Sharpe's Regiment Study Guide

Sharpe's Regiment by Bernard Cornwell

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Major Richard Sharpe loves his military unit the South Essex Regiment. He, Regimental Sergeant Major Patrick Harper, and others find the South Essex the closest thing to a home that they know. But warfare in Spain between England and Napoleonic France has taken its toll on the South Essex and the first battalion (that portion of the unit engaged in overseas combat) has lost so many men that it is scarcely a viable fighting force. A second battalion has been established in England to recruit and train replacements, but after many months no replacements have arrived in France. Sharpe, Harper, and a few others are returned to England to track down the second battalion, ascertain why it is not delivering replacements, and correct the situation.

In England, Sharpe quickly determines that the second battalion is in fact actively recruiting men, but instead of sending those men to the first battalion, corrupt second battalion commanders are selling the new recruits to the highest bidder—an illegal but fairly common process known as crimping. The second battalion draws rations and pay for the recruits but they do not receive it. Instead, they are marches to an islet ironically named Foulness where the martinet Lieutenant Colonel Bartholomew Girdwood trains them. Girdwood is protected by Sharpe's long-time nemesis Sir Henry Simmerson, who in turn derives political protection from Lord Simon Fenner, the Secretary of State at War. Sharpe's initial forays into a political solution are clumsy and easily deflected, leading only to an assassination attempt. Determined to resolve the situation at any cost, Sharpe and Harper travel through the countryside incognito until they locate a second battalion recruiting party led by the colorful Sergeant Horatio Havercamp and sign up as new enlistees. They are marched to Foulness and begin basic training, finding the place run by the sadistic Girdwood as a mix between a formal training ground and a prison. Men who attempt to assert their rights are murdered or even sometimes hunted as human prey. Sharpe and Harper gather intelligence and escape, only to discover that in London their personal testimonies are worth little pitted against Fenner's considerable political influence.

Simmerson's young and beautiful niece, Jane Gibbons, is also aware of the corruption and while a romantic relationship between Jane and Sharpe begins against a backdrop of Sharpe's investigative actions, Jane vows to secure documentary proof of her tyrant uncle's abuses. However Jane proves incapable of locating the ledger books and Sharpe ultimately resorts to a grandstanding maneuver during a Royal Parade to attempt to catch the Royal attention. In this he fails and faces an unsympathetic court of review. Fortunately for Sharpe the proceedings are interrupted by Anne Camoynes, a political enemy of Fenner who has befriended Sharpe due to their common interests. Anne provides the documentary proof of Fenner's corruption and a political deal is arranged whereby all parties are satisfied. Sharpe and Jane become engaged and Sharpe returns to Spain accompanied by the men of the second battalion who swell the South Essex's ranks and put the regiment back into fighting shape.

Prologue and Chapter 1

Prologue and Chapter 1 Summary

The novel opens immediately after a combat encounter between the first battalion of the South Essex Regiment and French forces. The action occurs in Spain during June, 1813, and leaves many casualties behind including a sergeant that dies in the protagonist Richard Sharpe's arms. Sharpe reflects on the encounter, noting that it was strategically insignificant and tactically pointless. Nevertheless, the British forces fought with determination and pride and successfully defended the area against a larger French force armed with artillery. After the action, Sharpe and the other British soldiers recuperate. Later, Sharpe observes the South Essex Regiment and notes that its numbers are seriously depleted through casualties. Later still, he meets with Colonel Nairn and they have a frank discussion about the regiment. The South Essex regiment is composed of two battalions. The first battalion is deployed in Spain and includes Sharpe and others. The second battalion is a recruiting and training battalion located in England. Supposedly, the second battalion recruits and trains men to send to the first battalion—yet for many, many months no new recruits have appeared. Nairn informs Sharpe that the second battalion's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Girdwood, is failing at his basic tasks and then drops a bombshell—Lord Simon Fenner, Secretary of State at War, has noted that due the second battalion's failure the first battalion is so depleted it can hardly be regarded as combat effective. Lord Fenner suggests that the first battalion be broken up and dispersed among other units. Sharpe is outraged; Nairn suggests the proper course of action is for Sharpe to travel to England and investigate Girdwood's failure. Sharpe's fame should gain him some political influence, and obviously no one in England cares about the South Essex as much as Sharpe.

In Chapter 1 Sharpe travels to England accompanied by Regimental Sergeant Major Patrick Harper, Captail d'Alembord, and Lieutenant Harry Price. The men travel to Chelmsford, the depot of the second battalion, and find it oddly deserted. At the depot they locate Captain Carline, Lieutenant Merrill, and Lieutenant Pierce, who, along with a relative handful of enlisted men, are all that are present of the second battalion. A brief but intense investigation informs Sharpe that the second battalion is drawing rations and pay for seven hundred men but only a dozen are at the depot. Carline does not know where Lieutenant Colonel Girdwood is and has not seen him for many months. Sharpe is stymied and confused; he then meets an old veteran companion, Sergeant Carew, who tells him that Sergeant Horatio Havercamp, the second battalion's recruiter, has been very active constantly and must be bringing in many recruits for the second battalion, yet the recruits never come to the second battalion's official depot. Carew also notes that the many new uniforms for the second battalion have never been issued. After further investigation, Sharpe realizes that the second battalion is actively drawing rations and pay and actively recruiting men, but is not performing its proper function of sending the men to the first battalion after training. He is at a loss of what to do next. Then a messenger delivers a summons to a royal event—the war-hero Sharpe is invited

to call upon the Prince of Wales. Sharpe believes his troubles are over as he plans to tell the Prince of Wales his troubles and have the royal influence solve them.

Prologue and Chapter 1 Analysis

The prologue and Chapter 1 are vital to the remainder of the novel as they establish the basic plot—the continued existence of Sharpe's beloved South Essex regiment depends on a supply of new recruits to replace battle losses. To this end a second battalion has been established as a recruiting and training battalion, yet after many, many months no new recruits have actually arrived at the South Essex regiment. Colonel Nairn dispatches Sharpe, Harper, and other officers to England with instructions to locate the second battalion and sort out any difficulties. Meanwhile, Lord Simon Fenner has officially suggested that the first battalion of the South Essex should be disbanded because he believes it is not combat effective due to high losses. The novel thus becomes atypical for the series of novels inasmuch as the bulk of the action takes place in England and the novel features relatively little combat—instead, political intrigue and interpersonal relationships form the basic tensions of the narrative.

Sharpe rather naively believes the situation will be easily rectified simply by bringing it to the attention of the authorities. His initial plan is to simply lay the matter before the Prince of Wales and let that august person propose a solution. Sharpe's involvement will take on a more personal involvement, and the solution will take rather longer than Sharpe anticipates. The remainder of the novel deals with Sharpe's and Harper's escapades. Although d'Alembord and Price accompany Sharpe and Harper, the former two men are relatively minor characters in the novel.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 Summary

Sharpe attends the gala and is presented to His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales. The Prince Regent is presented as slightly confused but enthusiastic about military matters. After much tutelage on how to approach and address the Prince Regent, Sharpe executed a creditable but not flawless presentation. The Prince Regent is much impressed by Sharpe whom he sees as a true soldier and a hero of the empire. When Sharpe broaches the subject of the second battalion the Prince Regent summons Lord Fenner to account; an expectant Sharpe is demoralized as Fenner easily deflects the situation with promises of future inquiries. Sharpe's appeal to royalty is thus foiled by the craft of the polished politician. Much of the remaining evening is spent in detailed consideration of the battle of Vitoria. In that combat, fully described in a previous novel of the series, Sharpe and Harper had captured a French Imperial Eagle, or regimental standard—the first such standard captured from France. During the evening the actual Eagle is paraded as a trophy of war and the Prince Regent is enthusiastic to have Sharpe again hold the standard. Later in the evening the Prince Regent becomes convinced that he, himself, participated in the capture. Late in the evening Sharpe meets a beautiful woman named Anne Camoynes. Although she appears largely disinterested, Anne throws herself at Sharpe and the two characters retire for an evening of sexual intercourse and chatter about court intrigues. The rather oblivious Sharpe assumes she is simply what she appears and discloses to her his troubles and future plans. She advises caution.

In Chapter 3, Sharpe and Harper attend a local play that re-enacts the battle of Vitoria. At the end of the play they are announced as being in attendance and a crowd gathers. Harper and his young wife Isabelle quite enjoy the attention and adulation, but Sharpe finds it irritating and quickly slips away. While Harper retires to the inn for many rounds of free drinks and soldier's bragging Sharpe travels to a desperately poor rookery and walks through the tangled streets with caution but confidence. He recalls growing up in the rookery and notes that it has not changed these many past years. He makes his way to a certain bar where he meets the owner, Maggie Joyce. Maggie and Sharpe were once lovers and he recalls how she taught him how to survive on the streets. The two old friends share drinks and conversation. Meanwhile Anne Camoynes meets with Fenner and discloses to him that Sharpe intends to pursue his investigations. Anne is deeply in debt to Fenner and he uses her financial obligation to control her actions; although she hates him he beds her upon his whim and uses her for a spy and informant as the opportunity presents.

