

Cries and Whispers (1973)

Cries and Whispers begins and ends in the park of a stately mansion. Between these two exterior sequences the action, except for one brief flashback, takes place inside the mansion, primarily in one room. The space is, in other words, exceedingly restricted.

Four women form the nucleus of the action: Agnes (Harriet Andersson), who is dying; her sisters Karin (Ingrid Thulin) and Maria (Liv Ullmann); and the maid Anna (Kari Sylwan). The cries and the whispers belong to them. As in a string quartet, we listen to four different 'instruments' somehow attuned to one another in this 'chamber film.'¹

Karin and Maria have come to the mansion, the home of their childhood, to keep watch at Agnes' bedside.² The film describes the last two days of Agnes' life, her death, funeral, and 'resurrection.' These events are intermingled with flashbacks of situations or events in the past, showing Agnes' relationship to her mother, Anna's to her child, Karin's and Maria's to their husbands.

The script begins with a declaration by the director which provides a key to the film:

As I turn this project over in my mind it never stands out as a completed whole. What it most resembles is a dark flowing stream: faces, movements, voices, gestures, exclamations, light and shade, moods, dreams. Nothing fixed, nothing really tangible other than for the moment, and then only an illusory moment. A dream, a longing, or perhaps an expectation, a fear, in which that to be feared is never put into words.

Like the author of *A Dream Play*, Bergman in *Cries and Whispers* strives to "imitate the disconnected ... form of the dream." The most spectacular dream element in the film is Agnes' continued life after death. But there are several other sequences which are almost as dreamlike: Karin's mutilation of herself, Joakim's suicide attempt, the Chaplain's self-reproaches. We must constantly ask ourselves whether the situations and events describe an objective reality or whether they express the characters' subjective versions of reality. Rarely does Bergman indicate that we are dealing with dreams, fantasies. Yet the descriptions are such that we find it difficult to accept them at face value. The borderline between dream and reality is blotted out.

In the centre of the film, we find Agnes, "the intended owner of the estate." In the script, it says:

She has vague artistic ambitions – dabbling in painting, playing the piano a little; it is all rather touching. No man has turned up in her life. ... At the age of thirty-seven she has cancer of the womb and is preparing to make her exit from the world as quietly and submissively as she has lived in it. ... She is very emaciated, but her belly has swollen up as though she were in an advanced stage of pregnancy. ...

AGNES' painting is generously colorful and somewhat romantic. Her main subject is flowers.

Agnes strikingly resembles the Young Lady, Adèle, in *The Ghost Sonata*, the intended owner of the beautiful *art nouveau* building on the stage. Neither the Young Lady's nor Agnes' illness – cancer of the uterus – should be taken literally. Just as the Young Lady is “withering away in [an] atmosphere of crime, deceit and falseness of every kind,” so Agnes is surrounded by faithlessness and emotional chill. Neither her mother, now dead, nor her sisters have given her the warmth she longs for. Both Karin and Maria are unhappily married, both have been unfaithful to their husbands, both are anxious – as are their husbands – to show an immaculate social persona. Agnes cannot thrive in such surroundings.

However, she has one friend who is pure of heart and able to feel love. Anna, it says in the script,

is very taciturn, very shy, unapproachable. But she is ever-present – watching, prying, listening. Everything about ANNA is weight. Her body, her face, her mouth, the expression of her eyes. But she does not speak; perhaps she does not think either.

Like the Milkmaid in *The Ghost Sonata*, Anna incarnates altruistic love. And just as the Milkmaid's profession indicates her nurturing function, so Anna's role of maid is a sign of her willingness to serve – feel compassion for – her fellows. In both the play and the film, the person who is socially the most unassuming is ethically the most high-minded. Characteristically, Bergman cast the same actress in both parts and provided her with virtually the same costume and hair (pigtail) in both.

Anna is the only one who hears Agnes' crying; who consoles her with the warmth of her maternal bosom; and who is willing to stay with her when she is dead. But Anna is herself in need of human warmth. Functioning as a mother substitute to Agnes, she has herself found a substitute in Agnes for the little daughter she has lost.

