Directed and written by Victor Sjöström
Based on the novel by Selma Lagerlöf
Produced by Charles Magnusson
Cinematography by Julius Jaenzon

Victor Sjöström...David Holm
Hilda Borgström...Mrs. Holm
Tore Svenberg...Georges
Astrid Holm...Edit
Concordia Seland...Edit's Mother
Lisa Lundholm...Maria
Tor Weijden...Gustafsson
Einar Axelsson...David's Brother
Olof Ås...Driver


LISA LUNDHOLM (b. 1895) appeared in only two films: 1955 Smiles of a Summer Night and 1921 The Phantom Carriage.

TOR WEIDEN (January 6, 1890, Stockholm, Stockholms län,
Sjöström—THE PHANTOM CARRIAGE—3

joined this exodus in 1880, arriving in New York when he was seven months old.

Most of the emigrants went on to farm in Minnesota, but the Sjöströms remained in Brooklyn, where they ran a small boardinghouse. Elisabeth Sjöström died a few years later and her husband soon remarried. He was a religious bigot and a domestic tyrant who had made his son’s early childhood wretchedly unhappy; there was conflict with the new stepmother as well. At the age of seven, Victor Sjöström was shipped back to live with an aunt and uncle at Uppsala, the university town north of Stockholm. He was educated there, but not at the university. Like his mother, his uncle Victor was an actor, then employed at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm. Enraptured by an exciting new world remote from the dour Puritanism of his early years, Sjöström plunged into amateur theatricals at the age of fourteen and three years later, in 1896, joined a theatre company touring Finland.

Sjöström was married for the first time around 1900 to Sascha Stagoff, an actress of Russian descent who died a few years later. Between 1900 and 1911 he became well known in both Sweden and Finland as an actor of exceptional power and intensity and—with his long, sensitive face and sad eyes—something of a matinee idol. He also traveled abroad, visiting theatres in Paris, London, and Berlin. For a time he was a director at the Royal Theatre, Copenhagen, and it was there that he met his second wife, Lili Bech. Sjöström’s interests turned increasingly to production, and in 1911, with Einar Fröberg, he established his own theatre company in Malmö, in southern Sweden.

By this time, the Swedish film industry was gaining strength, led by the Svenska Bio company under its able production manager Charles Magnusson. He had joined the company in 1909, initiating a policy of filming adaptations of popular classics using actors and directors already established in the theatre. The movies were still regarded as a vulgar and probably pernicious form of entertainment, but a few films of real quality were beginning to appear in Sweden, especially after Svenska Bio added the brilliant cameraman Julius Jaenzon to its staff in 1911.

Sjöström joined Svenska Bio in June 1912, when he was thirty-two—a few months after another Magnusson discovery, Maurice Stiller, soon to become a close friend. “The thing that brought me to filmmaking,” Sjöström said, “was a youthful desire for adventure and a curiosity to try this new medium of which I then did not have the slightest knowledge.” Looking back, long after at his beginnings in the cinema, he said, “I am sure that it did not for a moment occur to Stiller or to me that those days we were doing something that would be remembered or talked about years later. We happened to enter the job at a lucky time.”

It was as an actor that Sjöström made his film debut, appearing in Paul Garvagny’s I livets var in 1912. The same year he had the lead roles in two movies directed by Stiller, De svarta maskernas (The Black Masks) and Vampyren (The Vampire), as well as the first film he himself directed, Trädgardsmästaren (The Gardener), scripted by Stiller. Nothing seems to be known about this picture except that it also featured Sjöström’s wife, Lili Bech and “Sweden’s John Barrymore,” Gösta Ekman, and that (according to the director himself) it was banned by the Swedish censors and never released.


VICTOR SJÖSTROM From World Film Directors, Vol. I. Edited by John Wakeman. H. W. Wilson Co., NY, 1987 (September 20, 1879—January 3, 1960), Swedish director, scenarist, and actor, was born in Silbodal, a small rural community in the central Swedish province of Värmland. He was the son of Olof Sjöström, a farmer, and the former Elisabeth Hartman, who had been an actress.

The conditions into which Sjöström was born were markedly similar to those evoked in Jan Troell’s film Utvandrarna (The Emigrants, 1970), about the homesteaders and tenant farmers of Smaland, a heavily forested region much like Värmland. The desperate hardships involved in wresting a livelihood from a small farm on poor soil led in the mid-nineteenth century to a great exodus in which thousands of homesteaders emigrated to the United States. Sjöström’s family

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Peter Cowie says that as an actor Sjöström “was as intrepid as Fairbanks or Flynn, which the [same] capacity for suggesting nobility, dignity, and emotional stress.” He continued to work as an actor for Svenska Bio, usually in his own films or Stiller’s, but devoted himself increasingly to direction, turning out an average of eight films a year between 1912 and 1916. Most of them were three-reelers—the commonest length for features at that time—but some were as long as modern features, like Sjöström’s first notable work, *Ingeborg Holm* (1913).

Adapted by the director from a play by Nils Kroos (itself based on an actual case), this was a tense social drama about a woman (Hilda Borgström) who, after her husband dies, is confined to a poorhouse while her children are auctioned off to speculators in forced labor. Hearing that her daughter is ill, she escapes from the poorhouse to help her but is caught by the police and returned, white-haired and insane with grief, cradling a piece of wood as if it were her baby. There is an unconvincing happy ending—a bow to the conventions of the time—but otherwise this early movie shows a scrupulous concern for detailed authenticity, including some scenes shot on location. The stark photography (by Julius Jaenzon’s brother Henrik) intensifies the force of this savage indictment of the barbaric poor laws of the time.

A critical and financial success, *Ingeborg Holm* was greeted as the first Swedish film with any real claim to artistic merit. It is also the only one of Sjöström’s early movies to have survived. The rest—like other Swedish films of the period—were mostly trite melodramas or thrillers, interspersed with occasional comedies. Though his material was often banal, Sjöström’s early work is said to have been distinguished by a gift for characterization and “his way of using sets and landscapes with an absolute stylistic economy.” Unlike most of his contemporaries, he filmed on location whenever he could—for example in *Halvblod* (*Halfbreed*, 1913), a “Western” shot in the forest near Stockholm, and in *Miraklet* (*The Miracle*, 1913), a medieval drama based on Zola’s *Lourdes* and filmed at the ruins of Visby in Gotland.

