

sured mortgage to eliminate any risk of loss.

The companion to the home purchase program, a rental housing program (Section 236), offered tax benefits to wealthy investors who could shelter part of their income by claiming accelerated depreciation on their housing investment. The program built a large volume of housing at costs of 10 to 20 percent above those for comparable private housing. Often neither the developer nor the investor was interested in maintaining the project after its tax benefits were used up. The result has been that, ten years after the program began (and five years after it was terminated), over 10 percent of the projects have defaulted, and others are solvent only because additional subsidies have been piled on top of the original interest rate reduction. "A good fraction," Mayer says, "had turned into slums."

Mayer writes not only about builders, but often from their point of view. Thus he is critical of the newest program, Section Eight, enacted in 1974 after the interest subsidies were suspended; Section Eight subsidizes poor tenants directly, rather than builders. Mayer complains that new housing under this program is extremely expensive, ignoring the fact that most of those receiving subsidies under Section Eight choose existing housing, and existing housing costs much less. Builders, of course, are not particularly interested in encouraging the occupancy of older housing.

As with his proposals for restraining costs, many of Mayer's policy recommendations for subsidy programs seem unworkable. He advocates a low-income ownership program for small apartment buildings, with the owner living in one apartment and maintaining the others. This program would be aimed particularly at "capable welfare mothers." Mayer's sense of history here deserts him—the consequences of Section 235 demonstrated the difficulties that low-income families have in maintaining homes, and there is no reason to expect that they could handle four, five, or six apartments more easily.

Mayer is thus better at diagnosis than prescription. But despite its limitations, *The Builders* is a readable, usually reliable introduction to housing and housing policy. It is especially useful for anyone who wants to know how we got into our present situation, if not how to get somewhere else. □

# F I L M

**AN AUTUMN SONATA, directed by Ingmar Bergman.**

**COMES A HORSEMAN, directed by Alan J. Pakula.**

## Spellbound by Ingrid

STEPHEN HARVEY

**I**N THE THREE DECADES that have passed since his first film, Ingmar Bergman's kinship with that dour American genius, Eugene O'Neill, has become ever more apparent. Both found their voices at first in the realm of somber, wistful melodrama, flirting during their middle years with self-conscious experiments in form, immersing themselves in myth, masks, and allegory. Just as with O'Neill, however, Bergman's meaningful work in his later years has consisted of more or less naturalistic chamber dramas that explore the anguish of human dependence and missed connections. At its most powerful, recent Bergman has the visceral intensity and psychological truth of the O'Neill of *Long Day's Journey into Night*, but his latest phase brings with it certain unavoidable problems. A movie like *The Serpent's Egg*, which attempted to venture beyond his staked-out territory, turned out to be little more than a bloated calamity. Yet by staying within his secure boundaries, Bergman risks recycling the same insights to the point of self-parody.

*An Autumn Sonata* is a return to the Bergman formulas we've become so familiar with in the last 10 years—a pair of antagonists, linked by blood, love, and guilt, trapped together both physically and metaphorically, shred

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the veil of decorum between them in order to rip at the jugular. Pain and venom spent, a tentative move is made at the fade-out to salve their mutually inflicted wounds. This may well be the year's most decidedly mixed movie blessing: Spare savagery and fustian portentousness, nuance and nonsense, are inseparably interwoven.

Having already unraveled the knots that bind sisters (*Cries and Whispers*), fathers and sons (*Through a Glass Darkly*), lovers (*The Passion of Anna*), and spouses (*Scenes from a Marriage*), Bergman eventually had to get around to dissecting the mother-daughter relationship. It was just as inevitable, and even more to be hoped for, that he should finally join forces with that other Bergman, namely Ingrid, Sweden's most durable gift to film acting. The collaboration between the two Bergmans has benefited both of them; he's provided her with the most demanding and meatiest role she's had in what is far too long a time, while her radiance and brio spark even the film's most inert moments. Considering her own nomadic career (Bergman hasn't made a feature film in her native language in 40 years), it was an inspiration to cast her as Charlotte, the cosmopolitan pianist come home for a brief sojourn. She understands the local ground rules, but can never be entirely at home within them, a circumstance that Bergman the actress effortlessly conveys.

