

Becker) whom everybody lusts after—eventually gets to take his clothes off. I haven't seen so many pecks and peckers on stage since *Oh! Calcutta*. If that's your cup of tea, or piece of cheesecake, then you may find some value in *Love! Valour! Compassion!* One character, the dancer Gregory Mitchell who owns this week-

end house, seems to have some human dimension and is nicely played by Stephen Bogardus. The others, cast with very good actors, will undoubtedly soon be joining the play in the electronic media. Not since *Hot 1 Baltimore* has the Broadway theater provided such a successful tryout venue for network T.V. •

compellingly uncertain bodily style was plainly ridiculous was *Grand Hotel*, in which she made a totally unconvincing ballet dancer.

Garbo seems to have hated crowds, strangers and observers all her life, but always to have loved both acting and being photographed. At a precocious 15 years old, she happily posed for the millinery ads printed for the department store where she sold hats, and also appeared in two short promotional films. That was in 1920. In 1922 she quit the store to make movies, and appeared in one undistinguished comedy. Fortunately, she was taken up by Mauritz Stiller only a short time later during her subsequent drama-school period, while she was trying to improve her chances in movies by acquiring acting technique on a scholarship to the Royal Dramatic Theater Academy. What she obviously needed was not more school but a new father, the one with a creative Patriarchal Gaze aimed at her through the lens. She put herself in Stiller's hands, but it was doubtful he ever touched her; in her case, his hands were his eyes. He took over her life, her clothes, her behavior as well as her acting. Although her famous first movie, *The Saga of Gösta Berling* of 1923, was the only one she ever made with Stiller, she was still following his precepts about how to be a movie star many years later, long after he had left Hollywood and other directors were fostering her exceptional cinematic qualities.

The Face

By ANNE HOLLANDER

Garbo by Barry Paris

(Knopf, 654 pp., \$35)

It is significant that Garbo's appeal endures as much in her photographs as in her movies. Above everything, it was and is the Face, the first face made for the camera, the face that wants to be alone, that barely moves. The acting was mostly done with the eyes, into which the camera plunged again and again; the rare smile and the rarer laugh never obscured the inward look. She had fantasized about acting when she was a little girl, and she appeared in plays as part of her training at drama school, but a stage career would have been a disaster. It was the close-ups in movies and the portrait photographs that drew forth her real gift and made her immortal.

The voice, once it was heard in *Anna Christie*, was fortunately no hindrance. Her particular brand of foreign accent had no connotations whatsoever in America, neither good nor bad nor comic, and her speaking voice had a low timbre with a touch of hoarseness that went perfectly with the Face. Garbo's brand of Swedishness in general had a lot to do with her appeal, although not much was made of this. She had grown up in the working class of a self-contained liberal society, where her family was poor and life was harsh but not miserable, streets were safe, pleasures were simple and available. Having been obliged to leave school at 14 to go to work, she had never entirely grown out of her childhood attitudes and feelings. Her relatively stable background did not require desperate, self-creative escape.

In her later financial wrangles with her studio, it was clear that Garbo really did feel that she could happily leave the whole business to go and live by herself in a cabin in the woods; and it gave her

great power. Other stars, deeply committed to the prestige of luxury and brilliant personal display, might talk like that for effect, but never mean it for a minute. What was often perceived as a pose, a strategic and deliberately provocative withdrawal on Garbo's part, was really a form of uncultivatedness, of plain simplicity—the same quality that always made her seem to be shrugging detachedly out of her luxurious costumes. She had a similarly schoolgirlish kind of self-discipline, always on time and well prepared, but quick to claim absolute freedom and privacy at the stroke of the bell.

And then there was the melancholy—more Swedishness, many thought, just look at the suicide rate—and the ambiguous eroticism that went with it, both tellingly communicated on film as in no other possible form of art. The melancholy seems to have reflected a lifelong tendency toward depression that only intensified after her adored father's death, which brought about the end of her formal education. The ambiguous sexuality must have begun right then, as part of an ambivalent identity, a wonderfully cinegenic inner dissatisfaction. She had been an unusually tall and ungainly child. Later in her career she turned this internalized awkwardness into a form of quasi-masculine grace, a propensity to feel better in pants that struck a thrilling modern note.

