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Mark Cousins

SOCRATEASE

Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, volume II of *The History of Sexuality*, London, Allen Lane, 1986; 293 pp; £16.95

This is not really the second volume of *The History of Sexuality* at all. It begins again and this time as a different work altogether. The first volume was a conspectus and introduction to the arguments and figures through which modern sexuality might be raised - the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the pervert and the Malthusian couple. These figures, it was suggested, provided the surprising means of glimpsing the centrality of sexual life in the modern period and indeed the 'modernity' of sexual life. Elsewhere there was sex but what we have is sexuality, a formation of recent appearance and of prodigious powers. We don't see this for in our thoughts we cover the past and other cultures with our own passion to know our sexuality and to sexualize our knowledge. While the book offers no panacea for the politics of sexuality it is shot through with a kind of nostalgia for a future or an outside to this modern need to endure so much *as* sexuality. Of course there could be no liberation of sexuality but with luck there might be a liberation from 'sexuality'. But it remained a vague incitement to a world of energies, of limbs, of touchings, of bits and pieces unruled but not unruly, pleasured but not driven by desire.

The first volume also had a subplot - the denigration of psychoanalysis, a very odd denigration. Part of it consisted in prorclaiming psychoanalysis to be typical. Unlike the warlike historiography with which psychoanalysis equips itself, Foucault argued that psychoanalysis was matched to and propped up by the whole drift of pedagogy and psychiatry. The sexuality of children, the question of the disorders of femininity, the great kingdom of perversion, all these were the daily concerns of the most banal practices of whatever was designed to discipline the subject in the pursuit of normality. Psychoanalysis, for Foucault, might have shifted the study of mental pathology from biological degeneracy but it added nothing new. Nor was its practice of the 'talking cure' anything more than an elaborate version of the tendency of many techniques to borrow a pre-modern technique - that of confession. Freud is denigrated by promoting him to the status of the Church Fathers. This is an odd imputation for Foucault to make for it is one that can be found in the drearier kind of philosophy of science: this technique has its origins not in scientific method but in religious fife, *ergo.* . . . It is a strange argument to be employed by such an enemy of explanation by reference to origins. But as we shall see it has consequences for the argument of the new project cast in volume II.

Volume I was a history of sexuality of a very particular kind. Certainly it was

not a history of sexual behaviour any more than it was a history of ideas about sexual behaviour. It was a history of the conditions whereby we make sexuality a definite modality of experience. Such a history required Foucault to break with three ideas. First, that sexuality was a constant, exercising a continuous and uniform pressure on experience at all times and in all places. Second, that the historical manifestations of this drive were equal to the different mechanisms whereby societies repressed sexual drives. Third, that the mechanisms of the regulation of sexuality typically took the form of interdiction, prohibition and taboo. These refusals enabled Foucault to form a historical problem. 'In short it was a matter of seeing how an experience came to be constructed in Western societies, an experience that caused individuals to recognize themselves as subjects of sexuality.' He was concerned with the rise of modern knowledges; not just the knowledge of biological reproduction and inheritance but also the analysis of social and individual behaviour which emerges as the human sciences. These fields of knowledge recast things in new ways, the most important axis of which, for Foucault, was that of the distinction between the normal and pathological. These knowledges were linked to the social practices of education and the regulation of health and sickness, and to the judicial and penal machines. Finally, he was concerned with the way that, within these practices and knowledges, individuals are obliged to have a certain experience of themselves, of being subjects of sexuality, subjects of 'desire'.

Yet in so far as this last issue was dealt with in volume I there was an ambiguity. The sexuality at stake was precisely modern yet the way in which this experience was approached, the issue of the subject who is subjected to a recognition/construction of itself as a subject of desire, was related to a pre-modern spiritual exercise, confession. Establishing the link between confession and desire was not novel in Foucault; it had been forged with great *elan* by Jules Michelet in *Priests, Women and Families,* where he dealt with the consequences of confession with a 'healthy' fury against the enervating eroticism through which spiritual directors drew women into their power. But Foucault extended the notion of spiritual direction to a generalized mechanism of confession in which the psychoanalyst becomes the secular equivalent of Michelet's scheming Jesuit. Yet this merely intensifies a paradox. If the modernity of sexuality is what deploys this confession/desire couple how is it that it derives from Christianity? And how far back in the Christian era? And what about before the Christian era?

The Christian category of the 'flesh' is certainly predicated upon the subject of desire. The insistence of classical antiquity upon the regulation of appetites is equally predicated upon a subject of desire. This centrality in the west, modern, Christian and classical, of desire, requires Foucault to change and broaden his project - no longer a genealogy of sexuality, but a genealogy of the *subject* of desire, which in some sense for Foucault is the genealogy of the subject as such. It is not that desire is one of the attributes of the category of the subject as it emerges in the west but rather that out of the problem of desire the category of the subject emerges. The forms and modalities whereby the individual takes up a relation to himself and subjects himself to that relation turn upon the tradition of desire. Such a genealogy of the subject is not simply a concern with

the experience of desire, but rather with the experience of desire as it is contaminated by the problem of truth. To experience something is also to play a game of truth, that is to answer the question of what in truth one experiences. The subject, in Foucault's most recent sense, is the relation of an individual to himself at the intersection of the problems of truth and desire. The subject is an effect of putting the two into a relation with each other.

If the history of sexuality is re-posed in this way, not as a history of behaviours, norms, prohibitions but in terms of the genealogy of the subject, it enables Foucault to re-pose another question, 'Why is sexual conduct, why are the activities and pleasures that attach to it, an object of moral solicitude?' The question is not answered in terms of the tables of laws, the dictates of moral codes, partly because such answers beg the question but partly because what interests Foucault is that the solicitude which sexual conduct has excited in the west far exceeds the formal concerns of legal or moral codes. The solicitude which does interest him is the way in which this excess has been used by humans to regulate themselves by transforming themselves, to turn life into a question of aesthetic or stylistic decisions or objectives. To pervert a philosophical point: if the logical problem with the uncritical category of the subject is that it is teleological, that it presupposes the attributes it is supposed to explain, perhaps this is because the 'subject' is not an entity at all but a 'technique' for becoming one, an art of existence which has as its objective mastery over desire.

