FIGURE 1. Thomas Couture, French (1815-1879), Drummer Boy, 1857; oil on canvas, 146.6 x 114.3 cm. (57 3/4 x 45 in.). Robert H. Tannahill Foundation Fund (76.23).
THOMAS COUTURE’S DRUMMER BOY BEATING A PATH TO GLORY

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The drum and the drummer boy were two of the most popular military symbols in the 19th century. Their pervasiveness may be understood in the context of the martial pride, patriotism, and even imperialism of the great Western powers. Above all, the image of the innocent youth serving the nation-state in time of war incarnated the highest ideals of self-sacrifice and duty. While the actual use of the drummer boy in the field was vastly exaggerated, the image tried to capture the kind of idealism and devotion to a transcendent cause which became increasingly untenable with the technology of modern warfare, the heightened awareness of historical development, and the self-interested objectives of those who wage war.

The drummer boy was the product of 18th-century European armies. The improvement of musical technique required greater flexibility and longer training time to develop proficient performers. Children could be trained as fine drummers, since they had both the physical flexibility and the time to learn advanced techniques and new beats. An Irish writer advocated in 1768 that boys below the age of 14 be enlisted to train as drummers under a drum major. They were to be carried as privates in addition to the regular adult drummers of the company. The romantic legends of boy drummers of the American and French Revolutions obscure the fact that these boys served as supplements rather than as replacements for the adult musician. Usually, they were orphans or sons of soldiers and grew up with a strong attachment to their unit. As we shall see, these gamins early assumed symbolic and propagandistic status.1

Drums have always been venerated symbols in the western military tradition.2 In Europe and America an emblazoned drum added dignity and respect to the call to arms. This association of the drum and the military has an ancient pedigree: from the earliest times, percussion instruments were used to encourage the troops and raise their spirits before, during, and after combat. The Greeks and Romans used drums not only to maintain orderly ranks but also to instill patriotism in their soldiers and inspire them to perform heroically in the field. Indeed, all ancient peoples used the drum and its assimilation in modern warfare scarcely conceals its primordial appeal. This emphasis extended to the drummer himself, who dressed differently and more flamboyantly than the regular soldiers. While this distinction served a practical function—it allowed officers to locate their signalman quickly in the smoke and chaos of battle—it also pointed to the tradition of military pomp and spectacle closely identified with the drums and tympani.

The drum in Couture’s painting, Drummer Boy (fig. 1) acquired in 1976 by The Detroit Institute of Arts, was a typical military side-drum, a rope-tensioned snare drum descended from the medieval tabor.3 It was carried by means of a sling worn across the player’s right shoulder and rested at his left side. The drummer’s duty in Couture’s period was to signal and beat the rhythmic marches, to infuse morale by a combination of technical movement and entertainment. The entire day’s activities in garrison or in the field were called by the drummer. While the drum preceded the fife historically, fifes were added to the drums to provide melodic interest and together they comprised the field music.4 During the second half of the 19th century, the bugle and trumpet began replacing the drum and fife in military communications. The development of fast-moving artillery units and swift cavalry tactics required an instrument equally flexible in movement and penetrating in sound.

Military music—and the drum in particular—has a celebrated history in France dating from the Renaissance.5 Significantly, the drum and its performer are uniquely identified in the French language: the same word, “tambour,” is used for both. The great emphasis on drummers was already present during the time of François I, who invested them with a special mystique:

The drummer must be brave, for he marches at the head of the regiment, and even in the middle of the fray. He must, by his heroism, and without ceasing to beat his drum, lead the soldiers through the enemy ranks...6

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Drummers also enjoyed special prominence with the musketeers under Louis XIII and Louis XIV; the latter’s court musician, Philidor, composed the first collection of drum rolls—including the long roll for the General Alarm. During the ancien régime, drummer boys on horseback (“timbaliers à cheval”) wore magnificent costumes and were a popular vogue.

The military band, although temporarily suppressed by the events of the French Revolution, ultimately attained high status in response to the revolutionary zeal. At the grandiose fêtes, monster military bands and choirs, in which the drums assumed a major role, contributed immeasurably to firing patriotic devotion to the Revolution. At this time that the drummer boy was transformed into a vehicle for propaganda: examples are the legendary “petit tambour” who was the first to cross the bridge at the battle of Arcole, and the earlier notorious case of Joseph Barra, which Robespierre skillfully manipulated for political ends.

There is a great deal of confusion surrounding Barra, and it is not even certain that he was a drummer boy. Legend has it that he was killed at the age of 13 by the royalist partisans in the Vendée for having refused to cry “Vive le roi” and shouting instead “Vive la république.” Jacques Richard’s poem written in his memory includes the verse “To the sound of the bugle, to the beat of the drum” (“À la voix du clairon, aux accents du tambour”). In reality, Barra died from bayonet wounds for refusing to turn over his two horses to the royalist “brigands.” The incident occurred in 1793, a year of general crisis for the Revolution and particularly poor for recruitments. Robespierre, who knew the truth about Barra, saw in the event a potential patriotic symbol to fire revolutionary fervor, and fabricated the famous myth of the drummer boy. During the same period, shiny new drums were offered to all youngsters who volunteered for active duty.

