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Memoirs and the Communication of Memory

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On the afternoon of 18 June 1815, François-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand, was walking on the outskirts of Ghent, where he had accompanied Louis XVIII into exile, reading, if we are to believe him, a copy of Caesar's *Commentaries*, when he heard a 'dull rumbling'. He stopped and listened, looked up at the cloudy sky, but heard nothing more so continued on his way. Thirty paces later, the rumbling began again, 'now short, now drawn out at irregular intervals'. He crossed the road and leant against the trunk of the poplar tree, with his face turned in the direction of Brussels:

> A southerly wind sprang up and brought me more distinctly the sound of artillery. That great battle, nameless as yet, whose echoes I was listening to at the foot of a poplar, and for whose unknown obsequies a village clock had just struck, was the Battle of Waterloo![1]

These musings on the battle can be found in one of the most famous French memoirs of the nineteenth century, Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* (or 'Memoirs from Beyond the Grave').[2] Chateaubriand never witnessed a battle, nor did he ever go out of his way to do so or ever encounter its aftermaths. Nevertheless, like many memoirists, Chateaubriand placed himself at the centre of a world historical event. He did so by making the battle much more about himself than about Napoleon or indeed about the fate of the French monarchy or the world. For Chateaubriand, as it was for the thousands of tourists who over the years came to visit the battlefield of Waterloo, this was a kind of exercise in imagining warfare, much as it is for historians who have never experienced it. Chateaubriand thus inadvertently

1 François-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand, *The Memoirs of Chateaubriand*, Robert Baldick (trans.) (New York: Knopf, 1961), 277.
2 Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 59–62.

underlines the extent to which the vast majority of contemporaries as readers would have lived the battle, and therefore would have lived history, vicariously. In fact, Chateaubriand thinks he is better placed to reflect on and to be moved by the battle because of the distance between himself and it. If he had found himself in the fray, he reasoned, 'the danger, the firing, the press of death' would have left him no time for meditation.[3]

In some respects, Chateaubriand confounds experience, reflection and memory. What he calls 'meditation', by which he means reflecting on the past and one's place in it, is a necessary prerequisite for writing autobiography or memoir. Most memoirs are written years if not decades after the events they describe, as a result of which the subject has ample time to think about what they had seen, experienced and lived through. The flip side to that coin is that the subject can be influenced by contemporary media and other rememberings. As we can see from a number of chapters in this volume, there were any number of ways in which the memory of the Napoleonic Wars was recalled, preserved and disseminated in the course of the nineteenth century: through paintings, caricatures, statues, monuments, plays, poems, novels, magazines and music. These different media contributed to the preservation of different types of memory, conscious and unconscious, private and public, individual and collective, living and cultural.[4] All these ways of remembering were interconnected, the one medium often influencing the other. This was particularly the case for histories of the Napoleonic Wars, the first of which started to appear in the 1820s, and which often relied on memoirs as primary documents. But they can also be competing sites of memory, which can show up differences between the public's perception of the wars and the state's 'heroic' narrative.

One of the most important ways of perpetuating the memory of the Napoleonic Wars was through the publication of accounts written by those who had either been witness to or who had taken an active part in the wars. Those publications cut across a number of genres and included histories of the wars, personal memoirs and autobiographies, as well as diaries, journals and travelogues. Many of the war memoirs adopt the conventions of the

3 Chateaubriand, *The Memoirs of Chateaubriand*, 277–8; Jan Mieszkowski, *Watching War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 51–63.

4 For a good summary of the different approaches to conceptualising memory see Alan Forrest, Étienne François and Karen Hagemann, 'Introduction: Memories of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in Modern European Culture', in Alan Forrest, Étienne François and Karen Hagemann (eds), *War Memories: The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in Modern European Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 13–22.

travelogue, which had been in vogue for some time. That is, they describe the geography and topography they encountered as well as the people and their customs, although, in the case of these war memoirs, always from the perspective of the conqueror. Memoirs from this period are very different in kind, some personal and intimate, others 'objective' and as detached as one could be for the era, but they gave readers particular narratives and particular impressions of the wars, and in doing so not only became sources for the memory of the wars for future generations but also influenced the ways in which the Napoleonic Wars were remembered.

This chapter focuses on personal, autobiographical accounts, what we recognise as the memoir, although in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it could take different forms. Moreover, during this period there was a blurring between history, memoir and autobiography. The majority of memoirs emerging from the era are, not surprisingly, 'military', written by veterans who had survived the wars. There were, of course, many other types of memoirs, some written by politicians, men and women not directly involved in the fighting, others by literary figures, so that we also get, as in no other previous war, a civilian perspective; for civilians were often witness, if not to battles and the aftermaths of conflicts, then at least to troops passing through their home town and to the behaviour of occupying forces. This memoir literature, which resulted in what one historian refers to as a 'memory boom', has been the focus of a number of studies in recent years as historians have begun to analyse and use the texts in ways that were never intended by their authors.[5] This chapter looks at the nature and changing form of the memoir, the types of experiences they characteristically recounted, the history of publishing and the extent to which they may have led to the creation and perpetuation of a number of myths surrounding the Napoleonic Wars. The ability of the memoir to shape 'cultural memory' is one of its central themes.

