

‘A spectre is haunting Europe’: Napoleon’s reappearance in British literature of the 1840s.

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Abstract: This essay considers the resurgence of British interest in their former foe, Napoleon Bonaparte, apparent in literature of the 1840s. The circumstances surrounding his death and interment on St. Helena had already given him mythical status. The British government’s formal approval in May 1840 for the repatriation of his mortal remains to Paris prompted a renewed interest in this heroic figure on British shores. Thackeray, who had attended the Parisian ceremony and familiarized himself with ensuing fictional and historical re-appraisals of the Napoleonic wars, had recognized the potential of this material for anti-heroic treatment by the time he began *Vanity Fair*. However, by the April 1848 serial episode, in which the novel’s narrative chronology closes down for a ten-year break, the contemporary political framework in which the novel was being written had changed. That March Thackeray had dined at the same table as Louis-Napoleon, the Emperor’s heir, who had just returned from a premature attempt to claim his political inheritance. When Becky dons the exiled Emperor’s mantle at the start of chapter LXIV, she serves as a reminder to Thackeray’s initial readers that the Napoleonic legacy was still very much alive as a spectre haunting European politics.

This essay examines various ways in which Napoleon’s spectral presence returned to haunt British literature of the 1840s. As Simon Bainbridge has argued, Napoleon had served as an iconic, but divisive, figure in the Romantic imaginary: central to the British political debate between the forces of conservatism and radicalism, and frequently deployed in considering the respective reforming power of poetry and political activism.¹ The changed circumstances of the 1840s were once more to bring the name of Bonaparte to the fore, and once again it acted as a touchstone for the expression of a wide range of political and cultural responses.²

During his lifetime, repeated periods of exile had scarcely diminished the fallen Emperor's mythical potency. The escape from his first island exile on Elba, had led to his hard-won defeat at the battle of Waterloo, where the evident loyalty he commanded amongst the French troops resulted in his being condemned to a second exile on St. Helena, an island over a thousand miles off the west coast of Africa, even these days unapproachable save by sea. The distance from the scenes of his former triumph is a measure of the fear he invoked. Famously, in 1817 the five-year-old William Makepeace Thackeray landed at this stopover on his long voyage home from India and was taken by his accompanying 'black' servant for 'a long walk over rocks and hills until we reached a garden where we saw a man walking'. 'That', said the servant, 'is Bonaparte! He eats three sheep every day, and all the little children he can lay hands on'.³

Nor did Napoleon's death in 1821 apparently diminish the fear he inspired. Percy Bysshe Shelley had written a sonnet in 1815, rejoicing, as a young republican, over Emperor Napoleon's fall, convinced that both the ruler and his nation were now 'in the dust', leaving Virtue to fight 'a more eternal foe'. News of Napoleon's actual death seemed to leave the poet less secure.⁴ His 1821 poem on this subject takes the form of a dialogue with Mother Earth, who tells the poet not to leap so fast to the conclusion that Napoleon lies still in his grave:

To my bosom I fold
All my sons when their knell is knolled,
And so with living motion all are fed,
And the quick spring like weeds out of the dead'.⁵

In 1823, Lord Byron, lamenting that Napoleon's bones had not been returned to

France, also raised doubts as to whether that 'soaring spirit' could really be confined within the tomb, and prophesied in a truly dreadful couplet,

But be it as it is, the time may come

His name shall beat the alarm like Ziska's drum.⁶

Doubtless the success of Benjamin Haydon's famous 1829 painting, showing Napoleon, in full military rig on a cliff edge, presumably brooding upon his escape and means of return, helped fuel this notion of an unquelled spirit. First exhibited in 1830 as *Napoleon Musing After Sunset*, the painting became so popular that Haydon churned out 23 further versions, apparently reaching the stage where he could complete a copy in two and a half hours.⁷ (Fig. 1)

Determined to prevent this quickening of the dead, his British captors had taken firm means to prevent weeds springing from Napoleon's grave. When they came to exhume the former Emperor's remains in October 1840 they found themselves confronted by nine and a half hours hard labour. Within the surrounding iron railing, set in a heavy stone curb, was a six-inch surface of stone, covering a vault, filled with earth, eleven foot deep, eight foot long, and four foot eight inches broad. Having dug seven foot deep, the exhuming party encountered a layer of cement. Once this had been broken, they came upon a further layer of stones, some ten inches thick, clamped together by iron braces. It took a further four and a half hours to remove this layer before uncovering an interior sarcophagus. An initial mahogany coffin then had to be sawn off at both ends, to get out a second coffin, made of lead. When this had been unsoldered, a third, again of mahogany, was revealed. When this had been unscrewed, a final fourth coffin made of tin was disclosed, containing the former Emperor, laid out in his military uniform.⁸

