A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE GOOD SOLDIER

Almost two hundred years later, Napoleon still finds himself in the heat of battle.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

PEOPLE who are famous enough to be known by one name usually have one verdict attached to it. Though Churchill has his doubters and Mussolini his apologists, reputations are for the most part like summer rentals: an agreeably solid front, with the termites gnawing down below, unseen. Almost the only exception to this rule is the first of the great modern one-namers, Napoleon, Emperor of the French. In the case of no other historical figure does opinion diverge so widely, accept so extensive a set of possible judgments, or differ so radically from country to country. In France he remains a great man. Every year sees the publication of still more books, generally rapturous, about his life and times, to add to what is probably already the largest pile in the French language devoted to a single subject. (One guess puts the number at forty-five thousand.) A big success of French publishing this year has been a swoony series by a minor left-wing politician named Max Gallo, whose titles—"The Song of Departure," "The Emperor of Kings"—give the game away. "What character, what will, what courage, what energy, what imagination," the jacket blurb begins. The winner of this year's prize from the French Academy, Patrick Rambaud's "La Bataille," is a retelling of a Napoleonic battle. Last week, it also won the Prix Goncourt, the first time a book has ever won both prizes. For the French, Napoleon is not just an icon; he is a constellation, high in the sky, and no more to be judged good or evil than the stars are.

The darker view has been around for just as long, and, not surprisingly, gets its biggest play in England, where Napoleon has been pictured as a deformed megalomaniacal dwarf ever since Gillray's caricatures. In that vein comes Alan Schom's new book, "Napoleon Bonaparte" (HarperCollins; $40), which offers the most polished, scholarly, and successful version of Gillray's megalomaniacal dwarf that has yet appeared. Schom's book is obviously meant to replace Vincent Cronin's seventies biography as the standard one-volume work available to the general reader. But where Cronin took the worshipful French line Schom is a revisionist, even a negationist. Schom, whose earlier books include a precise, exciting history of the Battle of Trafalgar and a somewhat less exciting history of the Battle of Waterloo, can barely stand the sight of his subject. For Schom, nothing that Napoleon does is any good at all. He even goes after him with inverted commas: his victory at Austerlitz becomes "this 'successful' military campaign"; his impassioned love letters to his Polish sweetheart, Marie Walewska, become "impassioned 'love letters.'" His accomplishments as a maker of laws and of schools are described in a couple of pages and then dismissed in a paragraph, with Schom maintaining that the Napoleonic curriculum to this day is one in which "glory was extolled at the expense of truth, French leaders preferring to treat their citizens like children." Schom even concludes, in an afterword, that "all my medical friends confirm that Bonaparte—like so many dictatorial rulers—would according to the U.K. Mental Health Act of 1983 be described as a psychopath."

If Schom's Napoleon is credible, it's because of our knowledge of what came after Napoleon. In his own time, and for most of the nineteenth century, his career was irresistibly projected backward as a retelling of Alexander the Great's. In our time, it is hard not to project it forward as a first draft of Hitler's. There are enough similarities—the nationalism of the man not born to the nation; the failed invasion of England which turns into a disastrous invasion of Russia; the eventual defeat; the millions dead—so that Schom, without quite saying it, can ask the reader to see the events of 1812 through the lens of 1944. This is not an

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unpersuasive reading: both Hitler and Napoleon did the same kind of compulsive, showy, exhausting talking; played the polymath with their retinues; wildly oscillated between cozy domestic longings and wild imprecations; and even feared their capital city. (Hitler mistrusted Berlin, and Napoleon never seemed at home in Paris.) Hitler's favorite French monuments, which he toured in a rush during his single, early-morning visit to defeated Paris, were the Imperial ones: the Arc de Triomphe and Napoleon's tomb.

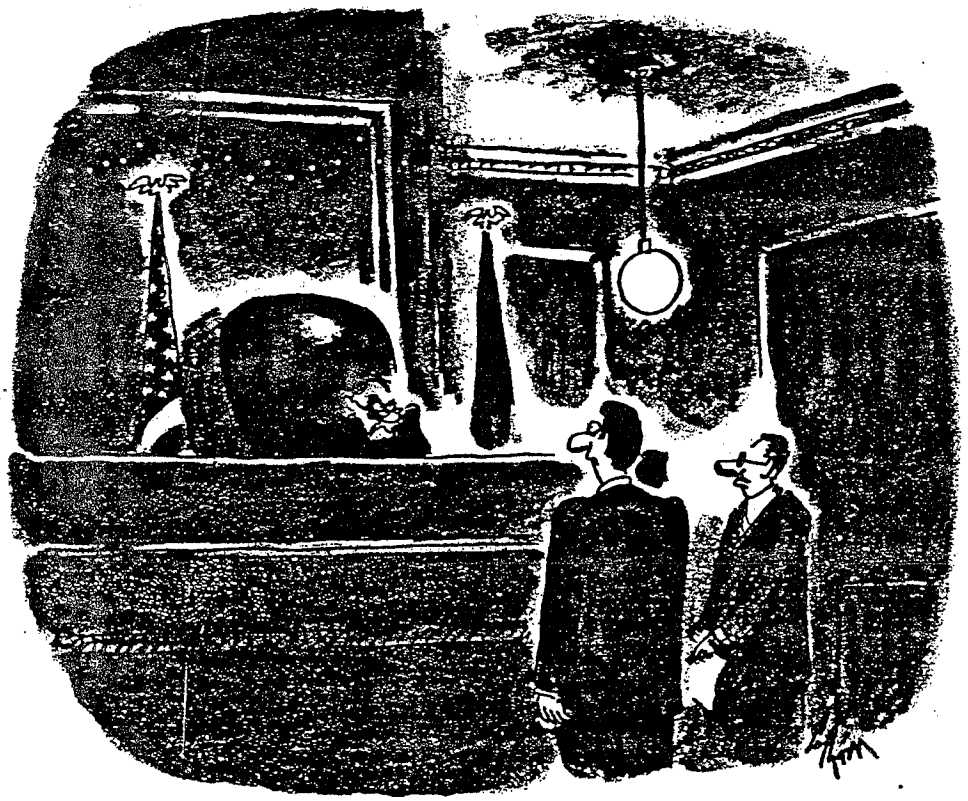
Yet to make Napoleon into a convincing villain we need at least to glance at why anyone, and especially generations of intelligent Frenchmen, from Stendhal to Victor Hugo, thought he was a hero. Historical contexts are infinitely expandable for the purpose of apology: the life of Al Capone misses the broader context of Chicago violence; the condemnation of Hitler misses the broader context of total war. (Brecht made an entire career out of this kind of argument.) But in Napoleon's case the context is specific enough to be manageable and significant enough to be meaningful: the disaster of the Revolution, and the crisis of the ideas of liberty and of order. The Napoleonic period is so complicated and the literature so vast and controversial that the amateur reader, trying to find a path, can only search and sort and simplify. Still, a couple of images force their way through. A true picture of Napoleon includes the idea of him as a charismatic dictator. But it also includes the rise of professions open to talent and the growth of the mass democratic army—in fact, of the modern state and all the manipulations necessary to make it run.