The Memory Boom

The number of memoirs that appeared in the years and decades following the end of the Napoleonic Wars far surpassed any other war until that time. French memoirs on the Napoleonic Wars, civilian and military combined, are by far the most numerous, and this does not even take into account the

5 Karen Hagemann, *Revisiting Prussia's Wars against Napoleon: History, Culture, and Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 402.

Revolutionary Wars. At a rough count, there are more than 1,600 published memoirs in French (including translations from other languages), more than 600 German-language memoirs and more than 330 British memoirs, as well as memoirs in most other European languages.[6] A small number were published while the wars were in progress, but most appeared after 1815. Personal recollections continued to be published throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, often years after their authors passed away, as historians and family members came across manuscripts in the archives and in personal collections. In fact, when memoirs were published varied enormously across Europe. In France, more than two-thirds of memoirs were published after the death of the author. Similarly, in Germany, about three-quarters appeared after 1865. In Britain and in Spain, on the other hand, most were published during the author's lifetime. In all, there are hundreds if not thousands of memoirs, but they necessarily represent only a small proportion of the millions of men and women who participated in or witnessed the wars and can consequently only ever be taken to be a small sample of the vast number of lived experiences.

The sizeable increase in the number of memoirs being published after the wars has to be understood in conjunction with a number of other important cultural developments taking place in Western Europe, among them increased literacy rates, which created expanding audiences; the decreased costs associated with publication and the increase in the number of publishing houses; the rise of the novel; the transformation in thinking about the place of the individual in society and history (it is at the end of the eighteenth century that we see a proliferation of writings in which the individual and personal experience are at the centre of the narrative); and the change in status of the soldier, who became more socially acceptable as the military became associated with the nation and patriotism.

Both the public and the private accounts were also products of their time, in the sense that memoirs were imbued with literary conventions that predated the Napoleonic Wars and that were common to particular national

6 Jean Tulard (ed.), *Bibliographie critique des mémoires sur le Consulat et l'Empire: écrits ou traduits en français* (Geneva: Droz, 1991); Jacques Garnier, *Complément et supplément à la Nouvelle bibliographie critique des mémoires sur l'époque napoléonienne de Jean Tulard* (Paris: Editions SPM, 1997); Hagemann, *Revisiting Prussia's Wars against Napoleon*, 303–4, 311, 316–17; Robert Burnham, 'Appendix: British Memoirs of the Napoleonic Wars', in Rory Muir et al. (eds), *Inside Wellington's Peninsular Army 1808–1814* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2006), 275–303; Matilda Greig, *Dead Men Telling Tales: Napoleonic War Veterans and the Military Memoir Industry, 1808–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2, 8.

writing traditions; these would also include the *Bildungsroman*, the picaresque, Romanticism, and even the Gothic novel, so that the lines between reality and fiction are often blurred.[7] Put another way, writing one's memoir is a deeply personal process as much influenced by the cultural norms of the day as it is a product of the self and self-reflection. Other scholars have emphasised the intermingling of oral culture and folklore into soldiers' tales, taking into account the fact that we are largely dealing with non-literate societies in which the oral tradition of transmission is still important.[8] Stories would have been told before ink was put to paper.[9] The story is then transmitted to friends and family so that they, who did not live through the event being told, nevertheless become the bearers of a common, shared memory.[10] But those stories are never straightforward. There is, for want of a better phrase, an editing process, carried out by either the author, or the family, or the publishing house. The very act of constructing a life into a cohesive and comprehensible narrative means that a certain amount of self-censorship is involved, transforming the life into something that it was not. Veterans are not necessarily going to want to tell everything they lived through if there is the possibility of some sort of moral opprobrium at the end of it all. One way around this is to hint at what might have happened, without ever admitting any direct involvement. After the sacking of Cordoba, for example, one of the worst atrocities committed by the French during the war in Spain, Jean-Baptiste Chevillard claimed that his children could walk the streets: 'no accusatory voice would be raised against their father; his heart and his hands remain pure'.[11]

The very act of writing reveals that the author was looking for a form of recognition, and for whatever they hoped to gain from that recognition.[12] The decision if not the struggle for the author was to decide whether that recognition was to be limited to a restricted private circle or extended and

7 Hagemann, *Revisiting Prussia's Wars against Napoleon*, 301–3.
8 The main proponent of that approach is David Hopkin, 'Storytelling, Fairytales and Autobiography: Some Observations on Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century French Soldiers' and Sailors' Memoirs', *Social History*, 29:2 (2004), 186–99.
9 See, for example, Tatiana Saburova, 'The Patriotic War of 1812 in the Commemorative Practices and Historical Memory of Russian Society from the Nineteenth to the Early Twenty-First Centuries', in Janet M. Hartley, Paul Keenan and Dominic Lieven (eds), *Russia and the Napoleonic Wars* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 244–6.
10 Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, 'The Politics of Memory and Commemoration: Contexts, Structures and Dynamics', in Timothy G. Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper (eds), *Commemorating War: The Politics of Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2004), 18–1 9.
11 J.-B. Chevillard, *Souvenirs d'Espagne, 1808–1809* (Paris: La Vouivre, 1999), 83–4.
12 See Ashplant et al., 'The Politics of Memory and Commemoration', 17.

circulated within a larger public arena that would have included their peers. For example, Jean-Stanislas Vivien wrote his memoirs between 1834 and 1846, largely for his family and from notes taken during the wars, but they were not published until 1907.[13] A rare few were destined for publication long after the death of the author. This was the case, for example, with the memoirs of Napoleon's Foreign Minister, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, who wrote in stages between 1816 and 1830. He left strict instructions, however, not to publish them until 1888, by which time everyone involved in Talleyrand's life had long passed. Most of the Prussian memoirs appeared posthumously, after the fiftieth anniversary of the wars of 1813–15.

