



Directed by Carl Theodor Dreyer
Produced by Carl Theodor Dreyer and Julian West
Cinematography by Rudolph Maté and Louis Née
Original music by Wolfgang Zeller
Film editing by Tonka Taldy
Art direction by Hermann Warm
Special effects by Henri Armand

Allan Grey...Julian West
 Der Schlossherr (Lord of the Manor)...Maurice Schutz
 Gisèle...Rena Mandel
 Léone...Sybille Schmitz
 Village Doctor...Jan Heironimko
 The Woman from the Cemetery...Henriette Gérard
 Old Servant...Albert Bras
 His Wife...N. Barbanini

CARL THEODOR DREYER (February 3, 1889, Copenhagen, Denmark—March 20, 1968, Copenhagen, Denmark) has 23 Directing credits, among them *Gertrud* (1964), *Ordet/The Word* (1955), *Et Slot i et slot/The Castle Within the Castle* (1955), *Storstrømsbroen/The Storstrom Bridge* (1950), *Thorvaldsen* (1949), *De nåede færgen/They Caught the Ferry* (1948), *Landsbykirken/The Danish Church* (1947), *Kampen mod kræften/The Struggle Against Cancer* (1947), *Vandet på landet/Water from the Land* (1946), *Två människor/Two People* (1945), *Vredens dag/Day of Wrath* (1943), *Mødrehjælpen/Good Mothers* (1942), *L'Esclave blanc/Jungla nera* (1936), *Vampyr - Der Traum des Allan Grey* (1932), *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc/The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), *Glomdalsbruden/The Bride of Glomdal* (1926), *Du skal ære din hustru/Master of the House/Thou Shalt Honour Thy Wife* (1925), *Michael/Chained: The Story of the Third Sex/Heart's Desire* (1924), *Der var engang/Once Upon a Time* (1922), *Die Gezeichneten/Love One Another* (1922), *Blade af Satans bog/Leaves from Satan's Book* (1921), and *Prästänkan/The Witch Woman* (1920), and *Præsidenten/The President* (1919).

RUDOLPH MATÉ (January, 21 1898, Kraków, Poland—27 October 1964, Hollywood, California) has 61 Cinematographer credits and 31 Directing Credits. He was nominated for 5 best cinematography Oscars: *Cover Girl* (1943), *Sahara* (1943), *The Pride of the Yankees* (1942), *That Hamilton Woman* (1941), and



Foreign Correspondent (1940). Some of the other films he shot were *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), *It Had to Be You* (1947), *Down to Earth* (1947), *Gilda* (1946), *They Got Me Covered* (1943), *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), *It Started with Eve* (1941), *Love Affair* (1939), *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (1938), *Stella Dallas* (1937), *Come and Get It* (1936), *Dodsworth* (1936), *A Message to Garcia* (1936), *Charlie Chan's Secret* (1936), *Metropolitan* (1935), *Dressed to Thrill* (1935), *Dante's Inferno* (1935), *Le Dernier milliardaire/The Last Billionaire/The Last Millionaire* (1934), *Liliom* (1934), *Paprika* (1933), *The Merry Monarch* (1933), *Une femme au Volant/A Woman at the Wheel* (1933), *Monsieur Albert/Mister Albert* (1932), *Vampyr - Der Traum des Allan Grey* (1932), *Prix de beauté/Miss Europe/Beauty Prize* (1930), *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc/The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), *Pietro der Korsar/Peter the Pirate* (1925), *Michael/Chained: The Story of the Third Sex* (1924), *Dunkle Gassen/Der Schwarze Boxer* (1923), *Lucifer* (1921), *Alpentragödie* (1920). **Some of the films and TV episodes he directed were** *Il Dominatore dei sette mari/Seven Seas to Calais* (1962) *The 300 Spartans* (1962), *The Barbarians* (1960) "The Loretta Young Show" (7 episodes, 1959-1960), "Zane Grey Theater" (1 episode, 1960), "General Electric Theater" (1 episode, 1958), *Miracle in the Rain* (1956), *The Far Horizons* (1955), *The Violent Men* (1955), *Siege at Red River* (1954), *Forbidden* (1953), *The Mississippi Gambler* (1953), *When Worlds Collide* (1951), *Branded* (1950), *Union Station* (1950), *D.O.A.* (1950), *No Sad Songs for Me* (1950), and *It Had to Be You* (1947).

