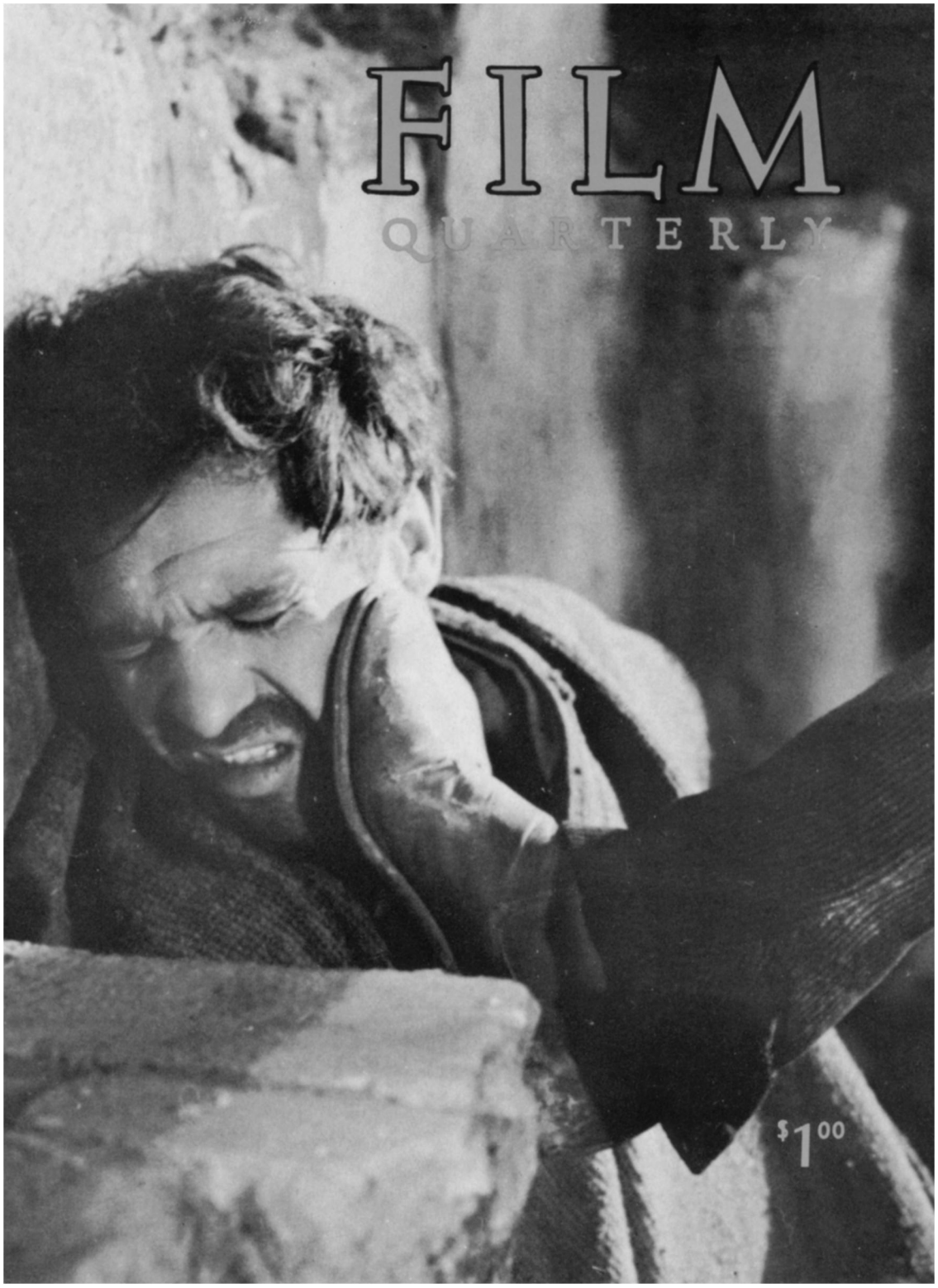
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Editor's Notebook

In recent months a note of alarm has been running through the trade papers on the topic of censorship. According to reports, a "curiously similar" series of newspaper film-advertising codes has been set up, in various parts of the country, and industry figures suspect that a massive censorship movement may be in the offing.

A good deal of resentment evidently exists in the industry toward the makers of *Suddenly, Last Summer*, which one attorney called a weapon put into the hands of ultra-conservatives who would like to mount a nationwide censorship drive; he advised the industry to "lay low." Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times* also proclaimed that "cheap and violent" films may bring on the blue-pencil forces; and Jesse Zunser in *Cue* said that "highbrow playwrights flaunting their poetic psychoneurotica and lowbrow producers grinding out the kiss-and-kick-'em-in-the-belly stuff are brothers under the skin." John Wayne declared, "I don't like to see the Hollywood bloodstream contaminated and diseased with perversion and amoral nuances." His statement concluded, as such statements often do, with: "The motion picture is for the family and you just don't tell dirty stories to the kids." You leave them to discover the dirty stories for themselves, presumably; at any rate, in such a view the idea that one might deal with "dirty stories" through art hardly exists.

But of course if we ask that film-makers confront life truthfully they are bound to portray a good deal of both immorality and amorality. And what they may say about them is by no means a simple question. The tendency of *Suddenly, Last Summer*, certainly, is impeccably "moral," far more so than many a "family drama": evil is punished, and good triumphs.

The situation reveals a typical lack of both nerve and intelligence on the part of the film industry. In actuality the position of the movies has never been so strong in censorship matters. And it is bound to get stronger still; the legal tide against censorship in general is a heavy one, and not likely to be turned back after the crushingly emphatic Supreme Court decisions on *The Miracle* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

For example, an interesting recent case involves the U.S. Customs which, in the case of Allen Ginsberg's poem *Howl*, was the instigator of the most celebrated literary censorship case of recent years—which it lost resoundingly. A Mexican film denied entrance to the country three years ago has finally been admitted without cuts. The film, *La Fuerza del Desco* (alternate English titles, *The Nude* and *A Woman's Only Weapon*) deals with a nude model, and the film contains several scenes of the girl at work. Attorneys for the importer argued that the Supreme Court had previously ordered Customs to allow importation of nudist magazines and claimed that a film not obscene or immoral was entitled to equal treatment. Sensing defeat, apparently, the Customs withdrew its ban for "excessive nudity" (a phrase that must cause considerable chuckling among grammarians as well as nudists) and the film, for better or worse, will be seen upon the screens of the land—where at least one all-out nudist picture, *Garden of Eden*, has preceded it.

Chicago's municipal censorship code is being frontally challenged by a suit asking the U.S. Supreme Court to decide whether a state or city can censor by *any* standard—a decision the Court has hitherto managed to evade. Meanwhile, in Memphis the city attorney has told the censor board that it has no legal basis for banning *Jack the Ripper*; and in St. Petersburg, where the school board asked theaters not to show *Teacher Was a Sexpot* (with Mamie van Doren, later retitled *Sexpot Goes to College*) the *Times* rebuked the board. Only five states now have censor boards, and like their municipal counterparts these are increasingly the subject of well-deserved public ridicule. It would be odd if, in circumstances such as these, an attempt to mount a massive censorship program had any but scattered and short-lived success.

The root problem is that the industry has no clear idea of its own stand. It does not know what constitutes an enforceable and constitutional statute; and it does not care about the freedom of the artist. Consequently it panics whenever pressure is applied, or even hinted at.

and cannot carry out a concerted, aggressive, educational campaign against what is really a minute body of procensorites; instead, it begins to talk of a public-relations fund. But "public relations" here is to be read "conciliation and more self-regulation." And it is significant that the MPAA is reluctant to participate in plans afoot to break censorship in the city of Atlanta and the state of Pennsylvania because the films likely to be used as test cases are not approved by the MPAA itself. This reluctance, while comical enough when one considers that all the gore of *Ben-Hur* brought no whispers from Code officials, merely proves that the industry cannot distinguish between principle and expediency. Indeed it has no principle in these matters except where commerce dictates: if there is enough money in it, censorship will be fought. And since the respectable elements in the industry, except for a few men like Otto Preminger, do not yet see enough money in it, the battlelines will be manned by less savory elements. ("There's nothing wrong with good, clean teen-age horror films," says the producer of *I Was a Teenage Werewolf.*) In the end, as even *Life* magazine has pointed out, the only effective censor is the parent; a long article in its February 29 issue concludes with the sound observation that "True censorship, like charity, begins at home, the one place where it incontestably belongs."

About Our Contributors

JAMES BROUGHTON was a leading figure in the experimental film movement in San Francisco; his most recent film is *The Pleasure Garden.* He is also well known as a poet and playwright.

NOEL BURCH lives in Paris, where he has worked in films for nearly ten years; he is now in the process of completing a new film.

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MARJORIE GREENE

Robert Bresson

Bresson has been acclaimed as the greatest living master of cinema; he has also been accused of practicing a kind of mystic anticinema. His reputation, in any case, is worldwide, and his new film, PICKPOCKET, *will command careful attention wherever it is shown. Bresson has made only five films previously:* LES AFFAIRES PUBLIQUES (1934), *which has completely disappeared;* LES ANGES DU PECHÉ (1943); LES DAMES DU BOIS DE BOULOGNE (1945), LE JOURNAL D'UN, CURÉ DE CAMPAGNE (1950), *and* UN CONDAMNÉ À MORT S'EST ECHAPPÉ (1956).

Marjorie Greene saw M. Bresson several times in Paris in January; quotations not otherwise identified in the following article are taken from her conversations with him.

Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* begins quickly. Credits, in severe gothic letters on the regulation black-and-white screen, disappear in seconds. Suddenly, you are motionless, caught with the impact of the simple beauty and incredible perfection of the discovery of Michel, the pickpocket.

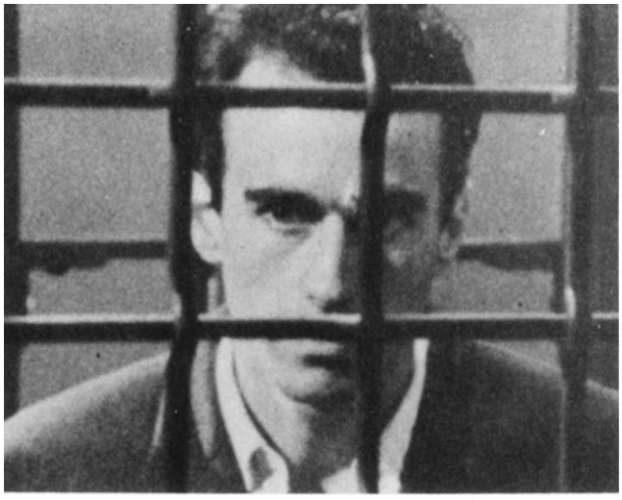
Bresson's camera—a continuously, imperceptibly moving camera—finds Michel at a race track as he watches hands transferring money and tabs his victim. He appears as he is—a man poorly made for a normally moral circumstance. He looks uneasy. He is suspect. He is apart. And he is with you every moment—even when you do not see him.

Michel is plagued with the restlessness of the man unmotivated except toward a debasing obsession. He moves always, afraid of his separate existence, circling in a dreary rut: from, to, up, down, out, in—his destinations the poor room in which he lives with his few possessions, or the "open market" where he plies his trade. He is not safe or comfortable in either. In a fleeting transformation in his face or in a transient glimpse of his eyes, you feel his consuming desire to use his pickpocket's hands with the skill of a magician—but not for the money in the wallet or the value of the watch.

The doubts which beset Michel do not prevent his thievery. And he has doubts, latent, bursting forth in a rare moment of sorrow as he kneels in prayer at his mother's funeral and wonders how her life will be judged. Or in a tense moment with Jeanne, who loves him, and he finds she knows him as a thief. Or in his refusal to treat Jacques, his friend who wants to reform him, with other than impatience and contempt. Or, and perhaps more than any other, in his relationship with a hovering police inspector with whom he debates the question of the value of his life, his right to live as he wishes.

Only that which permits us to discover Michel is shown. We know nothing of Michel's former life. There are no "neighborhoods" to which we can attach him. Those who touch his life trail no other identification except as they are shown: friend Jacques, "ma mère," the questioning detective, Jeanne, the girl whose fate it is to love him.

The precisely effective, constant medium shots, relieved only when the camera moves in for the detail of an intricate hand movement, are part of this control. The swift pace of the film, so many times using a "waiting" frame pregnant with suspense, participates in Michel's revelation.



Martin Lassalle in PICKPOCKET.

When the film is over, you have experienced another human being. You may have found him cold, unfeeling. You may not believe in his redemption through the love of Jeanne—and, again, this may not be important. You may not have become passionately involved in his problem—but you *know* him. His very thoughts have been unveiled to you. Yours has been an incredible—almost miraculous—motion picture experience. Michel has come to you totally. You may not know how.

A great many who talk about Bresson and write about him use the term "mystic," perhaps, and logically, trying to find the proper category for the uncommon sensitivity with which he collects the qualities of the cinema into a communion—an intimate rapport—with a man's inner self.

One reviewer (so many have written so much!) says: "A Robert Bresson film is not a collection of tricks: gray walls, low skies, immobile faces, abstract dialogue; it is, on the contrary, one of the most extraordinary of existing cinematographic languages: the perfect meeting of form and substance, of the written word and thought."*

Asked about mysticism, Bresson has answered: "I do not know what you mean by mysticism."† Of the cinematographic language he has said simply, implying that this should be assumed: "At the moment, I am more occupied with the special language of the cinema than with the subject of my films."

For Bresson, this language begins and ends with the director. *Pickpocket* is his entirely. One step beyond *Un Condamné à Mort S'est Echappé*, he conceived the idea. He wrote the script, accumulated the cast and crew, directed it, selected music, supervised the editing.

He works alone. He needs no advisors, no assistance except in the technical operation of a production unit. All decisions are his. The final result is an expression of himself. No one else has participated creatively except himself.

For this, Bresson conquered the "unconquerable": the dissident, illusive, distorting, problem element of the film—the actor. This conquest is reverberating around the motion picture world in a delayed reaction pattern, distributing shock, willing disbelief, and uneasy curiosity. This, even serious film students tend to say, is merely a personality, a style; or Bresson is a genius with a method; or this is no concept, nothing historical for film except that it represents the artistic achievements of a talented man.

Examine this.

"There is no art—if the cinema must be an art," Bresson says, "there is no art without transformation. There is no art where the things which you use to express yourself do not change when you put them together. The film ought to be a perpetual transformation of all its elements in contact with each other. All these elements must change. These changes give the film its life.

"It is not the characters (or actors) that give life to the film, but the film which gives life to the characters (or actors).

"I do not want the actor to express *himself*. What he gives me, he gives me without knowing. It is I who must express *myself*. I photograph things that might be nothing or next to nothing in themselves—and which become something only in relationship to what is next to them—like a color blending with another color.

"From the first moment I arrived at the studio to make my first film, I felt about profes-

* Claude Choublier, "Robert Bresson ou de l'idée fixe," *France Observateur*, December 24, 1957.

† "Propos de Robert Bresson," *Cahiers du Cinéma*, October 1957. The following three quotations also came from this source.

sional actors exactly as I do now. 'If they are going to act like this,' I said to myself, 'there is no film at all. I cannot make a film.' "

As a director—a term which he decries for himself—Bresson controls the actor much as he controls the sound, or the camera movement: he gets what he needs. No more.

This control begins with the selection. He does not use professionals.

"An actor, and especially a talented one, can no more be himself," Bresson says. "He must be another. This brings about an odd circumstance: this apparatus, which is the camera, takes everything . . . that is to say, it takes the actor who is himself and another at the same time . . . there is phoniness . . . the result is not true. Through the cinema you must make contact only with those things which are true—and you are profoundly touched with these very subtle truths."

Beyond using the nonprofessional, Bresson selects for his principals those having a strong "moral" resemblance to the characters in his films. This takes an intuitive sense, Bresson admits. He has to feel himself that the person is right, but he does not take chances. After selection he "lives" with them for quite a time, studying movements, gestures, listening to them talking in the flattened tone which for him as a director is mandatory. Of François Leterrier, the young philosophy student who played Fontaine in *Un Condamné* he says ". . . before the shooting we saw and conversed with each other every day, and I was sure that I had not made a mistake, that I had found in him the person or character that I searched for. This [contact] continued for a long time."

"The cinema is not a show," he says, "it is a kind of 'scripture' through which one tries to express himself in the face of terrible difficulties, because there are so many things between yourself and the screen. You must move mountains . . . chains of mountains to get to the point of self-expression. But you cannot change the inner nature of the principal character; an authentic expression is one thing that you are not able to invent; to capture it, is an admirable achievement . . ."

This means, of course, that Bresson cannot use the same individuals again. Almost a legend is the story of Claude Laydu, the aspiring young actor who was the tortured little priest in *Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*. "Will you use him again?" Bresson was asked. "No," he replied. "How can I? For *Journal* I robbed him of what I needed to make the film. How could I rob him twice?"

Provided Bresson has not erred in the selection of his principal character—and for a given film he goes through the same process for all important characters in the story—his film-making will then give him great joy, the fulfilling joy that the artist in him cries out for when he is idle, and he says: "I want to make another film. My joy is in *making the film*."

"I set out on a road," he says of film-making. "I do not look for things. I find them. It is in that moment of discovery that I rejoice."*

It is from the total submission of the man to the medium that art results—art of the highest order. For the man has let himself be immersed, because this immersion frees his own extraordinary abilities. He discovers, he says, because he is intuitive, he sees instinctively. Originality, sensitivity, the "stuff" of art — are spawned only in the exceptional intellect. The "moving audio-visual" which is the film is an exploratory mechanism, its creativity limited only by the mind which uses it. Bresson says:

". . . that which is beautiful in a film, that which I look for is the movement toward the unknown. The audience must feel that I go toward the unknown, that I do not know in advance what will happen. I do not know this because *I do not know the depth of my character*, although I have chosen him with as much precaution as possible. It is marvelous to discover a man gradually, and it is to this degree that one progresses in a film, instead of knowing in advance what will come to pass, the result . . . which, in fact, would be only the false personality of an actor. In a film, there must be this

* René Guyonnet, "Entretien Robert Bresson," *L'Express*, December 17, 1959.

sense of discovery of a man, of a profound discovery . . . the thing given is nature, man; it is *not* the actor. It is necessary to return to nature: you must search always, you must have at your disposal the means to keep on searching."*

This concept of discovery suggests the "non-preconception" of Robert Flaherty. It may also suggest the approach of the neorealists who take life as they find it. It does, of course, suggest immediately the probing cameras of documentary film-makers – the non-propagandists. But it goes beyond any of these, because Bresson is concerned with the one element of film-making which has eluded "discovery"—the "inner man." Flaherty, the "neorealists," the documentary film-makers work with the exterior man, photographing him as he appears. Bresson seeks to discover what this exterior can tell him about the man—how he is "constructed inside."

How?

His work with his principal character calls for interminable rehearsal. He has to arrive both in movement and voice-tone at a certain level of "automation." This, because he believes that body-movement, words spoken and reactions to them are in fact in the daily routine of living for the most part, "automatic." "I may," he explains, "have my character walk to a desk and place a book on it for as many as 10, 20, 30, 40 times. When I see what I want, when he gives me what I want—this tiny glimpse of him—I take it. With the voice, it is the same. I will have him read—just read for me—until I have the tone, the flattened tone I desire. During the filming, he does not know what he gives me." (Claude Laydu, the priest in *Journal,* was said to be shocked when he saw the saintly figure he had become on the screen.)

"You see," Bresson continues, "it is yet not so much the words he says or the movements he makes which are important. It is what they provoke. That constitutes the 'essence' of the film."

How does the interpreter feel under this regimen? When Leterrier was asked this question, he replied: "Quite frankly, I had the feeling of being very much circumscribed, totally directed."

"This is not difficult to understand," Bresson countered. "I try to arrive at the truth by way of some mechanical way, if you wish. This feeling that Leterrier had of being maneuvered by me is due to this mechanical way without which it is not possible to arrive at that which lies beyond the truth, namely himself."*

And again he says: "Perhaps, during the filming this feeling that [the interpreters] might have (but they have not) of being treated as objects, comes from the fact that I prevent them from 'exteriorizing'. What I am trying to capture is not what they *show* me, but what they *conceal* from me, that which is marvelous, unique: their personalities."†

This admittedly mechanical use of the non-professional to permit total expression by the film author is perhaps the most controversial of Bresson's film concepts. It would not, naturally, be popular with actors. He has been obliged to insist, time and again: "I have nothing against actors. In fact, I am always amazed by their extraordinary performances in the theater. But the film is not the theater."

Even those who do not write kindly of *Pickpocket* find it a faultless film technically. It is impressive in its perfection: exquisite framing, beautifully clear images, camera angles as precise and effects as subtle as Bresson's own mind. The rhythm of the film is so skillfully enmeshed in the over-all impression of the film itself that it is not identifiable as rhythm.

"I know what I want—in all elements of the film," says Bresson. "I ask for it. I ask for it from those who work with me in a technical capacity."

But each element is his—his alone.

He reviews the rushes—first with the crew (but not the cast), and then alone. It is when he is alone that the decisions on the day's shooting and necessary re-takes are made, to be announced when shooting begins again.

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* *Cahiers du Cinéma,* October 1957, *op. cit.*

* Both quotations from *Cahiers du Cinéma,* October 1957, *op. cit.*

† René Guyonnet, *op. cit.*

UN CONDAMNÉ À MORT S'EST ECHAPPÉ

When the shooting is over and editing begins, Bresson occupies the cutting room. He alone knows what he is looking for as he views the footage sequence by sequence. "It is characteristic of M. Bresson," says Raymond Lamy, the very proficient editor of *Un Condamné* and *Pickpocket*, "that he works until he has what he wants. He does not begin with any preconceived notion—he is "discovering" as he edits—*but you may be sure that whatever pleases him will be right.*"

Bresson edits each sequence within itself, until all are edited. If a sequence does not give the effect he wishes as it is placed with others, he takes them apart and starts over again.

Dubbing and mixing sessions receive his constant attention. Every element of the film is vital to him—and sound especially. Each sound he uses must contribute to the transformation he must have. One of the most brilliant examples of his use of sound is in *Un Condamné* when each sound heard stirs, or excites, or moves in some way. He does not use the sounds as he finds them on location, or on a studio set. In a room, for instance, if there are to be noises of conversation, doors opening, and closing, a clock ticking, a baby crying, he must record each separately. The result is an endless number of sound tracks to be used thereafter as he sees fit.

Music for Bresson is never background. It is for a purpose selected by him. In *Un Condamné* he uses the somber, beautiful strains of Mozart to accompany the daily march of the prisoners carrying their waste cans from their cells to the cesspool for dumping. How close this came to the ridiculous! But it worked, and brilliantly. "You see," Bresson explains, "this is an example of what I mean by transformation: when things come together. This music lifted this scene to another level. It is not possible now to think of those men without remembering their dignity, and they were dirty, ragged and dishevelled."

It is a tribute to Bresson's great perception and sensitivity, to the profound inquiries which drive him to astounding discovery, that his films provoke sometimes unexplainable emotions and impressions. They are so completely an expression of himself that his own inner nature is exposed.

"I am after the truth," he says. And again, "My interpreters must have a moral resemblance to the character in my film." And again, "I discover."

When asked if in *Un Condamné* there was not to be found extraordinary praise of the perseverance of faith, his answer was: "This praise is not the subject, but follows from the subject. . . . I put very simply a certain man in a certain danger and I followed him closely with my camera. The important thing, more than the facts or the events, was this man whom these facts and events permitted me to portray."*

"Was this man in *Un Condamné* predestined?"

"Aren't we all?"

"The mysticism which many of us see in your film, have you put it there, or is it there in spite of you, or it is your opinion that it is not there?"

". . . I do not believe that everything in a film is put there. You include some things without including them. What you call my mysticism must derive from this. In *Un Condamné* (as the subtitle indicates: "The Wind Blows Where It Will") I tried to make the audience feel these extraordinary currents which existed in the German prisons during the Resistance, the presence of something or someone unseen: a hand that directs all."†

Bresson lives on the Seine across a footbridge

* René Guyonnet, *op. cit.*

† *Cahiers du Cinéma, op. cit.*

LES DAMES DU BOIS DE BOULOGNE

from Notre Dame, on the curved tip of the Ile St. Louis, in one of the oldest, loveliest spots in Paris. It is easy to imagine the ghosts of Pascal, the Jansenist, referred to so often by those who discuss Bresson, and of Montaigne, whom he himself loves to re-read and quote, haunting the cobblestone quay. He lives with austere elegance. A part of his house is a large room overlooking the Seine, in which he seems to spend much of his time. When one looks at it, it is so much his that it is impossible to conceive of it being any other way. The walls and high ceilings, white and bare; tall bookcases along the fireplace wall packed with rows of books; a rough-hewn madonna and child on the mantel, reflected in a mirror framed in an intricately woven design; ivory coverings on the lovely period chairs and sofa—a warm, comfortable room.

