

MARGARET KOSKINEN (ed.):

Ingmar Bergman Revisited: Performance, Cinema and the Arts

Wallflower Press, London 2008. Pp. 242. ISBN 9781905674336.

Since the death of Ingmar Bergman at the age of eighty-nine in August 2007, a number of books on this major film artist have appeared or reappeared. English-language translations of Bergman's autobiographical works from the late 1980s, *The Magic Lantern* and *Images*, have both been re-issued, after being long out of print. The University of Mississippi has at last added Bergman to their burgeoning director interviews series. And of course there is the mammoth 600-page Taschen tome, *The Ingmar Bergman Archives*, with its encyclopedic breadth, coffee table-size girth, and \$200 list price. As a collection of new scholarly essays, however, *Ingmar Bergman Revisited* is certainly one of the most significant contributions to Bergman studies in a long while. Emerging from the first international 'Ingmar Bergman Symposium' in 2005, these essays collectively take an interartistic and intermedial approach to the protean range of Bergman's working life. Bergman wrote and directed some fifty films, staged about 130 plays, and creatively worked in television, radio, music, opera, and literature. As the essays progressively argue, his creative process in any one medium was constantly informed and inspired by his work in the others.

The volume opens with a prologue by Liv Ullmann, whose text here is the affectionate opening address she gave at the 2005 symposium, discussing her long professional and personal relationship with Bergman. Thereafter the anthology is divided into three main sections, all structured around "intermediality" as an organizing principle. It is an ambitious approach, one aimed at exploring a more fully inclusive "interart" Bergman oeuvre. The first section, "Music, Stage, Film – Between the Arts", inaugurates this overarching intermedial approach through editor Margaret Koskinen's article "Out of the Past: *Saraband* and the Ingmar Bergman Archive". Here she traces the correspondence of music, television, theatre, and still photography in Bergman's work back to his unpublished diaries and manuscripts in the Bergman archive. Next, Ulla-Britta Lagerroth argues that Bergman not only theatricalises his films but cinematises and pictorialises his theatrical productions. As evidence, she discusses four of Bergman's Shakespeare productions at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm. Stefan Johansson meanwhile takes a personal, anecdotal look at Bergman's early passion for opera, dating back to his teenage Wagnerian phase and his unpaid internship during the 1941-42 season at the Royal Opera in Stockholm. Lastly, Marilyn Johns Blackwell explores a rich dialectic between Bergman's stage and screen work through the privileged, ritualized and often sexualized spaces of platforms and beds.

The anthology's second section, "Picturing the Self – Between Words and Images", focuses on issues such as authorship, self-fashioning and selfhood, while also making interdisciplinary links to philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience. In "Analysing Self-Fashioning in Authoring and Reception", Janet Staiger examines the artist's own sly agency in crafting and perpetuating the *author function* and brand known as "Bergman". In making this neo-auteurist case, she mines Bergman's autobiographical works, particularly *Laterna Magica*, as well as revealing interviews such as James Baldwin's 1959 *Esquire* magazine piece. Linda Haverty Rugg then examines still photography in Bergman's work, while relating Bergman's self-projections in film to recent ideas by scholars working at the intersection of philosophy and neuroscience. She compellingly reads Bergman's most modernist, experimental film *Persona* within interlinked concepts such as aphasia, disassociation, performance, and spectatorship. Finally, Paisley Livingston (author of *Ingmar Bergman and the Rituals of Art*) reads Bergman through Eino Kaila's *Psychology of the Personality* from the 1930s and speculates on the Finnish philosopher's possible influences on the young Bergman.

