No, I thought I'd do a better political job the way I did, and I was very interested in this question of putting the working class on the screen, of bringing the working-class thing alive in another form than we were getting on the soapboxes of Glasgow Green. That wasn't good enough for me, the soapbox. You see, I worked in a factory down the Clyde, and I didn't think that we could live off platforms, platform relationships. And I think I saw early the possibility of other forms. Of course I was interested in the journalistic form first of all, that is the yellow newspaper form. I've always been interested in the yellow newspaper. But then of course Flaherty was a turning point. *Nanook* hit Glasgow round about 1922, I think. I was on to it by 1924, that film could be turned into an instrument of the working class.

From then on, there was no question of where one's duty lay. But it was an idea that didn't develop in Glasgow or in England. It was an idea that developed in America. I spent three years, 1924 to 1927, based in Chicago, and I was very concerned then with what was happening to the immigrants. There was no question that it started out in a political conception, a political social conception.

Now, if you think of the cinema, the motion picture, round about the twenties, you have a tradition of it's being used for theatrical purposes and developing quite a big tradition in comedy and also in theatrical shapes, through people like DeMille and D.W. Griffith and so on. You get the use of the film extending into musical comedy when sound comes along. But apart from entertainment, dramatic entertainment, you have very little use of the cinema's native and natural powers – for example, in the matter of getting around. There's nothing like the camera for getting around. That's what makes it unique, the fact that it can travel from place to place. It can see round corners, more or less. It can see upways, downways, all the way round. It can put a telescope at the end of a lens. It can, of course, look through a microscope. In other words, it's capable of an infinite variety of observations. But in taking the picture of the twenties, it had not greatly invaded the field of its possibilities.

There was a whole world undiscovered, a whole area of cinematic possibility undiscovered. All we did in documentary was we occupied Oklahoma. I saw this thing. I saw here was a territory completely unoccupied. I thought I was going in for newspapers, but obviously newspapers were very expensive and I couldn't see myself buying up a few newspapers. But here were newspapers – as it were, the whole

power of newspapers – going for nothing. The only thing was to find a way of financing it. And, of course, the great event in the history of documentary was that we didn't go to Hollywood for money. We went to governments for money and thereby tied documentary, the use of the realistic cinema, to purposes.

Source: Elizabeth Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary: The Story of the Film Movement Founded by John Grierson*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975.

First Principles of Documentary

JOHN GRIERSON

In this characteristic essay from 1934–6, Grierson, who never liked to be pinned down, comes as close as he ever did to setting forth the aims and methods of the British documentary movement.

First principles. (1) We believe that the cinema's capacity for getting around, for observing and selecting from life itself, can be exploited in a new and vital art form. The studio films largely ignore this possibility of opening up the screen on the real world. They photograph acted stories against artificial backgrounds. Documentary would photograph the living scene and the living story. (2) We believe that the original (or native) actor, and the original (or native) scene, are better guides to a screen interpretation of the modern world. They give cinema a greater fund of material. They give it power over a million and one images. They give it power of interpretation over more complex and astonishing happenings in the real world than the studio mind can conjure up or the studio mechanician recreate. (3) We believe that the materials and the stories thus taken from the raw can be finer (more real in the philosophic sense) than the acted article. Spontaneous gesture has a special value on the screen. Cinema has a sensational capacity for enhancing the movement which tradition has formed or time worn smooth. Its arbitrary rectangle specially reveals movement; it gives it maximum pattern in space and time. Add to this that documentary can achieve an intimacy of knowledge and effect impossible to the shim-sham mechanics of the studio, and the lily-fingered interpretations of the metropolitan actor.

I do not mean in this minor manifesto of beliefs to suggest that the studios cannot in their own manner produce works of art to astonish the world. There is nothing (except the Woolworth intentions of the people who run them) to prevent the studios going really high in the manner of theatre or the manner of fairy tale. My separate claim for documentary is simply that in its use of the living article, there is also an opportunity to perform creative work. I mean, too, that the choice of the documentary medium is as gravely distinct a choice as the choice of poetry instead of fiction. Dealing with different material, it is, or should be, dealing with it to different aesthetic issues from those of the studio. I make this distinction to the point of asserting that the young director cannot, in nature, go documentary and go studio both.

