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W Dorrison

CARL DREYER

Ebbe Neergaard

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CARL DREYER

A Film Director's Work

Ebbe Neergaard

Translated by Marianne Helweg

NEW INDEX SERIES No. 1

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Editor's Note

This is the first of a new series of Indexes to the work of important film directors, published by the British Film Institute and formerly issued as supplements to *Sight & Sound* and now to appear, in expanded form, as separate publications four times a year. The next three titles in the series will be :

Frank Capra, by Richard Griffith

Rene Clair, by Jean George Auriol

S. M. Eisenstein, by Jay Leyda.

The stills from *The Day of Wrath, Vampyr, Leaves from Satan's Book*, the cover portrait of Dreyer and close-up of Falconetti in *Jeanne d'Arc* are from the National Film Library collection. The others are reproduced here by kind permission of the publishers of the original Danish version of the book, Atheneum Dansk Forlag, Copenhagen.

Foreword

THE aim of this brief study is not only to write a monograph on an important film director. I hope I have also succeeded in contributing something of general interest about the very heart of film-making itself—film direction. Not many directors' work is better suited to illustrate this theme than Carl Dreyer's. In large-scale film concerns the director often becomes just a link in the production process. But in small countries there are more opportunities for the film director to control his film completely from the first page of the script to the final cut, when the film is ready for showing. Carl Dreyer is a great director from a small country. His work has always been marked by strong individuality, which can be studied from his first film to his twelfth till now. By doing this it is possible, I think, to reach a very clear idea of what direction means to a film.

When that great exponent of the theatre, Sarah Bernhardt, agreed to take part in a film—something considered worse than buffoonery at the time—she excused herself by declaring that this was her only means of obtaining immortality. Only very few extracts of her films now remain. For films do vanish, and it is often only at the last moment that we succeed in rescuing fragments or even single shots from films that have been of great importance. In this book I have tried to collect most of the relevant information and to reproduce some typical shots from the work of one of the most important directors in Denmark and, to my mind, in the world. It is only a little book, but even this would have been impossible without the kind help of a great number of people. Most of all I want to thank Carl Dreyer himself for his invaluable help with information and illustrations from *Mikael* and *Vampyr*.

EBBE NEERGAARD.

Before the Films

Carl Theodor Dreyer was born in Copenhagen on February 3rd, 1889. His mother was Swedish; she died shortly after his birth. He was adopted by a Danish family who never ceased to let him feel that he ought to be grateful for the food he was given, and that he really had no claim to anything, considering that his mother had managed to escape paying for him by departing this world.

The boy was given piano lessons. This was not so much out of consideration for his development and education; the lessons were free, because the daughter of the house was married to a talented musician. But it was made quite clear to him that it was his duty to pay back as soon as possible all the expense he had caused the family. He must learn to play and earn some money quickly.

However, the music helped him to escape from the unfriendly atmosphere. He got them to agree to let him have an attic to himself, which he papered and made into his den. There he would sit and dream about getting away—about independence. Sometimes in his silent attic he would conduct an imaginary orchestra and bow deeply to the applause of an imaginary audience. The piano stood in the sitting-room, where he dutifully practised. The family watched his progress, and when they thought him adequately proficient, they suggested that he should look for a job. Many cafés and restaurants employed young men to accompany the clients' chatter with a little music on the piano. An advertisement was put in the newspaper.

Eventually an answer came from a cafe in Store Kongensgade; their regular pianist had let them down. The symphony conductor from the attic was to take his place, and, glum and unwilling, proceeded to the cafe. At the end of the evening he was told he need not trouble to come back. In the home which expected to be paid in full for the trouble he had caused, sighs could be

heard—those discreet, almost unnoticeable sighs that burn the soul worse than acid. Something else had to be found—something that took him away and gave him a life of his own. With a tolerable School Certificate he was able to obtain various office jobs; for example, in the Copenhagen electricity service. But he was longing to get into the Great Northern Telegraph Company because there he would have a chance of getting much further away; to the Orient. At length he got a reply to his application, but when he went for his interview his expectations were soon dashed. They wanted him for the accountancy department in Copenhagen. It would be some time before he would get a chance to go abroad. The salary was good, but he was filled with impatience, and when he had spent the day making entries in ledgers, he was ready to throw himself into reading in his spare time. They were mostly on the history of art. He also went to lectures. One day he had to accompany the old accountant down into the fireproof vaults. When they had passed the steel door and were standing in the great cellar with its air of mustiness, the old man suddenly stood still, pondering. Then he pointed quietly at the long row of huge grey, canvas-backed files, dating back several decades, and he said with a certain naive mixture of pride and wonder: "There you see my whole life." But the young clerk with the serious expression on his round childish face said nothing; he was overcome by a feeling of horror. He could not rid himself of the thought that he might one day stand there and say to a man fifty years younger than himself: "There you see my life." He resigned his post next morning without any idea of what he would do next.

A director of the Great Northern Telegraph Company thought highly of the young man. He called him and asked if he knew that his career in the Company's service had already been mapped out; he was to spend so many years at headquarters, then so many years in one place and so many years in another, with a good fat pension waiting for him at the end. The young man could give no other answer than: "That's just why." Mr. Suenson measured him for a moment with a cool and thoughtful eye. Then he expressed the hope that the young man would not regret the step he had taken. The young man bowed and walked out. He has not regretted it.

He had rejected the way to a sure future, and from that day began a new life. He had become a member of the organisation called "Emancipated Youth," and he took part in the activities of the radical University Students' Club. He started writing theatre notices for radical provincial newspapers. Soon he was working for the Copenhagen papers as well; first *Berlingske Tidende*, then *Riget* (the *Nation*) and, finally, *Extrabladet*. This was in a way a "loose" form of existence, judged by his childhood standards. But he was not, and never became, a bohemian. On the contrary—he tells himself how he was at this time being "trained to work and to see the ludicrous side of all

those authors, actors, journalists, painters and sculptors who drifted round the literary cafés and considered themselves of tremendous importance." He belonged to the batch of journalists who came to the fore during the years just before the first world war. They were more hard-boiled than literary, and looked upon journalism as hard work concerned with life in the raw. By " in the raw " they meant that they got as close as possible to quickly moving events and reported them straight from the ear and the eye onto the paper. The change from the fireproof vaults of Store Nordiske to journalism could not have been more violent or dramatic; he joined *Berlingske Tidende* as their Air Sports reporter! He was the only Danish journalist who was present on the Swedish side when Robert Svendsen undertook his famous flight across the Sound to Sweden in 1910. Shortly afterwards he was himself the first passenger on board an aeroplane across the Sound. He trained himself as balloon pilot, made thirteen flights in them, and for a time considered becoming a flier. But he gave up the idea, because he really liked being a journalist, and he reckoned that, as a career, it would bring him closer to the world of theatre and literature. He did not think of films at that time.

His period with *Extrabladet* was to be of most value to him, particularly because of the editor, Frejlif Olsen. " He was equally lovable both as boss and man," says Dreyer, " I admired him blindly. I have always felt that he, who was so free from any form of affectation himself, must have had a strong influence on me. He taught me to abhor everything that was not genuine." On one point in particular this influence had a marked effect; the editor's withering contempt for actors translated itself in Dreyer to a contempt for all play-acting in the bad sense. When he later became a director, he demanded a very high standard of natural behaviour from his artists both in their work and their life. Frejlif Olsen can have had no idea that he was training an artist to understand the fundamental demand of a camera eye: simple, clear-cut natural acting.

But for the moment he was only concerned with journalism. He and his colleagues lashed out with biting but humorous attacks on the affectation and self-centredness of the literary café inhabitants. People called them scandal-mongers, but this was not true. Here was a new type of mind in conflict with the out-of-date, ruthless and witty exposure of people who for the most part were more " artistic natures " than artists. For a year or two under the modest pseudonym " Tommen," a series of very malicious articles appeared under the title " Heroes of Our Time," illustrated by Carl Jensen.

While he was still working for *Extrabladet*—about 1912—he got a job with Nordisk Films Kompagni, starting off with dialogue-writing. Later he was given scripts to do, and, on his initiative, the company started buying novels which he adapted for films. Amongst others he wrote the script for Rousthoj's *Hotel Paradise* which was first filmed by Robert Dineson in 1917. By degrees

he came to be entrusted with the editing of films, and for five or six years he worked at these different jobs, which gave him the wide knowledge and technical experience so valuable to him later on. It was not surprising, then, that in 1917 or 1918, when he suddenly asked why he should not be allowed to direct a film, he was given permission to go ahead without much difficulty. He was one of the company's most able men, had learned the alpha and omega of film-making: scripting and editing. Now he wanted to embark on the middle stage, and he chose for his first directing task the novel by Karl Emil Franzo, *The President*.

From about 1918, when he began to work on his first film, his life—at least that side of it which is of interest to the public—has been identical with his films and filming, completely absorbed by it. In quite a different way than he had dreamed of as a boy, he had become the conductor of orchestras. The vague longing that he had felt towards music, art, theatre and literature now found expression and shape in an art form which, at its best, demands perception of all the other art forms, as well as an ability to use them in a completely new way. This ability had been sharpened by his apprenticeship to journalism; he had acquired the critical attitude towards superficial acting, which is a necessary prelude to instructing actors in filming. And he had been trained in the modern school of journalism which was not inhibited by conventional ideas and literary traditions, and was, therefore, ready to meet life with open eyes, which was just what was needed in film pioneers. Travelling, which had been his greatest wish as a boy, now became reality. If you follow his twelve films till now, you get a feeling of a perpetually changing life of travel in time and space, imagination and reality.

The President

(Nordisk Films Kompagni.) *Script:* Dreyer, *adapted from the novel by* Karl Emil Franzo. *Main parts: Title role, the president of the court, Karl Victor v. Sendlingen*—Halvard Hoff; *his father*—Elith Pio; *his grandfather*—Carl Meyer; *Maika*—Jacoba Jessen; *Franz and Brigitta, the president's servants*—Hallander Helleman and Fanny Petersen; *Victorine, the president's daughter*—Olga Raphael-Linden; *her mother*—Betty Kirkeby; *Hr. Berger, her defending Counsel*—Richard Christensen; *the prosecutor*—Peter Nielsen; *Victorine's future husband*—Jon Iversen. *Photography:* Hans Vaago. *Decor:* Dreyer. *World Premiere:* Panoptikon Cinema, Copenhagen, February 9th, 1920.

THE PRESIDENT, which had its premiere on the 9th of February, 1920, bore the stamp of Nordisk Films' preference for melodrama. It is a touching, harrowing and over-sentimentalised story with a German or Austrian setting in a provincial town around the middle of the last century. It treats the classical problem of the "great public figure": a judge, who is faced with the choice between keeping his dignified and respected position as a lawyer, or saving his (inevitably illegitimate) daughter from going to her death in expiation of a child murder which she had committed (and this is the meliorating factor) but not in full possession of her wits. He naturally chooses her salvation, her marital happiness and his own noble death. In spite of its ingredients, the film contains some promising moments, but it was both the first and the last time that Dreyer chose such very novelettish material.

The thing that stamps *The President* as good old melodramatic "Nordisk Film" style is the moral in it and the acting in the big emotional scenes. The two things are closely allied; when you have a story with not less than three seductions in a row and several illegitimate children, it is to be expected that the acting will be somewhat intense. In the prison scene where the stricken president visits his illegitimate and condemned daughter whom he has never seen before, there is rather too much of limply hanging arms, appealing hands and wild eyes. At the end, the daughter throws herself into the father's arms with a choking sob: "Father!" But Dreyer was a beginner and did not at this stage worry much about directing actors. Not until the film was finished did he realise with a certain cold horror that the acting was in the usual melodramatic style hardly favoured by the Frejlif Olsen school of critics.

The finest sequence in the film is both exciting and well constructed. The president has been promoted and is to leave the little town: the townspeople are giving him a farewell reception at the town hall. But at the same time he has arranged with his old servants to stage his daughter's escape from the prison. Shots of the reception alternate with shots of the silent and hasty preparations for flight. While a sculpture of the president is being unveiled, while speeches are being made about his incorruptible sense of justice, while a torchlight procession in his honour passes through the market place—you see his features in close-ups; pale, rigid, but with a desperate determination which reveals that his thoughts are with the other sequence, the flight and the daughter. In this scene Halvard Hoff's immovable mask was far more effective than in the great emotional scenes. Dreyer directed the acting in the *editing* of his film.