Bresson is free in this room—free to pace and talk. And you are left free to accept his kindness, his eagerness to give; to follow his movements and his words. His eyes are young, younger than his face. His whole aspect is that of a handsome man, unaware that he is so. Although he talks easily, sometimes rapidly with enthusiasm or impatience, he is impatient with the words he uses to express himself. His English is excellent, but he insists that it is not adequate—and this because he feels it inadequate to the business of expressing himself as rapidly as he thinks, and as he does in his own language.

You are left free to listen, to watch, and try to understand. You see the sorrow he feels in the tragic death of Albert Camus, who was his friend. Again, you stare fascinated as he strikes a match with the expert toss of a match box, and see his fleeting pleased smile. Or you listen as he expresses disgust with every aspect of the film except that of making the film. This he loves. It is easy to see why.

For all that is seen and heard, there is so much about him that is not understood. Perhaps it is the genius given to so few; the important objectivity, the precise mind, the power of perception, the ability to unveil.

Bresson says of himself, as he comments on the narration he had read in *Figaro Littéraire* of *Un Condamné*:

". . . I remember that it affected me as something of great beauty; it was written in an extremely precise tone, very cold, and even the structure of the narration was very beautiful. It had great beauty. There was at the same time that coldness and simplicity, by means of which one senses that it is the work of a man who writes with his heart. This is something very rare. . . ."*

. . . . .

"You were a painter once, M. Bresson."

"I *am* a painter," he said. "I will always be a painter. But I had to stop. When I had to stop I had to fill up an emptiness."

* *Cahiers du Cinéma, op cit.*

GIANFRANCO POGGI

Luchino Visconti and the Italian Cinema

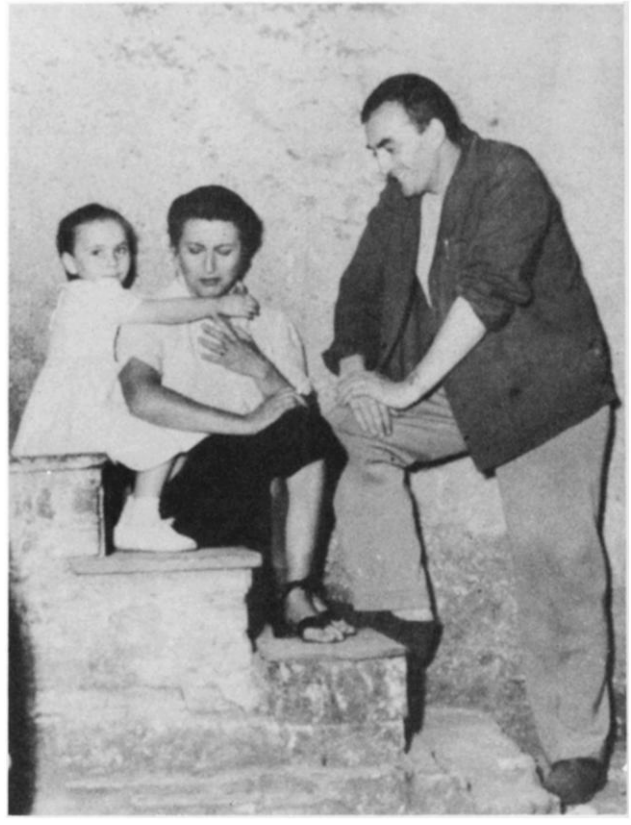
Three of Visconti's films, OSSESSIONE, LA TERRA TREMA, *and* SENSO, *occupy key positions in the history of the postwar Italian film, and hence entitle their maker to a respectable niche in film history as a whole. He has been little discussed heretofore, however, and the following article attempts to assess his place in the recent development of the Italian film.*

Few Americans are familiar with Visconti's name, and fewer still have seen his films. Only *Bellissima,* perhaps because it starred Anna Magnani, reached the art-theater circuits in this country. Visconti's films are not even widely known in Europe, even among serious filmgoers. While his work has been honored by special showings in Paris and London, and *Cahiers du Cinéma* has written about him, it is only in Italy that his reputation is formidable, and there partly for reasons (as we shall see) not connected with his films, none of which has enjoyed a great box-office success.

In Italy Visconti's prestige is unparalleled among the most informed sections of the movie public. At least half a dozen serious Italian directors (Lizzani and Maselli among them) have chosen Visconti as a creative model for their own work, now or at some time in their careers.

Many of the high priests of Italian film criticism, plus a sizable portion of intellectuals at large, especially those politically on the left, would choose Visconti as their candidate for the leading present-day Italian director.

But Visconti's leadership is one of prestige and centers largely around the man, rather than his films. The films are only five in number; and the first two of them received limited distribution. (*Ossessione* created something of a sensation, but on the basis of very few showings.) Furthermore, there is no widespread agreement that any of them is an unqualified artistic success of the caliber of *Bicycle Thief* or *Paisà,* though oddly neither DeSica nor Rossellini enjoys as high a reputation as does Visconti—let alone Fellini, whom most Italian



Tina Apicella, Anna Magnani, and Visconti during the schooting of BELLISSIMA.

critics take far less seriously than Americans do.

Visconti's personal prestige has arisen from several unusual causes, one of which is his name. The Viscontis were dukes of Milan during the early Renaissance, and the family still ranks high in the Italian aristocracy. From his branch of the family Luchino has inherited a large fortune, to which he has often liberally made recourse to overcome the financial resistance of producers. A tradition of enlightened interest in the arts also runs in the family; with Luchino, this has become an exclusive life-long commitment. Visconti's militant political leftism is hardly a family trait; but it has certainly helped give him an appealing aura, especially among younger intellectuals.

Visconti's reputation is based in part on an impressive record of theatrical productions, also. The claim that he is the best Italian screen director would be contested by some critics and film-goers; but his primacy among stage directors has long been demonstrated through a startling series of plays, operas, ballets, TV plays, and even musicals. The works he has staged run from classical tragedy to Shakespeare to Cocteau. Cosmopolitan in his education, Visconti is now cosmopolitan in his work for the stage, having directed *Two for the Seesaw* in Paris and operas in London and Edinburgh.

Visconti is known as a demanding director in both stage and screen productions. He is a domineering and outspoken personality, and has never shown any bashfulness about asking for more time and more money to make films as he meant to. He is also known as a director who expects a great deal from producers, actors, and technicians. When he has not been able to get what he considered necessary for a project, he has simply withdrawn. The number of film ideas he has abandoned is legion. Many of these cases were because of political difficulties. Curiously enough this happened both during the fascist period (for instance with *Amanti de Gramigna*) and after the war (for instance with *Pensione Oltremare,* which would have dealt with the German occupation of Rome, and *Cronache di Poveri Amanti* from a Pratolini novel dealing with the rise of fascism in the early 'twenties).

Visconti's public image is also of a man dedicated to a search for novel expressive strategies. He has sought to break through established traditions of the movie and stage world. His stage productions have included a series of revolutionary *mises-en-scène* distinctly sensational in their impact: some, like Sartre's *Huis Clos* (No Exit) or Cocteau's *Les Enfants Terribles*, because of their content; some, like Williams' *Streetcar Named Desire*, because of the starkly realistic treatment of the setting and acting; some, like Goldoni's *Locandiera*, because of the class interpretation superimposed on a familiar text.

Visconti's search is not for novelties or "effects," and it does not occasion improvisations. Visconti's real concern is with the theme and style of his pictures, rather than with a display of cinematic prowess. "Neorealism," he once remarked, "is first and foremost a question of content, and that's what matters." His camerawork is generally sober, his cutting measured and harmonious. The tensions of his films are usually "inside the shot." In the rock 'n' roll sequence in *Le Notti Bianche*, for instance, the emotional and rhythmic impact of a very fast montage sequence is created by a perfectly static and very long take—in which the feeling of frenetic cutting is given by the whirling heads of the dancing couple which appear and reappear in big close-up. The quality of the photography in all of Visconti's films has been superb but unobtrusive, and cost him endless hours of meditation.

Visconti's concern with the narrative aspects of his films is a somewhat unusual trait in the context of the postwar Italian film. The tenor of neorealism has been to reject a primary concern with the story, at least with the contriving of a self-contained "plot." According to Cesare Zavattini, the ideal neorealist movie would be shot by an unseen camera on a street corner like any other, on a day like any other; it would not be a structure which builds up and then resolves itself, but a series of logically and chron-

ologically connected episodes. The practice of neorealism has of course been less extreme—though perhaps the episodic construction of films like *Paisà* and *L'Oro di Napoli* is significant in this connection.

By contrast, Visconti's films have been conceived as "historical" constructs: a line of events develops with a coherent logic toward a destiny, a dénouement. Alone among Italian directors, Visconti regularly draws his material from literary texts. *Bellissima*, based on a script by Zavattini, is the exception; and it actually turned out to be more a character study than a "story" —though it had a neat and well-designed line and curve of events, occurring over a wider span of time than is common to neorealist films. ("Zavattini," Visconti says, "was very annoyed by the changes I made.")

"Narrative" art, it should be noted, is not a common flower in the Italian cultural garden. Despite Manzoni and Verga traditional Italian literature has never shown much feeling for story—for the novel in particular. (The triviality of Italian prewar production was in part a reflection of this weakness.) Visconti, however, with his wider European background, has been relatively successful in facing up to the problem of dramatic structure in the neorealist context.

Visconti, born in 1906, spent his childhood and adolescence getting the kind of wide, refined, and cosmopolitan education that a young man of his social rank and talent could aspire to. In line with a family tradition he then had some experience in the stage arts as an amateur scene designer. After that he devoted himself for years to the training of race horses and to reading and travelling. In France in 1936–37, through the intercession of a mutual friend, he rather casually entered the movie world as assistant director on Renoir's *Partie de Campagne* (A Day in the Country). "Renoir influenced me enormously," he said later. "It was certainly Renoir who taught me to work with actors. I was only with him a month or so, but that was enough, because I was so fascinated by his personality."*

In those years the Italian cinema was going through its darkest age: one dominated by slick idiotic comedies of the so-called "white-telephone manner" and by cardboard historical "colosses." However, Mario Camerini and Alessandro Blasetti were making interesting if derivative pictures, and a group of young *cineasti* was groping for a way out of the situation: some, who were actually making movies, in the direction of a heightened formal dignity (the so-called "calligraphists"); others, more often engaged in critical writing or in production jobs this side of direction, were feeling their way toward a more total and fundamental renewal in the film's approach to reality. When he came back to Italy, Visconti quickly gained a position of quiet but unmistakable cultural leadership in this second group, centered around the Milanese magazine *Cinema*.

It was among the *Cinema* group that he selected his collaborators in writing and directing *Ossessione*; some of them, Puccini and Alicata, were actually in hiding as members of the Italian Communist underground while *Ossessione* was being shot. And it was in *Cinema* that Visconti published some of his very few explicit statements on the kind of film he was thinking of: "What has brought me to the films is the task of telling stories of live men: of men who live among the things, not of the things themselves. The film I am interested in is an anthropomorphic film."

Neorealismo, that morally and culturally new way of conceiving and using the film medium which has given Italy her finest hour in the history of world film, was historically the central experience of postwar Italian film. Yet, as soon as neorealism had become established, critics sought to single out in the war period itself

* It was Renoir who gave Visconti a typewritten French translation of James Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, on which Visconti was to base his first film, *Ossessione*. Copyright difficulties, arising from sale of the rights to Cain's novel to an American company, prevented the film from being seen outside Italy except in private showings. *Ossessione* was also ordered destroyed by the fascist government at the end of the war; all existing prints come from a dupe negative that Visconti kept in his possession.

OSSESSIONE: *Massimo Girotti and Clara Calamai.*

some seminal, pathbreaking events which would intimate that the ferment had been at work, albeit half-consciously, in the last years of Fascism. In this search many critics agreed upon two very different works as having broken with the past and indicated the way for Italian film to move forward. One is DeRoberts' *Uomini sul fondo,* a tense, craftsmanlike, semidocumentary picture on submarine warfare; the other is Visconti's *Ossessione.* Recently, however, the initial judgment of *Ossessione* has been critically reappraised, and its relationship to neorealism reviewed.

In *Ossessione,* made in 1942–43, Visconti undertook to tell a story of sensual love and crime derived from James Cain's novel but set in the flatlands around the Po River in contemporary Italy. A workman, driven to wander in the country both by his need for work and by an internal inquietude, stopped at a small village grocery store, where he found work as an aide to the vulgar, fat proprietor, and to his frustrated young wife. Having gained the confidence of the shopkeeper he then gained the heart and the body of the woman. He left the place because he saw no future in the adventure, but then was brought back to the woman by his passion and contrived with her to kill the husband. After the crime, however, a feeling of guilt, the avidity of the woman, and finally her death, drove them apart; he ended up in prison. In Visconti's treatment Cain's cynicism and violence were toned down; sensual passion, greed, human alienation, isolation, and guilt were brought to the foreground.

Three features stand out in *Ossessione.* One was the unusually frank treatment of sex in the relationship between the two protagonists. This was one of the reasons, together with the general turmoil that was sweeping the country, and objections of the censors to the movie's pessimistic, defeatist mood and political undertones, why *Ossessione* never made the normal distribution circuits in Italy. A second feature is the unprecedented formal care the director had given to all aspects of his job: photography, acting, settings, camerawork. Since this care meant an unusual expenditure of time and money, it led the film's producer to withdraw his financial support after a few months of shooting—at which point Visconti simply went ahead on his own means. The final and critical feature of *Ossessione* was its new, vital, uncontrived and anti-rhetorical approach, which has made critics consider it a precursor of neorealism.

The break of *Ossessione* with the white-telephone manner which then dominated the "contact" of the film with the reality of contemporary Italian society could not be more complete. In an almost violent way, *Ossessione* really reestablished such contact—with bitter contempt for the fictional, utterly false way in which that reality had been so far avoided rather than sought. The heat and the sounds and the dust of the Po flatland; the drabness, the disorder of the house interiors, of the rooms for rent; the unkemptness in the train's third-class cars; the vulgar loudness of the local festivals and singing contests; the tired pace of life in this setting, the greed and the possessiveness of the people's life in it: all these traits of the bare everyday reality of a fairly typical corner of his country Visconti perceived with pitiless sharpness, tearing apart the veil which had separated the camera's eye from them for all those years of mystification and lies. More than that, he made them into vivid filmic images, he integrated them fully into his story. In the same vein he accomplished the first of many successful feats with his actors, forcing two conventional stars of the moment (Massimo Girotti and Clara Calamai) to give their expressive best to a

delineation of unamiable, contorted figures: a haunted young man, a sensuous, greedy woman.

On the basis of Visconti's unmistakable success in making the film medium "meet the reality of the country" arose the misconception of *Ossessione* as a neorealist movie. The break with the pre-neorealist Italian film is indeed neat and full; but the direction of the break is different from that which Rossellini and DeSica were to take immediately after the war. Perhaps the conditions for Visconti's taking that direction simply were not there; the rejuvenating experience of the Resistance, for instance, which Visconti was to live through later, was not yet a source of inspiration and of hope in the years when he made *Ossessione*. Whatever this or other factors—such as the oppressive political climate of dying Fascism—the basic approach of *Ossessione* was reminiscent of prewar French director Carné: not in dialogue, certainly, but in a certain calculation and formality. Many key identifying characteristics of the Italian neorealism of the "golden era," from *Sciuscià* to *Umberto D*, are absent in *Ossessione*.

For one thing, there is none of the keen awareness of the historical, time-bound dimensions of the "human situations" found in the great neorealist films. For all the naturalism of its "geographic," "spatial" details, *Ossessione* could as well have been situated in another historical epoch.

Again, in the neorealist masterworks the characters derive their motivations, the logic and direction of their action from being construed as socially motivated, as members of historically conditioned and differentiated social groups: think of the priest of *Roma Cittá Aperta* or of the unemployed Ricci in *Ladri di Biciclette*. But the protagonist of *Ossessione* is a marginal man, uprooted from his social *couche*, evolving his action only from a keenly idiosyncratic kernel of motivations and meanings. Also marginal is the only other character for whom Visconti feels any sympathy (he has hardly any for the woman, as is mostly the case in his pictures): a wandering actor called "lo Spagnolo," who bears some resemblance to Fellini's "Fool" in *La Strada*. But where as Fellini quite explicitly uses the Fool as a mythical semi-angelic figure, Visconti claimed for "lo Spagnolo" a full reality, but in utter contempt for what was going to be the central canon of the neorealistic conception of the character: its construction and development in terms of an identification with a wider, collective consciousness.

For several years after making *Ossessione* Visconti directed all his energies to his own revolution on the stage. In 1948 he came back to film, and made *La Terra Trema*. By then the rejuvenating expressive experience of Italian neorealism, which had begun three years before, was at its creative climax. DeSica was shooting *Bicycle Thief*; Rossellini had not yet lost himself; Castellani, Germi, DeSantis, Lattuada, were all at work in the neorealist spirit. With *La Terra Trema* Visconti vigorously and unmistakably joined forces with that "movement" and posed his candidature to creative leadership in it.

Indeed *La Terra Trema*, a picture about a fishermen's village in Sicily, was designed from the beginning with an almost paradigmatic faithfulness to some of the expressed or unexpressed "canons" of neorealism. Apparently Visconti thought of it initially as a documentary —and this early inspiration has left unmistakable marks on the style of the film, in its plastic severity *à la* Flaherty, in the harmonious pace of its montage. Even when that initial design changed into that of a "social epic," with a story derived from Verga's *House by the Medlar Tree* (I Malavoglia), Visconti stuck to methods which neorealism had in turn taken from the documentarist tradition. He employed only actors taken from real life, real fishermen from the place where the story was set, and he shot the whole film on location. Since "in Sicily Italian is not the language of the poor" his neorealist orthodoxy led him to put the dialogues exclusively in the local dialect—which is almost as foreign to Continental Italians as it would be to Americans. The dialogues themselves were the actors' own phrasing, after Visconti had told them what the broad meaning of the line would have to be. The nature and content of the *story*, then, were meant to build into the picture that histor-

La Terra Trema

ical and collective awareness which had largely been missing in *Ossessione*. The social relationships of the fishermen to the fishmerchants were made the substance of the story, and each of the characters lived it as rooted in his socially determined condition. From Verga Visconti had taken the broad outline of the story: a family of fishermen tries to break the circle of poverty and exploitation by "going on its own"—by fishing and marketing the fish on its own account, away from the tyrannical monopoly of the merchants—and fails. But in Verga's novel the failure was due to an obscure fate worked out by the nemesis of the sea and by family disunion. Visconti instead interpreted it in Marxian terms, as the socially inevitable failure of a misguided attempt of the exploited to make themselves into self-employed petty bourgeois entrepreneurs, rather than breaking through the circle of exploitation by a collective movement which would do away with the capitalist middlemen (such an attempt, incidentally, was at the center of DeSantis' *Caccia Tragica*). Actually for some time Visconti entertained the design of making *La Terra Trema* as just the first episode ("episode of the sea") of a trilogy, the other two dealing with the plight and the struggle of the Sicilian peasants and miners respectively.

But the "episode of the land" and the "episode of the mine" were never made. The reasons for this include the changing political climate of the country, which would not tolerate another such "progressive" movie, and the failure of *La Terra Trema* to repay its costs. But another reason might lie in perplexities of the director himself. Visconti was quite convinced, and outspoken about it, that he had created a masterwork; but the failure of his picture to gain the first prize at the Venice Fesival of 1948, and then the unsatisfactory response of the public to it, prompted him to the following declaration:

> Perhaps it simply cannot be seen at this time. Maybe it is better this way. In ten years, they will demand to see it. . . . Yes, ten years, that ought to be enough. By then the people will want to see it and will be able to understand it.

Ten years after this prophecy, however, the sensitivity of "the people" has moved, if anywhere, in the opposite direction from that which would lead it to appreciate *La Terra Trema*. The Sicilian of its dialogues does not get any easier to understand as years go by; nor does its severe expressive style become more appealing; nor does its theme become less bitter, or its message arouse a prompter response. Actually, steadily improving Italian economic conditions have made *La Terra Trema*, if anything, more foreign to the current mood of the general public. Finally, the direction of the artistic development of Italian cinema has changed, moving away from the neorealistic rigor of *La Terra Trema*. Leaving aside (if one just could!) the dismaying decline of Italian cinema over the past six years, and its causes—which are to a great extent political and ideological—it is still true that neorealism has also undergone from internal causes first a deep modification, then a

serious crisis (which nothing proclaims more openly than Visconti's *Le Notti Bianche*).

In 1948 Visconti had made *La Terra Trema* as a self-conscious extrapolation of the main stylistic and thematic trend of Italian cinema as it was in those days. For this reason it found itself ahead of that very trend as it was being made; and, since the trend has changed, it would be today a still "stranger" movie.

Yet these considerations apply mostly to one aspect of the destiny of the picture: its fortune with "the people" to whom Visconti was referring in his statement, since he had wanted to make a popular picture: *popular* in the semi-mythical sense that the term may have for a Communist aristocrat. From this standpoint, the picture is a failure now as it was in 1948. In itself, however, *La Terra Trema* is an almost completely successful work. It is a monumental picture, which inspires a feeling of awe. It brings to the screen, in images of splendid plastic beauty, the fullness of life of the village, the bitterness and the elation of its ever-repeated struggle with the sea. Flaherty himself, in *Man of Aran*, hardly surpassed the mute sense of tragedy which Visconti gives to the waiting of the women after a storm. The social relationships whose pressure upon the fishermen Visconti wanted to reveal are made vivid in the scene of the market, where the camera finds its way on a track amid the voices and sounds of the crowd, to watch the transactions between the fishermen and the merchants. The fullness of these contacts with reality is possibly unparalled in Italian neorealism, with the exception perhaps of the last episode of *Paisà*. What is lacking is rather a feeling of *participation*: that alive, felt participation which makes De Sica virbrate along with the action in *Bicycle Thief*, and takes the spectator as he watches the scene of the maid in the kitchen in *Umberto D.* This is not to be found in *La Terra Trema.* It is not that Visconti only *watches* the action develop: on the contrary, he always construes it, step by step, and guides it unerringly toward its consummation. But his presence is always *mediate*, never *immediate.* Either a substantial "extraneity" to the drama itself, which Visconti may have felt in spite of himself, or an overwhelming preoccupation with the formal-stylistical job of making the movie (a preoccupation which was largely successful, of which Visconti was quite aware, and which he did not mind), or perhaps both these factors, make *La Terra Trema* a monumental picture which somehow does not get its message across.

The tremendous ambitions of *La Terra Trema* seemed to have been abandoned when Visconti in 1951 went to work on his third movie, *Bellissima.* The film was based on a story by the most popular Italian screen-writer, Zavattini, and Anna Magnani was to act in it, along with a popular comic actor, Walter Chiari; the thematic material had nothing of the epic greatness of *La Terra Trema.* It was the homely story of a working-class housewife, who felt trapped by the closed horizon of her family and neighborhood, and set her own frustrated hopes of escaping it on the dream of having her little daughter succeed in a contest for the title role in a movie. The girl finally made the grade, but at that point her mother, after having lost part of the family's savings and very nearly her faithfulness to her husband, was repelled by the squalor and cruelty of the world to which she had exposed her child, retreated to her drab daily life, and refused the part finally offered her daughter. The story, the cast, the stylistic key of the picture (one without the arduous expressive flights of some parts of *La Terra Trema*) appeared to express a desire to play it safe, to make *Bellissima* into a popular picture in rather a different sense from that of *La Terra Trema.* But it would be a mistake to infer that Visconti had simply thrown in the sponge, as so many actual or would-be movie creators have had to do at some time in their career (I think of Welles making *The Lady of Shanghai* after *Citizen Kane* and *Ambersons*). Actually Visconti's ambitions had simply become more covert and more subtle. He refused, first of all, to be taken in by the potentialities of the story for becoming a sentimental drama of misguided mother love, or a cheap satire on the movie world, or even a lower-class variation on the Madame Bovary theme. Aided by Magnani's best performance,

he produced a splendid portrait of the protagonist, Maddalena, but he did not overcharge the figure with sympathy and stood somewhat aloof from her. Of "Cinecittá" he emphasized the petty small-time intrigue, the emptiness and slow pace, more than the fleshy and flamboyant vices which popular imagination likes to bestow on the "dream factories." The leitmotif of the sound track, a theme from Donizetti ("Quanto é bella quanto é cara"—how beautiful, how darling she is) seemed a continuous irony on the terrible plainness of the poor child's features. Visconti looked at Maddalena's own world, her Roman working-class milieu, with a sharp and perceiving eye: he dissected pitilessly its daily miseries and its occasional attempts at evasion: the big meals *all'aperto*, the soccer game, the unrealizable dream of owning one's house. In *Bellissima* Visconti also displayed his animosity toward women; with the exception of Maddalena, he showed them as greedy, twisted, arid figures: Maddalena's scandalously fat, noisy, vulgar neighbors (the "whales," her husband calls them); the atrociously skinny tailoress; the troupe of mothers, obsessively fanning themselves in the lobby where their children have been called for the contest. Visconti looked with a shudder even at the sensuous surrender to her husband with which Maddalena at the end signified her frustrated withdrawal into her own world: she had learned her lesson, but Visconti gave her little sympathy for it. Such motifs, systematically evading the expectations one might have in such situations, are played quite subtly in *Bellissima*. It remains a rather puzzling picture, unamiable and unappealing, although its stylistic tone is quite high, and the portrait of Maddalena is clearly an achievement.

