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# Imposing on Napoleon: the Romantic appropriation of Bonaparte

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Article for *Journal of European Studies*:

# ‘Imposing on Napoleon: Romantic Appropriation of Bonaparte’

By

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**Abstract**

This article explores how major British Romantic writers perceived Napoleon in the early nineteenth century: the ideas they associated with him and the images they used to depict him. I argue that these perceptions have relatively little to do with the politics of the various writers, or with the chronology of Napoleon’s career. Instead, interest in Bonaparte is driven by aesthetic and philosophical concerns: especially the question of whether Napoleon is an ordinary man ‘within’ history, or a semi-allegorical personage – a representative of some ideology or concept (like Liberty or Heroism). I also discuss how Napoleon is appended to the Romantic problem of the ‘overreacher’ who fails *due to* his glorious success, and who thus blurs the boundaries between triumph and failure. Lastly, I show how Napoleon influences Romantic concern about ‘imposing’ ideas onto analysis of the world. In this way, Napoleon exposes insecurities at the heart of Romantic self-perception.

**Imposing on Napoleon: Romantic Appropriation of Bonaparte**

'Napoleon was not a personality, but a principle.'

Wellington

*Introduction*

In 1798, as the young Napoleon set forth to conquer Egypt, his fame had already infiltrated British Romantic writing. Before he had become First Consul, let alone Emperor, Walter Savage Landor called Napoleon 'a mortal man beyond all mortal praise' (Landor, 1937: I, 44), an individual so prodigiously talented that his glorious example expands the possibilities of human achievement. Only five years later though, Landor recants these views, adding a footnote to the above line: 'Napoleon might have been [great]', but became confused, and misused his gifts to 'overthrow by violence all institutions and to tear all social habits of men' (II, 549). This spectacular change of mind is important for two reasons. Firstly, it epitomises the vacillation common to many Romantics when discussing Napoleon. Secondly, more crucially, it shows that the reasons for admiring and attacking him are remarkably close. Landor changes his conclusion, but not his body of evidence: Napoleon is still an unparalleled talent, only the implications of that gift are reconsidered.

My purpose is to explore this range of responses to Bonaparte, within and between Romantic writers. In some respect, such variety is not surprising – after all, Napoleon's legacy has been a source of profound debate since his death. However, historians usually argue that ideas about Bonaparte can be 'plotted' along a political or chronological narrative. In his study of Napoleon's image through the ages, R. S. Alexander suggests that interpretations of him are determined by party politics. Socialists and right-wing dictators were particularly adept at exploiting his legacy for their own ends, presenting him as a forerunner for their styles of government (Alexander, 2001: 54-65). Other historians base understandings of Napoleon's reputation upon chronology. Jean Tulard (1984: 344-9) proposes that Napoleonic adulation blossomed only after 1815, when contemporary hardships made the Empire seem a golden age in retrospect. Walter Scott hints at this when he writes to John Morritt in 1815: 'I shall give offence to […] the Whigs by not condoling with

Bonaparte. Since his sentence of transportation he *has begun* to look wonderfully comely in their eyes' (Scott, 1932-7: IV, 100, my emphasis). Scott's phrasing suggests that a reassessment of Napoleon occurred after his banishment to St Helena. It is difficult, however, to detect such a conveniently dated alteration in Romantic writing on Napoleon. Instead, views of him follow patterns evident prior to *and* after 1815, and these groupings of images and associations offer a clearer picture of Romantic understanding of Bonaparte than any chronological scheme.

My objective is to investigate these associations more precisely; to explain what the British Romantics thought of Napoleon and *why* this interest was so high. As I will demonstrate, political preoccupations or chronological proximity are not enough to explain this fascination. Instead, he became a conduit for ideas – and hence I wish to argue that he features, not simply as a contemporary figure, or as a source of political debate, but as a kind of philosophical template – integral to Romantic concepts and their controversies. Napoleon, as we shall see, is central to the Romantics' perception of themselves.

*The Lake Poets' Disrupted Chronology*

According to F. J. Maccunn, the British press began to write extensively about Napoleon in 1798, after he concluded his campaigns in Italy, and before the expedition to Egypt (Maccunn, 1914: 9). At this time too, Napoleon attracted the attention of the Lake Poets (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey). During these early days, Napoleon became appended to the young radicals' hopes for the Revolution. 'His interests, and those of his country, run in parallel' enthused Coleridge in print (1978: I, 210), while in a letter he is almost inarticulate with joy: 'Buonaparte - ! dear DEAR Buonaparte!' (1956-71: I, no. 298). Southey is only slightly less hysterical, imagining that Napoleon will create a 'home' in Syria, 'flowing with milk and honey' (1965: I, 185). It is well known, however, that the Lakers became increasingly conservative later in their careers – and their views on Napoleon changed accordingly. Southey complains that 'He sought thro' evil means […] / To enslave, denigrate and brutalise mankind' (1845: 'The Poet's Pilgrimage to Waterloo', II iv 17), while Coleridge rants about a Napoleon-Monster who wears 'the putrid Cap of Jacobin Liberty' (1956-71: III, no. 731). Conventional explanation blames Napoleon's own conduct, particularly his coronation in 1804, for provoking this

change of mind; indeed, Wordsworth mentions the occasion as a seminal reason for his disillusionment, arguing that Napoleon turned potential into empty spectacle (1979: *Prelude* 1805, Bk. X, lines 930-40).

Upon closer inspection though, this chronology, even the Lakers' own sense of their views' alteration, becomes more problematic – and it is important to acknowledge this early, because vacillation, not coherent development, characterises the Romantic understanding of Bonaparte. In his poetry, Southey simply does not discuss his change of mind: especially after he became Poet Laureate in 1813, he switched to extreme condemnation with no self-consciousness. His letters though, are a different matter. Writing to Landor in 1814, he defends his original support for Revolution based on hatred of the Bourbons. Napoleon, he says, completed their overthrow, but then became too monarchical, and must be crushed at all costs. This strange fusion of jingoism, radicalism and reasoning, destroys any sense that Southey's views on Bonaparte progress smoothly from support to condemnation. Southey instead exposes a public / private dichotomy: his opinions are more extreme in his public role as Laureate, and less assured in personal writing. This represents an important trend in other British figures – even George Cruickshank, the caricaturist who attacked Napoleon so mercilessly, expressed a more measured view once the Emperor had died, ambiguously acknowledging his personal debt to a man he was *obliged* to hate for many years (Ashton, 1888: 440).

