

P E T E R L A N G

R. F. Delderfield's
Novels as
Cultural History

A READER'S COMPANION

VICTOR J. LAMS

This book begins with a survey of R. F. Delderfield's knowledge of Napoleonic history as revealed in his three Napoleonic-era novels. Two commentaries follow: the first on English attitudes and actions in a London suburb during the Interbellum (1918–1939) in his novels *The Dreaming Suburb* and *The Avenue Goes to War*, and the second on his Craddock trilogy, set in Devonshire, dramatizing the English experience from the Boer War until the late 1960s.

Emeritus Professor of English at California State University Chico, **Victor J. Lams** has written two books on Richardson's *Clarissa*, three on John Henry Newman's religious rhetoric, and two studies of Robertson Davies' novels, all published by Peter Lang.

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as Cultural History



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
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INTRODUCTION

In *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge 2004) Peter Burke explains what cultural historians do, whether they favor the internal approach, which brings to light “something at once elusive and important,” or the external approach which “connects the rise of cultural history to a wider ‘cultural turn’ in political science, geography, economics” etcetera. Burke notes that these historians are of several minds about the method of inquiry they should adopt. As it becomes “increasingly difficult” to say what does or does not “count” as culture, some of them “see their aim as essentially descriptive” while others believe that cultural history “can and should be presented as a story” (1–3). While not a cultural historian, R. F. Delderfield is a novelist with an ear cocked toward the realities which they address. And it is where cultural history merges with and melds into story that his best and most distinctive novels operate.

Above all, Delderfield seems committed to preventing the past from sliding out of our social memory. As Burke points out, the history of memory is “currently enjoying a boom” among the New Cultural Historians, which is “probably a reaction to the speeding-up of cultural change” which threatens to divide “what we are from what we were.” As they recede, events tend to lose their specificity and come to resemble “the general schemata current in the culture,” his illustrative example being Paul Fussell’s observation that British memories of the Great War “were shaped by recollections of” Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which was still “widely read at that time” (Burke, 65–6). In the same vein, though with a more positive and forward-looking cast, William Doyle in his short introduction *The French Revolution* (Oxford 2001) draws attention to contemporary endorsements which demonstrate that the French experiment is a paradigm which has not lost its mobilizing power.

Poles, who first sang the *Marseillaise* in 1794 as they resisted the carve-up of their country, sang it again in 1956 in revolt against Soviet tyranny. In 1989, as France commemorated the Revolution’s 200th anniversary, the same anthem of defiance was heard in

Beijing among the doomed student protestors in Tianamen Square. Few countries have failed to experience some sort of revolution since 1789, and in all of them there have been people looking back to what happened in France then and subsequently for inspiration, models, patterns, or warnings (3).

Delderfield would not be surprised at these expressions of solidarity with the French of the Napoleonic era, for, as his five books about Napoleon and his three related novels picturing the experience of ordinary citizens of that time demonstrate, he differed from many other English people in seeing the French Revolution not as a *Tale of Two Cities* horror story, but as genuinely liberating in both intention and effect, and long overdue.

Once again, Delderfield was a novelist rather than an historian and he contributed nothing original to our store of information about Napoleon and his influence. Rather, he evaluated and re-presented the wealth of information he had accumulated by immersing himself for forty years in the large shelf of histories of the period and the many memoirs of eye witnesses. The case is different as regards his Avenue novels (*The Dreaming Suburb* and *The Avenue Goes to War*), focused upon the period from the Great War's end to the defeat of Hitler and set in the London suburb to which Delderfield's father moved the family in 1917 [a safer home than the London then being bombed by German Zeppelins], and his Craddock trilogy (*A Horseman Riding By*), whose action is located in the Devonshire to which he relocated in later childhood and lived for the remainder of his life, with the exception of his service as an R.A.F. officer. In these novels Delderfield acts as a cultural historian presenting "as a story" (Burke) the realities that he knows intimately from personal observation, from direct experience. His two Diana novels and *To Serve Them All My Days* are altogether a different kettle of fish, for in them the cultural history involved is more diffuse, their action being less well described by this book's title.

DELDERFIELD'S NAPOLEONIC *OEUVRE*

In Doyle's recounting of events, the crisis which led to the *ancien regime's* collapse was "financial overstretch" (19), which was not ameliorated by Louis XVI's efforts to prevent national bankruptcy. What made reform impossible was the glaring inequality "in the structure of privilege and exemption" by which the heavy weight of taxation "fell disproportionately on those least able to pay," while parliamentary magistrates "were all nobles and represented nobody but themselves," whom they exempted (26). The pre-revolution, as Doyle calls it, occurred when Calonne, "the financial minister appointed in 1783" to halt the impending disaster, attempted to "float new loans" to fund "lavish expenditures in the hope of sustaining confidence." Being resisted in this attempt by the Paris parlement, Calonne next presented the king with a plan for "comprehensive reform" which involved a "new, uniform land tax, with no exemptions," to be overseen "throughout the kingdom by provincial assemblies elected by all prominent landowners." In his third attempt, Calonne imagined that "a handpicked Assembly of Notables" whose "approbation would powerfully influence general opinion" would have the desired reformative effect. But general opinion was powerless to moderate the excesses of entrenched wealth and privilege, so this plan like the others offered no hope of correcting the problem. Push having come to shove, "as crowds came onto the streets to cheer for the Estates-General, the Parisian magistrates were sent into exile" (34-5).

However, the Estates-General, which had not met since 1614, was a “massive disappointment” when it met, since it was an outdated political instrument which guaranteed that the nobility and clergy would overwhelm the reform efforts of the third estate. There was a ray of hope, though, one which emanated from the third-estate’s deputies, who “made it clear that they would transact no business as a separate order.” Their appeals to the nobility and clergy “to unite with them” were ignored, and a six-week stalemate followed, “during which bread prices continued to rise, public order began to break down in many districts, and the widespread hopes of the spring began to sour.” Then, Sieyès proposed that the third estate “begin proceedings unilaterally,” and after “an overwhelming vote in favour,” they invited the other orders to join them, and three days later a handful of parish priests did so. The dam had sprung a leak, which widened as “other clergy trickled in over the next few days, and a body that was no longer just representative of the third estate recognized that it now needed a new name.”

