same woman represented both. Two basic versions of this tutelary deity have been recognized: the dynamic fighter of the people, armed with a pike, half-naked, wearing a phrygian cap in allusion to the cap Roman slaves were given when they were set free; and the fully clothed, often crowned, serene possessor of state power.<sup>5</sup> Delacroix used the former type, only modernizing her by giving her a musket instead of a pike. In his painting and in the political symbolism he employs, the universal role of the woman standing for the sane, constructive life has been narrowed. She now represents a particular idea, a political cause, even a particular state – France. She remains a moral leader, but is now eager to fight; she may even be one of the sources of the misery felt and defined by women in our earlier images.



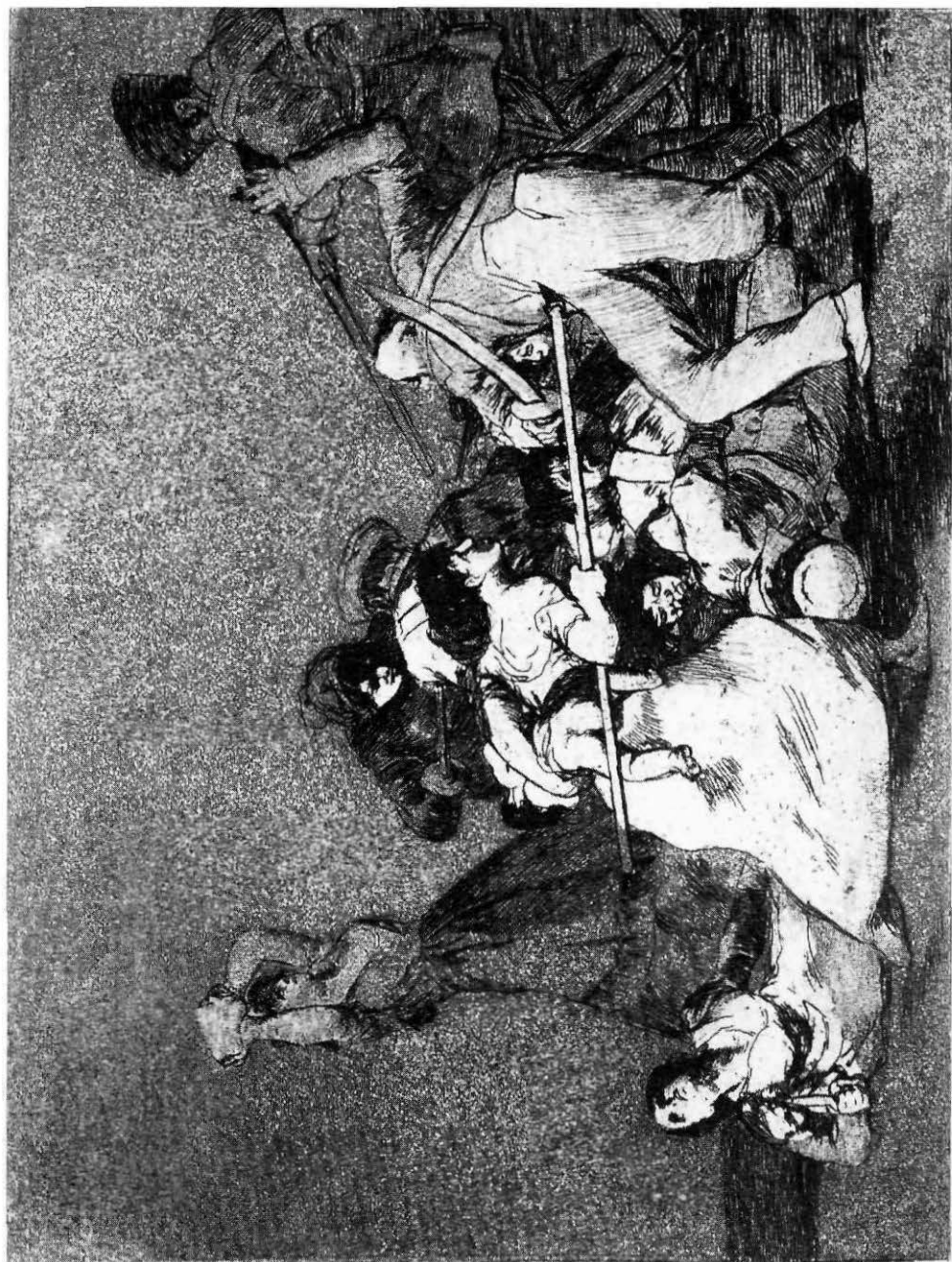
Eugene Delacroix, *Liberty leading the People*, oil, 1830

For our last image we move back some years before Delacroix painted *Liberty leading the People* to Goya's *Disasters of War*. Goya worked on this series of etchings from 1809 to 1820. The first forty-seven plates, before a group that deals with famine, address the French invasion and occupation of Spain. Several of the etchings refer to specific events and even individuals, but the group as a whole generalizes the war in Spain as an extended episode of savagery that may happen anywhere.

