man...He never went near my backside." On the other, he is alive to the bisexual appeal of all great stars—the way they have to be attractive to both men and women. There is, he says, "plausible evidence to place [Grant] inside any sexual box you want—gay, bi, straight or any combination that might be expected from a solitary street kid with a street kid's sense of expedience." But whichever side you come down on, Eyman cautions, remember that "neither Archie Leach nor Cary Grant ever played on any team but his own."

He was certainly a tightwad. Both Glancy and Eyman offer chapter and verse on Grant's miserly antics—some of them so mean they might dent your pleasure the next time you sit down to watch his warm-hearted turns in *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) or *Gunga Din* (1939). Eye-opening to read that Grant clipped supermarket discount coupons and the buttons off old shirts. Shocking to learn that anyone staying more than a single night at his home was billed for laundry and phone usage. When Douglas Fairbanks Jr. asked Grant to help him throw a party for his (Fairbanks's) lover, Gertrude Lawrence, he ended up being invoiced for cigarettes, napkins, and "two rolls of toilet paper—twenty cents." As Mel Brooks, who worked in the office next to Grant's at Universal, and who was somehow inveigled into paying for Grant's lunch four days in a row, said, "Cary was such a *schnorrer*."

But he was an artist, too, with a keen eye for a good script or a bad set. In fact, so multifarious were the ways Grant imposed himself on even the least of his movies that you half expect Glancy and/or Eyman to call him an auteur. He effectively restructured the screenplay of the 1936 Jean Harlow vehicle *Suzy* (in which no less than Dorothy Parker had had a hand.) He rewrote the big speech that ends *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* (1948). He instructed the writer of *Charade* (1963), Peter Stone, that the whole point of a Cary Grant picture was that he didn't chase the ladies because the ladies chased him. On the set of *Father Goose* (1964), Grant taught Leslie Caron how to react to his punchlines: "Don't move...give 'em time to laugh." He was incisive on the visual side of movies, too. On *The Bishop's Wife* (1947) he reprimanded Henry Koster for not making a winter-set interior look frosty enough. And even before the cameras had begun rolling on *The Grass Is Greener* (1961) he was telling Christopher Challis—the veteran cinematographer of more than one Michael Powell picture—how to light him. (As one of Glancy's screen captures proves, Grant was always rightly worried about there being "no division between my jawbone and my neck.")

Grant's private life was rather less well organized. The tone was set at his first wedding, to *City Lights* (1931) starlet Virginia Cherrill, when, in an ominous screwball trope, the couple's taxi left the ceremony with the bride but not the groom. Grant married another four times, but was unhappy with every wife but his last, Barbara Harris (forty-seven years his junior and, perhaps not insignificantly, *not* an actress). The fourth marriage, to Dyan Cannon, brought him his only child, Jennifer, on whom the by now retired Grant doted ruefully as he decided that family and not fame was the real point of life.

Written in short, staccato sections which stay true to chronology while occasionally blurring the thematic drift, Scott Eyman's book echoes Grant's lumpy home life. Mark Glancy's biography is rather more seamlessly structured—an objective correlative for the silky Grant persona. Which book to choose? Frankly, you need them both.

Eyman is better on Hollywood gossip. *A Brilliant Disguise* is almost worth the price of admission for its footnote about Roland Young's hooker habit. And there's a lovely line from George Sanders who, apprised of David Niven and Larry Olivier's decision to return to England for the Second World War, said, "I admire your courage and all that, but *I'm* not going back because I'm a shit and I don't give a fuck who knows it!" But Eyman is a lot less certain on critical terrain. His suggestion that Kay Francis and Carole Lombard should have switched roles for *In Name Only* (1939) is well made, but it's also just about the only moment in the book when he acknowledges that what counts about Cary Grant are his movies.

If it's aesthetics you're after, Glancy, an academic at the Queen Mary University of London, is more your man. His suggestion that Grant's mention of his real name in 1940's *His Girl Friday* ("Listen, the the last man that said that to me was Archie Leach, just a week before he cut his throat") "did not break the fourth wall so much as treat the audience as a clever, knowing confidante" strikes me as muddled. Otherwise, his counsel is sage. He is right when he says that Alfred Hitchcock had a lot less to do with the creation of the Grant persona than Leo McCarey and Howard Hawks. He is right to argue that while the disastrous denouement RKO insisted on for *Suspicion* (1941) is a cop-out, "it is hard to imagine any satisfactory ending" for the movie. And as for his treatment of the Cole Porter 1946 biopic *Night and Day* (he reads it as a study of Grant's own private torments), it's so persuasive it almost had me watching Michael Curtiz's clunker again. Almost.