All Dreyer's scripts are written in a kind of short story form. They only give the dramatic situations in broad outlines, not the shots in detail. They are not proper shooting scripts, but notes on the visions he has had when he was working out the film mentally. He uses them during the shooting to retain his original inspiration. It is therefore not surprising to find references, for example,

to someone blushing or growing pale, nor for a silent film script to mention the sound of somebody's voice. Dreyer claims that this kind of script leaves the director much less hampered than a shooting script in which every detail is planned out beforehand. Poetry and imagination can easily vanish when the human material has to be given such thorough technical labelling, and it becomes difficult to incorporate new ideas that spring up during the shooting, or change the part of an actor who proves more talented than expected, if the details are so watertight that the smallest alteration brings the whole structure down.

Dreyer was more interested in those scenes in *The President* where the principals become part of the whole filmic construction of a sequence than in the melodramatic ones, where he let them act in their usual manner. But this only bears out that the two sides of film-directing which interested him most in this first venture were: the small parts and the décor. He chose old people to play old parts: Hallander Hellemann and Fanny Petersen (who was not an actress but the wife of a theatre manager) were of an age to fit their rôles. This was new at the time; it was usual to make up young actors to look old. When he wanted a crowd in the court scene where the president's daughter is condemned to death, he avoided the lists of walkers-on and collected types outside. Some of them he found in the Copenhagen Glovers' Guild. He had observed that the eye of the camera cannot be deceived; it shows up everything false: old people must be real old people in films. It was not so much the demand for naturalism as filmic necessity which made him choose the genuine rather than the artificial.

His concentration on small parts meant that he wished to make the basic atmosphere of his film more real. The people who provided the setting and the milieu fascinated Dreyer; they belonged to the décor. But his attitude to décor was also quite new, he refused to let it appear as "décor." At that time a director merely ordered a "bourgeois drawing room" or a "salon," and it was delivered ready-made by contracted firms and artists. Dreyer built his own scenery, and chose the furniture with great care. He wanted to create rooms which showed the character of the person living in them—the president's apartment was furnished with stiff, elegant, symmetrically arranged pieces which echoed his correct and disciplined personality.

Leaves from Satan's Book

(Nordisk Films Kompagni.) *Script:* Edgar Hoyer, *from a novel by* Marie Corelli, *re-written by* Dreyer (under protest from Hoyer). *Star part: Satan*—Helge Nissen. *Main parts:* I.—*In Palestine: Jesus*—Halvard Hoff; *Judas*—Jacob Texiere; *the apostles*—Erling Hansson, *Hermansen* (*artist*), Weizel

(*carpenter*), Gylche (*bookbinder*), Wilh. Jensen (*carpenter*) and other artisans. The Pharisee—Satan. II.—*The Inquisition Don Gomez*—Hallander Hellemann; *Isabella, his daughter*—Ebon Strandin; *Don Fernandez, her young tutor*—Johannes Meyer; *the major domo*—Nalle Halden; *The Grand Inquisitor*—Satan. III.—*The French Revolution. Marie Antoinette*—Tenna Kraft; *Contesse de Chambord—Emma Wiehe; Contesse Genevieve, her daughter*—(a French actress); *Joseph, valet to the Chambords; later revolutionary commissioner of police*—Elith Pio; *Erneste Durand, formerly in the service of the Chambords, now leading revolutionary*—Satan. IV.—*Suomis Red Rose* (Finland, Spring 1918) *Paavo Rahja, stationmaster*—Carlo Wieth; *Siri, his wife*—Clara Pontoppidan; *Tautaniemi, porter*—Carl Hillebrandt; *Naima, peasant girl*—Karina Bell (*film debut*); *Ivan, former monk, now Red Guard*—Satan. *Photography:* George Schneevoigt. *Decor;* Dreyer, *with technical assistance of* Axel Bruun and Jens G. Lind. *Premiere:* Copenhagen, January 24th, 1921.

One evening in 1918, Frede Skaarup, a well-known film and theatre manager, had invited all Nordisk Film directors to see American films, because he thought they might learn something from them. Amongst the films was D. W. Griffiths' *Intolerance.* After the show, which did not end until four in the morning, Dreyer walked home through the quiet street and let the impressions of the evening sink in, wondering how the things he had seen could best be used in Danish films. Nordisk films had from time to time treated great themes, but only in a naively moralising and romantic style: *Pax Eterna*, in 1916 which, in the middle of the war, depicted a noble hospital nurse who brings about eternal peace by inspiring the leaders and the peoples of Europe to form a United States of Europe—and *The Sky Ship*, which came out in February, 1918, a fantasy about an airship which takes a group of people to Mars in order to convert its presumed barbarians to civilisation. On arrival, however, they find that the Martians wear white robes and are much more righteous and noble than earthly inhabitants. Griffith moralised in a different way; he attacked the unceasing wickedness of mankind throughout the ages. It was not only the magnitude of Griffith's theme that attracted Dreyer, but his combination of fantasy and realism. In *Leaves from Satan's Book*, Dreyer shows how the devil leads man to betray his neighbour, and how he disguises himself unrecognisably through the ages: first, the pharisee who leads Judas to betray Christ—the Grand Inquisitor in Renaissance Spain—a revolutionary policeman under the French Revolution, and a revolutionary monk in Finland in 1918. The film suffers from obvious weaknesses in the script, which is rather too naive in places, and it is also over-simplified in construction, the four episodes following each other with a certain monotony of action. It does not, as Griffith did, emphasise the human theme rather than the time theme. But it is, of course,

quite unfair to compare a man who is working on his second film with one who has reached mastery through ten years' experience. In comparison with his first film, *Leaves from Satan's Book* shows astonishing progress, and it is the only film made in Denmark in which this type of allegorical theme has been treated with any success.

In *Leaves from Satan's Book*, Dreyer continued to experiment with new ideas for décor. Some sequences have an expressive simplicity of effect not previously seen in those days of overcrowded film interiors. In this film he built large complete sets, not for the sake of publicity, but because they provided the best possible conditions for the effects he wanted to achieve. An example of this is in the images of Marie Antoinette (Tenna Kraft) being led to her cell in the Conciergerie. In a great panning shot the camera follows her all the way down the grand staircase till she goes into the cell at the right-hand corner of the frame. This panning and the depth of the images very effectively reproduce the changing mood of the queen during her martyr's walk. The set, the camera and the texture of the image all play their part.

Dreyer followed up his experiments with the " live " part of his décor, too—the type-casting of his extras was much improved in *Leaves from Satan's Book*. For a scene in the fourth episode of the film, which takes place in Finland in 1918, he found one morning a group of effective-looking revolutionary types outside a labour exchange. He begins the scene in the film—as any other director would have done—with a long-shot, in which the devilish monk (Helge Nissen) is seen speaking in the foreground with his back to the camera. But then he lets the camera move forward to close-up and " hover." In a fine combination of a track and a pan the camera reveals to us the faces of the audience. It is amusing to see how this variety of types actually forced the sensitive director to use the camera in a much freer way than in any other Danish film of the time. The raw material, so to speak, liberated the camera.

The method of editing was new and liberated, too—inspired by Griffith certainly—but primarily by the material. The Finnish episode was the first to be shot. In its five to six hundred-metres of length there are close on five hundred cuts, which means that each shot took about $3\frac{1}{2}$ seconds. The company executives were horrified when they heard how Dreyer was " ruining " the film. And before they let him direct the other three episodes they made him complete the cutting of the Finnish part and show it to the directors. As it turned out, the rhythm was so right for the tense action, that the short cuts appeared perfectly natural. Dreyer was allowed to go on with the film.

There were, of course, others too who were dissatisfied with the quick shots: the actors. It did not give them a chance to "*act out*," as they said. Clara Pontopiddan did not like the big close-ups either, which Dreyer (under the influence of Griffith) had introduced to heighten the emotional action; she

wanted someone to *act at*. But this time Dreyer knew precisely how he wanted the film to be acted. When an actor or actress had learned to understand the big close-up completely, both what dangers it holds and what possibilities for expression, then he or she would be able to give of their very best. Clara Pontoppidan did it, and when she saw the result of their work together, she threw her arms round Dreyer's neck. Her death scene at the end of the Finnish sequence is a most moving piece of acting. The most important Danish film critic of the time, Laurids Skands, wrote: " Foremost, perhaps, stood Clara Pontopiddan, who, in a close-up cried out in dumb anguish all her suffering and pain, as the cold steel of a knife slid into her heart. It was done so beautifully that one instantly loved her for it."

The Parson's Widow

(Svensk Filmindustri, Stockholm.) *Script:* Dreyer, *from Kristofer Janson's story. Main parts: the parson's widow, Margarete Pedersdotter*, Hildur Carlberg; *Hr. Sofren*—Einar Rod; *Kari, his sweetheart*—Greta Almroth; *graduates of divinity*—Olav Aukrust and Kurt Welin; *Steinar and Gunvor, servants at the parsonage*—Emil Helsengreen and Mathilde Mielsen; *the bell-ringer*—Lorentz Thyholt. *Photography:* George Schnéevoigt. *Premiere:* Rialto, Stockholm, October 4th, 1920. *Danish Premiere:* Palace Cinema, Copenhagen, April 26th, 1921.

Dreyer's third film was, like *Leaves from Satan's Book*, influenced by an important artist. It was a film in the Sjostrom style. Sjostrom's *Terie Bay* (January 1st, 1917), *Ejvind of the Mountain and his Wife* (January 1st, 1918) and, particularly, his Selma Lagerlof adaptations which began with *The Sons of Ingmars* (first part shown December 30th, 1918), together with Mauritz Stiller's work in the same field: *Arne's Treasure* (September 28th, 1919)—Swedish directors introduced a completely new type of film which reversed the production principles of Nordisk Films Kompagni. These principles had been expressed in a guide to script writers for the company by Jens Locher under the title " How to write a Film " (1916). In this he says: " The action must take place in the present and in good society. Plays which take place among poor people and peasants will not be accepted." Swedish companies had succeeded with films that were seldom set in the present or " in good society," but usually in the past and amongst the peasantry. But, of course, this was not the secret of their success; it was the poetry, the lyrical quality which gently, but effectively, outshone the more primitive and often snobbish melodrama.

The Parson's Widow had its première in Stockholm on October 4th, 1920, before *Leaves from Satan's Book* was shown in Denmark. The scenario was something of a find. It is adapted from a short story by the Norwegian author, Kristofer Janson, who got the material from an authentic case which occurred about 1600. The story tells of a young graduate of divinity who was forced to marry an old parson's widow to obtain the living she held from her dead husband. He became her fourth husband! And matters were not made easier by the fact that he had a mistress. He passed her off as his sister, and she came to live in the house of this strange pair. The old widow had to suffer several attacks on her life, but when the two young people at last confessed the real state of things, she took her own life. There are both grotesquely comic and very touching elements in this material, and Dreyer created a little masterpiece out of it.

Dreyer thinks back on this summer's work as one of the best experiences of his life. He enjoyed freedom of action; it was as if, in more senses than one, he had got out into the air which he could breathe. The wonderful scenery round him and the spirit of Swedish films influenced his work profoundly; there are fine lyrical passages in *The Parson's Widow*. But Dreyer would not have been Dreyer if he had not contributed something himself to Swedish film technique. In this film he grasped the opportunity of creating a completely authentic milieu for the story. Not a single set or flat was built for it; every shot was taken in the Norwegian landscape and in the interiors of old Norwegian farmsteads which, together with a parsonage and church, had been collected by Mr. A. Sandvig in a sort of museum village near Lillehammer. In this way Dreyer could give the film an almost documentary background. There were no actors among the peasants in the film, they were farmers from the Guldbrand valley who had agreed to take part because the script had been written by Kristofer Janson, a local poet who was more or less uncrowned king of the district. Dreyer says that he has never had a better crowd to work with then these grave, well-to-do farmers.

Both this documentary background and the authentic types were a revelation to film goers of the time. And from yet another point of view *The Parson's Widow* contributed to Swedish films; it had humour in it. It would no doubt have been a good thing if Swedish films had absorbed more of this uninhibited peasant humour, for, after the climax of the *Gosta Berling Saga* production (Mauritz Stiller, 1924), they became more and more monotonously " stimmung " and atmosphere films, and finally came to a complete standstill. The reason that *The Parson's Widow* did not have a greater influence can possibly be found in the star part of Hr. Sofren. Einar Rod, though he was handsome and charming, had not quite got the robustness the part needed. He should have been so utterly boyish and unselfconscious that the tricks he played on the old widow

seemed natural and excusable. But sometimes he looks more like a nervous wreck than the drunken young peasant theologian he is meant to represent. If a film actor does not have a feeling for the part, there is not much a director can do about it, and the authenticity of the rest of the film did not quite make up for it. This was the first time that Dreyer realised the importance of the actor's personality.

