Ingmar Bergman, the biographical legend and the intermedialities of memory

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Abstract
Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007) wrote his autobiography *The Magic Lantern* (*Laterna magica*, 1987) 5 years after he had finished his film career with *Fanny and Alexander*, his last feature made for the cinema screen. This arguably marked the second stage of his strictly literary career, the first being his plays for the stage in the 1940s. *The Magic Lantern* is of interest from an intermedial perspective in its forthright theatricalization or cinematization of the written text and the self-conscious performativity of its authorial voice. Of particular interest is the way the narrator turns into a kind of distanced autobiographical witness, which in turn reminds the reader of the inherent narrative split in the autobiographical genre between the enunciating subject speaking from the present, and the described subject, the younger self in the past. In doing so the narrator seems to turn language itself into a performative venue: the medium of words becomes a theatrical stage or a cinematically charged mise-en-scène for memory as such.

This is of course not only stylistically elegant, for what can be more natural than a film- and theater director who, as the very title of the autobiography announces, turns memories into cinematic and theatrical performances? But even more interesting is the extent to which Bergman in doing so seems to conjur forth his biographical legend, reminding the reader of who is in charge of text: the narrator becomes the director of the text, so to speak, lighting and setting the stage.

Besides this artful approach, Bergman also clearly fictionalized his life in other ways, which is corroborated by the private note books and original manuscripts that the writer of this paper has gained access to.

**Keywords:** Intermediality; biographical legend; performativity; theatricalization; cinematization; autobiographical witness

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THE INGMAR BERGMAN FOUNDATION ARCHIVE: A TREASURE FOR INTERMEDIAL STUDIES

It is now 10 years ago that Ingmar Bergman threw that question in my direction: “Hey listen. There’s a room here in my house on Fårö. It’s five times five square meters, and in it I’ve amassed all kinds of things. In fact, it’s a hell of a mess. Would you like to take a look at it?”

Subsequently, my early findings from Bergman’s private archives were published in 2002 under the title (in translation) *In the Beginning was the Word. Ingmar Bergman’s Early Writings*, and also resulted in the international Ingmar Bergman Symposium in 2005 as presented in *Ingmar Bergman Revisited. Performance, Cinema and the Arts*.

But, more importantly, this entire process eventually led to the formation of the Ingmar Bergman Foundation Archive, which now is open to scholars.

It goes without saying that the contents of this archive are a virtual chest of treasures in and for itself. But it is a treasure also for the fact that, in relating to film as well as to theatre, literature, music/opera, television, and radio, it so readily transgresses the various arts, media as well as academic disciplinary boundaries.

As such, this archive material virtually calls out for intermedial approaches, which focus on the complex and multifaceted relationships between the various arts and media, including different forms of historic as well as present-day transversional traffic between them. However, as is well known, intermediality as both a concept and a field of research is highly contested and understood differently, depending on who sets the agenda. On one end, one finds traditional “inter-arts” perspectives; that is, that unwieldy field in which literature, the philosophy of aesthetics and the history of ideas are used to occupy a privileged position in setting the agenda for studying the relations between various arts. On the other end, one finds that intermediality also encompasses “post-human” technological perspectives mainly concerned with the medium as a physical and historically defined channel, influenced by the so-called visual turn in the humanities, and the medial and remedial turn of cinema studies. Thus intermediality can be understood to encompass everything from traditional aesthetic and work-oriented perspectives, with questions such as adaptation practices or authorships on the agenda to technological perspectives mainly concerned with the medium as a cultural practice in which the idea of individual authorships is regarded as incompatible with the *medium* or media as “cause” and origin—the computer, the gramophone, the printing press, what have you.

Personally I am convinced that these approaches do not have to be regarded as mutually exclusive but rather as different foci along an interconnected continuum, or as art historian WJT Mitchell has put it: there are no pure media, only mixed media. Thus, in this chapter I will take a middle road in taking a closer look at how Ingmar Bergman made use of various arts and media in promoting what has sometimes been referred to “the technologies of self”. For while it is certainly true that this director is next to stereotypical individual auteur of European art cinema, what is not very well known is the degree to which he himself took part in actively constructing himself as such, thus contributing to his own *biographical legend*—that phantomlike public myth or persona that, over time, tends to surround a leading cultural personality.

True, such biographical legends are most of the time created by journalists, critics, and scholars but also, as David Bordwell has noted, by the personalities themselves. Ingmar Bergman certainly belonged to this category, and what is more, contributed to his own legend with full awareness of the difference between Bergman the biographical person of flesh and blood and “Bergman” the brand name with quotation marks.

