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This Story Kills Fascists: How Ingmar Bergman Atones for his Nazi Past and Looks to an Uncertain Future in Fanny and Alexander

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This Story Kills Fascists: How Ingmar Bergman Atones for his Nazi Past and Looks to an
Uncertain Future in *Fanny and Alexander*

by

Alexander S. Thompson

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

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in

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ABSTRACT

In *Fanny and Alexander*, Bergman creates a fascist character who exhibits the characteristics he saw in Hitler. The Bishop Edvard Vergerus sweeps into the young Alexander's life and begins to rule it with authoritarian aplomb. Rather than get swept up in Vergerus's show of Truth and strength, however, Bergman has Alexander see past the "surface lustre" and understand Vergerus's "darkness." In so doing, Bergman rights a wrong from his childhood.

Bergman goes still further, though, when he has Alexander fight back against the Nazi-esque Bishop through the power of creative storytelling. Bergman's weapon against fascists is not just art but rather storytelling specifically, because storytelling requires a participatory audience that will take in the story and add their own imagination to it, creating a new vision of the world that melds the story and reality into one. Only then can the stories, following Richard Delgado's "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others," "create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understandings, and meanings" and "shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (2412, 2414). When Alexander tells stories that run counter to the Bishop's own stories about his Truth and strength, Bergman documents these stories with an attention to the two audiences listening, the one in the film and the one watching the film. Because of this attention to the audience and its participation in the storytelling process, *Fanny and Alexander* represents a first for Bergman: a political film that asks its audience to tell counternarratives in an imitation of his storyteller so that they can avoid his mistake of becoming infatuated with a Nazi and instead fight fascism when its ideology and practices return.

Introduction

In his sixteenth year, Ingmar Bergman went to Germany as an exchange student. There, he witnessed a speech by the newly elected Chancellor of Germany, Adolf Hitler. Bergman describes the speech in his early-life autobiography *The Magic Lantern*: “unvaccinated and unprepared, I fell headlong into an atmosphere glowing with idealism and hero worship. I was also suddenly exposed to an aggressiveness which to a great extent was in harmony with my own. The surface lustre blinded me, and I did not see the darkness” (Bergman 124). It was this speech, along with the Nazi culture he encountered in his adopted home, school, and church, that led Bergman to claim that he, “loved him [Hitler] too. For many years, I was on Hitler’s side, delighted by his successes and saddened by his defeats” (Bergman 124). It was not until he fully “conquered [his] resistance” to the images of the Holocaust he had initially dismissed as propaganda that he realized just how “dark” Hitler and the Nazis were. After this experience, he told himself that he would not get caught up in such a sight in the future: “Politics – never again! Of course, I should have made an utterly different decision” (Bergman 124). Bergman went on to make masterpiece after masterpiece in both film and theater, becoming one of the preeminent directors of the second half of the twentieth century. He made two movies about Nazis, neither of which seemed to attack their ideology head on. Instead, his films often focused on the personal, a man or woman’s relationship with another man or woman or with God. He took his disavowal of politics seriously, it seems. Peter Ohlin, whose essay on the subject of Bergman’s Nazi films will inform this one, claims that there are “very few . . . traces of Bergman’s Nazi experience in [his movies that are ostensibly about Nazis]” (464). But in *Fanny and Alexander*, Bergman creates a

fascist character who exhibits the characteristics he saw in Hitler. The Bishop Edvard Vergerus sweeps into the young Alexander's life and begins to rule it with authoritarian aplomb. Rather than get swept up in Vergerus's show of Truth and strength, however, Bergman has Alexander see past the "surface lustre" and understand Vergerus's "darkness." In so doing, Bergman rights a wrong from his childhood.

Bergman goes still further, though, when he has Alexander fight back against the Nazi-esque Bishop through the power of creative storytelling. Bergman's weapon against fascists is not just art but rather storytelling specifically, because storytelling requires a participatory audience that will take in the story and add their own imagination to it, creating a new vision of the world that melds the story and reality into one. Only then can the stories, following Richard Delgado's "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others," "create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understandings, and meanings" and "shatter complacency and challenge the status quo" (2412, 2414). When Alexander tells stories that run counter to the Bishop's own stories about his Truth and strength, Bergman documents these stories with an attention to the two audiences listening, the one in the film and the one watching the film. Because of this attention to the audience and its participation in the storytelling process, *Fanny and Alexander* represents a first for Bergman: a political film that asks its audience to tell counternarratives in an imitation of his storyteller so that they can avoid his mistake of becoming infatuated with a Nazi and instead fight fascism when its ideology and practices return.

The critical consensus surrounding *Fanny and Alexander* is that it follows in the footsteps of other of Ingmar Bergman's films, a personal film from a personal filmmaker. Amir Cohen-Shalev sees the film as a series of father-son relationships in which the

father-characters have always “estranged themselves from the child-like mode of experiencing through imagination” (94). Stuart M. Kaminsky identifies youthful innocence as a central theme for Bergman, and the loss of it as a necessary step in the maturation process in Bergman’s films. Like many of Bergman’s films, *Fanny and Alexander* is often seen in an autobiographical light. Linda Haverty and Jan Holmberg trouble that claim by showing that Bergman never expressed a fixed idea of the self and identity in his films or autobiographical writing, so seeing him so clearly in these films becomes an act of interpretation. While some critics take on Alexander and his storytelling, Lynda K. Bundtzen and Jarrod Hayes both talk about it in the context of his puberty and maturation, the former with a focus on the mentors he learned from and the latter looking at the film as a postmodern representation of sexuality and images following Jean Baudrillard. All of the criticism on *Fanny and Alexander* looks for individualist ideas in the film. Only Dean Flower understands that the film is “about a teeming cast of characters who are interwoven visually, verbally, and motivationally” (92). My understanding of the film is a mixture of these two ideas, the individual in Alexander’s personal struggles and the collective in the various audiences throughout the film that point to a more political reading, using Peter Ohlin’s investigation of Bergman’s Nazi past and films as necessary context. Ohlin argues that Bergman’s claims to harboring Nazi sympathies are overblown, especially since some of the things he claims, such as his conversion when he finally saw the horror of the Holocaust after the war ended, are dubious at best. Bergman’s films, Ohlin posits, are not particularly strong when it comes to dealing with Nazis, a fact that Ohlin claims represents the muted impact Hitler had on Bergman. I suggest, however, that *Fanny and Alexander*, while not dealing

directly with Nazism, has the (semi-autobiographical) personal stand in for the political, with a focus on the audience of the storytelling: the social aspect of storytelling develops alongside Alexander's own maturation as a storyteller and Bergman thus, through Alexander, addresses his experiences in Hitler's Germany.

This essay first examines the world that Bergman creates in the film and how it operates as a place where he can presage the Nazi threat that he eventually recognized. With that context in mind, I compare Vergerus to Bergman's description of Hitler, focusing on their mutual love for Truth and strength, disgust with Jews, and visual similarities. With that connection established, I investigate how Bergman's hero, Alexander, develops as a storyteller who discovers the power of stories to create real change in the world, borrowing from Delgado's founding article of Critical Race Theory to illuminate how storytelling works on ingroup and outgroup audiences. Finally, I read the end of the film as a way for Bergman to prepare Alexander and his audience to fight Nazis (and fascists of all sorts) in their respective historical moments, since Nazism saw a resurgence in the 80s when the film was made.

