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INGMAR BERGMAN'S WINTER JOURNEY — intertextuality in 'Larmar och gör sig till'

Ingmar Bergman maintains on the back cover of his *Femte akten* (*The Fifth Act*, Norstedts 1994) that the four plays contained in that volume

are written without any particular performance medium in thought, like Bach's cembalo sonatas ... They can be played by a string quartet, a woodwind ensemble, by guitar, organ or piano. I have written in the manner that I am used to for more than fifty years - it looks like theatre but could equally well be film, television or just a text for reading.¹

However, these plays did not remain unperformed reading dramas, as three of them have been adapted for television, and the fourth for the stage. 'Efter repetitionen' (After the Rehearsal) was filmed long before publication, and 'Sista skriket' (The Last Cry) was originally performed on stage but then converted for television. Film and theatre merge in that play, illustrating Ingmar Bergman's much-quoted words about theatre as a wife and film as a mistress. During his long creative life (he turned eighty on July 14, 1998, and is still going strong), he has demonstrated how well the two media combine. In 'Sista skriket' he uncovers early Swedish film history, in a reconstruction of a plausible interchange between two pioneers of the silent screen, Charles Magnusson and Georg af Klercker.

The last piece in *Femte akten*, called 'Larmar och gör sig till' (Struts and Frets), is also centred on theatre and film. In his cover text from

¹*Femte akten*, p. 14 (my translation). - A similar statement prefaces the published script of 'Persona': "I have not produced a film script in the normal sense. What I have written seems more like the melody line of a piece of music, which I hope with the help of my colleagues to be able to orchestrate during production" (quoted by Peter Cowie in his *Ingmar Bergman* [1992], p. 231).

1994 Bergman mentioned that his "intention is to produce 'Larmar och gör sig till' on the stage". But it did not turn out that way. The text, carrying a Shakespearian quote in its title, was transformed into yet another play for television. It was broadcast by Sveriges Television in the autumn of 1997, directed by the author himself.² So far, this late Bergman text has not attracted much critical attention, although film researchers at Lund University have advised that studies on the subject are forthcoming.

In this article, a preliminary inventory of the intertextuality of the play, and of its auto-references will be essayed. 'Larmar och gör sig till' is an echo-chamber of quotes from and allusions to literature and music, film and theatre. This is achieved by the words in the printed text, and in the TV-production enhanced by music and images. Thus the text is part of a strong tradition in theatre and film.

A brief summary of the plot might be advantageous. Middle-aged Carl Åkerblom (Börje Ahlstedt), an engineer, is engaged to be married to a German physiotherapist and pianist more than thirty years his junior (Marie Richardsson). He has invented a method of synchronizing images and sound in the cinema. In October 1925 he is admitted to the psychiatric wing of Uppsala Academic Hospital, after having physically abused and attacked his fiancée. He successfully makes his fellow psychiatric patient Osvald Vogler (Erland Josephson) interested in his cinematographic invention. As the play progresses, Carl, his fiancée and Vogler tour the country with a film about Franz Schubert, where the new technique is being used. The performance at Grånäs Good-Templar Lodge in Dalecarlia during a severe winter evening is witnessed by Carl's step-sister Karin Bergman (Pernilla August) and others. The screening of the film is interrupted when all the fuses blow, but the drama is brought to an end in a live performance by candlelight.

The play centres on anguish, sexuality and death, and, as in many previous Bergman films, on the question of the debasement and ultimate triumph of the creative artist. There is a wealth of open and

²Cinematography by Tony Forsberg, in a co-production by Scandinavian, German and Italian TV-companies (SVT, DR, NRK, YLE 1, ZDF and RAI).

hidden quotes from Shakespeare and Schubert, Ibsen and Strindberg, and a great number of allusions to Ingmar Bergman's own work. Lastly, it seems likely that a strange figure from an unexpected quarter may have been inspirational, a man from the world of the French variety show at the turn of the century.

