

Maaret Koskinen. 2010. *Ingmar Bergman's The Silence. Pictures in the Typewriter, Writings on the Screen*. New Directions in Scandinavian Studies. Seattle: University of Washington Press. 208 pages. ISBN: 978-0295989433.

Few would dispute the claim that Maaret Koskinen is the most important Ingmar Bergman critic of our time. Her three major tomes (*Spel och speglingar: En studie i Ingmar Bergmans filmiska estetik* [*Plays and Mirrors: on the cinematic aesthetics of Ingmar Bergman*], *Ingmar Bergman: "Allting föreställer, ingenting är": Film och teatern, En tvåestetisk studie* [Ingmar Bergman: "Everything represents, nothing exists." Film and theater: An interdisciplinary study], and *I begynnelsen var ordet: Ingmar Bergman och hans tidiga författarskap* [In the Beginning was the Word] and her various other books (among them an introductory short book in English on the director and a co-authored book on *Fanny and Alexander*) make her, as another Swedish film critic put it to me in conversation, "en stjärna" [a star], certainly the leading voice on film in Sweden today. This stature is only enhanced by the fact that she is the film professor at the University of Stockholm (there is only one) and the leading film critic for the Stockholm daily *Dagens nyheter*. Not surprisingly, then, it was to her that Bergman turned when he decided to donate the private papers he had accumulated over a lifetime—film scripts and directorial scripts among them. And thus it is she who sorted through the Bergman papers and arranged for their transferral to the University of Stockholm's Filmhuset where they became the Ingmar Bergman Archive, the kind of archive that students of many other filmmakers can only dream of.

And indeed the value of the archive is apparent throughout Koskinen's latest book, as it refers repeatedly to Bergman's directorial script for the film, a script he has dubbed "Den stora bilderboken" [The big picture book]. But the importance of this new study lies not merely in its publication of material in the archive, as valuable as that is, but it also serves two other functions: to look at the film with a methodology drawn from the new and rehabilitated version of "auteurism" and to offer a new reading—at once convincing and significant—of *The Silence* and of certain features of Bergman's style.

The first half of the book analyses the limitations of the traditional auteur approach initially through a comparison with Antonioni and then by showing how the film "offers an excellent entry into the cinematic, cultural, and socio-political issues of its time, in this case the institution of censorship and certain nation states' relationships to their own film culture" (138). Koskinen discusses, for instance, how Bergman used the censorship laws to, as it were, reinsert himself and his films into Swedish cultural life. By consciously flaunting the censorship laws of his time, Bergman makes of his film a kind of cause célèbre. Here Koskinen's thesis is supported by quotes from "Den stora bilderboken" where

she also points to notions of gender fluidity and the mutability of subjectivity which it took Bergman scholarship thirty-some years to register. In this section of her study Koskinen also speaks of how strapped for cash Bergman frequently was as he embarked on making his films. Although those of us who know the history behind the financing of *Fanny and Alexander* are not surprised by these revelations, many film students and critics will be appalled to learn that a filmmaker of Bergman's stature had to go begging for money to make his films, despite the critical and commercial success of both *The Seventh Seal* and *Wild Strawberries*. This section of the book also addresses the ways in which Bergman manipulated his celebrity in the Swedish media.

The two chapters that constitute the second half of the book offer an inspired new reading of the film *The Silence*, which in turn demands that we reconsider some of the accepted views of Bergman's cinematic practice in general, including the cinematic devices and stylistic choices to which he turns again and again throughout his career. Koskinen starts with a topic to which she has already devoted an entire book, namely Bergman's complicated relationship with language, a relationship which is based at least in part in the poor reviews garnered by his extensive early prose. Again using archival material, she points to his many allusions to the senses of touch and smell, to the corporeality manifest throughout "Den stora bilderboken." Koskinen then develops an argument about Bergman's fear of language and suggests that this fear is central to the role of language in *The Silence*. She goes on to look at the conflicts in the film between text and image, and also between text and music, before turning to a consideration of the film's depiction of the eroticism of language. Finally as a culmination of these issues of intermediation, in what may be one of the most original and important parts of the book, she argues that Bergman's use of sexual narrative (Anna's recounting of her sexual activities and in *Persona* Alma's orgy story) as a theatrical staging of language itself.

In the final chapter, "Framing the Senses," Koskinen continues to explore the ways in which the film centres on various senses—smelling, hearing, and feeling, as well as seeing. Noting how Bergman introduces the little boy Johan in a moment of awakening and how his eyes are initially depicted in shadow, Koskinen goes beyond the critical position a number of us have espoused—namely that this camera work establishes him as the film's protagonist—to argue that we sense the film and the events through him, through his corporal being. His world of fragments is our world of fragments, his excursions into the world our excursions, his bewilderment ours. He is, she argues, "our perceptual activity made visible ... A pre-reflexive meeting with the world, someone who without any preconceived notions registers data, and for whom meaning and significance are not givens" (118, 124).

The chapter concludes with short treatments of Bergman's use of mirrors and of close-ups. Identifying the mirror, logically enough, with both guilt and

desire, Koskinen observes that Ester's and Johan's relationship to Anna is frequently represented in framed shots that parallel the frames of mirrors, windows, and the film screen itself. "Like Johan, the viewers are driven by a desire for 'wholeness,' seeking to meld together a totality from those fragments supplied by the narrative. Perhaps, then, Anna can be said to metaphorically signify this fullness, the fictive world that the viewers try to piece together; she is the body of the fiction" (132). The author's insights into the film's use of close-ups are no less revealing. Noting the traditional understanding of close-ups as shots of agency and spectator identification, Koskinen politely disagrees with Gilles Deleuze's contention that the close-up "tears the image away from spatio-temporal coordinates in order to call forth the pure affect as expressed" (135). Rather she suggests that Bergman's repeated use of close-ups as "icons" that "retain painterly qualities" (134) results in a "de-personalization of human features, which in turn are made abstract" (135). As a student of Bergman, I find this observation compelling. For years I have been referring to a particular close-up in *Persona* as "human architecture"; in it the camera is very close to the two actresses, who are leaning forward and are so starkly backlit that their features disappear and become nothing more than a black mass against a white background. While this is, to be sure, not the kind of "iconic" close-up to which Koskinen is referring, it does suggest that Bergman was aware of the inherent possibility of depersonalization within iconic close-ups.

Indeed the only flaw, and it is not an insignificant one, in the volume lies in the copy-editing. There are a number of sentences that make no sense unless one reads them five or six times (and sometimes not even then) and words are not infrequently used incorrectly. The part of a pair of glasses that goes over the ear is not an "arm" (94), but a "temple." There is to my knowledge no such word as "church room" (94); the word "sanctuary" is clearly what is meant here. Texts do not have "turnabouts" (103). And the words "unnecessity" (103) and "lettrification" (112) simply do not, again insofar as I know, exist. Such infelicities occur on every third page or so; the responsibility for them lies squarely with the copy editor, not with the author, whom I know to speak excellent English.

Nonetheless, this study by Koskinen is more than a major contribution to Bergman studies. It will, I predict, change the way most serious Bergman critics "read" this film. Seldom do archival work, decades of experience with a text and its author, and theoretical sophistication come together so fruitfully. As is the case with all her other books, this is one that no critic of this film can possibly afford to ignore.

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