Building Worlds, Building Potentials

While *Fanny and Alexander* is generally understood as an autobiographical film, Bergman's life does not map as easily to the film as it might seem to. If Bergman had grown up in an idyllic world where his imagination could develop freely, then was thrust into a tragic and difficult life ruled by a strict religious figure only to be eventually rescued by a Jewish magician and returned to his family a changed man, we might be able to draw those connections more clearly. However, this is not the case. Rather than

undergoing a drastic change from one home to another when his father died, Bergman lived much of his young life in the austere surroundings that Alexander encounters at the Vergerus house. Bergman suffered under his father whom scholars often identify as the source for the Bishop's personality and mistreatment of those under his care. But Bergman troubles the easy assumption that Vergerus is a stand-in for his father. His written autobiographies contain falsehoods and exaggerations, and even in interviews he seems to play a character named Bergman as much as he represents his inner-self. Jan Holmberger implores scholars to treat Bergman's autobiographies not as keys to unlocking his films but rather the other way around, citing the "aporetic nature of the relationship between [Bergman's] life and work" (8). Rather than the lock and key metaphor, we might use his films to read back to his life and "carefully examine his public appearances and statements in light of his work" (Holmberg 6). If Bergman's life does not line up directly with Alexander's, the differences between the two must be purposeful. In this section, I will read the world that Bergman creates in *Fanny and Alexander* against the world that he presents in *The Magic Lantern* to suggest that the changes in the film were made to accommodate his story about the fascistic Vergerus and to create a dual context for the film in both the early part of the twentieth century and the early 1980s.

Bergman's young life was "based on such concepts as sin, confession, punishment . . . We had never heard of freedom and knew even less what it tasted like," a situation that the comfortable Alexander would find unfathomable at the beginning of the film (Bergman 7-8). The Edenic nature of the Ekdahls' house signals a perfect environment that gets ruined rather than a return to Bergman's childhood house. The

film's prologue sees Alexander reign over a realm all his own, a kingdom of his own making, quite literally, as he builds mini-sets for a paper doll theater and sits atop a gold-plated and plush-cushioned toilet, issuing edicts to imaginary subjects. The frame is always packed with set decoration in the foreground, middle ground, and background of any given shot. When the bells chime the hour, Bergman cuts to several props that indicate just how ostentatious this house is, including a tinkling chandelier and various spinning cherubic clock decorations. These are symbols of Alexander's family's wealth and the security it has allowed him: he can while the hours away, imagining statues coming to life and a visit from grim death. Each of these magical-realist dream visions point towards what Bundtzen calls a "wish-fulfillment world for the artist as child and daydreamer--a maternal, nurturing and forgiving environment for Alexander" (100). If this world is perfect for childish daydreamers, threats to it and the safety it represents become threats to the concept of imagination itself. One of the ways that Bishop Vergerus's usurpation of the head-of-household position threatens Alexander most is in the destruction of his imaginative capacity. But the destruction of that safety might have another, perhaps beneficial outcome. While Alexander's delusions of grandeur and dream-visions conjure abstract concepts like authority, sexuality, and death, none of them do anything to change Alexander. Alexander's time as king of the bathroom is interrupted by a rat caught in a trap that he frees to live another day, destroying any dominance he might have initially wanted to project. The Venus statue's beckoning gesture happens only in the length of a break in the clouds when the sun shines on it. Once the clouds return, she has transformed back into stone, an image of sex with none of the agency required for his sexual awakening to happen. And Death looks menacing, dragging his

sickle and looking intently at Alexander, but he retreats of his own volition. The Ekdahl house might be safe, but that safety will stunt Alexander's growth as a serious artist invested in telling stories that will change the world.

Although Bergman did not grow up in a house like Alexander's, he did know one like it, which he writes about in *The Magic Lantern*. His grandmother's house "was the epitome of security and magic: numerous clocks measuring the time, the sunlight wandering across the infinite greens of the carpets ... red wallpaper, a mahogany-and-plush thronelike chair with brass fittings and ornamentation" (18-9). This house was not his home but rather one he went to as an escape from his own home, the one that feels more like the Bishop's. Why? If this nearly-autobiographical film does not line up with his life, it must be for a reason. Perhaps it is the fact that the house was a place that "gratified [his] constant and importunate need for silence, regularity, and order" (20). This reading is still too easy. The answer lies in a memory he shares on the next page, which points to the way Bergman created his life through movies.

The sunlight turns fiery, lighting up the prisms in the chandelier, sweeping over the picture of houses growing out of the water and caressing the whiteness of the statue. Then the clocks strike, the golden girl dances, the boy plays, the naked lady turns her head and nods at me and Death drags his scythe across the linoleum in the dark porch. I can just see him, his smiling yellow skull and dark gangling figure against the panes of glass in the front door. (21)

The scene is remarkably familiar to people who have seen *Fanny and Alexander*.

Bergman must have taken this scene from his childhood and re-created it in his film,

right? Maybe, maybe not. Though some critics have read this similarity in that way, they miss the fact that the film was made before the book was published. Indeed, a six-year gap exists between the two. Might there have been a real moment like this in his youth? Perhaps. Just as likely is the scenario in which Bergman writes a scene for his movie involving these thematically coherent visuals that he then incorporates into his memories of his own life. The world of the film becomes a place where Bergman can craft rich symbolism and connect it to his story. When he borrows those symbols for his supposed “memory,” they retain the thematic charge from *Fanny and Alexander*, at least for readers who have seen the film. Then we can see the parallels between the two works as an indication that Bergman similarly regards the subjects of his fictional world and the memories of his experiences. He investigates the nature of “Security and magic” in the parallel Ekdahl/Grandmother’s houses, the problems of strength and truth in the parallels between Vergerus and Hitler. Read together, his films and autobiographies become Bergman’s conversations on a variety of topics rather than fictional works directly sourced from concrete moments in his life.

The Ekdahl house is something to fight for, and Bergman’s use of the first decade in the new century points back to a time when the fight could still happen. Alexander is ten during much of the film, which is set roughly around the year 1910. That makes him a little older than Bergman, who was born in 1918. Setting the movie in 1910, though, gives Bergman a way to address the coming Nazi threat without naming it as such and in a way that allows it to stand in for all Nazi-esque threats. The film rarely mentions war or the military, focusing instead on the family as the site where social upheaval happens. This era, before World War I, allows the film to exist in a moment when the greatest

threat is the one Vergerus poses to the family. As I will soon demonstrate, his tactics and obsessions align with what Bergman saw in Hitler, so his intrusion into this pre-war idyll is a stand-in for Hitler's taking the global stage in 1933. This time period combined with Alexander's age also allows Bergman to create a simultaneously more dangerous and slightly less threatening foe. Alexander likely will not lose his life at Vergerus's hands, but he may feel like his life is in danger, especially if this is the greatest threat he has experienced in his young life. Finally, the pre-war era offers Bergman the possibility that Alexander would be entering his artistic maturity during the Nazis' rise to power twenty-three years later. At thirty-three, Alexander would be close to Bergman's age when *Summer with Monika* (1953), his first domestic hit, came out. An Alexander who is still discovering the power of storytelling can defeat Vergerus. Perhaps a storyteller at the beginning of his artistic maturity could defeat men like Hitler.