The genealogy of the subject is therefore inevitably part of the genealogy of morals. But Foucault attempts to differentiate within morality what it is that the genealogy of morals refers to. It is not the history of the variety of moral codes, the doctrines, teachings and prescriptions which social agents have presented to individuals. Nor is it the history of the relation of behaviour to codes, the measurement of enforcement and transgression. What interests him is the mode by which individuals situate themselves in relation to morality. For this the terms of obedience, conformity and deviance are beside the point. It is the mode of the relation as such. One can experience a rule as part of an obligation to another, as part of the heritage of one's spiritual tradition, as an attempt to appease a divine anger, or as an attempt to make one's life a work of art. This question of the mode of one's subjectification through rules, Foucault calls the 'determination of the ethical substance'; it is what determines the kind of ethical work one does. Consequently, sexual moderation or austerity can take different forms. It can take the form of comparing behaviour to an established code in order to learn control by reference to an external constraint. Quite different would be a practice of sexual austerity 'as a relentless combat whose vicissitudes - including momentary setbacks - can have a meaning and value in themselves; and it can be practised through a decipherment as painstaking, continuous and detailed as possible of the desire in all its hidden forms, including the most obscure'. The differences between the modes of the relation between the individual and the code is a difference between the differing purposes and means of being 'good'. Sexual austerity can be conceived as having its end in mastery over the world, but can equally be directed towards abandoning the world, towards an intensification of unease, or towards a tranquil soul. Now if this is the history of morals which Foucault attempts it is clearly not a history of

moralities or behaviour. In this sense he is quite eccentric to the contemporary project of mapping a history of sexual codes or sexual behaviour. Volume II is explicitly not concerned with what was permitted or with what happened in sexual life in Ancient Greece. It is the mode of subjectification that interests him and in particular the mode that seems to link moral codes to the individual not through the judicial models of authority and obedience but through the ethical substance in which one observes and regulates one's desires in order to become something, a proper subject. And for Foucault, whatever differences mere might be between them, this is what links the ethical programmes of Christianity and Graeco-Roman morality, a discipline, an *askesis* in which subjects become themselves by transforming themselves.

The argument allows Foucault to place the solicitude for sexual conduct as part of a system of moderation and austerity which extends in volume II dirough the domains of diet, household management, marriage and erotics, the literature which sought to specify how the relation between men and boys should be governed. There is no space in this review to cover all these areas and I shall restrict myself to this issue of erotics. Foucault's first argument is that there is no equivalent within classical antiquity for our 'sexuality' even at a semantic level. The Greek *la aphrodisia* or the Latin *verier a* are terms which cannot be translated as sexuality. Not only is our term much broader but *ta aphrodisia* refers to a reality at a different level. So it is not just a question of representing sexuality as different, as if it were a case of different things that were permitted and forbidden; it is a completely different set of relations. Certainly many things were not forbidden; a free man might make use of women, slaves and boys in many ways. But this is not what gives the key to the problem of pleasure. For the anxiety which existed about pleasure in sexual acts does not revolve around object-choice but around self-indulgence. Immorality is related not to a class of actions but to excess. Foucault provides a wealth of evidence on this point.

Two themes are linked here: self-mastery and male virility. This is in turn linked to a political virtue, freedom. For the free city in Aristotle's *Politics* there must be free citizens, that is good citizens. And the definition of a free citizen is one who is not in bondage to pleasure or the slave of another's. This affirmation of mastery insists upon a continence which is a practice of male self-scrutiny. Moderation is male and free; immoderation is slavish. The feminine is a passive, abandoned relation to pleasure. By extension this theme also involves a relation to truth. If in Aristotle the rational man always performs the good, what is implied is that the logos commands the soul and at the same time the soul apprehends what is real, what is true. The control of desire thus always opens on to philosophical questions of truth. The proper subject knows how to use sexual pleasure, knows its place, knows how to govern it.

The literature on the courtship of boys turns out not to be a celebration of a special type of love, though that is prized. It is far from the excited reveries of late Victorian literary worship. It is rather the working through of a careful anxiety: of how the man must not become possessed, of how the boy must not be compromised. Indeed in Foucault's analysis a certain logic obtains in which there is always a movement away from physical pleasure to the truth of philosophy. The subject of desire must master himself and free the boy to be a

proper masterful citizen. It is an apprenticeship fraught with difficulty. The logic culminates in Foucault's analysis of Plato's *Symposium.* By refusing to court Alcibiades, Socrates has driven him to flirt and to denounce and to praise. This reversal is all done in the name of truth and a philosophical programme, a discipline. In renouncing pleasure, in rising to the truth, Socrates avoids the dangers which come from desire. But in making himself master of himself he makes himself a maitre. This is the strange dialectic of desire which Foucault elaborates as the outcome of this practice of austerity as it passes into truth. It is a fascinating scene. Socrates stands, or rather sits, as the first great practitioner . . . of what? It is difficult to resist the temptation to read Foucault's Socrates as the first psychoanalyst. There is the couch. Alcibiades comes in (late of course). . . and the rest we know. On these terms then the denigration of psychoanalysis in volume I becomes more obscure. It seems not so much that confession gives rise to psychoanalysis but that the transference and counter-transference under conditions of sexual abstinence give rise, not to analysis, but to philosophy and to the line of its masters. None of which is plain.

Stranger is the apparent lack of engagement with Nietzsche. In developing the notion of genealogy Foucault made clear many debts to him, though they were chiefly at the level of arguing a distinctive historiographical position. Certainly *Discipline and Punish* used arguments about the history of punishment drawn from the first book of the *Genealogy of Morals.* But the third book is precisely on the question that Foucault now addresses: what do ascetic ideals betoken? The necessities and cruelties of ascetic ideals are traced out by Nietzsche in an attempt to diagnose the relations between, among other things, philosophy and values. But these are not taken up here. Perhaps what Foucault does provide in this volume are materials for an analysis which he does not make, yet which shadows the volume: the relation between knowledge, sexual desire and the question of values. It would include reading the *Genealogy of Morals* together with *Civilisation and its Discontents.*

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RESCUING REASON

Christopher Norris: *The Deconstructive Turn: essays in the rhetoric of philosophy,* London, Methuen, 1983; 206 pp; £5.50: *The Contest of Faculties: philosophy and theory after deconstruction,* London, Methuen, 1985; 256 pp; £16.00 and £6.95

The decade of deconstruction, it seems, is over. Its achievements have been in a sense remarkable. The lit. crit. tradition, only belatedly and somewhat dazedly coming to terms with structuralism, was cruelly dealt a double blow by post-structuralist criticism. On a second front, deconstruction took on the entire western philosophical tradition, and in many ways came off better. For one thing, countless intelligent people who registered the critique in their political and research vocabulary would go around actually saying things like 'the entire western philosophical tradition is logocentric'.

The terminology of combat I've used is not inappropriate. Most intellectual purgers operate on a lean, fit diet of terror and insight, and deconstruction inherited this mode of waging war on complacency from parts of the structuralist tradition it succeeded. Like real-life Jacobinism, deconstruction has not so much been defeated from without as burnt out from within. Its 'rigour', like Robespierre's, has finally turned in on itself. Unable to latch on to a popular, creative vision, it becomes - like the Revolution - difficult in the end to state what it stands for except vigilance against the *ancien regime* and its traces.

