

Beyond Reconciliation: Filial Relationship as a Lifelong Developmental Theme in Bergman's Films

Introduction

The development of father-child relationships in Bergman's films is a topic that has received little attention. This is somewhat surprising given the autobiographical as well as cinematic importance of this topic for Bergman (Cowie; Cohen *Ingmar Bergman*). My concern here is not, strictly speaking, the psychological makeup of Bergman as the son of a Protestant priest, nor with the underlying psycho-dynamics of filial relationship in his art as such. Rather, I focus on the filmographic trajectory of the father-child relationship as an evolving core-dilemma in Bergman's art.

Bergman's career has spanned nearly six decades, from the very early *Torment* (1944) to *Saraband* (2003). The theme of filial relationship is central among the films considered the director's best vintage: *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), *Wild Strawberries* (1957), *Through a Glass Darkly*, (1961), *Fanny and Alexander* (1982) and, most recently, *Saraband*. My point of departure is to examine Bergman's work through a life-span, developmental perspective, whose premises are presented in the following section. This perspective is then used to examine the gradual change which can be traced in Bergman's cinematic treatment of the father-child issue. For this purpose I offer a chronologically organized tour through several filmographic stations, taking us from the young, via the middle-aged, to the old Bergman. In contrast to conventional film criticism which often centers on one work at a time, such an approach has the potential to produce new insights into Bergman's evolving style.

Life-Span Perspective in the Study of Artistic Creativity

The life-span view of human development that emerged 30 years ago (Baltes "Longitudinal"; Baltes and Schaie "Life-span Developmental") focuses on systemic developmental change textured by normative, age-graded ontogenetic change, by normative temporal (historical) change, and by non-normative life events (Baltes "Theoretical Propositions"; Baltes et al., *Life-Span Development*, "Life-span Theory"; Gottlieb). The use of the life-span perspective was associated with a

burgeoning of the study of aging, both as an area of scholarship meriting greater scientific attention per se *and* as an ontogenetic laboratory affording the testing of key concepts brought to the fore by the life-span perspective, for instance, plasticity (Lerner). The study of life-span artistic creativity is a relatively recent academic enterprise. The traditional view considered creativity after midlife as a sharp decline/departure. Both of these options contradict the possibility of life-span developmental approach that focuses on continuity within change. The option of *decline* was made popular in the US by several behavioral scientists working under the so-called “productivity paradigm,” who applied statistical procedures to questions pertaining to the resilience, or lack thereof, of creativity after midlife (Lehman; Simonton; Romaniuk and Romaniuk; Lindauer). Using expert value judgments, these researchers generally found age-decrements to accompany the progression of chronological age in the careers of famous artists and literary figures.

In contrast, the option of *departure* appeared in German art history already in the first half of the twentieth century through terms like *altersstill* (old age style) or *spatstill* (late style) (Brinkmann; Adorno; Simmel). These scholars attempted a broad delineation of the art of elderly painters and composers and singled out common stylistic features, such as formal ambiguity, expressive intensity, and lessened attention to detail or to finished surfaces (see also Rosenthal; Clark).

These two approaches to artistic creativity — the European approach of “old age style” and the North-American “productivity approach” — hinge on opposite and often implicit assumptions concerning human development: the biological model in the case of the productivity approach, and the cultural model of the “Old Masters” employed by old age style proponents (Cohen-Shalev, “Old Age Style”). Recently, with the branching out of gerontology in the direction of the so-called “life-span developmental paradigm” (Baltes, “Theoretical Propositions”), a new synthesis appeared. The individual versatility of artistic development is arguably underpinned, according to this proposition, by the unfolding of a core dilemma, which is usually presented in a dramatic and conflictual manner during youth, resolved in maturity, and transcended in old age (Cohen-Shalev, *Both Worlds*). While it is futile to insist on a single developmental pattern of creativity, a general scheme can be suggested based on the analysis and comparison of many artists (Said; Lindauer). In this very general scheme, the earlier stage of the artistic career usually focuses on the articulation of a core dilemma whose conflicting elements are made to confront each other within a selected genre. Midlife style features a crystallization of the dilemma through heightened differentiation, formal closure and emotional containment (the equivalents of Freudian sublimation). Late style

represents a transcendence of basic contradictions and a de-sublimation of the core dilemma. Within the new perspective that comes with age, interpretation becomes more idiosyncratic, individual, and at the same time also metaphysical and universal. Each and every artist, of course, brings his or her own touch and twists to this very general scheme. In what follows I employ this perspective to examine Bergman's lifelong depiction of the father-child conflict.

Aesthetic Sublimation through Denial: Bergman's Early Work

In Bergman's early films, from *Torment* (1944) to *Smiles of a Summer Night* (1955), there are only few parental figures, and intergenerational conflict is either displaced or generalized. In Bergman's first film, the issue of authorship is dubious: Bergman wrote the script, and his mentor, Alf Sjöberg — a Swedish leading filmmaker - did most of the directing. The film features a sadistic school teacher who appears in his nickname, Caligula (the appellation, together with the fact that the film was made during the occupation, may have hinted at a Nazi), and is responsible for the female protagonist's torment. The physical punishment this educator profusely and cruelly incurs upon innocent young souls is perhaps symbolically parental. The issue of paternal authority and corporeal punishment reappears later in *Fanny and Alexander* and *Sunday's Children*.