This can be traced in various arenas, not least in his relations to the mass media. In fact, as the literally hundreds of interviews reveal, over the years Bergman not only learnt to master the art of self-promotion offered by press conferences and interviews but also, as Janet Staiger has shown, became noticeably adept at mastering the particular dramaturgy involved in the interview situation itself. He was particularly skilled in making use of those stratagems she calls “recipes” and “codified exercises of agency” that creators employ in order to create that “author function” as defined by Michel Foucault, thus producing their own descriptions of their authorship with the ultimate aim of predictably recreating success in their careers.
However Ingmar Bergman not only understood how mass media exposure created an alternate public persona. What is more unusual is the way he was able to make use of this persona in his fictional works as well, thus in a sense vampyrizing on himself. What I will attempt to show in the following pages, then, is how Bergman in the latter part of his career, after having finished making films (with *Fanny and Alexander* in 1982, his last film for theatrical release) made use of his biographical legend by turning the medium of theatre into a venue for autobiographically filtered reminiscing before turning to the medium of writing in his autobiography proper, *Laterna magica* from 1987.

**MEMORY AS A STAGE—STAGE AS MEMORY**

But before turning to theatre and literature, let us start with a film: *Wild Strawberries* from 1957. For it is here one finds that classic scene in which the aged professor Isak Borg stops to rest during a car trip and falls asleep outside his childhood summerhouse.

In a dream, Borg now sees himself standing in a dark foyer peering in at a chaotic breakfast scene inside the large kitchen of the house (see Figure 1). What characterizes this scene is the contrast between the darkness of the foyer where Borg is standing in the foreground, and the almost luminously white colors of both the costumes and the scenography visible through the doorway of the kitchen in the background.

Indeed, what the doorway where he stands, surrounded by darkness and himself a shadowy silhouette, resembles most of all is a theater curtain—as if memory (and this is, we understand, a memory of something that once actually happened in his youth) is being enacted on a strongly illuminated theater stage. Thus strictly speaking, this kitchen is in fact a kind of stage or venue of memory and, furthermore, with an audience present: Borg himself, sitting in the dark like a spectator who has snuck inside without paying for his ticket, so to speak. Indeed, by this time we already know that this old man is somewhat of an outsider: enclosed inside himself, excluded from simple forms of pleasure. At least that is what he is accused of by various family members, past and present, whom he encounters in his dreams and nightmares. It is thus not surprising that now, as an old man, he is seen literally standing on the outside, obliged to remain in the darkness of the foyer.

However, this outsider’s position does not only apply to those of Bergman’s rational “Vergerus” types to which Isak Borg certainly belongs, but quite often to his artists or “Vogler” characters as well. It is, in fact, precisely in their capacity as artists that they too are cutoff from their surroundings, not least since their artistry often revolves around ceaselessly registering other people. Thus, Bergman’s Vergerus and Vogler characters are similar in that they share a desire for observation, which while it may bring them enjoyment (for example, through knowledge and manipulation), also endows them with an unpleasant clear-sightedness and, not least, a fundamental alienation from other people. This is, in fact, something Bergman described as a problem for himself personally as well, for example in the unusually revealing passage in his autobiography *Laterna magica* (to which we will return to in greater detail shortly), where he admits to his habit of constantly “observing” himself or “playing a role”: “that professional disease which has followed me mercilessly throughout my life and so often robbed or diminished my most profound experiences”. What Bergman seems to describe here, then, is a kind of obsessive need for control or a kind of constantly heightened consciousness resulting in a sense of distance: an outsider looking in.

Figure 1. Memory enacted on an illuminated theatre stage.
Assuming that there is at least a partial overlap between private and professional experiences in this regard, it is difficult not to be struck by certain parallels between the scene of Isak Borg gazing into the stage-like scene of memory and Bergman’s admission in *Laterna magica* of his “professional disease”. After all, what is called forth, both in Bergman’s later literary works and his theater productions is precisely the presence of a *controlling consciousness* or perhaps rather an *implicit metteur-en-scène*, which, thereto, tends to blur the lines between life and work. Pushing this to the extreme: it is as if that outsider-looking-in, which appears in various forms in Bergman’s films causing characters like Borg to stand riveted to a real or imaginary curtain, reappeared, though now in their proper element, so to speak: first on the stage and later in writing.

This phenomenon occurred on many levels in Bergman’s later theater productions, but, as mentioned, perhaps the clearest example can be found in his staging of *Hamlet* in 1986 at the Royal Dramatic Theatre Stockholm. From the Swedish debate that arose after its premiere, most critics seemed to concur that in this production Hamlet was above all a representative of (contemporary) uncompromising youth, partially blinded by its ideals. As one critic wrote: “He is the eternal rebel. Penetrating, black and merciless in his judgment of his fellow humans. Eternally young and immature, he rages at the weakness of the human soul. Hamlet is a destroyer of games, who in his fundamentalist fervor is blinded by purity”. This is something Bergman himself indirectly seemed to confirm in contemporary interviews when he insisted that “Hamlet is about the maturing of a soul” and, by inference, Bergman’s own.

