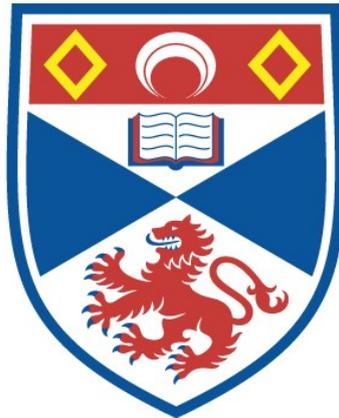


HASSE EKMAN : A QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP IN A
NATIONAL CONTEXT

Fredrik Gustafsson

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Hasse Ekman – a Question of Authorship in a National Context

Fredrik Gustafsson

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Table of contents

Abstract	p. 4
Acknowledgements	p. 5
Introduction	p. 7
Methodology	p. 9
Chapter 1 Literature Review, Theory and Context	p. 11
1:1 Literature review	p. 11
1:2 On authorship and auteurs	p. 14
1:2:1 The history of the auteur	p. 14
1:2:2 A definition of 'auteur'	p. 18
1:3 National cinema	p. 23
1:4 The social context	p. 27
1:4:1 The 1930s – constructing <i>folkhemmet</i>	p. 28
1:4:2 The 1940s – politics and war	p. 32
1:4:3 The post-war years	p. 35
1:5 Swedish cinema	p. 40
1:5:1 The 1930s – beer and nation-building	p. 40
1:5:2 A Swedish renaissance	p. 44
1:5:3 Swedish cinema after television	p. 53
Chapter 2 Hasse Ekman in the Renaissance	p. 56
2:1 Hasse Ekman's early life	p. 56
2:2 Ekman's first films, experiments and versatility	p. 57
2:3 Enter the theatre	p. 64
2:4 Films in a time of war	p. 69
2:5 First peak year	p. 73
2:6 Urbanity, self-reflexivity and dialogue	p. 80
2:7 Comedies and Generation 40	p. 87
2:8 Bergman arrives	p. 92
2:9 <i>Prison vs. The Girl From the Third Row</i>	p. 93

Chapter 3 The Early-1950s	p. 98
3:1 Ekman on the stage	p. 98
3:2 Ekman turns inwards	p. 99
3:3 Parodies of Bergman and new partnerships	p. 107
3:4 Autobiography and feminism	p. 113
Chapter 4 The Final Years	p. 118
4:1 Ekman after the arrival of television	p. 119
4:2 Autobiographical games	p. 123
4:3 The last films and voluntary exile	p. 130
Chapter 5 Ideas and Legacy	p. 135
5:1 Ekman and Sweden	p. 135
5:2 Ekman's view of the world	p. 138
5:3 Influence and legacy	p. 144
Conclusion	p. 148
Filmography	p. 153
Works cited	p. 158

Abstract

Hasse Ekman – A Question of Authorship in a National Context

This thesis takes a historical approach to its subject and focuses on Swedish cinema of the 1940s and 1950s. The thesis argues that Swedish cinema experienced a renaissance in the 1940s, lasting approximately from 1940 to 1953. It further suggests that one of the most important filmmakers in this renaissance was Hasse Ekman. By focussing upon Ekman and this renaissance, a much-needed contextualisation of Ingmar Bergman will be achieved. Ingmar Bergman is one of the most well-known and well-researched filmmakers of all time, but there are still gaps in the material surrounding him, and one such gap concerns his cinematic origins. Bergman was a part of the 1940s renaissance, during which Bergman worked with, and was influenced by, other filmmakers and in particular Ekman.

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the relevant literature and discusses ideas of authorship and national cinema. It also provides a historic overview of Swedish society and cinema during the 1940s and 1950s, providing the context needed to better understand the films of Ekman, and Bergman too. This part also looks at the 1930s to illustrate what came before this renaissance, and how the films of the 1940s differed from what had gone before. The second part is a chronological overview of Ekman's career from the late-1930s to his move to Spain in 1964. The last part is a discussion of Ekman's relation to Swedish society and his view of the world, based on close textual readings of his films.

The aim of the thesis is to present, for the first time, a coherent and extensive overview of Ekman's career and body of work, while also situating it in the specific context in which it emerged, thereby shedding new light on an important, though neglected, episode in cinema history.

Acknowledgements

In the mid-1990s Johanna Bäck, a colleague at a cinema in Stockholm, wrote her Master's dissertation in film. Very impressed (and envious) I thought that some day I must do that to. Eventually I did, and I found out that there was nothing to it. A bit of an anti-climax. So I thought that I should write a Ph.D. thesis. It took many years before I figured out what I wanted to write about, but when I knew that, I immediately got to work on it. That was autumn of 2009. Now I have finished, and this time it does not feel like an anti-climax.

Many have helped me, inspired me, supported me in various ways, during the years of writing. I cannot name them all but, of course, my supervisor Elisabetta Girelli is first among them. A few that must be included are Ola Törjas, Maia Dexander, Martin Jansson and Marika Junström at the Swedish Film Institute, and Maaret Koskinen and Astrid Söderbergh Widding at Stockholm University. In St Andrews, my whole department and in Dundee, Brian Hoyle. In New York, Dave Kehr, in Edinburgh, Martine Beugnet, and in Hong Kong, Paisley Livingston.

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the staff at Costa in St Andrews

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As promised, I have dedicated my thesis to Megan Dilly, who does better sand-surfing impressions than anyone else.

Introduction

Film history is not something fixed and stable, it changes all the time. The importance once given to particular films, filmmakers and movements is not set in stone, and is partly dependent on the interests and priorities of film historians and scholars at any given moment. At the same time, many films and filmmakers are forgotten, misunderstood or under-appreciated, because they were not part of a particular movement, or hospitable to a popular theory, or because the films are not available in subtitled versions, or not available at all. But as new films are discovered, and critical and theoretical trends evolve, filmmakers need to be re-evaluated, and genres and eras will be seen in a new light.

Swedish film history has a good reputation and it has received much attention from film scholars. The silent era, seen as a 'Golden Age', has been substantially written about, as has the 1960s and onwards. The career of Ingmar Bergman has been thoroughly discussed and analysed from many different angles. But there are still gaps, and one gap in particular stands out. In his book *Ingmar Bergman: Magician and Prophet* (1999), Marc Gervais points out that very little is known of, and consequently written about Swedish cinema between 1924 and 1945, the years following Victor Sjöström's and Mauritz Stiller's departure to Hollywood, but prior to Ingmar Bergman's début as a director, and that this is a problem. (Gervais 1999: 24) To give a few examples, in David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's *Film History – An Introduction* (2003), Swedish cinema between 1924 and 1944 is not mentioned at all, neither is it in Mark Cousins's *The Story of Film* (2004) , nor in David A. Cook's *A History of Narrative Film* (2004). It seems as though the historical and critical consensus is that nothing of interest happened during those years. This thesis will be looking at that era and to argue that this was a time of great progress and experimentation. It will further argue that it is relevant to talk about a renaissance for Swedish cinema, beginning in 1940, well before Bergman made his first film. In view of the international standing and importance of Swedish cinema from the 1950s onwards, it is important to investigate and discuss the context and the special circumstances which helped afford Sweden, a rather small country, such a comparatively strong profile.

But the focus of the thesis will be a case study of one particular filmmaker, namely Hasse Ekman. Ekman got his first script turned into a film in 1938 and he made his first film as writer/director in 1940 and would make films until 1965. In Sweden Ekman was very popular while he was active, but after he made his last film he was to some extent forgotten. Outside Scandinavia he has never been known and he never had an international career. This is unfortunate, considering the importance and quality of his films. He played a central role in the renaissance which began in 1940, and his body of work is not only remarkably consistent and personal, but important for the evolution of Swedish cinema. Hence the primary aim of this thesis is to introduce Ekman as an auteur to an international audience. No international scholars or film historians have so far written about Ekman. In the few Swedish studies made of his films, no rigorous thematic analysis has been made of his complete body of work. One rare article about Ekman, by Cecilia Axelsson, mentions auteur studies but her conclusion was that Ekman's oeuvre was eclectic, that it did not have any recurring themes, that it was hard to find a common thread or a personal touch, and that he did not seem hospitable to auteur studies because he did not fit such a model. (Axelsson 1995) This thesis will argue the exact opposite.

Traditionally, Swedish cinema has been almost synonymous with Bergman, yet by placing so much emphasis on Bergman film historians have gained a skewed view of both Bergman and of Swedish cinema. A second, more implicit, aim of this thesis is, therefore, to contribute to a much needed contextualisation of Bergman, especially those early years during which he gradually became a filmmaker of international standing. This contextualisation will be achieved by placing Bergman within this renaissance of the 1940s and by comparing him to Ekman. Whereas there are a large number of books about Bergman, in many different languages, there is practically nothing written about Hasse Ekman in any language. He has received only a few sentences in English language books about Swedish film history in general. Though unfortunate, this is not surprising since his films did not at the time get any attention outside of Scandinavia, even though a few were shown in France and the US. But what is really remarkable is how little is written about Hasse Ekman in Swedish, and how narrow the focus of that which has been written. For example, Ekman's career as a filmmaker lasted for twenty-five years but only the first twelve years have been discussed by historians and scholars, along with only a small selection of the films. And, as shall be shown,

hardly anything is written about the last half of his career. This thesis is the first comprehensive discussion and analysis of Ekman's complete body of work that has ever been undertaken.

Ekman was not only a filmmaker; he was also a theatre director. Here the lack of critical material is even more striking. As far as it has been possible to establish, no books, not even general books on Swedish theatre history, deal with Ekman's theatre years. Also, since it is not possible today to witness his staging of the plays it is very difficult to discuss them. However, when appropriate his theatre career will be invoked because it is very important and cannot be ignored. It is important both because his theatre work took up a large part of his career and because he made many films that are about the theatre and the people who work in theatre. This is a recurring theme and milieu throughout Ekman's whole oeuvre.

Methodology

This is not a theoretical thesis, but an historical one. While the thesis will use notions of authorship and national cinema, it will be a historically informed analysis of Ekman's creative output. The thesis consists of two parts. The first part begins with a discussion of the concept of the auteur and a discussion of national cinema, and follows this with an historical overview of Swedish society and cinema from the 1930s until the mid-1960s. This context is important for several reasons. In the first place it shall emphasise that any artist or filmmaker works in a particular time and place, and not in a vacuum. Such a context shall further explain why it was that particular films were made at a particular time, that is, with ample attention to the social, economic and cultural circumstances. The context is also important for a proper understanding of Ekman's themes. An additional function of this context is to make clear that both Bergman and Ekman were part of a larger movement in Swedish cinema, which included many other filmmakers, as well as producers, cinematographers and actors. This thesis argues that Bergman and Ekman were two among many filmmakers, several of which were also important and interesting, for reasons that will be explained at length. This first part forms the historical and theoretical foundation for the second, and largest, part, the case-study of Hasse Ekman. The approach for studying the films of Hasse Ekman has been two-fold; to view Ekman's films as a coherent oeuvre, and then to define and explain what the key elements of this body of work are, what defines him as an auteur, and simultaneously to place them in a national

context. To further both these aims there will be an engagement with the writings of film critics who were Ekman's contemporaries. Since so little has been written about Ekman by film historians, these critical opinions are important for insights into his style and themes. Invoking the critics also serves the purpose of highlighting the fact that Ekman was considered a major filmmaker, one of the very best that Sweden had, which makes the lack of scholarly interest all the more surprising. Ekman made over 40 films, but all of them will not be discussed. Only those that are of considerable artistic importance and those that add something new to the full picture of Ekman as an auteur will be discussed.

The thesis will be structured along the following lines.

Chapter 1 will have a literature review, present a theoretical framework, and discuss authorship and national cinema. It will also offer a historical overview of both Swedish society and Swedish cinema during the years covered by this thesis.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will constitute the case study of Ekman's work and his relationship with Ingmar Bergman.

Chapter 5 will discuss how a view of the world can be constructed out of Ekman's films, and how this world-view is an important factor in his status as an auteur. It will also discuss Ekman's relationship with the national context and national cinema.

After that there will be a brief conclusion which sums up what has been said in the thesis.

Several of the books used are in Swedish only and when they are quoted the translation has been made by the author of the thesis. That is also the case with quoted dialogue from Swedish films. When a quotation from a book has been translated, it will be highlighted thus '(trans.)'. Many of the films mentioned in the thesis do not have an English or international title. But in the thesis they have all been given English titles, with the original title mentioned the first time. Those that have been translated directly for the thesis are highlighted with an * after the title.

Chapter 1 Literature Review, Theory and Context

This chapter consists of a literature review and a discussion of some theoretical approaches. It also offers a historical overview of Swedish society and cinema during the years Ekman was active. This is in order to give the contextualisation needed to fully understand Ekman's work. It is also important for placing him within a larger movement, that is the renaissance of Swedish cinema that occurred during the Second World War and the immediate post-war years.

1:1 Literature review

Ekman was virtually forgotten after he made his last film. Occasionally, he has been 'discovered', however, and the following literary review shall look at books written both specifically on Ekman and those that deal with Swedish film history.

Arguably the first 'discovery' of Ekman's films came in 1982 when Bengt Forslund wrote *Från Gösta Ekman till Gösta Ekman – en bok om Hasse, far och son* (1982, From Gösta Ekman to Gösta Ekman – a book about Hasse, father and son). It is a piece of popular film history and Forslund's aim was to look at the Ekman family and in particular Gösta Ekman and his grandson Gösta (Hasse's son), a very popular actor in Sweden today. This is the first book to discuss Hasse Ekman at any greater length, and it will be one of the most invaluable books for this thesis, both for the personal detail and for views on particular films. It does not cover Swedish cinema in detail or offer much insight into Ekman's Sweden, but it says more about Hasse Ekman than any other book, except Leif Furhammar's *En liten bok om Hasse* (1993 A Little book about Hasse). Furhammar is a leading Swedish film historian and his short book is the only one ever written about Hasse Ekman alone. In it, Furhammar discusses twelve of Ekman's most important films, and the book also has a long interview with Ekman, conducted by Jannike Åhlund. This book was the second 'discovery' of Ekman and it came out in conjunction with a retrospective of Ekman's films at the international film festival at Göteborg, in the south-west of Sweden.

These are the only publications which focus on Hasse Ekman. In addition, there are a few articles in film journals and a couple of dissertations but since they add nothing new they are of minor interest. They will, however, be mentioned later on in the thesis when called for. But there are various books on Swedish cinema in general in which Hasse Ekman figures and which will be valuable for this thesis. Among them is Furhammar's seminal *Filmerna i Sverige* (1991, Cinema in Sweden). It is the standard work on Swedish cinema history and Swedish cinema culture and it covers every detail from the late nineteenth century to the present day. It discusses film politics and studios, genres and directors, actors and producers, the business side and the national side. Like the above mentioned books, it is only available in Swedish.

Nordic National Cinema (1998), by Tytti Soila, Astrid Söderbergh Widding and Gunnar Iversen; *The Cinema of Scandinavia* (2005), edited by Tytti Soila and *Swedish Film – An Introduction and Reader* (2010), edited by Mariah Larsson and Anders Marklund, are all available in English. *Nordic National Cinema* begins and ends with discussions on various aspects of national cinema as such, and in between is longer essays on all the five Nordic countries. Soila has written the essay which deal with Swedish cinema. It moves swiftly through 100 years of film history and even though there is not much on Ekman, she covers many angles, from production conditions to actors. It will be used for theoretical insights on the idea of a national cinema, and Soila's piece on Swedish cinema will be used as a complement to Furhammar's *Filmerna i Sverige*.

The Cinema of Scandinavia consists of 24 essays, each about a specific film from one of the three Scandinavian countries and Finland. What is of most interest here is one essay about *The Fire-Bird* (*Eldfågeln* 1952), a ballet film directed by Ekman. The essay places the film in the context of Swedish cinema in the early-1950s, and the particular historical circumstances of that time.

Swedish Film – An Introduction and Reader is an overview of Swedish cinema from its inception until the present day. In brief chapters various aspects, such as censorship, distribution, specific filmmakers and genres, are discussed. There is also a chapter on one of Ekman's most famous films, *Girl With Hyacinths* (*Flicka och hyacinter*, 1950). That chapter unfortunately lacks much historical context and is of minor use for this thesis.

Among other complementary books on Swedish cinema in English is *Swedish Cinema, from Ingeborg Holm to Fanny and Alexander* (1987) by Peter Cowie. It is an introduction to Swedish cinema and Swedish cinema history, from the beginnings to the early-1980s. It touches only the surface, with film history as a succession of one director after another, and the 1930s and 1940s together get only 15 pages out of a total of 150. It will be used as an example of the common received perception of Swedish cinema, and it has some useful comments and suggestions. There is also Brian McIlroy's *World Cinema 2: Sweden* (1986), which offers a concise summary of Swedish film history.

There are some additional books in Swedish that should be mentioned, even though they neither deal with Hasse Ekman nor Swedish film history in general. One is *Folklighetsfabriken – Porträtt av ett svenskt filmbolag* (1979, The Populist Factory - Portrait of a Swedish Film Production Company) by Leif Furhammar. The production company, Svensk Talfilm, is not one of the big ones and Ekman did not work for them, but the book is useful for its perspective on Swedish cinema of the 1930s and 1940s, that is, the era that concerns this thesis. It helps to create a bigger picture and it provides some context. The same is true for *Det pensionerade paradiset – anteckningar om svensk 30-tals film* (1970, The Retired Paradise – Notes on Swedish Cinema of the 1930s) by Jurgen Schildt. It will also provide a background as well as being a companion piece to Furhammar's work, although it does not discuss Hasse Ekman. Ekman is mentioned, however, in *Den svenska filmens historia* (1978, The History of Swedish Cinema) by Gösta Werner. It is not much more than a complement to *Filmen i Sverige*, much less detailed and nuanced, but it is still a valuable text. Then there is *Den glömde mannen: Erik 'Hampe' Faustmans filmer* (2000, The Forgotten Man: The Films of Erik 'Hampe' Faustman) by Per Vesterlund. It is a PhD thesis written at Stockholm University and it is about the life and work of Faustman, a film director of the 1940s and 1950s. As it focuses on the same era as this thesis, it is useful for ideas, facts and references.

And lastly, there are the two autobiographical books that Ekman wrote. The most relevant is *Den vackra ankungen* (1955, The Handsome Duckling) in which Ekman looks back at his film and his career up until the year in which it was written. The second one was written when Ekman was only

17 and it is called *Hur ska det gå för mig?* (1933). The Swedish title translates as “What will happen to me?” and a part of the answer to that question will be provided by this thesis.

There are, of course, a very substantial number of books about Ingmar Bergman. They are on the whole not relevant to this thesis. If they engage at all with Swedish cinema and society in any comprehensible manner it is in the decades after those covered in this thesis. And hardly any book about Bergman acknowledges the presence of Ekman, other than his performances in three of Bergman's films, so in that respect too they are somewhat beyond the purpose of this thesis. One book on Bergman which does mention Ekman as a filmmaker, however, is Paisley Livingston's *Cinema, Philosophy, Bergman* (2009). Another is *Cinema Borealis Ingmar Bergman and the Swedish Ethos* (1971) by Vernon Young, who dismisses Ekman with one sentence. ““Hasse Ekman made an uncertain beginning with a war film, a political film, and a gloomy drama which in point of departure resembled Noel Coward's *Brief Encounter*, filmed two years later by David Lean, before settling into a sequence of films largely inspired by deviated mental behaviour.” (Young 1971: 25) This sentence does not do Ekman justice, but this thesis aims to prove that there is much more to Ekman than Young suggested.

1:2 On authorship and auteurs

This thesis shall argue that Hasse Ekman is an auteur. Since it is a term which has been seen as problematic, this section will begin with a brief historical background to the concept, and then explain how the auteur is defined in this thesis.

1:2:1 The history of auteurs:

When talking about authorship and auteurs it is customary to begin in France in the late-1940s and the 1950s and the writings of Alexandre Astruc, André Bazin, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard and others. *Film History – an Introduction* (Bordwell & Thompson 2003: 415-417), *The Film Experience – an Introduction* (White & Corrigan 2009: 465-466) and *Approaches to Popular Film* (Hollows & Jancovich 1995: 37-58) are examples of books that place the emergence of ideas about

directors as auteurs in France at this time. But this is to some extent a-historical since already at the beginning of the 20th century there has been a particular focus on the director in cinema.

Traditionally, film has been seen as the director's media, not least from a marketing perspective. Posters for the American film *Intolerance* (1916) are examples of this. Despite the fact that some of Hollywood's most famous stars at the time, such as Lillian Gish and Mae Marsh, are acting in the film, the name used to sell it was the name of its director, D.W. Griffith. It also makes a direct reference to a previous film by Griffith. The words on the poster, directly below the film title are, "Mr Griffith's first production since "The Birth of a Nation"". Using only the name of the director, however, was arguably rather unusual. More likely, the director and the names of some of the more famous actors would be used, such as on the poster for the first version of *Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ* (1925). The name of the director, Fred Niblo, comes first, and in slightly bigger letters than the rest. For a typical Swedish example, the poster for *The Phantom Carriage* (*Körkarlen* 1921) is illustrative. Beneath a drawing of the eponymous carriage it runs: "Selma Lagerlöf's *The Phantom Carriage* told in moving images by Victor Sjöström" (trans.). The selling point was definitely the authors behind it, Lagerlöf who wrote the short story and Sjöström who made the film. Already on the poster for Hasse Ekman's first film *With You In My Arms** (*Med dej i mina armar* 1940) it says "Direction: Hasse Ekman" (trans.) as an enticement to the audience.

These examples have focused mainly on the marketing perspective and it should also be added that film trailers often used the director's name as a selling point, the director sometimes even appearing in the trailer. Of course, it was not only the publicity departments that were propagating the director above other members of the crew. In early film theory, films were also often attributed to their directors. One example from the 1920s is Jean Epstein who wrote:

But the proper sensibility, by which I mean a personal one, can direct the lens towards increasingly valuable discoveries. This is the role of an author of film, commonly called a film director. Of course a landscape filmed by one of the forty or four hundred directors devoid of personality whom God sent to plague the cinema as He once sent the locusts into Egypt looks exactly like this same landscape filmed by any other of these locust filmmakers. But this landscape or this fragment of drama staged by someone like Gance will look nothing like what would be seen through the eyes and heart of a Griffith or a L'Herbier. And so the personality, the

soul, the poetry of certain men invaded the cinema. (Epstein 1988: 317-318)

Since Epstein was writing in French, he of course used the word “auteur”, which here was translated into “author”. He unequivocally equates the author with the director, and for him this is an important aspect of what makes cinema an art form.

Another theorist writing in the 1920s, Louis Delluc, wrote about the director as the unifying force, the one who, if he is good enough, is the genius behind the film, and is even, if he is as brilliant as Thomas Ince, capable of creating a masterpiece out of nothing. (McCreary 1976) Vachel Lindsay is yet another early example of a theorist who championed the notion of the 'auteur'. (Lindsay 2000) One of Britain's leading 20th century film critics, Dilys Powell, had what might be called an auteurist approach, at least from the beginning of the 1930s. When she wrote, in the 1930s and 1940s, about individual films by the likes of Carol Reed, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford and Fritz Lang, she frequently discussed those films as being part of each director's larger body of work. In 1946 she talked about the national, industrial and cooperative aspects of cinema and then asked the rhetorical question: “How can one man leave the mark of his personality and his talent on this higger-mugger?” and she answered “But he does.” (Powell 1991: 37) In Sweden in the early-1940s there was a debate among film critics and scholars about who should be considered the true author of a film. There were those who said that it should be the writer and those that said it should be the director. In a summary of the debate the critic Georg Svensson came down firmly on the side of the director (Svensson 1941), in an article that would not have been out of place in an issue of *Cahiers du cinéma*, some 15 years later.

The point here is to argue that directors since the early days of cinema have often been seen as the main force behind a film, the artist making it, by both critics and theorists. Additionally, that the publicity departments used the name of the director as a selling point, something which seems to suggest that for the public too it was the director who counted most, together with the actors. These ideas though were then amplified in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in France (*Cahiers du cinéma*), Britain (from 1962 in *Movie*) and in the US, especially through the writings of American critic Andrew Sarris. At this point, it came to be known as the ‘auteur theory’. However, it should be

stressed that, although often used, the term 'auteur theory' is questionable. Even Sarris, who wrote extensively about it and helped make the idea popular in the US, said that it was not a theory as such and that: “[u]ltimately the auteur theory is not so much a theory as an attitude.” (Sarris 1968: 30) Arguably it is rather a critical approach, or, as Robert Stam would have it, a “methodological focus”. (Stam 2000: 91) It shall not be addressed as 'auteur theory' in this thesis but 'auteurism'.

There have been some strong reactions, especially in the late- 1960s and 1970s, against the idea of the auteur, and authors in general. (See for example Kael 2007, Foucault 1977, Heath 1973) Some of the criticism came from structuralists and post-structuralists, who argued that the author is not important but should be seen as merely a mediator between the text and the audience. (Stam 2000: 123-125) The author might even, as in Barthes's famous essay from 1967, be declared dead. Barthes is concerned with language which for him is the central creator of meaning, as in: “it is language which speaks, not the author:” (Barthes 1977: 143). And by 'killing off' the author, as it were, the text is liberated and it becomes open to the reader's own ideas and interpretations, and in a sense the text is created when it is being read. However, three years later Barthes opened up the possibility that the author might actually be alive in the text. In the essay “From Work to Text” he wrote that: “It is not that the Author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest'. If he is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters.” (Barthes 1977: 161) When Barthes wrote about films his writing was usually focused on the director, his skills and intentions. In an article in *Le Monde* about the film *French Provincial* (*Souvenirs d'en France* André Téchiné 1975) Barthes wrote: “With Téchiné comes lightness: this is a significant event not just for the theory of film-making but also for the practice of film-watching.” (Calvet 1994: 193) This seems to suggest that not only was the author alive, but also the director is significant. Barthes has also written, favourably, about Sergei Eisenstein and Charles Chaplin (Barthes 1994) so maybe the author never was dead, not even for Barthes.

Today there is a common expression in film criticism which has taken the notion of the auteur to a different level. It is the expression 'auteur cinema'. In a way it is the opposite of traditional auteurism, even though they are frequently used synonymously. 'Auteur cinema' is often put in opposition to commercial cinema, and by doing so the difference between 'auteur cinema' and

traditional auteurism becomes clear, since auteurists were arguing that there was no contradiction between auteurs and commercial cinema and that auteurs were in fact plentiful in commercial cinema. So 'auteur cinema' is an unhelpful term. It is often used as a marketing device at film festivals and by arthouse cinemas to distinguish their films from the mainstream cinema, as if mainstream cinema could not possess auteurs. It is sometimes said against auteurs that it is a romantic idea, as when Linda Haverty Rugg argues that the concept of the auteur is “imbued with romantic notions of artistic genius”. (Rugg 2005: 228-229) That is a valid criticism against the concept of 'auteur cinema', because it suggests films that are made by creative geniuses beyond genres and commerce. But it is not a valid criticism against auteurs as such, in the way that the concept is used on this thesis.

1:2:2 A definition of 'auteur'

Films can be analysed from an economic perspective, or an industrial perspective, or from an audience perspective. But whilst important perspectives, they will not fully explain why *this* particular, individual, film was made and neither will it explain what the particular circumstances were in which the film was made. This is something important that auteurism brings to the study of cinema. Part of history and its progress are ideas and emotions, and these originate in human beings. This is naturally true for film history as well. By not discussing the actual persons making the films, an important part of film history goes missing, and it will not be possible to get a complete understanding of that history. In the introduction to his book on Luchino Visconti, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith wrote:

As a principle of method the [auteur] theory requires the critic to recognise the basic fact, which is that the author exists, and to organize his analysis of the work around that fact. Whether one is trying to get to grips with a particular film, or to understand the cinema in general, let alone when one is studying the development of an individual director, the concept of authorship provides a necessary dimension without which the picture cannot be complete. /.../ [O]ne essential corollary of the theory as it has been developed is the discovery that the defining characteristics of an author's work are not always those that are most readily apparent. (Nowell-Smith 2003: 10)

The key point in the quote from Nowell-Smith is that “the author exists”. It is not something that can be theorised away. Films are made by individuals, individuals who think, act and make conscious decisions, they are independent agents, and to quote Torben Grodal: “It is fundamental for normal human functioning that our theory of other minds acknowledges that such minds belong to conscious, intending, and desiring beings”. (Grodal 2004: 15)

However, there are more agents than directors on a film set and the automatic focus on the director is problematic. It is often the case that scriptwriters and cinematographers tend to get overlooked, as well as other contributors. It is quite obvious for example how Michael Powell has been given much more attention than Emeric Pressburger, despite the fact that they worked as an intimate team. (Interestingly, British cinema is arguably unique for the prevalence of such teams. Other examples are the Boulting Brothers, Basil Dearden/Michael Relph and Frank Launder/Sidney Gilliat.) In *Our Films Their Films* Satyajit Ray wrote:

A director weak on the visual side may be considerably helped by a cameraman with a sense of drama. When a director is a true *auteur* – that is, if he controls every aspect of production – then the cameraman is obliged to perform an interpretative role. Whenever he does more than that, the director should humbly part with some of his credit as an *auteur*. (Ray 1994: 68)

This seems only reasonable, and not only with regard to the cameraman, but with script writers, set designers and composers. Paul Coates calls these other participants “mini-*auteurs*” (Coates 1985: 83) and the critic and the scholar should likewise see to it that credit is shared.¹ This thesis will stress the importance of co-workers and companions, of writers, cinematographers, producers and actors in the making of the films being considered, whilst arguing that it is in most cases the director who is the central force on the set, the person who is responsible for the whole of the film. As V. F. Perkins wrote in *Film as Film*: “The director’s authority is a matter not of total creation but of sufficient control.” (Perkins 1993: 184) and the word 'control' is important. As a writer, producer and director, as well as actor, Ekman had considerable control, as shall be seen later. On the other

¹ A feminist example of this is Christina Lane's research on writer/producer Joan Harrison in “Stepping Out From Behind the Grand Silhouette – Joan Harrison's Films of the 1940s” (Lane 2003).

hand, it is hard to judge how much control each individual had on a film set unless you were actually there to observe. That is why it is important to stress that with the approach taken in this thesis, the study of a larger body of work is essential. If there are clear links between the films of a particular filmmaker this strongly suggests that the filmmaker had at least some measure of control over how they were made. It is the argument of this thesis that whether the filmmaker in question worked as a contracted studio director (like Bergman most of his career) or as an independent filmmaker (like Howard Hawks) is not what decides his or her status as auteur. It is the consistency and cohesiveness of their respective oeuvres that matters in this definition (and both Bergman and Hawks have such oeuvres). The empirical approach to auteurism taken in this thesis means that most, if not all, films of the individual filmmaker under investigation should be watched. Additionally, films made by many other filmmakers working at the same time, and before, should also be analysed in order to be able to pick out what it is that makes this particular body of work special, and to be able to see the unique contributions made by a particular auteur. This thesis further argues that there is a difference between director and auteur in the sense that the director is something you are from the moment you start to work on the film set, it is a job title, whereas auteur is something you become with time. With this definition it is therefore not meaningful to say of a first-time director that she is an auteur. In order to be considered an auteur, a larger body of work is needed, which can be analysed as a whole.

Another difficult question, besides the cooperative aspects of filmmaking, and one which is perhaps an integral part of the discussion of authors and authorship, is the autobiographical aspect. Making links between an artist's work and her own personal life and history has been done repeatedly over the ages. It is common enough either to consciously look for the connections between a character (in a book or film) to the artist, or to compare specific events or actions in the artist's past with specific events or actions in the art work. However, one potential problem with looking for such links is the autobiographical fallacy. Any work of fiction, regardless of how closely linked it may appear to the artist's life, is still a processed story, where things have been altered and manipulated. Sometimes it is done simply to better fit the narrative structure and sometimes it is done in a deliberate effort to change the reader's or viewer's perception of what really happened. The artist might, for example, overplay dramatic events in order to evoke sympathy or give a narrative a

happy ending which in real life ended tragically. What the artist says about her work may also be part of that process of alteration and manipulation. A correlation between a character in a film and the actual filmmaker does not necessarily mean they are the same person. Having said that, it is not necessarily the case that autobiographical readings should be dismissed out of hand. It is arguably close to impossible to create a narrative without using, consciously or unconsciously, real-life experiences and putting them into the story, the structure. Here it is also important to consider the fact that even if an artist vehemently denies that there is anything autobiographical in her work, that should not be taken at face value either. She may not want to admit it, or fails to see it, even though the biographical aspects might still be there, and obvious for someone else. While acknowledging these concerns, in this thesis there will be autobiographical readings of some of Ekman's films. (For discussions on autobiographical readings, see Staiger [2008] or Mazierska [2004].)

At this point a new way of looking at auteurs will be introduced; the distinction between what this thesis will call *external auteurs* and *internal auteurs*. The history of film is filled with auteurs and for making the discussion more precise distinctions between different kinds of auteurs are helpful. An *external auteur* would be somebody who simply makes the films yet has no presence in the films, while thematic and stylistic consistencies and recurring motifs persist. An *internal auteur* would be somebody who, besides making the films, has a strong presence in them, either personally, and/or by devising a voice-over, and/or if there are strong autobiographical elements in the film. External auteurs are more common, for instance somebody like Henry Hathaway. Internal auteurs are not as common but among the more prominent in narrative cinema are Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Federico Fellini, Chantal Akerman, Clint Eastwood, Orson Welles, François Truffaut, Woody Allen, Ida Lupino, Alfred Hitchcock and Ingmar Bergman. Their strong personal presence in the films they made can lead to difficulties in interpreting their work, especially to separate filmmaker, character and actor, but these filmmakers can also be especially rewarding to analyse, and they can serve as a counterpoint against theories that diminish the role of the filmmaker, such as Barthes's. Hasse Ekman should be considered an internal auteur, as this thesis will make clear, and to an extent not usually found outside of avant-garde cinema. Besides writing and directing, and then acting in his own films, and even playing the part which is based on himself in films with autobiographical elements, he sometimes also does a voice-over. This intermingling of different

roles for Ekman (the director, the subject of the story, and the actor in the story) can sometime become rather complex and will be further discussed on several instances in the thesis.

The difficulties with reading films autobiographically are emphasised when it comes to internal auteurs. So are the temptations of understanding the films as just that, autobiographical 'truths' in some sense. However, in order to establish to what extent a film is autobiographical, research other than simply watching the films is needed, such as reading interviews, archival material or autobiographies, in order to establish to what an extent a particular film is autobiographical, and whether it is important.

This thesis will discuss the modernist aspects of Ekman's films. He can be seen as a combination of a 'classical' and a 'modernist' filmmaker. 'Classical' refers to Hollywood cinema, especially before the 1960s, involving story-based, as opposed to character-based, narratives told in a linear fashion and with a clear-cut ending that does not leave any loose ends, and where there is no breaking of the fourth wall, i.e. no direct address to the audience by the actors. 'Modernist' typically refers to the post-war European art film, involving character-based narratives and loose endings with a more experimental attitude to style and context. This is also sometimes called art-cinema narrative (see Bordwell 1985). This distinction has always been fraught and the differences are often more apparent than real, as there were modernist ideas and impulses in pre-1960s Hollywood cinema as well as post-1960, and many films in post-war Europe can equally be seen as 'classical'. So since the distinction in general is too simplistic, it would be better to talk about individual films as being classical or modernist, rather than establishing a dichotomy between classical cinema (such as Hollywood cinema) on the one hand and modernist cinema (such as European post-war cinema), on the other hand. Ekman's films are a mix of films that are more classic and films that are more modernist, however the uses of character-based narratives, open endings, self-reflexivity and autobiographical elements are prevalent already from the beginning of his career. There are many examples, as shall be illustrated in the thesis.

To recapitulate, in the context of this thesis auteurism is seen as an empirical way of looking for patterns in the oeuvre of a filmmaker. To be as clear as possible, this thesis will rest on the

following assumptions:

- a) all narrative films are created by individuals, working alone or in collaboration.
- b) these individuals are independent agents who can hence be considered as authors and artists.
- c) auteurs are creators, be they directors, writers, producers, or cinematographers who over a body of work show thematic and/or stylistic consistencies.
- d) the cinema studies approach which searches for, and discusses, these consistencies is called auteurism.
- e) auteurism is an empirical approach, and a way, among many others, of trying to understanding cinema history.
- f) there are different kinds of auteurs, and a distinction made in this thesis is between external and internal auteurs.
- g) auteurism should preferably be used in conjunction with other approaches, to put the subject being studied in a proper context.
- h) auteurism is not an evaluative approach, and has nothing to do with 'good' or 'bad' cinema. It stands outside notions of 'commercial cinema', 'art cinema', 'independent cinema' and other evaluative stances.

1:3 National Cinema

The author does not appear out of nowhere or work in a vacuum; she is part of a bigger context. That context can be regional, national or global, but in this thesis it is the national that is the chosen context. Swedish cinema has a history of explicitly engaging with, and even exploiting, national specifics in film production. With reference to the Swedish cinema of the 1910s and early-1920s, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson argue that: “Sweden was among the first countries to create a major cinema by drawing deliberately on the particular traits of its national culture.” (Bordwell & Thompson 2003: 64), Leif Furhammar continues with this Swedish national discourse when he argues that in the Swedish cinema of the 1930s a major theme in most of the films made was to project a sense of national belonging, to instil in the audience a sense of togetherness under the Swedish welfare state. (Furhammar 1991: 161) He then goes on to argue that this more or less

disappeared in the 1940s. Since Ekman began making films in 1940, he is part of this new, less national, generation of filmmakers. This will be discussed in greater depth later in this thesis.

However, the concept of a 'national' cinema is problematic. Is it really possible, or even relevant, to sum up all films made by a particular nation and analyse them as a whole? It would arguably by default lead to simplifications and generalizations. At the same time, if the sample pack is too small, it will be impossible to tell how representative the chosen films are for the nation which produced them. It would also entail a very clear definition of the nation that the scholar is working with. Tom O'Regan asks in his influential *Australian National Cinema* (1996) if one should call: "the growing body [in Australia] of short films shot in Italian, Spanish and Greek a contribution to the Italian, Spanish and Greek 'national cinemas' or are they 'Australian cinema'?" He further asks if a discussion about Australian cinema should include or exclude films made by aboriginal nations living within the Australian state. (O'Regan 1996: 74) Such a definition is also relevant for a scholar working with Swedish cinema. From the 1930s to the 1950s, Sweden was not a multicultural country, and was not a destination for immigrants; rather it was a country which had lost over a million citizens through massive emigration, mostly to the USA and Australia. (Hofsten & Lundström 1976) After Norway had gained its independence from Sweden in 1905, Sweden was hence fairly homogeneous, albeit with strong class divisions. However, it could be argued that it was not a proper nation-state since they lived within Sweden's borders the indigenous Sami people, and there has been an ongoing struggle between them and the rest of the population. The Sami people might be considered a nation without a state, spread as they are among several Northern European states but with no state of their own.² It is not the purpose of this thesis to engage in debates on these matters. The purpose is simply to offer a glimpse of what constituted 'Sweden' in the 1940s and 1950s, and to show that Sweden encompasses different nations.