Once again at Sieyès instigation, on 17 June [1789] it chose an ominous but uncomplaining title: the National Assembly. Immediately afterwards it decreed the cancellation and then re-authorization of all taxes. The implication was clear. The assembly had seized sovereign power in the name of the French Nation. It was the founding act of the French Revolution. If the Nation was sovereign, the king no longer was. (Doyle, 39–40)

At that point “certain regiments” began to converge at Versailles, and when more troops joined them, the “nervous assembly” begged the king to withdraw those forces, which Louis argued were necessary “to secure the public order.” Predictably, “Paris exploded with a mixture of fear and indignation,” and members of the Paris garrison of “French guards began to desert,” while bands of “hungry insurgents were ransacking strong points in the city for arms, powder, and hoards of flour.” Then on 14 July they descended upon the Bastille, the prison “which commanded the entire east end of the city with its guns,” and with the assistance of “military deserters” they seized the fortress. “A counter-revolution had been defeated. The National Assembly had been saved” (42). Without tracing the enabling events in specific detail, what followed was “Civil war and terror” (52), which exacerbated the latent hunger for effective leadership of the country—a leadership not committed as the *ancien régime* had been to crushing ordinary citizens while profiting an exalted minority. The stage is now set for Napoleon to take control, to unite and lead the nation.

This is an appropriate juncture at which to discuss one of those cultural historical studies which brings to light “something at once elusive and important,” namely Lynn Hunt’s *Family Romance of the French Revolution* (U.Cal Press 1992). While Freud’s family romance “was located in the individual psyche,” Hunt uses the expression to signify “the collective, unconscious images of familial order that underlie revolutionary politics,” especially (as I see it) the politics which led to the enthusiastic acceptance of Napoleon to govern France. As Hunt puts it, “the ide-

ology of absolutism explicitly tied royal government to the patriarchal family, and the use of the term *fraternity* during the French Revolution implied a break with this prior model." Hunt does not mean that the French "were acting out of some pathological fantasy rooted in warped individual psychologies," but that they were engaged in "creative efforts to reimagine the political world, to imagine polity unhinged from patriarchal authority" (xiii-xiv). Now the killing of King Louis XVI "was the most important political act of the Revolution and the central drama in the revolutionary family romance." It was *through* the king's execution that kingship itself died, because "the government which ordered the execution of the former king was a republic whose legitimacy rested on popular sovereignty" (2-3). Hunt illuminates the restiveness of the French people regarding the rule of no fathers or bad fathers by teasing out the implications of the popularity of Saint-Pierre's novel *Paul et Virginie*, published in 1788 and "reprinted more often than any novel published during the revolutionary decade; thirty separate editions appeared between 1789 and 1799."

What is perhaps most remarkable, however, is how much of the action of these novels [Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne* was also one of the most influential eighteenth-century French novels] takes place in the absence of the father. In a sense, then, the eighteenth-century French novel predicts the fate of the king; it might even be argued that the novel produces the fate of the king in that the spread of the ideal of the good father and the father's subsequent effacement fatally undermined the monarchical regime. (*Family Romance*, 29-34)

Further, Hunt points to the French Salon paintings of the second half-century, which "seem increasingly preoccupied with figures of old men who had trouble holding onto their powers," the "status of the father" being "particularly ambiguous" in Jacques-Louis David's best-known paintings of the prerevolutionary decade (37).

In terms of the political paradigm at stake, if the bad old king could no longer rule, who would replace him as the icon of a post-absolutist form of government based upon the consent of the governed? Not even the good father, but no father at all, for "the killing of the political father enacted a ritual sacrifice and opened the way to the band of brothers," the first of these being Napoleon, who became the first among equals since he inspired, and rewarded, the diligent and successful enterprise of the officers and men he commanded. As Hunt puts it, tyranny was replaced by the "authority of affection that the laws cannot command." In this paradigm "liberty would guarantee individual autonomy, and love would provide familial solidarity" (64-5). That Napoleon would attempt to replace the *ancien regime* with a family dynasty not unlike the absolutist configurations he displaced is irrelevant here, where the point is to picture the palpable alternative to the crushing system the French had previously endured.

Delderfield's Napoleonic Engagement

I use the term in the *engagé* sense meaning “to involve oneself in or commit oneself to,” to which Delderfield’s authorship of *Napoleon in Love* (1959), *Napoleon’s Marshals* (1962), *The Golden Millstones* (1965), *The Retreat From Moscow* (1967) and *Imperial Sunset* (1968) bear sufficient testimony. His passion for things Napoleonic developed out of an adolescent enthusiasm which fed upon Lockhart’s *Life of Napoleon*, which he chanced upon in Appleby’s bookstore and read until lunch time, “was there again the next day,” and finally bought, for “it was, after all, marked down to sixpence.” Earlier than that his imagination was captured when he was “shown his Waterloo coach in Madame Tussaud’s, a relic unfortunately destroyed in the great fire at that Museum.” Napoleon’s coach and Lockhart’s biography acted upon Delderfield as Edward Casey’s “commemorabilia,” i.e., the “texts and artifacts which are the souvenirs” of the dead that help others recall them (*Remembering*, 1987, 159).

Another instance of the commemorabilia that eventually came to occupy “three long shelves” in Delderfield’s study is Baron de Marbot’s *Memoirs* (two volumes, Longman’s Green, 1892), an account of this sublieutenant who rose to become a full colonel in Napoleon’s army. In reading Marbot, says Delderfield, “the armchair strategist can partake of every kind of adventure and narrow escape,” and, in his imaginary company, “march and fight alongside the veterans of the Grande Armée throughout the period of fifteen years when they dominated the Western world.” Nor did his enthusiasm for Marbot’s *Memoirs* disappear with his adolescent reading, for when Delderfield was sent out by the R.A.F. with a crew of photographers and camera men in three small aircraft to compile “a review and assessment of the damage to French and Belgian targets [by Allied bombing] prior to the D-Day assault in June,” he took Marbot’s reminiscences along with him.

With Marbot’s book in my pocket [A. J. Butler’s translation, issued by Cassels in 1929 in “a pocket edition” (*Retreat from Moscow*, p. 238)] I travelled over some of the same roads as those along which he had ridden in the company of men like Ney, Lannes and Masséna but thank God I was never called upon to face his personal risks, or exercise his daring or ingenuity. For all that he was a kind of patron saint for me when I crossed France and Belgium in the final stages of World War II, and I thought of him—indeed, I almost saw him in the flesh—when De Gaulle walked down the Champs Elysees surrounded by cheering Parisians. How Marbot would have cherished that moment of liberation! And how proud he would have been of that section of the French nation that had kept its courage and will to resist during the German occupation. (*For My Own Amusement*, 274-5 and 342)

Delderfield’s first attempt to present the material he had become familiar with, *Napoleon in Love*, is tangential to this study because it examines personal, not cultural, history. That the great leader had “two wives and at least a dozen mistresses” while at the center of the world stage (11-12) has little bearing upon his ambitions and career. Its bearing is limited to his having two wives: Joséphine Beauharnais,

the thirty-two-year-old courtesan and widow who was the love of his life, so far as he had one, and Marie Louise of Austria, the bovine eighteen-year-old woman descended from seven centuries of “every reigning house in the Western world” (203), whose purpose was to provide the heir who would carry forward the line his father intended to establish. That Napoleon’s siblings hated Joséphine and tried their best to get her out of the family, in part to enhance their own dynastic aspirations, is interesting for the light it throws on human nature, but that is a separate topic. One senses that Delderfield hoped to write a book which had not been written before, a book that a general readership would find interesting.

