

## Document Citation

Title	<b>The magician</b>
Author(s)	Vernon Young
Source	<i>Art Film Publications</i>
Date	1961
Type	booklet
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Ansiktet (The magician), Bergman, Ingmar, 1958

# ANSIKTET

(THE MAGICIAN) – 1958

Producer ..... Svensk Filmindustri  
Scenario and Direction ..... Ingmar Bergman  
Cinematography ..... Gunnar Fischer  
Music ..... Erik Nordgren

## CAST

Vogler ..... MAX VON SYDOW  
Aman ..... INGRID THULIN  
Vergerus ..... GUNNAR BJORNSTRAND  
Grandma ..... Naima Wifstrand  
Spegel ..... Bengt Ekerot  
Sara ..... Bibi Andersson  
Ottilia ..... Gertrud Fridh  
Simson ..... Lars Ekborg  
Starbeck ..... Toivo Pawlo  
Egerman ..... Erland Josephson  
Tubal ..... Ake Fridell  
Sofia ..... Sif Ruud  
Antonsson ..... Oscar Ljung  
Henrietta ..... Ulla Sjoblom  
Rustan ..... Axel Duberg  
Sanna ..... Birgitta Pettersson

## THE MAGICIAN

BY  
Vernon Young

Stockholm

The literal translation of ANSIKTET, *The Face*, would have been a preferable title; if less colorful it is more pertinent, thematically. Referring to Vogler, a servant of Consul Egerman says viciously: "There's something about magicians! Their faces make you mad... You want to smash them... You want to tread on them. Faces like Vogler's..." And Vogler returns the hostility in the first speech one hears from him, directed at Those Others upon whom he depends and whose vulgarity he despises and fears. "I hate them. I hate their faces – their bodies, their movements, their voices. But I'm afraid, too ..."

Many aspects of this film have been deeply misunderstood or simply not grasped, but the writer of this brief has no desire to increase self-consciousness in the viewer by emphasizing esoteric values. I do think the film conveys its essence to a relaxed but not inattentive viewer with some directness. It is significant that Federico Fellini, for instance, recognized the gist of the film at once, with none of the confusion experienced by a host of professional critics, and publicly praised Bergman without reservation. (By publicly, I mean that someone was on hand to quote him!). Fellini and Bergman bear one cross in common: they have both been falsely

identified with the objects of their irony. Many critics, lay or engaged, in Sweden and elsewhere, were outraged by the hocus-pocus which takes place in the attic near the end of THE MAGICIAN, believing that at this point Bergman had indulged a taste for science-fiction or something equally irresponsible. By this presumption they lined themselves up with Dr. Vergéus, since the whole delicious point of the scene is precisely that Vergéus, who claims to be fearlessly above un-analyzable manifestations, is scared witless by a convincing, if elementary, display of 'black magic'. Similarly, when Fellini with sardonic relish employed a virtuoso style to achieve the sensational effects of LA DOLCE VITA, he was accused of being *primarily* sensational, and the insufficiency of his Marcello in that film was taken at its face value.

THE MAGICIAN is a study in the ambivalence of the Gifted Man – call him the poet, the artist, the visionary, what you will. Vogler has an occult gift which entertains and sometimes liberates his fellows. Yet while they need his talent they distrust it and, more often than not, from envy, despise the owner of it. Vogler, himself, forced into certain subterfuges, rituals and defenses in order to sell his services, is no longer sure where charlatanry ends and magic begins. The central situation of this film is the test to which he is put by those skeptical of his powers and by others who over-rate them or misconstrue them, who in fact attribute to Vogler the calamities or the inspirations they invoke from their own needs. (e.g., Antonsson and Mrs. Egerman). Thus, the film is essentially an expression of skepticism, in the form of a period-fantasia – but of a *troubled* skepticism, as the intensity of Vogler's self-searching makes evident and as certain key declarations announce. "Step by step we go into the dark. Movement itself is the only truth". (In Bergman's following film, THE VIRGIN SPRING, other truths are acknowledged.) In THE MAGICIAN, no face is what it appears to be. Mr. Aman isn't a man. Vogler isn't a mute. Vergéus isn't invulnerable. Spegel, consistently with his name, which means *mirror* in Swedish, reflects Death; but at which point in the film, and whose? Tubal "explains" everything to the others, but he is as little astute about his own "power" over the widow as the others are *vis-a-vis* the magician. He is the eternal sacristan who lights the candles and knows nothing of the mystery that transpires at the altar. He is the press agent who guards the "personality" of the artist. He is the film distributor who stands at the door of the screening-room and tells the more knowing exhibitor – "Of course, this movie is really about the Loneliness of Man".

THE MAGICIAN is certainly the most personal of Bergman's films to date (1961). It was the climax of a struggle which had plagued him while he made THE SEVENTH SEAL and WILD STRAWBERRIES (both of which

---

A contributor to Film Quarterly and the Hudson Review, Vernon Young is currently living in Stockholm.

Moving Pictures - Criticisms & Reviews  
**THE ART FILM**

he wrote, also) and which in this film was only partly resolved. (I have had his word for it. He didn't "feel right" about any of these films.) But where his sense of dissatisfaction led to ambiguity in the conceptions of the preceding films, the *subject* of THE MAGICIAN is the ambiguity. Which is why the viewpoint, urged in some quarters, that the ending of the film (Vogler's summoning to the Royal Palace) is an evasion cannot be plausibly upheld. If the tone of the film throughout is one of irony, the film could scarcely be expected to close on either a sudden catastrophe or a complete resolution. Vogler's final humiliation is followed by a Royal summons, as if to say, "There's always *someone* who needs the artist!" Yes, but for the artist himself satisfaction is all in the timing. A day later, Vogler might have been in the gutter or dead. The film has a "happy ending"? It has a contingent one.

(It may not be irrelevant here to note that, in fact, cases of such royal intercession have actually occurred. Notably, an historically famous Commedia del' Arte company, captured by Huguenots, was ransomed by the French ruler who awaited a performance at Blois. The great Moliere was involved in a more abstractly gratifying rescue. Refused local burial by the Paris clergy, he was interned (secretly) after special request of Louis XIV.)

Cinematically, THE MAGICIAN achieves a very convincing milieu with extremely economical means. The foreign filmgoer may not realize the normally stringent budget within which Bergman tries to work, and he may be interested to learn that the scene in the remote forest was shot in a clump of woods on the Svensk Film studio property (suburban Stockholm) about 500 yards from the lunchroom. The exterior of the Egerman mansion was a cramped space fronting an historical building in Stockholm where the camera could hardly swivel more than 45 degrees without exposing a vista of contemporary Sweden! - and the balance of the film was all studio-shot. This was the twenty-fifth movie which Bergman, still in his early forties, had written and/or directed since his first contribution - HETS (*Torment*, directed by Alf Sjoberg), 1944. Subsequently he has produced JUNGFRUKALLAN (*The Virgin Spring*), THE DEVIL'S EYE, a comedy - and AS IF IN A MIRROR (working title); the latter, featuring Harriet Andersson and Gunnar Bjornstrand, was largely filmed on the northern tip of Gotland, an island in the Baltic.

WORLD COPYRIGHT, 1961  
ART FILM PUBLICATIONS  
BOX 19652  
LOS ANGELES 19, CALIFORNIA  
JERRY WEISS, PUBLISHER  
PRINTED IN U. S. A.

BERGMAN'S

# *The Magician*