In 1916 Charles Magnusson asked Sjöström to make a film based on Ibsen’s epic poem *Terje Vigen*. The director at first refused this assignment, arguing that there was no place for a serious work of literature in the show-business atmosphere of the contemporary film industry. He was in fact at a low point in his career, demoralized by the vulgar rubbish that occupied his days at Svenska Bio and bruised by the failure of his second marriage. That summer he went on a bicycle tour of his birthplace near the Norwegian border, searching for his roots in that inhospitable landscape. An old nurse’s memories of his mother awoke his regard and admiration for her and renewed his sense of himself. Continuing his journey down the southern Norwegian coasts, he came to Grimstad and Terje Vigen’s rocky islands. Sjöström experienced a kind of epiphany there, from which he developed the almost pantheistic feeling for landscape and nature that infuses his mature work. He cabled Magnusson that he would film *Terje Vigen* and shooting began in August 1916.

The poem was adapted by Gusaf Molander (verses from it being retained as titles) and photographed by Julius Jaenzon—not at Grimstad but more economically on the rocky coast near Stockholm. The Norwegian actor cast as Vigen accepted another assignment and Sjöström decided to play the part himself. The film is set during the Napoleonic Wars. Terje Vigen is a Norwegian fisherman who runs the British blockade to secure food for his family until he is captured by a British frigate and imprisoned. Released after the war, he finds that his wife and baby have died of starvation. With nothing left but hatred, he retires to a lonely island. One day he rouses himself from his dreams of revenge to rescue the crew of a small boat that is foundering in a storm. In the boat is the English captain who had captured him years before. Terje Vigen is tempted to let him drown, but the sight of the officer’s wife with a baby in her arms reawakens his humanity. He relents, and his obsession with revenge ebbs away.

Einar Lauritzen wrote that in *Terje Vigen* “that peculiar juxtaposition of man and nature that was to be the hallmark of the ‘Swedish school’” was for the first time fully evident. Peter Cowie agrees, saying that here, “for the first time in the cinema, the natural background reflects the struggles between the characters and within themselves….The film is swept along by the feeling for landscape and atmosphere, by the almost prehensile attacks of the sea, and by that brilliantly syncopated editing which is at its most impressive in the scene where Terje’s real foe and there is a magnificent back view of Sjöström shaking his fist at the boiling waves. This defiance in the face of nature runs through the best Swedish films.”

Released in 1917, *Terje Vigen* became a major international success, screened and admired in the United States, Latin America, India, Japan, China, and all over Europe. And Sjöström’s next picture confirmed that Swedish cinema had matured into a serious threat to Hollywood’s domination of world screens. This was *Berg-Evjind och hans hustru* (*The Outlaw and His Wife*, 1918), based on a play by Johan Sigurjunsson in which Sjöström had scored one of his greatest successes as a stage actor. He recreated the part for the screen and himself wrote the adaptation, in collaboration with Sam Ask. The heroine was played by Edith Arastoff, who had appeared as the British officer’s wife in *Terje Vigen* and who became Sjöström’s third wife in 1922, beginning a happy marriage that lasted until his death. The film was shot partly in the studio and partly in the mountains of northern Sweden, with further exterior camerawork by Julius Jaenzon in Iceland.
Like Terje Vigen, Berg-Evind is a man of iron integrity who does what he believes is right and is punished for it by an unjust society: in nineteenth-century Iceland, he steals a sheep to feed his family and is imprisoned. Escaping, he finds works on a farm belonging to Halla (Arastoff), a rich young widow. They fall deeply and passionately in love, and when Berg-Evind is forced to flee to the mountains, she joins him there, abandoning her estates. In that magnificent landscape they share a few years of ecstatic happiness, and a child is born. They are betrayed. Driven higher into the mountains, with time and hope running out, they kill their little daughter—casting her from a precipice almost as a propitiatory sacrifice to the gods of nature (or perhaps to conventional morality). In the end, exhausted and starving, they die together in the snow: nature gives and nature takes away.

_The Outlaw_ has two central themes: Hall’s belief that “love is the one and only law”; and Berg-Evind’s stoic recognition that “no man can escape his fate, though he run faster than the wind.” The second theme in particular is deeply embedded in Scandinavian literature, all the way back to the sagas, with their stories of men and women who intransigently offend the old gods of nature and pay the penalty. This fatalism pervades Sjöström’s most deeply felt work, along with his belief that “human love…is the only answer to fling in the face of a cruel…nature.” Both themes recur in the products of the “Swedish school” of cinema that Sjöström fathered, as they still do in the work of Ingmar Bergman.

The film’s success exceeded even that of _Terje Vigen_. It was praised for its acting and above all for its photography. One critic wrote that “particularly in the scene at the sheepfold with its snow and subtle night-lighting, its sense of silence and desperation, Sjöström created effects not found outside the work of Griffith, yet more sophisticated and complex than anything even he had done.” Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brassilach called it “an important event in the history of cinema art. Perhaps the most important since 1895, because here for the first time a film consciously invaded the domain of art.” And for Louis Delluc it was simply “the most beautiful film in the world….directed with a dignity that is beyond words….It is the first love duet heard in the cinema. A duet that comprises all life.”

_Tösen fran Stormyrtorpet (The Girl From Stormy Croft)_ is Sjöström’s next picture, was released in September 1917, a few months before _The Outlaw_. This rustic drama was the first of his adaptations from the novels of Selma Lagerlöf, who had assigned the screen rights to her books to Svenska Bio partly on account of her admiration for Sjöström. Later to become the first woman to receive the Nobel Prize, Lagerlöf was, like Sjöström, a native of Värmland. Many of her voluminous novels were inspired by the legends and folktales of the province and by her conception of nature as an active force in the destiny of her characters, torn as they are, between good and evil.

The girl from Stormy Croft is Helga (Greta Almroth), who lives in poverty in a wretchedly overcrowded mountain hut. Scorned as the mother of an illegitimate child, she is taken in as a servant by Gudmund (Lars Hanson), a landowner’s son in the rich valley below. This angers Gudmund’s fiancée (Karin Molander) and her magistrate father. After a brawl in the local tavern, Gudmund finds himself facing a murder charge and the elaborate wedding preparations are called off. It is Helga who, with selfless devotion, proves his innocence and wins his love and the respect of the community.