Another problem is the risk of essentialism. In his book on Taiwanese filmmaker Hou Hsiao-hsien, James Udden highlights this danger and talks about the Orientalist view many scholars have taken when discussing Hou's films, their efforts to 'explain' him and his films by reference to the fact that he is from Taiwan. (Udden 2009: 1-8). The same mistake is often made when Bergman is discussed.

² For more on the Sami people, see for instance Hugo Beach, *A Year in Lapland: Quest of the Reindeer Herders* Smithsonian Institution Press 1993

The bleakness the critics see in Bergman's films is explained by, or seen as example of, his Swedish-ness or Scandinavian-ness. It is not usually explained why Swedish or Scandinavian is, or should be, associated with something bleak, or which parts of the Scandinavian region. It would also seem to suggest that all those Swedish filmmakers that are not bleak are somehow less Swedish than Bergman.

Studies of national cinema usually involve case studies of state funding of the films of that particular nation. This adds an additional 'national' element to the films. In the films and the era discussed in this thesis, however, there was no state funding. All films were funded by the production companies or the filmmakers themselves and there were no national initiatives or institutions to support and assist the films into production. Such public assistance came later. If anything, the government at times rather hindered the development of the cinema, as will be discussed later.

Having considered these problems with national cinema, there are still ways of using the national context when discussing films and film history.

Writing on national cinema, Andrew Higson has argued that there are four uses of the term: an economic sense (a production and industrial perspective), an audience perspective (who is watching the films and how do they interpret them), a marketing perspective (the nation as a brand), the perspective of representation (what values or ideas are projected in, and through, the films). (Higson 1995: 4-6)

With regard to Ekman and this thesis, the first use is taken for granted; his films were financed and made in Sweden. The second use of the term is not applicable here. For the aims of the thesis, looking at the films from the perspective of an audience is not necessary. The third use, the marketing perspective, is not relevant here either. In some Swedish films, especially of the 1930s, there is a conscious effort to build up a national brand, to sell Swedish-ness to the Swedish spectators, and this will be duly discussed later in the thesis, but Ekman was not involved in this

'brand-building'. Higson's fourth use is closer to what this thesis is concerned with, which will be explained later in this section.

A key question when discussing an artist in a national context is: Could this artist have done this same work of art in another country? An equally relevant question is: Is the nation that produced this particular film reflected in it? Sometimes the nation is without importance, it is just there, whereas at other times the nation is central to the story of the film. Different filmmakers will work differently in this respect and some directors, for example Theo Angelopoulos, make films specifically about their own countries, be it either from a celebratory or critical perspective, to the extent that the themes of the films are intimately connected with nationalism, the nation and its history, in Angelopoulos' s case Greece (see for example Horton 1997). This is not the case with Ekman. Ekman's films were produced in Sweden, and in general they take place in Stockholm, the capital of Sweden, but in several films the nation is not relevant. It is accidental, in the sense that the film just happens to be made in that place. Such films might be called 'a-national'. However, whilst many of the characters and stories may be of a more urban than national significance, the films are still made by Swedes and set in Sweden, so it would be hard, possibly impossible, for them to be completely removed from the particular Swedish context. As referred to in Chapter 2, one essential aspect of Ekman's films is the dialogue, the language which the characters speak and how he plays with words, sentences and dialects. Language could be seen as a defining national trait, especially with films made in a language which is spoken in only one country. If a spectator did not know where the film she was watching came from, recognising the language might be her first clue as to the nationality of the film (at least in countries where dubbing is not used). With the complex transnational financial arrangements behind many films, especially if the locations are spread out among several countries, or if the locations are not known, then the language spoken by the actors might even be the spectator's *only* clue to its nationality. It is not only language that matters but also dialects or accents of a language, as in Australian, British or American English. So with regard to language, Ekman's films are unquestionably Swedish, and can therefore unequivocally be defined as such. From a financial perspective too, Ekman's films are Swedish since the money for making them comes from Swedish sources (The exceptions are two European co-productions, *Waiting Room for Death* aka *Interlude (I dödens väntrum* 1946) and *The Fire-Bird*,

which both have international settings and international casts, and which are bi- or even trilingual.) In addition to the language and financial factors, the films Ekman made were constrained by certain factors peculiar to Sweden, such as censorship roles, especially during the Second World War. There were also other political and economic factors that were peculiar to Sweden, and these factors will be discussed later in this chapter.

Some of Ekman's films also engage directly with certain aspects of Swedish society (the place of women or how society is organised are aspects that Ekman occasionally focusses upon). The view of these particular aspects of Swedish society as it comes across in the films is often ambivalent but more often critical. So even if many of Ekman's films do not directly engage with the nation, the nation is still there and what this thesis will do, even if it does not discuss Ekman's films as 'national cinema', is to look at how the national context in which they were made influenced them. It will discuss Ekman's relationship with Sweden and Swedish society, and the way he critically engaged with it. The thesis will also compare what Ekman's films look like alongside other Swedish films made in that time.

That concludes the first part of this chapter. To reiterate, the approach taken in this thesis is to look at Ekman's films as a complete body of work and to describe and analyse this body of work from an auteurist perspective, while situating it in a specific national context. In so doing, the thesis seeks to highlight both this particular filmmaker and this context.

1:4 The social context

This part will present, in chronological order, some important aspects of Swedish history during the years covered by this thesis. It will introduce Swedish society, politics, economics and culture. Although the period this thesis is primarily focused on is the 1940s and 1950s, the overview of the social context will begin earlier than that. In order to understand how Sweden came to be what it was in 1940 it is important to begin with the 1930s. This is not merely because of the need for some political background, but also because these were the years during which Ekman came of age and started to work, and because he made a film about this period. Consideration of the 1930s is vital,

therefore, for a broader understanding of both Sweden and Ekman, not least for the introduction of the term *folkhemmet*. This word is an essential part of Sweden's history, and its sense of itself, and also affects Ekman's film, and how his films were seen by critics and scholars. So even though there are not always direct references to Ekman in the following section, the historical circumstances discussed are central for a proper understanding of his work and his themes.

1:4:1 The 1930s – constructing *folkhemmet*

Democracy in Sweden began to take shape in the late 19th century and by 1921, when women got the right to vote, it was fully established. As referred to earlier, Sweden had been, and still was, a net-emigrant country, which means that more people moved out of the country than moved in. This was primarily due to widespread poverty. It was not an egalitarian country and there were many who lived in abject poverty, in almost slave-like conditions.³ But the industrial revolution, which came to Sweden in the middle of the 19th century and lasted until the First World War, brought on a sharp increase in wealth and growth and the wages rose accordingly. (Magnusson 1999: 301-310) This and increased public awareness had begun to make change apparent already at the beginning of the 20th century, when a series of reforms took place. The 1920s saw the international breakthrough of companies such as ASEA (today ABB), SKF, Ericsson and Atlas Copco. At the same time a system whereby the workers were given grants in order to purchase their own homes was introduced. Overall, the years from 1921 until 1932 saw a very volatile labour market and those years were also politically unstable, with 12 different prime ministers succeeding each other. The critical situation came to a sort of apotheosis in 1931 when a violent strike in Ådalen in the north of Sweden ended when the army, called in by an overwhelmed police force, shot dead five demonstrators. The next year in the general election the Social Democratic Party won a clear majority and would eventually form a government together with the Farmer's Party, which had seen an internal rebellion and turned progressive. (Hadenius 2003: 61) The leader of the Social Democratic Party, Per-Albin Hansson, became prime minister. Hansson's ambition was to create a

³ From the mid-1700s all the way until 1945, there was in Sweden a system whereby the owner of a mansion hired married people for one-year contracts, in which they were paid in natura, and had to live in special shacks (called *statarlångor*). They had few rights and were at the mercy of their employers. Films such as *Karl Fredrik Reigns* (*Karl Fredrik regerar* Gustaf Edgren, 1934) and *The Emigrants* (*Utvandrarna*, Jan Troell 1971) deal with this issue.

welfare state and it was he who popularised the term *folkhemmet*. *Folkhem* or *Folkhemmet* means roughly “the people's home” but perhaps a more accurate translation would be “the people's society”. When discussing Ekman's films this term is key to understanding some of their narratives since he did sometimes criticise aspects of *folkhemmet* and a few films were in a sense deliberately about it.

As an expression, *folkhem* had been around for decades, and probably originated in Germany with the word *volksheim*, which were public buildings meant to provide community services for everybody. (See for example Björck 2008) At this point it literally meant “the people’s house”, but Per Albin Hansson’s use of the term referred to something bigger than just a house. It was metaphor for the entire society. The aim for Hansson was to create a nation where people would be healthy, wealthy and happy, and the means to do this was of course through politics and economics but also partly through scientific progress and to instil a sense of a common agenda for all Swedes. In keeping with this model of consensus, in a deal made in 1938 in the Stockholm suburb of Saltsjöbaden, the Swedish Trade Union Confederations (SAF) and the Workers Union (LO) agreed to work together in harmony and through stability in the market the economy would grow and everybody would prosper. This consensus was called The Saltsjöbaden spirit. (Magnusson 2002: 445-449)

This was at about the same time that Franklin D. Roosevelt was launching *The New Deal* programme in the USA. A few years later in Britain, William Beveridge presented his report *Social Insurance and Allied Services* in 1942, which argued for an extensive welfare state, including the creation of a national health service, ideas which were implemented by the Labour government of Clement Attlee in 1945. So these ideas were in the air, globally. The Swedish Social Democrats were in theory influenced by the writings of Karl Marx but in reality their economic policy, under the finance minister Ernst Wigforss, was much closer to the ideas of the British economist John Maynard Keynes and the liberal Swedish economists banded together under the name “the Stockholm School”. (Magnusson 2002: 405-406) These policies included a preference for free trade and that the state, instead of taking over business, would invest in infrastructure and see to it that a vibrant private business environment could flourish, and that those who were unemployed would be

taken care of by the state. It has also been argued that it was neither Marx nor Keynes and the Stockholm School, but rather the concept of 'productivism' that was the guiding principle, meaning that the aim of the collective work of politicians, citizens and corporations is to work together to synchronise and maximise production. (Björck 2008: 193) What happened in the Swedish economy was that it began to change from an industrial to a service economy, (Hadenius 2003: 50) a change that would only increase over time. It is important to remember that, contrary to popular wisdom, it was not a one-man show by the Social Democratic Party, and it can be argued that it was a push and pull situation between them and the Liberal party. Whenever one side became too radical the electorate sent a clear message (for example in opinion polls) that it did not want any revolutions but were more inclined to gradualism and stability. So the parties had to aim for the middle ground. It was during these years that Sweden began to attract much interest from the outside world for the way it was seen to effectively balance socialism and capitalism and for the way it managed to stay calm and progressive in Europe when most countries seemed either to become dictatorial or backsliding. A book such as Marquis W. Childs's *Sweden: A Middle Way* exemplifies this international interest. Representative of the book's stance is the following: "The wisdom of the Swedes lies above all in their willingness to adjust, to compromise, to meet what appears to be reality. [...] In a sense they are the ultimate pragmatists, interested only in the workability of the social order." (Childs 1944: 161)

These ideas of *folkhemmet* and the social experimentation which accompanied the ethos, as well as the social progress and the values that underlined these developments, are dealt with in some of Ekman's films, and will be discussed later.

Besides *folkhemmet*, another prominent idea in Swedish society at the time was 'engineering'. Originating in the US at the turn of the century, the concept of the social engineer came to Sweden in the beginning of the 20th century. The thinking was widespread and an international economic conference in Geneva in 1928, organised by the League of Nations, ended with a proclamation advocating: "the benefits of rationalisation and of scientific management". (Björck 2008: 125-126). Sweden was arguably one of the countries where these ideas were put to most comprehensive use. (See also Hirdman 2010). Included in this project were also efforts to cut back on drinking habits. A

large movement argued for a complete ban on alcohol consumption but after a public referendum it was instead decided that it would still be legal to sell and consume alcohol, but with far-reaching restrictions. The general movement of the 1930s was for a kind of 'social engineer society', in which everything should be as functional and organised as possible. A new generation of architects, sociologists, designers, writers, and government officials were working towards these aims, and were building houses, planning city centres, reforming schools, building roads, and reforming the social safety net in an effort to make life better for everybody. As shall be discussed later, such a 'scientification' of society was often at odds with Ekman's world-view.

The reverse of this combination of *folkhemmet* and rationalisation was a certain intolerance against those that did not fit in, such as the Sami people, or those with degenerative diseases and mental health problems. In 1922, *Statens Institut för Rashygien (The Government Agency for Eugenics)* was founded, and in 1934 a widespread system of forced sterilization began, which lasted up until 1965. In total some 63,000 people were sterilized, in most cases because of their race or their psychiatric condition. (Ronci 2008) There was much anti-Semitism, which can also be seen in popular culture, including films such as *Pettersson & Bendel* (Per-Axel Branner 1933). Hans Ingvar Roth has argued that: "The greater the proportion of social areas defined as public the less room there was for cultural idiosyncrasy in Swedish society." (Roth 2004: 222) In Ekman's films however, there has always been a celebration of this cultural idiosyncrasy, and he made some films challenging intolerance and anti-semitism, as shall be discussed further on.

An important figure in most of what has been discussed so far concerning films, politics and economics was the industrial tycoon Ivar Kreuger. Kreuger was known as the matchstick king as the centre of his business empire was the making of safety matches, a business in which he had almost a global monopoly. He and his empire became extremely wealthy and expanded its influence in many fields of business. He also lent money to other countries on such favourable terms as to contribute to the rebuilding of Europe following the First World War. This came to an end in 1932. After the Wall Street Crash of 1929 instability set in for Kreuger and it became evident that stocks and bonds were losing their value. Instead of being a creditor he had to borrow, and as things worsened he eventually shot himself in his home in Paris. That led to the 'Kreuger-crash', in

Sweden, amid an atmosphere of international financial panic. (Magnusson 2002: 370-372, see also Partnoy 2009)

Kreuger was also a majority owner of the leading Swedish film company SF from its inception in 1919. At that time its head of production was Charles Magnusson and, as has been shown, this was a high point in the history of Swedish cinema. Towards the end of the 1920s, Kreuger and Magnusson had a falling out, which led to Magnusson being replaced by Olof Andersson. (Furhammar 1991: 108) This was a time when the Swedish film industry was in severe crisis, but Kreuger's money kept it going through its good as well as its bad years. Fortunately for the Swedish film industry, the tide would turn and at the time of the Kreuger crash it were no longer as dependent upon Kreuger's money as it once was, owing to strong box office receipts. (Furhammar 1991: 138, Soila 1998: 170) In 1959, Hasse Ekman made his tribute to this era entitled *The Jazz Boy** (*Jazzgossen*, 1958). This film shall be returned to later.

1:4:2 The 1940s - politics and war:

Ekman made his first film in 1940, and the beginning of his career took place in the shadow of the war. It is therefore important to explain Sweden's position and politics during these years, not least the censorship that was implemented, and the different ways in which politics affected the filmmakers.

In a famous (or perhaps infamous) speech at the end of August 1939, prime minister Per-Albin Hansson tried to reassure the Swedish population by saying that Sweden did not have any enemies, would not be dragged into war and that “our readiness is strong”. It has earned its infamous status for allegedly claiming that Sweden's readiness to defend itself was good when the military was actually in a very poor state. (Andersson 1995) However, what Hansson meant was that Sweden was mentally prepared and that there was no shortage of food and shelter. The timing of Hansson's speech was almost prophetic as two days later Germany invaded Poland and the Second World War began in Europe.

It may be argued that in stressing that Sweden did not have any international grievances, that it had no enemies, and that it was set on remaining neutral, Per-Albin Hansson also set the agenda for what has come to haunt Sweden's own view of its role in the Second World War, when it did not fight the Nazis, but rather accommodated them on several occasions. But although official Swedish government policy was that Sweden should remain neutral, it was always adapting the policy according to the changing political circumstances, and this policy of neutrality came about after several failed attempts to form some kind of pact between the Nordic countries. (Hadenius 2003: 71)

After Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in August 1939, which led to both countries attacking and occupying Poland, the Soviet Union turned its attention to the three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and had soon occupied all three of them. Next came Finland, which the Red Army attacked in November 1939. This led to Per-Albin Hansson forming a coalition government, including all the major parties with the exception of the Communist Party, and a declaration of being not neutral but “non-combative”. Sweden was overtly supporting the Finnish people, even so far as to send voluntary soldiers and weapons, including fighter planes and bombers. There was a rallying call in support of the Finnish: “Finlands sak är vår!” (“Finland's cause is our cause!”) Despite this, when Great Britain and France sought to send soldiers through Sweden to help Finland, the Swedish government said no. (Hadenius 2003: 73-75). Sweden’s position was precarious since it had to walk a thin line between Germany and the Soviet Union, and then between the Soviet Union and the West, and following that between the Allies and the Axis. This outside pressure grew even stronger after Germany occupied Denmark and Norway in April 1940. So with Germany at its borders and with a military sector which was still comparatively weak, Sweden felt that when Germany made demands for transporting troops on Swedish railways, the government had to give in, and millions of German soldiers were transferred through Swedish territory. But as the Allies, in a series of important battles, such as at El-Alamein (1942) and at Stalingrad (1942), and at the invasion of Sicily (1943), began to gain the upper hand in the fight against Nazi Germany, and the Swedish army and air force continued to grow in strength, the government felt more secure in not giving in to German demands. Sweden also began training and arming Norwegian and Danish soldiers, and stopped selling coal and other vital raw

materials to Germany. Sweden also supported the Allies with intelligence. In fact, all through the war Stockholm had been something of a spy central, and Sweden's intelligence organisations were intercepting most of the German wires, having cracked their decryption, and was also tapping phones and opening letters on a massive scale. (Dahlberg 1999: 159)

As part of the government's early efforts to keep Sweden out of the war, and to avoid antagonizing the Nazis more than necessary, the government enforced a lot of censorship, primarily against the press. In charge of the censorship was SIS, Statens Informationsstyrelse (The State Board of Information) and newspapers that were considered too outspoken in their criticism of the Hitler regime were sometimes confiscated, sometimes shut down, and some journalists were sent to gaol. (Gustafsson 2007) Communists were treated the same way. Films were also affected by this censorship, both with regard to which films could be imported and with regard to subject matter in films made in Sweden, which will be dealt with more in detail later in this chapter. This applied to Ekman and his filmmaking as well, and censorship partly helps explain why Ekman did some of the films he did, and why he did them when he did, as shall be discussed in the next chapter.

The censorship changed over time, as the government grew less intimidated by the Germans. In October 1943, *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz 1942) had its Swedish première and caused something of a sensation since it was so overtly anti-German. But during the hard times several books appeared which, in various ways, usually allegorically, dealt with the contemporary fear of the fascism that haunted Europe. Books such as Karin Boye's *Kallocain*, set in the future, Vilhelm Moberg's *Ride This Night!* (*Rid i natt*), set in the past, Pär Lagerkvist's *The Dwarf* (*Dvärgen*), about an evil man, and Eyvind Johnson's Krilon trilogy were among those books, which have since become part of Swedish literary history. Another spokesperson with explicitly political views was the stage comedian and song writer Karl Gerhard. He performed several anti-Nazi numbers during the war years that caused him official reprimands and visits from the police. As will be discussed later, through his films Ekman was also involved in these anti-fascist activities.

During this difficult time of political and actual privation when most food items were rationed, the general population in Stockholm seemed to be well catered to and people went to the movies like

never before. Ekman has written that Stockholm during the war years was a mad time, with restaurants always fully booked, shows always sold out and the times were likened to a gold rush. (Ekman 1955: 151) People were also having a lot of sex. More than twice as many babies were born towards the end of the war as before it began. The country was also liberalised, partly because of the fact that everybody had to work together and share everything, regardless of class, gender and income (Dahlberg 1999: 166) and partly because of the continuation of political reform. Public health increased substantially, due to campaigns to increase public awareness about how to live healthily, and to a nationwide spread of new medicines such as penicillin, and new ways of treatment. Whilst times were rough, and the threat of war was constantly present, it was not all gloom and despair. War never did come explicitly to Sweden, and eventually Germany was defeated. The world celebrated and Sweden entered the post-war era.

1:4:3 The post-war years

The years covered in the previous section were the formative years of Ekman's life and work, yet as the world, and Sweden, continued to change, so did Ekman and his films. This section will briefly discuss the evolution of Swedish society during the rest of his career, and highlights the fact that a new sense of security and progress set in, and new habits were formed. These changes effected cinema as well, including Ekman's films, and in particular the appearance of television.

When the war ended people were expecting a rough time economically, with a depression as the most likely scenario. What occurred was the opposite, with pronounced growth, inflation and a huge trade deficit which led to the economy overheating. One reason for this was that Swedish infrastructure was undamaged, unlike almost any other country in Europe, and that there was almost no social unrest at all. (Hadenius 2003: 87) The coalition government ended in 1945, and the Social Democrats were now alone at the helm. In 1946, the Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson died of a heart attack and was succeeded by Tage Erlander, who would remain Prime Minister until 1969. Ernst Wigforss stayed on as Minister of Finance until 1949, and policies continued much as they had during the war, including rationing of various items, due to the trade deficit. Debate continued between the Social Democrats and the Liberals. The Liberals now had a new party leader, Bertil

Ohlin. He was a professor in economics and a future Nobel Prize winner in the same discipline. As both Wigforss and Ohlin were influenced by the Swedish economist Knut Wicksell, and the 'Stockholm School', of which Ohlin was a founding member, the differences between them were not that great. The political scientist Herbert Tingsten argued at the time that this was the end of politics, and from now on it would only be a question of implementing the welfare ideology which all the major parties adhered to. (In a speech, quoted in Hadenius 2003: 111) Sweden's economic growth after the war was one of the highest in the western world so it could well afford it. (Magnusson 2002: 409-410) The more significant policy debates concerned foreign policy. The Second World War had quickly been replaced by the Cold War, and again, after trying to form a Nordic pact without any luck, Sweden decided to continue its policy of neutrality. It did however, in 1948, sign up for the Marshall Plan, the American economic support system to help rebuild Europe after the war. All of this meant that the situation for filmmakers was, for a European country at this point, unusually stable. In addition, as the war was over the strict political censorship laws disappeared.

The country became more socially liberal (homosexuality was decriminalised in 1944, abortion became legal in 1946, if there were special medical circumstances), and the economy continued to grow, moving gradually from heavy industry towards services. The electorate saw to it that neither the Liberals nor the Social Democrats became too radical, and they also kept extreme parties out of parliament, as they had almost always done. (Hadenius 2003: 99) More and more women joined the work force, and rising wages led to a fairer country, as the gap between the poor and the wealthy decreased. (Magnusson 2002: 410) Among the reforms brought forward were state pensions (1946) and unconditional child support (1947). In order to pay for these and other benefits, taxes were raised on a regular basis, almost doubling from 1945 to 1969. (Dahlberg 1999: 201) Ekman's films sometimes touch upon these new progressive ideals, pushing them even further, as shall be discussed later on in the thesis.

Sweden also became a suburban society. All over Sweden suburbs were being built and, as was often the official Swedish way of doing things, they were thoroughly planned down to every last detail. Everything was standardised in the apartment blocks, height, width, length and light, along

with the entire areas in which the apartments were built. The organising principle was called ABC; A for 'Arbete' (work), B for 'Bostad', (apartment) and C for 'Centrum' (area for doctors, dentists, restaurants, schools, shopping, and cinemas), so that in theory the inhabitants would never have to leave their suburb. (Dahlberg 1999: 195-196) This standardisation is commented on, and criticized in Ekman's films from the beginning of his career.

Culturally, this was a time of popular successes and innovative artistic movements. Swedish design became famous, and plastic became popular. Radio and films continued to be increasingly popular, and a new generation of writers appeared, one of them being Stig Dagerman. Dagerman was a journalist, writer and occasional film critic, and he was a leading light in a group of poets and writers that were called '40-talisterna' (the 40-ists, or 'Generation 40', so called because they all had their first works published in the 1940s). These were angst-ridden and existentialist writers, and they will appear later in this thesis. Among the more well-known members of this group, besides Dagerman, were Erik Lindegren, Karl Vennberg and Werner Aspenström. Bergman was close to this group but Ekman was not. As shall be discussed, Ekman sometimes criticised and even ridiculed them.

In the immediate aftermath of the recent and tragic war, to feel such existential angst was understandable, and darkness often crept into Ekman's films as well. But in the 1950s, life would become steadily more prosperous and easy-going and art, including films, arguably less adventurous. The early-1950s saw the birth of the consumer society (Magnusson 2002: 416). The economy continued to grow and be strong all the way through the 1950s and 1960s (until the oil crisis in the early-1970s). Reform also continued, now including a three week vacation (1951), five day working week, the 40-hour week, and mandatory health insurance (1955). In 1951, the right to freedom of religion (and freedom *from* religion) was enshrined in the constitution. Before that one had to be a member of the Swedish church, unless one was of some other religious denomination.

With growing affluence and longer vacations, Swedes began to travel, and when the airline Scandinavian Airline System, SAS, was formed in 1951, followed by the opening of Arlanda airport just outside Stockholm, travelling abroad became much easier. Swedes also travelled around Europe

by bus, and went camping. (Löfgren 2009) These changes affected Ekman, and they were eventually incorporated in his films, as will be discussed in a later chapter.

After having been in a coalition with the Farmer's Party (who had, in an effort to broaden their appeal, re-branded themselves as the Centre Party), the Social Democrats were now alone in government. The Prime Minister, Tage Erlander, stated that the aim should now be to create "the strong society" (Hadenius 2003: 132), and to aim for even more equality. However, as the government spent more than it earned, something had to be done. Reluctant to raise taxes or to cut back on spending, they decided to bring back VAT. (Hadenius 2003: 120) One thing this new money was needed for was to build more apartments and houses, since there was a shortage of both. On the whole, the general outlook was one of optimism and hope. The final conclusion of an investigation from 1955 sums it up: "If we will have peace, the engineers promise us an almost new society in a couple of decades. The national economists at the same time calculate that in this new society the standard of living will be almost double to what we have now." (Björck 2009: 348) This era was called *Rekord-åren* – the Record-Years.

Culturally, the 1960s was a time of great change, and also a time of social problems. Progress was made with regard to female emancipation. The number of women entering the workforce, both married and unmarried, increased dramatically, and the government's policy was for equal pay for equal work. (Dahlberg 1999: 204) This ties in with what can be called the feminist side of Ekman, and his recurring use of a strong, working woman as the central character. But he was ahead of the society in that respect. 'Increased equality' was the catch-phrase of the 1960s and the 1970s (Magnusson 2002: 460), but as shall be argued, Ekman was already thinking along those lines from the early-1940s.

However, in the late-1950s and 1960s there were also drug abuse, crime and street fighting. For example, Sweden had more car thefts than any other country in Europe, comparative to the population, and youth gangs would battle with the police in the streets. (Dahlberg 1999: 210) These issues are rarely discussed in Ekman's films. Only one later film of his actively addresses the problems of the time in which it was made and that film, *The Heist** (*Stöten* 1961) will be discussed

in Chapter 4.

Swedish design, both industrial and graphic, as well as art was in high demand, nationally as well as internationally, and in 1958 the Museum of Modern Art opened in Stockholm, with Pontus Hultén as its director. It quickly became one of the more important focal points of the global modern art circle, and brought a lot of American art, such as that of Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg to Europe. Ekman also incorporates some of these new ideas in art and design in his films in the late-1950s, both in production design and cinematography.

Simultaneous with the rise of modern art and design, a big cultural shift took place in the living room of almost every household in Sweden. The television set arrived. It had been decided in Parliament that television should be free from commercials and it should be an independent organization, a public service inspired by the BBC, and work as a parallel institution to national radio. (Hadenius 2003: 125) In 1957 there were 30, 000 receivers in Sweden, two years later there were 500, 000, out of a population of 7.4 million. One of the reasons for this boom was the 1958 World Cup which was held in Stockholm and which saw Brazil beating Sweden in the final. This event is generally seen as the breakthrough of television in Sweden. The number of households with television sets went from 200, 000 to 2, 000, 000 in less than four years. (Snickars 2008: 195)

Television brought about significant changes for the cinema, to audience behaviour and to ticket sales. Television also changed politics, family life, and design. Everybody would gather round the television, watching Swedish or foreign programmes. Among the most popular foreign television series were the American western series *Bonanza*, which began being broadcast in Sweden in 1959 (and led to a debate about violence on TV and its effect on society (Alm 2008: 192)), and later in the 1960s the British *The Forsyte Saga* became a nation-wide success. The most popular Swedish television show was *Hylands hörna* (Hyland's Corner), which ran from 1962 to 1983 and was a Swedish version of *The Tonight Show starring Johnny Carson*. It was hosted by Lennart Hyland, who was already a well-established figure in Swedish society after a long career on the radio before he went into television. According to Furhammar, Hyland was “for Sweden a completely unique phenomenon” (Furhammar 1991: 253), in his role as national father-figure, comparable to the prime

minster or the king perhaps. *Hylands hörna's* aim was for Sweden to be like “one big happy family” (Furhammar 1991: 253). It was here, in an unprecedented event, that the Swedish Prime Minister Tage Erlander appeared, in the first year, telling jokes and appearing like a regular guy. This is an example of how television changed politics. It also changed how the home was furnished and designed, with the audience sitting at home on their 'TV-sofa', and on their tables there would be a 'TV flask'. The television itself would be on the 'TV-shelf'. There was a whole range of products that came about to cater to the new needs of the television-watching population. (It should also be mentioned that Swedish furniture company IKEA opened its first store in 1958, making comparatively cheap and stylish furniture available to a large number of people.) As will be discussed later, in his films in the late-1950s and early-1960s Ekman often satirized television, and the popular infatuation with it, along with other popular phenomena such as radio and the newly emerging trend of Continental coach travel.

1:5 Swedish cinema

This section will be discussing trends, movements, filmmakers and genres, but also film policy and industrial issues. Since this thesis argues that there was what can be called a renaissance in Swedish cinema and that it began in 1940, the cinema of the 1930s needs to be discussed at some length, to place the renaissance in a clearer light. Then the 1940s will be discussed, to show what made the renaissance come about and who was central to it. There are two reasons for doing this. The first is to explain under what circumstances Ekman was working and the second to underline that he was not alone, but that he, and Bergman, were part of what can be classified as a movement.

1:5:1 The 1930s – beer and nation-building

If the silent era was considered a 'golden age' of Swedish cinema, an expression commonly used about films made between 1913 and 1924, (cf. Bordwell, Thompson 2003, Furhammar 1991, Cowie 1985), then the 1930s was widely regarded as at best a nuisance, at worst a threat to society and morality. The church thought that the cinema was 'immoral' rationalised on the basis of sexual titillation, the army found it a disgrace due to the many comedies about silly soldiers and the

temperance movement found it appalling due to the excessive consumption alcohol portrayed. (Furhammar 1991: 127-128) There was even one special genre called 'pilsnerfilm' ('beer movies'). The intelligentsia and leading writers were perhaps particularly upset, led by esteemed writer Vilhelm Moberg (known internationally for his four books about Swedish immigrants to the USA, beginning with *The Emigrant (Utvandrarna)* 1949). It all came together in 1937 with a meeting at the Concert Hall in Stockholm, where Moberg and others made their hostile feelings towards Swedish cinema perfectly clear. Moberg himself said: "We have been given the horrid gift of mass-reproduced infantilism and stupidity." (Furhammar 1991: 128, trans.) According to Bordwell and Thompson: "Swedish cinema had been in eclipse since Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller were lured to Hollywood." (Bordwell & Thompson 2003:383)

How did it come to this? Why did Swedish cinema go from being considered a national treasure to something shameful? There were several reasons. In 1929 Swedish cinema was in a terrible state, in fact not a single Swedish film premièred in the first half of 1929. This was the result of a perfect storm of financial problems. The depression, mass unemployment and inflation combined with very strong competition from foreign films and the fact that Swedish production companies had been reckless in their spending, and were on the verge of bankruptcy, all contributed to the near death of Swedish film production. (Furhammar 1991, 91-93) But then came sound cinema, talking pictures, and that was the beginning of a revival. In 1929 *The Dream Waltz (Säg det i toner)*, Edvin Adolphson, Julius Jaenzon) was not only one of few Swedish films which actually got made, but it was also the first made with sound, although no spoken dialogue. The first proper 100% talking film in Sweden was *When Roses Bloom (När rosorna slå ut)*, Edvin Adolphson, 1930). Despite the novelty of hearing Swedish spoken on the screen it did not generate any immediate box office successes. Furhammar has argued that the box office records for the early 1930s are very difficult to interpret, but that it appears that the depression made people less likely to go to the cinema, (Furhammar 1991: 129-132) and it was not until 1933 that ticket sales started to increase. However, Swedish films became more popular and so more films were made. The production companies realized the value of using sound to appeal to the audience's sense of local patriotism. The movies that were being made were vernacular and regional, and the production companies were finally making money again. So after an uncertain start, including the economic depression and the suicide

of financier Ivar Kreuger in 1933, the Swedish film industry was back on its feet, although Gösta Werner argues that the output of the time was provincial and self-indulgent. (Werner 1978: 65)

Considering that, globally, the late-1920s were among the best world cinema had ever seen and that the 1930s were a great decade for French, American, British and Japanese cinema, it is even more disappointing that Swedish cinema was in such relatively bad shape. However, it is important to recall that the notion that the Swedish cinema of the 1930s was a complete failure is narrow-minded. In the 1930s between 250 and 300 Swedish films were made, which is more than twice as many as in the 1920s, and with so many films made, there were bound to be both good and bad releases. The 1930s was a period of rapid growth, the number of cinema theatres grew quickly and more than tripled during the decade (Furhammar 1991: 135) and according to Tytti Soila: “virtually all domestic feature films produced were profitable”. (Soila 1998: 173)

Criticism of Swedish films of the 1930s is not always fair. There were other works besides the 'immoral' films with no artistic value the critics railed against. One example is the filmmaker Gustaf Molander, who might be called the grand old man of classical Swedish cinema. He wrote scripts for Victor Sjöström and Mauritz Stiller in the late-1910s and early-1920s and directed his first film, *Bodakungen* in 1920. During the 1930s he made a number of witty comedies and heartfelt melodramas, and among those is *Intermezzo* from 1936 with Ingrid Bergman. In total he directed 22 films during the 1930s, an impressive number which also included the experimental *One Night (En natt, 1931)*, which was influenced by Russian filmmakers of the 1920s. Molander's films were also successful at international film festivals. *A Little Flirt (En stilla flirt, 1934)* won in Vienna in 1934, *Swedenhielms* (1935) received an honorary mention in Venice in 1935 and *A Woman's Face (En kvinnas ansikte, 1938)* won an award for “artistic perfection” in Venice in 1938. Molander, it should be added, was later to work with Bergman, and Bengt Forslund has argued that Molander's interest and skill in telling women's stories also marks him out as an important forerunner to Bergman. (Forslund 2003: 91) Particularly relevant for this thesis is that Ekman's father, Gösta Ekman, acted in several of Molander's films, including *Swedenhielms* and *Intermezzo*, where he played the father and Ekman played his son.

Another director worth mentioning is Schamyl Bauman. He has never been given much attention, but some, such as Per Olof Qvist, argue that Bauman can be seen as an important inspiration for Ingmar Bergman. (Qvist 1995: 14) Towards the end of the 1930s Bauman had become an accomplished director, especially in directing actors, and with a good ear for dialogue. Among the more prestigious films Bauman made were *Witches' Night* (*Häxnatten*, 1937), with Gösta Ekman, *Career* (*Karriär*, 1938), *The Two of Us** (*Vi två*, 1939) and *Wanted** (*Efterlyst*, 1939). Both *Career* and *The Two of Us* are reminiscent of films that Ekman would eventually make, and as Bauman and Ekman have many links Bauman will feature later in this thesis.

One filmmaker who was often political, in a Social Democratic consensus discourse, was Gustaf Edgren. Of the films he directed, most noteworthy here are *Karl Fredrik Reigns* and *The Red Day** (*Röda dagen*, 1931). The male star in these films was Sigurd Wallén who also starred in two other films which had a strong Social Democratic profile, *With the People for the Motherland** (*Med folket för fosterlandet*, 1938) and *Towards a New Dawn** (*Mot nya tider*, 1939). They were both films about the rise of a strong and just Social Democratic Sweden. Besides playing the male lead, Wallén was also the director. Insofar as these films work to establish a (mythical) image of Sweden, they easily lend themselves to studies from the perspective of national cinema, and the construction of an idea of the nation. In this they differ from the kind of films that were made in the 1940s, and Ekman's films in particular.

But even though Swedish films were available in abundance, foreign films were still much more popular, especially American films. The greatest stars, after Greta Garbo, were Jeanette MacDonald and Maurice Chevalier. (Furhammar 1991: 157) They acted together in six films from 1929 to 1934, five of which were directed by Ernst Lubitsch, either alone or together with George Cukor. It can probably be taken for granted that Hasse Ekman saw these films, and that these years were very formative for him as a filmmaker. It is an important factor in Ekman's career that his sources of inspiration were international, such as Lubitsch and Jean Renoir, rather than Swedish. That influence began in the 1930s. After the MacDonald/Chevalier films, Lubitsch made films such as *Design for Living* (1937) and *The Shop Around the Corner* (1940). The French filmmaker Marcel Carné, who will be discussed later in the thesis, also made several important films during the decade

such as *Hotel du Nord* (1937) and *Port of Shadows* (*Quai de brumes*, 1939). Renoir made films such as *Boudu Saved From Drowning* (*Boudu sauvé des eaux*, 1932), *The Crime of Monsieur Lange* (*Le crime de M. Lange*, 1935), *La Grande Illusion* (1937), and *The Rules of the Game* (*La règle du jeu*, 1939).

So to conclude this section, the audience in the 1930s had a lot of films to choose from, both domestic and foreign, both quality and mundane. With regard to the more mundane Swedish films that were produced, Furhammar's sums them up: "It was quite simply a picture of the Swedish *folkhem*". (Furhammar 1991: 161, trans.) Then came the war and everything changed.

1:5:2 A Swedish renaissance

These were sensitive times and the political situation was tense. There was much state censorship and it is reasonable to assume that this also led to a kind of self-censorship. Sweden's official policy during the war was neutrality, so films arguing for one side over the other were rarely released. Foreign films were also being censored or forbidden. This mostly affected films from the Allies, particularly the US. But, as Soila points out: "there was one category that was consistently allowed through and that was the Finnish, frequently avidly anti-Russian, films that were imported into the country." (Soila 1998: 179) This was because Sweden's official policy in the war between Finland and the Soviet Union was not neutral but non-combative. That fact that it was a politically sensitive time did not change the sense in which, from an economic viewpoint, the war years were a glorious time for the Swedish film industry. Due to the war it was hard for foreign films to come to Swedish cinemas, not in the least French films, so there was less competition from abroad. At the same time, the public was going to the cinema like never before. Despite the fact that the movie theatres were cold during wintertime due to rationing, audiences almost doubled, from 13 to 23 million visitors a year in Stockholm and Göteborg. (Furhammar 1991:170) The authorities responded to this huge increase in box office records with a change in the tax code, so there was a kind of film tax which became mandatory in 1940.

