ized, germ-free film-making. Like other latter-day apologists, Mr. McCabe works hard excusing the more sadistic displays of savagery; or reassuring us that Laurel’s version of a raped maiden (in Putting Pants on Philip) is never “vulgar.”

The most astonishing thing about L&H may be that their comedy technique was so quickly developed and brought to perfection in so few films: by the time Criminals at Large (1927) was finished, they had settled on their own style, redolent of English music halls and American vaudeville, limited yet never rigid, allowing for infinite variations and nuances: the formal ritualistic violence tempered with periods of contemplation; the exquisite sense of timing, lacking in all but the best of silent film comedy, which openly broke with Sennett’s exhilarating frenzies; the substitution of the unexpected with the eagerly awaited reactions and mannerisms. Most of all, the unique combination of two separate comic identities transcending the comedian-straight man relationship that has been the bane of subsequent teams from Wheeler and Wolsey to Abbott and Costello and all the way down to Martin and Lewis. In the public’s eye, Laurel and Hardy were one, perfect and indivisible; Hardy’s three film appearances on his own are justly forgotten. “Who is the Fat One? Laurel or Hardy?”

The book does fairly well by Oliver Hardy, a genial, gentle man whose screen image is that of moth-eaten, prepossessing Southern aristocrat. In their films, Hardy is born under the Sign of Logic, so it’s a little as if Don Quixote and Sancho had changed roles. But Stan Laurel is more difficult to pin down. Part child, part genius he brings something otherworldly to his playing. His screen image haunts to this day the work of Marceau, Tati, Alec Guinness at his best, Beckett, Ionesco, and Saroyan. He may very well be the last of the Elizabethan fools and one of the screen’s greatest funnymen.

Of the usual criticisms leveled at L&H, the one about their lack of social intent does not, I’m afraid, hold water. If we are to see an attack on Society, Church, and Institution in every one of Chaplin’s wriggles, twitches, and shrugs, what then to think of L&H at war with Family (in Twice Two, for instance), Children (in Brats), the Law (who else but Edgar Kennedy?), the Next Door Neighbor (it had to be James Finlayson), and the Army (in The Flying Deuces)? The L&H detractors are closer to the mark when they pick on their limitations. McCabe explains that the arrival of the cartoon forced them to go into features after the coming of sound. Other comedians successfully traveled the path from two-reeler to eight-reeler. Laurel and Hardy did it once, in Babes in Toyland. Their other long films remain a series of disconnected two-reelers padded with musical sequences. Here was a case of a fatal dose of modesty. From there on, they went their not-so-merry way, through MGM and Fox, unsupervised and unappreciated, to their last effort in France, in which the boys, grown old, sick, and discouraged, made one of the most pathetic films of all time.

It’s a pity that Laurel and Hardy will never profit from all this attention, in the way that Keaton did a few years ago. Hardy is dead, Laurel retired, and most of the critical writing about them sadly reminds us that this is little more than an obituary for a unique, lost form of comedy.—Carlos Clarens

LES GRANDS CINEASTES

By Henri Agel.* (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1959. 16 NF.)

In the past decade world attention has been attracted by the new French school of film criticism, often radical, sometimes irresponsible, but always fresh and exciting. French criticism is centered around the famous Cahiers du cinéma—

* It has recently come to our attention that the New York Film Bulletin is reprinting translated chapters of the Agel book, as well as translations from Cahiers du Cinéma.
ma (1951–) and other journals like Cinéma (1955–), and is also represented by publishing ventures like “Editions universitaires” with its Classiques du cinéma (1954–), a series of book-length analyses of individual film-makers (Ford, DeSica, Eisenstein, Chaplin, Hitchcock, Bresson, and Bergman have been covered to date), and the Belgian “Club du livre” (1957–) with its series of brochures on individual directors, national cinemas, and genres.

The most fascinating aspect of French criticism, to this reviewer, is the total stress on the director as the be-all and end-all of film-making. An illustration is last September’s issue of Cahiers (No. 111), which devoted 45 of 64 pages to Joseph Losey, printed his complete filmography (including films made under pseudonyms by this little-known American exile now operating out of England), and even put Losey’s portrait on the cover!

At last this director-orientation is manifest in book form: Henri Agel’s Les grands cinéastes in 306 engrossing pages presents a survey of the careers of 60 international film-makers, each in a separate complete chapter of three to six pages accompanied by a brief filmography and an illustration from one of the subject’s pictures. The longest articles are on Ophüls, Chaplin, Hitchcock, Dreyer, Von Sternberg, Pabst, and McLaren, although Agel’s revaluation also treats in detail and sometimes with perhaps unaccountable fondness the work of many lesser-known figures, from Lumière through Wellman, Grémillon, and Donskoy to Ivens, Mizoguchi, Cukor, and Visconti.

Perhaps the greatest interest of the book is precisely this attention paid to the neglected talents of the past who are now being rediscovered in France. Men like Louis Feuillade (famous for thrillers like the Fantômas serials and Les vampires before 1920), whom Agel credits with introducing mystery and surrealism into daily life; or America’s Frank Borzage, whom he calls “one of the greatest poets of love on the screen.”

At the same time, the author attacks with gusto some of the highly rated giants and knocks them off their pedestals. Disney is sharply criticized and comes off second best to UPA’s Steve Bosustow, René Clair’s work is written off as “too limited and predictable to earn him a good place among the great creators of the seventh art,” in comparison with Jean Renoir, “one of the four or five greatest authors of films in the entire history of the cinema.”