However, the factor that most readily lends itself to an autobiographical reading of this staging of *Hamlet* is the fact that in the gravedigger scene Bergman had casually equipped the actor playing Hamlet (the Bergman look-alike Peter Stormare) with clothes that the public consciousness, at least in Sweden, through decades of exposure of the internationally renowned auteur-star and brand name called “Bergman”, had long since learnt to associate with the young Bergman known through mass media: a knit cap, leather jacket, corduroy trousers, and boots (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Peter Stormare as Hamlet in “Bergmangarb”—and Bergman in Bergmangarb.

This was, however, not quite as gratuitous as it may seem since it served as an element in the overall directing concept. For this particular production of the play was hardly conceived in a straightforward or classic vein, but was in many ways a commentary on Hamlet as “myth”, filtered by so many performance(s), through time, and in media (otherwise apostrophized at the end of *Hamlet* by a spectacularly anachronistic camera team that stormed in at the end of the play and started filming the dead bodies while interviewing those that were still alive). Thus in recruiting this media image of the young Ingmar Bergman that other “Bergman” filtered by media performance(s) through time. This production can be viewed as a commentary on the nature of myth as such, by having the Hamlet myth filtered through an addition layer of myth—the Bergman myth. What we see here, then, is Bergman’s cultivation or recruitment of his own biographical legend, and at the same time the workings of a controlling consciousness of an *autobiographical witness*. If nothing else, this illustrates that strong awareness of that second self or other, circulating out there, living a life of its own.

Phrased in a formula: when the films—that is, that which had comprised the very foundation for Ingmar Bergman’s autobiographical or self-referential material—inexorably had come to an end, this self-referentiality seemed to assume an increasingly prominent role in his theater productions. To put it differently, *memory as a stage* in the cinema was transformed into *stage as memory* in the theater.
**LATERNA MAGICA AND THE INTERMEDIALLY OF THE WRITTEN WORD**

*Laterna magica* is the only book I've written with any literary pretensions whatsoever. (Bergman in a telephone conversation with the author in 2005)

Ingmar Bergman’s autobiography *Laterna magica* from 1987 is no exception in this regard. Let us first start with noting that anyone who has read the book cannot help but notice that, contrary to the promise in the title, it does not deal much with his films or filmmaking. Rather, besides delineating some aspects of his personal life, the book as a whole is saturated with anecdotes dealing with Bergman’s doings mainly in the theater, down to detailed analyses of his own productions for the stage. (In fact, it was partly in order to rectify this omission that Bergman published *Images: My Life in Film* a few years later.)

This may seem odd because Bergman is, after all, best known internationally as a film director. But my assumption is that, by this point in time, when Bergman had finished his film career proper (after *Fanny and Alexander* in 1982 his work was exclusively made for Swedish television) he was becoming more interested in writing *per se*; that is, be accepted as a writer, not only of screenplays but as a “real” writer of literature—something in fact he failed to achieve as a young writer in the 1940s, before turning to the medium of film. As he put it in an interview from the late 1960s: “I never belonged to the ‘the 40s-ism’ [a Swedish literary movement in the 1940s]. I wasn’t allowed to play in their yard, something that I used to be very bitter about.”

And in trying to achieve this it seems that Bergman turned to the theater and the metaphors it has to offer. Naturally this is not surprising, for as so many scholars have pointed out, Bergman’s world view as such is intensely ruled by the idea of *theatrum mundi*. As in Pirandello, existence in his work as such is regarded in theatrical terms, where men and women are only players on that proverbial stage while God is a director. But more interesting is the extent to which *language itself* in *Laterna magica* is saturated with the same idea.

One prominent example of this can be found in Bergman’s descriptions of marriage. Thus when writing about his own theatre production of *A Dream Play*, Bergman launches into the following description of August Strindberg’s relationship with the actress Harriet Bosse:

In May 1901, Strindberg marries a young, rather exotic beauty at the Royal Dramatic Theatre. She is thirty years younger than he is and already successful. Strindberg rents a five-room apartment in a new building on Karlaplan, and chooses the furniture, wallpapers, pictures and bric-a-brac. His young bride enters a décor entirely created by her ageing husband. The contracting partners [in the original: “the protagonists”] lovingly, loyally and cleverly take pains from the start to reproduce [in the original: “perform”] the rôles expected of them. However the masks soon begin to crack and an unforeseen drama breaks through the carefully planned pastoral. The wife flees the home in rage [. . .]. The writer is left alone with his handsome décor.

