

Heard and Seen

LIVING AND PARTLY LIVING

The sixth London Film Festival was held as usual in the National Film Theatre at the end of last October, but on a wet day it looked and felt more like the Western Front in 1916 than the South Bank in 1962. The demolition around the Royal Festival Hall had to be seen - and heard - to be believed. Nothing, however, could damp or deafen the enthusiasm of the crowds who wished to see the films so briefly available to them; during the fifteen days of the Festival just over twenty-one thousand people paid to see the thirty feature films and fifty shorts presented in the framework of the fortnight, and a full house stayed the whole course of an all-night show on the first Friday. This was a marathon indeed: four feature films - Bunuel's *Exterminating Angel*, Tony Richardson's *Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, Gregoretti's *I Nuovi Angeli* and Roman Polanski's *Knife in the Water* - were shown between 11.30 p.m. and 8.15 a.m. the next morning, with intervals for hot soup and other refreshments; one can well believe they were needed.

Of the films new to me which I was able to see during the festival two stood out head and shoulders above the rest, though I am ready to be persuaded that they might have had close competition from two which I did not catch - *Commare Seca* and *Les Oliviers de la Justice*: but my two winners were the Polish *Knife in the Water* and the Italian *Il Mare*. No one who saw *Two Men and a Wardrobe* is likely to have forgotten it; this brilliant, imaginative and enigmatic short was made by Roman Polanski as a technical exercise while he was still a student at the Lodz state film school. *Noz w Wodzie*, *Knife in the Water*, is the first feature film directed by this intelligent young man to reach us, and it shows just as much disturbing originality as did the earlier short film, perfectly expanded to the scale of a full-length feature film.

The story is deceptively simple. A husband and wife, he thirty-five or so, she a little younger, leave Warsaw by motor car very early on Sunday morning for a day's sailing; a young hitchhiker takes an idiotic risk to stop them and, wholly angry and half-intrigued, the husband picks him up. Somehow, the couple find that they have invited him to come sailing with them; they are very experienced at the job and he knows nothing at all, so he finds their ship-shape and Bristol fashion of going about things faintly ridiculous. And so the odd, triangular relationship is set. The boy sulky, humiliated and yet mocking; the wife competent, detached and a little amused; the husband confident, even arrogant, yet constantly finding the need to assert his superiority over the supercilious teenage intruder. The boy has a dangerous cherished knife which the husband Andrzej almost deliberately lets fall into the water and instantly the quarrel comes to a head. The boy, who says he cannot swim, is knocked overboard and the wife's covert criticism of Andrzej becomes overt. So the boy has

disappeared, Andrzej swims off to the police, and Christine sits reflecting: but when the boy swims shiveringly back to the boat, we are less surprised than they are that they finally make love. The film ends in a wet dawn, with something irreparable having happened to the marriage of Andrzej and Christine and nothing, apparently, to the boy.

The images are used with a sense of style - up the mast, along the deck, round the curves of the sail to the flat horizon - that is almost sculptural in its significance. The dialogue is minimal and actions are far more informative than words. The age-differences could hardly be better conveyed, partly because the acting is so good (Andrzej is played by the admirable Niemczyk who was so good as the doctor in *Pociąg*) and partly because the director expects his audience to be as intelligent as he is. One will not easily forget the final sequence: the car is at a crossroads, and we know that the husband, not believing his wife's story of the boy's return or her infidelity, is hesitating whether to go to the police or not. We, and the camera, track back down the road and, as the scene fades, we see the car taking the *other* road, away from the police station. What, we wonder, are they saying to each other behind the streaming windscreen?

Il Mare is also the first feature film of its director; Giuseppe Patroni-Griffi has in fact come to the cinema via the theatre, for which he is an experienced writer, and this approach is sufficiently rare in Italy though even rarer is the fact that after such a screen success his next piece is to be another stage play. Patroni's film has been criticized on the ground that it is like Antonioni's work, this I think to be true only on the most superficial level and for that reason unimportant. He has set his three ambiguous characters on Capri in winter emptiness, with keen winds whistling up the steep and narrow streets, and occasional scats of rain whipping across the deserted squares, even though there is much thin sunshine. Here we find a young man, an actor, studying a new part and quarrelling by telephone with his girl in Rome; a boy, beautiful, wretched, half-seas over and solitary; an assured and attractive woman who has come to sell a house where she has been unhappy. The whole film is a permutation of their chance relationships, and we know no more about them or their lives when it finishes than we did at the brilliant wordless beginning. For the first ten or fifteen minutes of this film we hardly hear any words at all, as we watch the actor arrive on the empty boat, come up in the empty cable car, and swing irritably out of the hotel almost as soon as he arrives. It is passionately interesting and indeed I found the whole film equally so. We explore the curious attraction of the man for the boy and the boy for the man; the adult relationship between man and woman which exasperates the boy because it excludes him; the half-kind, half-patronizing attitude of the woman towards the boy. The whole episode exists in a vacuum, existentially, and one should not, I feel, be at all surprised at the deliberate way in which the director has left almost every loose end untied. This is essentially a film about transient emotions taking place at one of life's junctions where we all, sooner or later, are apt to fetch up. The fact that Patroni-Griffi has contrived to tell the whole thing in purely cinematic

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terms, with an understanding not only of the medium, but of the medium in that place at that time, is as much *camera-stylo* technique as that of any French director's. Umberto Orsini as the actor has a Sinatra-type face which precisely conveys the difference between actor and person - note the corruscating sequence when he turns into actor in the dark square for the boy's amusement - and Françoise Prevost is beautiful and defined as the woman; Dino Mele is at once touching and tricky as the young boy. Patroni-Griffi is certainly a man to watch.

These two films are of a kind to make one feel, all over again, that there is nothing like the cinema when it really uses its resources intelligently; I cannot believe that one could get two expositions such as these equivalently explored with anything like the same subtlety in any other medium. They certainly made me feel that, even if I'd seen nothing else, the sixth London Film Festival was a resounding success.

MARYVONNE BUTCHER

Reviews

FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT, by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan; Oxford University Press; 12s.

THE SPIRIT OF ANCIENT BUDDHISM, by Etienne Lamotte; Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Rome; n.p.

This lecture of Dr Radhakrishnan, which was given at the inauguration of the Harvard Centre for the Study of World Religions, is a good example of the kind of religious philosophy which is popular in India to-day and which is found no less attractive by many people in the West. For Dr Radhakrishnan religion is essentially a matter of 'experience'. He defines it as 'life experienced in its depth'. To this kind of religion the great obstacle is what he calls 'beliefs and dogmas', above all what he regards as the 'exclusive' dogmatic belief of Christianity. He is prepared to allow a place to 'beliefs' and 'rites' in religion, but they are seen simply as symbolic expressions of experience. It is characteristic that he can speak of Christianity as 'based on inner experience symbolized by the events from Easter to Pentecost'. With such a form of Christianity he has no quarrel, and he would like to include the great men and saints of Christianity in this category. Thus he writes of 'Benedict, Bernard, Abelard, Francis and Dante' that they 'all shudder at the thought of shutting up the divine Reality in any form or denomination'. Dr Radhakrishnan's fear is clearly that beliefs and dogmas should 'shut up' the soul and prevent its attaining to the full experience