Similarly, *The Golden Millstones* is focused on family and dynastic matters rather than cultural history. After Napoleon became the head of the Buonaparte family at age sixteen when his father died, he attempted to direct his four brothers and three sisters this way or that the better to fulfil his own dynastic aspirations. But except for Joseph (and even he was not “the dull, clumsy fellow of Napoleonic legend”), his siblings “possessed considerable individuality and an exceptionally strong character” (7). Herding cats would have been easier. Says Delderfield, “this book is not an attempt to trace the military and political history of Napoleon,” but rather “to follow the careers of the seven millstones Napoleon chose to hang around his neck during the twenty-one years separating the siege of Toulon from the final disaster at Waterloo,” and so it is not the great man’s story “but an attempt to tell seven almost parallel stories over a period of sixty-odd years” (11). That being the book’s focus, one does better to concentrate upon Delderfield’s other three volumes of Napoleonic history; these contain concentrated, definitive passages which capsule his convictions about Napoleon’s importance as an element of change in European political culture, from which there has been no going back.

The March of the Twenty-Six: The Story of Napoleon’s Marshals (1962, reissued as a “Military Classic” by Pen & Sword Books in Yorkshire in 2004) tells their story, says Delderfield, “for the average reader who may want to know more of the brave, ambitious men who sustained the weight of Napoleon’s throne—how they began, how they reacted to power, how they met their several ends, what kind of employers they seemed to the men who followed them and how they behaved to the man who had elevated them from stable boys and travelling salesmen to places in history where their names became legends in their own lifetime” (11). In Delderfield’s book-blurb prose one can hear echoes of Henry V encouraging his troops on Crispin’s Day: “Then shall our names,/ Familiar in his mouth as household words,/ Harry the King, Belford and Exeter,/ Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester,/ Be in their flowing cups freshly remembered” (IV, iii, 53–55). This is the “we few, we happy few, we band of brothers” theme which is endorsed by the staid *Columbia Desk Encyclopedia* when it summarizes the key reasons why Napoleon was able to quickly transform his “starving and ragged army” into a first-class fighting force. His success resulted not only from his supply system, which permitted troops to

“live off the land” instead of depending upon “the financially exhausted Directory,” nor only from using “speed and massed surprise attacks by small but compact units,” but above all by “his magic influence over the morale of his soldiers” (p. 1878). Could such a “magic influence” constitute cultural history? It could, and it always has done. *The March of the Twenty-Six* highlights Napoleon’s ability to inspire enthusiastic popularity in the men under his command and illustrates the general historical truth that love of comrades and faith in one’s commanders is more efficacious toward inspiring self-sacrificial efforts on the battlefield than imprisonment in the hulks or the pain inflicted by the bloody lash.

By May 1798, when the Egyptian adventure was well advanced, [Napoleon] had gathered about him a group of talented officers who took his luck for granted. Their confidence in it, plus their faith in his ability, seeped downward through the ranks of junior officers, sergeants, corporals, to the ranks. Today, we should call this confidence *esprit de corps* and the attitude of the men of the British Eighth Army towards Montgomery, or that of the American troops toward Patton, are examples of what collective confidence can do for a fighting force. The German Africa Corps felt this way about Rommel and in Napoleon’s own time the Peninsular [Spain and Portugal] veterans acquired the same faith in Wellington’s luck. (*March of the Twenty-Six*, 65)

Moreover, what is true of a nation at war will also be true in peacetime, for the same psychology operates in both venues. Delderfield nicely juxtaposes the band of brothers solidarity which Napoleon had activated against the foolish arrogance of the Bourbon émigrés when in the spring of 1814 they returned to France “after twenty-two years of exile.” Headed by Louis XVIII, who had been advanced to the throne by the aristocracy following Napoleon’s exile to Elba, they “had everything in their favour” and had they been tactful, the bourgeoisie and working-classes would have been content to support them. How did the Bourbons conduct themselves? “One of their first public acts was to parade the statue of the Virgin Mary through the streets” as though it signified the delight of Kingship Above at the return of a Bourbon to France’s throne. King Louis “pretended that the Revolution and Empire had never existed at all” and dated documents as if he had “mounted the throne in the twenty-second year of his reign.” Under Napoleon “honours had to be won,” but “now they were for sale.” One could purchase “the coveted ribbon of the Legion of Honour” for “about twenty pounds,” and in the period “between August and December 1814, the Bourbons made more Legionnaires than Napoleon had made in the twelve years of his reign!” Was it any surprise when “within six months of the restoration the popularity of the exile in Elba was increasing at a rate that thoroughly alarmed” men who saw where this could lead? By March 1815, the exile had returned from Elba, Louis XVIII had fled, and Napoleon began his rule of a Hundred Days until he was stopped at Waterloo. The Bourbons had virtually *demandé*, by their attempt to reverse French history, that Napoleon reinstate what the émigrés thought they had rooted out.

Inconceivable errors of judgment stemmed from the new government. Injured pride and a spirit of malice dictated its every gesture for the returning exiles had come home determined to exact revenge for twenty years' penury and obscurity in Britain and elsewhere. They wanted more than obedience. They demanded grovelling subservience. These vain and rather pitiful men and women cared nothing for the glory won by French arms against successive coalitions. They only remembered that they had been bundled out of their homeland by the uprising of a rabble they considered less than human and forced thereafter to live on charity, or on their wits in foreign lands. Here, for the first time in their lives, they had to earn their bread and watch their country march to triumph after triumph under the man they had once hoped would restore the privileges they and their kind had enjoyed under Louis XIV and XV. Their outlook was still entirely feudal and they tried by every means in their power to re-rivet feudal fetters upon a people to whom Napoleon had given cohesion and boundless opportunity. (*The Twenty-Six*, 232-33)

Moreover, Louis mistakenly supposed that by honoring the marshals he was "automatically enlisting the support of the army." This was for him an inevitable error since "he had no conception of the warm relationship that had been shared by senior officers, junior officers, N.C.O.s and men during twenty years in the field." To Louis XVIII and his friends "an officer was a professional brute" and the men under him "dumb, patient serfs, ready to be flogged into obedience as the Prussian armies were driven" (233).

Delderfield continues and amplifies in *Imperial Sunset* the contrast he earlier drew between the feudal outlook of the terminally intermarried European ruling class and the brave new world which the Revolution had brought to birth.