Strength and Truth

Bergman's invented world is ripe for disruption, and there is no greater disruption of the opulence and excess that the Ekdahls represent than Vergerus's reign based ostensibly on the values of Truth and Strength. These are the Bishop's pet themes, and they form the basis of his authoritarian rule over the remaining members of the central family: Emilie, Alexander, and Fanny. These two values are also at the heart of what Bergman identifies in Hitler during his time in Germany. Critically, Bergman notes not just the way that the German people he knew responded to Nazism alongside his recollections of seeing the man himself but also how the man and the culture he inspired influenced Bergman's feelings and worldview. In identifying how Bergman and many

Germans acted, we can read Emilie's and Alexander's converging reactions to Vergerus as both an atonement for what Bergman later identified as "hero worship" of Hitler and an instruction manual of sorts for fighting against future variants of Vergerus and Hitler.

The Bishop Vergerus's house stands in stark contrast to the house that the children and Emilie come from, a contrast that Bergman uses to express the different ways of thinking that the two houses represent. Where the Ekdahl house is extravagant in its aesthetic, an extravagance that the characters who live in it take as an invitation to live at the extremes of emotions, the Vergerus household is austere and starkly lit. Bundtzen claims that, "Harsh, natural light and symmetry assert themselves as the Bishop's presence becomes stronger. This is Bergman's visual trope for the Bishop's Truth" (102). Indeed the lighting does change from the artificial to the "natural." No longer is the frame filled with the warm candle glow that is so characteristic of the film's Christmas eve dinner scene. Instead, harsh white light from the seemingly always cloudy outdoors streams into the Bishop's house and bounces off the gray walls, floors, and ceilings. The light is Bergman's visual representation of Vergerus's Truth because it exposes everything; there is no place to hide from his Truth and its strength. This light is reminiscent of the light Bergman describes shining at the end of the speech he saw Hitler give: "When the speech was over, every shouted his *Heil*, the rain stopped and the hot bright light broke through the blue-black formations of clouds" (Bergman 122). His use of the same "hot bright light" in many of the scenes with the Bishop connect the two aesthetically. Vergerus further describes his house in the span of a quietly brilliant Bergmanesque shot that captures how each of the characters thinks about their new living situation while giving the Bishop time to wax philosophical about one of his pet themes.

“These old rooms have an imperishable beauty. We should be grateful that we may live in an atmosphere of purity and austerity.” Purity and austerity are starkly opposed to the Ekdahls’ previous way of living, but Emilie—at least—is entranced by the idea. Bergman shows how this entrancement happens in a clever shot that first has Alexander and Fanny out of focus in a doorway in the background of the frame while the Bishop walks around the foreground, talking about “purity and austerity.” It is clear that his Truth is the law in the house, and Alexander and Fanny will be trapped within the strength of that truth like they are bounded by the doorframe. Emilie follows the Bishop into the shot, her eyes wide and with a small smile on her lips. She does not recognize the danger she is putting her children in and is instead seduced by the Bishop’s appeal to a “true God” and the strength of his convictions, despite the children’s objections. Their house, once a place for daydreams and familial warmth has become instead a harshly lit blank space where Vergerus’s convictions of Truth and Strength reign supreme.

Not only does the Bishop’s house resemble the aesthetic and ideological ideas that Hitler professed, but also his subjects’ (specifically Emilie’s) reaction to his proclamations of Truth are echoed in Bergman’s recollection of his time in Germany. He remembers attending school in Germany and seeing *Mein Kampf* as the instructional book for a Religious Knowledge class: “The teacher read something out of a paper called *Der Stürmer*. I remember only one phrase that seemed peculiar to me. Again and again, he repeated in a factual tone of voice, *von den Juden vergiftet* [poisoned by the Jews]. I asked later what it meant. Hannes [his German friend] laughed. ‘*Ach, Ingmar, das alles is nicht für Auslander.*’ [Oh, Ingmar, all that's not for foreigners.]” (Bergman 120). Here Bergman relates a tale of Hitler’s truth becoming the only acceptable Truth. The Truth is

a twisted one, a conspiracy theory that blames Jews for “poison[ing]” seemingly all sorts of things, given its repeated use. This Truth is also “not for foreigners,” a way of keeping people from knowing the full truth until they have accepted Hitler’s ideology. Emilie experiences a similar exclusion from and enchantment with the Bishop’s version of the Truth. As a condition of their upcoming marriage, he wants her to come to her “new life as if newly born,” without her “clothes, jewels, furniture, [her] valuables, [her] friends, habits and thoughts.” The Bishop must control everything, a typical authoritarian strategy. They must leave behind not only their possessions but their relationships as well. The transition from “valuables” to “friends, habits and thoughts” is at once an escalation in severity and an elaboration. These are the most valuable things that the Ekdahls have and they must be sacrificed for the Bishop’s pleasure and control.

Even though the price is great, Emilie complies at once, demonstrating just how alluring the concept of absolute Truth can be to those who feel adrift in a chaotic world. She justifies the decision with a desire for Vergerus’s Truth, “You say your God is the God of love. It sounds so beautiful and I wish I could believe as you do. . . . My God is like myself, amorphous and intangible. . . . Through you I’ll come to know God’s true nature.” This scene sees Emilie falling for the Bishop’s rhetoric that insists he is the sole provider of the Truth and the love that comes with it. And Bergman claims he responded like Emilie to Hitler. After getting a portrait of Hitler as a gift from his exchange family, Bergman writes that he “loved him [Hitler] too. For many years, I was on Hitler’s side, delighted by his successes and saddened by his defeats” (Bergman 123). Emilie, too, spends some of the film in love with Vergerus. She does not see her children’s reaction to his proclamations or actions, instead blindly choosing his side over theirs. At the end of

the third episode, though, she undergoes a version of Bergman's wakeup call. When she sees Alexander's beaten backside, she finally recognizes what Alexander and Fanny knew all along: the Bishop's truth is nothing more than a way to control the people around him.

Vergerus and Alexander's first scene together sets the stage for the conflict that will form the center of the film's drama and signals that their battle will be over Truth. Alexander has been caught in a harmless lie, but Vergerus uses the situation to assert his vision of the Truth, a vision that Alexander eventually feigns accepting to protect himself from physical harm. Alexander's appeasing of the Bishop seems like another version of Bergman's own acceptance of Hitler's version of the Truth, but Alexander's actions in the scene as well as Bergman's attention to the Bishop's use of force to achieve his victory undercuts that interpretation of the scene. Alexander is trapped within Vergerus's worldview before he even knows what has happened. The Bishop leaves little wiggle room in the conversation, and anything Alexander says must follow his script or meet with punishment. "Can you tell me what a lie is and what the truth is? Of course you know the difference between a lie and the truth." The Bishop first asks a question and then tells Alexander that he knows the answer because, according to the Bishop, there is only one Truth and everything else is a lie. Anders Marklund cites this kind of move as an expression of "authoritarian institutions failing to accept any diverging opinions or ideologies" (39). Their Truth is the only truth available to the people living under their rule, and liars or people who think that there might be other ways of understanding how the world works are the enemies. Alexander learns early to appease the Bishop while

simultaneously understanding that his harmless lie in fact contains the seed of destroying such an absolute conception of the Truth.

