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THE SEVENTH SEAL

(DET SJUNDE INSEGLET)

Director: Ingmar Bergman

Sweden 1956 96 minutes

Cast: Max von Sydow, Gunnar Björnstrand



Essential Bergman. Max von Sydow plays Antonius Blok, a fourteenth-century knight who returns home after a decade fighting in the Holy Crusades. His country, ravaged by the black plague, is in a frenzy of self-flagellation and witch hunts. When Death comes to claim the knight, he attempts a gambit: he challenges the grim reaper to a game of chess, hoping to gain enough time to overcome his spiritual doubt before he perishes. The film's darkness and starkness are not just aesthetic choices suggested by the brooding austerity of medieval paintings; they were dictated by Bergman's small budget and short shooting schedule. (His reminiscence, *Images: My Life in Film*, published in 1994, revealed that the famous Dance of Death that ends the film was improvised in a matter of minutes.) "A magically powerful film – the story seems to be playing itself out in a medieval present. . . . The actors' faces, the aura of magic, the ambiguities, and the riddle at the heart of the film all contribute to its stature" (Pauline Kael).

Tuesday, June 21 8:30 p.m.

Cinematheque Ontario, June '05.