Even allowing for the difficulties of preserving remains in a tropical climate, these elaborate burial arrangements of 1821, seem to smack of paranoid fears that Napoleon might come back to haunt his captors. There were, and still are, those who apparently believe that the deep grave on St. Helena was a subterfuge, designed to hide the fact that the English had spirited the body back to England immediately after death.⁹ The tearing and sharing of Napoleon's death-bed sheets, and the mystery surrounding the creation and authenticity of Napoleon's death mask had been symptomatic of this nervous concern both to convince one and all of his final demise, but also to attribute an almost totemic significance to the last tangible relics of this former conqueror of the western world.¹⁰ The exhumation, therefore, almost inevitably gave rise to parallels being made to the burial and resurrection of Christ. Gustave Tassaert's 1840 lithograph, *France and the Prince de Joinville at the Tomb of Saint Helena*, for example, depicts Napoleon striding from the tomb in full military dress, mantled by a white shroud; his distinctive hat is surrounded by a halo of sunbeams. In clear allusion to New Testament accounts of Christ's resurrection, the stone plinth on the grave has been raised, and the risen hero is greeted by two figures modelling the first arrivals at Christ's tomb: in this case the one an officer and the other a kneeling woman personifying France.¹¹

It is relatively easy to understand why in 1840 the French King Louis-Philippe, keen to associate himself with French *gloire*, decided to honour Napoleon's testamentary desire, 'to repose on the banks of the Seine, in the midst of the French people, whom I have loved so well'.¹² The resurgence in the 1840s of British interest in their erstwhile foe is, on the face of it, less easy to comprehend.

Compassion for the former Emperor's long banishment to St. Helena had served to soften attitudes over the years ensuing his death. British radicals, for instance, were inclined to picture this incarceration of a republican hero as a further

example of the abuse of power by an oppressive government. Yet radicals were nervous on the one hand of being seen to condone Napoleon the latter-day dictator, and on the other of being accused of downright treachery to their own compatriots. The Francophile G.W.M. Reynolds adopted the solution of condemning Napoleon the tyrant, while praising Napoleon as warrior and statesman.¹³ The Irish novelist, Charles Lever, was also cautiously ambivalent in his admiring portraits of Napoleon. In an epilogue to his 1844 novel, *Tom Burke of "Ours"*, he declared:

My estimate of Napoleon may seem to some to partake of exaggeration; but I have carefully distinguished between the Hero and the Emperor, and have not suffered my unequalled admiration of the one to carry me on to any blind devotion of the other.¹⁴

Mindful that in 1803 Napoleon had found it possible to recruit an entire legion of Irish soldiers with a view to invading England, Lever has the hero, an Irish exile, make it a condition of his service in Napoleon's army that, despite England's ill-treatment of Ireland and the Irish, he will never serve against England.¹⁵ Consequently, Lever chose the battles of Austerlitz (2 December 1805), Jena (14 October 1806), and Montmirail (11 February 1814), none of which directly involved British troops, as engagements in which the hero could fight under the French banner and finally receive the Emperor's own 'cross of the Legion'.¹⁶ Napoleon's mysterious capacity to appear at crucial points in these engagements, the electrifying effect of his physical presence on his troops, and their superstitious regard for his seemingly praeternatural powers are emphasised, but held in balance with his insulting treatment of the vanquished Prussians, and the distasteful political surveillance characteristic of his regime.¹⁷ A similar equipoise is attempted at the novel's conclusion where the emotional scene of the defeated Emperor's farewell to his troops at Fontainebleau

prior to his first exile, is followed by a scathing indictment of those French military commanders and previous recipients of Napoleon's bounty who 'inveighed even against his greatness and his genius, as though malevolence could produce oblivion'.¹⁸

This fictional treatment of Napoleon's earlier military exploits by no means exhausted Lever's fascination with the Emperor's campaigns.¹⁹ From 1837 Lever had been spending time practising medicine amongst the expatriate community in Brussels, which gave him access to retired British combatants' first-hand accounts, and these he supplemented by poring over *Victoires, conquêtes, désastres, revers et guerres civiles des Français de 1792 à 1819* (1835), a fifteen volume collection of military documents and memoirs (1835), mainly edited by a former French General, Charles Théodore Beauvais Préau. Both sources were naturally predisposed to emphasize the heroism displayed on their own side and thus the might and bravery of those they had overcome, and Lever's novels reflected this tendency to valorize military virtues such as instinctive courage, or decisive leadership capable of calling forth unquestioning loyalty.

