

"Big Thoughts," and a "crudely sentimental" finale, all of which echo my own long-held opinions. He faults Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) for "spiritual messages [that] can come across as pompously simplistic," but he also makes the bold and original point that while *Solaris* obviously resembles Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), its themes resonate even more strongly with Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), another meditation on guises, resurrections, "the inability of the male to protect the female," and "the inevitability of repeating past mistakes." This is pithy and suggestive critical analysis.

To love the cinema doesn't mean liking this or that particular movie, to be sure, and Lopate is candid about the preferences, aversions, not-quite-sures, and beats-the-hell-out-of-mes that underlie his judgments. He is so candid, in fact, that the first essay in the book is called "On Changing One's Mind About a Movie," a topic some reviewers—he mentions Pauline Kael, who insisted on seeing pictures only once—would rather dance around than cheerfully confront. Here he lays out some of his basic propensities, such as a partiality for long takes and a suspicion of rapid cutting and reaction shots, and admits that certain filmmakers who counter these practices (Cassavetes, Lumet) can bring annoyance at first and reversals of judgment later on. He owns up to the realities of peer pressure, another ticklish topic for critics, and he notes the hazards of trusting too much in first impressions, writing about first viewings so irksome—Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975), Terrence Malick's *The New World* (2005)—that he walked out before the end. I part company with Lopate about those walkouts, which provoke the movie-cop side of me; apart from special circumstances (e.g., marathon selection-committee screenings) my policy is always to stay put. As an earlier scribe once remarked, the definition of a critic is a person who sits through things. Or as video artist Nam June Paik recommended, stay with a movie you hate so you can hate it *thoroughly*.

Lopate's gift for balanced views is especially interesting in chapters about filmmakers he has known personally. In his essay on Dušan Makavejev, he recalls serving on the New York Film Festival selection committee (where he and I were colleagues for several years) and giving Makavejev the bad news that his 1988 dramedy *Manifesto* was being rejected; the friendship survived, but it wasn't the same. The lengthy chapter on Robert Gardner eloquently summarizes the moral, ethical, and practical problems that ethnographic filmmakers inevitably confront, explains how these are compounded in documentaries that deal with violence, as Gardner's classic *Dead Birds* (1963) does, and ponders the question of whether that film's quest for objectivity represents "scientific detachment" or "amoral spectatorship" on the director's part. Discussing the voice-over

narration of *Dead Birds*, which some critics have censured for anthropological arrogance, Lopate defends it as efficient means of conveying Gardner's own ideas about the material his camera has recorded. Even if one decides that an ethnographic film is a fiction at heart, Lopate concludes, "fiction can capture its own set of truths." Well said.

Alongside his expertise in film and literature, Lopate has extensive savvy in the fields of architecture, urban life, and Japanese culture, and the latter two crop up frequently in his cinematic musings. Some of his most enthusiastic essays focus on the Japanese giants Kenji Mizoguchi and Mikio Naruse, both old favorites of his, and filmmakers from other Asian nations, such as South Korea's Hong Sang-soo and Taiwan's Hou Hsiao-hsien, are discussed with equal insight. And not surprisingly for a personal essayist, Lopate is a tireless advocate of the essay film. In an article on urban pictures, he bypasses legendary city-symphony auteurs like Dziga Vertov and Jean Vigo in favor of Wim Wenders's *Tokyo-Ga* (1985), Thom Andersen's *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), Guy Maddin's *My Winnipeg* (2007), and Terence Davies's *Of Time and the City* (2008), which have the personal perspectives and expressive verbal elements he deems essential to genuine essay films. Lopate honors Chris Marker as the "grand master" of that genre, but it's worth adding that while Marker is a forthrightly political filmmaker, Lopate's own politics remain understated and more or less opaque, although his careful analyses of works like George Clooney's *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005) and Lino Brocka's *Insang* (1976) indicate quietly progressive leanings.

Lopate's love letters to the movies don't always make for lively prose, and on rare occasions a pesky cliché ("hook, line, and sinker," "poor as church mice") or infelicitous phrase ("a trifle glacial," "physiognomy-diverse") creeps into his typically spotless writing. I'm not sure anything in his new book has the enormous power of the essay on Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951) in his earlier collection and, as always, he has little use for avant-garde cinema. As for the ascendancy of television in recent decades, he seems ambivalent, although the book's witty last sentence hints at a fondness for home video: "I will continue to be in thrall to the moving image until they pry the remote from my cold, dead hand."

What matters in the end is the unfailing clarity, lucidity, and intelligence of Lopate's critical voice. In a thoughtful consideration of Frederick Wiseman's career, he declares that Wiseman has taken "the journalistic technique of cinema vérité and elevated it to a form of personal expression." Lopate effects a similarly brilliant merger of journalistic writing and idiosyncratic, self-exploratory revelation. We art-house aficionados will read his elegant essays as long as our own remotes stay firmly in our movie-loving grasps.—David Sterritt

God and the Devil: The Life and Work of Ingmar Bergman

by Peter Cowie. London: Faber and Faber,
2024. 407 pp., illus. Hardcover: \$40.00.

