

NAPOLEON BY STANLEY KUBRICK

A commentary on the first eleven pages

by J. S. Bernstein

The *Napoleon* screenplay by Stanley Kubrick appeared online sometime before the year 2000. It has since disappeared from view. But it has recently been announced that the Kubrick estate is preparing to have *Napoleon* published in book form. Anyone who is familiar with Kubrick will welcome the *Napoleon* script with great excitement. It is an extraordinarily vivid read, a splendid work of narrative art.

The *Napoleon* script is one of Kubrick's unrealized projects, a magnificent "what might have been." The script is dated September 29, 1969, and while the text has a certain polish and concision, suggesting that much work had already been devoted to each individual scene as well as to the overall structure, the scenes are not numbered, which indicates that this particular version of *Napoleon* is not a shooting script. The specific draft number, however, is missing from the title page. There is no way of knowing how much more work Kubrick may have wanted to undertake on the way to arriving at a shooting script. That said, the screenplay seems closer to a final draft than to a first draft. Strict structural symmetries that are characteristic of Kubrick's films from 2001 onward are also evident in the tightly constructed, well wrought *Napoleon*.

WHY ONLY THE FIRST ELEVEN PAGES?

A traditional rule of thumb for screenwriters is that the first ten pages of a screenplay are the most important.¹ If the first ten pages fail to properly set up fundamental structural components of the story, the screenplay will be in danger of being received as deficient.

Kubrick's *Napoleon* is an exemplar of this imperative of proper screenplay structure. The first eleven pages of *Napoleon* are a well-rounded, unified whole that sets in motion a variety of themes which will be expanded upon as the story progresses. Kubrick communicates a great deal in only eleven pages. The story is told with expert narrative economy.

The fade in to scene 1, and then the fade out at the end of scene 13, indicate that the first thirteen scenes are a structural "block," a self-enclosed section, a component of the larger framework of the film, which is composed of six blocks, or parts. The block of thirteen scenes comprising the first eleven pages of the script is Part I of *Napoleon*. Consider the commentary that follows as a coming attraction for the screenplay.

FADE IN:

1. INT. BEDROOM CORSICA – NIGHT

This introductory scene prior to the main titles is a "thesis scene" setting the tone and defining aspects of the main character. Many thematic currents run through this mellow opening moment.

The film, which will involve complex battle scenes and the excitement of world conquest, begins quietly, delicately. Night, candles, comfort, patina of olden times: the soothing familial ambience recalls the gentle atmosphere of Lischen's home in *Barry Lyndon*. It is an ordinary household. Scene 1 is a view of the simple pleasures of peaceful domesticity.

While many films begin with a character waking up from a night's sleep, *Napoleon* opens with the main character looking drowsy, poised on the cusp of falling asleep. The four-year-old boy is tucked in bed, sucking his thumb and cradling a teddy bear while his mother reads him a bedtime story. This surprising and unconventional beginning suggests that all of Napoleon's life to come will be somewhat in the manner of a dream. Fundamental to *Napoleon* is the theme of "dreams" and the "dreamlike." In the opening paragraph of the screenplay, the word "dreamily" sticks out as an important word ("dreamily sucks his thumb"); the adverb defines Napoleon's character.

That his brother Joseph is already asleep beside him suggests, through this cinematic shorthand, that Napoleon and his mother share a bond that is deeper and more significant than her relationship with Joseph.

An omniscient narrator imparts some factual details. Napoleon is presented as a mommy's boy. This weak, sickly child was smothered with a mother's love, and grew up as the center of attention in the household. This suggests that Napoleon's eventual triumphs in the social and political spheres originate from a particular inner personal need. His drive to become the most powerful man in the world is motivated primarily by his (childlike) desire for love and attention. The historical Napoleon has often been described, by critics of his time as well as by subsequent historians, as being a man devoted exclusively to self-glorifying actions. Kubrick, having the freedom of the artist, traces Napoleon's need for fame and renown back to the comfort he felt when enfolded in his mother's love. According to the workings of Napoleon's psychology, world fame would serve as a surrogate for maternal attention.

First Napoleon is the center of his family, later on he becomes the center of the European world. This scene inaugurates the theme of “from humble beginnings came . . .”

