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The Seventh Seal

BY PETER COWIE

Year of Production: 1956. Production Company: Svenskfilmindustri, Stockholm. English Distributor: Contemporary Films. Producer: Allan Ekelund. Director: Ingmar Bergman. Screenplay: Ingmar Bergman. Director of Photography: Gunnar Fischer. Music: Erik Nordgren. Sound: Aaby Wedin and Lennart Wallin. Choreography: Slse Fischer. Sets: P A Lundgren. Editing: Lennart Wallin. Costumes: Manne Lindholm. Running Time: 96 minutes. First London Showing: March 7 1958 (Academy Cinema).

Cast: *The Knight*, Max von Sydow; *The Squire*, Gunnar Björnstrand; *Death*, Bengt Ekerot; *Jof*, Nils Poppe; *Mia*, Bibi Andersson; *The Girl*, Gunnel Lindblom; *Skat*, Erik Strandmark; *The Monk*, Anders Ek; *Knight's Wife*, Inga Landgre; *Lisa*, Inga Gill; *Witch*, Maud Hansson; *Raval*, Bertil Anderberg.

Plot outline: After some splendidly tasteful credits, the film opens with a choir singing loudly and intensely as a hawk hovers in a louring sky. Then it is suddenly quiet and we see a Knight, Antonius Blok, and his Squire, Jöns, sprawled asleep on a rocky beach. It is dawn. A voice off-screen reads some words from the Book of Revelations that put the title of the film into context. The setting is 14th century Sweden. The plague is at work.

As the Knight prays on the shore he is suddenly aware of Death standing behind him. The tall, minatory figure moves forward to enwrap Blok in his cloak. But his victim remembers that he has seen Death playing chess in paintings, and so he challenges him to a game. Death agrees, and this game develops into a crucial *motif* of the film. While the Knight can forestall his opponent, he has time to attend to his doubts and to seek for some significance in his life.

The scene now moves to the hills as the Knight and his Squire ride wearily on their journey homeward (they have been away with the Crusades for ten years). They pass a caravan, and Bergman introduces us to his trio of wandering players—Jof, Mia, and Skat. Jof and Mia have an infant son, Mikael, for whom his father has great ambitions. He dreams that this boy will be a great juggler and perform the one impossible trick—making a ball stand still in the air. Jof is a visionary, and in the morning sunlight he perceives the Virgin walking sedately across a lawn with her child.

The scene switches again. The Knight and Jöns enter a small church and, while the latter is discussing the ravages of the plague with a rood-painter, the former confesses his doubts to a priest near the main altar. The priest is Death, and Blok does not realise this until he has foolishly revealed the trick by which he had intended to defeat his opponent at chess. But his courage remains unquenched—'This is my hand', he says ardently, 'I can move it,

● *The procession of penitents praying desperately for help against the plague*

feel the blood pulsing through it. The sun is still high in the sky and I, Antonius Blok, am playing chess with Death!'

As he and the Squire leave the church, they see a young girl tied to a stake. Men-at-arms are on guard, and a tight-lipped priest mutters prayers over her. She has been found having 'carnal intercourse with the Evil One', and is to be burned the following night. The travellers ride along the hills for a short time and then stop for water at a village, deserted because of the plague. Jöns discovers a malicious seminarist, Raval, robbing a dead man, and just prevents him from raping a young girl. He takes the girl with him as a future housekeeper.

The rhythm of the film settles into its stride as Bergman changes his scene to a village farther along the coast, where Jof, Mia, and Skat are performing a farce in front of the soldiers and local folk. Skat slides away lecherously behind some bushes with the giggling wife of the neighbouring blacksmith, while Jof and Mia's gaiety turns to dread at the approach of a procession of flagellants. Imaginative camerawork stresses the ghastly fervour of this procession, with its crude cross, its numerous skulls and its anguished Christ-figure, all of which are enveloped in a cloud of smoke from the censers. The wailing of the penitents ceases briefly while a monk inveighs against them—'Do you know, you fools, that you will die today or tomorrow, or the next day, because you are all doomed!' In a controlled burst of cross-cutting between this man's distorted face and the faces of those standing about him, Bergman emphasises admirably the malevolent hold that the Church exercised over the population in the Middle Ages.

After the procession has moved on, Jof is taunted by Raval into dancing like a bear on the table. Again the horrific element is conveyed well in the editing, and only at the frenetic climax, with beer-mugs beating down on the table and firebrands licking round the dancer's legs, is Jof saved by the entry of the Squire, who brands Raval as a reward for his sadism.

