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# Hjalmar Bergman's "Accounting" with the Swedish Middle-Classes

By *Alrik Gustafson*

One of Hjalmar Bergman's letters which most intimately reveals how deep, how tragically deep, was his own personal identification with the materials of his novels is the well-known letter of the 2nd of February 1922 to his old friend, the philosopher Hans Larsson. "Mina tre sista böcker," Bergman writes in this letter,

ha för mig haft en viss s. a. s. proklamatorisk betydelse. De äro avskedstaganden. I Markurell från kärleken och familjeliv, i von Hancken från ärelystnad och allehanda utopier, i Farmor från den borgerliga miljö, ur vilken jag utgått. Avsked i godo vill jag gärna hoppas — eljest intet värda vare sig för mig eller andra . . . Du tycker kanske, att jag börjat i god tid med mitt avskedstagande? Mig faller det snarare före att jag börjat för sent. Och en viss nervös och obehaglig jäkt gör sig nog tyvärr förnimbar. På "lediga stunder" sysslar jag mest med en teori, som jag vrider och vänder, passar på och påtar på. Denna: Ingen människa dör, förrän hon själv beslutat dö. Hon dör övertygad och övertalad — om än i sista sekunden — av döden. Att mycket gamla så dö, det har jag sett, men jag tror det även om de unga. Jag tror det om dem, som dö i krig eller av olyckshändelse. Ty olyckshändelsen *kan* faktiskt *ej* vara det avgörande eftersom vi dagligen ha hundratals dödsomöjligheter lurande omkring oss. Det är först då döden övertygat oss, som sjukdomen eller olycksfallet finner sin tid. En fantasi — jag vet — men för mig stämmer den väl överens med vad jag sett och hört. För mig är livet ett enda långt, oftast lågmält, ibland högröstat och vredgat samtal med döden. Och jag skulle vilja veta, vem döden är.

This letter, with its curious fatalistic circling around the concept of death, has in the past attracted critics and scholars primarily as a central psychological document, one which suggests with naked poignancy how Bergman's macabre genius was already in 1922 preparing grimly for that death which did not in fact come until nine years later, in a hotel room, alone, in Berlin.

The letter suggests, however, at least two other approaches to Bergman and his work. First, it might be used as a point of departure for an analysis of what was to come in Bergman's production—the work of the last years. This work, strangely subtle and complex, may be said to be in no small measure inspired by the mood of the letter of 1922. The novels and plays of the last nine years reflect everywhere a desperate oscillation between a partial attachment to life and a nihilistic craving for death, between a hectic, half-forced attraction to the comic muse and a fatalistic flirting with life's tragic undertow, culminating finally, in Bergman's last

year, in *Clownen Jac*, in whose broken fragments of confession and judgment we witness the author's last terrifying confrontation with those destructive life-forces which lead inexorably, and in Bergman's case quite willingly, to death.

But this is not the approach to Bergman suggested by the letter to Hans Larsson which I wish to develop here.

Rather do I propose to take up for consideration a second approach: the one touched upon by Bergman in his letter when he suggests that *one* of the "avsked" contained in the three novels mentioned is the one particularly applicable to *Farmor och Vår Herre*—a farewell to "den borgerliga miljö, ur vilken jag utgått." It is clear from the opening sentence of the letter that this "farewell," like all serious farewells, is to be considered both a leave-taking and an *accounting*. From this point of view *Farmor och Vår Herre* (1921) is to be conceived as something more, merely, than one of Bergman's most "fascinating" novels—a novel in which his strange narrative magic, his astonishing inventive skill, his mad comic fantasy, and his penetrating psychological insights had attained perhaps their greatest triumph in a novel. *Farmor och Vår Herre*, it is clear, is also to be considered a critical examination of what may be called the structure of a modern bourgeois society, specifically that of Sweden at the turn of the century. And as such *Farmor och Vår Herre* is in a sense more or less typical of all of Bergman's novels dealing with Sweden—from *Hans nåds testamente* (1910) down through the myriad of Bergslagen tales to the last of them, *Farmor och Vår Herre*, eleven years later, and perhaps even more typical of the later Stockholm novels, particularly *Chefen fru Ingeborg* (1924) and the two companion novels *Jonas och Helen* (1926) and *Kerrmans i Paradiset* (1927).