With *Senso*, which he made in 1954, Visconti took up a more overt, more complex challenge. Based on a story by the romantic Italian writer Camillo Boito, it protrayed the moral and mental breakdown of a Venetian countess, who is swept into an insane passion for an Austrian officer. Because of that passion she betrays not only her husband but also her patriotic ideals, which are nearing fulfilment (through military defeat) in the Third War of Italian Independence (1866). She is in turn betrayed by her lover after she has given him the money to bribe a doctor and stay out of the war; she informs on him, watches his execution, and rushes into her destiny of insanity. As the plot shows, Visconti was to deal with a historical theme; yet he declared at the beginning of his work on the movie:

"I shall not abandon the line of cinematographic realism which I have followed to this day, nor lose contact with my characters just because they wear nineteenth-century costumes."

In Visconti's intentions, *Senso* was to prove that the reality which could be dealt with "realistically" in a film need not be limited, along one dimension, to strictly contemporary events, or along another, to lower- or middle-class milieux. Antonioni, in *Cronaca d'un Amore* had already broken through the *social* coördinate and attempted, with some success, to deal with the well-to-do world in the spirit of neorealism. Visconti was to break through the *temporal* coördinate of the neorealist experience also.

It was an important challenge that lay in Visconti's intention to deal with a historical situation in the spirit of neorealism. The cinema has always felt the attraction of the "historical" film, and many times raised the claim that it had succeeded in bringing forth History as Reality. Almost all "historical" films, however, give the lie to that claim, by succumbing to the temptations of cardboard colossalism or of oleographic stereotype. Even the best of them, from *Birth of a Nation* to *Alexander Nevsky*, either break down the context of history into a search for a more manageable unit of action (the Cameron and Stanton families in *Birth of a Nation*) or simplify it in terms of a hero conception of history. What they finally amount to is *epic*; by the same token they show that the fullness of historical reality is unamenable to filmic treatment in terms of a realist style. What they represent is a perception of history *à la* Plutarch or Walter Scott, never Thucidides or Leo Tolstoy.

This is the challenge which *Senso* takes up. It does it through a complex strategy, not all the lines of which are successful. Visconti said:

SENSO. *Top: Alida Valli and Farley Granger. Bottom: The battle of Custozza.*

"I wanted the film to be called *Custozza,* after the name of a great Italian military defeat. That caused an outcry: from Lux, from the ministry, from the censors. At the outset, the battle had much greater importance. My idea was to mount a whole tableau of Italian history, against which the personal story of Countess Serpieri would stand out, though basically she was only the representative of a particular class. What interested me was to tell the story of a war which ended in disaster and which was the work of a single class."

Visconti seems to have judged that the first and major element of a realist film approach to history is a strenuous effort to recapture *from inside* the reality of the historical background. His was not simply a concern with exact reconstruction of settings; it was a serious philological effort to evoke the color, the feel, the proportion of the smallest detail. In his search for how the reality around them appeared to the characters of his story, he drew upon the painters, musicians, and writers of that age, as well as its historians. He got Mahler's Ninth Symphony to comment on the sound track on Countess Serpieri's moral undoing; he asked the late romantic and the *macchiaioli* (pre-impressionist) painters, from Hayez to Fattori, for cues on the appearance of the Venetian countryside in the summer heat, the Palladian villas, the sunset on a battlefield, the people's dresses, their faces under the yellow light of oil lamps, the bottles and boxes and combs on a gentlewoman's night table. Visconti has remarked, however, that he never sought to copy Fattori. "I simply tried to get at the truth. And as Fattori painted the truth, it's hardly surprising that our works coincide on one level or another."

Thanks to such efforts all these details did not come to the screen as bits of circumstantial information, but existentially experienced objects—evocative symbols, not items in a catalogue. By seeing the final execution, for example, as if through Goya's eyes, Visconti gave it the impact of horror that drove the Countess to insanity. Italian and French critics played for months the game of catching this or that cultural reference in the film.

On *Senso* Visconti was spendidly aided by his cameraman (since *La Terra Trema*) G. R. Aldo.* With him he lived up fully to another big challenge posed by the film *Senso*: the use of color, to which both Aldo and Visconti were new. *Senso* is by far the best color movie ever made, as far as color goes: not only because it exploited more fully than ever before the technical potentialities of Technicolor; but mainly because it inexorably bent those potentialities to expressive goals: it used the color to bring forth meanings, references, undercurrents of feeling. Take the scene of the Custozza battle, for instance, where the Italian army is defeated by the Austrian. The approach is eminently subjec-

* Aldo died during the shooting, which was completed by Robert Krasker.

tive: Visconti follows Marquis Ussoni, a relative of the protagonist, and a leader of irregular patriotic bands of peasants, who tries to reach his troops after a bitter conference at the headquarters of the regular army, and wanders in the battlefield. Like Stendhal's Fabrizio at Waterloo or Tolstoy's Peter at Borodino, Ussoni is an eager patriot, full of enthusiasm about the task at hand; but also a "layman," who watches the battle develop with a definite feeling of helplessness, unable to seize its logic although more and more aware of its drift. For this reason at the beginning of the sequence the march of the riflemen through the wheatfields appears like an imposing, vivid, but incomprehensible ceremonial. Later, when Ussoni reaches an isolated gun-battery, and realizes that he is lost and the battle is lost, to his sinking spirit the scene appears veiled by a bluish haze, in which the guns' smoke, the rising dust, the hill's grass, the horizon, the artillerymen's uniforms are blended. Still later, in the retreat, the shadows which grow on the plain, and the feeling of fatigue, of undoing, make all the colors livid, spectral.

Another line of attack taken by Visconti to the task of a realistic historical film, was his attempt to maintain a complex and delicate balance between the "private" and the "public" side of the story: the affair between Countess Serpieri and Lieutenant Mahler on one side, the development of the Venetian independence movement and the war on the other. Such a balance, if successfully struck, would have helped avoid that flattening out of history into sheer oleography or breathless anecdote to which most historical movies have fallen victim. But the attempt was not successful: Visconti's attention is mainly on that knot of shame, of reckless egoism, of reciprocal betrayal, which is Livia's affair with Franz; the "public" line of events appears and disappears in the background, but is not integrated with the "private" line. Marquis Ussoni's figure, which was to supply the link between the two lines, is too weak and pale to be up to the task. It is difficult to say to what extent interference with Visconti's intentions contributed to this deficiency (the film was also cut after completion, before it was exhibited at Venice). Visconti explained:

"The first final version was quite different from the one seen today. It didn't end, for instance, with the death of Franz. We saw Livia pass through groups of drunken soldiers, and the very end showed a little Austrian soldier—very young, sixteen or thereabouts, blind drunk, propped up against a wall, and singing a song of victory. . . . Then he stopped and cried and went on crying and finally shouted: *Long live Austria!*"

"Guallino, my producer, and a very sympathetic man, came to watch the shooting. He muttered behind my back: 'Dangerous, dangerous.' Perhaps. But for me this was the perfect finish! We left Franz to his own affairs, we didn't give a damn for Franz, it didn't matter in the least whether he was killed or not. We left him after the scene in the room where he shows himself in his true colors. Pointless that he should be shot.

"We watched Livia instead, running to denounce him and then escaping into the streets. She passed among whores, become a sort of whore herself, going from one soldier to another. Then she fled, shouting: 'Franz, Franz!' And we moved on to the little soldier who stood for all those who paid the price of victory . . .

"But I had to cut it. The negative was burnt. Thousands were spent filming Franz's death. I tried to do the best I could with it, but for me this isn't the end of *Senso*."

Parts of the film dealing with partisan formations in the Third War of Italian Independence were also mutilated through the military censorship.

Finally, to avoid another common pitfall of "historical" films, the failure to *interpret* their characters, rather than just idolizing them or condemning them, Visconti projected a Marxian interpretation on his figures—interpreted them in class terms. Livia Serpieri is seen as the expression of the total moral breakdown on the Venetian aristocracy; Franz Mahler as a member of a cynical parasitic military bourgeoisie living off the weakness and corruption of the aristocracy; Marquis Ussoni as the intellectually aware son of the upper classes who has understood their destiny and is quite willing to seek a new identity by accepting leadership among

the ascending lower classes. Not even this line of Visconti's effort is completely successful: the ruinous moral features of the first two characters so clearly verge on the monstruous, on the pathological, that we refuse to accept them as symbols of a class destiny.

Behind this weakness of *Senso* lies perhaps a fundamental ambiguity in Visconti's own attitude toward the world of Livia and Franz Mahler. As a Marxian intellectual Visconti condemns and rejects that world, and preaches the inevitability, the historical necessity, of its ruin. Yet, because of his links of blood and culture to that aristocracy, Visconti seems to feel a morbid fascination with its refined wealth, its manners, its destiny of decadence. To an American reader it may be illuminating to learn that Tennessee Williams collaborated on the *Senso* dialogue: the same ambivalence of feelings which pervades Williams' treatment of the decadence of the old South seems to echo in *Senso*.

I have made *Le Notti Bianche* because I am convinced we ought to try a different way from that which Italian cinema is going on now. I have felt that Italian neorealism, lately, has become a mere formula, and this has been made into a sentence [condanna]. With *Le Notti Bianche* I have meant to show that certain borders can be crossed, although I am not reneging on anything by crossing them. . . . What I have tried to create is not an irreal atmosphere, but a reality which is re-created, elaborated, mediated. I have detached myself from a documented, exact reality, thus breaking sharply with the habitual approach of current Italian cinema. By doing this I hope I have opened a new gate to the young Italian directors who are now growing up.

With this statement to the press Visconti prefaced the first showing of his last movie, *Le Notti Bianche*, which gained a second prize at the 1957 Venice Festival. A proud, incisive statement, it reveals rather clearly certain traits of the "uomo Visconti," as Italians would put it, which I have tried to bring out in the first part of this article. It also gives a fair clue to what Visconti was up to in the film, which he shot in the period of six or seven weeks—unusually short for him.

The subject was taken from a beautiful story by Dostoievski. Mario, a young, pleasant lonely "white collar," just dispatched to a new

LE NOTTI BIANCHE: *Maria Schell.*

job, meets Natalia, a fragile girl, while taking an evening walk in a city which is new to him. Natalia spends a lot of time, every night, waiting for her fiancé to reappear at the spot where he said good-bye to her a year before, and where he has promised he will look for her when he returns. Mario falls in love with the girl, and tries desperately to get her to take an interest in him, to give up waiting for her lover to come back; but the girl uses him only as a sounding board for her own hopes and memories; during three sleepless wandering nights of talks and tears (ending in a strange snowstorm) she seeks in Mario only the comfort of his understanding, while Mario sinks more and more into an identification with a "third" in whose existence he only half believes, and who, he is sure, will never come back. But he *does* come back, just when Natalia is beginning to respond to Mario; and Mario is left alone. The film derived a definite feel of irreality (in spite of Visconti's own contention to the opposite) from developing wholly at night, in a badly lit quarter of narrow lanes and steep bridges, which vaguely suggested an area in Leghorn. The set design, the lighting, and the photography were all aimed at creating a haunting atmosphere, while the drama, in a sense, went on inside the characters. There is a double remove from reality; one from the daytime reality of things and into the nocturnal reality of the selves; the other in dissolving even *that* reality either into a receding perspective which mixes memories and hopes (in Natalia's case) or into a frantic, self-defeating search for a response on the part of the Other (in Mario's case). The spectator—like Mario himself, in a way—is left to wonder whether the action he has seen develop was meant to have ever happened, or whether it was a nightmare to start with.

Thus, the negative side of Visconti's intention, the neat break with the neorealist formula, is fully embodied in *Le Notti Bianche*. But the nature of the "gate" Visconti is opening is much less clear. For this reason the picture has left both the general public and the critics rather uneasy. It can be granted that Italian cinema cannot face its crisis by attempting to revive neorealism, as Rossellini seems to have tried to do in *Il Generale Della Rovere*—returning to themes and styles new and vital in 1945–50, but no longer. And another alternative, certainly, lies in a more direct and dedicated concern with the inner dimensions of people. Visconti's "double remove from reality" seems to hold less promise than, for instance, Antonioni's more sustained concern with the inner self in *Le Amiche* and *Il Grido*: an approach which is perhaps existentialist where Visconti's is vestigially Marxist.

In any case Visconti has, like Fellini, never been a "typical" neorealist; though he has led, he has at the same time always stood slightly aside. And while *Le Notti Bianche* is no doubt a slighter film than Visconti's previous works, he remains an innovating force in the cinema, ever able to go beyond himself. We can now hope that, having in *Le Notti Bianche* squarely posed the challenge of "meeting the reality of the self," he will in his next film more positively articulate and illuminate his response.

[NOTE: Reports from Italy indicate that Visconti, having recently staged a Donizetti opera, is now at work on a film about a boxer, entitled *Rocco e i Suoi Fratelli* (Rocco and His Brothers). Some of the quotations in the above article are taken from an interview originally published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*; an English version appeared in *Sight & Sound*, Summer–Autumn 1959.]

CLASSIFIED SECTION

CYNTHIA GRENIER

Wild Time in Tours

For the past five years an energetic group of young Frenchmen, with financial support from the government, have organized an increasingly popular and successful short-film festival in the pleasantly provincial city of Tours, a three-hour drive from Paris.

Unlike the summertime feature-film festivals which devote a great deal of time to marginal if agreeable frippery and folderol, Tours is strictly for film-makers, critics, and a sprinkling of concerned producers. Here, lodged together in the suitably named Hotel de l'Univers, 150 young directors and film critics from some 20 countries meet; they exchange ideas and methods for attacking film problems during three congenial, intensive days, while all manner of shorts are being screened from ten in the morning through midnight in two of the local theaters. Most of the showings—top prices $4—are sold out to the townsfolk.

This year's festival was marked by plenty of hullabaloo in the best French tradition of vocal manifestations of displeasure to art. Audience reaction had been relatively peaceful during the first two days except for occasional good-natured sniping from the *Cahiers-Cinema 60-Positif* gangs (these are the leading French intellectual film publications) in the first three orchestra rows during pretentious or religious films (French movie critics are resolutely anti-clerical). But on the afternoon of the last day, *A Dancer's World,* by Peter Glushanok, made a few years back for U.S. television, hit the well-fed, well-wined Sunday provincial audience quite wrong. Not understanding what Martha Graham was saying, they could only see a strangely got-up woman speaking in a clearly mannered way. Some hoots went up, then loud unkind laughter. As the dancers appeared on the screen in a style thoroughly alien—modern dance has never caught on in France—the laughter got very loud, and the jibes mounted. The critics—most of whom, despite their unfamiliarity with the style of dance, saw the merit of the film—began shouting for quiet and exchanging insults with the local townsfolk.

The next film, *We Are the Lambeth Boys,* by Great Britain's Karel Reisz, drove the crowd wild with rage because of its leisurely pacing, sparse subtitling, large amounts of unintelligible dialogue (even to English-speakers) and its unrelenting aura of quiet do-gooder sincerity. The film treated a week in the life of a group of English teen-agers in a poor section of London during forty-nine very dull minutes through which almost no points or observations were ever made. The audience, which might have borne the film in a more peaceful frame of mind had it dealt with teddy boys, was unable to endure the sanctimoniousness of this film about good, honest, poor, unambitious youths. Halfway through, when by a unfortunate coincidence the subtitles read "Sunday is always the dullest day of the week for the boys," the crowd set up a tremendous but unsuccessful clamor to stop the showing.

That evening, jury chairman Jules Romains of the most proper and distinguished Académie Française announced the award of the Grand Prize of the Fifth Annual Short Film Festival to this same British entry, and touched off fifteen minutes of screaming, stamping, hooting, whistling, and pounding of seats by some 1500 people, many of whom had been present during the afternoon. A few supporters of the film yelled back, to no avail. The only thing that kept the seats from being ripped up and hurled was the sturdiness of the rivets holding them to the floor. The presentation of the other awards was completely drowned out.

Alarmed municipal and festival authorities sent in a couple of police squads which were duly hooted in their turn, and then begged American actress Betsy Blair, member of a

heavyweight intellectual jury which included Marguérite (*Hiroshima, Mon Amour*) Duras, Louise (*Les Amants*) Vilmorin, Eugène (*Les Chaises*) Ionesco, Siné (the cat cartoonist), Claude Mauriac, and Germaine (TNP) Montéro, to present the film from the stage in hopes of preventing an incident. Although visibly somewhat shaken when she faced the almost completely hostile audience, Miss Blair not only managed to still the house, but won herself an ovation nearly as long and noisy as the tumult she had just quelled.

While the festival had its share of first-rate films among the 44 competition entries, curiously enough not one of these won a prize, except for a Polish satire (see below) which picked off the unofficial critics' award. The prize-winners included, in addition to the plodding *Lambeth Boys, Les Hommes Oubliés* by Jacques Villeminot, a rather ill-organized enthnographic film in messy color about the Australian aborigines, and Barnaby Conrad's hoked-up treatment of the death of Manolete.

The American selection, apart from the Conrad film, was of an unusually high quality, thanks to the diligent, devoted efforts of an American sometime documentary film-maker, Helen Grayson. Miss Grayson, who has been following short film festivals in Europe for the past four years, had always been distressed by the lack of American representation at such events. Such representation was missing largely because there is no central film office in the States, such as exists in most European countries, for selecting and sending films to festivals. The MPAA of course, acts for the major companies in sending their features and shorts to the principal film festivals, but it does not represent the independent companies or individual film-makers. One might expect that the U. S. Information Agency, which is supposedly concerned with the export and exploitation of U. S. culture, would interest itself in seeing that the United States was represented on such occasions, since European film critics and audiences have so few opportunities to judge independent work by young American movie-makers. Unfortunately, the Agency is tied down by the necessity of seeing that films are entered in recognized festivals only by individuals properly security-cleared—a qualification tedious and expensive to implement—and also that the films should fairly directly serve some specific USIA goal. As a result, the Tours Festival for four years was able to show only a tiny number of American films, which its organizers usually obtained by chance if some young American director happened to pass through Paris around festival time. On the other hand, the Iron Curtain contributions were and are huge, and certainly during the last two years have been almost entirely free from any direct propaganda overtones. Smart, wickedly satirical Polish animated cartoons, Czech puppets, lively Yugoslav abstract designs, and sluggish Soviet nature films all moved across the Tours screen, adding up to a fairly imposing over-all picture of creative imagination and talent. British, French, Italian, and German directors and critics watched and admired the Eastern European work, while the organizers implored the local USIA officials to find them good American shorts to help balance the picture. In six months in the States, Helen Grayson, acting all on her own, accomplished what USIA had been unable to in five years. When she returned to France in December of this year she brought with her a collection of American documentary and animated films that dazed and delighted European film-makers and critics.

Hardly any of the films were brand new, but none had been seen in France before. Among them were George Stoney's moving *All My Babies* on the work of a Negro midwife in Alabama; the Sanders Brothers' *A Time Out of War;* John Hubley's *Moonbird;* the television documentary, *From the Kaiser to Hitler;* Glushanok's *A Dancer's World;* and a wide selection of animated television commercials. *A Time Out of War*, which won the International Film Club's award, also won nearly all the votes as well on the first ballot of the International Film Critics until the critics were reminded that the film had already been awarded the Grand Prize for the Documentary at Venice in 1954. This simple, intelligent film—which might have been a great one, had its young actors been talented

as well as sincere—had a tremendous impact on the European critics and film-makers at Tours, who until then did not realize that such film work existed at all in the States. An interesting side point is that the film was offered to USIA in France some four years ago, but was unanimously turned down as "not the sort of film which would be interesting for our program." A sad thought, particularly when one views the short films which USIA produces and shows abroad in the hopes of creating a favorable image of United States culture in other lands.

Of all the films shown at Tours, the most original by far was that of the brilliant young Pole, Jan Lenica, who with Walerian Borowczyk just a year ago won the $10,000 first prize at the Brussels Experimental Film Festival with the short fantasy *Dom*. His new film, made in France with a scenario by Eugène Ionesco (As M. Ionesco was a member of the jury it was automatically ineligible for the competition), tells the adventures of a cleverly drawn *Monsieur Tête*, who is periodically bitten by the "sepent of revolt," and turns a passionately angry dark green. Love, society, bureaucracy all come in for their share of ingenious and intelligent satire. At the end, M. Tête no longer has his serpent of revolt; he has a chest covered with medals and a perfectly empty countenance—"Now," purrs the commentator, "M. Tête is just like everyone else." Considering the nationality of Mr. Lenica, and the fact that he returned to Warsaw three days after the festival, there is a curiously interesting touch in the film. When M. Tête looks out his window in the morning, he observes, "In the east, nothing new," as the strains of "The Volga Boatmen" are heard. "In the west," he says, turning his head, "There's always something new," and a brand new rock'n' roll tune blares out. When asked about the Soviet reaction to this, quiet, blond Lenica says with a smile, "They tell me very seriously that nobody sings "The Volga Boatmen" anymore in the USSR. I think they missed my point."

The French proved once again that they have not lost their hand at the art of the short subject even though they have lost some of its best practitioners to the feature film. Jean Barral

MONSIEUR TÊTE, *by Jan Lenica and Henri Gruel; commentary by Eugene Ionesco.*

(25), in his first film, *La Belle Saison est Proche*, succeeded with a difficult, yet often attempted subject—a filmed tribute *cum* biography. He chose the surrealist poet Robert Desnos, who died in a concentration camp, and shows him through his poems, which are recited with great effect by his friends—Jacques Prévert, André Breton, Alain Cuny, Roger Blin, Mouloudji, Jean-Louis Barrault—who all project a very real sense of mourning with simplicity and modesty. Photographically, the film is both brilliantly original and evocative. Strange pieces of surrealist business come off impressively well—such

as the shot of Cuny, Barrault, Prévert and two other middle-aged, grim-faced men seated in modern chairs set far apart from each other in an empty field overlooking Paris on a dark, windy, winter day. Young Barral clearly understands the close bonds between the literary and the visual in film-making. The maturity, intelligence, sensitivity, and skill evidenced in this film promise much for his success when he too turns to the feature-length film.

The Tours Festival program had its negative side as well—far too many animated cartoons, all sharing concrete music and cunning little figures against abstract backgrounds, and all strangely—whether from east or west—devoid of humor. There were a couple of stodgy Soviet entries, some inept Spanish and Moroccan numbers, but by and large, in all of the 74 films shown, in and out of competition, there was plenty of evidence of creative imagination and technical skill. This was as true in the area of the conventional documentary such as Robert Mennegoz's handsome *Fin du Désert* on the building of the Sahara pipeline or Jan Lomnicki's *Steel*, an impressionistic treatment of a Polish factory, as in that of the cleverly conceived and animated group of publicity films from the French firm, Cinéastes Associés, staffed by former UPA men. Mercifully, there were hardly any blobs of color running to poetry or blurred interpretations of Freud set to film.

Altogether this festival at Tours added up to a serious, intelligent display of a lot of hard-working talent. The rather extravagant expressions of critical and audience reaction, unsettling as such exhibitions of emotion may be to partisans of a film so received, testify to a genuine enthusiasm and concern with an art form, which is always somehow exciting and encouraging, and rare enough in these days.

L'EAU ET LA PIERRE, *by Carlos Vilardebo (France). A sensitive, impressionistic documentary on Greece.*

New Periodicals

The Abbey Film Society, Box 764, Fordham University, New York 58, N.Y., has begun publishing *N.Y. Film Bulletin*, a biweekly summary of film showings in the Greater New York area. We applaud this effort to break through some of the barriers to better audience knowledge of film activities. If the enterprise prospers similar publications can be begun in other metropolitan centers where the amount of film activity is so great, and newspaper and other publicity so ineffective, that good films often go unnoticed by the people who most want to see them. The first issues of *N.Y. Film Bulletin* have contained listings of showings and a variety of comments on films to be shown, including reports on Museum of Modern Art series by Richard Kraft and an article on *Ivan the Terrible Part II*. Television showings of important films are also noted. One-year subscription, $3.00; 6 months, $2.00; 25¢ per copy.

