

body who has the chance of getting into print. I will venture on one statement though: it seems to me that everything I have been saying is fully consistent with what Pope Pius XII has been saying for the last few years in the many references he makes to war and its possibilities.

JAMES. Consistent?

JUDE. Yes, that's as far as I would venture to go. The Pope gives us principles. It is up to us to try and apply them. Taking the whole of the present Pope's utterances on war, would either of you claim that your opinions are *more* consistent with those utterances than mine are?

*(The conversation is doubtless still going on)*

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## THE FUTURE OF ITALIAN FILMS

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

'AFTER the Steppe-cat—What?' It is with the feeling of baffled uncertainty posed by Mr Thurber's wistfully evocative question of long ago that the English filmgoer may look at the Italian cinema today, or at least so much of it as he is able to see for himself or learn about from the writing of those who have seen more, or other, films than he. For after *Umberto D*—what? This great film is not only the climax of the neo-realist school in Italy, it is also its full-stop, for after this there is really nothing more to be said in this line without repetition or recession. The Italian cineasts must either drive roads across new country or they must fall back on old ones which have for some time been abandoned.

This is not the first time that Italian films have had great importance; in the very early days of the cinema the Italians had an influence quite disproportionate either to their output or to their distribution. That taste for the grandiose and the magniloquent which had so far had to express itself in opera (should we prefer not to go back quite so far as the Imperial Games), seized upon the cinema as the perfect vehicle for the spectacle, seeing

here no limit to the scale of décor or caste except the financial; and it produced in Enrico Guazzoni's *Quo Vadis* (1912) and Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914), two films which set the pattern for a picture which the Italians seem to have been making, on and off, for some forty years—each one bigger and more lush than its predecessor. The American cinema industry, then in its infancy, was profoundly impressed by these monster works and promptly began making, in its turn, pictures in the same genre and the two industries have, as it were, been injecting each other with an auto-genous vaccine of the historico-grandiose ever since. And though we may sigh when we think of Cecil B. de Mille, we should not forget that *Intolerance* would not have been the masterpiece it is had not Griffith's genius been touched-off by the Italian manner. And it is worth while remembering in this connection that King Vidor, as he tells us in his entertaining autobiography, *A Tree is a Tree*, saw the two-reel Italian version of *Quo Vadis* nearly one hundred and fifty times in one week when he was a schoolboy projectionist—so that *Hallelujah's* rhythm and grouping owe something to this tradition also. The coming of sound, in the thirties, meant that the Italian films were largely confined to their own territory from then on, and we had rather lost the habit of thinking of Italian films as worth consideration in the same way as, say, the French or German or Soviet cinema until just after the war, when we were rudely jolted out of our complacent ignorance by the arrival in London of *Roma, Città Aperta*.

We were justifiably proud of the documentaries and feature-documentaries which had been made in this country during the war: *Fires were Started*, *The Way to the Stars*, *Nine Men, In Which We Serve*, and the like—but this was something quite different. The savage mastery of Rossellini's direction, the vitality and integrity of Aldo Fabrizi and Anna Magnani in the two main parts, above all the way the film was shot almost exclusively on location with the utmost naturalism of background and atmosphere: all this made an extraordinary impression on the English public. There was a raw compulsion here that made our carefully-judged understatements appear suddenly a little thin and colourless. For all we knew at the time, this was a flash in the pan and the majority of Italian films might still be *Ben Hur* and *Quo Vadis*, but it was soon clear that *Open City* was a single spy reaching us from battalions yet to come; films made by a number of directors

all with this harsh yet compassionate eye to the social problems of the poor and under-privileged in a country weltering in chaos; a movement which we soon learned to call the neo-realist.

In the beginning the products of this school were strongly marked by characteristics of almost unrelieved disillusion and hopelessness which did not show great variation of key. The world of *Sciuscia*, for instance, was a terrible world: vice, dishonesty, violence and injustice seemed to be omnipresent and omnipotent, and the pitiful weapons of loyalty, solidarity and comradeship that the helpless characters could bring to bear against the vested interests of society, the Church and the state were doomed from the outset. I remember, towards the end of this film, turning to my companion and saying that I could not take much more, and he replied that he was sure that the horse must die, too, before the story could end: and of course it did. This lack of economy and decorum in some of the films occasionally became ludicrous as a minor Elizabethan tragedy may become ludicrous in its extravagance, and is perhaps a symptom of the same floridity and taste for exuberance that gave us *Cabiria* in the old days. *Sciuscia* drew an intolerable situation and was ablaze with criticism of the many forces which, while responsible for that situation, seemed to have no concern for its consequences; *Caccia Tragica* and *Riso Amaro* were even more crude, melodramatic and angry; but *Vivere in Pace* and *Paisa*, both of which reached England in what was for us the early days of neo-realism, were greater films, whose passionate appeal on behalf of humanity against the racketeers who beset it on every side sent the audience stumbling out into the darkness afterwards, moved by a very real catharsis to a new pity for the poverty and weakness to be found as much round the bombed sites of London as in the alleys of Rome and Naples.