In the scene, a mature Napoleon, in voice-over, says of his mother, “She would do anything for me.” This common expression takes on a sort of grandeur when it comes from the mouth of a man who lived on the largest scale, a man who became the most important personage in Europe for a time, a man who, so to speak, “could have done anything.” The idea of “anything,” of being up to the task, of fulfilling the promise, of carrying out amazing deeds, is powerfully resonant, coming from Napoleon.

The narrator’s remark about “St. Helena” is significant (“In middle age, he would write about her [his mother] from St. Helena”). The beginning of *Napoleon* is already looking toward its end. Indeed—just as in Napoleon’s first scene he is falling asleep, so in his final scene in the film, which takes place on St. Helena, he awakes from a dream. This is a prime example of the multilayered composition of *Napoleon* which is distinguished by many structural symmetries.

Various themes, techniques, and character moments employed in the *Napoleon* script will be used in Kubrick films that followed. The technique of the main character’s voice-over reappears in *A Clockwork Orange*, while the omniscient narrator, relating historical data, returns in *Barry Lyndon*. As in *Barry Lyndon*, sometimes the narrator of *Napoleon* leaps ahead of the story and tells the audience of what is to come, a dramatic technique that adds resonances of “grim implacable fate” and the “tragic irreversibility of time” to certain scenes. A teddy bear and mommy’s boy figure prominently in *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*.

Themes introduced in scene 1: the feminine, the dreamy, the well-loved child, humble beginnings, the frailty of the body, storytelling.

There is a fundamental reason why storytelling is a prominent theme in the first scene of the film. The historical Napoleon's great fame resulted from the stories, rumors, and gossip of his martial exploits which spread throughout Europe.

MAIN TITLES

2. INT. DORMITORY BRIENNE – NIGHT

This scene inaugurates themes which will be amplified in scenes to come. A young Napoleon wakes up at the Royal Military College on a “freezing winter morning” and audibly reacts to the discovery that the water in his pitcher had turned to ice during the night; and in the process embarrasses himself in the eyes of his fellow students.

Napoleon, age nine, is presented as an archetypal hick from the sticks. Unused to the cold, he is shivering, still the sensitive boy. That he is described as “sun-tanned” in this wintry environment emphasizes his fish-out-of-water condition.

He starts out as a naive boy from a sheltered environment, knowing nothing of the world. Juxtaposed to the intelligent and shrewd man to come is the raw youth who has never even seen ice in his life. Napoleon's outburst—“Who has been putting glass in my pitcher?”—reminds us of *Barry Lyndon's* “Lad! Can I have a new beaker? This one's full of grease!” It is an impulsive statement which brings a storm of disrespect down upon him.

Napoleon is presented as someone set apart, alienated from the rest of the boys who show him no kindness. Napoleon is learning that being cruel comes naturally to too many people. There is no motherly love here. He is among people but he feels all alone. This sets the stage for the “self-made man” theme in scenes to come: if Napoleon is going to make it in the world, it is going to have to be under his own steam. That the other children laugh at his ignorance serves to motivate Napoleon to become a superior student, to prevent further mocking laughter and rude jibes. The rest of the screenplay could have been given the subtitle, “The Education of Napoleon.”²

Now comes the introduction of one of the major stylistic techniques of the first eleven pages of *Napoleon*: dynamic contrasts. Scene 2 takes place in winter. Scene 3 takes place in late summer.

3. EXT. FARM BRIENNE – DAY

Napoleon is still the dreamy boy, described by Kubrick as “lost in thought” with a “book under his arm.” He is a loner, a thinker. Sitting under a tree, he is set apart from the rest of the boys, who are eating an afternoon meal at a “rough table.”

Describing the sun-drenched location, Kubrick uses such words as “lovely” and “beautifully colored.” That Kubrick seeks to capture the beautiful with his camera lens reminds us of both *Barry Lyndon* and *Eyes Wide Shut*.

That Napoleon is reading “Caesar’s conquest of Gaul,” as the script has it, is another oft-used film technique. In years to come, his childhood dreams will become a reality.

Once more the boys taunt Napoleon, going so far as to allude to his mother in a sarcastic way. They invade his peace and quiet—it is the first invasion of the film. Napoleon has come to learn that the world outside of the comfy family environment is a harsh one. He knows that if he is going to succeed in the world, he will have to push back when people aggravate him.

