



REPOSE by Umberto Romano

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AN APPRECIATION of PIETRO DI DONATO

By LAMBERT DAVIS

I can make no claim to the discovery of Pietro di Donato as a writer. I did not see the short story, "Christ in Concrete," when it was published in *Esquire Magazine*.

And when I became connected with the publishing company that is publishing the novel "Christ in Concrete," into which the short story developed, the manuscript was practically complete, with only a few chapters remaining to be done. For that reason I do not feel the usual paternal pride of an editor for a work in which he has assisted from the beginning. I did suggest changes and revisions—always with a certain amount of trepidation, because, faced with a work so original and so moving, I was not sure that my previous editorial experience had fitted me to make suggestions. I did work hard with Pietro di Donato and with his book, and never have I had a more rewarding sense of pleasure in work, for never have I had a greater sense of the fineness of the material and the worthwhileness of the labor.

"Christ in Concrete" itself is about labor. It is not, I think, about labor movements or labor politics, it is about labor itself—what some people call the curse of Cain and what others think of as the sacrament that makes all men brothers. And in the lives of Paul, Geremio, Annunziata and the Italian bricklayers of "Christ in Concrete," di Donato tells what labor is like: its joys and sorrows, its cruelties and its rewards. He tells how work can be a terror of exploitation, how the job can break a body or twist a soul; but he also shows the comradeship of men working together and the satisfaction of good craftsmanship. And "Christ in Concrete" deals not with labor alone, but with the life of the man and woman who labor.

It touches that life in all its crises—birth and death, marriage, love of man and woman, love of family, as well as the daily sacrifice of labor—and in every crisis it puts us face to face with humanity in its simplest and most understandable terms.

Only an Italian, I think, writing of poor Italian workmen and their families, could achieve the simple humanity of "Christ in Concrete." Only the Italian has the simple acceptance of human values, the belief in ritual, and the free expression of emotions, that makes the ordinary life of labor dramatic. And only an Italian writing of this life could deal with it so simply in terms of the poetry of the senses that the drama becomes significant. It is the great talent of Pietro di Donato that, being such an Italian and writing of such Italians, he is at the same time an American writing of America. It is not simply that the scene is vividly the American scene today; more than that, he makes you feel that these people are the builders of America, as much a part of it as its rivers and mountains. And for himself, while his language captures in English the emphatic rhythms of spoken Italian, it is at the same time a language as American as that of Walt Whitman.

It is this happy combination of the American and the Italian in Pietro di Donato that makes him the important writer that he is. His Italian heritage stands out in him as it does in his book: pride of family, pride of craftsmanship, exuberance of feeling; and at the same time the use to which he has put this heritage is as American as a skyscraper building. He stands out as a man who has put his Italian heritage to work to create a better understanding of America.