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE was a foreigner in the country whose national ambitions he helped create. (In this, he was not only like Hitler the Austrian and Stalin the Georgian but also, and perhaps more to the point, like Alexander the Macedonian, who became the bearer of Greek culture.) He was born in Corsica in 1769, a time when the island was much closer, culturally and linguistically, to Italy than to France. Corsican nationalism, the movement in which Napoleon grew up, is the lost love child of the Enlightenment. After the sale of the island by Genoa to France, in 1767, the Corsican patriot General Pasquale Paoli led what was in many respects the first modern "liberation movement," to free Corsica. Corsica became the Tibet of 1770—the cool little country to be for.

His father, Carlo Maria Buonaparte, was a lawyer from a once grand Tuscan family; he was also a fierce Corsican patriot. As Paoli's movement grew, Carlo joined him in his battle against the French. The French kept sending in troops, though, and, after several losses, managed to beat the guerrillas. Carlo decided to accept a generous French offer of amnesty, and then took advantage of a scholarship program for impoverished aristocrats and sent his nine-year-old son, Nabulio, to the Royal Military School at Brienne. So Nabulio—or Napoleon, as his teachers renamed him on his arrival—was, unlike Hitler the Austrian, a nationalist whose nationalism was originally directed against the country where he was forced to make his way. The first records we have of him at school are of his being violently anti-French. (He spoke French with a strong Corsican accent, which he never lost.) He saw his mission in life as the liberation of Corsica from the French. "Civilize this dangerous islander" was the memorable order issued by one drill instructor to a friend of Napoleon's.

Napoleon got the virus of romantic nationalism very early, in its first Corsican appearance, before it became virulent—at a time when it was attached to the universalist Enlightenment love of liberty rather than to the pursuit of romantic identity, the mystical love of race and *Volk*. For Napoleon, the alternative to small-scale, island liberty was, paradoxically, large-scale French imperialism, practiced on the "If you can't beat 'em, lead 'em" principle. He had an outsider's freedom to be a little dangerous. Once, he and a friend went off to see a hot-air-balloon launch on the Champ de Mars. When the takeoff was delayed, Napoleon, who was fifteen, walked up, took out his penknife, and cut the balloon loose.

The Enlightenment side of Napoleon—the love of learning for its own sake, the appetite for strange civilizations and foreign shores—is the most attractive aspect of his character, and what sets him off most strongly from other world-devourers. Hitler was an autodidact, too, but there was an edge of delusion and grievance in his studies from the very beginning; Napoleon wanted to know. At his first military posting,



"Unfortunately, the law allows me no leeway in the case of an acquittal. I have to let you go."

I CANNOT SEPARATE HER

from the beautiful body.
She has charm and a very
gay spirit; in every way
she's attractive. Intelligent
and she reads good books.
But it's the faultless body
that forces me to make a fool
of myself, pursuing a virtuous
girl I could never possess.

—JAMES LAUGHLIN
(1914-1997)

with an artillery regiment in Valence, he was quartered in a little room above a café, where he read and, for his own satisfaction, wrote essays about Robert Walpole's politics, analyzed Plato's Republic, studied the ancient Persians, Carthaginians, and Assyrians, and the history of Turkey and the religion of the Aztecs. He wrote meditations on the State of Nature (mixed) and the Nature of Happiness (hard to figure). He liked big things, large numbers, long lists. He would copy out figures, making tiny augmentations for his own pleasure. He once read in a book that there were a hundred and thirty ships in the Spanish Armada, and in his notebook he made it a hundred and fifty.

All that studying only increased Napoleon's desire to bring freedom to Corsica, and eventually he obtained leave to go back to the island. But he found his family involved in various kinds of small-time crime, and, disillusioned, he returned to France and the Army after a year at home. Corsica as an abstract ideal didn't disappear from his thinking, but it did constrict, and in time it became pure clannishness. For him, much as for an Italian child of the Risorgimento emigrating to New York at the end of the last century, the nation became the family. Napoleon's Corleone-style devotion to his four hopeless brothers, all of whom he made kings and princes, turned out to be one of his greatest weaknesses.

