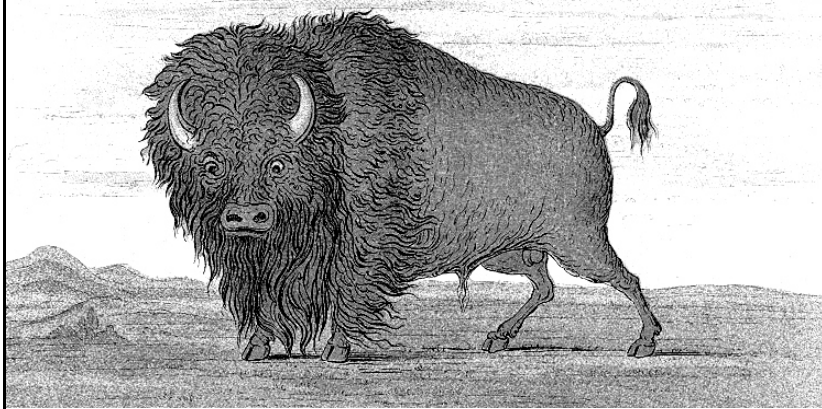


# The Buffalo Film Seminars



Conversations about great films  
with Diane Christian & Bruce Jackson

**INGMAR BERGMAN** (14 July 1918, Uppsala, Uppsala län, Sweden) has directed 61 films and written 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 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), *HOUR 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.) Sadoomasochistic 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



**MARCH 1, 2005 (X:6)**  
**SMULTRONSTÄLLET/WILD STRAWBERRIES (1957) 91 min**

Directed by Ingmar Bergman  
Written by Ingmar Bergman  
Produced by Allan Ekelund  
Cinematography by Gunnar Fischer

Victor Sjöström...Professor Isak Borg  
Bibi Andersson...Sara  
Ingrid Thulin...Marianne Borg  
Gunnar Björnstrand...Evald Borg  
Jullan Kindahl...Agda  
Folke Sundquist...Anders  
Björn Bjelfvenstam...Viktor  
Naima Wifstrand...Isak's Mother  
Max von Sydow...Henrik Åkerman

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, Silbodal, 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), *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).

**INGRID THULIN** (27 January 1926, Sollefteå, Västernorrlands län, Sweden—7 January 2004, Stockholm, Sweden. cancer) acted in 64 films (including 10 by Bergman), the last of which was *La Casa del sorriso* (1988). Some of the others were *The Cassandra Crossing* (1976), *Viskningar och rop/Cries and Whispers* (1972), *La Caduta degli dei/The Damned* (1969), *Tystnaden/The Silence* (1963),

*Nattvardsgästerna/Winter Light* (1963), *Ansiktet/The Magician* (1958)

**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 Emigrant* (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).

**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 a 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.

### **Wild Strawberries. Philip & Kersti French BFI London 1995**

*Wild Strawberries* brings together the dominant figure of the Swedish cinema's Golden Age [Victor Sjöström] and the pre-eminent figure of its second flowering [Ingmar Bergman]. They could almost be considered the film's joint auteurs.

The Golden Age of the Swedish cinema began in 1913, lasted a decade, and was overwhelmingly the creation of two charismatic, strikingly handsome directors, Victor Sjöström (1879-1960) and Mauritz Stiller (1883-1928)...Five of Sjöström's finest films and three of Stiller's were based on novels by Selma Lagerlof, who in 1909 became the first woman (and the first Swede) to win the Nobel prize for literature.

Sjöström acted in most of his own movies as well as several of Stiller's. With his large head and square thrusting jaw he was a forceful presence, and he soon became a popular star. His films dealt with social injustice, prejudice, redemption, revenge and eternal love, frequently in rural and historical settings making extensive use of natural locations and more often than not the tone and conclusion were tragic. By the early 1920s his renown was matched only by Griffith and Chaplin, who called him 'the greatest director in the world'. Thus the Swedish cinema as a presence on the world scene (though not as a local industry) came to an abrupt end when Sjöström went to Hollywood in 1923, and Stiller followed him there the following year, accompanied by Greta Garbo, the star of his masterpiece, *Gosta Berlings Saga (The Atonement of Gosta Berling)*. Sjöström directed Garbo in *The Divine Woman* (1929), of which no print is known to exist, and made one sound movie, *A Lady in Love* (1929), before returning to Sweden for good at the age of fifty.

[Sjöström helped with Bergman's first film *Crisis*, giving practical advice and encouragement.] Sjöström noted in his diary: "Touchy moments with Ingmar Bergman, who is extremely sensitive and lets himself be easily thrown off balance." As Bergman recalls it: "He grabbed me firmly by the nape of my neck and walked me like that back and forth across the asphalted area outside the studio, mostly in silence, but suddenly he was saying things that were simple and comprehensible. You make your scenes too complicated...Work more simply. Film the actors from the front. They like that and it's best that way. Don't keep having rows with everyone. They will simply get angry and do a less good job."

