Chapter Eight

Battling Bonaparte after Waterloo: Re-enactment, Representation and 'the Napoleon bust business'

Simon Bainbridge

In his Collège de France lectures of 1975-76, translated and published in Britain in 2003 as *Society Must be Defended*, Michel Foucault examines what he sees as the continuation of war in peacetime society, inverting Clausewitz's famous dictum that 'War is the continuation of politics with the admixture of other means' to argue the opposite, that 'politics is the continuation of war by other means'.[1] In these lectures, which it should be noted Foucault himself never wrote up or published, he explores the idea that even what is conventionally regarded as peacetime society is structured in all its aspects and operations by conflict:

> we have to interpret the war that is going on beneath peace; peace itself is coded war [. . .] We really do have to become experts on battles, because the war has not ended, because preparations are still being made for the decisive battles, and because we have to win the decisive battle. In other words, the enemies who face us still pose a threat to us, and it is not some reconciliation or pacification that will allow us to bring the war to an end. (p. 51)

Throughout this lecture series, Foucault tests this model of power as 'war' on a range of historical examples and social structures, looking at ideas of class, civil and race conflict. Though he would abandon the war metaphor as a mode of analysis once the lecture series was complete, his thinking is characteristically suggestive in its speculation that war is not terminated by victories or treaties but continues to occupy a key function in peacetime. Foucault's argument helps understand Britain's war by other means against Napoleon long after the nation's military campaign had been concluded at Waterloo on 18 June 1815. Throughout the nineteenth century, the war with Bonaparte remained a profound presence in British society, fought not only through public restagings, representations and re-enactments of Waterloo but also through the placement of cultural objects within the British domestic space.

The pervasive presence of the Napoleonic wars in British culture after the defeat, exile and even death of the French Emperor is powerfully indicated by the 1838 comments of an officer who had himself fought at Waterloo that 'I shall not be far wrong in asserting that there exists not in the United Kingdom, man, woman, or child, who has not either seen pictures or panoramas of Waterloo, heard songs on Waterloo, read books on Waterloo, talked for weeks about Waterloo, and full two-thirds of the adult population could not rest until they journeyed forth to have a look at Waterloo'.[2] The British public could encounter Waterloo (and other battles of the Napoleonic Wars) in a huge range of forms and practices, including grand history paintings (such as William Sadler's *The Battle of Waterloo*), panoramas (such as the one exhibited in the Large Circle of the Leicester Square Panorama from 1816 to 1818 and re-exhibited in the 1820s, 1840s, and 1850s), the various version of the panorama (including the 'Historical Peristrephic [revolving] Panorama' and the 'steam cosmorama'), and dioramas and models, most famously the so-called 'Great Model of Waterloo' made by Lieutenant William Siborne, displayed in the Egyptian Hall in the autumn of 1838, which covered 420 square feet and featured 190,000 metallic figures.[3] The conflict with Bonaparte was re-enacted in various military spectacles that proved immensely popular in the first half of the nineteenth century, a period which saw over one hundred different restagings of Napoleonic battles in London and the provinces.[4]

The most successful of all these spectacles was J. H. Amherst's 'Great Military Melodrama' of 'The Battle of Waterloo' staged at Astley's Amphitheatre in 1824. This performance took the form of 'Hippodrama', combining the circus ring and the theatrical stage and making extensive use of feats of equestrian skill. Employing Waterloo veterans in a production that included cavalry charges and cannon fire, the show ran for 144 consecutive performances to estimated audiences of between two and two and a half thousand people each night, being seen by approximately a quarter of a million people in a few months.[5] The melodrama went into repertory to become the second most frequently performed show in house's history. This play also became the source for the characters and scene sheets for a children's toy proscenium theatre set, produced by J. K. Green's Juvenile Drama and released on Waterloo Day, 18 June, 1842, giving a striking example of how the battle with Napoleon moved inside the home, indeed into the nursery, as domestic space became the theatre of war. This juvenile play pack included a performance script, with Amherst's original adapted by

Eric H. Underwood, 12 characters plates, representing principal characters and individuals as well as groups of troops, and 12 scenes to insert as a backdrop into the toy theatre, some of them paired as 'before' and 'after' scenes, with the latter showing the devastated landscape and buildings and including depictions of casualties. This set is still commercially available (and was featured in 1970s film version of *The Railway Children*) and a projected performance using it was given by the National Theatre, London as recently as August 2010. The National Theatre is situated next to Waterloo Bridge, enabling the show's publicity material to claim that 'Napoleon's defeat at the hands of the Duke of Wellington takes its rightful place overlooking the bridge that bears the name of that famous battle'.[6] This statement makes a remarkable claim for the fusion of national space, national performance, and national victory nearly two centuries after the event it re-enacts. Waterloo continues to be fought at the heart of the British nation.