Of all the film actresses of her generation, Bergman is the only one who continues to grow and to stretch her talents, who still has the capacity to surprise us. There's always been a contradiction in her screen presence between her air of self-sufficient composure and her warm simplicity, and throughout her career she's usually handled it by alternating between playing worldly sophisticates and big-spirited mothers (Superior or not)-of-us-all. Here the two aspects are fused into one complex characterization, and the film's greatest pleasure consists in watching her do it with such success.

During her reunion with her daughter, Eva, a rural parson's wife (Liv Ullmann, of course), as withdrawn as

Charlotte is extroverted, Bergman is required to pass through an astonishing variety of moods within one brief scene—vanity and fatigue, solicitude and egotism, grief over the loss of her late lover, guilt at her neglect of her family, and fury that her laxness should be called to her attention. With subtlety and economy, she lights briefly on one emotion and then imperceptibly shifts to the next, her face hardening and dissolving to meet the requirements of the moment. As she has managed to do from the start of her international career, Bergman has once more made the near-impossible seem easy and spontaneous.

**T**HE IRONY IS THAT HER skill and the goodwill we bring to her as a performer eventually subvert all of Ingmar Bergman's intentions. With her simultaneous entrance into the closed world of the film and the house of her daughter, the brisk air of reality following in her wake only shows up her director's overfamiliar contrivances. Her costar has perhaps lived too long within the confines of this world; while Liv Ullmann's performance is technically impressive, we've seen her fumble toward a martyred state of grace at least once too often.

Once more Ullmann has been handed the obligatory monologue in which, glowing and aching, she expostulates on the grandeur of God's unfathomable scheme for mankind. Once more she valiantly shatters the shell of her passive compliance to rage out at her tormentor, gaining the upper hand before extending it in reconciliation. Neither she nor Bergman seems to notice what a drag this character has

become, nor does the director seem to realize how appealing, in comparison, is Ingrid Bergman's sturdy self-assurance. At least in the past the Ullmann roles were granted a kind of sympathetic objectivity by their creator, but in *An Autumn Sonata*, Eva is practically canonized before the film comes to a close.

Intimidated by the mother whose love she never won, Eva is intended as the homespun counterpoint to the blithe and worldly Charlotte, but Ullmann makes her a case of arrested development if there ever was one. Encased in brown woolen jumpers with Peter Pan collars, her hair in a coiled braid, her eyes hidden behind a pair of granny glasses, and her mouth drooping wanly at Mommy's mastery of a Chopin prelude, Ullmann projects a frumpiness that's practically a TV-sketch travesty of itself. Yet this character is not only meant seriously, she is positively exalted. Everyone loves her except for Mother, who is too self-centered to perceive what an unpolished gem she is. The husband who abjectly depends on her, the palsy-afflicted sister whom she uncomplainingly nurses, even, presumably, her dead infant son, whose memory she alone is committed to perpetuating. One waits in vain for Bergman (Ingmar, that is) to give a sign that he sees through her smug torpor. But the film's frenzied climax, when Ullmann spews out her stored litany of resentment against her mother's misdeeds, tips Bergman's hand completely.

It's Mother, it turns out, who's responsible for all that's gone awry in her daughter's life, as well as the physical afflictions of the invalid upstairs, who, at this very moment, is crawling

downstairs, crying for solace from Mother. Now as ever, Mother ignores her. One would have thought that this attitude of lifelong reproach would be confined to self-pitying adolescents and, lately, the grown children of movie stars no longer around to defend themselves, but it's clear throughout that Bergman identifies completely with this point of view. In the queasiest way imaginable, *An Autumn Sonata* turns out to be the wish fulfillment of any child who feels his parents once wronged him unforgivably and has cherished his rancor ever since.

Finally the tables are turned; Mommy is forced to confront her sins and at long last to plead penitently for the chance to redeem herself. Never mind any nagging notions you might have that the offspring's pious candor resembles nothing so much as the flip side of masochism, or that at a certain point men and women should take on responsibility for their own lives and mistakes. (I won't dwell on Bergman's increasingly offensive use of illness as a metaphor for emotional neglect. There's something exceedingly distasteful about using an offspring's grave physical condition as a weapon to flay a mother for not having loved her children enough.)

The denouement is even more odiously self-righteous. After musing on the fact that she would gladly kill herself if she weren't sure that God still needed her to carry out His tasks on earth, Eva decides to make her peace with her mother—not because the mother deserves it, mind you, but as yet another demonstration of the daughter's sublime goodness of heart.