On the whole, the protagonists of Bergman's films at this early stage are young figures that dwell on the social and economic margins of contemporary life, outraged at their inevitable failure to find a niche in the daily modes of a tedious and conservative socio-economic reality. In *Summer with Monica* (1952), two youngsters in their late teens are left alone to fend off tyrannical society. The father of one of them (Harry) is depicted as an ineffectual character, rendered helpless by grief over the loss of his wife. It is left to the young to assume the role of adults all by themselves. It would seem that the father figure had been pushed aside in order to make way for the young adult to make her own self. This is exemplified by the 20-years-old Harry, as the film ends with an image of him lovingly holding his baby. Coming of age, and awakening from the dream of adolescence, is here inseparably entangled with the experience of young fatherhood, and although Harry faces meager prospects, his fatherhood is nevertheless a sobering experience, not yet turning sour. This image is a hopeful one: Harry will compensate for the inadequate parenting he (and his generation) has received.

The naïve fantasy of parental bonding is shattered in Bergman's next film, *Smiles of a Summer Night*. The fall, however, is softened, and defended against through recourse to the formalities of comedy. The father is depicted as tyrannical, selfish, un-giving, or indifferent to his male offspring, yet his is a powerful presence

conjuring a fantasy on the part of the son to gain his father's love, and at the same time a parallel fantasy of the father to reprieve for lost contact. The father is a successful lawyer with a history of amorous conquests, who marries a young girl (his son's age). The son, secretly in love with his father's wife, tormented by his passion, converts into gloomy philosophizing and mock-religious repent, but to no avail. Befitting a classical comic genre, the odds are turned in the end: The son wins the young girl, and the middle-aged father finds solace in the bosom of an age-appropriate old flame, "proper" order thus duly restored.

Two years after *Smiles of a Summer Night*, 39-years old Bergman made *Wild Strawberries* (1957), a film that, together with *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and *The Virgin Spring* (1960), established his reputation as a central filmmaker. The protagonist of *Wild Strawberries*, Dr. Borg, is an old physician-scientist, a pedantic recluse who is an estranged father to his son. He finds the role of fatherhood an impassable obstacle, and hates his own father for that. *Wild Strawberries* is an elegiac road film leading from a sense of imminent catastrophe to deliverance. During a series of encounters — dreamed, imagined or actual — Borg's estrangement gradually turns into dialogue. In fact, the dialogue between father and son at the end of the journey is commensurable to the father's internal journey and the insights he acquires in its course. There is no direct confrontation, however, between father and son. It would seem Bergman is still "unprepared," so to speak, to tackle the father-son issue directly, in contrast to other family confrontations. Father-son reconciliation takes place at the level of fantasy, and not as a worked-through insight. The sought-for resolution at the end of the film leaves a sense of distance: the two characters do not face each other, the son facing away from the father's gaze.

The last scene shows Borg, now pacified, conjuring up an image of his early childhood where, having lost sight of his parents, the anxious child is led by an angel-like creature to a rock overlooking the bay, beholding his parents from a distance. Once again Bergman significantly juxtaposes fantasy and realism, the yearned-for warm embrace of parental figures and the partial, thus tragic, satisfaction possible. There is still a deep-seated ambivalence with respect to the possibility of a truly intimate rapport. This ambivalence gains special salience as it stands out sharply in contrast to the film's final sense of ego-integrity (Erikson "Adulthood") and artificial closure (Cohen-Shalev "Effect of Aging"). The midlife fantasy of a meaningful ending to life is in this film also entangled with a sought-after reconciliation with one's parents, father in particular.

In the decade following WWII European cinema was preoccupied with issues of parental authority and responsibility (Cowie), for example the "vulnerable father"

in the Italian cinema of the 1950's and 60's (Sorlin 134). In this context, Bergman's general avoidance of direct confrontation with the father figure is particularly noticeable. The early films hint at an underlying father-son conflict where the father figure is suppressed (*Summer with Monica*), satirized (*Smiles of a Summer Night*) and analyzed (*Wild Strawberries*) — but all in all, not given actual presence or directly confronted. *Wild Strawberries*, in particular, illustrates an artistic attempt to conquer ambivalence through control, reaching for an aesthetic of denial by means of analytical perfection.

According to his autobiography, Bergman's relationship with his father centered on formality and duty, like the relationship depicted in *Wild Strawberries* between Dr. Borg and his son — who hates his father because he has never been “able to show love or create an emotional situation in his home” (*Bergman on Bergman* 14). When Dr. Isak Borg (whose initials match those of Bergman) recalls/imagines his past and hears someone says that he is fishing with his father, he “felt a secret and completely inexplicable happiness at this message” (Cohen, *Ingmar Bergman* 31). This is evidently also the projected feeling/fantasy of Bergman himself. While filial reconciliation is achieved in *Wild Strawberries* in a beautifully crafted artistic manner, its smoothness might carry a sense of fraudulence. This can explain why it comes back to haunt Bergman with a vengeance a few years later.

“Father Spoke to Me”: The Failed Fantasy of the Father as a Spiritual Mentor in *Through a Glass Darkly*

During the 1960's, female protagonists gradually take the lead in Bergman's films. *Through a Glass Darkly* (1961) announces the arrival of the female character, with Harriett Anderson in the role of Karin, a young woman on the brink of schizophrenia and later plunging to its abyss. *Through a Glass Darkly* preserves the strict formal unity of time and place of that period in Bergman's work, within which increasing disillusionment with emotional coldness of his Lutheran religion takes the form of absence of familial love. Karin's mental disintegration manifests itself in the belief that God is a spider. As she slips inexorably into madness, she is observed with terrifying objectivity by her emotionally paralyzed father and seemingly helpless husband.