Wordsworth rationalises his variable views on a different basis. Sometimes he admits his change of mind; but more regularly he constructs an elaborate defence of his own consistency (that he is devoted to Freedom – originally embodied by revolutionary France, but later by non-absolutist Britain [1979: *Prelude* 1805 Bk. IX, line 520]). Wordsworth argues that his principles have remained unswerving, overriding any uncertainty about Napoleon. This may strike us as disingenuous (after all, Wordsworth plainly *does* harbour doubtful Napoleonic opinions), but it would be equally misleading to explain his thoughts using the language of chronological development – terminology he explicitly denies. The most puzzling case though, is that of Coleridge, who demonstrates an almost implausibly extreme change of mind. In March 1800, he mounts a stirring defence of Napoleon in *The Morning Post*, writing about his 'commanding genius', 'predestined fortune' and un-despotic

ambition (1978: I, 210). Confusingly though, in a letter dated three months *before* this article, Coleridge rages against Bonaparte's 'detestable Villainy', wishing that he could be hanged, for 'guillotining is too *republican* a death for a Reptile' (1956-71: I, no. 306). This alteration *can* be attributed to historical occurrences (e.g. the acceptance of the First Consulship offending Coleridge); but this method cannot explain the force of change or the strange reversal three months later. The complexity of Coleridge's indecision cannot be clarified merely by reference to French politics; his insecurity about Napoleon is not based solely on the chronology of the Imperial career. Other criteria must be used to discuss Napoleon's influence on the Romantics: conceptual / thematic ideas which are sometimes, but not necessarily, linked to the temporal progress of French history or Napoleon's biography.

*Man, Devil or God?*

One such conceptual tension concerns Napoleon's 'humanity': whether he is an ordinary man (however much a success or failure), or a kind of demigod – a unique, semi-allegorical personage worthy of adulation or denigration. Despite his ambiguity, Landor consistently presents Napoleon as a 'mortal man' – a daring individual who pushes human capacity to the limit in pursuit of ever more extreme objectives. This perspective finds popularity in the early correspondence of Coleridge and Southey – especially when writing to each other. Coleridge describes Napoleon as a 'Man of Science': a political reorganiser who stabilises new laws for human conduct (1956-71: I, no. 298; 1978: I, 71). And Southey lauds him as 'philosopher-diplomat', praising Napoleon as a man of rounded talents, not tumultuous imbalances (1965: 1, 221-2). Even the Tory Walter Scott pays tribute to Napoleon's military and administrative prowess: ' in general, the public actions of Napoleon, at the commencement of his career, were highly laudable: the softening of civil discord, the reconciliation with the Church of Rome, the recall of the great body of emigrants, and the revivification of National Jurisprudence' (Scott, 1834-6: XVI, 320). This view of Bonaparte did not, of course, originate with the British Romantics. Las Casas, whose memoirs of Napoleon on St. Helena were bestsellers, presented him as a self-critical man – an accessible, human figure (Alexander, 2001: 34). And Napoleon's English doctor, Barry O'Meara, styles him as a sensitive humanitarian (O'Meara, 1969: II, 68).

The same writers, however, also criticise Napoleon *as a man*, pointing out incorrect decisions in policy. In some early sonnets, Wordsworth derides the hero-worship surrounding the French leader, and identifies flaws in his militaristic political style – namely the reluctance to collaborate or meditate on ideas (See 'Is it a reed that's shaken' and 'Thoughts of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland' [Wordsworth, 1923]). Shelley follows these thoughts, believing Napoleon's coronation to be an egotistical policy decision, a return to 'frail pomp' and monarchical personality-politics ('Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte' [Shelley, 1970]). Damning as these assessments are, they treat Napoleon merely as a politician – no different to any other public person. This is however, only part of a pervasive dilemma in Romantic work – for Napoleon is also perceived as 'more or less than man': a metaphysical being 'beyond' the bounds of mere humanity (Byron, 1986: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, III*,* stanza 38).

At its most schematic, this involves demonising Napoleon as an evil incarnation. The later Coleridge becomes particularly fond of this mode: by 1811, he rages wildly about Bonaparte's 'wicked ambition', wishing for his assassination (1978: II, 192-5). In *The Poet's Pilgrimage*, Southey interprets Waterloo as a cosmic conflict: Heaven has been "insulted and defied" by Napoleon's malevolence (1845: II, iv, 17). Even the Wordsworths disparage Bonaparte's 'diabolical system' and 'faithlessness in every object' (1978-88: 'To Southey', Mar 1827; 'To Thomas Powell' 2 Apr 1842). Reacting to news of Napoleon's advance across Spain in 1808, Scott declares, perhaps only half-seriously, 'I think some evil demon has been permitted, in the shape of this tyrannical monster whom God has sent on the nations […] I am confident he is proof against lead and steel, and have only hope that he may be shot with a silver bullet' (Scott, 1932-7: II, 135). Significant too is the frequency with which Romantics compare Napoleon to Satan – an analogy that implies both absolute evil *and* inevitable victory for righteous opponents. As Simon Bainbridge shows, references to Milton's Satan are particularly extensive (1995: 110-133). The image invokes a political thesis founded upon Milton's theology – Napoleon as a Satanic insurgent who, fuelled by arrogant individuality, acts rashly to destabilise a carefully constructed world order. However, as Bainbridge observes, this comparison is problematic given Milton's notoriously complex presentation of Satan. Blake chose to interpret Satan as an individualist hero, rebelling against tyrannous world order.

Alive to such ambiguity, Hazlitt uses the Satan-image differently – to celebrate Napoleon as a courageous figure, confronting the order of international relations and reconstituting it according to his own brilliance, not a preconceived moral code. For Hazlitt, Napoleon and Satan both represent revolution against cultural / political conservatism (Bainbridge, 1995: 185-6).

This connects with another, similar presentation of Napoleon: adulation of him as a superhuman, transcendent being. Just as Coleridge abuses Bonaparte in a metaphysical sense, so too does he spiritualise him as an 'animal force' and 'hero of romance': an 'essence' or symbol rather than a real person (1956-71: I, no. 298; 1978: I, 71). The trope is, however, more common in the younger Romantics. Shelley's reaction to Napoleon's death mythologises him as a 'fiery spirit'; his narrator wonders if the Earth sustains itself on the vitality of his exceptional greatness (see particularly 'Lines Written on Hearing the News of the Death of Napoleon'). Similarly, Hazlitt celebrates Napoleon as an 'Idea' not an individual. In 'On the Spirit of Partisanship', he reinvents Napoleon as the personification of Liberty who 'alone could prop a declining world' (Hazlitt, 1930: XVII, 36-40; XII, 166). Furthermore, the daring hero suspends the laws of morality: 'Wrong dressed out in pride, pomp and circumstance has more attraction than abstract right' (1930: XVII, 40). Hazlitt claims that Bonaparte has created a new morality by battering down traditional assumptions and refusing to accept the moral limitations of human conduct. This indicates a crucial difference between Hazlitt and the later Wordsworth: whereas the former is enthused by the challenge on ethics, Wordsworth is appalled by 'the audacious charlatan's' moral waywardness (1969-70: 22 February 1822).