Christopher Norris would probably think this fanciful sketch and the heralded end of deconstruction misplaced, applicable only to the 'vulgar' caricature he valiantly holds off in these two books. But his own shift of emphasis between *The Deconstructive Turn* and *The Contest of Faculties* is indicative enough of the evolving process I've referred to. Similar in scope and topic, at first glance it seems as though the two volumes should be one. In both, Norris reveals his interpretative gifts by ranging across critical and philosophical topics and authors to show the common ground beneath these absurdly disconnected specialisms. As exegesis and summary, his mode is always clear, fair and critical. He provides the kind of conceptual flexibility that in the early 1970s we students taking joint philosophy-literature degrees were groping for, largely unassisted by our excessively departmentalized tutors. The impact of deconstruction, through its best exponents like Norris, has strategically weakened that fake separation of interests. Not merely, I should add (for this would be what Norris calls the vulgar view), because we now believe 'everything is textual', but because we can see better the extent to which logical concepts, metaphors and fictions roll in and out of one another in the construction of *all* argument, be it manifestly philosophical or literary.

The differences between the two texts are nevertheless marked. In *The Deconstructive Turn* the general strategy is to show how even those philosophers most attuned to the vagaries of particular linguistic conventions (Wittgenstein, Ryle, Austin) are caught between the recognition of textuality and *differance*, on the one hand, and the metaphysics of presence, on the other. Being philosophers, they persist in trying to seek out both the logical key to a problem and the authentic voice of its articulation (the two are inseparable, according to deconstruction). Their dual commitment prevents philosophers from accepting the impossibility of fixity entailed in the very use of language. The general scenario here is that at the very moment of breaking with foundational rhetoric, these writers hold back from the radical consequences of their insights into the strategic power of language.

In a sense, the deconstructionist contribution is simply to reveal contradictions and discrepancies between intention and text, to show the disruptiveness for logic of the rhetorical strategies employed in its service. But even in a work like *The Deconstructive Turn*, which contains valid and intriguing examples of this contribution, something else is going on. Deconstruction itself becomes the 'other' of logocentrism and authorial rationality; it becomes the synthesis which awaits the reader who is struck by the dialectical contradiction revealed in a Wittgenstein or a Kierkegaard text. Ironically, then, these ventures in interpretation are in their own way teleological and reductionist. The contradictions identified are presented as *necessary* to a given textual mode; and the key to their unlocking, the end point of the exercise, is deconstruction. The message is always that the text will run away from the argument and its author.

Deconstruction here appears as much more than a critical *method*, more than 'rhetorical close reading' (*The Deconstructive Turn*, p. 35). It is the disembodied Other of metaphysics, rationality, phonocentrism, intentionality and the rest. To assert that the vulgar version of deconstruction (all is textuality, all is dispersal and deferral) is at work here is therefore quite appropriate, *not* because Norris or anyone else necessarily believes in an Ur-metaphysics of discontinuity (though plenty seem to), but because the structure of argument employed forces the exegesis into a fake dialectical mode. A problem is identified (the old authorial fallacies at work); a contradiction is identified (discrepancy between text and authorial presence); a higher synthesis emerges (recognition of the necessity of text-intention discrepancy).

Thus the rather predictable summary judgements that are given of even the most 'advanced philosophers'. Ryle in the end 'restores a phonocentric theme' (p. 27). Wittgenstein both poses and evades the textuality of his own arguments (p. 40). Frege's nominal retention of reference in his semantical theory is found insufficient to halt the slide away from necessity towards 'semantic slippage or undecideability' (p. 151). Kripke, whose hard-line referentialism is designed to effect just such a halt, is nevertheless also revealed to employ an internally legitimating *rhetoric*, thus rendering his text likewise undecideable (p. 172). Like all reductionisms, deconstruction becomes boring.

Lest I be accused *of substantive* hostility to the deconstructionist mode, notice that the objections I've stated so far are themselves deconstructionist in two distinct ways. First, in alleged opposition to teleology and intentionality,

deconstructionism looks to the text. Yet in this book (and in others less cogent), the form of the arguments is in important respects reductionist and teleological, thus undermining the writer's general purposes. Secondly, I have been looking at *The Deconstructive Turn* without conveying much of Norris's subdety and self-consciousness. Of course, he doesn't rule out the potential of (for instance) Kripke's technical realism, or the similarity between his deconstructionist themes and the analytic practice of much linguistic philosophy. But still, if we stricdy compare one *text* (*The Deconstructive Turn)* with another (*The Contest of Faculties),* certain vulgar deconstructionist traits are indeed marked in the former. Apart from the teleological form of argument, deconstruction is still broadly located in the literary domain; textuality is presented as some kind of unified essence; and all the characteristics of western philosophy (presence, logocentrism and the rest) are assumed to be irredeemably problematical.

The Contest of Faculties is different. It is distinctly more analytic-philosophical in tone and feel, and this reflects a new respect for some of the old themes apparently decimated by deconstruction. There is no complete break, that must be said. Norris's skills in unearthing the rhetorical modes behind 'pure' conceptual debate are again abundantly and helpfully in evidence. There is a persistent attempt not only to show the Active element in rationalist arguments, but to reclaim the status of the Active from its evasively contemptuous treatment at the hands of philosophers. (In fact, Norris tends to use 'fiction' to cover a complex of terms - fictions, metaphors, analogies, scenarios, possible worlds and so on. This condensation makes for rather easy deconstructionist point-scoring against rationalism whilst leaving some more interesting and difficult issues on one side.) Nevertheless, this is a major continuity of concern in the two books.

On the other hand, deconstruction is set up more clearly as being as much concerned with the philosophical mode as the literary, the conceptual as well as the fictive, with logical consistency as well as creative disruption, and with the cognitive as well as the affective side of rhetorical strategies. Thus some erstwhile allies in post-structuralism (and indeed the post-structuralist and post-modernist current taken as a whole) are subjected to fundamental critique. Rorty's complacent pragmatism, the whole trend to cognitively uncommitted narrativism, Quine's ontological relativity, Foucault's solipsism - all these are clearly and precisely taken apart. (The details of the demolition are important - this kind of summary is obviously insufficient.) And yet these undesirable *consequences* which Norris picks out are the products of practices very much akin to deconstruction. To pursue this, Norris has to mildly criticize and redefine the contribution of two of his mentors - Derrida and de Man. What was perceived in earlier work as the strength of de Man's critical apparatus now becomes itself a contradiction: the tension between an emphasis on deep textual undecideability and the demand for logical precision (p. 75). Moreover, Derrida's legacy, so firmly based on the decimation of Enlightenment presuppositions, now turns up on the side of Habermas, of all people (p. 46).

