Popular politics in England, circa 1800

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Alvar Blomgren, *The Hurricane of Passion: Popular Politics and Emotion in Late Georgian England 1792–1812* (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press 2022). 255 pp.

The French and Napoleonic Wars involved global political upheaval, revolution, new ideologies and contested forms of representation across Europe and the Americas. This was the period of the rise of popular political movements demanding democracy. In response to this tumult, loyalist social elites sought to protect the existing structures of representation, monarchy, and the established church.

Alvar Blomgren's thesis, *The Hurricane of Passion*, offers refreshing cross-disciplinary insights into popular politics in England during the 1790s and 1800s. He gives a distinctive take on this period, by applying the framework of "emotional politics" to the agitation of the time. The thesis argues that the manipulation of emotions was a well-established and integral part of popular politics. This is a compelling argument, and Blomgren carries it through with pace and interest throughout the thesis. The thesis is very well written, with a good balance of narrative and analysis. It is structured around three geographical case studies: Nottingham, London, and Liverpool. In studying the varied political composition of the three towns' social and political elites, and the differing responses by the rising democratic movements to these different authorities, Blomgren demonstrates the significance of taking a local and regional approach to understanding the national politics of this era.

The thesis uses a variety of primary sources, meticulously analysing newspaper reports of protests, elections and rallies, and the Home Office reports on radicalism. It highlights some rare visual sources, not least the image of a Nottingham loyalist "ducking" in 1794, a detailed depiction of "Church and King" violence in print. Blomgren could have examined further types of sources expressing and shaping emotion. For example, love tokens, of which there are also political variants, expressing anger or ridicule were also expres-

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sions of emotion.[1] There also could be interesting comparisons with analysis of emotions in caricatures and popular prints. Caricatures of Sir Francis Burdett illustrate a later chapter for example, but it is worth considering a broader range of cartoons that were an integral part of cultural discourse in this period. Caricatures no doubt were vehicles for many political emotions, not least for satire and disgust.

Blomgren's thesis fits within a well-established historiography of the early reform movement and loyalist response in Britain during the French and Napoleonic Wars. In this, it nuances the narrative of the development of loyalism, arguing that local elites fostered loyalism through association with popular anger as well as love of country. The thesis therefore offers a further challenge to the dominance of Linda Colley's classic 1992 study, *Britons*: *Forging the Nation*, in the story of the development of patriotism and national identity in Britain. It draws on more recent work by Matthew McCormack on masculinities in loyalism and patriotism in this period, and Matthew Roberts's work on "democratic passions" and emotions in the reform movement.[2] Indeed, Blomgren owes a debt to Roberts's work, and further adds to the growing "emotional turn" in current historical studies.

Chapter one outlines the theoretical framework of emotional regimes and tactics. It presents an innovative model that challenges the dominant understanding of emotions as impulses acting in opposition to reason and willpower. Drawing from sociological studies of emotions, notably by Helena Flam, this chapter offers a truly cross-disciplinary model. It argues for the dissolution of the opposition assumed in historical explanation between deliberate goal-oriented action and emotion. The concept of "emotional tactics" is suggested as a way of studying emotion not as static structures but as a "dynamic tool of the political trade". It sketches out dominant theories of 18th century emotions, with the culture of sensibility connected to new understandings of anatomy and psychology. Again drawing from sociology, it argues that emotions are actively created and performed through social practices. So this explains why, at the same time as sympathy being cultivated as a political ideal, the position of the ruling oligarchy rested on a system of terror.

Chapters two and three focus on Nottingham in the East Midlands. Chapter two charts anti-Jacobin mobilisation in Nottingham. It focuses on the use of feelings of anger and hate in manipulating loyalty. Tories de-

1. Sarah Lloyd & Timothy Miller (eds.), *Tokens of Love*, *Loss and Disrespect*, *1700–1850* (London 2022).

2. Matthew McCormack, *Public Men: Masculinity and Politics in Modern Britain* (Basingstoke 2007); Matthew Roberts, *Democratic Passions: The Politics of Feeling in British Popular Radicalism*, *1809–48* (Manchester 2022).

liberately fostered anger towards reformers. The next chapter then places the food riots of 1800–1803 in the context of expressions of violence. The moral economy model was most famously employed by E. P. Thompson as a counter-point to the contemporaries' and historians' interpretations of the crowd as an irrational mob.[3] By emphasising anger as an emotional tactic, this account squares the tensions between rationality and emotion in popular action. It would be useful to have some reflections on John Bohstedt's reinterpretation of the food riots of this wartime era as "the politics of provisions" here.[4] The chapter then explains the under-studied tactic of "spencering", an inventive use of long-standing traditions adapted for a new purpose. Spencering was the tactic of cutting the coat tails of elite men were an open attack on their wealth and social status as well as their manliness, combining ideas of community justice with gendering actions and clothing used as political symbolism. This is an interesting parallel or even subversion of the ritualistic types of radical protest identified by James Epstein, such as the wearing of the Cap of Liberty.[5]

Chapter four examines emotional contagion in London, particularly in relation to Cold Bath Fields prison. It argues that sympathy for the radical prisoners was an emotional tactic part of a conscious and clearly articulated political strategy to build a national movement for reform, with the "gentleman leader" of Sir Francis Burdett. It argues for the emotion of shame as a channel of protest from below, as employed in the 1802 Middlesex election by the London crowds. I'd recommend comparison with the essays in *Political Trials in an Age of Revolution*, especially Michael T. Davis on the noise and emotions of the 1790s trials of the London radicals here.[6] Chapter five analyses politics in Liverpool, focusing on anti-slavery and elections in the rapidly expanding port with a large working-class franchise. It points out the moderate reformism and classism of the middle-class intellectual circle around poet and writer William Roscoe "serves to illustrate the limits of sensibility as a tool for political mobilisation", not least in his contempt for plebeian feelings.

The thesis presents a history of politics that is not solely a narrative of the emergence of popular politics or just about loyalist repression of democratic actions. Rather it valuably focuses on the interaction of both loyalist and

3. E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century", *Past & Present*, 50 (1971), pp. 76–136.

4. John Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provisions: Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, c. 1550–1850* (London 2016).

5. James Epstein, *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790–1850* (New York 1994).

6. Michael T. Davis, Emma Macleod & Gordon Pentland (eds.), *Political Trials in an Age of Revolution Britain and the North Atlantic, 1793–1848* (London 2018).

radical political actors. Ultimately, it argues, the Tories linked anger to loyalty. Its strength lies in the comparison between the different contexts and personalities of each case study town. London radicals engaged humanity and sympathy for victims of government oppression, and this use of emotions increased their popularity, whereas this tactic did not work as well in Liverpool, where abolition of the slave trade was a much more contested issue among workers. In Nottingham, by contrast, Nonconformist tradesmen and manufacturers that made up the ruling elite relied on support from Anglican retailers and employers.

Blomgren's thesis gives three clear and important directions for historians of this period. First, that historians should be cognisant of the use of emotional tactics by political leaders. Second, historians should consider the emotional demands and character of the local community. Finally, despite the "nationalising" thesis of Colley and other histories of Britain, we should analyse how local conditions continued to shape politics and identities. Political communities varied geographically and responded to the manipulation of emotions by political leaders in different ways.

The Hurricane of Passion is a vital contribution to approaches to the popular politics and the reform movement of this revolutionary period. It was a revolution in emotions as well as ideas.