This understanding of Napoleon is not confined to literature. George Ponsonby, the early nineteenth-century Whig politician, proposed a debate on Napoleon's greatness, adding 'I speak not of his moral character [but] of the faculties and energies of his mind' (Harvey, 1998: 27). Contemporary French artists also presented him as a transcendent being (e.g. David's 'Napoleon Crossing the Saint Bernard' and Gros's 'Bonaparte at the Bridge of Arcola', which show him as a sublime, almost mythological hero [Munhall, 1960, 3-20]). Alexander even argues that the transcendent view of Napoleon influenced Nietzsche's notions of übermensch and will to power (Alexander, 2001: 140-1). Indeed, adulatory views of Napoleon remain

popular with modern historians – Ben Jones proclaims that Bonaparte cannot be judged 'in purely human terms' for he has 'leapt beyond rational bounds' (Jones, 1977: 204-5). The Romanticised view of 'the great man' has played a central role in directing subsequent (historiographical) perceptions of Napoleon.

However, the idea of the Emperor existing 'above' human society was also disconcerting. Madame de Staël agreed that he positioned himself outside conventional moral schemes, but that this indicates egoism and distain for fellow humans (Geyl, 1949: 23). Shelley becomes similarly estranged by greatness that detaches itself from morality. In *Prometheus Unbound* I, 625, he mourns that 'The good want power, but to weep barren tears. / The powerful goodness want […]'; and in *The Triumph of Life* (lines 215ff.) he connects these perceptions directly with Napoleon – a man in denial of 'virtue's self'. Such sentiments typify the Romantic treatment of Napoleon: self-reflexive judgments constantly open to revision, and a dialectical desire to associate observations with an overarching Idea or Concept, but reluctance to accept any one position unquestioningly.

*Napoleon as Ideological Instrument*

As the above discussion indicates, the Romantics regularly configure Napoleon part of broader ideological controversies – both literary (how to interpret Milton) and political (how to define Tyranny, or Heroism; how to ascertain the limitations of democracy or individualism). The public poems of Southey and Wordsworth are saturated with such ideologies: the Napoleonic wars interpreted as a providential clash between Good and Evil and the potential result absorbed into a comprehension of Christian history. In his ode 'Imagination – ne'er before content', Wordsworth claimed – to the disgust of Hazlitt – that the wars, and resultant deaths, were the instrument of God's plan. Although this 'providential' view of history is often in tension with Wordsworth's alternative understanding of history perpetrated and directed by human agency, Napoleon is commonly employed as an allegory of moral conflict. In the 'Thanksgiving Ode', for instance, he connects Napoleon's 'Hundred Days' with Satan's role in the Genesis story, appending moral exegesis to international politics. Southey utilises a virtually identical strategy, writing in the 'Argument' of *The Poet's Pilgrimage* that war is an ideological dispute between the 'gross material philosophy' of France and 'consistent and clear' Christianity, a

struggle between 'good and evil principles' (Southey, 1845: X). In this way, Waterloo becomes a religious experience – a revelation of moral Truth and the incomprehensible will of divine power. Although he participates in similar demonisation of Napoleon, Scott also reveals how these associations serve partisan purpose, providing a clear enemy to bolster both governmental unity and newspaper sales: 'the newspapers miss Napoleon, as the Church would miss the Devil, were it possible to annihilate [the] arch-enemy of mankind' (Scott, 1932-7: III, 444). By drawing an analogy with Satan, this extraordinary sentence manages both to demystify and participate in the appropriation of Napoleon for ideological purposes.

Hazlitt also uses the Emperor as an ideological symbol: the instrument and representative of a changing society, less an autonomous person than the tool of broad historical forces. In the *Life of Napoleon*, Hazlitt incorporates him into class politics: he symbolises wide social changes – the rise of middle-class men of talent, at the expense of aristocracy. Napoleon 'sprang from the earth… annulling the distinction between classes'; he 'rose to the height of kings from the level of the people, and proved there was no natural inferiority in the one case, no natural superiority in the other' (Hazlitt, 1930: XIV, 302). This is, of course, a controversial conclusion, ignoring Napoleon's monarchical leanings and tendency to proclaim himself 'a superior being'(Markham, 1963: 29). But Hazlitt has no desire to present a balanced portrait. When he relates the meeting between Napoleon and Pope Pius VII in 1804, he stresses that Bonaparte conducted himself like an equal. Despite knowing that the purpose of the occasion was to facilitate Napoleon's coronation, Hazlitt interprets the event as a kind of historical stand-off between ancient theocracy and new democracy, between Privilege and Liberty. The *process* of this appropriation is explored illuminatingly by Tom Paulin, who investigates how Hazlitt connects the rich imagery of Orion with mythologisation of Napoleon: 'Orion is both changing sea and starry constellation for Hazlitt, just as Napoleon is both a great historical force and a mythic figure who exists as a fixed heroic pattern in the heavens' (Paulin, 1998: 224). There is an important parallel here: between the apparent fixity of the Orion constellation and mythology, and the variable ends to which Hazlitt puts that imagery; between his certainty about what Napoleon *signifies*, and his implicit awareness of the flexibility of that appropriation. This illuminates the paradox of interpreting Napoleon: any assertion of what he 'denotes' or 'means' necessarily acknowledges the variability of

possible interpretation – for that variability *makes possible* such secure, and apparently unambiguous, *re*interpretations of Napoleon and his legacy.