. . . With Flaherty it became an absolute principle that the story must be taken from the location, and that it should be (what he considers) the essential story of the location. His drama, therefore, is a drama of days and nights, of the round of the year's seasons, of the fundamental fights which give his people sustenance, or make their community life possible, or build up the dignity of the tribe.

Such an interpretation of subject-matter reflects, of course, Flaherty's particular philosophy of things. A succeeding documentary exponent is in no way obliged to chase off to the ends of the earth in search of old-time simplicity, and the ancient dignities of man against the sky. Indeed, if I may for the moment represent the opposition, I hope the Neo-Rousseauism implicit in Flaherty's work dies with his own exceptional self. Theory of naturals apart, it represents an escapism, a wan and distant eye, which tends in lesser hands to sentimentalism. However it be shot through with vigour of Lawrentian poetry, it must always fail to develop a form adequate to the more immediate material of the modern world. For it is not only the fool that has his eyes on the ends of the earth. It is sometimes the poet: sometimes even the great poet, as Cabell in his *Beyond Life* will brightly inform you. This, however, is the very poet who on every classic theory of society from Plato to Trotsky should be removed bodily from the Republic. Loving every Time but his own, and every Life but his own, he avoids coming to grips with the creative job insofar as it concerns society. In the business of ordering most present chaos, he does not use his powers.

Question of theory and practice apart, Flaherty illustrates better than anyone the first principles of documentary. (1) It must master its material on the spot, and come in intimacy to ordering it. Flaherty digs himself in for a year, or two maybe. He lives with his people till the story is told 'out of himself'. (2) It must follow him in his distinction between description and drama. I think we shall find that there are other forms of drama or, more accurately, other forms of film, than the one he chooses; but it is important to make the primary distinction between a method which describes only the surface values of a subject, and the method which more explosively reveals the reality of it. You photograph the natural life, but you also, by your juxtaposition of detail, create an interpretation of it.

This final creative intention established, several methods are possible. You may, like Flaherty, go for a story form, passing in the ancient manner from the individual to the environment, to the environment transcended or not transcended, to the consequent honours of heroism. Or you may not be so interested in the individual. You may think that the individual life is no longer capable of cross-sectioning reality. You may believe that its particular bellyaches are of no consequence in a world which complex and impersonal forces command, and conclude that the individual as a self-sufficient dramatic figure is outmoded. When Flaherty tells you that it is a devilish noble thing to fight for food in a wilderness, you may, with some justice, observe that you are more concerned with the problem of people fighting for food in the midst of plenty. When he draws your attention to the fact that Nanook's spear is grave in its upheld angle, and finely rigid in its down-pointing bravery, you may, with some justice, observe that no spear, held however bravely by the individual, will master the crazy walrus of international finance. Indeed you may feel that in individualism is a yahoo tradition largely responsible for our present anarchy, and deny at once both the hero of decent heroics (Flaherty) and the hero of indecent ones (studio). In this case, you will feel that you want your drama in terms of some cross-section of reality which will reveal the essentially co-operative or mass nature of society: leaving the individual to find his honours in the swoop of creative social forces. In other words, you are liable to abandon the story form, and seek, like the modern exponent of poetry and painting and prose, a matter and method more satisfactory to the mind and spirit of the time.

Berlin or the Symphony of a City initiated the more modern fashion of finding documentary material on one's doorstep: in events which have no novelty of the unknown, or romance of noble savage on exotic landscape, to recommend them. It represented, slimly, the return from romance to reality.

Berlin was variously reported as made by Ruttmann, or begun by Ruttmann and finished by Freund: certainly it was begun by Ruttmann. In smooth and finely tempo'd visuals, a train swung through suburban mornings into Berlin. Wheels, rails, details of engines, telegraph wires, landscapes and other simple images flowed along in procession, with similar abstracts passing occasionally in and out of the general movement. There followed a sequence of such movements which, in their total effect, created very imposingly the story of a Berlin day. The day began with a processional of workers, the factories got under way, the streets filled: the city's forenoon became a hurly burly of tangled pedestrians and street cars. There was respite for food: a various respite with contrast of rich and poor. The city started work again, and a shower of rain in the afternoon became a considerable event. The city stopped work and, in a further more hectic processional of pubs and cabarets and dancing legs and illuminated sky-signs, finished its day.

