

Alvar Blomgren, *The Hurricane of Passion. Popular Politics and Emotion in Late Georgian England 1792-1812* (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, 2022). 255 s.

Peter K. Andersson, Örebro universitet

Alvar Blomgren's doctoral thesis focuses on the political events in a number of English cities during the Georgian period, arguing that emotions were being increasingly politicised and recruited in political campaigns in the wake of the French Revolution. Treading into territory that has been studied from numerous angles over the last two centuries, his venture is a daring one, and it is certainly difficult to apply new perspectives and make new observations to the political turmoil of post-revolutionary Europe. However, Blomgren manages to fulfill his task and shed new light, both on a general and specific level.

The context of the study is the politically sensitive situation in England following the French Revolution, and the conflict between insurrectionary forces calling for reforms also in England, and politicians who sought to preserve the existing political order. Often referred to as "Pitt's Terror", after Prime Minister William Pitt, who has been designated to represent the severe ways in which rebellions were crushed, the period predates what is seen as the "Age of Reform" in the 18XXs and XXs. Pitt issued a series of repressive laws, banning trade unions and all other forms of political organisation among the laboring classes. A number of clashes between opposing political camps ensued, putting further strain on a country caught up in a drawn-out war with Napoleonic France.

A period of British history that has long been dominated by the generations of historians working in, or in dialogue with, a Marxist interpretation, Blomgren joins the group of scholars who, in recent decades, have sought to apply a different viewpoint in order to reach new conclusions. With historical events such as riots and uprisings, this is particularly pertinent, but also particularly challenging. Blomgren stresses how many of the most prominent historians dealing

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with this period, including George Rudé and Charles Tilly, sought to lessen the emotional aspect of the crowds' actions to emphasise their political rationality. Taking earlier generations of historians to task for ignoring emotions is certainly apposite, although in his effort to accentuate the originality of his own contribution, he perhaps overstates the case somewhat. As he acknowledges, many later historians have made wide-ranging studies of changes in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century concerning conceptions of emotions and sensibility, including Colin Jones, Philip Carter and Ute Frevert, but focusing on the political world, he does not engage with this type of research as much as previous work on the era's politics. The effort to imbue political history with an emotional perspective is an important step towards combining different strands of scholarship, but one gets the feeling that the political is the overarching theme, while emotions is just a way of getting at it. Thus, Blomgren spends much time discussing the concept of emotions, whereas "politics" is considered to be a fairly unproblematic concept.

This is, however, a common problem in works that seek to infuse a new perspective into an old subject, and perhaps one that can never be entirely avoided. As Blomgren gets going with his close study of a number of political uprisings, his skills as a historian are admirably displayed. The first two chapters deal with events in Nottingham and examines how both government supporters and reformers employed emotions in order to make the community side with them. Several interesting events are discussed, including the burning of effigies of the prominent republican Thomas Paine, a hero in Revolutionary France but identified as an enemy by anti-revolutionary currents in England, and the practice of "pumping" and "ducking", where crowds seized representatives of their enemy and lowered them into a body of water. In the detailed accounts and analyses of such phenomena, Blomgren manages to tease out many revealing and relatively unexplored aspects of the emotional and behavioural life of the turn of the nineteenth century. Especially fascinating is his examination of various ways in which rioters tried to humiliate their opponents by cutting off pieces of their clothes. Rituals known as "cropping" and "docking" consisted of cutting the tails off tailcoats, using terminology originally referring to the cutting of dogs' ears and tails. The related custom of "spencering" was another means of shortening a coat, but this term derived, interestingly, from the word for a woman's item of dress, the spencer, thus effectively symbolising an emasculation, or even castration.

Moving on from Nottingham, in his last two chapters, Blomgren deals with events in London and Liverpool – the mass protests against abuses of prisoners in the Cold Bath Fields house of correction, and clashes between anti-slavery activists and workers dependent on the slave trade, respectively. By combining these varying but fundamentally related events, he manages to include many of the main

themes underlying political struggles at the time. In the process, several interesting and understudied primary sources are employed, such as letters to the Home Office from government spies infiltrating groups of radical workers, and minutes from so called controverted election cases, challenged elections where witnesses from various walks of life were called to testify, thus providing a rare case of plebeian voices taken down verbatim.

So, what does Blomgren bring, in the end, to the study of these pivotal political events? In his meticulous work with a wide variety of source material, he supplies new aspects and shades to the picture of the age, perhaps especially concerning a diversity of groups, voices and customs that has hitherto only been partly glimpsed. But his main contribution is doubtlessly his application of theoretical tools from the school of the history of emotions onto these occurrences. Trying to find a new perspective is often a difficult task, and any study that foregrounds a particular concept will inevitably be criticised for the limitations of that concept. This means that when one is reading a monograph which tries to persuade its readers that almost everything the historical actors do or say betray certain emotions, one often asks oneself: Is this really “emotions”? Is “emotions” the best term to convey what they were doing? In correlation with this, there is a danger of allowing the concept to encompass too much, so that one begins to wonder if all political actions are emotional, and whether emotions, then, is the best word for narrowing down the focus.

But Blomgren manages to steer clear of such pitfalls for the most part, and provides a solid and convincing new picture of the age. His use of the theoretical framework is innovative enough so that he even concocts a theory of his own, by combining the notion of everyday tactics as devised by Michel de Certeau, and the theory of emotional regimes formulated by William Reddy. Consequently, Blomgren’s monograph is the first work investigating the subject of “emotional tactics” within the field of history. Not bad for a dissertation.