

Spy Editor to TAS: "I Am Not
Nor Have I Ever Been" (p. 9)

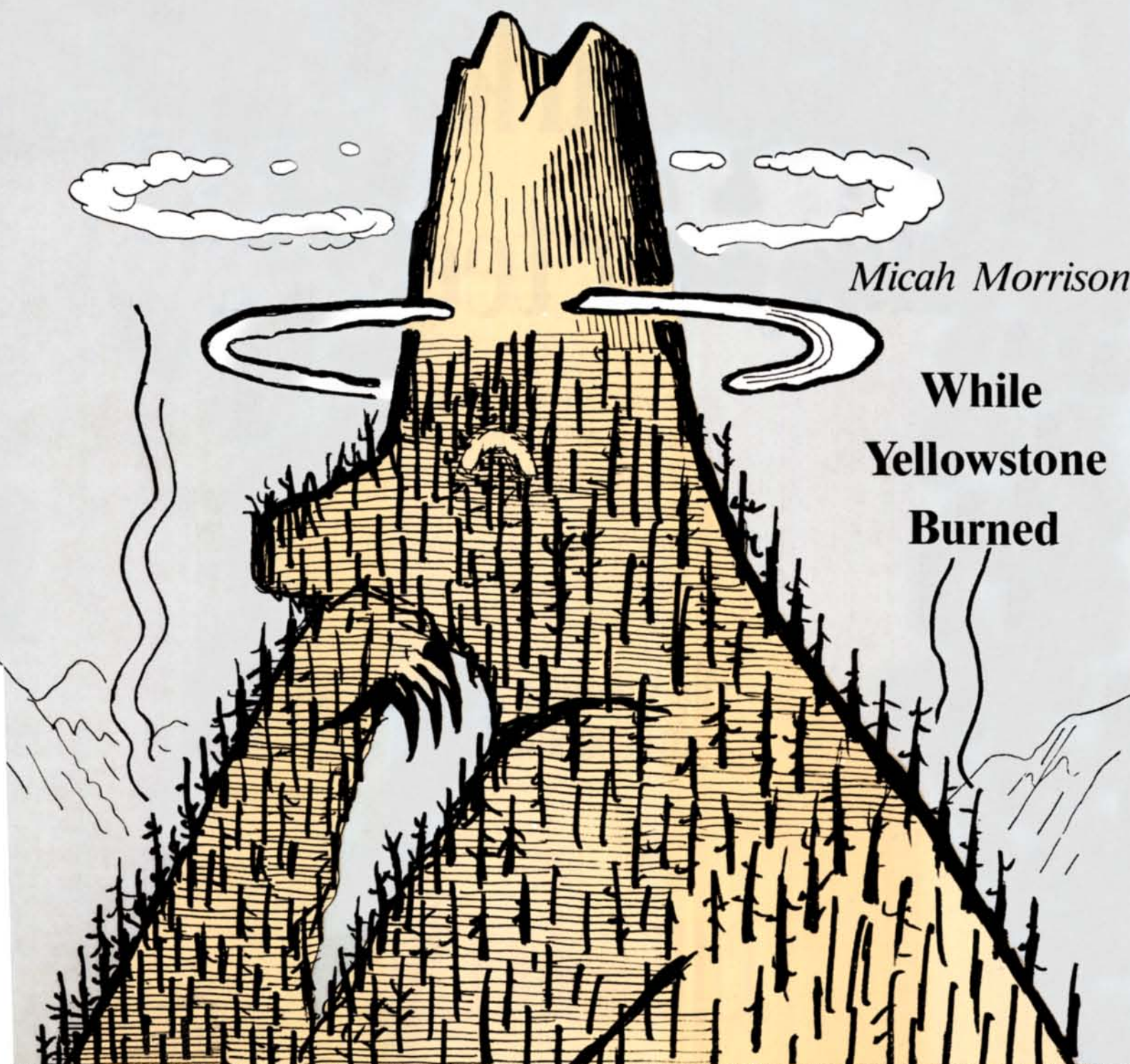
U.S. \$2.50
CANADA \$3.00

THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR

NOVEMBER 1988

A MONTHLY REVIEW EDITED BY R. EMMETT TYRRELL, JR.

