May 4, 2021 (42:14)
Ingmar Bergman : FANNY AND ALEXANDER (11982,188 min)
Spelling and Style—use of italics, quotation marks or nothing at all for titles, e.g.—follows the form of the sources.
Cast and crew name hyperlinks connect to the individuals' Wikipedia entries

Vimeo link for **ALL** of Bruce Jackson's and Diane Christian's film introductions and post-film discussions in the virtual BFS

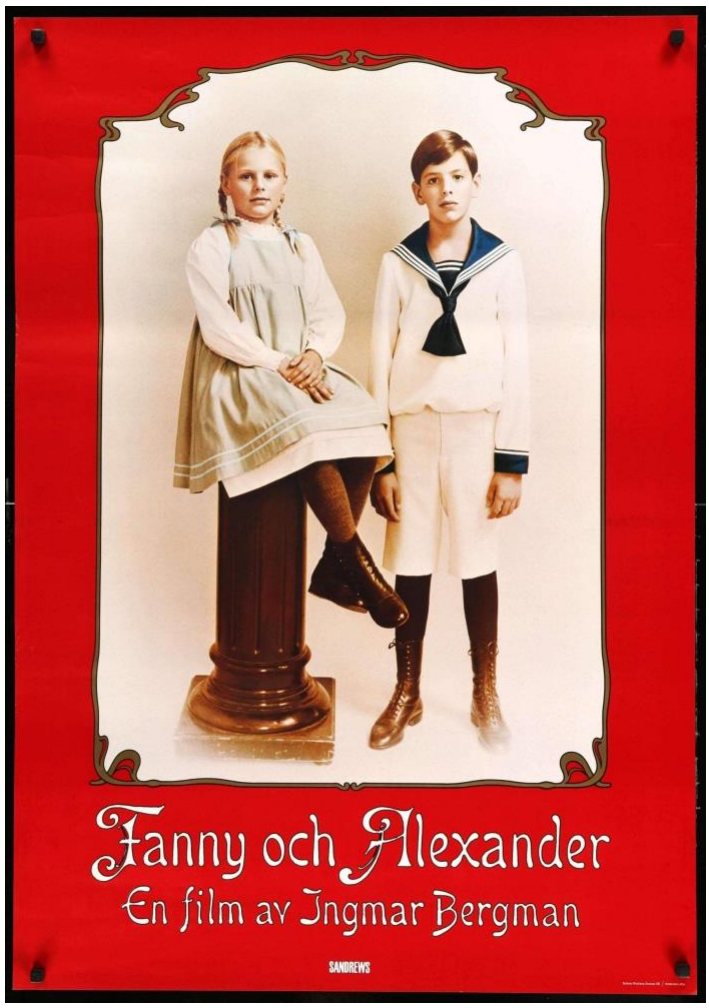
Vimeo link for our introduction to *Fanny and Alexander*

Zoom link for *all* Spring 2021 BFS Tuesday 7:00 PM post-screening discussions:
Meeting ID: 925 3527 4384 Passcode: 820766

Written and Directed by Ingmar Bergman
Produced by Jörn Donner
Music by Daniel Bell
Cinematography by Sven Nykvist
Film Editing by Sylvia Ingemarsson

The film received six Academy Award nominations, winning four, including **Best Foreign Language Film and Best Cinematography**. The four wins was the most any foreign-language film had received at the Academy Awards to date until it tied the record with *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), and *Parasite* (2019).

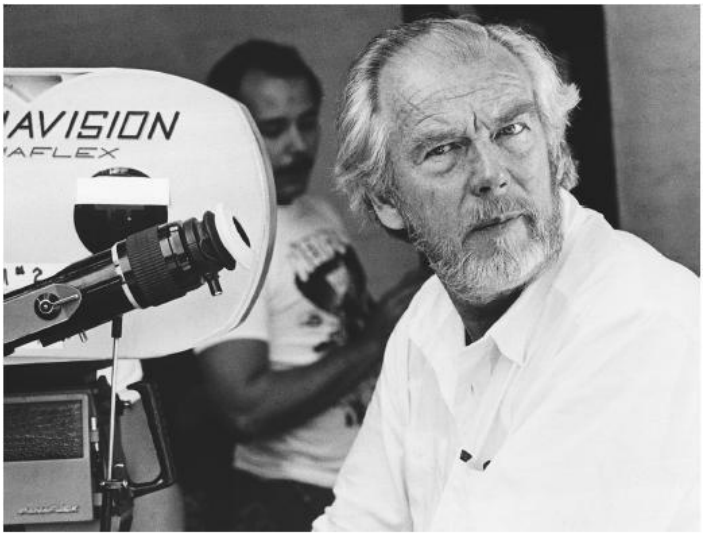
Cast
Pernilla Allwin…Fanny Ekdahl
Bertil Guve…Alexander Ekdahl
Jan Malmsjö…Bishop Edvard Vergérus
Börje Ahlstedt…Carl Ekdahl



Anna Bergman…Hanna Schwartz
Gunn Wållgren…Helena Ekdahl
Kristina Adolphson…Siri
Erland Josephson…Isak Jacobi
Mats Bergman…Aron Retzinsky
Jarl Kulle…Gustav Adolf Ekdahl

Ingmar Bergman (July 14, 1918 in Uppsala, Uppsala län, Sweden—July 30, 2007, age 89, in Fårö, Gotlands län, Sweden) was an undisputed colossus of world art cinema. He was chosen the world's greatest living filmmaker by *Time* (11 July 2005). He astonished people with his willingness to recognize cruelty, death and, above all, the torment of doubt. From the late 1950s to the late 1970s, Bergman would have been on any film buff's list of great movie