Not that Bergman deliberately indulged in these novels in what we usually mean by the term "social criticism." Nor that he had at hand a ready moral judgment for the middle-class Swedish society which he so brilliantly depicts. As a fabulously gifted narrative artist he is usually too much concerned in his novels with the sheer joy of creation, with the pleasure simply of *depicting* with unerring skill the multifarious, and often mad, activities of a teeming Swedish middle-class life in the provinces. And it is this teeming middle-class life, with its queer assortment of personalities and its fascinating patterns of conflict, which casts an hypnotic spell over the readers of Bergman's novels. The narrative spell is so hypnotic, in fact, that the reader tends more often than not to forget (as Bergman himself—half-consciously delighted by his own narrative magic—not infrequently tends to forget) that these oddly assorted characters are indulging in patterns of conflict which provide, in the last analysis, a revealing commentary, not entirely free from elements of ethical judgment, on a bourgeois society in a state of rather advanced disintegration and decay.

Bergman's judgment, when it emerges, is, however, seldom obtrusive, never dogmatic in tone, never formulated with doctrinaire finality. It emerges *by the way* as it were, as a kind of implied rather than expressed commentary; or—when explicit—it takes on more frequently than not an ironic form which may be all but submerged under the rich surface magic of the novelist's purely narrative brilliance. But it is there—this commentary, this judgment—and it shall be the purpose of the present paper

to extract from Bergman's pages these elements of commentary and of judgment and to attempt a formulation of the direction which this commentary on a bourgeois society finally comes to take in Bergman's novels.

Bergman's family background had provided him with an almost overwhelmingly rich dossier on middle-class Swedish life in the provinces, and it is largely upon this dossier that he draws for the materials of his novels, particularly those beginning with *Hans nåds testamente* from 1910, the first of the novels dealing with Swedish life in the provinces. Bergman's father was a very successful banker in Örebro, and his mother came from a leading family in this city, the centre of widespread business activities for the so-called western Bergslagen, an ancient mining and small foundry district which during Hjalmar Bergman's boyhood and youth in the last decade of the nineteenth century was experiencing a rapidly expanding business activity. Most characteristic of this expanding business activity was the rise of modern industrialism on the Swedish countryside, an industrialism which came finally to replace the older, semi-patrician business families, largely aristocratic in origin and with roots far back in a feudal economy, by a new, more callous and brutal financial type, whose activities were seldom burdened by traditional concepts of honor or those even of a simple humanity. It was a world in which a financial law of "the survival of the fittest" was operating in grim disregard of what is sometimes called "human values." Nowhere in Bergman's work is this phenomenon more dramatically developed than in the central conflict in *Markurells i Wadköping*, the most popular of Bergman's novels—the conflict here being sharply joined between the crude modern streber type Markurell, primitive representative of the "new" business type, and Carl Magnus de Lorche, last hapless off-shoot of an old patrician family.

In *Markurells i Wadköping*, however, the crude streber type finally capitulates in a way to "human values," Markurell's brutal parvenu procedures yield at the last to considerations of an ideal kind, and in a moment of almost unbelievable magnanimity he comes to "save" his enemy de Lorche. But such a sentimental resolution of the economic conflict occurs nowhere else centrally in Bergman's novels. In *Markurells i Wadköping* Bergman bowed momentarily to his public's demand for the "happy ending." Elsewhere in Bergman's novels—both before and after *Markurells i Wadköping*—the "fittest" rather than the "best" almost invariably survive, the strongest and the least scrupulous take over, the acquisitive egotism of modern capitalism triumphs.

But the triumph of a cold, impersonal modern capitalism over earlier economic practices and forms did not take place at one leap. It established its power only gradually. In Bergman's novels one finds reflected quite clearly the historical process which is involved in this development insofar as it is illustrated in the changing economy of Sweden during the last hundred and fifty years, an economy which still retained in the early nineteenth century certain odd remnants of an earlier feudal society, but which even in the first half of the nineteenth century had become predominantly an economy based on the relatively small provincial business firm, usually dominated by a single family or two with some sense of local loyalties. This small business firm in turn comes, in the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to be gradually swallowed up by

the expanding colossus of modern capitalism, with national, and even some international, ramifications—all made possible by revolutionary developments in modern industry.