NAPOLEON returned to France—landing, with his entire family, at Toulon in 1793—at the moment when the Revolution was about to become the Terror. France was headed by the first modern totalitarian agency to be ruled by a theory, the Committee of Public Safety. This proto-Khmer Rouge group—led by the original Pol Pot, Maximilien Robespierre—had taken as its motto Saint-Just's terrible statement: "The Republic consists in the extermination of everything that opposes it." Napoleon was troubled by the role of the Army in supporting the Terror (in 1793, after participating in General Carteaux's attack on Avignon, he wrote and published a long dialogue between himself and an imaginary businessman, debating which was worse, terror or civil war), and asked to be sent somewhere on the frontier, where he would not have to fight Frenchmen. As chance would have it, a Royalist uprising took place in Toulon, and was supported by an English naval garrison. Here was a reasonably unambiguous foreign invasion, and Napoleon, put in charge of the artillery, defeated the British, under Admiral Hood. His tactics were simple: with his cannon, he stood overlooking the city and fired until the British went away. His fellow-officers were impressed by his tenaciousness in finding the cannon. Like most gifts, Napoleon's military genius, on examination, owed a lot to grit and perseverance. Napoleon understood, to paraphrase Woody Allen, that eighty per cent of war-making is just getting other people to show up.

He was quickly called back to Paris. The Terror and its makers had been overthrown and replaced by a well-meaning but hopelessly ineffective series of constitutional governments. The guillotine was abolished, and its terrible site was soon given a new, more hopeful name: the Place de la Concorde. But the Royalists, sensing the constitutional government's weakness, planned an uprising, again with English help, and a mob marched on the Tuileries Palace. Napoleon, who was one of the few professional artillery officers around, and was on the side of the Revolution, fired on the crowd, killing two hundred, and saving the government. Within a few weeks, the constitutionalists, while they continued to bicker, offered Napoleon the command in a quixotic plan—to take northern Italy away from France's Austrian enemy. Before he left, Napoleon fell in love with a beautiful young widow named Rose Beauharnais, whose husband had gone to the guillotine. He liked everything about her except her name, and he peremptorily changed it to Josephine. They were married, but had an uneventful honeymoon. "We'll have time to make love when the war is won," he explained to her sapiently.

What Napoleon did to the Austrian armies in Italy turned him from a hero into a legend. Fighting with a relatively small force, and without enough food to feed his Army or enough money to pay for it, he defeated a succession of Austrian commanders and drove them from northern Italy. Although Schom gives Napoleon credit for what was, by any standard, a spectacular military victory, he doesn't try very hard to explain how Napoleon did it. The Italian campaign became the model for all of Napoleon's subsequent campaigns, and he stayed in command right up to Waterloo, so he must have been doing something right. But what was it? The American baseball analyst Bill James may have come close to capturing one secret when he wrote, half jokingly, that Napoleon invented relief pitching: the strategy of saving the best troops for the late innings. Certainly a mixture of extreme impatience and peasant shrewdness—throw almost everything you have at them at once, but keep back a crucial reserve—seems to have been key to his success. Other military historians have suggested other elements: organizational savvy, a taste for the offensive, an unwillingness to squander men in peripheral operations, a sense of when to strike, above all an appetite for the decisive battle.

In the end, however, Napoleon's genius seems to have been cultural, in the military historian John Keegan's sense—derived from his skill at what might now be

called "symbolic manipulation"—rather than strictly strategic. An amateur reader scouring the Napoleonic literature may once again find in print two thrilling studies of Napoleon's armies: John R. Elting's "Swords Around a Throne: Napoleon's Grande Armée," newly reprinted by Da Capo, and A.G. Macdonell's "Napoleon and His Marshals," just republished in Prion's Lost Treasures series. (Macdonell's book may contain the best bibliography in all scholarly literature: he proposes to "confine myself to the simple statement that every single detail of this book has been taken from one or other work of history, reference, reminiscence, or biography.")

Elting is a terrifyingly comprehensive social historian of Napoleon's Army, who seems to know every regiment of the Grande Armée down to the typical smell of its horses' manure. He makes the point that even before Napoleon's rise to power the French Revolutionary Army had been forcibly democratized—the mob had become the Army—and therefore reduced, or perhaps elevated, to a kind of inspired amateurism. Like the North Vietnamese Army in our time, it had the benefit of an extreme simplicity of approach. Its adversaries, Elting writes, "did their professional best and eventually found that some vulgarian of a French ex-sergeant, whom they had completely outmaneuvered, would fail to recognize the hopelessness of his situation, or that a recent captain of French artillery (i.e. Napoleon) would show a shocking disregard for the accepted system of strategy and tactics." A contemporary German observer wrote, "Everything about these Frenchmen was supple and light," and, while noting that they were "lacking all organization," he said that each man had "his musket, his cartridge box and cockade of the national colors, and all were brave and energetic."

In a series of forced moves, the Army had made the crucial transition from a professional army of "walking muskets," led by an aristocratic officer, to a modern mass army, led by an officer corps advanced on merit and moved, if not sustained, by abstract ideas and symbols. The men who rose from the ranks to lead this new kind of Army would become Napoleon's marshals. At a time when throughout Europe the officer class was restricted, by both law and custom, to the aristocracy, Napoleon's marshals were the sons of merchants and millers and innkeepers and tanners and barrel coopers. Like contemporary gang leaders, they had to make their authority manifest through bold, unmistakable symbols—above all, by ostentatious acts of personal bravery, but also by dazzling displays of bravura elegance. As Marshal Joachim Murat, the innkeeper's son, galloped across the snows at Eylau for a last, desperate assault on the Russian armies, he had a gold-embroidered uniform, ostrich feathers in his hat, a great leopard skin over his saddle, and a gold-headed cane in his hand. (The Mafia hit man, in black, is still Corsican, feudal; the Crips and the Bloods are Napoleonic.)

Napoleon's crucial insight was that it was not, in the long run, the romance of the nation, or of the cause, or of the Republic, that would keep such an army in battle. It was the army's romance of itself, of its own existence. Napoleon was the first to understand that the mass army, like the mass society—it is their paradox—is moved not by a simple calculation of self-interest but by the power of extremely abstract and obviously manufactured mythologies, symbols, and legends: by advertising. Elting points out that official national flags were unknown to the pre-Revolutionary Royal Army, and that it was only the National Convention of 1791 which ordered all flags to be the tricolor. In the Italian campaign, Napoleon gave each fighting group a personalized slogan to attach to its colors: "The Brave 18th, I know you: No enemy can resist you"; "The Terrible 75th which nothing can stop"; "I am confident, the 32nd is there"; the "Incomparable" 9th. Napoleon seems to have known not just his regiments by character but most of his soldiers by name. (In 1807, as Emperor, he wrote from Poland about a corporal of the 15th Ligne, saying that he had heard he was drinking too much, and ought to stop.)