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In Shakespeare's words from *As You Like It*, his play written around 1600, "All the world's a stage/ And all the men and women merely players...". When a similar theatre metaphor appears in *Macbeth* five years later, life itself is the actor:

Out, out, brief candle!/ Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,/ And then is heard
no more; it is a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

This is where William Faulkner found his title *The Sound and the Fury* for a novel partly told by an idiot. In Faulkner's book he is Benjy and like Dante at the outset of his journey thirty-three years of age, but certainly of a more muddled mind, as witnessed by his inner meandering monologue which is much more opaque than transparent.

This is how the same lines in *Macbeth* read in C.A. Hagberg's classical translation into Swedish:

Ut ut du korta ljus!/ En skugga blott, som går och går, är livet;/ En
stackars skådespelare som larmar/ Och gör sig till, en timmes tid,
på scenen/ Och sedan ej hörs av. Det är en saga/ Berättad av en
dåre; låter stort,/ Betyder intet. —

When Ingmar Bergman wrote his play five years ago he borrowed his title from the same passage in *Macbeth*. His story is, as was Faulkner's, a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury - or at least a tale in part enacted in an asylum. But 'Larmar och gör sig till', dated Fårö, July 30, 1993, takes not one but two hours to stage in its TV-version.

Shakespearian influences have always been prominent in the Bergman oeuvre, as can be expected in a writer who has directed a rich variety of the classical drama repertoire over the years. In *Fanny and Alexander* a rehearsal of *Hamlet* is cut short when Oscar Ekdahl, playing Hamlet the elder, has a stroke. He dies and reappears as a benevolent ghost, trying to help his son. In Shakespeare's drama there is a play within the play, put on stage in order that young Hamlet can prove his uncle's guilt. *Hamlet* is the basic intertext or subtext of *Fanny and Alexander* which gives strength and structure to the conflict in the film: the dead father re-appearing as a ghost, the son brooding on revenge, the remarried mother, the evil step-father. But Helena Ekdahl, the re-married widow, tells her son: "Don't act Hamlet, my boy". Maybe Alexander should have borne in mind some despondent lines uttered by T.S. Eliot's anti-hero J. Alfred Prufrock: "No, I am no Hamlet, nor was meant to be..."

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Shakespeare's Swedish colleague August Strindberg, in his historical plays an ardent Shakespearian, is quoted at the end of *Fanny and Alexander*. Grandmother Ekdahl, former director of the family theatre company, reads the introductory lines of a play that has just appeared (the time is at the turn of the century):

Everything can happen, everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist; on an insignificant basis of facts the imagination creates new patterns...³

The lines from Strindberg's *A Dream Play* (1901) read like a self-confession by Ingmar Bergman. And "det är synd om människorna" ("Humanity is to be pitied"), a statement often repeated in Strindberg's drama, is valid also in Bergman's text. Strindberg's opening of *A Dream Play* is Indra's daughter's "I sink...", a line similar to the one which closes Bergman's play, Carl Åkerblom's "One sinks,

³*A Dream Play*, p. 225 (my translation).

that's what one does". Carl Åkerblom has referred to the emotional Strindberg earlier in the play, in a scathing remark attacking sentimentalists. He himself is not seeking "compassion like Jesus, Mahler, Ågust S" (indicating the typical 19th century Stockholm pronunciation of Strindberg's first name). This quote might be seen as a belated thank-you for Strindberg-borrowings in the past, for example those in *Wild Strawberries*. No film by Bergman is more marked by Strindbergian influences than that one.

No text by Bergman, on the other hand, is more marked by borrowings from Ingmar Bergman's own earlier works than 'Larmar och gör sig till'. That can be established already by a quick look at its gallery of characters. Readers or viewers who have kept the film *Winter Light* (1963) in good memory will recognize a host of well-known figures. In life, actors and actresses age as we all do; in films they don't. In the glass-bell of films they remain the same from year to year. In this play, they also seem to exist outside time, still at about the same age as they were in the film. *Winter Light* takes place around forty years later than 'Larmar och gör sig till', in the mid-sixties (in a film contemporary with its original viewers). 'Larmar och gör sig till' is enacted in the twenties. The gap between time of subject and that of writing has widened from zero in the film to around seventy years in the play. In spite of the thirty years that have passed between the creation of the film and that of the play, the characters have remained almost static and ageless, as if existing in a curiously anachronistic limbo.

