

Mark Glancy, *Cary Grant, The Making of a Hollywood Legend*, Oxford Cultural Biographies (OUP 2020), xv, 550 pp., 50 b/w ill. Hardback, £22.99. [ISBN 978-0-19-005313-0]

Archibald Alec Leach was born in Horfield, Bristol in 1904, the only surviving child of Elias Leach, a tailor's cutter and his wife Elsie. Archie's early years were somewhat traumatic; when he was eleven, his mother suddenly disappeared and he was told she was dead. Elias had in fact had her committed to the Bristol Lunatic Asylum in Fishponds. Whatever the nature of the "mania" which was diagnosed, it was doubtless convenient for her husband, an alcoholic and something of a philanderer. Archie did not learn the truth about Elsie until he was thirty, procuring her release after Elias's death.

Leach, a bright boy, won a scholarship to Fairfield Grammar School, but once there was idle and inattentive and eventually expelled at fourteen (the precise reason is disputed). Already theatre-struck, he now left home secretly to join a vaudeville troupe run by Bob Pender of Norwich; they had performed at the Bristol Hippodrome whilst he was doing small backstage jobs there. Leach learned many performing skills with Pender, notably walking on stilts. In 1918, the troupe departed for a tour of the USA, where he was to spend the rest of his life. A lucky break brought him into musical theatre, but his singing voice was never more than passable. Hollywood, inevitably, was beckoning this 6'2" and darkly handsome young man. Archie Leach was signed by Paramount in 1931, changing his name shortly afterwards to Cary Grant.

Soon getting leading roles and popular with depression era audiences looking for escape from daily realities, Grant was nonetheless frustrated that the studio saw him merely as a complement to its leading ladies, among them Mae West, whom he "fed" with two of her most famous lines. In 1937, he followed Carole Lombard and other stars in going freelance, quickly finding fame in the "screwball" comedies then in vogue, like *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) with Katherine Hepburn for RKO and *His Girl Friday* (1940) with Rosalind Russell for Columbia. As his fame grew, he could increasingly dictate his choices of director, co-stars and other things.

When Britain declared war in 1939, Grant was too old for call-up and in any case his emotional ties to his homeland were, sadly, by now somewhat attenuated. He shortly afterwards took American citizenship and was genuinely anxious to emulate other male stars in joining up after Pearl Harbour in 1941. Too old for the draft, he was frustrated when the US government unexpectedly put a moratorium on further volunteers. He did however do his bit entertaining the troops, occasionally encountering taunts of "Why aren't you in uniform?" which itself presumably took some courage.

Grant's association with Alfred Hitchcock began with *Suspicion* (1941) and lasted for three more pictures, culminating in *North by Northwest* (1959), regarded by some as both the star's and the director's best. As he aged, and television began seriously to compete with

the cinema, his perennially youthful looks enabled him still to attract much younger women, both on the screen, like Audrey Hepburn in *Charade* (1963) and off, marrying as his fourth wife the 28-year-old starlet Dyan Cannon in 1965.

His final films, the comedies *Father Goose* (1964) and *Walk Don't Run* (1966) were, as was becoming usual for him, produced independently by his own companies, which he ran with considerable business sense. They show no loss of acting power, but he was probably wise to retire after *Walk Don't Run*; the grey hairs were growing in number and Grant wanted to be remembered as he had been. In retirement he found happiness with his fifth wife, the Englishwoman Barbara Harris, who is still living and in watching his and Dyan Cannon's daughter Jennifer (his only child, who became an actress) grow up. He died of a stroke in 1986.

There have been previous lives of Cary Grant but Mark Glancy's is, surprisingly, the first to make full use of his vast archive of papers, made available by his widow. A number of myths are dispelled, among them the persistent rumours of homosexuality. Although he shared a bachelor pad for some years with fellow-actor Randolph Scott, the two men were clearly leading vigorous heterosexual lives throughout and the famous shots of them doing the dishes and playing with the dog were set up by Paramount for "film-fan" magazines. It is unclear Grant had homosexual tendencies, let alone experiences, and Glancy concludes he was at the very least "predominantly heterosexual".