JULIAN WEST (December 12, 1904—February 20, 1981) was the stage name of Baron Nicolas Louis Alexandre de Gunzburg, who was later an editor in chief of *Town & Country* and a senior fashion editor at *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar*. Calvin Klein said of him, "'He was truly the greatest inspiration of my life... he was my mentor, I was his protégé. If you talk about a person with style and true elegance—maybe I'm being a snob, but I'll tell you, there was no one like him. I used to think, boy, did he put me through hell sometimes, but boy, was I lucky. I was so lucky to have known him so well for so long.'" According to Wikipedia, "Born in Paris to a wealthy ennobled Russian banking family called Günzburg; the umlaut was dropped and the aristocratic particle "de" added in the nineteenth century. His father was a Russian Jew, and his mother was Polish-Brazilian, which perhaps accounts for his exotic good looks. The Günzburgs were, among other things, financial patrons of Russian dance impresario Sergei Diaghilev and his famed Ballets Russes in Paris during the first decades of the century. He was himself a patron of Vaslav Nijinsky until he was swayed by Diaghilev. Raised primarily in England his later youth was spent in France. The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, when he was just thirteen, had ended any heritage in the Günzburgs' native land of Russia to return to. Living the life of a bon vivant in the Paris of the 1920s and 1930s he was popular with the artistic and social elite of Paris. He spent money lavishly, and the parties he gave included extravagant sets designed by architects and artists. His costume balls and parties of pre-war Paris were discussed not for the next week, but the next forty years. Carl Theodor Dreyer the Danish film director, met him in 1931. This led to their co-production of the classic horror film *Vampyr* (1932) which used music, sound effects, and dialogue in an impressionistic way. Loosely based on the vampire novella *Carmilla* by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu the hero "Allan Gray" was played by Gunzburg under the screen name Julian West. After his father's death, he learned that the remaining family fortune proved to be nothing more than an illusion. Left with only the money he had in a checking account, he purchased his passage to America and used what was left to throw one last, great party in Paris- "Le Bal de Valses", and then set off for America. For this farewell he co-hosted a costume ball with his close friends the Prince and Princess Jean-Louis de Faucigny-Lucinge during the summer of 1934. "Le Bal de Valses", or "A Night at Schoenbrunn", had as its theme the Imperial Court at Vienna in the late 19th century. Arriving in America in 1934, Gunzburg settled first in California. He was one of many European émigrés who sought refuge in the growing colony of artists in Hollywood. Here he met Erik Rhodes, an actor, with whom he would live for a number of years after the Second World War. In any case, Gunzburg soon headed back east, this time to New York City, which was his home for the remainder of his life." *Vampyr* was his only acting job.

DREYER, Carl Theodor, from *World Film Directors V. I. Ed John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Co NY 1987, entry by Philip Kemp*

Danish director and scenarist, born in Copenhagen. According to recent research by Maurice Drouzy, he was the illegitimate son of a Swedish woman, Josefin Bernhardin Nilsson. His father, Jens Christian Trop, owned a farm near Kjristianstad in southern Sweden, where Josefin Nilsson worked as a housekeeper. To avoid scandal, she went to Copenhagen to have her baby in

anonymous seclusion. For the first two years of his life, the child lived in a succession of foster homes, before his mother succeeded in having him adopted early in 1891. A few weeks later she died, poisoned by phosphorus, which she had taken in a misinformed attempt to abort a second pregnancy.

The boys adoptive parents were a young Danish couple. The family was not well off and often had to move in search of cheaper lodging. Perhaps partly as a result of this poverty, Dreyer's childhood he described to his friend Ebbe Neergaard, was unhappy and emotionally deprived; his adopted family "never ceased to let him feel that he ought to be grateful for the food he was given, and that he really had no claim to anything, considering that his mother had managed to escape for paying for him by departing this world. As soon as possible he was encouraged to start earning his keep.



Dreyer, always a reserved and reticent man, rarely discussed his personal life, but his marriage was to all appearances a happy one, lasting until his death fifty-seven years.

In 1913 he joined Nordisk Films Kompagni as a part-time screenwriter, becoming a full-time employee two years later. At the time the Danish film industry was at the height of its brief Golden Age, producing a spate of movies that rivaled those of Hollywood for international popularity. Between 1910 and 1916 Nordisk alone turned out over a hundred films a year. Dreyer's first task was to devise dialogue for intertitles, but soon he was writing complete scripts, editing films, and acting as literary consultant on potential properties. From 1913 to 1918 he was credited with scripts for more than twenty films and worked uncredited on many more. It served him, he later said, as "a marvelous school."

In 1918, having worked a five-year apprenticeship, Dreyer suggested that Nordisk should let him direct. The studio agreed readily enough, and Dreyer began work on *Praesidenten* (*The President*, 1919), to his own script from a novel by Karl Franzos. The film proved a creaky, old-fashioned melodrama, full of seductions, illegitimacies, improbable coincidences, and impossibly stacy acting, all strung around a complicated flashback structure that betrayed the ill-digested influence of D.W. Griffith. Dreyer subsequently attributed the hammy gesticulations to his directorial inexperience: "I let the actors do what they liked. Later I saw my mistakes on the screen."

More characteristic of Dreyer's later work was his

handling of some of the smaller roles, where he cast nonprofessionals in the interests of authenticity, and his treatment of the décor, which was clean and uncluttered, contrasting black and white in starkly dramatic compositions. *Praesidenten* also marks the first appearance of Dreyer's perennial theme: an isolated suffering woman victimized by intolerant society....