The third section, "Picturing the World – And Beyond", moves into more social-political terrain. John Orr writes on "Bergman, Nietzsche and Hollywood." The passages that pay particular attention to the influence of classical Hollywood comedy (especially the "comedy of remarriage") in Bergman's work are the essay's most cohesive and successful. Among the strongest entries in the anthology is Thomas Elsaesser's critical recovery of *The Serpent's Egg*, the English-language film that Bergman made in exile in Bavaria in 1976 and set in 1920s Weimar Berlin. Focussing on a film that has often been treated as a failed, anomalous, strange orphan in the Bergman canon, Elsaesser locates its rich cinematic intertext within a "retro-fashion" genre of historical films made in the 1970s by European directors such as Visconti, Bertolucci, Truffaut, Malle, Pasolini, Fassbinder, and Schlöndorff (and even in dialogue with Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*). Erik Hedling's article "The Welfare State Depicted: Post-Utopian Landscapes in Ingmar Bergman's Films" addresses a heretofore neglected approach, Bergman's films as a social critique of Sweden's affluent welfare society. Lastly, Astrid Söderbergh Widding works against the grain of much Swedish scholarship on Bergman's religious motifs, which she argues have focused either positively or negatively on their literal character as opposed to their aesthetic or creative dimensions.

In the anthology's epilogue, the doyenne of Bergman scholars, Birgitta Steene, provides an elegant overview of this volume's interart approaches as well as a meditative, historical analysis of the development of Bergman reception and academic studies. (She cites that there are to date some fifty book-length studies of Bergman, as well as more than thirty dissertations).

Reviews

Both Steene's afterward and Koskinen's introduction also begin to wrestle with the thorny question of why Bergman's international reputation and pantheon position in the international cinema canon have fallen so steeply after his great heyday in the art house cinema boom of the 1960s and 1970s. Even in the wake of his death, cineastes like Jonathan Rosenbaum have not been shy about attacking Bergman as overrated, a middle-brow entertainer whose works are both too literary and too theatrical when compared to more cinematically-engaged masters like Hitchcock, Welles, Godard, Bresson, and even fellow Scandinavian Carl Dreyer. Shifts in canon-shaping tastes and film aesthetics have temporarily left Bergman's stock at a relatively low ebb, especially in the light of his titanic status as possibly the world's greatest filmmaker only a generation ago. The pendulum will no doubt swing back in Bergman's favor. In the meantime, scholarly works such as *Ingmar Bergman Revisited: Performance, Cinema and the Arts* do a superb job of validating Bergman's intermedial strengths across the arts as a key source of the creative dynamism of his films – a triumphant virtue rather than a fatal “anti-cinematic” failing.

Ingmar Bergman drew on his own memories for this ambitious period drama, seen through the eyes of the titular children, about a wealthy Uppsala family thrown into turmoil following the death of its patriarch and the mother's decision to marry the local bishop (Jan Malmsjö), a villain of Dickensian cruelty. Read more. Originally intended to be Bergman's final project and a five-hour TV series, the film is most commonly viewed in a three-hour theatrical cut. Very moving and utterly charming, the Ekdahl family Christmas party is one of the loveliest sequences in all of cinema, a feast of candlelight, dancing and pillow fights perfected by the shock of Fanny and Alexander's roguish uncle setting alight to his own after-dinner farts for their amusement. (2008) Ingmar Bergman Revisited: Performance, Cinema and the Arts, Great Britain, London: Wallflower Press. Google Scholar. 6. Wood, R. (1969) Ingmar Bergman, London: Studio Vista; Gado, F. (1986) The Passion of Ingmar Bergman, Durham: Duke University Press. Google Scholar. 21. Braudy, L. and Cohen, M. (eds.) (1999) Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings, New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, Fifth edition. This edition includes Bordwell, D. "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice", pp. 716-724 (originally published in Film Comment, Volume 4, no. 1, Fall, 1979). Google Scholar. Without underestimating the impact of Ingmar Bergman's own work, his standing has also been influenced by a number of external factors. He wrote his first screenplay at the end of the Second World War, and started to make his own films during the post war years. In this mould Bergman's films rapidly came to typify the concept of "art house cinema". In a period when film was once again striving for legitimacy, Bergman demonstrated that film could be something more than entertainment: it could indeed be art. If one ignores the surrounding factors that contributed to the impact of Ingmar Bergman and looks instead at what makes his films unique, one can begin to discern the thematic and stylistic developments of his career.