TEXT TWO

ENCOUNTERING DIRECTORS

By Ch.Samuels Interviewing Ingmar Bergman

*(Extract)*

Ingmar Bergman — a famous Swedish film director, writer and theatre pro­ducer was born in 1918. His psychological films are well known all over the world. *Crisis* (1945), *Smiles of Summer Night* (1956), *Seventh Seal* (1957), *Wild Strawber­ries* (1958), *The Silence* (1963), Autumn *Sonata* (1978) are only a few films made by him. I.Bergman himself wrote the scripts for most of his films and won awards for many of them. In the focus of his attention people's fates are put. The people usu­ally have a lot of problems. Bergman focuses attention on the fate of individuals, on their problems and their search for life's meaning. Many of his»characters are isolated people who suffer from the harsh realities of the cruel world in which they live. It is difficult to understand the majority of Bergman's films since the distinc­tion between reality and the world of the imagination is blurred.

Samuels: Mr. Bergman, I'd like to start with a rather general question: If I were asked to cite a single reason for your pre-emi­nence among film directors, I would point to your creation of a spe­cial world. You are, in fact, very much like a writer. Why didn't you become one?

Bergman: When I was a child, I suffered from an almost com­plete lack of words. My education was very rigid; my father was a priest. As a result, I lived in a private world of my own dreams. I played with my puppet theatre.

S.: And —

В.: Excuse me. I had very few contacts with reality or channels to it. I was afraid of my father, my mother, my elder brother — eve­rything. Playing with this puppet theatre and a projection device I had was my only form of self-expression. I had great difficulty with fiction and reality; as a small child I mixed them up so much that my family always said I was a liar.

S.: I want to interrupt you for just a moment. This description of your childhood resembles one classic description of the genesis of a writer. Was it only the acqident of the puppet theatre that sent you the way of theatre rather than of books?

В.: No. When I began writing I liked it very much. But I never felt that writing was my cup of tea. And I always lacked words; it has always been very difficult for me to find the word I want. I have always felt suspicious both of what I say and what others say to me. I always feel something has been left out. When I read a book, I read very slowly. It takes me a lot of time to read a play.

S.: Do you direct it in your head?

В.: In a way. I have to translate the words into speeches, flesh and blood. I have an enormous need for contact with an audience, with other people. For me, words are not satisfying.

S.: With a book, the reader is elsewhere.

В.: When you read, words have to pass through your conscious mind to reach your emotions and your soul. In film and theatre, things go directly to the emotions. What I need is to come in con­tact with others.

S.: I see that, but it raises a problem I'm sure you've often dis­cussed. Your films have emotional impact, but since they are also the most intellectually difficult of contemporary films, isn't there sometimes a contradiction between the two effects? How do you react when I say that while I watched "The Rite", my feelings were interfered with by my baffled effort at comprehension?

В.: Your approach is wrong. I never asked you to understand, I ask only that you feel.

S.: And the film asks me to understand. The film continuously makes us wonder what the spectacle means.

В.: But that's you.

S.: It's not the film?

В.: No. "The Rite" merely expresses my resentment against the critics, audience, and government, with which I was in constant battle while I ran the theatre. A year after my resignation from the post, I sat down and wrote the script in five days. The picture is just a game.

S.: To puzzle the audience? В.: Exactly. I liked writing it very much and even more making it. We had a lot of fun while we were shooting. My purpose was just to amuse myself and the audience. Do you understand what I mean?

S.: I understand, but certain members of the audience can't re­sist pointing out that Bergman is sending messages, he thinks, but what are they and why?

В.: You must realize — this is very important! — I never ask people to understand what I have made. Stravinsky once said, "I have never understood a piece of music in my life. I always only feel."

S.: But Stravinsky was a composer. By its nature, music is non-discursive; we don't have to understand it. Films, plays, poems, novels all make propositions or observations, embody ideas or be­liefs, and we go to these forms —

В.: But you must understand that your view is distorted. You be­long to a small minority that tries to understand. I never try to un­derstand. Music, films, plays always work directly on the emotions.

S.: I must disagree. I'm afraid I didn't make myself clear —

В.: I must tell you before we go on to more complicated things: I make my pictures for use! They are made to put me in contact with other human beings. My impulse has nothing to do with intel­lect or symbolism: it has only to do with dreams and longing, with hope and desire, with passion.

S.: Does it bother you when critics interpret you through these items?

В.: Not at all. And let me tell you, I learn more from critics who honestly criticize my pictures than from those who are devout. And they influence me. They help me change things. You know that ac­tors often change a film, for better or worse.

S.: May I ask you how "The Touch" differs from the one you in­tended?

В.: I intended to paint a portrait of an ordinary woman, for whom everything around was a reflection. Bibi Anderson is a close friend of mine — a lovely and extremely talented actress. She is to­tally oriented towards reality, always needing motives for what she does. I admire her and love her. But she changed the film. What Bibi Anderson did made the film more comprehensible for ordi­nary people and more immediately powerful. I agreed with all her changes.

S.: You use music less and less in your films. Why?

В.: Because I think that film itself is music, and I can't put music in music.

S.: If you could have shot all your films in colour, would you have?

В.: No. Because it is more fascinating to shoot in black and white and force people to imagine the colours.

S.: Do you work in colour now— to any degree — because you feel that the audience demands it?

В.: No. I like it. At the beginning, it was painful, but now I like it.

S.: Why do you use so much dialogue in your films?

В.: Because human communication occurs through words. I tried once to eliminate language, in "The Silence", and I feel that picture is excessive.

S.: It's too abstract.

В.: Yes.

S.: Some people have criticized your films for being too theatri­cal — particularly — the early ones. How do you answer this charge?

В.: I am a director —

S.: But aren't the two forms different?

В.: Completely. In my earlier pictures, it was very difficult for me to go from directing in the theatre to directing films. I had al­ways felt technically crippled — insecure with the crew, the camer­as, the sound equipment — everything. Sometimes a film succeed­ed, but I never got what I wanted to get. But in "Summer Interlude", I suddenly felt that I knew my profession.

S.: Do you have any idea why?

В.: I don't know, but for heaven's sake a day must always come along when finally one succeeds in understanding his profession! I'm so impressed by young directors now who know how to make a film from the first moment.

S.: But they have nothing to say. *(Bergman laughs.)*