One of the fullest contemporary accounts of one of these Waterloo re-enactments comes from the letters of Hermann Pückler-Muskau, a Prussian Prince who had himself fought in the Napoleonic wars and who visited London in 1827 when he witnessed a grand recreation of the battle at Vauxhall Gardens performed for an audience of 1,200 amongst whom was the Duke of Wellington himself.[7] This re-enactment was the culmination of an evening's entertainment and lasted from 10pm until midnight. An aural extravaganza as well as a visual spectacular, the performance began when the 'discharge of a cannon thundered through the seeming wood, and the fine band of the second regiment of Guards was heard in the distance' (p. 228). A large red curtain, strung across the trees was drawn back to reveal, 'as if by the light of day, the outwork of Houguement on a gently rising ground' (p. 229). As Pückler-Muskau description shows, rather than attempting to reproduce the whole battle, the performance focused on the conflict for the farmhouse at Houguemont, a focus that ignored the significant and possibly decisive Prussian contribution to the French defeat, a not uncommon oversight or erasure in these restagings. Siborne, for example, was pressured into removing the majority of Prussian figures from his Great Model, giving the credit for the victory much more fully to Wellington and the British.[8] The emphasis of the Vauxhall Gardens performance was similarly on the British triumph. Pückler-Muskau describes the culmination of the battle recreation as follows:

The fight is begun by the 'tirailleurs'; whole columns then advance upon each other, and charge with the bayonet; the French cuirassiers charge the Scotch Grays […] the combatants were for a time hidden by the thick smoke of a real fire, or only rendered partially visible by the flashes of musketry, while the foreground was strewed with dead and dying. As the smoke cleared off, Houguemont was seen in flames, – the English as conquerors, the French as captives: in the distance was Napoleon on horseback, and behind him his carriage-and-four hurrying across the scene. The victorious Wellington was greeted with loud cheers mingled with the thunder of distant cannon.[9]

As this account suggests, these performances offered an exciting restaging of national victory in which the audience could participate by joining in the cheering of Wellington as Napoleon fled the scene. As such, the re-enactments sustained the processes of nation making and unity building that many commentators have associated with the wars of the long eighteenth century.[10] By a continual restaging of national conflict, they kept alive the struggle against the antagonistic other through which the country defined itself.

However, this sense of the restaged Waterloo as a performance of national celebration is somewhat called into question by Pückler-Muskau's description of the representation of the two main protagonists, for by his account it was Napoleon who enacted the heroic role for the majority of the show, rather than Wellington. Pückler-Muskau describes how, when Napoleon is introduced, he rides past his assembled troops 'en revue', accompanied by several Marshals, and 'A thousand voices shout "Vive l'Empereur!"' before the French leader touches his hat and sets off at a gallop (p. 229). This sense of drama and excitement at Napoleon's presence contrasts with Pückler-Muskau's account of Wellington's entrance: 'Shortly after, Wellington appears with his staff – all very good copies of the individuals, – harangues his troops, and rides slowly off' (p. 229). This contrasting presentation of the two leaders was actually a familiar construction of the time, with the glamorous, galloping genius of Napoleon frequently set against the plodding solidity of Wellington, a contrast suggestive of the way the two commanders become figures for representing national character. However, the inherent politics of spectacle would seem to ally with Bonaparte who often cut a dynamic, heroic figure in such performances. In another equestrian spectacle, *Napoleon*

Bonaparte's Invasion of Russia, staged at Astley's in 1825, the Emperor dashes on horseback through burning Moscow, gallops into a collapsing house and rescues a woman and child.[11] Yet the burning of Moscow and subsequent French retreat, like Waterloo, was a defeat for Napoleon, and in both productions the elevation of Napoleon exalts his vanquishers still further.

What ruined an otherwise enjoyable and credible show for Pückler-Muskau was not the absence of the Prussians but another aspect of the treatment of Napoleon, one which he felt shattered the generic conventions of the performance. The Prussian prince and sometime soldier was impressed by what he interpreted as the realism or authenticity of the re-enactment, commenting that 'in many scenes the deception [is] really remarkable' and declaring that 'as there are a thousand men and two hundred horses in action, and no spare of gunpowder, it is, for a moment, very like a real battle' (p. 228-9). While we may be inclined to think of the genres of spectacle and melodrama as non- or anti-realist, this emphasis on authenticity was a feature of both the publicity for, and many of the responses to, these re-creations, which frequently made use of veterans, costumes and objects from the battle itself. The advertisement for Siborne's Grand Model, for example, concluded with the claim that 'it is difficult for the Spectator to divest himself of the idea that he is beholding a reality instead of a Work of Art'[12] while an ex-artillery officer who saw Astley's re-enactment expecting 'much food for mirth' was 'amazed at the accuracy with which the military encounters were executed'.[13] Another viewer of the Vauxhall Gardens spectacle commented that 'it seemed a wonderful spectacle with real horses, real Highlanders, real Dragoons, real Horse Guards and Coldstream [Guards], real Old Guards which "died but never surrendered", real guns, real cannon, real gunpowder and smoke and real red fire'.[14] Pückler-Muskau, who had himself experienced armed conflict, similarly responded to the performance as realistic, finding its authenticity not only in the sheer numbers recruited to re-enact the fighting but also in two elements that have come to feature in modern representations of battle, incoherence and destruction:

> The storming of Houguemont, which is set on fire by several shells, was particularly well done: the combatants were for a time hidden by the thick smoke of real fire, or only rendered partially visible by the flashes of musketry, while the foreground was strewed with dead and dying. (p. 229).