Once again, landscape is used with a subtlety and symbolic weight unequalled by Sjöström’s contemporaries, and the film also provides a convincing and detailed study of an unfamiliar society. Regarded by contemporary reviewers as a minor piece. This was more recently described by Thomas Milne as “a deceptively simple, low-key film infused by a quiet lyricism….It has its melodramatic flaws…but still manages to astonish by its psychological accuracy and emotional subtlety…full of delicate nuances and exquisitely underplayed.” Writing in Richard Roud’s _Cinema: A Critical Dictionary_ (1980), Milne in fact states an extremely unconventional and interesting view of Sjöström’s work as a whole. The received opinion, as he says, is more or less that voiced (in French) by René Jeanne and Charles Ford in their 1963 monograph on Sjöström: “After painting a depressing view of Sjöström and his work as slow, somber and impeccably sincere, they define his dominant themes as ‘redemption by Nature, the purification of souls by vast natural phenomena,’” dismissing as minor or misguided films that do not fit these preconceptions. Milne, on the contrary, tends to reserve his warmest praise for precisely those works that escaped the adulation of the director’s contemporaries, and to denigrate the established masterpieces. Thus, for him, _The Outlaw and His Wife_ is not “the most beautiful film in the world,” but “a tempestuous melodrama…in which all the attention is lavished on the majestic, inimical landscapes”—a movie as “monumental but hollow” as the three Lagerlöf adaptations that followed between 1919 and 1921.

The first of these was _Ingmarsönerna (The Sons of Ingmar)_ released in two parts in 1919. This massive and ponderous family saga, shot partly on location in Jerusalem, and largely an exercise in social realism, also reflects something of Lagerlöf’s fondness for the supernatural—notably in the famous scene in which Ingmar climbs an enormous ladder to Heaven to seek the advice of his ancestors. Though modern critics find the film lacking in the emotional intensity of _Terje Vigen_ or _The Outlaw_, it was an immense commercial success in 1919, enabling Charles Magnusson to build new studios and amalgamate Svenska Bio with its principal rival to form Svensk Filmland, still the largest Swedish production company.

The Ingmar saga continued in _Karin Ingmarsdotter (Karin, Daughter of Ingmar, 1920)_ Sjöström’s first film for the new company. This was followed by the most famous of the
Lagerlöf adaptations, Körkarlen (The Phantom Carriage/Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness/Clay), made in 1920 and released in 1921. It begins on New Year’s Eve, with a dying Salvation Army nurse sending for the alcoholic David Holm (Sjöström) so that she can make one last attempt to return him to his penniless wife and children. David is at the time drinking with his cronies in a cemetery, where in a drunken squabble he is knocked out, apparently dead. According to legend, a man who dies at midnight on New Year’s Eve must drive the phantom carriage for a year, collecting the souls of the dead. A long flashback shows us how David has fallen from grace, tempted by his boon companion Georg (Tore Svennberg), now himself deceased. It is Georg who has been driving the phantom carriage and he now delivers it to David. But the latter is only unconscious and, recovering, hurries home in time to save his family from communal suicide.

“Sjöström plays David Holm with dazzling ease and without any make-up,” writes Peter Cowie; here he retains the control that he sometimes lost as an actor, ranging “from cynicism and wry humour to moments of agony and bewilderment….But The Phantom Carriage derives its originality from from the luminous, double exposure photography of Julius Jaenzon. The construction of flashbacks is highly complex. And in fact about four-fifths of the film takes place in the cemetery itself. Occasionally, as many as four images are superimposed in one frame….The images of a carriage moving over the waves, or silhouetted….against a twilight sky, carry a highly charged appeal to the imagination….The phantasmic scenes are even more credible because they are placed at intervals between the often brutally realistic incidents. ..[of] daily life.”

It seemed to Léon Moussinac that Sjöström had “attained an encompassing lyricism, unknown until now on the screen: tragic stillness, noble and potent serenity of some scenes. Though he tries to hypnotize us with the tragic dream of his Phantom Carriage….he never fails to draw out the gentle pervasive force of familial intimacy and of the nuances of feelings externalized through a gesture or an illuminated expression. His films are for the most part freely elaborated etchings.” Greeted as a masterpiece in 1920, the film, as Cowie says, has not endured as well as some of Sjöström’s earlier work—perhaps because its advances were technical rather than psychological.” There have been two inferior remakes of The Phantom Carriage—by Julien Duvivier In 1938 and by Arne Mattsson in 1958.

But while Sjöström was trudging through his massive series of Lagerlöf adaptations, he was also producing other works of a quite different nature. Hans nads testament (His Lordship’s Last Will, 1919), scripted by Hjalmar Bergman from his own play, is an eccentric comedy about an old aristocrat (Karl Mantzius) who, having discovered the vanity of all human endeavor, desires to pass what remains of his life in absolute indolence, undisturbed by any kind of activity whatever, anywhere in his domain. He nevertheless manages to settle his

inheritance to the benefit of two young lovers “without actually doing anything about it.”

The conventional view is that, of the two masters of the Swedish silent cinema, Stiller was the exponent of comedy, Sjöström the somber intellectual (who, as an actor, achieved some memorable comic performances, thanks mainly to Stiller’s direction). Tom Milne allows that Sjöström may well have been profoundly serious by temperament, but maintains that he could match Stiller as a director of comedy when he chose to try. Milne writes that “few films of the period could rival the airy grace with which His Lordship’s Last Will opens. A shot of a stately mansion. Pan down to a shabby tramp sleeping in the sunshine outside the gates. Cut to a farm labourer and a bevy of pigs happily blending their snores in the courtyard. Cut inside to a kitchen where the butler and his staff doze with their heads on a table while a cuckoo clock vainly chimes the hour.”

Milne goes on: “With a lazy wit oddly reminiscent of the Renoir of Boudu sauvé des eaux, Sjöström uses thus opening sequence not only to establish an unusually precise picture of the geographical layout of the house, but to adumbrate his theme…Aided by a performance of marvelous fantasy by Karl Mantzius…Sjöström scarcely puts a foot wrong in elaborating an exquisitely funny and touching comic fable out of this story of a sleeping beauty who stubbornly resists the world’s efforts to free him from a self-imposed spell.”

Mästerman (Master Samuel, 1920). Also scripted by Sjöström’s friend Hjalmar Bergman, is another comedy—a “wonderfully funny and touching” original story about a fearsome old moneylender (played by the director) whose hard heart is melted by a young woman (Concordia Selander) whom he rashly accepts as a debtor’s pledge. At the same time, Sjöström was exploring a Gothic vein in Klosteret I Sendomir (The Monastery of Sendomir, 1920), adapted by himself from a novel by Franz Grillparzer. A “lurid tale of marital deceit and revenge” full of chiaroscuro lighting effects, flickering candles, and deceitful mirrors, it impressed Carl Dreyer above all because of the skill with which Sjöström had given expression to mental suffering.