Early in the film we see Anna in her simple room praying for her dead daughter. Next to her, there is a lit candle, flowers in a vase, and apples in a bowl. A close-up of Anna is followed by one of a photo of her and her daughter, this again by a close-up of



At the end of *Cries and Whispers* Agnes' diary, recording a blissful moment, comes alive in Anna's memory. The three sisters – Karin, Agnes, and Maria – seated in the old swing, are rocked by Anna.

the daughter on the photo. When the praying Anna returns in view, the frame is supplemented by nondiegetic piano music, a melancholy Chopin mazurka. Anna blows out the candle and begins to eat an apple while she regards the photo of herself and her daughter. She then gets up and leaves the room past an empty child's bed.

The sequence is carefully composed. The flowers, the apple, the candle, the photo, the bed – nothing is there by coincidence. The eating of the apple links Anna, whose dead daughter was undoubtedly an illegitimate child, with the Eve of the Fall, with Original Sin. The photo, which is framed by flowers on one side and by a card showing a butterfly, symbol of the resurrection, on the other, bears witness of her longing for the dead daughter – as do the prayer and the empty bed. The lit candle represents her hope that her little girl has risen from the dead and that God's angels are now protecting her in heaven.

The melancholy Chopin mazurka continues as Agnes, dressed in white, is framed next to a bowl with big, white, cultivated roses (contrasting with Anna's more modest wild flowers). Agnes takes one of them, smells it, looks thoughtful, then very sad. The fragrance of the rose evokes the image of her beloved dead mother. There is a slow dissolve from the white rose to the mother's white dress, as she is walking, alone, in the park of the mansion, surrounded by shadows as though she were a prisoner of the park.

While Agnes and Anna relate to *The Ghost Sonata*, Maria is linked with *A Doll's House* and *Miss Julie*. This is especially obvious in the sequence showing Maria lying in the bed of her old room. With a thumb in her mouth and a doll next to her, regarding her old doll's house, she is still a doll's wife, a child. The camera follows her glance from the elegant upper floor of the doll's house to the kitchen in the basement – the class society in one tilt. The close-up of a cook by the stove, a servant in livery, and a bird's cage clearly refers to *Miss Julie*, while the mother looking down on her daughter from the painting on the wall resembles the final shot in Alf Sjöberg's film version of Strindberg's play, where Julie's portrayed dead mother looks down on her daughter. Bergman frequently makes use of this kind of allusions. Apart from amusing the initiated, they economically enrich the action.

The environment in *Cries and Whispers* may in the first place be associated with decadent aristocratic life around the turn of the century, as described in Chekhov's *Three Sisters* – an adequate title also for Bergman's film – or in *Miss Julie*. But very soon we notice that the social aspect is not central to the film, which deals more with the shortcomings of humanity than with those of the bourgeoisie.

The most striking aspect of the scenery is that the interior is constantly kept in various shades of red. Moreover, the different parts of the film are separated by slow dissolves containing intermediate red frames. Red is the color of blood, of life but also of sacrifice, of death. It is the color of erotic love, passion. In addition to these conventional meanings, there is a more esoteric significance, indicated by Bergman himself. In the script, he informs us that "ever since [his] childhood [he has] pictured the inside of the soul as a moist membrane in shades of red." It is obvious that Bergman's "soul" is very similar to the uterus.³ In *Cries and Whispers*, we not only find ourselves in the sisters' home of childhood, this alone a sign of their inability to escape the early phase of their life; we find ourselves in the original 'home' of us all, the maternal womb, the only place where two human beings are in true communion with one another. As David tells Karin in *The Touch*: "You can never live inside me. It's only for short, hopelessly short moments that we imagine the prison has been opened. ... I think it's some dim memory from the womb. That's the only fellowship there is..." Both in the red interior and in the reddish dissolves, we should sense the blood pulsating in each of the four women, driven by the beating of the heart, just as the many clocks of the mansion are driven by their clockworks. At the same time, the redness makes visible the psychoanalytic idea that our lives are determined by what we have experienced in the maternal womb. The dissolves combined with whispering voices – equivalent of fetal membranes and fetal sounds and/or sounds heard by a fetus – suggest both a prenatal existence and, in the context of the film, the alienation from life felt by someone dying.⁴

Of the many clocks in the mansion, "*the mantelpiece clock, with a flute-playing shepherd,*" associated with Agnes, "*is the only one not going.*" The symbolism is obvious. As in *Wild Strawberries*, the ticking and striking clocks represent the living, while the silent clock indicates that Agnes' time on earth is up.⁵ When she sets it moving again, her action, comparable to Peer Gynt's appeals to the Buttonmolder or Antonius Block's chess-playing, is a prayer for respite.