Just about all the memoirs published before the 1850s, however, appeared during the author's lifetime and were thus the result of a conscious choice, whereby individuals actively sought out publishing houses and played a part in the production of the book.[14] In 1831, for example, Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Leach, former captain in the British army's famous 95th Rifles regiment, approached publishing house Longman, Rees and Co. for the publication of his memoir, *Rough Sketches in the Life of an Old Soldier*, offering to part with the copyright to the work for a small fee. In Leach's case, the publishers agreed to produce one edition at their own cost, declined the copyright and moved forward with the process without much evidence of further involvement on the old soldier's part, but other authors were more determined to dictate the terms. In 1819, having corrected the proofs of his forthcoming *Memoir of the Early Campaigns of the Duke of Wellington in Portugal and Spain*, Lord Burghersh, lately aide de camp to Wellington in the Peninsular War, wrote authoritatively to his publisher John Murray to demand the inclusion of three further notes, the printing of a newly written second part, and the speedy return of the fresh proofs 'as soon as possible'.[15]

Individuals wrote their recollections for all sorts of reasons: in order to give a 'true' account of what they had witnessed and experienced; in order to rectify history by presenting a purportedly more accurate account of events; in order to commemorate the lives of fallen comrades; in order to defend one's reputation or attack another's; and in order to leave behind a testimony

13 He is, moreover, one of the few to reflect on the decision to write his memoirs twenty years after the end of the wars. Jean-Stanislas Vivien, *Commandant Vivien. Souvenirs de ma vie militaire, 1792–1822* (Paris: Hachette, 1907), 1–2, 39–44.

14 See, for example, Matilda Greig, 'Accidental Authors? Soldiers' Tales of the Peninsular War and the Secrets of the Publishing Process', *History Workshop Journal*, 86:1 (2018), 224–44.

15 Greig, 'Accidental Authors?', 233, 236.

for future generations, so that they could understand what they had lived through.[16] Some may have simply begun to write in order to relieve the boredom or to fill the lonely void that was peace in old age in civilian life, but then peace gives one the opportunity to reflect on a tumultuous past. Many were encouraged to set down their recollections by family and friends. Some of the memoirs were meant to instruct, in a military sense, future generations of officers in war. Most (but not all) were imbued with a sense of national pride, and an inveterate disdain for other peoples they had encountered along the way. In some respects, all memoirs are self-justifications. The majority of memoirs were published by men; though there are numerous memoirs written by women, and indeed by some women who cross-dressed and fought in the wars, memoirs were typically a male affair.[17] All were educated, although some more than others. Captain Coignet, who went on to write one of the most famous French accounts of the Napoleonic Wars, was taught how to read and write in an *école régimentaire* at the age of thirty. At the other end of the scale, some memoirs were the work of experienced authors, such as George Gleig, who wrote regularly for literary magazines such as *Blackwood's*. A few were by aristocrats, while others were written by non-commissioned officers, but it is a peculiarity of these wars that, for the first time in history, the majority of the memoirs at our disposal, at least as far as the campaigns were concerned, were written by junior and middle-ranking officers.

One of the distinctive traits of memoirs is that the authors projected authenticity and reliability through being witness to the events they related. Their account was 'true', they became 'flesh-witnesses' to use a term coined by Yuval Harari, they assumed the voice of authority, because they had direct, personal experience of the events they recounted.[18] Harari thus draws a distinction between 'eyewitnessing', which is simply to see something transpire, and 'flesh-witnessing', which is to have experienced the event, to have lived through it. Most war memoirs fall into the category of 'flesh-witnessing', giving weight to the authority of the account. Flesh-witnessing

16 See Natalie Petiteau, *Écrire la mémoire: mémorialistes de la Révolution et de l'Empire* (Paris: les Indes savantes, 2012), especially 23–70, which outlines the multitude of reasons people turned to writing.

17 David Hopkin, 'The World Turned Upside Down: Female Soldiers in the French Armies of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars', in Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann and Jane Rendall (eds), *Soldiers, Citizens and Civilians: Experiences and Perceptions of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, 1790–1820* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 77–95.