Talking of which, Jane Wyatt, who starred opposite him in *None But the Lonely Heart* (1944), remembers Grant telling her that "this is the first time on-screen that he's ever played himself." Well, you know what he means—even though seen today Clifford Odets's picture (which has a structure that exactly predicts that of the gloriously mindless *North by Northwest* [1959]) looks like the last word in melodramatic hooey. No matter. These two diligent and dense books take us as close to the real Grant as any standard-issue biography ever will.

Which isn't all that close. Eyman quotes John Mitchell, the soundman on *The Grass Is Greener*, recalling that whenever the camera was about to roll Grant would tell himself "I like me." He didn't, of course: liking oneself is a rare thing—but it's the key illusion all great stars somehow contrive to pull off. Bogart, Mitchum, Eastwood, Grant: they make you believe that, unlike you, they're comfortable in their own skin. "I always wanted to be Cary Grant," a close friend once told him. "So," said Cary Grant, "did I."—**Christopher Bray**

I Appeared to the Madonna

by Carmelo Bene, translated and with a preface by Carole Viers-Andronico. New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2020. 239 pp. Paperback: $20.00.

My Films with Carmelo Bene

by Mario Masini. A trilingual Italian, English, and French edition. Venice: Damocle Edizioni, 2020. 130 pp., illus. Paperback: €15.

Introducing Carmelo Bene (1937–2002) to some readers of *Cineaste* who may never have heard of him before could well constitute the greatest challenge of my writing life. Indeed, the task reminds me of a talk I once gave at a film conference on the irascible Lettrist artist/theorist (and self-proclaimed Messiah) Isidore Isou (1925–2007). After my wholly enthusiastic twenty-minute effort to talk up Isou and his many achievements, the chairperson opened discussion by drolly declaring, "Well, obviously, Isou was autistic." The conversation went downhill from there.

I shudder to imagine what that host would have made of Bene. Egomaniacal, a studied provocateur, politically incorrect beyond any known tabulation of correctness, hurling his hard-won pearls of artistic and philosophical wisdom in every forum from rarefied art festivals to popular TV chat shows, Bene militantly set himself against virtually everybody and everything. Only his very closest and most faithful collaborators—such as cinematographer Mario Masini —tell a different, warmer tale.

But I am already getting ahead of myself—a complication of the type that Bene savored and encouraged. Who was Carmelo Bene? He first came to notice, in his early twenties, as a stage actor in Italy during the late 1950s. Quickly taking over the reins of his career in the early Sixties, he became his own director and formed the first of several troupes that served him well (if sometimes reluctantly) during his lifetime—Bene was renowned for sleeping through the day and then driving his players through arduous rehearsals all night, even if they also had other, more normally timed obligations to fulfill.

Inspired by Antonin Artaud, Franz Kafka, and the Marquis de Sade—and meanwhile loathing every supposedly "spontaneous," hippie-ish effusion of theatrical experimentation of the era, such as Judith Malina and Julian Beck's Living Theatre—Bene developed a completely unpredictable form of "ritualistic" spectacle. It was busy, cluttered, baroque, seemingly chaotic, but rigorously controlled at the level of both action and sound (Bene was an innovator in the stage use of microphonic amplification and the playback of preconstituted soundscapes). As for the nominal content of these productions, Bene was postmodern way before his time: he often tackled a classic text of drama or opera—by Shakespeare, Verdi, and a host of others—but unfailingly pulverized it within a wild collage of several texts, whether of "low" or "high" cultural origin.

Why should *Cineaste* readers be interested in this guy? Because, between 1968 and 1973, Bene devoted himself body and soul to what he called his "cinematographic parenthesis," making five features and a twenty-five-minute short. Ultimately, having conceived a project (*Saint Joseph of Cupertino*) that demanded more elaborate and expensive special effects than he could independently whip up, Bene abruptly abandoned film and returned to the stage—as well as to TV (for which he created some of his finest pieces), musical performance and recording, and sundry other media adventures.