There is, then, a necessarily positive aspect of the weaknesses of previous philosophical stances. For all the fallacies of logocentrism, we cannot after all do

without a limit concept of true rationality (p. 39). Indeed, Norris suggests that possible subtitles for the book would be 'the defence of reason' or 'rescuing philosophy' (p. 5). The *cognitive* element of first order narratives is held to be crucial, yet there seems no way of asserting this without resort to metanarrative constructions. Thus a key plank of post-structuralism, highlighted above all by Lyotard, is kicked away. This brings back history. Critique is not simply, in the end, the juxtaposition of text with text, with the real world forever bracketed out. This brings back the traditional theory of ideology (p. 24). Indeed the whole book turns on the centrality of an epistemological *problem:* how to combat relativism. It also involves a logocentric and legalistic mode of redividing the sides of a *debate* and arguing a substantive conceptual *case.* And it retains faith in a progressive *moral outcome* of the argument. Norris's handling of the defined problem, mode of argument and normative expectation is therefore squarely in line with the philosophical tradition profoundly questioned in deconstruction. Perhaps Norris is right, overall, to argue that deconstruction should not in fact ever have been equated with uninhibited postmodernism. In his hands, it now appears too 'serious' and rigorous to have been so playful with purposes. But even a relatively late and subtle work like *The Deconstructive Turn* retains the traces of the headier positions of the late 1970s, so this line of defence seems unconvincing.

The real reason for the shift has been indicated - deconstruction has run into a dead end and turned in upon itself. The supposed rigour of bracketing off reality and letting language 'go on holiday' (Wittgenstein) ultimately courts irrationalism and irresponsibility, however hackneyed that rejoinder may appear. To spend more than a couple of books pointing out how rhetorical an argument is, or how slippery a text is, or how authorship manifests the myth of presence and so on, is basically a sterile pursuit. Intelligent deconstructors like Norris have come to see this. They have also come to acknowledge that scepticism is as much part of the western philosophical tradition as anything else, and that its intellectual and political implications (for such it has) are not progressive. Now, few would deny that epistemology is problematical, progress delusive and rationality double-edged. But the absence of a logical, final proof of these options does not make them impossible to defend or combine in new and constructive ways. Norris thus looks for a new constructive role for deconstruction alongside Habermas's objectivism (idealist though it is), alongside Davidson's assertion that beliefs about truth are interpretatively anterior to linguistic meaning (pre-textual though that view is), and alongside Putnam's and Marxism's limit-concept of rationality as a means of demystification (purely notional though that often is). As someone who has never been inclined to leave the rationalist terrain for the promise of post-structuralism, I have to say that I find these positions and the book as a whole powerfully argued, informative and theoretically gratifying. It is as well, then, to add that a number of important tensions are rightly left hanging. Norris has recovered for himself and deconstruction some unfashionable metaphysical concerns, and with a bit of luck fewer people will be found talking about 'the entire logocentric western philosophical tradition' and the like. Nevertheless, these themes have not been simply reinstated. I don't think Norris's position can seriously be

called deconstructionist in the hard sense, but he rightly insists that deconstruction has served to leave us all looking over our shoulders to see if outmoded and complacent assumptions are tagging along, and to accept the material effects of 'slippage' and 'performativity'. We do, literally, take our leave of the things we write (or say), and they belong more to the context they're read in, than to us as individuals. This goes for the 'big ideas' texts too. The textuality/rhetoric/belief nexus is therefore inevitably an unstable one which cannot be wrapped up in terms *either* of pure discourse *or* substantive rationality.

Another point concerns the very performativity of Norris's text itself. Like many people who read deeply in analytic philosophy, he has come out sounding a bit like an analytic philosopher and indeed it is part of his argument to assert a fundamental community of interest between philosophy and deconstruction. Certainly, both are valuable and reveal similar techniques. But the less palatable side of this is that like deconstructors, analytic philosophers have often seen their task as beginning and ending with the picking apart of presuppositions and elaborating the logical grammar of a text. And like deconstruction, logical analysis of itself simply does not possess the grounds or the means for the constructive commitment to substantive theory that Norris now reaffirms as a vital cultural goal. If philosophy and deconstruction do share common strengths, they also share the limitations of a purely textual practice. How far this is a problem and how far it might be addressed in Norris's broader picture of cultural analysis is not fully brought out in these books.

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Bill Schwarz

ENGLISHNESS AND THE PARADOX OF MODERNITY

Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds), *Englishness. Politics and Culture 1880-1920*, London, Croom Helm, 1986; 378 pp; £25.

From the start, whenever that was, England has always proclaimed itself a historic nation. With an unusual intensity the promise of its future has been overdetermined by its past, burdened in its historicity with 'a heap of passive sedimentations' which Gramsci claimed to be the due of all old nations. In the current epoch - the period of imperialism and its aftermath - it gets ever harder to imagine a future for England and for the neighbouring, subordinated nations of these islands. The predominant genres of English Utopian writing, for example, are reproduced by disinterring ancient, mythical pasts or by slowly transmuting them into familiarly tedious technocratic dystopias which rail against the modern world. In the current century past grandeur appears to slide irretrievably into decay and decomposition. The modernity of the new century never quite seemed able to break free from the imprint of this past. That peculiar intellectual formation, English literary modernism, took possession of this dialectic of grandeur and decline and gave to it a distinctive voice. It pervades the work of Eliot, the metamorphosed midwesterner, from *The Wasteland* to the *Four Quartets.* And it finds one of its most famous, compressed expressions in Virginia Woolf: 'But there could be no doubt that greatness was passing, hidden, down Bond Street, removed only by a hand's-breadth from ordinary people who might now, for the first time and last, be within speaking distance of the majesty of England, of the enduring symbol of the state which will become known to curious antiquaries, sifting through the ruins of time, when London is a grass-grown path and all those hurrying along this Wednesday morning are but bone with a few wedding rings mixed up in their dust and the gold stoppings of innumerable decayed teeth.'[1]

The historical conjunction of the modern period and the dramatic proliferation of recharged ideologies of Englishness has long been evident, linked above all to the expansion of the formal territories of empire. Recent academic discoveries of the late-nineteenth-century predilection for the invention of tradition, in new and old countries alike, in Europe and Japan as much as the USA, have given a new dimension to the study of ritual and collectivities, including that of the nation.[2] In this new collection Robert Colls and Philip Dodd concentrate on the varied forms in which Englishness was constructed and reproduced. They take the period from 1880 to 1920 (although in fact the essays freely move well beyond these confines) because, as they put it without apparent irony, 'we, as

well as others (e.g. Stuart Hall and Enoch Powell) believe that it is within the shadow of that period, and its meanings, that we still live'.

