

The Buffalo Film Seminars



Directed and written by Ingmar Bergman
Produced by Allan Ekelund
Original Music by Erik Nordgren
Cinematography by Gunnar Fischer
Film Editing by Lennart Wallén
Production Design by P.A. Lundgren

Gunnar Björnstrand...Jöns, squire
Bengt Ekerot...Death
Nils Poppe...Jof
Max von Sydow...Antonius Block
Bibi Andersson...Mia, Jof's wife
Inga Gill...Lisa, blacksmith's wife
Maud Hansson...Witch
Inga Landgré...Karin, Block's Wife
Gunnel Lindblom...Girl
Bertil Anderberg...Raval
Anders Ek...The Monk
Åke Fridell...Blacksmith Plog
Gunnar Olsson...Albertus Pictor, Church Painter
Erik Strandmark...Jonas Skat

INGMAR BERGMAN (14 July 1918, Uppsala, Uppsala län, Sweden—30 July 2007, Fårö, Gotlands län, Sweden) directed 61 films and wrote 63 screenplays. (Bio from WorldFilms.com)
"Universally regarded as one of the great masters of modern cinema, Bergman has often concerned himself with spiritual and psychological conflicts. His work has evolved in distinct stages over four decades, while his visual style—intense, intimate, complex—has explored the vicissitudes of passion with a mesmerizing cinematic rhetoric. His prolific output tends to return to and elaborate on recurrent images, subjects and techniques. Like the Baroque composers, Bergman works on a small scale, finding invention in theme and variation. Bergman works primarily in the chamber cinema genre, although there are exceptions, such as the journey narrative of *WILD STRAWBERRIES* (1957) and the family epic of *FANNY AND ALEXANDER* (1983). Chamber cinema encloses space and time, permitting the director to focus on mise-en-scène and to pay careful attention to metaphoric detail and visual rhythm. Perhaps his most expressive technique is his use of the facial close-up. For Bergman, the face, along with the hand, allows the camera to reveal the inner aspects of human emotion. His fascination with the female face can be seen most strikingly in *PERSONA* (1966) and *CRIES AND WHISPERS* (1972). In his autobiography, Bergman claimed that he was always trying to generate his mother's face; hence, a psychological and aesthetic need are

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Ingmar Bergman *THE SEVENTH SEAL* 1958 92 min.



realized in this cinematic signature. Of the early period, *WILD STRAWBERRIES* stands out for its narrative invention in a fluid manipulation of flashbacks, reveries and dream sequences. Its penetrating psychological investigation of the closing of the life cycle established Bergman's preoccupation with the relationship between desire, loss, guilt, compassion, restitution and celebration. *SAWDUST AND TINSEL* (1953)/*NAKED NIGHT*, more allegorical than *WILD STRAWBERRIES*, is likewise designed around a journey motif of existential crisis. In contrast, the Mozartian *SMILES OF A SUMMER NIGHT* (1955) displays Bergman's romantic, comic sensibility. The early period concludes with two symbolic works, *THE SEVENTH SEAL* (1957) and *THE VIRGIN SPRING* (1959), both set in the Middle Ages. The extreme long shot in *THE SEVENTH SEAL* of Death leading the peasants in silhouette across the horizon now forms part of the iconography of modern cinema. The second stage of Bergman's cinematic evolution shifts to the chamber style. Intense spiritual and psychological themes are explored in the "Silence" trilogy (*THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY*, 1962, *WINTER LIGHT*, 1962, *THE SILENCE*, 1963), and in *THE SHAME* (1968), *HOOR OF THE WOLF* (1968) and *THE PASSION OF ANNA* (1969), three films all set on the island of Faro. With its dialectical