This seems to have been the first instance of the propagandistic function of the drummer boy, which was to have such a devastating effect on Western youth deep into the next century. Western peoples, peace-loving though they may have been, were indoctrinated by the wooden sword and the tin drum of boyhood. The drummer boy thus appealed to the child’s normal love of soldierly and romantic obsession with heroic battles,
and to the adult’s nostalgia for the idealism of youth and for the unquestioning faith in “la patrie.” Robespierre’s use of Barra anticipated the later romanticized image of the English and the Americans.

Musicians occupied an elevated position in the “Grande Armée”; Napoleon believed in the effectiveness of pomp and spectacle and lavishly endowed his drummers. They received high pay and wore elaborate uniforms reminiscent of the ancien régime. In 1811 the Emperor established a school to accommodate 120 student drummers for his elite Imperial Guard to insure that its calls remained uniform in all the units and to perpetuate its tradition. Candidates were recruited from working-class children and from the “pupilles” (minors already serving in the army).

Adolescents (ages 9-16) had always served in the French army, and a special preparatory corps for the Imperial Guard—“the baby regiment”—had a number of drummer boys, the youngest being 12 and the oldest 16. Some of these were orphans of soldiers killed in the service of their country, and some of them had come to France from the Hague where they were attached to the Royal Guard of Louis Napoleon. After his abdication, these Dutch trainees were formed into a regiment of “pupilles” and attached to the Imperial Guard. Their ranks were also opened to foundlings and orphans of the Empire who were at least “four-foot-nine and healthy.” Thousands of recruits under 16 from France, Italy, Brabant, Holland, and Germany poured into Versailles and eventually comprised one-sixth of the Guard.

The drummer boys of the “pupilles,” sometimes accompanied by fifers, frequently marched in the field and shared the legendary heroism of their predecessors. Napoleon, like Robespierre, knew the effects of drums and martial music on the young. During his Hundred Days, he ordered recruiting parties to enlist volunteers and attract veterans by beating the drums, parading flags, and displaying posters: “The Young Guard Officers in Paris . . . will send officers to the mairies with bands and drums and . . . do everything possible to arouse enthusiasm in the young.” Napoleon deliberately cultivated virtuoso drummers for propagandistic ends.

In the ensuing years, the organization of the musicians was affirmed: each regiment had its “école des tambours,” generally supervised by a corporal who was himself a veteran drummer. The trainees were still drawn from the ranks of the people and were orphans or vagrants. As in the time of Napoleon, these legacies of public charity were rescued from poverty and trained to become good soldiers. They had hopes of rising through the ranks and even one day occupying leadership positions: one veteran noted that he “enlisted and was a drummer boy at 14, battalion leader at 50 . . . .” The same soldier recalled the heroism of a “young drummer” who marched at the head of his regiment in 1823 during an encounter with the Spanish, received a citation for valor, and was celebrated in a painting by “one of our great artists.”

Drummers and drummer boys continued to distinguish themselves in the popular mind during the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, and firmly established the mythical image. By 1846 an English author, whose remarks were published in the Revue britannique, could note the special veneration of the French for the drum, and their use of the drummer in combat:

In all stages of the attack and the charge, the drummer always marches at the front, beating his drum as if he already had the enemy under his drumsticks. One seeks to render an

FIGURE 3. Thomas Couture, Study for “Drummer Boy,” 1857; black and white chalk on gray paper, 43.2 x 28.3 cm. (17 x 11⅛ in.). Formerly Shepherd Gallery, New York.

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army powerless by cutting off supplies; for my part, I recommend, if ever we have a new war with the French, to destroy as soon as possible their drummers. (Italics added.)

And he noted that this affection for the instrument carried over to the soldier who played it. The French drummer had assumed mythological status, and it was only in France that the drummers beat “pour la gloire.”

Under the Second Empire, military music in general thrived; anxious to revive the pageantry of his uncle’s Imperial Guard, Napoleon III re-established this unit just shortly after the Crimean War broke out. He also commissioned the renowned Belgian musical inventor, Adolphe Sax, to reorganize the military orchestras. The Emperor himself had a special affection for the drum: “he cared only for the drum and the trumpet, with the fifes as supplementary.” It was no coincidence that he was lavish with his military musicians during this period: the Crimean and subsequent Italian campaign—strictly self-serving—presented opportunities to enhance the reputation of his dynasty and realize his fantasies. The orchestra of the Imperial Guard and other outfits, unlike the English bands, were sent to the front to keep the spirit of the regulars aroused. During the Crimean War, French drummers and trumpeters thrilled the English as well as their own men as they entered combat; they kept up a steady play of rolls, fanfaronnades, and flourishes. An English observer, who missed the presence of British musicians, called attention to “the joyous clamour” of the French drums.

Drummer boys served in the Imperial Guard and also as “timbaliers à cheval”—another tradition which the Emperor revived. While they did not actually march into the field like their predecessors of the old Imperial Guard, drummer boys played in the bands behind the lines and called the day’s activities in the camp. The older drummers, however, achieved the traditional prominence accorded them in previous wars and were awarded medals for their bravery in the Crimea and in Italy.

The close association of the drummer and the Crimean War became fixed in the romantic lexicon of the 19th century. The potential of this image for propaganda is demonstrated by a collection of poems by an English veteran of the Crimean campaign, entitled appropriately enough, The Drummer Boy. The leitmotif of the collection, the “fair-haired drummer boy,” symbolized in the

author’s mind “memories of youthful inspirations.” Even more revealing, the author noted that “The Drummer Boy” would probably be ignored by the present generation (c. 1900), but he hoped rather to reach “other elderly men who have lived those days.”

