

# Politics, Prints, and a Posthumous Portrait: Delaroche's *Napoleon in his Study*

Alissa R. Adams

For fifteen years after he was banished to St. Helena, Napoleon Bonaparte's image was suppressed and censored by the Bourbon Restoration government of France.<sup>1</sup> In 1830, however, the July Monarchy under King Louis-Philippe lifted the censorship of Napoleonic imagery in the interest of appealing to the wide swath of French citizens who still revered the late Emperor—and who might constitute a threat if they were displeased with the government. The result was an outpouring of Napoleonic imagery including paintings, prints, and statues that celebrated the Emperor and his deeds. The prints, especially, hailed Napoleon as a hero and transformed him from an autocrat into a Populist hero. In 1838, in the midst of popular discontent with Louis-Philippe's foreign and domestic policies, the Countess of Sandwich commissioned Paul Delaroche to paint a portrait of Napoleon entitled *Napoleon in his Study* (Figure 1) to commemorate her family's connection to the Emperor. The portrait was closely modeled on an earlier work from 1812 of the same name by Jacques-Louis David (Figure 2), but made several simple but effective changes to the composition that reflected the idealization of the Emperor's features that was typical in Populist prints. Although Delaroche's portrait was clearly inspired by the David painting, its details and handling of the Emperor's face suggest that, rather than attempting to replicate the historical depiction of Napoleon's visage, Delaroche meant to evoke the idealized version of the Emperor that had become a staple of Populist print culture. By making this decision Delaroche revealed his familiarity with—and perhaps even his approval of—Populist reconfigurations of Napoleon's image.

I would like to express my gratitude for the advice, assistance, and opportunities to which I had access while writing this essay. Dr. Dorothy Johnson's suggestions and encouragement were vital resources when I originally wrote on this subject for my thesis. Her comments and suggestions continue to be invaluable contributions as I expand my work on this subject. I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge the influence of Stephen Bann, whose work on Delaroche has been a touchstone of and major influence on the research presented here. Finally, I am extremely grateful to the Department of Art History at Florida State University and the organizers of its Annual Graduate Symposium for the opportunity to present my findings.

<sup>1</sup> Sudhir Hazareesingh, *The Legend of Napoleon* (London: Granta Books, 2005), 73.

<sup>2</sup> Norman Ziff, *Paul Delaroche: A Study in Nineteenth-Century French History Painting* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977), 22.

By the time Delaroche was commissioned to paint *Napoleon in his Study* he had become known for his uncanny attention to detail and his gift for recreating historical visual culture with scholarly devotion. Throughout the early phase of his career he achieved fame for his carefully rendered *genre historique* paintings.<sup>2</sup> These paintings carefully replicated historical details and, because of this, gave Delaroche a reputation for creating meticulous depictions of historical figures and events.<sup>3</sup> This reputation seems to have informed the reception of his entire *oeuvre*. Indeed, upon viewing an oval bust version of the 1845 *Napoleon at Fontainebleau* the Duc de Coigny, a veteran of Napoleon's imperial army, is said to have exclaimed that he had "never seen such a likeness, that is the Emperor himself!"<sup>4</sup> Although the Duc de Coigny's assertion is suspect given the low likelihood of Delaroche ever having seen Napoleon's face, it eloquently attests to the perceived accuracy that was habitually used to describe Delaroche's paintings.

Such accuracy would have been of interest to the woman who commissioned Delaroche's *Napoleon in his Study*. The woman in question was Louisa Montagu. Montagu was not only the Countess of Sandwich, but also a patron of the arts, mother of the first wife of Napoleon's natural son Alexandre Walewski, and a liberal-minded supporter of Polish emigrés who had fled to France after the November Uprising against Russia. Delaroche scholar Stephen Bann has suggested that it was in the company of these Polish emigrés that she met Delaroche and decided to commission *Napoleon in his Study*.<sup>5</sup> Although her daughter had passed away shortly after marrying Napoleon's son, the Countess

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Stephen Bann, "Delaroche, Napoleon, and English Collectors," *Apollo* (1 October 2005): 24-31.