Most readers of Bergman's first Bergslagen novel, *Hans nåds testamente*, are not apt to be especially aware of the manner in which it fits quite naturally into the pattern of economic and social change outlined above. *Hans nåds testamente* is usually thought of simply as one of Bergman's most fantastic novels, in whose pages a grotesque and bizarre comic fantasy is allowed to run wild—as a kind of end in itself. And certainly the novel may be enjoyed simply in these terms. Nowhere in Swedish literature, and seldom in the literature of the world, does one come upon such a strange ménage as that which by devious, and largely sordid, ways has converged upon the ancient house of Rogershus—from the sly, fantastically decadent head of the house, Baron Roger Gustaf Abraham Bernhusen de Sars, through an amazing alcoholic assortment of servants, to an innocent young boy and girl who experience a growing, sensitive, teen-age awareness of the morally miasmatic environment in which they must live. And nowhere in Bergman's novels are situation, character, and dialogue handled with a more sovereign verve than in *Hans nåds testamente*. The novel can in consequence be enjoyed, and usually is, as a kind of all but unbelievable narrative *smörgåsbord* loaded with the most extravagant varieties of fictional fare.

But the alert palate in the presence of this fabulous literary fare notes finally, despite the undeniable intoxication of the gustatory experience, that some of the ingredients have a bitter taste, that what at least *seems* to be merely a fascinating array of rather harmless exotic tidbits is, in fact, something partly, at least, sinister, if not actually half-poisonous.

For Rogershus, with the forced and hectic tempo of its life, is really a house which is rotten to the core. Its story is in the last analysis a tale of utter moral irresponsibility, the last mad chapter in the story of a thoroughly decadent aristocracy of blood. Rogershus, we come to know, was originally built by means of a brutal exploitation of human blood; down through the centuries it had battened with a slyly salacious complacency on its own private tradition of "Chronique scandaleuse"; and it now exists under the absolute rule of its present owner's senile egotistical caprices—  
detta Rogershus, där människorna hade så liten lust och än mindre förmåga att bereda varandra lycka. Där nycken var en lidelse, lidelsen en nyck. Där nycken ensam härskade, bestämde allt, trotsade sig till allt.

Little wonder is it that Jacob—together with Blenda the only young and healthy and innocent characters in the novel—feels somewhat more than vaguely oppressed by this environment.

... Det var ju saker, som snuddat förbi honom så många gånger, saker, som Johnsson sluddrat och sladdrat om, saker, som han stundvis förnummit ur gårdsfolkets viskningar. Jacob avskydde denna Rogershus' krönika, denna cronique scandaleuse, som hade så många pinsamma förbindelser med honom själv, med hans mor! Han kände, att lyssnade han väl en gång med öppna öron, med begär att veta, så skulle den paradisiska friden försvinna, tankarna bliva bittra.

Someone has suggested that the note of comic aplomb with which Bergman handles his picture of a dying aristocratic tradition in *Hans nåds*

*testamente* may be an unconscious reflection of the author's sense of his own middle-class superiority. If this is so—and it may well be—one should add that the novels which are to follow from Bergman's hand do not retain much of this unconscious feeling of superiority, even though the degenerate aristocrat continues to appear more or less persistently in the long list of Bergslagen novels which otherwise are preoccupied more centrally with the middle-classes themselves. And when Bergman's probing critical genius comes to be focused primarily on his own class the picture is not exactly a pretty one, though it may be admitted that the Swedish middle-classes do not on the whole appear in such purely freakish forms as does the master of Rogershus in Bergman's first Bergslagen novel.

Among the nearly half score novels about Bergslagen beginning with *Hans nåds testamente* (1910), and the half dozen starting with *Chefen fru Ingeborg* (1924) which shift the scene largely to Stockholm, there are five—*En döds memoarer* (1918), *Markurells i Wadköping* (1919), *Farmor och Vår Herre* (1921), *Chefen fru Ingeborg* (1924), and *Jonas och Helen* (1926) together with its sequel *Kerrmans i Paradiset* (1927)—which are particularly rich in their treatment of the middle-classes in the shifting economic and social scene of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In these novels Bergman becomes the sober, penetrating analyst of a modern capitalistic society without substantially sacrificing the magic of his rare narrative skill. In fact, in at least one of these novels, *Farmor och Vår Herre*, Bergman is at the very height of his artistic power while providing in addition a never-to-be-forgotten moral on the pervasive inhumanity of an aggressive economic egotism.

In general there are two phases in the rôle of the Swedish middle-classes in the changing modern economy which particularly interest Bergman in these novels. His first, and central, concern is with the historical rôle played by the relatively small provincial business firm toward the close of the nineteenth century in swallowing up both the last economic remnants of a feudal society and the small independent mining and foundry entrepreneurs who had themselves by the early nineteenth century triumphed almost everywhere over a more aristocratic early economy. His second concern is with the gradual disintegration, in turn, of the small provincial firm, its step-by-step merging in a modern twentieth century industrial economy with what comes to be called "big business," first on a national and then even, to some extent, on an international scale.