This terminology—décor, protagonists, roles, masks, drama—clearly forms a stylistic choice, a virtual theatricalization of language itself, in this case perhaps in an attempt to give shape to something lost in the distance of time, while at the same time serving as a clue to his own intentions behind his theatre production of this particular play in the paragraphs immediately following this passage.

However, interestingly such theatricalized writing returns when Bergman arrives at describing aspects of his own autobiography. Thus, for instance, in the following passage about the marriages of not only his grandparents but his parents as well:

They fulfilled their duties, they made huge efforts, appealing to God for mercy, their beliefs, values and traditions of no help to them. Nothing helped. Our [the family’s] drama was acted out before everyone’s eyes on the brightly lit stage of the parsonage.

Indeed, the fact is that this kind of imagery flows over into those descriptions that deal directly with Bergman’s own life:

I had wearied of my bohemian existence and married Käbi Laretei, an up and coming pianist. We moved into a handsome villa in Djursholm, where I intended to live a well-organized bourgeois life. It was all a new and heroic production which rapidly turned into a new and heroic disaster, two people chasing after identity and security and writing each
other’s parts [...]. The masks quickly cracked and fell to the ground in the first storm and neither had the patience to look at the others face. [...] Outwardly, the picture was of a stable marriage between successful contracting parties [in the original: “the protagonists”]. The décor was tasteful and the lighting well arranged.\textsuperscript{16}

Now, compare this terminology to the following rather comical description of a later relationship:

By the early 1970s, I had made some dubious films, but earned quite a lot of money. Personally I was in poor shape after my grandiosely thought-out but unsuccessful production with myself and Liv Ullmann in the main parts and the steeles of Fårö as the setting [in the original: “the décor”]. One protagonist had moved on and I was left on the set.\textsuperscript{17}

In other words, over a period of time spanning more than a century—from Strindberg’s marital interiors to those of Bergman’s grandparents and via his parents to his own—one finds a similar theatricalized terminology.

As mentioned, this may not be worth elaborating on per se, since it only corroborates the previously mentioned worldview that seems to rule Bergman’s work. However, what is worth emphasizing in this context is the degree to which this theatricalized language introduces a sense of distanciation, in that it tends to turn the narrative voice itself into a kind of autobiographical witness and, thus again—as in the examples given from Wild Strawberries and Hamlet—a perspective of someone who is constantly on the outside looking in.

Indeed, what this theatricalization of the language in \textit{Laterna magica} achieves is to hit on the very nerve of literary autobiography as such, in reminding the reader of the narrative split or double persona inherent in this genre; namely, between the remembering, describing subject speaking from the present and the remembered, described subject in the past, the self-in-the-act-of-becoming. Moreover, what Bergman does in choosing this terminology is to conjure forth precisely that which contributed to his fame as a filmmaker, especially during his heyday from the 1950s to the mid-1970s: someone with (supposedly) a privileged access and insight to the psychology and rituals of married life.

However, this split authorial voice and autobiographical witness does not only surface in descriptions of various marriage scenarios but also in other contexts. See for instance the following passage about childhood:

To be honest, I think back on my early years with delight and curiosity. My imagination and senses were given nourishment, and I remember nothing dull, in fact the days and hours kept exploding with wonders, unexpected sights [in the original: “scenes” or “ stagings”] and magical moments. I can still roam through the landscape of my childhood and again experience lights, smells, people, rooms, moments, gestures, tones of voice and objects. These memories seldom have any particular meaning, but are like short or longer films with no point, shot at random.\textsuperscript{18}

Now a cinematic metaphor has entered the stage, so to speak, and note again how these earliest memories from childhood are verbalized according to the reader’s foreknowledge of what this particular narrator would be known for later in life, namely, filmmaking.

Similar cinematic metaphors return in memories from early adulthood as well, as in this description of a divorce:

Gun was four months’ pregnant. I behaved like a jealous child. She was alone, deserted. There are moving pictures with sound and light which never leave the projector of the soul but run in loops throughout life with unchanging sharpness, unchanging objective clarity. Only one’s own insight inexorably and relentlessly moves inwards towards the truth.\textsuperscript{19}

Memories, then, seem to have become imprinted, forever etched in the very emulsion of the film strip, while at the same time emphasizing the previously mentioned narrative split between the one who observes and the one who is observed.