This sense of immediacy, of things happening here and now for which everyone is held responsible and should be ready to shoulder that responsibility, a sense of auto-criticism almost Soviet in its force, is one of the great marks of the Italian cinema of this period; and as production grew in momentum and technical skill, gathered more praise and consequently more influence, so did it arouse more and more disquiet in authority of every kind. Social criticism is always a dangerous game to play, and particularly in a country like Italy after the liberation, where ecclesiastical,

political and military authorities were coping as best they could with problems far beyond their control in a scene of unbelievable confusion. This grave and bleak affirmation of the state of affairs as these men saw it—pain and poverty and exploitation, girls seduced and men betrayed and children corrupted and the old abandoned—was something new for Italy. To ecclesiastical observers, accustomed to assessing the dangers of the cinema largely in terms of immorality and unrealistic scenes of luxury, this new type of film was a challenge as unfamiliar as it was difficult. For many of the Italian films are explicitly anti-clerical, and de Sica, for instance, often goes out of his way to ridicule the Church: you will remember the file of German seminarians or the charitable ladies in *Bicycle Thieves*, and the bitter hospital sequence in *Umberto D* in which the patients say the Rosary. Only man, we are made to feel, only man will come to man's aid in this post-war world, and probably, only poor men at that. *Open City*, it is true, allowed the priest to play an epic part in the life of the community, but apart from the Franco-Italian co-productions based on the Don Camillo books the inference is, even when the criticism is not overt, that religion is doing little enough to alleviate the human situation. The Church in Italy keeps a vigilant eye on the cinema but in many dioceses the clergy are not permitted to see films, and there is nothing comparable to the serious achievements of the French religious film. The one exception that has come to England is *Cielo sulla Palude*, the admirable and powerful film made on the life of St Maria Goretti. It makes use of all the weapons of the neo-realists, the horrifying poverty and the ever-threatening insecurity are underlined as much as they are in *Bicycle Thieves* or *Sciuscia*, the direction is as disciplined, the camera-work as good (in fact, it shares the same cameraman, Aldo, as *Bicycle Thieves*), the issues faced as fearlessly. But where the man and his child in de Sica's film are safe only in their mutual relationship, Maria Goretti visibly and recognizably relies on God. If only more pictures like this had been undertaken, religion would not be so embarrassed for an answer to directors like de Sica and Rossellini.

The fact that the rich are almost always on the wrong side is another factor that makes for the unpopularity of the neo-realist film with officialdom in Italy; film production there is now so heavily subsidized by the state that independence is more difficult

to maintain and the state itself is getting restive under this constant hail of criticism and ridicule, and the implication that the country is riddled with incompetence and worse. Clearly de Sica must be an uncomfortable fellow to have about; *Bicycle Thieves* was an explosive mixture all the more effective for the apparent lack of explicit judgment. The facts, says de Sica, are thus and thus: no bicycle, no work, no food, no help, no kindness except from a small boy. What kind of a treatment, we may well wonder, would have been meted out to *Love on the Dole* in the early thirties if it had been so good a film with as wide a publicity, or what kind of a film would de Sica have made from a Zavattini script about Jarrow or the Rhondda in those days? Not one that would have rated a government subsidy, at a guess. 'The keenest necessity of our times is *social attention*', wrote Zavattini, and he goes on to say that people who want to stop the poverty, that is to say the films about poverty, are committing a sin. Poverty, says Gavin Lambert in *Sight and Sound*, is for the neo-realist school the greatest social reality. And from this stems all the other factors that go to make life as we see it: 'It's a battlefield', in the words of Mr Graham Greene.

