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A LESSON IN LOVE.

Sweden. 1954. 95 minutes.

Directed by Ingmar Bergman; scenario by Bergman; photography by Martin Bodin; music by Dag Wirén. Starring Eve Dahlbeck, Gunnar Bjornstrand, Yvonne Lombard, Ake Bronberg.

This film by Ingmar Bergman did not make its appearance on the U.S. screen until 1960, well after Bergman's reputation was established in this country with such gems as The Seventh Seal, Wild Strawberries, and The Magician.

When these movies broke on the unprepared public in the late '50's, the effect was electric, to say the least. For the viewing

audience was well acquainted with the simplistic story lines that encompassed most of the world's production up through the '40's. (This is not to say that there weren't landmark films that jolted the general rule.) With the end of the 1940's, the New Wave from France changed many of the visual and sequential habits of story-telling with new camera techniques and a rethinking of reality. What Bergman brought from Scandinavia was an extremely personal involvement in his films, which, typically, he usually wrote and directed. Any artist of note must bring a personal vision to his work: it remained for Bergman to create a demi-monde of demons, angels, good and evil, and a heavy overlay of symbolism. He put onto his film things that had not been seen except in the mind and emotions. Where he wished, he used cliches with pounding effectiveness (the figure of Death in The Seventh Seal, for an example).

It is generally conceded that Bergman has long threads of central theme running through groups of his films. It is as if he wishes to examine a question, and finds that he needs several films to autopsy the various organs, tissues, and nerves of the idea. Thus, through the films Through a Glass Darkly, Winter Light, and The Silence, the search for the nature of God is pushed; the nature of God and the structure of man's relationship to him and to each other.

Tonight's film is the first part of an informal trilogy--informal in the sense discussed above. Through the three films, A Lesson in Love, Dreams, and Smiles of a Summer Night is the theme of Love: what is it? how is it revealed? how many kinds are there?, etc. The film lacks many of the polished and practiced sophistications and subtleties of his later works, but why should he be expected to start off accomplished? One reviewer said of the picture, "It is warm, accidental, lifelike, full of lucky hits, preposterous misses, and all sorts of surprises. A comedy of morals as well as manners, the film seems, like the Korschach test, no more than an amusing game, but it soon develops some remarkable insights into the character and predicament of human beings."

Considered in sequence with the rest of Bergman's work, the film, like Fellini's early works, "contains loads of hints of later developments both in techniques (the use of flashback, for one) and content." Bergman has said that he wishes to examine (in all his work) "the reality beyond reality." Everything he introduces has a meaning and a bearing. Most of his films proceed on two levels simultaneously: they are attractive and fascinating to watch, and they are instructive to contemplate--if only as a means of crystallizing one's own thoughts on various matters. And even at this date, Bergman was using abrupt cuts in place of dissolves, and sound in unreal but excitingly logical ways. The result is a realization in the viewer of, what one reviewer called, the simultaneous existence of all of a person's experience at every moment of his life.

In many of his early films, Bergman brings out the duplicity of relationships between the sexes. The appearance that men are the "stronger" of the two, but the operational conclusion that the education of men begins with a wise and knowing woman. Women are wise and seeing; men are clever children and for their egos' sakes, their women allow them to think themselves dominant and deep. One reviewer wrote that Bergman's early works took the position that all men are children, and the women merely have to select the one (or ones) that amuse them the most.

There are several areas which the later, more skilled, Bergman would probably have changed in Lesson in Love, but as Stanley Kaufmann wrote, "When Bergman fails, he does so at a level quite beyond most directors' successes."

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