As Elting explains, the Revolution had abolished all the royal decorations (their holders had been "invited" to turn them in at the local town hall) and replaced them with written good-boy, fine-work certificates, which inspired nobody. Napoleon invented a new series of decorations from scratch. He distributed medals on the Dodo's principle—that all must have prizes. There were silver-mounted muskets, carbines, and drumsticks; axes, silver trumpets, and an insignia of the

GIRAUDON/ART RESOURCE

"Battle of the Pyramids, 21 July 1798," b

"Three Wild Turkeys."

"flaming grenade." There was even a special ear trumpet awarded to a captain who went deaf after a mine explosion.

Napoleon was essentially extending to a democratic army the system of honors that Louis XIV had introduced at Versailles in the seventeenth century. The King had grasped that the contentious and insurrectional nobles could be pacified and controlled by an absurdly transparent system of baubles and honors: a special coat; an invitation to Marly, the King's second house, for breakfast; a thousand small, meaningless rewards. Napoleon made the discovery, later to be remade by every P.R. man and politician in America, that a cynically engendered change in packaging could change real loyalties and feelings. "Baubles?" he said once. "It is with baubles that men are led.... You imagine that an enemy army is defeated by analysis? Never. In a republic, soldiers performed great deeds largely through a sense of honor. It was the same under Louis XIV." (He saw the link.) The most famous French order—the Légion d'Honneur, whose red ribbon even writers occasionally get to wear on their lapels—is of Napoleonic origin. Again and again, one is impressed by Napoleon's extreme diligence in creating symbols and regalia—for example, the invention of the "eagles," the golden figures at the end of the regimental flagstaffs, whose loss was meant to be, and became, more grievous for a regiment than any number of casualties.

Of course, the baubles didn't win the battles by themselves. Like every other general, Napoleon usually won when he had more men and more guns than the enemy, and lost when he didn't. But the men came to fire the guns because they had convinced themselves that the baubles were worth having. The vision of Napoleonic glory that one sees in the pictures of Baron Gros and Jacques-Louis David, and even of Delacroix—the fetishism of tight breeches and swaying plumes and silken jackets, the obsessive display of flags and standards, a stiff breeze blowing everywhere, the tonality of scarlet and gold—is not a romantic version of an uglier reality. It is a real transcription of a willed romance.

THE Italian campaign left Napoleon, at the age of twenty-seven, the military hero of France but without a role in government. The Directory that ruled France, a weak five-man cabinet, thought it wise to keep Napoleon at a distance, and so, accepting a plan devised by Talleyrand, the all-party, all-weather Foreign Minister, it sent the General off to colonize Egypt. Although the plan demonstrated a certain imperial logic—after all, the British controlled most of the rest of the Mediterranean—one smells a classical allusion just beneath the surface, rising from that room above the café. Far from France, cut off from all news, Napoleon set himself up as a little philosopher-king—or, to be more accurate, an anthropologist-king, for in his circle the human sciences had trumped the practice of abstract thought. He had brought with him from Paris to Egypt a clutch of intellectuals, and he founded an institute to which he and they could report. Their interests were historical and archeological, and culminated in Champollion's decoding of the Rosetta stone. In Egypt, Napoleon also betrayed Josephine for the first time: he had a long affair with Pauline Fourès, the wife of one of his officers, and she became known as the General's Cleopatra.

THE first triumphs of the Egyptian campaign soured, and a long subsidiary campaign into Syria failed disastrously. Yet Napoleon, though he abandoned his troops in Egypt (where the British eventually finished them off), was able to return to Paris as a hero. Once there, he swore loyalty to the Directory and began plotting to overthrow it. Schom is very good on the unbelievably sloppy and disorganized coup d'état that took place on November 9, 1799—the coup known as 18 Brumaire, which Tocqueville called "one of the most badly conceived and executed coups d'état imaginable." It left Napoleon in the role of First Consul. He propagated a constitution, which, confirmed by a dubious plebiscite (he got more votes than there were voters), made him the effective dictator of France. (Three years later, a referendum declared him consul for life.)

For a brief time, Napoleon ruled pretty well, making peace with the Americans, with the Russians, and even with the British. The line of intellectuals and artists and philosophers who believed in him—who believed that he was the rational guarantor of the Revolution's best values—outdoes even those who believed in Stalin. Yet the peace did not survive, and soon Napoleon's war-making took on a compulsive touch. In 1805, having defeated the Austrians and the Russians at Austerlitz, he embarked on a scheme to invade England, building a national flotilla of unseaworthy flat-bottomed boats and organizing a combined fleet with the Spanish. Vast sums of money

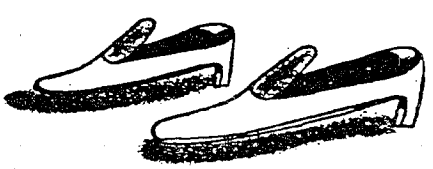
and amounts of attention were spent on this, and Schom writes convincingly on its essential impracticality, not to say absurdity. (Even if Napoleon could have got the boats across the Channel, he could never have held the country with the number of soldiers who could be ferried over. This is a point that Hitler didn't get, either.) The Combined Fleet, meanwhile, under the command of the incompetent Admiral Villeneuve, was the fleet that Nelson totalled off the coast of Spain, near Trafalgar, and that was the end of that. The man deserves his column.

