Admiral Nelson

*Image and Icon*

**Volume 1**

Marianne Czisnik

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

University of Edinburgh

December 2003
I hereby certify that this thesis has been composed and written by me, and that it is entirely my own work.

Marianna Cipriani, Edinburgh, December 2003
This thesis is dedicated
To the Memory
of

Marie Elisabeth Zimmermann,
geb. Graef
## CONTENTS

### Volume 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract.</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements.</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prologue. Nelson's Public Image in His Lifetime.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part I. Inquiry into Nelson's Deeds and Personality in the 200 Years after His Death</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Biographies of Nelson.</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nelson and His Acts of Disobedience.</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Nelson the Commander.</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Nelson's Involvement in the Defeat of the Neapolitan Revolution.</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Nelson and Lady Hamilton.</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The Death of Nelson.</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Nelson's Character.</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. French, Spanish and German Accounts of Nelson.</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Summary of How Nelson Was Dealt with in Biographies.</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II. Nelson Commemorated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Nelson's Funeral.</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Monuments to Nelson.</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Pictures of Nelson.</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Poems and Songs about Nelson.</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Novels, Plays and Films about Nelson.</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Exhibitions Dealing with Nelson.</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Nelson as Propaganda.</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Volume 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendices</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Illustrations.</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Nelson's Letters in Print.</td>
<td>454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Nelson's Letters to Lady Hamilton. A Synopsis of the Versions in Print.</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Example of a Discussion about Nelson's Involvement in Neapolitan Affairs in 1799 between Badham and Mahan with a Final Comment by Laughton.</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Synopsis of Accounts of the Death of Nelson that Have Some Claim to Authenticity.</td>
<td>522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. The Song 'The Death of Nelson' and Its Variations.</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Primary Sources.</td>
<td>535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Secondary Sources.</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Few figures in British history have caught the public imagination as much and as enduringly as Admiral Nelson. This thesis explores the ways in which Nelson has been interpreted and used for a variety of purposes. A prologue about the public image of Nelson in his lifetime is followed by the two main parts of the thesis, which deal with Nelson as an image and as an icon respectively.

The first part of the thesis, about the image of Nelson, examines historical literature. After an introductory chapter about the general development of the writing of biographies about Nelson, six chapters analyse how the most controversial aspects of Nelson's life have been treated since his death in 1805: his acts of disobedience, his actions as a commander, his involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution in 1799, his relationship with Lady Hamilton, his death and his character. A chapter also explores historical treatments of Nelson in France, Spain and Germany. The findings of this part lead to the concluding chapter.

The second part analyses the iconography that has made use of certain aspects of Nelson. An introductory chapter examines the immediate public reaction to Nelson's death. The following chapters are dedicated to the different forms of iconography, visual as well as literary: monuments; pictures; material artefacts; poems and songs; novels, plays and films; exhibitions; and propagandistic (political as well as commercial) use made of Nelson.

In the conclusion the various findings are brought together in order to give an overview of how Nelson as a historic figure, close to British national identity, has been interpreted and used by succeeding generations.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have supported the development of this thesis in many ways. I am indebted to several members of my family for having confided in my project enough to give me their financial support at the beginning, when there was not yet much proof of my progress. These relatives who helped me financially were my parents, Karin and Ulrich Czisnik, my grandmother, Marie Elisabeth Zimmermann, and after her death my uncle, Jürgen Zimmermann-Hallier. My grandmother also furthered my research indirectly through her professional achievements. She had been the librarian of the German naval officers' school for about a quarter of a century after the re-foundation of the German navy after the Second World War and she left behind a thoroughly organized and well catalogued library that enabled me to trace sources about Nelson that I did not find anywhere else. In gratitude for her heartfelt generosity and admiration for her dedicated professionalism, this thesis is dedicated to her memory.

As I advanced in my research, a prize from the Department of History of the University of Edinburgh for my master's dissertation, the Jeremiah Dalziel Prize of the Department of History of the University of Edinburgh and different scholarships proved an essential help. They assisted me to focus on the thesis alone for most of the last three years, in which it was written, and they enabled me to investigate a broad range of material in different places in Britain, Spain, France and Germany. Donors who thus supported me were: the Faculty of Arts of the University of Edinburgh who paid the fees during my first year and contributed to my maintenance for the following two years, the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (later: the Arts and Humanities Research Board) who paid my fees for the last two years, the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland who awarded me two scholarships for travelling within Britain, the Faculty of Arts of the University of Edinburgh with its 'George Scott Travelling Fellowship' which paid for my research in Spain as well as Germany and the Deutsches Historisches Institut Paris who granted me money for a month of research in Paris, during which period I also received advice from members of its staff.

A great support for my frequent and often long spells of research outside Edinburgh was the hospitality of friends and relatives. I am here particularly indebted to the generosity of Jane and Roger Knight, who let me live in their house in London for weeks on end and who spent many hours talking with me about Nelson. Other generous hosts were Stuart Richmond (London), Rüdiger Ernst and Holger Wessels (Berlin), Alberto Lena Ordoñez (Gijón), my sisters Ursula (Hamburg) and Annette (Berlin) and my aunt Emmy Kelly (Portsmouth). All of them, each in their way, contributed to encourage me in my research.

On the basis of the extensive source material I have been dealing with over these last three years my thesis took shape mostly thanks to the guidance of my supervisors, H. T. Dickinson and Jeremy Crang. They were always ready to give me advice on my work. Harry Dickinson patiently read and commented in detail on my drafts. My hopes for a good supervision were all fulfilled and often surpassed. I wish this thesis could reflect the quality of the advice I received.
ABBREVIATIONS

References to institutions are given in full when they are first mentioned in a footnote. Thereafter the acronyms listed below are used.

BL The British Library, London.
ECA Edinburgh City Archive.
NMM National Maritime Museum.
RNM Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth.
SCC Sea Cadet Corps.
TNA/PRO The National Archive, formerly Public Record Office, Kew.
INTRODUCTION

A passionate, lasting and scandalous love-affair; stunning settings from polar regions to tropical jungle and from square-rigged ships to sumptuous palaces; dramatic battles of great historic importance; a summit of triumph coinciding with a hero's death - What else is needed to awake interest in a historical figure? Admiral Nelson has even more to offer to attract attention and wonder: a seasick sailor; a one-armed fighter; an officer with a daring tendency to disobey orders; a man of humble origins who makes history without ever becoming a political figure, thereby staying 'one of us';¹ and a person who gets involved in foreign affairs that are so intricate that even the bare facts of the matter are being disputed to this very day, more than two-hundred years after the event. On top of all this, Nelson as an admiral can be easily linked to British maritime identity. It is therefore inevitable that he exerts an enduring fascination. The many layers of this fascination, combined with the masses of material about Nelson, guarantee lasting controversies and the development of a variety of myths about the man and his achievements.

So far, the various reasons that evoke interest in Nelson have produced an immense number of depictions of the famous British admiral from many different viewpoints and in many different forms. This makes it difficult, perhaps impossible, to get at the real man. Instead of writing another biography or narrative of Nelson's career, this thesis will explore and analyse how he has been interpreted as an image and an icon. The image has been and still is being shaped by authors trying to develop an understanding of the man, while the iconic representation makes use for diverse reasons of certain aspects of his personality that have caught the imagination of the public. These two approaches to Nelson have shaped the structure of this thesis.

A prologue about Nelson's public image in his lifetime sets the stage for the examination of the explosion of public interest in Nelson after the battle of Trafalgar. The first part of this thesis builds on its prologue by examining the image of Admiral

Nelson as historians have shaped it since his death at the battle of Trafalgar, in 1805. In their attempts to understand and describe Nelson's life and death they have discussed certain elements more deeply than others. The development of these elements in the historical literature about Nelson is the subject of six chapters in the first part of this thesis. An introductory chapter gives an outline of the development of biographical studies of Nelson, taking into account the general developments in the field of biographical literature since 1805. After several chapters treating the major aspects of Nelson's life in British literature, a separate chapter investigates the French, Spanish and German historical representations of Nelson. A concluding chapter then summarizes the findings of the first part of this thesis.

The second part of this thesis builds on the first by showing how aspects of what historians tell us about Nelson have been used to shape him as an icon. The iconography, visual as well as literary, is not primarily concerned with an understanding of Nelson himself or his naval victories. Instead, there is a desire to use details of Nelson's personality and career in order to stress certain aspects - such as the heroic personality, the romantic lover or the admiral removed into the sphere of Neapolitan politics - in order to serve purposes which at times have little to do with Nelson himself. The interest in the different facets of Nelson's personality and life has been (and still is) reflected in a variety of media. The chapters of the second part examine the forms in which the iconography of Nelson has been presented. After an introductory chapter about the immediate public response to the news of Nelson's death at Trafalgar, culminating in Nelson's state funeral, three chapters examine visual iconography - monuments; pictures; material artefacts - two chapters analyse literary sources - poems and songs; novels, plays and films - one chapter investigates the iconic use that exhibitions have made of Nelson, and the final chapter explores how the most basic iconography that can be distilled from Nelson is used for propagandistic purposes. In so far as they are

---

2 The Life of Nelson of the American naval historian A. T. Mahan is considered here as part of the British discussion of Nelson.
relevant, French, Spanish and German iconography of Nelson is considered in the different chapters of this second part.

A conclusion brings the findings of the two parts of this thesis – about historical imagery, on the one hand, and fictional iconography, on the other – together and summarizes how they have developed over the last two hundred years.
Although Nelson did not become a public figure until after his great victory at the battle of the Nile, he had sometimes been mentioned in newspapers in the 1790s. His successful part in the battle of Cape St. Vincent (14 February 1797), when he captured two superior Spanish ships, however, seemed not to bring him any public fame, since he was not mentioned in the official report that was published in the London Gazette. To rectify that omission, Nelson wrote A few remarks relative to myself in the Captain, in which my pendant was flying on the most glorious Valentine’s Day, 1797, a report which he got ‘authenticated by the officers of my ship’. Although this account was naturally centred on Nelson’s own dramatic actions, it did not fail to praise the captains who had ‘most nobly supported’ him or ‘most gallantly pushed up’ to help him. To give Nelson’s own description more weight, Colonel Drinkwater, who had been a spectator at the battle, anonymously published A Narrative of the Battle of St. Vincent, in which he praised the ‘gallant’ and ‘undaunted Commodore’ Nelson’s ‘bold and decisive manoeuvre’, and his ‘intrepid conduct’ and ‘impatience’. His report also included a section taken from Nelson’s Remarks about the battle of Cape St. Vincent. At the end of his Narrative, Drinkwater claimed that ‘the whole squadron have gained immortal honor’. As

The prologue is drawn from my dissertation about Nelson’s Self-Image and Image in His Lifetime, submitted for the degree of MSc by Research in History at the University of Edinburgh in September 2000.

1 See for example The Times of 3 March 1794 (about vessels intercepted by Capt. Nelson), 8 June 1795 (about his promotion to a Colonel of the Marines) and copies of the London Gazette about Nelson’s activities in the Mediterranean in The Times, 5 October 1795, 29 June 1796, 18 July 1796, 22 August 1796 and 2 March 1797.


3 Naish, p 314.

4 Nicolas, ii, 341 and 344, 345 (draft); and Naish, p. 315.

5 Colonel J. Drinkwater Bethune, A Narrative of the Battle of St. Vincent; with Anecdotes of Nelson, Before and After the Battle ([n. p.]: William R. Blackmore, 1969, identical with the second edition of 1840, which contained on pages 25-54 the first edition of 1797) [hereafter: Drinkwater].

6 Drinkwater, pp. 37, 42, 43 and 44.

7 Compare Drinkwater, p. 45 with Naish, p. 316.
Drinkwater himself later admitted, his *Narrative* 'had but a very limited sale' and 'the greatest part of the impression had been consigned to the usual fate of unsaleable articles', before its authenticity 'became established'.

At least a 'Letter from an Officer on board his Majesty's Ship Orion' about Nelson's part in the battle of St. Vincent and Nelson's own *Remarks* were published in London daily newspapers, so that *The Times* could refer on 21 March to 'Rear Admiral Nelson, who so much distinguished himself in the late glorious Victory over the Spaniards'. The press did report the public honours (including the Order of the Bath) that were conferred upon Nelson and several months later a printer produced a not very accurate stipple engraving after an oil portrait of Nelson which had been begun when he was still a lieutenant and finished in 1781 when Nelson had just been made post-captain. The reaction to the battle of Cape St. Vincent also produced a song that dedicated two of its 72 lines to Nelson and the first items of Nelson-memorabilia: a little box with an inscription that inaccurately claims that Nelson took the Spanish ship 'El Salvador del Mundo' and a jug commemorating the battle of Cape St. Vincent which shows a one-armed figure, meant to be Nelson. This item must have been produced after mid-August when the news of Nelson's loss of an arm reached Britain. Although Nelson's actions had been reported, he was not yet generally known to the public or even a popular hero.

None the less, his part in the battle of Cape St. Vincent had created public interest in the newly promoted admiral and from then on the public followed his career more attentively. His unsuccessful attack on Tenerife, as a result of which he

---

8 Drinkwater, p. ix.
9 *The Times*, 9 March 1797.
10 See reaction to the publication in the *Sun*, in Nicolas, ii, 471-472.
11 *The Times*, 21 March 1797.
12 *The Times*, 29 May and 2 October 1797 (Order of the Bath), 29 November 1797 (Presentation of a sword and the freedom of the City of London).
16 McCarthy, p. 42.
17 See for example *The Times*, 3 April, 14 April, 2 August, 4 September 1797 (about the attack on Tenerife).
lost his right arm, seems to have aroused concerns about his state of health instead of reproaches for his failure.\(^\text{18}\) When he received the freedom of the City of London after his return to England, one of the aldermen, addressing him in a speech, praised his ‘rare heroic modesty ... You have given the warmest applause to your Brother Officers, and the Seamen under your command; but your own merit you have not mentioned even in the slightest manner’. Nelson’s indirect propaganda for himself seems to have worked.

At this time there was another engraving for sale; this time copied from a miniature painted in Leghorn in 1794. In future however engravers would be better supplied with likenesses of Nelson, since he sat for several artists during his stay in England in autumn 1797 and winter 1798. Even before he had earned further fame in 1798 elaborate and sometimes large engravings from the new portraits where published,\(^\text{19}\) while a bust of Nelson was exhibited in the Royal Academy\(^\text{20}\) and Wedgwood offered a black basalt bust of Nelson for sale.\(^\text{21}\) At the beginning of 1798 Nelson was first mentioned in a caricature on which his name (among others) was written on a cloud blown by George III against a ‘Republican Crew’ that was shown on a ‘Raft in Danger’.\(^\text{22}\)

II

Public reaction to the battle of the Nile

The popularity of Nelson dramatically increased when the news of his great victory at the battle of the Nile reached Britain. After a long chase Nelson had finally found the French fleet on 1 August 1798 in Aboukir Bay at the mouth of the Nile, where it had anchored in a supposedly secure position, while a French army under Bonaparte had started to conquer Egypt. Nelson had immediately attacked with thirteen of his fourteen (one having run aground before entering the battle) ships-of-the-line and

\(^{18}\) The Times, 11 September, 13 September, 20 September, 29 September and 6 November 1797.

\(^{19}\) Walker, pp. 195 (after Leghorn Miniaturist, 20 October), 197 (after Orme, 14 February), 197 (after Edridge, 12 May) and 203 (two engravings after Abbott, 25 May and 1 November).

\(^{20}\) Walker, p. 209 (May 1798).

\(^{21}\) Walker, pp. 214 (22 July 1798).

had taken or sunk most of the thirteen French ships-of-the-line, allowing only two to escape. The French flagship L'Orinet of 120 guns (the biggest British ships in the battle had only 74 guns) had blown up at the height of the battle.

After the months of suspense, wondering what Bonaparte and the French fleet were doing, The Times remarked with relief: 'The long-awaited news is come at last'. But it was much more than had been expected; after printing the official dispatches, copied from the London Gazette Extraordinary, the same newspaper concluded: 'A victory more glorious and more compleat is not recorded in the annals of our Navy; nor has any of our naval triumphs been so likely to produce a general good influence throughout Europe'. The news filled the London newspapers for days. Two days later, for example, The Times insisted 'Admiral Nelson's victory cannot be compared with any other; it stands alone ... it is unexampled in its kind' and later it reported that even the French 'Redacteur ... allows that Nelson's name will be immortalized'. Thus, Nelson's name was inseparably connected with the success achieved in the battle of the Nile. This was underlined by the creation for him of the title 'Baron Nelson of the Nile' less than a week after the news of the battle had reached Britain. The news did not spread through newspapers alone. Not everybody could afford buying one, since the stamp duty (due for every single newspaper) alone amounted at that time to 3 ½ pence and a newspaper cost about 7 pence. To fill this gap An Historical Narrative of the Destruction of the French Fleet, By Admiral Sir H. Nelson was published one day after the London Gazette Extraordinary and sold for one penny. It was adorned with a woodcut of a sailor and consisted of 8 small pages on which the contents of the Gazette were reprinted and some information about the battle (mainly the dramatic blowing up of the French flagship) was given.

---

23 The Times, 1 October 1798.
24 The Times, 4 and 5 October 1798.
25 The Times, 8 October 1798.
27 Anon., An Historical Narrative of the Destruction of the French Fleet, By Admiral Sir H. Nelson, With a List of the Killed, Wounded, Number of Ships taken, burnt, & sunk ([n. pl.: n. pub., 3 October 1798]).
In direct response to this overwhelming victory fireworks were set off in a London display showing 'Nelson's Triumph; or Buonaparte in the Dumps'. The performance boasted that it was going to be 'analogous to the glorious Battle, off the Mouth of the Nile ... consisting of song, dance and pantomime, a view of the Egyptian Country, and also a view of the two fleets in real action ... to conclude with new Extensive Fireworks'. Two days later a competitor offered 'Grand Fire-Works In Honor of the Glorious Victory obtained over the French Fleet, by the brave Admiral Nelson', together with a concert. A 'Musical Pasticcio, called 'Nelson a Match for Buonaparte' was advertised, as was 'Nelson's Triumph or Buonaparte in the Dumps', as a 'Naval Spectacle' this time without fireworks, 'to conclude with "Rule Britannia"'. Amidst the general joy, Lloyd's Coffee House pleaded for support for the widows and families of the fallen and invalided seamen, while publishing a list of subscribers.

Through the London Gazette Extraordinary of 2 October 1798, which was copied in newspapers all over Britain, the news of Nelson's great victory spread quickly throughout the country and 'a day of Thanksgiving [was] appointed by his Majesty'. The victory was celebrated all over the country. For example, on 3 October, in Hereford, 'a gang of jolly tars appeared on the stage, drinking Admiral Nelson and the Wooden Walls of Old England, when Mr. Fox sung several appropriate Songs, and read the Gazette and [some] lines written, on the spur of the occasion ... afterwards "Rule Britannia" was sung by the Actors and the Audience, with the most fervent zeal and loyalty'. A Law Report, published in The Times, described another of these festivities, which unfortunately had led to a disturbance:

28 Advertisement for 4, 5 and 6 October in The Times, 4 October 1798.
29 Advertisement in The Times, 6 October 1798.
30 The Times, 8 October 1798; even a year later, shows were still dedicated to the Battle of the Nile. See for example The Morning Chronicle 16 August 1799 (report about 'The glorious battle of the Nile ... at the Naumachia') and 14 October 1799 (advertisement for a 'Panorama' with 'a correct view of Lord Nelson's Victory at the Nile' in which 'Seven ships of the line appear close to the observer, and as large as reality').
31 The Times, 4 October and 5 October 1798.
32 Sermons preached on this day (29 November 1798) were also published: William M'Kechnie, Nelson's Victory. By the right Hand of the Lord: A Discourse on Exodus XV, 6 (Edinburgh: J. Rutven and Sons, 1799); and A Sermon preached before his Excellency the Lord Lieutenant ... for the late glorious Victory obtained by Lord Nelson ... By the Honourable and Right Reverend William Knox (reviewed in the Gentleman's Magazine 70 (1800), 62.
33 British Library [hereafter: BL], Add MS 34,990 (Nelson-Papers), vol. lxxxix (Miscellaneous Papers, 1797-1806) [hereafter: Add MS 34,990], f. 88.
the inhabitants of Manchester were assembled to celebrate the glorious victory of Admiral Nelson off the Nile. The company being very numerous, one room could not hold them ... toasts full of fervour and zeal for the preservation of the Constitution [were drunk], and for the prosperity of the country, he [the 'intoxicated' offender] went up stairs to the other party, to get another batch of toasts; and upstairs and downstairs they were drunk'.

Among the early responses to Nelson's victory at the Nile were several graphic prints. On the day after Nelson's dispatches had been published, one of these prints portrayed the opposition shocked about the news of 'Nelson's victory' and a week later three more prints were on the market. They were the first that portrayed Nelson and were probably inspired by the engravings of Nelson that had by now been published. One of them was entitled 'Extermination of the Plagues of Egypt; Destruction of Revolutionary Crocodiles; or - The British Hero Cleansing ye Mouth of ye Nile' and it showed Nelson capturing crocodiles. Another showed 'The Gallant Nellson [sic] Bringing Home two uncommon Fierce French Crocadiles [sic] from the Nile as a Present to the King'; Nelson's victory was once again given a political meaning, since the crocodiles were portrayed with the faces of two leading opposition members (Fox and Sheridan). In the following weeks Nelson - in person or simply in name - was often used as a symbol for what was seen as loyalist Britain.

As time went on, the celebrations of Nelson's victory at the Nile found ever more diverse forms. A favourite means of expression was in verse. 'An Impromptu on the late Glorious Naval Victory obtained by Sir Horatio Nelson over the French Fleet' was convinced that 'For sure to Nelson all is due/Which naval tactics ever knew'. Another poem set Nelson's fame in a broader historic context: 'As long as

34 The Times, 20 November 1798.
35 George, vii, no. 9248 of 3 October 1798.
36 George, vii, no. 9250 of 6 October 1798.
37 George, vii, no. 9251 of 7 October 1798, the third caricature was published 8 October 1798 and showed the 'Runaway [French] Admirals' (George, vii, no.9252).
38 See for example George, vii, no. 9257 of 24 October 1798 ('John Bull taking a Luncheon' in which Nelson offers French ships as a meal), no. 9259 of 1 November 1798 ('John Bull taking a Lunch', copy of no. 9257), no. 9262 of 3 November ('A Sleepy Dose to the Jacobines - or the Effects of Nelson's Victory') and no. 9264 of 12 November ('High Fun for John Bull or the Republicans Put to their last shift').
39 The Times, 9 October 1798.
Egypt's pyramids shall stand, / Long as the Nile shall fertilize her land;/ So long the voice of never-dying Fame/ Shall add to England's glory Nelson's name! In one of the popular historic comparisons Nelson's fame was first connected with a claim on immortality: 'Fam'd by you, Neptune's wild domain/Shall rival Agincourt's immortal plain'. Less than a month after the news of the victory at the Nile had reached London a short play about 'The Mouth of the Nile' was added as an afterpiece to theatre performances in the theatre of Covent Garden. It was performed 25 times until April 1799 and again three times in the theatre season of 1799-1800. Another piece about 'The Vanguard [Nelson's flagship at the battle]; or, British Tars Regaling after the Battle' was put on stage in Covent Garden as late as May 1799.

Still in October 1798, an eager businessman produced the first portrait of 'Sir Horatio Nelson', showing a person with a boyish face and the left (instead of the right) arm missing. Another printer ran off two prints, one being a plan of the battle showing the whole 'Bay of Bequire [Aboukir]', the other showing Nelson on the deck of his ship, depicted in a naive style. About a month after his great success had become known in Britain an artist, who had never seen the now famous admiral, delivered a wax model of a profile medallion of Nelson. This profile 'turned out to be one of Wedgwood's major successes ... used ... in various forms, often applied to vases, urns, jugs and other memorabilia'.

There was now clearly an avid public interest in Nelson's character and personal background that had to be satisfied. The press seems to have addressed Nelson's wife to obtain some additional information to satisfy this public curiosity. A short note consequently informed the readers about Lady Nelson's background. It

---

40 Gentleman's Magazine, 68 (1798), 881-882, pages 880-882 'Select Poetry, Ancient and Modern, for October 1798 contain five poems in Nelson's honour.
41 The Times, 5 November 1798, more poetry can be found for example in The Times, 26 October and 26 November 1798.
43 Hogan, iii, 2103, 2169 and 2181 (another performance in June 1800).
44 National Maritime Museum [hereafter: NMM], PAD 3762.
45 Published 18 October 1798, Royal Naval Museum [hereafter: RNM], on display.
46 RNM, 64/67, published by John Fairburn 26 November 1798. The same printer published other pictures of Nelson in similar quality: NMM, PAD 3757 (with scene of the Battle of the Nile in the background) and NMM, PAD 3761, both not dated.
47 Walker, pp. 66 and 219. A mug using the profile is shown in appendix A, plate 1.
also summarized Nelson’s career in a few words: ‘Admiral Nelson entered early into the service, was a Lieutenant 1777 and a Post-Captain 1779’. While *The Dublin Magazine* of October 1798 mentioned Nelson’s ‘amiable Lady’, it also elaborated on Nelson’s career saying that he had ‘distinguished himself in several engagements during the present war’ and reported of Nelson’s unsuccessful attack on Tenerife, but it did not contain any description of Nelson’s part in the battle of Cape St. Vincent.

*The Lady’s Magazine* (of November 1798) was obviously better informed. It started off with the above quoted short passage about Nelson’s career, noted that Nelson’s ‘conduct has been peculiarly distinguished by activity and bravery’ and then entered into details about Nelson’s part in the battle of Cape St. Vincent. These details were a near literal transcription of the most important part of Nelson’s few remarks relative to myself in the Captain ... on the most glorious Valentine’s Day, 1797 and the account was illustrated by the first picture of Nelson at St. Vincent. This was an engraving showing ‘Admiral Nelson engaging two Spanish Ships of superior force’ that was especially ‘engraved for the Lady’s Magazine’. The short biography went on to relate the unsuccessful attack on Tenerife and Nelson’s pursuit and defeat of the French Fleet in the Mediterranean. It finished with a description of how ‘the fame of this signal victory resounded through all Europe’.

A more elaborate attempt to write a biography of Nelson was made at that time in a publication about *British Public Characters of 1798*, to which Lady Nelson again seems to have contributed. This biography of ‘Lord Nelson’ mentioned Lady Nelson’s son from her first marriage, gave some instances of Nelson’s generosity and claimed that he possessed: ‘Piety, or a just sense of the superintending providence of God, ... Parental piety ... as well as conjugal tenderness and affection for relations’. As a proof of his strong ‘feelings of private friendship, [the biography described] that when returned from a distant climate, he has been known to shed tears upon meeting an old friend unexpectedly’.

---

48 *The Times*, 9 October 1798 and *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 67 (1798), 1001.
49 *The Dublin Magazine and Irish Monthly Register*, October 1798.
50 *The Lady’s Magazine*, 1798, 483-484. The engraving is opposite page 483.
52 *British Public Characters of 1798*, pp. 510 (son), 509 and 514 (generosity), 513 (quotation).
53 *British Public Characters of 1798*, p. 514.
Nelson also reflected his wife's concerns about his safety: 'the commodore generally placed himself in "the hottest battle", and exposed his person to the same dangers as the meanest seaman'.\textsuperscript{54} Nelson's part in the battle of Cape St. Vincent is mentioned in this biography, but this was not copied from either Drinkwater's \textit{Narrative} or Nelson's own account.\textsuperscript{55}

\textit{The Dublin Magazine} and \textit{British Public Characters of 1798} also tried to convey an impression of what Nelson looked like. \textit{The Dublin Magazine} showed him, full-length, on board a ship with a battle-scene as the background and with his right sleeve dangling down (instead of fastened to one of the buttons of his jacket). His appearance seems to have sprung from the imagination of the artist. \textit{British Public Characters of 1798} printed a plate at the beginning of the book with small portraits in the style of a drawing of each 'public character' it included. Nelson's image is taken from an engraving of Abbott's oil portrait. Most of the costly engravings of high quality that were published in the following two years were copied from one or other painting by Abbott, who was about to produce more oil-portraits, following his original sketch, in which he added the orders that Nelson had received in the meantime.\textsuperscript{56}

The wider market for memorabilia had to be satisfied by the needs of mass-production rather than a desire for precision. The news of Nelson's victory at the Nile met an industry ready to mass-produce commemorative pottery. On one creamware mug the rush to production meant that an old transfer print of Admiral Rodney was used to portray Nelson.\textsuperscript{57} Decorators of other pottery items simply followed their imagination. They usually made Nelson somewhat fat\textsuperscript{58} and on prattware jugs, which were decorated with a moulded portrait, he is hardly

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{British Public Characters of 1798}, p. 511.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{British Public Characters of 1798}, p. 512. For Abbot's original sketch, his first portrait and a later development (with additional orders) see appendix A, plates 47-49.
\textsuperscript{56} Walker, pp. 201, 203 and 204. Walker mentions a large mezzotint after Singleton, published on 29 November 1798 (p. 198), then six engravings after Abbott. An engraving after another artist (a Palermo Miniaturist) was not published before 1 August 1800 (Walker, p. 230).
\textsuperscript{57} NMM, AAA 4783 and 4784, one of them currently on display in the museum, and McCarthy, p. 54 (with picture).
\textsuperscript{58} McCarthy, pp. 53 and 192 (RMN, 1973/190, spill vase, on display) and NMM, AAA 4759 and 4760 (Creamware plates with portraits of 'Lord Nelson', probably copied from NMM, AAA 4758 bowl with a portrait of 'Sir Horatio Nelson' inside that was either made already in 1797 or produced in the first days after the news of the Battle of the Nile had reached Britain and before Nelson was made a Lord).
recognizable. To make sure that he would be recognized, his name was added to the portrait and sometimes potters underlined his appearance by positioning him in a befitting context, for example with sword in hand and with ships in the background. Potters rarely decorated their ceramics with nothing but a portrait of Nelson. Instead, they made use of a variety of motifs to celebrate Nelson and his achievements. Their repertoire can be grouped into the following categories which were often combined on ceramic pieces: portraits, ships or a battle-scene, a battle-plan, trophies (such as flags, cannons or swords), symbolic items (such as laurels for victory or - more specifically - crocodiles for the battle of the Nile) and Nelson's coat-of-arms. This imagery was sometimes supported by mottoes such as 'Admiral Lord Nelson for ever' or - more often - by short pieces of verse, mostly quatrains. These stanzas praised British naval power and condemned 'Proud France' as in:

The Young Alexander of France  
May boast of his prowess in vain  
When Nelson appears 'tis confest  
That Britons are Lords of the Main.

Enamelled boxes were equally suitable as mass-produced commemorative items, because it was possible to print patterns on their lids. Even hand-painted lids were not too extravagant, since the lids were quite small. Their lack of size also meant that they could not be as elaborate in their design or as detailed in their written message as ceramic items. Instead of short poems they focused on mottoes such as

---

60 For example on the Prattware jugs that bore a naive effigy of Nelson (McCarthy, pp.106, 107), see also: McCarthy, p. 192.
61 NMM, AAA 4744.
62 An elegant service of china was produces that used a transfer-printed oval engraving after Edridge (NMM, AAA 4761-4770).
63 For example: NMM, AAA 4738, 4742, 4743 and 4748 ('Lord Nelson engaging the Toulon Fleet off the Mouth of the Nile'), 4751-4753 (showing a battllecene taken from an engraving of an engagement of 3 November 1758), 4754-4755 and 4757.
64 For example NMM, AAA 4745, 4747 and 4749.
65 For example NMM, AAA 4738 and 4742.
66 For example NMM, AAA 4745 (trumpets and laurel wreaths), 4747 and 4749 (trumpets, laurels, naval crown) and 4750 (crocodiles).
67 For example NMM, AAA 4745.
68 For example NMM, AAA 4746; see also NMM AAA 4771 ('Success to Nelson').
69 NMM, AAA 4743, 4751-4755 and 4757; see also NMM, AAA 4742, 4744, 4759 and 4760.
'Like Nelson may each Briton be - a friend to King and Country'. 70 Another motto contained the popular comparison with ancient heroes that offered itself in the Egyptian context: 'Where Caesar and Alexander fought/ Brave Nelsons Fleet new wonders wrought'. 71 While the texts on enameled boxes were naturally shorter than on ceramic items, these items nevertheless conveyed similar imagery, although mainly focusing on one subject at a time. Apart from Nelson's coat-of-arms and battle-plans, which were rare even on ceramics, all motifs that appeared on ceramic items were also used on enameled boxes: portraits of Nelson, 72 ships or a battle-scene ('L'Orient [sic] on fire' being an attractive motif) 73 and trophies. 74 Apart from these, the enamellers also developed imagery particularly suitable for their tiny objects. Popular were symbolic items (such as anchors), 75 sailors (combined with a saying such as 'Nelson forever') 76 and allegoric figures (such as Britannia, Fame and Hope). 77 One motive even showed a pyramid-shaped memorial for the 'Victory of the Nile Aug 4th 1798', flanked with Britannia and a lion, and a motto explaining: 'Nothing can oppose Virtue & Courage'. 78

There were also prints available that combined the different elements of imagery already described. One showed Nelson’s portrait surrounded by trophies above a picture of the battle of the Nile (with the French flag-ship L'Orient blowing up) together with his coat-of-arms, 79 in others his portrait was surrounded with a

70 McCarthy, p. 125, NMM, OBJ 0010-13, 19 and 56; see also NMM, OBJ 0017 ('Brave Nelson's Manly Fortitude - Is crown'd with Royal Gratitude'), 0018 and 0087 ('Nelson and the British Crew forever'), 0024 and 0045 ('Nelson for ever') and 0044 and 0048 ('Nelson and Victory'). Examples of enameled boxes are given in appendix A, plate 2.
71 NMM, OBJ 0096.
72 NMM, OBJ 0025, 0033, 0091, 0101 and 0102.
73 NMM, OBJ 0062 and 0107; ships and battle-scenes in general: NMM, OBJ 0036, 0044 and 0048, 0049, 0064, 0097, 0111 (showing a ship with the Scottish saltire flying, commented: 'Britannia rules the Waves'), 0113, 0114 and 0117.
74 NMM, OBJ 0110.
75 NMM, OBJ 0032 and 0121; another example is the letter 'N' for Nelson with a crown on top and the explanation: 'Brave Nelson's Manly Fortitude - Is crowned with Royal Gratitude' (NMM, OBJ 0017).
76 NMM, OBJ 0045 and 0024; other sailor-motives: NMM, OBJ 0018 and 0087 ('Nelson and the British Crew forever') and 0098 ('Nelson & the Navy').
77 NMM, OBJ 0131, 0132, 0133 and 0134 (Britannia), 0031, 0051, 0057, 0099, 0123 and 0151(Fame), 0123 and 0151 (Hope), 0057 and 0099 (Plenty).
78 NMM, OBJ 0047 and 0085.
79 NMM, PAG 8981 and RNM, 76/208 (portrait after Edridge); another portrait showed him in full length with L'Orient blowing up behind him (NMM, PAD 3752).
wreath and allegoric figures or he was portrayed as one of thirteen ‘British Admirals’ in a picture of ‘Britannia viewing the ... Conquerors of the Seas’. Other prints showed only allegoric motives. Prints commemorating the battle of the Nile seem to have been immensely popular among all parts of the population. George Crabbe described in his Parish Register an ‘industrious swain’ who had an engraving of the battle of the Nile on the wall of his cottage. The motifs that were used on prints, ceramics and enamelled boxes could be found on other items as well. Among the flood of commemorative items that used these motifs were medals, fans, watches and handkerchiefs. The exotic setting of Nelson’s victory seems even to have had an impact on fashion. A caricature showed a couple ‘Dressed à la Nile’ with crocodiles adorning their clothes.

Even poems made use of some of the elements used in visual imagery. Thus, one poem painted an allegorical picture of Nelson and his victory: ‘When Mars in envy at a mortal’s fame,/ Of his right hand Horatio had bereft;/ Clad as Britannia, sage Minerva came,/ And nerv’d with doubled pow’rs his conquering left’. The battle of the Nile was described in lengthy odes that gave credit to Nelson’s ‘matchless deeds’ and adorned him with adjectives such as ‘great’ or ‘intrepid’.

---

80 NMM, PAD 3758 (portrait after Abbott, surrounded by Fame with trumpet and Britannia with trident); NMM, PAD 3755 (a little portrait only surrounded by a wreath).
81 NMM, PAH 5658 (portrait after Abbott).
82 See for example the plate printed in the Naval Chronicle 3 (1800), opposite p. 189.
84 McCarthy, pp 54-47.
85 May, p. 93.
86 May, p. 89.
87 McCarthy, pp. 72-73.
89 The Times, 26 November 1798; see also Gentleman’s Magazine, 70 (1800), 257, where - using another allegory - ‘th’applauding voice of Fame/ Wafts o’er the deep her Nelson’s name’.
90 James Maxwell, Victory obtained over the French Fleet, on the memorable first of August - 1798. The Honourable Sir Horatio Nelson met the French Fleet at the Mouth of the Nile (Paisley: [n. pub.], 1798), p. 4; see also: Anon., An Ode on the Victory of the Nile, Gained by Admiral Lord Nelson, on the first of August, 1798; over the french Fleet, Commanded by Admiral Brueys, in the Bay of Aboukir (Ipswich: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1800), p. 14 (‘matchless merit’).
91 Edward Dupré, On the Victory obtained by Rear Admiral Lord Nelson, of the Nile, over the French fleet, on the first day of August, 1798, a poem (Jersey: [n. pub.], 1798) [hereafter: Dupré], pp. 5 and 8. This poem was also published in the Gentleman’s Magazine, 68 (1798), 1133-1134. An ode of a length of 64 pages (The Battle of the Nile, a dramatic Poem on the Model of the Greek Tragedy) was reviewed in the Naval Chronicle, 1 (1799), 309-311.
Nelson’s victory ‘in Aboukir bay’ was compared with that of Agincourt and Nelson’s name was added to the names of the other successful admirals of the French Revolutionary War: ‘Duncan, [St.] Vincent ... and Howe’. 92 The combination of the ‘Four Great Naval Victories’93 and their admirals seems to have been generally popular and it appears also in songs. 94 Texts for songs contained elements similar to poems and commemorative imagery: one song decorated ‘the brow of each hardy British Tar’ who had fought in the battle of the Nile with a ‘resplendent Laurel Crown’,95 while another praised the ‘sons of Neptune’ and alluded to the ‘solid Pyramids’.96 One song even proclaimed ‘Immortal Nelson!’.97 Nelson’s one-armed figure seems to have been as much a favourite subject98 as the blowing up of L’Orient99 that inspired the ‘Allegro’ movement of a sonata about the battle of the Nile, which finished with ‘Rule Britannia’ as an ‘Andante Maestoso’.100 The texts of

---

92 Dupré, pp. 4 (Agincourt), 5 (‘Aboukir bay’) and 10 (‘great Chiefs’: Duncan, St. Vincent, Nelson and Howe).
93 The Times, 17 October 1798, alluding to the ‘Glorious First of June’ (1794, Adm. Howe), the Battle of Cape St. Vincent (Feb. 1797) and the Battle of Camperdown (October 1797, Adm. Duncan); see also BL, Add MS 34,990, f. 88.
95 Fielding, third stanza.
97 Anon., Ode on the Glorious Victory gain’d over the French Fleet, off the Mouth of the Nile, by Admiral Lord Nelson, on the 1st August 1798 (London: G. Somart, [c. 1799]); less direct references to immortality can also be found in other sources, see for example the poem in BL, Add MS 34,990, f. 88 (‘Britain’s glory ... will a fourth Admiral immortalize’).
98 Anon., Britannia Triumphant or The Destruction of the Tri Colour’d Flag (London: [n. pub.], [c. 1799]), ‘Though one arm be lost by the fortune of war/of the other shall Nelson be shy?’; and Anon., ‘The Battle of the Nile’, in Real Sailor Songs, ed. John Ashton (London: The Leadenhall Press, 1891) [hereafter: Real Sailor Songs], p. 11 (‘Gallant Nelson gave command, altho’ he’d but one hand’ and ‘Brave Nelson ...’).
99 Knight, pp. 6-7; and Real Sailor Songs, p. 11.
100 Anon., Nelson’s Victory. A Sonata for the Piano-Forte (London: Longman & Broderip, [c. 1799]), pp. 4-5; see also The Mouth of the Nile; or, The Glorious First of August, a Musical Entertainment by T. Dibdin, advertised in The Times, 19 November 1798.
songs written by sailors conveyed more of the actual fight or went into great detail to describe the search for the French fleet before the battle.\textsuperscript{101}

Such information about the particulars of the actual battle and its preparation did not play an important part in the publicity about Nelson that followed the arrival of the news about his victory. Partly because of lack of information about the event, newspapers and journals dedicated much more space to how Nelson was celebrated than to exactly how he had gained his fame. They reported on ‘the late illuminations for Nelson’s glorious victory’,\textsuperscript{102} described Nelson’s coat-of-arms\textsuperscript{103} and informed their readers that ‘a Sword of the value of 200 guineas ... was ordered to be presented to Lord Nelson’ by his captains.\textsuperscript{104} The honours that were loaded on Nelson even became the subject of a caricature that showed a small figure overburdened by orders and an impressive hat. On his coat-of-arms it showed purses full of money.\textsuperscript{105} It became known that a Mrs. Damer had offered the Court of Aldermen of the City of London ‘to execute and present to the Court a bust of Lord Nelson’ - an offer that was readily accepted.\textsuperscript{106} Readers of the \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine} sent letters to the editor about the origin of Nelson’s name, about Nelson’s report of the battle (‘a letter so generally and justly admired’) and about what ‘a Mansion House for Lord Nelson’ should look like (illustrated with a plan).\textsuperscript{107} A French émigré priest contributed some lines in French ‘Sur l’Expédition dans la Méditerranée, et sur le Combat du Nil’.\textsuperscript{108}

Among the dozens of verses printed about the battle of the Nile were also some ‘Latin Verses on the burning of L’Orient ... attributed to the ingenious Abbé Denis, Vienna’.\textsuperscript{109} As time passed, the British public could read more and more about how Nelson was received in other countries. News arrived from Vienna that ‘The Grand Senior [Sultan of the Ottoman Empire] has sent some rich presents to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{101} \textit{Real Sailor Songs}, p. 11; and Anon., ‘The Battle of the Nile’ [Fragment], in \textit{Naval Songs and Ballads}, ed. C. H. Firth (London: Navy Records Society, 1908) [hereafter: \textit{Naval Songs and Ballads}], pp. 287-289.
\item \textsuperscript{102} \textit{The Times}, 1 November 1798.
\item \textsuperscript{103} \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine}, 68 (1798), 991.
\item \textsuperscript{104} \textit{The Times}, 17 October 1798; see also \textit{Naval Chronicle}, 2 (1799), 441.
\item \textsuperscript{105} George, vii, no. 9269 of 1 December 1798 (‘The Hero of the Nile’).
\item \textsuperscript{106} \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine}, 69 (1799), 160-161; see also \textit{The Times}, 25 January 1799.
\item \textsuperscript{107} \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine}, 68 (1798), 826 and 945 (name, incl. answer), 1008 (report) and 69 (1799), 97 (mansion) and opposite (plan).
\item \textsuperscript{108} \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine}, 69 (1799), 324-325.
\item \textsuperscript{109} \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine}, 68 (1798), 1067.
\end{itemize}
Admiral Nelson, accompanied with a flattering letter\textsuperscript{110} and that a 'brilliant sword [was] given by his Neapolitan Majesty to Lord Nelson'.\textsuperscript{111} The foreign reaction was not limited to monarchs, however. According to the \textit{Gentleman's Magazine} 'all the shores and wharfs of Naples were crowded with a multitude of rejoicing people' when Nelson arrived.\textsuperscript{112}

Indeed, the international reception of the news of the battle of the Nile outside France was as enthusiastic as that in Britain. The battle of the Nile was regarded as the first decisive victory against Bonaparte,\textsuperscript{113} and 'at Vienna, the government paper rose 5 per cent'\textsuperscript{114} at a time when not only Austria felt threatened by French expansionism. While Bonaparte was cruising through the Mediterranean before the battle of the Nile, the then famous German poet, Klopstock from Hamburg, had written an ode about the 'degeneration of Europe' that flew from the 'venomous Gallic well', but he now added a verse in praise of Nelson's 'most connecting victory'. He offered Nelson an allegoric 'wreath' and even alluded to the 'plume ... which for you Selim [the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire] took from his turban'.\textsuperscript{115}

Poems and Songs in Nelson's praise, whether they were written in German, Latin,\textsuperscript{116} French\textsuperscript{117} or Italian,\textsuperscript{118} used elements similar to those which appeared in English ones. They were written all over Europe. A German from Celle, near Hanover, living in Southern Spain, for example, wrote a poem in French addressed to the 'honourable conqueror', the 'great and famous Nelson', whom he regarded as entitled to

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Gentleman's Magazine}, 68 (1798), 896; see also \textit{The Times}, 19 November 1798.
\item\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Gentleman's Magazine}, 69 (1799), 1078.
\item\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Gentleman's Magazine}, 68 (1798), 1071.
\item\textsuperscript{114} \textit{The Times}, 9 October 1798.
\item\textsuperscript{116} Deutsch, pp. 75 and 110-111; see also BL, Add MS 34,990, f. 95-98.
\item\textsuperscript{117} See for example BL, Add MS 34,990, f. 107-117 ('Ode a Horace Nelson'), 123 and 130 ('À Nelson ... leopard intrépide').
\item\textsuperscript{118} See for example BL, Add MS 34,990, f. 115 ('Al Vittorio Ammiraglio Inglese Lord Orazio Nelson'), 118 ('Sonetto in Lode di ...'), 120 (''Oda'), 121 ('Sonnetto ...'), 124-129 (different sonnets) and 131-132 (different poems).
\end{thebibliography}
‘immortality’. A cantata written about Nelson’s ‘happy arrival in the city of Naples’ praised the ‘great merit’ of the ‘glorious British hero’.

In Austria, Nelson’s victory was also commemorated with instrumental music. In December 1798 two sonatas (one for piano solo, the other for piano, violin and cello) that had the battle of the Nile as their subject were published in Vienna. Both pieces describe the blowing up of L’Orient (one of them in ‘Tempo Militare’) and one of them ends with a ‘Finale all’Inglese’ which quotes the melody of ‘Rule Britannia’. The naval interest created by Nelson’s Egyptian victory also had an impact on Viennese fashion. Ladies of elegant society wore ear-rings in the form of anchors, dark blue ‘Nelson-overcoats’ (woollen for the winter and silken for the summer, worn at least until 1805) and bonnets that - according to a humorous comment - made them look ‘like a crocodile’. The impact of the battle of the Nile was so great that the first fireworks in the Viennese season of 1799 (starting in May) were dedicated to it.

But continental Europeans did not rely only on their imagination to celebrate Nelson. Even before authentic portrait-engravings of Nelson were generally known in Britain, they had obviously spread across the Channel. A very good copy of one of them was published in Vienna after the news of the battle of the Nile had reached that city - and ten days before the news had reached England. This and other images must have been so well known that, when Nelson arrived two years later in the south Austrian town of Graz, a newspaper could remark that ‘the portraits ... look very much like him’. In the same year another engraving after an original miniature of Nelson was on sale in Berlin and a wax figure of him was later exhibited in Hamburg. Not all available images of Nelson were authentic,

119 BL, Add MS 34,990, f. 103.
120 BL, Add MS 34,990, f. 99-102.
121 Deutsch, pp. 56-60 (for piano forte, published 22 December 1798) and 60-63 (for piano forte, violin and cello, published 5 December 1798).
122 Deutsch, pp. 59-60 and 62.
124 Deutsch, pp. 67-69.
126 Deutsch, p. 81, quoting from the ‘Grätzer Zeitung’ of 18 August 1800.
127 NMM, PAD 3890 (confusing the English name for Livorno with the name of the painter, who is said to have been ‘Legkorn’), s/c.
however. On 1 October, that is before the news of the battle had reached Britain, a
north German newspaper published a full-length portrait of Nelson with two arms. In
an explanation it said that otherwise he would not have been recognized (!) ‘and the
hero, who does more with one arm than some generals with head, hands and feet,
does not deserve this’. 129

Although images presented of Nelson - on pictures or in writing - were often
far from authentic, a general image of Nelson and his deeds spread all over Europe.
This image showed less interest in factual details than in the idealized figure of a
romantic hero, whom it adorned with allegorical symbols, honourable historical
comparisons, heroic scenes and impressive adjectives. These attributes presented him
as the embodiment of a hero and as an effective weapon against republican France.
This image was strengthened by the repetition of his fame through different media,
such as commemorative items, prints and songs.

III

Establishing Nelson's reputation

Although it became increasingly difficult to discern the real Nelson and his deeds
behind the massive and diverse forms of hero-worship that enveloped him, part of
the general interest in Nelson did consist of a genuine interest in him and his victory.
The Gentleman's Magazine published two letters by seamen serving in Nelson's
fleet130 and an article about the 'Proceedings of the Squadron under Sir Horatio
Nelson'.131 This article was based on the anonymously published Authentic Narrative
of the Proceedings of His Majesty's Squadron, under the Command of Rear-Admiral
Sir Horatio Nelson, from its sailing to Gibraltar, to the Conclusion of the Glorious
Battle of the Nile; Drawn up from the Minutes of an Officer of Rank in the
Squadron.132 This officer of rank had been Nelson's flag-captain, Edward Berry. The
Narrative was preceded by a lengthy 'introduction' informing the reader that 'foreign
nations have ... hailed the British Conqueror as the Hero and Saviour of Europe.' 133

129 Pinneberger Correspondent, 1 October 1798, quoted in Voigt, 174.
130 Gentleman's Magazine 68 (1798), 1139 and 69 (1799), 151.
131 Gentleman's Magazine 68 (1798), 1442 and 69 (1799), 67-69.
132 Anon. [Edward Berry], [title see above] (Edinburgh: James Simpson:, 1798) [hereafter: Anon.
[Berry], Authentic Narrative].
133 Anon. [Berry], Authentic Narrative, p. 1.
and it was followed by a summary that praised the 'great commander' and 'gallant admiral'. But Berry’s *Narrative* itself was a rather factual account. It recorded with technical precision how Nelson and his squadron had searched through the Mediterranean for the French fleet which had left Toulon. Berry explained that Nelson, with ‘His anxious and active mind’, had not been immediately successful in his chase, because of his lack of frigates and the difficulty in obtaining information about the course or position of the French fleet. In considerable detail Berry described how Nelson informed all his captains about his ‘intentions’ so that ‘they could ascertain with precision what were the ideas of their Commander, without the aid of any further instructions; by which means signals became almost unnecessary’. This co-operative aspect of the victory at the Nile was omitted in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, however, so that even this first-hand account was used to confirm the image of the hero who (in a literal as well as figurative sense) single-handedly won against the odds.

Apart from outstanding abilities, the press also attributed humility to Nelson. This had already been observed in his report about the battle, which had been published in a *London Gazette Extraordinary* and had begun with the words ‘Almighty God has blessed his Majesty’s Arms in the late battle, by a great Victory’. Lady Nelson now contributed to this image by entrusting the *Gentleman’s Magazine* with one of Nelson’s letters to her. In this letter of 24 May 1798 Nelson described the devastating results of a storm that had shaken his squadron and judged: ‘I believe firmly that it was the Almighty’s goodness to check my consummate vanity’.

The most reliable contemporary publication about naval matters in general and Nelson in particular was the newly started *Naval Chronicle*. Its first pages were filled with information about the battle of the Nile. Among other articles Berry’s *Narrative* was printed, this time according to the original, as was the *London Gazette Extraordinary* of 2 October 1798 with Nelson’s own report about the battle of the

---

134 Anon. [Berry], *Authentic Narrative*, pp. 27-29.
135 Anon. [Berry], *Authentic Narrative*, p. 9.
136 Anon. [Berry], *Authentic Narrative*, pp. 7-11.
137 Anon. [Berry], *Authentic Narrative*, pp. 12-13 and 16.
138 Nicolas, iii, 56.
139 *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 69 (1799), 344.
In the second half of the year 1799 the Naval Chronicle published Nelson’s remarks on myself on his role at the battle of Cape St. Vincent. To complete the image of Nelson the editors of the Naval Chronicle decided to publish a ‘Biographical Memoir’ of him. For this purpose one of them asked Nelson to furnish the Chronicle with some information about himself. Nelson produced a Sketch of my Life, which was then used, together with some other sources such as Drinkwater’s Narrative relative of the Battle of St. Vincent, as the basis for the most elaborate biography of Nelson that appeared during his lifetime. It gave not only some hitherto neglected details, but also covered Nelson’s youth.

Some additions, however, did seek to stress Nelson’s image as a warrior. For that purpose the biography invented the story that Nelson exclaimed ‘Westminster Abbey! or glorious Victory!’ when he led the attack on a Spanish ship-of-the-line at the battle of Cape St. Vincent. It even attributed super-human strength to him. Thus, it is said that Nelson ‘immediately after [the amputation of his arm] began his official letter, and finished it by eleven’ and that ‘the next day ... he wrote to Lady Nelson’. In reality, Nelson was given opium after the operation, wrote the first letter with his left hand three days later and the first letter to his wife ten days after the amputation. Similarly, the biography maintains that at the battle of the Nile ‘as soon as the painful operation of dressing [Nelson’s head-wound] was over, Admiral Nelson immediately sat down, and that very night wrote the celebrated official letter, that appeared in the Gazette’. The ‘celebrated letter’ was in fact written two days after the battle - itself an amazing accomplishment.

The same biography also attributed characteristics of an intellectual to Nelson by claiming that he ‘enjoyed the opportunity of strengthening, by frequent reflection,
the experience he had obtained'. It thus added new dimensions to Nelson's character, that point in different directions. On the one hand, he is depicted as calm and reflective and, on the other hand, he is shown as a dashing hero with amazing strength. These rather contradictory aspects seem to reflect what the author of the 'Biographical Memoir' saw as admirable in a naval hero. Although this biography contained much more information than any other written before it, it is strongly influenced by the hero-worship that was produced by the news of the battle of the Nile.

IV

The Neapolitan revolution and Lady Hamilton

While Nelson was being celebrated across Britain and Europe for his victory at the Nile, news continued to spread of what he was currently undertaking. This news, admittedly, was not always reliable. It soon became clear, however, that he was involved in Neapolitan affairs. It was reported that he had carried the royal family of Naples to Palermo (their second capital) at the outbreak of disturbances and, on 12 August 1799, it became known that Nelson had helped to suppress the Neapolitan Revolution. The Times informed readers that Nelson had declared the 'Convention with the French, and the Neapolitan Rebels ... not having been ratified by his Majesty's authority ... null and void'. The Morning Chronicle, known for its sympathies for the parliamentary opposition, published a first-hand-account, which acknowledged that the treaty had been 'very disgraceful on the part of the King'. But this account also criticized Nelson for having taken some of the rebels prisoner: 'His Lordship, no doubt, must have some strong reasons for this proceeding, which however criminal the individuals might have been, was contrary to an express engagement, on the faith of which they had acted'. The Times commented a few days later that 'some persons appear surprised that Lord Nelson should not accede to the capitulation entered into ... [with] the Neapolitan Traitors'

149 Naval Chronicle, 3 (1800), 168.
150 The Times, 21 January 1799, reported, for example, that he had 'bombarded Genoa'.
151 The Times, 5 February 1799.
152 The Times, 12 August 1799.
153 Christie, p. 318.
154 The Morning Chronicle, 12 August 1799.
and defends Nelson’s measure, arguing that the conditions of the capitulation were unacceptable.

When Nelson’s political and naval actions in the Bay of Naples ceased to be a news item, reports focused on his involvement with Lady Hamilton, who was first mentioned simply as Nelson’s interpreter. 155 The Morning Chronicle then suggested that she was also a distraction for Nelson. It reported that ‘the English fleet has been ordered to ... Minorca’, but ‘his Grace the Admiral [remained at Palermo, where he had] his flag hoisted at a balcony at the house of the British Minister’ and took part in a ‘Fête Champêtre’. A part of this ‘Fête’ was a ‘Temple of Glory’ in which three waxen figures were displayed. One represented Nelson; ‘a female figure in an elegant attitude, representing Fame with her trumpet, and the face the perfect resemblance of Lady Hamilton, hung over him; while another figure, representing ... Sir William Hamilton ... filled an opposite niche.’ The Morning Chronicle continued: ‘On the brows of the figure of the noble Admiral was placed a wreath of laurel which his Majesty with his own royal hand took from the waxen figure, and placed it on the head of the real hero, who wore it through the whole of the entertainment’. 156 The Times and the Naval Chronicle copied the report, carefully omitting both the first part that hinted at an act of disobedience by Nelson and the embarrassing description of how Nelson received and wore a wreath on his head. 157 But suspicions about the undue influence that Lady Hamilton was exerting on Nelson were now published in several newspapers. 158

The Morning Chronicle returned to political criticism of the Neapolitan affair without mentioning Nelson, when it reported a speech of ‘Mr. Fox’ from Parliament in February 1800. Fox connected ‘the horrors and murders perpetrated at Naples’ with the breach of the ‘Treaty ... which promised safety and the security of property’ and he went on to say that ‘as this treaty is said to have been signed and guaranteed by a British officer [Captain Foote], he hoped ... that this foul stain should be washed away from the British name; a stain that in blackness could rival any that resulted

155 The Times, 14 August 1799 and The Morning Chronicle, 15 August 1799.
156 The Morning Chronicle, 22 October 1799.
157 The Times, 23 October 1799 and the Naval Chronicle, 2 (1799), 533.
158 For example: The Times, 14 November 1799 (‘Mark Antony followed Cleopatra into the Nile’) and The Morning Chronicle, 7 December 1799 (‘Unfortunately Lady Hamilton interfered’).
from the atrocities of the French Revolution'.159 Nine months later, when Nelson was expected back in England, *The Morning Chronicle* reminded its readers of the subject. It reported that the treaty, signed by Captain Foote had contained ‘the capitulation of the [French] garrison’, which was wrong. It went on that after the arrival of Nelson, Sir William and Lady Hamilton this capitulation ‘was annulled’, but it did not specify by whom. After describing the consequences (in a slightly distorted way), *The Morning Chronicle* asked whether ‘the breach of the stipulation ... [was not] a flagrant violation of national faith’.160 In her book about the French Revolution, published in 1801, Helen Maria Williams described the Neapolitan affair in much greater detail. But even she attacked Nelson only by claiming (incorrectly) that he had tried to cheat the republicans into giving ‘their names and places of abode’.161 She attached much more blame to Lady Hamilton whom she depicted as Lady Macbeth.162 It seems, however, that Nelson - although subject to some ridicule - was at that time so widely acknowledged as a hero of his country that it was difficult to attack him seriously, especially from a position of opposition to the government.

When Nelson was recalled from his post in the Mediterranean, he chose to travel with the British ambassador Sir William, who had been recalled at the same time, and his wife, Lady Hamilton, overland to Britain, instead of taking the frigate that had been offered to him. This enabled central Europeans to show their admiration for the famous admiral. After Nelson had arrived in the city of Trieste, it was illuminated in his honour and he was followed ‘by thousands’.163 In Laibach a symphony of Haydn was performed and an aria about ‘British virtue’ sung in Nelson’s honour.164 In Graz ‘numerously assembled people welcomed Nelson with loud shouts of Vivat’ and Nelson pleased them by letting them into his room and by walking amongst them ‘with the beautiful Lady Hamilton at his arm’.165

159 *The Morning Chronicle*, 4 February 1800.
160 *The Morning Chronicle*, 11 September 1800.
162 Williams, pp. 182-185.
163 Deutsch, pp. 78-79.
164 Deutsch, p. 80.
165 *Grützer Zeitung*, 18 August 1800, quoted in Deutsch, p. 81.
Even greater crowds surrounded Nelson in Vienna. On one occasion a local newspaper reported ‘a huge crowd’ around Nelson’s carriage.\textsuperscript{166} Another newspaper remarked that a swarm of people filled a central Viennese street ‘to see the brave hero’ and it added that ‘a great number of ladies do now want to wear nothing but their Nelson dress’.\textsuperscript{167} While Sir William was ill and had to stay indoors, Nelson went with Lady Hamilton to the theatre and was reported to be ‘a great friend of amusing comedies’.\textsuperscript{168} His outer appearance with his decorations prompted a satirical magazine’s comment: ‘Admiral Nelson alone has a complete treasury vault on his body’.\textsuperscript{169} This display of wealth seems to have evoked romantic ideas of the immeasurable riches of successful sailors. Another newspaper remarked that ‘he carries with him fabulous treasures and receives, on top of them, a yearly income of 20,000 gold coins’. But the same article also offered a more personal impression of Nelson. The writer had spoken to Nelson in ‘French and Italian’ and informed his readers that he ‘praised the charming landscape of our country’. The article, written in Eisenstadt, also mentioned Lady Hamilton, who had come there to visit Haydn. She is portrayed as beautiful, cultured and well-behaved. The author reported that her attitudes had made her famous and that she sang with a ‘clear, strong voice’, accompanied by Haydn.\textsuperscript{170} The Austrian public obviously did not feel any resentment against her.

Prague presented itself illuminated, when Nelson stayed there on his birthday (29 September)\textsuperscript{171} and three days later ‘it resounded through all of Dresden, Nelson and Lady Hamilton were there. The hotel [in which they stayed] was surrounded by onlookers’.\textsuperscript{172} When the party travelled down the river Elbe on boats, ‘the banks were always crowded with curious people who flocked to see the victor of the Nile’.\textsuperscript{173} In Magdeburg he was again greeted with ‘loud Vivats’ of the crowds\textsuperscript{174} and


\textsuperscript{167} Deutsch, p. 84 (quoting from the \textit{Eipeldauer Brieffe}; see also \textit{The Times}, 17 September 1800 (‘Lord Nelson is much followed at Vienna ... The Nelson ribbon, and the Nelson cap are all the rage’). Deutsch, p. 84-85, 89.

\textsuperscript{168} Deutsch, p. 92 (quoting from the \textit{Eipeldauer Brieffe}).

\textsuperscript{169} Deutsch, p. 92 (quoting from the \textit{Eipeldauer Brieffe}).

\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Magyar Hirmondo,} 9 September 1800, quoted in Deutsch, pp. 110-112.

\textsuperscript{171} Deutsch, p.118.

\textsuperscript{172} Voigt, 159 (quoting from Th. Kosegarten, \textit{Meine Freuden in Sachsen,} Leipzig, 1801, pp. 176-179).

\textsuperscript{173} Voigt, 160.
in the small town of Hitzacker he was said to have been accompanied by ‘nearly all the inhabitants’. Nelson used his stay in Hamburg, where ‘the multitude follows him wherever he goes’, to visit Klopstock, who composed another ode on the occasion - *The Innocents*. This ode described a dinner with Nelson and Lady Hamilton and contained a last verse dedicated to Lady Hamilton’s ‘attitudes’. Since the poet did not publish this last verse, it has been speculated, that he disapproved of Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton, when he learned about it. During their stay in Germany, however, there seems to have been no indignation about their joint appearance and Nelson’s actions in Naples in 1799 were not criticized until a year later.

At home Nelson was received no less triumphantly than abroad. English newspapers had expected him to return much earlier and they had reported extensively on his stay in Hamburg, so that he was anxiously awaited when he finally arrived. On 6 November 1800 he ‘landed [in Yarmouth] amidst the repeated huzzas of the populace’ and later ‘came to the balcony several times to gratify the populace’. A ‘feux de joie’ was displayed, ‘an excellent sermon was preached’ and Nelson received the freedom of the town. In London ‘The noble Admiral, who was dressed in full uniform, with three stars on his breast, and two gold medals, was welcomed by repeated huzzas from the crowd, which the illustrious tar returned with a low bow’. Lady Hamilton - according to the *Naval Chronicle* - ‘looked charmingly, and is a very fine woman’. It was observed that ‘These distinguished

174 Voigt, 173.
176 *The Times*, 3 November 1800.
177 Dünntzer, pp. 173-174 (ode ‘Die Unschuldigen’) and 217-218 (note about the ode ‘Die Unschuldigen’).
178 Voigt, 174.
179 In September 1801 Klopstock withdrew the last verse of his ode *Pleasure and Sorrow* which had been in praise of Nelson, when he learned that Nelson had broken ‘the word of his subordinate commodore [captain] Foote’ (Friedrich-Wilhelm Pohl, *Lord Nelson. Ein Triumphzug durch Europa* [Hamburg: Koehlers Verlagsgesellschaft, 2000, hereafter: Pohl), p. 95).
180 *The Times*, 2 September 1800 (reported, when Nelson arrived in Vienna, that he was expected in England two weeks later - in fact it took him two months to come home) and 3 October 1800 (Nelson’s arrival is - incorrectly - reported), and *The Morning Chronicle*, 2 September 1800.
181 *The Times*, 31 October and 1, 3 and 8 November, *The Morning Chronicle*, 1, 4, 5 and 8 November 1800.
182 *The Morning Chronicle*, 8 November 1800.
183 *Naval Chronicle*, 4, 429; see also *The Morning Chronicle*, 10 November 1800.
personages travelled very easily, only two stages a day' and that Nelson had only ‘ten minutes' for his wife after his arrival in London. 184

Nelson’s days in London were packed with activities. On 10 November he took part in the ‘Lord Mayors’s Day’, on which occasion ‘the mob took the horses from the carriage of Lord Nelson, and drew him to Guildhall, amidst repeated huzzas’. 185 On his way ‘ladies [greeted him] from the windows with their handkerchiefs, and the loudest acclamations’. 186 In an impressive ceremony Nelson received a richly decorated sword (which ‘cost 200 guineas’) from the City of London. It was reported that he replied to this honour: ‘with this very sword - (holding it up in the left and remaining hand) - I hope soon to aid in reducing our implacable enemy to proper and due limits - without which this country can neither hope for, nor expect, a solid, honourable, and permanent peace!’ 187 To carry out this plan, Nelson also paid his visit to the Admiralty on the following day. Because he was on that occasion only ‘in the half-dress uniform of an Admiral ... He was not recognized until he came into the Strand, where the curiosity of his countrymen became a little troublesome, the inconvenience of which he avoided by going into Somerset-house’. But the respite was not to be for long. ‘When his Lordship left Somerset-house, a numerous crowd assembled, and accompanied him to Whitehall’. 188

The press recorded his steps meticulously 189 and thus could not fail to notice that he remained in the company of Lady Hamilton. This led to some comments on their scandalous relationship. A caricature, published ten days after Nelson’s arrival in London, was entitled ‘Smoking Attitudes!’ , alluding to Lady Hamilton’s famous ‘attitudes’. Full of sexual innuendo, it depicted Nelson and Lady Hamilton detached from a greater party of smokers. Lady Hamilton is shown admiring Nelson’s pipe and comparing him with her husband: ‘Pho, the Old man’s pipe is always out, but

184 Naval Chronicle, 4, 429-430.
185 The Naval Chronicle, 4 (1800), 430; see also The Times, 11 November 1800 and The Morning Chronicle, 11 November 1800.
188 The Times, 11 November 1800.
189 The Times, 17, 18, 19, 25 and 29 November, 3 and 4 December; The Morning Chronicle, 17, 20 and 25 November, 1, 2, 3, 10, 20 and 24 December.
yours burns with full Vigour', to which Nelson replies: 'Yes, yes. I'll give you such a Smoke! I'll pour a whole broad side into you'. Even The Morning Chronicle, which prided itself on a 'high standard of propriety', poked fun at the notorious couple. It remarked ironically that 'The heroes of the sock and buskin [symbols of comedy and tragedy] are great admirers of the gallant Lord Nelson'. Suggesting Lady Hamilton was pregnant the text went on: 'Without underrating his past services to the nation, they are of opinion he may yet confer great benefits! The phrase of “being in the straw” [reference to a woman in childbirth] may now be applied in a double sense to our literary females, and the “straw will be laid” whether the object be a boy or a book in sheets!'. Finally The Morning Chronicle concluded 'The new Adultery Bill' could not be expected soon. In this gossipy mood the famous opposition newspaper even forgot to remind the public of Nelson’s actions in the Bay of Naples eighteen months earlier.

The press also traced the couple on their way to the south-west of England - with the patient husband. It was reported how enthusiastically Nelson was welcomed by the populace, when he came to Salisbury to receive the freedom of that city, and the Gentleman's Magazine printed a detailed report about how Nelson and the Hamiltons had spent their Christmas-holiday as guests of William Beckford, at Fonthill.

All in all Nelson’s impressive public image was not tarnished by these reports. His role in the Bay of Naples was never generally discussed and not even thoroughly examined. His entanglement with Lady Hamilton had created gossip, but no open criticism.

---

190 George, vii, no. 9550. The caricature is given in appendix A, plate 3.
191 Christie, p. 343.
192 The Morning Chronicle, 19 November 1800; Jack Russell, Nelson and the Hamiltons (first published 1969; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972) [hereafter: J. Russell], pp. 219-221 claims that The Morning Post, 1 December 1800, alluded to Lady Hamilton's pregnancy with the remark: 'Lady Hamilton has arrived in the very nick of time in this country'.
V

Nelson's public Image during the last years of his life

Prior to the battle of Trafalgar, which elevated his reputation to quite mythic proportions, Nelson's public image remained much as it had been established by his great victory at the battle of the Nile. The battle of Copenhagen failed to gain him the kind of public attention achieved by the victory at the battle of the Nile. As second-in-command in the Baltic Nelson had attacked the Danish fleet before Copenhagen to break the 'Armed Neutrality' formed by Denmark, Sweden and Russia. When his superior (Sir Hyde Parker), worried about the outcome of the battle, had recalled Nelson, the latter had turned his blind eye to the order. Instead he had written later a note ‘to the brothers of Englishmen, the Danes’ proposing to cease hostilities, to which the Danes had agreed. In the following days Nelson had negotiated an armistice with Denmark. The news of the battle was followed, one day later, by the news of the death of Czar Paul I who had been - unlike his son and successor - hostile to Britain. The Times remarked: ‘Had the news of the Emperor Paul’s death reached this place a few days sooner, it is highly probable that the bloody action fought near Copenhagen, would not have taken place’. Apart from this impression that the battle had been unnecessary, there was probably a feeling of uneasiness at fighting against Denmark (rather than republican France) at all. The Gentleman’s Magazine dedicated less space to its report about the battle than it had dedicated to the description of Nelson’s Christmas holiday at Fonthill. There were only a few short poems and songs published on the occasion. One of these songs reflected the dislike of fighting against Denmark:

Brave Nelson was by Parker sent
To say if Danes would friendly meet,
No more to fight was his intent.

195 The Times, 17 April 1801; The Times had reprinted the London Gazette of 15 April 1801 about the Battle of Copenhagen on 16 April 1801.
196 Gentleman’s Magazine, 71 (1801), 363 (the description of Nelson’s Christmas holiday had covered five pages and it had been illustrated).
197 Naval Chronicle, 5 (1801), 426; and Bennett, p. 255 (quoting from The Scots Magazine, 63, May 1801, 350).
198 Naval Songs and Ballads, pp. 290-295, 295-296 and 296-297; Anon. [an officer of distinguished rank], A New Song on the Glorious Defeat of the Danish Fleet off Copenhagen ..., RNM, on display; and NMM, 214 G+H.
199 Anon., The Danish Expedition (Broderip and Wilkinson: London, [n. d.]).
The lack of interest in the battle of Copenhagen is also reflected in the scarcity of items commemorating it. A privately issued medal, a watch, a glass-picture and a service of creamware pottery, adorned with oakleaves, an anchor and the date of the battle of the 'Baltic', seem to have been the only items to commemorate the event. Cheaper pottery or enamelled boxes were not produced and no caricatures celebrated the victory. There was only one print published soon after the news had reached Britain and another was published a year later (i.e. in 1802). Yet in comparison, new prints of the battle of the Nile were still being published as late as 1803.

The fact that Nelson had ended the battle with his letter to 'The brothers of Englishmen', instead of delivering a crushing defeat of the Danes (like that of the French at the Nile), gave commentators the opportunity to doubt whether the British fleet had been victorious at all. But there were also reports that showed Nelson in a favourable light. The Times informed its readers that Sir Hyde Parker was recalled from his post and Nelson himself appointed commander-in-chief in the Baltic in his place. The article added that it was 'confidently mentioned there was some misapprehension about signals on the 2d of April, which proved rather fortunate than otherwise'. The Naval Chronicle printed - among other news about the Baltic campaign - a long letter by a seaman who described how when meeting Nelson he had been impressed by 'the singular and unbounded zeal of this truly great man'.

---

200 May, p. 82 and 89.  
201 McCarthy, p. 65 (with illustration).  
202 Fairburn’s Plan of Parker and Nelson’s Victory before Copenhagen (published 22 April 1801), on display in the NMM.  
203 Walker, p. 250 (a plan of the Battle of Copenhagen, combined with a portrait of Nelson, after de Koster).  
204 NMM, PAH 5670 ('Victors of the Nile', published 1803); and RNM, 75/119 (etching of a scene at the Battle of the Nile, by Fittler, 1803).  
205 The Danish admiral at the Battle of Copenhagen argued thus (Naval Chronicle, 5 (1801), 342. This has remained controversial. In a recent study a Danish historian has pointed out: 'If victory is understood to mean the opponent was defeated, then Nelson had his victory when he sent his letter. But ... until the Deep was completely cleared of all Danish vessels, he had not completed the task he had undertaken ... If a person's motives for action are the articulate manifestation of what is uppermost in his mind, then Nelson's motive was undoubtedly humanity ... But ... all Nelson's professional instincts told him to put an end to the battle and get his ships out of the king's Deep while the going was good'; see: Ole Feldbak, The Battle of Copenhagen 1801. Nelson and the Danes (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Leo Cooper, 2002), pp. 195, 197.  
206 The Times, 1 May 1801.  
207 Naval Chronicle, 5 (1801), 452.
Thus, the Baltic campaign at least confirmed Nelson’s fame as a warrior. In fact, he was welcomed back home ‘with the most enthusiastic demonstrations of joy - ... bells ringing, colours flying &c. His Lordship immediately on his landing went to the Hospital, to visit the brave fellows under cure there, who were wounded in the battle off Copenhagen - a circumstance which gave infinite satisfaction to the crowd, who hailed his return’. 208

Backed by such strong popular acclaim, Nelson’s image helped to restore public confidence in the government and in its ability to repel or even prevent a French invasion. The Admiralty consequently appointed him to the command of the naval forces in the Channel which were intended to protect England against a French invasion. The Times closely followed Nelson’s movements in the Channel 209 and observed that ‘The public confidence has revived in no inconsiderable degree, since Lord Nelson’s appointment, and people justly look forward to the destruction of the enemy’s armada, instead of an invasion of our own shores’. 210 After a first attack on the French invasion force at Boulogne The Morning Chronicle vented some doubts about the usefulness of such an attack, 211 but it did praise Nelson’s personal dedication in securing Britain against invasion 212 and a week later it joined in the generally held opinion that favoured an attack on Boulogne. The fact that the attacks on Boulogne failed did not seriously damage Nelson’s reputation. Nelson ‘with that humanity which has characterized his naval career’ was reported to have ‘paid frequent visits to the wounded 213 and a song about the fate of the wounded sailors at Boulogne circulated. 214 No public blame seems to have been attached to Nelson’s failure.

The interest of the general public in naval achievements slackened in the joy brought about by the Peace of Amiens. A clear indicator of this phenomenon was that the idea of a naval monument was abandoned. In reaction to the battle of the Nile a committee had been ‘formed in 1799, headed by the Duke of Clarence [a son

208 The Times, 1 July 1801.
209 The Times, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 and 18 August 1801.
210 The Times, 1 August 1801.
211 The Morning Chronicle, 12 August 1801.
212 The Morning Chronicle, 11 August 1801.
213 The Morning Chronicle, 20 August 1801.
214 Naval Songs and Ballads, 297-298; and a slightly different version: Real Sailor Songs, 17.
of George III, later William IV], for raising a "naval pillar or monument" and subscriptions had been collected. There had been plans to build a complex of streets (named after famous admirals) around the monument. But this fantastic project vanished in a controversy about the form of the monument - Flaxman favoured 'a colossal statue of Britannia', whereas Dufour 'pleaded for a monument of Architecture'. The dispute became the subject of a 'musical entertainment' and a caricature and the whole project to build a monument was finally dropped.

Although on a lesser scale, prints of the battle of the Nile and portrait-engravings of Nelson were still produced, however.

In the peaceful atmosphere of 1802 Nelson decided to accompany Sir William and Lady Hamilton on a trip to Wales. This journey had the effect of creating publicity for Nelson, since he was constantly at the centre of attention. The route was even extended, because some towns desired to be visited by the famous admiral on his tour. Several towns presented him with their freedom and he was made an honorary doctor of law at Oxford University. Wherever he went 'the multitude ... welcomed him with the most friendly acclamations', 'a great concourse of people assembled, who hailed his approach with heartfelt acclamation' or he received 'grateful plaudits of the numerous admiring spectators who lined the streets and the windows of the houses'. The crowds regularly took the horses from

215 George, vii, no. 9513.
216 See for example: The Morning Chronicle, 3 and 16 August and 14 October 1799.
217 The Morning Chronicle, 26 August 1799.
218 George, vii, no. 9513 (the musical entertainment was by the younger Dibden, The Naval Pillar, or Britannia Triumphant, performed at Covent Garden on 7 October 1799, the caricature was published on 1 February 1800); the Gentleman's Magazine reported about a 'Plan for a Temple in Honour of Naval Victories... by Blakeney', 70 (1800), 409.
219 Walker, pp. 250 and 259.
220 Berrow's Worcester Journal, 26 August 1802 ('A deputation of the Mayor and Corporation of Hereford waited on Lord Nelson at Rudhall, to request he would honour that city with his presence ...'); Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 30 August 1802 ('An invitation ... from the High and Low Bailiff, which was sent to his Lordship previously to its being known that he had declined passing through the town, will, we hope, induce him to alter his determination and gratify our fellow-townsmen by the honour of a visit').
221 Jackson's Oxford Journal, 24 July 1802 (Oxford); The Times, 13 August 1802 (Haverfordwest); Berrow's Worcester Journal, 29 July 1802 (Hereford); Berrow's Worcester Journal, 2 September 1802 (Worcester); and The Coventry Mercury, 6 September 1802 (Warwick).
222 Jackson's Oxford Journal, 24 July 1802; and The Times, 7 and 12 August 1802.
223 Gloucester Journal, 26 July 1802; and The Times, 31 July 1802.
224 Berrow's Worcester Journal, 2 September 1802 (reporting about Nelson's arrival in other places: 'affectionate testimonies of respect' ... 'many thousands of people assembled ... and cheered the victorious Hero with incessant Huzzas'); see also Berrow's Worcester Journal, 29 July ('acclamations
Nelson's carriage and pulled it through the town. In Birmingham they even waited until Nelson had left the theatre at about midnight, to pull his carriage back to his hotel. The enthusiastic reception was often accompanied by the ringing of church bells, in Birmingham even during 'most of the day', and sometimes by firing of cannons. At different stages of the tour Nelson was welcomed and accompanied by the militia, a triumphal arch was erected for him, a band of music played, 'hundreds of lighted torches' were positioned along the streets through which he went at night or flowers were strewn in his path. Nelson, in return, showed interest in the places he visited and spread the effects of his publicity to local manufacturers. His stays in Worcester and Birmingham seem to have been wholly dedicated to factories and shops that were consequently mentioned in the local press.

Although the press-coverage of Nelson's tour mainly dealt with how he was welcomed and celebrated, there were also reports about him personally. When he was given the freedom of a town or city the press sometimes informed the public about how he had replied. In all these speeches Nelson seems to have stressed that 'the merit ascribed to him, however, was more particularly due to the brave men who

---

225 The Coventry Mercury, 6 September 1802; further examples in The Times, 13 and 20 August 1802; Berrow's Worcester Journal, 26 August and 2 September 1802; and Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 6 September 1802.
226 The Coventry Mercury, 6 September 1802; Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 6 September 1802, reported that the church bells rang 'till night'; examples of ringing the bells in other towns can be found in Gloucester Journal, 26 July 1802; Berrow's Worcester Journal, 29 July and 2 September 1802.
227 Berrow's Worcester Journal, 2 September 1802.
228 The Times, 13 August 1802.
229 Berrow's Worcester Journal, 26 August (in Ross-on-Wye) and 2 September 1802 (in Worcester).
230 Berrow's Worcester Journal, 2 September 1802; and Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 6 September 1802.
231 The Coventry Mercury, 6 September 1802.
232 He usually visited the local cathedral or church and public buildings, such as prisons and schools; see: Gloucester Journal, 26 July 1802; Berrow's Worcester Journal, 26 August and 2 September 1802; The Coventry Mercury, 6 September 1802; Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 6 September 1802.
233 Berrow's Worcester Journal, 2 September 1802; and Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 6 September 1802.
had been placed under his orders; it was to them the country was indebted'.

He also made clear that he was ready to fight for his country, whenever necessary: 'His future conduct, he said, would best evince his gratitude for the distinguished honours conferred upon him; the remaining period of his life should be devoted to the service of his King and country, and while he had a limb left, that limb should if necessary, be cheerfully sacrificed in their defence'. He showed his 'gratitude' for all the celebrations also to 'the exulting crowd by repeatedly appearing at the window, and bowing to them with the most graceful condescension'.

The Times concluded afterwards: 'If, on the one hand, the country owed his Lordship a large share of gratitude for the brilliant services he performed during the war, no man ever had it repaid in a more ample degree'. The fact that Nelson accompanied his lover and her husband seems not to have disturbed the frenzy about his person.

When war with France broke out again, Nelson was given the command of the fleet in the Mediterranean. His image as an effective tool of Britain's defence against France was now settled. Caricatures used his name in that sense. One, for example, showed George III hunting a fox (representing Napoleon) with dogs, one of which had 'Nelson' inscribed on its collar. One reason why public attention focused on him may have been that he was the only one of the four admirals, who had been successful in battle in the 1790s, who was still at sea. Nelson appeared as an experienced and revered admiral in whose glory others wanted to share. His popularity as a fine admiral remained strong even when the French fleet - after two years of blockade - managed to escape and Nelson chased it unsuccessfully through the Mediterranean and across the Atlantic. The public seemed to ignore the fact that

235 Berrow's Worcester Journal, 2 September 1802; see also Aris's Birmingham Gazette, 6 September 1802.
236 The Times, 7 September 1802.
237 George, viii, no. 10039 (published 20 July 1803); see also no. 10065 (published 13 August 1803, showing a veteran telling a 'young sailor' to remember Nelson), 10123 (published 17 November 1803, showing a bank-note promising to pay the 'Bearer, two pence when the Gallic Flag shall triumph over the British ... for ... Nelson & Co'), 10253 (published 18 June 1804, showing a lady wearing a miniature of Nelson) and 10276 (published 3 September 1804, giving a 'Loyalists Alphabet' that includes 'Noble Nelson' with a portrait for the letter N).
238 Howe had died in 1799 and Duncan in 1804; and St. Vincent worked at the Admiralty.
239 The Times, 5 June 1805, prints a letter of a seaman who entertains 'the hope of joining Lord Nelson, and that he will keep us with him, that we may share in his glory'.

35
Nelson had not fought the combined French-Spanish fleet. Instead, he was praised in
the press and on prints for having dared to chase a fleet of seventeen ships-of-the-line
with just ten ships-of-the-line. The Times rejoiced at the simple fact that Nelson
was back in Europe and 'as soon as Lord Nelson's flag was descried at Spithead,
the ramparts, and every place which could command a view of the entrance of the
harbour, were crowded with spectators. As he approached the shore, he was saluted
with loud and reiterated huzzas, as enthusiastic and sincere as if he had returned
crowned with a third great naval victory'. The inhabitants of London that 'were
yesterday [i.e. 20 August 1805] waiting in thousands about the Admiralty to give him
a truly British reception' persevered in vain. But when Nelson arrived a day later,
'he was recognized, and the concourse of persons continually increasing as he passed
along the Strand, was extremely numerous'. 'People ... [were] anxious to see
him' and the public seems not to have cared that he lived openly with the now
widowed Lady Hamilton. When he finally left England, he was 'attended by a vast
number of people' in Portsmouth.

VI
Conclusion

Before the battle of Trafalgar two major factors had influenced the creation of
Nelson's public image. On the one hand, public opinion desperately needed a hero to
defend Britain against the power of France. On the other hand, Nelson appeared the
only commander who possessed the qualities to fit into this role. His astonishing
victory at the battle of the Nile had undoubtedly left a deep impression on public
opinion. This reputation had not been seriously tarnished by his actions at Naples or
his involvement with Lady Hamilton. Nelson's success at Copenhagen as well as his
perseverance in the Channel and during the blockade of Toulon reinforced his

240 The Times, 10 July 1805; George, viii, no. 10422 (published in July 1805, 'The Glorious Pursuit of
Ten against Seventeen') and 10423 (published around July 1805).
241 The Times, 8 August 1805.
242 The Times, 20 August 1805.
243 The Times, 21 August 1805.
244 The Times, 22 August 1805.
245 The Times, 24 August 1805.
246 The Times, 16 September 1805.
reputation for patriotism, valour and leadership. These characteristics were complemented by Nelson’s acknowledged piety, support for his officers and humanity to his men. This image was so strong that it prohibited any serious criticism of Nelson’s actions. It also prevented a deep insight into Nelson’s more complex character. The public and the press seem to have had little interest in enquiring into his handling of complicated situations (such as Naples and Copenhagen) or into his independent way of acting that meant he did not always stick to orders (such as at the battles of Cape St. Vincent and Copenhagen). His personality was thus smoothed according to the needs of the day and no biographies of Nelson were published in the years before his death at Trafalgar in 1805 to inquire further into his personality. The following examination of Nelson as an image and an icon investigates how public views developed after his death at Trafalgar.
PART I
Inquiry into Nelson’s Deeds and Personality in the 200 Years after His Death

CHAPTER ONE
Biographies of Nelson

In order to launch into the examination of the image of Nelson as developed by historians after his death at Trafalgar, this chapter presents an overview of the development of biographies of Nelson in their historic and literary context over the last two hundred years. This examination of the background and characteristics of these biographies will be divided into two sections: from the death of Nelson to the First World War and modern biographies since 1918. Both sections will deal first with the general developments of biography writing and then explore how these are reflected in the particular biographies about Nelson. This chapter provides a background to the more detailed analysis in later chapters of how certain core elements of Nelson’s life have been treated over the last two hundred years.

I
Biographies until the First World War

The nineteenth century is generally regarded as the period of hero-worship. Since Admiral Nelson can clearly be seen as a, if not the, national hero of Britain and since he died so gloriously at the beginning of the great century of hero-worship, one might take it for granted that he was one of those whose memory was cherished most by the hero-worshipping Victorians. The following examination will show, first, that this was not so and, second, that the reason for his not being admired for most of the nineteenth century was at least partly due to the cult of hero-worship itself. In order to be able to assess the impact of this cult of hero-worship on the biographies of Nelson, it is necessary to
examine the development of the notion of the hero and of ideas on the writing of biographies in general.

The concept of heroism was relatively underdeveloped in the eighteenth century. Johnson defined the hero in his dictionary simply as 'a man eminent for bravery' and heroes seem to have played a minor role in eighteenth-century biographies. Instead of presenting brave men as exemplars, writers then were more interested in simply satisfying curiosity. Thus, popular biography focused on the lives of condemned criminals or theatrical personalities, rather than on military of naval heroes. When dealing with famous personalities, the biographer was more or less free to present his subject as he liked. Although Boswell's *Life of Johnson* aroused some criticism, because it brought previously unknown weaknesses of Johnson to light, it was welcomed at the same time for being so true to life. A critic remarked 'Give us all; suppress nothing'. After all, according to Boswell, Johnson himself had declared: 'If a man is to write a Panegyrick, he may keep vices out of sight; but if he professes to write A Life, he must represent it really as it was.' Possible negative aspects would, so Johnson claimed, 'produce an instructive caution' and help a reader to avoid these vices.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the situation, with regard to both, the subjects of biographies and the directness with which these subjects were portrayed, changed. The public during the Napoleonic wars, was much more concerned about its own security and consequently more interested in possible heroes to defend it. In this serious situation Evangelicalism had a particular appeal and consequently influenced the writing of biographies. The subjects of biographies were now no longer amusing or exciting characters, but exemplary people who were to be admired and emulated.

---

4 Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, quoted in Clifford, p. 82.
enhance their dignity less favourable aspects of their lives were suppressed. As a result of this focus on morals and virtue, biographies tended to become dull or even tedious. This effect was further intensified by the way in which these biographies were written, since they were usually merely compilations of anecdotes and letters. In reaction, critics began to demand that more care should be taken in the composition of biographies. Such an improvement in style could be achieved by a more narrative approach and greater enthusiasm for its subject. One of the most striking results of this development was that the subject of a biography had to be a positive character who could serve as a moral pattern for others and with whom readers were expected to identify.

At this stage the works of Thomas Carlyle influenced developments. In a review of a new edition of Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*, he maintained that the main task of a biographer was to represent not only a person, but also that person’s struggle with the external world. Carlyle called it a ‘battle’ between the internal and the external. He thus refocused biography as a study of the role of man in society and put emphasis on the importance of courage as the essential characteristic to enable men to fight this battle of life. A few years later Carlyle went on to develop these elements in his lectures *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History*. Instead of bothering about ordinary men’s ‘battles’ of life, he examined only the chosen few, who drove on history with a courage that was beyond ordinary mortals.

In Carlyle’s view the hero had an historic mission that reminds one of religious ideas about predestination: ‘Great men are the inspired (speaking and acting) Texts of that divine book of revelations, whereof a Chapter is completed from epoch to epoch, and by some named history’. Great men were seen as divine instruments of

---

6 Reed, pp. 38, 39; C. I. Hamilton, p. 382.
7 Reed, p. 87; C. I. Hamilton, p. 382.
8 Reed, p. 80.
9 Reed, p. 69.
10 [Thomas Carlyle], ‘Biography’, *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country*, 5 (1832), 253-60, at 254 and 258.
11 Reed, pp. 81 and 82.
13 Houghton, p. 314, quoting from Carlyle’s *Sator Resartus*, Bk. 2, chap. 8, p. 177.
providence, invested with a certain authority that demanded unconditional obedience.\textsuperscript{15} For the rest of mankind it only remained to find those heroes to be followed.

The hero himself, as a person advancing the development of history, would be a man of action who would be expected to be a patriot, ready for sacrifice, self-repression and discipline.\textsuperscript{16} Carlyle's ideal hero was a combination of soldier and statesman.\textsuperscript{17} In the course of his mission the hero would be involved in what one author has described as 'the equivocations, the compromises, and the dirt of actual life',\textsuperscript{18} but only as they lay along his predestined historic path. Otherwise, he would be expected to have moral stature and to be able to master his passions.\textsuperscript{19} More than that, he had to possess manliness that would show itself in power, success and firmness and not in meekness or love.\textsuperscript{20}

Carlyle's ideals of a hero were readily adopted by other writers of the day\textsuperscript{21} and accepted by Victorian society in general. The mood of the day proved to be keen to absorb the concept of the hero. The tremendous nineteenth-century changes in social, technical and economic terms as well as the threat that natural science posed to religion created an anxiety and insecurity that predisposed the Victorians to dogmatism and the worship of force. The cult of the hero produced an immense outpouring of literature about heroic figures during the second half of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{22} The interest in famous men thus shifted over the nineteenth century from the simple moral hero to some kind of superman, who was meant to inspire lesser mortals.\textsuperscript{23}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Bentley, p. 35; see also generally for the Victorian Age: Houghton, p. 99.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Houghton, p. 325.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Houghton, p. 309.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Bentley, p. 39; for references about the man of action see: Bentley, p. 21 and Houghton, p. 110.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Houghton, pp. 316, 198.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Bentley, p. 50; see also Houghton, p. 201.
\item \textsuperscript{21} As, for example, Charles Kingsley and J. A. Froude; Carlyle has been merely claimed to have discovered the mood of the age (Bentley, p. 43).
\item \textsuperscript{22} See for example: Edwin Hodder, \textit{Heroes of Britain in Peace and War} (2 vols., London: Cassel, [1881]); this work went through several editions until the beginning of the twentieth century.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Houghton, pp. 311, 331.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
It remains to examine, how biographic literature about Nelson reacted to this cultural movement. Nelson seemed to fit well into the concept of a hero; his death at the battle of Trafalgar could be seen as an inspiring example of self-sacrifice. Moreover, since Carlyle's more elaborate ideas of the hero as a statesman were not yet developed, Nelson could easily be portrayed as a hero to be emulated. Indeed, early biographies often present his life as a pattern to be followed.\(^{24}\) One author suggested that "some official, or national institution were created, purposely to record the Biography of those contemporaries who have distinguished themselves in their respective professions."\(^{25}\) Several biographers referred to the Parallel Lives of Plutarch,\(^{26}\) thus, not only justifying biography writing as a way of writing history, but also making it appear that lives can be compared, if not copied. Nelson was frequently compared to heroes of antiquity\(^{27}\) and most biographies present him as an example to future generations.\(^{28}\) While the majority of authors placed him within an historic context, only a few discovered traces of


uniqueness in Nelson. 29 Some regarded him as 'an instrument chosen by ... God'. 30 Such a description appeared as an expression of admiration rather than a statement that was supposed to make Nelson stand outside his contemporary context. The contents of the early biographies about Nelson therefore still betray some of its eighteenth-century heritage.

Most of the masses of biographies that poured onto the market in the months and years after October 1805 were very much the product of the fashion of the day. This meant that they were nothing but compilations of anecdotes and letters. Assembling letters, as well as copying from journals and newspapers, one author proudly stated: 'No pains have been spared to render the performance as complete as possible'. 31 This kind of biography culminated in a two-volume quarto biography weighing twenty-one pounds of which Robert Southey said: 'it is ill-proportioned, confused, unsatisfactory in some of the most important parts, and so imperfect that a supplement is hinted at, though it is the bulkiest work of its kind that has been seen in modern times'. 32 Consequently, Southey himself was commissioned to write a biography of Nelson. In this work he presented a narrative and was the first to interpret Nelson's life, although, at the same time he drew heavily on the sources he had criticized so harshly,

29 [Edward Orme and] Francis William Blagdon, Orme's Graphic History of the Life, Exploits, and Death of Horatio Nelson (London: Edward Orme, 1806) [hereafter: Orme/Blagdon], p. 5: 'the biographer searches in vain in ancient or modern history, for a warrior, whose exertions in defence of his country will not be depreciated by comparison with ... Nelson', and p. 31: 'succeeding heroes can only gaze with awe and admiration, without ever expecting to attain its [Nelson's name's] vast elevation'; Clarke and M'Arthur, i, 122: Nelson's rise is 'almost without parallel in history'.

30 J. White, p. ix; similarly: [Anon.], The Life of Admiral Lord Nelson, Baron of the Nile, &c. (Birmingham: [n. pub., printer: T. Martin, c. 1805]) [hereafter: Anon. (Martin)], p. 46; Jones, p. 120; Charnock, p. 353; Clarke, p. ix.


sometimes copying Nelson’s wording literally into his story.\(^{33}\) In order to enliven his account Southey used passages from Nelson’s letters for quotations of supposed oral speech.\(^{34}\) He remained conventional, however, in sticking to the ideal of creating an exemplar life and he announced in the preface of his biography: ‘Many lives of Nelson have been written: one is yet wanting, clear and concise enough to become a manual for the young sailor, which he may carry about with him, till he has treasured up the example in his memory and in his heart’.\(^{35}\) To be an example for the young sailor, an imperfect life seems to have been considered sufficient, because Southey himself declared: ‘The time is not yet come when the life of our great Nelson can be fully and faithfully related’.\(^{36}\)

Southey’s biography would have sold better, if others had shown the same caution in dealing with Nelson’s private life. One year after his biography was first published an anonymous editor published, in 1814, *The Letters of Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton*.\(^{37}\) This publication caused a scandal, whose impact on the image of Nelson can hardly be overestimated. Contemporary reviewers seemed particularly to dislike the idea that they might have to give up Nelson as an exemplary hero and, in this vein, the *Edinburgh Review* commented:

> it is to be feared that the knowledge of his faults sooths many a conscience ... The community may cease to despise, with such undivided contempt, as it now does, the vile and degraded wretch, who maltreats her whom he has taken for better and for worse, and vowed to protect for life.

> The conduct most befitting a coward, an effeminate and besotted tyrant,

---

\(^{33}\) Robert Southey, *The Life of Nelson* (2 vols., London: John Murray, 1813) [hereafter: Southey (1813)], i, 51 (compare with: Clarke and M’Arthur, i, 62), i, 31 (compare with: Clarke and M’Arthur, i, 75-77), i, 63-65 (compare with: Clarke and M’Arthur, i, 205), and many other instances; J. Harrison, for example: i, 84 (using the same letter as Southey, i, 31, which had before been printed in: Charnock, appendix, pp. 32-35) used the same technique.

\(^{34}\) Southey (1813), i, 58, 158.

\(^{35}\) Southey (1813), i, 1.

\(^{36}\) Southey (1810), 220.

may no longer call forth the unanimous execration of Englishmen, when they vaguely hear it said, that ‘Nelson did so’. 38

By now biographic ideals were obviously far removed from Johnson’s relaxed attitude that a bad example would at least ‘produce an instructive caution’. Instead, another reviewer proposed that to maintain Nelson’s image his letters to Lady Hamilton should have been suppressed. 39 But the damage was done and a former superior of Nelson’s remarked in private: ‘It will reflect eternal disgrace upon the character of Lord Nelson, which will ultimately be stripped of everything but animal courage, of which he certainly had an abundant share’. 40

The effect of the publication of some of Nelson’s letters to Lady Hamilton in 1814 was further enhanced by the anonymous publication, barely a year later, of a biography of Lady Hamilton that reads in great parts more like a moral treatise than a biography. Supposedly setting out a warning through bad example, the biography went well beyond what Johnson might have regarded as an instructive lesson. Instead it unfolded as a vicious diatribe, warning against the dangers of trying to rise above one’s social rank. 41

In such a hostile climate Nelson as a biographical subject was simply dropped by respectable authors. There were no more publications on Nelson for more than twenty

---

38 Review in Edinburgh Review, 23 (1814), 404, quoted in Reed, pp. 56, 56.
39 Review in Quarterly Review, 11 (1814), 73, quoted in Reed, pp. 56, 57.
40 Earl St. Vincent, quoted in Michael Nash, ‘Building a Nelson Library’, in The Nelson Companion, ed. Colin White (Annapolis, Maryland: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1995), pp. 177-97, p. 184. In another letter, also written shortly after the publication of some of Nelson’s letters to Lady Hamilton in 1814 and quoted in Terry Coleman, Nelson. The Man and the Legend (first edition: London: Bloomsbury, 2001; New and Revised Edition: London: Bloomsbury, 2002) [hereafter: Coleman], p. 343, Earl St. Vincent expressed himself similarly: ‘Animal courage was the sole merit of Lord Nelson, his private character most disgraceful in every sense of the word’. The publication of the letters sent out such shockwaves that their contents was exaggerated: Lady Shelley thought that there was only one of ‘Nelson’s captains … not abused in the letters of Lady Hamilton’, whereas in fact there was none of his captains criticized or ‘abused’ in the letters (rather members of the royal family and others); see: The Diary of Frances Lady Shelley 1787-1817, ed. Richard Edgcumbe (2 vols., London: John Murray, 1912, 1913), i, 77. 41 [Anon.], Memoirs of Lady Hamilton; with Illustrative Anecdotes of Many of Her Most Particular Friends and Distinguished Contemporaries (2nd edition, London: Henry Colburn, 1815; the first edition appeared earlier in the same year) [hereafter: Memoirs of Lady Hamilton], particularly pp. iii-vi, 1-16, 29, 33, 35, 174-75; Edward Pellham Brenton, The Naval History of Great Britain from the Year MDCCCLXXXIII to MDCCCXXII (5 vols., London: C Rice, 1823) [hereafter: Brenton], ii, 484, also gave Lady Hamilton as a negative example and, iii, 460, focused on Nelson’s professional career as a positive example.
years, and then only under the pseudonym ‘The Old Sailor’. While the author appeared hesitant to associate his name with that of disgraced Nelson, the choice of his pseudonym, ‘The Old Sailor’, betrays a desire to revive interest in Nelson as a naval hero. The author, indeed, wanted to present Nelson as a ‘splendid example ... [for] the young officer’. 42 Several authors followed with smaller publications, all of them either navy men or acquaintances of Nelson, or both. 43 One of them stated that he was encouraged to publish his book by the renewed interest in Nelson, created by the plans to build a monument to Nelson on Trafalgar Square in London. 44 These works, although often interesting sources, were not of great literary quality.

The most impressive of them was the edition of The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson in seven volumes by Nicholas Harris Nicolas, a former naval lieutenant. Although his huge work ignored many letters to Lady Hamilton, 45 it was otherwise remarkable for its completeness, particularly in contrast to the Dispatches of ... the Duke of Wellington. 46 At that time minor biographies tried to interpret Nelson’s character and life according to the new standards for heroes. Authors approached the absolute Carlylean type of hero by remarking ‘It was as if nature had decreed, “there has been but

---


44 Drinkwater, pp. xi, xii; he even intended to contribute with his profits to the building of the Nelson monument, p. xii; for a further discussion of the building of this monument to Nelson see chapter III 2.

45 For details see appendix B.

46 The Dispatches of Field Marshall The Duke of Wellington, During His Various Campaigns from 1799 to 1818, ed. [John] Gurwood (12 vols., London: John Murray, 1834-1838). This difference between the publications of the Wellington and of the Nelson dispatches was also noted by the contemporaries: The Times, 10 December 1844: ‘The Wellington Despatches disclose the talent of the commander, the Nelson Letters lay open to the face of day the generous, frank, impetuous nature of the man’.
one Nelson, and there never shall be another!". To the ordinary mortals it merely remained to emulate Nelson 'in the humblest nook of social life'.

The massive edition of Nelson's letters seemed about to restore the study of Nelson to respectability, offering a well-researched basis for new biographies, when Thomas Joseph Pettigrew published a biography of Nelson which was based on the most comprehensive collection of Nelson's letters to Lady Hamilton that have ever been published. The claim, contained in this work, that Nelson's relationship with Lady Hamilton had been of a carnal nature, made Nelson morally unsuitable as an object for hero-worship. Admirers of Nelson were outraged and one of them judged that 'The publication of Mr. Pettigrew's life of Nelson ... was not only a superfluity, it was infinitely worse', because 'Letters written in his most unguarded moments, and under the seal of unbounded confidence have been recklessly submitted to the vulgar gaze to gratify the cupidity of their grovelling holders, and the morbid taste of thoughtless readers'. The same author also doubted the authenticity of Pettigrew's sources. In consequence, it took nearly forty years before Nelson's life was submitted to new scrutiny.

These forty years witnessed the popularization of Carlyle's ideas on heroes and hero-worship. Although publishers now started to put old biographies of Nelson — including those of Southey and 'The Old Sailor' — into print again, Nelson was not admitted into the Carlylean pantheon of heroes. Instead, a few rather simple biographies treated his life cautiously, for example, by focusing on Nelson's professional life only.

47 John Montmorency Tucker, The Life and Naval Memoirs of Lord Nelson Compiled from Original Documents and Other Authentic Sources (London: [n. pub., c. 1845]) [hereafter: Tucker], p. 448; similarly: G. Thompson, The Life of the Right Honourable Horatio Lord Viscount Nelson, Baron of the Nile, &c. (London: J. S. Pratt, 1843) [hereafter: Thompson], p. 5: 'in almost every quality which constitutes the accomplished commander ... no one has equalled Nelson, and no one can ever go beyond him'.

48 Tucker, p. v; also, p. vi: 'Each of us in our little circle may thus imitate the heroism of a Nelson'.


51 Allen, p. v, also, p. ix: 'The details of his home have been purposely excluded — the public have no right to pry too deeply into the sanctuary of private life, ... '; another rather simple biography of Nelson is:
A published lecture about Nelson was specifically addressed to the 'lower orders'. This class was also addressed in Samuel Smiles’ much published and much read book Self Help, in which he gave Nelson as an example of someone who had risen through the ranks.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Nelson was reclaimed as a pattern for naval officers in a new wave of publications, which may well be called ‘the second naval revival of Nelson’. It was initiated by one person: John Knox Laughton. Laughton had been a naval instructor and, in the course of this career, he had even been engaged in fighting. Trying to establish the importance of naval history, he believed that he had to establish Nelson as the most outstanding representative of Britain’s naval past. Initially working on his own, he was later joined by other naval historians who – according to Andrew Lambert’s recent study about the foundations of naval history – agreed that Nelson as ‘the great naval hero should be developed as the basis for naval education, a case study in professional development, leadership, sound doctrine and the exemplar of all that they valued about the Royal Navy’.

