

Napoleon

The Urth list — 6 messages, 3 voices, 30 Apr 1998

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Robert King — 30 Apr 1998, 20:23

Maybe it's my sick mind at work, but I always surmised that Weer's theory held that Napoleon was surreptitiously, uh, fondling himself. (In Seinfeldian terms, the Emperor might have ruled much of Europe but he was definitely not master of his own domain.) Although I suppose the hand would have to be much lower than portraits usually place it.

In any case, that's the type of explanation a certain type of boy at a certain age would take great delight in recounting, especially to older relatives. And it would invariably offend.

-- Bob

Paul C Duggan — 01 May 1998, 14:23 · follows Robert King

The story about napoleon that fits weers description would seem to be that Napoleon was one of the first to receive a colostomy bag. He kept his hand in his coat to keep it from passing wind.

Hey, that's what I read somewhere. Sounds like a job for alt.folklore.urban

"I am an impure thinker. I am hurt, swayed, shaken, | paul + | + elated, disillusioned, shocked, comforted, and I | --|-- have to transmit my mental experiences lest I die." | + | +
-- Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy | pduggan at world.std.com

William H. Ansley — 01 May 1998, 23:46 · follows Paul C Duggan

Bob (Robert King) wrote:

Maybe it's my sick mind at work, but I always surmised that Weer's theory held that Napoleon was surreptitiously, uh, fondling himself.

....

In any case, that's the type of explanation a certain type of boy at a certain age would take great delight in recounting, especially to older relatives. And it would invariably offend.

Aside from difficulties associated with how Nappy could do this with his hand in his waistcoat (which ends at the waist, at least in front), it seems unlikely to me that Weer (or Wolfe) would consider this an innocent remark.

William Ansley

William H. Ansley — 01 May 1998, 23:46 · follows William H. Ansley

Paul C Duggan wrote:

The story about napoleon that fits weers description would seem to be that Napoleon was one of the first to receive a colostomy bag. He kept his hand in his coat to keep it from passing wind.

Again, I don't think this fits with the fact that this is supposed to be an innocent remark.

"At first I used to tell it in the hope of satisfying curiosity (and so obtaining those real though impalpable satisfactions, sweet at any time, but sweetest at thirteen, which accrue when we appear knowledgeable and thus, at least by implication, effective). Later I continued it as a psychological experiment, having observed that the innocent remark invariably offended."

Peace, p. 2

BTW, don't you just love the long involuted sentences that abound in _Peace_?

William Ansley

Robert King — 02 May 1998, 13:18 · follows William H. Ansley

I agree with you on the physical difficulties, and maybe the colostomy bag is more realistic. But I think it's perfectly common for kids (okay, maybe 13 is a little old, but then again these were supposedly more innocent days, weren't they?) to think of their questions or remarks as innocuous and then find that they've offended more-knowing adults. As in, "Hey mommy, what does **** mean?"

To "invariably offend," the remark would have to somewhat salacious, wouldn't it? How likely is it everybody would be offended by young Weer demystifying Napoleon's pose?

Don't you think it's wonderful that by not telling us what Napoleon was supposedly doing, Wolfe has managed to keep us talking about it 23 years later?

-- Bob

On Fri, 1 May 1998, William H. Ansley wrote:

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William H. Ansley — 04 May 1998, 00:57 · follows Robert King

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This is possible, but my interpretation of the passage in question, which I have appended to the end of this message, is that Weer continued to repeat the story ("as a psychological experiment") into his adult years but still felt the remark to be innocent. There is some mild support for this later on. When Weer is talking to Louis Gold in his study, after Sherry Gold has persuaded Weer not to tell anyone about about her father's forged books, on p. 226 of the Orb edition, he says:

"I'm afraid I only know the story of Bonaparte's hand, and I don't tell it very often anymore."

To "invariably offend," the remark would have to somewhat salacious, wouldn't it? How likely is it everybody would be offended by young Weer demystifying Napoleon's pose?

It certainly is hard to think of a remark that meets these two criteria. If the author weren't Wolfe, I might think that he didn't have any real remark about Napoleon's hand in mind and was just being annoyingly mysterious. But, since it is Wolfe, I tend to think that (in addition to being annoyingly mysterious) he does have a remark in mind that would make us all say "Oh, of course!"

Don't you think it's wonderful that by not telling us what Napoleon was supposedly doing, Wolfe has managed to keep us talking about it 23 years later?

It certainly is wonderful, but the time of wonders must end. 8-> I think I have beat this thing to death and beyond, so I'll (probably) stop here.

"At first I used to tell it in the hope of satisfying curiosity (and so obtaining those real though impalpable satisfactions, sweet at any time, but sweetest at thirteen, which accrue when we appear knowledgeable and thus, at least by implication, effective). Later I continued it as a psychological experiment, having observed that the innocent remark invariably offended."

Peace, p. 2

William Ansley