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## PROLOGUE



## The Stage and the Screen

With his fifty feature films, around a hundred stage performances, some forty radio versions, about fifteen television transmissions, a few opera productions, and even a libretto contribution to a ballet – not to mention his work as a playwright, screenwriter, and adaptor – Ingmar Bergman has presumably proved more productive and versatile than any other director to date.

A Sunday child, born into a clerical Stockholm family on the French national holiday in the year ending the first World War, Bergman at an early age – as shown in *Fanny and Alexander* – was a ‘director’ already in the nursery. There he staged plays in his puppet theater and made up ‘film’ stories with the help of his *laterna magica*. When only 17 he wrote his first play; in the 1940s some twenty-three others were to follow, a few of which were published and staged.<sup>1</sup> His debut as a director, in the proper sense of the word, took place in 1938 when, at the age of 20, he staged Sutton Vane’s *Outward Bound* with an amateur group at Mäster Olofsgården in Stockholm, himself playing one of the roles.<sup>2</sup> Still staging at least two plays a year, Bergman, soon 77, has declared that he will probably continue directing in the theater as long as he has the strength to do so.

For almost four decades Bergman has, in conformance with the Swedish system, divided his time between stage productions in the theater season and filming in the summertime, when the actors were available. To a great extent he has worked with the same actors in all three media under consideration here: Max von Sydow, Anders Ek, Allan Edwall, Bibi Andersson, Gunnel Lindblom, Gertrud Fridh, to mention but a few. In several cases – Birger Malmsten, Gunnar Björnstrand, Eva Dahibeck, Maj-Britt Nilsson, Harriet Andersson, and Ingrid Thulin come to mind – there are actors who have largely appeared in his films, while the opposite (Benkt-Åke Benktsson, Karin Kavli, Toivo Pawlo) also, though more rarely, holds true. It has become a truism to say that Bergman’s achievements on stage and screen are inseparably related to his long-standing close connections with a group of outstanding actors and actresses and the inspiration he receives from and gives to them.<sup>3</sup>

After his first screenplay, *Torment*, had been filmed by Alf Sjöberg, Bergman’s career as a film director began in 1946 with *Crisis*, based on his own adaptation of a Danish play. This part of his career ended in 1982, with *Fanny and Alexander*, when he decided to stop filming because of the physical strain it involved. Most of Bergman’s radio productions were done in the late 1940s and in the 1950s. His debut as a TV director came in 1954, with Hjalmar Bergman’s *Mr. Sleeman Is Coming*.

Unlike novels or poems, plays lead a double life. Having two kinds of recipients – readers and spectators – drama is a hybrid genre. With an increasing number of film scripts being published, film is gradually moving in the same direction. It has not always been like that. For a rather long time, films had only one kind of recipient: the spectator. The script on which the film was based was rarely published. While you could choose between reading or watching Shakespeare, Ibsen, or Strindberg, you had to be content with watching Griffith, Eisenstein, or Sjöström. Only when a director based his film on a published novel or play, could you as reader acquaint yourself with a text that had some connection with the film in question. Even now the publication of a film script is a sign that we are dealing with an artistic product.

Film is an international medium, theater a national one. As a film director Bergman is world-famous; as a stage director he is little known outside his own country. Even if a production by the Royal Dramatic Theater in Stockholm, directed by Ingmar Bergman, may be seen nowadays in London, Paris, New York, Amsterdam, Madrid and Rome, the audience attending it will be very limited compared with the audience attending his films. Besides, unlike the film audience, the theater audience will either listen to a language they do not understand, or will be provided with simultaneous interpretation via earphones, which is an unsatisfactory solution of the language problem, since it prevents a proper reception of the paralinguistics of the performance, the way in which the speeches are enunciated.