In this Carlylean spirit that sees a hero as the representative of a historic phenomenon, Captain A. T. Mahan wrote at the end of the nineteenth century his Life of Nelson with the significant subtitle The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain. This biography was far removed from Southey’s ‘manual for the young sailor, which he may carry about with him’. It represented instead a thorough study that was...
meant to establish Nelson as 'fortune's own favorite in his profession'. Throughout this biography Mahan saw his hero as a 'genius ... [separated] from his fellows by a chasm not to be bridged by human will'. He described what Carlyle called the 'battle of life': 'however harassed and distressed externally, the calmness of a clear insight and an unshaken purpose guided his footsteps, unwavering, in the path of duty'. Mahan also made clear that his hero represented the Navy he regarded so highly: 'The British Navy, in the slight person of its indomitable champion, was gradually rising to the appreciation of its own might, and gathering together its energies to endure single-handed that gigantic strife, with a spirit unequalled in its past history, glorious as that had often been'. Such expressions, however, should not detract from the honest and thorough approach Mahan took to his subject. In a positivist struggle for historic truth Mahan explored a great variety of primary sources and he delineated in his biography many details in order to illustrate Nelson's character. In the course of this examination he did not shrink back from criticizing Nelson. One of the major weaknesses Mahan perceived in Nelson was his affair with Lady Hamilton. As a moral author Mahan naturally severely disapproved of this affair and he did so in the strongest terms. In handling the affair, however, he went beyond imposing a late nineteenth-century moral judgement by asserting that Nelson himself was punished for his moral transgression in his lifetime: the affair, so Mahan concluded, 'wrecked the happiness of the man'.

This interpretation of Nelson's life enabled Mahan to incorporate this scandalous relationship into the image of the hero. A contemporary review of Mahan's biography

56 Mahan, Life, p. 80; see also pp. 225, 226.
57 Mahan Life, p. 107.
58 Mahan Life, p. 63.
59 Mahan Life, p. 207.
60 Jon Tetsuro Sumida, Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command. The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997) [hereafter: Sumida], pp. 36-39, gives detailed evidence for Mahan's thorough approach; Jordan (1998), 40, also refers to what Mahan criticized in Nelson, although he wrongly included Nelson's 'repudiation of Cardinal Ruffo's amnesty agreement with the Neapolitan republicans' - chapter II 4 examines the pains Mahan took to defend this measure; 41, he quotes Mahan: 'I have purposely omitted any attempt to summarize Nelson's character &c. thinking it more artistic to aim at producing the impression I seek by the gradual evolution of the book itself'.
61 Mahan Life, p. 268; see also pp. 58-59, 122, 268-69, 318, 330.
dedicated half of its space to the subject of happiness and answered the question ‘Are Great Men Happy?’ by stating: ‘As the mass of men judge happiness, great men are unhappy’. Lack of happiness was thus seen as one of the sufferings that heroes – more than other mortals – have to deal with in their ‘battle of life’. In this vein Lady Hamilton, by making Nelson unhappy, appears to have contributed to his greatness. Whether the general public adopted this view or not, Nelson was finally, after much effort, installed in the pantheon of Britain’s great heroes.

The image of Nelson as a hero, who sacrificed himself and thus inspired future generations, is summarized in a passage at the end of Mahan’s Life of Nelson. The book ends with the death of Nelson, followed by only one page of text. In a single paragraph the end of the battle of Trafalgar is described and then Mahan comments:

There, surrounded by the companions of his triumph, and by the trophies of his prowess, we leave our hero with his glory. Sharer of our mortal weakness, he has bequeathed to us a type of single-minded self-devotion that can never perish. As his funeral anthem proclaimed, while a nation mourned, ‘His body is buried in peace, but his Name liveth for evermore.’ Wars may cease, but the need for heroism shall not depart from the earth, while man remains man and evil exists to be redressed. Wherever danger has to be faced or duty to be done, at cost to self, men will draw inspiration from the name and deeds of Nelson.

Mahan’s biography of Nelson appeared definitive to contemporaries who often claimed that there was now no more research about Nelson to be done. Short biographies, which flooded the British market in the years leading up to the centenary of the Battle of Trafalgar, did not attempt to develop or offer new insights into the man. In their uncritical admiration of Nelson they can even be described as hagiographies. In the centenary year of Trafalgar one author even openly declared: ‘Every man has his

---

62 The Navy League Journal, no. 23 (May 1897), 8; White/Moorhouse, p. 4, also conclude that Nelson was unhappy.
63 Mahan Life, p. 742.
blemishes. ... Let us look upon the bright face of Nelson, and forget that there were stains in it. Above all, do not let us peer round corners in quest of blackness where there is so much light'. 65

In conclusion, it is possible to claim that the image of Nelson in the nineteenth century did not consist of admiration for or even devotion to a hero, but, on the contrary, that his image was severely affected by the high expectations the Victorians had of an ideal hero. As a consequence the image of Nelson was so controversial that any approach to his life was deeply influenced by the moral values of the day that did not allow for a balanced judgement of such a complex character. Rather than pure hero-worship, it was more the tension between the non-recognition of Nelson as a hero and the desire to make him a hero that created his image in the nineteenth century.

II

Biographies since the First World War

At the beginning of the twentieth century Siegmund Freud’s inquiry into the human psyche paved the way for a new approach to the assessment of personality, including that of historical figures. 66 Peter Gay points out that professional historians have not yet made sufficient use of this new tool and elaborate psychobiographies date only from the second half of the twentieth century. 67 The awareness of psychology, however, encouraged authors of biographies to address new questions about inner motives for, rather than personal interests in, certain actions. The new tendency to closely examine a person coincided with the desire to overcome nineteenth-century hero-worship.

The end of the First World War saw the outbreak of what Richard D. Altick has called the ‘Stracheyan Revolution’ in the writing of biographies. Altick remarked that:

65 S. Baring-Gould, A Memorial of Horatio Lord Nelson (London: Skeffington and Son, 1905) [hereafter: Baring-Gould], p. x; Philip H. Colomb, ‘Nelson’, in From Howard to Nelson: Twelve Sailors, ed. John Knox Laughton (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1899) [hereafter: Colomb, ‘Nelson’], pp. 435-68, p. 452, observes similarly: ‘But the blaze of light which springs up every time that Nelson is brought into contact with the enemies of his country dazzles us so that we must perforce half close our eyes as we look upon him’.
‘After [Lytton Strachey’s] *Eminent Victorians*, biography could never be the same’. Strachey had set out to challenge the Carlylean approach to biography writing and he achieved this aim. Strachey and other members of the Bloomsbury Group resented the exaggerated elevation of individual persons as representatives of a whole historical phenomenon, which in their view had marked the Victorian age. Instead of putting them back into their humbling context, Strachey set out to take the opposite path. By exaggerating the Victorian focus on isolated individuals he detached the lives he was describing from their historical context and exposed them to further scrutiny. In his programmatic preface to *Eminent Victorians* Strachey proclaimed:

> The history of the Victorian Age will never be written: we know too much about it. For ignorance is the first requisite of the historian – ignorance, which simplifies and clarifies, which selects and omits, with a placid perfection unattainable by the highest art. ... It is not by the direct method of a scrupulous narration that the explorer of the past can hope to depict that singular epoch. If he is wise, he will adopt a subtler strategy. He will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined. He will row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity. Guided by these considerations, I have written the ensuing studies. I have attempted, through the medium of biography, to present some Victorian visions to the modern eye ... in the lives of an ecclesiastic [Cardinal Manning], an educational authority [Dr. Arnold], a woman of action [Florence Nightingale], and a man of adventure [General Gordon], I

---


have sought to examine and elucidate certain fragments of
the truth which took my fancy and lay to my hand. 70
Strachey thus used the Carlylean framework of historical figures as representatives of
their epoch in order to dismantle the reputations of some central Victorian heroes and
one heroine. The basis of his approach was a twofold detachment: on the one hand a
detachment of the author from his subject; and on the other hand a detachment of the
subject from his/her historical context. 71 Instead of developing a character through facts,
Strachey aimed directly at the character. 72 In order to deliver his ‘attack’ on *Eminent
Victorians* Strachey made use of a whole arsenal of weapons. He chose at will those
details that served to support the image he wanted to present73 – as he himself had
outlined in his preface. In combination with some manipulation of historical detail74 this
technique enabled him to develop certain key characteristics, each of which he could
follow up throughout a biography as a kind of *leitmotif*. 75 These keys to the person he
was trying to expose76 were further stressed by his style which Altick described as
‘witty; it had epigrammatic terseness; it had a seemingly inexhaustible liveliness’. 77
Strachey’s most devastating weapon, however, was irony. 78

In the 1920s and 1930s many biographers tried to follow Strachey’s iconoclasm
using the means he had developed. It turned out that Strachey was not as easy to copy as
his easy style suggested. 79 Perhaps this was in part a question of the length of the
biographical study. Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* had after all been mere sketches and

70 Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (first published: May 1918; London: Chatto and Windus, 1938),
pp. vii-viii.
ii, 263.
76 The word ‘expose’ is the last in his preface to *Eminent Victorians* which ends, Strachey, p. ix: ‘To quote
the words of a Master – “Je n'impose rien; je ne propose rien; j'expose.”’
78 L. Marcus, p. 210, names ‘satire and irony’. Not surprisingly Strachey was criticized at the time: ‘Gosse
... though generally disposed to welcome it [the book *Eminent Victorians*], regretted Strachey’s lack of
it would be much more difficult to develop leitmotifs throughout a full-length biography. When Strachey himself attempted one such biography of Queen Victoria he showed more ability in dismantling certain persons around the queen than in tackling Victoria herself. Strachey had nevertheless lasting effect on British biography writing.

Strachey’s heritage encompassed authors, subjects and style of biographies. By neglecting the context and focusing on the person alone, biography writing was removed from the domain of specialists in the field – technical, historical or whatever – and opened up for any writer. The focus on character alone as the subject of a biography was additionally emphasized by the development of psychological biography. And in matters of style anybody who did not adopt Strachey’s marked pose of detachment, if possible by repeated use of irony, was in danger of being regarded as a hagiographer. Only Strachey’s clear move into the sphere of fiction was not maintained and later biographers returned to the historical sources, but only to continue the ‘ceaseless campaign to purge from the body of biographical knowledge all the myths, biases, unsupported assumptions, misinterpretations, and sheer mistakes that had crept past the unvigilant eyes of earlier biographers’. The primary motivation remained the iconoclastic dismantling of myths.

Only very recently has an author dared to speak out again for understanding of the person portrayed. Richard Holmes has maintained that the use of biography is to ‘teach us simply how to understand other people better’. In his view students should be studying biography in order ‘to exercise empathy, to enter imaginatively into another place, another time, another life’ – person, context and all.

It now needs to be analysed how these developments affected biographies about Nelson that have been published since the First World War. At first authors did not

---

80 Altick (1969), p. 287, quotes G. M. Trevelyan: ‘the most important event in the history of English biography in the twentieth century is not the portrait of Queen Victoria by Lytton Strachey, it is the conquest of Strachey by Queen Victoria’.
choose Nelson in their rush to copy Strachey and dismantle historical figures. The obvious reason for this may be that he was no Victorian. A secondary reason may be that prospective authors were still well aware that Nelson had never been an easy hero to the Victorians and that he had even been severely criticized at the height of the cult created about him around the time of the Trafalgar centenary. In 1929 'a professional novelist whose work consists in the study much more of human beings than of maritime affairs' produced a biography of Nelson, excusing his choice of subject with the interest Nelson's character held 'in comparison with, say, Wellington, whose brutally impersonal correspondence is a mine of military information but monotonous reading to the student of human nature'.

In 1930 the backlash against Victorian biographies finally also affected work on Nelson. The authors George Edinger and E. J. C. Neep set out in a slightly chaotic preface to show to the public that there is a myth around Nelson, so that they could justify what they regard as their de-mystification:

The vital facts of his life have been repeatedly omitted or distorted and the manner both of his living and of his dying have been successfully withheld. The whole English speaking world has been informed, with a wealth of meaningless but impressive technicalities, ... Four generations of patriotic readers have battled manfully with sloops, frigates, prams, cutters, brigs, polacres, snows, shallop, copper bottoms, ships of 98, 74's, 84's, and other cabbalastic [sic] numbers. ... the reader has completely forgotten to be interested in the man himself, which is, of course, exactly what the biographers intend[ed]. But,

---

84 Mainly for his involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan Revolution and his affair with Lady Hamilton, see chapters 4 and 5.
86 C. S. Forester, Nelson (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1929) [hereafter: Forester], p. 2.
above all else, a biographer must be amoral. Censorship — and particularly moral censorship — is in him the unpardonable sin. ... Because of the squeamishness of writers and readers alike the true story of Horatio Nelson has been left untold. ... Posterity has preferred to survey him through a telescope, and that telescope held to a blind eye. 88

What follows is not a thorough examination of the sources, but a narrative in which facts are juxtaposed arbitrarily and an effort is made to copy Strachey’s style without ever approaching its quality. The authors did not manage to keep up this level of irony and sarcasm throughout the whole book. Instead, they broke out in bouts of satire either when they dealt with elements of Nelson’s character and life that had already been criticized in the nineteenth century or when they let their imagination roam too freely. 89

Throughout the twentieth century satirical remarks that reflect the detachment of the authors from their subject can be found in biographies of Nelson. They appear usually in connection with Lady Hamilton or Nelson’s involvement in Naples. 90 Apart from such shows of distance from Nelson in the actual texts of the biographies, many authors explain their attitude to Nelson more directly. In 1931, Clennell Wilkinson described ‘the modern way’ of dealing with Nelson: ‘He should not be taken too desperately seriously’. 91 Sometimes authors are praised by the writers of the

88 Edinger/Neep, pp. 8-10.
89 Edinger/Neep, pp. 125-127 (Nelson’s self-publicity after the battle of St. Vincent — criticized before by J. Ralfe, The Naval Biography of Great Britain. Consisting of Historical Memoirs of those officers of the British Navy who distinguished themselves during the reign of his majesty George III (4 vols., London: Whitmore & Fenn, 1828), ii, 141-208 (Life of Nelson) [hereafter: Ralfe], at 163-67), 156-57 (assumption that Nelson paid Captain Berry to publish his Narrative about the battle of the Nile), 157-58 (Captain Foley’s role at the battle of the Nile — authors themselves quote sources of 1835), 176-89 (Lady Hamilton and Naples), 10, 173 and 315-21 (author’s views on Nelson’s death are discussed in chapter II 6).
90 W. M. James, The Durable Monument (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1948) [hereafter: W. M. James, Durable Monument], p. 238 (‘Nelson had entrusted the business of finding and furnishing a house entirely to Emma. ... but he would foot all the bills’); Russell Grenfell, Nelson the Sailor (London: Faber and Faber, [1949]) [hereafter: Grenfell (1949)], p. 122 (about Naples: ‘While thus absorbed in displaying his devotion to the principle of monarchy and his hatred of treason, ... ’); Frank Knight, The Hero. Vice-Admiral Horatio Viscount Nelson (London: Macdonald, 1969) [hereafter: F. Knight], p. 137 (‘Ready for the Kill’); Christopher Lloyd, Nelson and Sea Power (The English Universities Press: London, 1973) [hereafter: C. Lloyd], p. 101 (‘Hostilities had never been formally declared, so that Nelson was unwilling to massacre a defeated fleet: the Danes were not Frenchmen’); Harry Edginton, Nelson, The Hero ... and the Lover (London: Hamlyn Paperbacks, 1981) [hereafter: Edginton], p. 140 (‘Lesser rebels were shackled in dungeons’).
introductions to their works as no 'hagiographers'. In other cases they distance themselves from 'those Victorian authors' or 'the portrait of an imperial hero'. Several books about Nelson, published in the second half of the twentieth century, do not betray the influence of Strachey; but, after the publication of Edinger and Neep's biography, only one book, and that written by an elderly admiral and published in 1932, dared to describe Nelson as 'our best-loved hero'.

Apart from elements of style and the need to distance oneself from any suspicion of hero-worship, Strachey's heritage can also be observed in the tendency to focus on character, rather than historical context. The most outspoken example for this phenomenon is Christopher Hibbert's *Nelson. A Personal History*. The continuing attraction of dismantling myths by focusing on the person, not the historic setting, remains so powerful, that Terry Coleman's recent book attempted to stress the two aspects by dealing with *Nelson. The Man and the Legend*. Both authors, Hibbert and Coleman, show detachment from their subject by making use of satire and irony.

---

92 Foreword by Captain S. W. Roskill to Russell Grenfell, *Horatio Nelson* (reissued version of *Nelson the Sailor*; London: Faber and Faber, 1968) p. vii: 'Nelson has perhaps suffered more than most national heroes from the work of hagiographers; but Grenfell would never allow himself to be placed in such company' (on pp. viii-ix Roskill takes criticism that was already common at the end of the nineteenth century as proof for a non-hagiographic approach to Nelson); Nicholas Tracy, *Nelson's Battles. The Art of Victory in the Age of Sail* (London: Chatham Publishing, 1996) [hereafter: Tracy], p. 7 [editor's Foreword]: 'Dr. Tracy's book is not a 'mere biography', nor is it hagiography. ... His [Nelson's] premature death, during the battle which is often regarded as England's finest nineteenth-century hour, turned high competence and charisma into legend. In the years after his death, Nelson came to represent, to the general public, the general superiority, if not invincibility, of the Royal Navy and its men' – the writer has obviously no idea how much Nelson's image shifted during the nineteenth century.


94 Namely the books by Carola Oman, Oliver Warner and Tom Pocock.

95 Admiral Mark Kerr, *The Sailor's Nelson* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1932) [hereafter: Kerr], p. 7; similarly p. 21; see also p. 270: 'it will be as well to sum up the lessons that we should learn from Nelson's life, character, and work. First of all we should imitate his patriotism; thoroughness in work; and sense of duty. Next ...'. The author Kerr had already before the First World War taken part in the discussion about Nelson's tactics at Trafalgar.


97 Coleman, p. 7, proclaims that his book attempts 'to tease out the man from the legend'.

98 For example: Hibbert (1994), p. 145 ('The Almighty, to whose grace Nelson attributed his victory, ...'); Coleman, pp. 69 ('In a fight he was always fit, but he survived in an intermittently dying state throughout
follow the development towards the extended use of historical sources. They give notes, though they do not always examine their sources critically\(^9\) and Hibbert has the unfortunate habit of quoting from secondary sources (often giving the wrong page numbers), where printed primary sources are at hand, so that his notes are not always very helpful in tracing the original sources.\(^10\) Hibbert also takes quotations out of their historical context and he combines them in a way that is meant to create a certain impression,\(^11\) but he does not manage to provide any Stracheyan keys to Nelson's character. Coleman, by contrast, is clearer in this respect. His biography uses 'hasty' as a leitmotif of Nelson’s character and what he summarizes by calling Nelson 'a natural born predator'.\(^12\) The desire to demythologize the memory of Nelson has, ironically, restored the most mythical and least well examined elements of the nineteenth-century image of Nelson – Nelson’s dash.\(^13\)

A very recent biography by Edgar Vincent does attempt to understand Nelson’s personality and to deal with his professional context, thus getting closer to the aim that Richard Holme has set out for biographers. It is perhaps no coincidence that the author of this new Nelson biography is not a professional writer, as nearly all post-Stracheyan

---

\(^9\) Both use highly doubtful quotations as chapter headings: Hibbert (1994), p. 74 (the actual quotation is on p. 81, fn 16, taken from J. Harrison); Hibbert (1994), p. 137 ('Westminster Abbey' before the battle of the Nile; for the unreliability of this quotation see chapter II 3); Coleman, p. 9 (the actual quotation is on p 14, fn. 10, taken from Clarke and M'Arthur).


\(^12\) Coleman, ‘hasty’: pp. 89-90, 197; similar representations of Nelson: pp. 114, 115, 117, 190; ‘Natural Born Predator’ is the heading of the first chapter that gives a general introduction to *Nelson. The Man and the Legend*.

\(^13\) Demolished in its turn by Laughton, Mahan and Corbett around the year 1900, see above.
Nelson biographers have been, but a professional businessman who tries to assess Nelson's 'charisma' as a 'fighting commander'. It remains to be seen whether this book marks the end of the era of anti-Victorian biography writing about Nelson and whether, so long after Strachey published his *Eminent Victorians*, authors now feel free, simply to assess Nelson without needing to distance themselves from what they perceive as the hero-worshipping approach of the nineteenth century.

III
Conclusion

This overview of the development of biography writing since about 1800, and the impact on biographies about Nelson, is now followed by an examination of several specific aspects of Admiral Nelson's life and personality. These different aspects have been chosen because of their importance in biographies of Nelson and because they were subject to change or controversy over the last two hundred years. At the end of these examinations a concluding chapter assesses the overall development of the image of Nelson in written sources.

---

CHAPTER TWO
Nelson and His Acts of Disobedience

As we saw in the previous chapter, the image of Nelson shifted from being an example to be emulated to a person who was first singled out as a hero and then even further disconnected from his historical background by the desire to dismantle this heroic image. Consequently, it is worth examining, which arguments were used to advance the case for separating Nelson from his context. At the heart of this question lie Nelson's acts of disobedience which are dealt with in the main section of this chapter. The second section examines how Nelson was singled out as being exceptional, particularly by writers at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.

Acts of Disobedience

In two of his four most famous naval actions Nelson acted against his superior's orders. In the other two battles Nelson did not have any immediate superior nearby whose orders he could have disobeyed, and in both these cases he acted unconventionally. This, admittedly crude, summary of Nelson's role in his most famous naval actions has challenged his biographers to deal with the question of Nelson's disobedience.

Most of the very early biographies of Nelson did not approach the topic of his disobedience, because they focused simply on the results of Nelson's actions without considering how they had been achieved. Unaware of Nelson's unconventional decisions, some authors even praised him for his obedience to his superiors: 'Let those who desire to emulate (as every British seaman must) the glory acquired [at the battle of Trafalgar] ... repose the most perfect reliance in the courage, judgment, and skill of their superior officers, and let them aid the designs of these by uniform obedience and willing subordination'.

1 James Harrison went even further than merely asserting Nelson's

1 F. Lloyd, p. 63; similarly: J. White, p. viii: 'By long obedience he became qualified to command'; Anon. (Tegg), p. 35; and [Anon.], The Life of Horatio Viscount Nelson, Baron of the Nile, and Duke of Bronte,
obedience. In his biography, Nelson is said to have tried to counteract 'the principles of modern whiggism, which he did not think very conducive to the loyalty and subordination of a young British sailor'. His political message was said to have been summarized in the following set of rules given to a midshipman:

‘There are three things, young gentleman’, said he, ‘which you are constantly to bear in mind: first, you must always implicitly obey orders, without attempting to form any opinion of your own respecting their propriety; secondly, you must consider every man as your enemy who speaks ill of your king; and, thirdly, you must hate a Frenchman as you do the devil.’

This passage, fanciful as it was, was copied by Southey and gained wide currency thereafter through him. 3

To describe Nelson’s career as a pattern of obedient behaviour became increasingly difficult as more information about his acts of insubordination became known. There are four major cases that biographers have focused on after 1805. These acts of disobedience will be dealt with here in the chronological order in which Nelson committed them: Nelson contravening his superior’s order in applying the Navigation Laws in the West Indies in the 1780s; 4 Nelson wearing out of the line of battle without the permission of his superior at the battle of St. Vincent in 1797; Nelson disregarding his superior’s order to sail with the force under his command to join his commander-in-chief off Minorca, in 1799; and Nelson turning his blind eye to his superior’s order at the battle of Copenhagen in 1801.

The earliest and most prolonged of Nelson’s four important acts of disobedience was committed in the West Indies, when Nelson was a young captain in his mid-

---

2 J. Harrison, i, 102.
3 Southey (1813), i, 86-87; the passage was even copied by Mahan, Life, p. 86. The quotation can also be found, though without the passage about blind obedience, in: The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, ed. Angela Partington (4th ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) [hereafter: Partington], p. 491, no. 10.
4 Nelson counteracted another decision of the same superior, Admiral Hughes (about allowing a captain on half-pay to use a commodore’s pendant), which will not be dealt with here, because it did not reach the same amount of notoriety over the last two hundred years as the other acts of insubordination dealt with here.
twenties. It concerned the application of the Navigation Laws. After some of the British colonies in North America had gained their independence, the Navigation Laws which allowed colonies to trade only with each other or with the mother country, and only on certain conditions, no longer applied to these colonies. Direct trade between the West Indian islands and the new United States of America had therefore become illegal for the West Indian colonies. Nonetheless they continued this trade, because it was profitable. The governors of these islands let it happen and so did Nelson's superior, Admiral Hughes. Not so, Nelson. At first, he convinced Hughes to support him, but, reacting to pressure from influential men on the islands, Hughes gave in and, rescinding his former order, directed Nelson to keep out of the matter. Nelson, however, supported by his friends, the Collingwood brothers (both captains), continued to pursue his line and interrupted the illegal inter-American trade for a period of about three years, until the Admiralty finally approved of his proceedings (praising Admiral Hughes for it!). In a letter to his former superior, Captain Locker, Nelson put his situation: 'I must either disobey my orders, or disobey Acts of Parliament which the Admiral was disobeying. I determined upon the former'.

The letter in which Nelson put this choice between obedience and disobedience so starkly was first published in 1806, in the appendix to Charnock's biography. In the actual text of the biography, however, Charnock mentioned only that Nelson was 'treated with much asperity'. However carefully Charnock dealt with the matter, the issue was now in the public domain. Another early biographer used the new information and added at the end of a new edition of his biography of Nelson the comment that 'he had no other alternative than to disobey the orders of the admiral'. Other authors, who invested more care in their work, tried to treat the affair more cautiously. Clarke and M'Arthur, in their substantial two-volume biography, described Hughes' second order as 'a memorandum to Captain Nelson, advising him ... which not being an order, the

5 Nicolas, i, 157-58.
6 Charnock, in the appendix: pp. 32-35; see also: appendix B.
7 Charnock, p. 50; other authors followed this cautious approach to the matter; see: Duncan, Life, p. 21; Orme/Blagdon, p. 8; Ralfe, ii, 152.
8 J. White, p. 405; similarly: p. 407.
intrepid commander of the Boreas [Nelson's ship] still pursued his course'. Southey, too, managed to pass over the affair without addressing the thorny issue of Nelson's disobedience.

When Nelson's actions in the West Indies were dealt with from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, two ways of interpreting them emerged. One approach was used by authors of biographies aimed at the wider market, while the other, was more thoroughly argued by scholarly naval historians. The former approach uniformly praised Nelson for disobeying his admiral in the West Indies. In justification of Nelson’s actions writers referred to the concept of duty, without explaining how an act of insubordination can be regarded as fulfilment of ‘duty’. What Cynthia Fansler Behrman in Victorian Myths of the Sea has called the ‘favorite Victorian watchword, duty’ appears from the end of the nineteenth century into the 1920s as a fairly unspecific and idealized concept throughout biographies about Nelson. It is also applied to his life in general: ‘Duty to country was the key to Nelson’s life’.

The naval historians, Laughton and Mahan, investigated Nelson’s disobedience in the West Indies more thoroughly. Laughton, though acknowledging that Nelson was ‘right in his contention’, insisted on the formalities of a hierarchically structured organization:

The first duty of an officer is to obey orders, to submit his doubts to the Commander-in-Chief, and in a becoming manner to remonstrate against any order he conceives to be improper; but for an officer to settle a moot-point himself, and to act in contravention of an order given under

---

9 Clarke and M’Arthur, I, 74; they also quote Nelson’s outspoken letter (i, 73).
10 Southey (1813), i, 61-62.
presumably adequate knowledge of the circumstances, is subversive of the very first principles of discipline.\textsuperscript{14} Mahan was more generous. In a letter to Laughton he pointed out that he thought ‘Nelson’s course towards Hughes justified upon the whole’, because ‘Nelson owed it to … his country’s interest … to do as he did’.\textsuperscript{15}

In his biography, published in 1929, C. S. Forester was the first to examine Nelson’s personality in some depth by seeking to separate him from his historical context. His acts of disobedience were not so much investigated within his professional context as before. Instead, they were approached in a psychological way and seen as expressions of the character of Nelson. For the purpose of this approach Forester searched for Nelson’s motives. He observed a general restlessness in Nelson and a dislike of Admiral Hughes that combined to explain, ‘the attraction the disobeying of ill-conceived orders had for Nelson’.\textsuperscript{16}

The Stracheyan fashion of rejecting Victorian hero-worship went beyond a psychological attempt at describing Nelson and it had a lasting impact on the discussion of Nelson’s acts of disobedience. George Edinger and E. J. C. Neep took Nelson’s family background as the starting point for their examination of the personality of Nelson. They had discovered in the ‘somewhat colourless line’ of Nelson’s ancestry an eccentric poet and they claimed that ‘the insatiable spirit of the poet never ceased to torment the neurotic nature in the feeble body it had chosen to inhabit’.\textsuperscript{17} Even serious biographies, written by members of the navy, now viewed Nelson’s acts of disobedience more as attempts to challenge those in higher social positions than decisions dictated by naval circumstances. Nelson’s disobedience in the West Indies was described as performed, notwithstanding ‘social ostracism’.\textsuperscript{18} In the second half of the twentieth century Nelson’s zeal for the implementation of the Navigation Laws in the West Indies

\textsuperscript{14} Laughton (1895), pp. 34-35.
\textsuperscript{16} Forester, pp. 45, 47.
\textsuperscript{17} Edinger/Neep, pp. 16-17.
\textsuperscript{18} W. M. James, Durable Monument, p. 46. Similarly: Grenfell (1949), p. 26.
tended still to be treated in the same fashion. Nelson is described as ‘socially ostracized’ and his action is interpreted as a reflection of Nelson’s ‘contempt’ for his superior.¹⁹

The second of Nelson’s major acts of disobedience was committed at the battle of St. Vincent, where he wore his ship out of the line against the orders of his superior, Admiral Jervis. Thanks mostly to Nelson’s own report,²⁰ it was already known in his lifetime that he had made such a manoeuvre. Authors usually praised this act simply as a ‘bold and decisive exploit’,²¹ and William James even regarded it as committed ‘in obedience to the spirit, if not the letter, of a signal just made’.²² Some early authors, however, addressed the matter more directly and Charnock observed: ‘With all that promptitude which is the certain characteristic of a great and active mind, he found the bold manoeuvre, executed by order of the commander in chief, would fail in its effect, unless the most decisive measures were adopted to prevent the reunion of the main body of the [Spanish] fleet with those ships from which the Spanish admiral had been separated’.²³ Such open praise for an act of disobedience could be regarded as setting a dangerous precedent for less able or high-ranking sailors. Southey consequently addressed the question directly, asserting without further argument that ‘such an example is not dangerous’.²⁴ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Clark Russell did not feel so confident and remarked: ‘It may interest but it cannot edify living and future generations to learn that ... the most signal of the St. Vincent achievements was the result of a disregard of the flagship’s signals’.²⁵

---

²⁰ See Prologue. In the report (printed in two versions in Nicolas, ii, 340-343 and 344-347) Nelson had stated: ‘the Admiral made the signal to “tack in succession”; but I ... ordered the ship to be wore’ (Nicolas, ii, 341).
²¹ Clarke and M’Arthur, i, 348; similarly: Anon. (Goodchild)], p. 61; F. Lloyd, p. 13.
²³ Charnock, p. 91.
²⁴ Southey (1813), i, 176.
The possible dangers of Nelson’s act of disobedience at the battle of St. Vincent being followed by others did not worry authors in the twentieth-century, who tended to focus their attention on examining the character of Nelson. George Edinger and E. J. C. Neep followed their *leitmotif* of Nelson’s ‘neurotic nature’ and distorted the exaggerated Victorian hero-worship into caricature, by seeing the whole purpose of Nelson’s ‘spectacular move’ at the battle of St. Vincent as focusing ‘the attention of the whole Fleet upon himself’. Later authors have not followed this interpretation and Nelson’s wearing out of the line at the battle of St. Vincent is generally regarded as a courageous example of independent action.

In the light of an order that Admiral Jervis gave just when Nelson was about to execute his manoeuvre, David and Stephen Howarth concluded that ‘rather than an immense but crucial disobedience, Nelson anticipated and pre-empted Jervis’s order by something up to one minute’. Colin White went on to assume that Jervis made the signal that the Howarths mention together with another signal, before Nelson wore. This leads him to the question, whether the two signals intended what Nelson then executed. Although the signals only refer to movements ‘in succession’, White stated at one point that ‘it seems clear that Jervis intended his whole rear division ... to tack at once’; a few pages on, however, he observed that Nelson ‘realized that Jervis’ new order for the rear division to tack *in succession* (rather than all together) was inappropriate to the situation’. His vague conclusion to this confusing assessment, reminiscent of the

---

26 Edinger/Neep, p. 117; they even claimed that by doing what Nelson had done he threw Admiral Jervis’s ‘scheme out of gear and prevented the rounding up of the eight ships in the smaller Spanish group’ (nobody has ever made such a claim before or since).


28 Howarth/Howarth, p.163.


opinion that William James gave in the 1820s, is that Nelson’s action was ‘entirely within the spirit of the order that Jervis had just given’.  

Nelson’s most controversial act of disobedience took longer to surface than his other acts of insubordination. It concerned Nelson’s disobeying of Admiral Keith, commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean, in 1799. Nelson had just accomplished the reconquest of the city of Naples itself and he had sent men ashore to defeat the French garrisons in Capua and Gaeta, two towns north of Naples, when he received Keith’s order to join him with his force. Keith, assuming Nelson to be still in Sicily, needed these forces to protect Minorca (at that time in the hands of the British) against an attack by the French fleet which was at that time at large in the Mediterranean. Nelson’s squadron was needed even more if the French should manage to combine with the Spanish fleet. Nelson could not react immediately to Keith’s order, because he had employed too many men ashore, but he also decided to keep them there. Weighing the likely loss (or at least relapse into chaos) of Naples, if his forces should retire, against the danger to Minorca, Nelson decided ‘that it is better to save the Kingdom of Naples and risk Minorca, than to risk the Kingdom of Naples to save Minorca’.  

Although an attack on Minorca was not attempted and the French fleet did not unite forces with the Spanish fleet, the Admiralty disapproved of Nelson’s conduct for two reasons: first, he should not have sent so many sailors inland (to Capua), thereby weakening his own force, and, second, he should not have employed the whole squadron in the reconquest of the kingdom of Naples. 

Harrison, with Nelson’s letter books of the period at his disposal, was the first to deal with this disobeying of Keith’s order. He justified it by pointing out that Nelson decided on his course of action, ‘well knowing that Lord Keith, at the time of sending

31 C. White (1998), p. 53. It remains to be wondered why others in the British rear, including the commanding admiral, did not understand this ‘spirit’ of the order.
32 The controversy about Nelson’s involvement in this action is dealt with in chapter 4.
33 Nicolas, iii, 415. Keith’s (first) order can be found in Nicolas, iii, 414-415, fn. Five days later, Keith, now knowing about the reconquest of Naples, ordered Nelson to protect Minorca while he himself was following the French fleet (possibly into the Atlantic), Nicolas, iii, 419, fn.
34 Nicolas, iii, 409-410, fn.
35 See appendix B.
the order, could not be informed of the change of affairs in the kingdom of Naples. 36
Southey, too, did not criticize Nelson’s decision, though he argued ex post facto that ‘no
attempt was made upon Minorca’; 37 instead of considering whether Nelson’s act of
disobedience was justified from an ex ante position.

In 1828, at a time when Nelson was being neglected as a subject, J. Ralfe in his
Naval Biography of Great Britain was the first to condemn Nelson’s disobeying of
Keith. Remarkably, he did not examine the decision itself, but the supposed motives for
it: ‘his lordship was too much engaged with the court of Naples; his time was too much
occupied with Lady Hamilton and the queen, in endeavouring to set a worthless family
on the throne, to attend to such orders’. 38 Nicolas avoided such polemics and, avoiding
any close examination of the actual decision, pointed out that Nelson ‘with a proper
sense of discipline, ... submitted, without remonstrance, to the reproof of his
Superiors’. 39 This line of argument was also adopted by a reviewer of Nicolas’ work in
The Times. This reviewer, however, went further in generally stating ‘that in every
instance success attended his disobedience’. 40 The reviewer did not only justify Nelson’s
acts of disobedience, but also attacked those who might feel uneasy seeing
insubordination thus praised:

The prudent sycophants of boards have said that Nelson set
a dangerous example, by his frequent departure from the
orders of his commanding officers. ... We have, however,
no fear of Nelson’s example being detrimental to
discipline, for few can be found either willing or able to
tread in his footsteps, casting aside, as he did, every
personal consideration when the public good was to be
served. ... he was obedient enough, unless in cases where
his genius soared so high above that of his commanders
that national disaster must have been the consequence of
implicit obedience. But neither Admirals nor Admiralty

36 J. Harrison, ii, 123; Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 195-97, who quote the relevant letters, but do not give a
judgement of their own.
37 Southey (1813), ii, 255.
38 Ralfe, ii, 182: Ralfe refers here to two other controversial aspects of the life of Nelson (Naples and Lady
Hamilton) which are dealt with in chapters 4 and 5.
39 Nicolas, iii, xiii.
40 The Times, 26 December 1844.
need fear their high behests being soon disobeyed by another Nelson.

Naval historians did not adopt the line of unconditional Victorian hero-worship. They were too worried about the 'grave importance' of the example of the 'crime, – and from the military point of view it was a crime' – of Nelson's act of disobedience. Laughton and Mahan both agreed that disobedience must not be measured *ex post facto* by its outcome, but neither of them developed any feasible *ex ante* criteria that would describe when disobeying orders might be justified. Laughton simply stressed the danger of an act of disobedience providing an example for others and referred in the case of the disobeying of Keith to the rebuke to Nelson sent by the Admiralty. He did not examine this decision any further. As a naval historian he did not feel called upon to consider that in order to take the third largest city of Europe one might have to employ a substantial force ashore. In matters of disobedience Mahan alluded generally to the 'conditions of the case' and positively allowed for disobedience to be justifiable: 'It seems scarcely necessary to say that, while an officer in subordinate command should have the moral courage to transcend or override his orders in particular instances'; but then he went on: 'it would be impossible for military operations to be carried on at all, if the commander-in-chief were liable to be deliberately defied and thwarted in his combinations, as Keith was in this case'. Since it is in the nature of acts of disobedience to 'thwart' the 'combinations' of a superior, Mahan was unable to offer general criteria for determining whether an act of disobedience is justified. In the specific case of Nelson's disobeying of Keith, Mahan does not consider the fact that Nelson was better informed about the situation in Naples than was Keith, who did not even know that Nelson was at Naples. Instead of analysing Nelson's decision, Mahan resorts to the hierarchical division of responsibility: 'It was not within his [Nelson's] province to decide whether Minorca or Naples was the more important. That was the function of the commander-in-chief'.

---

1 Laughton (1895), p. 140.
4 Mahan, *Life*, p. 400; it may also be interesting to note here that, according to Sumida, p. 45, 'Mahan disliked amphibious operations'.
Keith, being ignorant of the true situation, could not possibly be in a position to decide between the relative importance of Minorca and Naples.

In his review of Mahan’s life of Nelson, Theodore Roosevelt overcame the problem of disobedience as a dangerous precedent by referring to the heroic status of Nelson: ‘A great soldier may disregard rules which must be binding upon all save those of transcendent ability. Nelson’s occasional disobediences, like his occasional disregard of manoeuvring, were traits which mean destruction if copied by men of less heroic mould’. 45 Another politician, Admiral Fisher, equally sympathized with what he described as Nelson’s ‘splendid idiosyncrasy of insubordination’. 46 In the spirit of pre-First World War Nelson-worship, Nelson’s acts of disobedience tended to be rated as manifestations of genius, rather than being investigated as an admiral’s decision taken in very difficult circumstances. One author even went so far as to accuse Nelson’s superior of ‘manifestly [rating] the strategic value of Minorca far too highly’, 47 although there is no evidence of such an opinion and it may even be that, once Keith knew about the situation in Naples, he understood Nelson’s decision (we do not know if Keith made any statement on the issue). Ignoring the Admiralty’s judgment at the time, it was now simply assumed that ‘after the victory of the Nile his [Nelson’s] name became immortal, and he could take any liberty he liked with our national conventionalisms’. 48

Ralfe’s approach to dealing with possible motives that were not related to the case of disobedience itself found new proponents. Admiral Colomb attributed Nelson’s acts of disobedience to his dislike of certain superiors (such as Hughes and Keith), 49 although there is no doubt that Nelson had good relations with Sir John Jervis at the time he disregarded his order at the battle of Cape St. Vincent. As with Ralfe, C. Reid

45 Roosevelt, p. 331.
46 Admiral of the Fleet [John Arbuthnot] Lord Fisher, Memories (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919) [hereafter: Fisher], p. 111. Fisher also remarked: ‘Nelson was nothing if not insubordinate’.
47 James R. Thursfield, Nelson and Other Naval Studies (London: John Murray, 1909) [hereafter: Thursfield (1909)], p. 105, who also argued against ‘the ex post facto justification of success’.
Andrew ascribed Nelson's disobeying of Keith's orders to 'the solar attraction of Lady Hamilton and the Two Sicilies'.

The search for motives of Nelson's disobeying of Keith became central to those authors who dealt with Nelson after the First World War. Forester, again, found the explanation for Nelson's insubordination in the appeal to Nelson of 'asserting his own opinion against that of his superior officer', while he also assumed that Nelson simply used the absence of his men ashore 'as an excuse for staying'. Edinger and Neep went even further by asserting that Nelson wished 'to enjoy the anniversary of the battle of the Nile'. Forester as well as Edinger and Neep looked for the reasons for Nelson's acts of disobedience mostly outside the actual circumstances in which Nelson found himself at Naples.

Ludovic Kennedy, however, returned to the actual decisions Nelson took, when he argued, in 1951, that, in counteracting Keith's order, Nelson was not taking a decision about the relative importance of Minorca or Naples; instead 'the real issue at stake was ... the British Fleet', which Nelson endangered by not sending ships to join Keith. Later authors have not attempted to investigate the matter further. They usually agree in condemning Nelson's disobeying of Keith in the Mediterranean as 'intolerable' or 'unacceptable' and they do not make any great effort to substantiate this claim.

---

51 Forester, pp. 165-66.
52 Edinger/Neep, p. 206.
53 Ludovic Kennedy, *Nelson's Band of Brothers* (London: Odhams Press Limited, 1951) [hereafter: Kennedy], p. 180; although it may be worth noting that Keith himself did not see this priority: he wanted to use Nelson's squadron *either* for the defence of Minorca *or*, in case the French fleet united with the Spanish (which it did not), 'for the purpose of co-operating with me against the combined force of the Enemy' (Nicolas, iii, 414, fn).
54 For example: Warner (1958), pp. 194-195 (including some discussion of the matter); Pocock (1968), p. 82; Bradford, p. 140 ('his behaviour by any standard was intolerable'); David Walder, *Nelson* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978) [hereafter: Walder], p. 332 ('unacceptable'); Edgington, p. 140; Roger Morris, "'No Common Being': Nelson's Character and Relationships", in *Nelson. An Illustrated History*, ed. Pieter van der Merwe (London: Laurence King, 1995), pp. 114-143, p. 138 ('it is also evident that Nelson thought he had reached the stage when he could do no wrong'); a recent exception is: Vincent, pp. 323-327, who argues from the *ex post facto* position of the result of Nelson's disobedience; also: W. M. James, *Durable Monument*, p. 178 ('behaving outrageously'); and Grenfell, pp. 120-123, although the author concluded on p. 124 that 'Nelson was undoubtedly right to prefer Naples to Minorca'; Kennedy's argument can be found in: F. Knight, p. 99; Howarth/Howarth, p. 220.
Nelson’s last is also his most famous act of disobedience. At the battle of Copenhagen, on 2 April 1801, Nelson’s superior, Sir Hyde Parker, had dispatched him to attack the Danish ships in their harbour. At the height of the battle, apparently fearing a defeat, Sir Hyde gave a general signal of recall which Nelson ignored.\footnote{Dudley Pope, \textit{The Great Gamble} (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972) [hereafter: Pope (1972)], pp. 406-408.} There had been a hint in a newspaper at the time that it was ‘confidently mentioned there was some misapprehension about signals on the 2d of April, which proved rather fortunate than otherwise’, but disobedience was not mentioned.\footnote{The Times, 1 May 1801; see above, prologue.} Harrison, however, quoted Nelson as having said to his captain: ‘Foley, you know I have lost an eye, and have a right to be blind when I like; and, damn me, if I’ll see that signal!’\footnote{J. Harrison, ii, 295.} Other biographers offered a variation: ‘You know I can see but with one eye, and I must keep that upon the enemy’.\footnote{J. White, p. 191; with ‘that’ before the ‘I’: Orme/Blagdon, p. 27, fn. In the main body of the text the authors remark that Nelson fought: ‘it is said, with an \textit{unobserved} signal of retreat flying at the mast-head of the ship of the chief in command’ (italics in original).} In 1809 Clarke and M’Arthur published a more detailed version, which they took from an eye-witness account that Colonel Stewart had given them:

When the signal, No. 39, was made, the Signal Lieutenant reported it to him. He continued his walk, and did not appear to take notice of it. The Lieutenant meeting his Lordship at the next turn asked, ‘whether he should repeat it?’ Lord Nelson answered, ‘no, acknowledge it’. On the Officer returning to the poop, his Lordship called after him, ‘is No. 16 [for ‘close action’] still hoisted?’ the Lieutenant answering in the affirmative, Lord Nelson said, ‘Mind you keep it so’. He now walked the deck considerably agitated, which was always known by his moving the stump of his right arm. After a turn or two, he said to me, in a quick manner, ‘Do you know what’s shown on board of the Commander-in-Chief, No. 39?’ On asking him what that meant, he answered, ‘Why, to leave off Action’. ‘Leave off Action!’ he repeated, and then added, with a shrug, ‘now, damn me if I do’. He also observed, I believe, to Captain Foley, ‘You know, Foley, I have only one eye – I have a right to be blind sometimes’; and then with an archness peculiar to his character, putting

\begin{flushright}
56 The Times, 1 May 1801; see above, prologue.
57 J. Harrison, ii, 295.
58 J. White, p. 191; with ‘that’ before the ‘I’: Orme/Blagdon, p. 27, fn. In the main body of the text the authors remark that Nelson fought: ‘it is said, with an \textit{unobserved} signal of retreat flying at the mast-head of the ship of the chief in command’ (italics in original).
\end{flushright}
the glass to his blind eye, he exclaimed, 'I really do not see the signal'. 59

Southey used this account, slightly re-worded, in his biography and Nicolas copied literally from the original of Colonel Stewart’s narrative, 60 so that this version became part of the standard account of Nelson at the battle of Copenhagen. None of the earlier writers commented in any way on this act of disobedience, so that the little story merely appeared as an amusing joke, reflecting on Nelson’s aggressive fighting style.

As with Nelson’s disobeying of Keith, it was Ralfe, in 1828, who first felt reluctant to defend Nelson’s act of disobedience. This time he did so by explaining it away. Contradicting Southey, Ralfe claimed that Sir Hyde Parker had been about to send Captain Otway to ask whether Nelson ‘saw a probability of success. But before Captain Otway could reach the Elephant [Nelson’s flagship], the signal was made. It was however disregarded.’ 61 Southey accepted the criticism and included in the edition of 1831 of his Life of Nelson a paragraph in which he described how Sir Hyde Parker decided to make the signal of recall ‘for Nelson’s sake. If he is in a condition to continue the action successfully, he will disregard it; if he is not, it will be an excuse for his retreat, and no blame can be imputed to him’. 62 The Recollections of the Life of the Rev. A. J. Scott who had been Sir Hyde’s chaplain at the time added another twist to the story. The Recollections, published by Scott’s daughter and son-in-law after his death, explain ‘that it had been arranged between the admirals that, should it appear that the ships which were engaged were suffering too severely, the signal for retreat should be made, to give Lord Nelson the option of retiring if he thought fit’. 63 These explanations, which served the dual purpose of avoiding the issue of disobedience and saving the honour of Sir Hyde Parker, were frequently adopted by later biographers, 64 although they fail to

---

59 Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 270.
60 Southey, ii, 123-124; Nicolas, iv, 308-309 (the narrative of Stewart starts on p. 299).
61 Ralfe, ii, 188.
62 Robert Southey, The Life of Nelson (London: John Murray, 1831) [hereafter: Southey (1831)], p. 146; on pp. 146-147 Southey describes how Captain Domett (sic, not Otway) unsuccessfully tried to convince Sir Hyde to communicate with Nelson before making his signal.
63 Recollections of... Scott, p. 70. An extract from Scott’s diary at the time, p. 71, does not contain any reference to such an arrangement.
64 For example: Letters and Despatches of Horatio, Viscount Nelson, K.B. duke of Bronte Vice-Admiral of the White Squadron, ed. John Knox Laughton (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1886) [hereafter:
explain, why Sir Hyde gave a *general* order (and not one addressed only to Nelson), if he wanted to give Nelson a choice.

Omitting any analysis of the battle of Copenhagen, Edinger and Neep, in 1930, again used their *leitmotif* of the 'neurotic' Nelson. They described his disobedience on that occasion: 'He had flagrantly disobeyed orders in a gambler's fling for Victory and Renown'. For them Nelson's actions thus became the expressions of an histrionic temperament rather than rational actions dictated by the circumstances of the actual situation in which he found himself.

It was only in 1972 that the details of Nelson's disobedience at the battle of Copenhagen were again examined. Dudley Pope looked in depth at the logbooks of the ships in Nelson's squadron and concluded that no one involved understood Sir Hyde Parker's *general* order as permissive. Nevertheless biographers have gone on using or referring to accounts which are meant to show that Sir Hyde Parker wished to give Nelson a choice of whether to retreat or not.

The issue of Nelson's acts of disobedience, important as these are for his career, has hardly ever been thoroughly addressed. Nelson's acts of disobedience in battle (St. Vincent and Copenhagen) have been described as feats of daring, criticized as dangerous examples or re-interpreted as in accordance with the real wishes of his commander-in-chief. The less spectacular, but more complex disregarding of orders in the West Indies and the Mediterranean has been harder to address. Even the naval historians of the late nineteenth century did not succeed in explaining their criteria for an *ex ante* assessment that could justify an act of disobedience. The field has therefore remained open for dramatization, either in the direction of describing Nelson as a heroic genius able to flout the standards expected of ordinary mortals or towards supposed motives of another

---

Laughton (1886), p. 256 (using Scott's account about the previous arrangement, but also referring to Ralfe); John Knox Laughton, *Nelson* (London: Macmillan, 1895) [hereafter: Laughton (1895)], p. 161 (using the 'well established' version about Captain Otway from Ralfe).

Edinger/Neep, p. 269; the authors allude that Nelson actually lost the battle of Copenhagen.


Howarth/Howarth, p. 253 (with both captains, Otway and Domett?, warning Parker that the signal could be taken strictly); Lavery (1995), 102 assumed there is still a debate about whether Parker's signal 'was really meant to be obeyed'.
kind. The latter became particularly popular in the twentieth century as a result of interest in psychological inquiry and the desire to distance oneself from Victorian hero-worship. So far no author has offered clear criteria by which to judge Nelson’s acts of disobedience.

II

Exceptionalism

The difficulty in handling Nelson’s acts of disobedience has led to attempts, particularly in the popular literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to elevate Nelson to a different plane and to consider him as ‘a law unto himself’. This tendency was also expressed in other areas than that of these acts of disobedience.68 Three main areas have been explored to display Nelson’s supposed exceptionalism: Nelson’s family, Nelson’s rise in his profession, and Nelson’s physique.

If any reference was made to Nelson’s family prior to the mid-nineteenth century, it was to stress its respectability and even to investigate his royal descent.69 This changed at the end of the nineteenth century when authors searched in vain for antecedents to Nelson’s heroism in his family and Laughton bluntly concluded: ‘The doctrine of hereditary transmission of genius seems to find but little support in his pedigree’.70

As the nineteenth century passed, authors increasingly described Nelson not only as lacking in suitable ancestry, but, even more important, as lacking in family support for his professional career. As the Victorians were distancing themselves from the old patronage system, Nelson was supposed to have ‘raised himself into public notice,

---


without the adventitious aid of interest'. Samuel Smiles, in his widely distributed *Self Help*, put forward Nelson as an example of a self-made man. Such perceptions of Nelson were conveniently supported by an anecdote about Nelson's lieutenant's examination, according to which, Nelson's uncle who presided over the event, in order to ensure a fair treatment of his nephew, did not disclose his relation to him until the examination was over. While this was suitable material for hero-worshippers who wanted to single out Nelson's exceptional qualities, it did not convince serious naval historians. Colomb discarded the anecdote and Laughton stressed that certain aspects of a naval officer's career 'depended entirely on interest'.

Even naval historians, however, regarded Nelson as a man set apart from the higher ranks of his profession. In Colomb's view his career was determined by the fact that he had been educated as a 'small craft midshipman' which determined his professional standing and 'the aroma' that 'was apt to hang about him'. As a consequence, Colomb concluded: 'It is clear that neither society nor his superiors were ever quite sure of Nelson'. To Mahan he was '[i]ke the American frontiersman'. Thus singled out, Nelson became, in more popular biographies, a maverick, not recognized by the establishment. The reviewer of Nicolas' edition of Nelson's letters in *The Times* had already stated that 'Nelson was scandalously underpaid for his services'. At the time of the Trafalgar centenary authors felt confident enough to claim that 'His government had never appreciated him: on the contrary had always snubbed him'. The view that Nelson was an outsider among his upper-class contemporaries

---

72 Smiles, p. 222.
73 Clarke and M'Arthur, i, 14; used, for example, in Browne, p. 10.
74 Colomb, 'Nelson', p. 441; Laughton (1895), p. 17.
75 Colomb, 'Nelson', pp. 440-441.
77 *The Times*, 25 December 1846; the idea of Nelson not being acknowledged by the governments of the day can be traced to early biographies: Anon. (Goodchild), pp. 94-95; J. Harrison, ii, 383, 386, 403; Southey, i, 118-119, 246 (fn), ii, 93.
78 Holme, p. 165; similarly: Gye, p. 4; Runciman, pp. 174, 187; Fisher, pp. 25-26, 158-159.
made him appear in the eyes of at least one author as more closely linked to the ordinary man. 79

Last, but not least, authors were fascinated by the perceived contrast between Nelson’s achievements and his bodily constitution. This subject was particularly significant, because the late nineteenth century was obsessed with physical strength and in the mind of many people athleticism was linked with patriotism and the greatness of the Empire. 80 In contrast to these ideals of physical perfection, Nelson’s body was perceived as a ‘frail and puny frame’. 81 One author was particularly explicit: ‘Nelson’s figure when set against a background of mighty battles, seems unheroic in an almost absurd degree’. 82 According to the late-Victorian ideal of bodily strength, the image of Nelson as diminutive and frail was strikingly out of line with his success as a warrior. Instead of doubting the validity of their ideas about bodily strength, authors concluded that Nelson’s inner strength must have reached even more outstanding proportions. The perceived contrast between his insignificant outer appearance and his mighty deeds was thus interpreted in such a way as to make Nelson appear even more heroic than anybody else who might have achieved such victories. The contrast was particularly poignant, when Nelson actually seemed to overcome his bodily weakness: ‘How can we sufficiently realize the power of spirit over flesh, truly to picture to ourselves the spare figure of the admiral, his right arm hanging loose and bloody, swarming up the side of

80 John Springhall, ‘Building character in the British boy: the attempt to extend Christian manliness to working-class adolescents, 1880-1914’, in Manliness and Morality. Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940, eds. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) [hereafter: Springhall], pp. 52-74, at pp. 61, 65. In the same book the editor’s introduction, p. 3, and several other passages stress the general obsession with physical strength, especially in the decades before the First World War.
81 Mahan, Life, p. 41; similarly: pp. 11 (‘physical frailty’), 12 (‘extreme fragility of constitution’).
82 Fitchett, p. 3. The author is particularly fascinated by this subject, see: pp. 8 (‘Through some of the most crowded years of his career, Nelson was little better than a semi-invalid’), 10 (‘the shattered, fragile, pain-tormented body’), 11 (‘this fragile, undersized, half-womanly figure’) and 130 (‘Nelson, measured by inches, was insignificant; one-armed, one-eyed’). Similarly: White/Moorhouse, pp. vii (‘that frail, weak, pain-wracked body’), viii (‘that weak, frail, wearied, stricken body’), 15 (‘Nelson’s appearance was frail, slight, almost odd, showing little of the greatness within’), 17 (‘little weakling body’) and 18 (‘an insignificant figure’); Thursfield (1909), p. 127 (quoting ‘Lord Rosebery ... “the fascinating incongruity of so great a warrior’s soul being encased in so shrivelled a shell”’); and Fisher, p. 27 (‘that frail body of his daily tormented with pain’).
the 74-gun ship Theseus by one man-rope ... Was there ever such an example of the power of mind over body, even if it were not remembered how frail the body was?'.

Nelson was seen as struggling with 'indomitable spirit' against all kinds of odds, not only outside, but also within his body. In a biography of Nelson, written for children, readers were promised that 'you will begin to appreciate the more the all-conquering will-power of Nelson, and the glory of spirit which brought him to triumph' before they learned how Nelson overcame bodily limitations:

Nelson's visible daily life at sea in these days onwards appears so superhuman that I am almost driven back into the realms of folk-lore ... Nelson never did sleep ... [rather] for the sake of keeping up the illusion of bodily presence than for any need of the food, Nelson might toy with some vegetables and sip a little milk and water ... We all know of the almost incredible spells of work performed by great men of genius or of action, without sleep and without food. ... But such men were endowed with an exceptional constitution and physical vitality. Nelson had nothing of this, but only that amazing spiritual vitality. And if I seem to harp unduly upon Nelson's bodily weakness and incessant illness it is only because I would strive to suggest how inconceivable it is that so fragile a body could have carried so heavy a burden of physical effort.

Elements that single Nelson out from his ordinary eighteenth-century context, particularly his supposed rise without the support of political interest, can be traced throughout the twentieth-century literature about Nelson. Never again, however, did the representation of Nelson as an extraordinary, nearly superhuman person reach the

---

83 Colomb, 'Nelson', p. 461.
84 Fitchett, p. 8; Baring-Gould, p. 142.
85 Corbett-Smith, pp. 45, 276-77.
86 Examples are: W. M. James, The Influence of Sea Power on the History of the British People (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948) [hereafter: W. M. James, Influence of Sea Power], p. 28; Tom Pocock, Nelson and His World (London: Thames and Hudson, 1968) [hereafter: Pocock (1968)], p. 21 (using the anecdote about the lieutenant's examination); attempts to put Nelson back into his eighteenth century context in which interest mattered and played a role also for Nelson: Brian Tunstall, Nelson (series: 'Great Lives', London: Duckworth, 1933), p. 9; F. Knight, p. 20; Robert G. Huddleston, "'The Yonker is my nephew!'", Mariner's Mirror, 76 (1990), 366 (arguing that each of the examining captains would have seen the papers that Nelson had submitted for his lieutenant's examination and that they therefore were aware that Nelson was a protégé of Maurice Suckling, even if Nelson's uncle Maurice Suckling should not have mentioned it).
proportions that it had done in the years around the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Only in this period was Nelson portrayed as a maverick who went his own way, overcoming all odds. Nevertheless, any treatment of Nelson has to address the question in what Nelson’s exceptionality may have consisted. This needs to be examined in dealing with his professional achievements. How Nelson has been assessed as a commander is the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE
Nelson the Commander

This chapter deals with how Nelson's battles have been examined throughout the last two centuries. To reflect the multi-layered approaches that authors took in their treatment of Nelson's battles, three different questions will be examined:

1. How has Nelson been portrayed as having acted in battle?
2. How have Nelson's tactics been analysed?
3. How have the results of Nelson's battles been evaluated?

Actions in Battle

When interest in Nelson exploded after his victory and death at the battle of Trafalgar, there was a widespread and almost insatiable public demand to know how the hero had conducted himself during his most successful feats. Unfortunately, this demand was difficult to satisfy. The engagement for which Nelson's actions were best recorded is the battle of Cape St. Vincent, because here Nelson himself supplied an account. As was discussed in the prologue, even this suspenseful narrative did not appear heroic enough for contemporary editors of a first biography of Nelson. They added 'Westminster Abbey or Glorious Victory!' to the account.\(^1\) Nelson's supposed ejaculation 'Westminster Abbey or Glorious Victory!', although somewhat contradictory in itself (the first is rarely achieved without the second), appealed to contemporary taste. As a consequence early biographers not only adopted it for the battle of Cape St. Vincent,\(^2\) but extended its use. Now it was recorded that Nelson shouted his battle-cry before the Battle of the Nile and before the battle of Trafalgar.\(^3\) In some biographies the

---

\(^1\) *Naval Chronicle*, 3 (1800), 176; See above, prologue.
\(^2\) Anon. (Roach), *Memoirs*, p. 10; Burney, p. 403; Duncan, *Life*, pp. 37, 38; J. Harrison, i, 165; Churchill, p. 30.
\(^3\) [Anon., Joseph Aston], *The Life of the Much Lamented Vice-Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson* (2\(^{nd}\) edition, Manchester/London: Joseph Aston/R. Bickerstaffe, 1805) [hereafter: Anon. (Aston)], pp. 34 (Nile), 44 (Trafalgar); Jones, p. 67 (Trafalgar); Dorothy Margaret Stuart, *Dearest Bess. The Life and Times of Lady Elizabeth Foster afterwards Duchess of Devonshire from Her Unpublished Journals and Correspondence*
exclamation became a general battle-cry of Nelson's or even a kind of motto for his life. In their substantial biography Clarke and M'Arthur produced a variation and gave it a more sedate setting, just before the battle of the Nile: 'On his officers rising from table and repairing to their separate stations, he exclaimed, Before this time to-morrow, I shall have gained a Peerage, or Westminster Abbey'. This version has been copied and is still to be found in recent biographies, while the earlier version for the battle of Cape St. Vincent has been retold so often that it appears to be regarded as established fact.

One saying alone, however, could not satisfy the general curiosity about what Nelson had done during his famous battles. Now that details about Nelson's death were being published in the newspapers, additional interest concentrated particularly on the battle of the Nile that had first made Nelson a national hero. While it was reported of Nelson's last hours that he had insisted on taking his turn to be treated by the surgeons and he had spoken to Captain Hardy, there was not much known about what Nelson had done or said at the battle of the Nile. There were only the doubtful account of Nelson writing 'the celebrated official letter that appeared in the Gazette' immediately after his

(reprint, London: Methuen, 1955) [hereafter: Stuart], p. 132, contains a diary entry that shows that after the news of the battle of Trafalgar reached Britain, it was said that Nelson had again referred to 'Westminster Abbey' before the battle, but now preferred St. Paul's (where he was actually buried).

4 Orme/Blagdon, p. 36, fn: 'His constant salutation to his crew previous to an action was, 'Now, my lads, Victory, or Westminster Abbey'; Clarke, p. 550 (end of book): "Victory or Westminster Abbey! - A glorious life or an honourable tomb"; seem to have been regarded almost as equal blessings'; see also [Anon.], Life and Achievements of Lord Nelson, who fell in the Glorious Victory Obtained over the Combined Fleets of France and Spain, off Cape Trafalgar, On the 21st of October 1805 (London: E. Young, 1805) [hereafter: Anon. (Young)], opposite the titlepage a picture of 'Victory' engaging another ship is shown, with 'Westminster Abbey or Glorious Victory' as caption below; Hadden, p. 166, stated explicitly: '"Westminster Abbey or Victory" was always his motto'.

5 Clarke and M'Arthur, ii, 77.


7 It can be found in the majority of biographies; see particularly: Wilkinson, pp. 7, 111; notable exceptions are: Mahan, Life, pp. 233-234; and Walder, pp. 207-8; Nicolas, ii, 343, fn. 4, unaware about the source of the exclamation, remarked: 'Charnock, Harrison, and Southey, state that Nelson led the way into the San Josef, vehemently exclaiming, 'Westminster Abbey, or Victory' - a gasconade very inconsistent with his character'; Coleman, p. 128 and p.379, note 22 (from p. 128), wrongly attributes this acclamation to Drinkwater and also misquotes from Nicolas; The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations contained this phrase until its 3rd edition (1953, reprinted various times).

8 For these see chapter 6.
head-wound had been dressed and the anonymously published *Narrative* of Nelson's then flag captain, Edward Berry. In this account Berry simply mentioned how he had to keep Nelson informed about the course of the battle, because Nelson was 'below in consequence of the severe wound which he had received in the head during the heat of the attack' and that, on informing Nelson that the French flagship *L'Orient* was on fire, he 'though suffering severely from his wound, came up upon deck, where the first consideration that struck his mind was concern for the danger of so many lives, to save as many as possible of whom he ordered Captain Berry to make every practicable exertion'. A wounded admiral, 'suffering severely' below decks, could not easily be regarded as acting particularly heroically. A threepenny biography of 36 pages that promised *Heroic Actions* in its title, offered a remedy in the form of the following account:

The severe wound which Sir Horatio Nelson received, was supposed to have proceeded from langridge shot, or a piece of iron; the skin of his forehead being cut with it at right angles, hung down over his face. Captain Berry, who happened to stand near, caught the admiral in his arms. It was Sir Horatio's first idea, and that of every one, that he was shot through the head. On being carried into the cockpit, where several of his gallant crew were stretched with their shattered limbs, and mangled wounds, the surgeon, with great anxiety, immediately came to attend on the Admiral. 'No!' (replied the hero,) ['I will take my turn with my brave followers.' The agony of his wound increasing, he became convinced, that the idea he had long indulged of dying in battle, was now about to be accomplished. He immediately, therefore, sent for his chaplain, the Rev. Mr. Comyns, and begged him to remember him to Lady Nelson; and having signed a commission, appointed his friend, the brave Hardy, Commander of the Mutine brig, to the rank of Post-Captain in the Vanguard, Admiral Nelson took an affectionate leave of captain Louis, who had come by his desire on board, and then with the utmost composure, resigned himself to death: When the surgeon came to examine the wound, it evidently appeared that it was not mortal: this

---

9 See prologue.
10 Anon. [Berry], *Authentic Narrative*, p. 18; also in Nicolas, iii, 51.
joyful intelligence quickly circulated through the ship. As soon as the painful operation of dressing was over, Admiral Nelson immediately sat down, and that very night wrote the celebrated official letter that appeared in the Gazette. He came on deck just time enough to observe the conflagration of L'Orient.\textsuperscript{11}

Not only the source, but also the contents of the account give reasons to doubt its authenticity. In its first part it looks suspiciously like the death-accounts that were so very popular at the time. Apart from Nelson’s wish to take his turn (which was a common element of the death-accounts), even Hardy (of ‘Kiss me Hardy’ fame) gets included in the story. Nelson makes him ‘Post-Captain in the Vanguard’ without bothering about Captain Berry, who at that very moment was busily engaged in that role. It also appears highly unlikely that Captain Louis should have managed to come on board at the height of the battle, let alone before the surgeon had had a close look at Nelson’s wound.\textsuperscript{12} Finally, the account of the writing of ‘the celebrated official letter that appeared in the Gazette’ was obviously copied from the equally doubtful earlier source and with it contradicted the facts (the letter was dated 3 August - that is: two days after the battle).

Notwithstanding these doubts about the accuracy of this account all elements of it were copied in the following years and most of them survive in accounts even to this day. The only two components that do not seem to have survived into accounts written in the twentieth century were Hardy’s commission and the joy spreading through the ship following the news that Nelson’s wound was not mortal. Both elements were copied by Southey, however, and thereafter gained currency throughout the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} Anon. (Lemoine), pp. 18-19; this biography is in great parts based on the biography in the \textit{Naval Chronicle} (pp. 3-25) and it contains an unreliable early death account – see chapter 6, fn. 44. The same account, with some changes in chronology and with additional comments to underline Nelson’s heroism appeared in: Anon. (Aston), pp. 34-36. Because Aston’s version appears to be further developed and because it appeared in the ‘province’ (Manchester) where accounts were usually taken from London publications, I suppose that the account published by Anne Lemoine was the first.


\textsuperscript{13} Southey (1813), i, 232.
Some components of the story underwent further elaboration. 14 Clarke and M’Arthur combined the claim that ‘the skin of his forehead … hung down over his face’ with Harrison’s fanciful assertion: ‘the wound on that occasion received in his forehead, by rendering him almost wholly blind, had proved the sole cause of a single French ship’s escape’. 15 As a consequence it was now reported that a ‘large piece of the skin of his forehead’ hung over Nelson’s seeing eye, thus blinding him. This version has found its way into recent biographies, although it contradicts evidence about the character of the wound itself. 16

The supposed blinding of Nelson also formed part of Clarke and M’Arthur’s account of Nelson’s report writing. Still regarding Nelson as blinded (now probably because of his bandaged head?) they varied the original story by claiming that Nelson needed help in writing from his secretary. The secretary was also said to have been wounded 17 and he supposedly failed in his task, because he was too shocked at perceiving Nelson’s ‘blind and suffering state’. When the chaplain was called for to help with the writing, the impatient Nelson supposedly took the pen himself and wrote his report. 18 How he could do that without being able to see, is not explained.

15 J. Harrison, ii, 3.
16 The developed version, usually mentioning a ‘flap’ of skin, can be found in: Southey (1813), i, 231; Pocock (1968), p. 70; Pugh (1968), p. 24; although Pugh (1968), p. 24, himself quotes the record of the surgeon who treated Nelson: ‘Brought the edges of the wound together’ and not that he brought a flap of skin back into position; T. C. Barras, ‘Nelson’s Head Injury at the Battle of the Nile’ Nelson Dispatch, 2 (1987), 217 points out: ‘We know that there was a vertical cut above the centre of the right eyebrow and there is no way in which this could result in a flap of skin. In order to create a flap which would fall to cover the left eye it would be necessary to extend widely the incision across the top of the forehead and down to a point above the centre of the left eye, so that this embellishment of the injury can be discounted’.
17 Lavery (1998), p. 191, points out that the secretary was not treated and assumes that his wound cannot have been serious. He does not doubt any part of Clarke and M’Arthur’s account about Nelson at the battle of the Nile and, unaware of the earlier versions of the story, asserts in a footnote that Clarke and M’Arthur ‘had some direct oral evidence’.
18 Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 84; copied by: Southey (1813), i, 233; Hibbert (1994), p. 142, commenting: ‘Nelson was in no mood to tolerate much weakness’.
Around the middle of the nineteenth century, Nicolas combined two separate elements of the story into one new little sub-story, based on the memory of Captain Berry’s widow, some forty years after the event. Now, it was only Nelson (and not ‘every one’ around him) who thought that the wound was fatal and, instead of waiting for the chaplain in the orlop deck to send his remembrances to his wife, it was Nelson’s first reaction (while still in Berry’s arms) to wish to be remembered to his wife. This version, again, has been copied by later biographers and Brian Lavery interprets it as an example of Nelson’s ‘typical morbidity’.

Also around the middle of the nineteenth century a biographer of Nelson quoted an eyewitness of the battle of the Nile who had been on Captain Louis’ ship (the Minotaur) and who now added another detail to the story:

Lord Nelson during the action sent a boat to the Minotaur to require the presence of Captain Louis on board the Vanguard. He said, ‘Louis, I am wounded and know not to what extent, but your support has prevented me from being obliged to haul out of the line, and I thank you from my soul.’

Did Nelson say this in his message or aboard the Vanguard? How could the (unnamed) witness know what was ‘said’? The evidence is quite flimsy, appears to be a variation of the familiar story of Nelson and Louis at the Nile and the eye-witness is not very trustworthy, considering that he is obviously trying to stress the importance of his ship in

---

19 Nicolas, iii, 55, claims in the text that he is quoting from Clarke & M’Arthur, but only the beginning of his supposed quotation (until ‘Westminster Abbey’) is from that source. Nicolas’ footnote to Nelson’s supposed exclamation ‘I am killed; remember me to my wife’ states: ‘From the information of Lady Berry’.


21 Browne, p. 198, quoting from his Life of Nelson ([n. pl.]: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1851).

22 See for example: Southey (by far the most common biography of Nelson in the nineteenth century, edition of 1813), i, 232; the most absurd account of the supposed meeting between Nelson and Louis can be found in Duncan, Life, p. 78: Louis ‘hung over his bleeding friend in silent sorrow. “Farewell, dear Louis”, said the magnanimous Nelson, “I shall never forget [no particular compliment from a man who believes himself dying!] the obligation I am under to you for your brave and generous conduct ...”.

Another variation that underlines the popularity of such a death-scene-like story can be found in Orme/Blagdon, p. 18.
the success at the battle of the Nile. Nevertheless, even Mahan used this account in his *Life of Nelson*.23

Another early biographer developed a piece of Berry’s *Narrative*. He dramatized Nelson’s decision to send out *Vanguard’s* last boat to save survivors of the burning *L'Orient* by claiming that ‘the enemy, on the lower deck, either insensible of the danger that threatened them, or impelled by the last paroxysms of despair and vengeance, continued to fire’.24 If this had been true, it would have been irresponsible of Nelson to send his men, defenceless in a boat, to the French flagship. The dramatization of the story obviously defeats its purpose here. Similarly a dramatization of Nelson’s actions after he got shot in the right arm at Tenerife turned to Nelson’s disadvantage. It was claimed that Nelson saved men from the water with his left arm alone and that he decided not to go on board the nearest ship, because he did not want to frighten Mrs. Fremantle, whom he knew aboard, with his appearance. This was obviously meant to show that Nelson remained considerate even when he was suffering from a severe wound. At the same time it challenged to the comment that by thus prolonging the trip of his boat, less men could be saved from the water.25

The interest in detailed accounts of Nelson’s actions during his battles thus created fanciful stories that were handed down over the generations by Nelson biographers and they served to distort the image of Nelson. Instead of attributing certain stories to the theatrical imagination of some of Nelson’s early biographers, these same stories have been used to make a theatrical figure of Nelson himself.

II

Tactics

Beyond what Nelson actually did during a battle, his biographers and naval historians have explored the tactics which he used to win them. The most thorough attempts and

---

25 Ralfe, ii, 169.
the most vivid controversies concerned Nelson’s tactics at the battle of Trafalgar. Consequently, the development of this discussion will be dealt with in this assessment of Nelson’s tactics.

Early sources about the battle of Trafalgar stress that Nelson did not need many signals on the day of battle, because he was ‘able, by the clearness and precision of his plans and orders, to make every man understand him in an instant’. Although Nelson’s plans are described as clear, no author bothers to explain them in detail. Some went on to claim that Nelson ‘rendered the system of naval encounter an absolute science’ or they praised Nelson’s judgement or even genius, and thus removed the subject from any serious enquiry. Only illustrations of battle-plans give an idea of how the British fleet had approached its Franco-Spanish enemy. These diagrams were based on basic information about the battle: that the Franco-Spanish fleet had formed a long, slightly bent and irregular line which the British attacked from the windward in two ‘columns’, headed by Nelson’s and his second-in-command’s (Collingwood’s) flagships, the Victory and the Royal Sovereign. These two columns are shown as sailing parallel to each other and in formation of line ahead (that is: one ship behind the other) at something like a right angle down onto the centre of the elongated Franco-Spanish line.

The emerging pattern of a rectangular approach onto the enemy’s centre, seems not to have convinced the professionals, however. When traditionalists added a new signal for attacking in two lines ahead to the Naval Signal Book of 1816, they did not intend the British to follow the approach pictured on the diagrams of the battle of Trafalgar.

26 Nelson’s tactics in his other battles have also been discussed, though nothing near as thoroughly. See for example, for the battle of St. Vincent: Charnock, pp. 93-96, and for the battle of the Niles: Ralfe, ii, 174-175 (critically), Collingwood, p. 25, Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 77, 79, Southey (1813), I, 221-225, Lambert, pp. 133-134, 137, 151.

27 Anon. (Taylor), 12; and J. White, pp. 315, 316; similarly: Anon. (Goodchild), pp. 223; Adam Collingwood, Anecdotes of the Late Lord Viscount Nelson; Including Copious Accounts of the Three Great Victories Obtained over the Combined Forces of France, Spain, &c. off the Nile, Copenhagen & Trafalgar (London: J. Stratford, 1806) [hereafter: Collingwood], p. 16; 1806, Orme/Blagdon, p. 30.

28 Charnock, p. 392, fn; similarly: J. White, p. 320; and Duncan, Life, p. 289.

29 J. White, p. 320; and Duncan, Life, p. 289; Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 437, fn.

30 See appendix A, plate 4, and the patch-box at the bottom of plate 2.
Trafalgar. Instead, they wanted the two lines to attack from the rear of the enemy's line and from there move on to attack the ships ahead in turn, one after the other. The fact that even naval men could not make sense of Nelson's tactics and had to invent something in its stead, has been explained by the lack of a tactical theory at the time. Rather than as a result of highly developed tactics, the victory in the battle of Trafalgar was interpreted as the outcome of 'mere daring and vehemence of attack'.

Without any professional analysis of Nelson's tactics at Trafalgar, it will not surprise us that the approach depicted on the battle-plans remained unchallenged. The general view of what had happened in the battle, which the battle plans conveyed, sometimes with slight variations about the precise positions of the ships, was put before the public in prints throughout the nineteenth century – except for a publication of 1824. This work by Admiral Ekins was influenced by a passage in Nelson's memorandum and its interpretation by a naval officer who had been at Trafalgar. In his plan for the battle, Nelson had written about the opening of the attack: 'The signal will most probably then be made for the Lee line to bear up together ... Some ships may not get through their exact place, but they will always be at hand to assist their friends'. This obviously meant that the ships of the lee line were not expected to enter into battle one after the other, following each other through the same gap in the enemy's line, but should 'bear up together' and each attack a ship in 'their exact place' in the enemy's line. Ekins now suggested that Nelson had planned to attack the enemy's line with all his ships more or less simultaneously advancing in two lines abreast, which would mean that the ships would have sailed next to each other in one direction, with their sides rather than their bows and sterns facing each other. Instead of going into battle one after the other, they would have been able to cross the enemy's line at their appointed places and would have been able to start firing at about the same time, always accepting that some irregularities 

33 Nicolas, vii, 89-92 [text of the whole Memorandum], 91.
in approach would have occurred because of the different sailing speeds of the various ships. Ekins went so far as to claim that this mode of attack would have been of a 'still more formidable nature' than the mode of attack described in most accounts of the battle. He quoted the anonymous participant in the battle who commented on this mode of attack that 'the victory would have been more speedily decided, and the brunt of the action would have been more equally felt'. On reading Ekins another naval historian, William James, sought to defend what he regarded as Nelson's tactics and confidently declared that 'Admiral Ekins has entirely misunderstood the principle upon which which the battle of Trafalgar was fought'. He went on to claim that the awkward passage in Nelson's memorandum must contain a clerical error and that instead of a signal 'for the Lee line to bear up together' Nelson had really planned to order 'the three lines to bear up together', which would refer only to the leading ships of the originally planned three lines. Unjustified as this change in Nelson's words was, it helped to overcome the doubts raised in Ekins' account.

The preconceived view, perpetuated by James, was further strengthened when Nicolas used James' account of the battle of Trafalgar in his important and influential edition of The Dispatches and Letter of Lord Nelson. The dramatic moments when the two flagships, first the Royal Sovereign and then the Victory, reached the enemy's line and started to return the fire so much caught the public imagination that the tactical moves that preceded them were not enquired into. It were exactly these moves - plan, positioning, approach and mode of attack - which constituted the prime responsibility of an admiral, in contrast to the actual fighting in which the actions of captains, officers and

---

34 See appendix A, plate 6.
36 W. James (1826), iii, 468, 469.
37 Nicolas, vii, 142-211; books about general history also copied James' views; see, for example: Archibald Alison, History of Europe from the Commencement of the French Revolution in M.DCC.LXXXIX. to the Restoration of the Bourbons in M.DCCC.XV. (10 vols., Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1833-1842), v (1836) [hereafter: Alison], 353.
38 John Ruskin compared the criticism for the first volume of his Modern Painters to 'the Royal Sovereign at Trafalgar, receiving, unsupported, the broadsides of half the enemy's fleet, while unforeseen circumstances have hitherto prevented, and must yet for a time prevent, my heavier ships of the line from taking any part in the action' (3rd edition of vol. 1, London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1846), p. xi.
men mattered more. Consequently Nelson's share in the battle was neglected and with the advent of steam there seemed to be no practical use any more in examining naval tactics from the age of sail. The preface to the 1859 edition of James Naval History of Great Britain commented on battles fought in the age of sail: 'The best lessons they can now supply are confined to the examples of skill, courage, and patriotic devotion, never to be surpassed, from which future Nelsons may learn how the battles of that great admiral and his contemporaries were fought and won'. Naval history was too much regarded as a pattern book for the present to allow for an interest in historical phenomena for their own sake.

The neglect of tactical issues was also furthered by the opinion that Nelson's victories had been easy, because his enemies had been weak. In the invasion mania around the middle of the nineteenth century the contemporary French navy was regarded as much more dangerous than the one that Nelson had faced and it was claimed that Nelson could win with 'spirit' alone. At this time Cochrane published his Autobiography of a Seaman (which went through several editions in the second half of the nineteenth century) in which he emphasized Nelson's dash. Cochrane had been only a lieutenant, when he had met Nelson in Palermo in 1799. After having gained fame as a daring frigate captain, who later lost his rank, honours and social standing in a financial scandal, he wrote in defence of himself an autobiography which he now reassembled at the end of his life. In this autobiography he claimed to have received in those days of

---

39 This has been particularly stressed by: Vice-Admiral P. H. Colomb, 'The Battle of Trafalgar', United Service Magazine, xix. New Series, cxxv. Old Series (September 1899), 578-95 [hereafter: Colomb, 'Battle of Trafalgar'], p. 579. Alison, 373, indeed judged the reason for the British victories: 'the superior rowess and naval skill of their sailors is alone the cause of their triumphs'.

40 W. James (1826), i, vii.

41 E. Plunkett, the Past and Future of the British Navy (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1846), pp. 147, 148, where it is specifically claimed that the British would not succeed, if they adopted Nelson's tactics of Trafalgar again; p. 193 (about 'spirit'); on p. 194 the victories of the past are described as 'cheaply purchased'; in a similar vein Admiral Thomas Byam Martin claimed in his memoirs, written about 1850, that the British succeeded with 'audacity', often against what 'prudence' demanded, inspired by Nelson, see: Letters and Papers of Admiral of the Fleet Sir Thos. Byam Martin G.C.B., ed. Richard Vesey Hamilton (3 vols., London: Navy Records Society, vols. 12, 19, 24, 1898 [vol. ii], 1901 [vol. iii], 1903 [vol. i]), i 65, 66.

42 Thomas [Cochrane], Tenth Earl of Dundonald, The Autobiography of a Seaman (2 vols., London: Richard Bentley, 1860) [hereafter: Cochrane], i, xiv: in the preface of 1859 Cochrane described the state
1799 helpful naval advice from Nelson: ‘Never mind manoeuvres, always go at them’. For Cochrane, Nelson was ‘an embodiment of dashing courage’ and he recognized in ‘Trafalgar itself ... an illustration of Nelson’s peculiar dash’. In his view Nelson was justified not to bother about tactics, because ‘the discipline and seamanship of their [the enemy’s] crews was in that day so inferior as to leave little room for doubt of victory on our part’. This simplistic assessment of Nelson’s professional qualities remained unchallenged until the end of the nineteenth century.

With the rise of serious naval history authors started to enquire more thoroughly into tactical matters. The study of naval tactics, however, was still in need of justification and, in editing Fighting Instructions Corbett remarked, as late as 1905, that ‘Much of the old learning which the volume contains is of course of little more than antiquarian interest, but the bulk of it in the opinion of those best able to judge should be found of living value’. He saw this ‘living value’ in the study of tactics from the age of sail, because ‘the dominant weapon in use ... was, as now, the gun’ and he went on: ‘In face of so fundamental a resemblance no tactician can afford to ignore the sailing system merely because the method of propulsion and the nature of the material have changed. It is not the principles of tactics that such changes affect, but merely the method of applying them.’

The new justification of a study of tactics in the age of sail opened the path for a discussion of Nelson’s tactics at Trafalgar. This was initiated in 1899 by Admiral Colomb. Looking beyond Cochrane and James, Colomb returned to the idea that Nelson had not planned to attack in line ahead. Although Colomb did not precisely follow Ekins of his papers as ‘beyond comprehension or arrangement’ without specifying how much of the published text relies on the notes he made in about 1816.

43 Cochrane, i, 88, 89.

44 The negative impact of Cochrane’s statement was particularly pointed out by: Laughton (1886), p. ix; Corbett (1905), p. 337; Laughton (1895), pp. 123, 165, 183, 188; examples for this impact can be found in: William O’Connor Morris, ‘A Study of Nelson’, Macmillan’s Magazine, 43 (1890-91) [hereafter: Morris], 429-36, at 429-30, 432; W. C. Russell (1890), p. 4.

45 Corbett (1905), ix, x; Joseph Conrad, The Mirror of the Sea & A Personal Record (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 190, in his essay about the Heroic Age (first published in the Standard, on 21 October, Trafalgar Day, 1903, as Palmam qui meruit ferat [Nelson’s motto]) suggests, still showing the influence of Cochrane, that in his ‘exclusive faith Lord Nelson appears to us as the first of the moderns’.
in suggesting a line abreast, he considered Nelson’s plan to contain the idea of lines of bearing (something between line ahead and line abreast). Having access to logbooks and more eye-witness accounts and other historical sources than his predecessor, Colomb came to the conclusion that the ships of the lee-line (commanded by Vice-Admiral Collingwood) and some of the ships of the weather-line (under Nelson’s own direct command) had not attacked in line formation, following the exact course of their respective leading ships, but had instead headed directly for different ships of the rear and centre of the enemy’s line. This persuaded him to claim that the battle of Trafalgar had not only been planned to be fought in line abreast, but that it had been, at least in part, actually fought in this formation. At the same time he discarded the usual account that Nelson had approached in two lines ahead and he criticized this as the ‘worst possible way’ to prepare for an attack. This challenging new view prompted a vivid controversy of what had happened at Trafalgar. This controversy was fuelled in the first decade of the twentieth century by a variety of publications offering different interpretations and also by published editions of the log-books of the British ships which had taken part in the battle and of the fighting instructions issued by the Admiralty which advised on tactics at sea in the age of sail.

The new material that came to light about the battle of Trafalgar only served to confuse the issue. The editor of the logbooks concluded: ‘The theory that the British fleet attacked in two divisions in line of bearing, receives little support from these logs or private letters’. While Colomb’s idea was thus discarded, the edited sources did not offer a clear new image of the formation of the British divisions either. Consequently, different authors came to different conclusions about how the battle of Trafalgar was fought. The issue was further complicated by uncertainty about what Nelson had

50 Jackson, p. 139.
actually planned to do. In the course of the discussion of the matter, in The Times and in several books, different views were advanced. 51

On one side of this discourse stood the friends, Corbett and Newbolt, and on the other, the journalist Thursfield. In his edition of the fighting instructions, published in 1905, the year of the Trafalgar centenary, the naval historian Julian S. Corbett stressed the arguments against an attack in line ahead and referred to this formation as a 'mad perpendicular attack'. He came to the conclusion that Nelson had developed an admirable plan to attack the enemy's rear and centre, but that he had deviated from this plan in the actual battle, when he pushed in haste towards the enemy in line-ahead formation. 52 In 1905, Corbett's friend, Newbolt, also published a book, dedicated to Corbett, in which he pointed out that Nelson had 'departed from the tactics he had laid down' and he adopted Corbett's term 'perpendicular' for the form of Nelson's approach. 53 Building on Corbett's analysis of Nelson's memorandum, Newbolt, however, went further than his friend and distinguished between the two different lines of the British fleet. He pointed out that they had to serve different purposes and even that it made sense for Nelson's line to use the formation of line ahead in order to 'overpower the enemy's Commander-in-Chief by a concentration upon him, and at the same time to sever his van entirely from the rest of his line'. 54 Newbolt even claimed that this tactical move was part of a feint on the enemy's van. 55 This explanation of the use of the line ahead formation contradicted the criticism of the 'perpendicular' attack, which Newbolt shared with Corbett.

James R. Thursfield, who saw Nelson's character at stake, openly contradicted Corbett's claim that the battle could have 'been equally well won, perhaps even better

52 Corbett (1905), pp. 282-313, especially pp. 300, 306 (about Nelson not fulfilling his own plan), 312 (about 'mad perpendicular attack') and 300, 312-13 (about 'unnecessary haste').
54 Newbolt, p. 93 (on pp. 83-85 he had discussed the evidence for an approach in line ahead and on pp. 86-93 he had analysed evidence for Collingwood's approach in line of bearing).
55 Newbolt, p. 135.
won, if Nelson had been less eager to "get at them".56 Thursfield also insisted that the battle had been fought 'in accordance with the spirit of the Memorandum'.57 While he acknowledged that he was indebted to Corbett's research,58 he forcefully advanced his own views. He stressed the different functions of Nelson's two divisions, maintaining that Nelson had executed a feint on the van. He emphasized that the formation of the lines was not so important, that they were irregularly formed and Nelson attacked in 'anything but perpendicular' fashion.59

The controversy about the Trafalgar tactics was not yet resolved, when Corbett published his detailed account about *The Campaign of Trafalgar* in 1910. Although mainly concerned about political and strategic issues, Corbett also re-examined in detail Nelson's plan for the battle and the way in which he actually conducted the engagement with the superior Franco-Spanish fleet. Like Newbolt before him, Corbett now analysed the different tasks Nelson had assigned to his two divisions. He came even to the conclusion that the line ahead was the ideal formation for the purpose Nelson had given his own line.60 He now hardly ever used his old expression 'perpendicular' to explain this mode of attack,61 but, at the same time, he was anxious to argue for his old view that Nelson had deviated from his memorandum. In order to support this opinion he was content with general assertions or arguments that daringly (over-)interpreted Nelson's memorandum.62 He concluded that the memorandum was fulfilled only in what

58 Thursfield (1909), p. 32.
59 Thursfield (1909), pp. 40 (about functions of lines); 44, 68 (about feint); 41, 48, 60, 65-7 (about form of lines).
61 I found it only once: Corbett (1910), p. 344.
62 Corbett (1910), pp. 342-345, 358 (general assertions); 370 (interpretation of the diagram in Nelson's memorandum, which shows three parallel lines and can therefore not represent the actual attack, as evidence that Nelson wanted to attack in two lines of bearing, see also pp. 361, 365); 334-35 (claim that Nelson gave up the advanced squadron, although he had not given it a task in case of an attack from windward, as was the case at Trafalgar, and although he had not considered it in his 'Order of Battle and Sailing'); 374 (claim that Nelson breached the order of battle; this claim rests on a questionable interpretation of what Nelson would have regarded as order of battle).
concerned major tactics, but not in what concerned minor tactics. This judgment, however, contradicts his own assertion that, according to Nelson’s plan, minor tactics would depend on circumstances. Corbett was no more convincing in his treatment of the actual battle. He argued against Nelson having performed a feint on the enemy’s van. In order to explain why Nelson had headed for the van, although it had never been his aim to attack it nor did he do so, Corbett argued that Nelson had temporarily changed his mind during the actual attack.

Corbett’s *The Campaign of Trafalgar* had an ambivalent effect on the treatment of the tactics used by Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar. On the one hand, the book was the most thorough study of the battle of Trafalgar ever published and it is improbable that any more detailed study will ever be attempted, so that Corbett’s work tends to be regarded as unsurpassable, if not definitive. On the other hand, Corbett had not managed to convey a clear idea about what Nelson had planned for and what he had done in the battle of Trafalgar. Considering that he had praised Nelson’s way of attacking in line ahead, his conclusion was confusing and unsatisfactory:

All we can say is that in the culminating hour of his unmatched experience he flung away the security of scientific deployment, and in its place he staked all on the moral and material advantage of speed and momentum against an enemy apparently unformed and seeking to escape him. The risk he took of having the heads of his two columns isolated by a loss of wind or crushed prematurely by the concentration to which he exposed them naked, almost passed the limits of sober leading. Its justification was its success and the known defects of his opponents. ... The lack of training and sea experience in his enemy on which he relied saved him and justified the heroic risk he had taken. ... Some capable officers, reviewing the tactics afterwards in cold blood, believed, it is true, the hazard was unnecessary, that an hour or so of delay in attaining the position he had designed would have left time enough ‘to complete the business’ and have given even more decisive results. ... Such flashes of genius will not submit

---

63 Corbett (1910), pp. 395 (conclusion), 351 (about minor tactics).
64 Corbett (1910), pp. 373, 379-82.
65 Corbett (1910), pp. 383-84.
Corbett thus returned to the simplistic assumption that the enemy at Trafalgar had been weak and he finished his somewhat open-ended conclusion with a reference to Ekins' idea of a possible better formation without explaining why the line abreast, that Ekins had suggested, should be better than the line ahead of Nelson's column that Corbett himself had praised for keeping the enemy's van out of action.

Corbett's final conclusion annoyed Thursfield, his old adversary, so much that he successfully 'called on the press for an Admiralty Committee to investigate and pronounce on the subject'. Such a committee was appointed and it approached the subject in the most professional way possible, both from the maritime and from the historical point of view. A naval captain was entrusted with determining the positions of the different ships with the help of their logbooks and with drawing his results into charts which would represent the ships' positions and movements. These charts were the first, and until today also the only ones (they have never been reproduced after their first publication), that were drawn to scale. The members of the Committee also determined their historical methods and disclosed how they had weighed the evidence. Their report, published in 1913, consists of a concise account and several detailed appendices. Without referring to specific authors, the well-researched and clearly-argued report clarifies the controversy and in several respects contradicts Corbett's findings. The report does not agree with Corbett's conclusions that Nelson 'staked all on the moral and material advantage of speed and momentum', that 'The risk he took ... almost passed the limits of sober leading' and that the 'hazard was unnecessary'. On the contrary, the report pointed out: 'Nelson's reason for maintaining this formation [of line ahead] was...
the nature of the task he had set himself' and the report explained how the line-ahead formation enabled Nelson 'to prevent the van of the enemy from coming to the support of the centre or the rear' and it added: 'It also enabled him to threaten the van of the enemy’s line while concealing his intention of attacking its centre'.  

Contradicting Corbett’s view, the report also maintained that Nelson’s line had actually performed a feint on the van.  

Even more amazing than the stunning revelations about Nelson’s tactics in the report of the Admiralty Commission is the fact that this detailed scholarly report has never received the attention it deserves and it is frequently neglected completely. Thus, some of its most important conclusions have not been incorporated into modern accounts of Nelson’s tactics at Trafalgar. There are several reasons for this striking omission. One element that can, at least in part, explain the neglect of the findings of the Admiralty Commission is that its report was addressed to an audience of specialists. Although its account of the applied tactics is immensely readable, the report also contains many appendices, huge maps that need elaborate unfolding and it was produced in an awkward format. It would have needed to be presented in a more accessible form in order to reach a wider audience, but, even if there had been an author ready to do that, there was another problem. Starting from the turn of the century the public had been practically flooded with publications about Trafalgar and the market for Trafalgar-books was saturated by the time of the publication of Corbett’s great work, in 1910. Moreover, the public had other, more pressing things on its mind in the years after 1913 than studying Nelson’s tactics at Trafalgar. As early as 1918, H. W. Wilson remarked that Trafalgar ‘is not always studied to-day as it should be’.

In the years after 1918, when the events of the First World War where at the centre of public attention and the Trafalgar controversy was still relatively recent, there was no great chance of a revival of the discussion of fighting tactics in the age of sail.

71 Admiralty Committee, p. viii.
72 Admiralty Committee, p. xiv.
73 In Introduction to The Nelson Touch. Being a little book of the great seaman’s wisdom selected and arranged by ..., ed. Walter Jerrold (London: John Murray, 1918) [hereafter: Jerrold], p. xviii.
The only contribution to the history of the battle of Trafalgar that was of any consequence was the publication, in 1933, of the translation of the major French work about the battle by Colonel Desbrière. This book had originally been published in 1907 and Corbett as well as the Admiralty Committee had used it for their studies of Trafalgar. Desbrière’s work contained an extensive collection of printed primary sources, especially from France. These, however, as Corbett had noted and the translator confirmed, were often faulty. The book therefore did not enhance the quality of the discussion about Trafalgar or even revive interest in it. After the second world war the naval historian C. Northcote Parkinson remarked disparagingly: ‘The naval historian is too apt to … give us nothing but diagrams of battles and anecdotes about Admiral Nelson. Only by close attention to strategy – and therefore to trade – can naval history maintain touch with the general field of scholarship’. This remark indicated a more general development in the field of naval history. Naval historians were now attempting a more comprehensive understanding of the naval past, moving away from what they regarded as an over-emphasis on tactical issues.

A new assessment of the battle of Trafalgar was offered in an article by Admiral A. H. Taylor, published in the Mariner’s Mirror in 1950. This accessible version of the events drew on Desbrière’s flawed account, the edition of the Trafalgar logs and supposedly on the Report of the Committee Appointed by the Admiralty. Without

74 Edouard Desbrière, The Naval Campaign of 1805. Trafalgar (First published in 1907 as La campagne maritime de 1805, translated and edited by Constance Eastwick, 2 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) [hereafter: Desbrière], p. v, referring also to Corbett (1910), pp. ix, 165. My own research into Spanish sources has confirmed this general judgment. On pp. 98-100 in the appendix of the French edition Desbrière gives a letter in the Spanish original of ‘D. Antonio de Escafló a D. Enrique Mac-Donell Comandante del Navio Rayo’; this has been used and even defended as authentic by Corbett (1910), pp. 359-61. The contents of the ‘letter’, however, is actually the text of a memoir, supposedly by Escafló, published in Francisco de Paula Quadrado y de-Roo, Elogio histórico de don Antonio Escaño (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1852) [hereafter: Paula Quadrado], pp. 144-45; this text, which Desbrière claimed to be from a letter of Escaño to Macdonnell is in this Spanish book only a few pages away from the text of a letter of Escaño to Macdonnell of different contents (pp. 158-59), so that a confusion of reference and actual source seems very likely.


76 The classic book that represents this trend and supported its development is Daniel A. Baugh’s British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965).

dealing with Corbett, Taylor simply dismissed any tactical considerations: 'The secret of the “Nelson touch” is not to be found so much in the Memorandum, as in the strong confidence which Lord Nelson inspired in all who met him'. The fact that Taylor did not say a word about Nelson's feint of the enemy's van provoked a letter to the editor of the Mariner's Mirror:

It seems to me a pity that Admiral Taylor did not read the Admiralty Committee's Report on Trafalgar (1913) once again before he wrote his article. For surely had he done so he would have realized that the French as well as the British evidence shows clearly that Lord Nelson made a pretence of attacking the enemy's van; that he persisted long enough to deceive Dumanoir [who commanded the van]; and that this deception had an important influence on the battle. It delayed the van coming to Villeneuve's help until he was past praying for, as Nelson intended it should do; thus fulfilling one of the principles in his Memorandum.

The conscientious writer of this letter could not stem the tide. The report of the Admiralty Committee was neglected and Admiral Taylor's account of the battle was used as the basis for the popular book about the battle by David Howarth. In this work Howarth claimed that on the morning of the battle: 'Nelson was not thinking of tactics: probably he had decided it all in a moment'. Other popularizations of the battle followed the same pattern, all showing a lack of knowledge of the report of the Admiralty Commission, if not of Corbett's arguments as well.

---

78 Taylor, 283. Taylor's assessment of the tactics (on p. 293) also misrepresents the formation that Nelson had intended for Collingwood's line as a line abreast, although Nelson had merely intended it 'to bear up together', that is, in a line of bearing (see Nicolas, vii, 91).
79 Gregory Robinson, Mariner's Mirror, 37 (1951), 237.
82 See for example: John Terraine, Trafalgar (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1976), p. 129, who claims that 'the “Nelson touch” never really lay in a system of tactics, formations, or theoretical propositions; it lay in personal magnetism'.
83 Oliver Warner, Trafalgar (first published London, 1959 by B. T. Batsford, London: Pan Books, 1966, 2nd reprint of 1969), p. 76 even claimed that the attack in two columns was what Nelson had planned and what was the best way of attack, although all naval historians involved in the discussion at the beginning
It was only in 1990 that another scholarly approach to Nelson's tactics at the battle of Trafalgar was published. This was the edition of Naval Warfare in the Age of Sail. The Evolution of Fighting Tactics 1650-1815 by Brian Tunstall, Corbett's son-in-law. Written long before its publication, it brought together the extensive knowledge on the subject by the prime specialist of his time. Tunstall followed Corbett in many respects, but he also developed new ideas and doubts about Corbett's conclusions. In particular, he had unearthed a signal that Nelson had referred to in his memorandum. This signal supported the findings of the Admiralty Report, that Nelson wanted to execute a feint on the enemy's van and that he wanted to go at the enemy under full sail. In defence of his father-in-law, however, Tunstall asserted that the findings of the Admiralty Commission 'confirmed the work of Sir Julian Corbett'.


William Cuthebert Brian Tunstall, Naval Warfare in the Age of Sail. The Evolution of Fighting Tactics 1650-1815, edited by Nicholas Tracy (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1990) [hereafter: Tunstall], p. ix (editorial remark that Tunstall was Corbett's son-in-law); p. 250 (four main elements of Nelson's tactics similar to Corbett's); p. 257 (claim that stations of flagships were changed, taken from Corbett); p. 258 (Nelson's signal to stop the enemy going to Cadiz, is seen as 'informative' for Collingwood, as Corbett saw it in his edition of the Fighting Instructions and not, as Corbett saw it in his Campaign of Trafalgar, as an indication that Nelson had temporarily changed his mind); p. 259 (Corbett's conclusion doubted).

Tunstall, p. 251 (on p. 258 Tunstall remarks, cautiously doubting Corbett's views against a feint: 'we cannot today, in the light of this new evidence, entirely dismiss the possibility that some notion of a feint entered into his [Nelson's] calculations').

Tunstall, p. 258; Schurman, p. 130, who had used Tunstall's manuscript (p. 113, fn. 3), followed his judgement and confidently asserted: 'The Admiralty were mistaken in one thing. They regarded their pronouncement as final, or semi-divine. In fact, the god of tactics [Corbett] had already given utterance'.

importance his tactical ideas'. The complexity of the discussion about Nelson’s tactics at Trafalgar at the beginning of the twentieth century seems to have furthered a tendency to avoid facing the subject at all and as a consequence to advocate simplistic views about tactical issues. The ignorance of how Nelson’s tactics at Trafalgar have been unravelled in the discussion, culminating in the report of the Admiralty Committee of 1913, is also reflected in a remark published in a very recent publication: ‘The centenary was the occasion for a wide-ranging, if unrewarding, debate on the tactics of the battle. The discussion was concluded by the Admiralty Committee of 1911 [sic], and the work of Corbett’.

In the nineteenth century a neglect of tactical issues led to an inability to evaluate Nelson’s plan for and action at the battle of Trafalgar and to Nelson’s success being attributed to nothing but dash. A confusing, but very thorough discussion of the matter at the beginning of the twentieth century was brought to a conclusion in the well-researched and clearly-formulated report of the Admiralty Committee, published in 1913. This report has, for different reasons, been neglected throughout the twentieth century. Current assessments of Nelson’s tactics do not suggest this is going to change. By putting more stress on Nelson’s inspiring leadership than on his tactical abilities, modern accounts show a tendency to return to claims about Nelson’s charisma and dash, that were widely held in the mid-nineteenth century.

III
Impact of Battles

Beyond the treatment of the actual battles, looms the question of how their results are to be evaluated and, as a consequence, what might be regarded as Nelson’s historic achievements in naval warfare.

After Nelson’s death at the battle of Trafalgar, the overwhelming victory itself and Nelson’s dramatic death were so much on the public’s mind that not many authors

---

88 Tracy, p. 180. Not having used the findings of the Admiralty Committee he summarizes on p. 210: ‘Nelson’s tactics had been focused on exploiting to the full the morale of the British gun crews’.
examined the possible benefits of the victory. They sometimes elaborated more on the effects of the battle of the Nile, of which it was said that it 'resuscitated Europe, it released Egypt, and raised the honour of the British flag in the eyes of all nations'. In trying to assess the possible effects of the battle of Trafalgar authors either reverted to the recent invasion threat, posed by Napoleon's assembly of a huge army on the Channel coast, or they conjured up long-term advantages through the reasserted British supremacy of the seas. Although the immediate invasion threat was gone, because Napoleon had moved his army, originally destined for England, into central Europe, one author commented: 'Thus was the boasted idea of Invasion rendered abortive ... and in future ages, when the Stranger who may visit our Island, shall enquire for the Monument of Nelson, the answer will be "Behold the Country which he saved"'. Effects that would be felt in the long-term, resulting from the 'complete Sovereignty of the Seas' were measured by the strength of 'the blow which the enemy has received'. One author simply claimed this blow to be 'irreparable'. Another calculated his prognoses on the basis of the time it would take the enemy to rebuild his fleet, still optimistically trusting that 'the nation in general will feel the happy effects of it for a century to come'. Other biographers reflected the current mood and asserted that Trafalgar was 'a victory which will probably be more valued, in its effects, by future ages, than by the present; for our posterity, whilst they acknowledge it as the basis for their security and the monument of ancient valour, will not have to mingle with their triumphs the poignant recollection that it was obtained by the loss of a man whom their ancestors had personally seen and adored.'