18 Yuval N. Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450–2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 7–20, 231–40.

is, however, a concept that does not necessarily translate across cultures; the 'flesh-witness' probably made little sense in Spain or in the German and Austrian memoirs of the period, where alternative forms of (war) narratives continued to dominate.[19]

The Memoir in History, Politics and Memory

For many years, historians dismissed memoirs as unreliable, inaccurate, misleading and self-serving, all the while using them as sources, often taking their words at face value (there is still a tendency among historians of the period to do so). The point has already been made that memoirs are often written many years after the event (sometimes with the help of diaries), so while there might also be time to reflect, there is also time to forget, time to remember differently, as well as time to polish the prose. Many memoirs are fanciful in that the events described in them are exaggerated or sometimes did not take place at all. Captain Coignet has been referred to as a 'typical soldier-storyteller of the Baron Munchausen type', in other words, someone who exaggerated if not invented particular experiences, perhaps to conform to society's expectations of a veteran of the *Grande Armée*, while the memoirs of General Marbot have been compared to the adventures of Sinbad the Sailor in a *Thousand and One Nights*.[20] Others are contradictory or else depict the same events from entirely different perspectives; others again leave out (deliberately or unconsciously) events or experiences either because they are too painful to recall or because they no longer conform to accepted public understandings of the wars. Even contemporaries questioned the value of these works. Writing in 1811, the Prussian officer, Carl von Plotho, lamented that 'so many different views and judgements arise that falsehood and untruth establish themselves more and more firmly'.[21]

As sources, then, memoirs are problematic; it can be difficult for the modern reader to tell the difference between invention, falsehood and truth. Of course, by comparing and cross-referencing with other historical

19 Leighton S. James, *Witnessing the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in German Central Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 8–9, 190–3.

20 On Coignet, David Hopkin, *Soldier and Peasant in French Popular Culture, 1766–1870* (Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2003), 100. On Marbot, Francis Magnard, 'La Résurrection d'une légende', *La Revue de Paris* (1 February 1894), 104.

21 Carl von Plotho, *Tagebuch während des Krieges zwischen Russland und Preussen einerseits, und Frankreich anderseits, in den Jahren 1806 und 1807* (Berlin: Friedrich Braunes, 1811), iv, cited in Mark Hewitson, *Absolute War: Violence and Mass Warfare in the German Lands, 1792–1820* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 160.

sources, it is sometimes possible to disentangle fact from fiction. However, there is much in memoirs that is unverifiable, since they revolve around personal accounts that may very well have been exaggerated, embellished or even invented, sometimes by authors who were convinced they actually lived through events we know they could not have lived through.[22] A more interesting and more rewarding approach is not to take the memoirs at face value, but to read them as repositories of collective memory, to examine them for how memoirists may have contested or indeed perpetuated broader narratives about the Wars. Memoirs then can be treated as historical sources, less for what they tell us about the period, although that too can be valuable, than for what they tell us about how history is written and recalled. They can also be sources of individual agency; that is, the memoir is not just about how history is written, but also about what the author is trying to achieve.

In that vein, memoirs reflect the author's own experience of the war, coloured and mediated through their own national media. There were enormous regional, social, cultural and political differences, especially in the German and Italian territories, as well as in Spain. A Bavarian was not likely to recall the wars in the same way as a Prussian, a Saxon or a Hanoverian.[23] Some Germans fought in the *Grande Armée* against other Germans, only changing sides in the last phases of the Wars. Other Germans, the Austrians in particular, had fought against the French for the entire duration of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Similarly, a soldier from Turin was going to have a very different view of the Wars than someone from Naples, and so on. Men (and some women) wrote about war according to their own personal experiences, although, as we have seen, some significant events elicited more publications than others. By far the most written-about campaigns were the Iberian Peninsula, the Russian campaign of 1812 – despite the fact that only a small part of Napoleon's multi-national army made it back across the Niemen – and the Battle of Waterloo. The reason for the number of memoirs on the Russian, Spanish and Waterloo campaigns is obvious; there was a market for them; they were exciting; they were decisive. But each of those campaigns produced very different memories. The French, British, Dutch and Prussian memoirs around Waterloo, for example, all had radically different

22 Natalie Petiteau, *Lendemains d'Empire: Les soldats de Napoléon dans la France du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Boutique de l'Histoire, 2003), 129; and for a later period, Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (London: Allen Lane, 1997), 15–16, 23–5.

23 On the variations of the German experience see Abigail Green, *Fatherlands: State-Building and Nationhood in Nineteenth-century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 22–61.

perspectives. This suggests that national identities could influence the ways in which the Wars were remembered. Before getting into that, however, let us elaborate on the differences within the German and Spanish examples.

In Bavaria and other German states that had been allied to France, there appears to have been a tendency to emphasise the martial heroism of the individual, and to disparage the French, despite there being little evidence of such sentiments while they were serving under Napoleon.[24] On the contrary, most had a good deal of respect for him and the *Grande Armée*. Similarly, veteran authors who fought with the troops of the Confederation of the Rhine – that is, with Napoleon – tended to defend the post-war appearance of having fought on the 'wrong side' by emphasising their own professional code of honour. Baden too was allied to France for most of the war years, and yet the memoirs that were published in the mid-nineteenth century would fall within the larger German narrative of Baden joining Austria and Prussia to defeat France in the 'Wars of Liberation'.

The war in Spain and Portugal provoked similarly different perspectives from the various participants; the very name of the conflict continues to vary from country to country. The French call it *la guerre d'Espagne* ('the War in Spain'), just one campaign among many fought by Napoleon; the British call it the Peninsular War, which includes the fighting in Portugal; and the Spanish refer to it as *la Guerra de la Independencia* ('the War of Independence'), which has since become a key element in Spain's triumphalist nationalist tale. It is also *la Guerra del Francès* ('the War of the French') in Catalan and *As Invasões Francesas* ('the French Invasions') in Portuguese.