As there was a war on and times were precarious, not all output could be described as quality productions. A lot of films were made to foster patriotism and love of the countryside. These films were often short, and made not only by the film studios but by the SIS (the State Board of Information) and even by the military. Usually they depicted Swedish history or Swedish nature, but according to Furhammar, they were decidedly “non-military” and “free of aggression”. (Furhammar 1991: 168, trans.) A number of feature films were also made for similar purposes, and these films could be about the military, but in accordance with Sweden's neutrality, the films did not specify who was fighting who and where. Although, again, as Soila points out, this did not prevent films from being made that were specifically about the war in Finland. (Soila 1998: 182) Ekman made one film that was specifically about the war in Finland, *A Day Will Come** (*En dag skall gry*, 1944).

During the 1930s the studio system had been very strong in Sweden and in some ways it continued to be so in the 1940s. The biggest studio was still SF, together with Europa Film and the up-and-coming Sandrew. As in Hollywood, the studios had their contracted writers, directors, actors and technicians. Films had to be made on budget and on time. Hasse Ekman once quipped that on an ordinary day in the studio, he would be making a film in one corner, Arne Mattsson would be making a film in another corner, Alf Sjöberg in a third corner and in the fourth corner carpenters would be building a new set. (Åhlund & Carlsson 1993) The big studios were also vertically integrated, meaning that they controlled the production, distribution and exhibition of all their films. At the same time the owner structure was complicated due to dealings between the studios, in that they bought and sold parts of each other back and forth. (Furhammar 1991: 174)

The various studios had their differences however. Some were interested in comedies, some were more interested in highbrow dramas, and some focused on more lowbrow farces. (cf. Furhammar 1979) But there was at the same time a general wish to make more complex films with a message, and one way in which this became apparent was with the hiring of new heads of production at both SF and Sandrew. At SF, Carl-Anders Dymling, a man with a cultural outlook, took over in 1942, and he in turn hired Victor Sjöström as artistic adviser. Dymling even wrote editorials where he advocated the importance of high quality productions. At Sandrew, a leading film critic and film historian, Rune Waldecranz, was made head of production. His vision was to get the best

filmmakers, give them money and a free hand and in so doing create a genuine art cinema. Another important film company was Terra, headed by Lorens Marmstedt. It was at Terra that Hasse Ekman would make his first films, and Terra was at the time considered to be a high quality studio. This is emphasised by the fact that as a part of Sandrew's aim to further its artistic ambitions, they aligned themselves with Terra and Marmstedt. (Furhammar 1991: 178)

Comedies and films dealing with social issues were common, as were a number of adaptations of Swedish literary classics. Statistically, a major change occurred towards the end of the war. If during the 1930s and early-1940s comedies were the most common kind of films, from 1943 a large number of dramatic films were also produced, while roughly the same number of comedies was being made. Many of the dramatic films that were being produced were made by new filmmakers. So this new focus was partly due to a new generation of filmmakers appearing. (That more dramatic films were made is in itself of course not a proof of quality, it is only a proof of change.) But, as Soila argues: “[T]he sizeable repertory makes it difficult to determine clear thematic lines in the wartime production of films, because virtually all genres, ideas and patterns were tested.” (Soila 1998: 181) Furhammar argues that it became more common to discuss religious matters in films, something which had been almost non-existent as a theme in the 1930s, (Furhammar 1991: 192) and Werner argues that the filmmakers became more courageous and achieved a considerably higher level of stylistic awareness. (Werner 1978: 82) Furhammar even argues that it was specifically the visual aspects of Swedish cinema in the 1940s that constituted the real artistic advance. (Furhammar 1991: 193-194) But there were changes when it came to script writing as well. In Sweden during the 1920s, Stiller, Sjöström and af Klercker often wrote their own screenplays, together with Gustaf Molander, but in the 1930s this was most unusual. This changed with the newer generation of filmmakers who were writers/directors. Although it was not the first time that one individual was both a writer and a director, it was arguably the first time this became common, even a standard. Ekman was such a filmmaker.

It has been claimed that 1940 is something of a watershed in Swedish cinema history and that this is owing to one film, *A Crime (Ett brott)*, directed by Anders Henriksson. The critics at the time certainly talked about it in such terms. Yet such a position can be contested. Arguably 1940 was a

watershed, but not due to *A Crime*. Other films worth mentioning are Alf Sjöberg's *They Staked Their Lives* (*Med livet som insats*), Åke Ohberg's *Romance** (*Romans*) and Per Lindberg's *Steel** (*Stål*), a film about the industrial town of Falun. Another important film of 1940 was *With You In My Arms*, Ekman's first film as writer and director, less for its intrinsic qualities than for its very appearance, or rather the appearance of Ekman. As shall be elaborated upon in the next chapter, it was considered to be a breath of fresh air in Swedish cinema and its immediate success led the way to Ekman's further career.

Among the many talented directors working during the war years, Alf Sjöberg deserves a special mention. According to Peter Cowie: "Next to Bergman [...] Sjöberg must be accounted the most significant Swedish director of that long, uneven period stretching from the departure of Sjöström and Stiller for Hollywood in the mid-1920s and the establishment of the Swedish Film Institute in 1963." (Cowie 1985: 50) Whilst that is a questionable statement there is no question regarding Sjöberg's importance and high standing in Swedish cinema of this period. Sjöberg's most famous film is probably *Hets* (*Torment* aka *Frenzy* 1944) but admittedly more famous for being written by Ingmar Bergman, his first credited screenplay, than for being directed by Sjöberg. Among Sjöberg's most interesting films are *Home from Babylon* (*Hem från Babylon*, 1941), *The Heavenly Play* (*Himlaspelet*, 1942) and *Only a Mother* (*Bara en mor*, 1949). The artistically most accomplished film, however, was *Miss Julie* (*Fröken Julie*, 1951), adapted from August Strindberg's play which Sjöberg had already directed on the stage. It was shot by a distant relative of Strindberg, Göran Strindberg, who was one of Sweden's leading cinematographers at this point. On stage Sjöberg had been working with time and space in an unusual way, letting scenes set in the past and scenes set in the present play beside each other simultaneously, and he brought this approach with him to the film, making *Miss Julie* a bold experiment in both the use of depth of field and narrative structure. It was a critical success, at home and abroad, winning numerous awards in South America and the Grand Prix at Cannes (sharing it with *Miracle in Milan* (*Miracolo a Milano*, Vittorio de Sica, 1951)). Sjöberg can be seen as a major influence on Bergman, but to a lesser degree on Ekman. Of greater personal importance for Ekman was still Bauman, although Bauman had arguably lost the intimate touch that he had in the 1930s. He was now making mostly routine comedies. However, they were very profitable and Bauman still sometimes managed to return to his sense of everyday realism.

Other names that must be mentioned are Erik 'Hampe' Faustman, Per Lindberg, Olof Molander, Arne Mattsson and, of course, the ubiquitous Gustaf Molander. Of all major Swedish directors, Erik 'Hampe' Faustman was the most overtly political, with a strong socialist bent. His first film was *Night in Harbour** (*Natt i hamn*, 1943), a film about seamen and saboteurs at the height of the Second World War. As a studio director, he had to make films that were not necessarily personal, and it was not until the late-1940s that he really found his niche with angry films about the working class such as *When the Meadows are in Bloom* (*När ängarna blommar*, 1946), *Lars Hård* (1948), *Foreign Harbour* (*Främmande hamn*, 1948) and *Vagabond Blacksmiths* (*Smeder på luffen*, 1949). *When the Meadows are in Bloom* is a harsh look at the life of 'statarna', peasants living in almost slave-like conditions, *Lars Hård* tells the story of a man whose parents were 'statare' and who is sent to prison for manslaughter, and *Foreign Harbour* is about Swedish dock workers in the Polish harbour town of Gdynia who strike to prevent a ship bound for the fascists in Spain to leave the harbour. *Vagabond Blacksmiths* is the story of three blacksmiths who leave town and set out on a walk through the country, going from job to job, and experiencing suppression from the capitalists and the authorities and solidarity and camaraderie among the workers.

Per Lindberg made only a handful of films. He was, like Sjöberg, a man of the theatre. Those few films he made were rather experimental and offbeat. Again, like Sjöberg Lindberg made films in the 1920s, two in 1923, but then left filmmaking until the war years, making seven films between 1939 and 1941. After that he stopped, possibly due to the fact that his experiments were not widely appreciated. (Werner 1978: 83-85) But one of them, *Rejoice While You're Young, Fellow Cadets* (*Gläd dig i din ungdom*, 1939), did win an award at Venice. Olof Molander (brother of Gustaf) also made just a handful of films, and in them he experimented with narrative and visuals. The films often have a loose structure with an associative montage, disrupting both time and space, and telling their stories in a non-linear way. The visual style is expressionistic, with stark contrasts between light and darkness, and elaborate use of perspectives and depth. Among his six films from the 1940s, *Imprisoned Women** (*Kvinnor i fångenskap*, 1943) and *Appassionata* (1944) are particularly noteworthy. Arne Mattsson made his first film in 1944, *...and all these women** (*... och alla dessa kvinnor*), which was not a success but Mattsson was noted for his visual sense. He continued to work hard over the following years, with his fourth film *Sussie* (1945) being regarded by the critics

at the time as his artistic breakthrough. However, Mattsson, who soon developed an interest in psychology and thrillers, or perhaps psychological thrillers, was not to become a really big name until the 1950s when he made *One Summer of Happiness* (*Hon dansade en sommar*, 1951), and followed it with such works as the war drama *The Bread of Love* (*Kärlekens bröd*, 1953) and *Salka Valka* (1954), based on a novel by the Icelandic Nobel Prize-winner Halldor Laxness. Mattsson was above all else a visual filmmaker, using the camera and the mise-en-scène to create striking and symbolic compositions, with elaborate camera movements and expressive lighting. A special mention must also be made of Arne Sucksdorff, an experimental documentary filmmaker. He made several short films in the 1940s which were incredibly well edited. As many of the above-mentioned filmmakers, he also had an expressionistic visual style. These films, from both Sweden and India, won him awards all over the world. One of them, *Symphony of a City* (*Människor i stad*, 1947) was the first Swedish film to win an Academy Award.

So during the war years there was a sudden explosion of rich, nuanced and thought-provoking films, a lot of visual and narrative experiments and the rise of a new generation of filmmakers, who sometimes worked with each other. In addition, there was also the return of a few filmmakers (Sjöberg, Olof Molander) who had not been making films for a decade or so. All of these things, combined with a large audience interested in watching Swedish films and new producers interested in producing high-quality films, justify calling this time a renaissance for Swedish cinema and Ekman was both a part of this and a result of this new era. In an interview from 1962 Ingmar Bergman said that during the 1940s it felt like being part of a new wave. (Kindblom 2006: 94) Considering that a number of debutante filmmakers, working together and making films that constituted a clear break from what came before, it is possible to call it a Swedish New Wave. For Sweden, this Wave lasted for about a decade, because in the immediate post-war years things continued to be good for filmmakers. It is tempting to compare Sweden with Great Britain during the 1940s, a country which also had something of a cinematic renaissance at the same time. It seems as if the constant threat of war, combined with the fact that there never was an enemy invasion, led to an unusually vibrant cinema. With artists wanting to deal with social anxieties in radical ways, and with the population at large eager to escape from, and engage with, the existential crisis that the war can be said to have brought on, these were good years for films and filmmaking. The fact that

neither Sweden nor Great Britain were invaded meant that production never came to an end, and was never shut down, and that the countries could remain free and democratic. This set the two countries apart from most other countries in Europe in the 1940s.

The post-war years were years of paradox for the Swedish film industry. On the one hand, there were many economic problems, but on the other the quality and international prestige of many of the films being made were almost unparalleled in Swedish film history. The economic difficulties were partly due to the fact that the cost of running the cinemas was increasing more than was the price of the tickets. (Furhammar 1991: 205) There was also a substantial drop in the number of people who went to see Swedish films, even though as many films were made each year as had been the case during the war years, around 40 per year. (Ditto: 199) It was not that the audience had stopped going to the movies in general, they were just as eager as before, but they were not interested in Swedish films any more. In fact, the producers were at a loss trying to determine exactly what kind of domestic films the audience wanted. (Ditto: 199) What mostly appealed to the audience were British, French and Italian films. On top of this, in 1948 the government decided to substantially increase what was called an 'entertainment tax', which increased the price of a ticket (Ditto: 205). But the increase went to the Ministry of Finance, not to the cinema owners. The cost of raw film stock also rose, while the krona devalued. (Soila 1998: 194) Several production companies were either bought by bigger players or went bankrupt in the post-war era. The biggest company, SF, was cautious, not to say conservative, but still it had box office failures.

And yet these were good years for filmmakers, and a lot of new ground was covered. The first Swedish film in colour was made in 1946, somewhat late from an international perspective, and there were experiments with narrative, form and themes. A booming international festival circuit awarded many of these films, beginning with *Hets* winning the Cannes Grand Prix (the Palme d'Or from 1955) in 1946. This international prestige was matched at home by the fact that both audiences and media began to take cinema more seriously. Film journals devoted to serious criticism were launched; cooperative or communal film clubs were started. A new kind of audience emerged, which Furhammar calls "an elite audience" (Furhammar 1991: 202, trans.) and Soila calls "the connoisseurs" (Soila 1998: 197). This audience wanted to see intelligent, challenging and

sophisticated films. This is something Ekman was able to deliver, as shall be seen later in the thesis.

According to Soila, there had not been a large variety of genres in Swedish cinemas. The films were either melodramas or farcical comedies, and this was due to Sweden being a small market in which the films had to please as many as possible. (Soila: 195-196) But this was now beginning to change as well. One very prominent genre was what might be called 'the peasantry drama'. As already mentioned, this was a time of rapid urbanisation, and the shift from rural to urban areas, amid an overall shift from farming to industrialisation, caused much anxiety and these films reflect that. These films usually fall into three different types: a serious and tragic drama, often in a historic setting, a farcical comedy, or a melancholy drama about the inevitability of change. This was apparently exactly what the audience wanted. A film of the first type was *Sunshine Follows Rain* (*Driver dagg, faller regn* Gustaf Edgren, 1946), which was SF's biggest box office success since the company was founded. A film of the second type was the *Åsa-Nisse* series, which drew millions of cinemagoers to each film. The prime example of the third kind was Arne Mattsson's phenomenally successful *One Summer of Happiness*. Per Olov Qvist adds an additional subgenre to the rural films, the archipelago film. (Qvist 1986) According to Soila: "The dichotomy of country – city has always been a feature of Swedish film but this new nostalgic dimension came about through an awareness of the obsolescence of rural life." (Soila 1998: 191) Furhammar has argued, however, that many films made during this period showed a genuine, and increasing, willingness to engage with society and to discuss important issues, and that the most common theme is the conflict between the individual and the collective. (Furhammar 1991: 229) This can also be seen as the conflict between the collective, communal life in the rural areas and the more individualistic and anonymous life in the big city. It is important to mention this because Hasse Ekman did not make films with rural settings and themes. It is rather the case that his unusual urbanity is part of why he should be considered an auteur, and this will be discussed later in the thesis.

So filmmakers were pushing the boundaries and were still interested in making challenging and personal films. With the production companies often in disarray, it became easier for filmmakers to work without interference and to be able to move around among the studios, feeling less committed to any of them. It should be emphasised that, usually, the director wrote the script alone or

sometimes in collaboration, and that this is the case in almost all of the films mentioned in this chapter. The skills and technical mastery already alluded to was just as apparent in the post-war area. What changed was that a new generation of actors appeared and, unlike in earlier years, the actors were no longer playing a particular 'type', but were being used by the directors to create real characters. (Furhammar 1991, p. 222) In this respect, Ekman was of considerable importance.

The end of censorship and increasing social liberalisation in Sweden also affected the films being made. Films and filmmakers became more outspoken, socially as well as politically. They still worked within the general confines of the cinematic context but in such a rich and experimental context the films made were not necessarily routine and formulaic. Ekman, while being a part of the 'system', was also in many ways his own man and the balance between individuality and context shall be explored in later chapters.

The early-1950s were still dynamic and dramatic. There were bigger audiences than ever before and there were a large number of quality films being made, including some of Ekman's best. There was also among critics and intellectuals a strong, and increasing, interest in cinema as an art form, even though television was to become the dominant source of popular entertainment. These were years when Swedish cinema regained the worldwide reputation it had enjoyed in the early-1920s. In 1951, besides the festival successes of *Miss Julie*, *Living on 'Hope'** (*Leva på 'Hoppet'*, Göran Gentele, 1951) won the Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, the Swedish/Norwegian co-production *Kontiki* (Thor Heyerdahl, 1950) won an Academy Award for best documentary, and *While the City Sleeps* (*Medan staden sover*, Lars-Eric Kjellgren, 1950) won the Silver Laurel Award in Hollywood. The next year, 1952, saw *One Summer of Happiness* win the Golden Bear at Berlin and *An Indian Village* (*Indisk by*, Arne Sucksdorff, 1951) won the Prix Special du Jury at Cannes. In 1953 *Sawdust and Tinsel* (*Gycklarnas afton*, Ingmar Bergman, 1953), symptomatic of producer Rune Waldecranz's drive for high quality films, won the Grand Prize at the São Paulo Film Festival.

Since 1940 Swedish cinema had been rich and vibrant, experimental and profitable. But things began to change in the early-1950s. The film studios were nervous, and the situation was fragile. At the end of the 1940s the studios were restive over the government's film policy, especially the

doubling of tax on ticket sales and starting on 1 January 1951 all film production was shut down in what was called 'filmstoppet'. During this protest, a sort of strike, no films were made except Arne Mattsson's *One Summer of Happiness*, which received a free pass. After six months the government caved in and agreed that the film producers needed state funding for support (Soila 1998: 195), and this addressed the difficulties arising from the previously increased 'entertainment tax'. But during the 1950s filmmakers found it more and more difficult to make challenging films and with society becoming more affluent and content, there was arguably less of a market for, and perhaps less urgency on the part of filmmakers, to make films with deeper, existential themes. And this affected Ekman too. If the 1940s had been a renaissance, around 1952-1953 that era came to an end with Bergman's *Sawdust and Tinsel*, Ekman's *Gabrielle* (1954), and Sucksdorff's first full length documentary *The Great Adventure (Det stora äventyret, 1953)*. Things would soon get much worse, because now television appeared.

1:5:3 Swedish cinema after television

If there is one word that best sums up this period in Swedish cinema it is 'crisis'. In 1956, 78.2 million tickets were sold in Sweden, generating 180 million kronor. In 1960, 55 million tickets were sold, generating 120 million kronor. In 1961, 40 million tickets were sold, and in 1972, only 22.5 million. Such a drastic decline did of course have major impacts on almost all aspects of film production. At first the film industry was in a state of denial as to the reasons for this, and the decline in sales was blamed on the influenza epidemic, or on the popular taste for joyriding or other implausible factors. However, as Furhammar writes "Nothing could eventually hide the obvious fact that TV was the concrete and sufficient reason" for this decline and for the: "state of catastrophic crisis" (Furhammar 1991: 249, trans.). In 1957 an investigation was undertaken into the state of the cinema in Sweden and the results were presented in 1959. The report found that Sweden had, relative to its population size, more cinema theatres than almost any other country in the world, but that the attendance rate was among the lowest in the world. (Furhammar 1991, p. 262) The government implemented a new tax regime, with various tax cuts, tax breaks and tax refunds. In 1959, of the money the state received on ticket sales for black- and-white films, 30% was refunded while for colour films, 45% was refunded. But the crisis intensified and in 1962 Harry Schein, a

leading film critic at BLM and friends with both Bergman and leading members of the Social Democratic Party, suggested a complete overhaul of the system. This resulted in the creation of the Swedish Film Institute in 1963, with Schein as its director.

It is ironic that what in many countries was used by the film producers as a weapon to counter the allure of television, namely colour and widescreen techniques, in Sweden saw something of a backlash. For one thing, it was more expensive to shoot in these formats than the older ones. Secondly, since television was at the time available only as a monochrome medium, the television channels would not buy films shot in colour. This made it an even worse investment for the producers to shoot in colour at the time. These factors meant that the production of colour films and widescreen films actually declined in the late-1950s. (Ditto: 259). During such a calamitous time the scope for being adventurous as a filmmaker was very limited. Fewer films were made in general, and they were primarily mainstream genres, thrillers or comedies.

Among the more prestigious filmmakers, Bergman stood out. He was generally considered by the critics as being the cinema's leading auteur. Scarcely anybody else was even trying to be as artistically daring and challenging. In 1962 the magazine *Folket i bild* cancelled its annual award for distinguished achievements in film since there was only one contender, Bergman. (Ditto: 271) Bergman was working at Svensk Filmindustri, one of the few studios which was fully functioning, and he had the trust of Carl-Anders Dymling, the head of the studio. After the international successes of *Smiles of a Summer Night* (*Sommarnattens leende*, 1955), including winning prize for best film in Cannes, Bergman was given more or less a free hand to do what he wanted. By making one or two films a year, Bergman continued to develop as a filmmaker. Ekman was now also contracted with SF so both worked under Dymling. (This relationship and competition between Ekman and Bergman will be analysed extensively in chapters 2, 3 and 4.) Bergman's importance increased when Dymling died in 1961 and was replaced by Kenne Fant, as Fant made Bergman his close adviser.

Of the older generation of filmmakers most had disappeared. Hampe Faustman died in 1961, Arne Sucksdorff made two feature length financial disasters and moved to Brazil in the early-1960s, and

Schamyl Bauman retired in 1958. (As he was important to Ekman, he will be discussed further in later chapters). Gustaf Molander made his penultimate film in 1956, only to return to the cinema to make a short film in 1967, as a part of *Stimulantia*, an anthology film with 9 different directors, including Bergman. Alf Sjöberg made a few films, but struggled as he was not popular with the critics or the public, so he mainly worked in the theatre. Arne Mattsson was still prolific and successful, with a series of visually bold thrillers. However, as Furhammar argues: “it is saddening in hindsight to see how many filmmakers that [...] experienced artistic decline during the decade following the end of the Second World War”. (Ditto: 232, trans.)

The most important films at the beginning of the 1960s were of a different kind. A new tradition of Swedish filmmakers appeared, such as Bo Widerberg, Mai Zetterling, Jörn Donner, Jan Troell and Vilgot Sjöman. It would be a mistake to call this a new generation, or a young generation. They were all older than 30, and some were only a few years younger than Bergman and Ekman. But they were more politically engaged, and these were filmmakers who were influenced by the French New Wave. Like the French, some of them were also critics and writers and they were justifiably critical of the conservative and stale film climate of the 1950s. Widerberg had in 1962 written a series of articles about the state of Swedish cinema which were published together under the name *Visionen i svensk film* (*The vision in Swedish cinema*). There, Widerberg attacked the production companies for not allowing filmmakers to make personal and meaningful films, and criticised Bergman for not making films that were about the everyday problems of the common man. Widerberg is quoted by Cowie as saying: “Every new Swedish film was a disaster, it had absolutely no connection with modern society.” (Cowie 1985: 65) Soon Widerberg and his friends would be making socially-engaged films. These filmmakers and their films not only altered the cinematic landscape but they also changed audiences' and critic's perceptions of what a film could and should look like, something that was fresh, frank and real. The established filmmakers struggled with this. Bergman was arguably the only one who managed to negotiate this new landscape, even though he was often criticised by the newcomers for not being political enough. It is in this rapidly changing context that Ekman bid his farewell to filmmaking.

Chapter 2 Hasse Ekman in the Renaissance

The following three chapters will look at Ekman's career, chronologically, and discuss themes, motifs and stylistic preferences with reference to individual films, and to the context in which they were made. Chapter 5 will provide a specific discussion of Ekman's auteur credentials, and his relationship to Sweden. The rest of this chapter will deal with the period from Ekman's first year as an actor up to 1949.

2:1 Hasse Ekman's early life

During the 1920s and 1930s one of the greatest stars of the Swedish stage was Gösta Ekman. He also acted in films, both in the silent era and well into the 1930s, in Sweden as well as abroad. His son, Hasse, was born in 1915 in Stockholm, and from the start he was involved in the world of the theatre and show business. At the age of eight he acted, together with his father, in the film *The Young Nobleman* (*Unga greven tar flickan och priset*, Rune Carlsten, 1924). Living in such a world of acting and actors inevitably affected young Ekman. Around the time of the making of *The Young Nobleman*, he said to a friend: "It's spooky actually. Sometimes I feel like the world is just one big theatre, and that every human being is playing a part. Some are good at it, some are bad. But we never get to read any reviews. Are you always yourself? [...] I'm not, but that might not be unusual for a theatre child." (Ekman 1933: 216, trans.) That it was important for Ekman is perhaps indicated by the fact that he quotes it again in his second autobiography, *Den vackra ankungen*. (Ekman 1955: 240) It is interesting that already as a boy he was thinking about the same things that would be a major theme in his body of work; role-playing.

In the early-1930s Ekman did odd jobs in the theatre and in film. In 1934 he got his first chance to direct for the stage, together with Per Lindberg. The play was Tolstoy's *The Man Who Was Dead*. In 1935 Ekman joined a film magazine called *Filmbilden* (*The Film Image*)⁴ and soon thereafter he went to Hollywood to do research. He was there for almost seven months and with his background and journalistic credentials he would meet many important people, such as directors Frank Capra and George Cukor. (Forslund 1982: 138-139) This trip would be significant for Ekman as it enabled him to learn the craft of filmmaking by talking

⁴ See Habel 2002, for an analysis of *Filmbilden*.

to professionals, seeing them on the set, and by watching a lot of films. The year after the trip to Hollywood Ekman got his breakthrough as an actor, in Molander's *Intermezzo*, where he was again acting with his father. Gösta Ekman plays a world-famous violinist who is travelling all over Sweden and Europe doing concerts, whilst his long-suffering wife and two children are alone at home. The son is played by Hasse Ekman. Towards the end of the film there is a scene in which the son is accusing the father of abandoning them, saying that he does not care for them any longer. The conflict between a son and the father, or a father-figure, would be a recurring theme in Ekman's own films.

Ekman also worked on film scripts and in 1938 he for the first time got a script turned into a film. It was called *Thunder and Lightning* (*Blixt och dunder*, Anders Henriksson) and Ekman based the script on a story by P.G. Wodehouse called *Summer Lightning*. The book had been published in Swedish in 1935, and Wodehouse would remain one of Ekman's key influences. The film got moderately good reviews and Ekman was congratulated for his adaptation. But it would still be two years until Ekman got to direct his own script.

2:2 Ekman's first films, experiments and versatility

Ekman's artistic breakthrough came in 1943 with the film *Changing Trains* (*Ombyte av tåg*). The films prior to this are also of great interest however, so this section will look at the films Ekman made in his early years as a filmmaker from 1940 to 1942.

With You In My Arms synopsis:

Krister Dahl, a business man with his own company, is one day hit on the head with a golf ball. He passes out for a few seconds and when he wakes up he realises that he cannot remember who he is. He finds a jacket and a wallet and mistakenly thinks they are his, and that the man whose name is in the wallet is who he is, and that he has a wife and five children. Eventually he finds out who he really is, even though he still does not remember anything. He discovers that the man he was before the accident was lazy and untrustworthy, in both private and professional life, and he now tries to take charge of his life. He also meets his ex-wife, without remembering that they know each other, and instead begins to court her. Eventually he is again hit over the head and now remembers everything, only he is now a better man, and his ex-wife takes him back.

Ekman had long dreamt about doing a Swedish screw-ball comedy, and managed to convince Lorens Marmstedt that he was ready to direct his own script. (Ekman 1955: 134) The inspiration for *With You In My Arms* came from abroad, which is signalled already in the first scene. A well-dressed man is walking down a street. He approaches a boy selling newspapers and says, in English “Good morning, my good man. Nice weather today.” The boy looks puzzled and the well-dressed man says, now in Swedish, “Oh, forgive me; I thought I was in London.” After having bought a newspaper, the man then proceeds to an apartment where he walks in, and it becomes apparent that he works there as a butler, or manservant. He goes around, tidying things up (apparently the person who lives in the apartment has had some kind of party), whilst looking for his employer, whom he refers to as “direktören” (managing director). He enters the bedroom where someone is sleeping, completely covered by the blanket. When the butler shakes him he is startled to find that the person sleeping in the bed is not “direktören” but a cab driver. After some confusion it appears that the cab driver had followed “direktören” up the stairs the previous night. Now he is sleeping in the bed and “direktören” is sleeping in the bathtub. This is then a typical farcical opening of a comedy of mixed identities set among the upper classes, those who have the time and money to sleep in on a weekday and have a butler employed. (As his butler says, Krister Dahl is a: “typical product of the upper class, with all the vices and charms of the upper class.”). Even though this was an original script by Ekman, he was still writing as if under the influence of Wodehouse. But at the same time he had already begun developing his own ideas.

On the surface it is a typical Swedish story, which is seemingly arguing that, in Soila's words: “wealth is not always a precondition of happiness, but that hard work, honesty and contentedness are.” (Soila 1998: 176) It is also about the mixing of the classes in a manner consonant with *folkhemmet*, the 'people's society' and the spirit of Saltsjöbaden. In other words, a sense of natural bonds between people who might not be equals but are treated as such. But at the same time there is an English feeling to the film and the Wodehousian elements are noticeable. There are also a few things that set it apart from Swedish cinema of the time. It is too early to speak of a particular Ekman style, but a few touches predict things to come. According to Furhammar, this film was: “a playful challenge, a youthful witty provocation with a touch of international modernity right in the heart of the stale Swedish cinema of the 1930s” (Furhammar 1993: 42, trans.) In what way?

The most obvious way is by reference to the free-wheeling improvisations. In one scene all

the leading characters suddenly burst out singing an opera, in a parody of Verdi. There is an element of crazy comedy here, a sense of anarchy waiting to break out, which was something Ekman would come back to in his later years, especially in his theatre work. But perhaps the most important thing for Furhammar is the leading man and the leading lady. They are played by Edvin Adolphson and Karin Ekelund, who had earlier that year played the leading characters in the previously mentioned *A Crime*. It was a serious drama, nothing at all like a crazy comedy. For Furhammar, Ekman was here deliberately turning things around by having this grave couple suddenly be playful and mischievous. It should, however, be pointed out that it was not the first time either Ekelund or Adolphson did comedy. In fact, most of Ekelund's career so far had been in comic roles. More relevant for arguing for Ekman as an auteur are two of the scenes described here.

The reason for describing the opening scene in such detail is connected to what was said in the theoretical discussion at the beginning of the thesis, that there was a sense of in which many of Ekman's films were not geographically grounded, that they could be set anywhere (apparently almost to the point that the characters themselves are a bit lost as to where they are). This is accompanied by the wish to be somewhere else. If the butler did think he was in London, then maybe that was because that is where he really wanted to be.

When Krister Dahl realises that he has been a lazy womaniser he says that from now on he is going to be a responsible citizen, only to get the response: "Oh, really, that sounds boring." In the film there is a fear of being dull, but it would not be worth mentioning were it only in reference to this one film, but the argument that one must not be dull is a recurring theme in Ekman's films. It can be argued that this is a way for Ekman to distance himself from the Swedish model of scientific solutions, hard work and character-building. The world such as it is presented in Ekman's films can feel like a strait-jacket in which the worst outcome is to be caught up in the ennui of bourgeois living.

As Furhammar argues, it is interesting that, already in this first film, Ekman takes up the subject of identity and their fluidity. (Furhammar 1993: 40) It is a story about the search for self, albeit made in a whimsical manner. This is another common theme in Ekman's films, the looseness and fluidity of identities, and how they can be a mask to hide behind. At the end of the thesis these themes and ideas around longing, boredom and identity will have been thoroughly exemplified and discussed. The point here is to emphasise that they are already

present in his first film. What is also present is a talent for showing something symbolically, instead of explicitly tell what is happening. This can either be to heighten the emotional impact or to suggest erotic feelings or events (such as adultery). There will be several examples of this to come. One example of this from *With You In My Arms* takes place in a bedroom where Krister Dahl's ex-wife and new lover, Barbro, is seen sleeping in her bed. She wakes up with a big smile on her face, looking very content, and she reaches out to the side of the bed where her partner would be sleeping, patting it. Then she looks puzzled because there is nobody there. When the maid comes in she says: "I had such a beautiful dream." The implication, which is further underlined by visual means, is that in her dream she had sex, and she woke up at the point of having an orgasm.

When *With You In My Arms* was released the critics were favourably impressed. One reviewer from the leading daily *Stockholms Tidningen* wrote: "The young P.G. Wodehouse-expert and modern film expert Hasse Ekman has got fresh input from screwball comedies. But the playful, continentally smooth and elegant tone of his first film [is] un-Swedish in that it is chemically unsentimental" (Larz 1940, trans.) Here, Ekman is being compared to Hollywood cinema, especially the work of Garson Kanin.⁵ So the critics felt that the film was a breath of fresh air, and it is easy to see why. It does the film credit that it still feels modern and playful.

With You In My Arms was not the only film Ekman was involved with in 1940. He and Schamyl Bauman also made three films together. *Heroes in Yellow and Blue** (*Hjältar i gult och blått*), *A Man in Full** (*Karl för sin hatt*) and *Swing It, Mr Teacher!** (*Swing it, magistern!*). Bauman directed and he and Ekman wrote the script together, and it signifies the importance of Bauman for Ekman's career. At least one of the films, *Swing It, Mr Teacher!*, has become a Swedish classic, but all three of them were at the time considered by critics to be something new and fresh. The same point they had made about *With You in My Arms* was also made about these films. They were different from early Swedish films, more modern and it was the scripts they felt made such a difference. The story of *Swing It, Mr Teacher!* is about the conflict brought about when a young girl tries to introduce Jazz at her old-fashioned school. There is a parallel there to Ekman's efforts to bring a new, more modern approach to filmmaking, inspired by Hollywood and French cinema. Unlike the girl in the film, however,

⁵ Garson Kanin is today most well-known for having written several films for George Cukor, such as *Adam's Rib* (1949) with Judy Holliday, Katherine Hepburn and Spender Tracy and *Born Yesterday* (1950) with Judy Holliday and William Holden. But he also directed a number of films in the late- 1930s and early-1940s.

he was met with instant and almost unified approval.

So Ekman had got a good start. For his next film, he would do something different. In keeping with the mood of the time, he made a film about the military, *The First Division** (*Första divisionen*, 1941).

The First Division synopsis:

A new pilot arrives at an air force base in the north of Sweden. His father was also a pilot who was killed many years earlier. The head of the air force base knew the father well, and so feels protective of the new young pilot. Among the other pilots are the division chief and a man who is losing his eye sight. The film follows their daily routines, and the dangers of flying. The film also deals with the difficulties of maintaining a happy marriage whilst being a pilot. Although they are not engaged in warfare, it is still a dangerous business. In the end the new young pilot is killed in a crash, as is the pilot who was going blind, but they are immediately replaced.

Alvar Zacke, a journalist from Stockholm with a special interest in flying, came up with the idea and wrote the script together with Ekman. In the first scene a young sub-lieutenant⁶ in the Swedish air force arrives at a train station where he is met by an old friend and they walk together to the base. The scene with the two of them walking is done in one take, with the camera in front of them tracking backwards. The last scene of the film is at the same train station where another young sub-lieutenant arrives to take the place of the first. This is the first example of what would become something of a trademark for Ekman, the way he often lets a film end by making the last scene a repetition of the first, albeit with a slight but important difference. The long take that opens the film would also become something of a trademark of Ekman's style.

With You In My Arms was received favourably by the critics, and *The First Division* got even better reviews. The most noteworthy comment is perhaps from the leading Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* (DN): “Has there ever since the dawn of sound pictures been a film in this country which is in every sense of the word as cinematic as this film?” (O R-t, 1941, trans.)

⁶ Translating military ranks from Swedish to English is not straightforward. But a British 'sub-lieutenant' should be the equivalent to a Swedish 'Fänrik'.

The First Division is the film which firmly established Ekman as an important creative force in Swedish cinema. It is his second film but the critics already spoke of him as one of the best. It was praised for the quality of the acting and for the way it expresses itself in cinematic terms. Not all critics were as impressed as the majority, but even the more negative voices were impressed by the cinematography. Furhammar has argued that “Hasse Ekman is probably the greatest cinematic storyteller we've ever had.” (Furhammar 1991:237, trans.) And the critics at the time seemed to share that assessment. Ekman used editing and camera movement to tell his stories and took advantage of the cinematic elements that make film different from theatre. An example from *With You In My Arms* exemplifies his editing style. At one point a character is talking and Ekman cuts the scene in the middle of a sentence. In the next shot another character is continuing that sentence at another location. The first half and the second half of the sentence are spoken in two different shots, in different places, at different times, and the link between the two places is the sentence. This is a way of storytelling that Orson Welles made famous in *Citizen Kane* (1941), but Ekman did this before Welles. This, though, is not to argue that Ekman was the first to do this, because it might very well have been done before. Neither is it meant to imply that Ekman influenced Welles, because the possibility that Welles saw *With You In My Arms* is rather slim. They were just both thinking along similar lines, independently of one another. Ekman's next film, however, would clearly influence a later film of considerable fame. Ekman's film was called *Flames In the Dark* * (*Lågor i dunklet*, 1942) and the film that followed it was *Hets*, written by Ingmar Bergman and directed by Alf Sjöberg.

Flames in the Dark synopsis:

Latin teacher Birger Sjögren is rushed to his mother's side, at her deathbed. After she has said that she is afraid of what will happen when she can no longer look after him she dies.

Sometime later Birger is married to Eva and working at a school, feared and hated by his students. Another teacher, Rolf Nordmark, on the other hand is a favourite among the students and he tries to intervene between the students and Birger. He is also, secretly, in love with Eva. Birger is clearly a psychopath and also an arsonist, and when his fits of anger and jealousy gets out of control he sets buildings on fire. But he is found out by one of the students and after first trying to cover his tracks, including trying to kill Rolf, he finally commits suicide, and Rolf and Eva can then be together.

In *With You In My Arms* a small part was given to Stig Järrel, a Swedish comic actor and friend of Ekman. It was the beginning of a long and mutually beneficial working relationship. In *The First Division* Järrel got a bigger part and this time a dramatic one, not comic. For *Flames in the Dark* Ekman finally gave Järrel the leading part. This time it is not only a dramatic part but a demonic one. Ekman was eager to see whether he could do psychological drama (Ekman 1955: 144), and he wrote the script with help from Dagmar Edqvist.⁷ Inspiration came partly from a film by Richard Thorpe and with Robert Montgomery in the lead, *Night Must Fall*.⁸ Ekman's film in turn also has a successor, since the character of Birger Sjögren has clear links with Järrel's role in Bergman/Sjöberg's *Hets* made two years later, where Järrel again plays a conflicted demonic Latin teacher who frightens and threatens his students.

