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Ffion Mair Jones, *Welsh Ballads of the French Revolution 1793–1815*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. 2012. xxii + 486 pp. Preface, introduction, figures, appendix, musical scores, bibliography, and index. £24.99 U.K. (pb). ISBN 978-0-7083-2461-5; (eb). 978-0-7083-2462-2.

Review by Donald Braid, Butler University.

Welsh Ballads of the French Revolution 1793–1815 presents a sampling of printed ballad texts “composed between 1703 and the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815” (p. xv). As the preface notes, this work is part of a larger project to “bring to public view texts from the period produced in Wales, in both Welsh and English, and in a range of different genres” (p. xv). This book is also part of the series *Wales and the French Revolution* and in their preface, the general editors, Mary-Ann Constantine and Dafydd Johnston, note that work on literature and the “impact of the Revolution and its aftermath on British culture” has “shifted from a handful of major poets to the non-canonical edges” (p. vi). The ballads presented here offer insight into one of these non-canonical edges.

The book has three main sections: an introduction, the ballad texts themselves in both Welsh and English, and a section called “notes to the texts” (p. xii). At the outset, I should note that I am not an historian but rather a folklorist and scholar of oral ballad traditions in Britain. I therefore found the introduction somewhat difficult to follow, as it is the kind of academic writing that situates the specific (the individual Welsh ballad texts that are the focus of the book) within the broader contexts of British ballad production, the historical moment, and themes related to identity and the impact of the French Revolution more generally. Without expertise in many of the specific references indexed by the discussion, and, at times, hampered by over subtle shifts in subject, I found the reading slow-going. Having said this, my effort at reading was rewarded by the insights that emerge from the author’s analysis of the ballads and the windows they afford into the concerns and ethos of the period.

I was particularly intrigued by the complexity of the response to the threat of the political, social, and ideological changes in France in relation to the political, social, and ideological stances of the ballad composers. Not surprisingly this response is deeply intertwined with both religious worldviews and the subtleties of political position. As Jones notes in the conclusion to her introduction, “[i]n spite of a relative lack of dialogue between what may crudely be described as the ‘two sides’ of the political divide,” the Welsh ballad corpus nonetheless “offers a valuable opportunity to gauge the nature of popular loyalism in one of the constituent parts of Great Britain, showing it to be an extremely nuanced phenomenon” (p. 57).

The thirty-eight ballads selected for this volume are presented both in the original Welsh (at times with English refrains), on the left page, and in translation to English on the right page. Header notes and footnotes, when present on the original printings, are included. These translations also include line numbering, information regarding the original publication of the text, and cataloging numbers based on the pioneering work and indexing of collector J. H. Davies.

The “Notes to the Texts” section is invaluable. Here there are extensive notes organized by ballad that provide rich contextual information about events depicted in the ballad, the author, publication details,

historical references or allusions tied to specific lines in the ballad, and other details that provide needed orientation toward deeper understanding. I found that reading each ballad in relation to this context to be very helpful in understanding the broader issues referenced by the ballad.

As a folklorist, I was delighted to find an appendix that presented musical transcriptions and addressed what could be said about the ballad tunes. I was, however, disappointed in the overly brief discussions about the production, circulation, and reception of these ballads--especially in terms of how this genre must be understood as a contested representation of the beliefs of specific segments of the population.

In the end, *Welsh Ballads of the French Revolution 1793-1815* is a valuable and well-documented resource for anyone interested in exploring new sources available for understanding the impact of the French Revolution.

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