THEATRICAL IMAGES IN BERGMAN'S FILMS

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the theatricality in a selection of Ingmar Bergman’s films. First, I define what I mean by theatricality. I establish four theatrical elements or categories to look for in Bergman's films: mise-en-scene, characters, influence, play-within-a-play. I then give a brief overview of Bergman’s work in the theater and in the cinema. Next, I analyze three films according to the model that I have made: Sawdust and Tinsel, Fanny and Alexander and After the Rehearsal. I find that all three films contain these elements and discuss what they are. I then discuss Bergman’s other films, pointing out the prevalence of these theatrical elements. Finally, I conclude that Bergman makes extensive use of theatrical elements in order to convey universal human concerns. His intimate knowledge of this environment allows him to portray these concerns in a convincing manner.
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CHAPTER I Overview and summary

1.1 Introduction

Ingmar Bergman has a secure place in film history and is widely recognized as one of the world’s cinematic giants. His films are a staple at the art-house cinemas throughout Europe and North America. Many people do not realize that Bergman is also a great theatre director. In his native Sweden, however, he is well respected for his contribution to theatre, which soon has spanned six decades. His theatre career far exceeds the time and energy he has devoted to the cinema. Nevertheless, despite his prolific theatrical career, internationally, Bergman will be known, first and foremost as a film director.

The reason for this discrepancy is largely due to the nature of these media. Theatre is both location and time specific. This means that you can not distribute the performance to as large a number of places, as it is bound to one location at the time. A film can be duplicated a multitude of times and exported to many places. Also, a film does not age or change as rapidly, whereas a theatre production only lasts as long as the season for which it is billed. This is the primary reason why a film reaches a far larger and wider audience than a theatre performance might:

Film is an international medium, theatre 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 Theatre in Stockholm directed by Ingmar Bergman, may not 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 (Törnqvist 12).¹

I am interested in focusing on the fusion of theatre and film in Bergman’s oeuvre. I want to examine which aspects of the theatre have made their way into his films and how. My

¹ Egil Törnqvist, Between Stage and Screen: Ingmar Bergman Directs (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995) 12.
objective, with this thesis, is to look at a selected number of Bergman’s films and determine what elements are theatrical. The idea of influence from one media onto another is not new, as Susan Sontag notes:

For some time, all useful ideas in art have been extremely sophisticated. Like the idea that everything is what it is, and not another thing. A painting is a painting. Sculpture is sculpture. A poem is a poem, not prose. Etcetera. And the complementary idea: a painting can be ‘literary’ or sculptural, a poem can be prose, theatre can emulate and incorporate cinema, cinema can be theatrical. ¹

It is precisely this theatrical cinema that I am interested in taking a closer look at. However, before I start examining the theatrical nature of Ingmar Bergman’s films, I need to define what I mean by theatricality. I have found components in the chosen films that are particularly common to the theatre. The concept of theatricality according to my reading refers to the following:

1) A film is theatrical if it takes place in a theatrical milieu. In other words, part or all of the film is set in the theatre either on the stage or in the salon. It could even take place behind the scenes, behind the curtains or in the actors’ changing rooms; anywhere that is obviously within the confines of the theatre. This can even mean a circus trailer or an opera house. The idea is that it, in whole or in part, must take place in a live performance space or in a location that is designed for such a purpose.

2) Characters that portray performers or theatre actors provide another theatrical element in a film. These characters can even portray directors or playwrights or circus performers. As long as they represent a live performer or director of a live performance, they are a theatrical component in the film.

The central characters in many of Ingmar Bergman’s works are artists, artists of every sort: circus performers, dancers, tragic and comic actors, musicians, painters,

magicians, and film makers. Bergman’s artists wear a diversity of masks, and it might seem futile to suppose that these varied figures have anything essential in common. 1 However, it is performing artists of any masks that I am discussing here.

3) Another theatrical component in a film is the intertext or the influence. This is when there is a direct association in the film, to plays written for the stage. An example is August Strindberg’s *The Ghost Sonata* which is quoted in *Fanny and Alexander*. Character names that come from plays are also examples of intertext. Others are direct quotes that stem from previously written plays. Also, I consider narratives that are well associated and originally from a play to be theatrical intertext. Ingmar Bergman has directed a number of plays for the theatre that can be linked to these films. He has directed some of them many times and therefore it can be of particular interest to find the influence of them in his films.

4) The final theatrical element, that I have chosen, is the play-within-a-play motif. In this case it would be a play-within-a-movie. More specifically, a film is theatrical if the characters in a film are acting in a performance or rehearsing a role. This could be reading aloud from a theatre script or actually acting in a performance that takes place sometime during the course of the film. This category is inherently linked with the first. To say that a film has a play-within-a-play motif is to also acknowledge that there is a theatrical milieu. However, a theatrical milieu does not necessarily mean that there is a play-within-a-play contained within it. Activity can take place inside a theatre without necessitating a performance. Therefore, I attribute the meta-theatrical aspect only when it manifests itself in concrete performance. That is the case when the characters engage in a spectacle or staging of something where they embody characters separate from their identities in the film.

Bergman frequently stages a play within a play, or frames a film or play within a film. These are never self-reflexive gestures meant merely to remind us that the film or play is 'only an illusion'; the illusion is taken seriously, for it sometimes proves to be the most efficacious reality. Rather in this manner Bergman is able to illuminate the context of artistic performances by studying the interplay of aesthetic form and social interaction.¹

While I see a great amount of self-reflexivity in Bergman's films, I recognize that Bergman often has an alternate purpose. However, in many instances, such as in *Fanny and Alexander*, I believe that Bergman is, in fact, referring to himself and to the human condition in general. Film is an illusion, or rather, life is an illusion.

These elements, discussed above, represent the theatrical icons in a semiotic analysis. I have chosen to look at these parts (or icons) in order to create an understanding of the whole (hermeneutics). In other words, these icons will give the reader a better understanding of the influence that theatre has in Bergman's films. This then is the theatricality that I am considering in the selected films. There are some points that defy categorization that nevertheless deserve mentioning. I will reserve such statements for separate chapter after my analysis of the three films. These points link many of Bergman's other films to the films discussed in more detail.

I draw on a small selection of Ingmar Bergman's films, though I use a number of his other films for the purpose of comparison when required. I have selected three films: *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953), *Fanny and Alexander* (1981/82), and *After the Rehearsal* (1983). I chose these films because they were made during different periods of Bergman's career and as a result are different in style and content. *Sawdust and Tinsel* was an early black and white film that garnered a lukewarm response by the public when it was first released in 1953. *Fanny and Alexander*, a late Bergman film, was well received and

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¹ Livingston 25.
popular. It was also an extremely lavish production. After the Rehearsal is also a late film, but of a much smaller scale, completely different in form and content.

The primary sources that I use in my research have been the films themselves. They represent the most unambiguous information. Secondary sources that I rely on are the works of Egil Törnqvist (1995) and Paisley Livingston (1982). The work of Egil Törnqvist is especially useful; he has, in his work, Between Stage and Screen, compared Bergman’s career as a stage director, screen director, and radio director. Livingston’s Ingmar Bergman and the Rituals of Art examines the artist’s role (though not necessarily the performance artist) and how it is portrayed in a number of Bergman’s films. In other words, Törnqvist deals with the effects of theatre on some of Bergman’s films in a broad manner as a part of a larger assessment while Livingston, who looks at Bergman’s use of ritual in his film making, deals with a subset of theatricality. Their works reflect a different perspective in that Livingston, being a non-Swede, views Bergman’s work from the perspective of an outsider, while Törnqvist, being a Swede, looks at it from an insider’s point of view. Törnqvist analyses Fanny and Alexander, while Livingston looks at Sawdust and Tinsel. Neither scholar examines After the Rehearsal. In fact, After the Rehearsal has never been seriously analyzed in this way. Considering the approaches taken and examples selected by Törnqvist and Livingston, I decided to include these three films from my perspective as the outside-insider (Swedish and North American educated).

I divide the thesis into the following sections: First, I give the reader a brief background of Ingmar Bergman’s work as a theatre director and a film director. This clarifies and heightens the reader’s understanding of Bergman’s career. It is my contention that it is not possible to understand Bergman without realizing the breadth of his artistic abilities. He has worked within several media, not only theatre and film, but also radio, television and opera. In addition, he has written several autobiographical books where he comments on his films. I do not deal with Bergman’s work in other media as I am strictly focusing on the effect of theatre on film.
Bergman divided his time between the different media, primarily the theatre and the cinema. He worked on his films in the summer when the theatre season was over for the year. Using this work arrangement, Bergman let the theatre influence his filmmaking. “My films are only a distillation of what I do in the theatre. Theatre work is 60 percent” and, “Between my job at the theatre 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”. ¹ So, Bergman went beyond the constraints of the media and let them mingle and thereby broke the barriers that would otherwise exist.