Bergman further proves that Alexander's appeasement is only temporary and indicates that Alexander's assertion of his own worldview could destroy Vergerus's. The Bishop pulls Alexander onto the couch next to him and then sits facing him, leaning over Alexander, who looks down, afraid to confront the man. Bergman pays careful attention to the way that Vergerus touches Alexander, who is poked and prodded by the Bishop as the questioning continues. "People lie to gain an advantage," Alexander finally declares, though he does not know how prophetic he is in the assertion. The Bishop responds with firm taps on Alexander's head and then grasps and shakes the back of his head as if to emphasize the way that he is asserting his worldview on Alexander during this discussion of the way that Alexander has hurt Emilie's feelings with his lie. Alexander accepts the physical coercion but then shakes free of the Bishop, reasserting his own worldview and running to embrace Emilie for the last time until she rescues him from his attic imprisonment. Bergman has Vergerus pit Alexander against Emilie in order to separate them and deny their strength together. It will not be until the next episode that the two become a family again. Vergerus is simultaneously violating Alexander's personal space and his familial space, a violation and violence he will continue in the rest of the film. Alexander, however, will soon learn how to gain an advantage with lies and will use those lies to dismantle the Bishop's truths. In this scene, Alexander realizes how Vergerus's Truth works to control thought and action through violence, and he reaffirms his own worldview which values storytelling by escaping Vergerus's physical domination. Alexander will continue to develop these understandings and values as a way

of resisting the Bishop throughout his time in the man's house, a point I will elaborate in the next section.

By the end of the film, Vergerus has recognized that his Truth is problematically based in God and a misunderstanding of himself. Alexander rejects the idea that Vergerus's truth is the only one available and further rejects God as a source of truth entirely. These rejections expose Vergerus's greatest site of weakness. "I have only one mask," referencing Vergerus's conception of his Truth. "But it's branded into my flesh. If I tried to tear it off – I always thought people liked me. I saw myself as wise, broad-minded and fair. I had no idea that anyone could hate me." Emilie responds that she does not hate him, and he rebuts, "No, but your son does. I'm afraid of him." Bergman never hated Hitler, at least not while the dictator was alive. Alexander's hatred, now shared by Emilie despite her protests to the contrary, will be the vehicle of his revenge, and Vergerus is right to fear him. Alexander has by this point proven that he does not believe in the Bishop's Truth because he continued to lie even in the Bishop's house. His time in the Vergerus house seems to have unsettled his own faith. Where he once prayed for his family (albeit mechanically) every night, he declares later that "If there is a God, then he's a shit, and I'd like to kick him in the butt." Alexander's blasphemy might get him a severe punishment in the Bishop's house, but in the safety and mystery of Uncle Isak's house, he can get away with the sacrilege. Alexander's experience with Vergerus causes him to start questioning not only the Bishop's Truth but the source of that truth as well. The Bishop's fear of Alexander is the fear of a man who finally understands that his core belief in his single Truth is misguided: Alexander has shown that there are other kinds of truths that can exist in the world.

Bergman completes Alexander's rejection of God in the scene directly following Vergerus's confession of his terror at Alexander's hatred of him. This sets the stage for Alexander's final story that will prove Vergerus's Truth to be fallible. Bergman visualizes Alexander's final understanding that God is "a shit" if he exists at all. A key in a hidden door turns and the door pulls back, revealing an empty blackness that soon dominates the frame. Alexander asks who is behind the door and a voice whispers, "It is God behind the door." Alexander asks him to come out and he whispers back, "No living being may see God's face." God wants "To prove that [he] exist[s]," and a human hand wraps around the door near the keyhole. While Alexander exclaims "This is the end of me" and hides behind a couch, the door starts to flap open and closed. "Here I come Alexander," the voice declares, adding some anger and a deeper rumble to instill even more fear in the boy, who has now gone under the couch. The surrounding hanging dolls shake and rattle as a big wooden puppet of God with the traditional white hair and robe exits the door. Bergman films the foot first, indicating that the human hand has been replaced by the wooden foot that is supposed to stand in for the infallible being. The puppet barely enters the frame before it collapses in front of Alexander, who comes out to see that it was just Aron, Isak's nephew, playing a trick on him. Marklund reads the scene as exemplary of Bergman's desire to present the Bishop and God by extension as, "A constructed idol [that] is capable of casting a spell on the on-lookers. At least momentarily, people in [*Fanny and Alexander*] are duped, whereas viewers of the [film] would discern that they were not at all dealing with anything divine, or anything worthy of their respect (40). Alexander, even following his ordeal with Vergerus, is initially one of the duped and cowers in fear. However, Bergman implies that his belief in the

puppet's power is based partially in the dream-logic leftover from his sleep at the beginning of the scene and his history of being afraid of ghosts and the unknown. Alexander also sees the puppet fall to the floor, exposing it as "not at all divine" or "worthy of his respect." These are the conclusions he reached about the Bishop in their first interaction, and they are why the Bishop is so afraid of him. If Vergerus's Truth can be destroyed by a ten-year-old boy as evidenced by the Bishop's fear of Alexander's power to see through him, it is a flimsy truth indeed. Since Bergman creates such strong parallels between Vergerus and Hitler, Alexander's recognition can be applied to the real-world Nazi Truth just as it was applied to Vergerus. The same goes for his dedication to the concept of strength.

Truth as a value will do nothing if not wielded properly. Like any authoritarian dictator, the Bishop chooses not compassionate sharing of the truth but rather unwavering strength in his conviction to persuade those around him that his Truth is the truth to follow. Bergman identifies the desire to follow the strong as the best way to combat troubling confusion in his German host family: "[Hannes] explained how the Germans had created a bulwark against communism, and how the Jews had consistently sabotaged this bulwark, and how we must all love the man who had shaped our common destiny and decisively welded us together into one will, one strength, one people" (Bergman 123). Here the people living under Hitler who are specifically not targets of that strength believe the concept of the strength that Hitler projects so much that it becomes one of the founding elements of the new society. Hitler is the source of all the good in the world for Hannes and his family: it is he who "shaped" and "welded" them (white Germans) into "one will, one strength, one people." His strength has changed the world, previously

chaotic because of both communists and Jews, into a more easily understood and ostensibly united version of Germany. Of course, that unity comes at a cost to those who do not fit into the world. They become the enemies to the unity and strength, and they must be eliminated.

The uniting strength in an authoritarian regime will always be undermined by those who do not believe in it. Though Bergman and his exchange family are convinced by Hitler's strength, Bergman has Alexander respond to the Bishop the way he wishes he could have responded to Hitler. At the end of Hitler's speech, Bergman recalls an "eruption of immense energy. I shouted like everyone else, held out my arm like everyone else and loved it like everyone else" (123). Strength can be inspiring if the strong person uses their strength to vanquish enemies in the name of their truth, but it can also create stark divides between the people who believe in that truth and those who do not, or those who are the targets of that truth as the Jews (and others) were for Hitler. Perhaps Vergerus's biggest mistake is in using his strength against Alexander so nakedly in their first scene together and creating an enemy out of Alexander from the beginning of their relationship. The physical dominance he uses to bend Alexander to his will in that scene has an echo in the later trial scene, and there the Bishop makes the connection between his physical punishment and his strength more explicit. When, during the Bishop's interrogation of Alexander following his ghost story, Alexander says that he thinks Vergerus hates him, the Bishop responds, "I don't hate you. I love you. But the love I feel for you and your mother and sister is not blind and sloppy. It is strong and harsh." Here Vergerus tries to hide behind the concept of love just as he did in his earlier conversation with Emilie in which she seemed to fall in love with his claim to know

absolute and divine love and truth. The notion of love is invoked to hide authoritarian tendencies like it was in the scene with Emilie. Rather than truth, though, this time the value being couched in love is strength, as the Bishop tries to tell Alexander that his punishment of the young boy is based in a strong love for him.