editing and expressive compositions, *THE SILENCE* is considered one of Bergman's most artfully structured films. *THE PASSION OF ANNA*, with its innovative application of red motifs, marked Bergman's first use of color photography. Between these two trilogies came *PERSONA* (1966), a work many critics consider Bergman's masterpiece. *PERSONA* shares a similar look and ambience with the Faro trilogy, and has direct links with *THE SILENCE* in its focus on the antagonistic relationship between two women. Yet, with its distinctly avant-garde style and rhythm, it stands apart from any other of Bergman's films. Ostensibly concerned with identity crisis and the role reversal of a nurse and her mentally ill patient, the subtext of the film explores the nature of the cinematic apparatus itself. The narrative is framed by opening and closing shots of a film strip, projector and light, which lead into and out of the figure of a young boy. With his directorial hand, the boy conjures up a gigantic close-up of the female face. In a now celebrated sequence, the two faces of the female protagonists dissolve into one. (The figure of the precocious, magical child, previously seen in *THE SILENCE*, would later reappear in the autobiographical *FANNY AND ALEXANDER*, 1983.) Sadomasochistic behavior, along with problems of role reversal and denied maternity, form the tortured core of both *PERSONA* and *CRIES AND WHISPERS*, the masterwork of the late period. In contrast to the spare decor, sharp black and white photography and disjunctive editing of *PERSONA*, *CRIES AND WHISPERS* is a 19th-century Gothic period-piece featuring rich colors, draped, theatrical decor and muted dissolve editing. The film revolves around three sisters, one of whom, Agnes, is dying, and their maid, Anna. Bergman evokes religious iconography, with each of the three sisters representing various theological concepts. The dying Agnes, set in cruciform position, returns as a resurrected savior/prophet. The exquisite Pietà/birth shot of Agnes and the Maid, as well as the revolutionary dissolve red-outs, are highlights in this brutal and beautiful film. Even the minor films of Bergman's later period, such as *FACE TO FACE* (1976), *AUTUMN SONATA* (1978) and *FROM THE LIFE OF THE MARIONETTES* (1980) continue to explore and refine recurrent themes and techniques. In the underrated *THE TOUCH* (1971), Bergman examines the theme of marriage, with an inventive subtext of the Persephone myth, in a visually expansive way that distinguishes it from the more conventional *SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE* (1973). The cycle of Bergman's work appropriately concludes with *FANNY AND ALEXANDER*, an epic of family romance, touched with elements of fairy tale, horror and ghost story. All the preoccupations of Bergman's extraordinary career flow through the imagery, action and stylization of the film. Continuing his exploration of family relationships, Bergman drew inspiration from the marriage of his own parents to write the autobiographical screenplay for *THE BEST INTENTIONS* (1992), which Bergman entrusted to director Bille August after announcing his retirement from filmmaking. As an artist, Bergman pays homage to music and theater in general, to Bach, Mozart and Strindberg in particular. His work seems a synthesis of the internalized Swedish sensibility and harsh Scandinavian landscape, yet he speaks to a universal vision of human passion. Although apparently not influenced by other filmmakers, with the possible exception of Carl Dreyer, Bergman himself has had a wide-ranging influence on a generation of filmmakers. A unique and powerful presence, his genius has made an extraordinary contribution to the art of the cinema."

VICTOR SJÖSTRÖM (20 September 1879, Silbodalen, Värmlands län, Sweden—3 January 1960, Stockholm, Sweden) acted in 44 films and directed 44. Derek Malcom wrote in *The Guardian*: "Ingmar Bergman's choice of Victor Sjöström, then 78, to play Isak Borg in his 1957 film *Wild Strawberries*, was partly his way of paying tribute to a film-maker whom he much admired and by whom he was deeply influenced. Sjöström made films both in Sweden and America and was one of the chief reasons for the pre-eminence of the Swedish cinema just after the first world war. Between 1917 and 1921 he made four films of such technical mastery and luminous power that it was only a matter of time before Hollywood lured him across the water. These films, full of the almost masochistic obsessions of Swedish Protestantism, but also extremely beautiful in their depiction of the elemental forces of nature, caused Sjöström, together with his equally famous fellow director Mauritz Stiller, to be characterised as a gloomy Swede, even though he both acted in and made comedies too. And in America his three most famous works - *He Who Gets Slapped* (1924), *The Scarlet Letter* (1926) and *The Wind* (1928) - each dealt with human suffering. *The Wind* is almost certainly the best - a silent classic, revived in recent years by producer/director Kevin Brownlow with a Carl Davis score, which gave the great Lillian Gish one of the finest parts of her career....Sjöström made other films in Hollywood, most of which, including *The Divine Woman* (1928) with Greta Garbo, have been either destroyed or lost. He was one of the very first group of film-makers whose work convinced often sceptical critics, most of whom had been trained in literature and the theatre, that the cinema was capable of being a fully-fledged art form.

BIBI ANDERSSON (11 November 1935, Kungsholmen, Stockholm, Sweden) has acted in 91 films, 13 of them directed by Ingmar Bergman. Some of her Bergman films are *Scener ur ett äktenskap/Scenes from a Marriage* (1973), *Persona* (1966), *Ansiktet/The Magician* (1958), *Det Sjunde inseglet/The Seventh Seal* (1957), *Smultronstället/Wild Strawberries* (1957), *Sommarnattens leende/Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955). Some of the others are *Det blir aldrig som man tänkt sig/Shit Happens* (2000), *Babettes gästebud/Babette's Feast* (1987), *Quintet* (1979), and *An Enemy of the People* (1978).

MAX VON SYDOW (10 April 1929, Lund, Skåne län, Sweden) has appeared in 121 films (12 of them directed by Ingmar Bergman), among them *Snow Falling on Cedars* (1999), *What Dreams May Come* (1998), *Pelle erobreren/Pelle the Conqueror* (1987), *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), *Dune* (1984), *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977), *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), *The Exorcist* (1973), *Utvandrarna/The Emigrants* (1971), *The Quiller Memorandum* (1966), *Såsom i en spegel/Through a Glass Darkly* (1961), *Jungfrukällan/The Virgin Spring* (1960), *Ansiktet/The Magician* (1958), *Det Sjunde inseglet/The Seventh Seal* (1957) and *Smultronstället/Wild Strawberries* (1957).