Lever's first treatment of this material occurred in *Charles O'Malley: the Irish Dragoon* (1841), a novel set against the backdrop of the Peninsular Wars (1807-14), but culminating with the Battle of Waterloo whose nearby terrain Lever had had ample opportunity to visit while living in Brussels. The rapidly changing fortunes of war in which the picaresque hero is briefly taken prisoner by the French permits the reader to see both Napoleon and Wellington at close quarters. Whereas Wellington is shown as abrupt and aloof, Napoleon is represented as a far more complex and compelling figure, by turns the cool strategist, the magnetic leader, generous to a fault in rewarding his followers, yet also prone to superstition, irascible, and capable of vengeance. This novel was serialised in the *Dublin University Magazine* between

March 1840 and December 1841, but it was not until the penultimate instalment in November 1841 that the chapters referring to Napoleon Bonaparte's return from Elba, the Duchess of Richmond's ball and the Battle of Waterloo occur. The date is significant. Although the epilogue to *Tom Burke of "Ours"* showed that Lever continued to be slightly nervous lest he be accused of undue adulation of Napoleon in all his aspects, by late 1841 something had given him confidence that a favourable picture of Napoleon as military commander in a battle in which the British had been victors would not serve to alienate his readership.

This change in the tide of popular opinion might have been said, in Woolfian phrase, to have occurred 'on or about' 10 May 1840 when the British government approved the formal request of the French government for the return of Napoleon's mortal remains. Thomas Carlyle, with his journalistic flair for spotting and exploiting such 'signs of the times', was quick off the mark in responding to this new state of affairs. On 22 May 1840, when he delivered his last lecture in a series subsequently published as *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1841), he chose Napoleon as 'our last Great Man' to illustrate his lecture 'The Hero as King', in the belief that, though tyrannical and deeply flawed, Napoleon's achievements in restoring order to revolutionary France, entitled him to this status.²⁰

It was not until 7 July 1840 that the French got around to dispatching a ship on the long voyage to St Helena to retrieve Napoleon's remains, and it is probably not coincidental that the long-discussed construction of a monument in Trafalgar Square, honouring Nelson's as a victor in the Napoleonic wars, finally began to take practical shape that same month. Three days before the French ship eventually sailed, Elizabeth Barrett Browning published some verses under the title, 'Napoleon's Return'.

Prompted apparently by the thought that *Bellerophon*, the British ship on which Napoleon had surrendered to the British in 1815, had been retired by the Admiralty to

Plymouth, where she was staying, she reflected on England's shameful behaviour:

Because it was not well, it was not well
.....--that Heart

To bind and bare, and vex with vulture fell.

O mine own England – would, we had to seek

All crimson stains upon they breast – not cheek!²¹

Her final assessment, however, like Reynolds', Carlyle's, or indeed Lever's, hovered uncertainly between seeing Napoleon as a tyrannical 'despot', and as great man who possessed 'The genius to be loved'. She concluded her 28 stanzas,

But whether
The crowned Napoleon or his senseless dust

Be worth more, I discern not: Angels must.²²

Presumably, because like most English people she thought 'le retour des cendres' referred to funerary ashes, she badly misjudged the sentimental affect of her composition. The poem repeatedly refers to the return of 'a *little* urn – a little dust inside', so small 'a four-years child' might carry it, whereas the ebony coffin sent out from France to envelop the four nested coffins containing Napoleon's embalmed mortal remains weighed a massive 1200 kilos.²³

The French themselves had by no means been unanimous in welcoming the return of the Emperor's immense catafalque to Paris. Thackeray, who had been in Paris while the debates as to Napoleon's re-interment took place in the Chamber of Deputies and in the press, pointed out that even those most vociferous in support had different reasons for investing in the Emperor's return.

