

Sharpe's Honour: Richard Sharpe and the Vitoria Campaign, February to June, 1813 Study Guide

Sharpe's Honour: Richard Sharpe and the Vitoria Campaign, February to June, 1813 by Bernard Cornwell

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Plot Summary

The novel, one in a series of novels by Bernard Cornwell, chronicles the trials and tribulations of Rifleman Major Richard Sharpe of the British army. Torn with guilt after the death of his wife, whom he did not truly love, Sharpe accepts the challenge of a duel from El Marques—the husband of Helene Leroux, a woman with whom he is obsessed. Sharpe would have won the duel but is prevented from killing El Marques by Lieutenant Leroy, his commanding officer, who arrives just in time. Sharpe claims the duel was a matter of honor, but even Patrick Harper, his closest friend, cannot understand why Sharpe would jeopardize his career and well-being for something so ill-advised. The evening after the duel El Marques is murdered, and Sharpe is convicted of the crime though he is innocent. General Wellington of the British forces arranges for a switch, so another man dies in Sharpe's stead, and he is sent to discover why he has been framed for the Marques's death. Helene Leroux, or La Marquesa, had written a letter via the instruction of Pierre Ducos claiming Sharpe threatened her, and this letter is used as major evidence against him. He and a Spanish boy named Angel set out to find her and learn the truth. She has been kidnapped by Ducos, Father Hacha the Inquisitor, and his brother El Matarife, and taken to a convent. Since she is a widow, if she becomes a nun, all her great fortune goes into the church. Sharpe rescues her from the convent but oversleeps in a small town and is captured the next day. Just before El Matarife can fight him, the French army invades the town, including La Marquesa's lover, General Verigny. She lies about Sharpe's identity to keep him safe because he absolutely cannot be caught as Richard Sharpe, since that man is supposed to be dead. General Verigny wants Sharpe to sign a parole promising he won't try to escape, but Sharpe does not, so he is kept in a disgusting prison cell for safekeeping when they arrive at Burgos. Sharpe is then brutally interviewed by Ducos, who admits that he set Sharpe up to be blamed for the murder, as payback for a time before when Sharpe broke his eyeglasses. He, in turn, breaks Sharpe's beloved spyglass given to him for saving Wellington's life, but Sharpe uses one of the brass pieces to overcome his enemy and Ducos flees. Sharpe encounters Verigny again who is appalled at Ducos's treatment of the prisoner and quickly provides him with food, water, a doctor, and a change of clothes. That evening, La Marquesa, Verigny, and Major Montbrun try to convince Sharpe to sign the parole so he can be treated in a way befitting his status as a man. La Marquesa later returns alone, informs Sharpe about Ducos's treaty, and tries to convince him to sign the parole and escape to warn Wellington. She only wants to regain her wealth, which is held by the army. Sharpe is extremely conflicted, but the next morning decides he cannot in good conscience sign his parole. There is a terrific explosion and he is able to escape but is hurt and cared for by a nearby Spanish family. Meanwhile, the French are retreating to Vitoria, and the British army is in hot pursuit. Though still injured, Sharpe sets off the next morning to rejoin the army and almost runs into El Matarife and his men. Luckily he is reunited with Angel, and the two set off to warn Wellington of the treaty. The British are camped just outside Vitoria, and each side gears up for battle. The British emerge victorious; the French flee, and Sharpe must rescue La Marquesa once again from El Matarife, who admits that he killed the Marques.



Prologue, Chapter One, and Chapter Two

Prologue, Chapter One, and Chapter Two Summary

Sharpe's Honour is a continuation of the life of Richard Sharpe, a Major in the British regiment. The book covers Sharpe's life from February to June of 1813, while on campaign in Spain. British troops occupy Spain to help drive out French forces, and Spain's embarrassment at needing help from Wellington drives Spanish Inquisitor Father Hacha to plot with Major Pierre Ducos, a Frenchman. King Ferdinand VII of Spain was imprisoned in France, held by Napoleon, until he signed the Treaty of Valencay. The Treaty declares the conflict between France and Spain over, but Spain must end the alliance with Britain. Ducos, Father Hacha, and his brother (El Matarife) hatch a plot that cryptically involves the death of a woman's husband, the theft of her fortune, and revenge against Richard Sharpe.

Chapter one introduces Major Richard Sharpe, in the midst of a clever tactical maneuver against the French. He tricks them into an ambush, thus rendering his enemy immobile and winning the battle with no harm to his own soldiers. Though South Essex's arms had been accidentally dropped into the river by Mr. Collip, Sharpe takes the fault onto himself. Sharpe feels guilt about the death of his wife, and about his young daughter, Antonia, whom he is not raising. The reader views him through the eyes of Lieutenant Michael Trumper-Jones, who is surprised that Sharpe wears no markings of rank to identify him as an officer. His closest friend is Irishman Patrick Harper

In chapter two, the reader meets La Marquesa de Casares el Grande, Helene Leroux: "the Golden Whore." She is half-French, half-English, and married to a Spaniard. Pierre Ducos used her as a spy in the past and now plots to steal her fortune. She is moving her fortune from Spain to France for safekeeping, but Ducos intercepts her and accuses her of stealing the property. He asks her to write a letter in exchange for safe passage with her goods, accusing Richard Sharpe of ill conduct toward her, in hopes her husband would fight a duel to defend her honor. She is prideful and boasts to Ducos of her continued relationship with Napoleon, who told her about the Treaty. Ducos hates her and imagines himself as the savior of France.

Prologue, Chapter One, and Chapter Two Analysis

The Prologue sets up the major conflict of the book: the secret treaty. Cornwell introduces Pierre Ducos as a greedy and self-serving character, and brutally highlights hostilities between France and Spain. Father Hacha and El Matarife are brothers, though they are like two sides of a coin: Father Hacha is intelligent and clever with his cruelty, and El Matarife is completely savage; El Matarife is torturing a captive when the reader first meets him. He is set up as the "evil" character, a hired killer without a conscience whom the hero will inevitably have to face down. Ducos, Father Hacha, and



El Matarife are presented as the villains; additionally, Ducos has a personal vendetta against Richard Sharpe.

Chapter one reveals Sharpe in many different lights: he is smart, winning the skirmish without any losses, but he has deep conflicts within himself. The guilt over his wife's death gnaws at him, but not even his closest friend Patrick Harper can help him work through it. Sharpe seemingly has a stringent personal code and is torn because his treatment of his wife violated his own code. He is an extremely capable soldier and an excellent leader but cuts himself no slack for mistakes. At the end of chapter one, after winning the skirmish, Sharpe has some hope for the future—the first in a while.

Chapter two introduces La Marquesa, a beautiful but treacherous woman who seems to only care about herself. Her association with Ducos makes her potentially dangerous, and she condemns Sharpe to save her fortune, though she is fond of him. Ducos's letter is dangerous: though false, the contents of the letter can ruin Richard Sharpe very easily. Letters are extremely important because they are the only means of communication in this era: a false letter can have dire consequences.



Chapter Three and Chapter Four

Chapter Three and Chapter Four Summary

Chapter three begins with the arrival of tents, which Sharpe deems unnecessary. To have tents they would need mules, to have mules they would need more feed, for which they would need more mules. Sharpe and Patrick discuss selling the tents, but the arrival of a Spanish officer plunges Sharpe into a bad mood. Patrick's woman, Isabella, whom he rescued from Badajoz, wants him to marry her. Patrick is worried about Sharpe and thinks Sharpe is bored, claiming when Sharpe is bored Sharpe gets into trouble.

Lieutenant Colonel Leroy, a loyalist American and commander of the battalions, confronts Sharpe about the tents and about Sharpe's unpaid debts. Leroy wants Sharpe to buy a horse as well, befitting his rank as Major, but Sharpe is poor and cannot pay his debts. A Spanish general comes looking for Sharpe and challenges him to a duel on behalf of his master El Marques—La Marquesa's husband. Sharpe accepts the challenge, choosing swords as the weapon.