Catastrophic Otis Bowen • Huntingtonian Dan Quayle



Micah Morrison

**While
Yellowstone
Burned**

8404007208 AP 1
FORDHAM UNIV LIBRARY
PERIODICALS
BRONX NY 10458

JUL 89

BOOK REVIEWS

This is the era of show-biz autobiographies as big as the egos of their authors. So Arthur Miller weighs in at 600 tall pages and Elia Kazan at 800 (including, to be sure, the illustrations); modestly, Kirk Douglas contents himself with 500. How wonderful that Ingmar Bergman in *The Magic Lantern* can bring his seven decades of life in at 290 smaller, looser pages. It is not as if he had had a less eventful life or were a lesser artist—on the contrary. But in an autobiographer concision is a double virtue: it bespeaks skill in the writer and unpretentiousness in the man. It also means that he does not feel compelled to tell everything he ever did, saw, thought, but leaves a few empty spaces to be filled in by the reader. It is a charming, old-fashioned *politesse*, like leaving one last mouthful on one's plate: the one is a tribute to the host's generosity; the other, to the reader's imagination.

The two salient features of this autobiography are its unusually skillful construction and the simple beauty of the writing. If you add to this the eventfulness of Bergman's life, the hard-earned wisdom with which he can now contemplate it, and the candor with which he relates both the good and the bad about himself—without false modesty or vain self-justification—you have before you the stuff of great autobiography.

First, the construction. It resembles Bergman's film *Wild Strawberries* in its nonchronological progression, only it is much more daring. It begins with the birth of Ernst Ingmar during the Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918; a sickly infant, he is not expected to live. Soon the boy is four and wildly jealous of his new-born sister. Next, he is a grown man scanning pictures of his childhood for the changing face of his mother, clearly for the documentary he made about her face that he mentions near the end of the book. There follow recollections of childhood scenes involving Mother, then a flashforward to "today," with Mother in the hospital with a tube up her nose and talking to Ingmar about their lives. Then back to childhood, and forward again to 1965, each subchapter about two pages long, as Mother phones Ingmar to come to see Father at the hospital, where he faces a serious operation he may not survive. Ingmar refuses: he and Father

John Simon, author of *Ingmar Bergman Directs*, is movie critic for *National Review* and drama critic for *New York*.

THE MAGIC LANTERN: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Ingmar Bergman/Viking/\$19.95

John Simon

have nothing to say to each other, he is indifferent to the old man, and he might scare him to death with an unexpected visit. Mother and son fight: Ingmar will not fall for the blackmail of "for my sake," and Mother cries; he slams the receiver. Next she comes to Dramaten (the Royal Dramatic Theater) to extract from her son a promise that he'll go see Father; son and mother have a nice time drinking tea and chatting. The next time he comes to see her, a few days later, she is dead by the time he gets there. She has a small Band-Aid on her left forefinger. Near the end of the book, her ghost appears to him, and they have a long but unsatisfying conversation. The Band-Aid is still on her finger.

These juxtapositions, though sudden and jolting, have a common theme: Mother. Other collocations of subchapters may not have so obvious a thread, but they do connect, even as they often contrast in rhythm or emotional intensity. The ordering is both musical and cinematic, and thus especially appropriate to Bergman, to

whom Herbert von Karajan said, "You direct as if you were a musician. You've a feeling for rhythm, the musicality, pitch." Thus Bergman's life, which provided countless incidents for his scenarios (transmuted, of course), profits from the scenarist's art when that life, in turn, becomes the subject. Things come full circle.

This structure serves a distinct purpose: to make the past and the present coexist, to convey the oneness of life through and beyond individual phases, even as life and work also form a single, coherent whole. The ending of *Wild Strawberries* suggests the hero's reconciliation with his parents, his past, his life. *The Magic Lantern* is similarly shot through with reconciliations, although it is also a facing up to certain errors, certain insufficiencies, that will never cease to ache. A memory of Bergman's third wife (out of four or five, depending on whether you count the quasi-marriage to Liv Ullmann), Gun, who was in some sense raped by her ex-husband, elicits the following comment: "There are moving pictures with

sound and light which never leave the projector of the soul but run in loops throughout life with unchanging sharpness, unchanging objective clarity. Only one's own insight inexorably and relentlessly moves inwards toward the truth." So the inner life is cinema, too.

