



### The War Game

Director: Mai Zetterling

Producer: Mai Zetterling

Written by: Mai Zetterling, David Hughes

Photography: Brian Probyn, Chris Menges

Editor: Paul Davies

Cast:

Ian Ellis

Joseph Robinson

UK 1962

15 mins

Digital 4K (restoration)

Total running time: 90 mins

### Become a BFI Member

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](https://bfi.org.uk/join)

### Sight and Sound

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25\*

\* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: [sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk](https://sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk)



### BFI Player

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](https://player.bfi.org.uk)

### 25 & Under

We want to open up great independent and classic film and TV for all, making it as accessible as possible. If you are under the age of 26, you can get discounted tickets for BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. BFI Southbank cinema tickets are £4, with festival tickets £5, so you can enjoy the very best of cinema from around the world at an affordable price.

Sign up today and verify your age online, and you can start enjoying discounted tickets immediately.

## Passion and All That Goes with It: The Films of Mai Zetterling

# The War Game

### + In Conversation with Professor Louis Lemkow, Mai Zetterling's son

In a stark apartment building, two children playfully fight over a gun. As the tussle escalates from play to something more serious, their fight takes them higher up the building where the intensity of their conflict is mirrored by the increasing danger of their surroundings. Zetterling's award-winning short film will be followed by a conversation with Professor Lemkow, Professor of Environmental Sociology, Autonomous University of Barcelona, who will talk about his mother's life and work.

[bfi.org.uk](https://bfi.org.uk)

### 'The War Game': a contemporary review

A little drama of atmosphere and suspense, this film was obviously inspired by the cinematic potential of the new houses on the Oakhill Park Estate where it was shot (as the Dutch *Big City Blues* was similarly inspired by a half-finished concrete building). The film thus works on two levels which are perfectly blended: the psychological tension between the two boys, playing a game and yet also in earnest, and the background against which their game is played, the bright, affluent block set in a new estate with everyday noises breaking through. Indeed, with no dialogue or music, the brilliantly composed soundtrack is of the greatest importance. The two boys are perfectly cast and give excellent performances of considerable subtlety; through their intensity, the utter seriousness with which they play (but is it play?), the changing balance between them, the incipient viciousness and friendliness, this becomes more than merely a game between two children. It is a parable of antagonism which makes Golding's *Lord of the Flies* all too plausible. Made with great care, impeccably scripted and photographed, this film is a credit to all involved in its making.

*Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1964

## Passion and All That Goes with It: The Films of Mai Zetterling

Stardom in post-war Britain brought Zetterling unfulfilling parts in a stifling system, though she found some satisfaction through serious stage roles. Her unconventional views on the 'silly institution' of marriage grabbed the headlines and cemented her reputation as Scandinavian 'passion girl'. The determination to get behind the camera and bring her personal vision to the screen, by whatever means necessary, became the driving force in her life, and she left behind a dazzlingly varied and unique filmography. From visceral television documentaries to hard-hitting features, Zetterling was an auteur from day one, stubbornly demanding control of every stage of the filmmaking process. Often taking women's lives as her focus, she refused to be limited or pigeon-holed by her sex, fighting stereotypes both on set and on screen. This season, celebrating her centenary, highlights the immense passion and talent she brought to everything she did, both as an actor and director.

Josephine Botting and Kajsa Hedström, season curators

## Passion and All That Goes with It: The Films of Mai Zetterling

**Sunshine Follows Rain** Driver dagg faller regn  
Thu 1 May 18:10; Sat 10 May 20:50

### Frieda

Fri 2 May 20:50; Sat 10 May 14:50

### The Romantic Age (aka Naughty Arlette)

Sat 3 May 12:30; Fri 9 May 20:45

### Blackmailed

Sat 3 May 15:10; Wed 14 May 18:20

### Desperate Moment

Sun 4 May 12:20; Thu 15 May 18:20

### Jet Storm

Sun 4 May 15:10; Tue 13 May 20:40

### The Man Who Finally Died

Mon 5 May 15:00; Sat 17 May 18:00

### The War Game + In Conversation with Professor

Louis Lemkow, Mai Zetterling's son

Tue 6 May 18:10

### Loving Couples Älskande par

Tue 6 May 20:20 (+ intro by Professor Louis  
Lemkow, Mai Zetterling's son); Sun 18 May 14:20