French soldiers' accounts dealt with defeat in very different ways. Those with royalist sympathies denounced Napoleon's ambition. Others emphasised the previous successes of the *Grande Armée* in Germany. Many expressed their hatred and fear of the Spanish guerrillas, whose ambushes and disruption had, they argued, made it impossible for the French to establish any control over the country. Interestingly, both French and British soldiers wrote about their antipathy to the Spanish and Portuguese, while showing respect for each other, despite being entrenched military rivals.[25] Both also spoke often of the landscape and people they had met, dividing over their

24 Julia von Murken, *Bayerische Soldaten im Russlandfeldzug 1812: ihre Kriegserfahrungen und deren Umdeutungen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Beck, 2006), 126–30.

25 Gavin Daly, 'A Dirty, Indolent, Priest-ridden City: British Soldiers in Lisbon during the Peninsular War, 1808–1813', *History*, 94 (2009), 469, 478, 482; Laurence Montroussier, 'Français et Britanniques dans la Péninsule, 1808–1814: étude des mémoires français et britanniques', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 348 (2007), 132–3.

general depiction of women: French soldiers related their foreign conquests, while their British counterparts reminisced about the sweethearts they had left at home. And while British memoirs spun the tale of the Peninsular War as a great, almost single-handed British victory, Spanish writers concentrated on the achievements of a heroic people in the liberation of their country, demonising the French occupiers and largely ignoring the British, the Portuguese, the guerrillas, women, and even the Spanish army itself as it extended beyond their own division.

British, French, Dutch and German perspectives on Waterloo were also necessarily different, and could change over time.[26] In the case of Britain, Germany and the Netherlands, Waterloo helped sharpen and exaggerate national identity. In Britain, the battle became one of the great turning points in history and was presented as the result of a particular trait of the British national character – stoicism. Many of the British memoirs, while underlying the horror that was the battle, implicitly fed into that stereotype. Prussian memoirs of *La Belle Alliance*, as Waterloo was known for most of the nineteenth century, represented the battle as a Prussian and not a British victory, feeding into the triumphalist master narrative of German nationalism that dominated the second half of the nineteenth century.[27] In the Netherlands, until the fiftieth anniversary of the battle in 1865, the victory was attributed in large part to the bravery of the Dutch troops and the Crown Prince of Orange.[28] In France, on the other hand, given that it was *the* battle that brought the Empire and the reign of Napoleon to an end once and for all, survivors also spoke of the carnage that took place. Eventually, the French were able to turn the disaster on its head as the 'glorious defeat' that was Waterloo became part of the myth and the cult that developed around Napoleon post 1815.[29]

All of this is to say that memoirs played a role in the creation of national identity, even when the politics surrounding national identity were

26 Alan Forrest, 'Contrasting Memories: Remembering Waterloo in France and Britain', in Alan Forrest, Karen Hagemann, and Michael Rowe (eds), *War, Demobilization and Memory: The Legacy of War in the Era of Atlantic Revolutions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 353–68.

27 Jasper Heinzen, 'Transnational Affinities and Invented Traditions: The Napoleonic Wars in British and Hanoverian Memory, 1815–1915', *English Historical Review*, 127 (2012), 1404–34.

28 Pieter van den Berg, 'Memories of Defending the Nation: Commemorating the Battle of Waterloo in the Netherlands, in 1865' (MA dissertation, Erasmus University of Rotterdam, 2012); Janneke Weijermars, *Stepbrothers: Southern Dutch Literature and Nation-Building under Willem I, 1814–1834* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 40–9.

29 Jean-Marc Largeaud, *Napoléon et Waterloo: la défaite glorieuse de 1815 à nos jours* (Paris: La Boutique de l'Histoire, 2006).

contested, and when the author may not have intended to make any kind of political statement. In France, for example, where the restored Bourbon regime was bent on obliterating the memory of the Revolution and the Empire, memoirs were wont to be critical of Napoleon, at least until his death in 1821, after which censorship laws were relaxed and it became possible to express more favourable opinions about the man and his regime. In other words, the nature of the state and the extent to which it may or may not have permitted particular narratives and readings of the past, determined which voices could be heard. Autocratic regimes generally controlled how the wars were remembered and had little time for internal political divisions.

But it gets more complicated than that. A memoir could, whether this was a conscious decision on the part of the author or not, become entangled with and contribute to the dominant national narratives about the wars, thus helping to perpetuate certain national myths. Certainly, many war memoirs fed into such national narratives by giving far more importance to a number of key moments in the Napoleonic Wars than was probably warranted. In Spain, it was the Dos de Mayo of 1808 and the two sieges of Zaragoza; in Russia, it was Borodino and the burning of Moscow in 1812; in Germany, it was Leipzig and the Battle of Nations in 1813; in Britain, it was the Battle of Waterloo. The narratives around these moments evolved over time but common to them all is the role of the people as a driving force in history and their role in preventing the spread of tyranny.[30]

However, the very act of recounting the dominant narrative could also have subversive implications. As an example, the most popular memoirs in the German-speaking lands were those of volunteers (and not career officers) who fought during the 'Wars of Liberation'.[31] Many of them deliberately harked back to the time of the 'people's war' and often demanded of their rulers that they live up to the promises for political reform made in 1813. This was the case for Karl von Raumer, consumed by a 'profound pain' since the end of the wars, because German honour had been defiled. Saxon memoirs, on the other hand, downplayed the role of Prussia during the 'Wars of Liberation' and emphasised their own local patriotic motives. Memoirs coming out of the southern German states, which fought with the French for most of the Wars, resisted the myth of Prussian triumphalism, at least until the

30 Forrest et al., 'Memories of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars in Modern European Culture', 10–11.