The Napoleonic era lasted so long—Europe was at war for more than ten years—that no narrator can help getting bogged down in the details of the campaigns. Napoleon did everything he could to force his way into absolutist Europe, even divorcing Josephine and marrying the daughter of the Austrian Emperor. But none of it worked. (When he started losing battles, she stuck with Dad.) From Syria to Germany, the sheer scale of his engagements is amazing, and awful, in both the archaic and the modern sense of the word. One can, with gruesome connoisseurship, pick favorite engagements, marshals, and campaigns as subjects. The Russian campaign is the most "epic," producing, as it did, "War and Peace" and that unforgettable map of the Grande Armée bleeding away over the winter from a broad red belt into a wispy thread. The German campaign was perhaps the most historically decisive, since Napoleon's attack on the little German states ultimately produced, in reaction, modern Germany.

But it was with the earlier Peninsular campaign, where the French invaders fought a long, inconclusive guerrilla war with the Spanish and the Portuguese and their English supporters, that the modern horror began. Spain is the one place where no romance of Napoleon exists or ever could. The Napoleonic Army committed massacres left and right—albeit against a Catholic enemy that thought all Frenchmen might have tails or might be Jews—and the premise of the Enlightenment order that Napoleon embodied, if in severe and militarized form, seemed exploded. Is there a greater example of experience forcing a new style than the transformation of European painting from David's "Oath of the Horatii," of 1784, which presaged the forces that set Napoleonism in motion, to Goya's "Third of May," painted on the eve of Waterloo? In the David, the mechanical, pinwheel-like motion of the men taking the oath is meant to be contrasted with the collapsing disordered pile of feminine emotion. In the Goya, the masculine order has become the firing squad, and sympathy must go to the collapsing pile of the massacred. This is a change in style that goes beyond choosing good guys and bad guys: it reorders what it is that good and bad look like. If Napoleon was the creator of the first Romantic army, he was also—and perhaps more important—the author of the first Romantic disillusionment. From Beethoven to Goethe and on to Goya, the generation of liberals who had looked to the French Army as the bearer of reason found it to be a disaster. (The most famous disillusionment is Beethoven's; he removed the dedication of the "Eroica" Symphony after Napoleon declared himself Emperor, in 1804.)

The standard French apology for Napoleon's war-making is that he was encircled by diehard reactionary empires intent on restoring the ancien régime, which would be even worse. Dictators, of course, always say that they are encircled: it is in their nature to be encircled, since anyone not being dictated to is by definition part of the encirclement. But the apologists have a point: when the British oligarchs won, they *did* try to bring back the ancien régime, and it *was* even worse.

Napoleon never quite lost the faith of the French people. In the aftermath of the defeat in Leipzig, in 1813, he abdicated and went off to rule the island of Elba, where he took long salt baths and read and reread "The Arabian Nights." After only a year in exile, he decided to escape, and was quickly welcomed back to France. For a hundred and thirty-six days, he re-created the Empire—the marshals came back to his side, and the portly King Louis XVIII, who had been dropped on the throne by the English, ran away—and then marched north to Belgium to confront the allied armies of England and Germany. The battle was in doubt until the end of the day, when the Prussians, under Blücher, made one last, surprising charge, and Napoleon, sending his men out, saw them retreat in confusion, the democratic army turning back into the chaotic mob from which it had emerged. This time, he was sent to a smaller and more distant island, St. Helena, which, in a sour irony, had been a French possession ceded to England in the brief peace of 1804. Fat and wheezing, the little Emperor passed the rest of his days reading "Paul et Virginie," whose theme of love gone wrong he strangely applied to his own fate, and trying to restore his health by riding a seesaw that he had installed in his library. Schom is a believer in the theory that Napoleon's death, on St. Helena, was caused by arsenic poisoning, and he produces some new evidence to show that this is so, though he suspects that it was Napoleon's remnant court, rather than the eager British, who did the poisoning.



NAPOLEON'S reputation has been riding the seesaw every since. Despite his legend as the archetypal French hero, he was not a nationalist in the modern sense. His references and his world view were largely classical, referring to a unified European and Roman civilization. Even the satellite republics he created in Italy and Germany were justified by Roman imperial precedent. Various versions of empire appear in the Napoleonic iconography: David makes him Roman; Ingres makes him Carolingian. Often, he doesn't even seem particularly French. Had history taken a slightly different turn, and the boat from Corsica gone, like General Paoli's, to London instead of Paris, it is easy to imagine Nabulio (renamed Nathaniel) Bonaparte winning the battles for the other side. Had that boat taken yet a different, and perhaps more likely, turn, Bonaparte would have ended up an American patriot, with a naval victory or two in the War of 1812, and a liberal-arts college in Ohio named after him. (The absence of American Bonapartism is due to the fact that every tycoon already knows he is Napoleon.)

Yet though he was not a nationalist himself, as much as anyone he was the unintentional begetter of modern nationalism. His career helped bring about the dissolution of the cosmopolitan, universalist ideal it once was taken

to embody. Most obviously, it helped create (in Germany especially), by imperial aggression, the conditions for romantic nationalism. All the early Caspar David Friedrich paintings and drawings, for instance, get their radical impetus from the need to find a visual protest against French classicism. A new language of form was born in the effort to negate the order, the authority, and the clarity of Imperial style. Friedrich's famous image of a tiny French chasseur about to be swallowed up by the vast Northern forest is the herald of the coming opposition of national mysticism to imperial rationality.

In a more practical way, Napoleon solved a crucial problem of national size. His conquests created states that were of the right acreage to become modern nation-states. Places like Corsica and the German principalities were too small to survive; all Europe, as he found out, expensively, was too big to rule. But states the size of Napoleonic France and post-Napoleonic Germany were just right. In a generous mood, you could say that Napoleon's forced bonding of little states into big ones, along with his insistence on procedural, rule-bound constitutional government, created the conditions for the modern liberal democracy.