It was Hildur Carlberg, as the majestic old widow, who dominated the film. Seventy-seven years old, she was already mortally ill during the shooting, but she promised Dreyer she would hold out to the end. She died a month or two after the film was completed and never saw the final version. Her death scene at the end was far more genuine than Dreyer, who was very fond of her, could ever have wished.

Love One Another

(Primusfilm, Berlin.) *Script:* Dreyer, *from Aage Madelung's novel* (*Die Gezeichneten*). *Main parts: Hanne-Liebe*—Countess Polina Piekowska; *Jakow Segal, solicitor, her brother*—Wladimir Gajdarow; *Sascha Krasnow, student*—Torleiff Reiss; *Fedja*—Richard Boleslawsky (*film debut*); *Suchowersky, a merchant, his father*—Duwan; *Klimow, alias Rylowitsch and Father Roman, police spy and provacateur*—Johannes Meyer. *Photography:* Friedrich Weinmann. *Decor:* Jens G. Lind. *Artistic advice;* Prof. Krol and the artist, Victor Aden. *Premiere;* Palace Cinema, Copenhagen, February 7th, 1922. *German premiere;* opening performance at Primuspalast Potsdamerstrasse, Berlin, February 23rd, 1922.

From the Norwegian summer sun Dreyer went straight to the stone desert of Berlin—from Scandinavian peasants during the Renaissance to Russian Jews at the time of the 1905 Revolution. The film was adapted from Aage Madelung's novel " Die Gezeichneten," and made for the now extinct company, Primusfilm. It was a very cosmopolitan ensemble that Dreyer now had to work with: emigrant actors from the Moscow Arts Theatre and other artists brought in from Poland, Norway, Denmark and Germany, as well as extras who had never done any stage work or been before a camera—refugees just escaped from the Russian Revolution and people from the newly-formed Jewish quarter in North Berlin, where Polish and Galician Jews lived with their backs to a hostile world. With the help of these widely different collaborators, Dreyer recreated, in the course of a few summer months' stay at Lankwitz outside Berlin, a world which had disappeared in 1917. There was something strangely topical in this film about the past, and there were people taking part in it who would have preferred to have remained in that past.

Once Upon a Time

Producer; Sophus Madsen, Copenhagen. *Script:* Dreyer and Palle Rosenkrantz, *after the play by Holger Drachmann. Main parts: the princess*—Clara Pontoppidan; *the prince*—Svend Methling; *the king*—Peter Jerndorff; *Kaspar Roghat*—H. Ahnfeldt-Ronne; *others taking part:* Karen Poulsen, Gerda Madsen, Schioler-Linck, Torben Meyer, Musse Scheel. *Photography:* George Schnéevoigt. *Decor:* Jens G. Lind. *Premiere:* Palace Cinema, Copenhagen, October 3rd, 1922.

ONCE UPON A TIME has only one thing in common with *Love One Another*, that the theme was drawn from another age, though this time it was purely fictional and fairy story at that. From a work point of view the contrast was great enough; straight from a Germany in the throes of inflation, home to Denmark, leaving a sombre theme to tackle the lightest material. The film of this legend play is certainly Dreyer's weakest production, but certainly also the one which was made under the most difficult conditions. The lease of the studio was only acquired a month after the work of set-building should have been started. The shooting had to be hurried through because the actors from the Royal Theatre were only available during their summer holidays.

Furthermore, the theme was not quite right for Dreyer. He admits himself that it was a weak film. " It taught me the bitter lesson," he said, " that you cannot build a film on atmosphere alone. Just when it should have increased its dramatic tempo and culminated in a stormy struggle between two people, the action suddenly stood still like a windless summer day. From that film I learned that people are primarily interested in people."

The value of Drachmann's play lies in the lyrical quality of the dialogue, and it was almost impossible to convey this in a silent film. But if this type of film is to be built on atmosphere, there should probably be a deeper psychological meaning and tension in it, or otherwise it should have a legendary quality, naive and ironical at the same time in a primitive way. Psychological tension was something that Dreyer understood, but he did not find it in this material. Naive irony appeared only in one figure—the king, as played by Peter Jerndorff, who made a personal success in the role; he really did represent the fairy story.

Mikaël

Decla Bioscop under Ufa, Berlin (Pommer-Production). *Script:* Dreyer, *from Herman Bang's novel. Main parts: the master, Claude Zoret*—Benjamin Christensen; *Eugene Mikael*—Walter Slezak; *Furstin Lucia Zamikoff*—

Nora Gregor; *Fru Adelsskjold*—Grete Mosheim (*film debut*); *Switt, a critic* —Robert Garrison (*film debut*). *Chief photographer:* Karl Freund; *Exteriors:* Rudolf Maté. *Decor:* Hugo Haring, *World Premiere:* Ufa-Theater, Kurfurstendamm, Berlin, September 26th, 1924.

The novel, by Herman Bang, provided real human material. In the book it is over-exposed, hectic, half hysterical, the wishful dreams and fears of a tortured man, exaggerated into a vast personality drama. But there is a basis of psychological truth in it, which puts the novel on a far higher level than the other conflict story Dreyer made—*The President*. Dreyer made *Mikael* to the highest degree a film about human beings. The critics heralded it as one of the first examples of " intimate " screen play. Nothing in this film mattered except the mental conflict, the dramatic course of which was mirrored in subtle facial expression and mimicry. These could only be given effect in close-ups, and, in its close-up technique this film became the forerunner of Dreyer's most famous film *Jeanne d'Arc*.

While subduing and disciplining the emotional pitch of the novel, Dreyer retained some typical aspects of Herman Bang in the film; the décor and the environment, a framework of luxurious interiors which establishes the " great artist " the " master's " position in the outside world. The use of close-ups for depicting states of mind, alternating with long shots to give the no less important psychological effects of atmosphere and background, is thoroughly cinematic. A large proportion of the German audience interpreted the palatial surroundings as being " seriously meant "—that is, a sort of ideal world, and admired it. Others found it nauseating and overloaded, and missed the point entirely. But *Mikael* was a very subtle piece of work: a completely genuine representation of a completely false milieu, which contained wretched human beings buried in all its pomposity.

Thou Shalt Honour Thy Wife

(Palladium, Copenhagen.) *Script:* Dreyer and Svend Rindom, *from the play, " Tyrannens Fald," by Svend Rindom. Main parts: Victor Frandsen, engineer* —Johannes Meyer; *Ida, his wife*—Astrid Holm; *Karen, their daughter*—Karin Mellemose (*debut*); *Mads, Frandsen's former nurse*—Mathilde Nielsen. *Photography:* George Schnéevoigt. *Decor;* Dreyer. *Premiere:* Palace Cinema, Copenhagen, October 5th, 1925.

THOU SHALT HONOUR THY WIFE once more took Dreyer back to Denmark. The film was made for Palladium and was first shown October 5th, 1925. Here again was the typical " *theatre intime*," but just as Danish as *Mikael* had

been German in its background appeal. From the palatial dwelling of the world-famous artist we go to a humble precision worker's two-room flat in Copenhagen. The film was an adaptation of Svend Rindom's play, " Fall of a Tyrant " excellent material made into a first class script by the author and the director. This very Danish film of everyday life was in style one of the first " French " films: daily life under a microscope, daily life turning suddenly into a drama of passions and subsiding again into daily calm. It had a great success in France and was shown in 57 cinemas in Paris in three weeks.

Thou Shalt Honour Thy Wife sounds a little moralising and biblical. The title of the play, " Fall of a Tyrant " is better. This is taken from the history book, which the boy Frederik is memorising; he is preparing his lesson about the Danish King Christian II, sometimes called Christian the Tyrant, and he is explaining what a tyrant is, someone who bullies those around him, and makes them suffer. Then the boy stops and his mother bursts out crying. The description fits the father.

In the picture sequence illustrating this film (which must be " read " from the top left corner downwards and then down the second row the same way) the Tyrant, Frandsen (Johannes Meyer) can be seen in full swing. His wife has been on the point of a nervous breakdown and has been taken away while he was out at work. Now his old nanny (Mathilde Nielsen) has moved in with her bird-cage and all her knick-knacks to try and get the better of the tyrant. In the stills, which are taken direct from the film negative, her warm reception can be seen. Frandsen has already thrown her potted plant out into the hall, now comes the turn of the bird-cage. She protests: their hands meet in a struggle; his daughter, Karen (played by the youthful Karin Nellemose, whom Dreyer found one day at Fru Walbom's dancing academy) is horrified by his brutality and takes hold of his arm. He turns on her angrily, she pleads with him, and meanwhile the nanny takes the opportunity to snatch away the bird-cage. Of course, he revenges himself on the daughter for his first defeat. The sequence is a fine example of concentrated, essentially film-dramatic presentation of a crisis in everyday life, at the same time losing none of the intimate qualities of a small interior.

The rest of the film tells how Nanny finally triumphs over the tyrant. He cannot stand up to commonsense authority; in every battle she gets the better of him because right is on her side and therefore takes care always to have the last word. The part was admirably suited to Mathilde Nielson's warm-hearted talent. The film begins with Frederik standing in the corner and ends with his father in the same place.

This everyday drama depends entirely on its everyday background. To a greater degree than in any of the previous films it was necessary to create a naturalistic setting, so that the audience could believe the story and be moved by it. Dreyer would have preferred to make the whole film inside a real two-

roomed flat. But as this was impossible technically, a complete copy of such an apartment was built in the studio—not just a separate set for each room dotted round the studio with open sides like a doll's house, but a composite unit of four-walled rooms with doors between and gas and water and electricity laid on—everything was there. This may sound like exaggerated realism, but the emphasis was not on imitation; it was a question of bringing out the drama and its special intimate character. The confined working-space forced the director to keep close to his actors the whole time, and brought all the objects in the rooms into focus as well. His close-up technique, of course, developed from this proximity and drew the audience into the atmosphere of intimacy. But the close-up frame which concentrated the attention on separate figures prevented the film from being just realistic. If you look at the picture sequence, you will see how beautifully they are composed and how distinctly dramatic they are. The same is true of the street scene in which Frandsen hides behind his umbrella when passing the shoemaker on his way home—he has no money to pay for the shoes that are in for repair. This picture too is true to life, shot in just such a street where Frandsen would live. But the effect in the film is unusual and almost surprising. How little we have still seen of everyday life in films, and how much we could do with it. A new world reveals itself to us, not the familiar one, as people imagine, but a strange, unknown one in the very things that are too well known—like a drop of water put under a microscope. It is in the nature of a camera to watch out for and reveal the drama in ordinary things, and Dreyer knew it.

The Bride of Glomdale

(Victoria-Film, Oslo.) Made from Jacob Breda Bull's short novel. *Main parts: Ola Glomsgaarden*—Stub Wiberg; *Berit, his daughter*—Tove Tellback; *Jacob Braaten*—Harald Stormoen; *Tore, his son*—Einar Sissener (*film debut*). *Photography:* Einar Olsen. *Premiere:* Admiral-Plads and Carl Johan Theatre, Oslo, January 1st, 1926.

THE BRIDE OF GLOMDALE can be described as a little intermezzo. It was made during a couple of summer months in Norway for a Norwegian-Swedish company. It is the only film of Dreyer's that did not have a script written for it; it was improvised more or less directly from the printed pages of Jacob B. Bull's short novel of the same name. But the film was a success, due partly to Dreyer's skill, and also to the fact that the plot was a simple, well-known one; the poor farmer's son and the rich farmer's daughter love each other but may not marry, though, of course, they are united in the end.

Dreyer underlined the social and class difference, which was the basic theme, by giving the poor farmer's son almost exclusively a background of dark pine

trees and black, naked soil, while the rich farmer's daughter was mostly surrounded by white birch trees and light, tall grass.

The film ended with a spectacular fugue à la Griffith and Wild West films; the hero swims through a raging torrent to reach his true love. A double had been ordered to perform the swimming feat instead of Einar Sissener, but when it came to the point he did not dare to do it, and Sissener had to whirl away among the rocks in the river and plunge over a waterfall at the end. The final result was a simple, but positive and forceful film—and naturally it pleased the realist in Dreyer that the climax was real.

However, this was only a little film. Perhaps it would be right to regard it as a sort of summer holiday before he came to grips with his big task—*Jeanne d'Arc*.

Jeanne D'Arc

(*The suffering and death of Jeanne d'Arc*) (Société Genérale de Films, Paris). *Script:* Dreyer, *officially after Joseph Deteil's novel. Main parts: Jeanne*—Marie Falconetti; *Bishop Pierre Cauchon*—Eugène Silvain; *Jean d'Estivet, prosecutor*—André Berley; *Loyseleur*—Maurice Schutz; *Massieu*—Antonin Artaud. *Chief photographer:* Rudolf Maté. *Decor;* Herman Warm and Jean Hugo. *Assistants:* Paul la Cour and Ralf Holm. *Premiere:* Palace Cinema, Copenhagen, April 21st, 1928.