---

90 Anon. (Tegg), p. 4, even maintained that Nelson was 'a man, for whose loss no naval victory can adequately compensate'.
93 Anon. (Goodchild), p. vi.
94 Jones, p. 120.
95 Anon. (Martin), p. 44.
96 Anon. (Lemoine), p. 30; and Anon. (Taylor), p. 11.
Towards the end of the Napoleonic War, Southey combined the two arguments of the supposedly averted invasion and the effect of the destruction of so great a part of the enemy’s fleet, by claiming that the enemy needed to rebuild its navy after the battle of Trafalgar ‘before the possibility of their invading our shores could again be contemplated’. Southey also maintained that as a result of the battle of Trafalgar ‘the maritime war … was considered at an end’. Whatever that was supposed to mean, authors now had to face the fact that the battle of Trafalgar had not been decisive enough to end the whole war, which dragged on for nearly ten more years. If they ventured any assessment of the effects of Nelson’s battles, they sometimes gave more weight to the battle of the Nile than to that of Trafalgar or generally concluded (already in 1822) that the ‘period is advancing when the naval superiority which he [Nelson] completed will pass away’. Authors appeared to struggle in their efforts to assess the impact of Nelson’s battles on the course of history.

As time passed and no new war threatening the safety of Britain itself broke out, the battle of Trafalgar began to be accorded more importance. It was now seen as ‘a most brilliant victory, one which eclipsed all her [England’s] former deeds, crowned with neverfading laurels those by whom it was achieved, and fully established her security and independence’. The idea of the averted invasion became ever more powerful, so that one author claimed about Britain in the war against Napoleon: ‘At Waterloo she fought for victory; at Trafalgar, for existence’. At the end of the

---

97 Southey, ii, 272.
98 James, for example, merely focused on describing the actual battles, ‘[I]eaving to heads better versed in state affairs to discuss the political consequences, far and near, that attended the decisive victory which Rear-admiral Nelson and his fleet had gained’ (W. James (1826), ii, 173).
99 Brenton, ii, 316, considered it ‘as the greatest, both in itself and its consequences, of any naval engagement recorded in history’. Southey (1813), i, 176, fn., and i, 236, though praising the battle of the Nile, attributes the battle of Copenhagen (in which his brother took part) with ‘more importance even than the battle of the Nile to the honour and strength and security of England’.
100 Thomas Carlyle, Montaigne and Other Essays. Chiefly Biographical (London: James Gowans & Son, 1897), pp. 68-91 (essay about Nelson, written 1822), at p. 88.
101 Ralfe, ii, 194; Alison, v, 367, wrote about the battle of Trafalgar: ‘The greatest naval victory recorded in the annals of the world … The dangers of invasion, the menaces of Napoleon, were at an end’; and v, 372: ‘the battle of Trafalgar not only at once secured the independence of England and destroyed all Napoleon’s hopes of maritime greatness, but annihilated for half a century the navies of France and Spain’.
102 Alison, v, 381.
nineteenth century the naval historian Laughton still saw the impact of the victory at Trafalgar on Napoleon's invasion plans for Britain as the main result of the battle. Laughton also added a more personal heritage of Nelson's to the results of Trafalgar by alluding to the 'lessons' Nelson had taught his 'modern successors'. As the first centenary of the battle of Trafalgar approached, biographies, apart from repeating that the battle had 'rescued England from all chance of invasion', started to emphasize more far-reaching results. They stressed that the battle of Trafalgar, by firmly establishing Britain's vital supremacy at sea, had not only helped to defeat Napoleon, but had provided the basis for the extension of the British Empire throughout the nineteenth century. This was famously expressed in Mahan's words: 'Those far distant, storm-beaten ships, upon which the Grand Army never looked, stood between it and the dominion of the world'. The position of Britain as the great world-power of the nineteenth century, was attributed to Nelson's victories and the greatest praise seemed due to Nelson himself:

The ultimate effect of an action apprises its real value, and viewed in this light, Nelson's battles, culminating in the glorious victory at Trafalgar, must be regarded as the most important conquests won in modern times; for, through them, war was replaced by peace, chaos by order, and through the ensuing peace Britain became the mighty and pre-eminent nation she is to-day. It is impossible to ascribe too much glory to the wonderful sea-king whose victories laid the foundation of our present political and commercial supremacy.

Only a few authors contradicted this idealizing approach. The naval author, Fred T. Jane, worded his doubts strongly: 'but for the detail that the great admiral died that day, Trafalgar might never have ranked with the Nile in the category of famous victories'.

---

103 Laughton (1895), p. 238.  
104 Baring-Gould, p. 3.  
106 Holme, pp. v, vi. Similarly: White/Moorhouse, p. 163: 'Possession of the temperate parts of the earth's surface, and eighty years' start in the race for Empire, came to Britain because Nelson's dispositions of his fleet were strategically skilful, and his tactical manoeuvres masterly in the face of the enemy'.  
When the heated atmosphere around the centenary of the battle of Trafalgar cooled down, Corbett helped to further awareness in his sober study of *The Campaign of Trafalgar* that Napoleon had already given up the project of invasion by the time the battle of Trafalgar was fought. Instead of a battle for survival, as Trafalgar had mostly been portrayed in the past, Corbett showed it to have been in fact an event that marked the change from a defensive to an offensive war against Napoleon. As a result of Corbett's study, the idea that Trafalgar averted an invasion of Britain by French troops has since virtually disappeared from biographies about Nelson. Around the middle of the twentieth century historians tended to agree instead on the conclusion that the battle of Trafalgar established British sea power. They went on to argue either that this helped to defeat Napoleon or that Britain's supremacy at sea formed the basis for her Empire in the nineteenth century. Later biographers rarely spelt out the political consequences of Nelson's battles and, if they did, they simply repeated earlier conclusions. For some time they rather stressed the impact of Nelson's naval career on the spirit of the British navy. His successes were said to have created 'confidence in "combat supremacy" (to use Mahan's phrase) which no inequality in numbers could disturb' or it was said that '[h]e taught officers to use imagination and initiative, and he established a new standard of professionalism and humanity'. More recently, biographers have given up dealing with the consequences of Nelson's naval actions, focusing instead mostly on personal aspects of Nelson's life and the celebration of his person during his life and after his

---

108 Corbett (1910), pp. 15-18, 25-26. Mahan (1893), ii, 181, 196, had argued similarly. At the same time Corbett contributed to the fascination with big fleet actions, nourished by the cult of Nelson at the time, which had detrimental influence on the naval preparations before the First World War. This influence is cursorily dealt with by C. Lloyd, pp. 143, 144 with further references. The subject of how the Royal Navy tried to learn from Nelson how to fight successful fleet actions (avoiding other lessons) is worth a study in its own right and will not be further pursued in this examination of the image of Nelson.


110 For the defeat of Napoleon: W. M. James, *Influence of Sea Power*, p. 22; for basis for Empire: Kennedy, p. 332.

111 C. Lloyd, p. 137; A. A. C. Hedges, *Admiral Lord Nelson* (Norwich: Jarrold Colour Publications, [1975]), [there are no page numbers in this souvenir brochure, p. 31].


113 Pocock (1968), pp. 124-126.
The only conscious assessment of any impact of Nelson dealt with him as 'a hero', comparing him with Napoleon and Wellington, and did not attempt an assessment of Nelson's naval achievements in their own right.\textsuperscript{115}

\textbf{IV} \\
\textbf{Conclusion}

The treatment of all three aspects of Nelson's battles examined in this chapter — his personal actions, his tactics and the significance of his battles — have undergone a marked parallel development throughout the last two hundred years. At the beginning of the nineteenth century none of them was treated with any deep knowledge or understanding. Nelson's personal conduct was described in fanciful stories, his tactics were not seriously examined and the possible impact of the battle of Trafalgar was difficult to assess so shortly after the event. During most of the nineteenth century this did not change much, probably due to a combination of reasons, such as the lack of interest in Nelson himself (as dealt with in chapter 1) and the lack of serious scholarship on naval history. It was only at the end of the nineteenth century that scholarly interest focused on Nelson's tactics and, though to a lesser degree, on the context of his battles. The fanciful tales of Nelson's heroic behaviour survived this period untouched. With the decline of the study of naval tactics throughout the twentieth century and the lessening interest in an assessment of the role of Nelson's battles, recent biographies have not examined what may be regarded as the core elements of Nelson's career. In criticizing nineteenth-century hero-worshippers, recent biographers still follow their pattern and treat Nelson as an example of the cultural phenomenon of the 'national hero' rather than as a man who deserves to be evaluated within his professional and historical context.

\textsuperscript{114} Examples are particularly: Hibbert and Coleman. \\
At the end of the first chapter it was concluded that during his lifetime Nelson's reputation was not seriously tarnished by his actions at Naples. This was to change after his death and his involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution in 1799 was to become one of the main aspects for which Nelson was criticized.

As was discussed in the prologue, the British public had received vague reports about what Nelson did in Naples at the time. A critical speech of Charles James Fox, not mentioning Nelson himself, and Helen Maria Williams' book about the French Revolution, published in 1801, had attracted some attention to the matter, but none of these reports and views had affected Nelson's reputation in Britain seriously. After Nelson's death, early biographies sometimes indicated the difficulty of assessing what Nelson had done at Naples, for example by noting that they would not examine, 'how far it might have been more polite to have' acted differently. Going beyond such allusions, Edward James Foote initiated the critical discussion of Nelson's actions. Foote had been the senior British officer in the Bay of Naples under Nelson's command, before Nelson himself arrived in June 1799. In this period the Neapolitan royalists agreed to a capitulation of the rebel forces which was very disadvantageous to the King of Naples and which they did not have the necessary powers to conclude. Without any possibility of receiving advice from his admiral, Foote signed this capitulation below the Russian and Turkish allies' signatures under a 'protest against everything that can in any way be contrary to the rights of his Britannic Majesty, or those of the English nation'. When Nelson annulled the capitulation after his arrival, Foote justified his signature, for which Nelson never blamed him, by arguing that he had been ordered to co-operate with the Neapolitan royalists and that this had been very difficult.

---

1 Anon. (Goodchild), p. 108; similarly: F. Lloyd, p. 80, and J. White, p. 158.
3 Foote, pp. 22, 67, 68 (about duty to co-operate), 25, 81, 136-38, 151-54 (about difficulties).
Foote claimed that he did not want to speak up at the time, because the criticism of the British involvement came from supporters of the Whig party and he did not want to be attached to a party. It was only after the publication of Harrison's life of Nelson, in 1806, that Foote launched his criticism of Nelson. He now felt personally offended by the way the capitulation he had signed was described in this biography. Harrison, having access to Nelson's letter-books, quoted from Nelson's letters and used them as a basis for claiming that Nelson had referred to the capitulation as 'a most infamous treaty', 'to which Captain Foote had put his name'. In reaction to these words, printed on different pages of a two volume biography, Foote perceived that there was only one option: either he himself was to be blamed for signing the capitulation or Nelson was to be blamed for annulling it. As a matter of fact Foote had signed the capitulation, as he himself pointed out, as a powerless spectator of events, whereas Nelson annulled it with the power of a fleet of eighteen ships-of-the-line at his disposal. It appears reasonable to conclude that the decisions of both Nelson and Foote, though very different, can be justified when seen in their respective contexts. This fairly obvious conclusion was not reached by Foote, who declared emphatically: 'it is unreasonable to require me to sacrifice myself at the shrine of Lord Nelson'.

When Foote learned from James Stanier Clarke, who was at that time preparing his own biography of Nelson, that Harrison was planning a second edition of his life of Nelson, Foote immediately sent a warning to Harrison. Although Harrison's life never did go into a second edition, Foote still published his version of events, explaining to Clarke: 'I regret exceedingly that Mr. Harrison has compelled me to enter on a vindication of my conduct in the Bay of Naples'. When Clarke began his correspondence with Foote, he promised him 'that the whole of what I shall publish

---

4 Foote, p. 8.
5 Foote, pp. 6-8.
6 Compare J. Harrison, ii, 120 and 99; with Nicolas, iii, 406 and 392. In the second quotation Nelson referred to the news of an 'Armistice' he had received at sea.
7 Foote, pp. 6, 58, 59.
8 Foote, p. 19.
9 Foote, p. 35 (letter from Clarke to Foote, 23 February 1807) and p. 11 (letter from Foote to Harrison, 27 February 1807).
10 Foote, p. 42.
respecting the proceedings in the Bay of Naples, should be laid before you, previous to
publication, for you to alter, and to add to, as you may judge proper'. In the course of
their correspondence, however, Clarke vented some doubts and pointed out that it was
possible that both Nelson and Foote could be vindicated. In utter disappointment at
what Foote saw as Clarke’s betrayal, Foote published a second, enlarged edition of his
Vindication in which he also included his correspondence with Clarke.

In his Vindication Foote developed two lines of argument. On the one hand, he
excused his own involvement by explaining why he could not avoid signing the
capitulation. On the other hand, he justified his signature by defending the capitulation
as useful and appropriate. Foote’s second defence was a new argument, which he had
not used before and which somehow contradicted his stance that he had no choice but to
sign it. Not surprisingly Nelson’s biographer, Clarke, asked Foote, why he had protested
against the capitulation, if he thought it justifiable. Foote now explained that his protest
was ‘inserted ... solely because I had signed my name under those of the Russian and
Turkish commanders, which might not be proper, as I was at that time acting as the
immediate representative of the King, whose dignity with foreign states I had no right to
infringe’. It does not appear very convincing that Foote should have made such a fuss
just about the order of signatures. His explanation appears rather as an interpretation that
was meant to fit into his new argument that he really supported the contents of the
capitulation. It seems more than probable that the protest was indeed originally directed
against the contents of the capitulation, which Foote had unsuccessfully tried to get
changed at the time. Foote’s explanation of the protest, given in 1807, contained
another surprising element: Foote now regarded himself as entitled to act directly for the
King of Great Britain, whereas he maintained that Nelson had no right to annul the

---

11 Foote, p. 31.
12 Foote, p. 49.
13 Foote, pp. 21, 22, end of 23, 24 (centre), 25 (end).
14 Foote, pp. 23, 24 (beginning and end), 25 (beginning).
15 Foote, pp. 56 (Clarke’s request), 59 (Foote’s answer).
16 Compare Foote, pp. 189, 190; with the text of the capitulation on pp. 195, 196.
17 See also: Foote, p. 60.
capitulation, because he had not consulted his superiors. It can hardly convince that Foote, Nelson’s subordinate, should have had greater powers than Nelson himself.

Foote’s *Vindication of His Conduct* contains also a factual error. His memory betrayed him when he wrote the following:

> As I finally left Naples Bay on the 11th of July, I was not a witness of the disgraceful scenes that passed, though I have been made acquainted with most of them by those who were. I believe it is but too true that the garrisons of Uovo and Nuovo [consisting of rebels] were taken out of those castles under the *pretence* of putting the Capitulation I had signed, into execution, (which, after having annulled the treaty, must appear truly singular) ...

Although Foote had been away from the Bay of Naples before 11 July, on a mission to Palermo which began in the evening of 28 June, he had witnessed not only how the rebels left the castles on 26 June, but had also sent out his ship’s barge, on 28 June, in the afternoon, in order to seize the boats with the rebels on board. After having decided to favour the capitulation, Foote seems to have preferred to forget that he took part in undoing it. From his new version of events, Foote concluded that the rebels must have been somehow deceived. He did not specify by whom, but, in commenting that this action ‘after having annulled the treaty, must appear truly singular’, Foote alludes to Nelson. He thus created a hypothesis (about Nelson’s deceit) based on assumptions (about how the rebels left the castles) that he felt free to make on the basis of his distortion of facts (that is: his forgetting about his own involvement).

In the huge two-volume biography of Nelson that James Stanier Clarke published with John M’Arthur the views of Nelson’s critics, Helen Maria Williams and Foote, were considered; but these authors came to the conclusion that, if Nelson had committed any error, it had been one ‘not of professional integrity, but of political judgement’. They commented on the Neapolitan trials that followed the defeat of the revolution by

---

18 Foote, pp. 15, 38.
19 Foote, p. 39.
21 Clarke & M’Arthur, ii, 183; for consideration of Nelson’s critics see ii, 183 and 188.
stating that 'the whole odium ... was most industriously cast on Lord Nelson'. Clarke and M’Arthur were the first to describe in some depth the trial and execution of the Neapolitan Commodore, Caracciolo, ordered by Nelson after the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution. Two other biographies that appeared after this either did not comment on Nelson’s involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution at all or summarized the views of Clarke and M’Arthur’s on the subject.

Not all Whig partisans, however, were content with Clarke and M’Arthur’s explanation and they kept arguing that there had been a ‘breach of faith’. Foote’s description of and comments on Nelson’s actions in the Bay of Naples also appealed to Southey in 1813. Southey had turned from passionate critic into passionate supporter of the government and was about to receive the post of poet laureate. He had nevertheless retained his sympathies with European republicans. In his Life of Nelson, he compared the Neapolitan republicans not with their French contemporaries, but with the English opponents of Charles II and James II and thus made them more respectable for a British audience. In describing the surrender of the rebels, Southey used the distorted version presented by Foote and concluded:

A deplorable transaction! A stain upon the memory of Nelson, and the honour of England! To palliate would be in vain; to justify it would be wicked; there is no alternative, for one who will not make himself a participator in guilt, but to record the disgraceful story with sorrow and with shame.

To this strong view Southey added an account of the trial, sentence and execution of Caracciolo, which he copied from Clarke and M’Arthur. Southey’s strong criticism of

22 Clarke & M’Arthur, ii, 188.
24 [Anon.], The Life of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson (Dublin: Wogan & Larkin, 1810) does not contain any references; Clarke, pp. 181, 182.
26 Southey (1813), ii, 12, 13; this has been pointed out by Geoffrey Carnall, Robert Southey and His Age. The Development of a Conservative Mind (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 127.
27 Southey (1813), ii, 46.
28 Southey (1813), ii, 46-53.
Nelson’s actions at Naples in the summer of 1799, gave Foote’s views wider currency. From now on they formed the standard version of events not only because Southey’s biography was to become the most widely-read life of Nelson, but also because in the two years after its publication serious discussion about Nelson ceased, when some of his letters to Lady Hamilton and a diatribe on Lady Hamilton29 were published.

In the following twenty years Foote’s version of events, popularized by Southey, remained unopposed. It found its way into works about naval history30 and even into working-class literature.31 Some Whigs went so far as to speak of ‘treachery and murder’ in referring to Nelson’s involvement in the events at Naples.32

When expert naval men revived the interest in Nelson, one biographer based his account on Clarke and M’Arthur’s version of events rather than that of Southey.33 This cautious approach was not followed by all writers34 and it remained necessary to address the Naples affair more directly. Using nothing but secondary sources Commander Jeaffreson Miles published in 1843 a Vindication of Admiral Lord Nelson’s Proceedings in the Bay of Naples, in which he exposed the contradictions and superficialities in the texts of ‘Nelson’s defamers’. Though this little work, addressed ‘to the officers of the British Navy’, betrays the emotional involvement of its author, it is nevertheless thoroughly argued.35 In a more sober fashion the editor of The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson, Nicholas Harris Nicolas, in 1845, presented the available British and

29 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton deals with Nelson’s involvement in Neapolitan affair in the summer of 1799 on pp. 204-20, using Foote’s and Clarke & M’Arthur’s accounts; for the impact of the publications referred to see chapter 1.
30 W. James (1826), ii, 310; Brenton, ii, 478-84; also: Alison, iv, 86-89.
31 The Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, 1 (1832), 256 (29 September, Nelson’s birthday).
34 Thomson, pp. 131-39 again drew on Foote’s and Southey’s versions of events.
35 Miles.
Italian source material, narrated the events, discussed the arguments of Nelson's critics and came to the conclusion that Nelson had 'been unjustly and unfairly treated'.

These efforts of naval men had not settled the matter, however. Nelson's actions in the summer of 1799 were criticized in four articles in the *United Service Magazine* of 1845. The first two of these were simply based on Foote's account, whereas the third and fourth referred to Nicolas' publication and applied 'international law' to what its author regarded as the facts. In 1846, nearly half a century after the events, the accounts by two eyewitnesses were published. These threw a critical light on Nelson's actions. One of them was wrong in one essential aspect, while the other relied on second-hand information as to the most important information it contained. Although, therefore, none of these publications was thoroughly convincing in itself, together they showed that the nature of Nelson's involvement in Naples in 1799 was still an unresolved problem.

In the second half of the nineteenth century biographers of Nelson tended to favour Nelson, although it has to be kept in mind that Southey's life of Nelson, with its highly critical view of Nelson's actions at Naples, at the same time dominated the market. There were also still critical voices to be heard outside the biographical

---

36 Nicolas, iii, 477-523 (Appendix C, on the 'Surrender of the Castles Uovo and Nuovo, and trial and execution of Commodore Caraccioli [sic]').


38 Memoirs of General Pepe. Comprising the Principal Military and Political Events of Modern Italy. Written by Himself (3 vols., London: Richard Bentley, 1846) [hereafter: Pepe], i, 105, 106 (wrongly claiming that the rebels had embarked before Nelson's arrival), Pepe also blames the French general Macdonald, p. 69.

39 Thomas A. Evans, *A Statement of the Means by which the Nelson Coat, Presented by H. R. H. Prince Albert to Greenwich Hospital, was obtained by Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas, G. C. M. G. ... Also Some Unpublished Portions of the Trial and Execution of Caracciolo, and the Capitulation of the Castles of Naples* (London: T. A. Evans, 1846) [hereafter: T. A. Evans], pp. 60, 61 where an eyewitness is quoted as having said that the commander of the Russian troops at Naples in 1799 told him at the time that Nelson had accepted the capitulation.

literature and one keen admirer of Nelson's felt the need to launch a spirited defence of Nelson in *Blackwood's Magazine*. While the question of Nelson's guilt was still raised, none of the authors went beyond what his predecessors, Foote and Southey on the one hand and Miles and Nicolas on the other, had unearthed and analysed before them.

The events in Naples were, however, discussed by Neapolitan historians. Because it had been Nelson's appearance that had stopped the rebels from leaving Naples by sea for Toulon, most of these authors blamed Nelson for the non-execution of the capitulation to which the rebels had agreed, although the French Commandant at Naples was also sometimes blamed for not supporting the Neapolitan rebels. The earliest Neapolitan authors who blamed Nelson for disregarding the capitulation of the rebels were exiled republicans without access to source material, relying on their memory or second-hand accounts. They claimed, wrongly, that Nelson arrived only after the rebels had embarked for Toulon and that he had then merely stopped them from sailing. Some embellished their accounts with fanciful additions. According to one author, Nelson had control over the King of Naples as his 'prisoner'; Colletta, a translation of whose *History of Naples* was published in Britain in 1858, maintained that the Queen of Naples had sent Lady Hamilton to Naples 'in a corvette ... to persuade him [Nelson] to revoke the infamous treaty'. The Queen's order to annul the capitulation of the rebels – according to Colletta – at first appalled Nelson: 'a sense of justice and good faith made him shrink with horror from the office imposed upon him, and which he

---

44 Cuoco, p. 190; Carlo Botta, *Storia d'Italia dal 1789 al 1814* (4 vols., Italia: [n. pub.], 1826), iii, 402, 403; Pepe, i, 105.
45 Cuoco, p. 194 and p. 335 (as note to page 299, part of Lomonaco's account).
refused to accept; vanquished, however, by the allurements of Lady Hamilton, that man
of untarnished honour, so distinguished in war, was not ashamed to yield himself a base
instrument of perjury and tyranny'. Carried away by his own dramatic account,
Colletta failed to explain Nelson's horrible actions. He was more specific in his
embellishment of the sentencing of Caracciolo. Here he claimed that Nelson first forced
the Neapolitan court martial, against its will, to come to a verdict and then he changed
the verdict of 'perpetual imprisonment' into one of 'Death'. The popularity of
Colletta's work ensured that his imaginative version of events gained 'European
currency'.

Sacchinelli was the only Italian critic of Nelson in the first half of the nineteenth
century who was aware that the rebels had not yet embarked for Toulon when Nelson
arrived. Sacchinelli had been at Naples in 1799 as an under-secretary to Cardinal Ruffo,
who had led some quickly assembled Calabrian troops to Naples. Royalists had
criticized Ruffo for having agreed to a capitulation of the rebels, while republicans saw
him as the representative of the oppressive Neapolitan monarchy. About thirty years
after the events Sacchinelli set out to defend his former superior, whom he
deferentially referred to as the 'Porporato' (the 'purpled', alluding to his Cardinal's
robes). Trying not to offend the king, the queen or the rebels, whom he called
'patriots', Sacchinelli followed a precarious course. On the one hand, he praised
Ruffo's efficient use of royalist courts against the rebels and, on the other hand, he
claimed (wrongly) that Ruffo had started negotiating with the rebels. In order not to

47 Colletta, p. 370.
48 Colletta, p. 371.
49 Gutteridge, p. xcvi.
50 For information on Sacchinelli at the time, see: Gutteridge, p. xcvi, quoting a note from Maresca from
the Archivio storico per le Province Napoletane, 8, 228; on the time-span between the events and the
writing of the biography: A. T. Mahan, 'Nelson at Naples', English Historical Review, 15 (1900), 699-
727, at 715.
51 Domenico Sacchinelli, Memorie storiche sulla vita del Cardinale Fabrizio Ruffo (Napoli: Tipografia di
Carlo Cataneo, 1836) [hereafter: Sacchinelli], for example on pp. 213, 244, 256.
52 Sacchinelli, for example on pp. 211, 218, 225 and 239.
53 Sacchinelli, pp. 232, 261.
54 Sacchinelli, p. 237; in fact it had been Micheroux who started the negotiations not only without, but
against Ruffo's wish (see Ruffo's letter in Gutteridge, p. 126).
offend any of the Neapolitan parties involved, he shifted all responsibility on to Nelson by claiming that Nelson deceived the rebels into believing that he would accept the capitulation.

In his efforts to support his claim that Nelson had cheated the rebels, Sacchinelli advanced dubious evidence. Lacking source material, he appears to have reconstructed letters from memory. He provided only one supposed original document as a facsimile in an appendix to his book. This document is an unsigned Italian text which Sacchinelli did not even manage to quote correctly in the main body of his book and which he claimed was written by the British Captain Troubridge. Troubridge, however, did not know enough Italian to communicate in this language and his very large handwriting differs notably from that of this Italian text. The other supposed letters are paraphrased into Sacchinelli’s text and their contents contradict documentary sources that have survived. Apart from offering doubtful documents, Sacchinelli’s work has also been noted for errors in several details of its narrative.

Relying on such unreliable sources historians in continental Europe attempted to describe the events in Naples in 1799. An opportunity for a more balanced insight was missed by the French novelist, Alexandre Dumas, when he edited a collection of letters about the Bourbon monarchs of Naples in the aftermath of Garibaldi’s conquest of the kingdom in 1860. Dumas, or his assistant, left out passages that did not suit his case.

---


57 Sacchinelli, p. 251, claimed, for example, that Captain Foote had left the Bay on 26 June, which is contradicted by the logbook of his ship, Gutteridge, p. xciv; other errors have been pointed out by B. Maresca, ‘Il Cavaliere Antonio Micheroux nella reazione napoletana dell’anno 1799’, Archivio storico per le province napoletane, Anno 18 – Fascicolo I (1893) 494-526, 652-99, Anno 19, Fascicolo I (1894), 97-139, 252-99, 482-531, 659-91 [hereafter: Maresca (1893-1894)], XVIII, 497 and XIX, 129; for a more detailed assessment of Sacchinelli’s work see Gutteridge, pp. xcvi-ci.

mistranslated English letters into Italian, quoted as taken from 'original documents' the paraphrased letters of Sacchinelli, and finally left the Neapolitan Archives in such a mess that some of the letters from which he copied can no longer be found and therefore cannot be verified.\(^{59}\)

Later in the nineteenth century continental European historians started to look more thoroughly at the sources and to improve matters. The German historian, Hüffer, was the first author to consult both British and Italian sources. In his lengthy, meticulously researched and sharply argued article about the events in Naples he reached the conclusion that Nelson possessed the legal right to annul the capitulation, that he only promised to accept the *armistice* (which was to be distinguished from the capitulation) and that he acted reasonably in urging Ruffo to wait for the King of Naples to arrive and decide whether or not to accept the capitulation.\(^{60}\) Towards the end of his article, Hüffer suggests that the rebels should have been pardoned.\(^{61}\) Considering that he had previously argued that it was reasonable for Nelson to await the king’s decision, it appears surprising that Hüffer, in the last paragraphs of his article, came to the conclusion that all involved, including Nelson, deserve censure. Since Hüffer pointed out in the course of his article that he was ‘definitely not inclined to approve of Nelson’s behaviour at that time’,\(^{62}\) it appears that, although wishing to be historically correct, he did not wish to be listed in the disreputable category of defenders of Nelson.

Shortly after Hüffer’s publication, in the late 1880s and during the 1890s, the Neapolitan historian Maresca investigated the events of 1799 further. He edited primary sources that had been inaccessible to earlier authors\(^{63}\) and he wrote a long piece about

\(^{59}\) Gutteridge, pp. civ-cvii; Sacchinelli’s ‘documents’ can be found in *I Borboni di Napoli*, ed. Alessandro Dumas (10 vols., Napoli: [n. pub.], 1862), iv, 83 (= Sacchinelli, pp. 254, 255) and 79, 80 (= Sacchinelli, 251); see also Gutteridge, p. 220, note; examples of changed letters can be found in Gutteridge, pp. 249-51 and 269-70.

\(^{60}\) Hüffer, 378-82, 386.

\(^{61}\) Hüffer, 383.

\(^{62}\) Hüffer, 381 (‘Ich bin gewiß nicht geneigt, Nelson’s Benehmen in jener Zeit zu billigen’).

\(^{63}\) Among others: ‘Memoria sugli Avvenimenti di Napoli nell’anno 1799. Scritta da Amedeo Ricciardi, napoletano’, ed. B. Maresca, *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* 13 (1888), 36-94; he later also published in the same journal: ‘Diario Napoletano’, 24 (1899), 1-384 [hereafter: Maresca (1899)] (the essential parts are also in Gutteridge, pp. 181-93) and ‘Gli avvenimenti di Napoli dal 13 giugno al 12
one of the royalists involved in the events. In this text he made use of Italian primary sources as well as the findings of 'Hüffer, the eminent German historian'. As a result he pointed out, as some of the earliest Italian sources had done, that the French had not supported the rebels as they should have done as guarantors of the capitulation. This conclusion was later supported by the findings of a French historian. Like Hüffer, Maresca judged that Nelson had been authorized to act as he did and that he did not cheat the rebels, although he, too, came to the surprising and slightly cryptically worded conclusion that Nelson was involved in all the principal parts as 'rigid and not impartial executor of the sovereign will'.

At this stage of the discussion about the Naples affair, Francis Pritchett Badham, a grandson of Foote's, entered the scene. He can be credited with having alerted British historians to the existence of Italian sources. Approaching the subject in order to prove that his grandfather was right and Nelson was to be censured, he chose to use only those sources which confirmed his view – and he found an abundance of material among the unreliable early Italian sources, mainly Sacchinelli, whom he called 'the chief Italian authority'. Blissfully unaware of Hüffer's work and not bothering much about Maresca's he claimed that Nelson had no powers to act as he did and that he cheated the rebels. When he got his views published in the English Historical Review, criticizing Mahan's recently published life of Nelson, Mahan felt challenged to reply and defend Nelson's actions. Badham's article was also critically reviewed by Maresca and, his

---

64 Maresca (1893-1894), 19 (1894), 523 ('Ermanno Hüffer, il chiaro storico tedesco'); in his, review of Francesco Lemmi's 'Nelson e Caracciolo', Archivio storico per le province napoletane 24 (1899), 142-46, 144, Maresca refers to Hüffer as 'the most reliable of all' ('Hüffer [sic], il più autorevole di tutti').
65 Maresca (1893-1894), 19 (1894), 523; 'Documenti del Ministro di Guerra Francese', ed. E. Bertaux, Archivio storico per le province napoletane 24 (1899), 464-84.
66 Maresca (1893-1894), 19 (1894), 524, 526.
67 Maresca (1893-1894), 19 (1894), 530.
70 B. Maresca, 'Badham, F. P., Nelson and the Neapolitan Republicans (in The English Historical Review, April 1898)', Archivio storico per le province napoletane 24 (1899), 142.
blunders disclosed, the editor of the English Historical Review did not allow him to go on using that journal as a platform for his views about Nelson at Naples. Badham, however, was not to be silenced. In at least seven articles and two pamphlets he maintained his stance, supported with a variety of arguments of invariably bad quality.

Badham not only used unreliable sources uncritically, but also distorted sources so as to change their original meaning. In one case he left out a passage of a letter of Nelson's that was essential to the argument that Nelson was making but which did not fit Badham's line of argument. In another case, Badham simply changed a word in one of Nelson's letters and built an argument on this change. He also quoted Sir William Hamilton as having written what was in fact only Dumas' comment on a letter in his combined edition and narrative about the Neapolitan Bourbons. Badham's uncritical use of unreliable sources, his freedom in changing sources and his arbitrary choice of material cleared the way for him to reach his desired conclusions. He then went on to fill the gaps that remained in his narrative not by dealing with evidence that might disprove his point, but by guessing. His texts about the events in Naples are filled with phrases, such as 'There seem to be grounds for supposing', 'he would surely have mentioned', 'The fact of the matter seems to be...' Hamilton had probably pointed out' and 'having probably been forbidden'.

---


72 Badham (1898), 275 quotes incompletely from Nicolas, iii, 384, 385; this is commented on by Mahan (1899), 491, 492; another incomplete quotation (this time from Nicolas, iii, 510 and iv, 232) is in the same article on page 276.

73 Badham (1899), 36 quotes Nelson as having written 'a treaty of armistice' instead of 'the treaty and armistice' (Nicolas, iii, 393); Mahan (1899), 489 examines the importance of the 'and'.

74 Badham (1898), 278; from Dumas, iv, 96; commented on by Mahan (1899), 494, 495; A. T. Mahan, 'Nelson at Naples', The English Historical Review 15 (1900), 699-727 [hereafter: Mahan (1900)], at 700, points out that this misquotation was consequently copied by Francesco Lemmi in his Nelson e Carracciolo (p. 49) and by Laird Clowes in his History of the Royal Navy, iv, 396.

75 Badham (1900), p. 24; Badham (1898), 266, 274 and 275; Badham (1905), his last publication on the matter, bases its main argument on presumptions, see particularly p. 31.
The controversy between Badham and Mahan is generally remarkable for the style in which it is conducted. Parts of the controversy are extremely tedious to follow up, because Badham started arguments about many details in order to prove Mahan wrong or imprecise wherever he could.\(^{76}\) The fact that the discussion was about a national hero also played a role. Whereas Mahan and Laughton insisted on Nelson’s ‘fair reputation for integrity’,\(^{77}\) Badham tried to disparage his opponents as hero-worshippers and claimed that ‘the whole case for the defence is patriotic but not historical’.\(^{78}\) At one point Badham even went so far as to attack Mahan personally: ‘the readiness and daring which make Capt. Mahan so much at home in describing Nelson’s strategy and the dash of his victories disqualify him for a task which requires care and caution, patience and accuracy, attention to minutiae and judicial weighing of evidence’.\(^{79}\)

The discussion of the Naples affair was further revived by Maresca’s discovery of a document drawn up shortly after the events of 1799 by Micheroux, the royalist who had negotiated the capitulation. In this ‘Compendio’, Micheroux attempted to free himself from any responsibility. Although he had negotiated the capitulation he now condemned its ‘reprehensible’ contents and pointed out that it was Cardinal Ruffo who had signed it and who had to be held responsible for it.\(^{80}\) In this vindication of his conduct Micheroux wrote:

> What the motive may have been which led Lord Nelson to suddenly alter his mind under these circumstances I have never been able to ascertain. I should mention, however, that towards 10 o’clock his Eminence [Ruffo] wrote to me that Lord Nelson had consented to carry the capitulation into effect ... In proof of this his Eminence sent me in

---

\(^{76}\) An example for such a controversy is given in appendix D.

\(^{77}\) Mahan (1900), 712; see also Mahan (1899), 499; A. T. Mahan, ‘Nelson at Naples’, Athenaeum, No. 3741 (8 July 1899), 65; Mahan (1900), 699, 709, 710, 711, 713, 727; J. K. Laughton, ‘Nelson at Naples’, Athenaeum, No. 3748 (26 August 1899), 290-91, 290.

\(^{78}\) Badham (1897); similarly Badham (1899), 37; also Badham (1900), pp. v, viii.

\(^{79}\) F. P. Badham, Nelson at Naples’, Athenaeum, No. 3740 (1 July 1899), 36-37, 37. The correspondence between Mahan and Laughton at that time reflects how the two naval historians were kept busy reacting to Badham’s assaults; see: Lambert (2002), particularly pp. 143-48, 149-50, 169-70, 176-77, 182, 188-89, 192.

\(^{80}\) Micheroux’s ‘Compendio’, Gutteridge, p. 112.
great haste the documents from Lord Nelson enclosed herewith [missing] in order to reassure the garrisons, but as the latter relied on my word alone I was not under the necessity of making use of them.  

Badham believed his views had been confirmed by Micheroux’s claim that Nelson had ‘consented to carry the capitulation into effect’, instead of only the ‘armistice’ to which Nelson referred in his surviving letters. Maresca now changed his mind and claimed that Nelson had cheated the rebels out of the castles by a false assurance. Mahan stated reasons for mistrusting Micheroux’s evidence, but, at the same time, he also now concluded that the rebels had been cheated – not by Nelson, but by Ruffo. It seems to have become accepted that somebody cheated the rebels and therefore the question was merely ‘who played the trick’.

Because of the confusion about the sources, H. C. Gutteridge edited a collection of Documents Relating to the Suppression of the Jacobin Revolution at Naples. June 1799 for the Navy Records Society in 1903. In his extensive introduction, in which he narrated the development of events and also engaged in the major aspects of the discussion, Gutteridge claimed that: ‘The chief object of the present volume is not to continue the controversy, but rather to bring together the mass of evidence which deals with the point, and to reduce it to a form in which it will be accessible to the English reader, who may herein find the refutation of these charges’. Gutteridge’s work therefore took sides in the controversy; he agreed that ‘there is some evidence that the garrisons were tricked into surrendering’, but he maintained that ‘there is not the slightest proof at present of any foul play on Nelson’s part’; as to the trial and

---

81 Micheroux’s ‘Compendio’, Gutteridge, pp. 116, 117.
82 Badham (1900), p. 24, on p. 41 he also blames Ruffo to a certain degree.
83 Maresca (1899), 447-63, at 447 (Maresca’s introduction).
84 Mahan (1900), 721-26, 708 note.
86 Gutteridge, p. x.
87 Gutteridge, p. xcii; Gutteridge, pp. c, ci, also seems to be rather inclined to blame Ruffo.
execution of Caracciolo he conceded that it is ‘a question on which opinions will always differ’. 88

Gutteridge had indeed made ‘the mass of evidence … accessible’ and no essential source material has been discovered since. In order to form an independent judgement about the very complex events, however, one needs to study his book in detail. Few are prepared (or able) to do so. When the controversy had cooled down, Mahan wrote to Laughton about his own ‘experience with Badham’ that it made him ‘rather hopeless of convincing a public. … I do not indeed regret the trouble taken to refute Badham. I could scarcely have done otherwise under the conditions, but I have been unable to trace any reversal of the verdict obtained by Southey’s misstatement.’ 89

Throughout the twentieth century there is evidence to prove Mahan’s pessimistic judgement that a detailed discussion and convincing arguments need not have any impact on how a historic event is described. Authors have uncritically quoted from Sacchinelli’s account, especially his (extremely doubtful, if not clearly concocted) claim that the signatories of the capitulation sent a protest to Nelson. 90 Biographers have frequently been unaware of what Nelson’s orders relating Naples were, often replacing them by fanciful assumptions about the influence of Lady Hamilton, 91 and, more recently, they have sometimes (wrongly) assumed that the French were included in the capitulation. 92 Worst of all, biographers keep confusing the terms that are at the centre of the whole issue: armistice and capitulation. 93 Even Terry Coleman, whose account of the

---

88 Gutteridge, p. x.
90 Forester, p. 161; Edinger/Neep, p. 200, where they distort even Sacchinelli’s account by claiming that Ruffo made his officers (instead of his co-signatories) sign the protest; W. M. James, Durable Monument, p. 171; Coleman, p. 200 – about the doubtfulness of the claim see: Czisnik ‘Nelson at Naples’, 108, 109.
93 W. M. James, Durable Monument, p. 172; Pocock (1968), p. 79, blurs the matter by claiming that Nelson ‘agreed that, on surrender, the rebels should be allowed to embark in the ships’; Pocock is followed by F. Knight, p. 97; Walder, p. 325, thinks even that Ruffo had only agreed a ‘truce’ with the rebels (not a capitulation); Tom Pocock, Horatio Nelson (London: Cassell, 1987) [hereafter: Pocock
events in Naples is the most thorough published in a biography since the mid-twentieth century, remained vague on this matter. He commented on Nelson's recognition of the armistice: 'The word armistice was again being used', as if this was anything ominous and inexplicable. Coleman does not explore the possible meaning of the term 'armistice' any further. Instead, a few lines further down, he accepts that Nelson had 'change[d] his mind', thus assuming that Nelson, by accepting the 'armistice' had accepted the capitulation. 94

Biographers who could have profited from the detailed discussion of Nelson's involvement in Naples, instead of describing the complexities of the events, have tended to offer easy explanations and generalisations. They have developed the habit of introducing their treatment of the events with a kind of dramatisation of Nelson's state of mind: 'Nelson was in a tense, fierce mood'; 'Nelson's temper flamed'; 'Nelson was in poor health, and probably also suffering from a guilt complex'. 95 In many accounts Lady Hamilton figures prominently as a bad influence. 96 As a result of such evasive additions in biographies the final judgements about the events in Naples are not better founded. If biographers criticize Nelson, 97 they either specifically claim he cheated the rebels 98 or they judge his involvement in more general terms. Such general criticism can focus on Nelson's involvement as a whole so that, ignoring Nelson's orders from the Admiralty, Forester could confidently assert: 'The mistake he [Nelson] made, of course, was in being mixed up in the business at all'. 99 Bradford claimed that Nelson was lacking the

(1987), p. 200, the author now clearly confuses armistice and capitulation; Vincent, p. 329, where the author uses even Badham's expression of Nelson's supposed 'volte face' - among the few authors who are aware of the difference between armistice and capitulation are: Oman, pp. 356, 357 and Warner (1958), p. 186.

94 Coleman, p. 201; Coleman's similarly vague attempt to argue for a confusion of terms in Nelson's mind, pp. 195, 197, cannot convince, because Coleman never claims that Nelson, knowing of the capitulation, ever called it an armistice.
97 Those who don't are in the minority: Oman, pp. 355-57; Kennedy, p. 177; Vincent, pp. 328-33.
99 Forester, p. 162; similarly: Grenfell, pp. 121 ('it was no real concern of his').
necessary diplomatic or political skills, without specifying what an experienced diplomat or politician would have done.\textsuperscript{100} Without entering into details Lavery accused Nelson of 'merciless equanimity'.\textsuperscript{101}

The superficiality of the treatment of Nelson's involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan Jacobins which results from a failure in rigorous historical analysis, may be partly attributed to the character of a biography as a narrative rather than an analytical study. Biographers usually have to simplify complex events and cannot enter into detailed discussions within the narrative of the life they are telling. This, however, should not prevent them from investigating the material carefully in the first place. In the case of Nelson at Naples there are two main reasons for this neglect of an in-depth investigation. First, the subject is extremely complex and not easily accessible to most authors, because it is outside the sphere of British and naval history. It may be noted here that Italian research in the matter is not of much help either, because patriotic considerations have created a bias against Nelson.\textsuperscript{102} Second, authors are inclined to follow the majority of their predecessors and criticize Nelson, because they want to avoid being suspected of hero-worship. Criticising Nelson's involvement at Naples is the easiest way of settling one's reputation as a critical biographer, because the matter is too complex to make it easy to refute the criticism.

These reasons make it appear unlikely that biographers will change their views in the foreseeable future. What Mahan observed nearly a hundred years ago about the hopelessness 'of convincing a public' is still true today, because the intricate story of Nelson at Naples does not hold enough appeal for the general reader. An action-packed story of an Admiral, seduced by an infamous woman into cheating idealistic reformers and committing horrendous crimes, makes a much more exciting narrative and consequently holds much more appeal to the general public than an account of an

\textsuperscript{100} Bradford, pp. 236, 237, 238.
\textsuperscript{101} Lavery, p. 95; similarly Morriss (1986), pp. 98, 99.
\textsuperscript{102} For further references see Lambert (2002), pp. 121, 122; the influential Italian historian Benedetto Croce, \textit{La rivoluzione napoletana del 1799. Biografie, racconti, ricerche} (terza edizione aumentata, Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1912), p. 262, took sides for Badham, against Mahan; an example for the generally held Italian view can be found in: Indro Montanelli, \textit{L'Italia giacobina e carbonara (1789-1831)} (Milano: Superbur Saggi, Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, series: Storia d'Italia, 1998), particularly pp. 88, 89.
intricate situation in real life that demands responsible decisions. While dramatisations leave readers at a comfortable distance from the events, investigations into serious matters may remind them too much of the task of facing responsibilities in complex situations that, after all, is also their own.
Lady Hamilton is a key element in the image of Nelson. The discussion of her importance in his life goes far beyond her presence at the time of the defeat of the Neapolitan Revolution, analysed in the previous chapter. How her role in the life of Nelson was dealt with by biographers and historians over the last two centuries is the subject of this chapter.

Lady Hamilton did not appear prominently in the biographies published immediately after the news of the battle of Trafalgar and the death of Nelson reached Britain. This may in part be due to the fact that these very early works relied mostly on published official letters and the biography from the Naval Chronicle which dealt with Nelson’s life only until 1799. In the craze about Nelson after his death, none of the biographies included any allusions to the erotic character of Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton that had been published in newspapers and caricatures during his lifetime. For the most part, biographies did not deal with Lady Hamilton at all. When they did, they merely used factual information about Nelson’s public appearances with Lady Hamilton (and Sir William Hamilton) that had been published in newspapers and journals. Some even went so far as to call Nelson’s private life ‘pious’ and to describe him as an exemplary family man.

---

1 For these contemporary reactions in newspapers and caricatures see prologue.
2 J. White – the title (Memoirs of the Professional Life ...) already betrays the focus. Anon. (Goodchild), pp. 204, 206, did not mention Lady Hamilton, when describing how Nelson enjoyed ‘domestic felicity’ and ‘tranquil retirement’ in the house that he shared with her. The same text can be found in: F. Lloyd, pp. 148, 150. Anon. (Lemoine), omits anything between the battle of the Nile (1798) and Nelson’s attacks upon the invasion flotilla in Boulogne (1801, the battle of Copenhagen is dealt with later) as well as between 1801 and 1803, when Nelson was ashore. Anon. (Nicholson), p. 87: ‘Of the private life and virtues of this Great Man we cannot, in the present circumstances, nor do we need to give any particulars’. Orme/Blagdon, particularly pp. 29 (‘retired to the bosom of his family’), 41 (‘Of his private conduct it is not necessary to enter into any ... particulars’).
3 For example mentioning that ‘his lordship set out for England, accompanied by the Queen of Naples, and Sir William and Lady Hamilton’: J. White, p. 174; Anon. (Aston), p.39; Anon. (Goodchild), p. 120.
James Harrison's biography, written for Lady Hamilton, was the first book to put the focus very much on Lady Hamilton’s part in Nelson’s life. It can be assumed that Lady Hamilton commissioned the author to write this life of Nelson in order to support her claim to a pension which she had already pursued for some years. Harrison stressed repeatedly throughout the text the importance of her support for British interests in Naples, particularly her supposed influence in getting the British squadron under Nelson victualled before the battle of the Nile. Lady Hamilton’s asserted right to a pension was forcibly underlined by the fact that Nelson had included the claim in the last codicil to his will and Sir William Hamilton was supposed to have made it on his deathbed. 5

Harrison as well as other early nineteenth-century authors who dealt with Lady Hamilton’s part in Nelson’s life, shared a common interpretation of the roles of men and women. They regarded men primarily according to their position in society, as politicians, warriors, writers, builders, etc., while they defined women first of all through their relationship with men. This pattern of gender roles had a double significance for the treatment of Nelson’s relations with Lady Hamilton. First, instead of dealing with his relationship with her, authors dealt with hers with him. Since a relationship between a man and a woman was regarded as the defining aspect in a woman’s life the relationships between Nelson and the different women in his life were seen as female affairs that mattered to Nelson much less than to the women in his life. His relations with women were their responsibility. For his early biographers Nelson was defined as a warrior and questions such as why Nelson felt attracted to a certain woman or how he treated her did not matter much to writers. Consequently, his relationship with Lady Hamilton is dealt with as an excursion into her life, if it is mentioned at all. Second, the role expected from the woman in this strictly gendered partnership was one of subservience to the man.

In order to make sure that Lady Hamilton would be represented in a positive fashion and Lady Nelson would appear in less favourable light, Harrison depicted the lover as subservient to Nelson and the wife as demanding. Lady Nelson is portrayed as

5 Harrison, i, 252; ii, 413, 415-16, 491.
expecting much from Nelson, but giving him nothing, whereas Lady Hamilton, expecting nothing from Nelson, gave him considerable support. According to Harrison, Nelson did not secure any ‘mercenary’ advantages by marrying Fanny Nisbet, nor had he any ‘prospect of issue by his lady’. Nevertheless Nelson ‘possessed so high a sense of all the relative duties’ that one cannot imagine that he ‘had not afterwards good reasons for being separated from his wife’. Indeed, Harrison offered some instances that served to illustrate how Lady Nelson was supposed to have estranged her husband. At first, it was only her son who caused Nelson trouble, but then she herself resented Nelson distributing money among members of his family, and welcomed him back in England with ‘obvious coldness’ and did nothing to acknowledge Nelson’s ‘transcendent worth’:

she is said never to have asked him a single question relative to that glorious victory which had so astonished the world. On the contrary, all the scandalous insinuations, and licentious remarks, with which the Jacobinical foreign journalists had filled their pestiferous pages, relative to our hero and his friends in Italy, and which had found their way into the most thoughtless and depraved of our own newspapers, were preserved for his lordship’s immediate amusement.

Harrison alluded to their being more reasons for discontent on Nelson’s part but he chose to leave these ‘behind the sacred veil of the connubial curtain’.

According to Harrison, Lady Hamilton, rather than Nelson’s wife, represented the pattern of a good wife: ‘the amiable demeanour of Lady Hamilton, whose tender regard for Sir William could not fail to excite the admiration of every virtuous visitor’ also appealed to Nelson. Lady Hamilton remained in the role of the faithful wife of Sir William Hamilton in matters concerning Nelson’s relationship with his own wife. It was

---

6 J. Harrison, i, 93-94, 98.
7 J. Harrison, i, 236.
8 J. Harrison, i, 328; ii, 37, 106-7 (Lady Nelson’s dislike of Nelson’s relatives is again stressed, ii, 276), 270-71.
9 J. Harrison, ii, 271; similarly: ii, 281.
10 J. Harrison, ii, 255; also: ii, 271: ‘Lord Nelson ... went to visit Sir William and Lady Hamilton; where, at least, he was always sure to behold the actual existence of conjugal happiness’.
her husband to whom Nelson flew in his despair\textsuperscript{11} and it was again Sir William Hamilton who suggested that Nelson should in future live with the Hamiltons:

Lord Nelson opposed this arrangement, on account of the slanders of the world: but Sir William Hamilton, with a noble disdain of malevolence, felt sufficiently satisfied of the virtue in which he confided; and Lady Hamilton, who never opposed Sir William in anything, without affecting to raise squeamish objections, readily signified her acquiescence. Lord Nelson then dropped on his knee, and piously appealed to Heaven, as witness of the purity of his attachment; and, with similar solemnity, they each, reciprocally, vowed an equally disinterested and indissoluble friendship\textsuperscript{12}

Though supportive of the project, Lady Hamilton is here portrayed as the obedient wife who does not develop an opinion of her own, but follows her husband’s wishes, even if they may be construed to her own disadvantage.

Harrison’s stance that Lady Hamilton was subservient to Nelson’s wishes and never intervened herself in his affairs was difficult to reconcile with Nelson’s claim that she had used her political influence to get his fleet victualled before the battle of the Nile. Since it was Harrison’s task to justify this claim in order to help Lady Hamilton obtain a pension, he described her as helping without acting. According to Harrison, Lady Hamilton procured ‘from some being of a superior order, sylph, fairy, magician, or other person skilled in the occult sciences’ a ‘mystic charm’ that made any ‘Sicilian or Neapolitan governor’ obey the wishes of the bearer, which Nelson then applied to the advantage of the British fleet.\textsuperscript{13} Instead of portraying his patroness as a politically active person, Harrison attributed her power to witchcraft. The strange story about the ‘magic charm’ even forced Harrison to explain away, what could have been regarded as a piece of evidence in favour of Lady Hamilton: a letter in which Nelson complained about the lack of cooperation from the Sicilians.

\textsuperscript{11} J. Harrison, ii, 270 (problem), 271 (Nelson telling Sir William about his problems), 276 (problem), 278-79 (Sir William’s advice), 280 (problem and Sir William’s solution).

\textsuperscript{12} J. Harrison, ii, 280; according to J. Harrison, ii, 372, also chose for Nelson ‘their joint establishment ... Merton Place’, while, in fact, it was Lady Hamilton who looked out for it and found it.

\textsuperscript{13} J. Harrison, i, 244-45; see also i, 252.
Harrison portrayed Lady Hamilton as a woman who always remained subservient to the wishes of men. In his biography of Nelson she never actively determines the course of events herself, but rather helps men to do important things. If Lady Hamilton is ever shown to do anything, it is serving the interests of men, Nelson in particular. Harrison reported that on one occasion she fell onto her knees to beg Nelson to accept the title of Brontë and that before the battle of Trafalgar she selflessly convinced Nelson to go out and fight for his country. How Lady Hamilton’s obedience and unobtrusive encouragement could appeal to Nelson, who had stressed her political abilities so strongly in his last codicil to his will, remained unexplained.

Only towards the end of the biography did Harrison venture to describe Nelson and Lady Hamilton as something approaching a couple, when dealing with ‘his lordship’s adopted daughter’. This subject made him embark on a morally dangerous voyage of uncomfortably related arguments. Harrison alluded that ‘it seems highly probable’ that Horatia was Nelson’s biological daughter. This lead him to admit that ‘his lordship … though by no means ever a … seducer … was always well known to entertain rather more partiality for the fair-sex than is quite consistent with the highest degree of Christian purity’. Harrison now pointed out that Nelson never ‘indulged even an idea of dishonouring the wife of his bosom friend’, although he went on to report that Nelson entrusted the child to Lady Hamilton’s care (with her obediently following his ‘request’) and both stood as godparents ‘in the baptismal ceremony’. After having asserted that Nelson’s and Lady Hamilton’s relationship was ‘mutually the result of a most enthusiastic admiration of each other’s heroic and magnanimous qualities’ and did not rely on the ‘less durable tie of mere sexual or personal regard’, Harrison suspiciously pointed out that the two ‘would have been united, if his lordship had survived Lady Nelson’. He finished this chain of arguments by asserting that it was Lady Hamilton

14 Interestingly J. Harrison, i, 384, does not even describe how Lady Hamilton helped the royal family of Naples to evacuate Naples, which was mentioned in a letter of Nelson’s (given in J. Harrison, i, 386-89) and dramatically developed by Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 133.
15 J. Harrison, ii, 145; ii, 458-59.
16 J. Harrison, ii, 460-61, 472-73.
who enabled Nelson to fulfil his duty: 'It was with her image continually before him, that he combated the enemies of his country'.

In their extensive treatment of Nelson's life, published three years after the biography by Harrison, Clarke & M'Arthur could not ignore, as some of their predecessors had done, the fact that Lady Hamilton was important to Nelson. They even described her in a relatively positive light. They copied Harrison in claiming that it was through Lady Hamilton's influence that Nelson's squadron was victualled before the battle of the Nile and they went beyond Harrison in attributing an active part to her in the evacuation of the royal family from Naples. These biographers, however, showed a tendency to reverse the ways in which they described Nelson's relations with his wife, Fanny, and with his mistress, Emma. In doing so they also reversed the judgement made on these two women. For Clarke and M'Arthur, Fanny Nelson is her husband's 'respected counsellor' who follows his wishes even against her own inclinations, whereas Lady Hamilton does not show such subservience. The authors hint at the development of Nelson's infatuation in its early stages and, though they take it for granted that Lady Hamilton was in love they assume that it was rather with 'the Hero and not the Individual'. They stress the adverse reaction from two of his friends, partly by manipulating the wording of a letter, and finally determine to devote 'the remaining portion of his biography ... to his more splendid public character'. As a result their assessment of Nelson's relationship with Lady Hamilton remains underdeveloped and incomplete.

17 J. Harrison, ii, 473.
18 Clarke and M'Arthur, ii, 70, 133 ('this extraordinary and daring woman'); they also maintained, ii, 188, against Helen Maria Williams (see prologue and chapter 4) that Lady Hamilton was not to be blamed for any cruelty in Naples.
19 Clarke and M'Arthur, i, 94, 109 (Fanny 'at his [Nelson's] express desire always attended him'); ii, 46 ('Lady Nelson, at the earnest request of her husband, had attended the dressing of his arm, until ...').
20 Clarke and M'Arthur, ii, 111.
21 Clarke and M'Arthur, ii, 188.
22 Compare Clarke and M'Arthur, ii, 240 with BL Add MS 34,915, f. 284 (the sentence in which Troubridge assures Nelson of his 'sincere esteem' is doubled and reworded; the sentence 'Your Lordship is a stranger to half that happens, or the talk it occasions' is an invention of Clarke and M'Arthur). The authentic wording of two letters from Troubridge that were manipulated by Clarke and M'Arthur was first given in a letter from Edith M. Keate, Mariner's Mirror 25 (1939), 353-54, in which Mahan is blamed for having misquoted. For a general assessment of Clarke and M'Arthurs editorial practices see appendix B.
For those authors who wished to criticize what had happened at Naples, there was no reason to avoid Lady Hamilton, since it was much easier to condemn the popular hero’s actions, if it was possible to blame them on the influence of Lady Hamilton. Foote repeatedly referred in varying ways to Nelson’s ‘wretched infatuation’, which, he maintained, only lasted during the events at Naples. While following Foote’s judgment of Nelson’s involvement at Naples, Southey extended the period of Nelson’s ‘infatuated attachment for Lady Hamilton’, claiming that Nelson had ‘forfeited ... [domestic happiness] for ever’. Southey, on the one hand, described Nelson as ‘resigning himself to Lady Hamilton’s influence’. On the other hand, he did not regard the relationship as ‘criminal’ and he acknowledged positive traits in Lady Hamilton. He also accepted Harrison’s claim that Nelson’s squadron was victualled before the battle of the Nile thanks to the influence of Lady Hamilton (though this was achieved through ‘secret orders to the Sicilian governors’, not by means of a ‘magic charm’).

An opportunity presented itself to examine more closely Nelson’s attitude to Lady Hamilton, when the two volumes of Letters of Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton were published anonymously in 1814. Two letters, in particular, contained explicit passages as to the carnal nature of the relationship. In of them, written a few weeks after the birth of Nelson’s and Lady Hamilton’s daughter, Nelson wrote:

You cannot think how my feelings are alive towards you: probably more than ever; and they never can be diminished. My hearty endeavours shall not be wanting, to improve and to give US NEW ties of regard and affection ... a finer child never was produced by any two persons. It was in truth a love-begotten child! ... Recollect, I am, for

---

23 Foote, pp. 17, 18 (‘completely infatuated’), 39 (‘at that time absolutely infatuated!’), 66 (‘involved in such a delusion; the balance of his mind was lost at a critical moment’), 67 (‘fatal delusion’), 90 (‘Whilst his unfortunate infatuation lasted, and during that time only, proved himself void both of humanity and justice’), 92 (‘unhappy infatuation’). For Foote’s arguments in matters of Naples see chapter 4. Similarly: Mackintosh, ii, 137-138 (‘seduced into barbarity’).

24 Southey (1813), ii, 28 and 91, while Southey (1813), ii, 194-95, maintained for c. 1803 that ‘the film [concerning Naples?] was cleared form his eyes’.

25 Southey (1813), ii, 76.

26 Southey (1813), i, 216 (procuring orders); ii, 42 (not criminal); ii, 179 (character); also: ii, 28 (helping at evacuating royal family).
ever, your’s; aye, for ever, while life remains, your’s, your’s faithfully.\(^{27}\)

The other letter (with an inclosure) is of August 1803 and is equally explicit:

... from the first moment of our happy, dear, enchanting, blessed meeting. The thought of such happiness, my dearest only beloved, makes the blood fly into my head. ... My heart is with you, cherish it. ... my wife in the eye of God ... Ever, for ever, I am your’s, only your’s, even beyond this world. ... I only desire, my dearest Emma, that you will always believe, that Nelson’s your own; Nelson’s Alpha and Omega is Emma! I cannot alter; my affection and love is beyond even this world! ... I feel, that you are the real friend of my bosom, and dearer to me than life; and, that I am the same to you. ... I rejoice that you have had so pleasant a trip into Norfolk; and I hope, one day, to carry you there by a nearer tie in law ... than at present. ... time will pass away, till I have the inexpressible happiness of arriving at Merton [the house Nelson shared with Lady Hamilton]. Even the thought of it vibrates through my nerves; for, my love for you is as unbounded as the ocean!\(^{28}\)

The character of the relationship and the idea that it did indeed matter to Nelson, however, appears to have been too unattractive to be developed. Instead of investigating what in Lady Hamilton had attracted Nelson, a much-read life of Lady Hamilton was published anonymously in 1815. It presented the most scathing criticism of the relationship between Lady Hamilton and Nelson, taking the easy course of blaming the relationship on her, rather than on Nelson.

In this work Lady Hamilton became as far removed from Harrison’s subservient supporter of men as possible. She was now presented as the active manipulator of events: ‘instead of fainting on the arm of Nelson [as Nelson had described their encounter], she clasped him in her own, and carried him into the cabin, followed by Sir William Hamilton, and the rest of the company’.\(^{29}\) Lady Hamilton is portrayed as having

\(^{27}\) Letters of Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, i, 35-37. Nicolas, vii, 373-374, copied this letter, omitting its beginning and dating it 10 March 1801 and doubting its authenticity (this will be dealt with below).

\(^{28}\) Letters of Lord Nelson to Lady Hamilton, i, 176-178, and i, 136-138. Also in Nicolas, vii, 377-378, who again doubts the authenticity of the letter (see below).

handled Nelson's wife with similar resolution: when Nelson was at risk of returning to
his wife, she 'started up, and swinging poor Lady Nelson by the arm round the room, she
tauntingly said: "there, madam, only serve him as I have done you, and he will know
better how to behave himself"'. 30 Such acts of aggression show Lady Hamilton seeking
to influence matters in her own interest; at one point, she is even portrayed as trying to
murder a banker who did not lend her money. 31

Lady Hamilton is shown controlling Nelson not only by brute force, but also and
mainly by deluding him. According to her anonymous biographer, she had practised this
method frequently before and it helped her to rise above her rank. She was described as
cheating her lover, Charles Greville, and his uncle, later her husband, Sir William
Hamilton. 32 The author assumed that otherwise these gentlemen could never have fallen
for the blacksmith's daughter. In his judgement, the key to her success with men was her
ability as an actress who knew how to perform a role in real life. 33 Lady Hamilton,
however, did not use her influence to any good purpose. Her first biographer explicitly
rejected Harrison's claim that Lady Hamilton's influence helped to get Nelson's
squadron victualled at a critical time. 34 Before welcoming Nelson after the battle of the
Nile, 'Lady Hamilton began to rehearse some of her theatrical airs, and to put on all the
appearance of a tragic queen'. She extended her theatrical performances to critical

---

30  Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, p. 258.
31  Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. 128-30; the complete senselessness of murdering somebody for not
doing something (after his death he cannot do it anyway) underlines the impression of the sheer and
uncontrollable aggressiveness of Lady Hamilton.
32  Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. 57, 76, 82-83; on p. 95-96 the author stated: 'it may be safely affirmed
that the hold which she had over the mind of the Queen of Naples amounted in effect to a complete sway
over the sovereign', while later, on p. 120 the queen is shown more independent minded: 'they [Lady
Hamilton and the queen] were sensible that the appearance of an ardent affection would be for their
respective advantage'.
33  Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. 27-28 (she acquired 'a strong turn for mimicry ... imposing on the
credulity of others'), 47 (the 'picture of Emma, as the representative of a virtue, to the reality of which,
through life, she was an absolute stranger, though at any time she could easily assume the appearance of
it'), 51 ('became completely skilled in the arts of intrigue and duplicity'), 83 ('duplicity'), 119 ('more art
than sincerity').
34  Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. 134-37, 168-69; Nelson was 'deceived by female artifice' into later
believing this, on p. 169.
friends of Nelson and exerted her ‘consummate art’ to win them over. As a result Nelson ‘was now so completely under the influence of an artful woman, as to have forgotten the respect that was due to the dignity of his character’ and he was severely ‘affected by the wiles that were practised upon him’. As a consequence of Lady Hamilton’s supposed dominance over Nelson, his involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution and even his separation from his wife are attributed entirely to her machinations.

When brute force and mental domination threatened not to suffice, Lady Hamilton is shown keeping her hold over Nelson through her pregnancy. In arguing thus, the Memoirs of Lady Hamilton was the first work to claim that the relationship between Nelson and Lady Hamilton had been of a carnal character and that at least one child had resulted from the affair. Taken together, Lady Hamilton’s various attempts to gain influence over Nelson led to a reversal of gender roles. Instead of the female partner being obedient and dutiful towards the male partner, as Lady Hamilton had been described by Harrison and Lady Nelson by Clarke and M’Arthur, it was now Nelson who ended up being ‘dutiful and attentive to the commands of this artful and rapacious woman’.

The humiliating condition into which Nelson, according to Lady Hamilton’s biographer, had sunk was only partly explained by the superior artifice of Lady Hamilton.

---

35 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, p. 186.
36 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. 187, 188; similarly: pp. 189 (‘Our brave commander, who suffered himself, contrary to his better judgment, to be lured into the circle of folly’), 222 (‘so predominant was the influence of Lady Hamilton over his mind’), 234-35 (‘the influence which Lady Hamilton had gained over the hero’), 241 (‘that charm which then bound him in spite of his understanding … her arts’), 275 (‘conquest which she had made … her ascendancy over the mind of Nelson’), 281 (‘Cleopatra, putting on one of her high airs’), 296 (‘the entire controil which Lady Hamilton had over the mind of Nelson’), 297 (Lady Hamilton’s ‘malignant arts’), 317 (‘delusions which were so cunningly cast over his mind’), 320 (‘the unqualified supremacy which she had over the heart of Nelson’), 330 (‘her dominion over him was not shaken even by the terrors of dissolution’).
37 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, p. 208 (concerning Naples: ‘Lady Hamilton was indeed at the bottom of the whole’), the subject of Naples is generally dealt with on pp. 207-27; p. 254 (about Nelson’s separation from his wife: ‘that fatal breach … she was enabled to accomplish’).
39 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, p. 276; on p. 296 the birth of a second daughter is mentioned.
40 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, p. 304.
41 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, p. 280 (‘Greatly is it to be lamented, that he should now have fallen so low’).
Hamilton. Her ability to manipulate him had, at least in some measure, to correspond with a weakness on Nelson’s part that made him prone to manipulation. Such helplessness in the face of female determination was not in keeping with the generally held image of Nelson as the vigorous warrior. Lady Hamilton’s biographer, therefore, did not venture far into the subject of Nelson’s foibles and alluded merely in general terms to his ‘weakness’ or ‘the weak part of his character’, without examining in what this weakness consisted. 42

The biography made it abundantly clear, however, that the responsibility for the immoral attachment between Nelson and Lady Hamilton rested with her. It offered two major and in part contradictory reasons that explain the supposed moral degradation of Lady Hamilton. On the one hand, it blamed her ‘pristine meanness’ which ‘continued through life’ on her social origins; in this context it was maintained that there is a ‘Scoundrelism about persons of low birth’. 43 On the other hand, she was also portrayed as a victim of circumstances; she was shown as a girl who was drawn into ‘intrigue and duplicity’ by her unfortunate situation and by malign influences. 44 Far from blaming the limited opportunities available to daughters of poor parents in eighteenth-century Britain, it was suggested that to prevent such women following the immoral path taken by Lady Hamilton they should remain within their humble sphere. 45 Otherwise, they would end up like Emma Lyon, who had become Lady Hamilton: dying alone in a foreign land and terminating ‘her course of uncommon vicissitudes’ in the ‘Romish faith’. 46 According to this anonymous work it was the fact that a poor woman was allowed to break out of her social sphere that led to the ensnaring of Nelson.

42 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. 279, 330.
43 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, p. 15.
44 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. 28 (‘she acquired a boldness’ — she obviously did not have it originally), 32 (‘course of dissipation’ — it seems she was better before), 36 (victim), 51 (‘became completely skilled in the arts of intrigue and duplicity’).
45 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. 16 (‘the want of early instruction and example will be seen, and the force of low habits and improper connexions will be completely understood’ in reading the biography), 20 (‘Happy certainly would it have been for Emma, had she been suffered to remain in her original state of servitude’); similarly: pp. iii-vi, 1-16, 29, 33, 35, 174-75.
46 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, pp. 348-49.
The publication of some of Nelson’s letters to Lady Hamilton, which was attributed to her, and the book about her, which was more of a diatribe than a biography, strongly influenced what was written about Nelson’s relations with his mistress in the following decades. Since the publications of 1814 and 1815 had the effect of driving serious biographers away from the subject of Nelson, no one examined any further the scandalous details of his relations with Lady Hamilton. Those who for some reason touched on the subject (authors of naval histories, for example) mainly adopted the view that Nelson had been ‘possessed by a demon’. Few writers bothered any longer to maintain that the attachment had been ‘pure’, while some increased Lady Hamilton’s vileness to monstrous proportions. Even before Nelson had received the dukedom of Bronte from the king of Naples, Lady Hamilton was depicted as inciting Nelson: ‘Haul down the flag of truce Bronte ... No truce with the rebels’. To the author’s satisfaction, ‘Lady Hamilton, in her last moments, uttered the most agonizing screams of repentance for this act of cruelty’. Another author presented a variation of


48 This has been argued for the collection of letters, published in 1814, in chapter 1.

49 W. James (1826), ii, 311. Similarly: Holland, ii, p. vii (gives the date of the writing of the memoirs as 1812-1816 and the date of their revision as 1824, it is often impossible to tell the date on which a passage was written merely from the printed text, I suppose in the case of the remarks about Nelson the year 1824. See also chapter 7), 18-19, fn, 22 (‘the ascendancy which an artful and worthless woman had obtained over a mind’). Alison, iv (1835), 87 (‘the English admiral, who had fallen under the fascinating influence of Lady Hamilton’).

50 Carlyle (1822), p. 77; similarly: Southey (1831), p. 287.

51 Brenton, ii, 480; Nelson was offered the dukedom on his return to Palermo, in August 1799 (Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 213).

52 Brenton, ii, 484; ‘The Old Sailor’, p. 485, fn. even claimed that he ‘was near her when she died ... her last hours were passed in wild ravings, in which the name of Caracioli was frequently distinguished’.
the Bronte-story: "Come on Bronte," she exclaimed, "let us take the barge, and have another look at [the hanging corpse of] poor Caraccioli". 53

Among the new descriptions of Lady Hamilton’s influence over Nelson the *Personal Memoirs or Reminiscences* by Pryse Lockhart Gordon had the greatest claim to authenticity. Gordon, after all, had met the two in Palermo in 1799. Thirty years later this upper-class and outspoken Whig, who sympathized with the Neapolitan revolution, 54 remembered the royalist scene at Palermo. He summarized his slighting judgement of Lady Hamilton: ‘what could be expected from such a parvenue?’ 55 This social prejudice against the ‘vulgar’ Lady Hamilton recurs throughout his whole account. He took offence at her massive size, suitable for the ‘promiscuous herd of men with whom she associated’, and was repelled by the ‘mélange of Lancashire and Italian’ that she spoke. 56 Not surprisingly, Gordon detected severe character faults in the social upstart: ‘ambition and intrigue were her ruling passions’. 57 Like her earlier anonymous biographer, Gordon saw her as crossing gender boundaries and empowering herself by dominating Nelson. She was not only unladylike, but even lacking in any womanly traits: ‘There was nothing feminine about her’. 58 Nelson hardly appears as anything else but her prey. Although Gordon believed that Nelson was originally ‘amiable’ and possessed of ‘noble qualities’, he concluded that ‘his heart was corrupted, and his mind paralysed’, his ‘qualities were paralysed by the syren into whose hands he unfortunately fell’ and he ended up ‘in her chains’. 59 Gordon, like Clarke and M’Arthur, took it for granted that Lady Hamilton was not in love with Nelson himself, but rather with his

53 Ralfe, ii, 181.
54 Gordon, i, 23 (Whig), 159 (accompanying Lord Montgomery to Italy), 182 (missing ‘rural sports’), 186-87 (ironically giving exaggerated reports about the wildness of the Neapolitan revolution), 190-91 (sympathies for the revolution).
55 Gordon, ii, 394.
56 Gordon, i, 201 (Lancashire); ii, 383-384 (‘her splendid person ... commanded admiration from the amateurs of enbonpoint; ... more generally admired by the promiscuous herd ...’); ii, 383 (‘vulgar manners’). Perhaps it was below Gordon to know British accents: Lady Hamilton was not from Lancashire, but from Cheshire: Walter Sichel, *Emma Lady Hamilton. From New and Original Sources and Documents. Together with an Appendix of Notes and New Letters* (3d ed., revised, Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1907) [hereafter: Sichel], p. 39 gives Neston (which is in Cheshire) as birthplace.
57 Gordon, ii, 394; similarly: ii, 383 (‘she possessed a talent and tact in private and political intrigued’).
58 Gordon, ii, 384.
59 Gordon, i, 217, ii, 393-94.
fame: 'there can be no doubt but she persuaded poor Nelson that she was actually in love with him, not as a Mars but as an Adonis!'  

When it actually came to narrating accounts of the activities of Nelson and Lady Hamilton, Gordon relied on the two Bronte-stories mentioned above. Sensibly leaving out the impossible address of 'Bronte', Lady Hamilton was now reported as simply exclaiming: 'This will never do — we must have blood!' She is also said to have convinced Nelson to be rowed around the frigate from whose yardarm Caracciolo's corpse was hanging. Gordon even added some details to the story, before cutting it short himself: 'it is sickening to dwell on a subject so revolting'. At least he did not have to wait for Lady Hamilton to die in order to see her appalled by what had happened. Gordon reported that she fainted when still in the Bay of Naples, at seeing a pig being carved up to be eaten, because it reminded her of Caracciolo. Nevertheless, she did 'eat heartily of it — aye!' Lady Hamilton was not the only woman to faint conveniently when something dramatic was occurring. 'Mrs. C[harle]s L[ockle], the beautiful and amiable wife of our consul general' fainted, according to Gordon, when Lady Hamilton kissed 'the encrusted Jacobin blood' on a sword that a Turk passed to her, claiming that he had cut off the heads of twenty French prisoners with it. Although the story suspiciously fits the taste of the day for denigrating Lady Hamilton and clearly supports Gordon's prejudices against her, it has been frequently repeated ever since.

A new edition of Southey's Life of Nelson (in 1831) and the 'Old Sailor's biography of Nelson (in 1836), did not adopt these accounts about the relationship

---

60 Gordon, ii, 386.
61 Gordon, ii, 218-19, 219 fn. (account about pig from 'Mr. L-', most probably Charles Locke, who is also referred to as C---s L---e, i, 210, and who was very much at odds with Nelson and the Hamiltons — see: J. Russell, pp. 114-15, 128, 131-32, 154-55, 178, 452).
63 Mahan, Life, p. 393, fn. quoted this last story and claimed that he had first satisfied 'himself, by inquiry, as to the probable credibility of Mr. Gordon, and likewise testing his narrative. It bears marks of the inaccuracy in details to which memory is subject, but the indications of general correctness are satisfactory'. The story has since been used by: Vittoria Caetani, Duchess of Sermoneta, The Locks of Norbury. The story of a remarkable family in the XVIIIth and XIX centuries (London: John Murray, 1940), pp. 162-163 [although 'Mrs Charles Locke' does not report the event in any of her frequent letters to her mother]; Pocock (1987), p. 192; Hibbert (1994), pp. 174-175; Oman, p. 364 remarked that 'In 1830, Major Pryse Lockhart Gordon ... published memoirs of remarkable inaccuracy'.

139
between Nelson and Lady Hamilton. Attempts to approach the subject of Nelson anew betray their authors' dilemma over how to deal with Nelson's relations with Lady Hamilton. Efforts were made to explain Nelson's moral aberration by looking for other causes than just Lady Hamilton: one possible reason was found in the loss of 'his mother at a very early age, when the first principles of piety and morals are commonly imbibed from maternal instruction'.

Even Nelson's wife received her share of blame for supposedly not having tried hard enough to regain Nelson's affections on his return to England after his victory at the Nile. Nobody yet placed full responsibility upon Nelson himself. He was described instead as an unhappy victim, in danger of emasculation: 'The manly simplicity of his character gave way to the gross flattery which surrounded him, and being persuaded to resign his command, he allowed himself to be exhibited [by Lady Hamilton] through the continent in a manner unworthy of his great name'.

With Nelson's reputation recovering in the early 1840s, Lieutenant Parsons, who had served under Nelson as a midshipman in the Mediterranean in 1799, published his Nelsonian Reminiscences. Leaves from Memory's Log. In these memoirs he also dealt with Lady Hamilton, 'this unjustly treated and wonderful woman'. In the few passages in which Parsons mentioned her, he praised her 'kindness'. Feeling personally indebted to her, he expressed: 'May it be made up to thee in another and a better world, sweet lady! for man's injustice in this – where thou hast been most foully calumniated'. In assessing the criticism levelled at Lady Hamilton, Parsons was aware of the importance that her social background had played in fuelling these attacks. He attributed any

---

64 Although Southey (1831) made use of some of the letters published anonymously in 1814 (pp. 193, 285, 290-292, 304-306).
65 Edward Hawke Locker, Memoirs of Celebrated Naval Commanders illustrated by engravings from original pictures in the Naval Gallery of Greenwich Hospital (London: Harding and Lepard, 1832), pp. 10-11 [hereafter: Locker], at p. 10.
67 Locker, p. 10; 'The Old Sailor', p. 10.
68 Parsons, p. 10.
69 Parsons, p. 10.
70 Parsons, p. 61; further passages: pp. 9-12, 19, 41, 43 ('She was much liked by every one in the fleet').
weakness she may have had to her 'low birth', but pointed out: 'Had that well-proportioned head been encircled by a diadem, thy memory would have been held up for the adoration, instead of the execration, of mankind'.

Parson's Nelsonian Reminiscences give an insight into how Nelson and Lady Hamilton interacted that confirms the way they challenged gender-stereotypes. Nelson was reported to have 'blushed like a fair maiden', when Lady Hamilton '[b]ending her graceful form over her superb harp ... sang the praises of Nelson'. In contrast to such shyness, Parsons described Lady Hamilton as a very determined person. Half-jokingly she is said to have 'declared, “His lordship must serve me”'. She indeed made Nelson support young Parsons, 'dictating a strong certificate, which, under her direction, he wrote'. She went on arranging matters: "Now, my young friend", said her ladyship, with that irresistible smile which gave such expression of sweetness to her lovely countenance, "obey my directions minutely; send this to Lord St. Vincent, at Brentwood, so as to reach him on Sunday morning". In this very sympathetic account, Nelson hardly appears to be making any decisions for himself.

As the surviving eye-witnesses to this relationship died, writers had to rely increasingly on their letters in assessing the nature of Nelson’s attachment to Lady Hamilton. In this context, Nicholas Harris Nicolas’ edition of The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson was of particular importance, because it was used as a work of reference by later biographers. In matters regarding Lady Hamilton, however, it was unreliable. Nicolas not only omitted many of Nelson’s letters to Lady Hamilton in his work, but also doubted the authenticity of the two most telling letters from the collection published anonymously in 1814, quoted above. Having discarded these passages as not being authentic, Nicolas argued that there was ‘great doubt … whether the intimacy between Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton was ever, in the usual sense of

---

71 Parsons, p. 12, italics in the original.
72 Parsons, p. 43.
73 Parsons, p. 11. Parsons, p. 63, also described Lady Hamilton as fearless and with a strong opinion of her own, declining to go below decks when an action was imminent: ‘Lord Nelson was in a towering passion, and Lady Hamilton’s refusal to quit the quarter-deck did not tend to tranquillize him’.
74 See appendix B.
75 Nicolas vii, 373 and 377-380. For the quoted passages see footnotes 27 and 28.
the word, of a criminal nature. Nicolas clearly struggled to convince, because he also stated that ‘during a long separation from his wife on the Public service in the Mediterranean, he [Nelson] so far yielded to temptation as to become the father of a child’. Nicolas had also to explain why Nelson had actually separated from his wife, if his relationship with Lady Hamilton was of a purely platonic nature. Here Nicolas referred to a letter which he had received from Nelson’s solicitor, Haslewood, who blamed Nelson’s wife, Fanny, for the separation. Haslewood remembered that when Nelson had mentioned Lady Hamilton at a dinner, his wife protested and left the party, ‘muttering something about her mind being made up ... to the day of her husband’s glorious death, she never made any apology for her abrupt and ungentle conduct above related, or any overture towards a reconciliation’. As a result Nelson merely appeared as victim of female ‘temptation’ and of his wife’s lack of consideration, instead of being acknowledged as a determined lover.

Several authors followed Nicolas in claiming, first, that Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton had not been of an erotic kind; second, that Nelson was the father of his ‘adopted daughter’ Horatia (but Lady Hamilton was not the mother); and, third, that Nelson’s wife was to blame for the separation of the married couple. The claim that Nelson and Lady Hamilton had no carnal relationship (at least prior to their return to England) and had no child together was supported by the publication of the autobiography of Cornelia Knight who had known them both in Naples and who had travelled with them through central Europe. Cornelia Knight, however, had a personal interest in seeking to prove that she had not socialized for a lengthy period of time with an adulterous couple.

76 Nicolas, vii, 389.
77 Nicolas, vii, 394.
79 All three elements appear in: Allen, pp. 148 (not erotic), 195 (blame on Fanny Nelson), 312-315 (Nelson a father); the first two elements appear in: Tucker, pp.458, 460 (referring to Nicolas); the second argument appears in: Harcourt, i, 223-224.
Nicolas’ assessment of the nature of the relationship between Nelson and Lady Hamilton was forcibly challenged by Thomas Joseph Pettigrew’s two volume *Memoirs of the Life of Vice-Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson*. The justification for Pettigrew’s revelations was his claim that Nelson himself had made his relationship with Lady Hamilton ‘a subject of history by naming her and his child Horatia in a Codicil to his Will on the day of his death, and leaving them as a testamentary bequest to his country’.  

81 This biography of Nelson, making use of a near-complete collection of Nelson’s letters to Lady Hamilton, 82 advanced two main arguments: one about Lady Hamilton and the other about her relationship with Nelson, each in a separate chapter at the end of the second volume. The claim, that Nelson and Lady Hamilton were the parents of Horatia, was only a secondary consideration and the argument was not well developed. 83 Pettigrew wrote much more about Lady Hamilton being an intelligent woman, who firmly supported Nelson. 84 He acknowledged that some aspects of her youth had been criticized before, such as her reading ‘romances’, 85 and he admitted that she was later ‘known to express regret at the manner in which her time was here engaged’. 86 In her praise, however, he quoted George Romney, whose model she had been. He also described how she had assisted Nelson to victual his squadron and, later, had helped the Neapolitan Royal Family to flee. 87 Having recognized Lady Hamilton’s achievements, Pettigrew went on to describe her unsuccessful attempts to obtain a pension, which were partly thwarted, because Nelson’s brother failed to make public Nelson’s last codicil to his will. 88

Pettigrew’s claim that Lady Hamilton had been let down by her native country roused the interest of his contemporaries. In reaction to a review of his biography in *The

81 Pettigrew, i, v (first page of his ‘Preface’).
82 See appendix C.
83 Pettigrew, ii, 638-56 (supplementary chapter: ‘Horatia Nelson’).
84 Pettigrew, ii, 593-637 (supplementary chapter: ‘Lady Hamilton’), also 638.
85 *Memoirs of Lady Hamilton*, p. 21.
86 Pettigrew, ii, 594.
87 Pettigrew, ii, 596-99 (Romney), 609, 611-16 (victualling, also i, 126-27), 617-18 (evacuation).
88 Pettigrew, ii, 624-625 (Nelson’s brother’s intervention), 625-628, 631 (unsuccessful applications).
Times that had treated the issue only in passing, letters to the editor focused on nothing but the neglect of Lady Hamilton. If it was not referred to as a shameful act by an ‘ungrateful nation’, it was blamed on Nelson’s brother. No one seems to have doubted Lady Hamilton’s claim to the nation’s gratitude and, in two letters, published on the same day, it was suggested that Nelson’s daughter, at least, should belatedly benefit from her father’s sacrifice. A Nelson Memorial Fund was created, to which Prince Albert among many others subscribed. In the following years the public were keen to fulfil ‘the last request of the illustrious Nelson’ by patronizing and supporting Horatia’s sons.

Subsequent biographers did not react in the same way as public opinion appears to have done. Only two accounts, and those short and published in immediate response to Pettigrew’s extensive biography of Nelson, rejected Nicolas’ view of the platonic relationship between Nelson and Lady Hamilton. They were in great parts identical and appeared more indebted to the biography of Lady Hamilton, published anonymously in 1815, than to Pettigrew. Only an article, published in 1860, pursued Pettigrew’s arguments. Later, John Knox Laughton rejected ‘Pettigrew’s bulky work’ as ‘mainly filled with the story of Nelson’s supposed amour with Lady Hamilton, and … better suited for the society of the “School for Scandal” than for the student of naval history’.

---

89 The Times, 17 and 22 August 1849; this review in the seven columns over which it stretches is mainly consisting of text from: [Anon.], Astonishing Career of a Nursery-maid, Afterwards Lady Hamilton the Mistress of Lord Nelson (London: George Vickers, [c. 1850, written after Pettigrew and after Merton Place had been demolished, p. 15]) [hereafter: Astonishing Career of a Nursery-maid], which portrays Lady Hamilton and, though to a lesser degree, Nelson in a negative fashion. The passage that points out that Lady Hamilton’s ‘unparalleled service’ was forgotten is to be found in the second column of the second part of the review.
90 The Times, 29 August and 3 September 1849.
91 The Times, 30 August 1849.
92 The Times, 3 September 1849.
93 The Times, 2 June 1851.
94 The Times, 21 October and 11 November 1853, 3 April 1854.
95 The Times, 17 and 22 August 1849; Astonishing Career of a Nursery-maid.
97 Laughton (1886), p. vii.
With some difficulty Laughton denounced the most telling letter printed by Pettigrew as 'fictitious'.

Diaries and letters published in the second half of the nineteenth century that mentioned the relationship between Nelson and Lady Hamilton failed to persuade his biographers to incorporate these details into their accounts. Female upper-class contemporaries of Nelson and Lady Hamilton had observed: 'Lady Hamilton takes possession of him, and he is a willing captive, the most submissive and devoted I have seen' and 'she leads him about like a keeper with a bear'. Whether erotic or not, the whole relationship made Nelson appear undignified, if not unmanly. When the particularly scathing diary of Mrs. St. George was published, admirers of Nelson rose to the challenge. Biographers, however, stayed away from the subject of Nelson in general and his relationship with Lady Hamilton in particular.

The treatment of Nelson's relationship with Lady Hamilton did undergo lasting change in the late 1880s. At a time of rising interest in Nelson parts of the letters that Pettigrew had used, but which had not been published in the anonymous edition of 1814, as well as letters that had never been published before became available to the public. The wealthy collector Alfred Morrison made the original letters accessible first to authors and then more widely by publishing them privately in 1893. The disclosure of these letters wrought two major changes in the image of Nelson. First, they initiated a serious discussion of his relationship with Lady Hamilton, mainly whether it was of an erotic and carnal nature, but also whether Lady Hamilton had indeed helped him to get his squadron victualled before the battle of the Nile. Second, the sheer mass of letters

---

98 Laughton (1886), p. xx.
99 *Journal kept during a Visit to Germany in 1799, 1800 [by Mrs. Melesina St. George, later: Trench]*, ed. The Dean of Westminster [printed for private circulation, also published in: 'No. CCXXI of the Quarterly Review'; hereafter: St. George], p. 76; *Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot, First Earl of Minto from 1751 to 1806*, ed. The Countess of Minto (3 vols., London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1874) [hereafter: Minto], iii, 147 (quoting from a letter written from Vienna by Lady Minto to her sister).
100 *Matcham; [Anon., George Matcham], Observations on No. CCXXI of the Quarterly Review, with Reference to Admiral Lord Nelson* (Salisbury and London: [n. pub.], 1861).
that Nelson was now known to have written to Lady Hamilton during long spells of separation forced biographers at last to acknowledge the obvious importance that this relationship had for Nelson.

Those who bothered to read these letters could hardly fail to notice the carnal character of Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton. Passages that Pettigrew had suppressed and that were now published for the first time included: ‘My longing for you, both person and conversation you may readily imagine. What must be my sensations at the idea of sleeping with you! it sets [sic] me on fire, even the thoughts, much more would the reality’ (written on 1 March 1801); ‘I am for ever, with all my might, with all my strength, yours, only yours. My soul is God’s, let him dispose of it as it seemeth fit to his infinite wisdom, my body is Emma’s’ (written on 6 October 1803). 102 A passage in a letter of 9 March 1801, that had not been published before, read: ‘I shall soon return, and than we will take our fill of love. No, we never can be satiated till death divides us.’ 103

In an elaborate two-volume study on the basis of the Morrison collection about *Lady Hamilton and Lord Nelson*, John Cordy Jeaffreson was the first to deal with the erotic character of the relationship and with Lady Hamilton’s practical support for Nelson. The author cautiously argued in support of Pettigrew’s view that Horatia was the daughter of Nelson and Lady Hamilton. But, unlike Pettigrew, he denied Lady Hamilton’s part in the victualling of the British fleet. 104 Some authors still refused to accept the erotic character of Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton, 105 but

102 Morrison, ii, 123 (left out in Pettigrew, ii 652); Morrison, ii, 219 (left out in Pettigrew, ii, 346). For an overview over the development of Nelson’s letters in print see appendix B. For a synopsis of the different versions of letters from Nelson to Lady Hamilton see appendix C.
103 Morrison, ii, 127.
105 John Paget [who had published an article about Lady Hamilton in the same magazine in 1860], ‘Lady Hamilton and Mr John Cordy Jeaffreson’, *Blackwood’s Magazine*, 143 (May 1888), 635-649; Browne, p. xii; both authors claim to have used the Morrison letters; Browne asserts they are ‘a clever imitation of Nelson’s handwriting made by the lady herself’.
Jeaffreson’s view was soon generally accepted. After 1890 only female authors either denied the sexual aspect to the relationship or avoided the matter altogether.\textsuperscript{106} Perhaps women felt even more bound to the observance of Victorian moral standards than men, and did not dare admit to admiring someone they acknowledged to be an adulterer. The discovery, that many of the letters that Pettigrew had printed were actually authentic, was often difficult to accept. Laughton, who had before so vehemently defended Nelson’s morality, focused now just on the claim that Lady Hamilton had not helped to get Nelson’s squadron victualled and he went on doubting the reliability of Pettigrew.\textsuperscript{107} It took several more years before he openly acknowledged that Nelson and Lady Hamilton had had a daughter together.\textsuperscript{108}

With the erotic nature of the relationship now accepted, biographers of Nelson had to endeavour to analyse and interpret the affair. Jeaffreson minimized Nelson’s guilt mainly by suggesting that the intercourse that had led to the birth of Horatia had merely been a ‘momentary submission to an overpowering impulse of passion’.\textsuperscript{109} Jeaffreson did not acknowledge that Nelson loved Lady Hamilton; against the evidence, he even wrote of a ‘platonic attachment’ and ‘brotherly liking’.\textsuperscript{110} He also insisted that Nelson’s judgment was never affected by Lady Hamilton.\textsuperscript{111} Even so, Nelson’s ‘lamentable

\textsuperscript{106} Hilda Gamlin, \textit{Nelson’s Friendships} (2 vols., London: Hutchinson, 1899), i, 204 (she reached this conclusion by re-interpreting some letters, i, 169, 340-348, and by doubting the authenticity of other letters, i, 211-213); [Sabine] Baring-Gould mentioned Lady Hamilton only in passing on pp. 75-76, 86, 99; Clara E. E. Gye mentioned Lady Hamilton only as preparing Nelson’s birthday party and translator in Naples on pp. 33, 36-37; the latest denial of the erotic character of Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton that I have come across was not by a professed author, but in a work that had been recorded from oral reminiscences: Fisher, p. 158 (‘Supposing (what I don’t admit) that there was any irregularity in his attachment to Lady Hamilton’).

\textsuperscript{107} J. K. Laughton, ‘Nelson’s Last Codicil’, \textit{Colburn’s United Service Magazine}, April 1889, 647-62, [another volume, not further specified in the library of the National Maritime Museum], 10-23, at 12, claimed that Pettigrew did not see any original letters, 13, he referred to ‘Pettigrew’s blunders’, 22-23, regarded a letter given in J. Harrison, i, 256, as not authentic. Jeaffreson (1889), I, 343-346 did not share Laughton’s doubts. Laughton (1896), pp. 94-98 gives the English translation of the Governor of Syracuse’s report about Nelson entering Syracuse with his fleet to water and victual; this informative source has never again been used. The story about the victualling has since been discarded by serious biographers. A more recent analysis of the sources can be found in: J. Russell, pp. 48-50; the story can still be found in less well researched publications: White/Moorhouse, p. ix.

\textsuperscript{108} Laughton (1895), p. 154; again: Laughton (1913), p. 25.

\textsuperscript{109} Jeaffreson (1888), ii, 167; similarly: ii, 191 (‘one brief passage of tempestuous emotion’).

\textsuperscript{110} Jeaffreson (1888), ii, 161, 166.

\textsuperscript{111} Jeaffreson (1888), ii, 47-48.
misadventure' needed some explanation, and here Jeaffreson stuck to the image of Lady Hamilton as an actress in real life, who felt more attracted to Nelson's heroism than to his person.\(^\text{112}\) He also stressed other unpleasant traits of Lady Hamilton, such as her tendency towards 'intemperance' and extravagance.\(^\text{113}\) What had drawn Nelson towards Lady Hamilton was, according to Jeaffreson, his 'shyness', 'rusticity' and his 'disposition to regard women worshipfully'.\(^\text{114}\) Once he was drawn in, his wife committed the mistake of confronting him with 'sudden anger' so that he felt compelled to stay with his mistress.\(^\text{115}\) From then on, Jeaffreson calculated, Nelson and Lady Hamilton were not that much together and, if together, mostly in the company of others.\(^\text{116}\) Jeafferson assumed that Nelson's marriage would have been restored over time 'by force of their never-uprooted love'.\(^\text{117}\) He drew his conviction of the superior attraction of Lady Nelson from her letters which he described as 'more nervous and eloquent of womanly devotedness than the epistles he received from Lady Hamilton'.\(^\text{118}\) Jeaffreson, like so many of his predecessors, thus reflected the nineteenth-century ideal of women devoting their lives to men. He ignored the indications that Nelson might not have shared this ideal of gendered roles in a partnership.\(^\text{119}\)

Later biographers had even more difficulty in dealing with Nelson’s affair with Lady Hamilton, because they did not follow Jeaffreson’s assumption that Nelson’s

\(^\text{112}\) Jeaffreson (1888), i, 321 (attraction of hero, in this he followed Clarke and M’Arthur and Gordon), ii, 161 (misadventure), ii, 243 (actress, in this he followed Memoirs of Lady Hamilton and Gordon); Jeaffreson (1888) strangely contradicts his own assertion of Lady Hamilton choosing and then using Nelson, by claiming, ii, 162, that she was actually in love with Nelson.

\(^\text{113}\) Jeaffreson (1888), ii, 241, 280 (these had been claimed before by Lady Hamilton), although he also acknowledged, ii, 331-32, that 'in those respects in which she was most faulty, she was what masculine selfishness made her'.

\(^\text{114}\) Jeaffreson (1888), ii, 147, 152.

\(^\text{115}\) Jeaffreson (1888), ii, 217.

\(^\text{116}\) Jeaffreson (1888), ii, 244, calculated for the period from 13 January 1801 until the death of Nelson: '1 year, 9 months, 1 day together', 245. During that time, ii, 242, ‘Nelson was less enamoured of what she was than of what he imagined her to be’.

\(^\text{117}\) Jeaffreson (1888), ii, 219.

\(^\text{118}\) Jeaffreson (1888), ii, 150.

\(^\text{119}\) The access to the Morrison collection enabled Jeaffreson and all of his successors, first, to assess the reliability of the printed versions of Nelson’s letters to Lady Hamilton and, second, to analyse what Nelson appreciated in Lady Hamilton. The first has been concisely dealt with by Coleman, pp. 365, 409 (more information is contained in the appendices B and C a to this work). The second has not been seriously attempted so far.
attraction to Lady Hamilton had only been a rather short-lived and unimportant affair. Nevertheless, Nelson’s deep and enduring love for Lady Hamilton was still particularly hard for them to understand, because they hero-worshipped him and regarded her as a ‘vain, low-born, unprincipled woman’. One biographer commented on Nelson’s last letter to her: ‘It is not in human nature to repress an emotion of bitterness on thinking of the unworthiness of the recipient of these noble, touching, beautiful words’. Over the next decades Lady Hamilton remained a decidedly unpleasant person in any account of Nelson: she was a ‘wicked’, intemperate, ‘vulgar’, ‘empty-headed’ and ‘silly’ ‘liar’ and manipulating actress with a ‘love of notoriety’, who could not even boast an attractive appearance, since she was ‘decidedly over-plump’. Biographers of Nelson agreed that she never loved Nelson, as he loved her. In his biography of Nelson, published in 1919, Walter Runciman replaced her name by disparaging epithets referring to her as a ‘female nightmare’ and a ‘noxious creature’. The more positive image of Lady Hamilton that developed at that time in biographies about her, did not affect the low opinion that biographers of Nelson held of her.

121 W. Clark Russell (1890), p. 273; similarly: Mahan, Life, pp. 58-59 (‘The pitifulness of it is to see the incongruity between such faith, such devotion, and the distasteful inadequacy of their object’); Andrew, p. 176.
123 Laughton (1895), p. 177.
124 Andrew, p. 104; similarly: White/Moorhouse, p. 27 (‘underbred and overblown beauty’, although these authors are the only ones who also see something positive in Lady Hamilton as Nelson’s supporter, p. 18).
126 Laughton (1895), p. 127; Lambert (2002), p. 99, letter from Mahan to Laughton of 18 February 1894: ‘she being, as you say, such a liar (how could she be else?)’; Andrew, p. 176.
129 Fitchett, p. 5.
130 Laughton (1896), p. 312-313; Mahan, Life, p. 322; Thursfield (1909), p. 90; Runciman, p. 80; an exception is only Jeaffreson (1888), ii, 162 (though this love was described as product of the idealizing nature of a woman, i, 320).
131 Runciman, pp. 96, 99.
132 See for example: Sichel.
The devastatingly negative image biographers of Nelson had of Lady Hamilton compelled them to examine how Nelson could enter into a relationship with her and long maintain it. Mahan helped to spread Jeaffreson's opinion, that the explanation lay in Nelson's character. He asserted that Nelson had a 'tendency to idealize' and that he had an 'impressionable fancy', which led to 'extravagance of admiration'. According to Mahan, Nelson also showed these characteristics in his professional life in relationship with his friends and subordinates. Consequently, Mahan saw Nelson the lover and Nelson the warrior as related. Philip H. Colomb, too, recognized the connection between Nelson's character and his love for Lady Hamilton and he pointed out: 'The earlier biographers of Nelson, especially Southey, altogether failed to realize his passionate, impulsive character, and to them, therefore, the lamentable relations with Lady Hamilton were incongruous'. Later authors extended the analysis of what it was in Nelson's character that made him fall in love with Lady Hamilton. They observed an emotional side in Nelson that they regarded as 'feminine' and which was expressed by a need for approbation, if not flattery.

Some biographers, however, preferred to stress the impact of particular or propitious circumstances as explanations for Nelson's passion for Lady Hamilton. Laughton pointed out that Nelson was separated from his wife at the time when he met Lady Hamilton and that he was not used to 'the grandeur and display of the wealthy' that he was confronted with at Naples, where he met Lady Hamilton. Later authors added the head wound that Nelson had received at the battle of the Nile as a possible factor that temporarily weakened Nelson's resolve and contributed to make him fall prey to the wiles and charms of Lady Hamilton. Other biographers, following Jeaffreson,

---

133 Mahan, *Life*, pp. 28, 36; similarly: pp. 31 ('his ardent imagination'), 36 ('an ideal, which his mental constitution imperatively demanded as an object of worship').
134 Mahan, *Life*, p. 58 ('The same disregard of consequences that hazarded all for all, in battle or for duty, broke through the barriers within which prudence, reputation, decency, or even weakness and cowardice, confine the actions of lesser men').
135 Colomb, 'Nelson', p. 448.
136 Fitchett, pp. 4-5; White/Moorhouse, p. 19; Runciman, p. 77; Forester, p. 147 (though without reference to femininity).
137 Laughton (1895), p. 128.
blamed Nelson’s wife Fanny. Instead of relying on Haslewood’s account about the scene that Lady Nelson was supposed to have made, they now tended to focus more on her being too cold to meet the needs of Nelson’s passionate nature.\textsuperscript{139}

Nelson’s emotional needs and his particular circumstances combined to conspire to make him a slave to Lady Hamilton.\textsuperscript{140} The view that Nelson was degraded by his relationship with Lady Hamilton was not new, but what was new was that biographers of Nelson now saw him actually submitting to Lady Hamilton. Nelson’s decision to enter into a full relationship with Lady Hamilton is sometimes referred to in terms of a naval defeat, such as: ‘he struck his colours to Lady Hamilton’.\textsuperscript{141} The result of this surrender to an artful woman was seen to have had serious effects on Nelson’s mental stability: ‘everything was unhinged with him’.\textsuperscript{142} The affair was even threatening his masculinity. Mahan saw Nelson as relinquishing his masculinity to a masculine woman,\textsuperscript{143} who ‘dragged a man of Nelson’s masculine renown about England and the Continent, till he was the mock of all beholders’.\textsuperscript{144} A few authors did try to portray aspects of the relationship as showing that Nelson was the dominant partner. Nelson was represented as using Lady Hamilton for political purposes and thus as standing ‘as Caesar, not Antony, to Cleopatra’.\textsuperscript{145} It was also pointed out that he refused to let her join him in the

\textsuperscript{139} Colomb, ‘Nelson’, p. 448; Holme, pp. 25, 165; White/Moorhouse, p. 20; Thursfield (1909), p. 90, although Thursfield (1898), 19 February, 1, had bemoaned ‘that the affectionate relations which subsisted between Nelson and his wife for many years have attracted less attention than his unfortunate attachment to Lady Hamilton’; Runciman, pp. 84-85; Forester, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{140} Laughton (1895), pp. 129, 149 (‘entirely at her orders’); Mahan, \textit{Life}, p. 28.

\textsuperscript{141} Andrew, pp. 111-112; similarly: W. Clark Russell, \textit{Pictures from the Life of Nelson} (London: James Bowden, 1897), pp. 55-56 (‘Love mastered him, for here was a greater conqueror even than Nelson ... This was Nelson’s one defeat’); Corbett-Smith, p. 197 (‘he surrendered himself’).

\textsuperscript{142} Colomb, ‘Nelson’, p. 464, similarly: p. 466; Thursfield (1909), p. 125 (‘his mental balance was for the moment overthrown’); Runciman, pp. 79 (‘mental and intellectual deterioration’), 96 (‘he loses control of his wonderful gifts, and his mind becomes deranged with the idea of her being an object on which he should bestow reverence and infinite adulation’), 127 (‘he had lost ... the power of consecutive reasoning in matters of moral convention’).

