

REVIEWS

Anders Engberg-Pedersen, *The Empire of Chance: The Napoleonic Wars and the Disorder of Things*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015. 340pp. ISBN: 978-0-674-96764-9. Hardback. £30.00.

Are we in historical geography's cultural turn or is this the dawn of the age of spatiality? Professor Engberg-Pedersen panders to both as he reflects on a period of military obsolescence and the emergence of modern war. This is a book of ideas that raises a very different perspective on the Napoleonic wars and their impact in shaping European conflict.

Engberg-Pedersen opens with a brief survey of the geometry of war that culminated in the magnificent Vauban fortifications. This then neatly segues into a discussion about military obsolescence. His trigger being *Uncle Toby's* accident with a pile of books depicted in *Tristram Shandy* by Laurence Sterne (1759). Sterne used the fall of books as a metaphor marking the end of fortifications and the beginning of mobile warfare. Engberg-Pedersen then brings in *Don Quixote* to serve the coup de grace on fortifications and siege. This unusual opening, the questioning of what military obsolescence meant in early modern European culture, immediately advertises why this book is essential reading for military, cultural and geographical scholars.

This is a book about the geography's cultural turn but nuanced in the modern language of spatiality. The narrative doesn't mask its direct engagement with poetics, geometry and topography. The age of the map emerged at the demise of an age when Euclidian geometry had defined fortifications. The disorder that ensued led war to become mobile, fluid, and the element of chance restored to a prominent place in final outcomes. The notion of daring chance suited an age where soldiers were locked in a perpetual search for glory. Maps became all powerful in military decision making and the key to glory.

The classical military writer accompanying *Uncle Toby* and *Don Quixote* is Carl von Clausewitz. The segments taken from Clausewitz' writings are used to illustrate the brutalising effects of war and the confusions caused by the fog of war. This juxtaposition between the unfinished writings of the hardened realist of war and the literature of writers that use war as their muse brings home this author's expertise in comparative literature. Yet in keeping with the strictures of all cultural historians, Engberg-Pedersen seems obliged to cite aspects of Michel Foucault's even cautiously. This book is a well structured examination of literature but there are weaknesses and not just in the citing of Foucault.

Granted the book takes an alternative viewpoint of the theory and practice of war after

1750 and does so by extracting ideas of spatiality from within literature to set down a discourse about modern war. This in itself is incredibly exciting, unfortunately the delivery is undermined by awkward and often impenetrable reading. Entire paragraphs and sections are quite literally unreadable and in desperate need of translation. For many readers this might be a serious drawback and the reason not to open this book, but endeavour has its fruits except in the poorly drafted conclusions.

In reading the ideas Engberg-Pedersen presents, rather than struggling over the obstacles within his prose, one can extract several powerful themes from this book. The cultural impact of military obsolescence was obviously not just reflected in battles such as Leuthen and Austerlitz, but had a significant impact upon European society. Reading this book one begins to look beyond the French Revolution as the monumental event and recognise how societies were adjusting to a slow but grinding revolution in war. Engberg-Pedersen also brings to the forefront the power of war within literature often overlooked by the more conventional military history narratives. Clausewitz serves up the guns and thunder but it is Cervantes' cameo appearance that offers the more subtle and entertaining dish.

This is an exciting book but it's not pleasurable reading. The ideas the book presents outweigh its shortfalls. The author sometimes appears lofty but his lectures on YouTube contradict this impression. This is a book of the highest intellectual quality but the publisher has not risen to the challenge. I would recommend this book to all scholars, students, and those interested in this period of history.

PHILIP W. BLOOD

Peter Gaunt, *The English Civil War: a Military History*. I.B. Tauris and Co., Ltd: London and New York, 2014. xx + 219pp. ISBN: 978-1-84885-881-7. Price £19.99.

The author of a number of books on the English Civil War including an excellent biography of Oliver Cromwell, Peter Gaunt has long since established a name for himself as an expert in the conflict in so far as it was experienced and fought out in the area of Chester, North Wales and the northern Marches. In this new volume, however, he has produced a military study of a far broader nature that will be savoured by many different types of reader: the university specialist, the undergraduate and the honest buff will find much to ponder in its pages. In the actual details of the armies, the generals, the battles and the campaigns, there is probably not that much that can be described as new, but even those who are well versed in Edgehill, Marston Moor and the rest will be struck by such passages as Gaunt's discussion of what he terms the