A class distinction is emphasized here. Bremond and Dufour, his two antagonists, are French noblemen's sons. Bremond speaks elegantly (“Aren't we terribly conscientious about our studies?”). Napoleon, however, is not polished like these other boys, and uses earthy language, which emphasizes his distance from the others. The theme of the social hierarchy is significant. Later in the screenplay, Napoleon will move in the highest society and will come to have the polished character of the likes of Bremond and Dufour. He will attain great heights in spite of his humble beginnings. These upper class boys are a glimpse into things to come for Napoleon.

Now comes the first fight in the film. The young Napoleon stands up for himself, unafraid to fight with two boys at once, even though Bremond is older and bigger than him. This comical moment suggests the motif, “from humble beginnings came . . .”

The other boys are presented as adversaries. No childhood friend of Napoleon's is seen or mentioned. The early scenes of the film emphasize his *aloneness*.

4. INT. MILITARY TAILOR – DAY

Napoleon gazes into a mirror, regarding himself in his military uniform. This short scene continues the themes of being lost in thought and set apart.

“Dress makes the man.” This simple scene is elegant visual shorthand for Napoleon’s growth and progress. It conveys the passage of time and his growing maturity in the most economical means possible: a single shot (possibly).

That Napoleon is posted to a “crack regiment” (so the narrator imparts to us) implies that he is a superb student.³ This is the first pointed use of the theme of the “self-made man.” A second theme introduced here, one which will be further stressed before the end of Part I, is the concept of “performance,” specifically the theatricality of social roles (adulthood being the phenomenon of the assuming of poses). Napoleon is getting dressed, assuming a role, preparing to act on the world’s stage, already looking the part.

5. EXT. FIRING RANGE – DAY

6. EXT. DRILL FIELD – DAY

7. EXT. FIELD - DAY

These three scenes are a montage of the teenage Napoleon’s military training. He gains instruction in firing a cannon, firing a musket, and map-reading. Napoleon is presented as part of a group, just one more soldier at this time. The “man apart” has found a niche for himself.

The dynamic contrasts continue. Scene 5 takes place in hot summer, scene 6 in snowy winter, and scene 7 in windy spring.

In scene 7, the Captain and the young soldiers struggle to read a map in windy weather. This is an interesting moment. It sets up a contrast between the coldly rational map and the chaos principle of the natural world. The map is a symbol of reason, while the wind is a random element. This is a significant distinction, because of what comes later—Napoleon’s downfall at Waterloo, when the *unexpected* overtakes the *organized*.

The map scene has a further significance. It looks forward to scene 18, in which Napoleon’s big break comes when he addresses a room of high government and military officials while gesturing at a large map of the port of Toulon. His plan to capture Toulon succeeds, and he is promptly promoted to Brigadier General.

Maps, in fact, will recur throughout the film as a visual motif of Napoleon’s warmaking exploits and empire building. The map is a primary symbol of *Napoleon*.

8. INT. ROOM – NIGHT

The study in contrasts continue. The military montage included the loud sounds of artillery and musket fire. Scene 8 is quiet and subdued.

The teenaged Napoleon is alone with his books by candlelight. Once again he is set apart from the other officers, who are outside of Napoleon’s room, producing sounds of revelry. (Kubrick describes them as “less conscientious officers.”)

This is a tableau of a young man educating himself. Napoleon, a sensitive soul, reads poetry and philosophy along with books on military subjects. This conveys that the

mature Napoleon will not be a simpleminded, power-mad warmonger, but a man of intellectual refinement, a man sympathetic to the niceties of aesthetics and science. His educational labors will endow him with an intuitive sense for battlefield geometry. Moreover, this scene looks forward to Napoleon's time as leader of France, when, in the narrator's words (in scene 80), he "gave proof of his brilliant legislative, administrative and organizational powers." All of his reading now will serve him in good stead later. There is a moral lesson encoded in this simple scene: study hard, sharpen your intellect, and you can make your future, you can choose between destinies. Alternatively, party the night away like the less conscientious officers, and you might eventually end up powerless to direct your fate to your best advantage.

The omniscient narrator not only imparts historical data but also speaks of Napoleon's inner life. Napoleon has "moods" which are "complex and varied." This implies a feminine aspect to Napoleon's character.⁴ The feminine theme will return in a variety of ways. In scene 104, for example, Napoleon refers to his new friend Tsar Alexander in voice-over in this suggestive manner: "If Alexander were a woman, I think I should fall passionately in love with him." In scene 111, Napoleon dances a waltz with a male associate, Murat.