In chapter four, Captain d'Alembord tries to train Sharpe in swordplay, though he has secretly sent a messenger to retrieve Colonel Leroy, in hopes of preventing Sharpe's duel. The last time Sharpe fought a skilled swordsman, he won by getting the man to run his blade through Sharpe's thigh, thus trapping the weapon and giving Sharpe the opportunity to kill him. The duel is in a cemetery, and quite an audience has assembled. d'Alembord recommends that Sharpe keep the sun out of his eyes, but Sharpe's style of fighting is very different from the Marques: street fighting versus a polished, trained swordsman. Sharpe seems to be losing, but when the Marques smiles at him, Sharpe gets angry and begins to really fight. Sharpe feints a fall and fools the Marques, almost killing him, but Colonel Thomas Leroy arrives just in time to stop him. Sharpe's career is safe and his honor intact.

Chapter Three and Chapter Four Analysis

In chapter three, the reader learns through Patrick Harper that Sharpe is bored and gets into trouble when he is bored. Patrick genuinely cares about his friend and says as much to Isabella, explaining Sharpe was "chasing rainbows" again (p. 44). Cornwell often uses characters around Sharpe to examine Sharpe's inner workings. This paints a picture of the mysterious, tough character by not requiring an explanation from Sharpe himself. It also gives insight about the characters around Sharpe, as only the people really close to him are allowed to examine his feelings.

Sharpe accepts the challenge of the duel not only because he is bored, but because he feels he needs to redeem himself somehow. Perhaps by fighting the duel he can erase the mistakes of his past, honor his dead wife, and give himself some peace all at once.



He realizes his obsession with La Marquesa is dangerous, but he needs something—or someone—to fight for. As a soldier, he always needs a purpose, and he feels purposeless. He feels he has unfinished business with La Marquesa and cannot compromise his honor for his good sense to refuse the challenge.

In chapter four, the actual duel takes place, and even Sharpe cannot really explain to himself why he wants to fight. He knows the urge is connected with guilt over his wife's death and also connected to his desire for La Marquesa. He feels his honor has been impinged by the Marques and would rather defend his honor than his career, which is over if he kills a man in a duel. He realizes he is behaving foolishly, but he is also full of pride and superstitious: if he refuses the duel, he could not live with himself. He loses some confidence in the actual duel because his fighting style is so different from the Marques's. Sharpe learned to fight in streets and survival situations, while the Marques is a trained swordsman whose movements are cold and practiced. When he smiles, the Marques incites Sharpe's rage: his anger makes the fight come clear to him, and he stops second-guessing himself. Though the fight is interrupted, Sharpe unquestionably would have bested his opponent and thus leaves with his honor satisfied.



Chapter Five and Chapter Six

Chapter Five and Chapter Six Summary

Chapter five opens with the Marques and Father Hacha, the Inquisitor, discussing La Marquesa's letter. The Marques admits to himself that he married her out of lust and refuses to believe the rumors about her unfaithfulness. Father Hacha shares the Treaty plans with the Marques and strokes his ego by saying that Sharpe surrendered in the duel. However, the next morning the Marques's private chaplain discovers him dead in his chamber with a slit throat. Richard Sharpe is arrested for the murder and led to a prison cell.

In chapter six, Sharpe is placed in a holding room to await trial, and Lieutenant Michael Trumper-Jones is sent as his defending officer, though he is not an lawyer. He reveals to Sharpe that La Marquesa's letter has come to light, where she claims Sharpe threatened her. Witnesses claim to have seen Sharpe enter the Marques's quarters and murder him, identifying Sharpe because of his large, straight sword. Sharpe decides to write a letter to Major Hogan of what actually happened that night, just in case he is to be hanged.

Sharpe is prosecuted by a Major Vaughn, who paints Sharpe as a prideful man bent on revenge after his duel is interrupted. When La Marquesa's letter is presented as evidence, Sharpe reveals that he has another letter from her to compare the handwriting; a condolence after his wife's death. However, the letter cannot be found, and Sharpe has no defense: he ate dinner with Harper, Isabella, and d'Alembord and went to his billet and slept afterward, with no witnesses. Though Major Vaughn still tries to make Sharpe's motive into revenge, Sharpe will only claim that he was fighting the duel for honor's sake. Lieutenant Trumper-Jones makes a speech on Sharpe's behalf, but Spanish relations with the British army have to be satisfied, and Sharpe is declared guilty. He will die by hanging and is even denied permission to die in his Rifleman's jacket.

Chapter Five and Chapter Six Analysis

In chapter five, the reader learns that while the Marques is an outwardly pious person, he is greedy and prideful. He thinks he will help restore Spain to her former glory: little does he know that his death is part of Ducos's ultimate plan to take La Marquesa's money and frame Richard Sharpe. Sharpe is innocent, but the duel looks very bad to the outside world, and the Spanish are framing him by claiming they have witnesses.

In chapter six, Sharpe's demons have caught up with him: his single irresponsible act will potentially cause disgrace, dishonor, and death. Sharpe and those closest to him are convinced of his innocence, but the Spanish must be compensated for the death of their general. Though Sharpe is innocent, not to mention a hero to the British and his



battalion, he becomes the scapegoat needed to assuage hurt Spanish pride. His honor is not enough to protect him from the courtroom; in fact his honor is what lands him there in the first place. Sharpe's demise is carefully planned by Ducos, and La Marquesa's letter truly condemns him.



Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight

Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight Summary

Chapter seven introduces General Wellington, who has a heavy heart at Sharpe's execution. He is to be hanged, though some of the Spanish think this death too quick for the murder of their Marques. Father Hacha, the Inquisitor, regrets that Sharpe must die, and also that El Matarife had to kill the Marques. He thinks the death will save Spain; the Marques's fortune will go into the Church, and Spain will again become a world power. The Spanish are too far away to see the prisoner clearly, but his long black hair and baggy white infantryman trousers blow in the wind. Though Sharpe saved Wellington's life once, the general shows no emotion. The condemned man smiles while the noose is put around his neck, though he does not die right away from the rope. An English Sergeant jerks his legs down so the rope snaps his neck, to keep the man from suffering.

Chapter eight begins with a description of a valley pass through the mountains called the Gateway of God. Sharpe had won a great battle there in the past, though the place was now deserted, of no use to either army. Then, the story moves on to the city of Burgos, where the Great Road comes from the French frontier to San Sebastian and on to Vitoria. The French invaded and would need to retreat from this road. Ducos plans to stay at the old fortress in Burgos knowing his treaty will save France if not Spain. When Father Hacha tells him of Sharpe's death, he wishes Sharpe had known who had engineered his demise. The two discuss La Marquesa's wagons stationed in the castle and how she plans to go to her lover, General Verigny. He plans to intercept her, send her to a convent, and claim her wagons and wealth in the name of the church.

La Marquesa is angry that her wagons were denied release into France and is thinking of Ducos even as her wagon train is stopped. Father Hacha climbs in and tells her the Marques and Sharpe are dead, then arrests her under the authority of the Spanish diocese.

Meanwhile, Captain Michael Hogan, Captain "Sweet" William Frederickson, and a Spanish boy arrive at the Gateway of the Gods. They settle in for the night with a fire and food and are eventually joined by Richard Sharpe, who is very much alive.

Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight Analysis

Sharpe's execution in chapter seven is a very solemn affair, meant as penance to the Spanish for the death of their officer. It is almost entirely politically motivated, though the Spanish are kept far away from the gallows. Seemingly, Cornwell kills his hero in the middle of the story and gives no clues to the resurrection ahead.

Though the reader has spent a chapter thinking Sharpe is dead, in chapter eight it is revealed that the Major mysteriously lives. Ducos's plot involving the Marquesa gets



underway with her kidnapping, and the reader is introduced to the city of Burgos and the Gateway of the Gods. Now, there is a revitalization of plot: Sharpe has come back from the dead; the secret treaty plot is in motion, and La Marquesa is in trouble. Though she feels nothing when informed of the death of her husband, La Marquesa is slightly grieved to learn of Sharpe's death. She is a hard, self-sufficient woman, but she recognizes Sharpe's values and dislikes being somewhat responsible for his death. Ducos is taking his time, slowly tightening the noose around La Marquesa's neck. He is patient and careful, thinking he has the fate of the world on his shoulders.



Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine Summary

Chapter nine explains how Sharpe survived—a man named Patrick Dooley was hanged instead of Sharpe. Dooley and his brother were both going to hang for looting a church, and Major Michael Hogan promised Dooley's brother would live if Dooley pretended to be Sharpe. The rest of the world think Sharpe died on the gallows. Hogan compares the situation to a *torno*—a revolving cupboard in convents where unwanted babies are dropped off. "My job is to solve the mystery. The *torno* has just dumped this thing into my lap, and you're going to find out who put it there," he says to Sharpe (p.112). Hogan sends Sharpe as a spy hoping Sharpe can also clear his own name and save his career. Sharpe is given a Spanish boy named Angel to help him, and his belongings are returned, including the telescope given to him by General Wellington. Sharpe saved Wellington's life in battle on September 23, 1803. Wellington cannot execute an innocent man who saved his life, but Hogan warns Sharpe that he must not get caught by the French.

Chapter Nine Analysis

Chapter nine reveals that Sharpe's life was basically exchanged for another. His people know he is innocent, but the politics of the situation had to be satisfied. Sharpe still cannot explain to his colleagues why he fought the duel, though he knows it has to do with Teresa's death. It is as if the duel freed him somewhat, though it apparently took everything away that was important to him. He finds "a joy in taking great risks," (p.109). He must be born again to find himself: to save his life and career, he must become someone else and find La Marquesa. He must know why she wrote the letter, not only for the political significance, but for his personal satisfaction as well. Hogan compares the situation to the *torno*: the mystery has been dropped onto him, and he needs Sharpe to solve it. Chapter nine is where Sharpe receives his mission, at the Gateway of God, to redeem his honor. This is a big "hero moment" for the reader: Sharpe has a mission, a damsel in distress, an enemy, and a secret to keep.



Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten Summary

Chapter ten begins as the French army marches eastward toward Burgos, seemingly in defeat. Sharpe observes them in his telescope and reflects on his luck that his horse, Carbine, has a long tail, not a bobbed tail like other British army horses. Angel has gone into the city to gather information about La Marquesa. Angel's family was killed by Frenchman when he was thirteen, and since then he does everything he can to aid the British army and cast the French out of Spain. Angel's only possession is a Baker rifle, which he cleans obsessively. He returns at dawn with food and the news that La Marquesa has publicly disappeared but is being kept in the Convent of the Heavens in Santa Monica. The Partisans are guarding the convent, including el Matarife, "the slaughterman." He is feared by French and Spanish alike for his cruel tactics and brutal killings, even killing his own people during the siesta. Sharpe and Angel ride north passing through the Basque region. Sharpe reminds Angel to call him Major Vaughn, the disguise they have agreed upon. Sharpe worries that they will not be able to find el Matarife, but Angel assures him el Matarife will find them.

El Matarife receives news of them at an inn and a request from General Wellington to cooperate. He is guarding La Marquesa, waiting for her to take her vows and legally become a nun so her money will revert to the church. Father Hacha told el Matarife to allow no one into the convent, but he invites Sharpe and Angel to the inn. El Matarife fights a prisoner with knives and ties the end of a chain around one of his wrists, then the other around the other prisoner's wrist. Sharpe and Angel witness him killing a prisoner in an extremely slow, cruel way. Instead of allowing the man to suffer after his eyes are cut out, Sharpe shoots him in the head. They are taken inside for drinks, and Sharpe asks about La Marquesa. El Matarife claims she is in the inn. When he takes Sharpe, who claims he has never seen "The Golden Whore," to see her she has apparently committed suicide by hanging. Though Sharpe pretends otherwise, he knows the girl hanging is not La Marquesa; she has been killed so Sharpe will go away thinking La Marquesa is dead.

Chapter Ten Analysis

This is the first leg of Sharpe's journey and where he finally meets the fabled El Matarife. Like any hero, he has been given a loyal sidekick, Angel. The boy has demons just as Sharpe does, but while Sharpe's guilt drives him forward, Angel seeks revenge against the French for his murdered family. El Matarife is truly terrible, and Sharpe sees this firsthand when el Matarife tortures a prisoner. Sharpe cannot stand to see the prisoner's suffering so he shoots him but then must backtrack with El Matarife. He uses flattery to turn the mood into an advantageous one and appeals to El Matarife's ego to get information. Though Sharpe has certainly seen La Marquesa before, he tells el Matarife he has not, which unfortunately causes the hanging girl's death: El Matarife



wants to be rid of the Englishman, and if he thinks La Marquesa is dead, there is no reason for him to inquire further. Sharpe leaves knowing he must infiltrate the convent in search of La Marquesa, but the death of the nameless girl adds to his burden of guilt.



Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve

Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve Summary

Beginning with a description of the surroundings, chapter eleven is Major Richard Sharpe vs. the convent. Though Angel is worried about an attack on a holy place, Sharpe assures him they fight to defeat France. The Convent of the Heavens is at the highest point in a series of hills, leftover from when Muslims occupied Spain. Sharpe knocks and announces his visit to La Marquesa, but no one will let him in. He grabs a large rock and begins to beat the door down.

Meanwhile, Harper and Wellington discuss the unfortunate French move into the mountains—Harper worries Sharpe will surely be caught with only a boy to protect him.

Finally, Sharpe breaks into the convent. The Mother Superior asks him to leave, but he says he is an American who must speak with La Marquesa on matters of policy and threatens to bring all his soldiers into the convent. She will not let him pass, so he rushes past her and deeper into the convent, shouting for Helene. He finds her in the refectory and must wrest her away from a huge nun guarding her without hurting the sister. They stop to retrieve Helene's jewelry and race away from the castle. Sharpe cannot take his eyes off her, even dirty and in drab clothes.

At the beginning of chapter twelve, Sharpe stops La Marquesa and explains the situation. He knows there will be men waiting to cut them off at the foot of the hill and has formulated a plan. Right away, he asks her why she wrote the letter, and she laughs him off. He claims he came to see her and did not kill her husband. To get past the men at the foot of the hill, he and Angel have arranged an ambush: Angel uses his dry rifle in the rain to dispatch three men, and Sharpe leaps off the hill with his sword to take care of the others. La Marquesa is impressed with Sharpe's fighting skills. Sharpe, La Marquesa, and Angel ride down the mountain using a goat path.

Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve Analysis

Sharpe is in his element when there is a battle to be won. Though he feels some twinge of guilt for invading a convent, his goal keeps him going: to rescue La Marquesa. While Sharpe feels exuberant in rescuing La Marquesa, the reader knows the countryside is fraught with French soldiers, as per the conversation between Harper and Wellington. Sharpe is doing exactly what they hope he is not doing by breaking into the convent, and the reader can sense trouble ahead. Sharpe's obsession with La Marquesa seems to temporarily blind him from caution and instantly incites his lust and adoration. La Marquesa has not been changed by her stay in the convent and claims she will continue being a sinner. Sharpe does not know where they are going after the escape and follows her blindly for a few moments.



In chapter twelve, "for the first time in months, because of [La Marquesa], Sharpe [is] content" (p.153). Sharpe and Angel's plan to get down from the mountain works, and Sharpe is able to lose himself in battle. He is very pleased when La Marquesa is impressed with his fighting, and on some level she is almost as savage as he: they are each survivors, which could be why Sharpe is so drawn to her. She uses different tactics than he but is still extremely resourceful. Sharpe has broken La Marquesa out of the convent, symbolically allowing her to stay the same adulterous, treacherous person she was before. He still does not know if she cares for him at all; she has given him no thanks. Part of her draw for him is her treachery; she is like one of his battles: a thing he must win.



Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Thirteen Summary

In chapter thirteen, they must stop because La Marquesa is saddlesore. They choose an inn in a small town, though Sharpe would prefer to get deeper into the country. Sharpe boils grease for Helene's wounds, and she lies to Sharpe about why she wrote the letter, claiming she did not know it would cause him trouble. Then Sharpe notices she has fleas so calls for a bath and a piece of soap with which to trap the fleas. La Marquesa does not want the innkeeper to know she has fleas, so she makes Sharpe help her. She teases him, calling herself the Holy Grail of his quest, and gives condolences about his wife. She did not love her husband and likes the idea of being a rich widow. She requests that he take her to Burgos where she can be under the protection of the French army, including her lover General Verigny. They soap the fleas off one another, but cannot make love because of La Marquesa's sore thighs. Sharpe is happy with her, and they talk of life since the last time they saw each other. He explains that he is again poor because he gave all his money to his daughter. She explains that the retreating French army has all the treasures of Spain in its wagons because they have been looting everything along their retreat path. She reveals that Father Hacha the Inquisitor and El Matarife are brothers, and one of them may have killed her husband. She will write a letter for Sharpe discrediting the previous one claiming that Sharpe threatened her and requests Sharpe put the grease on her thighs. As she sleeps, Sharpe ponders why she lied to him: he does not believe the Church murdered her husband for her money and thinks there must be something else behind it. Unfortunately, he falls asleep, and wakes the next morning surrounded by El Matarife and his men. By invading "breaking into the convent, he [had] stirred the whole countryside against him" (p.164), and had been so eager for La Marquesa he had forgotten that danger. He must go out and fight and tells La Marquesa he loves her before he leaves, though she asks him not to and calls him a fool.

Chapter Thirteen Analysis

La Marquesa is playing Sharpe just as she does all the other men in her life. She knows he wants her and perhaps even loves her, so she turns the situation to her advantage: she plays the innocent and claims she had no idea her letter would bring him harm. Even through his bedazzlement Sharpe sees her lie, though it does not seem to disturb him that she is lying. She is still a haughty lady making demands on him, but she plays to his weaknesses: namely, her beauty and his honor. He opens up to her in a way that he has done with no one else in the story thus far. They discuss his past and his current situation, and it seems she can make the pain and guilt of his wife's death go away. He falls asleep because he is so comforted by her, and he has not felt comfort in a very long time. However, La Marquesa's survival instinct will always win out in the end, and even when they are surrounded, she is formulating ways to help herself. She seems fond of Sharpe but does not want him to confess his love to her, though she will allow

him to fight for her. Sharpe always needs something or someone to fight for; without an imminent battle he feels lost.



Chapter Fourteen and Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Fourteen and Chapter Fifteen Summary

Angel escapes from El Matarife's man at the beginning of chapter fourteen on Carbine, Sharpe's black horse. Sharpe goes down to fight El Matarife and negotiate La Marquesa's safe return when French lancers rush into the village, causing El Matarife and the Partisans to run. Sharpe reminds La Marquesa that he is going by the name Vaughn, and she reminds him to tell everyone he slept in the stable so as not to upset her lover, General Verigny. Verigny, who does not speak English very well, allows Sharpe to keep his sword, but must confiscate the rifle. La Marquesa told the General that Sharpe had been sent to take her back to the British for questioning, and the General assures him he will be taken to a prisoner exchange. Sharpe is trapped and cannot reveal his true name, so it is unlikely the British would exchange him, especially since Major Vaughn still existed elsewhere. General Verigny asks for Sharpe's parole, or his promise not to escape before he is exchanged as a prisoner. If he does not give his parole, he will be well guarded, locked up, and his personal effects confiscated. However, he cannot give his parole and then in turn escape, compromising his honor. He chooses to withhold his parole and remain a guarded prisoner.

In chapter fifteen, Sharpe is put into a foul cell in a castle in Burgos. He had no chance to escape on the journey and has been handed over to the fortress men upon arrival in Burgos. He tries to keep his spirits up but curses his fortunes and the duel that ultimately led to it all. He refuses to lay down in the cell and be covered in filth. Two men come for him eventually and march him into another room where Pierre Ducos waits for him. Sharpe knows this man is dangerous and a politician to boot. Ducos knows Sharpe's true identity and believes he is a spy. He tries to get Sharpe to answer questions about La Marquesa by having a man beat him, but Sharpe will only answer that he rescued her because he wanted to "go to bed with her" (p.181). Ducos has a score to settle with Sharpe: the Major once broke Ducos's spectacles because he insulted Sharpe's wife, so he savagely breaks Sharpe's telescope. They plan to hold Sharpe as a prisoner after the war and beat Sharpe again when he will answer no questions about Helene. Sharpe grabs a bent brass tube off the floor from the telescope to use as a weapon while Ducos admits he arranged everything: the letter, framing Sharpe for the murder, and Helene's kidnapping. Sharpe insults Ducos and attacks, luring the guards into a position where he can use the brass tube. Sharpe savagely retaliates, killing two men and wounding the other two and leaving Ducos suddenly defenseless. Ducos flees and Sharpe pursues and encounters General Verigny in the hallway. Verigny is appalled at Sharpe's condition, claiming "I came from honor, Major, that you would be treated in accord with honor" (p.188). Sharpe is promised a doctor, food, and a bed, and reveals his true identity.



Chapter Fourteen and Chapter Fifteen Analysis

While La Marquesa has betrayed Sharpe before, she keeps his secrets to keep him safe from General Verigny. To give his parole would be the easiest thing for Sharpe to do, but he cannot give his correct name, thus almost ensuring confusion on the British side when he is put up to be traded. He again chooses honor over the easier path and is taken to a secure location where he cannot escape. He even must watch Helene, whom he cares about, perform for her lover and vouch for his honesty, though they slept in the same room.

In chapter fifteen, he keeps his sanity by going back to what he knows and cares most about in the world: his company. By reciting the men's names, he remembers who he is and what he is capable of; he knows he has been put in the dungeon in hopes he will fall into despair. Here he displays not only physical discipline but mental determination as well. He is able to reflect on and truly recognize the mistake he made when he accepted the duel. As soon as he sees Ducos, Sharpe understands what is in store for him. It is another example of Sharpe undergoing extreme physical hardship but still besting his enemy. Ducos feels falsely safe with his cronies protecting him and gets overconfident, even revealing his plans to Sharpe. For such a careful, meticulous planner, he exacts his revenge from an emotional place rather than a cold and calculated plan. Ducos is similar to El Matarife in this instance: he is enjoying the slow, baited torture of his victim. But Sharpe, when cornered, lashes out in a very unexpected way, using his Rifleman's fighting experience and survival instincts to completely turn the tables. When Sharpe encounters General Verigny, the General's sense of honor has been violated as well. Sharpe and Verigny are similar: they each have a personal code and stick to that code rigorously. Sharpe has fought his battle against unfair odds, and his reward is a doctor, a room, and some peace.



Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Sixteen Summary

In the beginning of chapter sixteen, Sharpe is severely injured. He is again left with his thoughts, wondering why Ducos framed him and why Helene lied about it. La Marquesa, General Verigny, and Major Montburn come to dine with him. They eat gazpacho, a soup, and make small talk. Sharpe is given a razor to shave, a new shirt, and a tinder box to replace the items Ducos stole from him. They inform him they cannot let him go, and he is to travel with the army. If he is not well enough, he may travel in La Marquesa's coach. They encourage Sharpe to sign the parole, as it is unthinkable for a man of his caliber to be treated like a common criminal. He puts off the signing until the next morning, and the gentlemen leave, drunk. La Marquesa comes back later, and they make love. Later, La Marquesa admits that Ducos made her sign the letter, and she tells him about the treaty between Napoleon and the imprisoned Spanish king. She and Montbrun want Sharpe to sign the parole and then escape anyway to warn Wellington about that treaty—that way, La Marquesa can get her wagons back and Monbrun can stay close to the current Spanish king, Joseph. If Sharpe tells Wellington, then no one can blame Joseph, and she can regain her wealth, though she dooms France. Sharpe's name is purposefully misspelled on the parole, so according to La Marquesa, it is not actually his parole. He thinks she wants him to sign away his honor and promise to come to her when the war is over. After she leaves, Sharpe gets drunk. He weighs the price of his honor versus being with Helene, convinced in his drunkenness that she loves him. Before falling asleep, he notices an army's campfires in the distance.