At the war’s end in 1856, France emerged as the strongest diplomatic power in Europe and its army radiated an aura of prestige. The vast rise in French fortunes and reputation flowed in large measure from the success of its Imperial army. It became the model for all other Western nations, and its symbols and uniforms were widely emulated. At home, its popularity was reflected in the large number of battle scenes based on the war at the Salon of 1857.

Thus Couture’s Drummer Boy, painted in 1857, reflects the popular enthusiasm for the army in the aftermath of the Crimean War. While it was part of a series featuring prettified adolescent males as the presentiment of vice or as victims of some social evil, its immediate inspiration derived from the popularity of the French military and its conventional association with the drum and the drummer boy. In this case, the youth has not yet enrolled in the ranks, but his elation at finding the instrument and its decorative trappings leaves no doubt as to his future plans. Couture further made his protagonist a street urchin, indicating that he was familiar with the traditional origins of the drummer boy.

The critics who catalogued the collection of the first owner of the work certainly understood the subject in the light of the well-established tradition:

Ah! I understand the boy clearly in the process of analyzing him: he smiles at the future does he not, my dear Couture? And he already beats the charge in some imaginary battle, and he will enlist in an army of volunteers, and perhaps he will be in a revolution, he will become a general, a marshall of France,—and he will become rich enough to buy your very expensive painting!

The critic understood the work as an example of the typical Victorian rags-to-riches theme—eminently compatible with the ideology of the Second Empire which encouraged the romantic view of success. Here the innocent cherub makes it to the top through military channels, thus closely identifying himself with the authoritarian regime.
This is the overt or surface message of Couture's picture.

This theme was also suited to an American audience, and around this period Couture began conceiving sentimental genre scenes for an American clientele. These works from the late 1850s and early 1860s share qualities with contemporary genre pictures of American painters, among whom could be counted several of his own disciples. In keeping with the American tradition, the flesh areas are more finished and the details more carefully drawn than we would normally expect from the master. Paradoxically, an American who either purchased the work at a later date or commissioned a replica complained about what he felt were its unfinished passages. Couture, who insisted on the need for improvisation in works of art, responded: "Such spontaneous productions as these have a logic of their own which reason can add nothing." Couture always paid lip service to a modern ideal of revelatory brushwork, but actually tightened his style in this period.

There are a number of disturbing aspects about the Drummer Boy. Despite the apparent joy of the gamin, the somber backdrop casts an atmosphere of gloom and melancholy over the scene. It is reminiscent of Couture's Blowing Bubbles (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) where a soft and pampered child wastes his study hour in idleness, and the Petit Gille (Philadelphia Museum of Fine Art) who is pressed into menial servitude. Akin to his earlier Falconer (Toledo Museum of Art) as well, the grapevine growing on the wall recalls the onset of winter and adds an autumnal chill to the notion of "vanitas." The would-be drummer boy takes up the drumsticks in the ominous shadow of the stacked rifles leaning against the wall—like horrific echoes of the batons. Although in the preliminary sketch for the picture in The Wallace Collection (fig. 2) the child has an authentic coarseness, in the finished painting he is much too pampered and refined for his tattered clothing, which has the appearance of costume.

Couture, a highly pretentious artist who wanted to be simultaneously modern and classic, who tried to blend romantic, classic, and realist painting into a unique synthesis of "noble" painting, often relied on the fable, the proverb, and popular imagery to bring home a moral lesson. Such works as L'Amour de l'or and Les Romains de la décadence have to be understood on several levels. At the same time, his inclusive viewpoint made him an outstanding teacher, and his private art school attracted an international student body. He was one of the few masters at mid-century excelling in both color and drawing and who emphasized both in his training. It is no wonder that his approach appealed to Edouard Manet, his most famous pupil, as well as to Puis de Chavannes; the Germans Anselm Feuerbach and Wilhelm Gentz; the Swede Uno Troili; and a host of Americans including William Morris Hunt, William Babcock, Robert Loftin Newman, Eastman Johnson, John La Farge, George Peter Alexander Healy, Thomas Hicks, and Thomas Noble.

The feeling of incongruity in the Drummer Boy is heightened by the child's mawkish smile—suggesting the artist's own repugnance for the character. Couture's loathing for the subject is reflected generally in the youth's vacuousness and artificial expression, and, by way of contrast, in the degree of naturalism and affection he lavished on the inanimate objects. A preliminary sketch for the work (fig. 3) shows his obsession with military authenticity. The drum and rifles ring true in direct contrast with the hollow youth in old clothing. Just as the idle schoolboy wiles away his valuable moments building castles in the air, so the drummer boy, dreaming of military glory, is destined for obliteration by the French military machine. Thus, on a deeper level, Couture's picture reverses the old mythology and yields an insight into the propagandistic image as the prelude to a condemned and wasted life.

In some ways, Couture's picture resembles Philippe-Auguste Jeanron's Les Petits Patriotes (fig. 4), which, as Linda Nochlin suggested, is a "watered-down, sugar-coated reworking of Delacroix's... Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi." The disheveled ragamuffins, somewhat hardened and sickened by the events of 1830, seem deliberately staged. While they have taken up cudgels in imitation of their elders, they pose self-consciously in a manner anticipating the Couture. Couture was surely familiar with the work; he knew Jeanron, and also seems to have incorporated the motif of the insurrectionists in the rear of Patriots into his celebrated L'Enrôlement des volontaires en 1792 in Colmar.

