

technologists. If their productions are to control its life, they will have the deciding voice in determining the use to which such productions are put. Are men with such responsibility to have grown up without any roots in the humane past of European culture? It is frightening to see how far the divorce has already gone. If the process is to be stopped, a real effort and real sacrifice must be made. This report points the way: hard thinking is now required to see how its recommendations can most speedily be put into practice.

LAURENCE BRIGHT, O.P.

Heard and Seen

ANTONIONI SURVEY

There is little doubt that the most OK cinematic name in England to-day is that of Michelangelo Antonioni; critics back from Cannes brought reports of *l'Avventura* as voluminous as they were contradictory, and when last autumn it finally came to London—briefly at the South Bank Festival and then for an extended commercial run—the wave of interest and praise gathered momentum. In January and February of this year the National Film Theatre, sensibly cashing in on a vogue which it had done much to initiate, has been running an Antonioni season, and at the time of writing we have been able to see all his work except *La Notte*, the latest, which may not be available in time for this series.

It is, however, quite possible to come to some general conclusions about the work of this enigmatic director from the films shown already and, judging from *l'Avventura*, it seems unlikely in any case that the new picture is going to be radically different from the rest. Antonioni would never, I think, be a director with whom I would feel instinctively at home; his world is not mine, nor his obsessions; the people in whom he is interested are not those whose lives I should often feel drawn to study minutely. But his seeing eye, his concentration of observation, his obvious intellectual and sensuous delight in image and composition and movement compel one's attentive admiration. In other words, though I often do not agree with what he has chosen to say, I would defend to the death his fashion of saying it. It is odd to find this emphasis on the aesthetic and plastic qualities of film in a director who is an avowed Marxist; there must be few Marxist *cinéastes* who seem so openly uninterested not only in the dogmatic assertions of the party line, but even in problems of class or politics. He probes, for choice, the relationships of the rich, the idle and sophisticated, the bored; and when he does, for once, as in *Il Grido* take a specifically working class nexus of character and situation, he works out his theorem in terms that are almost exclusively psychological and have little or no proletarian signifi-

cance. He must be one of the least neo-realist of serious Italian directors, and there is more social protest in *Umberto D* or *Il Tetto* than in the whole Antonioni corpus to date.

The English public is certainly at a slight disadvantage in having seen his more mature work first—rather as if one began with *Anthony and Cleopatra* and then worked backwards to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. I happened to see *I Vinti*, that triptych of short studies in juvenile delinquency set in France, Italy and England, some six years or so ago and dismissed it as very mere at the time; but it is now a little difficult to look at, say, *Cronaca di un Amore* in detachment, and not as a tentative sketch for *l'Avventura* which it so greatly resembles in theme and treatment. There is the same bored beautiful woman (Lucia Bosé in this film), the same shadow of guilt poisons the love affair, and it is again due to a hinted complicity in the death of another girl. Already the backgrounds, taken on location in and around Milan—wet streets, lowering skies, forbidding buildings—seem more important than the anguish of the two lovers whose story this is. There are some wonderful shots in it; notably one in a bedroom, where the camera follows the man all round the room, and then suddenly takes in the bed, and there is the girl—we did not even know she had decided to sleep with him yet; and another almost at the end of the film, which swoops around a hairpin bend on two levels—the girl is standing on a bridge—to foreshadow the crash which will kill her husband. *Cronaca di un Amore* is considerably shorter than *Avventura* and the lovers fail each other even more decisively; it is nothing like so good a film, but I found it in some ways more absorbing. In 1952/53 Antonioni made *Signora senza Camelie*, also with Lucia Bosé (more icily regular and splendidly null than ever) which tells a Scott Fitzgerald type story about a girl who longs to be a real actress but is incapable of either the effort or the achievement, and in the end resigns herself to mediocrity and parts in Italian oriental spectaculars. It is made with a lighter, more explicitly satirical touch, and the director's genius for playing out the events of the story against the busy, inattentive everyday world is already wonderfully displayed. After this came *Le Amiche*, a novelettish story, for once not his own, set in Turin; the urban backgrounds are immensely important, but the film is a disappointment. *Il Grido* (1957) seems to be quite different; it is the story of Aldo (played by Steve Cochran), a working man who has lived with a woman (Alida Valli) for seven years and fathered her child; suddenly she hears her husband is dead in Sydney (odd how often Antonioni uses Australia as a symbol of remoteness) and this is the moment she chooses to tell Aldo she is leaving him for another man. Aldo is shattered; he takes the small girl and goes angrily away, and the rest of the film explores his gradual deterioration. Other women want him, but no one but Irma can satisfy him and all through the flat ugly wastes of the Po valley, windswept, streaming with rain or harsh with snow, he trails his little girl and his despair. This is one of the greyest pictures imaginable, but it is desolate not because of ideological stresses but because of Aldo's misery. But in spite of its assurance, its clinical analysis, its deliberate technical virtuosity, this picture remains for me in-

human, because the director is detached from his characters, without the genuine concern he shows for his infinitely less valuable sophisticates in *Avventura*.

Marxist Antonioni may be, but he is an aesthetic director, not a didactic one by nature, and it is in the tensions so set up that his peculiar fascination lies. And so we come to *l'Avventura*, the beautiful, irritating, sad and sensual work about which I wrote in these pages in January. Until we can see *La Notte*, this must be accepted as the fine flower of this ambiguous talent for here Antonioni's mastery of the evocative image, his dominant characteristic, is deployed in the delineation of character with greater control than in any of his earlier work.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

Reviews

THE TOMB OF ST. PETER. *The New Discoveries in the Sacred Grottoes of the Vatican*. By M. Guarducci; translated from the Italian by J. McLellan, with an Introduction by H. V. Morton; Harrap, 25s.

This admittedly popular account of the recent Vatican excavations falls into two distinct parts. One part, Chapters 1-4 and 6, which deals with the testimony to the Roman Petrine tradition of the ancient writers, the Vatican region in classical times, the Roman necropolis under St Peter's Basilica, the Apostle's Vatican Memorial, and the joint cult-centre of St Peter and St Paul by the Appian Way, is based on the more detailed and more closely documented studies that have already appeared in several languages, including English, and on the official *Report* of the Vatican excavators, published in 1951. Little that is new or original will be found in these portions of the book; and they contain several debatable statements. For instance, the Trajanic dating of St Ignatius of Antioch is probably too early (p. 33): H. Gregoire (*Les persécutions dans l'empire romain*, 1951, p. 162 ff.) makes out a good case for assigning his letters to the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Again, it is by no means necessary to assert that the obelisk of Gaius Nero's circus must have stood upon its *spina* and that therefore the circus was in use no longer at the end of the second century, at the time of the building of the circular pagan mausoleum, later the Church of St Andrew, which would have cut across the *spina's* assumed line (pp. 48-50): the *spina* could well have lain further to the south, and since the obelisk carries a Latin funerary inscription, in honour of Augustus and Tiberius, it could have stood most appropriately beside the road that ran between the circus on the south and the open, burial area on the north. All the same the authoress has assembled, to illustrate these chapters, a fine array of clear and useful pictures.

The second part of the book, Chapter 5, 'The Testimony of the Inscriptions', is, on the other hand, wholly original and extremely controversial, being a boil-