<sup>5</sup> For Delaroche and the dowager countess meeting in this context and Delaroche visiting Prince Czartoryski see Bann, "Delaroche, Napoleon," 26.

Delaroche's proximity to these emigrés, especially Prince Adam Czartoryski, is especially interesting in the context of this study. The Polish uprising against Russia occurred when it attempted to force the Polish army to suppress popular uprisings abroad (including the July Revolution), thus violating the Polish Constitution. Czartoryski was a prominent member of the new Nationalist government that was established after the Uprising and had been banished after the Russians overpowered the Uprising. He was, therefore, a kind of Populist hero. Moreover, Czartoryski wrote in favor of enfranchising Polish peasants. Delaroche's decision to visit the Prince suggests that

seemed to view her connection to the Bonaparte family as a source of pride, for she saw fit to engage the services of Delaroche, one of most prominent artists of his time. His reputation for accuracy made him an appropriate choice, since she wished to create an archaeological record of her family tie to Napoleon. This idea is best conveyed in the inscription she added to the back of the portrait. It reads:

The uniform of the old guard was lent by Baron Merchant, the Emperor's valet de chambre; the sword is the one that Napoleon carried at Waterloo...

The furniture is what existed in the Emperor's study in the Tuileries.

The snuff-box, ornamented with two medallions fixed on the cover, is the one which he gave to the Comte de Flahaut.<sup>6</sup>

The Countess's inscription leaves a detailed catalogue of the exact items that acted as models for Delaroche's painting. At the countess's insistence, then, Delaroche painted directly from historical artifacts. It can therefore be presumed that accuracy was of primary importance in the genesis of this painting.

In contrast to the artifacts the Countess of Sandwich provided for Delaroche's study, Delaroche had no access to Napoleon's face. The Emperor died long before the advent of photography, and portraits painted during his lifetime are unreliable in their flattery. Numerous versions of Napoleon's death mask do survive from the period, but it is not clear how widespread these objects were or if Delaroche would have had access to them. David's *Napoleon in his Study*, the inspiration for Delaroche's work, may have been the most reliable record of the ruler's face available. In a letter to his Scottish patron David wrote, "I can thus assure your lordship...that no one until now has ever made a better likeness in a portrait..."<sup>7</sup> David may have had ulterior motives for lauding the exactitude of his own work. However, the painting's lack of idealization of Napoleon paired with its reasonably objective tone toward its subject suggests that the artist was not exaggerating. David, in his portrait of Napoleon, probably sought to create a painting of Napoleon that humanized him through a studied naturalism and a removal of imperial idealization.

David's *Napoleon in his Study*, in its preoccupation with naturalism, would seem a necessary resource for Delaroche's

he was sympathetic to the Populist cause in Poland and possibly the same movement in France.

For more on the November Uprising and Prince Czartoryski's liberalism see Macej Janowski, *Polish Liberal Thought Before 1918* (New York: Central European University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Bann, *Paul Delaroche: History Painted* (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd. 1997), 247.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in A.A. Tait, "The Duke of Hamilton's Palace," *The Burlington Magazine* (July 1983): 400-402.

attempt to create an accurate record for his patroness. Yet, despite the Countess's insistence on accuracy, Delaroche did not seem to use the *Davidian Study*—possibly the most accurate extant portrayal of the Emperor—as a reference. Instead of transcribing the drawn, tired mien in David's work, Delaroche painted the Emperor with smooth, even features that echo the style of Roman imperial portraiture. Broad smooth planes compose his cheeks, his lips form a cupid's bow, and his eyes are clear. David's Napoleon, in contrast, has bleary eyes, tousled hair, and deeply lined cheeks that verge on fat rather than full. The second version (c.1812) of the work contains a nearly identical treatment of Napoleon's face (Figure 3) and adds a greenish cast to the entire composition, an effect that lends a sickly quality to the Emperor's face. These differences suggest that instead of working directly from either iteration of David's painting, Delaroche had a different source for his first portrait of Napoleon.