In Chapter 4, Sharpe gives to Maggie the riches of Vitoria. He and Harper had captured a vast treasure. Some of it has been deposited with official agents, but Sharpe trusts the bulk of the fortune only to Maggie as he knows she can fence it without suspicion and complete honesty—at least to him. Sharpe leaves Maggie's bar drunk and doesn't realize he is being followed. Maggie sends a young girl after Sharpe, however, and she

not only warns him but delivers a pistol. Sharpe ambushes the two men following him, killing one and wounding the other. The wounded man tells Sharpe that he was hired by a soldier to kill him and then Sharpe kills the wounded man. Sharpe then returns to the inn, signals to Harper, and the two men quickly leave the city.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 Analysis

This section of the novel transitions Sharpe from thinking the solution to his missing battalion problem will be relatively easy to solve to the realization that something is seriously amiss. Sharpe's initial appeal to the Prince Regent is made and dismissed after assurances from Fenner that the situation will be handled; of course, Fenner is the very man that Sharpe suspects to be responsible. Note the descriptions of the royal palace contrasted with the earlier descriptions of the battlefield in Spain. Sharpe then becomes entangled with Anne Camoynes in a sexual liaison and fails to question her motives for so engaging him. Anne indeed works as a spy and agent for Fenner and gathers information about Sharpe during their sexual escapade. This leads to Anne informing Fenner of Sharpe's intent to continue the investigation, which in turn leads to Fenner sending two assassins to murder Sharpe. Fortunately Sharpe has an ally in the devoted Maggie Joyce and avoids becoming another nameless casualty in the rookery. Notice the inversion of public honor and honesty in this segment of the narrative—the Prince Regent is addle-brained and concerned only with his own pomp and circumstance; Fenner—the Secretary of the State at War—quickly resorts to murder to silence a potential foe; Anne engages in prostitution and spying for a man she loathes. Meanwhile, Harper and his wife are happy and forthright, and Maggie is loyal to her friends regardless of personal danger. The narrative features a major turning point in these chapters as Sharpe's mission becomes more complex and far more difficult. Anne becomes a major character later in the narrative, while Maggie does not recur. The relationship between Anne and Fenner is clear from the beginning, but the relationship between Anne and Sharpe continues to develop throughout the novel. Sharpe and Harper leave the city and also leave d'Alembord and Price behind for the time being. The setting of the novel now changes from an English city to the English countryside.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 Summary

Sharpe decides the safest course of action is to lay low and let his enemies assume he is dead. To that end, Sharpe and Harper travel through the English countryside and subsist by poaching and doing odd jobs. Meanwhile they travel quickly and often, visiting many small towns in search of the South Essex's Second Battalion's recruiting parties. They finally meet up with the recruiting party and Sergeant Horatio Havercamp. Havercamp is a likable loudmouth who sings the praises of military enlistment and discards the dangers and discomforts associated with it. To listen to Havercamp, one would image the army to be full of lascivious young women, piles of gold coins, and excellent room and board. Havercamp supplies his potential recruits with so-called free drinks—the costs later deducted from their enlistment bonus payments—and gets about a dozen men to sign up in a day's work. Sharpe enlists under the assumed name of Dick Vaughn and Harper enlists under the assumed name of Paddy O'Keefe. Both men make up plausible but basic cover stories. Two other recruits who recur later in the narrative, Weller and Marriott, also sign up at this time.

In Chapter 6, the new recruits sign their name or make their mark on their enlistment forms. Sharpe notes that all the recruits have been medically certified as being fit though they have never been examined by a magistrate. Further, the enlistment forms' unit designation is blank and the enlistment has other minor irregularities. Over the next several days Havercamp continues his recruiting in various towns while the new recruits march. Then the company of men begins a long and fast march across England to Essex. They approach the huge estate of Sir Henry Simmerson, an occasional opponent of Sharpe, and then continue on to a large island accessed by a single bridge which is heavily guarded. The area is ironically named Foulness and it is bleak and extremely remote. Sharpe wonders at Simmerson's involvement—at one time Simmerson had been the commanding officer of the South Essex. Simmerson's command had been disastrous. Simmerson's ward, his young and beautiful niece, is Jane Gibbons, a woman whom Sharpe has met and for whom he has carried a strong attraction for many months.

Chapter 7 begins with a description of Lieutenant Colonel Bartholomew Girdwood. Girdwood is a smallish, wiry man who wears his mustache tarred, a briefly-fashionable practice of combing tar into the mustache to make it hold its form like a rock. Girdwood commands the training camp at Foulness and is a sadistic martinet who hates the Irish, has no combat experience, and demands appearance over functionality. Girdwood is cruel and demeaning to his subordinates and demands the camp function like a well-oiled machine. When Girdwood learns that the new group of recruits contains an Irishman—O'Keefe, or Harper—he decides to hand the group over to Sergeant John Lynch. Lynch, born Sean Lynch, is an Irishman who hates all things Irish, particularly other Irishmen. He has spent his life affecting English habits and pronunciation and loathes his own heritage. Lynch is a petty tyrant and is particularly sadistic toward the

men and sycophantic toward Girdwood. Lynch takes command of the detachment from Havercamp who quickly departs on another round of recruiting. One of the recruits, Charlie Weller, has a small mongrel dog named Buttons. It develops that Girdwood is terrified of dogs and Lynch intervenes and kills the dog by crushing it to death with his boots. Weller is dumbstruck while another recruit, Marriott, verbally protests to Lynch. Lynch responds by beating Marriott. The pecking order and methodology established, the new recruits begin a lengthy process of training, discipline, and exercise.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 Analysis

This segment of the novel provides a major turning point in the narrative as Sharpe abandons his initial plan of seeking redress through official channels and adopts a plan of direct involvement. As he knows the South Essex Second Battalion is actively recruiting, he determines to become a recruit. Sharpe and Harper adopt false names and travel the countryside searching for Havercamp. The recruiting sergeant is a bluff, likable man who tells ridiculous, grandiose lies and draws in many unsuspecting recruits. Havercamp recurs later in the novel but only as a minor character—he is a master of self-serving action but appears to be generally genuine and somewhat kind-hearted for a recruiting sergeant. In Chapter 6 Sharpe observes several irregularities in the enlistment process that it make it obvious the men presumably enlisting into the South Essex will in fact end up in some other battalion. The process also makes it obvious that many bribes have been paid to officials so they will overlook the irregularities. For example, a half-wit is enlisted and certified as medically fit; he will later be rejected as unfit.

The near approach to Simmerson's estate is a somewhat contrived narrative element. Sharpe and Simmerston have, in a previous novel, clashed in the past when Simmerson was Sharpe's dangerously inept commanding officer. Simmerson's beautiful niece, Jane Gibbons, is Sharpe's long-time love interest, though the two have not talked much. They will continue to develop their relationship in the current novel and Jane becomes a major character in later novels in the series. Chapter 7 introduces Girdwood and Lynch, two sadistic soldiers who play major roles in the graft occurring with the second battalion. The entire cast of evildoers thus includes Fenner, the mastermind and political power; Simmerson, providing the land and running the operation; Girdwood, running the camp; and Lynch, the vile strongman. Note that everyone else in the camp is either complicit in the corruption or a hapless victim of it.

Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11

Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 Summary

These four chapters describe events transpiring within the training camp at Foulness. Initially the men are drilled in parade and marching. From time to time small detachments are sent, under very heavy guard, to work projects on Simmerson's estate. After several weeks Sharpe and Marriott are sent on a work detachment to clear weeds from overgrown waterways around Simmerson's house. The channels are full of mud and water and choked with thick weeds. Sharpe takes the time to observe the lay of the land and the paths of the water-filled channels. He also notes the unusually heavy guard set over the work party, obviously intended to prevent escape. Marriott is a disgruntled soldier who constantly attempts to assert his rights; in return, he is constantly beaten by Lynch. Sharpe and Marriott are working to clear a boathouse when Sharpe happens to meet Jane Gibbons wandering her uncle's estate. She immediately recognizes him and they have a brief private conversation. It becomes quickly obvious that both characters feel strong affection for the other. Sharpe tells her why he is enlisted and how he plans to escape. She tells him the trained men are auctioned off in companies to the highest bidder and usually serve in overseas regiments. Jane then states she later will leave food and money in the boathouse to aid Sharpe's escape. When their conversation ends, Sharpe realizes that Marriott has taken the opportunity to attempt to escape.

In Chapter 9 the guard duty mounts patrols to locate Marriott. Sharpe realizes they are afraid of any escapees because knowledge of their activities could prove politically disastrous; after all, privately auctioning legitimate enlistees is clearly illegal. A huge search effort is mounted and eventually Marriott is located half-drowned and exhausted. Instead of taking him back, Lynch murders Marriott by shooting him in the head. Harper is outraged and verbally abuses Lynch. Lynch places Harper under arrest and has him hauled away to the stockade. Later, Sharpe learns that Harper will not be returning and Sharpe assumes the worst. Chapters 10 and 11 occur later in the evening of the day when Marriott attempted to escape. In Chapter 10, Girdwood orders Harper to be driven across a field while Girdwood and the other officers hunt him something like driven game. Girdwood insists that only sabers be used in the hunt to increase what he sees as the sporting aspects of the manhunt. Harper doesn't run, however, and goes to ground in the mud and network of ditches. His pursuers become agitated when they can't find the canny veteran. Back in camp, Sharpe starts a huge fire as a diversion, then steals a horse, rifles, and a uniform and rides out to the hunting grounds to attempt a rescue of Harper. In Chapter 11 the hunters become disoriented by the fire and Harper's disappearance. Sharpe then turns up and a brief exchange of gunfire occurs while Sharpe and Harper evade capture and run away. They travel to Simmerson's boathouse where Jane hands Sharpe food and money. Jane tells Sharpe that Simmerson has promised her hand in marriage to Girdwood, which infuriates Sharpe. He vows to disgrace Simmerson and Girdwood, and then he and Harper flee into the night.