Some people there were who had fought and conquered and been beaten with the great Napoleon, and loved him and his memory; many more were there who, because of his great genius and valour, felt excessively proud in their own particular persons, and clamoured for the return of their hero.²⁴

Thackeray also recognised that the heady mixture of nostalgia and patriotism displayed by the 'great hot-headed, gallant, boasting, sublime, absurd French nation' was coolly regarded by those French ministers who perceived the scheme's popular appeal as potentially inimical to the restoration of the national peace and wealth on which Louis-Philippe's reign was predicated.²⁵ The staunchly republican statesman-poet, Lamartine, warned "Napoleon's ashes are not yet extinguished, and we're breathing life into their sparks".²⁶ According to Victor Hugo, the carefully-orchestrated ceremonial progress of the Emperor's remains through Paris was ample evidence of Louis-Philippe's fear of the power of the phantom he had summoned up: the grandeur of the gilded carriage effectively hid Napoleon's coffin from the French working classes with whom he had been so popular, while casting the re-internment as a military rather than a civic occasion turned the whole event into a demonstration of the force at the disposal of the French government.²⁷ As if to justify the monarch's fears, Napoleon's nephew, later to become Napoleon III, convinced himself that the current popular wave of enthusiasm for the family name was sufficient to justify his launching an invasion on French shores on 6 August 1840, albeit unsuccessfully.

On 8 December 1840, the very day when the dead Emperor's remains were brought once again onto French soil at Cherbourg, in London a one-act play, entitled 'Napoleon's glory, or, Wonders in St Helena', was performed at the Adelphi theatre.²⁸ It featured Napoleon's ghost rising from the dead to confront the British soldier guarding his tomb to remind him that he owes his life to the Emperor, who rather than

killing him took him prisoner of war, thus enabling the sentry to rejoin the British army.²⁹ The sentry's vow to do anything for Napoleon and his country which would not threaten British interests, marks the point when it became possible for a British subject to express admiration for the dead Emperor's military prowess without his patriotism being called into question.

Unfortunately by the time that Napoleon I made this reappearance on French shores Anglo-French harmony had been dissipated there: a series of events in the near East that summer and autumn had left France beleaguered against an alliance of European powers including Great Britain. The British Embassy in Paris therefore feared that the grand pageantry and display accompanying the deceased Emperor's posthumous return up the Seine to Paris would cause an outbreak of violent Anglophobia. Thackeray, who claimed that 'Men get a character for patriotism in France merely by hating England', maintained that he only attended the ceremony in Les Invalides because he had failed to receive the Embassy's advice for all British residents in Paris to stay at home that day. His grandmother, mother and stepfather, together with his two small children watched the pageantry from a rented balcony on the Champs Elysées, comforted, according to Thackeray, by the thought that at least they would all be murdered together in the anticipated massacre.³⁰

Two years later Thackeray still considered his three-chapter account of *The Funeral of Napoleon*, published in January 1841, the best thing he had yet written, but ruefully acknowledged it had sold only 250 copies.³¹ The curious mixture of an account of the disinterment and the voyage home, translated from a French source, with a commentary on the Paris proceedings, which is part Carlylean in substance and vocabulary, and part whimsy, was unlikely to prove a best-seller.³² For one thing, British readers interested in the details of the proceedings on the island already had access to *The Exhumation of the Remains of Napoleon Bonaparte* (1840) by Georg

William Janisch, 'late secretary to Sir Hudson Lowe', the British Governor of the island.³³ Nor were Thackeray's sentiments in keeping with contemporary British self-congratulation on their own generosity in facilitating Napoleon's return to Paris. However, the exercise did open up just those opportunities Thackeray most enjoyed, such as playing off one set of national prejudices against another; exploiting the conflict between sentiment and morality, and meditating upon *vanitas vanitatum*. Using his favourite persona, Michael Angelo Titmarsh, Thackeray instructs, shares conversational confidences with, and wrongfoots the assumptions of his fictional dear reader, the young Miss Smith. In effect he had discovered the formula for *Vanity Fair*.

But as always, Thackeray required considerable time to mull over the way in which he could best tailor the latest literary vogue -- in this case for military histories and fiction concerning Napoleon and the Battle of Waterloo -- to suit his own distinctive voice and preoccupations.³⁴ He was not at heart a journalist, thriving on instant responses to passing events, but more inclined to take his inspiration from books and pictures. The subject had been on his mind ever since a conversation with Charles Lever in 1842.³⁵ Indeed the plot and turncoat anti-hero of Thackeray's novel, *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (serialised in *Fraser's Magazine*, from January to December 1844) might be said to be a satirical inversion of the picaresque plot and soldier heroes of Lever's military novels. In August 1847, the same month in which the serial version of *Vanity Fair* transported the major characters to Brussels to get them into position for the decisive battle, Thackeray had a trial run at handling military life in Leveresque vein, publishing 'Phil. Fogarty -- A Tale of the Fighting Onety-Oneth, By Harry Rollocker' as part of his series parodying contemporary novelists.³⁶ This brief *jeu d'esprit* captured both the naïve boastfulness of Lever's Irish heroes, and their surprising capacity to find themselves catapulted into the very

innermost circles of Napoleon's entourage, enjoying intimate exchanges with the Emperor himself. Thackeray could afford to risk mocking Lever for the implausibility of his heroes' access to the French high command in his pictures of the Napoleonic wars because by the time he published this parodic squib he had already determined on a different strategy for his own fictional presentation of the Battle of Waterloo.

