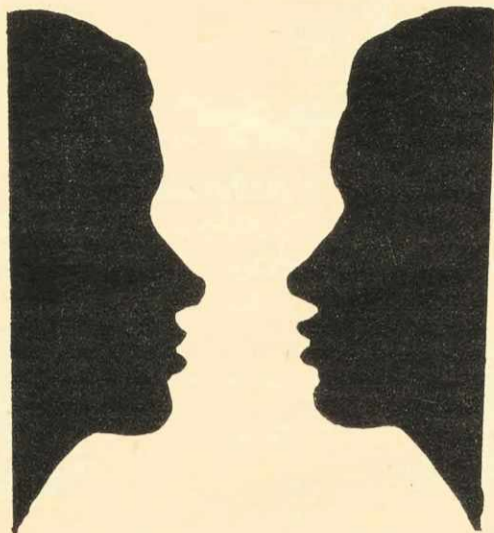


# Bergman's Face to Face

by Marion Frazer

Ingmar Bergman's *Face to Face* is a dramatization of unreality. In its portrayal of (ironically) a psychiatrist's emotional collapse, *Face to Face* subtly fuses psychological fantasy with actuality until we, like the psychiatrist, Jenny Isakson, are left asking "What is real?". At times, the style approaches "stream of consciousness film-making". The movement of the film is not a day to day progression. We linger on events that seem most to affect Jenny's mind, hopping between them with the disconnected rationality of thought patterns. The audience is constantly moving in and out of Jenny's awareness, sometimes with narration or an explanatory dialogue, sometimes simply through the focus of her eyes.

Technically, the film is superb. Bergman is an artist who knows how to make excellent use of background detail to heighten the effectiveness of his centre of action. The viewer is constantly surprised



by seemingly insignificant features that vividly express the mood or tensions of a scene. Occasionally, Bergman uses camera angles to achieve this end. One brilliant example of this usage introduced *Face to Face* audiences to first person suicide. Having impersonally observed Jenny hungrily pill pop, we suddenly leap into her person. The camera follows her eyes as she watches her finger trace the pattern of the wallpaper, then lets her gaze slide around the room picking up pictures briefly and finally coming to rest on a painted scene on her blind. Bergman pauses then, and fades through the blind and, as Jenny loses consciousness into her sub-conscious mind as it adopts the fairy-tale motif of the picture.

Other associations are made through use of colour. Red and white, colours important in such films as his *Cries and Whispers*, appear again in *Face to Face*. In it they become symbolic of control (white) versus passion and irrationality (red). Jenny, the successful psychiatrist wears white, while Jenny, the terrified child of her nightmare sequences appears in the flowing red ensemble of a sixteenth century fairy-tale Princess.

Jenny Isakson is bound by a complex mass of emotional problems. One theme is that of broken communication. Jenny, as a child, cannot accept her parents sudden death. She feels the need for an explanation, that their "desertion"

of her arose from a lack of love. As an adult, she cannot make her own daughter understand her suicide attempt. A cyclical pattern is revealed as the daughter, too, sees death as the ultimate form of neglect. Neither can Jenny communicate effectively with her husband. Their relationship seems trapped in civility and reserve. As a child, Jenny had been continually quelled to silence by her grandparents, who raised her. As an adult she is unable to break through the circle of silence. She feels that she cannot meet the needs of others — her family, her patients — when they turn to her for the "right words".

Sexually, too, Jenny feels paralyzed by mental restraints. In an early scene, she recounts the experience of an attempted rape to a doctor-mentor. She is hysterical, not solely due to remembered fear, but due to the fact that she wanted the rape and her bodily reactions made it an impossibility. Jenny has a cool relationship with her husband, who is much away from home and a rather impersonal relationship with a lover (she calls it "realistic", "reasonable"...). Her friendship with the doctor develops out of his initial sexual desire for her, for which she cruelly torments him. She needs someone to talk to in her distress, yet is unable to reveal herself completely even to him, a reassuring stranger.

To Jenny, love and death are bound together, but are irreconcil-

able. She loved her parents, especially her father, who would often pick her up and cuddle her, (a fact Freudians might link to her sexuality) then they were taken away from her and she failed to adjust properly to their death. She had "...a little dog that died, as well. At that time, that seemed the hardest". A cousin died during her childhood. All these deaths were loose ends, for which she had no healing explanatory tie.

Jenny's suicide attempt acts as a psychological trigger to a searching movement through her own sub-conscious. In her dreams she confronts her fears and inhibitions. Awake she gradually becomes able to talk them out with her doctor friend. Although she may not resolve all her inner turmoil, through acknowledging the issues that plague her, she is able to reach a state of relative calm. She leaves the hospital and parts with the doctor. A final note of resolution is sounded by Bergman as Jenny, back in her grandparents home, witnesses their confrontation with death in an intimate scene. She comes to the conclusion that love and death may be so interwoven that they strengthen each other rather than destroy.

*Face to Face* is a satisfying artistic achievement. If any criticisms may be put forward, they are trivial in comparison to the final success of the film as a whole. Still, it is possible to suspect that the occasional scene is fitted into the film more as a showpiece for its leading actress, Liv Ullman, than for its value to the entire piece. This refers particularly to one very well performed "schizoid" scene in which Ullman talks to and answers herself without the screen effect of the "dream" formula. As she shows no other symptoms of schizophrenia and soon after recovers almost completely, (her doctor can discharge her with no qualms) the credibility of the episode might be in question.

As always with Bergman films, the necessity for voice dubbing is an unfortunate distraction. The tone of the voices does not always match the mood conveyed by the characters' movements. Some nuances of meaning held in the original Swedish must also be lost in translation. Rather dubbing, though, than no Bergman.

*Face to Face* is another fine example of Bergman's film exploration of the human psyche.



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## Bowie as Starman

by Charlie Cockburn

This film starring Rock Superstar David Bowie, although somewhat incomprehensible at times, is on the whole an interesting and entertaining piece of cinema. There are no demanding roles and consequently no excellent performances — only adequate ones. As one may predict, the movie was, in places, surrealistic but even these scenes seemed lacking and at times forced. *2001: A Space Odyssey* it isn't.

What it is is your basic science fiction movie with a stark and relatively simple plot executed with accuracy and intelligence; well-timed sequences of film, and above average photography and production. Bowie's performance comes off well, but he doesn't really have much acting to do. His lines are not unlike Clint Eastwood's in that there aren't many of them. One keeps thinking he's probably that way in real life. His intensity, however, is so strong as to almost be a presence in the theatre. He is *The Man Who Fell To Earth* and the success of the movie lies in the way he portrays the character. He looks drowned in empathy, but the character, and consequently the

film, work because of it.

As science fictions go, it's well done, miles above "Logan's Run" and years behind *2001*, stuck somewhere between "Westworld" and "Rollerball". You can afford to miss it, but you'll probably walk out satisfied if you go. Fairly light entertainment occasionally presented in a complex way.

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