fighter of such quality, that future was
ble. Groomed by his devoted trainer,
Chappie" Blackburn, Louis ploughed
n the almost exclusively white ranks of
avyweights. The bouts were usually
st; sometimes the obvious mismatch-
lmost comic. The effect of his rise, in
erica where blacks were still lynched
ere the Ku Klux Klan could march in
gton, was electrifying. To anyone
ed with equal rights, he redeemed
a's promise. A speaker introducing
banquet said, "Joe, you put a rose on
's grave."

model for black kids (and under-
ed kids of any colour), he was ideal.
oken, dignified, given to none of Jack
n's defiant ostentation yet still clearly
man, he delighted everyone except
onents. He became known as well for
nic but sharp sense of humour. Dur-
second world war, asked if blacks
t be reluctant to fight since their coun-
reated them, he replied, "There isn't
g wrong with America that Hitler can

r's emergence exalted Louis's sym-
itus. His first defeat came at the hands
Schmeling, the Reich's champion,
he Nazis seized on ecstatically as con-
n of the master race. But Louis
ed his honour—and his country's—in
endary re-match, when he not only
d but almost destroyed Schmeling in
nishing round. It was the stuff myths
le of. The footage of the fight displays
gifts at their most awesome—his
d ferocity, the velocity and weight of
h, the cat-like, almost terrifying con-
on with which he stalked an
nt.

hose gifts did not help him outside the
either did his uncomplicated, trusting,
emperament. He was never in control
oney, which, taken by diverse hands,
went even faster than he earned it. Even allowing for mistakes in judgment, and too much innocence, the villain of the Louis story appears to be the Internal Revenue Service, and its determination to cut America's champion down to size. "Victimise" and "humiliate" are words one observer in the film chooses to describe the bureau's approach. It is difficult to believe the simple meanness that prompted IRS to tax Louis on the purses for two fights which he donated entirely to Army and Navy Relief.

The more he fought, the more he owed. He went through several marriages, picked up a cocaine habit, had to be put in hospital for what was diagnosed as "paranoia."

All this was preamble to his final years as front man at Caesar's Palace. Interviewed there he seems happy enough, amiable, still quiet, the voice thickened with age. Even in those surroundings, troubled by age and events, he was still Joe Louis. Talking to him, shaking his hand, put people in touch with something timeless.

No one quite knew what to do with him; perhaps he didn't know what to do with himself. He made ceremonial appearances at fights to standing ovations; shortly before he died, there was a huge testimonial with the most famous figures from sport, politics and entertainment, where Muhammed Ali, Louis's successor in more ways than one, told an interviewer that the remarkable thing about Joe was not just how great a fighter he was, but how much he was loved.

When he died, in 1981, they buried him in Arlington National Cemetery, ground hallowed to heroes, with full military honours. The film ends, as it began, with this ceremony, and probably the most famous quote that Joe Louis inspired in his lifetime. "He was a credit to his race," a sportswriter had said, "the human race."

The film is a monument to that, putting in perspective his last diminished years. As its title states, it gives us Joe Louis for all time, safe in his immortality.

TELEVISION

NEARLY NORMAL

SIMON HOGGART

There's yet another programme on Channel 4 in which earnest people talk about their sex lives. They all employ that curiously flat voice which seems to be *de rigueur* on these occasions: nobody ever says, "So I asked if she wanted to come back to my place, and worrrh!" which is how chaps talk in real life. Instead they describe it all as if it was daily routine in the sales office.

The new show is called *Just Sex* and it includes as a bonus stacks of clips from old films and TV programmes. It's fascinating stuff. Sir John Wolfenden on *Press Conference* in 1957, announcing ponderously that his commission was certainly not "approving of or condoning in a moral sense, homosexual behaviour."

