

parked her children with their grandmother. Eventually she found the love of her life, the sculptor Norman Mommens, five years her junior, and quietly escaped with him to Greece and Italy, marrying him only in 1994, thirty years after they first met.

The women Cooke writes about lived unorthodox but in some ways very modern lives – apart from the secrecy. One chapter is about three women, Nancy Spain, Joan Werner Laurie and Sheila Van Damm, living together in a lesbian relationship. Tragically, two of them were killed in 1964 when their light aircraft crashed, leaving two boys orphaned who thought they were brothers. The son of Nancy had been brought up as the son of Joan since Joan, having been previously married, appeared a more acceptable mother. The boys had never been told that they were unrelated.

This book is wonderfully evocative of the whole decade. I was wondering when the Teasmade, that hideous bedside object, would make an appearance, and there it

is, owned by J B Priestley but annoyingly broken. The story of his adulterous affair with Jacquetta Hawkes, archaeologist and writer, was deeply shocking at the time; her divorce from her first husband, Christopher, who had behaved so generously until then, was painful and unpleasant.

Cooke's writing sparkles; it is fresh and original and has great insight. And it is full of three- or even one-word sentences. Beware. This may annoy. But I loved it. I found Cooke's approach refreshingly honest, especially when she pauses to ask, 'What do I think?' or 'Is this right?' When she writes about the architect Alison Smithson, she states fittingly, 'Brutalism. What a word.' One of Smithson's best-known achievements is the controversial 'brutalist' Robin Hood Gardens in east London, where, after many attempts to get the abandoned council estate listed, demolition began earlier this year. Smithson, too, was both eccentrically bohemian and domestic, never stopping work when she had children, who just

became part of the enterprise.

Cooke insists that the essays stand alone and can be read out of order. But, like the author, I left Rose Heilbron QC, the first woman to sit at the Old Bailey, to the end. Heilbron arguably achieved the most. But in some ways this is the least satisfactory chapter because there appears to have been no inner conflict, just hard work and one successful case after another. Her home life was, as far as this essay reveals, calm. She had a supportive GP husband, Nat Burstein, and one daughter, Hilary Heilbron, who has followed in her mother's legal footsteps and chosen her mother's surname. She succeeded partly thanks to her plentiful staff and a lack of anxiety. 'One of the great upsides of being the first', writes Rachel Cooke, 'was that guilt, as it pertained to working women, had not yet been invented.' If this was really the case, perhaps the Fifties weren't so bad after all. *To order this book for £15.19, see the Literary Review Bookshop on page 10*

JONATHAN KEATES

It's Raining Frogs

A History of the French in London: Liberty, Equality, Opportunity

Edited by Debra Kelly & Martyn Cornick.

(Institute of Historical Research 488pp £40)

'When I consider this great city in its several quarters or divisions,' wrote Joseph Addison in 1712, 'I look upon it as an aggregate of various nations distinguished from each other by their respective customs, manners and interests.' Three centuries later the French 'nation' has become so numerous that London is now effectively France's sixth biggest city, with over 300,000 French citizens. French magazines routinely keep style-conscious readers up to date with photoshoots and articles on *le look londonien*, while the irresistible creep of *franglais*, that linguistic equivalent of Japanese knotweed, has made the term 'so-British' (pronounced *à la française*) an ironic seal of approval.

England (not Britain – the French love the Scots and the Irish) is France's archetypal Other. A nation profoundly loathed and despised, she is nevertheless a nurse

worth keeping hold of, an abiding sanctuary at those historical moments, not infrequent, when what Mr Micawber called 'our lively neighbour the Gaul' loses the plot. *A History of the French in London* gathers together the expatriate community's diverse perspectives over four hundred years, from Henry VIII's Hampton Court kitchen, ruled by 'the French yeoman cook for the king's mouth', to modern *Londres supercool*, its Elephant and Castle tower blocks tagged with French graffiti, its Spitalfields streets vibrant with the very same language spoken by the Huguenot weavers who first walked their pavements.

