

tinue to do as he has always done in the past; adopt the Communist approach towards a specific event when it suits him, and reject it when it doesn't. He is still the author both of *Les Mains Sales* and *Nekrassov*. The re-statements of his position are interesting as pieces of dialectic, but the result never deprives him of the pragmatic choice before each separate political event. It will be interesting to see in his February issue what his views are on the seizure of the January number of *Les Temps Modernes* by the French police. Editing reviews in France certainly has that element of tauromachy which Michel Leiris laments has vanished from literature. Perhaps a few confiscations on this side of the Channel would brighten up the literary scene. . . .

LOUIS ALLEN

OBITER

THE CARMELITES. It is, on the face of it, unexpected that the works of so concentrated, so economical a writer as Georges Bernanos should lend themselves easily to adaptation into another medium. But *Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne* was made into a near-perfect film by Robert Bresson, and now we in London have seen the opera which François Poulenc has made out of *Les Dialogues des Carmélites*: this, too, turns out to be significant in its own right, and it is interesting to recall here that both Bresson and Poulenc have put it on record that, in making their own versions from the Bernanos originals, they have found it possible, indeed essential, to use only the words of the author and have only eliminated—never interpolated—passages of dialogue. It is, perhaps, less surprising that Bresson should have made the film than that Poulenc should have written the opera, for most of the works by Poulenc that the average English concert-goer will hear are witty, sophisticated and intelligent; technically highly accomplished but not, for the most part, profound. But then we do not often, in England, have the opportunity of hearing the 'Litanies de la Vierge Noire' or 'Figure Humaine', which might have prepared us for *Les Carmélites*. It would be difficult for anyone of sensibility, and almost impossible for a Catholic, I think, to hear *Les Carmélites* and not be deeply moved, and this not only because of the high seriousness of the situation and the weight of the characters, but also because of the true humility with which the composer has subordinated himself to the exigencies of his material and the simplicity with which he has accepted its disciplines.

The Carmelites opened in London on January 16, and in March will be heard in Oxford and Manchester, when the company goes on tour; it has also been broadcast in the Third Programme so that a great many

people will have been able to hear this all-British production, though those who could only listen to the broadcast will have had no idea of the beauty of Wahkevitch's noble, austere *décor*, nor of the admirable speed and flexibility of Mme Margherita Wallmann's production, which carried us without faltering from scene to scene and mood to mood. Elsie Morison as Blanche de la Force sang sweetly and with a truly lyrical line; she looked delightful in her court clothes, but lacked the height to master the muffling habit as a Religious, and it was a curious relief when she appeared, once more defined, in the coarse apron and ragged clothes of the last act; Jean Watson, as Mme de Croissy, the first Prioress, was splendid, and the ravaged, ruined face with which she met her death precisely conveyed Bernano's words: 'Oh! ma Mère, regardez: vais-je dans un instant montrer ce visage à mes filles?' To me, the surprise of the evening was the wonderful thing Miss Sylvia Fisher, not always the most sympathetic of interpreters, made of Mère Marie de l'Incarnation. Looking, it must be confessed, a little like one of Brother Choleric's lumpy Reverend Mothers—massive, inflexible and recollected—she dominated every scene in which she appeared, and indeed this led to the one serious defect of the cast; for Joan Sutherland as Mme Lidoine, the new Prioress, is quite overshadowed by her and is not at all able to assert that antithesis of heroic earthy commonsense against fanaticism which is so telling in the play. In fact, she seems altogether a more tenuous and indeed aristocratic personage than Mère Marie, which weakens the passages between them irremediably. Perhaps the most wholly beautiful and consistent performance of all was that given by Jeannette Sinclair as the young Sister Constance, in her unforced gaiety and innocence; and the scene when she and Blanche are doing the ironing and discussing the death of the Prioress was of an unhopèd-for perfection.

It is only just that in BLACKFRIARS, of all places, we should remember that the original treatment of the Gertrud von le Fort novel, *Last to the Scaffold*, from which everything stemmed, had been made by a French Dominican, Père Raymond Brückberger, with the collaboration of Philippe Agostini, the director and camera-man; and it was on this tentative scenario that Bernanos, then in Tunisia and without the novel, was working right up to the time of his death. From his manuscript the play, *Dialogues des Carmélites* was staged after his death, and from this Poulenc wrote his libretto straight off, with the minimum of alteration. So it is to the Order, in the last analysis, that we owe this moving spiritual and aesthetic experience: I, for one, am deeply grateful.

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