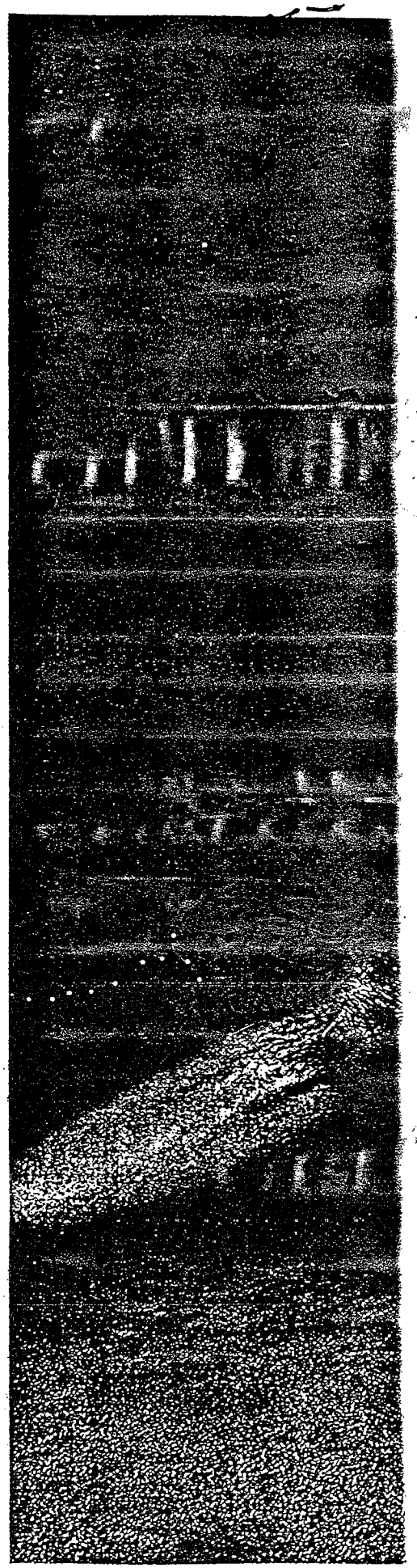
In France itself, oddly, the Imperial moment, of all the great moments in French history, seems the most remote. The Versailles seventeenth-century France of the Sun King and Saint-Simon—*ce pays-ci*, charming, witty, brilliant, incestuous, malicious—is still there in the salons, and the much later careerist, corrupt, nineteenth-century France of Napoleon's nephew Louis-Napoleon is in the streets and boulevards. Though it is possible to trace a line of descent from Napoleon to de Gaulle and current Gaullism, it's a little misleading. The style of autocratic rule in the Fifth Republic is essentially monarchical: the ideal role of the President is one of lofty consultation, with the details left to his ministers—not at all like Napoleon's one-man state.

Napoleon's legacy is not a reminder of the power of pure action. It has become instead one more demonstration of the power of words and abstract symbolism to create a reality of their own. In this way, the outward show of the Napoleonic era—the uniforms, the bobbing plumes, the sabres, the ostrich skins and gold-headed canes—was the most lasting thing about it. Napoleon spoke of the man on horseback, but maybe what mattered in the long run was what the man on horseback was wearing. Napoleon may have been a monster, yet it's hard not to feel that the romance of Imperial style has developed an independent existence in the world's imagination, and one not wholly evil. It seems to fill a deep human need for display, order, glamour that no other system of modern honor has yet quite managed to do. Even A.J. Liebling could write, a century later, on his first sight of Napoleon's tomb, "The gold light, the marble, and the massed battle flags made an image of Napoleonic glory that has always helped me understand the side of Stendhal that is least rational. If brief exposure to the glories of the Empire, a hundred years later, could so dazzle me, I find it easy to pardon the effect upon a lieutenant of dragoons eighteen years old, riding in the midst of the Sixth Light Dragoons, uniforms bottle-green, red waistcoat, white breeches, helmet with crest, horsetail, and red cockade."

That kind of Napoleonic glamour is everywhere in Paris. You can't ride on the Métro without passing a battlefield, or take a walk without crossing a marshal. For countless generations, toy soldiers have nearly always been Imperial soldiers. In every toy store in Paris, you find shelf upon shelf of precisely rendered and particularized Imperial chasseurs and drummer boys and dragoons and grenadiers—the Grande Armée in miniature, bayonets fixed, ready to charge. Glory looks best from a very great distance, or on a very small scale. ♦

BATHERS

"A beautiful print," Irving Penn once declared, "is a thing in itself, not just a halfway house on the way to the page." A good thing, then, that no fewer than four exhibitions of the master photographer's work go on view this month—in San Francisco, Chicago (a major retrospective at the Art Institute), Paris, and Berlin. The Paris show, at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie, includes the fourteen-picture suite "The Bath (1967, San Francisco)," which contains the lyrical image at the right.



HISTORY'S JUDGMENT

Napoleon rose to power by being all things to all men. His fall did not diminish the universal interest he commanded. To romantics he was the epitome of heroism; to Nietzsche, the exemplar of power. To the critic and historian Taine, his career was that of an artist; to the leaders of the New World he symbolized the tyranny and cupidity of the Old. The following pages present a selection of judgments that have been made about Napoleon by his contemporaries and posterity.