Märta Lundberg, the school teacher (played by Ingrid Thulin in the film and Lena Endre in the TV-performance) has the same attributes in both film and play: a practical but unbecoming sheepskin fur-coat and a knitted cap, and in both media she suffers from the same irritating eczema. Her beloved Tomas, the clergyman who was a true disbeliever, was getting a cold in the film. Now it has broken out. He is wise enough not to venture out in the extreme cold this winter's night when the mercury has dropped to below minus thirty degrees Celsius, on the Dalecarlian country-side. He keeps at home, while Märta, in a scene which is a parallel to the longest uninterrupted sequence in the film, takes an active part in the Good-Templar performance in her own

unobtrusive way. In *Winter Light*, Ingrid Thulin reads a letter to Tomas (Gunnar Björnstrand), in an extreme close-up with her glance directed steadily into the camera. In the up-dated sequence, Lena Ende's glance is as personal and intimate when she stares straight into the camera, in Märta Lundberg's long monologue that takes place in 1925. Now she is reading from a book, not a letter. The text she reads is full of allusions, and is no doubt a key passage in the play.

The following lines could have been written by Franz Kafka standing in front of the Law, or by the Swedish romantic poet Stagnelius in one of his most indecisive moods. Sometimes the words sound as if the knight from *The Seventh Seal* (Max von Sydow) uttered them, sometimes they remind of both Jean Paul Sartre, and of the mentally troubled poet Gustaf Fröding in his brooding poem 'En Ghasel'.⁴ This is Bergman's text, in a rough translation:

You lament that in spite of your crying God keeps quiet. You say that you are imprisoned and that you are afraid it might be for life, even if no one has said anything. But you should bear in mind that you are your own judge and your own prison-guard. *Prisoner, step out of your prison!* To your astonishment, you'll find that no one will stop you from doing it. To be sure, reality outside the prison is frightening, but never as frightening as your own anguish deep inside the closed room. Take your first step towards freedom, it isn't difficult. The second step is already not as easy, but you should never let yourself be vanquished by your prison-guards. They are only your own fear and your own pride.⁵

⁴Jag står och ser på världen genom gallret;/ jag kan, jag vill ej slita mig från gallret,/ .../ Förgäves skall jag böja, skall jag rista/ det gamla obevekligt hårda gallret/ - det vill ej tänja sig, det vill ej brista,/ ty i mig själv är smitt och nitat gallret,/ och först när själv jag krossas, krossas gallret" (*Gitarr och dragharmonika*, 1891.)

⁵*Femte akten*, pp. 155-156.

It may well be that these are Bergman's own words even if Märta Lundberg finds them in a book supposedly printed in 1925 or before, and even if some words are italicized, as if quoted. In an hour-long television interview, Ingmar Bergman has directed our attention to the fact that this passage is a key to the entire play. In *Winter Light* Tomas carries through his mass even if the church is almost empty. That scene has its late parallel in the TV-play, in the almost arctic film screening which is poorly peopled. A traditional communion has turned into a secularised one, a religious ritual into a showing of a questionable film.

In *Winter Light* Jonas Persson the fisherman (Max von Sydow) is troubled by the precarious state of affairs in a world where nuclear war looms large. He commits suicide by the brink of the river. Tomas the pastor has no trouble talking about his own doubts, but it is not easy for him to listen to other people. Like the dogs in Hjalmar Söderberg's well-known short story 'En herrelös hund' (The Dog Without a Master), he can neither help nor give solace.⁶ In the TV-play, Karin Persson is widowed, in an anachronistic violation of time, as if 1925 (the year in which the TV-play is set) followed 1963 (the time of the film). Algot Frövik, the hunch-backed church warden is still there, as is Fredrik Blom, the jovial organist, and Knut Aronsson, the former MP, Hanna Appelblad who owns a bakery, and the Chief of Police who has no name in the film. An actor back in 1963 was named Stefan Larsson. That is the name now given the policeman in the TV-play.