Insofar as the film was principally concerned with movements and the building of separate images into movements, Ruttmann was justified in calling it a symphony. It meant a break away from the story borrowed from literature, and from the play borrowed from the stage. In *Berlin* cinema swung along according to its own more natural powers: creating dramatic effect from the tempo'd accumulation of its single observations. Cavalcanti's *Rien que les Heures* and Leger's *Ballet Mécanique* came before *Berlin*, each with a similar attempt to combine images in an emotionally satisfactory sequence of movements. They were too scrappy and had not mastered the art of cutting sufficiently well to create the sense of 'march' necessary to the genre. The symphony of Berlin City was both larger in its movements and larger in its vision.

There was one criticism of *Berlin* which, out of appreciation for a fine film and a new and arresting form, the critics failed to make; and time has not justified the omission. For all its ado of workmen and factories and swirl and swing of a great city, *Berlin* created nothing. Or rather if it created something, it was that shower of rain in the afternoon. The people of the city got up splendidly, they tumbled through their five million hoops impressively, they turned in; and no other issue of God or man emerged than that sudden besmattering spilling of wet on people and pavements.

I urge the criticism because *Berlin* still excites the mind of the young, and the symphony form is still their most popular persuasion. In fifty

Source: *Grierson on Documentary*, ed Forsyth Hardy, Faber and Faber, London, 1946. The article originally appeared in *Cinema Quarterly* in three parts between 1932 amd 1934.

scenarios presented by the tyros, forty-five are symphonies of Edinburgh or of Ecclefechan or of Paris or of Prague. Day breaks – the people come to work – the factories start – the street cars rattle – lunch hour and the streets again – sport if it is Saturday afternoon – certainly evening and the local dance hall. And so, nothing having happened and nothing positively said about anything, to bed; though Edinburgh is the capital of a country and Ecclefechan, by some power inside itself, was the birthplace of Carlyle, in some ways one of the greatest exponents of this documentary idea.

The little daily doings, however finely symphonized, are not enough. One must pile up beyond doing or process to creation itself, before one hits the higher reaches of art. In this distinction, creation indicates not the making of things but the making of virtues.

And there's the rub for tyros. Critical appreciation of movement they can build easily from their power to observe, and power to observe they can build from their own good taste, but the real job only begins as they apply ends to their observation and their movements. The artist need not posit the ends – for that is the work of the critic – but the ends must be there, informing his description and giving finality (beyond space and time) to the slice of life he has chosen. For that larger effect there must be power of poetry or of prophecy. Failing either or both in the highest degree, there must be at least the sociological sense implicit in poetry and prophecy.

The best of the tyros know this. They believe that beauty will come in good time to inhabit the statement which is honest and lucid and deeply felt and which fulfils the best ends of citizenship. They are sensible enough to conceive of art as the by-product of a job of work done. The opposite effort to capture the by-product first (the self-conscious pursuit of beauty, the pursuit of art for art's sake to the exclusion of jobs of work and other pedestrian beginnings), was always a reflection of selfish wealth, selfish leisure and aesthetic decadence.

This sense of social responsibility makes our realist documentary a troubled and difficult art, and particularly in a time like ours. The job of romantic documentary is easy in comparison: easy in the sense that the noble savage is already a figure of romance and the seasons of the year have already been articulated in poetry. Their essential virtues have been declared and can more easily be declared again, and no one will deny them. But realist documentary, with its streets and cities and slums and markets and exchanges and factories, has given itself the job of making poetry where no poet has gone before it, and where no ends, sufficient for the purposes of art, are easily observed. It requires not only taste but also inspiration, which is to say a very laborious, deep-seeing, deep-sympathizing creative effort indeed.

poetry where no poet has gone before it, and where no ends, sufficient for the purposes of art, are easily observed. It requires not only taste but also inspiration, which is to say a very laborious, deep-seeing, deep-sympathizing creative effort indeed.

Source: *Grierson on Documentary*, ed Forsyth Hardy, Faber and Faber, London, 1946. The article originally appeared in *Cinema Quarterly* in three parts between 1932 amd 1934.