The firm hand of Sjöström must have reminded Bergman

of his father, and indeed there is a certain physical resemblance between the two stern, mustachioed men. It is also the case that Sjöström's own father, though never ordained, became a domineering religious zealot.

[Bergman worked with Sjöström in *Till Gladje (To Joy, 1949)*.] Nearly ten years would pass before Bergman and Sjöström worked together again—in 1957 on *Wild Strawberries*.

*Wild Strawberries* begins with Professor Eberhard Isak Borg, Professor Emeritus of Bacteriology at, presumably, the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, speaking rather smugly about his life, as the camera pans around the elegant book-lined study of the comfortable Stockholm apartment he shares with his 74-year-old housekeeper of many years, Miss Agda, and a Great Dane that is unnamed and goes unremarked upon. As he announces himself as a misanthropic loner, apparently content with a life apart from a somewhat distasteful humanity, the camera picks up framed photographs of people we will meet later on—his 96-year-old mother, his son Evald, his daughter-in-law Marianne, his long-dead wife Karin. We also see a chess set, which in the context of Bergman's career, a year after *The Seventh Seal*, hints at another encounter with Death. Isak Borg is a 78-year-old widower; Evald, his only child, a lecturer in medicine at the University of Lund, is 38—the same ages respectively of Victor Sjöström and Ingmar Bergman when the movie was made.

Borg's initials, EIB, are the same as Ernst Ingmar Bergman's and the name Isak Borg suggests in Swedish, and more or less translates into English, as Ice Fortress. Isaac was the son that Abraham (in Genesis 22:1-12) was prepared to sacrifice to God, and his mother was Sarah, the name of Borg's lost love and the woman in the present who brings her to mind. In one of the most celebrated set pieces in August Strindberg's early satirical novel *The Red Room* (1879), a cynical medical student called Borg helps escort a coffin with a blank name-plate, borne by a horse-drawn hearse from a house in one of Stockholm's less salubrious southern districts, to the cemetery.

*Wild Strawberries* is in effect an extended flashback, with flashbacks and dreams within that flashback, covering a single day, Saturday, 1 June, presumably in 1957, of special importance to Borg. Bergman, however, fudges this between writing the script and making the movie, and the time scheme remains vague to all but the most assiduous viewer.

Borg, Bergman suggests, is a spectator, then as now, in the theatre of his own life, neither enriched by coping with family tensions nor succored by reciprocal family love. He is that significant hero celebrated in the existential literature of the 1940s and 50s, the alienated figure in the fictions of Dostoevsky, Strindberg, Barbusse, Hesse, Gide, Sartre and Camus that Colin Wilson wrote about in *The Outsider*, his 1956 best-seller that briefly seemed to capture the mood of the mid-1950s before it was brutally consigned to the dustbin of cultural history. As it happens, Bergman's follow-up to the international success of *Wild Strawberries* was to have been an American-financed version of Camus' *La Chute*, a confessional, penitential first-person novel. The project was aborted following the novelists' death in 1960.

Some Swedish writers have evoked James Joyce's epiphanies and Proust's madeleine to suggest the force of the film's title. [*smultronstället* means 'The Wild Strawberry Place. It is not merely a place where wild strawberries are found. Traditionally each family member lays claim to his or her own wild strawberry latch in childhood and comes to regard it as their own special preserve. In addition to this literal meaning smultronstalle has the figurative connotation of a moment in the past to which someone looks back and which they would like to revisit or recapture.]

Bergman wrote the screenplay of *Wild Strawberries* in Stockholm's Karolinska Hospital (putative workplace of Isak Borg) in the late spring of 1957 after being given the green light to proceed by Carl Anders Dymling on the basis of a brief scenario. He was in hospital for two months, being treated for his recurrent gastric troubles and general stress, and the chief consultant, Sture Helander, invited him to attend his lectures on psychosomatic illness....Bergman was buoyed up by the completion of a triumphant season at the Malmö City Theatre, where he had been artistic director since 1952, and the success of both *Smiles of a Summer Night* and *The Seventh Seal*. But his private life was in disarray: his third marriage was on the rocks; his affair with Bibi Andersson, which had begun in 1954, was coming to an end; his relationship with his parents was, after an attempted reconciliation with his mother at a desperately low ebb.