I have just finished reading O'Meara's Bonaparte. It places him on a higher scale of understanding than I had allotted him. I had thought him the greatest of all military captains, but an indifferent statesman and misled by unworthy passions. The flashes however which escape from him in these conversations with O'Meara prove a mind of great expansion, altho' not of distinct developement and reasoning. He siezes results with rapidity and penetration, but never explains logically the process of reasoning by which he arrives at them. This book too makes us forget his atrocities for a moment in commiseration of his sufferings. I will not say that the authorities of the world, charged with the care of their country and people had not a right to confine him for life, as a Lyon or Tyger, on the principle of self-preservation. There was no safety to nations while he was permitted to roam at large. But the putting him to death in cold blood by lingering tortures of mind, by vexations, insults, and deprivations, was a degree of inhumanity to which the poisonings, and assassinations of the school of Borgia and the den of Marat never attained. The book proves also that nature had denied him the moral sense, the first excellence of well organised man. If he could seriously and repeatedly affirm that he had raised himself to power without ever having committed a crime, it proves that he wanted totally the sense of right and wrong. If he could consider the millions of human lives which he had destroyed or caused to be destroyed, the desolations of countries . . . the destitutions of lawful rulers of the world without the consent of their constituents, to place his brothers and sisters on their thrones, the cutting up of established societies of men . . . and all the numberless train of his other enormities; the man, I say, who could consider all these as no crimes must have been a moral monster, against whom every hand should have been lifted to slay him.

Thomas Jefferson

Now Napoleon—there was a fellow! Always enlightened by reason, always clear and decisive, and gifted at every moment with enough energy to translate into action whatever he recognized as being advantageous or necessary. His life was the stride of a demigod from battle to battle and from victory to victory. . . . it could . . . be said that he was in a permanent state of enlightenment, which is why his fate was more brilliant than the world has ever seen or is likely to see after him.

J. W. von Goethe

What a mighty bubble! What a tremendous Waterspout has Napolion been according to his Life, written by himself? He says he was the Creature of the Principles and manners of the Age. By which no doubt he means the Age of Reason; the progress of Manilius's Ratio; of Plato's Logos etc. I believe him. A Whirlwind raised him and a Whirlwind blowed him a Way to St. Helena. He is very confident that the Age of Reason is not past; and so am I; but I hope that Reason will never again rashly and hastily create such Creatures as him. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, and Humanity will never again, I hope blindly surrender themselves to an unbounded Ambition for national Conquests, nor implicitly commit themselves to the custody and Guardianship of Arms and Heroes. If they do, they will again end in St. Helena . . . and Sacre Ligues. *John Adams*

Bolívar

The fate of the world has been decided at Waterloo. Europe has been freed by this immortal battle, the consequences of which may be greater than any ever known in the history of the world, especially with respect to America, for she will see that vast theatre of war, that has for more than twenty years ravaged Europe, transferred to her shores. If it is true that Bonaparte has escaped from France and seeks, as it is reported, asylum in America, then, whatever the country of his choice, that country will be destroyed by his presence. With him will come the English hatred of his tyranny and Europe's jealousy of America. The armies of all nations will follow in his tracks, and all America, if necessary, will be blockaded by the British fleet.

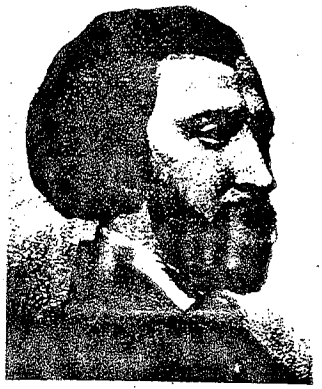
If Napoleon is welcomed by North America, she will be attacked by all Europe; consequently, Bonaparte will attempt to gain the support of the Independents of Mexico, the neighbors of the United States. If South America is struck by the thunderbolt of Bonaparte's arrival, misfortune will ever be ours if our country accords him a friendly reception. His thirst for conquest is insatiable; he has mowed down the flower of European youth . . . in order to carry out his ambitious projects. The same designs will bring him to the New World . . . *Simon de Bolívar*

Mme. de Staël

It has often been said that if Bonaparte had kept measure, he would have maintained himself in power. But what is meant by "keeping measure"? If, sincerely and dignifiedly, he had established the English form of government in France, no doubt he would still be emperor. His victories created him a prince; it took his love of etiquette, his need of flattery, his titles, his decorations, his courtiers to make the upstart reappear in him. Yet no matter how senseless his policy of conquest may have been, it may be that once his soul had sunk so low as to see no more greatness except in despotism, he became incapable of managing without perpetual war: for what would a despot be without military glory in a country such as France? Was it possible to oppress the nation . . . without at least giving it the fatal compensation of oppressing other nations in turn? The greatest evil plaguing mankind is absolute power. *Mme. de Staël*

The life of Europe was centered in one man; all were trying to fill their lungs with the air he had breathed. Every year France presented that man with three hundred thousand of her youth; it was the tax paid to Caesar, and, without that troop behind him, he could not follow his fortune. It was the escort he needed that he might traverse the world, and then perish in a little valley in a deserted island, under the weeping willow.

Never had there been so many sleepless nights as in the time of that man; never had there been seen . . . such a nation of desolate mothers; never was there such a silence about those who spoke of death. And yet there was never such joy, such life, such fanfares of war, in all hearts. Never was there such pure sunlight as that which dried all this blood. God made the sun for this man, they said, and they called it the Sun of Austerlitz. But he made this sunlight himself with his ever-thundering cannons which dispelled all clouds but those which succeed the day of battle.



Musset

It was this air of the spotless sky, where shone so much glory, where glistened so many swords, that the youth of the time breathed. They well knew that they were destined to the hecatomb; but they regarded Murat as invulnerable, and the emperor had been seen to cross a bridge where so many bullets whistled that they wondered if he could die. And even if one must die, what did it matter? Death itself was so beautiful, so noble, so illustrious, in his battle-scarred purple! It borrowed the color of hope, it reaped so many ripening harvests that it became young, and there was no more old age. All the cradles of France, as all its tombs, were armed with shield and buckler; there were no more old men, there were corpses or demigods.

Alfred de Musset

What I should like to describe is . . . not so much the actions of Napoleon's life as Napoleon himself—that singular, incomplete, but truly *marvelous* being, whom one cannot contemplate attentively without treating oneself to one of the most curious, one of the strangest spectacles that can be found in the universe.