They could not or would not bring themselves to understand that the French Revolution, and its greatest single gain, the opening of avenues of advancement by merit rather than birth, was an international event of tremendous significance and not the product of a large scale riot initiated by the rabble of the Paris slums. For the most part their hired and conscripted soldiers fought without enthusiasm and without any prospect of political or material rewards. They were there in the field by royal decree, and fear of the firing squad or the lash, while enough to keep them at their posts, was not sufficient to enable them to compete on equal terms with Frenchmen who could expect to share in the glory of a victory, who could win promotion to the highest ranks in their new profession and also share in loot made available by conquest. In the armies of Napoleon were men who had risen from the status of farmhand and apprentice journeyman to that of duke in ten years. They had no equivalents in the musters of the Habsburgs, the Hohenzollerns, the Romanoffs or, indeed among the British where the social structure was equally rigid. It is this, as much as the technical ability of their chief, that explains victories like Marengo, Ulm, Austerlitz, Jena, Auerstadt, Friedland and Wagram. (*Imperial Sunset*, 10)

Delderfield estimates that in the Russian campaign alone the French had lost "probably about 150,000 trained soldiers (exclusive of allies)," who were but a small part of "the sacrifice Frenchmen had made to overthrow their own autocracy and

spread the Revolutionary creed across Europe” (32). Now France in 1813 had been almost continuously at war since 1792, and war weariness was apparent. And yet, despite what that sustained conflict had cost every family in the country, the fact that Napoleon could create another army “throws into sharp relief the astonishing popularity of a man who had raised France to the position of the most dominant and aggressive Continental power since the days of Charlemagne” (32).

To appreciate this is to understand why, after so many sacrifices, France was willing to make still more to preserve the dynasty, one has only to read a report made to the Legislature by Montilivet, Minister of the Interior, on February 25, 1813. It goes some way towards banishing the popular conception of Napoleon as a military bully preoccupied with blood and conquest, and substituting, in place of this cartoon figure, an administrative genius whose achievements in the civil sphere were far superior to those of any previous despot. Montilivet declared “Notwithstanding the immense armies which a state of war has rendered necessary, the population of France has continued to increase; French industry has advanced; the soil was never better cultivated, nor our manufactures more flourishing; and at no period in our history has wealth been more equally diffused among all classes of society.”

It would be easy to dismiss this as the lip service of a political puppet were it not for facts quoted in later stages of the report, or contained in a survey of civic achievements during the last decade-and-a-half. From the anarchy of a revolution that had bedeviled the population from July, 1789, until November, 1799, the hand of Napoleon had produced a modern state that compared with the most progressive in the world, not excluding her nearest rival across the Channel, untouched by war and civil strife. Rotation of crops was studied, cattle multiplied and their breed improved, feudal tenures, tithes, mortmains, and monastic orders that had kept small farmers in a state of subjection for centuries were suppressed, the processes of law were not only simplified but speeded up, money was lavished upon buildings, seaports, docks and harbors, new roads ran right across the country, new bridges were built by the score, and millions of francs went into canals, embankments and drainage. “These miracles,” says a contemporary writer, “were effected by a steadiness of purpose, talent armed with power, and finances wisely and economically applied.” These achievements after centuries of oppression by a dissolute aristocracy, are an indication of why France was willing to renew the interminable war in 1813. (*Imperial Sunset*, 32–3)

Delderfield's Napoleonic Novels

Before we focus upon *Seven Men of Gascony* (1949), *Farewell The Tranquil Mind* (1950) and *Too Few For Drums* (1964), his novels dealing with the Napoleonic period, it is useful to draw attention to a phenomenon important for cultural history, i.e., the transmission of past events with the intent of making them present-to living audiences. The Bayeux Tapestry—unsuited for hanging in a church but just right for being mounted at eye level upon the interior walls of a great hall, such that the ambulatory viewer can peruse up close a continuous sequence of pictures that

tell in living color how the unworthy King Harold was overcome by William of Normandy—is the outstanding exemplar of the transmission of past events so as to make them present to the living. Similarly, it is the pungent immediacy of the memoirs written by Napoleon's marshals and their retentive wives that fascinated Delderfield, a personal response to which the "Sources" sections that conclude *The March of the Twenty-Six* and *The Retreat From Moscow* testify ("the wealth of memoir that flowed from European presses during the long peace that followed Waterloo," *Retreat*, 237).

But his last Napoleonic history, *Imperial Sunset*, does not end with the selective bibliography which one expects. Instead it *begins* with an "Acknowledgements" section which, although it does list selected books in categories such as memoirs and history-commentaries, does not *open* with those descriptors. Instead, the "Acknowledgements" section opens with the heading "Fiction." Now to use fiction as a basis of history is sufficiently unexpected that the writer finds it appropriate to explain what he has done.

It is not usual, in a history, to quote fictional sources but I make no apology for using background material contained in that excellent book *History of a Conscript of 1813* by MM. Erckmann-Chatrian [the pen name of Emile Erckmann and Louis Chatrian, who collaborated in writing both *Histoire d'un Conscrit de 1813* (1864) and *Waterloo* (1865)]. I first encountered this as a French exercise at school. It can be read in English, excellently translated by Russell Davis Gillman [Everyman's Library, London:Dent, and New York:Dutton, 1909. It contains both the *Conscript* and the *Waterloo* texts]. As stated, the authors collected all their material from Napoleonic veterans and if one compares their work with contemporary accounts it will be seen that they have written with a very careful eye on the truth. Theirs is a moving account of what it was like to be a private soldier in the Grand Army. (*Imperial Sunset*, ix)

Delderfield should have put it "to be a private soldier *in the final stages of Napoleon's career*," after former allies turned against him and the ideals of freedom that the great leader formerly espoused were defended by his enemies. It is within that late-Napoleonic time frame that Gillman can accurately say "Here we see the intense aversion felt by young Frenchmen to fight after the Emperor had abandoned his earlier ideals" (*Introduction*, ix).

One can find in these data the chronological sequence wherein an original event (Waterloo) occurs, after which it is commemorated and thus brought to life for new readers, then *re*-presented again, and yet again. In my *Introduction* I have said that "above all Delderfield seems committed to preventing the past from sliding out of our social memory." And in the particular case of Napoleonic history he was not the first to put his hand to the effort, the necessarily collaborative effort, of recovering not simply the facts or lessons of the Napoleonic era, but the *drama*, the living texture of past events. Here is the chronological sequence of the collaboration, the history of its re-presentations:

- Waterloo, the event itself.
- Fifty years later, the narratives recounting the event, i.e., two volumes by Erckmann-Chatrion published in 1864 and 1865.
- Forty-plus years later, Gillman's translation of Erckmann-Chatrion is published in 1909.
- Forty-more years later *Seven Men of Gascony*, dramatizing Napoleon's declining fortunes in the field over half a dozen years, as observed from a rifleman's perspective, is published in 1949.