The German film industry, led by the mighty UFA studios in Berlin, was now at the height of its influence and prestige, and it was for Decla-Bioscop, the "artistic" of UFA, that Dreyer directed *Mikael* (1924), with Erich Pommer producing....

"*Mikael*," in Tom Milne's opinion, "is perhaps Dreyer's first masterpiece, assured, reticent, and radiant with subtle inner connections." Certainly it enabled Dreyer to explore, more fully than in any of his previous films, his technique of expressing his characters' inner moral condition through the décor that surrounds them....

Master of the House (1925) also displays Dreyer's increasingly assured use of facial closeups as a key element in the construction of his films. "Nothing in the world," he once wrote, "can be compared to the human face. It is a land one can never tire of exploring. There is no greater experience in a studio than to witness the expression of a sensitive face under the mysterious power of inspiration. To see it animated from inside, and turning into poetry."

Master of the House enjoyed considerable success, especially in France, prompting the Société Générale des Films to offer Dreyer a contract for the film that would soon make him famous... Dreyer had now directed eight films in seven years. In the remaining forty-two years of his life he was to make only six more features—although they include all the five films on which his reputation now rests....

Throughout these [earlier] films, too, Dreyer can be seen striving for truth and sincerity on the screen, pressing for naturalistic settings and performances in the hope of achieving emotional truth. "What interests me," he explained, "—and this comes before technique—is to reproduce the feelings of the characters in my films: to reproduce as sincerely as possible feelings which are as sincere as possible. For me, the important thing is not only to seize the words they say, but also the thoughts behind those words." Also increasingly evident is what Tom Milne described as "Dreyer's preoccupation with texture, with the way the material world impinges on the human beings who live apparently detached from it, and with the tangibility of a gesture or a glance and with the equal tangibility of objects."

All these elements coalesce in Dreyer's next, and still his most famous, film. Invited to Paris, he proposed a choice of three subjects to the Société Générale—Marie Antoinette, Catherine de Medici, and Joan of Arc—and finally (by drawing matches, Dreyer later claimed) settled on Joan. Given ample time and a generous budget of seven millions francs, he spent several months in research and preparation before starting production on an unhurried schedule. To represent Rouen Castle, a huge concrete complex was constructed of interconnecting walls, towers, houses, a drawbridge, and a church, designed by Herman Warm (set designer on *Caligari*) and Jean Hugo. Warm drew his inspiration from medieval miniatures, with their disconcerting angles and naive perspective. Dreyer's script was based largely on the original transcripts of Joan's trial, though the twenty-nine separate interrogations were telescoped into one single, harrowing sequence.

It is virtually impossible today, even on a first viewing, to

come to *La Passion of Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc*, 1927) with a wholly fresh eye, so familiar have stills from it become. This may partly explain why some critics have tended to dismiss the film as no more than "an extension of still photography." Certainly few films, before or since, can have contained such a high proportion of facial close-ups—dictated, according to Dreyer, by the inherent nature of the material. "There were the questions, there were the answers—very short, very crisp.... Each question, each answer, quite naturally called for a close-up.... In addition, the result of the close-ups was that the spectator was as shocked as Joan was, receiving the questions, tortured by them." There was also a notable lack of establishing situation-shots: deprived of any clear sense of geographical layout of the various settings, we are left as helplessly disoriented as Joan herself.

Jeanne d'Arc comes across, in Jean Sémolué's term, as "a film of confrontation"—a sustained assault on the heroine (and the viewer) full of unsettling camera angles and off-center framings. "The architecture of Joan's world," wrote Paul Schrader, "literally conspires against her; like the faces of her inquisitors, the halls doorways, furniture are on the offensive, striking, swooping at her with oblique angles, attacking her with hard-edged chunks of black and white." In the title role, Maria Falconetti gave one of the most intense performances of mental and physical anguish in the history of cinema. (Astonishingly, it was the first and only film she ever made.) Her suffering face has achieved iconographic status as the classic cinematic depiction of martyrdom. "That shaven head," observed Jean Renoir, "was and remains the abstraction of the whole epic of Joan of Arc."

Along with the rest of the cast, Falconetti acted completely without make-up; Rudolph Maté's high-contrast lighting brought out every detail of the actors' features with stark clarity. Antonin Artaud was at his most gauntly beautiful as the sympathetic Massieu, while the faces of Joan's accusers, all lumps and warts and fleshly pouches, frequently recall the onlookers in crucifixions by Breughel or Bosch. These hostile figures are repeatedly shot from ground-level, to make them appear huge and intimidating; to this end, Dreyer had numerous holes dug all over the set, causing the film crew to nickname him "Carl Gruyère."

From this film, and especially from his allegedly harsh treatment of Falconetti, dates Dreyer's reputation as an exacting and tyrannical director. He himself, while conceding that he made considerable demands on his actors, rejected any suggestion of tyranny, stressing instead the importance of mutual cooperation. A director, he maintained, must be "careful never to force his own interpretation on an actor, because an actor cannot create truth and pure emotions on command. One cannot push feelings out. They have to arise from themselves, and it is the director's and actor's work in unison to bring them to that point."