The film was deemed too violent and disturbing by the censors so it was held up for weeks, and the head of the censorship bureau said that it was the most unpleasant film he had seen whilst working as a censor. After a battle in the media, the film was released, with some cuts. (Forslund 1982: 157-158) Yet again, the critics were on the whole favourable towards Ekman and the film. In *Stockholms-Tidningen* the reviewer felt that: "Hasse Ekman continues as a man of surprises, he, Swedish cinema's 'kid with the filmic sense'" (Larz 1942, trans.). Interestingly, in *En liten bok om Hasse*, Furhammar writes that at the beginning of his career Ekman was treated badly by the film critics (Furhammar, Åhlund, 1993: 64) but as has been shown here that was not the case.

At the end of 1942 Ekman had made in total four films which were released to largely positive reviews and good box office figures. He had laid the groundwork for what was to come but before proceeding to what is arguably Ekman's first really personal film, *Changing Trains*, it might be worth summing up Ekman's achievements so far.

Ekman had proved that he was a multi-talented filmmaker and he had won both the praise of the critics and the love of the crowds. At the annual film critics' award gala in 1942, Ekman won the award for best film, for *The First Division*, and *Flames in the Dark* came in second, tied with a film by Gustaf Molander, *The Battle Goes On** (*Striden går vidare*, 1941). He had

⁷ According to Ekman Dagmar Edqvist was approached to make the script more psychologically truthful. This was because "she had once been secretary to a professor of psychiatry" (Ekman 1955: 145)

⁸ The play is written by Emllyn Williams and the film version was adopted by John Van Druten and directed by Richard Thorpe, starring Robert Montgomery and Rosalind Russell.

demonstrated his deft handling of narrative and his ability to get the most out of his actors. He had shown a willingness to do things differently and he and Stig Järrel had struck up a partnership which was mutually beneficial. Several themes which would eventually become the cornerstones of his art had already been established, such as the question of identities (which is present in three of the films, the exception being *The First Division*), people playing parts, people not showing their true selves, either because they will not or because they cannot. What is also there is a wish to flee the boredom of everyday life and the burden of conformity. Ekman's disregard of, or at least distance from, society's conventions has also been established, even though this is something which will be more pronounced later in his career, as this thesis will argue. The theme of painters and paintings had also been introduced. Stylistically, the films were varied, with the lighting dictated by the story, but two things unite them, the use of long takes and an efficient and imaginative editing technique.

So a number of good and interesting films firmly established Ekman as an important filmmaker in the industry. Yet it was with the next film that Ekman for the first time showed his full potential, and for the first time told a personal story in a setting he knew well. And it is this film that the next section will focus on.

2:3 Enter the theatre

Changing Trains synopsis:

The fragile actress Inga is trying to get to see the theatre owner, and actor, Leo Waller. He refuses to see her, and afterwards she collapses in front of the theatre. She is taken to hospital and the doctor says that she has a fatal heart condition. She decides to take the train home to see her grandmother, and on a train station she meets Kim, a former boyfriend. They sit down in a café and begin to talk about their past. They were very much in love but eventually she had to choose between him and her acting career and she choose her career. Part of the reason was that she had been seduced by Leo Waller, the man who now wants nothing to do with her. Kim, who is on his way to South America, says that he never stopped loving her, and they spend the night together. The next morning he asks her to wait for him when he comes back from his trip, and she says yes, although she knows she will no longer be alive then. She never tells him about her illness.

As has been said, Ekman was born into the theatre and although his films do not feel theatrical or static he would from *Changing Trains* and onwards use the theatre as the setting for several of his films. The theatrical world is more than just a setting, however. As shall be discussed repeatedly throughout the thesis, the theatre also has thematic meanings. It is a place of refuge from real life, a haven from the constraints and boredom of petit-bourgeois existence. The theatre, as a place and as a metaphor, is a central aspect of Ekman's work as an auteur. In *Changing Trains* the following exchange takes place

“What do you want to do?”

“Become an actress!”

“How I envy you.”

and this is a representative quote for Ekman's films. Even in films with no overt theatre setting there would usually be a few scenes at a theatre, or some other performative space, such as a circus, a radio or television station. The treatment of these various performative outlets is not the same, however. Television and radio are ridiculed and are not accorded the same reverence as the theatre. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Changing Trains is told in flashbacks. We are moving back and forth in time, between hope and despair, between love and betrayal, life and death. The one thing that remains constant is the theatre. In *Changing Trains* the theatre almost has a life of its own. The film breathes the dusty air of dressing rooms, costume wardrobes and the stage. The audience gets to see the rehearsals, the back stage discussions, the dressing room gossip and the anxious wait for the reviews in the morning papers after opening night. Everybody gets some attention, from the manager to the night watchman. In one scene, the janitor says “I agree with old Frippe, the people of the theatre are all rabble, but yet they're the only ones you can live with”, a line which shall be repeated in later films. All these milieus, all of these scenes, will recur in Ekman's films.

After the opening sequence we are left with a question. Who is this woman, and what is her story? As the film progresses, the audience learns more about her, and where she comes from, and where she is going. But a crucial thing in the film is that only the audience is given the full picture of any particular character. The fact that we know more than the characters in the film adds poignancy. The fact that Inga is dying is kept as a secret between us and her. She

then continues to act, even if she is no longer on the stage. This time she is acting not for an audience but for Kim. By being untruthful, by playing a part instead of being her true self, she makes him happier than he would otherwise have been.

The film is based on a short novel with the same name, which had come out ten years earlier. When Ekman decided to make a film based on it he met with the writer, Walter Ljungquist, to discuss the project. Ljungquist agreed and filming commenced. (Ekman 1955: 154-155) It would be the first of six films they made together. It should be noted that there are many differences between the source novel and the finished film, changes which reveal something about Ekman's concerns and ideas. One such idea, or perhaps philosophy, is the conscious effort to try and evade the unpleasant aspects of life and to hang on to the good parts, the beautiful, precious things that make it all worthwhile. In the film, contrary to the book, Inga never tells anyone that she has a heart condition and is going to die, she keeps that to herself. Towards the end, Kim tells Inga that they must: "forget about everything, and just be really happy." Of course, that sentiment will only take them so far. But the most important change from book to film is the expansion of the story and the change of focus from Kim (in the book) to Inga (in the film). In the book there are no flashbacks, no tales about the theatre, and no Leo Waller. Whilst it is true that Inga is an actor in the book, this is only mentioned in passing a few times, this is not what the book is about. In the film, she and her theatre career are given more scrutiny.

The film is not, however, only about the theatre. It is also about Ekman. The leading character in the film is the woman, Inga Dahl, but it is through the men that Ekman touches on the more personal issues. Bengt Forslund has argued that Leo Waller, the Great Actor and creative force of the theatre, have strong similarities with Ekman's father, Gösta Ekman, (Forslund 1982: 164), whereas Ekman has stated that Kim, the young man, is a portrait of himself, (Ekman 1955: 155), an analogy which is, perhaps obviously, emphasised by the fact that he is playing the part himself. Inga, on the other hand, is inspired by the Norwegian-Swedish actress Tutta Rolf, with whom Ekman for most of the 1930s had been deeply in love with, without it being reciprocated. (Forslund 1982: 202-203, Ekman 1955: 155) This resonance is also emphasised by the fact that Inga is played by Wigert, a Norwegian actress who came to Sweden in 1939. Whereas Forslund may have argued that Leo Waller was Ekman's portrait of his father, Ekman in his autobiography *Den vackra ankungen* stipulates that Waller was a portrait of his rival for Tutta Rolf's affections, the American Jack Donohue. Ditto: 155). This is not to

suggest that what happens to the characters in the film is based on what happened in real life, but rather that the film can be seen as an allegory for the triangle Ekman, Rolf and Donohue found themselves in, and that the film is full of possible autobiographical readings. For the problems with doing autobiographical readings of works of art, see the beginning of this thesis.

The first time Kim is seen he is leaving his home and his parents because he is going to South America. It is clear that he has a strained relationship with his father and that his wish to get away from it all is strong. It is the first of many complex father and son relationships and although it is not the aim of this thesis to do a psychoanalytic analysis of Ekman and his films, it is still worth pointing out that this is a recurring motif in Ekman's work. Also noteworthy is the fact that Ekman has changed the destination for Kim's trip. In the book he is going to Sumatra, one of the Indonesian islands, but in the film he is going to South America. This is not the only allusion to South America in Ekman's films, since longing for that continent connects a number of his characters. But why South America?

As was mentioned in the introduction, during the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century an immense number of Swedes emigrated to the USA and to a lesser extent Australia. But a substantial number also went to South America, in particular Brazil and Argentina. The reasons why Swedes emigrated was the poverty and the harsh weather conditions in Sweden, with the plains of Brazil and Argentina evoking the appeal of rich, warm and fertile land. At this time, Brazil and Argentina were developing fast, becoming modern nations, so it was not just the poor who went, but professional engineers and artists, most famously perhaps the singer and poet Evert Taube. The strong connections between Sweden and South America continued to exist, even after Sweden became rich and prosperous in its own right and emigration ended. When Ekman was invoking South America with such regularity it is partly because of this cultural history and partly because it represented warmth and a more relaxed way of life, regardless of whether this relaxed lifestyle was mythical or real. But as with the theatre, South America also becomes a metaphor for the need for escape from everyday life, from the same constraints and restrictions that all his main characters fear, and many suffer from. There will be several examples of this as Ekman's oeuvre is further explored in the thesis.

It seems clear that *Changing Trains* meant something special for Ekman. He chose the source, and transformed it into something unique and personal. After having shown that he knew the craft, he now showed that he was also an artist, with something to say. He had something to share with the audience. Unfortunately, his first audience consisted of one man, Lorens Marmstedt, the producer, and he was most dissatisfied. Marmstedt felt that Ekman had been too influenced by French filmmakers such as Renoir and Carné, and that Ekman and Sonja Wigert were not exactly Jean Gabin and Michèle Morgan, try as they may. (Ekman 1955: 156)⁹ Both stylistically and in terms of the general mood of the film *Changing Trains* does give the impression of having been influenced by Carné and Jacques Prévert, as were Bergman and several other Swedish filmmakers at the time. A feeling of sadness, of a shadow of death hanging over the characters, is palpable. The look of the film also brings to mind the French school. A hazy glow, use of rain and mist, and an expressionistic but simultaneously subdued use of shadow are among the visual traits that link Ekman's film with French predecessors. Yet though there are visual links, the film is still a unique work as it is filled with Ekman's personal concerns and his own view of characters, not to mention the links between the film and Ekman's own life. Even though Marmstedt had his concerns, when the film critics voted for best Swedish film of the season *Changing Trains* won. Alf Sjöberg's *The Heavenly Play* came in second. (Forslund 1982: 164) Ekman could feel confident that making something so personal would pay off.

Changing Trains is also important because it was the first time Ekman worked with the cinematographer Göran Strindberg and the editor Lennart Wallén. Ekman and Strindberg would make five films together, and they are among Ekman's visually most accomplished. It has occasionally been noted that Ekman's films have a look reminiscent of film noir, but this seems to be primarily the case on the films shot by Strindberg. It is reasonable to say that Strindberg brought to Ekman's films a richer and more stylish visual texture, at least as far as lighting is concerned. Strindberg would photograph an impressive number of the most notable Swedish films of the 1940s and early-1950s, working with Bergman on several, with Sjöberg on *Miss Julie* and with Mattsson on *One Summer of Happiness*, among others. To call Strindberg a 'mini-auteur', borrowing Paul Coates phrase introduced in Chapter 1, seems

⁹ Gabin and Morgan acted together as a doomed couple in *Port of Shadows* (*Quai des brumes* 1938), under the direction of Marcel Carné. Interestingly enough, in his book *Images: My Life in Film* (Faber and Faber 1995), Ingmar Bergman writes that in 1946, when he made *It Rains on Our Love* (*Det regnar på vår kärlek*) for Lorens Marmstedt, Bergman too was scolded by Marmstedt for trying to be Carné and his lead actor for trying to be Jean Gabin.

appropriate. Wallén on the other hand was one of Sweden's most accomplished editors and after *Changing Trains* he and Ekman made 20 films together. Ekman's imaginative use of associative editing had been in place already from his first film, so whether Wallén introducing something new to Ekman's films is debatable. However, since Ekman was a filmmaker who was very conscious of the power of editing and used it so creatively, working closely with the same editor must have been invaluable.

By now, Ekman can be said to fulfil all the requirements of an auteur. Although his oeuvre as yet amounted to only five films, the consistencies were considerable and this despite working in different genres and with different crews. *Changing Trains* also firmly establishes Ekman as an internal auteur, one who makes his own life part of the film, and who plays an active part before as well as behind the camera. Barthes may have claimed that "it is language which speaks, not the author" (Barthes 1977: 143), but only the author would be able to tell personal stories and it is often the ideas and obsessions of the author that make one individual film different from all other films. Language and discourse matters, but they are not *all* that matters, individuals are essential too. At the same time, it is also clear that what interests Ekman are people, individuals, rather than the nation or history, and this is something that will be discussed further on in the thesis.

2:4 Films in a time of war

The bulk of the films Ekman made in 1943 and 1944 were connected to the war. *A Day Will Come* was set during the Winter War in Finland, *An Occupation for Men** (*Ett yrke för män*, 1944) was a short film about the army, and *His Excellency* (*Excellensen* 1944) was an existential drama revolving around the Nazi persecution of an intellectual. Ekman also made a film about life in an office in wartime Stockholm, which was a return to a lighter mood albeit with serious undertones: *Common People** (*Som folk är mest*, 1944).

His Excellency synopsis:

A birthday party is given for the author and public intellectual Herbert von Blankenau. His country is threatened by Germany and the Nazis, and there is a strong indigenous Nazi movement. Von Blankenau's daughter, Elisabeth, is fascinated by their rhetoric and is in love with a local Nazi leader, Max Karbe. But when the Germans invade von Blankenau's principal objections means he must leave the country for his own safety. On the train to the

border he gives his identity papers to a German refugee and is instead captured and sent to a concentration camp. The commandant is Karbe and Elisabeth pleads with him, and goes to Berlin as well, to try to save her father's life. Karbe is becoming increasingly critical of Nazism, and what the German's are doing to his country, so he quits and decides to join the opposition. But it is too late for von Blankenau who has been shot and killed.

It was Lorens Marmstedt's idea to do *His Excellency*, and he let Ekman direct it. (Ekman 1955: 161) It is more of a chamber play, not scripted by Ekman but by Sven Stolpe, and based on a play by Bertil Malmberg. It is a battle between moral superiority and raw power, where morality eventually triumphs, even if the cost is high. It is not clear where the film is set but in the original play both the country, Austria, and the concentration camp, Buchenwald, are named. Due to censorship rules in Sweden the locations were kept anonymous, otherwise it would not have been possible for the film to be released. The critics were pleased with the fact that *His Excellency* was not only made but could actually be shown. In *Svensk film under Andra världskriget* (Olsson 1979), the film gets a lot of attention and Olsson goes as far as to suggest that *His Excellency* is one of the most important works of art made during the war. It is certainly unique in a Swedish context for its outspokenness against Nazism, even though the names have been withheld. It is also another example of the interest Ekman had in people and their drives and motives. *His Excellency* is about the importance of the individual and the freedom of that individual and this is something that all of Ekman's characters can relate to. All wish to be free to pursue their own dreams. Few have been under such a threat as Blankenau, but the principle is the same. This shall be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Both *A Day Will Come* and *His Excellency* are still somewhat unusual in form and content for Ekman. For his next film, *Common People*, Ekman wanted to be closer to home, in present-day Stockholm instead of Austria, and the film is more traditionally Ekman-esque. He also got a new contract making him head of production, which meant that he had considerable freedom as a filmmaker but would also take full responsibility for the production. He is credited as writer, director and producer and, to revisit V.F. Perkins in Chapter 1, Ekman now had almost complete control. However, the script is not an original but based on three different one-act plays by Herbert Grevenius. Grevenius, who was a leading playwright and theatre critic at the time, also worked with Bergman and he will be returned to.

Common People synopsis:

The film is about the lives of ordinary workers in Stockholm. In the centre is the couple Inga and Kurre. She works as a typist at an office and he works in a warehouse. They have very little money and feel that they cannot get married, even though they would like to. But they have lost the spark and Kurre is being drawn to another woman, whereas Inga is having problem with a dictatorial middle manager at her office. Both Inga and Kurre dream of a better life, now they feel trapped and bored, and frustrated with the lack of money. But after they spend a night together in an elevator, that is stuck, they decide to give their relationship another chance.

In *His Excellency* Stig Järrel had played a cruel Nazi officer and in *Common People* Järrel returns. This time as Enander, the cruel manager at Inga's office, complete with a Hitler moustache. The film concerns the employees at the office, their everyday dreams and hopes and aspirations, constantly living in fear of Enander's watchful eye and the threat of unemployment and poverty. The film begins with a sequence of shots showing the main characters waking up in the morning, and the different ways they react to the alarm clock. Here in one brief montage Ekman has introduced not only the characters but also the main theme of the film, such as the conflict between spontaneity and rigidity (Enander is seen sitting in bed with a wrist watch in his hand, impatiently waiting for the alarm clock to go off). In the centre is a young couple, Inga and Kurre, who want to get married but since they do not earn enough money they are reluctant to do the deed. At work life is difficult, especially since Enander, the office manager, is so unforgiving and strict, keeping an eye on everybody and reprimanding them if they are a minute late. The office has glass walls and through the use of deep focus cinematography, Enander can be seen moving around in the background of the shot, his presence felt even though he is not part of the scene. He has a scientific mind and has a mantra which he often repeats; having a method is key for everything. Inga works at 'his' office and one of the story-lines in the film is the conflict between them. This is introduced by the kind of cut that is typical of Ekman. In the beginning of the film, Inga is seen entering a room and closing a door behind her. As soon as the door is shut, Ekman cuts to a shot of another door just as it is about to be opened by Enander, followed by him entering another room. Even though they have not been properly introduced yet, nor has their relation to each other been established, the two characters are linked visually through this cut, while also showing the opposition between them. If she closes a door, he opens it.

Another story-line is the frustration and boredom that both Kurre and Inga feel with their present condition. At one point a friend of Kurre says that Inga is rather attractive, to which Kurre replies: "Is she? I've stopped noticing that, since I see her all the time." In another scene Inga comes home, tired and exasperated after a bad day at the office. After sitting with her head in her hands she turns on a record and slowly begins dancing with herself, her back to the camera, dreaming of just fleeing her existence. She does not say where she would like to go, but Kurre at one point talks longingly about moving to "South America, the land of the future".

But in the end all is resolved satisfactorily and even the cruel manager shows a human side after accidentally getting drunk at the office party, together with the watchman. It is a typical Swedish solution perhaps, with everybody making nice and class distinctions becoming blurred. A positive message for the home front. But at the same time, when Inga and Kurre resolve their differences during a night when they are trapped in an elevator at her office, the film ends with her saying that she would prefer to stay at home and try to make things work rather than move away, with the words: "This is good enough." It is not exactly a passionate sentiment but rather more realistic. The film addresses many of Ekman's concerns, and he clearly links a fanatic attention to orderliness, efficiency and time management, to a 'scientification' of society, with fascism. Unfortunately, *Common People* has barely registered in the annals of Swedish cinema. It is not even mentioned in the one book written specifically about Ekman, Furhammar's *En liten bok om Hasse*. In a way it is not that surprising since the film is an unassuming comedy of manners. But it is also interesting for its acutely observed scenes from the daily lives of ordinary Swedes and it is rather moving. This is an example of how by focusing on ordinary people, without having to introduce strong drama, tragedy or action, it is possible to capture a specific time and place, and in so doing tell a story that is more than simply about the individuals in the film. This is the kind of film that the majority of the audience in 1944 would be able to relate to, and at the same time it today becomes a document of not only cinema at the time, but of society, regardless of whether this was intended or not.

Another important film from 1944 was one Ekman neither wrote nor directed, *Stop! Thing About Something Else** (*Stopp! Tänk på något annat*). It was written by Olle Hedberg and directed by Åke Ohberg, and is an ambitious drama about two young lovers, movingly played

by Ekman and Eva Henning. It is the pairing of the two that makes the film important because not only were they very good together, but they also began a professional as well as personal relationship, and for the rest of the decade they would be a team. Henning made comparatively few films, and primarily with three directors, Ohberg, Ekman and Bergman. But it is for her films with Ekman that she has become famous, and her importance for Ekman and his films will be discussed later.

The next year, 1945, was an important year. The war ended, and in the Swedish film world Ingmar Bergman made his first film as writer and director, *Crisis (Kris)*, released the following year. Things would rapidly change from now on, and to a large extent for the better. It would be one of Ekman's most successful years, artistically as well as commercially.

2:5 First peak year

These were exhausting times for Ekman. In his autobiography he writes of how, around midsummer 1944, he collapsed on a chair and thought: “It cannot go on like this! For sixteen months I have directed four feature films, one short film and one theatre play: I have played four parts and written three scripts. [...] This has got to stop, this has definitely got to stop!” (Ekman 1955: 164, trans.) In view of this quote, it might come as a surprise that after that he made three films in a row, from late autumn of 1944 until the summer of 1945. Even more surprising perhaps is that those three films were so successful, all gained very good reviews, and are today considered among Ekman's very best. They are *Royal Rabble** (*Kungliga patrasket*), *Wandering With the Moon (Vandring med månen)* and *Little Märta Steps Forward** (*Fram för lilla Märta*). To call 1945 a peak year would not appear to be hyperbole, and even though Bergman's first film came out this year Ekman was still alone at the top.

Royal Rabble synopsis:

The film begins back stage on a theatre in Stockholm. The performance is over and the actors are removing their makeup while the owner of the theatre is being interviewed. Most of them are part of the same family, Anker, including the owner. He is also one of Sweden's leading actors, and now he is trying to come up with an idea for a new play. The next show is also a hit, but he gets involved with a young actress. The family slowly breaks apart, and the children decide that they do no longer want to be actors. In the end though they all come together for a performance of a famous play by Hjalmar Bergman, “Swedenhielms”.

It was a film Ekman was desperate to make, and allegedly he wrote a large part of it at his favourite bar, Cecil's, because he did not have a home at this point. (Ditto: 171). This is worth mentioning since Cecil's bar will appear later in the thesis. (It was also where he and Stig Järrel developed the character Birger, the Latin teacher in *Flames in the Dark*). *Royal Rabble* is Ekman's second theatre film and like *Changing Trains*, a film with autobiographical elements, or at least a family resemblance. It is the first time Ekman introduces the Anker family to his audience. From now on, characters with the name Anker will appear from time to time in Ekman's films, whenever there is a theatre setting. It is tempting to see the Anker family as a screen version of the Ekman family, but sometimes the connections are more tenuous than real. In *Royal Rabble*, however, the similarities should be noted. It is one of the most explicit examples of him as an internal auteur.

At its centre is Stefan Anker, the great actor and head of the family. The family consists of his wife Betty, his children Tommy and Monica and his parents Karl-Hugo and Charlotta. The film follows them, much like *Changing Trains*, through rehearsals, repetitions, script readings, dressings and dressing downs, opening nights and nightly wakes for the arrival of the reviews. As in *Changing Trains*, the theatre almost becomes a character in its own right. To add to the interconnections between the films, the title of *Royal Rabble* refers to the line from *Changing Trains*, quoted above, about the people of the theatre being "all rabble". While espousing this romantic view of the theatre, the film also looks at the strains that the theatre life puts on the family, and especially the egomania of Stefan Anker.

Royal Rabble got lyrical reviews when it was released in January of 1945. It was perhaps, from a critical perspective, Ekman's most successful film to date. One leading critic, Stig Almqvist, wrote: "If ever a Swedish film has been the work of one man, it is *Royal Rabble*. Had the result been less good, all criticism would have been directed against Hasse: now on the other hand it is he who will be covered in flowers more than anyone else." (Almqvist 1945, trans.) And most critics noticed the similarities between the family Anker, especially Stefan Anker, and the Ekman family and Gösta Ekman.

Despite being a very accomplished and emotional work, the film has one weakness, and that is the visuals, which are plain and lack character. The cinematographer is Hilding Bladh and the film would have been enhanced by Strindberg's lighting. Furthermore, a case can be made

that the films of Ekman photographed by Bladh are his least visually interesting. Bladh's body of work also lacks films that stand out with one exception, Bergman's *Sawdust and Tinsel*, which Bladh co-photographed with Sven Nykvist. This is not primarily meant as an attack on Bladh's possible lack of imagination but an attempt to argue that the visual quality of Ekman's films to some degree is dependent upon who his cinematographer is, as there will be further examples in future chapters. The style of shooting will not differ, or the length of shots, but the lighting will, and lighting is an important component in any film.

But the themes and the characters are Ekman's own contribution. The opening of the film takes place after an evening's performance and all the actors and the members of the Anker family are changing back into everyday clothes. It is like a montage of short scenes from one dressing room after another, while in his office the great actor is preparing for interviews and meetings with writers and actors who seek to be hired by him. Long after all the other family members have gone home and to bed, Stefan Anker leaves the theatre. When he comes home, late in the night, he wakes everybody up so they can have a meeting in the kitchen. Whilst he is making lamb chops, he talks about his idea for the next project for their theatre.

When Gösta Ekman died in 1938, a book was published to honour his memory. Several people who had worked with him, and members of his own family, wrote essays and shared their memories about him. Ekman was among those who contributed and in his essay he wrote (among other things):

Never again will I see him, never again will I hear his voice. Never again will I sit on a chair out in the kitchen on Artillerigatan [Artillery Street] at two o'clock in the night and listen to his elaborations on plays, roles, projects and rehearsals, whilst he himself is standing by the stove with a pan in one hand and a list of parts in the other.

I hear him say

- Whatever I might know, how to fry a lamb chop I do know." (Ekman 1938: 7, trans.)

That is the scene, almost word for word, that was described above. So it is clear that Ekman, when writing *Royal Rabble*, was drawing on real life events. Some well-known, other more private, and some perhaps unintentional. That is not to say that Stefan Anker and Gösta Ekman are the same person, but such a reading is possible. Or rather that the connections between the real man and the fictional character are so clear that failing to draw attention to it

would be a mistake.

As he usually does, Ekman also plays a part in *Royal Rabble*, and the part he is playing is Tommy Anker, the son of Stefan Anker. As was mentioned earlier, in *Intermezzo* Ekman plays the son and his own father, Gösta, plays the father. Here, Ekman plays the role of the son to his fictionalised father, and the actor playing the father is the one actor who had been like a father figure for Ekman during his own career, Edvin Adolphson. (It should be mentioned that Ekman was still fairly young, he was only 29 when he made *Royal Rabble*.) In *Intermezzo* there is a scene in which father and son are having an argument, about the father always being absent, never taking an interest in the family. Similar scenes are to be found in *Royal Rabble*. Also, in the opening sequence the following dialogue between the son and a fellow actor takes place in his dressing room:

- I think Ibsen is overrated. Now, if you compare him to Strindberg...
- Why do you have to compare? I think it is silly.
- Said the son who does not want to be compared to his great father.

This dialogue is rich in connotation but there is no need to go further here than to point out the mood of art imitating life.

Royal Rabble was the first film Ekman directed which had Eva Henning in it, and she would from now on be his leading lady. In *Royal Rabble* she does not play the lead however, that comes first with Ekman's next film of 1945.

Wandering With the Moon synopsis:

Dan, a young man, is walking along a country road in the summer evening. A bus drives up beside him and the driver asks for directions. A young woman, Pia, jumps off the bus and decides to walk with Dan for a while. She and all the others on the bus belong to a travelling theatre company and they are going to perform in the small town where Dan lives. When Dan later returns home he has a fight with his dad, saying "I can't stand you. I can't stand myself, and I can't stand my office" Dan then decides to leave his home and his father. The next day he meets a bum, also aimlessly out walking, and later in the evening he hooks up with Pia. During the course of a few days they travel around and meet various strangers, some kind, some frightening. They also run into some men who are smuggling guns to the Germans. In

the end they are again walking along a country road, under the same moon that was shining upon them in the beginning of the film.

This film, which Ekman made in the spring of 1945, was the second collaboration between Ekman and the writer Walter Ljungquist. Ekman was for the first time not working at Terra with Marmstedt but for the rival studio, SF. The reason he was working for SF instead of Terra was that SF owned the rights to the novel *Vandring med månen*, and the new head of production at SF wanted Ekman do make it into a film. Ekman agreed to do it on condition that he could give a part to Eva Henning and work together with Ljungquist on the script, to which SF agreed. (Forslund 1982: 174)

It is not a film with a clear linear structure but rather an episodic, lyrical narrative. It is also a film about innocence and innocence lost; and, which often goes hand in hand with this, virginity and sexual inexperience. The first night Pia says to Dan: “Do you want to be my lover? I've never been with another man.” He cannot deal with this revelation; the thought of her and possibly himself as sexual beings makes him uncomfortable and even disgusted. But at the end of the film she finally makes him succumb, and they are both in a sense liberated.

Their walk together in the beginning is done in one long take and that the sequence is repeated in the last scene of the film. Yet another example of how Ekman links the beginning and the end together, here with Dan walking on a country road, talking to the moon. The difference is that whereas he was alone in the first scene, in the last scene he is with Pia. Dan and Pia meet a lot of different characters along the way and it is illuminating to look more closely at some of them. On his own Dan first meets a vagabond, played by Stig Järrel. The vagabond has an ironic and open-minded approach to life and misery. A poet and a philosopher, he takes things as they come and argues that nothing is important, that he himself is an insignificant being, one “who's name is written in running water” as he puts it. However, he praises the youth and is anxious for the couple to get a head start, before they too become cynical. This is the one thing that connects the various characters Dan and Pia encounter, the wish to protect and/or pity youth, for the experienced know that the idealism and hope of the young will inevitably give way to the cynicism and disappointment of adulthood and maturity.

They meet a careworn old woman (played by Hjördis Pettersson) who is the keeper of an inn where they spend the night, and she tells them that only those who gamble in life will really

live. They also meets a priest (Gösta Cederlund) who, when Dan confesses that he is an atheist says: “Well, I prefer an honest atheist to a dishonest Christian.”. But another piece of advice they all give is that in order to get ahead in life, they need to learn to use masks, to hide their true identities, because, as a crippled man played by Ekman says: “Everybody walks around with a mask.” The woman at the inn says that in order to remain sane and be able to function in the world “You must always try and be something other than you really are.”, and use irony as an escape mechanism. At one point when Dan is exasperated with all the hopelessness and cynicism he encounters, he demands to know if there is no belief in goodness, to be told that yes, there is goodness, but it is so desperately fragile. Yet despite these sometimes uncomfortable truths, most of the people they meet see something hopeful in the love and idealism that Dan and Pia radiate. It is as if these people become spokespersons for different ideas, for Ekman's view of life, as they speak of the need to hide behind masks, of the apparent inevitability of cynicism and boredom, how experience and conformity stifles life. At the same time there is also hope, the hope of breaking free from conventions and traditions, for example by devoting oneself to the arts, in particular the theatre. These themes, together with the loose narrative and the poetic imagery, are also what make this film a good example of the similarities between Ekman and Jean Renoir, and their shared sensibility.

Wandering With the Moon got good reviews. According to the film critic and historian, Bengt Idestam-Ahlqvist, writing under the name Robin Hood: “Wandering With the Moon has poetry. That is its great allure.” (Hood 1945, trans.) That remains one of the main strengths of the film and part of that is due to the episodic structure and the lyrical images of the country. The cinematographer this time was Gösta Roosling, who hardly ever worked on feature films. His expertise was in newsreels and documentaries of people and nature. It is possible that Ekman chose him for this purpose.

Little Märta Steps Forward synopsis:

Sture and Kurre are best friends and share a flat together. They are both unemployed and when the landlady demands that they pay their rent Sture, who is a musician, has to dress up as a woman and seek employment in an all-female band, and so Sture becomes Märta. Due to her forceful personality she is much admired by the feminist group in the small town where s/he is performing and they ask her to stand in the general election. She does, and she wins enough votes to go to parliament in Stockholm. There she becomes a firebrand politician, fighting women causes. Kurre meanwhile has fallen in love with Barbro, one of the other

members of the band, which is complicated because he poses as Märta's fiancé. After her session in Stockholm however Märta disappears and Sture returns. Now Kurre can declare his love to Barbro, while Sture and another band member, Inga, also get together. In gratitude to the work Märta has done, a statue of her is raised in the town.

It is a much more light-hearted film than the previous one, shot during the summer and with its première on 29 September 1945. Since working at SF on *Wandering With the Moon* was an anomaly, Ekman was now back at Terra. *Little Märta Steps Forward* would turn out to be Terra's greatest financial success so far (Forslund 1982: 176), so they were probably very happy about Ekman's return. Ekman wrote the script specifically with Järrel in mind for the title character, since he wanted to do something with Järrel wearing a skirt. (Ekman 1955: 177-178) It is a very interesting film and again the theme of the film is role-playing and play acting, and the way the role we are playing determines our personality, or, perhaps, that our personalities are fluent and shifting, depending upon the circumstances.

The film is a comedy, and it is rather hesitant even from the start. The first title card reads "Terrafilm presents" and the next card reads "somewhat reluctant", and yet another card mentions: "the so-called plot". But despite this playfulness, the suffering of some of the female characters is sincerely felt and it does raise interesting questions, which are in keeping with one of Ekman's pet themes, the elusiveness of identity. *Lilla Märta Steps Forward* got great reviews. The feminist and occasional film critic Barbro Alving, writing under the name Bang, wrote: "As a grey-haired champion of the female cause and a sincere citizen I welcome little Märta Letterström from Lillköping with all my heart as our pitiful community is so short on public figures with initiative, force and charisma. A handful of women like this and Swedish parliament can close shop." (Bang 1945, trans.)

The story has an unusual framing device. It is set in the future, where an old man and a young girl drive past Lillköping, the (fictional) town where the main story takes place. They stop in the centre and the old man shows a big statue of the young girl. It is a statue of Märta, the pride of Lillköping. In a brave new world, women might perhaps eventually be the rulers. This is then another example of Ekman's feminist side, and even if this was a light-hearted film, the oppression of women will be dealt with in darker mood later in Ekman's career.

That concludes Ekman's first years as a filmmaker, the war years. Those were extraordinary

years for Swedish cinema in general and for Ekman in particular. The immediate post-war era would also be remarkable and the next section will deal with this period. This was when Ekman solidified his position in Swedish film culture but it was also when he suddenly found himself with a rival. Ingmar Bergman. So far it has been possible to discuss Ekman without reference to Ingmar Bergman. That is no longer the case, because by this time Bergman had not only become a powerful presence in Swedish cinema, but both his and Ekman's collaboration had started, as had their rivalry.

2:6 Urbanity, self-reflexivity and dialogue

One of the key aspects of Ekman's filmmaking career is that, unlike almost any other Swedish director before the 1960s, he made hardly any rural films or films set in the countryside. It might be argued that Ekman was the only completely urban filmmaker in Sweden at the time, and for several decades to come. *Wandering With the Moon* and *Little Märta Steps Forward* are two lone exceptions. Additionally, he made only two films that were set in the past, *The Jazz Boy* and his last film *The Marriage Wrestler** (*Äktenskapsbrottaren*, 1964). His was a cinema of the here and now, and of the city. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, rural films were one of the most popular types in Sweden, and the 'summer films' were almost a genre in their own right. A prime example was *One Summer of Happiness*, but many of Bergman's films in the 1950s were 'summer films' as well, like *Summer Interlude* (*Sommarlek*, 1951) and *Summer with Monika* (*Sommaren med Monica*, 1953). Schamyl Bauman made most of his films in a rural setting, or in the archipelago, which was signalled already in their titles, such as *Rospiggar* (1942), the title is the Swedish name for those who live in Roslagen, a rural area just north of Stockholm), *In Darkest Småland** (*I mörkaste Småland*, 1943) and its sequel *The Girls In Småland** (*Flickorna i Småland*, 1945) refer to Småland, which is a rural area in the south of Sweden. By contrast, with the exception of the above-mentioned films, and the war movie *A Day Will Come*, Ekman stayed clear of life outside the big cities and when a film did partly take place in a provincial town, the town was criticised for being boring, small-minded and full of gossip. One reason for this is that, judging by his films, Ekman had a sophisticated view of the world, he was tolerant and modern, and that this world-view was easier to accommodate in a big city than in the countryside. Another recurring theme in his films is the fear of boredom and stagnation and this is something more likely to happen in the countryside than in the city. His strong interest in the artistic world is also another reason why it feels natural that his films should be so urban, given the norms of Swedish cinema. Another reason

for this urbanity is that Ekman preferred to make films about milieus he was familiar with, and about people that he knew. He once said that: “He did not like to work in milieus that he did not know, had not seen; he did not like to deal with characters that he had not shaken hands with, had never offered a cigarette to or asked what time it was; it made him feel insecure.” (Ekman 1955: 162, trans.) Even though Ekman had made several successful films about characters far from his own world (such as *The First Division* about pilots in the air force) he usually kept his films close to home. This urbanity is one of the stronger claims for him as an auteur. (This urbanity is something where he is different from Renoir, who seems to have a much more romantic idea of nature and the countryside.)

As has already been established, Ekman was a prolific filmmaker, as were most of his peers. In 1946 he wrote and directed three films, and he played a leading role in all of them. That year also saw the premiere of a film he wrote but which was directed by Rolf Husberg, called *Love and Downhill Racing** (*Kärlek och störtlopp*, 1946).¹⁰ The film is on one level a banal love story but since it is self-consciously treated as such by Ekman it becomes a metafilmic experience, a film that is about its own making and which also makes fun of itself and its maker(s). Therefore, this section will begin by a discussion of *Love and Downhill Racing* and how it works together with the idea of Ekman as an auteur, even though he did not direct it. In the very positive reviews, Husberg's name is not mentioned, only that of Ekman, and his co-writer, Sven Björkman.

Love and Downhill Racing begins at a film set, where the writer and the director are having an argument about a piece of dialogue, which the director has changed without informing the writer. The film will then follow the writer's travails as he wants to do a film version of August Strindberg's play “Erik IVX”, about the Swedish king from the mid-1500s,¹¹ but the producers insist that he write something commercial and playful, like a romantic comedy set in the north of Sweden. In a reference to the fierce competition between the studios already alluded to, the writer says: “well, fortunately there are other production companies one can go to.” But eventually he gives in to the idea, and takes the train to the cold and snow-covered north, having been convinced by the producer that no expenses will be saved and that he will feel: “just as comfortable as if you were at Cecil's bar.” Cecil's bar was famously Ekman's

¹⁰ It is a silly title, but it was actually not the first film to bear this title. In 1939 the French film *Le grand élan*, directed by Christian-Jaque, was released in Sweden as *Kärlek och störtlopp*.

¹¹ In 1954 Alf Sjöberg actually made a film version of this play. The film was called *Karin Månsdotter*.

favourite bar in Stockholm and it is but one allusion among many to the fact that this particular fictional script writer and Ekman the actual script writer, are related. What then follows is a series of confusions and mistaken identities, including a battle of the sexes between the writer and a journalist from a gossip magazine. They eventually fall for each other, and in the last scene they embrace on his bed.