Bergman, (Ernst) Ingmar
from World Film Directors, V. II. Ed. John Wakeman. H.H. Wilson Co. NY 1988 entry by Dennis DeNitto

Director, screenwriter, and playwright, was born in Uppsala, Sweden. His father, Erik, was a Lutheran pastor; his mother, Karin (née Akerblom) was the daughter of a prosperous businessman. From birth Bergman was a sickly, high-strung child, with an intensity that disconcerted adults. An instinctive independence and

stubbornness laid the foundation for the rebelliousness of his adolescence.

At an early age he became fascinated by the two performing arts to which he has devoted his career. By six years of age he was a motion picture devotee making his own film loops for a primitive projector. He attended his first theatre production in 1930—a dramatization of a Swedish fairy tale. With his usual energy and ambition, he built a puppet theatre and began to produce his own plays.

Many of the characters and situations that Bergman has depicted in his screenplays and dramas originated in his experiences as a child and youth. “I take up the images from my childhood, put them into the ‘projector,’ run them myself, and have an entirely new way of evaluating them,” he once told an interviewer. By the time Bergman reached his early teens, he had rejected the moral certitudes of his parents and he bitterly resented the humiliating punishments imposed on him whenever he rebelled. Yet as with many artists haunted by an unhappy childhood, he saw when middle-aged that there were positive aspects of his early years. The walls his parents built around him gave the youngster something to “pound on,” requiring that he become independent emotionally and intellectually if he was to mature with integrity.

In 1937 Bergman entered the University of Stockholm, where he majored in literature and the history of art. He never completed the degree requirements but did write a thesis on August Strindberg, the writer who more than any other influenced his attitudes and beliefs. While still an undergraduate, he began directing plays for amateur groups.

His professional theatre career began in 1944 when he was appointed director of the Helsingborg City Theatre and later of the Malmo Municipal Theatre. The climax of his theatrical career was appointment (1963-1966), as Chief Director of the Royal Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm, the most prestigious theatre in Sweden. The dramatists whose works he has presented on the stage comprise a wide range that includes Shakespeare, Moliere, Strindberg, and Chekhov, with an emphasis on twentieth-century playwrights such as Jean Anouilh, Bertolt Brecht, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, and Peter Weiss. The most acclaimed characteristics of his directing style have been his imaginative staging, carefully controlled dramatic pacing, and ability to elicit outstanding performances from actors. Five of the plays he directed during the late forties and early fifties were his own.

Bergman’s film activities have always been juxtaposed to his work in the theatre. In 1943, one year before being appointed Director of the Helsingborg City Theatre, he was offered a contract as a scriptwriter at Svensk Filmindustri, the largest and most active film company in Sweden. His first project was the screenplay for *Torment*, the story of a student hounded and abused by a strict, “old-fashioned” teacher, who is gradually revealed to be a fascist, a sadist, and the murderer of the young man’s sweetheart.

The director of *Torment* was Alf Sjöberg, the outstanding Swedish filmmaker active at the time. He was not only a mentor to Bergman, but also a living reminder of the impressive heritage of Swedish cinema. During the silent era, the films of Mauritz Stiller, Victor Sjöström, and others had achieved international renown for their psychological perceptiveness, awesome portrayals of nature, and visual beauty. The late twenties and thirties had been a period of decline. A resurgence, however, was in motion when Bergman joined Svensk Filmindustri. Under the guidance of Carl Anders Dymling, the company supported such

prominent directors as Sjöberg and actively recruited young apprentice filmmakers.

Bergman was influenced in the development of his cinematic style not only by his countrymen, but also by Carl Dreyer, the German expressionists, the French surrealists, and the Italian neorealists (particularly Rossellini). He has always been chary of offering opinions on other filmmakers; however, he has mentioned with approval the works of Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini; Jean Cocteau, Robert Bresson, and Jean-Lud Godard; Akira Kurosawa and Kenji Mizoguchi; Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Erich von Stroheim, Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, Arthus Penn, Michael Curtiz, and Raoul Walsh.

Torment revealed Bergman’s abilities as a screenwriter, a talent that he would exploit and develop throughout his filmmaking career. Of the forty-two features he directed between 1946 and 1982, he wrote original screenplays for thirty-one (in addition to two documentaries) and was cowriter on five others. He also contributed scenarios to six films by other directors. The most prominent trait of his screenplays is their essentially cinematic nature; that is, even with pithy dialogue and expressive verbal images, the words Bergman writes convey only intimations of the texture and tone of the films he finally releases and he may extensively revise a work during editing.

Within two years of joining Svensk Filmindustri, he was offered the opportunity to make his first film, *Crisis* (1946). It was neither a critical nor a box-office success, but it proved that Bergman could work with efficiency and effectiveness, and his career as a film director was launched.



Between 1946 and 1955 Bergman directed sixteen features, in most cases writing the screenplays as well. During this decade, which constituted an apprenticeship period, he learned his craft, developed a unique style, and introduced many of the themes that he explored with greater insight in later years. In addition, he established himself as an innovative figure in Swedish filmmaking.

