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"The Eclipse": Monica Vitti watches the speculator who has just lost a fortune in the market crash.

BOCCACCIO 70

STUMPED FOR A PUBLICITY LINE, perhaps, Joe Levine hit on the idea of selling *Boccaccio 70* (Fox) as "the first film in three acts." This, apart from eliciting the inevitable reply "so what?", is at best one of those depends-what-you-mean records, and what it means in this case is that it is a triple bill, which, as every theatregoer knows, hardly ever adds up to the equivalent of a good, straightforward, one-piece evening's entertainment.

Not that its credentials are not impressive. Three sizeable chunks of film, three major directors, three female stars of some slight note (there was a fourth piece, by a lesser director and without stars, but that fell by the wayside shortly before Cannes last year). If we would rush to see new films by Fellini, Visconti and De Sica, should we not rush with even more enthusiasm to get the three for the price of one? Perhaps we might, but if we do we shall be disappointed. The three stories have only the vague and hopeful connection with Boccaccio that they are all faintly saucy, one being comic, one fantastic would-be satirical, and one sentimental. None of the directors is anywhere near his best and De Sica, as a matter of fact, is (one hopes) absolutely at his worst. The Fellini is a little better, if only by virtue of being peculiar, and Visconti comes off best—at any rate his episode bears witness to all-round competence, if not on this occasion much more.

De Sica's episode, *The Raffle*, is an attempt to do Sophia Loren's pizza-seller bit from *L'Oro di Napoli* over again in colour and wide screen. This time she works in a travelling fun-fair and her gimmick is to raffle her favours among the local menfolk at each stopping-place, the business end of the proceedings being left in the hands of a timid little man who needs his cut for his pregnant wife. Inevitably fate, in the shape of a beefy young farmer, steps in to take her heart out of her work; and the plot of the film, such as it is, turns on her attempts to extract herself from her undertaking. But La Loren has never been much of a comedienne, and is by now too haloed in Hollywood stardom to be very convincing as a cunning little peasant vixen. Nor is De Sica much of a comedy director; he can manage the light fantastic of *Miracle in Milan*, but the spirit of broad rustic farce eludes him, and a lot of frantic rushing round and face-making on the screen proves no substitute for real lightness of touch on the camera.

The Fellini episode, *The Temptation of Dr. Antonio*, is at least very strange, and there seems to be something there, struggling to get out, which just does not finally manage to emerge. It is a slight anecdote about a puritanical censor of public morals who is tormented, like St. Anthony, with visions of an extravagantly voluptuous life of the senses which his conscious mind has rejected. The centrepiece is a long dream sequence in which the gargantuan figure of Anita Ekberg

from the vast hoarding outside his house (where she is encouraging the public, appropriately, to drink milk) descends and frolics with him through the night streets of Rome. There is little to it, and one's first thought is that the episode is much too long for its material. Second thoughts suggest, however, that it may in fact be too short. We know that Fellini first edited his episode to run an hour and a half, and wanted it released as a separate feature. What remains suggests that the story was paced with this form in mind, and the removal of more than a third to fit it into the "three-act" framework has left merely a series of slow, bleeding chunks. The original version may have been for all I know an aesthetic disaster, but on the other hand it might have caught consistently the tone of broad, coarse caricature which is now established only intermittently (in the splendid scene in a way-out, all-white, ultra-modernistic church, for instance), and made clearer the function of one or two rather mysterious figures, like Dr. Antonio's sister who has vision-fits and the demonic little girl who regulates the game.

The Visconti section, *The Job*, seems to have been generally accounted the best episode; and so admittedly it is, in that it does not attempt much, but what it does attempt it carries off with great skill. It is a bitter-sweet tragi-comedy about the lovely young wife of a profligate count who has married her at least partly for her father's money and now is involved in a call-girl scandal, through which it emerges exactly how much he is willing to spend on a night's entertainment. His wife does not take this as expected; she considers leaving him, but after thinking it over decides to remain and charge him a commensurate amount for a night in her company. It is, after all, the only job she knows . . . Visconti's handling of all this is very smooth and elegant, if a trifle on the slow side, and he gets good performances out of Romy Schneider and Tomas Milian. But the episode is essentially high-level schmaltz, and it is difficult to make out whether Visconti realises this as clearly as he should. Is he not perhaps—the doubt obtrudes itself—taking everything just a little too seriously?

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