Paralleling the way that people who reject a truth also reject the strength that backs the truth, Alexander is unconvinced and tells Vergerus as much. His impudence and denial of Vergerus's strong love incite his punishment as much as the initial misdeed, a dynamic Bergman signals when Vergerus continues his physical intimidation of Alexander by caressing Alexander's cheek during his declaration of love with the back of his hand. This is a distinctly un-comforting action and Alexander can only cast his eyes down to deny the Bishop his victory as much as possible. Alexander does not look upon Vergerus with love as Bergman did with Hitler, instead he averts his gaze and denies the comfort the Bishop seems to offer. Alexander is strong enough to oppose Vergerus at this point, but not yet strong enough to defeat him. Indeed, his choice of punishment from a list of beating with a cane, drinking castor oil, and spending time in a cabinet is an example of Alexander's own strength, according to Marklund: "Foregrounding the physical violence he is subjected to - more so than what the castor oil or cupboard would have done - Alexander (and Bergman) accentuates the austere consequences of the Bishop's regime" (39). When Alexander forces Vergerus to beat him (and then continue beyond what he originally set out to do when the boy does not apologize for his impudence), Alexander makes Vergerus follow through with his claims to strength and simultaneously proves that the strength will not be enough to defeat him. Though Alexander does finally bow to Vergerus's wishes in this scene, it is a momentary victory

for the Bishop. Rather than getting wrapped up in the Bishop's strength the way Bergman fell in love with Hitler's strength, Alexander looks inward to find his own strength to expose and oppose Vergerus's misused strength.

The final connection between Vergerus and Hitler is the Bishop's mistreatment of Uncle Isak. Bergman has Vergerus dehumanize Isak just as Hitler dehumanized the Jews as a pretext for committing genocide against them. Echoing Hitler's anti-Semitism, which was foundational to that man's Truth and the clearest expression of his strength as evidenced in the way that the Jews were blamed for all of the bad things that happened to Germans and Germany, Vergerus sees Isak as a representative of his race only, and his anger with the magician exposes the anti-Semitism in his heart. What initially looks like Vergerus's standard disdain for anybody he is not related to quickly morphs into a pointed attack on Isak for his Jewishness. Bergman might have made the children's savior any other character, or Isak might have been of some other religion, but Isak is Jewish for a reason. Not only does Bergman set him up as a strong opposing force against Vergerus's strict Christian religiosity, he also uses the character to bring out one of the more definitive features of Nazism. This allows Bergman to have the Jew defeat the Nazi through a series of clever deceptions that both accomplish the task of moving the plot forward and make Isak's particular religious qualities an important element of the story. Isak overhears the conversation between Vergerus and his sister after he presents the loan offer to the sister. When the Bishop mutters, "That man hangs on like vermin!" off-screen as the camera focuses on Isak's mysterious running around, Bergman has Isak pause and take the insult in. It is no coincidence that Vergerus describes Isak as a vermin and later a swine, this time to his face. The dehumanization of the Jewish other was central to the

Nazis' strategy, and these two animals also highlight the purported uncleanness that the Nazis disdained in their victims. The film gives the audience no interpersonal reason for the enmity between these two characters, and Bergman goes almost out of his way to show that Isak is a generous and kind man, holding on a long tracking shot of him as he goes to the family party at the beginning of the film so that he can capture Isak's donation to a beggar a block away from his house. Indeed, in this scene, Bergman seems to counter the negative stereotypes associated with Jews, perhaps in another bit of atonement for his supposed Nazi-sympathies in his youth.

It is important now to note that my purpose here is not to point at Vergerus and say that Bergman deliberately created him in the image of Hitler. The parallels I draw out in this section are not between the character Vergerus and the historical person that is Hitler. Rather, I read the Bishop as an authoritarian who has some fascist tendencies, especially in his dedication to an absolute Truth and his wielding of that Truth through strength. The clearest connection to Hitler's Nazism comes in a shared hatred of Jews, though Bergman twists Vergerus's hatred into a weakness that sees a Jew undermining his power. *Fanny and Alexander* comes out in 1982, five years before *The Magic Lantern*. Following Jan Holmberg's call to read his life in light of his films rather than the other way around, it is clear that Bergman's description of Hitler and the world he created in Germany lines up quite directly with Alexander's experience under Vergerus's rule. I suggest not that Vergerus is Hitler, but rather that Bergman thought of both in a similar way. Truth, strength, and love color Bergman's recollection of his time in Hitler's Germany, just as they color Alexander's time in Vergerus's house. Even the lighting

connects the two aesthetically, as does their anti-Semitism. With that connection and threat established, what does Bergman tell his audience to do about it?

Storytelling Has Power

It is no secret to those who have seen *Fanny and Alexander* that it is about storytelling. Bergman's film is a *Künstlerroman* (or story of an artist's development), at least in part, and that part might initially seem like Bergman sticking to his inwardly focused filmmaking rather than taking up the political. Especially if one reads the film as an embellished autobiography, Alexander's development into a competent and effective storyteller seems like the key piece of evidence given Bergman's career path. But that reading ignores the allegory Bergman sets in motion with the authoritarian Vergerus and the way that Alexander eventually uses his stories to oppose his evil step-father. Alexander's progression is still important in this reading, but I will focus not on his artistic development as much as how Bergman shows the effectiveness of Alexander's stories by paying attention to his audiences. I argue that this attention to the audience is consistent with Richard Delgado's observations on the way outgroup audiences create and respond to counternarratives.

Delgado's foundational work of Critical Race Theory applies to situations outside of the one he references directly and helps to understand how Bergman uses stories in *Fanny and Alexander*. While Delgado writes specifically about the way that systemic racism works in America, he writes more generally about the way that ingroups (those in power) use master narratives to establish a "mindset by means of which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is," which he further compares to "eyeglasses we

have worn a long time. They are nearly invisible, we use them to scan and interpret the world and only rarely examine them for themselves” (2413). The outgroup, consisting of those “whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized,” uses counternarratives to “create their own bonds, represent cohesion, shared understandings and meanings” as well as “show that what [people who have put on the master narrative eyeglasses] believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel” (2412, 2415). Vergerus is the source of the master narrative in *Fanny and Alexander*, his Truth and strength are the eyeglasses that have become invisible for him and those who live with him. That is until Alexander moves in and begins resisting the Bishop’s narrative and positing his own, satirical and subversive just as Delgado claims works best for members of outgroups. Delgado pays particular attention to the way that audiences of counternarratives respond to them and how they differ depending on which group they belong to. If Alexander’s stories are going to be of any use to him in the film or to the audience of the film itself, it will be because the audiences inside the film and in the movie theater will see how they work to create a new vision of the world better than the one Vergerus presents. Delgado helps understand how that happens.