This flavor was unusual at the time, and it was subliminally conveyed in all her very feminine roles—nothing at all overt and depraved, in the Dietrich style. Garbo's body thus supported the effect of the Face, with its searching and receptive air. Its very lack of smug assurance is what drew so much feeling from audiences. The one movie in which this

In his scrupulous and detailed biography, however, Barry Paris is at pains to emphasize that at this point, right after *Gösta* and right before Hollywood, Garbo came under the influence of another great director, G.W. Pabst, with whom she made *Joyless Street* in Berlin in 1925. She and Stiller were stuck in Berlin, penniless after a film project in Turkey had fallen through. Pabst gave Garbo a job in his movie so she and Stiller could survive until they went to Hollywood, where Louis B. Mayer had already seen *Gösta Berling* and had come to Berlin to sign the two of them on before the Turkish fiasco began.

Garbo's appearance in a Pabst film was thus a piece of pure chance, but Paris finds Pabst's influence even stronger than Stiller's on Garbo's actual screen acting. His part (and just at this moment, hers) in the flowering of German cinema in the 1920s was to help add an intense psychological dimension to filmmaking. An emphasis on authentic inwardness characterized the New Realism movement in all German art, following the externalized violence of Expressionism, and film proved its natural exponent. Paris points out, moreover,

that Pabst, like Freud, was not German but Austrian, and perhaps instinctively more apt at emotional nuance than German filmmakers—or even Swedish ones.

Paris's last book was a biography of Louise Brooks, the vivid and articulate star whom Pabst made famous in *Pandora's Box* in 1928. Paris uses telling quotes from Brooks's uninhibited writings throughout his new book, but especially in his essay on Garbo and Pabst. Brooks said:

A truly great director such as G.W. Pabst holds the camera on the actor's eyes in every vital scene. He said, "The audience must see it in the actor's eyes."... Pabst's genius lay in getting to the heart of a person, banishing fear and releasing the clean impact of personality which jolts an audience to life.

Just so. Garbo responded very well to Pabst, who whispered and suggested where Stiller had commanded and bullied, and she produced the first example of the subtle "vulnerable despair" that later became her trademark. In *Gösta*, it had been her beauty alone that seemed remarkable; in *Joyless Street*, it was the impact of her personality that came through, as she played a serious girl helplessly compromised and maneuvered into prostitution by corrupt villains.

Once she settled in Hollywood, Garbo's life seemed to become mainly an ordeal, a constant effort to stay out of the game while winning it at the same time. Her spirits were further depressed by the early death of her sister and later by that of Stiller, which coincided with the breakup of her much-publicized but always less than idyllic romance with John Gilbert. Garbo's personal reclusiveness was backed up by an ordinary North European reticence not much valued by the new American movie industry, which was largely created by extroverted East European Jews. But she made personal friends, among them Salka Viertel, who ran a sort of elevated European salon in the middle of crude Hollywood. And she eventually developed strong female attachments, notably with Mercedes de Acosta, the famous, rich and aristocratic lesbian who by her own account knew everyone of importance in the first half of the twentieth century.

Paris is careful to say that the whole of Garbo's sex-life is a matter of gossip; and he shares the opinion of several people that she was not much interested in sex and may have "done" nothing. She certainly acknowledged nothing, in appropriate respectable fashion. Her extraordinary appeal to the public of both sexes was quickly established, however,

especially after the success of *Flesh and the Devil*, her first film with Gilbert, in which they shared the first open-mouth kisses to appear on the screen. Despite her shyness and her solitary inclinations, her inspired screen acting made it possible for her to develop single-handedly a new Hollywood female character, that of the woman consumed by passion, the *grande amoureuse*.

Until Garbo, attractive women on the Hollywood screen had been wicked vamps or sweetly chaste wives and child-like virgins, with an occasional tempted matron or madcap heiress. The woman who risked everything for love—Anna Karenina, Christina of Sweden, Marguerite of the Camelias and numerous others—had to wait for Garbo. Most of the time the character had to die, although sometimes she had to make wrenching sacrifices other than the supreme one; but she was always a serious, intelligent and sympathetic character, felled only by the implacable force of her love. The vamp destroyed men, and laughed to see them grovel and suffer; Garbo's character brought about her own destruction, often wearing a faintly ironic smile.