Vem Dömer (Love’s Crucible), made in 1920 but not released until 1922, is another story of marital infidelity, set this time in Renaissance Florence, and photographed by Julius Jaenzon with a “glowing opulence” inspired by the paintings of the period. It ends with a spectacular scene in which the wife accused of poisoning her husband, undergoes a terrifying trial by fire amid “a crowd of black shadows” and drifting smoke. By this time, indeed, Sjöström—influcted perhaps by the example of Mauritz Stiller—was showing greater willingness to entertain his audiences with exciting set-pieces, and to spare them tedium by accelerating the pace of his editing.

All the same, Hans Pensel describes Love’s Crucible as “an unusually beautiful but otherwise fairly empty picture,” and there is a general feeling that Sjöström’s last Swedish pictures showed a decline in vitality and confidence that reflected the
condition of the industry as a whole. “During World War I,” Pensel says, “neutral Sweden experienced a boom in its film production, supplying paralyzed Europe with pictures. After the war, both the USA and the Continent were increasing their production... and the market for artistic Swedish film fell off badly... Svensk Filmindustri made desperate efforts to produce pictures with international appeal.” Sjöström’s last silent Swedish films... are all examples of this effort.”

Beginning with Love’s Crucible, Pensel goes on, “these films were all set in a foreign milieu and many parts were played by foreign actors. It is also significant that all were studio films and not made on outdoor locations.” Det omringade huset (The Surrounded House, 1922) is a routine story about a party of British soldiers in the African desert, featuring the English actor Matheson Lang. Eld ombord (The Tragic Ship, 1923) is an equally conventional drama. Combining a shipwreck story and a love triangle, in which Sjöström “loses the heroine to Matheson Lang in order to please the English audience.”

In 1931 in an article called “Sweden and Sjöström,” C.A. Lejeune wrote that “ten years ago Sweden was to the screen what Russia is today. It was first in intelligence, first in force, first in imaginative zeal... Watching those old Swedish pictures, we used to feel almost under our fingers the texture of the velvets, the stains, the lace... The candlelight too, the pale sunlight, the shadows, were rich in an almost tangible quality; we felt the light as a physical experience... The old personification of the elements has never quite left the Scandanavian mind, and wind, wood, water is still alive; light and darkness are still elementals.” For her, Sjöström would “always stand as the classic representative of Sweden in the cinema,” and the decline in that cinema began when first Sjöström and then Stiller left for Hollywood.

Ironically enough, it was in 1922, when Svensk Filmindustri was fighting for its life and Sjöström’s own work had begun to falter, that he was “discovered” in the United States. It was then that The Phantom Carriage reached America and that The Girl From Stormy Croft (then five years old) was voted the best foreign film of the year. In December 1922 Sjöström signed a contract with Goldwyn Pictures in which, among other things, he agreed to sign himself Victor Seastrom. In return, he was granted quite exceptional privileges, including the right to choose his own scripts.

Sjöström arrived in Hollywood with his wife and two daughters in February 1923. He had hoped to interest Goldwyn in an Ibsen adaptation; instead he was offered novels by Elinor Glyn. Finally, in desperation, he chose as his first script a melodramatic novel by Hall Caine, adapted by Paul Bern as Name the Man (1924). It is a courtroom drama involving an unmarried mother (Mae Busch) who happens to be the mistress of a judge (Conrad Nagel). In the United States, Name the Man was a success, both critically and financially; perhaps predictably, it was less warmly received by Swedish reviewers, one of whom found it “badly composed and unartistic to a high degree, revealing that Sjöström had worked without joy or interest.”

In the spring of 1924, when Goldwyn Pictures became Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the new company’s first picture was assigned to Victor Sjörström. This time, thanks to MGM’s brilliant young production chief Irving Thalberg, the director was given a farm more sympathetic project than his first—an adaptation of Leonid Andreyev’s nihilistic play He Who Gets Slapped. Sjöström wrote the adaptation himself, in collaboration with Carey Wilson and, with Thalberg as his producer, worked quite without studio interference. The only difficulty he reported was in persuading MGM technicians not to drench every scene with brilliant and unmodified lighting. Filming was completed within a month, at the low cost of $140,000.

As adapted, the movie tells the story of a dedicated scientist (Lon Chaney) whose false friend steals not only his wife but the fruit of a lifetime’s research. In a moment of absolute disillusionment, it comes to him that is only possible future is as a clown—the personification of humiliation and ridicule. “The moment, brilliantly enacted by Lon Chaney, is also brilliantly realized by Sjöström,” wrote Tom Milne; “as the scientist sinks down in despair at his cluttered desk, he accidentally knocks over a globe of the world that rolls away to become a ball spinning on the fingertip of a grimy, white-faced clown, which in turn becomes a huge globe with a horde of tiny clowns clambering down invisible ropes to perch on its horizontal band, which, in a final metamorphosis, becomes a circus ring with a troupe of clowns watching a rehearsal.”

In the circus, the sad hero falls in love with a beautiful bareback rider (Norma Shearer). Renouncing any hope of claiming her for himself, he rescues her from the attentions of an evil aristocrat, facilitates her happy marriage (to John Gilbert), and is murdered for his pains—though not before he has set the lions on the disgusting baron.

He who Gets Slapped opened in November 1924 at the Capitol Theatre in New York, accompanied by a big stage show and much ballyhoo. It was an enormous financial success, breaking a whole series of box-office records. The critical reception was equally positive, and not only in the United States, where the New York Times reviewer found in it “the genius of a Chaplin or a Lubitsch, and called it “the most flawless picture we have ever seen.” The Swedish critic Bengt Idestam-Almquist concluded that it and The Phantom Charriot were Sjöström’s best films to date.” The director’s use of light and shade was universally admired, and so was the acting. The movie launched Norma Shearer’s career and confirmed Chaney’s status as a major star.

In spite of its melodramatic plot, He Who Gets Slapped has stood up remarkably well to the test of time. It is said to
show a greater concern for narrative and characterization than Sjöström’s Swedish films, and a “new grace.” Tom Milne regards it as “one of Sjöström’s most daringly inventive films…In its acute masochism, expressionism blending neatly into the horror film ethos, *He Who Gets Slapped* is sui generis in Sjöström’s work. A blood brother here to the Tod Browning of *The Unknown*, Sjöström visualizes the clown’s searing pain as a series of stark black-and-white contrasts radiating from the astonishing moment when, as he broods alone in the ring, the spotlight is switched out on him, leaving his chalk-white face as a tiny balloon suspended in a sea of darkness where it gradually vanishes, leaving emptiness.”

