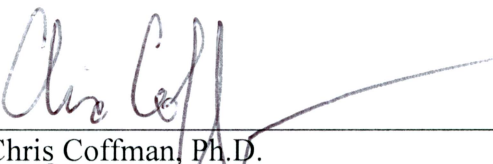


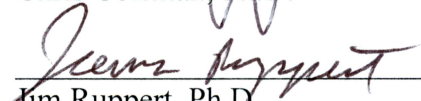
SACRED TRAUMA: LANGUAGE, RECOVERY, AND THE FACE OF GOD IN
INGMAR BERGMAN'S TRILOGY OF FAITH


By


Daniel Dyer

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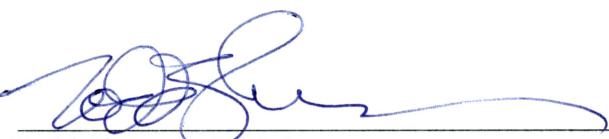

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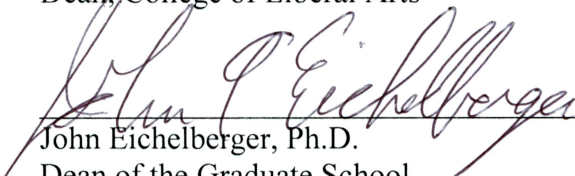

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SACRED TRAUMA: LANGUAGE, RECOVERY, AND THE FACE OF GOD IN INGMAR
BERGMAN'S TRILOGY OF FAITH

A
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

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for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the three films that constitute director Ingmar Bergman's first trilogy, *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, and *The Silence*. In the thesis I take a multi-disciplinary approach to analyzing the films' treatments of language, trauma, and God. Drawing on the Old Testament and work of psychoanalysts dealing with trauma, I argue for the similarities and reciprocity between trauma and communion with God and the ways in which the three films illustrate these relationships. Each film functions on a reflexive level to criticize the tools of filmmaking—images, dialog, and narrative—and points to discordance between symbols and reality. Bringing in Jacques Lacan's model of the imaginary and symbolic orders, I analyze the treatment of language and trauma in the trilogy and the potential for recovery suggested by the end of each film. The thesis culminates by tracing the trilogy toward a new vision of God and his role in the human psyche.

For Grandpa, the Eucharistic Minister.

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Preface Beyond Bergman: A New Consideration of the Trilogy of Faith

Few artists of the 20th century concerned themselves more with matters of faith than Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman. In many of his films, characters strive to rationalize their lingering faith in God with the grim reality of God's silence, a silence which indicates that God is either nonexistent or apathetic to human concerns. Death and human suffering in these films are life's only certainties, and the uncertainty of God's existence remains a source of supreme anxiety. In his iconic *The Seventh Seal* (1957), Bergman presents the knight, Antonius Block, who has returned from the crusades to find himself pitted in a chess game against death. In a confessional in which Block speaks with death posturing as a priest, Block asks, "Why can't I kill God in me? Why does He live on in me in a humiliating way, despite my wanting to evict Him from my heart? Why is He, despite all, a mocking reality I can't be rid of?" In *The Magician* (1958) Bergman introduces a troupe of wandering performers who encounter a wanderer, Johan Spiegel, left to die in the wilderness. Spiegel reflects on his life, with his last words surmising, "I've prayed one prayer in my life: Use me, O God! But He never understood what a devoted slave I'd have been. So I was never used." Block expresses his desire to evict God from his heart, and Spiegel longs for the objectivity offered by the certainty of God's existence, yet by the end neither film has offered these characters resolution. God's existence remains an uncertainty, and the characters can only linger in their despair and anxiety.

The motif of despair associated with religious doubt surfaces often in Bergman's films, so much so that the director is typified as much for the spiritual crises suffered by his characters as for the stylistic contributions he made to cinema. Critic Jonathan Rosenbaum, reflecting on Bergman's career in the wake of his death in 2007, accuses the director of trafficking in "bitter

and pinched” emotions, which remain “ugly ones, no matter how stylishly they might be served up” (Jones 35). *The Silence* (1963), among Bergman’s critically acclaimed and technically intriguing films, has been characterized by the misery which its characters suffer through, with one critic regarding it as “a symphony of despair, a harrowing harmony of unspoken anguish” (Hamilton 125). In something of the apologist’s role, other critics have been quick to excuse the gravity of Bergman’s films by pointing to the circumstances of his life which might have inspired themes of despair, religious doubt, and anxiety. Early biographer Marianne Höök comments on Bergman’s work as a whole, asserting, “Bergman’s production is intimately biographical, one big first-person narrative drama, a monologue for many voices” (qtd. in “Ingmar Bergman.”). She goes on to note that the artist as a type appears often in those of Bergman’s films which explore themes of “truth and falsehood” and “humiliation,” such as *Persona* (1966) and *Hour of the Wolf* (1968), and insists that these films act as a way for Bergman to express the frustrations of his childhood, as this artist becomes “relegated to the lowers rung in a society’s hierarchical power structure,” thereby resembling “a child in a strictly controlled family structure.” His treatment of religion, in this sense, has likewise been interpreted as stemming from his famously strained relationship with his father, a pastor in the Lutheran church, and a figure whom Bergman would refer back to frequently in interviews.

Through a Glass Darkly (1961) and *Winter Light* (1962), films which, alongside *The Silence*, constitute Bergman's first trilogy, are rife with spiritual despair, and the narratives explicitly deal with religious doubt and God’s silence. In *Through a Glass Darkly*, four family members vacation on the Swedish island of Faro. While the others sleep, the young schizophrenic Karin wakes and leaves her husband’s side to visit the empty room upstairs. Drawn by the sound of voices whispering inside the wallpaper, she waits for God to appear to

her. While Karin attends on this God upstairs, her father, David, spends his time working on his book, a written examination of the existence of God. In *Winter Light*, the pastor Tomas laments God's silence despite his prayers. After a conversation with the atheist fisherman Jonas, Tomas realizes that God has been a figment of his imagination, and this realization estranges him from the rituals which he has stubbornly adhered to.

Critics satisfied with biographical readings and the appellation "trilogy of faith" affixed to *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, and *The Silence* have drawn many connections between the emotional gravity of the films and the events in the director's life. Much scouring has been done of *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light* to explore how Karin and Tomas' despair might stem from Bergman's upbringing as a Lutheran, his ensuing loss of faith, and his relationship with his father. "As the son of a Lutheran pastor," writes critic Geoffrey Macnab, "[Religion] was never a subject he could escape. Religion was a fundamental part of his upbringing. In the same way that as a young man he turned against his father, he also began to question his religious beliefs" (155). Macnab's argument follows that Tomas' rigid adherence to the rituals of the church in *Winter Light* takes inspiration from the doggedness Bergman saw in his father, a man Macnab characterizes by "bullying and inflexibility" (156). Along the same lines, David's selfishness and detachment in *Through a Glass Darkly* may have been modeled after traits Bergman saw in his father.

Undoubtedly, the circumstances of Bergman's life must have influenced the trajectory of his work, just as such circumstances affect any artist. Strict biographical readings, however, undervalue the complexity of these films in favor of discursive reconstructions of the filmmaker. Though often trafficking in such readings, preeminent Bergman scholar Maaret Koskinen rightly observes that when one reads too much into the director's biography, his films "risk ending up in

the background while a ‘diagnosis’ of their author’s supposed emotional life somehow becomes the main focus” (“Ingmar Bergman.”). In such biographical readings the films no longer speak but instead act as mouthpieces through which the director indulges in cathartic self-expression. Marginalized by such readings, the films suffer ontological curtailment and fail to escape the gravity of the director’s star.

In regards to *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light*, overzealous attention to Bergman’s biography obscures important elements which contribute to their complexity. For all of Karin’s anticipation for God’s appearance in *Through a Glass Darkly*, the image of God ultimately proves devastating, a monstrous spider with a “terrible, stony face” which sends her recoiling in terror. Tomas, in *Winter Light*, tells a similar story of a “spider-God” which appears to him as “ugly and revolting” when confronted with the realities of war. If *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light* are meant to reflect Bergman’s conflicted relationship with his father and his lingering religious doubt, why should God take on such a monstrous form when appearing before Karin and Tomas? Likewise, if God proves such a monstrous being, why should the characters continue to seek him in prayer and ritual? In her vision Karin waits with the phantom voices for God to reveal himself while her husband, Martin, calls out to her. Forced to choose between Martin and God, Karin abandons her husband. Tomas, though he admits to having constructed a personal image of God removed from reality and invested wholly in him, continues to serve as pastor to the small group of communicants. God proves a strikingly traumatic figure in these two films, yet a figure to which characters remain inextricably drawn.

As biographical readings tend to devalue the complex treatment of God in *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light*, they also fail to account for the presence of the particularly secular third film, *The Silence*, in a trilogy allegedly about faith. Unlike the first two films, *The*

Silence refrains entirely from religious themes and motifs; not once is God brought up in dialog, nor are religious images or icons presented in frame. What occupies the bulk of the narrative is not the fear of and longing for God found in *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light* but the profane, incestuous lust of Ester for Anna. In a trilogy about faith, what should be made of the disappearance of God from the third film? God occupies the first two films as a creature familiar and foreign, both monster and saving grace, and his disappearance from the third film only emphasizes the strange nature of God in Bergman's trilogy of faith.

