

was once in a seminary, but who was removed because of an unsuitable skill as a mimic, it seems) and his sister have just that larger-than-life dimension which childhood's imagination gives. There are 'characters', whether nursemaids and aunts, or M. Félix, the puppet-man, who reflect the skilled observation of the novelist. But there is nothing exaggerated or forced: the grave evocation of earliest years is always true to its purpose. One thing that seems strange in this story of a Catholic family is the total absence of the impact of religion on a boy so perceptive. His obsessional love for the early silent films and for puppets suggests that he would scarcely be neutral where his imagination was stirred. But of the effect—if only by reaction—of religion, there is scarcely a word.

I.E.

BYZANTINE MOSAICS, with an introduction by Peter Meyer. (Batsford; 30s.)

*Byzantine Mosaics* maintains in every detail the tradition of Batsford publications. There is a very high standard of reproduction. The plates have been most carefully selected; the letterpress is quite inadequate. In the introduction, which is four pages long, Dr Peter Meyer deals with Byzantine mosaics as a whole. His style is epigrammatic, and it seems clear that he is familiar with recent research on mosaic decoration, notably with that of Dr Otto Demus. His essential standpoint seems best expressed in the sentence: 'Byzantine painting, illuminations and mosaics are neither representations nor idealisations—they are allusions, sacred emblems, almost hieroglyphs, therefore akin to script'. Such a view is hardly tenable after the discoveries of the Whittemore-Underwood expedition at Hagia Sophia, and the new knowledge of imperial Byzantine portraiture which has developed from it. It is hardly compatible with the classical reminiscences which were always known to have survived in Byzantine art and whose significance is becoming more and more apparent through the work of Dr Weizmann and the discoveries at Castel Seprio. Yet as a generalisation it would be far more tenable if it was only the art of Norman Sicily and the early Venetian Republic which was under consideration. It is this in fact that should have formed the title of the book, for it is its true subject. One of the illustrations is from Torcello, five are from San Marco, four from Monreale, three from Palermo, the last from Cefalú.

G.M.

SIGRID UNDSET. By A. H. Winsnes. (Sheed and Ward; 15s.)

This book provides quite an adequate introduction to the work of Sigrid Undset. Without either reserves or qualifications, the author accepts Sigrid Undset's attitude to life so that, though this book is called 'a

Study in Christian Realism', it can hardly be said to provide an objective criticism of the novels. It is really more in the nature of a biography, and it must be added that for who wish to understand Sigrid Undset's art the best account in English is to be found in W. Gore Allen's Scandinavian studies *Renaissance in the North* (1946). Mr Foote's translation reads well—though 'small-town lady' is a terrible phrase, and what does he mean by 'a few parcels of land' on page 118? Surely in the context it should be 'plots of land'?

N.B.

LE CINEMA A-T-IL UNE AME? By Henri Agel. MARCEL CARNE. By Jean Quéval. Collections 7e Art. (Editions du Cerf; Blackfriars Publications; 7s. 6d. each.)

A very occasional book may be a matter of such intense personal significance for the reviewer that it becomes difficult or impossible to review quite impersonally. Henri Agel is a French film critic and professor at the *Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques*. I heard him speak in Madrid at last year's stimulating conference of the O.C.I.C. (International Catholic Cinema Office) on the general theme of 'Education for the Cinema'. I was then immediately and deeply struck by the originality of his approach to the cinema. It was not a matter either of aesthetics, technical jargon or sociology, but was an integrated grasp of the essence of the cinema; to say of its soul would be to beg the question he argues so persuasively in his little book *Le Cinéma a-t-il une Ame?*. Here then is a book illuminating with a clear, steady radiance a truth after which I have been groping for years. I have long sought the exact point at which a film ceases to be the mechanical reproduction of a book or play, a mobile picture postcard or exhibition of combined crafts, and becomes synthesised into a film in its own right. For M. Agel that would, I think, be the point at which the film may be said to be touched by grace and to attain a soul.

In my case, then, M. Agel is so happily preaching to the converted that it is difficult to assess the reaction of others to his revelation. Perhaps they may find him arbitrary, even capricious in the application of his beliefs. Certainly his chapter headings seem chosen for simple convenience: *Connaissance au Monde, L'Aventure Humaine, Connaissance du Prochain, L'Amour, Le Dépassement de Soi*—headings under which to group his stimulating, even inspiring analyses of many of the screen's masterpieces. Again, why does he find a soul in *The Louisiana Story* but not in *Farrebique*; in *The Road to Heaven*, yet hardly in *Monsieur Vincent* (except in Fresnay's performance)? Has he not disregarded political and other considerations to insist upon the soul of Dmytryk's *Give Us This Day*? Is it not a question of personal taste to allow a soul—in a passage of most remarkably sensitive film appreciation—in Garbo (the star, of