



LIV ULLMANN: FACE TO FACE

# Shame (Skammen)

+ intro by Catharine Des Forges, Director, Independent Cinema Office

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

## Contemporary review

As in *Persona*, the credits in *Shame* provide some kind of key to what is to follow, only this time the sequence is not visual but aural. While the names of the technicians appear on the screen, sporadic bursts of gunfire punctuate what sound like transmissions from a short-wave radio-set, news items delivered in a babble of partly intelligible languages, whose immediate effect is to place the spectator in the same position as the film's central protagonists, to force upon him a physical awareness of the impossibility of choosing or taking sides. For even with a radio that works, truth is a question of the station you listen to. Evil is always on another waveband, and anyway, if you could listen to all channels and understand all languages, how could you analyse and rationally assess what you hear when it is forever being interrupted by explosions in your own vicinity? Even before the film has started, we are forced like Jan and Eva to dismiss the news of the world as being beyond our comprehension, relieved when the film passes from the political to the personal, from the 'difficult' credits to the seemingly easier, more familiar terrain of the opening sequence – the intimate tensions and dissatisfactions of a married couple who have sought to avoid the difficulties of their times by withdrawing to an island cottage.

For though we do not yet realise it, the theme of the journey, which will dominate the film's form, has already been introduced. Even in their sedentary retreat, the couple are already in mid-flight from a reality that will slowly prove to be ubiquitous, but which – though their house burns, their friends die and their faltering love turns to hate as a consequence of it – they will never understand as having anything to do with them. The purely negative form that their travelling takes reflects their inability to accept or confront their present situation, as of course does their physical unpreparedness for the journey (their car won't start, they have no provisions).

And their attempts to escape in space are mirrored again in their attempts to escape in time. The few moments of pleasure that they experience either separately or within their fraught relationship are invariably stolen from some other temporal dimension than the present.

If *Shame's* structure emphasises the futile escapism of the two main characters, this is further underscored by the fact that Jan and Eva are both artists, but artists whose work is shown – more harshly than in any of Bergman's films – as having no possible relation to the world around them. Their art provides them with nothing more than a temperamental alibi, an excuse for withdrawal, yet in so far as they no longer play and their fragile instruments are reduced to the level of mere objects, it further serves to underline the self-centred materialism that emerges as one of their most conspicuous characteristics. For instead of using the artist's isolation, as he does in his other works, to stress the differences that separate him from his fellow men, Bergman here presents it as a microcosmic embodiment of the

moral afflictions of all humanity. The privileged position which the artist seeks to occupy loses all possible justification in conditions where his art can no longer be exercised, in the political arena already delineated in *Persona* as being beyond art. In such conditions, the artist's withdrawal from moral responsibility, far from differentiating him from his fellow men, becomes a metaphor for all human duplicity and self-deception; so that the external forces which here invade his island seclusion, though beyond his control, are nonetheless perceived as logical extensions of his refusal to tune his radio in on the world, his inability to respond with anything more active than horrified compassion to the body of the dead child that lies across his path.

Similarly, Bergman demonstrates the human inadequacies of the artist when stripped of the protective clothing of his art by creating in Jan and Eva two of his least sympathetic characters to date. Clearly what interests Bergman about the peregrinations of this supremely mediocre couple is the indiscernible point at which ignorance stops and complicity begins, the point at which they either realise that they are naked or begin to collaborate with the serpent. And in this respect, it is hard to determine which of the pair is the first to fall. For the idea of the impossibility of taking sides that operates on the political level applies equally on the personal one.

Despite the psychological realism with which the couple are sketched, the extreme formalism of Bergman's direction transcends the plausibility of the film's surfaces. And though death no longer wears a cowl, the result is no less clearly a morality play than *The Seventh Seal*. A telephone ringing when no one is calling; a church bell tolling on a Friday; an endless line of transports rattling along the road in front of the cottage: all these, while functioning on a realistic level, serve also – as strikingly as the omens in any classical tragedy – to portend the greater disasters to follow. And despite the surprising number of awkwardly comic moments, the resemblance to classical drama does not stop there. The soldiers on both sides, the civilian corpses or the chain of floating bodies distinguishable only by the numbers on their knapsacks, are treated as impersonally as a chorus, while in relentless close-ups Bergman concentrates on the changes that war wreaks on a tiny circle of people.

Eva, well-meaning, uninformed and uncommitted, can feel little shame for the nightmare in which she participates. She stands back from her life and accepts no responsibility for what she regards as the concern of someone else's conscience. She stands back from it as we, spectators, may stand back from Bergman's film, and then retreats into another dream – this time her own – but which she still does not understand. In this dream, she is walking with the child she has always longed for down a very pretty street, with white houses on one side and a stream with roses growing near it on the other; a plane flies over and sets fire to the roses. 'It was beautiful ... it was awful because it was so beautiful ... I sat there watching the roses burn ... And the whole time I knew I ought to remember something, something that someone had said, though I'd forgotten what.'