The Knight is talking meanwhile with Mia at the caravan, and when Jöns returns with the exhausted Jof, the little group share a frugal meal of strawberries and fresh milk. This is the most beautiful and moving scene in *The Seventh Seal*. The momentary peace and friendliness that surround the Knight prompt him to express his simple, universal emotions with a touching lucidity: 'I shall remember this moment, the silence, the twilight, the bowl of strawberries and milk, your faces in the dusk, Mikael sleeping, Jof with his lyre. I'll carry this memory between my hands as carefully as if it were a bowl filled with fresh milk'. Significantly, the Knight moves away from his companions a few moments later, led by his instinct to the corner of the field where Death is impatient to continue the game of chess.

The struggle is now on with a vengeance. Gloom settles within the forest as the coach trundles inland with its escort. The blacksmith finds his wife's seducer in a scene bespattered with lecherous apophthegms, with the Squire looking on cynically and turning to his companion with the comment, 'In Southern lands there are things called apes . . .' Skat is claimed by Death almost immediately.

Then the soldiers come to burn the witch at dead of night. In the clearing where the pyre is prepared, the Knight tries to find some answer to his problems by interrogating the condemned girl. Believing that she has really known the Devil, he maintains that 'I want to ask him about God. He if anyone must know'. But the girl, like Death (disguised this time as an itinerant Monk) can give him no answer and he can only gaze with Jöns in horror at her disillusioned eyes as the flames and smoke swirl about her.

Later, as the party halts awhile, Raval emerges from the forest, stricken with the plague, and grovels before Jöns and his girl in a last servile plea for water. He dies convulsively, and the ensuing scene shows the Knight engaged in his final session of chess with Death. Jof's visionary power comes to his aid now and, perceiving the dark figure engrossed in the game, he calls Mia and leads her and Mikael away in their wagon. At this vital moment the Knight suddenly sweeps the chessmen off the board and thus distracts Death's attention. He has achieved his one significant action in allowing the Holy Family to escape but in so doing he is irrevocably doomed—

when the pieces are re-assembled, he is checkmate.

As Jof and Mia drive in panic through the forest, a storm begins. Lightning and thunder are backed on the soundtrack by a fierce chorus similar to that used in the opening shots of the film. It is still dark and tempestuous as the Knight arrives at his castle. He leads his companions—Jöns and his girl, Plog and his wife—through the deserted rooms to where at length his wife Karin stands listlessly by a fire. The meeting between them is beautifully understated. The atmosphere is heavy with melancholy and resignation as they sit at table and Karin reads from the Book of Revelations. All at once a thunderous knocking is heard. Jöns goes to the door but on his return says that no one was there. A few moments later, however Death is in the room (introduced by a shock cut just as he was at the start of the film), and each character in turn makes his final comment. 'God, you who are somewhere, who *must* be somewhere, have mercy on us', implores the Knight, idealistic to the end. Jöns' girl drops passionately to her knees and declares in a whisper, 'It is the end'.

The final shots are taken on the seashore yet again. It is dawn (*The Seventh Seal* has a timespan of 24 hours like most of Bergman's films) and Jof and Mia are preparing to continue their journey. Then Jof espies Death with his victims silhouetted against the stormy sky above the hills. 'They dance away from the dawn and it's a solemn dance towards the dark lands, while the rain washes their faces and cleans the salt of the tears from their cheeks'. He and Mia get into the caravan and it trundles along the shore into the sunlight.

The Critics: *The Seventh Seal* has received abundant critical attention in serious film publications, but the general tenor of the reviews in the national press when it opened in England was that of admiration mixed with horror, and sometimes loathing. Dilys Powell has admitted that she finds little to commend in Bergman's philosophy, except that portion of it expressed in *Wild Strawberries*, and in *The Sunday Times* (March 1958) she wrote: 'The magnificent craftsmanship, of course, I admit. But beneath the surface of the high-class bony morality which has understandably attracted so much admiration there lurks what to me is a dreadful squashy sentimentality which goes hand in hand with obsession by the dark and the cruel. On the one side the executioners and the hysterical self-indulgences, on the other the naive dreamer, the loving

● *The Knight is prevented by the soldiers from helping the Witch before she is burnt to death*

fair-haired wife in a low-necked blouse, the chubby baby. And it goes almost without saying that the dreamer is a strolling player. Innocence in the circus-tent and the caravan: it is the oldest hat in the business.'