The last scene is typical of Ekman's storytelling. It is almost exactly like the first scene of the film, which also narrates two lovers embracing on a bed. The dialogue is also similar. This suggests how many of Ekman's films are constructed. As already mentioned, *The First Division* and *Wandering With the Moon* begin and end with similar scenes. *Royal Rabble* and *Little Märta Steps Forward* are further examples of the way in which Ekman likes to make the last scene a repetition of the first, but with some significant difference. In so doing, it could be argued that he manages to show how life has no clear beginnings and endings, that there is a sense of continuity, regardless of people's activities. At the same time, since there is a subtle difference on an individual level between the beginning and the end, it also shows that although life, or the world, is bigger than the individuals who inhabit it, those individuals still have their own very important lives, important for them, even though they are not important in the bigger scheme of things. This is a key element in Ekman's films, and as more of his films are discussed, more examples of this will be given.

The three films Ekman wrote, directed, and starred in of 1946 are *Meeting in the Night** (*Möte i natten*), *Waiting Room For Death* and *While the Door Was Locked** (*Medan porten var stängd*), of which *Meeting in the Night* and *While the Door Was Locked* are of interest here, but for different reasons.

Meeting in the Night synopsis:

The plot concerns a journalist's attempt to expose the dreadful conditions in the Swedish prison system by faking a crime and seeing to it that he gets locked up. The plan is that he will pretend to kill a friend in a fit of jealousy, and then while the friend goes into hiding the journalist will go to the police and confess. Then after a month the friend will go to the police and explain everything. However, after the journalist has been convicted his friend is actually murdered and the body found and since nobody else knew about the hoax, the journalist no longer has any hopes of being set free. Instead, he escapes from prison and tries to find the killer himself. He succeeds in doing this but just as he and the killer is facing each other he

suddenly wakes up, and it turns out that everything that happened after he came up with his idea was a dream.

Ekman had developed writer's block and began working on a script for *Meeting in the Night* based on an idea from the writer Torsten Flodén, even though he knew it was not particularly good. He finished it against his better judgement, because people were depending upon him to make the film, including the studio. (Ekman 1955: 182-183) But it feels like it is a parody of thrillers more than anything else. Some sequences are very playful and there are several dialogue scenes that might as well have come from one of his proper comedies. It is tempting to see this as another example of what Ekman did with *Love and Downhill Racing*. When asked to do something he did not want to do he made it as a parody, in a very self-conscious way.

Yet even if Ekman's heart was not in it, and even if the thriller aspects do not really work, one joy of the film is the dialogue. Little has been said about dialogue so far in the thesis, but since it is one of the key distinctions of Ekman's filmmaking, it is time to elaborate on it. The first noticeable thing about his dialogue, at least for somebody who understands Swedish, is that it sounds natural. In too many Swedish films of this time the words either comes across as overtly stagy or laughable. But Ekman wrote for film, not the theatre, and he made his character speak in a realistic way, both how they spoke and what they said. It is a combination of writing and directing of course, as the diction does not come from the page but from the acting and directing. One critic wrote in 1949 that: "it is his dialogue, the wonderful, living, natural, agile and acutely interpreted dialogue [which is] probably the best dramatic dialogue that anybody is writing in this country, besides Herbert Grevenius." (Tannefors 1949, trans.) And there is more to the dialogue than its verisimilitude. Ekman also gives the impression of being in love with words, accents, dialects and phrasing. One of the things he is doing in *Meeting in the Night* is letting his various characters speak in a baffling variety of slang, some almost incomprehensible, and using this for comic effects. There is a telephone conversation that has an almost surreal quality due to the play with dialects and words. Mikaela Kindblom has written that: "the dialogue in an Hasse Ekman-film is on the whole filled with an enthusiastic wish to explore the resources and capabilities of words and language" (Kindblom 2004, trans.), and she also mentions the way certain words sometimes feel like they have a life of their own. To that can be added that it sometimes feels like both Ekman and his characters are amused and amazed by these words. In one scene in his film *Girl With Hyacinths* a

husband and wife start an argument over the meaning of a particular word the man has just used and which neither of them actually understands. This is a perfect example of this love of words that Ekman exhibits. There is also more to it than just how words and dialogue are used in themselves. As was exemplified when writing about *With You In My Arms*, Ekman would also play with dialogue for narrative purposes. By letting a sentence be split between two different settings, or having a question asked in one scene be answered in another scene, in another setting and at some other time. Words for Ekman can play many different roles.

Words can also hurt. *Meeting in the Night* led to a well-publicised feud between Ekman and the critic Robin Hood, which would have lasting effects on Ekman and his future career. Hood wrote a long article with the title 'Talented kleptomania', arguing that Ekman's one skill was to steal ideas from other films and then put them together in one script and pretend it was his. He compared *Meeting in the Night* with Fritz Lang's *The Woman in the Window* (1944), from which Ekman had got the idea for the ending, and then went through most of Ekman's films, tearing them apart. Ekman in turned replied, arguing that what he was doing was only how writers work, they borrow, steal and copy from each other and from themselves, and that creating a completely original work was almost impossible. To which Hood replied that Ekman most certainly was not a writer, but just a “bartender” albeit a gifted one. (Forslund 1982: 179-180) What is interesting to note here is that Robin Hood had often written positive reviews of Ekman's films, as has been stated elsewhere in the thesis, so this attack must have come as a surprise. Incidentally, one of the first scripts Ekman wrote in early 1940, for the Bauman-directed film *A Man in Full*, was with Hood (under his real name Bengt Idestam-Almqvist), but only Ekman got screen credit. But regardless of Hood's motives for his attack, Ekman started to doubt himself, even to the point where he was reluctant to go out. (Ekman 1955: 186) It should be added that while it is true that Ekman borrowed the ending from Lang's *The Woman in the Window* the film also foreshadows Lang's later film *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1956). It, like Ekman's film, tells the story of a writer who is faking a murder in order to expose the injustices of criminal system, only to find out that the “victim” is killed for real. It is not clear whether Lang had seen Ekman's film or not though.

While the Door Was Locked synopsis:

It is evening in Stockholm and in an apartment building the porter is going out to lock the front door as the film begins. Inside the building a number of characters are introduced, among them an older gentleman who talks about his life in Paris but is dirt poor, a couple

finalising their divorce, a prostitute, a journalist, an alcoholic actress and a rich landowner. During the night they will all go about their own business while in one way or another touch the lives of each other. At the centre is a party hosted by the rich landowner, who is accidentally killed by a young woman he is trying to seduce. The alcoholic actress, after being ridiculed by a theatre owner, tries to commit suicide. When she regrets her action she seeks help from her neighbours but none is responsive and she dies in the apartment of the killed landowner. The police arrive and conclude that they killed each other, but then the young woman steps forward and confess.

For his third film as writer/director in 1946 Ekman made a film for himself, about people he knew. In addition, he did not want tell a conventional story but instead follow a number of characters. (Ekman 1955: 186) He wrote it together with Walter Ljungquist, their fourth collaboration, and it is what is now sometimes called a 'multi-protagonist film'. As in *Wandering With the Moon*, these characters can be seen as spokespersons for characteristic themes and preoccupations of Ekman's. One clear example of this is a discussion between a man and a woman on the verge of divorce. It contains the following exchange. The wife says that she wants to meet new people who are: "interesting, not narrow-minded and petty." The husband responds: "You mean like me?" "No, of course not, but like Swedes in general, sitting here, content and smug, isolated from the outside world." Here she is in good company with all those Ekman characters that are tired of conformity and long for other lives, other worlds. She does not say, like so many others have done in Ekman's films, that she would like to go to South America, but she might as well have done so.

Another telling example is a monologue, more or less, by an old diplomat, who used to live in Paris but is now retired in Stockholm. He is at one point standing outside the building with the janitor, Johansson, and says to him: "One should live while one is young Johansson, and have fun. But God only knows that it is not easy in our so called 'folkhem.'" to which Johansson replies: "No, it's not so damn funny, that's for sure." The old diplomat continues: "No, it is not. We think that we live in a free country but nothing could be further from the truth. We all have our probation officers and walk around being discontent, but do we protest? No. In a country like France people made a revolution, we are satisfied with nagging and writing letters to the newspapers." Johansson objects and says: "But we, the little people, have at least gotten better off.", to which the diplomat sighs and says: "Yes, better perhaps, but more boring, more boring."

These sentiments and arguments can be seen, as has been shown, in almost all of Ekman's films. It is reasonable to suggest that this was something he felt himself, that this is his own personal belief. This will be elaborated in later chapters. But Ekman plays an intricate double-game in *While the Door Was Locked*. It opens with a shot of a city at dusk, with Ekman's voice telling the audience where the film is set, what it is about and then introducing the first person who appears in the shot, as the camera has zoomed in on a building. Ekman is also acting in the film, but the Ekman speaking is Ekman the filmmaker, not the character Ekman is playing in the film. This is an example of how with internal auteurs, such as Ekman, there is a risk in forgetting to separate the filmmaker from the actor and from the character. But since it is Ekman the filmmaker who is doing the voice-over in *While the Door Was Locked* and not the character he is playing, there is an implicit suggestion that these two are not the same. The filmmaker and the character are two different entities, and should not be confused.

The film is also something of a tour-de-force in editing and storytelling. It begins with a tour of the building where the camera just follows one character after another to introduce them. It is a sort of 'relay race narrative', as one character hands over the camera, in a manner of speaking, to the next, and then to the next, until everybody has been introduced and been given a brief sketch of who they are. The economy with which this is done can be illustrated with the case of the ageing theatre actress. The janitor and his wife are talking about her, saying that she does not get any parts to play anymore, and neither has she got any servants any more, and the wife says: "And it's not hard to guess why." Then there is a cut to the actress pouring herself a drink and toasting with her reflection in the mirror, the cut suggesting that the reason she is in decline is because she has become an alcoholic.

The censors were not impressed by this, especially in view of the film's sympathetic portrait of a prostitute, and demanded several cuts a week before the official première. After Ekman had re-edited it, the censors gave it green light. (Forslund 1982: 181-182) It opened on Christmas 1946, one month after they were finished filming. As far as the critics were concerned this was one of Ekman's best films. They wrote that it was as good as any Swedish film could be and, as they often did, compared it to international, especially French, cinema. Many critics noticed that Ekman had apparently based his characters on real life persons. Robin Hood wrote, in reference to his former critique of Ekman, that this time Ekman had not borrowed from other films but from real life, and that he had made a brilliant "miniature portrait of Stockholm". (Hood 1946, trans.)

2:7 Comedies and Generation 40

Again, it is worth pointing out how remarkably productive Ekman was during these years, so it will come as something of a surprise that, in 1947, only one film emerged. *One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer* (*En fluga gör ingen sommar*).

One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer synopsis:

Bertil and Inga Brantemo are married. He is a writer and she is a secretary, and as he is not successful she is the one who brings in the money. He is more like a “househusband”, who cooks and cleans. Then Inga is going to Venice on a business trip with her boss. The boss is interested in her romantically, and while they are away Bertil is being seduced by Chris, the daughter of his publisher. Then when Inga comes home unexpectedly and finds Chris in the apartment Bertil claims that she is the new maid. Eventually Chris convinces her father to publish Bertil’s book, and Inga (who never believed Bertil’s lies) and Bertil make amends.

One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer is interesting for its reversal of gender roles in the marriage. When the film begins the husband, in an apron, is preparing dinner and setting the table, while she is delayed at work. It is also pointed out that when they married, contrary to the conventional practice, he took her family name. This arrangement seems to bear out Ekman's feminist credentials. *One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer* is primarily a comedy and Ekman's talent for using innuendo and objects as telling details is much in evidence. The best example comes towards the end of the film. Bertil is having a fling with the daughter of his editor, whereas his wife is on a business trip in Italy and whilst there she is being seduced by her boss. Ekman does not show the audience exactly what happens, but afterwards the locations of a robe, a belt and a tie (they are all in the wrong places), indicate that they both, he at home, and she in Italy, have succumbed to their seducers. Regardless of what happened, it is very delicately handled. They also contribute to make this the film that most clearly shows Ernst Lubitsch’s influence on Ekman, together with his earlier film *Happiness Approaches** (*Lyckan kommer*, 1942). What is often referred to as “the Lubitsch touch” is often noticeable in Ekman’s films too, especially the elaborate uses of props, doors and innuendos to suggest rather than spell out what is happening and/or what the meaning of a particular scene is.¹²

¹² There are many books about Lubitsch but two to recommend are Poague (1978) and Eyman (1993).

Another point of interest is that the film has an ongoing discussion about art and artists. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, a popular group in Swedish literature during the 1940s was 'Generation 40, and they figure in the film, thinly disguised, with Gunnar Björnstrand playing a writer who is clearly suggested by members of this group of poets. Ekman's character Bertil is trying to write in that style which leads to an ongoing discussion of their views on life and art. The woman whom he falls for (the daughter of his editor, played by Sonja Wigert), tells him that “existential pessimism is no longer valid” and that modern writers are engaging in: “unhealthy analysing of psychological complexes”. She is also an artist, a painter, and she complains about feeling inadequate, that: “things come too easy for me, whatever I do will not go further than the talented sketch”.

This is one example of how Ekman wrote different characters and had them debate issues which he himself was struggling with. It has sometimes been said by critics that he never went deep enough, that often he seemed to be in a hurry. Furhammar has suggested that Ekman: “could compromise with the aims for perfection and settle for the next best thing” (Furhammar, Åhlund 1993: 89, trans.). In his own writings, books and articles, as well as in interviews, this is something he often comes back to, how he is filled with doubt about his artistry. By writing it into his scripts, his films, he seems to be trying to pre-empt the critics, but also to process his insecurities. Whether or not it is conscious or intentional may not be relevant, but it is still noteworthy. When the artist says that nothing will “go further than the talented sketch” it could have been taken from interviews with Ekman. But as this thesis has argued, there was no need for these doubts. On the contrary, it is the quality of the films that is remarkable. What is more, the constant re-discovery of his films also seems to suggest that Ekman was better than he gave himself credit for and even though he was occasionally criticised, the majority of films Ekman made were highly regarded by the critics, won awards and drew large crowds. And despite Ekman's self-doubts the critics found *One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer* funny and amusing.

To Each His Own (*Var sin väg*, 1948) synopsis:

Tage Sundell is a medical doctor and his wife Birgit is an actress. When he gets an assignment in a small town hospital their marriage comes under pressure. He is caught up in his research and she in her acting career and they ultimately divorce, and then both get married with new partners. But both their separate marriages end badly, his due to the death of his wife, her due to a miscarriage and the collapse of her career. When they meet again, they decide to give

their relationship another chance.

With *To Each His Own* Ekman return to one of his most common themes, a couple torn apart because one is an artist and the other is not. It is the same set-up as in *One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer* but this time the man works while the woman is the artist. The film is also a much darker and more anguished work than *One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer*. Both husband and wife are dedicated professionals but she has decided to give up her theatre career and stay with her husband, who is a young, promising and ambitious doctor. But she cannot let go of her theatre dreams, and eventually they are no longer able to compromise. They have an argument and he complains bitterly about her theatre work to which she responds: “You forget one thing. I love you.” He responds “More than the theatre?”, a question which she is unable to answer. They go their different ways, each pursuing their respective careers. This is by now familiar Ekman territory, marriage strife and the power of the theatre. Another typical Ekman motif is introduced in a party scene, full of anxiety and awkwardness, where they are talking about South America. One character says: “Argentina, how lovely it sounds. I’ve always wanted to go to South America.”

An interesting aspect of *To Each His Own* is its attempt, following *Flames in the Dark*, to explore the workings of a psychotic and cruel character. This time it is a brilliant surgeon, who is also head of a hospital, and who will be the young doctor's boss. What is unusual here is the film's reluctance to provide easy psychological answers as to why the surgeon is behaving as he does. It even plays with the common Freudian explanations that were popular at the time. In a scene towards the end of the film the surgeon is apparently caught off guard, and reveals a frightening childhood memory. He has also said that his wife killed herself. Yet in the very end of the film it is revealed that his wife did not kill herself. She only divorced him and she is still alive. The childhood memory he told of cannot be true either. So the audience is none the wiser. There is a double act going on here, with the surgeon playing on the popular Freudian explanations he knows his peers are familiar with, and Ekman doing the same thing with his audience, playing with simplistic ideas as to what causes human behaviour.

The film has several examples of Ekman's gift of suggesting things visually rather than saying them explicitly. The most powerful moment is the way Ekman lets the audience know that the couple have separated. In one scene the husband, alone at home, receives a letter and in the

next shot the wife's bed is taken upstairs, to the storage room. There is no dialogue, and the content of the letter is not revealed; only the removal of the bed signifies what the letter was about.

The ending of *To Each His Own* is something of a surprise, in that the wife returns to her husband and says that she will give up the theatre in order to save their relationship. This might be the only time this happens in an Ekman film, that love for a person is stronger than love of a vocation. It can also feel like something of a disappointment that it is the woman who gives up her professional career and not the man. But in general in Ekman's films the women are the stronger characters, and it is almost always they that have the last laugh or the final say. In the 1950s Ekman would make even more powerful films about the relationship between men and women, in which he criticises male hypocrisy and chauvinism.

Ekman had made these films for the production company Europa Film, for which he had signed a two-year contract. That contract was now up, and he returned to Terra and his long-time producer partner Lorens Marmstedt. One of the first films Ekman made back at Terra was *The Banquet* (*Banketten*, 1948).

The Banquet synopsis:

The family Cotten is one of the riches in Sweden, but the money has done them little good. The marriage is loveless, one son is a degenerate alcoholic, another son has become a communist and the daughter is in a sadomasochist relationship with an arts dealer. Jakob Cotten, the head of the family, is about to turn 60, and there will be a banquet held in his honour. He has no interest in that and is more concerned about his legacy. He wants to retire but he has nobody to whom he can trust to handle the family fortune. The one he would like to give it to, his younger son, do not want anything to do with the family money. While they debate politics, the marriage of the family's daughter is hitting rock bottom and she tries to kill her husband and then she commits suicide. In the end Jakob Cotten donates his money to medical research and the young son moves to South America.

This would be one of Ekman's most celebrated and ground-breaking works, which had its première on Christmas, 1948. Ekman is today often seen as a lightweight maker of comedies, but as has been shown in this thesis, that is not an accurate picture. But even if Ekman had done dark and serious work before 1948, *The Banquet* must still be considered a step further

in mood, in that it is a piercing and chilling film, occasionally shot almost like a horror film. The first scene is a travelling shot along one of Stockholm's most fashionable streets. The camera eventually focuses on a particular window, which is being opened by a maid to feed some birds. In that apartment lives the mother, father and the youngest son, and it is here and in the married daughter's apartment that most of the film will take place. The film has two main story-lines, the relationship between the rich father and his communist son, and the other is the relationship between the daughter, Vica, and her husband Hugo. They are played by Eva Henning and Hasse Ekman and their relationship is one of cruelty, jealousy, hatred and masochism. The scenes in their apartment, with their constant outbursts of vitriol and violence, are among the visually most striking in Ekman's career, with the play of light and shadow and the use of interior framing creating elaborate patterns of concealment, imprisonment and claustrophobia. Ekman is for the second time working with cinematographer Gösta Roosling, although it looks more like it was shot by Göran Strindberg, or perhaps the American cinematographer John F. Seitz (who shot *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder 1944) and many other distinguished films).

The Banquet divides its sympathies between the father, the honest businessman from a previous generation who does not understand the modern world, and the youngest son, the communist, who is torn between his hatred of capitalism and his love for his father. Eventually their two lives are incompatible, as are the lives of the daughter and her husband, and slowly the family falls apart. The film ends, much as it begun, with a long travelling shot. Only this time it starts at the window and tracks down the fashionable street, away from the stifling life in the apartment and out into the fresh air of the larger world. The film, although unusually dark, contains several of Ekman's motifs, including the wish to move to South America. What is new is that the only loving relationship is between a son and his father. It is one of the bitter tragedies of the film that not even this love will be enough. The son has to leave, as his freedom is more important to him than family and traditions.

The Banquet is one of Ekman's most internal films, both because it is about the inner lives of the characters and because it is almost exclusively shot indoors. The setting could be almost anywhere in the world. The setting is not even important for the film. With the exception of *Love and Downhill Racing*, which is set in the far north of Sweden, and taking advantage of that setting, none of the films mentioned in this chapter has a particularly Swedish setting, in terms of geography and topography. They could be set anywhere. But in terms of characters

and sensibilities they have a stronger connection with Swedish culture at the time, and *While the Door Was Locked* in particular is about the people of Stockholm. It can be seen as a discussion of the lives of urban Swedes in a post-war context. Films such as *One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer* and *To Each His Own* (which would constitute an interesting double feature) can also be seen as snapshots of what it was like to live in Sweden in 1947-1948. The films do not say anything about the nation as a whole, but implicitly, through the characters' behaviour and experiences, the audience will get a sense of Swedish life. A larger discussion around Ekman and Sweden will follow in the Chapter 5.

2:8 Bergman arrives

Ingmar Bergman began working as a director of a children's theatre in the centre of Stockholm in 1942, where he showed that besides being a talented director, he also was an astute businessman with a good sense of publicity. This would continue to serve him well after he became a filmmaker. His first film script was *Hets* which he sent to SF in 1943. After many alterations, including those suggested by the director Alf Sjöberg, it was made into a film in 1944, becoming one of the most popular Swedish films of the 1940s. Two years after *Hets* Bergman directed his first film, *Crisis*, which was followed by almost two films each year for the rest of the 1940s. He also worked simultaneously as a theatre director in first Helsingborg and then Malmö, two cities in the south-west of Sweden.

The films Bergman made in the 1940s were varied in style, and he has said that he was influenced by both Roberto Rossellini and Michael Curtiz. (Bergman on Bergman, 1993) As alluded to earlier, another influence was the French poetic realist films of Marcel Carné and Jacques Prévert, an influence most clearly seen in *Ship to India* (*Skepp till Indialand*, 1947). It was not until 1949 with *Prison* aka *The Devil's Wanton* (*Fängelse*) that Bergman made a film which made a lasting impression. *Prison* is also one of three films that Bergman made using Ekman as an actor in important parts. The other two are *Three Strange Loves* (*Törst*, 1949) and *Sawdust and Tinsel*. The third was Ekman's biggest part, as a handsome but devilish actor who seduces a married woman, played by Harriet Andersson, and then taunts her husband with his conquest.

Early on there was rivalry between Ekman and Bergman, possibly because they were considered the two best filmmakers by the critics. The first time a reference was made to a

Bergman film when one of Ekman's was reviewed was in 1945, when *Wandering With the Moon* was called the “most promising film since Hets” (Pavane 1945, trans.) in *Bonniers Litterära Magasin*, or *BLM*. On the other hand, in 1950 a critic wrote that he preferred to listen to Ekman: “in the perpetual dialogue between Ingmar Bergman and Hasse Ekman”. (Björkman 1950, trans.) When Ekman made *Royal Rabble* this constant comparison had not really begun, but even so the line that was quoted above: “Why do you have to compare? I think it is silly”, is given additional resonance. It should be remembered, however, that they also shared many things and Bergman worked with Ekman's producer, Lorens Marmstedt, for two years, making three films. They were not enemies, only two independent and competitive filmmakers even if what was mostly said in public, and what is mostly remembered today, is the rivalry. In an interview Bergman commented on this, saying that on the one hand Ekman had been a big support, especially after Bergman was severely criticised for *Ship to India*, but he was also envious of Ekman's calm professionalism and angry about the times when Ekman got to see the dailies of Bergman's *Three Strange Loves*, because the producer did not trust Bergman. (Furhammar, Åhlund 1993: 3-7) Ekman on the other hand said that he was sometimes jealous of Bergman's successes, but that he felt that the successes were deserved. (Ekman 1955: 225) Furhammar has written that it in some ways the competition between Bergman and Ekman was “childish” but at the same time he argues that: “the seriousness of the struggle cannot be questioned, even if neither Ekman nor Bergman admitted any hostility towards each other.” (Furhammar 1991: 231-232, trans.)

2:9 Prison vs. The Girl From the Third Row

As mentioned, Bergman's *Prison* was a substantial success. It tells two stories, one about three friends (a filmmaker, played by Ekman, a journalist, played by Birger Malmsten, and the woman they both love, played by Eva Henning), and one about a young girl, played by Doris Svedlund, who is forced to become a prostitute, has her new-born baby stolen and eventually commits suicide. The connection between the two stories is that the journalist appears in both, as he is the one telling his friends about the prostitute, and in the other tries to 'save' her. The film begins with a man saying that the devil rules the world, and ends with the comment that since there is no God, there is no hope. In *Prison* Bergman arguably makes the case that we are either tortured souls to be pitied or cruel animals to be loathed.

One consequence of *Prison* was that it prompted Ekman to make an, as he himself called it, “anti-Bergman film”, *The Girl From the Third Row* (*Flickan från tredje raden*, 1949). *The Girl From the Third Row* begins with the last act of a theatre play. The play ends with the only character on stage committing suicide. The curtains then fall and the camera travels among the audience, listening to some of their comments. They all hate it, and someone says that maybe the director should stick to farce and comedies instead. The actor, who also wrote and directed the play, and owns the theatre, is played by Ekman, who of course also wrote, directed and produced the film. After the audience has left and the theatre is deserted, Sture Anker, Ekman's character, sits alone and smokes a cigarette, until he gets up and walks out on stage, making a cynical comment to himself about his own fiasco. Then a woman appears out of the shadows, saying that she will tell him a story about life, since he apparently knows so little about it. The story concerns a golden ring and the people whose lives are affected by it. Reluctantly, he listens to it, while building a house of cards, and the film then moves back and forth between them on the stage, and the story she is telling. That story is set in several parts of Stockholm, among the rich as well as the poor, among happy and distressed, loving and hateful individuals, and together these individuals create a picture of humanity in all its complexity. There are no heroes and no devils; there are just humans with their capacity for cruelty and compassion. In one of the stories, two poor parents are forced to give up their daughter to adoption, in another a woman leaves her husband for her lover. In a third story, an accountant is exposed as an embezzler by his employer. In these three stories, and in some of the others as well, due to chance or the kindness of strangers, eventually things work out, and some kind of equilibrium is reached. It will not be perfect, but it will be hopeful.

Both *Prison* and *The Girl From the Third Row* have unusual narrative structures, and there are structural similarities. Both have a prologue, which is set in a backstage milieu, in Bergman's case a film set, in Ekman's a theatre. This setting will be used as a framing device for the main narrative, which in Bergman's case is that of the world as hell, and in Ekman's that of a world of hope and despair. Another shared device is to have the internal story narrated by an all-knowing character, telling the other characters, and the audience, their story. That way this character in a way becomes the filmmaker, or at least a spokesperson for the filmmaker. In Bergman's case it is the journalist, and in Ekman's it is the mysterious woman, the girl from the third row. Yet another similarity is of course that the character to whom the story is narrated is played by Hasse Ekman in both cases. Here the inter-textuality becomes increasingly complex because in Bergman's film, Ekman is in a way playing himself, as he is

seen by Bergman and the public, whereas in Ekman's film, Ekman is in a way playing Bergman, as he is seen by Ekman and the public. In an article from 1995, Cecilia Axelsson argues that by giving this part to Ekman, Bergman was deliberately trying to further his own career, by portraying himself, Bergman, as the artist, and portraying Ekman as the studio hack. (Axelsson, 1995) It is questionable how cunning Bergman's motives really were, but it is possible that he was thinking along those lines.

The critics liked both of the films, but with Bergman's they were more impressed by the style and form than they were by the stories told. It was criticised for being forced, pathetic and overtly symbolic, whereas Ekman's was criticised for being occasionally naïve and too generous. Although the critics did not know at the time of reviewing it that Ekman was specifically aiming his film at Bergman, they still understood its intentions. One wrote “[Ekman] has constructed a film which, consciously or unconsciously, aims at Sartre, but hits Ingmar Bergman” (AGB 1949, trans.) and another wrote that it felt like: “Ekman in this film dared to attack Bergman at close range”. (Björkman 1949, trans.) In an interview a few years later Ekman said that Bergman: “had the appearance of being the spokesperson for Generation 40 in Swedish cinema. My film wanted to be a reaction against this fashionable stance of talking about everything's meaninglessness.” (Malgefors 1961, trans.)

This is yet another instance where the connections between Bergman and 'Generation 40' can be seen. Ekman had playfully parodied this group and Bergman too when making *One Swallow Does Not a Summer Make*, but *The Girl From the Third Row* was Ekman's most decisive and complete rebuttal of this world view. His argument in the film seems to be that, although there is cruelty, betrayal, despair and death, that is only half of the story. There is also love, beauty, trust and kindness and the one does not negate the other. To say that the world is hell is just a shallow pose. It is a complex world and we are all torn. Just as in *Changing Trains*, the very narrative construction of the film has the audience moving back and forth between hope and despair, love and betrayal, life and death. Here Ekman's focus on acting, playing parts, hiding our identities, comes into play again. If we live behind a mask maybe our lives and the lives of others become more bearable, at least for a while. In many respects the film is also a companion piece to *Wandering With the Moon* which also has a number of different characters all acting out different aspects of humanity and life, and balancing precariously between hope and despair. And as with *Wandering With the Moon*, it is again appropriate to mention Jean Renoir as a reference point, and another French filmmaker,

Julien Duvivier. Duvivier was one of the major filmmakers in France before the Second World War, together with Renoir and Carné. A film worth mentioning as a reference point is *Christine (Un carnet de bal, 1937)*, about a woman who after her husband dies re-evaluates her life and visit all those men she once knew but did not marry, to see what has become of them. It has the same episodic structure has some of Ekman's best films. Duvivier later remade *Christine* in the US with the title *Lydia (1941)*. Then Duvivier made *Tales of Manhattan (1942)*, and as it is the story of a tail coat that moves from one owner to another, it can be seen as an influence on the structure of following a ring in *The Girl From the Third Row*.

One of the characters in *The Girl From the Third Row* is a painter, and as has been observed already, Ekman's use of painters and paintings is a recurring motif. In one of the episode an easy-going husband meets, without realising it, his wife's lover. The husband does not know about the affair, but the lover does. The lover is also a painter, doing abstract art, and they are discussing one of his paintings. The husband does not understand the painting which exemplifies all that is wrong with him, as far as his wife is concerned, and what is wrong with their marriage. The marriage, although safe and secure, is also boring, lacking in adventure and imagination, and is suffocating her, whereas the artist holds the promise of a completely different life. In the film the husband comes across as something of a buffoon, but yet very sweet and kind, and if he had understood the painting he might still be with his wife.

The reasons for describing this as an 'anti-Bergman' film are plentiful. First of all, the character Ekman is playing, Sture Anker, is too close to the popular view of Bergman for the resemblance to go unnoticed. But the film should not be read as a parody of Bergman. Sture Anker is being taught a lesson in the film, but he is not being ridiculed. Rather he is treated with a combination of respect and pity and at the end he has become a better person. He has learnt his lesson. Second, the film's debate between Sture Anker and the girl touches upon many subjects that were fashionable at the time, nihilism and existentialism, which is why some critics mentioned Jean-Paul Sartre in their reviews. Some characters and scenes in the film are also similar to characters and scenes in films of other filmmakers, such as Bergman, but here a new twist is given to these characters and scenes. It is not only Bergman, but the whole of 'Generation 40', that would have recognised particular lines of dialogue and even the setting of the film. In addition, the staging of the play which opens the films had been copied from a performance of Sartre's play *No Exit (Huis clos)* from 1944 at the Royal Dramatic

Theatre. For the audience at the time it was clear what Ekman was reacting against, and as Bergman was arguably a central person in the movement Ekman was engaging with, calling it an 'anti-Bergman'-film made perfect sense. This would not be the last time Ekman and Bergman were engaged in these kinds of games. But whereas future instances would be more humorous, more like parody, in *Girl From the Third Row* it is on a deeper level.

This chapter has analysed Ekman's films of the 1940s, the emergence of Bergman, and their competitive relationship. That competition was reflected in the critics' seasonal votes for best Swedish films. In 1946-47 Bergman won with *It Rains on Our Love* and Ekman's *While the Door Was Locked* came second. For the next few years one of the two would always win, and the other comes in second or third. In 1949-1950 *The Girl From the Third Row* came in fourth. In second place was Sjöberg's *Only A Mother* and in third place was Bergman's *Thirst*. But the film that won that season was another film by Ekman, *Girl With Hyacinths*. That film will preoccupy a large part of the next chapter.

Chapter 3 The Early-1950s

The end of the 1940s saw Hasse Ekman and Ingmar Bergman locked in competition, and Ekman was alternating between making personal films and films to honour commitments. Ekman's output in the 1950s would primarily concern itself with intimate and personal films, at least until 1956. That year several things happened, one of which was the emergence of television and another was a change in Ekman's relationship with Bergman and his view of himself as a filmmaker. This chapter will cover the years 1950 to 1956. First, however, a discussion of Ekman's theatre work.

3:1 Ekman on the stage

A topic that has not been elaborated upon yet is Ekman's own work as a stage director. He had earlier in his career directed for the theatre, but this would become even more pronounced from 1950. That year *Intima teatern* (The intimate theatre) opened in Stockholm and it would soon be known as the 'Ekman-theatre' because Ekman had a string of successes there, both as actor and director. Nothing has been written about his stage career before, and since it is impossible to re-watch the plays and the performances it is sadly beyond the scope and ability of this thesis to discuss his theatre work in any depth, beyond pointing out that his role in Swedish theatre was important. Here too there was competition with Bergman. *Intima teatern* opened with a play directed by Bergman but it was a flop, as were the following two plays Bergman directed. Instead Ekman took over, directing Elmer Rice's play *Dream Girl*, which ran successfully for two seasons. (Forslund 1982: 196) In total he directed more than 20 plays, including those written by him and others by writers such as Robert E. Sherwood and Peter Schaffer. He also brought Reginald Rose's play *Twelve Angry Men* to the Swedish stage for the first time. It is worth noting here that in 1951-52 Ekman directed Jean Anouilh's play *The Traveller Without Luggage* (*Le voyageur sans bagage*). With its story of lost identities, and people assuming the identities of others, it must have seemed a perfect fit for Ekman. Besides directing, he was also in constant demand as an actor. Yet it should be said that whereas Alf Sjöberg and Ingmar Bergman had theatre careers that were equal in importance to their film careers, and in Sjöberg's case the theatre was arguably more important than the cinema, this was not the case with Ekman. In his autobiography he barely mentions his theatre work at all and focuses almost entirely on his personal life and his work as a filmmaker. To what extent his experience of directing films influenced his work on the stage, and vice versa, is not

possible to say without having seen the stage work.

3:2 Ekman turns inwards

Besides working at the theatre, in 1950 Ekman also did three films. They are among his most interesting. As has been made clear, he occasionally made films that drew on his own personal experiences and sometimes used intricate flashback structures to tell his stories. He would do both on *Girl With Hyacinths*, his first film of the new decade.

Girl With Hyacinths synopsis:

One morning Dagmar Brink is found dead in her apartment. She has committed suicide by hanging. In a suicide note she says that her neighbours, the couple Anders and Britt Wikner, will inherit her possessions. They are puzzled by this since they hardly knew her and so they try to find out why she killed herself. The husband sets out to talk to those who knew her, her father, a former husband, a roommate, a famous painter and a popular singer. They all tell their different tales of how she was always sad and secretive, and often abused, but none can explain why it was that she wanted to kill herself. In the end Britt finds out that Dagmar Brink was a lesbian and killed herself because the woman she loved betrayed her. Britt decides to keep this to herself, not telling her husband the truth.

There are similarities between the narrative structure of *Girl With Hyacinths* and that of Ekman's earlier *Changing Trains*, the differences being that the dying woman is narrating the story in *Changing Trains* but in *Girl With Hyacinths* it is the dead woman's neighbours who are investigating her death. The flashbacks in *Girl With Hyacinths* are not chronological, in the sense that the second flashback tells something that happened before what was being told in the first flashback, and the third flashback tells of something that happened chronologically between the first and the second flashback, and so on, which makes the film deserving of additional viewings. Those who have written about *Girl With Hyacinths* before have all mentioned Welles's *Citizen Kane* as an inspiration for the structure. It is easy to see why as both films begins with the death of the main character and then the rest of the film is an investigation of a mystery surrounding the death, told in non-chronological flashbacks. Ekman has himself also acknowledged that he was inspired by Welles. (Åhlund & Carlsson 1993) However, the two films are different and the resemblance is only in the structure. These differences are revealing, however, for what they say about each filmmaker. *Citizen Kane* is

about a man who wants to conquer the world; *Girl with Hyacinths* is about a woman who wants to hide from it. *Citizen Kane* is about a man who is consumed by his own ego; *Girl With Hyacinths* is about a woman consumed by the world. *Citizen Kane* is about a so-called 'great man' who was larger than life. Ekman's film is about an ordinary girl. It is one of Ekman's strengths that he tells stories about the lives of ordinary people and yet makes these stories interesting, important and deeply moving.

Ekman has said that the inspiration for the script came from a relative of his then-wife Eva Henning, who plays the main character Dagmar Brink. He has also said that the three men in Dagmar's life can be seen as various aspects of his own persona. As he writes in his autobiography:

Himself he is split between three male characters in the film: 1. the on the one hand decent and bourgeois, but at the same time despotic and jealous, husband who had neither the capacity nor the need to understand his wife, 2. the ruthless, self-absorbed, work-obsessed painter who felt *her* bourgeois traits as stifling and had neither the time nor the inclination to understand, 3. the presumptuous, shallow but unremarkable gramophone singer who *thought* he understood, but did not understand anything. Each and every one represented different aspects of the writer. (Ekman, 1955: 201-202, trans.)

