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Rewriting God's Plot: Ingmar Bergman and Feminine Narrative

> MARTIN: *Och vad är djävulens mål? Varje stor politiker har ju ett mål, eller åtminstone ett program.*
> PAUL: *Djävulen har inte något program. Det är hemligheten med hans framgång. Och jag förmodar att hans Motståndare stupade därför att han hade för många.*
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> [MARTIN: And what is the Devil's goal? Every great politician has a goal, or at least a plan.
> PAUL: The Devil doesn't have a plan. That is the secret of his success. And I imagine his Adversary failed because He had too many.][1]

DISCUSSION of Ingmar Bergman's films from the 1940s and 1950s frequently mentions a dependence on

[1] This quotation from the prologue to Prison as well as all other quotations from the films, are my own transcriptions and translations from the video versions of the films in U.S. distribution. I have also consulted unpublished original scripts at the archives of the Swedish Film Institute, but there are often dialogue discrepancies between these scripts and the final filmed versions. At times when dialogue in a viewing copy was unintelligible, I have relied on the written script; otherwise, I have given my dialogue transcriptions from the filmed versions priority.

literary forms.[2] Heavily plotted, these early films abound in framing devices, flashbacks, obtrusive voice-overs, and other narrative pyrotechnics. Bergman's dependence on a conspicuous narrative apparatus is evident not only in the earliest adaptations of plays and novels, which understandably retain a literary feel, but also even more markedly in his original scripts of the late forties and fifties with a proliferation of narrative layering around his core stories. The formal excess of these films creates rich narrative tensions that not only foreground the "storiness" of the story, but more importantly direct attention to the fundamental conditions of narrativity. Although the metafilmic framing devices function as disclaimers distancing the viewer from the fiction, the frames themselves seem to be under scrutiny as well.

A second commonplace of Bergman scholarship is that he is preoccupied with metaphysics. References to God's silence begin early on as tangential observations in the so-called "crisis films" and eventually assume more prominence in films such as The Seventh Seal (1957) and the films of the first trilogy.[*] After this point Bergman proclaimed himself to be through with the unproductive metaphysical "puffings and blowings."[3] The trilogy films may jettison more than metaphysical obsessions, however. In her article, "Images and Words in Ingmar Bergman's Films," Birgitta Steene discusses a

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[2] See for example Ulrichsen, 135–140 and Steene, 23–24.

[*] The "trilogy films" refer to Through a Glass Darkly (1965), Winter Light (1963), and The Silence (1963). [Ed.]

[3] This is Bergman's own description of his religious phase. The entire sentence reads, "Nothing, absolutely nothing at all, has emerged out of all these ideas of faith and skepticism, all these convulsions, these puffings and blowings" (Bergman on Bergman 195).

concurrent shift from a verbal to a cinematic mode. Furthermore, she claims quite rightly that the "persistent ethical examination of language" in the trilogy films is inextricably bound up with Bergman's metaphysics (28), since the semiotic opacity that characterizes human communication mirrors closely the rupture between the seeker and the silent God.

What is true at the level of utterance is also true of the larger issue of narrativity; that is, Bergman's struggles with God have as many implications for the Story as they do for the Word. As soon as Bergman got complete control of both scripting and directing in films like Prison (also known as The Devil's Wanton (1949) and Summer Interlude (1951), a hypersensitivity to narrative modes closely tied to the metaphysical issues in ferment at the same time emerged. Just as a metaphysical view that claims ultimate certainty and knowledge would invite narrative closure, the post-modern worldview that Bergman gradually adopts encourages deconstruction of the narrator and exposure of narrative contingency. Such a conflation of God and narrator is reminiscent of Roland Barthes's essay, "The Death of the Author" (1968), whose title in turn echoes Nietzsche's "death of God." For Barthes, the removal of the author from the production of meaning and the resulting textual resistance to closure is an "anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law" (212). What one finds in Bergman's films is a growing unease with the narrative manifestations of these hypostases.

It should come as no surprise, considering Bergman's oft-noted artistic affinity for the female character, that the narrative crisis emerging from the rejection of God appears in the films in terms of sexual difference. Bergman's increasing preoccupation with the feminine can be seen as a search for alternative discourse that avoids the religious and authoritarian

implications of narration by a male. It is as if "maleness," in particular the authoritative male voice, is made to carry the burden of Bergman's struggles with God. Masculine discourse in Bergman's scheme resonates with undesirable theological overtones and becomes synonymous with stasis and fixed meaning. The fact that he so clearly marks his alternative modes of cinematic narrative as "female" is in my view not due to any essential connection between open narrative and female gender; these should be seen as Bergman's categories. The choice to see narrative issues in terms of gendered discourse is best treated as exactly that, a choice full of contradictions for the eventual position of Bergman as filmmaker.

The purpose of the present investigation is to examine how the process of exorcising God on the thematic level is accompanied by an attempt to transfer discursive control from male to female. The shift is literally represented, in film after film, in voices themselves—confirming with startling consistency Kaja Silverman's observations in the Acoustic Mirror regarding sexually differentiated uses of cinematic sound. Her claim that dominant cinema holds the female voice to normative representations as much as it does the female body casts new light on the intimate connection between Bergman's ambivalent relation to the male narrative voice and the concurrent metaphysical probing in his films. Silverman underscores the issue facing Bergman when she describes the male voice in dominant cinema as "disembodied, unlocalized, omniscient, and omnipotent" (40). It is precisely the "aspiration of the male voice to invisibility and anonymity" that connects it so closely with that of the Christian God (39). The cinematic female voice, on the other hand, is almost always synchronized, corporeal, and firmly situated within the diegesis. Although Bergman's earliest films employ conventional narratives that confirm this model, a growing ambivalence about male narration implicit in

the films Prison and Summer Interlude invites reading against the grain. Even though the frames in these two films are clearly male domains and the core stories they encase have female protagonists, as in dominant cinema, the validity of that arrangement is constantly in question. Persistent instabilities in the frame, proceeding specifically from challenges to the use of the male voice and male narration, reflect a progressive rejection of the closure and theological implications of male discourse.[4] Bergman's break with traditional religion and patriarchy therefore entails a corresponding break with classical cinematic narration. Even in such early films as Prison and Summer Interlude, one finds the first stirring of alternative narrative modes, which reach full articulation, as I shall suggest, in The Seventh Seal and later films.

A closer look at Bergman's film chronology of the late forties and fifties reveals that such a process was neither conscious nor consistent. Although the issues of gender and discursive control that are foregrounded in Prison and Summer Interlude appear sporadically in other films of the period, such as To Joy (1950), Secrets of Women (1952), and Dreams (1955), more conventional narrative configurations are also common. For instance, the realistic films Summer with Monika (1953) and Brink of Life (1957) may sustain the interest in gender but make little attempt to link it to issues of narrativity. I am in other words not arguing for a linear development in Bergman's rejection of male discourse

[4] Marsha Kinder deals briefly with Bergman's use of frame narratives in Prison, Hour of the Wolf and From the Life of the Marionettes, claiming that they appear as attempts to hold the "nightmare" of the core stories at bay. I would add to that argument the more explicit observation on the separation of gender in the inner and outer narrative layers as well as the claim that the level of the frame is anything but secure.

but instead that development of a new world-view without the Christian God not only makes the elaborate narrative layering eventually unnecessary and inappropriate, but changes the nature of Bergman's fiction as well.

The Prostitute

Prison looms large as not only the first film both scripted and directed by Bergman, but also the first in which narration begins to be a difficult and self-conscious act, a self-consciousness focussed on issues of gender and narrative closure. The first of Bergman's many metafilmic frames appears in this film, and the resulting envelopment of the core story reflects at first glance the containment of the feminine typical of dominant cinema. Bergman adapted this screenplay from one of his own short stories, which he ironically called "A True Story." In the Björkman interviews, Bergman identifies that title as a parody of the confessional stories in women's weekly magazines, which he calls "sob stories" (39–40). In other words, Bergman's attempt to distance himself from the story seems due to what he perceives as a feminine sentimentality. The finished film, Prison, mirrors the same discomfort; the narrative frame is situated in the male domain of the movie studio and conveys a ruthlessly callous tone markedly different from that of the core story, which concerns the prostitute Birgitta Karolina and her eventual suicide. The containment is double here; on the fictional level, she is determined and controlled by male desire in the system of prostitution. In the broader discursive sense, her character occupies the most interior, narrated position in the overall film. The "prison" of the title is therefore appropriate both diegetically and in terms of enunciation.