31 Hagemann, *Revisiting Prussia's Wars against Napoleon*, 319–23.

unification of Germany in 1870.[32] Those competing narratives, as Karen Hagemann has shown, eventually disappeared after the unification of Germany, and as the Prussian interpretation of the wars came to dominate imperial Germany's history.[33]

Publishing memoirs was also a highly political act in Spain, where soldiers' autobiographies took the form of manifestos or pamphlets, which, differently from their northern European counterparts, had evolved from juridical and bureaucratic traditions of self-justificatory writing dating from the early days of the Spanish Empire. Most were published by leading military commanders in response to scandals over their actions in the war, scandals which ranged from misinterpreting orders to having mutinied openly against the appointment of Wellington to supreme command over the joint Spanish and British armies in 1812. Such was the case for Francisco Ballesteros, who wrote from prison in Ceuta in 1813 detailing his memories of patriotic service in the war as a form of plea for reinstatement.[34]

Spanish memoir writers were also concerned with narratives forming on an international level, particularly the story of Spanish weakness and backwardness that spread among British and French commentators. Several memoirs directly attacked the autobiographies and statements of French generals such as Suchet and Duhesme, seeking to undermine the influence of these accounts. 'French accounts and especially those of General Duhesme do not contain one word of truth', wrote one officer, 'and the reader will admire in them the science of lying possessed by the French, something which has contributed not a little to the achievement of their designs.'[35]

Meanwhile, in the context of continued post-war upheaval in Spain, memoirs were occasionally used as instruments of international political intrigue. In the early 1820s, following the restoration of the absolutist king Ferdinand VII by an invading French army, networks of liberal exiles formed across Europe, with many Spanish veterans seeking refuge in London, among them former guerrilla leader Francisco Espoz y Mina. Encouraged by his companions, Mina published a Peninsular War autobiography with the

32 Leighton S. James and Sheona Davies, 'Constructing a Literary Memory of the 1812 Russian Campaign in German Central Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century', in Joseph Clarke and John Horne (eds), *Militarized Cultural Encounters in the Long Nineteenth Century: Making War, Mapping Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 275.

33 Hagemann, *Revisiting Prussia's Wars against Napoleon*, 391.

34 Francisco Ballesteros, *Respetuosos Descargos que el Teniente General D. Francisco Ballesteros ofrece á la generosa nación española* (Algeciras: Don Juan Bautista Contillo, 1813).

35 Francisco Xavier Cabanes, *Historia de las operaciones del exército de Cataluña. En la guerra de la Usurpacion, campaña primera* (Barcelona: Brusi, 1815), 8.

aim of stirring up international sympathy for the ongoing liberal cause and gathering financial support for the exiled community. Produced by a fashionable London printer, the book became one of the few Spanish memoirs from the Napoleonic period to be published in English, spreading Mina's narrative of patriotic resistance against the oppressive French invaders among the genteel households and *Times* readers of the day.[36]

Publishing Memoirs

As we have seen, there were enormous national and regional differences that resulted in differing publication histories. In France, a good number of memoirs were published during the Restoration, in the 1820s and 1830s, but the publication of war memoirs did not reach a peak until the 1880s and 1890s, after the defeat of Napoleon III at the hands of the combined Prusso-German army in 1870. In Germany, the publication of memoirs had a tendency to focus on the 'Wars of Liberation' of 1813 to 1815, and to peak during the anniversaries commemorating the end of the wars (1840 for the twenty-fifth, 1865 for the fiftieth, and 1915 for the hundredth).[37] The lateness with which these memoirs were published may have in part been due to the consequences of writing accounts that sometimes contradicted the honour of the Prussian military.[38] In Russia, the vast majority of memoirs touch on the Patriotic War of 1812, and were written in three waves, before 1819, around 1830 and again in the 1850s and 1860s, around the fiftieth anniversary of the war. The war obliged Russians to reflect on their own personal experiences within the wider context of the wars.[39] In Britain, memoirs appear to have reached a peak in the 1820s and 1830s, at least as far as the Spanish campaign is concerned, with a smattering of memoirs appearing throughout the nineteenth century.[40] The Peninsular Wars and Waterloo dominate the British literature, but one also has to take into account the vast array of naval memoirs, which have yet to be treated in a scholarly fashion. In Spain, we know that at least 114 'memoirs' were written directly in response to the