Chapters 8, 9, 10, and 11 Analysis

This section of the novel transitions Sharpe's solution from an appeal to higher authority toward personal involvement. Fenner has enough political influence that he politically is immune to Sharpe's accusations. Thus Sharpe must locate his mission battalion and somehow assert its proper place in the South Essex Regiment. He decides to first find the battalion and thinks the easiest way to do that is to enlist in the battalion's recruiting parties. To that end, he and Harper go in search of the recruiting party and, when they find it, enlist. Note the description of Havercamp's polished appeal to various types of persons. To some he promotes the company of women—in fact he actually brings along his own troupe of whores—while to others he praises honor, money, or a freewheeling lifestyle of adventure. Of course his entire spiel is lies, but even Sharpe admires Havercamp's ability to spin military enlistment as something desirable and exciting. In any event Havercamp is very successful and recruits many men to the battalion. The description of the irregularities in the enlistment paperwork is interesting, which allows Sharpe to deduce the men being enlisted will be subsequently sold, privately and illegally, to some other battalion short of men. Thus, Havercamp and his cronies use the fame of the South Essex Regiment to recruit but put the enlisted men into whatever unit will pay the schemers most. The process of selling recruits was known as crimping, and it was a lucrative crime. In a humorous turn of events, Havercamp even claims to know both Sharpe and Harper personally—yet fails to recognize the very men as those to whom he is speaking!

The brutality of the training camp becomes apparent as the weeks go by. The nearly psychotic Lynch delights in torture and abuse and goes out of his way to murder Marriott. That none of the other guards object in any way is proof that this type of punishment is not uncommon. Later, Girdwood orders a human hunt of Harper and once again all the guards are familiar with the activity, indicating that his happens at least occasionally. That nobody objects to the willful torture and murder of undesirable underlings indicates how corrupt the camp is and how depraved Girdwood and Lynch actually are. The description of Harper's fieldcraft is interesting—he easily eludes a whole group of supposed soldiers. Later Sharpe and Harper escape from various guard parties. Here, their extensive military combat experience gives them the unquestioned edge over a mass of men with no practical experience but parade ground training. The escape marks another narrative twist—now Sharpe knows where the battalion is and what has been occurring but has no actual proof. He knows that the information must be shared, but he is no longer certain about the best way to share it.

Chapters 12, 13, and 14

Chapters 12, 13, and 14 Summary

Sharpe and Harper return to London where they hear of a grand gathering scheduled for a few days' time—the Prince Regent will review a grand scale reenactment of the battle of Vitoria, complete with the capture of the French Imperial Eagle. Sharpe then decides once again to approach the Prince Regent and unsuccessfully seeks an audience. He then meets the Honorable William Lawford, apparently by happenstance. Lawford once commanded the South Essex and Sharpe saved his life during events described in a prior novel of the series. Sharpe decides to trust Lawford and over the course of an evening he tells Lawford all he knows about Fenner, Simmerston, and the second battalion. Lawford promises to make discrete inquiry and advises Sharpe to lay low for a few days. After their meeting Lawford immediately goes directly to Fenner and makes a deal—Lawford will guarantee Sharpe's silence if Fenner will promote Lawford in the government and grant Sharpe a promotion and a command on the American station. Fenner tentatively agrees. Anne eavesdrops on the entire conversation and then tells Fenner that Lawford's suggestion is probably the best way to proceed; Fenner is calmed by her assurances. Fenner and Anne then have sex.

In Chapter 13, Anne meets Sharpe and tells him that Lawford has betrayed his trust. Sharpe is enraged and confused. Anne and Sharpe then have sexual intercourse and exchange news. Anne explains that she is deeply in debt due to her dead husband's wastrel ways. She hopes to establish her son in society even though Fenner holds all of her considerable debt. Fenner uses Anne as a sexual pawn and a spy in exchange for servicing the debts. Anne loathes Fenner and hopes to see him ruined. She tells Sharpe that without documentary proof he will never convince anyone that Fenner and Simmerston are corrupt. Sharpe vows to get proof, and Anne tells him that she will take the situation forward if proof is secured. Sharpe believes documentary proof must exist at the Foulness camp and thus in Chapter 14 he, Harper, d'Alembord, and Price, travel to the Foulness and assume command of the forces there. They have no real authority to assume command but instead rely on bluster and much shouting to cow the men. Harper easily dominates Lynch but Girdwood proves a little more obstinate. The fact that the trainees view Sharpe's reappearance as a major with enthusiasm prevents the other sergeants from coalescing into cohesive resistance. Sharpe's rank certainly helps.

Chapters 12, 13, and 14 Analysis

Sharpe and Harper gain personal witness of what is going on with the South Essex Second Battalion and escape from Foulness only to realize they can't convince anyone else of the corruption. Lawford appears to meet Sharpe at random, but the narrative suggests Lawford is called in on purpose once Sharpe proves tenacious and obstinate in his desire to meet with the Prince Regent. Lawford's actions are blatantly self-serving. He tells Sharpe to lay low for a few days and then goes immediately to Fenner. Lawford

believes Sharpe will be mollified by a promotion, but the main thrust of Lawford's proposal to Fenner is that Fenner become Lawford's political champion and promoter. Lawford apparently believes he is acting in Sharpe's best interest but even so his behavior is reprehensible. Sharpe's situation is salvaged only by Anne who eavesdrops on the conversation. She suddenly sees in Sharpe as a capable man who can survive and fight, and she intends—and does—use Sharpe as a tool to destroy Fenner. Anne will intervene in the social and political sphere on Sharpe's behalf, but only if Sharpe can give her documentary proof of Fenner's corruption. The necessity of proof has never occurred to Sharpe who is naïve about politics and law. He believes proof must be found at Foulness and thus goes there and takes command. Note the methods that Sharpe uses to throw Girdwood off balance. Much of the writing in this section describes the diversions and experiences of London during the time period considered. The upcoming re-enactment of the battle of Vitoria features prominently in later developments in the narrative.

Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 Summary

Sharpe and his associates reorganize the command structure and place Girdwood under house arrest. Sharpe believes Girdwood will attempt escape—in fact Sharpe plans on it—and places Girdwood under house arrest on his own recognizance. Girdwood runs at the first opportunity and Weller, Sharpe's loyal subordinate, secretly follows Girdwood. Meanwhile the men search the camp papers and offices and come up short. The expected regimental paperwork is there, much of it with questionable omissions and irregularities, but none of it obviously falsified. None of it proves Girdwood's corruption, much less the involvement of Fenner. Sharpe's bluff attempt at seizing proof by main force has fizzled. As Sharpe realizes that his attempt has failed Girdwood seizes upon a chance to escape and flees from Foulness just as Sharpe has predicted. Notified by Weller, Sharpe follows Girdwood in his flight.

In Chapter 16, Sharpe follows Girdwood who predictably runs to Simmerson's estate. Simmerson is absent in London and Sharpe watches through a window as Girdwood packs up some pistols and books from a desk in the library. When Girdwood vacates the room Sharpe enters through the window and seizes the books, assuming them to be the desired documentary proof; alas, they are simple volumes of bad military poetry penned by Girdwood himself. Stymied, Sharpe replaces the books and retreats from the library only to bump into Jane Gibbons who arranges a secret meeting in the garden in a few minutes' time. In the garden Jane tells Sharpe that two red leather ledger books indeed exist; in fact, Jane has written them and kept the accounts. She knows of the corruption and disapproves but explains that Simmerson routinely beats her and forces her to perform the work. Jane estimates that in the past months Fenner and Simmerson have each taken in about £15,000, while Girdwood has probably taken in about £7,500, as part of their crimping activity. Further, Simmerson has forcibly engaged Jane to marry Girdwood, a fact that infuriates Sharpe. Jane recounts some of her unfortunate life's story and professes her affection for Sharpe. She tells him the ledger books are in London and promises to travel there and attempt to procure them for him. Sharpe provides Jane with money and then proffers a marriage proposal. Jane is flustered and does not respond, instead returning to the house in haste. A dejected Sharpe curses his reckless stupidity and returns to Foulness.

Chapters 15 and 16 Analysis

By this point in the novel Sharpe has completed the information gathering aspect of his mission—he knows the location of the South Essex's Second Battalion; he knows that men are being actively recruited, and he knows those men, once trained, are being sold off to the highest bidder in a process known as crimping. Crimping, while common, is illegal and obviously quite lucrative. Jane's estimates of the incomes involved are highly credible inasmuch as she has kept the accounting books. Fenner and Simmerson have

profited greatly from their scheme, as has Girdwood but to a lesser degree. The three men are influential, powerful, and unlikely to give up this lucrative source of income easily. Jane's information about the two red leather accounting books provides her vital contribution to Sharpe's mission—in the event, her promise to attempt to secure the books is not useful, though of course her determination is admirable. That Simmerson beats Jane paints Simmerson with an even blacker brush than before, as does his display of the South Essex flags in his personal estate. Indeed, there is literally nothing sympathetic about Simmerson. While Girdwood can be seen as pathetic, Simmerson is simply knowingly malevolent.