The four women, who receive about equal attention, represent four different types, outlooks, temperaments. Agnes is mild, Karin cold, Maria superficial, Anna warm. They appear in costumes suiting their mentality: white for the virginal Agnes, black for the life-denying Karin, red for the erotic Maria, gray for the serving Anna. Turning to their wombs, we may speak of a virginal but sick (Agnes), a frigid (Karin), a sensual (Maria) and a maternal (Anna) one.

What then does Agnes' sick womb represent? It has been suggested that the disease relates to that "of being a woman and of not fulfilling a woman's function by bearing a real child."⁶ However, the reason why Bergman has selected cancer of the uterus is not that it is an illness restricted to women but that it is an illness located in the original home of all of us – both in the biblical and in the psychoanalytical sense.

Through her cancer, Agnes, like the Young Lady, reveals that she is subject to Original Sin. Anna's eating of an apple and Karin's and Maria's 'sickly' wombs amount to the same. Yet, like Eve they have all begun life as innocent creatures – as their names indicate: 'Agnes' and 'Karin' both mean 'chaste'; 'Maria' carries, through the Holy Virgin, the same meaning; and 'Anna,' being the name of the Virgin Mary's mother, points in the same direction. Rather than being subject to *Original Sin*, Bergman's women seem to be victims simply of life; growing up means growing sinful. Life has turned the firm Karin into a hard and bitter person, who declares herself "rotten to the core." Similarly, the chameleonic Maria has become a cynic below her smiling persona. In contrast, Agnes and Anna have retained more of their original identity, each in their own way accepting life on its own terms.

Faced with Agnes' illness, science (the Doctor, Erland Josephson) is powerless. Once she has died, faith (the Chaplain, Anders Ek) proves as powerless when it comes to offering hopes for a blessed after-life. The representative fellow-creatures (Maria and Karin) distance themselves from the dead Agnes even though they are blood relations, thereby demonstrating the shortcomings of human love. Only Anna has the strength to console Agnes. In her alone does love prove triumphant.

The theme of isolation-versus-communion pervades the film. Both the dinner between Fredrik (Georg Årlin) and Karin, husband and wife, and the family gathering after the funeral signal the frozen relations that are typical of humanity. After Agnes'

death, the weather has, significantly, suddenly turned colder and it has begun to snow. The funeral guests, unable to warm one another, "*are warming themselves with a cup of tea and a glass of sherry.*"

Physical proximity is the symbol of communion. One of Anna's good memories, omitted in the film, is that of how she, her little daughter, and Agnes once built a house under the dinner table. "*There they are as close as a single body... In this way, they forget their fear.*" The situation anticipates the pietà scene between Anna and Agnes. Similarly, Maria reminds Agnes: "Do you remember when we were little and played together in the twilight? Suddenly, and at the same moment, we felt afraid and cuddled together and held each other tight."

One of Agnes' good memories is the one of how she once was allowed to stroke her mother's cheek: "We were very close to each other that time." Its counterpart is the scene in which Maria is allowed to touch Karin who never wants to be touched and who nevertheless nourishes "a longing for nearness." In the script, this sequence is accompanied by tender words between the sisters. In the film, the words are reduced to inaudible whispers which, along with their caresses, express the tenderness between them. In addition, there is music: a fragment of the sarabande from Bach's suite for cello in C minor – dark, warm, lofty music for *one* instrument, close to the human voice, an adequate expression of spiritual communion between people. (The sarabande returns later in the film, this time to illustrate the communion between Anna and Agnes.) However, this moment of tenderness between the sisters proves to mean much more to Karin than to Maria, who later denies its significance.

The theme of communion culminates in the final sequence. For the first and only time, we see the four women "*as close as a single body.*" The sequence clarifies a passage from Agnes' diary:

A summer's day. ... My sisters, Karin and Maria, have come to see me. It's wonderful to be together again – as in childhood. ... We slowly strolled down to the old swinging seat in the oak tree. Then the four of us (Anna was there too) sat in the swing and let it rock to and fro, slowly and gently.