NOEL BURCH

A Conversation with Alain Resnais

Writing about the work of Alain Resnais in previous issues of FILM QUARTERLY,* *Noel Burch suggested that he is perhaps the most promising new talent to have appeared in the French cinema in recent years. His shorts displayed a startling visual sense and his first feature,* HIROSHIMA, MON AMOUR, *is by all reports a film of stunning verve and authority. It is to be hoped that it will soon make an appearance in this country.*

We met for a drink in Harry's New York Bar, near the Opéra. The place is always deserted at that time of the afternoon and is convenient for conversation. Resnais is a shy, rather nervous young man. I began by asking him about his short-subjects: how he felt about them and how he felt about shorts in general. The chief point he seemed to want to make was that, practically speaking, it is much harder to make a good short than a good feature. "Say I'm shooting a feature in this bar. If I want a tall, skinny barman and a dozen extras, somebody is immediately sent to fetch them. But if I'm doing a short, the producer will hem and haw and I'll be lucky to have anyone in the shot at all. Shorts simply aren't worth the effort, either aesthetically or financially. *Le Chant du Styrène,* for example, took five days longer to shoot than *Hiroshima, Mon Amour,* and of course I was paid infinitely less to direct it." Still and all, he does have serious consideration for his past shorts, and distinct preferences among them. His best, he feels, was *Nuit et Brouillard,* and this independently of its subject matter (concentration-camp atrocities). In particular, he feels it was in this film that he came closest to solving the problem of commentary—a problem which we were to touch upon again in connection with *Hiroshima.* Resnais does not like the commentary for *Toute la Mémoire du Monde* at all, on the other hand, and in fact tends to feel that both of his last shorts were stylistic exercises more than anything else: "Polysterene just happened to be the most amusing subject proposed to me at a time when I needed money."

As he did not seem especially anxious to discuss his shorts further, I went on to ask about *Hiroshima*: what, to his mind, is the meaning of the juxtaposition of the two main story-themes in that film? He had obviously been asked that question before, but I did not feel that I was getting a stock answer when he told me, very simply, that for him these themes had no rigorous relationship at all. He had chosen them quite intuitively, *"the way a composer might choose two chords."* "There are things in everyday life which arrest one's attention, which seem to go together, the way words rhyme in a poem." This was the first of many allusions to an abstract conception of films which seems constantly present in his mind. But then, as if to satisfy another side of himself, he went on to talk about the importance of making people feel the hor-

* "Four French Documentaries," Fall 1959; "Qu'est-ce que la Nouvelle Vague?" Winter 1959.

ror of war and the atom bomb by showing how these phenomena can seep through into one's most private existence. "People think they can lay low [*se planquer*] but they soon realize they can't." Returning to a more formal vocabulary he spoke of "a macrocosm and microcosm" of suffering, a "funnel-shape structure, moving from the infinitely vast to the infinitely small." When I asked him what the film's last line meant—"You are Nevers, I am Hiroshima"—he was even more vague; for him it was merely a way of conveying the nostalgia of two lovers destined to be separated. "But then of course Marguerite may have had something else in mind." When I suggested that here and elsewhere in the film there was an atmosphere of "significance" which seemed to bely this simplicity, he allowed I might be right and implied he had heard the criticism before. In connection with Marguerite Duras' much-discussed commentary, he felt that the critics and intellectuals had largely missed the point; they had compared the film's verbal style to Péguy's, whereas Resnais feels that a comparison with Hemingway's attitude towards words would have been closer to the mark. Again he speaks of music, of words being used as "emotional notes" rather than for their literal meaning; he feels that the film's success in general distribution in Paris is a sign that the ordinary spectator is better prepared to accept this incantatory use of words than the Champs-Elysées snob. A surprising observation about *Hiroshima* came in respect to the peace-parade sequence. I asked him whether, as some of my friends had felt, this sequence was meant to be ironic. Misconstruing the question, he answered: "Yes, I suppose it was a bit meagre. But we simply couldn't get people to turn out. I would call the sequence nostalgic—nostalgic with respect to the really grandiose film against the bomb that ought to be made. After all, that's the only thing that really counts, demonstrating against the H-Bomb," and we went on whimsically to imagine a kind of *Triumph of the Will* shot around an anti-H-Bomb demonstration. This, I'm afraid, was as close as we ever came to discusing Resnais' politics.

I wanted to return at this point to a passing remark he had made earlier. Referring to "the direction in which he was striving to work," to his "experiments" and "attempts," he said: "When one thinks of the stage of development that painting has reached . . . !" Resnais, it turned out, has always been keenly interested in painting. When he came to Paris, just after the Liberation in 1944, he was "just a country boy" and the idea of meeting "a real-life painter" held a marvelous prestige for him. This was why he began making little 16mm films about the works of modern painters, among them Max Ernst. A producer got wind of these films and without ever having seen one commissioned Resnais to do his first real film: *Van Gogh*. As in every artistic domain, Resnais' taste in painting is highly eclectic: "I like what I call theatrical painting—Piero della Francesca, Félix Labisse, Paul Delvaux, etc. But then I also like Hartung. My favorite modern painter is Ernst; he satisfies me on both the theatrical and abstract levels. . . . There is nothing like looking at a painter's work through a camera viewfinder to judge the cohesiveness of his painting as such. That was how I came to see through Gauguin, for example—he just didn't stand up—but it's also how I came to appreciate the formal values of Ernst." In connection with this synthesis of the theatrical and the abstract in the paintings of Ernst, we finally came to what may well be the most meaningful question one can ask Alain Resnais: how does he propose to reconcile the highly abstract attitude displayed in his films—and confirmed in the course of our conversation—with the highly concrete emotional and intellectual communication for which he also expressed great concern? He is obviously aware how crucial this problem is, and knows that he is still a long way from the answer. He is tempted by solutions involving extreme heterogeneity, films which would leap from pure, graphic abstractions to documentary realism and which would even incorporate stretches of "non-cinema." "One cannot do away with the image completely—Gance tried this in the sound version of *J'Accuse*, but the spectator's mind begins to wander when a film is turned into a radio broadcast for any length of time. Still, one *can*

reduce the image to a mere focal point for the audience's eye, for example the clouds and other abstract patterns in Welles' Shakespearean films or the cross at the end of *Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne.*"

This led to a discussion of films in general, and here again Resnais' tastes are exceedingly eclectic. He admires Bresson tremendously, feels that certain scenes in his recent *Pickpocket* "go very far," but is naturally irritated by the Christian aspects of the film. He adores Renoir, placing *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* on a par with *La Régle du Jeu*—and he subscribes to Renoir's theories on the autonomy of the actor and "spontaneous" directing. Other men cited included Fellini ("all Fellini, pasted end to end and run off at one sitting, with the sequences not necessarily in the right order; even if there's God in it, I don't mind so long as it's Fellini who's telling me the story"); Buñuel (*"Je l'aime pour son culte de l'amour et pour sa générosité"* —a modern French catch-word which is best translated as "humanitarianism"; his favorite Buñuel film is *L'Age d'Or* and he was to acknowledge his debt to Surrealism at several points in the conversation); Antonioni; Visconti; and Welles—but also Howard Hawkes, one of those inexplicable favorites of French movie addicts. Resnais loves the old serials ("Feuillade," we agreed, "was a very great man") and even likes the sort of thing Lang is doing today in that vein: *"The Bengal Tiger* isn't as good as *Mabuse,* of course, but it still gives me a kick." I asked him if any films can be said to have influenced or inspired him in any way. He answered that as far as influences were concerned he had always considered himself as pottering away on the fringe [*"un bricoleur en marge"*] and then, after a moment's reflection, he said that there *was* one kind of film that had always made him want to make movies: the American musical comedy! (Donen, Minnelli, Kelly, etc.)

Resnais was very reluctant to discuss his future plans. He admitted that he was having three scripts written for him at the present time (he never wants to adapt any pre-existing work, scruples at touching anything which already has its definitive form) but doesn't seem too enthusiastic about the fact. He seems to have a strong inferiority complex about "not knowing grammar," as he puts it, or in other words about having no literary flair in a country where every school boy is supposed to be able to write like Madame de Sévigné. Also, this is the first time he has ever been in a position to *choose* his own subject matter. (Even *Hiroshima* was a commissioned film at the outset: a Franco-Japanese co-production *had* to be made, and it *had* to be set in Hiroshima.) He finds himself somewhat at a loss. Since our conversation, however, I have learned from a mutual friend about Resnais' fondest project, one which ties in rather nicely with his considerations on heterogeneity, Surrealist painting and Feuillade's serials. It is based upon a comic strip which appeared in Holland during the early 'thirties and told of the amazing, picaresque adventures of a certain Harry Nixon. The film is to be a vast, lavish, fresco-like serial, involving the wildest kind of *fin de siécle* science fiction, with sets to be designed by Paul Delvaux. Unfortunately it is such a costly venture (the figure quoted was a million dollars) that it is doubtful that the film can be produced for some time to come, despite Resnais' current prestige. In a work of this sort, however, Resnais would doubtless resolve the intellectual and aesthetic problems he confronted in *Hiroshima.*

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF *Film Quarterly*, published quarterly at Berkeley, California, for October 1, 1959.

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Sworn and subscribed before me this 17th day of September, 1959.

[Signed] William J. Schoener
Notary Public, Alameda County, California

(My commission expires December, 1960)

Film Reviews

Nazarin

Directed by Luis Buñuel. Producer: Manuel Barbachano Ponce. Screenplay by Julio Alejandro and Luis Buñuel. Camera: Gabriel Figueroa.

Guarded by police, a shabby line of convicts files slowly along a dusty road. Lagging behind them, exhausted and shackled, a young man walks by himself. There's something extraordinarily mysterious and pitiable in his face, it reflects the kind of interior tragedy that would make you stop and stare. An old lady notices him; from the little cart of fruit she's wheeling to market, she takes a pineapple and shyly offers it. An act of innocent kindness? You would think so. But the young man's face contracts with agony and rage. In his mind he suddenly hears the beating of drums. His eyes glaze over as if the pineapple were some unmentionable monstrosity. Then the spasm passes. Relief and astonished tenderness flood his face; he takes the fruit; and shambles on, through the hot dry landscape that stretches away to oblivion—to the penal settlement or the gallows. It doesn't matter. . . The real thing, now, is the pineapple: the love, the *caritas*, the young man had feared didn't exist. Having found the divine in the human, he won't feel so alone any more.

This disturbing, overwhelming final episode is in the great tradition of Luis Buñuel, who once said that his aim in making films was to convince people that they don't live in the best of all possible worlds. (And, in parenthesis, that there's no sign of the world getting much better.) He has never dramatized this belief so powerfully, and with such immense sadness, as in the whole of *Nazarin*.

Here is the parable. Sixty years ago, in a Mexico dominated by brutally reactionary rulers, landowners and clergy, a young priest called Nazarin came to live in a slum quarter. He wished to practice Christian love, forgiveness, and holy poverty. At first he found this difficult; later, impossible. He gave sanctuary in his little room to a whore who'd killed another whore in a quarrel—but the church found out, and defrocked him. Hoping to live as a simple anonymous Christian among the simple anonymous poor, he took to the countryside. Andara, the grateful whore, became his devoted follower; so did another girl, Beatriz, abandoned by her lover and subject to outbursts of wild sexual hysteria. Nazarin would rather these two half-crazed women left him alone, but he couldn't send them away. Loyally they traipsed after him, across the desolate countryside, the retinue swelled by a hideous but kindly dwarf who fell in love with Andara.

As the film opens out with the story of Nazarin's odyssey, we see that everything he does is misinterpreted, or has consequences that increasingly disturb his faith. He treats a sick child, and arouses the buried primitivism of the village women, who scream and abase themselves and welcome him as a witch doctor. In a village stricken by the plague, he tries to administer divine consolation to a dying girl. She won't listen. "Not heaven," she mutters, "but Juan . . . " Juan, her lover, breaks into the room and seizes her in his arms; the plague passes from the girl to her lover as they grasp at each other—and once again, Nazarin can only withdraw. Finally the police catch up with Andara and throw Nazarin into prison. Here he is mocked and beaten by a murderer, befriended by a thief who specializes in robbing church offertory boxes. And when the thief remarks that good men like Nazarin and bad men like himself are equally ineffective in this world, the young man's cup runs over. Bitter and desperate, he turns against religion, against life. Only on his way out of this world, when he finds he can accept a gift of fruit from an old woman, when it becomes a pathetic yet enduring symbol of human solidarity, does he reach a new kind of faith.

Nazarin loses Christ and finds man. Like Dostoevsky's Prince Muishkin, or his Alyosha ("I am a monk who doesn't believe in God"), he finds him among the derelict, the criminal, and the mad. By implication Buñuel is saying —as he has always said—that this is the way so-

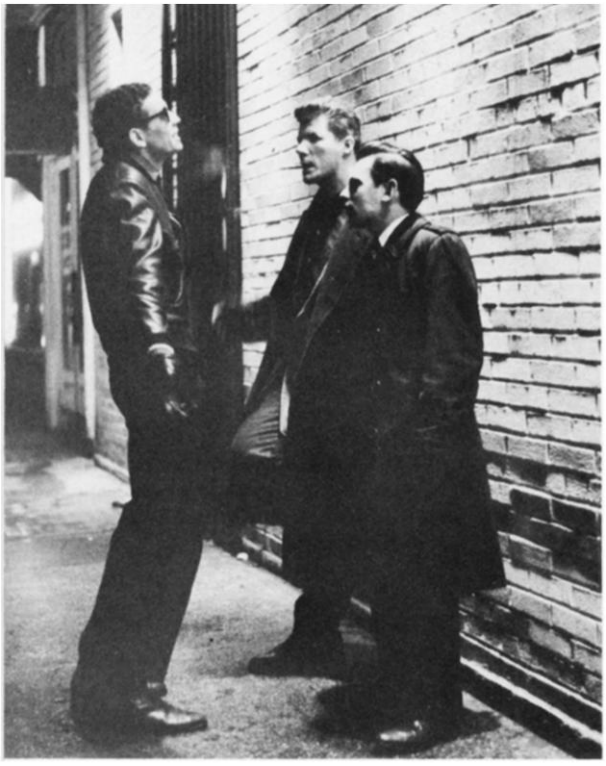
ciety drives the individual. In all of Buñuel's important work you can find this rich implacable hatred of society—church, conservative governments, bureaucracy, militarism, the bourgeoisie—displayed with a sometimes paranoiac fury. His protagonists seem to snatch their moments of pleasure (usually erotic) in the teeth of official disapproval or hostility. In *L'Age d'Or* the lovers disturb a pompous bureaucratic ceremony by rolling on the ground and clawing at each other with wild lustful cries before dignitaries drag them off. In *Nazarin* they cling suicidally to their passion, telling plague and priest, in effect, to go to hell. Stunning surrealist touches are introduced to show the individual's social or religious guilt—in *Nazarin* the portrait of Christ grins and sneers at the whore delirious after her brawl, in *El* the tormented husband wanders into church and sees priest and choirboys thumbing their noses at him from the altar. In the end, Buñuel suggests that society is only a legalized mob; beneath the institutional surface lies prejudice and cruelty. As in *Los Olvidados* a group of young delinquents attack a legless man simply because he is legless, so in *Nazarin* society attacks an innocent, a Fool, because he is just that.

Yet Nazarin, at the end of the film, is no Arturo at the end of *El,* crazily zigzagging across the courtyard of the monastery in which he thinks he's found refuge: no lost child at the end of *Los Olvidados,* a dead body trussed up in a sack, rolled down into an arroyo at night and forgotten. Unlike these, he finds a reality with which to replace an illusion, and the film itself goes beyond protest to reach affirmation. A not altogether surprising step, incidentally, remembering the wonderful passages in *Robinson Crusoe* which celebrate the discoveries of solitude, the marriage of a man to a beautiful desert island.

The film is finely acted by Francisco Rabal (Nazarin), Rita Macedo (Andara), Jesus Fernandez (the dwarf) and Marga Lopez (Beatriz, with her two manic sexual outbursts in which her body reproduces the form of Salvador Dali's Hysterical Arch). The images (Figueroa was the cameraman) are often more deliberately composed than is usual with Buñuel, especially in the powerful sequence of the plague-stricken village: the child wandering down the silent, abandoned street, the bodies laid out in front of the church. The script, by Buñuel and Julio Alejandro, is based on a novel by the remarkable nineteenth-century Spanish writer, Perez Galdós. I haven't read the original, but suspect—since it was one of Galdós' last works, written after a nervous breakdown which resulted in religious conversion—that Buñuel has turned it inside out, just as a few episodes in the film (notably the healing of the sick child) seem to turn the New Testament inside out. In any case, the result has all the impact of an absolute masterpiece, a work of beautiful, explosive force and strangeness.

—Gavin Lambert.

Marga Lopez (Beatriz) and Francisco Rabal (Nazarin).



Shadows

Director: John Cassavetes. Producer: Maurice McEndree. Associate Producer: Seymour Cassel. Camera: Erich Kollmar. Assistant Camera: Cliff Carnel. Supervising Film Editor: Len Appelson. Editor: Maurice McEndree. Sound: Jay Grecco. Music: Charles Mingus. Sax Solos: Shafi Hadi.

The artistic impulse in the cinema seems to have been strong at the end of the past decade, for this period gave us memorable works from such countries as Ceylon (*Rekava*), Czechoslovakia (*Wolf Trap*), Mexico (*Nazarin*), and Poland (*Ashes and Diamonds*), as well as the continued wonder of the Bergman films. On the other hand, American films have become so glossy in their technical mastery and box-office attitudes that one greets with surprise and a sort of awe an independent group of film artists, not particularly interested in financial gain, who have created a celluloid diamond of neorealism and called it *Shadows*.

It is, first of all, the best American film about racial relations yet made. Secondly, one hopes it heralds the beginning of a tradition of cinematic vitality and honesty dealing with the experiences of ordinary human beings in the United States. *Shadows,* produced by Maurice McEndree and Seymour Cassel, was conceived and directed by the actor, John Cassavetes. The initial idea for the film came out of several inspired sessions of acting improvisations in a class at the Variety Arts Studio in New York City. In fact, the entire film is an improvisation on life and emotional disturbances among a certain milieu of city strugglers—unknown singers, artists, dancers, and actors who comprise part of the so-called "bohemian" strata of society. Its theme is loneliness, the chief cause of frustration among the young, but strengthened by counter-themes of color prejudice, the lack of artistic values in this country, and the casual cheapening of ideals.

SHADOWS:
(Top) The night-drifters of the city: Ben Carruthers, Tom Allen and Dennis Sallas.

(Bottom) Comfort beyond the color-line: Hugh Hurd and Lelia Goldoni.

Although the American hero and heroine are angry about their world, they are not as articulate as their British counterparts, and in *Shadows*, the imagery is the really eloquent force. Cassavetes aims for the unobtrusive observation of truth—the suddenly dramatic revelation of character in a commonplace environment. His insight into the complexities of white and Negro relationships in an urban environment, and his belief in capturing the looks, tones, and movements of people off-guard, brings him close to a kind of stylized documentary. There was no prepared script for *Shadows*; the actors were given the idea of a sequence, the story-line of an episode, and then they improvised upon it, responding constantly to an inner pinpoint of emotion which had to be conveyed. Cassavetes allowed the actors' improvisations to continue, sometimes for an hour, before stopping them, and then, later, he would use whatever he was most moved by. All of the actors play characters whose first names correspond to their own, for Cassavetes feels that this helps them to give an authentic, involuntary response in every way. The result is a film of tremendous honesty and dramatic force.

Shadows takes one into the desperate, intense atmosphere of the lonely of New York City, all seeking emotional and artistic security among the millions. Attention is focused upon three Negro characters—two brothers and their sister. Hugh (Hugh Hurd) is the oldest, an unemployed singer who travels from one dreary nightclub to another, disillusioned by the apathy of intoxicated audiences who would rather watch half-nude chorines than listen to his blues. Hugh is *obviously* a colored man; that is, his skin is dark, and his features Negroid. However, his brother and sister, Ben (Ben Carruthers) and Lelia (Lelia Goldoni) are white-skinned mulattos who are deeply ambivalent regarding their racial allegiances.

They live together, parentless, in an apartment furnished in the intellectual tradition—with Scandinavian chairs on the floor, Libby Holman posters on the wall, and cool jazz in the air. The relationship among these three people alternates between expressions of tenderness and violent anger, and Ben is treated almost symbolically as the "invisible" Negro youth in a corrupt world. Carruthers' performance is a brooding, visual poem of modern agony, and, one feels he is literally playing himself in both name and essence. As the film begins, one sees him standing alone in the frenzy of a rock 'n' roll party, and from time to time the camera lingers upon his thin silhouette darting angularly past the neon panorama of Broadway-by-night. With two white companions, Tom (Tom Allen) and Dennis (Dennis Sallas), Ben invades the tawdry little bars on Eighth Avenue, picking up floozies or fighting bloodily in alleys with other outraged night drifters. Here is one of the great portrayals of "the Negro white-man," played by a mulatto. It is the first time that this has been done on the screen and the effect is poignant; the character of Ben is often inexplicable, like his generation, regardless of race. One is told that he has ambitions to be a jazz trumpeter, but his creative aptitudes are drowned in the mysterious and terrible conflict of one who suspects that society has no place for him. The bar sequences are astonishingly graphic in their use of dialogue. Each of the youths converses with some girl, and the conversations are cut back and forth in humorous fashion, but with an effect of tragic lack of communication. The comic element in the film is best presented in a sequence in which this trio of gremlins visit the Museum of Modern Art. In its wintry garden, Tom breaks forth in a violent harangue against the phoniness of higher education and the abstract detachment of current art techniques from the layman's intelligence. Tom's speeches comprise all of the earthily amusing attitudes of the uninitiated toward the intellectually obscure. (Skeptically observing Lachaise's wide-hipped statue of a woman, he declares, "Now looka dis cat. He *really* hadda have a sense a' humor!") The satiric approach is visually injected into some party scenes, and it is during an interracial cocktail gathering of vapid, well-dressed jabberers that Lelia, bored by a solicitous but totally companionate white patron (David Pokitellow) meets a handsome sexual opportunist named

Tony (Anthony Ray). The love affair between Lelia and Tony is the dramatic crux of the film, and once again, Cassavetes has elicited brilliant work from these actors. Goldoni's full, expressive face, her nervously feminine gaiety that so quickly transforms into sullen cruelty, the total lack of discipline, in fact, makes her portrayal a definitive exposure of the city virgin thinly protected by artistic misanthropy. Tony's seduction of Lelia is rather starkly presented, and gains pathos only in its bedroom aftermath of guilt and disillusionment. The intimacy of the love scene is another achievement for *Shadows*; with tragedy as its keynote, Lelia's comment upon the experience of sex is pitifully forceful ("I didn't know it would be so *awful*") and perhaps it is also the summation of the major characters' attitudes toward the aesthetic reality of New York City.

At the same time, Ray's portrait of Tony is excellently delineated. Whether comically showing the party-Lothario deflated by a blonde's unexpected husband, or clumsily attempting to squelch his inner horror when he learns Lelia is a Negress—this actor is thoroughly persuasive. In the sequence in which Hugh orders Tony out of the apartment, the impact of the ambiguous sources of white *vs.* Negro hostility in New York City is almost like a slap in the face because the "racial problem" is before us with all of the tenuous, inarticulate rages of apology *vs.* indignation, and every previous image from Hollywood films involving similar situations now appear weak and less meaningful. At this point, it is obvious that the racial outlook of *Shadows* is a tragic one. None of the protagonists finds happiness or security on any level. Hugh is left to placate his disgusted manager, Rupert (Rupert Crosse) and to continue a third-rate career as an entertainer. Lelia refuses to accept Tony's plea for reconciliation and turns resignedly toward a stodgy young Negro for affection. Ben is finally doomed, it seems, to a futile cycle of antisocial isolation, for at the end of the film, one observes him wandering like a blind scarecrow in a leather jacket, moving past the traffic, a lean night-nonentity, pacing to the tempos of a jazz sax. Nothing is solved. We are simply shown something of the modern generation, a glimpse of the hip and the cynical. There are many provocative nuances in the film. For instance, at one point, the intellectual frustration of Ben causes him to slap a colored girl, one of the guests at Hugh's party. This siren (Jacqueline Walcott) has attempted a flirtation, hoping to pull Ben out of his moodiness. However, she only arouses his physical rejection of Negroes darker than himself—it is the source of his anger toward his older brother. This moment and the argument that follows are quite something to watch. There is, too, some slight tendency toward "symbolic dialogue," one fears, when Ben is permitted to lean solemnly against a lamp post and mutter, "Mary had a little lamb" in low tones. The implications are apparent but somehow out of character, and actually, the handsome but misunderstood lout-as-artist is a familiar cliché in modern fiction and drama. We are shown more of the neurotic side of Ben than the creative side, and his ambiguity might be the chief fascination on the part of the spectator. Erich Kollmar's photography is used boldly, and rather crudely, but the camera's eyes are perceptive and understanding—part of an atmosphere of improvisation. The style is matter-of-fact, direct, artlessly simple. Kollmar was always one step ahead of the New York police who hounded the camera crew on charges of obstructing traffic, and so the outdoor sequences, especially those on Broadway or 42nd Street, are swift, shaky images of faces and blinking bulbs, all reconstructed out of a two-year period of cutting. Despite the crudities of lens and the occasionally discordant soundtrack, however, the truthfulness is inescapable, making *Shadows* a notably dynamic film gesture toward total reality. Completely lacking in either polish or glamor, it leaves one believing that the mass audience is finally ready for such a work, and having seen it, will demand many more of the same. —ALBERT JOHNSON

All-Night Burlesque

Start from Skid Row: no sound of cars or trucks;
Only, at times, a shout—high without tone.
And these gaunt wanderers are its only flux:
In dusty pinstriped jackets, men of bone,

Their eyes lit with an untenable glow, they stray
—Vaguely, but not with drink—from here
to there,
Dark in the dark. Now I, as stiff as they,
Return along the quiet street to where

I am halted by a compact diadem,
Beneath which sit the dreaming, faces white:
Marine and hunchback without ruling them
Gaze at the fluent vehicles of light.