Karin's character is dominated from the start by two men: her father and husband. While the husband, a medical doctor, is yet another specimen of the over-rationalist man of science, the father (David) is a man of letters, a writer who prefigures Bergman's later preoccupation with the artist who is tortured by his inner demons — for example *The Hour of the Wolves* (1968) and *Passion* (1969), among others. In an example of the Scandinavian tradition established by Ibsen and Strindberg

a century before, and embraced by Bergman, this father is an emotional cripple, manipulative, cold and estranged parental figure, whose daughter's mental illness serves as material for his always threatened artistic inspiration. As the writer-father painfully comes to terms with his responsibility for his daughter's sad mental state he attempts negotiations with his son, Minus (who at that point becomes a victim of his sister's delusions), but does it, both psychologically and cinematically, in a most awkward and unconvincing way. He becomes the director's mouthpiece for articulating his personal dilemma of the crisis of faith — both in God and in the Father figure. The father we see and hear is ineffectual, helplessly replacing true parental responsibility with vacuous, patently unconvincing words:

Minus: Papa, I'm scared. I sat in the wreck, holding Karin, when reality cracked, and I fell out. I can't live in this new world.

David: yes you can. But you have to have something to hold on to.

Minus: what would that be, a God. Give me a proof of God. You can't.

David: Yes I can. But you have to listen. I can only give you an indication of my own hope. It's knowing that love exists for real in the human world . . . the highest and the lowest, the most ridiculous and the most sublime.

Minus: the longing for love. . .

David: longing and denial, doubt and faith.

Minus: so love is the proof?

David: I don't know whether love is proof of God's existence, or if love is God.

Minus: for you Love and God are the same?

David: I rest my emptiness and dirty hopelessness in that thought

In hindsight, this exchange was criticized by Bergman as “totally impossible because of its superficiality” (*My Life*). Bergman further confessed in his autobiography to his need at the time to be didactic, resulting in a “false tone . . . running throughout the film.” With his characteristic ruthless introspection, Bergman thus explains his failure: “I was really defending myself against what was threatening me in my own life.” That threat revolved around the issue of artistic exploitation and its toll in terms of family affiliations. Unable to face up to his own crisis, Bergman reverted to denial, as well as to a suicide attempt that took place a few years prior to the making of *Through a Glass Darkly*. The film's end — where Minus, the 17-years-old son almost ecstatically utters “father spoke to me” — lends voice to the longed-for intimacy of a deprived son, who desperately aspires for the word of a God-father. Thirty years after, free of didacticism (and of the need of taking shelter in the safety of artistic sublimation), Bergman returns in his old age to the deep and painful longing of the adolescent for fatherly warmth — together with the lifelong wrath at being denied it.

The Various Faces of Fatherhood: Bergman's Middle Years

Bergman, of course, was not pre-occupied with the issue of filial relationship in all his films. Anatomies of the female psyche was a theme that in various guises dominated his films from *The Silence* (1963), to *Persona* (1966), and later on *Cries and Whispers* (1972) and *Face to Face in the Mirror* (1977). A related preoccupation emerged with the dynamics between husbands and wives, starting with *Shame* (1968), then *Passion* (1969), *Cries and Whispers* (1972), and finally, fully formed, in *Scenes of a Marriage* (1973). It is as though the youngsters in Bergman's early films, the products of the difficult post-WWII generation, have matured from their adolescent rebellion into middle class conformity. Many of his protagonists are now faced with the ills of the well-fed, complacent bourgeoisie, once again covering up the emotional complexities of parental relationship.

This middle-class/middle-age perspective forged a particular attitude toward parents. Liv Ullman character's parents in *Face to Face in the Mirror* (1977) appear only briefly; whatever feelings she has toward them is masked by the disguise of old age frailty. *Autumn Sonata* (1978) is an exception, examining the relationship between a concert pianist in her late 50s and her adult daughter. A major expression of the father-son issue is found in *Fanny and Alexander* (1983), which marks the epitome of Bergman's mature art, already on the verge of old age. 25 years after *Wild Strawberries*, at the age of 63, Bergman revisited the primal scene of intergenerational strife. *Fanny and Alexander* is a family saga, unique among his films in its spaciousness and general expansiveness.

While many of Bergman's films are concerned with (auto)biography, *Fanny and Alexander* is perhaps the mature summation of this concern, a bountiful, all-inclusive celebration of Bergman's obsessions, images and themes from nearly 40 years of film-making. *Fanny and Alexander* is Bergman in a celebratory mood. It is a work touched with grace, and, as such, a rarity within the director's general grave and gloomy outlook. Bergman of *Fanny and Alexander* has already established himself as the old master of Sweden's film industry. Indeed, he had announced *Fanny and Alexander* to be his last work for the screen. Imminent retirement (it was eventually not to be such) combined with a longed-for return to his homeland contributed to this overall celebratory mood. It is therefore intriguing that, in structure and substance, *Fanny and Alexander* is far from providing a closure, but rather ends up in an open-ended, almost subversive depiction of the life cycle.

In contrast to *Wild Strawberries*, *Fanny and Alexander* does not conceal its autobiographical import. It contains explicit allusions to the director's own childhood. The town where the story takes place is most likely Uppsala, Bergman's birthplace.

The 12 year-old Alexander's zealous experiments with primitive cinematographic equipment conjure up Bergman's *Laterna Magica* (1987), the autobiographical account of his early interest in the magic art of moving pictures. Yet *Fanny and Alexander* amounts to more than that. As Bergman himself commented:

It has been suggested . . . that *Fanny and Alexander* portrays my childhood, and that 12-year-old Alexander is my alter-ego. But this is not quite true. *Fanny and Alexander* is a story, the chronicle of a middle-class, perhaps upper-middle-class family sticking closely together . . . There's a lot of me in the Bishop, rather than in Alexander. He is haunted by his own devils. (Cowie 338-39)

In presenting the chronicles of the upper middle-class family of *Fanny and Alexander* one can discern at least three levels of meaning, which are all cyclic. On one level the story revolves around a family of three generations: the “*materfamilias*” Helena and her elderly friend Jacobi, her children (particularly Oscar and his wife Emily) and their spouses, and her grandchildren (Fanny and Alexander). The second level is the yearly cycle of the seasons, with their characteristic rhythms and associated symbols, myths, and moods — death in the cold of winter, regeneration in spring. On yet a third level, the story is a symbolic pilgrimage. As in the life of Christ, acted on stage by the theater group at the beginning of the film, there is a difficult time of trial in the descent to the abyss of cruelty, humiliation, and misery (the “Valley of Tears”), followed by a final ascent toward a blissful family unification.

