



Reference Books

Victoria Rosner, editor
**THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
 THE BLOOMSBURY GROUP**
 256pp. Cambridge University Press.
 Paperback, £17.99 (US \$27.99).
 978 1 107 62341 5

It is over sixty years since John K. Johnstone published the first academic book on the Bloomsbury Group. He subtitled it *A study of E. M. Forster, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf and their circle*. Since then, a broader, more balanced view has emerged owing to the increased attention given to Bloomsbury's interest in the visual arts. This is reflected in the *Cambridge Companion*, edited by Victoria Rosner, which brings together essays offering many perspectives (some fresher than others) on topics ranging from Bloomsbury's attitudes to Empire to Virginia Woolf's book-binding. This last, by Helen Southworth, includes the wonderful discovery that Woolf's training in this art can be linked back to Richard Cobden-Sanderson. Bloomsbury's modernism, it now seems, has a solid Arts and Crafts connection.

The *Companion's* rich diversity of thought and approach is undeniably stimulating. But Bloomsbury's multiple membership, the vast industry that surrounds it, the repeated and now enshrined incorrect "facts", make it difficult for even the most fastidious scholar to escape errors. The first sentence of Rosner's breezy introduction, for example, mentions that Bloomsbury artists opened a "furniture shop". This is a misnomer, for though items were sold there and commissions accepted, it was primarily a place for experimentation with new decorative ideas, stimulated by French Post-Impressionism. Hence its name – the Omega Workshops. Rosner states that furniture was made at the Omega. This was not so. Roger Fry, the chief mover behind this venture, handed over designs for chairs or marquetry to outside craftsmen. Rosner claims that Fry wanted the Omega-applied decoration to be hastily executed and deliberately underdone. This again is inaccurate: what Fry hoped the Omega aesthetic would imitate was the freshness, immediacy and human sensibility associated with primitive or peasant art, in opposition to the deadness and over-elaboration of machine finish. Equally skewed are Rosner's definitions of *To the Lighthouse* as "a family saga" and *A Room of One's Own* as "a landmark analysis of woman's authorship".

Among the excellent contributions is an essay by Katherine Mullin uncovering the complex and sometimes covert reactions within Bloomsbury to their Victorian inheritance – initially repudiated, then accommodated and eventually slyly celebrated. Christopher Reed's investigation into Bloomsbury's oblique radicalism with regard



A mural, c. 1935, in the Potala Palace, Lhasa, showing scenes of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's visit to Beijing, in 1908; from *A Historical Atlas of Tibet* by Karl E. Ryavec (216pp. University of Chicago Press. £31.50. \$45. 978 0 226 24394 8)

to conventional and traditional sexual behaviour also impresses, as does his explanation as to why Lytton Strachey's conversation had such a liberating effect, particularly on women. There is much of value in Christine Froula's "War, Peace and Internationalism", in Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina's "Bloomsbury and Empire", and in Laura Marcus's clarification of the group's aesthetics, though neither editor nor copy-editor corrected Marcus's misspelling of the name of one central figure, Desmond MacCarthy. Among other infelicities are the errors which damage the Woolf quotation in footnote 12 on page 159. Mary Ann Caws, who rightly praises Bloomsbury's burgeoning creativity and is a genial enthusiast, nevertheless wins a booby prize for the least rigour and precision.

FRANCES SPALDING

Film

Sylvie Lindeperg
"NIGHT AND FOG"

A film in history
 Translated by Tom Mes
 363pp. University of Minnesota Press. £20.50
 (US \$27.50).
 978 0 8166 7992 8

Sylvie Lindeperg's highly original study of the film *Night and Fog* (1955) is an example of Walter Benjamin's exhortation that the historian "discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event", in order to "grasp the construction of history". Beginning with an exploration of the genesis of Alain Resnais's groundbreaking film about life in the camps and the aftermath,

Lindeperg goes on to analyse its reception and the ways in which it has been re-interpreted as historical understanding of the camps has itself evolved. The book can be read as an index of the evolution of French memory of the deportation and the Occupation.

