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Wellington: Waterloo and the Fortunes of Peace 1814–1852

Dr. Ambrogio A. Caiani

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happened without partnerships with private organizations. Indeed, cultural cold warriors in the postwar world even seemed to take pride in this arrangement, believing that the freedom and creativity on display in privately funded artwork contrasted with the monolithic authoritarian messages of Soviet state-sponsored productions. To use another contemporary term, U.S. cultural diplomacy during the Cold War was at its best when it was 'trolling' the Soviet Union, when the point of each new art exhibit by the 1960s 'seemed to be to elicit vehement attacks' (128) from Moscow. But the turn of the 1960s also marked both the apogee and the beginning of the 'slow death' of U.S. cultural diplomacy, which happens quite quickly in the book, with the half-century following feeling as much like an epilogue as a substantive chapter. Such an imbalance is not any fault of Krenn's but a product of the secondary literature on which he relies; simply put, there is very little research yet on U.S. cultural diplomacy since the 1970s.

Scholars interested in a global approach to international history may find fault with the focus on U.S. intentions and institutions over local outcomes, but that should not detract from the book's value as a work of both historiography and synthesis. It is also highly recommended for advanced undergraduate or graduate courses as an introduction to the broad sweep of American efforts to win over the world with culture.

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Wellington: Waterloo and the Fortunes of Peace 1814–1852, by Rory Muir. London, Yale University Press, 2015, xiv + 713 pp., £30.00 (hardback) and £16.99 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0300187861

The Iron Duke's prodigious military abilities and career have been the subject of a substantial number of publications. He remains, despite unfortunate traffic cone incidents in Glasgow, the premier British soldier and hero. Certainly, the tone of such military studies has become more measured in recent decades. More attention is now given to controversies such as the Cintra Convention and the badly bungled siege of Burgos. The same, sadly, cannot be said of his fascinating afterlife as a statesman and Tory politician. This is why the final volume of Rory Muir's monumental biography of Wellington is to be welcomed with enthusiasm. The industry and research that has gone into this volume is monolithic and from an archival point of view this work is unlikely to be surpassed for many decades to come. Indeed, the appendices, notes, and bibliography weigh-in at no fewer than 120 pages.

The structure of this biography is extremely sensible, following chronologically the different offices and functions that the most decorated man in Europe filled after 1815. The Waterloo campaign, though described thoroughly, is not overly intrusive in this volume and covers about a sixth of the entire book. This leaves more than enough space to analyse the Duke's time as a diplomat, military bureaucrat, Foreign Minister, Prime Minister, Commander-in-Chief, Warden of the Cinque Ports and perhaps most unexpectedly as Chancellor of the University of Oxford. If one thing united him, in terms of personality, to his nemesis, the Emperor Napoleon, that was his prodigious capacity for work. Throughout the many chapters of this biography, we get a picture of a man who was deeply conscientious in the fulfilment of his duties with a fine memory for individuals and a good eye for detail.

In politics, like on the battlefield, the Duke was reactive and tended to wait for the enemy to move first and make mistakes. He fought hard to preserve both the European and British order from the contagion of revolutionary politics. This said, he did not possess a clear strategic vision or programme for British domestic politics. Catholic Emancipation was granted in 1829 with little enthusiasm and he believed it was better that a Tory government sympathetic to Anglo-Irish anxieties should carry it forth rather than a Radical-Whig administration. Like a character from Trollope when it came to electoral reform, corn laws, trade, and economic policies, he left such matters to the formidable and angular Sir Robert Peel. It was in the realm of foreign policy that the Duke was more in his milieu. Despite supporting intervention in Naples and Portugal, where possible, he avoided costly foreign adventures, found sabre rattling distasteful and sought to maintain peace above all other considerations.

The other fascinating aspect which this book covers dextrously is the question of how the Duke managed his public image. He was probably, much more than Marlborough, the first living celebrity in British history. It is often remarked that he refused to write his own memories. This has been incorrectly interpreted as an indifference towards his image and legacy. Muir rightly shows that nothing could have been further from the truth. The Duke was deeply involved with Colonel Gurwood's editing and publication of his letters and correspondence. He cultivated his image as any aristocrat in the nineteenth century would have done. He played the patron and host for London's *beau monde* at Apsley house, and entertained lavishly in the Waterloo gallery. All was not always plain sailing, and during the debates surrounding the great Reform the Duke's popularity nosedived and reached its nadir. He narrowly avoided lynching on the anniversary of the battle of Waterloo in 1832. When out riding he was surrounded by a menacing crowd who greeted him with shouts of 'Bonaparte forever [p.432]!' Yet, like an Italian Christian Democrat, Wellington had seven lives and by his eighties had become a much revered elder statesman around whom Britain could unite.

No book is without its weaknesses and probably the biggest fault is that Rory Muir has fallen in love with Wellington (almost as much as Mrs Arbuthnot had become infatuated with the Duke in 1820s). Every criticism of the Duke is dismissed and, at times, this tome reads like a hagiography. In truth, Wellington must have been an epic grump who was monumentally bad company, a fault that was exacerbated by the premature onset of deafness. Muir's hagiographic tone does spoil the overall balance of what is otherwise an excellent read. It is very likely that this tome will be compared and judged with Elisabeth Longford's magnificent two volume biography of the Duke. Ultimately, Muir exceeds her work in terms of scholarship, but falls somewhat short when it comes to style. Longford's work is vibrant and elegant whereas Muir is relentlessly thorough and at times a little flat. Indeed, his narrative does, from time to time, get lost in the detail. This seven-hundred-page biography could have done with a little more colour, but all things told it is both a fine piece of research and a splendid tribute to one of Britain's most important politicians. The conclusion that Wellington's politics must be read in the context of Georgian and early Victorian Britain, rather than from the vantage point of twenty-first-century liberal values, is an important revision and insight. The Duke was very much a man of his times and can be accused of many things ... but a prophet he was not.

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