The film depicts one year in the life of the Ekdahl family who owns and operates the local town theater, established by Oscar Ekdahl senior who married Helena Mandelbaum, a famous actress. Upon the death of the elder Ekdahl, the management of the company passes to the couple's eldest son, Oscar junior, a poor actor but a good administrator. Oscar is married to a beautiful and talented actress, Emily, and has two children, Alexander and Fanny. Most of the family, including the children, is involved in the family's theatrical enterprise; the exception is the aging Helena, now retired from the stage, but still the undisputed family authority. Her second son, Gustav Adolf, is the proprietor of a restaurant near the theater. He is a hearty fellow, something of a fool, whose outrageous philandering, especially with the children's lame but otherwise pretty maid, is made possible only through his wife's tolerance and good nature. The third son is Carl, a university professor of uncertain future who is given to the bottle.

The plot thickens after Oscar's death, when Emily marries the Bishop and she and her children — Fanny and Alexander — move to live in his Gothic house whose cold and Dickensian household is very different from the former Ekdahl's home. Alexander rebels and is horribly whipped by the Bishop. The children are

(magically) kidnapped from the Bishop's house by Helena's friend, the Jewish antique dealer Isak, and taken to his home, where several supernatural episodes take place. In one of them Alexander is dreaming of killing the Bishop. The film ends as it opened, with a communal celebration — the Bishop miraculously dead and Alexander's mother returned home.

Alexander, the representative of childhood, struggles to maintain a precarious balance between reality and imagination. When "reality" threatens to offset the balance, Alexander finds refuge in fantasy. The Bishop, his stepfather, is the prime agent of reality, threatening to replace fantasy with discipline — the father's role in many of Bergman's films. At the announcement of his mother's imminent marriage to the Bishop, Alexander suddenly meets the ghost of his real father. This is fantasy (the ghost) retaliating against reality gone awry (the father's death and the marriage).

Fanny and Alexander is populated by a variety of adult characters that, in one way or another, have estranged themselves from the child-like mode of experiencing through imagination. The Bishop is the most extreme manifestation of this repression, but he is not the only one afflicted with the "reality" malady. Oscar, Alexander's biological father, also manifests this "malady" in an extreme manner. His posthumous "ghostly" existence could be seen as a punishment for letting life slip away from him, always being useful to others but never alive himself. In between these extremes of Alexander's two fathers — Oscar and the Bishop — we find most of the second-generation Ekdahls, who go through a turbulent "midlife crises," emerging from it with various degrees of success and a regained balance of reality and imagination.

The crisis of midlife is portrayed most intensely in the dramatic development of Emily, Alexander's mother, through her confrontation with the Bishop. She is first driven to marriage with him through the fearful realization of her inner emptiness. This realization forces itself upon her consciousness during Oscar's last hour, when she is left with no emotional resources to help cope with her loss. When she contemplates her situation, she begins to see that neither grief nor joy have been within her reach: "I could not understand why nothing really happened, why I never felt really happy." She is in her 40th year, and pressed by time: "I weep with fear because time is so short... Nothing lasts forever." Emily reacts with active practicality. In marrying the Bishop, she hopes to find in his moral rigor and frugal existence the remedy for her feelings of futility (compare to Erikson's seventh stage, stagnation). However, she is also disillusioned: "I know we shall pain each other."

The film's outstanding feature with respect to the father-son nexus is a multi-perspective observation. The figure of the father is split into a number of representations, each reminiscent of similar figures in Bergman's earlier films. The ineffectual father of Bergman's early works is taken by Alexander's real father: a well-meaning, loving but passive parent who dies and leaves his children feeling deserted and at the mercy of a cruel stepfather, the Bishop Vergerus - who, much like the director's real life father, is a stern clergyman. Bishop Vergerus absorbs the very hatred toward the all-powerful father figure, again reminiscent of the father figure in the earlier *Smiles of a Summer Night* and *Through a Glass Darkly*. When Alexander's biological father appears in the boy's daydreaming, he complains to him about this unjust neglect in performing his official duties.

There is yet another father figure in *Fanny and Alexander*; old Isak Jacobi, "Uncle Isak," a close friend of the Ekdahl family, who is also an old lover of Helena. He is a character of legendary perspective, bearing the names of two biblical fathers. This old Jew, amiable and kind, suddenly turns out to be a powerful magician who releases the children who had been locked up by their step-father. This miracle maker, who is both an old man and a child, succeeds where both other fathers — the well-meaning but impotent biological one and the pathologically stern servant of the Christian Deity — failed. In the refractory mode of *Fanny and Alexander* the holy trinity of fathers sums up the various faces of fatherhood: the biological (progeny) the psychological (the source of emotional ambivalence), and the archetypal, symbolic (spiritual). The proliferation of father figures and the legend-like, fantastic character of the film contribute to a sense of reconciliation and natural harmony, although one which is reached only after the "bad" father had been horribly punished and burnt to death.

