

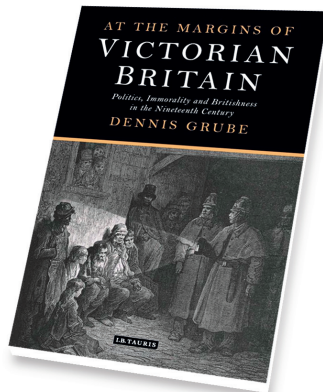
REVIEWS

such a visitor – the only Briton, only woman and only non-diplomat to have visited them. Durham stimulated curiosity and was honoured with feasts and speeches. The peasants believed she was there for a special purpose – to help them. Travelling in 1910 from Egypt to the Balkans, she wrote: 'I had no idea I was so notorious, but it seems all the English colony want to meet me.' The Albanian peasants believed her to be *kraljica*, a queen of the insurgents.

During the Balkan Wars she worked tirelessly for the Red Cross, providing essential relief to the starving masses of refugees – ripping up sheets to make shirts and smocks, handing out maize, bashing out leather shoes and providing quinine for malaria sufferers.

Occasionally Durham's character becomes slightly submerged in Tanner's exemplary drawing of the political complexities, but this is a revealing account of an amazing woman at a seethingly dangerous time.

Julie Peakman



At the Margins of Victorian Britain Politics, Immorality and Britishness in the Nineteenth Century

Dennis Grube

I.B. Tauris 224pp £59.50

LIONEL DE ROTHSCHILD won the City of London seat in the 1847 general election. Because Rothschild was Jewish he was unable to swear the usual oath and thus take his seat. In 1858,

after years of opposition and repeated re-election, a compromise finally allowed him into Parliament. Rainald Knightley, a Conservative opponent, complained that 'a foreign nobleman came to that table as a representative of the City of London'. While Rothschild used an Austrian title (as Baron de Rothschild), he had been born in London and raised in England. Yet his opponents sought to deny his British identity.

By the end of the 19th century, moral judgements, rather than religion, become the basis for identifying outsiders ... Grube provides an insightful reconsideration of the formation and reformation of British identity

Dennis Grube focuses on the British political elite's efforts to define Britishness by identifying the 'others' against which British identity stood. Forms of collective identity often rely on this kind of exclusion. As the notion of Britishness developed in the 18th century, its chief antagonists were identified by religion. Catholics provided a foil against which the Protestant nation could define itself. Grube traces the evolution of definitions of the non-British 'other' through the 19th century, detecting a 'shift from a concentration on the use of religion as a source of national unity to the use of morality as the stronger binding force'. A number of well-known incidents in Victorian England appear in a new light through the lens of defining Britishness and the 'other'.

Grube argues that, as the non-British 'others' shifted from those defined by religion to groups identified as morally unacceptable, some former outsiders won

access to Britishness. Jews, it was initially said, could never be truly British and for Catholics, Grube argues, 'tolerance came slowly but relentlessly'. The atheist Charles Bradlaugh also faced exclusion from Parliament until 1885, though he was first elected in 1880. Catholics, Jews and atheists all moved into the British nation, as religious difference no longer defined the boundaries of Britishness.

By the end of the 19th century, Grube claims, moral judgments became the basis for identifying outsiders. The Irish met continued barriers to inclusion due to a perceived link to criminality and immorality. Coercion laws operated in Ireland on principles that were unacceptable within Britain, enforcing the identification of the Irish as 'other'. British politicians, policing patterns and the press all propagated notions of Irish criminality that reinforced the exclusion of Irish immigrants from the nation. In addition, the late-century trial of Oscar Wilde and debates over Contagious Diseases Acts reveal the use of moral condemnation of homosexuals and prostitutes to define them as beyond the boundaries of the nation.

Grube highlights the arguments of politicians and the press in tracing the developing use of morality, rather than religion, as the basis for constructing British identity. However questions remain. How far did these establishment views affect popular perceptions of outsiders and of Britishness? Did most British men and women concur in the marginalisation of prostitutes or the gradual acceptance of Catholics, Jews and atheists into the nation? Despite slowly gaining access to Britishness, there remained wide and deep-seated hostility toward these groups.

These issues aside, the book provides an insightful reconsideration of well-known events and invites readers to consider the use of exclusion in the formation and reformation of British identity.

Andrew August



The Last King in India Wajid Ali Shah Rosie Llewellyn-Jones Hurst 288pp £20

AFTER THE ECLIPSE of Mughal power in the early 18th century, the repository of Mughal culture moved from Delhi to Lucknow, capital of the rich north Indian state of Avadh (then known as Oude or Oudh). The East India Company's greedy military annexation of Oudh in early 1856 – officially prompted by the misrule of its king – was a key factor in starting the Mutiny/Uprising of 1857 and so is extensively studied by historians.

Less familiar is the life of the king. Wajid Ali Shah (1822-87) is an enduringly controversial personality, famed in India for his musical, theatrical and literary compositions, his financial extravagance and personal grace, his sympathy for his Hindu subjects, his Muslim piety and his nearly 400 wives, though not for his political skills. After the king sent his crown to the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, his nemesis, Governor-General Lord Dalhousie, noted privately that 'the wretch at Lucknow ... would have done his people and us a good service if he had sent his head in it, and he never would have missed it'. Having relinquished his throne without a fight, he spent the rest of his life as a loyal but disgruntled exile, dependent on a government pension in a suburb of the imperial capital Calcutta, where he recreated a smaller version of Lucknow, complete with a menagerie of wild animals – to the

discomfiture of the government, that kept hoping he would die.