Note how Sharpe takes charge if the camp at Foulness without much resistance. Sharpe is the consummate soldier and within the military sphere his personal charisma is unmatched. In earlier portions of the novel, his attempts at political influence fall flat; here he redeems himself by correctly gauging the military situation and taking command by force of personality and bluster. The only man who offers any resistance is Girdwood and Sharpe easily dominates the blustering martinet. Further, Sharpe correctly assumes that Girdwood will fly at the first opportunity and therefore provides one. The novel presents a nice balance as Sharpe repays Jane's offering of food and funds during his own escape with an offering of funds for her escape.

Chapters 17, 18, and 19

Chapters 17, 18, and 19 Summary

Sharpe reorganizes the command structure at Foulness by making a few minimal but key changes. Knowing he must secure the loyalty of the sergeants he speaks to them privately and comes to terms with them. The other officers fall in line when they see that the men and the sergeants meant to follow Sharpe and Harper. The next day the entire camp sets off on a long march toward Chelmsford, the proper location of the training ground. Along the way Sharpe and Harper begin to provide training in fieldcraft and proper wartime operations. While the men know drill and parade marching evolutions, they are not fully prepared for actual combat. During the trips Sharpe speaks with Havercamp who confesses that he and the other officers received the enlisted men's pay to divide amongst themselves. Havercamp estimates his personal earnings at about £5 each week in addition to his legal pay. Havercamp promises loyalty to Sharpe simply because he sees the handwriting on the wall. As the troops march Sharpe formulates a plan of action. Rather than stopping in Chelmsford, he continues on to London—even picking up the pace.

In Chapter 18, days later Simmerson takes the two red leather accounting books to Fenner. The two men meet in Fenner's coach while they watch the organization for a large parade demonstration in London. Fenner is relieved to have the two books in his possession—they are the only physical incriminating evidence extant of his corruption. Unaware that Sharpe has taken over Foulness, the two men discuss how to proceed with their crimping operation in the future. They decide Sharpe is too public to attempt another assassination and Fenner determines to write out orders sending Sharpe far away on dangerous service. Fenner then gives the books to his servant and instructs him to return with them to Fenner's home and burn them completely in the fireplace. A few hours later the parade begins. The parade is a Royal review of troops and includes a staged mock battle of Vitoria where Sharpe's Eagle will be displayed and captured. The parade is well attended by the public, many military men, and the Prince Regent. The parade is a huge affair that has taken months to plan and will take several hours to execute. As the first stages of the parade begin, Sharpe marches the second battalion into the outskirts of London.

In Chapter 19, Jane Gibbons has traveled to London and calls upon Simmerson's house there only to learn that the two red leather ledger books have just left the premises in Simmerson's possession. Jane is despondent realizing she has failed to secure proof of Simmerson's corruption. Meanwhile the parade continues and Sharpe leads his battalion toward the parade grounds. There he meets Jane and she tells him she cannot procure the books; she also agrees to marry Sharpe. Sharpe is both saddened and elated by these events and decides his final course of action must be yet another appeal to the Prince Regent for Royal intervention—this time, the appeal will be dramatic and public. Sharpe marches his battalion directly onto the parade grounds and begins to disrupt the proceedings. He takes possession of the Eagle he captured at

Vitoria and attempts to lead his battalion directly to the Prince Regent. He is almost successful but at the last moment parade marshals intervene and pull Sharpe away and divert the battalion from the grounds. Fenner assures the Prince Regent the event was planned and even suggests that the battalion's tattered appearance was intended to duplicate their appearance on the field of battle. Meanwhile Sharpe is arrested and detained.

Chapters 17, 18, and 19 Analysis

This section of the novel begins to wrap up many of the narrative threads presented. Sharpe has intervened to end Fenner's corruption and crimping; Girdwood has fled to London and seeks protection under Simmerson. The second battalion follows Sharpe into London. Contrast the march through England and London with the marches presented in the prologue and epilogue—here the soldiers are in a friendly nation and the countryside is not ravaged by war. Even so, Sharpe approaches the maneuver with the same tactics he would approach a potential combat. Also contrast Sharpe's entrance into London with Jane's—both enter the city with nowhere to stay but Sharpe, the old soldier, is not perturbed by this while Jane the naïve young woman finds it entirely daunting.

Much of the action of these chapters involves the movements of the two red leather accounting ledgers written by Jane. They are the only physical proof of Fenner's and Simmerson's corruption and Girdwood's willing involvement. Because of this they are critical objects—their red binding symbolic of their nature—in the narrative as whoever possesses them will be victorious in any political development. Anne has told Sharpe he must have the books, and even Jane realizes their critical significance. Yet so too does Simmerson and he therefore takes them directly to Fenner. No longer needing to balance false accounts, Fenner orders them destroyed and entrusts their destruction to a retainer. This seemingly simple decision has profound implications in the narrative and signals a major—but subtle—turning point.

Sharpe makes his final bid to Royalty with his intrusion into the parade. This is the third time he has sought out the influence of the Prince Regent and also the third time he has failed. By this point it is obvious that the Prince Regent is rather a simpleton because each time Sharpe appears and appeals Fenner materializes with an unlikely explanation to brush away Sharpe's accusations. What intrigues the Prince Regent is not military fitness or preparedness but instead pomp, circumstance, and the accolades of victory. His later intervention in Sharpe's cause is entirely self-serving. The conclusion of Chapter 19 finds Sharpe at his lowest ebb—he has "solved" the mystery of his missing men but has also fallen into the hands of his enemies, is under official arrest, and is powerless to effect change. At this point he appears entirely subject to the whims of Fenner who plans to send him away under official condemnation. Jane, too, has failed and it appears that the only physical evidence has been destroyed.

Chapter 20 and Epilogue

Chapter 20 and Epilogue Summary

Anne intervenes during Sharpe's arrest proceedings and immediately gains Fenner's undivided attention when she presents to him one of the two red leather accounting ledgers. She claims the other ledger is safely hidden away. Fenner is flabbergasted at Anne's possession of the books, though she tells him that it was rather easy to obtain them from his servant. Anne's hatred of the vicious Fenner thus aids Sharpe at a critical juncture. Fenner is much embarrassed by the turn of events and sends away the various court officials, all of them protesting at the unusual turn of events. The negotiations are brief and somewhat vague, but in brief Anne will be released from her debts and unofficial servitude; the men and officers of the second battalion will be immediately sent abroad to reinforce the first battalion; Jane Gibbons will be released to her own recognizance; and Sharpe will retain his full standing and appointment. Sharpe then requests that Girdwood be forced to venture overseas in command of the South Essex Regiment. In exchange, Fenner will receive his red leather ledgers and be able to continue on in his office, though somewhat diminished in influence. All agree to the terms and the standard narrative concludes.

In the Epilogue, Sharpe, Harper, d'Alembord, Price, Jane, and all the men of the second battalion have traveled to Spain and integrated with the first battalion. At first Girdwood attempts to assert authority of command over Sharpe and the regiment, but Sharpe rebuffs him publicly and in essence takes command of the regiment. The regiment then performs an assault on a strongly fortified prepared defensive position on the border between France and Spain. The assault is bloody and difficult but the English soldiers carry the field and rout the French defenders. During the assault, Sharpe details Harper and several other Irish soldiers, including Sergeant Lynch, to a detached advanced scouting mission through difficult fortifications. During the assault Lynch is murdered by his countrymen, a result that both Sharpe and Harper unofficially condone, officially ignore, and in fact had anticipated. Also during the assault Girdwood sees his first real combat and is driven insane, sitting alone and babbling disconnected lines of military poetry. The new enlisted men acquit themselves admirably and the decisive victory leaves the road into France open to the advancing British army.

Chapter 20 and Epilogue Analysis

Chapter 20 concludes the primary narrative arc of the novel and ties up most of the minor narrative threads. Sharpe has traveled to England and located the second battalion. He has discerned the scale and type of corruption and illegal activities that have prevented new recruits from reach the South Essex First Battalion. He has determined the individuals responsible for the corruption and correctly discerned the chain of command from Fenner to Simmerson to Girdwood and, to some extent, on to Lynch. He has encountered these men in various adversarial situations and evaded

their direct actions intended to silence him. Sharpe has made three separate attempts to appeal directly to the Prince Regent—the final attempt resulting in the South Essex receiving the appellation of the Prince of Wales Own Regiment—yet none of these attempts have been successful. Indeed, Sharpe's various attempts at political involvement have been largely inept, naïve, and bungling. The final result of all this activity is personal knowledge but no substantive proof and Sharpe ends up detained by his enemies, legally arrested, and facing a bleak and uncertain future. Meanwhile, Sharpe has pursued an unlikely romantic interest with the timid Jane Gibbons who reciprocates his desires. Jane has attempted to help and has provided much vital information, but she, too, has been stymied by Simmerson and Fenner. Then, Anne arrives in a Dea ex Machina role holding the sole documentary proof of the whole corruption and definitively aligned against Fenner and highly sympathetic to Sharpe. Of course Anne's involvement is entirely credible as she is primarily motivated by self-serving interests, yet she also favors Sharpe's interests which happily do not conflict with her own. Anne's proof is delivered to Fenner so he can suppress it, in exchange for far-ranging favors. The text is fairly vague on the particulars but obviously Anne and Sharpe get everything they want while Fenner suffers a catastrophic loss of political power. Note Anne's prophetic statement to Sharpe about his relationship with Jane ending badly (p. 217)—in a subsequent novel it indeed ends very badly.

