



Laterna Magica

Ingmar Bergman

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“When a film is not a document, it is a dream. . . . At the editing table, when I run the strip of film through, frame by frame, I still feel that dizzy sense of magic of my childhood.” Bergman, who has conveyed this heady sense of wonder and vision to moviegoers for decades, traces his lifelong love affair with film in his breathtakingly visual autobiography, *The Magic Lantern*.

More grand mosaic than linear account, Bergman’s vignettes trace his life from a rural Swedish childhood through his work in theater to Hollywood’s golden age, and a tumultuous romantic history that includes five wives and more than a few mistresses. Throughout, Bergman recounts his life in a series of deeply personal flashbacks that document some of the most important moments in twentieth-century filmmaking as well as the private obsessions of the man behind them. Ambitious in scope yet sensitively wrought, *The Magic Lantern* is a window to the mind of one of our era’s great geniuses.

“[Bergman] has found a way to show the soul’s landscape Many gripping revelations.”—*New York Times Book Review*

“Joan Tate’s translation of this book has delicacy and true pitch . . . *The Magic Lantern* is as personal and penetrating as a Bergman film, wry, shadowy, austere.”—*New Republic*

“[Bergman] keeps returning to his past, reassessing it, distilling its meaning, offering it to his audiences in dazzling new shapes.”—*New York Times*

“What Bergman does relate, particularly his tangled relationships with his parents, is not only illuminating but quite moving. No ‘tell-all’ book this one, but revealing in ways that much longer and allegedly ‘franker’ books are not.”—*Library Journal*

Laterna Magica Details

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Author : Ingmar Bergman

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Genre : Culture, Film, Biography, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir

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Ben says

Ingmar Bergman’s autobiography, *The Magic Lantern*, may not be the “best” book that I read this year (that word carries so much weight with it), but is quite probably my favorite book of the year. It has everything one often hopes for when reading an autobiography. In it Bergman not only provides readers with a discussion of his life and work, but he also is incredibly open – removing the curtain that typically separates the front and back stage, the work is very well-written and it is very easy for readers of this work familiar with Bergman’s films to draw parallels between his life and art.

While it is said that *Fanny and Alexander* is Bergman’s most personal film, my margins were also crammed full of notes linking passages about Bergman’s life to his other films, like *The Seventh Seal*, *Wild Strawberries*, *Hour of the Wolf*, *Smiles of a Summer Night*, *Sawdust and Tinsel*, *The Magician* and *Cries and Whispers*. And in it Bergman discusses not only his relationships with actors with whom he has collaborated (Harriet Andersson, Liv Ullmann, Bibi Andersson, Victor Sjöström, Ingrid Bergman, etc.), but also with such giant figures of the cinema (and stage) as Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo and Laurence Olivier. However, it is odd (in retrospect) that there was really no mention of the great male actors who are in so many Bergman films, such as Max von Sydow and Gunnar Björnstrand (though Bergman does include a chapter explaining that he does not wish to discuss any of his living friends – dead ones are a different matter, for it is more difficult to gauge whether or not they will be offended by one’s remarks).

I also found it interesting the parallels between Bergman (one of my favorite filmmakers) and one of my favorite writers, Marcel Proust. Both works are really very personal. Both works show us the path from boyhood to the realization of the artist’s true potential (filmmaking/stage direction and writing, respectively). The title of Bergman’s book is *The Magic Lantern*, which is a very familiar object to readers of *Swann’s Way*. The narrative begins with Bergman’s grandmother feeding him sponge cake soaked in water. Though

this plays no role in Bergman's involuntary memory later on, it does call to mind the narrator in Proust's work eating a madeleine soaked in a spoonful of tea. Also, Bergman, like the narrator in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, travels with his grandmother and experiences his first young romantic encounter on this journey. Both also reveal certain neuroses over the course of their works, which are very similar to some of my own personal demons – my mother, who is one of the most ardent believers in astrology, would probably link this to the fact that we are all born under the sign of Cancer.

The parallels between the lives of Proust and Bergman were so close that I thought one could very well devise a fun party game out of the two texts. One would read a passage from Proust (or rather Proust by way of C.K. Scott Moncrieff) and from Bergman (as translated from the Swedish by Joan Tate) and have participants guess who wrote it. I think it would be a very fun and interesting game, but then again I'm a bit odd like that.

What I found most fascinating is that nowhere in the text does Bergman give any indication of reading Proust. He cites as his greatest influence the great Swedish playwright August Strindberg, and also mentions Ibsen and (to a lesser extent) Shakespeare. He also professes a love and lifelong fascination with cinema, and particularly American films.