Nipples like hubcaps tilt across the screen;
A great thigh heaves by, thirty times the size
A thigh should be; it is toward us they lean,
Vast forms which make it only to our eyes.

And though her chin is sharp, and her
eyes beady,
We sit here hour by hour, with mouths
gone dry,
Greyly remote from the complex and less heady
Commitments of the flesh, yet transfixed by

Her curved and tense verisimilitude.
The shaped intangibles are no dream, but
The familiar matter of obsession, crude,
Contrived, we have always to sit out.

—Thom Gunn

Les Quatre Cents Coups

(English title: The 400 Blows.) Produced and directed by François Truffaut. Script: François Truffaut and Marcel Moussy. Photography: Henry Decae. Score: Jean Constantin. Distributor: Zenith. With Jean-Pierre Léaud, Patrick Auffay, Claire Maurier, Albert Remy, and Guy Decomble.

François Truffaut's first feature, *The 400 Blows*, is one of the few masterpieces of its kind granted to the cinema in recent years. It is a sad, bitter story of a child's gradual disaffection from society. The child is tough, imaginative, exuberant; the society is dull, timid, corrupt. But the film's point of view isn't sentimental. Antoine, the hero (in a jewel of a performance by Jean-Pierre Léaud) is a completely spontaneous and engaging extrovert of 13 or 14, neither more nor less remarkable or sensitive than his classmates. He doesn't breach the pattern in any way. He does, however, get caught. For showing a certain mild defiance, he gets a reputation as a trouble-maker, and petty-bourgeois vindictiveness does the rest. Forced out of school, betrayed by parents for whom he represents the burden of an impossible marriage, he is consigned to the police and the vice-ridden world of adults. The "good-bye to all that" gesture of the finale has some of the proud fantasy of Lamorisse's films—the suggestion that freedom lies not in the present world of corruption but in another time and place, the time and place that a child conceives of in his imagination, where he is in his element. In a recent interview in *The New Yorker*, Truffaut dismissed the white manes and red balloons as sentimental and irrelevant additives to the child's world. But because he makes his own kind of poetry, and because he takes the path of realism, he is in no danger of being confused with Lamorisse. Unlike the Lamorisse films, *The 400 Blows* does not exist on a plane of fantasy; its premises are not allegorical. It is about the suffering an average young schoolboy must endure if he has the bad luck to be considered a criminal by both his family and the state in what we can only take to be present-day Paris. Given the actualities of this situation, and a manifest talent for observation, Truffaut's approach may seem to American audiences strangely stoical. He seems to be able to accept bad luck in good grace and still move us to moral indignation.

Truffaut is not, in the political sense, engaged. He protests in terms of the transcendent values; he protests the inhumanity of man. The underlying sadness of his film is the sadness of the universal estrangement. Truffaut's beautifully oblique style of commentary is a product of poetic intuition, not, I dare say, of political

Jean-Pierre Leaud in Les Quatre Cent Coups

evasion. In *The 400 Blows*, "new wave" technique serves to unite poetry and journalism in the powerful idiom of a particular environment—an environment, moreover, that has long supplied certain historical privileges for what an aesthetic need can make of them. On its most agreeable level, you see something of this environmental idiom in the style of an Yves Montand, and you see the difference between that and what one critic has called "the desperate strategies" of our own popular entertainers. An American film-maker who wished to present with sympathy and truth the predicament of the young Antoines of New York and Detroit would really have to *faire les quatre cents coups*—and risk bad art as well as public indifference. What Truffaut has achieved—a genuinely un-neurotic work of public art—is something that seems at present quite beyond the capacity of American film-makers to produce, and not only because of Hollywood. Our own tradition provides no model, no cultural precedent for the kind of radical humanism we need today—unless it be the image of Huck Finn lighting out for that territory. The image is apolitical because the society that produced it was practically nonindustrial. To an incomparably greater degree than in the days of Mark Twain, however, politics is the way we live. You don't find many valid images of revolt today. An omnivorous society swallows the more fashionable ones whole, and the others are all bound in the pages of *Dissent* magazine. Truffaut's hero also lights out. He might be the hero of a film made thirty years ago. We Americans don't live in the past, as Richard Nixon says. We most emphatically don't. The violent flux of American life constantly revises the artist's scale of reference. Whereas even the rebellion of Holden Caulfield begins to seem like an inner-directed archaism when compared to the enormities of present-day teen-age culture, the children of *The 400 Blows* seem to be growing up in a relatively unaltered social surround. Whether or not this is part of the provincialism Truffaut is attacking, it does give the film a perennial truth, an air of timelessness, and I think the obvious allusions to *Zéro de Conduite* held to point this out.

The 400 Blows is a film about freedom. It could, I think, convey this idea to an audience of deaf illiterates in any part of the world, because its construction is very nearly as absolutely visual as that of a silent film. Its metaphor for freedom is space, as in that other great escape film, *Grand Illusion*. Notice the deceptively casual way both films gradually broaden in scope, in both the dramatic and the optical sense. To take *The 400 Blows*: who would have thought its end was in its beginning? It opens with crowded shots of a decrepit classroom packed with Vigo's grubby scholars under the tyrannical eye of a master half-demented through exhaustion; later come perambulations in and around Montmartre, a maze of architectural restrictions, reflecting a life so cramped, limited, and circular that the hero, playing hookey one day, spots his mother in *flagrante delicto*; and the wedged-in life of the tenements . . . Against all these things, Truffaut presses an unsparing camera. But the mood is relaxed, footling, the film moves at an even speed. We seem to be watching trivia, amusing and somewhat inconsequential. The musical score, with its jogging tunes, seems to reinforce this impression. The scene in the revolving drum injects the first disturbing note. It is, perhaps, a presentiment of brutalization. A small, blurred figure flattened on the side of an enormous whirling cylinder, and the cylinder turning in the expanse of the widescreen—for a moment the film itself seems to be out of control. But Truffaut passes lightly over it, and things resume their old

prosaic proportions. Except that now the isolation of the boy creates a new series of involvements, to which Truffaut responds with a subtle increase in momentum and an instinct for incongruities that move the film decisively out of the range of anecdote onto a level of profoundly serious narrative. By the time the boy's father hands him over to the police with all the callous piety that seems necessary to the occasion, the transition in tone is complete: this is no joke. The scenes of incarceration which follow pull you way under. The boy is flung into a cage with some routine offenders and then into a smaller one, the size of a phone booth, by himself. It is only the first of the many times we are to see children behind bars before the film comes to its close, with a great climactic letting-in of air.

The most original feature of Truffaut's beautifully oblique style of commentary is his by-now famous use of protracted sequences accomplished through the sustained single shot and through a minimum of cutting: the scene in the revolving drum, the long ride in the paddy wagon which encompasses the boy's whole descent from innocence, and which I recall as one long close-up alternated with a single reverse-field shot; the extraordinary interview with the (off-screen) phychiatrist, in which there are no cuts, merely a series of unsettling dissolves; and the long tracking shot of the stupendous finale. Since cutting is a director's chief means of comment, the effects Truffaut obtains in these sequences depend on the progression of meanings with the frame. Sometimes, as in the examples cited above, the progression has the elliptical motion of fine poetry. At other times, there is little more than the amateur perpetuation of a cliché. The physical-culture outing, for all its obvious debt to Vigo, looks like nothing so much as tired Tati (which is pretty tired), and the puppet show episode is sheer *tourisme*.

Where there is poetry in Truffaut's method, it is often graced with the kind of ambiguity cherished among the "new wave" directors. The ambiguity derives from a deliberate withholding of explicit comment, as in the interview scene—from the apparent determination of the director to express no opinions. Revelation is a matter of the direct perception of what people say and do, and what is revealed to you is your own feeling about the words and deeds of others. For example, shortly after the boy's commitment to the reformatory, a judge is seen wearily assuring the boy's mother that he will do what he can. In opposition to this paternal image, which might almost be out of some government-sponsored information film (Truffaut used to make short subjects for the government), we later see a semi-conconscious young runaway being dragged back to captivity. The grown-up characters in the film may appear to us monsters of hypocrisy, but is it more correct to say that they control the world than to say that they are controlled by it? In either case, children suffer. Instead of a moral pattern in the conventional sense, you are confronted with the spectacle of unanalyzed phenomena. Conventionally speaking, the boy's father is an amiable coward, his mother a hard-shelled Bovary ("I'm used to being criticized!"—the nearest thing to a villain in the piece. But no one can say they don't "try." Similarly, the judge, the psychiatrist, the chief of police all do their best, they "have children of their own." But, as we soon see, the caretaker locks his three little girls in a pen when the boys come running out for sports, and the runaway, accepting smuggled food, declares he would do it all again for just five more days of freedom. If Antoine judges his world, he does so through the only means that are available to him—a pure-hearted instinct for decency that, in the end, makes him take to his heels. Away he goes in a cross-country run that seems to take him clear across France to the sea. In the surf, liberated at last, he turns momentarily to face us; the image freezes, is drawn suddenly close, then slowly closer, until it fades out.

In its retention of life's ambiguity, the "new wave" technique makes unique demands on the spectator. The novelty of it is the way it can open up a film in the mind of the audience, creating an experience which is insistently problematical. This is perhaps more true of Chabrol than it is of Truffaut, but even when Truffaut

seems to be putting things squarely up to you, as in the intense and disarming intimacy of the psychiatrist's interview, ambiguous sensations are evident, and there is a suspicion that, in some of the things he says, the boy may be lying. As he himself remarks, "When I tell the truth, they don't believe me." The important thing, however, is that at this moment, and at the end, you are no longer looking at the film—the film is looking at you. In Franju's words *(Cahiers du Cinéma)*: *"Il parle au public, le môme, il nous parle."* What a blessing.

—ARLENE CROCE

A Man's Destiny

Director: Sergei Bondartchouk. Scenario: Y. Loukine and F. Chakhmagonov. Camera: V. Monakhov.

The Soviets' official entry in their own first international film festival, held this summer in Moscow as an unsuccessful counterattraction to the U.S. Exhibition, predictably—given the heavy propaganda bias to the whole event—copped the Grand Golden Wheat Grain. The film, *A Man's Destiny,* cannot in itself be regarded as either an especially interesting or even a good film both because of its air of modest self-congratulation and its suds-drowned plot. What makes it worth, however, a certain amount of serious attention here is the quite surprisingly enthusiastic reception of it by European—principally French—critics and its relation to that other extremely popular—in Europe—Soviet film, *When the Cranes Fly Over,* which won the Grand Prize at Cannes in 1958, and which will be shortly seen in the States as part of the Soviet-U.S. film exchanges.

Pavlik Boriskine and Sergei Bondartchouk in A MAN'S DESTINY.

Based on a Sholokhov short story, incidentally of a much lower literary quality than the author's celebrated *Quiet Flows the Don, A Man's Destiny,* like *The Cranes,* has many elements proper to the old-fashioned tear-jerking melodrama. It does have some sporadically classy if somewhat dated visuals which lend it a slight air of quality. But what is interesting is that both films were made under the rather more lenient conditions of the post-Stalin period, and as a result show a faintly more realistic, individualistic view of Soviet life and citizens than could have been seen in any of the ponderous tractor dramas of the preceding years.

Actor Sergei Bondartchouk, who gave a notable lead performance in Sergei Youketvitch's *Othello* a few years back, plays the noble hero, having selected this film as his first directorial effort. It is very much the sort of film one might expect an actor to choose to direct himself in. There is a dandy range of emotion—Love, Humor, Anger, Courage, Pathos, Grief, Hope—with many a big moment. Altogether it is an ideal showcase.

The hero is a simple, good man with his share of human failings—the average Soviet citizen, to be exact, as the film announces in its opening titles. The first fifteen minutes show him as a young worker in the years immediately following the Revolution, his meeting the girl whom he shortly marries, their tender love and their hopes for the future, the first child. The edges of the screen are softly fuzzed for this dreamlike excursion into flashback past. To prove that the hero is human the audience is shown his getting drunk and having to be put to bed by his understanding wife. The children grow, the fuzz retreats from the frames. Man and wife are shown handsome and happy, with temples attractively silvered, when war comes to their rose-covered workers' cottage.

As an average Soviet citizen Private Bondartchouk is a positive paragon of heroic virtues and his exploits are reminiscent of numerous war-

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A Man's Destiny

Director: Sergei Bondartchouk. Scenario: Y. Loukine and F. Chakhmagonov. Camera: V. Monakhov.

The Soviets' official entry in their own first international film festival, held this summer in Moscow as an unsuccessful counterattraction to the U.S. Exhibition, predictably—given the heavy propaganda bias to the whole event—copped the Grand Golden Wheat Grain. The film, *A Man's Destiny,* cannot in itself be regarded as either an especially interesting or even a good film both because of its air of modest self-congratulation and its suds-drowned plot. What makes it worth, however, a certain amount of serious attention here is the quite surprisingly enthusiastic reception of it by European—principally French—critics and its relation to that other extremely popular—in Europe—Soviet film, *When the Cranes Fly Over,* which won the Grand Prize at Cannes in 1958, and which will be shortly seen in the States as part of the Soviet-U.S. film exchanges.

Pavlik Boriskine and Sergei Bondartchouk in A MAN'S DESTINY.

Based on a Sholokhov short story, incidentally of a much lower literary quality than the author's celebrated *Quiet Flows the Don, A Man's Destiny,* like *The Cranes,* has many elements proper to the old-fashioned tear-jerking melodrama. It does have some sporadically classy if somewhat dated visuals which lend it a slight air of quality. But what is interesting is that both films were made under the rather more lenient conditions of the post-Stalin period, and as a result show a faintly more realistic, individualistic view of Soviet life and citizens than could have been seen in any of the ponderous tractor dramas of the preceding years.

Actor Sergei Bondartchouk, who gave a notable lead performance in Sergei Youketvitch's *Othello* a few years back, plays the noble hero, having selected this film as his first directorial effort. It is very much the sort of film one might expect an actor to choose to direct himself in. There is a dandy range of emotion—Love, Humor, Anger, Courage, Pathos, Grief, Hope—with many a big moment. Altogether it is an ideal showcase.

The hero is a simple, good man with his share of human failings—the average Soviet citizen, to be exact, as the film announces in its opening titles. The first fifteen minutes show him as a young worker in the years immediately following the Revolution, his meeting the girl whom he shortly marries, their tender love and their hopes for the future, the first child. The edges of the screen are softly fuzzed for this dreamlike excursion into flashback past. To prove that the hero is human the audience is shown his getting drunk and having to be put to bed by his understanding wife. The children grow, the fuzz retreats from the frames. Man and wife are shown handsome and happy, with temples attractively silvered, when war comes to their rose-covered workers' cottage.

As an average Soviet citizen Private Bondartchouk is a positive paragon of heroic virtues and his exploits are reminiscent of numerous war-

time Hollywood films. He volunteers for dangerous missions; is captured, wounded, suffers in heroic silence; kills a potential traitor; helps other prisoners weaker than himself; courageously drinks down an entire bottle of vodka in about three minutes flat to confound an SS general and to show the Germans the stuff of which average Soviet citizens are made. To wind up his war career he conveniently kidnaps a German officer who just happens to have the plans for a final big attack on the Soviet Army in his brief case and drives with him through a mine field straight into Soviet lines. With an extra heavy sprinkling of white in his hair, he is decorated for bravery; learns his aviator hero son has been killed on the last day of the war and returns home to find that his wife, daughter, and home had been destroyed in a direct bomb hit early in the war. A lonely, bitter man, turned truck driver in peacetime, he comes upon an appealing seven-year-old waif, decides to adopt him in a scene calculated not to leave a dry eye in a movie house, and together they drive off into a red star sunset toward a better tomorrow. End of film.

Now, there's nothing wrong with happy family life, heroic deeds in time of war, the adoption of homeless waifs, or, *in fine,* the persistence of human nobility in the face of woeful adversity, but when all these acts are attributed to the same man in the same motion picture, a great deal of care has got to be used or it all adds up, as it did this time, to pretty sentimental hokum, despite a certain amount of fancy visual window dressing.

European intellectuals, critics, and audiences as a whole, however, have taken to this film with a great and perhaps too nonreflective enthusiasm. Through a singular but logical combination of snobbery, resentment, and envy, European intellectuals tend to be particularly critical of most U.S. films. In France, for instance, a recent poll of French movie-goer opinion showed that U.S. films were rated the lowest among national films people wanted to see, although according to box-office receipts the exact reverse was true. Actually, U.S. films do well commercially in Europe and strangely enough intellectual critics would never miss a one. Since the U.S.S.R. represents the most obvious antithesis to the U.S., many European intellectuals who have a certain rather traditional disposition to the left tend to be excessively tolerant of things Soviet, at least in the artistic field. In the realm of films they really haven't had many that could, even by the greatest indulgence, provoke much interest, let alone enthusiasm. Eisenstein is always invoked as a kind of cinema god, but his films tend to be too overpowering for average audiences and never have been good box office. *The Cranes* when shown at Cannes a year ago filled the bill perfectly for the people who were in a sense just waiting for a Soviet film which they could really like. True, it had a lack of sophistication long absent from any respectable Western film, there were embarrassing bits of melodrama, and many a moment of spurious emotion, but a pair of appealing young actors and some occasionally attractive photography—a kind of sub-Vigo crossed with a sub-Italian neorealism—seemed to do the trick, and the film positively cleaned up at the box office and critically, as *A Man's Destiny* is doing now. Giddy with the sense "Why, they're just like us," critics of the rightist press almost outdid the Communist press in praising both films. The fact that the same story and same technique applied to a film made in France, Italy or the United States would have been thumped mercilessly as an old chestnut didn't seem to occur to anyone.

In the Soviet Union the film *The Cranes* was important since it was the first in many years to show a greater creative freedom and imagination in camera work as well as presenting a slightly more honest view of daily life. When released in its own country it got uniformly bad notices for its very breaks, limited as they were, with convention. But a small group within film circles anxious for furthering artistic freedom pushed the film until they got it accepted for presentation at the Cannes Film Festival. There, so the story goes, in order to help this incipient movement for creative liberty in the U.S.S.R., the jury awarded it the Grand Prize, their task made the easier by the fact there weren't many good films in competition that

year. In any case, since the success of *The Cranes,* the first Soviet film to have long, successful runs in London, Paris, and Brussels and to be dubbed into other languages, there have been a number of other Soviet films released abroad showing rather more revealing insights into Soviet life and made with greater creative imagination. This number does not include *A Man's Destiny,* however. Among them are *The House Where I Live,* a simple, sympathetic study of adultery; *Home,* a study of different social classes in that classless society; *The Children of Others,* family life broken by divorce; and *The Captain's Daughter,* from the Pushkin short story, perhaps the only really topnotch Soviet film made since the death of Eisenstein. All these films with the exception of the last named have less obvious visual distinction than *The Cranes* and *A Man's Destiny,* but all are more seriously constructed, and although somewhat slow-moving for our tastes, are far more significant both as artistic and social documents than either of the two prize-winning films.

Of all these recent films, *The Cranes* included, *A Man's Destiny* has the least interest for Western viewers in that it pushes so hard in its effort toward near-deification of its "little man" hero. The puzzling insistence of the hero that he is only an "ordinary" man reminds one of the retouchings that the late Joseph Stalin (according to Nikita Khrushchev) made in his official biography. After adding heavily to the already abundant number of superlatives in this relentless eulogy, he introduced a brand-new passage pointing out his own supreme unassuming modesty. The great man not only has all the other virtues, he is modest too. —CYNTHIA GRENIER.

Suddenly, Last Summer

Producer: Sam Spiegel. Director: Joseph Mankiewicz. Screenplay: Tennessee Williams and Gore Vidal. Photography: Jack Hildyard. Music: Malcolm Arnold and Buxton Orr.

The film world of Tennessee Williams is a stylist's dream-world: the South glamorized in the manner of the Marquis de Sade—a hothouse of devourers, both physical and mental, an area so fantasized and psychologically in control of the author's subconscious that audiences must look upon this world as brilliant imagery with only a suggestion of truth. It is certain that *Suddenly, Last Summer* is a controversial film in the sense that people will discuss its meaning on so many levels that the intention of the film may be entirely overlooked. The film leaves audiences in mute astonishment, with their senses stunned; this is its intention, and *Suddenly, Last Summer* is directly provocative and unusual enough to grasp the viewer's total involvement, no matter how much one may resist. The jolting climax is out of Williams' nightmare world of exotic make-believe—it is unreal, vaguely symbolic of primitive rituals, a wildly *American* evocation of mysterious Spanish motives and hatreds, and above all, it is an extremely moral film. Despite the story's somewhat enthusiastic preoccupation with evil, the immoralists are thoroughly punished, and the excitements of the plot are neither half as brutal nor as realistically compelling as Buñuel's *macabres mexiques.*

The film also causes one to believe that the *dénouement* is somehow a matter of exquisite intellectual imagination—a tendency of certain writers to illustrate, with ingenious diversity, the emotional and sexual destruction of expatriate Americans or Anglo-Saxon Europeans trapped under another, more disturbingly erotic sky. This is a cliché regarding Latin, Asian or African atmospheres that thrives because of its infinite theatrical possibilities. Apparently, sex is always more sinister in the warmer climes.

A filmed play, *Suddenly, Last Summer* may seem a trifle talky at times, but then, no one should expect less from either Williams or the director concerned here, Joseph L. Mankiewicz. The latter has long been associated with uncontrollably verbal films (*People Will Talk, The Quiet American*), although in this case, the long monologues seem to be more controlled so that nonlistening cinemagoers may be kept in suspense while awaiting the major piece of visual excitement.

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SUDDENLY, LAST SUMMER: *The world of Sebastian Venable: desire, death-ceremonial and devourers.*

Williams and Gore Vidal have written a strong screenplay, and the interpolated sequences at Lion's View Asylum are far more effective than any single scene from *The Snake Pit.* When Catherine Holly (Elizabeth Taylor) confronts madmen and madwomen, on separate occasions, each incident is given an odd uniqueness of its own, and the scenes are gripping indeed.

Since only three major characters are ostensibly in the limelight of this tale of intelligent perverseness, the acting level is aimed quite high, but except for one performance it only strikes middle-ground. As Violet Venable, the mother of the dead poet Sebastian, Katharine Hepburn is absolutely magnificent. She creates a completely villainous, hawklike creature of such elegant abstrusity and affectation that by comparison Montgomery Clift seems extranumb in the numb role of an inquisitive neurosurgeon. The sympathy of Dr. Cukrowicz is amply projected by Clift, but the character is held within a limited range of emotions, remaining simply the intellectual catalyst who accelerates Catherine's progress from hysteria to sanity. In a surprise switch from the play, the writers have quite neatly reversed the doctor's effect upon the mother, thereby amplifying the moral tone of the film. However, the medical figure of normality is less attractive than the contrasting examples of glamorous neurotica presented by Taylor and Hepburn.

In her long monologue about predatory birds of the Galapagos consuming young sea-turtles, Hepburn is properly transfixed by horror and memory. It is the film's most explicit statement about the peculiar, dilettantish search for God and sensual pleasure that Sebastian and his mother experienced during those past summers, when the final symbol of Sebastian's self-centered quests was a volume of poetry, read only by a very few. In a description of previous summers abroad with her son, Hepburn achieves a perfect lyric combination of speech, mood, and demented mother-love that merges into a tiny episode of greatness—even the excellent musical score is most correct in this instance. In Hep-

burn's first scene, she constructs a tour-de-force of personal expression, from her descent in an elevator, and the artful usage of a large silk stole, to her total command of gesture and attitude: it is a lesson in the art of stylized acting. Of course, Hepburn is aided by Oliver Messel's superb art direction, and he is one who seemingly understands the gothic aspects of Williams' dark-Darwin South even *more* than the author and Scott Slimon's set decoration, especially in Sebastian's room, is extraordinary: the room itself, with its masks, drawings and paraphernalia of a corrupted Dorian, seems to embody the character of the doomed poet.