The depictions of God as a being both familiar and abhorrent in *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light*, in conjunction with his disappearance from *The Silence*, demands a more thorough exploration of the trilogy than one which peddles in the circumstances of the director's life. This thesis will examine the nature of God in Bergman's trilogy of faith by drawing on several modes of critical investigation, from religious studies to clinical psychoanalysis and post-structuralism. Juxtaposing the films in relation to scripture, the thesis will observe how the films' depictions of God adhere to or diverge from Old Testament representations of Jehovah as a devastating being. The work of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Greg Mogenson will elucidate the terrible power of the Spider-God in *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light* and the allure he exerts over the characters that gravitate toward him. Using Mogenson's and Lacan's writing about the relationship between language and trauma, the thesis will explore the miscommunication prevalent throughout the trilogy and argue for a correlation between God, silence, and trauma. Finally, the thesis will consider the bifurcated nature of God depicted in the trilogy while elucidating the films' conclusion about the role of God in the human psyche.

Chapter 1 The Terrible Face of God: Correlations between Trauma and Faith

In the books of the Old Testament, direct communion with God is a traumatic experience. When Moses returns from the mountain with his tablets, his countenance holds the radiance of Jehovah, and the light so terrifies the Israelites that he must veil his face (KJV Exod. 34: 29-33). The prophet Ezekiel falls prostrate on seeing the glory of God, while Job is terrified before the mightiness of the Lord. “Behold,” says Job, “I am insignificant; what can I reply to Thee?” (Ezek. 1: 28, Job 40: 4). Isaiah, on seeing God, becomes devastated: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isa. 6: 5). This god of the Old Testament is a terrifying being, fickle in his jealousy and brutal in his use of overwhelming power, a signifier for the unknown and unknowable.

The treatment of God in *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light* is much in line with Old Testament depictions of Jehovah. Karin, in *Through a Glass Darkly*, and Tomas, in *Winter Light*, both speak of the monstrous spider-God which appears to them in private. Karin recoils from this God in unbridled terror, cowering in a corner of the room; Tomas encounters this “ugly and revolting” spider-God when faced with the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. For all his terrifying qualities, however, the spider-God continues to captivate Karin and Tomas; despite their abhorrence, Karin and Tomas can no more disregard this God than they can stand undaunted in his presence. They speak of and to him in dialog; they wait for him in empty rooms and churches. God remains a paradox of revulsion and allure in *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light*—appealing and monstrous, loving, apathetic, and wholly awful.

In the films as in scripture, the paradoxical state of being both fatherly and monstrous imbues God with his traumatic presence. Sigmund Freud writes about this paradox in his essay on the Uncanny. For Freud, the Uncanny is an elusive experience; attempting to fix the Uncanny with a definition, he admits, “The word is not always used in a clearly definable sense, so that it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread” (1). Rather than referring exclusively to a particular agent, the Uncanny is defined as an emotional response and that which instigates the sensation of uncanniness. Through his anecdote of the dual meanings of the word *heimlich*, Freud describes this sensation as a paradoxical feeling of familiarity and surprise. He asserts, “In general we are reminded that the word *heimlich* is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas, which without being contradictory are yet very different: on the one hand, it means that which is familiar and congenial, and on the other, that which is concealed and kept out of sight” (4). For Freud, the word *heimlich* expresses the uncanny for it represents, at once, what is both familiar and concealed.

That the word *heimlich* translates to “home” suggests another characteristic of the Uncanny, and one particularly relevant to an interpretation of the traumatic nature of God in scripture and the trilogy of faith. Like God, the Uncanny is germane to human experience, a primordial part of the human psyche. Freud describes the Uncanny as “that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” and asserts that the Uncanny is “nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it” (1-2, 15). According to Freud, the genesis of the Uncanny as a part of the human psyche relates to the ubiquitous phenomenon of the double, a construct which he describes as “originally an insurance against destruction to the ego, an energetic denial of the power of death” (9). Freud explains:

. . . after having considered the manifest motivation of the figure of a ‘double,’ we have to admit that none of it helps us to understand the extraordinarily strong feeling of something uncanny that pervades the conception . . . The quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstance of the “double” being a creation dating back to a very early mental stage, long left behind, and one, no doubt, in which it wore a more friendly aspect. The ‘double’ has become a vision of terror, just as after the fall of their religion the gods took on daemonic shapes.

(10)

As Freud demonstrates, the construction of the double, driven by the impulse of self-preservation, acts as a psychological reassurance against death in the mind of the child or primitive man; however, once the individual leaves these primordial stages of human development, the Uncanny transmogrifies into something decidedly *unheimlich*. This new form of the double, the “harbinger of death,” retains its occupation in the psyche, where it opposes the rest of the ego, “observing and criticizing the self and exercising a censorship within the mind”—a voice we become aware of as our “conscience” (10). By its very origin as an integral and in all ways *heimlich* symbol of eternal life, the Uncanny comes, through repression, to take on the *unheimlich* aspects of foreignness.

The previous passage describes the origin of the Uncanny’s dreadful connotations, yet the sentence which concludes the passage proves particularly relevant in this discussion, for in attempting to analogize the Uncanny Freud incidentally offers an explanation for the terrifying aspects of God. If the Uncanny derives its awe and dread as a product of repression—terror through intimate relationship to the consciousness—then God is likewise made demonic by his proximity to the psyche. The phenomenon of the Uncanny is nothing more than a response of

recognition to the emergence of stimuli which have been buried into the subconscious, a sense of recognition; thus, the Uncanny is essentially the reemergence of repressed trauma. God becomes repressed when science and atheism threaten his haunting grounds, yet he persists in the psyche, only to be transmogrified in his resurfacing.

As Freud offers a plausible explanation of the traumatic aspects of God, other psychoanalysts have written extensively about the relationship between trauma and the divine. With the repetition of repression and reemergence, trauma comes to mimic ritual, and through the individual's difficulties articulating the nature of trauma, takes on aspects of the sacred. In his book *God is a Trauma*, psychoanalyst Greg Mogenson discusses the relationship between divine and traumatic experiences. He writes:

Whether a divine being really exists or not, the psychological fact remains that we tend to experience traumatic events *as if* they were in some sense divine. Just as God has been described as transcendent and unknowable, a trauma is an event which transcends our capacity to experience it. Compared to the finite nature of the traumatized soul, the traumatic event seems infinite, all-powerful, and wholly other. (1)

Like God, traumatic experiences are by nature beyond human reasoning, deriving their disruptive influence on the psyche from their inability to be rationalized and expressed in words. "Whatever we cannot imagine," writes Mogenson, "we reify and deify. Whatever we cannot inhabit psychologically, we propitiate with religious responses" (7). In its foreignness and brute power over the psyche, a trauma becomes a soul-shattering deity, made more devastating with each reemergence.

For psychoanalysts concerned with the relationship between language and trauma, traumatic experiences can be characterized by their resistance to symbolization—what Freud would describe as the *unheimlich* quality of the Uncanny. Language, when used to mediate traumatic stimuli, serves as a palliative for trauma, and through therapy the individual learns to express overwhelming events in words and thereby mitigate their affect. God, however, being wholly inexpressible, a being beyond words, is both the trauma and the antithesis of recovery, the “deferral of groaning, weeping, howling and shrieking . . . the inarticulate made Holy, the sanctification of the literally unspeakable, a circumcised tongue” (Mogenson 43). In the Book of John, Christ is described as the word which preceded all words, yet, as Mogenson suggests, perhaps this primordial word “was actually the pathetic groan or inarticulate whimper of early man—not a word at all but, rather, the failure of words, an anti-word” (44). In this sense, monotheism and the elevation of Christ over pagan idols represents the ascendance of trauma or the psyche, “a failure of the imagination, a failure of soul-making,” and man’s covenant with events which “overwhelm his capacity to connect with them imaginatively. . .” (30).

Trauma, like God, remains unknowable and inexpressible, inhabiting the nether regions beyond human understanding. Mogenson writes, “To stand before an event for which we have no metaphors is to stand in the tabernacle of the Lord. Like Moses before the bush that burned and yet was not consumed, the soul falls down prostrate before whatever it is unable to relativize into images” (7). Lacking adequate signifiers with which to mediate and thereby subdue trauma, the individual comes to deify the traumatic event, repressing it so that it may reemerge to disrupt the psyche. In this way, Old Testament accounts of devastating communion with Jehovah represent early models of trauma. As Mogenson observes, the construction of the golden calf by the Israelites at the base of Mount Sinai represents “a failed attempt to master overwhelming events

by turning them into absorbable experiences” (43). The Israelites, unable to construct a suitable image to encompass and mitigate the traumatic aspects of reality, are ultimately laid flat by the reemergence of the vengeful Jehovah, agent of trauma.

Chapter 2 Symbolic Discordance in the Trilogy

Despite the overtly religious themes in Ingmar Bergman's films, his work remains relevant to a wide audience regardless of their spiritual orientation, for they touch on conflicts inherent in the human condition: anxiety, despair, miscommunication, and the search for meaning in a morally subjective world. In her essay "What Should We Believe?: Religious Motifs in Ingmar Bergman's Films," Astrid Söderbergh Widding observes:

. . .even though the problems dealt with in [Bergman's] films often appear in the guise of religious questions, everything is still perfectly comprehensible to irreligious people. Religious motifs, even though they might be shaped in the form of criticism, must nevertheless be as much excused as possible...

Religious questions are widened, so that they contain all of the painful experience that tortures people of our times. (194)

As Widding here summarizes, the language of Christianity, the images, motifs, and rituals which Bergman was steeped in as a child, are only means through which his films arrive at aspects of the human condition. *Through a Glass Darkly* depicts a family torn apart by mental illness; *Winter Light* spends as much effort illustrating the strained relationship between Tomas and Marta as it does on Tomas' crisis of faith. *The Silence* in particular, rather than trafficking in religious themes and motifs, considers secular issues such as desire, isolation, and the strained familial ties between Anna, Ester, and Johan.