Along with the enigmatic self-mocking face and the ambiguous body, Garbo had extremely expressive hands, which she used in movies as vessels of erotic feeling, especially autoerotic. It was said by

several writers quoted in Paris's book that Garbo's love scenes take no real account of the man in them, of his feelings or even his individuality. She caresses him as if stroking her own passion, dwelling only on her own mounting desire, exploring the force of her own sexual feeling—perhaps complex, powerful and conflicted—and not of the man himself or his. One of her most extraordinary scenes occurs in *Queen Christina*, where she fixes the chamber of love in her memory by slowly caressing not the man but the room, fondling the mantelpiece and stroking the bedposts with a mesmerizing lust. Garbo, said one commentator, was in need less of leading men than of altar boys; and her own hands ministered to her own flame. Sometimes she would even play a love scene alone, with a prop or two. It was strong stuff to watch, much more potent than the submissive fluttering and possessive clutching deployed by all the vamps and virgins.

She was, and she still is, famous for self-absorption. Garbo ignored all wars, all politics and all the various wretched of the earth, right along with the irksome press and publicity people. She allegedly hated her lack of education and read widely on her own; but not newspapers, one would have to conclude. She was apparently devoid of racial or class prejudice, basically a non-snob; but the point was that all groups of



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people were equally uninteresting to her, or equally threatening. Only individuals meant much, a few at a time: Stilller and Gilbert, Salka and Mercedes, Cecil Beaton, Gayelord Hauser and Stokowski; but also her nephew and her housekeeper, and much later on, helpful and comforting friends not fond of the public eye, nor insistent on unacceptable degrees of intimacy.

And she did find an exclusive Hollywood circle to join. It is hard now to imagine the character of the cultivated European colony that maintained itself in Hollywood during Garbo's active career. Movies began silent, and therefore international; and a great many talented and educated Europeans were helping to make movies in Hollywood in the '20s and '30s and before. Others settled there for a time, too, as friends and fellow artists—classical musicians such as Schoenberg and Stravinsky, writers such as Christopher Isherwood and Lion Feuchtwanger. Later the tide of refugees swelled their numbers. Garbo quickly became part of what was called the "European ghetto," not always with good humor, by local American talent struggling for success and recognition in movies. Cinema was a serious artistic medium in Europe before movies became a serious entertainment industry in America. For two decades and more, Hollywood was struggling to match high European standards, and dealing with imported European practitioners, well before developing a distinctive product with its own unsurpassed brand of American excellence.

Garbo became our great movie star because our movies—I mean American movies—were somehow confirmed by her way of acting in them, just at a time when they were coming of age as the great expressive medium of the century. She obviously hated Hollywood the whole time she was there, and had very little respect for her own films, preferring her work in the German version of *Anna Christie*. But Hollywood had a real need of her. It was immensely important that the uniquely gifted Garbo

stay in Hollywood, so as to be identified with the rising success of American movies, and not return to Europe, to an assured cinematic home in the old-world artistic mode. And so she commanded an immense salary and her choice of working conditions, and set a new standard for every aspect of modern American stardom.

Garbo's self-absorption and isolation worked marvelously on film—along with her indifference to public opinion, her acknowledged but muted sensuality, her strong will and inner life made cinemati-



DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

cally manifest only in the tiniest shifts of expression and gesture, and in limited utterance. The whole combination produced the magnetic effect of someone at once vulnerable and unattainable. In the '40s and since, American movies went on to elevate and to idealize these qualities in American movie performers of either sex, in distinct contrast to the stage actor for whom constant projection is essential and utterance is primary. Gary Cooper and John Wayne partook of this ideal, besides a succession of American female stars such as Lauren Bacall and Bette Davis. Garbo was the first to embody it.

Paris's biography joins a host of Garbo

books, several of them quite recent, but his turns out to be the only one we must have. Paris has taken full account of all the other works on Garbo, and registered their value as well as their differing brands of emotional bias while clearly sorting out his own feelings as he proceeds. Along the way, he soberly corrects many factual errors that mar the public sense of Garbo's life. The results make a comprehensive study, including careful essays on Garbo's character and personal relationships, her difficult-to-discover financial arrange-

ments, her effect on individuals and on the public at different moments, her actual film performances and, most valuable, the exact circumstances of her long term as a living legend. He is very good on Garbo's shortcomings and bad behavior, both sympathetic and unsentimental. He has gone into the testimony of others in admirable depth (this book has more than 650 pages); and he has found quite a bit of new material—tapes, documents and a bunch of striking photographs from every period of Garbo's eighty-five-year-long life, both dumb snapshots and posed masterpieces.