It is in *En döds memoarer* that one can study best *the actual nature of the conflict* between the type of provincial business firm and the earlier independent mining and foundry activities carried on locally by single families, while it is especially in *Kerrmans i Paradiset* that we find what may be called the final *commentary* on the business procedures and methods of the rapidly expanding power of the provincial business firm. *En döds memoarer*, as the title indicates, is written in the form of memoirs—the memoirs in this case of the last, decadent male descendant of the old, at one time well-established Arnberg family, which in the person of Johan Arnberg, father of the author of the memoirs and a man whose obsessive ambition is to reestablish the fallen Arnberg fortune, comes to be mercilessly exploited by a Count A. O. Arnfelt, a cold, impersonal representative of the new speculative provincial banker-merchant type. Nowhere in

Bergman's novels is the actual conflict between the older and the newer economies more sharply developed than in *En döds memoarer*. Nowhere is the fall of an old family business under the ruthless impact of modern business methods more tragically reflected.

It is, however, in *Kerrmans i Paradiset*, a novel in which Count A. O. Arnfelt's business manipulations reach their final sinister apotheosis in terms of their identification with the Bourmaister fortune in the banking firm Arnfelt, Bourmaister and Co., that Bergman provides a final commentary on the business activities of Count Arnfelt. In this novel a sharp contrast is drawn between the two types of Swedish business man at and immediately after the turn of the century. In Fabian Bourmaister, Arnfelt's partner in Arnfelt, Bourmaister and Co., one meets a modern representative of a fine old patrician merchant family, with its roots far back in Hanseatic times. He is in his quiet way a sharp enough business man, but he is never inhuman, always essentially a "gentleman" in his personal and business relationships. Fabian Bourmaister is the older "merchant" type, in marked contrast to the more modern "banker" type represented in Count Arnfelt, who had forced the present partnership by a sharp exercise of sheer economic power. Outwardly a gentleman of fine old aristocratic stock, Count Arnfelt had down through his business career been a "wolf hunting alone," a late nineteenth-century Swedish representative of the rugged business individualist, cold, calculating, quietly ruthless in his dealings with those who for one reason or another were weak enough to become his helpless victims.

In *Kerrmans i Paradiset* we meet this formidable representative of modern business genius for the first time in the famous passage in which he and Fabian Bourmaister, both now old men at the end of their careers, enter "Paradiset," a room in the Bourmaister family mansion whose chief decorative feature is a series of tapestries depicting scenes from the Garden of Eden.

In i "Paradiset" trädde tvenne gamle. Den ene, husets herre, Fabian Bourmaister, redan över de sjuttiofem, krum under årens tyngd, liten bredvid den andre, högreste gubben, blid både av böjelse och klokhet, konciliant i sitt sätt som om han ständigt ginge omkring och försonade arga fiender. Den lille var mjuk i kroppen, begåvad ännu med den fridens och trevnadens måttliga fyllighet som inte ens de sena åren gnaga. Den högreste åter var snarast ett stort skelett kring vilket den långa, vida bonjouren hängde som en svepning. Över de breda skuldrorna, lätt ålderssluttande men knappast böjda, reste sig ett stort huvud med yvigt, stritt, vitt hår, som vid öronen övergick i vita polisonger. En bred haka och en lång, tämligen spetsig näsa syntes sträva att träffa varann mittöver den breda gäddkäften, en käft som slukat åtskilligt — enligt malisen: en fet borgare till frukost, två brukspatroner till middag och ett knippe väl skalade bönder till kvällsvard — sen petar han tänderna med Svea Rikes Lag. Så glupande aptit fanns väl ej längre hos denne åttionioåring, men redan den omständigheten att han för första gången på ett decennium rest upp från Wadköping till bolagsstämman i Stockholm kittlade en smula herrar medaktionärens nerver. . . .

A. O. — före detta bankdirektören, grundaren av Wadköpings Enskilda Bank och av firman Arnfelt, Bourmaister & C:o, greve A. O. Arnfelt.

Later in the novel Maxi Bourmaister, whimsically sophisticated son of Fabian Bourmaister, initiates us even more intimately into the inner

mysteries of this formidable A. O. Arnfelt's ramified business activities. "Maxi Bourmaister, expert på högst underbara och ofta makabra beräkningar, har konstaterat," we are told,

att näst lungshot, difteri och arsenikkaffe, var under åren 65—95 A. O. Arnfelt den vanligaste dödsorsaken bland den vuxna befolkningen i Bergslagen. Trots Maxis auktoritativa stämpel "Det är faktiskt sant" vågar man betvivla statistiken. Bankirens dystra tanke var dock ingalunda ett hugskott. Därtill hade han på alltför nära håll iakttagit Arnfelts och hans banks framfärd.