36 Greig, *Dead Men Telling Tales*, 55–8.
37 Hagemann, *Revisiting Prussia's Wars against Napoleon*, 303–4.
38 Ibid., 311, 316–17. Of the 129 German military memoirs published before 1875, 67 of them deal with the Russian campaign.
39 Alexander M. Martin, 'The 1812 War and the Civilizing Process in Russia', in Hartley et al.(eds), *Russia and the Napoleonic Wars*, 228–42, argues that the Napoleonic Wars were an important moment in the 'civilizing process' in Russia, and that war memoirs accelerated that process; and Saburova, 'The Patriotic War of 1812', 246–9.
40 Greig, *Dead Men Telling Tales*, 3, 12–13, 145.

conflict, most published between 1808 and 1818, with possibly as many again in Portuguese.[41]

One constant among Napoleonic memoirs was that they tended to outlive (and out-travel) their authors. Many were only first published after the author's death, and a significant minority were reprinted, translated and re-released in new editions as time went on. This meant that more people were involved in the memoir's history and in the communication of the stories contained within than simply the author themselves. Family members could play a substantial role in mediating what parts of their relative's manuscript made it into print, and were sometimes responsible for the dryness of a veteran's published account, having excised every potentially scandalous reference to their private lives, wives, personal opinions and enigmatic anecdotes (the passage about a 'rascally Monk' reportedly removed from General Napier's original text by his son is a tantalising example). Publishers also intervened in the presentation of memoirs, restricting the number and quality of images, approving changes and setting sale and discount prices. In France and Britain at the end of the century, schoolmasters, literary critics and amateur historians found, edited and published long-forgotten memoirs, diversifying the audiences to which these old accounts of war were marketed.[42] Finally, the lack of international copyright law before 1884 and the difficulty of enforcing it afterwards meant that Napoleonic memoirs were easily reprinted abroad, with many, especially those in English and French, making their way to the United States.[43]

Memoirs and the Memory of the Napoleonic Wars

There is little doubt, given the number of these memoirs, that publishers recognised the reading public's interest in the wars. Memories of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars had a tremendous impact not only on the ways in which they were remembered, but possibly also on how subsequent wars were conceived. That at least was the contention of the German historian, George Mosse, who argued that the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars lay at the heart of the 'myth of the war experience' in Germany, and quite possibly also in France and Britain, right up to the outbreak of the First

41 Fernando Durán López, 'Fuentes autobiográficos españolas para el estudio de la Guerra de la Independencia', in Francisco Miranda Rubio (ed.), *Fuentes Documentales para el Estudio de la Guerra de la Independencia* (Pamplona: Ediciones Eunate, 2003), 47–120; Greig, *Dead Men Telling Tales*, 9, 93–6, 107.

42 Greig, *Dead Men Telling Tales*, 167–74, 179–85. 43 Ibid., 188, 191–2.

World War.[44] That is, by creating a romanticised image of the wars, war throughout the nineteenth century and up until the First World War was largely seen as positive.

It is true that a good number of war memoirs tend to romanticise certain aspects of life in the military, portraying war as an adventure, as glamorous even. The romanticised aspects of remembering may have been born of nostalgia, a longing for a time in the past when the veteran felt most alive and life was more exciting than the humdrum civilian life in which he wrote, but it may also possibly have been born of a real longing for war. That is why General Bigarré was able to assert that, '[w]hoever has not known military life cannot have an idea of the happiness one enjoys when young, robust and of an adventurous character to make war in a renowned regiment, and to serve with officers who think highly of you and with soldiers who are ready to follow you'.[45] It is also true that some memoirs were decidedly anti-war in tone, but again this varied enormously from one country to another. It was especially the case of the French memoirs written in the years after the fall of Napoleon; they tended to be critical of both the Emperor and the wars he fought, especially those after 1812.[46] That only really changed after his death.

At the same time, however, memoirs can also underline the brutality and horror of war, and this across all nationalities, although some more explicitly than others. Alexander Mercer, who was a gunner with the British army, recalled the first man that fell among their ranks at Waterloo. It was an accident. Gunner Butterworth, 'one of the greatest pickles in the troop' (that is, a tearaway), had both his arms blown off below the elbow as he stumbled and fell before a canon just as it went off. He looked up 'most piteously in my face', Mercer recalled, but he was too busy firing the cannon to help him. He later found out that Butterworth managed to get to the rear, only to bleed to death.[47]

We can conclude from this that many veterans had an ambivalent relationship with war and their military past. The problem for the historian is to understand just how widespread and influential the war memoir really was.

44 George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6–7, 9–10, 19–20.

45 Auguste-Julien Bigarré, *Mémoires du Général Bigarré, 1775–1813* (Paris: Éditions du Grenadier, 2002), 127.

46 Philip Dwyer, 'Public Remembering, Private Reminiscing: French Military Memoirs and the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars', *French Historical Studies*, 33:2 (2010), 250; Petiteau, *Écrire la mémoire*, 183–211.

47 Alexander Cavalié Mercer, *Journal of the Waterloo Campaign*, 2 vols (Edinburgh and London: W. Blackwood, 1870), Vol. I, 316–17.