The anti-heroic vision of military life Thackeray adopted in *Vanity Fair* relied upon the twin comic strategies of choosing to represent the army as a less gentlemanly social milieu than Lever had done, and feminising its tactical campaigns. The mock-heroic fifth chapter, whose title, 'Dobbin of Ours' alludes to Lever's *Tom Burke of "Ours"*, goes on to satirise the narrator's yearning for 'the pen of a Napier' writing of the Battle of Waterloo with which to render the account of schoolboy fisticuffs between a grocer's son and a rich bully.³⁷ Meanwhile, early chapter titles repeatedly deploy the second method of deflating male heroics:

Chapter II: In Which Miss Sedley And Miss Sharp Prepare To Open The Campaign

Chapter III: Rebecca Is In Presence Of The Enemy

Chapter XXVII: In Which Amelia Joins Her Regiment

Chapter XXVIII: In Which Amelia Invades The Low Countries

These devices coalesce at the start of chapter XXX where the narrator, disavowing any 'claim to rank among the military novelists', declares 'Our place is with the non-combatants...the major's wife, the ladies and the baggage'. Major O'Dowd's wife, caricatured in Thackeray's accompanying engraving as a dumpy 'Venus Preparing the Armour of Mars', in the text is elevated to the position of loyal batman preparing her husband's kit so that he may emerge 'trim, fresh, alert' next morning to lead his troops into battle. Level-headed, professional soldier though the

major is, ‘All the officers saluted her when the regiment marched past the balcony on which this brave woman stood’ and only ‘a sense of female delicacy and propriety’, the narrator suggests, persuades her to refrain from ‘leading the gallant –th personally into action’.³⁸ If Major O’Dowd comes so close to being re-, or dis-placed in this ‘novel without a hero’, the Emperor Napoleon, whose character and presence is so often the focus of attention in Lever’s fiction, is distanced to a remote voice, heard only through his written ‘proclamation from Avesnes’.³⁹ Instead, shallow, vainglorious George Osborne steps into the breach as one of Lever’s ‘rollicking’ heroes. Drunk and gambling on the night before the regiment goes into action, he departs for war, bolstered by years of hero-worship at school and in the regiment ‘where the bravos of his companions had followed him everywhere...and wherever he went, women and men had admired him’. The immediately ensuing three sentences administer the death-blow to Lever’s romantic vision of the military hero:

What qualities are there for which a man gets so speedy a return of applause, as bodily superiority, activity, and valour? Time out of mind strength and courage have been the theme of bards and romances; and from the story of Troy down to to-day, poetry has always chosen a soldier for a hero. I wonder whether it is because men are cowards at heart that they admire bravery so much, and place military valour so far beyond every other quality for reward and worship? ⁴⁰

This reflection strikes not only at the vogue for tales of military derring-do, but at the heart of the assumptions and values on which many of Thackeray’s generation had been raised. Writing of the battle itself, the narrator remarks, ‘The tale is in every Englishman’s mouth; and you and I, who were children when the great battle was

won and lost, are never tired of hearing and recounting the history of that famous action.’⁴¹ Byron’s Romantic celebration of the combatants as a ‘fiery mass/of living valour’ on the field of Waterloo, and his subsequent desire to play an active part in the Greek war of Independence, had left a troubling legacy for his successors living in the peaceful years after the Treaty of Paris (1815).⁴²

Thackeray’s decision to eschew both the detailed military tactics of battle and the personalities of the commanders-in-chief left him free to continue his critique of European political scene by way of mock-heroic counterparts. Helen Small is surely right, in her introduction to the most recent Oxford World’s Classics edition of *Vanity Fair*, to identify Becky as ‘a spoof substitute Napoleon’, while also warning readers against hunting for straightforward ‘allegorical paralleling’.⁴³ The novel’s complex narrative time scheme, in which the reader is often alerted to later historical events of which the characters can have no knowledge, militates, as we shall see, against stable equivalences.⁴⁴ From the first Becky signals her Napoleonic pretensions with her cry of ‘Vive La France! Vive L’Empereur! Vive Bonaparte!’,⁴⁵ and like Napoleon I, with his Italian forebears and Corsican accent, she is a hybrid interloper. More important, however, is the manner in which the reader is lured into an aghast admiration for Becky’s capacity for cool calculation of the best way to turn events to her own purposes, for her ability to draw forth loyalty and devotion from those whom she will later have no scruple in exploiting, and for her tendency to succumb to occasional outbursts of passionate ill-temper. These were precisely the Napoleonic characteristics which Lever’s novels identified as the source of his fascination with the great man.