It is interesting to know, for example, that Garbo's retirement from the screen in 1940 was not sudden, a prima-donna's colossal fit of pique after her first failure. New projects were being constantly considered by her and her studio during the next two decades, and several interesting collaborations were conceived that all eventually came to nothing, leaving only the stark fact that she made no movies at all after *Two-Faced Woman*, and that it had been a disaster. Paris examines all the later negotiations in detail and every single earlier element contributing to the failure of Garbo's last film—and indeed, if Paris's book has a fault, it is excessive thoroughness of speculation and investigation.

We should certainly welcome this biography as an exemplary work of reference. It sets all the Garbo records straight, provides a sane assessment of a collective hysterical phenomenon together with a fine historical study of

Garbo's life and times, and it is annotated, indexed and appended to the point of being encyclopedic. But I found it psychologically indigestible after all, perhaps because the subject has obsessed the author so intensely for so long that he has unconsciously rendered it burdensome even to a movie-lover and a Garbo-fancier. It is hard to feel the need to care so much about every mundane detail of this woman's private existence, especially during her last thirty years, when it had finally become clear that she would never work again. Her career had slowly sunk under the immense weight of her negative spirit, a cumulative force of refusal that eventually discouraged all hopeful planning and creative suggestion on the part of rising filmmakers who had her in mind.

For a while, Garbo's life was peripatetic in the manner of the modern idle rich, moving from islands to mountains to Paris, from yachts to chateaux. At length she came to a stop on East 52nd Street, and began to travel only around Manhattan, being spotted on foot in her big coat and straight gray hair. Her efforts to flee observation were as tireless as ever, while she apparently found the effort to have domestic repairs made and successful clothes-

shopping done as difficult as career decisions had ever been. Near the end, Garbo spent a good deal of time in cozy intimacy with her housekeeper, who took care of her and her endless problems as a loving sister might have done. She died on Easter Sunday, April 15, 1990.

Garbo's beauty, talent and presence are undeniable forces in modern movie life, poetic life, visual and imaginative life. When all is said and done, however, her own life in the world was not so very interesting, neither as a historical passage nor as a personal trajectory. Her secretiveness made her life seem interesting to others, but in these pages Garbo gives the impression of boring herself: the transcripts from tapes of her phone calls during the last years are tedious, not piquant. She had magnetism, all right, and a telling way of displaying her soul and her sexuality, but not much wit or heart. Garbo herself might even agree that the important reality of her life was enacted in the pictures, moving or still, and those are perhaps all that the rest of us really need.

ANNE HOLLANDER is the author most recently of *Sex and Suits: The Evolution of Modern Dress* (Knopf).

Low Marx

By TONY JUDT

The Wager of Lucien Goldmann: Tragedy, Dialectics, and a Hidden God by Mitchell Cohen

(Princeton University Press, 351 pp., \$35)

Why should we study the forgotten ideas of dead men? The question is not an idle one. Those ideas, after all, are the primary subject matter of the discipline of intellectual history, a field under siege from many sides. Even if we agree that it is nonsense to assert that the ideas of dead men are unworthy of attention because they are the product of dead (or white, or straight) men, we cannot ignore the broader claim that it is not ideas but "cultures" that matter. In the latter view, the wider the historian's field of vision, the less he restricts himself to texts, and the better his chance of capturing a full understanding of the past, ideas included. And we cannot reject out of hand the suggestion that even texts of the past that matter in

principle must have some claim upon the present to merit our attention.

Of course, many of the arguments against the history of ideas are owed to a modern solipsism, and a philistine lack of interest in learning. Still, they point to a genuine difficulty. Some texts are more equal than others; and if we are not clear why that is so, then we shall have difficulty in accounting for our choice of books to read or to teach or to write about. There are truly original or brilliant works, obviously, for which we can argue from conventional first principles: your life is fuller when you have read Aristotle, Montaigne, Kant. In other cases we might claim that the influence of a particular theorist was once so considerable that his work merits our attention, even though we no longer find it

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