By contrast with Dilys Powell's skilful attack, there is the praise of *The Manchester Guardian*'s anonymous critic (March 8 1958): 'We talk so often about the cinema's powers of realism on the one hand, and of fantasy on the other. The wonder of Bergman's film is that on his fancy-dress setting he imposes a conviction which is much more disturbing than that provided by realistic, 'documentary' pictures, even in good films, of life as we know it. He is concerned to deal with life's ultimate questions and, such is his mastery of cast and written word and camera, that he nowhere needs to strain his idiom to show that the essence of the matter in plague-stricken, medieval unrealistic Sweden was essentially the same as it is in nuclear fissionable Europe today. His film may be like a medieval morality play but it is not a bit quaint, and it wears its stylised garb with such an ease of casual inattention that, in the end, it looks entirely modern'.

The late Campbell Dixon, writing in *The Daily Telegraph* (March 8 1958), said that, 'The fable is told, on all levels, with remarkable skill. You may, if it amuses you, trace this or that idea or incident to a dozen different influences, from the Bible and medieval miracle and morality plays to Brueghel's cruel villages and the drama of Hiroshima. Nevertheless the writing is fresh and original and Mr Bergman's imagery, with its vast cloud mushrooming to heaven and its constant emphasis on death, is memorable for its sombre poetry and disturbing power'.

C A Lejeune commented in *The Observer* of that week: '*The Seventh Seal* is almost as mysterious as the Book from which it takes its title. It is often very dreadful, and sometimes very beautiful. The acting is superb, and long after you have left the theatre the riddle teases. A film so large in its conception rarely comes our way', while at the opposite pole was Nina Hibbin's vitriolic dismissal of the film in *The Daily Worker* (March 8 1958): 'It has been made by that master of cinema technique, Ingmar Bergman, and its excruciating sadism has earned it an x certificate. I give it a Y certificate—my own invention, designed to exclude everybody!'

Biographical Information: Ingmar Bergman. Ernst Ingmar Bergman was born on July 14 1918, and was brought up in his father's vicarage in Uppsala. His youth was dominated by his sharp reaction to the staid 'iron caskets of duty' in which his family was bound. He left his home in the Ostermalm quarter of Stockholm and began to live on next to nothing in the old part of the town, Gamla Stan. He led a Bohemian existence, his hair down to his shoulders on occasion, sleeping on doorsteps in reefer-necked sweaters, and churning out plays prolifically.

At first he worked entirely in the theatre, but by 1942 was employed at the Svenskfilmindustri studios at Rasunda, as a resident script-writer. The Swedish film industry was gradually recovering, under the excellent tutelage of Carl-Anders Dymling, from the recession of the thirties. Sjöberg had developed into the leading personality of the new generation, and he was impressed by Bergman's screenplay about a sadistic schoolmaster and the effect that his private perversions had on his pupils. He turned it into the famous *Frenzy*. Shortly afterwards, Bergman was able to direct himself, and was responsible for a series of unusual, if occasionally naive works—*Crisis*, *It Rains on our Love*, *A Ship Bound for India*, and *Music in Darkness*.

The first signs of Bergman's true talent emerged from *Prison*, a haunting, cruel study of a young prostitute who is so ruthlessly exploited that she is driven to suicide. The dialogue was also written by Bergman, and contains many premonitions of his later work. The old Professor who tries at the outset to persuade a former pupil to make a film about Hell—on Earth—says, 'The Church has always been the Devil's best ally . . . God is finished, an unnecessary illusion destroyed by the Devil'. And at the close of *Prison*, his pupil tells the Professor that his film cannot be made because it would 'end with a question to which there is no reply. There is one if one believes in God. As one no longer believes, there is no point to it at all'. The film is absolutely representative of the 'black philosophy' that pervaded Bergman during this early period, and the slightly earlier *Port of Call*, regarded by many as his most interesting sociological film, is similarly depressing. Altogether his anguish is deeply personal and profoundly rooted in the Scandinavian tradition of Strindberg, Sjöström, Sigrid Undset, and Kaj Munk. Emily Brontë is the only artistic equivalent we have in England.