Mankiewicz has obtained an exceptionally perceptive performance from Taylor, in the pivotal role of Catherine, although she has an unfortunate tendency to seem forced in her most emotional moments. Her reaction *after* the attack of the madmen is unconvincing to the point of seeming Delsartean, while on the other hand, her first encounter with Clift, in the convent-hospital, is better acting than she has ever done in her adult career. Nevertheless, her biggest moment, the narration of Sebastian's death in Spain, is completely taken away from her by the camerawork of Jack Hildyard and Tom Howard. By *showing* us these events in a succession of striking images, superimposed upon Taylor's beautiful face, a haunting piece of cinematography is achieved, making the actress' recitative anguish secondary to these views of Sebastian's polite pederasty and sunlit death-ceremonial, all embellished by the story's bizarre symbols of carnivorous violence: one of the youthful band of destroyers hops about like a plucked bird, while another smilingly performs a dirge of death on his primitive-looking banjo, made out of a turtle shell. This sequence is all very much worth waiting for.

As Catherine's obnoxious mother and brother, Mercedes McCambridge and Gary Raymond offer contrasting approaches to the American southerner. The former is all obviousness and caricature, gushing fussily in an accent of such cornpone thickness that one is embarrassed by its falsity. Raymond, however, *does* prove that British performers can be masters of Mason-Dixon intonations, and his portrait of a feckless ingrate is exemplary.

Suddenly, Last Summer thrives in a realm of pitiless cinematic neuroticism, a distorted fantasy of the thirties (there is no sense of period at all, either in dress or decor), which really reflects to a great extent the psychological milieu and *era* of Tennessee Williams, and the obvious belief on the part of Hollywood film-makers that in this story of death and disfiguration lies the ring of box-office truth. —ALBERT JOHNSON

The Cranes Are Flying

Produced and directed by Mikhail Kalatozov. Scenario: Victor Rozov. Camera: Serge Uresovsky. Music: M. Vainberg. With Tatiana Samoilova, Alexei Batalov, Vasily Merkuriev.

It seems a shame that this film, which is one of the best to arrive recently in America, should be introduced with a timorous apology by its distributors. Warner Brothers—who, as we should always remember, combine good citizenship with their picture making—inserted a blurb at the beginning of the film which absolved them from responsibility should any American become tainted with the Soviet ideologies which surely must be lurking *somewhere* behind the innocent façade of a love story. Well, the brothers are absolved, and any future congressional committee will have to address themselves —with glee I'm sure—to the State Department for their satisfaction.

But whatever its intention, this bit of patriotism does the film a disservice. It tends to put one off; it creates the possibility, at the onset at least, that we are about to see one of those dreadful Stalinist happy-tractor films of the *genre* of *Cossacks of the Kuban*. And *The Cranes Are Flying* is not that: it is a film which, in the skill of its direction, in the verve of its camerawork and editing, and in the unified virtuosity of its acting, deserves to be spoken of in the company of such films as *The Seventh Seal* and *Miss Julie*.

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The only scene in the film which might be called directly political is the very last one, in which an exhortation is made by a returning Soviet soldier in favor of peaceful reconstruction. I hardly think that even Mr. Hagerty would object to this speech on political grounds, but it is an unfortunate speech on artistic grounds, for it sets up the worst shot of the picture in which suddenly a character appears in the middle of a large crowd and, his arm about his daughter, stares upward in an orgy of gratuitous optimism.

Boris, a young man from a reasonably well-to-do doctor's family, volunteers for service in the early days of World War II, leaving his fiancée, Veronica, behind him to pine and wait. While he is gone, her parents are killed in an air raid, and she goes to live with Boris' family. There, her will crushed, she is raped by Boris' cousin who previously had shown an active interest in her. For some reason which remains unclear but which must involve Soviet ethics, she decides to marry him, and does so. Shortly after, with the general retreat, the entire family is evacuated to Siberia. There, though married to the cousin, Veronica still yearns for Boris.

But Boris has been killed at the front. Veronica gets intimations of this, but refuses to believe it. She spends her days in idle hope, convinced that Boris will return to her. Only when victory is declared and Boris' best friend confirms his death beyond the possibility of doubt, and when the closing political speech points to the necessity for building a new life on the ruins of the old, does Veronica, in recognizing the truth, free herself from her anguish.

If this seems a banal plot, it is. One of the great virtues of *Cranes*, however, is the manner in which it is invested with real meaning: the manner in which the film treads a thin and careful line between bathos and sincerity, between the banality of overstated, unwarranted sentiment, and the stark, absurd, recognizable simplicity of a real and common experience. The plot, when abstracted and set down, becomes insufferably simplistic; it is the *film's* great achievement that it never becomes so.

The reasons for this are several, and we might look at them singly in order the better to evaluate the whole. There is a curious and obviously designed lack of imagistic unity. Two styles—one a very straight, naturalistic, pictorial rendering, the other a fast, nervous, symbolized evocation—seem to be in constant conflict throughout the film. What begins as a highly stylized visual convention suddenly turns into a very naturalistic one, and when we have become used to that, reverses itself again; the *adagio* of realism is reinvested with new meaning by the *allegro* of the montage scenes. What makes this apparent hodge-podge work is the fact that these movements, to extend the musical analogy, are both based on the same themes. A unity accrues which is not one of continuity but the rhythm, of the repetition and elaboration of certain symbolic elements, and of the way in which the camera treats these elements.

The opening sequence will serve as an example. The first shot shows Boris and Veronica as young, happy lovers, running along an embankment in the early hours of a Sunday morning. The streets are deserted; the lovers cross a bridge. They pause to embrace. There is a cut to a high angle shot from the top of the bridge, a striking composition which frames the two figures between a wide expanse of street and a tall stone pillar which angles across the screen. We are to see this camera angle repeated again in less happy circumstances, but for the moment it encompasses only the happy instinct of the lovers. A cleaning truck comes

Alexei Batalov and Tatiana Samoilova in THE CRANES ARE FLYING

into frame, spraying the street. The inevitable happens: the lovers are doused. The next shot is a close one, as, laughing, they try to dry themselves. The water here is insignificant; later it becomes an excited and referential symbol: Boris falls, dying, into water; in Siberia all is steam; Veronica is washing clothes, her hands immersed in water, when she learns of Boris' death; the first shot after peace is restored shows some racing sculls slicing the water under the very bridge where we had first seen Boris and Veronica embrace.

To take another example: when Boris, at the front, is shot to death, he is standing on a tiny island in the middle of a watery bog, leaning on a birch tree. A shot rings out, he starts to fall. As he does so he clutches the trunk of the tree and falls in a circular motion, slowly. The camera moves with him, around the tree but in the opposite direction, and a remarkable sequence begins. There is a cut to Boris' point of view: the trees above him are spinning, he begins to hallucinate. As the trees spin from left to right, a shot is superimposed which is almost an exact replica of the earlier shot of Boris mounting the staircase, though this time he is in his uniform. The movement in this shot is from right to left, and the two motions commingle until other shots are superimposed, in slow motion, showing mainly a wedding party coming *down* the stairs. The principals in the wedding are of course Boris and Veronica; she radiant in the full white veils which she had wished (and which re-introduce another visual image of veils which had been put forth earlier), he meticulous in a white tie, the very antithesis of the grubby, mud-caked, dying soldier he actually is.

However ingenious and successful this conceptual device is, there are other aspects of the film which deserve our attention. The photography by S. Urusevsky is meticulous. Of particular interest is the large amount of hand-held footage, which is the most effective and well-shot footage of this kind I have ever seen. One shot, which begins in a bus and is clearly hand-held, ends up, without any discernible cut, as a boom shot. However this was achieved (perhaps with a gyroscope?) it served as a very remarkable opening for the moving sequence which showed Boris' departure to war. There were other hand-held shots, equally effective, moving through thick crowds in a way which would, if they could be so affected, shame the Hollywood extravaganza manufacturers. Kalatozov's crowds were not only masses of people, they were thick agglutinations of individual persons, each of them there with a definite purpose, and all of them moving in a way which, though obviously pre-planned, seemed to provide an excellent definition of spontaneity.

The acting throughout reflected this same excellence. Tatiana Samoilova's Veronica was flawless. In less expert hands her role could have fallen apart or dissolved into helpless sentiment. She refused, however, to indulge herself in the slightest. She understated without anti-climax and she effused without insincerity. She was at once coy and worldly, naïve and adult, tender and realistic; she was beautiful and delightful. A less personal observation would remark on the perfect *balance* of her performance. She completely "lived" her part in the sense in which a Stanislavsky actor understands that term, but she never became so ingrown that the external expression of character suffered. Her performance in particular, and those of the others in general, could well serve as object lessons for our native mumblers from Actor's Studios and the like.

Clearly a strong and sensitive mind was at work to mold all of these elements. Kalatozov's hand is to be seen throughout, in the intricate conceptual maneuvering, in the performances, in the camera compositions, and in the superb editing (for which, incidentally, no separate credit was given) with its long, beautifully timed dissolves and superimpositions. Ultimately, what can be said of Kalatozov is that he not only knows how to use film, he also knows how to use his intelligence; not only can he move an audience to uncheap tears, he can also move his actors to the same. He is, in short, an artist, and he makes the Warner Brothers and their sententious apology look very small indeed.

—Mitchell Lifton

Ben-Hur

Producer: Sam Zimbalist. Director: William Wyler. Screenplay: Karl Tunberg. Photography: Robert Surtees. Music: Miklos Rosza.

There has been, since the war, a deep concern among Hollywood producers about the dwindling motion picture audience—particularly in America. However, the contemporary audience is not incapable of being dazzled, but simply harder to astonish—the technical miracles of the screen have been so fully explored, in sight, size and sound, that now the film-makers have turned to smell, one learns. And, in a mood of extravagant panic, the larger studios have tried to recoup postwar losses by embarking upon a long-range schedule of new versions of successful screen classics. These have been a source of revenue to the studios, but a source of some ennui to audiences. Now with tremendous fanfare and publicity, MGM has released a formidably expensive remake of the 1925 spectacle.

Already a commercial success, the film is a pretentious vehicle that once more falls back upon the two greatest gimmicks of popular drama—Romans and Christians. The film's cost ran to $15 million; it is almost four hours in length, photographed in a new oversize color process, and is epic in every sense of the term.

But by no means should one believe that it is a great work of art. When compared to the earlier version, the latest *Ben-Hur*, in spite of its excellences, is not as good. It demonstrates overwhelmingly that the most serious affliction of American film-makers today is lack of vision. The magic of the silent film, like that of every art, lay in its repect for the human imagination. In this film, absolutely nothing is left to one's imagination—except, perhaps, the physiognomy of Christ. There is too much of an atmosphere of awe in the entire approach to *Ben-Hur*, which is subtitled "a tale of the Christ." Christian, Jewish, and Roman points of view are thoroughly muddled; there is a treacly Christmas-card prologue evoking the Nativity, complete with choirs and orchestral sonorities, and some potentially powerful moments involving the Christus image are warped by obvious and intrusive musical reminders that The Great Religious Figure is being dealt with. One's alarm at the film-maker's inattention to the power of silence in a *sound* film is once more aroused. Where is the sense of drama?

In *Ben-Hur* the Passion is not given the dignity of simplicity because the general consensus in Hollywood seems to be than the audience might not *know* that Christ is being represented on the screen. This continual underestimation of the audience is very depressing because one is forced to watch the incipient power of a sequence destroyed by obviousness. For instance, the sequence in which the imprisoned hero is given a cup of water by Christ is poignantly, dramatically envisioned by actors and cameraman; a soldier stares into Christ's face with confused expressions of defiance and fear—it is excellently dramatized, this confrontation of the common man with divine forces in human form. The spell of natural sound should emphasize the figure of Christ dominating the landscape, watching the bewildered Ben-Hur stumbling away, turning to look over his shoulder in wonder. But the studio orchestra totally drowns the tensions and the triumph. The screenplay, by Karl Tunberg with some undefined assistance from Christopher Fry, is the result of what must have been an enormous task, for General Lew Wallace's book is packed with character-analysis and incident. The former is eliminated altogether, so that after a very convincing show of affection between Ben-Hur (Charlton Heston) and Messala (Stephen Boyd), one is asked to believe that Messala's personality could change overnight to that of an arch-fiend who would banish his friend to the galleys and imprison his mother and sister. In a film of such scope and length, the attention to motivation is extremely brusque; the definitions of theme are as swift and elusive as a flashback, and the love of Ben-Hur for Esther (Haya Harareet) is embarrassingly inept in its depiction, and wholly passionless.

Nonetheless, in his first big epic, Wyler has constructed the most tasteful and visually exciting film spectacle yet produced by an American company. The contribution of the film to what-

The chariot race in BEN-HUR, *directed by Andrew Marton.*

ever history the cinema will ever achieve is the chariot-race sequence, directed by Andrew Marton. Here one perceives the dynamic cinema at work, for the visual splendor, the vigorous, barbaric spirit of ancient Roman civilization is most meaningful to the spectator during these moments. Wyler and Marton have directed this race-of-hatred in what might be called "the Griffith tradition," with an acute sense of editing, natural sound, spectacular imagery, color, and movement. In the chariot race, the excitements of watching symbolic good (the white horses) and evil (the black horses, and spiked wheels) vie with one another, have the timeless melodramatic appeal which reaches audiences everywhere; the simple universal conflict pulls the spectator *into* the action, with the dust of the arena, the roar of chariot wheels and of the crowd. A visual moment of inspired cinema occurs, too, when Ben-Hur drives his victorious chariot past the mangled body of the defeated Messala. He looks back over his shoulder with the same helpless look of wonder that he had earlied directed toward Christ—the horses rear and pull at the reins, Messala rolls bloodily in the dust toward the camera, while beyond the tossing white manes Ben-Hur still stares down; then, suddenly, the horses pull his chariot away. The film achieves something wonderful in these moments, so that most of the scenes of leprosy and religious affirmation which follow appear theatrical and lacking in spirit.

The entry of Ben-Hur into a deserted Judean marketplace is also unusually effective. Accompanied by his afflicted mother and sister, he discovers only a few townspeople running to Pilate's villa to witness Christ's trial. One gets here, briefly, some indication of ingenuity of imagination, and feels that this incident might possibly have occurred in this manner, but the subsequent views of the trial and the "via crucis" are cinema mythology again, complete with thunderstorm-and-miracle.

In a film of this kind, the acting is of little consequence except for the leads. Charlton Heston has mastered a sincerely earnest, heroic style, and his performance dominates the others. Stephen Boyd's Messala suffers more from the writing, but he is actually quite impressive as an antique type of psychopath, playing the vil-

lain with an excellent flair for melodrama. The relationship between these two characters, a strong motif in Wallace's novel, is shallowly treated in the film, so that insight and humanity is evoked only in their reunion sequence. Jack Hawkins, as a Roman naval hero, brings depth and dignity to his brief role, Hugh Griffith is humorous as an Arab sheik, all rolling eyes and artifice, and Frank Thring, offers a stylish portrayal of Pontius Pilate, in true DeMille fashion. *Ben-Hur* is a step forward as far as sheer screen-spectacle technique is concerned, but one feels that a step *backward* should have been taken in order to get some perspective on what had gone before in the *content* of Roman epics. Far too many of the old clichés are still present in this saga of hatred and redemption in old Judea.

—ALBERT JOHNSON

La Casa del Angel

(English title not yet definite.) Director: Leopoldo Torre Nilsson. From the novel *La Casa del Angel* by Beatriz Guido. Camera: Anibal Gonzalez Paz. Kingsley International Pictures. With Elsa Daniel, Lautaro Murua, Barbara Mujica.

"Goodness has its degrees and depends on the circumstances," Pablo, the male protagonist of this recent Argentinian film, points out to the adolescent heroine, Ana, and her nurse, Nana. But Nana's religiosity is of the relentless, inquisitorial variety and, lest her charge be corrupted by such latitudinarianism, she reminds the impressionable Ana that "mortal sin means the death of the soul as well as the body."

Thus the deadly conflict between bigotry and skepticism upon which this hauntingly fatalistic film is based reveals itself in the opening dialogue. Indeed, the nurse can be compared with the chorus in Greek tragedy, although her running commentary on the corruption of the flesh and the consequent perilous position of the soul is meant to be understood ironically.

As a matter of fact, this film by the brilliant young Argentinian director, Leopoldo Torre Nilsson, is a beautifully structured, intricate series of ironies whose visual and verbal expressions run in a subtle, inexorable counterpoint from the first sequence to the last. The time is 1921; the milieu the wealthy, inbred, deeply puritanical, deeply corrupt aristocracy of Buenos Aires. Ana, not quite sixteen, is prevailed upon by her slier, more sophisticated contemporary, Vicenta, to explore the anatomical secrets of the heavily draped statues on her parents' summer estate.

"Why don't you kiss him?" mocks Vicenta, pointing to a voluptuously reclining satyr, and Ana—stealing mesmerized out of the glittering sunlight into the shadow hiding the recumbent satyr—leans over his stony lips, only to dart back with an irrestible impulse into the bright garden world. An instant later, in a perfect fury of revealed passion, she is embracing the first male she meets in her headlong flight up the garden path.

For this misdemeanor Ana is sent back to Buenos Aires. The camera moves into stifling town-house interiors with stiff, dark furniture, compulsively patterned wallpapers, and overbearing drapes. The lighting is shadowy; the actors rigidly restrain their movements. Rarely do we see the outdoors again, and only once more does Ana race along a garden path: this time in the dark, some hours after her seduction —so violent as to be a kind of mutual rape—by Pablo. Instead of running away from a supine satyr, she is running toward a corpse, flat on its back under a sheet—the body of the political enemy whom Pablo has just shot in a duel.

For beside the theme of Ana's awakening sex runs that of political conflict and corruption. Ana's world is the cloister of an adolescence guarded and absolutely dominated by the dogmatic religiosity of the older women: her nurse, her mother. Pablo's is the council chamber, with occasional forays into his mistress' bedroom or the whorehouse. Pablo's faction, agitating for a free, uncensored press, is opposed by the government whose chief representative publicly reveals the shady transactions of Pablo's father, a former cabinet minister. When Pablo angrily confronts his father, now retired, with this information, he is met with a shrug of admission

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LA CASA DEL ANGEL: *Elsa Daniel as Ana kisses the statue.*

and an ironic rephrasing of his own earlier statement to Ana: "Different circumstances," says his father, "demand different measures," and when Pablo bitterly accuses him of having preached ideals simply to conceal his crimes, the old man points out that Pablo's own ambivalent morality hardly makes him a fit judge of other people's behavior.

It is a measure of the sharply contradictory mores of his society that, although Pablo now knows the accusations to be true, he must still challenge his government attacker to a duel in order to defend the nonexistent honor of his father. Appropriately, the camera picks him up in the bed of a prostitute on the morning he is scheduled to deliver this challenge. That night he spends in the home of Ana's father—in whose garden the duel is to be fought—and it is there that he seduces, and is seduced by, the virginal Ana.

So the whole film balances upon the fulcrum of sexual awareness: light, ignorance, innocence, and the suppressed vitality of adolescence in one scale; and dark, knowledge, guilt, death in the other. And ironically again, while the end of innocence is death, it is death with a twist. Pablo, having seduced Ana, quickly becomes guilty of murder, also. But with a still further ironic turn, fate proves the accuracy of the nurse's warning that "mortal sin means the death of the soul as well as the body." Ana collapses at the scene of the duel and remains ill for a long time, during which Pablo gradually grows into an intimate member of the household. Upon her recovery there is slowly established an unbreakable relationship between her and Pablo; they rarely speak, obviously have no further sexual contact. Yet the isolation of each within the spell cast about him by the other is absolute: their souls have truly died.

However, and even more ironically, the state of suspended animation in which they exist is really only a somewhat more frozen extension of the congealing atmosphere in which they pursued their repressed and ambivalent existences earlier in the film. Their mutual dependence persists, not because of its vigor, but through their own inertia, whereas before they

had been held in bondage by the inertia of a stultified society. It is the final irony of the film that Ana and Pablo's brief, violent revolt against hypocrisy and repression is conducted in a state of ignorance so profound that it simply imprisons them more inescapably in the elegant dungeon of their world.

Certainly a good part of the credit for this film's careful construction must go to Beatriz Guido who worked with Nilsson on the adaptation of her novel, *La Casa del Angel.* But Nilsson's superb control of his actors so that their haunted, restricted movement provides much of the film's bedeviled atmosphere, and his choice of the sensitive camera of Anibal Gonzales Paz to visualize the character of events have done just as much to produce a startling unity of form and content.

This unity overrules any objections one might have to the movie's being a little unoriginal. Certainly we have seen films before in which the camera followed almost the very (fearfully drawn) breath of bewildered innocents at the mercy of outworn orthodoxies. Claude Autant-Lara's *Douce* (1943) comes to mind as an excellent and similar example. But there can be few scenes as simultaneously touching and foreboding as Ana's dance with her doll after she has first danced with Pablo (and for that matter with any male). Frightening in its inarticulate longing, her face looms into the lens as she leans down to grasp the doll, and it is this mood of subtle terror—inspired partly by the emphatic close-ups of her neurotically intense expression, and partly by the claustrophobically overstuffed interior—that quite rules out the sentimentality which could so easily have laid its sticky fingers on such a sequence. Bypassed also by these means is that other great pitfall of the sexual-awakening movie: unconscious humor. Never, even in retrospect, does it strike one as funny that an entire society should have made such a to-do over the most oblique references to the condition and/or usage of the pudenda.

While Nilsson and Paz frequently employ the light-dark dichotomy to emphasize the film's basic conflict (light equals innocence, shadow equals "sin"), they have brilliantly varied their pattern so as to emphasize the underlying ironies also. Thus, in the whorehouse scene one of the guests sets fire to the establishment to "purify" it and our last sight of the madam's parlor shows it illuminated by blazing draperies. Again, while the first important sequence involving Ana takes place in broad sunlight and sharp shadow and while the treatment of her scenes grows increasingly murky (the seduction scene is partly just a series of struggling shadows), the lighting in the film's prologue and epilogue—the story is told in one long flashback—is quite different and comments differently on the action.

Our first glimpse of Ana in the prologue is so soft-focus that it takes some moments to pick out her hands, her dessert plate, her body moving across the room. Gradually we establish through the dully glowing suffusion a richly furnished interior and a beautiful, mature-looking woman, and it is as though the lighting seeks to evoke associations with the fire at the heart of the jewel and more obviously perhaps with that other literary metaphor, the smoldering embers of passion—possibly even with hell fire. At any rate, light here is not the flat light of innocence but a kind of pearly, diffused lustre in the dark room which is not only visually beautiful and pleasing to anticipation by virtue of its gradual revelations, but also evocative—quite by itself—of those notions of passion and the illuminations of sexual experience with which the film actually concerns itself.

—Thalia Selz

Brink of Life

(*Nära Livet*) Director: Ingmar Bergman. Based on a story of Ulla Isaksson, "Det vänliga, värdiga"; adaptation by Bergman and Isaksson. Camera: Max Wilen. Editor: Carl-Olov Skeppstedt. Decor: Bibi Lindström. Produced by Svensk Filmindustri. With Ingrid Thulin, Eva Dahlbeck, Bibi Andersson.

In *Brink of Life* (1957) we find Bergman working austerely on a small canvas after the more monumental and ambitious *Seventh Seal* and *Wild Strawberries*, which immediately preceded

had been held in bondage by the inertia of a stultified society. It is the final irony of the film that Ana and Pablo's brief, violent revolt against hypocrisy and repression is conducted in a state of ignorance so profound that it simply imprisons them more inescapably in the elegant dungeon of their world.

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it. All of the action takes place inside one building, and most of it within one room; there are no flashback scenes and no dream sequences. The camera works quietly and the editing is unobtrusive. The material is equally stark; three women find themselves together in a maternity ward, each of them with a deeply personal significance to her pregnancy. There is no attempt to make an anecdote out of each woman's experience—the action unfolds simply and with little elaboration, and in two of the three cases the resolutions are only sketched. It is part of the film's naturalism not to round off the course of events, but to leave the audience with probabilities and possibilities and a sense of life continuing (with all of its uncertainties) after we leave the characters and these few eventful days in their lives.