The Epilogue furnishes a happy ending, of sorts, to the war novel. The British army advances to the French frontier and successful penetrates the border due to the men of the South Essex, now combining elements of first battalion veterans and second battalion recruits. All men perform admirably. The combat action is intense and bloody and the writing in this section is taut and exciting. Lynch receives his appropriate treatment at the hands of his spurned countrymen and the bizarre Girdwood becomes entirely unhinged. Sharpe and Jane have happily formed a couple, mirrored by Harper and Isabella, and the narrative concludes with all the protagonists getting what they want and all the antagonists getting what they deserve.

Characters

Major Richard Sharpe

Richard Sharpe is the principle protagonist of the novel and is present in most—but not all—the scenes in the narrative. Sharpe is described as a large man, six feet tall, with dark hair and a face slightly disfigured by scarring. A combat veteran of numerous campaigns, Sharpe is in excellent physical condition, possesses superior tactical and strategic reasoning, and rarely makes substantial battlefield mistakes. Outside the sphere of infantry warfare, Sharpe is fairly normal in most respects and during most of his attempts at politics in the current novel, Sharpe is fairly inept. Sharpe is not much given to introspection and instead focuses on what can be done. Throughout the military phases of the novel, found in the prologue and epilogue, Sharpe demonstrates flawless command instincts, decisive leadership, and a solid grasp of the tactical situation. Possessed of an exceptional intuition regarding his opponent's tactics, Sharpe is always one step ahead in matters military. Sharpe also takes advantages of extant situations and is more of a pragmatist than an idealist. Sharpe interacts with soldiers and men quite well, but tends to view women as rather helpless.

Sharpe is the son of a prostitute, conceived during her course of business by an unknown father. Raised as a self-proclaimed guttersnipe, Sharpe joined the army at an early age and rose through the ranks due solely to merit. In conjunction with his military service Sharpe has traveled widely. Sharpe returns to his early haunts during his visit to a London rookery and finds that time away has not dulled his senses. During the novel Sharpe's primary goal is to secure the future survival of his beloved South Essex Regiment and his role within the unit. His secondary goals are to woo and wed Jane Gibbons and manage to stay alive while meddling in the backroom politics of London. Sharpe's role in the present novel is atypical for the series inasmuch as in the current novel Sharpe is fairly ineffective and naïve and must rely on the help of others to carry him through to success. During his mock enlistment, Sharpe goes by the name of Dick Vaughn.

Sergeant Patrick Augustine Harper

Sergeant Patrick Harper, born c. 1785, is a long-time friend and fellow soldier of Sharpe, and the two men have fought together in many previous campaigns. Harper is described as a huge man, 6' 4", and heavily muscled. He is Irish but nevertheless a loyal, if conflicted, British subject. During the novel, Sharpe's and Harper's technical military rank fluctuates with their mock enlistment; however, Harper is entirely dedicated to Sharpe and contrives to accompany Sharpe on nearly all occasions. That Harper is a past master of the art of fieldcraft and warfare is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than his evasion of a line of men in the open fields of Foulness. While they march about with horses and sabers he simply vanishes into a tiny depression. Later, he escapes entirely

along with Sharpe. Harper's rate of musket fire is excellent and the pursuers are easily dissuaded from a vigorous attempt at recapture.

Throughout the novel Harper demonstrates an easy familiarity with a wide variety of other characters and his natural bluff attitude and charisma carry him through in almost all situations. He enjoys the adulation bestowed on him by the public after the reenactment of the battle of Vitoria; he enjoys the company of his loved ones, and he enjoys the company of friends. Harper has little to worry about financially, having become exceptionally rich through capturing enemy treasures, but he still finds his home in the ranks of the armed forces. Whenever Sharpe needs strong support or a sounding board, Harper is the man to whom he turns. During his mock enlistment Harper goes by the name of Paddy O'Keefe.

Maggie Joyce

Maggie plays a pivotal role in the series of novels while yet remaining essentially a minor character within the current novel. She is the first of three women in the narrative to assist Sharpe in a significant way. Maggie and Sharpe have a long history, having spent many years as youthful lovers, and Sharpe infers that Maggie taught him how to survive on the streets of the poorest sections of London. During the present novel Maggie operates a bar of sorts, something of a cross between a flop house and a downscale eatery. The bar is the center of a large social network in the rookery in which it is situated. Maggie is obviously something of the leader in the area. Sharpe turns to her with his vast fortune of jewels and monies captured on the field of battle, as the only person whom he trusts enough to dispose of the booty without robbing him. Maggie acts as his fence with complete fidelity. After Sharpe leaves the bar, drunk, Maggie sends a messenger girl to follow him and tell him he is being followed by two assassins. The girl also delivers a pistol and Maggie's intervention undoubtedly saves Sharpe's life.

The Prince of Wales, His Royal Highness the Prince Regent

The novel portrays a fictional representation of the historic Prince of Wales, George Augustus Frederick, eventually to become King George IV in 1820. From 1811 through the time of the novel, and beyond, the Prince of Wales acted as Prince Regent because his father, George III, was incapacitated by insanity. The historic reign of the Prince Regent is not much considered in the current novel. He is portrayed as self-indulgent, passionate about entertainment and diversions, fat and effete, and suffering from delusions. In the novel, the Prince Regent struggles for political influence against his brother and others, cares little for the actual welfare of the military, and often inserts himself personally into combat actions in which he was obviously not involved. Sharpe mistakenly believes the Prince Regent will personally concern himself with the plight of the South Essex Regiment and makes three separate appeals for assistance. Sadly, the Prince Regent is only interested in the public spectacle that can be created with

Sharpe's reputation for valor. The fictional portrayal of the historic monarch is interesting and compelling.

Dowager Countess Anne Camoynes

The Dowager Countess Anne Camoynes is an interesting and compelling character in the novel. She is a widow with one child, and her deceased husband has left her with a mountain of debt and social disgrace. Desiring to secure a tenable future for her son, Anne seeks various ways to eliminate her substantial debt and secure once again a respected position within society. Sensing a potential easy victory, Lord Simon Fenner moves behind the scenes and purchases all the many debts owed by Anne becoming her sole creditor and putting himself in a position to ruin her socially and legally. Anne is thus very beholden to Fenner and acts as his sexual slave, prostitute, and spy as the occasion dictates. On several occasions Fenner demands sexual adventures; on other occasions he sends her to bed some man—such as Sharpe—for his own political reasons, and on yet other occasions he sends her to spy on various individuals. For each of these acts a small portion of her debts is theoretically erased. Due to Fenner's brutal and unrelenting treatment, Anne has come to hate Fenner and loathe her own submission to him. She first encounters Sharpe as she spies on him for Fenner. She takes Sharpe to bed and their ensuing chit chat during and after sexual intercourse gains the required intelligence which is passed on to Fenner. It also makes Anne believe Sharpe may prove an ally on the principle that the enemy of one's enemy is one's friend. Later in the novel Anne again meets Sharpe for sex and talk, sharing information with him and letting him know that she will publicly ally herself with him if he can secure tangible proof of Fenner's corruption. Anne's final appearance in the novel is during Chapter 20 when she appears as a Dea ex Machina, appearing just as all appears lost and providing the tangible proof herself. Anne later predicts that Jane will bring heartache to Sharpe and then goes on to live her own life freed from Fenner. Anne is the second of three women in the narrative to assist Sharpe in a significant way.

Lord Simon Fenner

Lord Simon Fenner is the British Secretary of State at War, a powerful posting with considerable political influence. Fenner is wealthy, influential, and despicable amoral. He uses his position to exert great influence over politics and military developments with an eye toward his own personal gain. Fenner's schemes of corruption are apparently widespread but definitely include crimping, or selling new army recruits to the highest bidder. His crimping scheme, carried out by Sir Henry Simmerson and Lieutenant Colonel Bartholomew Girdwood, deprives the South Essex Regiment of replacements and ultimately brings Sharpe to England from Spain. Sharpe's subsequent investigation compromises Fenner and brings about a catastrophic loss of political influence but not criminal charges. Fenner is presented as a disgustingly self-serving politician who uses people as slaves, views women as sexual objects, and uses murder, prostitution, theft, and corruption as he sees fit. Fenner is also a consummate politician, grasping immediately when his own fortunes are falling or his position is threatened. He moves

aggressively throughout the novel to protect his own interests and becomes complaisant only toward the end of the novel when he believes, mistakenly, that he has squashed Sharpe's chance of making a scene. Fenner is the most-powerful antagonist in the novel but appears less frequently than Girdwood. He seriously underestimates many opponents, including Sharpe and Anne Camoynes.

Sir Henry Simmerson

Sir Henry Simmerson is a landed gentleman with political connections to Lord Simon Fenner and a past history of involvement with the South Essex Regiment, a history discussed in previous novels in the series of novels. Simmerson has commanded the South Essex in battle with disastrous results. He has subsequently become involved in a scheme of crimping, where men are recruited as replacements for the depleted South Essex Regiment but are then auctioned off to the highest bidder. Crimping was illegal but commonly practiced, though rarely on the scale promoted by Simmerson. Simmerson's considerable estate is located in South Essex and includes a large island surrounded by swampy fens; the island is named Foulness and is the site of the clandestine training camp used to convert new recruits into trained enlistees. Under Simmerson's guidance, Lieutenant Colonel Bartholomew Girdwood runs the camp at Foulness like a cross between a training camp and a maximum-security prison. Simmerson lacks the vision and influence of Fenner but is just as contemptible in his own right. He demeans underlings and servants and is loathed by nearly everyone with whom he comes in contact. Simmerson is the guardian of Jane Gibbons, his young and beautiful niece. He treats her as his personal property, beats her savagely and routinely, and forces her to write out his crimping scheme's ledger books. Simmerson has also offered Jane to Girdwood in marriage in a forced arranged situation. Simmerson occurs in several other novels in the series (where he is also contemptible). He and Sharpe have a long history of adversarial goals. Simmerson has a flair for the dramatic, desires to claim others' achievements as his own, and believes himself unapproachable by common men such as Sharpe. When it comes to Fenner, however, Simmerson is obsequious and subservient.