The overlay of the conspicuous, ill-fitting narrative frame onto the story, however, leaves a provocative residue, a discomfort that undermines attempts to read this as an unproblematic realistic film narrative. A prime characteristic of classic cinema is the effacing of film's origins as a constructed object. In other words, the enunciatory frame implicit in every film is most effective, the usual line of reasoning goes, when it is not formally present in the film, or if included explicitly, when it conforms closely to established conventions (such as a brief voice-over introduction) so as not to attract attention to the constructed status of the film. The frame in Prison does neither: it is a lengthy, multi-leveled, self-reflexive enterprise that insists on spectator attention. The presentation of the "real story," the most interior narrative level, is stalled repeatedly by depictions of various situations in which narrating and listening, filming and watching play the main role. The function of these framing devices is not merely the familiar modernist concern that one be conscious of the fictional illusion. Bergman's film seems to convey a deeper crisis in the act of narration itself.

A close look at the relationship between the frame and the core in Prison reveals several ironic subtexts undercutting the male enunciation and undermining the validity of male narration. For example, Martin, the director of the film-within-the-film, is clearly a parody of the studio player with no artistic sensibility. The one glimpse we get of his film in progress reveals a kitschy romantic scene with sentimental dialogue, a confession of love by the female lead. The camera perspective in this sequence moves from a wide-angle shot showing the set as a whole toward a close-up of a mechanical, rocking boat with simulated water reflections and moonlight in rear projection. As the camera moves closer, the frame on-screen eventually corresponds to what would appear in the finished film, eliminating the extra-diegetic trappings of the set and collapsing the

frame distinctions. As soon as the conditions of the fictional situation are in force, however, the male lead forgets his line and says, "What the hell was I supposed to say next?" and the camera retreats hastily. This movement from the level of enunciation to that of the fiction, and then back to enunciation, parallels the framing of the film as a whole. Although the sequence seems to express the same distrust of feminine sentimentality that Bergman conveyed in the interview mentioned above, it turns out that the director Martin has written the screenplay himself, just as Bergman has done for the first time in filming his own script of Prison. The male enunciation can in other words not be separated from the fiction it seeks to contain. The twin movement of both creating and containing a "feminine" fiction remains central to Bergman's films, as I shall discuss later.

Further scrutiny of the male frame occurs when Martin's "crazy" friend, the old man Paul, visits the movie studio in the film's opening sequence, because his status as a prototype narrator alerts the spectator to possible instability at the level of enunciation. Paul has recently been released from a mental institution, but hastily assures Martin, "Yes, but now I'm completely healthy again." In so doing he of course raises as many doubts as he puts to rest. Paul has come to the studio in order to tell Martin and a few of his actors about his idea for a film whose plot revolves around the idea of life on earth as hell. When the group is gathered together to hear him outline his idea, his narration becomes in effect the potential film to which he is referring, and the group becomes his film audience. For example, he begins with the comment, "But I would really appreciate it if you didn't make fun of me." He thereby sets up a contract with his listeners that they agree to be willing participants in his narration and that they not laugh and break the spell of the fiction. He then describes his film idea, which, in its telling, has the

same effect on the listeners as would the film itself. Martin, for instance, later describes the experience to his friends Tomas and Sofi in terms more than slightly reminiscent of the cinematic experience: "You probably don't believe me, but the old man grew while he sat there. We stared at him as though we were spellbound. He became the devil himself." The emphasis on staring and the passive "bewitched" state shared by those listening to Paul calls to mind parallels with the filmic illusion's effect on its spectators.[5]

Paul's film, in other words, is already shown to be convincing, even in the form of an oral narration. At the same time, however, in his little metafilm, he is the equivalent of the enunciation and is clearly marked as unstable by his odd mannerisms and uncomfortably insane laugh. But with many levels of irony at play here, it is important to discover what sort of discourse he represents and how that relates to the narration being created in the film overall. A partial answer lies in Paul's line, quoted at the start of this article, in which Paul states that the devil's success is due to lack of any goal or program, whereas God's failure is precisely having too many. In the context of the film this last line could be, and often is, simply taken as an expression of a pessimistic philosophy of resignation, typical of the 1940s in Sweden, but a small interpretive leap leads from the

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[5] Christian Metz discusses in detail similarities and differences between dreaming and film-viewing in Part III of The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema. Useful for this analysis are the differences he outlines, such as the film spectator's in-between state of consciousness, the shared experience of similar perception by an entire group, and the higher awareness of self as subject. The situation Martin describes here in Prison shows precisely these effects, that of a shared illusion that nearly, but never completely, convinces the audience.

idea of program or plan to that of plot. In other words, if the lines are read self-reflexively, a theory of narrative emerges in which God is aligned with closure, and the Devil with a more open, chaotic narrative. The fact that Paul seems to become "the Devil himself" while Martin listens to him could align the old man with what Barthes called "anti-theological" narration, one not reducible to a single idea. Pitted against him is the closure associated with the ineffectual God, the narrator with too many plans. Paul's own narration is not undermined, then: on the contrary, the chaotic element it represents threatens the stability of other narratives and discourses.

In contrast, the characters Martin, Tomas, and Arne, the lead actor, represent precisely the structured and over-determined discourse under attack. In the final frame sequence, for example, Martin and Arne have a discussion about the resolution of the plot events of the core narrative. Their conversation immediately follows Birgitta's intensely pathetic suicide, and her "story" is brutally summarized in this brief, callous exchange between the director and his leading man:

> ARNE: Say, Martin.
> MARTIN: Yes?
> ARNE: Have you heard that Tomas has gone back to Sofi?
> MARTIN: Yes, did you know that Birgitta Karolina committed suicide?
> A RNE: Oh, did she really? No, I didn't have the slightest idea.
> MARTIN: Yes, well, that was the whole story.

The caricatured closure of such an off-hand summary, such a reduction of "story" to its most trivial form, motivates the spectator to seek a more complex understanding of what has happened. After all, we have seen the suicide (we have even seen it from Birgitta's

point-of-view as she dies, and are thereby forced into her subject position) and necessarily feel that there is more to her death than the men's abrupt, dispassionate account provides. Furthermore, when the old man Paul then reappears at the studio to follow up on his idea, the same two men decide that a film like his is impossible, because as Martin says, "A film like that would of course have to end with a great anguished question. One can't make such films." Paul's film, the "demonic" narrative, would call everything into question, and that kind of film is said to be impossible. Besides, as Arne says, since God does not exist, "There isn't anybody to ask." In other words, God could provide the meaning (the closure) that would allow these questions to be asked and answered, but in his absence, the questions (and the narrative) would remain agonizingly open. To this, Paul says, "Well, in that case, there's no way out."

The pessimism of this final scene makes it difficult to evaluate the film's narrative stance. For the characters in the last conversation, the lack of narrative closure and the absence of the transcendental answers are acutely painful instead of liberating. Life is depicted in such desperate terms that the lack of a fixed meaning explaining the suffering is intolerable. The male characters in the film long nostalgically for the comfort of narrative closure, but at the same time such closure is criticized as an impossible expectation given the unsympathetic nature of the universe. Prison seems to end in stalemate, since if Paul's "demonic" narrative of ambiguity is the preferred alternative to closure, it does not provide much consolation for the spectator (certainly nothing approaching a Barthesian jouissance). The resulting interpretive space creates in the spectator a sensibility that something has been overlooked by Martin and the other fictional frame characters. After all, with the exception of Tomas, they have not experienced the core narrative that was just presented to the spectator. Hints as to what this missing perspective

might be center on the issues of female discourse originating in the character of Birgitta.