Bergman, in his description of the three films which would come to be regarded as his "trilogy of faith," expressed reservations about the critical obsession with the trilogy's religious elements and instead advocated for a more secular reading. In 1963 he concluded somewhat

ambiguously, “These three films deal with reduction. *Through a Glass Darkly*—conquered certainty. *Winter Light*—penetrated certainty. *The Silence*—God’s silence—the negative imprint. Therefore, they constitute a trilogy.” In this interview he refrains from supporting those critics who group the three films as a trilogy of faith, and instead describes only *The Silence*, the most secular of the three films, in religious terms. In an interview a year later Bergman would look back on the three films and reaffirm their arrangement as a trilogy, this time expressing more clearly his intention behind their creation:

Through a Glass Darkly, *Winter Light*, and *The Silence* stand together. My basic concern in making them was to dramatize the all-importance of communication, of the capacity for feeling. They are not concerned—as many critics have theorized—with God or his absence, but with the saving force of love . . . Each film, you see, has its moment of human contact, of human communication . . .

(Hamilton 131)

As Bergman explains in this passage, the trilogy, beyond its religious elements, examines the difficulties, failures, and successes of human communication. Though critics preoccupied with bibliographical reading and the religious elements of the trilogy can overlook the films’ concern with communication, an interpretation of the trilogy as an examination of communication does much more to unite the overtly religious *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light* with the oddly secular third film, *The Silence*.

While Bergman’s films would become most reflexive with his famously experimental *Persona*, the trilogy is still rife with enough ambiguity and reflexivity to indicate the director’s fascination with communication and the tools of filmmaking. Each film in the trilogy is strikingly self-aware, each an examination of filmmaking which consistently undercuts the tools

through which films convey meaning. Each title suggests a criticism of communication: the biblical passage from which *Through a Glass Darkly* derives its name refers to the difficulty with which humans see and understand reality, while *Winter Light* similarly indicates occlusion of vision, as light in winter, particularly in the northern latitudes of Sweden, is either nonexistent or dim and oblique, offering little illumination. *The Silence*, of course, may suggest both God's silence and a failure of verbal expression—the death of the word as signifier.

The trilogy, despite operating in an inherently visual medium, questions the relevance of images and the potential to which images can accurately depict reality. In *Winter Light*, when Jonas leaves the church after his first visit with Tomas, Tomas wanders back into the sacristy and looks up at the icon of the crucifixion hanging from the wall, remarking, “What a ridiculous image.” Tomas describes God as an “improbable and private image” to which he prayed during his time in Lisbon, yet when Tomas speaks to Johan, he recognizes the image as a false one, fabricated by his own desire to mitigate human suffering. After Tomas has berated Marta in the kitchen, she removes her glasses and stares at him, explaining, “I can barely see you without my glasses. You're all fuzzy, and your face is just a white blob. You're not really real.” This odd moment of dialog expresses the film's concerns about imagery: firstly, that images are subjective constructions and thereby unreliable means of communication. Tomas occupies the scene alongside Marta, with close ups given to his face, yet Marta's image of Tomas as vague and nonexistent contradicts the image of Tomas presented in the frame. Secondly, this dialog suggests the role images play in facilitating interaction with the world. Just as Tomas revered a private image of God which endeared him to a life of religious service, Marta's image of Tomas as vague and fuzzy leads her to conclude that he has become nonexistent, despite his immediate presence in her kitchen.

Along with the criticism of images through dialog, *Winter Light* also examines the value of imagery through its frame composition and lighting. After Jonas has left for the second time, Tomas stares towards the camera with a pensive look on his face as light from the window waxes to fill the frame (see fig. 1). Given that this light immediately follows Tomas' realization that God does not exist, the light might signify his epiphany, suggesting that Tomas has in a sense "seen the light" and woken to atheism. Epiphany, however, is a religious experience, and waxing natural light an old motif in Christian iconography and painting, one which suggests communion with God. The light filling the frame casts Tomas' face in darkness, setting him in contrast with the rest of the frame and further complicating the relationship between light and his epiphany. Rather than elucidating whatever change has occurred in Tomas' character, the light only refutes itself, acting as an unreliable signifier for whatever change may or may not have occurred in Tomas.



Fig. 1. Tomas set in contrast with the rest of the frame in *Winter Light*.

Alongside this treatment of images as fallible, narrative is also called into question through the editing techniques of the trilogy. Laura Hubner, in her examination of *Through a Glass Darkly*, observes: “The film works on several levels, conveying events which happen as part of the narrative with a linear orderliness, events which do not fit into the narrative and events which may not happen at all, or happen in a metaphysical sense” (65). Karin’s communion in the room upstairs is accompanied by the chattering of voices; she does in fact hear something, yet every other scene in the film gives clear indication that these voices are only hallucinations brought on by her sickness. The incest which may or may not occur between Karin and Minus is hinted at obliquely but unfilmed, so that it remains unclear if the event

happens at all. When Karin brings Minus to the room upstairs, she tries to convince him of the existence of the voices which chatter inside the wallpaper, yet Minus remains dubious:

MINUS: Is this all for real?

KARIN: I don't know. I'm caught in the middle, and sometimes I'm uncertain. I know I've been ill and that my illness was like a dream. But these are no dreams. They must be real. They must be real.

MINUS: They're not real for me, not in the least.

The voices exist for Karin and are even made audible for the viewer, yet they fail to exist for Minus. The inclusion of these incidents which do not fit with the narrative, or which may be interpreted as happening only figuratively, question the validity of narrative itself as a means of expressing reality.

As the third film in the trilogy, *The Silence* concludes the trilogy's concern with symbolic discordance as the most reflexive of the three films. The film is sparing in dialog and shot with long, lingering takes, thus relying heavily on images to stand in for dialog. For all this emphasis on the visual realm, however, there remains an explicit mistrust for images, like that expressed in *Winter Light* but more pronounced. At the beginning of the film, Johan wakes and gazes out the window of the train, and from then on the three characters become involved in what Maaret Koskinen describes "orgies of spectatorship" (*The Silence: Pictures...*114). Johan remains the most important spectator throughout the film, frequently rubbing his eyes and trying to make sense of the visual stimuli presented to him. Ester and Anna, too, are caught up in acts of viewing—Ester watches Anna as she sleeps or moves about the adjoining room; Anna watches the waiter in the café who returns her gaze in the mirror. For all this viewing, however, the visual realm remains dreamlike, abundant with unrealistic elements, from the troupe of dwarves which

appear suddenly in the hotel hallway to the machines or war brought inexplicably through the city streets.

The dissonance between images as signifiers and reality becomes most pronounced when Johan is caught in the act of viewing, as when he looks out the window on the train at the beginning of the film. In this scene the camera jumps to a view of the sun cresting over hills, yet the frame of the window is omitted from the shot (see fig. 2). Without frame, the hills and sun are made distinct from what Johan sees through the window, which indicates that they exist somewhere outside of the film's means of expression. When the camera jumps back to Johan's face, the window's frame encompasses both Johan and the landscape, thereby reintegrating the landscape into the film (see fig. 3).



Fig. 2. Johan's depicted without frame in *The Silence*.



Fig. 3. Johan's view encompassed by the window's frame in *The Silence*.

This same juxtaposition occurs again when Johan stares at the Rubens painting in the hotel. In this scene the camera jumps from Johan's face to a close up on the painting without a frame (see fig. 4). After the dwarf passes through the hall, Johan looks puzzled and then returns his gaze to the painting; the camera jumps, and the painting is this time shown surrounded both by its own frame and that of the wall on which it is mounted (see fig. 5). As in *Winter Light*, these two instances of framed vs unframed imagery indicate the subjective nature of images; while a frame anchors an image in the world of the film by placing it in relation to the setting, an unframed image exists outside of this world as a testament to the limits of expression.



Fig. 4. The Rubens painting depicted without frame in *The Silence*.



Fig. 5. The Rubens painting depicted with frame in *The Silence*.

Along with the examination of images as somehow discordant from reality, *The Silence* also examines discordance in narrative. Koskinen observes of Bergman's early screenplay drafts that he went into "literary" detail to describe a sexual encounter in a church occurring between Anna and an unnamed man (*The Silence: Pictures*. . . 87). In the film, however, the scene is edited out and only relayed second-hand from Anna to Ester. In this retelling Anna describes the encounter as having occurred in the theater, yet a previous scene contradicts this, depicting Anna as a voyeur in the theater while another couple has sex. Anna's second description of her sexual encounter as having taken place in a church, however, remains unfilmed, and thereby unsupported by imagery. In these two stories imagery and narrative contradict each other, with neither elevated as a particularly reliable means of conveying reality. The sex scene between the strangers in the theater serves no purpose in the narrative and instead feels out of place, while Anna's encounter with the man in the church seems to contradict the long scenes of her moving through the metropolitan streets of Timoka. Each film in the trilogy, by undercutting its use of images and narrative, illustrates the inherent discordance between symbols and reality. As one additional example of how the trilogy suggests this discordance, it is worthwhile to consider Bergman's iconic use of the facial close-up.