The essays collected here prove conclusively the existence of a major discursive shift occurring at the end of the last century in which a range of new and forceful national identities was produced, organized not only in the state and political institutions but throughout the civil order itself. The essays examine literature, music and politics, the Irish as 'marginal Britons' - a fine, intelligent study by D. G. Boyce - women and national identity, ruralism and two wide-ranging opening surveys by the editors, of which the one on political cultures is thoughtful, provocative and contentious. Time and again it becomes clear that the dominant national cultural institutions of contemporary England - the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the implantation of English as an academic and school discipline, the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the national art galleries, music colleges and orchestras and so on - were formed in this period, creating a new civic culture, and amounting to a risorgimento as organized as, if rather more understated and concealed by the perceived inheritances of tradition than, those simultaneously established in the new European nation-states.

This is a book which is imaginative, impressive and good to read. Not surprisingly in an analysis as innovative as this there are problems too. The choice of case studies doesn't actually substantiate the claims of the introductions, and is confined too closely to pre-existing academic objects of study (literature, music, politics). There could have been far more attention to the popular relations of England, less inscribed in the dominant cultural institutions. The lived, subjective and gendered forms of national identity are too often flattened, or given a rather sociological, mechanical interpretation which makes it difficult to understand how these subjectivities were reproduced on a scale so overbearing.[3] It would have been useful too if some of the more abstract themes which cross-cut the case studies could have been separately developed; given the influence of Gramsci on the editors, an analysis of the emergence of the new stratum of organic intellectuals is something crying out for further comment.

But the essays have done their job, definitively marking out a new cultural formation. The problem for the future is that in all probability there will appear any number of further case studies, relishing the minutiae of ever narrower excavations in which more empirical work will be deployed to reiterate the thesis elaborated in this book and elsewhere. Further introspective studies of, for example, the origins of academic English, reviewing once more the careers of Sir Henry Newbolt, Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, are not now required.[4] It would be a shame if the excitement of this collection were to be diverted down the more pedestrian byways of conventional academic historiography.

IMPERIALISM

The editors recognize and apologize for the absence of the imperial dimension: this is indeed a telling, symptomatic omission, articulating its own indictment which students of the national culture would do well to consider. It suggests a failure in the wider political and intellectual milieu, reproducing in the critiques

rather too traditional, familiar structures of inclusion and exclusion. For the modern symbolic unities of England can make no historical sense unless the imperial determinations are painstakingly reconstructed - above all, the dominating inescapable centrality of India for the self-image of the English.

There is, for example, the extraordinary combined and uneven cultural development of Englishness, producing a powerfully circumscribed masculine metropolitan centre of unparalleled privilege (Westminster, the City, Oxford and Cambridge), the adjacent 'domestic' regions quaindy known in middle-class parlance as the Home Counties, in the south-eastern corner of the country, more open to feminine negotiation (the country houses dominated by the fashionable hostesses, the suburbs, Ascot, Henley and so on, the secluded total institutions for the children: the famous public schools and the profusion of anonymous south coast prep schools) and then the outer satellites of Ottawa or Buenos Aires (which until very recently boasted its own branch of Harrods), Nairobi or Cairo (with its renowned monument to the empire, Shephard's Hotel) possessing a closer cultural proximity to the metropolitan centre than those other great imperial cities, Cardiff, Liverpool or Glasgow. This was a cultural map profoundly organized by racial, class and gender boundaries, constituting a complex series of internal and external colonial relations. Illustratively, one can think of Rab Butler (born in India in 1902) perceiving his biography as based on the 'tripos' of India, Cambridge and the British Conservative Party; or Agatha Christie (born in Torquay in 1890) coming out, as it used to be said, in Egypt - marginally easier on the family finances than London - which no doubt cultivated her later assiduous engagement with the discourses of orientalism.

The ordered communities of the white settlers created the imagined England - despite the real, often complete relations of estrangement - as home. From the 1870s and 1880s, when increasing employment could be found on a regular basis for the middle classes in the formal or informal colonies, the lived relations of the expatriates had a significant impact on the domestic culture. Their sons and daughters (George Orwell, Doris Lessing) could not experience actually existing England without a deep, disturbed shock, while their grandchildren wondered at the detritus washed up in the suburban semis - 'A crocodile's skull... on the wall like a symmetrical, dried-up sponge. A leopardskin rug complete with fangs in a pink wax mouth, with claws and tail, sprawled over the chintzes.'[5]

The settlers took with them all the confidence of the upholders of a new, classical civilization. The men had been steeped in the study of the classics.[6] The great colonial cities aspired to embody in their very architecture - the daunting marble mausoleums - a neo-classicism. New Delhi, built from scratch from 1913 to 1930 by one of the most assured imperialists of them all, Sir Edwin Lutyens, was to be the greatest. But Lutyens was busy, too, in Pretoria and Cape Town, designing the embassy in Washington, and creating Admiralty Arch and the Mall in the imperial capital. At the same time, for the retired imperial functionaries, he built the sprawling modern country houses in the Surrey and Sussex hills, popularized in the newly published *Country Life.* Little wonder, perhaps, that *A Passage to India* was conceived and written in Weybridge.

But this white civilization, in its architecture and literature and in its daily

round of club life, was built on the principle of a strict segregation from the native black and brown cultures. Apartheid can hardly be said to have been invented by a reactionary Dutch caste rather late in the history of the Dominion of South Africa when its origins are so violently etched into the culture of the British Empire.[7] For the ordered neo-classical landscaping was not only to proclaim the future of the empire but simultaneously to destroy the remnants of earlier indigenous cultures. The facade of imperial dignity systematically concealed the work of the Indian labourers - some 29,000 it seems - who built the viceregal home in New Delhi, carefully following Lutyens specifications; and in so doing these colonized workers destroyed and effaced their own pasts and their own cultures. Here the ideals incubated in the imperial vision of England began to converge with 'the dirty work of Empire at close quarters', with 'the wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos'.[8] The imperative to segregate imposed by polite culture could find expression in the architecture and in the splendour of the imperial city; it could, too, under different exigencies, impel a logic of retribution for which Amritsar is infamous.

