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Terrance L. Lewis, *Prisms of British Appeasement: Revisionist Reputations of John Simon, Samuel Hoare, Anthony Eden, Lord Halifax, Alfred Duff Cooper*. Portland, OR: Sussex Acad. Press, 2011. Pp. vi, 233. ISBN 978-1-84519-422-2.

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It is always unpleasant to have to be severe with the scholarly work of a fellow historian, in this case, Terrance Lewis (Winston-Salem State Univ.). One should always bear in mind David Cannadine's apposite remark, "As anyone knows who has tried their hand sufficiently at both activities, it is a great deal easier to review books on history than it is to write them."¹ That *Prisms of British Appeasement* is based on an excellent idea—comparing the trajectories of five of Neville Chamberlain's associates in the troubled 1930s—is beyond doubt. The problems are in the treatment.

The writing strategy adopted here—allotting one chapter to each protagonist—seems at first glance perfectly logical, but it inevitably leads to irksome repetitions. Moreover, Lewis often leaves material until later, with promises to discuss-this-in-more-detail-when-I-examine x, y, or z. Most of the great crises of the period are seen, as the title indicates, through the prism of the reactions, positions, and sometimes posturing of the five men, with now Stanley Baldwin, now Chamberlain in the foreground. Thus, we view Italy's invasion of Abyssinia from five discrete perspectives successively; we learn of the measures each man advocated before the fact and his subsequent positions and attitudes, notably regarding the preservation of the Stresa Front. Needless to say, treatment of the archetypal crisis—"Munich"—follows the same pattern, with even more repetition. The cumulative effect can only be described as tedious and thus unsuccessful.

Lewis proceeds by comparing various judgments upon each politician's behavior in the face of events, as found in contemporary pamphlets, attacks, and hagiographies as well as in later histories, biographies, memoirs, and autobiographies. The (then) pseudonymous polemical work, *Guilty Men*,² is rightly prominent in this source material, as is the first volume of Winston Churchill's history of the Second World War.³ Lewis has written a "revisionist" work in arguing that matters are not so clear-cut as these two books suggest: the incorrigible, even despicable, appeasers (Simon, Hoare, Halifax) in one camp, the impeccable anti-appeasers (Eden, Duff Cooper) in the other. He does his best to justify the appeasement policies of the former, revisiting all the justifications put forward since 1940 despite the disastrous failure of the strategy. But he also repeatedly spotlights the inherent contradiction between the appeasers' refusal to rearm, whether for diplomatic or financial reasons (he denies that the opposition on the Left and pacifists played a role), and their contention that Britain could not deal forcefully with the dictators because of military weakness—a weakness of their own making.

Unsurprisingly for those familiar with the history, Samuel Hoare comes off worst. But Lewis goes too far in dismissing his defenders when he argues that the Dominions did not prevent the British from taking a firm stance, even at the cost of war. He makes a compelling argument concerning Australia (104), but then completely omits Canada—surely of equal importance: Mackenzie King, a great admirer of Hitler (a "German Joan of Arc"), had warned the British Government in June 1937 that Canada would only join a war if Britain were to be directly attacked, which, of course, excluded fighting over Austria and Czechoslovakia.

1. "On Reviewing and Being Reviewed," *History Today* 49.3 (1999) 31-33, rpt. in Daniel Snowman, ed., *Past Masters: The Best of History Today* (London: History Today Ltd, 2001) 457-65.

2. "Cato" [viz., Michael Foot, Peter Howard, Frank Owen], *Guilty Men* (London: Gollancz, 1940; rpt. London: Penguin, 1998).

3. *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948).

As for Anthony Eden and Alfred Duff Cooper, Lewis cautions against being misled by chronology. It is true that Eden resigned a few months before Duff Cooper, but the latter became, at least publicly, far more hostile to Chamberlain's post-Munich policy than did the ambivalent Eden:

If Eden was a leader against appeasement, this should have shown in the debates on the Munich Agreement. Eden had shown some signs of dissent—he had walked out of the House of Commons rather than join in the frenzied celebrations when the Conference had been announced, although he had refused to co-sign a telegram to Chamberlain urging him not to make more concessions.... Reading Eden's forty-two minute speech [during the debates on the Munich Agreement] today gives the impression of a very measured response. He praised Duff Cooper for his courage in resigning, and then Chamberlain: "We all owe him ... a measureless debt of gratitude for the sincerity and pertinacity which he has devoted in the final phase of the crisis to averting the supreme calamity of war." Eden did not criticize the Munich Agreement as such
(82)

Was there a link between cause and effect when Chamberlain called Eden back in September 1939, leaving Duff Cooper on the sidelines? Lewis leaves the impression that somehow there was. In any case, four of his five chosen politicians were still or again firmly in the saddle in the Phony War period: Simon as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Halifax as Foreign Secretary, Hoare as Lord Privy Seal, and Eden as Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.