Around the time of the trilogy Bergman began to rely more heavily on the close-up than the rhetorical dialogue which typifies his earlier films *The Seventh Seal* and *The Virgin Spring* ("Ingmar Bergman"). In *Winter Light*, for example, he uses a close-up of Jonas to complicate our understanding of the exchange between him and Tomas. After Jonas's wife explains to Tomas the extent of Jonas's depression, Tomas suggests that Jonas must keep his faith in God. Jonas turns his face towards Tomas, offering the first close-up of his face in the film (see fig. 6). The near-center focus on Jonas's face and the slight blurring of his wife's positions him as the subject

of the frame, yet his face is vapid, nearly expressionless, and contributes nothing to audience understanding of his situation. In one scene in *The Silence*, the faces of Anna and Ester fill the screen so that they become nearly identical (see fig. 7). Rather than highlighting the differences between the characters, this shot only complicates the portrayal of the characters by confusing their identities, expressing, as Koskinen describes it, “that wholeness is only momentary and provisional, and a moment of grace” (*The Silence: Pictures. . .* 134).



Fig. 6. Jonas Persson and his wife in *Winter Light*.



Fig. 7. Ester and Anna share a close-up in *The Silence*.

Maaret Koskinen, in her book *The Silence: Pictures on the Typewriter, Words on the Screen*, observes, “. . . the close-up of the face usually connotes ‘truth’ in mainstream fiction film: as soon as something is about to be revealed, confidences poured out, or someone’s true character unveiled—there almost invariably follows a facial close-up, functioning as a kind of visual corroboration . . .” (111). Koskinen goes on to admit that though the face may reveal truth, it may just as easily conceal the individual’s emotional state. She writes, “[T]he face in close up, in the able hands of a very good actress, is the best kind of mask, the best kind of lie” (111). Like Koskinen, Astrid Söderbergh Widding writes similarly about Bergman’s use of the face as an unreliable signifier. She asserts:

The face is the screen where the inner life of man is both made visible and concealed, is made to appear then disappear. The face can be made corrupt,

distorted; it may become affected, false, conventional or hypocritical. But still, out of all these deformations a transformation may finally come into existence, a re-moulding of what is into something that is yet in the process of coming into existence. No matter how, you cannot pull off the mask to expose the truth that is behind. The truth about man is never visible. It evades representation. (204)

Both Koskinen and Widding observe that the face, though often a reliable signifier of truth in mainstream films, is made ambiguous in Bergman's films, stubbornly resistant to interpretation. When used as an aesthetic feature in Bergman's films, the face becomes "depersonalized," with human features made abstract and transformed into "aesthetic attributes rather than characters or expressions of psychic states in a more conventional sense" (*The Silence: Pictures. . .* 135). The unreadable face signifies only that there exists, beyond words and images, the inexpressible—that which, according to Widding, "evades representation" (204).

Chapter 3 Silencing the Spoken Word

Though Bergman's fascination with the fallibility of signifiers would culminate with *Persona*, his earlier journals and script drafts reveal that these were already lingering concerns before he began filming *Winter Light*. Having been granted access to these writings in the wake of his death, Maaret Koskinen observes, "There is in Ingmar Bergman's notebooks and scripts a strong undercurrent of a critique of spoken and written language." These writings also reveal a resentment for the creative process, a "virtual *fear of writing*—a fear of the word as an artistic medium" (*The Silence: Pictures*. . . 109, 74). Subsequent drafts of *The Silence* illustrate Bergman's mistrust of language clearly, revealing how he labored to pare down the amount of dialog spoken in the film. The following exchange between Anna and Ester, for example, would have been the longest sustained dialog had Bergman chosen not to excise it in an early draft:

ESTER Naturally I ask out of curiosity.

ANNA (silent)

ESTER I want to know how you function; I'm curious about how you think. I'm trying to find out—about you. (Anna shakes her head, a gesture of resigned indifference, speaking is fruitless, the words without meaning.)

ANNA However much you ask, you won't understand anyway. Not me, not anyone else either. Words mean nothing. You always think that you can figure things out and find reasons. I really can't understand that you can keep it up.

Everything turns out the way it turns out anyway. (*The Silence: Pictures*. . . 87)

Somewhat paradoxically, these written lines of speech express the concern with language which characterizes the three films. Through his stage direction Bergman is explicit: "Speaking is

fruitless, the words without meaning,” and Anna repeats this sentiment in her next line.

The symbolic landscapes of *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, and *The Silence* remain unstable, yet nowhere is the trilogy more pessimistic about communication than in its concern with language. For all the lines of dialog in the trilogy, characters consistently fail to forge meaningful and lasting connections through the words they speak. Bergman describes his trilogy as concerning itself with “human communication” and each of the films as presenting a moment of “human contact,” yet what typify the three films is not connectedness between characters through language but rather disconnection borne of the failure of the word as a signifier (Hamilton 131). The failure of words in *Through a Glass Darkly*, for example, is apparent in the frequent miscommunications and contradictions which arise in dialogue. In the opening scene in which David, Martin, Karin, and Minus are heading to the house after a swim, David asks Martin for help with the fishing nets and comments on the weather:

DAVID Isn't it rather chilly?

MARTIN You think?

DAVID My bathrobe is thinner than yours.

MARTIN If you're cold. . .

DAVID Me cold? Not a bit. Are you?

MARTIN You're the one who said it was chilly.

By the end of the verbal exchange, David and Martin have still not reached an agreement on the weather; David’s denial that he is cold negates his previous statements about the weather while also referring to his initial question, and nothing much has been achieved through the dialog except a verbal stalemate.

Contradictions such as these prevail throughout the rest of the film. Often these contradictions occur when the elements of the film—the images, performances, or diegetic sounds—contradict the words spoken by characters, as when Karin claims to hear a cuckoo despite the silence which pervades in the scene, or when Martin hurts his finger opening a bottle of wine, gives a loud complaint and begins sucking it dramatically, only to complain of the “fuss” the other characters who tend to him make over “a little finger.” These contradictions, in most instances, occur between two or more lines of dialog, as in the aforementioned exchange between David and Martin, and later, when David, Martin, Minus, and Karin sit down to the dinner table, and David admits how homesick he was on his latest excursion to Switzerland only to reveal his plans to leave again, this time for an extended stay in Yugoslavia. By depicting frequent contradictions between characters, *Through a Glass Darkly* indicates the subjective nature of words which consistently fail to grasp at a fixed reality. Detached from any fixed reality, words instead vacillate in meaning, and therefore constitute an unstable medium through which the characters try to communicate with each other.

This concern with language carries over into *Winter Light*, yet whereas the characters in *Through a Glass Darkly* suffer miscommunication but remain insensible of the dysfunction in language, meaninglessness in words is fully expressed in the second film. When the suicidal parishioner Jonas is brought before Tomas, he has trouble speaking. Eventually he admits that his anxiety boils down to the news of a rapidly militarizing China, yet he can offer no elaboration as to why this news has bothered him; for Jonas, to speak of it would simply be “impossible.” Jonas remains withdrawn from the other communicants due to reluctance to use words which he finds insufficient, and this isolation results in him wandering off to a nearby field to take his own life. Like Jonas, Tomas also exhibits reluctance in his speech; he laments to Marta of inadequacy

of his own words, confessing, “I could only spout drivel. Yet I had the feeling that each word was decisive somehow.” After his altercation with Marta in the kitchen, he again expresses contempt for language, saying, “I better be going, before I spout even worse bits of senseless drivel.” Like Jonas, Tomas’ reluctance to use words finds him taciturn and withdrawn from the other communicants, for having sensed words are meaningless, he finds himself without any means of establishing meaningful human connections.

Through a Glass Darkly and *Winter Light* illustrate the fallibility of language and depict the anxiety of individuals who sense, on some level, the discordance between words and reality. *The Silence* exacerbates this treatment of language. The title of the film refers, in this sense, to the profound lack of dialog which characterizes the film, dialog which Koskinen observes is “greatly reduced or distorted into human sounds—murmurs, sighs, snivels, loud chewing, shouts, even hard swallowing” (*The Silence: Pictures. . . 131*). This silence arises directly as a result of speech; born of the death of the signifier, it is a negative imprint of words. Reveling in its own speechlessness, much of the film is absolutely devoid of dialog. In other scenes where few words are spoken, the words are often unintelligible or overwhelmed by other sounds. Of the diminishment of language in the film, Koskinen writes:

. . . the strangely guttural language spoken in the unknown city is incomprehensible, to the characters as well as to the intended (Swedish) audiences of the time. The human voice, and language itself, seems fragmentary and unarticulated, and is often marginalized or threatened by nonhuman sounds: running water, typewriting, sentimental music from a crackling transistor radio, the wispy sigh of clothing against skin. (*The Silence: Pictures. . . 113*)

The few words made comprehensible in the film might, for all purposes, be inaudible for all the affect they have—Ester and Anna speak to each other in curt, perfunctory phrases, and Anna’s communication with her son is characterized, like their physical exchanges, by impatience and detachment. Depicting this nonverbal wasteland nearly bereft of the spoken word, *The Silence* offers a world in which words are simply inadequate as a means of expression, a medium incapable of conveying reality.

In its own way, each film in the trilogy points to the existence of reality which lingers beyond the compass of words. For Karin, this reality is the choir of voices upstairs which none of the others can hear. For Tomas, it is the spider-God which comes to him in Lisbon and estranges him from his faith. By depicting words as inadequate means of expression, the trilogy concerns itself with questions about the nature of reality and the relationship between language and human perception. To further examine the discordance between language and reality depicted in the films, I would like to turn now to the work of French psychoanalyst and post-structuralist Jacques Lacan. While many theorists of the 20th century discussed the relationship between language and reality, suggesting that the former shapes the latter, Lacan’s work is unique in that he emphasizes the discordance between the two and how this discordance contributes to psychiatric dysfunctions.