Is this TV-play a continuation and development of the film? Yes and no: the difference between then and now, between film and play, can be seen in mood and feeling. A change into a lighter mood has taken place, tragedy has turned into comedy or perhaps a tragi-comedy with dark parts and openings to unknown depths. Some short lines in the TV-play indicate the autobiographical background, as if what is happening is in part based on events in real life. Uncle Carl is a magician performing for his step-sister Karin Bergman's two sons in 1925, Dag and his younger brother Ingmar who turned seven that year. Uncle Carl is at the centre of the play, sometimes an idiot full of sound

⁶"de kunna ju icke trösta och icke hjälpa" (*Historietter*, 1898).

and fury. However, the many references in the play point towards a larger number of fictitious than of factual persons.

Like William Faulkner or the Swedish realistic novelist Hjalmar Bergman, Ingmar Bergman does not let his characters out of sight. In all three writers, fictitious characters are recycled in an intricate way. Those who have been at the centre of one work might pass quickly into the periphery of another. Gradually, a village, a city or a landscape is peopled more and more densely by individuals in an extended family whose lives are intertwined. In Faulkner's world, fictitious Yoknapatawpha Country is not dissimilar to the vicinity of real life Oxford, Mississippi. In Hjalmar Bergman's universe, Wadköping is similar to the real Örebro. In Ingmar Bergman's world, landscapes and cities are easily recognizable. Sometimes they borrow characteristics from the geography of his own life: Dalecarlia and Gotland; Lund, Uppsala and Stockholm.

Even family names are recycled. In the TV-play, there is, as has been said, an Osvald Vogler. He is emeritus professor of theology and at regular intervals hospitalised in the psychiatric wing of Akademiska Sjukhuset in Uppsala. He might have met Gustav Fröding there at the turn of the century. It is stated that Vogler was born in 1850, and he is thus ten years the poet's senior. In the same clinic at the hospital, there is a doctor Johan Egerman, a psychiatrist replacing professor Fürstenberg who is well-known from Bergman's autobiographical writings but who now has had a stroke and dies. Egerman has more than one namesake in Bergman's earlier films. In *A Passion* Eva and Elis Egerman appear, in *The Touch* Karin and Anders carry the same surname. Fredrik Egerman, the lawyer in *Smiles of a Summer's Night*, plays Russian roulette with Count Malcolm and is ridiculed in the process; Peter Egerman appears in *From the Life of the Marionettes*; and Consul Egerman in *The Magician* is faced with unpleasant truths from his wife Ottilia when she is hypnotized. Because of this, he has strong reasons to hate Vogler the magician.

Osvald Vogler's first name is possibly borrowed from Ibsen's *Ghosts*, but there is also a Vogler in Bergman's film *The Shame*. In *After the Rehearsal* there is a Henrik Vogler, but the most well-known person with that surname is to be found in *The Magician*. He is the

mesmerizer Albert Emanuel Vogler, owner of a "Magical Theatre" and a creative artist who is treated offensively and badly by the bourgeoisie. He has mighty enemies, but he triumphs in the end, when he and his fellow performers are escorted to the Royal Castle for a private appearance. Vogler's assistant is the androgynous and enigmatic Aman who very well could have been Tintomara's twin sister in *Drottningens juvelsmycke* (The Queen's Jewel Brooch), the novel by the 19th century romantic-realist writer Carl Jonas Love Almquist. She gives voice to the deaf-and-dumb magician who in private is well-spoken. She is, as it turns out, his wife Manda. Osvald Vogler's wife Emma, on the other hand, is truly deaf-and-dumb, but also at ease with words thanks to sign language. Besides, she is rich enough to sponsor her husband's and Carl Åkerblom's expensive ventures into the world of experimental film.