The Naked Night (1953) is a dramatic discourse on humiliation, one of Bergman’s most personal themes. He once said, “One of the wounds I’ve found hardest to bear in my adult life has been the fear of humiliation and the sense of being humiliated.”

In 1956 Bergman at thirty-seven years of age had a successful artistic and fulfilling personal life....Bergman had gathered around him a team of filmmakers and actors who admired him and were capable of projecting the subtle overtones he demanded. There had been filmmaking teams of this sort in the

past, but none included so many members working so frequently together.

The Seventh Seal (1957) inaugurated the next stage in Bergman's career. The jury's special prize at the Cannes film festival was an official commendation; more important was critical acclaim throughout the Western world and a box-office success unequalled by any of the director's previous works. Not since Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* in 1950 had a single film caused such a sensation in the cinema world. The film is set in fourteenth-century Sweden.

The plot centers on the journey of the knight Antonius Block (Sydow) and his squire (Bjornstrand) from a shore of Sweden ravished by the Black Plague, to which they have returned from the Crusades, to the knight's castle. In the first sequence, Death (Ekerot) comes for Block, but is persuaded to play chess with the knight and to allow him to live until the game is concluded. In the penultimate sequence, Death, the victor, claims the knight and his companions.

Of the nine films Bergman directed between 1957 and 1964, six deal directly or indirectly with what one writer called "the God quest." Basically the artist during this period is asking a series of questions: Does God exist? If He does, can we come in contact with him in tangible ways? If he does not exist or is silent, can life have meaning?



The Seventh Seal premiered in February of 1957. By the end of that year Bergman had completed his next film, one that many critics place among the half dozen of his masterworks. *Wild Strawberries* presents the events of a crucial day in the life of Isak Borg (Victor Sjöström), a seventy-eight-year-old professor of medicine. There is a continual intermingling of two journeys. Physically he travels from his home in Stockholm to the University of Lund, where he is to receive an honorary degree.

Incidents during the trip trigger dreams that constitute a psychological journey into his past and subconscious.

Borg is a rigid, selfish, emotionally cold man on the night that he has a frightening dream about his death. At the end of the film, in Lund, he dreams again, only this time it is of reconciliation and contentedness. He has been changed through experiences with various people—including his daughter-in-law (Thulin), mother (Wifstrand), and a young woman, Sara (Bibi Andersson)—and two additional dreams in which he confronts the failures and humiliations of his youth and adulthood. His guide and adviser is a Sara of the past, his first love (also played by Andersson).

A chastened Borg has changed, but not everyone responds to his psychic transformation. Though he establishes contact with his daughter-in-law and the contemporary Sara, his estranged son and strait-laced housekeeper preserve their distance. More important, he is at peace with himself, as revealed in the dream with which the film ends.

Bergman had projected the dreams of characters on the screen in earlier works. Never before, however, had such dreams been so pivotal to an understanding of the inner world of a fictional individual nor had he made them so real and lucid to his viewers. A rich cinematic lode had been discovered by the director, and he was to mine it in a series of films that include *Persona*, *Hour of the Wolf*, *Cries and Whispers*, *Face to Face*, and *From the Life of the Marionettes*. Even in other films, dreams play a significant role in presenting us with insights into his characters. This technique is so central to Bergman's work that all his films could be explicated by this means.

Unlike *The Seventh Seal*, the overt religious element in *Wild Strawberries* is minor. Yet both films are variations on the question and tentative answers that constitute the major comprehensive theme of Bergman's work. In a modern world of violence and uncertainty how can the individual find "peace and clarity of soul" (Bergman's phrase)? A word from God would be reassuring, but Bergman reaches the conclusion that He is silent. A more viable answer involves two stages.

The individual must face the truth of his or her past and present. This can be achieved by what Carl Jung called "the night sea journey": an excursion into the personal subconscious and collective unconscious, the only repositories of the essences of self. Dreams and hallucinations are the most accessible vehicles of this type of psychic trip; the proximity of death (as in *Wild Strawberries*, *Face to Face*, and *Cries and Whispers*) can provide an impetus. The journey is dangerous and not everyone can survive it (Johan in *The Hour of the Wolf* does not). Those who do, however, can find the courage to attempt to establish connections with others—in a word, to love.

This is the thematic pattern that structures *Wild Strawberries*. The film would not be so praiseworthy if the cinematic techniques were not equal to the challenge of the content. Form and feeling reinforce each other. It is not perfect (for example, the character and speeches of the contemporary Sara are unconvincing), but it remains, with *Fanny and Alexander*, the most moving and organically unified of Bergman's works.

From 1966 to early 1977, when he left Sweden, new emphases and themes occupied the director. Furthermore, he went even further than previously in developing new cinematic techniques. He continued probing nonrational levels of the human psyche with the concomitant manipulation of symbols and archetypal patterns, but in addition to a definite lessening of

religious overtones in his work there appeared a notable shift in content.