Women appear in fourteen of the forty-seven plates: fleeing with their children from danger, in scenes of rape and attempted rape, being executed together with men by a firing squad; but also – in the plate entitled *Rabble* – themselves cruel and vindictive. The introduction of women and infants in scenes of military life and extreme violence, which had shocked and attracted the public in Wright's *Dead Soldier* and Vernet's *War* and in the engravings by Geissler and Seele, has lost all strangeness in Goya's etchings. Far from being outsiders in a male world, the unique characteristics of which they point up by their presence, they have themselves become part of its brutishness and sad reality.

Three plates show women fighting when rape is not the issue or not the only threat. The most extraordinary of these is the fifth plate, with the title *And they are like wild beasts*.

A patrol has encountered a group of women, and in the fight that has broken out one of the women, protecting her child by holding it in one arm against her back, stabs a soldier with a pike held in her other hand. The point of the weapon has gone deep into the man's stomach, and he is collapsing. Behind the woman, a soldier, his back toward us, fends off another woman who jabs at him with a sword. At the far right, a soldier has just fired his musket over the knot of struggling bodies, at a woman on the far left. She has fallen to the ground, but her hand still grips a knife or broken sword. A woman behind her is about to throw a rock, which she holds over her head with both hands. The clash without stated cause, in a featureless grey space, shows no sign of



Francisco de Goya, *And they are like wild beasts*, etching, no. 5 of *The Disasters of War*, 1810 or later.

ending until both groups have done away with each other.

Unlike some of the other images we have looked at, this is a complex and very powerful composition, and made all the more so within the context of Goya's series as a whole. In *The Disasters of War* Goya draws a moral distinction between aggressor and defender; but that is merely a first step. Throughout the series he shows that the defenders, too, may be flawed; that some are subject to the same cruelty and heartlessness that afflict many of their assailants. War, as Goya here presents it, is a force that brings out goodness in some, but may reveal the worst in everyone. He identifies just and unjust causes of war, but adds that regardless of the cause for which they fight and suffer, men and women are capable of the worst cruelties. He treats war not as a separate phenomenon, but as an extension of peacetime, an extension in which the elements of hatred and danger that always exist are enormously magnified. Goya's evenhanded moral outrage and his sense of the dynamic nature of violence point to the future, as does his recognition that once fighting starts the distinction between soldiers and civilians, whether male or female, is no more than a fragile cultural construct – a barrier that in our century has been torn down with a vengeance.

If we recall the first four pictures we looked at, it seems that the ideas on war and on the relationship between women and war found in them are contradicted in the two images by Goya and Delacroix. How do we explain this divergence, and must we correct our earlier analysis to take account of it?

Let me suggest that the contradictions result from the difference in purpose of the works, and also from differences in their aesthetic quality. The first four images were part of that great wave of pictures that responded to the expansion of war which I mentioned at the beginning of my talk. To a public avid for an idea of what contemporary war is like, they show something of the reality of the soldier's life and of battle, with a reminder of the costs of war – not only those paid by soldiers and armies, but also the costs to society. They use women and infants to point to this characteristic of all wars.



But even as they stress the tragedy of war, the four pictures may reveal a certain optimism. In each the woman and her child stand for the benign, life-asserting qualities of humanity. If society and its institutions, the pictures seem to say, would take the goodness of the individual as their guide, wars would be fewer or might be avoided altogether.

This is very different from what we are shown by Goya and Delacroix! In *Liberty leading the People* men and women are armed, and the dead and wounded cover the barricade, but the painting is less about war than about a compound ideal – liberty and the fight for liberty – and for the artist goodness has nothing to do with self-preservation. On the contrary, goodness lies in the willingness to fight and die for an ideal. To express this view, Delacroix uses the female figure who in nineteenth-century France had become the accepted symbol for opposition to traditional systems of privilege and social control. How this symbol emerged, and how other female figures came to symbolize various nation-states, which often showed little concern for liberty, is a fascinating historical process. We cannot explore it now, but certainly it is yet another instance of the idealization of women in a male-dominated society.

