

I was known as Jean,
From Normandie.
I was the fourth of many sons,
And no hope, nor desire, to follow in my family's path
And eventually take over a very small portion
Of the farm, the fields and orchards,
That grace the salt-blown cliffs and soft valleys.
So instead, I followed the sergeants
With their bright sashes, epaulettes and drums,
And I followed behind many horses and gun carriages,
Thus I followed the 'Little Corporal' all across Europe.

The battles were many, in many different countries,
With many different names.
I do not remember them all.
The men who write histories
Will remember them better than I:
What the Hell!
We won them all!
He told us where to go, and what to do, and
So we did it.

I killed lots of men, whose faces I never really saw,
And many horses, which did affect me.
And I became a Sergeant in due course.
Then I lost a stripe;
Then I killed a few more 'enemies';
Then I became a sergeant again.
What the Hell!

You lose some things too.
Friends mainly: girls always.
Thank God, I kept my health.
I thank God, that I kept my head.
And I thank God that I never got sent
Over seas, to Egypt, or to Russia.
That would have killed me.

The other bastards conspired
Eventually they sold him out
and got rid of Him.
"Him?" you ask.
We had many names for Him
But they liked us to call Him,
"L'Empereur"
How do you get rid of an Emperor?

Of course, He came back.
And, of course, we followed Him again
And we marched and we fought
and we killed for Him again.

You just do what you know how to do.
I had been following, marching, fighting, fornicating,
Looting, lording it, and liking it
For nigh on twenty years now.
So why should I do anything different?

We had won a battle the day before
 at some crossroads, in Belgium was it?
They ran before us,
Though after a hard fight.
It rained hard that day
 And it takes days to get dry afterwards.
But we knew the big one was coming.

“Ros-bifs” on one side; “Sausage-eaters” on the other.
But we had the Guard, and we had Him
No-one had ever beaten either.
And we knew it wasn’t going to be easy
 - this time.
They had it in for Him.
He had come back, you see.
He hadn’t given up – and they did not like that.
They wanted to crush Him.

My troop was told to occupy a farm.
That went hard. Eventually we got them out.
Then we pushed on, towards a ridge,
We could see their gold glittering.
There was a lot of smoke from the guns.
And that’s when I bought it.

A hard blow in the stomach
Like a horse kicked me there.
I knew that was it
You don’t recover from stomach wounds.

I waved the lads on (“You do, don’t you?”)
Mainly because there was nothing else to do
And I hate pity and fuss.
So I lay there a while.
And it hurt like hell.
But I wasn’t alone.
There were many of us: too many!

Then things got quieter.
It began to get dark,
Then it started to rain again.
Fuck it! I thought.,
I wish they would come and finish me off.
Then that is what they did.

Little noises first: low voices.
I had done this job myself, many times.
You pick up the odd good thing:
A decent pair of boots, a sharper knife:
They don't need it any longer.

Sometimes there is an officer who decides
And also wants his cut. Fuck them all!
It is we who do the dirty work.
We should get the perks.
I wondered which side would come.
Anyway, it was theirs.
I didn't understand what they said.
And ... there was a moment of understanding.
They were professionals.
They looked at me.
Then I nodded.
He used his bayonet.
I didn't feel it.
And then they moved on.

I was standing, looking down
On myself,
Seeing the whole battlefield
Knowing He had lost.
Then things turned misty-grey
Like one of our Normandie fogs.

I remember thinking then
That I had never actually seen Him
Not once in twenty years.
Funny that!

I learnt later that
They called the place Waterloo
And that He had lost there finally.
He never fought again
They made sure of that.
They even wrote poems about that.
Funny that!