Couture's visual idea was probably influenced by
the artist-illustrator, Numa Bassaget, who painted for a popular audience a series of children acting out military charades. Numa’s children are smug, cloyingly sweet, and fairly ooze with self-conscious seductiveness. His En avant (fig. 5), lithographed by Bettanier, displays a pampered child with chubby arms and delicate hands playing the drum; he sports a croix-de-guerre and knapsack and looks at the spectator with a precocious gaze. Another example, La patrie en danger, shows the same type drawing a toy sword from his scabbard, as if to lead volunteers to the front. Both Numa and Couture pandered to their audience in images that must have been commonplace, except that the latter managed to probe more deeply the meaning and appeal of the theme.

During the time he was conceiving his work, Couture must surely have recalled his idol David’s fatally wounded drummer boy Barra (fig. 6), the visual counterpart to the myth formulated by Robespierre. Delécluze, who published his biography of Jacques-Louis David in 1855, referred to Barra as “the young drummer, dying while carrying the tri-color cockade against his heart.” By this time, he had become the paradigm drummer boy and there was an entire literature and iconog-
raphy devoted to him. At the Salon of 1839, David d'Angers exhibited his version of the prostrate Barra grasping one of his drumsticks (fig. 7). The sculpture belonged to Prince Napoleon and would have been known to Couture. Both the painting by David and the sculpture by David d'Angers show the young hero smiling, and the former's version is unusual for the feminine head and rapturous expression of the fallen youth. Couture's pretty child—including the tilt of his head—picks up on these features of the older master's work.

The contemporary literature manifests the various levels at which the drummer and the drummer boy were understood. If Scribe, the ardent publicist of the "juste milieu," used these symbols to represent the youth and energy of the National Guard, Victor Hugo used them as sinister harbingers of disaster. Béranger, one of Couture's favorite authors, conjoined the marching drummer and childhood in his poem "Tambour-major" to show youth seduced by fanfare and fancy trappings. Denouncing the pretentious declamations of contemporary writers who take in the crowd, he compared their rhetoric to the drumbeat which attracts children and promotes a false sense of the heroic:

See this hurrying crowd of
Children drawn by the drums
There where struts a vulgar giant.
Ornate, all sewn with gold.
For them, it is the god of war:
Long live the beautiful drum major!

Couture's subversion of the sentimental image of the drummer boy was in line with the conceptions of Hugo and Béranger. His insight into the propagandistic image derived from personal experience. The patriotic ardor and optimism he manifested in the unfinished Enrôlement des volontaires commissioned by the Second Republic had culminated in disillusionment with the demise of the regime and his subsequent involvement with the Second Empire.

As a child, Couture was fired by the martial episodes of ancient heroes with whom he identified. Occasionally, he would dream of leading his humble school companions in glorious combat against some children of the aristocracy who taunted them. He projected himself in the role of an ancient hero and laboriously carved wooden swords to distribute among his fellows. But they took advantage of his generosity and joyfully made off with the imitation weapons—including his own wrested from him by a bigger chum. The event turned out to be bitterly disappointing and humiliating for young Thomas.

As an adult, his dream of martial glory and need for commitment to the national cause was revived by the Republic of 1848. Coincidentally, that very year the foremost French historian of military music tried to demonstrate the close relationship of the soldier and the artist in their common goal "to contribute to the national glory while insuring their own glory." He noted that both artist and soldier must demonstrate courage in the face of
“combat,” and that military heroism furnished the material for artists’ masterpieces. Reflecting this general thesis, Couture translated his patriotism and enthusiasm into the monumental Enrôlement des volontaires (fig. 8) based on the volunteers of the French Revolution in 1792. His composition assembles a vast throng of volunteers drawn from all classes of society who exuberantly march in fraternity toward the frontier. Couture could envision absolute national unity only in the context of an external threat, as a cohesiveness forged by the confrontation with a do-or-die situation.

Significantly, Couture used the drum in the composition as a fundamental expression of his gushing optimism and national pride: a drummer sounds the call-to-arms at the left of the incomplete final attempt in Colmar, while in the detail sketch in Beauvais, the table upon which the volunteers officially enroll is supported by drum cases (fig. 9). The drum, which signals the volunteers to the service of “la patrie” and sustains their esprit de corps on their way to the front, is an affirmative metaphor for the 1848 Republic.

In December 1848, however, following a string of disasters including the abandonment of the National Workshops and the June insurrection, Louis Napoleon rode a conservative mood to victory. L’Enrôlement des volontaires en 1792 no longer made sense, and while Couture made several concessions to accommodate it to the taste of the new regime, it remained unfinished—a symbol of the momentary exaltation of the short-lived Republic as well as its failure.

The advent of the Second Empire was not propitious for the consummation of his project, both in terms of the general political climate and the coolness of the officials. At the same time, Couture reached a modus vivendi with the new regime and received a series of notable commissions from the government in 1856, including Le Baptême du Prince Impérial, L’Empire s’appuyant sur l’Église et l’Armée pour repousser l’Anarchie, Rentrée de l’armée d’orient à Paris, which were destined for the decoration of the Pavillon Denon at the Louvre, a new extension scheduled to be completed the following year. All of these pictures were pervaded by military symbolism and attested to the prestige of the French army in the wake of the Crimean War.

