

Foreword by Andrew Nestingen

Denmark's (and for that matter Scandinavia's) most significant contributors to cinema have been enigmatic, multifaceted, and often peripatetic artists. Carl Th. Dreyer made films in Denmark, Norway, Germany, and France. After the premiere of *Day of Wrath* (*Vredens dag*, 1943), he pitched a remake of the film, "transplanted to an American milieu," to Louis B. Mayer of M.G.M. (see Wrigley 2015). While the remake never happened, perhaps it might be seen as one layer in the palimpsest of Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003), which reimagines *Day of Wrath*'s tortured woman (Rugg 2016) through the mythology of Hollywood. While von Trier famously has not gone to Hollywood, he has made films with international casts, including Hollywood stars, and Hollywood's myths and forms have long haunted his films. Dreyer and von Trier's Hollywood fixations have been realized by the woman who is arguably Denmark's most significant auteur of the twenty-first century, Susanne Bier. Yet as von Trier struggled, Bier became more prolific, made richer films, and received such recognition as an Academy Award, which she won for *In a Better World* (*Hævnen*, 2010). With Dreyer and von Trier she shares a body of work made in numerous countries, with multilingual casts and multinational financing. Moreover, she is a woman director who has made films, often focusing on traumatized, suffering men, in a male-centered industry. And despite her reputation for making melodramatic films, Bier revises and recombines genres to make films that are emotionally moving, aesthetically rich, and ethically thought-provoking. Despite her similarity to her cinematic colleagues, the many dimensions of her cinema, and her connections to and revisions of Scandinavian auteur cinema and its traditions, Bier has received scant attention from scholars.

ReFocus: The Films of Susanne Bier corrects this inattention by bringing

together a roster of film scholars that tease out the multiple and often contradictory dimensions of Bier's films: their shifting relationship to genre, Bier's identity as a filmmaker, her status as a film author, and the transnational character of the production and aesthetics of the films. The result is a rich introduction to her work and its contexts that will serve any reader interested in Bier's films.

The artists whose work matters most to us are those who give us language and form for the questions that trouble us. Bier's film career coincides with the move to a global, digitally interconnected age of people on the move, unprecedented flows of money, and complex historical interconnections. Bier's films depict her historical moment with deft and penetrating words, comedy and drama, arresting close-ups, and contradictory scenarios. In *After the Wedding* (*Efter brylluppet*, 2006), for instance, these contrasts intersect in the collision of the saturated oranges of Jacob's (Mads Mikkelsen) home in a Mumbai orphanage and the blues of his hotel room in Copenhagen. Each of the characters in the film has their motivations and their traumas, which launch them in conflicting trajectories. The film gives us language and image for our questions. What is my responsibility to others? Does my trauma give me license to use others to heal myself? How can we be moral in a world of criss-crossing moral systems? Engaging categories of gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, race, class, and generation, Bier's films put such questions to us in narratives and images that do not leave us.

ReFocus: The Films of Susanne Bier elaborates the history, aesthetics, and contexts of Bier's filmmaking. In so doing it offers the first book-length consideration of Bier's cinema, and why it matters. Bier's multidimensional films will continue to capture viewers' imaginations and emotions. This book provides readers and scholars interested in Bier with a rich entry into her cinema, and a smart companion in engaging the questions her films put to us.

WORKS CITED

- Rugg, Linda Haverty (2016), "A Tradition of Torturing Women," in Mette Hjort and Ursula Lindqvist, eds., *A Companion to Nordic Cinema*, Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, pp. 351–70.
- Wrigley, Nick (2015), Twitter post, February 6, 12.10 p.m., <<https://twitter.com/shittydeath/status/563791784334348288>>.