Jeanne d'Arc was a huge world-wide critical success but a commercial flop. Almost instantly hailed as a classic, it has consistently maintained its position as one of the enshrined masterpieces of the cinema. Godard paid homage to it when, in *Vivre sa vie*, he showed Anna Karina watching it in a movie theatre, moved to tears.

The Société Générale had intended Dreyer to make a second film for them, but the financial failure of *Jeanne d'Arc* and of the even more catastrophic *Napoleon* of Abel Gance (which the Société had also backed) made this impossible. Dreyer, already irritated because his film—or so he claimed—had been mutilated to avoid offending Catholic sensibilities, sued for breach of

contract. The lawsuit dragged on, and not until the autumn of 1931 as Dreyer, having won his case, at last free to make another film.

A wealthy young film enthusiast, Baron Nicholas de Gunzberg now approached Dreyer with a proposal that they form an independent production company. The film that they produced was *Vampyr* (1932)—one of the strangest, most idiosyncratic horror films ever made. Shot largely in a derelict chateau, with a cast composed almost entirely of nonprofessionals, it conjures up a pale, drifting, drowned world, in which events glide with the hallucinatory slowness of dreams and menace resides in the intangible reverberations of sights and sounds that seem to hover just beyond the reach of consciousness. Without gore or Grand Guignol, or the harsh gothic chiaroscuro of Murnau or James Whale, *Vampyr* creates an uncannily convincing universe of fantastic reality.

Dreyer's script was adapted, very freely, from two stories by the nineteenth-century Irish writer, Sheridan Le Fanu. The plot, such as it is, tells of a young man, David Gray, who comes to a remote village where a vampire, the un-dead Marguerite Chopin, preys on the living bodies of young women, abetted by the village doctor. Eventually Gary succeeds in destroying the vampire, and the curse is lifted. But plot in *Vampyr* is totally subordinated to mood and atmosphere. A grey, floating mist, as if everything were in a state of dissolution, pervades the film—an effect that Dreyer and his photographer, Rudolph Maté, hit on by lucky accident when a light shone on the camera lens during the first day's shooting. The general incompetence of the acting also contributes to the dissociated mood: the film's producer, Baron de Gunzberg, himself playing the hero under the pseudonym of Julian West, shambles somnambulistically through the action, seeming (in Paul Schrader's words) "not an individual personality. but the fluid, human component of a distorted, expressionistic universe." The film was post-dubbed by the actors themselves into English, French and German versions, thus further heightening the sense of unreality, since few of them were fluent in all three languages.



Vampyr, wrote Robin Wood in *Film Comment* (March 1974), "is one of the most dreamlike movies ever made, and one of the few to capture successfully the *elusiveness* of dream....Dreyer has here created a visual style unlike any other film, including many of his own." David Thomson, though, pointed out that "its intensity reflects back on all Dreyer's other films, showing how entirely they are creations of light, shade, and camera position." Most critics would now agree with Tom Milne in seeing *Vampyr* as "one of the key works in his career...quintessentially Dreyer"; but when released it was a

critical—as well as financial—disaster, and for years afterward could be dismissed as "a puerile story about phantoms." (Georges Sadoul)

Dreyer had now acquired the reputation of being a difficult and demanding director, averse to compromise, given to disputes and recriminations, and one moreover whose films lost money. Refusing to submit himself to the discipline of any of the major studios, Dreyer found himself unemployable. For the next ten years, at the height of his powers, he made no films. Various projects came to nothing: discussion in Britain with John Grierson; a version of *Madame Bovary* which eventually went to Renoir (1934); an idea for a film about Mary Queen of Scots. In 1936 he traveled to Somalia to make a semi-documentary film, *Mudundu*, with French and Italian backing. Several thousand meters of film were shot before Dreyer clashed with the producers and eventually withdrew, leaving the picture to be completed by Ernesto Quadrone.

After this fiasco, Dreyer returned to Denmark and once more took up journalism under his old pseudonym of "Tommen," writing film reviews and law reports. His chance to direct again came in 1942. With imported films blocked under the German occupation, the Danish film industry had reclaimed a greater share of the market and needed products. To prove that he could work on commission and within a budget, Dreyer directed a government documentary short, *Modrehjaelpen* (*Good Mothers*, 1942), about social care for unmarried mothers. On the strength of this, Palladium (for whom he had made *Master of the House*) offered him a contract for a feature film.

Vredens Dag (*Day of Wrath*, 1943) is, according to Robin Wood, "Dreyer's richest work...because it expresses most fully the ambiguities inherent in his vision of the world." It also unites all those elements that are held, perhaps unfairly, to be most typical of Dreyer's films. Its prevailing mood is somber, lowering, intense; the narrative pace is steady and deliberate, presenting horrific events with chilling restraint, and it deals with religious faith, the supernatural, social intolerance, innocence and guilt, and the suffering of women. In its visual texture *Day of Wrath* arguably presents, even more than *Jeanne d'Arc*, the most complete example of Dreyer's use of light and darkness to express moral and emotional concerns....