directors. Similarly, no critics' poll would have omitted from their list of greatest movies either *Wild Strawberries* or *The Seventh Seal*, which, with *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), made up a dazzling hat trick produced in under three years. According to the *Guardian*: "His work was in severe contrast to the neo-realist school that dominated postwar cinema, employing a surgeon-like precision to analyze the intellectual disquiet that seemed at odds with the hedonistic nature of the times." When *Seventh Seal* was released, Bergman was so revered that the editors of a Swedish film magazine declared they would print only negative criticism about the director and his movies. Bergman was amused by the ploy and, using a pseudonym, penned an attack on himself. His films often have a grim obsession with physical confrontation; he once remarked that he would like to have made a film entirely in close-up. At times Bergman seems unable to forget that he was examining a theme or topic, rather than creating a film where the medium itself can unwittingly reveal—in the hands of a great artist—an inner truth. In his native Sweden, Bergman was also a prolific theatre director; from 1963 to 1966 he was the head of the Royal Dramatic Theatre, Stockholm. The job would prove to be too demanding for Bergman with the entire company in need of reorganization, he found himself in an 'insoluble and incomprehensibly chaotic situation.' Against his better judgement, he did not cut back on his film work and ended up paying the price: double pneumonia and acute penicillin poisoning. In the spring of 1965 he was admitted to a local hospital where he began to write the screenplay for *Persona*, "mainly to keep my hand in the creative process." In poor shape, both physically and psychologically, he started to question the role of art in general, and his own work in particular. At this time he won a prestigious award, but hampered by illness he could not attend the ceremony. Instead he penned an essay entitled, "The Snakeskin", summarizing his broodings during his stay in hospital and his feelings about art. In many ways, *Persona* became an illustration of this essay (or vice-versa, perhaps), to the extent that "The Snakeskin" was published as the preface to the American version of the screenplay. *Persona* has often been regarded as a watershed in Bergman's career, a new start, just as he had prescribed for himself. Bergman mostly stuck to Sweden for his films, however, when he did dabble with American finance or other influences, the results were nearly disastrous, as in the case of *The Touch* (1970) and *The Serpent's Egg* (1976).



Sven Nykvist (December 3, 1922 in Moheda, Kronobergs län, Sweden—September 20, 2006, age 83, in Stockholm, Stockholms län, Sweden) perfected the art of cinematography to its most simple attributes, giving films the most natural look imaginable. Nykvist used light to create mood and, more significantly, to bring out the natural flesh tones in the human face in order to evoke the emotion of the scene without the light becoming intrusive. Nykvist entered the Swedish film industry when he was 19 and worked his way up to becoming a director of photography. He first worked with the legendary Swedish director Ingmar Bergman on the film *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953), but his collaboration with Bergman began in earnest with *The Virgin Spring* (1960). From that point on, Nykvist replaced the great Gunnar Fischer as Bergman's cameraman, and the two men started a collaboration that would last for a quarter of a century. The switch from Fischer to Nykvist created a marked difference in the look of Bergman's films. Fischer's lighting was a study in light and darkness, while Nykvist preferred a more naturalistic, more subtle approach that in many ways relied on the northern light compositions of the many great Scandinavian painters. For *Winter Light* (1961) Bergman toured the churches of northern Sweden. He and Nykvist, would sit in the hard pews from 11 in the morning till 2 in the afternoon, watching the light change. In the Swedish winter, there is no sun. A dim grey illumination came from the clouds, casting no shadows. The subtleties of the shifting light entranced Bergman, who decided that his whole film should be

lit that way. Having studied the light in a real provincial church carefully, Nykvist then recreated the subtle changes in the light on a Stockholm sound stage. It's hard to believe that the film was shot on a stage and not in a real church in northern Sweden. Working together on *The Virgin Spring* Nykvist and Bergman arrived at the conclusion that medium shots were 'boring and unnecessary', yet this was not nearly as radical as *Persona*. For tonight's film there are only a few wide-angle long shots, hardly any medium shots and most of all long, intensive close-ups. It was probably *Persona* that firmly established the 'Nykvist style', summed up rather facetiously as 'two faces and a teacup'. During the late 1970s, Nykvist began making films elsewhere in Europe and in the United States, working on such films as Louis Malle's *Pretty Baby* (1978), Philip Kaufman's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988), Bob Fosse's *Star 80* (1983), Nora Ephron's *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), Woody Allen's *Another Woman* (1988) and *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989), Richard Attenborough's *Chaplin* (1992), and fellow Swede Lasse Hallström's *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (1993). Although Nykvist is well-known for his distinctive black-and-white cinematography his two Oscars victories for *Cries & Whispers* (1972) and *Fanny and Alexander* (1982) and one more nomination for *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988) were all color films.

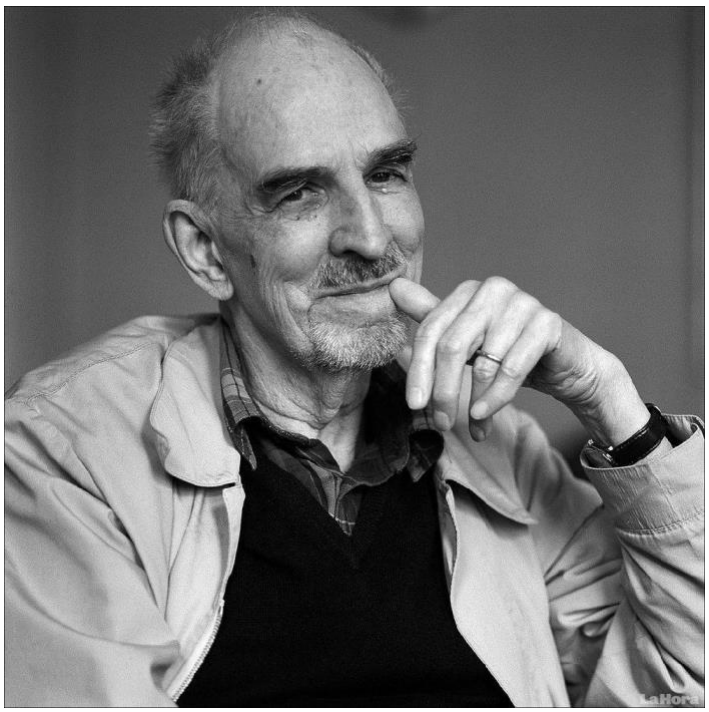
Nils Börje Ahlstedt (born 21 February 1939, Stockholm, Sweden) is a Swedish actor who has worked extensively with the world-famous director Ingmar Bergman in films like *Fanny and Alexander* (1982), *The Best Intentions* (1992), *Sunday's Children* (1992) and *Saraband* (2003). Ahlstedt has also worked with the directors Bo Widerberg and Kay Pollak.

Anna Bergman (born 5 May 1948 in Gothenburg, Sweden) is a former Swedish actress. She is the daughter of film and theatre director Ingmar Bergman and choreographer-director Ellen Lundström. Bergman mostly appeared as a performer in several British sex comedies during the late 1970s including the title role in *Penelope Pulls It Off* (1975), *Adventures of a Taxi Driver* (1976), *Intimate Games* (1976), *Come Play with Me* (1977) and *What's Up Superdoc!* (1978), though later she appeared in small roles in more mainstream films including *The Wild Geese* (1978), *Licensed to Love and Kill* (1979), *Nutcracker* (1982), and her father's 1982 film *Fanny and Alexander*. She also appeared as Swedish au pair Ingrid Svenson in seasons 2 and 4 of the British situation comedy *Mind Your Language*.