Noxious as all this is, however, Bergman has so consummately crafted the whole that *An Autumn Sonata* is almost persuasive in spite of itself. Alternating harsh, tight close-ups of Ullmann's thrusts and Bergman's parries, the director generates real fire and tension in the culminating scenes, as much through the rhythms of his editing, as the virtuosity of the two performers. The main prerequisite of all the actresses in Bergman's circle is the ability to open up to the emotional rigors of his gaze as it relentlessly closes in on them. Ingrid Bergman is the perfect subject for such scrutiny, as this has always been her most potent talent. Movies far slighter than this one have been made unforgettable because of a glimpse of her radiance and depth of feeling expressed in close-up.

However irritating the film's view-



point becomes, *An Autumn Sonata* is never less than engrossing. But the achievement, finally, is Ingrid's; when last seen, the character she plays is on a train leaving her homeland, this chapter of her life closed, and she's nattering on to her agent about past triumphs and future challenges. Ingrid Bergman has likewise persevered, from Sweden to Hollywood to Rome and back, vitalizing her gifts every so often by linking forces with the most exacting film artists on both continents. Doubtless she'll continue to do the same whenever the opportunity arises. The challenge is hers, but the pleasure is all ours.

**L**IKE LIV ULLMANN, Jane Fonda presently seems hemmed in by the image she has created for herself. Once the fire-brand "radical" outsider, with changing times she is now the icon of the liberal pop-culture establishment, and the roles she has elected to perform have followed suit. In the few choice films that came her way in earlier times, she represented the disenfranchised and the exploited (*They Shoot Horses, Klute*), and was caustic and contemptuous toward a society that excluded such people. Now that Fonda has become respectable, so have her movie heroines. Since *Julia*, the women she plays are no mere characters—they're no less than role models, meant to inspire and uplift, their progression from titles to end-credits following an upward curve toward self-awareness and fulfillment. All well and good, but the fact remains that none of her recent work can touch her accomplishments in the films from her "alienated" phase. The excitement Fonda once brought to her work derived largely from her sharp-honed, urban humor, the defense mechanism of the loser pitting herself for sheer survival against forces larger than she is. Losers now, of course, are out, as retrogressive models in the extreme—yet while Fonda may have won the battle, in the process she has temporarily mislaid her greatest gifts as an actress. What's left are her earnestness and her undoubted expertise, but at this point she runs the risk of turning into a female Charlton Heston with talent.

*Comes a Horseman* takes her one step further down this path. Cast as an embattled Montana rancher in the last days of World War II, Fonda works awfully hard to get all the details

right—the determined, denimed stride; tight-lipped, relentless gaze; terse nasal accent, and all. It's a classy show of technique, but what we're asked to applaud is Fonda's concentration; yet her dogged determination only draws our attention away from the character she's impersonating. The movie framing Fonda recalls all the more lamentable aspects of *Coming Home* and *Julia*—straining all too visibly for a semblance of importance, it's weighed down by the portentousness of its intentions. Intended as a testament to individualism, *Comes a Horseman* is really just a grade B western with delusions of grandeur. There's the power-mad land baron (Jason Robards glowering in the shadows) who'll stop at nothing to gain his ends, and a cattle roundup accompanied by The-Big-Country music booming over the soundtrack—damned if the finale doesn't find our beleaguered heroine

and her stalwart partner (James Caan) tied up inside a burning building, freeing themselves in time for the showdown in the dusty corral. All of this has been ridden to extinction in one oater after another—even the leathery western heroine softened by love hearkens back to Barbara Stanwyck's innumerable forays onto the prairie back in the fifties.

None of which would matter much if *Comes a Horseman* had some of the energy of its predecessors, but every scene dawdles in its tracks far too long, futilely trying to derive some resonance and meaning out of all the genre clichés. Apart from the movie's veneer of craftsmanship, it's hard to believe that the director, Alan J. Pakula, is the same man who once directed *Klute*. *Comes a Horseman* seems an object lesson in the seventies' truth that power doesn't always corrupt—sometimes it just defuses. □

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# LETTERS

**Letters to the editor should be addressed to INQUIRY Magazine, 1700 Montgomery Street, San Francisco, California 94111. The editors reserve the right to edit letters for length when necessary.**

## Abolitionists again

**I**T WAS GRATIFYING TO SEE your editorial, "Abolish the CIA" [INQUIRY, July 10, 1978]. I thought you might be interested to know that the Board of the American Friends Service Committee came to the same conclusion over two years ago. Since that time the AFSC has received, through the Freedom of Information Act, about 10,000 pages of files on the CIA, FBI, and some dozen other federal agencies. Needless to say, there is no indication of wrongdoing by the AFSC in any of these files, which were begun in 1921!