Even in *Domenico d'Agosto* pleasure is taken in sun and sea on the razor edge between survival and disaster; it is a happy film because it is made with love and generosity, but the implications are not particularly happy. The other charming, light-hearted pictures like *Four Steps in the Clouds*, *E Primavera* or *Angelina* all keep this tremendous awareness of the insecurity of life against which the only rampart is the comradeship of others. As for *Miracolo in Milano*, de Sica's variation on the René Clair manner, all its gaiety, inconsequence and nonsense is employed to emphasize rather than to mask its criticism of the rich and the powerful, and the miracles worked by its mooncalf of a hero are as deflating to the top-dogs as they are wonderfully funny; purely visual comic situations that are essentially of the cinema.

All this considered then, and with the searing testimony of *Bicycle Thieves* so recent a warning, it is not surprising that *Umberto D* was treated with a certain reserve. More and more co-production was being undertaken in Italy, more and more American money was flooding in; people, it was said, did not want these sombre stories. Italy was not only the home of poverty and muddle—the tourist trade must be considered and the export

market too, and after all even the home market was getting tired of seeing itself living and partly living—this last in spite of the well-attested fact that many Italian audiences were evidently contented to see from films that they really were of interest to someone; that their situation, as well as Audrey Hepburn's, was of some importance and significance.

Here in England we were tantalized with reports and rumours of this film dedicated by de Sica to the memory of his dead father. It was made over two years ago, but when the pictures for last autumn's Italian film festival in London were announced we found that a lot of jolly entertainment, some musicals, one curiosity and one good serious film were to be shown, but not a word of *Umberto*. The story of how the British Film Institute and the critics, with de Sica's connivance, had the film privately shown and how it promptly scooped all the publicity is ancient history now, but none the less agreeable to recall. Even so, it was well into the New Year before it finally reached London and then with an attempt at disguise as a second feature to *Bienvenido Mr Marshall*. The chorus of praise at once broke out again. This film, tragic, disciplined and at times almost intolerably moving, is one that makes great demands on the spectator. It is full of rage against the injustice of circumstance and de Sica seems, like Scobie, to have arrogated to himself the prerogative of God's compassion. Umberto is an old man of dignity and goodness, but he is redundant; Maria, the little slattern of a servant, is a creature of instinct and warmth, but she is shown to be expendable. Innocents in a world of wide-boys, their dereliction is total were it not for each other: and even here they often fail, though in the moment of Umberto's absolute despair as he sags against the bedrail, Maria's automatic half-rise to the sound of the bugle from the barracks is instantly checked for this time she feels obscurely that Umberto must come first. A lovely touch this, though indeed the film is full of such; and the long sequence with the sound-track cut to the minimum when Maria, getting up reluctantly from her pallet in the corridor, faces the dreary day queasily with a whole series of reflex actions that suggest the boredom of months, will surely become a classic of the cinema. Throughout the film the restraint, putting the emotion under pressure, makes it the more powerful and the situation of Maria and Umberto is as nearly intolerable as that of Lear and Cordelia and has on the spectator

a comparable effect. It would be difficult to see *Umberto D* and feel quite the same afterwards.

If the Italians continue to make films in the same genre the results are almost bound to be anti-climax: it would be impossible to bear more, and if less were expressed there would be weakness. A new direction must be found; whether it will be in the direction of greater sophistication, fantasy, or possibly more deliberate symbolism remains to be seen, but we can only hope that the Italian directors will not capitulate to the commercial claims of co-production and be persuaded to dilute the strongly individual flavour of their best efforts or, worse still, to reproduce an inferior brand of spectacle in a neo-Hollywood manner. After the very high standards to which the acting, camera work and scripts of the recent Italian films have accustomed us, noisy superficiality or bogus actuality would be equally distasteful. Of late, films in Italy have been notable for facing facts; it would be tragic if their new direction were to be a flight from reality.

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#### CATECHISM FOR ADULTS: IV. 'BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY'

IAN HISLOP, O.P.

**T**HE section of the creed introduced by the words 'conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary' consists of a relatively long Christological statement. This statement is an essential part of the original proclamation of the Gospel, and indeed, is found both in the Epistles of St Paul and the Acts of the Apostles. The reason for its inclusion in the creed is both because the Gospel cannot be expressed without it, and because it serves to refute any view of our Lord's life and suffering as only apparent and not real. The whole section is a witness to the historic reality of his words and actions. By the emphasis it lays on this section, the Church refutes the most pervasive of all heresies, Docetism. The term 'Docetism' is derived from the Greek word for 'suppose' or 'seem' and the heresy suggests that Christ only apparently possessed a human body or that only some of the events recorded in the Gospels are salvific. All Docetism pre-