The lack of a standard, posthumous, comprehensive biography of Ingmar Bergman reflects a puzzling omission on the bookshelf of any film lover. Into this breach strides Peter Cowie, one of the world's leading historians of film, as well as an expert on Ingmar Bergman likely without peer in the English-speaking world. Cowie was a valued consultant for The Criterion Collection's immense, thirty-disc *Ingmar Bergman's Cinema* box set and served in a similar capacity (and contributed to) Taschen's indispensable, mammoth *Ingmar Bergman Archives* (2008). Cowie has also provided feature-length commentaries for numerous landmark Bergman films, and he has written extensively about the legendary auteur, most notably in an earlier volume, *Ingmar Bergman: A Critical Biography* (Scribner, 1982, rev. ed. 1992). And with more than a half century on the Bergman beat, *God and the Devil: The Life and Work of Ingmar Bergman* draws on a spectacular range of sources. In addition to the essential primary material that has been published in English—Bergman's vivid, self-flagellating yet still-guarded memoirs, *The Magic Lantern* (University of Chicago Press, 2007) and *Images: My Life in Film* (Arcade, 2017), and the marvelous interview book *Bergman on Bergman* (Simon & Schuster, 1974)—Cowie is also able to draw on material accessible only in Swedish, including, notably, Bergman's workbooks (which document the doubts, detours, and creative development of his projects) and the memoirs, some unpublished, of intimate affiliates and close creative collaborators (such as those of fourth wife Käbi Laretei and cinematographer Gunnar Fischer). And for many years, Cowie also personally interviewed...well, everyone, including, on multiple occasions, Bergman himself (with whom for several decades he enjoyed warm relations).

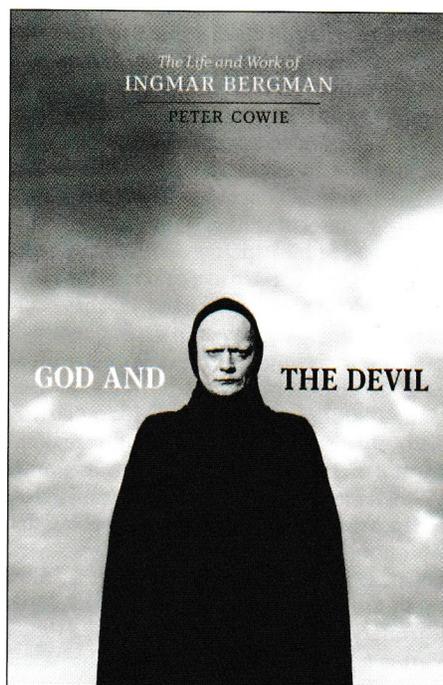
It is not surprising, then, to anticipate that *God and the Devil* will serve as the definitive Ingmar Bergman biography for a generation, and as such it is a must-own for any film lover. Theater and film, wives and lovers, even the soap commercials from 1951 (over which the budding auteur demanded complete creative control) are included, and all without sugarcoating a life often selfishly lived. Cowie offers as comprehensive a coverage that can be delivered within four hundred pages. Much more important, for those less familiar with Bergman (of which there are likely legions; after all, Bergman left us nearly two decades ago and his greatest achievements date to the Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies), this book will send them on a journey of discovery into the prodigious and thrilling oeuvre of one of the greatest artists in the history of the cinema. (Those readers already well-versed in Bergmania, however, might find themselves familiar with the narrative as it unfolds.)

Cowie starts at the beginning and proceeds chronologically, with the family, childhood, and his fraught (yet somehow long-enduring) relationship with his brother Dag. It speaks to the darkest side of Bergman's personality, or at least ego, that Dag's eight-hundred-page manuscript of his own memoirs "vanished, probably because Dag's memories conflicted with Bergman's own carefully orchestrated recollection of their childhood." More generally, Cowie does not shrink from the worst aspects of his subject (as an enfant terrible, scandalously absent father, and occasional score-settler). On the other side of the ledger, *God and the Devil* is welcome in setting the record straight regarding some of the most malicious insinuations of Jane Magnusson's 2018 hatchet-job of a documentary, *Bergman: A Year in a Life*.

Coverage of the threadbare early years, through the late 1940s, of screenwriting, theater production, initial tentative efforts at film direction, and first romantic relationships are deftly handled and will fill in gaps least familiar to most readers. The young Bergman was something of a prima donna, which he would outgrow with maturity, but from the very start his prodigious output in both theater and film, little short of breathtaking, would be sustained throughout his long career. Modern international audiences in particular will learn much from Cowie's engagement with Bergman's work on the stage, which is not easily disentangled from his cinema, and which in most years consumed the majority of Bergman's months. Indeed, his reputation in Sweden rests more on those theatrical triumphs than his internationally celebrated cinematic sensations, which, for obvious reasons, more easily reached a global audience. As Cowie notes, "Bergman's loyalty to the theater never wavered"—a sentiment supported by the director's public activity and private musings throughout his long life.