Although the central female figure never achieves discursive control in Prison, hints in that direction can be discerned by examination of two crucial storytelling situations. The first involves Tomas's suggestion to Martin in the introductory frame that he has the perfect subject for a film like Paul's, a young prostitute named Birgitta, whom Tomas has interviewed in hopes of discovering the sociological causes for her prostitution. The value of Tomas's narration of the interview incident to Martin and Sofi is, however, conspicuously compromised in several ways. First, the film director, Martin, protests repeatedly that he does not want to hear it. He says, for example, "No, Tomas, listen, not now all right? Can't I get out of listening to it—after all, we're having such a nice time," and then repeats his protest several times. Tomas must in fact force Martin to listen. Second, although Tomas begins describing his encounter with the prostitute in an objective, authoritative tone, the article soon proves to be a difficult read: "We made the deal just before eleven o'clock the same . . . damn, this is poorly written!" As Tomas strains to read his article with his glasses, the account proceeds in stops and starts. This "objective" and "accurate" text, this sociological interview with Birgitta, not only has an unwilling audience, but appears defective and communicates only with difficulty.

As might be deduced from the intensely self-conscious introduction of this "story of a prostitute," the discourse that seeks to explain and contain has nearly reached paralysis. That this discourse is marked as "male" is evident from its emphatic identification with typically male roles in the system of prostitution. For example, in the sequence when Birgitta and Peter, her boyfriend and pimp, are released by the police after questioning, Peter mentions to her that it was a lucky thing that he knew how to talk; otherwise they would

have been in real trouble. The connections between pimping and talking, between prostitution and silence, pervade the film. The typical relationship between enunciation and diegesis in dominant cinema divides consistently along gender lines. In addition, however, that relationship parallels quite nicely the economy of prostitution, in that one of the implicit projects of the commercially driven male cinema apparatus is to create pleasurable female images for consumption by male spectators. The diegeticized female character, like the prostitute, stands between male-dominated spheres of production and consumption. Prison makes the connection explicit by repeatedly casting prostitution in discursive terms.

When Tomas's introductory narration of the interview incident yields to a flashback of the same, it is apparent that Birgitta's resistance as interviewee causes the disruption of prostitution's discursive economy that is implied in Tomas's narrative difficulties. She literally refuses to be articulated by his speech. The flashback begins when she and Tomas, the supposed "john," enter her room. Once there, Tomas says that he has not come for the same reason as her other customers. Instead of sex, he wants answers, answers that will give him a sociological explanation for her behavior. As the interview progresses, however, Tomas's desire for a definitive explanation and Birgitta's resistance to his attempts create clear parallels between the potential "closure" of the sexual act and that of the "full explanation." Tomas adopts a professional, objective tone, donning his glasses (as he did in his introductory narration to Martin and Sofi) and reading from a written list of questions. Birgitta resists his detached, objective speech at every turn. At the beginning when he asks her name, she responds only with an offended, disdainful look, as if to say, "You must be kidding—you think I'd really tell you?" When he asks her age, she flippantly replies nineteen, then upon further questioning

eighteen, and finally seventeen. She puts off all of his further questions with questions of her own until Tomas becomes infuriated and demands the "real reason" for her behavior:

> TOMAS: You bring men home and go to bed with them and they pay you for it. Do you think I'm an idiot or something? You know it's illegal!
> BIRGITTA: Nobody said that.
> TOMAS: But why do you do it?
> BIRGITTA: Do what?
> TOMAS: Go to bed with various men and accept payment from them. You see, that's precisely what I want to understand.
> BIRGITTA: Oh, come on!

As the interview progresses, Birgitta moves over to the bed, smiles and turns on a spot lamp directly over her head. With this one gesture, she ironically evokes not only cliches of police interrogation, but also a metafilmic reference to the lighting on the set that in like manner "interrogates" her as a fictional character, thereby equating the enunciatory apparatus with Tomas's inept sociological interview. The immediate diegetic explanation for Birgitta's behavior in this sequence is of course that she is merely playing dumb in order not to implicate herself, but her extraordinary recalcitrance against participating in his investigation has obvious implications for issues of narration as well. Played out in this scene is precisely the tension between narrative closure and textual ambiguity suggested by Paul's earlier comments on God and the devil, with the addition of gender to the issue. Here the male is quite clearly aligned with the discourse of closure, the definitive sociological explanation, a discourse heavily dependent on written language, and the female with very deliberate sabotage of that closure. Significantly, after he finishes his account of the interview, Tomas

apologizes to Martin that the article was never finished, implying that her resistance was to some degree successful; he never found a rational explanation for her behavior. The male discourse of the frame fails, just as God fails because of "too many plans."

But what of the "diabolic" discourse Paul hints at in the beginning? Up to this point in the film, Birgitta has only resisted being narrated by males, and has not provided a narrative alternative of her own. In the idyllic attic sequence, however, she provides a clue as to what kind of alternative discourse Bergman marks as "feminine" narration. In many ways, this scene escapes the confines of the narration; when the landlady takes them up there that night, she calls the attic "a sort of spare room," marking it as a space partially outside the diegesis. In addition, a metafilmic awareness pervades the scene the next afternoon, when Tomas and Birgitta together view a silent film clip on an old projector, one of the film's few happy moments. In this setting, she tells him that she has recently had a dream. The circumstances surrounding both her initial telling of the dream and its frightening conclusion after she falls asleep again that night are crucial to understanding the relationship of female discourse to narrative, because Birgitta initially assumes the narrator position only with great reluctance. Tomas coaxes her in the following exchange:

> TOMAS: Tell me.
> BIRGITTA: No, I can't.
> TOMAS: Sure you can.
> BIRGITTA: I've never told anything like that before.
> TOMAS: Try.
> BIRGITTA: Ok, but you'd better not laugh at me.
> TOMAS: I promise.

> BIRGITTA: And you can't look at me while I'm telling it. It started rather unpleasantly. . . .

The two preconditions Birgitta sets before beginning her narrative are worth comment. First of all, her request that he not laugh at her echoes Paul's same request in the opening frame sequence, likewise endowing the narration that follows here with filmic overtones; it too is a kind of protofilm, realized in full when the dream is presented to the spectator later that night. Second, it is highly evocative that Birgitta should ask that he not watch her while she talks, especially in light of Silverman's various discussions of synchronization, who writes, for example, that "by insisting that the body be read through the voice, and the voice through the body, it [synchronization] drastically curtails the capacity of each for introducing into the narrative something heterogenous or disruptive" ("Dis-Embodying the Female Voice" 133). Birgitta asks here to become "unsynchronized" on the diegetic level. On the enunciatory level, however, a close-up of her face matches her voice and firmly retains for the male spectator, if not for Tomas, visual control of the re-telling of her dream. This first, entirely verbal account of her dream therefore only hints at the possibility of the female voice gaining discursive independence. Birgitta is hesitant to assume the speaking position, emphasized here through the use of the word "berätta," which not only means "to tell" in the ordinary sense, but more specifically the act of narrating or telling a story. Birgitta has never "narrated" before, and when she narrates the dream verbally, she gives the clear impression that she is doing so on Tomas's terms, not her own; the static, objective camera implies that she is being "spoken" in her narration just as she is being "seen." Tomas's constant prompting creates an effect strikingly similar to ideas in Silverman's discussion of the Freudian talking cure; that is, the female narration is coerced by a male figure

ostensibly in order to "heal" the fictional female character of some psychosis, but in reality by articulating her in a male discursive system and placing her in a preexisting subject position (Mirror 64–66).

Her first dream narration, however, like Tomas's intended article on prostitution, is a fragment. It reaches the same impasse as male discourse because it is narrated on male terms and is entirely dependent on a verbal formulation. We discover the frightening conclusion of the dream only when the two of them fall asleep after making love that night. This time, however, the camera moves down from Birgitta's face (into the unconscious) as the dream begins, and assumes the dreamer's point-of-view. The entire dream is now shown, not told—no introductory voice-over encloses this purely cinematic excursion. Not only does Birgitta's control of point-of-view mark the sequence as feminine discourse, but the voice-over that eventually calls to her and leads her through the dream is identified as her mother's voice, not that of an anonymous male.[6]

The transfer of discursive control to Birgitta and the replacement of the male voice-over with that of her mother is closely aligned with the switch from a verbal account to visual narration, so that the dream (the cinematic image) is clearly established as the discursive alternative to the objective, written exposition of male narration. Dreams play an increasingly dominant role in Bergman's later films, overpowering the dead rational discourse of written language. What emerges from Prison, however, is that it is precisely in the dream mode that Bergman initiates a narrative alternative to patriarchal discourse, a realm of uninterpreted, seemingly unmediated symbolic imagery that aspires to

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[6] See Silverman's discussion of the ramifications of the maternal voice for female subjectivity in chapter 4 of The Acoustic Mirror, pp. 47–54.

escape the rational constraints of logocentric discourse. This uniquely cinematic alternative to written language is correspondingly marked in Bergman's films as feminine. Whereas in Prison the dream must be explained by the male and reduced to a specific interpretation to be useful, in later films like Persona (1966) and Hour of the Wolf, 1968), the dream is its own justification and is necessarily inaccessible through rational discourse.