But even in these early works, Bergman's style is excessively individualistic, and it remains so throughout his middle period, while his outlook on life is at once broadened and lightened. *Summer Interlude* (1950) is the finest film of Bergman before *Smiles of a Summer Night*. It is an exquisitely-wrought film, observing with lyrical warmth and tenderness the progress of a brief love-affair on an island near Stockholm. A ballerina (Maj-Britt Nilsson) recalls her dead lover and the idyllic summer that they spent together, and is encouraged by these memories to begin her life again—'I want to cry all this week and all next, but deep down I feel happy', she says finally. The figure of her uncle is very sinister, and shows that Bergman, even in his most tender moments, is conscious of the evil and foreboding that lie just round the corner. The use of the sound-track in *Summer Interlude* is brilliant, helped by natural sounds during the island sequences, and by a very atmospheric score from Erik Nordgren, who has composed the music for nearly all Bergman's major films.

Bergman continued to create films with an astonishing rapidity during the next few years, and before he achieved the sparkling wit and elegance of *Smiles of a Summer Night* in 1955, he had made *Thirst*, *Towards Joy*, *This Can't Happen Here*, *Waiting Women*, *Summer with Monika*, *Sawdust and Tinsel*, *A Lesson in Love*, and *Journey into Autumn*. At least five of these deserve complete studies to themselves, but one can only mention briefly here the remark-

● *Top: Jof is driven to exhaustion by the taunts of the sadistic Raval, and collapses in the inn after dancing grotesquely on the table.*
Above: Jof and Mia perform their farce before a crowd of soldiers and villagers

● *The Knight unwittingly gives away his innermost thoughts to Death, disguised as a priest, in the confessional*

able documentary complexion of *Summer with Monika* (distinguished by the consistently erotic playing of Harriet Andersson); the curiously melancholy flavour of hopeless love in *Journey into Autumn*, perhaps Bergman's most underrated film; the occasional scintillating exchanges in *A Lesson in Love*; and the piercing anguish of the grotesque circus-owner in *Sawdust and Tinsel*, epitomised in a humiliating, brutal fight in the ring.

Smiles of a Summer Night won the Jury Prize at Cannes in 1956 and is the first of Bergman's masterpieces. It is a perfect historical reconstruction of a house party at the turn of the century, that varies in tone from Restoration comedy and Wildean pungency to the mordant and cynical reflections on life that colour much of Bergman's previous work. The sexual element is again strongly stressed, and it is unquestionable that Bergman regards physical love as one of the mainsprings of human existence. The moral of *Smiles of a Summer Night* would seem to be that people can be sexually attracted to one another without being in love, but can never be in love unless they are sexually attracted to one another. Certain set-pieces are superb, notably the dinner-party presided over by Naima Wifstrand; the meeting on the sunny lawns of the country mansion; and the final game of Russian roulette in the yellow pavilion between the imperturbable Count Malcolm and the petrified Egerman.

After *The Seventh Seal*, Bergman made *Wild Strawberries*, a masterly examination of an old man's past life and his fears, narrated by means of scarifying flashbacks and dream-sequences that arise during the Professor's journey to Lund to receive an honorary degree. Many regard this film as being at the summit of Bergman's art. Certainly it is his most controlled statement of the human condition, and it is remarkable that within a twenty-four cycle of real time, a complete life is revealed in all its various ramifications and stages of development. Victor Sjöström as the Professor gives a magnificent performance, and the long duologue that he has with his daughter-in-law (Ingrid Thulin) in the car is one of the most disturbing conversations ever written by Bergman. Again the period atmosphere is captured impeccably, and the Edwardian attitudes and manners of the Borg family in their summerhouse are delightfully nostalgic. *Wild Strawberries* is a very beautiful film, less striking perhaps than *The Seventh Seal*, but unmatched in its evocation of youth and memory. It won the Grand Prix at the Berlin Festival in 1958.

So Close to Life and *The Face* were made subsequently, and in many ways disappointed Bergman's admirers. The first film is set in a maternity hospital, and gives a remarkably unpretentious picture of the emotions and worries of a trio of women (Ingrid Thulin, Eva Dahlbeck and Bibi Andersson won the Acting Prize at Cannes for their performances) prior to parturition. The narration is very spartan and bare (no music, scarcely any symbolism, short spasms of dialogue), and the whole film is as clinical as the hospital in which it is set.

The second film, *The Face* (1958) is a return to Bergman's baroque style, and recalls *Sawdust and Tinsel*. Max von Sydow plays the part of Vogler, a hypnotist accused of being a charlatan by the resident sceptic Vergerus (Gunnar Björnstrand). The film develops into an absorbing duel between these two characters, a struggle between illusion (art?) and reality (science?). There is an amusing intermezzo in the kitchen which helps to throw into relief the Grand Guignol horror of the final sequence in the attic, and the film is peopled with equivocal and symbolic figures (Spegel, the dying actor who mumbles profound reflections on the senselessness of life; and the sex-starved wife of the consul). The high-flown impudence of *The Face*, however, makes it very likely that Bergman had his tongue in his cheek for much of the time.