Gunn Wållgren (November 1913, Gothenburg, Sweden – 4 June 1983, Stockholm, Sweden) is considered one of Sweden's finest and most appreciated actresses. Her Chekhov and Ibsen character interpretations, in particular, are considered to be unsurpassed. Her film debut came with *Sonja* in 1943, but her break-through came with *Kvinnor i fångenskap* the same year, where Wållgren portrayed a young prisoner on the run. Being "of the theatre" Gunn Wållgren filmed sporadically during her life. But whenever she turned to the big screen she was "The Actress". Ranked absolutely equivalent to Ingrid Bergman back in Sweden at the time, both in beauty and in talent (in Sweden even considered some notches higher than Bergman as an actress) she delivered electrifying performances in films such as Flickan och djävulen (*The Girl And The Devil*) (opposite Stig Järrel) 1944, *Var sin väg* (*Each To His Own Way*) 1946, *Medan porten var stängd* (*While The Door Was Locked*) 1946 (written & directed by Hasse Ekman), *Kvinna utan ansikte* (*Woman Without A Face*) 1947 (with an early script by Ingmar Bergman), *Glasberget* (*Mountain Of Glass*) 1953 (directed by Hasse Ekman) and *Klänningen* (*The Dress*) 1964 (directed by Olof Molander with script by Vilgot Sjöman), among others.

Erland Josephson (15 June 1923, Stockholm, Sweden – 25 February 2012, Stockholm, Sweden) was a Swedish actor and author who was best known by international audiences for his work in films directed by Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky, in films such as: It Rains on Our Love (1946,

Bergman), *To Joy* (1950, Bergman), *Brink of Life* (1958, Bergman), *The Magician* (1958, Bergman), *Hour of the Wolf* (1968, Bergman), *The Passion of Anna* (1969, Bergman), *Cries and Whispers* (1972, Bergman), *Scenes from a Marriage* (1974, Bergman), *The Magic Flute* (1975, TV Movie, Bergman), *Face to Face* (1976, Bergman), *Beyond Good and Evil* (1977, directed by Liliana Cavani) as Friedrich Nietzsche, *Autumn Sonata* (1978, Bergman), *Fanny and Alexander* (1982, Bergman), *Nostalghia* (1983, Tarkovsky), *After the Rehearsal* (1984, TV Movie, Bergman), *In the Presence of a Clown* (1997, TV Movie, Bergman), and *Saraband* (2003, TV Movie, Bergman).



Mats Bergman (born 5 May 1948 in Gothenburg, Sweden) is a Swedish actor and the son of director Ingmar Bergman and Ellen Lundström. Since 1987 he has been a stage actor at Sweden's Royal Dramatic Theatre. He has appeared in TV and film roles in a number of well-known productions, including as Aron in *Fanny and Alexander*, and as a cigar-loving salesman in *Kan du vissla Johanna?* (1994), traditionally shown each Christmas Eve in Sweden. He has also played the antique expert Erik Johansson in TV series *Berlinder auktioner* (2003) and a teacher in the Swedish film *Ondskan* (*Evil*), in 2003. More recently he has been playing the dry-witted forensic detective Nyberg in the Swedish crime films about Det. Insp. Kurt Wallander, with Krister Henriksson in the lead (32 episodes).

Jarl Lage Kulle (28 February 1927 Ekeby, Bjuv, Sweden--3 October 1997, Roslagen, Sweden) was a Swedish film and stage actor and director. Kulle was one of the leading Swedish stage actors of his generation and often appeared in TV productions, at the Royal Dramatic Theatre of Stockholm as well as in a number of films, several of these directed by Ingmar Bergman. In 1965 he won the award for Best Actor for his role in *Swedish Wedding Night* at the 2nd Guldbagge Awards. He won his second Guldbagge Best Actor award for *Fanny and Alexander* at the 19th Guldbagge Awards in 1983.

f**rom *World Film Directors, V. II*. Ed. John Wakeman. H.W. Wilson Co. NY 1988 entry by Dennis DeNitto**

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

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

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

independent emotionally and intellectually if he was to mature with integrity.

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

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

Five of the plays he directed during the late forties and early fifties were his own.

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

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

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

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

Within two years of joining Svensk Filmindustri, he was offered the opportunity to make his first film, *Crisis* (1946). It was neither a critical

nor a box-office success, but it proved that Bergman could work with efficiency and effectiveness, and his career as a film director was launched.

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

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

In 1956 Bergman at thirty-seven years of age had a successful artistic and fulfilling personal life....Bergman had gathered around him a team of filmmakers and actors who admired him and were capable of projecting the subtle overtones he demanded. There had been filmmaking teams of this sort in the past, but none included so many members working so frequently together.

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

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

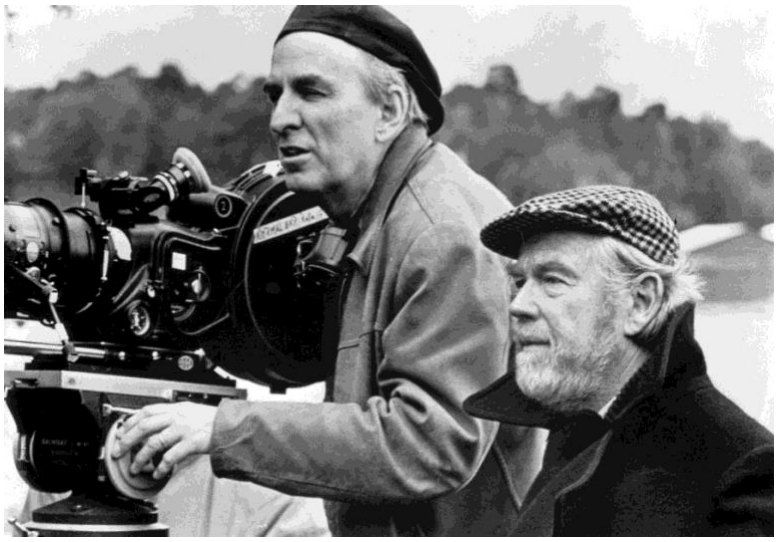
Of the nine films Bergman directed between 1957 and 1964, six deal directly or indirectly with what one writer called "the God quest." Basically the artist during this period is asking a series of questions: Does God exist? If He does, can we come in contact with him in tangible ways? If he does not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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Bergman initiated this new stage with a work of stunning originality and one of the most challenging motion pictures of our time. *Persona* (1966) delves into the interrelations between two women. The actress Elisabet Vogler (Ullmann) becomes mute for a few moments during a performance of *Electra* and after refuses to speak. At a hospital, her female doctor recommends that she stay in a cottage by the seashore with the nurse Alma (Bibi Andersson). At first the younger woman attempts to persuade her patient to talk; however, gradually the roles are reversed and Alma confides her innermost thoughts and secrets to Elizabet. A turning