JEANNE D'ARC made Dreyer world famous. There is practically no book on the art of film which does not mention it. In " Garbo and the Nightwatchman," a selection of the best film critics from England and the U.S.A., Esquire's critic, Meyer Levin, writes (while speaking of *Winterset*): " We have classics from Greece, classics from the Renaissance, classics of English literature and just a few classical films, such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Jeanne d'Arc.*" By classics he means a work of art which is so completely a product of the time of its creation, that it has become timeless.

It was the French company, Société Genérale de Films, that made an offer to Dreyer after the great success of *Thou Shalt Honour Thy Wife* in France under the title *Le Maitre du Logis*. This little film, which had not cost more than £5,000, gave the French firm the idea that Dreyer could make a great film. In any case the negotiations led to him being given the choice of three of the greatest female figures in history as subject: Catherine de Medici, Marie Antoinette and Jeanne d'Arc. He chose the last. The film had its premiere in Copenhagen, April 21st, 1928, and cost 7 million francs (about £50,000) to make. This can be compared with another big French film made at that time, Abel Gance's *Napoleon*, which cost 17 million francs. Even the cinemas' guaranteed receipts brought in the 7 millions.

Jeanne d'Arc, one of the strangest and most moving figures in history—it was a tremendous task, which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred would have been treated traditionally with much pomp and ceremony and patriotic fanfares. In fact, it became a harrowing mental portrait of a naive, but gifted little peasant girl in conflict with the great powers of this world. A picture created with a penetrating simplicity which made the film both a classic and a battle-ground for critics the moment it came out. It caused much consternation and disapproval that the film consisted almost entirely of close-ups. But artistically this was consistent. The normal function of the close-up in a film is to give emotional climax. *Jeanne d'Arc* gives the impression of being the climax in a huge film which consists almost entirely of climaxes. It is a very exacting film form both for the audience, the actors and the director, and by its very nature it can only occur on very rare occasions. But it is *right* here: a saint is not first and foremost an historical personage, but a myth. She has become the expression of a mass feeling, and this one must take into account, whether one is religious or not. It would be inartistic to emphasise the story in this material. The accumulative effect of all these close-ups is to render the film timeless and placeless (this is underlined in costumes and décor); the action has been cut down to a minimum, a faint stir, as it were, light nuances, leaving nothing behind except the happenings within mind and soul. These, on the other hand, are allowed to grow and develop so that they become the *only* focus on which all attention, all sympathy is concentrated. Such a vast concentration of emotional material was only possible because Dreyer had in the leading part an artist of the calibre of Mlle. Falconetti, who gave all she possessed of genius to this one part. It has been said that Falconetti has since been ruined both economically and artistically, and people who know her are apt to attribute this to the fact that Dreyer squeezed every drop of talent out of her. This may be exaggerated, but that the idea has persisted shows what an impression Dreyer's fantastic energy and intensity has on people.

There are people in the film world who have tried to get Dreyer to Hollywood to remake *Jeanne d'Arc*, possibly with Greta Garbo in the title role. The idea is preposterous and could only be fostered in commercial film minds. The thought is absurd in the case of Dreyer because *Jeanne d'Arc* is a work of art into which he put his whole personality. The theme might appear a double one but is actually single: suffering and honesty, the refusal to betray your mission, however heavy the cost. And this theme is treated with a strangely powerful humility. Time after time the characters are photographed from below, both the judges seen from Jeanne's point of view (and ours), and Jeanne seen with ours and Dreyer's eyes. The film theorists say that the so-called " frog-perspective " makes the person photographed look mighty and impressive. But this definition is too thin, though it does perhaps apply to Russian films. In *Jeanne d'Arc* it has another significance; it is not primarily the person that is imposing, but the audience's and the director's attitude which is humble. In order to get these frog perspectives Dreyer had holes dug all over the set, so that the camera could be placed sufficiently low. These holes caused much amusement among the actors and technicians who changed the pronunciation of his name from " Draière " to " Gruyère " on account of the cheesy look of the set. This was *their* comment on his working methods; but the Danish writer, Paul La Cour, who was Dreyer's assistant on this film, gives a more apt description when he says that they made the film on their knees.

If we now take a closer look at the work itself, a glance at the manuscript alone will show how concentrated the vast material became. The whole job—from the start of the script in October, 1926, to the completion of the final editing—took one and a half years. The trial of Jeanne d'Arc also took one and a half years, but in the film it is contracted to two hours, almost the full playing time of the film. So, both in the case of the trial and the film, we are given a very strong extract of one and a half stirring years. The result is the kind of realism to be found in the classical dramas, in the grand style and keeping to the three unities: *time*, less than 24 hours, her last, May 30th, 1429; *place*, the castle at Rouen, moving only a few steps from scene to scene; *plot*, quite simply the saint's last spiritual struggle against the representatives of superior force.

This struggle Dreyer had been able to follow step by step in the great work by Bishop Dubois, where essential parts of the hearings are given word for word. Jeanne's ingeniously simple answers to the sophistical questions of the ecclesiastical judge made a great impression on him and were transferred direct to the film script.

A short novel by Joseph Delteil about Jeanne d'Arc had been bought as a basis for the film, but Dreyer hardly used it at all. He was influenced to a certain extent by the realism of Anatole France's description of her as a robust peasant girl, a little mad, but brilliant in the arts of war. But Dreyer did not show her as a war-leader, nor did he make her robust; he made her helpless, defenceless. The two dramatic climaxes also indicate her two defeats, first in herself, secondly in her struggle against the world and life. The first is when, physically exhausted after the torture threat, she breaks down in spirit as well and signs a confession that she is a heretic to save her life. The second climax is when she is sitting alone in her cell and sees the warder sweep up her crown of reeds—this symbol of her suffering suddenly gives her strength and she cries: " I repent! I take back the confession! " She triumphs over her fear and asserts her faith—only to be sentenced to the fire for heresy. It was the human tragedy Dreyer wanted to bring out.

So when it came to making the film from the script, all the work had to be concentrated on penetrating and sweeping aside the gilt of legend and historical

patina. No outside element must be allowed to force itself between the audience and the story of this human being. The keynote was struck in the style of the décor and costumes. In "Movie Parade" (1936) Paul Rotha writes that only very few historical films can be considered to be within the framework of real film art. "There is only one that had living quality, Dreyer's *Jeanne d'Arc*. That it had because it did not attempt a realistic construction of the past, but rather interpreted the past through modern eyes. If history is to be a subject of cinema, this method of Dreyer seems the only one possible. The camera and microphone are instruments too sensitively attuned to modern things for their penetrative powers to be deceived by acting and costume."

A brilliant feature of the film is that costumes and décor are at the same time correct in period and yet give a modern effect; that is to say, they are appropriate and live material for the camera. The Earl of Warwick is shown as a modern steel-helmeted soldier—but they *did* have iron helmets in the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages force their way into the present, and though monks may seem out of date to us, they are, of course, an umbrella-carrying and galosh-wearing reality in the Catholic countries still. But whether one is Protestant or Catholic, one cannot help being struck by the realism of the picture of two monks, the fat one and the thin one, simply because the texture of the surfaces is real: the hairy material against the smooth white wall and the faces without any makeup.

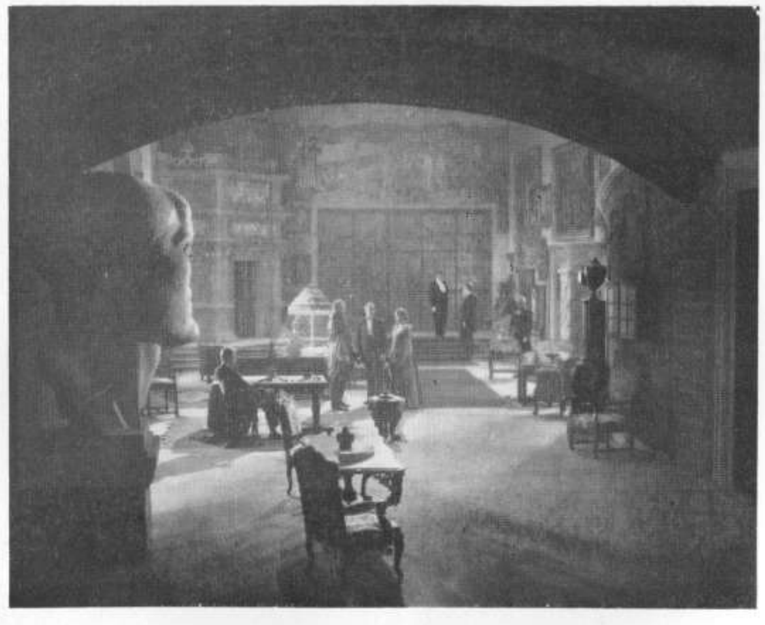
As a background for his tragedy Dreyer wanted to show everyday life of the Middle Ages. It cannot have been as gloomy and gothic and mysterious as we imagine—it must have had its simple and clear side like the present day. Ordinary days are always more alike than Sundays and the exceptional days. He and his assistants tried to find this everyday style. He was helped by two architects, the Frenchman, Jean Hugo, and the German, Hermann Warm (who built the sets for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*). Warm had as assistant the Danish author, Paul La Cour, who later became Dreyer's personal assistant. I believe it was Hugo who drew attention to one of the most beautiful manuscripts in the French national library, "Livre des Merveilles," an illuminated book from about 1400, which is illustrated with the most enchanting miniatures. The style of the film was based on these five hundred-year-old paintings, and when the sets were built, directly drawn from the old miniatures the effect was modern, with clean, white surfaces—as if they had been executed by Corbusier and not artists of 500 years ago.

The sets were all built into one complete construction: a great septagonal or octagonal castle with a very tall tower in each of the corners and a high wall running between the towers. Inside there were little houses built very simply, but with crooked angles and windows set out of line, like those in the miniatures. In the centre of the courtyard, opposite the drawbridge, was the church or chapel,

Leaves from Satan's Book

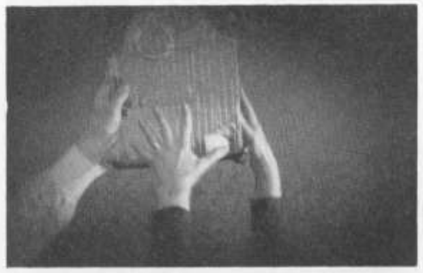
Above: two close-ups from *Leaves from Satan's Book*. Left: Helge Nissen as Satan. Right: Clara Pontopiddan as Siri, the stationmaster's wife, in the fourth episode.
Below: an interior from *Mikaël*.

Mikaël



Thou shalt Honour thy Wife

A sequence from *Thou shalt Honour thy Wife*, discussed on page 17. Johannes Meyer as the Tyrant, Mathilde Nielsen as the old nurse, Karin Nellemose as the daughter.

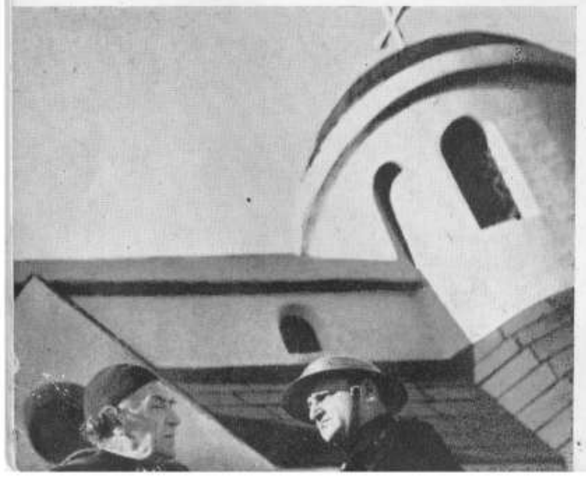


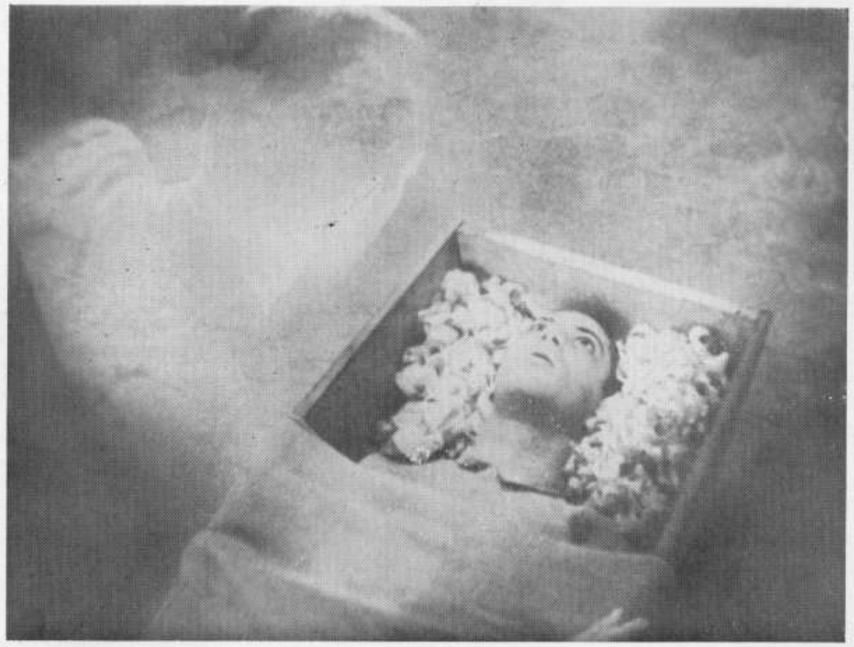
Jeanne d'Arc

Left: Falconetti as she appeared before the film, on a poster advertising cosmetics. Below: A close-up of Falconetti from *Jeanne d'Arc*.