The underlying motives of *Funny and Alexander* — magical mastery, life vs. fantasy, the cycles of nature and life — can be read as an admission in the limitations of logic and rationality, which were the cornerstones of Bergman's search for meaning in his early work, most notably in *Wild Strawberries*. In *Wild Strawberries*, the character of Borg and the persona of Victor Sjöström, who is playing him, provided a substitute father figure for the 38 year-old Bergman. Borg/Sjöström was a single, overly rational and coherent, even retentive, father figure. In *Fanny and Alexander*, in contrast, we have several different father figures entangled in fragmented and proliferated representations. From the perspective of creative life-span development, such change speaks of the fallacy of hard-core realism as a panacea for human problems. Once again, Bergman joins here the ranks of a number of dramatists, and artists in general, that have come to doubt the systematic nature of theories

of art — among them Ibsen and Strindberg in their late years, who moved away from intellectual rationality to emotional expression, allowing for more elasticity with respect to structure and causality (Cohen-Shalev, *Both Worlds*). Had Bergman concluded his filmmaking career with *Fanny and Alexander*, as he said he would, we would have been left with a rounded, somewhat optimistic feeling concerning father-son reconciliation. However, Bergman's script for *Sunday's Children* and his last film, *Saraband*, are striking rebukes of the prospect of reconciliation.

Toxic Enmity in a Final Showdown: The Late Films

In 1992, a full decade after *Fanny and Alexander*, *Sunday's Children* (1992) appeared on screen, directed by Bergman's son, Daniel, from a script by Bergman senior, based on his autobiography *Laterna Magica*. Several scenes in the film are faithful adaptations of selected paragraphs concerning childhood memories of Bergman's relationship with his father. The film as a whole is less a reminiscence than an open, bitter-sweet exploration of the father-son dyad as seen from a distance. The discrepant time echoes in the jump-cut juxtaposition of the central episode from the boy's childhood with the grim actuality of a confrontation between the presently adult son and his aged progenitor.

In the opening scene, eight-years-old Pu (the child Ingmar) is waiting at the train station for his father, a local priest, to return from an important clerical engagement. The scene's point of view is the child's, for whom the father is seen as an impressive and admired figure. Yet the child soon faces other, less admirable aspects of his father. What seems a wholesome reunion turns out to be a cover for a tense family crisis, with the boy's parents on the verge of separation. The happy reunion opening scene takes another form now, the form of a mute bonding between a male adult in torment and his vaguely understanding child, who nevertheless senses his father's distress and keeps him company in quiet solitude. When Pu joins his father for a Sunday trip to a far-away village for a sermon, he experiences a feat of fatherly rage on the way. At this point the scene abruptly changes. The now 50-years-old son visits his aged, dying father, having only harsh, cruel words of accusation for this now enfeebled and lonely man. In this exchange the father is as helpless as his son was when he was hurt by him, and the now grown-up son, on the verge of aging himself, finds only cold revenge. The aging Bergman comes full circle — directly to the roots of his ambivalence toward his father. The childhood fantasy for parent-child unity is reached through memory and crystallizes into an event from the past that comes alive in all its clarity, a memory of one Sunday with Pastor Bergman, revealing his volatile character, leaving the child Ingmar agonizingly helpless.

This incidence, the core of the film and at the same time of Bergman's childhood and creativity is then, with the same suddenness, juxtaposed with the meeting taking place forty-odd years later. This juxtaposition is openly, even harshly, unresolved. Contrary to Bergman's earlier cinematic essays, the contradictory feelings remain intact, separate, and the tragedy of separateness is fully enacted with no recourse to any reconciliatory discourse. In fact, *Sunday's Children* nullifies all the attempts, cinematic and real-life alike, to come to terms with the thick web of father-child ambivalence. Even the possibility of forgiveness is denied. This time it is the old, weak father who asks for it, but the now middle-aged son is incapable of returning the gesture. In his deathbed, Pastor Bergman stretches his hand out for his son to hold, but the latter tears his hand away from the father's grip, in one of the film's most excruciating moments.

The haunting, recurring inner schism that has accompanied Bergman since childhood is finally laid bare in *Sunday's Children*. We are caught in a double perspective that carries no sense of continuity. Father and son coincide, collide, yet they never come together. Moreover, the child Pu cannot be reconciled with the middle-aged man he turned out to be. He is visually unrecognizable when he pops up as a grown-up and then virtually vanishes again. The aftermath of childhood is highlighted in all its sobering harshness. Bergman seems to be plainly saying: I have become the cruel father I hated. With that insight, and at 74, Bergman seems to have said it all. But over a decade later, the 85-years-old Bergman returned to direct his last film, *Saraband*.

Saraband: The Dance of the Monads

Saraband is constructed as a dialogic sequence of ten movements, preceded by a prologue and ending with an epilogue. All episodes are conversation pieces, alternating dialogues between two of the four characters. As a chamber piece, or filmed theater, it is different from earlier Bergman chamber pieces in that we never meet the whole ensemble in one scene. There are four characters: Johan, Marianne (his ex-wife), Henrik (Johan's son from a previous marriage), and Henrik's adolescent daughter, Karin. Like *Wild Strawberries* and *Fanny and Alexander*, we have in front of us a three-generation family. In *Saraband*, however, familial issues and intergenerational transmission of rifts are crystallized and distilled as the characters are positioned and moved on stage like monads¹ instructed to perform duets that are beyond their reach.