The two years which have passed since the Board's action have only strengthened our conviction that reform of the CIA and the Internal Security Division of the FBI is impossible, and that the correct procedure is to abolish them outright.

I am impressed with INQUIRY's clarity and forcefulness, and wish you all success.

MARGARET BACON  
American Friends Service  
Committee  
Philadelphia, Penn.

## The boycott that won't work

**Y**OUR EDITORIAL, "BLOCKING an avenue of change" [INQUIRY, July 24, 1978], was appropriately titled. Unfortunately, you are incorrect in your statements favoring the ERA boycott. It is, in fact, the boycott that is impeding the progress of the Equal Rights Amendment.

You refer to those of us who oppose the boycott as "twisting and turning the language of politics." According to INQUIRY, our only arguments are that the boycott coerces and threatens. But the boycott is ineffective. Not only that, it acts in a negative fashion,

making it even more difficult for ERA to be ratified.

Consider the following: Not one state has ratified the amendment since the boycott began. If you check the voting records in the various states, you will find most legislators who represent large metropolitan areas favor ERA. It is the rural and suburban legislators who form the heart of the opposition. And yet, the boycott directly affects only those legislators who favor the amendment: the representatives of the urban communities, that stand to lose business.

Most rural legislators have few concerns about what happens in the city. In fact, because of the urban-rural legislative conflicts, the small-townners are happy to see the big cities in hot water in some circumstances. Certainly, they will not vote for ERA because of the boycott.

Not only has the boycott been ineffective in campaigning for the votes that are needed, it has also forced ratification efforts to take a step backward. The ERA opposition now has a plausible argument with which to discredit ERA supporters in the eyes of legislators. Opponents can point to the economically unethical tactics of the supporters. Despite how INQUIRY may feel about the legitimacy of such an assertion, many legislators give it merit.

LINDA R. ALLEN  
Springfield, Ill.

## The family farmer

**S**TEPHEN CHAPMAN'S "THE great western water swindle" [INQUIRY, Sept. 18, 1978] is a perfect example of the kind of intellectual arrogance and cultural elitism that makes your magazine so perversely delightful. I haven't had my adrenal output stimulated as delightfully since the glory days of Spiro Agnew.

What got the juices flowing wasn't so much Chapman's condemnation of pork-barrel water projects (though one man's pork barrel is another man's justifiable investment in the national interest), as it was his blissfully ignorant stereotyping of American

agriculture as being run out of corporate boardrooms presided over by latter-day Robber Barons.

Out here in what Chapman would, I'm sure, refer to as the hinterlands, we are in the throes of a throat-cutting battle over one of the projects on President Carter's hit list—the Oahe Project. And contrary to his benighted view, there really are farmers out here who are militantly opposed to what they consider an expensive, basically inefficient water delivery system.

On the other hand, there are also people out here who believe that the project can bring tremendous economic benefits to the entire area. The point is—are you listening, Mr. Chapman?—that any attempt to lump the many diverse factions in the American agricultural community into one conglomerate entity is like saying, If you've seen one slum, you've seen 'em all.

One last note. I wonder if Chapman realizes that the one way the Robber Barons can take over agriculture is by driving out the small family farmer, whose year-to-year production is subject to an incredible number of environmental and economic variables. And a subsidy program is his only cushion against disaster.

Hey, Steve, it ain't as easy as sticking a seed in the ground.

RICK FOYS  
Aberdeen, S.D.

No form of cultural elitism in America has been more influential, or more expensive, than the myth of the family farmer, backbone of the republic. But Stephen Chapman, a native Texan and former farmhand, doesn't buy the myth. As anyone who carefully read his article knows, the real issue is not corporate farmers versus family farmers, but the subsidies the majority of us pay, through our tax bills and electric rates, to underwrite the economic well-being of a small minority. Indeed, as Chapman shows, these subsidies, while benefiting farmers in western states, have hurt farmers elsewhere in the country.

We don't doubt that farming is tough business, but farmers are businessmen, not nature's yeomen. If that's intellectual arrogance or cultural elitism, we plead guilty.

—EDITORS