Women had always been crucial figures in Bergman's film world and he had created many mature, self-sufficient female characters. Their typical role, however, was as comforters of men, giving emotional support to their husbands and lovers or guiding a male to his personal redemption (as in *Wild Strawberries*). In contrast, women and the female psyche are the main objects of the director's attention and men are subordinate in most of the films of his third period. Night sea journeys are often undertaken by these women, and for the successful ones there is the reward of a new confidence in themselves, in integrity independent of men and children.

Bergman initiated this new stage with a work of stunning originality and one of the most challenging motion pictures of our time. *Persona* (1966) delves into the interrelations between two women. ...The demarcation between concrete reality and the realm of illusion and dreams is less clear in *Persona* than in earlier Bergman dramas.

Bergman has had his critics, both professional and in general audiences. With some justification he has been accused of being pessimistic, obscure, melodramatic, dour, unconvincing, nonpolitical, tiresome, obsessive, perverse. On the other hand, only a mentally stultified, obstinate critic could deny the positive qualities of Bergman as a filmmaker. He has a vision of human nature and the human situation that is definite and consistent, and he expresses that vision in a unique, personal, unconventional style. If the term *auteur* has any meaning, Bergman is the personification of that accolade.

While he can accurately and convincingly portray a milieu and the everyday world of men and women, as evident in his historical films, Bergman's forte is exploring the subconscious and unconscious levels of the human psyche and the ways in which irrational forces influence our emotions and actions. He has few equals in cinema in persuading an audience that a dream projected on the screen, though inevitably an artificial construct, is believable, actually might have occurred. If the symbolism is enigmatic and at times less than coherent, these qualities are inherent in the dream world. There is justification also for ambiguities and perplexities infused by the director into the fibre of entire films. Probing the recesses of an individual's psyche and the complexities of human relationships cannot be done clearly and methodically without oversimplification, and Bergman has never been reproached for this fault or for providing neat, pragmatic solutions to questions involving God, death, love, art, and human salvation.

***The Seventh Seal (Det Sjunde Inseplet)*. Melvyn Bragg. bfi publishing, London, 1993.**

“Regardless of my own doubts, which are unimportant in this connection, it is my opinion that art lost its basic creative drive the moment it was separated from worship. It severed an umbilical cord and now lives its own sterile life, generating and degenerating itself. In former days the artist remained unknown and his art was to the glory of God. He lived and died without being more or less important than other artisans; ‘eternal values’, ‘immortality’ and ‘masterpiece’ were terms not applicable in his case. The ability to create was a gift. In such a world flourished invulnerable assurance and natural humility.”

Bergman wrote this in the introduction to the script of *The Seventh Seal*. The interest lies not only in the statement itself but also in his decision to place it as a signpost to what is his most widely known and arguably most influential film. Is he claiming something for the film, or is he reclaiming his own past or is he declaring a truth which he wishes to be universally



acknowledged?

For there is a catch, in the paragraph which immediately follows:

“Today the individual has become the highest form and the greatest bane of artistic creation. The smallest wound or pain of the ego is examined under a microscope as if it were of eternal importance. The artist considers his isolation, his subjectivity, his individualism almost holy. Thus we finally gather in one large pen, where we stand and bleat about our loneliness without listening to each other and without realising that we are smothering each other to death. The individualists stare into each other's eyes and yet deny the existence of each other. We walk in circles, so limited by our own anxieties that we can no longer distinguish between true and false.”

...Like many other great artists, Bergman can face both ways. As some of his films redefined the force of religious art, the power of the sacramental, the resonance of a moral-aesthetic imperative, so others appear to cast out all of that and, with no less skill and with no less art, stand for the bleak and alienated individual of twentieth-century modernism.

Yet the undertow of religious essentiality in art persists in his introductory remarks. Having described the legend of Chartres—burnt down and reconstructed by thousands of builders and craftsmen, none with a name, so that ‘so one knows to this day who built the cathedral of Chartres’—he concludes with what reads like a profound credo:

“Thus if I am asked what I would like the general purpose of my films to be, I would reply that I want to be one of those artists in the cathedral on the great plain. I want to make a dragon's head, an angel, a devil—or perhaps a saint—out of stone. It does not matter which; it is the sense of satisfaction that counts. Regardless of whether I believe or not, whether I am a Christian or not,

I would play my part in the collective building of the cathedral.”

There is more than a suggestion there that art is religion whether we believe it or not. That in the end it will last only as long as it aspires to or fits into some collective cathedral which is alone the lasting temple of art. It is noteworthy that Bergman wants to make something out of ‘stone’. Obviously a metaphor, but just as obviously he wants to be associated with what appears to be the most lasting of materials—forgetting, for the moment, Ozymandias. The cathedral can be seen as the sum of all great art—all art, in Bergman’s view—strained through a religious vision or even an unconscious intention. It can also be seen as the collective endeavor which film-making is and which is so much a part of his enjoyment and commitment to it. And the cathedral, where congregations gather to see the great illuminated stories in glass, to watch the ritual performances on the stage of the altar, to follow, through the calendar, the great epic of Christianity with its heroes, its villains, its disputes and digressions, its strange character parts, its compelling story-line, can be seen as the cinema of the pre-celluloid era.