Cecilia (Ingrid Thulin) enters the hospital as an emergency patient following a miscarriage; Stine (Eva Dahlbeck) is a healthy and happy housewife who looks forward to her baby with joy; and Hjordis (Bibi Andersson), a young girl pregnant by a callous boyfriend, is in the hospital recovering from an unsuccessful attempt to abort. The one thing that the three women have in common, and which provides their interest for Bergman, is the fact that for each of them her pregnancy represents a crisis: not one of them will leave the hospital with the same future ahead of her that seemed to be integral to her life upon her arrival in the ward. Hjordis, touched and tormented by the sights and scenes of the hospital, develops courage and a new security, and leaves the hospital a good deal closer to womanhood. The gentle Cecilia, to whom the emergency has revealed her husband's indifference, also learns to tap her own inner strength. And the prospective mother who radiates animal contentment suffers the agony of losing her child for no good reason: it just happened, and the doctor can say no more than "That's life."

In *Wild Strawberries* Professor Borg, by a kind of self-analysis, changes his life conception and direction though almost eighty years of age, and we are reminded of the classical existentialist situation in which a man facing a firing squad still has time to change the whole meaning of his life. Bergman is perhaps mildly existential in outlook, like his Squire in *Seventh Seal*, and *Brink of Life* substantiates this view. Birth seems to be very close to existential awareness for the pregnant women. Cecilia's miscarriage leaves her feeling that life has passed through her body and has gone, when she first suffers the smart of the loss of her husband's love close upon the loss of her baby; but by the end of the film there are signs that she is aware that the only life that she can in fact feel or dispose of is her own. Life cruelly beats down the radiant middle-class Stine whose child has been planned, and its every material need anticipated, but the blow is impersonally, randomly, delivered, and there is no room for prayer, regret, doubt—nothing but acceptance, because those are the terms on which life is given to us. And the young girl, for whom pregnancy has meant only the unfortunate consequences of sleeping with her boyfriend, finds the child within her a refuge from the feeling that life has departed from the world, a feeling which afflicts her when Stine wakes to find that she has lost her child. Bergman's philosophical point (the film is quite didactic) seems to be that, in the face of the unexpected and catastrophic, the human spirit is capable of considerable resilience.

Brink of Life is a curiously cold film, and this is no doubt due to the fact that it has a philosophical proposition for a heart. (Perhaps Bergman felt that in *Seventh Seal* and *Wild Strawberries* he had resolved some of the problems that engrossed him. At any rate, he himself was no longer questing, if we can judge by *Brink of Life*. *The Magician* (1958—only now reaching this country) may perhaps have been a departure from a plateau, the beginning of a new questioning). It is an interesting comment upon the nature of the film medium that we are simultaneously aware of the stasis of the conception and completely won over by the actors, who, as in most Bergman films, are magnificent. *Brink of Life* is Bergman's chamber music. It is not, however, of the quality that Bergman himself has led us to expect. —R. H. TURNER

Aren't We Wonderful?

(Wir Wunderkinder) Director: Kurt Hoffmann Script: Heinz Pauck and Gunther Neumann. From a novel by Hugo Hartung. Constantin-Film. U.S. distributor: Film Alliance Corp. With Hansjorg Felmy, Johanna von Koczian, Robert Graf.

Too often, German-language films with vaguely operatic titles are shown only in German neighborhood theaters with names like *Tosca*, and the press and general public take no heed. Thus we get out of the habit of seeing German films, or even think about them. But it is evident from the notes by our German correspondent [see "Production Report"] that an extremely interesting, if mixed, collection of films has been produced in both East and West Germany over the last few years. Now with the example of Hoffmann's *Wir Wunderkinder* we begin to get an idea of what we have been missing.

Hoffmann's film attempts, on the whole successfully, to dramatise the German nation's facility for attaching itself to the wrong leadership, losing in war, recovering its strength both economically and politically, and learning nothing in the process. The film fastens on to the comparative careers of two quite dissimilar young men and then explores through them many of the personal reactions to the decay of the Weimar Republic and the consequent rise of the Nazi Party. One is Hans Boekel, thoughtful, somewhat academic, honest, patient to a fault; the other is Bruno Tiches, brash, unprincipled, opportunistic. The lives of these two men are interwoven a little too neatly but Hoffmann nevertheless uses his coincidences effectively and often movingly. Hans remains outside the political movement entirely, while Bruno thrives in the vacuum which gives him power and status. Germany's defeat does not strike him personally, and he rises with its recovery, until finally Hans, now a newspaper editor, is forced to nail him to his own cross in an untypically outspoken editorial. Dying accidently, Bruno is mourned by industrial and political society whose members, as the tongue-in-cheek narration says, look to him as a shining example. The camera leaves the line of parked limousines and goes to a sign on the wall —"Wir Mahnen die Lebenden"—we warn the living. . . . even, or perhaps particularly, the film concludes, in the Germany of the Wirtschaftswunder.

It is refreshing, and in the circumstances reassuring, to find a film-maker in Germany with such an unequivocal view of recent history. It is also interesting to see the way in which Hoffmann and his writers solve the many structural problems created by the need to dramatise a complex recurrent cycle covering some 45 years.

The film begins with narration in mock heroic style. We are introduced to the two main characters, as schoolboys, and to a device which runs throughout and gives Hoffmann the freedom he needs to move forward in space and in time: the narrator is shown to be in the pit of a theater, and the action is an image on a motion picture screen hanging behind him on the stage. He and his partner comment on the action in song and pantomime, and provide the required transitions. But more is gained than a useful transitional device; the satirical songs (by Franz Grothe) cut straight to the point. By being boldly theatrical they work in a Brechtian way to cause temporary estrangement with the main action, and permit the author to comment on it and embellish it. This device is entirely successful, but of course puts some considerable burden on Hoffmann's talent for bringing us back into the story again with sufficient interest and credibility. Part of the work is done for him by his principals—Hansjorg Felmy as Hans, and Johanna von Koczian as his sweetheart and later wife Kirsten. In a surprising way their romaticism works in the film's favor. The scenes of Nazi revelry in the Bierstuben have an uneasy way of getting under the skin—the casting of these scenes, and of Robert Graf as Bruno, is precise, and wholly effective. And altogether, in his handling of the cast, in his general staging and in his ability to bring off a difficult continuity (almost to the point of making us believe, in some inadequate make-up at the end) Hoffmann has achieved a notable success.

—Colin Young

The San Francisco Festival

The films reviewed below are recent productions shown at the San Francisco International Film Festival in December. While many of them will not reach theaters in this country for a long time, we review them now in hopes of helping to cut down the usual import lag. We salute the efforts of the Festival organizers who have, over the past three years, made the Festival a going institution.

Il Generale Della Rovere

Director: Roberto Rossellini. Script: Sergio Amidei, Diego Fabbri, and Indro Montanelli. Camera: Carlo Carlini. Music: Renzo Rossellini. Produced by Moris Ergas for Zebra Film. With Vittorio DeSica, Hannes Messemer, Sandra Milo, Vittorio Caprioli, Anne Vernon.

The film that caused the most excitement at the San Francisco Festival, because of advance publicity and perhaps also because of San Francisco's large Italian population was *Il Generale Della Rovere*, first-prize winner of the Venice festival. Local audiences had been primed by the promise of a personal appearance by Vittorio DeSica, the picture's star, and Roberto Rossellini, its director. The fact that neither of them finally showed up is regrettable—especially since such notables as Sandra Dee and Gregory Peck *did* appear. Fanfare aside, however, the picture managed almost to live up to the audience's expectations; and the nagging suspicion that it won all its prizes (best film, direction, actor, and supporting actor) by default can almost be written off to cynicism.

The script, by Sergio Amidei (who did Rossellini's scripts for *Paisàn* and *Open City*) and Diego Fabbri, was adapted from an account of an incident which occurred in the last war, during the German occupation of Italy. The author of the original account was Indro Montanelli, a professional journalist, who was himself arrested by the Germans for anti-fascist activities. Montanelli wrote first a novelette and then a longer account, from which the film was taken.

Briefly, the story runs thus: a good-for-nothing Italian, a con-man whose conning takes the particularly distasteful form of capitalizing on the distress of persons whose relatives have been imprisoned, is found out by the Germans, with whom he has been more or less collaborating. The German Colonel Müller (played with wit and insight by Hannes Messemer) persuades him to impersonate the beloved Italian general Della Rovere, whom the German troops have shot. The con man (DeSica) is thus to get a comfortable spot in prison, and the Colonel will get the "general" to find him the identity of Fabrizio, an important partisan leader. What happens, of course, is that the fake general assumes the character of the real general, identifying with his role so completely that finally, over the protests of Colonel Müller, he goes to a hero's death rather than reveal the identity of Fabrizio, who is also in the prison but under some other name. (It seems that in the real incident, the "general" was exposed for a fraud before he was sent to his death. In the film, of course, he is not; he even writes and sends off a message to "his" wife, telling her to have courage—and so forth.)

What, then, does the picture come to? The theme—the actor who becomes his role—is one dear to the theater, is even embodied in Method acting. The lovable crook, or at any rate the crook who becomes lovable, is nothing very new either. And patriotism is a value which has lost much of its appeal in recent times. Is *Il Generale* then a sentimental picture? It has certainly been accused of that, and there are in fact moments when one almost expects the cast to burst into patriotic song as in *Grand Illusion* or *Casablanca*; but they don't, and one realizes that here is indeed more than sentimentality. Partly this is simply the familiar humanness of DeSica, one of those actors who almost never seems unconvincing. The development of the "general's" character-change, from his original harassed desperation and venality through uneasy, amused pride in the veneration the other prisoners give him, to a genuine participation in the "cause," has no false notes. The rest of the characters, however, are also sharply observed,

IL GENERALE DELLA ROVERE: *Hannes Messemer (far left) and Vittorio DeSica.*

and many scenes are virtually flawless. In one such scene, the genuine general's wife, coming from safety in Switzerland to see him in prison, is put off by Müller's sensible argument that seeing her would break his spirit—her impetuosity and heroism, Müller's ambiguous gentleness, are all totally believable.

The film has flaws. Its rapid putting-together shows in a discontinuity of some of the scenes and a lack of adequate editing. The entire first part, which documents the life of the amiable con-man before his capture, is much too long, and despite the necessity of establishing the character to begin with and the indubitable charm of such scenes as the one in the brothel, one suspects that much deadwood could have been cut away. The documentary shots of Genoa and Milan, while adding to the "realism" of the picture, also fail to connect with the rest of it; and in particular a rather extended episode of partisans meeting in the snow is hardly necessary to the development of the plot or that of the characters, who make only a scant reappearance later.

Still, *Il Generale* is not only entertaining and gripping enough but also encouraging. It is, after all, the first decent product that Rossellini has turned out since the postwar neorealist days (perhaps fortunately, most of his work since then has not been released in this country). Some of the "realism" of those earlier films is still there, in the stark black-and-white camera work, in the settings, and in some of the characterizations. Yet the finished product is much more "slick." This slickness is achieved both technically and through the use of DeSica, assuredly an experienced professional—the earlier films used largely amateur actors. (It would be fascinating to know to what extent DeSica, an actor who is said to direct his directors, played this role in the making of this film.) But the differences go further still. Though the theme—the Italian Resistance—is again basically that of *Open City,* the tone of immediacy which so characterized that picture is gone. Partly of course this is due to the distance which time has given; but partly too it is due to a difference in emphasis. The protagonist in *Il Generale* takes sides or changes sides not because of any political conviction, but rather for personal reasons—he refuses to be "used." In place of the almost caricatural Nazis of *Open City* we have the intelligent, detached, ironic Messemer, and his bribable subordinate. If there is ideology in the film, it is no longer that of *Open City.* Perhaps this change in emphasis serves to make *Il Generale's* theme and its protagonist more universal; but it is at the cost of that earlier urgency of Rossellini's.

One can only wonder what Rossellini will do next; at any rate, one can be glad that he has at last begun to recover himself.

—HARRIET R. POLT

The World of Apu

(Original title, *Apur Sansar*) Director: Satyajit Ray. Scenario: Satyajit Ray. Camera: Subrata Mitra. Music: Ravisankar. With Soumitra Chatterjee, Sarmila Tagore, Smn. Alok Chakravarty, Swapan Mukherji.

The World of Apu seems to me not only the most successful, the most brilliant, the most moving, and the most important of the three parts of Mr. Ray's trilogy, but also probably the most important single film made since the introduction of sound. Unhappily space limitations make it impossible to treat this film in the detail which it deserves. Readers who have either missed the first two parts of the trilogy or been disappointed by either are referred to Arlene Croce's excellent article, in *Film Culture,*

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Number 19. This third part is the story of Apu's young manhood. As an impoverished student in Calcutta he discovers that he cannot pay the rent on his room. He makes desultory efforts to find a job and then gives up altogether the idea of working for his livelihood, and goes back to work on his novel. He reads his novel to a friend who is taking him to the back country to attend the friend's cousin's wedding. The bridegroom-to-be is discovered to be hopelessly insane and Apu is asked to marry the young girl instead. After protesting, Apu gives in out of pity for the girl; they are married and return to Calcutta, where Apu discovers that far from having made a terrible mistake he has in fact gained the finest bride imaginable. Shortly thereafter his young wife returns to her home to have her first child. And we learn quite suddenly that she has died in childbirth, though Apu's son has survived. Apu then disappears for a period of five years, refusing to see his young son, and when he is finally persuaded to return to his in-law's home to confront his child we discover that the boy doesn't really understand what a father is. But the film ends happily with Apu carrying off his son, who is still unaware that this man from Calcutta is actually his father.

It's difficult to give the full flavor of this film; it's difficult to describe the extraordinary success with which Ray has succeeded in stripping away several more veils from reality than any film-maker has ever removed before. Moreover, here at last is a student of film history who is able to absorb the best of the heritage handed down to him by the great film-makers of the twenties' and thirties' and fifties', to redigest and to improve on the originals. The dialogue is not only sophisticated but often genuinely surprising. The scenes at the end of the film involving Apu's five-year-old son and Apu's struggle to communicate with this boy whom he has never seen before represent perhaps the most moving portrayal of a father-son relationship in any motion picture ever made. Though they closely resemble some of the scenes in *The Bicycle Thief*, there is a surprising and even dazzling quality to them, which lifts them well above the DeSica-Zavattini work.

Apu has been wandering for five years in central India and is brought back by the same friend who had introduced him to his bride, six years earlier. We are shown his young son heaving rocks at his grandfather. His grandfather says if you don't stop that you'll get a good hiding, and the boy replies immediately, if you lay a hand on me my father in Calcutta will wring your neck. Finally Apu arrives with a toy train for his boy. The little boys flings it back at him and will have as little to do with his father as he can. And Apu is ready to give up and decides to have the boy put in an orphanage, tells his in-laws this and prepares to leave to go back to Calcutta. And as he walks away from the house the boy follows Apu down the road, Apu turns and the boys asks, "Where are you going?" Apu replies, "To Calcutta," and the boy says, "Will you see my father?" Apu says "Yes," and we suddenly realize that the boy has never grasped the fact that his father is a real person and that he might return some day. But Apu goes along with this little game and he says "Yes, I'll see your father." The boy asks, "Would you take me to my father?" Apu says he will, and the boy says, "But wouldn't grandfather be cross if I went to Calcutta with you?" The camera then shows us the grandfather watching, listening, aware of the entire exchange between the father and son, and Apu says to his little boy, "We won't tell grandfather." The last shot of the film shows the two going off down the long road toward Calcutta together, reunited, and we are made to understand that the boy will discover his father and his own identity, and that the continuity of generations will remain unbroken.

—JONATHAN HARKER

The Proper Time

Written and directed by Tom Laughlin. Camera: James Crabe. Music: Shelly Manne. Cast: Tom Laughlin, Nyra Monsour, Norma Quine. Produced by Business Administration Co.

This was admittedly an odd choice to represent America's best, even in the realm of the independent, low-budget, non-Hollywood film, and some of the hopeful groaned. Still, it showed

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more raw talent than most first efforts, including in my opinion Stanley Kubrick's abysmal *Killer's Kiss.* Had Tom Laughlin, who made *The Proper Time* virtually single-handed, been as sure of his aims as he was of his technique, it might have lived up to the promise of its opening scene, a jolting few minutes in a college classroom with a boy who can't talk.

Laughlin's uncertainty is evident in his title. The proper time for sexual relations, says the heroine, is after marriage, and the proper place for such a statement, says the viewer, is in another picture, say *Happy Anniversary.* In his eagerness to avoid the institutional, casework approach of the Armstrong Circle Theatre and the love-conquers-all solutions of a good melodrama like *Deep Valley,* Laughlin presents, not a "typical" stutterer, but a handsome, witty, well-off youth, and give him two girls and a speech problem that vanishes when he's alone with either one. This arbitrary device keeps the continuity from being as broken as the boy's speech and makes the blocks and struggles, when they do come, that much more jarring. Unfortunately, it also leaves us with the girls, who don't warrant the time they take. After some frank seduction scenes that tend to cloud the issue and a powerful, closed-in confrontation with the bad girl, the hero's ivory tower of womanhood collapses and he's left as helpless with girls as he's always been with his parents, his classmates, and the unseen enemies on the other end of the phone. The progression is backward from part-time to full-time stuttering, a *Miracle Worker* in reverse, and the film ends where the usual clinical document begins, as the boy realizes the extent of his problem and enrolls in a speech clinic.

The plot doesn't work, but Laughlin does, like a beaver, and mostly to good effect. His own performance is engaging in the fluent moments and genuinely painful to watch and hear in the tortured ones. There are great possibilities, overlooked here, in a hidden camera catching bystanders' reactions to someone who fakes stuttering as well as this, but *The Proper Time* isn't a documentary. Neither is it an entertaining film, in spite of some bright dialogue and an appealing earnestness and easy humor that make it hard to dislike. What it does accomplish is to display Tom Laughlin as a talented actor and a director with a good eye for the visual detail that builds a mood or makes a point, like a love scene played against the grinding sounds of a building under construction, or the sozzled hero pouring beer on the sweet nothings of a car radio. James Crabe, lost for years in the wilds of *You Asked For It,* contributes sharp, agile camera work and the sound is unusually good for a film that never got near a studio. Laughlin's abilities as a director of actors can't be assessed here since, except for Kip King and Connie Davis in small roles, he has none to work with. Basically there's nothing wrong with *The Proper Time* that couldn't have been cured by a sharper focus of interest and a little more boldness, which isn't quite the same thing as confidence.

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The Last Day of Summer

Written, directed, and photographed by Tadeusz Konwicki and Jan Laskowski. Music: Adam Pawlikowski. With Irena Laskowska and Jan Machulski. Production: Film Polski.

Shown recently by Cinema 16 in New York and to be shown again this spring by Art in Cinema in San Francisco, this is a very short (63 minutes) feature with only two human characters. Though it was praised extravagantly by Paul Rotha in *Sight & Sound,* this is by no means a masterpiece, but it is the most interesting feature which has been publicly shown in this country from the new Polish school. The two characters are a man and a woman, both of whom have suffered terribly during the war years. They meet on a lonely and otherwise deserted Baltic beach, on the last day of summer, the last day of the young woman's vacation. The man attempts to drown himself and then, after being rescued by the woman, he relents and makes love to the woman. But when she has gone to sleep he once more disappears into the waves. (It would be easy to see parallels with

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the Polish short *Two Men and a Wardrobe,* which I think is a more successful though certainly less ambitious work.) While it is a depressed and outspokenly defeatist film made by a director who believed and perhaps believes in the inevitability of the Third World War, *The Last Day of Summer* contains some very human and even compassionate moments. Its ultimate message is that, in a world half destroyed by war and expecting another war, there is no hope except in the private values of a man and a woman. But *The Last Day of Summer* is more than an interesting reflection of the social or political situation in Poland, as of the time it was made—1957; it is as valid a picture, not only of a society but of a human relationship, as Marcel Carné's *Quai des Brumes* or *Le Jour Se Lève.*

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A Non-Scheduled Train

Directed by Veljko Bulajic. Scenario: Veljko Bulajic, Ivo Braut, Stjepan Peroic, Elio Petri. Camera: Kreso Grcevic. Music: Vladimir Kraus-Rajteric. Cast: Ivica Pajer, Milan Milosevic, Inge Ilin, Lia Rho-Barbier. Jadran Film.

This Yugoslavian effort is more interesting for its aims than its accomplishments. The story of a group of Dalmatian farm families on the way to productive land given them by a grateful government, it seldom moves, in either sense. From the dedicatory foreword to the "Westering" background music, it has all the earmarks of a pioneer saga but none of the obstacles, and so no suspense. Some of the characters express doubts which are not so much resolved as deflected by side issues: blocked romances, flirtations, fraternal quarrels, debates over a proper share of land. An earnest attempt is made to show a new society being built of the same imperfect human materials as the old, and the people aren't glorified. Neither is the state; but without it there would be no journey and no film, which makes it a more convincing "hero" than any of the three or four we see on the screen.

The characters have been given particular qualities that clash with a script conceived in terms of types, embodiments of attitudes. There is a wounded veteran who could be any displaced hero, but he's also called upon to hold the group together despite his doubts, to love the widow another veteran seduces, and to help his brother win the right girl. Nearly everyone has to stand for something while being himself, and the effort shows. The personal stories are dull when they're not inconclusive, and some of the typicality is vitiated by miscasting. Ivica Pajer plays a happy-go-lucky irresponsible sailor with a steady Schell-shocked grin that confounds complexity. Milan Milosevic is a sensitive young actor who looks perfectly at home running across a field toward a girl but would probably have little idea of the field's agricultural uses. There is, however, one triumph, a character who represents nothing and is all but useless yet is cared for tenderly by the others. One longs for clearer credits to single out the actor who plays the village simpleton so beautifully.

The film is more successful in illustrating attitudes in the process of change. The father who's taught by his wife's and daughter's rebellion that you don't beat children into unwanted marriages, the sailor who learns that the land isn't his to sell and decides he'd do better in industry, the family giving way to the group—all these are instructive but hardly dramatic. *A Non-Scheduled Train* is not just another "official" film, but it's less than it could be with a personal vision behind it. The bad lighting is less a blot than the fact that director Veljko Bulajic seems incapable of really seeing a scene. The good things come almost by accident and without emphasis. There are agreeable touches of humor—an amusingly overplayed partisan drama, the sailor's "Crystal Lake" T-shirt—but there are even more opportunities missed. Editing could have played the veterans' two drunken scenes against each other and given them both more weight. A birth scene on a barge as the husband watches helplessly from the shore begins powerfully and soon comes to nothing, as does all but one of the romances. There is noth-

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ing excessive in the picture but a good deal is insufficient, and the final impression is one of a new way of life helped into birth by the rusty forceps of unimaginative technique and warmed-over writing. —JOSEPH KOSTOLEFSKY

Running Jumping and Standing Still Film

Devised by Peter Sellers. With Sellers, Spike Milligan, Mario Fabrizi, and Dick Lester. Distributor: Kingsley-Union.

What's this? A spoofy ten-minute British lark à la silent slapstick, blown up from 16mm, much praised and prize-given. *Jeux d'esprit* are rare birds at any season, and experimentals on big screen circuits more comfortable to watch than at film societies. Pleasant expectancy is upheld by an ear-scratching closeup behind the titles. "Devised by Peter Sellers" says the credit—which suggests roaring mouses and masquerades.

What happens? Upon a very bare open heath appear a rapid succession of cuckooized prototypes: explorer, inventor, hunter, painter, statesman, photographer, angler, musician, et al. (garbed circa Sherlock Holmes era) all obsessively engaged in outlandish compulsions, as if they were fugitives from limericks. And rapidly as they tilt their windmills, rapidly are they confounded. Movement is speeded up, the sound track is jolly jazz, the pranks are frenetic and anti-intellectual.

Are we truly back in the good old daze? Alas, no direct descendant of Big Dada here. The nostalgic land of *Entr'acte* lies across a Channel, no René Clair presides over the British Holidays Association. We watch the determinedly whimsical ideas of an actor and friends, but miss the illuminating attack of a creator with wits. Example: to evoke Edward Learish personae without any antagonistic "They" leaves the jest hanging out on its bare teeth.

I relish loony amateur energies, short or long. But what makes real funniness? Being funny? Even Tati knows that the highest absurdity is the human situation itself. Funniness like love is better as result than as intention. I came away regretting that this peppy charade had not in truth been a film about running jumping and standing still. —JAMES BROUGHTON

Orfeu Negro

Directed by Marcel Camus. Scenario: Vinitius de Moraes. Camera: Jean Bourgoin. Dispatfilm-Gemma Cinematografica. With Bruno Mello, Marpessa Dawn, Adhemar de Silva.

No doubt this film won its prize at Cannes because, in French terms, it is an unusual item: a giant Technicolor extravaganza, well laced with exoticism. In actuality, though it was made in Rio de Janeiro on a precarious budget, it comes out somewhere between inflated travelogue and semi-idiotic "legend." Camus perhaps let his experience as assistant director carry him away, once he found himself in charge of a picture: it is full of slow pans over the Rio skyline, lingering shots of cute children and dancing in the streets (nobody walks), and a general, slightly forced attempt to get plenty of "life" in the backgrounds.