Whether Ekman consciously set out to write it that way is hard to say, but perhaps a clue to that effect is that he himself did not play a part in the film, and that this might have been because there was no role for him, having split himself up into three parts. Forslund also suggests that the neighbour/writer who conducts the investigation probably had something of Ekman written into the part as well. To this, Bengt Forslund has added that the character Elias Körner, a painter played by Anders Ek, has a resemblance to the then recently deceased painter Curt Clemens. (Forslund, 1982: 190)

What is immediately striking about the film are its sensitive subjects. The suicide was in itself such a sensitive topic, but even more so is that the girl in *Girl With Hyacinths* is queer, a lesbian, and that this is the hidden truth. Homosexuality was at this time definitely not a mainstream subject, neither in films nor in society as a whole. Homosexuality had been decriminalised as recently as 1944, but it was still not talked about, so the film led to a lot of debates. These debates seem not to have been alarmist or critical, but rather a serious attempt

to discuss issues which had been taboo before. Ekman was open about this, and he participated in the debate. He said in an interview that he thought that “the day will come when this phenomenon is no longer considered ugly and dirty” and: “If *Girl With Hyacinths* in some way can contribute to clear the air around the debate about homosexuals the work has not been in vain.” (Heed 1950, trans.) It is worth noting that the film was made shortly after the Kinsey Report had been translated into Swedish and published in 1949 (Bergenheim 2009: 128), at least the first part, *Sexual Behaviour of the Human Male*. *Sexual Behaviour of the Human Female* appeared a few years later. The Kinsey Report was an investigation into the sexual life of Americans, both male and female, and Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues argued that homosexuality was common, and just as natural as heterosexuality, and that it was not really correct or helpful to define people based on their sexuality, since sexuality was not something stable, but fluctuating. In 1950, the same year as *Girl With Hyacinths* was released, a Swedish lobby group for gay, lesbian and bisexual persons was founded, called RFSL (the acronym reads Riksförbundet för Sexuellt Likaberättigande, meaning The National Society for Sexual Equality). Interestingly enough, and as a sign of how unaware the population was of the very existence of homosexuality, or at least how reluctant society was to admit to it, a survey conducted by one of Sweden's biggest newspapers, *Aftonbladet*, revealed that only 60% of the audience understood the context and meaning of the film. A psychologist tried to explain this by calling it a cultural “blind spot”. (Heed 1950).¹³

This might be in part because Dagmar Brink is a perfectly 'normal' woman; she does not stand out, nor has any characteristics that the audience would have found strange or unsettling. By contrast, in Bergman's *Thirst* there is a lesbian character, but she is an aggressive, predatory woman, and the main character avoids her. If lesbians had been portrayed at all in Swedish films, this was the dominant mode of portrayal. Dagmar Brink, on the other hand, is no different from any other female character in Ekman's films. This is another thing that makes *Girl With Hyacinths* so remarkable. The fact that she is a lesbian is in one sense not important, especially since it is not even apparent in the film. It is true that she commits suicide, but not *because* she is a homosexual, or because she is sickened by her own feelings, but because her one true love has betrayed her. With her melancholy disposition she would in all likelihood have committed suicide had she been heterosexual too, if she had been betrayed. The film is

¹³ In 2000, a Swedish medical journal published an article about *Girl With Hyacinths* and its importance in making homosexuality acceptable. (Karlsson 2000)

not really about homosexuality either, but more about women in general, one of which happens to be lesbian, and in this sense it is clearly a feminist film. There is a sense of female rapport, of support and shared common grounds, a female community that the men do not understand and cannot enter into. That women need to look after each other, as a way of surviving in a male-chauvinistic world. One such example is when, in one of the flashbacks, Dagmar tries to commit suicide the first time (as far as the audience knows), but a female neighbour sees her and interferes. They then sit together and talk about life and suffering and the sequence ends with the neighbour putting Dagmar to bed, and then sitting at Dagmar's bedside, holding her hand, until she falls asleep. In this world of self-righteous men who think they can seduce and exploit women and then just pay them off, without taking any real responsibility, the film shows that there is an alternative, a world of women standing up for each other, and covering each other's backs. In that context it is significant that in the last scene, the man who is investigating Dagmar's suicide has not understood anything. Only his wife knows the truth, but she does not tell him. In this world some things are better kept among the women, in their world of sisterhood, as a protection against the men.

For the perceptive spectator, Ekman has filled the frame with little hints as to the theme of the film, but if they are hard to spot then, they are even more difficult today perhaps, since these are both local and time bound and might not be recognized by a present-day audience. In Dagmar's apartment there are a few books and a painting that are signifiers to female homosexuality and suicide, such as poetry by Karin Boye and Edith Södergran, and a painting from 1927 by Swedish painter Sven Xet Erixson called *Flickor på ängen* (*Girls in a Meadow*), with two women decorating each other with flowers. As has been argued earlier, paintings often play a part in Ekman's films and *Girl With Hyacinths* is partly about a painter and a painting, a painting associated with the main character. The title of the film is the title of a painting which is being executed during the course of the film, a portrait of the main character. This in some way mirrors the whole idea of the film, which is also an effort at painting a picture, albeit with moving images instead of a still portrait.

Another recurring motif in Ekman's films are characters who keep things hidden, who play parts, who are pretending or wanting to be something other than what they are. In a sense Dagmar Brink does this more than any other character in Ekman's films. It is almost what defines her. It also ties in with a poem by Edith Södergran that Dagmar loves. A few lines are spoken in the film and they read thus (in a translation by Martin Allwood): "All my life I will

be the silent one, the talkers are like the babbling brook which gives itself away; I will be a lonely tree in the plain”¹⁴ As the first flashbacks take place before homosexuality was legalised, Dagmar Brink would not have had much of a choice other than to hide her inner thoughts and desires. There are links between her and Inga Dahl in *Changing Trains*, Dan in *Wandering With the Moon*, and other Ekman characters, loners and dreamers who have a difficult time in this world.

Stylistically, the film is one of Ekman's most accomplished, and the cinematography by Göran Strindberg is often striking. Ekman had previously made films in such a sombre style, using rain, shadows and stark contrasts between light and dark, especially in *Changing Trains* and *The Banquet*. Ekman and Strindberg would continue to develop this style in *The White Cat* (*Den vita katten*, 1950) discussed later in this chapter. Besides the lighting, *The Girl With Hyacinths* has many of Ekman's stylistic trademarks. There are the long takes and the imaginative editing and efforts to introduce real- world phenomena, creating images and scenes that in a sense contextualise *this* film's particular story. One example is when Dagmar Brink's maid comes to her apartment in the morning, opens the window and the sun are reflected in the window glass. This is not necessary for the story, but it is there because the sun was there, or, if it was shot in a studio, because the sun would have been there had this been in real life. Another example is when a little boy on a tricycle comes along the pavement just after the ambulance has arrived to pick up the body of Dagmar. The importance of the boy is that he brings in an element from the outside world, the world beyond the story. This adds poignancy by making the film feel real, but it also makes the unfolding drama less pressing, since for this little boy the suicide and that particular storyline is not important. He does not even know about it, which suggests that the world is bigger than the individuals in it. Sound is also used to this effect, such as in a sequence in which Dagmar and a man who may be her father are having a tense discussion in his office, while on the soundtrack men are heard shovelling snow outside. A scene when the maid discovers Dagmar's body also exemplifies Ekman's editing skills. After she has opened the window she turns around, sees the body and screams, with the camera close to her face (the audience does not see what she sees). As soon as she begins to scream, Ekman cuts to a poster with the figure of Death with a

¹⁴ Edith Södergran was a Swedish/Finnish modernist poet, (1892-1923). The lines come from the poem *Färgernas längtan* (Colour longing) and in Swedish the words say: “En tigerska ska jag vara i hela min levnad, en talerska är som den sladdrande bäcken som förräder sig själv, ett ensamt träd ska jag vara på slätten”

scythe, hanging on the wall of the police station to which the maid has called to report the death of her employer.

There is another subtext to the film. It is yet another film in which Ekman deals with the Second World War, and Nazism. The suicide takes place in 1949, but the flashbacks go back to the war years, and it is clear that Dagmar was fiercely anti-Nazi, whereas others around her do not share her principled objections against them. This is also, partly, a reason why she commits suicide. The film can be seen as an allegorical rejection of Sweden's ambivalent stance during the war, as discussed in Chapter 1, with Dagmar playing the part of the Sweden's conscience, as it were, or the conscientious objector. This was not something picked up by the critics, but many of them wrote that *Girl With Hyacinths* was Ekman's best film so far (or second best, after *Changing Trains*), with praise for the acting, the dialogue and the fluent storytelling. When the Swedish film critics at the end of the year voted for best Swedish film of the season, *Girl With Hyacinths* won a clear victory, with 113 points.

But for all the praise it received, Ekman was now constantly being reminded of his rival's Bergman's presence. In an interview during the making of *Girl With Hyacinths* Ekman was asked if he was trying to do a Bergman film. He replied "Ingmar Bergman? Well, I would not say that – a girl can commit suicide in the beginning of a film without it having to be an Ingmar Bergman" (Wernlöf 1949, trans.). That question reveals as much about contemporary Swedish cinema as it does about the filmmakers' rivalry, some critics writing, by way of praising Ekman, that *Girl With Hyacinths* was at least as good as Bergman's work.

1950 was a very productive year for Ekman, and two films by him opened around Christmas that year, *The White Cat* on the 26 December and *The Kiss On the Cruise* (*Kyssten på kryssen*) on the 16 December.

The White Cat synopsis:

A man arrives by train to Stockholm. He seems lost and confused, and scared. He wonders around at the central station and finally sits down to have a cup of coffee. He overhears two women speak about an escaped rapist who apparently looks like him, and he for a second thinks that in fact he is that rapist. But he has not got the scar in his face that the criminal had. When he is about to pay he discovers that he has no money, but the waitress takes pity on him and tries to help him instead. They walk home to her place and the next day he sets out to find

out who he is and what he has done. The clues take him to a small town far from Stockholm where people seem to recognize him, although they treat him with suspicion. It would appear that he has impersonated another man, who was killed. After first believing that he himself killed this man it turns out that he is after all innocent. One night after coming home from a trip abroad he found that his wife was having an affair with another man, a famous painter. After leaving the house in disgust the house burnt down, killing those inside. The man then took the identity of the painter, before losing his memory. When in the end he remembers all that has happened, and uncovers his troubled past, he returns to Stockholm together with the waitress.

Ekman had been very sick and hospitalised for some time, with jaundice, and was still not really well when he made *The White Cat*, in a rather angst-ridden and feverish state (Ekman 1955: 205-206). Ekman based the script on a novel by Walter Ljungquist, and with the story of a man who has forgotten who he is and is trying to find himself Ekman returned to the same premise as in his first film *With You In My Arms*, only this time there were few jokes. Instead, *The White Cat* is probably the darkest and cruellest film Ekman ever made, and it still has the potential to shock and disturb. The opening sequence, which is almost without dialogue, shows the man (Alf Kjellin) arriving by train at the central station in Stockholm, and then aimlessly walking around at the station. This is Ekman's most striking opening sequence, and it is shot by Göran Strindberg in an impressive style with great depth of field and almost expressionistic lighting. Like *Girl With Hyacinths*, the visual style of the film as a whole recalls aspects of film noir, but film noir spiked with surrealism. *The White Cat* has a distinct Freudian theme and is filled with dream imagery, nightmares of often violent and/or sexual content. The man, whose name remains a mystery throughout the film, has lost his memory and is haunted by those nightmares. Unusually for Ekman, the film has several extreme close-ups of faces, deep in fear and full of sweat. The themes of guilt and disorientation also recall American film noir, and it fits in rather well with films such as *The Blue Dahlia* (George Marshall 1946).

In many ways *The White Cat* can be seen as the usual Ekman story but inverted. In almost all of Ekman's films there is a constant wish to escape the boredom of the mundane bourgeois life, to go abroad or become an artist/actor. That is also the case in *The White Cat*. However, this time it leads to death and despair. In a confrontation between the husband, before he developed amnesia, and the painter, beautifully played by Sture Lagerwall, the painter says

that he only wanted to be free, to be able to live life to its fullest potential, to be as creative as possible, and that he does not regret a thing. He then asks the husband if his life, the safe and secure one, was really worth living. The husband struggles to respond.

The film can be seen as taking place in the hidden corners, in the subconscious, of Ekman's characteristic dreamer. A subconscious filled with violence, sexual repression and neurosis, with the white cat a recurring symbol of a torn psyche. In one striking shot the cat is seen crucified, and another is seen shot dead. But still it keeps coming back, prowling the alleys, basements and attics, and haunting the dreams. This is Ekman doing a film in the style and with the ideas of 'Generation 40', those that he had so many times criticised. This fact did not escape him. At one moment, the painter says to the husband that the situation he is describing is: "even worse than Generation 40..." It could be argued that this does not really fit Ekman, and he struggles with the ending, trying to smooth over what has happened, in a sense introducing a ray of light into the prevailing darkness. During the title sequence the white cat is seen approaching the camera in an alley, but in the last shot is seen running away from the characters and the audience along the same alley. Yet again an example of Ekman's habit of beginning and ending the film in the same space, with an almost identical scene, but with a slight variation.

The critics were on the whole sceptical and felt that Ekman had failed to make a strong and coherent film, several critics suggesting that Ekman had tried to make a 'Bergman film' but since his heart was not really in it, and since he did not have the necessary depth, the end result suffered. There is a sense in which the critics were to some extent allowing their prejudice towards Ekman to shape their responses, and Robin Hood felt the need to come to Ekman's defence. He wrote in a column that it was wrong to say that Ekman was a lightweight maker of comedies who now had tried and failed to make a serious film: "He has within him more than just the spirited amiableness; he has also experienced life's unpleasant and dark sides. This foundation is what he wants to set free through his films. Has he not been at his most serious, most truthful as an artist exactly in those tough scenes in *The Banquet*, *Girl With Hyacinths*, *The White Cat*?" (Hood 1951, trans.)

What Robin Hood suggests here is that there has been a misreading, a misperception that Ekman is primarily a maker of comedies. The irony, however, is that even if Hood in this instance tries to set the record straight, the year before, in 1950, Hood had himself said that:

“Ekman began with light, shallow, graceful comedies, well-made, and then changed his mind and became serious and realistic.” (Hood 1950, trans.) But as has been made clear in this thesis, Ekman had always had this serious side, already from his second film. It is something of a conundrum how this idea that Ekman was primarily a maker of comedies stems from, an idea that is still prevalent today. But one reason for this might be due to Ekman's public appearances. Ekman was sometimes seen as a playboy, driving around in a yellow sports car and often seen with beautiful women, and maybe when critics thought about him as a filmmaker they had this image in their heads. This image might then have skewed their memories of his films towards the funny and cheerful, much like a playboy. When he was asked in an interview if he considered himself a playboy the answer was that he certainly did not: “No, I’m everything but a playboy. Work has taken up all my time. I wanted to work. Surely no playboy wants to do that?” (Frankl 1967, trans.)

Having said that, the other film on which Ekman was involved in 1950 was a comedy, *The Kiss on the Cruise*, which Ekman wrote and Arne Mattsson then directed. It is tempting to view it as a distraction for Ekman, to do something light-hearted after the previous films.

3:3 Parodies of Bergman and new partnerships

In the last chapter the rivalry and competition between Ekman and Bergman was discussed and this competition was ongoing. There was a change, however, from *The Girl From the Third Row* to Ekman's approach in *The Kiss on the Cruise*, and in a few other films. These films would rather be parodies of Bergman and Generation 40, unlike *The Girl From the Third Row*, which was more an intellectual engagement with Bergman. But *Kiss on the Cruise* is not only a parody. It is also yet another example of Ekman’s self-reflexive films.

The Kiss on the Cruise begins in Morocco (it is actually shot on location), where a group of children gathers around an elderly man who starts to tell them a story in Arabic about a filmmaker, faraway in the “frozen North”, who was married to an actress. The scene then shifts to a dingy apartment, where a man enters and starts to harass the older woman who lives there. He asks for a woman who is not there, whereupon he discovers a new-born baby in a crib. He immediately decides to murder the baby by drowning it. When the older woman objects he solemnly says “We need to have the courage to be merciful!” and the woman raises her eyes and says “Is there no God?” and the man says: “No, Clara-Bella...” He then stops in

mid-sentence and says: “Oh, for crying out loud, I can't say these pathetic lines.” In this instance the audience realises that this is a film set, and that the scene was to be in a film. Then the director is shown wearing a beret, screaming and gesticulating. Few in the audience would at this point have failed to understand who this was supposed to be. It was a satiric portrait of Ingmar Bergman. If *The Kiss on the Cruise* is remembered at all today, it is for this parody of Bergman. To add an edge to this portrait, the director is played by Gunnar Björnstrand who was one of Bergman's favourite actors. Together, he and Bergman made almost 20 films. The sequence of the film-within-the-film has an additional level of meaning as well. It looks like the set of a film by F.W. Murnau, with crooked lines, low ceilings and forced perspectives. Murnau was undoubtedly one of the most influential of filmmakers of all time, and Bergman was one of many in whose work this influence can be seen. So when Ekman makes the scene Murnau-esque, while keeping the dialogue Bergman-esque, he is making fun of Bergman in two ways. Bergman as an imitator of Murnau and Bergman as a writer of pretentious and pathetic dialogue.

After this sequence, and following an argument between the actors and the director, there follows a lengthy sequence at the film set. The camera follows the director as he deals with set designers, actors, producers, the cameraman and others, who all seem to conspire against him, the great artist, and his vision. At one point he screams “This is an artistic film! I don't want anything to be natural!”, and in another moment he sighs and says “If only I had not turned down Hollywood, think of the resources and equipment they've got.”, and finally he is off to give a lecture on: “the re-birth of cinema”.

The producer finally persuades him to let his artistic ambitions rest for a while, and try and make a commercial comedy on exotic locations. This will be what the bulk of the film is about. It should at this point be clear that the similarities between this film and the previously discussed *Love and Downhill Racing* are considerable. They are both about struggling artists giving in to the demands from the studio to be commercial, and then a slapstick comedy about mistaken identities and mad adventures takes place in exotic settings. These two films are of the same type that the filmmakers in the films did not want to make, a case of Ekman as it were trying to make fun of the cake while eating it. It comes to a point when it becomes almost impossible to separate fiction from fact, and it is perhaps not necessary to do so either.

The idea that the film is a parody of Ingmar Bergman should be nuanced. Whilst it is true that in the beginning it clearly is Bergman making a 'Bergman film', there are also traces of Ekman in the filmmaker (not least since he had been compared to Bergman), and in a sense there is even something prophetic about the story, for later in the 1950s and early-1960s, Ekman would himself be making the kind of international comedy in exotic locations he ridicules here. There will be more about that in the next chapter.

The Kiss on the Cruise was directed by Arne Mattsson, but the credits begin with the words “a film by Hasse Ekman”, and as far as can be established by archival material both the idea and the script was Ekman's. The critics also mentioned only Ekman's name in their reviews, despite the fact that Mattsson was well established by this time. (Even though his final breakthrough, commercially and artistically, would come the following year with *One Summer of Happiness*). In reviews of Mattsson's previous films, the critics held him responsible for whatever was good or bad in the respective films, but not this time. As mentioned with regard to *Love and Downhill Racing*, when Ekman is involved he will be the one singled out by the critics. In this case, the critics were not particularly pleased. They felt that it was awkward, not funny enough and condescending towards the south of Europe and North Africa. One critic wrote that: “a certain smug tourist mentality towards the inhabitants of the various locations, who only get to act as buffoons, is spread unnecessarily wide”. (Zack 1950, trans) and it is true that the locals in both southern Europe and in North Africa are primarily seen as comic relief. But then again few people in the film are seen as anything else. The Swedes are portrayed as being equally silly.

In Ekman's oeuvre, as well as in Mattsson's, *The Kiss on the Cruise* is a lesser film. But from an auteurist perspective it is very interesting. This is partly because it shows the strength of Ekman's presence even in a film directed by somebody else, and the consistency of his ideas (for example, the film is full of hidden and mistaken identities), and partly because it is another example of how the rivalry between Ekman and Bergman took place on screen as well as off it. The next project, *The Fire-Bird*, however was both written and directed by Ekman, and did not relate to Bergman at all.

The Fire-Bird synopsis:

The Royal Opera in Stockholm asks the Italian singer Mario Vanni to do a guest performance in Stockholm. He declines, blaming the cold weather. But after he sees a short dance film with

the prima ballerina Linda Corina he changes his mind, because Corina is a member of the ensemble at the Royal Opera. Corina is engaged with a young man called Frank, but his mother do not approve of the engagement. Corina then breaks up with Frank and instead becomes involved with Vanni. Corina has a rival, Alice Lund, in the ensemble, and there is a lot of backstabbing so when Corina moves to Italy together with Vanni Alice is very pleased. But Corina and Vanni's affair ends badly after he hits her during a fight. She moves back to Stockholm to perform in *The Fire-Bird*, a part her rival Alice also wants. Due to a head injury Corina has to decline the role and instead she opens up a dance academy, and there she is reunited with Frank. But when Alice cuts her feet on razorblade Corina finally gets to dance the *Fire-Bird*.

The film is something of a detour in that is a ballet film that was one of Lorens Marmstedt's European co-productions, and Ekman's first film in colour. It is clear that the global success of Powell and Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948) had an influence on the film, as it had on so many other films of the time. It is not only the ballet setting which makes the films related but also to expressive use of colour, not least red. According to Furhammar, it was also the first Swedish feature film in which colour was used deliberately in an artistic way (Furhammar & Åhlund 1993: 13). It is a film set partly in Sweden and partly in Italy, with an international cast, and plays with the notion of national characteristics by using stereotypes and then transferring them. One example finds the traditional Swedish pastoral hymn 'Ack Värmeland du sköna' used first in a conventional clichéd way in Sweden, and then later it is sung by an Italian in Italy, in broken Swedish.

The story, as is so often the case in Ekman's films, is about the two worlds of artistic life and family life cannot mix, it is either art or family. It is also a somewhat traditional backstage story about the highly competitive world of ballet, with Linda Corina having to do battle with the up-and-coming ballerina Alice Lund. Alice Lund is played by Eva Henning. Mario Vanni is played by the Italian opera singer Tito Gobbi, in one of only three films he made, the other two being Italian opera films. Linda Corina is played by Ellen Rasch, who was a professional ballet dancer, and married to Marmstedt at the time. The ballet numbers were choreographed by Maurice Béjart, one of Europe's leading choreographers. He was working in Stockholm at the time, although his great international fame was to come later in the 1950s.

The story is not unusual for an Ekman film, but that is not what makes the film interesting today. The interest stems rather from the ballet numbers and the artful use of colour. Working again with cinematographer Göran Strindberg, as well as Hilding Bladh, the film is shot not on the commonly used Technicolor, but Gevacolor. It was something of an experiment, and the Swedish technicians and laboratories were not equipped to handle it. Instead, the ballet sequences had to be developed in Paris, whereas part of the post-production was made at Denham Laboratories in Britain. The primary colour is red, which is the colour of the costume that the fire-bird, the main character in the ballet, is wearing. In fact, red is everywhere, a striking, bold and vibrant red that sometimes gives the film the impression of having been shot in 3D. For example flowers, of which there are plenty, seem to be bursting out of the screen.

When Ekman was in Paris, doing the post-production for *The Fire-Bird*, his wife Eva Henning left him. This was a great shock to him (Ekman 1955: 215-216), and it would affect his work. He dealt with the divorce in his plays and films, as will be discussed later. Not, however, in the film which immediately followed the international experiment of *The Fire-Bird*.

We Three Debutantes (*Vi tre debutera*, 1953) synopsis:

A publishing house in Stockholm is going to release a book with three new, young poets. A working class man, a man from a wealthy family and a young woman who is a dancer. The three poets, despite the initial resentment between them, spend some time together, talking about their writing and their dreams. Both men fall for the girl, but she is reluctant to get involved. They have one adventure together, stealing a rowing boat and getting arrested by the police, but their friendship is too fraught and will not last. In the end the working class man signs on to a ship and the other two watch him leave Stockholm, before they too go their separate ways.

What is unusual with *We Three Debutantes* is that Ekman himself did not get any script writing credits. According to the credits, Herbert Grevenius and Olof Molander wrote the script, but it seems reasonable to assume that Ekman had a hand in it as well. Grevenius had written the play it is based on, first performed on radio in 1941 but not on stage until 1948. It is a sweet and affectionate film, loosely structured and without any particular plot. It can be seen as a snapshot of life among the young in Stockholm during springtime in the early-1950s. The tone is set in the opening sequence of several minutes of images of Stockholm in

the early morning sun, while Ekman introduces the film and the city with a voice-over. It is only after this long poetic sequence that the audience are introduced to the three debutantes, two young men and a young woman. The publisher is excited about the clash between the two men and says: “The errand boy, hmm, bicycle messenger and the boss’s son, what a publicity campaign, so folkhemmet!” Even though some of Ekman's earlier films have dealt with the idea of *folkhemmet*, this is the one time it is explicitly mentioned.

The film touches on various aspects of class difference and without going into any particular depth it still creates a picture of ordinary life, and as such can be compared to *Common People*, the earlier cooperation between Ekman and Grevenius. The film shows that even after roughly 30 years of Social Democratic governments, class and gender are still unequal and co-existence is difficult. The three debutantes have as their motto “Together we stand, divided we fall”, but sexual jealousies and class resentment means that they fight more than they have fun, and in the end they go their separate ways, the working class boy signing on to a ship bound for Ireland, because he cannot stand the suffocating life on land. On the one hand, it is a surprisingly pessimistic look at society, but on the other hand it remains consonant with Ekman's themes; the importance of freedom, the suffocating judgemental nature of bourgeois society, and inequality between men and women. In this film, possibly because the original idea came from Grevenius and not Ekman, it discusses specifically Swedish topics, there is an unusually clear 'Swedish-ness' to it. The balance between Ekman and the Swedish context will be analysed more thoroughly in the last chapter.

We Three Debutantes is also important because it inaugurates Ekman's permanent switch from Terra, where he had made most of his films thus far, to SF. SF was the biggest production company in Sweden and more conservative and commercially inclined than Terra. It is also the first film Ekman did together with cinematographer Gunnar Fischer, who already had a successful working relationship with Ingmar Bergman and was one of Sweden’s greatest cinematographers of all time, comparable to Göran Strindberg. The films Fischer and Ekman made together are among Ekman’s most stylish, although they are reminiscent of Ekman’s work with Strindberg. Incidentally, Ekman and Bergman were competing over who could do the longest single take, and according to Leif Furhammar, Ekman won with a take in *We Three Debutantes* (Furhammar & Åhlund 1993: 14). The sequence takes place at an office and is 4.35 minutes long, with the characters and the camera moving back and forth around the office, introducing characters and instigating plot points.

The three debutantes are played by Maj-Britt Nilsson, Sven-Erik Gamble and Per Oscarsson, and they were praised by the critics, as was the film as a whole. For some, this was a comeback for Ekman, although the critic at the *Dagens Nyheter*, himself in the publishing business, disapproved of the portraits of the publishers. It must have been obvious to everybody in the business that the publishing house in the film was Bonniers, who also owned *Dagens Nyheter*. The two male poets in the film were inspired by real poets, primarily Harry Martinsson. At one point the three poets steal a rowing boat, an incident that also was inspired by an actual occurrence. One of the poets involved in the actual theft was the aforementioned Stig Dagerman, the writer and occasional film critic who was part of 'Generation 40'. Again and again, Ekman's habit of drawing upon the world around him is apparent, and in his next film, *Gabrielle*, this would be agonizingly clear.

3:4 Autobiography and feminism

As was mentioned earlier, Ekman's wife, and star, Eva Henning, left him whilst he was in Paris doing the post-production work for *The Fire-Bird*. This was for him a great loss and he dealt with it artistically, in several ways. Besides writing about it in his autobiography, he wrote a play and made film based on the experience. The play was called *Fullmåne* (*Full Moon*), and in it he pretended that they eventually made up, and got back together. Ekman's play was also turned into a film script, but the film was never made. When he did make a film about the break-up, it was not a hopeful and positive story, but a bitter and pessimistic one.

Gabrielle synopsis:

A man is sitting in a bar in Paris, and tells his story to the bartender. He is a diplomat with the Swedish embassy and he is in Paris alone, because his wife wanted to have some time for herself to think about their marriage. She is disturbed by his jealousy and considers leaving him. While he is in Paris he imagines three different scenarios involving his wife and a man the husband knows, Rodin. In one scenario the two have an affair, in another Rodin tries to seduce her but she fights him off, and in the third she kills Rodin after she has made her pregnant. In the end it turns out that she had not done anything wrong, and does not even know Rodin. Instead she sends a telegram to her husband telling him she is leaving him, that it is all over.

Ekman wrote it with Walter Ljungquist, their last film together. It is set in Paris, where Ekman was when his marriage collapsed, and the similarities between fact and fiction are rather clear, with the man trapped in Paris while the wife in Sweden is contemplating leaving him. What is interesting is the difference between the above-mentioned play and the film. *Fullmåne*, the play written first, is wishful thinking, whereas the film is closer to the truth, and filled with despair. Typically for Ekman, however, the blame falls almost entirely on the man, and part of the problem is his jealousy. Several married men in Ekman's films are jealous, and often petty, whereas the characters played by Eva Henning and other actresses are usually more calm and collected, and in the comedies they laugh at their husband or suitor's behaviour. But there is a special kind of sadness that fills *Gabrielle*, in that the man and the woman both want to be together, but since he is incapable of controlling himself, and is acting against his better judgement, he forces them apart.

Some critics, among them the prestigious Harry Schein at *BLM* and Nils Beyer at *Morgon Tidningen*, thought *Gabrielle* was a great film, and as good as *Girl With Hyacinths*. Several others, while being dazzled by the visual and narrative complexities, one likened the film to a set of "Chinese boxes", felt that the theme of passion was beyond Ekman, that he was too nice and "too well-brought-up" (Björkman 1954) to make a film about such matters. Yet again it is clear that Ekman's public persona is held against him as a filmmaker, despite the fact that he had done plenty of films filled with passion, emotion and angst. One critic wrote that the film might have been good had it been directed by Bergman. It sometimes seems as if the critics had a fixation with Bergman, and that arguably Ekman, more than anybody else, suffered from this.

The narrative structure of *Gabrielle* was, as the critics noticed, fractured and complex, as so often with Ekman during these years, this time drifting not only back and forth in time, but also between dream and reality. The next film he wrote and directed, *Private Entrance* (*Egen ingång*, 1956) would be equally complex, and just as bitter and sad.

Private Entrance synopsis:

A heavy rain is soaking Stockholm and in a cheap apartment a woman, Marianne Stenman, is found unconscious by her neighbours. They move her into one neighbour's kitchen sofa, and then a series of flashbacks tells the story of what happened to her. She felt neglected by her husband, who was always working late, and when she met an attractive journalist who shared

her love of art she begins spending time with him. She then leaves her husband because he cannot give her what she needs. After the divorce she slept with the journalist and eventually got pregnant. When the husband comes to her new apartment to take her back she tells him that she is pregnant, and when he hears about this he becomes very upset and leaves. She faints and is found by the neighbours, the scene that opened the film. The journalist's wife then attacks Marianne in the apartment, accusing her of stealing her husband. After this Marianne leaves the apartment but on her way out she gets tangled up in a dog leash and falls down a staircase and is killed.

This was Ekman's first film of 1956 and has been seen by some, including Leif Furhammar, as proof that Ekman was losing his ability to do serious films. Furhammar writes that *Private Entrance*: “unquestionably looked like a desperate and shameless, or perhaps embarrassed, effort to repeat the exclusive narrative structure that had been so successful in *While the Door Was Locked* ten years earlier, for lack of alternatives. It might have been acceptable had the effort succeeded, but now it did not“ (Furhammar, Åhlund 1993: 14, trans.). Still the film, albeit flawed, is very interesting and worthy, on several counts, of a closer look. It is interesting to note that it was originally to have been made by Bergman. *Private Entrance* is based on a book by a Norwegian writer, Sigurd Hoels, and the rights were bought by SF with the idea of letting Bergman direct it. Instead, Bergman then decided to do *Smiles of a Summer Night*, so the idea of filming Hoels' novel was suggested to Ekman, who took it on and re-wrote the story.

As several previous Ekman films, it begins with a speaker and a shot of a house, on a particular street, Kavallerigatan 77. The speaker informs us that on this day Marianne Stenman will die, and he starts to tell her story and that of the events that led to her death. But the film is not only about her; it is about all the people in that building. As Furhammar mentioned, it is reminiscent of Ekman's earlier *While the Door Was Locked*, the buildings even share the same street. *Private Entrance* takes place on Kavallerigatan 77, in the earlier film it was Kavallerigatan 7. It is interesting to note that there is no Kavallerigatan (Cavalry Street) in Stockholm. But Ekman lived on Artillerigatan (Artillery Street) when he grew up, so maybe he simply wished to retain the military theme.

The main themes of the film are women's trials and tribulations in a male chauvinistic society, the pettiness of ordinary people and the suffocating effects of the institution of marriage. The

title refers to female empowerment and emancipation, that in order to be free they need to have their own entrance to the apartment, to the marriage. In the film, Marianne tries to break free from her marriage but after a month on her own the hatred with which she is met by her husband and her neighbours causes her mental breakdown, with the words “Human beings are much more horrible than I thought.” and her eventual, accidental, death. It is an angry and pessimistic film, but the fact that a young couple, a student and an actress, still wish to get married in the end can be read as a measure of hope. It can also be seen as the final irony, that despite all evidence to the contrary, humans still persist in thinking matrimony is something intrinsically good. At one point the two young lovers are discussing a neighbour, and he says “She’s in all likelihood a good, proper wife.” to which she replies “Proper? I can’t imagine anything more boring!” so maybe there is some hope for them. They also have an argument about her work in the theatre. He accuses her of neglecting him, saying “But the theatre isn’t everything, is it?” to which she replies: “Yes, to me it is.” As should be clear by now, both of these sentiments return again and again in Ekman’s films, the idea that respectability and propriety equal boredom and stagnation, that there is nothing more important than the theatre, and the strain this thinking often causes relationships. But it is not only the theatre. Marianne and her husband were genuinely in love at the beginning but what made them enemies was the fact that he was always working, as he was a doctor at a hospital, and she was left alone. This scenario is reminiscent of the story in Ekman’s earlier *To Each His Own*.

But perhaps the most interesting debate follows Marianne and the journalist's trip to the art exhibition.

Sture: “Life is ugly, art is beautiful”

Marianne: “So all art is based on a lie?”

Sture “No, but a great artist has the ability to create beauty that exists only in his imagination.”

“Ridiculous. Isn’t nature beautiful?”

“Yes, until man comes and destroys it. Between you and me, man is a bloody nuisance.”

“Between you and me, you are a quasi-philosopher.”

“Between you and me, I’m hungry.”

This can be read as yet another instance of Ekman taking on 'Generation 40', It can also be seen as an outlet for Ekman of an inner conflict, between a deeply-felt view that the world is

rotten, but that it should not be taken so seriously. It is not clear-cut, because the journalist speaking those misanthropic lines also talks about an ideal, which lies beyond right and wrong, beyond civilization, and this is a sentiment that can be seen defended in several of Ekman's films, for example in the character of the vagabond in *Wandering With the Moon*.

Visually, *Private Entrance* is one of the most striking and inventive of all Ekman's films. The fact that it is raining outdoors in the scenes taking place in the present is put to expressive use in all interior shots, especially when Marianne is lying on a bed in a feverish condition. On the wall above the bed, and on the bed itself, is the reflection of a window. On the window, rain water trickles down, making it appear that she is drenched, water gushing over her. In another striking shot, the right part of the image is a close-up of the journalist's face and the left part is black. Then a superimposition of Marianne's face appears on the dark side of the image, and she speaks one line of dialogue. Then a new superimposition of her appears, and she speaks another line. This continues for some time, and it becomes almost like a condensed re-telling of their whole affair, or as if her life is flashing before his eyes. Another impressive scene finds Marianne telling her husband that she is leaving him. His reaction is a combination of anger and self-pity, and they stand at opposite sides of the room, in medium shots, arguing. Then he starts to get really agitated and begins to gesticulate, and the camera stays on him, not cutting back to her. Then after a while the camera starts to track backwards, away from him. He slowly turns to follow the movements of the camera, and it can be assumed that it is moving towards the door, a suspicion that is confirmed with the appearance of the sound of a door opening and closing. In this long take the camera becomes her, and we become her as well. Without her saying anything, and without her even being seen, the audience can feel and share her pity and loathing towards her loud and abusive husband.

So *Private Entrance* is an important film, and essential when discussing Ekman's body of work. The problem with the film is that Ekman has included some unnecessary and melodramatic touches that jar with the rest of the film. The clearest example is the voice-over that appears frequently to remind the audience that Marianne has only a short time left to live. If the speaker had only introduced the film, it would have been fine, but coming back, again and again, it becomes a nuisance, and the effect is more likely to make the audience laugh or cringe than move them. It is an error of judgement. But even so the film remains moving and powerful, exposing the worst elements in human beings and of society.

Chapter 4 The final years

The last scene of *Gabrielle* takes place at Bromma airport in Stockholm. The character played by Hasse Ekman walks up to the desk that sells newspapers and magazines. He says “*Esquire*, *Look* and *Time* please. I'm flying to Brazil tonight.” It is the quintessential ending of an Ekman film, a lonely man buying international journals and then leaving Sweden for Southern America. Here the ending also has some additional symbolism. A popular perception of Ekman's career among film historians is that he declined in the 1950s, that *Gabrielle* was the end of Ekman as a serious and successful artist. Earlier in this thesis, Furhammar was quoted as saying: “it is saddening in hindsight to see how many filmmakers that [...] experienced artistic decline during the decade following the end of the Second World War.” (Furhammar 1991: 232, trans.) The complete quote however emphasises this perceived fall of Ekman (“it is saddening in hindsight to see how many filmmakers that, like Hasse Ekman, went through a remarkably declining artistic development during the decade following the end of the Second World War”). It is as if Ekman was the prime example of this atmosphere of decline. In *En liten bok om Hasse* Furhammar argues that in the years after 1953 Ekman does not: “come even close to the wit, depth and passion of before.” (Furhammar, Åhlund 1993: 14, trans.) Forslund argues that: “There is really no need to talk about what Hasse did in the coming 10 years – with a few *exceptions*.” (Forslund 1982: 204, his italics, trans.) Gösta Werner argues along similar lines. (Werner 1979: 92 & 190)

As was explained in the first chapter, there was a decline in Swedish cinema in general and Ekman's *Gabrielle* can be seen as the last film of the Swedish renaissance. There definitely was a shift in Swedish cinema, and as was seen above, some have argued that there was also a shift in Ekman's career. The shift in Swedish cinema and in Ekman's career might be related but the situation is more complicated when it comes to Ekman. It is clearly the case that something changed in Ekman's later films, beginning in 1956, but to argue that this constitutes a decline begs the question what decline can be. As far as box office success is concerned, it was not until the 1960s that the public began to drop out in substantial numbers, and that could just as well be attributed to the changing habits of the public than anything specifically related to the quality of Ekman's writing or direction. There was a general, and catastrophic, decrease in ticket sales, as mentioned in Chapter 1. From the perspective of an auteurist study, there was no noticeable decline either. The themes and motifs that Ekman had been dealing with since 1940 were still there, and the films were mostly as personal as they had ever been.

Whether they were qualitatively different, if the writing, direction and acting was worse than it had been, is a subjective issue. The later films in many filmmakers' oeuvres are often dismissed, or taken as evidence of decline. Charges similar to those directed against Ekman have been directed against many others. While it is of course sometimes the case that a filmmaker declines, that the films are no longer good or successful, it is often more a question of the films being different, and in a sense might be seen to no longer fit the auteurist thematic models that the critics have established for them.

This chapter will look at the films Ekman made in his last decade as a filmmaker and examine if they are different, and if so how, and whether there are signs of a decline. Ekman's move to Spain in 1964, and the significance of this move, will also be discussed.

4:1 Ekman after the arrival of television

One of the purposes of this thesis has been to correct the lack of critical and scholarly attention given to Ekman's work. Yet even if there has been little written about him in general, that which *has* been said has been about the 1940s and 1950. There have been some books and essays covering those years, albeit to a very limited extent. The years covered in this chapter on the other hand have had no coverage at all in the writings of previous historians and scholars. Only the first two films, which are also his last two films of 1956, have been written about. Therefore, there will be very few references to other texts in this section.