Thus, what we see in these passages from \textit{Laterna magica} is the employment of the theatre and the cinema as venues for subjective memory or, more precisely, a kind of staging or \textit{mise-en-scene of memory}, this time through the \textit{medium of language}. This is, of course, very elegant, for what can be more natural than a film and theatre director who, as the very title of the book announces, turns his memories into cinematic and theatrical performances? At the same time, the implication is that this must necessarily be so, all according to the literary formula: \textit{when memory does not serve, fiction will do just as well}.\textsuperscript{6}
And indeed, why not, since memory itself by
necessity is a (re)construction and thus, in a sense,
fiction. For, as we know, memory is not innocent;
rather the opposite, it is always already meaningful
as well as constantly revised during a lifetime. If
nothing else, what this ultimately reminds us of is
the fact that writing always establishes a complex
relationship to images, as images and language are
intimately connected (just as “real” physical
images are related to inner, mental ones). Natu-
really, this aspect comes into play specifically in the
case of autobiography since what is bio-graphy
writing (writing a life) if not literally writing the images of
(life’s) memories?

But even more interesting is the extent to which
Bergman in doing so seems to be conjuring forth
his own biographical legend, as if to remind the
reader of who really is in charge here throughout
these pages. The narrator becomes the director of
the text, so to speak, his sharp gaze falling over the
proceeding, lighting, and setting the stage.

Put differently: in Laterna magica Bergman may
have avoided writing directly about his films but
conjures them forth anyway—through language.
Author triumphant in other words.

THE ART OF BEGINNINGS AND
ENDINGS

Sometimes I have to find consolation in the
fact that everyone who has lived a lie, loves
the truth. (Ingmar Bergman in Laterna
magica)

Thus we are reminded of the fact that autobiog-
rophy is basically a literary genre, belonging to
fiction just as much as to some ostensible truth.
And as such, Laterna magica is clearly written with
a view to the possibilities and poetic license that
autobiography as a literary genre has to offer.

This is evident already for how its narrative
position roams associatively over time and space
rather than in an orderly chronological fashion,
thus seemingly giving free reign to the literary
imagination. But this becomes particularly notice-
able if one compares the book to other sources, for
instance, the diaries of Karin and Erik Bergman,
Ingmar Bergman’s mother and father.

Let us, for instance, see how Bergman chooses
to begin his autobiography: “My mother had the
Spanish flu when I was born in July 1918, I was
very frail and was given an emergency baptism at
the hospital.” This is no doubt a forceful opening:
drastic, dramatic—and consequently not com-
pletely true. Because if one is to believe the notes of
his father, Ingmar was not baptized until August
19th in Duvnäs at the summer home of Erik’s
mother-in-law in Dalecarlia, and that was appar-
ently conducted in a customary manner. This is
corroborated by his mother Karin who wrote in a
family book: “No one came to our house ‘Vårums’
in Duvnäs as early as Ingmar. He arrived when he
was only 14 days old, and there he was baptized
on an August evening at sunset in the plant corner
of the living room.” In addition, according to the
same source it was not until the fall that, after
their return to Stockholm, everyone in the family
became ill “one after another”, as Erik wrote in his
biography. Of course everyone was worried about
“Ingmar who was so little”. However they all
recovered.20

Thus: Karin Bergman did not contract the
Spanish flu while she was pregnant, but rather
during the fall several months after the child’s
birth, so little Ingmar could hardly have suffered
through the illness already at birth as is intimated
in his autobiography.

However, my intention here is not to pedanti-
cally accuse Ingmar Bergman of lying, or to point
out some “objective” truth that should be pre-
ferred ahead of those other undeniable human
truths that Laterna magica is so full of. My aim is
rather to emphasize the art of imagination that
makes this book such a good read as literature—as
exemplified by the first sentence with its skillful
condensation of time and a near-death experience
at his very entrance into life.

What is more, in this case we can note that this
dramatic biographical beginning corresponds to
prevalent motifs in Bergman’s films. One of many
examples is Nurse Alma’s (Bibi Andersson’s)
accusing words to her patient (Liv Ullmann) in
Persona from 1966: “When you saw that there
were no other alternatives you got sick and began
to hate the child and hoped that it would be
stillborn,” adding that the boy eventually was
“cared for by a nanny and relatives.”21 In other
words, the image of the vulnerable child, so
obvious in Bergman’s earlier narratives (and
whose life in Persona is already threatened in the
womb), seems to have rubbed off onto his
mythological conception of his own birth.
Also notable is the fact that the infant in *Laterna magica* is saved by a nanny and an alert relative, in this case the grandmother who enters the action right after the very first sentence: “One day the family was visited by the old family doctor who looked at me and said: ‘This little one is dying of malnutrition.’ My grandmother then took me to the summer house in Dalecarlia. During the train trip, which at that time took an entire day, she fed me sponge cake dissolved in water. By the time we got there I was almost dead.” However shortly thereafter it is noted that the child was saved by a wet nurse, “a kind, fair haired girl from a neighboring village: I got better, though I vomited and had a constant stomachache.”22

