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THE MAGICIAN

1958

"Messrs. critics and docile filmophiles, regard my picture carefully. It is 100-per-cent Bergman. I have included a selection of 'profound themes' and 'personal compulsion ideas.' In order to make the interpretation even more interesting, I have mixed them up a bit. Now it is up to you to identify them, to take stock of them, and elucidate them. You have the right to use the dictionary of my collected works. Get started!"

-Gilbert Salachas  
for BERGMAN

The film takes place in Stockholm in July 1846. The introductory vignette shows the silhouette of a vehicle. Horses, people against the sky; otherwise silence. A party makes a halt on its way. Persons are shown, but not introduced. An old woman is collecting herbs and spits on a raven. The group is Vogler's Magnetic Health Theater en route to Stockholm to give performances there. The journey is resumed to the city gates. A bit later the coachman Simson becomes scared by a strangely frightening sound in the forest. The group's central character, Dr. Albert Emanuel Vogler, steps out. In a puddle he discovers a dying man in rags. He is the actor Johan Spegel. He asks Vogler why he wears a false beard and mask: "Are you an impostor who has to hide his real face?" Vogler does not reply; he is mute. At the South Gate the carriage is stopped by police. The party is escorted to Consul Abraham Egerman's big house, where the action of the film takes place.

The final vignette, taken from Brecht's Threepenny Opera, tells how defeat turns into victory, rain and storm into sunshine. The crushed, destitute Vogler learns through a message from the King that he has been invited to perform at the royal palace. Vogler and his troupe leave the house in triumph. True, the chatterbox Tubal, publicity agent and manager, has become lost to Egerman's cook, Sofia Garp. True, "grandma", the herb-collecting old quack, takes her savings and leaves. But one of the maids in the house joins the troupe, because she loves the coachman. The carriage pulls out in triumph, to the accompaniment of merry sounds, and disappears behind a hill. Only a street lamp remains hanging. It stops swinging. The royal letter that releases Vogler from his humiliation is dated July 14, 1846. B was born July 14, 1918.



In a short article B has stated that it is permissible "to commit any outrageousness, any artistic violence, tell any dizzy lies one pleases, as long as they are truly seductive; to give the art form an enthusiastic contempt blended with respect for the minority of people who have managed to live while maintaining the relative purity of spirit and body." THE MAGICIAN is the clearest expression of this philosophy. The film corresponds exactly to the conception one may have of B's position as a film artist. As long as Vogler's trick is not revealed he convinces the spectators. When they see through him, he is transformed into the most miserable beggar. He uses a magic lantern to create "annoying and hideous sights." To the police chief Tubal describes the apparatus as a "ridiculous and perfectly harmless toy." Still, B has managed with the aid of this toy to evoke an imagined world which has the unique ambiguity, the humor, and the seriousness of THE MAGICIAN. Out of humiliation, Vogler rises to comply with the King's invitation. He carries a great disillusion but he knows that he can continue. He knows that his trick is still a hit with the audience.

## CAST

Max von Sydow (Albert Emanuel Vogler, the mesmerist), Ingrid Thulin (Manda Vogler, his wife, disguised, called Aman), Ake Fridell (Tubal, Vogler's assistant), Naima Wifstrand (Vogler's grandmother, a sorceress), Lars Ekborg (Simson, Vogler's coachman), Gunnar Bjornstrand (Anders Vergerus, counselor of medicine), Erland Josephson (Abraham Egerman, the consul), Gertrud Fridh (Ottilia, his wife), Toivo Pawlo (Frans Starbeck, police chief), Ulla Sjoblom (Henrietta, his wife), Bengt Ekerot (Johan Spegel, an actor), Sif Ruud (Sofia Garp, the Egerman's cook), Bibi Andersson (Sara Lindkvist, the maid), Birgitta Pettersson (Sanna Fernstrom, a maid), Oscar Ljung (Antonsson, the Egerman's coachman), Axel Duberg (Rustan, a servant).

## QUESTIONS

1. Can you see Vogler as a Christ figure?
2. Note the combination of triumphs and defeats, humiliation from the attic scene to the end. Is this mixture true to life?
3. Is the film effective as a work of art? How does Bergman make use of sounds and silences? This cinematographic method is subtle. Is it lost? Note the positioning and grouping of his characters. Is the ending believable?
4. Could Bergman be hinting that there are still somethings that cannot be explained?
5. Keep your eye on the two main characters, Vogler and Vergerus. What do you think each symbolizes? What do they have in common, particularly in relation to the society between them?
6. What would you conclude to be Bergman's opinion of society? Hatred, contempt, pity?