THE DISINTEGRATION OF ENGLISH HEGEMONY

The pre-history of the reassertion of English authority in India lies with the insurrection of 1857 - reworked back into the popular memory of the white culture through a handful of startlingly simplistic reconstructive narratives. By the turn of the century inter-imperialist rivalries intensified; this was accompanied by an anxiety within the dominant classes which gave renewed coherence to the varied perceptions of the Orient - most of all the great fear, rarely spoken, that the epochal dominance of the white races was drawing to a close. The symbolic moment which triggered these latent anxieties most forcefully occurred with the Japanese victory over Russia in 1905. A distinguished Africanist declared: 'The news of the Japanese success was discussed in the souks of Morocco, the mosques of Egypt and the coffee-houses of Turkey, in Indian bazaars and African mud-houses. It was the first set-back of the Caucasian since the Neolithic period.'[9]

Of course, the historic denouement of 'the Caucasian' has not been half so dramatic as this. About the battle of 1905, 'the British felt almost as pleased . . . as the Japanese, for the victorious navy had been largely built and equipped at Barrow, Elswick and Sheffield; and most, if not all, of the Japanese officers had been trained or professionally advised by Englishmen'.[10] Yet the sentiment persisted: half a century later in notes for his opening address at the Bermuda Conference with Eisenhower, Harold Macmillan claimed: 'For about 2,500 years Whites have had their way. Now revolution: Asia/Africa.' The reconstruction of the post-war world did indeed see the locus of economic hegemony shift from the Adantic to the Pacific. 'We are apt to forget that there are as many Vietnamese in the world as there are British, that for every one of us [British, that is] there is one Filipino, one and a half times as many Nigerians, three times

as many Indonesians, fourteen times as many Indians, and nearly twenty times as many Chinese.'[11]

This must put the contemporary study of England in a historic perspective. Not only has the British Empire effectively terminated, but the hegemony of the English state as the constituent force in the United Kingdom has come under terrible strains in recent years. England begins to look increasingly synonymous with the south-east corner of the old nation-state. Declaring war on Egypt or Argentina (both former subject nations) in desperate bids to reassert national power appears to outside eyes as only vain, stupid and dangerous. Even the most powerful institution of the old empire, the financial houses of the City, now function primarily as a collective sub-branch of New York and Tokyo - and even this is determined as much as anything by London's position in the time zones between them - in the late capitalist system of 24-hour global banking. Given the shifts in this overall balance of power we can understand why it is now possible, with the constitutive cultural relations of England no longer taken for granted, for studies of Englishness to make their appearance.

THE PARADOXES OF MODERNITY

Yet a number of puzzles remain. The most intriguing has to do with the idea of modernity. While a number of cultural historians have in a rather conventional fashion been settling accounts with the inherited forms of national subjectivities, others have been orbiting different planets, investigating the various contemporary legacies of the cultural break inadequately represented by the name of modernism. The modernist aesthetic forced into being new ways of seeing, undermining traditionalist forms of representation, and in many of its earliest variants was militantly populist, desperate to detonate the conventional forms of cultural practice associated with high Victorianism. Above all, the incubus of perceived traditions could be blasted away by the shock of the new. The point of interest, in this context, is that the first, heroic phase of the modernist break coincided almost exactly with the reinvention of Englishness. Both processes occurred simultaneously. A kind of double vision ensues.

It is not sufficient to suggest that these two cultural shifts appear as simple antagonists. In England, certainly, literary modernism combined with many aspects of the more traditionalist imperatives of Englishness. Conrad, James and Eliot were all attracted to English culture because of its 'density' and order. The great intellectual organizer of English modernism in the 1920s was *Criterion*, funded and directed by Lady Rothermere and edited by Eliot in his spare time from the Foreign and Colonial desk at the head office of Lloyds Bank. Harold Acton delighted in instigating public readings of *The Waste Land* at Conservative Party fetes. Indeed in high cultural circles the modernist aesthetic was one important form through which the notion of Englishness was reasserted.[12]

On the other hand, while this process may have been rather intensified in England, it was not without parallels in the rest of continental Europe - as some of the intellectual currents of fascism were to show. England was not alone in witnessing both a reassertion of invented traditionalism and the advance of

modernism; but the idea of the *invention* of tradition suggests perhaps some common cultural features.

Much of the recent attraction for modernism or postmodernism has had less directly to do with high literary manifestations, and more with the lived forms inscribed within popular cultures - most of all, popular exuberance for the dynamic of constantly shifting fashions, the 'signs on the street' celebrated by Marshall Berman: the day-glo pink jeans striding dirough the South Bronx.[13]

In Britain the emergence of a popular modernism also coincides widi the deepening idea of English traditionalism. Cinema, radio, fashion and beauty contests, mass advertising, airplanes and automobiles, a profusion of daily papers, detective and science fiction, funfairs, Charlie Chaplin, skyscrapers - these belonged not only to Chicago or Manhattan, but provided the rhydims which more generally were to come to dominate city life. As Raymond Williams puts it, 'out of an experience of the cities came an experience of the future'.[14] Nor was London simply the city of imperial pomp: east and west were sharply segregated, creating a specific internal colonialism; and London too was also the most cosmopolitan of cities, constituted by a bricolage of cultures - as Baedeker noted at the turn of the century, the re were in London more Scots than in Aberdeen, more Irish than in Dublin, more Jews than in Palestine, more Roman Catholics than in Rome. The pattern was repeated as a feature of the urban experience. And the fast-developing seaside resorts, Blackpool especially, provided their own provincial modernist experience, defying the order of the suburbs all around. Similarly, the 1924 Empire Exhibition held at Wembley, devoted to an idea of Englishness fully conforming to those described by Colls and Dodd, gave its 17 million visitors all the thrills of a popular futurism.

There would still seem to be some truth in Marx's observation that 'in our days everything seems pregnant with its contrary'. Or as Berman comments, 'to be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction'.[15] The paradox here - not addressed in the book - is the possibility that the dynamic and recurring inventiveness of tradition may precisely have required a popular, carnivalesque projection of modernity and of the future in order to sustain the idea of the past.

NOTES

1 The quote is from *Mrs Dalloway.* The impact outside the national culture can be surprising. For Gabriel Garcia Marquez this single sentence 'transformed my sense of time' and was a trigger for *One Hundred Years of Solitude;* Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *The Fragrance ofGuava* (London: Verso, 1982), 48.

2 Most of all, E. J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); see, too, David Cannadine, 'The Merry Wives of Windsor', *New York Review of Books* (12 June 1986); and Martin Pugh, *The Tories and the People, 1880-1930* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).

3 For example, compare the essay here on 'The Englishwoman' as represented in the *Girl's Own Paper* and other media with Gill Frith, '"The time of your life": the meaning of the school story', in Carolyn Steedman, Cathy Urwin and Valerie Walkerdine (eds), *Language, Gender and Childhood* (London: Roudedge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

4 It is now nearly a decade since diis work was initiated, following the tracks of Renee

Balibar: Tony Davies, 'Education, ideology and literature', *Red Letters,* 7 (1978).

5 Elizabeth Wilson, *Mirror Writing* (London: Virago, 1982), 3.

6 This, too, had repercussions on the domestic national culture. When female homosexuality was debated in the House of Commons in 1921 Colonel Wedgwood assumed that Labour MPs, bereft of the insights acquired by a classical education, would be ignorant: 'I do not suppose that there are any members of the Labour Party who know in the least what is intended by the Clause'; Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and sexuality, 1880-1930* (London: Pandora, 1986), 115.

