Photography

Judith Aronson LIKENESSES

With the sitters writing about one another 152pp. Lintott. Paperback, £19.95. 978 1 857 54994 2

Tere is an unamused Geoffrey Hill, scis-I sored together in a wide-screen rectangle with his wife Alice Goodman, her feet up by his shoulder. Here is the cartoonist Nick Garland with his writer son Alex, crashed out together on a sofa with a resentful, desperate air, as if they're stuck in the departure lounge at Stansted. Glimpsed behind a great floe of books edging him out of his Cambridge rooms is the "philosopher and Wagnerian" Michael Tanner. As a cast of characters for a suite of grainy, monochrome photographs, these subjects do well enough. They may not be pretty, but they have proverbially lived-in faces; one senses a lot going on behind them. The pictures, taken on assignment for the Sunday Telegraph, mostly, during the 1980s and 90s, are varied in composition but remarkably consistent in tone.

Judith Aronson has enhanced the project's sense of organization and consistency by soliciting written captions from the sitters, some commenting on their pictured neighbours, some on the subjects of other commissions whom they happen to know. The device lends a Schnitzleresque circularity. But while you're meant to think of the glances and asides caught in the photographs, the small reflections of intimacy and partnership in the adversity of Aronson's lens, you also occasionally feel you're trapped in some hellish North London dinner party.

These sitters are healthy specimens of the subspecies homo intellectualis, though Aronson's canon feels a little dated (as does her high-grain technique: fast film, as if a legion of elves had emerged from some Ruritanian coal mine and pattered over the pictures in the night; inexact cropping to reveal the blackness of the contact sheet; wilful asymmetry). The photographs I liked best are those with a whiff of misrule, as when a pre-fatwa Salman Rushdie takes up the bongos, or when the forensic pathologist and memoirist Keith Simpson careers around his garden on a tricycle. Otherwise what you see is a series of people you'd feel stimulated and honoured to know (and who, you sense, wouldn't mind you feeling that way) but wouldn't especially want to live with: a good working definition of the word "writer", maybe.

KEITH MILLER

Film

Elza Adamowicz "UN CHIEN ANDALOU" 109pp. I. B. Tauris. Paperback, £12.99. 978 1 84885 056 9

The slit-eye shot in Un Chien andalou is a I great moment in the history of cinema. This is the scene that invariably caused Charlie Chaplin's Chinese projectionist to fall unconscious with a thud each time the actor treated guests at his Hollywood residence to a private viewing of the infamous Surrealist short film. But this is also undoubtedly the single most memorable onslaught on the cinematic gaze since the advent of the cinemato-

graph, a powerful gesture of defiance that made Luis Buñuel famous and launched his lifelong association with the Surrealists.

It may even have helped to launch his transatlantic career, just as the scandal provoked by the premiere of L'Age d'or (initially conceived as a remake of Un Chien andalou) was making headlines and attracting the attention of American producers. However, this ogy and aesthetics on the making of Un a glorious rapport. Chien andalou. She cites Fritz Lang's possfervent declarations of admiration for Lang deserved seriousness devoid of solemnity. in his memoirs (My Last Sigh). The comparative analysis of Buñuel's and Méliès's use of dissolves and camera angles for theatrical effect or startling "transformation shots" draws attention to the importance of turn-of--the-century techniques. Despite a certain degree of repetition (in the return to Surrealist iconography), the final chapter devoted to the film's contexts provides many thoughtprovoking comments on Buñuel's parodic take on 1920s cinema (including some cult films for the Surrealists such as Buster Keaton's The Paleface and Sherlock Junior).

RAMONA FOTIADE

Peter William Evans "TOP HAT" 144pp. Wiley-Blackwell. Paperback, £13.99. 978 1 4051 8830 2

Top Hat, directed by Mark Sandrich and with a score by Irving Berlin, was the definitive film of the series starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, produced by RKO in the 1930s. Its considerable claims to Art and its resonant magic are the dual focus of this insightful and highly readable study by Peter William Evans.

Evans devotes a chapter each to the "meanings" of the principal stars. He casts Astaire in the mould of the Baudelairean dandy, yet recognizes his essential Americanness as well as the classlessness and modernity of his brand of knight errantry. But he overemphasizes the initial imperviousness of the Astaire unorthodox magnetism, which James Agate discerned in the pre-Hollywood Astaire - a virility based on vulnerability, a personality, at once knowing and guileless, that irresistibly combined ardent gallantry, restrained yearning, self-deprecation and self-confidence. Evans is better in his assessment of Rogers's appealing blend of fragility and toughness.

There are two oft-quoted adages about Astaire and Rogers: "Fred gave Ginger class and Ginger gave Fred sex" and "Ginger Rog-

gender equality the pair represented. He dem- of a separate nation-state in south India. onstrates how, through the crisp exchange of badinage and eloquent dance steps, they maker Buñuel in the first part of her study, and Rogers conversing through dance, banter-Elza Adamowicz rightly queries in subse- ing and sparring their way – with a seemingly mises that underpin India's complex reality. quent chapters the impact of Surrealist ideol- improvisatory wit - towards the discovery of

The volume has minor blemishes in the ible influence on the tension between the conform of slight misquotations and the odd ventional storytelling elements in Buñuel's factual error, but it is, on the whole, a wellfilm and the striking lyrical and non-narrative researched and thoughtful appraisal. Evans passages. More could have been made of this approaches this most celebratory of musical unusual parallel, especially given Buñuel's comedies in celebratory mode but also with a

KATHLEEN RILEY

History

Ramachandra Guha, editor MAKERS OF MODERN INDIA 500pp. Belknap Press. £25.95 (US \$35). 978 0 674 05246 8

India has successfully resisted the scepticomplex religious and regional diversity, caste Guha, as editor of this anthology, sets out to show "how this unnatural nation and unlikely democracy was argued into existence".

