David Andress. *Beating Napoleon: How Britain Faced Down Her Greatest Challenge*. London: Abacus, 2012. Pp. 428. Paper $15.99.

David Andress, Professor of Modern European History at the University of Portsmouth, spent much of his career investigating the social and cultural upheaval of the French Revolution. In *Beating Napoleon* he turns to Britain during those same tumultuous years from 1789 to 1815. Andress dissects the social, military, political, economic, and cultural events of the time, then illustrates how they informed each other and transformed Britain from a fragile empire, still reeling from losing the American War of Independence, into the most powerful empire of the nineteenth century.

The book is structured chronologically, with each section covering a year and beginning with a recap of the political and military events. With this background for context, supplemental chapters address the social, economic, and even artistic events during the war. Andress weaves together an understanding of how war, politics, social change, and art informed each other. While Andress references the epic military engagements, he is more interested in the social and cultural implications of the war, and how the ruling elites used them to preserve their own position and status. After the French Revolution, British political reformers argued for changes that would improve conditions for the poor. Underprivileged Britons engaged in uprisings to protest growing social injustice they faced and workers damaged machinery and factories to protest changes that were robbing them of their livelihoods. The elites responded opportunistically and used these uprisings in ways that served their own agendas. They used national security as justification for suspending *habeas corpus*, jailed political opponents for treason and ruthlessly suppressed rebellions in Ireland and other parts of Britain. They even sought to outlaw traditional associations and guilds of workers, painting them as seditious organizations. They protected their positions of power and reacted ruthlessly to any physical or rhetorical attack against them, just as Britain fought the war with increasing ruthlessness. Britain threw off these shackles of respectability and engaged in actions that might be considered the war crimes of its day – such as deliberately bombarding the civilian population of Copenhagen. Britain's goal was to make itself so feared, that no nation would ever threaten it again as France had done.

Andress succeeds in producing a work that will enhance readers' understanding not only of the period covered in its pages, but also the effects that echoed through Britain's political, economic, and social fabrics for the century that followed. Andress does not cite primary sources, but his purpose is not to unveil new information. Instead it is to analyze the events of this time period and synthesize the narratives of social, political, military and artistic events of the period from 1789 to 1815. Andress draws on the expertise of historians that will be familiar to scholars of this era. He builds upon their scholarship and argues that this period was the incubator for the model of British imperialism that controlled half the world through the nineteenth century. Before the French Revolution, Britain was shaken by its defeat in the American War of Independence. During the early years of the French Revolutionary period, Britain was in danger of similar internal cataclysms even as it braced itself for war with France and her allies. Andress discovers in these turbulent years the fires that forged the men who would lead the empire into its period of greatest strength. The nobility had been well represented on the battlefield, with a higher percentage shedding blood than of the common man (although certainly not in equal numbers).

This sense of sacrifice consolidated the elite's belief that they had a right to rule. The Duke of Wellington, the triumphant British General at the Battle of Waterloo, would become Prime Minister. His war generals filled his cabinet and the balance of the officer corps produced the civil servants, elected officials and appointed governors that would manage the empire. They took up a shared oath to protect British interests by making the world dread the power of the British Empire. At home, the elites were the investor class that benefited from a national debt that had ballooned during the war to almost a billion pounds. In preserving their economic and political privilege, the elites had also laid the first foundations of inequality and disparity in wealth that would give rise to the class upheaval of the twentieth century. This book succeeds because it laces these distinct historical threads into a comprehensive narrative that offers fresh insights not only about the years covered, but shows how this period influenced the evolution of Britain's imperial strategy and domestic politics for the subsequent hundred years.

Christopher Empett