Bergman even goes so far as describing life as a highly theatrical event in which we are all engaged as actors or audience in this “ofrivilliga rollspel”, forced role-playing in the theatrical room of life. “All the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and entrances.” The famous line from Shakespeare’s As You Like It, seems appropriate when considering Bergman’s work. It is clear that Bergman’s view of creativity contains a wider perspective than that designated by theatre or cinema. Bergman can extend his directorial vision to all the media that surround him. Theatricality can be seen everywhere and in everything. Film is no exception.

1.2 A Brief Chronicle of Bergman’s Career

1.2.1 Theatre

Bergman’s accomplishment in the theatre consists of about one hundred productions. That is roughly twice the number of films that he has directed. By dividing his attention between the two media, working on his films in the summertime and the theatre during the rest of the year, he was able to work on several theatre productions each year; at times he managed up to four plays in a year.

Even before Bergman began his professional theatrical career, he had staged a number of well-publicized amateur productions. He made his amateur debut in 1938 as a dramatist with the play *Outward Bound* in which he also acted. In 1944 Bergman’s professional directing for the theatre began. He was only 26 years old, which made him the youngest professional theatre director Sweden had ever seen. His first project was to revitalize the theatre of Helsingborg; changing the old fashioned theatre into a modern, dynamic institution. It took him only two seasons to succeed in this endeavour (during which he directed many of his own productions, including *Macbeth*).¹

From 1946 to 1949 Bergman was the main director at the City Theatre of Gothenburg (Göteborgs Stadsteater). There he had access to greater resources than in Helsingborg and learned how to make use of theatrical machinery to create grand scenes (such as in Camus’ *Caligula*). He also discovered there his favorite style of theatre, which has been described by many as minimalist. With this style, as in his production of Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*, he focused on the actors and the psychological evolution of events.

Bergman’s core group of actors formed during his time as artistic director of the Malmö Municipal Theatre (1952-'58). This “Bergman Ensemble”, as it is often referred to, included Erland Josephson, Gunnel Lindblom, Naima Wifstrand, Ingrid Thulin, Harriet Anderson, Max von Sydow and Bibi Andersson. This also was the time when Bergman began to work with canonical plays. His interpretations of these have been appreciated as major contributions to the theatre. These interpretations include Strindberg’s *Ghost Sonata* and Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* as well as his acclaimed production of Moliere’s *Don Juan* and Goethe’s *Ur-Faust*. The productions were all highly stylized and daring, an indication of Bergman’s future theatrical productions.²

Bergman himself denied that he had any particular preference for one dramatist over another. He has worked with a variety of plays by O'Neill, Camus and modern Swedish dramatists such as Pär Lagerquist. However, while he worked on a wide range of drama, one can still detect preferences. These include dramatists such as Moliere, Strindberg and Ibsen. Moliere's *Don Juan*, Strindberg's *A Dream Play*, and Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* have each been produced by Bergman at least three times.¹

At his post at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm (Dramaten), from 1963-1966, Bergman continued to focus on the classics. His pared-down, minimalist approach received immense support after his successful production of *Hedda Gabler*, his theatrical breakthrough. The 60's have been called by many scholars (such as Birgitta Steene) Bergman’s "Ibsen years". The 70's were to be his Strindberg era. He directed revolutionary productions of the *Dreamplay* and the *Ghost Sonata* eliciting rave reviews. Bergman has staged far more Strindberg plays than plays by any other playwright. For example, his triangle production, or the *Nora-Julie* production in Munich, was highly regarded. The 80's heralded such productions as Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in a highly stylized version and Yukio Mishima's *Marquise de Sade*. He did not, however, abandon Strindberg as several new productions of Strindberg’s plays were realized. Bergman continues to stage plays at Stockholm’s Royal Theatre and these vary from the large-scale productions to chamber plays.²

1.2.2 Film

Bergman’s first experience with the film medium was when he received a cinematograph or a "laterna magica" at the age of ten. This, in his own words, was a "clattering tin box with a chimney, a kerosene lamp and endless films that went round and round in a strip".¹ Many of Bergman’s films deal with his childhood experiences which had a great impact on

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¹ Steene, Ingmar Bergman, 20.
him. As a result they are the greatest source materials for his films. His troubled relationship with his parents has received the greatest attention in many of his productions. These films can be referred to as autobiographical in nature. In other words, he brings in a wide variety of issues that stem from this particular aspect of his life; religion, relationships and death are among the favored topics.²

Bergman’s film career started with his first screenplay, Torment, which was directed by Alf Sjöberg. His directive debut began in 1946 with Crisis, based on his own adaptation of a Danish play. Many of Bergman’s films, in particular his earlier films, deal with the issue of faith and the lack of faith. These films were inspired in part by poetic realism and are rendered in a neo-realistic style. By directing these films, he received invaluable training in film-making.³

Religious doubt is another theme that recurs in Bergman’s films: Is earth living hell, if so, is there also a God, and where is he? The most celebrated of such films is The Seventh Seal (1957). The film was based on a play written by Bergman for the stage. It portrays the medieval knight, Antonius Block (Max von Sydow), who confronts death. Following this film, Bergman created his religious “trilogy”: Through a Glass Darkly (1961), Winter Light (1963) and The Silence from (1963). The trilogy represents the culmination of his religious themes. This is “a movement from certainty achieved to certainty unmasked and finally God’s silence, the negative impression”.⁴ This is said to be the time that Bergman discovers his film style. It is also the time when he first introduces his characteristic close-up, which would become his trademark.¹

Another recurring theme in Bergman’s films is the problematic relationship between a man and a woman, concerning marriage, family life, and sexual relationships. His style was seen as revolutionary in that he portrayed these characters in a blunt manner. The

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¹ Bergman, Bilder.
³ Steene, Ingmar Bergman, 22.
⁴ Steene, Ingmar Bergman, 23.
films contain the idea, (as in *Smiles of a Summer Night*) "that living in hell together is at least better than living there alone." He also directed films that focused on the female gender. These include *A Lesson in Love* (1954) and *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955). Some of these were comedies, made when Bergman was in financial turmoil. *Smiles of a Summer Night* was based on the *Merry Widow* and described as the perfect example of "well-crafted cinematic drama".\(^2\) *Summer with Monika* (1952) can be described, as well, as film dealing with the relationship formed between a man and a woman. The film created a stir internationally. The scenes of the nude Harriet Andersson cemented the notion of "Swedish Sin". It also became the definition of Swedishness. However, the most obvious film, connected to physical union, that Bergman has created, is *Scenes from a Marriage*, which was made for television. It premiered outside Sweden in 1973 and it immediately prompted speculations that it could have affected the divorce rate in Denmark and Sweden.\(^3\)

Finally, the role of the artist is a feature in many of Bergman's films. This, of course, is of particular interest as this forms one of the kernels of my thesis. Many of Bergman's films take place in a film studio, at the circus, or in a theatre. Many of the films portray traveling circus members, jesters, or other lowly artistic types. They also portray the artists as members of a ballet or opera company. These artists are generally social outcasts struggling to make sense of their lives. This is true of the film *Sawdust and Tinsel* that I will be discuss in more detail. The film, *The Magician* (1958), uses similar motifs. Other films which contain the artist theme are *Persona* (1965), *Hour of the Wolf* (1966), *Shame* (1967), and *The Passion of Anna* (1968). The last three are often seen as a trilogy, dealing with the artist's alienation in a post-modern society. The first one describes an internal human struggle and the defeat in this struggle. The subject of the second film is the

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\(^1\) Long 91-107.
\(^2\) Long 47-57.
\(^3\) Long 138-140.
transformation from an artist to an assassin. The final film deals with the absence of the artist, who is replaced by a cynical and disillusioned figure.¹

Bergman states, in his Snakeskin speech from 1965, when he received the Erasmus prize:

Now, to be completely honest, I regard art (and not only the art of the cinema) as lacking importance. Literature, painting, music, the cinema, the theatre beget and give birth to themselves. New mutations and combinations emerge and are destroyed; seen from the outside, the movement possesses a nervous vitality...almost feverish; it resembles, a snakeskin full of ants. The snake itself is long since dead, eaten out from within, deprived of its poison; but the skin moves, filled with busy life...Religion and art are kept alive for sentimental reasons, as a conventional courtesy to the past.²

This speech is often linked to his film Persona that is also seen as a pivotal production because of the combination of the artist as motif and a radical film style, which includes the characteristic close-up. Persona contains the dream technique, originally from Strindberg’s chamber plays. This technique started in Bergman’s Wild Strawberries.