I closed my eyes and felt the breeze and the sun on my face. All my pain was gone. The people I am most fond of in the world were with me. ... I felt the presence of their bodies, the warmth of their hands. I closed my eyes tightly, trying to cling to the moment, and thought: This is, indeed, happiness.

This ending is quite similar to that of the final vision in *The Ghost Sonata*, the way Strindberg originally imagined it. But what with Strindberg is a journey into life hereaf-

ter, or rather the hope for such a journey, with Bergman it is at most an indication in that direction. Like the paradisaic final vision of *Wild Strawberries*, the ending of *Cries and Whispers* points to the past, to a paradisaic existence in *this* life, to the communion inherent in childhood that has later been lost. Nevertheless, the final visions of both films – since both Isak and Agnes are tormented by “*the ultimate loneliness*”: death – connote a hope that the communion of childhood will return in a coming life. It is precisely this ambivalence that makes the final visions in these films so meaningful.

What is the significance of the film title? We learn that Maria and her mother, who were very close to each other, “*kept whispering*” to one another. Anna “*whispers inaudible, consoling words*” to Agnes. When Karin and Maria after Agnes’ death for a moment are close to one another, they keep whispering. The whispers which, as we have noted, also accompany most of the reddish dissolves, function as caresses. They express tenderness, love, communion.

The cries relate to the opposite emotions: anguish, impotence, loneliness. Maria’s attempt to establish contact with her sister suddenly fails:

“I can’t,” KARIN *cries*. “I can’t. All that which can’t be altered. All the guilt. It’s constant anguish. It’s like in hell. I can’t breathe any more because of all the guilt.

The crying and the feelings of suffocation indicate that Karin’s inability to respond to Maria’s attempt at contact is based on guilt feelings at least partly connected with the recently dead sister. For this is how Agnes’ moment of death is described:

Suddenly she cries: “Can’t you help me? Help me, I don’t want to. I don’t want to.” She utters a piercing scream and beats about her with her arms until a new attack of choking cuts off her shrieks and she bends backward, mouth agape.

The closest formal connection with the title we find in the following passage, testifying both to Agnes’ anguish and her longing for communion as well as to the sisters’ lacking sense of her needs: “AGNES *calls to her sisters faintly, her lips move and she calls in a whisper, but they don’t hear her.*”

Already in *Through a Glass Darkly*, Bergman touched on this theme. After incest with his sister Karin, Minus falls to his knees, clasps his hands, and prays “*whispering*. God ... God ... help us! *Like a cry and a whisper.*” Naturally, these *de profundis* situations are designed with regard to the biblical archetype, Christ’s sense of desolation at the moment of death:

And about the ninth hour Jesus *cried* with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? ... Jesus, when he had *cried* again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. (Mat. 27.46, 50; italics added)

That Agnes' suffering and death are modelled on the Passion appears from a number of circumstances. Sharing her name with that of Indra's Daughter in *A Dream Play*, Agnes functions as an *agnus dei*, a sacrificial lamb, the symbol of Christ's *satisfactio vicaria*.⁷ Like Jesus, Agnes is pure, chaste. Her suffering at an age comparable to that of Jesus seems altogether unjust and can therefore be seen as vicarious. When the Chaplain states that Agnes' faith is stronger than his own and that God has found her "worthy to bear a heavy and prolonged suffering," he has the parallel to Christ in mind.

Already in the beginning of the film, we see how Maria, who is to keep watch over her sister, has fallen asleep in a chair. It is instead Agnes, who has just stood up, who keeps watch over *her* – with a smile expressing both disappointment and forgiveness. This is Bergman's variant of Jesus' disappointment at the disciples, when they had fallen asleep in the garden of Gethsemane: "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" (Mat. 26.40) Before this happens, we see Maria's face in close-up, overcome by pain as she is drinking a glass of water – Bergman's allusion to the bitter chalice. When Agnes later "*has bent her head against her chest*," her position resembles that of the Crucified. The same is true of the following description: "*Her eyes are closed and her forehead has beads of sweat on it. Her mouth is bitten and covered with sores. Now and then her body shudders with the constant pain.*" When "*she asks for something to drink*," it corresponds to Jesus' "I thirst" (John 19.28). Quite grotesque is the contrast between her quietly suffering Christ-like face, in close-up, and Maria's off-screen reading aloud from *The Pickwick Papers*.⁸ The washing and shrouding of Agnes' emaciated body has a sacred character. Just before she dies, the fingers of one of her hands are twisted like those of the Crucified. When she is laid out, there is a high-angle shot of her emphasizing the cruciform of her body.⁹ The most obvious parallel is, of course, the famous pietà scene with its complex fusion of death and birth.¹⁰