The choice of the 60 directors of Agel’s book was based on a series of polls conducted among French critics, ciné-clubs, and the IDHEC, and we can thank this for the considerable emphasis allotted to the more contemporary film-makers (e.g., Bergman, Resnais, Tati, Nicholas Ray, and Antonioni). Thus there is good chronological balance—a rarity among serious studies of film history. There are debatable inclusions or omissions, of course: Max Linder and Otto Preminger are included (the latter showered with fulsome praise!), but E. S. Porter, Feyder, Lubitsch, Duvivier, Wyler, Capra, Stevens, Clouzot, Becker, Käutner, Kazan, Minnelli, Preston Sturges, Wilder, Zinnemann, and S. Ray are not—except for lists of some of their films in chapter-end notes.

Moreover, incredible as it may seem, Korda, Powell, Reed, and Lean are not mentioned at all! British cinema doesn’t exist for the French, who are otherwise quite international in their outlook (being especially attracted to American films). The only men who could be called British film-makers allotted chapters in “The Great Film-Makers” are the exile Hitchcock and the Scots-Canadian McLaren, as compared with 21 from the United States and 17 from France. Italy is represented by five directors, Russia and Scandinavia by four each.

A welcome feature of this book is the ability to see beyond content significance to real formal artistry and style of the film-makers. As was recently pointed out to the reviewer, the new French critics have recognized that there is no such thing as an inferior genre. And Agel gives us very interesting discussions of the work of great directors, admittedly not “content men,” like Feuillade, Vigo, Von Sternberg, and Howard Hawks (“one of the rare patricians of the screen; his ethic is that of human nobility”). The author also attempts to pick out and trace
characteristic styles and themes running through film-makers' careers: Von Sternberg's obsession with desire, Lang's motif of guilt and Fate, Donskoy's concentration on the daily life of simple Russian country people. Occasionally Agel gets carried away into metaphysics, as when he theorizes on Christianity, moral issues, sin and grace, Evil and Redemption in Notorious, The Wrong Man, The Lodger, and Under Capricorn (the latter is "Hitchcock's masterpiece, one of the very rare works of the screen which merit the qualification of sublime").

This book is somewhat weakened (as are most books on film history) by occasional inaccuracies and omissions in factual data, such as the premature announcement of Wellman's death (p. 129), calling Borzage's 1933 Man's Castle a silent picture (p. 75), and by such peculiarities as listing DeMille in the generation of the first talkies (Chap. 5, rather than Chap. 3, where he belongs: the generation of 1915). The filmography accompanying each director article is confined to a list of the titles (usually the French version) of most or all of his important features, and should not be taken as authoritative. Some of the filmographies are quite complete, although at least one (p. 81), intended to be complete, comes out an unholy mess: Lang made Ministry of Fear in '43 (not '39 or '48—Agel gives it under both its English and its French title, Espions sur la Tamise, and both times in the wrong year!); Return of Frank James is listed twice (should be only '40, not '48); and Western Union and Man Hunt belong in 1941 (not '48 and '49 respectively).

Les grands cinéastes is attractively printed on slick paper, with well reproduced illustrations from films. It is widely documented, as Agel quotes (with acknowledgment) and compares opinions of various French critics without presenting too many of his own; thus the book represents a valuable compendium of current French cinema thought on the leading film-makers of the world, and would seem to merit an English translation. It is about time a book explicitly dedicated to directors is available in our language.—Steven P. Hill

**BIANCO E NERO**

Bianco e Nero is the Italian counterpart of Film Quarterly, published under the auspices of the Italian film school (the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia) and the University of Rome. The following survey, a parallel to that on Soviet film criticism written by Steven P. Hill in a recent issue, will acquaint American readers with something of the concerns and flavor of serious Italian criticism.

Italy, smaller than the state of Montana but with 44,000,000 people of whom more than half are faithful and enthusiastic movie-goers, prints innumerable film journals and magazines. Most of these are multicolored and gross, and appeal to the ordinary fan. A few monthly magazines, however, are competently put together and seriously conceived; of these, the most reliable, if not the most readable, is Bianco e Nero. Like Sight & Sound, Cahiers du Cinéma, Film Quarterly, and their counterparts elsewhere, it is a journal of specialized film criticism, containing studies and observations on current and past films. However, as often happens in Italy, what is meant to be serious also risks being boring, and Bianco e Nero only rarely avoids this danger.

Bianco e Nero, now 21 years old, is a monthly magazine which, however, often combines two issues in one; it has a 7'' x 9'' format, an average of 140 pages (2 months) to 100 pages (one month) per issue, and a stylish white cover with sober lettering; it is printed on mediocre white paper, with an average of 10 pages of good photographs assembled in the middle of the issue and printed on glossy paper; its price is 350 Lire (55¢) per month. It is published by the University of Rome Press (like practically all Italian universities, a state university). The chief editor, Floris L. Ammannati, is also president of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome; the assistant editor, Leonardo Fioravanti, is also director of the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia; and many of the other editors are closely related to national and international juries, committees, and boards for the selection and evaluation of films, actors, and directors. The design is pleasant, the indexing efficient, but Bianco e Nero's proofreaders are not the best: often one is obliged to read a sentence twice or three times due to misspellings,