Bergman was to return to this artist theme later in his film career with Fanny and Alexander and After the Rehearsal. These films are both seen as final statements from the director and a tribute to the theatre, where “Everything can happen; everything is possible and likely. Time and space do not exist; on an insignificant basis of reality the imagination spins and weaves new patterns” (Strindberg’s introductory notes to the Dream Play, and final lines in Fanny and Alexander).

¹ Long 109-129.
CHAPTER II Sawdust and Tinsel (Gycklarnas Afton)

2.1 Plot

Sawdust and Tinsel takes place in a provincial Swedish town at the beginning of the 20th century. We join the Circus Alberti as they near the town in a caravan. At dawn, as the caravan gets closer to the town, Albert Johansson, the director of the circus, wakes up and joins the driver, Jens, in the front seat of the first wagon. Jens tells Albert about an occurrence regarding the clown Frost and Frost’s wife, Alma. The flash-back sequence begins. Alma has encountered a number of soldiers relaxing on the rocks, right at the edge of a beach. The soldiers leer at her and encourage her to entertain them. Alma undresses and frolics in the water as the soldiers watch and cheer her on. Meanwhile, Frost is notified of this ridiculous performance and rushes to the scene. He throws off his clown attire and hurriedly wades through the water to his wife and attempts to hide her from their view. He then stumbles back to the circus tents with his wife in his arms. All the while, the soldiers look on, laughing and snickering, as they follow his humiliating journey home. In contrast to the rest of the film, this scene is overexposed and therefore high in contrast and the characters of Alma and Frost are heavily laden with makeup. There is no sound to accompany this scene, though we clearly see the shouting of the soldiers and the tortured cries of Frost. It resembles a silent film. It also serves to foreshadow future events in Sawdust and Tinsel.

Next we see Albert and Anne (Albert’s mistress and a performer in the circus). They have decided to pay the local theatre a visit as they are desperate and must request the use of their costumes. The theatre’s manager, Mr. Sjöberg (Gunnar Björnstrand), allows them to use some dowdy garments, all the while being condescending because of their lower stature. Albert, who had formerly lived in the town, leaves Anne to call on his wife and two small boys that he had previously abandoned. Albert’s wife now owns a small but prosperous shop and Albert experiences a strong desire to return to his family and live a
normal life. So, he asks her to take him back and free him from this nomadic life that he has been leading with the circus. He desires some stability and respect. Delivering the second blow of the day to his ego, she makes it clear to him that this will never be possible. She doesn’t hesitate to comment on his appearance either, after he removes his jacket, exposing his dirty collar and simple cotton slip. Anne, meanwhile, jealous of Albert’s seeing his wife (and suspecting his motives), becomes involved with Frans (Hasse Ekman), a handsome, callous and cunning actor. She notices Frans at the theatre, while requesting the use of costumes on behalf of the circus. He quickly and adeptly seduces her with what he claims is a valuable necklace, but which is actually worthless. When Albert and Anne meet on a street again after Anne leaves a pawnshop, where she has the amulet appraised, Albert suspects that she has betrayed him and is further driven to despair. This is just one more humiliation for him to bear.

At the circus performance, attended by members of the theatre company, Frans taunts Anne publicly about his seduction of her. A gruesome fistfight ensues between Albert and Frans in the center of the circus ring. Overweight and clumsy, Albert proves no match for the cunning actor, who beats him brutally while the audience cheers and laughs uproariously at his degradation. In his trailer, the stupefied and despondent Albert contemplates suicide with a pistol that lies in front of him by his dressing-room mirror. After a long, tense interval, he shoots his reflection in the mirror and then turns the weapon on Anne’s ailing circus bear, a symbol of his own condition as this heavy and trapped being. The following dawn, the circus moves on.

2.2 Analysis

2.2.1 Mise-en-scene:

The milieu that we encounter in *Sawdust and Tinsel* is that of the Circus Alberti. In the very beginning of the film, we see the caravan moving forwards with animals in tow. The group finally settles on the outskirts of a town and proceeds to set up the tent and prepares
for the show. We are introduced to the inside of the circus tent and to the inside of several of the wagons in the circus caravan. We see the animals of the circus paraded about the grounds. The circus performers are practicing inside and outside of the tent. This is the primary milieu of the film. It is gritty, grimy and desperate. It is reminiscent of other Bergman films such as the *Seventh Seal* (1956), which also features a traveling band of performers.

As a contrast to this rather seedy spectacle, we are also introduced to the town theatre. As the two main characters, Albert and Anne, visit the theatre, the grandeur of the theatre and its relative richness compared to the tattered circus is evident. In the town theatre we witness a rehearsal in progress as the characters search for the theatre director. Albert and Anne are positioned behind the theatre machinery, behind the actors rehearsing their roles. They are able to look out and into the salon which is mostly empty except for a few members of the theatre which are seated and watching the rehearsal process.

The seduction scene of Anne takes place in the young actor’s dressing room. Here we see that the contrasts are not so great between the two professions—that of the actor and that of the circus performer. Here, it is not so glamorous, although outside the dressing rooms a distinction is made.

Another scene in the film is the flashback sequence. This is a story of the clown, Frost, and his wife Alma. It takes place close to the circus grounds and near a group of soldiers resting by the ocean on the beach. These soldiers form an audience viewing the spectacle that is Alma. At the end of this scene, we see Frost carrying his wife back to the circus tent. So, while the circus is not the constant backdrop of this scene, we are still left feeling that these characters are performing a number. In addition, the quality of this sequence is somewhat unreal, as it is treated and exposed differently from the rest of the film. Birgitta Steene analyses the sequence: “Illusion and reality are intertwined. The
spectators judge by appearance (a clown is a jester), but the artist himself is blind to reality (Alma mistakes the soldiers' jeers for crowd's adulation).”

2.2.2 Characters:
The characters depicted in this film are chiefly circus performers and theatre actors (with the exception of Albert's wife). These two groups of artists are in strong contrast to each other. The circus troupe has little money and is hoping to borrow costumes for their show from the local theatre. They are received at the theatre with a great amount of disdain. Anne and Albert have dressed up for this occasion and the result is ostentatious and ridiculous. They are clearly neither respected by the town folk nor the theatre personnel itself. They are the most alienated of all artists. The theatre has some status in the community whereas the circus performers are seen as parasites. However, in reality this distinction is not sharp.

The theatre director, although he displays his scorn for the pitiful troupe, acknowledges the fact that the actors and circus people belong to the same contemptible pack. The two professions are the same, and as rivals, compete for the favor of the villagers, the actors risking their 'vanity' and the circus performers, their 'lives'.

The director of the theatre says to Albert (in a sequence filmed from below, angling up towards the looming figure of the director), "We despise you because you live in wagons and we in dirty hotel rooms; we produce art, and you offer stunts and tricks. The plainest and least gifted of us can spit on the best of you. Why? Because you look silly and patched sir, and your little lady would surely be more fun without her gaudy rags".

The difference between the theatre actors and the circus performers is that the circus actors are outsiders. This is shown when they try to settle permanently in the town but are

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1 Steene, Ingmar Bergman, 80.
2 Livingston 44.
continually persecuted by the villagers. As Anne and Albert walk down the street in their finery, Anne wobbles a bit though she keeps her head high. However, no one that passes them by is in any doubt of their actual status. Anne is oblivious to this, while Albert realizes it. He desperately wants to become a respectable regular citizen instead of being a helpless performer existing on the fringe of society begging for assistance.

Frans, who enjoys a somewhat higher status than the traveling band of performers, displays his lack of respect for Anne and her position by offering her a worthless trinket as a reward for her acquiescence. She soon discovers that she has been duped but until that realization dawns on her, she is taken in by his charms. Anne is naive, but she is also desperate to improve her life. Therefore, she becomes the perfect victim for Frans. Frans displays his victory by mocking Albert while Albert is performing in the arena of the circus. He insults his conquest, Anne publicly as well, which results in a fight between him and Albert. Albert, albeit noble in his efforts to protect Anne’s reputation, loses the battle and is humiliated. This fight, between the actor and the circus director, exposes the artificial status that one group enjoys at the expense of the other.

Several scenes take place outside of the immediate performance space; in the trailers, the storage areas, or even outside, next to the tent. We see a steady stream of acrobats, clowns, and other circus performers pass through these areas. They look worn and unclean. This is juxtaposed to the theatre set, where the actors, that are seen rehearsing, are all well dressed and relaxed.