Second, the quality of the writing itself, full of aperçus and ironies, evocations of people or places or situations with utmost economy and understated elegance. Here, for example, is a bit from Ingmar's final reunion with his older brother, Dag. As children, they had fought with fratricidal rage, Dag knocking out Ingmar's two front teeth, Ingmar setting Dag's bed (with Dag in it) on fire. In the very next subchapter, Dag is 69, paralyzed, and barely able to speak. He has been consul to Greece, and he and his Greek wife have come to Fårö (Sheep Island) to visit Ingmar and his wife:

He remembered much more than I did. He spoke of his hatred for Father and his strong ties to Mother. To him, they were still parents, mysterious creatures, capricious, incomprehensible and larger than life. We made our way along overgrown paths and stared at each other in astonishment, two elderly gentlemen, now at an insuperable distance from each other. Our mutual antipathy had gone, but had left space for emptiness; there was no contact, no affinity. My brother wanted to die, but was at the same time afraid of dying; a raging will to live keeping his lungs and heart going. He also pointed out that he had no chance of committing suicide because he could not move his hands.

And the narrative goes on from there, with the same incisive terseness, with the same artful alteration of small, concrete things and big, transcendently awesome ones. The same sense of architectonics for building up a paragraph to a shattering climax or a sobering anticlimax.

But Bergman can be just as effective with a comic episode. In Paris with Gun, after a fancy lunch of kidneys *flambé* and a visit to the theater, comes the ascent of the Eiffel Tower:

Now as we stood at the very top of the Eiffel Tower, gazing over that famous panorama, countless colon bacilli struck. We were both afflicted with terrible internal spasms and rushed for the lifts, where large notices stated that they were closed for two hours in sympathy with the protracted strike of the workers in the public cleansing department. We made our way down the winding staircase with no possible chance of preventing a catastrophe. An incredibly obliging taxi driver spread his newspapers



out on the back seat and conveyed this semiconscious stinking couple to their hotel, where for the next twenty-four hours, crawling from the bed across the floor, we alternately and jointly embraced the lavatory bowl. Until then, shyness in our love had prevented us from using the bathroom convenience, and when in need we had pattered off to the considerably less luxurious arrangement in the corridor. At one blow, all discretion was swept away. Our physical misery undoubtedly brought us closer to each other.

Here again Bergman understates consummately. The striking bacilli are clearly but subtly contrasted with the workers' strike, as is the latter's being in the "public cleansing department" with the lovers' private, intensely sullied state. And there are splendid details such as embracing the bowl "alternately and jointly."

Bergman, as mentioned, is terrific also with thumbnail descriptions and characterizations. Thus "... Serge Lifar, the aging monster in *L'Après-midi d'un faun* [sic, but blame this on translator and publishers], a fat whore with moist open lips, shamelessly radiating all the vices of the 1920's." In one way, of course, "all the vices of the 1920's" is absurd: what vices are limited to a specific decade? Yet it is also true: the decadence of that period seems somehow gaudier, more purple, than that of any other in recent memory. And what about the following, on the work of the director—in this case a fever-ridden young Bergman: "But I showed nothing. It is a dereliction of duty to let private afflictions obtrude at work. Your mood must be even and forceful, but, on the other hand, indefinable creative desires must not be encouraged. You have to rely on careful preparation and hope for better things." I love that last sentence, pitched exactly midway between matter-of-factness and irony.

Bergman's is an arduous life, the slow divestment of the terrible constraints imposed by a troubled Lutheran minister's household in puritanical Sweden. Escape into art was not easy; there was penury for a long time. Success, in both theater and films, came in sudden spurts; but there were always dread relapses into failure. A few directors and producers, the odd critic, and one dead writer—Strindberg—helped and sustained Ingmar; but there was lurking incomprehension all around, and the series of setbacks that made a young man who could take everything save humiliation suffer horribly. There were also the women, often his actresses or other co-workers, who became lovers or wives and helped or impeded artistic evolution. Here, for instance, is Bergman with Ellen, his second wife,

to whom he lied constantly: "For brief moments between battles, we felt a profound fellowship, the sympathy and forgiveness of the body." How nicely that is worded!

There are detailed accounts of the income tax scandal Bergman was unjustly enmeshed in and of his ensuing nervous breakdown; remarkable vignettes of other people's and his own experiences working in theater and film;

evocative sketches of meetings or collaborations with Garbo, Ingrid Bergman, the conductor Issey Dobrowen, the aging actor Lars Hanson (who is not named), Laurence Olivier (they did not hit it off), and great Swedish directors such as Alf Sjöberg and Olof Molander. When Bergman became director of Dramaten, he had to fire Molander though, along with Sjöberg, Molander had been one of his