Det hade varit om man så må säga en patriarkalisk framfärd. Den moderna penninginstitutionens upphöjda och klara opersonlighet hade ännu icke helt utkristalliserats. Ännu kunde det hända att en bankman som Arnfelt beviljade lån "av gott hjärta" — samt indrog dem, då hjärtat blev mindre gott. Och när var det Arnfeltska hjärtat gott?

In the pleasant harvest and hunting months of July, August, and September, we are told—months when Arnfelt visited the widespread properties of the miners and foundry owners, and by means of skillful maneuvering gained information about these properties which moved him to suggest apparently magnanimous loans to the unsuspecting owners, loans which later came invariably to be foreclosed "då hjärtat blev mindre gott."

That Bergman was not laboring under the illusion that such crude business procedures were peculiar alone to these relatively primitive turn-of-the-century financial practices and foreign to more "enlightened" modern business ethics becomes sufficiently clear from one of his later ironic commentaries on business procedures as such.

Denna primitiva affärsmetod à la A. O. — "jakt med uv" — strider som bekant helt och hållet mot den moderna merkantila andans krav på uppriktighet och lojalitet. Likväl finns det — vilket också torde vara bekant — än i dag affärsmän, som stundom anlita metoden, ej sällan med framgång. Då den "moderna andan" i mycket hög grad inspireras av och bygger på vissa stora empiriskt vunna fakta: "allmänhetens dom," "statistiken visar" och icke minst framgången, resultatet, så torde metoden få anses icke helt och hållet utdömd ens inom omdömesgilla kretsar. . . .

Behind the devastating sharpness of this passage it is not difficult to discern the *moralist* Bergman, an author whose depiction of Swedish middle-class life has now proceeded beyond a merely casual commentary on man's more or less innocent "foibles" business-wise, and has at last become more centrally concerned with a serious arraignment of certain basic aspects of a modern bourgeois society.

In this respect *Kerrmans i Paradiset* is to be considered simply one of that series of novels beginning eight years earlier with *Markurells i Wadköping*, and including, besides *Kerrmans i Paradiset*, *Farmor och Vår Herre*, *Chefen fru Ingeborg*, and *Clownen Jac*. Of these novels, *Markurells i Wadköping*, *Farmor och Vår Herre*, and *Kerrmans i Paradiset* are most centrally concerned with a critical examination of certain later developments in modern business ethics, while *Chefen fru Ingeborg* and *Clownen Jac*, which are concerned most immediately with psychological matters, focus somewhat less sharply on the ethical implications of modern business practices.

Broadly speaking Bergman is examining in this last group of novels a

twentieth century business community in a state of sharp moral disintegration under the multiple impacts of an increasingly impersonal business psychology. As business firms expanded at the turn of the century and later beyond their earlier limited patrician-family forms, and as they developed from their earlier relatively local-provincial status to financial institutions with broader national and international ramifications, they came to lose very largely whatever humane qualities they may at one time have had and came at the last to represent too frequently a purely speculative trend, which in its extreme form amounted merely to gambling on an extensive scale, or—even worse—took on the form of sheer criminal bluff.

The five novels which trace these developments and provide Bergman's final mature commentary on a modern bourgeois society never indulge in facile and oversimplified formulations of the problems involved. The moral disintegration of a modern business community is examined in a profound, richly faceted manner, reflecting always the complex nature of the forces involved and projecting developments with a creative variety and concreteness which reveals only occasional lapses in Bergman's earlier mastery of the novel writer's art.

Particularly impressive in certain of these later novels is their subtlety and penetration in the treatment of character. Bergman is not satisfied here, as he had been in some of his earlier novels, with creating merely "queer" characters, odd and only half believable personalities, who provide for the reader a kind of grotesque, not infrequently macabre entertainment in their mad, unpredictable, purely capricious arabesques of dialogue and of action. Bergman's purposes with his characters are now much more serious, in part probably under the influence of Freud. He probes much more deeply than heretofore into the fatal recesses of the subconscious and the unconscious, and he is now—sometimes by implication, at other times more directly—prepared to bring his characters into a court of moral judgment.