The Dancer

Summer Interlude extends the pattern of Prison, again with a male frame surrounding a female core story, but this time with a stronger female protagonist. The basic plot revolves around a day in the life of a ballet dancer, Marie, who is preparing to dance the lead role in Swan Lake. The most exterior frame sequence begins the morning of the dress rehearsal. While applying her make-up, Marie receives in the mail a diary belonging to Henrik, her former lover. The book sets off a chain of painful recollections of their youthful summer together, which ended in Henrik's death in a diving accident. The ballet rehearsal that evening and performance the next night together form the closing section of the frame. In contrast to Prison, however, this film's core story is narrated conspicuously by Marie herself, whose voice-off inner monologue envelopes three flashbacks of that summer in her youth.[7] Her

[7] Silverman discusses synchronicity as the audio counterpart of shot/reverse shot and makes the distinction between "voice-off," a momentarily unlocated voice that is eventually recoverable, and "voice-over," which is never located within the diegeses. Since Marie's flashback narration is identifiable as her thought process, it would be a voice-off. As such it represents a more cautious narrative move, since the voice-off can be

exploration of those events leads to a self-discovery that enables her to resist to some degree the closure of the film's final sequence.

The preliminary frame sequence invites closer scrutiny, because once again, the story does not start until the enunciatory apparatus is both clearly identified and at least partially exposed and undermined, as in Prison. Here the backstage preparations for the ballet rehearsal serve the same function as the trappings of the movie set in the previous film, and great effort is taken to show all the ropes, backstage entrances, stage crew and half-applied make-up. Before the ballet performance can start (read metafilmically, before the film narration can begin) certain qualities of the enunciation must be established, and once again that enunciation is marked as male. The old stage manager Nils controls access to the backstage area, for example, and by extension directs much of the apparatus of the performance. When he rings the bell for rehearsal to start, the female dancers scurry down the staircase and into position. A male conductor leads the orchestra, and the male technicians turn on the lights and raise the curtain. Finally, after this busy preparation, the performance can begin. We suddenly see the dancers from audience perspective, the film frame now coinciding completely with the view that would be available to a spectator in the theater. The initial distinctions between the ballet performance and the film projection have collapsed, as if the camera has renounced its mobility and has finally come to rest in a theater seat after examining all aspects of the backstage apparatus. At the very moment the viewing space of the theater merges with that of the film, a classic shot/reverse shot (usually regarded as the

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subsumed within the larger narrative. See The Acoustic Mirror, 47–54.

primary visual technique of suture[8]), shows the theater seats to be occupied by the male director alone. In other words, the theater spectator's space is identified within the diegesis as a male domain, and by implication we as film viewers are sutured into the fiction in a male position as well. Both the apparatus behind the screen and the gaze of the spectator in front of the screen are thus marked as male, with the female dancers situated in between as the spectacle.

The female's position between the male enunciation and male consumer is familiar from Prison. Like Birgitta Karolina, however, Marie seems to be a problem for the smooth operation of this configuration. Her late arrival downstairs to the rehearsal identifies her as narrative problem: one dancer says, "There is something strange about Marie today. Everyone says so, although nobody knows what it is." The enigma of her character is precisely that she is somehow absent from the male-controlled production just described. Nowhere is this more apparent than in a short exchange between Nils and his assistant Karl as they watch Marie make a phone call backstage after the morning rehearsal. The clear voyeuristic overtones of the dialogue as they "narrate" her body through a large window duplicate those implicit in the male film spectator's experience:

> NILS: She keeps herself in fine shape, at any rate.
> KARL: Yes, she sure does, that's for certain. But her legs are too fat.
> NILS: No, those are muscles. You see, Karl, all the ballerinas from the classical school, they get thick calves and thighs.

[8] See chapter 5 of The Subject of Semiotics [also Kaja Silverman—Ed.] for an excellent summary of the discussion surrounding cinematic suture.

Once again, male gaze and male narration are intertwined, but Marie is not a willing spectacle. After hanging up the phone, she sharply scolds Nils for chasing off her boyfriend David, so that the superior position they assume by "narrating" her is quickly undermined. Nils shakes his head after she leaves and says, "There is something hard about her." Although Marie is not aware of being "narrated" either in this particular scene or in her position as dancer generally, she possesses an unsubmissive quality that resists articulation much the same as that demonstrated by Birgitta Karolina in the interview episode in Prison. The male discourse of the film's enunciatory level is thus shown to be clumsy and inept, attempting but unable to contain Marie. The entire apparatus of production is in fact defective, since as soon as the rehearsal is finally set to begin, the lights blow out and they have to cancel for the morning. In short, although the initial frame is clearly male-dominated and aspires to containment of the female, the female character here is even more successful in her resistance than in Prison.

The diegetic catalyst for Marie's distress is Henrik's diary. She is clearly shaken by its arrival, having repressed the memories of that summer. Most intriguing, though, is that the diary, like Tomas's article, is again a written narration. As in Prison, the written discourse is clearly marked as male, both because the diary is composed by David and because it has been in the possession of Marie's Uncle Erland, who more than any other male character tries to contain and possess her. The film takes great pains to establish ownership of the diary by showing the initial page in point-of-view as Marie reads it:

DIARY
This is my diary
Stay the hell out of my diary
Because it is my diary
Henrik

As Marie reads the first pages, Henrik's face is superimposed on the book and grows larger until it fills the screen. On one level, this functions as a simple visual sign for her memory process; the writing conjures up an associative image, so that we see her memory of Henrik's face. Taken together with the inscription just shown, however, the face can also be read more generally as a sign that Henrik "owns" the discourse. In contrast, when the film returns to the frame after the series of flashbacks, Marie reads the pages again, but this time, superimposed in the same way onto the pages, is her face. Again, the most immediate interpretation is that the face represents the memory of her younger self with which she has now come to terms, but it can also be taken in the general sense as signifying "feminine." At the very least, the connotative field of the diary shifts from male to female.

If the diary shots are read discursively, then, narrative control of the events of that summer has been transferred from the male to the female by the end of the film. The real interest, however, lies in how we as an audience come to know the intervening events that make such a shift possible, and it is in this respect that Marie's voice-off narration of the core stories becomes crucial. As she speaks, she "creates" her own visual narrative of the past in the flashbacks shown to the viewer. That is, the visual presentation of the past is firmly anchored in her voice-off narration leading in and out of the episodes. In this way, she wrests the account of that summer from the realm of written discourse. Two versions of the youthful episode now exist, Henrik's written description and Marie's cinematic

narration just presented. Since we as spectators see only the latter, it is clearly the privileged discourse as far as we are concerned. It is interesting in this regard to note that perhaps because of the second superimposition, that of Marie's face, several commentators have mistaken the ownership of the diary; Peter Cowie, for one, attributes it to Marie (87). The two competing narrative modes, verbal and visual, parallel the two versions of Birgitta's dream in Prison discussed earlier, the one a male-coerced verbal narration and the other an unmediated dream/film.

The shift from the histoire of the written diary account to the discours of the cinematic flashbacks is apparent from Marie's narration of her past as she arrives on the island and returns to the cottage where she and Henrik lived that summer. Her voice-off narration is remarkable in several ways. First, it is completely unmotivated within the diegesis. She is alone, and even if the voice-off represents her inner monologue, she is clearly addressing an audience and telling a story, not thinking random thoughts. The narration therefore falls between the diegetic and enunciatory levels; her story is located at the core of the fiction, but she addresses an audience with all the directness of the cinematic apparatus itself. Whereas Birgitta's dream was first narrated under duress, Marie's three flashback narrations are in no way coerced; they simply begin out of nowhere, with no audience other than the actual spectator. In short, although they are enclosed by a frame, they are not contained by the male enunciation, which has been implied to be powerless. In fact, her narrations are made possible precisely because the breakdown of the apparatus in the initial male-dominated frame of the dress rehearsal allows her the time to take her trip to the island. If her flashback narrations are a sort of "talking cure," then, they are self-motivated. (Even if the diary is seen as the catalyst for her stories, it is eventually associated with the female, as mentioned

above, and thus cannot be considered an unambiguously male coercive force.)

