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Author(s)	Peter Cowie
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profound remorse, and Sjöberg's direction and conception of the film make these scenes meaningful in a cinematic way. Erik gives the order to kill two princelings who are prisoners in the dungeons of Stockholm castle. Almost immediately he regrets his impulsiveness. He dashes downstairs in an attempt to prevent the execution, but his soldiers ignore his cries. They track down the children in the shadowy vaults and murder them hideously. Erik is incarcerated himself: he is unable to exercise control over his court, and this scene provides visual proof of his plight. As he runs headlong through the huge rooms of the castle, one is confronted with his physical insignificance by comparison with the inanimate might of his surroundings, and, when he quarrels hysterically with Persson, with the gulf that lies between the characters — the ineffable solitude of kingship.

The lot of Karin, bearing one child after another in silent deference to her Royal lover, resembles that of many Scandinavian heroines, from Kristin Lavransdotter to Rya-Rya in *Only a Mother*. But despite the sincerity of Ulla Jacobsson's performance, she never comes to life with the same conviction as Erik. Technically the film is heavy but immaculate, and Sven Nykvist's photography is excellent in the interior sequences. Sjöberg's insistence on shooting in the castles of Koberg, Kalmar, and Gripsholm has been rewarded, for only occasionally does the film lapse into theatricality. The period detail, as always in the Swedish cinema, is faultless, but in the final analysis one hesitates to submit to the fascination of *Karin Månsdotter*. This is partly because — unlike *Miss Julie* or *The Virgin Spring* — it lacks a burning theme that can be given universal application, and partly because the characters remain hedged too closely within their historical context.

In Sjöberg's more personal films men and women are led by their instincts and respond positively to temptations. They are anxious not to be affected by social conventions. *Wild Birds* (*Vildfågler*, 1954) is a kind of purified *Frenzy*, but the characterisation is so ludicrous that one finds it difficult to believe in the romantic agony of the young sailor, Nisse. Wandering blind drunk round the harbour in Göteborg, he is taken in hand by a prostitute and lured into joining a band of petty criminals, led by Harry (Ulf Palme). Then one day he meets a

well-bred girl called Lena, and learns that the musician who lived in his attic room before him taught Lena and his sister to play the piano. Lena becomes the idealistic, good-hearted influence on Nisse. While her fiancé, Gunnar, is away at sea she falls in love with this intense and intriguing newcomer, breaking barriers of class with the same wilful glee as Miss Julie. Eventually Gunnar returns and is told by Lena's younger sister of the turn of events. When the father and Gunnar come to the attic, Nisse barricades the door and shoots first Lena and then himself.

Wild Birds is a hybrid film, ruined by some ridiculous scenes and yet sustained by others that are very compelling. Sjöberg took the story from Bengt Anderberg's novel *Nisse Bortom*, and he seems all too anxious to fit the characters into their predestined parts. The complaints and opinions of Nisse are grafted on to him and never appear to stem from his condition as shown in the film. The prudishness of Lena's sister is rarely persuasive, and Fiorentino himself, whose spirit obviously endures in the attic and supposedly unhinges Nisse, is a caricature of the Bohemian romantic-cum-psychopath. Like *Iris and the Lieutenant*, in fact, *Wild Birds* suffers from an excess of characters. Most of them are cardboard figures. The lachrymose prostitute who lives below Nisse is an all-too familiar acquaintance, trying to drown her sorrows in drink and moaning over an old photograph of her family that symbolises brighter days. The only one who comes at all to life is Harry, the jaded gang leader whose control over his accomplices strikes a realistic note. Sjöberg certainly manipulates his various personalities skilfully; but he cannot help obscuring the line of the plot, so that for at least one-third of the film one is unable to recognise the significance of Lena. (Why, for example, is her dream sequence inserted at so early a stage?) Where Sjöberg restores confidence is in his handling of the set-pieces, such as the party where Harry and his gang congregate. Nisse dances frenetically with a prostitute and the party develops into an orgy. The naked sexuality is emphasised by Sjöberg's cross-cutting between the dance and a fist-fight between two men in a corner of the room. The fiery eroticism of this scene is far more explicit than anything in the Swedish cinema, including *The Silence*, because the *pleasure* of passion is commu-

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nicated with such massive force. At the end everyone wilts from sheer physical exhaustion and satisfaction. The party to which Lena takes Nisse later in the film is sedate by comparison, and underlines the extremes in Nisse's personality. (He tells Lena, expressively, that life with her is like being in the heart of a cyclone, where the wind rages all around but one is unaffected). Lena's attempt to make him a respectable member of society is patently condemned from the start. He finds, as do so many heroes in the Swedish cinema, that their love is based solely on physical attraction. With the dawn comes disillusion, but disillusion not so great as to explain Nisse's extravagant suicide at the end. One would be more impressed if he was shown drifting, alone and drunk, round the harbour once again.

As a study in temperament, then, *Wild Birds* is only partially successful. Sjöberg's achievement is his direction of the action sequences, such as the party discussed above, and the various raids organised by Harry, and in his creation of an atmosphere of mystery and suspicion that colours the entire film.