Though the shifting, elusive, infinitely varied patterns of a disintegrating bourgeois class are examined in these novels from a number of crucial points of view, the aspect of this process of change and decay which most centrally fascinates Bergman is the constantly recurring struggle for economic power between the older, decadent aristocratic-patrician family and the new, aggressive business streber type. In *Markurells i Wadköping* this conflict occurs, as we have seen, in its simplest, most obvious form in the uneven struggle between two sharply contrasting personalities, those of Carl Magnus de Lorche, soft, aristocratic, decadent representative of the past, and Markurell, a crude, brutal upstart representative of the modern business scene. In *Farmor och Vår Herre* and *Kerrmans i Paradiset*, on the other hand, the conflict occurs in more complex, less schematic forms—and now essentially *within* the older semi-decadent business families, when these families, in their relative business impotence, seek more or less consciously a kind of regeneration by means of the addition of new blood through marriage with representatives of lower but more aggressive and healthier classes. Both the redoubtable Farmor in *Farmor och Vår Herre* and the able Jonas Kerrman in *Kerrmans i Paradiset* are "outsiders," intelligent, enterprising, resourceful, who each in his way comes to "take over" the more or less shaky business structures

of the Borek and the Bourmaister families. They do so, especially in the case of Farmor, however, by means that have unforeseen psychological and moral consequences. Constructive as Farmor's efforts at first outwardly at least seem to be, the total final effect of her activities on the ramified branches of the Borek family which she has come not only to save but to tyrannize is an unhappy and deeply tragic one. *Farmor och Vår Herre* becomes essentially in consequence—despite the roguish comic horseplay which is its surface mark—a long, subtly psychological, and infinitely original homily on the kind of evil unconsciously perpetrated by strong-willed personalities who come to force their wills upon an environment in partial disintegration. The case of Jonas Kerrman in *Kerrmans i Paradiset* is not so simple. One has the feeling that his is on the whole a salutary influence, that the “new blood” which he brings by marriage to the old Bourmaister shipping dynasty will meet successfully both the financial and moral challenges involved. One cannot be quite sure, however, that Bergman means exactly this with his novel about the late fortunes of the Bourmaisters, for the drift of thought in *Kerrmans i Paradiset* is somewhat inconclusive and various interpretations might with perhaps equal validity be placed upon it.

In any case it is certainly very doubtful that Bergman in general ever believed, except perhaps tentatively and wishfully, in any final possibility of substantial regeneration—either by the addition of “new blood” or by some other means—of the bourgeois classes with which his novels deal. Apparent to him as were the decadent strains in the Swedish middle-classes of his day, and unequal as these middle-classes might be to the tasks which faced them, Bergman sensed perhaps even more strongly (being a son of these classes) that the alternatives appearing on the horizon—the upstart streber, the impersonal efficiency of “big business,” and other possibilities—led inevitably in the main only to an over-all vulgarization of business practices. And this vulgarization seemed to him in the long run to reflect forms of moral indifference and decay even more vicious and far more pervasive than those characteristic of earlier business forms and procedures. A. O. Arnfelt's business methods were in essence, it may be admitted, no less “immoral” than were those of such a blatantly vulgar financial manipulator as Markurell, but A. O. Arnfelt and his generation maintained at least the outward amenities of a gentleman class while Markurell frankly gloried in a low plebeian sense of economic power dominated at almost every point by a crude, barbaric revenge motive.

It seems clear nevertheless that Bergman, despite a partial sense of solidarity with his own class, was sufficiently aware of the fact that Markurell was in one sense at least simply a grotesque modern variation of the A. O. Arnfelt type; both Markurell and Count Arnfelt were “wolves hunting alone” albeit Markurell's bloody claws and fangs were exposed for all to see whilst Arnfelt's were partly disguised under the surface elegances of his aristocratic manners. And this should suggest why, in the last analysis, Bergman's view of the middle-classes, whatever outward forms their activities may have taken down through three or four generations of time, is consistently a dark and pessimistic one. As an essentially irrational creature man in the main, in Bergman's view, is scarcely to be trusted; and perhaps least of all is he to be trusted when the temptation

is strong to pursue his own selfish egotistical ends, as he must do in the fierce competitive world of modern business. "Vilken människa som helst," we are reminded in a famous Bergman paradox which has its obvious bearing on modern business practices, "kan begå vilken handling som helst i vilket ögonblick som helst." Whether feudal-aristocrat or patrician-merchant or banker-financier, that which in Bergman's view always characterizes the middle-class, that which is the constant driving motivation of this class is a *basic acquisitive instinct*—an instinct which, in Bergman's view, is blind, egotistical, cruel, and ultimately even sterile despite what may seem to be its positive and constructive attainments.