2.2.3 Influence:
The theme of the artist as an outsider is paramount throughout the film. There are many associations to this theme in both literature and theatre. The human being as an outsider has been a common concept in the twentieth century consciousness. Strindberg deals with this dilemma in A Dreamplay, just as later authors do. Jean-Paul Sartre and Samuel Beckett come to mind as examples of post-war writers, whose work is filled with the quest
to make sense of life and thereby find a place in society. Life’s search for fulfillment, or perhaps understanding, and the pain associated with the failure to attain such a state or such knowledge is a central theme in the works of these playwrights. The result of a fruitless search is alienation or the experience of not belonging.

There is a farcical tone to the film which can be interpreted as melodramatic. This is most evident when examining the stock characters: the sad clown Frost and the buffoon character, Albert, the director of the circus. Even the title of the film indicates this. *Gycklarnas Afton*, translated literally, the eve of the buffoons, or, the Clown’s evening. As Livinston notes, the verb of gycklare is gyckla, which means to jeer at or ridicule, which is the prevailing theme of the play. Outsiders are frequently mocked or ridiculed as the circus performers are in this film.¹

“Det är synd om människorna som måste leva på jorden.” [I feel sorry for the people who have to live on earth.] Indra’s daughter in Strindberg’s *Dreamplay* declares this after visiting and living among the earthly people. Albert says the same, echoing the sentiment of the Strindberg play. In *Sawdust and Tinsel*, the line could be altered to “Det är synd om konstnären” [Poor artist who has to live on this earth], for the artist is synonymous with the alienated individual, the well established existential theme. However, Albert is voicing his despair when confronted with his appalling position in life. He sees himself as the townspeople see him and feels hopeless as a result. The word “synd” means both shame and pity, and thus, the real meaning in that phrase has a mocking quality lost in translation.

Anne says to Albert when he threatens to do something rash in the advent of her affair: “Du är svartsjuk som Othello.” [You are jealous like Othello]. A possible reason for inserting such a reference may be to connect Anne, Albert and the rest of the troupe to the theatre community as a whole. However, there is a more obvious link. Bergman’s own love of the theatre and in turn of Shakespeare infiltrates his cinematic subject matter. He

¹ Livingston 43.
includes lines such as these to create a bridge between his film career and his work in the theatre. Bergman wants to give his characters a tie to the theatre world that he inhabits and is so fascinated by. Albert is thereby associated with a well known figure that immediately identifies him with a certain code of conduct. He becomes a tragic figure, when associated with Othello.

2.2.4 Play-within-a-play:

The circus tent houses the performances of the Circus Alberti troupe. Inside this dome, we see the sand covered performance area. This area is circular in shape and surrounded by wooden benches that have a gradual outward incline. We see the performance of Anne, both as she tames the lions as well as when she is atop an elephant, circling the sandy space inside the tent. We also view a performance by the circus clowns. We see the troupe rehearsing as well as performing on the fateful evening of the fight between Frans and Albert.

The scene between Frost and Alma, or the film within a film component, is a result of the conversation between Jens and Albert as Jens recollects the humiliation of Frost. This farcical scene foreshadows Albert's own humiliation later in the film.

The sequence establishes, according to Bergman, the starting point and theme of the film. His exploration of the artist's social position finds its basis in the mob's humiliation of an individual, and the ensuing actions, the rest of the film within which the sequence is framed, offer variations on this fundamental encounter. The repetitive victimage of the performer points to the remote origins of an institution. The idea of repetition is central to the film. [The performers are] Outcasts, they are permitted only to camp at the boundary of a town where their role is to provide a sufficiently amusing spectacle at any cost.¹

¹ Livingston 43.
Several scenes in this film include an audience. This is the audience within the film. There is the audience at the circus performance as well as the audience comprised of the soldiers on the seashore observing Alma. We are observing, second hand, the events taking place. We are also observing the audience, which in turn is observing the “performance”. We can see the similarity, (which heightens the sense of repetition) in the behaviour or reaction of the two audiences observing the events taking place in front of them. Neither audience (the soldiers and the circus audience) has any respect for the people before them. They clearly find amusement in the degradation of the “performers”. They take pleasure in the misfortune of Alma and Frost and later of Anne and Albert. They observe without compassion or understanding, for these are outsiders. Instead it is we, the third party, that watch with compassion. Because we are faced with the insensitivity of the towns people, juxtaposed with the despair of the performers, our natural inclination is to feel empathy.

CHAPTER III Fanny and Alexander (Fanny och Alexander)

3.1 Plot
This lavish production was set in a fictional town (filmed in Uppsala) in Sweden. It was made in two versions: a five-hour work in six installments for television and a three-hour, seventeen minute feature film for international release. It is the film version that is analyzed in this paper. It concerns a large family in 1910, during their Christmas celebrations. The family is evidently well to do and respected in the community. They live comfortably, even lavishly. The servants are busy preparing for the Christmas festivities. Helena Ekdahl (Gunn Wållgren), a noted actress who married well, is now a widow and the family matriarch. She has three sons. Gustav Adolf (Jarl Kulle), a restaurateur of some repute, is married to the vivacious and tolerant Alma (Mona Malm) who adores him despite his continuous philandering. Gustav Adolf is well into middle age, but his appetite for life and
sex cannot be satiated so he is having an affair with the lame servant girl, May. The second son Carl is the black sheep of the family. He is a college professor and not altogether successful. He is experiencing some financial stress, while his German wife tries to comfort and support him. Occasionally he displays some exuberance as witnessed during the Christmas holidays when he entertains the children in a stairwell by pulling down his pants and extinguishing some candles by breaking wind. The children are shocked and delighted by this outrageous display.

The third brother, Oscar (Allan Edwall), the actor-manager of the theatre, is gentle but somewhat detached from the rest of the group. Oscar’s wife, Emilie (Ewa Fröling) is an actress in the local theatre and endowed with great beauty. Their children, Fanny and Alexander, are opposites in appearance; Alexander is dark and Fanny is blonde with blue eyes. Fanny seems to be care free and fairly content while Alexander is brooding and suspicious. Fanny is a peripheral character, while Alexander is the lead figure in the film.

We see Alexander lying under his grandmother’s large mahogany dining room table located somewhere deep in the interior of the lavishly decorated and heavily furnished apartment. Here he takes stock of his environment, without being seen himself. His imagination takes hold and a theatrical quality washes over the quiet and mysterious environment of the apartment. Alexander has also acquired a magic lantern that further satisfies his imagination, creating scary screen images, foreshadowing future events. This “laterna magica” is yet another biographical element tied to Bergman’s own childhood. This early section dealing with the Ekdahl’s household, which lasts about an hour, has been directed by Bergman on a far grander scale than ever before. It contains rich and vivacious scenes, like the Christmas Celebrations where they, the Ekdahls, form a long line, hand in with their servants through the rooms of the house as they sing the Christmas song “Nu är det jul igen”. Helena is somewhat melancholy during this happy occasion but brightens a bit when she reminisces in a separate parlour with her old-time lover Isak Jacobi (Erland Josephson), a Jewish antique dealer and moneylender. The section also
contains a dramatic and highly aestheticized scene in which Oscar, after suffering a stroke in the theatre during a rehearsal of Hamlet, is taken home, through the wintry streets, by a horse drawn cart. After Oscar dies in his bed at home, the children must endure a torturous and prolonged episode, observing their mother screaming in anguish.

When Emilie marries the Bishop Vergérus and the family moves into its new home, fantasy takes precedence over reality. Time and place becomes hazy and the sequence of events clouded. The new Vergérus household is ominous and austere, resembling an imaginary prison. The children’s nursery is high up in a tower, with a locked door. The bishop’s estate includes a severe mother and a cruel stone-faced sister clad in black as well as the oppressed and malicious servants. The final member of the household is the horrifically overweight aunt who is bedridden and mute and has to be tended to continuously. The film includes a monstrous scene, where she is spoon fed and making indelicate sounds.

The rigors of the Christian life govern the home, which naturally excludes any pleasant and happy activities or thoughts. This lack of warmth makes Alexander feel unloved and unhappy. When he tells Justina, a house servant played by Harriet Andersson, that the ghosts of the bishop’s two drowned children hold him responsible for their deaths, she informs on him to the bishop. Alexander’s experience resembles Bergman’s in two parts. “The first centers on the Ekdahl house that fosters closeness and imagination and is presided over by sensuously evoked women; the other is dominated by a despotic father figure who intimidates and punishes Alexander--just as another ranking churchman, Erik Bergman, had punished his son.”

