

At the Studio

Joe Fineman

1967

a review of
Night Games

Mai Zetterling strings out her Freudian implications to paper thinness, but then "Night Games," in plot anyway, is not unlike tissue paper.

It suffices to say that Miss Zetterling's pen clears a magnificent swath through the intricate Oedipal fantasies of adolescence. Unfortunately this directress is so plagued by Composition and form, her narrative reins up and the two never reach a comparable peak.

The story of Jan in the present is told both now and in the past through a series of flashbacks. Jan, at early middle age, returns to his birthplace (remember "Wild Strawberries") and confronts the bitter truths of his abnormally maternal and sheltered upbringing. But he is older and wiser and engaged to his mother's image. His struggle to escape into manhood is the two hours we observe. Not complex, to say the least.

What really accompanies the viewer as he finishes this ordeal is the classic and energetic colors with which the picture is painted. For one, the flashback technique used to curtain the boy's memories is given a unique softness. The present melts into the past and, as with a start, you are shot back, through uncluttered space to reality.

A second stroke so deftly employed is arrangement of light and dark shading or chiaroscuro. Sometimes the eye can understand impressions with greater clarity if colors fade into each other rather than pop from red to green to blue. Wild coloring borders move on objectives while black and white activate the subjective mind.

In "Night Games" all matter of intenseness slithers, drives, and punches forth only on the wings of fluent shading. The stark Fellian castle, the raven death images of Bergman and the frequent bleached images of Cocteau are all present.

Yet, all is not happy in Mudville. Miss Zetterling, at the expense of a compact media message, has dwelt too long and hard on an attractive obsession of visually flaming creatures. The Freudian bellowing is pretentious and fraught with loose ends. In the shape of a duet of expanded breasts and a mini-penis, the perversity meets all expectations. At least this is a tribute to art for art's sake.

See "Night Games" if you are prepared to replace your mind with your eye. At least see it so you can swear you've seen another Swedish director besides Bergman.

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