Hazlitt and the later Coleridge celebrate or castigate Napoleon almost exclusively in a theoretical manner – as the embodiment philosophical notions (like Rebellion or Freedom). Sometimes, he is used to define those notions (e.g. Hazlitt's model of class-conflict); at others the Romantics attach him to extant theses (like Wordsworth's interpretation of Christian history). But this conceptual line of thinking has proven extremely influential amongst later historians – who have attempted to decipher a 'grand idea' behind Napoleon's Empire. Albert Sorel proposes that Napoleon continued Louis XIV's plan to expand to France's 'natural frontiers'; Frédéric Masson believes Bonaparte's state-reform was motivated primarily by Corsican clannishness and 'personality-cult' government; while Edgar Quinet suggests that he sought to emulate Roman empire building (see Ellis, 1997: 3 and 224-7). Discussing these contentious formulations, Geoffrey Ellis remarks that Napoleon *cannot* be discussed in terms of ideology, because he did not possess any single motivating 'idea', preferring to constantly revise his strategies (1997: 5-6). But this is misleading – for, as we have seen, it is simple to attach ideology to Napoleon and his regime, and his failure to present a 'grand idea' makes it *easier* to append a range of concepts – more than would otherwise be possible. As Lefebvre observes, this renders him a kind of vacuum – associated with everything and nothing, a Lockean blank slate suitable for personalised decoration (Lefebvre, 1969: 63-8). In his study of Wordsworth, Alan Liu notes that configuring Napoleon in this manner decontextualises him – it removes him from historical circumstance and treats him as an instrument of philosophy rather than a participant in human history (Liu, 1989: 35). This tendency does not, however, *define* Romantic management of Napoleon – for, as the next section explores, it is merely one aspect of another significant inconsistency.

*Bonaparte's Role in History*

Elsewhere, in their writing, the Romantics are concerned to locate Napoleon in the context of the Revolution and the ancien régime. Once again, this preoccupation follows Napoleon's lead: Ellis notes how official reference to the Empire and Emperor invoked previous civilisations and leaders – from the adoption of the

Frankish eagle as an allusion to Charlemagne, to the Caesar-style portraits of Napoleon on currency. Bonaparte possessed a heightened awareness of his historical significance, presenting himself as the culmination of history – as if previous events merely adumbrated his achievement (1997: 157-9). 'If I had succeeded,' he once claimed, 'I should have been the greatest man known to history' (Markham, 1963, 252), placing himself *within* historical context, and yet unique for his scope of influence. Even in failure, he directs the course of history – not aloof from human society, but dictating its progression.

When he writes about Napoleon, Shelley treats the Emperor as a *continuation* of ancien régime government. He becomes disillusioned because he cannot detect any difference between Napoleon and the Bourbon monarchs: Bonaparte has shunned liberty and constructed his government upon 'old Custom, legal Crime / And Bloody Faith' – the same materials that propped up Louis XIV ('Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte', lines 13-14). Napoleon is therefore not a turning point in history – he inherits the long, tyrannous tradition of dictator-leaders who impose their will on society at the expense of ordinary people. This analysis emphasises the perverse insignificance of Napoleon: as a participant in a continuing tradition of oppression, he is distinguished neither by his methods, nor his depravity. Like the king in 'Ozymandias', Napoleon's vanity will be defeated by time's scrutiny. Byron adopts a similar position in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, where the narrator attacks Napoleon for returning to outmoded forms of government: 'Can tyrants but by tyrants conquer'd be?' (part IV, stanza 96). In questions like this, Byron configures history as a depressingly unchangeable cycle, and Napoleon as part of that vicious continuance.

Hazlitt however, equally iconoclastic in his politics, sees Napoleon as a radical departure from the ancien régime – initiating a new style and premise for government. He consolidated the Revolution, says Hazlitt, institutionalising it, and preventing its collapse. He overcame the 'foul Blatant Beast' monarchy, 'played with its crowns [… making it] a mockery to the nations' (1930: VII, 10). As Bainbridge comments, this is an incomplete assessment, ignoring the question of whether Napoleon strengthened monarchical tradition rather than destroyed it (1995: 207). But Hazlitt's appraisal is no simplistic idolisation; it is a nuanced perception of Napoleon's place in

history – the heir of Revolution and engineer of social *change*. Similarly, Stendhal declares Napoleon a 'professeur d'enérgie', liquidating the old order and founding a new historical era (Geyl, 1949: 32-8). From a different political persuasion, the cartoonist Gillray also portrays Napoleon as an agent of Revolution: his 1798 'Search-Night' pairs Bonaparte with Robespierre above the motto 'Vive l'Egalité' (Bainbridge, 1995: 35). This practise, of associating Napoleon with Revolutionary aims, assumes a progressive (rather than cyclical) view of history: Europe has permanently changed, for good or ill, and Napoleon supervises that alteration. Moreover, such speculation is the earliest flowering of a pervasive historiographical trend: trying to connect Napoleon's legacy to that of the Revolution. Martyn Lyons represents the most recent end of this tradition – he argues that Napoleon's social reforms completed the Revolution, promoting the bourgeoisie at the expense of nobility (Lyons, 1994: 294-9).

The most complex discussion of Napoleon's historical significance occurs in the Lake Poets' writing. They consistently regard the Napoleonic period as a critical turning point in history, but vary their explanations for this conclusion. In 1800, Coleridge wrote that Napoleon unified Revolutionary principles with the governmental style of eighteenth-century 'enlightened despots' – although he wavers over whether he considers this as a daring success or a gross betrayal (firstly of Revolutionary objectives, and, later in life, of the sanctity of monarchy) (1978: I, 71). In his *Life of Napoleon,* Scott also proclaims the Emperor a fusion of radical reformer and ancien régime despot: he crafted a *new* style of leadership which replaced 'the reserved dignity' of recent monarchs with active military and administrative participation (Scott, 1834-6: XIV, 403). This formulation has proved very popular in recent understandings of political ideas. Michael Broers, for instance, credits Napoleon for establishing a new form of government: authoritarianism justified with the rhetoric of Revolution – equality, liberty and legalism (1996: 16-17).

Wordsworth, on the other hand, complains that Napoleon cheated France of its potential, and he castigates the Emperor for changing history for the worse. He has committed the 'last opprobrium, when we see the dog / Returning to his vomit, when the sun / That rose in splendour […] Hath put his function and his glory off, / And turned into a gewgaw, a machine' (*The Prelude* (1805), X, 935-9). Napoleon's

regime is both a rupture from past promise (the sun of Revolution turning into artificial theatrical machinery) *and* a shameless throwback to failed forms of government. As Wordsworth's career develops though, this sense of degeneration grows still more complicated: how has Napoleon damaged France's potential? – by assisting the Revolution in its assault on monarchy, or by corrupting the purposes of Revolution itself? Wordsworth's view of Napoleon's historical significance thus varies along with his fluctuating political inclinations. Bonaparte occupies a paradoxical position in the poet's work: he is, at times, the antithesis both of monarchy and the Revolution – a turning point in history *and* a retrospective figure, returning France to how it used to be, either under the Terror or Louis XIV. Establishing a chronology for these variable conceptions is extremely difficult: in books nine and ten of *The Prelude* (1805), Napoleon is at once a radical despoiler and an unjust conservative autocrat.