7 Robert Huttenback, 'No strangers within the gates. Attitudes and policies towards the non-white residents of the British Empire settlement', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History,* 2: 3 (1973); John Cell, 'Anglo-Indian medical theory and the origins of segregation in West Africa', *American Historical Review,* 91: 2 (1986).

8 George Orwell, *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters,* volume I (Harmondsworfh: Penguin, 1979), 266.

9 Bernard Porter, 'The Edwardians and their empire', in Donald Read (ed.), *Edwardian England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 134.

10 Richard Storry, *A History of Modem Japan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 141.

11 D. A. Low, *The Contraction of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 8.

12 See Patrick Parrinder, 'The strange necessity: The rejection of James Joyce in England, 1914-31', in Colin MacCabe (ed.), *New Perspectives on Joyce* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982).

13 Marshall Berman, 'The signs in the street', *New Left Review,* 144 (1984); and - the only intelligent discussion of Americanism in this context - Dick Hebdige, 'Towards a cartography of taste, 1935-62', *Block* 4 (1981); and Dick Hebdige, 'Object as image: The Italian scooter cycle', *Block* 5 (1981); and Iain Chambers, *Popular Culture: The metropolitan experience* (London: Methuen, 1986).

14 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Paladin, 1975), 327.

15 Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (London: Verso, 1983), 13. Not only Marx; Gramsci too - in his essays on 'The southern question' and 'Americanism and Fordism' - addresses these issues, having himself migrated from Sardinia to the Turin of Fiat and futurism. See Tom Nairn, 'Antonu *su gobbu',* in Anne Showstack Sassoon (ed.), *Approaches to Gramsci* (London: Writers & Readers, 1982).

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Michael O'Pray

RADICAL VISIONARIES: POWELL AND PRESSBURGER

Ian Christie, *Arrows of Desire,* London, Waterstone, 1985; 128 pp; £17.95.

The critical rejection of Michael Powell's film *Peeping Tom,* made in i960, almost ended his career. The scandal of a major British director being starved of funding for his film projects since that date, is matched by the scandal of critical indifference to his work and that of his partner Emeric Pressburger, at least until recent years. *Arrows of Desire* is in some ways, but not all, a consolidation of a collection of essays on Powell's and Pressburger's films edited by Ian Christie and published by the British Film Institute in 1978.[!] Informative and entertaining, the present book is aimed at a wider readership and, perhaps for that reason, is more forthright in its project. It may also be the case that the intervening years, and the shifts of focus in film culture which have taken place during them, have encouraged a new confidence in approach. In his preface, Christie states that he will 'avoid much of the technicality that has characterized recent "serious" writing on cinema', stressing instead the visual aspects of Powell's and Pressburger's work 'in place of the analytic austerity' of the BFI publication. More provocatively, he remarks on the 'gulf between critical and theoretical concerns' in the writing around the British cinema. Thus one feels that a commission to write a popular work on the two film-makers was conducive and welcome. Given the paucity of serious writing on Powell and Pressburger, and the merits of *Arrows of Desire,* the book will surely be the standard reference text for some time.

For Christie, Powell's and Pressburger's work is characterized by 'its audacity, its range and confidence' and he links it with the 'visionary tradition in British art'. Raymond Durgnat in his pioneering work in the 1960s on Powell and Pressburger had firmly placed them in the romantic tradition. Whilst not disagreeing with such a broad connection, Christie rests his interpretative judgements on a more precise lineage culled from Borges's book *Other Inquisitions.* Kipling, Chesterton, Stevenson, Wells, Shaw, Dickens, Bunyan and Blake are writers who constitute a largely ignored tradition characterized by 'the visionary, the grotesque and the polemical'. Christie had already set out this set of reference points in his introduction to the BFI publication, and one of the disappointments of the present volume is that this insight is not worked through more fully. (This is perhaps to criticize Christie for something which he never attempted, however, and which would not have been appropriate in a book set against substantial critical analysis.)

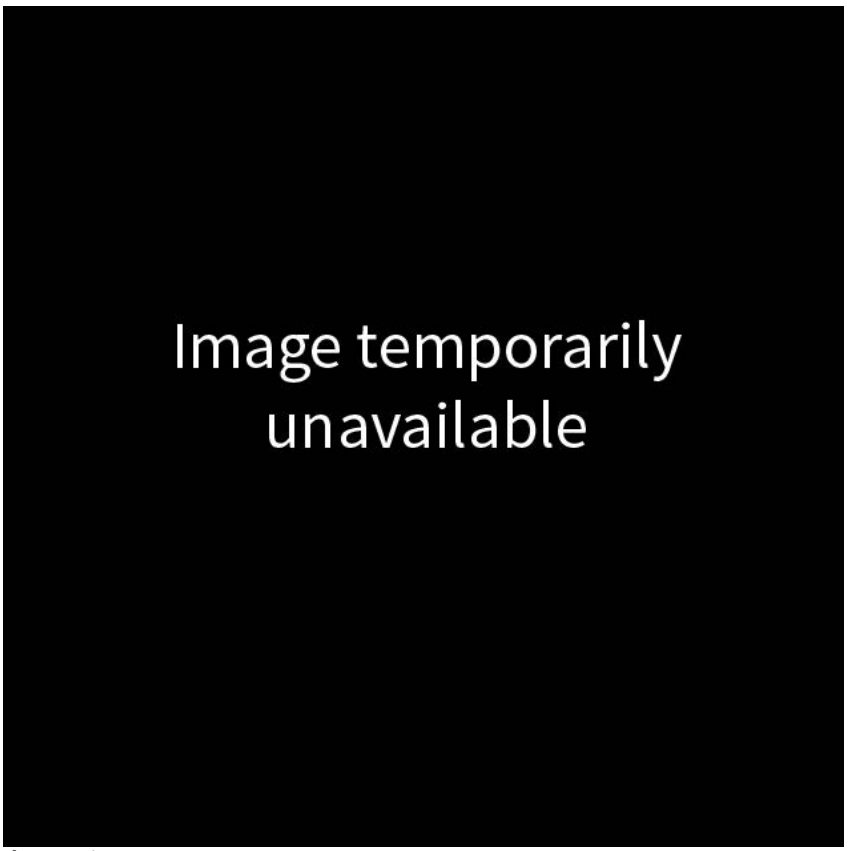
An exploration of Powell and Pressburger from this perspective would surely

not only resolve questions around the film-makers in question, but also ones central to the British film tradition as a whole. For example, as Christie suggests, it would counter the claims made for the realist tradition in film, establishing an 'other' strand in British film-making which has been repressed, to the extent that two major studies of recent years, *British Cinema History* and *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television*, barely mention the work of The Archers, Powell's and Pressburger's production company.[2] What Christie sees as Powell's and Pressburger's displaced position in British film culture is further evoked by his choice of cinematic comparisons and associations; Martin Scorsese writes the foreword and his final chapter discusses the films of Derek Jarman, Neil Jordan and Julien Temple (surely Ken Russell should have been there too). To some degree or other, these film-makers share a strong visual sense, often bordering on the excessive, a use of fantasy and an awkward radicalism (as opposed to oppositionalism).