Emma Vogler's speech-impediment which borders on muteness is real, whereas Albert Emanuel Vogler feigns his silence. It is not physiologically conditioned, as supposedly revealed by Dr Vergerus' (Gunnar Björnstrand's) examination of his vocal cords. A third person carrying the same initials EV appears in Ingmar Bergman's 1966 film *Persona*. She is the actress Elizabeth Vogler (Liv Ullman) who has retreated into a selfimposed autistic state when she performed *Electra*. She is totally taciturn, hers is a truly silent part. When her companion, nurse Alma (Bibbi Andersson) is on the point of scalding her with boiling water, she cries out in fear, but otherwise she does not break her silence. The few words that she says during the dreamy twilit summer nights on the island could equally well be interpreted as the auditory hallucinations of nurse Alma (whose name seems intentionally Jungian, as is the film-title).⁷ In 'Larmar och gör sig till', there are no members of the extensive Vergérus family, who otherwise people many of Bergman's films. A viewer has reasons to regard characters given that name with some suspicion. In the works by the Swedish novelist

⁷"The fact that Bibbi Andersson's character is named Alma is a gesture of acknowledgement by Bergman towards Jung's research in this area. For Jung, the *alma* is that person in dark cloak and shadowed face who crouches in the cellar of the subconscious" (Peter Cowie, *Ingmar Bergman*, 1992 [1982], p. 233).

Eyvind Johnson a strange name sometimes appears, that of Verolyg, made up of equal parts lies and truth, but often applied to persons who are not totally trustworthy.⁸ An extreme form for verité or veritas can possibly be detected lurking under the surface in those Bergman-characters wearing the name Vergéus. At least two of them are dangerous tellers of truth, related to Ibsen's Gregers Werle, the fanatic in *The Wild Duck* whose unbending love for truth has catastrophic consequences. One of them is Hans Vergéus in *The Serpent's Egg*. During the worst weeks of inflation in the autumn of 1923, he carries out experiments on people, in a foreshadowing of Nazi atrocities. He swallows a capsule of cyanide, and observes in the mirror with a clinical eye his own swift disintegration. The other Vergéus is the one already mentioned, the medical councillor in *The Magician* who believes he can expose Vogler as a quack but who is frightened out of his wits during the dissection in the attic. That scene has a follow-up in *Fanny and Alexander*, when Alexander stays in pawn-broker Jacobi's flat and is scared at night by dolls who come alive. Both scenes can be seen an eloquent apology for the suggestive power of the artistic imagination.

In the same film, the oldest member of the actors' guild is Filip Landahl (Gunnar Björnstrand) who plays the clown in the troupe's performance of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. He has a namesake in the TV-play, Petrus Landahl, the instructor of woodcraft who helps Carl Åkerblom when his "First Sound Film in the History of Cinematography" is to be shown at Grånäs Good-Templar Lodge. There are many similarities between the two. And when two policemen come to fetch Osvald Vogler back to the mental asylum in Uppsala, they remind us of the officious officials in *Fanny and Alexander* who tell Helena Ekdahl, at the time married to Vergéus the bishop, that she has been widowed in a tragic accident. They also remind us of the

⁸For example in his 1932 novel *Bobinack'* or his war trilogy about Johannes Krilon (*Grupp Krilon*, *Krilons resa* and *Krilon själv*, 1941-43). Cf. Kerstin Ekman's 1996 novel *Gör mig levande igen*, written in dialogue with Johnson's Krilon-series.

police at the end of *The Magician* who come to fetch Vogler's troupe to the castle.

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In year 1997 was the bi-centennial of Franz Schubert's birth. Ingmar Bergman was one of the many who celebrated this occasion, in his own particular way. In the TV-play 'Larmar och gör sig till' a persistent melody can be heard, albeit interrupted and fragmentary. Uncle Carl plays it over and over again on his portable gramophone in the hospital, on a 78-record, but he does not permit it to be played to its end. It is the beginning of Schubert's 'Der Leiermann', the song about the organ grinder in *Die Winterreise*. The title of that song cycle as well as that of Schubert's song and subsequent string quartet *Der Tod und Das Mädchen* are to the point as catch-words for Bergman's TV-play. Schubert (enacted by Börje Ahlstedt as Carl Åkerblom) plays an important part as the dying genius, almost immobilized by his sickness and his frustrated sexuality. Every time the androgynous figure of Death appears on the scene, she is accompanied by Schubert's wintry melody. But Death is linked to Schubert in a more concrete way as well, when Carl, in great detail and with a discernible note of panic in his voice, describes the moment when Schubert realizes that he has been infected with syphilis.