After this piece of “expressionistic sophistication” came *Confessions of a Queen* (1925), an opulent costume romance ruined by a weak script, and then *The Tower of Lies* (1925), which recruited Lon Chaney and Norma Shearer. Adapted from one of Selma Lagerlöf’s best-known novels, the latter is a film very much in the manner of Sjöström’s Swedish pictures. Chaney plays a peasant driven to madness by the discovery that his beloved daughter has become a prostitute in the evil city. Filmed on location in California, this was in its day one of the most admired of Sjöström’s American movies, praised above all for its psychological penetration.

And the director had even greater success with a radically truncated adaptation on Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novel about adultery and intolerance in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, *The Scarlet Letter*. It was Lillian Gish, then one of MGM’s greatest stars, who sold this production to the studio, calming Mayer’s anxiety about her daring project by canvassing the support of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ. Thalberg selected Sjöström as director, and Gish was delighted by his Scandinavian thoroughness and the restrained acting style he demanded, calling him the finest director she had ever worked with. Sjöström devoted a year and a half to this film, some of which was shot on location in New England. Released in August 1926, it earned critical superlatives for its authenticity of detail and atmosphere, and for the excellence of Gish’s performance as Hester Prynne.

The Puritan pastor Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter* was played by the Swedish actor Lars Hanson, who in Sjöström’s next film was cast opposite the most famous of Hollywood’s Swedish immigrants, Greta Garbo. It is said that all three “felt as if they were working back in Stockholm again.” *The Divine Woman* (1928) was very loosely based on a play about incidents in the early career of Sarah Bernhardt. Rather coolly received by contemporary reviewers, it was nevertheless another box-office success and is now (as Richard Roud says) among the more interesting of Hollywood’s “lost “films.

Lillian Gish’s second film for Sjöström is generally regarded as the greatest of his American films, *The Wind* (1928). Adapted from a novel by Dorothy Scarboough, it centers on a repressed and fastidious young Southern belle who goes to live with her cousin and his wife in Texas. The coarseness, dirt and ugliness of pioneer life reduce her to a state of almost unbearable revulsion, and the endless wind drives her to the edge of insanity. And there is worse to come. Forced into a marriage of convenience with a clumsy but goodhearted cowboy (Lars Hanson) whom she despises, she welcomes during his absence an ingratiating stranger in whom she sees hope of deliverance. The man is a rapist, and in defending herself she kills him.

The exterior shooting was done in the Mojave Desert under such dreadful conditions that Gish found it easy “to enter into the state of the character I play.” But the result justified the suffering of the cast and crew. “Illusions are literally swept away by the eternally raging wind, buried under the choking drifts of sand that creep into every crevice of the soul,” wrote To, Milne. “And in the final magnificent sequence where Letty watches in terror as the wind gradually erodes the grave to expose the dead hand of the stranger she accidentally killed and tried to bury, her hallucinated terror materializes in the form of a white stallion…who rides the duststorm like a beautiful, haunting omen of doom. Here Sjöström blends fact and fantasy so completely that the West itself…becomes a towering poetic image.”

*The Wind* reminded Peter Cowie of the Westerns of John Ford and of Stroheim’s *Greed*, but he also found “an undeniably Scandinavian character in this masterpiece of the Twenties,” with its characters drifting at the mercy of their environment. It was reportedly the studio that insisted on the happy ending, in which the trauma of the rape and killing exercises Letty’s fear of the elements, allowing her to adjust to her new environment and to recognize her husband’s simple goodness… Some but not all critics thought the film weakened by this conclusion; most agreed that Lillian Gish’s performance was the most powerfully dramatic of her career.

After filming * Masks of the Devil* (1928), an unexceptional variation on the Dorian Gray theme, Sjöström returned to Sweden to be at the deathbed of his great friend Mauritz Stiller. Back in Hollywood, he made his first talkie, *A Lady to Love* (1930), based on Sidney Howard’s play *They Knew What They Wanted*, a routine comedy about a mail-order bride. After that Sjöström made another visit to Sweden. He intended a temporary stay, but, once there, decided to remain.

It is not entirely clear why Sjöström abandoned his Hollywood career, which had been so much more successful than Stiller’s. Some critics maintain that he had been unhappy at MGM, and that his grappling with commercial texts like *Name the Man and Confessions of a Queen* had damaged him as an artist. C.A. Lejeune thought that “Sjöström, on leaving Sweden, has ceased to be Sjöström,” and Andrew Sarris wrote much later that it was “as if when Sjöström left Sweden, his artistic soul couldn’t breathe. There was not enough air on the Hollywood sound-stages.” But in a letter to Lillian Gish the director himself
Peter Cowie writes that “Victor Sjöström is one of that small band of directors... who have led the cinema into altogether fresh channels. No filmmaker before Sjöström integrated landscape so fundamentally into his work or conceived of nature as a mystical as well as a physical force in terms of film language.” Hans Penser calls him “the first important intellectual of the screen,” who “showed that an exciting film can be created by revealing what goes on in the human mind and heart.” And Andrew Sarris thinks it possible that he “was the world’s first great director, even before Chaplin and Griffith.”

Victor Sjöström 1879-1960
(Victor Sjöström : his life and his work, translated by Peter Cowie with the assistance of Anna-Majja Marttinen and Christer Frunck) (New York: New York Zoetrope, 1988)

...In 1919 Svenska Bio, where Sjöström had been employed since 1912, merged with Filmindustri AB Skandia to form a new company, Svensk Filmindustri. A year later the new studios at Råsunda, just outside Stockholm, were completed. The first project for the new company was Victor Sjöström's magnum opus The Phantom Carriage, based on Selma Lagerlöf's 1912 novel. Although not regarded as one of Lagerlöf's best works, the novel's theme of conversion and moral struggle fascinated Sjöström, and the supernatural elements has a special appeal to the cinematographer Julius Jaenzon, who relished the chance to experiment with special effects. In technical terms the film set new standards and was an all-round success. Ingmar Bergman, who wrote the play Bildmakarna about the reception of the film, still regularly watches The Phantom Carriage every summer at his private cinema on Fårö: "My relationship with The Phantom Carriage is very special. I was fifteen year old when I saw it for the first time. [...] I remember it as one of the major emotional and artistic experiences of my life."