Alexander’s first attempt at storytelling fails badly. Audiences saw him entertain and scare himself in the prologue, but when he tries his hand at telling a story with the magic lantern in the nursery on Christmas Eve his attempt fails because he does not adequately build the world that he needs to and the mood is broken easily. Alexander reads the story he tells from a book, presumably one that came with the picture set that he projects on the wall with the magic lantern. Alexander, a young reader, does not do much to embellish the story he reads of a girl visited by the ghost of her mother. Even his

ghostly “oohs” are upstaged by the noise from outside as the wind whips around the house. His story does not capture his audience’s attention, though the other children in the nursery do become enchanted with the pictures on the wall. The magic lantern is indeed a nifty device, and Alexander’s audience does seem to buy into the story at some level, even if it is more because of the eerie drawings projected on the blank wall than Alexander’s masterful storytelling. They seem to be drawn into the ghost story, or at least the images of the ghost story, all except the youngest boy, who puts on a mask and creeps behind the collected audience until he pounces on Fanny and yells. The spell, such as it was, is broken. Alexander’s story was not convincing enough to keep the boy from getting distracted and formulating this prank, and it certainly wasn’t strong enough to last beyond the premature jump scare. Alexander’s rote reading of the story gives it no weight, no value, and no lasting impact. Rather, this story is the definition of ephemeral, disconnected from any sense of reality, and apolitical. This will be the last time Alexander tells a story that does not build a community or “shatter complacency and challenge the status quo” (Delgado 2414). The introduction of his nemesis, Vergerus, insures that his next stories will have a reason for being told. He learns to be more detailed in his storytelling from his failure here and from his father who comes in and improvises an elaborate story. His father plays to the same audience Alexander tried to reach and is more successful in frightening them because his father has built the world of the story more effectively. Now part of the audience, Alexander is convinced alongside his relatives and cowers in fear from his father’s thief character. This lesson and new situation will have a direct influence on Alexander’s next story.

Alexander's next storytelling attempt succeeds in some ways in that it builds a connection between himself and his sister, Fanny, through his dedication to pointing out how evil Vergerus is and embellishing it with invented details, but it fails because it is a too direct assault on the Bishop, who only strengthens his resolve in response. His story is once again based on another, this time not a story in a book but rather a ghost story that Justine, the nursemaid in the Vergerus household, told earlier in the scene. She seems to be trying to get a rise out of the children and shows a wound on her hand that she attributes to the malevolent spirits that she claims haunts the rooms. She tells of Vergerus's first wife and their daughters, who drowned tragically in an accident. Her story resembles Alexander's first story in both its subject matter and the unconvincing nature of the story itself. Neither Alexander nor Fanny are scared, and instead, just as she goes to leave, Alexander starts telling Fanny his own story of encountering the ghosts of the dead women. Justine stops at the door and then comes closer to listen intently as Alexander continues his story, which is both more detailed and more pointed than Justine's story. He creates a visit from the ghosts who tell him what happened to them rather than Justine's hastily constructed scrap of rumor about the way that the Bishop's daughters and previous wife died as they played in the rain one day. Alexander also gives the women's drowning a context: their escape from Vergerus's oppression. Alexander listens to Justine's ghost story master narrative that comes from a representative of the ingroup who seeks to control the children with a story that will scare them into compliance with Vergerus's demands. Rather than being scared by the story, he turns it into a counternarrative that attacks the Bishop directly for his oppressive actions and

creates consequences that linger in the form of ghosts. The veracity of the story does not matter, as Bundtzen recognizes,

“it embodies aesthetic truth, Alexander's characterization of the Bishop as an ogre is validated by the way he imprisons the children when Emilie is away, by his vicious whipping of the boy, by the pleasure he takes in humiliating Alexander before Fanny and the assembled women (as if to demonstrate his sexual dominance over a young boy for the benefit of a harem), and by his cold-hearted effort to break Alexander's will, forcing him to kiss his hand and ask forgiveness after he is cruelly lashed. (105)

Even though Alexander's story might “embody aesthetic truth,” he also diminishes the story's world-changing power in its direct implication of Vergerus in his family's death. Alexander's ghost story “directly challenges – both in its words and tone – the [master narrative],” a strategy that causes it to “overwhelm the audience. [...] Too many of his listeners felt challenged or coerced; their defenses went up” (2430). Alexander opens himself to reprisal from the Bishop because his story is too frontal an attack. The Bishop indeed responds by beating Alexander, forcing him to apologize, and locking him in the creepy attic. Alexander will have to learn another day how to be subtler and more satirical in his subversion of the master narrative and put an end to Vergerus's Truth. Until then, he will deal with the consequences of pushing back too openly.

Alexander's next storytelling opportunity will be the culmination of all he has learned. It involves the most complicated way of telling the most simple story in the film as Bergman demonstrates visually how Alexander creates a detailed story that attacks Vergerus indirectly and “subvert[s] the very ‘institutional logic’ of the system” (Delgado

2429). As Alexander unexpectedly becomes the audience for his own story, Bergman transcends demonstrating the story's power via shots of the audience's faces to present the story coming to life on screen and records just how terrifying the process is for all involved. When stories have the power to change the world, including killing an evil man, their power needs to be wielded responsibly. Alexander's position as both the teller and member of the audience of this story happens thanks to the mystical intervention from Ismael, Uncle Isak's mysterious nephew. Alexander is brought to Ismael's locked room by his brother, Aron, who had just told Alexander that as a magician, his job is to create the believable. Alexander is going into an unbelievable realm, one where his identity will mix and merge with Ismael's identity, but there he will create a believable story. Ismael introduces himself as a "wild man" whose uncontrollable powers of empathy drive him crazy. That empathy is a superpower of sorts, allowing him to see deep into Alexander and become him, eventually telling his story for him and allowing Alexander's imagination as an audience member create the world that Ismael describes. Ismael explains that he "obliterates [him]self" and "merge[s] into Alexander." This allows Alexander to be both the teller of the story through Ismael's super-empathy and the audience of the same story, since he is the only character who can hear the story being told. Like previous examples of Alexander's imagination coming to life in the prologue and the attic, Bergman enters Alexander's subjectivity and shows what Alexander imagines on screen in a way indistinguishable from how he shows reality in the rest of the film.

Ismael's telling of Alexander's story will follow all the lessons Alexander learned throughout the film about effective storytelling. When Ismael starts telling Alexander's

story, it is more detailed than any of his previous stories, a point made by Bergman's depiction of the story on-screen rather than just letting the words play out as he had done in the past. Where Alexander once relied on visuals to create the details of a story he did not know how to make realistic, now his story has diegetic sound effects and cinematic qualities through Bergman's intervention in the slow-motion scene that forms the core of the story. Delgado is sure to point out that counternarratives need these kinds of details to allow the audience to believe in the world the storyteller is creating, which will in turn lead him or her to "alienate herself or himself from the events described, to enter into the mental set of the teller, whose view is different from the reader's own" (2434-5).

Alexander's unique position as the storyteller and audience simultaneously makes that alienation particularly troubling for the young boy, who responds in shock and confusion. But it is the expression of his anger that he must eventually "enter into"; he must acknowledge at last what he has often looked away from in cowardice. Alexander attacks the Bishop in anger, though his attack is now subverted and hidden within a story that sees Vergerus's Aunt become the vessel of Alexander's revenge. This is a story meant to convince Alexander and Bergman's audience that storytelling which destroys fascists is a valuable tool in dismantling their structures of truth and strength. When Alexander finds that his new world of counternarrative storytelling can bring down fascist authoritarians, he will dedicate himself to continuing the work he has begun here.

Ismael's story takes on magical properties so that Bergman can prove that authoritarian truth can be countered with fictional storytelling. Ismael tells the story in the future tense to make it into a prophesy of future destruction. There is no question that these things "will" happen: "The doors will be thrown open, a scream will echo through

the house.” The story happens in the future tense but it plays out on screen as it is being told because the story is strong enough for the audience (Alexander) to imagine fully. Bergman uses slow motion so that magic prediction of the Bishop’s death is depicted dreamlike onscreen. Dean Flower points out that Bergman “likes to let the camera study a storyteller’s face in close-up, and you begin to imagine that you see what the speaker’s words depict,” which happens differently in this scene to different effect (101). Alexander is the storyteller and the audience at once, yet his mouth does not speak the words and the close-up that should be focused on him alone is also focused on Ismael who is hovering over Alexander and saying his thoughts.