Delaroche's use of a different source should not be surprising, for the art world of post-imperial France likely did not become familiar with David's work by viewing the painted version. David had sent the first version to England shortly after its completion, and there it remained throughout Delaroche's lifetime.<sup>8</sup> The dearth of scholarly attention paid to the exhibition history of the second version has made it unclear when and where—or if—the French under the regime of Louis-Philippe may have seen the repetition. The second version had, until 1825, remained in David's atelier in Brussels. Eventually it reached Napoleon III's collection, but its history between David's death and its acquisition by Louis-Napoleon has not been well documented. A catalogue of the 1969 exhibition of Napoleonic art at the Grand Palais gives only a perfunctory review of its provenance before it came to Louis-Napoleon, stating only that, after David's death, "it then appeared in several sales."<sup>9</sup> The initial sale was probably made to private collectors either openly outside of France or discreetly within the painter's home country, for the sale and display of Napoleonic and Bonapartist works was prohibited by the censorship of the Bourbon Restoration government. Although Louis-Philippe's *juste milieu* politics led to the relaxation of anti-Napoleonic censorship, the degeneration of the King's popularity in the late 1830s may have created a political atmosphere in which the exhibition of this painting, with its celebration of the diligent Napoleon working late to ensure the safety and prosperity of his people,

<sup>8</sup> The National Gallery of Art, which is now in possession of David's original portrait, has recorded the provenance of the painting and made it available to the general public on their website. See Unknown Author, "The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries-Provenance," 2012, accessed 26 December 2013, <http://www.nga.gov/collection/gallery/gg56/gg56-46114-prov.html>.

<sup>9</sup> For more on the provenance of the second version of David's painting see the exhibition catalogue *Napoleon: Grand Palais Juin-Décembre 1969* (Paris: Ministère d'État Affaires Culturelles, 1969), 51.

would have been a misstep.<sup>10</sup> Delaroche, then, probably did not have access to either version.

He did, however, have access to printed reproductions of the image and could choose from several engravers' and etchers' adaptations of the original painting. His choices, as is the case of any artistic decision, are revealing. There are two works in particular that can be identified as possible sources for Delaroche's painting: an 1835 engraving by Jean-Nicolas Laugier (Figure 4) and an 1834 etching by Philippe Joseph Auguste Vallot (Figure 5). Stephen Bann has suggested that Delaroche may have worked, if not from the second David, then from Laugier's engraving.<sup>11</sup> Laugier, a highly regarded engraver who had direct access to David in the master's workshop in Brussels, first published his engraving of David's work in 1835.<sup>12</sup> He likely worked directly from the second *Study*, for Napoleon wears the green uniform of the *chasseurs à cheval* in both the second painting and in Laugier's print. Additionally, the engraving's treatment of Napoleon's face exactly replicates the treatment in the second version of David's work. This feature of the engraving may have contributed to its fame and popularity in the nineteenth century.

Delaroche's lack of faithfulness to the original work also suggests that he did not use the Laugier engraving as his source. Delaroche idealized Napoleon's face in his painting and depicted him in the blue-and-white uniform of the Imperial Guard, not the green uniform of the *chasseurs à cheval*. The faces in each work differ dramatically. Delaroche sharply defined Napoleon's jawline, giving the illusion of taut skin. Laugier's Napoleon, in contrast, features a much wider face that makes the Emperor appear slightly bloated. Moreover, the painting shows no sign of the thin lips with downturned corners from the Laugier engraving and instead portrays the Emperor's pout as a plump cupid's bow that curves almost imperceptibly upward. The hair, as painted in Delaroche's work, has been smoothed. Laugier, in a faithful reproduction of the detail in David's work, shows the Emperor's hair tousled and unevenly textured. The idea that Delaroche, whose patron was so invested in accuracy, would use the basic composition and details of a source but not take advantage of an accurate record of the Emperor's face, even if it was from a copy of a copy of said visage, is suspect. He seems, instead, to have chosen to use a different, more flattering image as his reference.