\textsuperscript{143} Mahan, \textit{Life}, p. 332, describes Lady Hamilton to ‘take possession of him’ and that as a consequence ‘Nelson was well handled’; when Mahan, \textit{Life}, p.338, speaks of her ‘lapse into feminine weakness’ he merely underlines that he regards her domineering demeanour as masculine.

\textsuperscript{144} Mahan, \textit{Life}, p. 330.

\textsuperscript{145} Thursfield (1898), 9 April, 5.
Mediterranean in 1804.\textsuperscript{146} Even these authors, however, described Nelson as becoming slowly demoralized and descending into the ‘darkest depths of sensuality’.\textsuperscript{147}

As authors developed their arguments about the feminine aspects in Nelson’s character and about his loss of masculinity, they constructed an image of Nelson that was increasingly removed from their stronger image of Nelson as the successful warrior. While Mahan could still assert that passion and professionalism went together, his followers, resenting Nelson’s relations with Lady Hamilton, dropped this connection. Thursfield was the first, in 1909, to reach the conclusion that a biographer needed to split Nelson into two persons. The letters published by Morrison were so shocking to him that he proclaimed that they showed that: ‘the incomparable Nelson of the \textit{Victory’s} quarter-deck and cockpit is as completely degraded into the sensual, erotic, and frantically jealous paramour of Lady Hamilton as the Dr. Jekyll of Stevenson’s story was ever transformed into Mr. Hyde’.\textsuperscript{148} The idea of the two persons in Nelson was taken up again in the 1920s, when Aston declared: ‘In dealing with 1800, a critical time in Nelson’s life, we must distinguish between the great seaman of St. Vincent and the Nile, and Nelson as he was at this period. A man stirred to the roots of his being by an enduring passion’.\textsuperscript{149}

The introduction of the double Nelson - one, the glorious warrior, the other, the besotted and emasculated lover - had a profound effect on the image of Nelson. Instead of investigating the aspects of Nelson’s character that had come to light with his letters to Lady Hamilton, and seeking to integrate them into other aspects of the man, biographers split them off from their pre-conceived image of Nelson, which was that of

\textsuperscript{146} White/Moorhouse, p. 18 (‘he put her from him with a stern hand’); Aston, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{147} Thursfield (1898), 9 April, 8, 23 April, 18; less outspokenly: White/Moorhouse, p. 20; Aston, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{148} Thursfield (1909), p. 125.
\textsuperscript{149} Aston, p. 50, the naval Nelson is later, p. 78, described as the ‘true Nelson’; also: Upcott, pp. 124-125 (‘from 1798 onwards he serves two masters: in times of crisis he is the old Nelson of St. Vincent, Teneriffe, and the Nile, animated by the single desire of his country’s glory; between whiles he serves Lady Hamilton and the Neapolitan royal clique in which her interests are involved’). Runciman, p. 113, described Nelson’s passion for Lady Hamilton as ‘for ever in conflict with his true self’. Kerr, p. 8 (‘So many people who read of him only retain in their minds the ‘Lady Hamilton’ side of his story, ... In doing so, they are only learning about his small, second-best self, and neglecting the great first side of his nature’).
the warrior. Their former image of Nelson could thereby survive untouched, merely accompanied by a subordinate image of the ‘weak’ side in Nelson. In Cecil Scott Forester’s biography of *Nelson*, what Aston had described as the ‘true Nelson’, seemed again to be gaining the upper hand towards the end of Nelson’s life. Forester developed the division in Nelson’s character into a split between his real self and his relations with Lady Hamilton. He described her as primarily motivated by the love of celebrity which, he maintained, was not completely satisfied, since she had not been presented at court, and which she could only live to the full with Nelson away at sea. In contrast, Nelson himself was glad to go; idleness had become a curse, and ... he felt a yearning for the ordered routine of shipboard life and the unchallenged position of a Commander-in-Chief after the late hours and melodramatic jealousies of Merton [the house he lived in with Lady Hamilton] ... From all the evidence it seems as though he had grown beyond the really wantonly, mad phase of passion.

The last remark was not borne out by contemporary evidence, since Lord Minto, visiting Nelson and Lady Hamilton at Merton during Nelson’s short stay in England in 1805, remarked in a letter to his wife at the time: ‘the passion is as hot as ever’.

Instead of arguing for a breach between Nelson and Lady Hamilton, Edinger and Neep described Nelson’s efforts to get the two sides of his personality and his life equally acknowledged in public: ‘He sought to enter society with her hanging on his arm’. To his great distress ‘all agreed that Society should ignore both him and his paramour’. According to Edinger and Neep, the rest of his life became a doomed struggle for a public recognition of his relationship with Lady Hamilton. They ridiculed Nelson’s visitors to Merton: ‘Local celebrities such as Mr. Stinton the grocer,

---

150 Aston, p. 78; Forester, pp. 146-47, 173 (Lady Hamilton’s desire for celebrity, limelight), 204 (Lady Hamilton dissatisfied, because not being received at court), 210 (Lady Hamilton ‘saw him [Nelson] go without regret, and turned again instantly to what society she could find in London’).
151 Edinger/Neep, p. 10.
152 Minto, iii, 363.
154 Edinger/Neep, pp. 292-95 (about trip to Wales).
Mr. Halfhide the gentleman farmer, or Mr. Abraham Goldsmid "the financial gentleman", might hang breathlessly upon the favour of his patronage and load him with invitations and hampers of game; but the Court, Officialdom, the Nobility, London and Society were inflexible in their enmity'. Faced with this social ostracism Nelson was said to have determined on a form of suicide in a decisive naval action: "his world had not accepted his Emma. They would not do it, even for his sake while he lived; but it would be hard for England to deny his wishes if he died victorious." No later biographer has taken Nelson's supposed desperation at the lack of recognition of his love affair from the upper classes as far as Edinger and Neep. At least one author, however, followed them some way in stressing how "the refusal of society to recognize Lady Hamilton annoyed him". The assumption that Nelson desired to be acknowledged as a member of the upper classes is contradicted, however, by Nelson's taste in company, expressed in letters to Lady Hamilton: "None of the great shall enter our peaceful abode".

Much more enduring than ideas of tension between Nelson and Lady Hamilton or between Nelson and society was the suggestion of a conflict within Nelson himself. C. J. Britton, though very favourably inclined towards Lady Hamilton, unknowingly gave this inner conflict an outer expression by distinguishing between Nelson at sea and Nelson on land. This difference between the shore-Nelson and the Nelson on and in his natural element was taken up by Admiral W. M. James as the key to Nelson's love for Lady Hamilton. He contrasted "the Nelson of St. Vincent and the Nile" with "another Nelson who was seen very occasionally - never on board ship". Admiral James even

156 Edinger/Neep, p. 286.
157 Edinger/Neep, pp. 315-16.
158 Selincourt, p. 46.
159 Nelson's view seems to have been shared by Lady Hamilton, because Nelson also wrote: "I agree with you no great folks" (both letters are quoted in Pettigrew, ii, 214).
160 C. J. Britton, New Chronicles of the Life of Lord Nelson (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, [1947]) [hereafter: Britton], p. 73 ('at sea ... he was much more in his element than he was on land'), evidence for this view from Nelson's professional life is given on p. 74; the book is "Dedicated to the memory of Emma Lady Hamilton whose faults the country remembered, and whose loving charms and the dead voice of duty the Nation forgot".
161 W. M. James, Durable Monument, pp. 7-8.
hinted at a possible explanation for this duality, by stressing the importance of an all-
male society: 'whenever he was alone with other men, and free from the influence of
Emma, he was always the same simple, rather boyish, fellow'. With such powerful
backing from an ideology of masculinity, the supposed split in Nelson's character as an
explanation for his relations with Lady Hamilton, survived throughout the second half of
the twentieth century. Clemence Dane (Winifred Ashton)'s remark in her preface to
an edition of Nelson's letters remained without consequence:

One has to realize that, until he met his 'guardian angel' as
he calls her, a side of Nelson's nature was undeveloped. It
was through Emma that he found himself a human being.
His love-letters are the raw material of his nature, and will,
I suppose, some day serve a dramatist as the stuff of the
Cleopatra story in Plutarch served Shakespeare, even
though a classic distance of time must elapse before the
greatest of all English love-stories can come into its
own.

With Nelson's passionate relationship with Lady Hamilton relegated to a
subordinate aspect of Nelson's character, many other aspects of his personality went
unexplored and the judgment of their relationship, that had been developed in reaction to
the publication of Morrison's collection of letters, remained unchallenged. Biographers
went on describing the woman whom Nelson loved passionately as simply 'vulgar'.

---

162 W. M. James, *Influence of Sea Power*, p. 27; the ideals of male friendship and of the admiration for the
boy in late Victorian education is impressively dealt with in: Jeffrey Richards, "'Passing the love of
women': manly love and Victorian society', in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in
Britain and America, 1800-1940*, ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester
University Press, 1987), pp. 92-122 (the admiration of boys is dealt with on p. 107).
[children's book], p. 79 ('not in ... [his] natural element'); F. Knight, p. 108 ('They knew that his sanity
could only be restored by getting him away to sea, away from Lady Hamilton'); *Nelson's Last Diary*, ed.
Oliver Warner (London: Seeley, Service & Co., 1971) [Warner (1971)], p.16 ('As a sea commander,
Nelson was a realist ... As a lover he was obsessed ...'); C. Lloyd, p. 79 ('chat about Emma is largely
irrelevant to an account of Nelson as a public character'); Walder, p. 517 ('Nelson's infatuation with Lady
Hamilton of course increased his private foolishness, but it is as a commander ...'); Carol Evans, 'Tria
41 [hereafter: C. Evans], p. 36 ('irregular desires ... tactical brilliance').
164 Clemence Dane [alias for Winifred Ashton], *The Nelson Touch. An Anthology of Lord Nelson's Letters*
(London: William Heinemann, 1942), p. xii; the real name of the author is given on the first page of
165 F. Knight, p. 99, who also regarded her as 'unintelligent'; similarly: Kennedy, p. 141; J. Russell, pp.
322, 442, although he also, pp. 38-39, explored the contemporary class-connotations of the
characterization as 'vulgar'; C. Lloyd, p. 81; Bradford, p. 230.
and they have not much explored her individual traits which they have preferred to regard as the mere poses of a 'consummate actress'. With the help of her acting ability, she 'enacted a scene which was to conquer the conquering hero', whom she never actually loved. Biographers went on using the same explanations as to why Nelson fell in love with this seemingly unattractive person: his ill health, partly caused by his head wound, the 'feminine streak in his character', the early death of his mother and the striking contrast between his modest home and the splendour of Naples. According to many fairly recent biographers of Nelson, all these elements led him to 'surrender at once and for ever'. As to Nelson's wife, Frances, there remained, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, a strong tendency to regard her as 'ill-suited' to him.

---

166 W. M. James, Durable Monument, p. 151; similarly: p. 274; J. Russell, pp. 23, 76, 77, 253, though he also insisted, p. 234: 'Emma was not playing a part'; Walder, pp. 122, 301 ('carrying her theatricality into her ordinary life. ... she regarded life as a drama in which she had a permanent role as heroine'), 476; Hough, pp. 109, 112; Pocock (1987), pp. 176, 191; C. Evans, p. 38; Tom Pocock, Nelson's Women (London: André Deutsch, 1999) [hereafter: Pocock (1999)], p. 187; Vincent, pp. 287 ('learned [from Romney] about theatrical realism'), 288 ('plotted' to get Sir William Hamilton), although the author does not adopt this traditional approach towards Lady Hamilton's relationship with Nelson.


168 Warner (1958), p. 215; Bradford, pp. 219-220; Walder, p. 301; an exception is J. Russell who, p. 359, described Lady Hamilton as 'shallow in everything but the capacity to love' and even went so far as to claim, p. 442, 'His passion was great, hers was greater'.


171 C. Lloyd, p. 10.

172 Pocock (1968), p. 47.


The image of Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton that dominated by the end of the twentieth century has been embellished because of the increased interest of biographers in the intimate aspects of a subject’s life. This has led to explicit references to sexual intercourse. Jack Russell, in 1969, was the first to address the question directly: ‘Nelson and Emma went to bed together’. Later authors have followed him in making clear when Nelson’s ‘love affair with Emma became a physical relationship’. This new openness about the character of the relationship was furthered by the discovery of one particularly explicit early erotic love letter from Nelson to Lady Hamilton, written in early 1800 from a cruise in the Mediterranean:

... no separation no time my only beloved Emma can alter my love and affection for you, it is founded on the truest principles of honor, and it only remains for us to regret which I do with the bitterest anguish that there are any obstacles to our being united in the closest ties of this Worlds rigid rules, as we are in those of real love … [describing a dream, he went on:] take those liberties with me which no woman in this world but yourself ever did … I kissed you fervently and we enjoy’d the height of love.

Other research has merely underlined the predominant view of Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton as that of a weak man dominated by an indecently strong woman. It was said that her ‘motherly’ personality appealed to Nelson and that his ‘vanity’ was catered for by Lady Hamilton. Pocock described Nelson as an ‘insecure man’ and his last letter to Lady Hamilton is described as reflecting ‘a schoolboy’s enthusiasm’. Other new details that have been unearthed focus on Lady Hamilton’s lifestyle and

175 J. Russell, p. 96.
179 Bradford, p. 221; Hough, p. 97.
180 Pocock (1998), p. 79; Pocock (1987), p. 259; Pocock (1999), p. 153, even went so far as to pathologize at least a part of Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton, by commenting on some of his letters to her: ‘his were the symptoms of a manic depressive’; Vincent, p. 67, also assumed, at least for Nelson’s early life that he had ‘inhibitions and lack of confidence about women’.
temperament; they do not go far, however, to explain what attracted Nelson so strongly to Lady Hamilton.\textsuperscript{181}

A combination of reasons conspired to hinder alterations to the view advanced about their relationship, notwithstanding the massive evidence about it available in the explicit letters from Nelson to Lady Hamilton. One reason lies in the scattering of these letters over various printed primary sources (and a much greater number of manuscript sources) which makes it difficult to assess the significance of this correspondence as a whole.\textsuperscript{182} Few biographers have explored this unwieldy mass of evidence.\textsuperscript{183} Another reason is that biographers wished to distance themselves from any form of hero-worship.\textsuperscript{184} What most late-Victorian hero-worshippers had found impossible to defend they can still not show in a positive light. Moreover, there remains an enduring class-bias against Lady Hamilton which has obstructed a balanced interpretation of Nelson’s relationship with her. Her accent has been made the subject of amusement: Jack Russell told how a nun compared Lady Hamilton’s ‘classic features’ to those of a ‘marble statue she saw when she was in the world. ‘“I think she flatered me up”, said Emma, who had only to open her mouth to ruin the whole impression’.\textsuperscript{185} Last, but not least, some stereotypical attitudes about gender roles have led authors to resent the whole affair because it appears to be such a serious challenge to traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity.

In his biography of 1958 Oliver Warner attempted a new assessment of why Nelson felt so attracted to Lady Hamilton. He pointed out that, in contrast to Frances Nelson, Lady Hamilton was an active woman and that this was exactly what Nelson liked in her.\textsuperscript{186} He was also the first to conclude that Nelson was actually happy with

\textsuperscript{181} For example: Hibbert (1994), pp 343-45; Coleman, pp. 247, 278.
\textsuperscript{182} See appendices B and C.
\textsuperscript{183} So far only Coleman, pp. 351-352, 408-409, has shown an effort to tackle this problem, though the text of his biography does not profit from his awareness about the sources; he does not attempt to explore the relationship between Nelson and Lady Hamilton.
\textsuperscript{184} See chapter 1.
\textsuperscript{185} J. Russell, pp. 31-32. The quotation from Alexander Pope about ‘scoundrelism of persons of low birth’, was not only used by the anonymous biographer of Lady Hamilton of 1815, but still by C. Evans, p. 37, in 1998.
\textsuperscript{186} Warner (1958), p. 165.
Lady Hamilton. This tentative effort to understand Nelson’s love for Lady Hamilton has not been followed up by subsequent biographers, however. Even Warner himself did not build upon it in his later works. This may be explained by the fact that he never challenged the traditional characterization of Lady Hamilton and therefore he still found it difficult to offer a fuller explanation of Nelson’s love for her. Only in the mid-1990s did a biographer follow Warner’s early lead. Roger Morriss judged that Nelson and Lady Hamilton felt ‘mutual passion’ for each other and that they were ‘at a personal level ... clearly highly compatible’. Edgar Vincent’s biography of Nelson supported this view. He saw Nelson ‘cooperating politically’ with Lady Hamilton and he maintained that the ‘relationship ... gave him everything he had been looking for’. Observing ‘important similarities’ between the lovers which help to explain their mutual attraction, Vincent insisted that the relationship was based on equality and that Nelson was not merely seduced by an ‘enchantress’. It will have to be seen whether these ideas will be developed more fully by future biographers.

In conclusion, it can be said that much remains to be assessed in Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton. In the nineteenth century the discussion was hampered by a lack of reliable source material and a moral unwillingness to accept the carnal and erotic aspects of the relationship. Those who assumed that there had been physical and erotic contact were still outraged by what they feared was a reversal of gender roles in the relationship. Once the sexual aspect of the relationship was finally acknowledged, some authors tried to divide the ‘weak’ aspect of Nelson revealed by this affair off from the supposedly more important part of Nelson as the warrior. The focus on a close examination of the more personal aspects of a subject that became fashionable with twentieth-century biographers has led to more arguments and more evidence about the Nelson-Hamilton affair as well as further speculation about the reasons for this relationship (such as brain damage or psychic effects through the early death of his

189 Vincent, pp. 301, 351.
190 Vincent, p. 350.
mother) rather than to a close examination of the relationship itself. Biographers of Nelson should seek to understand this complex emotional relationship that was clearly so important to Nelson. Only then will they understand the whole man and his multifaceted personality.
CHAPTER SIX
The Death of Nelson

In his book about Nelson and the Hamiltons Jack Russell claimed: ‘Nelson had been
great in his life, but in his death he was sublime’. 1 Southey expressed a similar point of
view at the time: ‘he could scarcely have departed in a brighter blaze of glory’. 2 Indeed,
a dramatist could hardly have created a more heroic death. The part of the battle that
Nelson could influence, the approach and attack, had just been finished and the battle
was at its height, when Nelson was hit by the fatal musket ball. He was conscious to the
end, leaving messages and receiving the news of his victory. He eventually fell silent
when the battle was decided and he died when the last distant shots were fired. Nelson’s
death was nevertheless as much contested by commentators as other elements of his life,
particularly at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Nelson’s dramatic death at the battle of Trafalgar is the natural climax of every
biography about the hero. Among the early reactions to his death are books entitled ‘Life
and Death of ... Nelson’ or even exclusively dedicated to ‘The Last Moments and
Principal Events Relative to the Ever to be Lamented Death of Lord Viscount Nelson’. 3
Biographies that were published in 1805, often referred to Nelson’s death as ‘the most
splendid [moment] of his life’. 4 At the same time authors were not yet able to produce an
accurate account of the actual death itself. This lack of information was at odds with the
deep-felt need for a treatment of Nelson’s death. Consequently, authors focused on
writing about the significance of what was regarded as the ultimate sacrifice to ‘King
and Country’. One author reflected the shock felt at the news of the death of Nelson,
when he wrote as if doubting, whether Nelson was really dead:

1 J. Russell, p. 497.
2 Southey (1813), ii, 274-275.
3 [Anon.] Goodchild; A. Y. Mann, The Last Moments and Principal Events Relative to the ever to Be
Lamented Death of Lord Viscount Nelson. With the Procession by Water, and the Whole Ceremony of The
Funeral. Intended as a Sequel to his Life (London: Symonds, 1806) [hereafter: Mann].
4 Jones, p. 120; similarly: ‘Captain’, p. 110: ‘No part of his life was more splendid than his death’; and in
the same words: Anon. (Young), p. 5.
If the great, the intrepid, and the gallant Nelson died, he died for his country – he died for us – for our persons and properties – for all that we can call dear and valuable: he ransomed them with his life; he sealed their safety with his blood; he died in the arms of a proud, a pious, and an honourable victory, covered with immortal glory and eternal fame – crowned with the admiration and gratitude of his countrymen, and embalmed for the best of recollections while memory holds a feat in the human heart.\(^5\)

Another author stressed what he regarded as Nelson's sacrifice by describing the death as the culminating point of a series of bodily sacrifices. The dismembering of Nelson’s body was correlated with increasing gain for his country: His ‘victories, while they have been the most brilliant in the annals of naval history, have been the harbingers to himself of wounds, scars, the loss of an eye, an arm, and at length of life itself’.\(^6\)

Once the shock about the costly sacrifice of Nelson’s life was expressed, people tried to make sense of what they regarded as a national loss.\(^7\) In order to compensate for the physical loss of Nelson, authors set out to construct his spiritual survival. This continuing presence of Nelson was mainly seen in the example that he had set ‘to the remotest period of time’.\(^8\) Early biographers sought to outdo each other in extending the significance of ‘the heroic Martyr of Trafalgar’.\(^9\) Some biographers claimed that ‘his name and memory will be a talisman of inspiration to the heart of every British seaman’.\(^10\) Others went beyond claiming the heritage of Nelson merely for the navy or even for Britain alone. In order to ensure the survival of his memory one author proclaimed:

\[
\text{Perished did we say – his fame survives! bounded only by the limits of the earth, and by the extent of the human heart.}\]

\(^5\) Jones, pp. ii, iii.
\(^6\) Anon. (Tegg), p. 4.
\(^7\) For the general reaction to Nelson’s death in Britain see chapter 10 about the funeral. George H. Pollock, ‘Mourning and Adaptation’, \textit{International Journal of Psycho-Analysis}, 42 (1961), 341-61 [hereafter: Pollock], differentiates between three stages of mourning (pp. 346-349): shock, grief (in which the reality of the death is perceived) and separation reaction.
\(^8\) Clarke, pp. 548-549.
\(^9\) Clarke, p. 551.
\(^10\) This passage can be found in: Anon. (Tegg), p. 35; and Anon. (Nicholson), p. 87; similarly: Anon. (Lemoine), p. 36; and Southey (1813), ii, 275.
mind. He survives in our hearts, in the growing knowledge of our children, in the affection of the good throughout the world; and when our monuments shall be done away; when nations now existing shall be no more; when our far spreading empire shall have perished: still will our Nelson's glory unfaded shine, and die not, until love of virtue cease on earth, or earth itself sinks into chaos.

Another method of idealizing Nelson's death was to assert that he himself had wished to die or even that he had felt joy in his death. Some early biographers maintained that Nelson had expressed a death wish: 'It is the first wish of my heart to bring the enemy to action, and to die in the arms of Victory'. One author even interpreted the fulfilment of Nelson's supposed desire to die victorious in battle as 'England's cause of joy'; and he confidently assured that Nelson 'like the great General Wolfe, could exclaim "I die happy!"'. Some authors went on to introduce this idea into their accounts of Nelson's last moments. They described how he had been 'convulsed with joy' when he heard that the Spanish four-decker Santísima Trinidad had struck, that he 'spoke in raptures of the event of the day', that 'with the utmost pleasure depicted on his countenance, he closed his eyes' or that he 'took Capt. Hardy by the hand, and said "I am now happy"'. Such suggestions that Nelson was happy to die a hero's death were explicitly challenged by the biography that was written for Lady Hamilton. Its author, James Harrison, explained: 'That he wished to live, however, is ... certain'. The accounts of Nelson's happiness in death vanished as more details about his dying moments emerged.

The very first accounts of Nelson's death could not rely on any direct information from eye-witnesses; instead, they reflected more the ideals which they

---

12 Anon. (Goodchild), p. 222; Collingwood, p. 58; this interpretation is still recognizable in Clarke, p. 400; Clarke & M'Arthur, ii, 436, claimed 'it was the Death he wished for'.
13 Mann, p. 4.
14 Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 414; Anon. (Martin), pp. 43, 47; 1806, Mann, p. 7; similarly: 1805, Jones, p. 69; [Anon.], A most complete and valuable memoir of Lord Nelson's Life and Funeral (London: [n. pub., printer: J. Bell], 1806) [hereafter: Anon. (Bell)], p. 3b claimed that Nelson 'smiled faintly', when Captain Hardy told him: 'you die in the midst of triumph' and answered 'Do I, Hardy?' – this account was very popular among early biographers, see also: Anon. (Goodchild), p. 227; F. Lloyd, p. 198; Orme/Blagdon, pp. 39-40; J. White, p. 340.
15 J. Harrison, ii, 468.
wished to find in a perfect heroic death. Several authors took the freedom to furnish their readers with a mixture of vague second-hand accounts about how Nelson had died and some romantic additions of their own. Some elements of these early accounts were corrected, others survived into later accounts. The stories centred around two main narratives: the scene on deck, where Nelson was shot, and the scene below decks, where Nelson actually died.

One of the questions that naturally demanded an answer was: How could Nelson be hit? At first it was taken for granted that the deadly bullet could have come only from the biggest ship in the enemy fleet, the Spanish Santísima Trinidad. This assumption was first corrected towards the French flagship, the Bucentaure, and finally, truthfully, changed to the French two-decker Redoutable. With similar dramatic effect an account, published in The Times, only one day after the news of Nelson's death, asserted: 'the gallant Nelson received a musket ball in his breast. What was very remarkable, it absolutely penetrated through the star which he wore'. The allegation that the ball had passed through Nelson's 'star' was never explicitly denied and the point of impact was only corrected over time as being at the shoulder. One biographer concluded at the time: 'There can be no doubt that a deliberate aim had been taken at his lordship. He had on the insignia of the different orders conferred on him ... He received the musket ball below his left shoulder through the centre of one of his decorations'.

This evidence that Nelson's orders on his uniform had attracted the attention of sharpshooters positioned in the rigging of the French ship challenged to ask the question whether this exposure could not have been avoided. Most authors were unaware that Nelson had embroidered versions of his orders stitched on each of his uniform coats and that he was simply wearing an ordinary undress uniform coat at the battle of Trafalgar.

16 Among the massive outpouring of biographies about Nelson I found only one that does not contain any account about Nelson's death at all: Anon. (Crosby).
17 The corrections appeared in The Times, 29 November 1805 (change to Bucentaure) and 7 December 1805 (change to Redoutable); but some biographers went on describing the Santísima Trinidad as the ship from which Nelson received his fatal wound: Anon. (Taylor), p. 12; Collingwood (still in 1806!), p. 66; Jones, p. 68, believed the sharpshooters were 'on board the Spanish Admiral'.
18 The Times, 8 November 1805; Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 375.
They assumed that Nelson could have laid aside his orders (as if they had not been sewn to his uniform), that he was dressed in 'full uniform', that he 'unfortunately, was dressed in a coat which was decorated with the Stars of the various Orders with which he had been honoured' (as if he had had any uniform coat without orders), or even that he had 'in the morning put on the stars of his different orders'. The supposition that Nelson had had a choice, as to whether to wear his orders on the day of battle or not, led to different ways of reasoning why he actually wore his orders. It was asserted that he had been alerted to the possible danger of wearing his orders — according to several biographies by 'his secretary and chaplain', but more commonly by Captain Hardy. Hardy, it was said, 'observing, from the manner in which these sharp-shooters fired, that it was their object to single out the officers, repeatedly requested Lord Nelson to change his coat'. In the hurry in which these accounts were composed and copied, nobody seems to have realized that it would have been much more likely that Captain Hardy would have ordered some of his men to aim at the enemy's sharpshooters than that he would have asked Nelson to change his uniform at the height of the battle. The reasons that Nelson is supposed to have given for not changing his uniform range from having no time to a courageous pride in his trophies. The dramatic phrase 'in honour I gained them; in honour I will die in them' became particularly popular. Several authors

20 Anon. (Nicholson), p. 85 (about laying aside); Duncan, Life, p. 250 (about 'full uniform', see also: Mann, p. 8); Jones, p. 68 (about unfortunate dress); and Lloyd, p. 201 (about putting on stars); similar to Jones also: Anon. (Goodchild), pp. 225-226; and J. White, p. 333.

21 J. White, p. 333, and Clarke, p. 418 (secretary and chaplain); Naval Chronicle, 14, 1805, 413; Anon. (Goodchild), pp. 225-226, Jones, p. 68, and Duncan, Life, p. 250 (Hardy); Lloyd, p. 201 (lists all three: secretary, chaplain and Captain Hardy); Mann, p. 8 does not specify who advised Nelson.

22 J. White, p. 333; Duncan, Life, p. 250; Anon. (Goodchild), pp. 225-226; and Clarke, p. 418; Mann, p. 8, states that the action 'became very hot and Lord Nelson was advised not to appear to conspicuously'.

23 Anon. (Goodchild), p. 226 (no time); Anon. (Nicholson), p. 85: 'he would not, he said, in the face of a foe, put off the trophies of his triumphs over the enemies of his country'.

24 Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 463, quoting from a letter from H.M.S. Euryalus; Lloyd, p. 201; J. White, p. 333; Clarke, p. 418; this exclamation was even extended into a little speech, ending: 'If it please God I am to fall; I will expire with these trophies entwined round my heart' — see: Naval Chronicle, 15 (1806), 14; Mann, p. 8; and Orme/Blagdon, p. 37; Clarke & M'Arthur, ii, 442, had learned by the time they published their biography of Nelson, in 1809, that his orders had been 'worked upon' his uniform coat, but they took it to be a special 'fighting coat', and used this phrase; and Soutey (1813), ii, 249 inserted it still in 1813, although he had noted, ii, 248, that Nelson 'wore that day, as usual, his admiral's frock coat, bearing on the left breast four stars'; Brenton, iii, 448, copied from Soutey; and Thompson, p. 257 even presented the extended version to his readers; Soutey's quotation found its way even into The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations (Partington, p. 491, no. 13).
praised Nelson for having faced his foe without following the example of other
'commanders disguising their persons'. Accounts of Nelson not wishing to change his
uniform have survived until today, although Nelson's surgeon at Trafalgar, Dr. Beatty,
pointed out in 1807 that Nelson wore his usual frock-coat. Beatty even explicitly
commented: 'It has been reported, but erroneously, that His Lordship was actually
requested by his Officers to change his dress, or to cover his stars'.

Different versions circulated as to how Nelson actually fell. Idealizing early
accounts did not even accept that he had fallen at all. In their descriptions Nelson had
merely 'staggered against the officer who was next him'. Even if an account accepted
that Nelson had fallen, this fall was put in a heroic setting. One account stated that
Nelson was in the act of giving an order, another report described how 'Captain Hardy,
who was standing near his lordship ... had hardly time to exclaim, "Change your
position, my Lord! I see a rascal taking aim at you", the fatal shot unhappily took place
at the same instant'. Captain Hardy became the favourite figure in the first scene of
Nelson's dying moments. The Times published, on 7 December 1805, an article from the
Gibraltar Chronicle: Nelson 'was immediately sensible of the wound being mortal, and
said, with a smile, to Captain Hardy ....: "They have done for me at last!"'. This phrase

25 'Captain', p. 111; Mann, p. 8, demanded even 'his answer ought to be recorded in the heart of every
Briton, and engraven on his monument'; Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 413, regretted that Nelson had worn
'all the various insignia of the respective orders' (copied by Collingwood, p. 66).
26 For example: Dane, p. xii; Walder, p. 495; Coleman, p. 319, pointed out that nobody alerted Nelson to
the possible danger that his orders posed, he writes in a remark in the paperback edition, p. 326, that 'he
decided to change' (as if this had been suggested).
27 William Beatty, Authentic Narrative of the Death of Lord Nelson ([London]: T. Cadell and W. Davies,
1807) [hereafter: Beatty], p. 22, note; on pp. 19-22 Beatty describes that different persons had thought
about speaking to Nelson about the danger he was exposing himself to. This was copied only by Churchill,
p. 92; years later Nicolas vii, 137 and 347-352, underlined, giving additional evidence, that Nelson had
worn no special coat at the battle of Trafalgar. Pierre Lorain, 'La balle qui tua Nelson', Gazette des Armes,
56 (1978), 18-25 [hereafter: Lorain], has thoroughly examined the bullet that killed Nelson and compared
it to other French bullets of the period. He comes to the conclusion that a sharpshooter would have used a
different bullet from the one that killed Nelson, while the one found in Nelson's body will most probably
have been used as one of several pieces that riflemen, posted in the Redoutable's rigging, would have fired
randomly down onto the Victory. This French source has so far not been considered by any account about
Nelson's death.
28 Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 413; Jones, p. 69 ; Anon. (Goodchild), p. 226; and Collingwood, p. 67, who
contradicts this version in a second account, p. 69, according to which Nelson 'instantly fell'.
29 Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 462, quoting from a letter from H.M.S. Euryalus.
30 Charnock, p. 426; see also: J. Harrison, ii, 500.
appealed so much that it was not only copied, but also transferred to another episode in Nelson’s life. He was now reported to have said, when he received the wound in his right arm in 1797 which led to amputation: ‘The Dons have me at last!’ On receiving his fatal wound Nelson was also reported to have asked Hardy to ‘Put something over my face’ so that nobody would notice that he was wounded. The authenticity of all these words that Nelson was supposed to have uttered was questioned, when the Victory arrived in England – and with her the eye-witnesses of Nelson’s death. A ‘statement … authenticated by Mr. Beatty and Mr. Bourke’, the Victory’s surgeon and purser, clarified that Nelson ‘was not, as has been related, picked up by Captain Hardy’; instead two seamen had found him and carried him below. Not all regarded this plain account as appropriate to the occasion. Some authors mentioned the two sailors, but then made Hardy join the scene. When Beatty, the surgeon of the Victory, published his Authentic Narrative of the Death of Lord Nelson, in 1807, he now – contradicting what he had ‘authenticated’ before – embellished his own narrative; he added ‘the Serjeant-Major (Secker) of Marines’ to the two seamen, let Hardy join the scene, inserted Nelson’s words ‘they have done for me at last’ and claimed that Nelson covered his face with his handkerchief. Through the authority of Beatty this version of events has become the accepted account.

On being carried below Nelson was said to have noticed that the tiller ropes were slack or shot through. According to this little story, Nelson had so much presence of

31 Duncan, Life, p. 51 (naming no less than four eye-witnesses); Duncan used a slight variation of the phrase also for the death account, p. 250: ‘they have caught me at last’. The same phrase appears in Mann, p. 6, and in the Naval Chronicle, 15 (1806), 27: ‘my back is broke, Hardy, they have caught me at last’ (Those were his exact words); J. Harrison, ii, 501, used the wording given in The Times; Clarke & M’Arthur, ii, 35 (copied into Nicolas, ii, 422), attribute to Nelson at Tenerife the line: ‘I am shot through the arm, I am a dead man!’, which has been used by later authors (see, for example, C. Lloyd, p. 60; and Coleman, p. 142); later, Nicolas, iii, 55, Nelson was even said to have exclaimed at the battle of the Nile: ‘I am killed remember me to my wife’, see also chapter 3.
32 Naval Chronicle, 15 (1806), 27; Orme/Blagdon, p. 40.
33 Naval Chronicle, 15 (1806), 38; this was copied by: Anon. (Roach), Memoirs, p. 4; Collingwood, pp. 69-70.
34 Lloyd, p. 196; Orme/Blagdon, p. 40.
35 Beatty, pp. 34-35; to complete the story, Beatty, p. 36, also related that the handkerchief fell off, just when Nelson arrived on the orlop deck.
36 Churchill, p. 89; Clarke & M’Arthur, ii, 450; Southey (1813), ii, 259; many others followed.
mind — even in the arms of death — that he asked Captain Hardy to be informed of the fact. 37 This, too, was spread by Beatty and by the fact that Southey copied it. 38 Later authors, however, rejected the claim that such a story would show presence of mind and doubted its authenticity. The tiller ropes connected the wheel with the tiller, but since the wheel of the Victory had been shot away at the beginning of the battle and ‘the ship was being steered at the time by the relieving tackles’, if it was steered at all at the time when Nelson fell, it would have been useless to replace the tiller ropes. 39 The only aspect of the reported death scene on the quarter deck, that appears to be true, is the account that the man who had shot Nelson was later shot dead himself. 40

Early descriptions of what happened after Nelson had been carried to the orlop deck were not much more reliable than accounts of the scenes that passed on the quarter deck. It was reported that Nelson was ‘placed on a chair’, 41 that he kept giving orders, 42 and that ‘although in extreme pain, not a sigh, not a groan escaped him’. 43 In the end Nelson was merely supposed to have ‘laid his head upon the shoulder of Captain Hardy, who remained with him to the last’. 44 As to the details of what Nelson talked about in his dying moments, periodicals reported that Captain Hardy informed Nelson about how many ships of the enemy he could see that had struck their flags, 45 while early biographies focused more on narrating how Nelson, before he died, expressed his

37 The Times, 7 December 1805 and 2 January 1806; Mann, p. 8; Churchill, p. 89; Collingwood, p. 67: ‘tiller rope ... too slack’.
38 Beatty, pp. 34, 35; Southey (1813), ii, 259; the story still appears in: Plowman, pp. 162-163.
39 ‘The Old Sailor’, p. 464, note; W. James (1826), iii, 445; in the first edition of this work, entitled The Naval History of Great Britain, from the Declaration of War by France in February 1793 to the Accession of George IV in January 1820 (5 vols., London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1822-1824), James (iii, 352) had still emphatically copied from Beatty; Nicolas, vii, 245, fn. 2, refers to James’ correction of Beatty’s account.
40 A summary of the evidence, which is mainly based on the account of the ‘avenger’ himself, can be found in: D. Bonner Smith, ‘The Avenger of Nelson’, The Mariner’s Mirror, 22 (1936), 470-74; the first account of the avenging of Nelson was published in December 1805, The Times, 2 and 7 December 1805. 41 Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 414; [Anon.] Taylor, p. 13; Jones, p. 69; Anon. (Goodchild), p. 226.
42 The Times, 30 December 1805; Gentleman’s Magazine, 76 (1806), 278; Naval Chronicle, 15 (1806), 38; Anon. (Goodchild), pp. 227-228; Jones, p. 69; J. White, p. 333; although J. White, pp. 315, 316, also emphasized that Nelson did not want to ‘distract the fleet with a superabundance of signals’.
43 Anon. (Martin), p. 47; similarly: Collingwood, p. 67; and Jones, p. 69.
44 Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 414; Anon. (Lemoine), p. 36; Anon. (Goodchild), p. 228; J. White, p. 335.
45 The Times, 7 November and 7 December 1805; Naval Chronicle, 15 (1806), 15; also: Collingwood, p. 67.
gratitude to God and ‘desired his blessing to be conveyed to all who were the nearest to his heart’. To these short and still rather vague accounts authors added new elements after the ‘statement ... authenticated by Mr. Beatty and Mr. Bourke’ was published. Beatty and Bourke contributed three major events to the narrative about Nelson’s dying moments on the orlop deck: first, that Nelson had told Beatty that ‘he had better attend to others’; second, that Nelson requested his flag-captain: ‘Kiss me, Hardy!’ and that Hardy kissed him on the cheek; and, third, that Nelson had asked Captain Hardy to tell the second-in-command, Collingwood, to anchor after the battle, that Hardy had remarked this would be Collingwood’s decision and that Nelson had protested strongly. Another account included Nelson’s request to Hardy not to be thrown overboard.

The first account that was much more detailed in its description of the scene below decks, was also noticeably different in its contents. It was published in the biography by Harrison, written for Lady Hamilton. Harrison pointed out that he had been ‘honoured by the kindest communications from ... dear and intimate friends, professional and private, who were united to his Lordship by the closest ties of a tender reciprocal amity’. In his account of Nelson’s death Harrison makes frequent direct references to ‘Dr. Scott’ who had stayed at Nelson’s side throughout his dying moments in the orlop deck so that it appears that he got his information from him. Harrison described that Nelson was ‘suffering the most extreme agony’ and that at ‘times, the
pain seizing him more violently, he suddenly and loudly expressed a wish to die'.
Although the account also insists that Nelson would be otherwise ‘calm and collected’, it conveyed much more of the sufferings that Nelson had to endure in his dying moments. According to Harrison, Nelson could only speak ‘in low, though broken and unconnected sentences’ and he frequently asked for something to drink, for air to be fanned towards his face, for his face to be wiped and later for ‘his breast and pit of the stomach’ to be rubbed.

Apart from these descriptions of Nelson’s physical ‘agony’, Harrison’s account also contains more about what Nelson said in his dying moments. Next to Nelson’s conversation with his captain about the course of the battle and his request to Hardy ‘Kiss me, then’, which had in a similar form already appeared in the report by Beatty and Bourke,55 Harrison also reported how Nelson had repeatedly referred to his will and that he left Lady Hamilton ‘a legacy to my country’. While this could have been stressed to reinforce Lady Hamilton’s claims which Harrison was meant to further, the end of his account could be interpreted as reflecting Nelson’s doubts as to the morality of his affair with Lady Hamilton. The following passage therefore gives Harrison’s account an authentic ring:

The last words the immortal hero uttered, were – ‘Thank God, I have done my duty!’ he had, before, pronounced them in a lower tone of voice: saying – ‘Doctor, I have not been a great sinner; and, thank God, I have done my duty!’ Then, as if asking the question, he repeated – ‘Doctor, I have not been a great sinner?’ Doctor Scott was too much affected immediately to answer. ‘Have I?’ he again eagerly interrogated. A paroxysm of pain now suddenly seizing him, he exclaimed, in a loud and most solemnly impressive tone – ‘Thank God, I have done my duty! Thank God, I have done my duty!’ After pronouncing these words, he had, apparently, suffered no pain; but gradually went off, as if asleep. Indeed, every person who surrounded him, except Dr. Scott, who had long felt the current of life sensibly chilling beneath his hand, actually thought, for some time, that he was only in a state of somnolency. It

55 J. Harrison also copied from earlier accounts, see appendix E at the end.
was, however, the sleep of death, the blood having entirely choked up his incomparable heart.

Harrison’s claim that Nelson had left Lady Hamilton and his daughter as a legacy to his country was further supported during the year 1806, when the last codicil to Nelson’s will, written just hours before the battle of Trafalgar, was published.\textsuperscript{56}

The most thorough account of Nelson’s death was published in 1807 by William Beatty, the surgeon who had attended Nelson in his dying hours.\textsuperscript{57} Beatty had been sent away by Nelson to attend other wounded men, so that great parts of his account had to be re-counted from Scott and Bourke.\textsuperscript{58} His narrative differed most notably from that of Harrison in the way in which it described the physical pain Nelson was suffering. Anything relating to Nelson’s wound and bodily needs was dealt with in a very sober medical fashion, using words such as: ‘He replied that “his breathing was difficult, and attended with very severe pain about that part of the spine where he was confident that the ball had struck”’ and ‘he now felt an ardent thirst’. According to Beatty, ‘the true nature of his wound was concealed by the surgeon from all on board [including Nelson] except ... [a few men, such as Scott and Hardy]’ and three different people, addressed on the subject by Nelson himself, denied to him that he was dying.\textsuperscript{59} Nelson had repeatedly to ask Beatty in order to finally be told the truth. Beatty also gave a much

\textsuperscript{56} Gentleman’s Magazine, 76 (1806), 628; Naval Chronicle, 16 (1806), 47; The Dying Request of Lord Nelson; addressed to his King and Country, On the 21st October 1805, the fatal but glorious day of the battle of Trafalgar, when he so nobly lost his life in their service (London, [1806]) [this separate publication which contains an ‘Attestation’ by the Rev. Scott (printed for Lady Hamilton?) can be found with some handwritten additions (by Lady Hamilton?) among the Nelson Papers, at the BL Add MSS 34,990, ff. 16-17.

\textsuperscript{57} Beatty, pp. 35-70 deal with Nelson’s dying moments; Beatty’s account, like Foote’s description of the events at Naples (see chapter 4), was originally meant as a contribution to Clarke and M’Arthur’s Life of Nelson and J. S. Clarke was annoyed (as in the case of Foote), when Beatty published his account separately – see: T. A. Evans, p. 46, letter of J. S. Clarke to Beatty, of 30 August 1806, on having heard about Beatty’s planned publication.

\textsuperscript{58} In The Times, 21 May 1891, a great-nephew of Beatty’s claimed that Beatty’s ‘narrative was compiled from memoranda made almost immediately after Nelson’s death, and during the seven weeks which intervened between the death and the arrival of the Victory at Spithead, when all the circumstances were fresh in Beatty’s mind, and in the minds of those with whom he compared his notes, including Hardy, Scott, Burke, and others. ... before the narrative was published in 1807, it was twice submitted to Captain Hardy ...’.

\textsuperscript{59} These were: Beatty himself, Scott and Hardy. Burke tried to distract Nelson by assuring him ‘that he hoped his Lordship would still live to be himself the bearer of the joyful tidings to his Country’.
shorter account of Nelson's confession than Harrison. He simply quoted Nelson as having 'said to Dr. Scott: “Doctor, I have not been a great sinner”'.

Beatty confirmed, now in much more detail, his earlier statement about Nelson asking Hardy to kiss him and to make the fleet anchor after the battle. Beatty also reported how much Nelson had worried about Hardy, until he could come below decks, and, most significantly, Beatty confirmed Harrison's claim that Nelson had repeatedly stressed that he left Lady Hamilton and his daughter as a 'legacy to my country'. Now Nelson's wishes for his mistress could no longer be easily ignored.

Such detailed examination of Nelson's last moments outraged parts of the public. A letter to the editor of the Gentleman's Magazine condemned as a 'breach of Christian charity' 'reports of those who, called in to relieve those agonies [of expiring mortality] ... [are] occupied in remembering or noting down every word that falls from the lips of their dying friends or patients'. The writer specifically criticized the fact that Lady Nelson had been left out of the story and commented: 'Yet surely, in the awful hour of death, if no one had feeling or courage to hint at the necessity of reconcilement and forgiveness ... it would have been indeed the part of a good friend to the great Victim of our cause, to have left untold the concern he expressed for Lady Hamilton and her Ward only'.

In their account Clarke and M'Arthur, perhaps reacting to public protests, avoided references to Nelson's sufferings and to Lady Hamilton. An utterance that described Nelson's pain was re-formulated into an unrealistically elegant expression: 'My Pain is so severe, that I devoutly wish to be released'. References to Lady Hamilton were omitted altogether. Southey, however, dared to insert Nelson's wishes concerning Lady Hamilton and Nelson's daughter into his account of Nelson's death. The difficulty of dealing with Lady Hamilton was increased after the publication of some of Nelson's letters to her in 1814. In their works William James and Edward Pelham Brenton found different ways of dealing with the matter. James referred to 'his

---

60 Gentleman's Magazine, 79 (1809), 404-5, letter written in Leicestershire, 16 January 1809, by 'A. H.'.
62 Southey (1813), ii, 262-63.
dying, and at time irrational moments which the injudicious part of his friends, to the 
regret of the others, and certainly not to the honour of this great man’s memory, have 
published to the world63 and Brenton simply left out any references to Lady 
Hamilton.64 In the second edition of his work, published just after the third edition of 
Beatty’s account, James felt a need to extend his treatment of Nelson’s death. In order to 
explain away Nelson’s references to Lady Hamilton, he inserted supposed actions of 
Nelson on his deathbed that were meant to disqualify Nelson’s other remarks as
‘rhapsodies of a disordered mind’:

stripped of his clothes … he kept constantly pushing away 
the sheet, the sole covering upon him; and one attendant
was as constantly employed in drawing it up again over his
slender limbs and emaciated body. This recklessness about
exposing his person afforded a strong proof of the injury
done to his intellect; and well would it have been for Lord
Nelson’s memory, had the listeners around his dying couch
possessed discernment enough to distinguish, and
friendship enough (as writers) to separate, the irrelevant
utterings of a mind in a paroxysm of delirium, from the
patriotic effusions of the same mind, when lit up, for a
moment or so, by a ray of returning reason.65

As a consequence of James’s ruthless treatment of the death of Nelson, accounts 
of it now avoided any mention of Lady Hamilton altogether66 or referred to her only
cursorily67 until ‘The Old Sailor’, in 1836, dared to include her again in his account. He
even made use of part of Harrison’s account, which was used in full by another
anonymous biographer of the day.68

The public gained a new insight into how Nelson died when a biography of
Alexander Scott, who had been with Nelson in his dying hours, was published. This

63 William James, The Naval History of Great Britain, from the Declaration of War by France in
February 1793 to the Accession of George IV in January 1820 ... (5 vols., London: Baldwin, Cradock,
64 Edward Pelham Brenton, The Naval History of Great Britain from the Year MDCCLXXXIII to
65 W. James (1826), iii, 445 and 446.
66 Ralfe, ii, 199-200; Alison, iii, 456-460.
67 Locker, p. 11: ‘The fatal infatuation with which she had inspired our beloved Nelson alloyed his dying
hours’.
book included a letter that Scott had written to a friend of Nelson’s on 22 December 1805, on board Victory, when he was accompanying Nelson’s body back to England. Scott did not attempt a full account of Nelson’s death in this letter, but he gave quite a few details about it. A lot of elements of the known death accounts, particularly Beatty’s, are confirmed in this account. Scott’s version also added the new information that he and Nelson ‘ejaculated short prayers together, and Nelson frequently said, “Pray for me, Doctor”’. Most interestingly, perhaps, Scott’s account coincided with that of Harrison in several details which do not appear in Beatty’s account. Scott, like Harrison, stressed repeatedly ‘Nelson’s mortal agony’ and his ‘intense pain’ and he remarked, almost in the same words as Harrison, that Nelson was ‘compelled to speak in broken sentences, which pain and suffering prevented him always from connecting’. One might now have expected that Harrison’s version of the death of Nelson, thus confirmed as being based in great part on Scott’s eye-witness account, may have become more widely acknowledged, but the impact of Nicolas’s work prevented that.

Nicolas included in his influential edition of The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson the account of Beatty, to which he added extracts from Scott’s letter in a footnote. Subsequent generations of biographers completely ignored Harrison’s account, mostly based their accounts on that of Beatty and only rarely used Scott’s eye-witness account. Descriptions of Nelson’s intense suffering from Scott’s and Harrison’s accounts were never included in accounts based on Beatty’s version of events.

With the account of Nelson’s death apparently thus settled, future generations who dealt with it focused more on shortening and interpreting Beatty’s account. In the

---

69 Recollections of ... Scott, pp. 188-90.
70 Namely: Nelson’s anxiety about Hardy; ‘Hardy, kiss me’; Nelson’s ‘earnest’ request for Hardy to make the fleet anchor; Nelson’s repeated worries about the future of Lady Hamilton and his daughter.
71 Nicolas, vii, 244-57 and footnote on p. 246.
72 Examples for the use of Scott’s account are: Browne, p. 339 (avoiding the emotional beginning of the account and otherwise using Beatty’s account); White/Moorhouse, pp. 111-13; Morriss (1996), p. 149, very unusually, makes use of a passage that only appears in Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 451; Vincent, p. 620, lists in footnote 41 (which does not appear in the actual text) also Scott’s death account, but his version of the event does not betray much use of it; in particular, it does not reproduce the description of how severely Nelson was suffering.
second half of the nineteenth century not only the passages about Lady Hamilton, but also Nelson’s request ‘Kiss me, Hardy’ (in Beatty’s version) were perceived as awkward parts to be included in accounts of Nelson’s death. The easiest solution was simply to omit the latter in an account of Nelson’s death. The request became so known over time, however, that towards the end of the nineteenth century the popular explanation developed that Nelson had, in fact, said ‘Kismet, Hardy’. In 1925 this suggestion led to a discussion in *The Mariner’s Mirror*. The initiator of the little debate believed that a ‘request of such a nature appears to be hardly natural ... between English naval officers’. The only contributor who defended ‘Kiss me, Hardy’ as authentic, had to resort to attributing the expression to Nelson’s supposedly ‘sentimental [character], and ... strong histrionic temperament’, instead of simply accepting it as common at the time. He also pointed out that the word ‘kismet’ was not in common usage in the English language before the mid-nineteenth century. Though ‘Kismet, Hardy’ was never included in any biography of Nelson, biographers in the early twentieth century felt distinctly uneasy about ‘Kiss me, Hardy’. One author contrasted what he regarded as Nelson’s undignified request with Hardy’s mental strength and he hardly dared to say that it was Nelson speaking: ‘Hardy is then asked in childlike simplicity to kiss him, and the rough, fearless captain with deep emotion kneels and reverently kisses Nelson on the cheek’. It was only in 1951 that Ludovic Kennedy reassessed Nelson’s request to Hardy to kiss him and he came to the conclusion: ‘Nothing could have been less fitting, nothing in the circumstance more profoundly right’.

---

73 In J. Harrison’s version, ii, 503, it is: ‘Kiss me, then!’.
74 As did Allen, pp. 288-90.
75 Andrew, p. 185, omits any death account, because: ‘All the world has stood by his death-bed; its scenes of farewell are known by heart to every one, “Kiss me, Hardy” — “Thank God I have done my duty”’.
76 *The Mariner’s Mirror*, 11 (1925), 96-97, 215-16, 427-28; 215 gives the earliest date for the origin of the Kismet-theory: many years before 1896.
77 Runciman, p. 243.
78 Kennedy, p. 324; though, more recently, an attempt was again made to change Nelson’s words, this time to: ‘Promise me, Hardy’; see: *The Nelson Dispatch*, 5 (1995), 136-37 (letter from Graham Hunt, referring to a Burke-descendant, who agreed with this view, without any further evidence).
Lady Hamilton’s part in Nelson’s death story, like ‘Kiss me, Hardy’, is sometimes avoided, though at the same time unavoidable. The fact that Nelson’s last wish, his ‘legacy to his country’, had never been fulfilled started to unsettle some authors. While Laughton forcefully put the case that Lady Hamilton had no claim on the country’s gratitude, as Nelson had maintained in his last codicil to his will, Newbolt opined: ‘What is it to us if our money be idly spent? We offer it to no one living, but to the memory of Nelson, alone in the cabin of the Victory, drifting to the last of all his battles.’

In their attempt to dismantle the heroic status of Nelson, Edinger and Neep focused particularly at Nelson’s death. In order to make it impossible to interpret Nelson’s death as a heroic sacrifice, they described it as one of Nelson’s publicity measures. According to Edinger and Neep, ‘[s]ociety repulsed’ Nelson and Lady Hamilton, so that in ‘his dismay he decided to die; and with a superb sense of the dramatic contrived to become the mark for a French bullet in a battle that was to seal the destiny of Europe’. Approaching the actual death scene Edinger and Neep dramatized the notion of Nelson’s death wish: ‘Apart from Emma and Horatia, he had nothing left to live for; he was going blind, his body was tortured by illness, his King had slighted him, and the established order had rejected him. His victories had not brought the thing he most desired – his world had not accepted his Emma. They would not do it, even for his sake while he lived; but it would be hard for England to deny his wishes if he died victorious. ... He had decided’. The suggestion that Nelson had wished to commit suicide at the battle of Trafalgar was taken amazingly seriously. Several authors took

80 Newbolt, p. 56, claimed ‘that this document [the last codicil to Nelson’s will] has never quite ceased to trouble the conscience of Englishmen’.
81 Laughton (1896), pp. 94-98, 311-12.
82 Newbolt, p. 59; Hough, p. 182, agrees: ‘The nation’s disregard for Nelson’s “last codicil” was a disgrace’.
83 Edinger/Neep, p. 10; for an assessment of this biography within the history of biographies about Nelson see chapter 1.
84 Edinger/Neep, pp. 315-16; see also p. 173: ‘Sick and solitary, tired and depressed, he sailed on as he thought to death, and all the demons of the evangelical cosmos were haunting his wild and clouded brain’.
pains to contradict it\textsuperscript{85} and one author even thought that ‘the last mystery of his death, the question of whether or not he sought it, can never be satisfactorily resolved’\textsuperscript{86} although contemporary evidence contradicts the hypothesis.\textsuperscript{87}

In the second half of the twentieth century only authors of children’s books about Nelson felt the need to leave ‘Kiss me, Hardy’ or Lady Hamilton or both out of the story of Nelson’s death.\textsuperscript{88} Otherwise the descriptions of Nelson’s death have generally been based on Beatty’s account since the beginning of the twentieth century, leaving Scott’s and Harrison’s versions virtually unconsidered.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{85} W. M. James, \textit{Durable Monument}, pp. 5, 15; Warner (1971), p. 11.
\textsuperscript{86} Hough, p. 187 (followed by further arguments, pp. 188-189); Robin Neillands, ‘I have one more Signal to Hoist. The Legacy of Admiral Lord Nelson’, in \textit{The Nelson Almanac}, ed. David Harris (London: Conway Maritime Press, 1998), pp. 172-79, p. 176, similar to Edinger/Neep, assumes that ‘His life with Emma Hamilton was already an open scandal and must have led eventually to some form of social ostracism had it continued — and all the evidence suggests that he could never have given her up’. Since the author does not assume this ostracism for Nelson’s lifetime (unlike Edinger/Neep), he does not come to the conclusion that Nelson committed suicide. Instead he claims: ‘On balance, therefore, it is better for the Nelson legend and perhaps for the man himself that a French sharpshooter found his mark ...’.

\textsuperscript{87} For example Nelson’s friend Gilbert Elliot noted on 10 November 1805: ‘He was remarkably well and fresh too, and full of hope and spirit’; see: Minto, iii, 374.

\textsuperscript{89} In footnote 72 the few exceptions to this rule are mentioned.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Nelson's Character

The various aspects of Nelson's life and death have challenged biographers to explore the character of the man. Early biographies often include such examinations of the personality of Nelson at the end of their biographies.¹ Not all biographers have followed this method and Mahan decided deliberately against it. In order to achieve a 'gradual familiarity' with Nelson's personality he preferred either to weave into his narrative accounts that reflect Nelson's character or to group them together in order 'to emphasize particular traits'. Later biographers have also adopted this technique which has several advantages: it does make the narrative more lively, it helps to describe personal developments and it avoids simplifications. These advantages come to bear, however, only if the biographer actually struggles to penetrate into the depths of the character of the person he or she is describing. For this purpose, Mahan tried to 'make Nelson describe himself, - tell the story of his own inner life as well as of his external actions'.²

In the wake of Lytton Strachey,³ empathy with one's subject was the least to which biographers aspired. Their critical distance from their subject has induced them merely to explore his or her perceived weaknesses. This chapter examines how these different approaches to Nelson's character influenced the way in which it was interpreted and described, and what influenced the perception of Nelson's personality.

Early characterizations of Nelson are enumerations of virtues. Bravery and loyalty, regarded as natural elements of a warrior's personality, were always, by common consent, attributed to Nelson.⁴ These driving forces were, according to the

---

¹ Anon. (Goodchild), pp. 237-239; Charnock, pp. 427-428; Collingwood, p. 73; Duncan, Life, pp. 316-19; F. Lloyd, pp. 252-59; Orme/Blagdon, p. 42; Clarke and M'Arthur, ii, 467-70; Pettigrew, ii, 562-591 (a whole chapter).
² Mahan, Life, p. x (in preface to the first edition).
³ For a discussion of Lytton Strachey's ideas about biography writing see chapter 1, section II.
⁴ For example: Anon. (Goodchild), pp. vi, 11 (daring); Charnock, p. 3 (courage and patriotism); Orme/Blagdon, pp. 40 (courage), 41 ('unqualified loyalty'); J. Harrison, ii, 48, 138, 375, 464 (serving interests of his country, loyalty, patriotism); F. Lloyd, p. 118 ('valour'); J. White, pp. 13 (patriotism), 23, 24, 25, 37, 45, 48, 66, 70, 73, 85 (all about bravery, courage, intrepidity).
same biographers, accompanied, and one may assume checked, by piety and humanity. 5
Archibald Duncan described the combination of Christian and professional qualities in
Nelson:

... the modesty with which he bore 'his blushing honours',
the active humanity, the exalted spirit of religion, the pure
philanthropy, the disinterested patriotism which under
every circumstance marked his private as well as his public
character, were virtues which claim as strong a title to our
veneration and our love, as his unparalleled skill, courage,
and professional talents, prefer to our wonder and our
admiration. 6

Among the other positive character traits that early biographers detected in
Nelson his ability to establish good relations with, and to be supportive of, his men stood
pre-eminent. 7 The sheer mass of sources that testify to this aspect of Nelson's character
without copying from each other demonstrates that these authors were reflecting a
commonly perceived image of Nelson, probably spread by word-of-mouth during his
lifetime. Public opinion acknowledged for example that Nelson had visited the wounded
after the ill-fated attack on the French invasion flotilla in Boulogne 8 and that he 'was not
avaricious of praise', but was always 'ready to bestow commendation on desert'. 9 As
more sources and eye-witness accounts were published, especially in James Stanier

---

5 For example: Anon. (Goodchild), pp. 155 and 206 ('humanity'), 237 ('with courage the most ardent he
combined piety the most sublime'); Charnock, pp. 322 and 357 ('philanthropy'), 428 ('humane');
Collingwood, pp. 35 ('philanthropy'), 73 ('with a piety equal to his valour'); F. Lloyd, p. 225 ('piety'); J.
White, p. 280 ('humanity'); Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 402 ('devout').
6 Duncan, Life, p. iv.
7 Anon. (Nicholson), p. 70; Anon. (Tegg), p. 5; ‘Captain’, pp. 92, 109; Anon. (Goodchild), p. 238; the
same as: J. White, p. 400; Charnock, pp. 123, 313; Collingwood, p. iv; Duncan, Life, pp. 182, 217-18,
317-18 and 319 (the same as: J. White, pp. 400-3, Clarke, pp. 473-474); J. Harrison, i, 337; F. Lloyd, pp.
73, 165; J. White, p. 100; Clarke & M’Arthur, I, 49, ii, 1, 9, 233, 283, 290-92, 308, 342, 355, 369, 413,
419, 422, 434, 434, 467-68, 469, 470; Southey (1813), i, 179-80, 247-50, 251-53, ii, 185-88, 192-93.
8 Charnock, p. 313; the same as: Clarke, p. 305 and J. White, pp. 257-58. This had been reported at the
time, see: prologue. Nelson had also visited the wounded of the battle of Copenhagen on his return to
England, which was reported at the time (see prologue), but did not find its way into the very early
biographies; thanks to Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 292, it was mentioned by Southey (1813), ii, 169, and thus
became more widely known.
9 Duncan, Life, pp. 183, 217-18; similarly: Orme/Blagdon, p. 9; Clarke and M’Arthi, i, 49. ii, 233;
Southey (1813), i, 250, ii, 185.
Clarke and John M'Arthur's two-volume biography, this view was supported by further evidence.\(^\text{10}\) It has never been seriously challenged since.

Early biographers saw Nelson's interest in, and care for, his subordinates in combination with other positive personal traits in addition to his outstanding professional ability. Among Nelson's endearing characteristics they stressed, with appropriate examples, his modesty\(^\text{11}\) and generosity.\(^\text{12}\) Additionally, they observed constancy in his friendships\(^\text{13}\) and agreeable personal manners.\(^\text{14}\) They could hardly find words and superlatives enough to describe his intelligence\(^\text{15}\) and professional ability.\(^\text{16}\) In the application of his abilities Nelson was described as having been driven by zeal and ambition,\(^\text{17}\) qualities which helped him to overcome physical weakness.\(^\text{18}\) Nelson's energy was sometimes described as bordering on impatience.\(^\text{19}\) Clarke and M'Arthur

---

\(^{10}\) Clarke and M'A rthur, ii, 19, published a note left for Nelson from a crew that had joined in a mutiny, before Nelson took over the ship as a commodore, ii, 308, Nelson's remarks on manning the navy and, ii, 283, 290-92, eye-witness accounts of Nelson as a humane leader of men in the Baltic in 1801. Some of these sources were made accessible to a wider audience by Southey (1813), i, 179 (crew's note), ii, 185-88 (in the Baltic).

\(^{11}\) Modesty in financial matters: Anon. (Young), p. 27; J. White, p. 94; Clarke and M'A rthur, ii, 1; modesty in matters of personal intercourse: Anon. (Aston), pp. 36-37; Anon. (Tegg), p. 25; Anon. (Goodchild), pp. 30, 207, 237; Charnock (who probably knew Nelson personally through their mutual friend Captain Locker), pp. 3, 62; Duncan, Life, p. 316; J. Harrison, pp. 145, 293; F. Lloyd, p. 254; J. White, pp. 14, 65, 280, 399, 415; Clarke and M'A rthur, ii, 381, 423; Clarke, p. 197; Southey (1813), ii, 168-69, 231; modest in his political opinions: Naval Chronicle, 15 (1806), 44.

\(^{12}\) Anon. (Nicholson), p. 87; Anon. (Tegg), p. 35; Anon. (Goodchild), pp. 30, 180; Charnock, p. 3; Orme/Blagdon, p. 41; J. White, pp. 14, 74, 410, 412-13.

\(^{13}\) Clarke and M'A rthur, ii, 353.

\(^{14}\) J. Harrison, ii, 468.

\(^{15}\) Anon. (Martin), p. 46 ('clear and penetrating mind, strong and sound judgment, calmness and temper for deliberation'); Anon. (Tegg), p. 35; the same as: Anon. (Nicholson), p. 87 ('genius'); 'Captain', p. 109; Anon. (Goodchild), p. 207; Charnock, p. 3 ('presence of mind, not confined to the quarterdeck'); 53 ('profoundest judgment'), 92, 360, 381-82; Collingwood, pp. iv, 73; Duncan, Life, p. 319 (the same as J. White, pp. 404-5), 320; J. Harrison, ii, 4, 376; F. Lloyd, pp. 73, 171; J. White, pp. 17, 36, 41, 97, 100, 410; Clarke and M'A rthur, i, 113, 219, 223, 241, 325, ii, 1('the various and wonderful resources of his mind'), 14, 108, 346, 362, 406, 408 ('wisdom and cool precaution'), 411, 413.

\(^{16}\) Anon. (Goodchild), p. 238; the same as in: Duncan, Life, pp. 316-17, and Clarke, p. 473; Charnock, p. 69; Duncan, Life, pp. 289 (the same as J. White, p. 320), 316-17; Clarke and M'A rthur, ii, 31, 405, 421, 433, 467; Nelson is also described as a good negotiator: Charnock, pp. 283-87; Orme/Blagdon, p. 41.

\(^{17}\) Charnock, p. 427; Collingwood, p. iii; J. Harrison, i, 14 and 108-9; J. White, p. 19; Clarke and M'A rthur, i, 122, 160, 181, ii, 468 (here 'vanity' is explicitly denied as characteristic of Nelson's).

\(^{18}\) Anon. (Aston), p. 48; J. Harrison, i, 326-27; J. White, p. 14 (the same as: Clarke, p. 16), 290; Clarke and M'A rthur, i, 122, 287, ii, 45, 376, 389, 407; Clarke, p. 550; Southey (1813), i, 138, 240, ii, 115, 168-69.

\(^{19}\) J. Harrison, i, 250-51 ('he was wholly incapable of remaining inactive'), ii, 282, 417; J. White, p. 39; Clarke and M'A rthur, ii, 1, 411, 467; Southey (1813), i, 218, ii, 172.
even went so far as to attribute a certain irritability to Nelson, whereas other authors praised his patience and perseverance.

Among these generally admirable and, for an admiral, eminently suitable qualities, Southey also detected ‘a pardonable pride in the outward and visible signs of honour which he had so fairly won’. Earlier authors had not addressed this trait directly, but observed in Nelson a ‘sense of his own ability’, which ‘created that confidence in himself which is the essential characteristic of a fearless and undaunted mind’. Clarke and M’Arthur were aware that ‘a proper estimate of his own powers’ could give ‘to a zealous mind the appearance of vanity’, but the unanimous admiration for Nelson’s modesty kept all biographers from openly describing Nelson as vain. This changed dramatically with the publication of the *Memoirs of Lady Hamilton* in 1815. This work, together with the publication of some of Nelson’s letters to Lady Hamilton in 1814, marked the beginning of Nelson’s fall from grace in the opinion of his biographers and it was at the same time the first publication to describe Nelson as ‘vain’. After 1815, no biographer ever dared to claim again, as early biographers had done, that Nelson was not vain. His vanity became so much an accepted truth that Christopher Hibbert could summarize Nelson, in 1992, as ‘England’s greatest and vainest

20 Clarke and M’Arthur, i, 110, 121, ii, 420.
21 Anon. (Goodchild), p. 217; the same as: F. Lloyd, pp. 177-78; F. Lloyd, pp. 72-73; J. White, pp. 14, 291, 303; Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 1, described Nelson as ‘Patient of toil and hardship, but not of inaction’.
22 Southey (1813), ii, 67.
23 J. White, p. 20.
24 Clarke and M’Arthur, i, 49, applying an observation of Montesquieu about the origin of the ‘Courage of a Warrior’ to Nelson.
25 See above footnote 11 for sources about Nelson’s modesty; The *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 75 (1805), 1154, described Nelson: ‘Though free from the pride and vanity of weak and ungenerous mind, he had a heart to enjoy the praise and rewards of his country, and the consciousness that they had been fairly and dearly earned’; Clarke and M’Arthur, ii, 468 (where ‘vanity’ is explicitly denied as characteristic of Nelson’s).
26 *Memoirs of Lady Hamilton*, pp. 177 (‘vain of honours’ before he arrived at Naples), 231 (‘vain’ in accepting title of ‘Bronte’).
27 Nelson is described as vain in nearly all later biographies. Thursfield (1909), pp. 105-106, seemed to be the only exception and seemed to have regarded Nelson as not vain (‘He knew his own value, and perhaps his self-esteem was only saved from degenerating into vanity by his real greatness of soul’), but, on p. 128, he, too, acknowledged that Nelson ‘had his moments ... of vanity’.

181
Admiral’. This fundamental and lasting change in the characterization of Nelson calls for closer examination.

In order to explore what authors meant when they started to describe Nelson as vain, it is important to distinguish vanity from arrogance and conceit, because biographers still showed a striking unwillingness to portray Nelson as arrogant or conceited.29 Indeed, these characteristics do usually exclude that of vanity. While vanity is the ridiculous preoccupation with outward show and symbols, arrogance is the unpleasant display of an actual or believed superiority towards others. When Wellington is described as having felt class conceit towards his intellectual equals and intellectual conceit towards his social equals, he is portrayed as possessing both: high social status and intellectual ability. What was disagreeable, was the fact that he made his inferiors feel their inferiority. Nelson has never been reproached with having made others feel inferior. On the contrary, it is said that he tended to over-estimate his subordinates.30 When Nelson is described as ‘vain’ the stress does not lie on the unpleasantness of his behaviour towards others, but on the incongruity of his preoccupation with his outward appearance in comparison to his many real and substantial achievements. During Nelson’s lifetime some of his contemporaries recognized the vanity they observed in Nelson from the inappropriateness of his preoccupation with the outer form, by which he sought to demonstrate his achievements. After his great success at the battle of the Nile, they described him as ‘a gig from ribands, orders, and stars’, at the same time acknowledging that he had maintained ‘the same honest simple manners’.31

29 Evidence will be given in the following treatment; one author who explicitly denies arrogance in Nelson is: Allen, p. 68. The only two exceptions I have come across are: White/Moorhouse, p. 100 (‘Belief in himself he had never lacked, and all through his life he expressed it freely, with child-like vanity, with justifiable arrogance’); Corbett-Smith, p. 233, who regarded Nelson’s ‘arrogance of outlook’ as the cause of his disobedience against Keith.
31 Lady Minto, writing to her sister from Vienna in 1800, Minto, iii, 147; similarly: Minto, iii, 242-243 (Lord Minto to his wife, in 1802, contrasting the decoration of Nelson’s house with his agreeable manners); Diary of Sir John Moore, ed. I. F. Maurice (2 vols., London: Edward Arnold, 1904), i, 367, where Nelson is described in 1800 as ‘covered with stars, ribbons, and medals, more like the prince of an opera than the conqueror of the Nile’; Lady Elizabeth Foster wrote into her diary (Stuart, p. 90), that ‘Lord St. Vincent ... said to us “That foolish little fellow Nelson has sat to every painter in London ...”’, while
During the period when Nelson was being ignored by respectable biographers (in the twenty years after 1814-15), some upper-class writers of memoirs felt a need to prove that Nelson was not one of them. His 'vanity' was the perfect vehicle to assert this, since it enabled them to disclose the emptiness behind the glamorous surface of the successful admiral. They did not find fault so much with Nelson's appearance, because of its inappropriateness in comparison with his modest personality, but they attribute to Nelson a lack of intellectual endowments and social graces, the presence of which might have allowed him to be placed among the upper classes. This was best expressed by Lord Holland (a nephew of Charles James Fox), whom Nelson had disliked:

His greatness (For who shall gainsay the greatness of the conqueror of Aboukir, Copenhagen, and Trafalgar?) is a strong instance of the superiority of the heart over the head, and no slight proof that a warm imagination is a more necessary ingredient in the composition of a hero than a sound understanding. He had ... acquired ... great knowledge of the management of a fleet ... His courage, the natural consequence of a boundless love of glory, and a devotion to his duty bordering on superstition, enabled him in the moment of danger to apply all the knowledge and exercise all the judgment he possessed. ... His powers of mind seemed to rise, because in action they were comparatively greater; and that circumstance procured for him, from such as had witnessed him in those moments, a reputation for abilities which never appeared in his conversation, correspondence, opinions, or conduct elsewhere, and which in truth, nature had not conferred upon him. St. Simon observes that goodness of heart and rectitude of intention will upon great occasions elevate and enlighten the understanding of very ordinary men; and the whole life of Nelson is a proof that, combined with disinterested devotion to a cause, they may become

she herself remarked, p. 88, that 'his manner [was] simple and unaffected'; St. George, p. 26 ('His vanity is so undisguised that it wears the form of frankness, and therefore gives no disgust'); Warner (1975), p. 212, quoted Collingwood as having remarked about Nelson in 1806: 'He liked fame, he was open to flattery, so that people sometimes got about him, who were unworthy of him'.

32 See chapter 1.
33 Minto, iii, 360 (after writing to his wife about Nelson Lord Minto notes: 'I have taken a great fancy to Lord Holland (don't tell the Admiral)'); Lord Minto also seems to have spoken about Nelson's household at Merton, which he had so disparagingly described to his wife, because Holland gave a similar description of it long before Minto's letter was published in 1874: Holland, ii, vii (text was 'written originally between the years 1812 and 1816; and now transcribed and revised ... in 1824'), 26-27.
permanent and efficient substitutes for great abilities and exalted genius. It is perhaps no ill office to the memory of Nelson to correct any favourable opinion that may be entertained of his understanding; ... his vanity, often ridiculous, was utterly unmixed with pride, arrogance, ill-nature, or jealousy. It was rather a diverting proof of his simplicity than a dangerous or offensive quality in his intercourse with others ... 34

Intellectual emptiness was thus connected with a modest yet vain appearance. Robert James Mackintosh pursued a similar line of argument in describing Nelson’s vanity and lack of understanding. 35 He went on, however, to link Nelson’s vanity more explicitly to a lack of class: ‘All the pomps and vanities of the world retained their power over him. ... He had not lived in that society where wit makes the gratifications of vanity ridiculous, or where reason proves their emptiness, or where society rejects them with disgust; he came forth from the most humble privacy. Fame, with all her marks, and praise from every source, worked with irresistible efficacy on his fresh and simple mind.” 36 Other sources, published in the 1820s and 1830s, also dealt with Nelson’s vanity and lack of intellectual ability, though they did not always connect the two. 37 The period after 1815 thus settled the image of Nelson as a vacuous star of popular opinion who never rose above the level of ordinariness in intellectual endowments and personal demeanour. Such a view remained undisturbed because of a lack of research into his actions. 38

The interpretation of Nelson’s vanity as a modest man’s inappropriate display of decorations and honours was transformed into the interpretation of a lack of ability. Two

34 Holland, ii, 19-22, 26.
35 Mackintosh, ii, 135-36 (‘His understanding was concentrated on his profession’, the ‘moment of action ... roused his genius to exertions greater than the languor of tranquillity could have produced’).
36 Mackintosh, ii, 136-37; similarly, ii, 138 (‘Art politeness flattery, magnificence, and beauty, acted upon his unworn sensibility. ... uncultivated sailor. The arts ... were still the land of prodigies to him. ...’).
37 Brenton, ii, 58 (‘never conspicuous but in action, Nelson in the private walks of life might have been passed over as a person of rather inferior talent’), 228 and 399 (both focus on Nelson’s dash in fighting); Ralfe, ii, 202 (‘he had a littleness of mind, which displayed itself in his love of praise’); Brougham, pp. 167 (‘Nelson was unequal to the farseeing preparation and unshaken steadfastness of purpose required to sustain a long-continued operation’), 169 (‘the simpler nature of ... [Nelson] became an easy prey to vanity’ ... he ‘was great only in action’) (all quotations are in the chapter about ‘Lord St. Vincent – Lord Nelson’).
38 See chapter 3, particularly section II.
people, describing meetings with Nelson about thirty years earlier, accused him of actually boasting, contradicting the earlier view that Nelson was modest. Pryse Lockhart Gordon claimed that Nelson had ‘made the exact same harangue’ about the uniqueness of the battle of the Nile that he had made in Gordon’s presence ‘to the Lord Mayor of London the following year, when a sword and the freedom of the city were presented to him’. Nelson’s little speech on the occasion of the presentation of the sword (he had received the freedom of the city already after the battle of St. Vincent) was reported in the newspapers, but without any mention of the boasts that Gordon attributed to him. The Duke of Wellington’s memory of events 29 years earlier has only come down to us through a note by John Wilson Croker, describing a conversation with Wellington which had touched on Nelson’s ‘vanity’. Wellington is said to have described how Nelson entered into a conversation with him at the Colonial Office that was ‘almost all on his side and all about himself, and in, really, a style so vain and so silly as to surprise and almost disgust me’. After a break in the conversation which Wellington attributed to Nelson having noticed that he was talking to ‘somebody’, Nelson changed and ‘talked of the state of this country and of the aspect and probabilities of affairs on the Continent with a good sense, and a knowledge of subjects both at home and abroad, that surprised me equally and more agreeably than the first part of our interview had done; in fact, he talked like an officer and a statesman ... I don’t know that I ever had a conversation that interested me more’. Nelson’s vanity appears to have irritated Wellington, because he had not recognized quickly enough that Wellington indeed was ‘somebody’. Interestingly, on one of the two or three days on which Wellington must have met Nelson, Lady Foster met him, too, and had the contrary impression of his ‘vanity’ at the time:

39 Compare Gordon, I, 203, with The Times, 11 November 1800; Gentleman’s Magazine, 70 (1800), 1101; The Naval Chronicle, 4 (1800), 431 and The Morning Chronicle, 13 November 1800 (dealt with in the prologue, fn. 187); Nelson’s supposed boast was made in the presence of Lady Hamilton; for Gordon’s prejudices against the two see chapter 5.

40 Mahan, Life, pp. 678-679 quoted this interview from The Croker Papers. Correspondence and Diaries of the late Right Honourable John Wilson Croker, ed. Louis J. Jennings (3 vols., London: John Murray, 1884), ii, 233-234 without giving his source (unlike Hibbert and Coleman), but with a calculation that the interview must have taken place between 10 and 13 September 1805. Croker noted down his conversation with Wellington ‘Walmer, October 1st, 1834’. 
... far from appearing vain and full of himself, as one had always heard, he was perfectly unassuming and natural. Talking of Popular applause and his having been Mobbed and Huzza’d in the city, Ly. Hamilton wanted him to give an account of it, but he stopp’d her. ‘Why’, said she, ‘you like to be applauded – you cannot deny it’. ‘I own it’, he answer’d; ‘popular applause is very acceptable and grateful to me, but no Man ought to be too much elated by it; it is too precarious to be depended upon, and it may be my turn to feel the tide set as strong against me as ever it did for me’. Every body join’d in saying they did not believe that could happen to him, but he seem’d persuaded it might, but added: ‘Whilst I live I shall do what I think right and best; the Country has a right to that from me, but every Man is liable to err in judgement’. 41

It is impossible to say how accurate Wellington’s memory was, but in using his evidence for Nelson’s vanity it needs to be kept in mind that at the time he was recollecting his meeting with Nelson the latter was regularly accused of being vain. 42

The first major revival of interest in Nelson, from about 1840 onwards, originally consisted in merely trying to repeat earlier assessments of Nelson’s character, focusing on his professional abilities, his modesty and his good relations with his men. 43 These traits were stressed in memoirs of two of Nelson’s subordinates, published in the early 1840s. 44 Nicolas’s edited collection of The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson went further; it was a frontal attack against the characterization of Nelson as possessing

41 Lord Granville Leveson Gower (First Earl Granville). Private Correspondence 1781-1821. Edited by His Daughter-in-Law, ed. Castalia Countess Granville (2 vols., London: John Murray, 1916) [hereafter: Granville], ii, 112 (letter from Lady Bessborough, of 12 September, describing what she had heard from Lady Foster); Stuart, p. 155, gives a shorter account from Lady Foster herself: “Pray don’t”, he said to her, in a low voice, and as she persevered, he said “I own I have been very much gratified and touched with the kindness shown me now, because this time I have done nothing. It is all kindness to me personally”.

42 It may also be considered that Nelson could appear as anything less than impressive and Lord Minto described him in a letter written on the day Nelson left his home for Trafalgar (that is not more than three days after he had met Wellington) as ‘in many points a really great man, in others a baby’ (Minto, iii, 370). I could not find any contemporary evidence of Nelson talking in a vain fashion.

43 ‘Old Sailor’, pp. 10, 166, 338; Thompson, pp. 5, 190.

44 Recollections of... Scott, pp. 119-27 (about how Nelson worked and dealt with his subordinates) [Scott had been the Victory’s chaplain and Nelson’s secretary in the years before the battle of Trafalgar]; Parsons, pp. 41, 55, 247-48 (about Nelson’s treatment of his men), 244, 246 (about Nelson’s ‘fascinating smile’, ‘good natured smile’) [Parsons had been a midshipman on board the Foudroyant, when Nelson’s flagship in 1799].
nothing but vanity and dash. In its second review of Nicolas’s volumes, *The Times* noted: ‘With respect to Nelson’s reputed rashness, we may observe that though he was ever reckless of his own life, he never entered upon any expedition or operation without having previously made every preparation for insuring its successful termination’.45 In a review of further volumes of Nicolas’ edition *The Times* also remarked on Nelson’s good relations with his men and noted ‘that he refused all honours tendered to himself exclusively, in which he felt his officers were entitled to participate. Fond as Nelson was of praise, he was no monopolist of honours’.46 In order to destroy the image of Nelson as vain, Nicolas was particularly intent on clarifying how Nelson had been dressed at the battle of Trafalgar. The notion that Nelson had died, because he had not taken off his orders,47 could be regarded as a potent symbol of his vanity. At first Nicolas was convinced that Nelson ‘only wore one [order], or two at most, upon that occasion’.48 Having discovered the actual coat and noticed that it was an undress coat with four orders stitched onto it (all of Nelson’s uniform coats had his orders stitched onto them), he dedicated a whole chapter in the last volume of his edition to ‘the Coat in which Lord Nelson fell’.49 In this chapter he concluded that all stories of Nelson deliberately dressing himself in a shiny uniform were ‘ridiculous … and … inconsistent with Nelson’s character’. Nicolas also defended Nelson against ‘the insinuation that his vanity caused him to wear his orders more frequently than was then usual’.50

In the wake of Nicolas’s publications, it became easier to regard Nelson’s character highly. Pettigrew dedicated a whole chapter to an examination of Nelson’s personal traits in which most of the earlier perceived strengths of Nelson reappear, now supported by more reliable evidence: outstanding intellect, ability to attach ‘to him those

45 *The Times*, 15 November 1845 (the first review was published on 22 January 1845).
46 *The Times*, 25 December 1846.
47 See chapter 6.
48 T. A. Evans, p. 7.
49 Nicolas, vii, 347-52. The quotation is taken from the index; the actual chapter is headed ‘Nelson’s “Fighting Coat”’.
50 Nicolas, vii, 347, 349.
under his direction', generosity, humanity and honesty. Pettigrew also explicitly denied the assumption, propagated particularly by the French politician and historian, Thiers, 'that Nelson was in fact only qualified to fight'. He accepted Clarke and M'Arthur's assessment of Nelson as 'irritable', but he was the first to argue for an important British characteristic in Nelson: sense of humour. The knowledge of Nelson's treatment of Lady Hamilton prevented respectable authors from offering any further discussion of his character. A few minor publications struggled with the problem posed by Nelson's vanity and modesty, without reaching any general conclusions about his character.

It needed a second revival of interest in Nelson, from the 1880s onwards, to produce a more thorough assessment of Nelson's personality. With his edition of the Letters and Despatches of Horatio, Viscount Nelson of 1886 John Knox Laughton opened up a new period of investigation into Nelson's character, inspired, perhaps, by the developing interest in the study of leadership. Laughton started by pointing out that 'Nelson's genius has been misunderstood and undervalued', and went on to present his character as a kaleidoscope of 'feminine affection, ... childlike vanity, ... masculine courage, honour, and integrity'. In arguing that Nelson's 'innocent and unblushing

51 Pettigrew, ii, 562 ('judgment ... genius ... grasp of intellect'), 563, 565 ('genius'); 567 (leadership qualities); 569 (generosity in acknowledging merit), 575 (generosity in money matters); 571 (humanity); 576 (honesty).
52 Pettigrew, ii, 563. Thiers' work had been translated into English, see chapter 8.
53 Pettigrew, ii, 563 ('irritable'), 576 ('Humour constitutes one of the characteristics of a British seaman; Nelson possessed this naturally, or imbibed it at an early period as may be shown in many instances'); Colomb, 'Nelson', p. 451, later also characterized Nelson as 'fretful'; which was copied, for example by Fitchett, p. 16.
54 Harcourt, i, 217 Mord Nelson's personal vanity'), 218 ('Nelson, to whom worldly distinction was all in all'); publications of memoirs and letters of Nelson's contemporaries introduced new elements of Nelson's vanity to the interested public: Minto and St. George, see above, fn. 31; against St. George's publication a nephew of Nelson's published his account from an opposing point of view: Matcham.
55 John Horsfield, The Art of Leadership in War. The Royal Navy from the Age of Nelson to the End of World War II (Contributions in Military History, Number 21, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), pp. 3–4 states that 'The word leadership was not frequently used until the middle of the nineteenth century, that is, in the sense of a 'capacity for leading'. ... By the end of that century [the 19th] there was an attempt to apply the intellectual approach of the natural sciences to the theme of leadership. It was thought that if the scientific method of inquiry could be applied to the history of man's leadership, a science of leadership could be formulated'.
56 Laughton (1886), pp. xi, xiii; Laughton (1886), p. xii, was also the first text about Nelson to quote Croker's remark about what Wellington had said about his encounter with Nelson; Mahan, Life, p. 71, also stressed: 'the breadth and acuteness of Nelson's intellect have been too much overlooked'.

188
vainy of a child’ led to ‘the very general belief that ... Fortune favoured the brave’,
Laughton warned against simply labelling Nelson as ‘vain’ and called for a closer
examination of Nelson’s strengths and weaknesses. Profiting from Nelson’s renewed
popularity, several authors merely recycled old characterizations of Nelson as not at his
best in ‘calculations requiring long trains of thought’, as modest or as vain. It was only
when Laughton published his biography of Nelson in 1895 that Nelson’s character
received further exploration. Laughton was the first to observe a tendency to idealize in
Nelson, which in Laughton’s view helped to inspire Nelson’s men: ‘it was a marked
feature of Nelson’s genius to “think all his geese swans”, and to believe his ship, as
afterwards his fleet, the very best in the navy’, even though this was far from true. ‘The
effect of this was that any officer or man coming under his command presently felt that
his chief considered him one of the finest fellows that ever lived, and forthwith
endeavoured, so far as lay in his power, to show that this flattering opinion was a true
one.’ Assessing Nelson’s repeated, if not continuous, complaints about his health,
Laughton concluded that there was something ‘hypochondriacal’ about Nelson.

In his Life of Nelson, Mahan developed many aspects of Nelson’s professional
ability in more depth than any of his predecessors and than any of his successors.
Instead of simply calling him ‘vain’, Mahan attempted to explore the nature of Nelson’s
vanity, for example, by describing that he recorded ‘his exploits with naïve self-
satisfaction’ or ‘that distinction in the eyes of his fellows was dear to him, that he craved

---

57 Laughton (1886), p. xiii; Corbett (1910), p. 281, also argued that Nelson’s reputation for vanity
endangered his recognition during his lifetime, when he assessed Lord Barham’s (who became First Lord
of the Admiralty in 1805 and ‘hardly knew’ Nelson) image of Nelson: ‘It is probable that, in common with
many others, he regarded him as a poseur, whose vanity was wont to make the most of his achievements,
and whose impulsive nature — for so it seemed on the surface — was not to be relied on in a vital crisis’.
59 Laughton (1886), pp. 24-25 (where he also assesses that Nelson’s subordinates were not as outstanding
as Nelson’s descriptions make them appear). Laughton was followed in this assessment by: Mahan, Life,
p. 28 (‘The disposition to invest those near to him with merits, which must in part at least have been
imaginary’); Colomb, ‘Nelson’, pp. 444-445 (‘He wrote of everything belonging to the Albemarle [his
ship] in the superlative degree ... none of Nelson’s subordinates in his ships ever in their after lives
justified his estimate of their qualities ... But this kind of really boyish and uncritical enthusiasm was one
of the things which made him such a leader. ... Nelson’s love was thus uncritical and universal’).
60 Laughton (1886), p. 141; similarly: p. 145; this was also adopted by later biographers, see for example:
Runciman, p. 67; W. M. James, Durable Monument, pp. 9-10; Walder, p. 5.
61 Sumida, pp. 36-39 gives many examples.
recognition, and was at times perhaps too insistent in requiring it.\textsuperscript{62} Mahan also explored Nelson's emotional side (even in a professional context), while he observed that Nelson at the same time 'feared no responsibility' and was 'insensible to bodily fear'.\textsuperscript{63} Though Mahan's \textit{Life of Nelson} regarded him as an outstanding warrior, it was too outspoken about Nelson's softer traits to allow for those to escape the notice of one eminent reviewer, Theodore Roosevelt. The future president of the USA observed that Nelson was distinctly lacking what Roosevelt himself regarded as masculine attributes; he described Nelson as 'hating field sports, not fond of country life' and 'distinctly afraid of horses'.\textsuperscript{64} Such effeminate traits did not worry Mahan. For him 'the group to which Nelson belongs defies exposition by a type, both because it is small in aggregate numbers, and because the peculiar eminence of the several members, - the eminence of genius, - so differentiates each from his fellows that no one among them can be said to represent the others'.\textsuperscript{65} Nelson's character was thus not to be regarded as a pattern that could be followed by others, but merely one to be analysed as an almost unique example of distinctive genius. Feeling no need to present Nelson as a person to be emulated appears to have enabled Mahan to explore all kinds of idiosyncrasies in Nelson.

Other biographies, aimed more at the general public, did not attempt to examine Nelson's character much further. Particularly works published around the centenary of the battle of Trafalgar tended to be mere concoctions of earlier characterizations.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{62} Mahan, \textit{Life}, pp. 24, 118; other examples can be found on pp. 17 and 129.

\textsuperscript{63} Mahan, \textit{Life}, pp. 45, 52 ('extremely sympathetic, even emotional'); for Nelson's feeling see also: Mahan, \textit{Life}, p. 248; for Mahan's ability to see Nelson's emotional side in his profession as well as in his private passion see chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{64} Roosevelt, pp. 328, 331; for Roosevelt's interest in exactly these occupations and his evaluation of them as essential for a nation see: John M. Mackenzie, 'The imperial pioneer and hunter and the British masculine stereotype in late Victorian and Edwardian times', in \textit{Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940}, eds. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 176-98, at 178 ('Rancher, soldier, big-game hunter and President, Roosevelt the pioneer and cowboy "possesses, in fact, few of the emasculated, milk-and-water moralities of the pseudo-philanthropist; but he does possess, to a very high degree, the stern, manly qualities that are invaluable to a nation". Quoting from Theodore Roosevelt, \textit{Ranch Life}, p. 83).


\textsuperscript{66} For example: Fitchett, pp. 4-5, 16-17, 19, 37, 40; Holme, pp. 17-18, 26; White/Moorhouse, pp. x, 3-4, 6-7, 9, 11-12, 32; Jerrold, p. x.
Standards sank to the level of: ‘The “Only Nelson” was strong, weak, and vain’.⁶⁷ After the First World War, in a climate less concerned with the hero-worship of the nineteenth century, some authors maintained against Pettigrew that Nelson was lacking in a sense of humour.⁶⁸ In 1931 Clennell Wilkinson attempted to summarize Nelson’s personality in the first chapter of his biography of Nelson under the heading ‘The Artist in Action’. Using some of the traits that Laughton had depicted, he went on to describe Nelson as ‘theatrical’,⁶⁹ an attribution more appropriate perhaps to Nelson’s actions than to his personality.⁷⁰ In 1933 Brian Tunstall added to the image by asserting: ‘He had what today we call the manic drive’. Such new labels, inspired by the new science of psychology, did not do much to further an understanding of Nelson’s character.

After the Second World War it became common to speak of ‘his curiously dual nature’: ‘At sea he was master of his fate. Ashore he was at the mercy of his emotions.’⁷¹ This analysis, borne out of an inability to reconcile Nelson’s relationship to Lady Hamilton with the rest of the image of Nelson,⁷² affected the characterization of Nelson as a whole. Admiral W. M. James saw how ‘the most human of men, modest and proud of his achievements’ turned ‘when surrounded by flatterers’ into ‘a vainglorious Nelson’ and he assumed that ‘sick of flattery and scent-laden rooms he [Nelson] craved for the company of plain-spoken seamen and the salty tang of a sea breeze’.⁷³ The habit of separating attractive from unpopular traits in Nelson may have been a way of providing

---

⁶⁷ Runciman, p. 95; in the following years authors merely recycled earlier characterizations of Nelson: Corbett-Smith, p. 46; G. Aston, p. 21; Forester, p. 11.
⁶⁸ Runciman, p. 188; Corbett-Smith, p. 283; in 1902 Fitchett, p. 5, had still observed that ‘There was humour, though of a somewhat grim sort’; later Bradford, p. 301, also claimed ‘that Nelson, like many great men, was without a sense of humour’.
⁶⁹ Wilkinson, pp. 1, 8.
⁷⁰ The theatricality has consequently been denied by Sélincourt, pp. 8-9. Later authors, however, have taken it up again: C. Lloyd, p. 107 (‘His histrionic style is reflected in the design of his career, which moves to a dramatic climax like a theatrical performance’); Walder, p. 141 (‘element of theatricality’); Hough, p. 184 (‘he was very much the stylist’).
⁷² See chapter 5, where the development of the perception of Nelson as having two personalities is explored in more depth.
⁷³ W. M. James, Durable Monument, pp. 7-8; similarly: pp. 201 (‘Happily for England, he was again the Nelson of the Ca Ira, of St. Vincent, and the Nile’), 241 (‘But other visitors who stayed longer saw something beyond this superficial, garish display. They saw the real Nelson’), 301 (‘as he stepped on board a ship some magnetic power radiated from him’).
an easily accessible image of Nelson’s character. It was clearly inadequate as a means of representing the complexities of his real character.

In 1958 Oliver Warner made a fresh attempt to explore Nelson’s vanity by cautiously hinting at the possible element of self-publicity in Nelson’s character. Quoting the following note by Nelson in a letter to his wife, ‘I find it good to serve near home; there a man’s fag and services are easily seen – next to that is writing a famous account of your own actions’, Warner remarked: ‘This aside is one of the more notable glimpses of a nature which saw in action the material for glowing representation’. The idea that Nelson was motivated to achieve success in action in order to gain personal recognition was further developed at the end of the twentieth century, when Nelson was increasingly seen as a self-publicist. In 1995 Roger Morriss claimed that: ‘By the time of Trafalgar, Nelson’s reputation was what he had made it’. This assessment ignores the fact that what made Nelson famous, the battle of the Nile, triggered off such a wave of public response that Nelson could hardly have influenced or increased it by any self-publicity, and he actually did not take the initiative to do so. Laughton’s observation, when he reinitiated the study of Nelson, that the shorthand characterization of Nelson as vain does not further an understanding of Nelson’s character, is still valid today. If biographers merely stick to terms such as vanity and self-publicist, they cannot gain

---

74 Warner (1958), p. 220; the quotation is from Nicolas, iv, 92.
75 Morriss (1995), pp. 114-143, p. 142; Morriss (1996), p. 8 (After the battle of St. Vincent Nelson ‘became a deliberate self-publicist’); Coleman, p. 128, tried to support this view by stressing that Nelson’s account got published in The Times and The Sun and was supported by Drinkwater’s account, which ‘had much more authority’; in fact The Times did not publish the account (just the little note about ‘Nelson’s New Art of Cookery’, on 13 March 1797) and ‘the greatest part of the impression’ of Drinkwater’s account had to be ‘consigned to the usual fate of unsaleable articles’, see prologue.
76 See prologue.
77 Unlike after the battle of St. Vincent, Nelson did not use private means to get his views published in newspapers (some of his official reports were, obviously, published in the London Gazette). Even as regards the criticism he attracted for his involvement in Naples, he showed surprisingly little effort to rectify his image (see Nicolas, iv, 232, and v, 43). A more thorough analysis of Nelson’s reaction to public opinion about himself after the battle of the Nile can be found in the third part of my MSc dissertation about Nelson’s Self-Image and Image in His Life-Time, copies of which are deposited at the History Department of The University of Edinburgh and the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich. Colin White, ‘The Nelson Letters Project’, Mariner’s Mirror, 87 (2001), 476-478, 477, discusses a letter, in which Nelson replied to the request to give his opinion of a print to be published about him.
helpful insights into Nelson’s character, understand his charisma or even his leadership qualities, which were so essential to the success of his career.

Otherwise not much has been added to the characterization of Nelson during the twentieth century. Tom Pocock discerned a ‘streak of vulgarity’ in Nelson, but most biographers stuck to the usual terms, such as vanity. Some also revived the portrayal of Nelson as ‘irritable’. The repeated use of these labels, combined with the failure to penetrate Nelson’s character and a lack of interest in the professional aspects of Nelson’s career, has led to superficial judgments of his personality. In 1995, van der Merwe offered a mixture of generalizations that return to the image of the 1820s of the vain hero whose only claim to fame was dash (assisted by good luck):

Nelson’s personal and even child-like sense of heroic mission contributed to some of his failings, as well as underlying his virtues. His ambition, charm and skills as a leader were matched by a capacity for self-righteousness and exhibitionism which did him professional harm. His own admirable dash and defiance of physical danger sometimes led to unnecessary casualties. While notably kind, and humane by the standards of his time, he was also capable of making savagely questionable decisions, of which some of his action at Naples in 1799 and his treatment of his wife are examples. As a daring and innovative squadron commander he was exceptional. In more complex circumstances, where military dispositions met political ones, his feelings and convictions could undermine his judgement. It was fortunate that his successes outweighed his failures ...

78 Pocock (1968), p. 47.
79 Sélincourt, p. 7; Bellis, p. 57; Pocock (1968), p. 47; J. Russell, pp. 64 (vanity discussed as necessary ingredient of a hero), 82 (vanity assumed), 154 (‘He longed to be recognized for what he knew he was. This is why the blatant flattery and adulation of the Neapolitans, including the Hamiltons, never revolted him’); C. Lloyd, p. 107; Walder, p. 151; Hough, p. 185; Edgington, p. 142.
80 Bellis, p. 58; F. Knight, p. 91; as had done Clarke and M’Arthur and Laughton before them. Neither vanity nor irritability are mentioned in Susan Harmon, ‘The Serpent and the Dove: Studying Nelson’s Character’, Mariner’s Mirror, 75 (1989), 43-51, which, however, is otherwise conventional.
81 The lack of interest in tactical issues has been analysed in chapter 3, section II. The complexities of the demands on a commander remain virtually ignored throughout the twentieth century; and questions of leadership are completely out of fashion.
In wishing to dismantle the image of Nelson, authors have focused on nothing but the image or self-image of Nelson. If one judges from the index to Christopher Hibbert’s *Nelson. A Personal History* there is one passage that deals with Nelson’s ‘ability’ (when still a lieutenant), followed by eight passages about Nelson’s ‘self-esteem’ throughout the book. Later on, the book treats with Nelson as a ‘negotiator’, this time followed by several pages about his ‘self-congratulation’. With such an obvious disinterest in exploring the professional context of Nelson, any assessment of his character cannot but fail. Not surprisingly Roger Morriss (in the same publication as van der Merwe) depicted Nelson as ‘aggressive’; a trait that he later extended into ‘predatory power’ and which has led Terry Coleman to characterize Nelson as a ‘natural born predator’, without attempting to develop the personality of Nelson further in the course of his biography.

Over the course of the last two hundred years interpretations of Nelson’s character, as presented in biographies, have shifted from a focus on his professional abilities (usually supplemented by some references to his piety or humanity) to a focus on his personal demeanour, particularly his ‘vanity’. The clearest examples of these extremes can be observed in the first three decades after his death, when the characterization of him shifted from positive-professional to negative-personal. The criticism of Nelson, triggered off by a condemnation of his affair with Lady Hamilton, shows elements of upper-class bias against Nelson. Once restored to a more respectable portrayal during the 1840s, this positive image could not be completely maintained, thanks to Pettigrew’s revelations. The characterization of Nelson, however, did not reach the extremes of disdain for him that had been expressed earlier. Authors of the late nineteenth century went beyond restoring Nelson’s character to respectable proportions by exploring some of its complexities. Such efforts were submerged by the massive outpouring of biographies at the time of the first centenary of the battle of Trafalgar and further undermined by the new Stracheyan fashion for authors distancing themselves

---

from their subject’s setting. As a result biographers have preferred to focus on Nelson’s
descriptions of his deeds, rather than the deeds themselves, thus neglecting traits of his
character that enabled him to achieve his successes in the first place. With the support of
material from the nineteenth century about dash and vanity, they have set out to
dismantle what they perceive as the false image of Nelson provided by a hero-
worshipping nineteenth century.
Following the analysis of how the most famous aspects of Nelson's life have been dealt with in Britain, this chapter explores the treatment of Nelson's life and career in France, Spain and Germany, countries which were Britain's European competitors for naval power since Nelson's time. It examines how French, Spanish and German authors have attempted to shape their own image of Nelson in ways that were different from those offered by biographies written by British authors.

After news of the battle of Trafalgar had reached Britain, the government made sure this information would spread to its allies: 'Two or three thousand copies of the Gazette Extraordinary were sent to Yarmouth ... [on the day of its publication] for the purpose of being dispersed over various parts of Italy and Germany'.1 This action raised a short-lived interest in Nelson. Joshua White's biography of Nelson was published in a German translation,2 but since the effect of the battle of Trafalgar was not felt so much in central Europe as in Britain, interest appears to have quickly vanished and no German made an attempt to publish an assessment of Nelson.

Britain's enemies reacted very differently to the event. In France the journal for official information, the Moniteur, suppressed any news of the battle while the Journal de Paris printed a fanciful report about a British defeat on 19 October 1805.3 During the reign of Napoleon only one authentic report about the battle of Trafalgar appears to have been published in France and this was a vindication of Captain Lucas and eighteen of his officers and petty officers for their conduct in the 'glorious combat' made by their ship, the Redoutable. In making their case, however, these officers did not describe in any way the overall development of the battle.4 In Spain, on the other hand, the official

---

1 The Times, 8 November 1805.
2 Josua White, Lebensbeschreibung des Horatio Lord Viscount Nelson ... (translated from the second edition in English, Hamburg: August Campe, 1806).
3 Nicolas, vii, 263-65.
4 [Jean-Jacques-Étienne Lucas and 18 of his officers and petty officers], Procès verbal du combat glorieux soutenu par le vaisseau « le Redoutable », commandé par M. Lucas, capitaine de vaisseau (Brest: [n. pub.)
government *Madrid Gazette* published the letters of the Spanish chief-of-staff, Antonio de Escaño, to the head of government, Godoy, in which Escaño wrote of a ‘calamity’. In southern Spain, particularly in Cadiz the defeat could not be ignored, anyway. Thousands of families had seen their relatives leave port, had heard the sound of the distant battle and had seen the few shattered ships return. Those who lived along the coasts had tried to help the shipwrecked of both sides.