These commissions reflected the official policies of the new regime which emphasized for propaganda purposes the glorious military exploits of Napoleon III. Existing documents attest to the conscious manipulation of art for political ends: in 1856 the Director of Fine Arts proposed to the Minister of State a series of monumental works depicting the crucial civil and military events of the Second Empire since “it is the role of art as it is of history to consecrate these memories in an unforgettable manner.” He proposed the building of a new museum with one whole gallery set aside for military scenes of the Crimean War.

The Director then proposed two categories of first
and second order commissions, reserving the first for the highest ranking French painters. Couture was one of those chosen for this category, along with Horace Vernet (1789-1863) and Franz Xavier Winterhalter (1806-1873), the stars of the Second Empire. Couture’s position with the government could now be likened to that of “Court Painter.” That Couture was himself imbued by the aspirations of the Second Empire is shown in his conception of Le Baptême du Prince Impérial (fig. 10). Standing behind the Emperor are several allegorical figures in military costume, including a cuirassier and a zouave who hold a flag inscribed with the names of the great victories of the Crimean War: Alma, Malakoff, and Inkermann. As Couture noted about the presence of the military at the ceremony: “The army . . . simple and devoted, will give him protection; but the most imposing of forces will be that of memory: Napoleon the First descends upon the earth to bless his posterity and to touch his eagles with his redoubtable sword.”

Here Couture invoked the model for Louis Napoleon’s own dreams of glory: while the Emperor of the Second Empire was no military genius, he tried to recapture the pomp and glory of the “Grande Armée” whose memory still inflamed the imagination and patriotic ardor of the masses of French people. He achieved this on the one hand, through the revival of the sumptuous military uniforms and lavish spectacle that the first Napoleon bestowed on his armies, and on the other, through the victories of the French army in Italy and the Crimea. Couture, who held vivid recollections of the impact the death of Napoleon made on the family circle (although he was only six years old at the time), was—like the majority of 19th-century middle-class youths in the Western world—inspired by the image of the victorious leader. Thus in may ways he could rationalize his service in behalf of the new regime on the basis of their common veneration for Napoleon.

Once again, however, his dreams of glory were destined to be squashed. Early in 1857 his arrogance and high status prompted a jealous rival to publish a forged letter in Couture’s name in Le Figaro compromising the artist in the eyes of the government. A skillfully worded letter, it was written with Couture’s characteristic braggadocio and convinced most of the artistic community that it was indeed by the master. The result was a notorious scandal which all but severed his relationship with the regime. While they did not abruptly terminate the commission for the Pavilion Denon, for all intents and purposes the harmonious relationship had ended. This left the artist broken and disillusioned for the remainder of his career: from 1857 on, he felt a profound alienation and went more or less into exile. He began working for wealthy collectors, many of them American, and was motivated by pecuniary interests. The diatribes directed at leading artists in his writings and the number of misanthropic subjects like the Drummer Boy and Blowing Bubbles in his works of the late 1850s and early 1860s reflect this bitterness.

Thus the Drummer Boy, painted in the year of the scandal, owes its ambiguities to Couture’s self-recrimination and general disillusionment with French society. Humiliated and disenchanted, Couture could hardly have avoided investing the conventional image of patriotism and self-sacrifice with the ominous quality we have discerned. During the subsequent years, Couture’s themes continued to reflect this bitterness and sense of betrayal, a mood reinforced by the defeat of the French in the Franco-Prussian War. Then he identified his personal sense of disillusionment with the disillusionment of an entire society.

Couture’s students were deeply affected by the example of the master; Manet’s famous Fière (fig. 11) springs directly from it. It may be recalled that the drum and fife most often comprised the field music, and that in military tradition they were in-
separable instruments. Manet’s model was a “petit trouper”—not Victoire Meurend as is usually stated—brought to his studio by a Major Lejosne of the Imperial Guard. The young fifer in his resplendent uniform thus exemplified the current revival of the Napoleonic flamboyance. The popular enthusiasm for the musicians of the Imperial Guard was shown by the huge crowds that jammed their performance at the Palais de l’Industrie in July 1867.

Manet’s image, however, is singular in its total extirpation of flag-waving rhetoric. As in the Couture, we are confronted with the vulnerable child-soldier whose plump, awkward fingers have not yet developed the resilience required for technical excellence. Manet carried out the theme more effectively than his master through the distracted, almost helpless air on the boy’s face and through the neutral background which isolates the figure like a target in a gunner’s sight. Couture’s gambit has now been inducted, decked out in fancy apparel for the public, and reduced to the status of an object like a toy soldier. Considering the conventional presentation of drummers and fifers, the chilling effect of Manet’s work becomes evident and anticipates his pictorial conception of Maximilian executed the following year.

Another Couture student, Marcellin Desboutin—friend of Manet, Degas, and Puvis de Chavannes—did a drypoint engraving in the early 1870s of a street singer and drummer boy (fig. 12). Instead of the lively group one might expect, the aged woman and the youth are shown as pathetic types unable to function as a pair. They move in opposite directions and even the directions of their gazes are opposed. This combination of old age and youth has an allegorical intent: the naive drummer boy and the melancholy old singer attest to the demoralization of France and its disunity in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. France and its once glorious military have been reduced to bankruptcy and forced to beg in the streets.

Curiously, in this same period, Couture picked up L’Enrôlement des volontaires, which had been abandoned for so many years. During the Franco-Prussian War, the picture became connected to one of his most terrifying experiences. The Prussians, who occupied his home at Villiers-le-Bel, looted and destroyed many of his major canvases. Yet the one work he thought sure to have aroused their hostility was left untouched: when he entered his studio after the wanton destruction he was flabbergasted to see the Enrôlement intact.