In his seminars Lacan outlined a three-part model of human perception consisting of the symbolic, imaginary, and real. According to Lacan, every individual learns to engage with the world from an early age, beginning with the construction of the ego. He refers to this period of development as the “mirror stage,” and describes it as the point at which the child views his reflection for the first time and recognizes his body as an object (*Écrits* 2). Lacan writes, “We have only to understand the mirror stage as *an identification . . .* the transformation that takes

place in the subject when he assumes an image” (*Écrits* 2). While experiences in the life of the child up to this point may be characterized as an array of fragmentary sensations, following the construction of the ego the child conglomerates these experiences into an image of wholeness, creating what may be called the ego or the “I.” As Lacanian scholar Amanda Loos points out, “When the infant stumbles upon a mirror . . . she is suddenly bombarded with an image of herself as whole—whereas she previously experienced existence as a fragmented entity with libidinal needs . . . this ego ideal, for Lacan, provides an image of wholeness which constitutes the ego” (n.p.). This construction of the “I” image becomes the foundation for all subsequent perception, as the individual continues from this point to construct image-ideals for the objects—and people—around him.

The imaginary in Lacan’s three-part model refers to both the constructed image of the self as whole and also to the compartmentalized images of the world around him; thus, the imaginary precipitates the use of symbols used to categorizes experiences. After the construction of the ego-ideal, the individual assigns the self with the label “I” and from then continues to employ signifiers to engage with the world. These signifiers, however, are not constructed by the individual but are instead appropriated from the system of language provided by the individual’s social environment, a system which Lacan describes as so encompassing as to “envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him” (*The Language of* . . . 42). The symbolic element of Lacan’s three-part model, then, represents all these symbols, the symbolic order of words, which function “as the way in which the subject is organized and, to a certain extent, how the psyche becomes accessible” (Loos).

The third part of Lacan's model, the Real, proves to be a more difficult concept to pin down, and Lacan's view of it shifted over the course of his seminars. The first and original concept of the Real implies that it precedes language, being "pre-mirror, pre-imaginary, pre-symbolic" and resistant to symbolization (Loos). As Bruce Fink notes, "The real is perhaps best understood as *that which has not yet been symbolized*, remains to be symbolized, or even resists symbolization; and it may perfectly well exist 'alongside' and in spite of a speaker's considerable linguistic capabilities" (25). Charles Shepherdson likewise writes, "In the first version, the real is construed as a domain of immediate experience, a level of brute reality that never reaches consciousness without being filtered through representation" (29). Despite the vast symbolic order which individuals use to label the world, this first version of the Real persists, precedent to and always outside of the scope of symbols. In Lacan's second version of the Real, however, the Real no longer represents what precedes the symbolic order but is instead described as a result of the order, a slack in the chain of signifiers. Of this second concept of the Real, Shepherdson writes, "In this case, reality is defined, not as an unknowable, external domain, independent of our representations, but precisely as the product of representation" (32). He goes on to observe that "the real designates something that only exists as a result of symbolization. In this view, the symbolic order is structured in such a way that it produces a kind of excess, a remainder or surplus-effect, that is not at all equivalent to reality, but is, rather, an effect of the symbolic order" (38).

While Lacan's two versions of the Real differ in that one is a pre-symbolic Real and the other a product of the symbolic order, both share a resistance to imaginization and symbolization. As Bruce Fink notes, "[The real] can never be drained away, neutralized, or killed. There is thus always a remainder which persists alongside the symbolic" (27). Like

Freud's Uncanny, the Lacanian Real is at once familiar and foreign—familiar in that it derives either from a time before the advent of language or as a result of it, yet foreign in its inability to be imagined or mitigated with words. Just as the Uncanny proves unsettling in its proximity to the psyche, the Real exerts a traumatic influence on the individual who faces it directly, without the necessary mediation of images and symbols.

In terms of a Lacanian reading of the trilogy of faith, the inadequacy of words suggested in the films represents the limit of the symbolic order. The miscommunication which characterizes the films arises from the emergence of the inexpressible—what Lacan calls the Real but also what Mogensen regards as the traumatic quality of God—that which cannot be represented through symbols or encompassed with images. In *Through a Glass Darkly* Karin's illness finds her caught between two worlds—the “normal” world mediated by symbols and images, in which she can harmoniously communicate with the others, and the “other” world of the room upstairs, a world filled with images and sounds the others cannot hear. When Karin slips into this second world of frightening hallucinations, she is brought face to face with stimuli lingering outside the bounds of normal human perception. Try as she might to convince the others of the existence of the Real, she remains isolated; though Karin brings Minus to the room upstairs, her words fail to convince him of the Real, for the Real exists by its very nature as that which cannot be expressed. Only a face to face encounter with the real can prove its existence, yet such an encounter must prove traumatic.

Karin's father David also suffers from the disparity between reality and the symbolic order. Though he doesn't articulate it, David senses, on some level, that words are inadequate means of representing reality. When Martin confronts David about Karin's illness while out on the boat, he accuses David of being a liar:

Martin: Have you written one word of truth in your life as an author?

David: I don't know.

Martin: You see. Your half lies are so refined they look like truth.

Rattled by a sense of the inexpressible, David has lost his grip on the objective, but fabricated, truth offered by the imaginary and symbolic orders. Though he senses the inadequacy of words to convey the Real, he cannot help but continue to use the symbolic order to facilitate interaction with the world. His words then ultimately prove false.

Like Karin and David, Tomas in *Winter Light* similarly struggles with a sense that his words fall short of capturing a fixed "truth;" however, unlike the others, Tomas understands and articulates the discordance between words and the Real. Trying to comfort Jonas, Tomas admits:

When I was ordained I was innocent as a baby . . . I refused to see what was going on. I refused to see reality. My God and I resided in an organised world where everything made sense. . . I put my faith in an improbable and private image of a fatherly god, one who loved mankind, of course, but me most of all. Picture my prayers to an echo-god, who gave benign answers and reassuring blessings.

That Tomas was innocent as a baby hearkens to Lacan's mirror stage, when the child first develops a sense of himself and sensory stimuli as whole and separate, and his recognition of his god as an "improbable and private image" demonstrates an awareness that his god is but a discursive construction, an image in the imaginary order modeled after his own ego-ideal. Despite this awareness, however, Tomas remains as isolated as Karin and David, unable to hold any sort of meaningful communication with the rest of the communicants.

Interpreting *The Silence* in Lacanian terms, the absence of language prevalent throughout the film and the miscommunication between the characters asserts the existence of the Real

while also emphasizing the importance of symbols in facilitating human connection. Anna, Ester, and Johan arrive in Timoka, where the people speak an unrecognizable language, leaving them completely isolated from the city. Despite practicing translation of the language spoken in Timoka, Ester can neither understand nor speak with the bellhop who attends to her. Anna engages in a sexual affair with a waiter, but he can neither understand nor speak with her, and though she speaks verbosely to him, her words are met only with indifference.

Caught in the midst of this symbolic dysfunction, Johan wanders aimlessly through the hotel halls consistently perplexed by his surroundings. In his frequent acts of voyeurism, Johan is preoccupied with trying to make sense of the world, yet his experiences are troubling. When the film opens, he is seen sleeping and then waking to rub his eyes, a movement which suggests his perpetual quest to make meaning of the sensory stimuli presented to him through imaginization. He is the pre-mirror stage of human development, before reality is mediated into words and images, and thus the world for him is fragmentary. In the hotel room Johan comments on Anna's feet as things separated from the rest of her body which walk around "all on their own," for he has yet to compartmentalize the world through the imaginary order. As Maaret Koskinen notes:

It seems to [Johan] that the world is still not quite 'finished' or a continuous whole and that it takes shape only gradually. Indeed, the world even seems hard to register, let alone process . . . Johan is always seen *in the act of perceiving*, in the most basic sense of the word: he seems to be involved in a pre-reflexive meeting with the world, someone who without any preconceived notions registers data, and for whom meaning and significance are not givens. (*The Silence: Pictures . . .* 124)

Though that undifferentiated mass of stimuli which constitutes reality presents itself to Johan, he lacks the images and symbols to organize and mitigate reality, and so bereft of the means through which humans interact with the world, he is left as a passive viewer in a world which acts upon him.

Chapter 4 A Trilogy of Trauma

The extent to which characters of the trilogy suffer from the discordance between words and the Real indicates that each has been estranged from the symbolic order. Such estrangement, in psychoanalytical terms, characterizes trauma. Lacan describes the pre-figurative individual as an array of fragmentary sensations, such as pleasure, pain, hunger, and fear, yet through an encounter with a mirror the individual finds a false image of wholeness which comes to constitute the ego-ideal. This image is encoded in a preexistent network of symbols and signifiers and acts as a base from which all individual perception develops (*The Language of . . .* 154). The Real, that which resists expression, disrupts the symbolic and imaginary orders; in subverting imagination and symbolization, the real illustrates for the individual the discursive nature of their perceptions and the fragmentary being of the self. Lacan writes:

There's an anxiety-provoking apparition of an image which summarises what we can call the revelation of that which is least penetrable in the real, of the real lacking any possible mediation, of the ultimate real, of the essential object which isn't an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail, the object of anxiety par excellence. (*The Ego in . . .* 164)

The real exists only as an “apparition of an image,” for it resists the imagination and cannot be adequately represented by the imaginary order. Being that which is “least penetrable” and “lacking any possible mediation,” the Real refuses mediation through symbols and images, and thus, “words cease and all categories fail” when the subject encounters the Real.