This is a great companion piece to Bergman's films and to Marie Nyreröd's documentary *Bergman Island*. Originally *Bergman Island* was a three-part documentary that dealt with three different aspects of the famous director's life: his filmmaking, his life on the island of Fårö and his career in the theatre. The last aspect was included at Bergman's insistence, as he was proudest of his theatrical career, something that really shines through in this text. Of course, to modern viewers of the documentary, it is his filmmaking career that is of greatest interest. So, when the documentary started being shown in various places the aspects dealing with his theatrical career were often excluded (and they played a minimal role in the version of the film that was edited by Bergman and Nyreröd). This book contains a much deeper look into that part of Bergman's life and career. Aware of his lifelong interest in theatre and his work as a stage director, but unfamiliar with his theatrical works themselves, I found these discussions the less interesting part of the work. But, at the same time, they are very important as they seemed to have contributed the most to Bergman's sense of self and self-worth.

As far as autobiographies go this is one of the best, about a very fascinating artist and the path that he traveled, the failures he encountered and the self-doubts that he suffered with on his path to great artistry. A must-read for any fans of Bergman's work, lovers of cinema or even for any with a passion for good books, as I don't think one need be a Bergman fan or even be familiar with his work in order to appreciate the merits of the book itself.

Ali says

Memoir books are usually same. But this book is different. Because Ingmar Bergman doesn't tell all of his memoirs with his huge ego. Certainly, he had got an ego. Like everyone else. However, Bergman's difference is that he knew himself very well with his negative and positive characteristics. In my opinion, that's the real wisdom (I feel the same thing for Andrei Tarkovsky. Also, Bergman says "Tarkovsky is the biggest of cinema directors" in this book). What's more, he explains his life, his works, his everything as a psychologist. So this book and his movies are great. Psychology is a key for Bergman.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Laterna Magica = The Magic Lantern: an autobiography? of Ingmar Bergman (1918), Ingmar Bergman
Ingmar Bergman, creator of such films as Wild Strawberries, Scenes from a Marriage and Fanny and
Alexander turns his perceptive filmmaker's eye on himself for a revealing portrait of his life and obsessions.
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Nandakishore Varma says

Berman's movies are a passion for me, so I absolutely devoured this book - however, it does not contain that
much insights into his methods. Hence the three stars.

Yasmine says

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I have no recollection of the moment I started watching and liking (that came in time, though) Bergman, since none of my friends and acquaintances had any taste in his films whatsoever. There must have been different listopias with his films, like '100 films to watch in a lifetime' or stuff like that.

Anyway, what struck me in Bergman's several films I've seen so far ('Persona' being by far my favorite) was the deep sense of simplicity, the austere and grave atmosphere. Most of them being B/W, the films I've seen seem rather gloomy than enjoyable (in the broad sense most people refer to a film when they use the term), somber and cold but tense and with a strong (sometimes – most of the times? - weird and twisted) relation between the characters.

In the book I found a man totally different from what I imagined; an inconvenient and undesirable person, like a bull in a china shop, fighting depression and IRS (or whatever the Swedish Fiscal authority is called), permanently struggling to support his numerous family members (he was married 5 times). I sort of admire his courage to speak freely about intimate and uncomfortable issues like his relationship with his parents, God's absence or his infidelities. I was quite surprised to find that he was not only successful with his films, but also a prominent theater director. And I praise his decision to use childhood memories or real-life facts in his films.

Cel mai mult duc dorul colaborarii cu Sven Nykvist. Aceasta se datoreaza, probabil, faptului ca amindoi sintem captivati cu totul de problema luminii: lumina blinda, periculoasa, lumina ca de vis, lumina vie, moarta, clara, cetoasa, fierbinte, rece, puternica, brusca, intunecata, primavarateca, dreapta, oblica, senzuala, supusa, limitata, otravitoare, linistitoare, lumina luminoasa. Lumina.

Unul din motivele pentru care-mi place Bergman. Pentru ca ilustreaza (in carte, ca si in filme) atit de fain conceptul de **sunshine and silent rooms**, pe care l-am descoperit (si de care m-am amoretzat fara scapare) in picturile lui Hammershøi, Ilsted si Holsøe.

Iarna era pe sfirsite si lumina soarelui aparea si disparea cu miscari rapide si silentioase pe deasupra draperiilor si a tablourilor. In dreptul capului meu se inalta imensa masa din sufragerie. Mi-am sprijinit spatele de unul din picioarele arcuite ale mesei. Scaunele din jurul mesei precum si peretii aveau o tapiserie de piele aurie, innegrta de timp, emanind un miros de ceva vechi. In spatele meu, o servanta se inalta ca un castel, carafele de sticla si cupele de cristal sclipeau in lumina miscatoare. Pe perete, in partea stinga, atirna un tablou mare cu case galbene, rosii si albe. Case rasareau din apa albastra plina de barci mari.