The cumulative years of bitterness and the disastrous effects of this experience sapped Couture’s vitality and morale. He compensated for his loss of faith in France with extravagant praise of America; for a moment he played with the idea of selling the Enrôlement to an American group of students and patrons. But once again he was unable to pursue the work to its fulfillment. In 1876 an American student recorded in her diary that she saw the study of the drummers for the Enrôlement (fig. 13), and discussed it with the master. The entry clearly shows Couture’s sense of self-disgust and state of depression attached to the traditional image of patriotism and national pride:

One of his studies for the “Volunteers” was of three (sic) drummers. One had laid his drum on the ground, and stood with his back turned. The centre-figure had fallen into reverie, his drum hung silent about his neck. “The drum makes one march” says Couture, “France no longer marches. There you are! The drum is silent.”

FIGURE 11. Edouard Manet, French (1832-1883), Le Fifre, 1866; oil on canvas, 160 x 97.2 cm. (63 x 38¼ in.). Musée du Jeu de Paume, Paris.

FIGURE 13. Thomas Couture, L'Enrôlement des volontaires en 1792, c. 1848; oil on canvas, 65.4 x 81.2 cm. (25 3/4 x 32 in.). Musée des Beaux-Arts, Valenciennes.

FIGURE 14. Archibald M. Willard, American (1836-1718), Spirit of '76, 1876; oil on canvas, 130 x 205 cm. (52 x 82 in.). The Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, gift of A. L. Bowersox.
FIGURE 15. Eastman Johnson, American (1824-1906), Wounded Drummer Boy; oil on canvas, 121.3 x 97.8 cm. (47 3/4 x 38 1/2 in.). The Union League Club, New York.

FIGURE 16. Thomas Couture, L'Enrôlement des volontaires en 1792, c. 1848/55; oil on canvas, 58.4 x 101.6 cm. (23 x 40 in.). The Springfield Museum of Fine Arts. The James Philip Gray Collection, Springfield, Massachusetts.

Across the ocean that same year, the America of Couture’s fantasies was preparing for its Centennial celebration at Philadelphia. Undoubtedly, the American group wanting to purchase the Enrôlement had the Centennial in mind, since the sentiment underlying both the painting and the celebration had a profound historical relationship. Couture wanted to give one of his equestrian figures in his composition “the features of Washington who presides morally over all the liberations in the world.” This allusion to the first president of the United States recalls the fascination of the “men of 1848” with the American political system, in turn reflecting the sympathy of their forebears of ‘89 with the American Revolution whose success they helped to guarantee. A French student of the master, Edouard Armand-Dumaresq (1826-1895), exhibited his version of the Signing of the Declaration of Independence in the Philadelphia Centennial—a work heavily influenced by the Enrôlement.

Couture contributed even more spectacularly to the Centennial. In the exhibition the spiritual counterpart to the Enrôlement was Archibald M. Willard’s Spirit of ’76—a work destined to become America’s most popular patriotic image (fig. 14). Willard typically focused on the inspired drummer boy and fifer as metaphors for “la patrie,” and it is no coincidence that his work may be traced in part to the example of Couture and his disciples. Eastman Johnson, who had studied with the master in 1855, executed in 1871 his popular Wounded Drummer Boy, which was displayed at the National Academy exhibition of 1872 (fig. 15). Johnson illustrated one of the legendary episodes of the Civil War, showing a wounded youth held aloft and still drumming to sustain the morale of the troops. It depends both technically and formally on Couture’s precedent. Two of the soldiers derive from figures projected for the Enrôlement: the man carrying the drumming boy is the marcher at the far left in Couture’s sketch at Springfield (fig. 16), while the warrior in the left background shouting and waving his cap is the soldier striding on the left of the recruiting platform. Mediated by Johnson’s work, this last figure entered directly into Willard’s conception; while this motif appears to the right of the main group in the definitive canvas, in the preliminary charcoal drawing the waving soldier is located in precisely the same spot as in the Johnson (fig. 17). Additionally, Willard’s sketch demonstrates that he borrowed the pose of Johnson’s central soldier for the fifer. Willard probably knew the Wounded Drummer Boy from his trip to New York in 1873 to study art under J. O. Eaton; shortly afterwards, he began his classic picture. Thus America’s popular image was informed by Couture’s Enrôlement and Drummer Boy as they were filtered through Eastman Johnson.

Willard, who was a veteran of the Civil War, clearly based Spirit of ’76 on the drummer boy tradition of his period and this made him responsive to Johnson’s picture. Drums and fifes were everywhere during the Civil War. Reminiscent of the French revolution, the flag was often suspended over a large bass drum on which volunteers signed the enlistment rolls. The drummer boy became an ubiquitous image based on the actuality: over 40,000 young drummers and fifers served on the Union side alone. The growth of the drum industry in America during the Civil War was nothing short of phenomenal: in 1854 the fledgling firm of Noble & Cooley in Granville, Massachusetts built 631 drums; in 1863, about 58,000. The drum held a more prominent place in the rhythmic pulse of the troops than any other instrument.