For Lacan, an encounter with the Real proves devastating in that it exceeds language and presents the subject with his own fragmentation. The Real, rather than a single, specific agent, may be anything which defies the individual's facility with symbols and images. In this sense, the Real can be better interpreted in its plural sense, as it encompasses an array of troubling stimuli limited only by the subject. Of an encounter with the Real, Lacan explains:

The object is never for him definitively the final object, except in exceptional experiences. But it thus appears in the guise of an object from which man is irremediably separated, and which shows him the very figure of his dehiscence within the world-object which by essence destroys him, anxiety, which he cannot recapture, in which he will never truly be able to find reconciliation . . . (*The Language of* . . . 154)

The “object” of the perception is never definite, for it exists only as a discursive imagining filtered through subjective perception, yet in certain “exceptional experiences,” when one encounters the Real, the experience appears as its unadulterated self, “irremediably separated” by human subjectivity. The gravity of a traumatic experience tears away the illusory world-object union, so that otherwise fragmentary sensory stimuli neatly mediated into separate objects through the imaginary order and categorized by symbols become again fragmentary—the self, as the separate and distinct “I,” loses distinction. Whereas all images of the surrounding world are constructed based on the first image of the self as whole and separate, and encoded in the symbolic order, traumatic encounters challenge the very foundation of human perception.

Before proceeding, I would like to note that though Lacan offers a distinct model of trauma in his concept of the Real, this model should not be misinterpreted as affixing the Real with agency. The Real instead refers to anything which exceeds the capacity for the individual to

imaginarize and symbolize, and thus what stimuli constitute the Real must vary from individual to individual. Lacan's model of the Real, though couched in the difficult and sometimes arduous language of his seminars, provides a valuable illustration of the connection between images, signifiers, and perception, and the role of language in recovery from trauma. Rather than abolishing preexistent conceptions of trauma or reevaluating the extent to which obviously traumatic events, such as death and sickness, devastate the traumatized individual, Lacan's model of the Real offers new ways of evaluating the workings of trauma and the ways in which the individual can emerge from the cycle of repression and step toward recovery.

Characters suffer from a history of trauma in all three films of the Bergman's trilogy of faith. When *Through a Glass Darkly* begins, David has just returned from travelling abroad where he tried to kill himself. In *Winter Light*, Tomas still reels from his wife's death some years earlier, while Johan, the troubled fisherman, admits to feeling shaken after witnessing a report on the television about a rapidly militarizing China. In *The Silence*, it is the death of her father which has isolated Ester from her sister, Anna, and nephew, Johan. Lacan observes that death and sickness, in particular, prove traumatic for the individual:

There's a horrendous discovery here, that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face, the secretory glands 'par excellence', the flesh from which everything exudes, at the very heart of the mystery, the flesh in as much as it is suffering, is formless, in as much as its form in itself is something which provokes anxiety. Spectre of anxiety, identification of anxiety, the final revelation of *you are this--You are this, which is so far from you, this which is the ultimate formlessness.* (154-55)

To consider one's own body close, to see one's own fragmentary nature unmediated by the discursive ego-image, is also to consider the fragmentary nature of reality. Sickness, by encouraging the individual to consider his body, proves traumatic, as do injury and concerns about mortality (Shepherdson 3). Death proves particularly problematic for the subject for, as Lacan writes, "The human relation-to-death . . . is thus in some sense at the 'origin' of the symbolic order—not represented 'in' language, or entirely captured by the symbolic rituals that seek to contain it, but rather 'primordial' to language" (Shepherdson 3). Death embodies the Real, being the event which man has tried and failed to mediate with symbols since the advent of language.

Sickness and death are both catalysts for trauma; being inexplicable, each functions to isolate the individual from the ego ideal. Little wonder, then, that performances of early Christianity were so steeped in human suffering. The Stations of the Cross depict in grave detail the injuries dealt to Christ on his walk to Golgotha, and the stigmata, bleeding from the hands and feet, acts as a pinnacle signifier of having been graced by God's presence. Christian ascetics struck themselves with barbed whips, while monks, prophets, and laymen fasted for the weeks to propitiate religious experiences. Mogenson writes explicitly about this relationship between suffering and God. "Through Christ's suffering and the mystical participation of our sufferings in his," he writes, "profane man becomes Christian man" (24). He goes on to suggest:

Nowhere, it seems, are we more immediately in the presence of the Lord than when we are wracked with pain or covered with boils. God is both the world-destroying deluge and the rainbow which follows after it. In His wrath He destroys us, and in His mercy He spares us from His wrath. He is the author of both good and evil, pain and pleasure, and of life and death. (19)

God, as an early symbol for the inexpressible, persists in sickness and death and remains synonymous with them. Like the lepers so often tended to in the Bible, the individual wracked with sickness and on the verge of death is brought in to the tabernacle of the Lord, in the grace of the traumatic real.

Sickness and death prevail in Bergman's trilogy of faith. In *Through a Glass Darkly* Karin's schizophrenia takes center-stage, driving much of the narrative, and themes of death also make an appearance, as in the play which Karin and Minus perform for David emphasizing the inexorability of death. In *Winter Light* sickness acts less central but still prominent—Tomas is sick with influenza while Marta constantly rubs her nose and speaks of a recent time when her hands were covered in blisters—yet death is most prominent when Jonas takes his life in a field beside the church. Sickness appears again in *The Silence* in the chronically ill protagonist, Ester, who suffers from an unnamed disease and is seen gasping for breath for much of the film.

Regarding the relationships between sickness, death, trauma, and faith, it is little wonder that Karin, the traumatized schizophrenic of *Through a Glass Darkly*, speaks the language of Christianity. Like an Old Testament prophet, Karin is an isolated and troubled figure, existing between the world of the living and the realm of the divine and unable to differentiate hallucinations, symptoms of her illness, from authentic communion with the Lord. She is distant from her husband, who can do little to aid her, and estranged from her father who watches her with a morbid fascination. Karin wakes in the night with a ray of light falling on her eyes, which indicates that she sees what the others cannot (See fig. 8). After slipping into the room upstairs, she waits for the coming of God with a ritualistic devotion while a chorus of voices chatter, though there is every indication that the voices remain silent for the other characters. Her history

of schizophrenia has estranged her from the symbolic order, and she lingers on the border realms just out of reach of the other characters.



Fig. 8. A ray of light emphasizes Karin's sight in *Through a Glass Darkly*.

In terms of a Lacanian reading of *Through a Glass Darkly*, Karen's schizophrenia entails significant implications setting her apart from the other characters who likewise suffer estrangement from the symbolic order. In his third seminar Lacan describes schizophrenia as an early failure to assimilate language; unlike the traumatized individual who has been so estranged from language by an encounter with the Real, the schizophrenic is, by their very nature, unaffiliated with the symbolic order, having failed to adopt what Lacan terms the "primordial signifier" through which all of reality is codified with language (Fink 55). Lacanian scholar Bruce Fink aptly summarizes Lacan's model of the schizophrenic: "A psychotic child may very

well *assimilate* language, but cannot *come to be in* language in the same way as a neurotic child. Lacking that fundamental anchoring point, the remainder of the signifiers assimilated are condemned to drift” (55). Fink continues, “[the schizophrenic] may see meaning in nothing, or find a purely personal meaning in virtually everything. Words are taken as things, as real objects (75). Without diving headlong into the complicated concept of the “primordial signifier,” it is useful for the purpose of this examination to assimilate Lacan’s concept of the schizophrenic as an individual doomed to exist outside of the symbolic order. Thus Karen’s conditions cannot be remedied by the mediation, in words, of a single traumatic event, for it is not the event which has separated her from language but rather a greater failure to exist inside the symbolic order.

Though herself not a victim of trauma, Karin’s performance of ritual attendance on the divine mimics traumatic repression and reemergence. Reeling from an inability to exist within the symbolic order, Karin is defenseless in her encounter with the real—the spider-God in the room upstairs. For Karin, God is the devastating Real; the hallucinations, symptoms of her illness, are virtually indistinguishable from religious visions, while God, in his very resistance to imaginization, mimics the obstruction of normal perception brought on by schizophrenia. The spider-God, when he finally appears, comes like Jehovah of the Old Testament to overwhelm her with his violence and “brutal power” (Widding 200). Though she waits devotedly for the coming of God, God represents the unimaginable and inexpressible, the silencing of images and symbols, antithesis of recovery. With Karin resigned to another stay in the institution, there is every indication at the film’s close that she has failed to assimilate the symbolic order and remains doomed to exist in the netherworld or schizophrenia.

Despite the bleakness offered by Karin’s condition, *Through a Glass Darkly* does provide optimism and hope that David can overcome his trauma and move into recovery. For David, the

events which have traumatized him occur before the film opens, with the viewer never made privy to his ordeal in Switzerland; therefore, *Through a Glass Darkly* depicts the aftermath of trauma: repression, reemergence, and recovery. Like Karin, David is also a solitary figure isolated from the other characters—from his children, who disdain his continuing detachment, and from Martin, who resents his arrogance and poor treatment of Karin. When speaking with Martin on the boat, David admits to having attempted suicide while on vacation in Switzerland. “I decided to kill myself,” he explains. “I hired a car and found a cliff. I set out calmly. It was afternoon. The valley was already in darkness. I was empty. No fear, no regrets, no expectations.” While David’s earlier dialog with Martin suggests that this suicide attempt was brought on by his sense of failure as a writer, it is never made explicit what events left him troubled, and instead we find David reeling from a history of trauma.