In style and content, *Saraband* is extremely minimalistic, abstract and fragmented. It is composed of fragments or scenes that do not represent a linear, progressive plot in the conventional sense. The physical environment is kept to a

minimum: two still shots, superimposed one upon the other, like unfolding pages in a photo album, signify Johan's country estate, and the shack of his son and granddaughter which is part of the estate. These short flashes are unabashedly non-cinematic, resembling a photo album rather than actual locations. Like a filmed theater, each scene presents two characters who deliver their dialogues and monologues in front of each other and the camera. The common denominator of these exchanges is their unbridgeable solitude, during which bare feelings of agony and longing are unveiled but not resolved. While disengagement and solitude have taken a central part in many of Bergman's films, *Saraband* manifests a different kind of isolation, transcending circumstantial time and place altogether.

Bergman's previous work is on the whole firmly anchored in time and space: note the crucial symbolic function of the sea in *Through the Glass Darkly*, the island in *Shame* and *Hour of the Wolves*, the side roads of rural southern Sweden in *Wild Strawberries*, or the streets, shops and churches of early twentieth-century Uppsala in *Fanny and Alexander*. The landscape supports the psychology of the characters in Bergman's earlier works. In contrast, *Saraband* seems to be taking place in a "non-space"; it is stubbornly deprived of specific geographical context, out of touch, as it were, with a defined locale. The series of confrontations, always between two characters, take place in rooms which are disconnected from the surrounding architectural structure. It appears that *Saraband* takes place outside history and biography, in an isolated space of its own. In fact, even the framing of the story as a sequel to Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973) is of little relevance to what happens in *Saraband*. It returns to the same duo, Johan and Marianne (played by the older Erland Josephson and Liv Ullman), who have not seen each other for many years, when Marianne gets the sudden impulse to look in on her ex-husband, who now lives in "the wilderness" by himself. As all references to contextual background in this film, Marianne's spontaneous decision is marginal to the film, almost a forced excuse. Furthermore, though their old relationship wounds are touched upon, the film spends little time revisiting them. By now each is disillusioned, and they get by with a grumpy restraint that is even sometimes accompanied by tenderness.

But Johan and Marianne are no longer the main story: rather, Bergman shifts his focus to a new power struggle, between a father (Johan's son by his first marriage, Henrik) and daughter (Karin), who live in a cottage on Johan's property. Henrik is 61, coming to the end of a disappointing career as a music professor, and despised by his father. His 19 year-old daughter Karin is a talented cellist herself, but her father, who has taken on the role of her music coach, is not prepared to let her go.

Saraband has a bare minimum for a narrative. Its story line, rather than constituting a plot of sorts, is a movement from one confrontation between two characters to another. We see Marianne and Johan in the first scene, Karin and Marianne in the second, Henrik and Karin in the third, Johan and Henrik in the fourth, and so on. *Saraband* moves like a baroque *suite*, a twosome stately court dance (a saraband) organized in advance in a fixed fashion. The musical score opens with a slow and soulful “saraband,” movement from Bach’s 5th Unaccompanied Cello Suite. That the Suite for Unaccompanied Cello should not be played as a duet, even with the younger person playing the “easier part” as Karin’s father suggests, is perhaps symbolic of the unbridgeable void between the generations: adolescent (Karin) and adult (Henrik), adult (Henrik) and old (Johan). Inter-generational borders, the film implies, are not meant to and indeed cannot be traversed together. This is a reminder from the elderly Bergman of the existential lacunas between individuals and ages.

When *Saraband* was released, Bergman’s first feature film in two decades, one critic wrote: “*Saraband* has all the elements it needs to be considered satisfactorily Bergmanesque . . . Its most exciting element — as rare now as it was during Bergman’s reign over art houses in the 50’s and 60’s — is his emotional ruthlessness. Once again, he lays bare the workings of the human heart with unflinching clarity. And what he shows is far from pretty” (Anderson). Yet continuity — psychological, formal, or stylistic — is only part of the story, and in this case not the most significant part. Another critic noticed that “as the majesty of the film’s shots develops, so does a feeling of something that is beyond spectacle and its recognized forms” (Frodon PAGE?). Bergman has always shown the far-from-pretty side of humanity. But in *Saraband*, as in *Sunday’s Children*, it is not only far from pretty, it is *beyond* pretty. The “unflinching clarity” here is of a different order, making the emotional ruthlessness of earlier films look mild in comparison.

The film returns to the same familiar topic, inter-generational family conflict, but this time with the vengeance of lateness. Johan holds his son in contempt for a whole list of reasons. Henrik heartily loathes him in return. Karin is justifiably scared of, and abnormally close to, her deeply neurotic father. Whereas father-son conflict had in previous films been offered some kind of resolution, real or potential, the only resolution offered in *Saraband* is a “respect for honest hatred,” which is what Johan offers to Henrik. This remark is quite astonishing when said by a father to his son. However, it suits well Johan’s unyielding character. He is an Olympian, Zeus-like, larger-than-life presence, even, and especially in his weaknesses. Pulling the strings and playing the other characters according to his openly egotistical needs,

and against each other, Johan is a Nietzschean-like hero standing above good and evil, making moral reproach simply irrelevant. Johan's character is a non-apologetic exploration of the essence of egotism. The bare, unmitigated admission in selfish motives seems to exonerate Johan (and Bergman) from the chains of social morality and psychological excavations: the truth, and nothing but the truth.

In the fourth scene (titled "Four") we see Johan in his huge library, looking at the first page of a book; it is Kirkegaard's "Either/Or: A Fragment of Life." This is a grim exposition for the life fragment we are about to witness. Henrik steps in. After a brief courtesy talk in which the elderly father dryly recounts his experience of physical deterioration ("at 60 you have six flaws. At 70 you have seven, and so on... It's a fairly good assessment"), the exchange seems to come to a halt. Henrik turns to the door, but when his father asks: "What do you want?" turns back and says: "I need 890,000 kronor — an advance on my inheritance." Johan refuses, saying that this is the second time Henrik asks for money after not having returned his first loan. He repeatedly humiliates his son as Henrik explains he intends to use the money to pay for a vintage cello for Karin. "Papa . . . where does all this hostility come from?" the hurtful Henrik cries out, and Johan replies: "Speak for yourself. When you were 18 or 19, I tried to get close to you. You'd been seriously ill and your mother wanted us to talk it out. I said I knew I had been a bad father but I want to be better. And you screamed, yes, screamed: 'You were never a father at all!'"