Thus it is not only a relative but, also as in *Persona*, one of these countless Bergmanesque female servants who come to the rescue. Add to this that nervous stomach, one of Bergman’s many nationally famous “daemons” and, finally the grandmother, this apparently caustic and resolute woman, who Bergman by this time already had mythologized in his previous stories and whose significance and influence he constantly returned to in interviews as well. Thus it is no wonder that it is she, in addition to Mother and Death, who is granted an almost self-evident place in the first pages of the book. In fact, something of a germinal seed for this constellation can be found in Bergman’s notebook for the autobiography, in the very first drafts he listed what he ought to discuss first: “The Material: On first memories. On mother-father-grandmother. The Signals.”23

In other words, the maternal grandmother’s presence and unique position in *Laterna magica* are motivated as much by purely narrative considerations as by any possibly factual ones.

Particularly worth noting is the deep ambiguity of her role. For one has to wonder, is she a savior who resolutely wrenches the child from his bewildered parents and thus saves his life? Or is she instead the one who almost kills the baby with her sponge cake, hardly suitable food for a newborn? Naturally this is the ambivalence that bestows the grandmother with her obvious place already in the beginning of the book and in Bergman’s own creation myth. After all, her presence virtually guarantees that the book’s opening lines—including the very beginnings of the alter ego—are poised in a suggestive balancing act between life and death.

As mentioned, this ambiguous presence will recur later on in Bergman’s writings, since the grandmother’s character was granted an extended fictional life in Bergman’s novel *The Best Intentions* (1991). In fact here she got to play a similar role, both in the book and later in Bille August’s cinematization: after all it is she who tries to interfere with the young couple Anna and Henrik (Bergman’s fictional rendition of his parents) and their young love, and implicitly almost manages to prevent the author’s alter ego from ever being conceived. Indeed, perhaps it is even she who personifies the comprehensive theme of the book: how all of the “good intentions” of human will and the collective experiences of generations can go so wrong.24

As mentioned, the presence of the grandmother also foreshadows an explanatory scenario of the aforementioned famous nervous stomach that is said to have plagued Bergman ever since his school days, which later took on the guise of a kind of legend among people involved with film generally and the media in particular. For isn’t it so that this unruly stomach can be traced back to grandmother’s life-threatening and probably entirely fictional sponge cake?

In any case this stomach becomes a conspicuous feature later on in the autobiography, particularly in terms of style: it is sometimes described as “a calamity that is as ludicrous as it is humiliating,” or as “a malevolent daemon in the most sensitive center of the body,” which “with its ceaseless, often inventive ingenuity sabotages my efforts.” However this topic is often treated with self-ironic humor in spite of the torment that this “daemon” undoubtedly caused. “At all the theaters where I’ve worked any length of time I’ve been given my own lavatory. These lavatories are probably my lasting contribution to theater history.”25 In any case, one can wonder whether this companion also provided the author with a frequently used favorite metaphor for many decades to come. After all, just how often is it stated in a film or a text by Bergman that someone is afflicted with a “moral stomachache” or “spiritual diarrhea”? 

As a matter of fact, Ingmar Bergman claimed in a telephone conversation with me (September 14, 2005) that *The Magic Lantern* really was supposed to have been called “At the Mercy of His Stomach”. However this too should be taken with a grain of
salt, at least if one is to believe Bergman’s own notes where the book was first christened “Peeling Onions” (according to the idea from Ibsen’s Peer Gynt that the ego has many layers with no nucleus), and later “The Evening of the Clown,” alluding to Bergman’s own film Sawdust and Tinsel from 1953, which in the Swedish original is called (in plural) The Evenings of the Clowns.

In light of this it is not surprising that on the very last page of Laterna magica the author not only returns to the image of himself as the emaciated newborn (in fact the infant is now specifically afflicted with diarrhea) who nearly dies at birth but also his mother and grandmother:

I searched in my mother’s secret diary for July 1918. It said: Have been too sick to write in recent weeks. Erik has now contracted the Spanish flu for the second time. Our son was born on the fourteenth of July. Right away he was stricken with a high fever and severe diarrhea. He looks like a little skeleton with a big crimson red nose. After a few days I no longer had any milk because of my illness. He was therefore given an emergency baptism here at the hospital. His name is Ernst Ingmar. Mum took him to Väröms where she found a wet nurse. Mum is furious about Erik’s inability to solve our practical problems. Erik is furious about Mum’s interference in our private life. I’m lying here completely powerless and miserable…I pray to God with no hope. One has to manage as best one can.26

It is true that Bergman’s mother Karin had a secret diary that she called “My Book.” However according to the editor Birgit Linton-Malmfors who dissected all of her diaries, there was only one short entry for July 1918: “Ernst Ingmar born on 14 July 1918. Swedish hymn 257:10.”27 In other words, this lengthy quotation that the author maintains that he had found in his mother’s diary is probably a complete fabrication. It is also worth noting that Karin Bergman, who judging by the published diaries did not seem to have been beset by any great doubts in her faith, is said to have prayed “with no hope”—which ought to rather be seen as the conclusive evidence of who really was behind the words that were put into Karin’s mouth.