The image of Nelson in early Spanish accounts was very much determined by the generally held view that the British, in contrast to the heroic and humane Spaniards, were piratical, brutal and uncivilized. This was even reflected in Escaño’s official reports in which he pointed out ‘our honour is intact’, while he also claimed that Nelson wanted ‘to insure the victory by a lavish effusion of blood’. Not even special treatments of Nelson’s battles inquired very deeply into his professional abilities. When a short Portuguese biography of Nelson was translated into Spanish, it was published with notes in order to ensure that the Spanish readers did not believe all that was written about Nelson by their Portuguese enemies. Predictably, Nelson’s successes over Spanish forces were played down, while his survival at Santa Cruz de Tenerife was attributed to Spanish generosity. The critical approach to Nelson’s achievements even extended to the battles of the Nile, which was described as of doubtful political impact, and of Trafalgar, the British account of which (copied by the Portuguese) was regarded as

---

6 Nicolas, vii, 283, 292.
7 [Anon.], ‘Noticia histórica de las principales Batallas Navales entre las esquadras Francesa y Española contra la Inglesa’, Minerva o El Revisor general, 19 November 1805, 113-51, 149.
8 [Anon.], Vida del almirante ingles Lord Nelson, traducida del portugues y aumentada con notas (Madrid en la imprenta real, 1806) [hereafter: Anon. (Imprenta Real)], pp. 14 (about the battle of St. Vincent, 1797), 15 (about boat action off Cadiz in 1797) and 17 (about Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1797). The biography from which this life is translated (Vida do Lord Nelson. Memorias das Brilhantes Ações deste celebre almirante ingles, Traduzida no Idioma Portuguez Por ... [sic] (Lisboa, Na Impressão Regia, 1805)) claims to be a translation from an English life and has been attributed to Archibald Duncan by the bookseller who sold a copy of it to the National Library of Scotland, but Duncan’s *The Life of the Right Honourable Horatio Lord Viscount Nelson* ... was published only in 1806 and with a different and much longer text than the Portuguese life of Nelson. I was not able to trace any biography of Nelson of 1805 that could have been the basis for the Portuguese translation.
unreliable. The last note commented ironically on the biography's appraisal of Nelson's character: 'The unhappy inhabitants of the coasts, the poor fishermen, and all the neutrals are good witnesses of the heart of Nelson and his sweet and affable manners'.

The outbreak of the Peninsular War in 1808 brought more pressing matters to the minds of the Spanish than making sense of the battle of Trafalgar and evaluating Nelson. The struggle against French occupation also complicated the perceptions of the British enemy at Trafalgar. In their 'War of Independence' the Spanish destroyed what had remained of the French fleet at Cadiz after the battle of Trafalgar and they fought their former ally in part side-by-side with the British, their former enemy. As a consequence of the diplomatic reversal of alliances neither the battle of Trafalgar in general nor Nelson in particular were subject to any historical interpretation in Spain for more than forty years.

French silence about the battle of Trafalgar was broken after the fall of Napoleon. There was a clear public need to explain the defeat at Trafalgar. Most of the treatment of the battle therefore consisted of defending and accusing different high-ranking French officers who had taken part in the battle. Captain Lucas, probably thanks to his own pamphlet, was generally regarded as a hero. Admiral Villeneuve, the French commander-in-chief, and Admiral Dumanoir, who had been in command of the vanguard of the combined fleet and who had not managed to join the battle in time, were regularly, though not always, blamed for the defeat. These efforts to lay blame on

---

9 Anon. (Imprenta Real), pp. 21, 27; similarly a translation of an account of Nelson’s funeral into Spanish ([Anon.], Entierro del almirante Nelson, sacado de los papeles públicos de Europa ... (Mexico [City]: Doña María Fernandez de Jauregui, 1806), p. 13) explained the good news of a victory brought to the dying Nelson as merely meant to prolong his life.

10 Anon. (Imprenta Real), p. 32, ‘Los infelices habitantes de las costas, los pobres pescadores, y todos los neutrales, son buenos testigos del corazón de Nelson, y de lo dulce y afable de sus modales’.

11 For the impact of the Peninsular War on the perception of the battle of Trafalgar in Spain see: Marianne Czisnik, ‘La interpretación más conocida de la batalla de Trafalgar – la novela Trafalgar de Benito Pérez Galdós’, in Trafalgar y el mundo atlántico, eds. Augustín Guimerá, Alberto Ramos und Gonzalo Butrón (forthcoming) [hereafter: Czisnik, ‘interpretación’]; there was, however, an unpublished speech in honour of the recently deceased Escáno, who had been chief of the Spanish staff at Trafalgar, which clearly indicated a changing view of the cooperation with the French; about the impact of this text on later writings about the battle of Trafalgar see: Marianne Czisnik, ‘El consejo de guerra antes de la batalla de Trafalgar’, Revista de Historia Naval, 81 (2003), pp. 49-60.

12 Jean-Jacques Magendie, Mémoire nécrologique sur Monsieur le Vice-Amiral de Villeneuve (Toulon: [n. pub. – Imprimerie d'Aug. aurel], 21 Octobre 1814) [a defence of Villeneuve by his flag captain at the
French participants meant that no serious attention was paid to Nelson’s contribution to
the outcome of the battle. He was often simply referred to as ‘genius’ or ‘the great
Admiral Nelson’, but neither his tactics nor his personality were more closely
examined. One author, in discussing the battle of the Nile, went so far as to claim that
Nelson was merely guided by ‘inspiration’, denying him any ‘genius’. If authors
believed that the French should try to imitate the successful British, and Nelson in
particular, they did not do so by investigating Nelson’s life and battles, but by
recommending what were regarded as typical British characteristics of strict discipline
and harsh punishments, applied to officers in particular. Among the early French
authors, only Charles Dupin appears to have investigated further. He praised Nelson as a
‘model’ in that he informed his subordinates about his plans and ‘once he had explained
his system to the captains in his fleet, he left it to their responsibility to act according to
circumstances’.

battle of Trafalgar]; [Anon.; according to W. James (1826), iii, 370: ‘chiefly written by C. T. Beauvais’;
according to Mathieu Dumas, Précis des Événements militaires, ou Essais historiques sur les campagnes
de 1799 à 1814 (Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1822), tome XII. Campagne de 1805. [hereafter: M. Dumas],
178, the part about the battle of Trafalgar was contributed by ‘M. Parisot’], Victoires, Conquêtes,
Désastres, Revers et Guerres Civiles des Français, de 1792 à 1815 (30 vols, Paris: C.L.F. Panckoucke,
1817-21) – vol. 16 (1819) [hereafter: Victoires et Conquêtes], 173 (blame on Dumanoir), 200 (‘personne,
dans la flotte combinée, ne fut trouvé reprehensible’); Charles Dupin, Voyages dans la Grande-Bretagne,
tenreprises relativement aux services publics de la guerre, de la marine, et des ponts et chaussées (5 vols,
Paris: Bachelier, 1821) [hereafter: Dupin], iv, 63 (Villeneuve blamed); M. Dumas, 192-94 (Villeneuve
blamed), 222 (Dumanoir defended); Hennequin, ‘Notice historique sur le Vice-amiral Villeneuve’,
Annales Maritimes et Coloniales, année 1828, 2 Partie, tome 2, 93-104 [defence of Villeneuve]; [Anon.,
‘un Capitaine de Vaisseau’], Histoire des Combats d’Aboukir, de Trafalgar, de Lissa, du Cap Finistère, et
de plusieurs autres batailles navales, depuis 1798 jusqu’en 1813 (Paris: Bachelier, F. Didot, Baudoin,
1829) [hereafter: ‘Capitaine de Vaisseau’], pp. 117, 160-61 (Dumanoir blamed), 121-23 (French
government blamed); Alfred de Serviez, ‘Trafalgar’, ed. Amédée Gréhan, La France Maritime (4 vols.,

13 M. Dumas, 201 (‘génie’); ‘Capitaine de Vaisseau’, p. vii (‘Le grand amiral Nelson’).
1837-42; Paris: Dutertre, 1852-53), iii, 209-14, at 210 (‘la gloire de Nelson ... ne fut donc point due au
génie militaire de ce général, mais à l’une de ses inspirations ...’).
15 The first to argue thus was, analysing the battle of the Nile: [Gilles] Achard, Détail du combat naval qui
da eu lieu le 14 Thermidor an VI, entre l’Escadre française aux ordres de L’Amiral Brueis, et l’escadre
anglaise aux ordres de l’Amiral Nelson, dans la rade des Beckiers ([Paris]: Baillio, [n. d.]), p. 14; later
authors were: Victoires et Conquêtes, 196-97; ‘Capitaine de Vaisseau’, p. 160; this appears to have been
inspired more by the execution of Admiral Byng than by habits of British naval leadership in the days of
Nelson.
16 Dupin, iv, p. 66 [fn: ‘Nelson doit être cité comme le modèle des amiraux, ... Il leur développait son plan
général d’opérations, ... Dès qu’une fois il avait bien expliqué son système aux commandants généraux
et supérieurs de son armée, il se reposait sur eux du soin d’agir suivant les circonstances ...’].
A translation of Southey's *Life of Nelson* into French, published in 1820, furnished French authors with some information about Nelson's life, but it did not have much influence on public views of Nelson. Only a short account of Nelson's life, published in a collection of biographies of naval men, made use of the information gained from Southey's work. This short biography gave a generally balanced view of Nelson. It even treated his attack on the French flotilla in Boulogne fairly by pointing out that Nelson was forced to adopt this kind of warfare 'in order to calm the fears of the English people'. It finished, however, on a particularly French note, by stressing Nelson's 'blind hate' of the French. A *Histoire Criminelle du Gouvernement Anglais* of 1841 was much more critical. It elaborated on and hinted at Nelson's supposed misdeeds in different parts of Italy, apart from Naples also in Leghorn and Palermo.

Using sources which were neither very detailed nor very specific, the former prime minister of France, Louis Adolphe Thiers, developed an image of Nelson in his influential work about the *History of the Consulate and the Empire of France under Napoleon*, published in 21 volumes from 1845 onwards. There Nelson is portrayed as a man of dash, but 'narrow-minded in things foreign to his heart'. This view of Nelson's character also had an impact on the assessment of Nelson's tactics, in which, according to Thiers, 'Nelson ... had contracted the habit of advancing boldly, without observing any order but that which resulted from the relative swiftness of the ships, of dashing upon the enemy's fleet'. He attributed victory in the battle of Trafalgar, which he regarded as of no great importance, not to Nelson's professional abilities, but to the

---

21 Thiers, vi, 72; similarly: vi, 75.
number of three-deckers in the British fleet and the weakness of his enemies, particularly the Spanish.22

Thiers' description of the Spanish officers and men who fought at the battle of Trafalgar as cowardly and incompetent caused vehement protests in Spain, where his work was translated and published in no less than three separate editions in the 1840s. The Spanish protests led to a revival of interest in the battle and in its wake also, though to a lesser degree, to an interest in Nelson. Several publications about the battle of Trafalgar, notably the book by Manuel Marliani, examined not only the Spanish, but also the French and British sources, to challenge Thiers' criticism of the role played by the Spanish in the battle.23 It is hardly surprising that a new evaluation of the Franco-Spanish relationship was at the centre of this discussion24 and there was little clear analysis of Nelson and his tactics.

When dealing with the actual battle, Spanish authors saw the explanation for the Franco-Spanish defeat at Trafalgar lying less in Nelson's tactics than in their own inferior equipment and poor training as well as in Villeneuve's order to the combined fleet to put about before entering battle, a manoeuvre which disrupted their line of battle.25 In their assessment of Nelson's tactics at the battle of Trafalgar, the patriotic Spanish authors relied on statements made in private letters written shortly after the

22 Thiers, vi, 81 (number of three-deckers), 75 (criticism of Villeneuve), 79, 88-90, 94 (cowardly and incompetent Spaniards), 96 (battle of Trafalgar had no decisive consequences).

23 Maunel Marliani, Combate de Trafalgar. Vindicacion de la armada Española contra las aserciones injuriosas por Mr. Thiers en su Historia del Consulado y el Imperio (Madrid: Impreso de orden superior, 1850) [hereafter: Marliani] this work was supported by the Spanish Navy Minister of the day (see p. xix) and found additional circulation, because it was also published in 'public papers' (see Creus, p. 4); Carlos Creus, Carta dirigida al Sr. D. Augusto [sic] Thiers ... Refutando las infundadas i injustas acusaciones que dirige a marinos españoles que combatieron en Trafalgar (Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1851) [hereafter: Creus]; José Ferrer de Couto, Historia del combate naval de Trafalgar. Precedida de la del renacimiento de la marina española durante el siglo XVIII (Madrid: Wenceslav Aygulas De Izco, 1851, reproduced by: [Valencia?]: Librerias "Paris-Valencia", [n. d.]) [hereafter: Ferrer de Couto], who makes use of Marliani's work, see for example pp. 101, 130-32, 141-45; José March y Labores, Historia de la Marina Real de España desde el descubrimiento de las Américas hasta el combate de Trafalgar (2 vols., Madrid, [s. n.], 1849 and 1854, the second volume deals with Trafalgar) [hereafter: March y Labores].

24 For an analysis of the changed views on the roles of the Spanish and French at Trafalgar in Spanish literature of the mid-nineteenth century see: Czisnik, 'interpretación'.

event by Escaño, the Spanish chief of staff. According to Escaño’s professional judgement the British fleet succeeded only because of the bad formation of the Franco-Spanish fleet. He insisted that in a meeting of two fleets, equally ‘marineras’ (seaworthy and seamanlike), a fleet that adopted Nelson’s tactics would have been defeated. Later publications accepted this verdict without further investigation. They claimed that in the circumstances that prevailed at Trafalgar a British fleet even ‘without Nelson would have equally triumphed’ or that Nelson’s plan had been decisive, only because of Nelson’s good fortune and because the combined fleets of France and Spain had not managed to form a regular line of battle. Marliani, who had quoted Escaño’s statement in the first place, failed to figure out exactly what Nelson had planned, but simply attributed the success of his plan to some kind of superhuman inspiration:

Genius does not achieve more, human foresight reaches its limits in these instructions, seal of immortal glory for him who contrived them. Here the famous seaman invades the domain of luck, tears from it its unforeseen turns of providence and, reading in the future, fixes with the inspiration of a warrior-seer the rules that his companions-in-arms and his subordinates have to follow to secure the victory, which he organizes well-nigh in advance.

While not carefully analysing Nelson’s tactics, the Spanish did start to show some interest in the man who had commanded the British fleet at Trafalgar. Some authors included elements of Nelson’s life in their books about Trafalgar. Since they had to rely on British publications, their image depended on the books to which they got access. They seem to have used British works about naval history, biographies of Nelson, such as those by Clarke & M’Arthur, Southey and Harrison, and also Memoirs

27 Marliani, p. 437.
28 Creus, p. 21, ‘sin Nelson hubiera igualmente triunfado’.
29 Ferrer de Couto, pp. 132-33.
30 Marliani, p. 398, ‘El Genio no alcanza a más; la previsión humana llega a sus límites en esas instrucciones, timbre de gloria inmortal para el que las concibió. Allí invade el preclaro marino el dominio de la suerte, le arranca sus imprevistas peripecias, y leyendo en el porvenir, fija con la inspiración de un vate guerrero las reglas que han de seguir sus compañeros de armas y sus subordinados para asegurar la victoria que organiza casi de antemano’.
32 Marliani refers to James (pp. 401, 402, 444) and Alison (444); Creus used Ekins and James (p. 20).
33 Marliani refers to Clarke and M’Arthur (p. 377) and 444 Southey (p. 444); Creus to J. Harrison (p. 20).
of Collingwood, Nelson’s old friend and second-in-command at Trafalgar. Spanish authors mostly reflected different elements of the British image of Nelson, which they sometimes interpreted in their own particular fashion.

As to Nelson’s professional ability, Marliani did at least develop enough enthusiasm to overcome Escaño’s judgement and, contradicting his own assessment, to praise Nelson’s foresight, which he compared to that of Napoleon. One naval historian wrote about ‘the intrepidy, the great ability, the profound knowledge of Nelson to combine and execute the plan of a naval combat’. Another regarded Nelson’s professional career as an example of the meritocracy existing in Britain, which he recommended other countries to adopt. Although he praised Nelson’s ‘admirable decision’ when he attacked the combined squadron, he still stuck, to the conventional Spanish wisdom, deduced from Escaño’s statement, that Nelson owed his success more to the courage and dash of his men than to the quality of his own plan of battle.

While Nelson was recognized as an ‘illustrious English leader whose eulogy is made by pronouncing his name’, he was also criticized. This criticism focused on his relationship with Lady Hamilton, but did not deal with Nelson’s involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan Revolution. Marliani painted a fanciful image of the ‘ugly spot [on Nelson’s] existence’: After his return from the West Indies in August 1805, Nelson ‘went flying to reunite with his loved one, who lived in the villa of Merton, the splendid residence which her lover had given her. There he relaxed ... and forgot the sea, the squadron and all the world, captivated by the flattery of Lady Hamilton’.  

34 Marliani, pp. 267, 423; Creus, pp. 19, 21; the book they used is: Newnham Collingwood, *Correspondence and Memoirs of Lord Collingwood* (London: 1828).
35 Marliani, pp. 199, 200; similarly: pp. 287, 376; 399-400 (contrast to Villeneuve).
36 March y Labores, ii, 804, ‘la intrepidez, la gran habilidad, los profundos conocimientos de Nelson para combinar y ejecutar el plan de un combate naval’.
37 Ferrer de Couto, p. 99.
38 Ferrer de Couto, pp. 139 (‘el almirante Nélsson, con admirable decision, se lanzó contra la escuadra combinada’), 146 (‘Nélsson que había aprendido á vencer con el arrojo de sus navios mas que con los cálculos de su estrategia’).
39 Paula Quadrado, p. 32 (‘ilustre caudillo inglés, cuyo elogio se hace solo con pronunciar su nombre’), similarly: Marliani, p. 385.
40 Marliani, pp. 385 (‘una fea mancha en su existencia’), 386 (‘se fue volando á reunirse con su querida, que vivía en la quinta de Merton, hermosa residencia que le había regalado su amante. Allí descansaba ... y olvidaba la mar, la escuadra y el mundo entero, embelezado con los halagos de lady Hamilton’).
Hamilton in turn was described as ‘the fatal enchantress, unworthy object of the passionate cult of such a great man’ and a ‘detestable woman’. Marliani was particularly appalled by Nelson leaving her and his ‘adulterous daughter whom he had with her’ as his legacy to his king and country and he remarked approvingly that ‘England repudiated this immoral legacy’. Another author, Carlos Creus, spoke of Nelson’s ‘delirious urge and blind passion ... [to be] at the side of a seductive woman who dominated all his senses’. By referring so clearly to the erotic character of Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton (using words, such as ‘lover’ and ‘adulterous’) and by claiming openly that Nelson had a child with Lady Hamilton, Spanish authors went much further than contemporary British authors in addressing the nature of the relationship between Nelson and Lady Hamilton.

Criticism of the besotted Nelson also extended to the way in which he led his fleet. Drawing from the Memoir about Collingwood, Creus judged that the ‘fiery Nelson’ could be judged fortunate to have had the ‘prudent and calm Collingwood’ at his side, who added solid experience to Nelson’s fertile imagination. The idea of the dashing and not very balanced Nelson was supported by another characteristic, also copied from British sources. Nelson was described as possessing ‘astonishing activity’ and as being ‘spurred on by a noble, but excessive, ambition, by a patriotism mixed with grudging hate of France and a pride, never curbed by prudence’. In the Spanish texts about the battle of Trafalgar an image of Nelson emerged that, though built on British sources, showed a certain independence of judgement. While adopting the image of the dashing man who enjoyed luck in battle and who possessed deplorable weaknesses,

---

41 Marliani, p. 386 (‘la fatal encantadora, objeto indigno del culto apasionado de tan grande hombre’), 451 (‘detestable mujer’).
42 Marliani, p. 451 (‘hija adulterina que tenía de ella’, ‘La Inglaterra repudió ese inmoral legado’); see also p. 430.
43 Creus, p. 21 (‘el delirante afán y ciega pasión ... al lado de una mujer seductora que dominaba todos sus sentidos’).
44 Creus, p. 21 (‘fogoso Nelson ... prudente y calmoso Collingwood’).
45 Antonio Alcalá Galiano, Recuerdos de un anciano (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, vol 63, ‘Obras escogidas’), p. 11 (‘actividad pasmosa’, ‘aguijado por una ambición noble, pero excesiva, por un patriotismo mezclado con odio rencoroso a Francia, y por un orgullo nunca enfrenado por la prudencia’).
Spanish commentators addressed more openly his relationship with Lady Hamilton and were prepared to attribute some outstanding qualities of imagination to Nelson.

French authors also began to investigate Nelson in more detail. In 1847 Jurien de la Gravière published his *Guerres Maritimes sous la République et l'Empire*, which was more fittingly entitled in its German translation as *Nelson und die Seekriege von 1789-1815*, because they actually centre upon the achievements of Nelson.\(^{46}\) Using Nicolas' edition of *The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson*, Jurien de la Gravière dealt in detail with Nelson's battles and even his personal background, while he mentioned the battles of the 'Glorious First of June' and Camperdown only in passing and disconnected from their historical context.\(^{47}\) In general, Jurien de la Gravière produced the characterization of Nelson that had previously developed in France. He described Nelson as being possessed of a 'blind and fanatic zeal' and his tactics as having consisted less in new ideas than in throwing overboard 'all that the old tactics had in prudent and wise rules'.\(^{48}\) Such dash, according to the French author, led to victory, because Nelson's enemies were weak at the time.\(^{49}\) Jurien de la Gravière also shared his countrymen's stress on obedience. He used Nelson's early career as an example of how obedience should be inculcated into young minds and he largely ignored Nelson's disobedience at the battles of St. Vincent and Copenhagen.\(^{50}\) He saw Nelson's 'ardent initiative' against his admiral in the West Indies as an omen of bad things to come, hinting at Nelson's future role as the 'adulterous lover of Lady Hamilton and murderer

---

\(^{46}\) E. Jurien de la Gravière, *Guerres Maritimes sous la République et l'Empire* (2 vols., Paris: Charpentier, 1847) [hereafter: Jurien de la Gravière]; E. Jurien de la Gravière, *Nelson und die Seekriege von 1789-1815* (Leipzig, 1847); an English translation by Plunkett (Lord Dusany) was published under the title *Sketches of the Last Naval War*, 1848.

\(^{47}\) Jurien de la Gravière, i, 7 (about use of Nicolas), 11-44 ('Jeunesse de Nelson'), 183-84 (Camperdown); ii, 148, 173 ('Glorious First of June', in French, following the revolutionary calendar: 'le combat du 13 prairial').

\(^{48}\) Jurien de la Gravière, i, 4 ('il inventa moins une tactique nouvelle qu'il se mit sous ses pieds tout ce que l'ancienne tactique avait de règles prudentes et sages'), 6 ('zèle aveugle et fanaticque'); similar passages can be found: i, 5, 183-84; ii, 222-24, 225 ('Fait pour surprendre la fortune par son audace plutôt que pour l'enchaîner par ses manœuvres').

\(^{49}\) Jurien de la Gravière, i, 9-10.

\(^{50}\) Jurien de la Gravière, i, 11 (early career), 164 (St. Vincent); ii, 23 (Copenhagen).
of Caracciolo’. Jurien de la Gravière did stress one great attribute of Nelson, however: his qualities of leadership. He also went on to examine, in more depth than earlier non-British authors, what he called ‘the great art of Nelson’: ‘this happy optimism and that affable and benevolent disposition’ that enabled Nelson to ‘appeal so well to the particular abilities of each that there was not a bad officer out of which he did not make a zealous servant, often even a capable servant’.  

No trace of Nelson’s leadership qualities appears in those French full-length biographies of Nelson that followed Jurien de la Gravière’s work in the nineteenth century. Instead, they portray Nelson in a thoroughly negative fashion. Alphonse-Marie-Louis Part de Lamartine published his Nelson in 1853, when his career as a poet was in decline and he was earning his living with a series of biographies, published in Le Civilisateur and meant to ‘educate the workingman’. Lamartine’s account makes several mistakes in the chronology of events, he confuses the battle of Copenhagen in 1801 with the bombardment of that city in 1807, and he offers little more on Nelson than on Lady Hamilton. Lamartine wrote much about the influence of Lady Hamilton on Nelson, which he attributed to the ‘uncultivated’ mindset of the admiral. The ‘insanity’ of his passion, according to Lamartine, made Nelson lose ‘reason and virtue’. The biography by E. D. Forgues, published in 1860, was much more clearly organized and more sharply focused on Nelson, though it was no less scathing in its judgements. As in Jurien de la Gravière’s work, Nelson appears as a narrow-minded sailor, ‘little enlightened in anything outside his profession’. Forgues also condemned Nelson’s

51 Jurien de la Gravière, i, 37 (‘ardente initiative’), 249 (‘l’amant adultère de lady Hamilton et le meurtrier de Caracciolo’).
52 Jurien de la Gravière, i, 64-65 (‘le grand art de Nelson. Il savait s’adresser si bien aux aptitudes particulières de chacun, qu’il n’était si mechant officier dont il ne parvint à faire un serviteur zélé, souvent même un serviteur capable.’); similarly: i, 185-87; ii, 227.
55 E. D. Forgues, Histoire de Nelson d’après les dépêches officielles et ses correspondances privées (Charpentier : Paris, 1860) [hereafter: Forgues], p. 4 (‘obstiné dans des idées étroites, peu éclairé dans tout ce qui ne concerne pas son métier’).
tendency towards disobedience as much as his 'adulterous passion' and he stressed Nelson's hatred of the French. Both Lamartine and Forgues concurred in condemning Nelson's involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan Revolution and they both claimed that he fought against weak enemies.

No biographies of Nelson appeared in Spain and the Spanish as well as the French image of Nelson did not undergo any major changes during the rest of the nineteenth century. In France, Nelson remained the audacious and narrow-minded warrior who was lucky enough to be faced with a weak enemy and showed 'savage brutality' when entering the political sphere. The Spanish view of Nelson, centred on the battle of Trafalgar, was marked by greater respect for an enemy. This respect for 'the most eminent seaman of England' was the consequence of the Spanish interpretation of the battle as a 'glorious defeat'. The Spanish respect for their own heroes at Trafalgar, expressed among many other ways in street names, made the whole contest into a heroic event, in which the enemy could be respected, too.

---

56 Forgues, pp. 221 (disobedience disapproved of 'again'), 329 ('adultere passion'), 353-54 (hate of French).
57 Lamartine, pp. 51-59 (Naples), 45 ('fortune' gave Britain the power of the sea), 47 (weak enemy); Forgues, pp. 204-10 (Naples), 327 (weak enemy).
59 Pedro A. de Alarcón, 'Las viajes por España', in Obras completas de D. Pedro A. de Alarcón de la Real Academia Española con un comento preliminar por Luis Martínez Kleiser (Ediciones Fax: Madrid, 1943) [the original was written about 1885, hereafter: Alarcón], p. 1843, 'el más insignie marino de Inglaterra' (the most eminent seaman of England). The 'Glorious Defeat' is the title of a book about the battle: Enrique Tomasich, Una derrota gloriosa (tenth of a series of 'Lecturas patrióticas. Glorias de España', Madrid: [s.n.], 1898) [hereafter: Tomasich]. This novel is organized in the same fashion as the famous novel about Trafalgar by Béneto Pérez Galdós that is discussed in chapter 15, narrated from the perspective of a young sailor, depicting the horrors of war and admiring 'the great, genial and marvellous head of Nelson', p. 21, 'la cabeza grande, genial, maravillosa de Nelson'; the book even contains a picture of the death of Nelson (p. 34, detail of Maclise's painting, for a discussion of this painting see chapter 13).
60 See Luis Miguel Aparisi Laporta, Toponimia Madrileña. Proceso evolutivo (Madrid: Gerencia Municipal de Urbanismo del Ayuntamiento de Madrid, 2001) under 'Churruca', 'Gravina', 'Trafalgar' and 'Valdés'.
More notable than these French and Spanish views of Nelson, however, was the emergence of a German image of the British admiral towards the end of the nineteenth century. In 1880 and 1883 two German biographies of Nelson were published, both of which surpass in depth and detail any French or Spanish texts about Nelson published during the nineteenth century. Though Reinhold Werner, whose Nelson was published in 1883, listed French sources (Lamartine, Thiers and Jurien de la Gravière) next to his British sources (Southey, Tucker, Clark and M’Arthur), his portrayal of Nelson (as well as that of Friedrich Althaus, whose Admiral Nelson was published in 1880), came closest to the British image of Nelson at this time. The non-British influence was reflected most in German views about Nelson’s role in Naples and his relationship with Lady Hamilton. Althaus and Werner agreed in their criticism of Nelson’s actions in Naples and they both accepted that Nelson’s daughter Horatia was a product of his relationship with Lady Hamilton. The two authors disagreed, however, in their assessment of this relationship to Lady Hamilton itself. While Werner regarded Lady Hamilton as a ‘demonic influence’ on Nelson, Althaus described Lady Hamilton in a very positive fashion and claimed that Nelson and Lady Hamilton felt ‘doubtless’ mutually attracted to each other.

In their assessment of Nelson as a naval officer Althaus and Werner widely agreed. Like Jurien de la Gravière they acknowledged Nelson’s ability as a leader of men, but, unlike French authors, they both praised Nelson’s critical thinking and even his acts of disobedience. Werner (an admiral himself) particularly commended Nelson’s critical observations on the Admiralty’s habit of tearing crews apart and he regarded

---

62 Althaus, pp. 230, 232, 235-36 (Naples), 265, 269 (Horatia, referring to Pettigrew); Werner, pp. 226-30 (Naples), 340 (Horatia).
63 Werner, p. 231 (Nelson’s ‘verbrecherische Handlungsweise ... [ist] nicht anders als durch den dämonischen Einfluß der Lady Hamilton zu erklären’); similarly: pp. 214-15, 217-20, 224, 243; Althaus, pp. 221 (‘die Gefühle der Neigung waren unzweifelhaft gegenseitig’), 260 (Lady Hamilton’s pleasant personality), 265 (here Althaus explicitly states that Lady Hamilton did not lead Nelson astray).
64 Althaus, pp. 159, 262; Werner, pp. 130, 209, 350.
Nelson’s disobedience in the West Indies concerning the navigations laws as the act of a ‘dutiful man’. 65 Althaus went even further in approving of Nelson’s acts of disobedience. He referred to Nelson’s often criticized disobedience of Admiral Keith in 1799 as ‘courageous’. 66 In order more generally to examine the question of disobedience, he quoted a passage from a letter in which Nelson stated ‘to say that an officer is never, for any object to alter his orders, is what I cannot comprehend’. Althaus eulogized this attitude as: ‘the indignation of a heroic soul who values the daily rule as nothing in comparison to the necessity of appropriate action’. 67 In his final assessment of Nelson’s life Althaus sees him as the founder of British supremacy at sea, whose ‘fame has not faded’. 68 Werner is more critical of Nelson. He regards him merely as the man who used against a weak enemy a strong instrument (the British navy) that somebody else (Admiral Jervis) had forged. In his final judgement Nelson ranks among the greatest admirals a clear second after de Ruyter, because ‘Nelson stains his fame with acts that De Ruiter [sic] would not have been capable of’. 69 This ‘stain’, Nelson’s involvement in Naples, was elaborated upon by other German authors. Hermann Hüffer pioneered scholarly research into the affair, whereas Robby Kossmann produced a more popular version of events that was also critical of Nelson. 70

The Spanish view of Nelson remained bound up with events that related to Spanish history. The centenary of Nelson’s attack on Santa Cruz de Tenerife (in 1797), in which he was repelled and lost his right arm, was the occasion for celebrations on

65 Werner, pp. 128, 134 (‘pflichtgetreuen Manne’); similarly: pp. 131, 133-34 (West Indies); 174, 177 (St. Vincent), 254 (Copenhagen).
67 Althaus, p. 237 (‘Der Unwille einer heldenhaften Seele, der die tägliche Regel nichts ist im Vergleich mit der Nothwendigkeit zweckmäßigen Handelns’); the quotation from Nelson can be found in: Nicolas, iv, 90.
68 Althaus, pp. 139-41, 285, 288 (‘Sein Ruhm ist nicht verblichen’).
69 Werner, pp. 157 (the relationship between Jervis and Nelson is compared to that of Scharnhorst and Blücher), 197 (French incompetence is regarded as confirmed by the result of the Franco-German war of 1870), 208-9, 211 (more on weakness of the French), 341-44 (‘Nelson befleckt sein Ruhmesschild durch Handlungen, deren De Ruiter unfähig gewesen wäre’).
70 For the thorough analysis by Hermann Hüffer see chapter 4; Robby Kossmann, Lord Nelson und der Herzog Franz Caracciolo (Hamburg: Verlagsanstalt und Druckerei (vormals J. F. Richter), 1895).
Tenerife and for a book about this historic event. Although the book’s author recognized Nelson as ‘valiant’ and ‘the hero of the seas’, he also denounced Nelson’s ‘mercantilist’ motive for attacking Tenerife, and he described him as possessed of a ‘blind confidence ... [and] arrogance’ in considering victory within reach. As at the beginning of the century, the idea of the British as ‘arrogant’ appears in the text, when the author remarks with satisfaction that Nelson’s ‘arrogant statue’, which shows ‘over the noble breast an empty sleeve, proclaims silently and eloquently the valour’ of the Spanish.

From the end of the nineteenth century until the eve of the First World War the French, Spanish and German interest in Nelson focused mainly upon the battle of Trafalgar. The Germans followed attentively the heated discussion of Nelson’s tactics in Britain, commented critically upon it and attempted their own interpretation of the event. In France, a few short publications about the battle of Trafalgar were followed by Edouard Desbrière’s extensive edition of documents relating to the battle, for which he had also mustered the support of the Spanish admiral, Pelayo Alcalá Galiano. The latter, related to three captains who had served at Trafalgar, published his own account

71 Juan Carlos Díaz Lorenzo, Puerto y plaza fuerte. El ataque anfibio de Nelson a Tenerife. La gesta del 25 de julio de 1797 ([s. pl.]: Autoridad Portuaria de Tenerife, Tauro producciones, 1997) [hereafter: Díaz Lorenzo], pp. 117-22 about centenary celebrations; Mario Arozena, La derrota de Horacio Nelson (25 de Julio de 1797). Monografía histórico-crítica premiada con Pluma de plata en el Certamen literario celebrado por el ‘Gabinete Instructivo’ de Santa Cruz de Tenerife en Julio de 1897 (2nd edition, Santa Cruz de Tenerife: [s. pub.], 1897) [hereafter: Arozena].

72 Arozena, pp. 86 (‘valiente’), 92 (‘el héroe de los mares’), 30 (‘mercantilismo’), 86 (‘confianza ciega ... arrogancia’).

73 Arozena, p. 92 (‘su arrogante estatua, que muestra cruzada sobre el noble pecho una manga vacía[,] pregon a muda y eloquentemente el valor del pueblo que supo vencer al invencible ...’).


of the battle in a study of nearly a thousand pages.  

The importance of Nelson’s most famous battle was generally acknowledged, even if his person did not arouse such interest.

This scholarly treatment of the battle of Trafalgar appears to have led both Spanish and German authors to a greater admiration for Nelson. Influenced by contemporary Anglo-American works, such as Mahan’s publications, Spanish authors now acknowledged Nelson’s tactical abilities more than their predecessors had done in the 1850s. Nelson’s memorandum was regarded as the ‘last word of naval strategy of the day’, his independent actions were admired, and, in a journal he was even referred to as a ‘genius’. Spanish naval historians even went so far as to describe Nelson’s ‘unfavourable idea of the Spanish Navy’ as justified. P. Alcalá Galiano’s work about the battle ended with Nelson’s last prayer. German authors, on the other hand, appear to have been chiefly interested in spreading news about Nelson to the younger generation. One life of Nelson was published as part of a ‘Helden-Bibliothek’ (‘library of heroes’), another in an English language textbook ‘for school and home’ about Heroes of Britain, meant to ‘stimulate the youth to emulation’.

76 Pelayo Alcalá Galiano, El combate de Trafalgar (2 vols., Madrid: [s.pub.], 1909) [hereafter: P. Alcalá Galiano], i, 3, footnote (about his relation to the captains of the Bahama, Dionisio Alcalá Galiano, Argonauta, Antonio Pareja, and San Ildefonso, José de Vargas y Vargas). How much P. Alcalá Galiano was involved in an international discussion may be seen by the fact that he even referred to a German article (by Lassen): i, 275-76, ii, 853.

77 P. Alcalá Galiano, i, 268 quoted explicitly from Mahan’s Life of Nelson; Víctor María Concas, Trafalgar y la Marina Española (Sección de Ciencias históricas del Ateneo de Madrid, sesión del 5 de Febrero de 1907) [hereafter: Concas], p. 8, refers generally to Mahan.

78 Cesáreo Fernández Duro, Armada Española desde la unión de los reinos de Castilla y de Aragón (Madrid: Museo Naval, 1973; reprint of first edition, published 1895-1903) [hereafter: Fernández Duro], viii, 316 (‘última palabra de la estrategia naval de la época’).

79 Concas, p. 29.

80 P. Alcalá Galiano, i, 174-75; P. Alcalá Galiano, i, 275-77, struggles with an anti-Spanish expression that Nelson was supposed to have said; instead of doubting its origin, P. Alcalá Galiano tried to disprove its contents, which affected his view on Nelson.

81 La Ilustración española y americana, año XLIX, número XXXIX, 22 October 1905, p. 223.

82 Fernández Duro, viii, 83-84; Concas, pp. 18-19.

83 P. Alcalá Galiano, pp. 981-982.

The idea of regarding Nelson as an heroic pattern to be emulated does not appear ever to have crossed a French author's mind. Biographies of Nelson and books about Trafalgar, published in the first half of the twentieth century, repeated the traditional French image of Nelson. While Nelson is acknowledged to have possessed certain leadership qualities, he is still generally portrayed as narrow minded (if not incompetent), uncultured, dangerously insubordinate and hating the French. French authors agree in their criticism of Nelson's actions in Naples and in their judgement that Nelson had faced a weak enemy.\(^{85}\) The publication of the translated biography by Edinger and Neep did not seriously challenge this superficial perception of Nelson.\(^{86}\)

The Spanish interpretation of Nelson became more diverse in the course of the twentieth century. After Primo de Rivera's 'pronunciamiento' in 1923, an eager author, trying to arouse Spain's 'national spirit', chose to write about the battle of Trafalgar.\(^{87}\) In this patriotic spirit the author focused more on Spanish heroism than on Nelson's tactics, although the British admiral is described as 'brilliant'.\(^{88}\) Leaving the sober approach of the beginning of the century behind, this book described Nelson as obeying his 'adulterous mistress'. Accepting that Lady Hamilton had inspired Nelson to leave for Trafalgar, the author declares her to be 'the esoteric cause for the defeat' and

---

Klapperich (series: Englische und französische Schriftsteller der neueren Zeit für Schule und Haus; Glogau: Carl Flemming Verlag, [1906]), pp. 52-57, the editor's preface ('die Jugend zur Nacheiferung anzufeuern').

\(^{85}\) Paul Laurencin, 'L'amiral Nelson', Les Contemporains ([n. pl., n. pub., 1903]), p. 7 (following 'Jurien de la Gravière, notre guide pour cette biographie'); André Gervais, Un Grand Ennemi: Nelson (La Renaissance du Livre, series 'La grande légende de la mer', no. 18: Paris, 1931), pp. 1 (leadership qualities), 174-76 (Naples); A. Thomazi, Trafalgar (Paris : Payot, 1932), pp. 97-98 (good leader, 'Obéir lui est plus difficile ... indiscipliné. La soumission ne lui est pas naturelle ... Il ne s'intéresse pas à grand chose en dehors de son métier. Il est peu instruit, ... et manque entièrement de culture générale ... hait les Français'), 166-67, 186 (weak enemy); Paul Chack, Deux Batailles Navales. Lépante - Trafalgar (Éditions de France : Paris, 1935), pp. 161 (ni un grand stratège, ni un grand tacticien), 170 (Naples), 207-10, 323 (weak enemy).

\(^{86}\) A translation of Edinger and Neep's 'Stracheyan' biography was published in at least two editions, 1931 and 1932.

\(^{87}\) Narciso Correal y Freyre de Andrade, El Nuevo y el Viejo Trafalgar. Rasgos heroicos de la Armada española en el siglo XIX (La Coruña: El Noroeste, 1923) [hereafter: Correal], pp. i ('En esta hora en que los estamentos armados de la Patria han emprendido la abrumadora empresa de regir, purificándola, la vida nacional, parécnos que todo lo que tienda a robustecer la actuación militar, con la evocación de las gloriosas gestas de nuestros Ejércitos de mar y tierra, es cooperar, con eficacia, a la redentora labor social que con elevado patriotism se han impuesto'), 11 ('espíritu nacional').

\(^{88}\) Correal, p. 60 ('genial').
consequently for 'the loss of our colonial empire'. This simplistic approach betrays a new, twofold perception of Nelson in Spain: on the one hand he is seen as a genius of naval warfare, on the other he is regarded as a slave to his lover's will.

Both aspects of Nelson, the gifted hero and the besotted lover, form part of the intensifying Spanish image of Nelson in the following decades. In 1929 the first full-length biography of Nelson in Spanish was published. It was written for a young readership and, according to its prologue, the life of Nelson was meant to give ‘useful lessons in patriotism’ and to prove the importance of ‘constancy, study, work and sacrifice’. Lady Hamilton is only mentioned shortly as a caring person without any clear reference to her adulterous relationship with Nelson. This straightened version of Nelson’s life for children was supplemented by the publication of a translation of Clennell Wilkinson’s biography of Nelson. This work supplied the basis for a fresh approach to Nelson in Spain after the Civil War, at the time of the Second World War, when Franco was establishing his rule. In 1940, the Spanish Minister of the Navy supported the publication of a new (and very superficial) book about the battle of Trafalgar, which followed the established pattern in describing Nelson as a ‘genius’ as well as condemning Lady Hamilton’s influence on him in strong terms.

The idea of Nelson as a person blinded by love seems to have been well established in Spain by 1940. When the influential Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset claimed in his Estudios sobre el amor (Studies about Love), published in 1941, that ‘in

---

89 Correal, p. 59 ('la causa esotérica de esta derrota, y por ende, de la pérdida de nuestro imperio colonial', 'dueña adultera').
90 Celso García, Horacio Nelson. Vida y gloriosos hechos del gran almirante inglés. Narrado a la juventud ... con ilustraciones de F. de Myrbach (third edition, Barcelona: Editorial Araluce, 1956; first edition: 1929) [hereafter: García], pp. 7 ('provechosas lecciones de patriotismo'), 9 ('la constancia, el estudio, el trabajo y el sacrificio').
91 García, p. 82; Lady Hamilton is not mentioned again in the book; Camilo Millán, Trafalgar o las consecuencias de un sueño (Barcelona: Pedro Torella, [c. 1930]) does not contain any references to Lady Hamilton either.
92 This work went through at least two editions (in 1932 and 1934, of 341 pages) in Spain; for references to this biography see footnotes 93 and 96.
the choice of a loved woman men reveal their essential character; a reader contradicted him, giving as examples of men loving undeserving women Don Quixote (who loved Aldonza Lorenzo) and Nelson (who loved Lady Hamilton).94 This comment, actually published in the Estudios sobre el amor, seems to have inspired a genuinely Spanish view of Nelson’s ability to love. In his Nelson. Vida sentimental (Nelson. A Sentimental Life) of 1944 Juan Cabal wrote about the way in which Nelson loved his wife: ‘Like Don Quixote, he invented his Dulcinea’ (Quixote’s highly idealized version of his beloved Aldonza Lorenzo).95 José del Rio Sainz, in Nelson (published in 1943), compared Nelson to the most famous figure of Spanish literature in a more comprehensive sense. He referred not only to Nelson’s first love as his Dulcinea, but also described Nelson himself when disobeying his commander-in-chief in the West Indies as a Quixote, thus conjuring up the image of the proud knight fighting against windmills.96 In seeing a quixotic single-mindedness in Nelson’s love affairs as well as in his professional conduct, del Rio Sainz managed to consolidate the two main traits that Spaniards had detected in Nelson: the passionate lover and the purposeful hero. Unfortunately, this was done in such an allusive manner that it did not have much impact on the overall interpretation of Nelson.

Spanish biographers of the mid-twentieth century varied in their interpretation of how Nelson combined his personal romantic satisfaction with the eager fulfilment of his professional duties. As regards Naples, where Nelson’s love affair and his professional duties are usually interpreted as having been confused, Cabal managed to keep the two apart, insisting that it is ‘too easy’ to blame ‘as do some superficial psychologists’ Nelson’s love for Lady Hamilton as being responsible for his actions in Naples.97 This robbed Cabal of an explanation for Nelson’s supposed misdeeds. Unlike those who can

94 José Ortega y Gasset, Estudios sobre el amor ([n. pl.]: Biblioteca Básica Salvat, 1985), pp. 93 (‘en la elección de amada revele su fondo esencial el varón’), 94; I am grateful to Alberto Lena Ordóñez for alerting me to this passage.
97 Cabal, p. 182 (‘como hacen algunos psicólogos superficiales’, ‘demasiado cómodo’).
blame what happened in Naples on Nelson’s affair with Lady Hamilton. Cabal had to deal with an inexplicable, temporary change in Nelson’s behaviour. This makes the contrast between the ‘normal’ Nelson and the supposed ‘Naples’ Nelson very obvious. Not doubting the justice of the condemnation Nelson had often received for his actions at Naples in 1799, Cabal simply attributed the event to a ‘demon which had been his inseparable companion’.

In his Sentimental Life of Nelson, Cabal also struggled to describe the nature of Nelson’s relations with Lady Hamilton. On the one hand, he restated the view that Lady Hamilton was being false, falling in love ‘not with the man, but with the symbol’. On the other hand, Cabal showed Lady Hamilton in sympathetic terms and discarded her critics as motivated by class prejudice. Nelson, in contrast, was portrayed as having quixotic traits, living ‘more in the imagination than with his senses’ and preferring to ‘close his eyes to reality and regard[ing] himself as the victim of an enormous injustice’. Cabal regarded him as ‘strictly speaking a sentimental’ person, whose ‘slightly feminine nature induces to give himself completely away to his intimate affections’. This portrayal of Nelson as primarily driven by sentiment, enabled Cabal to see how Nelson could be so widely liked, but it prevented him from understanding Nelson’s professional abilities. Consequently, he reduced Nelson’s driving force to ‘patriotic fanaticism’.

A biography of Nelson by the German expert on Napoleon Friedrich M. Kircheisen, published in 1926, appears to have made particular use of French sources,

99 Cabal, p. 196 (‘El demonio, que había sido su compañero inseparable ... le dejaba, por fin, en libertad.’).
100 Cabal, p. 168 (‘no se enamora del hombre, sino del símbolo’).
101 Cabal, pp. 75-97 (sympathetic description of Lady Hamilton’s life), 145-48 (Lady Hamilton described as helping to get the British fleet victualled before the battle of the Nile).
102 Cabal, pp. 207 (about ‘Mrs. St. George’, later Melesina. Trench), 208 (about Hugh Elliott).
103 Cabal, pp. 207-8 (‘Nelson vive más con la imaginación que con los sentidos’), 213 (‘cerrar los ojos a la realidad y considerarse víctima de una enorme injusticia’).
104 Cabal, p. 169 (‘Nelson ... es en el fondo un sentimental ... su naturaleza un poco feminina le induce a entregarse completamente en sus efusiones íntimas’).
105 Cabal, p. 126.
106 Cabal, p. 141 (‘fanatismo patriótico’).
since it portrayed Nelson in much the same fashion as did French authors. Kircheisen, however, also pointed out that Nelson, in contrast to Napoleon, taught his subordinates to act on their own initiative. Nelson's tendency to act independently, if needs be even against orders, remained what fascinated German authors about him. Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz referred admiringly to Nelson putting his telescope to his blind eye at the battle of Copenhagen in order not to see his superior's signalled order.

Other German authors followed in this admiration for Nelson's insubordination. A collection of biographies of warriors, entitled Führertum and published in several editions in the 1930s, treated Nelson as an example of a leader (Führer). The text about Nelson stressed that 'Nelson's strong, free and discerning apprehension of warfare' was in contrast to 'the ceremonious, schematic way of the old tactics'. The author went on to stress that Nelson was by no means carried away by some kind of 'impetuosity', but instead prepared his attacks very carefully. The examination of the professional side of Nelson praised his leadership qualities, particularly his habit of keeping his subordinates informed of his plans, as well as his own habit of independent action. The analysis concluded with the remark that Nelson's spirit could not be recognized in British warfare during the [First] World War; indeed, the author asks

107 Friedrich M. Kircheisen, Nelson. Die Begründung von Englands Weltmachtstellung (Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann, 1926) [hereafter: Kircheisen], pp. 72 (narrow-minded), 81 (knows nothing of the world), 73, 83-84, 98, 199 (manipulated by Lady Hamilton), 102-5 (criticized for involvement in Naples); 203 (acknowledged as good leader).
109 Alfred von Tirpitz, Deutsche Ohnmachtspolitik im Weltkriege (Hamburg and Berlin: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1926), p. 32; the book is one volume of Tirpitz's Politische Dokumente (Political Documents).
110 Manfred Fuhrke, Wilhelm Marschall and Friedrich Lützow, 'Nelson', Führertum. 26 Lebensbilder von Feldherren aller Zeiten. Auf Anordnung des Reichskriegsministeriums bearbeitet von Offizieren der Wehrmacht und zusammengestellt von Generalleutnant von Cochenhausen, ed. von Cochenhausen (3rd edition, Berlin: Verlag von E. G. Mittler & Sohn, 1937), pp. 280-305 [hereafter: Fuhrke/Marschall/Lützow]; the word Führertum evokes something more institutionalized than 'leadership' (which translates into 'Führerschaft'); as a later part of the title says this collection was produced 'by officers of the German armed services at the instigation of the Ministry of War'.
111 Fuhrke/Marschall/Lützow, p. 297 ('die feierliche, schematische Art der alten Taktik ... stand in schroffem Gegensatz zu Nelsons starker, freier und einsichtiger Auffassung von der Kriegführung. Wie wenig dieser sich dabei zu einem blinden Ungestüm fortreißen lässt, zeigen die durchdachten und peinlich genau durchgeführten Vorbereitungen zum Angriff'); similarly: p. 298.
112 Ibid., pp. 280, 288, 295.
whether this spirit might not have passed on to other nations. This thought was applied more specifically to the German and Japanese nations by an author with the strikingly un-German name of M. H. Edwards of a biography of Lord Nelson published in 1936. Edwards made a point of differentiating his portrayal of Nelson from that of the British, which he described as very morally biased. The result, though not always historically accurate, is largely a very positive portrait of Nelson that defends even his actions in Naples and insists how much for Nelson 'political facts and possibilities weighed against orders or instructions, which took only tactical issues into consideration'. Apart from some treatments of the battle of Trafalgar in the late 1930s, Germans from then on appear to have been content to get their information about Nelson from biographies, translated from English.

Spanish authors, too, no longer attempted any major new assessment of Nelson after the mid-twentieth century. The 1950s saw several publications about the battle of Trafalgar, none of which developed the image of Nelson any further than earlier studies. One simply states that 'the person and the exploits of Nelson are well enough known'; another repeatedly calls Nelson the greatest or best seaman of the world or of

113 Ibid., p. 304.
115 Edwards, pp. 5 ('Klippe ihrer Konventionen'), 105, 115, 121 ('aus Gründen puritanischer Konventionalität').
116 Edwards, p. 106 ('für ihn [haben] politische Tatsachen und Möglichkeiten stets viel schwerer gewogen als Befehle oder Anweisungen, die nur von taktischen Erwägungen ausgingen').
118 Eduardo Lon Romeo, Trafalgar (Papeles de la Campaña de 1805) ([n.pl.]: Institución 'Fernando el Católico' (CSIC) de la Excma. Diputación Provincial de Zaragoza, 1950); Augusto Conte Lacave, En los días de Trafalgar. Prólogo de Miguel Martínez del Cerro (Cádiz: Edición patrocinada por la Excma. Diputación Provincial de Cádiz, 1955) [hereafter: Conte Lacave]; José Baeza, Los héroes de Trafalgar. El famoso combate naval relato da la juventud... Ilustraciones de Ricardo y Ochoa (fourth edition, Barcelona: [series:] 'Páginas brillantes de la historia', Editorial Araluce, 1955) [hereafter: Baeza].
119 Conte Lacave, p. 17 ('La persona y las hazañas de Nelson son sobradamente conocidas').
There was a brief revival of interest in the battle of Trafalgar, rather than in Nelson himself, at the beginning of the 1970s and a book about Nelson's attack on Cádiz in 1797, was published in 1976. Only during the 1990s was there a noticeable revival of interest in Nelson and his deeds, mostly encouraged by scholarly publications in the Revista de Historia Naval (Journal of Naval History) and in publications dealing with the bicentenary of Nelson's attack on Tenerife. Preparations in Spain for the bicentenary of the battle of Trafalgar are under way and it remains to be observed how this commemoration will affect the Spanish view of Nelson. Otherwise, the Spanish, like the Germans, now rely chiefly on translations of British books for their personal image of Nelson.

Compared to the Spanish and Germans, the French have maintained their image of Nelson relatively independent of the image established by the British. Various books and articles have dealt with Nelson, particularly his involvement in Naples, and with the battle of Trafalgar. They have usually repeated the traditional French image of Nelson, though sometimes they have also contributed new arguments, for example on how Nelson was fatally wounded at Trafalgar. No translations of British biographies of

120 Baeza, pp. 42 ('el marino más grande del mundo'), 100 ('considerado por todos como el más grande marino de la época ... sencillamente incomparable'), 124 ('mejor marino'); also 7 ('talento excepcional').
122 For publications in the Revista de Historia Naval see: no. 11 (1985), 59-82 (about Nelson at Copenhagen), 60 (1998), 63-76 (about Tenerife), 65 (1999), 115-18 (about Tenerife), 74 (201) with several articles about Trafalgar and its commemoration; For publications about Tenerife see: Luis Cola Benítez, Reflexiones sobre el ataque de Nelson a Santa Cruz de Tenerife 1797. A propósito de un documento olvidado (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Goya Ediciones, 1991); Díaz Lorenzo; La Gesta del 25 de Julio de 1797. (Ayuntamiento de Santa Cruz de Tenerife: [n.pl], 1997) [hereafter: Tous Meliá]; Augustín Guimerá Ravina, Tenerife 1797. La Victoria de la Isla sobre la Escuadra de Nelson (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Ayuntamiento de Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1998).
123 Robert Southey's Life of Nelson was translated into Spanish and published in Mexico in 1945, I have seen a reprint of this edition for sale in Spain in the year 2002; Renalt Capes' biography of Nelson reached a third edition in its Spanish translation; Tom Pocock's Nelson was published in Spanish translations in 1985 and 1988 and Philip Haythornwaite's Nelson's Navy was published, as La Marina de Nelson, in 1994.
124 Michel Bourdet-Pléville, Tel fut Nelson ([Paris]: Fasquelle Editeurs, 1953); René Maine, Trafalgar. Le Waterloo naval de Napoléon (Paris: Hachette, 1955); Jean Tonnelé, 'Nelson à Naples (1799)', Revue
Nelson were published in France, although in 1990 a substantial biography of Nelson by Jacques de Langlade was published. The author, a specialist in British nineteenth-century literature and art, made ample use of British primary as well as secondary sources. As a result, traditional French perceptions, such as unease at Nelson’s disobediences were challenged. Langlade, however, did maintain the prevailing French view of the negative influence of Lady Hamilton on Nelson and of the weakness of his opponents, and he still refrained from exploring Nelson’s tactics.  

Over time, therefore, foreign images of Nelson have shown a tendency to merge with the British view, though specific national perceptions have had a distinct influence on how Nelson was seen in France, Spain and Germany over the last two centuries. The French image of Nelson has been the most negative, traditionally focusing on Nelson’s involvement in Neapolitan affairs and his relations with Lady Hamilton, expressing suspicions of his act of disobedience, and regarding Nelson’s naval achievements as the result of mere dash and good fortune. For the Spanish, Nelson has mostly been seen as the formidable enemy at Trafalgar. As such he has gained respect over the years and his abilities have emerged in more detail in studies produced throughout the twentieth century. The Germans appear to have got seriously interested in Nelson only as they started to develop their own national navy (after unification in 1871). They then largely followed the British portrayal of Nelson, though with a special emphasis on the idea of the single-minded leader, combined with a fairly relaxed attitude about Lady Hamilton and a modestly critical attitude towards Nelson’s involvement in Naples. In other words,

---


foreign perceptions of Nelson have been shaped more by the needs of these societies rather than by the reality of what Nelson achieved.
CHAPTER NINE

Summary of How Nelson Was Dealt with in Biographies

Before passing judgment on the historical accuracy of biographies about Admiral Nelson over the period of two hundred years, it is necessary to remind oneself of the problems that biographies pose in general as historical sources. There are three major characteristics of biographies that distinguish them from most other historical texts: first, they focus on one person, which contains the obvious danger of losing sight of the historical context; second, their subjects are mainly arranged chronologically, which can lead to a neglect of analysis of different aspects of their lives; and third, they are written as a narrative, which requires a certain fluency in prose that militates against a serious discussion of the opinions of other authors with different opinions. These inherent traits of biographies with their related dangers can result in a neglect of historical research and a tendency simply to copy what others have written, without any critical awareness of the reliability of the original source. In the case of the life of Nelson, his tactics at the battle of Trafalgar and his involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan Revolution in particular have been treated and contested much more outside than within the biographical literature on him. Articles, introductions to editions of documents and monographs allow for the historical context to be considered as well as competing arguments. There are, however, some aspects of historical research that are more easily revealed in biographies than in any other kind of publication. Biographies depict an individual's development as well as his/her personal relationships. This becomes apparent in Nelson's life, for example, in the development of his independent thinking (most strikingly expressed in his acts of disobedience), in his personal relations with Lady Hamilton and in the treatment of his personal traits (particularly as a leader of men). Whether dealing with aspects that are particularly suitable for biographies or with elements that need to be seen more in their historical and technical context, all treatments of aspects of Nelson's life have been subject to the taste and preoccupations of the period in which they have been written.
The taste for hero-worship in the nineteenth century, however, should not allow us to assume that Nelson was always worshipped as a hero. As has been maintained in the introduction and argued throughout different chapters, the high moral standards of the nineteenth century contributed essentially to making Nelson a controversial figure. Neither the extremes of adulation of Nelson that can be observed during the period before the First World War, nor the devastating criticism launched against him in the same period have been matched since. During most of the nineteenth century Nelson was shunned by serious biographers and upper-class worshippers of the cult of the hero. This encouraged the assumption that he did not possess the necessary qualities of a hero. While no respectable author inquired into Nelson’s affair with Lady Hamilton, it was supposed that Nelson had merely been a dashing hero of mediocre intelligence who enjoyed good fortune in battle. Non-British views of Nelson were not based on more balanced research than British studies. Reflecting contemporary views the young captain Fisher – later to become First Lord of the Admiralty – could remark in a letter to his wife in 1880: ‘All my spare moments for weeks past I have been reading Nicolas’s Letters and Dispatches of Lord Nelson, and I hardly do anything else. I never before realized what a great character was his, and how abominably wrong M. Thiers’s estimate was of Nelson – that he was merely a man to fight’.¹

Naval historians of the late nineteenth century, driven by the desire to establish Nelson as a hero, explored Nelson in a positivist approach to historical research. This intensified inquiry combined with the antagonistic views of Nelson to produce a vivid discussion and thorough examination of the character and achievements of Nelson that developed international proportions. The period of these controversies marked the high-water mark in terms of serious research about Nelson, though the resulting research was anything but conclusive in its results. Such central aspects of the life of Nelson as his tactics at the battle of Trafalgar, his independent way of decision-making, and the

¹ Fisher to his wife, 2 May 1880, quoted in ‘Fear God and Dread Nought’. The Correspondence of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Fisher of Kilverstone, ed. Arthur Marder (3 vols., London: Jonathan Cape, 1952, 1956, 1959) [hereafter: Marder], i, 94. The quotation about Thiers is from Pettigrew, ii, 563. For a discussion of Thiers see chapter 8.
character of his relationship with Lady Hamilton, were still open issues after the First World War.

Unfortunately, twentieth-century research did not contribute much to a further understanding of the character of Nelson and, in many respects, it did not match the standards set by Laughton and Mahan. This was partly due to the Stracheyan resentment against any nineteenth-century hero – however controversial his life might have been. New tools of psychological assessment, instead of being applied carefully, were merely used to dismantle the image of the hero. Colin White proclaimed, as late as 1982, that ‘some demolition has inevitably to take place before construction can begin’. 2 Biographies published in the 1990s and thereafter do not yet betray much construction work going on. 3 Their aim appears to be still to dissect, rather than to construct.

In order to achieve a more coherent picture of Nelson, his biographers need to find the courage to free themselves from prevailing fashions and to develop a profound understanding of Nelson’s professional setting. Nelson and the vast majority of readers of the biographies that deal with him, work in some kind of organization in which nearly all of them have a superior, some colleagues and some subordinates, with whom they have to fulfil certain tasks. Most readers would find it interesting to learn and might understand, if informed, how Nelson had to operate within the restrictions and conditions of such a complex organization as the Royal Navy in order to achieve certain aims that lay within his responsibility. This context, though central to an understanding of Nelson, remains sadly neglected by many, if not most, of his twentieth-century biographers. Writing about Nelson without an understanding of the intricacies of decision-making within very complex political and naval situations and within a tightly-knit organization, is like writing about Mozart without any understanding of music. The result is that the author misses a vital aspect of his/her subject. Nelson needs to be dealt with in his professional sphere and in his working environment. Instead of lifting him

3 A recent exception may be Vincent.
above all his contemporaries, he needs to be firmly placed within the complex network of responsibilities within which he had to operate. Seen in his own particular context, his abilities or weaknesses can then be more effectively assessed.

Generally speaking, the task of a biographer is similar to that of an actor or actress. Both have to enter somebody else’s personality without fear of losing themselves. As long as they feel a need to reassert their own individuality, by showing for example what they despise as immoral or by stressing that they are no hero worshippers, they will not be able to bring to life the person they presume to portray. A faithful (re-)enactment or re-construction of a person needs a critical observer who has the courage to enter into somebody else’s personality and to see the world as that person sees it, while also being sufficiently objective not to see that world only through those eyes.
CHAPTER TEN
Nelson’s Funeral

The funeral of Nelson was the culminating event of the public reaction to his death. In order to understand the significance of the funeral the context of the public response to the death of Nelson needs to be taken into account. This chapter therefore first looks at the emotional and spiritual reaction of the public to the news of the death of Nelson and then deals with the preparation of the funeral, before it explores how the actual funeral itself unfolded.

The public reaction to the news of the death of Nelson is famously described by Southey: ‘The death of Nelson was felt in England as something more than a public calamity: men started at the intelligence, and turned pale; as if they had heard of the loss of a dear friend. An object of our admiration and affection, of our pride and of our hopes, was suddenly taken from us; and it seemed as if we had never, till then, known how deeply we loved and reverenced him.’ Contemporary newspapers wrote that the ‘deep and universal affliction’ in reaction to the news of Nelson’s death, ‘though it is visible to every eye, and is felt in every heart, baffles the efforts of description’ and they observed how ‘one universal sentiment of sorrow, and deep regret, pervades the public mind, as it reflects that the nation’s “glory and its pride” have fallen’.

The sadness of the mood dimmed any joy about the naval achievement that might have compared to that felt after the battle of the Nile. The sombre feelings could

1 Southey (1813), ii, 272.
2 The Times, 7 November 1805, 14 November 1805; Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 386; The Times, 9 November 1805, referred to ‘the regret which the ever-to-be-lamented death of Lord Nelson has spread throughout the whole kingdom’.
3 The Times, 7 November 1805, observed that ‘The victory created none of those enthusiastic emotions in the public mind, which the success of our naval arms have in every former instance produced. ... No ebullitions of popular transport, no demonstrations of public joy, marked this great and important event’;
hardly be reflected in the brightness of the illuminations that commonly marked any events of national importance. Loyal citizens, intent on celebrating the victorious battle, included references to Nelson in their illuminations, either in the form of ‘illuminated initials of the gallant Nelson, or transparent medallions of his head, with suitable inscriptions’. More elaborate designs included symbols of death, such as urns, a wreath of palm and laurel, or even pseudo-religious groups, as, for example, in Ackerman’s shop window where was placed: ‘a beautiful female Figure kneeling before an altar, on which was placed an urn, surrounded with laurels and oak branches, with the following lines – “Sacred to the Memory of the Immortal Nelson”’.4 A shop window in Edinburgh resorted to heroic Scottish poetry, quoting Robert Burns and the supposed Gaelic poet, Ossian.5 Many believed that illuminations were inappropriate after the death of Nelson, however, so that they either did not participate in the illuminations at all or ‘displayed black with the lights, others hung bay-leaves round the windows, while some transparencies, expressing the general feeling, repeated, in large letters, “Britons lament! Your Nelson is no more”’.6 Not surprisingly, the illuminations were not accompanied by

on 8 November 1805 the same newspaper reported from Plymouth: ‘The death of Lord Nelson has thrown a gloom over the brilliant rays of the most glorious battle that ever graced the pages of history’; The Glasgow Herald, 11 November 1805, reported: ‘The turbulence of joy usually displayed on such occasions, was in this instance tempered by regret for the Hero who had fallen in the bosom of victory’.4 The Times, 8 November 1805; similarly: The Caledonian Mercury, 14 November 1805, ‘The illuminations, as they were in London, were mixed with many pathetic remembrances of the gallant Hero of the Nile’; the centre piece of one display in Edinburgh ‘exhibited Britannia sitting at the base of a Pyramid, in deep distress, contemplating the portrait of her hero, Nelson, which appears near the centre of the pyramid surrounded with laurels, entwined with the words, Death, Victory, and Immortality; a fine figure of Fame crowning the whole with the wreath of victory’; another display included a thistle (symbol for Scotland); similarly a shop window in Glasgow displayed: ‘in the centre a figure of Britannia adorning the tomb of Nelson with festoons of laurel ... the figure of Britannia holding Neptune's trident ... and another: ‘an Urn, encircled with a wreath of laurel, referring to the death of the Naval Hero. From the top of the Urn arose a flame, illustrative of his immortal fame, with the words “Sacred to Nelson”’ (Glasgow Herald, 11 November 1805).

4 [Anon.], The Life of the Right Honourable Horatio, Lord Viscount Nelson, Vice-Admiral of the White ... (Edinburgh and London: Denham & Dick and T. Tegg, 1806), p. i (‘When victory shines in life’s last ebbing sands, / O! who would not die with the brave?’ - Burns; ‘I may fall, but I will be renowned’ - Ossian); Ossian had only been invented by his supposed translator, Macpherson.

5 Mann, p. 10. In Edinburgh there was an additional reason to refrain from illuminations: ‘Out of respect to the memory of the gallant Captain Duff, who fell in the action, the inhabitants of South Castle Street, where his Lady resides, much to their honour, did not illuminate’ (The Caledonian Mercury, 14 November 1805).
expressions of joy, common even for much less decisive naval victories. One author of a pamphlet protested against the lack of joyous celebrations in Norwich. He passed over Nelson's death and tried to argue that the non-celebration showed contempt for the lower classes, disloyalty, disregard for the importance of the victory and a criticism of government. His attempt to politicize the issue, however, did not have much influence on the prevailing atmosphere in the country.

The sombre mood that the news of Nelson's death produced also affected other events, namely Lord Mayor's Day in London, which was traditionally celebrated in November. The decorations arranged for the sumptuous dinner on this occasion appeared rather to indicate a celebration exclusively dedicated to Nelson: his full-length portrait was hung over the seat of the Lord Mayor, 'with a prodigious number of lamps, and the flags of the different nations he has conquered. At the Sheriff’s table is placed a Bust, in marble, with the Brow of the Conqueror of the Nile adorned with oak and laurel leaves.' At the event itself, Nelson was referred to in 'the most animated passage' of the speech of the day, and immediately after the toast to members of the royal family, 'The immortal Memory of Lord Nelson' was drunk.

The 5 December 1805, appointed as day of public thanksgiving, provided an opportunity to find a spiritual expression of grief for those who had died in the battle of Trafalgar, Nelson in particular; an opportunity which was 'observed with remarkable, and, perhaps, unexampled attention'. Several ministers of religion tried to smooth the

---

7 The Times, 8 November 1805 ("Throughout the whole, however, there was a sombre air, ..."; Naval Chronicle, xiv (1805), 498 ("there was a damp upon the public spirit"); Southey (1813), ii, 273 ("without joy").
8 William Firth (Steward of Norwich), A Letter to Edw. Rigby, Esq. Mayor of Norwich, in which, amongst other matter, a few reasons are humbly offered, to shew that the destruction of the Combined Fleets of France & Spain, by the immortal Nelson, is rather a subject of rejoicing. (Printed and sold by R. M. Bacon: [n. pl. and n. d., ca. 1805]), pp. 6, 11, 12-13 (again on pp. 19-20, 22) and 13.
9 The Times, 9 November 1805; similarly: Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 374.
10 The Times, 11 November 1805; this seems to be the first recorded toast to the 'Immortal Memory', which has become a tradition, particularly on the anniversaries of the battle of Trafalgar.
11 At least in London, from where The Times, 6 December 1805, reported and where the pickpockets made great profits from the money that was intended for Lloyd's 'Patriotic Fund' for the widows and orphans, left behind by those who had fallen in the battle; similarly about attendance of churches on the appointed Thanksgiving Day: Gentleman's Magazine, 75 (1805), 1168; the attendance also crossed religious boundaries; The Monthly Review, 49 (1806), 110, published a short review of a sermon 'Preached at the great Synagogue, Duke's Place, on the 14 Kislar, (A.M.) 5565, answering to Thursday 5 December, 1805.
harsh reality of Nelson’s death by claiming that he could live on in the collective memory of the British: ‘His death, did I say? … Though removed from us, he still lives: yea, and he will live while Britain exists, and her sons are grateful’ Even if Nelson could be regarded as living on in historic memory, his active contribution to history was undeniably a matter of the past; a fact which challenged commentators to interpret the significance of his life on earth.

The great majority of clergymen appear to have seen Nelson as an ‘instrument in the hand of God’ for the deliverance of the country from danger. In some cases they went on to console their audience and readers with the claim that God would find new instruments to fulfil his will in case Britain should need new defenders. Taken to its logical conclusion, this line of argument made Nelson appear as a mere tool of the

---

By the Rev. Solomon Hirschel, President Rabbi ... of the German Jews in London. Arranged and rendered into English by a Friend'.

12 H. Draper, National Distresses counterbalanced by National Mercies: A Funeral Sermon on the Death of the Ever to Be Lamented Lord Nelson ... for the Benefit of the Widows and Orphans of those who were slain with Him. (Second Edition; published at the Request of the Congregation, to be had of the Author, a the Rectory House, ... [1805]) [hereafter: Draper], p. 13; similarly: John Gardiner, A Tribute to the Memory of Lord Nelson in a Sermon Preached on the General Thanksgiving-Day, December 5, 1805 (London: Rivington, [1805]) [hereafter: Gardiner], pp. 20 ('... but did I say he died? ... he still lives. '), 21; John Bedingfeld Collyer, A Sermon Preached at the Parish Church of Aylsham, Norfolk, on the 5th of December 1805, Being the Day Appointed for 'A General Thanksgiving' to Almighty God for the Signal Victory Obtained by His Majesty's Ships, under the Command of the Late Lord Viscount Nelson, over the Combined Fleets of France and Spain (Norwich: [n. pub., but printer: Bacon], [1805]) [hereafter: Collyer], pp. 9-10.; Lancaster Adkin, The True Dependence and Duty of Man. Being a Sermon preached in the Parish Church of St. Andrew, Norwich, upon the Thanksgiving Day, Dec. 5, 1805, for Lord Nelson's Victory, and published by Request (Cambridge: [n. pub., but printer: Mary Watson], 1806) [hereafter: Adkin], p. 20, claimed as a consolation that 'he died, as he wished'.


14 Draper, p. 23 ('the same God who gave us a Nelson, is able also to give us others of equal excellence'); Rouquet, p. 11; Gardiner, p. 26.

228
divine will. Interestingly pastors from the margins of British church life placed Nelson at the centre of their attention and made him an active contributor to the defence of 'our civil and religious liberties'. An 'independent minister' as well as Reverend Pitt, preaching in 'the Chapel of the British Factory, in St. Petersburg' both depicted Nelson as making a deliberate sacrifice for his country. Having treated Nelson as an autonomous person, able to make decisions of his own free will, both also praised him as a model for succeeding generations. Such a conclusion was not so easy to reach for those who regarded Nelson as a mere instrument of God. Comforting as the notion was that God finds the human instruments needed to protect Britain, it does not show how someone became one of these protectors. Certain ministers, among them Nelson's influential biographer James Stanier Clarke, therefore divided their argument and claimed, on the one hand, that 'our naval power has been selected by Providence', while, on the other hand, the specific individuals 'willingly offered themselves' as instruments of this Providence. The combination of a nation under God's special protection and

---

15 John Townsend (independent minister), Lord Nelson's Funeral improved in a discourse, delivered the 12th of January, 1806; in the morning at the meeting, Jamaica Row, Bermondsey, and in the evening at Orange Street chapel, Leicester Fields ([London]: Williams and Smith, [1806]) [hereafter: Townsend], p. 18.
16 Townsend, pp. 16, 19, his whole sermon is built on a comparison of Nelson with a biblical martyr of religion (Stephen, whose funeral is treated in Acts, viii, 2); Rev. L. K. Pitt, A Sermon Preached in the Chapel of the British Factory, in St. Petersburg, on Sunday, 15th/22nd December 1805. On Occasion of the late Glorious Victory obtained over the Combined Fleets of France and Spain and on the Lamented Death of Lord Viscount Nelson (St. Petersburg: ['printed in the Academy'], 1805) [hereafter: Pitt], p. 23; another independent minister, John Foxell, seems to have gone even further by drawing 'a contrast between the British Hero and the Saviour of the World', see: The Monthly Review, 49 (1806), 224 (review of a sermon 'preached Nov. 17, 1805, in the Independent Chapel, Penzance, Cornwall; occasioned by the Death of Lord Nelson. Published by request. By the Rev. John Foxell'); similarly William Kingsbury referred to Nelson as 'Captain of our Salvation', see: The Monthly Review, 49 (1806), 336 (review of a sermon entitled 'Victory Mourning': preached at Southampton Nov. 10 1805).
17 Townsend, p. 23; Pitt, p. 24; the Rev. T.L. O'Birne, D. D., Lord Bishop of Meath, seems to have preached similarly, with particular focus on the salvation of Ireland, see: The Monthly Review, 49 (1806), 334-335 (review of a sermon 'preached in the Parish Church of Kells').
18 Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 487-91: '... extract [from a Thanksgiving] Sermon ... [given in] Trinity Chapel, Conduit Street, [by] Rev. J. S. Clarke', 488, 491; similarly: Rev. Andrew Hatt, A Sermon preached in the Cathedral Church of St. Paul ... on Thursday the Fifth Day of December, 1805, Being the Day Appointed by His Majesty, To be observed as a General Thanksgiving to Almighty God, for the late signal and Important victory obtained by his Majesty's ships of war under the command of the Late Vice-Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson (St. Peter's Hill, Doctor's Common [London]: Printed by W. Wilson, 1805), p. 19; Collyer, p. 10 (praising Nelson as an example, apparently without attempting to find an expression of god's will in the recent events; the end of the sermon was lost, however, in the copy that I have consulted); Adkin, pp. 23-24, tried to construct Nelson as an example of obedience to god's will (to
individuals within it who are willing to sacrifice themselves enabled believers in God to see His will manifested on earth and at the same time allow for human acts of sacrifice, if not martyrdom, as the action of a person's own free will.

Now that Nelson was interpreted as a martyr for his nation, his dead body prompted similar veneration to that for a martyred saint. Newspapers recorded the means of its preservation (in spirits) on board the Victory, and the different stages of its journey home. It took some time before the body arrived in Britain, because 'the crew of the Victory [Nelson's flagship] ... manifested the strongest reluctance to part with the precious relic' and thus stopped it from being brought home on a fast-sailing frigate. Interest in the body's whereabouts and treatment rose as it approached England on board Nelson's flagship. The first sighting of the Victory 'off the Lizard' was reported with excitement, even more so the arrival of 'the remains' at Portsmouth, where all 'pendants [were] half-mast high' and 'there was scarcely a person of any description who did not hasten to obtain a sight of the vessel which contained all that was mortal of the hero of their affection'. Nelson's biographers, James Stanier Clarke and John M'Arthur, recorded meticulously, and with the veneration due to a martyr how the body had been treated at Gibraltar: 'His sacred remains were ... wrapped in cotton vestments, and rolled from head to foot with bandages after the ancient mode of embalming, and the body was then placed in a leaden coffin filled with brandy holding a strong solution of camphor and myrrh: this was enclosed in one of wood, and placed in the after part of his Lordship's Cabin'. As a consequence of this careful handling of the body, it was claimed that on arrival off the English coast, 'no variation appeared in the body,
excepting that the lips and the ankles were a little discoloured'. It was said that the
coffin in which he had been transported from Gibraltar 'was cut in pieces, which were
distributed as relics of Saint Nelson - so the gunner of the Victory called them'. After
having been dressed, the supposedly well-preserved body was placed in its luxurious
coffins to be seen no more.

Nelson's coffins attracted great attention in themselves. Following a pattern that
had developed in the eighteenth century, Nelson's body was placed into a flat-lidded
'triple case', which was the most elegant kind of coffin. It comprised 'an inner wooden
coffin, a lead shell and an outer wooden case'. Inside the traditional inner coffin of elm
Nelson was laid into his most famous trophy: the coffin which Captain Hallowell had
presented to Nelson in 1799 and which was made out of the mainmast of L'Orient, the
French flagship that had blown up at the battle of the Nile. While this innermost shell
of Nelson's multi-layered coffin had the greatest emotional value as a relic, the most
sumptuous part of the coffin was naturally the outer wooden case. This was covered with
black velvet which was decorated with patterns in gold. The design of the outer coffin
included national (Britannia and the lion) and naval (dolphins and trophies) imagery as
well as emblems specifically referring to the battle of the Nile (crocodile and sphinx); it
also gave expression to the nation's grief (through reclining female figures).

23 J. White, supplement p.12; similarly: Clarke and M'Arthur, ii, 460 ('the body ... was so well preserved,
that all who had known Lord Nelson, immediately recognized it') and Beatty, p. 73: 'The features were
somewhat tumid, from absorption of the spirit; but on using friction with a napkin, they resumed in a great
degree their natural character'; Beatty's description must be an embellishment, however; at the time of the
arrival in England he had noted: 'it will be right to apprise his lordship [Nelson's brother and successor in
the title] that the features of his departed brother cannot at this distant period from his demise be easily
traced'; additionally the skin would not react being treated with a napkin in the way that Beatty described
so long after death - see: The Nelson Masks, ed. Michael Nash, (Hoylake: Marine Books, 1993) [hereafter:
Nash (1993)], pp. 12 (quotation), 15-16 (view of the forensic pathologist Prof. M. A. Green).
24 Southey (1813), ii, 271-272.
25 J. White, supplement p.12.
27 Nicolas, iii, 89 (Hallowell's letter of 23 May 1799 that accompanied the coffin; Nicolas also comments
how much Nelson liked the present); The Times, 8 November 1805; J. White, supplement p.12; Clarke and
M'Arthur, ii, 460, don't mention the inner elm coffin, but state that the 'mainmast coffin' was 'lined with
satin'.
28 In this it also followed contemporary taste for luxurious coffins, see: Litten, p. 101.
29 Further emblems referred to victory (eagles) and naval supremacy (Neptune), see descriptions in The
Times, 10 January 1806.
decorated with a golden plate 'the same size as the Duke of Gloucester's', done by 'His Majesty's goldsmith'. The whole design attracted so much attention that it was depicted on a print, in newspapers and other publications. Many members of the public were now naturally keen to see it displayed. Ten days before the official lying in state began, 'an immense crowd' assembled at Greenwich to see the coffin with its valued contents arrive.

The public, particularly the inhabitants of London, had been waiting for Nelson's funeral since the news of his death had reached Britain. In the issue that reported the first news about the battle of Trafalgar, *The Times* emphatically declared: 'If ever there were a hero who merited the honours of a public funeral, and a public mourning, it is the pious, the modest, and the gallant Nelson; the darling of the British navy, whose death has plunged a whole nation into the deepest grief.' Since no public announcement to the effect was made known, the same newspaper insisted six days later: 'His Majesty has shewn so much regret for the loss of this gallant Chief, that it is not to be doubted that it will be the Royal wish to have all possible respect shewn to his memory, and to have his remains sepulchred among the most exalted Characters this country ever boasted.' The *Sun* went even further and started to comment on how the funeral procession should be organized. If government had not yet made up its mind, it took the broad hint of public opinion and let it be known what 'His Majesty has been pleased to order' for Nelson's funeral. The solemnities were to consist of three major stages: the lying in state in the Painted Hall of Greenwich Hospital, a procession by water to Whitehall and a

30 *The Times*, 27 November 1806.
31 NMM, PAF 4374, print of 'Lord Nelson's Coffin, with Description of the Ornaments and Devices thereon ...' ([London]: Ackermann [who had designed the fittings together with Holmes & Bidwell – see Litten No. 16, between pp. 142 and 143, 7 January 1806]; see appendix A, plate12; *The Times*, 10 January 1806; J. White, opposite titlepage of the supplement (side-view of the coffin) and between pp. 14 and 15 of the supplement (a view of the lid and the four sides of the coffin).
32 *The Times*, 25 November 1806; Earlier stations had been: the Downs (*The Times*, 21 December 1805) and Sheerness (*The Times*, 24 December 1805), where Nelson's body had been finally put into the outer coffin; the coffin had before been on display 'at Mr. Peddison's, Brewer Street' (*Naval Chronicle*, 14 (1805), 373) or 'at the house of Mr. France, the undertaker' (J. White, supplement p. 16).
33 *The Times*, 7 November 1805.
34 *The Times*, 13 November 1805.
35 The *Sun*, 14 November 1805; quoted in: Jenks, 426-27.
procession by land to St. Paul's Cathedral (in the City of London) where Nelson was to be interred.36 The preparations for the funeral did not proceed smoothly, however, so that when The Times reported two weeks later, at the end of November, that Nelson’s coffin was to be let down directly into the crypt through a hole in its ceiling, instead of ‘down the steps’, it also remarked rather impatiently: ‘We do not learn that any other arrangements are finally determined upon’.37 This aside and the suggestion in another newspaper, that the funeral should include members of Victory’s crew who had fought next to the fallen hero, was shortly afterwards followed by an appeasing official declaration that a ‘detachment of able seamen of the Victory’ would take part in the procession.38 Since no further information about the funeral was made known, The Times took the initiative and presented its own ideas. Observing an ‘uncommon interest in the obsequies of the Hero’ among ‘the lower classes’, The Times stated what it perceived as the current taste about some details of a public funeral. It particularly rejected the old tradition of displaying a waxen figure of the deceased.39 When more arrangements for the different aspects of the funeral were made known, The Times commented on them in a tone of impatience: ‘It is finally determined …’.40 Clearly, the press was suggesting that the public wanted a splendid funeral for Nelson.

As to the official response to the death of Nelson, it did indeed take some time to get going. Nothing is recorded before the date of 13 November, when the Lord Chamberlain was informed about the ‘Royal Wish’ for a public funeral.41 The College of Arms and a Funeral Committee of the City of London started their preparations for the

36 The Times, 15 November 1805.
37 The Times, 30 November 1805; The Times, 7 December 1805, went on to report about the opening of a ‘circular aperture in the centre of St. Paul’s Cathedral, underneath the dome’, as did the Gentleman’s Magazine, 75 (1805), 1168.
38 Jenks, 436, referring to: Bell’s Weekly Messenger, 1 December 1805; The Times, 2 December 1805.
39 The Times, 13 December 1805; an effigy had been displayed, for example, at the lying in state of General Monk, Duke of Albemarle in 1670 (see Litten, pp. 192-193).
40 The Times, 23 December 1805; similarly: The Times, 26 December 1805; the first arrangements (only for the procession on water) had been published in The Times, 21 December 1805.
41 The National Archives of the United Kingdom (formerly: Public Record Office) [hereafter: TNA/PRO], LC 2/37, f. 1.
funeral on 23 December 1805, only a day before Nelson’s body arrived at Greenwich. 42 During the next two and a half weeks there was much to prepare. The City of London arranged for its own participation, mobilized the livery companies for the participation in the procession by water and ensured the necessary order for the processions by water and land. 43 The Office of Works used the days before the procession on land for organizing the gravelling of the streets, 44 while the main task of organizing the procession fell to the College of Arms.

The College of Arms, an institution of medieval origin which gained the authority to regulate ‘outward marks of gentility’ from Henry VIII, has the exclusive right to organize heraldic funerals in England. 45 Street processions and ‘the chivalric element of the service within the church building’ followed long-standing traditions about the display of chivalric emblems, the order of the procession as well as certain symbolic acts. 46 Within this framework there was need and scope for decisions about each individual funeral. In the case of Nelson’s funeral these concerned mainly the choice of participants in and the order of the procession, as well as the form of the funeral car. Sir Isaac Heard, Garter King of Arms, the herald in charge of the arrangements for Nelson’s funeral, caused some friction at the planning stage when he positioned the lord mayor of the city of London behind the royal princes who intended to take part. This in itself was an innovation, because it had been ‘the tradition that royalty did not attend funerals of subjects, however distinguished’. 47 The new lord mayor stated

42 College of Arms, Funeral of Viscount Nelson MSS, fol. 1; City of London Record Office, Misc. Mss. 207.5, Lord Nelson’s Funeral Committee 1805 [unpaginated], note of 23 December 1805.
43 City of London Record Office, Misc. Mss. 207.5, Lord Nelson’s Funeral Committee 1805 [unpaginated], various correspondence; College of Arms, Funeral of Viscount Nelson MSS, fol. 59 (letter to city of London requesting it to ensure there would be no shipping on the river during the procession as well as other measures).
44 TNA/PRO, WORK 6-184/10, ff. 1-13 (correspondence with different parishes through which the procession would pass).
46 Litten, pp. 174-77.
47 John Wolffe, Great Deaths. Grieving, Religion, and Nationhood in Victorian and Edwardian Britain (published for The British Academy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) [hereafter: Wolffe], p. 16; in the event, all seven sons of George III attended the funeral (The Times, 10 January 1806, J. White, supplement p. 45, names them, quoting from the London Gazette).
that only the sovereign had a right to be placed ahead of him. In the end, the king intervened in favour of the lord mayor. The king himself never thought of participating in the procession, and it would take more than a hundred years for a sovereign to attend a funeral; but he would watch the procession from St. James’s Palace.

The most significant elements in Nelson’s funeral procession were, however, the different representatives of his profession. Government and College of Arms chose them to stand out in the procession. The government did so by choosing Admiral Peter Parker, Nelson’s early mentor, as the chief mourner. Traditionally this position, honourably placed in the procession directly behind the dead body, was filled by the successor in the title of the deceased in order to emphasize the ‘continuation of the family’s power’. Timothy Jenks has convincingly argued that by replacing Nelson’s aristocratic successor by a leading member of his profession, Pitt and Hawkesbury (who decided on the chief mourner) tried to stress instead ‘the continuation of Britain’s naval superiority’.

The College of Arms also gave members of the naval profession prominent places in the funeral procession. Instead of the usual group of the deceased’s tenants, the College of Arms decided to include in the procession some Greenwich pensioners and, probably in response to public demand, some members of the crew of the Victory.

Sir Isaac Heard also made sure the funeral car would bear ample reference to Nelson’s professional achievements. He appointed the College of Arms’ herald painter Ange Denis Macquin, a French immigrant, to design the hearse. The most obvious feature of the funeral car was that it was shaped in the form of the Victory. What David Irvin has called ‘contemporary realism’ was only in a minor and easily understandable

---

48 Jenks, 430-31; the conflict had become known to the public, The Times, 1 January 1806.
49 Jenks, 448; Wolfe, p. 16 (‘The tradition that the sovereign in person did not attend the funeral of a subject was maintained for another century, and was only decisively breached by George V’s participation in the interment of the Unknown Warrior in 1920’).
50 Jenks, 427-28; the two ‘supporters to the chief mourner’ and the ‘Six assistant mourners’ were also admirals (J. White, supplement p. 50, quoting from London Gazette).
51 Jenks, 427, 436; for the public demand see above.
52 Wagner, p. 429.
53 The allegory took the form of a personification of fame as a figurehead holding a laurel wreath in her outstretched hand. Apart from heraldic imagery on the sides of the ‘ship’, the emblematic decoration of the funeral car consisted of elements that would be understood by contemporary onlookers: imitations of palm trees (for the battle of the Nile) supported a canopy that was decorated with Nelson’s motto (*Palmam qui meruit ferat*—those who merits it shall bear the palm) and black feathers (since the mid-eighteenth century traditional elements of a hearse). Additional inscriptions on the canopy and on the car itself read ‘Nile’ and ‘Trafalgar’ and they listed the four most famous ships Nelson had taken or sunk. In bearing such imagery, instead of merely intricate heraldic devices, the hearse could appeal to the aesthetics of a wider audience. Jenks has gone so far as to draw a comparison between the ship-shape of the funeral car with ‘pasteboard ship models used at the naumachiae of the London stage and amusement ground’.

As the preparations for the funeral developed, the public began to expect it to be unequalled ‘in point of grandeur and pomp’ in British history and they were keen to witness the event. The newspaper columns filled with advertisements either looking for or offering seats with good views on the processions by water or land. The architect responsible for the fabric of St. Paul’s Cathedral informed the press that the ‘applications for seats are so extremely numerous, that … [he] gave directions for seats to be made to the top of the arches, which was not originally intended’ and that he would create additional seating inside and outside the cathedral, the whole would be ‘upon a larger scale than ever yet was known’. Thousands of people visited St. Paul’s Cathedral to see the preparations for Nelson’s grave; by 6 January 1806 *The Times*
reported that 'the door-money ... has amounted for several days to more than 40l. each day!!' and that it was calculated the cathedral would make in all £ 1,000 from these admissions.\(^59\) The immense public interest in the event can be explained not only by curiosity, but by a desire to be involved in an appropriate tribute to a great naval hero, since it was the public will itself, expressed through newspapers, which had urged that the funeral should be celebrated appropriately long before any details were known about official plans for it. The character of the public's response to the news of the death of Nelson, particularly the sombre mood that dominated the whole country, clearly indicates a strong emotional reaction to Nelson's death. For individuals, it is well known that they need a mourning-reaction in order to adapt 'to the loss of the object, as well as the readjustment to an external environment wherein this object no longer exists in reality'.\(^60\) The mourning helps 'to detach the survivors' memories and hopes from the dead'.\(^61\) Considering how much Nelson had become part of British national consciousness before the battle of Trafalgar, how recent his last feted visit to Britain (particularly London) had been, how many hopes had been connected with his last mission and – last, but not least – how indebted the nation felt for his last great victory, it appears likely that the first reaction to his death as well as the extreme interest in his funeral were expressions of collective national grief.

The intense public grief at the news of Nelson's death is also reflected in a massive production of mourning imagery. Mourning figures, as displayed already in the illuminations in immediate response to the news of Nelson's death, became staple pictures, in different media. Prints of all kinds of quality showed mourning female figures or 'Britannia consecrating the Ashes of the Immortal Nelson'.\(^62\) Of the very simple and affordable glass pictures alone fourteen different designs have survived that represent the public mourning. They all follow one pattern which consists of a monument to Nelson (plinth with bust or portrait of Nelson) flanked with mourning

\(^{59}\) *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 75 (1805), 1168, gave a description of the grave in preparation.

\(^{60}\) Pollock, 343.

\(^{61}\) Pollock, 344, quoting Siegmund Freud.

\(^{62}\) McCarthy, pp. xix, 89, 95; NMM PAD 3974, PAF 4351, PAF 4361, PAG 8671 (also: Royal Naval Museum 1952/64), PAH 7315.
figures, often weeping sailors. Similar motifs can be found on ceramic items, textiles and other pieces, such as jewellery, glasses and boxes. The subject was obviously so close to people's hearts that it even extended to more personal items. A piece of needlework was designed showing a monument 'sacred to the Memory of Nelson. Slain Oct' 21 1805' under a weeping willow. Cabinetmakers even produced mourning furniture with a black line inlaid level with the wooden surfaces. A caricature depicted two sailors drowning their grief in spirits, one of them explaining: 'this glass that I have put in mourning with my black silk handkerchief, is his dear departed Honor Lord Nelson, it was just now fill'd with grog - but the spirit is gone, - I have however fill'd the glass, I have in my hand with the same spirit, and this is his Honor Lord Collingwood – so here's to his Honor, and all his brave Tars, and the memory of the Immortal Hero of the Nile'.

The public interest in mourning Nelson's death naturally found its strongest expression in the different stages of the funeral itself. The event attracted people from

---


64 For examples see appendix A, plates 15 and 16; McCarthy, pp. 102 (no. 80, a pottery plate), 106 (no. 166, a locket), 122 (nos. 98-99, metal boxes with mourning imagery), 125-126 (no. 113, enamel box showing a mourning sailor at a monument to Nelson), 148 (no. 139, a handkerchief imprinted from a roll with among others a mourning figure of Britannia, taken from a print by Ackerman, compare pp. 94, 95), 160 (nos. 165 and 166 mourning jewel and locket), 184 (no. 215, mug, as in the NMM, but with a ceramic frog inside to surprise the drinker), 185 (no. 216, tea service showing History and Britannia mourning at Nelson's tomb), 203 (no. 249, tray); *Nelson. An Illustrated History*, ed. Pieter van der Merwe (London: Laurence King, 1995), illustrations on pp. 131 (mourning jewellery for Nelson), 136 (bone domino box that shows a British sailor mourning at a bust of Nelson); Nelson Museum Monmouth, P92 (tin box with sailor mourning 'Immortal Nelson'); Rina Prentice, *A Celebration of the Sea. The Decorative Art Collections of the National Maritime Museum* ([London]: National Maritime Museum, 1994) [hereafter: Prentice], no. 137 (two jugs showing Britannia mourning at Nelson's tomb, a mug using the Ackerman-print), between pp. 92 and 93; John and Jennifer May, *Commemorative Pottery 1780-1900*. A Guide for Collectors (London: Heinemann, 1972) [hereafter: May/May], p. 100 (nos. m and p); more pottery: NMM AAA 4861, 4930-4933, 4937, 4940, 4945-4946; May (1995), 81-101, 85 ('A tidal wave of mourning swept the country and was commemorated in an immense diversity of pottery'); a popular patch box motif showed the mourning Britannia at a monument to Nelson: 'Mourn England mourn grim Death – As tore thy Darling NELSON away' (NMM OBJ 0079, 0128, 0129, 0141).


66 *A Sailors Observation on the Lamented Death of Lord Nelson* by Woodward, engraved by Rowlandson (London: R. Ackermann, 3 December 1805), McCarthy, p. 93, no. 70.
different parts of the country. The rush to see the coffin in the Painted Hall at Greenwich surpassed all expectations. *The Times* reported that so many people pressed to see the lying-in-state that those who got into the hall were 'pushed onward with such rapidity, as to afford none of them the opportunity of having more than a short and transient glance of the solemn object of their curiosity'. The same account estimated that 'above twenty thousand persons were unable to gratify themselves'. The situation on the second day of the three-day lying-in-state, though supported by 'Volunteers', was no better: 'the rushing torrent of the multitude was so impetuous, that ... many were crushed in a dreadful manner, in the competition for entrance ... others were beaten down by the impetuosity of those who rushed forward from behind, and very severely trampled – in many cases, almost to death. Shoes, pattens, muffes, tippets, coat sleeves, skirts of pelices and gowns, without number were despoiled from their owners, and trampled in the mud.' *The Times* insisted, however, that inside the Hall the best order prevailed and the 'distinctions of rank were forgotten in the general avidity to pay the last melancholy honours to the Hero's remains'. It was only on the third, and last, day of the lying-in-state that, with the help of 'the King's Life Guards', some order could be established in the crowds that pressed forward for admission to the Painted Hall, although even then some 'Ladies ... were so severely squeezed, that ... [they] fainted'. Within the Hall only now was the pall taken from the coffin to display it completely and the six mourners grouped parallel to the coffin facing towards it, so that 'the effect was much more solemn and impressive'. The last act of the lying-in-state was an exclusive visit by the seamen and marines of the *Victory* who had been chosen to take part in the procession. 'After this part of the ceremony, the doors and gates were closed, and an immense concourse of people, extending almost from Greenwich to London, were under

---

67 *Glasgow Herald*, 13 January 1806: ‘The number of strangers who have arrived in London to witness this solemnity is immense’.

68 *The Times*, 6 January 1806.

69 *The Times*, 7 January 1806; *Naval Chronicle*, 15 (1806), 49-50.

70 *The Times*, 8 January 1806.
the necessity of returning, ungratified with the sight for which they had so anxiously pressed forward.\footnote{Naval Chronicle, xv (1806), 52.}

The procession by water was the first occasion for the wider public to see the coffin and large numbers seized this opportunity. The \textit{Gentleman's Magazine} described how the ‘decks, yards, rigging, and masts of the numerous ships on the river, were all crowded with spectators; and the number of ladies was immense’.\footnote{Gentleman's Magazine, 76 (1806), 66.} Like the remark in \textit{The Times} about the ‘Ladies’ who struggled for admission to the lying-in-state, it appears that the high proportion of female participants from a respectable social background was regarded as unusual for such large crowds. Perhaps women of elegant society felt more encouraged to participate in something that could be expected to develop peacefully and which could be interpreted as an emotional rather than a political statement. \textit{The Times} remarked about the ‘immense’ crowd: ‘their conduct every where marked their affection for the departed hero’.\footnote{The Times, 9 January 1806.} An eye-witness who had mingled with the crowds wrote to a friend about the shared feelings among those assembled: ‘Every post of vantage wherever the procession could be seen was swarming with living beings, all wearing mourning, the very beggars having a bit of crape on their arms’.\footnote{Richard Davey, \textit{A History of Mourning} (Jay's: London, [n. d.]) [hereafter: Davey], p. 75, quoting from a contemporary and inedited private letter'.} The aquatic procession reached its climax with the landing of Nelson’s coffin at Whitehall stairs. The effect was not only underlined by the playing of Handel’s ‘Dead March in Saul’, but also by the sudden appearance of a ‘tremendous hailstorm’ that finished as suddenly as it had appeared, as soon as the body was landed.\footnote{Gentleman’s Magazine, 76 (1806), 66.} In Whitehall, where it was possible to get a closer view of the coffin, the ‘windows, as well as the streets ... were crowded, and even the front wall of the Admiralty, and the roofs of the houses, were crowded with spectators’.\footnote{The Times, 9 January 1806.}

At the Admiralty, Nelson’s body was to stay during the night before 9 January 1806, the day of the procession by land to, and funeral service in, St. Paul’s Cathedral.

\footnotetext[71]{Naval Chronicle, xv (1806), 52.}
\footnotetext[72]{Gentleman's Magazine, 76 (1806), 66.}
\footnotetext[73]{The Times, 9 January 1806.}
\footnotetext[74]{Richard Davey, \textit{A History of Mourning} (Jay's: London, [n. d.]) [hereafter: Davey], p. 75, quoting from a contemporary and inedited private letter'.}
\footnotetext[75]{Gentleman’s Magazine, 76 (1806), 66.}
\footnotetext[76]{The Times, 9 January 1806.}
Though it had been announced that there would not be another lying-in-state, many people stayed until late at night and waited from the early hours of the morning in the hope to get a glimpse of the coffin, either inside the Admiralty or on its first appearance.\textsuperscript{77} Along the route of the funeral procession crowds started assembling from six o’clock in the morning. According to one eye-witness, ‘while it was still dark hundreds more than what are usually seen at mid-day, were assembled … It would be impossible to convey an adequate idea of the multitude of persons who crowded from all quarters of town and country to witness this interesting spectacle.’\textsuperscript{78} Even those who had found places at the beginning of the processional route had to wait until twelve o’clock for the procession to begin\textsuperscript{79} and even longer for the funeral car to appear. When it finally left the Admiralty, the coffin was ceremonially covered by a pall. This disappointed the waiting spectators so much that at their urgent request, the coffin was exposed to general view and remained so during the rest of the procession.\textsuperscript{80} The effect that it produced on the avidly-waiting crowds is famously described in Lady Bessborough’s words:

\begin{quote}
Amongst many touching things the silence of that immense Mob was not the least striking; they had been very noisy. I was in a House in Charing Cross, which look’d over a mass of heads. The moment the Car appear’d which bore the body, you might have heard a pin fall, and without any order to do so, they all took off their hats. I cannot tell you the effect this simple action produc’d; it seem’d one general impulse of respect beyond any thing that could have been said or contriv’d.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

Less known is the account of someone who witnessed the same event from within the crowd and thus could also report on what was said: ‘As it [the funeral car] passed, all uncovered, and many wept. I heard a great deal said among the people about “poor Emma”, and some wonder whether she will get a pension or

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{77} \textit{The Times}, 9 January 1806.
\item \textsuperscript{78} J. White, supplement pp. 39-40.
\item \textsuperscript{79} J. White, supplement p. 42, quoting from the \textit{London Gazette}.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Jenks, 440; the coffin was only again covered with the pall, when it was taken from the car in front of St. Paul’s Cathedral (\textit{Gentleman’s Magazine}, \textit{76} (1806), 69.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Granville, ii, 155.
\end{itemize}
It appears that Nelson had an appeal among the wider public not only as a hero, but also as a lover.

The actual interment was celebrated with a grand service at St. Paul’s Cathedral. The Cathedral had filled shortly after it opened at seven o’clock in the morning, but ‘the interest was so deep, that no uneasiness whatever appeared to be produced by the time which it became necessary to wait, exposed to a great severity of cold’. The impressively staged service included music by Handel and Purcell, as well as music composed for the occasion. It also used new techniques for illuminating the cathedral and for lowering the coffin into the crypt by a mechanism, invisible to the spectators. While the body was deposited, an anthem by Handel was sung, finishing with: ‘His body is bury’d in peace. But his name liveth evermore’; an expression which might be interpreted as referring to Nelson as well as to Christ. As soon as the body was laid to rest, ‘the troops being drawn up in Moorfield, the Artillery fired their guns, and the Infantry gave vollies, by corps, three times repeated’. After this climax to the funeral, Sir Isaac Heard of the College of Arms made the traditional proclamation of the ‘Styles’ of the deceased to which he added an individual ending: ‘and the hero who, in the moment of Victory, fell covered with mortal Glory! Let us humbly trust, that he is now raised to bliss ineffable, and to a glorious immortality!’ After another heraldic tradition, the breaking and throwing into the grave of staves, had been completed, the men from the Victory, gave the scene a final personal touch. They were supposed to lay

---

82 Davey, p. 77, quoting from ‘a contemporary and inedited private letter’; it needs to be kept in mind that by the time of the funeral Nelson’s last codicil to his will, in which he left Lady Hamilton as a legacy to his country, was not yet publicly known.
83 *Naval Chronicle*, 15 (1806), 225.
85 J. White, supplement p. 63, quoting from the *London Gazette*: ‘the vast space under the dome was illuminated for the first time since its construction to a sufficient degree for the solemn purposes of the occasion …[by a hanging construction with] about 130 patent lamps’, supplement pp. 63-64.
86 J. White, supplement pp. 64-65, quoting from the *London Gazette*; for the composer see: Page, p. 32.
87 *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 76 (1806), 71.
flags of the *Victory* into the grave, but ‘desirous of retaining some mementoes of their
great and favourite commander, tore off a considerable part of the largest flag, of which
most, if not all, of them, obtained a small portion’.89 ‘The ceremony was finally
concluded a little before six o’clock, but the church was not entirely vacated till past
nine’.90

After the funeral, which had been celebrated with great order throughout
London,91 Nelson’s grave became a great attraction for visitors. So far the coffin had
merely been sunk into its walled resting place and had not yet been covered by the
sarcophagus. Since, moreover, the hole through which the coffin had been lowered into
the crypt was not yet closed, spectators could look down onto the coffin; a practice
described in a letter to the editor of *The Times* as a ‘disgraceful exhibition’.92 Others
who chose to ignore the exhibitionist element of Nelson’s grave wrote about it in an
idealizing fashion: ‘the tomb of the Hero is the temple of his triumph’.93 Another
attraction was the funeral car, which was at first exhibited for two days in the King’s
Mews (later replaced by Trafalgar Square) and then conveyed to Greenwich Hospital.94

The funeral prompted a boom in the printing business. A part of the printed
output about the funeral consisted of accounts of the event, mostly filling several
columns in newspapers,95 but also pages in separate publications.96 Linda Colley states

89 J. White, supplement p. 65, quoting from the *London Gazette*.; this became a very popular scene of the
funeral: *The Times*, 10 January 1806; *Naval Chronicle*, 15 (1806), 333; Southey (1813), ii, 272.
90 *Naval Chronicle*, 15 (1806), 333.
91 *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 76 (1806), 71.
92 *The Times*, 21 January 1806; a poem also commented on the ‘indecorous circumstance that his coffin
should be made a mercenary object of exhibition, and shewn like the elephant at Exeter ‘Change for a
shilling’; see review in: *The Monthly Magazine*, 49 (1806), 96.
93 From ‘Apostrophe to the Shade of Nelson, By John Thelwall, ... Extracted from his Trident of Albion’,
*Naval Chronicle*, 15 (1806), 297.
94 *The Times*, 13 January 1806; *Naval Chronicle*, 15 (1806), 333; Jenks, 453: ‘Heard “benevolently” gave
the funeral car to Greenwich Hospital on the understanding that proceeds from its display would benefit
the Marine Society’.
95 Even newspapers as far afield as Scotland dedicated many columns to the different stages of the event:
*Glasgow Herald* [which was published twice a week], 10, 13 and 17 January 1806; *Caledonian Mercury
[published three times a week], 9, 11 and 13 January 1806.
96 Apart from the sources already referred to, for example: Archibald Duncan, *A Correct Narrative of the
Funeral of Horatio Lord Viscount Nelson* (London: James Cundee, 1806); [Anon. ‘By Authority’], *An
Official and Circumstantial Detail of the Grand National Obsequies at the Public Funeral of Britain’s
Darling Hero, the Immortal Nelson* (London: T. Tegg and T. Hughes, 1806); [John Fairburn], *Fairburn’s
Edition of the Funeral of Admiral Lord Nelson* (London: John Fairburn, [1806]); [Scales’s Edition], *A
that 'when Bell's Weekly Messenger devoted a special issue to Nelson's funeral in 1806, its sales soared from the customary 6,000 to over 14,000'. Other printed works on offer to the mourning public included prints of the coffin, armorial bearings, funeral barge and car, as well as different stages of the funeral. The Naval Chronicle gave a print of the funeral car opposite the title-page of its volume for the first half of 1806 and The Times dedicated nearly one whole page of its four pages on 10 January 1806 to illustrations and descriptions of the funeral car and coffin. Glass pictures which were produced in great numbers for less well-off customers, instead of focusing on the coffin with its emblematical decorations, showed the funeral barge and the funeral car, elements that anybody present at the funeral could have seen, even from a distance.