Despite their occasional tendency to abstract Napoleon, the Romantics therefore remain historically aware, keen to determine and question his historical role. This interest reflects concern for their 'historical experience' – their position as interpreters of history; and for this reason they view Napoleon according to their own political agendas (conservative, radical or both), to emphasise their double-role as participants in, and elucidators of, history (Bainbridge, 1995, 208). Some might argue that this Napoleonic appropriation ignores or manipulates Bonaparte as a historical figure – but this is only partly true, for it also exposes the Romantics' deep involvement with politics and ideas of historical development. One need not go as far as Arthur Bryant, who bizarrely argues that Wordsworth influenced the course of the Napoleonic Wars ('To understand why England defeated Napoleon, one should study Wordsworth' [1944: xii]). But writing on Napoleon, they articulate and direct conceptions of the Emperor – guiding not only their contemporaries, but subsequent historiographical trends as well.

*Man of the People; Man of the Poets*

Amidst all this talk of 'Napoleon and ideology' and 'Napoleon's historical role', one can easily lose sight of Bonaparte the man – a problem that preoccupied his contemporary apologists. This interpretation of the Emperor is no less ideologically motivated than the views discussed above, but unlike them, it disguises its

appropriative techniques by purporting to reveal the 'real', 'human' Napoleon. Gros's painting 'Bonaparte Visiting the Victims of the Plague at Jaffa' which shows him tending to the sick, reasserts his humanity and approachability, as well as his admirable fearlessness – a man of the people, but not quite one of them (Munhall, 1960: 6). This image, of Napoleon as 'man of the people', has proved particularly enduring, not only in France, but also in the United States, where Bonaparte's achievements were appended to the mythology of the American Dream (Alexander, 2001: 52-3). Napoleon skilfully cultivated such imagery, publishing his military speeches and conferring honours on all soldiers, not just officers. In Scott's words, he presented himself as 'the father of the war, to whom his soldiers were as children, and to whom the honour of the meanest private was as dear as his own' (1834-6: XII, 378-9). Bonaparte the 'Common Man' pervaded popular culture: Jean-Charles Pellerin produced cheap prints of soldiers in Napoleonic poses, invoking both the Emperor and the ordinary men who fought for him (Forrest, 2001: 52-3).

Some Romantics found this formulation attractive: they applauded Napoleon as a symbol of what one could achieve regardless of social background, and thus connected him to a meritocratic social vision – where status is based upon talent, not birth. In his letters, Byron speaks enthusiastically about Napoleon as 'first man' – a deserving meritocratic champion, not a dictator (1973-94: III, 218; IV, 284). Hazlitt goes further still, suggesting that he fought *on behalf* of 'a whole people', ensuring the victory of 'personal merit over rank and circumstance', and enshrining a system in which 'one was devoted to millions, not millions to one' (1930: XIII, ix-x). This supposition is wilfully uncompromising, and the 'meritocratic Napoleon' may seem like an ideological appropriation like any other. But unlike the vision of Napoleon as, say, 'Liberty', it has at its centre Bonaparte's *personality* – a real man who has succeeded with hard work and talent, not merely a concept or idea(l).

Unlike Hazlitt or Byron, whose versions of the 'meritocratic Napoleon' tend to be oversimplified, other contemporaries are more aware of the complexities of meritocracy. According to Scott, Napoleon only *presented* himself as a meritocratic hero; his government owed more to absolutism and ambition– a doubleness that Hazlitt is reluctant to admit (Scott, 1834-6: XII, 345 and 378). Moreover, Stendhal's *Scarlet and Black* diagnoses the problems of Napoleonic aspiration: how 'the

determination to achieve equality via merit hides the irresistible urge to show oneself inferior to none'. Meritocracy does not necessarily lead to equality, it also encourages superiority – and the latter concern preoccupied Napoleon more than pretensions of egality (Talmon, 1967: 158). Chateaubriand objects in somewhat different terms, protesting that Napoleon did indeed level society, but in a negative sense, reducing sovereignty to 'plebeian depths' (Geyl, 1949: 30). For these writers, Napoleon's personal qualities and achievements have rearranged views of the social order; their criticisms paradoxically admit to the extent of his influence.

Although the Romantics view Napoleon's 'meritocratic' credentials differently, they are all fascinated by his personality, regularly calling themselves the 'Napoleon of letters' with varying degrees of subtlety. In *Don Juan* Byron half-seriously denotes himself 'the grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme', claiming '*Juan* was my Moscow' and 'I will fall at least as my hero fell' (canto XI, stanza 55-6). This might be interpreted as comic exaggeration, except that he makes similar claims in private letters. In 1821, he began to sign his name 'NB' ('Noel Byron'), to provoke comparison between Napoleon and himself (1973-94: IX, 171). According to Leigh Hunt, Byron would boast of this tenuous connection: 'Bonaparte and I are the only public persons whose initials are the same' (Hunt, 1828: I, 125). One must not over-emphasise these correlations, for Byron also claims not to idolise Napoleon (1973-94: V, 201). Nevertheless, he revels in the Emperor's refracted glory, sharing his interest in publicity and public image.

Wordsworth equates himself with Bonaparte more carefully. In 'I grieved for Buonaparté' he connects Napoleon to his own development and theories about childhood. He implicitly compares Napoleon unfavourably to himself, since he (Wordsworth) has enjoyed 'books, leisure, perfect freedom […] 'the stalk / True Power doth grow on' (Wordsworth, 1923). The poem therefore disparages Napoleon, but also *inflates* him, presenting his fame and success as a foil for Wordsworth's greater imaginative power. Moreover, in a close reading of *The Prelude* Book VI, Alan Liu connects Wordsworth's thought processes with Napoleon's career: as the poet describes his crossing of the Alps in 1790, he alludes to Napoleon's later ventures on the same route – both the 1800 journey, and the 1798 invasion of Switzerland (which Wordsworth mistakenly attributes to Napoleon). The Emperor

haunts Wordsworth's sense of *his own* past: despite attempts to erase the memory of 'banners militant', he conceives this phase of his life in terms of Napoleon (Liu, 1989: 28-9). This deeply hidden Napoleonic preoccupation is somewhat unusual – especially when compared to Balzac's bombastic use of Bonaparte to assert his historical consequence: 'What he failed to do by the sword, I shall achieve by the pen' (Guérard, 1924: 191). But this personal equation with Napoleon occurs in unlikely writers. Despite his hostility, Chateaubriand still identifies with Napoleon, believing in the 'fraternity of their geniuses', even their 'parallel destinies' (Boorsch, 1960: 55-62). Perhaps, however, like Wordsworth, Chateaubriand's readiness to critique his 'counterpart' is an attempt to assert his superiority – rather than attach his life to Napoleon's success, he contrasts the Emperor's faults with his own steadfast morality.