But the films remain—particularly for someone like myself who never had a chance to see him perform live—as the most vivid and condensed embodiment of everything Bene explored. And these films are, from top to bottom, among the most extraordinary works in cinema: I can truthfully testify that seeing a couple of them (on the job for *Cineaste* at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in 2009) literally changed my life. They made me feel that there was still something for me, for cinema, for all of us to aspire to: a very modern and material kind of ecstasy. Plus—in case this is not evident from anything else I'm saying here—his work is also richly funny.

Like his French philosopher pal Gilles Deleuze, Bene loved to invent concepts with catchy titles. No discussion of Bene is complete without a mention of the actorial machine (actor as machine), un-staging (as opposed to old-fashioned mise en scène), suspension of the tragic, and (my favorite) the succubus of the signifier. In more literal terms, these ideas resulted in spectacles (on stage or in film) where the sound of words is more important than their meaning (because "the oral is a gurgling cesspit"), where the simplest action (such as crossing the set to answer a telephone) is met by a dozen, all-consuming obstacles, and where actors often mime to their own voices in playback.

Bene detested the ideology of "clear communication" or "faithful translation" of a play or screenplay; he took it as his divine vocation

to incessantly drive wedges between a text and its performance, between the actor and his or her own acting, and between the eventual, produced result and the audience that was all too ready to "receive" and recuperate it.

If you are having trouble forming a mental picture of the stuff Bene made, head immediately to YouTube. There is an embarrassment of Bene riches there (many collected by the "Archivio CB" project), but I suggest you dial up any segment from his feature films *Our Lady of the Turks* (1968) and *Salomè* (1972) or his TV adaptation of *Hamlet* (*Amleto*, 1974); listen to his late Seventies excursion into popular song-collage on the variety programme *Domenica In*; and, if you can follow the Italian, watch him, later in life, roaring at the assembled crowd for Maurizio Costanzo's TV talk show.

Bene's art is indelibly tied to his own body and voice, and the extraordinary things he could do with them, but the pyrotechnics do not stop there. In league with editor Mauro Contini, he became a virtuoso of audiovisual montage keyed to a "surgical indiscipline" and a dazzling speed (Dziga Vertov was another of his all-time cultural heroes). It was through this extraordinary montage blitz that Bene achieved what his contemporaries, including Werner Schroeter (whom he liked) and Jean-Luc Godard (whom he didn't like), sought by other means: to make films where extravagant things happen all the time, but the totality never really moves forward in narrative terms. The drawn-out spectacle of Jesus Christ trying (unsuccessfully) to nail himself to the Cross in *Salomè* is the agonizing, blackly comic culmination of this quest.

How many people saw Bene's film work during his lifetime? It did not reside in "underground" circuits (despite a glowing mention in Amos Vogel's 1974 classic *Film as a Subversive Art*); Bene frequently decried "those gentlemen kiss-asses of the neo-avant-garde." Several of his features premiered—usually accompanied by some noisy controversy stirred by Bene in person—at the Cannes and Venice Film Festivals. But, from all available evidence, Bene did not fuss with anything resembling a conventional "theatrical release" for his films, in Italy or beyond. He made them, presented them with an initial public flourish, and then simply moved on. Screenings at cinéma-thèques or arts events in subsequent years were relatively rare, and it was a long time after their initial production that RaroVideo in Italy began making them available on DVD.

Although there have been some outstanding exegetes of Bene's work, particularly in Europe (Jean-Paul Manganaro, Piergiorgio Giacchè, Marc Siegel, Jacques Aumont), it is only now that significant material either by or about him is becoming available in English. (Bene, it should be noted, was also a dedicated writer, and his published works fill at least ten volumes.) It takes special devotion—as well as unwavering belief in Bene's genius—on the part of publishers, translators, and researchers to bring this work to fruition, and so I salute everybody behind the two books on review here, gathered under the umbrellas of Contra Mundum Press based in New York and Damocle Edizioni in Venice.