However, when the first movement of the novel ends, in the course of the April 1848 serial episode (chapters LIV-LVI), it is Becky’s husband who serves as her Napoleonic substitute, banished to a fever-ridden island where he will finally die.

Ten years pass before the plot resumes. By the time that Thackeray had decided to kickstart the novel's action back into life in the May 1848 episode (chapters LVII-LX) his own world had also changed since the early months of 1845 when the novel had been conceived.⁴⁶ Most notably for our purposes, in February 1848 Louis-Philippe, France's Citizen King had been forced to abdicate, leaving the throne apparently free for the taking. Louis-Napoleon, nephew and surviving heir to Napoleon I, had always seen himself as the destined leader of the French, but his life thus far had seen a spectacular series of reversals, two failed coups landing him in prison and then in exile. Nevertheless the Bonaparte name continued to work its magic in France, as Louis-Philippe had known when summoning Napoleon's I's remains to bolster his own more mundane regime. At the end of February 1848, Louis-Napoleon made a quick sally to Paris, but was politely asked to leave by the provisional government of the new republic and so returned to London on 2 March, staying on English shores until late September. Partly because of the appeal of the Bonaparte name to the parts of the population who had been devoted to his uncle, and partly because his political inclinations were a largely unknown quantity, by December that year he had become Prince-President of the new Republic, waiting only three years to turn, as his uncle had done before him, from republicanism to imperialism.

Only a week or so after Louis-Napoleon's return from France on 2 March 1848, Thackeray dined with him at Lady Blessington's dinner table, where he remarked that the pretender to the French throne looked like a 'courier'.⁴⁷ Thackeray had long been a Louis-Napoleon watcher, and in casting about for a way to bring Becky back into play from her lowest point, he had only to remind himself of his review back in 1839 of the Prince's book, *Des idées napoléoniennes* in which he had pointed out, in an extended 'cobbling metaphor', the Prince's compelling desire to step into his imperial uncle's shoes. He had ended by acknowledging the defeat of the

Prince's most recent attempted coup, and the banishment of the imperial eagle, before asking, 'Who knows, however, how soon it may be on the wing again, and what a flight it will take?'⁴⁸ So in the final double episode of *Vanity Fair* in July 1848, when Becky appears in a sketch on the opening page in a pose imitating the Haydon portrait, like Louis-Napoleon cloaked in his ancestor's aura, she stands upon a foreign shore preparing, chameleon-like, to trim her behaviour to whatever section of society can best advance her chances. (Fig.2) Like Louis-Napoleon a schemer and an opportunist, she similarly endures rough times, and her campaign is, like his, financed largely by lovers; but of course when the novel ended in July 1848, Louis-Napoleon was still an exile with all to play for, perhaps a reason for Thackeray to leave Becky outside the box to which most of the novel's major players are finally consigned.

The only other puppet left outside the box, is surely Lord Steyne, the representative of an *ancien regime* very much under threat in that year of revolutions, 1848. (Fig.3) Thackeray would have thoroughly repudiated the conclusions of the Communist Manifesto, published in late February 1848, but he might have agreed with elements of its diagnoses. *Vanity Fair* charts the rise of a bourgeois, mercantilist ethic and the slow waning of old Europe's tight-knit social networks and political alliances. From Thackeray's sardonic perspective, Lever's nostalgic celebration of the heroics of the battlefield and enduring political loyalties had little place in a world where the 'courier'-like Louis-Napoleon, or the parvenu Becky Sharp, proved happy to shelter for a time under a republican flag if it served their ultimate purpose of achieving personal power. When Becky dons the exiled Emperor's mantle she serves to remind Thackeray's first readers that the talismanic power of Napoleon's name was once again being invoked, and was all the more dangerous in that the range of associations it had accumulated made it peculiarly susceptible to being appropriated and manipulated by those with very diverse political agendas.

¹ Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge, 1995).