**Jan Dawson, *Sight and Sound*, Spring 1969**

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## SHAME (SKAMMEN)

*Director:* Ingmar Bergman  
*Production Companies:* Cinematograph, Svensk Filmindustri  
*Production Manager:* Lars-Owe Carlberg  
*Unit Manager:* Lennart Blomkvist  
*Location Manager:* Brian Wikström  
*Assistant Director:* Raymond Lundberg  
*Script Supervisor:* Katarina Faragó  
*Screenplay:* Ingmar Bergman  
*Director of Photography:* Sven Nykvist  
*Camera Assistants:* Roland Lundin, Nils Fogeby  
*Grips:* Einar Carlsson, Georg Skarstedt, Börje Krogstad, Stig Limér, Jan Bergman  
*Gaffer:* Gerhard Carlsson  
*Assistant Gaffer:* Jan Nilsson  
*Editor:* Ulla Ryghe  
*Art Director:* P.A. Lundgren  
*Properties:* Karl-Arne Bergman  
*Assistant Props:* Arne Carlsson  
*Costumes:* Mago  
*Costume Assistant:* Eivor Kullberg  
*Make-up:* Börje Lundh  
*Make-up Assistant:* Cecilia Drott  
*Sound Recording:* Lennart Engholm, Berndt Frithiof  
*Sound Mixer:* Olle Jakobsson  
*Sound Effects:* Evald Andersson  
*Military Advisers:* Stig Lindberg, Lennart Bergkvist  
*Transportation:* Gillis Roosvall

## Cast

Liv Ullmann (*Eva Rosenberg*)  
Max von Sydow (*Jan Rosenberg*)  
Gunnar Björnstrand (*Colonel Jacobi*)  
Birgitta Valberg (*Mrs Jacobi*)  
Sigge Fürst (*Filip*)  
Hans Alfredson (*Fredrik Lobelius*)  
Ingvar Kjellson (*Oswald*)  
Frank Sundström (*chief interrogator*)  
Ulf Johansson (*doctor*)  
Frej Lindqvist (*cripple*)  
Rune Lindström (*stout man*)  
Willy Peters (*elder officer*)  
Bengt Eklund (*guard*)  
Åke Jönfalk (*condemned man*)  
Vilgot Sjöman (*interviewer*)  
Lars Amble (*officer*)  
Björn Thambert (*Johan, the deserter*)  
Karl-Erik Forsberg (*secretary*)  
Gösta Prüzelius (*rector*)  
Brita Öberg (*woman in interrogation room*)  
Agda Helin (*shopkeeper*)  
Ellika Mann (*woman guard*)  
Raymond Lundberg (*Jacobi's son*)  
Axel Düberg (*pilot*)  
Stig Lindberg (*doctor's assistant*)  
Jan Bergman (*Jacobi's driver*)  
Per Berglund, Nils Fogeby (*soldiers*)  
Gregor Dahlman, Brian Wikström (*men*)  
Monica Lindberg (*woman*)  
Nils Whiten (*elderly man*)  
Georg Skarstedt, Börje Lundh, Eivor Kullberg, Karl-Arne Bergman (*men on boat*)  
Barbro Hiort af Ornäs, Lillian Carlsson (*women on boat*)

Sweden 1968  
103 mins

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## LIV ULLMANN: FACE TO FACE

### The Wayward Girl (Ung flukt)

Mon 28 Mar 18:10 (+ pre-recorded intro by Invisible Women, Archive Activists); Thu 21 Apr 18:20 (+ intro by Anna Smith, film critic and broadcaster)

### Persona

Tue 29 Mar 14:30; Wed 30 Mar 20:50 (+ intro by Tricia Tuttle, BFI Festivals Director); Fri 8 Apr 20:40 (+ intro by Liv Ullmann); Sun 17 Apr 18:40; Mon 25 Apr 20:50

### Autumn Sonata (Höstsonaten)

Sat 2 Apr 20:45; Sat 9 Apr 12:10 (+ Q&A with Liv Ullmann); Mon 18 Apr 18:20; Tue 26 Apr 18:10 (+ extended intro by Melanie Iredale, Director, Birds' Eye View)

### Shame (Skammen)

Tue 5 Apr 20:45 (+ intro by Catharine Des Forges, Director, Independent Cinema Office); Wed 13 Apr 18:10; Wed 27 Apr 18:00

### The Passion of Anna (En passion)

Thu 7 Apr 18:15; Thu 14 Apr 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer at Large); Sat 23 Apr 14:20

### Faithless (Trolösa)

Sat 9 Apr 18:15 (+ extended intro by Liv Ullmann); Sat 23 Apr 16:40 (+ intro by Nellie Alston, freelance programmer and member of T A P E Collective); Wed 27 Apr 20:00

### Scenes from a Marriage (Scener ur ett äktenskap)

Sun 10 Apr 17:40; Sat 30 Apr 17:15

## An-Magritt

Tue 12 Apr 20:40; Wed 20 Apr 18:20

## The Emigrants (Utvandrarna)

Sat 16 Apr 14:10 (+ intro by Sarah Lutton, season programmer); Sun 24 Apr 13:45

## The New Land (Nybyggarna)

Sat 16 Apr 18:50; Sat 30 Apr 12:40

## Face to Face (Ansikte mot ansikte) + intro by Sarah Lutton, season programmer

Sun 17 Apr 14:15

## Saraband

Tue 19 Apr 18:20; Sat 30 Apr 20:50

## Miss Julie

Sun 24 Apr 17:50; Fri 29 Apr 20:20 (+ intro by Elaine Wong, short film programmer, BFI London Film Festival)

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

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