Here, then, we have a chronological line of descent in the collaborative sequence, the re-activating iterations of the cultural history of French conscripts in the Napoleonic wars, the re-presentations of historical viewpoints as they have been typified by fictional characters.

Delderfield found in the Erckmann-Chatrion volumes not only what the late-Napoleonic French foot soldier thought about the task he had been conscripted to perform, he found as well the precedent for presenting an accurate historical record within a fictional construct that makes it "a moving account." Baron Marbot's *Memoirs* are accurate and moving, but he was bred up to be a military leader like his father, a professional soldier, so his perspective is significantly different. In *Seven Men of Gascony*, Delderfield utilizes both viewpoints: in some measure that of Napoleon and his lieutenants, but overwhelmingly that of French infantrymen, fictive persons who give a local habitation and a name to the variable and shifting attitudes of a close-knit group of comrades—men who argue within themselves and with one another regarding the aims and the costs of what they are doing. Erckmann-Chatrion's hero, Joseph Bertha, a young fellow with a limp who does his best, is, says Delderfield, "more surely than any other figure in the literature of the period, the prototype of the French conscript of the Napoleonic wars and his wry comments on military discipline will find an echo in the hearts of millions of men of later generations who were encouraged by armchair patriots to seek glory in Flanders and the jungles of Vietnam and Malaya" (*Imperial Sunset*, 44). That is true enough, yet Bertha is rather too much of a hook to hang set-speeches on; his *representative* function overshadows the distinctive personality traits which make for more interesting reading. Bertha models how it might be done but *Seven Men of Gascony* does it better.

Seven Men of Gascony

A river is a natural boundary. Many rivers help to define the limits of countries which they border, for they seem to say "thus far shalt thou go and no farther." This is particularly true because on the other side of the wide water live folks who take the position "this close shalt thou come and no closer without a fight." I still remember word-for-word a sentence from a summary paragraph in a high school

history book which read "Having crossed the Rubicon, Caesar returned to Rome and began civil war with Pompey and the Senate." I had no idea what the fuss was about, but it was crystal clear that crossing the water was equivalent to throwing down a gauntlet. Washington crossing the Delaware has taken on the same symbolic meaning, and knowing this about rivers, Delderfield uses six of them to provide the structure of *Seven Men of Gascony*. That novel consists of six "parts," each of which is given a river's name, i.e., the Danube, the Tagus, the Otter, the Niemen, the Elster, and the Sambre. The Otter, a Devonshire river, is included because it signifies the pastoral interlude that his French riflemen (British prisoners of war doing construction work for the English locals because the war has resulted in a manpower shortage) enjoy, before they escape back to France to rejoin the Grand Army, cross the Niemen, and by invading Russia seal Napoleon's fate.

Whether Napoleon's military career lasted for fifteen years or for twenty depends on when it begins. If we count from March 1796 when he left for Italy, transformed the army, crossed the Alps to Vienna, and by early 1797 had become the idol of half of Europe, then he enjoyed a twenty year career which ended at Waterloo in 1815. At some point his rising fortunes levelled off and began to fall, but in so complex an action as the Grand Army's attempts to bring more and more of the western nations under his control it is impossible to say just when that point might have been. It is sufficient to say that Delderfield opens his novel at the point when Napoleon's fortunes had passed their apogee, and what remained thereafter was the six year slide from 1809 to Waterloo. The point Delderfield selects to begin *Seven Men of Gascony* is the 1809 Battle of Wagram, fought on the banks of the Danube from Napoleon's headquarters on the island of Lobau, over unstable bridges into towns such as Aspern, Essling and Enzerdorf across the river, and back from there ten or twelve miles into Wagram. The Austrians had challenged Napoleon's dominance, and he came not simply to subdue the city but to claim the Austrian Marie Louise as his second wife. Her function would be to provide him an heir to his throne, i.e., Napoleon II (1811-32), the boy who never ruled and died of tuberculosis at age twenty-one.

Delderfield says in an introductory note that "most of the incidents recorded in the following pages" are episodes written down at the time or afterwards by officers and men of Napoleon's Grand Army. The novel's chief characters are "typical infantry men in the years of the First Empire's decline." His purpose in writing was "to commemorate the gallantry and the hardihood of a million unknown men who marched, fought and died during the years when France challenged a continent" (*Gascony*, 7-8). The fictional representatives of those men are the seven members of "the Eighty-seventh Regiment of the Line" (25), conversationally known as a "file," which is also called a "line regiment" (32). Of these seven characters, three are very important because the intellectual evaluation that goes on within the file is concentrated in and between them, the others having the functions of dramatiz-

ing the variety of backgrounds, temperaments and talents of the young men serving Napoleon, and of being picked off one by one by the accidents of war until only one member of the file remains alive, Gabriel. While not the narrator, he is the most narrator-near file member and he gets the "I-alone-survive-to-tell-thee" role. We begin our cast of characters with this newest recruit to the Eighty-seventh Regiment, which has recently lost one of its men and needs a replacement before the Battle of Wagram begins.

Gabriel, who was raised by his putative "Aunt Marie," a pastry maker and confectioner in a French village, is in fact the bastard son of an Italian painter hired by the de Courcey family to repair one of the estate's chapels, his mother having been a de Courcey maid. This young fellow's talent for drawing enables him to create a visual record of the file's final six years of service. Finding himself in a town where all the eighteen year olds had been called to the army, and the shoemaker's son "was already back with an empty right sleeve and a distressing habit of dribbling," Gabriel chose to enlist since he needed "the companionship of other young men" and decided to go where they could be found. When the recruiting sergeant learned that he had previous experience with firearms and saw him score "eight hits out of ten" on the firing range, he was quickly packed off to join "a company of *voltigeurs*, sharpshooters just then going into action south of Vienna" (18-25).

Footsore but eager, Gabriel searches for the Eighty-seventh Regiment and finds it just as "the Grand Army was pouring down the Danube Valley, its chief seeking a major action and a Habsburg bride." Napoleon's soldiers have an audience, because both "the great and the defeated stood by watching, watching Spain and the Danube, hoping that the roar of battle would not end once again in a fanfare of Imperial victory trumpets and the boom of triumphant salvos from the Paris depots," sounds which for too long "had been the final notes" of every attempt of France's neighbors to stop "an annual extension" of the Napoleonic empire. It was the third week of May, 1809, and the Grand Army "was enjoying one of the last of its victorious sweeps across hostile territory, driving all before it" (26). This is the point at which *Seven Men of Gascony* intersects with Volume II, Chapter 1 of Marbot's *Memoirs*, which begins "By the end of June I was well enough to join [marshal] Masséna's headquarters on the isle of Lobau," of which more later.