The so-called quiet conquest of London by French Protestants, following Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, gave us the word 'refugee', vastly improved our furniture, textiles, watches and spectacles, brought new dishes to our tables and, in the person of the great Sir

John Houblon, whose periwigged head used to adorn the £50 note, helped to found the Bank of England. In Bloomsbury Huguenot craftsmen had already raised a Parisian *hôtel particulier* of unparalleled splendour for the Frenchified Ralph Montagu. With ceilings and staircases frescoed by Charles de Lafosse, hot from Versailles, cabinets decked with 'flower-pieces' by Jean-Baptiste Monnoyer, marquetry bureaux with ebony mountings, and beds hung with crimson and gold damask, Montagu House was *World of Interiors avant la lettre*.

Sophistications of another sort crossed the Channel a century later with the émigrés fleeing the Reign of Terror. 'They are clever beings, those French ... always playing fools' tricks, like so many monkeys,' says bluff old *rosbif* Mr Riley, sizing up the fugitive heroine of Fanny Burney's 1814 novel *The Wanderer*, 'yet always lighting right upon their feet like so many cats.' Edmund Burke, opening a school for refugee children, was somewhat more charitable: 'Distress and famine have worn them down, so that they can be objects of envy only to a lecturer in anatomy.' They needed to be resourceful, growing accustomed 'to thinking of English money as their legitimate prey by any

means'. A marquis, 'slim, long and pale, who seemed so at home with his Terpsichorean vocation that one could hardly fancy him fit for any other', taught dancing to Mary Russell Mitford; the Comte and Comtesse de Guerchy set up a haberdashery business; and the Duc d'Aiguillon was reduced to copying scores at Covent Garden Theatre.

But goodness how dull London was, for all its cosy prosperity, compared to the *esprit* and *éclat* of Paris before Madame Defarge got going with her knitting needles. No intelligent French man or woman comfortably accepted the mysterious English custom of separating the sexes after dinner. Male Londoners' obsession with getting drunk every evening was blamed for the withdrawal of a civilising female influence at the very hour when, across the Channel, it traditionally sweetened life. 'Conversation in England', complained a contributor to an émigré newspaper, 'has not that grace, that finesse that the presence of women necessarily inspires.'

As for that dire institution *le dimanche anglais*, with its shuttered shops and annihilating silence, how could any rational being survive it? By no special irony, the Second

Empire socialists and communists forming the next major emigrant invasion encountered precisely the same problem. Russian exile Alexander Herzen mocked their inability to resign themselves to 'the "slavery" of restaurants being closed on Sundays, and the people being *bored to the glory of God*, though the whole of France is bored to the glory of Bonaparte for seven days in the week'.

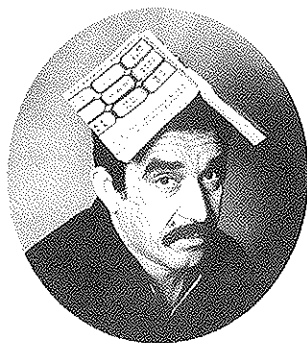
London, in all its sublime indifference, remained untroubled, later in the 19th century, by the simultaneous presence of Parisian anarchist cells and the courts in exile of the three different dynasties laying claim to the French throne. On the subject of the former, an excellent essay by Constance Bantman paints an intriguingly ambiguous picture of what *The Times* called 'London's dovecote of anarchists', harassed by police spies, detesting English hypocrisy and social inequality, yet grateful for a garret in Islington or Fitzrovia. Philip Mansel, typically alive to the *splendeurs et misères* of Bourbons and Bonapartists forced to cool their heels in suburban Twickenham or Chislehurst, rightly concludes that the experience made them more realistic about contemporary France than the government in Paris.

While in England the pretenders, as Mansel points out, enjoyed a wider following than their distinguished successor General de Gaulle. The inextinguishable romance of Free France in London is entwined with Resistance myth-history. Valuable work is carried out here by Martyn Cornick, focusing on the mobilisation of London's French cultural community, aided by the BBC, in the cause of sacred freedoms. Debra Kelly, meanwhile, furnishes a fascinating statistical profile of Free France – largely right wing, young, urban and university-educated – and maps its London territory from the consulate in Bedford Square to Prunier's restaurant in St James's.

