

Document Citation

Title	Swedish cinema from Ingeborg Holm to Fanny and Alexander -- Excerpt
Author(s)	Peter Cowie
Source	<i>Swedish Institute</i>
Date	1985
Type	book excerpt
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Kungajakt (The royal hunt), Sjöberg, Alf, 1944

a *Mother and Wild Birds*. The leading characters are members of an underground movement in an unnamed Baltic country that is clearly a police state. The frequent quarrels among the agents, and the gloomy gatherings in bare rooms emphasise Sjöberg's fatalism and the perplexities of a Europe drifting inexorably into war. One finds the same measure of disillusionment in Carné's *Quai des Brumes* and *Le Jour Se Lève* (Aino Taube as the heroine wears a Michèle Morgan-type raincoat), and in Graham Greene's books of the period, such as *A Gun for Sale* and *The Confidential Agent*. But Sjöberg, for all his years in the theatre, reveals himself a master not only at composing his shots, but also at asserting the rhythm of the film. Bursts of movement contrast with moments of stillness and thus describe the punctuated lives of the people in the film. Bitter, recriminating conversations are followed by swift action, and the final episode, showing Max laying a smoke-screen round the lake, is cut with magnificent assurance. Human relationships begin to matter again in the Swedish cinema after a decade of levity and false emotion. At the same time Anders Henrikson was directing *A Crime* along similar lines.

Den blomstertid (1940), the first two words of a familiar Swedish hymn, and *Hem från Babylon* (1941) did not live up to the promise of Sjöberg's first two films, although the setting of the Western coast of Sweden was adroitly used in *Den blomstertid*. The *Royal Hunt* (*Kungajakt*, 1943) made at the height of the war period, has the same veiled reference to Nazism as Molander's *Ride Tonight!* It summons up the ceremonial and the dormant virility of the Eighteenth century as cleverly as Renoir's *La Marseillaise*. Sweden's position in the north was uneasy around 1775, and there were Russian efforts to overthrow Gustaf III. Wismar (Holger Löwenadler) is an outcast of the Royal Court who plots with the Russian envoy to tamper with the King's rifle during a hunt. But he refuses to call in foreign troops to accomplish the mission. One man, Rehusen, sets himself against this intrigue. Sjöberg shows him as a symbol of a strong, loyal Sweden. When Rehusen is captured by the plotters at the height of the crisis, he flings back his head scornfully and says, "You can take us to court for being unfaithful to the new government but you can never quell our spirit!"

Regrettably, the tone of the film changes in the final scenes, and the gleeful antics of Stig Järrel's Ridderkrantz as he and Rehusen put an end to the conspiracy, belong more to Rafael Sabatini than to the precisely ordered period atmosphere of Sjöberg's picture. No other Swedish director could evoke the extremes of Eighteenth century life so well as Sjöberg does in the opening sequences, with, at first, a duel being fought under a bright afternoon sun and the patronising eyes of the courtiers, and then a tavern brawl set in motion by night, with gnarled faces looming out of the smoke and the shadows. The hunt itself is a regal centre-piece, a Watteau canvas come to life as the white horses spread over the fields to the accompaniment of Lars-Erik Larsson's martial music. There is a cavalier, gallivanting rhythm to the film at these moments that is established entirely by Sjöberg's professional eye for contrasts of light and darkness and by his inspiring his players to enjoy their fancied roles. //

Rune Lindström wrote the play, *The Road to Heaven*, while he was studying



Mats Ersson (Rune Lindström) and his fiancée Marit (Eivor Landström) in *THE ROAD TO HEAVEN*

to be a priest at Uppsala University. Ever since it has been performed annually in Leksand in Dalarna, and has become accepted in the provincial folk-art of Sweden, Lindström himself plays the leading role in Alf Sjöberg's film (*Himlaspelet*, 1942), which many Swedish critics acknowledge to be one of the finest products of the Scandinavian cinema between 1920 and 1950. It is part allegory, part fantasy. Mats Ersson is a young peasant who is naïve and gullible to a degree that seems at first ridiculous, and gradually rather admirable. His *fiancée*, Marit, is condemned quite falsely as a witch after a plague has swept the village and she is burnt at the stake. Mats strides off on the "road to heaven," to seek justice and recompense. He is inspired to do so by the murals in the local church (Swedish peasant paintings are legion in Dalarna and are also the source of *The Seventh Seal*). Mats is a *Candide*, the very spirit of optimism. In another sense he resembles Bunyan's Christian as he is helped along the route by various characters. He marches steadfastly to the accompaniment of a stirring folk-tune.

Inevitably, he is assailed by the Devil, and is led into a city where he is encouraged to dance and drink to his heart's content. He escapes after a terrible fracas, and some time later discovers copper ore in the fields. He abandons his lofty aims, and grows rich and bloated, old and cruel. He is saved on his deathbed by the Good Father (Anders Henrikson) who has watched him from the very

SWEDEN (#2) - PETER COWE