And it is clear from the whole drift of thinking in Bergman's novels and plays that he felt that groups or classes of people are motivated in the main by the same blind, irrational, often destructive drives as are individuals. In fact, the group as *society* forcing its *collective will* on the individual is apt to be even more blind and less ideal in its motivations than is the individual himself. "Det är ingalunda betydelselöst," we read in *Chefen fru Ingeborg*, "att individen protesterar mot samhället, som, hållande honom i sitt järngrepp, stundom hjälper honom, stundom stjälper, stundom förbättrar, stundom försämrar, men som alltid handlar 'på en slump' (ty i vida högre grad än individen lever samhället ett 'driftliv', föga påverkat av förnuft, än mindre av ideal)." It is for this reason that Bergman could not share his own generation's widespread faith in the possibilities of curbing man's destructive instincts by the political means of what is sometimes called "enlightened social legislation." Though Bergman's skepticism on political solutions of man's dilemma is well known, it is reflected only tangentially and fragmentarily in his novels, most interestingly perhaps in certain parts of *Kerrmans i Paradiset*. The difficulty that Bergman finds in political "programs" lies in the fact that society's programs of reform are not necessarily "enlightened" (perhaps in the very nature of things cannot be) in the sense that they serve intelligently the really constructive sides of existence.

What disturbs Bergman most deeply in the drift of forces in a modern economic society and confirms his pessimism as to the constructive possibilities of modern business is its cold impersonality and its consequent tendency to divest itself completely from such ideal moral checks as business methods and procedures may at one time at least in part have had. Modern industrialization in no way eliminates, in his view, the operation of a blind, essentially destructive acquisitive instinct in the world of business. On the contrary, it serves rather to intensify the destructive potential of the acquisitive instinct—it makes even more cruelly macabre the total possibilities of man's perennial inhumanity to man.

In Bergman's diagnosis of the moral malaise of modern business he is especially aware of two immediate conditions or causes, the one, as we have already noted in several contexts, being its broadly national and international tendency toward expansion, the other, a related phenomenon—what the cultured European is prone to call its "Americanization." Though his short stay in America in the mid-1920's was in no way primarily responsible for his dark view of the practices of modern business, it certainly served to provide him with additional evidence in support of his position, particularly inasmuch as his opportunity to view American life

was restricted very largely to the fantastically dubious business practices of Hollywood in one of the heydays of the film capital's excesses. Asked to write for a Stockholm newspaper an article on his impressions of the United States upon his return to Sweden, Bergman, in refusing the request, pens the following whimsically satiric notes in a purely private letter to the editor—

Amerika gör inte något intryck. Man kan visserligen säga: där finns utmärkta cigarrer, utsökt glass och frukt, i övrigt oätbar mat, där finns många bilar och några öknar. Vill ni ha intryck från Amerika bör ni skicka dit en statistiker och en geolog. Ty där finns jord befolkad med siffror. För den som egentligen bara tar intryck av människor är Amerika föga givande, ty där finns inga människor. Se där allt vad jag har att komma med och det är icke ens spik för en artikel. Vad filmdivorna av båda eller rättare sagt intetdera könet beträffar, så erbjuda de ringa intresse. Det är vanligen beskedliga varelser som leva av att sälja sina mer eller mindre behagliga kroppar till de utskänkningsbolag, vilka varje afton förse massan med dess för nattens behov nödiga dosis av lätt könslig stimulans.

One comes upon a more serious commentary on America in a passage in *Chefen fru Ingeborg*, the novel published the year after the return from the United States, a passage in which Bergman identifies American business methods with the deliberate and callous making of profits out of the weaknesses of man.

... Han [a Swedish-American now resident in Sweden] var son till Sommarros granne, fiskare Öhman, och till läggning och yrke blodsugare — en odåga, som under några Amerikaår utbildat vissa metoder att utnyttja andras svaghet. Dylika typer ha alltid funnits, men med kulturens tilltagande amerikanisering är det fara värt, att de skall tränga allt längre in i de "hedervärda" yrkena och allt högre upp på den sociala trappan. Så snart vinstbegäret helt överskuggar yrkesstoltheten och yrkesglädjen är bluffmakaren färdig, en man, som ej litar på egen skicklighet utan på andras dumhet eller svaghet. ...

This final stage in the moral disintegration of modern business, as Bergman sees it—the stage which quite deliberately seeks to exploit for economic gain the stupidity and weakness of man—becomes one of the central objects of satire in Bergman's devastating diagnosis of the American film industry in the last of his novels *Clownen Jac*. The ultimate moral vulgarization of the acquisitive instinct in modern business practices finds quite appropriately its bizarre and ghastly apotheosis in the world's film capital Hollywood.