The storyteller reaches his full potential when his audience believes in the story so much that it becomes a new reality. Alexander’s position as both storyteller and audience means that he must convince himself of the story’s reality and purpose. Bergman’s camera takes care of the first condition, as it presents the story as real within the world of the film. Ismael addresses the second condition when he calls Alexander a “strange little person” because he “won’t speak of that which is constantly in [his] thoughts.” “You’re thinking of a man’s death,” Ismael tells Alexander, providing the young boy with his story’s purpose. Alexander’s story, as told by Ismael, has the express purpose of killing Vergerus not just as a man but as part of Bergman’s allegory that expresses the power of storytelling to defeat authoritarians. Bundtzen claims that, “In the episode with Ismael, Alexander comes into contact with his own inner 'wild man,' and is forced thereby to acknowledge and assume responsibility for his passions and their all-too-real consequences when projected by his imaginative power” (108). Alexander may not want to carry his death wish against the Bishop and his family to fruition as evidenced by his

protests as the story unfolds, but the intensity of his anger forces the completion, and the scene cuts from the burning story-world to Emilie lying peacefully back in her house, finally able to rest without the threat of the Bishop's further tortures hanging over her and her family. This happy ending proves to Alexander and the film's audience that the storytelling is necessary and just, even if it is difficult and scary. There is a greater service that the storytelling provides: the opportunity for Alexander's imminently arriving sister who can now be born into and grow up in a world safe from Vergerus's authoritarian regime.

When Bergman focuses on the audience of Alexander's stories, he creates a connection to the audience of the film watching in the theater or at home. They, if they are good viewers, will begin to interrogate their position as audience members.

Alexander's stories have grown to have a purpose, a way of making his audience think about the world differently and therefore changing the world itself. Does Bergman's movie have the same effect? Delgado observes that the way counternarratives actually work is by getting the people watching to

move back and forth between two worlds, the storyteller's, which the reader occupies vicariously to the extent the story is well-told and rings true, and his or her own, which he or she returns to and reevaluates in light of the story's message. Can my world still stand? What parts of it remain valid? What parts of the story seem true? How can I reconcile the two worlds, and will the resulting world be a better one than the one with which I began? (Delgado 2435)

With Bergman's film as the counternarrative to the master narrative of his life in which he abjured all political pretenses, he corrects an admitted mistake and asks his audience to do the same. Audiences must then ask themselves the questions Delgado poses. Can artists create non-political art? Can they ignore political threats and just make small-scale personal works? Or should they, like Alexander, take up the task of opposing authoritarians when they appear and use their art to dismantle the enticing worldview that people like Vergerus and Hitler present to their audiences? Bergman presents the answers to these questions in his handling of Alexander's development as a storyteller by focusing on his audience's reactions. The film's audience sees how powerful his stories are and the effect they have on their listeners. The ending of the film cements Bergman's way of dealing with fascist characters through storytelling.

The End is not the end

After five hours of joy, love, terror, authoritarianism, and stories, *Fanny and Alexander* concludes with an epilogue that Bergman uses to reiterate the importance of political storytelling and ensure that Alexander and his audiences will continue to use their stories for good. In the epilogue, Bergman presents a mini-Vergerus who can be dispatched with a wink and a nod, a revival of the Vergerus threat, and an exhortation to believe in the power of storytelling to do literally anything. Bergman accomplishes a lot in a few short minutes, and these scenes also make explicit the political nature of the film. They cause the viewer to consider their own lives and political contexts to see if there are any revivals of Hitler's Nazi-esque authoritarianism in their political contexts, since Bergman was clearly recognizing the rise of neo-Nazism in Sweden in the early 80s.

After Alexander kills Vergerus literally and Hitlerian fascism figuratively, the family is reunited in the Ekdahl house for a baptism celebration. It would be nice to think that Alexander could go back to the innocent creativity he showed in the prologue. However, Bergman inserts yet another dictator figure into the story—though more absurd and less potentially harmful—before dismissing him and his rhetoric. The character is Gustav Adolf, one of Alexander’s uncles and the father of one of the baptized babies. He gives a speech to the collected family and friends (mostly from the theater that he ran in Emilie’s absence). In the speech, he tries to reassert the worldview that his brother, Emilie’s husband Oskar, provides at the beginning of the film: “We must live in the little world. We will be content with that and cultivate it and make the best of it.” The little world is that of the theater, which was previously content to perform old classics and nice Christmas pageants. Gustav Adolf’s desire to keep his domain disconnected from the “big world” runs counter to Alexander’s newly discovered political power. As if sensing this potential conflict, Gustav Adolf circles around the table in a shot (filmed from inside the circular table) that follows him and traps his audience between him and the camera. His circuit becomes a way of trapping his audience inside his worldview, and the exhortation to “live in the little world” happens just as he stops behind Alexander, who is in the lower half of the frame with the imposing Gustav Adolf posed above him, arms stretched out to rest on the chairs occupied by Fanny and one of his own daughters on either side of Alexander. Once again Alexander is trapped by a man who wants to limit him and his storytelling, this time to the “little” personal realm rather than outright denying his right to express anything at all. Gustav Adolf is more benevolent than the Bishop, and he is not restricting Alexander’s storytelling altogether, but he desires to

remove from the storytelling the idea that it might change the world. His rhetoric denies the possibility of resistance and instead posits acceptance as the only thing the family and theater company can do. Gustav Adolf, however, is impotent even before he begins to exercise his supposed power. Bergman has given the audience plenty of reasons to laugh off Gustav Adolf's attempts to take up an authoritarian mantle. His sexual misadventures with the nursemaid in the Ekdahl house during the Christmas Eve celebrations end in premature ejaculation and then two instances of literal impotence. When he and his surviving brother, Carl, visit the Bishop to bring Emilie back into their family, his attempts to intimidate Vergerus end up exposing their own weaknesses and demonstrate that "he is clearly a fool, and the Bishop knows it, never once losing his icy self-control" (Flower 103). In a one-on-one matchup, Gustav Adolf loses before the game even begins. So his attempts to limit Alexander and the theater under Emilie's returning rule will be just as easily dispatched. Alexander and Bergman's audience need not concern themselves with silly adversaries like Gustav Adolf who will be eliminated through familial politics. Rather, they need to be on the watch for real threats, new and old.

There is a real threat, and it is the return of a threat Alexander thought he defeated earlier in the film. Bergman creates a reminder that Nazis and authoritarians will never be truly defeated, and that their ideologies will return, when he has Vergerus's ghost knock Alexander over and insist that he is here to stay. After Gustav Adolf's speech and a few scenes concerning the family, Bergman again returns to Alexander making his way through his Grandmother's house. Everything seems right again, and audiences would be forgiven for hoping that the film might allow Alexander a return to the carefree existence that they saw five hours earlier in the prologue. In that first scene Alexander was a blank

slate of sorts, a condition reflected in his clothes' neutral grays and browns. Now, at the conclusion, he is in his white nightgown. Alexander has become a moral artist, one who uses his anger at the world and situations where evil people do bad things to make a counternarrative that would change that world for the better. Even if that change includes murder in this case, the peril of doing nothing would mean his mother's and unborn sister's likely death, so Alexander enacts what Bundtzen calls "a revenge Bergman also presents as art" (Bundtzen 110). Bergman, however, focuses on both the revenge and the art aspects of the story equally. He endorses the storytelling as powerful by showing it on screen and spends a long time in the next scene explaining exactly what the outcome of the story is via a visit from the police. That his story was inspired by his anger towards his step-father and fear for his mother's safety is secondary to the fact that he told that story (with Ismael's help) and told it to create a change in the world. Alexander's status as an artist cannot be questioned, and since his story did more good than it did evil, he gets to wear his white outfit and perhaps delude himself and the audience into thinking that nothing has changed. He will not get off so easily.

