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TYSTNADEN (The Silence), Sweden, 1963

Cert: X. *dist:* Gala. *p.c.:* Svensk Filmindustri. *p/d:* Ingmar Bergman. *assistant d:* Lars-Erik Liedholm, Lenn Hjortsberg. *sc:* Ingmar Bergman. *ph:* Sven Nykvist. *ed:* Ulla Ryghe. *a.d.:* P. A. Lundgren. *cost:* Marik Vos. *sd:* Stig Flodin, Bo Leveren, Tage Sjöborg. *l.p.:* Ingrid Thulin (*Ester*), Gunnel Lindblom (*Anna*), Jörgen Lindström (*Johan*), Håkan Jahnberg (*Floor Waiter in Hotel*), Birger Malmsten (*Café Waiter*), The Eduardini (*The Dwarfs*), Eduardo Gutierrez (*The Dwarf Manager*), Lissi Alandh (*Woman in Theatre*), Leif Forstenberg (*Man in Theatre*). 8,516 ft. 94 mins. *Original running time:* 96 mins. *Subtitles.*

Ester, her sister Anna, and Anna's ten-year-old son Johan are returning to Sweden by train from a holiday through a strange country. Ester has a serious lung illness, and they break their journey at a town where the streets are narrow, the people are always hurrying, and tanks clatter round corners. Their hotel is vast and empty except for a troupe of Spanish dwarf entertainers and an elderly waiter. There is tension between the sisters: Ester, more masculine, repressed, given to self-abuse and alcohol, regarding her younger sister with a mixture of suppressed lesbianism and responsibility; Anna, lustful almost to nymphomania, resentful of Ester's dominance and hating her for it. Johan wanders uneasily between the two and along the limbo corridors of the hotel. Anna, restless in the sultry heat, goes out into the town where, aroused by the sight of an amorous couple in a variety theatre, she rushes away and picks up a waiter in a café. Returning to the hotel, she defiantly relates to her sister the broad details of her pick-up, and then goes off into an empty bedroom along the corridor to make love with him again. When Ester, learning where she is from Johan, knocks on the door, Anna unlocks it and begins making love a third time, in front of her sister, but breaks off to rail hysterically at her until she goes out. Next day, Anna, cold and spiteful, departs with Johan, leaving the dying Ester to the care of the elderly waiter whose language she cannot understand.

In *Tystnaden*, as in *Nattvardsgästerna*, with which it is closely connected, Bergman is delving still deeper into his own private world, so deep that he has lost contact with the outside almost completely. In spite of masterly performances from the whole cast and some impressive sequences—the opening as the train edges in to the town past a moonscape mountain range, the last blaring brazen trump as Ester struggles for breath after her sister has left her—the audience is never involved. It is as though the film were being viewed through a glass screen. Its basic ingredients are clear enough: antagonism between sisters, sexual immaturity, an obsession with and yet contempt for the flesh, and a dominant father image in the background: factors which all merge together in one great failing, a characteristic which runs through nearly all of Bergman's films, the failure to communicate and the consequent sense of isolation. This presumably accounts for the deliberately shoddy photography of the town outside, and the vast emptiness of the *Marienbad*-like hotel (the world outside, which is not real anyway, can be shut out; but the real world within is empty). But the image is too cerebral, it has too little connection with the drama of the sisters, or with that of Ester herself about whom we learn and feel far too little. There are strong signs of a return to *Törst*, but without the same involvement in the natures of the two antagonists. In spite of the accuracy of detail, the characters themselves seem to remain at the level of symbols, and this is emphasised by Bergman's iron control of the so-called erotic scenes, which are deliberately unglamorous and unerotic. They make their point—but it is a point of argument and not of character. Bergman has fallen between the two stools of stylisation (in which he is clearly less happy than either Resnais or Antonioni) and realism, and has failed to resolve the resultant tension between them. Because of this, in the final analysis we do not care in the least what happens to either Anna or Ester, for they have not impinged.

Suitability: A.

N.M.H.

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