This is a fantastic fable that unfolds as they are rescued by Isak who casts a magic spell and with a large wooden chest, transports them mysteriously off to his antique shop, which in turn contains all sorts of mystical elements. There magic rules. Awaking in the night and searching through the dim byways of the darkened shop for a place to relieve

1 Törnqvist 177.
himself, Alexander hears a voice claiming to be God, to which Alexander gives defiant answers. Isak’s nephew, Aron, then appears to announce that he has been playing games with him. His namesake is Aaron of the Bible, the “artist” brother of Moses whose rod possessed magical powers; but Aron, a puppeteer declares his disbelief in God, who holds his terrors at bay through his art. Alexander next encounters a more disturbing figure in Isak’s other nephew, Ismael. Ismael is considered dangerous and has been locked away in a room that Alexander enters despite Isak’s warning not to do so. Ismael (whose biblical name gives the idea of estrangement and exile) represents the destructive forces dwelling in the imagination—and in Alexander himself. Through an extrasensory spell cast by Ismael but emanating from the boy’s own thoughts, the bishop is burned to death horrifically in a fire at the castle. Later the ghost of the bishop will pursue Alexander, who must live with guilt. In the meantime the Ekdahl family is reunited and the fairy tale has a happy ending as Gustav Adolf toasts the birth of two baby girls—Emilie’s daughter fathered by the bishop and Gustav Adolf’s own daughter with the servant girl Maj—who offer a vision of hope for the future.

3.2 Analysis

3.2.1 Mise-en-scene:
The film opens as the Ekdahls’ celebrate Christmas. We are invited into the Ekdahl home, where preparations of an extraordinary magnitude are unfolding. The staff is organizing the dinner, which is to take place at a large circular table. A Christmas tree is decorated, around which the whole family will dance, extending through the spacious apartment. Here is also a nativity scene, which Alexander’s mother, Emilie stars in. This is performed for the family’s benefit.

We also view the rehearsals taking place at the family’s theatre. Alexander’s father is rehearsing the role of the Ghost in Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Alexander watches from the
benches as his father delivers his lines in a faltering tone, shortly before collapsing on the stage. The actors are clad in theatre costumes, befitting the style of the period. Shortly thereafter he dies. Throughout the rest of the film, Alexander's father returns, clad in white, appearing before Alexander as a reminder of what has been. He appears when Alexander faces the hardships brought about by his mother's marriage to the Bishop Vergérus. As in Hamlet, Vergérus is a threatening stepfather, cruel and malicious. After the children are brought to the new austere residence of Vergérus, the story assumes the qualities of a fable, intertwining fact and fiction, or rather, reality with fantasy.

In fact, the resonance with Hamlet is particularly momentous when Alexander's mother, Emilie, says to him “Don't act Hamlet my son. I'm no Gertrude, your kind stepfather is no king of Denmark and this is not Elsinore castle, even if it does look gloomy.” Alexander, as Hamlet, tries to understand his universe, tries to fight the notion his mother puts forth, regarding what she sees as make believe. Alexander treads the line between reality and fantasy. Indeed, we are not sure as viewers of what actually occurs. We see through Alexander's eyes, as he tries to make sense of the events that unfold before him.

3.2.2 Characters:
Actors are Bergman's great infatuation. He adores actors and is fascinated by them. In fact, the whole acting profession is of immense interest to him. This is something that he repeatedly, in many of his interviews, touches upon. Therefore, he continually includes them as characters in his films. It is as if he explores the psyches of the people he is in continual cohabitation with in the theatre. In film he can evaluate his life as a theatre director and all those that work with him. In Fanny and Alexander the whole family is knee deep in theatre. The Ekdahl's run a theatre company and are performers as well. The children, emulating their parents, play-act while tinkering with their miniature playhouse. They tell scary stories creating a mysterious make-believe world. Then, the
make-believe takes over their world and becomes their world. Make-believe is transformed into reality.

3.2.3 Influence:
The great literary figures that have dominated Bergman's career are highly prevalent in *Fanny and Alexander*. Shakespeare is an obvious example. The story of Hamlet is clearly woven into the outer layer of fabric in *Fanny and Alexander*. Alexander's father collapses in Act II while rehearsing the role of the Ghost in *Hamlet*. He later dies only to return throughout the film. As such he appears before Alexander, clad in white and keeps doing so until the boy finally finds peace back at home in his grandmother's apartment.

Alexander is the young Hamlet, struggling to find a way to avenge himself on the man who has taken his mother's (Gertrude's) hand, in place of his father. This man, according to Alexander, is completely evil and destructive. It is up to Alexander/Hamlet to restore the family's happiness. How to do this is the dilemma he faces. He no longer trusts his mother who is suddenly distant and rigorously disciplines the children. However, his mother does feel empathy for them while they are at the Vergérus residence. There she is unable to ignore the harsh environment that her children must endure while living in the Vergérus residence. Another great presence that makes itself felt is August Strindberg.

As in so many of Bergman's films Strindberg represents the essence of the film. Humanity, as in *A Dreamplay*, struggles to understand life. Each individual experiences the same doubts and the same fears. People are pitiful. "Det är synd om människorna." This is the familiar refrain that runs throughout the play. Life is a misery, since life is full of uncertainty and pain. At the end of the film, in the epilogue, Alexander's grandmother reads to the sleepy child, the introduction that Strindberg wrote to a *Dreamplay*: "Anything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist. Against an insignificant background the imagination spins and weaves new designs." This occurs

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¹ Törnqvist 177.
after Emilie speaks to Helena about the possibility of staging the play. They eagerly exchange ideas regarding the theater and the atmosphere is warm and life-affirming. The end result is that the theater is the safe haven, where the imagination is allowed to grow and develop. So, Alexander is back to where he began. However, he now knows that it is a false sense of security. He knows about the cold outside world that constantly threatens this fictive universe. The real world is unsafe and boundless, whereas the small world of the theater can be controlled and understood.  

It is interesting to note the use of the name Ekdahl, which is, of course the same (save for an added ‘h’ in Bergman’s film) as the family name in Ibsen’s The Wild Duck. To note a link between Fanny and Alexander and The Wild Duck, beyond the likeness of the name is inevitable. The subject of Ibsen’s play is that of the “life lie”. Ibsen’s family as well as Bergman’s creates an illusion of reality in order to cope with life. In Bergman’s Fanny and Alexander, Gustav Adolf Ekdahl states “Rob a man of his subterfuge and he goes mad and begins hitting out.” This coping mechanism sounds familiar when considering Relling in Ibsen’s Wild Duck: “If you deprive an average man of his illusions you simultaneously steal his happiness.” The argument is clear. In order to be happy one must avoid the cruelty that is real life. I would argue that this is the underlying theme of the film.  

The children, Fanny and Alexander (the events that take place are generally seen from Alexander’s perspective), create a fantasy world not unlike that of the fairy tales told while they play with Alexander’s ‘laterna magica’ in the comfortable nursery of their privileged home. In order to understand the events that take place after their father’s death, a magic world gradually takes place of real life. In this way, Alexander makes sense of reality by creating a black and white world where evil is clearly distinct from what is good. His new stepfather, the bishop, is clearly evil in Alexander’s eyes who therefore must do everything imaginable to oppose him.

1 Törnqvist 178.
3.2.4 Play-within-a-play:

The first indication of a play-within-a-play in *Fanny and Alexander* is Alexander’s toy theatre. He hovers over this miniature replica of the “Copenhagen Theatre”, adjusting the machinery and the toy actors. This serves as a forecast of what is to come. The real world is interfering with the smaller fantasy world. Alexander represents, in this scene, the grown up world that controls the helpless children. This scene can also be seen as God playing with the marionettes. Bergman, himself, has often referred to the human condition in terms of its marionette like quality. The big world vs. the little world, as Carl Johan says in his dinner speech at the end of the film. The big world is the changing social structure in Sweden. The lower classes are gaining strength and demanding a better life. This social change leaves the upper class powerless and paralyzed. They have to focus on the little world so as to forget their shifting importance in society. They create a structure within the family or within their class where they can flee from the larger life.