There have been several biographies of Wajid Ali Shah by Indians and a classic, darkly comic film, *The Chess Players* (1977), directed by Satyajit Ray. *The Last King in India* is the first study by a British writer. Llewellyn-Jones is perhaps the world authority on 19th-century Lucknow. She calls her book 'a political study that attempts to move away from the many myths surrounding the king'. He was, she convincingly argues, 'certainly not the debauched character painted by the British, but neither the great romantic hero of Indian memory'.

The book abounds in vivid details, drawn from an exceptional variety of sources in both English and Urdu. When the Prince of Wales (the future Edward VII) visited Calcutta in 1876, for example, *The Times* journalist William Howard Russell – who had described the British recapture of Lucknow in 1858 – noted that the boats of the royal party were watched from the river bank by the retainers of the ex-king, standing on the tops of their residences and in the verandahs, who 'did not make any sign of welcome'. Not long after, in one of many arguments between Wajid Ali Shah and the government over his finances, he remarked that his wives 'are old and ugly, and can bear no more children; they are no use to me'. An official responded: 'Then who is to provide for them in their old age?' To which the king replied: 'The Government, whose ryots [peasants] they are.'

Throughout this compelling book one's sympathies are divided – as they are, too, in *The Chess Players*. Ray remarked that he almost abandoned his film out of disgust at the king's behaviour. But, after persevering with his historical research, he appreciated Wajid Ali Shah as an artist and a great patron of music, which redeemed him. Unfortunately, such cultural achievements held little or no appeal for Victorian imperialists.

Andrew Robinson

PHOTOGRAPHY

THERE IS NO DOUBT that the photographer whom Pierre Assouline called 'the eye of the century' had an exceptional ability to see, capture and translate into images the world around him.

Although Henri Cartier-Bresson's work is instantly recognisable, it is still difficult to understand exactly why, given the diversity of his output. As the current retrospective of his vast *œuvre* at the Pompidou Centre in Paris shows, his creative output (spanning nearly 80 years) was both extremely rich and uniquely varied, of which more than 500 photographs, drawings, paintings, films and documents are exhibited.

The exhibition is organised in three major chronological periods and starts with his early years (from 1926 to 1935), following his encounter in Paris with the surrealist group (he was close to both the poet René Crevel and the painter Max Ernst). From the surrealists, Cartier-Bresson learnt to question the tenets of his own bourgeois upbringing and became interested in social and political issues. He also learned to become a *flâneur*, looking for 'the marvellous' in the streets of the French capital. Like his surrealist friends, he believed in chance: 'One needs to accept "objective chance" as Breton would say', wrote Cartier-Bresson, adding that 'the camera is a wonderful tool to capture "objective chance"'.
It is this early realisation that helped him elaborate the notion of the 'decisive moment', which made him famous. For Cartier-Bresson the 'decisive moment' reaches a unique equilibrium between form and concept that reveals the intensity of a situation. This is illustrated in numerous photographs, such as the famous *Derrière la Gare Saint-Lazare, Paris* (1932, above) where we see a man in suit and hat leaping in a – no doubt vain – attempt to jump over a large puddle of water. The man is captured in the air, his rather heavy silhouette somewhat comically duplicating that of the dancer on a poster up on a wall in the background, announcing a concert by a Russian pianist, Alexander Brailowsky. In these 'decisive moments' everything seems to come together, enhancing the signifying dimension of photography.



Henri Cartier-Bresson
Retrospective at the Pompidou
Centre, Paris

Until June 9th, 2014

Cartier-Bresson also travelled extensively, first across Europe and then to other continents such as America (Mexico and the US), as well as an important encounter with Africa at the height of colonisation and Asia during Gandhi's lifetime. Like his surrealist friends, Cartier-Bresson's political involvement was firmly on the left and, in the exhibition, the second period of his life is largely dedicated to press photography (1936-46), documenting his political and creative engagement alongside the Communist press. Crucially it also covers the war years, sowing the seeds of his most famous achievement after the war: the creation of the photo agency Magnum (in 1947), followed by years of

photo reportage. However, when trying to give an account of this part of his work, it is perhaps more accurate to use the term 'visual anthropology' than photo reportage, because of the depth and breadth that went into his account of the subjects, some of whom he spent months observing.

This is probably the reason why his photographs do not look like news pictures, although he was often in the right place at the right time, capturing many important historic events – Gandhi's funeral, the USSR just after Stalin's death, the Cultural Revolution in China. Mostly they contain a human element that is timeless. In one of his most famous images, taken in 1933 in the ruins of a house in Seville in

southern Spain, we see children playing, running in the foreground of the photograph. One of these small boys, aged about 10, is on crutches: like the others he smiles and is partaking in the game. It could be a photograph about poverty and deprivation, as most of them are bare footed and dishevelled; it could be about polio (the boy on crutches), as this crippling condition was rife in Spain in those days. Indeed, there is no doubt that it is about that, but it is also about vitality and the grace of childhood. This expresses Henri Cartier-Bresson's ability to convey so many emotions in one captured moment and it is what makes him such an important photographer: a fact of which the Pompidou Centre retrospective leaves us in no doubt.

Nathalie Aubert