

## Document Citation

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THE NAKED NIGHT (Sweden, 1953)

Production: Sandrew Productions  
Producer: Rune Waldekranz  
Director: Ingmar Bergman  
Scenario: Ingmar Bergman  
Photography: Sven Nykvist & Hilding Bladh  
Music: Karl-Birger Blomdahl  
Cast: Harriet Andersson (Anne), Ake Greenberg (Albert), Hasse Ekman (Frost), Alma (Annika Tretow), Agda (Kiki)

During the second decade of our century, the Swedish cinema occupied an internationally prominent position. Its reputation resting mainly on the work of two great directors, Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller, it waned rapidly with their ill-fated departure for Hollywood, in the early twenties. The Swedish films of this period, mostly derived from serious literary sources, had far-reaching influence on the advance of the medium; although tending toward somewhat self-conscious illustration, they had the merit of setting standards of artistic and intellectual discipline far above the prevailing American stereotypes of the time. But the more significant contribution of the Scandinavian film-makers was their concern with pictorial composition, consistence of character, and purity of style. To this day, the Swedish cinema has preserved many of the essential qualities, both literary and visual, that originally distinguished the work of the older masters.

The slightly younger director, Alf Sjöberg ("Torment," "Miss Julie") bridged the extended interval to the nineteen-forties, when a vigorous intellectual movement revived the dormant creative forces and produced vital new ones. In 1944 Ingmar Bergman wrote the script for Sjöberg's "Torment" and, as one of his compatriots put it, "the second international epoch of the Swedish cinema had begun." The young writer's originality and demoniacal power as well as many of the moral, emotional and psychological problems obsessing or haunting him, became at once evident. But this non-conforming representative of a new generation was neither rebel, nor partisan. Involved, worried, intensely subjective, he also shared with his nordic contemporaries the pessimism, anguish and feverish restlessness which characterized the intellectual climate in Sweden toward the end of the last World War.

A well-informed writer, Erik Ulrichsen, remarks that "Bergman's work is at once terribly Swedish and terribly personal. In his films, an exceptionally sensitive and highly-strung personality high-lights typically Swedish problems." This unmistakable, terribly personal quality of his work, rather than its national tone, has never ceased to provoke controversies. A good deal has been written about this enigmatic, immensely gifted and productive young writer-director. Yet it is hard to find steady points of reference in a creative personality which is characteristically unpredictable and unsettled. He is a versatile and prolific writer (aside from being a successful stage director); but the thematic complexity and literary merit of his twenty-odd motion pictures and scenarios is less significant than their cinematic excellence.



Bergman's literacy tends to mislead the critic. A film like "Smiles of a Summer Night," with its vicious irony and sardonic humor, its distortions and exaggerations, its sophistication and style, appeals naturally to the intellect; but first and foremost it is cinema at its very best. Nearly twenty years after Renoir's "The Rules of the Game," it appears as another cinematic document of the times of comparable rank and penetration.

"The Naked Night," made two years previously, is unmistakably "literary." The ghost of Strindberg is recognizable in the equivocal human relationships, the touches of gratuitous cruelty, the excessive dwelling on suffering. It is easy to see that this film owes much of its peculiar tension to the discrepancy between the apparent detachment of the observer and the violence and passion he observes; between the diagnostic precision with which the people are exposed and analyzed and their own frustrating unawareness and inarticulateness. In many ways, the effect resembles Fellini's treatment of similarly primitive, suffering human creatures ("La Strada," "Cabiria"). But because Bergman is more driven and obsessed, he tends to overstate; because he is morally more involved and sexually more worried, he tends to become dogmatic. This ambivalence causes sudden shifts of emphasis or breaks of style: coldly calculated effects alternate with spontaneous flashes of genuine inspiration. Actually it becomes never quite clear whether or when the dramatic situation is reflecting the author's or the play-characters' tortured emotions. It is miraculous that, in the end, this complex web emerges as a masterly motion picture in which the heterogeneous elements fall into place with unflinching precision.

The film is as unique and admirable as its creator. It starts boldly with a high-pitched climax - one of the most brilliant and astounding scenes ever filmed. While it may appear as though this weird beginning had but a loose connection with the subsequent events, it would be hard to conceive of a more pointed allegory of human humiliation, introducing, as it were, the main theme in an unexpected key. Cinematically, the crucial observation is that the fantastic episode is transposed into wholly concrete images. The flashback, so often abused merely to disguise weak motivation, is here used as a legitimate artistic device. For as the main drama gets under way, one's visual expectancy has become extraordinarily acute, while the key motif is lingering almost ominously in one's memory. This awareness of the specific image quality is different from the appreciation of beautiful cinematography or cunning camera work. Visual effects may be used to disguise as easily as they may serve to disclose. In the one instance they fill in for a lack of significance, in the other they reveal it.

In the "Naked Night" many of the most important scenes are compressed into tightly confined space, with hardly any room for the camera to roam about or to exploit the merely picturesque. Instead the images flow magically around and about the central figure or detail so that space assumes unwonted dimensions. Thus the scene of Anne in the stage store room, for instance, becomes almost entirely visual drama, a "motion picture" - which is precisely what a good film ought to be.



Ingmar Bergman Filmography: Crisis (1946), It Rains on Our Love (1946),  
Ship to Dreamland (1947), Musik in the Dark (1948), Sea-port (1948),  
Prison (1949), Thirst (1949), To Joy (1950), It Couldn't Happen Here (1950),  
Forbidden Interlude (1951), Woman Waiting (1952), Summer with Monika (1953),  
The Naked Night (1953), A Lesson in Love (1954), Woman-Dream (1955),  
Smiles of a Summer Night (1955), Wild Strawberries (1957), Brink of  
Life (1958).

Next Film Program: Saturday, January 24, Battle of the Rails (France, 1945),  
directed by Rene Clement

Program Notes: George Amberg