An etching by Philippe Joseph Auguste Vallot (1796-1870) may be Delaroche's actual source. Documentary evidence of the exact date of Vallot's etching of the *Study* is scarce, but at least one source, Henri Beraldi's *Les Graveurs du XIXe Siècle*, dates it to 1834, one year before the earliest available dating of Laugier's engraving.<sup>13</sup> Beraldi's source links Laugier's work to this print and suggests that the Laugier is a derivation of the Vallot.<sup>14</sup> However, a comparison of the two prints quickly eliminates the possibility that Laugier worked from Vallot, for the former work bears a much greater resemblance to David's original than to that of the latter. While Laugier's engraving is a faithful reproduction, Vallot's etching takes a number of liberties with the original painting. Most notable among these changes is the idealization of the Emperor's features and de-emphasis of his paunch. Indeed, the same features that suggest that Delaroche could not have used the Laugier print as a model—the softened features, tight jaw, and plumped lips—are the same features that differentiate Vallot's etching from Laugier's engraving. Vallot and Delaroche's representations of the Emperor, then, can be linked together by the nature of their deviations from the original composition.

Although their similar approach to idealizing Napoleon's form does not prove that Delaroche worked from Vallot's etching instead of the more accurate Laugier engraving, the fact that the two men moved in similar circles lends weight to the connection. Like Delaroche, Vallot was a member of the French Academy. His first documented exhibition at the Salon coincided with Delaroche's first Napoleonic commission. The exhibited piece was an etching of *Bonaparte before the Battle of the Pyramids* after Delaroche's teacher, Baron Gros.<sup>15</sup> Although his work has faded from the narrative of nineteenth-century European art, Vallot enjoyed popularity and favor during his lifetime. He even found favor among the most influential members of the Academy, including Horace Vernet, Delaroche's mentor and father-in-law.<sup>16</sup> Given this relationship with Delaroche's father-in-law, Vallot's career-making turn etching the works of Delaroche's master, and his presence in the same institution of which Delaroche was a member, it is likely that the two men would at least have known of each other, even if they were not closely acquainted. In combination with the strong similarities between Delaroche's painting and Vallot's etching, it seems

<sup>10</sup> Louis-Philippe's policy of favoring the middle class and tendency to support initiatives that took advantage of farm and factory workers led to a growing discontent among the lower classes. This discontent took the form of political and social upheaval that eventually culminated in the Revolution of 1848. For more on this subject see H. A. C. Collingham and R. S. Alexander, *The July Monarchy: A Political History of France 1830-1848* (London: Longman Group UK, Limited, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> For Bann's brief discussion of this possibility see Bann, *Paul Delaroche*, 292n.52.

<sup>12</sup> For biographical information about Laugier and an account of Laugier's visit to David's studio in Brussels, see Gustave Lambert, "J.-N. Laugier, Graveur d'Histoire: Sa Vie et ses Oeuvres," *Bulletin de la Société Académique du Var: Nouvelle Serie* 7 (1874), 22.

<sup>13</sup> Henri Beraldi, *Les Graveurs du XIXe Siècle: Guide de l'Amateur d'Estampes Modernes* (Paris: Libraire L. Conquet, 1891), 170.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>15</sup> Frédéric Villot, *Notice des peintures, sculptures, gravures et lithographies de l'École moderne de France exposées dans les galeries du Musée national du Luxembourg* (Paris: Vinchon, 1855), 63.

<sup>16</sup> For a general biography of Vallot see Michael Bryan, *Dictionary of Painters and Engravers: Biographical and Critical* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899), 2:608. For Vallot's proximity to Horace Vernet et al., see Charles Gabet, *Dictionnaire des artistes de l'école française au XIXe siècle*, 671.

likely that Vallot's work was, indeed, the source for the 1838 *Napoleon in his Study*.