...Between 1939 and 1943 Sjöström worked almost exclusively in the theatre, but in 1942-43 he was called back to Svensk Filmindustri by the new head of the company Carl Anders Dymling, as artistic director responsible for all film production. In this role he was inspired by Irving Thalberg, becoming heavily involved in screen writing ("If you've got a good screenplay you can assume that any film is 75 per cent home and dry") and to a certain extent in editing, but he stayed away from the actual film shoots. During this period he first came into contact with Ingmar Bergman, who was working in the company's script department. He steered Bergman's first screenplay Torment through to production, and when Bergman himself went to direct Crisis, Sjöström was the young director's only ally in a company in which Bergman made himself so unpopular that he ended up getting the sack.

...In the 1950s Victor Sjöström went back to his life in travelling theatre. His roles included Willy Loman in Arthur
Miller's Death of a Salesman, the title role in Swedenhielms (Max von Sydow played one of the sons when Sjöström made a guest appearance at the Helsingborg City Theatre), his last part being the title role in Johan Ulfstjerna (1957-1958).

In 1957 Ingmar Bergman repaid his indebtedness to Sjöström by giving him the main part in Wild Strawberries [Smultronstället], which alongside The Phantom Carriage is the film which Sjöström is best remembered. Bergman adapted the role specially for the great man, whose first inclination was to decline a part he thought too difficult to play. Yet Bergman prevailed: "Victor was in a bad mood, saying: 'I don't want to do this, I don't think you're right'. We clashed because I wanted Victor to do certain things that he didn't want to do, or rather [...] he was tense and wanting to do too much and I didn't want him to do anything at all. But then he was amazing to work with [...] as long as he was home by quarter past five sharp in time for his daily whisky."

...Following Sjöström's death, Ingmar Bergman read out the following extract from the diary he kept during the filming of Wild Strawberries at a memorial ceremony organised by the Swedish Film Academy on 20 February 1960:

"We had just shot the final scenes to round off Wild Strawberries [Smultronstället] – the final close-ups of Isak Borg when he feels the sense of clarity and reconciliation. His face became illuminated with an enigmatic light, reflected from another reality. His facial expressions suddenly became mild, almost serene. His expression was open, smiling, full of love... It was a miracle..."

Such total tranquillity – a soul that had found peace and lucidity. Never before or since have I experienced a face so noble and enlightened. And yet this was nothing more than a piece of acting in a dirty studio. And it had to be acting. This exceedingly shy human creature would never have shown us bystanders this deeply buried treasure of compassion and purity had it not involved of a piece of acting, a performance...

The Phantom Carriage by Darragh O'Donoghue Senses of Cinema 61:
Lawyer: “Those are life’s little difficulties, you see!”
- August Strindberg, A Dream Play (1901)

When Ingmar Bergman wanted to recreate the late 19th century youth of Isaac Borg in Smultronstället (Wild Strawberries, 1957), he turned for inspiration to Sweden’s most famous artist, Carl Larsson. In a series of picture books with titles such as Ett hem (Our Home, 1899), Spadarfvet, mitt lilla landbruk (Spadarfvet, Our Place in the Country, 1906) and Åt solsidan (On the Sunny Side, 1910), Larsson portrayed family life in cosy farmhouse interiors and brightly lit rural idylls. This idealism was hard won, and Larsson’s youth, like that of Victor Sjöström, who plays Borg, was marked by rupture and poverty, and dominated by an abusive father. This was a background to some extent shared by Selma Lagerlöf, author of the novel Körkarlen – the source of Sjöström’s adaptation – and Larsson sketched at least two portraits of the writer, in 1902 and 1908. But the most striking of Larsson’s works, and one uncannily predicting the special effects for which Körkarlen (The Phantom Carriage) is famous, is “The Home’s Good Fairy” (1909), in which a benevolent ghost hovers in a bedroom like a double exposure. Sjöström and his legendary cameraman Julius Jaenzon (credited here under his pseudonym “J. Julius”) used double exposures in The Phantom Carriage to create the illusion of two worlds – one natural, the other supernatural – in the same space.

Sjöström was not the first major Swedish artist to evoke the spirit world through photography. August Strindberg, as well as creating modern drama and pioneering many of the concerns and methods of 20th century avant-garde painting, experimented with photography throughout his life, even inventing the “Celestograph”, an image taken without a lens (which Strindberg thought distorted and subverted reality), with sensitised photographic plates turned to the sky and left to expose; and the lensless Wunderkamera, a camera that enabled him to take “psychological portraits” endowed with “mystic meaning” or “visionary suggestion”.

Of course, Sjöström and Jaenzon’s experiments were primarily a response to Lagerlöf’s 1912 novel. The Phantom Carriage is remarkably faithful to its source, and the double exposures and other effects can be seen as at once:

1. A visual correlative to the literary narrative’s interpenetration of physical and supernatural worlds or states, where material actions, settings and objects are spiritually freighted;
2. An equivalent of the narrative’s recessive structure of stories and flashbacks, all controlled by Georges (Tore Svennberg), Death’s driver; tellingly, the carriage itself is introduced in a story within a flashback. In other Lagerlöf books, storytelling seems to be linked to the resurrection of the dead and moral regeneration (11); and
3. Marking the film world’s threshold points: the narrative begins with the Salvation Army’s Sister Edith [Astrid Holm] at “death’s door”, the first of many doors that physically, psychologically and spiritually block characters; while most of the first hour is set in a graveyard, that liminal space where the living bury their dead.

Although the novel, like much of Lagerlöf’s work, takes its cue from Swedish folklore and superstition, its theme is festively Christian. It is the tale of a misanthrope who appears to die on New Year’s Eve and is shown the lives he has ruined by an emissary of Death, before being given a chance to redeem himself, and is essentially a variation on Charles Dickens’ novella A Christmas Carol (1843). The film seems to endorse such sentiments by ending with David Holm (Sjöström) repeating Georges’ prayer for mankind: “Lord, please let my soul come to maturity before it is reaped”; the title of the book’s 1921 tie-in English translation, Thy Soul Shall Bear Witness!, further emphasises this exhortatory didacticism.
The film’s Christianity, however, is more Hitchcock than Dickens. Four decades before Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol identified “exchange”, in particular the “transfer of guilt”, as the English master’s preeminent theme, Sjöström was elaborating on its possibilities. Although David Holm is clearly conceived as the narrative’s sinner, his actions and fate are part of a roundelay of guilt, blame and punishment. His destiny is intimately bound up with that of saintly Edith – their narratives are intercut in the first “chapter”; each can see Death; they are defined throughout by being prone (Edith is on her deathbed; Holm is repeatedly tempted, for good and ill, when lying down, an image of his death-in-life, his lost humanity); and both destroy Mrs Holm’s well-being. The consequences of Holm’s moral failures physically manifest as consumption and are transmitted to Edith when she repairs his germ-ridden coat. But Edith is not as innocent as she seems; she subsumes her physical attraction to Holm into an obsession with saving his soul, with disastrous results for everyone.

