

Ingmar Bergman: satanist and Nazi

by Lotta-Stina Thronell

The Magic Lantern

by Ingmar Bergman; translated from Swedish by Joan Tate
Penguin Books, London, 1988
303 pages, illus., index, chronology, paperback, £4.50

Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman's autobiography is as full of hair-raising salacious details as his psychopathic films. Sane people either fall asleep in front of the television when a Bergman film is on, or simply turn it off after a few minutes. I personally cannot stand the kind of fixation with his own belly-button that always seems to preoccupy Bergman. On the other hand, Bergman's films have fascinated many people, especially in the so-called intellectual elite, and he is not by a long shot the only film producer who has been pouring out nausea-inducing products in the last 40 years.

Who are the people in the film industry that pushed the careers of Bergman et al.? What are the political aims of glorifying such apparently empty and meaningless films?

Influence of Nietzsche

In the autobiography we find some indirect answers especially to the latter question. Philosophically speaking, Bergman is a Nietzschean, which is expressed through his profound hatred and contempt for the Christian understanding of love. His films for sure have contributed to the general buildup of the New Age movement as well as opening the doors for outright Satanism. He describes how the reading of Nietzsche fascinated him, and how he felt the same way about life as the Swedish author and contemporary admirer of Nietzsche, August Strindberg: The world is a cesspool, and you live without meaning.

Art is for Bergman "a powerful erotic business; the proximity of actors is without reservations, the mutual exposure is total." Bergman connects this with a pathological fascination for death and ugliness. When he was 10 years old a caretaker, "Algot," locked him up in a hospital mortuary with a number of corpses, one of them a young woman. Bergman describes his encounter with the dead naked woman with morbid sexual fascination. He then couples that with a real satanic episode: "Algot had told me about a colleague of his who had wanted to play a joke on a young nurse. He had

placed an amputated hand under the covers of her bed. When the nurse did not appear for morning prayers, they had to go to her room, where she was found sitting naked, chewing on the hand. She had torn the thumb off and stuck it into her hole. I was now going mad in the same way. . . . I tried to portray this episode in *Hour of the Wolf* but failed and cut it out. It recurs in the prologue of *Persona* and receives its final form in *Cries and Whispers*, in which the dead cannot die but are to disturb the living."

Friedrich Nietzsche was Adolf Hitler's favorite author. Nietzsche's war cry "God is dead" was popular in the elite that promoted Hitler's career. Ingmar Bergman describes how he admired Hitler (in 1934, aged 16, he visited a German family and got a photo of Hitler as a present); and how his brother, Dag Bergman, was "one of the founders and organizers of the Swedish National-Socialist party, and my father voted several times for them." Bergman claims that he felt guilty and miserable once the truth about the horrors in the concentration camps struck. The question is: Can we believe that his remorse was genuine? Should we?

Unrepentant

The autobiography answers "no," for two reasons. First of all because Bergman never gave up his admiration for Friedrich Nietzsche, or for that matter, the paranoid Swedish author August Strindberg. In terms of nurturing a satanic, anti-Christian world outlook, Bergman never repented.

Secondly, Bergman describes himself as an unashamed liar in several situations. His encounter with the late conductor Herbert von Karajan is telling: "The Maestro came straight to the point. He wanted to do [Puccini's] *Turandot* as an opera film for television with me as director. He stared at me with his pale cold eyes. (I usually think *Turandot* an unpleasant, cumbersome, perverted mess, a child of its time.) totally absorbed by this little man's hypnotically pale gaze and heard myself saying this was a great honor, that I had always been fascinated by *Turandot*, that the music was puzzling but overpowering and I could think of nothing more stimulating than to be allowed to collaborate with Herbert von Karajan." Obviously Bergman considered Karajan higher in the satanic pecking-order than himself. Maybe it has something to do with Karajan's well-known background as a Nazi. Coincidentally Bergman's fifth wife is a von Rosen, of the same family into which Hitler's Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels married.

The autobiography is an interesting clinical study of a person in need of a classical exorcism. Bergman writes: "Ghost, devils and demons, good, evil or just annoying, they have blown in my face, pushed me, pricked me with pins, plucked at my jersey. They have spoken, hissed or whispered. Clear voices, not particularly comprehensible but impossible to ignore."

The book is slated for publication in the United States this fall.