

focus of research is on those points at which it broke down most dramatically. One would like to know a little more about how relatively “easy” it appears to have been for officials to restore order soon afterwards, perhaps especially in light of the often more violent and sustained outbreaks of prison rebellion that have appeared since the First World War, particularly in the United States.

Perhaps this would be asking too much. Or, at least, it might be demanding a book that would perhaps be less compelling and readily assimilable than this one. All students of late-Victorian English imprisonment will find much in this book that is instructive and that provokes serious reflection on the full complexities of the subject of English penological history.

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CALDER, Robert — *Beware the British Serpent: The Role of Writers in British Propaganda in the United States, 1939–1945*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004. Pp. xx, 311.

Robert Calder, a professor of English at the University of Saskatchewan, has provided a cogent analysis that highlights the importance of literary figures in the British propaganda campaign in America during the Second World War. Drawing his title from the February 1940 isolationist manifesto of the popular Irish-American (and anti-Semitic) broadcaster Father Charles Coughlin (p. 33), Calder demonstrates how British writers were used to undermine isolationism and anglophobia in the United States, keep the American war effort focused on Europe after Pearl Harbor, assist in constructing the postwar “special relationship”, and defend British imperial interests. Revelations in the interwar years concerning the influence of British propaganda on American involvement in the Great War meant that American cooperation, let alone belligerency, in any new conflict was far from guaranteed. British concern that the use of propaganda in the United States might create support for isolationism and damage the political prospects of President Roosevelt induced the Foreign Office initially to impose a strict “no propaganda” policy in America. Yet Calder effectively establishes how the official minds of the Ministry of Information and the Foreign Office found other, less official means of conveying British viewpoints on the conflict with Nazi Germany to Americans. These included the use of “appropriate personalities” from the British literary elite, often on “private visits” to America (p. 58).

Using wider studies such as Nicholas Cull’s *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign Against American “Neutrality” in World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) to set his stage, Calder draws upon archival research, memoirs, and literary analysis to shed light on the role of such figures in the British propaganda campaign. His vivid and engaging case studies of W. Somerset Maugham (on whom Calder previously published a biography), Noel Coward, and H. G. Wells provide detailed analyses of each author’s motives, actions, and work. Combining these with broader thematic sections on fiction, non-fiction, radio, and film propaganda, the

study succeeds in demonstrating the extent of official attempts to break down popular distrust of Britain and Britons in America using literature as a tool. Calder illustrates how, in lecture tours, published works, and radio broadcasts, most authors strove to explain that there were more similarities than differences between Britons and Americans, in the form of shared cultural values. In an effort to undermine the common American view of 1939 British society as class-ridden and empire-centric, authors emphasized the democratizing effect of the war due to the dismantling of social barriers between classes and ethnicities, the supposedly liberal nature of British imperial rule, and the progress of colonies towards self-government.

Calder also reveals that, as with other aspects of the British propaganda campaign, the literary effort was often poorly organized by the feuding Ministry of Information and Foreign Office. British authors themselves, through the Society of Authors, Playwrights and Composers, were first to volunteer their services. When these efforts failed, other means were found. In addition to writers who were employed by government ministries, many operated independently, often with “semi-official” backing (pp. 45–55). Some writers and lecturers, of various political stripes, ended up doing more harm than good on unpaid visits to the United States by expressing personal views. This was tolerated for the most part as the British government tried to balance freedom of expression against the goals of cultural propaganda. Deemed particularly harmful to the cause were elderly writers and academics, such as H. G. Wells, with his attacks on imperialism and on the appointment of Lord Halifax as ambassador to Washington (p. 107). One elderly economist left such a trying impression in America that British High Commission authorities admitted to a reporter after his tour that they wished “someone would drop Sir George Paish over Germany as a pamphlet” (pp. 56–57). Due to her pacifism, Vera Brittain was eventually forbidden an exit permit by the Foreign Office even to travel to the United States after her first wartime visit — despite having been first approached by the Ministry of Information because of how those very views would highlight British liberty to Americans (pp. 66–72).

Lack of coordination also led to squabbles over compensation. Noel Coward, upon arrival for an unpaid visit in the United States, believed that he was entitled to draw upon his local American royalties to support himself. It was in fact illegal to do so without permission because of British currency legislation, and charges were brought against Coward. This resulted in the embarrassment of the Ministry of Information having to admit publicly in a London court that Coward had been in their employ, albeit unsalaried (pp. 99–100).

Calder artfully evokes how personalities were key to the success or failure of various individual efforts. Oxbridge accents were generally frowned upon by most Americans as elitist, while J. B. Priestly’s earthy Yorkshire tones were widely accepted by American listeners of the BBC (p. 212). Noel Coward left an impression in the United States of being “on the one hand ... the frivolous and decadent performer of the twenties and thirties and on the other as the embodiment of the imperial Britain for which the Americans did not want to fight” (p. 105). Coward’s lack of success in America was also affected by his flamboyant homosexuality, unlike the more discreet and successful Maugham, who was seen by most Americans as an “orthodox divorcé” despite having lived with his gay lover since 1929 (p. 124).

By and large well researched, the book suffers from the odd bibliographical omission. Although Calder cites Thomas Mahl's *Desperate Deception: British Covert Operations in the United States, 1939–44* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1998), he does not compare Mahl's somewhat overdrawn views with Susan Brewer's *To Win The Peace: British Propaganda in the United States during World War II* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997). The now-published internal history upon which Mahl's work draws, *British Security Coordination: The Secret History of British Intelligence in the Americas, 1940–45* (New York: Fromm International, 1999), is also absent. Nor does Calder take the opportunity to compare the British wartime effort with the pre-war successes of the Foreign Office and the British Council, outlined in Philip Taylor's *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), or to show how the British "policy of truth" in propaganda differed from Axis efforts.

Those familiar with the field will find no striking new conclusions here — Calder agrees with Cull and others that the success of cultural propaganda in preparing the ground for Anglo-American cooperation and undermining isolationism was key, and perhaps more important than any perceived failure of British propaganda, to winning American entry into the war (pp. 259–261). His success is in using an insightful interdisciplinary approach to demonstrate in more depth how literary figures and media were used by the British as one part of a larger effort to create and maintain support for the European war in America.

Although Calder refrains from drawing direct analogies with contemporary events, there are many points of comparison, the most obvious being attempts to demonize Germans by using an overall literary theme of the war "as a black-and-white battle between civilization and light on the one hand and barbarism and darkness on the other" (p. 127). The dangers of such efforts, particularly in a coalition at war, are perhaps best exemplified in the mixed success of Coward's 1943 song "Don't Lets Be Bestly to the Germans". Intended as a satire of those advocating less harsh terms for German surrender, it provoked the wrath of both many Britons, who missed its irony, and many Americans, who resented the call for tougher handling of Germany (pp. 102–105). *Beware the British Serpent* will be of interest not only to those working in the fields of social, cultural, diplomatic, and military history, but also to scholars of literature, media, and communications, whether they are examining the Second World War or contemporary issues.

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CASTRO-KLARÉN, Sara, and John Charles CHASTEEN, eds. — *Beyond Imagined Communities: Reading and Writing the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. Pp. ix, 252.

As the title of this anthology suggests, Sara Castro-Klarén and John Charles Chasteen are moving beyond Benedict Anderson's seminal work *Imagined Communities*.