Goya's purpose is again different. He neither wants to give us a snapshot of war and its consequences nor respond to a particular political event – the July Revolution – by romanticizing the forces that led to it. Instead he uses war as a device to illuminate human nature. His starting point may be similar to Delacroix's: certain wars are moral, though for him they are wars of self-defense not wars for liberty. But *The Disasters of War* move beyond this moral judgment to an amoral assertion. For a moment Goya seems to approach the message of the first four pictures: war, whatever its cause, is a disaster. But he lacks the optimism to argue that wars would fade if humanity observed the life-asserting force personified by women. He has a different vision: war is boundless because the potential for evil in human beings is boundless. Even women who merely defend themselves may become corrupted.

Here, incidentally, Goya is in harmony with the conclusion of the other images that women are the equals of men. Only he harmonizes in a distinctly minor mode: women and men share the equality of being victims and, sometimes, perpetrators.

Apart from cynics and a few philosophers, it is unlikely that many of Goya's contemporaries shared his pessimism, which brings us to the difference in quality of the works we have seen. The first four are by respectable minor talents. Goya and Delacroix function on a different level, which takes them far away from received opinions. Not that great artists are unconcerned about popular taste and what does or does not sell – Delacroix painted *Liberty leading the People* at least in part to make a splash in the Salon of 1831. But minor talents are not only aware of the market, they tend to think in accord with the market. That, of course, often makes them better indicators of prevailing ideas and attitudes. They may document general tendencies more accurately than does an original and creative mind, which tends to be self-referential.

The different purposes of the creators of these images have resulted in different views of war and of the place of women and infants in war, and also in different ways of using women to reveal significant truths about war and about society as such. But let me conclude our discussion by suggesting that although the images are very different, we can see that they need not conflict. Each has captured a part of reality, each reflects something that did exist in the years we have been discussing. I would not claim that the first four pictures share the depth and power of the other two, but they have caught hold of a universal fact that is too often ignored when we consider the present or try to interpret the past. In all societies, whatever their political character, a large segment of the population is unconcerned with the great issues, the life-and-death issues of the day. Basically these are people who want to be left alone. It is a fairly safe assumption that in most wars, except religious and secular crusades and wars of obvious self-defense, most soldiers serve under duress. That certainly was the case in the wars of the French

Revolution and of the Napoleonic era. Historians have only intermittently addressed this disinterest because it rarely leaves a significant residue – wars are fought whether or not people like to fight them. But what millions have thought and felt must be worth studying.

Delacroix catches another part of the truth: the idealism and commitment that drive some people, and that the state then institutionalizes. Only the claim that the painting represents a majority attitude might be questioned.

Goya, finally, reveals yet another layer of reality by placing men and women in situations of extreme physical and psychic stress, situations that at the same time remove customary restraints on their behavior.

We might think of the six images as building blocks, out of which – together with many others – we can construct a more comprehensive picture of people's attitudes toward war in the past. They are also an example of the way images and interpretations of one major social phenomenon may be used to indicate people's attitudes and feelings in other areas – in this case, the broader social functions of women's intelligence and instincts. For those of us who are interested in gaining a better understanding of how men and women in the past struggled with the problems of the relationship between the individual and society and its institutions, this indirect evidence, moving between high and popular culture and crossing many social levels, is especially revealing.