In 1956, Ekman did three films and one of them, *Private Entrance*, was discussed in the previous chapter. The other two films Ekman released in 1956 are very different from anything Ekman had done before, and it is significant that they were both made after the release of Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night*. Significant because, after having seen *Smiles of a Summer Night*, Ekman sent a telegram to Bergman which read: "I have just seen *Smiles of a Summer Night*. Now I give up. Just so you know. It is that bloody good!" (Forslund 1982: 205, trans.) This is not to say that Ekman necessarily would have continued making complex and artistic films had it not been for Bergman's successes, but as has been mentioned previously, Ekman had suffered both comparisons and criticism, which he found more and more difficult to handle. He had also lost Eva Henning, his life partner as well as his artistic partner. But instead of leaving for foreign shores, as so many of his film characters did, he turned a corner and moved on. At least for the time being...

The filmmaker Schamyl Bauman and Ekman occasionally worked together and Bauman's 1930s output influenced Ekman. In 1955 Bauman became ill, and could no longer make films. In a sense Ekman then took over Bauman's filmmaking niche since the mid-1940s, that is, comedies with the actress Sickan Carlsson. She was one of Sweden's biggest stars at the time and the type she specialized in was the sturdy and self-sufficient woman, who, although not immune to romance, had a more professional approach to love and life. In a way Carlsson was like a Swedish version of Doris Day. She and Bauman made nine films together between 1945 and 1955. Bauman had had a few weak years during the war but it could be said that he was rejuvenated by working with Carlsson, and the films were commercially successful but left the critics somewhat torn. However, they all agreed that Sickan Carlsson was sensational, a brilliant actress and a brilliant comedienne. It could be argued that the Bauman/Carlsson films were almost a particular genre. And the year after Bauman's and Carlsson's last film together Ekman made his first with her: *Seventh Heaven (Sjunde himlen)*. But the fact that the Bauman/Carlsson films were considered an institution does not mean that Ekman did not make the films his own. And it could be argued that Sickan Carlsson was just what Ekman needed after his recent setbacks.

Seventh Heaven synopsis:

The most popular radio personality in Sweden is Willy Lorens, who has his own show directed towards women of all ages. Personally he hates his job, and all the excitement leads to a nervous breakdown and a stay in hospital. There he meets a doctor, Lovisa Sundelius, who confesses that she does not like his show at all. She thinks that he is frivolous and irresponsible whereas she is respectable and serious. She is engaged to be married to an officer, whereas Willy is against the very idea of marriage, on principle. But he gets it into his head to seduce her, and when he learns that she is taking a bus tour to Italy he decides to go with her even though she is travelling with her fiancé. During the course of the trip they both change, she by loosening her inhibitions and be more life-affirming, he by realising that he actually does want to get married. In the end, when they reach Italy, she breaks up with her fiancé and she and Willy get together.

Seventh Heaven is a travelogue of a bus journey around Europe, made in colour, full of music and with no apparent intent other than to amuse. It was the first of five films Ekman and Carlsson would make together, out of the 14 films Ekman made after *Private Entrance* and

that telegram to Bergman. Unusually, Ekman this time worked with Molander's cinematographer Åke Dahlqvist, but of the sombre and carefully sculpted images of Molander's films nothing can be seen here.

Foreign travel was something of a novelty in Sweden in the post-war era, and *Seventh Heaven* taps into this. Half of the film takes place during a bus trip through Europe, from Stockholm to Rome, and the film feels as though co-funded by a travel agency or bus company. To further emphasis the element of novelty, one of the passengers on the trip at one point expresses his excitement about being on this journey. With a combination of wonder and a sense of regret he says: "I'm 65 years old and I've never been outside of Sweden's borders." The film can be seen as an effort both to show the audience something they have not seen before, being shot on location, in Hamburg, Heidelberg, Venice and all the way to Rome, but also to let the audience feel that they too can have this if they want, that there are now ways for them to travel abroad, and that they should take the opportunity.

Seventh Heaven begins, like several earlier Ekman films, with his own voice-over. A series of images of Stockholm ends with a shot of a man, and the voice-over introduces him: "He did not know that 12 hours later he would lose his wife." Then the scene changes to a radio studio where Willy Lorentz (played by Ekman) is about to start his new radio show, called *Seventh Heaven*. This is playful variation of the overbearingly ominous voice-over of *Private Entrance*. Unlike the earlier film *Seventh Heaven* is rather frivolous and filled with crowd-pleasing elements but this does not negate Ekman's personal touches. It is also noticeable that *Seventh Heaven* is yet another of Ekman's films that is set in a creative milieu, in this case radio. But whereas the theatre had always been treated with love and respect this media, the radio, is mocked on several levels. This is to be a recurring motif in subsequent Ekman films, the parody of popular media, including the biggest star of radio and television, Lennart Hyland. One reason for the disrespectful treatment of television and radio could be that they were a grave threat to both cinema and the theatre, since they took away the audience. But it could also be that Ekman felt that they encouraged conformity and bourgeois family life, since television and radio are media that are consumed in the home, with the family, rather than with strangers in a public place. The possibility of doing something spontaneous and unpredictable is perhaps higher if you are abroad in the world, rather than sitting at home with your family. This would be associated with the fear of boredom and stagnation that links so many of Ekman's characters.

Willy Lorentz, the character played by Ekman in *Seventh Heaven*, is not that far removed from the public face of the real Ekman, in that Willy Lorentz is playing a famous, easy-going playboy. But when that character is off the air, he complains about the commercialism and stupidity of the radio content in which he must participate. At one point he cries: "I'll be damned if I'll have anything to do with this, you're making a fool out of me in the whole of Sweden." He eventually has a nervous breakdown, and decides to quit. After being criticised for his show by Lovisa Sundelius, however, he gets so angry he persists in continuing with the show, and also tries to seduce her. In this endeavour he eventually succeeds, after he has genuinely fallen for her. She is struggling, however, in that the two stand for two opposing world-views. He stands for pleasure and life-affirmation; she stands for order and control, and is engaged to be married to a stiff officer (played by Gunnar Björnstrand). As has been argued on several occasions in this thesis, this is a key motif for Ekman; the perennial battle between the orderly and stable on the one hand and the life-affirming and spontaneous on the other hand. It is telling that it is not until Lovisa has left Sweden for a bus trip to Rome that she realises what a mistake marriage to her officer fiancé would be. Her new-found sense of freedom, both in Bavaria and in Italy, is one important factor in her deciding to break the engagement and run off with Willy Lorentz instead. In a sense her fiancé comes to represent Sweden, petty and correct, and Willy Lorentz the outside world, glamorous and exotic. This is of course a one-dimensional view of the world, both Sweden and of Continental Europe, but it is important to remember that it is not so much Italy in itself that is exciting and exotic, but the fact that there is a world outside Sweden, a world which might be less meticulously designed and safe, and is therefore more alive. In this film, as in so many earlier Ekman films, the argument is that bourgeois ideals are over-valued, as is respectability and responsibility.

So here the personal interests of Ekman, the studio's need for a box office success, and the travel agencies wish to promote charter trips for the working and middle classes, coalesce. The film becomes both a sign of the times and yet another expression of Ekman's deeply-held beliefs. And it was a huge hit. (Forslund, 1982: 206)

Some critics saw it as a return for Ekman from the gloom of *Private Entrance* to the cheerful comedy of *Seventh Heaven*. However, one critic pointedly wrote: "Hasse may be very angry by the comparison, but Ingmar would have placed the same sequences on a completely different artistic level – occasionally during the course of the film this acknowledgement feels

like a lamentation.” (Björkman 1956, trans.) It is certain that Bergman would have made the film differently, but there is no reason to think it would have been better. Bergman was not incapable of a bad film. It is also somewhat strange that the critics felt that it was a return to form for Ekman after his previously tragic film. He had, after all, not made a comedy since *One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer* in 1947, so if this is a return to form for Ekman it would imply that all that went in between, such as *The Banquet*, *The Girl From the Third Row*, *Girl With Hyacinths* and *Gabrielle*, was just a waste of time.

As of yet, there has been no sign of any decline in Ekman's work. The last three films might have been different from most of the films he had made before 1956, but the question of their decline compared with his earlier comedies was not an issue for either the critics or the spectators. The films are witty and well-acted and full of Ekman's recurring themes. They are as personal as ever. The next film though was in some ways seen as a disappointment and the next section will look more closely at it.

4:2 Autobiographical games

Now Bergman and Ekman were colleagues at Sweden largest studio, SF, and the rivalry was perhaps contained. They would now be more supportive of one another, and Ekman would not make any more films that were parodies of Bergman, or that criticised him. After Ekman had admitted defeat in the telegram to Bergman, he perhaps felt less stressed and less competitive and could take pleasure in Bergman's successes instead. However, the fact that both Bergman and Ekman were now working for SF prompts Leif Furhammar's observation: “it must have felt a bit strange [for Ekman] to be the one at SF who with his professional routine more than anyone else created the financial support for, former rival, Bergman's artistic freedom.” (Furhammar & Åhlund 1993: 29, trans.) There is no denying the irony in this. In his 1958 film, Ekman would yet again touch upon their relationship but this time neither in a philosophical way, as in *The Girl From the Third Row*, nor as parody, as in the films discussed in the previous chapter. The film was called *The Jazz Boy* and it would be done in a more resigned way, in a way acknowledging the defeat, but this does not make it any less interesting.

The Jazz Boy synopsis:

Stockholm, 1922. Teddy Anker, a young man about town, does on an impulse buy a night

club. It becomes a success and Anker expands his business and is soon something of a king of Stockholm's nightlife and entertainment world. He puts on shows, produces films and record albums. He has married a cabaret girl who quits her job, on his command, and becomes a housewife. She is soon bored and starts a new career as a singer and then as an actress. She is not good enough though but he insists that she should become a great star. After a brutal failure she asks for a divorce. After the divorce Anker's business empire starts to crumble and after the global financial crisis he goes bankrupt. His ex-wife marries another man and Anker moves to Africa. Then Second World War breaks out and Anker is drafted, and by chance he meets his ex-wife whose husband has been killed in the war. They share a kiss and then go their separate ways.

The film got its name from a very popular song of the 1920s called 'Jazzgossen', a number which features in the film. Ekman's film is an ambitious undertaking, a combination of musical and historical biopic of a fictional character made with a large budget. It seeks to capture the evolution of Swedish show business from the early 1920s until the Second World War. That it is a film close to Ekman's heart might be deduced from the fact that the main character is called Teddy Anker, making the fourth appearance of that name in Ekman's films. There are also many people playing themselves, figures who are skilfully integrated into the story. Many well-known singers and writers appear, for example Karl Gerhard, who was introduced in Chapter 1.

It was again an Eastman Color production, in a widescreen format (1.66:1), but the cinematography by Bodin is not inspiring, and despite having musical numbers, the colour scheme is subdued and flat. Yet from a historical perspective, *The Jazz Boy* is more interesting, especially for the purposes of this thesis. The film covers the period during which Ekman grew up, one which was an important era in Swedish show business. In addition, the film is rich in typical Ekman themes and touches. During the title sequence, a man is seen tap dancing towards the camera on what looks like a large white stage. After this title sequence, there is a cut to a plate with the numerals 1922, and when the camera zooms out it is revealed that it is the number plate of a Stockholm car (in those days the number plates were organised after the district they came from, and all Stockholm cars had number plates beginning with an A). The car's owner is Teddy Anker (who is played by Ekman) and he is on his way to watch a show. Driving there, he almost runs over a young woman (Maj-Britt Nilsson). Her name is Karin Ingel and as an apology he drives her to the place where she is going, a lecture about

communism. Karin is dating Erik Jonsson, a poet and communist, and she asks Anker if he is interested in politics, to which he replies: “As the good little jazz guy I am I prefer Karl Gerhard to Karl Marx.” It is Karin that Teddy Anker will eventually marry.

As Anker's show business empire grows, so does his recklessness. Business is good so he is making a lot of money, and he is willing to take whatever chances he can. He is working all the time, and neglecting his wife. Simultaneously he also forces Karin to become his star, making the first Swedish talking picture with her in the lead, and trying to make her a theatre star as well. But it fails, partly because she is not good enough, and at the same time their marriage deteriorates. Besides investing in his own business, Anker has also invested a lot in Kreuger stocks. Ivar Kreuger, who was discussed in the first chapter of the thesis, was a Swedish business man and investor, and since he was interested in films, he invested heavily in the Swedish film industry as well as in more traditional industries. At one point in the film, when two characters are discussing Kreuger, it is said that he was “pumping gold into welfare-Sweden”. Then comes the Kreuger crash, leading to his suicide in Paris in 1932. In a telling scene in the film, at a performance of one of Anker's shows, a member of the audience is given a piece of paper. He immediately gets up and forces his way out of the row, while people start to whisper to each other, and as soon as anybody is told what was written on the paper they too get up and leave. Eventually, the camera dollies in on the paper lying on the floor and the message reads “Kreuger is dead.” This is the beginning of the end for Anker and his professional career.

In the end, after he and Karin have said goodbye, he turns his back towards the camera and walks further and further away, in a white space. It is a shot reminiscent of the opening shot of the film, as is so often the case in Ekman's films, only this time it is not tap dancing in the middle of a white stage, but walking in deep white snow, leaving a trail of lonely footprints behind.

As this lengthy discussion of the plot should have made clear, it is in many ways a typical Ekman story, set in the world of performers and the stage. Some of the characters in the film are playing themselves, and many are based on real persons. It also has that conflict between stability and security versus impulsiveness and excitement which runs through the whole of Ekman's oeuvre. This time the impulsiveness and excitement lead to a bitter end. It could be argued, however, that it might not matter all that much that the end was brutal. As has been

articulated in many earlier Ekman films, it is better to have really lived for a while than to have spent a whole life secure and embalmed.

Another recurring feature in Ekman's films are artists, painters and paintings. They are so frequent that this becomes a theme in its own right. There is a painting in *The Jazz Boy* that has symbolic value. The first time Karin comes to Anker's apartment she notices a large painting by Swedish rural painter Anders Zorn. As they are looking at it a piece of music is faintly heard in the background, music which is from the same time as the painting was painted, and from the same region in Sweden, and Karin says that the woman in the painting was her grandmother. This painting appears later in the film, on a number of occasions, and in a way follows the couple through their life together. Paintings also feature prominently, to the extent that they almost become a part of the plot, for example in *We Three Debutantes* and *Private Entrance*. There are painters in prominent roles in "Happiness Approaches", *One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer*, *The Girl From the Third Row*, *Girl With Hyacinths* and *The White Cat*, and in these films paintings also have special functions. The question then becomes whether these painters and paintings have a deeper meaning. At the end of *The Jazz Boy*, one of the things Anker has to do is to sell his large art collection. How many of those paintings were owned by Ekman himself is difficult to say, but the auction scene would recur in real life a few years later. In his private life, Ekman was an avid art collector, filling his home with paintings, primarily of modern Swedish artists. When he left Sweden and moved to Spain in 1964 he sold the collection, and got SEK705,700 for it (Forslund 1982: 227), which today would be around SEK7 million (or £640,700). It is possible that the paintings in the films were partly a way for Ekman to show off his own collection. Some of his characters seem to live in a gallery, such as Marianne Stenman in *Private Entrance*. But it is more than this. Ekman uses art to define characters, and to say something about them. Painters and paintings for Ekman are not just for decoration or for commerce, they are essential, both to his own art, and to his view of the world, and of people and relationships. Paintings will hang on the wall not just because they are beautiful but because they say something vital about the person in whose apartment they are hanging, such as the painting of the two bathing women in Dagmar Brink's apartment, or the painting *The Scarecrow*, also known as *Death and the Girl*, by Nils Dardel, which hangs on the wall at the home of the masochistic couple in *The Banquet*. When watching Ekman's films, paying attention to the art works displayed, the frames within the frames, can be very rewarding.

To return to *The Jazz Boy*, Erik Jonsson, the man Karin was originally dating but left for Anker, is partly inspired by Bergman. Not that Bergman was a communist, but they share other traits. On one of their dates Erik reads her his poems, which are pessimistic and tragic. “It is as if death was the most beautiful thing in life for you.” she says, and he answers that he does not know why he has these thoughts, an allusion to Bergman's well-known focus on death in his own work. Erik and Anker are seen as rivals, and initially Anker wins Karin, but after she and Anker break up she goes back to Erik and they get married, with him having got a job at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm. This makes it even more tempting to see Erik Jonsson and Teddy Anker as Bergman and Ekman, with Karin being a symbol of their rivalry, not over the same woman, but over their status in Swedish cultural circles at the time, with Bergman now the committed artist and Ekman the lightweight entertainer. This conflict between art and commerce would appear again, in somewhat unusual circumstances, in Ekman's next film.

*The Great Amateur** (*Den store amatören*, 1958) synopsis:

In a small town the local police constable is also head of an amateur theatre group. He has been asked to set up a play to celebrate the town's 800th anniversary. The police constable, Alfred, is in love with an actress, Linda Svensson, but he has kept this to himself. Then a theatre owner from Stockholm, Max Wallby, drives through town, and when his car breaks down he goes to see a performance at the local theatre. He immediately spots Linda and asks if she wants to sign a contract and come to Stockholm. After much hesitation she says yes. Alfred has not given up on her however and finally goes to Stockholm and asks her to come back with him. Again, after some hesitation, she says yes. There they do the anniversary play together and then go off to get married.

Unusually for an Ekman film *The Great Amateur* is not set in Stockholm, but in a small (fictional) town called Fårtuna, and the view of the town is initially condescending. Most of the people who live there are presented as backwards and silly, but the small town is also seen as threatening. When Wallby accidentally ends up there, his associate says: “It's not a town, it's like a panopticon. No wonder people are fleeing from the countryside.” This is typically for Ekman. But when Wallby approaches the actress Linda (Marianne Bengtsson) and tries to persuade her to come to Stockholm and play at one of his theatres her response is uncharacteristic for an Ekman character: “I'm not sure I really want to act, I would rather dance. I love to dance.” But she cannot relinquish the dream of going to the city, and struggles

with her sense of responsibility towards her home town, and the lure of the city. The dichotomy between town and country is played out in the ballet numbers that are spread through the film, with the girl at one moment playing the role of the city, graceful, against a man playing the country, coming across as clumsy. In another ballet she is playing the part of a girl caught between the two sides. She does eventually move to the big city, and begins to work on the stage for Wallby (the productions are lavish, and he calls it “neorealism”). But, what makes *The Great Amateur* so rare is that this time the small town eventually wins. Alfred, the head of the small town theatre company, who is in love with Linda, follows her and tries to get her back. In the end she decides to stay with him, leaving the city behind.

Alfred is also doing theatre, as head of an amateur group. Professionally, he is the local police constable. In one scene he has taken Wallby in for questioning, and is interrogating him in his office. When Alfred finds out that Wallby also works in the theatre he says: “But then we are like colleagues. What kind of theatre?” Wallby replies: “Mostly musicals and shows.” Alfred looks disappointed and says: “So, the easy option, just to make money.” Wallby answers: “Yes, and to some extent entertain.” Alfred is becoming more judgemental, but Wallby answers “It's much easier to be an idealist in your position than in mine.” and defends his line of business partly on the ground that many people are depending upon him to bring in money. It is easy to read this is yet another instance of Ekman working out his real life battles in his film scripts and defending himself against the critics (or possibly against himself). The fact that this scene takes place in a police station gives it an almost paranoid quality, as if he was being arrested for being commercial. Whether or not Ekman was consciously thinking about these matters when he wrote and shot the scene is not known, and it does not matter. The interpretation is still there to be drawn, and it shows how the view of Ekman as an internal auteur can give a broader perspective when analysing the films.

Martin Ljung, who played Alfred, the policeman and amateur actor, was a member of Knäppup, a comedy group that Ekman worked with before. Yngve Gamlin, who designed the dream and dance sequences here was also a member of Knäppup. This was to be their last co-operation on a film set, even though Ekman and Knäppup would work together on stage, up to the 1970s. For his next film, Ekman returned to Sickan Carlsson.

*Miss Chic** (*Fröken Chic*, 1959) synopsis:

The agent Buster Carell is abandoned by his one client and is facing financial ruin. In order to

save some money he rents out a room to a young woman. But when he sees a contender in a quiz show on TV he realises that she, a school teacher called Isabella Linder, will be the next big thing and signs her. He also falls in love with her, but she is not sure he is anything for her. The woman who has rented a room is more interested in him however. Isabella quickly becomes a sensation, much as Buster predicted, and but meets another man and they get engaged. Buster however manages to break up the engagement and in the end Isabella realises that she loves him too and they decide to get married.

The film was a great success, financially as well as critically; one critic even called it a comic masterpiece (E L, 1959). Sickan Carlsson plays Isabella, the school teacher, and the television quiz show *Kvitt eller dubbelt*. (*Kvitt eller dubbelt*, Double or Nothing, was a real quiz show which was broadcast on Swedish television for the first time in 1957, inspired by the American show *The 64 ,000 Dollar Question*). Ekman himself plays Buster Carell.

Miss Chic, besides being Ekman's first film shot in Aga-Scope, a Swedish version of CinemaScope, is primarily focused on making fun of television, and especially the host of *Kvitt eller dubbelt*, Nils Erik Bæhrendtz. In the film he is played by Stig Järrel, and called Docent Urbåhn (the name is a play upon the Swedish surname Urban, as well as the word urban). Overall, the tone of the film is Wodehousian and in that way it was a return to some of Ekman's films from the early-1940s, and it is also one of his most Lubitschesque films. But it is also a satire on masculinity, a light-hearted kind of feminism with Ekman's character, Buster Carell, and other male characters too, constantly upstaged and ridiculed by a series of strong and forceful women, including a female judo team which uses Buster Carell for practice. The film is also another of Ekman's evocations of the world of showbiz and creativity. It is unevenly paced (unusually for Ekman, it is slow and laboured), and the editing is not as sharp as it usually is, which is probably due to the new widescreen format Aga-Scope which might have made filming more difficult in the beginning. But even so there is little evidence of decline. *Miss Chic* was after all called a comic masterpiece and it is still popular today.

1956 had been a spectacular year for him, box office-wise, with three of his four most successful films appearing, among them *Seventh Heaven*, the fourth most successful being *Little Märta Steps Forward* from 1945 (Forsslund 1982: 215), but those days were now long gone. This decrease in ticket sales was partly because television had taken its toll, but perhaps

also because Ekman's films lacked the sex and provocation of Bergman's films or the excitement of Arne Mattsson's thrillers, two filmmakers who continued to be popular.

4:3 The last films and voluntary exile

For his next film, Ekman brought back Eva Henning. The last time they worked together was in 1954 when they made *Gabrielle*, the film inspired by the breakdown of their own marriage. She had not made any films since then and she would not make any more with Ekman apart from this one, *Decimals of Love** (*Kärlekens decimaler*, 1960). It holds a lot of interest for this thesis, and will be discussed in some depth.

Decimals of Love synopsis:

Ekman plays a golf trainer, Charlie Gedelius, who is working abroad because he has fallen out with his family. When the film begins he is in Denmark and there he meets Lena Lind, played by Henning. He falls for her, but she is going up to Sweden to get married to his brother. He decides to go home too, to try and get back together with his family. Since the family is wealthy, instead of telling them the truth about himself, he more or less invents a persona that he then presents to them, saying that he is rich and successful. His family on the other hand, whilst actually rich and successful, is not particularly happy. They are merely going through the motions. His brother wants to get a divorce so that he can marry Lena Lind, the same woman Charlie wants, but they are all living lives based on lies, and they are all unhappy together. Eventually, Charlie, after having made peace with them, cannot take that kind of life any more. He has got an offer for a job in Barcelona, and in the end he leaves his family again, and flies to Spain. He makes a stop on the way to visit a friend in Denmark, and he tells the friend that he is moving to Spain with Lena.

Had *Decimals of Love* been Ekman's last film it would have been very fitting in terms of how it relates to his earlier films. It takes at its subject several of his main concerns, ones that are well established by now. The seeming inevitability of married, comfortable life leading to stalemate and boredom, and how common, and easy, it is to live a lie rather than an authentic life. Charlie says at one point: "We all pretend to be better than we are, and if we did not we would probably not have the strength to carry on." And in the end he gives up, and moves to Spain. As in "Happiness Approaches", as in *Changing Trains*, as in *While the Door Was Locked*, as in *The Banquet*, as in *The Girl From the Third Row*, as in *Girl With Hyacinths*, as

in *Private Entrance*, people's lives are compromised by society's conventions and the inhibitions they bring with them, unless they are among the brave few who battle against it. Those that will not battle, usually because they have not got the strength, instead take comfort in the lie. So it is in *Decimals of Love*. Here Charlie takes a lie with him. Even though the audience is meant to believe that Lena is going with him, and even though he tells his friend in Denmark that she is, in the last shot it is revealed that this, too, was a lie. She did not come with him, she did not want to be with him after all, and he is going south alone.

Despite the many strengths and interesting aspects of the film, the critics were not in the least impressed, and as this quote, from the critic Carl Björkman in *Dagens Nyheter*, suggests, the times had changed: “Decimals of Love is one of the many Swedish films that are insufferable because they are in a sense untouchable. One of these films that make you scream after imagination and a willingness to try new things, after boldness and God knows what. A film that makes you want to scream for a Swedish New Wave.” (Björkman 1960, trans.) The film that could arguably be said to be the first in such a new wave, *The Pram* (*Barnvagnen*, 1961) by Bo Widerberg and Jan Troell, was just around the corner. It is worth noticing, however, that when *The Pram* was released, it too was criticised for trying too hard to be new and fresh. What can be said of *Decimals of Love* is that it is conventional in style, with none of the technical playfulness and inventiveness of other films of the time, or even of earlier films by Ekman. It neither has any provocative language or scenes nor is it about youth or aiming for a young audience. But another aspect of the many global new waves was their personal touch and whatever other flaws *Decimals of Love* may have had, it was definitely personal. It even feels like an act of masochism to bring back Eva Henning. But as with *Gabrielle*, Ekman does not try to make the world on film prettier than it was in reality. In the film, she does not want him, and does not go with him to Spain.

Ekman did stay in Sweden for four years and three more films, and while they adhered to the same format (academy ratio) and monochrome, they were very different and varied, especially the next one, a thriller.

The Heist synopsis:

Two young hoodlums, Erik and Janne, escape from prison. They meet up with two friends and after hiding out for a while they decide to rob a private casino. That goes well and they now have some money, and they hook up with some girls. The younger of the two hoodlums, Erik,

falls in love with a girl, Mona, a sad and lonely girl from a broken home. They then do a big job, robbing a race track, and afterwards Erik and Janne flee to Denmark. Mona has the money and she travels to Denmark as well, separately. The police are on to them though and they are cornered in Copenhagen. While Erik and Janne hid out in an empty bar, Mona is arrested and forced to plead with them to surrender. Eventually they do, and come out with their hands up.

The teenager had emerged as an important demographic in Sweden in the late 1950s, and teenagers were not interested in sitting at home in front of the television. They preferred the movies, making them a new target audience. In a sense, teenagers went to the movies to see films about teenagers (Furhammar 1991: 250-252), and *The Heist* spoke to this audience. It is perhaps the only film among those Ekman made after 1956 that is somewhat in tune with the time it was made and this is obvious even from the first shot. It is a conventional panorama shot over Stockholm, but the music is different. It is an energetic jazz score (the music is by Rune Öfwerman), which was a first for Ekman, but consonant with a growing trend in French, British and American films of the period. *The Heist* has a traditional storyline, but what gives it its edge is formally the impressive cinematography, combined with the score, and the depth of the characters. The film has a certain existential angst, which links it to Ekman's earlier films of the 1940s and early-1950s. In the middle of the film, the only time when the two convicts are not running or fighting, they have settled down to rest in a safe apartment. This is where Erik meets Mona, and have an intimate moment, more emotional than sexual as they have both finally met someone who understands them. Both have a feeling of being trapped, a sense of imprisonment which follows them around wherever they go. Family and society imprison them, and the girl at one point describes her existence as: "like a nightmare, and you want to wake up, only it's not possible to wake up." At the end of the film, when the two men are cornered by the police in Copenhagen, the girl is asked by the police to tell them to surrender. There then is a shot of the girl, dressed in white, standing on a square in a pool of darkness, surrounded by policemen. It is a haunting image of loneliness, fragility and entrapment, and one of the most striking visual expressions of what so many of Ekman's characters, mostly women, feel so very often.

Despite the fact the Ekman was more in tune with the prevalent cinematic fashion when he made *The Heist*, he was still criticised in the reviews. The critics felt that it was now too long since he did anything really important and worthwhile. They were not only critical of Ekman

but the climate in Swedish cinema, and one critic formulated these sentiments thus:

Hasse Ekman of course knows his profession. But it was a very long time since he had a particular agenda. Once upon a time he was very polished and bitter, there was a foundation in what he did, which was interesting and unsettling. It is a pity that he has become tired and sidestepped his problems. Understandable but lamentable. It is often said about Nehru that he is like a very large tree that towers over everything and in that way suffocates all that is growing in its vicinity. The same can apparently be said about Ingmar Bergman. There remains no vegetation either beside or under. And it is needed. For the benefit of everybody.” (Höken 1961, trans.)

Arguably, *The Heist* did actually have strong connections with Ekman's earlier films, when he was “polished and bitter”. The alleged decline in Ekman can be said to be more in the minds of the critics and scholars than in the actual films that were made. He had been making films for 22 years now, but he was still true to his themes and his beliefs, he had continued to make personal films, and the overall quality of the films is very strong. There had been occasional setbacks, films that were not as good or as popular as the best, but they were temporary, and always followed by something that was very good, and/or popular. So it could actually be argued that rather than showing signs of decline he showed signs of remarkable consistency and stamina. But he would make only two more films after *The Heist*. The last film would be *The Marriage Wrestler*, based on a play, a farce by Georges Feydeau called *L'hôtel du libre échange*. It was Bergman's idea that Ekman should do it, after the line of failures (Forsslund 1982: 219) and Ekman transferred it to a Swedish setting, Stockholm in 1912. It has a lot of energy, and Ekman's son Gösta Ekman has a part, the only time he acted in one of his father's films. The film does work well as a farce, but it is a far cry from Ekman's former glories.

In 1964 Ekman left Sweden and moved to Spain. Since it had been the dream of almost all his major characters since his very first films, to move to South America, it does not come as a surprise that he himself also eventually left, and if not for South America than at least to the small town of Fuengirola in the southern part of Spain. There are of course many reasons for this voluntary exile, and Ekman gave a reason in a newspaper interview where he said that: “it is much nicer to read a good book in Spain than bad reviews in Sweden. I am very sensitive to criticism.” (Frankl 1967, trans.) When *The Marriage Wrestler* was released Ekman had already moved, after selling his art collection. The next year he was asked if he wanted to

direct what was to be Sweden's first television sitcom, and he accepted. The ten episodes of *Niklasons* became a big success, and rejuvenated Swedish television. (Forsslund 1982: 220) That was the last time Ekman did any work with moving images, and it is something both ironic and typical in that the man who began his career as the filmmaker who rejuvenated Swedish cinema ended his career with rejuvenating Swedish television. It is also ironic and typical that the leading female character in *Niklasons*, played by Sickan Carlsson, in the first episode is taking Spanish lessons because she wants to be able to travel abroad, to Spain or maybe even South America. It shows the consistency of the extraordinary body of work that Hasse Ekman left behind.

Chapter 5 Ideas and Legacy

This chapter will discuss Ekman's relationship with Swedish society, and to what extent his films are “Swedish”. It will then synthesise the themes and the style of Ekman, the auteur, and by treating the films as a whole investigate whether a world-view can be extrapolated from this body of work.

5:1 Ekman and Sweden

This thesis has focused on the national context but at the same time suggested that it is problematic to discuss Ekman's films as unequivocally Swedish, besides the obvious aspects of language and finance. In many of his films the nation is neither an implicit nor explicit theme, and nationality is irrelevant for the story and for the characters. The characters are such that they could be found in most countries, as are the stories told about them. These films can be called 'a-national'. It has already been argued that *With You In My Arms* could have been set in Britain, *Changing Trains* could have been set in France, but it could also be argued that *Royal Rabble* might be set in the US and *The White Cat* in Norway, to name two other possibilities. There are many other films which could have been set elsewhere. This is especially striking in the case of *The First Division*. It is about the Swedish air force but it could be any nation's air force, since it is not about the flag, or a war, but just about men in uniform under internal tensions. No countries are mentioned, remarkably so considering the Second World War had started, and enemy aircraft might be coming from either the Soviet Union or Germany. They could have been British or French films, without changing the stories or the characters. If the same scripts had been filmed in other countries there is no reason why it would not have been possible to make the films without making any changes to the scripts or the shooting style. It is a possibility of course that they are all filled with small telling details that would give them away for, say, a French spectator, so that she would not suppose that it was originally a French film, but these details are still vague and unimportant. This is one reason why it sometimes might make more sense to talk about films as regional rather than national, in Ekman's case Scandinavian or northern European. It is no coincidence that the German-American Ernst Lubitsch and the French Jean Renoir were mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. This is because, given his way of filmmaking, Ekman feels more international than Swedish, and his inspiration comes from abroad rather than from Sweden. In an interview in 1957 Ekman said: "My ideals were Noël Coward, Wodehouse, Capra,

Lubitsch and John Ford.” (Gränd 1957, trans.) He does not mention any Swedish models, not even Bauman, and in a documentary from 1993, when asked if he had had any Swedish role models or sources of influence, he said: “From among the filmmakers, none.” (Åhlund & Carlsson 1993, trans.) That Wodehouse was a model has been alluded to already, but it is hard to see anything of John Ford in Ekman’s films, or of Frank Capra. There are a few similarities between Ekman and Lubitsch, primarily that they both have a way of relying on visual objects and innuendos to suggest sentiments and in particular sexual situations. The connection with Renoir, to some extent also with Lubitsch, is of a way of looking at the world rather than any thematic or stylistic influences. The next section on Ekman’s world-view will discuss this further.

Another reason why Ekman does not feel like a particularly Swedish director is that he is such an overwhelmingly urban director, compared to so many of his colleagues. Sometimes it might make sense to discuss the films as urban, rather than national or regional, and look at them together with urban films from other countries. Films that are set in the countryside might also be more easily seen as national than films set in the city, since the countryside can be more specific to a particular country than the streets of a city and also because national myths and stereotypes are more often associated with the landscape and the countryside. When Swedish films in the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s were drawing on particular national aspects, it was to a large extent the countryside, the rivers, mountains and the archipelago that was highlighted and celebrated. This is also the case with the number of rural films and summer films that were popular in the 1940s and 1950s. Many of these films were also historical and one important aspect of national cinema is the making of historical films, films celebrating or re-reading the history of a given nation. But since Ekman did films which were set in the here and now, with the exception of two films, this aspect of national cinema does not fit either when discussing his films.

But sometimes Sweden is important in Ekman’s films. It depends upon the style, content and context of the individual film and as the thesis has demonstrated, a number of his films are more or less concerned with the nation, or at least aspects of Swedish society, in an explicit way. *A Day Will Come* is set during the war, but unlike *The First Division* here it is clear that it is about Sweden, Finland and the Soviet Union, and that Swedish soldiers are fighting together with Finnish soldiers to defend Finland's national integrity. So here nations are a part of the story, possibly even the centre of it. *The Jazz Boy* is a historical biopic that covers a part

of Swedish history, and ends during the Second World War. Sweden here, although not a topic in itself, still becomes an important part of the story. Then there are three comedies, *Common People*, *Little Märta Steps Forward* and *We Three Debutantes*. They have a distinct Swedish feel to them partly because the subjects they discuss are Swedish. In the case of *Little Märta Steps Forward* the story involves a national election to the Swedish parliament. The other two are also about the state of Swedish society, and the concept of *folkhemmet*. In the earlier film, *Common People*, *folkhemmet* is seen as a positive force for the benefit of the working class. In the second film, *We Three Debutantes*, doubt has crept in. The suspicion, perhaps even fear, seems to be that, despite peace and rising prosperity, equality and inclusiveness, the idea of *folkhemmet* that the Social Democratic Party promised has not really worked, that there are still huge class and gender differences. Another example where *folkhemmet* is discussed is in *While the Door Was Locked*, which was made in between *Common People* and *We Three Debutantes*. Here the view is ambivalent, and especially the discussion between the old man and the janitor, quoted in Chapter 2, is telling. On the one hand people have got a better deal, with less poverty, for example, but on the other there is less space for individual eccentricities and life has become too regulated and orderly. Another film where Sweden in itself is important is *Girl With Hyacinths*, for example in the implicit critique of Sweden's relationship with Germany during the Second World War.

Something that becomes apparent when looking at Ekman's films is that when he does engage with Sweden and Swedish society it is almost always from a critical perspective. That Ekman had an ambivalent view of Sweden is also suggested by the need his characters have to escape from it and go to South America. However, his characters are perennial potential escapees and sometimes the theatre is the goal, rather than South America. Whereas the primary reason for wanting to join the theatre is to be able to act on the stage, it is also seen as an important way out of the boredom of everyday life and the oppression of family, marriage and society. In some sense, there are similar reasons for wanting to go to South America and wanting to join the theatre, which seems to suggest that it is not necessarily Sweden that they want to leave behind but any kind of restrictive environment where it is not possible to be free and prosper. This of course lies at the heart of Ekman's authorship, and it is connected to his view of the world. It is indeed connected to his personal life too, as Ekman dedicated his life to the theatre and cinema until he moved to Spain.

5:2 Ekman's view of the world

Auteurism is not simply an empirical project; there is also the element of interpretation. Once the style and theme(s) of the filmmaker in question have been isolated there is the option of interpreting style and themes. This section will synthesise the interpretations that have been undertaken throughout the thesis. In order to strengthen the case of the thesis a brief summary of Ekman's main themes will be laid out before extrapolating Ekman's world-view from them. In addition, the linkage of theme and style will be a key component of what follows.

One recurring theme is a sense of frustration with the way things are and a strong wish to leave a particular setting. This quote from *Wandering With the Moon* is typical of this feeling: "I can't stand you, I can't stand myself and I can't stand my office", says the main character Dan to his father. This is connected to a second recurring theme, the conflicts between fathers and sons, based on a conflict between the needs of the son to make something of himself, often abroad, and the father's wish for the son to follow in his footsteps. Another theme that is constantly present is the fear of, or a reaction against, the boredom and staleness of everyday life. A typical quote regarding this sentiment can be found in *With You In My Arms*, when the main character says he will change his ways and become a respectable citizen only to meet the response: "Oh really, that sounds boring." A fourth theme is an interest in outsiders, dreamers and misfits. There are many of them, who, like Dan in *Wandering With the Moon*, seek to live life on their own terms, not as followers of traditional conventions or expectations. The communist son in *The Banquet* is another example of this, as are Dagmar Brink in *Girl With Hyacinths* or Marianne Stenman in *Private Entrance*. It should also be noted, however, that Ekman has occasionally problematized this wish to be free and follow nothing but one's dreams and creative needs. In a few films he has shown the suffering this might cause others and how one person's dreams may be in conflict with those of another. *The White Cat* and *Knight of Heart (Hjärter knekt, 1950)* are the clearest examples of this. It is one of Ekman's strengths that he acknowledges that one person's need to be free is not always a positive thing but can also be egoistic and cruel, depending upon the circumstances.