Jane Gibbons

Jane Gibbons, born c. 1778, relates her fairly sad life's story to Sharpe during one of their brief conversations (refer to p. 217). Jane was born into a middle-class family with an older brother named Christian. She was orphaned c. 1802 at the age of thirteen whereupon she and her brother come under Simmerson's custodial care as he was married to their aunt. Their aunt, dominated and abused by Simmerson, played no role in their upbringing and spends nearly her entire time shut up in her room pleading illness. After several years, Christian entered the infantry, lacking the funds to enter the cavalry. In the infantry he had styled himself an aristocrat and amassed many debts before meeting an untimely end. Christian is held in high regard by Jane, who considers him to have been an excellent soldier—Sharpe knows better, having served with the man as related in a previous novel. For eleven years prior to the opening of the novel

Jane has lived in Simmerson's house. She reports that Simmerson routinely beats her with a cane, apparently across the buttocks and back. Simmerson has also promised her in marriage to Lieutenant Colonel Girdwood. Sharpe and Jane met briefly in a previous novel and both characters experienced a "love at first sight" type of event. Since then they have not met until events in the current novel. After only two more brief meetings Sharpe proposes marriage and on the next brief meeting Jane accepts. Anne suggests the union will not be a happy one—and this proves prescient. In the novel Jane is fairly ineffective at the things she attempts. She smuggles some food and money to Sharpe and then travels to London but is unable to locate and secure two ledger books that incriminate Simmerson. She does provide Sharpe significant pieces of information, however, and is the third of three women in the novel to significantly assist Sharpe. Jane comes across as a somewhat likable but also somewhat pathetic figure. She is unquestionably beautiful and wherever she goes most men stare openly at her. She is described as very slight in build, quite proper and polite, and exceptionally beautiful.

Lieutenant Colonel Bartholomew Girdwood

Lieutenant Colonel Bartholomew Girdwood is the novel's principle antagonist, though he is not the most-powerful antagonist present. Girdwood reports directly to Simmerson and is personally responsible for the day-to-day operation of the training camp at Foulness. Girdwood sports a mustache that he wears tarred, a custom briefly in fashion among some. He is described as a smallish man, thin, and exceptionally nervous. Girdwood styles himself a great warrior though he has never been in combat. He longs for what he sees as the honor and accolades of combat and spends much of his free time writing bad war poetry. In Girdwood's mind, he is a brave and valiant soldier. In reality, he is cruel and tyrannical martinet. Girdwood hates the Irish and is terrified of dogs, likes a clean and ordered camp regardless of inefficiency, and demands absolute obedience and correct behavior from his subordinates. In turn, he is obsequious to his superiors. Girdwood is engaged to Jane Gibbons, though he exhibits little desire or interest in her. For all his faults, Girdwood appears to be a competent staff officer, running the camp at Foulness and crimping operation without problems until Sharpe appears. Girdwood espouses extreme violence and brutal methods in training, such that the enlisted men under his command expect routine brutality culminating in sanctioned murder for desertion. On several occasions Girdwood arranges for a given enlistee to be hunted like an animal as the officers of the camp run him down with sabers. Sharpe sees Girdwood for the cowardly martinet he is and demands that Girdwood receive command of the South Essex Regiment when it deploys to Spain. Girdwood complies, finds actual command in the real world beyond his ability, and goes insane during his first bout of actual combat. A complex and interesting character, Girdwood proves ineffective at opposing Sharpe.

Sergeant John Lynch

Sergeant John Lynch is an Irishman who has betrayed his heritage and hates all things Irish with a consuming passion. He styles himself an English gentleman and constantly works to eliminate any accent or trace of his Irish heritage. Lynch is sadistic, vicious, and foul-mouthed and drills his men with brutal hatred. He is particularly vicious toward Irish recruits and hates Harper from their first introduction. Lynch is Girdwood's strongman at the Foulness camp, and the two men share a close relationship built on distrust, hatred, and suspicion. Of all the minor officers at Foulness, Lynch is the only one Sharpe deems irredeemably corrupted. During the novel Lynch murders one recruit and attempts to murder Harper. After Harper and Sharpe leave Foulness, Lynch moves into a minor role in the narrative. When the second battalion deploys to Spain, Lynch accompanies it. During the border fighting Sharpe details Lynch to accompany a squad of Irishmen led by Harper. When the fighting begins, Lynch dies by fratricide. Lynch is a minor but memorable character that has a major negative impact on many enlisted men's lives.

Objects/Places

The South Essex Regiment

Sharpe's military unit is the South Essex Regiment. The regiment is composed of two battalions—the first battalion is a combat battalion deployed to Spain; the second battalion is a recruiting and training battalion in England. The novel's primary narrative arc concerns Sharpe's ultimately successful attempts to discover why the second battalion is not sending recruits to the first battalion.

Maggie's Pistol

Sharpe visits Maggie Joyce in a London rookery and gives her a large amount of treasure. She notices he is being tailed by presumed assassins and sends a messenger to him to raise the alarm. The messenger also delivers one of Maggie's pistols to Sharpe who uses it to kill the assassins. Maggie's pistol is a symbol of her extensive power in the slums of London and arrives, for Sharpe, in the nick of time.

Chelmsford Depot

The South Essex's Second Battalion is officially based at Chelmsford Depot. When Sharpe arrives he finds Chelmsford nearly deserted, staffed only by a lame quartermaster and a few low-ranking officers who pass the time entertaining pretty local girls. Instead of being a training camp, Chelmsford is simply a deserted locale to receive mail and supplies.

Camp Foulness

The ironically named Camp Foulness is the location where the second battalion is unofficially based. Foulness is an island surrounded by swampy lands, rivers, and cut channels, and is located on the estate of Sir Henry Simmerson. The camp is run under the iron hand of discipline and offers virtually nothing appealing. The enlisted men are treated as prisoners.

Buttons

Buttons is a small mongrel dog that belongs to Charlie Weller, one of the new recruits enlisting with Sharpe and Harper. Buttons travels with the new recruits to Foulness and is then killed by Lynch who grinds its skull under his boot. Buttons is killed because Girdwood is hysterically afraid of all dogs; Buttons is symbolic of the irrational hatred and bizarre discipline that run through Girdwood. Buttons is only one of a few dogs in the narrative that frighten Girdwood.

The Two Red Leather Accounting Ledgers

All the accounting performed for the illegal crimping activities conducted at Foulness is noted down in two accounting ledgers bound in red leather. In fact, Jane Gibbons is the unwilling scribe and accountant under the direction of Simmerson. The two books form the only tangible proof of the crimping and corruption. They are particularly incriminating to Girdwood, Simmerson, and Fenner. Jane attempts unsuccessfully to gain the books for Sharpe and then Anne comes across them rather by happenstance.

The Royal Review

The successful battle at Vitoria, along with other recent British victories, is cause for great celebration in England. Part of the ceremonies consists of a vast reenactment of the battle by military units; the reenactment is staged on the grand scale before the Prince Regent and other officials. Sharpe attempts to take advantage of the Royal Review by inserting himself into it; his attempt fails and ends in arrest.

The French Imperial Eagle

During the period considered by the novel, French regiments were identified on the field of battle by a standard bearing a metal Eagle on the top of a long wooden shaft. During the battle of Vitoria, Sharpe and Harper captured a French Imperial Eagle—the first such prize claimed by England. The Eagle is displayed several times during the novel as a symbol of English victory and French defeat.

The French-Spanish Border

The land war between Napoleonic France and England begins in Spain. English victories roll back the French forces as far as the French-Spanish border before stalling. The novel's prelude takes place in Spain and the novel's epilogue begins in Spain and ends in France, the South Essex Regiment assault prepared border defenses and capturing them. The symbolic advance into France demonstrates the credibility of the British invasion of Napoleonic France.

Crimping

Crimping is the illegal practice of obtaining new infantry recruits through legal means and then selling those recruits to another commander or unit. Though illegal, crimping was widely practiced during the Napoleonic wars—though not to the degree carried out by Fenner and Simmerson. Crimping could be quite profitable and some looked upon it as a relatively harmless activity.

Themes

Master of War, Wimp of Politics

Sharpe, the principle protagonist of the novel and indeed the entire series of novels, finds himself in an atypical milieu where straightforward attack is not only ineffective but in fact damaging. The prologue and epilogue present Sharpe in his usual role as battlefield commander, and in this atmosphere he reigns confident and supreme. His military orders are nearly infallible; his tactics are always sound, and his leadership is effective and respected. In war, Sharpe is a master. The chapters of the novel present Sharpe in a different atmosphere, one of intrigue, deception, and above all corrupt politics. Here, Sharpe attempts the same straightforward attack methodologies that have served him so well on the battlefield and here those tactics fail utterly.