Dark as is Bergman's picture of a modern society dominated by a bourgeois class driven by a blind and egotistical acquisitive instinct, and comfortless as is his view that society in its own collective blindness is incapable of correcting the resulting evils, Bergman does not view man's modern dilemma with indifference. On the contrary, the pages of his novels are everywhere instinct with a sense of moral indignation whose intensity is not to be measured by the fact that it does not always break out in the sharp and violent form that it takes in *Clownen Jac* and in portions of one or two other novels, especially *Hans nåds testamente*. To one who like Bergman maintains the position that the central condition of life is its irrationality, it would certainly be inconsistent to blame overquickly and oversharply those representatives of society who simply *inevitably* operate in

terms of the essential irrationality of life. From this point of view the middle-classes cannot be said to be unique in their evil practices. This class was simply *fated* to play in the last century a central historical rôle in an economy undergoing an extraordinary expansion under the impact of the modern industrialization of the means of production. In extraordinary situations temptation is strong, and the middle-classes, chosen instrument of a capitalistic economy, failed—and failed almost inevitably—to resist the temptation of easy profits and maintain a high level of business ethics. It is in terms of some such reasoning as this, one may assume, that Bergman stresses in his letter to Hans Larsson quoted at the beginning of this essay that the "farewell" he is taking in *Farmor och Vår Herre* from his own class, the Swedish bourgeoisie of his day, is to be interpreted as an essentially decent and amicable farewell—"avsked i godo vill jag gärna hoppas." This half-forgiving attitude on Bergman's part would seem to justify the placing of quotation marks around the somewhat formidable word "arraignment" in the title of the present essay. Both Bergman's purely artistic function as a novelist of the highest distinction and his essentially humane perspective on the problems with which he is dealing in his novels would seem to forbid a sharper moral focus than the one he here suggests in his treatment of the bourgeois class from which he himself derives.

And yet the total evidence of the last group of novels suggests that Bergman maintained only precariously this relatively conciliant attitude toward his class and that he recognized not without elements of a deep moral indignation the failure of this class to maintain a decent standard of action. What he in the last analysis finds most disturbing about his class is its self-sufficiency, its egotism—an egotism which made this class all too frequently incapable of a feeling of sympathy toward less favored classes and less favored human beings. With Schopenhauer, the first of the modern philosophical pessimists, Bergman shared that ethical pathos which finds in the exercise of compassion toward man the highest of the virtues. The very meaninglessness of life, its irrationality, its brutal cruelty, make sympathy and understanding among men all the more necessary for existence. It is this kind of ethical pathos which inspires Bergman's final judgment on such characters as the capable but domineering Farmor in *Farmor och Vår Herre* and guides his heart and pen when he is moved not infrequently to record in his novels such exquisitely sensitive words as "Må vi alla minnas att fara varligt fram med de olyckliga och varligast i den korta stund de äro lyckliga," or when he writes the simple, moving admonition of Clownen Jac that one must always be humble, for "Man kan aldrig förstå en människa som man ser ned på," or when he quietly observes that "Människan vet mycket lite om sin granne och gör klokast i att döma honom så sällan och ödmjukt som möjligt."

It is not always, however—or for that matter usual—that Bergman reveals himself with such naked poignancy as a moralist as he does in such passages as these. More frequently the "moral" in his novels is so skillfully obscured by the astonishing fertility of his narrative and comic fantasy that we fail both to note the moral and to remember that all great humor has in it, finally, a deep and abiding pathos, a warm, understanding sympathy for those whom life's tragic irrationalities have dealt with harshly.

How closely wedded in Bergman are the comic and the tragic muses, how delicate is the interplay between laughter and tears is apparent everywhere in his most mature novels, nowhere more richly than in his fond and yet stern farewell to his own class in *Farmor och Vår Herre*. One should perhaps add also that this quality frequently carries over into many of those wise and witty aphorisms which Bergman scatters with such engaging profusion through the pages of his novels—"Samvetskval är ett tveeggat svärd som kanske oftare försämrar än förbättrar. . . ." "Goda människor äro ofta inbilska — det är just deras godhet som förleder dem till detta fel. . . ." "Grymhet och feghet äro tvillingbröder liksom mod och mildhet. . . ." "Saknar man moral, skadar man sig själv — har man moral, skadar man andra. . . ." "Må man säga vad ont man vill om ett syndigt leverne — men det är allmänbildande. . . ."