However, Pückler-Muskau identified a shift in the restaging's genre as realism gave way to farce following Wellington's victory:

> The ludicrous side of the exhibition was the making Napoleon race across the stage several times, pursued and fugitive, to tickle the English vanity, and afford a triumph to the 'plebs' in good and bad coats. But such is the lot of the great! The conqueror before whom the world trembled, – for whom the blood of millions was freely shed, – for whose glance or nod kings waited and watched, – is now a child's pastime, a tale of his times, vanished like a dream, – the Jupiter gone, and, as it seems, Scapin only remaining.[15]

The attempt at historical verisimilitude is replaced by comedy performed for political and national purposes. Napoleon becomes a clown; Scapin or Scapino is one of the comic servants from the *commedia dell'arte* whose name is meant to suggest 'escape' because of his tendency to flee from fights. Pückler-Muskau identifies how Napoleon is travestied by performance and defeated by genre. The great man of History has been reduced to 'a child's pastime', an entertainment worthy only of juveniles. While Pückler-Muskau suggests that this travesty is a hollow victory, its contrived generic shift illustrating too clearly its struggle to overcome Napoleon's power ('the ludicrous side of the exhibition'), his critique of the performance becomes a metaphor for the collapse of Bonaparte's career; both have gone from the sublime to the ridiculous, to use the phrase Napoleon himself employed after the disaster of the retreat from Moscow.

Pückler-Muskau's account shows that the Vauxhall Gardens spectacle partook of the British ambivalence towards Napoleon that can be traced back to the very early years of his career. The restaging exemplifies the two main ways in which various cultural forms sought to re-enact the defeat of Napoleon, by making him either sublime or ridiculous. Many British representations increasingly venerated Napoleon, characterizing him as the great hero or 'worthy foe', but this elevation and reverence of the national enemy was nearly always framed in such a way as to remind Britons that they had been defeated the great man, magnifying the nation's glory accordingly. The increasing veneration of the ex-Emperor in British culture is seen in the transformation of what were once trophies of war into 'relics' or icons, a process illustrated by the

changing status accorded to Napoleon's carriage, captured after Waterloo. This glittering trophy was acquired by William Bullock who displayed it at the Egyptian Hall in January 1816 where it was viewed by 10,000 people a day,[16] an event famously caricatured by George Cruikshank in the drawing 'A Scene at the London Museum Piccadilly, or A peep at the Spoils of Ambition, Taken at the Battle of Waterloo'.[17] In this cartoon, the carriage and other displayed objects are very much 'spoils' or trophies; the 'English Bees' are able to swarm all over Imperial conveyance, much to the disgust of the tearful Frenchman in the left of the picture who says to the bust of Napoleon says 'Ah! Mon dear Emperor des is de shocking sight'. But gradually such spoils came to be seen as relics. In 1843, the carriage was bought by Madame Tussaud's Museum and became the centrepiece of the 'Shrine of Napoleon, or Golden Chamber' in London, where it was displayed alongside other quasi-sacred objects such as the ex-emperor's watch, toothbrush, table knife, one of his extracted teeth and even the camp-bed on which he had died. To gain access to this 'Shrine', visitors were required to pay an additional 6d on top of the standard entry fee.[18]

The increasing veneration of Napoleon in British culture is illustrated by Sir George Hayter's extraordinary painting entitled *The Duke of Wellington Visiting the Effigy and Personal Relics of Napoleon at Madame Tussaud's* [Figure 1], [19] the title of which illustrates the shift in the categorization of Napoleonic objects from 'spoils' to 'relics'. Commissioned by the Tussaud brothers after one of Wellington's many visits to the 'Shrine', this painting both illustrates the elevation of Napoleon, presenting his waxwork lying in state surrounded by authentic imperial trappings, and reveals how the dead Emperor still needed to be contained within a form that reminded the public who was the victor and who was the vanquished. Hung in the 'Golden Chamber' itself, and so shaping the experience of other visitors to the 'Shrine', the picture illustrates how Wellington himself provided the model and authority for the increasing veneration of his great enemy. While the 'Iron Duke' was perhaps seeking to associate himself with Napoleon's charisma, his own post-Waterloo response to his defeated enemy became an important authorising model for the growing sympathy towards Napoleon and set the pattern for the incorporation of Napoleon into the British nation and home.