As Bergman himself has pointed out, there is a close connection between his work for the stage and for the screen. In 1963 he declared:

My films are only a distillation of what I do in the theater. Theater work is sixty percent.... Not even considering the connection between *The Seventh Seal* and my production of *Ur-Faust* (although they came about in the reverse order). Not even considering the connection between *The Face* [*The Magician* in the U.S.] and my production of *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in Malmö.<sup>4</sup>

Bergman here seems to indicate that his work in the theater – the contact with outstanding drama texts – has inspired him to pursue certain ideological, thematic, and formal patterns within the film medium.

In a statement made seven years later, he says: "Between my job at the theater and my job in the film studio it has always been a very short step indeed. Sometimes it has paid off, and sometimes it has been a drawback. But it has always been a short step between."<sup>5</sup> Some of the films, he points out, have even been "surreptitious plays."<sup>6</sup> Even

in the mid-1950s, he remarks, "there was a frustrated dramatist in me. I wrote stage plays for the screen in those days, because the theater seemed closed to me."<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy in this connection that the film *The Seventh Seal* grew out of the play *Wood Painting*; that, conversely, the film *Torment* and the TV series *Scenes from a Marriage* were transposed for the stage; and that films like *Smiles of a Summer Night*, *Brink of Life*, *The Silence* and *Autumn Sonata* without any drastic changes could be turned into stage plays.

Bergman's films deal with themes that have sometimes been regarded as typically Swedish: loneliness, lack of communication, somberness.<sup>8</sup> Although there may be some truth in this, "the question is not so much how 'Swedish' Bergman's movies are, but to what extent they have colored our perception of what is Swedish."<sup>9</sup> Besides, the characteristics just mentioned are not unequivocally Swedish. The international aspect of Bergman's films has certainly less to do with northern exoticism than with the universality of his pervading themes: the relationship between good and evil, dream and reality, art and life, mask and face, men and women, adults and children, conscious and unconscious. And though some of them – the recurrent theme of humiliation, the 'ideological' significance of music – carry a more individual signature, there is nothing Swedish about them. In fact, Bergman's metaphysical and psychological rather than political and social concerns seem fairly removed from what one might see as characteristic Swedish qualities. It is, then, not surprising that many of his films have had a greater success abroad than in his native country. This is not saying, of course, that Swedish nature and culture have not been of enormous importance to Bergman, who has often declared that he constantly revisits his childhood.

Of particular interest in our context, considering Bergman's profession, is his depiction of the relationship between theater and life. In his work, the theater – this protected home of dreams – frequently becomes a metaphor for this world of illusions. The theater family in *Fanny and Alexander* is named Ekdahl in recognition of the fact that, like Ibsen's Ekdal family in *The Wild Duck*, they live by illusions. The illusion is loved and hated simultaneously or alternately. Emilie Ekdahl's exit from the theater and return to it (she has a predecessor in Elisabet Vogler in *Persona*) is paradigmatic for the ambivalent attitude to the house of dreams – to illusion – characteristic of many Bergman figures as well as of their originator.<sup>10</sup>

Bergman's continuous work as a stage director means that for long periods he has been living almost daily with a particular play in heart and mind. Many of these plays have left traces in the films. This is, of course, especially true of the plays that have meant the most to him, ones that he has staged several times: Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Molière's *Don Juan* and *The Misanthrope*, Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, *A Doll's House*, and *Hedda Gabler*, Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, *A Dream Play*, and *The Ghost Sonata*, Pirandello's *Six Charac-*

ters in *Search of an Author*. There is much to be said for the view that “no other film director after the breakthrough of the sound film has been so influenced by the theater.”<sup>11</sup>

Molière, Ibsen, Strindberg and, later, Shakespeare are dramatists he has frequently returned to. Of these, Strindberg holds a special place. “My household gods,” Bergman points out, “were Strindberg, whom I began to consume already when I was twelve, and Hjalmar Bergman, whom I discovered a few years later.”<sup>12</sup> Strindberg “expressed things which I’d experienced and which I couldn’t find words for.”<sup>13</sup> This statement seems to imply that a major reason why Bergman turned to directing fairly early on was that as a director he could express audiovisually what he was unable to express verbally.