What is the purpose of all these allusions to the Passion? Is Agnes a Christ figure? Does Bergman wish to indicate that there are people – Agnes has a kinsman in Algot Frövik in *Winter Light* – who, like Christ, have a scapegoat mission? Do the allusions serve to give fundamental human feelings – pain, fear of death, sense of abandonment – a higher dignity? Or do they merely serve to create an archetypal object of identification, an emotional correlate? Perhaps something of all of this.

The contrast between mask and face forms a pervading theme in *Cries and*



In the pietà scene of *Cries and Whispers* Anna warms the dead Agnes, in fetal position, with her maternal body.

Whispers. The bedroom of the parents, it says in the script, is beautiful but overloaded. The dining room has “heavy furniture and dark-red, gilt-leather wallpaper,” “thick window curtains,” and “solid silver” on the dinner table. Karin, loaded with jewels – gifts from her husband while he still loved her or, more likely, gifts to disguise his withering love for her – fits into this environment.

“The women’s clothes,” Bergman points out, “are lavish, expensive, concealing and revealing.” By appearing in a social persona demanding respect, people try to keep up their self-respect. But the self-respect is undermined by their awareness that they are not what they pretend to be.

Sitting before the mirror, Karin is ironically watching her own “irreproachable façade” in no fewer than three mirrors. Similarly, Maria early in the film

walks over to a large mirror which is tilting out from the wall; it has panels of blurred glass, a marble ledge, and an ornamental gold frame. She stands before the mirror for a moment, turns her face toward her image and smiles quickly...

Being “*blurred*,” the pretentious mirror in which she sees herself provides poor possibilities for self-knowledge. This applies not only to Maria as an individual; it applies also to her as a representative of humanity; in the words of St. Paul: “For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face” (1 Cor. 13.12). True self-knowledge is not possible in this life.

The alternation mask-face is found also in some of the monologues. After Agnes’ death, Karin tells Maria:

We were so fond of her. *Suddenly in a different voice.* Nothing, no one can help me. *Again in her usual voice.* When the funeral is over, I’ll ask our solicitor to arrange all the legal formalities. ... I think that *With a change of voice.* yes, it’s true, I’ve thought of suicide many times. ... It’s everlastingly the same, it’s *In her normal voice.* nothing. I mean it’s not a serious problem.

Similarly, the Chaplain, “*enclosed in the black uniform of office*,” in the beginning of his speech sticks to the traditional funereal ritual:

May your Father in Heaven have mercy on your soul when you step into His presence. May He let His angels disrobe you of the memory of your earthly pain.

But he soon drops the ritual, and despite its rhetorical anaphorae, the rest of his speech carries the note of sincere despair at the conditions of mankind:

The CHAPLAIN falls silent, as though overcome. He stands perplexed with his eyes shut. Then he kneels down stiffly; ... He passes a hand across his eyes and supports himself against a chair with the other.

If it is so that you have gathered our suffering in your poor body, if it is so that you have borne it with you through death, if it is so that you meet God over there in the other land, if it is so that He turns His face toward you, if it is so that you can then speak the language that this God understands, if it is so that you can then speak to this God. If it is so, pray for us. Agnes, my dear little child, listen to what I am now telling you. Pray for us who are left here on the dark, dirty earth under an empty and cruel Heaven. Lay your burden of suffering at God’s feet and ask Him to pardon us. Ask Him to free us at last from our anxiety, our weariness, and our deep doubt. Ask Him for a meaning to our lives. Agnes, you who have suffered so unimaginably and so long, *you must be worthy to plead our cause.*

The Chaplain's split prayer may be compared both to the contradictory speeches of the split protagonist at the end of *The Seventh Seal* and to Tomas', the vicar's, opening and closing prayers in *Winter Light*, the first showing how he clings to the traditional formula, the second how he gropes for a faith.