"The interest in Dreyer's films," suggested Jean Sémolue, "resides not in the depiction of events, nor of predetermined characters, but in the depiction of the changes wrought on characters by events."

In considering Dreyer's work as a whole, most critics, without disparaging his considerable skills as a screenwriter, have stressed the visual aspects of the films as his most distinctive achievement. "Dreyer's style is wholly pictorial," asserted Richard Rowland, "it is visual images that we remember. . . faces, lights, and shadows."

...During the next ten years, Dreyer worked on a number of film projects: an adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*, a version of Faulkner's *Light in August*, treatments of Ibsen's *Brand*, Strindberg's *Damascus*, and O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*—as well as his most cherished project, a life of Christ to be filmed in Israel. But he completed only one more film: *Gertrud* (1964), based on the play by Hjalmar Söderberg....

This accepted view of Dreyer was fairly accurately summarized by Eileen Bowser: "his martyrs, his vampires, his

witches and his holy madmen are different facets of the same theme: the power of evil, the suffering of the innocent, the inevitability of fate, the certainty of death.”... But this doomsday resumé is not all of Dreyer and with his earlier silent films—especially *The Parson’s Widow*, *Mikael*, and *Master of the House*—gaining wider circulation and with *Vampyr* growing steadily in critical regard, there are signs that the conventional picture of the director may be changing, and that the lighter, often even cheerful, aspects of his work are achieving recognition.

After *Gertrud*, Dreyer continued to work on preparations for *Jesus*, completing the script (which was later published), learning Hebrew, and visiting Israel to hunt for locations. His age and exacting reputation, though, made potential backers wary. Finally, in November 1967, the Danish government offered three million kroner. In February 1968 the Italian state company, RAI, announced that it was prepared to back the film. Dreyer’s dream of twenty years seemed at last about to be realized. The next month he died, of heart failure, aged seventy-nine.



Vampyr Criterion DVD. “Vampyr’s Ghosts and Demons,” Mark Le Fanu.

A glance at *Vampyr* should begin with its Danish begetter, Carl Theodor Dreyer (1889-1968), whose relatively restricted output has not prevented him from being spoken of as one of the greatest film directors of all time. The accolade rests not so much on some perceived technical prowess as on the recognition of a very special spiritual integrity: everything he touched—and he touched many different genres in the course of his lifetime—he made inimitably his own. Proud, shy, and reticent in his personal life, he gave all he had to the burgeoning craft of cinema. Somehow or other, the profundity and heroism of that sacrifice are communicated as a felt value in his movies. Each of them has a beautiful seriousness.

The bulk of Dreyer’s filmography—nine films out of a total of fourteen, stretching from his debut in 1919 to *The Passion of Joan of Arc* in 1928—belongs to the silent epoch. And most of it was made outside his native Denmark. The country had enjoyed a brief golden age of cinema just prior to the First World War, but by the time Dreyer was establishing himself, in the late teens, this flowering was ending, and he was forced to seek his fortune abroad, wherever he could find backers, which in practice meant Germany and France. *The Passion of Joan of Arc*, his last effort in

the twenties, is one of the finest of all silent films—an epitome of the art form as it had developed up to that point—but it was not a success with the public. Notoriously, *Vampyr*, his next work and first sound film, would fail to find an audience too, and even more disastrously than *Joan of Arc* did, so it is worth emphasizing that this strange, hermetic, and experimental film was originally conceived of as, if not exactly a “potboiler” (the concept is impossible in Dreyer’s case), then at least something possessing—he hoped—healthy moneymaking possibilities. After the great expressionistic outburst at the beginning of the decade that had ushered in masterpieces like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920) and *Nosferatu* (F. W. Murnau, 1922), vampires, horror, and darkness were in vogue again toward the end of the twenties—both in Europe and the United States. In films such as *The Lodger* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1927) and *The Cat and the Canary* (Paul Leni, 1927) Dreyer discerned, or thought he could discern, instances of a genre where broad popular appeal was allowed to exist within the framework of artistic integrity.

The material Dreyer and his coscenarist Christen Jul chose to base their screenplay on (the director always worked from literary sources) was a collection of supernatural tales entitled *In a Glass Darkly*, by the nineteenth-century Irish Huguenot writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu—one tale in particular standing out from the collection, “Carmilla,” a strikingly modern vampire story with a scarcely concealed lesbian subtext. Since the writer of these lines professes kinship with Le Fanu, there has always been the hope harbored that Dreyer had a special fondness for this author. Alas, according to Caspar Tybjerg, currently writing what promises to be a major and long-needed biography of the director, there is no evidence, one way or the other, that this was the case. Other considerations may have been rather more important. After the legal trouble Murnau had with the Bram Stoker estate on the release of *Nosferatu* in 1922, one thing that *had* to be got right was that the material should be out of copyright. And here, as luck would have it (Le Fanu died in 1873), Dreyer was on safe ground.