Through voice-over, Napoleon speaks of his alienation from the rest of the world. His line, "I find only sadness in everything around me" is a significant marker of his inner life. *Sadness*, because he is feeling sad about himself: he is alone, without close friends, far from his mother's love. Like so many teenagers, he sees himself as sad and lonely, and is unhappy about not receiving the attention he craves or believes he deserves.

Napoleon doesn't like the world as it is, so he will be driven to change it.

9. INT. INN – NIGHT

Once more the theme of Napoleon's alienation from the others is the focus. He is, as the saying goes, "alone in a crowd." The image of him sitting among a dozen officers who are drinking and singing songs is put into relief by his voice-over in the previous scene, in which he stated that he will never feel comfortable in the society of men. Hence this scene of boozy camaraderie is a bittersweet one. That Napoleon is described by Kubrick as the "youngest" in the group perpetuates the fish-out-of-water theme.

The image of soldiers singing songs boisterously recalls similar scenes in *Barry Lyndon*.

10. EXT. FOREST – DAWN

Napoleon, "smartly uniformed," walks through a forest with a "lovely young girl" named Caroline Columbier, and they stop to pick cherries together. Scene 10, a vignette of a romance that goes nowhere, presents the first view of the teenaged Napoleon's reticence with women. While the narrator defines Napoleon's behavior with Caroline as a "flirtation," Napoleon stresses in his voice-over that "our whole business consisted in eating cherries together."

This scene, and the next two, present two views of the feminine which will define women in Napoleon's eyes: the "angel" and the "whore." Later in the film, Josephine de Beauharnais, his first wife, will embody aspects of both.

Once again, Kubrick stresses the “beauty” of the location. That the summery scene is “hazy” suggests the delicacy of a dream or memory. The dreamlike quality of the scene has great significance for the screenwriter of *Napoleon*. Dreams, and the dreamy, are enduring themes of the screenplay from its beginning to its end. In Scene 23, Kubrick describes a clash between soldiers and citizens on the streets of Paris as being composed of “dreamlike” shots. In scene 103, Tsar Alexander describes his friendship with Napoleon as “something out of a dream.” In Napoleon’s last scene of the film, a most powerful scene, the subject of his dialogue is a vivid dream he has just awoken from.

11. INT. LYON STREET – NIGHT

The dynamic contrasts continue. Scene 10 took place on a lovely summer morning, while scene 11 takes place on a dour winter’s night. These contrasts are cinematic embodiments of Napoleon’s changing “moods.” That these tonal changes come thick and fast adds liveliness to the flow of scenes.

Napoleon meets a teenage prostitute. As described by Kubrick, he looks at her “uncertainly” and then is at a “loss for conversation.” This scene sustains the theme of his reticence with women.

A snowflake lands on the girl’s nose. This is a cute, delicate, warm moment—one of the warmest moments in the entire Kubrick canon. Moreover it is also another instance of dynamic contrast: a warm moment on the dismally cold street.

That Napoleon and the girl speak about the weather emphasizes Napoleon’s status as an ordinary man. The weather is *the* conversational gambit when strangers meet in public.

In scene 8, Napoleon admitted in a voice-over, “Life is a burden for me.” Here in scene 11, Napoleon speaks of the girl’s “great burden” of having to make money to support her mother. The repetition of the word is significant. He thinks he knows what a great burden is all about, lost as he is in the flux of his changing moods and his ongoing loneliness. The use of the word “burden” here is poignant. It links Napoleon with the sweet girl. In using the psychologically charged word “burden,” he signifies that he shares an affinity with her. He, too, is fragile in a way, in need of tender loving care.⁵

But Napoleon is hesitant to act. So the simple girl takes the initiative, forcing him to react. This is the first instance in the film of *role reversal*. He lets this innocent girl have her way with him. She leads him along from first to last, similar to how Domino overawes Dr. Bill in *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Napoleon agrees to bring the girl back to his room, and yet the scene still maintains the theme of his alienation and loneliness. When she asks him if he is staying with a friend, he answers with a curt “No.” The girl will be his friend, but only if he pays her for her time. This is a sweetly sad scene, the meeting of two lonely souls.

The theme of Napoleon identifying with the “common sort” returns in scene 23, when General Napoleon spends his time chatting with a lowly bartender rather than with the elite of Paris at an elegant high society party.