Song of Ceylon

AN INTERVIEW WITH BASIL WRIGHT BY CECILE STARR

Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon* (1934) was the first of a handful of masterpieces produced by Grierson's documentary movement. Technically very sophisticated for the period, with a multi-layered sound track and intricate cross-cutting, it was commissioned by the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board to encourage a favourable image of Ceylon and its major export. Not that one would guess its commercial intention from watching it. Wright's film is an ambiguous, lyrical piece that bears none of the marks of strident imperialism one might expect.

Wright (1907–1987) was one of the first young film-makers to join Grierson at the Empire Marketing Board in 1929. After *Song of Ceylon* he co-directed *Night Mail* with Harry Watt, which took a similarly poetic approach to a mundane subject, and experimented even more adventurously with sound and narrative structure. He continued to make sponsored documentaries into the 1970s. This interview was conducted in 1975.

CECILE STARR: *How did you happen to go to Ceylon to make a film, any film, about Ceylon?*

BASIL WRIGHT: While I was working for Grierson, he was asked if he could send a unit to Ceylon to make some travel films about the country. They thought that by doing this the British public might become conscious of this beautiful island and therefore buy the tea which was its principal product. The negotiations went through, and I was sent off to Ceylon with one assistant to make four one-reel travelogues.

CS: *At what point did you know you were not going to make travelogues but were on the road to something else?*

BW: There are two answers to that question. The first answer is that I did know while I was in Ceylon, but only in my subconscious. In practical terms I didn't know I was making this film until I was back in England and had the material on a cutting bench.

During the shooting in Ceylon, I'd split the material into areas of activity purely for convenience: I had it in mind to make one travelogue about fisheries, another travelogue about harvesting, and so on. It was to this scheme I was shooting. It's awfully difficult to explain this, but all the time I was doing this, some inner impulse kept making me shoot certain other things. I couldn't for the life of me realize why, particularly as they were often very inconvenient.

Like the little birds that fly up in the first reel. We'd been working tremendously hard all day, from early morning until the light had practically gone. The cameras were all packed and put away, and we were exhausted. Then I saw this bird sitting on the branch of the tree silhouetted against the lake and something told me, 'I've got to shoot quite a lot of birds – I must do it at once.' So I said to my colleague, John Taylor: 'Unpack the case. Put up the camera. Put on the telephoto lens.' And he said, 'You must be mad.' I said, 'I don't care; you've got to do it.' So he did it, and we went on and on and eventually got those shots. We even flung stones at the birds because they wouldn't fly when we wanted them to.

I'd no idea what the shots were for until I began cutting the film. Then I realized they were to go with some other shots which I subsequently took, in which the camera moves very rapidly from one end to the other of some huge granite statues. That's what they were there for. This was done by curious instinct, and in fact a lot of the film got built that way. My inner consciousness had been set off by the fact that although an irreligious person, I was tremendously moved and impressed by Buddhist religion which I had encountered and seen for the very first time in Ceylon.

CS: *Did you script anything, or was all of your shooting just taking what you could find as you found it?*

BW: After we got to Ceylon (we arrived on New Year's Day, so it's quite easy to calculate one's time factors) I decided to spend at least four

weeks simply driving around the island looking at everything, so I could build up in my mind's eye the sort of pictures I wanted to take through the camera. That took a month, and then there was another ten days in sort of preparing.

But it was worth doing. We eventually got ourselves sorted out and travelled and shot continuously for six weeks. Then we had three days to pause and lick our wounds and look around and see what we'd done. Remember, we couldn't see the dailies because there was no air-travel in those days. The film was shipped back to England, but it would be at least a month or more before you got a report on whether your material was any good or not; so we were shooting in the dark, as it were.

When we were in these locations, the shooting script was something I cooked up on a bit of paper in my hand once we had the set-up. I had a big sort of sketchbook which I scribbled in all the time and sketched out little pictures of the different angles from which we had to shoot.

For example, in the last reel, when the little man comes with his

16 Song of Ceylon *(1934)*.

basket of rice and flowers and gives them to God. When we were on our first investigation, soon after we got there, I had been to this shrine and had been terribly impressed by the religious atmosphere there. I was sitting there by myself (the other people had gone off to look at something else) and I saw a little man come and make his offering. I made inquiries and was told: 'Yes, this is what they do. This is one of the most sacred places in Ceylon. Anyone passing this way is bound to make an offering.'