Characteristic of Strindberg as a playwright is his endeavor to engage his audience emotionally. Bergman likewise admonishes his theater audience: “It is in your hearts, in your imagination that this performance is to take place.”<sup>14</sup> He expresses the same view when speaking, in connection with his films, of the importance to “faire communiquer le public, de le faire participer,” and when he praises black-and-white film because it gives the spectator the opportunity to “voir les couleurs” in his or her own imagination.<sup>15</sup> In his plays Strindberg functions as a hypnotizer. The theater becomes a weapon directed towards our emotional life. The same is true of Bergman, whose stage and screen productions in this respect belong to Strindberg’s extreme form of Aristotelian theater. The film medium is here supportive, for “no form of art goes beyond ordinary consciousness as film does, straight to our emotions, deep into the twilight room of the soul.”<sup>16</sup> As a film director, via his magic lantern, Bergman has had better possibilities to hypnotize his audience than as a theater director – or as a playwright.

With the first part of his trilogy *To Damascus*, Strindberg in 1898 created the first subjective drama in world literature. An overwhelming part of this play is a projection of the protagonist’s, the Stranger’s, thoughts and emotions. *His* experience of the surrounding world becomes *our* experience. The border between objective and subjective is blotted out. The varying locations and weather conditions represent above all inner realities. The same is true of many Bergman films. The barren island in *Through a Glass Darkly* stands for a feeling of isolation, the frosty, gray November landscape in *Winter Light* for emotional chill, and so on. In *To Damascus*, as in Strindberg’s dream plays generally, there is a diffuse borderline between dream and reality, resulting in a feeling that life is a dream. This diffuseness is characteristic also of Bergman’s work, which is in other respects very lucid. It is in fact a key to it.

Scenes of unmasking often appear in Strindberg’s work. The most explicit one is found in the second act of *The Ghost Sonata*, where the Old Man, Hummel, unmasks the Colonel; later, when the guests begin to arrive for the ghost supper, he de-

clares: "You keep calm and we'll continue to play our old roles a while longer." The focal scene in a Bergman production is often one of unmasking. After this scene, the characters resume their roles and hide behind their social masks. Vampirism is another frequent theme with Strindberg, appearing in several Bergman films, notably in *Persona* and *The Hour of the Wolf*.

In the literature, drama and film of the twentieth century, man's inability to communicate with his fellows in any deeper sense is a constantly recurring theme. One of the possible means of communication is language. As a stage and screen director, Bergman distrusts language as a means of establishing contact. On the contrary, he maintains, language is normally used to build walls between people behind which they may hide.<sup>17</sup> This idea, which echoes the Old Man's claim in *The Ghost Sonata* that the different languages have been invented in order to hide the secrets of the tribe, seems to underlie the enigmatic words on the blackboard in the exam scene of *Wild Strawberries*, later developed in *The Silence*, where the three main characters are confronted with a language, created by Bergman and unintelligible both to them and to us. The inability to understand each other's language becomes a metaphor for the inability to understand one another generally. While Anna in *The Silence* tries to communicate by means of her senses, the unintelligible language becomes an admonition to Ester. Her job as a translator is an adequate symbol of her search for verbal communication. She is akin to the Student in *The Ghost Sonata*. Like him, Ester is a seeker who tries to decipher the meaning of life. But in contrast to her, the Student is clairvoyant. His true counterparts in Bergman's films are the young ones, the children. Their purity and openness contrast with the constant role-playing of the adults. This is true of Minus in *Through a Glass Darkly*, of Johan in *The Silence* and of Fanny and Alexander in the film of that name.

