

Oskar Cox Jensen, *Napoleon and British Song, 1797–1822*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. 261. £63. ISBN 9781137555373.

In *Napoleon and British Song, 1797–1822*, Oskar Cox Jensen considers the portrayal of Napoleon in British popular song both during and in the years following the Napoleonic Wars, with the aim of ascertaining what these portrayals can reveal about British popular sentiment towards Napoleon. This body of material has tended to fall through the cracks of scholarship, with songs being overlooked as cultural objects due to their status as mere ephemera, given only surface-level readings by historians who have frequently taken loyalist songs stemming from the London press as representative of the era as a whole. Cox Jensen brings to light a vast array of popular songs from across the British Isles, many of which are recorded and made available via a link to SoundCloud that accompanies the book, and he provides a fresh reading of them by considering their aesthetic as well as political dimensions. In doing so, he reveals that popular songs encompass a much broader range of perspectives than has frequently been assumed.

Chapter 1 provides an in-depth account of popular song culture in Napoleonic Britain, considering both their production and consumption through an examination of writers, printers, singers and listeners. The main portion of the study, Chapters 2–4, provides a chronological account of British songs about Napoleon from 1797, when he first enters British song, to the aftermath of Waterloo. Cox Jensen demonstrates that portrayals of Napoleon differ over time and across geographical areas, often reflecting local concerns. For instance, Napoleon is initially admired as a respected general and a rival to the hero Nelson in songs celebrating the latter's naval victories; depicted as a tyrant after rising to First Consul and then Emperor; mocked as a figure of ridicule towards the end of the Wars; and portrayed sympathetically as a tragic figure in post-Waterloo songs. Songs produced in London are almost exclusively loyalist, whereas numerous songs from Northern cities also express radical sympathies. This survey is impressive in its scope and level of detail, and is abundant with examples taken from songs from across the British Isles; 382 relevant songs are tabulated in a useful appendix.

Regional differences are further explored in Chapter 5, which provides a detailed case study of songs stemming from Newcastle. Cox Jensen shows that many of the 'non-loyal' songs being produced there largely stem from reactions to loyalist propaganda and the press gang, therefore reflecting anti-authoritarian rather than necessarily pro-Napoleon sentiments. The case study of Newcastle illustrates one of the book's main conclusions: that the loyalist propaganda songs churned out by the London broadside press largely failed to achieve any significant impact on the wider popular imagination.

A major strength of the study is Cox Jensen's critical approach to the songs themselves, in which aspects such as meter and text-setting are considered as well as the overriding message of the song's lyrics. This allows him to make observations that are not possible when the songs are treated merely as texts, particularly regarding reception and impact. In order to be well received a song had to be singable and memorable, besides conveying a message that was likely to resonate with its listenership. Cox Jensen's approach allows him to demonstrate where clunky text-setting rendered a song ineffective, as in the case of 'Boney's Degradation', set by an anonymous lyricist to the tune 'Maggie Lauder' and published in 1813. The lyricist '[struggles] endlessly with meter and stress', and the dense narrative of the lyrics is furthermore a poor match for the lively dance-like tune (83). The accompanying recording is particularly useful here, as it allows the reader to hear this uncomfortable mismatch rather than leaving them to imagine it. These critiques add weight to the conclusion that much of the loyalist ephemera stemming from the London broadside press largely failed to infiltrate wider popular song culture. Writers 'seeking to manipulate popular

song from above found the form resistant' if the conventions of good song writing were disregarded for the sake of espousing a particular political viewpoint (164).

Napoleon and British Song, 1797–1822 is an excellent study that brings fresh insights to our understanding of both the political and cultural histories of this period. It demonstrates that a nuanced reading of the era's popular song is highly rewarding, and its critical approach should serve as a model for scholars working with any ephemera of any kind.

Erica Buurman
Canterbury Christ Church University