The Romantics, therefore, feed from Napoleon's stature – a strategy which reflects their ambiguous treatment of him. They compare themselves with him, but also censure him, asserting their supremacy by taking control of his image, by bending him to their ideological ends. Firstly, this exposes how Napoleon facilitates the Romantics' view of themselves; as I will show shortly, Bonaparte is crucial to Romantic self-perception. Secondly, it reveals how Romantics simultaneously seek to magnify *and* denigrate Napoleon. This is, of course, an ambivalence that extends beyond Romantic writing. Contemporary caricaturists habitually depicted him as a titanic giant, fearsome to behold, or a ridiculous dwarf, pathetic for his pretensions. Debate rages over whether this indicates uncertainty about how to regard Napoleon; or whether it is a sustained campaign to forge a sense of British greatness, by both mocking him and celebrating victory over his unparalleled power (Kelley, 1991: 354). Either way, the Romantic use of Napoleon is highly personal, and yet reflects popular presentations of international relations. The Romantics seek to lead social understandings of Napoleon through their analysis and public proclamations; but they also *follow* social and literary trends – behaviour which undermines their self-mythologisation as men of solitary genius.

*The Glorious Failure*

In the light of this magnification / denigration dichotomy, we must consider perhaps the most important conception of Napoleon: his association with failure. As if to

counterbalance exclamations about his glory and success, the Romantics also accentuate his inglorious failings, even his insignificance. Southey is particularly harsh: his late-1805 letters belittle Napoleon, decrying the British and Austrians for succumbing to such a feeble foe (1849: II, 357; III, 11). Wordsworth also scorns those 'men of prostrate mind' who bow down to Napoleon's 'transient', illegitimate power (see 'Calais, August, 1802'). This strikes the reader as slightly hypocritical, since both poets are concerned elsewhere to accentuate his prestige. But it is crucial to recognise that reactions to Napoleon are not uniformly extreme or theoretical – he is also met with a façade of disinterest. This is potentially another way for the Romantics to assert themselves over Napoleon – attempting to deny his imaginative hold over them by pretending he is inconsequential. A similar strategy has been identified in the British press: *The Times* continually asserted that Napoleon's reign was doomed; while *The Edinburgh Review* subverted his propaganda by comparing France with Rome 'in the vices of her decline' (January 1809). This reminds us of an obvious but oft-forgotten detail: treatment of Napoleon, both in Romantic writing and the press, was often thoughtful and balanced, not moulded exclusively by extremism and uncertainty.

More commonly, however, Napoleon is presented as a glorious failure: an overreacher who fails *due* to his extraordinary success. Scott asserts that Napoleon was 'tried in the two extremes, of the most exalted power and the most ineffable calamity' (1834-6: XVI, 342), although Shelley and Byron investigate how success and failure are *interrelated*, not separate extremities. In *Childe Harold*, Byron discusses Napoleon in the context of conquerors that cause their own downfall: he 'ascends to mountain-tops', surpassing mankind, but upon these heights of glory he is assailed by 'contending tempests' and the hatred of his peers. Success and failure are part of the same experience: Napoleon 'Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire / Of aught but rest; a fever at the core, / Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore' (canto II, stanza 42-44). The overreacher-image also echoes throughout *The Age of Bronze*, where Byron comments on the glorious folly of other conquerors – notably Alexander the Great, who 'wept for worlds to conquer', defeated by his own accomplishments (line 35). Napoleon similarly broke down the 'fetters' of human limitations, but simultaneously 'crush'd the rights of Europe', failing to be restrained by moral standards (255-9). This view of Bonaparte as overreacher is, I would

suggest, an attempt to unify the providential / spiritual and human 'ideas' of Bonaparte – to explain his huge achievements without forgetting his human fallibility.

Another way of expressing this theme is by adapting the Prometheus myth: the legend of how Prometheus stole the secret of fire from the Greek gods and was punished for overreaching his station. Byron makes this analogy in *Bronze*, writing 'Oh dull Saint Helen! with thy gaoler nigh – / Hear! hear Prometheus from his rock appeal' (226-7). And in the 'Ode to Napoleon', he compares the Emperor to 'the thief of fire from heaven', supposing that he will endure his martyrdom with similar dignity. Blake's lost painting 'The Spiritual Form of Napoleon' (1821) also depicted him as a Promethean-figure, grasping the sun whilst chained to the Earth – almost divine, but constrained by failure (Bloom, 1960: 79-82). Bonaparte seems to have encouraged the comparison: one semi-apocryphal story has him inscribing the following before death: 'A new Prometheus, I am nailed to a rock to be gnawed by a vulture. Yes, I have stolen the fire of Heaven and made a gift of it to France. The fire has returned to its source, and I am here' (Haythornthwaite, 1996: 301). Even if the statement is fabricated, the image loses none of its force, for it shows a diligent attempt to mythologise Napoleon's godlike actions and portentous utterances. Applied conventionally, the Prometheus-image therefore represents the brave but disastrous efforts of an arrogant creature reaching beyond previous realms of possibility. Shelley however, employs the image for different ends. In *Prometheus Unbound*, he foregrounds Prometheus's rescue by Hercules and victory over his assailant Jupiter. The myth thus becomes the reverse of the overreacher-motif: a worthy, long-suffering being enjoys success *because* of failure. This makes the image still more complex, blurring the boundaries between success and failure until they can hardly be distinguished. Perhaps this is appropriate – after all, such intricacy reflects Romantic uncertainty about Napoleon, and how, when writing about him, affirmative and pessimistic judgements blend into one another.