At the same time that Napoleon was being elevated and venerated by these cultural forms, however, he was also being ridiculed and cut down to size by other forms of representation, including puppet shows and performances by child actors such

as Master Burke. This travestying and diminishing of Bonaparte can be illustrated by another of the recreations witnessed by Wellington, the impersonation of the Emperor by Charles Sherwood Stratton, or General Tom Thumb. Stratton was the American child midget managed by P.T. Barnum who toured England in 1844, performing songs, dances and imitations, and who became best known for his impersonation of Napoleon. Barnum describes how Wellington was 'particularly amused' at seeing Stratton 'dressed in the well-known uniform of the Emperor … marching up and down the platform, apparently taking snuff in deep meditation'. When the 'Iron Duke', inquired the subject of his supposed enemy's meditation, Stratton replied 'I was thinking of the loss of the battle of Waterloo', a 'display of wit' which, according to Barnum, 'was chronicled throughout the country, and was of itself worth thousands of pounds to the exhibition'.[20] In Wellington's laughter at the humorous diminution of his great adversary, still lamenting his defeat three decades on, we have the comic counterpart to Hayter's portrayal of the Iron Duke's reverential contemplation in response to the waxwork fabrication of Napoleon lying in state. In both, we have examples of the ongoing British engagement with Bonaparte, decades after the nation had supposedly defeated its greatest enemy at the battle of Waterloo.

It was in the domestic space of the home as much as the public spaces of spectacles and displays that Britain continued its war with the French Emperor. Napoleon has always had iconic status in the British imagination. As early as 1798 busts of Bonaparte started to figure in contemporary satires and accounts, particularly as a signifier of Jacobin sympathies. In his caricature *Shrine at St. Ann's Hill* of 26 May 1798, James Gillray presents Charles James Fox praying to an altar on which sit busts of Napoleon and Robespierre, surrounded by the other usual trappings of Jacobinism. Within four years, by 1802, Napoleon had actually become a prominent icon in Britain, according to Robert Southey. Writing in the persona of the imaginary Spanish traveller Don Manual Alvarez Espriella, Southey drew attention to Napoleon's incipient iconographic status at a time when the consul's popularity was high as a result of his role in the peace of Amiens. In one of the early *Letters from England*, for 23rd April 1802, Don Manuel describes the interior of an inn at which he and his companion J---- had stopped to change horses:

> There were two busts in porcelain upon the chimney-piece, one of Bonaparte, the
> other of John Wesley, the founder of a numerous sect in this land of schismatics;

and between them a whole-length figure of Shakespeare, their famous dramatist. When J---- had explained them to me, I asked him which of the three worthies was the most popular. 'Perhaps', said he, 'the Corsican just at present; but his is a transient popularity; he is only the first political actor of the day, and like all other stage-players, must one day give way to his successors, as his predecessors have given way to him. Moreover, he is rather notorious than popular; the king of Prussia was a favourite with the people, and they hung up his picture as an alehouse sign, as they had done prince Eugene before him, and many a fellow gets drunk under them still; but no one will set up Bonaparte's head as an invitation.'[21]

Letters from England was published in 1808 and writing with hindsight Southey uses his fictional travelogue to predict the transience of Napoleon's popularity. For readers of 1808 his prophecy would have seemed to have been confirmed by the increasing British hostility to Bonaparte following the recommencement of Anglo-French conflict in 1803, Napoleon's self-elevation to emperor in 1804, and France's seemingly unbreakable dominance of Europe secured by victories such as those of Austerlitz and Jena. But Southey's prediction was actually to prove short lived. In the longer term, Napoleon regained his place on the nation's mantelpiece. Following the decline of his power and particularly after his death in 1821, Bonaparte became an increasingly dominant feature of British interior design. In 1822 the French writer and politician Chateaubriand, who was serving as Ambassador in London, criticised what he termed the 'foolish enthusiasm' for all things Napoleonic and commented that '[Napoleon's] bust was on every chimney piece'.[22] And this 'foolish enthusiasm' lasted for the rest of the century. A source from 1904 which I'll examine at the conclusion of this essay explores the production of replica busts of Bonaparte in England and indicates that there were hundreds of examples of one such replica in London households at this time. As Southey predicted, Napoleon never (or only very rarely) became a public sign of the sort to be found outside an alehouse; that role would be fulfilled by his vanquishers Nelson and Wellington and by the battles that hindered and terminated his military career, Trafalgar and Waterloo. But Napoleon did move inside the British household, becoming a prominent symbol in sitting rooms, dining rooms, studies, halls, stairwells, gardens and even bedrooms. Paradoxical as it might seem, Napoleon Bonaparte

became the major household god of nineteenth-century Britain, but it was in the space of the British home that the French Emperor would meet one of his most significant defeats.

