



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

Amorosa

Amorosa

Director: Mai Zetterling

Production Companies: Sandrew Film & Teater, Svenska Filminstitutet, SVT - Sveriges Television

Unit Production Managers: Marianne Persson, Eva Ivarsson

Production Manager: Brita Werkmäster

Assistant Director: Glen Grapinet

Screenplay: Mai Zetterling

Director of Photography: Rune Ericson

Assistant Photographer: Mischa Gavrusjov

Editors: Mai Zetterling, Darek Hodor

Art Director: Jan Öqvist

Set Decorator: Niklas Ejve

Costumes: Gertie Lindgren, Kerstin Lokrantz

Make-up: John Janne Kindahl, Athanasios Vovolis

Music: Roger Wallis

Music Recording: Anders Larsson, Synderella

Sound Recording: Folke Beck Remnes,

Åsa Lindgren

Sound Re-recording: Sven Fahlén, Sonet Studio

Artistic Adviser: Bengt Forslund

English translation: Susanne Heine

Cast:

Stina Ekblad (*Agnes von Krusenstjerna*)

Erland Josephson (*David Sprengel*)

Philip Zandén (*Adolf Von Krusenstjerna*)

Cathérine de Seynes (*Eva von Krusenstjerna*)

Olof Thunberg (*Ernst von Krusenstjerna*)

Rico Rönnbäck (*Edvard von Krusenstjerna*)

Gunnel Broström (*Evelina Hamilton*)

Lauritz Falk (*Hugo Hamilton*)

Helene Friberg (*Viveka Hamilton*)

Efva Lilja (*Aimee Hamilton*)

Karin Forslind (*Eva Hamilton*)

Johan Rabaeus (*Jan Guy Hamilton*)

Börje Ahlstedt (*Joachim Rosenhjelm*)

Mimi Pollak (*Baroness Rosenhjelm*)

Peter Schildt (*Gerhard Odencrantz*)

Henrik Schildt (*Frey Odencrantz*)

Johan Schildt (*Knut Odencrantz*)

Margreth Weivers (*Beda Odencrantz*)

Lena T. Hansson (*Ava de Geer*)

Inga Gill

Gösta Krantz

Anita Björk

Heinz Hopf

Inga Landgré

Nils Eklund

Eva von Hanno

Seija Hyvönen-Mammen

Gustav Kling

Sten Lonnert

Allan Svensson

Anja Landgré

Hanna Wanngårb

Linda Sundström

Lilian Brage

Lief Görsa

Lars-Olof Larsson

Per Gudmunsson

Anneli Martini

Ulf von Zweigbergk

Tomas Laustiola

Bo Rhenberg

Peter Gröning

Ulf Montan

Paul Kessel

Bissa Abelli

Anna Karin Bomquist

Curt Hilfon

John Zacharias

Effisio Coletti

For her final feature, Zetterling returned to Agnes von Krusenstjerna – this time telling the novelist's life story rather than adapting her work. The film begins as a fever dream, with von Krusenstjerna being committed to an asylum during the Carnival of Venice. An extended flashback follows, beginning on a joyful note with the Swedish summer and her youthful (same-sex) dalliances, before becoming increasingly unhinged as illness, madness and an abusive husband take hold.

Throughout it all, von Krusenstjerna insists that she wants to write, searching for the truth – about herself, women, love and eroticism. Given such thematic similarities, it's no wonder that Zetterling returned to von Krusenstjerna, and it seems fitting that her two von Krusenstjerna projects bookend her directorial feature film career (though subsequent work for television followed).

Alex Barrett, bfi.org.uk

Entries in Mai Zetterling's diary, 27 January 1983

'Dreams women dreamed but could never interpret or capture.' – From a poem by Olof Lagercrantz in remembrance of Agnes von Krusenstjerna.

I've got Agnes on the brain. Have been looking again at Olof Lagercrantz's book about her. I've underlined so much and made so many notes in the margins that it's almost illegible, at least for anybody but me. She went astray, lost her footing, struggled up again. The borderline between the real and the unreal absorbed and frightened her. She found contact with everyday life difficult. Ordinary, far too ordinary, says Lagercrantz. The strange bird in our literature. Wrote about love and madmen. About family estrangement. Was a stickler for truth, recklessly unmasking herself and others. Deeply ignorant of many subjects, hardly any education due to ill health ...

Agnes von Krusenstjerna had to ponder quite a while before she could make up her mind whether the sun rises in the east or in the west. Love of nature: 'A landscape still untouched by humans and unpolluted by their breath.' Oh yes, I feel closely akin to Agnes. I'm a strange bird too, not only at home in Sweden but even in exile, in England, Australia, France. Family problems, eroticism ... ('Mai thinks too much about sensuality').