Orologiul din sufragerie, care ajungea aproape pina la plafonul de stucatura, vorbea cu el insusi, morocanos si nepasator. De acolo de unde stateam puteam privi in salonul in care totul era verde: pereti, covoare, mobile, draperii chiar si ferigi si palmieri crescind acolo tot in vase verzi. O cunosteam pe doamna alba si goala, cu bratele taiate. Statea putin aplecata in fata, privindu-ma cu un suris vag. Pe comoda pintecoasa cu fenerii si picioare aurii ticaia un ceas aurit, sub un clopot de sticla. Un tinar cintind la flaut se sprijinea de cadran. Aproape lipita de el se afla o doamna micuta, cu o palarie mare si o rochie scurta si infoiata, ambele figurine erau aurite. Cind batea ora douasprezece, tinarul cinta la flaut iar fata dansa.

Lumina soarelui stralucea puternic, facind sa scinteie prismele in candelabrele de cristal, alunecind peste picturile cu casele ce cresteau din apa, dezmiardind albul statuii. Si din nou bateau clopotele, si din nou fata de aur dansa iar baiatul cinta, doamna cea goala intorcea capul sa-mi faca un semn. Moartea isi tira coasa pe linoleumul de pe coridorul intunecat, o presimteam, ii vedeam craniul galben si surisul, silueta neagra, desirata, conturindu-se de cealalta parte a geamurilor de la usa exterioara.

Aya says

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Kimmo Sinivuori says

I began reading this book some twenty years ago but had to give up because it was too brutal in its honesty. Luckily, I had followed Doris Lessing's advice that one should collect a private library so that when one suddenly has an urge to read a book one only needs to walk to the bookshelf and get the book. Another Lessing advice that the same book can be totally different experience when returning to it years later was proven right as well because this time around I really enjoyed the book.

The Bergman family history is the story of a mother and father who had the best intentions but were actors in a respectable tragedy. They were desperately clinging to an ideal of family life that was never met by the imperfect reality and which crushed them.

From the family background that he had, it is no wonder that Bergman led a very difficult life. He did not help himself with the way that he treated his wives and children. As I have always had high regard of Bergman's work, it is sometimes very difficult to read about Bergman the man.

The tragedies of his personal life aside, this book has some great stories about making movies. It has one of the best anecdotes about cinema I've read and it involves actress Ingrid Bergman (no relation to the author). Ingrid Bergman was very ill when she acted in the *Autumn Sonata*. During the making of the film, a long documentary was filmed. After the filming was finished Ingrid joined Bergman on his island home of Fårö to watch the documentary. After the document had been watched Ingrid Bergman stayed quiet for a long time and then said in sotto voce "I should have seen this document before we started shooting the film."

Maybe that is it for Ingmar Bergman as well; he should have read this book before he started living it.

Bjorn says

Ah yes, the old myth of the tortured male genius and all that. And an autobiography containing everything from stories on how his dad used to beat him, about discovering masturbation and girls (in roughly that order), multiple marriages and families sacrificed to his "demons" and the drive to create ART, the torment from which great ideas are born, "truthlessness" as an excuse for rambling on at length...

Most of our education was based around concepts like sin, confession, punishment, forgiveness and grace, concrete factors in the children's and the parents' relationships to each other and to god. (...) I think I got off easiest by turning myself into a liar. I created an outer persona who had very little to do with my real self. Since I was unable to separate my creation and my person, the damage had consequences well into my life and creativity as an adult. Sometimes I must console myself with the knowledge that he who lives a lie loves the truth.

Τι πολυτ?ραχη ζω? ε?χε ο μεγ?λος Σουηδ?ς σκηνοθ?της! Μ?σα απ? το αυτοβιογραφικ? του βιβλ?ο, αναδεικν?ονται οι προσωπικ?ς του στιγμ?ς, οι οικογενειακ?ς αναταρ?ξεις, οι σ?χ?σεις του με φ?λους και γυν?κες, ?λα αυτ? που τ? ?δειξε στις ταιν?ες του. Οι φ?λοι του θα πρ?πει οπωσδ?ποτε να το διαβάσουν

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David says

vote-harvesting (vʔt·här-vʔ·stiʔ) v. 1. writing brief, generally worthless Goodreads reviews, usually of one's back-catalogue, in order to increase one's (net) vote yield; 2. producing many (usually short, irrelevant) reviews with little regard for quality. n. 1. the act of vote-harvesting. See also *vote harvest*; e.g., He can expect to see a large cumulative *vote harvest* from his one-sentence reviews of all those Little Golden Books.