The second important member of the file, Jean Ticquet, is approaching fifty and had been fighting since he was twelve. He is the file's leader, the experienced soldier who knows how to do things. For example, there is no food? Jean will disappear for a while, returning with something unpalatable but edible. Yet at this moment, as he marches "across the flimsy bridge," leading the other *voltigeurs* in the file "to take up positions in the granary of Essling," Jean feels some trepidation. "He had not served in fifteen campaigns and as many major engagements without learning how to draw conclusions from the close observation of facts." Ticquet, illiterate but not stupid, is the man to follow if your life depends upon it, which is

why “what was left of the file” after two campaigns in Spain and the present conflict on the Danube “worshipped him,” for “there was not one whose life he had not directly or indirectly saved during the last eighteen months” (33–4). Today, in his unsettling ruminations, he

paid particular attention to the haphazard structure of the floating bridge stretching from the bank to the island. It looked to him, an expert layman in bridge-building, far too light a contrivance to provide the only thread between the main battle and the reinforcements. He said as much to Nicholas, the big man at his side (36).

Nicholas was the other member of the file blessed with both intellect and experience, with whom he conferred whenever a critical situation required joint assessment to be properly understood and dealt with.

A former schoolteacher, Nicholas is the most troubled member of the file. He carries heavy emotional baggage, “old wounds that had ached intermittently ever since he had slipped out of the lodging the night when Old Cicero found him in Camilla’s arms.” He had come to Old Cicero straight from university and almost penniless, but his generous host spent many hours of “extra tuition” with him. If only the student had resisted that voracious woman until her husband had expired, “the house, the school, the beautiful inlaid Italian furniture, all would have been his.” Turning from that sordid disaster to reflect on his file-mates, Nicholas contemplates Jean, “looking as if his doglike faith in the Emperor’s tactics had been shaken”; then Claude, who “still insisted” that Napoleon’s mission was to “impose liberty, equality and fraternity upon everyone. The naïveté of the man!” Nicholas munches his meat ration as he then studies Manny, the Jewish acrobat and the file’s cut-up; Louis, the coachman’s son, who loved horses and “seldom thought of anything else”; and Dominique, the half-wit who played the fiddle and danced when not simply obeying orders. At that point, the Emperor appears before them in the night, as he often does to enhance his popularity with the soldiers.

Deep in the shadow Nicholas ground his teeth. “That’s how he does it,” he hissed to himself, “a gold piece, an assumed interest, a small avalanche of accurate detail. Suppose he had stood in my shoes three years ago, would he have had Camilla, house, property, and all, without being discovered in bed with the woman?” *Gascony*, 48–53

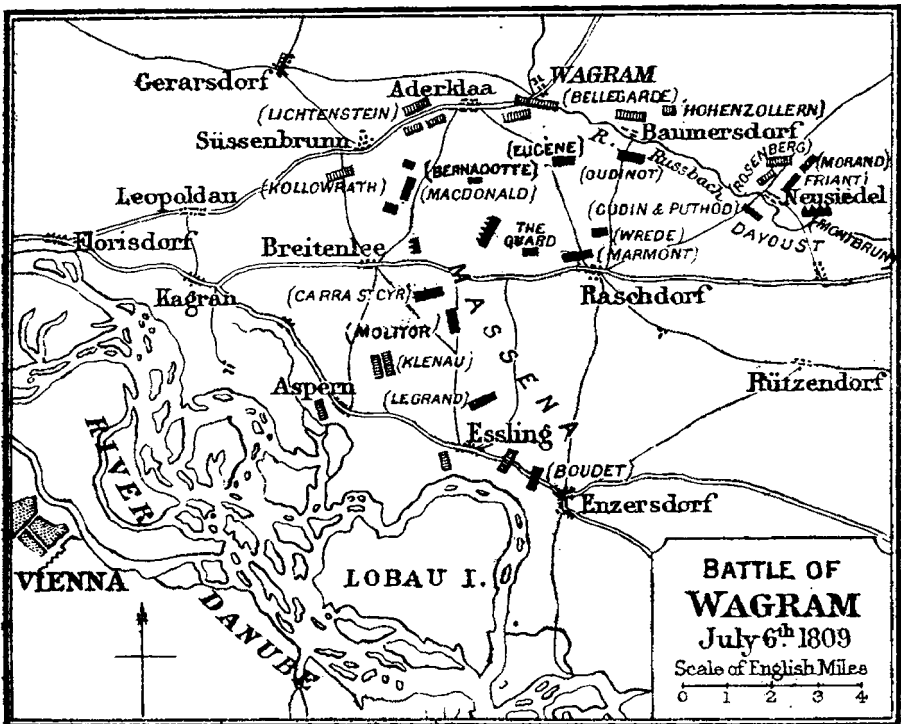
Though not a member of the file, the cantiniere of the Second Battalion—who supplies everything from brandy to hospital transportation if a wounded officer can afford the service—must be mentioned. Old Carla knows she is dying and informs her sixteen-year-old daughter, Nicholette, that she will need a husband to look after her; when Carla dies, Jean accepts from Nicholette the “jug of Bordeaux wine” and pockets “the small plug of tobacco she gave him,” tells him “I’ll have the curly-headed one!” [Claude Dupont], and Jean reciprocates by ensuring that when he offers the men his handful of straws Claude will draw the short one—there is to be no “frantic dispute” because the matter was so fairly managed. “The can-

teen wedding was held in the company's glade within a few hours of Carla's burial" (56-63), and Nicholette will be a fixture in and around the action from then on, as time and chance ravage her along with the rest.

Part I: 'The Danube'

The first contact between French and Austrian troops was a two-day exchange, the first day saved for Napoleon by "Nansouty's cuirassiers, big men on huge horses, a torrent of steel, their crested helmets dipping left and right as their long, straight swords flickered" among enemy columns which they "rolled up and hurled back, their furious charge having been a measure of desperation," as "a huge floating mill" set on fire by Austrian troops up-stream had "drifted down and crashed through the frail bridge to Lobau." The Frenchmen who were able "limped back," leaving "two-thirds of their number dead or prisoners." The fight continued on the next day, but again it was a draw in which "Aspern had been retaken five times, Essling six" (46, 55). Clearly, a continuation of such killing would not settle the matter.