Chapter Sixteen Analysis

In chapter sixteen, Sharpe is really tested: to give up his honor seems an easy thing to sacrifice to be with La Marquesa. He has been physically beaten and physiologically berated, and the only thing pulling him from the blackness is love of this treacherous woman. This is the closest Sharpe has yet been to giving in and taking the path of least resistance and trading his personal desires for his personal convictions. He understands he has been inadvertently caught up in a political struggle, and if he gives in everyone wins, but he may never be able to live with himself again. La Marquesa is doing everything in her power to get Sharpe to help her, utilizing all her feminine wiles and the knowledge that Sharpe cares about her. She may or may not care about him, but she certainly uses his feelings to her advantage. At the end of the chapter it seems that Sharpe really will sacrifice his honor, even after sighting the British camp.



Chapter Seventeen, Chapter Eighteen, and Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Seventeen, Chapter Eighteen, and Chapter Nineteen Summary

Sharpe wakes in chapter seventeen with a major hangover and is shaved by a young guard. He decides he cannot possibly sign the parole and still live with himself. He tips the ink bottle onto the paper, destroying it. Sharpe witnesses a cavalryman throw a lit cigar into a pile of fuses leading to shells and decides not to raise the alarm in hopes he will escape in the explosion. Though the explosion is very destructive, Sharpe escapes into the city but is captured by a Spanish family thinking him an escaped prisoner. The French leave Burgos and head toward Vitoria.

In chapter eighteen, Hogan learns that Sharpe very likely died in the explosion. He cannot believe it, and the British troops pursue the French to Vitoria. Sharpe is alive and being fed by the Spanish family, who recognize him as English just in time. Though he is still hurt and weak, Sharpe leaves to walk to Vitoria and catch up with the British army. He stops later in the afternoon and almost encounters El Matarife, who is traveling on the same road. Luckily Angel finds him, and the two set off to find Wellington; Sharpe is determined to win the war. Meanwhile, Harper has still not completely accepted Sharpe's death. D'Alembord bets him a pound that Sharpe is dead.

In chapter nineteen on June 21st, 1813, the one-hundred-forty thousand British have arrived at Vitoria, as well as Spanish, Portuguese, and the King's German Legion. The French have great confidence in their gun power and know the battleground is unlucky for the British troops, as they had been brutally beaten there centuries before. The French are very confident in their success and even send some troops back to France with their treasures. Ducos thinks the French will be defeated and has made his treaty ready. Father Hacha comes to speak with him, concerned that La Marquesa's money is not yet legally theirs; they plan to send El Matarife after her to take her back to the convent. Ducos does not like that the fate of France is left to the soldiers and would rather it be left to a clever and calculating man. Then, the battle begins.

Chapter Seventeen, Chapter Eighteen, and Chapter Nineteen Analysis

These three chapters are setting the scene for the great battles to come. Sharpe is safe, reunited with Angel, and presumably on his way to save the day. Harper is beginning to lose faith in his friend's survival, and the French confidence in victory is spelling their doom. Ducos, amid all the chaos, is still planning to kidnap La Marquesa for his own means. All the characters are gearing up for a great conflict, and Ducos's prediction



casts a dour shadow on the French army. Angel becomes, in chapter eighteen, literally an angel for Sharpe, arriving to save him from an encounter with El Matarife and transporting his battered body much more quickly to Wellington. La Marquesa, formerly thought safe, is actually still in danger from the three villains, Ducos, El Matarife, and Father Hacha. The story is weaving together for the final battle and the final resolution.



Chapter Twenty and Chapter Twenty One

Chapter Twenty and Chapter Twenty One Summary

Chapter twenty begins with French gunfire, and La Marquesa taking her seat in the spectator stands. Captain Saumier has been assigned to attend to La Marquesa by General Veringy, who purposefully chooses the captain because he is injured and ugly. Captain Saumier thinks Wellington will attack from the heights and not the plains, and Marshal Jourdan is confident in a French victory. Joseph Bonaparte, Napoleon's older brother and King of Spain and the Indies, needs this victory to secure his kingdom. The British march toward the killing ground, where the French guns are firing, and smoke obscures the field. The British troops are afraid of the French guns but try to put on brave faces. Sharpe and Angel arrive in search of the Fifth Division, and Sharpe sets off to join the battle.

The French gunners and infantry are written about in the beginning of chapter twenty-one; the gunners sponge the guns so extra powder does not spark and take off one of the gunner's hands. The British in the field have to cower in ditches and behind stone walls to escape the raining shells. The British cavalry ride up on the far side of the river bank, but Marshal Jourdan thinks it is a feint and the British want him to divert his troops, so he reinforces the left. Jourdan is so sure of a victory that a feast has already been ordered at Vitoria's grandest hotel. Wellington, however, has his own plan, like a left hand placed downward on a map: his thumb is the attack in the heights, his index finger the troops who have advanced to the French guns, and then the remaining three fingers attack from the north while Jourdan's attention is on the south and west. Meanwhile, La Marquesa is sending Captain Saumier out on errand after errand. She regrets Sharpe's death but suddenly sees British troops through her spyglass advancing on the French's unguarded flank. Sharpe finally catches up to the Fifth Division, just in time to help them invade the village Gamarra Mayor and cut off the Great Road.

Chapter Twenty and Chapter Twenty One Analysis

Chapter twenty is setting up the reader for the great battle. All the characters are preparing in their own ways: La Marquesa is seated to watch the outcome; Sharpe is searching for his battalion, and soldiers on each side are fortifying themselves. Cornwell gives detailed descriptions of the French weapons and a clear layout of the battlefield. The French are very confident, but thus far in the novel overconfidence has led to ruin, so the British may still have a fighting chance.

Chapter twenty-one is where some of the major action begins. Wellington's plan comes into focus more clearly, and Marshal Jourdan suffers the first wavering of his confidence since the beginning of the day. The British take a group of French guns, and everyone pauses to regroup. La Marquesa admits to herself that she regrets Sharpe's loss, and she is every glad she told him she loved him—she still thinks him a very simple man,

and unlike his men, underestimates him. The tide has turned in the battle, and Sharpe is racing to fight alongside his man.



Chapter Twenty-Two and Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter Twenty-Two and Chapter Twenty-Three Summary

Chapter twenty-two joins the Fifth Division, led by Colonel Leroy, who are poised to invade Gamarra Mayor. They shake out the flags and prepare to advance. Patrick Harper still insists that Major Sharpe is alive. Leroy and d'Alembord lead the men forward, but their line is ripped apart by French fire. Leroy leads them ahead to the barricade but is killed. Meanwhile, Sharpe has arrived and begins to whip the men into shape. Everyone is spellbound and thinks he is a ghost back from the dead. The battalion cheers him, and he cannot stop them, though he is leading them into death.

Chapter twenty-three begins with Sharpe thinking about La Marquesa. He does not love her and knows she does not love him, but he still fights for her and wishes she could see him in battle. He leads the soldiers to the barricade and pulls it down; British troops invade the city in honor of Leroy. To the dumbfounded soldiers who think they saw Sharpe's death by hanging, he jokes "The army can't do anything right" (p.274). Meanwhile, Marshal Jourdan is horrified by the possibility of defeat, but the French prepare for the possibility. La Marquesa wishes General Verigny would take her wagons back like she knew Sharpe would; she sees a fleeting glimpse of a man she thinks is El Matarife. Because of Leroy's death, Sharpe has become the commanding officer. Sharpe and Patrick reunite, Patrick happy about winning his bet that Sharpe is alive; Lieutenant Trumper-Jones faints upon seeing Sharpe. The British break the French lines and continue to advance while the French begin to run.