Although my specific recollections of this book are as spotty as a poorly-secured maxi pad on a light flow day, I can say that it didn't leave me with a very favorable impression of Ingmar Bergman, the man. He never bothered to discuss the stuff I *really* wanted to read about (like behind-the-scenes gossip -- duh), but instead dwelt on his continuing problems with nervous diarrhea and his total lack of interest in his own children. He was apparently immensely inconvenienced by the manifold (nine) fetuses that resulted from his serial-fucking. He wrote about his kids as if they were dental appointments. For root canals even. (But maybe that's just my distorted residual impression.)

Did I mention the diarrhea? He talks about being enslaved to the porcelain throne during the periods leading up to the debuts of his stage productions. Normally, I'd like this kind of detail -- it's right up my (heh) alley -- but in this case I'm resentful because I imagine these bowel-related reveries taking the place of fun stuff. Like GOSSIP! There's really none of it. You may want to hear about Gunnar Björnstrand's sex-with-midget fetish or Gunnel Lindblom's tantrum at the craft services table or Sven Nykvist's addiction to speedballing and IKEA meatballs... but no. Aside from the diarrhea, this is one of those proper, dignified affairs. There's not even much insight into his films.

If you were doing a Q&A with the Berg (premortem, natch), you'd probably be all, like, 'The beginning to *Persona*: WTF, right?' But he's not interested in satisfying your banal curiosities. He'd rather tell you about his childhood fondness for magic lanterns... which is 'interesting' but also very kinda *yawn*.

Philippe Malzieu says

Original title is "Laterna magica". It is the history of a little boy who needed love. His mother had consulted a pediatricist. He had forbidden her to have affection gesture to his son. This is the history of an unhappy loveless little boy which discovers joy with a toy, a magic lantern.

He search happiness all his life. He met many women, he had many children. He had never find peace. He will deliver his anguishes in all his movies. I saw all of them. I prefer Monika, Persona, The Serpent's Egg, the seventh seal. Much of them are austere and full of culpability.

It is the story of a little boy who never find love.

hope mohammed says

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Manny says

Laterna Magica shows how difficult it is to define that odd word, "autobiography". Bergman isn't very interested in telling you what happened, though you absolutely don't get the feeling that he's trying to hide anything from you either. He isn't interested in defending himself from the numerous charges that have been filed against him (sex addict, irresponsible father, tax evader, etc). What he wants to do is show you how he experienced his life from the inside, and turned that raw material into some of the 20th century's most remarkable films.

So don't read this book if you hope to find out the truth about his fight with the Swedish tax authorities, or who was to blame when his numerous marriages and amorous liaisons broke down, or to what extent he was a Nazi sympathizer. (If you really have to know what his own take was: not guilty, guilty, guilty). But if you've been wondering for ages about the origin of the hand in *Persona*

or the character of Desirée Armfeldt in *Midsommarnattens Leenden*

then you won't be able to put it down.

I suppose Bergman is a monster, but after a while you simply accept him on his own terms. That isn't the relevant question. He comes home unexpectedly in the middle of the night, his wife greets him with pleasure and surprise, and he tells her, without even removing this coat, that he's leaving her for someone else; then he uses it in *Scener ur ett Äktenskap*. His father beats and humiliates him, and he becomes the Bishop in *Fanny och Alexander*. Very few artists are willing to take you backstage like this and demonstrate how it all works. In the end, you see he's just the uncertain, neurotic, mythomaniac kid who receives a magic lantern and figures out how he's going to get the most out of his fantastic new Christmas present. We should all be so lucky. I loved this book.

Karim Abdel-Khalek? says

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The good parts in the book are when he doesn't focus on himself: the bit about his girlfriend's piano teacher, and her terrible wartime experience; also one of the last chapters, revolving around his father. I'd have been better off re-reading *Sculpting in Time*.

Ian Robinson says

I got this book to try and glean some insight into the workings of the mind of the Swedish genius of cinema Ingmar Bergman.

i have to say that if you are hoping for a look into the creation of his films, I think "Images", another autobiographical book, is the book for you.

This book focusses more on Bergman's personal life, his physical and mental health, his relationships and, with a remarkable and sometimes shocking candidness, his childhood.

Given this, the structure of the book is as unconventional as some of Bergman's more modernist films, drifting from childhood event to adult event based not on any chronological link but on emotional connection - a memory or feeling, a day or childhood occurrence. For long periods in this book, I lost the sense I was reading an autobiography of one of the world's greatest film makers and felt I was reading a beautifully written novel.

On finishing, what struck me was how self critical, how sickly and emotionally damaged this man was, which partly explained the deep (and often dark) art he produced, but also made that he was able to produce anything all the more remarkable.