In Bergman’s notes for *Fanny and Alexander*, (Bergman 1990) he speaks of the theatre as the playground as well as the hiding place for the children. The children in *Fanny and Alexander* contribute in a few of the family’s theatrical shows and when they are alone in their own world, they play with their toy theatre and cinematograph. Bergman, himself, possessed both of these items as a boy. This autobiographical element is something that Bergman himself does not deny. Bergman believes that life is a performance, and his own life can be no exception. That is why he notes that a passage he wrote in *Laterna Magica* can also be the kernel of what was to be the film:

> Sanningen att säga tänker jag på barndomen med lust och nyfikenhet. Fantasi och sinnen fick näring och jag kan inte minnas att jag någonsin hade tråkigt. Snarare exploderade dagar och timmar av märkvärdigheter, oväntade scenerier, magiska ögonblick. Jag kan fortfarande ströva genom min barndoms landskap och

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1 Törnqvist 176.
återuppleva ljus, dofter, männkor, rum, ögonblick, gester, tonfall och föremål. Det är sällan episoder med något att berätta, snarare korta eller långa, på måfå inspelade filmer utan poäng./.../ Det var svårt att skilja det fantiserade från det som ansågs verkligt. Om jag ansträngde mig kunde jag kanske få verkligheten att hålla sig verklig men där fanns till exempel spöken och gaster. Hur skulle jag göra med dem? Och sagorna, var dem verkliga?" [To tell you the truth, I think of my childhood with delight and curiosity. One’s fantasy life and senses were well fed and I cannot remember ever having a dull time. Rather, the days and hours exploded with marvels, unexpected scenes, magical moments. I can still wander through my childhood ‘s landscape and relive lights, smells, people, rooms, moments, gestures, intonations and objects. They are seldom episodes with anything to tell, rather short or long, randomly recorded films without a point/.../ It is hard to distinguish the fantasized from what seemed real. If I made the effort I could perhaps make the reality stay real but there were, for example, ghosts and ghouls. What was I to do with them? And the stories, were they real?]¹

It was impossible to distinguish fantasy from what was considered real. It was a way to deal with the events taking place all around.

The pretend world is what Törnqvist refers to as the small world.

As soon as the Prologue proper begins, Bergman cuts from this wide perspective of the stream of life to the small one of Alexander and his world. Significantly, we first see him via his puppet theatre. The sequence begins with a close-up of the theatre, causing us to believe that we are confronted with the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. Already here, at the beginning of the film, Bergman attunes us to Alexander’s mingling of reality and fantasy. And the key word in this process is ‘theatre’. The red curtain is lifted and we witness a romantic setting. When the

¹ Bergman, Bilder, 380-381.
backdrop is lifted, we see Alexander’s huge face behind the tiny paper figures on the stage.1

Thus, we have the small world within the large world, or the unreal world within the real world. Alexander appears, while pulling the strings of his puppet theatre, to foreshadow what is to come. He symbolizes the mysterious powers within the Antique store that alters the fate of Vergérus and his sister. One might even say that he represents Vergérus and the power he has over the life of the children.

Alexander may also be exercising his own power. He is growing up and taking a step into adulthood. He is trying to take charge of his life by creating this fictive universe that he can exercise his influence on. “What we witness here is an inward movement which is at the same time a movement from illusion to reality. What is the child living in a self-created fantasy world, a world that can be surveyed and controlled.”1 This may be a self-reflexive element. Bergman wishes to control his universe, his stage, his film. Perhaps he is telling us that despite his attempts, he is simply living in a fictive world, while the real world is beyond his grasp.

Another note that Bergman has made regarding the film is the transformation of the mother. She changes from the vivacious and decorous theatre director into an obedient and devoted wife. Here Bergman refers to this transformation as a theatrical masterpiece. She plays a role and does so without fault. One might say that this is a multi-layered portrayal of the theatrical. There is the pretend world of the child, which runs throughout the film. We have the adult world where pretense is just as prevalent, yet instead of being innocent, it is full of intent and embodies the “life-lie”. The theatre connects the two poles. This is where the children’s world (struggling to understand the adult world) meet. It is a collision that, thanks to the theatre, includes everyone.

Bergman adds even another layer of theatricality: Religion. The concept of God is confusing for Alexander, even frightening, as in the scene at the home of the Jewish

1 Törnqvist, 179.
Antique Dealer, Jacob. His fear is made concrete when a puppet of God appears before him. However, this meeting with the mystical Ismael, unleashes a horrifying chain of events, in which Alexander’s angry wishes are fulfilled. Bergman's description of human beings as puppets on a string and God as a strict theatre director, comes to mind when considering this occurrence.

Törnqvist describes the adult facade as “a need to embellish reality in order to endure it.”\(^2\) The adults do not wish to face reality as Gustav Adolf explains in his dinner speech at the end of the film: “We Ekdahls have not come into the world to see through it.” Törnqvist even goes as far as to say that the Ekdahl household is an illusion, due to its connection to the theatre, while the Vergerus household represents religion.\(^3\) The implication here, is that a life of illusion, the life-lie, is to be preferred. However, we will always as human beings suffer from our uncertainty about life’s meaning.

I reject the Freudian interpretation or reading that Törnqvist makes regarding Alexander’s rebellious behaviour towards his stepfather. The idea is that Alexander is not yet an adult and therefore unable to take his father’s place and compete in the sexual arena. This is why he villainizes his stepfather and tries to work against him in every way that he can. This reading, in my mind, is clichéd and dogmatic. I can accept that this interpretation may be valid concerning May, the maid, for whom he feels a great deal of affection and must share with his uncle, who takes precedence, since he can offer what Alexander can not.

\(^1\) Törnqvist 184.
\(^2\) Törnqvist 176.
\(^3\) Törnqvist 176-77.
CHAPTER IV After the Rehearsal (Efter Repetitionen)

4.1 Plot

Although, at this point in time, Bergman had retired from filmmaking, he directed a television production. After the Rehearsal is the title of this 1980 production. It was later revised into a film of seventy-two minutes and shown as such on Swedish television in 1984. Bergman did not approve of releasing it to movie theatres. When the producer, Jörn Donner, was negotiating its sale to American film distributors, Bergman tried to intervene as he felt that it might give the audience a false impression regarding his retirement from film. However, his efforts were in vain, as the film premiered in New York in June of 1984.

The film is in the form of a chamber play: a single set, one act and three characters. Sven Nykvist, the cinematographer had limited possibilities regarding the inventive camera angles. It is therefore very much like a stage performance that has been captured on film, visually un-enticing. The film concerns a stage director of advancing age, Henrik Vogler (Erland Josephson), who is remarkably interchangeable with Ingmar Bergman himself. The other two characters are the actresses, Rakel (who is dead since eight years but appears in a dream sequence), played by Ingrid Thulin and Anna Egerman, her daughter (Lena Olin), the ingenue who is rehearsing for the role of Indra in Vogler’s production of Strindberg’s A Dream Play.

The film, which contains many references to A Dream Play, opens with Vogler slumbering at his desk, on a theatre stage. His worn director’s copy of the Strindberg work lies resting beside him. Whether or not the following events actually take place is unclear. However, Vogler emerges from his sleep when Anna appears on the stage. She is there to look for her lost bracelet, although this may simply be an excuse she employs in order to initiate a liaison with Vogler. One can speculate on her motives. It may have to do with a bitter relationship with her mother. She feels unloved and has suspicions that her
mother was involved with Vogler many years earlier, which later turns out to be justified. As they converse, Vogler is reminded of those that have populated his past. One such person is Rakel, who appears in an episode where Anna is transformed into a thirteen year-old version of herself (played by Nadja Palmstierna-Weiss). The thirteen-year old Anna, wearing identical clothes to the adult Anna, sits paralyzed on the sofa located at the center of the stage. The scene with Rakel shows her trying to convince Vogler to give her a larger part in a play that he is directing. She even offers to rekindle an old affair in the hopes of changing his mind. But it is clear that her efforts are futile since she can not be trusted or relied upon because of her drinking problem and her disruptive emotional outbursts.

At the end of this scene, the camera scans Anna, who is transformed back into the adult Anna, and the action picks up from where it left off. Vogler and Anna resume their conversation and Anna tells Vogler that she is three months pregnant. This will make it impossible for her to play her part as scheduled, five months later. Vogler is upset as he feels that she is ruining her future by halting what would be a brilliant career move. She says that she could get an abortion, which Vogler dismisses and then realizes that it may be already too late. The truth of the matter is that she is not pregnant but merely testing Vogler to see what sort of response this may elicit. It becomes clear that she is hoping to seduce Vogler, that this has been her motive all along, but he gently rebuffs her. Vogler is directorial in nature when explaining to Anna the futility of such an endeavour. As they walk the stage, he describes to her the eventualities of their affair: how wonderful and giddy it would be in the beginning, and how it would consequently come to an end.