The records of the Staffordshire pottery industry powerfully illustrate Napoleon's astonishing status as the premier British domestic icon of the nineteenth century. Amazingly, Napoleon was the most commonly produced pottery portrait figure of the Victorian era, outselling not only his rivals Wellington and Nelson but even Queen Victoria herself. Pottery historian, P. D. Gordon Pugh, has shown that during 1840s and 1850s there was a 'fantastic output of figures of Napoleon 1'[23] while in *Staffordshire Pottery: The Tribal Art of England* Anthony Oliver describes 'the huge number of Napoleon figures of which the potters could never make enough to satisfy the demand', adding 'more Staffordshire portraits of the Emperor were made than even those of the Queen herself'.[24] The French Emperor was the subject of the tallest and most magnificent Staffordshire pottery figure ever produced, which was 24 inches high, as well as the second tallest of such figures, at 21 inches, and the smallest, at 2 ¾ inches.[25] Pugh observes that some of these figures were made for the French market where the demand for such icons was huge, as Sudhir Hazareesingh has shown in *The Legend of Napoleon*, giving the example of a street-seller who in 1819 sold 8,000 busts of Napoleon in four days.[26] But Pugh goes on to argue that the majority of these Staffordshire figures were produced for the British market,[27] raising a number questions about the relationship between Britain and Napoleon throughout the century.

Pugh sees the phenomenal production of Staffordshire Napoleons as 'a most surprising manifestation of left-wing sympathies'.[28] For him, the significance of these symbols is directly and essentially political, and it is in such terms that the production, possession and display of icons of the emperor are usually understood. For example, in *Napoleon and the British*, Stuart Semmel begins his chapter 'Radicals, "Legitimacy", and History' by describing the actions of the government informer William Oliver, who in 1817 sought to 'lull the suspicions of the would-be insurrectionists whose ranks he had infiltrated … [by placing] a bronze Napoleon on his mantelpiece.' As Semmel comments, 'By doing so, he proved himself an astute student of radical semiotics. Oliver's talismanic Bonaparte would have served as a convincing shibboleth to his "fellow" radicals'.[29] Certainly, in the war years and the period immediately after Waterloo, 'left wing sympathies' could be seen as the main motivation for the

possession and display of Napoleonic busts. This was the case with the Whig poet Lord Byron, who in 1813 recalled defending 'his bust [of Bonaparte] at Harrow against the rascally time-servers',[30] and with the radical essayist William Hazlitt, whose smashing and repairing of a small bronze figure of Bonaparte provides the key symbolic action of *Liber Amoris*.[31] On a grander scale, it was also the case at Holland House, the hub of fashionable Whig Circles, where in 1818 a bust of the ex-emperor by Canova was erected on a nine foot high column in the garden, becoming the centrepiece of a remarkable collection of Napoleana that included two further busts of the Emperor, one by Milne on a pedestal painted white and gold and another surmounted with 'an imperial eagle in bronze'.

However, 'left wing sympathies' cannot explain the motivations of other possessors of Napoleonic busts, like the Tory painter Benjamin Robert Haydon, whose passion for all things Napoleonic increased particularly after the Emperor's death in 1821 and the publication of the memoirs. Haydon kept a small bronze bust and a medal of Napoleon in his bedroom alongside a range of domestic furnishings such as statues of cupids and painting of naked women and nymphs which seem to have been used to create an amorous, even erotic, atmosphere in what Haydon described as the 'little nest of taste & happiness, [in which he and his wife Mary] enjoyed the most rapturous & enchanted moments of our lives!'.[32] For Haydon, Napoleon's significance seems to have moved inwards from the political to become part of his most private and intimate world.

More generally, 'left-wing sympathy' cannot account for the extraordinary popularity of busts or figures of Napoleon throughout the nineteenth century, especially given the evidence of a lack of political sympathy on the parts of the many who owned them. Rather, the popularity of such objects can be seen as part of the ongoing cultural struggle with Napoleon, a conflict that the nation internalised, moving the encounter with the national enemy from the battlefield to the home. Here again Wellington provides the model for the British engagement with the ex-emperor, for it was the 'Iron Duke' who owned and displayed the ultimate piece of Napoleonic domestic furnishing, Antonio Canova's statue 'Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker'. Napoleon had himself commissioned this monumental sculpture in 1802 but had rejected it upon eventually seeing it in 1811, forbidding public access to it in the Musée Napoleon. Following Waterloo, the statue was bought by the British government and presented by the Prince

Regent to Wellington who in 1817 installed it in the central stairwell of his London home, Apsley House, where it can still be seen today [Figure 2]. Only two years after his final defeat, Napoleon was incorporated into the heart of the British nation, taking his place in the central space of the national home, Number 1, London.

For many historians and art critics, Wellington's purchase of the statue and his placement of it within a domestic setting was a deliberate attempt to further humiliate his defeated enemy. C. M. S. Johns, for example, describes Napoleon as 'still claustrophobically "imprisoned" by the stair balusters near the front of the Duke's London mansion',[33] while Andrew Roberts reports that one visitor was infuriated to learn that the statue had been 'used by the duke's visitors "to hang cloaks and hats on"'.[34] Others like Julius Bryant have argued that Wellington's treatment of the statue was a respectful tribute, albeit one that located the grand image of Napoleon within a clear narrative of British triumph by surrounding it with busts of the victorious leaders and generals of Waterloo.[35] Whether we read Canova's statue in its stairwell setting as a war trophy or a tribute, its positioning suggests the functions fulfilled by the innumerable figures of Napoleon produced, bought and displayed in Britain throughout the nineteenth century. The statue's placement domesticates the national enemy, incorporating the terrifying external other within the household of the nation that has triumphed over it. From this point of view, the grander the statue of Napoleon, or the taller the Staffordshire figure, the better, because its size and grandeur testify to the power of the household that is able to contain it. The sublime figure of the emperor becomes, if not ridiculous, at least familiar; part of the household, if not part of the family.