Jeanne d'Arc

Right: two miniatures from the French medieval book, "Livre des Merveilles," and below, a scene from *Jeanne d'Arc* (with Bishop Cauchon and the Earl of Warwick), showing how the style of the decors was based on the book.

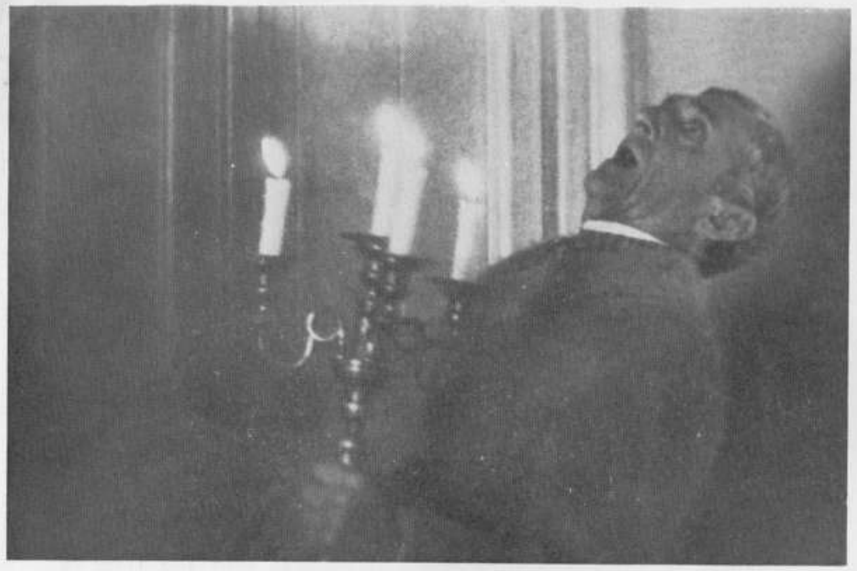




Vampyr

Above: the funeral cortege. David Gray (Julian West) sees his own body in the coffin.

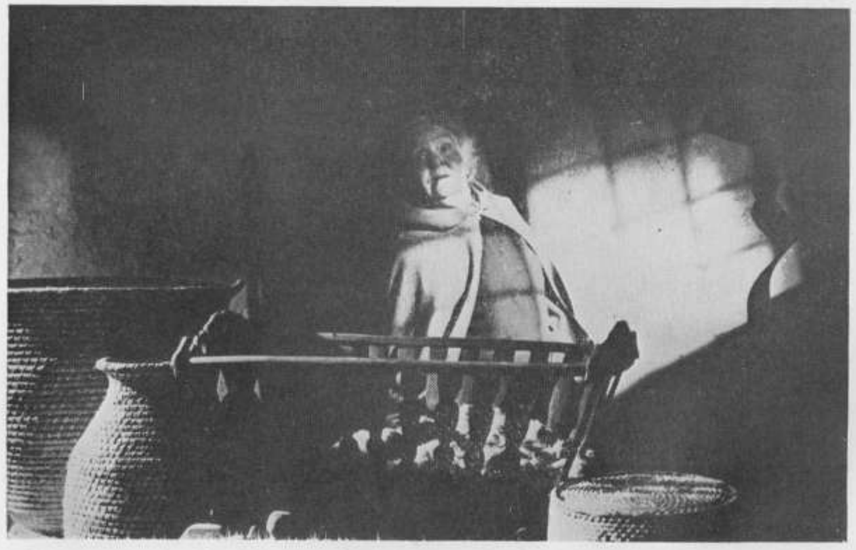
Below: the vampire (Henriette Gerard). On the next page: the lord of the manor (Maurice Schutz), and below, a photograph of Dreyer at the time of *Vampyr*.



Vampyr

The
Day of Wrath

Right: Lisbeth Movin as Anne. Below: the torture of Marte (Anna Svierkier), the old woman suspected of being a witch.



The Day of Wrath

The body of Marte (Anna Svierkier)
is carried to the pyre.

and at the side the entrance to the churchyard where the burning took place. The walls consisted of a cement shell ten centimetres thick, enough to carry the weight of the actors and technicians during the shooting. The whole construction was painted pink to give it a grey effect against the sky, which stood out white in the film.

It was a very large and expensive set, a whole little town about the size of Trafalgar Square, and it caused a certain amount of indignation among film people (particularly the financiers) that it was not "made full use of." There were no magnificent vista shots in the film showing any large parts of the set—it was all close-ups. And, strictly speaking, it should perhaps not have been necessary to make the construction complete. On the other hand, if separate sets had been used, there would not have been the same sense of continuity, the feeling of gliding movement, nor the impressive sense of intimacy about the film. In this pink town set in a field in Clamart, Dreyer could work unhampered, he could, so to speak, take it by storm—almost use it in a documentary way. Not until a set is so constructed that it can be lived in, is it possible to work with the documentary authenticity which is the basis of filmic inspiration.

The medieval miniatures had grown to a great frame, and within it Dreyer painted his enlarged modern miniatures with the brush of modern camera technique: his close-ups. No make-up was used at all. When Falconetti went on the set she took off her make-up. At first she was horrified when she saw the close-ups of herself. She looked so naked! But soon, of course, she realised that there was something more important which had to be revealed, and was revealed; not her complexion, but her talent, her soul.

Dreyer's collaboration with Falconetti was in itself a violent drama, not a drama of opposites—on the contrary, one of real collaboration, which also can be dramatic.

When Dreyer was about to shoot an important scene with Falconetti, everyone not directly concerned was banished from the set, and absolute silence was demanded (as a rule, in the silent film days, technicians and workmen would be hammering away in the corners of the studio). Sometimes he would put screens up round the group so as to be completely undisturbed. When he was describing what he wanted, he would stammer and go red in the face, not from shyness or any hesitation as to what he meant, but simply from eagerness to make his feelings and intentions completely understood. The blotchy red face and the disjointed speech were evidence of his unswerving belief that there is only one expression that is right, that can and must be found. But just because it seemed so difficult for him to express himself clearly, the actress was fired to work in with him with all her power. She was, as it were, activated into expressing what Dreyer could not show her, for it was something that could only be expressed in action, not speech, and she alone could do it, so she had to help him. And

she realised that this could only be done if she dropped all intellectual inhibitions and let her feelings have free access from her subconscious to her facial expression. "When a child," says Dreyer, "suddenly sees an onrushing train in front of him, the expression on his face is spontaneous. By this I don't mean the feeling in it (which in this case is sudden fear), but the fact that the face is completely uninhibited." In a big scene the face must be relaxed to the point of emptiness, then the expression will appear of itself.

In the early stages of their collaboration Dreyer and Falconetti used to have play-backs of a single little close-up scene, often as many as seven or eight times over again. Dreyer could then point to one little piece—perhaps only two feet long—which showed sufficiently relaxed expression. Falconetti could see it too, and when they did a retake she could play it at once without the slightest hesitation. Her own picture on the short scrap of film had inspired her. But as time went on her subconscious, or her ability to be inspired, developed so much, that she could play a scene direct from Dreyer's instruction in front of the camera without rehearsal. In any case Dreyer considers that a director should be able to tell exactly whether an actor works best with or without previous rehearsal, and what scenes he can take direct. When close-up emotional acting is in question, there can be no argument, as there is in the theatre, about "hot" or "cold" acting. The actor must play quite differently in front of a camera from on the stage—and particularly in close-ups, which is the only type of scene you cannot have in a theatre. In the close-up the actor must be raw material for the camera, the editor and the director's vision. The eye of the camera, and therefore of the director and of the audience, is so close to the actor, that it is impossible for them to look at the actor objectively; he must therefore *be*, not act. The old demand for naturalism which was so dangerous in the theatre, where it meant that the actor often had to turn away from the audience to keep the illusion, does not hold good in front of the close-up camera. Here it becomes a demand for the finest raw material from the actor, out of which can be moulded the highest climax of a new art form. Time after time this has led to artistic performances as moving, in spite of their different nature, as the greatest performances seen on the stage. The great film actor gives the director the elementary human substance, which is then brought forward into the full light of the big close-up. Dreyer has in his films sought to create scenes where the mask is off completely, and the effect is a sublime crystallisation of the whole atmosphere and tone of the film. Such a scene was Clara Pontoppidan's death in *Leaves from Satan's Book*, Benjamin Christensen's death scene in *Mikael*, Falconetti's acting when she lies exhausted on her bed in the cell, while a fly crawls over her almost unconscious face, and for a few moments at the stake before the smoke suffocates her—and in *Vampyr* there is a scene of this kind, with Sybille Schmitz, which will be mentioned later.

But the background for this close-up acting lies in the surrounding elements—the story leading up to it and the other faces in the film. In *Jeanne d'Arc* it was the other faces that mattered, a film of close-ups in which faces were juxtaposed with *a* face; the Catholic prelates and the English soldiers headed by Governor Warwick at the head with the executioners, and on the periphery the simple people of Rouen who simply believed in the lonely saint. Each part was carefully cast; Dreyer attached more importance to finding a mental than a facial resemblance. He cast Silvain for the supreme judge, Bishop Pierre Cauchon, because as doyen of the Théatre Francais he had the right mentality to play an archbishop! For the part of Warwick he chose a Russian café keeper with the kind of character needed. Sometimes, when he had to be the dominating figure in a scene, he would ask: "Soll ich die eiserne Maske anlegen?" (Am I to put on the iron mask?).

There was the best possible understanding between the director and the actors there was nothing he could not get them to do. Not only Falconetti had to appear without make-up and with her head shaved, so that she had to wear a wig off the set for several months; the judges and the monks were also made to suffer in the cause, and Parisian cafés were full of tonsored actors that year. Even the great crowd of extras which were used, for example, in the scenes round the pyre, were fascinated by the modest, yet exacting demands made on them by Dreyer. He wanted everyone to weep when Jeanne was burned. An experienced old film actor suggested glycerine, but Dreyer would not have it. Paul La Cour tells how Dreyer talked to them and explained in his halting and primitive French—and, "because it was Dreyer, they all cried and cried as they had probably never cried before. One old man was so affected that he streamed both from nose and eyes." Some with tonsures, some weeping, all without make-up—it was certainly a strange piece of film-making, almost as ecstatic as primitive funeral feasts—or perhaps as the Middle Ages.

And in the middle of all this ecstasy Rudolf Maté and his crew worked with their whirring cameras to capture the atmosphere. I have already mentioned the low angle shots used to express humility in the presence of great human emotion. Other effects were also used: the close high angle shot taken from the supreme judge's chair of Jeanne who is kneeling and swearing on the Bible before the hearing, or of the clerks at the judge's feet. A series of slow, calm panning and tracking shots which humbly follow in Jeanne's footsteps as she is led helplessly from place to place, or the sudden glide backwards or forwards to underline the sudden attacks made on her by one of the inquisitors. When a judge attacks with a question, his face is made to grow and fill the whole picture frame with the effect of a shock.

In many shots a diagonal effect was used, the figure photographed at an unnatural angle, giving extra emphasis to the character or emotion; it could

give expression to compassion, to accusation and brutality, or to almost childish despair—as in the picture of Jeanne weeping at the stake. The diagonal effect is nothing in itself, but it underlines and reinforces what is shown in the picture. Nowhere is this method of camera treatment, which can sometimes give a very violent effect, used on its own, but always in conjunction with the emotional expression of the actor. When you see the film you are not aware of these unusual angles or panning and tracking shots; they are a necessary psychological and artistic consequence of the situation described. Nothing could be further from Dreyer than to make a sensation with the help of diagonal shots, " frog " shots or " bird " shots, and *Jeanne d'Arc* has nothing to do with " abstract " or " absolute " films, but simply extends the explorations that great French, German and Russian experimentalists have made with camera effects. Shortly before he began shooting, he saw in Paris Eisenstein's *Potemkin*. He did not like it, but the Russian director's expressive camera treatment and bold montage gave Dreyer courage and strengthened him to follow his inspiration.