I should like to show how much, in his prodigious enterprise, he actually owed to his genius, and with what opportunities the condition of the country and the temper of the times presented him; how and why that indocile nation [France] was then speeding, quite spontaneously, toward servitude; with what incomparable art he discovered in the most demagogic achievements of the Revolution precisely everything that was suited to despotism, and how he made despotism their natural outcome. Starting with his interior administration, I want to contemplate the spectacle of his almost divine intelligence grossly laboring at the compression of human freedom; that perfect and scientific organization of force, such as only the greatest genius living in the most enlightened and civilized age could conceive of; and, under the weight of that admirable machine, society flattened, stifled, and increasingly sterile, intellectual activity slowing down, human mind languishing, souls shrinking, great men ceasing to appear, and a limitless, flat horizon against which nothing can be seen, no matter in which direction one's eyes may turn, save the colossal figure of the emperor himself.

Alexis de Tocqueville

Tolstoi

A man of no convictions, no habits, no traditions, no name, not even a Frenchman, by the strangest freaks of chance, as it seems, rises above the seething parties of France, and without attaching himself to any one of them, advances to a prominent position.

The incompetence of his colleagues, the weakness and insignificance of his opponents, the frankness of the deception, and the dazzling and self-confident limitation of the man raise him to the head of the army. The brilliant personal qualities of the soldiers of the Italian army, the disinclination to fight of his opponents, and his childish insolence and conceit gain him military glory. Innumerable so-called *chance* circumstances attend him everywhere. The disfavour into which he falls with the French Directorate turns to his advantage. His efforts to avoid the path ordained for him are unsuccessful; he is not received into the Russian army, and his projects in Turkey come to nothing. . . .

On his return from Italy, he finds the government in Paris in that process of dissolution in which all men who are in the government are inevitably effaced and nullified. And an escape for him from that perilous position offers itself in the shape of an aimless, groundless expedition to Africa. Again the same so-called *chance* circumstances accompany him. Malta, the impregnable, surrenders without a shot being fired; the most ill-considered measures are crowned with success. The enemy's fleet, which later on does not let one boat escape it, now lets a whole army elude it. In Africa a whole series of outrages is perpetrated on the almost unarmed inhabitants. And the men perpetrating these atrocities, and their leader most of all, persuade themselves that it is noble, it is glory, that it is like Caesar and Alexander of Macedon, and that it is fine.

That ideal of *glory* and of *greatness,* consisting in esteeming nothing one does wrong, and glorying in every crime, and ascribing to it an incomprehensible, supernatural value—that ideal, destined to guide this man and those connected with him, is elaborated on a grand scale in Africa. Whatever he does succeeds. The plague does not touch him. The cruelty of murdering his prisoners is not remembered against him. His childishly imprudent, groundless, and ignoble departure from Africa, abandoning his comrades in misfortune, does him good service; and again the enemy's fleet lets him twice slip through their hands. At the moment when, completely intoxicated by the success of his crimes and ready for the part he has to play, he arrives in Paris without any plan, the disintegration of the Republican government, which might have involved him in its ruin a year before, has now reached its utmost limit, and his presence, a man independent of parties, can now only aid his elevation. . . .

Chance, millions of *chances,* give him power; and all men, as though in league together, combine to confirm that power. *Chance* circumstances create the characters of the rulers of France, who cringe before him; *chance* creates the character of Paul I, who acknowledges his authority; *chance* causes the plot against him to strengthen his power instead of shaking it. *Chance* throws the Duc d'Enghien into his hands and accidentally impels him to kill him, thereby convincing the crowd by the strongest of all arguments that he has the right on his side since he has the might. *Chance* brings it to pass that though he strains every nerve to

fit out an expedition against England, which would unmistakably have led to his ruin, he never puts this project into execution, and happens to fall upon Mack with the Austrians, who surrender without a battle. *Chance* and *genius* give him the victory at Austerlitz; and by *chance* it comes to pass that all men, not only the French, but all the countries of Europe except England . . . forget their old horror and aversion for his crimes, and now recognise the power he has gained, acknowledge the title he has bestowed upon himself, and accept his ideal of greatness and glory, which seems to every one something fine and rational. *Leo Tolstoi*

Marx

Camille Desmoulins, Danton, Robespierre, Saint-Just, Napoleon—these were the heroes . . . who, with Roman trappings and phrases, accomplished the mission of their own epoch: they unleashed and established modern bourgeois society. The first four of these smashed feudalism. . . . The fifth, Napoleon, created inside France the conditions that made it possible for free competition to develop, for the redistributed land to be exploited, and for the newly liberated productive energy of the nation to be put to use; beyond the borders of France, he swept away the feudal institutions. . . . Once the new form of society had been established, those antediluvian giants disappeared from the earth, and with them vanished the resurrected Romanism—the Brutuses, Gracchuses, and Publicolas, the tribunes and senators, and Caesar himself. *Karl Marx*

The first form of government of which men can conceive when they emerge from a state of savagery is either democracy or despotism; they are the first phase of civilization. Aristocracy . . . has everywhere replaced both those primitive governments; it is the second phase of civilization. Representative government . . . is a new, a very recent innovation, and it constitutes . . . the third phase of civilization . . . Napoleon was the supreme product of that second phase of civilization. . . . He never understood the third. Where could he have studied it? . . . he had no time to read after he finished his schooling. All he had time for was to study men.

Napoleon, then, is a nineteenth-century tyrant. Who says tyrant says superior mind; and it is inconceivable that a superior mind can fail to absorb, . . . the common-sense ideas that are in the air. . . . It is very curious to follow in Napoleon's soul the struggle between the genius of tyranny with the deep rationality that made a great man of him. *Stendhal*

Nietzsche

Napoleon: We see the necessary relationship between the higher and the terrible man. "Man" reinstalled, and her due of contempt and fear restored to woman. Highest activity and health are the signs of the great man; the straight line and grand style rediscovered in action; the mightiest of all instincts, that of life itself,—the lust of dominion,—heartily welcomed. *Friedrich Nietzsche*