point in their association occurs when Alma reads a letter written by the actress to a friend in which she describes the nurse as a "real diversion" who is "amusing to study." Alma is outraged, and an altercation between the two, including small acts of violence, ensures. They finally leave the cottage and go their separate ways.

We never learn what originally instigated Elisabet's decision not to speak and to reject her husband, son, and the theatre. The doctor's diagnosis is that the actress can no longer tolerate the abyss between the truth of herself on one side and on the other the roles she plays and masks (personae) she wears before others. Revulsion caused by contemporary violence may also have influenced her, for she reacts strongly when looking at a Buddhist monk setting fire to himself on a television screen or a photo of Jews rounded up by Nazi soldiers. Her withdrawal seems to involve also a rejection of her son, an opinion elaborated on by Alma in the nurse's lengthy dream. There are clues to Elisabet's character, then, but no whole picture, like a puzzle with pieces missing.

That the actress's motivations are unclear is not a major flaw in *Persona* if we take the position that Elisabet is essentially a touchstone for examining the inner world of Alma. When we first meet the nurse, she believes herself secure in knowing who she is and what she wants from life: to marry her boyfriend, have a family, and serve with complete commitment like the old nurses she admires. As she reveals herself to Elisabet, however, we come to realize that she is wearing a mask and must learn the difference between her essential self and her persona. She is ready for a night sea journey and embarks on one.

The majority of critical controversy evoked by *Persona* concerns the bizarre events of the last third. Some critics argue that these events are explicable if it is accepted that from the time Alma goes to sleep after an argument with Elisabet to just before the final sequences when she awakens, all that takes place—including the arrival of Elisabet's husband, a scene in which Alma explains that what has caused the actress's withdrawal is denial of her son, and another in a hospital room—is Alma's dream. A creative force from her unconscious constructs dramatic situations in which the young woman either becomes Elisabet or assumes roles that are different from and more honest than those of her normal, conscious state. These situations give viewers—and perhaps Alma—insights into repressed desires and guilt about her abortion. Whether this journey into self through a dream with multiple settings leads to the nurse's psychic transformation is left ambiguous at the end. The cottage is put in order and Alma leaves on a bus for a reality and destiny that is beyond the confines of *Persona*.

Whatever an individual's interpretation of the content of the work, no fair-minded viewer can deny the boldness and artistry of Bergman's innovative techniques. The most prominent departure from standard cinematic narrative is to force on the audiences a Brechtian "distancing" from the plot by periodically shattering the illusion that the film is a self-contained, self-sufficient entity. It opens with a series of images unconnected on a narrative level. They are related together solely by associations with death, fear, pain and frustration or film projection as a mechanical process. In the middle of the work, at an intense moment, we see a single frame of the print burning. During the final sequence, there is a brief insert of Bergman and his crew operating a camera.

The demarcation between concrete reality and the realm of illusion and dreams is less clear in *Persona* than in earlier Bergman dramas. After the opening montage of images, we appear to be in the real world, but there are repeated moments when that reality is askew, such as a room appearing phenomenally large, no natural source for lighting, and a television set turning off with no one touching

it. After she prepares to leave the cottage, Anna looks in the mirror and Elisabet's face appears, recalling for us one of the dream images. Bergman seems to be saying that in both life and artistic recreations of reality, artificial though the latter may be, our inner and outer worlds echo and seep into each other.

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

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

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

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

BERGMAN: You know, you can't find in any other art, and you can't create a situation that is so close to dreaming as cinematography when it is at its best. Think only of the time gap: you can make things as long as you want, exactly as in a dream; you can make things as short as you want, exactly as in a dream. As a director, a creator of the picture, you are like a dreamer: you can make what you want, you can construct everything. I think that is one of the most fascinating things that exist.

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

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

thoughts afterward; you'll start to think; they are intellectually stimulating.

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

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

Molly Haskell: "*Fanny and Alexander:* The Other Side" (Criterion Essays, 2018)

In his autobiography *The Magic Lantern,* Ingmar Bergman describes the apprehension with which he approached a certain delicate scene in *Fanny and Alexander* (1982) with his young star, Bertil Guve. It is primarily through the eyes of Guve's ten-year-old character, Alexander Ekdahl—imaginative, angry, stubborn, credulous—that the film, with all its mysteries and terrors, unfolds. The scene takes place near the end, in the junk and curio shop of the antiques dealer and moneylender Isak, an Ekdahl family friend played by Erland Josephson. Isak lives in a dark, seductively cluttered hive with two grown nephews, the puppet master and magician Aron (Mats Bergman) and the "mad" Ismael, supposedly harmless but nevertheless confined to his room. Alexander and his sister, Fanny (Pernilla Allwin), are also prisoners here, but happily so, having been abducted by Isak in a daring rescue mission from the house of the wicked and abusive bishop who is their stepfather, and they are soon to be restored to the bosom of their family.

In the impenetrable darkness, Alexander stumbles upon Aron's puppets, then the man himself, who shows him a glistening mummy and talks to him of ghosts—a subject to which Alexander himself brings a certain expertise. They then enter Ismael's room, and it is here that the weird and fateful encounter occurs. For Ismael, both sensuous and ethereal, is clearly played by a woman (Stina Ekblad), yet no mention of that fact is made. The character who will embrace Alexander and help him realize his fantasy of destroying the bishop remains tantalizingly fluid, his androgyny the very emblem of the liminal space between dream and reality where so much of this film, or at least the mental wanderings of its characters, takes place.

To Bergman's relief, the brave little actor accepted the situation, reacting with "curiosity and fear." Curiosity and fear might also describe Bergman's own driving creative forces, not just singly but together, in the way that a child looks at the world and its strangeness with anxiety as well as acceptance—as a place that contains both the worldly and the otherworldly, and in which ghosts, spirits, and the palpably, sensually physical all coexist.