Camera and lighting is one in films. Technically, the picture consists of outline and light. Of course, Dreyer worked himself on these fundamental things, but the job done by his chief photographer Rudolf Maté must here be mentioned. Together they experimented till they found the right style of pictures: the dominating use of close-ups and of " frog " perspective, a camera treatment that gives merciless sharpness, and a lighting that gives an almost heavenly clarity to the film. The style of the film was built up from the whiteness of the lighting, the whiteness in the décor, the sharpness of the impressions: from faces, particularly one face which has the mask off not only physically because of the lack of make-up, but spiritually, so that it shows every emotion from the faintest to the strongest—and this face seen against a background of sky, an eternity of whiteness. It is a film made kneeling, and this shines out of its style.

Vampyr

(*The Strange Adventures of David Gray.*) *Producer:* Dreyer. *Script:* Dreyer and Christen Jul, *very freely adapted from the story, " In a Glass Darkly," by Sheridan le Fanu. Main parts: David Gray*—Julian West (Baron Nicolas de Gunzburg); *the old woman from the churchyard (the Vampyr)*—Henriette Gerard; *the village doctor, her assistant*—Jan Hieronimko; *the lord of the manor*—Maurice Schutz; *Gisele and Leone, his daughters*—Rena Mandel and Sybille Schmitz; *the old servants at the manor*—Albert Bras and N. Babanini. *Photography:* Rudolf Maté. *Music:* Wolfgang Zeller. *World Premiere:* Ufa-Theater Kurfurstendamm, Berlin, May 6th, 1932.

After *Jeanne d'Arc* Dreyer quarrelled with the film company, which broke its contract with him—in the autumn of 1931 he won his case against the company. This long drawn-out battle caused him to withdraw from the industry and try to work independently. He formed his own company, financed by the wealthy young film enthusiast, Baron de Gunzburg. The film he produced was *Vampyr* and had its première in Berlin, May 6th, 1932.

The story of *Vampyr* may be found difficult to stomach; it tells how an old woman continues to live after death by seeking out young victims from which she sucks life-giving blood. Even Dreyer himself did not lay much emphasis on the actual tale—he has not even made full use of some of the dramatic effects inherent in it; for example, in the scene where the vampire is destroyed by an iron pole being driven through her live body, this is not made the dramatic climax, hardly even a release. It is true that at the same moment that her body is changed into a skeleton, one of her victims, the young girl Léone, raises herself slowly up, transfigured, from her bed of sickness. But Sybille Schmitz, who played the part of the young girl, in following Dreyer's direction, made such a strangely ethereal performance of it, that the impression of release was somehow still linked with an impression of trance-like obsession. This is typical of the film as a whole.

In connection with *Once Upon a Time*, Dreyer said that one could not make a film on " stimmung " (atmosphere) alone. But here he has done it in one single " stimmung." Everything underlines it. The people in it glide slowly through a vague, whitish mist like drowned men, who are said to float in a vertical position along the bottom of the sea in a strange, diffused light. They are almost silent, and the camera follows them in long, slow panning and tracking shots. The film is pervaded by nightmare and obsession, and it shows a deadsure, calculated use of every means at his disposal. There are people who see this film again and again whenever it is shown, five, six, seven times.

Does not *Vampyr* contrast sharply with Dreyer's earlier productions, marked as they are by their realism ? On the contrary, it corrects the picture of Dreyer at work—that is, if the impression has been that his realism was merely an imitation of ordinary life and superficial truth. What he tries to get at is the inner truth, not the surface. He is a psychological realist. While he was working on *Vampyr*, he said one day during a conversation: " Imagine that we are sitting in an ordinary room. Suddenly we are told that there is a corpse behind the door. In an instant the room we are sitting in is completely altered; everything in it has taken on another look; the light, the atmosphere have changed, though they are physically the same. This is because *we* have changed, and the objects *are* as we conceive them. That is the effect I want to get in my film."

The strangest thing about this extremely fantastic film is that Dreyer has

never worked with more realistic material. All those taking part, the rooms, the objects, are as close to everyday reality as it is possible to make them in a film. The opening scenes at the inn, when the young dreamer, David Gray, first comes to the neighbourhood, was shot in the little rooms of a real inn. The scenes with the gliding, dancing shadows in the great white hall were taken in a deserted and derelict ice-factory. The scenes in the castle were from an old, deserted Chateau specially hired for the purpose. Not one set was built. With one or two exceptions, none of those taking part were professional actors, and there is hardly any so-called acting in the film. And yet the result is a most distinguished performance. These people *live* through their expressive naturalness. Dreyer chose them for the " mental resemblance " mentioned earlier in connection with *Jeanne d'Arc*, but there is genius in his power to discover the right mentality in ordinary people. The vampire was played by a nice old lady, widow of a French factory owner, who lived a quiet, retired life, and certainly did not seem to have a " vampire " mind. But there must have been something—not in her appearance, for she was a handsome, stately lady, but in some buried, unfulfilled, subconscious quality, which made her suitable for the part. The vampire's helper, the diabolical village doctor, was in real life a Polish journalist who worked in Paris, and during the making of the film, was favourite " uncle " to Dreyer's little boy. But he had a quiet sideways manner of looking at people, standing there with his stooping shoulders, which in the right context and used at the right moment, could give a very sinister and cunning effect, though it was in reality quite a friendly look. Did the eye of the camera reveal something in these people ? Did possibilities exist there which would have gone with them undiscovered to the grave, and which were now suddenly brought to light unknown to them ? Could they, perhaps, have become wicked people if their circumstances in life had been different ? Has every person perhaps such sinister possibilities hidden in him ? It was the very ordinariness of these people which paradoxically linked them with the extraordinary atmosphere. One of the young girls in the film, the pure, innocent and weak Gisèle, was played by a not very sympathetic young lady who earned her living in Paris as a nude photographic model. But in the film she was the quintessence of innocence—a hunted hind with great anguished eyes. And David Gray, through whom the audience experiences " the strange happenings " (as it says in the sub-title), was the film's young backer, Baron de Gunzburg, who played under the pseudonym of Julian West. He could not really act, but Dreyer simply made him wander through the scenes, and his long, thin, slightly stooping figure searching and questioning his way through the film was really enough. He was meant to be the impersonal dreamer, the audience's silent representative in the film.

One of the players was professional, and she *did* act: Sybille Schmitz, a

young Reinhardt actress from Berlin. Dreyer used her for the big scene which in each of his best films reveals the essence of the whole in a close-up climax. The other figures in *Vampyr* are simple manifestations of simple principles: the vampire and the doctor are wicked, David Gray and Gisèle are good. But in Gisèle's sister, Léone, played by Sybille Schmitz, these principles clash and the battle is on. The climax is the scene in which Léone is sitting in a chair, weak from the vampire's attack on her. Suddenly she sees her sister as a young and appetising morsel; her eyes follow Gisèle round the room, first with wonder, then with cold calculation. Finally her upper lip begins to tremble and shows her strong, square teeth—she has been infected by the vampire's blood thirst. Then, just as suddenly, a new feeling overwhelms her, love for her sister, and with a despairing movement of the head she turns away and weeps.

In this climax something is revealed which is otherwise only suggested: these ordinary people who seem so alive and so true because they express so little—or rather, never express too much—are wounded in the soul. This one single close-up scene, which had to be done by a professional actress, is, so to speak, the only positive, yet delicate proof we get—all the rest *could* happen in ordinary life. But it is exactly this under-emphasis of expression which puts a spark to our imagination and makes us believe. It is a style of story-telling in direct contrast, for example, to the German expressionistic films. In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, there was an attempt to create an atmosphere of macabre fantasy by introducing distorted sets and exaggerated acting. It was an attempt to create horror in front of the camera, and the result was photographed theatre. Dreyer realised that even when you want to portray the spiritually strange, the nature of films must be respected, and to make us believe in a film, the things we see must be credible—even the incredible. The fantasy must first and foremost be filmic fantasy: it must lie in the photography, in the use of the microphone, in the script and in the rhythm. By such means the director can dull or sharpen our senses and hold our attention, as he gives our thoughts the rhythm he wants and takes possession of our emotions. The camera is our willing and yielding eye and the tempo our sensitive pulse. When a film is built over one " stimmung " alone it must depend on its style to force our reactions.

Style, that elusive quality, somehow forms itself and becomes a ready and alert instinct, during the work of a director. For that reason a film-script must be fluid, details left open so that they can easily be changed for the sake of the whole and for the sake of the style. In the *Vampyr* script the doctor ends by sinking into a morass. This was difficult to carry out in a convincing way, at least without endangering the life of the nice Polish journalist. One day when Dreyer had been out looking at bogs and mud-baths and was driving home in a depressed state of mind, he came past a factory where the walls round the windows and doors were splashed with white as if there had been

a white fire. It looked strange, so Dreyer went in. It was a plaster-works where two workers were grinding lumps of plaster to powder. They were white, everything was covered in white dust. The sight immediately made contact with Dreyer's subconscious idea of the film—so he made the doctor die in a flour mill, set in motion while he is trapped in one of the steel cages for the flour bags. The white flour falls on him like fine snow, sticks in his throat and chokes and buries him. This white eeriness set the tone for the whole film, the style had been formed. The whole effect became a white and ghostly night. Right from the first day's shooting Dreyer and his photographer, Maté, tried to find a method to get the kind of images they wanted. A picture from the inn had failed by ordinary photographic standards; it was whitish grey, blurred. But Dreyer thought the greyish tone of this picture from the opening of the film pointed towards the white effect he wanted for the ending. The circle was complete. Baron de Gunzburg agreed with him, and Maté set about experimenting how to carry through and maintain this style. At last he discovered that if he put a piece of fine black gauze in front of the lens and let the sun (or in the case of interiors, the light) shine through it, the effect was that of a grey mist, and the pictures got the right tone.

In this white ghost-night nobody can move quickly—neither can the camera or the rhythm. There are some exceptionally long uninterrupted scenes, because sharp, clipped cutting would have given an incongruous effect. Everything glides along in a fog of uncertainty, until it gradually clears. If a faint sound is heard outside the picture, Dreyer does not immediately cut to where the sound is coming from; he lets the camera pan slowly round, so that we only discover its source after a period of suspense. It is what we do not see which makes the everyday things we *do* see seem strange. And what we do not know for certain creates an atmosphere of doubt around what we actually see. It is as if there is always someone standing outside the picture threatening us—in the same way that we can sometimes feel there is someone behind us, and we dare not look round. Both in the story and the style Dreyer gives the feeling that " there is a corpse in the next room."

The Day of Wrath

(Palladium, Copenhagen.) *Script:* Dreyer, Mogens Skot-Hansen and Poul Knudsen, *from Wiers Jensen's play, " Anne Pedersdotter." Main parts: Absolon Pedersson*—Thorkild Roose; *Anne, his wife*—Lisbeth Movin; *Merete, his mother*—Sigrid Neeiendam; *Martin, his son of first marriage*—Preben Lerdorff; *Herlof's Marte*—Anna Svierkier; *the bishop*—Albert Hoeberg; *Laurentius*—Olaf Ussing. *Photography:* Carl Andersson. *Music:* Poul Schierbeck. *Hymn texts:* Paul La Cour. *Designs for decor and costumes:* Lis Fribert. *Decor:* Erik Aaes. *Costumes:* K. Sandt Jensen and Olga Thomsen. *Historical adviser:* Kaj Uldall. *Sound engineer:* Erik Rasmussen. *Editing:* Edith Schlussel and Anne Marie Petersen. *Premiere:* World Cinema, Copenhagen, November 13th, 1943.

Eleven and a half years were to go by after *Vampyr* before there was another Carl Dreyer film première. From the age of 43 to nearly 55, in that period of an artist's life when the variety of his experience combines with the maturing of his personality and his still undiminished physical powers, Dreyer spent his time receiving humiliations and learning to be humble. He came to England and worked for a short time with John Grierson and the other documentary people. He went to North Africa, sent down there by a French producer to prepare a film about a white man who " goes black," abandons wealth and position because he is sick of white civilization, and finds deep satisfaction in the simple, primitive life of the natives. Dreyer was left without money down there, his letters were not answered—he had a taste himself of the white civilised mentality at any rate with regard to films. He planned, he negotiated with companies and said no to contracts time after time, because he insisted on freedom in his work.

