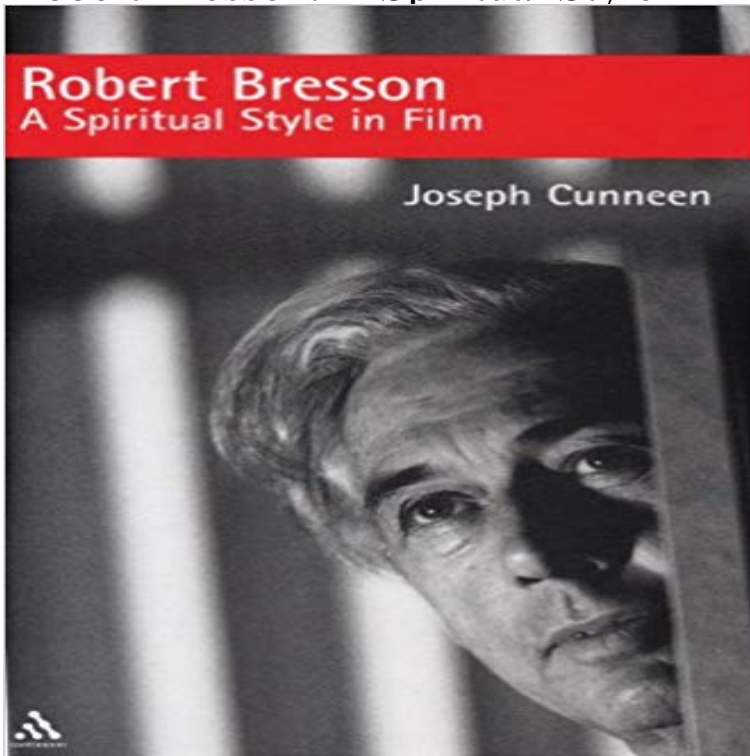


## Robert Bresson: A Spiritual Style in Film



Although Robert Bresson is widely regarded by movie critics and students of the cinema as one of the greatest directors of the twentieth century, his films are largely unknown and are rarely shown in the English-speaking world. Nonetheless, Susan Sontag has called Bresson the master of the reflective mode in film. The present book, which introduces Bresson's movies to a broader audience, assesses thirteen of his most significant films in the context of detailed plot summaries, vivid descriptions of characters and settings, and perceptive, jargon-free insights into the director's execution, intention, and technique. Among these films, made between 1943 and 1983, are *Diary of a Country Priest*, *A Man Escaped*, *Pickpocket*, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, *Au Hasard Balthazar*, *Mouchette*, *A Gentle Woman*, *Lancelot of the Lake*, and *L'Argent*. Each of these films in its own way illustrates what Joseph Cunneen calls Bresson's spiritual style. Though not necessarily focused on the explicitly religious, they illustrate two complementary principles: on the negative side, the rejection of what the director called photographed theater with its artificiality and dependence on celebrity performers. On the more positive side, as Bresson himself expressed it, the conviction that, The supernatural is only the real rendered more precise; real things seen close up. Being equally adamant about both these principles, he often had difficulty getting financial backing, and this in turn resulted in his having to abandon his long-cherished hope of making a movie on the biblical book of Genesis. Nevertheless, because of these firmly held principles, Martin Scorsese suggested that a young filmmaker should ask: Is it as tough as Bresson?... Is [meaning] as ruthlessly pared down, as direct, as unflinching in its gaze at aspects of life I might feel more comfortable ignoring? Questions that every reader of

this book and every viewer of Bressons films will also ask.

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