Lacan and Mogenson assert that language is a means by which the traumatized individual may reach recovery, and in therapy the individual learns to express and mediate trauma through language. “A shriek or a moan,” Mogenson writes, “could be used to differentiate overwhelming experiences at least to a minimal degree. Were the soul permitted to hear the difference between one groan and another, the differences in intensity, pitch and timbre, it could use these sounds as metaphors to particularize the events which overwhelm it” (42). The exchange between David and Martin on the boat mirrors Karin’s dialog with Minus in the attic; occurring simultaneously in the film, each scene represents an attempt on the part of the individual estranged from the symbolic order to mitigate the Real with language. Karin’s failure to convince Minus of the voices in the room upstairs represents a failure of speech, a failure to rejoin with the symbolic order. In David’s case, however, his conversation proves therapeutic. Initially Martin accuses David of being “grotesque” and “empty,” suggesting that he writes only lies and lacks humanity,

using Karin's illness as an experiment to further his writing. Through David's recounting of his suicide attempt in Switzerland, however, he emerges from the isolation which has characterized him to this point.

DAVID I crawled out of the car, trembling. I leaned against a rock across the road.

I sat gasping for breath for hours.

MARTIN Why are you telling me this?

DAVID To tell you I no longer have any pretense to keep up. The truth won't bring catastrophe.

MARTIN This has nothing to do with Karin.

DAVID I think it does.

MARTIN I don't understand.

DAVID From the void within me, something was born that I can't touch... or name.
A love.

The lines about Karin prove especially significant in that they liken David's condition with Karin, the two both being estranged from the symbolic order; yet whereas Karin's conditions stems from her schizophrenia rather than a single traumatic event, David's condition is one borne of trauma, and thus recovery may arise from a mediation of traumatic stimuli through images and language. By the end of the film David has mitigated his trauma with a personal god synonymous with love, and though he struggles to describe this love which has filled his emptiness and refers to it as something he "can't touch... or name," this vague image of love will provide the necessary mediation to facilitate recovery.

On the grounded boat where Karin hides, David continues in the same confessional manner as in his conversation with Martin. He explains, "One draws a magic circle around

oneself to keep everything out that doesn't fit one's secret games. Each time life breaks through the circle, the games become puny and ridiculous." David's dialog here is especially revealing as it suggests the nature of trauma as "life" which "breaks through the circle" of the symbolic and imaginary orders. David articulates trauma, and he embraces his daughter with a new tenderness standing in contrast with the detachment written in his journal. By the film's close, there's every indication that David has mediated trauma and rejoined the symbolic and imaginary orders. In David's study Minus speaks with David about his own traumatic encounter with Karin's illness, describing it as an experience of reality having "burst open," indicating that Karin, as a figure who exists outside of language and in the maw of the Real, has acted as a traumatic influence. In this sense, Karin's removal at the end of the film propitiates recovery, as does David's words about the personal god. To calm Minus, David explains "You have to listen carefully . . . I can only give you a hint of my hope. It's knowing that love exists for real in the human world." David's instruction that Minus should listen represents his reconciliation with language; that love stands in now as synonymous for God indicates that David has mitigated the traumatic face of Jehovah, god of the Real, with this new conception of love.

Winter Light, like *Through a Glass Darkly*, also addresses the aftermath of trauma. Like Karin and David, Tomas isolates himself and exhibits detachment from the other characters—he is stoic and stern with the kindly sexton; he remains coldly detached from his dotting lover, Marta. As in *Through a Glass Darkly*, the trauma occurs before the events of the film, and Tomas admits to two traumatic events in his past: his time spent as a pastor in Lisbon during the Spanish Civil War and his wife's death. Of his life before these events, he admits:

I knew nothing of evil or cruelty. When I was ordained I was innocent as a baby .
. . . I refused to see what was going on. I refused to see reality. My God and I

resided in an organized world where everything made sense. . . I put my faith in an improbable and private image of a fatherly god, one who loved mankind and, of course, but me most of all. Picture my prayers to an echo-god, who gave benign answers and reassuring blessings. Everytime I confronted God with the realities I witnessed, he turned into something ugly and revolting.

The distinction here between this private image of God and the “ugly and revolting” Spider-God proves significant for understanding the crisis Tomas faces. That Tomas describes himself as having been “innocent as a baby” likens this time in his life to Lacan’s mirror-stage, when the child first learns to organize his world through the symbolic order. During this stage Tomas refused “to see reality,” that is, to acknowledge the existence of the Real, and instead he puts his faith in an “echo-god” which loved him “most of all,” a fabricated image derived from his own ego-ideal. When confronted with the traumatic events of the Spanish Civil War, however, Tomas’ personal God became “ugly and revolting,” a spider-God. Rather than the docile image Tomas constructed in his own likeness, this uncanny spider-God, like Jehovah, proves terrifying and overwhelming.

Tomas reveals in this dialog with Jonah that he has mitigated his trauma with this private image of God, yet the events of *Winter Light* will estrange him from this private image and face him once more with the inexplicable Real of trauma. His encounter with Jonas, however, represents a confrontation with the Real which destroys his private image of God. Though Jonas finds himself unable to express in words the catalyst of his trauma, his wife’s statement that it has something to do with the nuclearization of China proves significant. With Jonas, *Winter Light* captures a fear of nuclear arms then spreading all of the globe—a fear roused by Hiroshima and Nagasaki, just seventeen years earlier, and the then burgeoning arms race between the U.S.

and Soviet Union. No doubt, nuclear arms represent an unimaginable destruction in and of itself traumatic, yet as Mogenson would suggest, nuclear arms present specific psychological and spiritual consequences:

With nuclear weapons man swallows God; man becomes his own God, his own danger, his own trauma. With nuclear arms man releases himself from the vicarious supports of religion. No longer can he conceive of himself in a conventional relationship with an omnipotent God. No longer can he look away from his own power and responsibility to the power and responsibility he projects into God. Grace has become extinct in this century. (87)

Nuclear arms present humanity with the impossibility of an omnipotent god and instead supplants it with the inexplicable terror of the Real. Though Tomas urges Jonas to trust in God, Jonas can only look back at Tomas with a vapid expression on his face elicited by his encounter with the Real.

Tomas' estrangement from the symbolic order has been perpetuated by the traumatic events of his past, and throughout the film he only perpetuates his trauma through his stubborn rejection of images. Like Karin's passionate attendance on the spider-God in the room upstairs, Tomas chooses to face the traumatic spider-God by abandoning the iconography of Christ, the private-God which had warded off the Real. Jonas's apostasy, his disavowal of the saving grace of such images, encourages him that life might be better lived without mediation through language and images, and thus he abandons his private image of God willingly. He asks, "If there is no God, would it really make any difference?" and concludes that without God, "life would become understandable. . . Suffering is incomprehensible, so it needs no explanation."

This optimism, however, proves short-lived, for his private image of God modeled after his own ego-ideal has served as the foundation for his interaction with the world, and with its passing, Tomas becomes estranged from the symbolic order with which he communicates with the other characters. The scene in which Tomas stands over the deceased Jonas illustrates this estrangement. While Tomas watches over the corpse, there is a noticeable lack of diegetic sound present in the film, with almost the entirety of Tomas' brief conversation with the police officer drowned out by the rush of the river and the rest of the scene bereft of dialog. Though the actors' lips move on screen, the river drowns out all but a few spoken words, and when Marta enters the scene to look after Tomas, their conversation is likewise drowned by the river. After Jonas's body has been lifted into the van, Tomas and Marta sit without talking for the duration of the drive, so that for the five minutes from which Tomas leaves the church for the river and when he leaves the riverside with Marta, only two lines of spoken dialog are made audible.

Bereft of the symbolic and imaginary orders, Tomas can no longer engage with the world and his fellow communicants, and thus he ceases to exist in any practical sense. After Tomas' rejection of Marta, Marta stares at him, explaining, "I can barely see you without my glasses. You're all fuzzy, and your face is just a white blob. You're not really real." Though Tomas stubbornly resists symbolization, recovery for Tomas can only come from a reformation of the ego-ideal, at which point Tomas will move past trauma and recode the world through the symbolic and imaginary orders. Tomas' behavior to Marta at the end of the scene in the kitchen, when he hangs back at the door, indicates a movement towards recovery. He walks down the hall and stands in the doorway, again immersed in darkness as in the scene of his epiphany:

TOMAS: Would you like to come along?

MARTA. Do you really want me to? Or is that fear talking?

TOMAS: Suit yourself. But I'm asking you to come. (*Winter Light*)

Though he has just finished degrading Marta and making clear his lack of desire for her, he reaches out to her in a desperate attempt to amend his isolation. The crippled sexton's words to Tomas near the end of the film reiterate this need for human connection through symbols: "Christ had known his disciples for three years. . . He was left all alone. That must have been painful. To realize that no one understands. To be abandoned when you need someone to rely on. That must be excruciatingly painful."

To the extent that Tomas' private image of God and his ego-ideal are closely linked, Tomas' apostasy and trauma remain synonymous, and therefore reconciliation between Tomas and his god indicate a recovery from trauma. His performance of the Eucharist at the end of the film, despite his earlier religious doubt, acts as a hopeful portent that Tomas has conceded to the world of symbols and images. Surrounded by religious iconography, he recites the words "Holy, holy, holy is the lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory" and takes a deep breath just before the film fades to darkness (see fig. 9). As Geoffrey Macnab observes, in this scene Tomas is "finally able to rise far enough above his self-pity to see the purpose he serves as a priest in helping others deal with their suffering and crises of faith" (161). In terms of the significance of this ritual, speaking these words represents a new pact with the symbolic and imaginary orders. In performing this Eucharist, Tomas reconstructs his personal image of God and moves toward recovery from trauma.



Fig. 9. Tomas performs the Eucharist in *Winter Light*.