So I thought, 'Right. Well, we'll do it.' But it took us a whole day to do it, from 7:30 in the morning until the light went. And this poor little man, to whom I could never apologize enough, had to do it over and over again. You must remember, the set-up was this huge outcrop of rock with all the carvings in it which gave us an opportunity to shoot from every angle. We could even get up on top of the heads of the statues and shoot down. And everything had to come from these different angles simply because you had to have them looking at each other and confronting each other from the correct angles – gods from up looking down, and man from down looking up, and so on. So it took a whole day.

But there was no shooting script which said 'Song of Ceylon' and then all the shots. There was only a post-shooting script, which was for the cutting room when we put it together.

CS: *And there were just the two of you?*

BW: We collected willing helpers. We had a great caravan and a motor car and a lot of very nice Sinhalese people. But they weren't film people – there weren't any film people in Ceylon – they were simply people who helped us, carried the apparatus, kept us cheerful, and so on.

CS: *And you did most of the photography?*

BW: Yes. When we had two cameras, John Taylor took the other one; but basically I did the photography. We couldn't afford luxuries like cameramen in those days.

CS: *What cameras did you have with you?*

BW: A Newman Sinclair, similar to that used by Flaherty on *Man of Aran* (1934). The lenses were 1.5", 2", 3", 6" and 12". As a spare we had a small Eyemo, and as a further standby (which we hardly ever used) a 1912 model Newman Sinclair alleged to have been used by

Ponting in filming Scott's last expedition to Antarctica. We had an ordinary gyro tripod and another with a very finely balanced free head which was very tricky to use, but once mastered, was capable of very delicate movements.

It was a huge tripod – one of the heaviest I've ever in my life seen – with a completely fluid gyrohead, as though it was just floating in oil. You could literally move the camera as though you were holding it in your hand. It was awfully difficult to operate, of course, because the slightest jerk made it shoot around. But for smoothness, I've never had anything like it. It was like a gyro, but it didn't have any of the resistance you get in a gyro. We used tripods ninety-nine per cent of the time.

CS: *Had you used panning, moving a camera to this extent, before* Song of Ceylon?

BW: My besetting sin is that I pan too much. But it's better than using a zoom lens. Thank God there weren't any in those days. I think people should have a licence for zoom lenses and be allowed to use them only twice a year.

CS: *What about tracking shots? Did you have a dolly?*

BW: The important dolly shots at the end of the first reel were done from the back of a train. The train from Colombo, which goes right through this beautiful hilly country, had an observation platform at the end and we shot from that. And if there seem to be any others in the film, they were probably taken from a motorcar or something. At any rate, we didn't have a dolly.

CS: *At the end of the film, the images and statues are almost like double images. Were they done in the camera?*

BW: They were very long dissolves. There are two or three in the film in which the centre of the dissolve is held – that is, the point at which the two images (the one fading out and the one fading in) have both arrived at the centre point and instead of letting the normal process continue, which is for the dissolve to make its way out, I held that centre point for an appreciable time, maybe a couple of feet.

This certainly happens on the dissolve to the head of the great statue behind which you see the little man walking up as you hear a very faint echo of the radio Morse code from the previous reel. That was an incredibly and unduly elongated dissolve which I wouldn't recommend

except under very exceptional circumstances. I thought it pretty naughty of me at the time, but I think it comes off.

Of course, it's easier to do dissolves now than it used to be. Ours all had to be done in a laboratory because time was too short to wind back your camera and start again.

CS: *And you did all the editing yourself?*

BW: Yes. Although with me in the cutting room was Walter Leigh, who not only wrote the music but did the whole sound track. Every sound of that film, except for the words of the commentary which were done separately, was his orchestral score. If there's a snatch of birdsong, or a dog barking, or the noise of saws, or that sort of thing, they were all on the score with the musical instruments as well. It was a music-plus-sound score, done down to split seconds. And Walter, as composer, lived with me in the cutting room, so he followed every change in the cutting of the film.