Most varied are pictures that include the celebration of the funeral, particularly the processions, because they also give some idea of the public reaction to what is going on. In his Reading Popular Prints 1790-1870, B. E. Maidment distinguishes between four categories in which a public event is being represented: the heroic, spectacle, the Correct Account of the Funeral Procession of Lord Nelson by Water and Land: also, a description of the manner of his lying in state at Greenwich; and the whole of the Ceremonies performed in St. Paul's Cathedral: Together with His Lordship's Will. (London: J. Scales, [1806]); [Anon.], Authentic Particulars of the Last Moments of Adml Lord Nelson, including an accurate account of the Public Funeral Ceremonies; the body lying in state, and the summary of his will ([London]: J. Roach, 1806)].

98 For example: NMM PAF 4370, PAF 4374, PAD 3930 (a German print); Clarke, opp. p. 478.
99 For example. NMM PAD 3993, PAD 3994, PAD 3996, PAD 3998 (with description in French), PAD 4002, PAH 7300.
100 For example: NMM PAD 3935, PAD 3936, PAD 3937, PAD 4376; Museum of London [hereafter: MoL], A 8826.
101 For example: NMM PAD 3938, PAD 3939, PAD 3940, PAD 3942 (German print of 'Admiral Nelson's Leichenwagen'), PAD 3944, PAD 3946 (Dutch print of 'De Lijk-Koets van Lord Nelson'), PAD 3948, PAD 3949, PAD 3950, PAD 3951, PAD 3952, PAF 4372, PAF 4369, PAH 7303, PAH 7307; MoL A 6564, 22045, 22046; a representation can even been found engraved into glass (see McCarthy, p. 103, no. 82).
102 Apart from those discussed below, examples are: (1) for the lying in state: NMM PAD 3928, PAH 7321, PAH 7322, PAH 6244; (2) for the procession by water: NMM PAF 4367, PAH 6241; (3) for the procession by land: NMM PAD 3932, PAH 6242, PAH 6247; such an image can even be found printed on a piece of linen: Prentice, p. 86, no. 131; (4) for the funeral service: NMM PAD 3929, PAH 6245, PAH 6246; the processions by water and land are also represented on the handkerchief mentioned above (McCarthy, p. 148, no. 139, see fn. 64).
Elements of most of these categories can be found in the prints of Nelson’s funeral. The heroic, reflected in impressive orderliness and regularity, can be observed particularly in pseudo-static stages of the funeral. For example, in a print that shows the arrival of the funeral car in front of St. Paul’s Cathedral, where the whole scenery appears more like an architectural arrangement than a moment of action. Most of the spectators, indicated by little dots representing their heads, appear lined up like the soldiers who ensured the central space in front of the Cathedral was kept free. Even people watching from the windows of the surrounding houses appear in orderly double rows and the masses in front of the houses are regularly spread out. Apart from a horse in the foreground, nothing seems to be moving. Nobody is struggling to get the coffin from the hearse; it just stands there like the monument to Queen Anne, apparently immobile and immovable. In its statuesque layout the print conveys, even to the observer of today, the impression of something distinctly grand and weighty. The contemporary owner of the print had a souvenir of a heroic moment in which he himself may have participated.

Prints of the procession by water tend to stress much more the element of the spectacle. As the coffin is far removed from the onlookers’ viewpoint, the spectators often fill the foreground of a view of the event. Edward Orme chose to represent what he may have regarded as a representation of his customers: elegant society; ladies and gentlemen in their Sunday dress walk leisurely along the riverside with the procession by water unfolding like a pretty scenic element in front of the skyline of London. There is only a small group of less elegant people on the right of the picture, where they appear more as decorative elements than realistic parts of the scene, because their view of the procession by water is blocked by buildings. J. T. Smith, on the contrary, showed

---


105 *Funeral Procession of the late Lord Viscount Nelson from the Admiralty, to St. Paul’s, London, on the 9th of January 1806*, engraved by M. Merigot, from a drawing made by C. A. Pugin during the time of the procession ([n. pub., n. pl., n. d.]), NMM PAH 7329; see appendix A, plate 7; this print forms part of a series of four after Pugin which picture the lying in state, the procession on water and (after the print discussed here) the service in St. Paul’s Cathedral.

106 *Lord Nelson’s Funeral Procession by Water, from Greenwich Hospital to White-Hall, Jan’ 8th 1806. Taken from Bank-side, Exhibiting a View of St. Paul’s, London Bridge etc.*, painted by Turner, engraved
from a similar perspective (the procession in front of the city of London with St. Paul’s Cathedral depicted) crowds of ordinary people set in a typical port scene; around a crane on the shore and on barges they look at the procession, holding up their children; a scene that reminds us much more of the written contemporary accounts than Orme’s elegant engraving. 107 G. Thompson focused even more on the spectators; instead of choosing an impressive background, he gave a view of Blackfriars bridge with onlookers standing behind and even in front of the balustrade at the moment Nelson’s funeral barge passes underneath. 108

Some months later, when demand for prints of Nelson’s funeral was still buoyant, G. Thompson dared to introduce an element of caricature to the sombre scene by picturing a pickpocket at work while the spectators’ attention is drawn to the funeral car. 109 Perhaps this new approach to the event indicates that the need to express grief at the death of Nelson was diminishing. The funeral as a central part of the mourning process had helped to relieve the public’s sense of grief. It was now becoming an historic event in which many ordinary people had participated and of which they wished to have a souvenir. If anything related to the funeral was pictured as sublime, defined by Maidment as employing ‘symbolic, allusive representational traditions’, 110 it was the representation of Nelson’s sarcophagus in the crypt of St. Paul’s Cathedral. This, however, was published on a print only many years after the funeral. 111 In general the

by J. Clark & H. Merke (London: Edward Orme, 1 March 1806), NMM PAH 7326, this print is coloured; see appendix A, plate 8.
107 View (drawn & etched by J. T. Smith, ...) from the House of W. Tunnard, Esq. On the Bankside adjoining the site of Shakespeare’s Theatre on Wednesday the 8th January 1806, when the remains of the great Admiral Lord Nelson were conveyed from Greenwich to Whitehall; ... (London: J. T. Smith, 15 February 1806), NMM PAF4378; see appendix A, plate 9.
108 A View of the Funeral Procession by Water from Greenwich to Whitehall Stairs Jan’8, 1806, with the body of that great Naval Hero Admiral Lord Nelson ... (London: G. Thompson, 27 March 1804), NMM PAH7325; see appendix A, plate 10.
109 [Nelson’s funeral], engraved by G. Thompson (London: [G. Thompson], 27 June 1806), Guildhall Library; see appendix A, plate 11.
110 Maidment, p. 37.
111 Sarcophagus, under which the body of Lord Nelson is enclosed, in the Crypt of St. Paul’s Cathedral, Drawn and Engraved by John Concy (London: Lackington et al, London, 1 September 1817), NMM PAF 4368; see appendix A, plate 13; View of the Crypts S Paul’s Cathedral (1817), NMM PAD 3923; St. Paul’s Cathedral. The Crypt; Monument to Admiral Viscount Nelson under the dome — for Winkles’s Cathedrals ... Plate 27 (London: Effingham, 1835), NMM PAD 3921; another print in the collection of the NMM (PAD 3922) in undated.
need for symbolic expression was searched for in the treatment of Nelson himself, which is a field that will be explored in chapter twelve of this part.

Beyond mere pictorial representations people who had missed parts or all the funeral wished to have a similar experience and so efforts were made to re-enact the event by different means. The Foundling's Hospital performed the programme of the funeral service. In Bristol the day of the funeral itself was celebrated from 'early in the morning ... [when] the funeral knell began tolling, which continued throughout the day'; 'on the Exchange, where three or four thousand persons were assembled [t]he military band of the North-Gloucester Militia appeared in full dress uniform, with mourning, ... [and] performed a solemn dirge'; 'the Gong from the Theatre ... was sounded, at intervals, by two young men dressed as sailors'. The Glasgow Herald pointed out that 'though prevented, by local situation, from bearing our part in this enviable tribute, the citizens of Glasgow have still the means of evincing the liberal spirit for which they are eminent' by subscribing to a Nelson monument. When the foundation stone to the monument was laid in the summer of the same year, this was celebrated with a procession and service, as if in imitation of the funeral. An "exact copy" of the coffin was exhibited at the Assembly Room in Lincoln, in order to "gratify" country families', and in Hull a businessman even re-built the whole lying-in-state. Some theatres presented entire re-enactments of the funeral processions with 'moving figures', though the performance in the Manchester Theatre failed when the figures, representing the participants, fell from the stage and caused laughter among the spectators and a rebuke from a reviewer as 'improper'.

112 Russell (Organist), The Burial Service and Anthem, performed at the Funeral of Lord Viscount Nelson, Duke of Bronti, At Saint Paul's Cathedral; Composed by Mr. Henry Purcell, Dr. Croft, and Dr. Greene; and Adapted for the Use of the Children of the Foundling Hospital, by Mr. Russell, Organist (London: Luke Hansard, January 1806).
113 The Times, 17 January 1806.
114 Glasgow Herald, 15 January and 4 August 1806.
116 Nelson Museum, S12 [advertisement for the 'Representation' in the Theatre Royal Covent Garden]; G. Russell, p. 84.
The significance of the funeral has probably been more contested among historians than among contemporaries. Linda Colley assumes that for 'many social conservatives, placing a premium on service to the nation was opening the door dangerously wide to a meritocracy'. Gillian Russell goes even further by claiming that 'George III and his placemen had every reason to be uneasy about the political implications of Nelson's popularity, especially its suggestion that men of vision and aptitude were more entitled to respect than those who possessed titles and property'. Jenks, in contrast, maintains that the funeral, instead of antagonizing, had a harmonizing effect by bringing different parts of society together in the participation of a single event. He rests his argument not only on the fact that the crowds remained peaceful and respectful, but also on the conscious attempts made by the organizers of the funeral to accommodate within the proceedings some details desired by the public. Examples of this are the inclusion of some members of Victory's crew in the procession and the decision to take the pall from the coffin during the procession on land. Beyond such specific elements of the actual funeral, Jenks has also shown that the government was considering creating a new military order that could accommodate more candidates than the Order of the Bath. After Nelson's death the projected 'Naval and Military Order of Merit' was planned to initiate a tradition of 'loyalist pageantry' on the anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar. Ideas such as this of rewarding merit clearly support the idea that the British governing elite regarded Nelson's success at the battle of Trafalgar and his funeral as a harmonizing element for British society.

Nelson's funeral, however, primarily afforded an outlet for the nation's grief at the death of Nelson. It was more a means of overcoming a national shock and paying

117 Colley (1986), 106; on 107 Colley argues that 'the College of Arms was instructed to omit from the hearse any indication that the dead hero had been a peer of the realm: the emblematic emphasis was to be solely on his naval victories on behalf of the British nation' – I have not found any trace of such an instruction; Nelson's Viscount's coronet was carried in the procession and laid onto 'the body' at the end of the service (see J. White, supplement p. 51) and his ranks were read, following the tradition of a heraldic funeral, over the grave.

118 G. Russell, p. 81.


120 Jenks, 431-33.
public tribute to a great hero, than an expression of a political point-of-view. How this strong emotional response was subsequently exploited and transformed thereafter will be the subject of the following chapters.
CHAPTER ELEVEN
Monuments to Nelson

Probably the most enduring reaction to the death of Nelson was the building of monuments to his memory. In that respect Nelson's death had happened at a convenient point in time, because public monuments became extremely widespread across Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Before that, monuments had been mainly produced as sepulchral architecture or sculpture. The most common exceptions were a few monuments to monarchs. Other monuments, such as the columns to commemorate the Duke of Marlborough or the fire of London, were extremely rare. This situation changed with the Napoleonic War which created a novel interest in other public figures than the monarch and an interest in warriors in particular. As a response to his spectacular success at Trafalgar, Nelson was among the first to be commemorated. This chapter examines, what motivated people in the first half of the nineteenth century to build monuments to Nelson, what influenced them in their choice of form such monuments should take and finally how these monument were used and regarded by the public, once they had been erected.

I
Preparations for Monuments

When news of the battle of Trafalgar reached Britain and Ireland in November 1805 a spontaneous monument to the memory of Nelson was erected in Ireland, where a Captain of the Navy organized a crude arch to be erected.¹ Three years later ironworkers from an iron smelting centre in Scotland erected a monolith on a hill to commemorate Nelson.² But these early monuments were the exception. More common were planned monuments to celebrate the career and achievements of the great admiral.

² Gentleman's Magazine, 80 (1810), 461.
Although most of the projects for erecting a monument to Admiral Nelson were started in direct reaction to the news of the battle of Trafalgar, they were usually the product of extensive deliberations. This was necessary because most of the monuments were erected by public subscription. Only two monuments were erected directly at the public expense; one, voted for by Parliament, was erected in St. Paul's Cathedral, while the other was erected by the City of London in its Guildhall. Both monuments were thus indoors, which made them less accessible to the public. The fact that St. Paul’s Cathedral was as much a building of art as a church, and levied an entrance fee, was widely criticized. It encouraged the production of a caricature depicting a sailor with his own monument to Nelson in his garden and a scroll stating: ‘Every person who wishes to see the Monuments in St. Paul’s must pay Twopence!! Sailors should have a free admission’. Britain did not adopt the French system of extravagant state patronage and although Parliament voted the generous sum of £300,000 in 1816 to pay for monuments to commemorate the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo, and it opened a competition for the designs of these, it never actually spent the money on any monument. More than twenty years later, when the subscription for Nelson’s Monument in Trafalgar Square had just been opened, a designer protested:

A monument erected by domestic affection, friendship, or admiration, by subscribers, does not become a public or national monument, merely because it is set up in a church or a square, or other conspicuous place. It manifests only the affection, &c of those who erected it, be their number great or small. A monument raised by the state records the approbation of a whole nation.

But public opinion did not generally agree with this view. A subscriber proudly stated:

‘The pillars of Trajan and of Antonine were erected to gratify vain-glorious conquerors,

---

5 Andrew Robertson, The Parthenon, Adapted to the Purpose of a National Monument, To Commemorate the Victories of the Late War: Proposed to be Erected in Trafalgar Square, or Hyde Park (Picadilly [London]: J. Hatchard and Son, 1838) [hereafter: Robertson], p. 8.
while ours will owe its origin to public gratitude and veneration for the best and bravest of our Admirals'.

Indeed the subscription committees did make every effort to show that their projects were a public affair. They gave ‘fellow-subjects of every situation, an opportunity of contributing to the commemoration of a name equally dear to all ranks’. This broad popular approach was also reflected in the processions that were organized to lay the foundation stone or to unveil the completed monument. In such processions local dignitaries and subscribers took part along with groups of ordinary sailors and volunteers. Even when locally influential groups, such as the Freemasons in Glasgow, took part, they were joined by the general public and the ‘concourse of people in the Streets, at the Windows, and in the Green was immense’.

There were several reasons for such manifestations of public interest in monuments to Admiral Nelson, the most obvious being the desire to honour the memory of Nelson himself. This motivation was naturally strong in members of the navy. Those who had fought at Trafalgar dedicated a monument of their own on a hill near Portsmouth ‘to the memory of Lord Viscount Nelson ... to perpetuate his triumph and their regret’. It was not only members of the Royal Navy who manifested this kind of personal regard for Nelson; others simply signed the subscription list for Nelson’s Column in Trafalgar Square as ‘an admirer’ or ‘a friend to merit’. The desire to do an ‘act of justice to his memory’ or even to ‘strengthen national devotion’ was also

---

7 Nelson’s Pillar, A Description of the Pillar, With a List of Subscribers. To which is added, the amount of the funds, and the account of the expenditure thereof (Dublin: Published by order of the Committee, 1846) [hereafter: Nelson’s Pillar] 7.
8 Nelson’s Pillar 14, and Glasgow Herald 4 August 1806.
10 Statement of Subscriptions to the Memorial of the Achievements of the late Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson ([n. pl.: n. pub.], 1 January 1841) [hereafter: Statement of Subscriptions], 33.
11 Statement of Subscriptions 12.
expressed in the choice of the anniversaries of Nelson’s famous battles as dates for the laying of the foundation stone of a monument or for its unveiling.  

Thus, reminding the public of Nelson’s achievements could also serve to present him as an example to ‘encourage those who are entering on the same career’. The often declared aim ‘to stimulate others to emulate his bright example’ could also influence the choice of the site for the monument: ‘Whatever plan is adopted, . . . [the monument] will, no doubt, be erected in the most frequented part of the place, the oftener to excite emulation in others . . . being reminded of a character which holds out so many objects of imitation - as a warrior, a christian, and a man!’ Others had the more specific aim of using Nelson to encourage other sailors and maintained that no site was ‘better adapted to the monument of a naval commander than a conspicuous station by the sea; where it may both serve as a land-mark, and animate the valour, while it catches the attention of the sailor’.  

The monuments to Nelson were also meant to prove that exertions and valour of the kind displayed by the great admiral paid off. One of the declared aims of the monument to Nelson in Glasgow was ‘to rouse the youth of succeeding generations, by the view of these lasting honours, that are the reward of distinguished professional genius and heroic enterprise’. It was claimed that ‘Honour and renown are what

---

13 Battle of St. Vincent: Laying of foundation stone in Dublin, 1808; Battle of the Nile: Laying of foundation stone in Glasgow, 1806, meeting to discuss a Nelson monument in London, 1838; Battle of Trafalgar: Laying of foundation stone in Edinburgh, 1806, and opening to the public of monument in Dublin, 1809.

14 Matthew Cotes Wyatt, Prospectus of a Model to the Memory of Lord Nelson, intended to adorn the habitations of those who appreciate his services (London: [n. pub.], 1808) [hereafter: Wyatt].

15 Corporation of London Record Office Misc Ms 207.5 “Battle of Trafalgar”, Common Council [hereafter: CLRO Misc Ms 207.5], 26 November 1805; see also: Edinburgh City Archive, McLeod Bundle 10. Bay A, no folio number, Description of the Monument intended to be erected on the Calton Hill, Edinburgh, to the Memory of Lord Nelson [hereafter: ECA Description]; and William Roscoe, Lord Nelson’s Monument, erected in the area of the Liverpool Exchange Buildings: completed October XXI. MDCCCLXXIII ([n. pl.: n. pub., n. d., 1813?]) [hereafter: Roscoe] one page only.

16 Langford, ii, 304, quoting from Aris’s Birmingham Gazette 19 November 1805.

17 [Anon., James Elmes], ‘A critical Examination of the Architecture of the Nelson Column erected at Yarmouth, 1817-1819’, Annals of the Fine Arts, 4 (1820), 511-543 [hereafter: ‘critical Examination’] (535); see also: W. Wood, 10, who was even more specific in proposing to erect the monument near a ‘military seminary from which we may justly expect a long continued emanation of equal skill and bravery’, 5.

18 Glasgow Herald 9 December 1805 and again 11 August 1806.
soldiers and sailors fight for, next to the defence of their country'. 19 Prints of designs for monuments to Nelson revealed a more material kind of 'rewards' for exceptional service: some of them showed on the left a list of Nelson's naval achievements and on the right a list of his 'rewards' which listed pensions and, among other prizes, several 'gold box[es]' .

More common than intricate didactic considerations was the desire of cities and their citizens to hand 'down to the latest posterity a memorial of their gratitude for his unexampled services to his King and Country'. 21 Such monumental gratitude to Nelson had quite a real significance for some of the contributors. Nelson's pursuit of the Franco-Spanish fleet across the Atlantic and back again, before the battle of Trafalgar, was widely interpreted as the preservation of the British West Indian Islands. The 'grateful inhabitants of Barbados' consequently inscribed their monument as 'a tribute of esteem, admiration and gratitude to their illustrious Deliverer' 22 and in less directly concerned Edinburgh it was recognized that Nelson was 'our great hero, to whom the Country owes such signal obligations'. 23

It was sometimes admitted that these obligations were for material gain. A Glasgow newspaper stressed the economic interests that Nelson had helped to protect: 

_We have shared largely in the benefits procured to the nation by the vigour of his arm, and by the terror of his name. - We have had our gainings from the established security of the ocean. The panic-stuck inaction, and subsequent flight, of the combined fleets from Martinique, must yet be fresh in the recollection of our merchants; and a tithe of what has been saved to the commercial part of the Island, by the exertions of this man alone, would rear up a more magnificent mausoleum than ever rose at the command of eastern pride_ 24

---

19 Robertson, p. 10.  
20 NMM PAG 6723 and PAI 5311; see also PAI 5280, where victories and rewards are inscribed on a wall in a niche of which the monument is placed.  
21 Langford, ii, 302; see also: Statement of Subscriptions 12, and CLRO Misc Mss 207.5, 26 November 1805: 'to prove to future ages the very high sense the City of London entertained of his merit'.  
23 Edinburgh City Archive, Nelson Monument Committe Minutes [hereafter: ECA NMCM], f. 6.  
24 Glasgow Herald 15 November 1805.
With similar thoughts in mind, the West India Association subscribed £500 to the Nelson monument in Liverpool, while the Corporation of this City subscribed £1000. Business organizations, such as London livery companies and the East India Company, contributed money even more than thirty years after Nelson's death at the battle of Trafalgar, when subscriptions were collected for the monument to be erected in Trafalgar Square. Such an economic interest in recognising Nelson's achievements was expressed in inscriptions on monuments to Nelson that mentioned loyalty or national pride, and praised the 'unexampled glory [that] confirmed in the eyes of Europe and the world the naval superiority of Great Britain'.

The construction of a monument to Nelson had the pleasant side-effect of embellishing a particular place, in some cases with the town's first public monument (as in Birmingham and Montreal). A leading member of the subscription committee in Liverpool promised that the monument would 'do honour to the town . . . as an effort of art'. Such hopes must have been shared by those living close to the proposed site for a monument to Nelson in Dublin's Sackville Street, because the 'Sackville-street Club' and the neighbouring 'Kildare-street Club' subscribed to it. To attract subscribers, the committees made clear that the monument would be erected 'in some conspicuous part' of the town or they praised the 'noble grandeur of the situation' in which it would stand. When the city of Norwich contributed £200 to the Nelson monument of his native county of Norfolk, the corporation sent a speaker to the county meeting to plead for the monument to be erected in a 'commanding situation in or near the city'. The disappointment must consequently have been great, when the monument was eventually erected near the sea in Yarmouth. The strong desire of the capital of Nelson's home

---

26 Statement of Subscriptions, 34, 55, 65,75,125, 128, 57.
27 On monument on Barbados (Naval Chronicle 1806, 387) and on monument in Hereford.
28 Roscoe.
29 Nelson's Pillar, 14.
30 Naval Chronicle 1806, 386; and ECA NMCM, f. 6.
county to have a monument of him finally led to the opening of another subscription in the 1840s.

In some places the monuments to Nelson instead of being seen as mere embellishments, formed part of various town-planning projects. In Birmingham the Nelson monument was placed in the market place, which had been 'formerly thronged with mean shops, and butchers' shambles'. In Barbados the subscription committee purchased, with the financial support of the 'Legislature', an area in Bridgetown that was called 'the Green' and renamed it 'Trafalgar Square'. Shamed by the condition of a place with such a proud name the same Legislature was motivated in 1826 to invest some money in the 'purchase and removal' of 'some unsightly houses [that] obstructed the square'.

The much more famous Trafalgar Square in London was also part of a major town-planning project. This time it was not the subscription committee that influenced the outlook of the place, but, on the contrary, the appearance of the existing square, recently named after Nelson's last and most famous battle, had to be considered in the choice of design for a monument. The area which had been occupied until the beginning of the nineteenth century by the royal stables and poor housing had been transformed into an open space, thanks to the ambitious plans of John Nash. His desire had been to make a previously neglected space between Westminster and the City of London into an elegant part of the metropolis, connecting the two cities. Although his plans were not adopted as such, the area was cleared of poor housing, regulations were introduced that excluded 'waggons, carts or other carriage' from remaining in the area, and the passages were cleared of obstructing 'Signs or other Emblems'. In this exquisite setting the monument could not be allowed to obscure the new building of the very broad but low National Gallery by William Wilkins. At the same time the monument had to be big enough not to appear minuscule on the huge square. Another local problem was posed by the sloping ground and the need to consider one of the few existing statues: that of

32 Gentleman's Magazine, 80 (1810), 414.
33 Schomburgk, pp. 245 and 147.
34 Mace, pp. 29-31, 37, 41, 42, 45.
Charles I at the southern end of the new square. An artist, who submitted a design insisted that a ‘statue of a subject should [not] be placed looking down upon royalty’. Considering how many different aspects the subscription committee had to keep in mind planning a monument to Nelson in such an important place, it is not surprising that Parliament appointed a select committee to examine the choice of design, even though this committee, discussing the matter only after the building of the monument had actually begun, did not change the project.

Such difficulties were not assisting the efforts of the subscription committees to attract money, however. In order to make the investment seem worthwhile, they published subscribers’ lists to give publicity to those who contributed and sent out circular letters to stimulate further subscriptions. The circular letter that the Nelson Monument Committee in Edinburgh sent out contained an engraving of a proposed monument on Calton Hill, although the committee had not yet been granted the use of the site and it was not sure whether it would collect enough money for the design (the committee did not collect enough money to realize the proposed monument in this form). To convey the impression that they were succeeding with their project they decided that ‘the Building shall be begun, so soon as the subscriptions amount to a proper sum’, but before all the necessary money was raised. This proved to be a risky decision, because the interest in monuments to Admiral Nelson was subject to change.

Shortly after the battle of Trafalgar the feeling of triumph engendered by the victory and the grief felt over Nelson’s death had stimulated many subscriptions and civic pride was challenged in a kind of competition as newspapers reported the amounts

---

36 James Hakewill, quoted in Mace, p. 255.
37 Mace, pp. 69-84, and Yarrington, pp. 318-325.
39 TNA/PRO, WORKS 6.119 Nelson Committee Minute Book 3 April 1838.
40 ECA NMCM, ff. 9, 10 (letter), 16, 17 (site agreed on by ‘Lord Provost, Magistrates and Council’), 18 (design decided), 6 (decision about beginning of the building).
of money that were collected in Liverpool and that were 'hourly increasing'.\textsuperscript{41} Some cautious subscription committees either used only the amount they managed to collect in this first enthusiasm for the project of a Nelson monument (in Liverpool and in Birmingham, for example) or stated that the money that would be collected, after the foundation stone had been laid, would 'be applied towards increasing the height and dimensions of the Monument'.\textsuperscript{42} In Hereford the committee was forced to refrain from putting a statue of Nelson on top of a column; they had to content with an urn that proved to be cheaper.\textsuperscript{43} A project for a Nelson monument in Bristol had to be abandoned.\textsuperscript{44}

The subscription committees for both the Edinburgh and the Norfolk monuments to Nelson hoped for further financial support, because their monuments were meant to serve useful purposes. The committee in Edinburgh had applied at the Admiralty for money, because its monument would replace a flagstaff that was used for signalling in the Firth of Forth. After a project for a Nelson monument in his native county had failed, the new committee in Norfolk hoped for money from the lighthouse authority, Trinity House.\textsuperscript{45} Both appeals failed, but the efforts of these committees were helped with the revived interest in the heroes of the Napoleonic War after the battle of Waterloo and the end of the war in 1815.

In view of the fact that the reasons and methods for raising money to build a monument to Admiral Nelson were generally the same, it is surprising that those in London (Trafalgar Square) and Norwich were not erected earlier, in direct response to the battle of Trafalgar. In the case of Norwich, the city leaders and its citizens had hoped that the Norfolk monument to Nelson would be erected in their town and consequently did not open a separate subscription for a monument in Norwich. The case may have been similar in London, where two monuments, in St. Paul's Cathedral and the Guildhall

\textsuperscript{41} Glasgow Herald, 22 November 1805, before the inhabitants were called to meet and discuss the plan of a monument, 2 December 1805; The Times 26 November 1805.

\textsuperscript{42} Glasgow Herald, 25 July 1806.

\textsuperscript{43} Flora Fraser, 'If You Seek His Monument', in The Nelson Companion, ed. Colin White (Royal Naval Museum Publications, Alan Sutton Publishing: Annapolis, Maryland, 1995), 129-151, at 143.

\textsuperscript{44} Naval Chronicle, 1806, 111.

\textsuperscript{45} ECA NMCM, f. 11, and Yarrington, pp. 141, 143.
respectively, were being built and people hoped that a monument paid for by nation-wide subscription would also soon be placed in the capital. Such a national subscription failed for three reasons. First, local projects for monuments in the provinces appealed more to those living outside London, because they could enjoy the result more directly. Second, subscribing to a national monument did not seem attractive, since a similar project had failed just four years earlier, when joy about the Peace of Amiens (in 1801) replaced the enthusiasm about the naval victories in the 1790s. When a new subscription was opened after the news of the battle of Trafalgar had reached Britain, several letters to editors of newspapers reflected the dislike of contributing to a new fund for a national monument, without having proof that the earlier subscriptions had been properly used. Third, the fact that Parliament voted money for monuments to the victories at Trafalgar and Waterloo in 1816 must have discouraged any project for a subscription for a national monument to Nelson.

Since there is no indication of any opposition to monuments to Nelson, raised by subscription, in either London or Norwich, it appears that both monuments were erected to fill the perceived lack of such a monument, with Norwich following the example of London. But why did this happen about thirty-five years after the battle of Trafalgar? Rodney Mace has argued that the ruling class wanted to distract attention from its problems with the Chartist movement at the time, but, since the subscription for the monument in Trafalgar Square was initiated by old friends of Nelson or their relatives and was supported by only a few eminent public figures (such as, the Duke of Wellington), this argument alone does not seem too convincing. Alison Yarrington has claimed that ‘the over-riding aim of the committee in its promotion of a national monument to Nelson was to utilize public enthusiasm for the hero in order to resolve the problems of planning the area of Trafalgar Square and its environs’. Although it seems

46 See prologue, fn. 215 and 216.
47 The Times, 19 November, 19 and 27 December 1805, 22 January 1806; Naval Chronicle, 1805, 382.
48 Mace, p. 57.
49 Namely, T. M. Hardy (Nelson’s flagcaptain at Trafalgar) and C. D. Scott (son of Nelson’s secretary, John Scott, who was killed at Trafalgar), Mace, pp. 57, 58.
50 Yarrington, p. 281.
understandable that subscribers to a local monument might think of embellishing their town, it appears hard to believe that people would organize a national subscription to a monument for a war hero to solve some planning problems in a newly developed area of London. Considering how much the project was influenced by its surroundings, they may even have regarded the planning problems as a nuisance. Yarrington's idea - that rising interest in national heroes in the 1830s influenced the project of a monument^51 - is more in accordance with the declared wish of the committee itself, to build a monument to the 'glory of Lord Nelson and the Country which he so long and successfully served' .^52

Whatever the additional reasons for a Nelson monument in about 1840 were, both subscription committees (in London and Norwich) overestimated the amounts of money they could collect. While the committee in Norwich after some delay somehow managed to erect its statue in 1852,^53 the Office of Woods, Forests and Land Revenues had finally to take over responsibility in 1844 for the monument to Nelson in Trafalgar Square. Although this office introduced minor changes,^54 it could not alter the whole design, since the committee - perhaps following the example of the committee in the Scottish capital - had already started to realize the design for the whole monument by building the column and putting a statue of Nelson on top of it. The change-over in managing the project did not accelerate the completion of the monument (which included bas-reliefs and lions) and it took until 1867 before it was finished.^55

It seems that the success of subscriptions to a monument to Nelson depended on more than just the mood of the moment. Thus, the success of the subscription in Liverpool was particularly due to the city's reliance on its trade with the West Indies that Nelson was thought to have saved. Birmingham lacked this direct feeling of indebtedness to Nelson, but their subscription also 'realized only one third of the amount collected in Liverpool', because 'one section of the community, the Quakers, who were

^51 Yarrington, p. 280, 281.
^52 Quoted in Mace, p. 61.
^53 Mackie, ii, 10.
^54 Mace, p. 98-100.
a particularly rich and influential if small group, was totally opposed to the erection of a monument glorifying war. On the other hand, the support of some individuals was essential. The widow of Captain Berry, whose husband had served under Nelson at the battles of the Nile (1798) and Trafalgar (1805), 'collected from various Ladies at Ipswich', more than £60, whereas Vice-Admiral Page collected in the same town only a little over £3 and no other collection of this kind was made in any other British town. Collections from Jersey (more than £70), Bombay and Calcutta must have depended on similar exertions as those of Lady Berry. That the 'ruling class' did not make political use of the occasion may be seen in the fact that only fifteen 'H. M. Ships Companies' contributed, clearly, a subscription depended on the dedication of a member of the respective ship's company. Other means of support were to dedicate the 'net proceeds of a concert' to the fund for a monument or to publish a sermon for the benefit of a Nelson monument.

II
Forms of Monuments
Since the subscription committees depended on support from the public for the money raised, they also had to consider public opinion in their choice of the style and design of the monument erected. This could even lead to the proposal for a building, to be used for some charitable purpose, that bore scant resemblance to a monument. Thus, the resentment of the Quakers in Birmingham led to the proposal for 'a dispensary and a post-office' as a monument to Nelson in that town. In Edinburgh the subscription committee had decided on erecting a tower, part of which 'should be fitted up into half a dozen of neat cabins, for the gratuitous reception of deserving wounded Seamen or Marines; the preference to be given to those who have bled with the Great Nelson'.

56 Yarrington, p. 104, referring to Aris's Birmingham Gazette 30 December 1805.
57 Statement of Subscriptions, Towns in Britain: particularly: 75; other places: 77, 41, 46; H. M. Ship's Companies: 115.
58 Nelson's Pillar, 37.
59 The Times, 2 January 1806, for the Norfolk monument.
60 Langford, ii, 306.
61 ECA Description.
This idea was changed into a caretaker's flat in the basement of the monument and this monument to Nelson is the only one that shows any trace of a charitable purpose.

When the subscription committees took purely artistic decisions about the design of their monuments they still had to consider the taste of the day. This was difficult to determine, because public monuments for war heroes did not have a long tradition in Britain. It would have been possible to develop features of sepulchral monuments, especially since Nelson had died so dramatically at the height of his most successful battle. Indeed, the design for the monument in Liverpool bears evidence of such an influence: 'The figures constituting the principal design are Nelson, Victory and Death [in the form of a skeleton] . . . Death lies in ambush for his victim; intimating, that he received the reward of his valour and the stroke of Death at the same moment'. 62 Other sepulchral features are more restrained. William Wilkins added to both of his designs for Nelson columns in Dublin and Yarmouth a sarcophagus 'which is placed on the Pedestal, over [the inscription] Trafalgar, to indicate that he there terminated his mortal career'. 63

Even sepulchral monuments that had been erected since the second half of the eighteenth century, however, had abandoned the previously common direct references to death, such as skulls and hourglasses. Julie Rugg describes the phenomenon:

'Enlightened theories that removed the terrors from death were in perfect accord with the neoclassical aesthetics that were all-pervasive in the visual arts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries'. She points out that instead of the representation of death, the painter Benjamin West demanded 'a monument [to Nelson] that would excite awe and veneration'. 64 Such a type of monument would have suited St. Paul's Cathedral, if it had been converted - as planned - into a British Hall of Fame. The architect responsible for the fabric of St. Paul's Cathedral had already proposed to erect a statue of Nelson directly over his actual tomb in the centre of the Cathedral and he had been supported by

---

62 Wyatt (after whose design the monument was built), p. 5.
63 Nelson's Pillar, p. 17; 'critical Examination', 516; see appendix A, plates 17 and 18.
sections of the public.\textsuperscript{65} This idea was not too much in conflict with the character of the building, if one considers that services took place only in the choir, which was separated from the rest of the building by a wall. This proposal was not realized, however.

Influenced by such ideas about a place for secular worship and by the new character of sepulchral architecture, designs for monuments to Nelson tried to follow examples of classical antiquity and sought to avoid Christian symbols of death. Such symbolism was replaced by national and naval emblems, such as lions, representing Britain (in London on Trafalgar Square and in St. Paul’s Cathedral, for example) or anchors, representing the navy (in St. Paul’s Cathedral, in Barbados and in Hereford). While a design for the Nelson monument in Trafalgar Square proposed ‘piled trophies of Nelson’s valour’, most other monuments seem to have tried to avoid too many different elements. A competitor simply claimed “Allegory . . . cannot be tolerated” and a critic of the Nelson column in Yarmouth praised ‘chasteness of decoration’.\textsuperscript{66}

Equal simplicity was demanded in terms of the materials to be used. These, according to contemporary taste, should not be artificially coloured and, if combined, should harmonize in their natural colour.\textsuperscript{67} The main alternatives in terms of materials chosen for outdoor monuments were stone on the one hand and brass on the other. The critics of ‘everlasting Brass’\textsuperscript{68} argued that it ‘is hardly to be trusted to as a means of communication with posterity, its intrinsic value and easy convertibility rendering it liable to destruction in the event of any foreign invasion or domestic disturbance (this is proved by the fewness of the ancient specimens which have been preserved)’.\textsuperscript{69} In the end both materials were used and, ‘to protect the edifice from the Vandalism of wanton

\textsuperscript{65} Yarrington, pp. 61-69; Gentleman’s Magazine, 1805, 1202, and 1806, 254; The Times, 30 November, 7, 26, 30 December 1805.

\textsuperscript{66} Mace, pp. 257, 246; ‘critical Examination’, 521; for an illustration of the column see appendix A, plate 18.

\textsuperscript{67} ‘critical Examination’, 519; Roscoe.

\textsuperscript{68} Langford, ii, 307; Mace, p. 254.

\textsuperscript{69} [Anon., ‘Stimulator’], ‘Hints regarding the expected designs for the Nelson Testimonial’, The Art-Union, 1 (1839), 46-47 [hereafter: ‘Stimulator’]: see also: Mace, p. 256, and on the subject in general: W. Wood, p. 2; and Yarrington, pp. 43, 44.
outrages, some of the monuments (in Dublin, Yarmouth and Barbados, for example) were surrounded by fences.

As to the form of the monument itself, there raged a controversy between architects and sculptors. This discussion had started already with an argument between the sculptor John Flaxman and the architect Alexander Dufour at the time of the first subscription for a monument to naval victories in 1799-1801. Both referred to examples from antiquity, but, whereas Flaxman stressed 'how much more sentiment and interest there is in a fine human figure than can possibly be produced in the choicest piece of Architecture', Dufour retorted 'if we wished to perpetuate his [a hero's] memory, a piece of Architecture is better calculated for the purpose than a Statue... It is to the Pillars of Trajan, Antoninus, Pompey, and their inscriptions, which have survived so many ages, that we are indebted for the memory of these great men; while their statues have been mostly destroyed. Some conciliatory attempts were made to combine the two forms of art and possibly even to include some paintings in a temple. None of these ideas was adopted and ultimately, both main forms, the column and the statue, were frequently used to commemorate Nelson.

A pattern for a monumental column existed in Trajan's column in Rome, which was probably the most famous surviving monument to a Roman warrior. Its shaft is decorated with bas-reliefs which tell the story of Trajan's campaigns in a series of pictures that are organized in a spiralling fashion up to the top, on which a statue of Trajan used to stand. Below the statue is a platform to which visitors were supposed to climb up a winding staircase built into the interior of the column. To imitate such

---

70 'critical Examination', 532.
71 See appendix A, plates 17, 18, 20 and 21.
72 John Flaxman, A Letter to the Committee for Raising the Naval Pillar, or Monument, Under the Patronage of His Royal Highness The Duke of Clarence (Cadell, Davies, Payne, Evans: London, 1799), p. 7. See also: Prologue.
73 Alexander Dufour, Letter to the Nobility and Gentry Composing the Committee for Raising The Naval Pillar, or Monument, ...; in Answer to The Letter of John Flaxman ... (Printed for the author: London, 1800) p. 15.
elaborate bas-reliefs was well beyond the means of any subscription committee for a monument to Nelson. They sometimes (in Montreal, for example) placed bas-reliefs on the base of the column, but in the case of the column in London’s Trafalgar Square even that proved to be beyond the means of the subscription committee. In any case, this left the question open, how to design the shaft of the column itself. The Roman architect Vitruvius, whose work was widely known and admired, had divided columns into a ‘masculine’ and a ‘feminine’ type. Naturally only the ‘masculine’ Grecian Doric column and its Roman variant, the plain shafted Tuscan column, were regarded as appropriate for a monument to a warrior. Consequently, the Nelson columns in Hereford and Montreal have plain shafts, while William Wilkins designed those for Dublin and Yarmouth with Doric flutes and a Doric capital. He had intended a statue of Nelson on top of both of them. This was executed in Dublin, where he did not survey the erection of the monument himself, whereas he changed his plan for the later column in Yarmouth.\(^{75}\)

Wilkins seems to have had doubts about simply copying Trajan’s column. He might have agreed with the critic, who pointed out at the time that Trajan’s column was ‘raised by the Romans in degenerate times, when the arts were declining, from a vain emulation to vie in height with the Egyptian obelisks’ with ‘a round tower in masquerade’.\(^{76}\) Wilkins, who had travelled for four years through Greece and Italy and was a great admirer of ancient Greek architecture,\(^{77}\) may well have felt inclined to introduce more Grecian elements. A contemporary observer noticed that he had copied the ‘decoration of the lower structure’ of his Nelson column from that of the Thrasyllus monument in Athens.\(^{78}\) The same author admired the platform in Yarmouth with its statue of Britannia, supported by six caryatids on top of the monument, although he was

---

\(^{75}\) See appendix A, plates 17 and 18.


\(^{78}\) ‘Critical Examination’, 525; see appendix A, plate 18.
surprised about the number six, as 'original, and extremely elegant'. Wilkins may here
again have been inspired by Greek monuments. A Corinthian column in Delphi is
surmounted by three caryatids, who carry a tripod, the trophy in a choragic competition.
Another choragic monument - the Lysikrates monument in Athens - is decorated with
six Corinthian half-columns. The Corinthian column is obviously chosen deliberately,
because the Acanthus leaves in its capital represent not only death, but also
immortality, an imagery which was known even in Wilkins' day, since the Corinthian
column had been frequently used on sepulchral monuments. So Wilkins introduced
Corinthian elements of monumental sculpture, symbolising immortality, while avoiding
at the same time the 'feminine' Corinthian column and capital itself.

It has been claimed that the Corinthian order was used for Nelson's Column on
Trafalgar Square, because the monument had to harmonize with the Corinthian columns
in the front of Wilkins' National Gallery on the northern side of the same square. Here
again William Railton, the artist who had proposed the overall design, might have been
aware of the Corinthian symbolism of death and immortality. This had been stressed,
even in antiquity, by executing the Acanthus leaves in bronze to imitate their naturally
green colour. Railton's design was changed several times in several respects and the
planned bronze statue of Nelson was finally executed in stone, but the bronze
Acanthus leaves of the capital were never questioned. The choice of the Corinthian order
may here, again, have been made deliberately to use the symbolism of death and
immortality. Some criticized the choice and a representative of the Treasury even
wondered, whether the flutes could be altered 'so as to suit a Doric capital', but the
column was also praised for its 'lofty and elegant proportions'.

79 'critical Examination', 528.
[hereafter: Rykwert] (8, 9).
81 Yarrington, p. 295.
82 Rykwert, 9.
83 Mace, pp. 73, 89-90; Yarrinton, pp. 308-310.
84 References in Yarrington, p. 297, and Mace, p. 101.
85 The Illustrated London News, 1 (1842) 266.
The great disadvantage of a column to a hero was that the commemorated person could not be easily represented. A statue on top, ‘raised so high above the natural point of focus of vision, would lose all distinctness of expression . . . unless they [its features] are colossal, and overcharged with expression beyond nature, even to caricature’. When Nelson’s statue was on show, before it was mounted on top of the column in Trafalgar Square, an observer remarked that the face had ‘sharp, angular features, the expression of great activity of mind, but of little of mental grandeur’. To solve such a dilemma, the monument in Hereford, which bears an urn on top, has a portrait-medallion of Nelson on its base. Some proposed designs had included a statue of Nelson in front of the base of a column, but none of them was executed.

The possibility of representing Nelson himself was the great advantage of statues. This, however, posed the question in what kind of dress Nelson should be portrayed. Only the early monument in Liverpool shows Nelson as a nude with nothing but a piece of cloth over his right shoulder, thus hiding the missing arm, and over the lower part of his body. When the choice for a monument on Trafalgar Square was about to be made, somebody insisted: ‘Surely it is not necessary to hand down specimens of the bad taste of a nation - to perpetuate in stone the ephemeral fashions of the times . . . Marble should perpetuate character, not costume - should exhibit the attributes of the mind, not the decorations of the body’. Several designs showed Nelson in ‘classical costume’, one even intended him to be ‘lion-skin habilimented’. A sculptor vehemently protested: ‘What is the English tar to say when he sees his beloved Nelson in a Roman petticoat!’ Other artists and various subscription committees seem to have agreed with this view and so all other monuments that represent Nelson full-length show him in an admiral’s uniform.

---

87 The Illustrated London News, 3 (1843) 289.
88 Mace, pp. 246, 252, 253, 255, 261, 266; Langford, ii, 307; NMM PAG 6723.
89 ‘Stimulator’, 47.
90 Yarrington, p. 82; Mace, pp. 253, 261.
91 Cockerell quoted in: Irvin, 135.
Realism in the representation of Nelson posed the additional problem of whether to show him idealized with two arms or to portray him with only one arm. A pamphlet published shortly after the battle of Trafalgar argued that a statue of Nelson in Norfolk should show him with two arms and the Italian sculptor Canova submitted a design for a sarcophagus on which Nelson can be seen with two arms. It has been argued that the sculptor instinctively obeyed an artistic law, which made him represent Nelson's body seen from the right. He could easily have presented the image in reverse and hidden the defect of the missing right arm, if he had known about it. Considering that it was widely known - even in Italy - that Nelson had only one arm and considering that Canova presented him in Roman dress, it rather seems that he wished to idealize him and not represent him as he was in life. At the same time, the British sculptor Flaxman also wondered how to deal with Nelson's major physical defect: 'in the execution of a statue the loss of his arm might so be indicated yet obscured that it would not injure the general effect of the work, or he might be represented . . . in his perfect figure'. Flaxman actually drew a design for such a monument to Nelson with two arms. His concern about how to portray Nelson was taken from Flaxman, since he was commissioned to execute a statue of Nelson after the design of Richard Westmacott, who had decided to be truthful in his representation, although a pupil of Canova ten years before. The same Westmacott executed the Liverpool monument (after a design of M. C. Wyatt) and the statues of Nelson in Birmingham and Barbados and thus contributed to the representation of Nelson with only one arm. This does not mean that this approach was uncontroversial. One of the critics of the monument in Birmingham commented indignantly: 'Were a great man, Admiral or General, to have both legs shot off in Battle,
should we then put up the mutilated trunk - a statue without legs - in the market place? Can we not imagine ourselves as meeting great men in a future state, whole and perfect? The subscription committee for a Nelson monument in London’s Trafalgar Square, however, would only have accepted a naturalistic representation of Nelson with only one arm. His image by the late 1830s seems to have been too settled to allow for a right arm to be added.

Some statues of Nelson presented him at the top of a conically shaped group of figures and thus could add a certain message to the pure representation of the hero. Hence, a group of allegoric figures was adopted in Liverpool ‘to exhibit, in the strongest manner, the glory and happiness of the hero who dies in the defence of his country; and who, in the act of grasping at another crown, which the Goddess of Victory is placing on his sword, is insensible to the stroke which terminates his glorious career’. Added to the principal figures of Nelson, Victory and Death are ‘his country [Britannia], mourning for her loss, ... her navy eager to avenge it [and] a conquered enemy’, all on a lower level. In St. Paul’s Cathedral the figure of Nelson stands on a base, which illustrates his three most famous battles and which is surrounded on the right by a lion and on the left by the figure of Minerva (or Britannia) instructing two young midshipmen, who are looking up to Nelson. When a subscription had not accumulated enough money to pay for an elaborate allegoric group, bas-reliefs were sometimes used to convey a certain message. Reliefs on the pedestal of the Nelson monument in Birmingham showed, for example, ‘Victory embellishing a ship’s prow [and] Birmingham ... mourning her loss’.

Other types of monuments were less elaborate in their ornaments. The Scottish towers to the memory of Nelson in Edinburgh and Forres have hardly any decorations and the obelisks in Glasgow and Portsdown Hill are also quite plain, although the later contains a small bust of Nelson at its upper end. ‘Cleopatra’s Needle’ on the

---

99 Quoted in Yarrington, p. 113; see also p. 114.
100 Yarrington, p. 290.
101 Roscoe.
102 Fawcett, p. 148.
Embankment in London was given as a present to the British Nation by the Viceroy of Egypt in 1819 as ‘a worthy memorial of our distinguished countrymen Nelson and Abercromby’, as the inscription of the 1870s claims, but it has no decoration that specifically refers to Nelson.

Even the major impact on public opinion of Nelson’s achievements was not sufficient to justify yet another monumental celebration, at a time when there was more interest in commemorating civil heroes and when public opinion preferred, after the disastrous Crimean War, to commemorate the ordinary soldiers, instead of their leaders. 103

III
Later History of the Monuments

Since most of the monuments to Nelson that were erected in public spaces were financed by subscription, they remained private property after they had been completed. Eager to spend the collected money on the realization of a beautiful design, the subscription committees had often not calculated the costs of the future upkeep of the monument. An exception in this respect had been the committee for Nelson’s Pillar in Dublin, which had considered future costs and had laid so much money aside that it was possible to claim in 1948: ‘To-day the Pillar is a thriving business. Last year more than £1,200 was taken at the turnstile and distributed by the trustees among a number of charitable bodies in the city’. 104 The Birmingham committee was lucky that someone bestowed a bequest ‘for cleaning the statue and basement’. 105 Other monuments later passed into the hands of their cities 106 or other public bodies. When the Admiralty took over the responsibility for the obelisk on Portsdown Hill that had been erected by members of the navy, who had taken part in the battle of Trafalgar, a report stated that ‘the Nelson Monument . . . is

103 Yarrington, pp. 334-336.
104 Nelson’s Pillar, p. 11; Patrick Henchy, “Nelson’s Pillar,” Dublin Historical Record, 10 (1948), 53-63 [hereafter: Henchy], at 63.
105 Langford, ii, 309.
106 ECA Monuments Catalogue - supplementary file, 32 Calton Hill.
in a very bad state of repair, and that, if it is not practically rebuilt, it will very possibly collapse at an early date'.

The badly planned Nelson tower in Edinburgh on the other hand profited from its attractive position and food and drink were sold in the basement from 1828. It also proved useful for practical purposes: A Time-ball was installed in 1853 and the flagstaff was used 'to indicate the days when the London steamers sailed, and arrived'. Notwithstanding its unimaginative exterior, an effort was made to construct a Nelson-site: the ground floor of the monument was used for a small Nelson exhibition and in the 1920s two naval organizations even competed for the responsibility of 'flying Lord Nelson's signal from the Monument on Trafalgar Day'.

Trafalgar Square in London was used for similar celebrations of Trafalgar Day. It was used for propaganda purposes during the Second World War and later an attempt was made to develop it into a place for naval celebrations in general when the busts of Jellicoe and Beatty were added on Trafalgar Day 1948. The square also became known for demonstrations against government politics, however, since it offered so much space close to the seat of government and parliament and Mace claims that the fountains were not only introduced to fill the space, but rather to restrict huge gatherings of people.

In other places it was more the monument itself that became subject of controversy. A contemporary critic of the Dublin monument remarked that 'The statue of Nelson records . . . the transformation of our senate into a discount office'. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and again in 1923 attempts were made to get the

---

107 TNA/PRO, ADM 116/581, 11 January 1899.  
108 Edinburgh City Library John Smith, *The Calton Hill and its Monuments*  
110 See chapter 17.  
111 *The Nelson Dispatch, 2* (1985), 19 and (1985), 39; Mace picture-appendix no. 50 "National Service is up to YOU" and no. 51, 52; Marcus Whiffen, 'The Story of Trafalgar Square', *The Listener, 40* (1948), 639-640, at 639.  
112 Mace, pp. 87, 88.
monument removed, although at least partly ‘to suit the modern traffic arrangements’.

Eventually W. B. Yeats, who at that time was a Senator, stepped in and declared:

Nelson’s Pillar should not be broken up. It represents the feeling of Protestant Ireland for a man who helped to break the power of Napoleon. The life and work of the people who erected it is a part of our tradition. I think we should accept the whole past of this nation and not pick and choose. ¹¹³

The IRA disagreed. For the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966, at a time when the group was rather weak, it was ‘forced to turn on monuments’ and it blew up the statue and upper part of the monument in Dublin (the rest was later dismantled) as well as the early arch erected to Nelson near Cork. ¹¹⁴

There have been discussions about removing the Nelson monuments in Montreal, where the French speakers form the majority of the population, and Barbados, where the statue of Nelson is seen as a relic of colonialism, ¹¹⁵ but no other monument to Nelson has been destroyed, though the statue on the top of the column in Montreal was so often damaged that it had to be removed to a local museum. It seems that the inhabitants of these cities have either adopted Yeats’ view and accept these monuments as part of the past or they have decided to include them in their current life, as, for example, with the use of Trafalgar Square on 29 April 2001 for an open-air concert to commemorate the end of Apartheid in South Africa.

¹¹³ Henchy, 60-62.
CHAPTER TWELVE
Pictures of Nelson

The previous chapters have considered prints representing elements or moments of Nelson's funeral and prints suggesting designs for monuments to the memory of Nelson, both of which were in great demand after the battle of Trafalgar and Nelson's death. Most prints dealing with Nelson, however, even those published in direct response to his death at Trafalgar, portrayed the man himself. Prints that depict Nelson either show him within scenes from his life or they are simply portraits, usually copied directly or indirectly from some oil painting. This chapter deals first with images of Nelson's death and apotheosis, then with earlier scenes from his life, and finally with portraits. Pictures of his battles will not be considered, since they do not immediately reflect the iconography of Nelson.

In reaction to the news of the Battle of Trafalgar and as part of the mourning process described in chapter ten, images of the 'Death of Nelson' were very much in demand. Since details about how Nelson had actually died emerged only slowly,\(^1\) the early and often relatively cheap visual representations of the event relied more on the imagination of their creators. They usually focused on the scene on deck, portraying Nelson as still standing or merely leaning on (or held by) an officer.\(^2\) The artists appear to have been intent on depicting a still active and conscious commander. In many of their pictures only Nelson's leaning position or his hat and sword in front of his feet indicate that he is not in full control of his body any more. In some cases Nelson is still

\(^1\) See chapter 6.

\(^2\) Le Quesne, pp. 34-35 (nos. 9-12, still standing), 36-38 (nos. 13-16, leaning); Anon. (Goodchild), opp. p. 226 (held by two officers); Duncan, Life, opp. 251 (held by three officers); F. Lloyd, opp. p. 196 (held by officers, this contradicts the account on p. 196 where it is stated that Nelson was raised by two sailors); The Death of Nelson, engraved by R. Cooper, after W. M. Craig (Edward Orme: London, 1 June 1806), NMM PAI 5451, see appendix A, plate 22 (held by an officer), NMM PAI 5451; prints showing the dying Nelson held by ordinary sailors are exceptional: England expects ..., painted by J. Parry, engraved by Charles Turner (Manchester: Vittore Zanetti, 21 October 1806), NMM, PAI 5422; L\(^4\) Nelson receiving his Death wound (London: Stampa & Son, 27 October 1806), NMM PAD 5754.
holding a sword or even pointing with it to the raging battle. A falling speaking trumpet indicates that he retained actual power to give orders until the last moment. Two slightly differing glass pictures even depict the dying Nelson sitting on a cannon with his hat on, again pointing with his sword to the battle-scene at the edge of the picture, ‘giving his last orders to Cap. Hardy’. Two others go even further and avoid the subject of Nelson’s death altogether; instead they show ‘Lord Nelson Commanding the Victory’.

Some of the early imagery dared to address the reality of Nelson’s death more directly. Some prints show Nelson being carried. Such scenes, however, are still carefully arranged. Nelson’s body is represented in a kind of sitting posture. The upper part is held by officers, while sailors support the weight of his lower body, often in a kneeling position. Behind such a group can be seen figures on the elevated poop deck in the act of avenging Nelson. Few of the early pictures of Nelson’s death show him belowdecks and never in the cockpit (where Nelson actually died), but in his cabin with a view of the battle unfolding in the background. Instead of showing Nelson’s control of and participation in the battle, these images show him stretched out on a sofa; and instead of the surrounding figures supporting him, they have now started mourning him. They face Nelson’s death in different ways: by taking his pulse, by praying or by weeping into handkerchiefs. Some figures are also shown turning away from the awful scene.

---

3 See particularly: appendix A, plate 22; F. Lloyd, opp. 196.
4 See: Le Quesne, p. 38 (no. 16).
5 See: Le Quesne, pp. 39-41, 59 (nos. 17, 18, 36 – half of the picture).
6 See: Le Quesne, pp. 32-33 (nos. 6, 7, both published in December 1805).
7 See appendix A, plate 23; similarly: NMM PAD 5743, PAD 5744, PAD 5746 (Death of Lord Viscount Nelson, London: J. & J. Cundee, 1813), PAH 6249 (the same coloured: PAI 5455), PAI 5445, PAI 5457; a sketch of The Death of Nelson by Samuel Drummond, which also represents the carried Nelson and became pattern for many reproductions, can be seen in: C. White (1995), 16 – used, for example, for NMM PAG 9042; Anon. (Lemoine), opp. title-page (print also published separately by: I. Roe, 1805, shows Nelson falling, on his left knee, held by somebody).
8 See appendix A, plate 24. Le Quesne, pp. 43, 58 (nos. 19, of 21 October 1805, and 35, of 18 May 1806, the later combined with a picture of a monument to Nelson, both showing Nelson dressed in trousers, shirt and stockings); NMM PAD 5736, showing Nelson with the upper part of his body naked and stump visible; Dying Moments of Ld Nelson (London: Stampa & Son, 24 October 1806), NMM PAD 5753, and Th Death of A Ld Nelson ([no publication details given]), NMM PAD 4005 (see appendix A, plate … [number still to be filled in]), showing Nelson still dressed in his uniform.
Many glass pictures avoided the gruesome details of Nelson’s death by resorting to allegorical imagery. Sometimes this imagery is inserted into a recognizable death scene on deck of the Victory with the battle raging in the background. Instead of falling into the arms of one of his officers, Nelson is shown falling into the arms of Victory, less often into those of Neptune or Britannia.\(^9\) Other allegorical glass pictures abandoned any references to the battle whatsoever. Apart from the figure of Nelson himself in his uniform, the images are allegorical. They depict the dead Nelson, in the arms of Britannia or Neptune, carried on a shell-shaped chariot over the waters.\(^{10}\) Such presentations were sufficiently detached from the subject of the death of Nelson that they can even be the subject of a caricature. About ten days before Nelson’s funeral a \textit{Death of Admiral Lord Nelson} by Gillray was published. It follows a recognizable pattern: Nelson, with his sword still in hand and his hat in front of him on deck, lies in the arms of a weeping Britannia; Captain Hardy is at his side and a kneeling sailor brings a French flag; above Fame with her trumpets proclaims: ‘Immortality’. For the amusement of his customers Gillray gave Captain Hardy the appearance of George III and the sailor that of the Duke of Clarence (later William IV) with whom Nelson had served as a young captain in the West Indies. As Britannia his contemporaries could recognize Lady Hamilton.\(^{11}\)

More elaborate prints about the death of Nelson took longer to be produced, since they were detailed engravings copied from equally accurate oil paintings. Suppliers of such expensive engravings were not slow in reacting to the demand for pictures of Nelson’s death, however. In November 1805, two editors announced the publication of exquisite engravings, depicting the death of Nelson. Both promised

---

\(^9\) See appendix A, plates 25 and 26. Le Quesne, pp. 72-78 (nos. 51-55, into the arms of Victory; 56, into the arms of Neptune; 57-58, into the arms of Britannia; on no. 54 even Captain Hardy is included in the scene). Such crude allegories are rare outside the art-form of glass pictures: an example is NMM PAD 3958 (unfinished proof of a design for a vignette).

\(^{10}\) Le Quesne, pp. 78-81 (nos. 59-63).

\(^{11}\) See appendix A, plate 27. For an explanation of the print see: McCarthy, p. 94 (explanation of print). Perhaps the portrayal of Britannia as Lady Hamilton was inspired by a print, published on 5 December 1805; this print was made after a drawing by Thomas Baxter and shows Britannia crowing a bust of Nelson with a laurel wreath; since Baxter knew Lady Hamilton well, it is assumed the picture shows her as Britannia (see McCarthy, pp. 87, 89, no 63).
something of the scale and quality of Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe*, a then widely-known and admired death scene. Josiah Boydell, nephew and successor in business to John Boydell who had made a fortune with the prints of West's picture, published an advertisement, offering 'Five Hundred Guineas to any British Artist who shall paint the Best Picture on that subject, from which a Print shall be engraved ... the size of, and in the manner of the Death of General Wolfe'. The engraver James Heath addressed West directly and as a consequence could promise the public an image of Nelson's death by 'the author of that celebrated Picture the Death of General Wolfe ... to which this Print is intended as an appropriate Companion'. Boydell's competition does not seem to have come to anything and he commissioned Arthur William Devis to paint a picture of the death of Nelson. West finished his oil painting in 1806 and Devis his in 1807, though it took much longer for their pictures to be available as engravings: until 1811 and 1812 respectively.

Charles Mitchell has detected similarities between West's and Devis' paintings of the death of Nelson that can be traced back to West's *Death of General Wolfe*: several companions around the dying man who is pictured in the centre of the group; figures on the left (in both of West's pictures: ready to proclaim the victory); a smaller group to the right (The Death of General Wolfe inspired Devis to include a mourning figure here); a kind of proscenium which includes ordinary sailors (parallel to the 'Cherokee Indian' in The Death of General Wolfe). Both pictures also follow the

---


13 *Farington*, vii, 2652 (about Heath talking to West); *The Times*, 29 November 1805; a third announcement for an engraving after an oil painting (by J. S. Copley), without reference to West's *Death of General Wolfe*, did not come to anything (*The Times*, 2 January 1806; Mitchell, p. 266).

14 West's painting finished: *The Times*, 11 April 1806; *Farington*, vii, 2757 (11 May 1806); Devis' painting finished: *Farington*, vii, 2837 (16 August 1806, 'in a state of forwardness'); *The Times*, 16 July 1807 (reporting about its exhibition); about problems with the engraving of West's picture: *Farington*, viii, 3162 (12 July 1807); xi, 3898 (23 March 1811) and 3933 (20 May 1811); about problems of the publisher of Devis' picture to find an engraver: *Farington*, viii, 2920 (4 December 1806); Mitchell, p. 269 (engraving of Bromley published in 1812).

15 Mitchell, pp. 268-269; for a comparison of the pictures see appendix A, plates 28, 29 and 31.
pattern that West himself had set with his *Death of General Wolfe* in portraying all persons involved in their contemporary costume, instead of imitating the dress of classical antiquity.

What strikes even the casual observer at first glance, however, is the fundamental difference between the setting of the two pictures of West and Devis. Whereas West portrayed Nelson dying on the quarterdeck of his flagship, surrounded by many of his colourfully dressed companions in arms and in front of the dramatic background of a battle, Devis placed the death scene in the dark orlop deck. West’s approach was in keeping with contemporary ideas about history painting as having the task to instruct. Reynolds had declared: ‘a painter of history shews the man by shewing his action. ... He cannot make his hero talk like a great man; he must make him look like one’.  

West himself had developed more specific criteria about how to make a hero ‘look like one’. He suggested that the painter should ‘change the order, time and place of events by fresh inventions and combinations’. Indeed, West, who had worked closely with eyewitnesses of the battle, was aware that Nelson did not die on deck. When Joseph Farington visited West in his studio, he came to talk to the sailor, whom West had portrayed kneeling in the foreground of his version of the death scene: ‘He [the sailor] said He never saw Lord Nelson after He was wounded for He was carried below immediately. — West has made a picture of what might have been, not of the circumstances as they happened’. In order to stress the heroic character of the scene West included many details, such as ‘a swirl of flags’, marines and officers on the poop deck in the background and jubilant members of Victory’s crew.

---


17 Mitchell, p. 271 (summarizing West’s ideas from his *Philosophical and Critical History of the Fine Arts*); the same idea was suggested in *The Artist; A Collection of Essays, relative to Painting, etc.* (London: John Murray, 1810), Part 1, No 1, pp. 16-20 [about how to picture the death of Nelson]: ‘the combination of many various circumstances, tending to exemplify one and the same event’; this is quoted in: Peter Harrington, *British Artists and War. The Face of Battle in Paintings and Prints, 1700-1914* (London: Greenhill Books, 1993), pp. 86-87.

18 Farington, viii, 2806 (8 July 1806).

19 Mitchell, p. 268, comparing these elements to ‘the running messenger in the ‘Wolfe’ ... [and] the crowded skyline beyond the Heights of Abraham’.

277
Devis was developing what West had started with his painting of *The Death of General Wolfe*: trying to give a convincing idea of the actual scene that would move its viewers.\(^\text{20}\) In preparation for his painting he had stayed for three weeks on board the *Victory*, while she was waiting in Portsmouth to sail with Nelson’s body to the Nore. He had the opportunity to talk to eye-witnesses and to make sketches of the site where Nelson had actually died as well as the persons present at the scene. Although he mentioned to Farington that he had taken care ‘in painting the death of that Hero to represent everything faithfully’, he also manipulated some details of the scene in order to heighten the dramatic effect. The heightening of the deck and ‘Rembrandtesque atmosphere’, with the body of Nelson appearing to emit light, contribute to create the effect ‘at once of a “Deposition” and a “Nativity”’.\(^\text{21}\)

Different as West’s and Devis’s depictions of the death of Nelson are from each other, they both make use of elements that can be found in the most simple images of Nelson’s death that were on sale at the time. West’s picture shows Nelson’s hat in front of him on deck, Hardy bringing the news of the victory and members of the crew avenging Nelson in the background. Devis depicted Beatty, the surgeon of the *Victory*, taking Nelson’s pulse, and a marine mourning in the foreground. All these elements appear on glass pictures that were published in immediate response to the news of Nelson’s death. Perhaps it was because of these popular and therefore recognizable elements that both pictures were well received at the time and copied on cheap prints.\(^\text{22}\) When West exhibited his picture of the death of Nelson in his own house, in ‘a little over a month thirty thousand people went to see it’ and the queen ordered a print.\(^\text{23}\) West himself was astonished to observe what a powerful effect his picture had on the spectators: ‘By an instinctive motion the hand accompanied the mind, & when the picture was approached the Hat was taken off’.\(^\text{24}\) In private, however, some voiced

---

\(\text{20}\) Mitchell, p. 269.
\(\text{21}\) Mitchell, p. 269; *Farington*, viii, 3058 (5 June 1807).
\(\text{22}\) See appendix A, plates 29, 30, 31 and 32.
\(\text{23}\) Mitchell, p. 268; *Farington*, viii, 2811 (13 July 1806); West picture was also the pattern for a very naïve copy: NMM PAD 4043; poetry in praise of the picture was published in *The Times*, 6 and 9 May 1806.
\(\text{24}\) *Farington*, viii, 3064 (10 June 1807).
criticism and the painter Sir Nathaniel Holland judged that West 'was only copying Himself; & proceeding in a fixed manner'. Even before Devis' rendering of the famous scene was finished, his publisher, Boydell, had registered '800 Subscribers' for the engraving. Once the finished piece was exhibited The Times enthused that '[a]mong the many pictures which have been painted of the last Moments of Lord Nelson ... the superiority undoubtedly rests with that which the pencil of Mr. Devis has given with so much effect and appropriate circumstance'. Again, though only in private, West dared to differ. Not surprisingly he thought that

there was no other way of representing the death of a Hero but by an Epic representation of it. It must exhibit the event in a way to excite awe & veneration & that which may be required to give superior interest to the representation must be introduced, all that can shew the importance of the Hero. Wolfe must not die like a common soldier under a Bush, neither should Nelson be represented dying in the gloomy hold of a ship, like a sick man in a Prison Hole. To move the mind there should be a spectacle presented to raise & warm the mind, & all shd. be proportioned to the highest idea conceived of the Hero. No Boy, sd. West, wd. be animated by a representation of Nelson dying like an ordinary man, His feelings must be roused & His mind inflamed by a scene great & extraordinary. A mere matter of fact will never produce this effect.

J. M. W. Turner approached the subject of the death of Nelson in a manner that did not owe anything to conventional patterns of death scenes. Instead of focusing on the death itself, he chose to depict the fall of Nelson as part of The Battle of Trafalgar, as seen from the Mizen Starboard Shrouds of the Victory. Strictly speaking this perspective was neither a traditional battle scene nor a traditional death scene. The fallen Nelson, though close to the centre of the picture and highlighted by his white clothes and an empty space in front of him, is only a tiny part of the whole scene. Most of the canvas

25 Farington, viii, 3029 (21 April 1807), Sir Nathaniel Holland also remarked that West's 'death of Lord Nelson was far inferior to His Death of General Wolfe'.
26 Farington, viii, 2837 (16 August 1806).
27 Farington, viii, 3064 (10 June 1807).
is covered by sails, masts and rigging; smoke (fiercely yellow near the hulls and grimly grey above); and bows of ships as well as Victory's deck, on which wild fighting scenes unfold. No water and hardly any sky are to be seen, which strengthens the impression of confusion and intense fighting. Like West and Devis, Turner drew his imagery from first-hand accounts. As soon as the Victory, carrying Nelson's body, had arrived off Sheerness, he hurried on board, made sketches of what he saw and notes of his conversations. Consequently, his minuscule depiction of Nelson shows him fallen and, according to Turner's own description, 'with the Officers and seamen that attended to him after he was wounded and carried off the Quarter deck'. In fact an ordinary sailor, standing next to Nelson, takes him by the arm and there is no indication of Captain Hardy joining them. Such a degree of authenticity and battle-scene disorder could not appeal to such people as West, the dramatic producer of detail, who judged the figures on Turner's painting as 'miserably bad'. Turner's approach to the event was appreciated by some at the time, however. One writer detected a new kind of 'epic picture' in Turner's piece, because the painter 'has detailed the death of his hero, while he has suggested the whole of a great naval victory, which we believe has never before been successfully accomplished, if it has been before attempted, in a single picture'.

When James Stanier Clarke and John M'Arthur prepared their massive biography of Nelson, they asked West to paint pictures that would address the death of Nelson and could be made into engravings with which to illustrate their work. West

30 Quoted in Finberg, p. 141.
31 Quoted in Finberg, p. 142, where also Robert Hunt is quoted who 'remarked in the Examiner that all the men on the Victory had been "murdered"'; Farington, vii, 2777 (3 June 1806), similarly commented: 'It appeared to me to be a very crude, unfinished performance, the figures miserably bad'.

280
developed the theme of Nelson’s death in two directions: on the one hand, he became more truthful by setting the scene in the cockpit; on the other hand, he created a thoroughly allegorical piece. West’s cockpit scene owes much to Devis, whose painting West himself had previously so strongly rejected. Nelson is now undressed, only covered by a white sheet, so that his body shines out from the dark scene. He sits upright, though supported, thereby retaining a certain appearance of dignity. His hat and uniform are held by an onlooker, instead of his uniform jacket being irregularly spread on the ground, as on Devis’ painting.

An engraving of West’s more important contribution to Clarke and M’Arthur’s biography was to be inserted opposite the titlepage. The allegorical image of The Immortality of Nelson is arranged as an apotheosis and described in Clarke and M’Arthur’s biography, most probably by West himself:

The leading point in the Picture represents Victory presenting the dead Body of Nelson to Britannia after the Battle of Trafalgar, which is received from the arms of Neptune, with the trident of his dominions and Nelson’s triumphant flags. Britannia sits in shaded gloom, as expressive of that deep regret which overwhelmed the united kingdom at the loss of so distinguished a character. Apart from some drops of blood near Nelson’s left shoulder nothing reminds the observer of the violence of battle and the pain of death. The wound itself is covered by a piece of the cloth into which Nelson’s body is wrapped. The stump of his right arm is hidden behind one of the ‘winged boys round his body [which] are emblematic that the influence of Nelson’s genius still exists’. In this apotheosis not only is the body of Nelson lifted in a physical sense; his death is elevated at the same time, in a figurative sense, to sublime significance. West appears to have regarded this image as the most

---

33 Though West appears to have planned to paint a death scene in the cockpit, before he saw and criticised Devis’ picture on 10 June 1807; see: The Times, 11 IV 1806; for an illustration see appendix A, plate 36. 34 The engraving, which Heath finished before the engraving of the earlier death scene by West, was inserted in Clarke and M’Arthur, opp. ii, 453; it was explained i, xiii; the original of the painting is on display in the NMM BHC 0566. 35 Clarke and M’Arthur, I, xxxvii; Farington, viii, 2990 (16 III 1807), refers to the West’s work in progress as ‘a sort of Apotheosis of Lord Nelson’; Mitchell, p. 272, suspects that the description in Clarke and M’Arthur is by West himself; the original of the painting is on display in the NMM BNC 2905; for an illustration see appendix A, plate 37.
expressive, if not definitive interpretation of Nelson’s death. At an advanced age he took the trouble to convert it into monumental proportions by representing it in stone in one of the pediments of Greenwich Hospital.36 Transformed into Coade stone, Nelson is lifted in the central and highest part of the pediment, while the accompanying allegorical figures spread out into the narrowing sides. It was not only West, who wanted to see Nelson portrayed in a sublime way. Scott-Pierre-Nicholas Legrand, too, painted an Apotheosis of Nelson.37

There was only one artist who deeply resented Nelson being lifted into the regions of the sublime: William Blake. In 1809 he produced a couple of tempera paintings, one of The Spiritual form of Nelson guiding Leviathan, in whose wreathings are infolded the Nations of the Earth, and the companion piece of The Spiritual Form of Pitt guiding Behemoth.38 The title is as enigmatic as the picture of Nelson itself. In private, Blake wrote of ‘Contemptible Idiots who have been call’d Great Men of late Years’ and added: ‘I wonder who can say Speak no Ill of the dead when it is asserted in the Bible that the name of the Wicked shall Rot’.39 In public he did not dare to express himself so ruthlessly about recently deceased figures of national importance. As a consequence he painted Nelson and Pitt in what modern scholars call a ‘demonic parody’. Paley defines the term: ‘A demonic parody caricatures the nature of the celestial world as, for example, the three-headed Satan at the centre of Dante’s Hell caricatures the Trinity. The demonic could also be regarded as a grotesque imitation of the sublime’. 40

36 Mitchell, p. 272; Farington, xi, 4033 (20 November 1811): The task nearly was too much for the seventy-three-year-old: ‘I exerted myself till I could do so no longer, having applied by night and by day’. For an illustration see appendix A, plate 38.
37 NMM BHC 2906 (on display).
In Blake’s picture of Nelson the observer first perceives the element of the sublime. Nelson is portrayed as a golden, naked and complete standing figure with two outstretched arms and a halo around his head. In choosing this kind of representation Blake used a pattern that he had developed himself in earlier pictures. In *Glad Day*, or *Albion rose from where he laboured at the Mill with Slaves*, for example, Blake had pictured a shining youth with outstretched arms and a radiant halo around his head in a similar pose to that of Nelson on his later picture. The difference that contains the ironic element lies in the surrounding of the figure. While the figure of the risen Albion stretches into open space, Nelson is surrounded by a dark monster and a sharply defined halo. Mark Schorer argues that the symbolism of the *Leviathan*, led by Nelson, goes beyond a mere parallel to *Behemoth*, the monster that accompanies Pitt and embodies the land: ‘the leviathan is not only the symbol of the sea, with which Nelson would quite properly be coupled, but also of the tyrannical state’. Blake exploits this symbolism, well known from Thomas Hobbes’ use of it. The Leviathan on the picture of *The Spiritual form of Nelson* has in his wreathings ... infolded the Nations of the Earth. All nations have the shape of female bodies who struggle to free themselves from the snake-like winding body of Leviathan. The figure that David Erdman identifies as France also has her hair torn by Nelson’s right hand. At the bottom of the picture, in front of one of the coils of the monster, on which Nelson stands, lies a black man with hidden face and with manacled hands, a symbol of ‘the continuing institution of slavery’. In the jaws of the fierce monster that Nelson leads is Christ himself, so that the shining figure of Nelson is finally turned into the embodiment of the ‘heroic Antichrist’. The satanic Nelson of Blake’s picture is about to receive his punishment, however. What at first glance may appear as rays from his light figure are indeed flashes of lightning, licking towards him. Erdman remarks: ‘In Blake’s preliminary drawing his purpose is less

---

41 Paley, p. 196, also discusses one element of the figure of Nelson himself: ‘Most important, perhaps, the genitals are discreetly veiled by a wisp of smoke or cloud, in contrast to the complete nakedness of Albion: “The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty, the hands & feet Proportion” [from Blake’s *Proverbs of Hell*]. “Art can never exist without Naked Beauty displayed” [from Blake’s *The Laocoön*]; for a comparison of the two pictures see appendix A, plates 39 and 40.

disguised: a great bolt of lightning is piercing Nelson's right shoulder'. 43 This may have been meant as a reference to the fatal wound which Nelson received in the shoulder (though it was the left one). Paley summarizes the picture as a 'parody of the sublime'. 44

Blake's fiercely critical interpretation was not understood at the time and has only started to be appreciated in the twentieth century. 45 This need not surprise us, if we consider how Blake concealed the meaning of his message, not only in the picture itself and in its title, but also in the accompanying catalogue, in which he wished for a commission 'to execute these two Pictures [of Pitt and Nelson] on a scale that is suitable to the grandeur of the nation, who is the parent of his heroes, in high finished fresco'. 46 At the time, even Whigs, who could have sympathized with the anti-war message misinterpreted and resented the picture as that of 'an unfortunate lunatic, whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement'. Having declared the allegory 'unintelligible', The Examiner even 'jumped to the conclusion that Blake was whitewashing the war policy associated with Pitt and Nelson'. 47 Blake's awkward interpretation of Nelson therefore did not have any noticeable impact on the development of the imagery of Nelson in general.

The popular market settled for what it regarded as authentic representations of the death of Nelson. Devis' publisher and West's heirs both failed to get the painters' versions of the death of Nelson sold to Greenwich Hospital. 48 Devis' painting in the end, however, found its way there in 1825 and was made part of the Naval Gallery that Edward Hawke Locker (a son of Nelson's mentor Captain William Locker) had created

---

43 Erdman, p. 417.
44 Paley, pp. 196, 199.
45 For references to the early discussion see: Erdman, p. 416; Kathleen Raine, Blake and Tradition (2 vols., first published 1966; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), I, 359, still assumes: 'And yet his two paintings of the Spiritual Forms of Pitt and Nelson showed that Blake saw the war against Napoleon as righteously waged by the two great powers of land and sea'.
46 Quoted in Paley, p. 172.
47 Quoted in Erdman, p. 419, citing and discussing an article by Robert Hunt in The Examiner, 17 September 1809.
48 Farington, ix, 3451 (9 May 1809), about Boydell's hopes 'to sell the Picture of the death of Lord Nelson by Devis to the Commissioner of Greenwich Hospital to be placed there'; Farington, xvi, 5506, 5534-5, 5537-8 (all 1820), about attempts to sell West's death of Nelson to Greenwich Hospital after his death.
there. Thus, positioned in the shrine of British naval history the painting was seen more often than West’s heroic interpretation, which appeared dated to later generations. Devis’ painting has thus become the standard version of the death of Nelson.

Though most engravers followed the patterns set by Devis and some of the very early images of Nelson’s death, some painters attempted to depict the scene in a new way. Denis Dighton, about 1825, showed Nelson already fallen and with his blood spreading to the deck, while he stuck to the pattern of letting Hardy join the scene and men in the background avenge Nelson. Daniel Maclise worked from 1863 to 1865 on his Death of Lord Nelson in a fresco technique in the House of Lords. The picture, a companion piece to a depiction of the battle of Waterloo, is nearly four times as long as it is high, so that it offered itself to Maclise to paint the scene on deck along the length (and not as usual the width) of the Victory. The dying Nelson reclines in the centre of the picture, supported by an officer. His knees are bent and the left one stands up, so that he rather gives the impression of relaxing in a comfortable pose than that of dying. Though the figure of Nelson himself is not very successfully depicted, the surrounding scenery is of some interest. In his close-up view Maclise clearly attempted to give an idea of the chaos of battle. He shows marines firing, sailors handling a gun, a powder-monkey supplying the gun-crews and several wounded men in the foreground. Though many sailors look distinctly Victorian (with side-whiskers), Maclise also tried to represent the variety of people on board by including, for example, in prominent positions a black man (near the dying Nelson) and a woman (in the foreground, caring for a wounded sailor). As late as in the 1860s the British public was still aware that women had been

49 Mitchell, p. 273; before the painting had been on public display in the British Institution Exhibition (Farington, ix, 3451, 9 May 1809).
50 The painting is in Liverpool since 1866 (Mitchell, p. 273).
51 Mainly in book illustrations; for example, Clarke, opp. p. 421, still portrays Nelson on deck, sword and hat on deck, and held by officers; Southey (1831) [not the 1813-edition!], opp. p. 339, depicts Nelson fallen onto the deck of the Victory, held by sailors, with Hardy approaching with a speaking trumpet; Tucker, p. 427, shows Nelson being carried down form the poop deck (!), an officer holding the upper part of his body, a seaman holding his legs, p. 429, a copy of Devis.
52 NMM BNC 0552 (on display).
53 An engraving of the picture by Charles W. Sharpe (London, 1874) is shown in McCarthy, p. 82, no. 57.
on board battleships, because they were from time-to-time mentioned in newspapers as veterans of the French wars.\textsuperscript{54} In the twentieth century, however, observers of the painting regarded the inclusion of women as ‘artist’s licence’.\textsuperscript{55}

Certain other scenes from Nelson’s life also became very popular. There was considerable interest in Nelson showing some daring, such as when, as a young midshipman, he tried to shoot a polar bear; when, as a lieutenant, he volunteered to board a prize in a storm or when, already an admiral, he engaged in hand-to-hand fighting off Cadiz.\textsuperscript{56} Painters and engravers also tried to represent the ‘humanity’ of the warrior, which was stressed so repeatedly in the early biographies of Nelson.\textsuperscript{57} Richard Westall did this in his depiction of the Battle of St. Vincent, by representing Nelson and Captain Berry ‘with expressions of pity towards the vanquished and fallen enemy’.\textsuperscript{58}

The dignified conquest became a much more popular motif than Nelson’s dashing boarding of the Spanish ships that had preceded their defeat.\textsuperscript{59} In parallel to the many death scenes, it also became popular to portray Nelson wounded in the arm at Santa Cruz de Tenerife.\textsuperscript{60}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} In the 1840s several women had (unsuccessfully) claimed the Naval General Service Medal 1793-1840 for their parts in the battles of the Nile and Trafalgar (see \textit{Mariner’s Mirror}, 33 (1947), 366-67 and 47 (1961), 45-46); \textit{The Times}, 10 October 1843 (about ‘Mrs Sarah Frank Pitt, who was present at the Battle of Trafalgar … she … saw the immortal Nelson fall’, from the \textit{Exeter Times}); for a notice in an unspecified newspaper about a ninety-three-year old ‘lady who fought at St. Vincent and the Nile’ see: NMM PAD 4287; I have only come across one early death-scene that includes a female figure: Le Quesne, p. 38, no. 16 (the editor himself does not describe the figure; being portrayed with necklace and red dress with a low cut neck I assume she is meant to be a woman).
\item \textsuperscript{55} \textit{Mariner’s Mirror}, 25 (1939), 355 and 26 (1940), 103.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Orme/Blagdon, opp. p. 7 (bear); [Anon.], \textit{The Glorious Naval Career of the Immortal Nelson} (London: E. Walker, 1 August 1806) [one sheet with nine pictures; hereafter: \textit{Glorious Naval Career}], no. 2 (prize); Clarke and M’Arthur, i, opp. 16 (prize, engraving by A. Raimbach, from painting by R. Westall, described: i, xxxix), ii, opp. 24 (Cadiz, engraving by Anker Smith, from painting by R. Westall, described: i, xl); Clarke, opp. p. 94 (Cadiz); Southey (1831), opp. p. 11 (bear), opp. p. 117 (Cadiz).
\item \textsuperscript{57} See chapter 7.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Clarke and M’Arthur, i, xxxix (description), opp. 350 (engraving by R. Golding, from painting by R. Westall).
\item \textsuperscript{59} Nelson receiving the sword of the Spanish admiral is also shown in: Duncan, \textit{Life}, opp. p. 43; \textit{Glorious Naval Career}, no. 4; Clarke, opp. p. 91; Southey (1831), opp. p. 113; The actual boarding is depicted in: F. Lloyd, opp. p. 18; another representation of Nelson’s humanity was portrayed in showing boats saving French sailors at the battle of the Nile: Duncan, \textit{Life}, opp. p. 82.
\item \textsuperscript{60} \textit{Glorious Naval Career}, no. 5; Clarke and M’Arthur, i, xli (description), ii, opp. 36 (engraving by J. Nagle, from painting by R. Westall).
\end{itemize}
When the writing of biographies about Nelson went through its first revival in the mid-nineteenth century, there was new scope for the creation of book illustrations showing scenes from Nelson's life. Probably it was the desire to re-establish Nelson's reputation that a not very generously illustrated biography contained two scenes alone of Nelson being received at court.\(^6_1\) Such respectable imagery in the long term exerted much less appeal than Nelson's affair with Lady Hamilton, however, although revelations about this relationship had made him fall into disrepute in the first place and kept threatening his reputation throughout the nineteenth century.\(^6_2\) A biography, while following the accepted view that the relationship had not been of an erotic character, was attractively illustrated with a lady who could be taken for Lady Hamilton and with a death scene of her husband Sir William, in the presence of both, Nelson and Lady Hamilton.\(^6_3\) An edition of Southey's biography of 1873 went even further. Although the text makes hardly any mention of Lady Hamilton and certainly does not recognize the intimate character of her relationship with Nelson, an illustration portrays the admiral with his lover at home.\(^6_4\)

Though book illustrators were ready to modernize the appearances of the people they depicted, Nelson's apparel remained the same: a naval uniform of the turn of the nineteenth century. This pattern became so much the standard for Nelson's dress in illustrations that even the young Nelson was portrayed with epaulettes, though these were only introduced in the British Navy in 1795.\(^6_5\) Other officers, however, were represented in Victorian uniforms, sailors possess side-whiskers and ladies are dressed

---

\(^6_1\) Anon. (Foster), pp. 33 and 57; an earlier example of such a scene is: Glorious Naval Career, no. 6; later this subject can be found in: Robert Southey, The Life of Nelson (London: Bell & Daldy, 1873) [hereafter: Southey (1873)], p. 45 (new engraving from design by Birket Foster).

\(^6_2\) See chapters 1 and 5.

\(^6_3\) Tucker, pp. 318 (picture of lady), 397 (death of Sir William Hamilton), 458, 460 (passages that maintain that the relationship was not erotic).

\(^6_4\) Southey (1873), p. 349 (new engraving from design by Birket Foster).

\(^6_5\) Tucker, pp. 33, 40, 47, 48, 50, 60; Nelson himself regarded two fellow officers who wore epaulettes on a visit to France in 1783 as 'great coxcombs' (Nicolas, i, 86, where it is also stated when epaulettes were introduced in the British navy).
in wide skirts and possess long ringlets at the sides of their faces.\textsuperscript{66} While the clothes of the British were modernized, foreign notables were still dressed in medieval robes.\textsuperscript{67}

Changes in representations of scenes from Nelson’s life could involve more than just clothing fashions. The choice of subject for Nelson at the battle of Copenhagen, for example, changed in the course of the nineteenth century. An early print had shown Nelson accepting the surrender of the Danes in person.\textsuperscript{68} In the mid-nineteenth century, Nelson was rather portrayed as the humane commander sending his message ‘To the Brothers of Englishmen, the Danes’.\textsuperscript{69} Only towards the end of the century was Nelson portrayed disobeying his superior’s orders in putting his telescope to his blind eye and declaring: ‘I do not see the signal’. In order to emphasize the significance of the act, it occurred to one illustrator to depict Nelson with an eye-patch.\textsuperscript{70} The development of the portrayal of Nelson at Copenhagen reflects the changing tastes of the time. Nelson evolved from a heroic figure, known throughout Europe (during the Napoleonic Wars), via a humane Christian hero (in the mid-nineteenth century), to a single-minded warrior, ready to fight for the Empire (before the First World War).

With the interest in Nelson rising again towards the end of the nineteenth century, the portrayal of Nelson, apart from the traditional scenes of battle and death,\textsuperscript{71} now also developed in new directions, particularly with regard to his private life. Charles Lucy was one of the first, in 1853, to depict Nelson in a very intimate situation. He painted him sitting in his cabin before the battle of Trafalgar. The codicil to his will, in which he left Lady Hamilton a legacy to his country, lies open on his desk in front of

\textsuperscript{66} Tucker, pp. 37 (side-whiskers); 114 (Victorian uniform); 40, 69, 318, 397 (ladies in Victorian fashion).
\textsuperscript{67} Tucker, pp. 33 (German count), 114 (mayor of Bastia).
\textsuperscript{68} Glorious Naval Career, no. 8: ‘The Danish Officers said they wished to treat with Lord Nelson in person, “I am Lord Nelson” replied the hero, throwing aside his cloak and shewing his stars’.
\textsuperscript{69} Southey (1831), opp. p. 253; Anon. (Foster), p. 49; Southey (1873), p. 285 (new engraving from design by Birket Foster).
\textsuperscript{70} Oliver Warner, Nelson and the Age of Fighting Sail (London: in consultation with Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, U.S.N., Cassell (a Cassell Caravel Book), [1963]), p. 100, reproduces a Victorian print (sailor with side-whiskers) of the scene (Nelson with eye-patch); Holmes, p. 227. ‘Nelson’s blind eye’ (illustration); Hadden, p. 202 (Nelson putting his telescope to his right (sic!) eye); Sellar, opp. titlepage (image of Nelson holding his telescope to his blind eye); this last picture was again used in: John Lang, A Life of Nelson (T. C. & E. C. Jack: London and Edinburgh, 1914) [children’s book], opp. p. 232.
\textsuperscript{71} For example: Death of Nelson by Ernst Slingeneyer, used in: W. C. Russell (1890), opp. p. 1; illustrations in Southey (1873).
him. Instead of preparing for battle, Nelson leans back on his chair, holds his hand to his temple and seems to be pondering what he has just written. Others followed the pattern of portraying the thoughtful Nelson on the morning of the battle of Trafalgar, usually showing him at prayer. The imagery was extended to homely scenes: the Victorian vision of idyllic family life found expression in pictures of Nelson's first farewell from home and it was eventually even transferred to Nelson's adulterous affair with Lady Hamilton, showing the two lovers visiting the studio of George Romney together and portraying them with their daughter in the garden of their house. Other pictures showed the two at a sumptuous dinner or dancing in Naples.

The newly presented private Nelson was also shown connected to the world of the wider public. Printed images showed his reception at Naples (again prominently figuring Lady Hamilton) and his last farewell from Britain. The motif of Nelson leaving Portsmouth for the last time gave ample opportunity for the artists to depict Nelson's appeal to his countrymen and - women. They represented barefooted beggars

---

72 See appendix A, plate 41. Walker, pp. 272, 274 (no. 236). At the time the fact that Nelson's last wish (that Lady Hamilton and his daughter should be cared for) had remained unfulfilled was discussed publicly and a Nelson Memorial Fund was created to benefit his daughter (mainly her sons), see chapter 5.


75 The painting of Nelson and Lady Hamilton in Romney's studio is depicted in: Stephen Deuchar, 'The Immortal Memory'. Nelson. An Illustrated History, ed. Pieter van der Merwe (London: Laurence King, 1995), 144-67, 160, where it is also pointed out why it is impossible that the encounter ever happened. Happy Days at Merton Place, 1803 (The introduction of little Horatia), painted by Frank Dadd (London: Leggatt Bros., 1 November 1913), RNM, 1980/70, is in appendix A, plate 42.


and old women as much as young professionals, beautiful women and simply dressed children — a mixture of what they regarded as representative of the British populace. Some artists went further in attempting to transfer the British people’s admiration for Nelson to their own time. The first example of this kind was Thomas Davidson’s *England’s Pride and Glory*, of about 1890, in which a mother shows her son, a naval cadet, a portrait of Nelson in the Painted Hall of Greenwich Hospital. For the year of the Trafalgar centenary two further pictures of the same kind followed, showing a *Young Sailor looking at Nelson’s Picture*, again in the Painted Hall, and a Greenwich pensioner *Saluting the Admiral*.

The illustrations to a book that described a modernized battle of Trafalgar, fought with dreadnoughts and other naval ships of the beginning of the twentieth century, also went so far as to transpose Nelson into a setting of 1905. Dressed in an early twentieth-century uniform, Nelson remains recognizable due to his empty sleeve and in most paintings also due to his characteristic white curls. On one illustration even an eye-patch is added. The subjects of the paintings are mostly copied from earlier patterns: a death scene with Nelson leaning on an officer, his hat on the deck in front of him; Nelson, on his last departure from Portsmouth, surrounded by cheering crowds but now walking from his hotel to a motorcar. The picture that can be traced directly to a pattern also illustrates most clearly the transition of values in the intervening one hundred years. The depiction of *Lord Nelson explaining methods of attack* is copied from Edward Orme’s view of *Lord Nelson explaining to the Officers the Plan of Attack previous to the Battle of Trafalgar* of 1806 — with some significant changes. While the Edwardian version imitates the poses of the officers assembled around the table, it creates the atmosphere of

---

78 NMM BHC 1811 (on display).
79 Both pictures are held at the NMM. The Young Sailor made it onto a postcard with the caption: ‘England: What thou Wert, Thou Art’, a quotation from Newbolt, reproduced in: Shannon (1987), p. 30, no. D. Albert Holden’s *Saluting the Admiral* is reproduced in appendix A, plate 43. This picture became known to the wider public as one of three plates presented with *Pears’ Annual 1905*, NMM PAI 7615.
80 William Laird Clowes and Alan Hughes Burgoyne, *Trafalgar Refought* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, [1905]) [hereafter: Clowes/Burgoyne], pp. 19 (with eye-patch), 261; on p. 247 a short-haired and not like Nelson looking one-armed admiral passes by a cheering gun-crew; this image is inspired by written reports, it seems to have become popular to depict Nelson with his cheering crew at the time of the Trafalgar centenary, see: Holme, p. 355.
a gentlemen’s club: many officers are shown smoking, Nelson even points to the chart in front of him with a pipe and the whole group is shown under a cloud of smoke. A soda bottle and a decanter stand on the table to complete the picture of exclusive male socializing. 81

While scenes of Nelson’s life developed, portraits of Nelson kept being reproduced. They were strikingly missing on the print market directly after his death, when death-scenes and memorial prints dominated the market for Nelson iconography, 82 but they were regularly used for biographies of Nelson. The short, early biographies, quickly produced after the battle of Trafalgar, mostly used cheap copies of engravings after one of Abbott’s portraits of Nelson. 83 More elaborate biographies as well as separate engravings that were published over the course of the nineteenth century reproduced a greater variety of portraits of Nelson. 84 In France, from the 1820s onwards there were quite individualistic portrayals of Nelson to be had. 85 In 1871 The Illustrated London News published an oval cut of a portrait by Füger, painted in Vienna in 1800, which had not been published before in Britain. 86 This image was copied into an illustrated edition of the Spanish novel Trafalgar by Benito Pérez Galdós, next to a

---

81 Clowes/Burgoyne, p. 153; compare with: Orme/Blagdon, between pp. 32 and 33; for illustrations of the two pictures see appendix A, plates 44 and 45.
82 I have found only one portrait print of Nelson, produced in immediate response to the battle of Trafalgar: [after Bowyer] ([London]: R. Bowyer, 9 December 1805), NMM PAD 4325 and 4164.
83 Anon. (Goodchild), frontispiece; Anon. (Tegg), frontispiece (showing Nelson with an added eye-patch, which he never wore); Charnock, frontispiece. For illustrations of portraits by Abbott see: appendix A, plates 48-49. An exception is [Anon.], Memoirs of the Professional Life and glorious Achievements of the late Vice-Admiral, Lord Nelson (Norwich: Stevenson and Matchett, [1806]), frontispiece (portrait that could be inspired by Beechey’s portrait of Nelson).
84 Portraits that were included in different books, can be found in Walker, p. 204 (for Campbell’s Lives of the Admirals (1817), viii, frontispiece, after Abbott), NMM PAD 4130 (‘for Gifford’s History of the War’, 1815, after Abbott), 4162 (for Brenton, after Bowyer, 1836). Pettigrew made the very unusual choice of a engraving after a portrait by the Italian artist Guzzardi. Examples of separate engravings: NMM PAD 4141 (after Abbott, 1842), 4146 (after de Koster, 1815), 4152 (after de Koster, 1823), 4153 (after de Koster, 1807), 4156 (after Edridge, 1810), 4225 (after Beechey, 1823).
85 See appendix A, plate 54. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Le Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, nos. D 224935, D 224947 (two similar portraits that might have been inspired by Hopnner), P 207646 (whole-length portrait of Nelson leaning against bulwarks of ship, holding a speaking trumpet in his hand), D 224930 (after Abbott). NMM PAD 4174, 4178, 4180-4183, 4228, 4309, 4333.
86 Walker, p. 230.
portrait of the Spanish admiral, Gravina. 87 It thus became fairly well known in Spain and is still used to represent Nelson in Spain today. Spanish interest in portrayals of Nelson was strong enough to produce an oil painting of Nelson just before the amputation of his right arm at Tenerife as late as 1947. 88 As photography and reproduction techniques for pictures improved, engravings were no longer used, illustrators of scenes from Nelson's life found occupation merely in the field of children's books, 89 and the interest in illustrations turned more to an attempt to approach the authentic image of Nelson, namely the oil portraits that had been made from life. 90

In the mid-nineteenth century people started to wonder, what the portraits conveyed of Nelson. Then a critic was content to ponder 'the frail, wan, and wasted form, mutilated with wounds’, adding:

yet, in the pale, melancholy features, ... in the silent eloquence of the blue, thoughtful eye, may be discovered the traces of that indomitable spirit which actuated the leader, and was successfully infused by him into his followers. In looking at the likeness, in recalling the many recorded traits of his gentle, yet enthusiastic nature, his warm religious emotions, his ardent personal enterprise, we fancy we can comprehend the confidence and attachment he inspired among those who served under him. 91

Thoughtfulness, gentleness, warm religious emotions, even when coupled with indomitable spirit, an enthusiastic nature and ardent personal enterprise, were not quite

88 This painting by Lambarri is pictured in Tous Meliá, p. 126. It is entitled: ‘Vista del Theseus con Nelson en el momento de amputarle el brazo derecho a la altura del codo’ (‘View of the Theseus with Nelson Nelson just before the amputation of his right arm at the height of the elbow’).
89 Examples for individually illustrated children's books about Nelson from after the First World War are: Plowman; Peach; Whipple; Bellis; Humphris; Colin Hayes, The Boy from Burnham Thorpe. The Story of Lord Nelson (Saffron Walden: AngliayoungBooks, 1989).
90 There had also been oil paintings inspired from other oil paintings that had been painted from life, as for example: Farrington, viii, 2849 (10 September 1806), about Hoppner consenting to get his portrait of Nelson copied; Walker, p. 272, about Charles Lucy using ‘the Hoppner portrait, the [Catherine] Andras waxwork and the Thaller and Ranson bust’ (see appendix A, plate 41).
91 Pettigrew, i, xiv, quoting from the Westminster Review for January 1848.
the characteristics that people interested in Nelson were looking for at the turn to the twentieth century. W. H. Fichett, writing in 1902, missed what he called ‘Nelson’s battle face’ and observed that ‘in most of his portraits the sensitive mouth, the curving lips, the set of his eyebrows’ only told ‘of the emotional side of Nelson’s character’. 

Arnold White and Ester Hallam Moorhouse agreed that ‘[h]is features in repose and stillness have a marked sadness, an almost feminine sweetness’, though they thought that ‘the stern and masterful side of his character’ came across in some portrayals. Even they, however, insisted that no portrait reflected ‘the marvellous battle-light which shone in his face when in the presence of the enemy’. Though not in such crude terms, authors writing after the Second World War, too, have distinguished between the ‘feminine’ and the ‘masculine’ portrayals of Nelson.

In their search for the most authentic portrayal of Nelson, critics have tended to prefer the virile to the mild Nelson. C. J. Britton judged portraits according to whether one could ‘imagine the dare-devil fighter’ in them and he asked about Abbott’s famous picture: Who can see the fighter there? The full-length portraits of Nelson have attracted most attention in the struggle to determine the character of Nelson. The picture of the young Captain Nelson, by John Francis Rigaud (painted 1777-1781), has been interpreted, on the one hand, as showing him ‘with the assurance of command’ and, on the other hand, as ‘not in the least belligerent, but rather gentle, calm and sensitive’, suggesting ‘humility’. More agreement exists in the assessment of the two later pictures by William Beechey and John Hoppner, both painted in 1801. Oliver Warner was the first to remark: ‘They are of particular interest as emphasising the masculine and feminine side of his nature’. He went on to contrast Beechey’s portrayal of ‘a virile, confident, even masterful man’ to Hoppner’s picture, showing ‘a face full [of] suffering

---

92 Fichett, p. 4.
93 White/Moorhouse, p. 13.
94 Britton, 84 (he praises Devis’ portrait of Nelson for conveying ‘the fighting dare-devilry characteristic’, while he regards it as missing in Wichello’s and De Koster’s; Bowyer’s portrait gets praised: ‘It is aggression itself in battle’; an example of one of the Abbott pictures Britton refers to is in appendix A, plate 48.
95 Warner (1958), p. 30; Howarth/Howarth, p. 18; for an illustration see appendix A, plate 46.
and sensibility, delicate, sympathetic and vivid'. When the National Portrait Gallery acquired the oil sketch for Beechey’s portrait of Nelson the staff was thrilled, as Richard Ormond remembers: ‘Here was a naval commander we could believe in, tough, energetic and resourceful, with the wound above his right eye clearly visible, an image startlingly at odds with the weak tea and sugar dished up by Abbott’. In his thorough study of The Nelson Portraits Richard Walker notes that Hoppner was particularly renowned for his portraits of women and children. He seems thereby to suggest that this is the reason why ‘Hoppner’s Nelson, with its coyly tilted head and sugary expression, has an effeminacy distasteful to this hard-bitten age’. Even Beechey, however, had observed at the time that Nelson’s ‘cheek had rather an Infantine [sic] plumpness’.

While one approach to the portraits of Nelson was to search for the warrior, another was to try to deduce characteristics or moods from the portraits. The same authors who acknowledge that Nelson was suffering from bad health at the time he was portrayed, deduce from the resulting portrait some state of mind, in one case even as specific as a feeling of guilt. Thursfield noted, in 1909, about the portrait of Nelson painted by a Sicilian artist, that ‘a tablet affixed to it states that it was painted just after Nelson’s recovery from a severe fever’. This does not stop him from going on to interpret that ‘its expression is that of a man who is not at ease with himself’. He attributes his reading of the painting in part to ‘Nelson’s passion for Lady Hamilton’. Walker sees the same painting, in a similar vein, as proof of Nelson’s ‘unhappiness’, caused by ‘ill-health and disillusion with his own behaviour in the Mediterranean’.