In any event, it is a somewhat contentious question how much *Vampyr* really is based on “Carmilla.” The French film historian Maurice Drouzy, who has written extensively on the director and knew many of his collaborators firsthand, is only one of a number of authorities who believe that the debt is quite marginal. “While certain directors don’t hesitate to pillage literature without naming their sources,” Drouzy wrote in his 1982 book *Carl Th. Dreyer né Nilsson*, “Dreyer, here, was engaged in an exactly opposite maneuver, that of attaching his own ideas to an innocent third party. Why didn’t he, I wonder, own up to the fact that he invented the whole thing?” Drouzy’s answer—that Dreyer needed the camouflage to protect the deepest personal meaning of the film from the public’s and critics’ gaze—is suggestive, and we will come back to it. Still, it is fair to add that Drouzy’s take on the adaptation (or as he would say, the pseudoadaptation) is not necessarily the last word. Other writers—notably S.S. Prawer in his fine monograph *Caligari’s Children: The Film as Tale of Terror* and David Rudkin in an exceptionally intelligent essay published recently by the British Film Institute—have been more patient with the mysterious ways by which literary sources “infiltrate” scenarios, not always head-on, yet in the end decisively, through their accumulation of often surprising detail. A crucial linkage here is that the vampire, in both story and film, should be female. In “Carmilla” she is young and beautiful, whereas in *Vampyr*, of course (it is one of the most striking things one remembers from the film), she is a stout, aged witch with a walking stick. As Prawer points out, the cue for this

change is provided by the original, in the figure of Carmilla's terrifying mother, briefly introduced in Le Fanu's tale, before just as suddenly vanishing. Nor is the intimate, adolescent, and sexual subtext of the story totally absent from the movie—mediated here by the bifurcation of Le Fanu's ripe, innocent heroine Laura into a pair of languid sisters, Léone and Gisele, one of whom in becoming a vampire herself, substitutes for the absent central figure of Carmilla, whom Dreyer and Jul chose to dispense with.

In the end, the issue is probably not whether the film is 100 percent faithful to the original (plainly it is not) but what *Vampyr* signifies in its own terms, as an autonomous aesthetic object. Its elliptical, dreamlike logic seems to demand, more than many films do, some definitive shot at interpretation. What is it exactly that we have watched here? Can we piece together what the film means? A critic who failed to ask these kinds of questions would be failing in his duty, I think, and indeed it is one of the attractive aspects of Drouzy's approach to Dreyer that he doesn't hesitate to give us a reading. We may or may not agree with him in the event, we may feel (as with most interpretations) that there is something reductive and simplistic about it, but at least it is there and examinable. The essence of Drouzy's case, as I have already said, is that the film is profoundly autobiographical. He claims that it plays out as a fantastic psychodrama the ambivalence and pain that Dreyer felt all his adult life about his fate as an abandoned, adopted child. In the film, the vampire Marguerite is Dreyer's hated Danish foster mother (Marie in real life), while Léone is his beloved birth mother, whom our hero fails to rescue from suicide yet who nonetheless survives, reborn and reanimated, in the figure of her "twin" sister Gisele—whom our hero in due course falls in love with (just to round out the Oedipal circle).

In forwarding his thesis, Drouzy makes a lot of play with proper names. Marguerite, as we have seen, elides into Marie (perhaps not so close after all?); Gisele and Léone are pressed together to become—in a pinch—Joséphine, the first half of the name of Dreyer's birth mother. Her complete name Josephine-Bernhardine, is supplied, conveniently, by the names of the castle owner's servant, Joseph (an important secondary figure in the film) and the castle owner himself, Bernard.

The reader may harbor legitimate doubts about the usefulness of this kind of Freudian detective work, while at the same time recognizing that names *are* an interesting aspect of the film. The fact that the vampire is given a surname is quite striking in the first place: her complete name, Marguerite Chopin, certainly has a ring to it. Then there are the different names that the hero is known by: in real life Baron Nicholas de Gunzberg (the film's independent financial backer), he is credited in the movie with the stage name, or pseudonym, of Julian West, while—depending on which print one sees—the character he plays is called either Allan Gray or David Gray. The explanation for all this may well be straightforward—attributable to nothing more odd than the different linguistic versions of the film (French, German, and English) that Dreyer was preparing for the international market. Yet, on the other hand, if we think about it, this pluralism really does seem to symbolize something important about the film, and that is the way that the characters

dissolve into each another, taking on different personas, imitating in so doing the logic of dreams, in which identity is always fluid, and you—the dreaming subject, the inventor of these phantasms—can never be quite sure whom you're dealing with.