CS: *I've read about the various sound experiments, like running the gong backwards and so forth. Exactly how were these handled?*

BW: We had two days of one big recording session for the whole film. We had a number of elements: an orchestra, all sorts of metal objects to be banged to sound like oriental bells because we didn't want them to sound like church bells; the choir from the local school, because there was singing in some of the music; and the choir from the local church which also did the noise of the little boys learning to dance. They were trained by the two dancers we brought over from Ceylon to England, who did all the Sinhalese singing and drumming. We did no sound recording in Ceylon at all; everything was silent. So all the sound was put on in England with the instruments we brought back.

CS: *How were the sound tracks laid in?*

BW: It was very complicated because we had a rather primitive sound recording system and only three channels (or four at a pinch, if we used the projector). It wasn't very satisfactory.

The number of sound tracks that had to be combined went up to eight, which was a great problem because we had to re-record three together, and then two others together, and then try to find the right balance between all of those when you put them all together. And as the sound system was, as I said, rather primitive and rather noisy, it really

was done with considerable difficulty. I think we spent over a week mixing because we didn't have instant playback. Sound at that time was developed just like a photograph in the laboratories. It came back the next day, you listened to it, and then you found out whether you'd been right or wrong. And if you were wrong and had to get your orchestra back, it would cost you another 100 pounds.

I sometimes wonder what sort of film it would have been if we'd gone to Ceylon with a nice selection of Nagras and different mikes. But you work within the limitations of your medium.

CS: *How did you happen to choose the narration and the narrator?*

BW: I was wondering about narration while I was editing the film, and I had no idea what I would use. Then one day I was walking near the British Museum and happened to glance into the window of a bookshop and saw this book on Ceylon by Robert Knox. As soon as I read it, I realized its 'period' flavour was just what I needed .

The voice was that of Lionel Wendt, our assistant and mentor while we were shooting. Wendt came from a racial group called Burghers – descendants of intermarriages between the Dutch colonists and the Sinhalese. He was a lawyer, a brilliant pianist, and one of the world's best photographers at the time.

He came back to England to help with the editing and look after the two dancers we had brought over for the sound track. Quite by chance, I tried him out reading passages from Knox and the result was perfect. This was two days before he was due to return to Ceylon, so we had quite a job completing the recording.

CS: *What about the rhythms in the film? There's a constant movement, a kind of dance in itself. Did it come from a musical rhythm you may have unconsciously assimilated, or was it a more deliberate effort?*

BW: We brought back a lot of ten-inch gramophone records. Walter Leigh listened to them and to a lot of oriental music. He was an incredibly gifted composer (he had studied under Hindemith in Germany for a long time), and had this marvellous gift for sort of soaking up the feeling of everything.

For instance, the clanking noises I mentioned we used for the bells ringing. Well, in that sequence in reel one when all the bells are ringing and the birds flying, he was determined that there must not be a single sound which resembled a European bell. So he armed himself with a

soft hammer and a hard hammer and went off to the part of Covent Garden which is full of metal workers and went into their shops and said, 'Would you mind if I banged some of the things in your shop?' So he found all those sounds of the different sorts of metal and bought them and brought them back. The whole studio was draped with a great clothes-line on which were hung all these misshapen bits of metal which gave the sort of sounds he needed.

As for the visual rhythms, there was what I would call a bit of Flaherty shooting: you anticipate a movement and start moving your camera a moment before the movement you want is going to take place. I don't know how that happens; it's just an instinct. But it's very difficult to determine which came first. I think the basic rhythm of the film came from the pictures but as we started to shape the film and as I had Walter Leigh in the cutting room all the time, his ideas as to how the music might develop would echo back on to the cutting bench and I might make certain alterations in the cutting.

If you mean the rhythm of montage, all this came, I suppose, through experience and through having been very strongly influenced by Eisenstein. The three people, apart from Grierson, who influenced me were Robert Flaherty, Alexander Dovzhenko, and Eisenstein – and Eisenstein because of his dialectical montage and all his theories, which I still find extremely valid.

CS: Song of Ceylon *is often associated with the work of Robert Flaherty. Do you feel he greatly influenced you?*

BW: Very much so. I'd been tremendously impressed with *Nanook of The North* and *Moana*. And we had had the very good fortune at the EMB Film Unit to persuade Flaherty to come and work with us for a time.

