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Dartmouth Film Society Film Notes

NOTTI BIANCHE (1957) (WHITE NIGHTS)

Natalia	Maria Schell	The Householder	Marcella Rovena
Mario	Marcello Mastroianni	The Dancer	Dick Sanders
The Lodger	Jean Marais	The Caretaker	Maria Zanolli
The Prostitute	Clara Calamai		
and Corrado Pani,	Elena Fancera, Alfranco Ceccarelli, Angelo Galassi		

Screenplay by Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Luchino Visconti from the novel by Feodor Dostoyevsky. Photography by Giuseppe Rotunno. Sets by Mario Chiari. Costumes by Piero Tosi. Music by Nino Rota. Produced by CIAS under Franco Cristaldi for VIDES at Cinecitta. Directed by LUCHINO VISCONTI

Although Visconti is not very familiar to Americans, Europeans have for quite some time both acclaimed and declaimed his works, all, however, recognizing his essential significance in today's cinematic world.

As a nobleman, possessing a vast personal fortune, Visconti enjoyed a freedom which many might envy. However, early in his life he subjected himself to the rather arduous task of selecting whether he liked raising horses or making films. And since that time he has risen to prominence by directing for the stage, opera, and cinema. Although it might appear that he spreads his energies too widely, it is significant that he has made only seven features in the last twenty years. His strong sense of integrity causes him to work arduously and thoroughly at a film, sometimes even financing it with personal funds. As a result he is often considered the pioneer of the neo-realists; his films perform an intensive examination of Italian life and demonstrate acute social criticism.

Visconti got his start in the film world in the late 1930's under the excellent hands of Jean Renoir. Along with Jacques Becker, he assisted in the making of *PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE*. By 1942 he was on his own. His *OSSESSIONE*, based on "The Postman Always Rings Twice", was most astounding; unfortunately it was suppressed by the fascists who called it immoral.

Six years later in 1948 he made his greatest work, *LA TERRA TREMA*. This study of Sicilian fishermen, set in a natural setting of Italian poverty, was the great impetus behind his neo-realism. It was regarded to be so strong a piece of social criticism that it ran into much political and, in turn, financial trouble. As a result Visconti found that no company was ready to help him on another grand experiment. Nevertheless, in 1953 he made a very small and unpretentious comedy called *BELLISMA*. The appeal of its central actress Anna Maganani was enough to recreate his reputation.

In 1954 Lux Film gave Visconti a chance to make a sumptuous color spectacle called *SENSO*. Starring Farley Granger and Alida Valli, the film portrays the love of a married Venitian woman for a worthless young officer in the Austrian army. Visconti made the production so lavish that Lux got a new director for the last scene. The film is not very worthy of Visconti; but it does show how sumptuous the use of color and decor can be in a story.

His next film, *NOTTI BIANCHE*, was made in 1957. Although it is based on Dostoevsky's story of the same name, the two are not very similar in expression. In fact, the Russian Ivan Pyriev was so incensed at Visconti's treatment that he made his own version in 1959. Without denying that both the story and the film are very good works, the differences are evident, resulting from two sources in particular. The film lacks much of

the very intimate and sentimental feeling that results from the narrator's direct addresses to the reader (which is sacrificed to a large extent by the dramatic necessity of the film). And the film presents a starker reality by showing photographs of an actual Italian city, while the story paints a luminous series of twilight impressions. Nevertheless, intensity of life created ~~by a feeling of~~ fate or dreaminess is part of both works, and in this sense the film is a successful adaption. Dilys Powell writes in the Sunday TIMES (London) about this quality of work:

"Now comes Visconti's latest film, and unlike his former works, it is not realistic at all. Played by skilled actors against an elaborate studio background, it is deliberately artificial and stylized. Not neo-realist, says Visconti, but neo-romantic ... WHITE NIGHTS has on the screen the shape and movement, rightly, of a short story. I find this a strange and beautiful film. The acting, under Visconti's strong, elegant direction, makes it a film with a great deal of feeling, too. Marcello Mastroianni as the bewildered young man, distraught between pathos and comedy, struggling with delicate, urgent gestures to understand the dream in which he is entangled; Jean Marais, the taciturn figure of romance whom we see through the eyes of the desperate girl - I cannot imagine these two characters otherwise played. As for the girl herself, maddeningly vagabond in her moods, a character whom extreme simplicity makes enigmatic; Maria Schell with her air of roguish innocence gives the mysterious, butterfly creature plausibility. WHITE NIGHTS, is far from the turn-tail which some have thought they saw. It is, for all its delicacy, a bold experiment."

SHORT SUBJECT

WIR EROBEN LAND (WE CONQUER THE SOIL) (1936). Produced by UFA-Kulturfilm. Written and directed by Dr. Martin Rikli.

This short film was intended as a sort to "song in praise of the Reich's Labor Service." It is a rather revealing look into the workings of one of the Hitler Youth groups in which young men and women worked with shovels in preparation for the day when they could exchange them for guns. A great number of similar shorts were prepared for showing in all German cinemas, and their importance, at least in the eyes of Dr. Goebbels and his propaganda ministry, was greater than that of the entertainment feature the audience had paid to see. WIR EROBEN LAND is an excellent example of this mode of propaganda with a few pseudo-poetic touches thrown in for good measure. The photography, as usual in this period, is superb, and only the music is routine. There are no subtitles; how much one can understand without them is a tribute to Dr. Rikli's skill. DSH

This is our first film in Spaulding Auditorium. For maximum viewing enjoyment, we request that all members sit in the central section from row K to the back of the hall. All future films will be shown here in the winter term with the exception of February 7. Full brochures will be sent to all members about the first of January to avoid being misplaced in the holiday mail. The first film of the new term will be THE EMPEROR JONES (1933) on January 17.

We call to our members' attention that the Russian film THE YOUTH OF MAXIM will be shown in Spaulding Auditorium at 4:00 pm on Thursday, December 6. Considered by many authorities as the greatest Russian film of the 1930's we have never shown it for the film society due to the fact that all prints were damaged. However, a beautiful copy has just been made and at last this masterpiece, which is beautifully acted and boasts a superb score by Shostakovich, can be seen again. There are full titles and admission is free. This is the second in a series of four Russian films of the 1930's presented by the Russian Department and Dartmouth College Films. We strongly urge our members to attend this most remarkable film.