

'Who hopes to conjure with the world of dreams,
Waking to life my visionary powers,
He draws inexorably out from the vast
Lottery a dream to dream himself.

The illusion that you practise power is delusion.'

This can be read several times before any meaning is apparent. When it is heard to music it is incomprehensible. Tippett is too good a composer not to know this and it is sad to observe his psychological proselytism getting the better of his musical judgment.

Much of the music *qua* music is very beautiful and makes a deep impression in spite of the subject and a very bad stage production. It has great melodic charm and all the rhythmic vivacity of Tippett's other music. The orchestration is sometimes so heavy that it thereby obscures the voices, whose parts are by no means easy to sing effectively. But it is not dramatic music. There is no characterization and too little contrast in the elaborate contrapuntal texture. The 'Ritual Dances' are perhaps the best thing in the work, and since these can be (and have been) detached and performed separately, may well prove the most enduring music. At the second performance I found my eyes continually closing to avoid watching again the antics on the stage and it was then that I found myself enjoying the music best. The words could be largely disregarded and (save for the rather tedious recitatives) the music perceived as a beautiful flow of symphonic sound. Singers and orchestra under John Pritchard's careful direction certainly gave their best efforts to putting the work over. That they did not wholly succeed was not in any way their fault. For allegory is not the task of opera. The composer seems to have envisaged a presentation of a neo-gnostic rite, a musical substitute for 'outmoded' religious worship, which should be for twentieth-century man what Wagner fondly imagined that *Parsifal* should be for the nineteenth-century. But *Parsifal* can be enjoyed as a medieval story and its repulsive philosophy ignored. Not so with Tippett's opera which has no story other than the representations of its symbols. All symbols point ultimately to their divine Referent without which they lose meaning. Substitution of psychology is utterly ineffectual. And all this muddle, to quote Chesterton, 'because you are frightened of four words: *Verbum caro factum est.*'

ANTHONY MILNER

TELEVISION AND PERSONALITIES. The extraordinary thing about television is the mythology it creates: the familiar figures of its parlour-games are by this a sort of *lares et penates*, domestic gods no detail of whose existence is not the subject of fascinated speculation by the

viewing millions. Recently the B.B.C. 'Critics' had a lively discussion on this subject, and in rather a highbrow way they unearthed a clue or two. Whether or not Gilbert Harding is really an 'Uncle figure', the occasional visitor, gruff and unpredictable, who enlivens the ordinary routine of family life, he is certainly much more than an entertainer. For television means an invasion of the formerly closed circle: strange and exciting visitants disturb the fumed oak furniture and 'personalities', whether Mr Harding or even a genuine viscountess, look you straight in the eyes and give you the illusion that they're interested in you: as well they may be, since you are their bread-and-butter—and caviare. Absurd to exaggerate what this might ultimately mean—especially if the critic carries too ready a load of psychological explanations—but there's need already to look for some responsibility in the use of this easy power. Perhaps the B.B.C. could spend some time in trying to find out what they are *really* trying to do: too often one feels that the television 'personality' is saving them from some necessary thinking.

A.J.

UMBERTO D. Vittorio de Sica's masterpiece (for so the director himself regards it) has at last been publicly shown in London and this harrowing study of old age deserves a much wider public than that of the minority cinemas. Here, faithfully recorded, is the story of an old man's attempt to keep his independence as a person in the midst of the heartless anonymity of the city. All turns on his struggles to pay the rent for his room. He even goes to hospital to save on food: he even tries to beg, and a brilliant sequence shows him awkwardly putting out the palm of his hand, then turning it in shame upwards as though to see whether it has begun to rain. De Sica reveals his compassion and his anger in this film. Its single faithful being is a dog; and most English critics have missed the special irony here, for to Italians a dog is not the faithful friend of English idolatry. A dog is despised or tolerated or teased, but to Umberto his dog is his hope and indeed his salvation. This is a picture quite innocent of grace, but never has the cinema seen so moving an account of the situation that grace is given to heal.