At the turn of the 1950s, a great filmmaker was emerging, and it is fair to call his tenth feature, *Summer Interlude* (1951), as the first fully formed Bergman picture, followed quickly by a series of exceptional efforts, including *Waiting Women* (aka *Secrets of Women*, 1952) and *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953). Even in the joyous days of the mid-1950s, however, the great director's personal demons were constant companions. Describing luncheons with friends at a favorite Stockholm restaurant, Tillie Björnstrand (spouse of Gunnar, who, with Max von Sydow and Erland Josephson, are the three male actors most intimately associated with Bergman) would recall "Bergman's violent sense of humor, which concealed a deep streak of angst and melancholy."

Those demons did not hold him back artistically; one warily speculates that they might have propelled him forward. *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), an unexpected prize winner at Cannes, was the start of a run of



ten feature films Bergman would direct through 1963 (in addition to four television productions), a streak of one achievement after another that included *The Seventh Seal* (1957), *Wild Strawberries* (1957), and *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961). In those heady days, Bergman towered over the art-house cinema (an era overflowing with masterpieces by a half-dozen of the all-time greats), gracing the cover of *Time* magazine for a glowing profile in 1960. But as Cowie astutely notes, the "new found confidence" that emerged as these triumphs were showered with international accolades "concealed the seeds of an attitude that would grow ever more autocratic."

A difficult, relatively fallow interlude followed, and by 1965, Bergman, approaching fifty in an art form seemingly falling over itself to hand over the reins to a younger generation, was written off as overly severe and over the hill. After *Winter Light* (1963) Bergman seemed ready to set aside his debate with God, writing in his workbook that the film marked "the end of a painful conflict that has plagued me throughout my conscious life"; two years later, hospitalized with (yet another) stomach ailment, he would write, "I want to make a fresh start."

Which he most certainly did, re-emerging in 1966 with *Persona*, the start of another ten-feature run though *Face to Face* (1976), an astonishing flurry of original, fresh, ambitious productions—unlike anything that had come before—and which collectively advanced conceptions of what cinema could achieve. Of *Face to Face* (which does not soar to the heights of *Scenes from a Marriage* (1974) but still demands a special edition box set), Cowie assesses that "Liv Ullmann's acting matches anything she has done for the cinema." Which is, to say the least, very high praise given the breadth of

her career and the stratospheric performances she delivered for Bergman in a dozen years. This is not to slight the accomplishments of other stellar female players who served in the director's stock company, including Bibi Andersson, Harriet Andersson, and Ingrid Thulin. Like his acolyte Woody Allen, Bergman had a rare gift for writing rich, complex female characters.

God and the Devil then turns to Bergman's laudable late career and subsequent "retirement," during which his relentless productivity barely slowed, directing for television, remaining especially active in theater, and engaging in extensive writing, including several memoirs and numerous screenplays. Among the latter, *Faithless* (2000), directed by Ullmann and featuring Josephson playing a character called "Bergman," illustrates why Cowie well-describes these decades as "a long coda of introspection." Bergman would sit behind the camera one final time in 2003, with the remarkable *Saraband*, again reuniting Ullmann and Josephson. It was also a period characterized by increasing reclusiveness on his beloved island of Fårö. Turning down one generous invitation, he responded, with remarkable self-awareness, "Although I am very flattered...a visit to Cannes would strike me with horror and will probably be stopped at the last minute due to some inexplicable illness."

God and the Devil is not without its shortcomings. Cowie notes in his introduction that since in his 1982 volume he had focused on the films, here he "placed the emphasis on biography." This protestation is less than convincing, however, both about the art and the life (which, as Cowie notes, are not easily disentangled), and there are, inevitably, overlaps between the two studies, in some passages extensively so. The contributions of crucial behind-the-camera collaborators—cinematographers Fisher and especially Sven Nykvist—are almost scandalously neglected. In some instances, the discussion of the films is inspired—Cowie is welcome company with *Waiting Women*, *The Seventh Seal*, and especially the still underappreciated masterpiece *Shame* (1968), among others—but in general all the movies are handled with workmanlike summaries.

Except for a very smart final five pages, *God and the Devil* surprisingly keeps something of an arms-length distance from its subject. Ultimately, despite access to a treasure trove of source material and Cowie's unimpeachable sure-footedness and uncommon command of the subject matter, most Bergman aficionados will not, I suspect, come away from this volume with new or deeper insights into the man. Perhaps after all the memoirs, academic film studies, commentaries, documentaries, and thinly veiled self-characterizations in innumerable features, that is simply expecting too much. But, given this author's closeness to the filmmaker, it would have been nice.

—Jonathan Kirshner

AGNIESZKA HOLLAND REFLECTS ON *GREEN BORDER*, HER MIGRANT CRISIS FILM

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