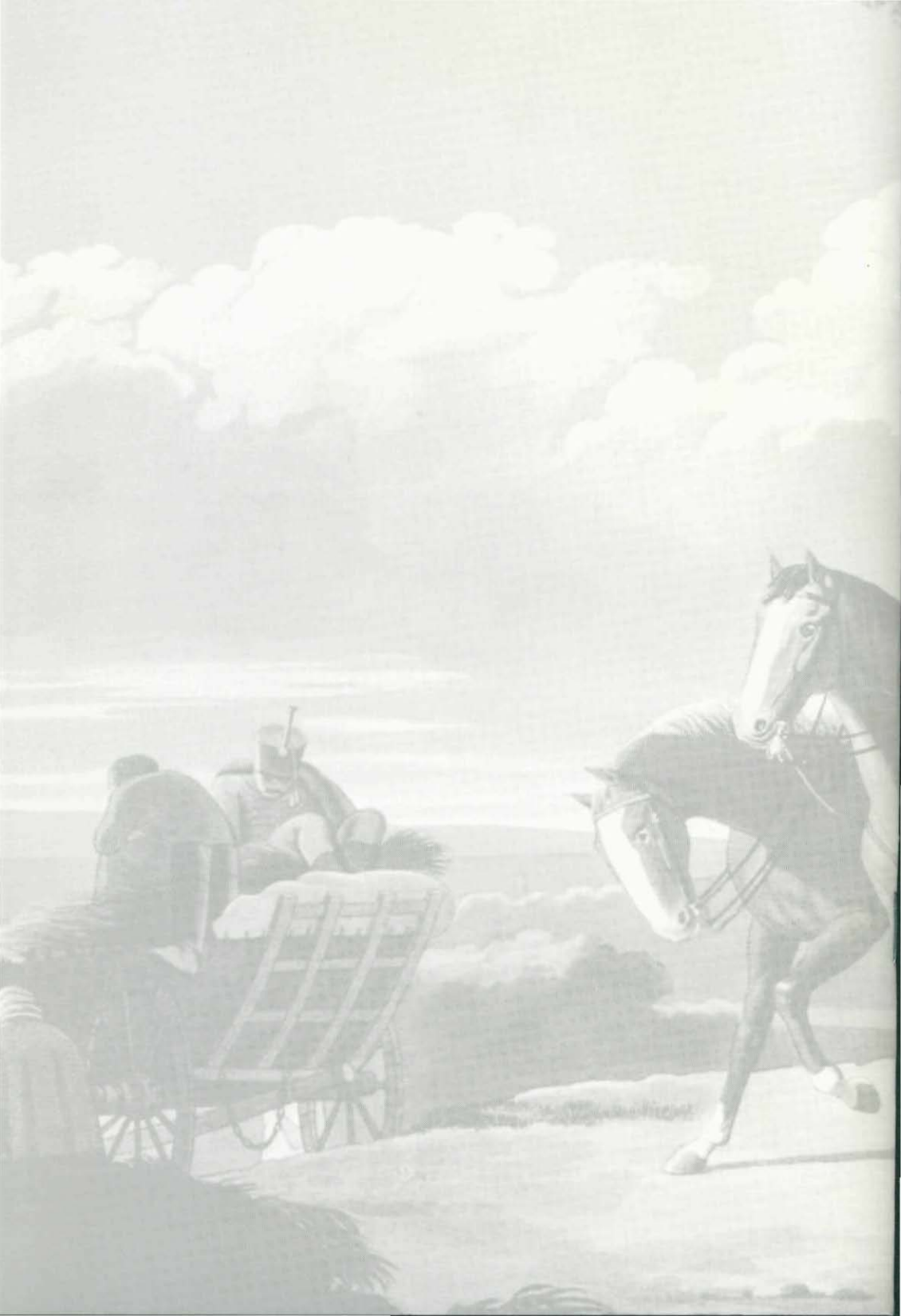
## FOOTNOTES

- 1 The background of *The Dead Soldier* and the work itself are discussed in Benedict Nicolson's excellent *Joseph Wright of Derby, Painter of Light*, 2 vols., London and New York, 1968; and in a brief, illuminating analysis by David Irwin, "Der tote Soldat," in *Triumph und Tod des Helden*, eds. Ekkehard Mai and Anke Repp-Eckert, Cologne, 1987.
- 2 John Langhorne died in 1779, a few years before Joseph Wright's first version of *The Dead Soldier*. Langhorne's literary reputation was sufficient for his collected works to be published in the series *The British Poets* (volume 65, Chiswick, 1822). Today he is largely forgotten. In the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1955, he is represented only by three lines from the episode of the woman and her soldier in *The Country Justice*.
- 3 Hermann Mildener's biography, *Der Maler Johann Baptiste Seele*, Tübingen, 1984, reproduces several of Seele's paintings of camp scenes, but does not depict or discuss the etching, although it is superior in composition and execution to the paintings from which it is derived.
- 4 The question, much discussed by some feminist scholars, whether there are innate psychological and moral differences that distinguish women from men, is not the issue here. The argument is solely concerned with the historical significance of nineteenth-century social and cultural attitudes.
- 5 See Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle*, translated by Janet Lloyd, Cambridge (UK), 1981.



THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY IS A TAX-EXEMPT EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION THAT FILLS A UNIQUE ROLE IN POSTDOCTORAL EDUCATION. THE INSTITUTE CONSISTS OF FOUR SCHOOLS: HISTORICAL STUDIES, MATHEMATICS, NATURAL SCIENCES, AND SOCIAL SCIENCE. THERE IS A PERMANENT FACULTY OF 22 PLUS APPROXIMATELY 160 VISITING MEMBERS ANNUALLY, INCLUDING YOUNGER PH.D.S AS WELL AS SENIOR SCHOLARS FROM UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. SINCE ITS FOUNDING, THE INSTITUTE HAS BEEN INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S FOREMOST CENTERS FOR THEORETICAL RESEARCH AND INTELLECTUAL INQUIRY.

Peter Paret is the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities in the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study.



# WITNESSES TO LIFE:

Women and Infants in some  
Images of War, 1789 – 1830

PETER PARET  
SCHOOL OF HISTORICAL STUDIES

INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY  
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY  
1996