One ghost that haunts the proceedings is August Strindberg, whose *A Dream Play,* written in 1901, six years before *Fanny and Alexander* begins, furnishes the talisman of the movie's ending. Bergman eventually staged this difficult play four times—difficult because of its combination of intimate chamber drama and technically complicated spectacle, its mix of abstract and concrete characters, its passages of undigested Buddhism, and also (I would surmise) because of the problematic, anything-goes nature of dreams, always more meaningful to the dreamer than to the audience. Here are the words with which Strindberg introduces his play and Bergman ends the movie he intended to be his last:

Everything can happen. Everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist. On a flimsy framework of reality, the imagination spins, weaving new patterns.

Bergman observes the principle without going so far into abstraction and unruliness. His characters are anchored in a concrete time and place, and "a flimsy framework" would not be the term for the film's gliding choreography. Bergman envied Andrei Tarkovsky, "the greatest of them all," for abandoning conventional realism and moving "with such naturalness in the room of dreams," something he felt he had either not managed well or not managed at all. But one could argue that in movies like *Persona, Cries and Whispers,* and *Fanny and Alexander,* Bergman accomplishes the more difficult task of moving effortlessly between the worlds of the natural and the supernatural, between document and dream. With the great Sven Nykvist as cinematographer, the camera weaves its way, near the beginning of both the television and the theatrical versions of *Fanny and Alexander,* through a seemingly haphazard but in fact carefully controlled introduction to the characters in medias res, as they act out their habitual roles during their annual Christmas celebration. In the longer television version of *Fanny and Alexander,* the servants squabble and reminisce at greater length over dinner, and Helena, the Ekdahl matriarch (the magnificent Gunn Wållgren), delivers a mournful soliloquy that is a sort of coda absent from the shorter film version. But the latter contains all the essential scenes, and even gains something in the seamlessness of its transitions. The palette and emotional tone will shift from the sumptuous reds and burnished splendor of the Ekdahl apartment, setting for the antics of an extravagant ménage of revelers (one of the children's uncles, Carl, treats them to fart fireworks; another, Gustav Adolf, pursues the nursemaid Maj, who in turn flirts with a furiously jealous Alexander), to the chilly blues and grays of the bishop's castlelike residence, its stony facade lashed by an angry ocean, its cold interior home to a weird and no less histrionic assortment of witches and invalids. Stories bubble up concerning the death, at sea, of the bishop's first wife—Fanny and Alexander's mother, Emilie (Ewa Fröling), is his second—along with her two little girls. Alexander will resist the bishop's authority (and get into more trouble) through the exercise of his imagination, lying whenever possible, drawing on those deaths to fill in the blanks with a murder plot. Toward the end of the film, the transitions between the two locales will occur with dizzying frequency, creating a sense of interpenetrating worlds, reality and illusion merging, the horror that takes place in the bishop's residence lodging in our and Alexander's minds as a nightmare memory.

We have seen other small boys in Bergman films who possess the bravery and curiosity of Alexander: the lonely child in *The Silence,* who wanders through the fusty old hotel where he is staying with his mother and aunt; and the child who may be the abandoned son of the actress in *Persona,* his fingers caressing the ghostly image of a mother he can't reach or possess, in the dreamlike images that bookend the film. Alexander, too, presses his hand against a window, the snowy world outside suddenly transformed by its frame into a composition, an illusion.

Even as a child, Bergman was comfortable with death and decay, fascinated by the corpses at a mortuary on the grounds of the hospital where his father was the chaplain, and he described with a mixture of clinical detachment and sensuality sights from which most would have recoiled. As a director, he would preserve his sense of the uncanny, of Death as a hovering presence. *Fanny and Alexander,* celebratory and singular in its cheerful Dickensian plenitude, nevertheless contains its own reckoning with morbidity, and thus becomes a kind of culmination, a summing up of all the themes and conflicts that so indelibly mark Bergman's earlier films. Alexander's jagged journey of exploration is Bergman's own, but, at the other end of it, so are the retrospective musings of Helena, who exudes a

mellow appreciation of the shifting layers of reality and the endlessly unresolvable questions of identity.

Bergman, by his own account, became less angst-ridden as he aged, was released from his strenuous questioning of God and death into a kind of acceptance of the essential aloneness that is being human—an aloneness that is nevertheless joyously relieved by the connections we make, the artistic illusions we treasure. It's as if he had to go through the trials of the soul, the endless conflicts within the artist between asceticism and romanticism (as in *The Silence*), the encounters with death (*Cries and Whispers*), the selfishness of the artist (*Persona*), and the agonies of marital discord and betrayal (*Scenes from a Marriage*) to reach this exhilarating equipoise.

Bergman is rightly known as a director of women, perhaps the greatest ever, having been both discoverer and artistic partner of his actresses, midwife to an array of performances from them as characters whose journeys and struggles seem inseparable from the filmmaker's own. His is the sensibility of a man who has loved women fully enough to include in his portrayals of them the terrors they hold in all their flawed mortality. Over and over again, he has made us see them in all their infinite variety—rustic and intellectual, ravaged and incandescent, mulish and inspiring, virginal and ripe—has shown us their slack and ugly moments as well as their radiant and beatific ones. Any narrow idea of women as "mere" objects of desire or the raw material of a possessive Svengali simply doesn't apply—they are muses, yes, but so much more. The criticism has been that they are almost too much more, earthy goddesses and enchanters, more at home in the world than the men, who are almost invariably portrayed as weak and ineffectual.

But in *Fanny and Alexander*, the male characters are, if not hypereffectual, at least deeply human, people whose follies Bergman and we (and, more importantly, their wives) regard with humorous indulgence: the Ekdahl men are, by Helena's reckoning, either oversexed or undersexed. In the former category, her philandering husband, now deceased, led the way; her billy-goat son Gustav Adolf (Jarl Kulle) impregnates the luscious maid Maj (Pernilla Wallgren) while somehow remaining both true to and aroused by his buxom and good-humored wife, Alma (Mona Malm); Carl (Börje Ahlstedt), the least sympathetic and most uptight of the Ekdahl sons, is a cad, a boor, a gambler and drunk who uses and abuses his masochistically patient German wife (Christina Schollin). The undersexed are represented by Fanny and Alexander's soon-to-be-departed father, Oscar (Allan Edwall), amateur actor and impresario of the theater the family runs. All three brothers experience piercing moments of self-awareness, the mask suddenly shed, only to quickly resume their respective roles.