Vallot's idealized vision of the Emperor was not unique in the visual culture of the July Monarchy, but may—alongside Delaroche's painting—instead be a conscious effort to reflect a wider trend in Napoleonic representation. With the removal of Bourbon Restoration era censorship came a plethora of Napoleonic prints and paintings that were displayed without fear of reprisal.<sup>17</sup> The government even commissioned a cycle of Napoleonic paintings from Horace Vernet.<sup>18</sup> However, the government's embrace of Napoleon's image should not be read as an acceptance of all things Bonaparte. The decision was much more in the vein of self-preservation. By 1838 it had long been clear that Louis-Philippe's initial promise to champion the revolutionary cause was hollow, for his policies favored the bourgeoisie, exploited the work force, and avoided the glorious war desired by the general populace.<sup>19</sup> The July Monarchy's adoption of Napoleonic imagery was, in large part, an attempt to recode the abundant images of Napoleon, who gained popularity when Louis-Philippe proved to be an enemy of the common man. The term for the enormously popular and idealized image of Napoleon that so threatened the July Monarchy was "*le petit corporal*." Despite the quaint connotations of this term, it was the little corporal of popular prints that the government most feared—and which Delaroche and Vallot evoked in their painting and print, respectively.

*Le petit corporal* had been a feature of Napoleonic visual culture for years by the time Delaroche began painting his portrait of Napoleon. Although shades of his form can be seen even as early as in Gros's *Battle of Eylau* from 1808, *le petit corporal* did not acquire a consistent iconographic form until years after Napoleon's death. In its most common form, *le petit corporal* is an image of Napoleon as a middle-aged man. Although his age would suggest that he is an Emperor, he seldom wears imperial garb. Instead a simple soldier's uniform covers his rounded torso. In addition to the uniform, the Emperor typically wears the famous bicorn hat and a long gray greatcoat. Although the July Monarchy attempted to coopt this image, most notably on Seurre's statue from Vendôme Column, it consistently failed or deliberately chose not to replicate the most important quality of *le petit corporal* images: a sense of Napoleon's accessibility to the common man. More than the hat, uniform, or coat, the placement of Napoleon in close proximity to the common people was the defining characteristic of *petit corporal* images. Delaroche evokes this proximity by bringing an idealized Napoleon close to the picture plane and allowing the

viewer to observe him in unguarded reflection. However, a more typical example of *le petit corporal* can be seen in an 1837 print by Etienne Achille Réveil after Nicholas Tousseint Charlet (Figure 6). An enthusiastic and loving crowd envelops Charlet's Napoleon. Although above the crowd, Napoleon leans down to make eye contact with his subjects. He is both surrounded by and engaged with them. The title of this image, "*Is it true, as they say, that things are going so badly?*" positions him as a savior. In combination with the title, the date of the original's production, 1824, establishes the Emperor as an anti-Royalist champion. Although the regime the Emperor is meant to counteract in the original is the Bourbon dynasty, Réveil's repurposing of the image in 1837 pitted Napoleon against Louis-Philippe. The image of Napoleon among the common people quickly became a symbol of the brewing Populist revolution.

The importance of proximity to *petit corporal* images mirrors the function of the prints that popularized the image itself. Where Napoleon was accessible to the common people in the world of the prints, the prints were accessible to a massive audience—including, it would seem, Delaroche—in the real world. In his study of the legend of Napoleon, Sudhir Hazareesingh notes that Napoleonic prints, because of their portable nature, occupied a unique space in the political world.<sup>20</sup> Because they could travel, they acquired a popular, democratic power that could be harnessed to pass ideas—like the Napoleon of the people—quickly and effectively. A sense of community arose from this privatization of Napoleonic images and persisted after they were made public. Delaroche may have initially been exposed to this community through his father-in-law Horace Vernet, who used his atelier as an informal meeting ground for Bonapartists and produced a series of Napoleonic lithographs during the Bourbon Restoration.<sup>21</sup> It was in contexts such as Vernet's Bonapartist club that *le petit corporal* grew strong in the minds of the French people. To have access to these images, even during the July Monarchy, implied a familiarity with the Cult of Napoleon or the Bonapartist circle. Further evidence for Delaroche's affiliation with the Napoleonic cult can be found in his own self-presentation. Many commentators noted that he habitually wore his hair in a Napoleonic style and went about town in a gray coat reminiscent of *le petit corporal's* greatcoat.<sup>22</sup> Although it is possible that, as Stephen Bann suggests, Delaroche simply felt a personal affinity for the Emperor, his Napoleonic dress and coiffure may also point to his sympathy for the plight of the masses who saw Napoleon as their champion. It is near-impossible to prove that such an interpretation is accurate, however,