"There was to be no repetition of the slaughter opposite Aspern-Essling." Instead, for a month and longer Napoleon's forces "transformed" Lobau "into a vast



fort, bristling with nine hundred large-calibre guns, hedged round with rampart, redoubt and complicated systems of abatis." During this time the voltigeurs were employed as a construction crew, working with mattock and wheelbarrow on the gun emplacement. Jean had wondered "What in God's name was the Grand Army coming to that it should need naval men [in boats, clearing away debris upstream] in the field? Were the old days of infallible victory receding? If so, it was because men like himself were becoming used up. Dead of plague on the Jaffa road, or of cold and hunger in the Spanish mountains; and in their place were mere children like this new recruit, [Gabriel], who had never heard a shot fired save at a brace of pigeons" (36-7). Toward the end of that long construction period—in which the cannon that would decide the conflict in Napoleon's favor were hidden away, out of sight of the Austrians, who would only sense their presence when they began to fire—Gabriel "painted his first portrait group of the file," six men "grouped against a background of summer foliage," three standing, the others sitting or kneeling. "The sketch is dated July 3rd, 1809" (71-4).

With the decisive troop encounter in the offing, it is useful to follow the battle from Napoleon and his marshals' viewpoint, which Baron Marbot narrates masterfully. During the month before the July 6th battle, Napoleon has been planning how the conflict might go; when the configuration of troops on the ground is right, he issues the orders and his marshals vigorously perform the complex movements he requires, at the precise times when they are to be enacted. Early skirmishes had suggested that "the chances of either side seemed to be about equal."

Really, however, they were all in favour of Napoleon—in the first place, because it was unlikely that the village of Neusiedel, where the only means of resistance was afforded by an old fortified tower, would hold out long against the attack which Davout was delivering with his usual vigour; and it was easy to see that when this was taken, the Austrian left, being outflanked and without support, would retreat indefinitely and get separated from the centre, while our left wing, though beaten at the moment, was in its retreat coming nearer to the island of Lobau, the powerful artillery on which would check the Austrians, and prevent them from following up their success. Secondly, Napoleon, acting on inner lines, could hold a great part of his troops in reserve, and yet show a front in different directions; while the Archduke, being obliged to extend his army, in order to execute his great movement on an outer line with the view of surrounding us, was not in force at any point. The Emperor, observing this mistake, was perfectly calm, though he could read in the faces of his staff the anxiety caused by the conquering march of the enemy's right, which, always driving Masséna's corps before it, had already reached the battle-field of May 22, and after crushing Boudet's division by a formidable charge of cavalry, was threatening our rear. But the success of the Austrians was short-lived. The hundred heavy guns with which Napoleon's foresight had armed the island of Lobau opened a scathing fire upon the enemy's right, and it was compelled, under pain of annihilation, to halt in its triumphant course, and retire in its turn. Masséna was then able to reform his divisions, which had lost heavily. We thought that Napoleon would profit by the disorder into which the cannonade had thrown the enemy's right wing to

attack with his reserves; Marshal Masséna, indeed, sent me to ask for instructions on this point. But the Emperor remained impassible, his eyes ever fixed on the extreme right, towards Neusiedel (which lies high and is surmounted by a tall tower, visible from all parts of the field), waiting to hurl himself upon the enemy's centre and right until Davout had beaten the left and flung it back beyond that village. A valiant defence was being maintained by the Prince of Hesse-Homburg, who was there wounded; but at last we suddenly saw the smoke of Davout's guns beyond the tower. Beyond a doubt the enemy's left was beaten. Then, turning to me, the Emperor said: "Quick! Tell Masséna to fall upon whatever is in front of him, and the battle is won." At the same time the aides-de-camp from all the other corps were sent off to their chiefs with an order for a simultaneous attack. At this supreme moment Napoleon said to General Lauriston, "Take a hundred guns, sixty from my guard, and crush the enemy's column." As soon as their fire had shaken the Austrians, Marshal Bessières charged them with six regiments of heavy cavalry, supported by part of the cavalry of the guard. In vain did the Archduke form squares; they were broken, with the loss of their guns and a great number of men. Our centre advanced in its turn, under Macdonald, and Sussenbrunn, Breitenlee, and Aderklaa were carried after a smart resistance. Meanwhile Masséna had recovered the ground lost on our left, and was pressing the enemy hard, forcing him back beyond Stadlau and Kagan; and Davout, calling Oudinot to his support, occupied the heights beyond the Russbach, and captured Wagram. This decided the defeat of the Austrians: they retreated all along the line, retiring in very good order along the road to Moravia. (*Memoirs*, II, 18-20)

Being a novelist rather than a military historian in *Seven Men of Gascony*, Delderfield's narrative is different from Marbot's, yet he too gives us the large picture rather than descend to the particulars of his characters' actions in the battle. He focuses upon one of the more colorful of Napoleon's generals, Masséna, doing his part along with the other marshals, yet in Delderfield's prose entertaining the reader rather than describing the battlefield's complexity.

On the French left, where the voltigeurs fought alongside Boudet's infantry of the line, old Masséna slowly yielded ground to the enemy's main attack, sitting all day in an open carriage amid a tempest of shot, calmly directing a withdrawal to lure the enemy within range of the Lobau batteries...Vainglory, obstinacy or both had caused him to choose four white horses for his carriage, well knowing that such an entourage would attract fire. The marshal sat there...rubbing his chin and screwing up his one sound eye, as though he were turning over a gardening problem in one of the ornate summer-houses on his country estate. The issue of the battle was never in doubt. It was combat after the old style, stirring the veterans' memories of Marengo, Austerlitz, Jena and Friedland, but the artillery fire was weightier and more destructive than in any of these battles, and the losses, on both sides, were proportionately heavy" (*Gascony*, 75)

Small, compact units of soldiers attacking swiftly are now in the past, because Napoleon has fewer soldiers to carry out such tactics. The big guns take up the slack, but they cannot take the place of enthusiastic men like Jean Ticquet in the

old days. Thus the victory of cannon-fire at Wagram is also the clear sign that Napoleon is trending downward.

While they awaited the peace treaty's signing, the voltigeurs were "under arms every other night," the rest of the time being their own. Gabriel explored Vienna with Manny, who knew the city intimately, and they walked among Viennese people "who seemed to bear the French no grudge on account of the recent campaign or their defeats and humiliations of the past fifteen years," as though what the generals did was no business of theirs. Word circulated that Napoleon would soon marry an Austrian princess, which distressed Jean Ticquet because "like most of the veterans he was attached to" Joséphine, regarding her "as a symbol of victory, dating back to the early Italian campaign" when their leader was "an experimental general of twenty-six." The two voltigeurs eventually go their separate ways, Manny to "sample the Viennese brothels," the young artist to walk the city's streets, "storing up impressions for the future" and occasionally drawing, sometimes attracting "a crowd of curious urchins to his sketch book."