Chapter Twenty-Two and Chapter Twenty-Three Analysis

These two chapters are where the big battles take place. Though the reader has already seen British and French troops engaging, Colonel Leroy's advance is a major turning point in the war. Their flags, battered and torn, have been through many battles, and the men seem to take comfort in them. Though these flags have likely outlasted many men in battle, they are a proud symbol of what the battalion fights for and where they come from. Sharpe does not seek the glory of the men cheering for him because he knows he may lead them to their deaths. Although, as soon as Sharpe gets involved in the battle, the tides turn for the French and the British forces come out strong. Sharpe does not love La Marquesa, nor does she love him, and he still does not quite understand why he fights for her, but he knows he must. He is still searching for something, and she is the closest he has come to fulfilling that something. Though she thinks of him as a lovesick puppy, he knows who she is and what she does. He has no

illusions about their future together or her love for him, but he knows he wants her now, so he pursues that impulse.

In chapter twenty-three, La Marquesa wishes for him to retrieve her wagons because she knows General Verigny does not have the backbone. Her glimpse of El Matarife foreshadows the other battle to come, which must be Sharpe and El Matarife battling for La Marquesa. The big battle has been won, but there are still loose ties and unfinished business Sharpe must attend to before he can be at peace.



Chapter Twenty Four and Chapter Twenty Five

Chapter Twenty Four and Chapter Twenty Five Summary

In chapter twenty-four, the French forces unabashedly flee. King Joseph must abandon his carriage and belongings and run along with all the other French subjects. La Marquesa is trying to escape in her wagon, protected by Saumier, and must shoot people pulling valuables off her wagon. Saumier tries to take her north, away from the melee, and Ducos flees as well, happy his treaty will now be the savior of France. Saumier tries to take La Marquesa across the ditch but is intercepted and killed by El Matarife, who again kidnaps La Marquesa. She is being taken back to the convent.

In chapter twenty-five, Sharpe and Patrick discover La Marquesa is missing. After a brief stop at her empty carriage, Sharpe searches for her in the chaos of the retreating army. The British army begins to raid the wagons, among them La Marquesa's. Sharpe and Patrick return to La Marquesa's wagon and confiscate her jewels. Sharpe continues on until Angel spots El Matarife with La Marquesa splayed over his saddle. Sharpe sets off to save La Marquesa and do battle with El Matarife.

Chapter Twenty Four and Chapter Twenty Five Analysis

There is terror in the air in chapter twenty-four, as the battle is decidedly won by the British. The French, who were so confident in the beginning, are running for their lives instead of fine dining at the hotel. And La Marquesa, captured then rescued, is captured again. She has seemingly lost her own dangerous game, and even her important suitors, her status, and her money cannot help her. El Matarife found her because her golden hair stuck out easily against the frenzied background; thus, her most famous attribute is her downfall.

Sharpe cannot locate La Marquesa and frantically searches for her among the chaos. While others rifle through the abandoned wealth, Sharpe's goal is finding La Marquesa. When he sees her in the company of El Matarife, it leads to the inevitable showdown. Sharpe's honor has led him this far, and he must complete the journey and tie up all his loose ends.



Chapter Twenty Six and Epilogue

Chapter Twenty Six and Epilogue Summary

Sharpe must fight El Matarife; it is the only way to save La Marquesa, so Sharpe must challenge El Matarife to a duel. La Marquesa crosses herself when she sees Sharpe, as she thought he was dead. El Matarife throws a chain at Sharpe, and the two men tie the ends of the chain to their respective arms to commence the knife fight. It is a fierce fight, but Sharpe emerges victorious, and he makes El Matarife admit to killing the Marquesa and working for the French. He means to let El Matarife live but slits his throat when El Matarife fights unfairly. Sharpe tells El Matarife his death is in honor of the girl he killed and tried to pass off as La Marquesa. He will go to Vitoria to tell Hogan the truth and clear his name.

In the epilogue, Sharpe receives a telescope from La Marquesa as a gift to replace the one he lost. The telescope was King Joseph's, and La Marquesa bought it off a cavalryman for Sharpe. Patrick Harper and Isabella get married, her with diamonds around her neck from the raid. La Marquesa gets her wagons back from the Inquisitor and is promised safe passage back to France. The men are dining in victory, and Sharpe, after many speeches and much leave taking, makes his way upstairs where La Marquesa waits for him.

Chapter Twenty Six and Epilogue Analysis

Sharpe's showdown with El Matarife is the final battle of the book: Sharpe is fighting for La Marquesa, as well as the nameless girl who was killed to fool him, and mostly importantly, for his own honor. He must defeat El Matarife fairly according to Sharpe's own code. This is the second time El Matarife has taken La Marquesa, and Sharpe must rescue her once and for all. El Matarife is like an animal, and though Sharpe can be savage, his honor is what keeps him separate from El Matarife. He beats El Matarife at his own horrible game and thus can have peace in the victory. It is ironic that the very thing that got Sharpe into all the trouble is the same thing that saves him in the end: a duel. Though he did not finish killing his victim the first time, he does kill El Matarife, completing his journey and restoring his reputation.

Sharpe is finally content: he has saved his career, his reputation, gotten La Marquesa, and done it all according to his sense of honor. While sometimes his path would have been easier had he compromised, he sticks to his convictions and is rewarded by being at peace. La Marquesa will never love him, nor will he love her, but her treacherous nature and tough-as-nails attitude makes her a fitting reward for a soldier in Sharpe's eyes.



Characters

Richard Sharpe

Major Richard Sharpe is a soldier's soldier, bound by his own personal code of ethics and a true love for his life as a soldier. Though he is torn apart with guilt by the death of his wife, Sharpe's Honour takes the hero on a cathartic journey through his own psyche. Though thought of by La Marquesa as a "simple" man, Sharpe's convictions and loyalties make him a formidable enemy. He is not willing to compromise his honor, which leads him on a series of escapades where he must prove himself yet again. His life is high stakes: because of the duel, his career, honor, and very life are on the line, not to mention being judged by all. He is given a chance to save his honor and his life is spared; he uses that chance to find La Marquesa. Sharpe does not love her but is obsessed with her beauty: as a hardened soldier, he presumably sees little beauty in his life, so when he comes across such an exceptional woman as La Marquesa, he is spellbound. He hopes to assuage the guilt over his wife's death by somehow aiding La Marquesa, though he still has a young daughter living with relatives. He begins the novel a tortured soul, then becomes a dead man on the run, and finishes with everything again in its right place: he is a hero; La Marquesa is safe, and he has been rewarded handsomely. He has everything he needs to start over and to move on from his demons. Sharpe is mentally anguished throughout most of the book, but much of his punishment is physical: he survives countless disasters and seems on the edge of death multiple times. This physical punishment is part of his spiritual cleansing, as if he must be very close to death or madness to truly appreciate his life. He is a soldier, responsible for more soldiers, and understands how to survive; however, in the book, he seems to learn how to actually live. His existence is not simply survival anymore but truly a life.

La Marquesa

La Marquesa, or Helene Leroux, is as treacherous as she is beautiful. She is a woman who has had to play for power her whole life and has used her beauty as an advantage. As a spy for France, La Marquesa married a man close to the Spanish king but has no maidenly scruples about having affairs. While she did spy for France, La Marquesa's major concern is herself. She is a freespirted and wealthy woman, and her status garners jealousy and disapproval among many conservative Spaniards. La Marquesa is seemingly the opposite of Sharpe's late wife: Mrs. Sharpe was loyal to a fault and honest, while La Marquesa betrays Sharpe with barely a twinge of conscience. It is ironic that La Marquesa's near downfall is in seclusion in the church—she, an adulteress and a liar, trapped and subsequently rescued from a convent. La Marquesa is not concerned with her soul but almost exclusively with her material wealth and wellbeing. She rewards Sharpe in the end for her rescue and recognizes he has fought long and hard for her. She is willing to share herself with him, thinking of it almost as payment for him returning her wealth to her.