The Virgin Spring followed *The Face* in 1959, and has received much discussion recently. Enough here to say that this simple story of the rape of a young maiden and the revenge enacted by her father is perhaps the most classical and pristine of Bergman's achievements, in which beauty of image and hideousness of content are fused perfectly into a powerful morality film that strikes at pride, hypocrisy, and greed with relentless skill. The medieval setting is again absolutely credible.

The Devil's Eye was shown at the London Festival last year and was extremely well received. It is a fine comedy, marred by one or two banalities in the script (perhaps in the translation?) but is also marked by fairly serious moments. *Through A Glass Darkly* is a psychological study of a schizophrenic girl on holiday in the Baltic with her husband, young brother, and father. It is a masterpiece in that the often naked symbols of Bergman's earlier work have been effectively translated into psychological terms. The film is the first of a trilogy which has just been completed by *The Communicants* and *The Silence*, the latter being Bergman's most expensive film to date (approximately £68,000).

He intends to take a year's rest from the cinema in order to study Bach, and feels that another eight or ten films will complete what he wants to say through the medium of the cinema. His real interest, after all has been the stage, and he is one of the directors at the Royal Stockholm Theatre. 'The cinema is like a woman' he has remarked, 'a beautiful capricious, lusty and spirited lady in the prime of life, but although it is pleasant to be her lover, she is a mistress one can do without. The theatre is a faithful wife to me'. Among the playwrights whose works he has produced in Stockholm or Malmo are Shakespeare, Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Moliere, Hjalmar Bergman, Brecht, Tennessee Williams, Pirandello, Camus and Jean Anouilh, as well as half-a-dozen or more of his own plays. He has bravely refused lucrative offers from abroad to leave the Swedish theatre and cinema. Germany wanted him to shoot a film version of *A Doll's House*, and the Americans tried to persuade him to adapt Turgenev's *First Love* for the screen. Already Ingrid Thulin and Max von Sydow have been tempted by MGM and United Artists respectively, and it is fortunate that Bergman is forever aware of the ill-fated precedents of Sjöström and Stiller's migration to Hollywood.

Max von Sydow is only 33 years old, and at the age of 26 played with perfect assurance the part of the Knight in *The Seventh Seal*. Like most of the other members of Bergman's troupe, he has a theatrical background. Shakespeare became his favourite playwright at an early age and for his audition in 1948 for entry into the training school of the National Theatre in Stockholm he selected a passage from *Henry IV*. Since then he has played many rôles on the stage, one of the most notable being Faust in the production which was brought to London by Ingmar Bergman in 1959. His film parts have been few but good, although his brief appearance in Sjöberg's *Miss Julie* was rather a failure. Perhaps his most majestic interpretation was that of Töre in *The Virgin Spring*, although for sheer acting his Vogler in *The Face* was a fantastic achievement. Since then he has played in *Through a Glass Darkly* and *The Communicants*, as well as appearing in minor parts in

Wild Strawberries and *So Close to Life*. He has now been cast as Jesus Christ in George Stevens' production of *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.

Gunnar Bjornstrand. He was born in 1909, and studied in the same drama class as Ingrid Bergman at the National Theatre of Sweden. After overcoming a parental aversion to his entering the acting profession, he had to earn his living as a railwayman, hairdresser's assistant, sewing-machine agent, confectioner, and insurance representative. His rôles have been very numerous, although a production like *Fröken April* (1958) shows that when he is not under Bergman his acting ability is not sufficiently disciplined and guided. His performances in such Bergman films as *Journey into Autumn*, *Smiles of a Summer Night*, *The Face*, and *Through a Glass Darkly*, however, stamp him as one of the world's best character actors when well directed. Students may be interested to know that the unidentified figure of a schoolmaster chasing a boy downstairs at the start of *Frenzy* is probably one of Björnstrand's earliest appearances.

Bibi Andersson also studied at the National Theatre, and had her first big part in *The Last Couple Out* (1955); **Bengt Ekerot** was born in 1920, and has been a director and actor in many Swedish theatres; **Nils Poppe** had made a dozen films before *The Seventh Seal*, and, now over fifty years of age, has a long background of comic rôles on the stage; **Gunnar Fischer** has been Bergman's photographer over a dozen times, although he has now given way to Sven Nykvist. He is an excellent musician and, like Bergman, he once had plans for a musical career. In his spare time he is a prolific author and illustrator of children's books.