Through the course of the nineteenth century, then, the British home domesticated and internalised its greatest enemy. Three theoretical accounts can help us consider the processes of reproduction, multiplication and incorporation at play in this contest with Napoleon. Walter Benjamin's well-known essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' of 1936, offers one way of thinking about the astonishing popularity of Napoleonic icons in the century after Waterloo. Benjamin argues that the power or 'aura' of a work of art (its authenticity, uniqueness or specialness) becomes increasingly diluted or lessened as a result of its multiplication: 'that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art'.[36] Following Benjamin, we might argue that during the nineteenth century the

Napoleonic icon was transformed from being the hidden, secret or ceremonial object of a cult, as it was satirically perceived to be by Gillray in his satire of Fox worshipping at the shrine of Jacobinism, to become an object widely exhibited but increasingly devoid of inherent meaning or value. It could be argued that despite his status as the genius of modern warfare, despite his standing as the strategist who was best able to exploit the technological and scientific developments of the modern age, Napoleon was ultimately defeated in Britain by the process of mechanical reproduction that robbed him of his authenticity and his aura. The European ruler who perhaps more than any other sought to reinforce his power through the manipulation of his mythic identity was ultimately beaten by the very proliferation of that image.

This argument about the proliferation of the Napoleonic image can be developed through reference to the work of Jean Baudrillard, particularly his analysis in *Simulations* of the third of the four stages of the sign under capitalism, the stage in which the image masks the absence of a basic reality. Here Baudrillard examines the proliferation of icons or images of divinity, asking 'what becomes of divinity when it reveals itself in icons, when it is multiplied in simulacra?'[37] Using the example of the Iconoclasts, who destroyed images because they suggested the 'overwhelming, destructive truth' that 'God himself has only ever been his own simulacrum', Baudrillard argues that the power of simulacra is not only that they usurp the imaginative power of the real object that they supposedly represent, but that they reveal the truth that 'there is no prior reality anyway'. In Baudrillard's terms, the proliferation of images of Napoleon reveals that Napoleon is no longer meaningful; what he says of the iconolators in relation to God might be applied to those British who purchased busts of the emperor: 'they already enacted his death and disappearance in the epiphany of his representations.'[38]

Michel Foucault's *Society Must be Defended*, to which I have already alluding in this essay's opening, provides an alternative way of accounting for the predominance of the Napoleonic image in Britain after Waterloo. Arguing for the continued presence of war in peacetime society, Foucault also emphasises the process of internalisation; war is fought not just at national frontiers but also within the nation itself. If we follow Foucault's argument, we might take the popularity of Napoleonic busts as a symbol of a continuing conflict with Napoleon, suggesting that in the century after Waterloo, the

war with France was ongoing, that Britain continued to face the same enemy, and that this war was fought within the homes of the nation itself rather than at its frontiers.

These three theories can be tested through a reading of a literary text which provides a remarkable testament to the enduring popularity of the Napoleonic icon a full century after Southey had predicted its transience, Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes story 'The Six Napoleons', first published in Great Britain in *The Strand Magazine* in May 1904. Set in 1900, 'The Six Napoleons' concerns what Inspector Lestrade describes as 'the Napoleon bust business', [39] the serial smashing of plaster busts of the Emperor because, as Holmes deduces, a stolen jewel, the 'Black Pearl of the Borgias', has been secreted in one. Ultimately, the fact that it is busts of Napoleon that are being shattered turns out not to be directly relevant to the plot, but this isn't known during the course of the narrative, when the possible motivations for such iconoclasm become one of the main areas of inquiry. What is particularly interesting about the story is that it repeatedly refers to the 'hundreds of statues of the great Emperor [that] exist in London' (p. 178) without feeling it necessary to offer any explanation for this proliferation in the capital of images of the one-time national enemy. Indeed, it is the motivations of the iconoclast rather than the collectors of the Napoleonic image that are seen as abnormal. As the plodding policeman Inspector Lestrade comments, the perpetrator of the crimes must be mad because 'You wouldn't think there was anyone living at this time of day who had such a hatred of Napoleon the First that he would break any image of him that he could see' (p. 176). For Lestrade, Napoleon seems to have become devoid of meaning, or enough meaning to justify the destruction of his image. Moreover, the purchasers of what become the smashed busts are presented throughout the narrative as highly respectable professionals, rather than the spiritual descendents of Fox, Byron or the Hollands who courted controversy through their possession of such icons. None of the purchasers are linked to any radical or subversive organization or involved in any kind of unpatriotic activity. So it would seem that the Napoleon icon no longer carries a subversive charge, nor even any great personal or sentimental significance; the journalist Horace Harker comments of his smashed bust that 'it was only a plaster cast, and of no real value whatever' (p. 181), while Holmes himself describes one of the busts as 'trifling' (p. 183).