² Michael Broers, *Europe after Napoleon: Revolution, reaction and romanticism, 1814-1848* (Manchester and New York, 1996), 107-20 provides an interesting summary of the diplomatic re-alignments and ‘shades of ideology which separated allies and adversaries alike’ (117). The assortment of British commentaries upon French affairs exemplified in this article works to support his contention that this was a period characterized by the way in which political philosophies and movements tended to overspill national boundaries.

³ George Saintsbury (ed), *The Oxford Thackeray*, vol. 13: *The Four Georges* (London, New York and Toronto, 1910), 753.

⁴ ‘Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte’ (1816), *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (London: 1947), 526.

⁵ ‘Lines written on hearing the news of the death of Napoleon’, *Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 641, ll. 21-4. (My italics).

⁶ ‘The Age of Bronze’, stanza 4, in Jerome J. McGann (ed), *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, 7 vols (London, 1980-93), vii, 5, stanza 4, ll. 129-30.

⁷ Stuart Semmel, *Napoleon and the British* (New Haven and London, 2004), 234-5.

⁸ Based upon an account by the doctor on the French ship sent to retrieve the remains: Rémy-Julien Guillard, *Retour des Cendres de Napoléon. Procès-verbal d'exhumation des restes de l'empereur Napoléon* (Paris, 1841). For a modern narrative of the event and an evaluation of its significance see Alan Forrest, *Napoleon* (London, 2011), pp. 1-16.

⁹ The French government last refused a request for a DNA test to establish the identity of the remains in 2002 in response to the thesis advanced by Bruno Roy-Henri in *Napoléon: L'énigme de l'exhumé de Sainte-Hélène Napoléon* (Paris, L'Archipel,

2003) that the body lying in Les Invalides was that of Napoleon's butler, and that the Emperor's remains were buried in Westminster Abbey.

¹⁰ The account of proceedings at Napoleon's death-bed is given in P.P. Howe (ed.), *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt: Centenary Edition*, vol. 15: *The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte*, (London and Toronto, 1931), 360. According to Robert E. Robinson, *William Hazlitt's Life of Napoleon Buonaparte: Its Sources and Characteristics* (Geneva and Paris, 1959), 44, Hazlitt derived this information from François Carlo Antommarchi, *Derniers Moments de Napoléon*, 2 vols (Paris, 1825). Napoleon's death mask was created on 7 May 1821, a day and a half after his death. During the casting process the major contributors fell out and the resulting prototype, of which either four or six copies were made, is in part a hypothetical reconstruction. It was presumably the legend of these murky doings that fuelled Arthur Conan Doyle's short story, 'The Adventure of the Six Napoleons' (1904). British fascination continues: in 2013, faced with the prospect of losing a Napoleonic death mask of attested provenance, the then Culture minister, Ed Vaizey, deferred an export licence on the grounds that the object was 'so closely connected with our history and national life that its departure would be a misfortune.' Quotation from 13 November 2013 Press release DCMS, Arts Council England, <<https://www.gov.uk/.../export-of-objects-of-cultural-interest-201415>>. Accessed 8 December 2015.

¹¹ This and other contemporary illustrations employing Christian iconography can be seen in Michael Paul Driskel, *As Befits a legend: Building a Tomb for Napoleon, 1840-1861* (Kent, Ohio, and London, 1993), 22-5.

¹² Testament of Napoleon, clause 2.

¹³ G.W.M. Reynolds, *Alfred de Rosann: or, the Adventures of a French Gentleman* (London, 1839), 79-81.

¹⁴ *The Novels of Charles Lever, edited by his daughter: Tom Burke of 'Ours', 2.vols* (London, 1897), ii, 497.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, i, 218-19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ii, 473.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, ii, 471, 238-9, 277 and 286-8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ii, 484. A point Lever had made equally forcefully in chapters 57 and 58 of *Jack Hinton: the Guardsman* (1843).

¹⁹ Napoleon made a further brief appearance in Lever's *Maurice Tiernay, the Soldier of Fortune* (1852).

²⁰ H. D. Traill (ed.), *The Works of Thomas Carlyle, vol.5: On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London, 1897), 243. See also, D. Sorensen, "'Je suis la Révolution française': Carlyle, Napoleon, and the Napoleonic Mythos", *Carlyle Studies Annual*, 22 (Spring 2006), 283-302.

²¹ 'Napoleon's Return', ll. 97, 100-3. First published with this title, under the name by Elizabeth B. Barrett, in the *Athenaeum* (4 July 1840), 532, it subsequently appeared in a revised form as 'Crowned and Buried' in Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Poems of 1844*, where the final couplet of this quotation read:

I would, my noble England, men might seek

All crimson stains upon thy breast – not cheek!

The Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Boston, 1974), 161.