There was a tremendously sad, clerkly little man who looked as if made up to play Mole in *Toad of Toad Hall*. "I just wanted to have a man-woman relationship." he said wistfully, "I wish I was normal." He appeared in a 1967 *Man Alive* on homosexuality. I'd forgotten that 17 years ago they were also still showing people with the back of their heads to the camera. This must have put a terrible strain on the poor interviewer, who has to be reasonably expressionless (a look of outraged horror would not suit) yet not so blank as to seem rude.

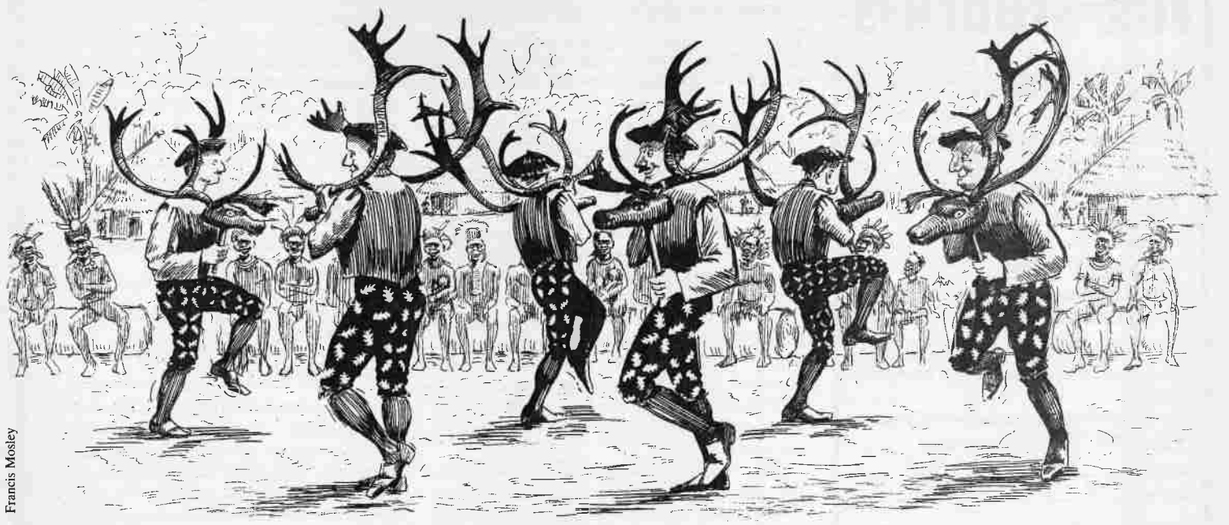
Anyone who's done a TV interview knows that the most embarrassing part comes at the end when they film the "noddy" or cutaway shot and you have to look mute but interested for five seconds. Those chaps who kept it up for 20 minutes deserve some kind of People's Medal for pioneering work in the early days.

The clips were mingled with two conversations, one with a group of men, including some homosexuals and the other with a similarly mixed group of women. I don't think we learned much new; they cantered over familiar ground about their sense of guilt, society forcing you to be straight, resentment at all the poof jokes on TV. This last point illustrated by clips from *Are You Being Served?* which, having being made in 1977, was also wreathed in historical mist. Even I found John Inman offensively over the top: presenting the utterly grotesque as loveable is demeaning.

Somewhere near Birmingham the producers had found a splendidly cross-patch Peter Finch-lookalike who positively hated queers, and kept saying so to their faces. There was a marvellous moment of high comedy when he described an unwitting encounter with one: "purely because I like to be sociable, I nodded and winked at him and then suddenly he grabbed my knee and said, 'Where have we met before?' What right had he to do that?" True bigots are often touchingly naive as well.

The contrast between the amiable, thoughtful, brightly coloured youngsters of today and the black-and-white, subfusc suffering gays of yesteryear was poignant and, no doubt, deliberate. Nothing reflects social change much faster than TV and nothing can make the past seem so, well, so out of date. Elsewhere in this issue, Jonathon Green recalls the time when Ken Tynan said "fuck." People were "fucking" and "dicking" all over *Just Sex,* and one hardly noticed at all.