Vogler finds the idea of an affair, though charming and delightful, an unnecessary distraction from his real passion in life, directing. "My rehearsal", he says, "is like an operation. Self-discipline, cleanliness, and stillness prevail. Then we solve the riddles and learn the mechanism of repetition."
4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 Mise-en-scene:
This chamber piece takes place on a theatre stage after a rehearsal. The director, a man in his sixties, is looking over his notes after a day's work. His young ingenue, the lead of the play walks in, on the pretext of recovering a bracelet that she lost during rehearsal. They become engaged in a conversation. This discussion concerns the acting profession, directing and their mutual attraction to each other. Later another character appears (the mother of the young actress and a retired diva of the stage). She is aggressive and we find out that she used to be involved with the director and worked for him as well. However, she no longer can work as she is struggling with excessive alcohol abuse and depression. After she exits, Anna, who has been sitting, immobile during this entire scene, suddenly “comes to life” again and finishes her dialogue with the director and they both leave at the end.

The stage is vast and contains dusty scuffed stage props. The sense of emptiness is palpable. When the characters pace across the stage the sound of the heels produce an echo. Their voices seem to reverberate through the air. We sense the empty auditorium before the stage. In fact, the film is shot from what would be the view of the non-existent theatre audience. So, as in Sawdust and Tinsel, the view of the film audience mimics that of the audience in the film.

4.2.2 Characters:
There are, as stated above, only three characters in this film. All of them are in the theatre profession. They are the theatre director, Vogler, the young actress, Anna and the older actress, Rakel. The dialogue in this film deals with their passion: the theatre. Also, it deals with the relationships that come out of such work. We see Anna, the struggling ingenue, who is trying to escape the legacy of her mother, also an actress. She has been cast to play Indra’s daughter in an upcoming production of A Dreamplay, directed by Vogler. What
follows is a discussion concerning this role and why she has been cast. Vogler talks about his fascination with actors: “Jag ska säga dig något som är rena sanningen: Jag älskar skådespelare. Jag älskar dem som företeelse, deras mod eller döds föraktelse. Jag älskar deras yrke. Jag förstår deras flykt, också deras svarta hänsynslösa uppriktighet. Jag älskar när dem försöker manipulera mig. Jag avundas om deras godtrogenhet och deras skarpsynhet. Jag kan aldrig skada dem.” [I am going to tell you something that is absolutely true. I love actors. I love them as an idea, their bravery or death defiance. I love their work. I understand their escapes and also their brutal insensitive honesty. I love when they try to manipulate me. I envy their trusting nature and their sharp wit. I could never harm them] (my translation), and then Anna asks in response: “Du säger att du älskar skådespelare. Blir du aldrig besviken?” [You say that you love actors. Are you never disappointed?] Vogler answers: “Nej/.../En gammal lärare sa engång att en regissör ska lära sig att lyssna och hålla käften.”[An old teacher once said that a director should learn to listen and shut up.]

This description of actors and directors roles can be seen as a representation of Ingmar Bergman’s own experiences as a theatre director. He has written a great deal about his work with his actors and how he relates to them. He also discusses his own relationship to the theatre and by extension to life in general.

4.2.3 Influence:
The film contains liberal references to Strindberg. One such reference occurs with Vogler’s apparent lack of concern when interpreting the text of Strindberg’s plays: “Jag våldtar Strindberg...” [I rape Strindberg...]. He associates this with the magic of the theatre - how a director can create a new world with the help of the text, which he can manipulate in order to produce the desired effect. Everything seems to be; nothing is. This is a motif reminiscent of Strindberg’s Ghost Sonata.
Another reference to Strindberg is the play that is about to take place on the stage, and where the film takes place. Vogler has cast the young Karin in the role of Indra’s daughter in Strindberg’s *A Dreamplay*. He frequently refers to this play throughout. Here, too, all is not as it seems. This may refer to the difficulty to escape the role of the actress. The question is, is there a distinction between the two.

Yet another reference to Strindberg is to his chamber plays or naturalistic plays. The film, with its three characters locked in a room is like Strindberg’s naturalistic plays, such as *Miss Julie*. Birgitta Steene discusses this connection between Bergman’s films and Strindberg:

Bergman’s dramatic figures who frequently emerge as embodiments of ideas or rudimentary human attitudes, could be termed cinematic descendants of Strindberg’s characters; not only in Strindberg’s ‘dream plays’ but also in his so-called naturalist dramas, like *The Father* and *The Dance of Death*, the dramatis personae are stylized representatives of the male and female, engaged in elemental conflicts between the sexes or between Man and a god-head.¹

In *After the Rehearsal*, it is between actor and director, man and woman, and to some extent “Man and a god-head”. The old director, Vogler, is all knowing, fatherly and in control.

4.2.4 Play-within-a-play:

There is a flashback scene or a performance within a performance that takes place within the confines of this film. Anna is transformed into a little girl and sits “frozen” on the sofa, while her mother enters the stage and confronts Vogler. It is a dream sequence, that is an unexplained shift, connecting one world with another. Even though the film seems realistic in its earnest and straightforward chamber play construction, there is the element of the surreal. It seems to be a memory of an event that took place some time before, as indicated

¹ Steene, Ingmar Bergman, 135-36.
by Anna’s change in stature. However, there is no explanation of this occurrence. We, as viewers receive no explanation of why this scene takes place. The logical assumption is that we achieve a higher understanding of Vogler’s motivations in relation to Anna. It also explains Anna’s defiance towards her mother and possibly her desire to provoke a reaction in Vogler.

The events unfolding before us depict actors and a director outside of a performance. The very fact that they are on a stage, in an auditorium and playing roles for one another, creates the impression of a performance taking place before an audience. They are not playing their roles in A Dreamplay that they have been rehearsing before the film begins but they are on a stage and this implies that they are not entirely themselves. They are still acting.

CHAPTER V – Discussion

Many other Bergman films contain elements of the theatrical. When scanning his career, one can point out such a presence in almost every film. For example, one of his first films is Dreams. Here he employs for the first time his dream technique. He uses this technique in subsequent films, such as Wild Strawberries. The dream technique, as mentioned earlier, is a method that Bergman (who first used it in the theater) borrowed from Strindberg. “The older playwright lent his voice to the younger, but their experiencing of life was fundamentally the same: …a tendency to regard dreams and nightmares as more real than daily activities.”

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1 Steene, Ingmar Bergman, 35.
Although Bergman developed his own very unique voice, the idea of the dream portrayed in film has been a presence ever since. This is most prevalent in his film, *Persona*, where the two main characters in a dream like sequence merge into one, symbolizing the dependence that they have on one another. They are like two halves of a whole and together they form one person. It is not clear where the "... 'acting' stops and the 'being' begins."\(^1\) It is not entirely obvious to us, the viewers, what actually takes place and what is a dream. These sequences flow into the more obviously real scenes.

Bergman admits that when he started to write plays, he was heavily influenced by Strindberg. "I started reading Strindberg when I was ten. It was a shattering and fundamental experience. His very dialogue burnt into my flesh. Later when I began to write, I was of course dependent upon this, and only slowly, very slowly, could I create a dialogue of my own."\(^2\)

Strindberg's influence can also be seen in the chamber films that Bergman has made. *Autumn Sonata* from 1978 is an example of such a film. There are only four main characters and the action takes place within limited confines. The film centers on a dispute between a mother and daughter, played by Ingrid Bergman and Liv Ullman. It is similar to *After the Rehearsal* in that it is very much like a filmed stage drama. There are also flashbacks without any voice accompaniment, as in *Sawdust and Tinsel*.\(^3\)

*Winter Light* is constructed like a passion play with well defined scenes.\(^4\) Also, the *Devil's Eye* (which is based on a Danish radio play) has the styling of a stage play with scenes divided into acts. The set itself seems constructed and the characters reminiscent of Molière.\(^1\)

That leads us to another type of theatricality that one can trace throughout Bergman's films: the characters that he chooses to portray. As I have mentioned earlier,

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2 Steene, *Ingmar Bergman*, 34.
3 Long, 159-160.
4 Long, 102.
his interest in this matter is for actors or performers of some sort. In *Summer Interlude* we have, as the main character, the ballet-dancer. In the *Seventh Seal*, we observe the travelling performers. In *The Ritual* (which was written as a play) the main focus is on a group of cabaret artists. This is also the case in *The Serpent’s Egg*, where Liv Ullman portrays a cabaret performer. In these films, just as in *Sawdust and Tinsel*, the actors portrayed are marginalized in society. Sometimes the seemingly respectable characters, such as the councilman in *The Ritual*, in an effort to vilify the easily targeted performers, expose themselves as weak and morally corrupt.