Night and Fog played an important role in the construction of a collective memory in France of the Occupation and the concentration camps, as well as giving Resnais his first serious recognition as a director. As Jean-Michel Frodon notes in his foreword to the book, it represented "a turning point in the intellectual, political, and moral process that sought to articulate, without confounding them, the horrors of the Nazi past".

The first section of the book looks at the process by which Resnais was commissioned to make the film, and traces the gradual understanding of the dimensions of the Holocaust. Lindeperg considers the film as a "palimpsest", and this is evident in her close analysis of the director's formal decisions, including the use of both colour and black-and-white film as well as Hanns Eisler's soundtrack and Jean Cayrol's text. She is particularly sensitive to the way in which documentary and fiction rub up against each other as archive and contemporary footage are interwoven.

In the second part of the book, Lindeperg examines the film's afterlife, from the work of censors in France and Germany to the film's absurd treatment at the hands of American television executives and the extraordinary diplomatic interventions that prevented it from being shown in competition at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival. Lindeperg's perceptive and lucid narrative (first published in French and now available in Tom Mes's competent, if

occasionally flawed, translation) is illuminated with personal observations and written with authority as well as humility. It pays eloquent tribute to both the historical and the cinematographic significance of one of the great post-war documentaries.

NATASHA LEHRER

Essays

Mark Ford
THIS DIALOGUE OF ONE
 Essays on poets from John Donne to
 Joan Murray
 250pp. Eyewear. £18.99.
 978 1 908998 27 9

Thirteen poets, from the well known (John Donne, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, W. H. Auden) to the unloved or overlooked (James Thomson, Samuel Greenberg, A. S. J. Tessimond, Joan Murray), come brilliantly to life in *This Dialogue of One*, a collection of Mark Ford's essays. The author's astute close reading, sharp biographical observations, and gift for the perfectly judged quotation render even the most familiar of subjects newly compelling, while the unfamiliar are vividly drawn.

Ford presents Donne, for example, in the midst of an "ongoing duel with death", enacting "the drama of leave-taking" that holds such fascination for him by commissioning a "life-sized picture of his own body arrayed in the winding sheet that he would shortly be needing". The "histrionic" Baudelaire struggles with "finding ways, consciously or unconsciously, of registering the chaos of impossibilities through which he had to make his way". The "metaphysically destitute" James Thomson ("B. V."), whose London was "a nocturnal urban wilderness inhabited only by ghosts and damaged, desperate exiles", is imagined sitting across from Rimbaud in the British Library, "both furiously scribbling away at their nightmarish long poems". Alfred Jarry, creator of Père Ubu – "a sort of ur-Homer Simpson rampaging through a mind-boggling Monty Pythonesque narrative" – is posited as "Rimbaud's only true rival for the accolade of the most terrible of the many *enfants terribles* thrown up by French literature".

The essays (and their subjects) speak subtly to each other. Pound's "denunciations of America as a cultural desert" recall Walt Whitman's "analysis of America's cultural health", while Murray's reading habits (Auden and Wallace Stevens) "anticipate the processes that shaped the development of Ashbery". Greenberg's "act of intrepidly adventuring into both a foreign language and a new ideology" echoes Pound's "delight in penetrating into regions beyond the official itinerary". Meanwhile, the visions of London that punctuate the work of Thomson, Eliot and Murray reverberate throughout the text.

Like poetry, to borrow from Auden, literary criticism "cannot be 'done' like Venice / or abridged like Tolstoy, but stubbornly still insists upon / being read or ignored". If all critics expressed their "readily passion" in the way Ford does, the genre would not find itself ignored. Ford's writing combines an Eliotic intelligence with all the perceptiveness of Ashbery. Best of all, like Randall Jarrell (the subject of one of the essays in the collection), he has "great taste in poetry, and an infectious enthusiasm when he writes or talks about it".

RONA CRAN