Even though he himself has contributed vividly to the cinema of alienation, the cinema of the dispossessed individual, the post-Christian, fallen world of the second half of this century, we must take his seriousness about the connection between art and religion for what it is: the governing test of a film-maker whose intelligence and curiosity have inspired some of the finest films ever made. Bergman, in my opinion, is one of the dozen or so master film-makers of the century; and one of the marks of his genius, when he is at his best, is the intensity of what can only be called a vision of life. This can be almost unbearably bleak, though relieved by stoicism in *Winter Light*; eroticism in *Summer with Monika*; womanism and tenderness in *Cries and Whispers*; or religion, in a line which takes him back to his beloved Chartres, in *The Seventh Seal*. His thesis would be challenged by many who would produce pagan, heathen, secular, atheistic, even irreligious artists, and whole centuries of artistic achievement which only by the loosest connection, could be said to qualify and pass the Bergman test. Yet for him it was, and is, a profound and informing truth. And if ever it needed an exemplar, *The Seventh Seal* is first in line.

...We must take him at his word and see *The Seventh Seal* from the outset as Bergman’s attempt to keep that link: the link between creation and worship and the link between the mid-twentieth century, the Middle Ages, the New Testament and much deeper into the past.

Yet even when we look at the artefacts from ancient Mexico, Egypt, Assyria, or Aboriginal Australia and so many antique civilisations, let alone the variety of work left by the Greeks, we are struck both by the religious and the secular nature of the works. Those clearly designed to fit in with the governing theology, bow to the belief of the tribe, conform to worship, and those made by ‘man/woman the maker’ for the sake of the thing itself, for the hell of it as opposed to the Heaven of it. Even in Chartres there are carvings which show the carver showing his own skill, taking a little of the glory to himself as well as offering so much to God. Even in that which is ostensibly devoted to the imperative of worship, there is always space made by the individual, the artist, the mischief-maker perhaps, the side of Bergman which gives him the skills to be the worshipper through cinema and in cinema that he aimed to be....

Lindsay Anderson, the British film director who did the commentary for Thames Television’s two-hour study of Bergman, said that in *The Seventh Seal*. ‘Bergman influenced a whole generation of film-makers and film-goers.’ I would suggest that this influence spreads now beyond one generation. As television recycles old movies and art-houses reach out for cheap and cult re-runs, the Bergman oeuvre grows in importance both as an example of what one man could achieve on what were very often small, even meagre, resources and as a number of films which take on territory few dare enter with any confidence. There is a Bergman world. It is a landscape lit by the finely modulated greys of Northern European light; it has intensity and intelligence in equal measure; it can be charming and comic and erotic and playful, but this is a place where the shadow is as important as the living figure and the inwardness of life as demanding as anything that happens in the world outside. It is a cultivated world, a thinking world, above all perhaps a world trying to answer the questions which cannot be answered. For many, the clearest statement of all Bergman’s preoccupations is expressed with the simplicity of genius in *The Seventh Seal*.

...The story is simple enough. A Knight and his Squire return from the Crusades. Their country is ravaged by the plague. They meet Death and the Knight makes a bargain: as long as he can hold him off in a game of chess, his life will be spared. As they journey through their native country they encounter artists, fanatics, mere rogues, but everywhere the presence of Death, who proceeds to win the game by fair means and foul. At the end, all but the artists are gathered up by him. Intellectually the film is bound together by two strands of the Knight’s desperate search for some proof, some confirmation of his faith, and the Squire’s view that there is nothing beyond the present flesh but emptiness. ...

Throughout the interview Bergman maintained that he used his films to face up to his personal fears. ‘I am afraid of most things in the world that exist,’ he said.

In *The Seventh Seal* he was facing up to his fear of Death. ‘Death is present the whole time in this picture and everybody in this picture reacts differently to Death. After that picture I still think about Death but it is not an obsession any more.’ The making of the movie as a therapy? Or does the picture coincide with a phase in Bergman’s life through which he would have travelled without making the movie?

Death appears as a monk, I said. ‘Or a clown,’ Bergman replied. The ambiguity could not be more succinctly stated. ...More than twenty years on from the making of it, Bergman introduced me to an interpretation which seems less convincing as the film goes on but is certainly a strain which the character Death can bear. If he is ‘like’ a monk, then he is the devil’s monk, but monklike he dresses and indeed later in the film he impersonates a monk to gain an advantage over the Knight. If he is a clown, with all the wisdom and weary overview of life that a Bergman clown would bring to bear, then he is like Lear’s Fool and playing a most serious role, clown as the true voice of reality, not clown as comic.

‘He is a man,’ I said, ‘not a presence.’

‘Yes,’ Bergman agreed. ‘That is the fascination of the stage or the cinema. If you take a chair, a perfectly normal chair, and say “This is the most fantastic and wonderful chair made in the whole world”—if you say that, everybody will believe it. If the Knight says, “You are Death,” you believe it.’...