The camera zooms in on Henrik's astonished and humiliated face, tears in his eyes, as we hear Johan speaking to him in the background: "Honest hatred should be respected . . . and I do. But I don't give a damn if you hate me. You barely exist." Upon leaving, Henrik draws closer to his father and says: "That story about an exchange of words 50 years ago is no excuse." Johan replies: "So that's what you think? Are you going to hit me again now?" Henrik looks at him with anger and, in an act of aggressive sublimation, knocks off the lamp and books from his father's table. The scene ends with no closure and no real sublimation. It demonstrates how both father and son are capable of becoming monsters from the slightest narcissistic injury. Johan's egotistic reasons for rejecting his son — indeed, denying his existence — has made Henrik a pathetic and vengeful creature whose survival subsequently depends on positive mirroring from others. Without Anna (his deceased wife), it must be Karin; without Karin, he cannot exist.

In Bergman's films, from the 1940s to the 1980s, a pessimistic worldview is smoothed over by the possibility, remote and partial though it may be, of redemption in the form of a personal life-review (as in *Wild Strawberries*) or mutual intimacy

and empathy, as in the closing image of Helena reading to Alexander in *Fanny and Alexander*; or the three sisters in *Cries and Whispers*, dressed in white, walking peacefully and happily through a blossoming orchard on a bright sunny day. All vestiges of salvation, however, are mercilessly removed in *Saraband*. What remains is the very essence of father-son relationship, not what it should be or is desperately trying to be. Foreshadowing this attitude is Ehrland Josephson's (Johan in *Saraband*) character in Bergman's 1969 film *Passion*, who says: "I'm under no illusion. I'm capturing the essence of things; I'm merely recording the interplay of small and immense forces. Everything is useless."

A powerful scene towards the end of *Saraband* captures this emphasis on bare feelings and unadorned, painful honesty, characteristic of the old-age style of the octogenarian Bergman. We see the divorced couple, Marianne and Johan, who have a lifetime of experience behind them, but concentrate on the present and agree not to discuss their past. As a result, while they are comfortable together, they have no hope of reconciliation. One night, Johan has an anxiety attack, probably connected to the imminence of death. While crying "my anxiety is bigger than me . . . I'm too small for my anxiety," he is invited by Marianne to sleep with her in her bed. The pair strip naked before the camera and climb into bed together, where they lie like intimate strangers, physically close but distant all the same. This is not a sexual reunion, but a mutual recognition of their fleshly mortality. It is a profound moment of closeness in a film that contains only rare moments where a tender connection between characters is expressed. This closeness, however, is very different from previous intimate or loving relationships depicted by Bergman. It is a difference that arguably represents the perspective of old age, Bergman's perspective when making *Saraband*. Recall that the film is framed by Marianne's impulse visit to Johan, an impulse which is never fully explained. That fleeting moment of touching is matched by the impulsiveness of the visit — like two monads meeting briefly, and then going their own solitary, solipsistic ways.

The popular, Hollywood-style, midlife ideal of "love" — passionate, metaphysical, energy-consuming, but also deceptive and questionable — is here replaced by a different conceptualization reflecting the perspective of old age. A literal, concrete materialization of "love" is shaped by the constraints and wisdom of old age. In old age the body is a matter of daily coping rather than glorification. Robbed of its past and future, life becomes present-bound. The physical proximity of naked bodies lying next to each other in bed becomes not a symbol of "love" but a figurative sign of practicing survival. Like father-son relations in *Saraband*, there is no intimacy in such survival, but also no self-deception. There is no relief, but

also no artificiality. The illusion of “love” — filial as well romantic — is replaced by the much more practical reality of belonging.²

In a final twist on Eriksonian terminology, Bergman finds “integrity” *in* despair, or rather, the certainty of despair, to be reckoned with as such — contrary to Erikson’s notion of a bi-polarity resolved in vital old age by life-affirming wisdom. The old Bergman surely goes beyond Erikson in that there is no palpable dilemma in *Saraband*, only plain, unashamed - to the point of indifference - admission of unconditional, unfathomed hatred and boundless egocentricity as the pillars of existence.

Concluding Remarks

This paper offered a new reading of a major theme in Bergman’s lifelong cinematic work — that of filial relationships, particularly father-child relations. This lifelong theme evidently also bears on, as well as departs from, Bergman’s lifelong involvement with his father — initiated through an early trauma and worked throughout a long career. A careful reading of Bergman’s films shows that (perhaps contrary to classical Freudian psychology) early determination and later repetition do not automatically imply either fixation or stagnation. Rather than *returning* to the same basic conflict time and time again, Bergman *re*-presents that initial guilt-ridden and anxiety-producing trauma in a cumulatively *progressive* manner, reflecting an intriguing correlation of style and age.