Several spirits hover above Carl, foremost of them that of the spiritual leader Emanuel Swedenborg who is mentioned in the text, and that of Erik Johan Stagnelius, the romantic poet. Sexuality and Death throng in on Carl on his lonely bed during his nights in hospital. Rigmor the Clown whom he penetrates from behind ("ta mig i ändan") is Death. Her name can easily be seen as a portmanteau word, recalling "Rigor Mortis". Death from *The Seventh Seal*, white-faced and dressed totally in black (Bengt Ekerot), makes a rare reappearance although in a different key and of a different sex (Agneta Ekman). Carl Åkerblom's film *A Prostitute's Happiness* centres on the composer in the last few weeks of his life. In a clear break with all sensible chronology, Carl makes Franz Schubert's last love, before his death of syphilis in 1828, the Viennese girl Mitzi Veith who is hardly

twenty years of age around 1900. And Schubert in turn becomes her last love. Because he is dying, she commits suicide by jumping into the Danube.

Osvald Vogler entertains his fellow patient Carl Åkerblom with a scabrous book, *Confessions of Countess Mitzi*, which leaves its traces in Carl's film later on. It does not seem totally improbable that this book really did appear in Austria-Hungary in 1909, as protested by the manuscript. Be that as it may: it seems close to much of the pornography written at the time. Three years earlier, a classic in this field had appeared, the anonymous *Josefine Mutzenbach*. Its many scenes take place in the same decadently immoral metropolis, Vienna. Felix Salten was its author, a fact revealed only long afterwards.⁹ He reached literary fame for a completely different and quite innocent book, *Bambi*. Another pornographic classic of a later time may have inspired Bergman when he named the count who buys Mitzi's favour *Siraudin*. In Pauline Réage's sado-masochistic *L'Histoire d'O* the mysterious Englishman who pays generously to have his sadomasochistic pleasures fulfilled is called, half-anonymously, "Sir Stephen".

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Sexual matters have a tendency to merge with scatological ones in Ingmar Bergman's films. Puerile Alexander masters all the swear words connected with excrement etc. Those words act as his talisman in his fight against Vergérus the bishop, his evil step-father. Alexander would have appreciated Gunnar Ekelöf's (untranslatable) pun about "lorteraner och kissoliker som bönar på latrin och kräkiska".¹⁰ Young

⁹His authorship of that book has been debated, cf. the entry in Gero von Wilpert's *Lexikon der Weltliteratur*, bd. 1: "Ss Verfasserschaft der erot. 'Lebensgeschichte' (1906, n. 1969) der Wiener Dirne Mutzenbacher ist nicht erwiesen" (p. 1328).

¹⁰"Vad helvetet är 3vligt!/ Där sitter lorteraner och kissoliker/ och bönar på latrin och kräkiska:/ Glor jag in excelsis Deo?/ Pax in terrore!/ Hå, min i busken bona voluptatis!" (Gunnar Ekelöf's poem 'Helvetes-Brueghel, detalj' in

Ingmar Bergman made use of the same kind of incantatory word magic when he was confronted with his father's tedious preaching in church.¹¹ Judging by Bergman's films, this scatological interest has remained with him throughout the years. Starbeck, the pompous and inflated Chief of Police in *The Magician*, is deflated in more than one sense, as is revealed when his scatter-brained wife is hypnotized and talks uninhibitedly about his flatulence.

Starbeck has a farting companion in Carl Ekdahl, the misanthropic Uppsala professor in *Fanny and Alexander* who turns this activity into a farce. After the all-too rich dinner on Christmas Eve, he not only emits trumpet-blasts with his behind, he has even the capacity to extinguish candles at a distance in the same manner. Awed and thrilled, Fanny, Alexander and their cousins witness his performance. Carl Åkerblom is as clever; he masters the same set of tricks. According to himself, he can "extinguish seven burning candles in one big fart", and in Uppsala Hospital there is talk of his "faecal activities", as if he were reverting into a second childhood's anal phase. Seventy-five year old Osvald Vogler, a man who is not of sound mind all the time, has the same interest in the body's pneumatic activities. He wants to engage Åkerblom in a world-wide society with an impressive name, "l'Esclavage rompu ou la Société des Péteurs du Monde". What kind of farting business, intent on liberating humanity, is this?