The end of the first part, quoted here, sounds like the Student's intercession for the recently dead Young Lady at the end of *The Ghost Sonata*: "may you be greeted by a sun that does not burn, in a home without dust...." The next part resembles the Poet's appeal to Indra's Daughter in *A Dream Play*: "Child of the gods, will you translate / our lament into language / the Immortal One understands." The Chaplain's prayer is crammed with "ifs" – as though he doubted the existence of a benevolent god. In line with this, the perspective of the introductory ritual part is reversed. No longer praying that God take mercy on the dead woman, the Chaplain asks her to intercede by Him for the living. To speak with the author of *A Dream Play*: It is not the dead but the living who are pitiable.

When the sisters after the funeral talk to one another, their veils function as masks. The black-toned sequence, alternately showing their faces, contrasts with the earlier red-toned communion sequence, in constant two-shot.

A striking characteristic with Bergman is his predilection for mystifying doublings. In *Cries and Whispers*, one actress (Liv Ullmann) incarnates both Maria and her mother. The outward resemblance serves to point to an inner one, which in turn explains their closeness to one another. In addition, the film contains another, less obvious doubling: the parts of Anna's and Maria's daughter are played by the same actress, Bergman's own daughter Linn. In this case, the reason for the doubling seems to be that it enhances the contrast between the two mothers. To Maria, the living daughter is merely a doll; in the scene where they appear together, the daughter significantly carries a doll, indicating that it is to her what she is to her mother. To Anna, by contrast, the dead daughter is fully alive.

One of the most enigmatic elements of the film is Karin's self-mutilation. Karin's and Fredrik's dinner – dressed in black, they eat fish and drink red (!) wine, for "*perhaps it is Good Friday*" – is marked by cold phrases between moments of icy silence. A meal of hatred rather than love, their dinner is an anti-Communion, revealing their complete lack of contact. Suddenly, Karin fumbles with her glass. It shatters and the red wine is spilt on the white table-cloth, an ironic visual comment on the formula of the Communion: "The blood of Jesus, shed for you." Here, it is instead purity that is stained, perhaps at the moment when Karin is thinking of her secret lover. Alternatively, the spilt glass and the shed wine (the blood) could be seen as expressions of her longing for death. Her spilling of the wine is visibly linked with Joakim's (Henning Moritzen) suicide at-

tempt: when he has driven the knife into his breast, the blood spreads across his clean, white shirt.

Karin takes a splinter from the broken glass and says, obviously with reference to life: "It's nothing but a tissue of lies." Once inside her boudoir, she "*inserts the splinter in her vagina.*" When Fredrik appears, she shows him her bleeding womb, then smears the blood from it around her mouth, declaring again: "It's nothing but a tissue of lies."

Karin clearly wants to make herself sexually inaccessible to her husband. But the sequence means more than that. Having brought the glass in touch with her mouth (the organ of verbal contact), Karin brings it in touch with her womb (the organ of sexual contact). The red wine is figuratively identified with the blood that is moved from womb to mouth. The repeated expression "a tissue of lies" is put in a visual context which makes it pregnant, indicative both of verbal (spiritual) and sexual (sensuous) contact. To Karin there is no true communication. Man is hopelessly lonely in life.

When Agnes dies, it is Anna who closes her eyes. We hear someone weeping, and since Anna, turned away from the camera, is in frame, we believe that it is she. We soon discover that it is Maria, at the other end of the room, who is weeping. The arrangement of sound and image emphasizes how Anna's unsentimental closeness to Agnes contrasts with Maria's sentimental distance.

When Agnes is dead, Anna hears "*a peculiar sound – very faint, very remote,*" soon identified as the desperate crying of a child. Hurrying to Agnes' bed, she discovers "*that the dead woman has been crying; the tears have run down her cheeks.*" In the film, Anna's emotional experience of the dead woman is expressed through a subjective camera movement, a swift zoom-in on Agnes' face. Agnes wears a baby's hood on her head, indicating that Anna now merges her with her own dead daughter. It is one of the most dreamlike passages in the film.

For Agnes' miraculous 'resurrection' Bergman gives the following explanation:

Death is the ultimate loneliness; that is what is so important. Agnes's death has been caught up halfway out into the void. I can't see that there's anything odd about that. Yes, by Christ there is! This situation has never been known, either in reality or at the movies.