Sometimes the connection to the theatre is more direct, as in Ingmar Bergman’s version of Mozart’s opera, *The Magic Flute*, which takes place at the Drottningholm Theatre in the Stockholm Archipelago. The camera scans the audience as the Overture of Mozart’s opera begins. The camera rests on an audience member’s face; a young girl, who is listening to the music. This establishes a connection between the audience in the film and the movie going audience. What follows is a fairly close reading of the opera, making full use of the 18th century machinery, still intact in the Drottningholm Theatre. When Bergman speaks of the *Magic Flute*, he automatically links it with this theatre. He says that he could not imagine it set anywhere but at the Drottningholm Theatre. Perhaps the extravagant baroque theatre with all its grandness, contained, in Bergman’s mind, all the magic that the opera could convey. “Jag har i min forestallning alltid sett *Trollflöjten* inneslutet i det där gamla teaterhuset, i den fina akustiska trälådan med sitt milt sluttande scengolv, sina fonder och sidostyken. Här finns illusions teaterns ädla magi. Ingening är, allting föreställer. I samma ögonblick som ridån går upp manifesteras överenskommelsen mellan scen och salong: Nu diktar vi tillsammans.”

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1 Long, 95.
Nothing is, everything represents. In the same moment that the curtain goes up, the agreement between the stage and salon is manifested: Now we are composing together] Bergman’s words, “Nothing is, everything represents” could easily refer to his own work in film. Thus, one could say about Bergman, that, nothing is what it seems. It represents a connection to the other: film represents theatre.

This is certainly true of Bergman’s Hour of the Wolf. This film contains flashbacks within flashbacks, where the line between reality and fantasy is continually blurred. The film is populated by ghouls and goblins that hover between dusk and dawn. The distinction between the dream world and the real world is questioned. In one dream sequence, the character Lindhorst stages a sequence from The Magic Flute in the form of a puppet show. It becomes apparent that the puppets are the real life characters represented in the film connecting the dream to reality.

In 1997, Bergman released to Swedish television viewers (1999 to North American viewers) a new film, In the Presence of a Clown, with Börje Ahlsted and Agneta Ekmanner. This film centers on an inventor, Carl and his group of followers. It opens in an insane asylum where Carl is being detained. He is obsessed with death and the grotesque qualities of human behaviour. In his dreams he encounters the female clown played by Ekmanner. This clown taunts and terrifies him. She is frightening yet has a sexual appeal.

Here, at the asylum, he also discusses another consuming interest with his psychiatrist—-the life and fate of Franz Schubert, the composer. His fiancée, Pauline Thibault, (perhaps a reference to Shakespeare) who Carl had threatened- the reason for his incarceration- visits him and he relates to her his idea. Carl wants to undertake a film project with Professor Osvald Vogler, also a patient at the asylum. They have an idea for creating a vocal film. This will be the first of its kind and will be part of a tour. So, Carl embarks on a trip into the backcountry of Sweden, in the dead of winter. He and his crew end up at the Grånäs Good Templar Lodge. At the lodge they set up the projector and
prepare for the evening’s show, which is about the, for Carl, fascinating tale of Franz Schubert and his mistress. A modest amount of tickets has been sold and the audience slowly gathers at the lodge, after braving through the storm outside. Soon after they start off the evening’s show the projector blows a fuse and cannot continue to be operated. The cast then continues the show in an improvised theatre performance, starring Carl and his fiancée, Pauline. In the middle of one of the acts, Carl has a mental breakdown, but manages to get himself together and finish the performance. The audience is satisfied, though not overwhelmingly appreciative. They leave the lodge and the crew is left to gather their things together and move on.

Here, the performance takes place in a Good Templar’s Lodge in the middle of the countryside in Sweden. This is a makeshift stage, but nonetheless a stage, which perhaps serves as a performance space for this village regularly. The audience members are farcical in nature. The main characters are performers as well as outsiders. They are outsiders in the literal sense as they are travelling throughout the region. They put on ‘performances’ in the form of running the film but standing behind the film screen mimicking the character’s voices, thus creating a “talkie” and becoming a part of a performance. When the film breaks down they improvise the entirety of the film, that is, they embody the characters, physically as well as vocally. They give life to the film characters by portraying them on the stage. This element is concordant with the mise-en-scene of the film. The improvised performance of the film that was to take place within the film is the play-within-a-play element.

The female clown in this film, portrayed by Agneta Ekmanner, is a character found in somewhat different forms in several of Bergman’s films. Sawdust and Tinsel, which has been discussed earlier, has the character, Frost, the circus clown. The clown in this film, however, is ominous: a symbol of death. However, they both contain the element of humiliation. Frost is humiliated in Sawdust and Tinsel, while the clown in the Presence of a Clown, humiliates and mocks the subject.
The name of one of the characters in this film is Vogler. This is a name that Bergman has used in many of his films. We have a female Vogler in *Hour of the Wolf*. There is Vogler's Magnetic Health Theater in *The Magician*. Another oft repeated name is Vergérus. This name is found in *The Passion of Anna*, *The Ritual* as well as in *Fanny and Alexander* (as well as several other of his films). Then there is the name Egerman. This name is, for example, used in *Scenes from a Marriage*, *Smiles of a Summer Night* and *The Magician*.

The habit that Bergman has of repeating his use of certain character names can have several meanings. It can be a way to link the body of his films together. Bergman may be trying to indicate that his films are connected, that they are related. He may be interpreting the same character in many different ways. It may also be a way for us, the public, to step back or to distance ourselves from the characters. Since we see the Vogler's reappear in film after film, but played by different people, they stop being realistic and become instead like stock characters.

**CHAPTER VI Conclusion**

What do these films by Ingmar Bergman have in common? Many elements within Bergman's body of films seem to reappear consistently. The religious motif is one of them, as is the exploration of the subconscious, or if you will, the dreamscapes. According to one critic: "Bergman, like Cocteau, is an artist who presents us with his own world of myth and illusion. Everything is there except the key to Bluebeard's castle."¹

These elements have been dealt with in the great body of work concerning Bergman's prolific career. I have chosen the theatrical motif. This does not necessarily exclude the elements mentioned above. The subconscious is closely related to Bergman's use of the

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dream technique, which he originally borrowed from Strindberg. By appropriating this idea, Bergman creates a tie between himself and Strindberg.

Bergman's characters are complex. His great love of the theatre and his affection towards actors and their profession has held an enduring interest for him in his filmmaking. One could easily include a number of other films by him in a further analysis of this kind. *The Seventh Seal, The Magic Flute* and *Devil's Wanton* are but a few more films that contain rich theatrical elements.

Bergman has a new film in sight: *Faithless*. It is to be directed by Liv Ullman, based on a screenplay by Ingmar Bergman. Little relevant information has been released. However, based on the cast list, one can glean some idea of the subject matter. Lena Endre is to play Marianne, an actress. Erland Josephson will play Bergman. Thomas Hanzon plays Markus, Marianne's husband and an opera conductor. Finally, Krister Henrikson plays David Bergman, Marianne's lover and a famous theatre director. Making an educated guess, I assume that the film will revolve around the theater. It may be fairly autobiographical, dealing in some way with life in the theatrical profession. This film is scheduled for its premiere in Cannes, the spring of 2000.

Based on the studies that I have conducted, I have found that Bergman is tightly focused on the theatre in his films. He consistently chooses subjects that explore the theatrical: the profession, the performance or the physical theatre environment. Is his use of the same theatrical motifs a sign of his limitations as a director? One might argue that the constant portrayals of actors, directors and other theater people is insular, that an audience outside of the profession would be alienated or uninterested since the subject matter does not concern them. I argue, however, that the themes in his films are universal and that he is simply using the theater and the characters in the theater as a metaphor for topics that concern everyone. The theater is a miniature world that reflects the outer world just as in *Fanny and Alexander*. We can identify with Frost, the clown in *Sawdust and Tinsel*, not only because he is a pathetic figure, but because in his humiliation he represents the
existential nature of humanity. We are all vulnerable. We all wish to maintain our dignity. This is a universal theme, not solely reserved for the theatre profession.

It might be argued that these themes or motifs could be represented differently and in a different environment. Why do his films have to be set in a theatre or be represented by actors or directors? I believe that Bergman chooses to present his ideas in a theatrical habitat because this is what he is most familiar with. He knows this world very well, as he has constantly worked within the theatre alongside his work in the cinema. He has allowed the theatre to provide him with the impulses or the inspiration for his films. He has fed off one in order to feed another. Bergman wishes to explore themes that are of interest to us all, but he uses the theatrical elements in his films in order to convey these ideas convincingly.
Bibliography


Filmography