Still, it is in one sense fortunate that the decor rather overwhelms the story, though it prevents the note of myth-*cum*-melodrama from being consistently struck. If one's eyes were not so occupied with Carnaval dance rehearsals and girls scampering away from the camera, the story might well seem ludicrous. A re-creation of the Orpheus myth, it concerns two pleasant and healthy individuals who manage to carry the thing off without substantial embarrassment.

What is nicest about *Orfeu Negro* in the end is its protrayal of life in the Rio "slums"—high atop the surrounding hills—with what one assumes is a pervasive feeling for color and grace among their people. One would like to go there. The sequence in which Eurydice is accidentally electrocuted by Orpheus in the streetcar barn is also very successful: it is abstract, surrealistic almost, and its poetry carries one away from the awkwardness of the earlier parts of the story. But afterwards, things collapse: Orpheus seeks Eurydice in a religious cult meeting (there is a

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For Whom the Larks Sing

Directed by Laszlo Ranody. Scenario: Jozsef Darvas. Camera: Istvan Pasztor. Music: Endre Szervanszky. With Geza Tordy, Klary Tolnay, Eva Papp, Gabor Agardy.

This Hungarian entry will probably never be shown again in the United States. It has all the qualities which scare off distributors: extreme length and slow pace, an unknown studio and cast, and a dark brooding sense of the sorrow of the human condition. But once experienced, the world of *For Whom the Larks Sing* stays with the viewer for a long period. This is the sort of film which plays out its length, leaving the spectator upset and pulled in many directions, but which will be periodically recalled, breaking into everyday thoughts and activities, long after the event.

The picture relates a young peasant's attempts, in rigid, classbound rural Hungary of 1920, to find a decent and hopeful living. Sandor Varga (Geza Tordy) whose dream is to learn the respected trade of blacksmith, has to impress himself for a year as stableman to a farmer in the Hungarian plains. In similar circumstances, a young servant-girl Julia (Eva Papp) falls in love with him even as she watches Sandor gradually succumb to an agonizing desire for Agnes, the wife of their master (Klara Tolnay). Even though Agnes dislikes her crude and overbearing husband and is drawn to the youth, she refuses his awkward advances, and in a restrained and very moving scene, he makes love to Julia, both of them sadly aware of the incompleteness of their union.

Julia becomes pregnant and Sandor forces her to attempt an abortion in a sequence which can only be described as cosmic whimsey; with Sandor looking guilty and anxious, the girl wheels a heavy farm-barrow around and around, terribly determined and completely ludicrous; the scene is quite humorous, but the laughter catches in the throat. Julia's attempt fails, and she almost dies from the subsequent ministrations of a quack midwife. Sandor's pity and guilt are slowly transfused with a deepening love for the girl and, weak and hesitant, he is persuaded by Agnes to marry her before her condition becomes obvious.

Their wedding-day, although they are unsure, alone, their dreams shattered, and in hopeless poverty, becomes through some extremely sensitive handling a lyric tribute to the human spirit. The two lovers pass a photographer's shop-window and stop to look at the wedding photographs. We then see them through the window-pane, caught and framed in a delightful portrait—delicately hopeful and shyly happy.

For Whom the Larks Sing has happily received considerable critical success in Europe and since both the photographer and director are recent graduates of the Hungarian State Film Institute, we can look forward to the continued appearance of imaginative work from the Hungarian industry. However, the film was

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This tale of Greek high life begins badly, with a good deal of second-rate glitter, nicely and coldly photographed; and it ends in a gush of melodrama. In between, however, is some first-rate film: those sequences in which Miss Lambetti, as a beautiful and sensitive girl whose family fortunes have failed, and whose mother is pushing her to make a successful marriage, gradually perceives the horror of the things she is being led to do. The horror lies not so much in the things themselves (though these include an inadvertent semi-murder) as in her realization that it is by her own nature as well as by her family situation that she is being dragged down; and she is movingly tormented by this double degradation. At the end, she is redeemed through caring for the small child of the woman she and her mother caused to have a heart attack; the boy learns to speak again (after a bad accident) when she takes him to a shrine. The story is rounded out with a father on the skids, a tenacious and ruthless mother, a rich suitor, and some gay young things. The ghastliness of its clinging to social status is such that one is positively relieved to see the family penniless, finally; and Cacoyannis should have ended the film there, on a note of disaster.

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The Hidden Fortress

Director: Akira Kurosawa. Scenario: Ryuo Kikushima, Hideo Oguni, Shinobu Hashimoto, Akira Kurosawa. Camera: Ichio Yamazaki. Music: Masuru Sato. With Toshiro Mifune, Misa Uehara, Minoru Chiaki, Kamatari Fujiwara.

This is really a John Ford Western, with Japanese and feudal overtones. It contains a fine, snarling performance by Toshiro Mifune, but also stars a girl-princess who seems to have come out of the pages of a sex comic book and whose dull, boyish performance is the most embarrassing aspect of a film which does Kurosawa's reputation no good. The picture also contains what is supposedly a satirical portrait of two cowardly, greedy, and moronic peasant types, who constantly disrupt Mifune's chivalrous endeavors. After a while they begin to seem positively sympathetic. —J. H.

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rather peculiarly received in Hungary itself. *Filmvilag*, the official organ of the state industry, recognized the film's lyric and poetic beauty, but judged this style empty and incorrect for a feature-length production, and, inevitably, criticized it for its lack of socialist realism.

But the film is an experiment which deserves much better than it got in San Francisco, where the quiet playing of the cast was received coldly by the judges. —MARK MCCARTY

A Matter of Dignity

Director: Michael Cacoyannis. Script:Michael Cacoyannis. Camera: Walter Lassally. Music: Manos Hadzidakis. Finos Films. With Ellie Lambetti, Minas Christides, Michel Nikolinakos, Eleni Zafiriou.

This tale of Greek high life begins badly, with a good deal of second-rate glitter, nicely and coldly photographed; and it ends in a gush of melodrama. In between, however, is some first-rate film: those sequences in which Miss Lambetti, as a beautiful and sensitive girl whose family fortunes have failed, and whose mother is pushing her to make a successful marriage, gradually perceives the horror of the things she is being led to do. The horror lies not so much in the things themselves (though these include an inadvertent semi-murder) as in her realization that it is by her own nature as well as by her family situation that she is being dragged down; and she is movingly tormented by this double degradation. At the end, she is redeemed through caring for the small child of the woman she and her mother caused to have a heart attack; the boy learns to speak again (after a bad accident) when she takes him to a shrine. The story is rounded out with a father on the skids, a tenacious and ruthless mother, a rich suitor, and some gay young things. The ghastliness of its clinging to social status is such that one is positively relieved to see the family penniless, finally; and Cacoyannis should have ended the film there, on a note of disaster.

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Book Reviews

Film: An Anthology, edited by Daniel Talbot. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959. $8.50.)

This is the largest and most diverse collection of fugitive pieces of film writing ever published in English, and in many ways a very useful addition to film literature available in book form. The book's 600 pages are divided into three sections: "aesthetic, social commentary and analysis"; "theory and technique"; and "history and personal." While these divisions are often awkward, they at least suggest the scope of the volume. Most of the pieces which seem least dated are those in the first section: Pudovkin, Balasz, and Arnheim have stood up least well, while Panofsky's "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures" and Agee's "Comedy's Greatest Era" seem likely to be useful to film students and teachers for years to come.

As a textbook for such persons, this book should prove more useful than any other single volume now in print; it is unlikely, at least, that many of the selections in it will kill a latent interest in the medium.

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Another long piece is Manny Farber's "Underground Films." Farber, who seems to have been performing a critical function the opposite to Agee's, is an enthusiast of Howard Hawks and Raoul Walsh; he evidently wishes the Museum of Modern Art would devote its auditorium to the kind of films usually shown in 42nd Street grind houses. While this attitude has its provocative aspects, it also tends to reveal Mr. Farber as more of a professional heretic than an understanding film critic.

If there are lessons to be learned from this collection they are that film criticism and history have hardly advanced since the first English-speaking audiences saw *Potemkin* and that film writing is almost exclusively the domain of the younger generation. Almost all who have continued to write about films after the age of their first enthusiasm have tended to regard the medium as a lost cause, and for each writer there is a different Golden Age. For Agee it was comedy, which died with the coming of sound; for Seymour Stern it was the film as a whole, which died with the bureaucratization of production; for Pauline Kael the American film, at least, died sometime after World War II. Publication of this volume is thus an excellent occasion for readers to ask themselves why they love motion pictures, and, if their love has cooled, why this is. For my own part, I refuse to believe that the cinema will ever die. Like the stage, it may be an invalid, but an invalid far more fabulous than the theater we know today. As long as there are extraordinary new masterpieces such as *The World of Apu*, *Two Men and a Wardrobe*, or *Thursday's Children*, and as long as we can see hitherto unknown films such as *Strike* and *Earth*, I suggest we put away the mourning-clothes.

—JONATHAN HARKER

Introduction to the Art of the Movies, edited by Lewis Jacobs. (New York: Noonday, 1960. Cloth, $6.00; paperbound, $1.95.)

Chronologically organized, this "anthology of ideas on the nature of movie art" contains material from American publications only. In it one may see how a variety of Americans, some of them intellectuals, some of them film-nuts, began to take film seriously. There is a good deal of pretentious writing in the volume, no doubt, but even its faults are fascinating. Mr. Jacobs, who has prefaced the other contributions with a forty-page essay reviewing what might be called "official" film history, notes that in the selections is "a persistent reiteration, not accidental, of the

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If there are lessons to be learned from this collection they are that film criticism and history have hardly advanced since the first English-speaking audiences saw *Potemkin* and that film writing is almost exclusively the domain of the younger generation. Almost all who have continued to write about films after the age of their first enthusiasm have tended to regard the medium as a lost cause, and for each writer there is a different Golden Age. For Agee it was comedy, which died with the coming of sound; for Seymour Stern it was the film as a whole, which died with the bureaucratization of production; for Pauline Kael the American film, at least, died sometime after World War II. Publication of this volume is thus an excellent occasion for readers to ask themselves why they love motion pictures, and, if their love has cooled, why this is. For my own part, I refuse to believe that the cinema will ever die. Like the stage, it may be an invalid, but an invalid far more fabulous than the theater we know today. As long as there are extraordinary new masterpieces such as *The World of Apu*, *Two Men and a Wardrobe*, or *Thursday's Children*, and as long as we can see hitherto unknown films such as *Strike* and *Earth*, I suggest we put away the mourning-clothes.

—JONATHAN HARKER

Introduction to the Art of the Movies, edited by Lewis Jacobs. (New York: Noonday, 1960. Cloth, $6.00; paperbound, $1.95.)

Chronologically organized, this "anthology of ideas on the nature of movie art" contains material from American publications only. In it one may see how a variety of Americans, some of them intellectuals, some of them film-nuts, began to take film seriously. There is a good deal of pretentious writing in the volume, no doubt, but even its faults are fascinating. Mr. Jacobs, who has prefaced the other contributions with a forty-page essay reviewing what might be called "official" film history, notes that in the selections is "a persistent reiteration, not accidental, of the

differences in technique and structure between movies and theater, and a stress upon movie values, principles and doctrines." Many of the items are pleasantly specific in their analytic methods. The atmosphere of the volume as a whole is perhaps a little like that of the old *Close-Up*: determinedly *entre-nous*. But Mr. Jacobs has also included things like Dwight Macdonald's 1933 "Notes on Hollywood Directors," an irreverent but thoughtful piece. (Readers of the film column Macdonald has now undertaken for *Esquire* may not realize that he is an old film highbrow.) And in general the volume belongs, with the Talbot anthology, in every film enthusiast's collection.

—ERNEST CALLENBACH

My Wonderful World of Slapstick, by Buster Keaton with Charles Samuels. (New York: Doubleday, 1960. $4.50.)

During the 65 years of film history, few artists have been as misunderstood or as ignored by historians, critics, and the supposedly knowledgeable public as Buster Keaton. This autobiography, which rehearses the basic story of Keaton's life, should help to create a climate in which the coming reissue of his features will prove a popular success. It tells a good deal of Keaton the entertainer, but little of Keaton the artist; yet from this bare, perhaps shrewdly naïve account one may infer something about the sources of Keaton's comic genius, and sense in outline at least why this greatest of America's film creators to date made the kind of films he did. (One looks forward to the release of *Steamboat Bill, Jr.* with eagerness not only because it is a first-rate film, but because it is the most openly autobiographical of Keaton's pictures.) An old man's reminiscences tend to become formalized, practiced; and this book contains stories we have heard before, certainly. But it is full of fascinating hints as well as exasperating superficialities. And like any statement by a great artist, it sends you rushing back to the works themselves. —ERNEST CALLENBACH

Eye, Film, and Camera in Color Photography, by Ralph M. Evans. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1959. $8.95.)

"It has become a sort of fashionable thing in recent years to say that photography extends our normal human vision and then to go on from there to deduce all sorts of theorems for the photographer. When we attempt to analyze the phrase, we find as in most such cases that it is so ambiguous that it can mean almost anything and so must be correct."

With this and similar admonitions, Ralph Evans, Director of the Color Technology Division at Eastman Kodak, sets out in his latest book to relate what we know about the psychology of vision to the task of creating photographs. By the time Mr. Evans has finished, the serious and patient reader has reviewed with him several theories of human perception, the fundamentals of optical image formation, the principal techniques of lighting control, and some approaches to a dialectic of photographic aesthetics.

It is the amateur's delight and the professional's despair that the road to photographic artistry is littered with technological debris. No other art interposes quite so many different materials and processes between the artist and his audience. More than anything else, Mr. Evans' new book represents an attempt to back away from all of this impedimenta so as to specify what it is that we are trying to say with the medium, what it is that is capable of expressing, and what it is—ineffabilities aside—that viewers see when they look at a finished photograph.

The book that results is a paradigm of accuracy and authority in the otherwise muddled literature of photography. If it does not answer all the questions that can be asked about the photographic representation of reality, it gives the impression that answers are not likely to be found elsewhere—at least not at the present time.

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The author begins with a brief review of perception theory—especially Gestalt theory—which reveals the peculiar and aesthetically necessary ability of the brain to idealize perception and to transfer perceived forms. References to experimental studies seem generally pertinent and comprehensive, although one regrets that the book went to press too early to allow for appraisal of Edwin Land's interesting recent experiments on color perception.

A review of optical theory follows which leads the reader to a well-illustrated discussion of the manner in which the color, brightness, texture, and form of photographed objects may be modified and distorted through control of perspective, lighting, and image associations.

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The book is well printed and the illustrations, in black-and-white and color, are numerous, ingenious, and handsome. An extensive bibliography and a serviceable index render this a reference work of lasting value.

—Raymond Fielding

Briefer Notices

Fiches Filmographiques, by various authors. (Paris: Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques.) Text in French. Recent issues: No. 150, *Salt of the Earth*; No. 151, *Asphalt Jungle*; No. 152, *Kiss Me Deadly*.

Hollywood Rajah, by Bosley Crowther. (New York: Henry Holt, 1960. $5.50.) A biography of Louis B. Mayer.

International Film Annual No. 3, edited by William Whitebait. (New York: Taplinger Publisting Co., 1960. $4.95.) Printed in Austria (and full of typographical errors) this sumptuous volume is a kind of annual grab-bag, assembled by the film critic of the *New Statesman*. As a whole it is useful for stock-taking at the end of a year, and its Appendix lists credits for most of the interesting films that have come along. Especially valuable chapters are: "A Dawn in British Films?" by Whitebait, discussing primarily *Room at the Top, Look Back in Anger*, and *The Horse's Mouth*; "My Experiences as a Director," by Federico Fellini; "Film Schools," by David Robinson, more general than one might like but stimulating; "On the Outside Looking In," by Karel Reisz, about some remarkable television programs made by Denis Mitchell; surveys of the scene in France and Sweden by Cynthia Grenier and John Gillett; "A New Medium?" by Richard Williams, maker of *The Little Island*; "The Naturalness of Renoir," by Richard Roud (though one suspects that, like some French critics, Roud may have fallen victim of a Renoir cult); "Through the Eye of the Lens," a reminiscent and hortative declaration by Paul Rotha; and "Ghost Films," by G. W. Stonier [alias Whitebait], a charming piece on films that might have been. The volume has many illustrations, some in color, and is generally very handsome. It is somewhat difficult to read, however, due to its wide pages being set in too-closely-spaced lines of type.

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My Wicked, Wicked Ways, by Errol Flynn. (New York: Putnam's, 1959. $4.95.)

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Production Report

EDITED BY RICHARD GERCKEN

[In this section information will be provided on current production in the United States and abroad, and on items of interest not otherwise dealt with in FILM QUARTERLY. *Each issue's "Production Report" will focus on several countries besides the United States, so that in the course of a year most film-making countries will have been covered—a series of reports by foreign correspondents is in preparation. Werner Zurbuch is our German correspondent; Mr. Gercken prepares the Hollywood coverage.]*

Germany

For the most part German films today are characterized by the commercialism and conventionalism of their producers, of whom we might thus conclude there are too many. Though the industry is in good financial condition, there seems no room for experiment; there seems, in fact, little room for anything but innocuous romances and atrocious remakes of such earlier successes as *The Last Laugh* and *Congress Dances*. The most distressing phenomenon of all is the practice of setting a forceful plot back thirty or forty years in order to avoid embarrassing implications for the present.

Contrary to this latter trend is the work of Wolfgang Staudte (*The Murderers Are Amongst Us)*, whose new film *Rosen für den Staatsanwalt (Roses for the Lawyer)* deals with a one-time Nazi lawyer, a man still in a high position in Germany today.

One of the most exciting of present-day film-makers is Konrad Wolf whose *Sterne (Stars)* was honored last year at Cannes. His films previous to *Sterne* were *Einmal ist keinmal (Once For No Time), Genesung (Recovery), Lissy,* and *Die Sonnensucher*, the last of which was banned on two different occasions by the Communist Party. Wolf, who works only in the East, has an interesting background. He lived as an emigré in the Soviet Union from 1934 to 1944 and there studied at the State Institute of Cinematography under Alexandrov and Gerassimov. He later worked as assistant director in DEFA's documentary film studio with Joris Ivens and Herbert Ballmann and worked on feature films there as assistant to Kurt Maetzig. Wolf's films all deal with contemporary problems in a forthright manner. Their technical excellence and style reveal him as an interesting individual artist.

Helmut Käutner's latest film *Der Rest ist Schweigen (The Rest Is Silence)* was premièred at the last Berlin festival. Treating the Hamlet story in a post-war German setting, the picture is well made.

Bernhard Wicki, an actor turned director, is the creator of *Die Brücke (The Bridge)*, nominated this year in Hollywood for an Academy Award. *Die Brücke* is an ironic, bitter film concerned with the futility of war. It tells of a group of young men senselessly giving their lives during the last weeks of the war in defense of a bridge which is of no strategic importance. Actor Wicki chose a largely nonprofessional cast for his picture.

Kurt Hoffmann, director of *Wir Wunderkinder (Aren't We Wonderful)*, has since done two more pictures. The first, *Das Schöne Abenteuer (The Beautiful Adventure)*, is a slight but pleasant film, and the second, *Lampenfieber*, has as its subject young people in the theatre. It stars Bernhard Wicki.

Rolf Thiele, director of *Mädchen Rosemarie (Rosemary)*, which has had considerable success, has done another film, *Labyrinth*, a disappointing picture characterized by the same unevenness of style already evident in *Rosemarie*.

Staudte, Hoffmann, Kaütner, and Thiele are all film-makers of established reputation, while Wicki and Wolf are younger men who, along with Franz Peter Wirth and Georg Tressler, make up a sort of German *nouvelle vague*. Wirth is a good technician who came to the cinema from television and uses (as he has acknowledged himself) some of television's techniques, especially a larger than usual number of close-ups. Wirth was director of *Helden* (a suprisingly faithful and successful adaptation of Shaw's *Arms and the Man)*, nominated last year by the Motion Picture Academy, and he has now done two other pictures, *Menschen in Netz*, a drama of East-West espionage, and *Ein Tag der Nie zu Ende Geht* about a German submarine in Ireland during the last war. Georg Tressler is director of *Endstation Liebe*, starring Horst Bucholz, which received mixed reactions in 1958 at London and Brussells, and *Die Halbstarken*, about "Teddy boys."

Other film work of note:

Robert Siodmak is at work on a film entitled *Der Schulfreund*, and J. Lee-Thompson, of all people, has completed *Wernher von Braun*, with a cast that includes Curt Jurgens, Victoria Shaw, and Gia Scala. —WERNER ZURBUCH

Czechoslovakia

[In the following listings, the director is given at the beginning of each entry.] Miroslav Hubacek, *Oskliva slecna (An Uneasy Romance)*—a sensitive, intimate story of a not very attractive woman discovering she can no longer substitute her career for love and human contact; starring the celebrated stage actress Dana Medrická.

Ivo Novak, *Stenata (The Puppies)* from a script by Novak and Milos Forman—a comedy which incisively observes Czech youth in love.

Jiri Krejcik, *The Halo*, a short comedy film from Karel Capek's story. *Condemned to Life*, a drama of five young people in conflict with the law. *A Higher Moral Code*, a psychological drama of the Nazi occupation.

Jiri Weiss, *New Heroes Will Arise* (an early work). *The Wolf Trap. Appassionata. Romeo, Juliet, and Darkness* from Jan Otcenasek's novel of the occupation.

Jan Kadar and Elmar Klos, *Tam na konecne (The House at the Terminus)*, a story of several families of apartment dwellers, starring the famous Eva Ocenasova. The film shows Italian neo-realist influences.

Milos Makovec, *Ztracenci (Three Men Missing)*, script by Makovec and Jiri Brdecka from a novel by Aloise Jiráska—an uncompromising attack on war, set in the time of the Austrian-Prussian conflict.

Ladislav Helge, *Skola otcu (School*

for Fathers), a very outspoken picture depicting a community torn between old and new conceptions of education.

Vojtech Jasny, *I Survived Certain Death*, a film about the concentration camp imprisonment of the famous boxer Tonda; German actor Fred Delmare plays a Nazi hangman. *September Nights*, script by Jasny, Frantisek Daniel and Paul Kohout, based on the famous play by Kohout—a very frank film concerned with the shortcomings of an army officer.

Otakar Vávra, *August Sunday*, a study of people living their lives divorced from real human contact.

Hollywood

Elia Kazan has completed *Wild River*, to be released by Fox this spring. The screenplay by Paul Osborn is from *two* novels, by William Bradford Huie and Borden Deal. The picture stars Montgomery Clift, Lee Remick, and Jo Van Fleet.

Philip Leacock's *Reach for Tomorrow* is also due for spring release. Robert Fresnell's script is from the novel by Willard Motley, and the picture stars Ricardo Montalban, Shelley Winters, Burl Ives, James Darren, Ella Fitzgerald, and Jean Seberg.

Billy Wilder has completed *The Apartment*, which United Artist describes as showing "the status seeker at work." The picture, to be released during the summer, stars Jack Lemmon, Shirley MacLaine, and Fred MacMurray. The script, by Wilder and I. A. L. Diamond (Wilder's collaborator on *Love in the Afternoon* and *Some Like It Hot)* was conceived expressly for Mr. Lemmon, but much of the writing was done only as the film progressed. Shooting was done in Hollywood and, for location sequences, in New York.

Sidney Lumet's fourth feature is *The Fugitive Kind*, from Tennessee William's play *Orpheus Descending*. Shot in New York, it has in the cast Anna Magnani, Marlon Brando, and Joanne Woodward.

Films of Interest from Here and There

U.S.: UPA's *1001 Arabian Nights* (with Mr. Magoo); directed by Jack Kinney, produced by Stephen Bosustow. Sidney Lumet's *That Kind of Woman*, with Sophia Loren, Tab Hunter, and George Sanders; Lumet was quoted in *Sight & Sound* as saying the scoring and recutting done in Hollywood took from the picture the simplicity he desired. **France**: Claude Chabrol: *A Double Tour*. Jean Renoir: *Le Dejeuner sur l'Herbe*. Claude Autant-Lara: *La Jument Verte*. Claude Bernard-Aubert: *Match contre la mort*. Jean-Luc Godard: *A Bout de Souffle*. **Britain**: Anthony Asquith: *Libel*, with Olivia de Havilland. Robert Siodmak: *The Rough and the Smooth*. Val Guest: *Espresso Bongo* (script by Wolf Mankowitz). John Boulton: *I'm Alright, Jack* (with Peter Sellers). **Eire**: Fielder Cook: *Home Is the Hero*. **Argentina**: Leopoldo Torre-Nilsson: *The Fall*.

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