Then he returned to Copenhagen and settled down to being a journalist once more. For a number of years he wrote, under his old pseudonym of " Tommen," a daily column in the midday paper with reports from the law courts.

All honour is due to Danish documentary films, particularly to their chief producer and inspirer at that time, Mogens Skot-Hansen, for bringing Dreyer out of obscurity once more and offering him a documentary film to make. The subject was an institution for unmarried mothers. It turned out a touching little piece about a young, unmarried woman who is expecting a child, wants to get rid of it and will have nothing to do with the child's ne'er-do-well father. She is taken in by the institution, encouraged and given instruction, so that when the child comes she is very pleased with it. Dreyer chose " natural types," ordinary people, she a young translator, he a council-school teacher. The film was unpretentious, almost *too* modest.

But Dreyer had shown that he could carry out a commissioned job and stick to a budget! He had got the reputation of being very expensive. The Danish film company, Palladium, for whom he had made *Thou Shalt Honour Thy Wife*, twenty years earlier, now took courage to offer him a contract to make a feature film for them. That was in 1942; the film was *The Day of Wrath*, and again he kept to the budget, which was about 250,000 Kroner (£12,500).

The Day of Wrath was first shown at World Cinema in Copenhagen, November 13th, 1943, during the blackest period of the German occupation in Denmark. On August 29th the Danish Government had resigned in protest against the demands of the occupation forces, one of which was the removal of

Danish citizens of Jewish origin. The country was without a government, and about the first of October the persecution and arresting of Jews began. There was a mass flight to Sweden, to which some German officials, both higher and lower, shut an eye as they were aware of the rising anti-German feeling. There was a curfew at night and early closing of all places of entertainment. Under these conditions and in this atmosphere *The Day of Wrath* had its première.

It was torn to pieces by most of the critics. But people came to see it. And a number of prominent citizens sent out a protest against the critics and proposed that a society should be formed with the object of protecting and encouraging Danish films of artistic, moral and national value. Once more Dreyer became the centre of a battle.

What irked the professional film critics most was the slow tempo of the film. It was intolerably slow, they thought. I think the critics were taken by surprise. They came unprepared, with the ordinary films' fast tempo in their systems, and found something they did not expect. I am sure many of them would change their minds if they saw the film over again now.

The same thing happened four and a half years later in New York. Most of the critics complained about the slow rhythm. One of the few who appreciated the film, Archer Winston of the *New York Post*, attacked his colleagues sharply and wrote amongst other things: "That any critic can suggest that its slow movement is a fault reveals a deep-rooted depreciation of taste. Far too many sensational films, the critics' daily poison, all action and no thought, create this sad hypnotism." In London, on the other hand, the critics were positive and impressed. The difference may have been due to the difference in film habits: Hollywood's fast, expert timing, as opposed to the quieter and slightly more ponderous authenticity which had come into English feature films via the documentaries.

The Day of Wrath contains many long and lingering close-ups of faces and quiet, horizontal movements with the camera moving from one person to another. The style is not documentary, but the film is most likely to be appreciated by an audience with a taste for the purely documentary film—and also by a quite different audience, namely the one that has no training in film-going at all, the specialised literary audience. A paradoxical position for a film..

In its theme and particularly in its setting it is a little reminiscent of *Thou Shalt Honour Thy Wife*. Both deal with the tensions between a small group of people in a Danish social milieu. But in *Thou Shalt Honour*—— Dreyer was able to cut sharply and quickly. In *The Day of Wrath* the camera movements are slow. In the first film the aim was to caricature a patriarchal type, the domestic tyrant who is put in his place. It gave an opportunity for drama and action in the domestic clashes. The background was present-day; the grey, dreary and impoverished everyday life in a sunless tenement flat, a life

that is wearing to the nerves. In *The Day of Wrath* the camera takes us back three hundred years to the year 1623, a distant and slow moving period. We are transported to a well-to-do parsonage in the country. Both inside and out all is quiet. The parson, Hr. Absalon, is an elderly, ascetic type. His young second wife, Anne, has become very quiet herself from living there with him and his old mother, an obstinate and vicious-tongued woman who hates her daughter-in-law. Dignity is the main note struck in this setting. The conflicts that *must* exist in and between these people are sublimated. We have to look carefully to find them. That is what Dreyer wants: that the audience should discover for itself.

There is no make-up: we see Anne's smooth and childishly rounded face, and slowly we discover feelings there which we had not expected—hate, love, joy. Particularly the last surprises us; to see real joy in this mild and almost empty young girl's face which before glided so disconsolately through the shadows. And the parson's face, full of wrinkles compared with his wife's, mild, but in quite a different way: a mildness that is marked with worry, with renunciation and with loneliness. Unforgettable is the scene where he is on the point of joining in the conversation of the two young people, and merely by looking at his face we can see that he realises he is outside, he does not belong. Then take the parson's mother; her face has fewer wrinkles than her son, she is fatter, she has not his kind of conflicts hidden behind it. She is a simpler character, her face is that of a peasant with hard eyes and a mouth pursed up with sour primness and permanent outrage and distrust. Added to this is her primitive concern for her silly, elderly son, who to her has never seemed grown up. We are given such a close study of these faces as well as all the other minor figures that we can get to know them intimately. But it is an exercise we are not used to from the average American or British film. For a person of literary inclination, Dreyer's technique appeals to his interpreting powers in the same way that a piece of poetry would appeal to him. For a documentary trained person, Dreyer's technique calls on his ability to study a piece of reality, reproduced and revealed on film.

The average film audience is also irritated by the fact that *The Day of Wrath* has no clear moral, no trend. What is meant by the introduction, they ask, with its story about an old woman accused of being a witch and burned at the stake? Does Dreyer consider her a witch? What is the idea of letting Anne be accused of witchcraft at the end and of having caused her husband's death by magic? Are we to believe this? Are we to believe that she has inherited supernatural powers from her mother who was a self-confessed witch and was only saved by Hr. Absalon because he was in love with Anne? Are we expected to share Anne's own belief that *she* is a witch?

To Dreyer the witchcraft is only the background. The important thing to him is the triangle; he wants to describe the so-called illegitimate love.

Hr. Absalon's son of his first marriage, Martin, comes home after many years absence. He arrives on the very day when the old witch-woman, Marte, is caught after having appealed in vain to her " colleague's " daughter, Anne. Anne is in great distress, agonisingly alone with her knowledge and her despair, so she is in a particularly receptive mood, when at last someone sympathetic appears in the house; a normal young man of her own age. She thaws, her passive mask slides from her like snow from the roof in spring. Not only can she suddenly smile, she becomes impudent. A charming, innocent impudence. And she starts humming—humming in the parsonage! Mother-in-law purses up her mouth. Then Anne laughs, loud, ringing laughter in the stillness of the parsonage! It seems obscene, at least to the mother-in-law, and very nearly to us, too—just the pure laughter of a young girl—so suggestive an atmosphere can Dreyer create.

This makes a witch of her; the fact that she must not laugh, that she must not sing. That she must hide her love. She wishes her husband dead. What else can she do ? She tells him in plain words that she has never loved him, that she loves his son and that she wishes he were dead. He has a heart attack and dies, and she, in her naive love-blindness, thinks now all is well. But, of course, the mother-in-law has seen through her. Over Hr. Absolon's coffin she accuses Anne of witchcraft, her lover begins to suspect her and finally she herself believes it. She confesses to being a witch, to having caused her husband's death. The film's dramatic conflict is really between her and her surroundings, represented by the silence within the parsonage and the wild witch-hunt outside the windows. The focus of interest is on the fate of this young girl—a beautiful, but not unusual young girl, ripe for love, but who goes under in a morass of sin and the consciousness of sin. Her surroundings and the morals they contain must be preserved, not the individual—not youth.

Dreyer has not in this film set himself up to judge the problem of witchcraft—living in a modern age the question does not exist for him. He *uses* it to intensify his story, because it did at that time stamp the lives of the people he is describing, and to this day the roots are there; we still live surrounded by tabu and superstitions and unnatural conventions. *The Day of Wrath* is with all its " objectivity " and cruel mildness, undoubtedly Dreyer's most radical film.

It goes without saying that Dreyer in this film, which illustrates the power of surrounding over people, has paid special attention to the settings. First, he searched out localities in Denmark that had preserved a Renaissance atmosphere undisturbed; a cellar in Dronninglund castle with thick white arches had a brutal sterility which made them suitable for the torture scene. The high white interior of Vordingborg church gave him the setting for the parson's inner world. This and other interiors were copied and adapted, of course. But the exact atmosphere was recreated and underlined by the lighting. In the parsonage the panellings are dark and warm, and in spite of the cleanliness give an air of

stuffiness and stiffness. From this sober setting the close-ups and lighting pick out the faces, so that they stand apart, as it were, from the world around them, infused in turn with suffering, fear, short-lived joy and fear again. *The Day of Wrath* is, without doubt, a most carefully worked out film as regards lighting effects. The figures appear outlined in grey against the black or blinding white background—always in contrast. A light is thrown over Anne's face and draws the expression towards us, or it is used to emphasise all the wrinkles in Absalon's harassed features. The material of the costumes is given texture under the light, woollen or silken, warm or cool. The embroidery stands like a dream vision in its frame, the veins of the wooden bench are sharply profiled.

The sound track of the film is almost revolutionary in its Spartan quality. Time after time the silence plays an *active* part. The dialogue stands out in relief in short, clipped sentences as meaningless as any ordinary conversation, yet *revealing*. There is one sequence where for a long time nothing is heard except the urgent but thin tinkling of a bell calling the people to chase the witch. Then the stylised shouting of the crowd, not loud, but deafening in its constant mad repetition. Or in another place, as C. A. Lejeune mentions in *The Observer*, " the horrifying, sexless, sweet voices of the choir boys singing while a woman lies in terror of death."

In an article on " Foundations of Film Style," in *The Listener*, January 30th, 1947, Dreyer reaffirmed what he had said about *Jeanne d'Arc*; " Actors should be chosen for their mental resemblance to the character they are to play, as you can read the mind of a man through his facial expression."

In Lisbeth Movin he found the actress to play Anne. She was then extremely young and not very well known. He fell in love with her veiled eyes. She understood the part instinctively and immediately, he said, " She has great dramatic talent. If I had attempted to direct her she would have over-acted. I often let her play a scene without any rehearsal." Lisbeth Movin says herself that she missed direction very much indeed. Most probably she had expected too much of Dreyer—and then he did not work on her at all! She had read about his violent struggle with Falconetti during *Jeanne d'Arc* and thought she was in for the same treatment. She has, of course, since come to understand what a compliment this passive attitude of Dreyer's was to her. She turned out exactly as he wanted her in the film because of this mental resemblance: an *ordinary* Danish girl, pretty, sweet and amiable, but with that erotic undercurrent which makes her dangerous. I think it will be found that this is the greatest and most important artistic fact in the film; the normality of Lisbeth Movin's performance lends a universal aspect to it which is much more convincing than any brilliant prima donna act. I am sure (though I have not said this to him) that Dreyer was only interested in Anne in this film. I believe that is why in the end we are only interested in her, and that is all to the good.

The critics, however, even the friendly ones, have praised Anna Svierkier almost as much as Lisbeth Movin. This is understandable. Her performance as Marte who is burned for a witch leaves a violent impression, with its mixture of little-old-womanly pitifulness and desperate, threatening majesty. But there can be little doubt that Dreyer is more responsible than she herself for the success of the part. He used her very well. She was one of fifty that he "examined." She had been a provincial actress, and was the over-eager kind who act too much. In the opening scene, when she was to go through a stable door to escape her pursuers, she rushed along and there was no stopping her. But her shoes were too tight, so Dreyer let her do the scene over and over again, ten, fifteen, twenty times. At last she was so tired and foot-sore that she slowly staggered through the door as an old woman would.

The smaller parts, particularly the priests in the tribunal, Dreyer chose from amongst painters and sculptors. "They have beards and good faces and a sense of grouping and plastics," he maintained. When once, before shooting a group scene he changed the position of a hand, the painter to whom it belonged said "Yes, I had just been wondering whether that hand ought not to be out of the way—there are too many hands in the picture." Dreyer likes that kind of co-operation.

When the film was being cast, the producers wanted the Danish actor, Eyvind Johan-Svendsen to play Hr. Absalon. He had the brusqueness and full-blooded-ness usually associated with the Renaissance. But, as Dreyer said, "Renaissance men were not all beer-barrels; this full-blooded idea is banal. Look at Rembrandt's Night-watchmen—people of quite ordinary stature."