Theater is where we begin—or rather, the marriage of theater and cinema, Bergman's twin passions. In the stunning opening of both versions of the film, we first see bright candles and a proscenium, scale unknown. Then, as we look on, through the back curtain emerges the face of Alexander, huge, his wide eyes transfixed. The stage becomes a miniature theater, and the boy gazes at the puppets inside, adding one, then retreating to wander through the apartment, calling out to family members, hiding in Grandmother's bed and under a table, exploring the massive and opulent apartment where the Christmas party and much of *Fanny and Alexander* will take place. Later that night, he will entertain Fanny with a scene from his cinematograph in which a damsel in distress is imperiled and rescued.

In *The Magic Lantern*, Bergman writes of the searing experience of first going backstage at a theater. Night after night, the twelve-year-old watched

magical transformations: a man staring down at his shoes one minute would then go onstage and become an officer. No wonder theater became not only a lifelong calling for the filmmaker but also a metaphor for existence. In this film, it is from Helena that we are given most pointedly the abiding sense—these are theater people, after all—that human beings are performers, always in flux, unresolved. In one of the loveliest scenes, at the end of the riotous Christmas dinner, she and Isak settle onto a more-than-metaphorical love seat. They earlier embraced each other with a kiss that was not just amatory but slyly, deliciously sexy. The two go back a long way, through flirtations, an affair, friendship, advice. But for Helena, this Christmas represents a kind of watershed, an end to something—her own youth and middle years, the possibility of a late-in-life passion. Her own children are aging, and poor Oscar is really quite sick.

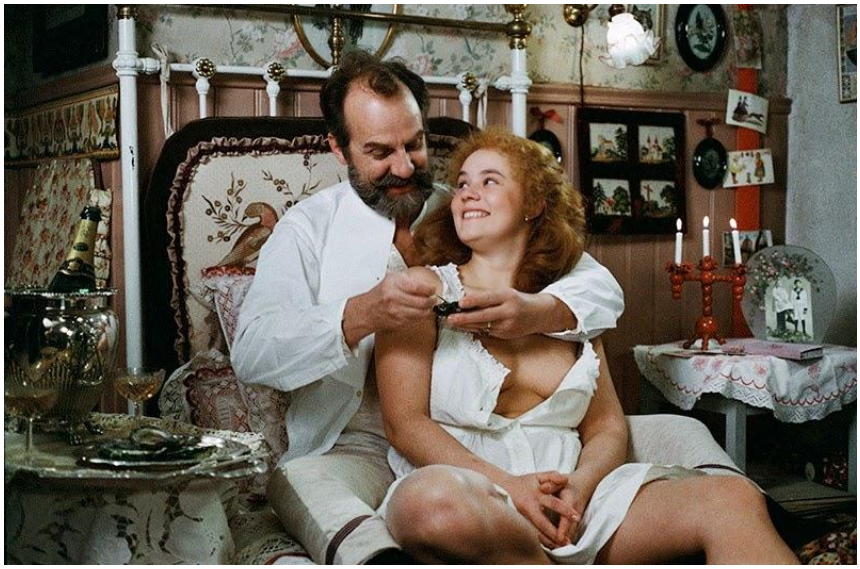
"I suppose I'm getting old," she says ruefully, and Isak doesn't contradict her. But she doesn't look old, her mobile face so expressive, her honesty making her only more beautiful. She cries, then dries her eyes. "A weepy, lovesick woman turns into a self-possessed grandmother. We play our parts." Later, she says, "I enjoyed being a mother. I enjoyed being an actress too, but I preferred being a mother . . . It's all acting anyway. Some roles are nice, others not so nice. I played a mother. I played Juliet and Margareta. Then suddenly I played a widow or a grandmother. One role follows the other. The thing is not to shrink from them."

But the role-playing that Helena accepts, even embraces, can torment others, as we soon see in the vexations of her beautiful daughter-in-law Emilie, the luminous blonde leading lady of the family theater. Emilie feels she has worn one mask after another, that there is nothing behind them. After her husband, Oscar, suddenly collapses during a dress rehearsal for *Hamlet* (as Alexander looks on) and dies later the same evening, she becomes a young widow, and allows herself to be led, following a brief courtship, into that disastrous marriage with the bishop because of the firm sense of identity and mission he gives her in her desperation. Jan Malmsjö gives one of the most mesmerizing performances in all of Bergman as this tortured, seethingly righteous clergyman. Emilie agrees not only to surrender completely to his will but also to allow him complete control of her children.

This surrender is made a little more understandable in a passage in the television version in which Emilie summons cast and crew after a performance of a play. It is a year since Oscar, on his deathbed, asked her to run the theater. Now she confesses to the little group that she is tired of it; it has become a security blanket. She feels lost, because all her adult life she has been an actor, and playwrights "tell us what to say and think," to the point that one doesn't know who one is. "Are you tired of the theater?" someone asks. "You want to quit?" "Maybe," she replies. At this point, she is, as she more or less acknowledges, a beautiful cipher, a little girl lost.

Throughout Bergman's work there are characters who struggle with identity, with feeling ill-defined, this sense of a void where the soul or the personality should be. In *Scenes from a Marriage,* Liv Ullmann's Marianne is a divorce lawyer, and one of her clients has lost any sense of her own reality. As the woman talks in numbed tones of what her unfelt life is like, we can see fear on the face of the normally placid Marianne as well. In *Persona,* existential dread seems to be the catalyst for the actress played by Ullmann to simply stop speaking, presumably to reject the inauthenticity of role-playing both on and off the stage. Puncturing, or at least assailing, her metaphysical torment is the levelheaded doctor who suggests to her that her muteness is a role like any other, advising her to "play this part until it's played out, until it's no longer interesting."

Yet common sense can go only so far; doubts will continue as long as there is introspection, and Bergman's films are fueled by such crises, dark nights of the soul. But when, near the end of *Fanny and Alexander*, Helena grasps the hand of the spectral Oscar, a kind of reconciliation has taken place, not only with the spirit world but also with uncertainty and irresolution. "Reality has remained broken," she says, "and, oddly enough, it feels more real that way."