The drummer boy of the Civil War appeared in painting, popular illustration, novels, plays, and especially song and poetry. An incredible number of songs and poems about young drummers emerge in this period, the most notable of which was Will S. Hay’s “Drummer Boy of Shiloh.” In 1863, Thomas Nast did a cartoon for Harper’s Weekly entitled “The Drummer Boy of Our Regiment” which depicts a series of sentimental vignettes of an eager youth; two of the episodes show him leaving home tearfully and returning a mature and stalwart “man” (fig. 18). Recruitment posters directed toward black people in 1862 include the drummer boy, already a stereotyped image (fig. 19). Not surprisingly, the subject proliferated in a period when both sides were desperate for new enlistments. While in the early stages of the war there was sufficient popular enthusiasm to generate a large enough force through volunteers, this fervor dropped off considerably after the first year. Indeed, except for the period immediately following Fort Sumter, the raising of troops was difficult during most of the war. On the Confederate side, the number of boys under 18 years enlisting was probably higher in 1861 and early 1862 than at any other time. As a result, both the North and the South had to institute and promote recruitment programs, and it was in this period that the drummer boy image began to be widely circulated.

As in Europe, the natural garb of patriotism was martial: processions, stirring music, speeches, cheerings, romantic farewells and reunions, and heroic drummer boys had been crystallized into a

platitudinous imagery that fell upon youth from their earliest experiences. Especially in America, where there were few institutional outlets for dashing chivalry, war entered the fantasies of romantic adolescence. A recent survey has shown that about one-third of the space in American history textbooks published prior to the Civil War was concerned with military events—three times as much as appears in most modern textbooks.72

What immediate example did the Americans have to emulate? The Civil War tried in many ways to recapitulate the fervor and symbols of the Crimean War, which preceded it by only five years. To study the popular illustrations of both wars in the contemporary illustrated magazines is to experience an eerie sense of the "déjà-vu." The Civil War, like the Crimean, was stimulated by many romantic fantasy elements—fantasy elements expressed by both the North and the South. Indeed, the American Civil War remains exceptional as a domestic insurrection for the mere fact that both antagonists wore specialized military garb. They "acted out" the gallant attitudes and military pageantry culled from their European readings and observations. The reputation of the French army made a major impact in the United States, where both Confederate and Union soldiers adopted a uniform based on the French pattern and both armies copied the traditional French and British military marches and tunes.73 The senior officers on both sides were affected by the example of Napoleon and his "Grande Armée," which Napoleon III had revived.74 There was a veritable American cult for the Napoleonic myth, and one indication of the universal Francophilia is the number of officers on both sides who sported the Imperial mustache and goatee.

One direct link between the two wars is Union General McClellan's account of the Crimean conflict: he had been appointed special military commissioner to travel to the areas of combat and write an official report on the armies involved.75 Above all, McClellan called attention to the special unit of the French infantry known as the Zouaves whose origin was in North Africa. The Zouaves had fought heroically in the Crimea and to a great extent the reputation of the French military prowess was based on their exploits. McClellan called the Zouaves the most "complete infantry that Europe can produce," and concluded: "Of all the troops that I have ever seen, I should esteem it the greatest honor to assist in defeating the Zouaves."76

Significantly, volunteer units on both sides showed a particular attraction for the Zouave costume.77 Many of the illustrations of the period depicting the Zouaves show them accompanied by drummers and drummer boys—an association that had its basis in the French tradition.78 One contemporary photo of the drummer boys of the 146th New York regiment portrays them in the Zouave costume (fig. 20) while an illustration of the Charleston Zouaves shows a conspicuous drum on the ground at the left of the figures (fig. 21). Thus, it may be concluded that among the symbols appropriated from the French was that of the heroic drummer boy.

William Morris Hunt, an American student of Couture's from Massachusetts, did two thematic versions of the drummer boy which reflect the transformation of the public attitude toward the war.79 The first version of 1862 takes up Couture's gamin and shapes it into an American patriotic symbol (fig. 22). Hunt's boy wears the same white shirt open at the neck and blue trousers rolled up above the knees. The artist's propagandistic intent is clear from the inscription on the marble slab on which the youth stands: "1861. U. S. Volunteers! 1862." Posed high above the viewer's head against the sky, this heroic image has the graphic power of James Montgomery Flagg's Uncle Sam pointing an accusatory finger at guilt-ridden civilians.

Hunt's Wounded Drummer Boy of the mid-1860s (fig. 23), showing a prostrate youth in a desolate brown and gray landscape, points to the artist's disillusionment with the war. The earlier enthusiasm and patriotic ardor has given way to the bitter insight into the tragic waste of lives. Hunt evidently modeled his image after an illustration accompanying the poem "The Drummer-Boy's Burial," published in the July 1864 issue of Harper's Magazine (fig. 24).80

The theme of the drummer boy continued to be exploited in both fiction and the visual arts long after the war's end. Richard Norris Brooke's Furling the Flag of 1872 (fig. 25) casts the drummer boy as the symbol of pathos for the defeated Confederate side, while the somewhat distracted protagonist of Julian Scott's Union Drummer Boy of 1878 (fig. 26) summons his fellows in a bleak, snow-dusted camp. Scott, who had studied with Leutze, moved in the circle of William T. Blodgett, Couture's foremost American benefactor, and this may explain the affinity of this work with the French master's Drummer Boy.

Muscroft's popular drama, The Drummer Boy; or the Battlefield of Shiloh, was first performed in 125

FIGURE 22. William Morris Hunt, American (1824-1879), Drummer Boy, c. 1862; oil on canvas, 91.4 x 66 cm. (36 x 26 in.). Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, gift of Mrs. Samuel Wolcott, 66.1055.
FIGURE 23. William Morris Hunt, Wounded Drummer Boy, c. 1864; oil on canvas, 35.5 x 48.9 cm. (14 x 19½ in.). Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.


