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ANSIKTET (The Face), Sweden, 1958

Cert: X. *dist:* Contemporary. *p.c.:* Svensk Filmindustri. *d. and sc:* Ingmar Bergman. *ph:* Gunnar Fischer. *ed:* Oscar Rosander. *a.d.:* P. A. Lundgren. *m:* Erik Nordgren. *l.p.:* Max von Sydow (*Vogler*), Ingrid Thulin (*Manda*), Naima Wifstrand (*Grandmother*), Gunnar Björnstrand (*Dr. Vergerus*), Åke Fridell (*Tubal*), Lars Ekborg (*Simson*), Bengt Ekerot (*Spegel*), Toivo Pawlo (*Starbeck*), Erland Josephson (*Consul Egerman*), Gertrud Fridh (*Mrs. Egerman*), Bibi Andersson (*Sara*), Sif Ruud (*Sofia*), Oscar Ljung (*Antonsson*). 9,200 ft. 102 mins.

Sweden in the middle of the nineteenth century. Dr. Vogler, mesmerist and magician, travelling to Stockholm with his troupe, is stopped at a customs post where he and his company are examined by three officials: a consul, a medical officer, and a chief constable. Is Vogler, with his aura of both Christ and the Devil, a charlatan? The three officials are almost certain that he is, and their interrogation is brutal. Yet the medical officer, Vergerus, realises that Vogler is an unusual, interesting person and is drawn to him. Overnight the troupe stays at the consul's house. Next morning the committee order a private performance, during which they manage in part to expose Vogler's trickery and humiliate him. But Vogler is not entirely a fraud; and he contrives a savage revenge, culminating in the haunting of the terrified medical officer after an autopsy in an attic. Only the intervention of Vogler's wife saves Vergerus's life. The committee are about to humiliate the mesmerist still further when a message arrives from the King summoning the troupe to a command performance. Vogler and his wife drive away in triumph to the palace.

Ingmar Bergman's new film is a melodrama which tries to trick us into believing that it deals adequately with serious issues: as melodrama alone, it would have been excellent; as a piece of intellectual trickery, it is in fact exasperating. Technically this is an expert film, with its brilliant camerawork, its assured evocation of the Bergman world of sunshot glades and elegant interiors, and its three compelling performances by Björnstrand as the dessicated medical officer, von Sydow as the mesmerist, all brooding magnificence, and Naima Wifstrand as an amiable witch. But Bergman's script is weak, with a confused and repetitive story and various rich themes never fully worked out. A debate between science and the occult soon degenerates into a macabre romp between a rationalist medical officer and the magician; a half-worked-out conflict between Bohemian and bourgeois morality soon centres rather lazily on a study of the Bohemian Vogler. Even here the script is inadequate. Vogler is a familiar figure to readers of Gide and Thomas Mann, the artist who in the eyes of the bourgeoisie is partly fake, partly criminal and partly magician. His relationship to society is awkward and difficult, and Bergman hasn't made much of it. When Vogler justifies himself by saying: "Haven't I done everything to give you a sensation?", one suspects that he is an apologist for the film itself. But this is too easy. Rhetoric by itself is always cheap, and *The Face* is never much more than a series of dramatic tricks. All the cunning of Bergman and his able cast can't in the end save the film from seeming rather hollow.

Suitability: A.

E.H.R.