First, Bene's own book. No, it is not a garbled auto-translation of the title—there is nothing garbled in Carole Viers-Andronico's absolutely superb, inventive translation of Bene's highly experimental Italian, which must have posed innumerable difficulties. It's not *The Madonna Appeared to Me*, as in more conventional mystical experiences, but *I Appeared to the Madonna*. Bene's 1983 memoir, preceded by the related 1995 "An Autographical [sic] Portrait," is a sequence of lightning flashes that could be classified under the literary genre of "self-proclaimed genius." Bene lets us know as much on its first page. But let's put this unusual claim about appearing to the Madonna in its precise context.

Bene is looking back over an interval of only two years to a live performance event held in Bologna in 1981. On the anniversary of the "Bologna massacre," when terrorist bombs killed or wounded almost three hundred people, Bene climbed to a stage perched at the top of the Asinelli Tower and read—via a sound system built to his exacting specifications—a selection of Dante's verse. His audience on that night numbered a staggering 100,000 people! You need consult only a few seconds of the documentation of this event (YouTube to the rescue, once more) to instantly feel the hypnotic, chilling, and utterly captivating resonance of Bene's vocal performance. "Charisma" may seem an odd word to apply to someone who worked so hard at being a bad boy anti-star but, whatever charisma is, Bene oozed it.

He describes this undoubted theatrical triumph, however, in a paradoxical way: "Then I faded away...The sounds chased after one another above the rooftops, and the people's devout silence created an enchantment that made my fading away even more sweet...For a miracle to occur, you need to disappear in the saying." In a text that juggles both sacred and (very) profane images of the Madonna, Bene experiences, through his reading of Dante, a miracle of inversion: in disappearing, he changes places with the object of devotion. It's heady stuff, a species of delirious poetry that sometimes sits right at the edge of comprehensibility; but every chapter of *I Appeared to the Madonna* contains piercing, luminous gems of this sort.

If the splendid word braggadocio seems, at times, to have been invented expressly to describe Bene's intense level of self-tribute and his evident enjoyment at recounting the most scabrous episodes of his life, that thread of his book should not blind us to its deeper insights. Bene's text is strung between the poles of strident, even grotesque nihilism—an extended, scatological ode to reading on the toilet is a memorable highlight—and childlike flights of innocent fantasy, as when he recalls the truly formative experience of reading Shakespeare without yet understanding English ("words, sounds, wanderers by nature, like the stars above, arranged here and there in the sky..."). One could say that he strove to maintain himself, all his life, in this blissful state of never-quite-understanding. Who cares about Verdi or Shakespeare as supposedly great, canonical artists, he rhetorically asks, when "not even they were themselves"?

Mario Masini's *My Films with Carmelo Bene* offers a less grandiose but equally precious account of the director at work. Masini —who, as a cinematographer, has worked with everyone from the Taviani brothers in the Seventies to Alina Marazzi in recent years—collaborated closely with Bene on the indelible visual conception and execution of his films. Assembled from conversations with Carlo Alberto Petruzzi (who has also published an invaluable Bene Bibliography), Masini's recollections uncover valuable technical, logistical, artistic, and anecdotal aspects of Bene's cinematic exploits. His bad moods were, by all accounts, volcanic; as Masini politely remarks, "Filming with Carmelo was never very easy."

By the same token, he tells us that "working with Carmelo was amazing. It was all very extravagant, and there was never anything boring"—and that, somewhat surprisingly, "He was a very good person. He was affectionate and respectful with the people he worked with." Masini also corroborates my suspicion that Bene had a refreshing sense of humor: "Certain viewers wonder about the significance of a scene, looking for elaborate explanations, while I think a good laugh would be much more appropriate."

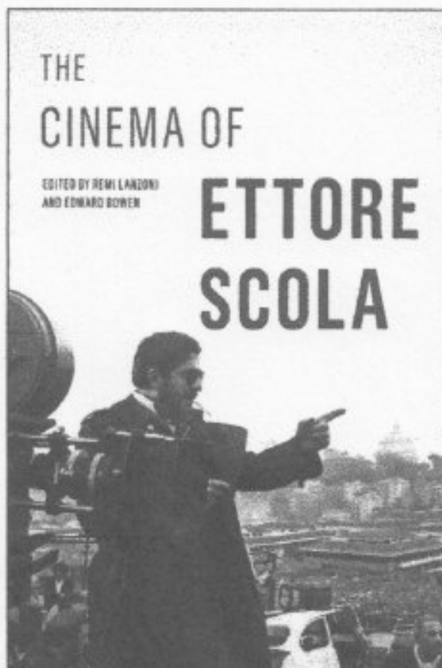
—**Adrian Martin**

The Cinema of Ettore Scola

Edited by Rémi Lanzoni and Edward Bowen. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2020. 315 pp., illus. Hardcover: $84.99 and Paperback: $36.99.

