

## Document Citation

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## ( ALL THESE WOMAN )

Svensk Filmindustri, 1964. Directed by Ingmar Bergman, produced by Allan Ekelund, screenplay by Bergman and Erland Josephson, photographed by Sven Nykvist, sets by P.A. Lundgren, music by Erik Nordgren, edited by Ulla Ryghe, costumes by Mago, special effects by Evaid Andersson.

With Carl Billquist (Felix), Jarl Kulle (Cornelius), Georg Funquist (Tristan), Allan Edwall (Jilker), Eva Dahlbeck (Adelaide), Karin Kavli (Madame Tussaud), Harriet Andersson (Isolde), Gertrude Fridh (Traviata), Bibi Andersson (Humlan), Barbro Hjort Af Ornas, Mona Malm, Gösta Prüzelius, Jan-Olof Strandberg, Göran Graftman.

Each Bergman film since Prison has its own defined individual character, but in obvious ways ALL THESE WOMEN is unusually isolated from all the rest. It remains Bergman's only film in color [since this was written, The Passion of Anna has since been released, his second film in color], and it uses color to accentuate the deliberately artificial and stylised prettiness of the decor. Bergman used color, in fact, once before, for some preliminary work on Through a Glass Darkly, and is reported to have scrapped the result and started again because it looked "too pretty"; that he felt color appropriate to ALL THESE WOMEN tells us something of its character and of Bergman's attitude to making it.

It is easy to understand that after the sustained intensity of the Trilogy, Bergman felt a desire to make something emotionally (though not formally) relaxed, which would give him a respite from his probing of the deepest levels of emotional experience. To call The Silence a work of extraordinary courage is not to use empty phrases: the creation of such a film involves exposure to emotional experiences most of us would shrink from, and the risk of jeopardising one's personal stability. But it was impossible for Bergman, from the position he had reached, to recapture the spontaneity and warmth of that earlier relaxation, A Lesson in Love, that followed Sawdust and Tinsel. ALL THESE WOMEN strikes one as above all calculated and deliberate. No one I have met finds it very funny, and I don't think (Ian Cameron, in his interesting analysis of the film in Movie 13, notwithstanding), that it is defensible on the grounds that it isn't meant to be. When Bergman made A Lesson in Love he was--in however relaxed a way--wholly engaged; when he made ALL THESE WOMEN he couldn't afford to be, couldn't allow the deeper levels of himself to be stirred, or there could have been no comedy, not even an unfunny one. Hence the sense of thinness and brittleness that one gets from the film. One admires Bergman for turning at such a time to the traditional set pieces of slapstick comedy--attempts to balance a huge marble bust, a tea-and-cream-cake retaliation scene, an impromptu and unintended firework display (Monsieur Hulot's Holiday is one of his favorite films), a sequence with the protagonist in "drag"--and bringing them off in a curious sort of way. For if they aren't very funny they are never boring, and no sequence is bungled. The laughter evoked by Keaton, by Laurel and Hardy, and for many by Tati, is intimately bound up with the warm flow of sympathy they release in the spectator; the slapstick of Bergman's film is necessarily cut off from any such flow, so that one admires its aplomb but keeps a straight face.

The film, besides its function as interlude between the emotional rigors of The Silence and Persona, is part-retrospect, part-testament and part neither. It collects together a number of actresses associated with Bergman's previous work, notably Eva Dahlbeck and Harriet and Bibi Andersson, who play, one might say, "themselves": that is, they recapitulate their familiar personae from earlier Bergmans. Especially in the case of the two Anderssons, the performances are simplified and exaggerated to an extent amounting to parody, which befits the artificiality of the whole film. It is tempting, therefore, to see it as a film about Bergman and his actresses: each of master-cellist Felix's women satisfies a different aspect of his personality, therefore by extension each reflects the aspect she satisfies and can be taken as the way in which Bergman's own development has consistently been reflected in his choice of actresses; it is sufficiently suggested in the film to mislead the critic who naturally likes to make everything tie up neatly. For it cannot, in fact, be pressed very far. The significance of the Eva Dahlbeck character, Felix's wife and protectress of his artistic integrity, goes rather beyond what one sees as Miss Dahlbeck's role in Bergman's development, and several of the women have no clear counterparts in his work.

More centrally, ALL THESE WOMEN offers a statement about the autonomy of art and the impertinence of substituting biographical gossip about the artist for criticism of the art. At the end of the film the section of the biography of Felix by the



critic Cornelius giving the "personal details" is stolen by Felix's valet (an alter ego?) Tristan, who hands it to Felix's widow; the suppression clearly has Bergman's approval. With this goes a statement about the necessity for the artist of preserving his artistic integrity, whatever the transgressions and infidelities of his personal life: hence his wife's gracious toleration of the rota of mistresses, and her decision to shoot him dead the moment he begins to play Cornelius' 14th Abstraction as a means of ensuring his own immortality in the biography.