I predict that the next stage will be a gay sitcom, such as they already have in the States, or at least a non-camp non-Kenneth Williams type appearing in a sitcom. Real life is, apart from all else, much funnier than stereotypes.



Francis Mosley

THE ENGLISH WAY

BERNARD CRICK

The British Council: the first 50 years
Frances Donaldson
Jonathan Cape £15
0 224 02041 2

In Egypt in 1933 an American professor called Russell Galt described the colonial methods of the rival French and British: "In Egypt England had an army—the French an idea. England had educational control—France a clear educational philosophy. Because the French did have such an organised philosophy and the English did not, the French pen has proved mightier than the British sword." And at that time it was not only the French who were spending heavily on cultural politics, but also the Russians, Germans and Italians.

Hitler had been particularly impressed by British first war propaganda, in the hands of Lord Northcliffe as Director of Propaganda to Enemy Countries, ably supported by his competitor, Lord Beaverbrook. In 1919 the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, appointed a committee under Sir John Tilley to consider how the government might "(1) foster a greater spirit of solidarity among British communities abroad, and (2) make British ideals more generally known and appreciated by foreign nations."

In response, Tilley wrote about schools, language teaching and libraries to disseminate British literature, history and art. He conceived the British Council prematurely (or rather Englished the *Alliance Française).* A Treasury minute aborted the birth: "My Lords recognise that his primary object is to correct misapprehensions as to the policy and actions of HMG . . . but they would point out that there is some danger that this object may imperceptibly be transformed into a general desire to spread British culture throughout the world; and they do not think it would be possible to defend in parliament . . . expenditure on such a purpose to which it would not be easy to assign definite limits."

By 1934 it was realised that we had to act, so the British Committee for Relations with Other Countries was established with a budget of £881. But by 1936 it was spending £14,000 a year and had been renamed, less ludicrously but more mysteriously, "the British Council." Last year it spent nearly £164 million, though £75 million of that came from acting as the agent of British government departments (mainly the ODA) and foreign governments and institutions, and almost £30 million was earned. Language teaching and technical aid now loom larger than culture.

But how "to assign definite limits" to the Treasury nightmare of "spreading British culture throughout the world"? Almost every year since the war has seen some committee sitting to consider either overseas representations in general or the BBC external services and the British Council in particular. Lady Donaldson's official history of the British Council, which marks its fiftieth birthday (it *would* be 1984), chronicles the constant changes of government and Foreign Office policy about what it should be doing and where. Missions open and close as policies change, and in general there is a truly remarkable Treasury suspicion of cultural politics.

In September Sir Anthony Parsons gave a splendid anniversary lecture, "Vultures and Philistines: British attitudes to culture and cultural diplomacy." These attitudes are truly depressing. Ambassadors and ex-ambassadors like Parsons have seen the importance of cultural diplomacy, but they've spent their lives fighting against what he called "the persistence of the doctrine of equal misery being applied to microscopic budgets when there is pressure on governmental expenditure as a whole." The old diplomats, unlike the crude politicians and the Treasury, who are obsessed with measuring utility, realise that our very lack of a *mission civilisatrice* makes the seeming *l'art pour l'art* of our culture and the "objectivity" of our news a far more effective advertisement for us than direct assault.

Our biggest asset, both Parsons and Lady Donaldson point out, is the English language—and that has spread throughout the world for free. How fortunate that so many prefer learning English-English to American-English; how sad that philistinism, cheeseparing, stop-go and, at one time, fear of the popular press has limited the opportunities this presents.

Despite all the chopping and the changing, the British Council has held out, funded by the government. It is too establishment for radical critics, but too independent for the new breed in Westminster and the old breed in Whitehall. Anyone who has seen Council officers in the field will know that they are perforce masters of making a little go a long way. It is impossible to think of the postwar worldwide prestige of British music, theatre, art and literature without the British Council.

This is a very big book, nearly 400 pages.