The test of this narrative independence comes after the dress rehearsal later that night, when the ballet master appears in her dressing room dressed as Coppelius. As Frank Gado observes, "The reference to Coppelius also invokes one of Bergman's favorite conceits: That life is a play written and directed by a God cruelly indifferent to the suffering of his actors" (147). Coppelius, the ballet figure derived from the E.T.A. Hoffmann tale, "Der Sandmann," is the heartless creator of life-sized marionettes. But Bergman's ballet master functions here not only as a callous God-figure; he is also the narrator of Marie's life and her future, so that once again issues of metaphysics and narrative converge. When he comes into Marie's dressing room, he tells her the "truth" about her life: that she has only a few years left to dance, that she can never be happy and should resign herself to the situation. As puppet-maker, he represents forces that would enslave Marie in the mechanical, severely limited existence of marionette-performer. As narrator, he compels Marie to accept a brutal and harsh evaluation of her life, a "story" whose severely delimited meaning is the very essence of narrative closure; he tells her, "You dance. Period." Any notion of contingency in the ballet master's narrative is not immediately apparent to either Marie or the audience.

Several features of this scene, however, allow an alternate reading and leave open the possibility of rejecting the initially compelling and dire analysis of Marie's life. First of all, the ballet master is only dressed as Coppelius. That is, his identity, like that of all actors, has a metaphoric, rather than essential status. Much of what seems irrefutable about his narration has to do with the effect of his costume, an effect whose temporary status leaves open the possibility of unmasking, of breaking the spell. Marie's make-up and its eventual

removal raises the same issue. Second of all, as the ballet master describes Marie's appearance and explains its meaning, he is most often shown seated next to Marie's mirror reflection, not to Marie herself. The juxtaposition of spoken narration with mirror image works to make his version of Marie's life seem irrefutable, at least initially, because the mirror does not lie. Or does it? The complexity of visual codes in this sequence certainly leaves room for a reading in which the distance between Marie's actual body and her reflection emphasizes the same distance between her point of view and that of Coppelius's narrative. In other words, both the mirror image and the narration can be seen as having representational status only, one image among many, with no necessary or compelling value.

This seems to be the realization that motivates the final sequences of Summer Interlude. Up to this point in the film, the mirror (and seemingly any representation of the female) has annoyed Marie. Like the male enunciation, the mirror seems to entrap the female in a fixed image. Marie pouts and is cross whenever she looks at herself, and in the scene just mentioned, she breaks into tears in front of the mirror after accepting (however momentarily) the ballet master's version of her life. The effect is only temporary, however. After both the ballet master and David have left, she begins another voice-off monologue in which she decides she is actually happy. She removes her make-up (which the ballet master said she would never have the courage to do) and then sticks her tongue out at the mirror image, and by extension rejects Coppelius's representation of her.

In light of the overwhelming, restrictive male forces that have threatened to contain and possess Marie throughout the film (the ballet stage apparatus, her uncle, the written narration of the diary), this sudden reversal may with justification be seen as arbitrary and unmotivated. In addition, the fact that Summer

Interlude ends with the ballet performance is by no means an unambiguous victory for Marie. The film attempts to valorize it as some sort of breakthrough, in which case her final voice-off monologue in front of the mirror would be seen as the reassertion of discursive control that makes her liberation as a performer possible. The dance then becomes a form of "female" expression that eludes the written narrative, just as the presentation of Birgitta's dream was unmediated, ambiguous and non-verbal. But as a dancer for an audience that has been negatively marked earlier in the film, participating in a machine-like apparatus that has not changed significantly since the opening sequences, and still wearing those cruel ballet shoes, Marie has certainly not changed her practical situation in any way: she has simply decided that she is happy. Summer Interlude is therefore not as intriguing in its conclusion as in the issues of gendered narration it raises along the way, but even so points to a more thorough-going valorization of the feminine voice in later films.

The Unnamed Mute Girl

The attempt to transfer discursive control from male to female, begun in Prison and Summer Interlude, achieves its clearest articulation in the Seventh Seal. Many intervening films touch on the same issues (Secrets of Women, for example, foregrounds the storytelling situation and employs female narrators exclusively), but the Seventh Seal is the first film with a prominent religious thematic exposition, so that the metaphysical and gender-related issues of narration converge more conspicuously. The usurpation of the male narrative frame is here articulated more forcefully than in previous films, with unmistakable implications for Bergman's metaphysics.

Like many of Bergman's films of the fifties, the Seventh Seal relies on the structure of the journey motif, but also framing the tale are the verses from the book of Revelation that give the film its title. Their first occurrence is preceded by the ominous tone of a cymbal crash that sets the stage for the silent presentation of the credits. The screen then goes black, followed by a build in the music soundtrack. Light bursts suddenly onto the screen, seen through the clouds in a low-angle shot of the brooding heavens. Synchronized with this flash of light is the explosion of the choral voices in the "Dies irae, dies ilia,"* which also yields in turn to an uneasy silence. An unlocated male voice-over then reads the scripture from the book of Revelation about the opening of the seventh seal and the ensuing half-hour of silence in the heavens. The positioning of the spectator in the opening sequence activates familiar codes of the authority-based text, for which Holy Scripture is the prototype. The total synchronization of cinematic image and soundtrack as they burst forth from the heavens likewise creates the narrative expectation that we are dealing with a secure text in which voice and image are inseparable. The whole of this film, the opening sequence tells us, is being narrated from on high.

In light of the fact that, as Silverman asserts, the voice-over is almost exclusively a male prerogative in classic cinematic narrative, and considering what she calls "the theological status of the disembodied voice-over" (Mirror 49), this initial sequence could hardly be more representative of male narrative as Bergman has presented it in the previous films. Like the God with too many plans in Prison, the "theological" voice of the scripture reading here aspires to ground the film's narrative in a firm teleology. It descends from on high,

* "Days of wrath and doom," from a medieval Latin poem, best known from its use in the "Funeral Mass." [Ed.]

invites no questioning as to source or motivation and equates the level of enunciation and production with the voice of God. Indeed, the use of canonized scripture elevates the subsequent story to the status of the Word itself. In these ways, the initial sequence assaults the viewer with an overwhelming enunciatory power and authority. Since such hierarchal narration is entirely in keeping with the film's medieval setting, the opening sequence in itself might seem unremarkable. However, in the context of the present examination of Bergman's framing devices and their subversion, the crucial question then becomes how the frame is completed at the end of the film, because this sort of "theological" male narration has been so consistently undermined in previous films.

In fact, the film does complete the frame with a reading of the same scripture for the weary travelers after their arrival at Antonius Block's castle—but with a dramatic shift in enunciation. The transcendent voice of the initial reading was that of God on high; in the recapitulation it is the voice of a woman. As the wayfarers share a final meal, Block's wife Karin reads the text in the intimate realm of the castle interior. The effect is entirely different. Here the words are laden with personal emotion as the travelers prepare for Death's arrival. Admittedly, the repetition of the scripture creates a sense of closure on the level of the frame narration, because it marks the completion of Block's journey. In fact, the moment Karin finishes repeating verbatim the scripture from the opening sequence, three knocks on the castle door signal Death's arrival, and by extension the complete closure of the narrative. But she continues reading, adding more verses to the original quotation. The continuation of the scripture reading after the plot has seemingly come to a perfect full circle, when taken with the dramatic transformation of the address of the film's establishing shot, creates a final narrative excess that is worth investigating.