The search of Bergman's protagonists is often expressed in the form of a journey. Just as in Strindberg's post-Inferno plays, the journey here plays an important thematic and structural role, functioning as "a catalyst for the conflict between the present and the past, between imagined and real values."<sup>18</sup> It can be a train journey, returning the characters to an environment they have left behind them, as in *Three Strange Loves*, or a voyage in remembrance of things past, as in *Illicit Interlude*. In *The Seventh Seal* we accompany Antonius Block on his way to his waiting wife – and to death. Similarly, we accompany Isak Borg in *Wild Strawberries* on his presumably last journey, from Stockholm to Lund. In *Winter Light* we journey with Tomas, the doubting clergyman, from one church to another. When Bergman once, speaking of this film, declared that "everything became stations on the road for the priest," he indicated not only the connection with Christ's way to Calvary but also the connection with Strindberg's dramas of penance.



Bergman has rightly been called the most energetic pursuer of the Strindbergian chamber play.<sup>19</sup> Although the term 'chamber play' in the first place has a spatial meaning, Strindberg gave it a generic status. In his *Memorandum to the Members of the Intimate Theater* he writes:

... in drama we seek the strong, highly significant motif, but with limitations. We try to avoid in the treatment all frivolity, all calculated effects, places for applause, star roles, solo numbers. No predetermined form is to limit the author, because the motif determines the form. Consequently: freedom in treatment, which is limited only by the unity of the concept and the feeling for style.<sup>20</sup>

But the term 'chamber play' relates also to music. In his *Memorandum* Strindberg speaks of "the concept of chamber music transferred to drama. The intimate action, the highly significant motif, the sophisticated treatment."<sup>21</sup>

Bergman has borrowed the term from Strindberg:

*Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light* and *The Silence* and *Persona* I've called chamber plays. They are chamber music – music in which, with an extremely limited number of voices and figures, one explores the essence of a number of motifs. The backgrounds are extrapolated, put into a sort of fog. The rest is a distillation.<sup>22</sup>

*The Ghost Sonata* ends with a 'coda,' a swift recapitulation of earlier themes and an execution: the faith in a benevolent God which is the prerequisite for the Student's intercession for the Young Lady. In the same way, *Through a Glass Darkly* ends with a 'divine proof' – the idea that God is love – and this forms, says Bergman, "the actual *coda* in the last movement."<sup>23</sup> Just as Strindberg calls *Master Olof* and *A Dream Play* symphonies, so Bergman calls *The Seventh Seal* "an oratorio."<sup>24</sup> And just as *The Ghost Sonata* by its very title implies a relationship with the sonata form, so the title *Autumn Sonata* has the same implication. With his chamber plays, Strindberg has renewed drama. By applying Strindberg's idea to film, Bergman has renewed film art.

Olof Molander, the leading Swedish stage director in the 1930s and 1940s, especially renowned for his Strindberg productions, has acted as an important mediator between Strindberg and Bergman. In the program for his 1945 performance of Strindberg's *The Pelican*, Bergman clearly stated his indebtedness to Molander, who

has made us see the magic in Strindberg's dramaturgy. ... [He] gives us Strindberg without embellishments or directorial visions, tunes in to the text, and leaves it at that. He makes us hear the poet's anxiety-driven fever pulse. ... We listen to a strange, muted chamber music. ...

First it was *A Dream Play*. Night after night I stood in the wings and sobbed and never really knew why. After that came *To Damascus*, *Saga of the Folkungs*, and *The Ghost Sonata*. It is the sort of thing you never forget and never leave behind, especially [not] if you happen to be a director....<sup>25</sup>