Religion is no longer a solace for most of these characters, and the ghosts who make their appearances seem themselves lost in a limbo with no promise of a pathway to heaven. Not the least of these is the ghost of Hamlet's father, the role Oscar is playing when he collapses. At the funeral, while others mourn, Alexander hisses profanities at God, with whom he carries on a running argument throughout the film, accusing him of being either cruel or brutally indifferent.

Meanwhile, poor Oscar, now in his own purgatory, will reappear in a white suit, hovering over his bereaved family until an exasperated Alexander wishes he would either go to heaven or disappear. The late-medieval concept of purgatory seems peculiarly apt for this movie. In his provocative book *Hamlet in Purgatory,* Stephen Greenblatt describes what became of the concept under the Reformation in sixteenth-century England, which rejected the Catholic doctrine of this liminal place as pure fantasy. That led to a cultural shift whereby purgatory became "a way of organizing, articulating, and making sense of a tangle of intense, intimate feelings in the wake of a loved one's death: longing, regret, guilt, fear, anger, and grief."

Shakespeare, Greenblatt goes on to say, deeply understood the inherent drama in ghosts, and his elaboration could quite remarkably be applied to Bergman: "They are good for thinking about theater's capacity to fashion realities, to call realities into question, to tell compelling stories, to puncture the illusions that these stories generate, and to salvage something on the other side of disillusionment."

"The other side of disillusionment" would be just the way to describe what in *Fanny and Alexander* seems a hard-won hope wrested from the very vitality of the struggle by the sorely tested survivors—chiefly Helena, Emilie, and Alexander—and based on almost nothing but an instinct for preservation, for exercising the imagination in a sea of uncertainties.

Not to know: this, after all, may be the difficult truth of the human condition, not to have answers and somehow make peace with uncertainty. In a long passage included only in the TV version, Isak reads a bedtime story to Alexander and Fanny, supposedly translated from Hebrew, which describes the journey of a young man that takes him through various landscapes, encounters, dreams, quests for answers, until finally—the story suggests—he forgets what he was seeking and even where he came from. In the end, it is the epiphanies he has beheld, both numinous and of the natural world, that will sustain him.

In a sense, Alexander's journey is both religious (Christian and Jewish) and secular (Freudian and artistic). With stubborn tenacity, he faces and triumphs over the Oedipal figures of his father and stepfather, who are themselves antipodes. Oscar, a frustrated actor and inadequate husband, was weak but not without fervor, whereas the bishop's strength is both terrifying and spurious.

Bergman's father, the minister, was a harsh and punitive perfectionist whom Bergman only later understood as a man who had himself been compelled to live up to an almost impossible standard. His parents were always in public, exemplars in a glass bowl watched day and night by parishioners—a place they never wanted to be. This discomfort finds its way into the bishop, embodied in Malmsjö's complex magnetism. Handsome, with a blond severity, he, like

so many sadistic bullies, is both repellent and strangely seductive. In one of the movie's few laugh-out-loud scenes, which appears only in the television version, Gustav Adolf and Carl come to him in an attempt to negotiate the children's release. Carl soon turns craven, beating his usual cowardly retreat, while Gustav Adolf hurls a volley of well-aimed and hilarious insults at the bishop—who, of course (but nevertheless infuriatingly), never loses his cool. His love is creepier than his hate, and we see in his treatment of Alexander how the two are insidiously entwined. (Incidentally, one of the nastiest inmates of the bishop's household is a slovenly maid played by Harriet Andersson, who eggs Alexander on in his fantasy of the bishop as murderer, then informs on him . . . leading to a violent retribution.)

But the bishop, too, suffers, and in ways not unlike the film's more sympathetic characters. If Oscar's collapse is in the middle of a performance, beginning when he stops abruptly, saying, "I've forgotten what I am to do," the bishop, too, plays a part that has long since taken over his life, made him its slave. "You once said you were always changing masks," he says to Emilie as he is about to die (partially by her hand). "I have only one mask. But it's branded into my flesh. If I tried to tear it off . . ." It's as if "Hansel and Gretel" were being told from the witch's point of view, and suddenly you pity the man you previously hated, if only for a moment. For he will later appear chez Ekdahl, a ghost in his own purgatory, wearing a large cross, promising to give Alexander no rest.

And that is as it should be, for Alexander, like all sons, has killed off his fathers so that he may come into his own. The murderous fantasies are both natural and terrible, part of what the adult must bear, the stuff of nightmares but also the seedbed of artistic creation.

Near the beginning of *Fanny and Alexander,* a nativity play is staged in the family theater, and the film ends with a real nativity, inspiring the christening party at the theater for two new Ekdahl babies, Maj's by way of Gustav Adolf and Emilie's by way of the bishop, with Gustav Adolf replacing Oscar as master of ceremonies. And so a new son or daughter will now challenge Alexander's supremacy, as perhaps will Fanny, his first lieutenant, who may soon shed the role of follower. (Bergman said Fanny was based on his own sister. The complicated nature of that relationship—the two were very distant as adults; she had writerly ambitions—may explain the strange mixture of prominence in the title and sketchiness in the film itself that Fanny is afforded.) Gustav Adolf, as Oscar's surrogate, makes an appropriate host, celebrating the theater as a refuge from the baffling miseries of the world, but his tenure is to be short-lived. In the very end, it is Emilie, now of stiffer spine and sense of purpose, who will fulfill Oscar's request that she assume control. And in her hands is *A Dream Play,* with parts for both Helena and herself. Appropriately for Bergman, it is women who gather the reins into their hands.

It is no surprise that the director should give these two women the triumphant last word in *Fanny and Alexander,* a multigenerational drama that leaps lightly over barriers of age, gender, and class. Throughout his career, with his characteristic spare-nothing close-ups, he has followed the emotional logic in his actresses' faces, adjusted his cinematic vocabulary to their moods, dug deeper into their psyches than any other director. Robert Altman, whose *3 Women* (1977) was inspired in part by *Persona,* said that human beings are so much alike that we have to struggle to make ourselves different. In both films, the merging of two women speaks to that terror, that sense of sameness that contains both voluptuous yearning and fear. In *Fanny and Alexander,* terrors, fears, and ghosts rise up . . . and are laid to rest. Or almost.