His romantic life, including five marriages and numerous affairs, was marked at times by a jealousy and possessiveness which are not his most endearing characteristics. When courting his first wife, Virginia Cherrill, he rammed the car of a rival in love and later another actress, Phyllis Brooks, ended their engagement when he put before her a pre-nuptial contract containing a term that her mother should not visit. Conversely, Grant was himself promiscuous, for example conducting an affair with Sophia Loren whilst married to his fourth wife Betsy Drake (yet another actress). Another disagreeable characteristic was a lack of gratitude; the young Leach cheated on Pender, asking for the boat-fare home to which his contract entitled him and putting it towards starting a new life in New York. Thereafter, he never contacted the older man, who had been something of a surrogate father to him in the early years. Against these qualities may be set his generosity in donating his earnings from three wartime films to American and British war charities.

Doris Day (*That Touch of Mink*, 1962) recalled that of her leading men, she got to know Grant the least, describing him as "remote". The reader of this biography can, in a sense, know him better but, through no fault of Glancy's, a gap remains. Maybe the star himself provided a clue when he joked: "Everyone wants to be Cary Grant. Even I want to be Cary Grant." The problem was that, inevitably, part of him remained Archie Leach. Perhaps this is what led him to experiment with LSD (then lawful in America) in the 1950s.

There is much here for the serious student of cinema; Glancy is reader in Film History at Queen Mary University, London and each picture is analysed in detail with regard to direction, performances (not just Grant's) and much else. There are numerous insights into the studio system in its golden age and decline. There is also plenty for the film "fan". We learn much about Grant's relations with his leading ladies; having a nervous streak and tendency to perfectionism, he was not at ease with the still more neurotic Jean Arthur but worked well with Katherine Hepburn and the chummy Rosalind Russell, who became a friend and whom he introduced to her future husband, producer Freddie Brisson (unusually in Hollywood, the marriage lasted). He achieved a celebrated chemistry with Deborah Kerr in *An Affair to Remember* (1957); Kerr, incidentally, had been educated in Bristol, something Glancy oddly fails to mention. Ingrid Bergman and Grace Kelly were among other co-stars who became friends. His favourite director, and another friend, was Alfred Hitchcock.

There is also much for the Bristolian. We learn something of Grant's boyhood in the newly built working-class terraces of Horfield and around, of the Fishponds asylum and of his regular visits to the city after his reunion with Elsie, who died at 95 in 1973. In her last years, Grant liked to take the bus from Temple Meads to the Clifton care home, "like an ordinary Bristolian" and he always enjoyed fish and chips and beer with his cousins. He deplored the post-Blitz rebuilding of the Broadmead area.

Where the book fails to fully convince this reviewer is in its assertion of its subject's "incomparable" range on screen. Glancy goes some way to achieving this, citing performances such as the cynical aviator in *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939) and the cockney hoodlum in *None but the Lonely Heart* (1944). For the most part, however, whether in comic, romantic or sinister roles, he always seems to be playing Cary Grant, the urban sophisticate whose mid-Atlantic accent (a mixture of Bristol, Brixton – where he had lived in his teens - and American) is instantly recognisable. It is submitted he never attained the scope of his contemporary (and *The Philadelphia Story* (1940) co-star) James Stewart, who could range from sunny suburban comedy to the most psychotic of western anti-hero roles.

The volume is well indexed and the text fully supported by endnotes and a generous bibliography. There are two minor criticisms. Firstly, the illustrations are all monochrome and inset. For a subject of this sort, some colour plates would surely have been appropriate. Secondly, those yet to see the films are warned there are "spoilers" all along the way.

The above notwithstanding, Glancy's account is full, readable and scholarly and it is confidently predicted that this particular quarry is now closed.

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