The uneasy synthesis of accomplishment and failure haunts Shelley's final treatment of Napoleon in the unfinished 'The Triumph of Life'. Like 'a thousand climbers', Bonaparte strode to the peak of opportunity, only to topple into infamy: 'The child of a fierce hour; he sought to win / The world, and lost all that it did contain of greatness' (217-9). Shelley attaches this reflection to his most urgent enquiries

concerning the purpose of life and the limits of knowledge. Napoleon's prominence propels him to the brink of impossible achievements, ensuring that success and distress are so close as to be identical. Shelley shares in this pattern, for his work explores metaphysical questions that remain unanswered, his skill and perceptiveness similarly pushing him towards failure. In 'To a Skylark', for instance, Shelley struggles to describe the bird's song, using a series of similes that complicate, rather than articulate, his understanding of the music. He is overwhelmed, not only by the limitations of language, but also by his own talents: he fails *due to* success. Moreover, by asking 'what is life?' at the end of 'The Triumph', Shelley draws his readers into the process, pushing us towards Napoleonic disappointment by testing the limits of rational enquiry, anticipating our own intellectual failure. In 'The Triumph', Shelley thus unifies various conceptions of Napoleon: he becomes a theoretical, metaphysical exemplar, and a close, personal figure, whose presence and abilities pertain to all who read the poem. Shelley merges the 'spiritual Napoleon' with 'Bonaparte the man' in one extraordinary image.

*Napoleon's Self-Image: Mastery and Insecurity*

Amidst this obsessive interest in Napoleon, one question remains unanswered: *why* were the Romantics so preoccupied by his career? A partial explanation lies in Napoleon's astute cultivation of his own image. He habitually associated himself with ideologies, thereby providing a precedent for the Romantics to impose their own ideas onto his person and legacy. Historians have grown increasingly curious about this 'chameleon' Napoleon who self-consciously manipulates his presentation to associate himself with useful ideas. The talent was evident throughout his rise to power. He began his career as a devotee of patronage, attaining entry to military school and his first commission through the influence of patrons. After the Revolution, Napoleon allied himself with the Jacobins, writing a pamphlet in 1793 which discredited Robespierre's enemies (Alexander, 2001: 15-16). Napoleon thus adapted to social circumstances, exploiting different facets of French society to construct a range of public faces. As we have seen, he became particularly proficient at using military bulletins and official portraits to promote various 'images' concurrently – from regal Emperor, to bourgeois meritocrat, to latter-day Revolutionary. These propaganda techniques were evident to his contemporaries: writing in 1812, John Galt discovers 'a narrative of the exploits of the Emperor

Napoleon, printed at Paris, in Arabic characters, for the purpose of shewing that he is a man sent by heaven to alter the condition of the world' (Galt, 1812: 120-1). And nor was Napoleon interested merely in his current image, since he was also a revisionist historian reinterpreting his past to the best advantage. In accounts of his coup on 18 Brumaire, for instance, he re-formulated his speech as brilliant rhetoric, not the clumsy mumbling that other commentators (including his own secretary, Bourreinne) recall (Andrews, 1929). Pieter Geyl notes that, despite his concerted effort to embody ideals (e.g. Revolution or Heroism) Bonaparte's methods in fact demonstrate his ruthless pragmatism (1949: 146). Such shrewd command of his own image might imply that Napoleon *planned* to be interpreted by his contemporaries. And indeed, F. G. Healey (1959) uncovers his admiration for what is sometimes called 'pre-Romanticism': those eighteenth-century works which initiate, or anticipate, later Romantic concerns. Napoleon read Rousseau, Goethe and *Ossian* avidly, reaching out to Romantic thought, rather than passively waiting to be adopted.

However, what allows British Romantics to appropriate Napoleon for themselves is the *inconsistency* of his image creation: he left himself vulnerable to a kind of public schizophrenia, a victim of fragmented representation. In this way, Napoleon was never in *full* control of his likeness: he was, says Holtman (1950: 215), continually fighting his own people to impress upon them the images he preferred. John Keats mentions Napoleon very little, but one passing remark is especially instructive: talking about his poem *Hyperion*, Keats says 'the Hero of the written tale being mortal is led on, like Buonaparte, by circumstance' (Motion, 1997: 224). Napoleon, Keats implies, lacks control – forces beyond his direction determine his actions. This model had found favours with recent historians: Jones declares that 'his dominance relied upon favourable circumstances', and his failure to interpret those circumstances correctly, especially in Russia, provoked his downfall (Jones, 1977: 204). On Saint Helena, Napoleon apparently acknowledged this flaw: 'I never was truly my own master; but was always controlled by circumstances […] I moulded my system according to the unforeseen succession of events' (Ellis, 1997: 195). Bonaparte was so preoccupied with using circumstances to fashion his self-presentation, that he could not achieve any stability of image. Instead, he was at the mercy of incidental fluctuations. Scott hints at this circumstantial instability when he says that Napoleon's 'keen sensitiveness to the attacks of the public press attended him through

life and […] seemed to remind him that he was still a mortal man'. Crucially however, Scott *also* implies that such public presentation *heightened* his confidence and authority: 'one species of idolatry was gradually and ingeniously substituted for another [until] the name of a successful general was of more influence than the whole code of the Rights of Man' (1834-6: X, 169; XII, 304).

This dual aspect of Napoleon's legacy – this combined mastery, and insecurity, of self-image – fascinates and inspires the Romantics. Despite their opposing politics, Scott and Hazlitt both admired his familiarity with the public stage. He 'played upon the imagination of the French people' said Scott (1834-6: XII, 304); while in 'On Egoism', Hazlitt distinguishes between base vanity and Napoleon's gift for self-glorification (1930: XII, 166). Shelley's 'Political Greatness' investigates how tyranny overwhelms all around it, seeking to find its own reflection wherever it turns, 'staining that Heaven with obscene imagery / Of [its] own likeness'. This is a more radical argument, for it suggests that Napoleon does not merely interpret his own image, he interprets surroundings in terms of himself: an argument which seems plausible given his tendency to name things after himself (the Louvre became the Musée Napoléon). However, while enthralled by this mastery, the Romantics also note, and exploit, Bonaparte's lack of image-control: Byron accuses him of 'losing himself in his dramatic character' – preferring performance over action (1973-94: IV, 27).