However this is, no doubt, an extremely effective rhetorical device with which to round off the autobiography since it closes the circle so elegantly: from the nearly dead newborn alter ego in the beginning of the book to the mother herself, who now furnishes names and contours not only to a number of accompanying circumstances in life—religion, family conflicts, loneliness—but also gives the child a name: Ernst Ingmar.

One should also note to what a great extent this ending of the autobiography, by using this long (supposedly authentic) quotation from the diary, is reminiscent of the (supposedly more fictitious) conclusion of Bergman’s novel The Best Intentions, which was published just a few years later. Here, a very pregnant Anna is sitting on a park bench beside her husband Henrik who has just recently come to see her after a lengthy separation. She is just about to give birth to a child: the author’s alter ego who, it is implied, in the future will write this story about her—a story about a married life full of complications that, because of the force of a life catastrophe that previously has been conjured up (in the book), now threateningly and retroactively in a manner of speaking, casts its menacing shadow over the couple’s future.

Thus this is similar to the sentiment evoked at the end of Laterna magica: a child is born under the signs of illness and budding family conflict. More than this as a matter of fact, the quotation appears almost to be a synopsis of The Best Intentions, not only in terms of the role of the main female character but also in terms of the other most important characters there: the child, the nervous father, and the domineering mother-in-law.

What we see here then can be said to constitute the actual nucleus of Bergman’s first published novel—and thus his continued venture on a literary career.

That Ingmar Bergman himself was painfully aware of this new début on the literary arena is evident in the enormous tension that is so conspicuous in his notebooks for Laterna magica. One day is full of confidence, though with a barb of self-irony: “Sometimes I think it would be funny with an elegant epilogue. But perhaps the epilogue has already taken place? Get out of here, Bergman!” (July 1987) On another day everything is pitch black: “For all of this damned stress, anxiety attacks…For everything that passed through my body while it was shaking and shaking. All of this for something that was so infernally important and where did it go—where is it now? Where do I see this extreme importance
other than as an illusionary image of a parody, created for me—by me. This is the situation on the first of August 1987.”

And then in September one finds deliverance and at the same time an explanation as to the prolonged “affliction of the soul,” all condensed in a note in capital letters in the margin: “THE BOOK IS BEING PUBLISHED!” The following is written in the actual body text: “One Valium and half of a Mogadon. Moderate sleep. Woke up at six. Long wait for Kulturrevarden [radio program reviewing the arts]. Not without apprehension. Then an enormous undaunted joy! Everything is actually a bit unreal. Yes, it’s wonderful as hell to get one hundred percent good criticism. That doesn’t happen very often.” The intoxication of good fortune remains the next day as well: “Too happy to sleep. It’s been a long time since I was allowed to be so genuinely happy. Don’t have time to do anything sensible” (Bergman’s emphasis).

This is actually the same Ingmar Bergman who said repeatedly that he never cared about any reviews and that if he ever had, it was only for the sake of the actors. But this time something else was also at stake. Now more than anything it was a matter of Bergman’s continued life as an artist, this time as an author, after and apart from his film career—a career as an author that Bergman himself felt had been shot down by the critics in the 1940s and 1950s, even before it had hardly begun. The positive reaction to Laterna magica was thus all the more a proper revenge and carte blanche—and not the least, a promise of continued creative activity.

And as we know, his desire to write increased, judging from the works that came from Bergman’s pen during the 1990s and 2000s. A passage dated Saturday 4 June 1998 from the notebook for The Best Intentions speaks for itself: “Well, it’s certainly really wonderful to write, and what tranquility, what peace… I am so grateful for the quiet company of my creativity. That’s the way it is. That’s how it should be.”

Notes

1. For a more detailed presentation of this, as well as of some of the more specific contents of the Archive, see (in French) Maaret Koskinen, ‘Au commencement était le Verbe. Les écrits de jeunesse d’Ingmar Bergman’, Positif, no. 497/498 (July–August 2002): 17–22, and (in English) Maaret Koskinen, ‘From Short Story to Film to Autobiography. Intermedial Variations in Ingmar Bergman’s Writings and Films’, Film International [formerly Filmhäftet] 1, no. 1 (2003): 5–11.