“I was teaching at the Theatre School in Malmo [this was in 1955]. There were some youngsters there, eight or nine of them, and I was looking for a play to put on for that’s the best way of teaching. I couldn’t find anything, so I took it into my head to write something myself. It was called *A Painting on Wood*.

It is a pure training play and consists of a number of monologues. All except for one part. One pupil was being trained for the musical comedy section. He had a good singing voice and looked very handsome, but as soon as he opened his mouth it was a catastrophe. So I gave him a silent part. The Saracens had cut his tongue out. He was the Knight. I worked it up with my pupils and put it on.

Then, if I remember aright, it suddenly struck me one day I ought to make a film of the play; so I started on the script. The whole thing developed quite naturally. My stomach had been in bad shape and I sat writing this film in Karolinska Hospital in Stockholm while it was being put to rights. I handed the script to S.F. (Svensk Filmindustri) and S.F. said ‘No thank you.’ But then came the success of *Smiles of a Summer Night* and I got permission to make it, providing I did it in thirty-five days. So I shot in thirty-five days and it was ever so cheap and ever so simple....

Cowie then points out elements in *A Painting on Wood* which found their way into the final film script: the fear of the plague, the burning of the witch, the Dance of Death. However, there is no chess game between Death and the Knight (who is without speech, as noted, in the play; in continuous dialogue with God in the film), nor are the artistic clowning ‘holy couple’ of Jof and Mia—Joseph and Mary with their infant—there. The smith and his strumpet wife are there but, Cowie concludes, ‘Only one character may be found full-blown, and that is Jons the Squire, whose dialogue in play and film is almost identical line for line. Gunnar Bjornstrand, who played the part in Bergman’s original production, transferred it to the screen.

The deeper preoccupations of the film can be traced back to Bergman’s childhood in an intense—for him suffocatingly, oppressively tense—Christian home where the great questions of the relationship between Good and Evil, God and the Devil, Man and God, Man and Death and Redemption were part of daily life and conversation. His father, a pastor in the Lutheran Church, addicted to all its high rituals and strict forms, was the tyrannical domestic Godhead. Although he rebelled against his family and background, his introduction to *The Seventh Seal* shows how close he kept to it in essentials. ‘He often,’ writes Cowie, ‘signs his scripts with the initials S.D.G. (Soli Deo Gloria—To God Alone the Glory) as J.S. Bach did at the end of every composition.

In the 1950s, when Bergman was in his late thirties, the religious significance of Death informed at least three films: *The Seventh Seal*, *Wild Strawberries*, and *The Magician* (also known as *The Face*).



In 1955, he was still influenced by medieval frescoes he had seen as murals in Swedish churches. At the beginning of the play *A Painting on Wood*, Bergman states that his story is taken directly from a fresco in a church in southern Sweden. Bergman’s cultural well was deep and his taproot to Scandinavian culture profound. Swedenborg and Kirkegaard as much as Sibelius and Swedish history influenced him. But most of all in his own language there was Strindberg. There were also those whose influence could be directly felt, such as playwright Hjalmar Bergman.

The theatre and opera invade many of Bergman’s films in content, style, casting and tone. ...I would like to point out yet another influence on Bergman which is rarely given its full weight. Radio. Bergman wrote prolifically for Swedish radio and the medium fascinated him as much as it fascinated the young Orson Welles. The three primary elements in radio are: the utter reliance on words and sounds; the necessity for strict linear story-telling; the collusion with the imagination of the listener. All these qualities are found in many a Bergman film and *The Seventh Seal* is one of the finest examples.

...Between leaving home in the late 1930s and making *The Seventh Seal* in 1957, Bergman roared to glory....*The Seventh Seal* was the seventeenth film he had directed. He had scripted six other films which were directed by others and worked on many other scripts with other writers. His stage productions, if one includes amateur productions, are too numerous to list, but he managed about three or four major productions a year from 1944 to 1956. He also wrote twenty-three stage plays, as we have said, and worked on dozens of radio plays...

It is possible to trace a very great number of cultural influences in the script and film [of *The Seventh Seal*], and Peter Cowie notes some of them: Picasso’s picture of the two acrobats; Carl Orff’s ‘Carmina Burana’; Strindberg’s *Folk Sagas* and *To Denmark*; the church frescoes which Bergman went especially to see in Haskeborga Church. Just before beginning *The Seventh Seal* he directed for radio the old *Play of Everyman* by Hugo von Hofmannstahl, in which Max von Sydow was highly praised for his ‘pious emotional power’.

The budget was between 700,000 and 800,000 crowns (\$150,000). There were only three days on location—principally the opening sequence and the other hillside shots. One of those was the famous Dance of Death shot, which was improvised at such short notice that one of the actors (playing the blacksmith) had a stand-in. The weather and the location and the light were perfect and Bergman grabbed it in one take.

It was a film full of improvisation. The greater part was shot in the studios at Rasunda. Bergman is delighted to tell you that in one deep-forest sequence you can, if you look hard enough, see the plate-glass windows of a block of flats, and that the stream in the forest was in fact the overflow from a loose pipe which threatened to flood the place. The great scene with the flagellants was shot in a single day—extras coming from local geriatric homes. Bergman has often described it as a time of enormous fun.