After stealing into a side-room to get some sweets, Alexander walks down the hallway, nibbling on a cookie. Behind him, a black shape blots out the rest of the background and soon the Bishop's crucifix comes into view just behind Alexander's head. He is caught unawares and the specter of the Bishop knocks him over as he strides in front of Alexander. Sprawled on the ground with the sweet-tin open and its contents spilled on the floor, Alexander looks up to see that the man he thought dead has returned in spectral form. "You can't escape me," the Bishop sneers in a wide shot from Alexander's perspective on the ground. Vergerus's menacing frame towers in the wide

shot that establishes his presence and power in the world Alexander thought was safe from his reach. Vergerus walks off after a moment of intense staring, leaving Alexander stunned on the floor. This short scene makes clear both the hold that the Bishop has on the young artist and his importance in the rest of the creator's art. Bundtzen reads the scene in a similar way, "The Bishop is embodied in just such a new, and in many ways less vulnerable, form. Ghosts cannot be laid to rest, and Bergman demonstrates finally that the fanatical Vergerus is of primary importance to Alexander. As he is always there to threaten Alexander's lies with humiliating punishment, so Alexander must dissemble like truth and must at least pretend to gentleness and humility" (110-11). I do not think this scene is about lies as much as it is about the responsibility Alexander now feels to continue his work against the Bishop. If authoritarianism and fascism were defeated when the leaders of authoritarian and fascist regimes were killed, we would be living in an easier world. But the ideas behind those leaders remain. Their desire to exert control reappears in later would-be leaders and we are too quick to forget the lessons we learn from their predecessors. Alexander goes to chew on some sweets, hoping he can finally indulge in some of the things he was denied while living with the Bishop and his family. But, "You can't escape me." Alexander cannot escape the Bishop or what he represents, and his sweets are scattered just like his illusions of safety should be. In the context of the film, it is a few short years before Hitler's rise to power in Germany, a threat to the peace and wellbeing of people across the globe but especially in Europe. Sweden officially maintained neutrality towards Hitler during World War II, and that kind of neutrality cannot defeat a person like the Bishop. Alexander cannot retreat back into the "little world" as his uncle would have him do, and Bergman does everything in his power to

convey the danger that the Bishop and people like him pose by having him loom large in the frame. The first thing to do with people like him is to recognize them and the danger they pose to the world.

Fanny and Alexander, however, is not just a film set in the early part of the twentieth century but also a film made in the early 1980s. Even as he presents the Bishop as a proto-Hitler, Bergman makes an argument for constant vigilance. Ohlin argues in his essay on Bergman's claims to Nazism that "Bergman's confessions of Nazi complicity are part of a self-dramatization that has less to do with reality than with his deliberate placement of himself at the heart of some of the great conflicts and dilemmas of our time, and that, at the same time, this sense of complicity is part of a very specific Swedish cultural and political context" (440). In *Fanny and Alexander* too, the Nazi influence is less to do with reality than it is to do with a sense of the larger scale of things. Germany has gone to great lengths to remember what it did during World War II. Their history is not forgotten. But Bergman believed that Sweden was taking a different course:

In the light of his suggestion to Boëthius in 1999 that the seductive power of Nazism today 'has more to do with the dismantling of the teaching of history in the school, which has resulted in a total loss of history,' one can see a clear line of concern, from the forties to the present, about the dangers of the loss of history in the face of totalitarian forces, a concern very similar to what can be found in his films. (Ohlin 452)

This "total loss of history" will not be a problem for Alexander's or Bergman's audience if they understand his allegory here. The Bishop will indeed always be with Alexander and with the audience because the film acts as that history—albeit made-up—that

Bergman sees as the essential tool to fighting authoritarians and fascists in the time before and after Nazis. Not only does the film ask Alexander to become a responsible political artist who remembers what terror the Bishop brought to his family, it fulfills that request itself by having the Bishop's ghost knock Alexander over and remind him that he will always be there. In 2017, there exists a disturbing rise of authoritarians and those who desire to live under their strict and powerful rule. By instilling fear of outsiders with their master narratives and claiming that only their strength can save their countries from "American carnage" and "expel foreigners who preach hatred on our soil," modern would-be authoritarians rely on the same strategies that Bergman experienced with Hitler and gave to Vergerus (Nossiter). It is time to learn from Bergman how to tell a counternarrative that uses fiction to fight against their Truth and Strength. The stakes are high, let us learn from Bergman's disappointment with himself. Tell stories that will change the world.

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VITA

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My area of interest is the intersection of words and images in 20th and 21st Century American literature and film, with an emphasis on how they combine to create visions of a better future through art.

EDUCATION

- Lehigh University
M.A. in English 2017
Thesis: This Story Kills Fascists: How Ingmar Bergman Atones for his Nazi Past and Looks to an Uncertain Future in *Fanny and Alexander*
- University of Connecticut
B.A. in English 2010

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Lehigh University, Bethlehem PA
Teaching Fellow – English 1 and 2 2015-Present
- Created syllabi.
 - Taught composition techniques.
 - Worked with students to develop research strategies.
 - Guided students through multi-modal projects.
 - Evaluated all papers.
 - Met with students to develop papers.
- Writing Center Tutor** 2016-Present
- Helped both undergraduate and graduate students to improve their papers in a broad sense with their theses as well as in specific areas such as structure and problematic paragraphs.
 - Brainstormed with students to start their thinking process.
- Kaplan Inc., Hartford CT
SAT and GRE Prep Teacher 2012-2015
- Taught composition and essay development.
 - Evaluated essays.

RELATED EXPERIENCE

- Lehigh University, Bethlehem PA
Co-Editor of Drown Unbound Grad Student Blog 2016 – Present
- Solicited posts from students and professors in the areas of Teaching and Community.
 - Edited posts for clarity, grammar, and formatting for the web.
 - Added pictures and gifs to create a fun reading experience.
 - Wrote a series of articles reviewing the movies from my Film Club and giving advice on how to teach them.
- Film Club Leader** 2016 – Present
- Founded and led semimonthly club for fellow grad students.
 - Decided on schedule of films with input from members to cover wide range of genres and countries of origin.
 - Led discussion after viewings to discuss form, content, and teaching possibilities.
- Goodwin College, East Hartford CT
Writing Center Tutor 2013-2015
- Helped students at all points in the writing process including brainstorming ideas, developing an outline, working on a particular paragraph, and revision for completeness.
 - Worked with non-traditional students, students with learning disabilities, and English as a Second Language students.

- Assisted with a variety of essays outside the English department, especially nursing and business essays.
- Aided students working with MLA and APA citation styles.

PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS

“What Does A Melody Mean?: Marge Piercy’s Violent and Nonviolent Visual Media”
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