---

96 Warner (1958), p. 261; for illustrations of the two pictures see appendix A, plates 50 and 51 (oil sketches, which probably as a kind of snapshots, taken immediately from Nelson, betray best the different portrayals of the two painters) and plates 52 and 53 (finished oil paintings, which led Warner to his assessment in the first place).
98 Walker, p. 128.
99 Quoted in Walker, p. 124.
100 Thursfield (1909), p. 96.
101 Walker, p. 6; similarly: p. 91 (‘He is something of a puppet or actor on the boards of a provincial Italian stage’); on p. 80, he remarks that the painter was unknown, even in southern Italy.
Convinced that 'a transformation can be found in his features and expression', Walker finds more evidence of Nelson's depressed state. While he again notes that Nelson was in a bad state of health when travelling through central Europe, he perceives in the portrait, painted in Dresden by Johann Heinrich 'Schmidt ... a melancholy face, the expression unsmiling', supposedly the 'face of a man, sick in body and mind', reflecting the effects of a 'network of constrained emotion and guilt'.

Whatever characteristics may be adduced from Nelson's portraits, authors have also shown an interest in what they tell us about his state of health. P. D. Gordon Pugh examined, with surgical expertise, what the different portraits reveal about the wounds Nelson received in the course of his career. Walker, with an art-historian's eye, has looked more at the way in which Nelson was portrayed. He argues convincingly that the 'Abbott portraits, especially the early ones, are marked by a severity of expression that can only be due to the prolonged endurance of considerable pain'. As Nelson's career advanced, Abbott went on producing portraits, mainly copied from his original sketch, to which he added flesh and colour. As Abbott went on painting Nelson as he imagined him in good health, in Walker's opinion his 'copies deteriorate into the softened form all too familiar from constant reproduction'.

Whether the softened form of Nelson's face springs merely from the imagination of Abbott and Hoppner, the specialist in women's and children's portraiture, will probably remain as disputable as the question whether more sharpened features reflect ill health, guilt or the determination of a warrior. Walker comes to the traditional conclusion that 'there is a dichotomy underlying his character'. As in the biographical

---

102 Walker, p. 6, where he goes so far as to claim: 'It is as though a metamorphosis were taking place under our very eyes'.
103 Walker, p. 113; the aspect of 'guilt' is again mentioned on p. 124; Nelson's bad state of health at the time is examined in more detail in: Nash (1993), p. 13 (Walker's paper is given on pp. 12-14).
104 Pugh (1968), pp. 46-49.
105 Walker, pp. 3, 5; similarly: p. 36.
106 Walker, p. 44 ('replicas ... with the features softened and the expression no longer austere and drawn with pain'); for illustrations of three of Abbott's portraits (the sketch, an early and a later portrait) see appendix A, plates 47, 48 and 49.
107 Walker, p. 52.
108 Walker, p. 6; similarly: p. 7 ('dual life'); for the discussion of this approach to Nelson's character see chapter 7.
portrayal, few authors seem prepared to reconcile softness with the determination of a warrior.\textsuperscript{109}

\textsuperscript{109} For the biographical interpretation of Nelson as dichotomous see chapters 6 and 7.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN
Material Artefacts Representing Nelson

The visual commemoration of Nelson went beyond the pictures dealt with in the previous chapter and found expression in a variety of material artefacts. Those which attempted to illustrate the grief about Nelson's death have already been mentioned in chapter ten. This chapter explores how Nelson himself, rather than the mourning of his death, was commemorated through material artefacts in the two centuries after the battle of Trafalgar.

The first artefacts that poured onto the market were quickly produced ceramic items, reusing earlier motifs. Some mugs and jugs were transfer-printed with the depiction of a much earlier naval encounter, fought in 1758. This motif had already been used for ceramic items meant to commemorate the victory at the battle of the Nile. Retaining a short poem referring to the battle of the Nile, it was now adapted to the new occasion merely by changing an inscription that now referred to the battle of Trafalgar. A mug, again formerly produced to commemorate the battle of the Nile, representing Nelson and his then flag-captain Berry, was adapted to the new situation by simply writing Adm. Collingwood over the relief lettering of Captain Berry. Even if ceramic items addressed the recent event directly, they were often imprecise, giving the wrong numbers of ships in the fleets involved, the wrong age of Nelson and exaggerating the difference in number of guns between the British flagship Victory and the biggest ship in the enemy's fleet, the Spanish Santísima Trinidad.  

The visual representation of the battle of Trafalgar resulted in artefacts that were less attractive than those produced after the battle of the Nile. They did not contain motifs that could be developed into fanciful decoration. There was no colourful blowing up of a French flagship to be depicted and the grey Atlantic did not conjure up any

---

1 Both examples are given in Prentice, p. 30; a jug and two mugs with the naval encounter of 1758 are pictured between pp. 28 and 29 (no. 51). For the name of Collingwood over the relief lettering of Berry see appendix A, plate 56.

2 Prentice, p. 36 (about wrong numbers of ships and wrong age); NMM AAA 4776 and 4777 (wrong number of guns).
exotic imagery, such as pyramids or crocodiles. In order to represent the sombre subject of the battle of Trafalgar producers of commemorative ware therefore reverted in part to traditional elements of decoration, such as a plan of the battle, but mostly focused on the hero of the day.\(^3\)

The most common portraits of Nelson on transfer-printed ceramic items were taken either directly from portrait prints or developed out of them.\(^4\) Nelson, always without a hat, is recognizable by the empty sleeve, pinned to his uniform, his decoration(s) and white hair. Additional inscriptions give his name, and often a short reference to his achievements, a verse or the words of his famous signal, usually wrongly rendered as ‘England expects every man to do his duty’.\(^5\) Nelson’s stunning victory at Trafalgar is sometimes summarized by varying the Caesarean quotation (veni – vidi – vici): ‘He saw – he fought [sic] – he conquered – and he died’.\(^6\) Most telling, however, are the verses that often accompany the portraits of Nelson. Without exception they express grief at the hero’s death. The shortest of them goes:

Dear to his Country,
Shall his Mem’ry live:
But sorrow drown the Joy,
His Deeds should give.

\(^3\) John and Jennifer May, *Commemorative Pottery 1780-1900. A Guide for Collectors* (London: Heinemann, 1972) [hereafter: May/May], pp. 96-101, consider nearly all known transfer-printed pottery commemorating the battle of Trafalgar in their descriptions of twenty types of these pieces (denominated by the letters a-i); one of these categories (a) is a purely allegorical design, two are battle plans (f and g), one is a list of ships that took part in the battle (h), two are representations of the mourning of Nelson (m and p) and the remaining fourteen portray Nelson. The purely allegorical image refers to the battle of the Nile with a pyramid, to the battle of Copenhagen with a castle and to the battle of Trafalgar (lacking any suitable image) with scroll inscribed ‘Trafalgar’.

\(^4\) Those numbered by May/May j, k and l (pp. 98-100) are taken from Daniel Orme’s print (compare May/May, colour plate 5, with Walker, p. 196, no. 6). Those numbered by May/May b, c and i (pp. 97-98) as well as the one pictured in McCarthy, p. 187 (no. 220) are similar to Orme’s portrait, apart from the fact that they show the head turned to sinister, instead of dexter; for an illustration see appendix A, plate 57. The type numbered by May/May e (p. 98) is taken from Chapman’s print after Abbott’s painting (compare May/May, p. 99, no. 167, with NMM PAD 3884); for an illustration see appendix A, plate 58.

\(^5\) May/May, pp. 97-100 (nos. b, e, i, n; nos. j and k render the signal correctly as ‘England expects that every man will do his duty’; no. c renders it without the ‘that’); McCarthy, p. 187 (no. 220), also renders the signal correctly adding: ‘And we will have Twenty of them’.

\(^6\) May/May, pp. 07-98 (nos. b and i), see appendix A, plate 59.

\(^7\) See appendix A, plate 59; McCarthy, p. 182 (no. 211); described in May/May, p. 97 (no. b), as are the others: pp. 97-101 (nos. d ‘The Briton[s] mourn, what else can Britons do’, l ‘He’s free from care & war’s alarms / Sees not our tears nor hears our sighs’ and q ‘the loss unspeakable’). One rare type of transfer-
In addition to the different inscriptions the portraits were surrounded by common maritime and naval imagery, such as anchors, flags and naval trophies.8 A striking omission on the pottery is the actual death scene that figured so heavily in prints and paintings that were produced in response to the battle of Trafalgar.9 Only one such piece, a jug, is recorded among the early Trafalgar pottery.10 The reason for this omission may lie in the fact that potters tended to re-use earlier prints in varying combinations and merely adapt the wording of their products to the new occasion.

The potters sometimes combined different prints in order to decorate their pieces more lavishly. In a first hasty reaction to the new need for ceramic items commemorating Nelson, one producer added a portrait of Nelson to a type of jug otherwise covered with Chinese patterns.11 Other potters tried to find prints with related subjects, such as boats, ships, even an exploding ship, Britannia or George III.12 One piece was even decorated with the by then old-fashioned symbols of death: a skull and crossbones.13 Other decorations were meant to appeal to certain types of customers: Masonic symbols or a famous bridge.14 As the initial shock about the news of Nelson's death passed, potters even combined a portrait of Nelson with caricatures of Dandies.15

Nelson was also the subject of moulded and handpainted ceramics. Some elegant pieces applied as a relief copies of the Medallion which Wedgwood had first produced.

printed jugs also includes an appeal to contribute to the Patriotic Fund for the widows and orphans, left behind by the battle (May/May, p. 99, no. k).

8 May/May, pp. 97-98, nos. b, d, i, j.
9 See chapter 12.
10 May/May, pp. 100-1, no. q (illustration on p. 97, no. 167; the original is in the 'Abrahams' Museum on Nevis' in the West Indies).
11 May/May, pp. 100, no. n, commenting: 'The result, of course, looks hopelessly overcrowded; not do Nelson and small Chinese people make happy jug fellows'.
12 NMM AAA 4803 and 4804 (boats), 4814 (Britannia), 4827 (George III), 4842 (exploding ship), 4922 (merchant ship). More vaguely related is NMM AAA 4823 (Hercules).
13 NMM AAA 4841. For the change of fashion to classical elegance without allusions to the reality of death see chapter 11.
14 NMM AAA 4792 and 4795 (Masonic), 5163 and 5166 (lusteware with Nelson portrait and iron bridge over the Wear near Sunderland), similarly: 4777 (in addition to a picture of the encounter between Victory and Santísima Trinidad: 'A Friend that is social / Good Natur'd and Free / To a Pot of my Liquor / Right welcome shall be / But he that is Proud / Or Ill natur'd may Pass / By my door to an Alehouse / And pay for his glass').
15 NMM AAA 4881 (Dandy, handicapped by his high cravat, tries unsuccessfully to get into his trousers) and 4883 ('Dandy horsemanship', showing a Dandy on a walking bicycle running into a bystander).
in reaction to the battle of the Nile.16 Cheaper ceramics showed a moulded one-armed admiral with a speaking trumpet in his left hand, resting on a gun behind him.17 The simplest versions of commemorative ceramics were those that merely bore a handpainted inscription, such as ‘To the Memory of Lord Nelson’.18 The most expensive pieces were exquisitely handpainted porcelain vases which could be produced only as expensive individual items. As a consequence they can be regarded more as private memorials than examples of the public image of Nelson.19

Though ceramics dominated the commemorative market, the immense interest in Nelson after the battle of Trafalgar also found expression in other media. Medallions of different sizes, medals, glasses, wax pictures, patch boxes, fans and even handkerchiefs bore Nelson’s portrait.20 Patch boxes, as after the battle of the Nile, often included short verses or phrases to commemorate Nelson, such as: ‘Trafalgar the Battle was Fought – Nelson’s Life the Victory bought’.21 More elaborate items took longer to produce, but still found a market years after the battle of Trafalgar. Ceramic busts of Nelson, wine

---

16 See appendix A, plate 1. NMM AAA 4967, 5069. For earlier history see prologue. The motif is still used today.
17 See appendix A, plate 60. This was a very popular item which was used on different pieces: see for example NMM AAA 4981, 5986-5990, 6016-6021, 6136, 6160-6161; NMM AAA 5055 (combined with a mourning figure); NMM AAA 5065-5066, 5070-5071 and 5111-5116 (combined with other subjects).
18 NMM AAA 4988.
19 Prentice, between pp. 28 and 29 (no. 62, porcelain vases by Chamberlains of Worcester, painted with the Battle of the Nile and Trafalgar; p. 36: ‘said to have been presented to William, 1st Earl Nelson after Trafalgar’).
21 NMM OBJ 0020, 0042 and 0068. Other patch boxes bear similar inscriptions: NMM OBJ 0015 (‘Brave Nelson is no more – Success to his memory’), 0034 (same as: 0046, 0053, 0063, 0076, 0136, ‘British Gratitude to Nelsons Valour’), 0043 (same as: 0094, 0137 and 0145, ‘When Nelson knew the Battle was won / He said to fate God’s will be done’), 0079 (‘May all British Admirals prove a Nelson’), 0089 (‘England expects every man to do his Duty Nelson Oct 21 1805’), 0105 (‘The Victory’s won / The Gallant Nelson cry’d / He liv’d a Hero and a Hero he died’), 0115 (‘Nelson his King & Country’s Pride / Who in the Blaze of Glory died’), 0147 (‘Victorious NELSON Immortal be his Name’) and many others. See appendix A, plate 2, for some examples.
coolers with his portrait moulded onto them and a box with pictures of the 'naval victories' (prominentlyfiguringNelson) were produced towards the end of the NapoleonicWar.22

As with biographies, monuments and pictures, material artefacts also neglected the subject of Nelson in the period between 1815 and 1839, when the project to erect a monument to Nelson in Trafalgar Square finally got under way. Only a very few items produced in this period referred to Nelson, such as a fruit dish of the early 1820s which depicts a transfer-printed scene of the death of Nelson inside.23 Though material artefacts are often difficult to date,24 there is a noticeable upsurge in the production of Nelson commemoratives from 1840 onwards. Early symptoms of the new interest were stoneware jugs in the form of Nelson busts, produced about 1840.25 A song even advertised an image of Nelson by referring to his 'grand monument up charing Cross'.26

Along with the production of memorabilia of the new Nelson monument on Trafalgar Square,27 Staffordshire figures of Nelson flooded the developing market for interior decorations. In addition to the influence of the publicity around the building of the

---


23 McCarthy, p. 86 (no. 62), where the piece, as part of a 'History of England' series, is dated 1820/1. A better reproduction of the death scene can be found in Leo Marriott, _What's left of Nelson_ (Shepperton, Surrey: Dial House, 1995) [hereafter: Marriott], p. 76.

24 McCarthy, pp. 166, 169 (nos. 179, 184), dates a wax bust of Nelson 'c. 1830' and a statuette 'c. 1820'. P. D. Gordon Pugh, assisted by Margery Pugh, _Naval Ceramics_ (Newport, Mon.: The Ceramic Book Company, 1971) [hereafter: P. D. G. Pugh (1971)], plate 52D, dates a statuette 'c. 1830' and points out, p. 42, that it may be earlier.

25 See appendix A, plate 62. Doulton and Watts stoneware jugs were produced in great numbers: see NMM AAA 4995-5006 and 5010-5017. P. D. G. Pugh (1971), plate 52B, Staffordshire earthen ware jug, also depicting Nelson, dated 'c. 1840'.


Nelson column on Trafalgar Square, P. D. Gordon Pugh suggests that Queen Victoria's visit to the Victory in 1844 may also have contributed to the popularity of Nelson figures.\(^{28}\) These reasons for a particular interest in Nelson have recently been contradicted by L. P. Le Quesne, who stresses that 'it seems altogether more probable that other, more general factors were responsible' for the production of Staffordshire figures. He argues that they, 'notably the characteristic chimney pieces', were generally fashionable in the 1840s and 1850s, 'reflecting ... with the boom in house-building and growing prosperity, the increasing demand for household ornaments'.\(^{29}\) The massive production of cheap Staffordshire figures, focused, however, on the portrayal of contemporary, living personalities. The only exceptions are Nelson and Napoleon. Figures of Napoleon were usually produced as companion pieces to Wellington (as well as Nelson) and, at least in part, were produced for the export market.\(^{30}\) The impact of the building of Nelson's column on Trafalgar Square on the production of material artefacts depicting the famous admiral should not be ignored. It appears that a renewed interest in Nelson coincided with the fashion for decorative items, particularly Staffordshire portrait figures.

The Staffordshire figures were intended more as decorative elements than as accurate representations. Nelson in particular is portrayed in different coloured breeches, patterned vests, and dark hair and hence is generally not very life-like.\(^{31}\) Simple as the representation of Nelson is, he remains recognizable through his empty right sleeve, his uniform coat and his cocked hat. The potters gave their imagination free rein in moulding the figures. In about half of their designs they chose to portray Nelson dying. In comparison with the standing figures, often produced as companion pieces to Wellington or Napoleon or both, these death scenes were much more elaborate. They


\(^{29}\) Le Quesne, p. 10; Asa Briggs, *Victorian Things* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1988) [hereafter: Briggs], pp. 147-48, supports the idea that the Staffordshire figures were part of a growing market for 'commemorative artefacts for the home, including the working-class home', 153 (giving prices for Staffordshire figures).

\(^{30}\) For an overview over figures produced see P. D. G. Pugh (1987). For the export of Napoleon figures see Briggs, p. 148.

\(^{31}\) Le Quesne, p. 10. For the portrayal of Nelson see: P. D. G. Pugh (1987), pp. 221-29 and 231.
showed a sitting Nelson, usually with his hat still on and accompanied by two men, who can be identified as surgeon William Beatty (offering Nelson something to drink) and the Reverend Alexander Scott or Captain Hardy. In some cases the outline of the Victory is moulded on the reverse of the group. Another portrayal shows a bare-headed Nelson accompanied by two officers, who wear their hats for and aft following the Victorian fashion (and not athwartships, as Nelson always wore his hat). The artists thereby merely followed the practice of modernizing dress in historical portraits that can also be observed in nineteenth-century pictures of Nelson.

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Nelson commemoratives remained popular and developed into different forms. Busts of Nelson, some of them made of porcelain, catered for the expensive taste. Admirers of Nelson with more modest means could acquire a Nelson jug or a silk embroidered picture, a so-called Stephengraph, of the Death of Admiral Nelson after Daniel Maclise's painting. Artisans used their imagination and ingenuity to design an ever greater variety of Nelson commemoratives as the century wore on, including such things as a Nelson umbrella stand. These items, however, were merely the cautious prelude to the outburst of commemorative production for 1905, the year of the Trafalgar centenary.

From exquisitely worked porcelain to paper napkins a variety of things were decorated with portraits of Nelson and other elements that could fittingly commemorate the centenary. The majority of the items focused on Nelson. One pottery reproduced its popular Nelson jugs of 1840 and Wedgwood re-used its portrait medallion with

32 P. D. G. Pugh (1987), p. 221. An example of a Staffordshire ‘Death of Nelson’ with Captain Hardy can be found in appendix A, plate 63. For these men’s attendance of the dying Nelson see chapter 6.
35 See chapter 12.
36 McCarthy, pp. 166-68 (nos. 181, 183); Walker, p. 183 (two porcelain busts, both dated ‘c. 1850’). For an example of a bust see appendix A, plate 65.
37 See appendix A, plate 64. Briggs, pp. 151-52, points out how popular this textile art-form was. For a discussion of Maclise's painting see chapter 12.
39 McCarthy, p. 112 (no. 64, Loving Cup by Copeland, limited edition). RNM, 1975/39 (paper handkerchief, combining portraits of Nelson and Napoleon under the heading ‘L’Entente Cordiale’).
reference to the centenary. 40 Newly designed ceramics combined Nelson with ‘his captains’, thereby degrading his second-in-command, Vice-Admiral Collingwood to that rank. 41 The pieces of commemorative ceramics were decorated with portraits of Nelson, usually copied from one of Abbott’s portraits, and with naval elements, such as a battle scene, or simply elements that conjured up a maritime impression, such as ropes. Inscriptions were short, usually giving only names and dates (of Nelson’s birth and death or those of the centenary). The longest piece of text was Nelson’s signal (now usually rendered as ‘England expects every man will do his duty’). 42 In comparison to the elaborate pieces from the early nineteenth century, the centenary ceramics were usually adorned with much simpler imagery and they completely dispensed with poetry or other lengthy written messages. Other items, such as statuettes or medallions, naturally contained even less elaborate textual elements. 43 Artefacts in general thus focused on imagery, rather than written messages, in commemorating the centenary of the death of Nelson. A series of fifty ‘Nelson’ cigarette cards shows that the image of Nelson even served to attract buyers with very limited purchasing power. 44

Throughout the twentieth century Nelson memorabilia seems to have remained continuously in demand. This can be measured by the fact that new items kept being designed. The imagery conveyed on ceramic commemoratives became even simpler over the course of the century. Most designs were far removed from the varied combinations, detailed battle plans, extensive lists of ships, complete poems and elaborate naval imagery that had adorned most of the very early pieces. Instead, material artefacts focused ever more exclusively on a portrayal of Nelson himself. Probably in order to make Nelson’s face more interesting and distinct, some ceramic items, produced

40 Doulton and Watts; Prentice, between pp. 92 and 93 (no. 140). Wedgwood’s profile of Nelson by De Vaere can be found on: NMM AAA 5060-5062, 5097 (and in appendix A, plate 1).
41 See appendix A, plate 66. NMM AAA 5073 (produced by Royal Doulton, Lambeth), the other ‘captain’ pictured is Captain Hardy.
42 See appendix A, plate 67. NMM AAA 5074-5077, 5086 (with ropetwist borders), 5078-5085, 5087-5088 (with battle scene), 5089-5090 (with ships and guns). The ‘that’ is missing in the wording of the signal.
43 McCarthy, pp. 170, 175 (nos. 186, 196).
44 See appendix A, plate 68. Will’s Cigarettes, Nelson Series (published 1905).
after the Second World War, showed an eye-patch over Nelson's blind eye.⁴⁵ An elaborately decorated teapot extended the decoration without abandoning the personal portrayal by depicting, apart from Nelson, also Collingwood and four of Nelson's captains.⁴⁶ Simple mugs merely presented one of Abbott's portraits of Nelson or a sketch inspired by it, sometimes combined with rough representations of 'H.M.S. Victory' and the 'Battle of Trafalgar'.⁴⁷ A very recent mug attempted an even more personal portrayal of Nelson, by including, a portrait of Lady Hamilton, in the same size and on the opposite side from that of Nelson, and the combined knife and fork, which Nelson used after the loss of his arm.⁴⁸

Other material artefacts besides ceramics indicate a similar development towards the intimate portrayal. While tea towels still offer space for the depiction of the Victory or a battle-scene, Nelson dolls and teddy bears convert Nelson into a cuddly object of affection.⁴⁹ Nelson is portrayed in a wide variety of contemporary trinkets, such as tin soldiers, paperweights and fridge magnets; the later available in form of a profile of Nelson's face as well as a small full-length Nelson teddy bear, complete with eye-

---


⁴⁶ The Nelson Dispatch, 5 (1996), 403, produced by James Sadler & Sons Limited as part of their 'Minster Historical Series'.

⁴⁷ One cream-coloured and gold-rimmed mug, bearing a copy of an Abbott portrait with hat, is inscribed: 'Lord Nelson, made exclusively for H.M.S. victory souvenir Shop by J.H.Weatherby & Sons Ltd. Falcon Pottery. Hanley. England' (c. 1980). A white mug, on sale at the NMM at the time of the opening of its Nelson exhibition in 1995, is inscribed '© Hart Series' and depicts a simple black sketch of Nelson, possibly from the same Abbott painting, flanked by blue sketches of 'M.M.S. Victory' and the 'Battle of Trafalgar'.

⁴⁸ This mug, designed by Pete Smith, was on sale at the NMM in 2000. It shows also the flags of Nelson's famous signal and ships that took part in the battle of Trafalgar. Nelson's Column on Trafalgar Square is depicted on the handle.

⁴⁹ A tea towel of the Victory is sold at the RNM in Portsmouth, where the ship is on display; another tea towel bore the same design and was for sale together with the white mug, created on the occasion of the opening of the NMM's Nelson exhibition in 1995. Nelson dolls have been on sale at the Nelson Museum in Monmouth (The Nelson Dispatch, 1 (1983), 104) and Nelson teddy bears at the NMM in 1995.
patch. In the language of the material artefact Nelson has thus evolved from a heroic warrior who sacrificed himself for his country's weal to an ever-recognizable icon of enchanting familiarity.

---

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
Poems and Songs about Nelson

When news of the battle of Trafalgar and Nelson’s death reached Britain a deluge of poetry dealing with the event flooded the British public. In theatres, at concerts, at dinners, in magazines, in books, on broadsheets and on elegant engravings poems about the battle of Trafalgar and the death of Nelson were recited, sung, and printed. Everybody with the slightest inclination towards poetry, from politician (George Canning and John Wilson Croker) to ‘a Young Lady Eight Years of Age’, produced odes, dirges, stanzas in memory of the battle and the hero’s death. Naval officers and sailors joined the ranks of acknowledged poets, such as Charles Dibdin, Richard Cumberland and the then poet laureate Henry James Pye. Some authors rhymed in Latin, French or Greek. In preparation of this thesis about one hundred and fifty different poems, published in the last two months of 1805 and during the year of 1806 alone, have been traced. Since it was customary to read poetry in private and recite pieces at public gatherings, it can be assumed that the published pieces form only the peak of a veritable iceberg of poetry. A hundred years later Henry Newbolt commented: ‘Probably no other national event has ever produced so large and so direct a movement to expression in verse’.

If somebody, Walter Scott for example, refrained from dealing with the subject, it was because he felt overwhelmed by it. Scott felt his own ‘general incapacity to perform such a mighty task’, which was suggested to him by Warren Hastings. He went

The deluge of poetry, mentioned above, if referenced here in full, would swamp the pages of this chapter. I have therefore decided to replace complete references for poems by numbers. These numbers correspond to those given in the bibliography for the poems (section 13.3 of the sources).

1 50 (Theatre Royal Richmond), 81, 122, 155, 156, 157, 168 (all Covent Garden), 150.
2 13 (‘at a Dinner given by a noble Lord to the Volunteers of his District’), 102 (‘Vocal Concerts’, Hanover Square), 120 (‘Grocer’s annual Dinner, on Lord Mayor’s Day’), 166 (Guildhall, on Lord Mayor’s Day), 174 (‘at the Rotunda’, Dublin).
3 63 (‘Young Lady ...’), 105 (Canning), 149 (Croker).
4 34 (‘sailor’), 109 (‘naval officer’), 150, 151 (Cumberland), 156, 157 (Dibdin), 209 (Pye).
5 1, 29 (Latin), 21 (Greek), 41 (Latin and French).
6 Newbolt, p. 187.
on to state: ‘After all, the fate of the hero of the Nile, of Copenhagen, and alas! of Trafalgar is almost too grand in its native simplicity to be heightened by poetical imagery’. When he mentioned Nelson in passing three years later, in Marmion, it was merely to express grief at his death (‘glory weeps o’er Nelson’s shrine’).

The most immediate response expressed in poetry was, not surprisingly, sheer grief. Some poems explicitly called upon their readers to ‘mourn, Britons, mourn’. Others felt confused at the ‘mingled sense of joy and grief’. Many poems started with a triumphant description of the victory, merely to go on to express that it was muted by sadness about the death of Nelson. Some were even ‘almost loathing the triumphant strife / That robbed this country of her Hero’s Life’. George Canning expressed the situation:

On every brow the cloud of sadness hung
The sounds of triumph died on every tongue!

As several other poets, however, Canning went on to try to convince his countrymen to regard the triumph as a means to overcome their grief:

He died the death of glory – Cease to mourn,
And cries of grief to songs of triumph turn!

A mood of triumph was not conveyed in the Trafalgar poetry, however. If at all, it found expression in a comment about Nelson being avenged.

Instead of expressing triumph, most poets searched for a meaning in Nelson’s death and some hope for the future without him. His loss was widely interpreted as a sacrifice and Nelson was regarded as a saviour of Britain, if not the nations of

---

8 213.
9 See chapter 10.
10 4; similarly: 72 (‘mourn, England, mourn’), 139 (‘Mourn one and all / Great Nelson’s fall’), 168 (‘Oh! mourn! Through all thy realms, Britannia mourn!’).
11 85; similarly: 19 (‘joy is twin’d to grief’), 22, 62, 63, 120, 123, 138, 140, 152, 167, 209.
12 13, 50, 80, 108, 123, 150, 174; only one short poem (207) remained triumphant.
13 118; similarly: 11, 45 (‘Too dearly bought, our trophies we deplore’), 116, 216.
14 105; similarly: 97, 139, 156, 221, 222, 229, 230.
15 10, 21, 62, 73, 98 (p. 6), 173 (p. 26), 230.
16 8, 69, 73, 86, 104, 127, 129, 140, 150, 160, 166, 175.
17 35, 90, 127.
Europe. Highly estimated as Nelson’s last victory was, it could not wholly console people for his loss. The war, after all, was still raging with Napoleon conquering central Europe and declaring that he was out for ‘ships, colonies and commerce’. Though fears of an invasion among the public were at an end, it was believed that Britain’s naval mastery, which Nelson had contributed so much to achieve, needed to be sustained in future. Some poets set their hopes on Nelson’s immediate successor, Admiral Collingwood, ‘train’d in Nelson’s school’, but most hoped for his example to be emulated throughout the navy:

Your Nelson shall conquer and triumph again!
Each tar shall inherit
A share of his spirit,
And all prove invincible Lords of the Main!

Other poets were not content merely with Nelson’s example or his spirit surviving. They saw Britain producing new Nelsons: ‘And EVERY BRITON WILL A NELSON RISE’.

Apart from the question of how Nelson would be succeeded, much of the early poetry about Nelson and Trafalgar focused on how Nelson himself could transcend his death. The most common response to his death was the consoling thought that he had passed on to immortality. Some poems insisted ‘Your Nelson lives in heavenly sphere’, while others let him appear and comment on the battle and his own death. Nelson’s newly gained heavenly position was sometimes even transferred to his lifetime.

---

18 35, 49, 50, 112, 143.
19 This was referred to in 157.
20 71; similarly: 120, 123, 139, 150, 163.
22 143; similarly: 9 (‘Britannia / ’Cease to weep, ... altho' Nelson is slain, / You still have more Nelsons in store!’), 28, 46, 77, 98 (p. 7), 107, 111, 131, 224. 171 hoped more modestly merely for one new Nelson: ‘May there rise from his ashes a Nelson again!’.
23 2, 16, 24, 26, 48, 50, 54, 58, 67, 77, 85, 86, 89, 90, 91, 104, 123, 127, 139, 140, 143, 149, 150, 156, 160, 161, 163, 171, 173 (pp. 23, 24, 26), 175, 209, 222, 230.
24 10; similarly: 86, 94, 98 (p. 8), 150.
25 111, 150, 173.
when he was referred to, without the restraint preachers had shown, as 'god-like'. 26
Some elegant stanzas described Nelson as '[i]n Life, in Death, alike sublime'. 27

While refined society lifted Nelson to the sublime, some poetry, particularly that by sailor's, was much more down to earth, or rather, deck. The setting of Nelson's death is described as 'the decks covered all with human blood' 28 and instead of alluding to immortality, broadsheet ballads cherished a more personal memory ('as long as I breathe his great praises I'll sing') and bid their comrades: 'Always let Lord Nelson's memory go round'. 29 While they show admiration for Nelson, at least one of them also pointed out: 'Not only brave Nelson but thousands was slain'. 30 One exceptional poem, though written by a professional writer, also used the viewpoint of an ordinary sailor: Tom Halliard. A Ballad. Its author, Peter Pindar (John Wolcot), was personally acquainted with Lady Hamilton. 31 His ballad, published as a broadsheet with a woodcut illustration, describes the death at the battle of Trafalgar of its subject, Tom Halliard. The sailor's death bears obvious resemblance to that of Nelson and focuses on his 'constant Catharine'. Tom asks the captain to 'Cut a Lock from this poor Head' for his sweetheart, to tell her that 'hers alone I die!' and to carry his last letter to her. 32 It appears that the popular reception, in idealizing less, was also more open about illicit love as well as the cruelty of war. 33

26 19, 82 ('sent down from Heaven'), 104 (repeatedly referring to Nelson as 'godlike'), 143, 179, 221 ('a demigod'), 173 (pp. 12, 18, 21, 40), 209; other poems were content with a religious allusion, calling Nelson 'father' (139, 174, 222). For the more cautious approach of preachers see chapter 10.
27 91; similarly: 221 (p. 7).
28 5 (p. 214, 'A lamentable story'; p. 216, narrator: 'I am but a saucy foremost Jack, and to the Defence belong'), 14 (a broadsheet ballad, addressed to 'all you gallant seamen that unites a meeting'); elegant poems that give a blunt description of the scene on deck are an exception: 191 ('How shall I relate the story, / When the gallant Nelson fell. / Mangled limbs, and bullet flying, / Shatter'd planks of rived oak; / Groans of hardy sailor dying, / Envelop'd all in cloudy smoke'). 29 14; similarly: 5 (p. 216, 'his mem'ry shall be ever dear to British sailors all'), 64 ('on the mind of Britons his death will long remain').
30 66 (also: 'All the world with Lord Nelson they could not compare').
31 Memoirs of Lady Hamilton, p. 314, states that he was a guest of Lady Hamilton's at Merton.
32 208. The poem is also outspoken about the scene on deck: 'From the Maindeck to the Quarter, / Strew'd with Limbs, and wet with Blood, / Poor Tom Halliard, pale and wounded, / Crawl'd where his brave Captain stood'. For public knowledge about Nelson's death scene see chapter 6.
33 For the popular gossip about Nelson and Lady Hamilton see also chapter 10.
Among the elegant poetry that was produced in reaction to the battle of Trafalgar, Wordsworth's poem about the *Character of the Happy Warrior* stands out, not only in matters of quality, but also in matters of subject. As the title indicates, Wordsworth did not deal with the event of the battle and the death of Nelson (Nelson is not mentioned in the poem), but instead he examined the abstract idea of the ideal warrior. Inspired by Nelson, Wordsworth discerned an 'inward light' that leads the warrior on

> Who doomed to go in company with Pain,
> And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!
> Turns his necessity to glorious gain ...

Confronted with the cruel side of life, the happy warrior is 'rendered more compassionate' and develops honourable qualities:

> As tempted more; more able to endure
> As more exposed to suffering and distress;
> Thence, also, more alive to tenderness.

If he has risen by merit he 'Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim', instead of waiting 'For wealth, or honours, or worldly state'. The 'inward light' that carries him through his eventful life expresses itself particularly in situations of danger:

> And, through the heat of conflict, keeps the law
> In calmness made, and sees what he foresaw;

This utter calmness and inner balance makes the happy warrior in the end also insensible to what most other poets stressed so much: immortality.

> Who, whether praise of him must walk the earth
> For ever, and to noble deeds give birth,
> Or he must fall, to sleep without his fame,
> And leave a dead unprofitable name —
> Finds comfort in himself and in his cause; 34

With this allusion to less commemorated men, Wordsworth may have thought of his dead brother, who had regretted not having joined 'the Naval, instead of the East India Company's service'. This, at least, is what he claimed after 'the great war with the French' was over and he, together with most of his countrymen, saw Nelson more critically. 35

---

34 232.  
35 *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. William Knight (11 vols., Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1882-99), iv, 2. The editor does not give the date of the letter, but since Wordsworth refers in it to 'the great war with the French' in the past tense, it must have been written in or after 1815, when
While the British were still celebrating Nelson’s life and mourning his death, the Spanish poetry, produced in response to the battle of Trafalgar, treated the British admiral much more critically.\textsuperscript{36} There Nelson was described in general terms as the ‘tyrant of the sea’;\textsuperscript{37} but he was also depicted in a personal rage, striving to avenge the loss of his right arm at the hands of the Spanish (at Santa Cruz de Tenerife in 1797), and driven by ‘frenetic pride’ in his former successes to let Spanish blood flow.\textsuperscript{38} As a consequence, the poets interpreted Nelson’s death as a punishment for his morally flawed attitudes.\textsuperscript{39} Another, widely-known, poem went on to use the negative figure of the slain ‘British chief, impetuous terror of the sea’ as an appearance that predicts ‘the fatal ruin/ which I see near and inevitable/ [for] Ambitious Albion!’\textsuperscript{40}

Not all Spanish poetry, published in response to the battle of Trafalgar, reflected dislike of the British in general or Nelson in particular. Some viewed Nelson in an ambivalent, if not conciliatory way. In the most famous and most lasting Spanish poem

---


\textsuperscript{37} 212 (p. 564, ‘el tirano del mar’); similarly: 165 (p. 6, ‘el feroz britano’ = ‘the ferocious Briton’).

\textsuperscript{38} 200 (p. 8).

\textsuperscript{39} 200 (pp. 20, 21), 212 (p. 565).

\textsuperscript{40} ‘... adalid britano/ fiero terror del mar’, ‘la fatal ruina/ Que ya cercana inevitabe miro,/ lAmbiciosa Albion!’, 159 (p. 609). This poem was praised at the time: \textit{Minerva o El Revisor general}, 17 December 1805, 201; but also ridiculed at the time: \textit{Minerva o El Revisor general}, 24 December 1805, 217-220. It was later praised by: Antonio Alcalá Galiano, \textit{Recuerdos de un anciano}, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, vol 63, ‘Obras escogidas’ [hereafter: A. Alcalá Galiano, \textit{Recuerdos}], p. 17.
about the battle of Trafalgar, *Al combate de Trafalgar* by Manuel José Quintana, the ‘English’ are again portrayed as haughty, while a classic line that was still quoted in the twentieth century showed respect for Nelson: ‘Englishman, I abhorred you, and hero, I admire you’. The change of tense from past to present indicates that the author felt able to admire Nelson only after his death, when his being English had somehow lost its importance and he could be regarded primarily as a hero. Others refrained from pouring nothing but revengeful anger upon Nelson, either because they were primarily motivated by a grief that mourned all who died or because acknowledging Nelson’s skill and courage helped to explain their defeat.

At a time when the flood of Nelson poetry was ebbing in Britain, in 1811, a ‘Mr. Arnold’ wrote the lyrics of a song which would become the most enduring and most famous poem about Nelson. The song was composed (with M. P. King) and sung by ‘Mr. Braham’, another old acquaintance of Lady Hamilton. *The Death of Nelson* starts with a ‘Recitative. Larghetto’ in c minor:

```
O'er Nelson's Tomb, with silent grief oppress'd  
BRITANNIA mourn'd her Hero, now at rest:  
But those bright laurels ne'er shall fade with years,  
Whose leaves, whose leaves are water'd by a Nations tears.
```

After this solemn introduction about grief and immortality, an ‘Aria. Allegro’, entitled ‘Twas in Trafalgar’s bay’ and opened by three powerful trumpet-blasts, narrates the glorious day in joyous, if not triumphant, C major. Among ‘cheers’ and many mentions of ‘Vict’ry’ it is emphatically pointed out:

```
We scorn'd the foreign yoke,  
For our ships were British oak,
```

---

41 210; praised at the time: *Minerva o El Revisor general*, 14 January 1806, p. 29; and even in a poem: 164; later referred to as famous or praised by: *BAE*, vol. 67 (1875), p. 66, fn. 1; A. Alcalá Galindo, *Recuerdos*, p. 17; *La Ilustración española y americana*, año XLIX, número XXXIX, 22 October 1905, p. 227; quoted by: Marliani, pp. 261, 391; del Rio Sainz, p. 156.

42 210 (l. 139 ‘ufano’), similarly throughout the poem.

43 ‘ingles te aborreci, y héroe te admiro’. 210 (l. 150); quoted by Marliani, p. 391; P. Alcalá Galindo, i, 277; and del Rio Sainz, p. 156.


45 Minto, iii, 243 (Lord Minto writing about a visit to Merton in March 1802: ‘Braham, the celebrated Jew singer, performed with Lady H.’); Braham also composed the music to a poem by Richard Cumberland (150).
And hearts of oak our men!
The threat of 'foreign yoke' in the song emanated only from 'the Frenchmen'. After the Spanish had risen against the French in 1808, they were now regarded as comrades in the struggle against Napoleonic tyranny and it did not appear appropriate any more to classify them among the enemy at Trafalgar. Into this simplified version of the event, Nelson's famous signal is incorporated. It had been used in earlier poems and adopted in its wording to the needs of metre, but it now received such an enduring addition that people trying to quote it, even today, often quote Arnold, rather than Nelson: 'England expects that every man, / This day will do his duty'. The author also included in each of the three verses of the aria the phrase 'For England, home, and beauty!' which was effectively underlined by a melodic phrase. The triumphant character of the aria in The Death of Nelson was merely interrupted at the beginning of the third verse, which describes 'the fatal wound, / Which spread dismay around', when the melody falls back into a minor key.

Arnold's, King's and Braham's co-production, originally part of an opera entitled The Americans, increased in popularity throughout the nineteenth century, particularly from the middle of the century onwards, when interest in Nelson rose again. Charles Dickens made a reference in David Copperfield to 'a gallant and eminent naval Hero' by quoting 'For England, home, and Beauty'. In the 1860s and 1870s the song went through so many editions and became so well known that it was used as the basis for variations. A soap advertisement about The Death of King Dirt. And Triumph of 'Borax', Health & Beauty was published as a music sheet with the remark 'A Domestic Revolution. Since the Death of Nelson'. It made ample use of the words beauty and duty, finishing:

46 121; 'this day' is an addition and Arnold was not the first to introduce it; variations in other poems can be found in: 19 ('England Expects Each Man Will Do His Duty'), 62 ('This day, let each man do his duty'), 83 ('England expects every Man to do his duty'), 92 ('England expects her sons to-day will show / The duty Britons to their country owe'), 136 ('England did expect / Every Man would do his Duty'), 139 ('England expects every man will do his duty'). During the nineteenth century it was also claimed that Nelson originally intended to signal 'Nelson expects ...'. For the development of this rumour see: Mariner's Mirror 41 (1955), 255-56. For variations of the text of the signal see also chapter 13.

For Ladies, who've thro' troubles pass'd,
The washing boon is found at last,
For home and health and beauty, For home and health and beauty,
And, servants, if you've not begun,
Use Borax Extract, every one,
With ease to do your duty. With ease to do your duty.

A 'Humorous Parody on "The Death of Nelson"', sung in music halls and entitled 'Twas in Trafalgar Square, criticized police intervention against a demonstration on Trafalgar Square. It satirized the policemen's fulfilment of their 'duty' and converted the mournful introduction into a dirge on 'freedom's doom'. On the eve of the First World War the taste for making an amusement or satire out of The Death of Nelson had vanished and the author of a one act play used the melody of the song 'for a motif' of its 'incidental music' and let one of his protagonists proclaim: 'An Englishman only wants to know two tunes – "God save the King" and "The Death of Nelson"'.

Before The Death of Nelson became widely popular, however, hardly any new poetry about Nelson was published, as interest in him diminished. Byron commented on the neglect of Nelson after the battle of Waterloo in his Don Juan:

Nelson was once Britannia's god of war,
And still should be so, but the tide is turn'd;
There's no more to be said of Trafalgar,
'Tis with our hero quietly inurn'd;
Because the army's grown more popular,
At which the naval people are concern'd:
Besides, the Prince is all for the land-service,
Forgetting Duncan, Nelson, Howe, and Jervis.

Byron, though at least partly motivated in his acknowledgement of Nelson by his dislike of Wellington, had caught the spirit of the time in describing Nelson as forgotten. Only

---

48 Both variations on The Death of Nelson can be found in appendix F; many editions of the song, published in the second half of the nineteenth century can be found in the British Library.
50 Very few poems were written about Nelson in the years 1813-1843: I have found only Byron's passage (141) between 1813 and 1820, only two in the 1820s (47 and 162) and none between 1828 and 1843. For the lack of interest in Nelson between about 1815 and 1839 in general see particularly chapters 1, 5, 11 and 13.
51 141.
52 Byron wrote somewhere else: 'Nelson was a hero: the other [Wellington] is a mere Corporal, dividing with Prussians and Spaniards the luck, which he never deserved'. This is quoted in: Byron's Don Juan. A
from the mid-1840s onwards did poets interpret Nelson’s life and his death afresh. In 1845 Robert Browning wrote a short poem in which he set the colourful scene for the battle of Trafalgar. A ‘blood-red’ sunset in ‘Cadiz Bay’, ‘bluish’ water off ‘Trafalgar’ and ‘gray’ Gibraltar led him to ask ‘Here and here did England help me. How can I help England?’ In his Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington Tennyson gave the battle of Trafalgar similar significance, portraying Nelson as the ‘saviour of the silver-coasted isle’ and reflecting on the admiration of his countrymen:

Thine island loves thee well, thou famous man,
The greatest sailor since our world began.

Less sophisticated poetry also treated Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar admiringly. Paulin Huggett Pearce connected it to British maritime supremacy and the Pax Britannica. In order to fulfil the role of the basis for such powerful concepts Nelson himself was portrayed as a Victorian hero: ‘War’s noisy tumult felt a master hand’.

Nelson was now becoming to be so much regarded as the outstanding representative of his profession that no poet expected any more to find the whole navy following his example. Pearce produced the deep sigh: ‘oh! Nelson, rise again’. At the end of the century Algernon Charles Swinburne decided:

There is none like him, and there shall be none.
When England bears again as great a son,
He can but follow fame where Nelson led.
There is not and there cannot be but one.

In a similar strain George Meredith proclaimed: ‘For he is Britain’s Admiral / Till setting of her sun’. One poet tried to see in Admiral Beresford a new Nelson, but he


53 137.

54 205 (pp. 7, 20, 21, 22: ‘Nelson left his country strong in power’); this poem also shows inspiration from Nelson’s column in Trafalgar Square (p. 23: ‘When nigh Trafalgar Square I musing stood’, another reference is on p. 21) which further supports the argument that the monument had a considerable impact on the revival of interest in Nelson (this was argued before in chapters 1 and 13).

55 205 (p. 6); similarly, also by Paulin Huggett Pearce: 206 (pp. 3: ‘From Nelson’s birth, desires of stubborn force / Impelled his soul to brave the stormy deep; / Dim dreams of greatness tented on his sleep’, p. 6: ‘his lion heart’, p. 17: ‘His spirit soared his country to secure’); for the Victorian concept of the hero see chapter 1.

56 205 (p. 10).

57 220; in another poem (219) Swinburne wrote: ‘A name above all names of heroes’ and ‘Nelson: a light that time bows down before’.

316
remained exceptional and outnumbered by poets who described Nelson as unique.\textsuperscript{60} With the First World War approaching, poets stressed even more Nelson’s role in creating naval mastery and even argued with him for naval armament.\textsuperscript{61}

The most unusual kind of poetic approach to the subject of Nelson and Trafalgar was Thomas Hardy’s \textit{The Dynasts}. In this \textit{Epic Drama of the War with Napoleon} Hardy made Nelson converse in rhyming with his friends and comrades. The storyline was built on contemporary views about the events added by elements of poetic licence. In a conversation with his second-in-command, Collingwood, before the battle, Hardy’s Nelson confesses to a depression about the censure his ‘private life’ and ‘those dear Naples and Palermo days’ were receiving and he concludes:

\begin{quote}
Smiling I’d pass to my long home to-morrow
Could I with honour, and my country’s gain.\textsuperscript{62}
\end{quote}

The death scene, thus prepared, develops with proofs of Nelson’s feeling for ‘Poor youngsters’ and the shattered enemy, but without an explicit mention of Lady Hamilton.\textsuperscript{63}

Nelson poetry written during the world wars tried to evoke his spirit. One song, entitled \textit{The Nelson-Touch} and published in 1915 trusts in its success:

\begin{quote}
Our mighty fleet goes forth.
And in each sailor’s heart, lads,
A speeding o’er the main,
The spirit of that hero wakes,
And leaps to life again!
It’s Nelson-touch they’ve got, lads,
The Nelson-touch once more, -
They’ll fight and die for England,
As in the days of yore!
The foe may twist and turn, lads,
But this has got to be,
The Nelson-touch will lay them low,
And sweep them from the sea!\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{58} 197.
\textsuperscript{59} 178.
\textsuperscript{60} 204 (‘the hero of heroes’), 218 (‘There is but One – her Nelson stands alone!’).
\textsuperscript{61} 183, 198 (naval armament), 218 (naval mastery).
\textsuperscript{62} 176 (p. 40).
\textsuperscript{63} 176 (pp. 92-98, particularly 94 and 95).
\textsuperscript{64} 185.
Robert Bridges constructed a poetic conversation between Nelson and Beatty, in which Nelson admires Beatty’s ships as ‘stouter and better mann’d / Than anything I ever had in command’, while Beatty returns the compliment by conceding that ‘none of my crew … Is thinking of me so much as of you’.65 Such specific confidence in British naval might did not appear in the Nelson poetry of the Second World War. Clemence Dane (Winifred Ashton) instead conjured up the Nelson spirit, in reaction to a bomb hitting St. Paul’s Cathedral, as something that moves among the people and strengthens their morale.66

The peacetime poetry of the twentieth century showed a less respectful approach to Nelson. G. K. Chesterton described him and Drake drunk and he commented, in a more serious poem, that ‘Nelson turned his blindest eye / On Naples and on liberty’, verbally mixing Nelson’s famous disobedience at the battle of Copenhagen with his involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution.67 Other poetry focused more on Nelson’s famous characteristics and foibles. A children’s poem dealt in three verses with the facts that Nelson ‘only had one eye’, ‘only had one arm’ and ‘was sick at sea’.68 In a more complex approach to the subject of Nelson, Robert Graves summarized all the familiar elements of Nelson’s outer appearance, character and life to an ambivalent image of an uneasily unpredictable man of irresistible charm:

At Viscount Nelson’s lavish funeral,
   While the mob milled and yelled about St Paul’s,
    A General chatted with an Admiral:
     ‘One of your Colleagues, Sir, remarked today
      That Nelson’s exit, though to be lamented,
       Falls not inopportunely, in its way.’

65 134.
66 153; a bomb had passed through to the roof of the north transept into the crypt next to Nelson’s grave; Dane (Ashton) varied ‘England expects’ with the ‘this day’ addition popularised by The Death of Nelson; another wartime poem that refers to the Nelson spirit is 181.
67 146, where Nelson also ‘pledged immortal beauty’ (perhaps an allusion to the famous line in The Death of Nelson?); 145, for the discussion of the incorporated events in Nelson’s life see chapters 2 and 4.
68 158; a more charming and funnier short poem about Nelson’s sea-sickness was written by Robert Louis Stephenson in 1882, but apparently not published until 1972 (215), there Nelson says: ‘If you and I, sea-faring Robin, / Where with yon harbour-buoy a bobbin; / The thing is beyond reach of question, / All would be up with our digestion, / And I, your Admiral of the Blue, / Should have to strike my flag and spew’; Bridges also reduced Nelson to essentials in one poem (135): ‘He standeth in stone / Aloft and alone / Riding the sky / With one arm and one eye’.

318
‘He was a thorn in our flesh’, came the reply —
  ‘The most bird-witted, unaccountable,
    Odd little runt that ever I did spy.
‘One arm, one peeper, vain as Pretty Poll,
    A meddler, too, in foreign politics
    And gave his heart in pawn to a plain moll.
‘He would dare lecture us Sea Lords, and then
    Would treat his ratings as though men of honour
    And play at leap-frog with his midshipmen!
‘We tried to box him down, but up he popped,
    And when he’d banged Napoleon at the Nile
    Became too much the hero to be dropped.
‘You’ve heard that Copenhagen “blind eye” story?
    We’d tied him to Nurse Parker’s apron-strings —
    By G-d, he snipped them through and snatched the glory!’
‘Yet’, cried the General, ‘six-and-twenty sail
    Captured or sunk by him off Tráfalgár —
    That writes a handsome finis to the tale.’
‘Handsome enough. The seas are England’s now.
    That fellow’s foibles need no longer plague us.
    He died most creditably, I’ll allow.’
‘And, Sir, the secret of his victories?’
    ‘By his unServicelike, familiar ways, Sir,
    He made the whole Fleet love him, damn his eyes!’

The admired admiral of the early nineteenth century has thus first been singled
out as unique, before he was submitted to individual scrutiny that shows more interest in
his personal traits than in his professional significance.

69 169.
CHAPTER FIFTEEN
Novels, Plays and Films about Nelson

In novels, theatrical performances and films artists sought to go beyond the restricted format of poetry in fictionalizing Nelson's life and death. This chapter examines what kind of image of Nelson these media have conveyed over the last two hundred years.

I

Early Novels and Plays

Theatres reacted immediately to the news of the battle of Trafalgar and Nelson's death. On the evening of 6 November 1805, the day on which the news spread in London, Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres staged commemorative pieces. They combined well-known patriotic elements, such as the song Rule Britannia, with poetry composed on the occasion by some 'prompt and patriotic pen'. The new poetry had a strong effect on the audience, which showed 'the corresponding emotions of sorrow'. Covent Garden had even arranged some scenery including portraits of naval heroes and the 'English fleet ... riding triumphantly in the perspective'. In the foreground 'Naval Officers and Sailors' were grouped 'in attitudes of admiration', when 'a medallion descended, representing a half-length [portrait] of the Hero of the Nile, surrounded with rays of glory'. According to the Naval Chronicle the 'effect was electrical, and the house resounded with the loudest plaudits and acclamations'. ¹ Covent Garden went on developing its 'loyal Musical Impromptu' into a play in its own right. When news of Trafalgar was published in the newspapers on the following day it was already announced with the title Nelson's Glory. And a day later, according to The Times, the piece had already 'assumed a dramatic shape'. ² A song 'in praise of the departed Hero of the British Navy, was given ... with a degree of feeling and expression that strongly

¹ Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 498-99 (which also mentions that Handel's 'Death March in Saul' was 'very solemnly performed by the orchestra'); Gentleman's Magazine, 75 (1805), 1044; The Times, 7 November and 5 December 1805.
² The Times, 7 and 9 November 1805 (advertisement for performance on 7 November and comment on performance of 8 November).
affected the audience'. The mourning for Nelson was mingled with a desire for revenge. This wish went beyond the aim of avenging Nelson, expressed in some of the poetry of the day. According to The Times, the 'audience appeared to relish the project of sending over for the invaders'.

A few days later Drury Lane staged The Victory and Death of Lord Viscount Nelson by Richard Cumberland to music by King and Braham, with Braham also performing. This piece was also more of a combination of different solemn representations than the depiction of developing action. A 'grand Sea View, in which two Fleets are represented as towards the close of an engagement', a descending figure of fame, 'a scroll on which appear the words, “England expects every one will do his duty”', and a rising 'illuminated figure of Lord Nelson' formed the scenery. Singers were 'habited as Officers of the Navy'. In addition, 'groups of volunteers and women were introduced, who join[ed] in lamenting their departed Hero'. Along with different songs a little dialogue was inserted, in which the comment that Nelson 'had sent his mantle and his spirit to Lord Collingwood, was strongly felt by the audience'. The whole performance 'was received with tumultuous applause'.

The obvious public demand for such commemorative pieces led theatres to develop their repertoire in this field. One of the actresses of Covent Garden, on a day on which the house did not stage Nelson's Glory, 'throwing off some of the front of her dress, she appeared in a purple apron, with the word Nelson, in gold, and the English jack struck on one of the comers' and recited a poem about Nelson. This again 'produced a strong effect on the audience'. At the end of November, the German Theatre produced a ballet which depicted 'the circumstances of the battle' and

---

3 The Times, 9 November 1805 (where it is also noted that '[m]any persons of distinction were in the number of the audience, which was very numerous, and they were not the least forward in applauding this elegant tribute to the memory of the proudest boast of the Navy of England'); for poetry see chapter 14.
4 R. Cumberland, A Melo-Dramatic Piece; Being an Occasional Attempt to Commemorate the Death and Victory of Lord Viscount Nelson (Lackington, Allen, and co.: London, [1805]); The title is given, among other sources, in The Times, 12 November 1805.
5 The Times, 12 November 1805; Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 500, mentions that the singer Braham had to give an encore.
6 Naval Chronicle, 14 (1805), 500.
terminated with a figure of fame ‘placing the laurel upon the brow of the immortal Nelson’. 7

On 7 December 1805 the King’s Theatre misjudged the public demand when it went so far as to show in Naval Victory, and Triumph of Lord Nelson ‘the immortal Nelson … in the cabin of the Victory, in the convulsions of his last moments’. Whereas theatre-goers could not get enough of idealizations of ‘the immortal Nelson’, they did not want to be confronted with the reality of his death. In immediate reaction to this dramatization of Nelson’s death ‘a general cry of “off, off” prevailed’. Even after Braham had promised the audience that the scene would be omitted in the next performance, tempers did not completely cool down. Although the audience had ‘rapturously applauded’ the first scene, ‘representing the battle’, it now answered to Braham’s assurance that if any scene ‘was objectionable … [it] should be omitted’ with ‘cries of “all, all” from the Pit and several parts of the House’. A contemporary critic was not surprised at this vehement reaction, commenting: ‘The scene was too strong for the feelings of those who loved and admired him’. 8 Gillian Russell contrasts this strong reaction to a death scene of Nelson with the success of a pantomimic ballet of Captain Cook’s death. She suggests as a possible reason ‘the fact that Nelson’s death and funeral took place at the height of a period of renewed anti-theatricalism associated with the evangelical movement’. 9 Perhaps more important was a fundamental difference between the two performances: Captain Cook’s death was staged twelve years after the event, while the performance of the death of Nelson was given only a day after London newspapers had reported the arrival of his body off Portsmouth, where is was awaiting a state funeral. 10 The strong emotional response to the news of Nelson’s death that

7 The Times, 28 November 1805.
8 The Times, 9 December 1805; Others went even further, condemning also decorative elements, such as a ‘few pasteboard ships, a squib or two, let off by carpenters, and some sorry daub, bearing the name of the victorious hero’, because they ‘throw a sort of ridicule upon events that … were too recent and too sorrowful for theatrical representation’ (Monthly Mirror, 20 (1805), 339, quoted in: G. Russell, p. 83).
9 G. Russell, pp. 84-85.
10 G. Russell, pp. 83 (death of Cook: 1778), 84 (performance of his death: 1790); The Times, 6 December 1805 (about arrival of Nelson’s body off Portsmouth) and 9 December 1805 (about performance of his death on 7 December 1805); G. Russell, p. 84, also discusses that a play by Richard Cumberland for the
prevailed at the time appears to have inhibited any attempt to represent Nelson’s death itself.\textsuperscript{11}

The Spanish reaction to Nelson’s death did not betray such qualms. Instead, it reflected the prevailing prejudices against the British. In contrast to the heroic and humane Spaniards, the British were regarded as piratical, brutal and uncivilized. A tale of the \textit{Public Entry of Admiral Nelson in the court of Pluto, on 23\textsuperscript{rd} October of this year} (published in Cadiz, the port from whence the combined Franco-Spanish fleet had left for the battle of Trafalgar and to which its shattered remains returned after the battle), described the views and behaviour of Nelson and his men. On being shown a ‘tragic piece’, in which the ‘English’ use ‘red shot’ to fire into enemy ports, the English spectators were shown thoroughly enjoying themselves while viewing the devastation caused. They preferred a ‘general discharge of artillery’ to music and they admired pictures of hell. Studies of bestialities, it was said, had taught them how to ‘usurp the empire of the seas’. This general picture of the British was reflected in the poem that Nelson declaimed at the end of the story. In it, he openly conceded that ‘the motive of the war was weak, null and void’ and praised the recent battle as ‘What a well-ordered action!/ What a gentlemanly combat!/ What an action! What a butchery!/ What a barbarity! What a devastation!’\textsuperscript{12}

While elegant society in Britain continued to be concerned with the sublime depiction of Nelson’s death in pictures and poetry, lower class artists and consumers enjoyed an interpretation of Nelson’s part in the battle of Trafalgar in dramatic form. \textit{Trafalgar; the Sailor’s Play. In 5 Acts}, though often clumsily worded, explored the event from a great variety of angles. Nelson was shown addressing ‘his Admirals and Captains’ as well as his ‘Brave Shipmates’. He repeatedly gained a ‘roar of applause from the Men’, for example by appealing to their rough sense of humour with some

day after Nelson’s funeral was suppressed; this was probably done to avoid similar strong reactions from the audience to those against \textit{Naval Victory, and Triumph of Lord Nelson}.\textsuperscript{11} For the emotional response of the public see chapter 10.

\textsuperscript{12} [Anon., ‘D.A.S.A.’], \textit{Entrada pública del almirante Nelson en la corte de Pluton el día 23 de octubre de este año} (Cádiz: Manuel Ximénez Carreño, 1805), pp. 4-7, 9-12 (‘El motivo de la guerra / Era debil, nulo / z vano ... ¡Qué funcion tan bien mandada! / ¡Qué combate tan hidalgo! / ¡Qué accion! Qué carnicería! / ¡Qué barbaridad! ¡qué estrago!’); Nelson had taken a leading part in a bombardment of Cadiz in 1797.
crude sexual innuendo: ‘I feel the longings of a woman to place you close aboard their largest ships for my own’. The actual battle is represented in a scene from ‘the middle gun deck of the Victory’. Another interesting layer was added by the portrayal of the Spanish side. Although the Spanish uprising against Napoleonic influence had not yet started at the time the play was written, the Spanish admiral of the play, in addressing his officers, openly deplores his country’s alliance with the successful ‘Traitors’ (the French). 13

In fiction about sailors, Nelson seems to have become increasingly part of the world of ‘Jack Tar’. In John Mitford’s *Adventures of Johnny Newcome in the Navy* Nelson frequently crosses the protagonist’s path and he is portrayed, together with Lady Hamilton, as the sailors’ friend and the two are even the subject of a print in the book. 14

In a note the author pointed out that Nelson and Lady Hamilton went to harbour taverns together, dressed as ordinary sailors, ‘mingling in the sailors’ pleasures, listening to their songs, and generally retiring unknown’. 15 Nelson was also shown close to his men in a popular play, *Nelson; or, the Life of a Sailor* by Edward Fitzball, first produced in 1827 and afterwards repeatedly performed during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. 16 Following the pattern of the typical melodrama, the characters were stereotypical: the protagonist, a sailor appropriately called ‘Jack’ (in reference to ‘Jack

---

13 Gentleman’s Magazine, 77 (1807), 444-46, review of Trafalgar; the Sailor’s Play. In 5 Acts (by ‘no juvenile Bard’); Nelson also tells the sailors, how ‘a puppet show’ inspired him to join the navy; the Spanish uprising started in Madrid on 2 May 1808.

14 John Mitford, *The Adventures of Johnny Newcome in the Navy. A Poem in Four Cantos. With Notes* (2nd edition, London: published for the author and sold by Sherwood, Neely, and Jones et al, 1819), pp. 46 (Nelson referred to as ‘the seaman’s father’), 65 (‘For dear was Nelson to each heart’), 71, 164 (Nelson at Naples, vaguely critical), 165-166 (Nelson and Lady Hamilton; note about her: ‘She possessed a good heart and was generous in the extreme. The sailors idolized her, to whom she was a zealous friend. ... This amiable woman ... England never was better represented at a foreign court than by this *Female Ambassador*’), 169 (Lady Hamilton described as ‘fair addition to the crew’). For the print see appendix A, plate 69.

15 Mitford, p. 166.

16 Edward Fitzball, *Nelson; or, the Life of a Sailor. A National Drama in Two Acts ... First Performed at the Adelphi Theatre, Monday, December 3rd, 1827* (London: John Dicks, [1886]) [hereafter: Fitzball]. This publication includes, on p. 2, the note: ‘This favourite and popular piece, has never failed on each performance, to be received with every demonstration of heartfelt exultation and national approbation’. This edition seems to be a shortened version, because some of the dramatis personae (listed on p. 2) never appear in the play, the second act appears a bit incoherent (the battle of the Nile changes into that of Trafalgar) and because the play was performed in Edinburgh in three acts (playbill: Nelson Museum S11).
Tar’), is honest and faithful, as is his sweetheart Rachael, whose father, a Jew called ‘Moses’, is avaricious and speaks English with a strong accent, while the pawnbroker’s son, called ‘Peter Pledge’, shows off with other people’s achievements and honourable Nelson is the pattern of an ideal commander. He is proud of his ‘brave boys’, generous in allowing them ‘to have their wives and sweethearts aboard’ when in port, tough when wounded, and compassionate with all the wounded, including the enemy: ‘in distress all men are brothers’. Fitzball’s play also included a scene of the death of Nelson. Nelson’s dying utterances, though based on Beatty’s account of Nelson’s death, were worded to include a clear reference to the pain he was suffering: ‘Ah! this agony – welcome death – yet one would like to live a little time’.

Frederick Chamier’s novel, Ben Brace: the last of the Agamennons, was also popular during the middle decades of the nineteenth century and it also portrayed Nelson from the point of view of an ordinary sailor. Ben Brace, the first person narrator, was modelled after Nelson’s servant Tom Allen, though with the significant difference that he accompanies Nelson during his whole career and not merely for a few years. The novel followed Southey’s Life of Nelson and avoided the controversial issue of Nelson’s involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan Revolution by stating: ‘I don’t really exactly understand it’ and ‘I do not like to think of it [the execution of Caracciolo]; for every one says it was an error of Nelson’s. As I can’t bring myself to believe he ever committed an error, as an officer, - mind, I say, as an officer; and I can’t say that his

---


18 Fitzball, pp. 8-9.

19 Fitzball, p. 12; the first two expressions are paraphrased in Beatty’s account; only the words of the last of the quoted expressions can be traced to Beatty’s account, where Nelson is quoted as having said ‘Yet one would like to live a little longer’ (see appendix E). Another play, performed on 15 February 1844 at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane about Nelson’s Last Victory, Death and Testimonial (playbill: Nelson Museum S8) also seems to have included a death scene.

20 Frederick Chamier, Ben Brace: the last of the Agamennons (London: R. Bentley, 1836; the first of many editions) [hereafter: Chamier], p. 187, fn. Nelson was captain of the Agamennon from January 1793 until June 1796, in which period he referred to his men as the ‘Agamennons’.
lordship acted --- But no matter'. \(^{21}\) Nelson’s affair with Lady Hamilton is brushed over to some extent, but Ben Brace makes frequent references to ‘her’, usually reflecting the critical views of the time he was writing, but in one early passage he also defends her against ‘the great people [who] have been pleased to abuse Lady Hamilton right and left, yet I say, she had more heart, more courage, than a whole regiment of Neapolitan soldiers. She was a wonderful woman; she did not know what fear was’. \(^{22}\) She did not seem to have been ‘wonderful’ enough to make Nelson happy, however, because Brace notes that ‘his happiness was gone for ever – he never recovered it’. \(^{23}\) Brace’s account of Nelson’s death, built on Beatty’s version, introduces two major fictional elements: a conversation with Brace and a rather unheroic end: ‘his under jaw fell, and Nelson of the Nile was no more! ... I saw the glassy stillness of his eye – the dead cold paleness of his forehead – the fluttering tremor which shook his whole frame’. \(^{24}\) By the 1830s at least, popular fictional accounts clearly had no qualms about describing Nelson’s death.

II

**French and Spanish Nineteenth Century Novels and Plays**

French novels and plays, understandably, also focused on the death of Nelson, when dealing with the battle of Trafalgar. The *Mémoires de Robert Guillemard* gave a dramatic account of how the author of the memoirs shot Nelson during the battle of Trafalgar. \(^{25}\) These fictitious memoirs were so convincingly written that many, especially in Britain, took them to be authentic. The book’s claim that the French commander-in-chief at Trafalgar, Villeneuve, had been murdered on his return to France caused suspicion to be thrown on so many innocent men, that the anonymous author of the

---

\(^{21}\) Chamier, p. 181.

\(^{22}\) For example: Chamier, pp. 182 (praise of Lady Hamilton); 286, 290-91 (passages referring to ‘her’); 294 (‘To say that I liked her would be a falsehood; I never liked her enough to call her by name’). The praise of Lady Hamilton is remarkable in preceding the earliest praise by an actual eye-witness (Lieutenant Parsons) by several years (see chapter 5).

\(^{23}\) Chamier, p. 184.

\(^{24}\) Chamier, pp. 282-84, 286.

Mémoires decided to reveal his identity and disclose that Guillemand was invented and that his memoirs were 'a historical novel'.

An equally fictitious follower of Guillemand, whose achievement of a lifetime it was to have killed Nelson, took the name Trafalgar and gave it to the play whose protagonist he was. Other fictitious heroes also bore the name 'Trafalgar', though with increasing distance from Nelson's death as the century wore on. The hero of the novel Trafalgar by Joseph Méry had taken part in the battle, but had not killed Nelson. The author, in describing the event as a heroic slaughter rather than a defeat, even acknowledged heroism in Nelson 'who, from the height of his quarterdeck shouted to the crews of four ships in front of the smoke: “I am Nelson, shoot at me!”'

Later in the novel 'Trafalgar' even develops some sympathy for the English. A French corsaire got his name Capitaine Trafalgar in the novel of the same name merely from his battle-cry 'Trafalgar! Trafalgar!' which 'carried horror to the enemy's heart'.

A Spanish authoress showed a much more conciliatory approach to the enemy in the battle of Trafalgar, and to Nelson in particular. In her short story about Una Madre (A Mother), which was first published in 1835, she described a mother, worrying about

---

26 Lardier, ‘Lettre de l’auteur des Mémoires du sergeant Robert Guillemand, publiées en 1826 et 1827, qui déclare que tout ce qu’il a raconté sur la mort du vice-amiral Villeneuve est une fiction, et que Guillemand est un personnage imaginaire’, Annales Maritimes et Coloniales, année 1830, 2e Partie, tome 2, pp. 184-187, 184 (the Mémoires were quoted as authentic in the Edinburgh Review, the Westminster Review and the Monthly Magazine; in unnamed French journals the authenticity of the Mémoires was doubted), 186 (‘Guillemand n’est qu’un personnage d’imagination, et ses prétendus Mémoires un roman historique’). The invention became so popular that it survived the author’s disclosure (see Henri Lachêze [wrongly attributed to Rémi Monaque], ‘Was Nelson Killed by Robert Guillemand?’, The Mariner’s Mirror, 88 (2002), 469-72) and even nowadays a shopping centre near the French naval port of Toulon is named after the supposed marksman who had shot Nelson (I am grateful to Admiral Rémi Monaque for this piece of information). Guillemand made his way as a supposedly historical figure also into a German publication: [Anon.], ‘Der Tod Nelsons’, Überall. Illustrirte Zeitschrift für Armee und Marine, 9. Jahrg. (1906/1907), Nr. 13 and 14.


28 Joseph Méry, Trafalgar (Michel Lévy Frères: Paris, 1865) [hereafter: Méry], pp. 39-40 (‘l’heroïsme ... ou, on peut le dire aussi ... c’est Nelson qui, du haut de son banc de quart, crie aux équipages de quatre vaisseaux, avant la fumée: «Je suis Nelson, tirez sur moi!»’); similarly: pp. 8-9; Méry, p. 9, takes his account of Nelson’s behaviour on deck (smoking a pipe) from Robert/Perroux, p. 6.

29 Méry, pp. 118-19.

30 A. Laurie, Le Capitaine Trafalgar Illustrations de G. Roux (Bibliothèque d’Éducation et de Récitation. J. Hetzel et Cie: Paris, 1886), pp. 15-16 (‘qui portait l’épouvante au cœur de l’ennemi’).
her sons who were involved in the battle. Although the narrative did not approach the subject in an openly political way, it did indicate a clear shift in allegiances since the day of the actual battle by representing the French admiral as morally inferior to the Spanish admirals and by referring to 'the brilliant star of Nelson'.

Rather than investigating the battle of Trafalgar any further, French fiction turned to aspects of Nelson's life that could be more easily criticized, in particular Nelson's involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution and his affair with Lady Hamilton. 'The King of Romance', Alexandre Dumas, found himself in a uniquely suitable position to exploit the subject, when Giuseppe Garibaldi made him, in 1860, Director of the National Museum at Naples, with 'the very freest access to the State Papers of the defunct dynasty'. On the basis of his tendentious and in parts manipulated edition of documents from the royal archive, *I Borboni di Napoli*, Dumas went on to produce three novels that deal with the events in Naples in 1799. Two of these novels deal with the events themselves by focusing, as their titles betray, on *La San Felice*, as representative of the republicans, and *Emma Lyonna* (Lady Hamilton), as representative of the royalists. These two novels, in spite of their 'inordinate length, made a big impact on the French reading public', and are now usually published together under the title of the first (*La San Felice*). The third novel, *Souvenirs d'une favorite*, is written in the form of memoirs of the dying Lady Hamilton.

---


33 For the discussion of *I Borboni di Napoli* see chapter 4. Alexandre Dumas [père], *La San Felice* (4 vols., Paris: Calmann-Lévy frères éditeur, 1876); Alexandre Dumas [père], *Emma Lyonna* (5 vols., Paris: Calmann-Lévy frères éditeur, 1876). The novels were written much earlier: A. Dumas, *La San Felice* (1996), p. 1604, states that they were written between 24 July 1863 and 25 February 1865.


35 Alexandre Dumas [père], *Souvenirs d'une favorite* ([n. pl.]: Feuilleton de l'Avenir National, 1865) [hereafter: A. Dumas, *Souvenirs d'une favorite*].
of the novels have an impact on their contents. While the treatment of the revolutionary events in Naples in *La San Felice* is very critical of the royalists, the supposed memoirs take a much more complex view of Lady Hamilton as well as of Nelson. Nevertheless, it is possible, to some degree, to generalize about Dumas' treatment of Nelson.

Dumas derived his knowledge of Nelson mostly from Lamartine's biography and he ignored the more recent one by Forgues. 36 His characterization of Nelson therefore remained rather stereotyped. Dumas' only reflection on Nelson's life at sea showed Nelson repeatedly returning wounded from some encounter or other. 37 In general terms, Dumas depicted Nelson as a 'man of the people, born far from the court' and therefore as somebody who 'felt ..., more profoundly than those born in a superior condition, the fascination that the royal smile exercises'. 38 As a rough seaman without gentlemanly demeanour and with a tendency to throw himself passionately into the arms of women, 39 Nelson, in Dumas' view, was clearly inexperienced in the two fields he was entering in Naples: politics and female society. According to Dumas, these two fields were dangerously connected in late eighteenth century Naples by a network of intrigue at the centre of which sat the queen of Naples and Lady Hamilton.

Dumas showed how Nelson fell prey to these women, because he had already been 'madly in love with Lady Hamilton' since their first meeting in 1793. 40 On his return to Naples after the battle of the Nile, in 1798, he became even 'more in love, more


37 A. Dumas, *Souvenirs d'une favorite*, pp. 222, 224.

38 A. Dumas, *Souvenirs d'une favorite*, p. 177 ('Enfant du peuple, né loin de la cour, il ressentait ..., plus profondément que les personnes nées dans une condition supérieure, la fascination qu'exerce le sourire royal'); similarly: p. 175 ('né loin des trônes, fut ébloui par les rayonnements qui s'en échappent, dès qu'il en approchait').

39 A. Dumas, *Souvenirs d'une favorite*, pp. 170 ('Il était facile de reconnaître en lui l'homme de mer dans toute l'acception du mot, et l'on y eût vainement cherché le gentleman anglais ...'), 176 ('Cette passion ne s'étaitignit que pour faire place à une autre').

The connection of love with insanity shows Nelson as losing his self control to a dominant woman. In Dumas’ version of events, Nelson himself admits to Lady Hamilton that she is exercising a dangerous ascendancy over him: ‘You will drive me mad’; and he asks her to ‘lead’ him, ‘you know that I cannot see anything else, when I see you’. In order to portray Nelson as a man robbed of his masculine strength, Dumas employed a strategy developed in French literature during the nineteenth century: the introduction of an interpretation of lesbianism. Honoré de Balzac in *La Fille aux yeux d’or* (*The Girl with the Golden Eyes*, published in 1833) had been the first to portray a lesbian ‘as monster: a mysterious, perverse, jealous, vengeful, and powerful female animal’, who humiliated ‘the male sense of masculine supremacy’ and was in the end punished for her libidinous lifestyle. A few years before Dumas started writing about Naples, the subject of lesbianism in French literature was revived by the publication of Charles Baudelaire’s controversial *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1857, which had originally been announced as *Les Lesbiennes* (*The Lesbians*) and which contained the famous poem about ‘Femmes damnées’ (Damned Women) dealing with lesbian love.

Dumas exploited this pattern in French literature by making Nelson appear as the dupe of calculating Lesbians. These lesbians are moulded into the shape developed for them in French nineteenth-century literature. The queen of Naples keeps Lady Hamilton overnight, sings ‘verses of Sappho’ to her, undresses and kisses her. Following the pattern that lesbians were of ‘licentious stock’, Lady Hamilton, is described as the

---

44 Waelti-Walters, p. 33, who interprets the poem as a condemnation of lesbian love. F. W. J. Hemmings, *Baudelaire the Damned. A Biography* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1982), p. 56, argues that Baudelaire, as a ‘damned’ author identified with the ‘damned women’ he was describing in his poem.
45 A. Dumas, *La San Felice* (1996), p. 47 (overnight stay after Lady Hamilton performed erotic attitudes); A. Dumas, *Souvenirs d’une favorite*, pp. 128 (Queen of Naples undresses and kisses Lady Hamilton), 136-37 (another kiss and embrace), 138 (Queen of Naples sings ‘strophes de Sappho’), 227 (Lady Hamilton usually stays overnight with the Queen of Naples).
illegitimate daughter of an English nobleman. Further corrupted by the frivolous Miss Arabell, a modern ‘Sappho’, she begins to threaten male gender roles, appearing ‘virile’ and desiring to play ‘Lady Macbeth or Cleopatra’ in real life. Both the queen of Naples and Lady Hamilton dress as ‘amazons’ and they confess to each other that they are disappointed by their real loves. Their lesbian activities are thus expressions of frustrated heterosexual love. The women’s latent lesbianism makes them ‘rivals in conquest to men’ and unreliable in their heterosexual relationships. The queen of Naples is not only a rival to Nelson for Lady Hamilton’s affections, but also through her a dominating force undermining Nelson’s control over his own actions as well as his lover and thus threatening his virility. The queen encourages Lady Hamilton at one festivity in her salon to sing a song ‘À la femme aimée’ (‘To the Beloved Woman’), accompanying herself on a ‘lesbian lyre’, which is said to have belonged to the ‘muse of Mytilene [a town on Lesbos, where Sappho lived]’. This love-song ends with the poetess dying ‘without expiring, of desire and of love’. As Lady Hamilton falls at the end of the performance she is caught in the queen’s arms, while Nelson stands by ‘trembling’. The queen, ever in control of the situation, takes a laurel crown from Lady Hamilton’s head and puts it on Nelson’s. On leaving, she declares: ‘in my absence, it’s

46 Waelti-Walters, p.27 (the lesbian in Balzac’s story is ‘offspring of an extremely libidinous parent: Lord Dudley ... Henceforth most lesbians, vicious or victimized, come of overly licentious stock on one side (or both) of their family and as a result have no possibility of living a normal life’); A. Dumas, La San Felice (1996), p. 39 (Lady Hamilton is the daughter of ‘Un comte d’Halifax, qui sans doute, dans un de ses caprices aristocratiques, avait trouvé la mère d’Emma encore belle’).


48 A. Dumas, La San Felice (1996), pp. 423 (‘Emma ... prête à faire passer dans la vie réelle ces créations de la vie factice que l’on appelle Juliette, lady Macbeth ou Cléopatre’), 425 (‘elle s’avança d’un pas rapide et qui avait quelque chose de viril’).


50 Waelti-Walters, p. 212; similarly: pp. 4 and 5 (‘with the exception of the ideal wife, all other women are shown as potentially attracted by women. (Beauvoir will call this group “situational lesbians”’)).

51 A. Dumas, La San Felice (1996), p. 424 (‘À la femme aimée ... cette lyre lesbienne que nulle femme n’a osé toucher depuis que la muse de Mitylène l’a laissée échapper de ses mains en s’élancant du haut du rocher de Leucade’).
Emma who is the queen'; and to Nelson she says: 'Tell her to dance the shawl dance for you that she has been dancing for me'.

In this atmosphere of delusion Nelson appears to be dominated by emotion and inaccessible to reason. As 'Ulysses' in the arms of 'Circe', Nelson disobeys an order to leave Naples with the argument, suggested by Lady Hamilton, that he cannot leave the queen of Naples. Drawn ever more into the politics of the queen of Naples, Nelson ruthlessly supports the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution. In his description of the events, Dumas is remarkably imprecise, though priding himself on changing from the role of novelist to that of historian. Making little effort to examine the documentary evidence, he insists that Nelson 'bombard[ed] Naples', he describes Nelson as keen on catching rebels and he confidently asserts that Nelson forced the Neapolitan court martial condemn Admiral Caracciolo to death.

Only in *Souvenirs d'une favorite* did Dumas go on to describe Nelson's life after the events at Naples in 1799. Here Nelson himself and his relationship to Lady Hamilton undergo a remarkable change. Whereas Lady Hamilton confesses her guilt at not having stopped Nelson at Naples and at having separated Nelson from his wife, Nelson, thus comfortably freed from all responsibility, recovers not only his heroic stature, but also his position as a man: 'It was now him, on the contrary, who had all the power over me',

52 A. Dumas, *La San Felice* (1996), pp. 425-26 ('je ... meurs, sans expirer, de désir et d'amour'; 'tremblant'; 'en mon absense, c'est Emma qui est reine ... Dites-lui de danser pour vous le pas de châle qu'elle devait danser pour moi'); in the very much shortened English edition of the novel, Alexandre Dumas, *The Lovely Lady Hamilton* ('Emma Lyonna') or *The Beauty and the Glory. An Historical Romance of Royalty and Revolution* (translated from the French by Henry L. Williams, Shurmer Sibthorp: London, [1903]) [hereafter: A. Dumas, *The Lovely Lady Hamilton* (1903)], which generally avoids references to lesbianism, p. 95, the poem is changed to one addressed by 'Sappho to Neptune' and the poetess dies at the end throwing herself into the arms of Neptune (the sea); when Lady Hamilton has finished the queen 'flew to her rescue as though her favorite were drifting off toward Neptune's grotto'.

53 A. Dumas, *La San Felice* (1996), p. 601 (the heading of this chapter, pp. 596-604, is 'Ulysse et Circe').

54 A. Dumas, *La San Felice* (1996), p. 1431 ('le romancier ... passe la plume à l'historien'); the heading of chapter CLXX (pp. 1441-47) is 'On le romancier fait le devoir de l'historien'.

55 A. Dumas, *Souvenirs d'une favorite*, p. 264 ('obligé de bombarder Naples'); A. Dumas, *La San Felice* (1996), pp. 1428-29 (about Nelson's attitude towards the rebels; using a misquoted letter from his *I Borboni de Napoli*, compare: Gutteridge, pp. 276-77), 1430 (death sentence against Caracciolo, similarly: p. 1433); while he asserts, p. 1473, that Nelson was jealous of Caracciolo, he insists in A. Dumas, *Souvenirs d'une favorite*, p. 266, that this 'accusation est absurde'.

56 ibid., pp. 266 (guilt for Naples), 283 (guilt for adultery).
confesses Lady Hamilton.\(^{57}\) Her wild spirit thus subdued by masculine determination, she becomes faithful and even establishes some kind of respectable family life with Nelson.\(^{58}\) When he dies tragically, she is doomed to fall back into her old dissolute lifestyle.\(^{59}\) Dumas’ depiction of Nelson thus attempted to demonstrate the importance of men’s dominance over women and the danger of a loss of virility through the loss of this dominance to potentially amoral females.

Dumas’ unwieldy treatment of Nelson’s involvement with Lady Hamilton and his role in the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution were not only widely read; they also had an impact on how other French authors depicted Nelson. This influence can be noticed far into the twentieth century. One author produced a play, inspired by Dumas’ novel about \textit{La San Felice}, in which Nelson is described as a ‘plebeian’ carried away by ‘love and ambition’.\(^{60}\) The account of Nelson’s responsibility for the execution of the Neapolitan admiral Caracciolo became widely known as a result of Dumas’ treatment and this led Victor Hugo to remark on ‘a column to Nelson, with Caraccioli’s ghost pointing the finger at it!’\(^{61}\) Particularly popular became the idea of Nelson being mixed up in a network of intriguing lesbians, with the queen of Naples and Lady Hamilton competing in viciousness.\(^{62}\) This interpretation, however, remained predominantly

\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. 284 (‘c'était lui, au contraire, qui avait toute puissance sur moi’).

\(^{58}\) Ibid., pp. 289 and 294-95.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., pp. 301 (‘je redevenais tout simplement Emma Lyonna, c'est-à-dire une courtisane enrichie’), 302 (‘cette existence de folies, d'erreurs et de dissipation’).

\(^{60}\) Maurice Drack, \textit{La San Felice}. Drame en cinq actes, sept tableaux tiré du roman d'Alexandre Dumas. Reprisenti, pour la première fois, à Paris, sur le Théâtre du Château-d'Éau, le 11\textsuperscript{e} novembre 1881 (no publishing details), p. 10 (Acton about Nelson: ‘ce plebéien de génie ... L'amour et l'ambition’).


\(^{62}\) Dubarry, pp. 105-6, 288 (Lady Hamilton’s end: ‘Cette punition providentielle était peu au regard de ses crimes’); [Jean Marie Mathias Philippe Auguste de] Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, \textit{Trois Portraits de Femmes. Hypermnestra. Isabeau de Bavière. Lady Hamilton} (Jacques Bernard : Paris, 1929), pp. 91 (Lady Hamilton even dominating the queen of Naples), 96, 104 (Lady Hamilton punished at the end); the same author also produced a play about the situation at the court of Naples with Lady Hamilton as one of the protagonists engaging in multiple lesbian relationships: \textit{Morgane. Drame en cinq actes et en prose} (première édition : 1866 ; Chamuel: [Paris], 1894); Albert Flamant, \textit{Une ennemie de Napoléon. Lady Hamilton} (Flammarion : [n. pl.], 1927), pp. 3 (Lady Hamilton daughter of Lord Halifax, as in A. Dumas), 57-58 (Lady Hamilton seduces queen and king of Naples), 76 (Lady Hamilton interested in Nelson), 80 (queen of Naples jealous), 81 (Nelson falls prey to Lady Hamilton), 95-98 (queen of Naples uses Lady Hamilton to dominate Nelson, Sir William Hamilton and the king of Naples!).
French. A ‘cruelly abridged’ British version, published in the run-up to the Trafalgar centenary, did not attract much attention. The Spanish author Manuel Cubas used Dumas as a source for his account of Lady Hamilton in his book about Famous Courtesans, published in 1893. Although he followed Dumas’ interpretation of Nelson as being duped by a vicious woman who in the end finds her due punishment, he did not include any hint of lesbianism in his account. Cubas at the same time, however, was the first and one of few Spanish authors who dealt with and criticized Nelson for his actions in Naples in 1799.

Spanish fiction about Nelson has focused mainly on the battle of Trafalgar and it has produced the most famous, most widely read and most enduring interpretation ever written about the battle; a 130-year-old best-seller, still available in at least three different pocket book editions in Spain: Benito Pérez Galdós’ novel Trafalgar. Galdós, arguably the most famous Spanish author of the nineteenth century, was thirty-years old, when he wrote his novel Trafalgar in 1873 as the first of a series of Episodios Nacionales (National Episodes) which would, in the end (that is in 1912), amount to 46 volumes. Galdós was driven to start this monumental series by prevailing political instability in Spain at the time. Since the uprising that had overthrown Queen Isabel II, in 1868, Spain was in a state of turmoil: provisional government, republican insurrections, regency and revolutionary movements followed each other. Finally Spain acquired a new monarch, Amadeo I, who abdicated while Galdós was writing Trafalgar.

---

63 A. Dumas, The Lovely Lady Hamilton (1903); Hemmings, Dumas, pp. 198 and 223 (note 4).
65 Cubas, p. 304, asserts very vaguely that Nelson ‘rompió la doble capitulación estipulada por uno de los jefes de su escuadra con las guarniciones de los castillos de Nápoles y la flota napolitana’ (broke the double capitulation agreed between one of the officers of his squadron with the garrisons of the castles of Naples and the Neapolitan fleet').
66 The three publishers who offer pocket book editions of Trafalgar are: Catedra, Letras Hispanicas (Madrid), Colección Fontana (Barcelona) and Alianza Editorial (Madrid); for the success of the novel in general see: Benito Pérez Galdós, Trafalgar. Prologo de Ramon Solis ([n. pl.]: Salvat Editores, 1978), pp. 7, 13 (part of the prologue); there are also children’s editions: Benito Pérez Galdós, Trafalgar. Apéndice y notas: Pascual Izquierdo. Ilustración: Miguel Angel Oyarbide ([n. pl.]: Ediciones Generales Anaya, ‘tus libros’, 1983); Libros Eternos para la Juventud. Vol. I ‘Robinson Crusoe’; ... ‘Trafalgar’ por Benito Pérez Galdós (Madrid: Secciones del Reader’s Digest, 1967). In the course of my research I have come across dozens of Spanish and Latin American editions as well as translations into French, English, Welsh, German, Russian and Japanese.
When Galdós sat down to begin his *Episodios Nacionales*, his aim was to alert his compatriots to the condition of contemporary Spain and to offer an outlook on the future. For that purpose he set out to describe historic events in the country's fairly recent past from the viewpoint of ordinary people; the protagonist in *Trafalgar* being a fourteen-year old orphan. Most historians of literature who have dealt with Galdós' novel *Trafalgar* agree that he wanted to send out a message of peace and harmony to a country which ought to strive to establish a meritocratic society and a sense of its own national identity. Because Galdós' ideal of patriotism was one which saw different nationalities coexisting peacefully, he neither condemned nor glorified any particular nation.67

The presentation of Nelson in *Trafalgar* shifts, as Galdós' protagonist in the novel, Gabriel, expands his initial narrow views on war and nationhood into more balanced ideas about peace and national identity. At the beginning Nelson is referred to by Gabriel's adult friend, Marcial, an invalid sailor, who presents his experiences of naval warfare as a big adventure story. Marcial, in his idiosyncratic nautical language, calls Nelson Señorito, which according to Galdós' explanation 'indicated a certain esteem or respect'68 and Marcial wishes Nelson to bring a lot of 'timber' into which to shoot cannonballs.69 Marcial's respect for the British admiral takes a more serious turn, when he explains to his fellow sailors shortly before the action begins Nelson's plan of battle. With his comment that 'to this gentleman everything seems easy' he provokes some murmuring among his listeners.70 Even in Galdós' description of the battle itself, which lacks the over-enthusiasm of Marcial, the author shows respect for 'the genius of the great Nelson'.71

---

67 Czisnik, 'interpretación' with further references.
70 Ibid., p. 153 ('A ese señor todo le parece fácil. (Rumores)'); similarly, p. 225 (an ordinary sailor after the battle).
71 Ibid., p. 164 ('el genio del gran Nelson').
During the course of the battle, a new and softer view of Nelson emerges. Gabriel witnesses, when his ship is taken by the British, how a British officer speaks about Nelson’s death and bursts into tears. The first person narrator breaks the line of the story here and inserts a short account of Nelson’s death. Galdós omitted here any allusions to Lady Hamilton, although he drew on Marliani, who had so strongly condemned Nelson’s adulterous relationship and his mention of it on his death bed.72 Instead of detracting from his subject with a moralistic message about marital fidelity, Galdós focused on the dramatic aspect of the death of ‘the first seaman of our century’,73 thus conveying more powerfully the loss to the British and consequently his own anti-war message. The indirect portrayal of Nelson in Trafalgar - through other people’s comments - shows that he is generally regarded with respect, which fits into Galdós’ concept of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence between nations.

Although Nelson is only a minor figure in Galdós’ Trafalgar, the respectfully positive way in which he is treated, thanks to the great success of the book, left a mark on the Spanish image of Nelson. Some texts about the battle of Trafalgar followed Galdós’ interpretation of Nelson as well as the battle itself. A book about Una derrota gloriosa (A Glorious Defeat), for example, is organized in the same fashion as Galdós’ novel, narrated from the perspective of a young sailor, depicting the horrors of war and admiring ‘the great, genial and marvellous head of Nelson’.74 Not all authors who felt inspired by Galdós to write about Trafalgar, however, followed his interpretation of the battle. Two musical adaptations made use of the idea of Trafalgar without mentioning Nelson. One of them, performed in 1899 with ‘extraordinary success’, finished with the beginning of the battle, thus avoiding Galdós’ appeal for peaceful coexistence; an enthusiastic and yet unreconstructed sailor even sings at the end ‘Death to the English!

72 Benito Pérez Galdós, ‘Memorias de un Desmemorizado’, Obras Completas de Don Benito Pérez Galdós (6 vols., M. Aquilar: Madrid, 1942), vi, 1734 (Galdós about his source); for Marliani’s judgement see chapter 8.
73 Galdós, Trafalgar (1984), pp. 176 (‘el primer marino de nuestro siglo’), 230 (‘el glorioso fin del almirante Nelson’).
Long live Spain! The other operetta focused more on a love-story developing in parallel with the battle.

III

British Novels, Plays and Films from about 1890 until 1920

British novel writing started to exploit the subject of Nelson with some force only at the end of the nineteenth century; and then at first only in the field of boy’s literature. These books, which explicitly addressed boys (and not girls or young readers in general), followed the pattern of masculinity in British boy’s literature that had developed at that time. Ideals of patriotism and stoicism had replaced the focus on Christian values that had been displayed in mid-nineteenth century books for boys. The authors portrayed Nelson as the embodiment of a masculine warrior: as impatient, ‘clever’, using ‘terse seaman language’ and as someone who ‘became in a measure intoxicated with the sound of battle, like the war horse who scents the combat from afar’. In crisis situations he remained unmoved: ‘Nelson’s face did not soften in the least. It was like a mask of steel’. He was part of a world in which ‘true courage, manliness, muscle, dash and go were appreciated to their fullest extent’. This world of ‘manliness’ in which Nelson moved was quite distinct from the weak and effeminate spheres of shore life. The boy’s books consequently depict the hero at sea and one author proclaims: ‘My Nelson is

---

75 Julio de las Cuevas and Josué Caldeiro, Glorias Españolas. Episodio lírico nacional del combate de Trafalgar! En cinco cuadros y en verso (Madrid: [s. n.], 1889), p. 37 (‘¡Muera el inglés! Viva España!’), on p. 5 the authors say that they were incited by Galdós).
76 Javier Burgos, Trafalgar. Episodio nacional cómico lírico. En dos actos ... Música del maestro Jiménez (Madrid: Zozaya, [1891]).
77 For example: Gordon Stables, Hearts of Oak: A Story of Nelson and the Navy (London: John F. Shaw and Co, [1893]) [hereafter: Stables], pp. x (‘Nelson is notably a boy’s hero’), 356.
80 F. Shaw, p. 221; similarly: pp. 222 and 225.
Nelson on the quarter-deck', assuming that the 'young fellows for whom I write ... infinitely prefer the sailor's cutlass to a lady's fan'.

In these books for boys Nelson is depicted primarily as a fighter. His fighting affirms his masculinity and thereby serves as a pattern for the initiation into manhood of the boys in the novels. F. H. Winder described his protagonist's 'accession of manhood' as his 'initiation into the terrors and the grandeur of naval warfare'. The novels gave Nelson himself the role of lending a helping hand in this process of initiation into a man's world. He encourages boys to join the navy and he welcomes them as his 'lads' into his world of male socializing. According to these novels for boys, Nelson's authentic character can flourish only as long as the separation of gender spheres is maintained. Gordon Stables described how Nelson's 'whole demeanour altered in a moment' as soon as his wife appeared. In her presence, Nelson recommends the protagonist of the story, a young boy, not to join the navy, but to 'plant cabbages' instead, while in her absence he is enthusiastic about his profession. One of his early loves is described as the 'haul[ing] down [of] his flag to a girl'. Clearly women have to be kept at a distance and even Lady Hamilton, who never actually appears in person in any of these novels, is mentioned merely as a supportive female or inspiration for Nelson. Nevertheless Nelson is also allowed a softer side, which can express itself in a longing for 'a happy home', tears at the news of the death of a friend or 'a kindly glance at ... [a] midshipman'.

---

82 Stables, pp. ix, x.
83 Winder, p. 312; similarly: p. 301 ('his manhood was stirred within him as he listened to his elders'); Stables, pp. 164-67.
85 F. Harrison, p. 75; F. Shaw, p. 226; similarly: Winder, pp. 291-92; F. Shaw, p. 337.
86 Stables, pp. 91-96.
87 Ibid., p. 127.
88 Ibid., p. 191 ('Nelson's guiding star'), 305 (Lady Hamilton helping to get Nelson's fleet watered); Winder, pp. 290-91 (absent-minded Nelson writing a poem, 'his gaze lingered dreamily upon the picture of a beautiful woman which hung before him').
89 Stables, p. 187; similarly: p. 358.
90 Winder, p. 292.
91 F. Shaw, p. 224.
The British novels for boys, as well as the plays at the beginning of the twentieth century, tend to present Nelson very much as the great hero. His first appearance in these works is usually elaborately staged, with him surrounded by a cheering crowd, with a description of his eminence or with a conversation concerning him. Nelson himself, once he starts speaking, often maintains this atmosphere of distance by talking 'with quiet decision', 'with quiet and tender dignity' or merely making curt remarks. One successful play, set in an early twentieth-century household of a naval officer, even included an apparition of Nelson, prepared by elaborate stage directions which demanded a darkening of the stage and a spotlight on the figure of Nelson. Once on stage, Nelson admonishes the naval officer's wife to let her husband go and do his duty and, in a second apparition, he calls on the officer himself to follow the example of those 'who have passed'. The play is accompanied by the melody of Braham's 'Death of Lord Nelson' and finishes in a resounding and affirmative 'Rule Britannia'. The desire to recapture Nelson's spirit also found its expression in other fictional patriotic representations. William Laird Clowes and Alan H. Burgoyne produced a book in which they tried to figure out how a modern battle of Trafalgar might be fought and an early film made an inaccurate attempt at depicting the Death of Nelson. Such repeated use of Nelson as a national hero annoyed George Bernard Shaw. He wrote, a year after the widely celebrated Trafalgar centenary, in his preface to his play John Bull's Other Island, a comparison between Wellington, 'the intensely Irish Irishman', and Nelson.

---

92 F. Harrison, pp. 70-71.
93 F. Shaw, p. 217 ("he saw for the first time in his life the face of Horatio Nelson, the hero of his boyhood"); Winder, pp. 284-85 ("He was about to see Admiral Nelson, to stand in the presence of the great hero of the sea, and hear him speak ... It would be easier, the lad felt, to speak with the king himself.").
94 Frederick Fenn, The Nelson Touch. Adapted from 'The little pale Man' by Mayne Lindsay (London: Samuel French, 1908) [hereafter: Fenn], pp. 15-16.
95 Fenn, p. 17; Drury, p. 16; F. Shaw, pp. 220 and 225.
96 Drury, pp. 4 (giving three different London theatres at which the play was performed in 1910 and 1911), 5 (giving stage directions for apparition), 16 (Nelson's actual apparition).
97 Drury, pp. 16 and 18.
98 Clowes/Burgoyne.
99 Death of Nelson (1905); a staged scene shows Nelson, with left (instead of right) arm missing, entering, looking through his telescope, getting shot and dying on the spot, in front of a mast.
100 For more about these celebrations see chapter 17.
‘the intensely English Englishman’, as a result of which the Englishman is severely judged: ‘it seems impossible that any other country than England could produce a hero so utterly devoid of common sense, intellectual delicacy, and international chivalry as Nelson’. 101 This verdict on Nelson seems to have been at odds with the pre-First-World-War chorus of adulation for Nelson.

Apart from patriotic novels and plays, a romantic fictional approach to Nelson started, too, at the turn of the twentieth century. Douglas Sladen’s novel _The Admiral. A Romance of Nelson in the Year of the Nile_ went through further, and cheaper, editions under the more outspoken title _The Admiral. The Love Story of Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton_. 102 Building on many historical sources and an invented ‘journal’, supposedly written by Nelson himself, Sladen represented the relationship between Nelson and Lady Hamilton in a positive light. 103 In doing so, he followed the ideals of gender roles current in his day, at least at the beginning of his book. Nelson is described as a man of strong masculine character, who displays in battle ‘his fighting smile of serene superiority’. 104 At the same time, Sladen attributed to him ‘delicate sensibilities’. 105 While Nelson’s wife Fanny fails him, because she proved to be ‘totally unable to satisfy such an intense, imaginative, romantic temperament as the Admiral’s’, 106 Lady Hamilton shows herself as the model of a supportive woman. She cares for the wounded Nelson ‘with a woman’s tender solicitude for sickness’ and she shows ‘a woman’s reverence for a hero’. 107 Towards the end of the novel, however, Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton is described as ‘companionship’ and Nelson praises his lover in his ‘journal’ as a strong woman in her own right: ‘Had Emma been a sea-captain, she would have

102 Sladen; further editions under the title _The Admiral. The Love Story of Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton_ (London: J. Eveleigh Nash, 1903, and [n. pl.]: C. Arthur Pearson, [1906]) were shortened and published cheaply (for sixpence).
103 Sladen, pp. v and xii listed as his sources: Laughton, Nicolas, Southey, Jeaffreson, Mahan, W. Clark Russell, some letters addressed to Lady Nelson (published in _Literature, see appendix B_), Beresford and Wilson.
104 Sladen, p. 85; similarly: pp. 21, 56.
107 Ibid., p. 105; similarly: 108-9; p. 110.
been as Daring as Foley at the Nile'. Sympathy with Lady Hamilton was also expressed in a novel that described how her life could have developed a hundred years later, if she had been given greater opportunities.

The first full-length feature film about Nelson, produced in 1918, made ample use of elements that had already been developed in British prose fiction. The frame of and general motivation for the film was a propagandistic effort on behalf of the navy. In the first scene, Admiral Freemantle appears and, in summarizing the importance of the navy in British history, gets a boy so interested in the subject that the admiral suggests that he read Southey's *Life of Nelson*. Told through recurrent flashbacks, the actual storyline owes a lot to recent fictional adaptations of Nelson’s life. Young Nelson is shown in a boyish struggle for manliness, climbing trees and falling off them, engaged in pillow-fights with his boarding-school mates and also being ‘the victim of brutal horse play then the fashion in the Navy’.

Once initiated into the manly world of the navy, Nelson becomes a pattern of fighting virility. His future wife, Fanny, in feminine contrast, is shown sewing. Though she is also shown caring for the wounded Nelson, a disconnected inter-title comments: ‘Like most men of genius, Nelson craved for warm-hearted appreciative response. Unfortunately his wife lacked the power to supply this’. This prepares the scene for Lady Hamilton. She is first shown as the coquettish wife of the British ambassador to Naples. When she learns about the seriousness of the political and military situation of the British, however, she becomes serious and turns into a patriotic supporter of the British cause. When she sees Nelson’s empty sleeve on his second visit to Naples, she becomes, more specifically, Nelson’s supporter, though only after her husband’s death does she become his lover. Nelson, in the meantime, is shown as a caring superior, who ‘loved his men better than honours’ and whose last farewell is

---

108 Ibid., pp. 137 and 343 (‘companionship’), 244; Captain Foley’s ship led the British line at the battle of the Nile.
110 *Nelson. The Story of England’s immortal Naval Hero*. The quoted passages are taken from the inter-titles. John Sugden, ‘Lord Nelson and the Film Industry’, *Nelson Dispatch*, 2 (1985), 83-88 [hereafter: Sugden], 83, points out that the film ‘seems to have won some popularity because it was followed almost instantly by THE ROMANCE OF LADY HAMILTON (1919) in which Malvina Longfellow, who had played Emma Hamilton in NELSON, was recast in the title role’. 

---

341
depicted with waving, praying, crying crowds, a scene similar to that depicted on many popular prints.\textsuperscript{111} As the battle of Trafalgar approaches on 21 October 1805 the images switch between Lady Hamilton at home and Nelson aboard ship: Lady Hamilton at a window - Nelson at a window - Nelson writing his last letter to Lady Hamilton - Lady Hamilton kissing a letter - Nelson kissing her portrait. After the patriotic opening of the battle, with Nelson’s signal ‘England expects’ and hat-waving sailors, Nelson’s death scene is depicted very much in the style of Devis’ painting.\textsuperscript{112} Nelson’s death scene is embellished with him holding and beholding a medallion of Lady Hamilton. The closing comment, ‘There will never be another hero like Nelson’, is followed by the encouraging message that he has followers, including the enthusiastic reader of his biography. Modern battleships seen firing at sea complete the message that the Royal Navy maintains the spirit of Nelson.