For Christie, these virtues - no doubt vices for some - are not simply a critical foible on his part or some wayward sensibility on that of the film-makers. On the contrary, the book's Blakean title is a fitting one (and not only as a riposte to that other Blakean effort, *Chariots of Fire)* precisely because it evokes both Blake's art and the visionary and ruggedly democratic tradition of which it forms a part. The role of the visionary and the eccentric as a radical impulse in English culture is one that is little understood. It has received scant attention here compared with the French structuralists' obsessive recovery of their own eccentrics - de Sade, Baudelaire and Lautreamont. Of course, the left has always had a strong affiliation with the romantic movement - the latter being an important element in Marx's own work. The fantasy of utopianism has also guaranteed some concern with the imaginative in the cultural left's analyses but usually only to negate it for the science of socialism. The recent infatuation with a dry analytic film-making in this country - based more often than not on a distorting interpretation of Brecht, Vertov and Straub/Huillet and a fundamental indifference to Eisenstein - marks the unwillingness to acknowledge the necessity and power of fantasy as a mode of merging different levels of concern. It is implicit in Christie's book that the over-evaluation of the intellectual reveals its own version of utopianism, as if the mess and chaos of emotional and imaginative aspects of life can find no place in art. In part, *Arrows of Desire* rejects that prejudice. It grasps the potency of the imaginary, the bizarre and the exotic not only as an anti-realist ploy but as a strong instrument of cultural expression that need not evade important social and political matters.

What Christie is exposing in part is a tradition whose romanticism merges with nostalgia (a much-ignored emotion in our cultural analyses) and an exoticism and quasi-mysticism that have a complex relationship to the British Empire. Kipling is the key figure in such a view. Powell has declared his love for Kipling, and Christie describes their common traits - an 'innate interest' in 'how things work', an ability to perceive mystery in the apparently commonplace and an almost literal sense of 'the constant presence of history'. Brecht too had a high regard for Kipling, and the indifference of the cultural left to the latter's work is a further sign of its provincialism and, paradoxically perhaps, its philistinism.

Of course, one of the problems with any set of critical parameters when



Black Narcissus

applied to Powell and Pressburger is the very variety of their work. One has only to consider *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, Black Narcissus* and *Peeping Tom* with the added difficulty of the fact that Powell did not always work with his Hungarian partner, to recognize the strains any interpretation would suffer, if intended as a general one. However, Christie in an article on Pressburger succinctly summarizes the problem. He suggests that Powell's and Pressburger's significance lies in 'their commitment to a "total cinema" that is both national and personal. A conservative cinema in some sense no doubt, but one that is also critical and visionary. A cinema alien to Britain, yet deeply desired.' National, personal, conservative, critical, visionary, alien, desired - a set of concepts that implies no facile internal logic.

The desire for a total cinema is as old as cinema itself. Melies and Eisenstein in their anti-naturalism, their orchestration of and synchronization of the senses, and in the case of Eisenstein, of course, the integration of the national and the personal, survives in many forms, ranging from the New Romantic cinema of John Maybury and Cerith Wyn Evans, to Scorsese and Jarman and the mainstream work of Coppola and Spielberg. But the uniqueness of Powell and Pressburger rests in their eclecticism represented in particular in the mode

of fantasy, but not simply a subjective personal fantasy, rather one that is embedded in our culture and that depicts a certain class, one that mingles a hard-headed practicality with a taste for the exotic and mystic. It is perhaps a kind of 'lust of paradox' to use the expression that Swinburne aptly applied to Blake. It is also more a matter of a social class released from political struggle by a long parliamentary tradition in which the ruling class has been rarely challenged for power. It is a class bathed in the light of a fantasy encapsulated in Blimp, and which connects strongly with the potent mythology of T. E. Lawrence, and given its black humour in Waugh. It is the complexity of fantasies that is part of Edward Said's project in his book *Orientalism.* And the capacity for such fantasies to condense is nowhere more present than in *Black Narcissus* where a neurotic intensity of female sexuality becomes inseparable from the colonizing spirit. Christie notes the tendency to banish our visionary, exotic writers to the nursery. There is a sense in which the empire was the nursery of England, a place immersed in an 'otherness', a site and relationship with its own internal justification for an infantilism born of enormous power whose object was mesmeric, controllable and yet in essence always escaping that control, being as it was a dense nexus of imaginary projections and, of course, identification. The opium-smoking retired colonial officer saturated in the mysticism of the east and erotically captivated by its women, signals the opportunities in the empire for the merging of fantasy and reality that Powell and Pressburger so imaginatively explored.

Of course, the films cannot be reduced to such an understanding. *A Matter of Life and Death, Canterbury Tales, Peeping Tom, I Know Where I'm Going,* to name but a few, reveal a more complex story, one that owes more to English romanticism proper than the ideology of empire. Christie, once again, only hints at possible routes of explanation here, although it does fall into the notions of an eccentric tradition, a repressed tradition in this country. In Powell and Pressburger the awareness of tradition itself, a nostalgia for the past, brings to mind a remark by the arch-conservative himself, Roger Scruton:

> nostalgia for the past... is, like every other form of sentimentality, a way of standing back, a refusal to engage in the practice of rational life. It consigns its subject to inaction, and its condition is that of Dante's Limbo: without hope, living in desire.[3]

A few lines later, he remarks that 'there is no sound politics of antiquarianism'. Quite. Quoting Scruton is no mere caprice, but a way of provoking connections with a political situation in which the British right is exploring notions of nationhood, culture and sexuality in a way unheard of fifteen years ago. Christie's book not only suggests means of exploring the work of two major British film-makers but also points us in the direction of a reassessment of the priorities of writing about film within a wider cultural context, and of a cinema that has received barely any support from the orthodox film culture of this country. It becomes more and more apparent that a central failing of film-writing in this country, with a few notable exceptions, has been its puritanical rejection of anything that does not wear its politics on its sleeve. Instead it has embraced its own version of the social realist tradition in its misreadings of

Brecht, Soviet avant-gardeism and Godard, to mention only three of its key signifiers. Christie's book is then doubly important. It sketches out interpretative strategies for future study of Powell and Pressburger and, between the lines, it takes a stand against a blinkered orthodoxy within contemporary film culture. The binding of those two projects is the true strength of the book.

NOTES

1 Ian Christie, (ed.) *Powell, Pressburger and Others* (London: BFI, 1978).
2 James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds), *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1983); Geoff Hurd (ed.), *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television* (London: BFI, 1984).
3 Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 141-2.