²² 'Napoleon's Return', ll. 166-8, *Athenaeum* (4 July 1840), 532. The final three lines of the poem in *Poems of 1844* were revised to read:

But whether

The crowned Napoleon or the buried clay

Be worthier, I discern not: angels may.

Poetical Works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 163.

²³ His heart and stomach were separately preserved.

²⁴ *Oxford Thackeray*, vol.3: *The Second Funeral of Napoleon*, 400.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 400.

²⁶ ‘Les cendres de Napoléon ne son pas éteint, et ‘l’on en souffle les étincelles’,
quoted in Guy Antonetti, *Louis-Philippe* (Paris, 1994), 817.

²⁷ Victor Hugo, ‘Choses vues: 15 décembre 1840: Funérailles de l’Empereur. Notes
prises sur place’, *Œuvres Complètes, Histoire*, ed. Sheila Gaudon (Paris, 1987), 805-
22.

²⁸ Allardyce Nicoll, *A history of early nineteenth century drama, 1800-1850*, 2 vols
(Cambridge, 1930), ii, 500.

²⁹ Brenda Assael, *The Circus and Victorian Society* (Charlottesville, 2005), 59.

³⁰ *Oxford Thackeray*, vol.3: *The Second Funeral of Napoleon*, 415.

³¹ *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray*, ed. Gordon N.
Ray, vol.2 (London, 1945), 136.

³² Thackeray acknowledged his French source as *Itinéraire, de Toulon à Sainte-
Hélène, de la frégate "la Belle-Poule", commandée par M. le prince de Joinville. Avec
des notes historiques, biographiques et topographiques; par M. D***, capitaine de
vaisseau dans la marine royale* (Paris, 1840). The report was jointly drawn up and
signed by three commissioners who descended into the vault during the exhumation:
Captain Frederick Augustus Alexander, representing the island’s English governor,

the French surgeon, Dr. Guillard (see n.8 above), and Philippe de Rohan Chabot, a French attaché.

³³ Available at

<http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/lsidyv3159d25c#ark:/81055/vdc_00000000230F.0x000082|open>. Accessed 28 September 2015.

³⁴ Thackeray acknowledged his use of G. R. Gleig's *Story of the Battle of Waterloo* (1847) in a footnote to chapter XXVIII of *Vanity Fair*, and probably knew William Siborne's *History of the War in France and Belgium, in 1815* (1844).

³⁵ F. Dwyer, 'Reminiscences of Lever and Thackeray, by Major D—', in W. J. Fitzpatrick, *The Life of Charles Lever*, 2 vols (London, 1879), ii, 405-21.

³⁶ 'Punch's Prize Novelists. Phil Fogarty – A Tale of the Fighting Onety-Oneth. By Harry Rollicker', *Punch* 13 (7 August 1847), 49-50; (14 August 1847), 56-7; (21 August 1847), 67-8. Reprinted in *Oxford Thackeray*, vol.8: *Miscellaneous Contributions to 'Punch'*, 138-53. Thackeray's fictitious author's name makes clear allusion to Lever's pseudonymous, 'Harry Lorrequer'.

³⁷ W. M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel without a Hero*, ed. H. Small (Oxford, 2015), 54.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 361-2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 376.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 405.

⁴² *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt*, in *Byron: Complete Poetical Works*, ed. McGann, ii, 86, Canto III, stanza XXVII, ll. 241-2. By 1833 Thackeray's contemporary, Tennyson, was already lamenting the supposed simplicity of an era in which fame could be won and moral arguments settled by burnishing 'The brand, the

buckler, and the spear -/ Waiting to strive a happy strife,/To war with falsehood to the knife.' 'The Two Voices', in Christopher Ricks (ed.) *The Poems of Tennyson*, 3 vols (Harlow, 1987), i, 577, ll. 129-31.

⁴³ *Vanity Fair*, ed. Small, xii.

⁴⁴ The narrator's handling of the schoolboy fight in Chapter 5 is one such instance.

Invoking the military historian, Sir William Napier as a model, the narrator continues

'I should like to describe this combat properly. It was the last charge of the Guard (that is, it would have been, only Waterloo had not yet taken place)'. Ibid., 54.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁶ The date at which Thackeray started to write this novel has been placed as far back as 1841, but is more commonly believed to be in the opening months of 1845.

⁴⁷ *Letters of Thackeray*, ed. Ray, ii, 362.

⁴⁸ 'Napoleon and His System', *Oxford Thackeray*, vol.2: *The Paris Sketch Book*, 139.