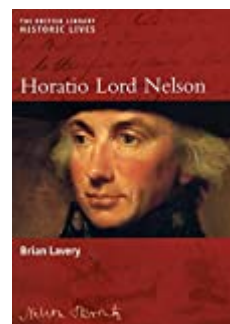




Brian Lavery. *Horatio Lord Nelson*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. 144 pp. \$21.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8147-5190-9.



Reviewed by Dr Tom Lewis (Australian Defence Force Academy)

Published on H-War (January, 2005)

New Nelson Book a Worthy Addition

For any student of the world of Nelson's navy there should be two essential books on the shelf: *The Wooden World* (1986) by N. A. M. Rodger and *Nelson's Navy* (1989) by Brian Lavery. Both are tremendously authoritative works built on impressive research. They give the technical background to the world of sea battle brought (with equal skill) to life in the fictional works of Patrick O'Brian and C. S. Forester. Given next year's two-hundredth anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar, it is indeed welcome to see Lavery's name on the cover of *Horatio Lord Nelson*.

Of course, there have been biographies of Nelson written before—Lavery has penned two minor variations—and it is instructive to compare his book to the works of Robert Southey and Geoffrey Callender, both written nearly one hundred years ago. Lavery writes in a much more direct style than his antecedents, well-suited, perhaps, to the majority of readers; although those who love Patrick O'Brian's prose, so reminiscent of Jane Austen, might find it too straightforward. Lavery's straightforwardness goes further than his prose. He plunges in where many might fear to tread, contrasting how modern views might differ on some of Nelson's ac-

tions. For example, he acknowledges that the general public today might not approve of Nelson's abandonment of his wife for Lady Hamilton in the manner that many, at least of the mob, did two hundred years ago.

So this is a modern work written with the modern reader in mind, and it is deserving of attention, as is Nelson's legacy. Lavery outlines this legacy neatly in the conclusion, as a fitting end to the series of precise vignettes that take us from the early days of peacetime, which educated the young officer, to the days of combat in the War of the American Revolution. Then it is on to the conflicts with Spain and France, which would dominate and eventually end Nelson's life. The essential battles of St. Vincent, the Nile, and Copenhagen are well documented. Documented too are the essentials of seaboard life and Nelson's personal battles, including the shocking injuries (he lost an arm and an eye) which these days would see him pensioned off. The illustrations, a mixture of paintings, graphics, and sketches (coming almost one on every two pages), are comprehensive and add well to the text.

Overall, there is nothing new here, but that is not the

aim of such a work as this. Rather, for one who has an interest in the great man and his achievements, but who does not possess David Howarth's *Trafalgar: The Nelson Touch* (1997), the biographies of Southey or Callender, or the time and/or desire for works of this depth, Lav-

ery's book would serve well as a superior encapsulation of Nelson's special blend of strategist, tactician, and manager. This is indeed the right book for the right time and is highly recommended.

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Citation: Dr Tom Lewis. Review of Lavery, Brian, *Horatio Lord Nelson*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. January, 2005.

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