Major Pierre Ducos

Ducos is a cold, calculating man. His plan for the secret treaty is at once brilliant and chilling, and his personal revenge against Sharpe and La Marquesa is woven in seemingly perfectly.

Patrick Harper

A big, loyal Irishman, Patrick Harper is Sharpe's best friend. He has complete faith in Sharpe and looks up to him as the hero Sharpe is.

Father Hacha

Father Hacha is in league with Ducos and El Matarife, though the Father believes he is doing a good deed and truly saving Spain.

Lieutenant Trumper-Jones

The young Lieutenant assigned to Sharpe's defense during his trial. Despite the Lieutenant's impassioned speech defending him, Sharpe is still pronounced guilty.

El Matarife

El Matarife, or The Slaughterman, takes a perverse delight in torturing his victims. He kidnaps La Marquesa and must ultimately do battle with Sharpe, with her as the prize.

Napoleon

Emperor of France who seeks to take over Spain as well.

Major Vaughn

The Major who is Sharpe's prosecutor in his murder trial. Sharpe later borrows his name as a pseudonym to move secretly on his mission to find La Marquesa.

Teresa

Sharpe's deceased wife. He feels guilt over her death, which leads him to many of the situations in which he finds himself.



Antonia

Sharpe's daughter, to whom he has given all his wealth. She lives with relatives.

Angel

The Spanish boy who aids Sharpe on his mission. Angel has a vendetta against the French for killing his family when he was thirteen. Now, at sixteen, his goal is to be a rifleman in the British army.

General Wellington

The Commander and Generalissimo of the British and Spanish forces against the French. Wellington gives Sharpe another chance after the murder accusation because Sharpe saved his life in the past, and he knew Sharpe was innocent.

Liam Dooley

The man who dies in Sharpe's stead, to save his brother.

Captain William Frederickson

Known as "Sweet William," he is a Rifleman in Sharpe's command. He guides Angel and Major Hogan back to the Gateway of God to meet Sharpe.

Major Michael Hogan

Meets Sharpe at the Gateway of God and gives him instructions to hunt out his enemies, clear his name, and stay free of the French.

Isabella

Patrick Harper's wife.

Marshal Jourdan

Leader of the French in the battle at Vitoria. He is overly confident, and this arrogance is his downfall.



Captain Saumier

Assigned by General Verigny to attend to La Marquesa during the battle.

Colonel Leroy

Leader of Sharpe's battalion at the battle of Vitoria and killed trying to take the village Gamarra Mayor.



Objects/Places

Treaty of Valencay

The treaty Ducos has created in hopes of securing victory for France.

La Marquesa's letters

One letter initially condemns Sharpe, and one clears him of blame. Though La Marquesa is treacherous, her letters are used as evidence in his trial; an earlier letter from her expressing condolences for his wife's death is withheld as evidence.

Burgos

A city in the northern part of Spain that the French army occupies. This is where Sharpe is held in prison and where an explosion enables his escape.

Vitoria

The final battle that drives France out of Spain.

The Telescope

This item was given to Sharpe in the past by Wellington for saving the General's life. It is one of the few meaningful things Sharpe possesses and is broken in a fury by Ducos. However, a sharp brass piece of the telescope helps Sharpe escape interrogation and ultimately get back to his battalion. La Marquesa gives him a telescope after the battle; the telescope which is originally intended for King Joseph after the French victory.

The Gateway of God

Formerly a fierce battleground, the Gateway of God is where Sharpe is sent to await further instruction after his presumed death.

Sharpe's Sword

The sword is distinct because it is a straight sword, not curved, and the sword is an identifying characteristic of major Sharpe.



Gamarra Mayor

The small village that Sharpe and his battalion must take in order to complete British victory over the French.

Flags or Colors

The colors are carried into battle by each side. The flags of Sharpe's division, South Essex, are battered and torn, an indication that they have been in many battles.

The Convent of the Heavens

A convent in the north of Spain where La Marquesa is held captive.

The Great Road

The road that connects southern France and northern Spain. The French army must invade and retreat using this road.



Themes

Honor

Sharpe's honor is what both gets him into trouble and redeems him. He refuses to take the dishonorable route even when it is easier and seems to make more sense. For instance, La Marquesa calls him foolish when he will not sign the parole for General Verigny, but to do so would have seriously compromised Sharpe's character, which may be all he has left after his adventures. He has a stringent personal code he cannot break, which is much of the reason the men of his battalion look up to him. Sharpe's idea of honor is unwavering, and even at his weakest moments, he is much too honest to break his word. While Ducos is subversive and scheming in attempt to achieve his goals, Sharpe seeks nothing but the truth of his situation: to find out why he was framed for a murder and why it was primarily La Marquesa's letter that set him up. Though Sharpe is obsessed with her, La Marquesa seemingly has no sense of honor. She is out to save herself and her wealth and is willing to go to great lengths to assure she can continue in the comfortable life to which she is so accustomed. She even bribes Sharpe with herself if he will sign the parole and escape. She is a survivor and has no rules to play by like Sharpe does. Though honor takes him on a more difficult path than sometimes necessary, he cleanses his conscience of the horrible guilt about his wife's death that had wracked him by sticking with his instincts and solving problems in his own way.

War

The entire novel centers around the war between Spain and France. It is not only a backdrop for the character's stories, but directly affects their situations as well. The politics that are involved in the war are a large part of the storyline; Ducos's treaty is why he frames Sharpe in the first place. Besides the actual, physical war, Sharpe wars within himself throughout the novel as well. His guilt is eating him alive, and he must do battle to win the war for his honor. There are many instances in the book Sharpe is faced with a choice, and his honorable code wins the battle. He must grapple with his feelings for La Marquesa realizing that the war he fights between lust and love is certainly not love. He is still obsessed with her but recognizes his feeling as physical and not emotional. She tempts him, leaving him torn between doing the right thing and doing the easy thing. In a weakened, drunken state, he resolves to sign the parole and simply be with her for as long as he is able, but in the harsh light of morning he knows he cannot. All Sharpe has is his honor, and if something else were to win that honor he would have nothing. Just like the British and Spanish are fighting for freedom, Sharpe fights for his liberation.



Outside vs. Inside

All the characters in the novel have ulterior motives. Some of them are well-intentioned, but they all have goals hidden beneath what they present on the outside. La Marquesa is the prime example: she is absolutely beautiful on the outside, bedazzling everyone she meets, but she is always scheming and figuring out how to better herself. Her primary concern is wealth, and she is even willing to sacrifice the ever-loyal Sharpe to protect her status. She marries the Marques as a political move and does not intend to adhere to her marriage vows. While Sharpe sticks to a strict personal code of honor, La Marquesa is willing to do anything it takes to preserve her wealth and status. Ducos, who on the outside appears virtuous and collected, is coldly planning revenge on the inside. Even Father Hacha, supposedly pious, arranges murder and furthers Ducos's plans for the treaty. Young Angel plans revenge on the French for killing his family, but is still a sixteen-year-old boy caught up in a war. Sharpe, on the outside, is a tough soldier's soldier but inside is tortured by guilt about his wife's death.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written from third-person, so the author can examine each of their characters' thoughts at a whim. Mostly, though, the reader is presented with the thoughts and feelings of Major Richard Sharpe, Rifleman in the British army and main focal point of the novel. Sharpe is a soldier's soldier and very tough, so many of the terms and situations in the novel are written from a male-centric perspective. Cornwell takes the liberty to move about in other characters' thoughts as well when beneficial to the story line and takes great care to explain the inner workings of his triumvirate of villains: Ducos, Father Hacha, and El Matarife. Cornwell often uses other characters' perspectives of Sharpe for the reader to gain insight on Sharpe's actions, most often with the men of his battalion and Patrick Harper. La Marquesa is seen mainly from Sharpe's point of view, painting her as a beautiful, dangerous, and selfish woman. The reader believes that Sharpe is dead, and effective ploy because the reference character is gone: not until Sharpe is revealed as alive do his thoughts and feelings come into play again. The reader gains a greater understanding of Sharpe's concept of honor though his actions, his thoughts, and others' thought about him.