Sharpe's basic reasoning is that corruption, once identified, will be recognized and eliminated from government. He knows that his corrupt foe, Lord Simon Fenner, is highly placed in government and Sharpe therefore assumes he must go directly to the Prince Regent for redress. While Sharpe's combat fame allows him occasional and fleeting contact with the Prince Regent, he is unable to engage the Prince Regent's interest sufficiently to solve the problem. In battle, Sharpe would not make a mistake twice—in politics, he makes the same mistake three times and each time is mystified by the negative outcome. The truth—that the Prince Regent does not care about official corruption—is incomprehensible to Sharpe. Fortunately for our confused hero several women emerge at various points in the narrative. These women—Maggie Joyce, Jane Gibbons, and Anne Camoynes—understand politics and local affairs in a way that Sharpe never will. Their interest in Sharpe and their common goals finally carry the political field in Sharpe's interest. While the protagonist leaves England victorious, he also leaves slightly confused as to why he has been victorious. In politics, Sharpe is a wimp.

Men are for War; Women are for Intrigue

The novel presents two basic milieus in which the characters operate. First, England and France are at war and the battlefield is in Spain. There, forces of trained men fight and kill as they prosecute the war. It is this element in which Sharpe, Harper, d'Alembord, Price, Nairn, and others are so effective. They are warriors and they know their craft well and prosecute it with zeal. In these areas, women are presented as victims of war or as camp followers: their fates are largely dictated to them and their contributions are performed in a minor supporting role. Within the narrative, there is little space in the sphere of warfare for women to participate. For example, in the epilogue the women view the carnage from a distance and after the fact and express gratitude that their loved ones have survived the fight. The second basic milieu presented is that of domestic England—Royal galas, reviews, and parades are common; social parties are held where guests dip for gemstones with fishing nets and aristocratic couples run

off behind bushes to copulate, and corruption is rife. The distant war effort is supported half-heartedly but in general the populace wants to live the good life and forget about the war. In this element Sharpe, Harper, and other soldiers are not only ineffective but are in fact rather bumbling. Their only successful role is that of entertainer and after being trotted out for inspection, they are packed off like an old toy. In the domestic milieu of politics, corruption, and relationships, the women of the narrative come to the forefront. Here we see Maggie Joyce intervening—by way of a women messenger—to save Sharpe from assassination; we see Maggie running a successful business in very trying circumstances, and we see Maggie fencing jewels. Here we see Jane Gibbons keeping accounting books and attempting to procure evidence against her tyrannical uncle. And most significantly we see Anne Camoynes moving behind the scenes to bring down her political rivals and personal foes. While the men might rule the overt battlefield, the women rule behind the scenes.

It's Crazy Who You Love

Sharpe has had many loves in his life. Most of them have been the types of women you would expect a rough-and-tumble soldier to love—resistance fighters, aging street urchins, and camp followers. The current novel presents Sharpe's burgeoning love for Jane Gibbons, a singularly unlikely candidate to win our hero's affection. Jane is twenty-four and exceptionally beautiful; in several scenes of the novel whole crowds of men stare at her as she walks by. Her background is fairly banal—orphaned at age thirteen she has since grown up as the ward of a cruel and tyrannical uncle. Her only sibling, Christian, enlisted in the infantry and is killed. Her life's sphere has encompassed little more than her uncle's bleak and remote estate—she finds London bewildering in most of its aspects. She is decidedly polite, demure, and socially proper, and most who meet her find her agreeable enough. There is little substance to her, however. One can easily see Sharpe loving Maggie Joyce, the streetwise and foul-mouthed barkeep. Likewise, Anne Camoynes seems a suitable partner for Sharpe—they form a likely couple, they are sexually adventurous, and they understand each others' motivations. But what does Sharpe see in Jane that becomes so compelling? Her single act of bravery is to reject her sadistic uncle and make a coach journey to his house in London. Even this proves ineffective and she then wanders the streets until locating Sharpe who again takes control of her. Throughout the remainder of the narrative she wanders around looking pretty and being indecisive. What makes her so attractive to Sharpe? One might also ask what makes a rogue like Sharpe so attractive to Jane? Ah, the mysteries of love.

Style

Point of View

The novel is presented in the third-person, omniscient viewpoint, traditional for fiction and particularly suited to the narrative structure presented. Richard Sharpe, the primary protagonist of the novel, is present in most scenes of the novel but occasionally the scene varies so alternative viewpoints can be presented. The most-prevalent of these concerns Girdwood, Simmerson, Fenner, or some combination of these. The narrator divulges internal thoughts and attitudes of the protagonist, and some of other characters. The majority of the story is told through action and dialogue; revealed thoughts are fairly frequent but generally are used for characterization rather than plot development.

The third-person point of view allows Sharpe to be presented in a highly-sympathetic manner. For example, the narrative structure portrays Sharpe's bumbling attempts at politicking as valid and well-meaning rather than completely inept. The narrative also allows portrayal of Sharpe's life situations as difficult but not pathetic. In this way, the choice of narrative view is appropriate and successful. Indeed, the structure of the novel and the method of plot development nearly require the use of a third-person point of view. Finally, the frequent appearance of minor characters is allowed through the point of view selected; it is carried throughout all of the novels of the series and is accessible and successful.

Setting

The prologue of the novel is set in Spain during June, 1813. The epilogue is set in Spain and France during November, 1813. The twenty chapters of the novel are set in England, particularly in the environs of London, with the bulk of the action transpiring in July and August, 1813. The period of September and October, 1813, is referenced indirectly in the epilogue. The novel's chronology spans a period of time of six months concluding in the early British incursions into France. The Napoleonic wars have ravaged Europe for years, and the British Empire has survived only because of its superior naval forces. Recently under Wellington, however, the British have successfully invaded Spain and ultimately subjugated a foothold in France.

The action in England begins in London with Sharpe's early attempts to engage the Prince Regent in a quick fix to the official corruption that robs the South Essex Regiment of its new recruits. From there, Sharpe and Harper wander through the English countryside looking for a recruiting party. Several chapters in the middle of the novel are set at Sir Henry Simmerson's estate at Foulness—a bleak and remote area of flat, marshy fens and mud flats fractured by rivulets and cut channels. From Foulness, the action returns to London for resolution. The epilogue returns the action to Spain and then the French border. Within these general locales few specific settings are

developed. Simmerson's house is described in some minor detail, but the layout is not significant to the overall narrative. Foulness is described in some detail, but this is primarily focused on the tactical methods of Sharpe's and Harper's escape; it is not particularly significant to the overall narrative.

Language and Meaning

The novel is presented in standard British English, using British spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Such is familiar enough to any American reader that they should pose no special obstacle to comprehension. In general the writing is accessible to high-school level readers. Sentence and paragraph construction are typical and present a fairly even texture throughout. The language of the novel is generally informal and very readable, and the prologue and epilogue capture the exciting essence of close-quarters combat without placing undue stress on grammatical construction. Language occasionally wanders into the technical aspects of early nineteenth century customs and practices, but such descriptions are not central to the narrative and form an exceptionally enjoyable aspect of the book's realistic and historic texture. Indeed, were such passages absent the book's tone of authenticity would suffer markedly.

Meaning within the book is derived through traditional means, and subtle interpretation through nearly the entire narrative is not required. The main characters presented are largely simple men who hold concrete notions of things such as duty, honor, and valor; the villains are thoroughly despicable and fairly one-dimensional. The only exception to this is perhaps Girdwood, though even his complexity is not difficult to understand.

Structure

The 301-page novel is divided into a prologue, twenty chapters, and an epilogue. Part I contains all of the chapters. The prologue is set in Spain during June, 1813. Part I is set in England from July through August, 1813. The epilogue is set in Spain and France during November, 1813. The novel covers about six months of time though the bulk of the action occurs over the course of two months. The novel is the seventh-written in a series of novels extending to twenty-one novels and three published short stories; chronologically, the novel occurs seventeenth in the series. The novel includes a concise historical note, an authorial explanation, or apology, of certain events described. The novel is written using standard British spelling and punctuation which may not be immediately familiar to American readers but such should pose no special problems to reading. The novel is constructed in a typical and accessible fashion that aids materially with understanding the narrative plot and elements. Each enumerated chapter generally is presented in chronological order. Of course, characters occasionally remember the past or speculate about the future but these events are obvious and clarified. Thus the construction follows a chronological presentation. Scenes occasionally shift between characters and locales, and occasionally scenes occur roughly simultaneously; this is particularly marked when Sharpe marches toward London and Jane makes the same trip independently, and again as Sharpe marches into the parade and Anne locates the

ledger books. The construction makes such shifts obvious and presents to special obstacle to comprehension.