The first book-length study in English of director and screenwriter Ettore Scola (1931–2016), *The Cinema of Ettore Scola* is a handsome selection of essays by international authors, full of stimulating pathways toward expanding one's understanding of this humanist Italian political director with his roots in the *commedia all'italiana.* Covering a long career that included directing twenty-seven feature films in addition to documentaries, short films, and omnibus episodes, it is a collection of academic texts that thankfully make do with only a thin veneer of academy speak. Edited by Rémi Lanzoni of Wake Forest University and Edward Bowen at the University of Kansas, it should resuscitate interest in one of modern Italy's most important—and entertaining—cultural figures.

An active member of the Italian Communist Party who famously served as its "shadow minister" of culture, Scola was a mentor to Walter Veltroni, subsequently an Italian minister of culture, who sums up the man and his mission very well: "He had both the ability to make people laugh and the passion of a militant political thinker...He knew, at the highest level, how to tell the story of his country." Memorable films like *We All Loved Each Other So Much* (1974), *Down and Dirty* (1976), *A Special Day* (1977) and *La terrazza* (1980) put him at the forefront of pungent social comedy. Many of these films recombined ensemble casts of popular actors such as Marcello Mastroianni, Vittorio Gassman, Nino Manfredi, Alberto Sordi, Stefania Sandrelli, and Massimo Troisi. Yet, in the final decades of his career, disillusionment over cinema's ability to bring about cultural change diminished his appetite for fictional stories and pushed him toward innovative documentaries.



Though he spent most of his life in Rome, Scola was born in Trevico, a small hill town not far from Naples. The wheres and whens are important to mention, as many of the book's thirteen essays approach Scola's world vision and aesthetics by invoking space and history. They are particularly successful in inserting him into the landscape of his time, place, and fellows; in evoking his sense of learning from, and belonging to, a cultural community of filmmakers, as distinct from a younger generation of filmic orphans with their self-isolating sense of "authorship." In this context, writes Vito Zagarrio in his foreword, Scola's political commitment unfolded in the new era characterized by a crisis in ideologies and the disintegration of the left.

Although the essays come at their subject from different points of view, they end up talking to each other across the pages and interconnecting. In "Thinking with His Hands," Mariapia Comand examines Scola's "narrative intelligence as a screenwriter and compulsive illustrator." After threatening to hit the reader with a "neuroscientific, neuroaesthetic and empirical aesthetic approach," her essay instead offers a readable intro to the writer/director's early years. Working for the famous humor magazine *Marc'Aurelio* alongside other promising young talents such as Mario Monicelli and Federico Fellini, Scola transitioned from an apprenticeship as a cartoonist and joke writer to full-fledged scriptwriter. As Rémi Lanzoni writes regarding the *commedia all'italiana*, Scola's films in this period reflect the very real violence taking place in Italy during the dark *anni di piombo* (years of lead) through a satirical lens of grotesque humor—think Nino Manfredi's one-eyed beggar king in *Down and Dirty*. In another assessment, Francesca Borrione calls *Down and Dirty* "an ideal sequel to Pasolini's *Accattone*" and connects Scola's critique of the Italian intelligentsia with Pier Paolo Pasolini's.

During his long career, Scola wrote some eighty screenplays, including several for director Antonio Pietrangeli. One of their most memorable collaborations is the ironically titled *I Knew Her Well* (1965) starring Stefania Sandrelli as a misunderstood, free-spirited girl surrounded by exploitative misogynists. Fabrizio Cilento draws attention to how unusual the film's progressive representation of a woman was for its time. Linking Sandrelli's character to Anna Karenina and Emma Bovary, Command describes how Scola used women to talk about the social and culture changes in postwar Italy. Interestingly, Scola's first feature as a director was entitled *Let's Talk About Women* (1964.)