So a fascinating aspect of the film is the way that the hero himself, and not just the heroine, is "bifurcated," not only (though most obviously) in the scene in which, after he has tripped and fallen in the meadow, we see his soul (in double exposure) leaving his body, but also in some earlier scenes where a kind of "relay effect" is introduced by allowing the servant Joseph to take over from Gray the reading of the vampire manuscript—in effect usurping Gray's function as authorial presence and chief guide to events (a substitution reinforced toward the film's ending, where intriguingly it is Joseph, not Gray, who digs up the coffin and, in the censored version at least, seems to be the one who drives the fatal stake through Marguerite Chopin's heart [see the chapter "Vanished Scenes" in Caspar Tyberg's visual essay]).

The serious theme that may be said to lie behind the vampire genre concerns the issue of life after death—in what ways such a concept may ever be true, and if true, desirable. It is a question that fascinated Dreyer throughout his life, both within and without the traditional Christian context. The meditation it encompasses is the central idea explored in what is probably Dreyer's greatest work, *Ordet* (1955), from Karl Munk's play, which ends, stupendously, with the resurrection of the young heroine Inger after she has supposedly died in childbirth.

Impossible, blasphemous, and yet (in the context the film provides for it) true, just, and compelling. There is none of the malignity and madness in that film that one finds in *Vampyr*. It is a different kind of poetic sublime. But with vampires, too, it is the pathos of immortality that moves us most, when we admit to being moved—the restlessness of their undead souls, the sadness of their longing to be done with it all, even as they feed on the blood of live mortals.

The vampire genre gave Dreyer the chance to explore, too, a more contingent aspect of immortality, the idea of out-of-body experiences—the notion (terrifying or exalting depending on circumstances) that the soul may survive, even for a short period, the physical death of the

subject, rising out of the body to look down upon it from "above," as happens in the extraordinary sequence in which Gray, nailed into a casket, seems to observe his own progress as the coffin is carried through the streets of Courtempière toward the cemetery. Bergman may have been thinking of this episode when he came to stage the wonderful dream early on in *Wild Strawberries*, in which old Professor Isak Borg, played by Victor Sjöström, confronts his ghostly double in the coffin that slides out of a broken carriage. It is a fair guess, anyway, that at one time or another many of us have dreamed of such ghostly encounters with ourselves, just as we regularly dream, too, of the beloved dead—friends and relatives departed from us who for the duration of the dream are yet back and "alive" in our company. doing their best to prove that they are immortal.

On waking, alas, it is different. Then we see that death is really irrevocable. Under cover of the film's discreet symbolism,



the two sides of the question are both present: the hope for continuance coupled to the notion of irredeemable loss. Dreyer's birth mother, a servant seduced by her Swedish master, killed herself in a particularly horrible way when Dreyer was two years old, by eating a box of phosphorous matches. We glanced at the question earlier of whether Drouzy's autobiographical reading of the film is or is not to be judged "far-fetched." Yet if proof for Drouzy's contention is needed, it is perhaps provided by the extraordinary moment (one of a number of such moments accruing round this strikingly conceived character) when we come across the vampire sister, Léone, staring at the poison bottle by her bedside with a mixture of longing and horror. Drouzy doesn't say it explicitly, so we may be allowed to say it for him, that it is difficult, if not plain impossible, to avoid here a fleeting reminiscence of Josephine-Bernhardine's last moments on earth. It is the intensity of the shot that permits this intimation: the idea that we are in the presence, if only momentarily, of something personal, secret, and momentous. (No one involved could have known when the film was being shot that the actress who plays the part, Sybille Schmitz—one of the few professionals in the cast—was herself to end her life tragically by suicide.)

Vampyr was made at a time when the technology of sound was still at a quite early stage of its development, and the aesthetics of the film still belong in obvious and important ways to the silent epoch. There is no harm in that: by the end of the twenties, the vocabulary (so to speak) of silent film had reached, internationally, an extraordinary level of refinement and sophistication. Indeed, it could be argued that a significant percentage of the most beautiful films of all time belong to this period. I refer here not only to refinement of visual composition (Dreyer himself was one of the greatest contemporary connoisseurs of painting) but also to the suppleness of camera movement, which, following the innovations of Murnau in the mid-1920s, took off in a major way during the rest of the decade. *Vampyr* is full of terrifyingly soigné traveling shots that explore space and locale with freedom and daring. We are never quite sure where we are, and for once, this confusion is productive. Yet to return to sound for a moment, the opacity (one might almost say crudity) of the dialogue is arguably an "aesthetic value," contributing importantly to the film's uncanny, dreamlike atmosphere. (We do talk in dreams, of course, but somehow

speech is not dreams' primary element.) In later vampire movies—for example, the famous Hammer cycle of the sixties and seventies—talk is naturalized into the dramatic fabric of the scenario, at the expense, however, of atmosphere and mystery, introducing indeed, at times, an unwanted comic element: such movies slide easily into camp. It would be wrong to imagine that Dreyer was uninterested in speech. On the contrary, later films of his show, among other things, a complete mastery of the medium of sound. But in *Vampyr*, Dreyer intuited, correctly I believe, that, concerning atmosphere, the crucial contribution would continue to be made (where it had always been made in the days of co-called silent film) through the medium of music. And, in fact, Wolfgang Zeller's delicately eerie score is one of the film's quiet triumphs.