Opposing the idea of a director's theater, Bergman here implicitly characterizes his own ambition to be a humble elucidator of the play text, loyal to the spirit, if not to the letter, of it. Since the demarcation line between letter and spirit is unclear, it is often difficult to determine to what extent Bergman's stage adaptations of drama texts have affected one or the other. Unwilling to compromise with his own vision, he changed the opening and ending of Tennessee Williams' *The Rose Tattoo*, minor parts were cut, and the collective scenes were omitted. In Strindberg's *The Crown Bride*, he left out most of the folkloristic passages and the ghostly ingredients, while in *Erik XIV*, by the same author, he added a court jester, appearing in the history books but not in the play text.<sup>26</sup> Bergman's versions of Strindberg's so-called post-Inferno plays have proved especially controversial in this respect. Strindberg's faith in a life hereafter that would justify the misery of this life is not shared by Bergman, who from the early 1960s has stressed his belief in human love as the only salvation for the single life granted us. While Bergman's productions of these plays have nevertheless been convincing, it is not because he has been true to their spirit but because he has been able to transubstantiate the texts in such a way that his own vision has come to penetrate them. The subtitle given to the published version of his 1970 production of Strindberg's *Dream Play* – "an interpretation by Ingmar Bergman" – adequately summarizes his own very distinctive contribution to the plays he is directing.

If the relationship between drama text and performance is complicated, the one between script and film is hardly less so.<sup>27</sup> While many of Bergman's early film scripts are unpublished, nearly all scripts beginning with *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961) have been published both in Swedish and in English translation. Owing to Bergman's dissatisfaction with the Swedish critics in the 1950s, who often complained about his clumsy language, some of the early scripts have been published only in translation; this concerns such significant films as *Smiles of a Summer Night*, *The Seventh Seal*, *Wild Strawberries* and *The Magician*.

Other circumstances further complicate the matter. Thus scripts for some of Bergman's early films have been written by others. Moreover, Bergman has changed his

attitude to the relationship between script and film. In 1961 he could still embrace the principle of faithfulness:

Don't leave your script in the lurch in the middle of shooting. Be faithful to what you wrote, even if now, here in the studio, you think it represents a bygone phase. Don't meddle with the unity it had *then*. That sort of thing is dangerous from both an artistic and a practical production point of view. If you want to record new results, then wait until the next film.<sup>28</sup>

Five years later he took a very different view, seeing now the script as "a very imperfect *technical* basis for a film."<sup>29</sup> And in 1969 he declared that

The script is nothing but a collection of motifs which I work over with my actors as the filming proceeds. The final decisions I make in the cutting room, where I cut away all obtrusive elements.<sup>30</sup>

In 1976 he was so negative about film scripts that we may wonder why he chose to publish the scripts at all:

It is hard to write a screenplay.... The words can never express what the finished film wants to convey. ... a filmscript is always a half-finished product, a pale and uncertain reflection.<sup>31</sup>

In 1987 his faith in the script seemed somewhat restored:

The rhythm in my films is conceived in the script, at the desk, and is then given birth in front of the camera. All forms of improvisation are alien to me.<sup>32</sup>

It is hard to see how the rhythm of an audiovisual medium could to any significant degree be caught in a textual medium. On the contrary, the cutting continuity of an average film, containing hundreds of shots, would reveal that the rhythm is necessarily very different from that indicated by the script. In Bergman's case rhythmical discrepancies may also arise from monologues in the script being turned into dialogues in the film or subsequent sequences in the script being turned into simultaneous, cross-cut episodes in the film.

As a matter of fact, by his own admission Bergman's scripts have often lacked a clear orientation toward a specific medium. The dialogues in his most recent

book, *The Fifth Act*, were written, he says, “the way I have written for the last fifty years – it looks like theater but might as well be film, television or merely reading matter.”<sup>33</sup>