Rick Moody: "*Fanny and Alexander:* Bergman's Bildungsroman" (Criterion Essays, 2011)

Upon its release in the U.S. in 1983, the theatrical version of Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander* generated a wealth of controversy. Bergman has always seemed to breed conflict among cineastes (Phillip Lopate, for example, has written recently about the polarized reactions to Bergman in the sixties), but *Fanny and Alexander,* which the

director announced as his final theatrical release, seemed to bring the critics out in even greater force, as though there were just the one remaining chance to be quoted on the subject. You either loved the film or hated it, and strong voices from the reviewing community lined up on either side. John Simon, in the *National Review:* "Few things are sadder than the attempt of a great artist, hitherto fully appreciated only by a minority, to reach the masses." Vincent Canby, in the *New York Times:* "*Fanny and Alexander* is still another triumph in the career of one of our greatest living filmmakers."

Yet history frees us from preconceptions. The question for the contemporary viewer is how Bergman's final theatrical film looks more than twenty years later. And for me, the matter is settled: *Fanny and Alexander* in the twenty-first century looks like what it was meant to be, a big, omnivorous bildungsroman about youthful imagination at the moment of modernism's inception. Imagination is at the core of the film, central to both its story, in Alexander's coming-of-age, and its method, in its opulent design and languid, confident pacing.

Even in the first seconds of the film, we find young Alexander Ekdahl, alone in his grandmother's house, in an apparent dream, imagining that he sees a statue moving in the parlor. It's a beautiful introit to the Christmas feast that follows, and in it, we begin to understand that the style of the film will combine both the stolid traditions of the nineteenth century (the century of Alexander's birth) and the illusionist preoccupations of the twentieth. The family's Christmas dinner, with its attention to detail, is full of visually dazzling moments, such as Gustav Adolf (Alexander's restaurateur uncle) galumphing into a reception before the meal with a giant, flaming bowl of punch; Uncle Carl, the besotted professor, astounding the children in a stairwell with his omnipotence in the department of flatulence; and the beautiful pillow fight in the bedroom just after dinner.

Bergman grew up with a rather severe clergyman for a father. And if the first half of *Fanny and Alexander* represents an idealized origin for the director (in the character of Alexander), in which the young artist is raised in a household of actors and loveable cranks, the second half of the film—after the death of Alexander's beloved father, Oscar—tells a much darker tale. Here is recounted his mother Emilie's marriage to the minister who presides over Oscar's funeral, Bishop Edvard Vergérus. Alexander's sunny curiosity in the first half of the film now gives way to a headstrong cynicism, as he mumbles "Piss, cock, shit" and other scatologies throughout the funeral procession. He and his younger sister, Fanny, suffer their mother's courtship with the frankly Calvinistic Vergérus impassively but with much foreboding. It's into this darker narrative that the ghost of Oscar, perhaps conjured by Alexander himself, begins to intrude. Likewise, in the wake of his loss, Alexander's invented accounts of life begin to proliferate: he is, he says, to be sold by his mother to a traveling circus; he is, he says, to be trained as an acrobat with a gypsy called Tamara. As does any good fiction writer, Alexander Ekdahl turns his bad circumstances into excellent material.

I won't dwell overlong here on the bishop's residence and its deprivations in order to avoid spoiling one of the most stunning portions of Bergman's film, but suffice it to say that it's no wonder that Alexander's stories become even more baroque in this landscape. Bergman seems to be suggesting that to become the artist, to become the fully cognizant, storytelling adult, the boy may need to throw off the yoke of the father. Bergman enacts this liberation twice in the film, first with Oscar's death and then with the fate of the autocratic stepfather (played with enormous brio by Jan Malmsjö). *Fanny and Alexander* depicts this second patricide in a sequence of tremendous invention that was, for me, when I first saw the film in 1983, the

moment at which I knew I was in the presence of enduring art—art that would last as long as there were projectors to project it.

It's Isak Jacobi, a former lover of Alexander's grandmother, who comes to spirit the children away from the clutches of Bishop Vergérus, and he does so as if from the pages of a fairy tale—with Fanny and Alexander stowed away in a hope chest carried off to his apartment. His home itself is a dream landscape, crammed full of antiques and junk. The rooms seem to append themselves to other rooms, depending on the hour, so that the space stretches and grows. These apartments also contain the puppet theater of Isak's nephew Aron, to which Alexander is inexorably drawn. Alexander's Strindbergian "dream play" is even more in evidence in his rendezvous with Aron's strange, violent brother Ismael, played with menace and allure by the female actor Stina Ekblad. This is Alexander's initiation into the freedom of the imagination, where violence, coincidence, death, and sexuality all become regular parts of life. Meanwhile, in the Gothic parsonage, as if in answer to Alexander's prayers, a spectacular accident frees him from the oppression of his stepfather once and for all.

Is such deliverance brought about by circumstance? Is it brought about by coincidence? Is it brought about by God, who makes an appearance to Alexander as a rather comic puppet among Aron's creations? Or is deliverance from the bishop part of Alexander's journey of the imagination? After Alexander falls asleep in the beginning of the film, is it not possible that he in its entirety?

These are the sorts of questions that Bergman's films have always generated, and so perhaps the answer in this, Bergman's summa, is just to ask them as we have always done, and to realize that it is the interrogatives of which life is composed. Maybe *Fanny and Alexander* is simply an autobiographical yarn as Alexander would tell it, so that Bergman and Alexander now appear to us to be one and the same narrator of the tale. Maybe Alexander is Bergman refracted, in this instance in the convex mirror of art, where strange happenstances are routine and tidy answers are hard to come by. Or maybe Bergman is somehow Alexander's own dream, from which the boy has yet to wake.

In this light, *Fanny and Alexander* sits alongside the great stories of Thomas Mann, Heinrich von Kleist, Franz Kafka, Bruno Schulz, and August Strindberg, the latter of whom is quoted wistfully at the close of the film. *Fanny and Alexander* combines the rigors of realism—in Sven Nykvist's pellucid cinematography; in the scenic design and the elegant costumery; in the wonderful performances of Bertil Guve (as Alexander), Allan Edwall (as Oscar), and Malmsjö—with the register of dreams and fantasies that come to us from folkloric narratives, all in the service of revealing how a young boy comes of age. "Imagination," as Bishop Vergérus remarks to Alexander, "is something splendid, a mighty force, a gift from God. It is held in trust for us by the great artists, writers, and musicians." In the pursuit of this theme, Ingmar Bergman made one of his warmest and most memorable films, one that is even more arresting today than when it was first released.

THAT'S IT FOR BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS, SPRING 2021, SERIES 42
We'll be back here, in Virtualville, Tuesday, August 31, 2021
The schedule for BFS 43, Fall 2021, will go out to everyone on the list over the summer, as soon as we can confirm streaming access.

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