But it has been known on the stage! In *The Ghost Sonata*, the ghosts (the Milkmaid, the Consul) are nothing but people whose death has been "*caught up.*" However, just as these characters are no real ghosts but incarnations of the Old Man's guilt feelings, so we

should not take Agnes' resurrection literally. Rather, we may imagine that whatever Agnes is doing after she has died is communicated solely through internal narrators. Anna's compassion for Agnes here converges with the guilt feelings of the sisters. In different ways, their thoughts revolve around the recently dead woman. Significantly, Agnes in the Swedish original uses the plural form of the pronoun when she tells Anna: "For you [Sw. 'er'] perhaps it is a dream."¹¹

Actually, Agnes' 'resurrection' serves primarily to express, in a pregnant way, the three women's attitude not to an abstract character called Death, as in *The Seventh Seal*, but to a dying and dead person. The purpose, however, is the same. In either case, it concerns man's confrontation with "the ultimate loneliness." Like most of the characters in *The Seventh Seal*, Karin and Maria try to escape a confrontation with what eventually will become their own fate. One is reminded of the medieval idea of the dead as a *speculum*, a mirror, of the living: "What you are, I have been. What I am, you will be."

Like the nameless, mute Girl in *The Seventh Seal*, Anna accepts death. It is she who hears Agnes' crying. It is she who remains with the dead woman, both literally by keeping watch over her, and figuratively by keeping the memory of her alive. When the sisters and their husbands depart, in a very Chekhovian scene, Anna is left alone with the memory of Agnes merging with that of her daughter: "Faintly, very far away and scarcely discernible, she hears the CHILD'S crying."

The contrast between life and death is expressed also spatially. While Agnes is still alive, her black sick-bed with its blood-red spread seems located at one end of the large red living room. When she has died, the bed appears to be in a smaller room with a door to the living room. The dreamlike change indicates that the room of life has now been separated from the room of death. Anna is significantly the only one who moves freely between the two rooms, the only one who accepts both.

In his 1973 staging of *The Ghost Sonata*, Bergman replaced Strindberg's hope for divine grace with a belief in human love. The same idea is expressed in *Cries and Whispers*, where Anna, not God, dries the tears of the dead woman and where the fact that Agnes' crying does not cease when she dies seems to contradict the words of the Revelation concerning the solace awaiting the blessed after death.

However, after the paradisaic flashback of the four women in the swing, the film ends with the assurance: "Then the cries and the whispers cease," an assurance pointing to the following passage from Revelation (21.4):

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.¹²

Unlike the situation in *The Ghost Sonata*, the final vision in *Cries and Whispers* is only implicitly a flashforward of a heavenly paradise; explicitly it is a flashback of an earthly one. Through Agnes' diary, we witness the happy communion between the three sisters. Anna is also present, rocking the sisters as a mother would her children. Unlike the diary-writer, Agnes, we realize that the togetherness of the sisters is purely momentary and that the only lasting communion is the one between Agnes and Anna.

As the diary-writing Agnes had done earlier, Anna now recalls the happy moment of communion in the park. Significantly, her reading of the diary takes place in her own room. Again, we see the flowers and the apples. Anna is sitting on her bed, looking down at her daughter's empty bed, thinking of Agnes. She lights the candle we earlier saw her blow out and then starts to read from the diary which she has kept in her drawer. The white burning candle, slowly dissolving into Agnes, dressed in white, expresses Anna's hopeful faith that Agnes now lives in a blessed hereafter. Agnes at this point resembles her dead mother, whom we saw earlier in the same environment, she, too, in white. The Chopin mazurka, which earlier formed a bridge between Anna's intercession for her dead daughter and Agnes' memory of her dead mother, now returns. Suggestively, the music combines the two 'memorial' sequences. When Bergman first has Anna read aloud from Agnes' diary and then, when the flashback begins, change to Agnes' voice, it is an expression of how Anna at this moment experiences Agnes as very alive, very close to her. The whole sound-image arrangement indicates that the dead Agnes in Anna's imagination merges with her dead daughter. Agnes' words in the diary about her moment of absolute happiness are applicable also to Anna – but for her, the feeling of happiness concerns a communion not with the living but with the dead.

For the believing Anna, the final words can only mean that Agnes has found rest in God. Some spectators will share her hope. Others will prefer to see the final silence simply as a sign that Agnes has found rest in the earth.