12. INT. HOTEL ROOM – NIGHT

Kubrick describes the hotel room as “cheap,” which continues the theme of Napoleon deriving from humble beginnings, of being an ordinary guy at heart. The private interior recalls Napoleon’s home environment in scene 1; the affection this girl will show Napoleon is a subtle recollection of his mother’s love.⁶

Shivering naked in bed, the girl refers to the sheets as feeling like “ice.” It is a significant reference. The word takes us back to scene 2, which featured the ice in young Napoleon’s pitcher. This is expert cinematic shorthand. The word “ice” quietly emphasizes Napoleon’s childlike quality in this scene. The significant repetition of a word to give psychological depth to a characterological moment recalls the use of “burden” in scene 11.

The girl addresses Napoleon as “sir” eight times in scene 11, but not even once in scene 12, as she is on more familiar terms with him now. This may be a small point but it is a significant one. The screenwriter’s technique serves to give the girl a depth, a “lived reality.” Kubrick is creating a character, not a character type.

Napoleon is reluctant to get undressed, yet more evidence of his shyness. He only gets undressed *after* he blows out the candle.

An echo of this scene comes much later, in scene 115, in which Napoleon calms his newly wedded second wife, Marie-Louise, Archduchess of Austria, a trembling, innocent young woman whom he has brought into the marriage bed. Before she will submit to him, she says, “Blow out the candle, please.” At that moment Kubrick would have us think back to scene 12, in order to put in relief how much Napoleon has changed. By the time of scene 115, Napoleon has had experience with a countless number of women, and

is now a confident lover, having come a long way from his early bashfulness and reticence. (This progression mirrors Barry Lyndon's journey from Nora Brady to whores and maids.) Finally, in scene 177, the middle-aged Napoleon, now blasé about women and sex, responds to the arrival of his latest mistress "gloomily." It is the gloom of a man who has experienced an ample sex life, but miserable love life.

TITLE: 1789 – REVOLUTION

13. EXT. TOWN SQUARE – DAY

The narrative use of contrasts continue. We cut from a tiny room in the coldest of winters to a town square "jammed" with three hundred people in the summer.

This scene fulfills scene 4, Napoleon in military dress regarding himself in the mirror. Here he will graduate from reticent boyish teenager to strong, confident, authoritative man. The military suits him, while so much else doesn't (friends, women).

This is a magnificent scene, the first scene with high drama and historical scope. Napoleon makes an impressive entrance at the head of a column of soldiers to the beat of a solitary drum. Napoleon knows how to cut a figure. It is a virtuoso display of pomp and might.

This is the first scene in which Napoleon is seen to be fully grown-up. Napoleon has come to confront a Revolutionary Committee which is in the act of making a presentation to the crowd of townspeople. His allusion to how France remains in the control of the "proper authorities" gives his character weight. It communicates that he

has been entrusted with the responsibility to protect the standing government. Napoleon confronts the rebels, and we in the audience are on his side, at least at first, because he acts with the profound confidence of someone who feels totally in the right.

Kubrick describes Napoleon as “speaking for the crowd.” This is significant. Napoleon knows how to work an audience. Napoleon keeps referring to the crowd as “honest men” . . . “these good people.” He has an innate sense of style, of hitting the right note. There is a sublime theatricality about his performance here. He has the presence of mind to describe himself as “a simple officer in the army,” an oratorical ploy to win over the crowd of peasants and town workers.

This brilliantly devised scene features both *role reversal* and *dynamic contrast*. Varlac, the revolutionary leader, is an earthy man. He makes an obscene gesture at Napoleon. Napoleon, in contrast, is polite in his threats, addressing the man as “Monsieur Varlac.” Faced with Varlac’s sarcasm and aggressive talk, the grown-up Napoleon stands cool and composed. At the moment at least, it looks as if Napoleon has learned to master his moods. Here, Napoleon has become the Bremond/Dufour character, while Varlac recalls the young Napoleon. No longer will Napoleon be pushed around by anyone. The audience is surprised that he is so strong and firm here, considering that in the previous scene he was markedly bashful and hesitant.