By 1904, then, the image of Bonaparte no longer appears to symbolize the threat to the British nation. Indeed, so fully has the Napoleonic icon been incorporated into the

British household, that it is the attacks on the busts themselves that are linked to threats to national stability, as when Morse Hudson, the owner of the shop in which one of the busts of Napoleon is smashed, describes the events as 'Disgraceful' and comments: 'A Nihilist plot, that's what I make it. No one but an Anarchist would go about breaking statues. Red Republicans, that's what I call 'em.' (p. 185) So, within the course of the century, Napoleon has been transformed from the monstrous other and idol of the 'enemy within' to a symbol of orthodoxy and normality, even of a certain middle class, professional suburban Britishness that is imperilled by political extremism linked to forces outside the nation.

Following this line of analysis, 'The Six Napoleons' might seem to exemplify the theories of Benjamin and Baudrillard. The Napoleonic icon has lost its aura, the Emperor himself is robbed of his authority, and busts of Bonaparte have replaced the historical reality. However, the narrative of 'The Six Napoleons' also suggests that neither the process of mechanical reproduction nor the omnipotence of the simulacra are quite powerful enough to win the war against Napoleon, for the story also enables the reader to enjoy a pleasure in a continued triumphing over Napoleon of the sort produced by Wellington's placing of Bonaparte in his stairwell or in the re-enactments of the Battle of Waterloo. In Conan-Doyle's story, this sense of triumph is achieved through the repeated accounts of the destruction of Napoleonic icons, the remains of which are described with great relish; the busts are 'shivered into fragments' (p. 177), 'dashed savagely against the garden wall' (p. 178), 'smashed to atoms' (p. 178), 'broken into fragments' (p. 182) and 'scattered in splintered shards upon the grass' (p. 183). The culmination of the plot comes when Holmes (whose arch-enemy we might remember was Moriarty, the 'Napoleon of crime') engages in his own act of imperial iconoclasm:

> Sherlock Holmes's movements were such as to rivet our attention. He began by taking a clean white cloth from a drawer and laying it over the table. Then he placed his newly acquired bust in the centre of the cloth. Finally he picked up his hunting-crop and struck Napoleon a sharp blow on the top of the head. The figure broke into fragments, and Holmes bent eagerly over the shattered remains. Next instant, with a loud shout of triumph, he held up one splinter, in which a round, dark object was fixed like a plum in a pudding.

'Gentlemen', he cried, 'let me introduce you to the famous black pearl of the Borgias'.

Lestrade and I sat silent for a moment, and then, with a spontaneous impulse, we broke out clapping as at the well-wrought crisis of a play. (p. 195)

In the well-wrought culmination of this story, Holmes reveals the solution to the mystery at the same time as he shatters the image of the national enemy. Narrative resolution is achieved simultaneously with the restaging of national victory, accompanied by a loud shout of triumph that echoes the cheers greeting Wellington at Waterloo. The reference to pulling a plum from a pudding may even refer to that most famous caricature of Anglo-Gallic conflict, Gillray's 'The Plum Pudding in Danger'. Yet rather than sharing the pudding with Napoleon as Pitt had done, Holmes displays its plum as a symbol of his triumph over the shattered image of Napoleon (a moment chosen for representation on a Royal Mail stamp of 1993, a striking example of a British state institution continuing to enact the triumph over Napoleon [Figure 3]).

Throughout the nineteenth century, then, Britain continued its contest with Napoleon, battling the Corsican not only in the public spaces of performance halls but also in the domestic space of the British home itself. Even after his death, the defeated French Emperor remained centre-stage in the nation's imagination and kept his place on its mantelpiece. Yet even though Britain domesticated and incorporated Napoleon within the national household, dissipating his aura through mechanical reproduction and enacting his disappearance in the epiphany of his representations, his residual power was such that it remained necessary to face the old enemy, to re-enact the triumph over the Emperor, and to shatter the bust of Bonaparte.

[1] M. Foucault (2003), *Society Must Be Defended*, trans. David Masey (London: Allen Lane), p. 15.

[2] H. Austin (1838), *Guards, Hussars and Infantry. Adventures of Harry Austin* (London: Sanders and Otley), p. 311.

[3] On these various forms, see R. D. Altick (1978), *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), passim; on panoramas, see P. Shaw (2002), *Waterloo and the Romantic Imagination* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 67-91; on Siborne, see P. Hofschröer (2004), *Wellington's Smallest Victory: The Duke, The Model Maker and The Secret of Waterloo* (London: Faber and Faber), passim.

[4] B. Assael (2005), *The Circus and Victorian Society* (Charlottesville, VA.: University of Virginia Press), p. 46.