Bergman has left a legacy of ongoing documentation of his own psychological development, revealing a progression through several age-related qualitatively distinct phases. To recapitulate my argument, the particular picture of filial relationship in each age/phase is crystallized in one film that epitomizes that phase. The three films providing central milestones in Bergman’s evolving view of parenthood are *Wild Strawberries*, *Fanny and Alexander* and *Saraband*. All are dynastic: the family subject is both central and expansive, involving, as Bergman’s childhood did, at least three generations interacting in multiple and intricate ways, enabling a broad inter-generational perspective. The lifelong intergenerational web, that had been disentangled through introspective self-analysis (*Wild Strawberries*) is later exorcised through the antics of magical mastery in *Fanny and Alexander*, and finally left in a state of huge, un-glorious wreckage (*Saraband*). The mutual hatred between Johan and Henrik is no longer, for the elderly Bergman, to be sublimated through art. Deeply dissonant either with the midlife retentivity of *Wild Strawberries* or the mature festivity of *Fanny and Alexander*, *Saraband* is a work of old age style, very much a reminder of the late works of Ibsen. In *Saraband*, old age becomes “not harmony and resolution but intransigence, difficulty and unresolved contradiction

. . . an occasion to stir up more anxiety, temper irrevocably with the possibility of closure, and leave the audience more perplexed and unsettled than before” (Said 7). Instead of closure, formal as well as psychological, *Saraband* as a whole is an act of ultimate *disclosure*, visually exemplified in the image of the panic-stricken Johan, standing naked before Marianne, at his most vulnerable moment, reverting to a child just long enough to feel a sense of security.

Bergman’s cinematic journey following the father-son conflict illustrates several central themes of life-span development, such as Gould’s (1976) conception of development as a progressive riddance of illusions about the self, or Vaillant’s (1997) notion of the progression of defense mechanisms, from psychotic to neurotic to healthy confrontation. However, Bergman’s films present progressive development as well as sharp departures that cannot be neatly subsumed under the conventional dialectics of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis. *Wild Strawberries* introduces the notion of necessary order achieved through linear logic, based on a quasi-Freudian combination of psychological determinism and free choice. *Fanny and Alexander* favors an epistemology of non-order, divergence, and tolerance for benign chaos. *Saraband* is a paradoxical, oxymoronic embodiment of fragmented order. In terms of narrative, *Wild Strawberries* is the most mimetic of all, built on the linear analogy of the car ride and the life course. *Fanny and Alexander*, in contrast, has a cyclic narrative which is much more bountiful, fragmentary, and surreal, compromising mimesis for the sake of fantasy and imagination. *Saraband*, once again, is a contradiction in terms: It has a narrative moving the action in a certain direction, yet this narrative is both minimal and secondary, a by-product of a given, unchangeable factuality. The movements in this dance of the monads are both pre-determined and free, inter-connected and detached. Kenneth Clark’s description of old age style is especially apt with respect to *Saraband*: “A sense of isolation, a feeling of holy rage . . . transcendental pessimism; mistrust in reason, a belief in instinct . . . impatience with established technique” (21-22).

In academic terminology, the dialectics of the three films/phases can be seen as a shift from psychological ego-integrity and life review (*Wild Strawberries*) through anthropological bricolage (*Fanny and Alexander*) to sociological disengagement (*Saraband*). The psychological terms of the first phase are taken from Erikson and Butler, who found in Borg’s psychological journey a template for their propositions of the life review and ego-integrity as the crucial developmental functions of old age. In these conceptualizations — Bergman’s, Erikson’s and Butler’s — “old age,” as well as the supposed “filial resolution” that comes with it are artificially constructed from the point-of-view of midlife fears and anxieties. In using the

concept of bricolage for the second phase, I have in mind Lévi-Strauss' notion of mythical thought (associated with "primitive" mentality) that creatively rearranges magic and reality, modeling life on myths, as in fact we all do. The notion of the artful, creative *bricoleur* is contrasted by Lévi-Strauss with the modern, industrial, scientific engineer — much like the contrast between the mature Bergman of *Fanny and Alexander* and the younger Bergman who directed *Wild Strawberries*. With *Saraband*, the much disputed sociological notion of disengagement (Cummings and Henry) is matched by the unconventional expression, characteristic of Bergman's third phase, of inter-generational emotional detachment. Anger, frustration, and outright hatred, hidden as they are under the veil of civilization, surface in old age when life becomes a matter of bare survival and nothing else matters. If this is true, then the recommended disengagement of older people from the rest of society, as well as from their family, is indeed functional.

The important point of this terminological characterization is not the academic discipline from which the term is taken. The different terms are offered in an attempt to capture the stylistic differences between the three phases. Ego-integrity and life review attempt to capture the analytical sublimation; bricolage stands for the replacement of linearity and analytical order with chaos, magic and myth; and disengagement is a proper keyword for the bare essentiality of old-age style. Other relevant terms might also suggest themselves and there is no specific emphasis on these particular terms — they merely serve as cultural metaphors. The fact that they are taken from three different yet complementary disciplines — psychology, anthropology and sociology — is not crucial in itself, but rather attests to the rich and eclectic character of Bergman's work. The lesson here is perhaps that in order to encompass a life-span panoramic view of even one artist, we should not limit our perspective to one discipline only. This is truly an important humanistic lesson - not just for gerontologists but for all those interested in life-span creativity. Finally, it should be clarified that none of these age-related conceptualizations is privileged or better in artistic or psychological terms. The sequence I have described is definitely not a universal one. Rather, the inductive juxtaposition of these stages should serve to refine our appreciation of each film *vis-à-vis* the works that preceded and followed it.

Notes

¹ I use the term "monad" following Gottfried Leibniz's designation, referring to soul-like, singular and solitary entities which move about in an existentialistic world of consciousness, memory, appetite and perception.

² According to film critic Phillip Lopate: “Bergman shifted his emphasis from “Does God exist?” in the Fifties and Sixties, to “Does love exist?” in the Seventies. *Saraband* provides a new, practical and powerful, old-age-style answer to this question. “Love” does not exist for love’s sake, but only for survival.

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