<sup>17</sup> For more on this subject see Chapter 3 of Hazareesingh's *The Legend of Napoleon*.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Marrinan, *Painting Politics for Louis-Philippe: Art and Ideology in Orleanist France, 1830-1848* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 164.

<sup>19</sup> Collingham and Alexander, *The July Monarchy*, 334.

<sup>20</sup> Hazareesingh, *Legend of Napoleon*, 96.

<sup>21</sup> Derin Tanyol, "Histoire Anecdotique—The People's History? Gros and Delaroche," *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Inquiry* 16, no. 1 (2000): 7-30.

<sup>22</sup> Bann, "Delaroche, Napoleon," 28.

Delaroche's decision to style himself in a Napoleonic mode strongly suggests that, at the least, he was familiar with the Cult of Napoleon and its iconography.

Previous scholarship has traced a straightforward heritage for Delaroche's *Napoleon in his Study* that argues that the artist used an historically accurate source. It suggests that the progression began with David's original paintings and continued with Vallot's etching after which Laugier's engraving, the ostensible inspiration for Delaroche's painting, was modeled. It is more likely, however, that the second Davidian *Study* served as the original source for both Vallot and Laugier. Rather than continuing in a direct line, the "pedigree" of Delaroche's painting shows a divergence. Laugier and Vallot's works represent two separate directions of development: one accurate and one idealized. Delaroche's work seems to have sprung from the tradition

of the idealized and less-than-historically accurate etching by Vallot. Delaroche's decision to base his version of David's celebrated painting on an idealized reproduction of the image rather than an accurate one suggests that he was familiar with the reconfiguration of the Emperor's image enacted by Napoleonic print culture. It also demonstrates his willingness to engage with a visual *milieu* geared toward affecting revolution rather than preventing it. Both Vallot's etching and Delaroche's painting reflect the conventions of popular prints that depicted Napoleon as *le petit corporal*. Delaroche's decision to eschew his interest in replicating historical sources by using an idealized reproduction of David's painting as a reference suggests that his *Napoleon in his Study* ought to be read as a political statement rather than a simple study of physiognomy.

University of Iowa



Figure 1. Paul Delaroche, *Napoleon in his Study*, 1838, oil on canvas, 91m x 1.21m. Private Collection. Photo © Agnew's London. The Bridgeman Art Library.