Vogler explains: "Our society fights for free farting". It sounds like something invented by the jokers in the pataphysical group around Alfred Jarry, but it may well be based on a factual although bizarre music-hall activity. The most prominent of all farters, and a professional one at that, was Joseph Pujol from Marseille who elevated his natural sounds into pure art. He became famous when he appeared on the Moulin Rouge. He was born in 1857, the year in which Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* appeared in print. Pujol followed the footsteps of his father and trained as a baker. But

Stroutnes, 1955.)

¹¹as he explained when interviewed (shortly after his move to Munich) in the TV-documentary 'The Bergman File'.

already at the age of thirteen he discovered that he had an unusual talent: he had absolute control of his anal sphincter.

Pujol performed in public with some variety tricks that would have gained him immediate access to the freak-show of the Barnum Brothers. With his sounds which did not come from his mouth but from the opposite end, he imitated cats on heat, puppies, frogs and nightingales. And it was possible for him, as it is for Carl Ekdahl and Carl Åkerblom, to blow out candles with his behind. No one was offended by this (*honi soit qui mal y pense!*). His performance was very much *comme-il-faut*, and he had supporters in the highest quarters. At a private show, King Leopold of Belgium gave him a gold coin as a token of his appreciation.

Joseph Pujol had some difficulties before he hit on the right artistic name. He could not really call himself "The Farter" (Le peteur) nor "The Coward" (Le peteux). Instead, he invented the non-sensical "Le Petomane", and as such he became as famous and for a while as well-paid as other much celebrated artists in Paris at the turn of the century, like Yvonne Guilbert or Sarah Bernhardt. His son Louis-Baptiste wrote an unassuming biography of his father whose artistic hey-day were the eight years following his debut in Paris in 1892.¹² Joseph Pujol fathered ten children and had many grandchildren, and went back to the job he had trained for. He died in 1945, 88 years of age. As a variety artist, he appears to have performed with impeccable taste.

That he inspired Ingmar Bergman seems plausible when one looks at a series of pictures in his son's biography. Pujol on *Moulin Rouge* donned the same corporal language as the two Carls in Bergman's film and TV-play do: his index finger raised in anticipation, and bent forward with his hand on his knees. Uncle Carl in *Fanny and Alexander* performs in an almost identical manner. At the height of his popularity with the Parisian public, Pujol got into trouble with the

¹²Quoted in its entirety in Jean Nohain & F. Caradec: *Le Petomane 1857-1945* (Les Éditions Jean-Jacques Pauvert). In the English translation with the same title (Souvenir Press 1967, new edition 1992), Louis Pujol's account of his father's life and career is found on pp. 13-43.

owner of Moulin Rouge. Pujol was sacked and replaced by a female Petomane. But she was a humbug, lacking his special physical prowess. She faked his outbursts by hiding farting cushions in her voluminous frocks. The bluff was called after only a few performances, and she disappeared behind the scenes and was lost sight of.

Where did Ingmar Bergman find the name for Carl's fiancée, twenty-two year old physiotherapist Pauline Thibault from Germany, the head-strong girl who is not crushed even if the man she is going to marry tries to bash in her forehead? Is it a loan from Roger Martin du Gard's cycle of novels 'Les Thibaults', his interminable *roman fleuve*? Judging by Bergman's own preface, she really did exist:

In the extreme periphery of the family chronicle, one can find a note that tells in sparing words of the engagement between Carl Åkerblom, the engineer, and Pauline Thibault, a physiotherapist.¹³

But art imitates life doubly. What, pray, was the name of Joseph Pujol's competitor, the woman who tried to bluff her way into the favours of the Parisian public by fake farting? Her name is almost as close as can be to that of uncle Carl's fiancée: Angele Thiebeau. Is this purely coincidental?

¹³ *Femte akten*, p. 89 (my translation).

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