2. Maaret Koskinen, I begynnelsen var ordet. Ingmar Bergman och hans tidiga författastäkop [In the Beginning was the Word. Ingmar Bergman’s Early Writings] (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 2002), and Maaret Koskinen, ed., Ingmar Bergman Revisited. Performance, Cinema and the Arts (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2008), with contributions by, amongst others, Thomas Elsaesser, Paisley Livingston, John Orr, Janet Staiger, Birgitta Steene, and (actress) Liv Ullmann. See also Maaret Koskinen, Ingmar Bergman’s THE SILENCE. Pictures in the Typewriter, Writings on the Screen (Nordic Cinema Series; Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2010).

3. The name of the web site is Face to Face and can be accessed at: http://www.ingmarbergman.se (accessed December 15, 2010).

4. See for instance, Ulla-Brittia Lagerroth, Hans Lund, and Erik Hedling, ed. Interart Poetics. Essays on the Interrelations of the Arts and Media (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1997); Erik Hedling and Ulla-Brittia Lagerroth, ed. Cultural Functions of Intermedial Exploration (Amsterdam and NY: Rodopi, 2002); and Claus Cluver, ‘Intermediality and Interart Studies’, in Changing Borders. Contemporary Positions in Intermediality, ed. Jens Arvidsson, Miika Askander, Jorgen Bruhn, and Heidrun Fuhler (Lund: Intermedia Studies Press, 2007).

5. Besides Friedrich Kittler’s highly influential Gramophone, Film, Typewriter. Trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999, see Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Remediation. Understanding New Media (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2002); John Fullerton and Jan Olsson, eds. Allegories of Communication. Intermedial Concerns from Cinema to the Digital (Corso, Trieste: John Libbey-CIC Publishing, 2004); and Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide (NY and London: New York University Press, 2006).

6. W.J.T. Mitchell, What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images (Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), and especially chapter ‘Showing Seeing. A Critique of Visual Culture’, 336–56, as well as MediaArtHistories, ed. Oliver Grau (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), especially 399–400 (in chapter ‘There are No Visual Media’).

7. For definition and background of this concept, see David Bordwell, The Films of Carl-Theodor Dreyer (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 9.

8. Janet Staiger, ‘Analysing Self-Fashioning in Authoring and Reception’, in Ingmar Bergman Revisited.
Ingmar Bergman’s biographical legend and the intermedialities of memory

9. Ingmar Bergman, *Laterna magica* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1987), 12. *The Magic Lantern: An Autobiography*, translated from the Swedish by Joan Tate (New York: Viking, 1988), 7.

10. Carina Wäern, ‘En Hamlet bredvid tiden’ [A Hamlet beside the times] (*Dagens Nyheter*, January 31, 1987).

11. Radio-interview in SR [Swedish National Radio] (*Channel P1*, April 20, 1987).

12. Henrik Sjögren, *Ingmar Bergman på teatern* [Ingmar Bergman at the theatre], in interview chapter ‘Dialog med Ingmar Bergman’ (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell/Gebers, 1968), 307.

13. This is worth noting, not least because of some quite lackluster translations of the book. For instance, English speaking readers will have to do with an albeit competent but strangely flat and at times outright insensitive translation.

14. *Laterna magica*, 47/*The Magic Lantern*, 37.

15. *Laterna magica*, 165/*The Magic Lantern*, 139.

16. *Laterna magica*, 219/*The Magic Lantern*, 188.

17. *Laterna magica*, 265/*The Magic Lantern*, 228.

18. *Laterna magica*, 197/*The Magic Lantern*, 13.

19. *Laterna magica*, 197/*The Magic Lantern*, 168.

20. Published in the volume of correspondence compiled and commented by Birgit Linton-Malmfors *Den dubbla verkligheten: Karin och Erik Bergman i dagböcker och brev 1907–1936* [Dual Reality: Karin and Erik Bergman in Diaries and Letters 1907–1936] (Stockholm: Carlssons), 1992.

21. Ingmar Bergman, *Persona and Shame*, translated from the Swedish by Keith Bradfield (London and New York: Marion Boyars, 2002), 96.

22. *Laterna magica*, 5/*The Magic Lantern*, 1.

23. Dag/arbetsbok [Diary/workbook] ‘Laterna magica. 1.5.86–19.7.86’. The Ingmar Bergman Foundation Archives.

24. Bergman, Ingmar. *Den goda viljan* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1991).

25. *Laterna magica*, 75/*The Magic Lantern*, 62.

26. *Laterna magica*, 336/*The Magic Lantern*, 289–290.

27. Birgit Linton-Malmfors, 89.

28. Dag/arbetsbok ‘God vilja. Den goda viljan’ [Diary/workbook ‘Best Intention. The Best Intentions’] The Ingmar Bergman Foundation Archives.