### Knock on Wood

Wed 7 May 18:10 (+ intro by Professor Louis  
Lemkow, Mai Zetterling's son); Thu 15 May 20:40

### Night Games Nattlek

Wed 7 May 20:45 (+ intro by Professor Louis  
Lemkow, Mai Zetterling's son); Wed 21 May 18:10

### Doctor Glas Doktor Glas

Sun 11 May 12:30; Mon 19 May 20:45

### The Witches

Sat 17 May 12:40; Mon 26 May 11:50;

Sat 31 May 12:00

### The Girls Flickorna

Sat 17 May 15:00 (+ discussion presented in  
partnership with Club des Femmes);  
Wed 28 May 20:40

### We Have Many Names Vi har många namn

Sun 18 May 18:20; Sat 24 May 14:40

### The Moon Is a Green Cheese

Månen är en grön ost

Fri 23 May 20:50; Mon 26 May 18:20

### Scrubbers

Sat 24 May 20:30; Tue 27 May 18:00 (+ intro by  
producer Don Boyd)

### Amorosa

Sun 25 May 11:45; Fri 30 May 20:40

### One Pair of Eyes: You Must Make People Angry

Sun 25 May 18:10; Sat 31 May 14:40

### With thanks to

Reece Goodwin, ACMI



**Swedish  
Film Institute**



**Embassy of Sweden  
London**

Zetterling's reluctance to be seen as a 'women's lib' filmmaker reflected frustration at the tendency of critics to focus on her film's feminist content at the expense of other aspects of her work. From her perspective, her films were just as concerned with other political issues – particularly pacifism, class and consumerism. (Zetterling's left-wing leanings were well known enough that MI5 kept files on her throughout the 1940s and 50s, to monitor her 'communist sympathies'.)

Her complicated relationship to feminism might also reflect her isolated position, as a rare woman director in the Swedish film industry, whose work pre-empted the 1970s feminist film movement. (Zetterling's role models were celebrated auteurs such as Fellini, Buñuel and Tarkovsky, and she aspired to be part of the overwhelmingly male-dominated arthouse tradition.) Indeed, the loneliness of the trailblazing artist is a recurring subject for Zetterling, evident in engrossing hybrid documentary *Vincent the Dutchman* (1972), about Vincent van Gogh, and in *Amorosa* (1986), a biopic of her heroine Agnes von Krusenstjerna, charting the writer's struggles with mental illness.

Another factor in Zetterling's isolation, could be her position as an immigrant filmmaker. Despite making her best-known work in Sweden, Zetterling left as a teenager and spent most of her life in the UK and France. Her conflicted relationship with her birth country is apparent in *Mai Zetterling's Stockholm* (1979), a travelogue made for Canadian television, in which she describes Stockholm as 'the city of no faces, the city of no dreams... the city of the greatest isolation.' The film is a weirdly disquieting watch, part sightseeing tour, part brutal takedown of Sweden's self-image. She presents a large portion of the film, wearing a thin moustache and manic gaze, as the playwright and novelist August Strindberg, whom she portrays as a raving misogynist. The film's working title, 'Native Squatter', underlines Zetterling's sense of disconnection from her birth country. Yet despite her complicated feelings towards Sweden, her Swedish films have largely been absorbed into the national canon. In the UK, her cultural status is less clear, although *Scrubbers* (1982), a vicious punk-infused drama about the horrors of the women's borstal system, still has many admirers. Undeniably messy and narratively confused in places, but elevated by some blistering set pieces and nightmarish imagery, *Scrubbers* has come to be seen as an essential, women-centric counterpart to Alan Clarke's *Scum* (1979).

Rachel Pronger, "What Do You Want from Me?" The Many Faces of Mai Zetterling' (extract), *Sight and Sound*, June 2025 (available to buy from the BFI Shop)

**Louis Lemkow Zetterling** has lived and worked in Catalonia since 1975 and is currently Emeritus Professor at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology (ICTA) at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB).

**Host: Josephine Botting** is a Curator at the BFI National Archive and author of *Adrian Brunel and British Cinema of the 1920s*.