IV

German Adaptations of the Early Twentieth Century

German fictional adaptations of Nelson’s life tended to focus more on the events in Naples, but even they contained patriotic elements. A Nelson play of 1903 included some conversations of ordinary sailors, some of them Germans who served in the Royal Navy. One of the Germans points out that British successes at sea are partly due to their own involvement and a British coxwain admits that the Germans used to be a ‘powerful seafaring people’ in the days of the ‘Hansa’.\textsuperscript{113} Even Nelson himself acknowledges the German contribution to British might,\textsuperscript{114} and he is eagerly preaching his wife a lesson about ‘patriotic duty’, very much in the spirit widely encouraged at the beginning of the twentieth century. His patriotic spirit fails him, however, when he enters the corrupting atmosphere of the Neapolitan court. The play underlines Nelson’s moral decline by his

\textsuperscript{111} For these pictures see chapter 12.
\textsuperscript{112} For the discussion of this painting see chapter 12.
\textsuperscript{114} Neudeck, pp. 47-48, including a reference to the royal family’s German descent.
own acknowledgement of his dependence on Lady Hamilton as well as his controversies with Captain Troubridge and with his own step-son.\textsuperscript{115}

The subject of Lady Hamilton was a particular favourite in Germany.\textsuperscript{116} The most successful German adaptation of the Nelson and Lady Hamilton story was Heinrich Vollrat Schuhmacher's two-volume novel about \textit{Lady Hamilton} and \textit{Nelson's Last Love}, translations of which were published as far afield as Argentina.\textsuperscript{117} Schumacher drew heavily on Dumas in the first volume and the beginning of the second volume, although he appears to be slightly more sympathetic to Lady Hamilton, portraying her as a victim of circumstances and showing her disgust at the lesbian approaches of Miss Arabella Kelly and the queen of Naples.\textsuperscript{118} As soon as Nelson appears, the story takes on a different slant. He is portrayed as the honest person who helps Lady Hamilton to free herself from her corrupt circumstances and to live a more honest life. Nelson makes his first appearance in the novels as a semi-paralysed young Captain seeking help from the quack 'Dr. Graham', for whom young Emma (not yet Hamilton) works. By her hypnotic abilities she relieves him from his pain in such a way that Nelson as 'Dr. Graham' puts it, 'is entirely in your [her] power'. Emma, however, does not use this power.\textsuperscript{119} When she meets Nelson again, in Naples in 1793, she turns patriotic and wants to become like him, 'a man, a warrior!'.\textsuperscript{120} His sincerity softens her distrust of him, for which she apologizes having 'lived among Italians'.\textsuperscript{121} At Nelson's

\textsuperscript{115} Neudeck, pp. 66 and 92 (Nelson's own admissions, confessed to Lady Hamilton), 87-90 (Troubridge), 106-7 (Josiah Nisbet).

\textsuperscript{116} In preparation for this thesis I have found catalogue entries of three \textit{Lady Hamilton} novels (all three copies lost in the Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin as a consequence of the Second World War) and one \textit{Lady Hamilton} play (temporarily inaccessible in the Deutsche Bücherei Leipzig due to post-unification restoration work).


\textsuperscript{118} See particularly: Schumacher, \textit{Lady Hamilton}, pp. 73-75; Schumacher, \textit{Nelson's Last Love}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{119} Schumacher, \textit{Lady Hamilton}, pp. 141-44.


\textsuperscript{121} Schumacher, \textit{Nelson's Last Love}, p. 18-19.
second arrival at Naples, in 1798, his admiration for her patriotism finally wins her over in a double sense: to love Nelson and to become a moral person. While he needs her physical support to overcome his different ailments, he helps her to enter a world of patriotism and integrity. Nelson's involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan Republic is, for the first time in a piece of fiction, defended and the blame for later atrocities is shifted to the king of Naples. Only in ordering Caracciolo’s execution, is Nelson described as having gone too far, and in this matter Lady Hamilton is, contrary to all earlier depictions, portrayed as trying to stop Nelson. In contrast to the reformed Lady Hamilton, Nelson’s wife proves to be harsh and demanding, so that her generous husband appears justified in deserting her. For the two lovers: ‘Nothing was now left to complete their happiness'. Nelson’s death leaves Lady Hamilton defrauded of her pension, instead of falling into deserved decline, as earlier novels had portrayed her later life.

Schumacher’s interpretation of Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton was made into an internationally successful German film in 1921. Producer, scriptwriter and director, Richard Oswald, used an all-star cast for his Lady Hamilton. Conrad Veidt, who had just gained world-fame for his role as the somnambulist in Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari, played Nelson. Unfortunately, it is now difficult to reconstruct faithfully his portrayal of Nelson. In making the film, Oswald deviated from his own script and many of his originally intended scenes seem never to have been filmed. It also appears

122 Schumacher, Nelson's Last Love, pp. 41-57, 124, 127, 149, 157 (Nelson suffers from 'some peculiarities, that are usually only found in women ... hysteria').
123 Schumacher, Nelson's Last Love, pp. 273-90, 295-96; Lady Hamilton also convinces Nelson to help to save a respectable Neapolitan's life (pp. 297, 300-4).
125 Schumacher, Nelson's Last Love, p. 332.
126 Hans-Michael Bock, 'Biographie', Richard Oswald. Regisseur und Produzent, eds. Helga Belach and Wolfgang Jacobsen (München: Ein CineGraph Buch, edition text + kritik, 1990), 119-32, at 126-27 (describing the huge financial success of the film and listing Italy, Sweden, France and Belgium as examples of countries into which the film was exported).
127 The script (consisting of 173 scenes) is reprinted in: dif [Deutsches Institut für Filmkunde] – Filmkundliche Mitteilungen, Nr. 3/4, December 1971, 11-48; the following scenes were filmed differently from the script: 3, 47, 53, 58, 69, 72, 77-80, 82, 88 (allusion to lesbianism omitted), 96, 99-101, 103, 106, 109, 134, 145, 151-152, 155, 159, 161, 162b, 164, more scenes are incomplete, other scenes are newly inserted; the following scenes I could not find in any of the two versions I have seen: 4, 8, 15-43, 59-61, 63-68, 70-71, 73-76, 81, 84a, 85, 94-95, 98, 102, 107, 131-132, 135-142, 171-173.
that different versions of the film were cut. A Russian copy presents a mostly romantic version of events, while a surviving series of incoherently combined scenes in a German version includes depictions of the trial, execution and reappearance of the corpse of the Neapolitan Admiral 'Caraciollo'. Judging from the scenes that have come down to us, Nelson undergoes a certain change during the course of the action. In Naples he appears rather helpless, lost in front of the stunning scenery and vibrant intrigues that develop in the film. The atmosphere in Naples is recaptured with flirtatious looks, a drunken king, impressive artificial waterfalls and fountains, fireworks, and crowds in front of the royal palace in Naples (demonstrating or cheering). When Nelson is shown, he is portrayed as weakened by his wounds, almost staggering, with a lecherous expression on his face, or he seems bewildered, nervous and besotted, wildly kissing a miniature of Lady Hamilton or, later, the original. After Lady Hamilton has demanded from Nelson never to see his wife again, the film for its short final scenes presents a family idyll with Lady Hamilton and her baby, Nelson kissing his lover and caressing his little daughter. Nelson's death is represented in a short scene, in which Nelson, as in the British film of 1918, holds a miniature of Lady Hamilton. According to the script the author had intended an appearance of the head of the dead 'Caraciollo in the water' which would make Nelson exclaim: 'Don't throw me into the water'; but in the actual

128 The Russian version is held at the Bundesarchiv - Filmarchiv (Berlin); the incoherent succession of German scenes is kept at the British Film Institute (London); scenes 144-151 (trial, execution and reappearance of corpse of 'Caraciollo').
129 The film was extravagantly produced, including outdoor photography from different places in Germany (including Lübeck and Hamburg), England and Italy (Naples, Rome and Venice); Richard Oswald. Regisseur und Produzent, eds. Helga Belach and Wolfgang Jacobsen (München: Ein CineGraph Buch, edition text + kritik, 1990), 157.
130 New scene, inserted between scenes 120 and 121 in the Russian version, kept at the Bundesarchiv - Filmarchiv; scene 127; new scene inserted after scene 134; Michael Esser, 'Der Löwenbündiger', Richard Oswald. Regisseur und Produzent, eds. Helga Belach and Wolfgang Jacobsen (München: Ein CineGraph Buch, edition text + kritik, 1990), 53-64, at 61, compares Nelson in the film to a puppet.
131 This inter-title does not appear in the script; it is added to scene 155 of the script in the disorganised German version of the film, kept at the British Film Institute.
132 These scenes are inserted (instead of scene 159) in the German version, kept at the British Film Institute.
film Nelson only stares and points with trembling hand into empty space, so that the spectator is left wondering what may haunt Nelson.133

In other works of German fiction, produced in the 1920s, Nelson remained the admiral under the command of a woman. An operetta by the popular composer, Eduard Künneke, depicts Lady Hamilton as dominating the events – and in the end also dominating Nelson.134 Nelson’s submission is only the culmination of a lecherous desire for Lady Hamilton, probably inspired by Oswald’s film. When Nelson first meets her, he is described as ‘panting’.135 Such a degree of ridicule made Nelson an ideal subject for an absurd portrayal of the kind fashionable at the time: _Lady Hamilton or the Posing-Emma or from Servant Girl to Beefsteak à la Nelson. A just as Fantastic as Well as Short-Story-Rocking Proliferating Parody: Most Industriously and Most Fleshly Pictured by George Grosz._136 This Dadaist novel, instead of focusing, as other novels had done, on how Lady Hamilton seduced her successive lovers, described how these successive lovers tried to get rid of her. Nelson achieves his final goal by blowing up the _Victory_ (and himself) at the battle of Trafalgar: ‘All other stories about the death of the admiral are legends, as they develop all too easily around such a great man’.137

133 Scene 170 (‘(Vision) Kopf Caracciollos im Wasser ... “Werft mich nichts ins Wasser”’). Since the Russian version (held at the Bundesarchiv – Filmarchiv), which contains this scene, does not include the scenes about Caracciolo’s end, the spectator is left wondering without a hint at the intended interpretation.
135 Bars/Jacobson, p. 213 (‘keuchend’).
137 Meyer/Grosz, p. 52 (‘Alle anderen Erzählungen von dem Tode des Admirals sind Legenden, wie sie gar zu leicht um einen so großen Mann entstehen’).
Adaptations in the English Language from about 1920 until 1995

British fiction also appears to have built on Schumacher's novels, particularly by using the idea of Nelson transforming Lady Hamilton into a patriotic lady. E. Barrington's novel of 1925 about The Divine Lady. A Romance of Nelson and Lady Hamilton added some elements that were designed to explain why Nelson was so attracted by Lady Hamilton's patriotism. According to this book, Lady Hamilton at their first meeting in 1793 had already helped Nelson to get the support from the kingdom of Naples he needed and in 1798 she personally handed over a letter from the queen of Naples that would allow Nelson to get his ships victualled in the ports of the kingdom of Naples. Towards the end of the novel, however, Barrington returned to a critical treatment of Nelson's affair with Lady Hamilton and concluded that his adulterous affair led to unhappiness. The novel was used as the basis for an American film in 1929, which seems to have followed a rather unconvincing story-line, because one critic remarked on the difficulty of striking 'a balance between History on the one hand and squeamish morality on the other' and that the result was '[e]verything but a persuasive story'. Avoiding the intricacies of Nelson's affair with Lady Hamilton, British films of the 1920s focused rather on Nelson's professional career. Cedric Hardwicke, in Nelson (1926), presented an acclaimed portrayal of Nelson as commander and a production of 'British Instruction Films' - about Naval Warfare 1789 to 1805 - dealt exclusively with naval encounters.

---


139 Barrington, pp. 257 and 278.

140 Barrington, pp. 386, 399; Nelson is also drawn by Lady Hamilton into gambling (p. 339) and a vaguely described involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution (pp. 345-47).

141 Variety, 27 March 1929, quoted in: Sugden, 84; Frank Lloyd nevertheless gained an Academy Award as best director (Sugden, 84-85). I was not able to see this film. For the traditional arrangement of the death-scene (after Devis) see Appendix A, plate 34.

142 Sugden, 84, quoting from Kinematograph Weekly, 16 September 1926. I was not able to see this film.
British novels now also started to exploit the naval setting of Nelson. Joseph Conrad, in *The Rover*, built a story around the way Nelson was misled into suspecting Egypt as once more the destination of the French fleet in 1805. Nelson is merely talked about, by the British as aiming for ‘the destruction of the enemy’ and by the French as ‘a cunning one’, before he appears himself towards the end of the novel. Then, he is described as a kind and sickly man with a ‘nervous’ energy that expresses itself in constant walking (up and down the room) and a drive for action. Nelson himself is quoted as saying: ‘This is anxious work ... It is killing me. ... I have hardly enough breath in my body to carry me on from day to day. ... [sic] But I am like that ... I will stick to my task till perhaps some shot from the enemy puts an end to everything.’\(^{143}\) It appears that the image of Nelson as the ever active, never doubting naval commander was so strong that it did not allow for much fictional license. C. S. Forester decided, therefore, to construct a parallel character tailored in part on Nelson and called Horatio Hornblower, who had the bad luck never to have served under Nelson.\(^{144}\) Later authors followed this idea, producing series about naval men during the French Wars, in which Nelson never actually makes an appearance.\(^{145}\)

British plays of the 1930s about Nelson, however, went on to develop the story of his relationship to Lady Hamilton that Schumacher and Barrington had helped to create. Some plays introduced scenes in which Nelson was openly criticized by one of his captains for his affair with Lady Hamilton;\(^{146}\) others showed Sir William Hamilton explicitly accepting his wife’s affair with Nelson.\(^{147}\) Whenever Nelson’s wife appeared,

---


\(^{144}\) C. S. Forester, *The Happy Return* (London: Michael Joseph, 1937), pp. 141, 261 (Hornblower’s first lieutenant, Bush, talks about his Trafalgar experience); 257-258 (Bush compares Hornblower to Nelson); *The Happy Return* was the first book of the Hornblower series, which was mostly written after the Second World War; in *Hornblower and the ‘Antropos’* (London: Michael Joseph, 1953), pp. 44-69, Hornblower is entrusted to oversee the transport of Nelson’s coffin on the Thames to Whitehall. Forester had written a biography of Nelson, published in 1929.

\(^{145}\) Alexander Kent and Patrick O’Brian. O’Brian’s hero, Jack Aubrey, serves as a lieutenant under Nelson at the battle of the Nile and he dined with him a couple of times as a young officer, but this is only treated indirectly through his memories. I am grateful to H. T. Dickinson for informing me about this.


\(^{147}\) Mann, pp. 37-50; Tarkington, scene VII.
she was portrayed in a negative fashion, usually intolerant of his profession.  

This, however, did not necessarily lead to a romantization of Lady Hamilton. James Lansdale Hodson’s play portrayed Lady Hamilton as an alcoholic at the end of her life.  

Such clearly negative aspects in the depiction of Nelson’s affair with Lady Hamilton mostly vanished with the outbreak of the Second World War and the nation’s need for an endearing national hero. Hodson changed the critical message about Lady Hamilton by making a part of his play into a new one-act play and adding to this part a new proof of Lady Nelson’s unpleasant character, letting her say to Nelson: ‘I hope you may suffer as I am suffering’. A radio play of 1940 exploited to the full the patriotic element of the love story, developing Nelson’s and Lady Hamilton’s desire to help ‘to make England glorious’. When Lady Hamilton is asked at the end, after having received the news of Nelson’s death: ‘What is there left of him for you to love now?’, she answers: ‘His glory!’  

The most enduring of the patriotic interpretations of Nelson’s story and also the most famous film about him is Alexander Korda’s That Hamilton Woman (in Britain: Lady Hamilton), shot in Hollywood in the autumn of 1940. The film contained clearly propagandistic elements, among which the speech that scriptwriters Walter Reisch and R. C. Sherriff wrote for Nelson (played by Laurence Olivier) stood out. In this speech Nelson appeals to the lords of the Admiralty not to trust Napoleon (here read: Hitler), culminating in the remark: ‘you cannot make peace with dictators’. Korda was aware of the German version of the film. For a discussion of the propagandistic elements in the film and Korda’s propagandistic ideas about the film see: K. R. M. Short, ‘“That Hamilton Woman” (1941): propaganda, feminism and the production code’, Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, vol. 11, no. 1 (1991) [hereafter: Short], 3-19, particularly 3, 5-7, 13.

148 Mann, pp. 4-11, 51-55, 62-63; Hodson (1936), pp. 8, 15, 58-64.  
150 James Lansdale Hodson, ‘Nelson in Arlington Street’ (Copyright 1936, by J. L. H.; Copyright in revised form, 1940, by J. L. H.), in Fifty One-act Plays. Second Serie, ed. Constance M. Martin (Victor Gollancz: London, 1940), pp. 123-38, p. 131; the only exception to the rule I have found is Burton.  
152 Tarkington, scene X, which ends with the music swelling ‘solemnly into “God Save the King”’.  
153 Other clearly propagandistic elements are: Nelson’s speech in the House of Lords and Sir William Hamilton’s explanation to Lady Hamilton, how Britain stood alone against a continental tyrant (Napoleon/Hitler). The second scene is cut out of the German version of the film. For a discussion of the propagandistic elements in the film and Korda’s propagandistic ideas about the film see: K. R. M. Short, ‘“That Hamilton Woman” (1941): propaganda, feminism and the production code’, Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, vol. 11, no. 1 (1991) [hereafter: Short], 3-19, particularly 3, 5-7, 13.  
154 Short, p. 6.
that ‘[p]ropaganda ... can be bitter medicine. It needs sugar coating – and Lady Hamilton is a very thick coating of sugar indeed.’\textsuperscript{155} The Lady-Hamilton coating was provided by the most positive elements of twentieth-century novels and plays about the famous love affair,\textsuperscript{156} particularly Lady Hamilton’s patriotic support for Nelson. In the film she helps him in 1793, and again before and after the battle of the Nile, so that he can remark: ‘This is the third time you have helped me’. Nelson’s appearance in her life does not lead her solely into the typically female role of supporting a man, but also makes her ‘change morally for the better as her wardrobe shift[s] radically from the low cut dresses of her Hamilton period to the high collared dresses and shawl clad-wardrobe of her country life as Nelson’s “wife” and mother to their beloved daughter’.\textsuperscript{157} Reisch and Sherriff portray Lady Nelson in a distinctly negative fashion and allow Captain Hardy to remind Nelson only once of what people will say. But when Nelson replies ‘I will not see those I love and owe loyalty to left alone’, Hardy mutters that he understands him. Although the film is generally restrained in erotic terms, Nelson is still shown escaping with his lover to a harbour tavern in Naples, thereby taking up an old myth that can be traced back to 1819. The romantic message of the film is underlined by the fact that the protagonists were played by a notorious (and originally adulterous) couple of the day: the recently married Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh.\textsuperscript{158}

Such romanticization of the adulterous Nelson-Hamilton affair did not escape the self-censorship of Hollywood’s film-industry. The responsible censor, Joseph Breen, protested that the script was ‘treating the adulterous relationship as a romance, instead of as a sin’ and he insisted on changes.\textsuperscript{159} Korda eventually gave up his original idea of

\textsuperscript{155} Quoted in Short, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{156} The original idea to give the film the title \textit{The Enchantress} (Short, p. 11, thinks this is a parallel to Barrington’s \textit{The Divine Lady}) indicates that Reisch and Sherriff used the English version of Schumacher’s novels (\textit{The Fair Enchantress} and \textit{Lord Nelson’s Last Love}) as one of their sources; some elements also appear to have been inspired by earlier films, particularly Lady Hamilton’s shocked reaction when she notices Nelson’s empty sleeve, similar depictions can be found in the British \textit{Nelson} film of 1918 and the German \textit{Lady Hamilton} film of 1921, where the focus on Nelson’s sleeve is emphasized by effect of a telescope (giving a round image with a black margin).
\textsuperscript{158} Short, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{159} Quoted in Short, p. 10.
'cutting back and forth between Nelson’s cabin on *HMS Victory* and Emma’s bedroom at their country home’ on the day of the battle of Trafalgar,¹⁶⁰ as had occurred in the British *Nelson* film of 1918. He added a final scene that showed Lady Hamilton in prison at the end of her life, in order to satisfy Breen’s demand that the adulterous parties ‘must be punished’¹⁶¹. And he shot another scene, which he cut out again when the film was exported; this scene, following one of Breen’s suggestions, showed Nelson’s parson father admonishing his son for his adultery.¹⁶² As a result some critics were ‘disappointed by Korda’s chaste handling of the Nelson-Hamilton affair’. Other critics disliked the obvious propagandistic elements, and Korda was just about to justify his position when the USA entered the Second World War and hence siding with the British became acceptable.¹⁶³ From the beginning, however, the film was popular with the public and it achieved great success in such places as the Soviet Union and South America.¹⁶⁴

The portrayal of Nelson himself focused on two major conflicts: the tensions between his profession and his emotional needs (‘I have not seen her [his wife] for seven years. I wonder why sailors ever marry’) and the moral struggles that resulted from his love for Lady Hamilton (‘I know that I must not come back and I know that nothing in the world can keep me away’). While females were often moved by Olivier’s portrayal of Nelson and by what he says in the film, a male critic claimed that he ‘provides us with no insight into the man’ and his performance ‘appears too passionless and stagey’.¹⁶⁵ In general, male critics require virility in Nelson. One commented that ‘Olivier … is hard

¹⁶⁰ Short, p. 13.
¹⁶¹ Short, pp. 10 (about Breen’s demand), 13 (about the new last scene); one is left to wonder whether Nelson’s death at Trafalgar is meant to be interpreted as a punishment for his adulterous affair.
¹⁶² Short, pp. 11-12; the British Board of Film Censors accepted the film without the admonishing father.
¹⁶³ Short, p. 5; Kulik, pp. 249, 252-53 (Korda had received a subpoena to appear before the ‘Senate Foreign Relations Committee’ which was ‘investigating the status of possible “foreign agents”’).
¹⁶⁴ Short, pp. 5, 14; Kulik, p. 249.
¹⁶⁵ What Nelson said, after he kissed Lady Hamilton at midnight of New Year’s Eve 1799, impressed one of my aunts so much that she still remembered it years after she had seen the film: ‘Now I have kissed you through two centuries’. The film started my teenage interest in Nelson. The male critic quoted is Kulik, p. 248.
to believe as the heroic sea dog', while another claimed that 'Nelson's aggressive spirit is admirably evoked' in his speech to the Admiralty.166

The British post-war novels and plays about Nelson followed earlier fictional patterns without producing any notable artistic work until the late 1960s. Novels for children or adults were concerned with Nelson's masculinity, showing him as a man who escapes from his dominating wife into male bonding with his step-son or as a man who overcomes his weaknesses to achieve authority.167 Other novels recycled the Nelson-Hamilton story without introducing any revealing new elements.168 Probably inspired by Korda's film, which showed Nelson with an eye-patch when going out, plays now often provided Nelson with an eye-patch.169 The libretto for a Nelson opera, though traditional in portraying Nelson as lacking a masculine appearance and 'bewildered' by Lady Hamilton's advances, also introduces Earl Minto and Captain Hardy as influences on Nelson's decision to go to sea in 1805.170 This was developed into the setting for a whole play by Terence Rattigan.

Rattigan's Bequest to the Nation (performed as a television play under the title: Nelson: A Study in Miniature), which was later, with some variations, made into a film, focuses on Nelson at the height of his fame in 1805 and on Nelson’s affair with Lady Hamilton.171 The spectator of the play as well as the film must wonder, what attracts Nelson to his lover, since she is portrayed as drunk and vulgar: 'I know you think me a

168 David Stacton, Sir William or A Lesson in Love (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), Nelson inexperienced (pp. 147, 196) and Lady Hamilton calculating (p. 152-56); Lozania Prole, Nelson's Love (London: Robert Hale, 1966), offering a smooth romantic story-line; Edward Bishop, Emma, Lady Hamilton (Geneva: Editor-Service, 1969), weak Nelson seduced by vicious Lady Hamilton.
170 Pryce-Jones, pp. 13-14, 21, 36-37.
171 Terence Rattigan, Bequest to the Nation (London: Evans Plays, 1970) [hereafter: Rattigan]; Sugden, p. 85, also mentions the television production of 1966.
vulgar, drunken slut. ... I don't give a fart for being thought what I am. Rattigan gives a hint that Nelson is even portrayed as recognizing his lover's unattractiveness: 'Do you think I relish the gutter-talk, don't wince at the vulgarity, and have lost the capacity to smell liquor on the breath? Do you think there isn't a moment in each day that I don't feel blasted with shame?' To Captain Hardy's question why then does he endure such days, he answers: 'because after the days there are the nights'. This purely carnal attraction leads Nelson to the conclusion, which otherwise cannot convince in the light of the repugnance which he feels against Lady Hamilton: 'You must understand that there is nothing in Emma I would change ... because I love her'. The play does not succeed in offering a convincing examination of an unusual love affair.

Rattigan gives a hint that Nelson is very different at sea from how he behaves ashore (an opinion probably inspired by post-war biographical literature). The printed version of the play and the film do not investigate this 'other Nelson' any further. He is not shown explaining his battle plans to the visiting captains (although this is hinted at) and the episode on the battle of Trafalgar that is included in the film merely deals with Nelson's vanity at wearing his orders and with his death. Nelson is shown in his professional context, only when he speaks to the First Lord of the Admiralty. The actual conversation develops very unprofessionally, however. Nelson makes constant references to his lover and behaves overbearingly, treating his superior with insolence. As a result, Rattigan, instead of unravelling Nelson's personality, creates an enigma.

---

172 Rattigan, p. 68 (addressed to Minto); similarly: pp. 23 ('Fart off'), 24 ('impertinent cow'), 25 and 69 ('bitch'), 29 ('my arse'), 39 ('Those buggers aren't worth by piss'), 62 ('arse-licker'), 64 ('a pox on Mother Church! ... a pox on that old madman of Windsor and his German bitch of a Queen').

173 Rattigan, pp. 81-82; Sugden, p. 86, notes: 'it is difficult to imagine Rattigan's obnoxious Emma attracting anyone, Nelson's affair is reduced to a caricature'; in the film Nelson's attraction to Lady Hamilton appears even less comprehensible in contrast to the portrayal of Lady Nelson as kind and forgiving; in the play Lady Nelson is shown as more calculating, merely waiting for Nelson loosing interest in his lover.

174 Rattigan, p. 42 ('He [Minto] once told me that ashore I was a babe in arms, while at sea ...'). In the film Captain Hardy expresses this thought; a supposed contrast between Nelson at sea and ashore was particularly stressed by Admiral W. M. James, see chapter 7.

175 Nelson's explanation of his battle plan seems to have been included in the earlier television play Nelson: A Study in Miniature, because Sugden, p. 86, remarks: 'Bryant [the actor who played Nelson] is equally effective enthusing naval officers at the dinner table with his plans for annihilating the enemy fleet'.

353
John Arden and Margareta D'Arcy, in *The Hero Rises Up*, found a different approach in order to demolish ideas of romance and heroism in the story of Nelson. They chose as their setting the events in Naples of 1799. In front of an unfolding scenery of atrocities, Nelson is portrayed as intent on destruction and keen on disregarding orders: 'I was the first naval commander who understood – and put into practice – the theory of the entire and total destruction of the enemy fleet, at whatever cost to my own. A destruction made possible by my enthusiastic disregard of everybody's orders.' In view of this approach to Nelson as a 'naval commander', the allusion elsewhere to a different Nelson who is trusted by his crews, appears even less convincing than in Rattigan's play.

Arden's and D'Arcy's portrayal of Nelson as an aggressive warrior at sea is combined with a display of dominating virility ashore. Drawing on the revelation that Nelson had had an adulterous affair in Leghorn around the turn of 1794-1795, he is now depicted as promiscuous, desiring Lady Hamilton merely as an additional conquest to his wife: 'Not one woman: two: I'm a hero.' In order to attract a man with such an attitude towards women both Lady Hamilton and Lady Nelson show their obedient side. Lady Hamilton develops such an enthusiasm for agreeing with Nelson that the two incite each other to engage in Neapolitan affairs. Lady Nelson, on the other hand, attempts to regain her husband by showing that she is 'feeble'. The two women positively determine the course of events only once, when they force Nelson to decide between them against his will, since he would have preferred to have them both. Only after his death do they both offer themselves to him, so that Nelson can finish the play remarking from eternity: 'what more can a sailor want?'

177 Arden/D'Arcy, pp. 80 (claim by Captain Hardy), 93 (Nelson referring to his proper 'element').
178 Arden/D'Arcy, p. 45; similarly: pp. 23, 101; Warner (1958), pp. 91-93, had first published an account of this affair in a biography of Nelson.
179 Arden/D'Arcy, pp. 36-37 (Lady Hamilton's over-identification); 27, 33, 45 (other demonstrations of Lady Hamilton's obedience); 79 (Lady Nelson as 'feeble'); 48 (other demonstration of Lady Nelson's obedience).
Lady Hamilton was recognized by a contemporary critic of ‘this unexpectedly reactionary play’ as ‘stern morality’.\(^{181}\) The authors themselves would probably have wished to describe themselves as intellectual rather than moralizing and reactionary, when they set themselves socially between those two groups who, in their view, commemorated Nelson: ‘the established ruling circles and the undifferentiated popular sludge’.\(^{182}\)

With some temporal distance Susan Sontag, in her novel about Sir William Hamilton, *The Vulcano Lover*, also focused on events in Naples in her portrayal of Nelson. Her protagonists are stereotypically referred to as ‘the Cavaliere’ (Sir William Hamilton), ‘the Cavaliere’s wife’ (Lady Hamilton) and ‘the hero’ (Nelson). Having styled Nelson ‘the hero’, Sontag describes somebody aspiring to the Victorian ideal of a hero: ‘He wanted not to let himself down. ... He had wished to be taller ... He did not want to feel weak ... He dreamed that he had both arms ... He did not want to be seen sitting down ... ’ — merely to dismantle the false image: ‘War confiscated parts of his body ... The hero does not look like a hero; ... the hero is a maimed, toothless, worn, underweight little man’.\(^{183}\) The dismembered ‘hero’, naturally vain and in need of admiration,\(^{184}\) in his constant drive for acknowledgement, is then drawn into Neapolitan affairs. In an account based on several false assumptions, Sontag expounds ‘the hero[’s] ... merciless’ deeds, concluding repeatedly (though in varying words): ‘Eternal shame on the hero!’\(^{185}\) Her version of ‘the hero’ is successfully torn from his pedestal.

---

\(^{181}\) *Sunday Times*, 14 September 1969, review of a performance at the Edinburgh Festival.

\(^{182}\) Arden/D’Arcy, p. 14; similarly p. 97 (disdain for ‘loyal’ cheering).


\(^{184}\) Sontag, pp. 193, 198, 205, 207, 234-35.

\(^{185}\) Sontag, claims that ‘many of the rebels had gone aboard with their families and possessions’ before Nelson arrived at Naples in 1799 (p. 285); she invents that Nelson ‘ordered the transports boarded, the rebels taken off in chains and put in prison’ (p. 285, I have never read this anywhere else) and that Caracciolo did not get a trial (p. 286, I have never read this anywhere else); she claimed that Nelson had ‘no right to abrogate Ruffo’s treaty with the rebels’ (p. 287). For a discussion of the events see: Czisnik ‘Nelson at Naples’. Sontag’s conclusions can be found: Sontag, pp. 298, 319, 348-49, 419 [last sentence of the book].
VI
Novels, Plays and Films of the Late Twentieth Century

French, Spanish and German novelists, film-directors and playwrights in the meantime did not care much about the subject of Nelson at Naples. The Spanish, if at all concerned about Nelson, were bothered only about the battle of Trafalgar. Even the French kept up an interest only in fictional adaptations of Nelson’s battles. One French novel had as its subject the story of an oriental princess who worked for Nelson at the time of the battle of the Nile. Other novels dealt with the battle of Trafalgar, though never giving much more insight into Nelson than the description of ‘admiral from hell’, used in the novel Un coup de Trafalgar. This title quoted an expression that had become to stand proverbially for an ‘underhand trick’, so much so that it was used as a title for pieces of fiction that had nothing to do with Nelson. French fiction, unlike Spanish fiction, does not appear to have examined the battle of Trafalgar as an event in French history.

Instead, the encounter is made into the subject of an amusing parody about what would have happened if the French (and Spanish) had won the day, with Lady Hamilton trying to seduce Napoleon. Nelson in this play is only referred to briefly at the beginning by Napoleon and Talleyrand as ‘this one-eyed ... [and] one-armed’ man. In a Trafalgar-comic Nelson has only a short appearance as the admiral who stupidly gets himself

186 Galdós' Trafalgar kept being sold in the Franco era and survived into the years after Franco’s death, when Spanish naval and military history was becoming resented against, most probably because Galdós’ book had such a clear anti-war message and because it had reached the status of a classic piece of Spanish literature; Francisco Prosper Zaragoza, Los hombres de Trafalgar. Argumento Cinematográfico (Madrid: [n. pub.], 1962), even suggested a Spanish cinema film about Trafalgar. A recent novel takes the subject up again: José Luis Corral Lafuente, Trafalgar (Barcelona: Edhasa, 2002).


killed, thus giving a valiant one-handed Frenchman the chance to save his daughter, ‘Miss Nelson’. 191

In Sten Nadolny’s best-selling German novel about the polar explorer, John Franklin, Nelson is thoughtfully portrayed in his professional context, shortly before the battle of Trafalgar: ‘He appeared like a man filled with love – love of glory, and love for his own kind. And soon there was no one who didn’t want to be of Nelson’s kind.’ John Franklin decides not to ‘be infected by this’. When he addressed his men, years later, however, it ‘suddenly occurred to him that Nelson’s address ... had begun with the same words’, thus becoming aware of the ambiguities of professional dedication. 192

In general Nelson’s relationship with Lady Hamilton exercised more fascination in France and Germany than elements of Nelson’s professional career, let alone the political aspects of Nelson’s actions in Naples. French and German authors wrote novels about the love affair, one of which even explicitly doubts the authenticity of Dumas’ evidence. Even when they follow the traditional approach of blaming Nelson for the events in Naples, they do not make the subject a central aspect of their story. 193 Thus, freed from controversial political issues, the story was made into a film: Lady Hamilton zwischen Schmach und Liebe (Lady Hamilton between Disgrace and Love). 194 In this German-French-Italian co-production, Nelson is presented as a swashbuckling hero, fighting off, with sword in his only surviving hand, revolutionaries in Naples and

191 Jean-Yves Mitton (Scénario) et Molinari (Dessins) et Sophie Balland (Couleurs), Les Survivants de l’Atlantique. Livre cinquième. Tempête sur Trafalgar (Toulon: Géronimo/Mitton/Molinari, 1997), p. 46; see illustration in Appendix A, plate 70.

murderers, sent out by Caracciolo. The hanging of Caracciolo, shown in the film, is therefore easily explained as justified punishment for attempted murder. Nelson’s honourable, though also openly erotic, appearance in Lady Hamilton’s life frees her from the overtly lesbian approaches of the queen of Naples and leads her into a respectable, though short-lived, family life, as in earlier filmic treatments of the Nelson-Hamilton story.

A British television series about Nelson failed to free itself from the Naples subject. The four-part series I Remember Nelson described Nelson from the viewpoints of different people: his wife describing their separation; the Hamiltons (!) disclosing Nelson’s ‘ruthlessness’ in Naples; Captain Hardy appalled by Nelson’s affair with Lady Hamilton; a gunner of the Victory admiring Nelson, but rendered insane by the atrocity of the battle. None of the episodes developed an understanding of Nelson, so that John Sugden’s summary of it does not surprise: ‘he [the actor playing Nelson] exuded a distant aloofness which was inappropriate to a man as approachable as Nelson, and captured none of the little admiral’s charisma’. At the end of the twentieth century, several British plays, including a musical one, attempted portrayals of Nelson. One built on Thomas Hardy’s The Dynasts, others told the story of Nelson’s life. None of them became more than a modest success.

Barry Unsworth’s Losing Nelson was a successful adaptation of the Nelson-story (it won its author the Booker Prize). In this novel Unsworth chose not to deal primarily with Nelson, but rather to describe somebody obsessed with Nelson, who tries to write a biography of his hero. This approach enabled Unsworth to reflect on what biographers are looking for in Nelson and what kind of problems they encounter in writing about him. Charles Cleasby, the protagonist in the book, increasingly identifies with Nelson, whom he starts to refer to as ‘Horatio’. He links Nelson to his own national identity ('he

---

195 Sugden, pp. 86-87.
was English to the core’)\textsuperscript{197} and he tries to see him as a representative of the hard kind of masculinity he aspires to himself (‘Never show what you feel’),\textsuperscript{198} though he is unsettled by ‘something feminine’ in the portrait of Nelson’s father and he gets reminded of Nelson’s emotional side by his uncomfortably independent-minded secretary.\textsuperscript{199} While Cleasby manages to escape the issue, at least temporarily, by referring to an ‘obvious broad division in Nelson’s case … between sea-life and land-life’,\textsuperscript{200} he keeps struggling with Nelson’s involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution. Although he feels supported by ‘manly’ Mahan, he is haunted by Badham, whom he recognizes in a Neapolitan historian who confronts his own views on Naples and Nelson: ‘There are no heroes out there, Mr Cleasby, there are only fears and dreams and the process of fabrication’.\textsuperscript{201} Cleasby’s defence of Nelson is doomed to fail.

Stephen Fry gave an amusing interpretation of the desire to see Nelson represented in purely romantic fashion. His contribution to the film Lucky Break is Nelson. The Musical. This piece, supposedly written by an unworldly prison warden, is introduced in order to give the inmates a chance to escape. Naively worded, it contains the basic elements of love and patriotism: Nelson sings to Lady Hamilton: ‘Sail with me, leave with me, Say you’ll always sail the world with me’; and Hardy sings to the dying Nelson: ‘You gave your life that we could live and might be free; a land you loved so much, you gave the Nelson Touch’.\textsuperscript{202}

\textsuperscript{198} Unsworth, p. 169; other aspects of masculinity, linked to Nelson, can be found on pp. 62 (entirely male membership of ‘Nelson-Club), 67 (another Nelson-aficionado regards ‘Kiss me, Hardy’ as too ‘unmanly’ to have been said by Nelson), 141 (the protagonist discovers in Füger’s portrait of Nelson the ‘Horatio in the part of the killer’).
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., pp. 56 (portrait of Nelson’s father), 130-131 (secretary analysing Nelson’s emotional side).
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., p. 81.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., pp. 243, 304.
\textsuperscript{202} Lucky Break (Filmfour, in association with Senator Film, Paramount Pictures and Miramax Films, 2001).
VII

Conclusion

The artistic Nelson Touch has attracted authors for two hundred years to write novels and plays and to produce films about Nelson. What mostly inspired them, was his affair with Lady Hamilton, which so intriguingly combined romance and morally dubious behaviour. An additional, thoroughly controversial, element is provided in Nelson's story by his involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution. This element had a great impact on French and German fiction writing about Nelson from Dumas' novels in the 1860s until the 1920s and was later taken up by British authors. Works about Nelson often struggle in their effort to depict Nelson's masculinity. While pre-First-World-War British fiction tends to reassert Nelson's manly behaviour, fictional treatments that focus on Lady Hamilton's role in Nelson's life and the events in Naples usually regard him as weakened, if not emasculated. An exception are Arden and D'Arcy, who have managed to construct an assertively virile lover. Nelson's great professional achievements have been treated comparatively rarely in fiction writing, with the exception of Galdós' important novel about the battle of Trafalgar. Overall, the image of Nelson that emerges from novels, plays and films is that of a man dominated by his emotions and often enigmatic in his actions.
CHAPTER SIXTEEN
Exhibitions Dealing with Nelson

The interest in a visual approach to Nelson has extended beyond prints, material artefacts and performances of parts of Nelson's life to pieces that can be more closely related to Nelson, namely life-size representations of Nelson and things that used to belong to him or that were closely related to him. Those who wished to gain a closer experience of Nelson himself went to exhibitions that contained this kind of material. This chapter examines these exhibitions in order to understand how different generations satisfied their curiosity about Nelson.

The very first public exhibitions were private enterprises that profited from the interest in Nelson stimulated by news of his death in 1805. One of these businesses was 'Mrs. Salmon's Wax Work' which included a scene of the death of Nelson in its exhibition of 'more than 200 wax figures'. Following the tradition of representations of recently deceased famous persons that had developed because of 'the early association of wax modelling with funeral effigies and the fact that wax more closely approximated the color of corpses than of living human flesh', the show presented 'the interesting dying Figure of Lord Nelson, supported by his Sailors ... till the day after Lord Nelson's funeral'. The willingness of this business attraction to let the dead body rest, once buried, was not shared by some functionaries of Westminster Abbey. The Abbey was suffering severe financial losses, while St. Paul's Cathedral attracted curious visitors first with its preparations for Nelson's funeral and then with his grave. In order to compete with St. Paul's Cathedral in attractiveness, a wax figure of Nelson was commissioned for the Abbey's waxworks from the wax portraitist, Catherine Andras. The artist modelled her life-size figure after a wax miniature which she herself had made of Nelson from life and after the 'feminine' portrayal of Nelson by Hoppner. The result pleased not only Lady Hamilton, but also helped the Abbey's 'tourist revenue' to

recover. Mme. Tussaud's waxworks produced their first Nelson figure at about the same time and they carried Nelson's waxen image across the country on travelling exhibitions.

Another business commemorating Nelson and his deeds in exhibitions was the panorama. The new art form of panorama, developed at the end of the eighteenth century, was particularly suited to representations of battles. Altick calls the panoramas 'the newsreels of the Napoleonic era' and their programmes read like a list of major military and naval events of the French Wars. These representations, however, sometimes owed more to the excitement of the event than to historical accuracy. While the well-established panorama in Leicester Square offered a depiction of the battle of Trafalgar, a competitor combined in a 'Grand Nautical Moving Spectacle of the Naumachia' the different Splendid Victories achieved by Lord Nelson, with the Elements and Ships in Motion; L’Artemise, L’Orient [both burned in the battle of the Nile], and L’Achille [burned in the battle of Trafalgar] on fire; the masts falling by the board; the three (?) Lines of English and French exchanging Broad sides; the Explosions of the L’Orient, and the Boats out saving the People: depicting the Havock and Destruction which took place, with all the majestic Horrors which characterised those great Events.

While crowds flocked to wax-works, panoramas and St. Paul's Cathedral, a new exhibition was established in Greenwich, when Nelson's funeral car was positioned in the Painted Hall of Greenwich Hospital. Although it attracted tourists and was even the subject of an engraved print, the Hospital administration did not take care to preserve it

---


3 Susanna Lamb of Madame Tussaud's wrote me on 11 February 2003: 'There has been a figure of Admiral Nelson in the Exhibition permanently since 1805'; a poster for an exhibition by Madame Tussaud's in Hull including a Nelson-figure is given in: Tom Pocock, The Young Nelson in the Americas (London: Collins, 1980), opp. p. 203.

4 Altick (1978), pp. 129 (patent in 1787), 132 (name of 'panorama' found in 1791, building in Leicester Square opened in 1794), 136.

5 Altick (1978), pp. 97 (text of advertisement), 136; The Times, 11 November 1805, announcing the panorama of the battle of Trafalgar for 'early in the ensuing spring'.
and 'having been suffered to go to decay, it was broken up about the year 1826'. Its destruction may also have been ordered because the funeral car did not appear to suit the new use of the Painted Hall as a place for an exhibition of paintings and sculptures.

Edward Hawke Locker, the son of Nelson’s mentor Captain William Locker, initiated this ‘Naval Gallery’ at about the time the National Gallery was founded and he managed to win influential backing for the venture so that the collection of naval art was continuously enriched, mainly by portraits of naval officers, but also by battle-paintings and Devis’s painting of the death of Nelson. Edward Hawke Locker’s idea of a ‘National Depository’ for art that depicted naval subjects resulted in the creation of the first public naval collection. By focusing exclusively on ‘high’ art, however, the exhibition neglected popular art as well as relics of famous naval men. This left a public need unfulfilled, particularly in relation to Nelson. This need was met by other means. The musket ball that killed Nelson had been the subject of a print, facsimiles of his signatures were inserted into biographies, the purser of the Victory made gifts of miniature coffins, produced out of the outer coffins in which Nelson was brought home from Gibraltar, and sailors, too, tried to keep some personal mementoes of their famous chief: ‘The leaden coffin, in which he was brought home, was cut in pieces, which were distributed as relics of Saint Nelson, - so the gunner of the Victory called them, - and when, at his interment, his flag was about to be lowered into the grave, the sailors who assisted at the ceremony, with one accord rent it in pieces, that each might preserve a fragment while he lived’.

The collections of the Naval Gallery of Greenwich Hospital extended into the field of relics mostly by chance. One of the coincidences that led to a broadening of the collection was that those responsible for St. Paul’s Cathedral lacked much interest in

---

6 Allen, p. 303, fn; a print of the funeral car in the Painted Hall (London: Ackerman, 1810) can be found in NMM, PAD 3934; the figurehead of the funeral car was preserved, however, and is on display in the NMM.


8 NMM, PAD 3987; Clarke, p. xiii (signature, ‘as every relic ... cannot fail to prove interesting’); Nelson, An Illustrated History, ed. Pieter van der Merwe (London: Laurence King, 1995), p. 149 (illustration); Southey (1813), ii, 271-72.
such items. Towards the mid-nineteenth century even the statues in St. Paul’s Cathedral were so much neglected that they assembled dust on ‘every part where dust will lie, even on sloping arms and limbs, it reposes in a thick and offensive appearance’.\textsuperscript{9} As a result the flags that had been captured at the battle of Trafalgar were passed on from St. Paul’s Cathedral to the Naval Gallery.\textsuperscript{10} A much more important relic was the coat that Nelson had worn at the battle of Trafalgar. The editor of \textit{The Dispatches and Letters of Lord Nelson}, Nicholas Harris Nicolas, informed Prince Albert in June 1845 that the coat and waistcoat were available for purchase. In learning this, Prince Albert immediately decided to buy ‘these relics’ himself in order to give them ‘to Greenwich Hospital’.\textsuperscript{11}

The renewed interest in Nelson from the 1840s onwards also led to an increased interest in relics of the great sailor and, according to Nicolas who had himself contributed to the revival of this interest, it also led to a ‘manufacture of Nelsonian relics’, specifically a sword which Nelson was said to have worn at Trafalgar (whereas, in fact, he did not wear a sword on that occasion).\textsuperscript{12} The desire to purchase relics of Nelson appears to have resulted, at least in part, from the difficulty or even impossibility of the general public viewing any such relics in public exhibitions. Tucker’s biography of Nelson listed Windsor Castle and the Royal United Service Institution as places where Nelson relics were kept. The latter, founded in 1830, opened its museum ‘normally ... only to bearers of tickets signed by members, although the general public was admitted for three days at Christmas and Easter and on the anniversaries of Waterloo and Trafalgar’.\textsuperscript{13} Most Nelson relics were in the private possession of

\textsuperscript{10} Tucker, p. 456.
\textsuperscript{11} Nicolas, vii, 250-52; for the controversy surrounding the purchase see: T. A. Evans, particularly pp. 10-14. The coat is now on display in the NMM. For an illustration see Appendix A, plate 71.
\textsuperscript{12} Letter from Nicolas to different newspapers of 1846, quoted in: Munday, p. 60. This was written in reaction to Evan’s sale of the sword which Nelson had supposedly worn at Trafalgar (see: Tucker, p. 457) and which was given to Greenwich Hospital; for the discussion see: \textit{The Times}, 6, 7, 9, 17, 19 and 25 November and 4 (quoted letter of Nicolas) and 8 December 1846; Nicolas, i, xxv, complained also that ‘copies of Letters were refused [him], lest their publication might injure their pecuniary value as autographs!’; more references to Nelson relics can be found in \textit{The Times}, 13 September 1865, 24 December 1877, 21 September 1883.
\textsuperscript{13} Tucker, p. 456; Altick (1978), p. 300.
members of Nelson's family, his friends and their descendants or were owned by dedicated collectors.

The focus on relics in private hands and, though to a lesser degree, in public collections indicated a new specialized interest in history and famous people. This development can be most clearly illustrated with regard to ships' models. At about the time that the Naval Gallery in Greenwich Hospital was founded, a collection of ships' models was assembled in a large room in Somerset House. This collection served to illustrate contemporary naval architecture and to demonstrate new inventions. The later foundation of the museum of the Royal United Service Institute and even more so the personal collection of a Mr. Robinson (assembled around the mid-nineteenth century), in contrast, displayed ships' models rather as decorative additions to battle paintings and personal relics of famous men. 14 Robinson prided himself on owning 'large models of every ship in which he [Nelson] had sailed, with pieces of their masts or keels'. Objects therefore gained value through their association with Nelson rather than as illustrations of technical devices (such as ships) or social phenomena (such as the living space for sailors). Less personalized historical treatments, instead of creating an awareness of a broader context, focused on battles, represented in models or plans of the battle of Trafalgar. Such overviews often offered not much more than 'a very spirited representation of the battle' of Trafalgar at its chaotic height. 15

The personalized approach in exhibitions became particularly noticeable towards the end of the nineteenth century. Illustrations in biographies of Nelson started to feature Nelson relics, such as Nelson's watch and seal worn at Trafalgar and a 'Snuff-box made from the wood of L'Orient [the French flagship which had blown up at the battle of the Nile]'. 16 The popular interest in such items conspired with the Royal Navy's desire to

14 Veronica Stebbing, Somerset House Guide Book ([London]: Somerset House Trust, 2000), p. 23; Altick (1978), p. 300; The Nelson Dispatch, vol. 1, part 10 (April 1984), 158-59, quoting from diary of Richard Henry Dana, 4 August 1856, about 'a gentleman named Robinson ... a man of some fortune, and an oddity, who has an absorbing admiration for Nelson, and has devoted much of his time and money to collecting a private museum of Nelson curiosities and memorials'.
15 Admiralty Committee, pp. xv-xvi, which also deals with the inaccurate plan on board Victory and the model in the Royal United Service Institution.
16 W. C. Russell (1890), opp. p. 229, p. 299.
emulate the successful Royal Military Exhibition of 1890 to produce probably the largest ever display of Nelson paintings, prints and relics: ‘The Royal Naval Exhibition, 1891’. Aiming to bring the importance of the Royal Navy before the public, the organizers ‘restricted [their display] to purely national objects’ and exhibited items that had caught the public interest in the preceding years.\(^\text{17}\) Though the exhibition covered several centuries of naval history and included contemporary matters (such as a model of the ‘Eddystone Lighthouse’), it had a particular focus on Nelson. Apart from the huge ‘Nelson Gallery’, it provided a model of the *Victory* and a ‘Panorama of the Battle of Trafalgar’. In the real-size reproduction of the *Victory* visitors could contemplate a waxen recreation of Nelson’s death scene on the orlop deck, produced by Mr. Tussaud and largely based on the painting of the death of Nelson by Devis.\(^\text{18}\) The Trafalgar panorama, a ‘private speculation’ by a German, gave its visitors a supposedly historically accurate impression of the battle as seen from *Victory*’s quarterdeck. Those who entered the ‘polygonal building’ looked ‘straight ahead towards the bow, and there, in the middle of the quarterdeck, you observe the great scene on account of which the picture was painted. You look upon Lord Nelson at the moment that he has fallen mortally wounded.’\(^\text{19}\)

In the Nelson Gallery of the Royal Naval Exhibition, which presented pictures and relics, quantity appears to have counted more than quality. Though eminent specialists, such as John Knox Laughton, sat on the ‘Arts Committee’ and tried to find authentic pieces, they included many duplicates and some items of doubtful authenticity. Tufts of Nelson’s hair were spread over different parts of the Nelson exhibition, a sword which again Nelson supposedly wore at Trafalgar was included among the numerous relics and pieces of furniture were so numerous that they prompted a contemporary to


\(^{19}\) *RNE. Illustrated Handbook*, pp. 30-32, where sketches of the panorama picture are given; the claimed historical truthfulness suffered at the hands of the Bavarian painter, who painted (among other little inaccuracies) the French two-decker *Redoutable* higher than *Victory* with her three decks.
comment: 'It is simply a physical impossibility that it [Nelson’s cabin on board the *Victory*] should have contained all the “favourite chairs”, “arm-chairs”, “chairs and beds combined”, and “folding bedsteads” here exhibited as having been used by Nelson at sea'.\(^{20}\) These relics combined with a great number of prints and paintings of Nelson and of scenes from his life to produce a strong visual impression of the admiral.\(^{21}\) Some visitors may have been alert enough to notice: ‘It is curious among so much that belonged to Nelson that there is no collection of relics of his “beloved Emma”, the mistress of his heart, who in spite of all her failings, was one of the inspiring motives of his final heroism’.\(^{22}\)

Interest in Nelson relics, paintings and engravings grew considerably as a result of the Royal Naval Exhibition of 1891. In 1895 a descendant of one of Nelson’s brothers sold his considerable collection of Nelsonia. At the sale ‘[e]very article was contested for with almost unparalleled eagerness, and so tumultuous was the excitement that it was scarcely possible to record the bids’. Nelson’s decorations, however, were acquired for the nation and were deposited in Greenwich Hospital.\(^{23}\) Unfortunately, the new publicity surrounding the Nelson relics also attracted thieves. In 1900 all but one of the jewels of Nelson’s orders together with some other relics were stolen from Greenwich Hospital.

The watch and chain that had been pictured in a biography of 1890 were recovered four

---

\(^{20}\) *Official Catalogue of RNE*, pp. 215-310, 320-50 (relics of different kinds); pp. 212, 321, 324-25, 342-43, 346-47 (in all: eleven tufts of hair); p. 301 (supposed Trafalgar sword); *RNE. Illustrated Handbook*, p. 11; *The Times*, 22 May 1891, p. 13, also commented on ‘scores of ... alleged Nelson relics’, which prompted a member of the ‘Arts Committee’ to reply: *The Times*, 28 May 1891, p. 7.

\(^{21}\) *Official Catalogue of RNE*, pp. 104-20, contains ten paintings of the battle of St. Vincent, ten paintings of the battle of the Nile, one painting of the battle of Copenhagen, twelve paintings of the battle of Trafalgar, two portrait paintings of Nelson, three paintings of the death of Nelson, together with paintings of other subjects related to Nelson’s life; pp. 145-74 contain an even greater number of engravings of these subjects.

\(^{22}\) *RNE. Illustrated Handbook*, pp. 13-14; the handbook included a reproduction of a painting of Lady Hamilton by Romney to make up for the perceived omission.

\(^{23}\) [Anon.], *Catalogue of Old English Silver & Silver-gilt Presentation Plate, Enameled Gold boxes, Gold Sword Hills, Medals, Orders, and other Highly Interesting Objects, Formerly in the Possession of Admiral Viscount Nelson* (Christie, Manson & Woods: London, 1895), p. 17 (the author of the catalogue tried to enhance the orders’ value by wrongly claiming that they had been worn at Trafalgar), other items that were acquired for Greenwich Hospital can be found on p. 14 (pictured opp. p. 15); Holme, p. 412 (about auction); Charles Beresford and H. W. Wilson, *Nelson and His Times* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, [1898, published in 12 parts 1897-8]) contains illustrations of many relics.
years later, the stolen orders and most of the other pieces were not recovered. 24 With the desire for Nelson relics growing and the number of pieces being limited, the production of fakes thrived and contributed considerably to Lady Llangattock’s collection, which included Nelson’s supposed glass-eye (he never actually lost his eye, only the sight of it). 25 People with very limited means fared better by collecting pictures of relics on cigarette cards.

The collecting of Nelsoniana from its early days in the nineteenth century until today shows that interest in Nelson crosses gender boundaries. Belk and Wallendorf have argued that collecting ‘makes visible the gender distinctions governing social life’. Such gender distinctions can be expressed in the articles collected and through the uses made of a collection. While women tend to collect items such as ‘housewares’, men prefer ‘guns and rifles’. 26 In the case of Nelson-related collecting, however, this gender pattern with Nelson ceramics on one side and his weapons on the other, does not apply. One of the greatest authorities on Nelson ceramics was a man (P. D. Gordon Pugh) 27 and the most industrious collector of Nelson-swords (though mostly fakes) 28 was Lady Llangattock. As to the gendered use of collections, Belk and Wallendorf’s assumption, that it is typically men who collect representations of a ‘sailor’ or a ‘hero’ does not convince in the case of Nelson either. 29 Lady Llangattock’s collection was formed into the Nelson Museum in Monmouth (opened in 1924) and Lily Lambert McCarthy’s substantial collection became in 1971-2 the foundation of the Nelson collection at the

27 Competitors for the title are John and Jennifer May.
28 Henry T. A. Bosanquet, Naval & Other Swords in the Nelson Museum, Monmouth (typescript held at the NMM, 1949).
29 Belk/Wallendorf, 245-250.
Royal Naval Museum, Portsmouth, and this initiated the extension and modernization of the whole museum.\textsuperscript{30} This striking interest of women\textsuperscript{31} in Nelson reaffirms the perceived femininity of Nelson that surfaces in so many aspects of the Nelson image and iconography. It may additionally be explained by the fact that so many of the Nelson relics stand, not only for victory, but also for suffering, which may appeal more to women. After a visit to the Painted Hall in Greenwich, Virginia Woolf noted in her diary:

> behold if I didn't almost burst into tears over the coat Nelson wore at Trafalgar with the medals which he hid with his hand when they carried him down, dying, lest the sailors might see it was him. There was too, his little fuzzy pigtail, of golden greyish hair tied in black; & his long white stockings, one much stained, & his white breeches with the gold buckles, & his stock – all of which I suppose they must have undone & taken off as he lay dying. Kiss me Hardy &c – Anchor, anchor, – I read it all when I came in, & could swear I was there on the Victory – So the charm worked in that case.\textsuperscript{32}

The more masculine side of the interest in Nelson can probably be seen in the question of the preservation of ships that were connected with him. J. M. W. Turner was the first to alert the public to the way in which this part of Nelson’s heritage was being treated, when he painted ‘The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up, 1838’ in order to show in what a dishonourable way this participant in the battle of Trafalgar had been treated by the Admiralty.\textsuperscript{33} While contemporaries often simply admired the beauty of the painting without understanding its patriotic statement, the fate of the Foudroyant (Nelson’s flagship after the battle of the Nile) caused much more publicity. When the Admiralty sold her to a German shipbreaker in the Baltic, it prompted a wave of public outrage, including a caricature using Turner’s ‘Fighting

\textsuperscript{30} The Nelson Collection. Monmouth, p. I; McCarthy, pp. 21-25.

\textsuperscript{31} Perhaps homosexual men should be added here.

\textsuperscript{32} The Diary of Virginia Woolf, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (5 vols., London: Hogarth Press, 1977-1984), iii, 72; I am grateful to Belinda Beaton for alerting me to this passage. A similar woman’s response to Nelson relics can be found in: The Navy League Journal, x (1905), 252 (on ‘The Women’s Page’: ‘A pathetic remembrance of all the suffering …’).

\textsuperscript{33} Egerton, p. 12; see also pp. 71, 90.
Temeraire' and a poem by Arthur Conan Doyle entitled 'For Nelson's Sake', which finished: 'Take heed! And bring us back once more / Our Nelson's ship!' The Foudroyant was recovered from Swinemünde (near Stettin, now in Poland) at immense costs, and was restored and sailed around the coasts of Britain, before it foundered in a storm off Blackpool in 1897. This drew public attention to the fate of the Victory, the most famous surviving ship of Trafalgar, which served as a floating museum in Portsmouth Harbour. The Society for Nautical Research, founded in 1910, set itself the task of preserving the Victory, a project which was postponed because of the First World War. On Trafalgar Day 1922 the 'Save the Victory!' fund was launched, but severely curtailed by the economic crisis: 'On one occasion ... Admiral [Sturdee] raised £65 in pennies'. When the appeal had raised £3,000, it was saved by the anonymous donation of £50,000 from the wealthy former shipowner James Caird, a gift which enabled the restoration work to start.

It again took James Caird's support to get the project of a national museum going to house a major Nelson collection. There had been temporary exhibitions commemorating the centenary of the battle of Trafalgar in 1905, at the British Museum and the Royal United Service Institution in addition to privately organized ones. But, while the army was served with the Imperial War Museum shortly after the First World


35 There remained also the Implacable, a French ship taken in the battle, which some wished to preserve: Littlewood/Butler, pp. 36-37; Sea Cadet Corps, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Navy League, vol. JJ10, p. 44, about a letter suggesting the preservation of the Implacable by the Navy League. The Implacable survived until after the Second World War, when it was blown up for lack of funds of maintain her. Her stem is kept at the NMM (on display).


37 [Anon.], A Guide to the Manuscripts, Printed Books, Prints and Medals Exhibited on the Occasion of the Nelson Centenary with Eight Plates ([London]: Printed by order of the Trustees [of the British Museum], 1905); A. Leetham (Secretary, Royal United Service Institution) and B. E. Sargeaunt (Assistant Secretary, Royal United Service Institution), Catalogue of the Exhibition of Nelson Relics. In Commemoration of the Centenary of the Battle of Trafalgar (second edition, London: J. J. Keliher, 1905); [Anon.], The Life of Lord Nelson [by Orme/Blagdon], Extra-illustrated by S. E. V. Filleul, in the Centenary year of Trafalgar: at Dorchester. 1905, NMM; see also: Littlewood/Butler, p. 25.
War, the Royal Navy had to be content with the overcrowded Painted Hall in Greenwich Hospital. Combined financial (James Caird), political (Lord Stanhope) and scholarly (Geoffrey Callender) forces finally led to the passing of the National Maritime Museum bill in 1934 and the opening of the museum in 1937. Although the museum’s name indicated that its subject would broadly include anything ‘maritime’, its collections still had a distinct naval focus, because they incorporated those of Greenwich Hospital and the Royal United Service Institute.

The new National Maritime Museum had its focus on Nelson. It was organized chronologically and ‘climaxed with Trafalgar and the death of Nelson, a display which included Turner’s painting of the battle, both Devis’s and West’s versions of Nelson’s death [West’s painting for Clarke and M’Arthur’s biography], and the Nelson relics’. While the museum was modern in displaying the exhibits in spacious rooms, it remained traditional in its choice of exhibits: concentrating on paintings, engravings and relics.

The first director of the museum, Geoffrey Callender, wrote to its political father, Lord Stanhope, who intended to bring the museum under the auspices of the Board of Education: ‘I do not think it is the task of the National Maritime Museum to teach and instruct … but rather to inspire pride and admiration’. Callender wished the museum to serve as a focal point of Britain’s maritime identity, but this was criticized within the museum not so much for its nationalism, as for its neglect of the intrinsic significance of the different items. Specialist curators wished their collections to be at the centre of interest, rather than made subservient to some patriotic exhibition about Nelson.

---

38 Because of the crowded condition of the Painted Hall the Nelson relics had been moved to a special room already in 1880 (although they seem to have been returned later); the fact that this room had less generous opening hours than the Painted Hall itself had led to criticism: *The Times*, 3 February 1880, p. 11; Littlewood/Butler, p. 65: ‘Admiral Goodenough, visiting the Naval Gallery where his father was commemorated, discovered Nelson’s “sacred treasures” on display next to some “second-rate ship model [and] a model of a steam-ship that might have come out of Hamley’s shop, pushed into place next to my father’s bust”.

39 Littlewood/Butler, pp. 45-50, 71-72, 93.

40 Ibid., pp. 89-90. For illustrations of the death-scenes by Devis and West, the original paintings of which are kept at the NMM, see appendix A, plates 31 and 36.

41 Ibid., p. 91.
After the Second World War and the death of Callender, when bomb damage and building difficulties were overcome, the National Maritime Museum organized its display more according to material and "only the Nelson Gallery and the Polar Gallery were recognised as having "integrated displays"; that is, paintings, models, relics, charts, uniforms, and other material used to illustrate a subject or theme". Influential members of the staff of the museum tended to dislike the mixture of items in the Nelson Gallery. They wished to display only pieces 'worthy of exhibition, without regard to the criterion of popularity' and contrasted the 'real students', whom they wished to attract, to those who flocked to the Nelson Gallery in search of 'diversion'. Whereas Nelson relics may have been disregarded by scholarly museum personnel, they were popular enough among thieves. In 1951 the diamond chelengk, which Nelson had received from the sultan of Turkey and worn on his hat, was stolen from the National Maritime Museum and broken up. Two years later, after a radio programme had attracted attention to the collection at the Nelson Museum in Monmouth, thieves raided that place as well.

The National Maritime Museum, as prime repository of Nelson relics, souvenirs and paintings, has found a new approach to the man whom they call in the pocket plan provided for every visitor: 'Britain's most popular naval hero'. The museum's collection of Nelson material appears to focus on manuscripts rather than material artefacts and relics. Its most recent Nelson exhibition, opened in 1995 to start the 'Nelson Decade' before the bicentenary of the battle of Trafalgar, also reveals a new approach. While it follows the now more generally accepted pattern of an 'integrated display', it no longer aims at 'inspir[ing] pride and admiration', but rather to inform. The display itself sets out the historical context at its beginning: the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. In its main part it leads the visitor through the different stages of

42 Ibid., pp. 171, 173.
43 Munday, pp. 65-66.
44 The Nelson Dispatch, vol. 3, part 9 (January 1990), 171-72 (again, the most precious piece, a pyramid build out of guinea coins found in Nelson's purse after Trafalgar, was broken up).
45 Littlewood/Butler, p. 185 (acquisition of Matcham collection); recent acquisition of Davison letters; while the existing collection of nineteenth century material artefacts and prints can hardly be considerably extended there is no visible policy for collecting popular contemporary Nelson items (for example those sold at the museum's shop).
Nelson's life and then offers some insights into Nelson's character (through quotations and taped extracts from letters). Different characteristics attributed to Nelson are also provided on the exhibition poster, which shows Nelson as the product of an odd mix of character traits. The conclusion of the exhibition presents examples of the massive collection of material artefacts celebrating Nelson's achievements, produced mainly in the nineteenth century. The display thus leads from historical facts to the legendary status of Nelson. The Royal Naval Museum in Portsmouth also re-arranged its Nelson exhibition and distanced itself from an all too patriotic approach by putting 'emphasis on the human aspects of the story', producing models of Lady Hamilton and Captain Hardy and, recently, a new wax figure of Nelson himself.

The second half of the twentieth century also witnessed many private Nelson exhibitions, often produced by Nelson enthusiasts. Sometimes the organizers also desired to uncover neglected aspects of Nelson's life, as for example with an exhibition about Nelson's medical history, arranged by P. D. Gordon Pugh. There is even an attempt to create a new museum in Great Yarmouth to house a Nelson memorabilia collection. Private enthusiasm for Nelson has also produced valuable research into Nelson relics as well as commemorative items. Meanwhile, a Nelson wax figure remains part of Mme. Tussaud's exhibition which from about 1966 until 1990 housed a display of Nelson's death, following the scene as painted by Devis.

Interest in the treatment of Nelson in exhibitions has even reached Germany, where two major exhibitions in Berlin included material about Nelson. One of these exhibitions...

---

46 See Appendix A, plate 73.
51 Outstanding examples are the publications about Nelson ceramics by P. D. G. Pugh and J. J. May (used for chapter 13) and the privately initiated research into Nelson's supposed 'death masks', which are now commonly agreed to be life masks.
52 See Appendix A, plate 33 (for the death scene) and plate 72 (for a standing figure of Nelson).
exhibitions, *Admiral Nelsons Epoche*, focused on ships under sail.\(^{53}\) The other, 'Mythen der Nationen' (Myths of the Nations), attempted an assessment of the iconography about Nelson as the representative of a national myth. The poster of this later exhibition used a detail of West’s idealized scene of Nelson’s death on deck of the *Victory*.\(^{54}\) A more recent exhibition in Hamburg, *Lord Nelson. Ein Triumphzug durch Europa* ('A Triumphal Procession through Europe’), dealt with Nelson’s trip through Europe after the battle of the Nile.\(^{55}\)

However the different ways of presenting Nelson in exhibitions changed over the centuries, it appears that he has secured a firm place in the public world of museums and exhibitions for some time to come.

---


\(^{55}\) A book accompanied the exhibition: Pohl.
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
Nelson as Propaganda

The analysis of the iconic treatment of Nelson has shown that he can stand as the pattern of a variety of stereotypes, such as the admirable hero, the romantic lover or the ruthless aggressor. These stereotypical elements have been so strongly reinforced by different means that it was and is possible to adhere them like stickers to certain products, in order to convey certain characteristics, which are usually regarded as positive, such as: reliability, success or patriotism. This chapter examines, who made use of the iconic status of Nelson in order to propagate or promote something not primarily concerned with Nelson himself.

The response to Nelson’s death included the use of him for patriotic purposes, though at least one opportunistic businessman also exploited the commercial value of the revered sailor by advertising ‘Nelson’s new Patent Sideboard and Dining Table, … the first of which article ever manufactured was intended for the most brave and ever to be lamented the late Admiral Nelson’. Patriotic references to Nelson were usually isolated examples and did not add up to a formal commemoration. The College of Arms planned the creation of an ‘order of merit to be conferred on 21 October’ (the day of the battle of Trafalgar) and hoped to initiate an ‘annual ritual’ of ‘pageantry to St. Paul’s’, but nothing came of this proposal. It was the navy, which most endeavoured to keep the spirit of Nelson alive and to conjure it up in the moment of battle. The Admiralty let it be known, in the same month, in which they had received the news of Trafalgar, that they had decided to lay ‘down a first-rate man of war … to be named after’ Nelson. According to The Times they thereby paid ‘the highest tribute in their power’. Officers who had served under Nelson spurred their men on by reminding them of Nelson. On entering into the battle of San Domingo, in 1806, a band played ‘God save the King!’ and ‘Nelson of the Nile’ and Captain ‘Keats brought out a portrait of Nelson, which he

1 The Times, 2, 5, 17 December 1805, 11, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 January 1806.
3 The Times, 27 November 1805.
hung on the mizzen stay, where it remained throughout the battle untouched by the enemy’s shot, though dashed with the blood and brains of a seaman who was killed close beside it’. In the approach to the battle of Lissa, in 1811, Captain Hoste appealed to his crews with the signal ‘Remember Nelson’.4

Without a set pattern of Nelson celebrations, the patriotic use of Nelson and his battles was subject to chance, as for example in 1814, when peace with France coincided conveniently with the anniversary of the accession of the Hanoverian dynasty to the British throne and the anniversary of the battle of the Nile. The festivities on 1 August included an elaborate re-enactment of the battle of the Nile on the Serpentine in Hyde Park, London. ‘Woolwich Dockyard had adapted a whole set of ships’ boats into miniature frigates and ships-of-the-line, including some three-deckers; they were all carefully rigged, and even carried light saluting guns.’ After sunset these miniature ships engaged in a ‘Grand Sea Fight’, which attracted many viewers and became the subject of several prints.5

Since there were no other major naval engagements in the nineteenth century after 1815, Nelson increasingly became a focal point for the expression of Britain’s national and particularly naval identity. At first, however, he was not used for a clear propagandistic message. He started to figure more prominently in the national consciousness, as the last participants of his battles began to pass away and members of the rising generation were wondering how to follow Nelson. J. M. W. Turner sensed the spirit of the time and anticipated a whole movement (as with his awareness of the *Temeraire’s* significance as a participant in the battle of Trafalgar) when he painted his watercolour of ‘Yarmouth Sands’ in 1830. The painting shows the Nelson monument at Yarmouth towering over a beach, on which sailors arrange improvised ship models into

---

4 Entries of Richard Goodwin Keats and William Hoste in *The Dictionary of National Biography. Founded in 1882 by George Smith ... From the Earliest Times to 1900*, eds. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (22 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1885-1901, reprint 1959-1960), vol. 9, 1297, and vol. 10, 1178 (both contributions are by John Knox Laughton); I am grateful to Jane Knight for alerting me to the note about Captain Keats.

battle formation, while women and boys look on 'absorbing the Nelson legend'.  

In Turner’s wake variously reproduced paintings show survivors of Trafalgar with a portrait of Nelson or Greenwich Pensioners celebrating Nelson’s battles and discussing their plans.  

A ‘committee of gentlemen’ proposed to honour Nelson’s brothers-in-arms by inviting the surviving participants of his battles, who now lived at Greenwich Hospital, to a dinner on the anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar to be held on Trafalgar Square, where it was hoped the statue of Nelson would have been mounted on its column. Since this was not accomplished in time, the dinner was repeatedly postponed (at one time to the queen’s birthday), relocated and finally abandoned. In the meantime, the project attracted so much attention among ‘the public, even the lower orders’ that the accumulated funds (consisting in part of farthings) were ‘distributed among the wives and children of the seamen whom it had been contemplated to entertain’.  

Perhaps partly in response to the public pressure for patriotic commemoration, the queen visited the *Victory* on Trafalgar Day 1844.  

The participants of Nelson’s battles (including women) remained in the news and in 1847 the Admiralty distributed ‘Naval General Service Medals 1793-1840’ for the participants of these battles (excluding the women who had taken part).  

The patriotic urge to commemorate Nelson and to acknowledge his followers strongly associated Nelson with patriotism and loyalty and this was exploited for

---

6 Egerton, p. 71.  
7 ‘The Battle of the Nile, Greenwich Pensioners disputing the line of Battle’ (London, 10 January 1831); Painted by H. Pidding, engraved by W. Giller. ‘From an Original Picture in the collection of the Duke of Bedford, at Woburn Abbey, to whom with permission this Plate is most respectfully dedicated by his Grace’s Obliged and Humble Servant, Henry Pidding’, listed in: Nash (1982), pp. viii, ix; Pieter van der Merwe, p. 58 (Watercolour by S. P. Denning, after John Burnet’s oil of Greenwich Pensioners on Trafalgar Day 1835, painted for the Duke of Wellington, showing among others Nelson’s former servant, Tom Allen, who shows a picture of Nelson); McCarthy, pp. 142-143 (no. 133, print with ‘Greenwich Pensioners. Commemorating the Battle of Trafalgar’ assembled around a plan of the battle, 1836), 52 (no. 25, pot lid ‘Battle of the Nile’ showing invalided sailors discussing the battle plan, c. 1850); The Graphic, 1 March 1879 (print showing surviving officers of the Battle of Trafalgar with death scene and portrait of Nelson in the background).  
8 The Times, 25 September 1843 (p. 4), 22 May 1844 (p. 6), 23 May 1844 (p. 5), 31 July 1844 (p. 3), 2 August 1844 (p. 6).  
9 Tucker, p. 461 (though Tucker claims the queen had learned by chance of the anniversary).  
10 The Times, 10 October 1843 (p. 7, about surviving woman from battle of Trafalgar); Mariner’s Mirror, 23 (1937), 366-67 and 47 (1961), 45-46, about the medals; these medals were the first for the participants in the battle of Copenhagen, for whom Nelson had tried for years in vain to get medals.
different purposes. One of the most obvious examples is the naming of one of the two settlements founded in New Zealand after Nelson (the other was called Wellington) and filling it with fitting streets, such as 'Trafalgar' and 'Nile'. The settlers of the New Zealand Company, though not on a governmental mission, thereby manifested their allegiance to Britain, which helped to convince the government to accept the distant archipelago as a British colony. Back home in Britain a town in Lancashire and innumerable Victorian streets adopted Nelson's name and others chose the names of his captains, ships or victories. By choosing these names, town councils as much as the owners of public houses and cricket enthusiasts gave expression to their sense of national identity, an identity strongly linked to British naval supremacy and the man who was seen as its prime representative.

At the end of the nineteenth century, political organizations tried to exploit the significance of Nelson to British national identity. The first of a series of associations was the Primrose League (founded in 1884), which propagated Conservative ideas in a pleasant social setting. Its different habitations, organized evening entertainments, at which songs, such as Braham's 'Death of Nelson', were played and 'magic lanterns and tableaux vivants ... displayed a series of images of imperial splendour such as ... Nelson on the Victory' Women, children and all social classes were included and their different interests catered for. A 'Question Paper set for Juveniles' in 1900 contained questions such as: 'Give a brief account of the great naval battle of Trafalgar, and the death of Lord Nelson'. While Nelson figured merely as one of many elements of

---

11 B. E. Dickinson, 'Street Names of Nelson. Some Notes On Their Origin', Journal of the Nelson Historical Society, II (1966), 3-30, at 3, 9-12, 14 (the 'Hallowell Cemetery' is fittingly named after the captain who gave Nelson his coffin, made out of the wood of the mainmast of the French flagship at the battle of the Nile, see chapter 10), 16.
12 Michael Rundell, The Dictionary of Cricket (2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 122: 'Nelson [is] the score of 111 runs (or a multiple of this) made by a team or an individual player, [the Nelson is] generally believed to be extremely unlucky. ... The origins of this term lie in the erroneous notion that Admiral Nelson had one eye, one arm, and one leg; in reality, of course, Nelson ... retained the use of both legs.'
14 M. Pugh, p. 214.
national identity within the patriotic repertoire of the Primrose League, his commemoration took centre stage within the propagandistic efforts of the Navy League. This association, bearing a portrait of Nelson in its crest, was founded at the end of 1894 as a pressure group promoting the interests of the navy. Similar to some other leagues, it attempted to further national strength against a perceived external danger. More specifically it argued for the strengthening of the Royal Navy by a variety of means, such as building dreadnoughts and ensuring the supply of a rising generation of British sailors. Like the Primrose League, the Navy League also tried to attract members from all strata of society, from both sexes (a ‘Ladies’ branch’ was founded already in 1895) and particularly from the younger generation (whole schools were enlisted as members). Anne Summers observes that the Navy League and other ‘Leagues grew continuously in numbers and vigour despite their inability to influence government policy; it is arguable, therefore, that for many of their members they fulfilled functions quite other than those outlined in their official literature’.

One of the greatest non-political attractions of the Navy League was the celebration of Nelson on Trafalgar Day (21 October). In 1895, following the suggestion of the navalist and journalist Arnold White, the Navy League laid a wreath to the memory of Nelson at the base of Nelson’s monument on Trafalgar Square on Trafalgar Day. Supported by Arnold White’s letter to the press about this ‘national demonstration’, the event attracted some attention in the newspapers. This was the beginning of a tradition. Until then there appears never to have been any regular habit of celebrating Trafalgar Day outside the Royal Navy, although it had been suggested on the day of Nelson’s funeral that the date should be entered ‘on the ever-open and widespread folios of the British Calendar … to the remembrance of all ranks’ and the

---

16 Hamilton, 39-42; Summers, 69, 76; *The Navy League Journal*, 1, no. 6 (December 1895).
17 Summers, 84.
anniversary was deliberately chosen as the date for several Nelson-related or generally commemorative events. When the Navy League celebrated Trafalgar Day more lavishly in the following year, investing £50, instead of £10, into the decoration of Nelson's column with wreaths and garlands of evergreens, its members were surprised by the impact of their own celebration. In *The Navy League Journal* they called it a 'triumphant success', partly because it was celebrated in different parts of the country, but mostly because of the demonstration on Trafalgar Square itself:

> It was as if the people had arisen to answer those who say: 'They do not care ...' The hundreds of thousands who for six days from morning till night defiled before the column have shown the unsuspected strength of feeling latent in British hearts. They have shown that Britons do care, that they have not forgotten, that they are still capable of devotion and self-sacrifice. Trafalgar — the very name, with its stirring associations, is a trumpet-call to the nation to do its duty. ... Some, of course, came only to look. But the great mass of the people in the Square were pilgrims, rather than mere spectators. And those who were mere spectators must have learnt much from their gazings. They would realize that the British Navy still regards Nelson as its chosen hero.

The Navy League managed to sell 'an immense mass of literature' on the occasion, but did not otherwise profit materially from the success. The Executive Committee called a 'special meeting' on 22 October 1896 in order to 'consider what steps should be taken to reap the benefits of the demonstration on Trafalgar Day'. They decided to enlarge their League, including its *Journal*. In the meantime private businessmen used the opportunity to make money by selling fake reprints of *The Times* of 7 November 1805 with the news of the battle of Trafalgar and Nelson's death in it.

---

19 *The Times*, 9 January 1806; The laying of the foundation stone to the Nelson monument in Edinburgh in 1806, the opening to the public of the Nelson monument in Dublin in 1809, Queen Victoria's visit to the Victory and the planned dinner for Greenwich Pensioners in 1843 are examples of such events.

20 *The Navy League Journal*, 1, no. 17 (November 1896), 1 (I, 131).

21 SCC, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Navy League, vol. B, pp. 111 (£10 in 1895), 126 (£50 in 1896), 140 ('special meeting').

22 *The Times*, 24 October 1896 (p. 9).
Gerald Jordan assumes that the Navy League had two aims: to attempt 'to create a popular cult of the admiral and revive interest in the navy', but this overstates the Navy League’s interest in Nelson since the admiral was merely a propaganda tool to enlist support for a stronger navy in terms of ships and recruits. The Navy League would readily have dropped any reference to Nelson, had he not served their League’s purpose. The Executive Committee twice discussed giving up the Trafalgar Day celebrations, in 1900 and in 1906. On the first occasion, they lowered their investment into the decoration of Nelson’s column from £100 in the previous three years to a mere £20, without any impact on the popularity of the event. The Times remarked that, though the meagre decoration ‘caused some disappointment to many in the large crowds’, ‘it in no way diminished the interest taken in the celebration’. Since the crowds were ‘as large as ever’, the report concluded: ‘the patriotic endeavours of the Navy League to bring about a national celebration of Trafalgar Day have borne fruit’. By then Trafalgar celebrations were held in a great number of towns and cities across Britain; particularly large ones were held in Liverpool.

The Navy League had reason, however, to feel uneasy about the success of its Trafalgar Day celebrations. The early protests from the ‘Increased Armaments Protest Committee’ did not greatly disturb the Navy League which responded with public statements in the press about its aims, so that the success of the Trafalgar Day celebrations was not affected. The Navy League took French sensibilities much more seriously, however. The Navy League Journal printed, next to the overwhelmingly positive response recorded in the British press, those hostile responses to the massive

23 Gerald Jordan, ‘Admiral Nelson and the Concept of Patriotism: The Trafalgar Centenary, 1905’, in Naval History: The Seventh Symposium of the US Academy, ed. William B. Cogar (Wilmington DE, Scholarly Resources, 1988) [hereafter: Jordan (1988)], pp. 143-55, at p. 143; the whole article is flawed by a mixture of the discussion of the two aims that the author regards as somehow of equal importance, rather than the first being subordinate to the second.
24 SCC, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Navy League, vol. F, p. 3 (17 September 1900), vol. L/12, p. 4 (8 October 1906).
25 SCC, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Navy League, vol. C, pp. 81 (£100 voted for 1897-decorations), 99 (only £90 spent in 1897); vol. D, p. 111 (£100 voted for 1898-decorations); vol E, p. 100 (£100 voted for 1899-decorations); vol. F, p. 7 (£20 voted for 1900-decorations).
26 The Times, 22 October 1900 (p. 8).
Trafalgar Day celebrations of 1896 printed in nine different French newspapers. In 1897 Arthur Conan Doyle suggested that Trafalgar Day should be exchanged for Nelson's birthday and thus become a less offensive 'Nelson Day'. This caused a heated discussion in The Times and Arnold White attacked the suggestion in The Navy League Journal. In the end, neither date nor name of the festivity was changed. The discussion, however, did produce J. R. T[hursfield]'s comment that the 'efforts to manufacture a national anniversary ... have done not a little to vulgarize a great and solemn thought'. Defenders of the celebration maintained that 'Captain Mahan has made Nelson live again for the student, but "the man in the street" needs a shorter and sharper reminder'. With the increasing popularity of the celebration of Trafalgar Day the public response to the event appears to have become ever more positive. In 1898 The Glasgow Herald stated explicitly 'that whereas last year several men of influence in politics and religion protested against this annual celebration as likely to offend French susceptibilities, on this occasion not a single voice has been raised against the keeping of the anniversary'. In 1900, the year in which the Navy League had so drastically curbed its expenditure on the Trafalgar Day Celebrations, its Executive Committee 'decided that they would dedicate one wreath to the French and Spaniards with a suitable inscription'. As a result the Navy League commemorated all French and Spanish dead of the battle, while on the British side only Nelson was commemorated. This does not

28 The Navy League Journal, 1, no. 17 (November 1896), 7 (1, p. 137); a tenth French newspaper quoted, Le Temps, appears to have remained fairly neutral on the issue, though it printed Guillemard's supposed memoirs about how he killed Nelson (for this story, see chapter 15).
29 The Times, 20 October 1897 (p. 12, first letter from A. Conan Doyle); 22 October 1897 (p. 8, critical response from Admiral R. V. Hamilton); 23 October 1897 (p. 11, second letter from A. Conan Doyle and letter from Norwood Young in support of Doyle); 25 October 1897 (p. 7, response from J. R. T[hursfield] against Doyle); 27 October 1897 (p. 11, response from a member of the 'Ladies' Grand Council, Primrose League); The Navy League Journal, 1, no. 29 (November 1897), 2 (1, p. 268, Arnold White's examples of French naval armament which were obviously regarded as 'insensibilities' towards Britain).
30 The Times, 25 October 1897, p. 7; 'J. R. T.' was attacked (in three letters) as well as defended (in one letter) for this remark: The Times, 26 (p. 6) and 27 (p. 11, quoted passage) October 1897.
31 Quoted in The Navy League Journal, 3 (November 1898), 166.
32 SCC, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Navy League, vol. F, pp. 7-8 (24 September 1900); the dedication of the wreath in the end read: 'Respect and Homage To the memory of the gallant sailors of France and Spain, who fell fighting at Trafalgar, October 21, 1805' (The Navy League Journal, 5, November 1900, 180).
appear to have troubled anybody, since the practice remained the same until the First World War, when the League started to commemorate the recently dead.\textsuperscript{33}

The propagandistic use of Nelson carried with it a constant financial burden for the Navy League. In order to rid itself of this problem the Navy League called for contributions and finally, in 1909, created a special ‘Trafalgar Fund’.\textsuperscript{34} This fund attracted so many contributions that the Executive Committee could invest the money in other projects, mainly their newly created ‘Boy’s Naval Brigades’ (the predecessors of the Sea Cadets). After three years the League itself borrowed the considerable amount of £300 from the Trafalgar Fund; and this while it was still spending only about £50 on each of the annual Trafalgar Day celebrations from 1901 (except the celebrations for the centenary in 1905, for which it was ready to spend £200).\textsuperscript{35} Since so many people were ready to invest in the ‘Trafalgar Fund’, rather than the Navy League itself, it appears that many felt more attracted to the commemoration of Nelson and Trafalgar than to the political ideas of the Navy League. Indeed, the \textit{Manchester Guardian} commented that ‘a little more ancestor worship would do us as a nation no harm … [and it] regretted that the public Nelson celebrations should have depended so much on an organisation identified in the public mind with indiscreet and often unintelligent advocacy of increased naval expenditure’.\textsuperscript{36}

The public celebrations of Nelson reached a peak with the centenary of Nelson’s most famous battle, Trafalgar Day 1905, for which the Navy League had arranged a

\textsuperscript{33} The vast majority of wreaths were dedicated to the memory of Nelson, sometimes together with the memory of an ancestor of those who had contributed the wreath, on a few occasions only to such an ancestor; among the dozens, if not hundreds of inscriptions of wreaths, I have found only one which included British sailors: ‘In memory of those who fought and those who fell at the glorious battle of Trafalgar …’ (The Navy League Journal, 5, November 1900, 181).

\textsuperscript{34} The Navy League Journal, 6 (September 1901), 160 (first call for contributions); SCC, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Navy League, vol. O/15, p. 20 (first mention of the ‘Trafalgar Day Special Fund’, which is referred to in the minutes with various names).

\textsuperscript{35} SCC, Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Navy League, vol. P/17, pp. 60, 73, 75 and vol. [Q]/17a, p. 103 (means from the Trafalgar Fund used for branches of the Boy’s Naval Brigades); vol. [Q]/17a, p. 125 (loan from Trafalgar Fund for Navy League); the amounts for the Trafalgar Day celebrations can be found in: vol. F, p. 137 (£50 for 1901), vol. G, p. 154 (£50 for 1902), vol. H, p. 143 (£50 for 1903), vol. I/9, p. 6 (£50 for 1904), vol. J/10, p. 85 (£200 for 1905 voted), vol. J/10, pp. 92-93 (final amount for 1905 settled, but not stated), vol. L/12, p. 129 (£50 for 1906), [I have not found the amounts for the years 1907-1911] vol. R/18, p. 83 (£55 for 1913).

\textsuperscript{36} Jordan (1988), p. 150, quoting from the \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 23 October 1905.
short ‘semi-religious’ ceremony. Though only a part of the ceremony was overtly religious (the reading of a prayer), the whole event was hugely indebted to Christian symbolism of the saviour, reminiscent of Easter, including the notion of death and ‘resurrection’. A journalist of The Times described the scene on Trafalgar Square, which was filled with a ‘sea of people’:

In silence all waited while the hands of St. Martin’s clock crept round to half-past 2, ... At the first sound of the chime of the half-hour the flags at the four corners [of Nelson’s monument], Union Jack, White Ensign, Red and Blue Ensigns, were solemnly lowered to half-mast, all men uncovering their heads, while the band of the Queen’s Westminsters played the ‘Death of Nelson’. As the music died away Bishop Welldon read the prayer ‘To the memory of Nelson’ – the preposition perhaps, might have been more prudently chosen ... the bugles sounded the reveille ... and, as the stirring call was blown slow and loud, the flags went up again. The ritual ended with the singing of the National Anthem ... followed by cheers which rang and echoed and thundered around the square.\(^37\)

The Navy League Journal made the Easter-like allusion even clearer when commenting on the end of the short ceremony: ‘The bitterness of death was overpast. The prayer was answered, and God had given us the victory.’\(^38\) Other organizations all over Britain and the Empire joined the Navy League in contributing their own festivities to the centenary of Trafalgar. The massive commemorations included church services, concerts (regularly including Brahain’s ‘The Death of Nelson’), dinners and, in Liverpool, even a public procession led by the Lord Mayor.\(^39\) ‘Mssrs. Metzler published 25,000 copies of five songs, patriotic in their nature’ for the event, postcards were produced for and of the

\(^{37}\) The Times, 23 October 1905, p. 10; The Navy League Journal, 10 (November 1905), 273, estimated that ‘20,000 men and women and children were in the square, whilst it may be observed that it was estimated that the queue formed on Sunday, the 22nd, of the people wishing to see the Nelson column was from one to three miles in length. It took an hour and twenty minutes to pass from one end round the column, and it was estimated that rather more than seven thousand people per hour passed a given point’.

\(^{38}\) The Navy League Journal, 10 (November 1905), 273-74; at the ‘Patriotic Concert at the Royal Horticultural Hall’, also organised by the Navy League, the resurrection motif was again used: ‘Nelson lives’ (ibid., 280).

\(^{39}\) The Times, 23 October 1905 (pp. 5, 10-12); another organisation that showed particular eagerness to celebrate the day was the ‘British and Foreign Sailors’ Society’, which opened a ‘Nelson Centenary Memorial Fund’ for sailors’ homes abroad and which organised a concert in the Royal Albert Hall on Trafalgar Day 1905 (The Times, 12 August, 14 September, 11, 13, 14, 19, 20, 23 October 1905).
different events across Britain, journals published articles and pictures of Nelson or Trafalgar and the souvenir industry profited from all these celebrations.\footnote{The Times, 14 October 1905, p. 6; illustrations of such postcards can be found in: Shannon (1987), pp. 23 (nos. A-D), 24 (nos. A and B), 29 (no. A); Pearson’s Magazine, October 1905 (entirely dedicated to Nelson and Trafalgar); for the production of material artefacts see chapter 13.}

Jordan, nevertheless, maintains that the centenary of Trafalgar was a ‘failure’. He measures this ‘failure’ mostly by the Navy League’s inability to achieve its main objectives, to ‘revive interest in the navy’, to include the working classes in their membership and to ‘inculcate bourgeois values’.\footnote{Jordan (1988), pp. 143-145; similarly: pp. 147-148.} Moreover, Jordan maintains that Nelson was converted into an upper-class figure, ‘a serious, staid, and aloof muscular Christian’, and thus divorced from the working classes. He tries to maintain his view by asserting that ‘[f]or most of them [the working classes] the Nelson message was simply irrelevant in the daily struggle for survival’. This claim ignores the presence of so many members of the working classes at the Trafalgar Day celebrations. Jordan assumes that the masses, who crowded Trafalgar Square, were there as mere spectators, like crowds who attended football matches, rather than being genuinely interested in honouring Nelson’s memory.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 149, 153-154.} He denies the working classes the ability to express their own tastes, opinions and allegiances. It is admittedly difficult to assess the motivations of the assembled masses at these commemorations and one must not assume that their views were the same as those who organized these events. None the less, the desire of the assembled spectators actively to participate (by silently waiting, taking off their hats, cheering) clearly indicates that the event had some kind of meaning for them. Perhaps admiration for Nelson and a desire for national unity explain why the Navy League’s celebrations attracted more people than did the League’s political ideas.

Jordan also claims that the centenary celebration on Trafalgar Square ‘was marked by Admiralty disapproval and the absence of any official naval contingent’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 151.} The lack of official support, however, should not be interpreted as proof of Admiralty disapproval of the event. The then First Lord of the Admiralty, John Arbuthnot Fisher,
certainly approved of it. He made his admiration for Nelson and his appreciation of
Trafalgar Day public, when he insisted on being installed as First Lord of the Admiralty,
in 1904, not earlier than 'on Trafalgar Day' The significance of this choice was well
understood at the time, when a cartoon in The Daily Mirror showed Fisher about to enter
the Admiralty and Nelson about to climb down from his column, commenting: 'I was on
my way down to lend them a hand myself, but if Jacky Fisher's taking on the job there's
no need for me to be nervous. I'll get back on my pedestal'. 44 Fisher contributed a
preface about Nelson to a book that A. White, the initiator of the Trafalgar Day
celebrations, wrote for the centenary with Ellen Hallam Moorhouse. 45 Fisher had also
learned years before how to use journalistic pressure, particularly that exerted by Arnold
White, in order to achieve his political aims. 46 Though clearly interested in exploiting
Nelson and Trafalgar, Fisher, as in his earlier propagandistic co-operations with White,
appears to have preferred to give the impression that the Admiralty reacted to popular
pressure rather than making propaganda itself.

The Trafalgar celebrations became ever more focused on Nelson and detached
from current issues of naval policy. Among the few who voiced any doubts about or
even criticism of the Trafalgar Day celebrations was the reputable author of naval
works, F. T. Jane, who claimed there was 'Too Much Nelson'. He argued, 'I deplore and
am opposed to the Nelson cult', because 'victories of the future are not to be won by
dwelling on the glories of a dead past': 'The theory that the British sailor will fight any
better because “England expects every man to do his duty” is printed on the
handsteering wheel and around the ward-room hatchway is pure and unadulterated
moonshine'. 47 The Navy League appeared unimpressed by such criticism and began to

---

44 Marder, i, 320. See Appendix A, plate 74, for the caricature.
45 White/Moorhouse, pp. vii-xiii. The authors were legally barred from disclosing Fisher's name (ibid., p. v), but Fisher himself included a hint as to who he was in the remark: 'By a pure chance (but a delightful one!) from the place where this is now being written [his office in the Admiralty] one can see nothing else but the figure of Nelson on his column in Trafalgar Square' (ibid., p. vii). Even a German reviewer was aware of Fisher's authorship: [Anon., 'v. U.'], 'Die englische Marine 1805 und 1905', Marine-Rundschau 1906, 339-43. One of Fisher's letters to A. White proves his authorship: Marder, ii, 62.
47 White/Moorhouse, pp. 295-97, where F. T. Jane was given a chance to argue his case.
personalize its celebrations even more by referring to the ‘Nelson Centenary’ and ‘Nelson Day’, instead of Trafalgar Day.\(^48\)

As the name of Nelson was developing into a trademark of national identity, it also started to attract commercial users. With the growth of brand marketing and imagery in newspapers, Nelson was beginning to be used to sell the usual products of early advertising: soap, washing powder and pills ‘for all derangements of the Stomach’. Sometimes only Nelson’s portrait was used. In other cases some reference to his name or to his fame or to ‘England expects’ was made, as in: ‘Nelson the Hero of Trafalgar and Pears Soap Have Become the Most Familiar Names in the English Language’ or ‘England expects that every man this day will do his duty and take Beecham’s Pills’.\(^49\)

The commemoration of Nelson on Trafalgar Day was maintained through the years of the First World War, though now usually combined with some references to recent events, such as: ‘I rely with confidence upon the loyal and united efforts of all my subjects. The King’.\(^50\) Although celebrations of Trafalgar Day have lost prominence more recently, some remnants of the tradition, invented by the Navy League, have survived. Hundreds of Sea Cadets (successors to the members of the Boy’s Naval Brigades and the only remnant of the now defunct Navy League) still parade on Trafalgar Square every 21 October. At these events wreaths are laid, bands of male and female cadets play, a short service is held and Nelson’s last prayer is read. In Portsmouth, the Sea Cadets and the Royal Navy join in a commemoration and take part in a traditional ‘Seafarers’ Service at Portsmouth cathedral. In Edinburgh, Nelson’s signal is hoisted every 21 October (unless if it is a Sunday) on the local Nelson


\(^{49}\) The Pears’ Soap advertisement is of 1897 and bears a portrait of Nelson (after Abbott) and a depiction of Nelson’s Column (in Trafalgar Square). *The Nelson Dispatch*, 3 (1990), 175 (Beecham’s Pills, including Nelson portrait, the version of ‘England expects’ is from Arnold/Braham, poem no. 121). By the way: the authentic flag code for ‘England expects that every man will do his duty’ was only re-discovered after the centenary celebrations: [Anon.], *Nelson’s Signal at the Battle of Trafalgar* ([London]: Admiralty, 4 July 1908). The song advertising Borax washing powder has been discussed in chapter 14 and its text can be found, together with the text of the original by Arnold/Braham, in appendix F.

\(^{50}\) British Film Institute: *Trafalgar Square Celebrations* (1915).
Monument, overlooking great parts of the city. Trafalgar Dinners are held by different clubs and societies all over Britain, and these always include a toast to 'The Immortal Memory'.

It is difficult to say when Nelson-related traditions within the navy originated and how they were observed over the last two-hundred years. The tradition to give a toast to 'The Immortal Memory' on Trafalgar Day in officers' messes appears to have been observed continuously since Nelson's death and the wording of the toast can be traced back to November 1805. Ordinary sailors (not only in Britain) are said to commemorate Nelson, most of them unknowingly, in their dress. The three white stripes on their blue collar are supposedly there to commemorate Nelson's victories at the Nile, Copenhagen and Trafalgar. The black silk handkerchief draped round the opening of the sailor's jumper, over his chest, was originally worn around the neck and it is said that the men were ordered for Nelson's funeral 'to drape the handkerchief round the V-opening of the jumper, and tie it with a small tape at the bottom, to keep it in its place'. Admiral Kerr commented in 1932: 'The order was never rescinded, and the men continue to mourn Nelson and all that he stood for, week after week, month after month, and year after year, until it has become a permanent memorial to the best-loved leader that any navy has produced'.

In the political sphere, since the Second World War, Nelson has rarely been used to represent the navy or notions of national identity. There are a few official reminders of Nelson in the form of stamps, but mostly Nelson has remained part of the political discourse in cartoons, which usually make use of his characteristic appearance (eighteenth-century naval uniform, empty sleeve, sometimes an eye-patch, sometimes on the top of his column in Trafalgar Square, London) and his most famous expressions.

---


52 The tradition to observe Trafalgar Day in the Royal Navy is mentioned by Althaus, p. 288, in 1880. For the origin of the wording of the toast see chapter 10.

53 Kerr (1932), pp. 9-10.

54 An exception from this rule appears to be the 'Trafalgar Club' of the British National Party.

Margaret Thatcher as well as Tony Blair have been represented as Nelson, demanding of representatives of the European Community that ‘England expects that every European will do his duty’ or in danger of turning a blind eye to issues of worldwide terrorism. More direct references to Nelson himself have recently been made in cartoons that referred to discussions about disabled and homosexual people in the armed forces; in the later case with Nelson dying in the arms of his captain, saying: ‘Kiss me and tell Hardy’. The use of Nelson for advertisements usually involves reference to his outer appearance, as in Admiral Insurance, which shows a stylized one-armed Nelson, holding a telescope to his eye. Since the reference to the person is obvious in ‘Nelson’s Revenge. Premium Ale’ from Woodforde’s Norfolk Ales, a black-and-white rear view of Nelson’s head and shoulders in combination with a stylized image of the Victory and some muzzles of guns suffice.

The basic knowledge about Nelson possessed by most Britons, on which commercial advertisements as well as political cartoons can draw, is summarized in a ‘Historical Postcard’ from the comedy programme ‘I’m Sorry I Haven’t a Clue’:

Nelson to Lady Hamilton from Trafalgar: Having a great time at Trafalgar, apart from the pigeons. Captain Hardy has shown me great loyalty and affection. Though I still have to remind him ‘no tongues’. Can’t wait to be back with you – hope the eye and the arm are enough to be going on with.

The bicentenary of the battle of Trafalgar in 2005 will be certainly commemorated, perhaps on a very large scale. Nelson’s iconic status in the collective memory of the British ensures that he will go on being used to convey

---

56 See Appendix A, plates 75 (from Handelsblatt in 1982) and 76 (The Economist, 29 September 2001, p. 40).
57 See Appendix A, plates 77 (from The Times, 21 December 2000) and 78 (from Private Eye, no. 1067 [15-28 November 2002], 5).
58 See Appendix A, plates 79 and 80.
59 The Almost Totally Complete 'I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue', ed. Jon Naismith (London: Orion, 1999), p. 103; other Nelson-related jokes can be found on pp. 77, 92 (Historical Headlines ... Nelson Victorious at Trafalgar).
political as well as commercial messages that do not necessarily have anything to do with his life, achievements or opinions.
CONCLUSION

The different aspects of Nelson’s life and death that have aroused and still maintain interest in him, such as his dramatic career, his passionate love affair and his iconic outer appearance, have again and again drawn writers and artists towards the subject of Nelson. Enduring as his appeal has proved, it has also undergone changes in matters of intensity as well as quality throughout the last two hundred years. These changes can be traced as much in historical imagery as in fictional representation and material iconography.

Nelson’s death at the height of the battle of Trafalgar prompted a powerful reaction in biographical literature and in different art forms, such as material artefacts and poetry. Interpreted as a saviour of Britain, Nelson caught the public’s imagination and aroused their profound sense of gratitude. The resulting idealized views about Nelson, however, as well as contemporary moral standards, were deeply upset by the publication of some of Nelson’s letters to Lady Hamilton, in 1814. As a consequence Nelson was neglected for a period of time. Only from the late 1830s onwards did friends of Nelson’s and naval officers manage to begin a revival of interest in Nelson by publishing works about him and, perhaps more important, by starting the subscription for and erection of Nelson’s Column on Trafalgar Square. Another phase of not very pronounced public interest in Nelson during the second half of the nineteenth century ended with parallel efforts in the fields of imagery and iconography. Shortly after naval historians had started researching Nelson seriously, he was popularized by the Royal Naval Exhibition in 1891, with its focus in great part on Nelson, and the Navy League’s celebrations of Nelson at the anniversaries of the battle of Trafalgar from 1895 onwards. Nelson was moved to the core of British national, if not imperial, identity and firmly installed as national hero. The quality of historical scrutiny into Nelson and the scale of his popularity reached a peak in the years around the centenary of the battle of Trafalgar, in 1905.
Nelson had been brought so much into public consciousness in the years before the First World War that imagery as well as iconography dealing with him remained present throughout the twentieth century, presenting a challenge to new interpretations. The isolated treatment of Nelson, promoted as part of the cult of the hero around the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, was further emphasized as Nelson was increasingly taken out of his naval context in the course of the twentieth century. While novels, plays and films explored his love affair and criticized his involvement in the defeat of the Neapolitan revolution, biographic literature scrutinized his personality, in a desire to break with Victorian hero-worship, and followed a path opened by psychological inquiry. Apart from the disputed actions of Nelson's, such as his acts of disobedience, his tactics at the battle of Trafalgar, his involvement in Naples and his love affair with Lady Hamilton, Nelson's personality has remained enigmatic and it has appeared 'dichotomous' to many. Since the nineteenth century, biographers, observers of Nelson's portraits, and authors of novels and plays, have been confused by what they perceive as elements of femininity in the successful warrior. The general difficulty of explaining Nelson in simple terms, guarantees a continuing struggle to understand the man, while it opens different iconic interpretations – from roughness in 'Nelson's Revenge Premium Ale' to the sensitive issue of gays in the military.¹

The variety of aspects that excite popular and scholarly interest in Nelson and the continuing controversies about them promise further imagery and iconography to come.

---

¹ See appendix A, plates 78 and 79.