He had his film family about him. Actors from the theatre, actors he had worked with before in film, actors who seemed to him to bring a new dimension to screen acting: intelligent people acting intelligent parts seriously and well. The

film was dedicated to Bibi Andersson, who was to work with him on more films and to live with him, as did several of his leading actresses. 'He had two sides to his talent,' she has said, 'one intuitive, chaotic, one disciplined, certain about amounts of money and amounts of days.' Liv Ullman said, 'It's like being with a lover, a lover who cares, you want to give of your best.' 'His background taught him to listen,' said Max von Sydow, 'and to feel and to try to find out what is going on beneath'....

In *The Seventh Seal* he had actors of the highest quality, a cameraman he was still deeply satisfied with (although he was to fall out with Gunnar Fischer and take up with Sven Nykvist), a script which had begun as a play and been reworked several times—when I shoot the picture, I have already planned how to edit it,' he told me. Above all, on that idyllic set with its little copses and open spaces at Rasundam he had total control. That is central to everything with Bergman. 'Like a flu, like a virus—I have to be involved—everybody in the studio has to be infected by the virus. What I want are people of high standards and integrity who like to play the game with me.'

...Within those few [opening] minutes the story of the film is all foretold. The plot is fixed: the Knight will challenge Death and he will fail because Death cannot lose. The plague will accompany them on their quest but so will the grace of innocence. Strong, even primal images obtain—the sky (the Heavens), the sea (the Womb), the stony beach (the Life/Death of Man), the hovering sea eagle (the Soul of Man). Everywhere the indifference of Nature. Bergman allows you many interpretations with the simplest of techniques. Death appears as a monk, reappears as a skull in monk's clothing, will soon reappear as an actor's mask. Death is the ultimate final challenge, the final reality and yet part of our play.

The music marks each movement, with unselfconscious emphasis. The 'Dies Irae' is played over the sky which is violently featured, half blinding light, half dark, poised to usher in the Revelations of the opening of the seventh seal. A medieval dancing sound sets off the Knight and his Squire on their travels, a sound soon to be punctured by the 'Dies Irae' which punches behind the dead skull. After that the Squire's ironic and funny comments on the skull's 'most eloquent', gravedigger humour again point to another strand—the Knight's unremitting seriousness, the Squire's agnostic and wry worldliness....

Perhaps it is this which makes *The Seventh Seal* such a satisfying film an a film which it is so easy to return to and remember: that each scene is at once so simple and so charged and layered that it catches us again and again.... You could tell the story to a child, publish it as a storybook of photographs and yet know that the deepest questions of religion and the most mysterious revelation of simply being alive are both addressed.

from *Filmmakers on Filmmaking*. V. I. Ed. Joseph McBride. J.P. Tarcher. Los Angeles 1983
from a seminar Bergman held at the Center for Advanced Film Studies, 1975.

In your films you often confuse reality and dreams, and I wonder if you feel that they are of equal importance.

BERGMAN: You know, you can't find in any other art, and you can't create a situation that is so close to dreaming as cinematography when it is at its best. Think only of the time gap: you can make things as long as you want, exactly as in a dream;

you can make things as short as you want, exactly as in a dream. As a director, a creator of the picture, you are like a dreamer: you can make what you want, you can construct everything. I think that is one of the most fascinating things that exist.

I think also the reception for the audience of a picture is very, very hypnotic. You sit there in a completely dark room, anonymous, and you look at a lightened spot in front of you and you don't move. You sit and you don't move and your eyes are concentrated on that white spot on the wall. That is some sort of magic. I think it's also magic that two times every fame comes and stands still for twenty-four parts of a second and then it darkens two times; a half part of the time when you see a picture you sit in complete darkness. Isn't that fascinating? That is magic. It's quite different when you watch television: you sit at home, you have light around you, you have people you know around you, the telephone is ringing, you can go out and have a cup of coffee, the children are making noise, I don't know what—but it is absolutely another situation.

We are in the position to work with the most fascinating medium that exists in the world because like music we go straight to the feeling—not over the intellect—we go straight to the feeling, as in music. Afterward we can start to work with our intellect. If the picture is good, if the suggestions from the creator of the picture are strong enough, they'll give you thoughts afterward; you'll start to think; they are intellectually stimulating.

You use women as your main characters quite a lot, and I was wondering how you relate to them, how you identify with them? Your male characters aren't very much in the foreground.

B: I like more to work with women. I have many good friends who are actors and I like tremendously to work together with them, but in filmmaking it's a job for good nerves and I think the women have much better nerves than the men have. It's so. I think the problems very often are the common problems. They are not, on the first hand, women; they are human beings. And God forgive me, but I have the feeling that the prima donnas always are male. I think it has to do with out whole social life and the male part and the female part they have to play, and it's very difficult to be an actor; it's not so difficult to be an actress in our society.

Buffalo Film Seminars resumes August 26 with Errol Morris's FOG OF WAR.

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