Setting

Cornwell takes much time in the novel to clarify the settings. Most of the novel takes place in the mountains, valleys, and grassy hills of northern Spain around Burgos and Vitoria. The author describes the surrounding landscapes in beautiful detail, especially in latter chapters before the imminent battle. The Gateway of the Gods is relayed in its full majesty, and Cornwell pays special attention to the domestic attributes of the day as well, such as the houses, inns, and even the convent. Since the novel is historical, Cornwell must pay particular attention to the customs and taboos of the time period, up to and including specific rifle models, soldier's dress, and treatments of injuries. Sharpe is "bled" a couple of times when he is ill, and he fixes La Marquesa grease to slather on her wounds. Also, La Marquesa and Sharpe catch their fleas with soap—Cornwell has spared no detail to daily life in the 1800s. All the action in the novel takes place in Spain in 1813, though there are references to previous events in the series as well, such as Teresa's death, Wellington's rescue, and the horrible Spanish Inquisition. The British army is constantly on the move, existing without tents and other conveniences, but with traveling peddlers and even professional prostitutes trailing in their midst. All combine to provide a realistic picture of the times.

Language and Meaning

As a narrator, Cornwell focuses his language on his characters' development. Since he is dealing with at least three major powers, each with different languages, he must



encompass English, French, and Spanish words within the story. For instance, La Marquesa is known in Spanish as "La Puta Dorada," or "The Golden Whore," and El Matarife is "The Slaughterman." He does not use many complicated words, as his main character is a gruff soldier, but does incorporate many military terms and slang with which the reader becomes familiar. While La Marquesa's sentences tend to be longer and more complicated, Sharpe tends toward a more concise speech pattern. He pokes fun at General Verigny for his mispronunciation of many English words, though Major Sharpe speaks no French. Cornwell uses language and accent to specify the nationality of characters, such as when he points out Patrick Harper's Irish brogue or La Marquesa's proficiency at languages.

Structure

The author often employs shorter sentence structure or even fragmented sentences to achieve dramatic effect. The novel is sectioned into fairly even-sized chapters, and from there different paragraphs. Whenever the scene changes, the paragraphs are indented to show a difference. The dialogue is signified with quotation marks; the reader can follow along with the dialogue and know what the characters are thinking as well. The first few chapters of the book follow Sharpe's guilt over his wife. Then, after the trial and hanging, the story follows Sharpe in his attempts to find La Marquesa and clear his name. The latter chapters of the novel focus on the battle between the French and British and Sharpe's final battle with El Matarife. The story continually moves forward, though with a few references to the past present. The climax of the story is Sharpe's defeat of El Matarife. The resolution comes after that, as Sharpe's name is cleared; his career is safe, and he has La Marquesa.



Quotes

"Sharpe was a soldier's soldier, a man whose approval was eagerly sought by other men, whose name was used as a touchstone of professional competence, and apparently a man who now contemplated surrender without a fight." (p.21).

"El Matarife clasped the priest in his arms. They were brothers, though it was hard to see how the same womb could have given birth to two such different men." (p.14).

"He had been oppressed since Christmas, swinging between violent guilt and savage despair because his wife had died in the snows at the Gateway of the Gods. Unbidden into his mind came the sudden picture of the blood at her throat. He shook his head, as if to drive the picture away. He felt guilty that she had died, he felt guilty that he had been unfaithful to her, he felt guilty that her love had been so badly returned, he felt guilty that he has let his daughter become motherless." (p.22).

"If any man was a friend of Sharpe's it was this Sergeant. They had shared every battlefield together in Spain and Portugal, and the only thing that Harper could not share was the guilt that haunted Sharpe since his wife's death." (p.28).

"Harper laughed. He was fond of saying that Major Sharpe was always chasing the pot of gold that lay at the end of every rainbow. He found the pots often enough, but, according to Harper, he always discarded them because the pots were the wrong shape." (p.44).

"He twisted his horse through bright-leaved ash trees on a hill top that overlooked their destination, and he thought of La Marquesa, of her eyes on him, and he knew that he risked all for one woman who played with men, and for another who was dead. None of it made sense, he was simply driven by a soldier's superstition that said not to do this thing was to risk oblivion." (p.58).

"Officially you're dead. You don't exist. There is no Major Sharpe, and there never will be unless you vindicate yourself." (p.108) Major Hogan to Sharpe at the Gateway of God.

"Time passed and passed, measured only by the dripping of water onto stone. They wanted him to despair, to be dragged down by this foul, stinking place, and he fought it by trying to remember the names of every man who had served in his Company since the beginning of the war in Spain, and when he had done that he tried to call aloud the muster-roll of the very first Company he had joined in the army. He paced the cell against the cold, back and forth, his boots splashing on the floor, and sometimes, when the smell was too much, he put his mouth against the spyhole in the door and sucked deep breaths. He cursed himself for this capture, for oversleeping in the dawn, for accepting the challenge of a duel." (p.178).



"He drank more, not bothering with the glass. If he was to sign the parole, he thought, then he would be with her for a few days. Verigny could not be there all the time. They could make love in her carriage, the curtains drawn. He would break his parole. There would be no honor left to him if he did that, none. Yet he would save Britain from the defeat at the price of his honor. He could make Helene rich for his honor. And, by forcing failure onto Ducos, he could disgrace the man, maybe even, as Helene had said, have him stood against the wall and shot. All at the price of his honor" (p.202).

"He could not sign it, he told himself, because it would be unworthy of him. He would have to escape instead. He would go to Wellington with this news, but not by sacrificing his honor. Captain d'Alembord had said that honor was merely a word to hide a man's sins, and La Marquesa had laughed at the word, but Sharpe knew what it meant. It meant he could never live with himself if he signed the paper and let Montbrun engineer his escape. Honor was conscience. He walked away from the table, from the temptation of the parole, and carried the champagne to the barred window." (p.206).

"That finger was the Fifth Division. It marched to a village called Gamarra Mayor, and it if could take that village, cross the river, and cut the Great Road, then it would turn French defeat into a rout. There, Wellington knew, the battle would be hardest, and to that place, as the sun rose to its zenith, Sharpe rode." (p.259)

"The smoke cleared slowly from the plain to show an army marching forward. Not in parade order, but in a more glorious order. From the mountains to the river, across two miles of burned and bloodied country, the allied Regiments were spread. They marched beneath their Colors and the sun lanced between the smoke to touch the ragged flags red, white, blue, gold, and red again where the blood had soaked them. The land was heavy with the men who marched, Regiment after Regiment, Brigade after Brigade, climbing the low hills that had been the French second line. Their shadows went before them as they marched towards the city of golden spires" (p.282).

"Now, standing at the stair's head with Captain d'Alembord, he felt a surge of affection for these soldiers whose life was so hard and whose pleasures so few and who knew how to take both hardship and pleasure in their stride" (p.314).

"This was what had driven him across Spain to this city. This woman, treacherous as sin, who would love and betray him in the same moment. She was as faithful as a morning mist, as hard as a sword-bayonet, and that, he thought, made her a suitable reward for a soldier" (p.315).



Topics for Discussion

What is Sharpe's concept of honor? Why doesn't he sign the parole? Would it have made anything easier for him?

La Marquesa is very concerned about her wagons and wealth. Does she really love Richard Sharpe? Does she love anyone?

Discuss the three villains and how they interconnect. Does El Matarife get what he deserves?

Major Sharpe admittedly got himself into this whole mess with the duel. Why did he decide to fight the Marques?

Why does Wellington save Sharpe from being hanged?

How does Sharpe eventually escape from Burgos? How does he make it back to the British army?

What is Father Hacha's excuse for holding La Marquesa's wagons?

How was Wellington's plan to defeat the French? Why does he continue to throw troops at the front, where they are cut down by French guns?