Lewis's conclusion is unexpected: specifically, that his five prisms were "hollow men"⁴ manipulated by Baldwin and, above all, Chamberlain to further their own agenda of avoiding war at all costs. On this interpretation, the whole disastrous episode of appeasement becomes a sort of Shakespearean tragedy, as the arch-villain (blinded by some curse of the gods) drags his faithful lieutenants to their ultimate fate. Though not explicitly stated, there is a striking parallel with Hitler (equally blinded, if in a radically different way, by the gods' curse) and his National Socialist sycophants.

Even though Lewis concedes that "Baldwin and Chamberlain were not the only men who created the British portion of the policies which led to 1940" (145), he sees them as the true "Guilty Men," without whom there would have been no appeasement, even allowing for the forces at work in 1930s Britain, including the five men discussed in this book.⁵ This thesis has been at the center of debate ever since May 1940.

In light of excellent recent reappraisals of the subject,⁶ has Lewis added any fresh point of view on the matter of appeasement? His book is not based on new documentary evidence, makes no use of public archives or private papers as such, and relies on published books and pamphlets.⁷ On the other hand, Lewis has read virtually everything by or about his five protagonists—a substantial corpus of data.⁸

If there is a novel aspect of the book, it is its reconsideration of the anti-appeasement credentials of Duff Cooper and, especially, Eden. It should be remembered that Churchill himself always took their late conversion to his own ideas at face value, while savaging Simon, Hoare, and Halifax in *The Gathering*

4. To borrow the title of the British edition of Margaret George's *The Warped Vision: British Foreign Policy, 1933–1939* (Pittsburgh: U Pittsburgh Pr, 1965): *The Hollow Men: An Examination of British Foreign Policy between the Years 1933 and 1939* (London: Leslie Frewin, 1967).

5. So, too, the prevailing *fable convenue*—until A.J.P. Taylor shattered it in *The Origins of the Second World War* (London: Hamilton, 1961)—was that without Hitler the Germans would never have started another war.

6. E.g., Andrew David Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler's Germany* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

7. But not articles, even such important and germane ones as Larry L. Witherell, "Lord Salisbury's 'Watching Committee' and the Fall of Neville Chamberlain, May 1940," *English Historical Review* 116 (2001) 1134–66, with David J. Dutton's thorough discussion in "Power Brokers or Just 'Glamour Boys'? The Eden Group, September 1939–May 1940," *ibid.* 118 (2003) 412–24.

8. One unfortunate omission is Robert Self, ed., *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters*, vol. 4: *The Downing Street Years, 1934–1940* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005).

Storm.⁹ While this is not without interest, it does not outweigh the many shortcomings¹⁰ of *Prisms of British Appeasement*, which I will not recommend to my university's chief librarian.

9. And elsewhere, notably in his correspondence with his wife: see Mary Soames, ed., *Speaking for Themselves: The Personal Letters of Winston and Clementine Churchill* (NY: Doubleday, 1998).

10. Including very faulty proofreading: "Sir Sameul Hoare" (34), "The Anglo-Germany Naval Agreement" (38), "Munich" in September 1939 (106), "Chamberlain's resignation and death in the autumn of 1939" (115), "the principle burden" (13), "according Eden" (44), "Eden was now charged trying to find a solution" (46), "the Churchill[s]" (47), "there was really been" (49), "Churchill would not continence that" (53, 77), "although he not actually rejoin until June" (70), "if the recognition of the Abyssinian might not be made" (72), "had the chance arose" (73), "Churchill's personality would have been too dominate" (81), "The same might be said if his career not ended" (85), "Hitler's already starting the rearming Germany" (95), "time to back deals with Mussolini and Hitler were running out" (102), "believe that that because" (103), "did not attach much important to this trip" (111), "continue as a break on Churchill" (114, 134), "It was therefore not overly surprising that after the 1935 election that he was finally promoted" (120), "money to be spent on tank" (124), "temporally occupy" (124), "Duff Cooper was on the outside as the Czech crisis development in the summer of 1938" (129), "Chamberlain was forced to agree with limited rearmament, but never believed that Britain should actually have to go to war, that there would be a point where the dictators would realize that spending more money on arms would not get them what they wanted" (122). The "The Five Munich Speeches" included in the fifty-page Appendix are easily accessible at the Hansard website—<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications>.