India has been fortunate in the abundance of thinkers who wrote extensively, and often evocatively, on the fundamental issues raised by the task of forging a modern nation from a severely fragmented and backward colony. Guha presents well-chosen excerpts, expertly contextualized by insightful introductions, classes B. R. Ambedkar and the man Gandhi ment rather than an analysis. called his conscience-keeper, C. Rajagopala-

ers did everything Fred Astaire did, but back- chari. Some others require explication, in wards and in high heels". In the course of his particular the remote figures of an early femiinvestigation, taking each of the film's musi-nist, Tarabai Shinde, and a late modernizing cal numbers in turn, Evans provides a far Muslim, Hamid Dalwai, as well as Muhammore nuanced and accurate reading of the mad Ali Jinnah who fought for the creation of Astaire-Rogers dynamic and of the notion of Pakistan and E. V. Ramaswami, a champion

Guha's self-imposed rule of choosing only philosopher-doers enables him to justify his critical reassessment does not so much establish themselves on an equal "footing", choices with consistency and also his omisemphasize its Surrealist credentials as and how it is through the medium of dance sions, in particular the iconic Subhas Chandra attempt to situate its disconcerting narrative that the permutations and progress of their Bose and the iron-handed integrator and editing style in the context of evolving relationship (independence, rivalry, perfect of 500-plus princedoms into independent directorial practices from Georges Méliès complementariness) are most clearly defined. India, Vallabbhai Patel. Makers of Modern and Louis Feuillade to the French Impression- Especially strong is Evans's appreciation of India is not meant to be close-ended, but it ist avant-garde school of the 1920s. While "Isn't This a Lovely Day", a routine that best effectively brings together the great arguers, concentrating on the close collaboration exemplifies the sophistication of Top Hat's fiercely independent in thought and action, between Salvador Dalí and the aspiring film- sexual politics and in which we see Astaire from whose disputatious but educated debate emerged the political traditions and compro-

NAVTEJ SARNA

David Pryce-Jones TREASON OF THE HEART From Thomas Paine to Kim Philby 224pp. Encounter Books. £17.99. 978 1 59403 528 9

"Dy and large, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants", as E. H. Carr wrote. David Pryce-Jones's book is, he tells us, "about British people who have taken up foreign causes", but within a few sentences this becomes the "treason" of "radicals", "indifferent to the implicit violence and killing" of the causes they supported. What follows is a bizarre series of mini-biographies in which half-truths and guilt by association . combine to present a taxonomy of conserva-Leism that accompanied its birth. Despite tive score-settling through the modern age. Everyone who has ever supported a failed and gender disparity, the debilitating burden cause which originated overseas is in Pryceof mass poverty, illiteracy and a violent parti- Jones's litany of the damned. J. B. Priestley? tion, it has survived, and thrived, as a billion- He may have helped to motivate the British strong working democracy. The edifice may people in the fight against Hitler, but to be raucous, imperfect and still unfinished, but Pryce-Jones, he was "easily manipulated". no one can deny the uniqueness of its exist- Christopher Hill? A hugely influential ence. Even as he identifies five revolutions - scholar never afraid to admit that he had national, industrial, urban, democratic and made political mistakes? No, "a closet Stalinsocial – historically separated by decades else- ist". Anyone who doubts the honesty and sinwhere, that are still unfolding simultaneously cerity of the West is a fellow traveller, and in this monumental work-in-progress, India's their words are carefully selected, taken out eminent political historian, Ramachandra of context and used against them mercilessly. For example, the very fact that at the end of his life Thomas Paine was housed in a property confiscated by the United States government from a loyalist is enough to justify Pryce-Jones to comment that "war-profiteering was a consummation of Paine's vaunted pursuit of liberty".

The book insults those such as Emily Hobhouse (who apparently "took advantage of her privileged position to pester politifrom the writings and speeches of nineteen cians") and Malcolm MacColl, who spoke persona and fails to penetrate the secret of his such thinker-activists who reflected, often in out against injustice, by equating them with conflict with each other, on the critical dilem- Nazi sympathizers such as Julian Amery and mas of their time: colonialism, religion, lan- Lord Haw-Haw. Pryce-Jones's world is a guage, caste and Untouchability, the status of Manichaean one. Any suggestion that foreign women, grass-roots governance, electoral causes may have inadvertently contributed to systems, regional discord and India's engage- the enrichment of the British polity is not to ment with the world. Most of the "makers" be entertained. The influence of, for example, pick themselves: Rammohan Roy, Rabind- the ideas of the Enlightenment, of Rousseau ranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal or Montesquieu in reforming the corrupt Nehru, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna clientocracy of Georgian Britain, is simply Gokhale, the champion of the oppressed ignored in a book that resembles an indict-

IAN CAWOOD