[5] Assael, *Circus and Victorian Society*, pp. 4, 52.

[6] 'Watch this Space' Festival, National Theatre, 23rd June-26th September 2012.

[7] H. v. Pückler-Muskau (1957), *A Regency Visitor: The English Tour of Prince Pückler-Muskau described in his Letters, 1826-1828* (London: Collins), pp. 228-30.

[8] Hofschröer, *Wellington's Smallest Victory*, pp. 175-6, 196, 204, 208.

[9] Pückler-Muskau, *A Regency Visitor*, pp. 229.

[10] L. Colley (1996), *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Vintage).

[11] Assael, *Circus and Victorian Society*, p. 58.

[12] Hofschröer, *Wellington's Smallest Victory*, p. 1.

[13] Assael, *Circus and Victorian Society*, p. 53.

[14] Assael, *Circus and Victorian Society*, p. 53.

[15] Puckler-Muskau, *A Regency Visitor*, pp. 229.

[16] Altick, *Shows of London*, p. 238.

[17] The British Museum,

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/, date accessed

22 October 2012.

[18] Altick, *Shows of London*, pp. 238, 335.

[19] National Portrait Gallery, http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search, accessed 22

October 2012.

[20] P. T. Barnum (1871), *Struggles and Triumphs or Forty Years' Recollections of P. T.

Barnum* (New York: American News Company) p. 184.

[21] R. Southey (1961), *Letters from England*, ed. J. Simmons (London: Cresset Press), p.

26.

[22] Quoted in G. Martineau (1976), *Napoleon's Last Journal* (London: John Murray), p.

55.

[23] P. D. G. Pugh (1981), *Staffordshire Portrait Figures and Allied Subjects of the

Victorian Era* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors Club), p. 16.

[24] A. Oliver (1981), *Staffordshire Pottery: The Tribal Art of England* (London:

Heinemann), p. 136.

[25] Pugh, *Staffordshire Portrait Figures*, pp. 234, 16, 91, 107.

[26] S. Hazareesingh (2004), *The Legend of Napoleon* (London: Granta), p. 81.

[27] Pugh, *Staffordshire Portrait Figures*, p. 94.

[28] Pugh, *Staffordshire Portrait Figures*, p. 16.

[29] S. Semmel (2004), *Napoleon and the British* (New Haven, CT: Yale University

Press), p. 175.

[30] Lord Byron (1974), *Letters and Journals* (London: John Murray), III, 210.

[31] William Hazlitt (1983), *Selected Writings*, ed. R. Blythe (Harmondsworth: Penguin),

pp. 308-9.

[32] B. R. Haydon (1960), *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon, volume, 2, 1816-1824* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press), p. 416.

[33] C. M. S. Johns (1988), *Antonio Canova and the Politics of Patronage in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), p. 106.

[34] A. Roberts (2002), *Wellington and Napoleon* (London: Phoenix Press), p. 211.

[35] J. Bryant (2005), 'How Canova and Wellington honoured Napoleon', *Apollo*, October 2005.

[36] W. Benjamin (1970), *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, trans H. Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 223.

[37] J. Baudrillard (1983), *Simulations*, trans. P. Foss, P. Patton and P. Beitchman (Semiotext[e]), p. 8.

[38] Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 8-9.

[39] A. C. Doyle (1994), *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. R. L. Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 180.

Figure 1: The Duke of Wellington visiting the Effigy and Personal Relics of Napoleon at Madame Tussaud's by James Scott, after Sir George Hayter. National Portrait Gallery.

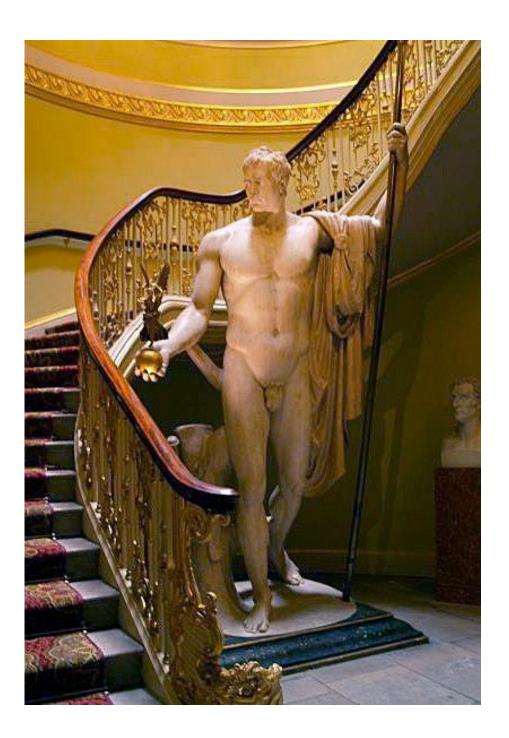Figure 2. Antonio Canova, *Napoleon as Mars the Peacemaker* (National Heritage)

Figure 3. Royal Mail Stamp 1516, 'Sherlock Holmes & Lestrade: "The Six Napoleons"'