

MOVIES

Italian Impressions of The Kennedy Assassinations

By Alberto Moravia

Ubiquitous Alberto Moravia, the famed Italian novelist, discusses the Kennedys. Most of the credit in this case, however, goes to the director whose film Moravia reviews below: Gianni Bisiach. In "The Two Kennedys," Bisiach combines his documentary footage with what Moravia calls "impressionism and narrative." The result is a film which confirms the widely held opinion in Europe that the assassination of the Kennedy brothers was a conspiracy.

GIANNI BISIACH'S film, "The Two Kennedys" is made up of sequences from documentaries that span the period from the 1930s to 1968. There was an enormous amount of material at the director's disposal; however, he selected only that which fits his thesis. Now it should be pointed out that nothing is more unreal than a newsreel when the news in question is no longer news; that is, when the one-dimensionality of the documentary image is no longer reinforced by the depth of contemporaneity.

Documentary films seem real to us because they show us things that we are now actually living through; once these events have vanished into the past, these films may well become more "beautiful," but their beauty is no longer that of truth, but rather the beauty of the dream and the mirage.

What, then, should be the aim of the director of a film composed entirely of archival material? It can only be to restore to this material its lost contemporaneity. But how does one go about "contemporizing" a documentary that is thirty, twenty, ten, or even two years old? It seems to me that there are, basically, two methods: either galvanizing the material with poetic elan, producing a kind of impressionistic mosaic that each spectator may interpret in his own fashion, or else giving it the absolute rationality of a logically structured narrative.

Gianni Bisiach's thesis is, briefly, that the assassination of President Kennedy was not the work of a lone, mentally disturbed person, but the product of a conspiracy involving the oil interests and the underworld — two sectors of American society against which the two American Gracchi had declared war. In order to demonstrate the veracity of this thesis, Bisiach had a choice of two techniques; a poetic and impressionistic composition or a straightforward narrative. By means of the first, he would have demonstrated that, in a society like that in America, a conspiracy



JOHN AND ROBERT KENNEDY
Italians remember conspiracies of old

was highly probable; by means of the second, that there had in fact been a conspiracy. Gianni Bisiach chose a third approach: a mixture of impressionism and narrative. He wanted to draw for us the portrait of a society in which it was highly probable that a President like Kennedy would fall victim to a conspiracy; and, at the same time, he wanted, in a certain way, to tell us the story of this conspiracy.

Let me say at once that he has been more successful with the first of these aims than with the second; and that, in any case, it would perhaps have been more interesting to explore in depth the probability of a conspiracy than to try to prove that one actually existed. While his comprehensive portrayal of life in the United States adequately reveals its sinister aspects, his reconstruction of the conspiracy, even at this hypothetical level, strikes me as somewhat too explicit. This defect, moreover, is aggravated by the commentary, which, in my opinion, should have been more subtle and creative and less journalistic and oratorical. Montage and commentary are most effective when no attempt is made to force the tempo or the meanings of events.

Having said this, one must acknowledge that Bisiach displays a remarkable capacity for spotting and illuminating all the elements of alienation, of automatism, of unconscious criminality (and hence, the threats to the entire world) hidden in the creases of American society.

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