But, if I raise this familiar "testament" interpretation of the film, it is as much to reject as accept it. Hour of the Wolf also contains elements of an artist's testament, and they directly contradict certain aspects of the earlier--but only three years earlier--work. In ALL THESE WOMEN art exists apart from relationships, which are conceived as satisfying the man's various needs so as to leave the artist free to fulfill himself independently. Felix's wife is the guardian of his art, sworn to kill him if he betrays it; but there is no question of fidelity on his side in the relationship, and no indication that she is of particular personal importance to him. In Hour of the Wolf Johan Borg's art is conceived as existing and developing inseparably from his relationship with Alma. Artistic fulfillment there is felt as growing (potentially at least) out of the wholeness of the woman and the wholeness of the relationship: the touchstone is "The Magic Flute". When Borg's "demons" undermine the relationship, they undermine the art too. The comparison reminds us of something the "testament" interpreters (Cameron honorably excepted) tend to ignore or play down: Felix is an interpretative, not a creative artist; the climactic sequence of the film arises from the fact that he has no body of work to leave behind (apart from an unrecognisably primitive gramophone record) and is dependent on Cornelius' biography for immortality. He touches on Bergman himself only tangentially. The difference between this film and Hour of the Wolf emphasizes that, while interpretative art can exist in and for itself, largely independent of the artist's life (which has merely to be kept from impinging on it), creative art grows out of the whole personality; it is affected and to a great extent determined by the quality of the life and relationships that feed it.

The underlying confusion of the film should now be apparent. It clearly intends a general statement about the Artist, but the moment one substitutes Bergman the filmmaker for Felix the cellist, its argument about the autonomy of art and the irrelevance of personal life to it comes to look much too simple. One can entirely sympathise with Bergman's attack on the sort of critic who substitutes lewd and prying gossip for an attempt to understand the work, and accept the film's implication that the art, not the artist, is the critic's proper concern. Yet one can ignore the sense of personal development of a cellist's art as one cannot in the case of a filmmaker, especially a filmmaker as personal as Bergman. One feels neither the need nor the desire to pry into the "personal details", but one can hardly expect to do justice to Bergman's art if one loses contact with its quality as (in whatever depersonalised way) a record of lived experience.  
[Robin Wood]

In ALL THESE WOMEN, a film that is insufferably ponderous in some places and egg-shell delicate in others, color is used to point the contrast between the characters (for example the scarlet dress worn by Adelaide as she takes her revenge on Felix at the end). It has remarkable affinities with Fellini's Juliet of the Spirits, not least in its combination of the irreverent and the statuesque. The plot, skeletal as it is, concerns a rather precious music critic, Cornelius, who visits the summer residence of Felix, the distinguished cellist, in order to write his biography, and finds himself surrounded by a gaggle of mistresses, who at first attract, and finally humiliate, him. Bergman clearly intended the film as a revenge on his critics, and the hapless Cornelius stumbles about like Groucho Marx in a fruitless effort to penetrate the defences of ridicule and awe that surround Felix--the artist, and therefore Bergman himself, and therefore inscrutable except to his mistresses....Even the statues in the garden bleed when struck by a stray bullet. Nothing is quite what it seems: everything is vulnerable. The action of the film is consciously theatrical, as is the heavy, rococo sets. The sprawling rooms of the mansion are really so many stage sets. If one is aware of the theatrical antecedents of Bergman's comedies, it is because one is never emotionally absorbed in them as one is in his more intense "chamber cinema." The arbitrary switches from lechery to lugubrious disquisition preclude such a total involvement. The best scene in ALL THESE WOMEN--an elaborate explosion of fireworks--comes off because of its visual excitement and dash and concludes on a pensive note as Cornelius lingers alone on the balcony with bursts of color whirling round him. (The film is set in the 20's, and there is evidence of this in the jumpy editing as well as in the rendering of "Yes, We Have No Bananas" that metaphorically suggests the sexual act at one point.) Sven Nykvist exposed 18,000 feet of Eastmancolor film in experiments before shooting began, and many of the color effects are startlingly imaginative, ranging from the muted greys of the funeral sequence to the creams and blacks and greens of the scene in the garden with Adelaide and Tristan.  
[Peter Cowie]

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Next Week: Oct. 6th -- THE BOWERY (1933), directed by Raoul Walsh, with Wallace Beery, George Raft, Fay Wray and Jackie Cooper.