

REVIEWS

319

Jutland 1916: Death in the Grey Wastes. Nigel Steel and Peter Hart. Cassell. £25.00. 480 pages. ISBN 0-304-35892-4. Both authors of this exhaustive and definitive study of the Great War's single naval engagement work in the Imperial War Museum. They use their expertise, and the information stored in the Museum, to great advantage to describe the twenty-four hour battle that began on 31 May 1916. Ironically it was naval rivalry that helped to set the stage for war and ironically, it was believed that the war would be won or lost at sea. In the event this battle was the only one in which the Royal Navy met the German Fleet in battle. Ever since the battle ended historians have debated the outcome: who, if anyone, actually won the battle? The aim of this book is to eschew 'sterile controversy' and to 'return Jutland to the mainstream of public understanding of the First World War' by concentrating not just on the battle but on the lives of those thousands of sailors caught up in it. Here the holdings (both on paper and on tape) of the Museum come into their own. The writers succeed in painting a vast canvas and in bringing to life the horrors, heroism and suffering of those involved. As to who won, the writers point out that whilst more British ships were sunk and more British sailors were killed, the German fleet fled back to the safety of Germany's ports whilst the Royal Navy stayed at sea. This was undermined by the Admiralty's defeatist tone: had the Sea Lords had one of Mr Blair's spin-doctors, Jutland would have been called a victory whereas it really was a 'qualified British success'.

Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy 1846–55. David Brown. Manchester University Press. £42.50. 239 pages. ISBN 0-7190-6392-2. Palmerston, the Canningite Tory who passed as a Whig and posed as the people's champion, remains a giant amongst Victorian statesmen and this book examines a period in his career that has hitherto received less than full academic investigation, the ten years before he was appointed Prime Minister. Dr Brown's aim is to 'elucidate the key features of that

period . . . to establish quite how Palmerston managed to carve out a specific role in politics, and against the odds, rise to the highest office in government at the age of seventy'. Because the book emphasises how important Palmerston's adroit handling of public opinion was to his success it is really a study of 'the political nation and the use and manipulation of public opinion' particularly as concerns foreign policy. It is also a study of mid-Victorian politics and the working of the Constitution. Palmerston added public opinion to the three traditional formers of foreign Policy: the Crown, the Cabinet and Parliament. To a large degree he created 'public opinion' and then used it as a battering ram to get to high office. This is a brilliant study and delineation of mid-Victorian politics and the role of Victoria's troublesome Prime Minister. (R.F.G.)

The Empress Theodora: Partner of Justinian. James Allan Evans. University of Texas Press, Austin. £22.99 (US\$29.95). 146 pages. ISBN 0-292-72105-6. This book, by the Professor Emeritus of Classics in the University of British Columbia, grew out of his 1996 study, *The Age of Justinian: The Circumstances of Imperial Power*. This new study is part of a general revival of interest in the history of the Eastern Empire and in the role of the empress. Theodora's own life – she died in 548 – is a remarkable one: like Eva Peron she rose from her past as a prostitute, although her 'day job' was as a mime artist, to become consort of the ruler. After a careful analysis of the sources available to scholars, Prof. Evans argues that Theodora played a decisive role in the government of the Empire, especially in the theological issues between the orthodox, Chalcedonian, view and the 'heretical', monophysite, view over the nature of Christ. Unlike Justinian, Theodora did not revere the Papacy in distant Rome and defended the Monophysites. These two facts have guaranteed that western church historians have universally hated her. In the end, however, Justinian ruled, not Theodora. As Prof. Evans argues, 'she remains a fascinating figure' and this well

written biography brings this fascination to a new generation of scholars less burdened with the prejudices of the past. It also gives readers a unique insight into the Court and government of the Empire in the sixth century. (T.H.R.)

Rossini. Gaia Servadio. Constable. £20.00. 244 pages. ISBN 1-84119-478-6. Gioachino Rossini remains one of the most popular opera composers of nineteenth century Italy and one of the greatest names in the Romantic period. His operas still delight audiences round the world. Rossini was also one of the most elusive and mysterious of composers after he disappeared from the public stage at the height of his fame. The author of this book is a well established authority on Italian history and society as well as on the rich and varied world of Italian opera. After extensive research she sheds new light on Rossini's unhappy childhood and his various emotional and physical problems, explains how Rossini's disappearance was due to a combination of psychological problems and humiliating illnesses (gonorrhoea and urethritis). When he died he had 'become a caricature not only as a man but also as a musician' and his music was largely forgotten. Rossini had not kept pace with the developments in Romanticism, towards 'nationalism and individualism', nor in the revolutions that were sweeping Europe. Rossini held to the older view that 'only beauty had the right to be used as the language of art'. Perhaps this is a view that needs to be rediscovered in a world in which the ugly and absurd are raised to the status of art. In this revealing biography Gaia Servadio gives us the best biography of Rossini yet written, one that will not be bettered for many years. (M.D.G.)

The Tower Menagerie being the Amazing True Story of the Royal Collection of Wild and Ferocious Beasts. Daniel Hahn. Simon & Schuster. £15.99. 260 pages. ISBN 0-7432-2081-1. This is a history of the zoo that was kept for many centuries within the walls of the Tower of London. The Royal Menagerie dated from the reign

of Henry III in 1235, when he was given three leopards by his brother-in-law, the Emperor Frederick. From that date until 1835, when the Menagerie was removed to the new Zoo in Regent's Park, it was the place in which Londoners came face to face with the wild. Mr Hahn uses his history of the development of the Menagerie as a 'prism' through which to trace the history of the Tower itself, the 'birth of modern surgery', the influence of the animals upon art, the 'rise of journalism', and, finally, our changing perceptions of wild animals, the 'wild' and animals themselves. Whilst the author has adopted a certain light-hearted approach to his story and whilst the book lacks the usual academic paraphernalia, readers should not be misled into thinking he has not engaged in a great deal of study. Mr Hahn's book gives us the history of a forgotten but fascinating aspect of English history. (R.F.T.)

Reading Chekhov: A Critical Journey. Janet Malcolm. Granta Books. £13.99. 210 pages. ISBN 1-86207-586-7. This small book, originally published in the U.S. in 2001 by Random House, is a mixture of three separate approaches. The first is biographical although it is not a biography; the second is literary criticism although it is not a volume of criticism; the third is a travel book although it is not just a description of modern Russian life as seen by an American visitor. The three approaches – biography, literary criticism and travel book – are held together by the unifying theme which is the life and works of Anton Chekhov. It is a book for aficionados of Chekhov's plays and fiction and is based on the author's tour of Chekhov's Russian homes. Her visits gave her an opportunity for biographical reflection just as her travels give her readers an insight not just into Russian attitudes to Chekhov but into life in Russia today. By her constant references to Chekhov's stories and plays and by her frequent citations from these, lovers of his works will gain an extra appreciation of them. This is a delightful book which will give pleasure as well as gentle instruction. (P.P.F.)