Another system of transference originates with Georges, the smooth-talking, pointy-bearded Mephistopheles who tempts Holm from his contented family life – one significantly rooted in work and nature – to a dissolute urban existence which, paradoxically for a fantasy film, returns Sjöström, after the romantic pantheism of the films that brought him global fame (Terje Vigen [A Man There Was, 1917] and Berg-Ejvind och hans hustru [The Outlaw and His Wife, 1918]), to the unblinking social-realism of Ingeborg Holm (1913). That film’s title character was performed by Hilda Borgström, who here plays Holm’s wife – on one level, The Phantom Carriage imagines what might have changed for the luckless Ingeborg if her husband had lived; Sjöström bleakly suggests: not much. For all its brilliant and evocative use of double exposure, the most moving piece of technical “trickery” in The Phantom Carriage is a dissolve that turns a family picnic in a lakeside glade into a drunken orgy. This triad of inebriates will be repeated in a tavern, with Holm turning a family picnic in a lakeside glade into a drunken orgy. Together with their friend the director Mauritz Stiller — who discovered Greta Gustafsson and turned her into Garbo in The Saga of Gösta Berling (1924) – they created the golden age of Swedish cinema, which declined abruptly when they all left for Hollywood.

Sjöström quarreled with Lagerlöf about the style of the adaptation of The Phantom Carriage. She wanted it shot on location in the southern town of Landskrona. He opted for a studio production at Filmstaden in Råsunda, built for the new company Svensk Filmindustr. The film was a bold experiment in controlled conditions, carried out with his cinematographer, Julius Jaenzon, who had already used double exposure in Stiller’s Sir Arne’s Treasure (1919), and the laboratory work of Eugen Hellman. This time, the superimpositions were layered up to four times. The ghosts appeared to move within the sets, disappearing from time to time behind the other characters and the solid foreground objects. A hand-moved camera followed each of and redemption, and Holm’s second resurrection in the world we’ve been shown is serial, without end.

**Paul Mayersber: Phantom Forms: The Phantom Carriage**

...While American silent cinema was defined by its various genres — comedy, melodrama, adventure — Swedish cinema was almost entirely devoted to national folktales and sagas, which gave it a unique identity, a landscape never seen before. With films like A Man There Was (1917), The Outlaw and His Wife (1918), and The Sons of Ingmar (1919), Sjöström was established as a master, with a reputation as grand, if not as international, as D. W. Griffith’s. Then came The Phantom Carriage, a major departure from his outdoor dramas.

The film begins on New Year’s Eve. Edit (Astrid Holm), a Salvation Army sister, is dying of tuberculosis. She sits up in her bed to call for a man named David Holm before she dies. The clock ticks toward midnight. David (Sjöström), a violent alcoholic, is located drinking with down-and-out friends in a cemetery. He refuses to visit Edit, gets into a brawl, and is accidentally struck dead at the midnight hour. A carriage arrives in a ghostly double exposure, with a phantom hooded coachman, Georges (Tore Svennberg), to take away David’s soul. The legend is that any person who dies at midnight himself becomes the new coachman employed by Death to pick up souls and wait for next year’s midnight death, when he will hand over the reins of the carriage to the new incumbent.

At death, David is forced to recall his life, and his mind becomes the narrative itself. Through an intricate series of flashbacks, we discover a reprobate who has abused his wife (Hilda Borgström) and children, his younger brother (Einar Axelsson), and Edit, whose mission has been to personally save him from his addiction. Lagerlöf, whose book owes much to Dickens’s A Christmas Carol, was the star of Swedish fiction, and Sjöström himself filmed four of her novels. Together with their friend the director Mauritz Stiller — who discovered Greta Gustafsson and turned her into Garbo in The Saga of Gösta Berling (1924) — they created the golden age of Swedish cinema, which declined abruptly when they all left for Hollywood.

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them. And they were lit differently, using filters, to give them a special reality. The final effect was to create a seemingly three-dimensional image. Sjöström’s studio work did not undermine his realism but enhanced it. The sets, interior and exterior, were shot in exceptionally deep focus for the time. Busy background action was as clear as the foreground, impossible without artificial studio lighting.

Before 1920, the cinema has no history of its own. In Germany, Fritz Lang, F. W. Murnau, and G. W. Pabst, the fathers of film noir, continued the theatrical and painterly tradition of expressionism. In France, Louis Feuillade, the father of comic-book cinema, made serials in which fantastic, costumed characters roamed the real streets of Paris. In Italy, Giovanni Pastrone, father of the epic, went straight back to the Roman Empire. But like Griffith, Sjöström explored what Bergman called the ultimate truth of cinema, the human face, to which Sjöström constantly guides us even without close-ups.

Coming from the theater, Sjöström nonetheless rejected traditional stage acting as detrimental to films. He wanted another style of performance since the dialogue could not be heard, concentrating on face, movements, and gestures. His own performance in The Phantom Carriage avoids melodrama by admitting David’s inner confusion, which simultaneously erupts into violence. His outward realism explores inner states. Some of the intertitles are actually voice-over, as he talks to himself.

The scene where David takes an ax and splinters a locked door to get to his terrified wife and children is an exact forerunner of the crazed attack by Jack Nicholson’s character in The Shining (1980). There is a similar scene in Griffith’s Broken Blossoms, made a year before The Phantom Carriage, which Sjöström may or may not have seen. Interestingly, Kubrick played down Jack’s progressive alcoholism from Stephen King’s original and went for out-and-out schizophrenia, the origins of which he scrupulously avoided. Sjöström hints at social causes, poverty and unemployment, but the truth about David may lie elsewhere.

In 1881, as a small child, Sjöström went to America with his father, Olaf, and mother, Maria Elizabeth, to whom he was devoted. Tragically, she died when he was seven, and soon afterward his father married the family nursemaid, twenty years his junior, whom Victor did not like. Olaf was a womanizer, twice bankrupt, and a born-again Christian. In 1893, Victor was returned to Sweden to live with his aunt. (By then, he was fluent in English, which was extremely valuable when, in the twenties, he returned to America.) All his life, Sjöström feared becoming like his father, whom he closely resembled physically. He lived frugally and was terrified, even when successful, of being without money. Perhaps his rendering of David’s alcoholism derived from the tensions in Sjöström’s relationship with his father. His performance is so realistically and subtly detailed that it may have come from precise memories, a ghostly reincarnation of his father, in other hands a model for a horror film.

