

The Spaniards

BERNARD BERGONZI

Ullathorne, Bishop of Birmingham
and a moderate man,
was pained by the glare of fanaticism.
In 1870, at the first Vatican Council,
he wrote of certain Spanish bishops:

'One might think from them
that fixed and hard ideas,
pushed to the furthest extreme
were just the cure for all human ills.

'They seem to fancy that men and women,
the actual creatures of this world,
are spirits living on fixed ideas,
and devoid of disturbing elements.'

Monstrously pure, that heaven of the intellect,
an icefield, a desert, a void,
a shimmer of empty Iberian air
with no disturbing elements.
Ideas, fixed as the stars,
burning in a vacant sky; hard as diamonds;
cruel and exact as pincers, as the rack.
O aquiline fathers! Sharp, dogmatic beaks!

Ullathorne was more merciful.
As good a Catholic as the heirs of Torquemada,
he felt the infirmities, the imprecisions of our state,
preferring the misty midlands
to the absolute parched plains of Spain.
He would not burn a man for an idea.

BLACKFRIARS

The Spaniards would.
A marvellous and terrible precision,
black shadows clear-cut on the glaring sand,
error purged by pain,
no mistiness, no tolerance, no mercy.

And proved themselves, unflinchingly,
as brave as martyrs as inquisitors.

In 1936
eleven bishops and more than 5,000 priests
were killed by the democrats of loyalist Spain.

(And in three years of civil war
about 400,000 people died,
of whom, it is thought,
120,000 were killed
behind the lines on either side).

Heard and Seen

THE OTHER END OF THE TELESCOPE

As presented to us in Europe at the moment, the American film is in a rum state of disproportion. Hurtling around in circuit like so many giant satellites go the blockbusters—*El Cid* and *Ben Hur* and *West Side Story*—and not yet generally released are the near three hours of *The Cardinal*, the three hours plus of *Cleopatra*, looming like Easter Island figures in the West End or on the boulevards of Paris.

And yet, in contrast to films of such enormous magnification, spatial and temporal, financial and technical, we have now been able to see a handful of American films which would almost appear to have been made by directors looking through the wrong end of the telescope, so deliberately small-scale are they.

The first of these was, I suppose, the memorable *Shadows*, made by John Cassavetes to please himself in a kind of sophisticated near-improvisation, which ran for months at the Academy Cinema, with the longest queues of the most enthusiastic young audiences that London had seen since foreign films reached