As Bergman himself indicates, the discrepancy between script and film tends to be greater in the late films than in the early ones. In these films, many situations in the scripts are omitted, while, conversely, they contain much that does not appear in the scripts. In this respect the scripts of these films are comparable to drama texts, where the stage directions merely register a fraction of the audiovisual elements of a performance. The appearance of ingredients in the scripts that cannot be realized in films (smells, colors in relation to black-and-white film, etc.) also demonstrates that such ingredients are more indicative than prescriptive.<sup>34</sup> Well aware of this, Bergman refers to his published scripts as “film stories.” The label suggests that we deal with something that can be read by itself, something that has deliberately been made friendly to the reader. Another complicating factor is that even one and the same film will show national differences. A Bergman film without subtitles differs from a subtitled version, and this again from a dubbed version. It can even differ in width and length, whether because Bergman himself has produced two different versions – as in the case of *Face to Face* and *Fanny and Alexander* – or because film censorship has demanded certain cuts, cuts which may differ from one country to another. The situation of reception, finally, may vary considerably. A Bergman film in a large cinema with perfect audiovisual equipment is rather different from a Bergman film on television.

As a result of these complicated circumstances (with regard to production, distribution and reception), the literature about Bergman’s films – there are still very few works devoted to his work in the theater – has become rather heterogeneous. While most analyses seem founded primarily on a reading of the published scripts, some of them are based – as are the film reviews – mainly or exclusively on a viewing of the films. (The intermediate stage – Bergman’s own director’s copies – are still, if at all preserved, a missing link.) As a result, different presentational modes (one textual, the other audiovisual) and different stages in the creative process (a semi-product as compared with a finished product) are indiscriminately brought together under the same common label: the name of the film. There is, after all, a considerable distance between, say, an analysis of an original Bergman film and an analysis of a translation of a Bergman script. It is still an open question what influence defective translations and subtitles/dubbing have had on the international Bergman criticism.

The differences between script and film may concern the characters’ actions: in the script of *Through a Glass Darkly*, David burns the manuscript of his novel; in the film he does not. They may involve the place of action: in the script of *Autumn Sonata* Eva is seen in the churchyard, where her little son Erik is buried, together with her

mother Charlotte, while at the end she is alone, somewhere out of doors; in the film their conversation takes place in Erik's room, while the location at the end is the churchyard. The differences may concern the time when a piece of information is given: the spectator of *Winter Light* immediately sees that Märta Lundberg, the Christ figure in the film, wears a furcoat made of sheepskin; the reader of the script learns this much later. The textual medium is often more explicit than the audiovisual one. When it says in the script of *Cries and Whispers* that "*the sun breaks out like shimmering horizontal spear points,*" the enmity of the sunlight is more obvious to the reader than to the spectator.

Why then bother with the scripts? Is it not the finished product that matters? In the choice between script and film, the latter must obviously have priority. But just as it is natural to analyze a stage performance with a certain consideration for the drama text on which it is based, it is legitimate to analyze a film with regard to the script functioning as a blueprint for it. In both cases there are ingredients which in one form or another – by elucidations or divergences – illuminate the final product.

What distinguishes the significant stage and/or screen director is his or her ability to create images which communicate something that is difficult or even impossible to express in words. This something is frequently of a metaphoric nature. Naturally, some images in a Bergman stage or screen performance are more complex than others. Also, some passages are richer in metaphors than others. The borders are fluid and highly dependent on the interpretative imagination of the recipient. Thus, a grouping may become expressive when combined with what is, has been or will be said, a costume when combined with another one. A face may take on a new meaning when lit in a different way or, in screen versions, when seen at a different distance or angle. A dissolve may seem significant when regarded in its thematic context. In all these cases we deal with visual imagery. The same is true of acoustics. A sound may become significant through striking changes, through repetition, or even through sudden absence. Or it may become so because of a suggestive concurrence or contrast between sound and image.

Since both theater and film make use of words, sounds, and visual images, it is possible to distinguish between verbal, acoustic, and visual imagery. In combination, the three types create – in the imagination of the spectator – a metaphoric network of considerable complexity and power. (In radio drama, the visual component is relegated to the recipient's imagination, which in fact makes it very powerful.)<sup>35</sup> In the following chapters we shall see how this is done in some of Bergman's most successful stage, screen, and radio presentations.