The father and God. The film is surprisingly disconnected from Swedish Lutheranism. It is closer to Bergman’s demonic Hour of the Wolf (1968) than to the religious crisis of Winter Light (1962). David’s sudden conversion at the end is not altogether convincing. He is given a last chance by coming back from the dead to save his wife from poisoning herself and their children out of hopeless desperation. But it isn’t God the Father who intervenes. It is his dead predecessor, coachman Georges, who is touched by David’s loving wife and the devoted Edit, who have fought so hard and long to save the man.

Sjöström’s women are independently minded rather than compliant, resolutely loving rather than sadly helpless when beset by monstrous male authority. The success of The Phantom Carriage brought the director an invitation to America, where as a revenant from his own childhood, he made two films with Lilian Gish, The Scarlet Letter (1926) and the masterpiece The Wind (1928). Her face was unnervingly similar to that of The Phantom Carriage’s Hilda Borgström. As Norma Desmond, ghost of silent cinema in Sunset Boulevard (1950), proclaims, “We didn’t need voices. We had faces then.”

In America, where Sjöström’s name had been changed to Seastrom, he made an extraordinary film, He Who Gets Slapped (1924), adapted from Leonid Andreyev’s play, in which Lon Chaney’s scientist, having lost his wife and his original research to another man, becomes in his humiliation a circus clown. Chaney, the Man of a Thousand Faces, who defined horror as “a clown at midnight,” was an expressionist metamorphosis of David Holm. Despite the success of Sjöström’s American films, however, he returned to Sweden in 1930, at the dawn of the sound era, to work in the theater, feeling perhaps that this was where speech belonged.

His influence remained. David Holm is possessed by drink as a vampire is by blood. Murnau’s spectral Nosferatu (1922) owed something to this film. David renouncing his alcoholism at the stroke of midnight is surely as impossible as Dracula swearing off blood. But Sjöström, the humanist, could not resist.

The Phantom Carriage is at root a Faustian tale, with drink as the devil. If the film were the work of a Jansenist Catholic like Robert Bresson, David’s suffering would be a struggle with God’s design for him, alcohol being the mysterious presence of the divine in his bloodstream, and would probably end in suicide. But for Sjöström, God helps those who help themselves. There is an extraordinary moment when David’s wife faints out of fear at his ax attack and hefetches her a cup of water, only to berate her violently when she recovers consciousness. Here is a glimpse not of God but of a good man within a bad man. Sjöström the actor marvelously conveys the brutish, the melancholy, the sarcastic, and the reflective aspects of his character. The Shining treats Jack as a man with the aggressive need to humiliate others. He is all demon, and the film is essentially a spectacle. Sjöström’s David is a study of tortured self-humiliation, like Dostoyevsky’s Raskolnikov. The original draft of Crime and Punishment was titled “The Drunkards.”

When The Phantom Carriage opened at the Criterion Theater in New York, it was lauded for being precisely what it was not: a cautionary tale of the evils of drink. The distributor had completely reedited it as The Stroke of Midnight. The legend of the Phantom Carriage didn’t come in until almost halfway. Sjöström’s structure had been dismantled, and the film became a straightforward narrative. As such, it works well—as a Hollywood film with a quasi-religious score performed on a cinema Wurlitzer.

Julien Duvivier remade The Phantom Carriage in 1939 as La charrette fantôme, with Pierre Fresnay as David and Louis Jouvet as Georges, an interesting expansion of their relationship. It was reborn again as Arne Mattsson’s Körkarlen in 1958, and in
Bergman’s TV film on the making of the original, The Image Makers (2000), based on the Per Olov Enquist play. The subject came back unheralded in Frank Capra’s It’s a Wonderful Life (1946), a gloomy film noir subversively reimagined as a feel-good Christmas story.

The special handmade visual beauty of The Phantom Carriage has never been equaled. When Georges drives to a rocky seashore to pick up a woman who has drowned after a wreck, the coach glides through the crashing waves. When he goes down into the sea to get her, the effect of the ghostly figure under the swirling water is delirious, a hallucination of drunkenness. The film itself is drunk. The carriage is an emblem for cinema as a phantom form capable of the documentary (Lumière) and the imaginary (Méliès) at the same time. Jean Cocteau’s film Orpheus (1950) was probably influenced by Sjöström and Murnau in its use of negative printing to evoke the spectral in the real—or vice versa. Cocteau had a word for it: l’irréel.

The influence of Sjöström on his friend Carl Dreyer in the spectral Vampyr (1932) is often cited. But Dreyer’s film is about unseen fear. It is not dark but powdery white. He does not rely on double exposure for the supernatural but, subverting Soviet montage, implies missing pieces to evoke the absent menace.

The Phantom Carriage, the most experimental of Swedish films, reaches for inward realism. In Search of Lost Time was concurrent with the early development of film. Proust’s creation of memory as a literary form is parallel with the experiments in film as a dream form. Proust’s “printing” of recovered memory is a photographic process. Film is in fact a sequence of still photographs, frozen images, “dead” pictures brought back to life on the screen. With The Phantom Carriage, we may properly ask, are the dead more alive than the living?

Paul Mayersberg started as a film critic, worked as an assistant to Jean-Pierre Melville, Joseph Losey, and Roger Corman, and became the screenwriter of The Man Who Fell to Earth, Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence, Eureka, and Croupier. He is the author of Hollywood: The Haunted House and a novel, Homme Fatale.

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**Spring 2012 Buffalo Film Seminars XXIV**

Jan 24 William A. Wellman, *The Public Enemy* 1931
Jan 31 Merian C. Cooper, *King Kong* 1933
Feb 7 Ernst Lubitsch, *To Be or Not to Be*, 1942
Feb 14 Luchino Visconti, *Senso* 1954
Feb 21 Stanley Kubrick, *Paths of Glory* 1957
Feb 29 Sidney Lumet, *12 Angry Men* 1957
Mar 13 spring break
Mar 20 Clint Eastwood, *The Outlaw Josey Wales* 1975
Mar 27 John Woo, *The Killer* 1989
Apr 10 Terrence Malick, *Thin Red Line* 1998
Apr 17 Fernando Meirelles *City of God*, 2003
Apr 24 Christopher Nolan, *The Dark Knight* 2008

**Contacts:**
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