According to Silverman's argument, synchronization of the female voice with the female body is a common suture technique that denies the female any extra-diegetic role. In other words, as long as the female voice can be contained within the fiction, it can be denied real authority because it is still ultimately "spoken" by the male enunciation. Silverman points out, for example, that in classic Hollywood cinema, one rarely finds a female disembodied voice-over because that would place woman close to the source of enunciation. The opening sequence of the Seventh Seal fits her analysis nicely, since the voice of male authority appears at the enunciatory level. However, the last sequence in the castle would then have to be interpreted as a continued containment of the feminine precisely because the female voice is physically located; Karin exists on the same level as the other fictional characters. Her reading of the scripture is thus not as striking as if a disembodied female voice-over had read the same. If that had been the case, enunciatory authority would clearly have shifted from masculine to feminine, and the film would acquire a more radical edge. As is, however, the valorization of the diegeticized female voice is not only a more cautious move, but one necessitated by fundamental contradictions between Bergman's use of "feminine" narration and his own position as male filmmaker, as I shall discuss in the conclusion.

Karin's expanded reading of the scripture and Death's subsequent arrival in the castle are not alone in exceeding the symmetry of the anticipated narrative circle; however, the film continues into one last sequence outside the castle. The final scene belongs to Jof, the visionary traveling actor. He, Mia, and little Mikael, who have escaped from the main company while Block stalled Death in the final moves of the chess game, head off in another direction as morning breaks. As they make ready to leave, Jof has his third vision of the film, one of the most famous shots in cinema. We see,

from his point of view, the silhouetted Dance of Death on the hill, with Death leading the other travelers on in macabre procession. Here, as in the previous two instances (Jof's initial vision of the Virgin Mary teaching the Child to walk and his glimpse of Death playing the last round of chess with Block in the forest), Jof's vision is validated, even privileged, by the fact that we see precisely what he sees, while Mia cannot. His visions are given the same status as the film itself, since both present themselves to us as spectators as secure visual objects. In addition, the pleasant angelic music that accompanied his first vision returns after the screen grows dark at the end of the film. The "last word" of the film's auditory code, is that of heavenly music that was a product of male consciousness.

This final narrative remainder seems to reassert the primacy of male vision (that is, the male artistic vision) in a move that Bergman repeats in later films. The interpretive jump from Jof to Dr. Vogler in The Magician (1958), for example, is not a large one. Both are charlatan illusionists who can function easily as stand-ins for Bergman as filmmaker. The escape of the artist from the closed narrative and the final reassertion of his sight as the organizing principle of the fictional world, when taken with Silverman's observations on synchronization, complicate the above interpretation of the female voice in the final scripture reading as a signal of emerging feminine narration. The granting of discursive control to Karin in the final sequences of the film starts to seem like a token gesture, one which has no ultimate effect on the status of the enunciation. The diegesis is still firmly supervised by the (male) artist, through whose visionary powers alone the filmic illusion is available in the first place.

In order to understand better Jof's function in the final sequence, it will be helpful to consider the cumulative effect of a few other key sequences leading up to the final scripture reading in which issues of gendered

narration are foregrounded. These situations reveal what I see as an extremely provocative interpretive stalemate at the end of the Seventh Seal. The first such sequence is the burning of Tyan, the young "witch." In this scene, the running theological argument between Block and his squire Jöns culminates in a powerful exchange as they watch the young girl's terror. Tyan, who after torture has "confessed" to a carnal encounter with the devil, suddenly realizes that she will not be rescued by him, that her belief was all a delusion. She stares with horror and falls completely silent. As usual, Jöns fills in the ensuing textual gap with a narration of his own: "Look at her eyes. Her poor consciousness is making a discovery. Emptiness under the moon). Block denies it vehemently, and Tyan's own voice is lost in yet another flurry of theological debate. Although both Jöns and Block have demonstrated kindness in giving Tyan a pain-killing drug and are genuinely moved by her plight, their disputation about the meaning of the girl's suffering has a numbing effect of its own, since narrating her pain makes her simply another piece of evidence in their on-going feud. They are struggling for the narrative rights both to her silent terror and to the opacity of existence in general.

At the end of this sequence, however, is the first of several initially perplexing shots that direct attention away from the squabble between knight and squire and the male, theological discourse (both literally and in the Barthesian sense) that they represent. As the wagon pulls away, a high-angle shot shows Tyan on the ladder with flames approaching. Standing hesitantly below in the background is the mute girl who has accompanied Jöns ever since he saved her from assault by the thief Raval early in the film. Muteness is of course a red flag in Bergman's work as a whole, but especially here in the Seventh Seal because of the narrative implications. The issue is foregrounded early on in the film when Jöns asks a stranger for directions, only to find he has

addressed the corpse of yet another plague victim. When he returns to his horse without the information he sought, Block asks him, "Was he mute?" Jöns replies that he would not exactly put it that way: "I would be more inclined to say that he was highly eloquent." The significance of the girl's muteness for the narrative issues, when seen in the context of this initial scene, is that one finds in her the extreme depiction of diegetic and discursive interiority—she is completely "spoken" by others. But she, like the corpse, conveys in her silence precisely what is lost in the flurry of words; she as well becomes "highly articulate" in the final sequences of the film.

The girl plays a minor role in the film up to the witch-burning. From this point forward, however, she is shown more and more frequently reacting to the course of events. Her face becomes a main point of reference first during the witch-burning sequence, when she provides a silent but intensely engaged visual contrast to the debate between Block and his squire. Then in Raval's gruesome death from the plague, she is the first to leap to his aid, trying to bring him some water. She is stopped by Jöns, who echoes his lines from the previous scene: "It's meaningless. It's completely meaningless. I'm telling you it's completely meaningless." Again, the mute girl's face provides the silent counterpart to Jöns's characteristically verbose narration. Finally, in the entire closing sequence at the castle, her presence positively dominates the screen. A close-up of her face, not Karin's, accompanies the beginning of the scripture reading at mealtime. This brief flirtation with non-synchronization ruptures the emphatic synchronization of heavenly voice and image in the film's establishing shot, in which the same scripture is read. The camera then returns obtrusively to the mute girl's face at each new development in the narrative; twice a medium two-shot of Block and Karin is dramatically transformed by panning slightly to the left to

include an unanticipated close-up of the mute girl's face in the composition, expressing visually the shift in narrative interest away from Block and toward her. When Death enters the room, she is the first to rise. As he approaches the group, a close-up of her radiant face yields to a slow reverse tracking shot that reveals the other five characters composed in a stylized grouping, with Karin and the mute girl in the foreground, the blacksmith and his wife to the side, and Jöns and Block displaced to the frame's background. The scene ends with another close-up of her face.

Complementing the visual priority of the female characters in the last scene in the castle is the play with male and female voice; both image and voice in this scene after Death's arrival finally tip the scales against the male discourse represented by Jöns and Block. The mute girl's power to attract the camera's interest at every turn, to displace the initially firm alliance between the protagonist Block and the visual attention of the narrative, creates a neat parallel with the larger discursive movement from the dominant male narrative voice to its feminine counterpart, which has up to this point been of minor force. As Death approaches, Jöns and Block continue their convoluted religious debate up to the bitter end, with Block praying and Jöns ridiculing his attempts to understand a God who has ceased to exist. During their argument, the mute girl's lips begin to move, as if she is struggling for speech. She, not Antonius Block, seems to discover the secret of death, because while he offers yet another futile prayer, her face shines with understanding. As mentioned, the fact that she and Karin occupy the foreground of the frame clearly marks a shift in visual emphasis from the metaphysical argument of the male characters throughout the film to the new presence of the female characters. The same is true of the female voice. As Jöns and Block continue to quarrel, Karin turns slightly to them and says, "Tyst, tyst!" (Hush, hush!), to which Jöns

responds, "I will be quiet, but under protest!" A discursive reading of this sequence reveals the last gasp of the male discourse of metaphysical debate, which falls silent only under coercion. That the silencing voice is that of Karin confirms the impression of discursive control suggested by her appropriation of the scripture reading. Supporting such a reading is the dramatic emergence of the female voice in the girl so far assumed to be mute. After all the others have fallen silent comes the final close-up of the mute girl. Her attempt to speak is finally realized in a startling sentence, yet another appropriation of scripture: "It is finished." The transfer of discursive control to the female voice is in other words not to be inferred from Karin's scripture reading alone; the same idea is conveyed even more forcefully by the mute girl's literal acquisition of voice and by her placement in the privileged visual position in the final sequences of the film.