1868 and regularly thereafter right through the century. The hero of Trowbridge's novel, The Drummer Boy (1867), is named Frank Manly; too young to be a soldier he defies his family to run off and demonstrate his manliness as a drummer. He dreams of "the old flag" and on his departure suppresses his tears before strangers for fear of revealing his lack of "manhood." Rand's handsome, fair Drummer Boy of the Rappahannock of 1809 (fig. 27) survives his wounds to become a valiant Union officer and returns home to marry his childhood sweetheart. The book ends on this characteristic note:

Into the future they went, still working in the bright sunshine, doing God's Will, taking sides for the right, under his triumphant banner."

In retrospect, the romanticized image of the drummer boy seems cloying and manipulative. Yet its powerful persuasive appeal in the 19th century was demonstrated by the number of victims it deceived. Youth marched off to war in fulfillment of fantasies stimulated by painters and poets who themselves participated in the cultural hegemony. While the artists derived creative inspiration from the image, the drummer boys died for it.

NOTES

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6. Le tambour doit être un brave, car il marche à la tête du régiment, et même au milieu de la mêlée. Il doit, par son héroïsme, et sans arrière de bataille son tambour, entrainer les soldats au travers des rangs ennemis... (Baggers [note 5]: 1696.)


9. For the standard account of Barra, see the article "Barra (Joseph)," in Grand dictionnaire universel (note 4), II: 253.


16. Ibid.: 466.


19. Dans toutes les évolutions de l'attaque et de la charge, le tambour marche toujours en tête, frappant sur sa caisse comme s'il tenait déjà l'ennemi sous ses baguettes. On cherche à rendre une armée impressionante en lui coupant les vivres; moi, je recommande, si jamais nous avons une nouvelle guerre avec les Français, de crever autant que possible leurs tambours. (Italics added.) (P. H., "De la musique militaire," Revue britannique, 6e série, vol. 2 [Mar.-Apr. 1846]: 439 ff.)

20. Ibid.: 441.


I chafed at my narrow life And longed to be in the game, To join in the noble strife For my country’s weal and fame To have on her scrolls my name As one who was in the van And worthy of those who faced her foes From Senlac to Inkermenn. (ibid.: 1.)


31. Traditionally, autumn refers to the passage of youth and the grapes further allude to uncontrollable urges.


37. Sloane (note 10): 153 ff. Much later, the painter Jean-Jacques Henner (1829-1905) executed a version which combined characteristics of both David and David d’Angers. For a reproduction of his work, Bara, which was exhibited in the Salon of 1882, see P.-A. Meunier, *La Vie et l’Art de Jean-Jacques Henner*, Paris, 1927: 84.


43. Ibid.: 97 ff.


52. The commission was officially withdrawn at the end of the following year: see “Foreign Correspondence, Items, etc.,” *The Crayon*, 6 (1859): 51-52. See also E. W. Longellow, *Random Memories*, Boston and New York, 1922: 189-190.


56. I am very grateful to Dr. Gabriel Weisberg for bringing this work to my attention and commenting upon it.

57. Musée de Compiègne, Couture Family Archives, ms. notes in ledger, p. 289: "Quelques lettres (brouillons) et notes de Couture."


59. Ibid.


61. The most recent study of this rather obscure artist and his proverbial painting is W. F. Gordon, The Spirit of '76, An American Portrait, Fallbrook, California, n.d.


64. Devereux (note 63): 26, 32.

65. W. C. White, A History of Military Music in America, New York, 1944: 72. See also J. L. Clem, "From Nursery to Battlefield," The Outlook, 107 (1914): 546 fl.; A. Meyers, Ten Years in the Ranks, U. S. Army, New York, 1914: 1, 6, 10 fl.; D. Russell, "Documents, Letters of a Drummer Boy," Indiana Magazine of History, 34 (1938): 324 fl.; B. I. Wiley, The Life of Johnny Reb, New York, 1943: 332-333. The accounts affirm the romantic view of war; Clem, only nine when he ran off, reminisced: "The spirit of adventure had gripped me. It was necessary that the Union should be preserved, and my help was obviously needed." Meyers' description of the school for musicians under the direction of a corporal suggests that it was modeled on the French.


68. For the confusion surrounding the origin of this song, see Wiley, The Life of Billy Yank (note 67): 297-298.


74. Cunliffe (note 73): 399 ff.


76. Ibid.: 61. For the Zouaves, see J. J. G. Cler, Reminiscences of an Officer of Zouaves, New York, 1860: 2 ff.

77. Jordan (note 66): 49, 50, 60-61. Some indication of the influence of these soldiers and the French military prestige in general may be gleaned from a poem by Fitz-James O'Brien entitled "The Zouaves," inspired on the eve of the Civil War by a Chicago company of Zouaves on tour. It opens with:

To bugle-note and beat of drum
They come, — the gallant Zouaves come!

and ends with this final stanza:

Your Zouave corps, O Haughty France!
We look on as a wild romance
And many a voice was heard to scoff
At Algeri and at Malakoff;
Nor did we Yankees credit quite
Their evolutions in the fight.
But now we're very sure what they
Have done can here be done to-day,
When thus before our sight deploys
The gallant corps from Illinois,—
American Zouaves!
(Fitz-James O'Brien, The Poems and Stories of Fitz-James O'Brien, New York, 1969: 80 ff.)