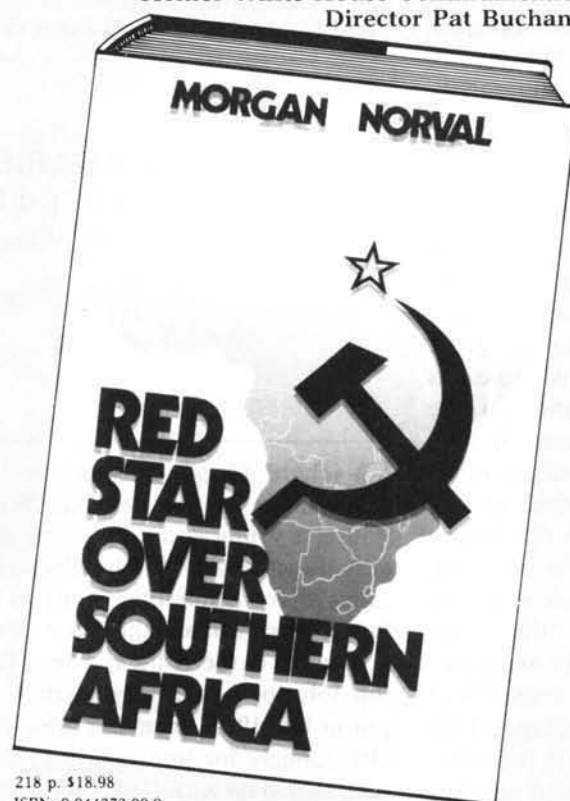
heroes; the incident is told with devastating honesty and is painful even to read, much less to live. There are entrancing episodes of work experiences, ludicrous or inspiring or both at once.

From a tormented and exultant child, Bergman develops into a neurotic and difficult young man whom success doesn't lastingly appease or tame. Loves and marriages come and go, as

New foreign policy perspectives from the Selous Foundation Press

Red Star Over Southern Africa By Morgan Norval

"It is too bad that Teddy Kennedy, Jesse Jackson, and the rest of the Boer-bashers both in and out of government won't take the time to read this important book. If they did, and were honest in their intentions, they would pursue a different course in regard to the tragic events now unfolding in southern Africa...."
—former White House Communications Director Pat Buchanan



218 p. \$18.98
ISBN: 0-944273-00-9

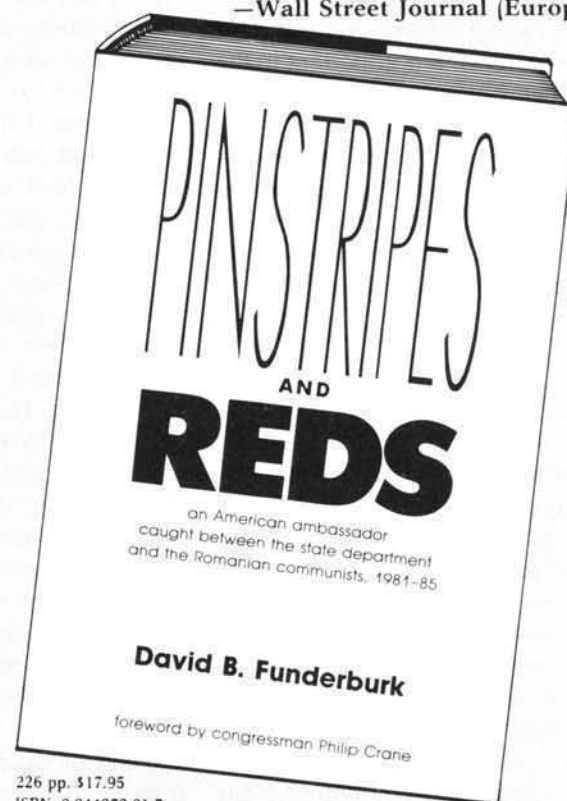
Red Star Over Southern Africa details why the increasing influence of Soviet-sponsored guerilla movements within the region may jeopardize the future economic and political interests of South Africa and threaten strategic relations with the United States.

Pinstripes and Reds:

An American ambassador caught
between the U.S. State Department and the
Romanian Communists, 1981-1985.

By David B. Funderburk

"... a lively if diplomatically selective account of (Ambassador Funderburk's) 'Cassandra' years in Bucharest.... (His resignation) dramatized the hostility that often arises between political appointees... and the State Department career cadre."
—Wall Street Journal (Europe)



226 pp. \$17.95
ISBN: 0-944273-01-7

Funderburk demonstrates how Romania, under the leadership of Nicolae Ceausescu has gone from a measure of self-sufficiency to a country now plagued with a devastated economy and an increasing magnitude of human rights violations.