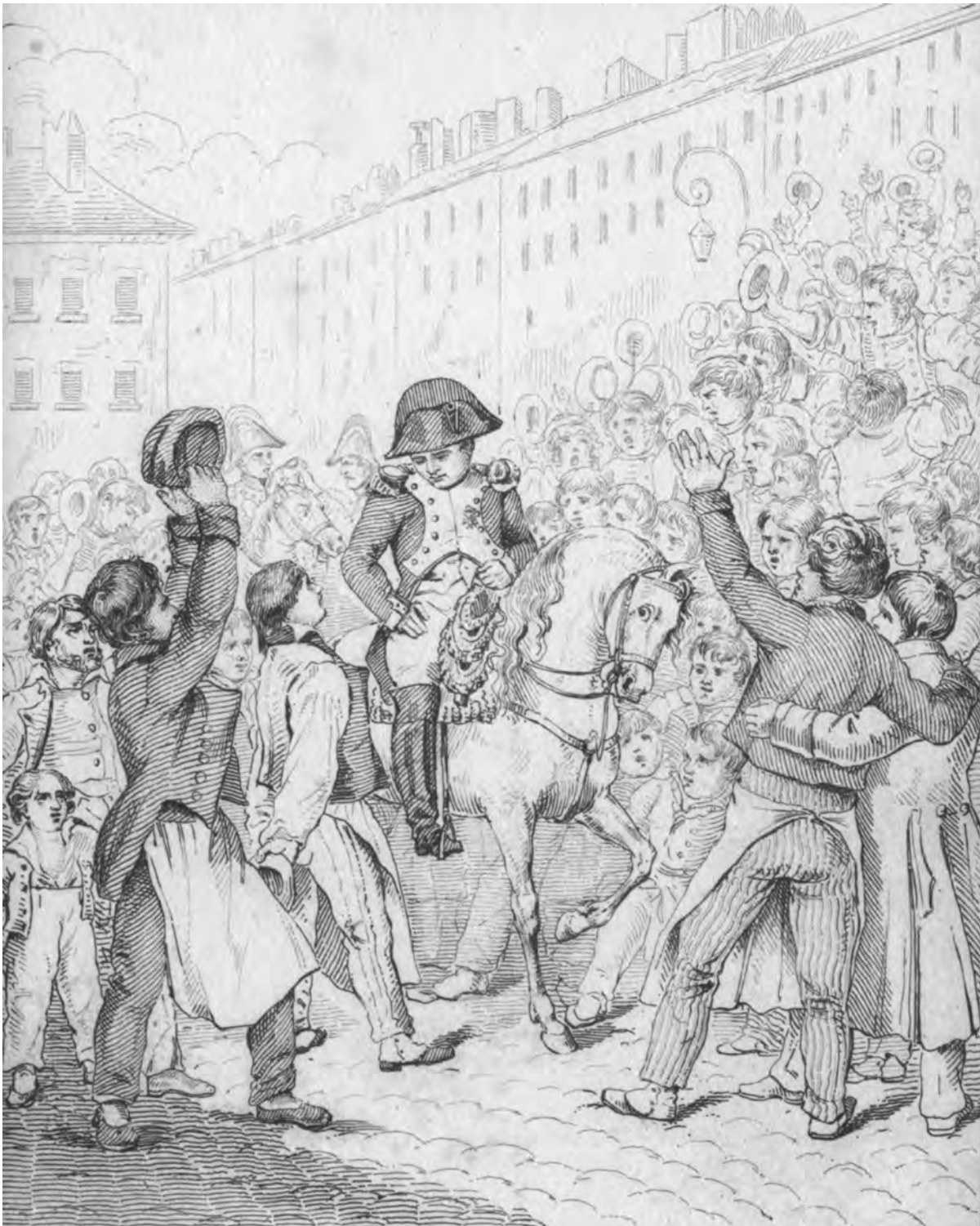


Figure 6. Etienne Achille Réveil after Nicholas Toussaint Charlet, "Is it true, as they say, that things are going so badly?" 1837, after an 1824 original, engraving, 8 cm by 12 cm. Collection of the Author.

◀[facing page, top left] Figure 2. Jacques Louis David, *Napoleon in his Study at the Tuileries*, 1812, oil on canvas, 2.04 m by 1.25 m. National Gallery of the Arts, Washington, D.C. The Bridgeman Art Library.

◀[facing page, top right] Figure 3. Jacques Louis David, *Une Répétition of Napoleon in his Study at the Tuileries*, c.1812, oil on canvas, 2.05 m by 1.28 m. Private Collection. The Bridgeman Art Library.

◀[facing page, lower left] Figure 4. Jean-Nicolas Laugier after David, *Napoleon in his Study at the Tuileries*, 1835, engraving, 88.9 cm by 66 cm. Library of Congress.

◀[facing page, lower right] Figure 5. Joseph Auguste Vallot after David, *Napoleon in his Study at the Tuileries*, 1834, etching, 13.5 cm by 9.5 cm. Collection of the Author.