Matilda Greig contends that the genre was popular and attracted a wide readership, lending weight to the argument that it did much to shape people's idea of war.[48] The connection between the two is not, however, easy to demonstrate. The nineteenth century was a period of an expanding public sphere, of mass media, as well as of mass conscription. It was also a period in which the major powers, including France, were involved in wars on a reasonably regular basis. The French invaded Spain (again) in 1823 and from the 1830s were involved in wars of colonisation in Algeria, Africa and Indochina, as well as taking part in the Crimean War from 1853–6, war in Italy against Austria in 1859, and the Franco-German War in 1870–1. Likewise, Prussia, Denmark, Austria and many of the German states were involved in the struggles both within the German lands and beyond, including the war over Schleswig-Holstein in 1848–51, the Crimean War, Prussia's war against Denmark in 1864, and her war with Austria in 1866. And all of this before the outbreak of war in 1914.

It is interesting to speculate on the degree to which memoirs from the Napoleonic Wars may have influenced the ways in which people perceived later nineteenth-century wars. It is possible that memoirs played a role in communicating the memory of the wars right up to the outbreak of the First World War. The centenary of the invasion of Russia in 1812, for example, resulted in the publication of previously published German memoirs as well as the publication of new material.[49] Moreover, the memoirs may have reinforced national stereotypes and longstanding national tensions, between the French and the Germans, for example. It is no coincidence that there is a spike in the production of memoirs in both Germany and France after the war of 1870–1. In addition, the continued interest in memoirs at the end of the century by leading British and French publishing houses such as Longman, Plon and Hachette supports the idea of a renewed public appetite for Napoleonic stories, especially when repackaged with colourful illustrations and eye-catching titles.[50] The possible influence of these war memoirs on the idea of war may not just stem from the original texts' reach or relevance, but also from how people later in time chose to re-use them.

Of course, speculate is all we can do for the moment – there have been few in-depth studies of the topic, and little systematic work on readership.

48 Greig, *Dead Men Telling Tales*, 3–4, 146–61.

49 James and Davies, 'Constructing a Literary Memory of the 1812 Russian Campaign', in Clarke and Horne (eds), *Militarized Cultural Encounters in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 274.

50 Greig, *Dead Men Telling Tales*, 210–13.

Furthermore, as Mark Hewitson has shown for the German lands, other media such as newspapers, pamphlets, sermons and popular catechisms, as well as photography later in the century, probably had just as much influence on the ways in which wars were perceived and later remembered.[51] Perhaps all we can conclude at this stage is that the memory of war goes through a cycle: the act of remembering and putting ink to paper tends to result in a romanticisation of war; a new generation experiences the brutality of war, increasingly horrific as the technology of killing improves; and they in turn fall into the trap of romanticising war when they later write their memoirs. The wars throughout the nineteenth century were romanticised in this way, as much in 1815 as in 1870, in both the press and in the memoirs of the day.

Conclusion

Historians recognise that the memoir is central to understanding how wars are remembered, but memoirs and memory were not always consistent with broader nationalist narratives of the wars. They could also contest those narratives, and in doing so became political in the sense that they could challenge regimes in power. This was the case in France, Germany and Spain. As Peter Fritzsche has shown, letters and personal testimonies 'translated experiences from the public to private realm and back again' and in the process could challenge 'authoritative narratives' as often as they supported them.[52] However, we do not know the extent of the impact memoirs had on the development of the memory of the wars in the nineteenth century. In any event, it would have varied in what was a fragmented, regionalised public sphere. Most memoirs were only ever published once and then forgotten. Many more were written and never published, or at least not in the lifetime of the veteran. A few were translated into other languages, although more often in order to reject the perspective of a former enemy than to understand it.[53] Only a few survive in print to the present day, re-edited and published over the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. That these survive at all is rather remarkable: the reminiscences of a semi-literate French veteran like Captain Coignet, for instance, seem to have made enough of a mark on the

51 Hewitson, *Absolute War*, and Mark Hewitson, *The People's Wars: Histories of Violence in the German Lands, 1820–1888* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

52 Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present*, 41.

53 See, for example, Matilda Greig, 'Traduire la guerre au XIXe siècle: Réinventions et circulations des mémoires militaires de la guerre d'Espagne, 1808–1914', *Hypothèses* 20 (2017), 329–38.

collective memory of the wars to continue to be read today.[54] Exactly how and why, though, remains something of a mystery.

That memoirs were used for political purposes is also evident, although the extent to which this occurred again varied from country to country. In France and in Prussia at the end of the nineteenth century, memoirs were imbued with patriotic meaning by a readership caught in a nationalist narrative, a meaning, moreover, that their authors did not necessarily intend them to have. Memoirs are useful, this chapter maintains, in order to understand how wars were remembered and represented, but as Annette Wieviorka has argued for Holocaust testimonies, witnesses put pen to paper, 'using the language of the time in which they are delivered and in response to questions and expectations motivated by political and ideological concerns'.[55] The historian's task is to unravel those 'political and ideological concerns' so that not only do we get an insight into contemporary preoccupations, but also into the relationship between the individual, history and memory.

54 See, for example, Bob Carruthers (ed.), *Soldier of the Empire: The Note-books of Captain Coignet* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2012). The first edition of this memoir appeared in the mid-nineteenth century: Jean-Roch Coignet, *Aux Vieux de la Vieille! Souvenirs de Jean-Roch Coignet, soldat de la 96e demi-brigade*, 2 vols (Auxerre: Perriquet, 1851–3).

55 Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), xii.