The Seventh Seal (Det sjunde inseglet, SW 1957)

Ingmar Berman’s 1957 film, *Det sjunde inseglet* [*The Seventh Seal*], is typical in both subject and style of the middle phase of his cinematographic development, in which he tackled the religious significance of death (Bragg 28). The modernist narrative style of *The Seventh Seal* encompasses many symbolic references to Christianity: the Devil in the figure of Death; the apocalyptic vision of a landscape smitten with the plague; allusions to the New Testament story of the flight of Mary, Joseph and Jesus; and quotations from the Book of Revelation in the opening scene. The protagonists, the knight Antonius Block and his squire Jöns, have returned to Sweden from the Crusades to find their country devastated by the plague. The knight makes a deal with Death: if he beats Death in a game of chess, he will be spared. Block loses the game but distracts Death in order that the travelling theatre family (the holy family) of Mia, Jof and Michael can escape. The knight and his squire embody the film’s critical religious ambivalence: the latter is an atheist; the former seeks proof of the existence of God. Through a modern and individualistic approach, the film questions traditional religious interpretations of the meaning of death. A self-conscious representational mode characterizes the expressive acting, monologues, and speeches addressed to the audience. The dramatic juxtaposition of the Dance of Death and the hopeful young family in the last scene hints that death is not inescapable.

References and Further Reading:

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Paratextual

Filmclip (2:29): The\_Seventh\_Seal\_End

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