For some years Bergman explained the genesis of *Wild Strawberries* as deriving from the experience of visiting his late grandmother's apartment in Uppsala while on a drive from Stockholm to his grandmother's summer house in the province of Dalarna. According to this story he had imagined what it would be like to step back into one's childhood as a fully grown man. From that came the notion of the central character being a doctor, 'a tired, old, egocentric, who'd cut himself off from everything around him—as I had done. Only after writing the script, he claimed, did he think of Victor Sjöström for the role of Borg, and Dymling acted as go-between.

Twenty years later Bergman characterises this version as quite simply a lie. 'The truth is that I am forever living in my childhood, wandering through darkened apartments, strolling through quiet Uppsala streets, standing in front of a summer cottage and listening to the enormous double trunk birch tree.' In this view Isak Borg is both a version of Pastor Erik Bergman, through which the movie-maker attempts to see things from his parents' point of view, and Ingmar Bergman himself, crying out to his mother and father for their love and attention: 'The driving force in *Wild Strawberries* is, therefore, a desperate attempt to justify myself to mythically oversized parents who have turned away, an attempt that was doomed to failure.' He now says that the suggestion for casting Sjöström came from Dymling, 'and as I recall, I thought long and hard before I agreed to let him have the part.'

Whether or not Bergman had Sjöström in mind while writing *Wild Strawberries*, Sjöström came to dominate the movie during its production and to become inseparable from our memories and experience of it on the screen. Present in every scene except for the flashback to Marianne and Evald's conversation beside the sea, the 78-year-old actor gives one of the great performances in movie history, an unsurpassed portrait of resilient, rebarbative, unsentimental old age. The film's sixty-year journey into the past and its fifteen-hour one through the present are registered by an endlessly expressive face that exhibits the experience of a lifetime, a subtly modulated old man's voice and a body that learned to speak in silent films. With a tilt of the head, the flick of a muscle, a slight upward vocal inflection, he can reveal the rare emotional depths that his mind and heart are tapping. Such is the power of the performance that it is possible to view Isak Borg not as some kind of emotional cripple in need of sympathy and spiritual awakening but as a tough, proud stoic, capable of taking a critical look at an honourable, inevitably flawed life. This can be seen as introducing a central dramatic contradiction into the film, which was certainly the view of the *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther: 'He is so real and sensitive and poignant, so winning of sympathy in every way, that Mr. Bergman's explanation doesn't make sense.'

Looking back from his own seventies, re-viewing *Wild Strawberries* in his private cinema in Faro in 1989, Bergman

remarks:

What I had not grasped until now was that Victor Sjöström took my text, made it his own, invested it with his own experiences: his pain, his misanthropy, his brutality, sorrow, fear, loneliness, coldness, warmth, hardness and ennui. Borrowing my father's form, he occupied my soul and made it all his own—*there wasn't even a crumb left over for me!* He did this with the sovereign power and passion of a gargantuan personality. I had nothing to add, not even a sensible or irrational comment. *Wild Strawberries* was no longer my film; it was Victor Sjöström's. But Sjöström contributed more than his personality. Bergman was steeped in the movies of the man he considered the supreme genius of Swedish cinema.

In February 1960 Bergman delivered an address at the memorial celebration arranged by the Swedish Film Academy to mark the death of Victor Sjöström at the age of eighty on 3 January 1960. Bergman, who had drafted Sjöström's 1944 tribute to Kaj Munk, expressed himself lost for words. 'No, I can't compose a speech in memory of Victor Sjöström,' he began. 'I suspect he would smile with the utmost irony if he could see me making such a speech.' Instead he read some jottings from the diary he had kept during the makings of *Wild Strawberries*, and he concluded with his observations of Sjöström's face, shot in close-up 'in a dirty studio' for the final moments of the movie.

Bergman is often quoted to the effect that the theatre is his wife and the cinema his mistress, and a man who has had five of one and a dozen of the other knows whereof he speaks. According to his reliable biographer Peter Cowrie, what he actually said back in 1950 is: 'The theatre is like a loyal wife, film is a great adventure, the costly and demanding mistress—you worship both, each in its own way.'

*Wild Strawberries* has taken a permanent place in the classic repertoire of world cinema (in 1972 it sneaked in at ninth place—equal with Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu Monogatari*—in the international poll of the ten best films of all time taken every decade by *Sight and Sound*).

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 frame 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.

#### COMING UP IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS:

March 8 Andrzej Wajda *Ashes and Diamonds* 1958

March 22 David Lean *Lawrence of Arabia* 1962

March 29 John Frankenheimer *The Manchurian Candidate* 1962

April 5 Sergio Leone *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* 1966

April 12 Robert Bresson *Lancelot of the Lake* 1974

April 19 Larissa Shepitko *The Ascent* 1976

April 26 Akira Kurosawa *Ran* 1985

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