He was kind enough to come on location with me on the first film I ever directed, *The Country Comes to Town* – which was about what you would find if you thought about what was behind the milk bottle on your doorstep or the piece of meat at the butcher's: what has happened, who's produced it, where it comes from, and all that. And it was marvellous having him on location with us. He never made criticisms; he just remarked on things. His wonderful eyes were seeing and taught you how to see particularly camera-wise, in a different way.

CS: *Can you explain what you mean by 'camera-wise, in a different way'?*

BW: When you look at something with your own eyes, you've got binocular vision: your vision goes out quite a long way to the side. If you look at something through the eye of the camera, it's a narrow vision. Another point about it is that the eye of the camera has no brain behind it – it's just a piece of machinery; when you're looking through your own eyes you have a brain which is taking in a lot of extraneous material which you might not, in fact, want. The camera narrows it down, but the great problem is to translate what you see with your eyes into the correct range of vision which you can make the camera give you. This was Flaherty's great genius, and this is what I learned a little bit of from him.

CS: *I know Grierson was an enormously dynamic person to have as a boss and a friend, and I know he was enormously fond of this film. What was his specific role, other than sending you off and handing you your expense money?*

BW: Grierson was a very great man, and maybe the greatest friend I ever had. As a producer, he was absolutely murderous. He was so tough, I remember when I was first working for him I was in dread. When you were shooting a film for him, he had to see your dailies every day. You'd come back into the studio and the dailies would be processed overnight, and Grierson would come in to see them. The worst sign would be if he didn't say anything and just spat on the floor. You knew you had to go back and shoot absolutely everything over again. If he just cursed you, you only had to re-shoot some of it. He was a perfectionist!

But I can give you an example of his genius as a producer: we got to the stage at which I said to him 'Here is the final cut for the film, it's ready to go to the lab to be processed – it's negative cut,' and I showed it to him. The lights went up and he said, 'You must be mad.' I said, 'What do you mean?' And he said, 'In the last reel, you committed an aesthetic blunder which you will never forgive yourself for unless you put it right.' I said, 'What do you mean?' And he said (and note this, because this was how the film was at the time), 'When that little man goes away from praying to the Buddha, you cut straight to those people in their head-dresses and so on dancing away like mad. Bang! Like that. Well, you're throwing away the drama of the dance.'

Well, I was pretty exhausted by that time (I'd been working on the film for about a year) and we had a most appalling row, screaming and shouting, and I finally slammed off and got in my car and went home. I sat in my flat drinking whiskey for three days and not speaking to anybody. But then on the third day a thought crept into my mind. If I took some of those sentences which were spoken on the mountain at the end of the film and illustrated them with a sequence I hadn't used of the men getting ready for the dance and other shots of people coming and getting ready to watch the dance, it would be a marvellous anti-climax to the end of the film! So I rushed back to the studio in the middle of the night and worked all night. When Grierson came in the next morning, I showed him the last reel again and he said, 'There you are.'

But the point is this: *he* didn't do it, he forced me to find something I didn't know I had. He didn't tell me what to do; he just said I'd made an absolute blazing mess of the thing and I had to put it right. And he was correct. But that's what I call the work of a great producer, and that's what a director wants from a great producer.

Source: *Film-Maker's Newsletter*, November 1975, Vol. 9, No. 1.

BBC: The Voice of Britain
GRAHAM GREENE

The novelist Graham Greene served intermittently as the film critic of the *Spectator* between 1935 and 1940, and was one of the documentary movement's most ardent and perceptive supporters.

In this review of Stuart Legg's *BBC: The Voice of Britain*, Greene perhaps read more satire into the film than the makers intended.

The superb complacency of the BBC was never more delightfully parodied than in the title of the official film made by Mr John Grierson and the GPO Film Unit: *The Voice of Britain*. It is certainly the film of the month, if not the year; but I doubt if the BBC realize the devastating nature of Mr Grierson's amusing and sometimes beautiful film, the satirical background to these acres of dynamos, the tall steel towers, the conferences and contracts, the enormous staff and the rigid technique of a Kremlin which should be sufficient to govern a nation and all is directed to this end: Miss Nina Mae McKinney singing 'Dinah', Henry Hall's Dance Orchestra playing 'Piccadilly Riot', a spot of dubious education, and a spot, just a spot, of culture when Mr Adrian Boult conducts the Fifth Symphony.

This was the most cynical moment of a witty film: Mr Adrian Boult