After such a powerful emergence of the female voice in control of the very scriptural discourse that begins the film, the "left-over" scene with Jof seems even more puzzling, even arbitrary in its reassertion of the male artistic vision. In the famous silhouetted shot on the hill, however, a kind of cinematic sleight-of-hand significantly complicates the argument. When we first see Jof in sunny close-up as he experiences his vision of the Dance of Death, he narrates what he is seeing, ostensibly for Mia's sake. But in so doing, he also calls our attention to an unusual feature of the figures on the hill. Since the vision is shown in point-of-view to the audience, we can compare the visible scene to his narration, an intriguing discrepancy emerges. He says, "Mia! I see them again. I see them. Over there against the dark, stormy sky. They're all together there. The smith and Lisa and the knight and Raval and Jöns and Skat). The six personages following Death are in other words not the same persons in the final scene at the castle, as we have been led to believe by the careful,

stylized framing of the six of them together in those scenes. Bergman has instead substituted Raval, the thief, and Skat, the acting troupe's manager, both of whom had died earlier, into the Death's procession up the hill. Two extremely significant persons are missing from the dance, the very two women who assume such visual and discursive importance in the final scenes, Karin and the mute girl. Jof's line "They are all together there" points ironically, emphatically at their absence.

Already in a 1959 review of the film, Andrew Sarris mentions the absence of the two women from the famous shot. He speculates first that Karin is left out because Jof has never seen her—she is introduced to the film only after Jof has parted company with the others. Sarris has a much more difficult time explaining the absence of the mute girl, however. He first proposes that the dissolve from the final shot of the mute girl's face into the face of Mia the next morning signals a perceptual merging of the two characters, and that Jof does not mention the mute girl in the procession because of "a mental block in imagining death for someone resembling Mia" or some such reason (60). The second possibility Sarris offers, this one "frighteningly intellectual," is the impossibility of Jof assigning the girl a place in his roll-call, precisely because she lacks a name and therefore "cannot operate in Jof's artistic imagination" (60).

Bergman's own explanation is somewhat less sophisticated, and depends less on the writings of Camus, Sartre, Anouilh, Strindberg and Pirandello, as Sarris suggests, than on the realities of shooting the entire film ad hoc in thirty-five days. That is, Bergman claims in the Björkman interviews that the effect is entirely accidental, that one of the most famous shots in cinema was filmed on the spur of the moment because the light was just right (115). Many of the primary actors had gone home, so extras had to grab the costumes and stand in for the actual actors. Bergman says the entire

scene was filmed in ten minutes. Even more interesting is the fact that in a separate publicity shot for the film, two women are present, not one, as Jof's narration insists, nor three, as we would expect from the final scene in the castle. Moreover, in that still photo, the order of the characters is reversed, with Death heading downhill, not up.[9]

These explanations for the women's absence—one convoluted, one ridiculously simple—mirror the dual reception of the Seventh Seal, which on the one hand has read the film ever-so earnestly as our time's most profound existential document, and on the other has dismissed the film as amusing pastiche. Although Bergman's explanation may be the most obvious, it does not put the matter to rest, because as I have shown, the sequences preceding the shot on the hill create a strong argument for a valorization of the female voice. The growing emphasis on feminine discourse makes the absence of the women highly meaningful, even if unintentional. In fact, the accidental status of the effect in some ways makes it more intriguing, because the same sense of casual oversight pervades the later reception of the film. Despite the girl's and Karin's exaggerated presence in the castle scene, few critics other than Sarris have noticed their absence. Jörn Donner states quite bluntly, "We know that the picture ends in the death of everybody except the juggler family" (159). Similarly, Colin Young writes of Jof and Mia in a review, "Calm and serene, they are the only ones who in the end are saved," adding that the mute girl is the only character for whom "death comes as a relief" (44).

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[9] This strange shot of the Dance of Death, which is not included in the film at all, has ironically since become the most familiar image associated with the Seventh Seal. The "still" photo can be seen in Kwiatkowski 96 and in Bergman on Bergman 114–15.

In this context, the previous dialogue during the last round of the chess game acquires an ironic spin. Block asks Death, "Nothing escapes you . . . or does it?" Death replies, "Nothing escapes me. No one escapes me." Just moments after Death's omnipotent claim, however, Jof and his family escape through the forest. Karin and the mute girl have seemingly escaped even more surreptitiously, eluding Death, Jof, spectators and critics alike. This may just be Bergman's most successful (and inadvertent) cinematic magic trick, because it has resulted not just in many divergent readings of the dance of death, but in a complete "non-reading" of the female characters as well—they have in fact escaped without a trace in most criticism.

In this context, perhaps Sarris's "frighteningly intellectual" theory may not be too far off the mark; the mute girl's lack of a name is significant, but not just in shedding light on Jof's creative consciousness. It also reflects the contradictory role that unarticulated female experience plays in Bergman's narrative strategy. In one sense, the mute girl's anonymity is her strength, because it epitomizes her existence outside articulation in male discourse. In another, her namelessness reveals the problems inherent in such marginal status, since any discursive "victories" must necessarily go unmentioned, undepicted. Likewise, the absence of these two women from the Dance-of-Death shot is both a victory, in that they completely escape the closure of the narrative, and a defeat, in that their escape is virtually unnoticed by the vast majority of viewers. Their fate is completely overshadowed by Jof's concluding vision, which points back metafilmically to Bergman's imagination as the ultimate organizing principle of the film. But the accidental remainder of the two women, both in this film's narrative and later criticism, could hardly be more appropriate as a metaphor for the fate of Bergman's female characters, who almost yet never quite gain control of the film's discourse. The contrast

between Jof and Mia's sunny departure and the unmentioned "slipping away" of the women creates a certain unease, and in the final analysis, provides a useful vantage point in coming to terms with Bergman's films as feminist texts.

The Filmmaker

The cultivation of feminine narration in Bergman's films turns out to be a highly problematic enterprise. The narrative remainders mentioned in the Seventh Seal, the male artist and the woman, are never reconciled in later films nor is their equally exceptional status vis-à-vis the diegesis consciously examined or compared. Examination of Bergman's work thus becomes a hunt for traces and shadows, for competing narrative pressures instead of for feminist statements. In this respect the simultaneous presence of both the male artist and certain female characters outside the narrative becomes highly evocative, a compact expression of what for Bergman remains a fundamental narrative problem, that of filming across gender boundaries. An artist figure like Jof is such a trace. He is a reminder of Bergman's enunciatory role, a signal that ultimate control still belongs to the illusionist filmmaker. Similarly, the escape of Karin and the mute girl through absence alone, through a seeming oversight, minimizes any ultimate discursive power, despite the clear valorization of their voices in the previous castle sequence. When one considers the frequency with which a tortured male protagonist is paired with a well-grounded, comparatively uncomplicated female partner in Bergman's films (several come immediately to mind: Isak Borg and Sara in Wild Strawberries (1957), Dr. Vogler and Amanda in the Magician, Tomas and Marta in Winter Light (1962), Johan and Alma in Hour of the Wolf), the configuration of the narrative remainders at the end of the

Seventh Seal appears both quite consistent with Bergman's other work and indicative of a general dilemma. For Bergman, feminine narration seems an attractive alternative to male discourse precisely because it is perceived in its radical otherness as inscrutable, ambiguous and most importantly, uncreated. As any critic familiar with feminist theory can attest, this is not an unproblematic stance. As a result, Bergman's cultivation of a "feminine" narration becomes a kind of ventriloquism, a literal "throwing of the voice" that seeks to accomplish through a female persona what now seems impossible in male discourse. Bergman wants to tell without telling, to create fiction without narrating it, because the position of narrator has been fundamentally compromised.