According to Dreyer it would have ruined the film to have employed the otherwise excellent actor, Eyvind Johan-Svensen. The spiritual problem of the part, the real tragedy, is that Absalon is a sensitive and good man who believes that he has married Anne out of kindness. He is shaken to the depths of his soul when she flings it in his face that her attraction for him has been purely erotic. He realises then that his motives have not been purely religious and unselfish. But if the part had been played by an unascetic and full-blooded type, this theme would have been lost, the relationship become banal without any sense of tragedy. Dreyer, therefore, chose Thorkild Roose, one of the finest older actors at the Royal Theatre, a little older than the part demanded. But in him he found a combination of sternness, ascetism, gentleness and repressed eroticism. He filled the mentality of the part completely.

Two People

(Svensk Filmindustri, Stockholm.) *Script:* Dreyer, *partly in collaboration with Martin Glanner from W. O. Somin's play,* "*Attentat.*" *Dialogue translation:* Herbert Grevenius. *Those taking part: Dr. Arne Lundell*—Georg Rydeberg; *Marianne, his wife*—Wanda Rothgardt. *Producer:* Hugo Bolander. *Photography:* Gunnar Fischer. *Music:* Lars-Erik Larsson. *Conductor:* Erik Tuxen. *Decor:* Nils Svenwall. *Sound engineers:* Lennart Svensson and Tore Ljungberg. *Editing:* Dreyer and Edvin Hammarberg. *Premiere:* Roda Kvarn, Stockholm, March 23rd, 1945.

How important, even essential it is for Dreyer's art that he should be allowed to choose his own actors for their mental resemblance to the parts can best be shown in the history of what happened when he made his twelfth feature film, *Two People.* It was made for Svensk Filmindustri in 1944-45 in Stockholm, and had its premiere at the Röda Kvarn Cinema, March 23rd, 1945. It ran for five days and was then withdrawn. The critics were very hard on it. In Denmark it has, so far, had only a single showing in the Danish Film Society in 1947—otherwise I don't think it has been shown anywhere.

Dreyer had for many years been interested in the idea of making a film with only two people in it. Dr. Dymling, Director of Svensk Filmindustri, met him during a visit to Copenhagen in 1944 and heard about this idea. Dreyer was invited to come to Stockholm to make it. S.F. were unable to obtain the rights of Louis Verneuil's *M. Lambertier,* so they bought the rights of a Swiss piece by Somin called *Attentat,* and Dreyer wrote the film script himself, partly in collaboration with the Danish author, Martin Glanner. The story is as follows:

Dr. Arne Lundell, assistant physician at a mental hospital, has written a thesis, but his superior, Prof. Zander, simultaneously publishes a thesis which is word for word the same as Lundell's, and accuses Lundell of having stolen it from him. The real background to it is that Zander, under cover of wanting to help L. has persuaded L's young wife, Marianne, who has earlier been his mistress, to hand over the manuscript of the thesis as each part is written. He then threatens to ruin L's career unless Marianne agrees to divorce him and marry Z. Marianne shoots Z. But as L. has been seen near the home of Z. at the time of the murder, suspicion falls on him. Marianne confesses to her husband, who tries to make her escape, and says he will take the blame. But she takes poison and he follows her in death.

This story has obvious weaknesses; it is melodramatic, Professor Zander is such an exaggerated villain, that it could easily become a cheap thriller. And it did . . .

Dreyer denies any blame in the matter. He was not given the two players he wanted for the parts, and instead was forced to use two artists who are clever enough in themselves, but who, according to Dreyer, were entirely unsuited to the parts and could not possibly carry out his ideas. When one knows the four people in question, the two Dreyer wanted and the two he was forced to use—one must agree with him. Personally, I believe it could have been a good film if he

had had the other actors, they were so completely in harmony with Dreyer's idea. But I will let him speak for himself. Here is a quotation from an explanation he sent to me.

" I will attempt to sketch the two people as they were described in the script and as they appeared to me.

" *HE* had to be young, sincere, with a pure mind and heart, completely without guile or deceit. Ignorant of the wickedness of the world because he himself is true. An idealist, immersed in his studies with blinkers on, so that he sees nothing but his work—and the woman he loves and blindly trusts. Mostly a quiet and peace-loving man, but violent and uncontrolled when deceived.

" Anyone can tell that Georg Rydeberg's talent is on an utterly different plane. It is easier to imagine him in a part where he can be mysterious, hard to fathom, intriguing, cunning and even demoniacal. A man of this nature would after a few weeks have seen through the secret guilt his wife was trying to hide from him.

" *SHE* should be young, warm-blooded and sensual, so that there is an explanation for her slightly tarnished past, when she has gone from one affair to another. On the other hand, since she has met her husband, she has loved him with such complete devotion that she is in constant fear that he shall discover her earlier relations with Prof. Zander. As a character she is insincere, she has no difficulty in pretending and even lying, if she finds it necessary. She is theatrical and a little affected, with a definite inclination to hysteria.

" It is not necessary to emphasise that the sweet, natural and uncomplicated Wenda Rothgardt would find it easier to represent a woman diametrically opposite to the one I have described above.

" I was then faced with the grotesque situation that I got the exact opposite of what I wanted. Instead of two young people ignorant in the affairs of matrimony, I got two people who had to be presumed married for a number of years, with settled habits, who would therefore react quite differently to the conflict."

The two artists that Dreyer wanted were Gunn Wallgren and Anders Ek. She was turned down because she was not sufficiently well-known and was not beautiful. Since then, it is, I believe, safe to say that she has become one of the great names amongst Swedish actresses. Anders Ek was turned down on account of his large adams-apple! Ek, too, has had a great success since, beginning with Galigula in the play by Camus. Merely the fact that the two artists in question have since come to the forefront on the Swedish stage (and films) speaks for Dreyer's genius for spotting hidden talent.

It must be openly admitted that the premiere in Stockholm was a miserable business. The effect of Rydeberg's efforts to appear sincere and reliable (two qualities he always finds difficulty in expressing) was particularly weak. And

Wanda Rothgardt had turned into a comfortable little housewife whose reactions, motives and actions had no connection with her personality. The attempt at detailed psychoanalysis seemed slow and long-winded.

Matters were not improved by the film company putting back an unfortunate scene which Dreyer had cut out. Dreyer also objected to the music at the ending which had been inserted without his having heard it.

Dreyer's artistic personality

After reviewing Dreyer's work as a director so far, his distinctive films which reveal both the predominantly subconscious character of his attitude to life and a complete mastery of technique, one cannot help returning to the starting-point—to his childhood. One thing must have had a decisive effect on him: his extreme sensibility suffered a deep shock when he found himself surrounded by people with cold eyes that constantly reproached him for his very existence. For most of his films he chose the theme himself, and there is one which occurs again and again—that of passive suffering, the helplessness of the lonely person calling to some fellow-being to come to his aid. For example: the unmarried mother in *The President*, Jesus, Marie Antoinette and Siri in *Leaves from Satan's Book*, the old widow at the end of *The Parson's Widow*, the whole persecuted Jewish people in *Love One Another*, Benjamin Christensen's sensitive performance depicting the resignation and lonely death of the Master in *Mikael*, the martyrdom of the wife in *Thou shalt Honour thy Wife*; and in the three films, *Jeanne d'Arc*, *Vampyr* and *Day of Wrath*, it is quite openly stated. The theme going through them all is of one person (usually a woman) who is wrapped in loneliness as in an icy shroud, but who draws a kind of gentle strength from this helplessness. In *Vampyr* the basic motive is literally these cold eyes which we sense beyond the picture, beyond the everyday reality.

But this very personal aspect of his art is at the same time one of the reasons for its objectivity: Dreyer's supreme technical assurance, his never-failing instinct for cinema. Being a director has never become just a professional job to him, and so he has never compromised. His thirst for personal satisfaction with his work made him artistically relentless, made him film a scene over and over and over again until it came true to his vision and feeling. In this way he developed within himself an exceptional visual intuition, so that he identified himself completely with the camera and with the rhythm of the film as it was formed. His great sensibility has made him an acute critic, particularly of his own work—a self-criticism so delicately tuned that it is

always urging him on and transforming his natural humility from passivity to active effort.

But in identifying himself with cinema as an art form, Dreyer was forced to turn his critical faculties against the artistic shortcomings of the film in its various stages of development. This new art, to him, lacked the quality that he wished first and foremost to express: perhaps one can best describe it as truth. His productive self-criticism made him strive to introduce a personal *milieu* into his films and to ensure that they contained real people. His unswerving humility forced him to demand the qualities of truth and naturalness in his actors' performances, and opened his eyes to the real nerve-centre of film—the close-up. In this way he created genuine and natural films at a time when most other films were everything else: literature, painting, theatre, decor, costumes, tableaux, propaganda and dreamlands. *Jeanne d'Arc* and *Vampyr* appeared at a time when film criticism had not been trained to accept new trends in the cinema, and when the public had not acquired any sure appreciation of films. Today there is probably quite a broad level of filmgoers who will recognise Dreyer's genius and the important contribution he has made to the art of film-making.

Danish Documentary Films

SINCE the liberation in May, 1945, Dreyer has been an energetic collaborator in the production of Danish short films. Apart from the already mentioned film about maternity help, he made another short during the war, in 1942, called *Water in the Country*, about the problem of getting unpolluted water to the farm. It was not shown, as it was found on completion to be bad propaganda for Danish agriculture. Dreyer must have been too much of a realist!

In 1947, in conjunction with the photographer, Preben Frank, Dreyer made a series of historical tableaux called *The Village Church*, which illustrated the development of typical Danish churches during the last 700-800 years. The same year he wrote the script for Torben Anton Svendsen's film, *Seventh Age*, which is a picture about the care of the old in Denmark. This film is number 5 in the series *Social Denmark*, with English dialogue, intended for export. The maternity film was also included in this series as No. 2, after it had been slightly modified and an English commentary added.

In 1948, Dreyer made a film from a story by the Nobel prize-winner, Johannes V. Jensen—one of his "myths" called *They Caught the Ferry*, a forceful narrative about a young motor-cyclist's race with time, ending in death. The ferry he catches is Charon's boat.

In January, 1949, two new shorts by Dreyer were shown. One of them told the story of the classical sculptor, Thorvaldsen, in rather cautious terms, with flattering illustrations by Preben Frank. The other was a newly cut version of some older material on the subject of the beginnings of Danish radio. It was called *The Childhood of Radio*. Several others had tried and failed to make something of the material; Dreyer managed to make a workmanlike and popular little film of it.

During the course of 1949, Dreyer also made a cinematic study of Denmark's longest bridge, Storstromsbroen, as well as *A Castle within a Castle*, an archaeological film about the old castle, Krogen, of which remains are still to be found inside the present castle of Kronborg in Elsinore.

In this way Dreyer has made his contribution to the Danish State production of short films, which at a difficult time helped to keep up morale in Denmark, and which have given Denmark a hearing in the outside world.

All this was only an interlude . . .

Postscript

WHILE Dreyer is at work on short films he is also occupied with plans of considerable importance for the future. In 1946 he had actually signed up with an English producer to make a film on the life of Mary Stuart. But he had the contract annulled when it was discovered that the producer had not sufficient backing to secure good working conditions.

In the U.S.A. he has been negotiating with producers on another plan: a film about Christ. At present there is a possibility that the plan may be realised by a combined English, American, Jewish and Christian team.

The shooting is to be done in Palestine, even the studio work. The actors are all to be Jewish except for some Italians who are to play the Romans. The theme of the film is to be that it was not the Jews but the Romans who were responsible for the crucifixion.

Palestine is seen as an occupied country. The Zealots will be presented as resistance fighters, the Pharisees as the bourgeois absorbed in the worshipping of God and keeping neutral. The Sadducees will be the collaborators, an upper class serving the Roman occupation forces.

Dreyer wants to present Jesus as politically inactive—his kingdom is not of this world. He was forced by public pressure to become their Messiah, the national liberator. That was why he rode into Jerusalem on the back of an ass, to signify that the prophesy had been fulfilled.

The film will not open with the birth, but with Jesus as a grown man, speaking in a crowd of people. As in Dreyer's other films the action will be concentrated in time to a considerable extent.

Jesus will only use the words that are in the Gospels. The action, too, will keep closely to the Gospels.

Dreyer realises the many artistic problems that will have to be solved before the film can become a reality. What about the parables? What about the miracles?

But one thing is important: Dreyer believes he has found the right style for the film. It will not be naturalistic or documentary, but simplified like a modern wood-cut. He is now studying the period and its culture. Not before he had absorbed it completely, so that he knows it in detail, will he start looking for the characteristic traits to be picked out and fitted into the pattern of the style. The picture of the period must be clear, correct and artistically expressive and convincing. Dreyer knows he can make this film; it *must* become a reality.

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