This is the first scene in *Napoleon* with tension and suspense, fulfilling the promise raised by the war training montage. Napoleon announces that he holds a warrant for the arrest of Varlac on the charge of murder. Varlac resists Napoleon’s order to give himself up. “I will carry out your execution,” Napoleon warns him, and it turns out to be no idle threat. All of Napoleon’s sanctimonious talk of “murder” will be juxtaposed uneasily to his own

brazen act of blowing out Varlac's brains. Napoleon counting down from five to one is a breathless moment. The cold, calculated mechanics of the execution reveal a new, and dark, shade to Napoleon's character. Kubrick describes Napoleon aiming his revolver "carefully." (This recalls Barry Lyndon aiming his pistol carefully at John Quin.) Some members of the audience (the hypothetical audience of Kubrick's unrealized film) may be shocked by Napoleon's behavior. Yet Napoleon stresses that he is only acting in accordance with the law of the land. The execution of Varlac is a complex moment. Napoleon's beastly behavior has the aura of a rational act. In Napoleon's mind, it's not murder, it's capital punishment, the ancient principle of the *lex talionis*. Even so, it looks like a cold-blooded murder all its own. Another point can be made: Napoleon is doing what he has to do in order to get ahead in the world. He gets the job done.

The script suggests that in this scene Napoleon presents an icy demeanor—a neat thematic resonance that harks back to scene 2. The nine-year-old Napoleon, impulsive and hot-blooded, wonders what ice is, and later on, in scene 13, he has become cold and hard himself, presenting a "frosty" manner to the world.

This is the first example of what Kubrick, in the Production Notes following the scenes of the script, describes as Napoleon's "ruthlessness" and "inflexible will." There is something unsettling in the combination of Napoleon's line, "A confessed murderer has just been shot" with his own murder of Varlac. The audience is faced with a moral dilemma. When Napoleon shoots Varlac, the audience recoils from Napoleon's act. Suddenly Napoleon has distanced himself from the audience. He is not only a man capable of murder but a man with the will to carry it through with the ease of dusting off one's clothes. Napoleon has become more than an ordinary man. He is a "natural killer."

The crowd gasps. It is the first big response he has elicited in his life. Napoleon, for his part, remains perfectly at ease. At the end of the scene he addresses the stunned members of the crowd, ordering them to return to their homes. It is the first glimpse into the Napoleon as ruler of men.

FADE OUT

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FINAL REMARKS

1. Part I of *Napoleon* has a well-balanced structure of six interiors and seven exteriors. The scenes comprise a kaleidoscope of emotional colors. We are shown a mother's love, a child's loneliness, tough military training, a wistful failed romance, a suggestion of sex, shocking violence, and the spectacle of a historical moment. Napoleon ages swiftly, progressing from age four in the first scene to age nine in the second, then sixteen, then seventeen, then seventeen or eighteen, then, in the last scene, twenty.

2. Consider the contrasts. WEATHER: scene **2**, winter; **3**, summer; **5**, summer; **6**, winter; **7**, spring; **10**, summer; **11** and **12**, winter; **13**, summer. MOODS: scene **1**, quiet, harmonious; **2**, disharmony, division; **3**, harmony, then disharmony; **4**, harmony; **5**, **6** and **7**, war training montage; **8**, subdued and quiet; **9**, boisterous but bittersweet; **10**, hushed, enchanting; **11**, subdued, sad, "witheringly cold"; **12**, quiet, gentle; **13**, vast, dramatic, bloody.

3. The first eleven pages have an episodic structure, leapfrogging from scene to scene without a connecting story focus other than the personal life and times of Napoleon's

character. The character of Napoleon *is* the sole meaning of this first structural block. We get to know the main character in his different shades and moods. When scene 13 fades out and Part I ends, the introduction to Napoleon's character is completed. With the commencement of scene 14 comes the "real beginning" of the story, as it were, as from then on the scenes will be woven together with ongoing story threads.

4. The *Napoleon* screenplay is composed of six parts, each specified by a fade in and a fade out. There are also titles, ten of them, such as "1789: Revolution" and "The First Italian Campaign," demarcating sequences. These titles are not coordinated with the fades, and rather than serving deep structural functions, they seem to be used specifically to focus the audience's attention on a historical moment.

5. While the first eleven pages have a warmth and are character driven, later on the screenplay will cast a dispassionate, academic eye on its subject matter. At times the film becomes akin to a documentary, with the narrator expatiating, sometimes at surprising length, upon such historical subjects as Napoleon's innovations in warfare; and there is also a series of animated maps showing battlefields and army positions. But the main characters will never become lost amid the historical details. The documentary-like treatment of the film's historical matter will be set alongside scenes of domestic struggles between husband and wife. Napoleon's epic successes, such as his conquest of Egypt, will be juxtaposed to his private struggles with Josephine. The early scenes of Napoleon and the two girls prefigure this major structural component of the screenplay—the vicissitudes of the big-screen romance of Napoleon and Josephine.