The movie premiered in Berlin in the spring of 1932, but as stated previously, it was not a popular success: on its opening night, it was booed by a section of the audience, anticipating the notorious reception in Paris, some thirty years later, of Dreyer's sublime masterpiece, *Gertrud*. Nor did the film's lukewarm welcome in Copenhagen nearly a year later help to restore the director's equilibrium. The independence he enjoyed as a producer, while providing him with vital aesthetic freedom, had worn him down physically and mentally. As Drouzy records, the shooting of *Vampyr* was a draining and indeed fearful experience for all involved, taking its toll on Dreyer's personal life. In its wake, there were the inevitable money problems. His marriage came under threat, and for a time he entered a psychiatric clinic (by bizarre coincidence, the name of this establishment, at Saint-Mandé, near Paris, turned out to be the Institut Jeanne d'Arc). At the same time, contacts reestablished with his old production company, Société Général de Films, issued only in abortive projects—a doomed production company in Somalia—before being ruptured altogether. We are entering what Drouzy calls "les années noires de Dreyer," the bulk of the 1930s, when rather little is known about his movements. He rested and read and wrote articles. Ten years were to pass before a new Dreyer emerged at the far side of his crisis—strengthened, reinvigorated, and ready to enter the fight again.

[Mark Le Fanu is a Danish-based critic and film historian who has written books about Tarkovsky and Mizoguchi. He contributes regularly to *Sight and Sound* and the French film monthly *Positif*.]

COMING UP IN BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XIV:

- Jan 20 Preston Sturges SULLIVAN'S TRAVELS 1941
- Jan 27 Samuel Fuller PICKUP ON SOUTH STREET 1953
- Feb 3 Henri-Georges Clouzot LES DIABOLIQUES 1955
- Feb 10 Jack Clayton THE INNOCENTS 1961
- Feb 17 Akira Kurosawa HIGH AND LOW/TENGOKU TO JIGOKU 1963
- Feb 24 Ján Kadar & Elmar Klos THE SHOP ON MAIN STREET/OBCHOD NA KORZE 1966
- March 3 Jean-Pierre Melville LE CERCLE ROUGE 1970
- March 17 Robert Altman, THE LONG GOODBYE, 1973
- March 24 Andrei Tarkovsky: NOSTALGHIA 1983
- March 31 Larisa Shepitko THE ASCENT/VOSKHOZHDENIYE 1977
- April 7 Warren Beatty REDS 1981
- April 14 32 SHORT FILMS ABOUT GLENN GOULD
- April 21 Pedro Almodóvar ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER/TODO SOBRE MI MADRE 1999

Other Screenings of Interest

Jay Ruof continues his series of exceptional classic and recent films at the Hamburg Palace Theater (31 Buffalo St., Hamburg NY 14075). Here's the January schedule:

Jan 13 - 15 *THE EXILES* 1961 bw a documentary about the Native American community in a part of Los Angeles that is no longer there - Bunker Hill. Kent MacKenzie created and directed the film and it has been recently restored by the UCLA Film & Television Archives.

Jan 17 - 18 *THE BIRDS* 1963 35 mm film to be shown of the classic Alfred Hitchcock movie as part of their continuing monthly Hitchcock festival.

Jan 24 - 26 *AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL* 2008 documentary by Darryl Roberts about America's obsession with beauty. Mr. Roberts will be at the Jan 24 screening.

Jan 27 - 29 *MONSIEUR VERDOUX* 1947 bw A new 35 mm film print will be shown of this classic Charlie Chaplin movie. Chaplin stated that this was his favorite film.

3 x3 @ AKAG

Bruce Jackson and Diane Christian will host a series of nine Thursday evening film screenings at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery this spring. They will present three films by three masters of film form: Jean Renoir (1894–1979), Federico Fellini (1920—1993), and Yasujirō Ozu (1903—1963). All screenings will be free with Gallery admission, and will take place in the Gallery's auditorium beginning at 7:30 p.m.

Jean Renoir

February 5 *The Grand Illusion* 1937
 February 12 *La Bête Humaine* 1938
 February 19 *Rules of the Game* 1939

Federico Fellini

March 5 *I Vitelloni* 1953
 March 19 *8 ½* 1963
 March 26 *Juliet of the Spirits* 1965

Yasujirō Ozu

April 9 *Late Spring* 1949
 April 16 *Tokyo Story* 1953
 April 23 *Floating Weeds* 1959

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...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>

...to subscribe to the weekly email informational notes, send an email to addto_list@buffalofilmseminars.com

...for cast and crew info on any film: <http://imdb.com/>

The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the Market Arcade Film & Arts Center and State University of New York at Buffalo with support from the Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation and the Buffalo News