Bergman's films increasingly propose a model of an un-narrated, immediate, yet closure-resistant cinematic fiction that was hinted at in Birgitta's dream, Marie's dance, and the silent radiance of the mute girl. What actually emerges on screen, however, is the kind of charlatan illusionism that a Dr. Vogler would appreciate, for example, since the image pretends to exclude mediation by male discourse, yet keeps sabotaging itself by revealing the "special effects" that make such fiction possible. The traces and figures reminding the audience of a male enunciation have much the same effect as the moments in the Magician's performance scene when the curtain slips open to reveal the ropes and wires that make illusionism possible. Such glimpses into the "stage machinery" of male enunciation, these traces of the artist's discursive control, are surely unintentional. In fact, Bergman often becomes quite insistent that we accept his fiction unreflectingly, "emotionally" (Samuels 102). For example, after the filming of Through a Glass Darkly (1961), the first film of the crucial trilogy, Bergman makes the following statement: "Earlier I played the guardian. . . . My fictional people were not left alone; I interfered with their actions and their

destinies. Since Through a Glass Darkly I can let them live their own lives" (in Steene, References 108). Bergman's claim that he now "leaves his people alone" is clearly wishful thinking, but demonstrates his conviction that a sort of "found" fiction (again, defined primarily as "female" discourse) is the solution to his narrative difficulties.

That this aspiration is fraught with contradiction is clear in Persona. In the book Mindscreen, Bruce Kawin proposes the intriguing argument that Persona literally presents itself as both generating and deconstructing its own filmic image; it aspires to be the ultimate unmediated cinematic fiction and "imitates mindedness" (113–14). The film is also, in the context of the preceding discussion, the most thoroughly female in its narration. The only male characters are the boy in the prologue and Elisabeth Vogler's husband in a scene of indeterminate visual status. Even the voice-off of the doctor's voice in Alma's initial briefing, a quintessentially authoritative male voice in most narrative film (and prose), is here the voice of a woman. This point in particular is emphasized by the building frustration of viewer expectation each time the doctor's voice is introduced, since the reverse shot that shows the source of that voice is first delayed, then shown out of focus, then finally located in the body of the doctor. In short, the doctor's voice initially approximates the authority of a disembodied female voice-over. The film itself aspires in its entirety to the ambiguous status only hinted at in the isolated, carefully bounded dream sequences of earlier films. The status of many events in the narrative is impossible to determine, such as whether Elisabeth Vogler really spoke to Alma and appeared in her room in Persona (which scene is yet another "cutting loose" of voice from narrative). The question of "what really happened?" is made irrelevant, so that the entire film can be seen as the fuller realization of an

alternative fictional narration that far exceeds the earlier, partial feminine resistance to male discourse.

Yet even here, one glaring intrusion, one vestige male voice-over, shows the now familiar, inevitable trace of male enunciation. When Alma and Elisabeth leave the hospital for their stay on the island, a disembodied male voice-over obtrusively narrates their arrival in an entirely conventional style. The return to a familiar narrative code of dominant cinema is truly jarring in light of the intense interrogation and ultimate rejection of precisely such narrative techniques in earlier films, and in the context of the rest of Persona in particular. The voice-over does not last more than ten sentences and never returns. Even more strikingly, as Kawin points out, that voice is Bergman's own (122). The voice-over thus literally represents the enunciatory address of the director, a startling self-display in a film that otherwise "tells itself." This intrusion into an otherwise "feminine" film seems to me to exhibit the same reflex as Jof's escape from Death. Bergman has formulated the idea of gender difference so exclusively that he cannot film a completely "feminine" text without including, most surely unintentionally, a reminder of the inescapable male valence of his enunciatory role.

Perhaps the ultimate formal expression of the narrative tightrope Bergman walks, however, is to be found in Hour of the Wolf, which is a good example of both feminine narration and of the contradiction it entails for Bergman, because at first glance, the gender configuration in the relationship of enunciation to diegesis seems to have been reversed. Alma now occupies what is left of the frame, and makes some attempt to narrate the strange events contained in the diary of Johan, the tortured artist, but due to the ambiguous, nightmarish nature of the experience, ends her account by trailing off in mid-sentence. One can read her incomplete narration as a further alignment of the female with non-closure, or even as a model of the type of story possible

in feminine discourse, yet one also perceives a sense of hesitancy in the construction of the film, and Bergman's comments in the Björkman interviews betray his uncertainties about the form the narrative should take:

> Hour of the Wolf is extremely personal. So personal I even made a prelude and a postlude to it, playfully "boxing it in." Nothing is left of this but the dialogue which accompanies the titles. In this prologue and epilogue I was guilty of a self-deception. It was better not to play at any aesthetic games to hold this film at a distance. (215)

Bergman's great personal investment is clearly directed toward the artist figure Johan. Such "personal" fiction is unmediated fiction, and Bergman here describes his acceptance of such fiction on its own terms as a breakthrough of sorts. Yet he is left with mixed feelings about questions as basic as the choice of the film's protagonist:

> The difficulty with the picture is that I couldn't make up my mind who it was about. Had I made it from her point of view it would have been very interesting. But no, I made it the wrong way. After it was finished, I tried to turn it over to her; we even reshot some scenes, but it was too late. (Samuels 131–32)

This provocative comment catches the thought in midflight; it depicts in unusual detail the hidden activity informing the narrative choice I have been discussing throughout, the transition from male to female discourse. The fundamental ambivalence manifests itself formally in the fact that although Alma begins and ends the film with her own frame narration, her speaking is clearly prompted by the invisible but unmistakable presence of the film director in those scenes. For

example, a short narration introducing Alma's account proceeds directly from the enunciatory level and elicits her speech; in this short preamble, an unidentified source explains that Alma gave "me" Johan's diary and that together with what she told "me," the film's story was created. Alma in turn addresses her unseen interviewer directly, saying that "you" have the diary. Moreover, her first sentence in the film is obviously a response to a previous question, and in her final monologue, she uses a conversational tone and interrupts herself by asking, "Are you in a hurry?" The play of pronouns throughout her frame narration marks her speech clearly as discursive in nature—it is a conversation between Alma and her invisible interlocutor. We hear only her responses, not the all-important implied questions. Bergman often refers to his films as "conversations," as a form of intimate human communication (Samuels, 103), but in this case the interviewer's unseen status cannot help but call to mind the familiar, omniscient invisibility of male enunciation. Bergman has in short rejected the third-person distance of "histoire" in his narrative technique, but seems unsure of his role in the ensuing cinematic conversation—he both retains some formal role in the address of the film and yet simultaneously attempts to efface it. What results is not an appropriation of the enunciatory apparatus by the female voice; that is merely an "effect" that distracts from the more complex problematic of filming across gender boundaries.

In a 1978 discussion of feminist film practice with several women filmmakers and critics in New German Critique, Michel Citron makes the following claim: "I would argue that a man can't make a film about a woman now. I don't think they should and I don't think they can. It's dishonest. Those films are really about themselves, not women, yet they never acknowl-edge

that" (104).[10] Many have voiced concern that male subjectivity is so ingrained in the present cinematic codes as to make it impossible for a male director to film a female protagonist without in some way participating in the typical enunciation of dominant cinema. The stubborn vestiges of male enunciation in Bergman's films support such a view, since despite a growing valorization of female discourse in the films, the independent female voice is consistently recuperated by a stray male point-of-view shot, a male voice-over, an unseen male interviewer, or the like. Bergman's disdain of the male voice and its "theological" overtones in other words never quite overcomes his hesitation about yielding total control to the female voice, since in the context of his exclusionary models of male and female discourse, that would in effect write him as a male director out of the film. The resulting double movement is never resolved, foregrounding the mutual interdependence of metaphysical, narrative, and gender issues. Such narrative tensions make his work an intriguing sort of ventriloquism, as interesting for feminist aesthetics as it is problematic.

Original Titles of Bergman Films

Brink of Life	Nära Livet
Dreams	Kvinnodröm
Hour of the Wolf	Vargtimmen
The Magician	Anskiktet

[10] This interview was arranged by Renny Harrigan in 1978 and in addition to Michel Citron, included Julia Lesage, Judith Mayne, B. Ruby Rich, and Anna Marie Taylor. Harrigan was assisted in leading the discussion by co-editors Helen Fehervary and Nancy Vedder-Shults.

Prison (aka The Devil's Wanton)	
	Fängelse
Secrets of Women (aka Waiting Women)	
	Kvinnors väntan
The Seventh Seal	Det sjunde inseglet
Summer Interlude	Sommarlek
Summer with Monika	Sommaren med Monika
Through a Glass Darkly	Såsom i en spegel
To Joy	Till glädje
Wild Strawberries	Smultronstället
Winter Light	Nattvardsgästerna

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