On one lovely day, Gabriel hired a punt and poled up the Danube, exploring "one of the many backwaters that flowed into the main stream above the bridge." It was on this occasion that he found Karen, an eighteen-year-old blond-haired farm-girl who had driven her small herd of cows into the water, where "their stumbling hooves" stirred up the mud and sent out "a ring of gentle ripples that splashed softly against his punt," while the artist, hidden by the low-hanging leafy branches on the bank where he sat, observed the young woman

dabbling her feet in the stream and humming to herself as she leaned on her hands and watched the cows drink their fill. There was a pastoral perfection about the scene that delighted Gabriel. Its appeal lay in its very ordinariness, the contented cattle revelling in the cooling ripple of the water, the dappled pattern of sunlight on the still leaves, the girl's relaxed contentment as she wriggled her pink toes in the stream. *Gascony*, 83-5

Gabriel draws a remarkable memorial of this scene before he announces himself, and the delighted girl takes him to her father and sister on their nearby farm. A lovely bucolic relationship develops between them which opens toward the future—but there is a hitch, or rather two hitches.

One problem is that Karen has an older sister who some years back had a child by an unknown father, but she still has no husband and this young fellow, being seduced, might do. Yet no crisis develops because Gabriel summons Manny, who fellowships with her in the hayloft. "The sun-drenched landscape of the Danube Valley inclined a man towards lotus-eating," and things continue until the Eighty-seventh receives its orders to move north-west, "where Masséna was assembling a vast army for the Spanish Peninsula." Gabriel must comply, but what brings down the curtain on the sunny interlude is the return of Karen's brother Karl, discharged from the Austrian army with one thigh ending "in a knot of dirty bandages" where his right leg had formerly been, and mentally disturbed. The ever-observant Manny

says "there's murder in that fellow," and that night the returnee fires the house and barn, which go up in flames. While escaping the hayloft, Manny brings out Gabriel's sketchbook, and its owner is struck by the strange "incongruity of Manny's act of salvage. Two women and two men burned to death," along with the farm and livestock, "yet here was his sketchbook, not even soiled" (92-7).

Part 2: "The Tagus"

The Tagus, a major river in the Iberian Peninsula, flows from the west-central portion of Spain into Portugal, debouching into the Atlantic at the port of Lisbon. A gull travelling in a straight line from Madrid to Lisbon would approximate the direction if not the ragged course by which the Tagus traverses that mountainous terrain. One could plausibly see the river as the objective correlative of the tortuous course of Napoleon's effort to subdue the British. Early in his career the Emperor hoped to raise an invasion force which would cross the English Channel and overwhelm his most formidable competitor in Europe, but that had not been possible. This newest attempt to get the edge over the English by driving them out of Lisbon will also fail, because Wellington holds the winning hand, though his cards remain secret.

Nobody in the French army...had the slightest inkling of the presence of vast lines of fortifications, erected by the British with Portuguese labour, in the area of Torres Vedras outside Lisbon. Every pass, every gully had been blocked and fortified. The Mountains bristled with guns. A chain of small forts, each of which would have defied the assault of an army corps, ran like a granite necklace round the lower slopes of the bare hills" (133-34).

The impossibility of capturing Lisbon will be revealed only after Masséna's army suffers terrible hardships and losses.

Part 2 of the novel, "The Tagus," is the story of that failure, which does not feature great battles like that on the Danube, whose purpose was to solidify Napoleon's union with the Austrians by marrying one of them for the dynastic purposes which had not entered his mind as a young officer. The Emperor is not even *in* Spain but off somewhere with the Archduchess Marie Louise, engendering Napoleon II while his weary marshals are not cooperating in a military action but arguing with one another: "It was common knowledge in the army that Masséna was at loggerheads with his lieutenants, Ney, Reynier, Foy and Junot. Rumors of furious quarrels trickled down to the ranks through the gossip of staff orderlies and headquarters guards. Ney was said to have insulted Masséna's mistress in front of the junior staff officers." The first or Danube Part of the novel contains seven chapters, "The Tagus" only three because the story of an extended attrition—the commander absent, his marshals arguing, while men like Jean "who were the barometers of the battalions

who now distrusted their commanders," were "sapping the confidence" of the soldiers who trusted their judgment (119)—all that does not require a long telling.

"The Tagus," Chapter 1, does two things: it describes the savage conditions the French soldiers experience and it dramatizes the degeneration of the band-of-brothers spirit that Jean Ticquet laments the loss of. The "fierce African sun" of the Iberian Peninsula is the natural background for a campaign in a country where "no loot was to be had," and "an hour's lagging behind the column meant almost certain death" suffered "with the refinements of Oriental torture." Food was scarce, draught animals "almost unattainable and beyond the reach of any but high-ranking officers with money to burn" (102–03). Worse than this, leadership of the ranks collapsed in the proportion that the quality of their soldiers plummeted. Captain Vidal became vicious as "would-be deserters," rounded up after "individual attempts to evade service," were being kept "under close guard" at night until "they could be absorbed into regiments where they would be under permanent observation." Men like that would *never* be absorbed, yet attempting to make soldiers of them turns the army into a reformatory. Captain Vidal, the company's senior officer, "a ruthlessly efficient soldier" who after twenty year's active service had won the Legion of Honor, would if given his way "have shot the prisoners en masse before they left France." Coddling a group of men who had done their best to evade service "in the slender hope that one or two" might become genuine soldiers "seemed to him the outside limit of idiocy" (106).

Manny will become the file's first casualty when he foolishly puts himself in the center between Captain Vidal and one of the prisoners they are guarding, i.e., Andreas, "a kinsman of mine," as he tells Gabriel. Manny passes to his kinsman "a farrier's file," and by morning Andreas has gone missing. Vidal, "already a day's march behind the main column," which puts all the men under his command in jeopardy from lurking assassins, is shown "the neatly filed links of the gipsy's chain," while Manny, who with Gabriel had been guarding that group, "stood by expressionless" and his artist-companion "made himself scarce at the far end of the column" (110–11). Anybody "less resolute" than Vidal would have been happy to see the last of Andreas, but the Captain aims his full-bore determination towards recovering the escapee. "Take eight men and keep out of sight," he directs, and the first person assigned to the search patrol is Manny. Before long the voltigeurs of the Eighty-seventh "were marching back over the road the guard company had travelled," and one hour before sunset "on the second day" (which dramatizes how far Vidal's troops have strayed from an army's core task of finding and defeating an enemy) they found the massacre scene.

On a flat rock, where the shelf widened, the voltigeurs found their comrades, six of them, with bullet wounds and throats cut, spread naked for the mountain eagles and laid in a neat row, as though the Spaniards had planned an obscene parody of parade-ground precision.