Revaluation: Bergman has recalled his impressions of the frescoes that decorated the churches he visited when young, with his father: 'There was everything that one's imagination could desire—angels, saints, dragons, prophets, devils, human beings. All this was surrounded by a heavenly, earthly and subterranean landscape of a strange, yet familiar beauty. In a wood sat Death, playing chess with the Crusader. Clutching the branch of a tree was a naked man with staring eyes, while down below stood Death, sawing away to his heart's content. My mind was stunned by the extreme cruelty and the extreme suffering'.

It certainly seems indisputable that part of the stature of *The Seventh Seal* arises from Bergman's ability to make the events and characters of the film as convincing and disturbing as the frescoes appeared to his own youthful eyes. As a historical film, *The Seventh Seal* is superb, far superior to Dreyer's often stilted, static *Day of Wrath*, remarkable though the latter may be, and even to Eisenstein's theatrical *Ivan* films. Of course one can speak readily of the parallel between the fear of the plague in the fourteenth century and the fear of the hydrogen bomb at the present time; but one should never pursue the equation too far because it tends to ignore the historical validity *per se* of *The Seventh Seal*. Bergman's characters here are not simply modern men dressed up in medieval clothes: at best, they can be taken as allegorical embodiments of Man's aspirations and fears throughout the ages. The Knight is troubled by the eternal problems—is there a God? If so, why does he not answer Man's pleas? Why does he allow such suffering to ravage the world? What is the object of life if there is no God? It is a struggle that has been represented in nearly every kind of person, from Luther to George Bernanos, from Shakespeare to El Greco, from Baudelaire to the Norwegian Sigrid Undset.

Thus *The Seventh Seal* aims, thematically, at a very elusive target, and if the final compromise (the innocent family heading into the sunny promise of a new day) prevents Bergman from satisfying his audience completely, the visual beauty and power of the film is almost faultless, a delicate combination of editing (the scene at the castle is brilliantly cut), Fischer's photography, the acting of the whole cast, and expert control of the players' movements (Death's sidling entries from left or right of the frame create precisely the sinister effect Bergman desires).

The script of the film is vitally important too. No point is overstated; no image is duplicated by a spoken word; and the bouts of dialogue possess a remarkable rhythm and clarity. On other occasions, as in the sequence at dusk on the hillside, Bergman's writing achieves a lyrical intensity that is all the better for not being purely literary—without the images the words would seem trite and hollow.

The symbolism is prolific and possibly puzzling at a first viewing. But continued study of the film reveals that nearly every symbol is firmly rooted in the narrative and therefore perfectly legitimate. For instance, when the Knight and the Squire ride along the hills at an early stage of the film, Jöns inquires the way from a man in a black robe, whose dog is nuzzling him. The man's face is a ghastly skull, hideous witness to the efficacy of the plague. It is both a symbol of death and a stiff reminder to Jöns that the land to which he has returned is perhaps in a worse state than those he has known during the Crusades.

The overriding symbol—Death himself—is presented very skilfully indeed. One can think of no other director who could introduce such a figure into a film and get away with it so well. Bengt Ekerot's impassive face, white as alabaster against the black of his cowl and cloak, dominates *The Seventh Seal*. His movements and speech are always credible, reaching their most disturbing point in the final chess-scene, when he admits to the Knight that he has no secrets.

The Seventh Seal is perhaps still too recent a film to be judged impartially and in the light of subsequent cinema history. Its principal importance seems to me to lie first in its historical authenticity as compared with the costume dramas of Hollywood and even many European directors; second, in the profundity and universality of its theme; and third, in the freshness, originality and modulated beauty of its imagery. Apart from anything else, too, *The Seventh Seal* remains the most startling statement of Bergman's own religious struggle, a struggle that he seems to be waging solely through the medium of the cinema. 'Somehow life goes on', he has said. 'I believe in life, in this life, a life after death, all kinds of life, and death is a part of life'.

For all these reasons, *The Seventh Seal* stands as an arresting, elaborate masterpiece, one of the most stimulating films to have appeared since the war, and, in my opinion, the richest expression of the genius of Ingmar Bergman.

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● *The Knight meets Jof for the first time, as they stand with Mia and the infant on the hillside*