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THE RITUAL

Reviews

PLAYBOY (December issue) by Bruce Williamson

Three actors bare their souls to a dispassionate investigator representing a "court of appeal" in *THE RITUAL*. As in much of his recent work, Bergman seems obsessed with the very fact of being an artist. He keeps asking what relationship exists between the world at large--inhabited for the most part by dullards--and those complex creative beings, like himself, whose inner compulsion is to make order out of chaos. *THE RITUAL*'s investigator, or judge (played with chilling precision and a hint of prurience by Erik Hell), may be viewed as a stand-in for the common man, who begins by questioning the actors about an allegedly obscene performance and is led by them into an ordeal of soul searching that renders his life unbearable. Prior to a ritualistic climax, during which the actors repeat their offensive skit in the judge's chamber--the lady topless, while her male co-stars brandish giant leather phalluses--the drama takes shape as a series of interviews filmed mostly in penetrating close-ups. Ingrid Thulin, Gunnar Bjornstrand and Anders Ek, three familiar faces from the accomplished Bergman stable, approach their moments of truth with a skill that hypnotizes. Like members of a flawless string quartet, they saw away at discordant themes relating to fear, adultery, greed, cruelty, alcoholism and emotional dependency. Family entertainers they're not; but they serve a master whose slightest composition bears the hallmark of greatness.