Please send me the following:

_____ copy(ies) of **Pinstripes and Reds**
at \$17.95 plus \$2.00 for postage and handling for each book.

_____ copy(ies) of **Red Star Over Southern Africa**
at \$18.95 plus \$2.00 for postage and handling for each book.

Amount enclosed: _____ (VA residents please add 4.5% sales tax.) Make check payable to:

Selous Foundation Press

For discounts on bulk orders please contact American Comnet, Inc., at the address or phone number listed above.

Name: _____

Affiliation: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

AS 988●

Place your order by calling (202) 463-0346, or send order with payment to:

Selous Foundation Press
c/o American Comnet, Inc.
1155 21st St. N.W.
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036

do triumphs and failures; the suggestive leaps by which the story proceeds—through reminiscences, echoes, flashforwards—somehow manage to turn discursiveness and disjointedness into the compelling self-portrait of a restlessly stalking mind. Past, present, future are abolished, and there is only a stretch of synchronicity over which the memory roams freely in search of connection and comprehension.

Bergman believes in ghosts, and there are several arresting ghost (or otherwise fantastic) stories. But he is also an atheist, albeit with relapses into some sort of half-belief. The struggle with God leaves him “with a calming message. You were born without purpose, you live without meaning, living is its own meaning. When you die, you are extinguished. . . . A god does not necessarily dwell among our increasingly capricious atoms.” But note that “necessarily.” And he never denies the life of the spirit. From his pastor father, Bergman learns (in an incident he incorporated at the end of *Winter Light*) that “*irrespective of everything* [specifically: physical illness], *you will hold your communion*. It is important to the churchgoer, but even more important to you. We shall have to see if it is important to God. [Again the uncertainty, disguised as playfulness.] If there is no other god than your hope as such, it is important to that god too.” This writing can hold its own against anybody’s.

That is Bergman hopeful. But there is also Bergman dejected, fighting the weakness of age and sympathizing more and more with Master-Builder Solness climbing the church tower despite his vertigo in “the urge toward the impossible.” And he goes on: “Failure can have a fresh and astringent taste, adversity stirs up aggression and shakes life into creativity which might otherwise remain dormant. It’s fun to cling to the northwest wall of Mount Everest. Before I am silenced for biological reasons, I very much want to be contradicted and questioned. Not just by myself. That happens every day. I want to be a pest, a troublemaker, and hard to pigeon-hole.”

Here again the attitude toward life and, by implication, death is, if not cheerful, at least stoical. But Bergman wouldn’t be Bergman if the opposite were not also true. Take this passage, perhaps the most moving in the book, where he tries to talk about his current and doubtless last wife, Ingrid, the only fully mature woman he was ever involved with. He finds he cannot write about her. Then he recalls Ovid’s tale of Philemon and Baucis (which he gets

slightly wrong) and goes on, infinitely movingly:

My wife and I live near each other. One of us thinks and the other answers, or the other way round. I have no means of describing our affinity.

One problem is insoluble. One day the blow will fall and separate us. No friendly god will turn us into a tree to shade the farm. I have a talent for imagining most of life’s situations. I plug in my intuition and my imagination and appropriate emotions pour in, colouring and deepening.

Nevertheless I lack the means of imagining the moment of separation. As I am neither able nor willing to imagine another life, some kind of life beyond the frontier, the perspective is appalling. From a somebody I will become a nobody. That nobody will not even have the memory of an affinity.

This strikes me as enormously powerful in its understatement. But, then, Bergman is precisely the master of the hint, the suggestion—of what is said without being spoken. When he and Ingrid left Sweden over the income tax mess—just as Strindberg had left under a different sort of cloud—they tried Hollywood for a while. One morning “Barbra Streisand telephoned and asked us whether we would like to bring our bathing gear with us for a little party by the pool. I thanked her, put down the receiver, turned to Ingrid and said: ‘Let’s go back to Faro at once. . . .’” Nothing is said. Everything is said.

There is a wonderful love of nature and childhood informing this book, which may come as a surprise to those having only a cursory knowledge of Bergman’s work. But the twin passions that thread their way through the autobiography are the theater and the cinema. Bergman went to the Royal Dramatic for the first time at age twelve. Subsequently, as its director, he would sometimes go sit in the same seat in the dark, empty house and “give in to nostalgia.” For “this great auditorium lying in silence and semidarkness was—after great hesitation, I think of writing ‘the beginning and the end and almost everything in between.’ It looks silly and exaggerated in print, but I can’t find a better way of putting it—the beginning and the end and almost everything in between.”