Just as Napoleon interprets himself, and allows himself to be interpreted, so the Romantics impose their own concerns onto him: from the religiosity of late Coleridge and Wordsworth, to the radical sympathies of Hazlitt. Although they *are* interested in 'Napoleon the man', they are *more* concerned with how he can be attached to Romantic 'idea(l)s' and other intellectual preoccupations. Befitting their ambiguity towards Bonaparte, the Romantics seek to imitate his methods of image manipulation *and* to control that self-presentation. Such aims might appear unconscious, in that they are rarely openly discussed, but the trend was noticeable to Romantic contemporaries. In his *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte*, Richard Whately acknowledges the created personae of Napoleon, satirically arguing that he is an entirely invented figure, conjured by writers to fulfil ideological purposes. Whately does not discuss specifically Romantic appropriations of Bonaparte, but he

does demonstrate how easy it is to construct myths around the Emperor, by, for instance, pretending that 'Napoleon' was a common term of praise for generals, meaning 'Lion in the Forest'. He reminds us how concerns of the onlooker, not the conduct of the subject, colour perceptions of Napoleon (Whately, 1985: 39). This seems a strikingly (post)modern thesis, recalling Said's assertion that no full comprehension of 'reality' exists, there is only 'representation' or 'interpretation' of reality. Ronald Paulson's ideas also follow Whately's lead. He applies Wittgenstein's maxim 'Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use' to eighteenth-century aesthetics, investigating what depictions of the Revolution *do* in a political sense, rather than what they signify (Paulson, 1983: 5). In this sense, it is unhelpful to over-emphasise the ambiguity of Napoleon's appropriations since they are employed for very specific agendas. Paulson is indebted to postmodern uncertainties, but wary of exaggerating ambiguity for its own sake.

*Napoleon and the 'Imposition Problem'*

This, however, does not end the story: there is a further reason for Romantic interest in Napoleon, related not to *what* they think, but *how*. Hazlitt hints at this in his essay 'On Means and Ends':

> When Buonaparte fell, an English editor exhausted a great number of the finest passages in *Paradise Lost*, in applying them to his ill-fated ambition. This was an equal compliment to the poet and the conqueror: to the last, for having realised a conception of himself in the mind of his enemies on a par with the most stupendous creations of imagination; to the first for having embodied in fiction what bore so strong a resemblance to the fearsome reality. (1930: XVII, 221)

Hazlitt recognises the degree of fictionalisation surrounding Napoleon's image. But paradoxically, he also implies that this presentation goes beyond fiction and hints at *reality*: images of Bonaparte are not just impositions; he *realises* those 'creations of imagination'. What Hazlitt implicitly discusses is whether ideas of Napoleon, no matter how embellished, are founded in *perception* of his conduct; or whether they are entirely the invention of an imagining mind. This cuts to the heart of the Romantic 'imposition problem'. 'Imposition' occurs when an observer ignores the objective details of a scene or circumstance and instead imposes his or her ideas and feelings onto it: he sees what he wants to see, depending on mood and perspective. When the

Romantics derive inspiration from something (typically nature, but also literature, other people etc.), do they *perceive* agency external to them – the pantheistic Spirit of Nature, for example, or the genius of an esteemed author? Or is this idea of perception an illusion: is the significance of a scene *imposed*, not discerned – the invention of the observer's mind.

This inquiry concerning the validity of their own insights obsesses the Romantics – it causes crises of confidence, and introspective worries about their own capabilities. In Wordsworth's 'Home at Grasmere' (MS B text [see Wordsworth, 1984]), the narrator is aware of such impositional dangers when he asks 'Did we come hither, with romantic hope / To find in midst of so much loveliness / Love, perfect love' (400-2). He insists that his wish to find "loveliness" has not led to him artificially imposing it on Nature. Later, his doubts are stronger – in a passage asserting the 'majesty and beauty and repose' of the environment, the narrator asks in an aside '(or is it fancy?)' (155). These words undercut his certainty, implying that his own imagination has superimposed these qualities onto his surroundings. Shelley's *Alastor* raises similar questions. The Poet projects his thoughts onto his surroundings and is startled when 'he looked around. / There was no fair fiend near him, not a sight / Or sound of awe but his own mind' (296-8). Moreover, at line 470, whilst looking into a well, he believes he has seen a mysterious Spirit, whose eyes 'beckon him'. Only once the vision is over, he realises that the experience may have derived from 'within his [own] soul'.

The variability of Napoleon's presentation indicates Romantic reliance on the 'imposed idea' – the imagination adding to external observation. Wordsworth's 1805 *Prelude* indicates how closely Napoleon and the imposition problem are connected. Book VI relates how, when Wordsworth first saw Mt Blanc, he 'grieved / To have a soulless image on the eye / Which had *usurped upon* a living thought' (453-5, my italics). In other words, Wordsworth's imaginative configuration, and his actual perception, of the scene are disengaged. As Alan Liu's research shows, this section was written immediately after Napoleon's 'seizure' of the crown, and alludes to his Alpine adventure (1989: 24-7). Wordsworth thus deliberately connects Bonaparte's usurpation with his own imposition of the imagination: Napoleon, like the poet, imposes and is imposed upon. Coleridge makes the theme more explicit. In

*Biographia Literaria*, he distinguishes between the 'absolute genius', who is secure and disciplined; and the Napoleonic 'commanding genius', who knows no 'inner peace' and satisfies himself only through 'constant, ceaseless imposition of his will upon the outside world' (Calleo, 1960: 83-93). Coleridge characterises Napoleon as an imposer – unconsciously suffering from the same intellectual problem that plagued the Romantics. Moreover, he connects Napoleon with theories of the Imagination. The reason for his enduring appeal, Coleridge says, is his ability to 'engage the imaginations of men', to heighten an observer's inventive sensitivity with his deeds and posturing. Indeed, the imagination depends upon such extremity of experience to function at its most potent (1978: II, 75 and 150). The Romantic 'idea of Napoleon' and concepts of the 'Imagination' are thus fused together: in Coleridge's and Wordsworth's cases, exploration of the former frames and informs discussion of the latter. Still more radically, these speculations show how Romantic notions of international relations are related to their most theoretical aesthetic interests.

*Conclusion*

British Romantics therefore use Napoleon as an instrument to explore ideas important to them – not merely politics, but also metaphysics and philosophy of history. However, they grow increasingly self-conscious about this practice – the act of appropriation – and the more philosophical (Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley) connect Napoleonic imposition to their *own* thought processes. Napoleon, or rather the image of Napoleon, indicates not only *what* the Romantics think, but also *how* they explain and critique these thoughts. He reveals not just opinions and ideas, but the process of thinking, of formulating those ideas. In this way, they each create their own Napoleon(s) – but that created image lays bare the glories and failures of the writers themselves. They metaphorically imprison Napoleon and use him for their intellectual ends, but as with Frankenstein, their prisoner / creation both inspires and torments. Referring to Napoleon's imperial success and subsequent incarceration, Byron calls him 'Conqueror and Captive of the earth' (*Childe Harold*, canto III stanza 37). Appropriated for many diverse ends, Bonaparte is indeed 'captive' of Romantic imaginations – a public figure at the mercy of intellectuals. However, such is the hold he exerts over the Romantics, and such is the introspectiveness he inspires, that he also captivates them: he is *their* conqueror. Romanticism both defines, and is defined by, the complex legacy of Napoleon.

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