Quotes

"Regimental Sergeant Major MacLaird was a powerful man and the pressure of his fingers, where they gripped Major Richard Sharpe's left hand, was painful. The RSM's eyes opened slowly. 'I'll not cry, sir.'
'No.'
'They'll not say they saw me cry, sir.'
'No.'
A tear rolled down the side of the RSM's face. His shako had fallen. It lay a foot from his head.
Sharpe, leaving his left hand in the Sergeant Major's grip, gently pulled back the red jacket.
'Our Father, which art in heaven.' MacLaird's voice choked suddenly. He lay on the hard flints of the roadway. Some of the dark flints were flecked with his blood. 'Oh, Christ!'
Sharpe was staring into the ruin of the Sergeant Major's belly. MacLaird's filthy shirt had been driven into the wound that welled with gleaming, bright blood. Sharpe let the jacket fall gently onto the horror. There was nothing to be done." (p. 11)

"Harper pulled his shako over his forehead. 'What in hell's name are cavalry doing here?'
'Christ knows.' Sharpe's voice was grim. 'Dally?'
'Sir?' d'Alembord was brushing the dust from his boots.
'Take the Sergeant Major. Go round this place and roust the bastards out.'
'If there's anyone to roust out,' d'Alembord said gloomily.
'Harry! With me.'
Sharpe and Price walked towards the headquarters building. Sharpe's face, Price saw, boded ill for whoever had left the guardroom empty and the depot unguarded." (p. 28)

"'Tell me, Major, was it not hot on the day we took the Eagle?'
Lord John was making furious signs at Sharpe not to protest the word "we". Sharpe nodded. 'Very hot, sir.'
'I do believe I remember it! Indeed, yes! Very hot!' The Prince nodded at his companions. 'Very hot!'
Sharpe wondered if the man, like his father, had lost his wits. He was speaking as if he had been there, in that valley of the Portina where the wounded sobbed for mercy. There had been small black snakes, Sharpe remembered, wriggling away from the grassfires. His mind seemed a whirl of black snakes, memories, and sudden shock because his journey had been useless. Lord Fenner would order him away tomorrow; there would be no replacements for the South Essex, and a Regiment would die.
The Prince nudged Sharpe and smiled again. 'We shocked them, Major, yes?'
'Yes, sir.'
'What a day, what a day!' the Prince shook his head, sifting white powder from his hair into Sharpe's wine. 'Ah! A syllabub! Splendid! Serve the Major some. We have a French chef, Major. Did you know that?'" (p. 50)

"Sharpe could not find the Battalion, but the Battalion could find him. Major Richard Sharpe and Sergeant Major Patrick Harper, who only the night before had been crowned by the Goddesses of Victory, were going to become recruits again. They had donned the costumes of tramps and must act the parts of the desperate men whose last recourse was to join the ranks. Sharpe and Harper would join the army." (p. 77)

"On the morning of the second and fourth Monday of each month, at eleven o'clock precisely, Lieutenant Colonel Bartholomew Girdwood's servant brought a small pot of boiling pitch to his master. Then, carefully, he put a thick cloth over the Colonel's mouth, other cloths on his cheeks and nostrils, and, with a spatula borrowed from the Battalion surgeon, he smeared the boiling tar into the Colonel's moustache. He worked it in, forcing the thick, steaming mess deep into the wiry hairs, and, though sometimes the Colonel's face would flicker as a boiling drop reached the skin of his lip, he would stay utterly silent until the servant had finished the task. The cloths would be removed, there would be a pause while the tar set solid, then the servant, with scissors, file, and heated spatula, shaped and polished the moustache so that, for another two weeks, it would need no further attention.
'Thank you, Briggs!' The Colonel tapped his moustache. It sounded like a nail rapping on ivory. 'Excellent!'
'Thank you, sir.'" (p. 101)

"The happiness was on him, the foolish, crazy, insane happiness of a man who believes himself, despite the lack of evidence, to be in love, and the happiness made him laugh aloud as he leaned down to pick up his shovel and as he wondered how he and Harper would escape from Foulness this night.
Then the happiness went.
He had not noticed it till this moment, so bound up was he by her sudden appearance and by the shock of her words on all his hopes, but Giles Marriott, whom Sharpe had ordered to go away, had obeyed. He had gone." (p. 127)

"That morning, when Sergeant Lynch had marched them off the island, Sharpe ahd noted a drainage ditch that angled north west from the road and pointed, like a straight line on a map, towards Sir Henry's house. It was beside that ditch that he and Harper now went. 'We're going to the creek! You go ahead!' Sharpe reloaded the carbine, watching to see if the pursuers pressed close, but his earlier shots had taken what small courage they had and destroyed it. He felt a moment's shame that these men wore the uniform of the South Essex, then turned and ran after Harper." (p. 153)

"Lawford shrugged apologetically. He was nervous. This handsome lord, a government minister, conveyed such an air of elegant gravity that it seemed unthinkable that he should be bound up in so squalid an affair as Foulness. Lawford smiled. 'I do not, for one moment, sir, imagine that you know of what I speak. Let us, though, assume that you have some influence over those who might? Sir Henry Simmerson, perhaps?'
Lord Fenner showed none of the relief that he felt. Lawford was showing his cards, and though the first cards had horrified Fenner, this last demonstrated that Sir William did

not seek his disgrace. Fenner's voice was still cold and toneless. "We can assume that, Sir William.'" (p. 175)

"The sergeants stood to attention as Sharpe came in. None, except for Horatio Havercamp, caught his eye. Some flinched when Harper slammed the door. The huge Irishman's boots were loud on the wooden floor as he went to stand behind and to one side of Sharpe.
Sharpe, as the silence stretched almost unbearably, counted thirty-one men in the room. He had decided to start here, letting the officers sweat in Lieutenant Colonel Girdwood's old office. These men, the sergeants, were the men who really ran this camp. They were the trainers, the disciplinarians, the workers who took boys and made them into soldiers. Nine officers were more than sufficient for Foulness, but Sharpe knew that Girdwood would have needed as many sergeants as he could find." (p. 200)

"The morning was chaos, as Sharpe had known it would be chaos. The men were willing enough, but the Foulness officers and sergeants seemed incapable of solving the smallest difficulty. 'Sir!' Sharpe turned to see Lieutenant Mattingly frowning unhappily in the moonlight before the dawn.
"What is it, Lieutenant?'
'The cauldrons, sir. We haven't got transport.' He waved feebly towards the huge iron pots, each of which was large enough to boil a beef carcass whole. 'We can't carry them, sir.'
'Lieutenant Mattingly,' Sharpe spoke with a patience he did not feel, 'imagine that within two miles of this place there were ten thousand Frenchmen who wanted nothing more than to blow your skull apart. Further imagine that you had orders to retreat. What would you do with the cauldrons if that was the case?'
Mattingly blinked, thought about it, then looked tentatively at Sharpe. 'Abandon them, sir?'
'Exactly.' Sharpe turned his horse away. 'Do that.'" (p. 224)

"She looked at his jacket, torn and patched, still marked with his dried blood and the blood of enemies. 'That's terrible!'
'It's the jacket I fight in.'
She fingered a rent. 'I can see why you want a wife.'
He held her still, his arms on her shoulders, and for a few seconds he thought he could not speak.
'You mean?' She said nothing, and he could hear nothing but her breath, feel nothing but her body, see nothing but her eyes.
'Jane?'
'I can't go back. Ever.'
'I don't want you to.'
'I mean we shouldn't.'
'No.'
'I don't know you.'

'No.'
'But I will marry you.' She looked so solemnly at him, he blinked, and for this glorious moment there was no war, and no crimping, and no bands playing, just her eyes and a happiness that was greater than he thought he could manage. He swallowed. 'I would be most honoured.'
'And I, Mr Sharpe.'" (p. 251)

"But Sir Henry Simmerson, who had just handed his cloak to a servant, did not have the same sense. He stared in outraged anger. His niece, dressed in her simple blue country dress, was coming down the Prince Regent's stairs on the arm of the man Sir Henry hated most in all the world. 'Jane! I ordered you home! I'll have the skin off you!'
'Sir Henry!' It was Sharpe who replied. His voice, echoing in the marbled splendor of the hall, seemed unnaturally loud. He put his right hand over Jane's to clam her fears.
Sir Henry stared at them, and Sharpe, in the same loud voice, spoke two brief words that, though much used in Britain's army, were rarely heard in Carlton House. Then, with his bride on his arm and his sword at his side, he went into the night. He was going to Spain." (p. 271)

"Girdwood was mad, so these men, until another colonel was appointed, belonged to Sharpe now. He watched them march, listened to the singing that had already begun, and he though how they had fought among the rocks to victory. They were, he considered, as good as any troops he had known and, for the moment at least, they were his men, his responsibility, and his pride. Jane watched him. She saw on his hard, striking face the glint of water that was not rain. He was staring at the men for whom he had fought against all the bastards who despised them because they were mere common soldiers. They were his men, his soldiers, Sharpe's regiment." (p. 298)

Topics for Discussion

Nairn understands that the second battalion is not sending replacements to the first battalion and assumes there is some political fiasco going on in England, yet he sends Sharpe to deal with the situation. What qualities does Nairn see in Sharpe that make him select Sharpe for this duty? Did Nairn make a wise choice? Why or why not?

Consider Fenner's grand crimping scheme—is it really bad for the nation's military as a whole? Or is it only bad for the South Essex Regiment? Discuss.

Sharpe suspects the Prince Regent is bordering on mental instability, and the narrative presentation of the Prince Regent seems to support this view. Discuss how an unbalanced (or simply ineffective) commander-in-chief can significantly and negatively impact a nation.

The narrative presents many villainous antagonists, including Fenner, Simmerson, Girdwood, and Lynch. Of the four men noted which do you consider to be the most irredeemable?

Does Sharpe really fall in love with Jane, or is she simply a pawn in his power struggle against Simmerson? Likewise, does Jane really fall in love with Sharpe, or is he simply a way out of her present untenable situation? Do you think their relationship will be durable? Why or why not?

The novel is atypical for the series, inasmuch as it involves very little combat and is set primarily in England and involves political corruption. If you have read other novels in the series, do you consider this novel to be a successful deviation from the formula of the other books in the series? Why or why not?

At the end of the novel Sharpe sends Lynch with Harper and other Irishmen on a detached assignment. Lynch is killed by fratricide. Sharpe anticipated his murder and Harper was happy to ensure it. Do you think this action was morally reprehensible? Or was it simply justice? Discuss.