

RHETORIC AND REPRESENTATION. THE BRITISH AT WAR

Gabrielle Linke and Holger Rossow, eds.
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(by Mónica Calvo Pascual, Universidad de Zaragoza)
mocalvo@unizar.es

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Despite the European claim that the continent has enjoyed the longest period of peace since World War II in the last four centuries, the essays in *Rhetoric and Representation* provide an overview of the various armed conflicts in which European countries —mainly the United Kingdom— have participated actively and of how popular and high culture products have reflected those struggles. This volume is a cohesive, well-structured collection of essays with a clear focus on the cultural and literary representation of conflict. The editors openly acknowledge the multidisciplinary approach offered by the different contributions while noting their insertion within the by definition interdisciplinary field of cultural studies. Disparate in content and object of analysis as the essays are, the editors manage to impose certain thematic and chronological order that is thoroughly explained in the Introduction. Thus, Linke and Rossow highlight the similarities between the fields of cultural studies and the increasingly successful area and degree courses in war studies, which center not only on warfare and its effects on society but also on the examination of propaganda material and cultural representations of war.

The first contribution to the volume centers on the paradoxical situation of the British population, who received with public enthusiasm Britain's declaration of war against Germany in 1914 despite their professed pacifism. Michael Paris links Britain's positive attitude toward the war to the long-sustained idealization in literature of the patriotic warrior defending the British Empire. He thus elaborates

on the different kinds of literary texts that from the mid-nineteenth century addressed mainly British young males with a view to promoting the desire and need both to defend the empire and to prove their courage and manliness through military action. Paris's criticism is launched at the sanitization and romanticization of battle in nineteenth-century novels like Sir Walter Scott's or Charles Kingsley's, and also at the representation of war as escapist fantasy —always abroad, of course— where the civilized chivalric warriors subdued the inferior “heathen”.

On an entirely different theme, Daniel Dornhofer provides interesting insights into the parallelism drawn by British punk and post-punk music bands like The Clash, Gang of Four, or The Levellers, between the 1640s' Civil War and the eighteen years of Thatcherite government. For this purpose, Dornhofer brings to bear his analysis of the bands' political affiliations, aesthetics, music and lyrics upon the similarities between King Charles I and Cromwell's tyrannical measures and the upheavals provoked by Thatcher's government in terms of racial conflict, the miners' strike of 1984-85 and what Dornhofer considers to be the civil war going on in Northern Ireland during the Iron Lady's regime.

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Moving from punk to classical music, Hartmut Möller explores how composer Benjamin Britten combined lyrics and poetry written by anti-war British authors like Wilfred Owen or W. H. Auden in the composition of his operas and cantatas, which became emblematic pro-peace compositions during and after World War II. The context of the Great War is precisely what brings together this and the following article, where Penny Summerfield unveils the double-standard applied to the inclusion of women into the work force during World War II, revealing the discrimination and belated political maneuvers obscured in hegemonic accounts of the phenomenon. Summerfield's illuminating and challenging critique concentrates on two main theses. Firstly, she shows that what has usually been depicted as a substantial progress toward women's 'equality' was but a partial *integration* into the work force and as members of a social unit. To this end, the author explains that increasing mechanization of the skilled production processes turned them into semi-skilled jobs thus degrading women's work, that equal pay was never even considered, and also that after the war only young single or black women remained in full-time jobs. Second, the establishment reinforced the gender divide and its clear-cut gender roles by the over-feminization of female workers' uniforms and use of make-up and, more outstandingly, by refusing to admit women as active members of the armed forces. As Summerfield argues, arming women would have undermined the traditional gender contract that women stay at home in times of war whilst men fight for the protection of women and children.

In the next article, Doris Teske explores the guiding principles and underpinning notion of experience in the teaching of the two World Wars in British schools. For

that purpose, she studies three current textbooks and other sources like museum exhibitions and institutional web sites to conclude that the teaching of history has evolved in the same direction as the academic discipline of history. That is, the focus has shifted from the learning of facts and figures to the fostering of an empathic understanding of the past through personal experience and its recovery through contact with authentic material.

Moving on to post World War II Britain, Christian Schmidt-Kilb approaches the Suez crisis of 1954 through Prime Minister Eden's maneuvers to vilify the Egyptian government as seen in his declarations and letters to US President Eisenhower together with the manipulation exerted by the colluding British press. Finally, Schmidt-Kilb shows how Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* corroborates the feeling that, after the Suez crisis, Britain's status as a world power was diminished to the benefit of the United States.

Thomas F. Schneider analyzes the content and motives of the representation of British soldiers in UNPROFOR peace units in Bosnia in the early 1990s in Peter Kosminsky's television miniseries *Warriors* (1999). The series, which avoids any mention of the reasons why the Yugoslavian Civil War broke out or of the interests of the factions involved, presents an unambiguous, Manichean distinction between good and evil, victims and perpetrators. Produced four years after the war was over, Schneider argues that the aim of the series was to have an influence on the NATO and British intervention in the Kosovo crisis in 1999. Not being allowed to take part and fight, the peace forces are portrayed as powerless and helpless in their role as observers, their mere presence seen as an interference that usually brings about death. The series thus appears to be a straightforward defense of military intervention against the UN ideal of 'peacekeeping' missions. Holger Rossow analyzes stances toward the Kosovo War of the UN in general and Tony Blair's in particular. He mainly focuses on the discourses that equated Milosevic's ethnic cleansing of the Kosovar Albanians to the Holocaust and on Blair's acknowledgment that British intervention was motivated also by national interest. While denouncing the lack of action in massacres where NATO and European interests are not endangered, Rossow rejects "the view that mixed motives undermine the legitimacy of humanitarian interventions" (2007: 172).

Eventually addressing armed conflict on British territory, Kathleen Starck posits that the study of the cultural representations of a conflict can provide an understanding of its history and complexity, which is an integral part of any peace process. Starting from this basic idea, Starck's enlightening contribution sets out to analyze the ways in which the wall murals of both unionist Protestants and republican Catholics in the Northern Irish conflict work to create a sense of unity, identity and community, while taking into account the issues of power and their

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construction of a social space, transforming public space through the use of paramilitary and political imagery.

Finally, Sebastian Berg's contribution focuses on the relation of British Muslim subjects and the British establishment after 9/11 and, more exceptionally, after the London tube and bus attacks on 7/7. By centering on an analysis of public discourses, Berg highlights the vicious circle provoked by Muslims' rejection of the British military intervention in the so-called 'war against terror', which has apparently radicalized their approach to Islamism. In turn, Blair's call for a process of assimilation that he tried to disguise as integration has widened the breach between the British Muslim and the British Christian and secular populations, raising the level of mutual hostility.

In general terms, this volume proves highly compelling and a good read for scholars engaged in the fields of war and peace studies but also for anyone with an interest in British society and history in general. It provides useful information on a variety of conflicts that have undeniable repercussions in British society but also worldwide. Furthermore, the social and political analyses carried out through the detailed scrutiny of cultural representations and texts of various kinds constitutes a good example of what cultural studies is—or was at its origin and should still be from an orthodox point of view.

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