6. Whole studies could be written on the similarities between *Napoleon* and *Barry Lyndon*. When Kubrick shelved the *Napoleon* script, many of the inspirations embodied in the

screenplay were refocused for use in *Barry Lyndon*. I pointed out some, but not all, of the *Barry Lyndon* connections in the first eleven pages of *Napoleon*. Both the overall conceptual viewpoint of *Napoleon*, as well as some of the story's minor details, will be reborn in *Barry Lyndon*. For example, for two minor rather than major examples, in scene 119, Napoleon's son rides in an elaborate cart pulled by two lambs, which reminds us of Barry's son Bryan (both his birthday party and his funeral); and scene 39, in which a troubled Napoleon stares vacantly into the flames of a camp fire, which is exactly what Barry does following the death of Captain Grogan.

7. While at first the screenplay is devoted exclusively to the character of Napoleon, later the script becomes overwhelmingly devoted to the mechanics of diplomacy and warfare. The film remains focused on character, and yet, like *Barry Lyndon*, it is also about a vanished world. In *Napoleon* Kubrick would have sought to recreate, no doubt with painstaking detail, the culture of Napoleon's time (both material details and "world views").

8. It would be a mistake to assume that the film, if it had been made, would have corresponded exactly with the words on the page. A screenplay is a guideline, a blueprint, and it seems plausible to assume that some of the dialogue scenes would have been reduced, along with some of the narrator's speeches.

9. Kubrick's camera would no doubt have captured expertly the rectilinear aesthetics and coolly elegant manners of the (final days of) the Age of Reason. Many of the compositions would surely have displayed the technical grace and visual symmetry that characterize the camerawork of *Barry Lyndon* (and all of Kubrick's films from 2001 on). To what degree Kubrick's camera would have augmented and transformed the

screenplay into something above and beyond what is on the page is something we will never know. As it stands, the screenplay is no more than a fragment of a lost project, a piece in a larger conceptual puzzle that can never be realized. When a man dies, so much dies with him.

That said, the screenplay suggests that *Napoleon* would have been a magnificent visual experience, a feast for the eyes. Epic in scope, the screenplay is full of grand imagery, notably in the final section, Napoleon's conquest of Russia, in which, for example, the French army marches into a deserted Moscow, which is described as an eerie ghost town. The battle scenes would have been grandiose and spectacular. The many sumptuous interiors and the splendor of the costumes would have contributed to the dazzling effect. In the Production Notes Kubrick relates that he has located an extremely fast lens which will allow him to shoot interiors by candlelight. Obviously *Napoleon* would have had the majesty and grandeur of *Barry Lyndon's* cinematic style. While *Napoleon* is the film that never was, *Barry Lyndon* was born from its ashes, and remains *Napoleon's* close relative.

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In the first eleven pages of the screenplay of *Napoleon*, the character of Napoleon is set up as both mommy's boy and tough cookie. He's dreamy, thoughtful, and bookish, and yet he's also capable of physically holding his own in a man's world. He is both soft and tough. Brilliant before a crowd, in private he's timid with women. Sensitive to poetry, he can also shoot a man in the head without batting an eyelid. By the end of Part I, Lieutenant Napoleon has graduated to man's man. Now he has the rest of the movie to live out. To fall in love, to make a friend, to win great fame, to die a lonely death.

Special thanks to Amanda Bernstein, Sue Vice, and Nick Swinglehurst.

¹ See, for example, the guides by Syd Field. Veteran screenwriter William Goldman says straight out, “The first fifteen pages are the most important of any screenplay.” *Adventures in the Screen Trade* (London: Futura, 1985), p. 106.

² Kubrick, who never received a college education, was himself a self-educated man, also a man who never ceased educating himself.

³ “Crack” being colloquial for “first-rate.”

⁴ The cliché is that men stand firm while women flow like the sea.

⁵ There is another resonance in the word “burden.” A story has come down through the years of how the historical Napoleon, strolling along, gave right-of-way to a man carrying something heavy. “Respect the burden,” was Napoleon’s explanation of his graciousness.

⁶ I think of Alexander the Great in Oliver Stone’s film telling his wife Roxane that she is only a “pale reflection” of his “mother’s heart.”