And what of the movies? When Ingmar was even smaller, nine or ten, a very rich aunt gave a cinematograph—a toy film projector—which he thought *he* was getting from her on Christmas, to his brother instead. It was what he had wanted most, and the injustice of it crushed him. Later that night he woke up Dag and gave him all his hundred tin soldiers for the cinematograph. As he projected his first little film loop, his excitement was indescribable. Near the end of *The Magic Lantern*, he talks about his private screening room on Fårö and the films the Swedish Cinema-

theque lends him: “Sixty years have gone by but the excitement is still the same.”

In sundry interviews, Bergman has said that film was his demanding mistress, but theater his cozy, loyal wife. Well, he managed the amazing feat of keeping both wife and mistress happy—not to mention himself. Neurotic as Bergman was all his life (though less so as he grew older), hounded as he was by chronically upset stomachs, insomnia, and a host of intermittent ailments, he nevertheless always came through for himself, for his art, for the world. Would that Joan Tate, the translator, had done likewise. But not only is this translation full of sometimes arcane Britishisms, it is also devoid of knowledge of film, theater, even grammar. Miss Tate gives us “two-acters” for two-reelers, “Goethe’s Margareta” for Gretchen or Marguerite, such barbarisms as “virtuosi Bavarians,” “and nor,” “when I asked him . . . he had at once accepted,” “a mutual existence,” “period of time,” “intriguing objects,” “hellish stimulating,” and many more.

“Johnny,” the key word, is missing from the title of Marlene Dietrich’s famous song, Claudel’s *The Tidings They Brought to Mary* (as it is known in English) becomes *The Annunciation to Mary*, and so on. Since the American edition does not use the British pages, we must assume that copy editing is equally dead on both sides of the Atlantic.

It would take much more than that, however, to dim the pleasure of this book. In nine lines, Bergman can encapsulate what went wrong with his marriage to the pianist Käbi Laretei (of whom, bizarrely, we get only a rear view among the inadequate selection of illustrations), but the true writer reveals himself even in the briefest of snatches: “I was sitting in my workroom in Fårö and it was raining, that soft quiet summer rain, as if it were going to rain all day, the kind that doesn’t exist any more.” That three-part build-up from physical description, through psychological impression, to metaphysical nostalgia—there you have the true writer at work. In any medium, Bergman is the kind of artist that hardly exists any more. □

REMEMBERING AMERICA: A VOICE FROM THE SIXTIES

Richard N. Goodwin/Little, Brown/\$19.95

Fred Barnes

Richard Goodwin was the boy wonder of the Kennedy White House, a young and very liberal aide with direct access to the President. Later, after meddlesome stints in the State Department and the Peace Corps, he returned to the White House as Lyndon Johnson’s chief speechwriter. He quit in late 1965, soon was criticizing LBJ publicly for intervening in Vietnam, signed on with Gene McCarthy’s campaign in 1968, and finally jumped ship to join Bobby Kennedy. That’s his claim to fame. Goodwin thinks the years when he was a big deal in Washington were better than the years since then, when he wasn’t. That’s only human nature, I guess. Reporters who covered him in those days tell me he had a big head. After reading his book, I can confirm that he still does.

So many pages (543), so little to say. The basic theme, which is what Goodwin spent his time on in the sixties and how wonderfully important it all was, is the stuff of a fat magazine article.

Fred Barnes is a senior editor of the New Republic.

Or maybe he should have given a series of lectures at some East Coast college on “The Swinging Sixties: The Puffed-Up Reminiscences of a Kennedy Liberal.” Instead, we get this book.

Out of twenty-seven chapters, I counted two interesting ones. And to be honest, I could make it through the rest of my life without having read those two. Both deal with LBJ. I’d always heard that Lyndon liked to talk with aides as he sat on the toilet. Goodwin recounts such an incident. “I remained standing, of course—Johnson had the only seat in the room,” he writes. This was different from Kennedy’s approach. “Kennedy’s intimacies with me were restricted to receiving communications while taking a bath,” says Goodwin.

The other good chapter is devoted to Johnson and civil rights. Goodwin sat in on a meeting between LBJ and then-Governor George Wallace of Alabama. Shrewd and tough as Wallace was, LBJ blew him away. Wallace wound up asking Johnson to send federal troops to Alabama to restore racial peace. Goodwin also wrote Johnson’s speech to