Concluding the trilogy, *The Silence* complicates the examination of trauma while offering a resolution less optimistic than the previous two films. Whereas *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light* emphasize the traumatized individual's isolation from humanity brought on by dysfunction in the symbolic order, *The Silence* depicts a post-symbolic world in which symbols fail entirely and means of recovery nearly extinct. Rather than simply examining trauma, however, *The Silence* manages to *model* trauma metaphorically, for as trauma correlates with estrangement from symbols, Timoka, the imaginary city where Ester, Anna, and Johan are forced to layover, represents the condition of the traumatized soul. Anna, Ester, and Johan remain unable to speak with the people of the city, and for the few words spoken between the characters, each remains distant from the other. Military tanks and other implements of war are transported through streets of Timoka and over the railways as reminders, like the news of nuclear weapons in *Winter Light*, of the presence of inexplicable death.

Much of *The Silence* is occupied by Johan's attempts to code the world in the symbolic and imaginary orders. He spends the entirety of the film caught up with what Koskinen terms "organizing his existence in various medialized forms," including "reading, writing, drawing, playing with his Punch and Judy dolls—and now stopping to look at a painting" (*The Silence: Pictures*. . . 120). These attempts to organize the fragmentary sensory stimuli he experiences are repeatedly thwarted, however, by the appearance of stimuli which he can't seem to mediate with words and images. Though he cannot articulate his mother's detachment, he registers it on some sort of level, mentioning to Ester Anna's proclivity for going out by herself and crying inexplicably while playing with his Punch and Judy dolls. He looks out the window several times to find army tanks moving through the city. Though he cannot understand the significance of these images of war, they still trouble him and resurface in his playful activities, as evinced in the violence with which he acts out the puppet show and his attachment to the toy gun he keeps in his waistband. For all his attempts to mediate reality and engage with the world, Johan's world remains fragmentary and puzzling, a cacophony of undifferentiated sounds and images. The dwarf passing him in the hall is no more or less odd to him than the worker on the ladder or the painting against the wall. Johan remains infantile, a "viewing subject, constantly engaged in an act of signifying, for whom the world of objects and phenomena have still not coalesced in concepts of meaning" (*The Silence: Pictures*. . . 125).

As the scenes which often place Ester and Johan together would suggest, Ester, as a victim of trauma, represents the post-figurative equivalent of Johan. Anna reveals in dialog that the death of their father affected Ester immensely, contributing to suicidal thoughts, and thus this death was the traumatic event which has estranged Ester from the symbolic order. In that the previous two films correlate isolation with trauma, Ester's lurid attempts to establish a

relationship with her sister represents a movement toward recovery, as does her affection for Johan. These attempts, however, end in rejection and disaffection; though she dotes on Anna, her advances are met with enmity and curt responses, and though Johan attends to Ester, he expresses discomfort when his aunt tries to touch him. Anna manages to engage in a sexual relationship with the waiter, an indication that she has managed to use the symbolic order in some sense to facilitate interaction, yet Ester remains isolated. Though an academic with a penchant for language and translation, she fails to make a meaningful connection with Anna, Johan, or the bellhop who attends on her.

Through a Glass Darkly and *Winter Light* each offer a glimmer of hope for recovery from trauma, yet no such hope is offered by the end of *The Silence*. In *Through a Glass Darkly* David finds recovery through his conversation with Martin and his fixation on the image of God as love; the words and images of the Eucharist in *Winter Light* offer Tomas mediation for his trauma. For Ester, however, there can be no recovery. Ester's final words remain incoherent to the bellhop, like Karin's when she is unable to express her trauma to Minus. Ester, like Tomas and Karin, perpetuates her own trauma—whereas Karin remains attendant on the spider-God of the Real, Tomas and Ester stubbornly refuse to code the world in the symbolic order. Though Ester laments her loneliness and expresses a desire for human connection, she describes her own words as “a waste of time,” thereby rejecting the very means through which trauma may be mediated. Timoka, in representing the inexpressible, must be left behind for the soul to reach recovery, yet Ester remains bound there, in the city where language fails.

By depicting Ester's succumbing to trauma alongside Johan's developing engagement with the world, *The Silence* stresses the importance of symbols in human interaction. Though Johan is pre-figurate throughout the film and overwhelmed by the fragmentation of a world

which has yet to coalesce, the letter which he holds after leaving Timoka suggests that he must soon begin to organize his world with symbols and images. The letter, which contains Ester's "translation from the foreign tongue," represents a new affiliation with words, a departure from the nonverbal wasteland of Timoka. Ester's fate, to die alone in a city where her words are meaningless, emphasizes the extreme isolation of the traumatized individual bereft of symbols with which to mediate trauma. This death, in completing the trajectory of trauma outlined by the three films, emphasizes the importance of words and what Bergman referred to as "moment[s] of human contact" in recovery.

Chapter 5 Post-Trauma: A New Vision of God

In a 1963 interview with Vilgot Sjöman, Ingmar Bergman cites a passage from Pär Lagerkvist's novel *The Death of Ahasuerus*:

Beyond the gods, beyond all that falsifies and coarsens the world of holiness, beyond all lies and distortion, all twisted divinities and all the abortions of human imagination, there must be something stupendous which is inaccessible to us.

Which by our very failure to capture it, demonstrates how inaccessible it is.

Beyond all the sacred clutter the holy thing itself must exist. (Widding 201)

Considering this allusion in light of the treatments of trauma, language, and God in his trilogy of faith, it is clear that the pursuit of the sacred, the inexpressible which exists beyond human understanding, preoccupied Ingmar Bergman. The films, in questioning the value of images, narrative, and language, implies a limit to which reality may be adequately conveyed. That which exceeds this limit—call it the Uncanny, the Real, or God—exists beyond the sacred clutter of language and images which facilitate the human day to day. In seeking the inexpressible, Bergman's trilogy of faith questions the role of God in the human psyche and the extent to which the individual may dispense with God and still live a happy, constructive life.

The films *Through a Glass Darkly* and *Winter Light* make an important distinction between the image of God and the God of the Real. For David, the image of God is the love which he finds at the end of the film that offers him hope for Karin's recovery, despite every indication that her condition is hopeless. For Tomas, the image of God is that which he models after himself to reassure him in moments of religious doubt. In contrast with this fatherly and loving image of God, the God of the Real always proves traumatic; a wrathful Jehovah of the

Old Testament, this God of the Real terrifies the characters with his brutal and incomprehensible power. In *Through a Glass Darkly* he is the creature which tries to rape Karin in the room upstairs; in *Winter Light* he is the blinding light which encompasses Tomas while setting him in darkness. Characters speak of him as the “spider-God” who comes to them and supplants the personal, loving image of God which comforted them in times of crisis.

Noticeably absent in the third film, the image of God which offers blessings and reassurances in the first two films becomes supplanted by the God of the Real. Instead of the “improbable and private image of a fatherly god” which Tomas speaks of, characters in *The Silence* commune with the inexpressible God of the Real, the extinguisher of speech. This God is the silence which overwhelms language in the film, the death of the signifier, and he is the war machines which are brought through the city as reminders of death. When Ester is seen lying in bed at the end of the film with a bright light shining in her face, he is this light of isolation (see fig. 10). Just as Karin’s schizophrenia brings her into communion with the spider-God upstairs, Ester’s sickness leaves her at the mercy of the God of the Real. Karin, in her ritual perpetuation, and Ester and Jonas, in their stubborn refusal to use words to mediate reality, sit before the tabernacle of this God, isolated from the world of symbols and images.



Fig. 10. Ester on her deathbed in *The Silence*.

The religious doubt exhibited in Bergman's characters and the terrifying appearance of the God of the Real go hand-in-hand. In subduing God through doubt and atheism, God becomes repressed, yet the shape of God, his position in the human psyche, persists. When Tomas describes his personal image of God to Johan, he explains, "Every time I confronted God with the realities I witnessed, he turned into something ugly and revolting." The "realities" Tomas witnessed, the atrocities of the Spanish Civil War and wife's death, suggest the nonexistence of a comprehensible God borne of love. Essentially, this is the problem of evil which theologians have puzzled over in their attempts to justify God's existence, asking, *how can a loving God exist in a world in which evil is allowed to flourish?* By confronting his god with these realities, Tomas represses the private image of God and allows for the emergence of the God of the Real. Formerly familiar and loving, this god takes on the newly traumatic, "ugly and revolting" form, all the more terrifying for his intimate proximity in Tomas' psyche.

By depicting characters left at the mercy of the inexpressible, *The Silence* emphasizes on the importance of images and symbols. As in scripture where terrifying Jehovah was ultimately supplanted with the advent of “the word” Jesus Christ and the personal God he represents, the God of the Real, catalyst for trauma, must be mediated by images and symbols. As Mogensen writes in *God is a Trauma*:

The soul that has been traumatized by events which it cannot take in needs to be supplied with images which can bear the overwhelming events in a holding pattern until the imagination can become habituated to them. Without some kind of model of perseverance and endurance, the soul will tend to retreat from life into defensive withdrawal. (25)

Despite the indication that symbols, images, and God are inherently discursive constructions, the trilogy stresses the role of these constructions in mediating reality, and though God may be nothing more than a discursive construction born of the individual’s hope and fear, his image proves necessary in protecting the individual from the traumatic reality of human existence. In *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, and *The Silence*, Bergman points out that the distinction between reality and subjectivity is irrelevant; individuals should instead strive for those moments of human contact facilitated through the symbolic order. In their varied depictions of God, the trilogy of faith concludes with the statement that though we may abandon our temples and desecrate our altars in our quest to repress Him, God will always return in times of sickness, death, and trauma as a new yet familiar signifier to palliate the trauma of the Real.

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