Several of Ekman's films are about the theatre, and its actors. At least eight of Ekman's films deal directly with the theatre, and other films deal with other kinds of performance art, such as the ballet or the circus. The strong presence of artists and painters is part of his focus on misfits and dreamers, as they have all had to make the choice between real life and the life of

the theatre. A fifth recurring theme is the dream of Argentina and Brazil, of South America as a continent of hope and a future. This dream recurs in almost all of Ekman's films, either as the explicit goal of a main character, or as a dream they have, but are unable to realize. Finally, there is the interest in the question of identity, and the complexity of characters. This is apparent already in Ekman's first film *With You In My Arms*. The films show how people hide their personalities or secrets, obviously in the case of all the actors that appear in Ekman's films, but also many other characters. Sometimes the films also show how the mask that people assume can become their real self, and the question then becomes what is the true nature of that self. The most puzzling example could be *Little Märta Steps Forward* where the man, after having dressed up as a woman, starts to think and feel like a woman, and in a sense becomes a woman, and even has a statue of her raised.

In the beginning of the thesis there was a quote from Ekman, something he said when he was a little boy. It is remarkable how that quote encapsulates so much of what his films are about: "It's spooky actually. Sometimes I feel like the world is just one big theatre, and that every human being is playing a part. Some are good at it, some are bad. But we never get to read any reviews. Are you always yourself? [...] I'm not, but that might not be unusual for a theatre child." (Ekman 1933: 216, trans.)

These themes are all connected with each other, and by putting them together it becomes possible to extract an idea of Ekman's view of the world. The first thing to notice, which is at the centre of that world-view, such as it can be interpreted from the actual films, is the non-negotiable importance of the individual's dignity and freedom. This can be said to be the essence of the philosophical stance of the films, although it is never stated explicitly, since neither his characters nor he himself made statements or gave speeches. This is more a case of leading by example. When all the films are taken together, with all the stories that are told and all the characters that are brought to life, that stance is something which shines through almost all of them. Family, marriage, conventions and society are all seen as constraints on the freedom of the individual. One of the virtues of looking at a complete body of work from an auteurist perspective is that it is often not until the combined effect of all of the films is taken into account that these larger themes emerge. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith was quoted in the first chapter as saying: "the defining characteristics of an author's work are not always those that are most readily apparent" (Nowell-Smith 2003: 10) and this stance, this defence of the freedom and dignity of the individual, is such a defining characteristic of Ekman's oeuvre.

The most horrifying attack on an individual is to be found in *His Excellency*, the anti-Nazi film in which von Blankenau is sent to a concentration camp, but these attacks on dignity and freedom are also happening in peacetime, in the daily life of ordinary individuals.

There is a sequence in *While the Door Was Locked* that beautifully encapsulates the need for dignity, and how even in peacetime it is still something you might have to fight for. In the building in which the film is set lives, among others, a prostitute and an old man. They both quietly go about their daily life but at one point their paths cross. He collapses in the stairway and she picks him up and helps him to his apartment. When they enter she notices that it is completely empty, and that the floor is covered with newspapers. The old man is completely penniless, and at the end of his life, but he does not want people to know. He begs her not to tell anybody what she has seen. As long as he can keep his trousers clean and a flower in his buttonhole, he will be content. If people knew they would intervene and that would be the end of his happiness, the end of the one thing he has left in the world, his freedom and dignity. She, being a prostitute and consequently an outcast, understands him perfectly well and quietly walks out of the apartment and closes the door behind her. In so doing she also allows him to keep his mask, to make it possible for him to continue playing a part and hiding his true self. There is also a political dimension involved. He would rather stay at home, and put on a brave face, than be hospitalised and taken care of by the welfare system.

The world depicted in Ekman's films is often an unpleasant one, and especially so for women. One of the factors that threaten and constrain the individual woman is patriarchal society, and as has been argued in the thesis there is in Ekman's films feminism than runs through his whole career. Many of his films show how both the men in themselves, and the system, conspire against the concerns, needs and wishes of women.

This dark view of the world is countered with elements of humour and parody, and sometimes an anarchic spirit. There is almost always a sense of hope, even a hope that one must fight for. This world is full of dreamers who want something else. Sometimes they aim for Brazil, sometimes they aim for the theatre. It is interesting to note, however, that, despite being at odds with the world, there does not seem to be any kind of revolutionary instinct in his characters, other than standing up to the father. Although they suffer they are not interested in changing the system, just to take care of themselves. To escape, even if escape means death, is instead the chosen path, or to stubbornly stick to the theatre or the studio. An exception is the

communist son in *The Banquet*, but he is a very gentle rebel and he too dreams of South America. These dreamers and performers are the heroes in Ekman's films, and he views them with a combination of tenderness and frankness. It is these characters that are the ones that have to fight against the stifling conventions of society.

It is important to emphasise that Ekman's films are very forgiving, in the sense that there are hardly any villains in them. The tone is non-judgemental and instead filled with sympathy. A particular character might be criticised or shown to be in the wrong, but they are often given a scene or perhaps even just one redemptive line of dialogue to add complexity. One example is Dagmar Brink's father in *Girl With Hyacinths*. He is first shown as a cruel and remorseless man, a symbol of the patriarchal system. But it is also possible to read him as a man filled with shame and guilt, and who hides his feelings under a cruel mask. Gösta Cederlund who plays him does provide facial expressions to suggest this, and Ekman's directing underlines it, such as the way the camera lingers on him after he has been left alone. The father is also given a line which makes him more sympathetic, when he tells the story of how he saw a man shovelling snow and how he thought to himself: "The devil knows whether you're not better off than I am." This seems to suggest that he does not like his life or what he has become. It might be argued that while Ekman is critical of conventions and institutions, he also acknowledges that some individuals, such as Dagmar's father, are too weak to fight it, and instead of being judged they should be pitied.

With this focus on the individual and the critique of marriage, family and society, whether explicit or implicit, Ekman can be said to be at odds with the concept of *folkhemmet*. As was explained in the first chapter, this idea which permeated Swedish society at least until the 1960s and can be said to remain part of the Swedish psyche, albeit with a nostalgic bent, as a sense of something that has been lost, was about creating a harmonious nation-wide community in which everybody works together for the greater good. Although there is no reason to suggest that Ekman did not support the goals of *folkhemmet*, such as democracy, equality and the eradication of poverty, his films emphasise the dangers of conformity and intolerance that such a de-individualised concept can lead to. In Chapter 1 Hans Ingvar Roth was quoted as arguing that there was little room for "cultural idiosyncrasy" (Roth 2004: 222) in Sweden and this is something that Ekman was aware of, and problematized in his films. That is a vital part of his work, this sustained attack against conformity. Yet whereas Ekman does critique some aspects of Swedish society his overarching concern is not necessarily

something that is uniquely Swedish but global. Marriage, family and the patriarchy are global phenomenon, not exclusively Swedish.

As has been argued, Ekman's films are almost exclusively, and for a Swedish filmmaker, uniquely, urban. One of the reasons for this is that Ekman preferred stories about people and milieus with which he himself was intimate. This is another aspect of his auteurist credentials, that real life is closely interwoven with fictional stories in his films. He made films that had strong autobiographical elements, such as *Changing Trains*, *Royal Rabble* and *Gabrielle*, but even when they were not autobiographical they were still close to real life, especially in terms of characters, as was discussed in the previous chapter with regards to *While the Door Was Locked*, *Girl With Hyacinths* and *We Three Debutantes*. This proximity to life, this interplay between fact and fiction, is essential to Ekman's cinema. It is what makes him an internal auteur.

However, it is not only the words, the stories told and the characters' behaviour that testify to a filmmaker's world-view or philosophy. Style should also be included in the discussion. During the 1940s and early-1950s the 'battle' between Ekman and Bergman took many forms, one being that they were competing over who could do the longest single take. In Ekman's films, there will usually not be a cut until it is absolutely necessary. This is not only due to the competition with Bergman, but is also related to Ekman's temperament and interest. A film's philosophy or perhaps the philosophy of the filmmaker can not only be read and interpreted from its story but in equal measure from how the story is told, and how editing, camera movement, colour, sound and length of shots are handled. In Ekman's case, his style underlines his outlook on life. He is an actor's director, and he stays with them as much as he can, but he does not want to intrude by going too close or by cutting away. He prefers to just watch them and see what happens. He gives space to his actors. This way of filming, with long, distant takes instead of cutting and using close-ups, also takes on another meaning. It means that real life can intervene or to interact with fiction. This can be seen primarily when the scenes take place outdoors and the environment, such as buildings and ordinary people in the background and the foreground, contribute to the mood of the shot. A particular sequence from *The Girl From the Third Row* encapsulates this approach. A woman, a fairly central character in the film, is seen running through the streets in a hurry to go to the pawnshop to get money for a trip to Italy with her lover. At one point she bumps into a man coming out of a liquor store, without realising it. At another point her path is blocked by a carriage filled

with celebrating students, fresh from graduation. But then, as she runs across a street, she is hit by a streetcar and killed. The audience do not get to see the accident, however. Ekman shoots the scene with a pan from her running to the approaching street car, and then to the face of a woman who turns her head in shock. Ekman then cuts to a curtain being pulled down at the pawnshop, followed by a shot of the man from the liquor store, who is sitting on the pavement trying to rescue the contents of the broken bottles. All through the sequence, the prevalent sound is the students singing, and depending upon where they are, their voices are more or less audible.

What is remarkable here is that there is little sentiment, and a strong sense of city life in all its aspects. The woman may have been killed, but the students are cheerfully singing and the man coming from the liquor store is just upset because his bottles are smashed. Life goes on. This, it could be argued, is an essential part of Ekman's philosophy. And this is also when it differs most distinctly from the philosophy of Bergman, which is almost the opposite. Bergman often presents an isolated and alienated world, both in terms of story and visuals. The characters are cut off from the world. If Ekman's characters are within this world, Bergman's are outside it.

In *The World Viewed* Stanley Cavell writes that:

Early in its history the cinema discovered the possibility of *calling* attention to persons and parts of persons and objects; but it is equally a possibility of the medium not to call attention to them but, rather, to let the world happen, to let its parts draw attention to themselves according to their natural weight. This possibility is less explored than its opposite. Dreyer, Flaherty, Vigo, Renoir, and Antonioni are masters of it. (Cavell 1996: 163)

A case could be made for including Ekman in that category. Yet this argument must not be pushed too hard. Not all of these directors' films are like this, and the dichotomy is not clear-cut. It should be seen more as a general tendency than a constant presence. What this approach "to let the world happen" does though, at least in the case of Ekman, is to help put things in the right perspective, the perspective Ekman often felt was missing in Bergman. As was suggested earlier, in Ekman's films there is a sense of a world outside the frame. The single individuals are not really that important in the bigger picture, the world goes on regardless of their petty affairs. Bergman's cinema is a cinema of the closed room, a few

characters in a secluded environment, whereas Ekman's is the cinema of the open door. The story that is told is just one of many possible stories, and the world is bigger than any of the characters in the film. This sense of intermingling real life and fiction also comes across in Ekman's style of filming, the way that they are set in the actual world, rather than the studio, and how, even when set in a studio, efforts are made to make it feel as real as possible. This also ties in with Ekman's shooting style, how the camera remains at a distance from the actors, whereas Bergman's work is famous for its close-ups. Ekman's use of loose narratives, sometimes of an episodic nature, is also relevant here as it is closer to actual life, gives more breathing space than a focused, narrow narrative would do. *Wandering With the Moon* is a prime example of this. The way Ekman usually ends his films by a repetition of the first scene with an important difference, is also an important factor for this argument. As was said about both *Changing Trains* and *The Girl From the Third Row*, the very narrative construction of some of his films has the audience vacillating between the themes of hope and despair, love and betrayal, life and death, which is also one of the themes of the films. The visual style, the narrative structure, and the world-view become inseparable.

It is also the case that some auteurs, within the framework of their particular themes and motifs, subtly change, modify and question these themes. An artist can keep his or her main concerns but look at them from different angles. This might make the body of work richer, as it suggests a more complex and nuanced understanding of the world than might be implied from only one or two films. This is the case with Ekman, in particular two films made in 1950, "Knight of Hearts" and *The White Cat*. In these films the solitary, creative and life-affirming characters, which are usually the heroes for Ekman, are shown to be cruel and exploitative.

Ekman's career has now been presented from beginning to end, his themes and his style have been analysed and the deeper meanings in his films have been discussed. What is left is to look at the impact he had on Swedish cinema, and to what extent he influenced other filmmakers.

5:3 Influence and legacy

Influence is complex. Sometimes an artist will be doing something that would appear to be influenced by a previous artist, even though she was not aware of the work of that artist.

Similarities do not in themselves signify influences. It can be more about the spirit of the times than a question of one person necessarily influencing another. One can also talk about similarities between filmmakers based on similar approaches to filmmaking and to life in general, without there being any actual influence by one on the other. Any similarities between Renoir and Ekman should be taken as an example of this, a shared outlook on life and of perspective on the characters, rather than the one being overtly influenced by the other.

Having said that, this section will look at Ekman's impact on Swedish cinema. There are two different aspects to this. The first is how Ekman's films and filmmaking made a difference and added something new to Swedish cinema. The argument of this thesis has been that he did and one reason for this is that Ekman's inspiration was more to be found in France, Britain and Hollywood than in traditional Swedish cinema. It is reasonable to say that Ekman was a cinephile, a filmmaker who was in love with cinema and who watched as many films as he could find the time for, not least on his trip to Hollywood, which was mentioned in Chapter 2. Because of this it can be said that he brought a new approach to Swedish filmmaking, a professionalism and cinematic know-how combined with a relaxed attitude to rules and conventions. When his first film appeared, the critics said that it was like a breath of fresh air, and this is primarily related to the style of filmmaking and of directing actors. It can be argued that another thing he introduced was a deeply personal cinema, personal almost to the point of being called confessional. Although personal cinema was not unheard of, the extent to which Ekman made films about himself and his life was definitely not common in Swedish cinema at the time, and neither was the way he would include scenes in his films which were discussions of his own private fears and relationships. Another thing he did was to introduce and/or develop several important actors and actresses. Stig Järrel, Gunnar Björnstrand and Eva Henning among them. He was also one of the very first Swedish filmmakers who had a stock company, that is a select group of actors who would be used in film after film, which was how Bergman would later work as well.

The second aspect is the importance of Ekman as a writer and actor. He wrote scripts for a number of other filmmakers, and he worked as an actor in many films other than those he himself directed. It might be said that he was what is today called a 'script doctor', somebody that is called in when there are problems with a script. With his skills and popularity he helped many careers besides his own. Arne Mattsson, Schamyl Bauman, Rolf Husberg and Gustaf Molander are among those directors he worked with and wrote for.

These two aspects then coalesce in the particular case of Ingmar Bergman. The characteristics that it can reasonably be argued Ekman brought to Swedish cinema were then picked up by Bergman. Bergman would also be making deeply personal films, and he would have a stock company of actors, several of whom had begun working with Ekman. Bergman would also take ideas from some of Ekman's films and use them for his own films, such as the storyline for *Hets* (which came from *Flames in the Dark*), or a long elevator sequence in *Waiting Women* aka *Secrets of Women* (*Kvinnors väntan*, 1952) that has a precursor in Ekman's *Common People*. Since the two of them were working closely together, albeit competing, Bergman was in a position to learn a lot from Ekman, and vice versa, but it should be remembered that Ekman did most things first.

In the late-1960s, Bergman would go further than Ekman had done when it comes to pushing the film medium forward through narrative and visual inventiveness, in films such as *Persona* (1966) and *The Hour of the Wolf* (*Vargtimmen*, 1968). In addition, Bergman and the new filmmakers of the 1960s began making films that were more explicit as regards sex and violence than Ekman's had ever been. Other than that, much of what was considered new and revolutionary in the 1960s had already been done by Ekman in the 1940s and early-1950s, such as critical engagement with society, self-reflexiveness, experiments with narrative, and a commitment to emotional honesty. That is not to say that they were influenced by Ekman, although some of them might have been. It is just to point out that Ekman was a modern and often daring filmmaker.

And it is this influence, this modern and personal approach to filmmaking and the high and persistent quality of his films that make it possible to argue that Ekman should not only be regarded as one of the most important filmmakers Sweden has ever had, but also a major artist in the history of European cinema. It was suggested in the first chapter that the 1940s can be considered to have harboured a new wave in Swedish cinema and it should be remembered that Henri Langlois were running regular screenings of world cinema at the Cinémathèque in Paris after the Second World War and that the future filmmakers of the French New Wave, such as Eric Rohmer, François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard were there, watching these films. Many of these films were Swedish, and the influence Bergman had on the French New Wave is often mentioned by both film historians and the filmmakers themselves. But in all likelihood they also watched films by Ekman. It is not far-fetched to imagine that Truffaut

both watched and liked the films by Ekman, and was perhaps inspired by them. In an article about Ekman from 1985, leading Swedish critic Leif Zern wrote that Ekman was "a Swedish Truffaut", not least for the way he: "overwhelmingly combines tragedy and humour" (Zern 1985, trans.). But since Ekman came before Truffaut maybe it would be more apt to say that Truffaut is "a French Ekman".

This thesis has discussed Ekman from the perspective of authorship and national context but there are many other approaches which were not possible to incorporate here but that can be used for further research into his films. To further explore the possible connections between Ekman and the French filmmakers mentioned above is an approach which might lead to interesting revelations. Another approach would be to analyse Ekman's work with actors, and how he and Bergman and other directors differed in the way they used their actors. This would be especially interesting since many of the actors, such as Gunnar Björnstrand, played prominent roles in the work of several filmmakers. Another approach could be to look at Ekman's films in terms of theories of urbanity and cinema and the city. This is a growing field within film studies and since Ekman is such an urban filmmaker he is a valuable case study. Yet another approach that might lead to interesting insights would be to look at his body of work from the perspective of queer theory. With his interest in role-playing, cross-dressing and, of course, the central role *Girl With Hyacinths* has in his oeuvre Ekman would be a good case study here too. With such a large, complex and rich body of work as that of Hasse Ekman it is not possible to cover everything in one thesis. The hope is that this work will be seen as an important and comprehensive study which can be used as a foundation for further research.

Conclusion

Swedish cinema has traditionally been held in high regard, and its history has to some extent been well-documented. However, there are still some gaps in the study of Swedish film history and this thesis has attempted to fill two of these gaps. The first gap concerns Swedish cinema of the 1940s and the second gap concerns the filmmaker Hasse Ekman. The reason for choosing this era and this filmmaker was that they are very important for Swedish cinema, and should be discussed and analysed. Considering the influence and status Swedish cinema has had internationally, conducting research on the 1940s and Hasse Ekman is also important from a global perspective. The thematic structure of the thesis has been a combination of authorship and context, as its title, *Hasse Ekman – a Question of Authorship in a National Context*, suggests. Ekman's work has been analysed in terms of recurring stylistic and thematic motifs, and the argument has been that he was an auteur, but at the same time his relationship to the social and cinematic context in which he worked is also very important. The thesis also discussed the often fraught relationship between Ekman and Ingmar Bergman, the auteur who, more than any other, has signified the importance of post-war Swedish cinema

It is widely reckoned that it was in the 1950s, following the crucial critical intervention of the French journal *Cahiers du cinéma*, that the director became the focus of aesthetic attention. However, at least from the 1910s it has been customary to single out the director as the most important person in the making of a film, both among critics and in the film industry itself, and some leading theorists in the 1920s called the director the author of the film. Authorship studies have been a central part of cinema studies ever since. This thesis has argued for the relevance of this emphasis for film history, using an approach which has come to be called auteurism. It is not a theory but a critical approach, or methodological focus, which is empirical in its method. In addition, this thesis made a distinction between *external* and *internal* auteurs. An external auteur is a filmmaker whose films have the thematic and stylistic consistency of an auteur but the filmmaker herself has no presence of any kind in the films. An internal auteur is a figure who has a strong personal presence in the films, for example by acting and/or doing voice-overs, or by making autobiographical films. Hasse Ekman can be seen as an internal auteur.

But no auteur has worked in a vacuum and the context is important too. In this thesis that

context is Sweden. All of Ekman's films were made in Sweden (including two transnational projects), and although some of Ekman's films have themes and characters that are not specific to any one nation, and can be called 'a-national', some do discuss, and directly engage with, specific Swedish topics and concerns.

The silent era, at least the years 1913 to 1924, is considered something of a golden age of Swedish cinema, when filmmakers such as Victor Sjöström, Mauritz Stiller and Georg af Klercker were active. After several years of problems, both financially and artistically, in 1940 Swedish films experienced a renaissance that lasted approximately until 1953. Hasse Ekman was a leading figure in this renaissance, as actor, writer and director, and among other notable filmmakers of the renaissance Alf Sjöberg, Per Lindberg, Hampe Faustman, Arne Sucksdorff, Olof Molander, Gustaf Molander and Ingmar Bergman should be mentioned. Some had made one or two films before, but most began their careers in the 1940s. One reason for this creative outburst was the Second World War. There was a large and eager audience in Sweden, and they wanted to see Swedish films. This wish, combined with fewer foreign films coming to Sweden owing to wartime restrictions, meant that it was very profitable to make films, and producers were willing to let filmmakers experiment both visually and with narrative, and make films about important and difficult subjects. At the same time, film societies sprang up and leading newspapers and cultural journals began writing informed criticism and essays about cinema.

But by the early- 1950s the audience began to lose interest in Swedish films, and at the same time producers and production companies had to struggle with rising taxes and production costs. The most serious problem, however, was the arrival of television in 1956, which led to an almost immediate collapse in box office figures. The result was that fewer films were made and there was much less scope for artistically challenging and experimental work.

Hasse Ekman's career followed this broader trajectory for Swedish cinema. He made his first film *With You In My Arms* in 1940, the same year the Swedish renaissance can be said to have begun, and he made the film which is generally considered to be his last great one, *Gabrielle*, in 1954, shortly after the renaissance had passed. In 1956, when television emerged, his career took another turn as he began making a series of colourful comedies whereas before he had mainly made sombre dramas. He then made his last film in 1964 before moving to Spain. Whilst there were turning points in Ekman's career, there is a strong consistency in his oeuvre

from 1940 until his final films.

The characters in Ekman's films share certain traits, and among them is a fundamental feeling of not fitting in, and of being constrained. Whether from marriage, family, work or society at large, his characters have a strong need to escape, and there are primarily two escape routes for them. One is into the theatre or other art forms such as painting, and the other is to go abroad, especially to South America. Besides the constraints of rules and traditions, what also troubles his characters is the boredom and stagnation that arises from daily routine, something that art or the larger world can perhaps remedy. Another strong recurring motif in Ekman's films is play-acting and people who are confused about their own identities or are hiding their true identities from the rest of the world. This is connected with the many films he has made that are set in the theatre and are about actors and acting, but even outside the theatre these games are being played out. Often when people pretend, and hide their secrets, it is because they want to protect their dignity, especially if they are sick or poor, or living in shame.

Ekman's view of society can be bleak but the heroes of his films are those that fight for their freedom and dignity. This is especially so for women, and there is a feminist side to Ekman's films as he has created many strong, independent female characters who struggle in a society dominated by men.

One reason why Ekman can be called an internal auteur is because he acts in almost all of his films, and there is an interesting relationship between his characters, himself and his public persona. Some of the films are also autobiographical, more or less explicit so and this is especially the case with those that are set in the theatre, such as *Changing Trains* and *Royal Rabble*. Ekman also use his films to discuss personal concerns, such as questions about art, family and relationships. Some of his films are mere assignments, but even in those few films that he made because he was obliged to, rather than because he had a particular story to tell, there are these specific characters and themes that are typical of Ekman. Something that is also distinct about Ekman, and which makes him different from almost all other Swedish filmmakers of the time, is that his films are distinctly urban, almost exclusively set in the city. Rural dramas, 'summer films' and films set in the archipelago were traditionally very popular in Sweden, and most filmmakers, including Bergman, have made such films. But not Ekman. Sweden outside Stockholm hardly figures at all, and when it does it is a transitory space. *First Division* is set in the north of Sweden but only *Wandering With the Moon* takes places

completely in the countryside.

Stylistically, Ekman favours long takes and deep focus, but he is more interested in the actors than in pictorialism. He will sometimes do complex takes, following characters as they move around, in order not to break up the scene but instead let the actors remain in focus.

Sometimes his films will have surrealist sequences, such as nightmares or, in the later films, dance sequences, but on the whole he aims for realism, in that the films are set in this world, with geographical locations often highlighted by a voice-over or with signs. There is much location work, filming on the streets of Stockholm, to emphasis this sense of the world.

During the 1940s, Ekman was frequently considered by the critics to be Sweden's best filmmaker but when Ingmar Bergman made his first film in 1945 there was almost immediately competition between them. The critics began to compare them, and each year when the award for best Swedish film was handed out it was either given to a film by Ekman or a film by Bergman. They were also competing personally, for example over who could do the longest take. In 1949 Bergman made *Prison*, and later the same year Ekman made what he himself called an "anti-Bergman film", *The Girl From the Third Row*. The two films are similar in their complex structures, but Ekman's film is a protest against the relentless hopelessness of Bergman's film. Ekman's film acknowledges that life is filled with hardship and suffering, but it suggests that there is also hope and love, that there is a sort of balance.

The competition between the two lasted until 1956, when Ekman gave up the ambition to make serious and challenging films, and instead made a series of comedies. But he would also make one or two films of a more serious nature, and the later films still had typical Ekman themes, extending even to the television series, *Niklasons*. This was the last work Ekman directed for either film or television, and he had by now moved to Spain, where he would remain for the rest of his life.

Besides making films of high quality, Ekman's importance lies primarily in bringing new life into Swedish cinema. This was partly due to his own professionalism and creativity and partly due to the fact that he was inspired by French and American cinema, rather than Swedish. Also important was that, as a writer and director, he did films that were often based on his own life, something which was relatively rare for Swedish cinema at the time. For these reasons, Ekman played a central role in the 1940s renaissance of Swedish cinema, and this is

why his name is so significant.

This thesis has argued for the need to look at Swedish cinema from a new perspective. It has argued that Hasse Ekman is an auteur, more to the point an internal auteur, and a filmmaker with important themes and considerable skills. But the work of discussing and analysing Swedish cinema and Ekman, as well as film history in general, will continue. If audiences can learn anything from Ekman it is the need to go against conventions and complacency, to be creative as well as playful. Film history is not something fixed and stable, it changes all the time. The importance once given to particular films, filmmakers and movements is not set in stone, and is partly dependent on the interests and priorities of film historians and scholars at any given time. At the same time, many films and filmmakers are forgotten, misunderstood or under-appreciated. The hope is that this thesis has changed the reader's perspectives on Swedish cinema and on Bergman, besides introducing them to the world of Hasse Ekman.

Filmography (nationality only mentioned with non-Swedish titles)

Films written by Hasse Ekman:

*Thunder and Lightning** (*Blixt och dunder*, Anders Henriksson, SF, 1938)

*Heroes in Yellow and Blue** (*Hjältar i gult och blått*, Schamyl Bauman, Produktion S. Bauman AB, 1940)

*A Man in Full** (*Karl för sin hatt*, Schamyl Bauman, Produktion S. Bauman AB, 1940)

*Swing It, Mr Teacher!** (*Swing It, magistern!*, Schamyl Bauman, Produktion S. Bauman AB, 1940)

*Love and Downhill Racing** (*Kärlek och störtlopp*, Rolf Husberg, AB Sandrew-Ateljéerna, 1946)

Kiss on the Cruise (*Kyssen på kryssen*, Arne Mattsson, SF, 1950)

Films directed by Hasse Ekman:

*With You In My Arms** (*Med dej i mina armar*, AB Terrafilm, 1940)

*First Division, The** (*Första divisionen*, AB Terrafilm, 1941)

*Happiness Approaches** (*Lyckan kommer*, AB Terrafilm, 1942)

*Flames in the Dark** (*Lågor i dunklet*, AB Terrafilm, 1942)

Changing Trains (*Ombyte av tåg*, AB Terrafilm, 1943)

*Common People** (*Som folk är mest*, AB Terrafilm, Hasse Ekmanfilm, 1944)

His Excellency (*Excellensen*, AB Terrafilm, 1944)

*An Occupation for Men** (*Ett yrke för män*, AB Terrafilm, 1944)

*A Day Will Come** (*En dag skall gry*, AB Terrafilm, 1944)

Wandering With the Moon (*Vandring med månen*, SF, 1945)

*Royal Rabble** (*Kungliga patrasket*, AB Terrafilm, 1945)

*Little Märta Steps Forward** (*Fram för lilla Märta*, AB Terrafilm, 1945)

*Meeting in the Night** (*Möte i natten*, Hasse Ekmanfilm, 1946)

*While the Door Was Locked** (*Medan porten var stängd*, Hasse Ekmanfilm, 1946)

Waiting Room for Death aka *Interlude* (*I dödens väntrum*, AB Terrafilm, 1946)

One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer (*En fluga gör ingen sommar*, AB Europa Film, 1947)

To Each His Own (*Var sin väg*, Hasse Ekmanfilm, 1948)

The Banquet (*Banketten*, AB Terrafilm, 1948)

The Girl From the Third Row (Flickan från tredje raden, AB Terrafilm, 1949)
Girl With Hyacinths (Flicka och hyacinter, AB Terrafilm, 1950)
Knight of Heart (Hjärter knekt, Hasse Ekmanfilm, 1950)*
The White Cat (Den vita katten, Hasse Ekmanfilm, 1950)
The Fire-Bird (Eldfågeln, AB Terrafilm, 1952)
We Three Debutantes (Vi tre debutera, SF, 1953)
Gabrielle (SF, 1954)
Private Entrance (Egen ingång, SF, 1956)
Seventh Heaven (Sjunde himlen, SF, 1956)
The Jazz Boy (Jazzgossen, SF, 1958)*
The Great Amateur (Den stora amatören, SF, 1958)*
Miss Chic (Fröken Chic, SF, 1959)*
Decimals of Love (Kärlekens decimaler, SF, 1960)*
The Heist (Stöten, SF, 1961)*
The Marriage Wrestler (Äktenskapsbrottaren, SF, 1964)*
Niklasons (Television series, SVT, 1965)

Other films (titles marked with HE are those in which Ekman appears as an actor):

...and all these women (... och alla dessa kvinnor, Arne Mattsson, Film AB Lux, 1944)*
Adam's Rib (George Cukor, MGM, 1950, USA)
Appassionata (Olof Molander, Film AB Lux, 1944)
Battle Goes On, The (Striden går vidare, Gustaf Molander, SF, 1941)*
Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ (Fred Niblo, MGM, 1925, USA)
Beyond a Reasonable Doubt (Fritz Lang, Bert E. Friedlob Productions, 1956, USA)
Blue Dahlia, The (George Marshall, Paramount, 1946, USA)
Bodakungen (Gustaf Molander, B Skandinavisk Filmcentral, 1920)
Born Yesterday (George Cukor, Columbia, 1949, USA)
Boudu Saved From Drowning (Boudu sauvé des eaux, Jean Renoir, Les Productions Michel Simon, 1932, France)
Bread of Love, The (Kärlekens bröd, Arne Mattsson, Nordisk Tonefilm, 1953)
Career (Karriär, Schamyl Bauman, AB Irefilm, 1938)
Casablanca (Michael Curtiz, Warner, 1942, USA)
Christine (Un carnet de bal, Julien Duvivier, Productions Sigma, 1937, France)

Citizen Kane (Orson Welles, RKO, 1941, USA)

Crime of Monsieur Lange, The (*Le crime de M. Lange*, Jean Renoir, Films Obéron, 1935, France)

Crime, A (*Ett brott*, Anders Henriksson, AB Terrafilm, 1940)

Crisis (*Kris*, Ingmar Bergman, SF, 1946)

Design For Living (Ernst Lubitsch, Paramount, 1933, USA)

Double Indemnity (Billy Wilder, Paramount, 1944, USA)

Dream Waltz, The (*Säg det i toner*, Edvin Adolphson, Julius Jaenzon, SF, 1929)

Foreign Harbour (*Främmande hamn*, Erik Hampe Faustman, AB Sandrew-Produktion, 1948)

French Provincial (*Souvenirs d'en France*, André Téchiné, 1975, France)

*Girls In Småland, The** (*Flickorna i Småland*, Schamyl Bauman, Produktion S. Bauman AB, 1945)

Grande Illusion, La (Jean Renoir, RAC, 1936, France)

Great Adventure, The (*Det stora äventyret*, Arne Sucksdorff, Arne Sucksdorff Filmproduktion AB, 1953)

Heavenly Play, The (*Himlaspelet*, Alf Sjöberg, AV Wivefilm, 1942)

Hets aka Torment aka Frenzy (Alf Sjöberg, SF, 1944)

Home from Babylon (*Hem från Babylon*, Alf Sjöberg, AB Wivefilm, 1941)

Hôtel du Nord (Marcel Carné, SEDIF, Impérial Film, 1937, France)

Hour of the Wolf, The (*Vargtimmen*, Ingmar Bergman, SF, 1968)

*Imprisoned Women** (*Kvinnor i fångenskap*, Olof Molander, AB Terrafilm, 1943)

*In Darkest Småland** (*I mörkaste Småland*, Schamyl Bauman, Produktion S. Bauman AB, 1943)

Indian Village, An (*Indisk by*, Arne Sucksdorff, SF, 1951)

Intermezzo (Gustaf Molander, SF, 1936)

Intolerance (D.W. Griffith, Triangle Film Corporation, 1916, USA)

It Rains on Our Love (*Det regnar på vår kärlek*, Ingmar Bergman, Svenska folkbiografer, Lorens Marmstedt, 1946)

Karin Månsdotter (Alf Sjöberg, AB Sandrew-Produktion, 1954)

Karl Fredrik Reigns (*Karl Fredrik regerar*, Gustaf Edgren, SF, 1934)

Kon-tiki (Thor Heyerdahl, Artfilm AB, Thor Heyerdahl, 1950, Sweden, Norway)

Lars Hård (Erik Hampe Faustman, AB Sandrew-Produktion, 1948)

Little Flirt, A (*En stilla flirt*, Gustaf Molander, SF, 1934)

*Living on 'Hope'** (*Leva på 'Hoppet'*, Göran Gentele, AB Europa Film, 1951)

Lydia (Julien Duvivier, Alexander Korda Films, 1941, USA)

Miracle in Milan (*Miracolo a Milano*, Vittorio de Sica, ENIC, Produzioni De Sica, 1951, Italy)

Miss Julie (*Fröken Julie*, Alf Sjöberg, AB Sandrew-Produktion, 1951)

*Night in Harbour** (*Natt i hamn*, Erik Hampe Faustman, SF, 1943)

Night Must Fall (Richard Thorpe, MGM, 1937, USA)

One Night (*En natt*, Gustaf Molander, SF, 1931)

One Summer of Happiness (*Hon dansade en sommar*, Arne Mattsson, Nordisk Tonefilm, 1951)

Only a Mother (*Bara en mor*, Alf Sjöberg, SF, 1949)

Persona (Ingmar Bergman, SF, 1966)

Pettersson & Bendel (Per-Axel Branner, AB Wivefilm, 1933)

Phantom Carriage, The (*Körkarlen*, Victor Sjöström, SF, 1921)

Port of Shadows (*Quai de brumes*, Marcel Carné, Ciné-Alliance, 1939, France)

Pram, The (*Barnvagnen*, Bo Widerberg, Europa Film, 1961)

Prison aka The Devil's Wanton (*Fängelse*, Ingmar Bergman, SF, 1949) HE

*Red Day, The** (*Röda dagen*, Gustaf Edgren, Film AB Minerva, 1931)

Red Shoes, The (Michael Powell, The Archers, 1948, UK)

Rejoice While You're Young, Fellow Cadets (*Gläd dig i din ungdom*, Per Lindberg, SF, 1939)

*Romance** (*Romans*, Åke Ohberg, Europa Film, 1940)

Rospiggar (Schamyl Bauman, Produktion S. Bauman AB, 1942)

Rules of the Game, The (*La Règle du jeu*, Jean Renoir, NEF, 1939, France)

Salka Valka (Arne Mattsson, Nordisk Tonefilm, 1954)

Sawdust and Tinsel (*Gycklarnas afton*, Ingmar Bergman, AB Sandrew-Produktion, 1953) HE

Ship to India, A (*Skepp till Indialand*, Ingmar Bergman, Sveriges Folkbiografer, Lorens Marmstedt, 1947)

Shop Around the Corner (Ernst Lubitsch, MGM, 1940, USA)

Smiles of a Summer Night (*Sommarnattens leende*, Ingmar Bergman, SF, 1955)

*Steel** (*Stål*, Per Lindberg, SF, 1940)

*Stop! Think About Something Else** (*Stopp! Tänk på något annat*, Åke Ohberg, Europa Film, 1944) HE

Summer Interlude (*Sommarlek*, Ingmar Bergman, SF, 1951)

Summer With Monika (*Sommaren med Monika*, Ingmar Bergman, SF, 1953)

Sunshine Follows Rain (*Driver dagg, faller regn*, Gustaf Edgren, SF, 1946)

Sussie (Arne Mattsson, Film AB Lux, 1945)
Swedenhielms (Gustaf Molander, SF, 1936)
Symphony of a City (*Människor i stad*, Arne Mattsson, SF, SI, 1947)
Tales of Manhattan (Julien Duvivier, 20th Century Fox, 1942, USA)
They Staked Their Lives (*Med livet som insats*, Alf Sjöberg, AB Artfilm, 1940)
Thirst aka *Three Strange Loves* (*Törst*, Ingmar Bergman, SF, 1949) HE
*Towards a New Dawn** (*Mot nya tider*, Sigurd Wallén, Svensk Talfilm, 1939)
*Two of Us, The** (*Vi två*, Schamyl Bauman, AB Terrafilm, 1939)
Vagabond Blacksmiths (*Smeder på luffen*, Erik Hampe Faustman, Nordisk Tonefilm, 1949)
Wages of Fear, The (*Le salaire de la peur*, Henri-Georges Clouzot, CICC, 1953, France)
Waiting Women aka *Secrets of Women* (*Kvinnors väntan*, Ingmar Bergman, SF, 1952)
*Wanted** (*Efterlyst*, Schamyl Bauman, Produktion S. Bauman AB, 1939)
When Roses Bloom (*När rosorna slå ut*, Edvin Adolphson, Paramount, 1930).
When the Meadows Are in Bloom (*När ängarna blommar*, Erik Hampe Faustman, Filmo, 1946)
While the City Sleeps (*Medan staden sover*, Lars-Eric Kjellgren, SF, 1950)
Witches' Night (*Häxnatten*, Schamyl Bauman, AB Irefilm, 1937)
*With the People for the Motherland** (*Med folket för fosterlandet*, Sigurd Wallén, SF, 1938)
Woman in the Window, The (Fritz Lang, Christie Corporation, 1944, USA)
Woman's Face, A (*En kvinnas ansikte*, Gustaf Molander, SF, 1938)
Young Nobleman, The (*Unga greven tar flickan och priset*, Rune Carlsten, Bonnierfilm, 1924)
 HE

Television:

Bonanza (NBC, 1959-1973, USA)
Forsyte Saga, The (BBC, 1967, UK)
Tonight Show starring Johnny Carson, The (NBC, 1962-1992, USA)
Hylands hörna (SVT, 1962-1983)

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