When, as seems possible, Britain swallows the go-it-alone snake oil of UKIP, will London's 21st-century mini-France – inspired, like its ancestors, by the city as a place of refuge, liberty and opportunity – simply head for home? For me at least, born in Neuilly-sur-Seine, this would be a profound cultural tragedy. So many mon-keys playing fools' tricks the lively Gauls may occasionally appear, but as this massively rewarding study implies, we should feel pretty miserable without them. □

PRIZE CROSSWORD

Portrait of the Writer Literary Lives in Focus



Thames & Hudson

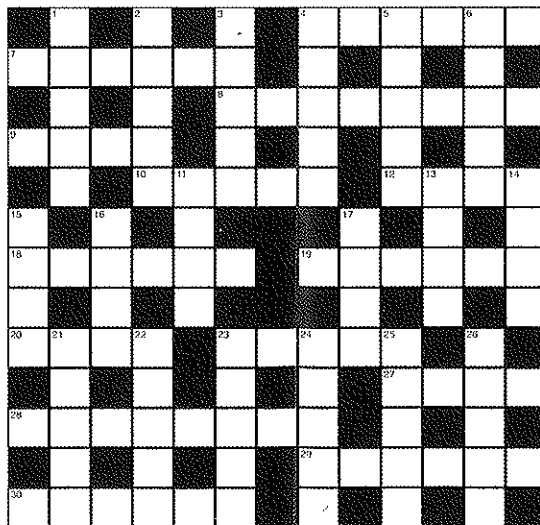


Thames & Hudson

This month, Thames & Hudson generously sponsors the prize crossword with five copies of *Portrait of the Writer: Literary Lives in Focus*. This photographic journey is a collection of striking, unusual images of 250 twentieth-century writers immortalised by renowned photographers in remarkable poses. Send your entries to 44 Lexington Street, London, W1F 0LW by 19 November.

October's winners, who will each receive a copy of Simon Gray's *The Complete Smoking Diaries*, are: Karen Carpenter in Maidstone, Michael Stuart Green in Wester Ross, James Greene in Isleworth, D A Prince in Kirby Muxloe, and Amy Tullett in Portsmouth.

Solution to the October puzzle – ACROSS: 1 Thomas, 4 Charon, 9 Coleridge, 10 Lycra, 11 Dada, 12 Rabbi, 14 Brace, 15 Baron, 17 Rifle, 19 Gigi, 21 Throw, 23 Incognito, 24 Ernest, 25 Gerald. DOWN: 1 Taylor, 2 Otic, 3 Arcadian, 5 Hero, 6 Red dwarf, 7 Needle, 8 Blade, 13 Barbican, 14 Baritone, 15 Betide, 16 Mimic, 18 Edward, 20 Ages, 22 Raga.



ACROSS

- 4 Mark of shame of one inhabiting dump with mother (6)
- 7 Potassium carbonate reserves kept in luxurious surroundings (6)
- 8 Union's hanky-panky a non-starter (8)
- 9 Thus graduate describes hallucinogenic drug in *Brave New World* (4)
- 10 African mountains in cartography collection (5)
- 12 Only description of fictional ranger (4)
- 18 Sparkling wine makes us merry (6)
- 19 Carroll heroine almost accepted by company in cotton cloth (6)
- 20 Reveal gambler's giveaway (4)
- 23 Guiding principle providing low cover for non-drinker (5)
- 27 Fuel for merry monarch, say? (4)
- 28 Obscure wife's opera? (8)
- 29 Look into phony greeting (6)
- 30 Say, bay obscuring a lake in Irish town (6)

DOWN

- 1 Athenian statesman quickly left inside (5)
- 2 Mostly rational drivers in capital (5)
- 3 Stole from Irish playwright at length (5)
- 4 Sails away with Paul's New Testament companion (5)
- 5 Altogether exhausted when switching components (2,3)
- 6 Wine-growing region's company in island (5)
- 11 Ring road charge (4)
- 13 Old verse I'd linked with *Metamorphoses* poet (4)
- 14 Tender about sexual desire (4)
- 15 An objection to border (4)
- 16 Sailor the Spanish identified as Tasman (4)
- 17 Vehicle taken up to market (4)
- 21 Mistake concealed by terrorist (5)
- 22 Left 16's marker (5)
- 23 Last part of golden mile confused author (5)
- 24 Part of breakfast giving us good health, say (5)
- 25 Old church provided an abundance (5)
- 26 Vessel capsized in 25 (5)