A great affinity to madmen. As an actress I didn't have young handsome men for admirers, I had unhappy creatures from loony-bins, both Boston and Oxford. Crackpots waiting for me outside the theatre who whispered they would pray for me, who sent me long poems about God, about reincarnation. These chosen few with the mark on their foreheads have always been drawn to me and I to them. My father's sister who ended her days completely mad was the one I liked best. We talked about essentials even when I was a child. I too have suffered anguish, perhaps not as intensely as Agnes and not with the same after-effects. But the dizziness, the fear of being hurled into space and seeing myself from above I have also shared. And then, like Agnes in Wonderland, being swallowed up by a looking glass, going over to the other side where I believe I see myself. Agnes von Krusenstjerna has written: 'She stares into her own eyes, the look becomes frightened and wants to hide. Behind the pupils of her eyes *must* lie the indescribable and mysterious spirit which is hers alone, unlike that of any other.' And 'the deathly silence' which alarms her. 'Was ashamed because she couldn't stand being on her own, she who had always longed to be alone.' And finally the enormous importance of nature – a religion, a revelation.

I too can't live or breathe if I can't be at one with nature. I must bury my hands in the soil, enjoy the scents of outdoors ... and again that ruthless honesty

Carlo Barsotti
Federico Caprara
Lamberto Caprara
Sweden 1986
117 mins
Digital (restoration)

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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

The Witches

Mon 26 May 11:50; Sat 31 May 12:00

The Moon Is a Green Cheese

Månen är en grön ost

Mon 26 May 18:20

Scrubbers

Tue 27 May 18:00 (+ intro by producer Don Boyd)

The Girls Flickorna

Wed 28 May 20:40

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Agnes forced on herself when she wrote. People have asked me: 'Why do you say such nasty things about Hollywood, Mai?' Ah, there humbug flourishes. Shirley Temple is still alive.

Perhaps I ought to make a film *about* Agnes von Krusenstjerna. 'A Destiny' ... conjecture, imagination.

Production notes

A contemporary review

Mai Zetterling's first film as director, *Loving Couples*, was based on a novel by Agnes von Krusenstjerna, whose scandalous life is the subject of *Amorosa*. Zetterling herself is no stranger to controversy. She converted an international career as an actress in mainstream cinema into a career as director of contentious documentaries, shorts and feature films. *Loving Couples* created a scandal at the Cannes Film Festival, just as the novel had when it first appeared 14 years before. Two years later, Zetterling's second film, *Night Games*, based on one of her own novels, created a similar furore in Venice. Only the jury and the press were allowed to see the film, and the posters, which contained a drawing by Leonardo Da Vinci, were blacked out.

Zetterling, effectively, subscribes to the Savage God theory of the artist, in which madness, even suicide, are the corollary of daring creative endeavour. The trouble is that, though obsession is perfectly valid as a motivating factor, distance and measure must at some point enter the artistic frame of reference. There can be no doubt that for women in the past, when creativity was equated with child-bearing ('the child is dead', Agnes announces of her damaged manuscript, indicating the divisive nature of the choice she has been forced to make), it was a terrifying struggle to go against the dictates of society, to defy the enemies of promise and emerge into the public arena. This painful and destructive struggle for totality of self is the focus of Zetterling's film, which is replete with images of chaos and disorder.

Agnes is frighteningly dislocated from her very first appearance, where she is carried masked and straitjacketed (a central metaphor for all that is to follow) on a stretcher from her hotel amidst all the bizarre chicanery and revelries of the Venetian carnival – by now one of the cinema's most insistent images for identity crises. Even the ravishing green and gold splendour of her adolescent summer, bucolic and sumptuous though it is, is at odds with her disturbed, febrile temperament. Her relationships with other people constantly invite betrayal. Her brother Edvard is obviously attracted to her fiancé Gerhard and may even be having an affair with him; her future mother-in-law is having an affair with her servant girl, and though she gives Agnes good advice is clearly very attracted to her; the family doctor whispers lascivious suggestions under the eyes of her parents; and her friend Ava violently rebuffs Agnes' advances having previously encouraged her. Sprengel, too, though he is offered in the film as doting lover, is in truth an evil genius – a Svengali-like amalgam of pander, voyeur, parasite and enabler.

In two superb central performances, Erland Josephson as a fish-eyed erotomaniac, alternately abject and abrasive, is a marvellous foil to Stina Ekblad, who brings a sinewy wilful grace to her portrayal of tortured and torturing genius. But for a film to offer an effective vision of madness, excess and despair, it must also supply an anchor. In this instance, we are whirled and jolted from one personal crisis to another. A laudable enterprise, directed with great conviction, this is a film about oppression that has itself become oppressive; like the obsession it recreates, *Amorosa* must fail since it offers neither hope nor respite.

Sylvia Paskin, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1987